

## 1 - Joyce

“Listen, Emms, I just think we should...start seeing other people.” Jack awkwardly spoke, his half-hearted breakup airing through the speaker of her phone. “We just don’t have that connection anymore, ya know? So I figured it’d be best if we just broke up this way and have it be easier on the both of us.”

“Jack you fucking asshole!” the livid girl shouted, kicking the door to a home she no longer had ownership of. What a sick joke, finding to have been kicked out of your own home before even trying to step a foot inside. It was one thing for wanting to break up, but for doing it in such a shallow and sleazy way? Breaking up by voicemail and changing the locks was what really took the shit-lord cake! Unbelievable!

“Listen, er,” the voicemail continued, and his digitized voice made Emily seethe. “I had the locks changed to the...apartment. I know you have stuff in here, but I’d rather someone else came for them. So you know, uh, we wouldn’t have to see each other...--”

“Ugh, you piece of shit! Can’t you at least look at me if we’re gonna do this?” Emily raised her voice again, pounding on the door, crying out to a tall block of wood. The outlet for anger and confusion that should have been her now-Ex was what kept her from smashing his face in, and she could only express that anger through her fists. Underhanded and scummy didn’t even begin to describe it.

Being dumped so one-sidedly, and stepping out of the picture before she could even catch a breath--so suddenly. There was certainly sadness from losing her significant other, but it didn’t do a single thing to dampen the frustration and rage she was feeling towards him right now.

“And um...”

Of course there was more.

“...I’ll be gone for the week doing some stuff, so one of your friends won’t be able to reach me until next Sunday. Sorry about that,” as if there was actually any remorse, “and I’m really sorry about this Emily, I just think this is the best for the both of us...Bye.” The voicemail clicked, and his pre-recorded spiel was over.

Emily’s heart was being tossed and turned by a tornado of emotions. She was hurt, yet bitter, since the poor sap couldn’t even face her to give a proper breakup. To the very end he was an

inconsiderate, self-absorbed douche that only ever gave a damn about how he felt! In the short term for what sucked the most, all of her clothes were in their--his apartment! Emily was already kicking herself for having lingering attachment. But how could you sever almost a year's worth of love in the blink of an eye? Even she knew their relationship wasn't in the best of spots...but not bad enough to think that this would happen.

Unfortunately, the place was signed under his name, and she had no legal authority to be in there; no authority to get all of her clothes...That's what sucked the most! Unable to even change, as she moved closer to the exit, the anger burning inside Emily turned into frustration, then finally sorrow. So much of her life had been turned on its head in one fell swoop.

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Emily moped along the sidewalk as she was still in the blouse, dress pants and hard-sole shoes she'd been hoping to change out of since she sat at her desk this morning. The bustling of cars, people, and city construction blended into white noise as she was deep in sorrowful thought. The little things like not being able to change clothes, get something to drink or even take an after-work shower in her former home seemed to be all that she could think about. The passing faces and noise by this point had all meshed together into white noise. An even darker reminder in the back of her head was how just because her life stopped, that didn't mean the same for the rest of the world. She had work tomorrow, and there was no chance in hell she could wear the same clothes twice! She took out her phone, hoping someone could help her out; observing her very small list of contacts...

"Candace, please, it's just for one night. I just need a place to stay so I can freshen up for work the next morning..." A repeated string of failed attempts were already plummeting her expectations. "Oh...you said there's no space at your place? Alright, sorry to bother..."

"...You moved? Where? Denver? Alright, sorry for calling..."

"The place is being renovated...Mhmm. Okay, thanks anyways."

"Vacation...Okay."

A new piece of her heart would chip, as each and every one of her friends let her down; the many lifelines she thought she could count on in times like this. Her mom and dad were not an option either, as it was thanks to her own life decisions--so long ago now, that would put the width of almost an entire country between she and her guardians. She was sitting on a park bench,

becoming more glum as the minutes passed and the oranges and yellows from above started to mix with emerging blues and purples, until it all became a muddled black.

Taking a deep breath, Emily tried to minimize the overbearing panic over work in her mind; diverting all the energy she had focused towards being mad at Jack. She tried her best to use it in a much more productive sense. What she needed to worry about the most was finding a place to stay for the night. She reasoned that a hotel or motel room would have to do; whatever she could find at the cheapest price. Standing up from the bench, she then noted her phone had only 13% of its battery left.

*Fucking Jack!* If he hadn't royally screwed her day up, she could have tended not only to herself, but her phone too! But that wasn't an option right now, like all other avenues of hope. All Emily could do was work with the time she had. The clock read 7:06, and the sun was setting. And speaking of the sun setting...the clouds suspended above looked to resemble her mood an awful bit. Almost like...

Rain.

The raindrops were crashing onto the brick sidewalks with such force, that they would explode into little mini water bombs; snaking their way into the cracks between Emily's exposed foot and shoe. Without an umbrella, Emily's body had become ice cold with her business attire doing little to protect her from the raw elements, as she became drenched in every sense of the word.

"N-Need t-to find a motel..." She shivered and shook with each step. Upon the research done on her phone, any of the nearby hotels were far too expensive to spend a night in. Yes, she needed shelter, but not the kind that would break the bank. Practically swimming in her shoes, Emily felt alienated by the few people that still walked the streets, the difference between them and her being they had umbrellas.

"S-Somewhere, please..." Emily quaked as she was on her last leg. She couldn't stop anywhere, because another wasted moment would be the potential rest she would lose out on. Everything had gone wrong, and there didn't seem to be any sign of that changing in sight. What was supposed to be another day off of work had transformed into something much more unforgiving, and became a night filled with unforeseen obstacles that challenged her in every which way. Emily could only let out a pout as she saw the time on her phone read 8:28. But as long as she could get through this, everything would be okay, until--!

"Wha!- agh!" Emily yelped as she was swept off the ground, and collided with the brick path face-first. Getting up on her knees shakily, she turned around to see the small opening in the

sidewalk she managed to trip on; a puddle of water disguising the evil trap. She looked at her foot which now had a throbbing pain, but it was too dark to clearly see just how bad it was. Either way, her ankle hurt. What made things worse was when she noticed something on the ground, closer inspection revealing it to be a phone. Her phone.

“No...no, no, please!” the damaged girl whined as she held the broken remains of her phone. The screen was cracked, and the now lifeless screen reflected her helpless situation. The feelings of despair truly started to sink in at that point, tears edging out of her eyes as bitter defeat embraced her. It was impossible to distinguish what were her tears and the rain, the mix of misery rolling down her cheeks. Bracing herself, Emily picked the phone up and started to stand. Putting weight on the wounded foot however was a mistake, feeling a sharp jolt of pain erupt from her left foot Emily quickly fell again. She looked around for anyone that could help her, but she had truly reached a new low now, as no one was walking in the area. Only the occasional car would drive by, much too busy to stop, much less even notice a person in the pouring rain. Not that she’d expect them to. Just like everyone else, she should be able to handle this.

Streams of indistinguishable liquid ran down her cheeks. Did it matter though? Without any goal in mind now, Emily stood herself on the uninjured foot this time, limping to the doorstep of a building that was covered by a small overhead. Silently, interrupted by sobbing every now and then, she watched the rain crash into the ground as if it were hypnotic, and was devoid of all thought. Too miserable to think, too damaged to move, she ran out of stamina to consider the future, and was too preoccupied with digesting the present. Somehow, despite being covered in water and chilled to the bone, exhaustion must have taken her over, and she dozed off for who knows how long.

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“Excuse me? Hello?”

Emily, still groggy from sleeping, looked up to see a mysterious figure tower over her.

“You’re awake, thank goodness...” The womanly voice sighed in relief.

“Wh-who are you?” Emily was still shaking the sleep out of her head, trying to collect herself.

“Come on now, can you stand?” They were concerned for her, as they leaned over to pick Emily up by the shoulder.

Leaning on the woman as a crutch, Emily quickly found herself on her bad foot again, letting out a yelp of pain as she quickly readjusted. The woman seemed to take notice as well, taking care to ease their pace towards who knows where. In one arm she had Emily's torso and the other a hand occupied with an umbrella--something Emily would have appreciated as a silver lining ages ago. It hadn't been but only a few minutes until Emily found herself being shuffled into a car and laid down on a row of seats with a towel surprisingly ready for her. Emily's rescuer shut the door behind her and moved to the front seat. Then the driver's door shut, and the car made a quiet hum as the vehicle began to move.

"I know you're a bit out of it right now hon, but if you can hear me, I'm going to take you ba..."

And that was it. Emily dozed back off into sleep, relishing that she was somewhere much more comfortable than the hard steps on the city streets. Either way, her current bed was thousands of times better than what she was just dealing with, and it felt amazing. Despite all the turmoil she'd experienced that day, Emily finally felt at peace, if only for a short while.

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"Mmmmm" Emily softly moaned as she stirred beneath the covers. She rolled her body from one large pillow to the next. The mattress felt like a cloud that supported her entire body and everything around it. And the covers felt warm, yet so loose and free. Light from somewhere aroused her eyes, causing them to open, and force the realization that this wasn't her bed, or room. Or...clothes? Emily looked over to the light that poured through a glass door balcony, and onto her and the light brown covers that blanketed her. She looked down at herself, dressed in a slightly white oversized nightgown, and lifted the hem to also see she wasn't wearing the same panties as she was from when she was last awake. Unfamiliar with where she was, Emily racked her brain trying to think of what happened. She looked at the digital clock by the nightstand, seeing it was the early morning of tomorrow, or rather, today.

Someone had picked her up last night, took her to her car and...nothing.

That's all she could remember? Emily looked down at herself again, reasoning she must have been pretty dazed to go under a transformation like this without being disturbed. It was also clear then she wasn't wearing a bra, if she didn't already feel vulnerable enough. Emily whisked the cover to the side as she stepped out of the bed onto the thickly carpeted floor, and walked over to the door leading into a hallway; reminding herself to stay on her good foot. The floor was now wooden (And cold, she almost sheepishly noted), and there were a couple of other doors that were closed. She walked into an open area decorated like a living room. On all of the white walls, she noticed the occasional empty space would be occupied by some abstract art piece or

another. She walked past the large couch and coffee table, into a much shorter hallway, through another opening and into a kitchen.

“Finally awake, are we?” The woman from the night before said to Emily, causing her to jump slightly from surprise.

She was sitting at a table next to the island, sipping what permeated the wonderful aroma of coffee and was scrolling through a tablet, reading who knows what.

“Uhm, hi.” Emily could only stifle a response. Being in a stranger’s home and comparing their attire, the woman couldn’t help but feel intimidated, and also well-underdressed for the exchange.

“Well? Don’t be a stranger. Sit!” She commanded in a friendly tone, slipping off what were probably her reading glasses as she excused herself and moved over the counter.

Emily was still taking in the woman’s appearance and her surroundings, trying to get things up to speed for herself while she adjusted. This room’s interior was dressed in tiled backsplash, and the many metal tools and appliances seemed so stainless...and expensive.

“Excuse me?” Her savior suddenly asked, breaking Emily’s train of thought.

“Oh! Yes?” Emily quickly responded, slightly embarrassed for being so out of tune.

“I asked how you liked your coffee.” She looked back at Emily waiting for an answer. “Do...do you drink coffee?”

“Yes! Yes, please,” Emily was quick to answer again. “I’ll just have whatever you’re having.”

“Are you sure? I really don’t mind making something extra.”

“No, please, I’ll be fine with yours.”

“If you insist...”

Emily stared down the back of the person she didn’t even know the name of yet. Her brown hair ran a bit past her shoulders, and was wavy and free, yet was tame and professional. Seeing her stand, even minus the heels, the woman looked like she had quite a few inches on the very

small-feeling Emily. She was already dressed in a gray two-piece suit that hugged her curves, ready for the day, much unlike Emily who felt very exposed at the moment.

She pulled a mug from one of the cabinets and poured the rest of the coffee pot into it, setting the drink in front of Emily.

“Bon appétit.” She chuckled, returning to her own seat.

Black. Of all the kinds of ways she could drink her coffee, it was black. The least of Emily’s favorites. But she couldn’t turn it down now, not after already being offered the drink. That would be impolite of course...and childish. Emily took a sip of the still-hot coffee, taking in the bitter taste as she sat the mug down.

“You looked pretty banged up last night,” The woman broke the silence. “It was a good thing I found you when I did.”

“Yeah, that’d have to be an understatement. I can’t thank you enough for what you did last night. Believe me, I felt like I’d reached the end of my rope...”

The woman smiled again at Emily’s return of gratitude, taking a sip from her own drink now.

“And you’ll have to forgive me,” She started again. “I didn’t even catch your name last night?”

“Emily, Emily Sen.” Again, Emily internally cursed herself for not even giving her name before spending the night. Not that she was even in the condition to have done so. “And I didn’t get yours either...?”

“Joyce, Joyce Summers. Sorry for not telling you any sooner, you seemed a bit out of it to try and make any conversation.” She laughed, as Emily’s unfortunate night was already starting to feel like a thing of the past.

“Thank you again. And your house is so lovely, from what I’ve seen at least. For letting me stay in your room, thank you, really! I can’t appreciate it enough.”

Joyce was still smiling, but with a tinge of curiosity she asked, “It’s really no trouble, but what do you mean? You didn’t sleep in my room last night. You slept in the guest room?”

What? She had to be joking! Joyce looked amused as she could see the surprise morph Emily's face. "But it was so huge! Everything in that room looks way too nice to not be a master bedroom!"

"Better believe it hon, I just like my guests to feel comfortable." Joyce sipped her coffee again, taking a moment to check once more on her tablet.

Now that Emily thought about it, this apartment did seem awfully large, and didn't look cheap in decor. Judging from what she had seen, it didn't take long for Emily to connect the dots that Joyce did in fact live some kind of lavish life to an unknown degree.

"Wow..." It was all Emily could do for a reply. Being in such a big home really put things into perspective with what she and Jack had at their relatively much smaller apartment. *Jack...* She then felt a pang of sadness at the sound of his name. Jack truly was an asshole, but she couldn't deny how long they'd been together, and how much it hurt to now be apart. She felt the tears coming on as she never had a moment to process her emotions.

"Is everything okay?" Joyce was already getting up from her seat, ready to come to her aid.

"Yes," She sniffled. "Everything's fine...I was just thinking about last night, that's all." Emily half-lied, quickly drying her tears and doing her best to stay strong and keep up appearances, in front of the one person she wanted to look good to.

Joyce sat down again, seeing she was more or less alright now, and said: "Well please, I want to hear all about it. It's the least you could do. I'd like to know how something as wonderful as yourself could have been dealt such a bad hand."

Emily warmed to the kind tone of her words. For in what felt like forever, things actually felt like they were stable. And she was right. The least Emily owed Joyce was an explanation.

Emily took a deep breath, then started. "So I was just coming home from work the other da..."

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"Well..." Joyce briefly spoke, taking in Emily's entire story. She stopped, and got out of her seat, wrapping her arms around the surprised Emily. "It's alright now, we'll get you fixed up." She continued, comforting Emily in the middle of her kitchen. She couldn't help but blush, feeling even smaller now for being hugged like a child as if they needed consoling (considering her eyes



could see just only above her bosom). But she couldn't deny it was nice to have someone that actually felt like they were there for her.

"Th..thanks..." Emily responded. While she couldn't reciprocate the awkward embrace totally, she at least hung her hands from Joyce's arms. The two were still far from really knowing each other, but it felt like Joyce was making an effort to shorten that gap of strangeness.

"Now," Joyce released Emily from their hug. "Let me clean our drinks up. I'm sorry I didn't make anything more... 'extravagant,' but I'm a bit rushed for time, you see..." Joyce was quick to take both mugs (Emily's being hardly touched) and empty whatever was left into the sink and wash them out. Snapping back to reality, Emily then asked, "Also, how were you able to find clothes that fit me?"

"As you can see the nightgown doesn't fit since it's my size," Joyce joked as she turned off the faucet. "But other than that, I just bought you a package of underwear when I got you back here. And how did I know your size? Well..." Joyce gave an exaggerated look as if she were sizing Emily up. "I have a knack for clothes!" She laughed. Then as an afterthought she included, "And sorry about the bra, I was a bit preoccupied on getting back to you with the bare minimum. I didn't want to put you for a total scare by being alone in a stranger's apartment."

"Wait, you bought this for me?" Emily looked down at herself. "Please, just let me know how much I owe you. I promise I'm good for it, and--!"

"Nonsense." Was all Joyce said. "Your money's no good here. Only *I* will provide for my guests."

Emily then remembered her chest was currently bare under a single article of clothing, and was suddenly thinking about how Joyce had dressed her at some point last night; coloring her face in a new shade of embarrassment. But such thoughts were quickly chased by another one.

*Work!*

*Ohgodohgodohgod*, she totally forgot! Emily remembered checking the clock that morning and it was somewhere around 7:00, and she had to be in for 7:30! A look of panic took over Emily's face and Joyce seemed to notice too, asking what was wrong.

"I'm gonna be late for work! I need to be in by 7:30!" Emily worried as she was quick to slide the chair back over the tiled floor and unknowingly step on her injured foot. With a wince and jolt of pain, she fell back into her seat however, Joyce following over to her.

“Emily,” She politely yet sternly said as she knelt and made eye contact with her. “You can’t go to work today.” Gently, Joyce lifted Emily’s red and slightly swollen ankle. “Did you forget about this?” Emily then looked too, and realized that she was being foolish for thinking she could work. But there wasn’t any way for her to call in! Not with her phone at least...

“But my phone is broken, and I can’t-” Emily was interrupted as Joyce was already taking out hers.

“What’s the number to your workplace?” Joyce asked, patiently waiting for an answer.

Hesitantly, Emily gave the number to her. But why would she need to know? Emily was the one who had to call in. Joyce dialed the number and put the phone to her ear while she waited on the line.

“Joyce really maybe I should be the-” Emily was again halted by Joyce when she mouthed the words “it’s fine” to her.

“Hello?” Joyce greeted the person over the phone, “Hi, this is Joyce Summers calling in place of an employee named Emily Sen?” There was a short pause on the other line. “Yes, I’m calling to let you know Emily won’t be in for work today.” Another pause. “She injured her foot last night and can’t stand on it properly.” Maybe this was a wealthy stranger’s home, or maybe this was just a glorified nurse’s office of an elementary school she never left. Whatever it was, Emily stayed quiet and allowed the adult to speak for her.

“Yes, she’s scheduled to be having it looked at today. Perfect, thank you for your help.” There was another long pause over the phone. “Yes, yes, thank you very much. Oh- I’m sorry, I’m a...close friend of hers. Yes. Alright, I will be sure to let her know, thank you.” With that, Joyce hung up the phone and Emily was seemingly free for the day.

“You didn’t have to call for me, really.” Emily stammered, feeling as if a line had been crossed that felt oddly foreign. She strangely felt the need to assert some sort of agency she now felt was lacking.

“I know I can seem overbearing,” Joyce admitted, “but please, let me do whatever I can to take any stress away from you? Let me help you.”

Emily felt better once she explained herself and was somewhat put at ease.

“Okay... Thank you... again.” Emily couldn’t express her gratitude enough, though that didn’t stop the novelty of it all bogging down her mind. In a span of less than 24 hours, Emily had come to meet a person that was apparently willing to bend over backwards for her on all fronts. Frankly, she didn’t feel deserving of such generosity. Not a single bit of it.

“But they did tell me to relay to you that you still need to send an email stating that you won’t be in today. Just so they hear from you. And so, please, please, please!” Raising her voice with each and every ‘please’, Joyce had a calming smile, “take it easy today?”

After a brief pause, Emily conceded and nodded her head with a sheepish smile.

Their moment was interrupted by the ringing of a doorbell.

“Oh?” Joyce turned her head away. “Just a second, please?” Joyce walked out of the kitchen and a little bit down the hallway to what was likely the main door. Emily didn’t dare budge from her seat, lest she cause even more trouble for the kindest stranger she’d ever met. She could hear a conversation begin.

“Ms.Summers, I don’t mean to rush you, but the car has been waiting for half an hour! I understand maybe taking a few minutes, but don’t you think this is a bit much?”

“Calm down George, what are they going to do, fire me?” Emily could hear Joyce laugh a bit at her own remark.

“Either way, we need to go, please!” The man sounded as if he were almost begging.

“Okay, okay. Give me a moment, I have to say my goodbyes.”

“Goodbyes?” The sound of a door promptly closing made itself known, and Joyce reappeared in the kitchen.

“Did I make you late?” Emily asked, already beginning to feel seeds of guilt.

“No, you kept me company.” Joyce corrected as she grabbed her handbag off the counter.

“Time’s obviously a little short right now, though, but here’s the rundown: I want you to rest here today. Feel free to use the couch, tv, kitchen, bathroom and so forth. If I were you, I’d want to change right about now, but unfortunately there isn’t anything for you to wear that’d fit, so you’ll have to make do. There’s a computer in my office for you to send out your email whenever, and feel free to browse if that’s your thing.” Joyce took a brief pause, reaching the end of her laundry

list. “And also, I didn’t bathe you last night, so don’t forget to take a shower!” Joyce joked as she was already walking out. “I’ll be back at around five!” she shouted to Emily, farther away now. Emily could hear the doorbell ring once more. “I’m coming, George!” Joyce yelled in an irritated tone, opening the door and quickly shutting it behind her.

Emily sat there blankly, taking everything in once more. She now had this giant home to herself for hours, and was being *told* to enjoy it to the fullest extent. She was fine being dressed this way since it was just her; all she had to do was rest. But wait, bathe her? Emily remembered what she hoped was a joke made by Joyce. Emily blushed, already trying to forget about the thought.

## 2 - Relaxing

Emily walked down the hallway, searching for Joyce's office. She may have the entire day to relax, but she could get it started sooner by doing the one small task entrusted to her first. Emily looked at her choices, there being four doors (aside from the room she slept in) to choose from. Turning the knob of the nearest one, Emily opened the door to find a large bathroom, but that was for later. Either way, not an office. Shutting the door and moving on to the next, it was another room, probably Joyce's. She didn't take time to ogle out of respect for her rescuer's privacy.

The next door was locked, meaning it probably wasn't that either, but the final door out of process of elimination looked to be it. An L-shaped desk was set up in the corner, and was mounted by a few monitors, notebooks, binder, and the rest of the office essentials. Emily pulled out the chair and faced herself in front of the monitors, looking down to see there were in fact two computers. On the rightmost one there was a small sticky note attached, labeled 'BUSINESS'

"A computer just for business, and another for everything else..." Emily muttered to herself in amazement. Living life lavishly truly had its perks, and was especially intimidating to witness firsthand. The computer tower was already humming softly to indicate it was already on, and Emily shook the mouse to bring the computer out of its slumber. Instantly the screen lit up and she was quick to write and send out a proper email. Putting the computer back to sleep, Emily closed the office back up and was ready to start her day.

It was only then though did the hunger really start to hit her. She'd barely had anything to eat or drink since lunch at work yesterday. It did feel a bit impolite, invading Joyce's fridge; but she did tell her to, after all...

Keeping it simple, she made some eggs and toast with a glass of orange juice. Biting into her food, she couldn't help but note its unexpected quality! Be it the ingredients or appliances used to prepare them, it was certainly a better meal than she could ever prepare back at her old place.

After finishing, she looked longingly at the fridge once more, already aware of how she was restraining herself from indulging too much. Yes, she was hungry, but then she'd not only feel like a glutton, but she was also taking advantage of Joyce's kindness. Despite being told to relax, her actions needed to be careful and calculated, so not to make Joyce regret her own kindness. The dishes and pan were washed, and next on her checklist was the bathroom.

It was a spacious, tiled room with orange lights that gave the atmosphere a warm glow. The centerpiece to the room was the tub itself; surrounded by steps, and a lowered ceiling that was an expansive shower head! On one end of the tub there were two handles for a faucet, and one for what Emily assumed to be for the shower portion. Near the sink was a pair of two large cabinets, opening them to find countless towels and amenities. Grabbing just the essentials, Emily set them beside the tub and started the water; the gushing flow already warm to the touch within seconds. It wasn't every day Emily had a chance to bathe. She'd always have to be on the go and couldn't afford a long soak, but today she could--and, it was also convenient for her foot.

After enough time, when the water was filled to a reasonable height, Emily cut the water and had already stripped herself of her two articles of clothing and stepped into the water. It was pure bliss as she eased into the large tub. Easily she could have fit four more of herself in the tub; the sheer size was almost overwhelming. She rested her head along the curved edge where there was already cushioning attached. With her legs splayed out, and almost sitting up, the water coasted just beneath her shoulders; tiny waves bobbing from the shockwave of her entering the glorified hot tub.

This home truly was like a fantasy and a dream to many much like herself. She knew it couldn't last, but she knew to enjoy it for as long as possible. It was almost funny to imagine what she'd do if Joyce had told her to stay put. With the soap and conditioner she took out, Emily performed her routine (much slower than usual, of course) and allowed herself to simply soak. The euphoria was indescribable, just from lying there. She even let out a yawn, and then her eyes started to feel a little droopy.

"Maybe for just a second..." Emily bargained with herself as she closed her eyes, clearly for more than just a second. Alone with her thoughts, and the noise of a bathroom fan, she quickly dozed off and fell into a slumber.

"Hnnn...ah!" Emily stirred for a moment, then jolted herself awake from the swishing of water. "Ah...?" Emily looked around, confused for a moment, trying to remember what she was doing. "Aww...damn!" Called back to the task at hand, she somehow fell asleep while in the bath.

Feeling all pruny, Emily was quick to press the drain button on the mounted console, as water slowly swirled into the center drain.

"How long have I been in here?" She wondered, stretching away the fatigue. Emily looked at a high set window on the other end of the bathroom, and from what she could tell, not too much time had passed. Reluctantly, she stepped out of the water and draped a towel that seemed to fit quite well around her figure, and walked over to the sink to wash up while she dried off. She

grabbed a smaller towel for her hair; it being somewhat shorter than Joyce's--something she oddly noticed.

After enough time, her blacker-than-usual hair was returning to its original shade as most of the excess water was gone. Unsure of what to do with them, Emily folded her towels and placed them next to the tub and returned the other things she had used. Reminding herself to ask Joyce what she should do with the towels when she gets back, Emily put her sole pair of panties back on and then the nightgown. It did feel kind of strange being in practically pajamas during what felt like daytime, but it was all she had to work with. The light was flicked off and the fan came with it, as a much cooler draft welcomed her back into the rest of the apartment. With really nothing else to do, Emily flopped onto the thick-cushioned couch and looked on at the tv as she gave it life with a nearby remote.

Flipping through channels, it took a bit of searching until she could find something to be satisfied with. From then on it would be a day of lounging and relaxation. She stared at the high ceiling, still trying to accept what has happened to her and what has been done. A total stranger, someone she'd never met before was so willing to stick their neck out for her. The idea felt foreign to her, and the same could especially be said for the irony of a stranger treating her better than Jack did. Without even glancing at something that could give her an inkling of what time it was, Emily listened to the sounds of the tv and fell into sleep again. But before she could do that, the apartment was filled with a doorbell's ring.

Huh? Who was that supposed to be? Sitting up from the couch, carefully walking over to the door, Emily stepped down into the shoe area and on her toes peeked through the peephole. Of course, she had no idea who this person was, nor what they wanted. Warped by the wide lens, she could see they were wearing some kind of white lab coat. A doctor's coat maybe?

"Hello? Emily? Are you in there?" The new stranger knocked on the door this time.

How did she know her name? Emily was puzzled as she reluctantly turned the handle and opened the door. She was adjusting her glasses when she saw Emily open the door, putting on a happy face.

"Great, you must be Emily." She greeted her, giving a small wave.

"Hi," Was all Emily could say for a moment. "I don't mean to be rude, but how do you know my name?"

The woman was a bit taken aback by Emily's confusion, brushing past Emily and already entering the apartment with a bag about the size of a normal purse.

"You're kidding, right?" The woman asked as she made her way into the kitchen, already knowing the way. Emily shut the door behind her, following her in tow. "Did Ms. Summers not tell you I was coming?"

"No, she didn't..." Emily trailed off. She didn't know how to feel. This person seemed familiar with being here, but she had no way of knowing who they were to Joyce, but at the least they were on a professional level.

"I apologize for the confusion," She was sifting through her bag on the table. "Ms. Summers called me earlier this morning, asking me to make a visit here to look at your foot." She was pulling out a pair of latex gloves. "You can call me Doctor Hall." she stretched out her hand, Emily shaking it in reply, still caught off guard by an in-home visit from a doctor in a stranger's home.

"I'm Emily, it's nice to meet you."

While Doctor Hall was washing her hands, she said to Emily, "If you could just sit in a chair for me, please? That way I can take a quick look at the injury."

Not wanting to waste the woman's time, Emily pulled out one of the chairs and turned it from the table, sitting down. It felt awkward not having to do anything else, but the sudden reminder of what she was wearing returned a few shades of embarrassment to her face. The doctor either didn't care, or knew too well how to pay no mind to it though, as she slipped her gloves on and set her bag beside her on the floor while taking a professional, yet gentle hold of Emily's foot.

Nonetheless, it caused her to wince out of reflex, and tried to take a deep breath in the solace that she was still likely in good hands now. Doctor Hall poked and prodded her foot in certain spots and gave other areas around the ankle light taps. She'd ask Emily to try moving her foot and roll it, sizing up what she was looking at. Satisfied, she set Emily's foot down again and went back into her bag.

"Well, it's nothing serious, just a minor sprain, it seems." Doctor Hall said, pulling out what looked like gauze. "However," she continued, beginning to wrap Emily's foot. "Better to nip the problem in the bud before it has time to bloom, as they say..."

"Will I be able to work tomorrow?" Emily asked.



“Tomorrow?” She took a moment to consider. “What kind of work do you do?”

“Office work. But some days I have to move files from different departments in my building, so I guess walking is part of the job...” As the words left her mouth, even Emily had a second of hesitation.

“Coming from a doctor that cares for her patients? If you stay off your foot today, and keep it well-iced, I would say you would probably be in decent shape to be working at the desk. But in the long-run and for what possibly may come your way? It’s a definite no. I’d give it a couple of days, at least.”

“A couple of days?” The estimate was a little shocking. “Do I really need to wait that long?”

“In the end you’re your own person.” The doctor shrugged as she finished wrapping Emily’s foot. “If I were you though, I would wait until my foot is back in good shape before I start going back to my daily routine. Worst case if you do choose to work tomorrow, you could potentially prolong the injury and find yourself in a position even worse than now. Best case? Well, consider it a lucky gamble you shouldn’t have been making in the first place.”

Emily still looked unsure as Doctor Hall discarded her gloves into the trash bin and grabbed her bag, standing up. “You can ask Ms.Summers for my contact information if you’d like a direct referral to take some time off of work. Just remember what I said, should you choose to bite the bullet. Don’t forget to keep ice on your foot for today, regardless of what happens tomorrow. She was already making her way to the door when Emily suddenly realized she was leaving unpaid.

“Wait!”

Doctor Hall turned around for a moment to look at her.

“Don’t you need my full name, credit card or something for the bill? The address might be an issue though, so-”

“Already taken care of. Ms.Summers insisted on the bill going under her name. She requested that I don’t talk numbers with you. Enjoy the rest of your day!”

With that, Doctor Hall took her leave, and Emily was alone again, dumbstruck. Already paid for? Why was Joyce doing so much on her behalf? That woman was of a breed Emily couldn’t even begin to understand. However, she quickly resigned the thought, for now, and grabbed some ice

from the freezer. Resting her foot on a pillow and an ice pack on top, Emily was able to find comfort once again with where she lay, with a slightly less irritated ankle.

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Emily opened her eyes to find she'd slipped into another nap for, again, who knows how long. Turning a bit to notice the blanket that had been draped over her, she also noticed how her foot was just as numb from the cold as it'd been when she slept. Did someone change the ice out? Her ears then picked up on the humming from the kitchen, accompanied by a wonderful smell dancing past her nose. Looking out the large windows that lined the wall of the apartment, the sky was of a much more orange shade now. Not wanting to leave the blanket, Emily carried it with her like a cloak to the kitchen. Sure enough it was Joyce, her hair pulled back as she worked on some sort of meal. She was in a much more relaxed outfit now, a long sleeve shirt and smooth charcoal pants.

Joyce turned around to see her, and if she was surprised to see her, she did a good job of hiding it.

"Finally awake, are we?" She smiled.

"How long have I been asleep?"

"Since I got home a few hours ago, that long, at least." Joyce stirred something in a nearby pot.

"I'm sorry for being asleep, if I had known you were back I..."

"Don't even think about it," Joyce was quick to respond, but just as focused on the cooking.

"You're doing exactly as I instructed, and you're making yourself at home. Anything less and I'd have been sure to scold you." Joyce again let a small laugh at her own teasing. "But I've been dying to know, what did Doctor Hall say about your foot?"

"Oh, well she said I would technically be fine to go back tomorrow, but she said I should wait a few days for a full recovery..." Granted, if it were a few days, Emily would have to start thinking about where she could stay for a more long-term situation. It stressed her out even thinking how she should have already gotten started on this earlier today.

"Okay then." Joyce blankly replied as she unloaded a tray of what looked like garlic bread from the oven. "I'll have to know what you like in advance for what to eat then."

“Wait, what?” Emily almost broke into a stammer, Joyce yet again being a box full of surprises.

“Well, if you’re going to be staying here I should at least accommodate you properly.” She nonchalantly spoke, looking to Emily as if it were a given.

“Joyce, I can’t thank you enough for what you’ve already done. I’m already in your debt so much there’s no way I can make you do more for me! I’m practically a stranger to you!”

“First,” Joyce was getting plates out of the cabinet. “There is no debt, only kindness from one friend to another. Second,” The silverware came out next. “You already said it yourself that no one was around to take you in, yet here you are with someone more than willing to do that. Third,” Then the glasses. “Having company here for an extended time is rare for me. You might think it’s weird, but I like having company every once and awhile. These opportunities aren’t exactly common for me. And finally,” She opened the fridge. “What would you like to drink?”

“Joyce, please. I can figure something out on my own. I can’t be a burden to you like this anymore. You paid my medical bills!”

“Emily,” Joyce assumed that firm tone from earlier this morning. “I appreciate your thoughtfulness for how I handle my finances, but frankly, they are mine and not yours.” It certainly was a bold, yet factual stance. “What I choose to do with my money is my business, and I choose to use it on you. Instead of *worrying* about what I do for you, it’d make me much happier that you take the time to *enjoy* the things I do for you. In the end, I can’t make you stay; but I want you to know how happy it would make me if you did. Think about today. Didn’t it feel good? Being able to take the day off for once? I know it’s only been a day, but...I really don’t mind becoming something more than just strangers?” Joyce didn’t feel like waiting and was already pouring some kind of drink for her, finishing her little speech.

“Joyce...” How was she supposed to respond? She had trouble finding the words. Joyce wanted this, and Emily knew it would be convenient for her, so why was she fighting this? Was it a matter of values or something? She didn’t even know herself.

“Please. Let me take care of everything?” Joyce finally stopped to look at Emily sincerely, giving what felt like her complete, undivided attention. Not that she was ever insincere before, but the look in her eyes almost had a sense of...rawness to them?

With a final sigh, Emily sat down in the chair and hung her blanket over the back of it. Her bare thighs felt cold making contact with the bare wood of her seat, the adjustment in temperature

feeling a bit hard to acclimate to. Joyce seemed to have taken that for compliance, because she took their plates and already started to load them.

“I hope you like pasta,” she said, moving on to the pot of sauce, “it’s one of my all-time favorite dishes.”

Pasta did sound good, and if it was anything like the breakfast from this morning it was sure to be good.

“Sounds great.” Emily said, part of her mind still hanging on their conversation from a moment earlier.

“So I’m curious,” Joyce finished their plates and set them in their respective spots, once across from the other. “What did you have for lunch today?”

“Lunch? Oh,” It then occurred to her she really didn’t have anything. “I actually didn’t have anything.”

“Well you should start. My food is your food, and sticking to a constant meal cycle is good for you.”

Yes, this was true. Yet this wasn’t something she didn’t know. Emily took her first bite into the angel hair pasta, covered in a layer of rich sauce and lightly powdered in parmesan. The first bite was amazing. Everything blended so well together in an indescribable taste. She felt like she was eating at a restaurant right now! What was the secret? Was it the cook? The ingredients? Emily was dying to know.

“How is it?” Joyce took another casual bite of her food.

“It’s...amazing!” Emily exclaimed. “How do you get it to taste this good? It feels like I’m sitting at a restaurant right now!” Better put a luxury hotel. After using much of Joyce’s apartment, it was clear that this wasn’t a far cry from being one--maybe even better.

“Glad to hear my cooking receives such high praise!” Joyce continued eating.

“Do you eat like this every night?”

“Not every night,” Joyce pondered the thought. “Sometimes I have business dinners to attend, or I like to eat out instead. Food’s always better when someone else makes it for you.” It went

without saying, but did Joyce honestly not consider this good food? “For times like this I don’t mind cooking for a guest. It’d be poor etiquette otherwise.”

“Speaking of business,” Emily took another bite, and then another. “What do you do for work? If you don’t mind me asking.”

“Oh, I...” Joyce seemed to be calculating her answer. “I have a high position in a company that helps manufacture things for hospitals.”

“Oh, okay. Like, bioengineering or something?” Emily poked further, wondering why the answer was so dumbed down.

“In a way, I suppose.” Joyce kept to her cryptic answers. “But what about you? What do you do for work?”

“I have a desk job at this real estate office, not like I could ever afford anything there haha.”

“Oh? Any company I might know?”

“It’s called Luxury Estate?” While the company did handle high-end properties, it did include much more down to earth and affordable ones as well.

“Oh right, now I know. The international one!”

“Mhm,” Emily took a sip of her drink, finding it to be iced tea; equally as delicious as her meal. “Now if you don’t mind me asking, how old are you?” Emily couldn’t help but feel curious to find the answer. She couldn’t put her finger on it. Joyce looked so full of youth, had a great figure, and was tall...Unlike others who could not be as blessed. Yet, she had this aura around her that made her seem so...mature? Maybe that’s what it took to survive at the level she worked at?

“My, you’re being quite forward aren’t you?” Joyce gave Emily a little grin as the pair ate.

Her remark quickly had Emily backtracking, suddenly realizing how rude she was being. “If it was too much to ask, I-”

“32. I just turned 32 last month.”

32?! Emily was shocked for different reasons. She looked so young, but she seemed to be at an age where she wouldn’t look as great as she did now! And to be so young at the same time,

wouldn't it take years upon years to reach the kind of place she was in now? The kind of time that'd make your age closer to 40 at the minimum?

"Wow..." was all Emily could say.

"Wow?" Joyce raised an eyebrow. "Now I'm worried, is that good or bad?"

"Good! It's good, really. You just seem so...accomplished."

"I hope so," Joyce chewed her food. "To reach somewhere like this has been some time in the making. I know it usually takes others a bit longer, but both luck and skill play their parts for something like this. But now I need to know, how old are you?"

"26." Emily said. The age gap was only six years, but it was a whole six years. She felt light-years away from the kind of success Joyce had, and highly doubted that she could ever reach something like Joyce's stature. Still, Joyce seemed almost as young as Emily was, apparently Joyce has brains *and* beauty on her side.

"Looks like I'm six years your senior." Joyce spoke in an almost playful voice, with her plate almost cleared.

They continued their small talk as dinner came to a close. Despite Emily insisting that she help, Joyce took on the task of cleaning up all by herself, happy to do something for someone else every once in a while. Emily then excused herself to the bathroom, walking in and by the tub, quickly realizing that she forgot about the towels, and yet they weren't where she had left them?

"Joyce, I'm sorry, I forgot to ask you what to do with the towels." Emily said, finishing her business a second ago.

"That? Don't worry about it. I saw them on the way in to take a shower. I don't remember telling you what to do with them, so you're not at fault," Joyce had just finished washing the dishes and set them out to dry. "Still though, you must have been in there for a good two hours? What did you do, fall asleep in there?"

"How did you know I was in...?" Puzzled, she stared at Joyce for a response, but suddenly felt her eyes drifting around the room, connecting the dots as she could see a tiny security camera mounted in one of the corners. "You were...spying on me?" Emily suddenly felt a sense of betrayal.

Realizing how she made Emily feel, though, Joyce was quick to try and amend the situation. “No, no, please don’t misunderstand! These things were here long before you arrived. They’re for security purposes, of course. It’s my daily routine to review the footage, with you in the shot or not. And...it’s not that I don’t trust you, but on some level as you said earlier, we’ve just met. And if it makes you feel any better, I don’t have a camera in the bathroom, or any of the bedrooms.”

The air certainly felt awkward now, even though part of Emily knew Joyce was justified in her actions, it wasn’t pleasant to suddenly find out she’d been on recording for the entire day. But it had been only a day. She was still a complete stranger despite their brief yet meaningful interactions. She paced her mind trying to remember if she’d done anything worth worrying over, but if she hadn’t been confronted over something now, there wasn’t anything noteworthy to begin with.

“I’m sorry. It was something I should have told you earlier. Just being here for so long makes it second nature, I suppose. But believe me, your privacy is assured while you’re here.”

“It’s fine.” Emily said, not even sure if she believed what she was saying. “Like you said, it’s no biggie. It was just a surprise hearing there are cameras. But you have your reasons, of course.

“Thank you for being so understanding. Truth be told, they came with the apartment when I got it. But let’s not talk about that anymore. I’m going to finish up cleaning here. In the meantime, you can take a look at some of the clothes I got for you to start wearing.

“Joyce! Please!” With a few simple words, Emily’s stress had already kicked back into high gear. Coming from a lifestyle where she was just a few steps away from pinching pennies, it didn’t sit well with her to have so much money be spent on her.

“I know you loved wearing my nightgown all day,” Emily blushed at the ‘my’ part. “But I figured you would start needing some more appropriate clothes, be it for work or anything else. And stop worrying! It’s only just a few things until that Jack fellow is back from whatever he is up to.”

Anxiously, Emily walked to the door where there were a couple of large shopping bags from store brands she’d only dream of shopping at casually.

“Take them into the living room!” Joyce shouted from the kitchen. “I need to see how they fit so they can be tailored if need be!”

Tailored? She had to be joking. Yet, judging from her track record thus far...it wasn't likely. Maybe she was back at 5 because she was doing all this shopping for her...

"I said I got you some clothes, yet truthfully some of it was ballparking." Joyce followed into the living room. "I know I said I can have a knack for sizes, but it's not usually my forte to take these sorts of gambles." She sat herself on the couch.

That was hard to believe. Emily sifted through one of the bags, already pulling underwear and socks out.

"The underwear should be fine though, I was able to get your size for that this morning. After getting you that pair last night I wanted to be sure before I made any real commitments."

"Joyce...thank you so much..." She had no idea how she would ever repay Joyce for all of this--not that Joyce ever intended to let her.

"Like I mentioned earlier, this is nothing hon. Now enough about the price tags and try some stuff on! I need to know if any adjustments need to be made."

Emily took all the sets of bras and panties with her into the bathroom, individually setting them apart to try each of them on. Shockingly, Joyce had gotten her seven sets, one for each day of the week. Looking all of them over, each was some shade of dark blues, purples, pinks, grays and black. Unlike what she was used to wearing, they all had some form of design be it in stripes or small white dots all across. She slipped the nightgown off and so with the panties too. Grabbing the first pair, she slid the bottoms on and sure enough they were a perfect fit, and the bra as well. She even noticed the stark change in quality feel, as the material felt wonderful to the skin, and hugged her figure. Cycling through all the other pairs, they were sure enough identical in quality and fit.

"Like you guessed it, everything was perfect." Emily said, back in the simple nightgown and underwear.

And as she returned them to the bags, she wasn't positive, but almost could have sworn she heard maybe the slightest bit of disappointment in Joyce's voice, when she said "You tried all of them in there?"

"Mhm, they feel really nice too." Emily shrugged off the thought. How was it realistic to be sad over something like that?



“Great then, let’s have you try the rest on.”

And so she did. After excusing herself to put one of the new sets of underwear on (feeling stupid for having taken the last pair off, anyways), Emily showcased herself in the rest of the clothing, much to the approval of both.

“Well, there could be a few minor adjustments to be made on some of the clothes, but I’m thankful I could get away with as much as I did.” Joyce looked content, as Emily packed the rest away.

“I’ll say,” Emily meant it too. Truly luck had been on her side when Joyce shopped for her. It felt otherworldly to have such high quality clothes, and for such a pleasant fit too. Her normal clothes fit, of course, but there was something about expensive clothes that separated themselves from what was pristine, and what was...well, generic.

“But I think that button-up should at least stay like that.” Joyce pointed out to the pajama set Emily was wearing. The top and bottom were light purple and made of silk (a wonderful feeling), and had sleeves that stretched just up to her palms, giving it a slightly oversized look. Other than that, the pants were just as form-fitting as the rest (and even accentuated her bum, a bit), and had the slightest bit of extra length on them as well.

“You think?”

“Definitely, not everything has to fit the figure to be cute, you know.” Emily blushed at Joyce’s remark, trying to casually play it off, as Joyce couldn’t help but eat up the flustered girl’s emotions. “But with our last job for the night finished, all that’s left to do is relax.”

The pair laid themselves on the couch for the rest of the night, and it was spent watching tv and lounging. It didn’t take long though for Joyce to stay on top of Emily for not having ice on her foot, which was quickly rectified.

Becoming drowsy, Emily finally nodded herself off on the couch, just awake long enough to feel suspended in the air, and then gently crashing her head into something soft. It was only her first day meeting Joyce, but she already felt like an irreplaceable person in her life. Not for the money, but for the genuine care and concern she had for her. Who knew what tomorrow would bring?

### 3 - A Night Out

Time truly did seem to fly, being with Joyce. Agreeing to take the next few days off with the aid of Doctor Hall's referral, Emily was able to receive three more excused days off work. She would have been fine with one or two, but both Doctor Hall and Joyce pressured her to take more time to recover.

Every day Emily would perform her daily routine, then have a scheduled nap and wake up to find Joyce cooking another wonderful meal for dinner that night. In this time the two had grown closer and the transition from strangers to acquaintances and finally newly-made friends had been fast and swift. Emily still continued to fret over staying in Joyce's company for too long, but Joyce would only shoot down every self-complaint that she made. And sure enough, what was considered Emily's life now started to feel normal, even if it had been days since she stepped foot outside, there was comfort in the solitude of Joyce's home.

Doctor Hall came back on Emily's last official day of recovery to inspect her foot again, satisfied with the results. What was once a red and slightly purple sight, had now receded considerably and was more pink than anything else. Regardless, Emily was much more happy with their second interaction compared to the first, considering she was much more "clothed" now, snug in jeans and a t-shirt--both articles of course sporting their expensive logos.

"Looks good, Emily." Hall discarded the bandages in the bin with her gloves. "Just keep ice on it for the rest of the weekend and there shouldn't be a problem going back to work."

*Work.*

The idea felt almost foreign to her now. It had only been a few days, but she already felt so out of her usual rhythm. What's more, the weekend was already here, meaning she would have two more days off until she went back; surely making the adjustment even tougher on her.

The two said their goodbyes and Emily was on her own again for a short while, until Joyce soon came walking through the door in her usual business attire. "Good to see you after working all day," Joyce let out a sigh as she took a moment to sit on the couch.

"Well, you know where I've been." Emily took a sip from her bottle of water, tapping her feet rhythmically on the wooden floor.

"Well?" Joyce looked at Emily with an expecting look, a cue Emily didn't pick up on. "Don't you want to tell me what the doctor said?"

Feeling dumb for not noticing sooner, “Right! She said my foot is more or less fine now. Just take it easy for the rest of the weekend and I should be ready to go back Monday.”

“You’re already going back?” Joyce said with a small tinge of disappointment in her voice.

“Well I mean, yeah. My foot definitely feels better, and I’ve already taken off so much time from work. It wouldn’t feel right prolonging this kind of thing.”

“I suppose…” Joyce seemed a bit lost in deep thought over something, but seemed to snap out of it quickly, exclaiming, “But we need to celebrate.” She said it in a matter-of-factly kind of voice. “Your foot is all better now?”

“Celebrate? My foot is still in recovery, she said it was *going* to be fine with some more rest.”

“Kids have early birthdays all the time; it’s the same thing with a foot recovering.” Joyce waved her hand in playful dismissiveness. “And don’t worry, I know just the place we can go. That way you won’t have to do much walking. Just leave it all to me.”

“Joyce, we really don’t have to-”

“Think of it as a celebration of our friendship then?” She seemed adamant about this whole, ‘going out’ thing. “Had it not been for your mishap we wouldn’t have met, no? To happy accidents, as they say.”

It was clearly another argument Emily was not going to win. With a little more convincing, she agreed to Joyce’s terms, knowing that she’d not be allowed to spend a single dime on their “little dinner” that night.

Joyce had outfits prepared for them in advance. A black, charcoal cocktail dress for herself, and a skater dress made up of shades of blue for Emily. With a little makeup, the pink blemish on her ankle from before was just about completely undetectable now, and after slipping on their shoes for the night they were ready. Right before exiting the apartment, Emily caught her first glance of Joyce in her outfit; a magnificent form, and only complimented by her masterful makeup work.

“Wow, you look amazing.” Was all Emily could say.

“You look nice yourself. Maybe we should do these things more often?”

Out of concern for Joyce's bottomless finances, Emily hoped they didn't.

For the first time in days, Emily set foot outside of Joyce's apartment, and made her re-entry into reality. Joyce must have been thinking the same thing too, when she said, "Welcome back to the outside world! I know it's been a while, so let me know if you need to be brought up to speed on things." She laughed, and so did Emily.

They walked down the hallway, lined with a patterned rug, half-circle tables decorating empty parts of the walls, topped by vases filled with plants. They reached an elevator and Joyce pressed the down button, waiting in brief silence. Seeing the distance they had walked and riding the elevator to the top, it was a tough feat to comprehend how Joyce could have carried her all the way up here...

"Did you really carry me all the way up here by yourself?"

"Believe it or not, I did. I may not look strong, but I like to fit some exercise into my work breaks whenever I can. And you're pretty light, I should add."

Was she really? Last time she had checked she weighed maybe about 110lb for being only 5'6", but apparently Joyce really did work out for that to be doable. Not only that, but how could she be this heavy of a sleeper?

Her thoughts were interrupted by the ding of the elevator opening--no one being inside to greet them. Pressing the ground floor button, Emily watched as the digital number descended from 27 to 1. The entire time, all Emily could hear was Joyce's soft humming, a tune she'd grown quite accustomed to. She didn't know what it reminded her of, but it was soothing nonetheless. The doors opened, and they rounded the corner into a very wide lobby with a shorter than expected ceiling. It came off as very minimalist: just enough to make the place look nice, but not feel cluttered. But it was all relative, of course. She may have called it minimalistic, but it was leagues upon leagues better than the lobby to her old place. There was a large black rug leading to the entrance, and black leather couches for waiting lined on top of the white marble floor. They walked past a desk worker and straight to the door, where a doorman was already waiting with an open door.

"Thank you, Charles." Joyce politely thanked him in a reserved tone--nothing like how she spoke to Emily. With her, there was a sense of...care in her voice when she spoke. But to this man and like the one who complained to her for being late, she seemed to be more or less stone cold to them. There was gratitude, but also...distance. Out on the sidewalk a black car was parked and waiting for them. A chauffeur was holding the backseat door open, and Joyce gave Emily the

privilege of sliding in first. Joyce followed suit and slipped in next, having the door shut behind her. The chauffeur entered the driver's seat and politely asked, "Where will it be tonight, Ms. Summers?"

"Carmine's." Was all Joyce said.

"Sure thing. We should be there soon."

A divider suddenly rose between them and the driver, allowing the two some privacy. The windows were also tinted as well, reminding Emily of the movies where the bad guy would always unroll the window to his limo to talk to the protagonist. Other than that, Emily could almost instinctively feel the tension around Joyce dissipate now that they were alone.

"Sorry about that. I didn't tell the driver in advance where we were going."

"That's fine..." Emily was still taking in her new situation. "What kind of place is Carmine's anyways?"

"Italian. If my cooking already wasn't a tell, I'm quite fond of the cuisine...and wine."

Emily harbored no objections to the choice in food. If Joyce figured it was worth showing, it was more than likely out of this world compared to Emily's standards.

Staring out of the window at the city nightlife, it was a spectacle to be seeing all of this from the other side. Not once had she driven a car in the city for the time she had been there. Her job paid well enough, but not enough to support the upkeep of a car in the city. Buying one was one thing, but paying the price to conveniently store it and gas upkeep was another. To Emily it was far more convenient to rely on walking and public transportation.

After about 15 minutes of driving the car came to a halt, the driver coming around to let Emily and Joyce out of the vehicle. Without even looking back at him, Joyce said: "Come back to pick us up in a couple of hours."

"Yes ma'am."

Without question, and like an obedient servant, the chauffeur got back into the car and pulled back onto the road.

Staying close by Joyce's side, they weaved through the passerby on the sidewalk. Stepping into the restaurant, the walls were decorated with traditional landscape photos and art of iconic locations and sights from Italy. The place was packed with people as equally dressed for the occasion as they were, if not more. Walking up to the receptionist with a book set on his podium, he was busy reading through the list to give Joyce any notice.

"Do you have a reservation?" He asked, his eyes still busy inspecting the paper.

"I'm sorry, I'm afraid we don't." His expression didn't change, but he already seemed ready to turn them away. "But I was hoping you'd be able to squeeze my friend and I here into one of your booths, perhaps?"

"My apologies ma'am, but we cannot seat you without a-" His voice trailed off as he finally took the time to see who he was speaking with.

"Ms. Summers! It's wonderful to see you again! Please forgive my rudeness a moment ago, you know how the regulations are!" He tried to laugh off what looked like a big mistake.

"No problem at all. So is a booth doable for us tonight?" Joyce didn't seem fazed by his attitude, not that Emily could understand why their interaction seemed so off. Had Joyce forgot to make reservations?

"Most certainly! Please, come this way." Personally, the receptionist escorted them to a booth in the corner of the restaurant. Emily couldn't help but notice Joyce's face had gotten a few more heads to turn. Just who was she in the public eye?

The man handed each of them a meal and drink menu, plates and silverware already being set up for them.

"Please, take your time. Whenever you are ready, just flag down one of the servers, they'll be sure to forward your order immediately. And also, you ladies are both looking quite lovely tonight."

Joyce playfully laughed at his remark as he walked away, and Joyce quickly turned back into the person Emily so familiar with.

Emily leaned in and asked, "What was that all about?"

“Oh, him? Nothing to worry about. I’m a bit of a...’valued guest’ here. Good friends with the owner.”

“Okay...but some of the people eating here looked like they knew you too?” That ‘high position’ was starting to sound a bit higher...

“Some of their new items sound absolutely delicious, don’t they?” Joyce politely dodged her question, looking busy with the menu, and also dropping a hint that she didn’t want to talk about that right now. “Anything look good to you?”

Emily looked down the menu, doing her best to avoid the prices that followed them. There was some stuff on here she had never even heard of before. What was an ‘ossobuco’?

“I’m not really sure...” Emily admitted. “I don’t even know what some of the stuff on here is...”

“Pick whatever sounds good to you hon,” Joyce already put down the food menu. “It’s my treat, so feel free to explore if you so choose. Don’t forget we’re here to celebrate.”

Emily browsed her menu for a little bit longer and finally decided on a plate of what she thought was pasta. Yes Joyce had just made it for her a few nights ago, but she didn’t want to risk wasting food this expensive on Joyce’s dime.

“And what do you want to drink?” Joyce asked her next.

“Oh, um...I’ll let you choose for the both of us.” Already feeling challenged enough by the food menu, she wasn’t going to try and tackle the wine choices next.

Joyce merely smiled at her answer, continuing to browse.

“Did I say something weird?” Emily had no idea what she’d done to amuse Joyce.

“Nothing. It’s just you being yourself, that’s all.”

Was that a good thing? Or a bad thing? It didn’t sound mocking, but that didn’t make it any much more clear to her. Completely unsure, Emily pried a bit more. “What do you mean by that?”

“It’s one of the many things I really appreciate about you, Emily,” She looked from her menu to the girl. “In my line of work it’s hard to meet people as nice as you without them having an

ulterior motive. The difference between you and everyone else being that I'm the one who found you, and I know you're trustworthy."

"I mean, how can you be so sure?" Emily was starting to become a bit embarrassed from such high praise.

"For one, you didn't try robbing me on day one. Two, no matter what I do for you, you always try and fight tooth and nail to somehow repay me for what I do. And three, even when I tell you to lean on me, you're always so self-conscious about being the perfect house guest. It's simply adorable!"

The 'adorable' part felt a bit off, but it was still honest compliments from Joyce and that made Emily feel all the better.

"Thank you Joyce, that means a lot to me. I'm...I'm glad I met you."

"Likewise."

It didn't take long for Joyce to flag down a waitress and submit their orders under her name, leading to their meals arriving at most maybe half an hour later. A different waitress came with their meals, and then back again with a large bottle of red wine, pouring a fair amount in each of their glasses.

The food was unsurprisingly delicious. Even more than Joyce's cooking, would you believe it. Had she been told that there was something better than Joyce's cooking a few hours ago, Emily would have likely called bull. Joyce could see the pleasure on Emily's face, as after each bite there was a small window reserved for only the occasional sip of wine.

"Slow down there kiddo, we're not in any rush, you know?" Joyce laughed as she took a few small bites from her own plate, moving onto her second glass.

Soon, Joyce turned her head away to see a larger man approaching them, dressed in a chef's attire, someone who Joyce instantly recognized.

"Antonio!"

"Ms.Summers!"

Joyce stood up from her seat to give the big man a proper hug.



“It’s so good to see you back in my restaurant again! Why didn’t you tell me personally? I would have had you in the VIP room ages ago!”

“Oh Antonio, sometimes I like to try living life on the ‘normal’ side,” she joked. Emily couldn’t help but laugh at the irony of her statement. Joyce’s ‘normal’ was Emily’s once in a lifetime experience.

“Either way, allow me to at least serve you and your friend some of my special wine? Free of charge!” The chef’s voice boomed throughout the restaurant, catching the attention of a few people sitting nearby.

“Well, I couldn’t possibly turn down a bottle if it was recommended by you Antonio! I’m sure we’ll love it!”

“Magnifico! I’ll send it to your table after you’ve finished your entrées! A great way to end the night! Bah! Listen to me talk, interrupting your time together! Please, please, finish your dinner and enjoy the rest of the night.” Antonio then turned back towards the kitchen, and the two were alone once again.

“Just how popular are you?” Emily took a quick glance at the rest of the restaurant, everyone seeming to have resumed their own dinner conversations.

“I already told you, I know the owner of this place. He just came to see me, that’s all.” Joyce maintained her relaxed tone as she treated the encounter as commonplace. “And he really does have great wine. You’ll be sure to like it, I’m positive.”

Emily wasn’t much of a wine drinker, nor was she a high-class restaurant goer either, but tonight was certainly full of exceptions.

They traded bites of their food, both being equally pleased with the other’s choice--not that anything they served here could even be considered bad. While Emily started her second glass of wine, Joyce was already on her third, showing no signs of change at all in her composure as she took a sip from her glass. On their last round, the glasses were soon empty and so were their plates. Their table was cleared and then came a small plate of what looked like gelato with a light chocolate sauce striped across it. The gelato itself had a strange pink tint to its whiteness, and was decorated with a graham cracker-looking type of square, sticking out of the side, looking oh-so absolutely delicious. On each side a small spoon was already plunged into the sweet-looking treat, and a bottle of wine came grasped in the hands of the chef they met earlier.

“Antonio, you didn’t have to get us dessert too!” Joyce exclaimed as she seemed to be eyeing the gelato as well.

“Nonsense! How do you expect to enjoy my wine without something sweet to go with it? Not only can you share a drink, but a personal favorite dessert of mine as well!” He tore off the paper wrapping to the bottle, and used a corkscrew to open up the bottle’s contents. “Only the finest for my dearest customers.” He said, pouring the dark red substance into two new wine glasses.

“Now please, I’ve disturbed you for long enough! Take the whole bottle for the night! I would not have it any other way!”

“You’re far too generous Antonio! Please, keep some for your other clients.”

“A bottle’s past its prime after the first time it’s been opened and drank, and therefore you must do me the pleasure of finishing it off! Hahaha!” He chuckled as he walked away. “I look forward to seeing you again, Ms. Summers!”

A spectator to their conversation once again, Emily felt a tad bit giddy over the man’s generosity and insistence to make the night so special. What they had alone was enough, but to even push beyond that was amazing! Emily’s focus turned back to their dessert, and already the smallest bit of rich, creamy goodness had begun to roll off the top of the perfect scoop and pool at the bottom of the plate. She couldn’t wait any longer for a taste as she went for her spoon, but was cut short when one was already inserted into her mouth. Following the handle, she saw Joyce had already made the first move, feeding a spoonful to her currently hypnotized friend. Joyce slipped out the spoon with a grin as Emily’s mouth didn’t allow the frozen dessert to leave like the spoon, and swallowed.

Absolutely amazing. It slowly melted at the touch of her tongue, as little gelato warriors in chocolate sauce armor assaulted her innocent and vulnerable taste buds. Her face melted into pure ecstasy as she completely digested the small sample. Joyce looked quite happy to have seen the spectacle, but Emily was too preoccupied to even mind. She wanted another bite, and badly.

“I can take it by the look on your face, it’s quite good?” Joyce stifled a laugh as she took a spoonful for herself. Joyce had a similar reaction, albeit much more reserved, quite pleased with the taste as well. Emily took a sip of her wine next, followed suit by Joyce, to receive a just as amazing taste. The residue and aftertaste of the cream was washed away by the flavor of grape mixed with the light taste of alcohol, cleansing her throat with sweetness. The drink was beyond delicious! It was not sweet nor bitter, and had just the right consistency to be the perfect accent to

their dessert. Emily had to reconsider her thoughts on wine after trying something as amazing as this, but to achieve this kind of quality would probably be a bit out of her budget.

“To a wonderful night, and our pleasant meeting.” Joyce raised her glass towards Emily, who returned the gesture with the clinking of glass.

“To us.” Emily giggled.

The two were making good on Antonio’s request to finish off the entire bottle of wine. After a good amount of refills later from the both of them, the bottle became quite light in the ice bucket, and so did their heads. The gelato was finished off and Joyce’s cheeks were a slight bit redder than they were on the way in. Clearly a little bit intoxicated, Joyce was a bit more giggly around Emily, though she still maintained her composure towards others, like when calling for the check. Emily had done her best to limit herself, but she was feeling the buzz a little bit as well, knowing she was past her normal threshold. Their check came quickly, and Joyce slipped a black card into the pocket of the check holder without hesitation. The transaction was quickly processed and had the girls on their way in only a few minutes.

“Joyce, I had such an amazing time,” Emily said, walking by Joyce as she held open the door for her; a torrent of cold, city air washing over her. As if he knew, the chauffeur was already waiting with the car door open, the two slipping in and headed home.

“Emily, you have no idea how much I love having you here...” Joyce sighed as she stared off in clouded thought.

“Er, thanks, Joyce...” Emily wasn’t sure how to take the compliment, whether Joyce meant it 100%, or if that was partially the alcohol talking.

“I mean it,” She turned to face Emily. “It can just feel so...lonely at times being in that apartment alone. I know I helped you, but you have repaid me in full with your kindness and company...”

Did she really feel that way about her? Emily couldn’t help but feel happy over such kind words. Here she thought herself to be a complete freeloader, when in-fact she’d been doing something in return all along...

The rest of the drive was silent as they pulled up to the front door of the apartment building. They stepped out of the car while Emily took a second to find her land legs from all the alcohol she’d had that night. Joyce seemed to be taking it like a champ, however, drinking even more than Emily, and not showing so much of a sign in her motor skills. Just her emotions, mostly.

“Home, sweet home!” Joyce half-shouted as they walked into her apartment. Emily closed the door behind them, kicking off the shoes Joyce specially ordered for the night. Emily eyed Joyce as she shuffled off into the kitchen, noting the subtle, yet obvious differences when she was drunk. If anything she seemed more relaxed, yet still had this...maternal vibe about her. They were certainly friends, but Emily could always feel this motherly aura linger around Joyce. Not that it was a bad thing...

“I need to go undress.” Emily announced, walking to the room she’d been staying in. Everything felt a bit wobbly; still trying to assume her not-drunk self for long enough to just take her dress off. She scanned her hand across her back, trying to search for the tiny zipper that kept her locked in the dress that hugged her torso so well. It had almost been a minute of searching, and Emily’s heightened emotions got the better of her as she was becoming visibly and audibly frustrated.

“Come on...come on...damn it! Stupid zipper!” She sat down on the bed to take a mental breather, so as not to throw a complete fit over something so trivial.

“Everything alriiight?” Joyce popped her head in, her shoes being taken off as well.

“No,” Emily pouted. “I can’t find this damn zipper on my back. Could you do it please?”

“Let me see what I can do sweetie...”

*Sweetie?* That was a new one. Emily stood up, while Joyce ran her finger up and down Emily’s back, searching for the zipper. The feeling was pleasant, having such sensitive areas touched by someone else...But then it stopped, feeling the light tug as Joyce pulled at the zipper.

“Down we go...” Joyce cooed as the zipper slowly followed suit.

“Joyce, I think you’re a bit out of it...” Emily said, uncertain of the new person she could feel behind her right now.

“And next we slip off the dress!” Joyce playfully continued, lowering Emily’s dress and exposing her in just her underwear.

“Um, that’s enough Joyce. I just needed you to get the zipper.” Emily said, starting to feel a little uncomfortable.

“Shhh...” Emily grew wide-eyed as she felt Joyce’s arms loosely wrap around Emily’s neck.  
“Let *Mommy* get you all ready for bed...”

“Joyce! Stop!” Emily was suddenly shouting, shoving Joyce away.

Emily stared at Joyce from her bed, dress at her ankles as she was practically naked in her underwear, unsure of who she was staring at right now. Joyce came to her senses too, her sober thoughts catching up just a bit too late before the damage had already been done. She stared at Emily in disbelief of what she’d just done to the poor girl.

“I-I’m so sorry Emily, I don’t know what...” Her voice couldn’t find the words as Emily still looked confused and scared. Voice choking on tears, Joyce could only mutter an apology as she left Emily’s room, shutting the door behind her.

*Idiot! idiot! idiot!* Joyce couldn’t hold back the tears after she left Emily’s room, locking herself in her own. She laid down in her bed, sobbing for her mistake. Why did she do it?! Joyce internally berated herself, angry for doing what she did. Tonight was supposed to be special! So why? Why did she have to let her deepest desires get the better of her?

*Please forgive me, Emily.* Joyce teary-eyed, laid into her pillow, chasing out her fantasies and replacing them with terrible thoughts; flashes of her likely now permanently-damaged friendship. Even if she couldn’t have Emily in the way she really wanted, she didn’t want to lose such a precious friend...Emotionally unstable, Joyce wept silently until she tired herself out, and fell asleep in her dress from the night that had taken a turn for the worse.

#### 4 - Confessions

Emily groggily stepped out of her room with a throbbing headache. Like with the fallout of any fun night, it was never pleasant. She hoped Joyce had an aspirin or something to make the pain go away...

*Mommy.*

She suddenly felt herself become uncomfortable after remembering last night's events. Yes, she was confused, and yes, she was a little freaked out. But this was Joyce she was talking about. Maybe she just wasn't the best with alcohol, or something...Emily racked her brain with reasoning for some kind of excuse or explanation that could somehow make her feel better about last night.

It was 10:00 AM and Joyce wasn't anywhere to be found. Emily grew a little worried over not being able to find her. She wanted to talk about last night, and do something to get rid of these negative feelings about Joyce. She wanted to do anything in her power to know somehow that last night was a misunderstanding, and they could still be friends. Hopefully Joyce felt the same...Longingly she stared at the couch where they would always lounge about together. Why did things have to be this way?

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Joyce rapidly typed away on her keyboard in her office, quite a distance away from her home--from Emily. She couldn't bear to face Emily right now...not after what she'd done to her. Joyce didn't even know how Emily felt about last night...She was such a terrible person, leaving a small and confused girl without any context about last night. She must be- *No no no! Stop thinking about it!* Joyce started typing faster, trying to occupy her mind from such thoughts. She still felt the lingering hangover, the curse that tempted her into slipping Emily into her own personal fantasy; taking advantage of her like that, how could she? Joyce could feel the tears coming. No matter what she did, she couldn't stop thinking about last night. She didn't even come in on Saturdays, but she was willing to do anything to get these awful thoughts out of her head. She wanted everything to go back to normal. Where she would come home to see Emily peacefully lazing about, so she could know that she had someone to come home to--to care for.

Joyce suddenly stopped typing, covering her face as she couldn't keep her emotional front up. It was the best having Emily in her home, but all those times she called her a friend she really knew what she meant on the inside. She was lying to herself. What she had with Emily was only a tease of what she truly wanted. She wanted to be friends, but in reality, she just couldn't bring

herself to admit how much she wanted Emily in *that* way! God, please make these awful thoughts stop!

---

Emily could only pace around the house as she was filled with more and more uncertainty. She didn't know where Joyce had gone, how she was feeling, or what she herself should do. Was she supposed to leave? Was this her way of saying to leave quietly? Frustration pushed her over the edge, as she wasn't able to reach the one person who could answer these questions. Her cellphone was still broken, and Joyce did have a house phone, but Emily had no idea who to call to find her whereabouts. Emily was absolutely powerless and she hated it.

The hours passed from 11 to 12, and then to 1. From 1 to 2, and from there to 3. It had been five hours since Emily woke up, and her mild feelings of unrest only grew into a small panic for her dear friend. She hadn't left her, had she? No, that was impossible. This was *her* home after all. Emily was still in her pajamas from this morning; purple-striped shorts with a thin short-sleeve to match. Another outfit Joyce had bought for her...

Emily couldn't understand why she was experiencing these feelings she felt. The more time she had to stew on her own, it meant the more time she had to convince herself last night that Joyce's "roleplay," as Emily reasoned it, was something she probably didn't want to show her... Was that all? Emily hoped so, because if it were, it would be only a small mishap that did nothing to their friendship! She stopped for a second to consider another thought: what would it take *to* threaten their relationship? Emily shook the idea out of her head, doing her best to stay positive. All she wanted to do was see and talk to Joyce...

---

*Deep breaths. Deep Breaths.* Joyce tried to calm herself as she walked down the hall to her apartment. Why was she so scared? It was *her* home. Emily was a guest there! Or so she told herself, knowing very well she was scared nonetheless to see Emily. Joyce could imagine it now: Emily had probably already packed up her things and left; a sensible thing to do. She was already gone, and their friendship came to an end like that. All on account of Joyce's foolishness. Reaching her door, heart beating a mile a minute, Joyce braced herself for the worst and most likely outcome in her head as she turned open the lock and opened the door.

It was silent. She'd be able to hear the sound of a pin hitting the floor.

*That's it. She's gone. You stupid, stupid-!*

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of feet rushing across the floor, still registering the sound of running before she could feel herself be embraced in the arms of a black-haired girl that came up to just above her chest.

“Emi...” Joyce was beyond surprised to see her in front of her right now, much more in her arms.

“Where have you been?” Joyce could hear Emily choking back a few tears.

She had hurt her even further. Joyce’s heart broke to pieces. Joyce returned Emily’s embrace and hugged her tightly as well.

“I’m so sorry, Emily,” Joyce maintained her composure and did her best to stay strong. “Last night I crossed a line with you, and...”

“Please!” Emily interrupted her, turning her head to get the words out properly. “Just talk to me. I want to know what happened. I haven’t been able to reach you all day!”

The words hit the woman in the gut like a sucker punch. All day she had kept Emily so isolated. Joyce had the convenience of physically being able to leave with her thoughts, whereas Emily was forced to sort them here. Emily had proved her wrong once; it... it was only right to come clean with her.

They stood across from one another for a short while, as finally the look on Joyce’s face was one of immense discomfort. Nervous and anxious, Joyce finally untied the knot in her throat to make some room to speak.

“Okay.”

---

Emily loosened her grip around Joyce to give her some space, her heart rapidly pounding in her chest. Why was her heart beating so fast? Why did she feel so relieved to see her again? Nothing made sense, but now knowing that Joyce was still here put her somewhat at ease.

“Let’s just sit down first...” Joyce started to feel a bit uneasy again, having to give one of the biggest confessions in her life, to someone she started to feel increasingly sensitive towards.



The pair walked over to the couch, unsure of what Joyce had to tell her. Emily didn't know what to expect, but this kind of build-up instinctively made her feel that it was significant. Emily sat on one end of the couch while Joyce did the other. There was a bit of silence between the two, while Joyce looked more focused than she had ever in the time Emily had known her.

"I..." Joyce's voice fell flat. "I...have feelings for you..." Emily could see Joyce's cheeks blush, as she pensively stared into her lap. Emily for some reason felt her heart strike a chord, hearing that, unsure of the turmoil in her own chest now. "But, what I want to tell you even more...*After* I tell you, I'm afraid I don't know what it'll be like between us...I'm scared of what might happen between us..."

Emily felt scared too, but the feelings to stay connected were even stronger than that. She couldn't deny her own uncertainty as well, but she wanted to dive in headfirst, believing nothing could damage their bond.

"Please," Emily said. "Tell me."

Joyce took another moment, still avoiding Emily's eyes. She took a deep breath, and put everything on the line.

"I have a...fetish..." There was no turning back now.

A fetish? All sorts of people had fetishes, what was the big deal? And how did it involve Emily?

"Okay. It's totally fine if you have a-"

"No, I still haven't been clear yet..." Joyce looked to tear up a bit, revealing her true self to the first person in over a decade of knowing. She wished more than anything she could stop there, but Pandora's Box had already been opened. It was the first time she'd ever exposed herself, face-to-face, to boot.

"I have a...caretaker fetish..." Her voice started to grow quiet from embarrassment. "...A mommy fetish..." She hated every moment of it. Her words felt vile and vulgar. She could only imagine how disgusting she looked now. But she knew it had to be done for the sake of moving forward. For better or worse.

A mommy fetish? What...what did she mean by that? Is that why she referred to herself as "mommy" last night?

“Last night was about that...” Joyce suddenly broke the silence, as if reading her thoughts. “I...” Joyce openly choked back some tears as the thoughts of self-disgust spread to her face. “I think about you as more than a friend...” She sobbed.

Emily wasn't sure why, but she could feel herself starting to cry too. She couldn't understand what was going on, but she wanted to somehow alleviate Joyce of the pain she was feeling right now. She wished she could have done anything for her sake right now.

“Emily,” Joyce cleared her throat. “In the time we've been together...I've been fantasizing about us non-stop...wishing I could...could...”

Emily waited in silence, and unsure of how to help her finish. Her thoughts were moving faster than she could process the information being given to her.

“...baby you.” Two tiny words, yet it was like a bombshell. She said it. The hardest part was over. “Non-stop, I've been wanting to take care of you, on a much more...intimate level...”

Take care of her? Baby her? The entire concept was foreign to Emily, and she didn't understand entirely, but was able to see how important this was to Joyce, and that made it matter to her. Is that why Joyce seemed so motherly though? Was it because she had this kind of fetish or was it that Emily was being drawn into it? Or both? Regardless, the idea wasn't a turnoff, rather, an unknown idea...

“I know you're an adult, and you have every right to be angry with me--but I just wanted to--”

“Wait, stop.”

Joyce's voice halted on command, now trying to count the tiny, minuscule holes she could see in the machined threading of her clothes; doing anything to occupy her mind. She felt ready to burst with anxiety.

“I don't completely understand what feelings you have for me.”

Joyce felt bitter for what was likely to come next.

“But...I don't understand my feelings for you either.”

What? She finally lifted her downward gaze, caught off guard yet again.

“You said you have feelings like a mother for me...”

It sounded even more repulsive, hearing it from another person’s mouth. How could anyone ever think of her as normal after confessing something like that?

“I don’t know anything about this side of you...”

Joyce waited. Then, she was suddenly pounced on by the 110lb girl, pinning her on the couch.

“But..” Her hesitant tone suddenly didn’t match her aggressive advance. “I want to try it with you.”

Joyce had to have a double-take, so to make sure she heard Emily correctly. Her mind was still catching up, despite her body and heart already knowing the truth; fresh tears running from her eyes out of pure relief and happiness. As Emily’s hair dangled over Joyce’s face, she could see the tears beyond her glasses and she seemed to be in pure bliss.

Emily had no idea what she was getting herself into. But the fact that it wasn’t necessarily a turnoff, and more so the unknown is what tempted Emily to take the plunge. What wasn’t knowingly hurting her, and only putting Joyce at ease was all that mattered. She would be Joyce’s baby any day if it could make her feel like this.

A monstrous weight had been lifted off of Joyce’s shoulders. Minding herself so carefully as to how she acted around Emily, it was all okay now. The feelings of acceptance from who she felt such a deep maternal love for felt better than any sensation she’d ever experienced in her life.

The two laid there on the couch as Joyce pulled in the girl who now had such a special place in her heart. To some, a fetish could be only temporary feelings for while they are in the mood, but to Joyce it was an undying desire that was part of her very personality, and something she wanted to be part of her lifestyle. Never would her feelings for Emily wane, and she would never, ever let her girl feel alone ever again. For that brief moment, everything felt perfect, and an unbreakable bond had been formed.

Emily was simply happy to be emotionally reunited with Joyce again, and felt as if their bond had been deepened and renewed after such a stressful trial. And the more she thought about it, the idea of being loved by Joyce in such a way piqued her interest in a way she’d never felt before. The more she thought, she herself never had a “fetish” before. Maybe this could be it?

Either way, the two just laid there in each other's arms, as they began a new chapter in their lives together. In a single night their relationship felt as if it went under a special transformation they had both come to appreciate. It was the perfect night to make up for such a terrifying one before.

"Now come on," Joyce had dried away most of her tears. "Let me make us something to eat."

Happy to go back to their routine, Joyce cooked another pleasant meal while Emily laid there on the couch. Being so much more open with herself, Joyce couldn't help but smile knowing now she had someone to truly dote on and could be honest with. It was a mild form of satisfaction to the levels she wanted to take things, but after tonight, Joyce felt that those kinds of goals weren't as impossible as she thought.

The two enjoyed dinner like any other night, and Joyce had promised to go into further detail in the morning; tonight already taking such a toll on the both of them. It just felt so good, knowing it was alright to take charge now...After dinner, Joyce changed into her own pajamas where the two spent the rest of the night on the couch watching tv like any other night. Only this time, Emily's head was resting in Joyce's lap, their connection feeling quite pleasant to Emily as well. It went on like that until Emily was the first to fall asleep again, Joyce being more than happy to carry her special girl off to bed.

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"So, what does being your baby entail?" Emily pensively asked. She was loaded with questions, and was urged more by curiosity than fear, even if it was the surrealness that kept her from truly being wary of it.

"Well..." Joyce was still adjusting to being so open about what she was used to hiding for years. But Emily's acceptance wanted her to be more open. "For one thing...I would have you wear diapers..."

Emily felt a bit awkward hearing that. Of course she expected it, but hearing it finally be put out in the open still felt strange.

"Okay..." Emily said. "Will I have to...use them?" Emily knew she it was a stupid thing to ask, but she couldn't help but want to clarify just how she would be treated.

"Ideally...yes..." Joyce felt a little bit uncomfortable as well. "For all intents and purposes...at some point, at least."

It was difficult to comprehend what it would be like peeing and messing herself, Emily strangely pondered the thought. Admittedly it didn't sound very thrilling, at all. The last time she did that was before she was even old enough to retain the thought of remembering what it was like to use diapers... Guess she would be finding out soon enough. But diapers were diapers. Taking the first step was for Joyce, she'd see where it went from there.

"What else would I have to do or wear?" Was being a baby hard? She'd have to do her best to make this pleasant for Joyce.

"Apart from diapers, whatever I clothe you in."

Clothe her? Then again, Joyce *did* say she wanted to mother her, which didn't sound all that bad--being cared for.

"But all I want from you is for you to enjoy yourself. I may find pleasure in babying you...but I want you to find pleasure in me babying you as well..."

Emily couldn't believe the terms Joyce was setting here. It only felt like to Emily that she was supposed to benefit from Joyce's kink, and Joyce was simply caring for her even more than she already did. But it being so unconventional was what made it a kink, Emily reminded herself. It was weird thinking that her own happiness made Joyce happy, but if that's what it took, Emily was prepared to explore this uncharted territory.

"It would come with dressing you, changing you, bathing you...and feeding you."

Emily could almost imagine the orchestrated scenes, popping through her head, only feeling curiosity for them rather than distaste. She figured that was a good sign.

"And also...I might change a bit how I talk to you..." What did she mean by that?

"What do you mean by that?" Emily asked, unsure.

"In a tone more..age appropriate." Again, Joyce felt caught up, laying her intentions bare in front of the exact person that she was going to do these things to was just as emotionally difficult as confessing it from the start..

"Okay." Hearing it from Joyce was one thing, but experiencing it was on a whole different level. There wasn't much Emily could get out of a table discussion rather than experiencing the thing firsthand.

“Do you have any requests from me?” Joyce asked. She wasn’t even entirely sure herself how their first time together doing this would be. She would need time to plan.

“How often or long would we be doing this?” Emily wondered. She knew both of them had work which could interrupt long-term “play,” which wasn’t exactly bad to Emily, as she was currently fond of adulthood, and wouldn’t mind returning to it regularly.

“Let’s just try it first, then we’ll see where to go from there...” Joyce decided, again, uncertain herself. If she were to take this seriously, she’d need to be much more decisive and prepared for her sake and Emily’s in the future.

“Okay. Alright then,” Emily couldn’t think of anything that needed to come now; most of her questions either being trivial, or would ruin some kind of surprise Joyce may have already cooked up. “So when do we start?”

“Since it’s already Sunday, I figured we should wait until this Saturday comes up. That way we both have time to prepare...mentally and physically.”

Whatever that meant, Emily trusted Joyce. She was willing to surrender to her care if that meant she would be happy, and would even have Emily’s best interest at heart as well. It would be a long week in anticipation, but the both of them would tough it through. Who knew what Joyce had cooked up.

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And so the week was quite slow, but with the help of Joyce’s chauffeur, Emily was commuted to and from work with ease, as the pair could meet each other at home each and every night. There was always dinner together and cuddles, but both of them knew with each passing day that their special time together was coming closer and closer. On the days Joyce came home before Emily, she would use the time to openly strategize and move some newly purchased items into her locked room down the hall...

Late Friday night, when Emily had been carried to bed some time ago, Joyce reviewed her plan with satisfaction, and knew everything was ready to go. Joyce set her alarm clock for 9, and drifted off to sleep. For both of their sake, Joyce would ensure that tomorrow was perfect.