

58 - In the Know

Words can be as dangerous as bullets, and Joyce's family, Trisha, was the gun firing them.

Speechless, save for a few incoherent mutters, Emily simply stared at the woman with all her shock, sudden self-disgust, fear, and absolute shame. Surprise did not even begin to describe or capture the sheer how, who, what, and why of such a terrifying scenario.

Especially when Trisha glanced down at the item in her own hands; one of Emily's diapers, then back up at the frightened young woman, currently squatting on the other side of the room, trying not to look and feel like she just filled her pants.

Similar actions were received just as painfully.

And brilliantly she retorted, "Nn...no..." A quiet murmur filled the room as well as the smell from her mix of mush and baby powder did.

Trisha sniffed again with a scrunching look of disgust and Emily only grew more and more petrified.

"Wait—" Trisha blurted with a sudden rise in her eyebrows, mounting disbelief that was clear as day and making Emily tremble where she tried to be a statue.

Emily was waiting, though, not for Trisha to say something outraged, but instead for the girl's own heart to give out. The mortifying pins and pricks she was feeling all over nearly trumped the very obvious smell she was now joining in.

Shit.

A lot of things were happening, and a lot of Emily was short-circuiting. She instinctively shut down into the defensive and discarded the thoughts that at least could've given her a foothold to stand on. Take for example, just why would Trisha be snooping through her and Joyce's room? Why was she in their closet? Why was she looking at Emily's diapers? Many questions. None that Emily could manage to ask, however.

"I-I...please leave..." Emily murmured with a voice almost as low as her bum was to the floor. There was no anger. No disappointment, no confusion, but fear and desperation.

And all Trisha did was glance down at the diaper in her hand, blinking twice before the rising arch in her brows that said it all in a single expression.

“O...oh my gosh...oh, wow...Wow!” Trisha exclaimed. She chuckled, even. Disbelief, yet hardly with kind sincerity. “This...this is *yours*?” she commented, then sniffed, shriveling her nose as she grimaced at the smell. “Oh my god, it totally is...” the woman muttered again with far less dress to her ridiculing tone. “*Wow...*”

“P-please!” Emily blurted as she stood, feeling the backside of her padding bend, shift and form as she did so. It was her sagging, stinking badge of shame that was barely even a mystery anymore. “P-please don’t tell anyone...!” The Devil themselves would’ve had a tougher time trying to get a plea out of her. No matter the audacity and absurdity this woman had to stick her nose where it did not belong, it didn’t change that Emily in a frenzied state needed to stop Tracy from telling others that she needed one.

But her question was ignored. Tracy’s skeptical eyes glossed over the thick padding in her hands. “And you’re wearing these...? Right now?”

The girl grit her teeth as she glanced off to the side, choking down tears and persevering through the shame.

“Yes...! So please, I need privacy...!”

The woman coughed out a chuckle. “Uhm...right...” she said as she awkwardly stepped around, giving Emily a wide berth like she was radioactive. She was the embodiment of audacious judgment. A woman with no right to be here who shouldn’t have had the opportunity to learn about such revealing things. Trespassing and then looking offended for finding something that she wasn’t supposed to. The knife was deep, yet somehow the woman managed to plunge and twist it even deeper.

“And wait– Did you say ‘no’? That you didn’t?” Trisha raised her brow. She cracked a grin born from disbelief. “You sound like my youngest did when he was still...” her jaw hung open as the thought finished in her head first. “Nevermind.”

A knock on the door made both of them jump, and Emily’s anxiousness only doubled.

Joyce, please...!

But alas, a different concerned citizen was announcing their arrival.

“Emily, you in there?”

Hannah was on the other side and Emily's heart plummeted. No! Where was Joyce?! Her moment of thought kept her from yelping bloody murder when without a second thought Trisha opened the door.

"Sorry, coming through~!" The perpetrator was gone in a flash. She opened the door just enough to wedge herself between the crack and Hannah standing, looking concerned and confused on the other side.

"Wait, what...?" Hannah tried to call for Trisha, and Emily had the displeasure of seeing her looking the other way, all from the half-ajar door that Trisha had so recklessly left it as. And inevitably, she had to look where Trisha just came from. Squarely at Emily, wholly beside herself without a single coherent thought left in her head.

Trisha was gone.

Diapers were seen.

Hannah's here.

Joyce isn't.

Need a change.

Now.

Smells.

"Emily? Is everything okay?" Hannah's voice made her flinch.

Her hand was on her shoulder. She was already in the room and beside her and Emily made a nervous glance at the bed, right where the discarded diaper Trisha was holding sat, plain as day. Her eyes darted back to meet Hannah's first, because she was still busy seeing exactly what Emily didn't want her to see.

No! No!

"Th-that's not mine!" Emily, as tricky as a toddler with the crime currently taped around her hips, failed to convince yet another person with at least half a working nose.

Immediately Hannah stepped back, holding up her palms just to show her lack of ill will.

“Nope, I understand!” she assured her with her hand already on the door. There were no comments or faces. No audible sniffs or confused and awkward reactions. “I’ll guard the door, okay? So just do what you need to!” And again, before Emily had even a sliver at saying anything meaningful, another party privy to her potty privileges was gone. Right on the other side of the closed door, really.

It was all feeling like there wasn’t time to react, think, or breathe. Heck, she wasn’t even full-on crying yet. Certainly there was a litany of reasons for that, though. But nevertheless, there she stood. Outed, afraid and confused. Alone and effectively barricaded in her room by someone who could somehow act so decisively in a moment’s notice. The only thing worse than the smell of her own diaper was the feeling of whatever in the hell Trisha might do. She was sick to her stomach.

Do what you need to do!

The words were obviously considerate, given the intentional vagueness for something so clear as day at this point. But even in the worst of moments was Emily’s weirdness still triumphant. Even with all this kind grace to sort her situation and at least change into a new diaper.

After a few minutes of heart-aching deliberation, Emily meekly opened the door up to Hannah’s back.

“All done?” Hannah turned her head. Emily had an instinct to shake her head no, but she skipped over the question.

“Could...could you please get Joyce?”

Mommy wasn’t here to change her.

“Hey Joyce?” Hannah nonchalantly called from the backyard door. “Could I borrow your charger?” she waved her phone.

“Sure...” Joyce answered with her eyes still on her screen. “Sure thing,” she said again with her undivided attention this time. “Let me go get it from my room.”

“Thanks!”

Joyce came back in to see a couple cakes and bakery treats being prepped for presentation, with surprisingly no Emily to be found. “I’m surprised Emily isn’t the first one in line,” Joyce laughed at her dad peeking under some tinfoil. “Unless you kicked her out?”

“Nope, no need yet,” Frank laughed. “Think she’s watching the game with everyone else.”

Joyce poked her head around the corner, catching most of everyone in the living room, save for Hannah standing by the wall, waiting for Joyce. And while Emily still was nowhere to be seen, by chance, in passing Joyce glanced at Trisha sitting on the couch, who for a split-second seemed to be staring directly at Joyce. It could’ve just been baseless intuition and imagination though, because Joyce walked onwards.

“Just a second,” Joyce reminded Hannah on her way by.

“No worries, take your time!”

When she walked inside, she wasn’t expecting Emily, nor the sudden smell that hit her nose.

“Emily? Oh, honey...what happened?”

Something about seeing her strongest support made her want to collapse the most. All Emily did was fall into Joyce with a wordless, tearful hug.

Luckily Hannah was willing to wait, because Joyce kicked the door shut so she could tend to her top priority first.

“I’m sorry...” Emily mumbled with her back on the bed. Her skirt was flipped up to her chest with her onesie undone and very much out of the way. It was nothing but her dirty diaper laying on a changing mat.

“Yes, I thought we specifically agreed to no poopies the entire weekend,” Joyce nagged in a crude, croaky old voice. “Emily,” she chuckled, “this was bound to happen. More importantly, does your tummy feel okay?” she lightly dropped her palm on her stomach. “Thank you for getting a diaper out for me, by the way,” Joyce complimented the one already waiting for her on the bed.

“Mm...mmm...” Emily nodded with a mumble, hearing the tapes scritch and scratch as they were peeled off.

“Did you send me a text message or try to call me?” Joyce tilted her frown as she delicately cleaned and sanitized. “I only got lucky because Hannah needed something.”

“...I was gonna...” the girl with her back on the bed muttered again.

“Mhmm,” Joyce nodded simply. Her girlfriend’s bottom was now clean. Just the way she preferred it. “Well from hereon don’t be afraid to bend the rules a little, especially with something like this.” Pee was a bit better at being discreet than poo, after all. *Thank goodness no one found out.* Per Joyce’s thought process, at least. But the whole change Emily was far from chatty, which wasn’t totally unexpected, although her eyes seemed to be watching something far beyond whatever was within these four walls. A pair of hands on her crinkly hips caught her attention.

Joyce was now partially leaning over her. “Is everything okay?”

Again, her gaze was wandering anywhere but the place it was supposed to be.

“Uhm...yeah...why?”

A little more pressure was lightly applied. “Because if you won’t look me in the eye, that usually makes me think something’s up. So what’s up?”

“Nothing, just...I-I was embarrassed. That’s all... About doing...you know...”

“Mhm...” She hardly seemed surprised, given the likelihood of such a thing. “Let’s...bend the rules a little more, okay?”

“More...?”

“Only by a *little* more,” she clarified with a light tap on Emily’s nose. “Specifically while we’re here. Christmas included. When you need to go potty– not pee, we’ll take you to the toilet. Fair?”

There were quite a few ways to get a rise out of the diapered girl, and this was certainly one of them. Even in her subdued behavior she could still put on a look of surprise.

Joyce stole the reaction right from her, however. “Yes, yes, I know,” she buttoned Emily’s onesie back up. “But I think for just about everyone involved that’s a better decision, don’t you think?”

“Yeah...I do,” Emily accepted her partner’s hands to pull her back to her feet.

“Good, because it’s the one we’re gonna go with,” Joyce smiled, satisfied. “So,” she clasped her hands. “Does that make everything all better now? New diaper, new rules? Can I get you to smile again, please?” Half a second passed. “Did I mention my dad was getting the desserts out?”

The only thing sweeter than the cookies and cake they were about to have was the tinge of a smile on Emily’s face. Per Joyce’s biased opinion, at least. And thankfully, things were all well again.

Hardly.

If the clock were to be turned back by ten to fifteen minutes or so, Emily was face to face with Hannah in the bedroom, recently pulled away from the door.

“Wh-why aren’t you surprised...?” Emily blushed, cringing at herself even harder with every glance at the disposable on the bed.

“It wasn’t much to figure out when you took that tumble,” Hannah shrugged through her earnesty. “Not that I care; it’s nothing unheard of in my work.”

And while the mirror in the room was still in-tact, the shattering noise came from Emily’s foolish delusion that Hannah hadn’t seen anything in the kitchen.

“Y-you...?”

“Yes,” Hannah answered simply. “Now more importantly, what can I do for *you*? Get Joyce? Is that all you need?”

Screw it, if Hannah was sweeping it under the rug, then... “Please...” Emily sighed. “B-but wait!” she stopped her with her hand on the handle. “Can...can you make up a reason? I...I don’t want Joyce to know about you knowing...or Trisha...”

There wasn’t surprise, but a certain look of dread. “So she did find out? Was that what happened?”

“If...if nothing happens, I don’t want Joyce to know...” Emily frowned with a deepening crease in her brow. “I don’t want to cause any trouble.”

“Trouble...?” Hannah frowned. “Did you say something to Trisha? Why was she even in here?”

Why indeed. “I...I don’t know. But– I just want to keep as they are. I don’t want things to blow up any more than they already have.” This was all truth. Words Emily was willing to die for. If Joyce found out that Trisha knew about their secret on account of her own willful negligence and self-entitlement, it’d be nothing short of nuclear. And if she learned that *Hannah* knew too? The fuse would start just that much shorter...

“You’re sure about this?” Hannah asked with a look that said all it needed to. Doubt, of course. “As for me, really, don’t think anything of it, Emily.” Wow. Amazing. Day one of their meeting, forced to smell her own dirty diaper, no less, and she was still as friendly as could be. “I’d be the first to want to rein Trisha in...”

“It’s fine...” probably, “and yes, please just get Joyce. Thank you, by the way...”

“Of course,” Hannah smiled, then left.

Then Joyce came. Then Emily was changed, then they both descended the stairs.

Joyce, none the wiser.

“Here you go,” Joyce held out a small block and bundled cable to Hannah, who only glanced at it like an afterthought.

“Sorry?” she blinked.

Joyce started with a confused smile, “The charger you–?”

“Oh! Right!” Hannah laughed as she took it. “Sorry about that; got a little distracted with the game.”

“Okay folks, o-kay!” Frank rang his imaginary dinner bell. “Hope you’ve made some room for the final round!” which was a comment that made Emily’s fresh diaper crinkle quite uncomfortably. “Dessert is served and ready to go!”

“I call the first plate!” Oliver was the first rocket off the couch and to the kitchen, followed by his whining younger brother suddenly competing in a trivial non-issue that became something simply because.

“No! I want the first! Or I want the second! I want the second!”

“No running, guys!” Daniel, their father, called after them on his feet.

“Did Frank make those cookie brownies again?” One of Mary’s sisters chatted with Joyce’s mom on the way through, followed by many more, including a curious dog named Warden in tow.

“Everything alright?” Joyce spoke up, and for half a second Emily thought it was about her. But it wasn’t. Instead it was Trisha on her way by.

She stopped with a multi-layered smile. “Huh? What’s up?”

“Nothing, I don’t think,” Joyce used one of her polite smiles. “Just thought I’d ask.” After all, her cousin could only make so many blatant stares at them before Joyce could no longer excuse it as her own paranoia.

“Okay,” Trisha shrugged, looking pleased as punch. Smiling. Smugly? Joyce couldn’t tell, but for lack of a better explanation, the vibe was off. The mood? Something that annoyed her more than looking at Trisha usually did. As if even in silence she could still hear a constant spew of ignorant one-liners from a person harboring incessant jealousy. “If that’s all, I’m gonna go make sure *my* kids behave themselves!” And the slight stress didn’t go unnoticed, and it sure made Joyce raise her eyebrow in the woman’s passing.

Emily was tugging her by the wrist. “I want dessert,” she said adamantly.

“Then dessert you shall get,” Joyce stole a quick kiss before forgetting and moving on. Thankfully she had much bigger priorities. While it wasn’t all that discreet, Emily briefly smiled at Hannah still sitting on the couch, who flashed a thumb’s up before she was out of view. Call it a biased opinion, but of all the people John could find to fall in love with, Hannah certainly seemed like a keeper...

On a far more cheerful note, or much more grim, depending on which side of history you’re on, Emily waged quite the conquest on all the sugary settlements dotted across the kitchen counters. Or alternatively, not a single calorie was spared in the infamous glutton’s massacre. Legends say such a travesty should’ve been preventable, but alas, her retainer had run an exceptionally loose leash this time around.

With a crumb of banana bread on her chipmunk cheek, Joyce giggled as she wiped the crumb away from Emily’s clueless expression.

“I take it that you’re enjoying the food?” Joyce grinned after another sip from her mug.

She swallowed before she spoke this time. "--Yes, very much so." Then in a quieter voice she mumbled while laughing, "I should skip dinners more often if it means I can have more room for dessert!" The pair laughed, and even Joyce took a few bites for herself.

"Mm...true..." Joyce giggled, watching the rest of the lively kitchen.

A calm whisper spoke right near Emily's ear.

"But if I catch you doing that back home, it means no dessert at all. Understood?"

Still with a fork in her mouth, Emily blinked then swallowed before nodding.

"Good," Joyce giggled again, finding far more humor in Emily's legitimate worries. "Ou~, I wanna try some of the wine my aunt brought over. I'm gonna go get us a glass!" Joyce, a mommy and girlfriend all wrapped into one, found her stride again, all in spite of lingering friction. Friction that thankfully she wasn't fully aware of...

Blood was in the water, and so was a shark, but the fact nothing was biting was making Emily a whole different kind of concerned. She knew there was a bomb, but when was it going to blow up? Never? Not in this lifetime? Possibly, but it was beyond her, and that's what sucked the most. Now Emily couldn't help but watch Trisha every now and then. Her actions, her mannerisms, her speech. Anything to indicate that she may have leaked a terrible, awfully-kept secret. But nothing. Nothing more than paranoia from the victim's end.

"Try this," Joyce was back with an offered sip. "Good?"

Emily massaged her lips with her tongue. "Sorta. I like the stuff from Carmine's better."

"The astronomically more expensive one?" Joyce exhaled through her nose before laughing.

"*Not* because it costs more...! It just tasted better!"

"Uh-huh, uh-huh. Just be careful, you know? You're a whole lot more bougie than you think...!" After all, what was more bougie than having someone else to wipe your bottom? Pampered privileges at their finest...

Barring bumps and pebbles along the way, the rest of the weekend went without much of a hitch. Thanksgiving concluded a couple hours after dessert and only John and Hannah stuck around to help clean things up. Leftovers had been properly distributed, remains were boxed and stowed

away, folding tables and chairs were moved back downstairs, and lastly dishes and glasses were cleaned.

“Another year done!” Frank sighed, finally pulling the dishcloth off his shoulder like a soldier finally removing their scabbard.

“Another year done,” Mary agreed.

“So when do Christmas decorations start? Tomorrow?” John grinned at his parents who could only collectively groan.

“Every year I wish I had a month longer in between...” Mary rolled her eyes. “I’ll be needing you two this year. I want you helping your dad with the lights outside.”

“I imagine Christmas must look pretty cool here,” Emily chirped.

“Very cool,” Joyce agreed, “but every house in the neighborhood is just about deadlocked in competition.”

“One I wish we didn’t try to compete in...” Frank added before his wife could butt his unwelcomed opinions out.

“Oh hush!” Mary complained. “Emily, you need to see how fun all the decorations are here! You two *are* coming for Christmas, aren’t you?”

“Yes, we are,” Joyce answered as they had discussed beforehand. Although...the timing was still bothering her. It *was* baby’s first Christmas, after all... They had their own decorating to worry about. She’d also need to start clearing her schedule as well... Whether it was online or in-person, Christmas shopping needed to be done... How much work could she offset into January...? Decisions, decisions...

“Good, then we have you two to look forward to very soon then!” Mary nodded cheerily.

“Maybe depending on the timing we could go out to a restaurant?” Hannah suggested.

“That could be fun...” Emily said, and with that nothing else needed to be.

“It would be, which is why we should,” Joyce doubled down for her.

Only now did Emily think about how busy everyone might be the week of, however. “But wait, aren’t you guys gonna be tied up with cooking again?”

“No, no,” Frank quickly and gladly shook his head. “Nope. Thanksgiving is plenty for me. I take Christmas off.”

“As do I by extension,” Joyce giggled. “Thanksgiving is already busy enough, so we usually order out for Christmas.”

“Speaking of which, are we gonna get from that wings place again?” John asked.

Mary shook her head. “That was last time. Let’s do something different. There was that nice sandwich place that opened up in town?”

But all this talk about food was making Emily with a full stomach churn just from trying to stuff imaginary calories into her brain.

Hannah was the first to corral her fiance to the hallway. “Christmas is soon, but not that soon. Let’s chat about it later this week. Mary, Frank, thank you for another awesome holiday!” She quickly let go of John just to hurry over and embrace Joyce and Emily. “And Joyce, great to see you, hope you two fly safe! And Emily, hope it goes without saying how great it was to finally meet you! Looking forward to seeing more of you!”

“Same here, Em!” John waved his hand, and Emily waved back, still feeling embarrassed about the way she fumbled his original greeting...

“Thanks, you guys!” Joyce hugged back, then let Hannah go. “Thankfully the flight isn’t too late tomorrow, so we’ve got time to sleep in. Which reminds me that I still need to arrange us a taxi or a—”

“*A-hem?*” Mary was as fast as a firing pistol. Naturally, Joyce sighed, immediately ridden with regret for even thinking she had a shot at sidestepping her parents. “I think we already told you that we’re the ones driving you two to the airport?”

“Mom, it’s fine... You and Dad should be taking tomorrow off.”

“And we will once we see that you two are on your plane,” Frank insisted right alongside his wife. “No arguing about it, honey. Although we do take tips.”

“Duly noted,” Joyce commented, leaving Emily awkwardly trying to stay out of the middle. “Either way, bye John, bye Hannah! See you guys soon!”

“Bye~!” Hannah waved on the way out, and the pair were gone, shrinking the party down to its final quartet. A few more tidying loose ends were taken care of, and for the rest of the night everyone mostly meandered. Drained and exhausted from a whole multi-day’s worth of prep, practice, and performance.

“Excuse me~” Joyce strode over to Emily who was sitting on the couch, idly watching TV while Joyce was suddenly mounting her, dropping a knee beside her whilst she leaned over the side of the couch in search of something.

“What’re you~?” Emily tried not to make a sound as the foreign finger pressed into her diaper that may not have been so dry...

As quick as it came, however, it was over. “Sorry, Hannah had to borrow this,” Joyce held up her phone charger, but her smile wasn’t totally devoid of deviousness, given how well she could hide a smirk in something seemingly so pure. “Think you could meet me upstairs? I wanna go charge your phone.”

Code for: time for a diaper change.

“Mm...” Emily nodded before standing up.

Once upstairs and the change was over, Joyce was taking her balled up diaper to the closet.

“I still can’t believe she went and got this, thinking it was actually necessary...” Joyce sighed, using the diaper pail for now the third time.

“R-right...” Emily agreed, unsure whether the irony was real or if she wanted to talk diapers at all whatsoever for the rest of their stay.

“More importantly, think you’re good if we head off to bed?”

And for once, Emily wasn’t disagreeing on the matter of sleep. She certainly was feeling drained. “Yeah, let’s shleep...” she already yawned.

“Good,” Joyce finished pulling off her onesie and replacing it with a T-shirt. “I wanna keep you that way tonight.”

“...I’ll allow it,” Judge Emily decreed on the spot.

“Oh my, how gracious of you, your highness,” Joyce giggled with her head hitting the pillow.

“Actually, I’m a judge this time,” Emily sternly corrected.

Joyce gasped her way in a hurried apology. “My mistake, your honor! And may I ask the jury’s verdict on your diaper? Huh? Guilty of being dry?”

“Innocent *because* it’s dry!” Emily corrected again with a ferocity that only her trusted supreme judge could handle.

“Yes, yes, of course, of course,” Joyce nodded, leaning out of bed just to flick the lightswitch.

“Either way,” Joyce yawned herself, “I sentence you to...one-thousand years in mandatory diapering...”

“Denied...” Emily snuggled right up against her.

“Overruled,” Joyce snuggled right back, patting the back of Emily’s plastic-padded bum. “And you’re already following the rules oh-so well...”

The night had become calm and quiet. Emily found it in herself to relax and unwind, finally realizing that Thanksgiving on a net scale had gone without a hitch. Thank goodness. A few stones were unintentionally turned along the way, but...nothing that ruined the day completely... And to think, come tomorrow this time, they’d be back in the comfort and privacy of their own home. No need to worry about what they wore, how they acted, or anything else that strangers and or third parties would take issue with.

Just themselves, and the excitement of that alone was making Emily restless. But before either one could fully lose themselves to dreamland, Emily made one last thoughtful decision. She made a small admission at what could only be known as prime-time. Erring on sleep when the mind was weak and susceptible to big things and willing to take it on as small packages.

“...Joyce...?”

“Hnn...?” she moaned, already well-into her beginning dreams.

“You...you know Hannah...?”

“Yeah...?”

“Well...she...she knows about my diapers...”

Five seconds of silence went by, suddenly making Emily rethink her rash decision.

“Does she...?” Joyce tiredly mumbled back.

“Yeah...but...she seemed okay with it. Or, like...she didn’t care so much.”

“Is that it?” Joyce asked, not in a way that discredited what Emily said, but to find the cap on such a crazy development.

“Y-yeah, it is...” Emily snuggled closer, and Joyce hugged tighter.

“That’s nice then...” Joyce murmured, and nothing else was said. Nothing more that could be, anyway. But surprisingly, Joyce didn’t mind...?! Unless sleep really *was* messing with her judgment? But...the weight on Emily’s shoulders felt lighter, at least. It was better than nothing, right?

If not the whole truth, didn’t at least part of it count for something?