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“I’m not going.” Emily stood firm with her hands at her sides. Resolute.

“Won’t go, or don’t want to go?” Joyce, sounding somewhat distraught, asked for the umpteenth time. In the span of just a couple hours they were having constant tug-of-wars like this.

Emily furrowed her brow while she concentrated on the floor between Joyce’s feet, wiggling her lips as she herself failed to find the right words.

Then with a small sigh, disappointed in herself, Emily groaned, “Don’t want to...”

“Emily,” Joyce gave herself some dramatic pause to find the right words, “remember how I said that Amy’s been looking forward to this? About how much she wants to see you?”

“Yes...” The stress in her voice could not have been more evident. Not caused by Joyce, but by the war within herself.

“It’s always scary the first time, I know that. But you gotta remember Emily, it’s...not really much of a secret to Amy, anymore?” It barely was from the start. The moment they needed a medium to help them indulge was the same time they were forced to give Amy an indirect glimpse.

“That’s...but that’s still different from her actually seeing it!” Why did she even entertain the idea last night? Why didn’t she just say no? Was it too late to back out? Joyce said it wasn’t, but it felt that way. Social pressures were making her feel that way. She could refuse, but it’d be heavily frowned upon...

“That’s fair,” Joyce nodded, “you’re right, it is different. But so has every new and scary thing we’ve done before? She will *not* have anything mean to say, Emily. Remember? Amy *wanted* to do this! And it’s all private. Amy doesn’t talk about us to anyone, and the same goes for all her other clients. Trust me.”

Trust was something that needed to go a terribly far way to make any of this work. Trust had been what brought them to this point, so in theory it made sense to continue to bet on it?

“What...what if somebody walks in and sees?”

“The store is closed today. It’s just gonna be you, me, and Amy.”

“What...what if someone looks through a window?”

“We’ll be in the dressing room or upstairs. The back room doesn’t have any windows, and the upstairs is off the ground floor.”

Damn, there was always an answer, wasn’t there?

Emily continued to fidget, having every point become null and void by crushing facts, but she felt hardly any more enlightened or less worried.

“...Can...can she come here instead?” The words flew out of her mouth, but to Emily they didn’t feel like her own. An off the cuff sort of spew with no meaningful intent. It didn’t change anything. It didn’t eliminate the risk of being outed by someone else. Maybe all it changed was Emily getting to stay in her comfort space.

Joyce was quiet for a second, honestly blindsighted by a sort of fair question. Amy had obviously never come to their home, but that was because they were mostly on a seamstress and commissioner type of relationship, though that seemed to have evolved a little. “Is that what you want? To see if Amy will come here?” Joyce calmly asked. Her patience was still plentiful and she wasn’t testing the girl, just seeking to confirm.

Nervously, Emily nodded her head. “Is...is that okay?”

“...Let me call Amy,” Joyce frowned, at herself and not Emily, “I...didn’t really think of that.”

A few minutes later and Joyce was alone in their room with the phone to her ear.

Just after some short buzzes and another voice was on the line. “Heyyy~!” Amy excitedly greeted, “Thought I’d be hearing from you soon! So? What’s up? Am I still expecting you two?”

“Maybe,” Joyce sighed, “sort of... Emily is having nerves, so she’s still on the fence, but that’s better than how she felt about it the very first time. I don’t think I’m going to convince her to get out of the house today. So...if you’re fine with it, you can come here?”

“Oh?” Amy’s reaction wasn’t expected, as far as Joyce was concerned. They’d known each other for some time, pre-dating Emily quite easily, but the idea of being friends was something still quite new to Joyce, and likely Amy herself. “I don’t mind, as long as you’re okay with it? Sorry,” she chuckled, “I guess I didn’t expect that, but I also guess Emily might be feeling a little nervous.”

“I could see her heart beating out of her chest...” Joyce lamented. “You really don’t mind? It’s sort of a business related thing, so I feel kind of awkward asking.”

“You’re using my personal number, aren’t you?” Amy butted in. “Joyce, I don’t go hunting down my clients just to see how they look in my clothes. Of course this is different...ish. Think of it as me gathering some more visual material in case you plan on having any more stuff made. So okay, how far away are you? Can you send me the address?”

And with a brief exchange of details, Joyce bid her a temporary goodbye, now awaiting her friend to arrive.

“Okay,” Joyce found Emily laying on the couch pensively, “she’ll be here in a few.”

“She’s really coming?” Emily sat up, partly hoping it would be too strange of a request and they could have just kicked this can down the road a little bit further.

“Yes, and because she’s coming now, there aren’t any more backsies on this,” Joyce firmly added, now realizing the beautiful upside. Emily wasn’t in any danger, which is why Joyce had no qualms about the girl painting herself into a corner.

“...Okay.”

“Hey,” Joyce’s voice edged on a warning the moment she saw it in Emily’s eyes. “No attitude. We compromised and got Amy to agree to come here. That’s what you wanted, isn’t it?” If Joyce was a betting kind of person, she’d have guessed Emily was trying to force a ridiculous standard, but wasn’t expecting to have her bluff called.

Emily was quiet with her cheek against her shoulder, looking at the couch while she tried to come to terms with the new, suddenly worse development.

“...Are you upset with me?” Joyce asked, standing beside the couch.

“No...” Emily continued to look away, but her honesty was genuine. “I’m nervous. I’m scared.”

And all the talking in the world felt like it wasn’t going to convince her, hence Joyce’s own apprehension.

“Do you want a bath before she comes? Just some time to relax?”

“I wanna shower...” Emily decided right then. Maybe it was her subconscious trying to do something adult-like before she had to go back into childish clothes, like it’d have some kind of residual effect that could lessen the sensory impact of onesies and footie pajamas.

“Okay,” Joyce nodded, no offense taken. “I’ll check on you in a little bit when we should probably get you changed and dressed in the nursery.”

Emily wasn’t feeling for words, mumbling something akin to a nod before heading off to the bathroom.

With nothing left to do but wait, Joyce wandered into her office, opting to kill time in her own way.

“P-please...!” Emily begged, practically on the verge of tears. “Don’t make me! I...I’m gonna be sick. Please, make her come back another day! I promise! Next weekend!”

“And I promise,” Joyce leaned over Emily, strapped onto the changing table, kissing her on the lips, “you’re going to be fine.” Her voice was rock-steady and completely unphased by the girl entering hysterics.

Emily continued to breathe quickly and sniffle quite often as the denim hem of her dress was pulled up and so was the flap of her onesie to make room for her padded underwear. Thank goodness for the strap, otherwise Emily would have been running. If she had any control she would be doing her damndest to put a stop to this.

The diaper was soft, the powder smelled nice, but any kind of comforts those feelings may have given in the past were nonexistent now. Vastly overshadowed by an impending doom, Emily wanted more than nothing just to hide.

“Do you want your pacifier?” Joyce asked an honest question, not to tease.

“Nnn...no...” She couldn’t keep her eyes straight, constantly shifting where she looked. A pacifier was too dangerous, obviously. She wouldn’t be caught dead with one in front of Amy. Not in front of anyone but Joyce, and that’s only if she made her use one!

“Then here’s Pip,” Joyce set the stuffed animal on her stomach, making her look all sorts of conflicted.

“No...I don’t want this either...! I don’t want Amy to see! Please, Joyce! Please!”

“Emily...” Joyce was finding it hard to hide her own troubled look. She knew this was going to work out. She just did, but of course Emily couldn’t see that. She was far too blinded by her own anxieties and worries. After all, she was the one putting herself most on the line here? “It’s like a bandage, okay? Once we rip it off, you’re gonna feel silly for worrying like this in the first place, okay? Deep breaths, sweetheart.”

And so Emily tried the breathing exercises, maybe just barely passing. And despite her protests, she was currently squeezing the dear inanimate life out of Pip.

And then it came. A distant ring, like the sound of a horn before the impending stampede; the call to battle. Emily stretched her head and looked behind at the door, as did Joyce. Her phone was ringing. Who could it be? Only one specific person in mind was Emily’s terrified guess.

A click of the buckle’s release let Emily off the table while Joyce excused herself to answer the phone.

“Hello? Amy?”

“Mhm. This is she! I’m in the lobby, I think. Did you tell the people here that I was coming? Can I just take the elevator up?”

“Yep and yes. Go on ahead. Just ring the doorbell once you’re here. See you soon.”

After hanging up, Joyce peered around the apartment, winding back up in the nursery.

“Emily...” Joyce stared down at the large stuffed bear in the corner, looking a bit farther out from the walls than it usually did.

“Please...I don’t feel good!” Emily begged from behind the giant bear. “I wanna throw up!”

“Then let’s take you to the toilet, okay?” Joyce beckoned with a hand. She couldn’t see any other way of handling this than by just brushing off her childish delays.

“I’m...I’m staying here...” Emily frowned in her fetal position.

“Here?” Joyce questioned. “So you’re fine with Amy seeing the nursery?”

“No!” Emily shouted back, caught in her own words being twisted right back at her. “You...you know what I mean!” she rubbed her eye while the other hand grabbed as hard as it could onto the stuffed bear.

“I do know what you mean,” Joyce kneeled in front of Emily and the bear between them, “and I’m trying to show you that you’re blowing this out of proportion.”

“But she’s gonna see me like this...! She’s gonna see how you treat me like a baby!”

“I don’t have to treat you like that? Not while she’s here?” Joyce tried to reason. “You’re just Emily, my sweet and beautiful girlfriend. What you’ve always been, and what you’re still going to be today. Can we please come out of the nursery now? I’m not trying to embarrass you. I want to keep the same secrets that you do, but all I’m trying to say is that Amy already knows about some of this...”

Emily in tears followed her by the hand out of the nursery, dearly clutching Pip as well.

“It’s making noise...” Emily sniffled, referring to her diaper.

“It’s always made noise.” Joyce soothed her as she locked the nursery door.

And while Emily self-consciously looked at her butt over her shoulder, she jumped with a startle when the doorbell rang.

“Okay, Em, it’s gonna be fine, alright--” Joyce was assuring her, but fell flat when Emily was nowhere to be seen. With a sigh she walked to the door all on her own. “We’ll find you in a minute!” she called out to the rest of the apartment where a wild Emily lurked somewhere.

Amy was all smiles when Joyce opened the door. Wearing modestly expensive, yet somehow casual street clothes, she had a large canvas bag slung over her shoulder, looking absentminded for only just a second before she paid Joyce any attention.

“Hey there!” Amy grinned, greeting the host first despite being the guest.

“Hey Amy,” Joyce smiled back, “glad you could come! Sorry about the last minute shift...”

She shrugged it off with a wave. “I was expecting worse; this is completely fine with me. I’m too excited to care!” A giddy look ran over her face. “Where’s Emily? Is she getting dressed?”

Now Joyce's look faltered a bit, glancing over her shoulder. "W-well... She's a bit nervous right now. I may have lost her..."

"Lost her?" Amy raised her brows. "Should...should I leave?"

"No," Joyce came right back with a knee-jerk response. "You've waited long enough, and truthfully, Emily needs to learn how to get out of her own way... And please," she lowered her voice, "please no teasing? I know you'd never make fun of her, but she's...sensitive right now." Understandably, though.

"Cross my heart," Amy dutifully nodded, looking no less deterred and still just as excited. "So is she hiding?"

"Definitely," Joyce stared at the hallway like there was an imaginary trail of breadcrumbs. "I think we should give her another minute though... Do you want some coffee?"

"Sounds great," Amy smiled, taking her first step inside. "I can't believe this is the kind of building you live in, by the way... Well, no, I can believe it, but I'm just...wow. Jealous, I guess."

"Thank you, I think," Joyce laughed a little, pointing to where Amy's shoes could go. "It's convenient," if not outright lavish and luxurious, "and keeps me close to my work."

"Oh yeah? Are you the type with multiple homes?" Amy followed Joyce into the kitchen, but of course her head tried to see into the living room the entire short trip the other way.

"Can't say that I am. No reason for it yet," Joyce casually shrugged. "Besides, I bet you make a killing yourself. I'd imagine you have a vacation home or something?"

"Hardly," Amy scoffed, doused in a splash of cold water, reminding her of the difference between her own standing and Joyce's. "Yeah, I can manage a vacation wherever I want out of the year, but I can't hold on to properties like poker chips!" she laughed. "Who knows, maybe Emily could find me--Ooh, wait, shit--my bad." she quickly backpedaled her voice with a look of guilt.

"It's fine," Joyce calmly waved it off. "We're doing fine. It's a little bit of an adjustment for her, but Emily's doing well." For the most part, given that she was hiding at the moment out of fear of embarrassment.

While Joyce brewed some brew, Amy casually walked throughout the spacious kitchen, finally coming over to the fridge. “Awh, who’s the artist?”

Joyce turned her head and saw the drawing on the fridge. Carefully torn from a coloring book was a black print outlined drawing of chirping birds in a nest atop a tree overlooking a river and mountain. A simplified cartoon drawing. The birds were a mismatch of colors, the rivers were anything but blue, and the leaves had transcended somehow beyond the red, orange, and yellow of a leaf’s typical “outrage” season.

“Oh, that? That’s something my friend’s niece did for me a while back,” Joyce shrugged, spinning the lie without skipping a beat, somehow still fresh in her mind from the day Emily colored it.

“Oh that’s cute,” Amy remarked, leaning in a bit closer. She turned her head over at Joyce and said, “There’s an ‘E’ on it, too?” She grinned and the inner parts of Joyce’s lips started to fold.

“Mhm. Funny coincidence. I like to tease Emily about it being a drawing she made for me,” she rolled with the punches and tried to take the meta route.

“Yeah?” Amy laughed and stood back up away from the fridge, happily accepting a warm mug. After a sip with both hands she asked, “So can I use that against her, too?”

“Uh-mmm...” Joyce lightly coughed from the stutter she’d been given mid-sip. “It’s sort of an inside joke...” In very, very recent retrospect, Amy was probably the last person to try and fool. There was far too much chemistry between them added with a handful of writing on the wall that told enough of a story to the point where coincidences couldn’t just be coincidences. Amy knew, and Joyce knew she knew.

“Don’t say anything about it...” Joyce mouthed a whisper.

And with a pair of fingers to her lips, Amy zipped them shut.

Nothing more needed to be said and the topic came to a close. Joyce looked down at the coffee maker with a distant expression before snapping back to the present.

“Alright,” she sighed, having prepared enough and stalled for far too long, “I’m gonna go wrangle her out now. She’s had plenty of time.”

“Look at you!” Amy smirked, “No nonsense kind of partner, huh?”

“Just a very loving one,” Joyce spoke true to her heart. “You can come wait in the living room while I go get her.”

Amy followed Joyce as far as the couch, another room with an amazing view to leave the woman starstruck and distracted enough for Joyce to quietly excuse herself down the hall. It was sort of a guessing game as to where Emily might be, but it didn't feel like much of a game when the first place she looked was the correct guess.

Like a two-year old caught under the slide, Joyce could see the spot of black hair peeking from the other side of the bed.

“Ready to come out?” Joyce sat by the corner of the bed, looking at Emily sat on the floor, clutching Pip.

“No...” She sorely responded. The thought of exposing herself like this was heart-wrenching. It made her so uncomfortable, so raw and exposed. All those feelings weren't anything new; it was the same sensations she felt when she was like this with Joyce, except they were good feelings. Now it was all like poison.

“No?” Joyce rhythmically stroked the top of Emily's head. “If you really didn't want to do this, why didn't you just take the clothes off...or use our phrase?”

And then came the helpless gesture; a shrug of the shoulders.

“I think it's because you're my good girl. My special, pretty, adorable little girl.” With a little bit of cooperation, she lifted Emily back onto the side of the bed. “Amy worked so hard to make you even more adorable and help us both bond even more than we already have. She's honestly helped me and you in a few different ways... You're my absolute treasure, Emily, and I'm very picky about sharing,” she gave her a playfully stern look. “But I want to share this with Amy because I want her to know how appreciative we are. I want her to see how amazing you look.”

“I'm...I'm scared...” Emily quietly spoke. The anxiety was killing her, imagining just how Amy might react. She wasn't going to see what Joyce saw. She'd see a grown adult in children's clothes, half-assing some kind of fantasy that hardly translated to an outsider.

“And that's completely natural,” Joyce touched her forehead with her own. “But the only way you can stop being afraid is by ripping off the bandage, sweetheart. Can I hold your hand?”

Despite being the one who was asked for consent, Emily answered by initiating herself.

“Let’s walk out together, okay? You’re going to feel one-*million* times better the second you do. I promise.”

“What if I don’t...?”

“Then we send Amy home,” Joyce said as simply as that. “Then, I will spend the rest of today and even tomorrow pampering you and spoiling you until all those bad feelings go away. But I’m not going to do that because it’s not going to happen,” she made doubly sure to get a look at Emily’s eyes. “Now what do you say?”

Everything was always a downward spiral, funneling into a single point of convergence and an absolute inevitability. Amy was going to know. She knew enough already. That is what ran through Emily’s terrified mind. There wasn’t much left to see, yet that small bit felt even more sacred and top secret than the rest. Words were words and rumors were fickle, but seeing was believing and oh-so tangible, just like the denim skirt her knuckle was anxiously kneading itself into.

It was almost like learning how to walk again the moment she stood. Shaky legs like a newborn fawn, her caregiver was right beside her to fill the role of a physical and emotional crutch.

Nervousness was a part of life. Fear, apprehension, worry and panic were simply par for the course. Everyone goes through stress and faces difficult decisions and moments in their life, and Emily was going through nothing different, except she’d truly reached a new peak of terror. Her first day of school, being scolded by her teacher, speaking in front of a crowd, her first job interview... Maybe it was the heat of the moment, or maybe it was simply the fact that this moment was the most emotionally tiring and stressful thing she’d ever had to deal with. Her emotions were gaslit like wind chill making the temperature feel absolutely so much colder.

By the time they were out in the hall she was a quivering mess with Joyce’s hand practically behind her back by the way Emily crawled behind.

She was going to die. It was social suicide. The moment she showed herself, it’d all be over. Joyce was insane. She was crazy. There wasn’t anything rational about this! They can’t show Amy, no matter how much she’s seen already! It didn’t matter! It wasn’t right! No, no. Emily knew. She couldn’t do this. Absolutely not. There was still a chance. A chance to turn around and run back to the room, beg while kicking, screaming and crying for Joyce to send Amy home.

Her eyes were focusing lasers on Joyce’s back, the fear was so paralyzing her peripheral vision was shutting down.

“J-...Joy...Jo--”

A mind-numbing jolt of static ran through her body the moment Amy’s gasp reached her ears. The shock fried her nerves and her muscles twitched. Her legs didn’t work and she was locked in place. What she could manage was grabbing the back of Joyce’s sweater with both hands. She didn’t care how it looked because her mind was far too haywire to even care about that anymore. She just wanted to hide. Joyce’s hips were wide, but not wide enough to hide the spread of her denim skirt, courtesy of the woman she was so desperately trying to conceal it from. The window to leave was gone. Over. It was finished.

And then there was betrayal. Her rock. Her lifeline, the one she’d surrendered everything to. She took one step, and then another. Emily couldn’t move her feet, so the moment Joyce shifted Emily stumbled with an incoherent whimper. Everything was so hot, her face was a million degrees. The TV dramas in her mind surrounded her, laughing like a chorus of hyenas, ridiculing her for barely heeding the vast “warnings” they showed with every single stereotype of trusting the dear friend, believing in your closest loved ones just to find a knife in your back.

All she needed was some kind of garnish and she would have made the perfect meal for the encroaching predator. Amy was up from the couch with a wide-eyed expression as Emily’s panic only intensified. Her hands trembled and the worry was all over her face, yet either Amy didn’t notice or in Emily’s biased mind, she was enjoying it all the more just to see the poor victim squirm.

“Ho...--” Amy started to speak, yet she’d continually pause to chuckle, raining down on Emily like damaging blows, making her flinch with each reaction. “H-holy shit...!”

Emily tried screaming for Joyce, fearing for her very life. Amy was a bully. A cruel, ruthless person who was about to make a mockery of her. But the air left her lungs as her nervous breathing robbed her of the ability to cry for help and her head was frozen like her feet.

Amy tensed her shoulders and covered her mouth, frantically looking straight at Emily with wide eyes, then briefly glancing back at Joyce as if she were watching a sport.

Emily wanted nothing more than for it all to stop. She truly did want to disappear. Joyce was wrong, this wasn’t going at all how she said it would. Hiccuping, tears rolled down her cheeks once her mind stopped choking up long enough for her to process more negative emotions.

The moment she did start to cry though, the absolute glee on Amy’s face stopped on a dime as utter horror overcame her.

And finally, after a few moments stretched out into a millennia by sheer anxiety and embarrassment, time started pacing like it should.

“Oh! Oh my gosh! No! No! Emily!” Amy shouted with a desperate voice and stumbled Emily forward into her arms. Joyce continued to watch a few steps back, expecting something like this, but being no less surprised. Over Emily’s shoulder Amy could not seem to wash away whatever cocktail of rapidfire excitement was running through her veins.

“You look so good! Holy shit...!” Amy couldn’t stop her rambling and even looked over at Joyce, gleefully shouting with utmost disbelief, “I made these! I made these clothes! Oh god! Hahaha!” The way she spoke to her creation only interfered with the way she tried to hug the sobbing Emily, prioritizing her own efforts on one front, yet trying to console Emily on the other.

Why was Emily being hugged? She didn’t know why. Bullies didn’t hug their prey. It was contradictory. Picking on someone wasn’t the same as comforting them. Maybe she was going to fling her? Had the conflict already escalated to physical abuse? Maybe Amy was that sort of bully.

Amy kept hugging her, endlessly spewing off one-line comments either to herself or the room for all, drowning in her artists’ high, lost to a plane of creativity neither women in attendance could hope to interpret. Only for brief moments would she ever break free from her own euphoric trance to say something intended to be comforting for Emily, or a half-baked statement for Joyce. By all accounts, it was Amy who had been fried.

“Okay...” Joyce stepped in with a smile, “I think she wants me.” She slipped her hands tactfully between Amy’s arms and Emily, releasing her with ease into a new set of hands.

The touch was familiar almost instantly, and Emily, the well-trained pet that she was, recognized her owner’s scent. The feeling came back in her legs and the adrenaline inspired her to spin around and crash forward into Joyce.

“I’ve got you...I’ve got you...” her soothing voice continued to play on repeat. Amy stood there with a long-lasting look of fidgety ecstasism, like electricity was firing from her fingertips.

Like it was just them and in their own bubble, Joyce soothingly suggested, “Why don’t we go sit down, huh?” And a quiet look over Emily’s head suggested the same to Amy, who was more than happy to oblige.

Every kind of defense mechanism was screaming, blaring alarms and flashing red lights. She was moments away from self-destruction or complete shut down, and it only grew worse when even the blanket they usually kept on the couch was nowhere to be found.

It was impossible to ignore. Inconceivable to think otherwise. Emily stared at her legs and the floor, willing to believe that somehow magi-fied Amy out of existence. But she knew it didn't. She knew none of it worked when the sounds Amy made and the presence of her drilling stare shattered all those illusions of pure fantasy.

Amy, meanwhile, continued to make an endless array of facial expressions, animating her hands like her life depended on it. She was over the moon, quite clearly, continuing to snuff any of the concerns she may have had about Emily's own feelings.

"Oh my God..." Her head couldn't stop turning and treated Joyce like her prized confidant, someone else to share in the absolute glory. Joyce had already had her fun under the sun with this once and even now it didn't make Emily any less adorable to her, but even Amy seemed to be pushing the shock factor to new limits.

"I-Ah...ahm...I-hm...I'm sorry...!" Emily finally blurted. "Ihm sorry! Ihm sorry!"

Finally it was the outlandish words that convinced Amy's mind to write something other than ecstatic on her face. "W--what? You're sorry?" Quickly, she looked to the Emily whisperer for interpretation.

"Wh...what are you sorry about, Emily?" A bit dusty on her studies in adult child-rearing, the scholar chose to refresh herself on the spot. "No one's upset with you?"

"I...I look weird! This...this is wrong!" she sobbed, pinching the fabric on Joyce's sleeve.

"Please...! Please let me change! I don't wanna do this anymore...!"

"No, please don't!" Amy nearly gasped at the gunshot of a plea. "Emily...!" The snuggled duo suddenly became a trio the moment Amy slid right next to her other side. "This...this is so perfect! You look amazing!"

It didn't matter what words of encouragement there were. Emily could hardly see it that way. She was embarrassed. Mortified. She wanted to be dignified, dressed maturely. This was for Joyce and no one else. Where was the undo button? How could she rewind this mistake?

"Emily?"

What if she just stopped breathing? Or pretended to fall asleep? Maybe Amy could be convinced to go home if she tried that.

“Emily...?”

Or...or if she locked herself in the bedroom. Or the bathroom. Hold herself hostage until Amy left. What if she left herself? No, bad idea...baby clothes and all...

“Emily!”

Startled and teary, Emily jumped from the raise in volume of a voice right next to her. Joyce had won her attention, maybe if only for a brief moment.

“You do not look weird and this isn’t wrong. You’ve heard it yourself, haven’t you? Amy thinks you look great!”

“Adorable,” Amy, a devil for the details as much as a fuss for every improper stitch, corrected, “actually.”

Rolling her eyes with a grin, Joyce hoped some of it might be infectious for the overwhelmed girl. “See? Amy would never tease you, especially because there’s nothing to tease about.”

“But...” Words were words, and feelings could cut much deeper than just sounds, but the reverse could also be true in some cases... Emily’s irrational logic was failing her and that only continued to make things feel less and less stable.

“And for as long as Amy’s here today, you’re going to stay dressed like this.”

Right then, words nearly did kill. Had the look in Emily’s eyes and the noise from her mouth been testimony, Joyce would have been charged for murder. And just as her conscience was fading and she really was about to sink inside of herself, Joyce simply would not let go of the reins.

“Hey, look at me?” Joyce reached into her metaphorical bag of assertive tricks and steered Emily by the chin to look back up at her. “You’re sitting here right now, aren’t you? The world isn’t ending, you’re still loved, and you’re in front of two people right now that think you look absolutely amazing.”

Emily’s lips tensed up as they struggled to decide what they wanted to do. Quiver, speak, or just stay put.

And if there wasn't enough baggage already, "And Emily, also remember that you can always blame me? I'm the reason you're dressed like this, aren't I? So if you want to be mad, be mad at me. It's okay, I can handle it." She laughed at her own self-sacrifice, but Emily didn't laugh back. The troubled look never left her face, but she wasn't making desperate noises anymore. No more desperate pleas. She was uncomfortable and nervous. But...she wasn't dying. It wasn't quite the end of the world. Just potentially the onset of it. Nevertheless, there was one less degree of imminent danger, as exposed as she literally was and felt.

"Emily?" It wasn't Joyce's voice, and that meant to pay it respectful attention, Emily would have to look them in the eyes. Quite hesitantly, Emily looked up at Amy.

"Can I just say how happy I am that you're wearing this?" At some point, the skirt of Emily's denim dress was between Amy's fingers. "I've never had the chance to make stuff like this before, and you should have seen what Joyce was like when I first showed these to her! Weren't you bouncing off the walls?" She laughed at Joyce's expense.

"M...Maybe a little..." With a sudden shift in spotlight, Joyce averted her eyes a small bit, but she was smiling.

"Emily, I just want you to know that I think you look amazing dressed like this and how much it means to me that you're willing to show me how it looks." And the entire time she spoke, her eyes continued to shift up and down, emotionally overwhelmed herself by the absolutely surreal reveal. To Amy, it was stupefyingly amazing just how much a person in already-amazing clothes could magnify the wow-ness of it!

And finally, just by a tiny bit, Emily's mouth was tugged by the corners, even if only a little.

Then the front of her denim dress was nonchalantly flipped up.

"Oh my gosh! That's right! I thought we made a onesie for this one!"

Suddenly smiles were quivering frowns.

"A--AMY!!"

"So it's comfy when you move around? They feel like clothes-clothes, right? Not like costume clothes?"

“I...I guess...yeah...” The blush never left her cheeks since Amy’s arrival, but Emily was finally open to limited conversation as she “walked”, but more honestly shuffled across the floor for Amy. It was like wearing these for the first time all over again with how Joyce asked similar questions, only now there was a whole new level of scrutiny.

“Is this your sketchbook?” Joyce couldn’t help but peer into the large object already half-outside the large canvas bag that Amy brought.

“One of them,” Amy answered without turning her attention, “ever since you put me down this rabbit hole, frankly I’ve had to separate some of the idea streams just to keep it from getting jumbled.”

“So what you’re saying is...the one you brought today has to do with stuff related to...this?” Her curiosity couldn’t have been killed even if it were nuked. With a probing and mischievous finger, Joyce was already dying just to “accidentally” flip the front cover open.

“Hm?” Now she finally looked back over her shoulder, sitting front and forward just to watch the embarrassed model in diapers walk the line. Suddenly Joyce’s hands were back at her sides, one busying itself with a warm mug of coffee. “Yes, it is.” And quite defensively she pulled the canvas bag far and away from snooping peeks. “Which you can see when I decide to show it to you.”

Now Joyce was frowning. Playfully. But a frown nonetheless. “Boring.” She miffed.

“Has she played in this outfit yet?” She looked back over at Emily, looking busy with the way she awkwardly drilled her toe into the floor, desperately hoping to be allowed to sit back down.

“Uhm...well, sort of.” Joyce half-shrugged. Now the idea of “play” wasn’t feeling so universal. They hadn’t exactly done much that could be considered physically engaging... There wasn’t a place with privacy for it. “We haven’t done anything outside the house, if that’s what you’re asking.”

Amy nodded. “Well if you ever do, let me know how it goes. Obviously it makes her adorable,” and with her tone of voice it was like she was studying objectively despite such emotionally-charged words, “but it’d be ideal to make sure that it’s functional.”

“It has been so far, but it’s not like we can just go to the park like this...” Maybe in her dreams, but dreams were just that. Then again, many dreams were coming to life as of late...

“N-no...” Emily quietly whimpered. “Please...”

“Nope, don’t worry.” Joyce liked to tease, but only when it was appropriate. “You won’t be dressed like this in front of strangers.” An important part out of respect above all else for Emily, but also others who had no business with this, nor should they be forced to. As for Amy... Joyce quietly watched her for a few minutes. She was harder to tell just what all of this enticed her. The clothes, obviously, but to what degree and just how much of that bridged into other aspects?

“Emily? Hon?” Amy started, casually using the pet name, “Could you just try turning around and touching your toes for me?”

“Uhm...o...okay...” Clueless and none the wiser, Emily did so, stretching as best as she could.

Joyce was confused as well, but the spectator sport spoke for itself from the bleachers. She watched as the denim skirt of the dress started to ride up, not fully exposing what was underneath, yet just started to tease it. And from the corner of her eye she watched Amy dutifully scribble some notes.

“Okay, thank you!”

“What was that for...?”

“Just making sure none of the fabric stretches funny...” Amy continued to write, and Emily, as innocent as she was right then, was too self-conscious to notice the tiny wink from Amy that Joyce did in fact see, which was meant for her. One lover of adorable clothing to another.

Amy was good. Too good, and Joyce was trying to compose herself, lest Emily get any more nervous from the things she didn’t understand, nor would she be allowed to know.

“Okay, good. This is good. Really good.” Amy nodded affirmatively. “What about her sleepers? How have they been doing?”

“Oh...uhm...I don’t think we have tried them yet, come to think of it.” And also come to think of it, she’d only put Emily down in her crib for a nap only a few times. She still had yet to make Emily spend the night in it. The only problem though was that meant being without her cuddlebug a whole night herself...

“Mind if we give them a try now?”

“Emily, hon? You okay with that?” Joyce asked Emily, who was still standing at the front of the room nervously, specifically because no one had told her it was fine to leave yet.

“I...I guess...” By this point, things were already quite exposed in Emily’s eyes, so what difference did it make if her embarrassment was colored in pink or blue.

“Let’s excuse ourselves for a little wardrobe change, then~” Joyce hummed with her stride as she took Emily by the hand and down the hall. “We’ll be just a second Amy. No peeking!”

They walked right by the nursery this time and into the bedroom.

“You moved them out in advance?” Emily asked from the bed.

“I didn’t want to risk opening up your nursery while she was here,” Joyce explained as she pulled out two different pajama sets from underneath a pair of normal looking jeans. “Unless you would have wanted Amy to see?”

“No...that’s okay...”

“You definitely seem a lot less nervous, you know?” A lot less, sure, but it was a relative term, and didn’t do away with her nervousness altogether.

“I...I dunno... She’s already seen me now, so...” And need she be reminded, but her denim skirt was flipped up and three loud pops from her crotch later, she was looking at her own diaper. “But I don’t like wearing a diaper around her...”

“Sorry, Em, but diapers are part of the whole process. And I doubt Amy minds those either, because it’s half of what makes the clothes fit so well, you know?” She added a kiss as a bonus, just to keep her soldier strong.

“Does...does doing this stuff make me weird?”

“It would be weird if we didn’t have our special things that make us feel so good...” Off the outfit came. “Everyone has things that they like, Emily, and just because others might not or may not understand it, that doesn’t make this stuff any less valid.” Thankfully Emily wasn’t a kicker when she didn’t want to be, as Joyce fed her feet into the sleeper without a struggle. “This does make you feel good, right?” Because it sure did for Joyce.

“Y...you know that, already...” Something that was at this point embarrassing to admit. Their justifications started in different places, but they always ended in the same spot.

A decent stretch of time had gone by, and it was filled with plenty of stretching from Emily. Awkward poses, rotating her arms, legs, going as far as crawling (which could only be coaxed out of her after much easier instructions to digest).

It'd become an extensive R&D session for Amy and Emily had become the poor puppet, whilst Joyce played the part of conversationalist for both sides, keeping Emily out of her own head as best as she could and continuing to chat with Amy.

“Like this...?” Emily mumbled with her face away and back towards the two women, splaying her legs in a sitting ‘W’ position. She was in her second set of pajamas, which essentially felt identical to her, but as Amy put it, “Function is only half of fashion!”

And while Amy scribbled away; sketches and notes like a raging storm of overflowing consciousness onto paper, Emily finally turned partly over her shoulder.

“...Joyce?”

All it took was her tone of voice and Joyce was on her feet and over.

“What’s up?” she asked with a hand on her shoulder. “Did I mention how well you’re doing, by the way?”

“Thanks...” Emily scratched her head a little. It wasn’t itchy though.

“You can whisper in my ear, you know?” Joyce offered it up with a patient smile. Whether it was legitimate focus or mindful politeness, Amy was temporarily lost in her own sketchbook.

Cupping her hands over her mouth, like sharing a secret at recess, Emily shared with a nervous whisper, “I...I need to use the bathroom...”

“Amy?” Joyce exaggeratedly sighed at the woman on the couch. “Can’t we give her a break? I think by now Emily’s feeling a bit exhausted...did you get enough of what you need?”

“Oh?” she looked up from her sketchbook, but still wasn’t quite following. “Oh! Sure! Yeah, no, this is plenty. Thanks for being my model today, Ems! You can get changed, if you want,” she waved her off like it was her own studio. “Or don’t? You look cute, too?”

“And that’s that,” Joyce beamed at the flustered girl. “Can you stand?” Without waiting for an answer, she chanted, “and...one...two...three!” Hands in hands, Joyce bounced on the balls of her feet before finally rocketing into the air, standing her legs upright and so the same with Emily’s.

Behind closed doors, Emily wasn’t expecting Joyce to also be behind said door when they went into the bathroom.

“What? Don’t give me that look,” Joyce lightly chastised as she worked the zipper lining Emily’s back. “These were made to need a little help in getting them off,” just as quickly she spun back around as Emily’s pajamas hung from her knees, “and even if Amy is here, I’m still the one in charge of your diapers, got it?”

“I do get it...” Emily blushed all the way through her compliance, looking one way, then shooting her head right in the other direction the moment she was staring into the mirror. “C-can we turn on the sink or something? Just so--”

She was interrupted by a loud tearing adhesive sort of noise. The kind of noise that was like pulling apart strips of velcro. The kind of noise a diaper might make if it was taken off.

“Emily, she already knows.” Joyce reminded with a loving kiss.

“That...that doesn’t mean she still has to hear...!”

“And she didn’t.” Probably. It didn’t make Joyce’s tone any less soothing.

Joyce didn’t leave the bathroom when Emily sat on the toilet, and admittedly something like this didn’t bother her as much anymore, especially when it looked like Joyce was preoccupied with other things on her phone. A level of trust a mother might have for her recently toilet trained child, who has at least enough know-how to do their business and flush. Conditioning was both a frightening, and admittedly exciting thing.

“Sorry about that!” Joyce announced their return, and Emily was looking a bit more put-together this time now that she was in jeans and panties, two things that were simply incompatible with her other wardrobe nowadays. And yet the diaper she was just wearing was as if it had residual effects, somehow clinging to her image like a phantom.

When Amy looked at her by chance, or made eye contact to converse, Emily could see through her eyes. See the Emily that she was probably seeing. Just the silly girl who was still in diapers. The incompetent adult that could hardly hold her bladder, much less a job--

“Emily...?” A finger probed her cheek, momentarily lost in thought.

“What?” Emily quipped as she swiped away Joyce’s finger, who looked pleasantly bemused.

“So grouchy,” she chuckled. “I asked if you had anything in mind for lunch?”

“Like what? Are we ordering?” Takeout sounded wonderful, especially after an emotional gauntlet like that.

Joyce shared a look with Amy, who shrugged with disinterest. “It can be if you want? I think it’s fair to say that you earned the right to pick what we get for lunch?”

And so they did, as for once Emily wasn’t afraid to indulge herself. After being made the spectacle of these two, finally she was feeling some confidence now without a pampers prison putting her in check, she was willing to be a bit selfish.

Joyce strolled back into the living room, phone slipping back into her pocket. “Okay, order has been put in. It shouldn’t be too long.”

“Thanks for treating me, you two,” Amy finally huffed, apparently reaching some sort of conclusion with her work as she finally closed the book, sounding satisfied. “Oh! By the way, Emily? I’ve got a question for you.”

“Yeah?” Nervous was all she could be at her best right now. Just coming off of diapers and baby clothing, she’d only ever interacted with Amy in padding, so forgive her for being a bit skittish over a surprise ambush of questioning.

“Relax, relax, I’m not going to ask anything weird,” she laughed, “Joyce said you’ve been out of a job for a bit? How’s that going?”

Oh. Not a weird question, but not a comfortable one either. And apparently Joyce told her...

“It’s...going, I guess.” Emily tried to shrug, playing the role any adult would. Answering the tough questions, but somehow in a way that made the person asking not feel uncomfortable. In other words, lie and placate. “I’m managing, though. I’m sure I’ll be working again soon.”

“That’s good,” Amy nodded thoughtfully. “Because you know, I think I could give you some work?”

In unison, Emily and Joyce looked at her in surprise.

“What?”