

49 - The Places We'll Go

It was an uncomfortable silence. Very uncomfortable. It was warm, hot, confusing, and obscenely embarrassing. The world was spinning, there must have been an earthquake because her heart was thumping tremors.

“H...” Emily breathed a sound, but her tongue felt numb. “H-h....huh?”

Never. Not ever; not in a year, ten years, one hundred, one thousand, or in the lifetime of the universe did Emily even *think* she'd be faced with this. As dumb and stupid as she was to have skirted the line so carelessly, she didn't actually expect the consequences. After all, what rule had she broken?

But sitting on the same couch as her, just a few cushions down, Amy with her head tilted ever so slightly, creased her brows with the tiniest signs of a disappointed smile. Maybe if Emily wasn't as frazzled as she was, she may have noticed even the slight blush from Amy herself. The bright yellow and purple diaper, made by Amy herself, was held against her chest by the edges where the tips of her curled fingers clutched it.

“No...?” Amy smiled as sweetly as she was shy now, but somehow able to overcome all that and project an overwhelming sense of desire.

“A-Amy...I...” The loose fabric on Emily's legs started to collect and converge right where her hands were bunching whatever they could hold, over and over.

A diaper. A diaper was offered to her. No, not even offered, but softly forced. She saw the diaper, the soft hands, well-kept nails and casual and comforting clothes. It almost made her reminiscent of whom she could only ever think of in a case like this, but looking any higher brought clashing headaches and confusion when it wasn't who she expected it to be.

It wasn't her Joyce making demands. It wasn't her mommy. She was across the city, doing other things as she saw fit, while simultaneously now ordering others to do her bidding. She couldn't do that, but she did, and the predicament Emily found herself in now was a living example of that.

This was a proxy, that's all it was. Joyce multitasking from another body, doing what she did best and wanted most. But...the sensation was different. The feeling.

“...Emily, I...” Amy's lips retracted inwardly. “...I think I understand...a little.”

Understand? Understand what? What could she understand? This...she didn't *do* this! She...she made clothes! Not diapers...!

The cloth diaper in her hands slowly dropped into her lap where she slowly smoothed it out over and over. "When I make people clothes, I try to understand a lot of things about them. What they like, who they are, and how they might want to feel. I know it sounds a bit ridiculous, but I really do try and capture who they are as a person."

"But—" Emily bit her lip anxiously, "but you do this for Joyce? I..." she sighed worriedly, "I-I like it too...I do, Amy, I...I really do... b-but this is for Joyce?"

After a quiet few seconds, Amy broke the silence.

"Is it?"

Her lowered eyes were saving her from the paralyzing feeling of direct contact, but her space was invaded again once Amy cocked her head out even further just to lower into it. It was uncomfortable and weird. Amy still felt the same and that was the most troubling. She felt just as gentle and just as accepting, only now different shocks were traveling down the same wire Emily let her plug into.

Before she opened her mouth her chin was already shaking. All the progress they'd made felt completely undone, and why was that? Were they not just talking about all the things Emily did with Joyce? Maybe that was it. Talking. There wasn't any physical evidence of the crimes or fingerprints to convict the culprits. Words were words and this was...real. Very real. Too real. In a silly, shortsighted way Emily went out on a limb without even coming close to fully realizing just what kind of chain reaction she could have set off.

But again, miraculously, it could have been stopped.

"When I came over your house just to see you all dressed up, I really can't tell you how happy I was, but, well," Amy stifled a giggle, then let out a small laugh. "I think I kinda made my point when I hugged you?"

And Emily remembered it too. Yet another terrifying moment when she thought it was practically life or death whether she'd be eaten alive by an outside spectator. Christ, Amy volunteered herself as a participant at that.

“Emily, I can’t get over how adorable I think you are. –And don’t think of this as a confession, or anything!” she worriedly blurted out. “Please don’t think of it like that,” she humorously moaned. “I don’t want Joyce hating me!”

Amy’s artillery was strong, and her bunker-busting banter was unrivaled, but Emily’s self-conscious cage was just that much tougher.

The seamstress mumbled, “It’s kind of embarrassing,” *Ah, touché*. Amy went on, “but...I can’t get that stuff out of my head now after visiting your place... I think a whole lot about my clients and how their clothes are going to fit and look, but with you guys, it’s just...different.” If only she knew how big the word ‘different’ seemed to be in Emily and Joyce’s lives.

“B-but you...Joyce wants this stuff...” Emily muttered with the single card in her hand to play.

Amy’s sudden and immediate retort was cruel, precisely because it felt like a knife in Emily’s back. “Is that why you wanted to wear those footie pajamas on your own?” It was far from unkind, and she delivered the blow gently but effectively. Nevertheless the wound made Emily wince. She certainly was stabbed in the back. Maybe only with a foam knife, though...

“You’ve been so honest with me today, Emily, and I love getting to hear so much about you. I don’t want you to feel like you need to keep up your guard around me, because you don’t. I know what you two have. I get it. Not like get-get, but enough to know that I can tell when you’re lying, Emily.”

Oof. The accusation was more electricity and Emily’s shoulders took the shock.

“Yes, I do this for Joyce, but I do it for myself, and I do it for you. You don’t have to lie,” she stressed, and finally the flames were too strong for the girl to even look at the confrontation.

“Hey, Emily...” Amy called and even reached out for her shoulder.

“It’s...it’s not for me. It’s for Joyce.”

“No? Is it?” Amy was a friend, and she was kind, which is why it made it so much harder to hear the sickening amount of doubt her few words were saturated in. “Should I stop, then? Do you want to pretend today never happened? That we didn’t talk and hang out? About all the silly ways Joyce can be a bully, and you can be a mischief-maker?” she chuckled, and Emily nearly felt herself be swept away by the urge to grin.

“We *are* friends, aren’t we?” Amy asked, and finally she expressed the smallest amount of self-doubt, like there had been an unfortunate misunderstanding. As if her kindness had merely been borrowed to suit Emily for the afternoon, and nothing more.

“W-we are!” Emily stressed, reaching out just enough to stop the wreck from derailing. Her chest rose and fell uncomfortably as the words stumbled and tumbled, but they came out nonetheless. “I-I...I want to be friends, Amy, a-and I don’t know why I’m so...s-so like this...! It’s...it’s j-just embarrassing, but I know you are nice and wanna help, but I...it’s just...!”

“Wanna hug?” Amy asked with open arms, and Emily couldn’t have fallen for her faster.

The moment her head came against Amy’s chest, she stared off to the side where all the fabrics, needles and threads were, and just beyond that the shelves of bins she sorted through. It wasn’t the same as Joyce, but it didn’t feel that far from just as comforting. It was just different.

Her lips quivered and the sharp lines of the shelves and corners from the tables all started to go blurry like her camera was out of focus. The lens was just wet, though, because her whimpers went on to tears.

“I-Ih’m sorry...!” Emily sniffled and whimpered, and Amy did the same thing that Joyce did and rubbed circles on her back.

“Don’t be sorry,” Amy chuckled. “Also, how much practice do you have with Joyce? Do you know how good of a hugger you are?”

“S-sorry...” Emily immediately softened her arms like wet noodles, but a sudden firm grip on her triceps forced them back to the tight way they were.

“Did I say to stop?” Amy taunted, then laughed. “Nuh-uh, hug as much as you wanna.”

So she did, and despite the embarrassment she felt there wasn’t a second attempt to go limp. Maybe she felt ashamed, but by this point she was too well-trained by Joyce to not crave physical affection. Physical affection simply made her feel too good now to not crave them. Not when she felt like this, no matter the circumstances. Her worst enemy or agent of destruction could somehow be her best friend with just a simple gesture. One that bled from Emily’s smaller and simpler self into her adult headspace.

“You’re cute, Emily. So cute,” Amy hummed, holding her nearby the whole time. “Do I hug as good as Joyce does?”

Maybe for many reasons Emily shrugged. It didn't quite feel like a one-to-one comparison, and also she probably couldn't forsake herself by criticizing either woman. After all, Amy was here to hear if she was criticized, and Joyce...well, somehow had omnipotent powers.

"Good point. Probably shouldn't make ya choose," Amy pondered to herself, and finally the first smile shined on that dreary day. "Em, I like you, and I like Joyce. I met her first and I've known her for longer, but I feel like after today I've learned so much about you. I'm sure you can guess, but I don't get all close and cushy like this with just anybody, you know?"

"S-sorry..."

"Don't be sorry!" Amy admonished with a laugh. "I'm just saying that's how it is. I like you two a lot, and I guess I like doing what I do for you two."

"But you don't like this..." Emily whispered with her head half-submerged in a self-conscious muck, but one that even she didn't believe herself.

"Now you're just trying to get me to spell it out," Amy playfully scoffed. "I like this *too*," she rolled her eyes. "I'm no therapist or anything, so I can't pretend like I know why, but I just like it. I like cute things, Em, on *top* of liking you," she emphasized, if there was any doubt that the appreciation was fleeting. "I want to see more of that side from you. The kind that can giggle and laugh, tell me all about the ways Joyce can be mean or silly, and let me make so many more things just to draw that side out even more. Hey, tell me, does Joyce make lunches like that for you all the time?"

"Kinda..." Emily murmured, still leaning into Amy's comforting embrace. "She...she wanted me to get a lunchbox..." Amy feigned a gasp.

"And you didn't get one?"

"It's...embarrassing..."

"Yeah, maybe for like two seconds! You opened up to me, didn't you? Awh...!" Amy laughed, and the woman's comforting hug was just a little tighter. "You're a real keeper when you're bubbly, but feeling nervous over stuff like that is pretty good too," she chuckled.

"You don't get it..." Emily mumbled next, and Amy sounded with disbelief.

"Oooh no," she refuted then shook her head. "I *said* that I didn't understand *some* stuff, but I know exactly how you tick, missy. I can tell you like stuff like this. You like hugs, and you like

feeling cute. I'm absolutely sure it makes you embarrassed, but I think you're okay with that. If it makes you feel small and doted on, it's your fit." Amy's lips were just starting to part, showing her toothy smile.

"Th-that's not..." Emily started to say, and even with enough bravery to finally look up at Amy, but she froze. She was met with a smug, eyebrow-raised grin from the same woman giving her the affection she very much indeed liked.

And suddenly Emily was pulling away and retreating to her end of the couch.

"Oooh? Now you don't like them, huh?" Amy teased, and Emily's mouth quivered. Finally Amy's smirk softened into just a smile. "I'm not gonna ask you to spell it out, but I *have* noticed something...?"

And Emily, already with her tail caught by the trap, nervously waited to hear her captor's words.

"In all this time, after all these tears...talking to Joyce, me, and acting the way you have, you haven't once asked me to stop?" She waited for an answer, but Emily's tongue had been long since removed, and the tiny, but oh-so important detail that Amy was finally starting to see was that it was all by choice. Emily's choice. It was the golden and unspoken rule, but Amy had gone and dragged it out in the open.

It was the quietest she'd ever gone, and while Amy may have heard that she was making sound, the words not quite so much. "Th-that's becauz...I..."

Emily was still close enough for Amy to pat her knee as she stood. Emily watched the woman in her primest element, looking over her workshop like a torture chamber filled with tools. She observed her arsenal and finally landed on something that was on a shelf too high for Emily to reach

"This should work...!" Amy decided one-sidedly, looking down at a large bundle of purple fabric in her hands. She set the bundle on her desk and then grabbed the end of her coffee table, sliding it away from the couch and Emily, leaving a wide, open space right in front of her. Amy flung the fold of cloth outward, wafting it like a sheet until it was fully unfurled and laying wide, long, and flat like a big blanket. Almost like a...

Emily was a second too slow to notice Amy grab what she left on the couch while on her knees, and then the music stopped all over again with a double pat on her thighs like a gentle beckon.

"Emily? Down here, hon."

“Wh-...B-but Amy, I...” Emily stammered and started her retreat, tucking her feet under her legs, but Amy pounced, leaping and locking her hands on Emily’s ankles like they were shackled.

“Nuh-uh! No you don’t!” she giggled, and Emily whined just barely. Her system was too shocked and the one thing she could hold on to was a cushion that popped right out of place and fell right with her.

“A-Amy, please!” Emily cried from her new spot on the blanketed floor, but her puffy shield was swiped away next and set aside. And before Emily could try and escape her feet fell victim again once two anchors wrapped around them. Amy was the predator and Emily was prey, and just like textbook biology only one of them was enjoying it.

“Emily,” Amy said it loud and clear in a way that cut through the mood entirely, like her core was being addressed. “Joyce gave me permission to do this, didn’t she?”

Crap! No! Why is she saying that?! Her look of embarrassed discomfort went up a notch at the drop of the J word. Joyce said so, so Emily had to.

“...D...” Amy started quietly, but her expression tightened just slightly some more. “Didn’t Mommy say so?”

Then the girl’s heart skipped a beat, and then another. So many skips as all the caterpillars she had for lunch were blossoming into thousands of fluttery butterflies inside her stomach. The ants in her pants were marching for conquest and her face was on fire.

The J word was always bad. All-powerful and seemingly invincible. And yet, there somehow existed a weapon of even greater mass destruction than that.

Mommy.

It was meant to be a secret that no one else knew about. Too powerful and too dangerous to be known by the masses, and even the upper echelons of the Joyce & Emily social circle.

But the nuke came crashing down, obliterating everything indiscriminately. The imaginary gust of wind blew right over the bashful girl’s face, stripping layer after layer away by the immense heated shockwave coming from the unexpected tyrant right in front of her. It was the second in command. The incarnate of Joyce Summers herself.

Everything went like a crumbling building. First her outward embarrassment was lost, then every hair on her body went erect. She felt paralyzed as the tingling sensation rocked her through in a matter of milliseconds. It was the shock from not realizing she was already dead. Emily was killed. Her entire self was wiped into smithereens, leaving nothing left but her rawest, most vulnerable self.

“Sh-she...she told me to behave...” Emily whimpered, barely even able to see straight now that her mind was melting mush trying to solidify under the blazing sun.

Amy, of all people, had played a card in her deck that Emily didn't even think was possible. The shock alone was enough to knock her over, had she not already been on her bottom.

The mommy card.

She was submissive before, but a dial was turned, a switch was flipped and a button was pressed. It didn't go unnoticed by Amy, who looked taken aback for just a split-second, but no more than that. Emily wasn't the only one swept into the momentum as the seamstress herself slipped into whatever she was feeling at a frightening speed.

“Just...just think of it as trying on some more clothes for me, okay?” Amy smiled, now with the high ground and looking down at her little model.

What kind of magic does Joyce work on her...?

Amy waited for a moment, expecting Emily to undress for her.

“Oh— right,” Amy stared through her with a slightly dumbfounded look. “I guess that part's my job too, huh?”

“I-I...I can help...” Another whisper from the quiet and conquered, laying back while the mood and circumstances assaulted her in ways that felt unimaginable. With Joyce there was always the unexpected, and by now Emily was prepared for that. Amy wasn't though. She was an outsider, at least she was supposed to be. But henceforth she would certainly be “in” now., and to somehow be surprised by that was ridiculous. After all, it was Emily's own fault.

“Mmm, keep those hands where I can see them, missy,” Amy barked in a chipper voice, having the girl assume a surrendered pose. “Just do what you normally do, kay?”

What she normally did. What, chit-chat with Joyce? Try and anticipate a wet raspberry or kiss on the cheek or forehead? For just a tiny moment Emily abandoned all sense of reason, truly wondering if Amy really did somehow have Mommy's entire playbook.

The feeling of another person's nails gently digging against her sides made her shiver, and the talons sunk around and through the waistband of her panties, clutching her pants right with it.

"And...down-down-down-down-down!" Amy continued the game, repeating jovially with each and every tug she made, bunching it up more and more, leaving more and more of Emily and her privates to see. Something only Joyce would regularly see.

"Wanna keep your socks on? Actually—" Amy hung her head out, holding up her finger like she was testing the wind. "Nevermind. Don't want cold feet."

And just when Emily's feet were free and she was able to move, her knees slowly started to rise as she hoped to protect whatever she could.

"Did somebody put rubber bands in these legs?" Amy laughed lightly, pulling them right back out, however. "Em, hon, it's my *job* to work with clothes, so it's nothing new seeing somebody naked?" she said nonchalantly, all the while making eye contact, catching Emily's full lower naked half in view.

Pop!

Pop!

Pop!

Every snap that came undone was like a ringing gunshot. She flinched with each sound, knowing that the inevitable was closing in at a terrifying pace.

"Then we go up...!" Amy soothed as Emily's legs were suddenly mounted on the woman's shoulder, taking Emily to the same extremes that Joyce always did. Wasn't that difficult because she was...bigger than a normal baby?

"Now I can see how Joyce might do it," she chuckled, "you're as light as a feather!"

Emily was back to turning her head, watching the underside of the couch as her poor defense mechanism. After all, if she couldn't see it, surely she wouldn't believe it. Maybe from this

vantage point she could see anything she may have missed... *Oh, look, a few small tufts of thread...*

“And one-two-three!” Amy cheered as she lifted just a slight bit higher and Emily’s bum left the ground. She braced for the hard landing, but without seeing it happen, miraculously the soft fabric beneath her had somehow become even softer.

“Okay...moment of truth!” Amy announced excitedly, making that only one of them, and right after Emily’s heels touched the floor they were nudged apart. Not a moment later and a very familiar yet presently unwelcome sensation hit her. Physically and mentally so. A soft and secure bulk grew between her legs, covering her crotch and resting just at the bottom of her stomach. It felt so familiar, like it was something she went through just this morning after waking up. Maybe because that was exactly the case, only slightly different.

Her difference was the bulk was a different kind of soft, as if she was misappropriating a shirt or sweater.

“The measurements should be fine, but I’m a little nervous...!” Amy grinned as that same softness Emily felt between her legs was beginning to go the same way about her hips. As it all joined into one, the snugness and comforting sense of security came forward, regardless of how nerve-wracking it really all was. With each pop into her padded prison she became one button more trapped in her diaper. Diapered not by Mommy, but by a friend, and not even in a familiar disposable, at that.

She nearly kicked her foot out like a knee-jerk reaction when she found that the fitting wasn’t over. Amy’s finger slipped between her thigh and elastic gathering around her diaper. She traced the holes and finally clasped her hands.

“Oh my gosh...!” The woman sounded ready to squeal, but her joy was already at an impressive height. “I think it fits! It looks so good! Wait-wait! Emily? Can you stand? Please?” She reached out her hands and reluctantly Emily offered up hers to let them be had. Because Mommy said so. Mommy said to behave for all of this.

But the gravity of what’d been done was different depending on the perspective. Something like this was the kind of solid and heavy boulder that’d sit in her mind for the whole day, if only that, leaving her to chip away at it little by little just to decompress. Yet Amy despite being the agent of Emily’s newfound embarrassment was still speaking and moving like greased lightning. Like nothing was different. But how could everything *not* be?

Every motion the blushing girl made was more fuel for Amy to hold her hands to her cheeks, fawning, gushing, oo-ing and ah-ing all over.

“Awh...! Yes! Yes! This is just how I pictured it!”

Was she really in a diaper? Emily didn't have the strength nor the will to look. With a heave-ho she was pulled up to a sitting position, then finally stood. It didn't feel exactly like the diapers she wore, but the bulk factor was more or less the same. Softer, maybe, but just as oppressive and in the way. When it bunched between her legs there wasn't the audible crinkle, save for a muffled one.

“Oh– honey, come on, let's go over to the mirror, okay?” Amy took a hold around Emily's farthest shoulder and steered her to the one place she absolutely did not want to go.

“W-wait– please...!” Emily shook her head, finally staring down their destination with the fear of God in her. She could feel what she was wearing, but again, seeing was believing, and she did not want to believe one bit. Not that in any way could Emily end up the way she did when she was only with Joyce. Diapers just didn't happen unless it was with Joyce, so this couldn't be real, but Amy was about to give her irrefutable evidence.

So with a stroke of brilliance, Emily employed the strongest tactic she had. Amy had Joyce, Mommy, but Emily had something maybe just as great. Like flicking a switch, the world around her went black.

“Okay...let's stand right here...! Ah!” Amy squealed, “perfect! Emily! Look at how– huh?”

She was there, but she wasn't. Gone. Disappeared. Everything. She could hear her surroundings but not perceive them. Seeing is believing, and she could not see, therefore she could not believe.

“Em, why are your eyes shut?”

“P-please...please don't make me look in the mirror...!”

“What? Why?” Amy asked with concern. “Is everything okay?”

“I...I don't wanna wear one...not like this!” Emily sniffled.

“Why not? Didn't you say you were gonna try it on? Do you not want to anymore?”

“Th-that’s...that was different...!” she whined with a sniffle. “I-I said *I* was gonna do it...but then...then Joyce made you!”

Amy went silent for a moment, then asked in a clear voice, “...And that must have made you feel pretty uncomfortable, right?”

“*Yes!*” Emily stressed, and her world became no less dark. “It’s...it’s different when somebody else does it...and...and I don’t like it!”

“...Is it because you don’t like me?”

The suggestion was enough to make the girl’s eyes widen with horror. She spun her head and looked up at Amy with a deep sense of regret.

“N-no! I-I didn’t mean it like that...! I-I just...I...” She was what? Embarrassed? Nervous? Obviously, but what else?

Scared.

Fearful.

Being like this was one of the single-handedly most vulnerable states Emily could find herself in. By now she knew how malleable she could be when she was treated like a kid. The diapers just did something at this point, because it affirmed and reinforced just about every tiny tweak or installment Joyce made to her brain, her body, and emotions. And she loved it. She loved all of it.

That moment right then made it clear what she loved, and why she was so scared to accept any of it in a strange place without her significant other. Every wall imaginable inside her heart and mind crumbled whenever it was time. By the time Joyce had her up on the changing table she was nothing but soft putty ready to be played with. There was no need for an iron box to keep herself together, held together by chains and locks; only Joyce was supposed to have the key too.

But with how Emily’s younger half was *trying* to feel right this very minute, she realized shockingly that duplicate keys apparently existed. What Joyce could do to her...could others as well?

It suddenly became a terrifying thought of a world without Joyce. A time and a place where Emily could be convinced to feel like the small little girl she’d been trained to be, yet all without Joyce having any part in it. But it was *Joyce* that made her like this, not Emily! This was Joyce

that made her like being a baby, right? It wasn't herself that liked it! She liked it because Joyce liked it!

So her body felt physically ill. Her stomach was turning over and over, trying to fight the endorphins and fuzzy feelings that were essentially pavloved into leaking into her brain right when the babying began.

She wasn't allowed to feel like this, which is why it made her restless because her body wouldn't listen.

It needs to be Joyce! It can't be anyone else! It has to be Mommy...!

"Emily? Honey, look in the mirror?" Amy calmly pointed, and as much as Emily didn't want to, for some reason, she did turn her head.

Slowly her eyes fell on the reflection and there she was. Emily, wearing a diaper. The upper half was hiding underneath her shirt, but not enough to see the rest of the button snaps where the wings of her diaper fell in place. It was a cacophony of colors. Her puffy crotch was a pleasing purple, followed by her yellow buttons, and red trims. It looked weird for a second, like it was the utmost ridiculous fashion statement. Because it was, and that was the point.

But beyond that, it was her normal shirt, bare thighs, and socks that she came in. Right beside her, holding her by the shoulder was Amy, smiling simply.

"You know what I see?" Amy squeezed the frightened girl's shoulder. "What I see is a very brave girl who was nice enough to let me indulge myself. But I also see someone a little afraid with how they might be feeling?" she phrased it like a question, but even her guesses were dead-on like her sense of size. Tearily, Emily nodded.

"But what I *also* see is just Emily. Emily, the same gal that came over to my house today to hang out, help me with my work, and be a really good friend. You see her too, right?"

See...herself? She...she saw the diaper. The flustered and embarrassed girl. The worried look on her face that just wanted Mommy, and so much more. But...maybe somewhere...was Emily, Emily Sen there too?

"I..." Emily started, but her soft voice trembled.

"Take your time, it's okay!" Amy comforted her.

“I-I...I don’t wanna feel like this...n-not unless it’s with Joyce...!”

“And why’s that?”

“B-because...!” Emily balled her hands by her sides. “J-Joyce is why I’m like this! She made me like this! I-I...I wouldn’t do any of this if she didn’t start it...! And I *do* like it! B-but...! She’s the reason! S-so...so I can’t do it without her! It’s not fair!”

“So the way she makes you feel...that’s how you’re feeling right now?”

It wasn’t love that she was feeling. She loved Joyce. Loved-loved. Romantically, intimately, and innocently all the same like a child loved their mother. But she didn’t love Amy. Not like that. There was no romance, and that was clear. They were friends and that was as far as it went. But the babyish sensations and headspace...it made the poor girl exhausted with each second trying to reject what by now felt so instinctual...!

“Yes...!” Emily cried, wiping her eyes.

Was this what cheating felt like? Was she cheating on Joyce?

“I’m...I’m cheating on her...!” Emily bawled.

“Awh...honey...” And despite her cries, Amy hugged her even tighter. “Sweetheart, it’s not cheating? You’re not, I promise!”

“H-how though...! I-I’m doing what Joyce and I always do!”

“But honey, she gave us permission, remember?”

“B-but...! But that’s...!” she breathed uncomfortably.

“Emily, I’m absolutely sure that this is something special to you, because I know it sure is for Joyce. It’s okay if you’re nervous about feeling this way without her, but you gotta know that it’s not bad to feel like this?”

How could it not be bad? She felt guilty, did she not? Wasn’t that more than enough reason? Joyce got jealous all the time, and she must have been fuming right this very minute! Wasn’t she upset on the phone? Angry? Were they going to fight when they went home? Was Joyce going to even take her back?

“Honey, Emily? Look at me,” and with some steering via her chin, Emily did. “Loving Joyce, and...being a baby; those are two separate things. Joyce isn’t mad, and you shouldn’t feel guilty.”

“B-but...! But Joyce...!” Emily whined like saying it again somehow made a difference. “She’s...she’s...!” Christ, why couldn’t she think of any other way to explain it?! “Sh-she’s my *mommy!*”

“I...” Amy hung her words, freezing for just half a second, but holding herself together far better than Emily was right then. Either way, the woman was becoming fully aware of just what kind of box she’d opened. “I know, hon... I’m not replacing Joyce, okay? I’m not replacing Mommy. Just...think of it like this, okay? Joyce is Mommy, right? So...I’m Mommy’s friend, right? I’m just Auntie Amy. Yeah! I’m allowed to take care of you while Mommy’s at work, right? She said I could, didn’t she?”

That she did, and bombshell after bombshell kept hitting the frightened girl. Amy said it herself: she wasn’t replacing Joyce. Babying was separate from loving Joyce. Cheating was loving someone else, but that wasn’t this. It was just babying, but with another person. Not a complete stranger, but someone between Joyce and Emily, and someone that Joyce trusted enough to tell Emily to behave for her.

Auntie...

She was Amy. Auntie Amy, and not Mommy. It was difficult to digest, all because it meant going off the good faith of a person holding all the cards.

“Oh– I see those tears drying up?”

And before Emily could feel herself, Amy’s fingers brushed the last few specks of wetness on her cheeks.

“Emily, another thing,” Amy started in a soothing voice, “If Joyce was okay enough to let me do with you what she does, don’t you think that she would rather you feel the same way when it’s with her? Joyce can be...competitive,” Amy giggled for a second, “but you are the *last*, no– not even someone she would ever even consider trying to hurt. She wouldn’t want to see you feeling like this, sweetheart. I won’t pretend like I know her reasons, and you’re gonna get to hear them from her, but you should know that none of this was ever to make you feel upset?”

And whenever Emily got carried away by her emotions or feelings, she quite never had the mental capacity to consider what felt so obvious. Joyce never intentionally tried to hurt her. It was always from a place of good intentions, no matter what the outcome was. So...she was supposed to feel okay with this? She was allowed to?

“B-but...sh-she sounded mad on the phone...!” Emily’s voice went thick, near ready to cry again.

“Because it sounds like she had some big feelings to go through herself, but that doesn’t have anything to do with you, hon. Joyce still loves you, and nothing’s changed. Give it just a couple more hours and she’s gonna be here to pick you up, okay?”

“I-I...I wanna call her...” Emily squeaked.

“Yeah?” Amy nodded softly. “Okay, let’s give her a call. Why don’t we head upstairs though? It’s a bit cleaner up there!”

Amy’s hold on Emily wasn’t let go the whole trip up the stairs, and the silent spectator to the entire event was quietly following behind them, one paw at a time.

“You just have a seat...right here,” Amy sat Emily on the bigger couch where Ashes pounced up right beside her, brushing against her naked leg.

“He makes me feel better whenever I pet him,” Amy suggested, pointing at her friend which Emily couldn’t help but smile at.

“W-wait...” Emily looked around with worry, like the weight of the world was coming down on her all over again. “I-I forgot my phone...”

“Nope! Nuh-uh,” Amy softly refused and planted her right back on the cushion she sat. “You can use my phone. Just sit and relax, okay?”

Amy pulled hers from her pocket, pressed a few things on the screen and shortly thereafter had it in Emily’s hands, soon to be cradled against her ear.

Is...is she gonna pick up?

A horrible worry made her heart ache, suddenly wishing she wasn’t using both hands to hold the phone, just so she could pet the cat for comfort.

“Hello? Amy?” But there Joyce’s digital voice was in a hushed whisper.

“J-Joyce?” Emily stammered, already feeling the waterworks ready to burst again.

“Emily? Honey? Is everything okay?” More urgency, more concern. Like she always had whenever Emily got like this. Like things were still the same between them.

The hiccups started and now the tears were free-flowing. “A-are...a-are y-you...nn...not mad at m-me?”

“Em—...one second, okay?”

On the other end, in a very tall building, in a room filled with blazers, blouses, glasses of water and secretaries, Joyce stood from the table. She wasn’t noticed however, courtesy of the darkness that allowed the projector facing the other wall to flourish. But of course her secretary noticed.

“I need to excuse myself,” Joyce whispered into Sheila’s ear, and the tone implied no room for negotiation. So Sheila nodded, and Joyce quietly removed herself. The hallway was busy so she walked right down to the adjacent and empty conference room.

After the soft click of a heavy door, she asked, “Baby, you still there?”

“Mm-mmhmm...”

“Sweetheart, why are you crying?” Joyce sat against the table. Her heart was already a mess after the first phone call, and now this?

“I-I’m sorry I asked to wear one...!”

“Sorry? Wearing what, a diaper?”

“Y-yes...!” Emily poured out with a crying wail.

“Wh...why are you sorry, sweetie?”

“Because...! I-I made you mad...! W-we have rules, and...and I tried breaking them...!”

“Emily, baby, I’m not mad!” Joyce softly assured, and the fact all she could do was offer her words and nothing more only heightened the frustration with herself. “You didn’t try to break any rule! Did Amy put a diaper on you?”

“Y-yes... I’m sorry! I’m so sorry...!”

“Don’t apologize! It’s nothing to be sorry for...!”

“B-but I cheated...!”

“Cheated?” Romantically? With Amy? Her impulsive self was triggered for just a second, but then she tried to imagine it. Cute little Emily, getting frisky with Joyce’s friend that was given the opportunity to diaper her? Her baby getting involved romantically? Needless to say, the image hardly fit in Joyce’s mind, despite her unbelievable jealousy. “Emily, sweetheart? You didn’t cheat, though?”

“B-but I wore one without you...!”

Her heart was cracking. Is that how it felt for her? “Emily, baby, it’s not cheating, I promise you. I’m not mad, and I love you just as much, okay? You didn’t do anything that made me mad or upset.” She could admit to her own faults of admittedly being that way at first, but she dared not mention something Emily would undoubtedly try to shoulder the blame for.

“B-but...”

“But nothing,” Joyce refuted, and Emily could practically hear the smile in her voice. “You *enjoy* yourself, Emily. Today’s a fun day, remember? I asked Amy to do what she did because I love you, and I still do. You know, if you’re gonna call me like this in tears it’s just gonna make Mommy love you even more?”

And Joyce called herself Mommy, and that didn’t go unnoticed by the sobbing girl.

Mommy. Joyce was still Mommy, and Joyce was Joyce. She was loved and nothing had changed. Was this really all just in her head? Were things really okay?

“It’s just a little bit longer until I’m out of work, okay?” Joyce softly explained. “The first thing I’m doing when I leave here is I’m gonna drive right over there, and give you the *biggest* hug and kiss you’ve ever gotten, understood?”

“Mm...mhm...”

“Does that clear things up a little? You know I love you, right?”

“I love you too...” Emily whimpered back.

“And I know you do,” Joyce chuckled. “I know it must be scary right now...but I’m so proud of you, Emily. I want you to feel comfortable being yourself and enjoying all the things we do whenever you want. I...it’s too much for right now, but what you asked to do, and what I decided because of it...it’s what I wanted. It’s what I wanted, but I was too afraid to ask. You make me so happy, Emily, and there’s nothing you could do to change that.”

“Uh...uh-huh...!”

“And those better be happy tears I’m hearing!” Joyce giggled, wiping a silent tear of her own. “Are you okay now? Do you think you can tough it out for a little bit longer?”

“Mm...mhm...”

“Good. Now, can you do me an extra big favor?”

“Yeah...?”

“Can you please put Amy on the phone for me?”

“Mhm...I...I love you.”

“And I love you so much too.”

The phone slowly left her ear, and Emily departed from a conversation she didn’t want to end. She already missed the sound of her voice, but parental orders superseded her own emotions as she shakily held up the phone to Amy.

Amy took it with a smile and held the phone with one hand to her ear. “Hey Joyce!”

“Is Emily listening?”

“One sec,” Amy paused, definitely noticing the curious girl on the couch. She grabbed the TV remote and brought the screen to life, quietly pointing Emily at the screen, then she left for the farther end of the apartment. “Okay, just us.”

“What happened? Did everything go alright?” Now without the need to a big and strong front, the woman’s worries were out on full display.

“As well as it could...” Amy spoke awkwardly. “I’ll be honest; I knew this meant a lot to you both, but I guess I didn’t fully realize that until, well...she started crying.”

“Is she mad at you?”

“No, not that I think, at least. I...admittedly, was a little excited... But I think she thinks she messed up, Joyce. Like she did something she wasn’t supposed to. But I did try telling her that what this is and your relationship are separate things.”

Joyce sighed. “They are...” but they aren’t. “I knew this would be tough, but...that doesn’t make it feel any easier... A-Amy...I’m sorry, I...I didn’t make you feel uncomfortable, did I?”

“You gave me a choice, didn’t you? Like I said to Emily: I don’t quite fully get it, but...I know enough that there’s things I like about it too, so...I guess being included some way...it felt...kind of nice, I guess.” It went the same way for Amy. Without a subjective child in earshot, it somehow made it easier to be more expressive. “I...I liked it.”

“I’m glad...” Joyce sighed, then had a silent doubletake. What did she just say? She’s *glad*? “I-I mean...I’m glad that...it didn’t make you feel uncomfortable... Wait– what did you even put her in? What did you make?”

“Didn’t I say it’s-a secret?” Amy finally teased.

“*Amy?*”

“Ou,” Amy’s joking fizzled out. “Okay, okay. I made her a cloth diaper. Something Idunno...just felt like doing.”

“So she really is diapered right now?”

“Mhm,” Amy nodded to herself.

“And she hasn’t tried taking it off?”

“None that I can tell.”

“And...she didn’t say anything? Like...anything strange?”

Amy hung her head. “Strange? Like...?”

“Like...” Joyce frowned. It was easily her least favorite and most hated, but necessary evil.

“Like a safeword...”

Amy blinked. “Oh. Oh! No, nope. Nothing that I could tell. She did say a lot about how she didn’t want to or felt embarrassed after the fact, but...she never did say anything out of the blue.”

So she really did go through all of it...without any hard or immovable issue...

Another relieved sigh from Joyce.

“Okay...good.”

“And Joyce, believe me, I’m doing everything I can to make her feel comfortable, but what if I give her a breather? Take off the diaper maybe?”

“...No. If she isn’t trying to get out of it, I want her to stay in one.”

“And...you’re sure?” Amy asked skeptically.

“It...What we do, Amy...it’s not meant to be a game, and Emily knows that.” There unfortunately wasn’t much time right then to talk. “We’re both committed in our own way... So when she’s in a diaper, she stays in one. And...whatever happens,” which as the past would indicate could certainly be a lot, “it’s only a couple more hours.”

“Okay, Mommy, but don’t take too long,” Amy chuckled, and Joyce all by her lonesome was blushing with a quivering mouth. “Joyce,” she giggled, knowing exactly from the silence what she may have looked like right then, “she *just* called you that on the phone in front of me? That’s not including the few times she already used it with me a little bit ago.”

“Sh-she called me that in front of you?” Joyce’s heart did a somersault, but the point still stood. Emily *openly* acknowledged her as Mommy? In front of other people? And she wasn’t there to hear it? Her heart melted as did her annoyance flare.

“And sorry in advance, but in trying to calm her down, I *may* have appointed myself the Auntie position...”

“What?” Joyce sounded confused, “Al...alright,” she dismissed the confusing subject. “Listen, what’s she doing now?”

“Watching TV. Didn’t want her eavesdropping just in case.”

“Is there a bed she could use? Or the couch?”

“I can make that happen, yeah. Why?”

“She needs a nap,” Joyce decided right there and then. “And if I’m lucky she’ll be ready to get up by the time I’m there. I think that’ll help her calm down the most...”

“Yeah, I can do that. Er...should I say that you told her to have one, though?”

“No,” Joyce sounded quite clear. “Don’t use the ‘n’ word around her. Just...can you think of some way to do it?”

“Have her take a nap without suggesting she take one? What a tricky request.”

“Please?”

“I’ll get it done,” Amy laughed confidently. “Any last words I should give her?”

“Yes. Please tell her how much I love her...”

“Can do! Now go finish up work, Mommy!”

Amy laughed, and Joyce silently hung up.

“Okay...” Amy puffed out her cheek, putting away her phone. “Nap time... Nap time...” she looked around, then finally landed her eyes on a bedroom door. “Blanket.”

And she disappeared from the main room, gathering what she needed, all the while reflecting on everything that had happened thus far. Why was she going to such lengths? She wasn’t even being paid. In fact, she was the one paying Emily, the girl she was somehow about to convince to take a nap without making it explicit. She made a diaper of her own volition, and even put the very girl that it was meant for into one. Then she held and consoled her; said anything she could just to keep her from crying. And even labeled herself as an authority figure. *Auntie Amy*...

“An aunt, huh...” Amy murmured to herself, arms filled with a pillow and blanket.

An aunt.

Auntie Amy...

“Emily?” Amy sauntered back into the living room. “Kinda chilly in here, right? How about a blanket to warm up a little, huh?”

It was on rare occasions, almost never when Joyce, Ms. Summers was the first one to announce their leave. “Sheila, I’ve wrapped up what I needed to. I’ll be heading out first.”

Sheila blinked, far more accustomed to being the one to collect her boss first.

“Okay. If it wouldn’t be an issue, looking at the briefings scheduled for tomorrow right now might—”

“I’ve finished my work,” Joyce repeated, but quite more firmly, shushing her secretary into a silence.

Her tone had not gone unnoticed, and finally Sheila nodded simply. “Good work today. I’ll leave those things on your desk for tomorrow.”

“Thank you.” And Ms. Summers was gone.

Her heels didn’t give her the opportunity to sprint, so she race-walked across the parking garage, beelining for her car and skirting just under the speed limit where traffic didn’t intervene, going as fast as she could to the one who needed her the most. Was she asleep? Napping? Did she cry at all any more after their phone call?

So many questions, so few answers, and Joyce wanted to know the truth about everything so dearly and so badly.

It didn’t take long to park, and not much longer to race through the empty front of the store and back through the showcase room. Things looked somewhat tidy, but she noticed the displaced coffee table and giant cloth rug. A cushion was missing from the couch and laying on the floor, and sure enough, Joyce spotted an article she recognized.

She walked around and over to the items, picking them up and holding them in her hands. Emily’s pants, no doubt, and sitting inside them was also a familiar cyan pair of panties. After neatly folding them she walked up the stairs. After softly knocking on the door, a few seconds later Amy answered.

“Hey Joyce!” Amy greeted her quietly, “Come on in—!”

“Where’s Emily?” Joyce spoke in a normal volume, but Amy quickly shushed her.

“Shh! She’s *right* here!” Amy whispered, pulling the surprised woman by the hand and leading her inside.

Round around the corner, there she was.

An all too familiar black head of hair, cutely disarrayed by her head against a plush-looking pillow. She was against the arm of the long couch, covered by a blanket where she slumbered so soundly.

So she really did go to sleep, and for that, Joyce was relieved.

“You convinced her?” Joyce whispered, only barely taking her eyes off the angel.

Amy looked unimpressed. “I *tricked* her. What, did you put some bad blood between her and early bedtimes, or something?”

“She did it herself... It’s my job to make her do the things that she doesn’t want to. Was...was she good?” It felt inappropriate to ask, at first, but considering how much Amy had already done, was it not a fair question?

“Mm...” Amy sagely nodded, right by Joyce’s side, watching Emily the same way she did.

But suddenly Joyce noticed something, and Amy was already smirking. “Wait, is that...?”

“Ya-huh,” Amy nodded.

“Hang on...” Joyce mumbled, fumbling quickly with her purse. Where was her phone...?!

“I charge, you know?” Amy joked.

“Charge as much as you want...” Joyce couldn’t hide her smile as she aimed her camera. And while there was no one to say ‘cheese’, it didn’t stop Joyce from going, “one...two...three!”

And like that another memory was immortalized and recorded. Joyce looked ready to gush as she was absolutely enamored by the picture on her phone, just peeking over it to see the real deal all

over again. Hiding right beneath her short black hair was another mass of black, just as soft-looking and cuddly, only belonging to someone else. Sleeping just as soundly, save for the quiet purrs, was Ashes, right against Emily's head and neck, halfway underneath the blanket.

"Look at our two babies!" Amy giggled, and Joyce couldn't help but smile herself. "Wanna get her up?"

And while Joyce had one answer, just as she was about to give it, she hesitated.

"Actually...do you want to do some coffee first? Would you mind making some?"

"Should I get a cup ready for Emily?" Amy was already walking into the kitchen.

"No...not yet. Was there any juice left in her thermos?"

After a quick shake from it in the fridge, "Yeah, still some in here."

"Then she'll be fine," Joyce decided. "And...how much did you plan on paying her?"

"Not a lot a lot, but I kept track of the hours..." Amy pondered, then noticed Joyce. "W-wait, Joyce, what're you...?"

"For everything today," Joyce offered a small amount of bills on the counter. Clearly and honestly, she said, "Thank you."

"I...get the feeling you don't know how this quite works..." Amy smirked, eyeing the money suspiciously. "I pay Emily. You don't pay me anything?"

"Amy, stop," Joyce took on a serious look. "You've done a lot...this obviously isn't the same as her working for you."

"Maybe, but she *did* work for me. And all this?" she glanced over at Emily. "It..." her expression grew softer. "It wasn't work... So, no," she gently pushed the money back. "I didn't do this to be paid."

"Amy, but-?" Joyce sounded confused, but Amy continued the conversation in their lowered voices.

"But nothing. Do I really have to spell it out? I...I liked it," Amy admitted, but immediately turned her head the other way. "Gosh, even I can get embarrassed sometimes, you know?"

“You...liked it?” Joyce blinked, sounding stunned.

“What would you have done if I didn’t?” Amy taunted. “Yes, I did. I don’t know...once you offered me that choice on the phone, yeah, I was surprised, and maybe it was a little weird, but... I dunno...it just...clicked.” As happy and go-lucky as Amy could be, even she had places in her mind and emotions even she didn’t fully know, and her visible discomfort right then was a testament to that. Her playful way of lashing out was just to hide something deeper. Yet being hired as a designer for baby clothes, involving herself so deeply with befriending clients, seeing the beautiful baby herself model them, and lastly being given the chance to snap her into one of her own creations...

“I would’ve liked an apology if I was against all of this,” Amy was clear, but again, her look started to falter and her hands held her elbows. “But here I am...somehow glad I could get your girlfriend to sleep...”

Joyce listened silently in awe, unsure of what to say.

“No? Nothing?” Amy asked expectantly.

“I-I...” Joyce blinked. “Sorry...I’m just...surprised, I guess... I’m sorry.”

“Did Emily learn to say sorry so much from you?” Amy sounded cheeky again. “Don’t be sorry. Just...I hope she doesn’t hold any of this against me.”

“She won’t,” Joyce sounded adamant, and that truly did make some of the tension subside from the seamstress, even if she didn’t know she had it to begin with. “No matter what I say, Amy, it doesn’t change that you got this far with Emily... She really does trust you...” and the words came off on an almost somber note.

“And that bothers you?” Amy asked, but she didn’t sound offended, but like the inquisitive friend she’d been for so long that just took Joyce even longer to realize.

With a guilty look Joyce stared down at the counter, then up at Amy. “It did...for a few seconds... I can’t help but get jealous, but I’m not anymore. Not in the slightest about this. I know you wouldn’t try anything, and Emily wouldn’t either, but I can’t help feeling that way at first. I’m just...protective.”

“Mmm,” Amy nodded. “Can’t say Emily’s my type. I guess I like mine a little taller, more muscle...no diapers?”

Joyce raised a brow and Amy giggled.

“Though, I guess as a kind of impromptu niece, she’s *exactly* my kinda type. I get to say that, right? Even if I don’t know why?”

“Have you felt like this before...?” Joyce asked.

“No, not really,” she shrugged, and pulled out the pot of hot coffee. “Not until after today...or I guess, maybe since I started working on her outfits, I got more curious. Call each extra step another ounce of curiosity, until...well, today.”

Joyce nodded, accepting a warm mug for her hands to hold. “I don’t know if we feel the same, but...it feels good, right?”

“It does,” Amy quietly agreed and nodded. “I don’t have even half the experience as you though, and I basically just got my foot through the front door on...all this weird stuff, but yeah, after today, I felt good. I...maybe I was doing things already, I don’t know. Taking off her jacket...helping put together her lunch...and...when...you asked me to do what...you know. I really got her to open up to me, and I can’t describe how good that felt, and I don’t know why.”

“I’m sorry...” Joyce said again, and Amy rolled her eyes.

“Didn’t I say to stop that?”

“I’m sorry for involving you like this,” Joyce repeated, only with more clarity. “I involved you. Selfishly. This was for Emily. I...I’ve wanted her to get used to this. Eventually...involving diapers and this kind of treatment around other people. I...I used you to help Emily feel more comfortable with others treating her like a baby.”

There was silence, save for Ashes very distant and quiet slumbering purring.

“I know.” Amy answered simply, and Joyce’s mouth hung agape.

“Y-you knew?”

“Obviously. Joyce, I can tell how much Emily matters to you? How long has she been in your life now? Besides, call me selfish too, because I actually decided to listen to you and use your authority against Emily. I’m just as bad as you are.”

“To make her behave...?”

“To try and calm her down. If Mommy said so, then she has to behave. Don’t think that I liked doing that,” Amy partially frowned before sipping from her mug.

“...I won’t put you through that again.”

“I...I didn’t know if it was ‘okay’ to do, but I just did it anyway,” Amy muttered. “Is that what I’m supposed to do with her? Hold your name over her head like it’s some kind of end-all be-all?”

“As a last resort, yes. But up until that point, no. Thank you for today... I won’t do that to you again.” Joyce offered a weak smile.

“...Well...” Amy turned her head to avoid eye contact.

Joyce raised her head in surprise.

“I said I liked today, didn’t I?”

“But...”

“If...if it’s possible...and Emily is okay with it...again. I...I want to do this again. The right way, and not start so...awkwardly.”

“Amy...are you serious?”

“Yes, I’m serious,” Amy answered, trying to wipe the small blush off her face. “It’s not like I’m going to stop making clothes for her, and I still want to be...involved. And fine, let’s call it what it is at this point: babysitting. Let me give it another shot...”

“Bab—...A-Amy, that’s...you realize what that means, right?”

“Yes, I do. Or, at least I think I do... What, just keep her busy, right? Come over, play a little, chit-chat, lunch?” She turned her head for a live example. “Naps? Can I have her still try some things on for me? Like, adult clothes? I could still use her help with that. But that’s all there is to it, right? I...I know I’m making it sound like a chore, but...ugh, yes, I want to do this again, but better, okay? I just want to see how I feel about it...” Today was just a tiny sliver, and like it was the forbidden fruit itself, Amy’s greed and gluttony simply wanted a greater taste.

“But you know that she wears...diapers?” Joyce cautiously asked, and Amy herself paused for a moment.

“So she does use them...” Amy concluded, exhaling with a nod. “That’s...okay. I...think. I can get used to that. Sure.”

And Amy despite her bravery left Joyce giving her a slightly skeptical look. Quite frankly, it wasn’t much of something that one decided comfortability with in just a single moment.

“Well...” Amy openly second-guessed herself, “maybe if I had an example...”

Joyce quietly nodded. *An example...*

“So will you bring it up to her?” Amy asked. “...Babysitting?”

The intent was clear in her voice, and the desire was shining in her eyes. Amy’s thumbs were still sickeningly green, and she had merely only watched from the other side of the fence for so long. But Joyce could see it right away. Maybe it was only a fraction of herself, or still certainly a greater part, but it was clear nonetheless. The want to be in. The desire to partake and contribute.

All this time Joyce had toyed with the idea of growing and expanding their circle. Safely and securely, somehow, and all of that on top of the impossible reality where Emily became comfortable with any of that. Yet the more she thought, the more the desires and wishes started to overflow, right up until she was in that convention in another state.

She really did confront her selfish wishes and was scared because of it. And right now, leaning against the countertop and staring at her from the other side of the island was that very second chance. A golden goose that Joyce couldn’t have imagined as a better fit. Someone just as open-minded and self-electing. Maybe people just like or similar to Joyce really did exist. Maybe...maybe Isabelle was being honest?

If Amy was genuine, what’s to say there weren’t others like her. *Sh...a-and Sheila...?*

Emily opened a door, and Joyce found the key leading to one even bigger than that. Monumental in size, and hiding away a path and place that seemed frighteningly exciting.

She saw Amy briefly glance over where Emily lay, eliciting a tiny smile from the woman, and it was another wonderful jolt for the woman sitting in her chair, leaving Joyce quietly astonished.

A doorway... No, a gateway. A pathway so great, it wasn't big enough just for two people now. So...so much bigger. So much...

In the span of one morning and early afternoon, Joyce's worldview, feelings, wants and wishes had been changed entirely. Fantasy farther away that hid in the void and recesses of her mind were suddenly being tugged forward, and phantom echoes of silly thoughts and dreams started to sharpen as tangibility took away their fuzzy shapes.

She could see it. A miraculous, exciting future; one that she wanted so dearly with Emily, and one that she now knew was completely and totally possible.

"Auntie..." Joyce quietly muttered, but loud enough for Amy to hear.

"It- I just said it to help her calm down..." Amy mumbled with a flustered look. "I don't even know if it worked... Joyce?"

But Joyce didn't answer. Her cheeks were rosy and her teeth were on full display as a smile grew in size on her face.

"S-sorry," Joyce chuckled, snapping out of it. "Would you mind getting that thermos out, actually?" she looked fondly over at the couch.

"I think it's time for someone to finish their nap...!"