

40 - Out of Town

“What?”

“Mmmmfmmm.”

Were her ears working properly? “C-come again?” Joyce tried not to smile.

“Mmmmfmm!”

“Wait, found the problem,” Joyce grinned, hooking the ring and pulling a pacifier out of Emily’s mouth. “Try that again?”

“I *said*, what’re you gonna do without me tomorrow?” Emily rolled from one side of the bed to the other, all with her padded behind peering over a pajama pant waistband that was far too undersized for a girl in oversized protection.

“I may not be a scholar, but I’m pretty sure that wasn’t what you were saying with that pacifier...”

“Yes it was. You just need to keep studying,” Emily declared right before smothering her mouth into Pip.

Joyce leaned forward on the bed, snatching Emily by the bare waist with her hands, dragging her back to the foot of the bed. “Mommy’s just about ready to give up. It might just be something meant for cute little tots like you?”

“So you mean I’d have my own secret language that I can use to keep secrets from you?”

“Maybe, but who else is just as fluent as you?” And in the midst of their chit-chat, Joyce tugged down the front of Emily’s pajama pants, feeling the warm front of her diaper before tugging it back up without a comment. A silent signal that a change had yet to be warranted. “And since we agreed on no secrets,” Joyce slightly paused for dramatic effect, and as a teeny tiny legitimate reminder, “I can only imagine you might be scheming about...hmm...playing hide and seek from me? Maybe hiding Mommy’s favorite pair of shoes? Trying to hide a soggy diapie from me? Huh? Huh?”

“Stop!” Emily giggled, “No tickles! No secrets! I promise! Promise!”

“And don’t forget it~,” Joyce sealed their pact with a kiss on the forehead. Then she sighed, “But yes, that is a *very* good question,” now she really was sulking, “what am I going to do without you tomorrow...”

“I don’t mind going too?” Emily tried a route long-since shutdown once more.

“Thank you for offering again,” Joyce smiled affectionately, “but you know that this dinner is going to run past your bedtime?”

“I don’t have a bedtime...” Emily groaned.

“You certainly do on business dinner nights?” Joyce raised her brow, but eventually softened her expression. “I want to bring you too, but since Carol invited me, it just wouldn’t be polite. Or at least, it’s important that it looks like a business trip and not a vacation...”

“So are you gonna invest?” Now the night before the event, Emily admittedly was a bit curious.

“Invest?” Joyce’s tone carried uncertainty, but optimism. “No idea. It may be all fetish stuff, but a good idea is a good idea. Though...I can’t exactly say I know a whole lot about fetishes.”

The wolf was trying to pretend it was a sheep, but Emily with a grin kept that thought to herself. “What? You don’t?” Okay, maybe not.

“And neither do you, missy,” Joyce fired right back with a little bit of competition. “Part of investing is about making educated guesses. Knowing what works from experience and figuring if there’s a market for it. Didn’t Carol mention something about fursuits when we were at their house?” Her face was covered in skepticism. “I wouldn’t even know the first thing...”

“Maybe it’ll all be super weird and freaky stuff,” Emily openly marveled, “like...like super hardcore torture stuff? Or people that wear latex and have orgies?”

Joyce wasn’t as well-versed as Carol, but she knew when her little girl’s mind was starting to run awry.

“Maybe?” She shrugged. “But that’s what I’ll find out. More importantly, my flight is in the morning a little bit after around when you’d be waking up. Want me to give you my goodbye kisses before bed tonight?” Sometimes things just had to be done out of courtesy, regardless of whether you knew what the answer would be or not.

Emily, giving the expected response with a dash of frowny-face, said, “No. I want you to wake me up tomorrow before you leave. Promise me?”

With a pinky hooked with hers, Joyce leaned in, “Promise,” right before kissing her on the lips. “Maybe while I’m gone I can leave you with a babysitter?”

“Excuse me?”

“Just to keep you from getting bored?” Joyce shrugged nonchalantly, holding back the teasy part of her voice.

“I have Pip,” Emily held the mochi defensively. “I’ll be fine.”

“Relax, I’m kidding. Or I don’t have to be? Amy said she wants to double check some measurements, you know? You two could make a day out of it?”

Emily narrowed her gaze, finally able to see a speeding bullet just peeking on the horizon. “I’m not wearing diapers for Amy.”

“She didn’t say *which* measurements,” Joyce laughed. “Either way, if that was the case, the only way it’d happen is if she was fine with diapering you herself.” And Emily being okay with it at all, first and foremost.

“What? I’d do it myself?”

“No?” Joyce innocently, but firmly, put down her freedoms. “We agreed, remember? Little girls don’t get to change their own diapers?”

“But strangers do?” Just where was Emily on this totem pole?

“Grown-ups do,” Joyce corrected with a boop on the nose. “Grown-ups we both agree on.”

“Which is only you,” Emily quickly added, suddenly feeling the slight need to make mention of such an important point.

“Only Mommy,” Joyce nodded with a pearly smile.

They laid there some more while Joyce absentmindedly traced circles in the comforter.

“But...what would you think about including someone else?”

“Huh?” There wasn’t any Jazz music or ambient noise that could be stopped to insinuate the jarring surprise, but the diaper crinkling certainly ceased.

“I dunno,” Joyce shrugged, “I’m just thinking out loud. Like if there was someone else that could interact with you when you’re my baby girl?”

“You mean...*sharing* me?” Was this actually Joyce she was speaking with?

“*No. Not sharing.*” Joyce didn’t look happy to hear the ‘S’ word, which was something that finally made sense to Emily, given a slew of jealousy this woman was known to harbor.

“Someone who...adds to the lifestyle? Does something for you that I can’t?”

Emily at best was keeping a sideways look. “I mean...I’d be lying if I said that I didn’t like this now, sort of, but...I think you’re a big reason why I like it, Joyce...” she murmured her lips, avoiding eye contact, “...Mommy...”

Joyce giggled, kissing her again. “And you’re one-hundred percent of the reason why I like it, my little Emmy.” She breathed quietly for a few moments before saying, “I guess I mean someone like...like an actual babysitter, or...or a private tutor that’s like your personal daytime daycare teacher?”

“Are you being serious right now?” It wasn’t phrased in any sort of ridiculing way, but as a means to try and decipher fact from fiction when there were sparkles in Joyce’s eyes.

“No...and yes...a little...” she exhaled. “If I’m being honest, I think I get carried away with my dreams a little bit...”

“I think so too,” Emily giggled with her hands on her lover’s waist. “Besides, wouldn’t that risk your reputation or something? If something like that got out?”

“Yes, but...”

A mind with desires was the worst fiend to be in the company of. A pestering trickster that sat atop her shoulders 24/7 with as much time as it pleased to exercise reason and rationale just to make the impossible seem possible.

“There’s...you know...discretion.”

“I think you’re mommying a bit too hard, Mommy,” Emily spoke upwards to her star-gazing girlfriend.

“I think so too... Maybe it’s Mommy’s bedtime?”

“Afraid so,” Emily sighed the most ‘oh my hopeless girlfriend’ sigh she could ever muster, then stood on her feet, hanging by the doorway.

“Did you forget something?” Joyce asked from her spot on the bed, just as comfy as she was a few seconds ago.

Apparently the mood hadn’t been mutually understood. “I...” Emily’s eyes shift down, then back at the door, then on repeat just a couple more times. “Weren’t we gonna...take it off?”

“Change your diaper, honey?” Joyce innocently asked with a tone of syrup. “I just checked you, silly; I think you’ll be fine.”

“But you’re leaving early tomorrow?”

“And I think I’d be a bad mommy if I left my little girl in a wet diaper the entire time I’m on my trip, but just as bad if I let you go to bed without a diaper on?” Then with a cautious hand against her cheek she said in a lowered voice, “What if you have an accident, sweetheart?”

“I...” Her cheeks were red, meaning an embarrassing talking-to had been well-executed.

“I’ll have you all taken care of, Emmy,” she beckoned her back to the bed. “Or did you want to sleep in your crib tonight? We can do that too?”

It didn’t take any more than that to get a padded waddle back over to the bed. “No. I’m fine.”

“Good. I was hoping to snuggle all night? Just so I don’t forget what it feels like tomorrow?”

Questions then went on to be answered with actions, and actions only beget more actions. Joyce, with such a ripe fruit hanging right before her, played Emily like an instrument. Hearing her embarrassed squirm, Joyce tugged down her pajama bottoms in full, past the ankles and soon onto the floor.

“Hey...!” Emily whined, something she was unfortunately building a knack for.

“Shush, it’s just in case,” Joyce couldn’t hide her rosy-cheek smile. “If you leak I don’t want you to ruin your pretty PJs?”

“I won’t leak!” Emily could find pleasure in the idea of being small, but she wasn’t accustomed to playing make-believe about her bladder.

“I know you won’t, because Mommy keeps you in the best-est diapers!” Joyce giggled again, kissing her all over. “And actually,” she paused to ponder a thought, “there was that one time when Mom and Dad were here; you *did* have an accident on the couch, sweetie? Remember?”

“No I didn–!” Emily started to say, then the memory inserted itself and the embarrassment spread through her like a parasite. “Th-that was different! That was just water! It was a…” And for lack of a better word under a panicked mind, Emily, bless her innocent soul, cried, “It was a different kind of accident!”

And Joyce, overjoyed by her use of the a-word, only chuckled fondly. “And I love you no less,” she kissed her again.

With such a limited bag of tricks already vetted by her Mommy, Emily played her strongest card, threatening, “Maybe I’ll just go sleep in the other bed tonight if you’re gonna tease me so much…”

“Yeah?” Joyce caressed her cheek. “Wanna have some crib time?”

“No. The *other* bed. My old room.”

“That’s where the guests stay, silly. It’s either here with me in the big girl bed or in your crib?”

Whether it was because Emily suffered from chronic gullibility or Joyce was simply good at forcing an atmosphere, an altered reality was all the diapered girl could see. Knocking her head into Joyce’s side, she laid there with her mind made up.

“You’re like politics…” Emily grumbled.

It didn’t make sense in such a characteristic way which is why Joyce could only start with a laugh. “Excuse me?”

“Lesser of two evils, and stuff…”

“Ah-huh… Well, before you push any of Mommy’s buttons, do you want something to drink before bed?”

“Coffee Milk.”

“Juice it is,” Joyce rose from the bed. “Stay put.”

“I didn’t ask for juice!” Emily droned with a groan at the open doorway, which her girlfriend had already passed through.

“Emmy? Baby?” Joyce made the first whisper of the morning into a sleeping Emily’s ear. “I gotta start getting ready now...you awake?”

The sleepy and tired whine squeezed between her lips as she involuntarily stretched.
“Hnnnmmm...!”

With her eyes still closed, Emily’s hand probed itself around the bed, searching for the waist beside her and resting on it for as long as she could. Unfortunately it wasn’t long, to no one’s pleasure as only Joyce with her eyes open frowned to end the gesture so quickly.

“I’m gonna get this diaper off you and into some big girl undies, ‘kay?”

“Wha...what time is it...?”

“Too early for you to be up,” she issued the tranquilizer with a tender kiss. “Keep those eyes closed, I gotta turn the light on.”

A well-advised suggestion indeed, as even with her eyes shut Emily was rolling her face into the mattress just to escape the irritating light. A pair of hands found her waist as for just a brief moment her padded bum left the bed when Joyce tugged on the tapes of her diaper. It’d been wetter than last time Joyce checked last night, which was always nice to see. Though for Emily she was likely too tired to care, and would never admit how secretly appreciative she was becoming of its sponge-like qualities.

And through the pillow Emily sleepily mumbled, “I’ll...in a second...too...”

“Mhm?” Joyce whimsically cooed back, finding Emily’s sleep babble somewhat akin to a tyke rambling through a change. Her words didn’t need to have any meaning, and all Joyce needed to do was acknowledge and love right back.

One trip to the nursery later and one trip back, Emily was where she was left on the bed, only naked from the waist down now, but not for much longer.

It was mind-boggling to think of how much wearing diapers could force a paradigm shift or flip her world view. That's to say, the shift back to panties was always a weird one when it felt like she wasn't wearing anything at all, essentially. No more thickness, none of the crinkle to remind her of what she was wearing, and none of the intimate checks from her girlfriend either.

Right as Joyce turned to leave, a hand of the living dead rose from its eternal slumber to snatch the wrist of the living. She turned her head to see Emily using her as a foothold for dragging herself out of bed.

"No, no, silly," Joyce laughed as she forced her back on the bed, "I said too early for a reason."

"No..." she started, then continued one yawn later, "diapers...no rules... I wanna be up when you leave..."

"I thought we just agreed on goodbye kisses?"

Seeing as her girlfriend had no intentions of abetting her efforts to stay awake, Emily slumped herself to the other side of the bed, finally rising from the torso and up. "And I gotta be awake for it..."

And then on a whim, though feeling the most desirable, Emily asked, "Can I come to the airport with you?"

"What? Emily, you should be in bed right now. No, no airports."

Stumbling onto her feet like a newborn doe, Emily crashed into Joyce's arms. "Why not? Sebastian's driving, isn't he...?" Being tired made it so easy to act spoiled. "Can't he just drive me back here?"

It most certainly was possible, and more than likely not an issue. But for Emily's sake, Joyce decided to rewrite reality. "No, because that's not what I told him to prepare for, sweetheart. Besides, you know what'd happen if you went along for the ride, right?"

"What?"

"I'd *definitely* have to stuff a cutie like you in my suitcase then! Mwah! Mwah!"

Between her giggles, Emily relented. "Okay...fine..."

Joyce tugged her suitcase on wheels to the front entrance while Emily dozed around, half-slumped against the walls to support herself as she watched, barely managing to qualify as an alert spectator.

In a blazer and slacks, Joyce couldn't stop herself from kissing her panty-and-pajama-shirt girlfriend each time she had to pass by, or at least made up a reason to.

And trying to be as much help as she possibly could, Emily asked, "And do you have...uhm...the stuff?"

"Yes; I double, triple, then quadruple checked," Joyce assured, even though "the stuff" was as clear as Emily's current state of mind.

One buzz later on Joyce's phone and they were sharing their final embrace.

"I'll be back tomorrow in the afternoon, okay?"

"Mhm..." Emily nodded, though trying not to come off as somber.

"Stop it," Joyce grinned, "this is a thousand times harder for me, you know? Alright, be good; call me if you need anything, because I'm definitely going to be calling you. There's food in the fridge, no ice cream— don't give me that look!" she warned, both playfully and not so playfully. "And most importantly, I love-love-love you very much!"

"Love you too..." Emily came back with a blush, a hug, and a final kiss.

"Promise me one thing?" Joyce asked.

"What?"

"Once I leave, go back to bed."

"...Fine."

And with that the door was opened and closed, and the penthouse was one less in attendance for more than 24 hours. For at least two of those, however, would immediately be spent going back to bed, per the warden's order.

“Joyce!”

“Carol!”

Just outside of the baggage pickup of the airport, they shared a hug before putting Joyce’s luggage in the car and driving off.

“How was the flight?” Carol asked from the driver’s seat. “I’m sorry we couldn’t fly in together, by the way! I had to take care of some other stuff; I’m so glad you decided to come!”

“I appreciate the invite, and yeah, the flight wasn’t too bad. I think I can only say that though because I always try to get a good seat... How’s Michael and Jackie, by the way?”

“Good! They’re up to the usual, but Jackie wants to know when you two are coming over again!” she paused to laugh, “I’m so sorry! I think my daughter considers you two as part of her friend group.”

After laughing herself, Joyce said, “Well it’s good to hear that everyone’s doing good. We’ll definitely have to get together again, sometime.”

“Oh! I forgot! How’s Emily?”

She couldn’t help herself when she let out a small phantom pain, “Awh~. I told her the only reason she couldn’t come to the airport with me was because I’d try and stuff her in my bag.”

“Homesick already?”

“Admittedly, yes...” Joyce awkwardly drew circles on her thigh. “Since we started...dating,” and how wonderful it felt to be able to say that, “this is the first time I’ve left on a trip. Normally I feel fine, but this time is just...”

“Like you’re always anxious about how things are at home?”

“Yes!” she blurted out immediately, then just as quickly recomposed herself. “I mean— Yes, it feels like that a lot...”

It was a bit shameful the way she’d reacted, but it was also entertaining, given Carol’s laugh.

“You remind me so much of when I first had Jackie! I didn’t get to have a whole lot of time off with her until I had to go back to work. Just going to the office was like torture; being away from

her for so long. I tried to avoid trips like these as much as possible just to be home as much as possible. Only after Michael talked me out of it did I start getting comfortable again. At least for me, I'd call it Mother's separation anxiety. I'm sure you're probably going through a similar thing."

"Mm..." Now Joyce was the quiet one in the relationship, mulling over what likely was MSA. Mommy Separation Anxiety. Commonly confused with GSA, the girlfriend variant, though much more severe.

"You could give her a call right now, you know?"

"I want to, but if I'm right, she should still be asleep right now. She was up to see me out the door, but I made her go right back to bed afterward."

"Michael's usually the same way, but if I have too many flights in too short of a time, he usually calls it 'taking a rain-check' on giving his goodbyes," Carol snickered, "I don't blame him. I don't like getting up early either."

"You should see her," Joyce was already digging at the thought in her head, "the poor thing barely handles early times just as much as late ones! I brought her to a business dinner a few weeks ago and after a few drinks..."

Aimless wandering around the apartment unfortunately made for quite the terrible pastime. No Joyce meant no excitement, and all that was left was job hunting, but her boredom and unease from her girlfriend being away put her in a mood that didn't want to do anything involved. Not only that, but Joyce probably wouldn't give her the password to the parental lock on the computer.

Maybe she should go out? Then her feet came to a halt once the thought had hit her. Go out and do what? By herself? The silence spoke of her awkwardness.

"Maybe I should be friend hunting instead of looking for a job..."

Was it bad that she was thinking of Amy right then? Was Joyce being serious about her wanting to come over? Was it still too late?

Then she remembered the diapers.

Without Joyce? Absolutely not. Never. It was bizarre how thoughts alone could make a person feel embarrassed. That one time alone was plenty enough anxiety-inducing. Besides, Emily wasn't allowed to change her own diapers, so that would mean—

Falling into her hands, she groaned aloud, “Urggggh...!” Of course she'd be able to put on her own diaper then! Joyce had wrapped her fingers around her so tightly, it was hard discerning left from right anymore. She loved it, truly, but if it couldn't cloud her judgment at times...

It was more than likely going to be a do-nothing day. A do-nothing day that included ice cream, whether her girlfriend liked it or not. She wasn't here so Emily didn't have to listen.

That thought felt liberating, and quite empowering, actually.

“Just a comfy, do-nothing day...” she whispered her plan, then nodded to herself once the confidence had been found. And on her way to the bedroom to find a nice pair of sweatpants, like a photo on the wall being slightly ajar, something caught the corner of Emily's vision.

A door that was usually closed had the slightest crack in it. It was enough to stop on a dime, enough to watch and stare for a good few seconds, and enough to slightly nudge the uncharacteristically unlocked door open just a smidgen more. And a little more. And just a little more.

In an absolutely shocking turn of events, Emily was standing inside the nursery. Alone. Unattended. Unsupervised.

It was a bit ridiculous, but an odd sort of giddiness or curiosity infected the woman standing there. Had Joyce forgotten to lock it? She usually doesn't forget that kind of stuff, so to see a rare mistake like this was quite the oddity as well as treat.

She imagined it as almost like witnessing behind the scenes of some grand picture or play. Being at your school in the dead of night; being somewhere at a time you're not supposed to be. Without Joyce, her mommy, what power, if any, did anything in this room have over her? Lots, certainly, but all without the director to orchestrate it all.

Maybe she could tease Joyce about forgetting later on the phone. Striking herself with a newly brilliant idea, Emily wandered over to the closet, stepping inside. There weren't many, but all her specially designed outfits hung on the racks, freshly cleaned and ready to be worn.

Mischief may have been her cause, because half the reason she stayed in this room was simply because she could never imagine getting a chance like this again. Getting to explore the nursery

by herself? Without consequence or reprimand? A small smile grew on her face. She was trying to get comfy, wasn't she?

The perks to having been babied already meant acquiring some kind of tolerance for it at this point. She'd still blush, she'd still go quiet and meek, but that at least meant by now she could certainly tolerate herself.

She looked back at the mirror as she held up the footie pajamas against herself. It was cute...naturally, considering Amy had made it. And she was by herself. Alone. She could wear it, be comfy, put it back after, lock up the nursery herself, and no one would ever know. No one.

Excitement and intrigue were dangerous things, because Emily didn't even recognize herself anymore as she stripped her shirt, unzipped the back of the pajamas and stepped inside. The inside was lined with a cool, soft material, like a soothing hug all over. It was strange, but the secure feeling she got as she watched herself in the mirror trace the zipper up her back was wonderfully suffocating. Since when did she enjoy stuff like this? Her confused look warbled into a bashful grin. Joyce had been her constant drug and she was probably starting to form an addiction.

She bent and stretched, just to feel and watch the pajamas conform and follow her every move. It was silly, but that's why she couldn't help but laugh. But most importantly, it was comfy, far more so than what sweat pants would afford her, which is why she kept it on. Leaving everything as it was, she resumed her trip to the bedroom, only to grab Pip and head over to the couch. Turning on the tv and finding a nice spot, she was all set.

“So it doesn't officially ‘start’ until later tonight,” Carol explained with air quotes, “but usually we get together for drinks beforehand.”

Joyce listened as she unpacked. “That's fine by me. Though...I don't suppose I could have a little coaching on what to maybe expect? I am curious, but I guess I don't want to look completely like a fish out of water...” Scouting investment opportunities wasn't a foreign concept to her, but in the way of kinks certainly was.

“Don't worry; everyone at this event is extremely professional. After all, they want our money,” Carol laughed, and so did Joyce. “Sure, I can tell you a little bit about what I've seen in the past. Before that though, maybe you want to try giving Emily a call? I know I'm gonna call back home.”

She may have just been looking for the go-ahead, because Joyce was already pulling out her phone. “Yes, definitely. Is it okay if I borrow the bathroom?”

“All yours.”

A few minutes later Joyce was sitting on the edge of the tub with her phone held against her ear, waiting for the quiet buzz.

“I was expecting that to take a little longer?” Carol sounded surprised as she finished hanging up her phone.

“Me too,” Joyce sounded a bit glum, “I tried twice;” she chuckled, “she’s probably napping right now, if I had to guess.”

“Did she have any plans for today?”

“Mm...don’t think so. I think it might be just a lazy day for her. She might be feeling bored, though...”

“Maybe you should’ve gotten her a babysitter then?” Carol chuckled.

With her mind elsewhere, almost a bit too seriously Joyce let her unfiltered thoughts slip when she started to say, “Maybe...” Then caught herself a second later. “--Uhm, but... No, she’s fine, I’m sure. I’ll try calling her later.”

“Sure,” Carol nodded with a smile. “Should we get going then?”

“Sounds good to me.”

Sleep was quite dangerous, and no other opinion could be offered otherwise. Losing blocks of time to just emptiness or dreams that kept the distracted mind entertained. Without alarm clocks or doting girlfriends the passage of time if left unchecked could be robbed entirely by the sleep demon.

Emily groggily awoke to the sound of knocking, a half-slumbering mess as she rose from the couch. She yawned with Pip in her arm, near-stumbling over herself as her bare feet through the cuffs of her pajamas padded across the floor.

She'd done it. She had slept the entire day away and then some. It was already tomorrow and Joyce was back. Sleeping for so long really could put a spell of guilt on a person. Imagine losing an entire day simply because your lover was gone?

It sucked, but Emily couldn't help but smile, knowing that Joyce was finally back! She wanted to know how the investment event went. Did she see anything weird? Meet anyone new? Was she buddies with Carol now?

Emily debated waiting for Joyce to come in herself, just so she could lunge at her on no-heel days like she always did, but once she heard another knock, it became quite clear that Joyce had forgotten her key. Just like she'd forgotten to lock up the nursery.

Apparently Emily wasn't the only frazzled one.

With her free hand on the door she unlocked and opened it, saying as she did so, "How did you forget so much stu—"

"Oh?"

"S-..."

It was an intruder. A stranger. It wasn't Joyce. What the hell was going on? Emily wanted to move for the door, but she was frozen. Not frozen, just scared, shell-shocked and frazzled. Rather, she even took a step back, the fool that she was. And like that it was too late. The person had entered, beyond the barrier that could've separated them once again.

"E...Emily?" the person asked.

And only then did it fully click. A name had come to mind. Did all the associated memories flood her head.

"Sh...Sheila?" Emily quietly, in a painfully small voice whispered back.

Sheila stood in front of her, bewildered and surprised to see Emily as much as she was to see her. She was in casual, modest attire with a purse over her shoulder. Emily could barely find the words as she looked up at her, then remembered herself what she was wearing.

At least Emily was caught at a good time. Thankfully, no diapers to be seen and just her big-girl panties. Though, a silver lining like that didn't matter when they were underneath her loud and

colorful footie pajamas. The cherry on top though was the tightly clutched Pip by her side, only short by a special blankie for the full set.

Her eyes couldn't seem to look away from the girl. From her clothes. "Uhm..." Sheila broke the silence, blinking once or twice before reaffirming herself. She turned her head back to the doorway, stepping over just to close the door, committing them both inside. "Emily, right?"

Emily would have liked to believe that she sounded normal, yet in a very objective squeak she said back, "Y-Yeah..." She wanted to bolt. She wanted to run, but her frozen emotions made it impossible to move.

Just like for Sheila, she too remembered the last time that they had met. The memories for her however came much more vividly, on account of having far less substance in her bloodstream that night. Everything she'd done for Emily.

She remembered that it was her job to watch her while Ms. Summers was working the rest of the dinner. It was her job to get Emily in her pajamas and into bed. It was her job to find her stuffed animal, or toy, or... "that," was as best as she could describe when she instantly recognized the item being tightly squeezed by the girl.

A littoney of questions were already flooding the secretary's head, which only inflated her sense of curiosity; a difficult thing to satisfy with anything other than the truth.

"Wh...why..."

The sound of a quiet and socially frightened Emily finally made Sheila snap out of it. "Oh! I...I'm sorry about the surprise. I'm here to pick up some of Ms.-- I mean Joyce's files she brought from the office." Since that night at the hotel Sheila had kicked the habit as soon as she formed it when it came to addressing her boss. It felt strange to use her last name around Emily. Like expecting a kid to know their parents as nothing but "mom" or "dad." Why that was the comparison she thought of though was a different question entirely.

Emily, while she tried not to implode from sheer embarrassment, paced the thoughts in her mind as to how Sheila could have come unannounced. It seemed very out of place, and so did Joyce forgetting things, but Sheila was trustworthy, or at least she was supposed to be. Joyce told Emily to see her as such, after all.

"Do you want to call Joyce to double check?" Sheila asked with a step back into the shoe area. "I don't mind waiting."

It was clear Emily felt uneasy and now it was mutually known.

Emily frowned apologetically, “It’s...it’s not that, it’s just...”

“It’s all right,” Sheila smiled, “Do you want me to call her? I could also give—”

“No...I have her number...one second.” Emily disappeared a second later.

Sheila left alone then put a hand to her mouth, perplexed and staring at the floor. What was she thinking? Why did she say that? Did her boss’ girlfriend really need help calling her? What kind of question was that? And offering to give her a number? Belittling and insulting was all it was, and only guilt was what she felt for it.

Maybe it was those...objectively cute footie pajamas that she was wearing, and how they were interacting last time. How Ms. Summers interacted with Emily last time. After all, she worked that night as a babysi—...a caretaker.

More importantly, did Emily live here now? Her boss was almost always well-equipped, but if she was perfect, then Sheila would be out of a job. Hence why some of the work like this could come about. Sheila prided herself in her diligence and dedication to her work which was ensuring smooth-sailing for her boss. That included access to her outside of the office, like the spare key she had stowed away now in her purse. She’d only been to Ms. Summers new apartment once before for a similar situation, but there was no girlfriend then, as far as she could tell.

Soon a furry pajama-wearing pipsqueak returned with a phone nursed against her ear. “Did Joyce know you were coming?”

“I made sure to let her know earlier today, though I know she had some kind of non-work event that she needed to attend.” Non-work was certainly uncharacteristic of her, which is why Sheila could only guess in certain areas, but an unattended Emily certainly seemed out of place, what with how protective her boss had seemed.

Emily didn’t answer back as she listened to the constant pulsing buzz from her phone. Why wasn’t Joyce picking up? Was she busy? It was maybe just the shock of not being Joyce, but stress was all she felt from dealing with an unexpected visitor.

And then another unsettling thought had hit her. It was Sheila. *The* Sheila. The middleman Sheila. The one who handled all Joyce’s private affairs. Satisfied her requests. Got things done. Got things made. Got...diapers...

“Not picking up?” Sheila asked, who started to pick up on the reservedness Emily was starting to show. Come to think of it, she did look like she was napping before she came to answer the door.

Voicemail. Of all people, Joyce had missed a call? Emily frowned, maybe partly out of selfishness, truly believing her own issue to be important and worthy enough of her attention. But whatever the reason, Joyce wasn't here now and the situation had come to Emily's discretion.

“She didn't pick up... She's not supposed to be back til tomorrow,” Emily said, finding a conveniently sewn front pocket on her footie pajamas to stash her phone. The moment she made use of it, the secretary's eyes followed the entire time. “...But it's fine. We've met before and...you seem...nice, so...”

After a long second, Sheila looked up from her pajama pocket. “I-Is it okay if I take my heels off? I don't want to leave any marks on the floor.”

Emily quietly gestured for her to do so. “Did...you need to go to her office?”

“Please. I've been here once before though, so I should be able to find the way?”

“Oh, then uhm, in that case I'm just gonna go change real quick if you need anything...” Emily was fast disappearing. But fast enough.

“Wait,” Sheila called, and something dreadful, maybe a switch inside Emily's brain meant for someone else had just been unexpectedly flipped. “Are you changing for my sake?”

It was an extremely forward question. One that came on impulse. “I'd rather you didn't just because I'm here?”

“It's...it's not that...” It totally was.

And if looks could kill, surely it was Emily's bashful face wandering about, and it was a lock of hair twirled around her nervous finger that struck the final blow to Sheila's petrified heart.

Sheila brought a hand to her mouth like she was about to cough. “I...really don't mind?” She didn't mind, nor was she looking forward to seeing the sight leave. Why did it matter though? She just didn't want to be the reason such a sweet thing was ruined.

And if Emily folded, it would have been an indirect admission to Sheila hitting the nail right on the head. And she had, but Emily was still debating whether to lie and save some visual face. Regardless, her comfort zone must have been lost in transit, feeling bare and exposed right then.

“I...I’ll be in the kitchen if you need anything...”

Sheila watched her leave, admittedly (only to herself) doing something she probably shouldn’t have. It was simple curiosity; nothing she would ever act on or respond to. Something she simply wanted to know just because. And she probably had her answer.

No crinkle, no puff.

What could have been under those pajamas likely wasn’t.

Things had changed somewhat since her last visit, but thankfully the walls and floor plan wasn’t one of those. Take a left in the living room, walk down the hall, and at the end should be...

But a new nugget of information had stopped her in her tracks.

What she remembered about the apartment were two bedrooms, a bathroom, and an office. A living room, a kitchen; the works. All that and one room for storage. Boxes, furniture in hibernation...

And as she had made her walk to the office, from the corner of her eye she couldn’t help but see what was most certainly not a storage room. The walls as she remembered were unpainted and white. Not cream. A simple and unused room had no need for drapes, nor a carpet, or a mirror, or a...large crib, or a cushioned table...with...

A doorway with a door only half ajar could show only so much, which wasn’t a lot at all. What it did show was a sliver of something much bigger, and such a small taste enticed Sheila’s curiosity like pure dopamine. The intrigue and suspicions she’d worked so hard to choke, punch down and hide away as a result of everything her boss only ever alluded to were rising from the ashes with vitality and force, demanding to be answered like an itch that was begging to be scratched. What she saw was far more than from just a half-glance through a half-open door. What she saw was from standing dead-center inside the nursery, because that’s where she was.

There were certainly lines in her work relationships that should not and could not be crossed, and as the secretary’s heart rate picked up from stimulus intake, she was fairly certain that the line was sitting way back at the doorway.

Unless her boss had a second secretary taking similar orders, Sheila could not mistake the two baskets filled to the brim with all-too-familiar looking diapers.

Ignorance would have asked if they were for her boss, or maybe a third someone she had yet to meet. And yet, there, in the apartment, sitting in the kitchen, footie pajamas, stuffed animal and all, was the primest suspect who could easily have been carrying the same scent of powder Sheila could smell in this room. This nursery.

It was certainly weird, but strangely, very strangely, fascinating. She'd never even seen something like this, much less conceived it. A nursery for a giant baby? An...adult baby?

A few seconds later Sheila was by the changing table, pressing her hand curiously on the cushioning. It felt sturdy, well-designed. Another custom piece?

BabyMaker.

Another synapse fired and another connection had been made.

For the first time she finally turned around and jumped in shock, just stifling a full-blown yelp! She'd been spotted. She was seen! But...she wasn't... but she was.

A large, stuffed bear sat in the corner of the room. A large, large bear. Big enough for a smaller-sized person to be enveloped by completely. Then she spotted the closet.

And already waist-deep in what was surely a violation of privacy, Sheila's sensational self took hold and tip-toed forward, quietly turning the handle and peering inside.

It was certainly a half-empty kind of closet, but what caught her by surprise the most was an entire other machination waiting for her. A...giant chair? A chair with a table? Once it clicked her eyes grew wider. It was a highchair, but of course for an adult, and yet that seemed to mitigate the shock no less.

She quietly closed the door, turning back around to take in the bizarre room all over again. Her eyes fixated on the crib. A bed where someone could sleep. An adult could fit in it. An...Emily, even.

The footie pajamas.

Cute. Colorful. Just like everything else in this room. The numbers were crunching faster than she could process coherent thoughts and the conclusions were already writing themselves...!

This wasn't just a stranger's room. This was Emily's room. She...lived like this? As a...for lack of a better word, a baby? Sheila tried to find the logic to refute, yet she had anything but. It was obvious to say that she'd walked in on something she was absolutely not meant to see, and yet the guilt hardly matched the immense intrigue and satisfaction for having her old wounds of not knowing freshly opened and satisfied beyond belief.

And so, somehow finding her way back to reality, Sheila stepped out of the nursery, setting the door back to how it was as best she could. As much as she wanted to observe Narnia for a little bit longer, Sheila tried to remember her reason for coming here in the first place, walking off to the in-home office.

“Sheila?”

The woman adorning her glasses nearly slipped and fell on her backside, the surprise caught her so badly. Quietly cursing herself for stockings being the work attire of the night, Sheila put on her best smile as she turned around.

Still in her footies...!

“Y-yes?”

“Uhm...I just remembered...” Emily couldn't have sounded more bashful if she tried. Stretching her hands along her front, she half mumbled, “It's...well, Joyce got some software stuff on her computer, so I don't know if you'll be able to use it...”

How was she supposed to explain to her girlfriend's secretary that her workstation had a parental blocker on it because *someone* was too irresponsible?

“Software?” Sheila asked, but the conundrum solved itself in the span of speaking the very word. “Ah! She has parental controls on them, doesn't she?” Sheila kept half-glancing Emily's way, but she slowly gravitated towards the office.

She knew?!

“Is that what it is?” Emily awkwardly laughed. “I wouldn't know— I only heard her talk about it...one time...”

It wasn't even intentional. Sheila was a problem-solver by nature. Even as a bystander she couldn't help but observe. Think. Make her own conclusions.

“Joyce gave me the information just in case something like this happened. I should be all set.”

“Oh, uhm, okay...” Another thing that Joyce knew that Sheila knew, but Emily didn’t. With Sheila’s back turned to the girl, Emily couldn’t help but frown.

Trust Joyce. Trust Sheila...

Being that Emily was no tech whiz by any means, hearing someone type at what sounded like a professional level was certainly intimidating. By the time Emily could finish a sentence, Sheila was likely forwarding three different drafted emails. The only digits she had that knew how to type were the short, opposable ones that could only text.

“Does Joyce keep a lot of stuff from work on her computer?”

“Yes, but she usually sends me everything. She must have been in a rush so she didn’t get the chance.”

Even mommies forget stuff, apparently... Had Emily not already forgotten, she’d be thinking that same thought twice over now instead of one.

It reached a point when Sheila was sitting in the computer chair, typing away, signing onto the company VPN, opening files, preparing an email—

Oops! This executable requires parental permissions to be used at this time. Please enter the password below:

Not surprising. Sheila got Joyce the license, after all. Like many things, this password was just a drop in the bucket of how many things Sheila could and did retain on a daily basis. And just as she was about to type, a pair of padded feet evening themselves out on the hardwood floor reminded her of who was watching.

Emily obviously noticed she stopped too. For what reason?

And maybe it was not the best action, and maybe it wasn’t the best impulse. She could have stayed quiet and simply put in the password; it likely would have been too fast for her to see, anyway. And yet, already being such a slave to her instincts tonight, Sheila couldn’t help herself and asked:

“Did Joyce say if you could see the password?”

The tiny zipper on Emily's footie pajamas jingled.

It was demeaning. It was rude. Amounting the woman to just a child that needed rules. Supervision. It was bad. Sheila knew it. But a tickled side of herself was begging for the question to be asked. Begging to confirm what had to be absolutely true. Stroke her ego. Stroke her bias.

To Sheila's credit she wasn't smiling. It sounded like a genuine question because it was one.

Emily was no longer there. Instead, the stiffest board of wood you could find in the northern hemisphere had suddenly erected itself in a pair of pajamas.

Needless to say, Sheila's question cut deep. Of course she was going to say she could know! She'd mention that it was for Joyce's nephew who totally visited all the time, and actually drew a really cute picture for them on the fridge!

She was absolutely going to lie just to save her own skin. She was... Surely...

Maybe it was the eyes. Maybe it was because she was sitting in Joyce's chair, so she had the same demeanor? Right? Was it the footie pajamas making her feel like this?

"Emily?"

Her patient reminder hit Emily like a hammer.

Shit! She asked again! Had she been quiet for that long? A second? Multiple seconds?! Emily's toes tried to burrow themselves, but the shiny wooden floor and her closed-feet clothing was having none of it.

But why? Why?! Why couldn't she just lie? Ashes wasn't here, so what the hell had her tongue?!

And in her most pathetic play yet, Emily stuttered out an awkward laugh.

"A-ahm...! I actually...I'm gonna get some water? Do- do you want any?"

"No thank you," Sheila smiled. No, she did something else. Yes, she smiled, but there was something else in that smile. Emily may not have noticed, but Sheila sure did.

A smirk? Did I just smirk at her?

Too embarrassed to own up to the child lock, Emily was gone. After a few good seconds of no return, Sheila quietly huffed, hanging her head back for just a second, then put in the password.

iluvPeaches27

Passwords were supposed to be random. Yet as of late, nothing felt random anymore.

Emily was hunkered down in the kitchen again, staring down at the transparent substance in her glass. She didn't even want water; she just wanted to live her lie so well that it didn't feel like one. Uncomfortable memories of second grade were bubbling up for some reason.

She loved her former teacher, Ms. Lox, but some days in second grade were downright terrifying when work didn't get done. The days she didn't do her homework were like public executions the next morning.

When the teacher came around to collect everyone's assignment and was nearing poor elementary-level Emily. And when she was just with Sheila a moment ago, it wasn't Sheila that was sitting. It was Emily still in her grade school desk with her expectant, discerning teacher right beside her. The embarrassment was burned into her memory to this very day.

The fake excuses she would give.

"I'm still looking for it!" she would say, falsifying the search for a finished document that didn't exist. And Ms. Lox would know it, too. She'd keep walking while Emily drowned in shame, slowing down the movement of her hands, the rummaging of her folders and notebooks as soon as Ms. Lox was speaking to another student. She was forever known as the girl who couldn't admit the truth.

Well, at least for the rest of the class for just that afternoon... Second grader's memories were quite fickle, thankfully.

But the point still stood. She'd just been Ms. Lox'ed by Sheila. She just Ms. Lox'ed herself!

Her heart still dwelling on memories stumbled with a horrible jolt as soon as she heard a pair of teacher's heels.

Shit! Her homework wasn't done yet!

But she sighed in quiet relief when she remembered that it was second grade anymore. Peering around the corner, she saw Sheila sitting on the edge of the floor, slipping on her heels.

“Did...did you get everything?”

“Hm?” Sheila turned her head, stunned all over again by the sight. It was her niece about to be sent off for bed. Was she about to be asked for a goodbye hug, next?

Finally remembering to speak and smile, “...Yes, mhm! Everything I needed.” Yes, everything and so much more.

With a quiet nod, not knowing any other way than to just stick around as a means of sending her off, Emily patiently waited for Sheila to leave.

“Do I need to go turn off the computer, or anything?” Emily’s eyes wandered over to the living room where the route to the office was.

“...No,” Sheila shook her head, dragging her mind back from somewhere else. “I...um, I took care of it.” She slowly draped her hand over the handle.

“Okay. Well, er, have a good night?” With a hand behind her back, Emily offered a small wave.

No.

Absolutely not.

Never.

Impossible.

It simply could not happen.

It couldn’t end like this.

“E...Emily?” Sheila retracted her hand and turned away from the door.

“Have...have you had your dinner yet?”