Lucy’s family had always been a little weird.

That wasn’t to say that they were, like, the Addams family or anything. But like all large families, the Tamberlands had their fair share of unique quirks and traditions that got passed down from generation to generation. Including this one that not a one of them—at least, no one Tori’s age or younger—really paid much attention to.

“You know, after forty, it’s only a matter of time before the women in our family start to blow up…”

And of course, that had been bullshit. Lucy’s grandmother and great aunt had been fat for the twenty years that Lucy had been alive because they’d been cooking and eating like crap for those same twenty years—and *sure* the fact that they used to be skinny (up until what, the nineties?) got thrown around occasionally, but nobody had honestly bought into what they were selling. Not even her daughters, who had (presumably) been there to watch it happen.

“You’ll see—it’s only a matter of time before the Tamberland Tonnage hits you square in the face.”

“Uh-huh, and is *that* why you’re baking *another* sheet of cookies to “sample”?”

“Laugh all you want, but I was skinny as could be until—”

It was all just good fun. Lucy and her cousins, Myra and Laci, had honestly never paid much attention to it. After all, *they* weren’t the ones in any immediate “danger” of blowing up one day. It was really just something that their mothers would get tired of talking about whenever it got brought up at the dinner table. Nobody really *believed* in any of it except for (seemingly) her grandmother and great aunt.

Y’know, at least until Aunt Lucille started to really pack on weight.

She had been the oldest among the aunts, and the only one without any representation among the trio of cousins since her son wasn’t as interested in this sort of thing as they turned out to be. Lucy, Myra, and Laci had been aghast at the sight of their eldest aunt showing up for Christmas one year nearly a hundred pounds heavier than the last.

At forty-five, Aunt Lucille had been the one that really brought the Tamberland Tonnage back into the forefront of everyone’s mind. She was the one that had served as a stark reminder of what could happen if you weren’t careful about your diet and exercise regimen—like, you know, actually putting in some effort.

And even if the other Tamberland women had laughed it off as a joke, Lucy and her cousins were starting to become believers.

“Phew—Aunt Lucille’s pretty big these days.”

“Jesus, maybe there’s something to what Grandma and Aunt Cheryl have been talking about this whole time…”

“Yeah, I’m starting to rethink that second helping of mashed potatoes I had earlier…”

And in all honesty, Lucy wasn’t quite sure how the topic of conversation got brought up from there.

“Please, if anyone should be worried about the Tamberland Tonnage hitting next, it’s my mom” Myra scoffed, “She cancelled her gym membership last week because she doesn’t use it enough. I think she’ll be the next one to get hit.”

“Um, what about *my* mom?” Lucy scoffed, “She had like, three slices of pie for dessert before anyone noticed.”

“Please, *my* mother has *literally* zero self-control.” Laci shrugged confidently, “Next Christmas, she’ll probably be a blimp if she keeps this up.”

There was a subtle, unspoken edge to her cousin’s voice that caught Lucy off-guard. For a second they all just stood there in stunned silence.

Myra was the first to break it, “You can’t be serious…”

Laci laughed nervously, “Of course not.” But then she thought about it for a minute longer before adding with a coy smile, "If and when it happens to *whomever* it’s going to happen to, I’m sure it’ll happen… naturally.”

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It was hard to explain just *why* the idea had gripped her like it had. Something about the scandalous nature of it all had appealed to Lucy—fattening up her mom just to prove a point to her cousins? That was ridiculous…

But it hadn’t stopped her from just-short-of actively sabotaging her mother’s already pitiful diet and exercise regimen.

Linda—her mother—had never been all that active in the first place. She had a parttime job that she worked at three days a week and, other than that, was pretty content to stay at home. Cleaning, cooking, doing the whole “domestic goddess” thing. But now that she was in college and had some free time of her own, Lucy saw to it to make some time to take some of the load off of her mom where she could.

And would you look at that, conveniently it was the same days that she wasn’t on campus.

“I appreciate you takin’ charge a little more around the house Lucy, but I’ve gotta tell you, I feel kinda useless now that you’re the one doing all the chores around here…”

“Well, what can I say, guess I’m finally maturing!” Lucy chuckled dismissively as she took a glance at her mother’s bowl of chips, “Looks like you’re running low, mom—no need to get up, I’ll take care of it!”

Was she laying it on a little thickly? Absolutely. But her mom really was happy to have the help. At least, if she wasn’t, she wasn’t doing a very good job of picking up the slack that Lucy had adopted as her own. And she *really* liked that she wasn’t the only one going to the grocery store. Lucy was doing her level best to keep the house as chock-full of snacks as she could manage without coming across as having an ulterior motive for helping out as much as she had been.

But at the end of the day, what exactly was Linda going to suspect her daughter of being up to?

“Here you go, mom—hey, I’m about to go make a run by the grocery store, you want me to pick something up on my way back?”

“Lucy, I just ate lunch like three hours ago.” Her mother scoffed, “*You* made it for me!”

“Yeah, I know, just uh…” Lucy cleared her throat, “Whoops, look at the time, gotta go!”

That had been a close one—she was going to have to get smarter about how she did all of this…

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Over the course of the coming months, Lucy found herself putting far more effort into this stupid little bet than she would have ever thought reasonable.

After all, that’s all this was—a silly little joke between cousins about which one of their moms would be the one to show up next Christmas a total cow.

But the longer that the year went on, the more committed to this silly little joke that Lucy became. It wasn’t long before Lucy had gone from merely stocking the cubbards with her mother’s favorite treats to taking over the entire kitchen some nights just to try out a new, fattening recipe to tempt her increasingly contented mother with. Using entire sticks of butter and plenty of oils to pad out the already fattening family recipes that had been a part of the old Tamberland cookbook.

“You’ve got to stop cookin’ like this hun, or you’re gonna have to roll me outta here every day before work!”

Another silly little joke that Lucy might have taken a bit too literally.

Her mother had always been a little thickset. Most women down here were. But Summertime had brought plump, round cheeks that spread out wide beneath her short and stylish ‘do. Her green eyes had begun glistening with every treat that her kitchen-proficient daughter was pumping out for her to try. Linda’s wide hips were becoming less and less removed from the couch due to the lack of responsibility that she suddenly found herself saddled with.

Yes, Lucy was doing her level best to feed her mother until she felt like she could pop as often as possible, but it wasn’t like Linda wasn’t finding ways to fill the free time that she had been granted once her daughter decided to step up around the house.

Almost none of it going towards addressing that budding belly that bulged against her high-waisted jeans.

“I’ll stop cooking when you tell me to stop and mean it.” Lucy laughed, sliding another helping of fried chicken onto her mother’s plate, “Speaking of—I’ve got plenty, so feel free to eat as much as you want.”

And boy did her mother want to eat a *lot* lately. Whether it was the fact that she was finally getting to kick back after so many years of taking care of Lucy or if there was just something being *unlocked* within her, Lucy had never known her mother to make as big of a pig out of herself in her whole life as she had been for the past few months.

Who would have known that it would have been so *easy* to kick her mother off the wagon…?

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The Fall was a transitionary season for the Tamberland family. The temperatures were cooling off and the days were getting shorter, but Linda's waistline seemed to be expanding with each passing week. Her clothes had become tighter and her jeans were practically bursting at the seams as she attempted to squeeze herself into them every morning before work.

“These are… brand… new!” her mother gasped out as she fought against the herculean strain that came with buttoning her jeans over her paunch, “Huff… I don’t… ugh… know if I’ve got anything that’s going to *fit* me!”

“Maybe you should start shopping for clothes that are a little more… generous?” Lucy suggested with the kind of coy tone she often used when attempting to manipulate her mother into doing something.

“I guess I could try, although it looks like it might be too late by now…”

Linda sighed as she stepped away from the mirror and pulled her shirt down over her stomach. No matter what she did, no matter how many times she tried to take in the waistband on her pants or unbutton them completely, nothing seemed to fit right anymore. She was resigned to make do with whatever she had until things changed—which was looking increasingly unlikely given how quickly weight seemed to jump onto her frame with each passing day.

All while Lucy tried not to look like the one directly responsible for all of her mother’s inexplicable weight gain.

“Y-Yeah, maybe this is, uh… y’know… your natural shape or whatever.” She suggested with a little clear of her throat, “Y’know, no point fighting it. At least not too hard, y’know?”

“I’ve been skinny all my life though!” Her mother made a face as she squished either end of the belly that muffin-topped over the waistband of her jeans, before quietly muttering to herself, “Maybe my mom and Aunt Grace are onto something…”

And as much as Lucy wanted to disagree with her mom in that regard, it wasn’t like it had been *hard* to get her mom into habits like overeating and laying around the house. If Lucy had even been slightly more helpful as a teenager, she had no doubt in her mind that her mom would have found an excuse to kick her feet up sooner rather than later…

But that didn’t mean that she felt like she could afford to slow down any time soon.

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“It’s such a shame that nobody came by the house this year, isn’t it?”

Lucy’s mother had brought up the travesty of having no trick-or-treaters while she plundered idly from the big turquoise bowl of candy that had been filled to the brim with enough fun-sized candy bars to put the neighborhood kids in a coma. And she said it next to a pile of wrappers that had been steadily growing since their scary movie marathon had kicked off in earnest.

“Yeah, it’s weird—like, you *know* they’re out there…” Lucy tried to lie as best she could, just as she had tried to enjoy the movies, but it was difficult to stay relaxed when she knew at any time that one of those snot-nosed little shits outside could ignore the sacred code of trick-or-treating and ring the doorbell despite the porch lights being off.

“And you’re *sure* you checked the porch lights?” her mother asked from behind a mouthful of itty-bitty Snickers bar

“I sure did.” Lucy nodded sagely, “I guess we just need to decorate a little better next year… oh hey, you want another soda while I’m up?”

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All of this was to say that Lucy had spent the past year doing her part in making sure that her mother would be the person to put on the Tamberland Tonnage before the year was out.

For a little less than twelve months, she had been steadily wriggling her way into her mom’s headspace, taking the brunt of the chores and the majority of the kitchen responsibilities so that her mom could sit back, relax, and follow her natural instincts.

“This is *delicious* honey, you *have* to try some…”

“Does this look a little *tight* to you? It feels like I just bought it…”

“Are you gonna finish that, honey?”

And luckily for Lucy, her mom had the instincts of a total chubster in the making to begin with. Adding onto and rewarding those impulses had been as easy as one, two, three—and the longer that this went on, the bigger that Lucy’s mom got.

Before either of them knew it, Christmas was right around the corner once again, and a grand unveiling would be upon them; even if Linda wasn’t quite sure *why* Lucy was so excited to go to Christmas at her grandmother’s this year.

“I’m glad tat you’re excited to see your cousins again, but I’m absolutely floored at how my sisters are going to look at me.” Lucy’s mom frowned, one hand sliding from the steering wheel to rub self-consciously along her gut, “With all the weight I’ve put on this year, they’re not going to recognize me!”

The weeks leading up to Christmas were a blur of food and barely contained excitement for Lucy. She could hardly contain her anticipation as she thought about what her family members' reactions would be when they finally got to see the result of her hard work in person. As much as it was a joke between cousins, there had been something that she found *oddly* satisfying in watching her mother get bigger and bigger by the day, even if she wasn't fully aware of what was going on.

Lucy couldn’t help but notice how different her mother looked now that she had gained eighty pounds since last year’s holiday season—an impressive feat considering this time last year Linda had only weighed one hundred and thirty-five pounds! Her belly jutted out proudly from beneath her shirt, stretching the black dress fabric so tight against its curves that you could practically make out every ripple along its surface; while above it fat hung off both sides like two sacks full of loose change cascading down over thick thighs that made walking up steps an exercise in patience rather than agility.

“Oh you’re just being dramatic.” Lucy scoffed, subtly taking in her mother’s expanded shape, “You look great.”

But as Lucy and her mother entered Granny Tamberland’s Christmas soiree, it was clear by the looks on her relations’ faces that Lucy’s mom was going to be the brunt of many a joke before the night was over.

“Wowwww Lucy…” her cousin Laci said with raised eyebrows as she sipped on her eggnog, “I guess you really weren’t kidding when you said that your mom would be the next one to put on the Tamberland Tonnage.”

There was almost a sense of… bitterness? Was that the word? In that moment, Laci sounded less like a cousin striking up conversation that came at the cost of her aunt and more like a sore loser at a soccer game; something that Lucy couldn’t help but notice and, strangely, revel in. It wasn’t as though she had been *enjoying* making her mother put on so much weight this past year… right?

“Oh well, what can I say, can I call them or can I call them?” Lucy chuckled, trying and failing not to let her victory go to her head, “I guess it’s just destiny or something!”

“I mean, Myra said the same thing on her way up.” Laci shrugged as she took a sip of her eggnog, “Maybe y’all were onto something.”

“…wait, is Myra not here?”

“Nah, her and her mom should be pulling up…” Laci checked her phone, “Shit, literally in like a minute or two.”

"Well look at you!" Lucy heard her Granny laugh not long after the sound of the front door opening from deeper into the house, "I guess now we really do have proof that something is *definitely* going around!"

Lucy’s pride fell flat instantly as worry began to overtake her. Surely her Aunt Tammy hadn’t managed to put on more weight than her mother had. Who was putting on more than eighty pounds in just one year—that was insane?!

“Thanks… mama…” the muffled sounds of her aunt’s haggard breathing were enough to make Lucy zone out of the entire conversation as she approached the entryway, “Y’all haven’t started dinner yet, right?”

No. No it couldn’t be true—Lucy’s mom *had* to have been the heaviest. She was a shoo-in! After all the work that she had put into making her mom fat this past year, how could Myra have swooped in and taken that achievement away from her? How in the world—

“Well hello Lucy.” Myra finger-wiggled her way maliciously at her cousin, “Long time no see.”

“H-Hey! Myra…” Lucy gulped, looking next to the woman whom she *thought* resembled her aunt Beatrice, “W-Wow Aunt Bea you look—”

Fat.

Fatter than her mom.

…

…something would have to be done about this by next Christmas.