II

Seeing her mother, her Aunt Bea, and her Aunt Tammy side-by-side never got any less surreal.

The two of them had clearly taken the old family adage of the Tamberland Tonnage to heart—Bea, Myra’s mom, was only just now turning forty-five, and Laci’s mama was only a year younger than that, but they’d both put on nearly three hundred pounds between them. These days, the two of them were closer to Aunt Lucile and Granny Tamberland in size than they were to Aunt Tammy, and that wasn’t something that could be said when Lucy, Myra, and Laci were growing up.

“With how Granny Tamberland cooks—” Laci groaned as she plopped down into her grandmother’s recliner, “S’a wonder we *all* ain’t fat.”

“Wonder how long *that* lasts.” Myra chuckled knowingly from behind her phone, “The Tamberland Tonnage seems pretty real to me, Laci… I’d lay off the Christmas Cookies if I were you.”

Lacy rolled her eyes and had retreated from what Lucy found to be a prime view of the dining room. Lucy’s mama and her aunts had always liked to gossip around the table for a little while after a big holiday dinner, but usually by now they’d have been done eating.

But with all that Lucy had been doing to keep her mother well-fed, there was very little chance of that happening any time soon. She’d been eating biscuits since well after dinner was over, nursing a cup of warm eggnog while her belly threatened to eep out from underneath her blouse whenever she raised her arms. She had been idly topping herself off bite after bite throughout the night, to the point where she had started to lean back in her chair.

“Yup, it’s a shame—the Tamberland Tonnage hitting all three of them like that at the same time.” Lucy said in a voice that was dripping with plausible deniability, “At different ages. At around exactly the same time.”

“A real tragedy.” Myra nodded knowingly, “Totally unexpected.”

“Honestly the odds are like a billion to one.”

In no time at all, this silly unspoken competition between them had become somewhere between a running joke and an actual, all-but-literal mother-measuring competition. If Tammy’s double chin and Bea’s bingo wings were measures of how Lucy’s aunts had spent their time since the previous Christmas with their respective daughters, then they had spent their years much like Linda had—kicking their feet up and letting go, preferably with something yummy in their hands.

“Looks like Lucy’s the winner this year.” Myra looked up as she lowered her voice as though their mothers would hear them over the sounds of their own clucking, “If that’s something to be *proud* about.”

From the couch against the back wall, Lucy watched her mother’s nostrils flare and her breathing slow over the course of the night as she withdrew from gossip and into the remaining finger food that was slowly getting gobbled up. Aunts Bea, Beatrice, and even Tammy slowly withdrawing from the race as Linda continued to pluck sleepily from whatever she could get her hands on. But when Grandma Tamberland brought out the pie, she still instinctively asked for a plate.

“From where I’m sitting, yeah.” Lucy sat with her legs crossed and tight, “Pretty proud.”

Getting Linda to kick her feet up in the first place had to have been the hardest part of all this. It might have been the only thing keeping her in some semblance of shape for most of her life, come to think of it—she’d taken to letting Lucy handle the household like a champ.

“Ooh, you didn’t have to… *mmm…*”

Lucy’s mom was so used to this sort of treatment that it didn’t take much more than putting something tasty next to her to get her to drop any aspersions she had. She was about as easily bribed back into platitude as she was willing to accept the extra calories. Waving a bunch of deviled eggs in her face was as much incentive for her to stay on the couch as it was to look forward to ordering lunch.

“Well if y’don’t mind…” Lucy’s mother submitted in a contented husky voice, grunting ever so slightly as she reached forward on a full stomach, “Jush… mmm… we got anymore’a these?”

The longer that this went on, of course, the less likely Lucy’s mama had become to want to pry herself from the sofa. Back when Lucy first started taking more of an interest in the housework she’d been happy, but Linda was still largely the driving force in who did the chores around here. The more domestic her daughter became, the less reasons that Lucy let her have to need to get up.

Her blouses and tops and loose, flowy pants had slowly given way to more comfortable outings. Thin hoodies for the summer with wide, billowing lounge pants, with no tight waistbands and plenty of room to gather. There was a solid ring of sausage packed into the tight casing that was her loosest top, billowing out in all directions even (and especially) while she sat on her big fat butt. The way that Linda’s eyes traced the path of the deviled eggs as Lucy placed them on the arm of the couch, the subtle flare to her nostrils as she raised a plush arm to pluck even more from the tray…

“Yeah, there’s plenty.” Lucy said with a nod, already retreating towards the kitchen, “Help yourself, mama.”

“*Mmm…*” she said with a wanting grumble that emanated from deep within her belly, “Don’t mind if I *do*…”

Lucy did her best to bottle the emotions that swelled from her chest as she watched her mother’s wattle roll out lusciously with every sinful bite. The way that she pushed each treat past her lips, the little moan that would occasionally slip out as she topped off what was already a contentedly stuffed stomach pooling into the roomy crotch of her lounge pants…

“If you need anything else while I’m up, just holler!”

Lucy was finding herself just as incentivized to keep this going as her mother was.

Subtly encouraging her mother to indulge herself at every opportunity had been the most fun part about all of this.

Lucy had never really thought to go on errands with her mom when she was growing up. She’d had no reason to, except for the fact that her mother controlled the car and where they both went by proxy. Once she got her own, but before the topic of the Tamberland Tonnage had come into play, Lucy had never really *wanted* to take her mama up on her incessant offerings of doing things together.

“Ooh, I could go for a Frosty right about now…”

“I could go for a 4-for-4.” Lucy shrugged, “Let’s be bad.”

“I like the way you think, honey…” she’d grip the steering wheel a little tighter as a new sense of wicked delight began to grip her senses, “A baconator sounds *mighty* fine right about now…”

That had, of course, changed with the seasons.

Her mother could hardly drive past a Burger King or a Chic fil A without at least mentioning something on their menu—at least once, sometimes twice they’d always pull into the drive-thru before coming home. Lucy always offered to help pay where she could so as to keep this little charade going. After all, the less guilty that her mother felt about her indulgences, the more likely she was to actually *indulge* in them. Even if she almost always wound up taking most of Lucy’s fries, and slurping from the bottom of Lucy’s cups.

“Are you gonna finish those?” Lucy’s mother asked with a flicker of hopefulness.

“Help yourself.”

Linda’s hankering for a Frosty and Lucy’s addition of a 4-for-4 had evolved into a Double Baconater combo with a Dr. Pepper, an extra side of fries for them to “share”, two chocolate frostys “for dessert”, and Lucy’s 4-for-4. The burger, drink, and fries having been the extent of what she’d actually eaten from the cost-effective meal.

Linda had already helped herself plenty. The seatbelt cut tight into her stomach as it billowed forward onto her lap and made a steady bee-line for the steering wheel. She was far and away from being able to drive, but Lucy’s mind couldn’t help but wander.

Linda’s eyes got glassy even at the sight of the remnants of the fast food binge she’d just undertaken, happily partaking in the four “forgotten” nuggets as though they were an extra course. Her soft, marshmallow body rolled and billowed out in all directions, eliciting a soft “oof” as she struggled to navigate the newfound tightness in the driver’s seat of her once roomy SUV. The belt hugged the zenith of her stomach, to the point where it cut into its sagging hugeness ever so slightly. Her eyes may as well have crossed whenever she dangled a fry, dipped in the remains of Lucy’s half-drunk chocolate milkshake, waggled in front of her nose.

“Ughh… your mama’s gettin’ kinda *fat* these days, don’tcha think?”

She said after a dewy wet chomp, her breathing still hard as she smacked the shelf of her stomach as it jut out from underneath her sizeable spare tire. A chuckle lingered on her lips alongside the grease and chocolate. The concept of the Tamberland Tonnage had clearly done much to soften this eventual expansion in her eyes, though Lucy’s constant pampering had certainly helped her in that regard as well. She had said it like it was something that was simply out of her control—as though she couldn’t *help* herself from eating the lion’s share of Lucy’s fast-food lunch, and as though this detour through the drive thru was just a necessary part of any grocery run.

“Woof… I might have to adjust my seat…”

Lucy could watch the ravenous, heavy-breathing hog fumble against her fat hip for reign of the seat recliner all day if she needed to. Her lovehandle spilled out on the opposite side as she tried to lean over, her stomach eeking out in a way that warranted an impotent tug on a too-tight t-shirt. Lucy’s mama had been getting big for a while now, but it was only just now dawning on her that she was starting to get really, *really* big. Her whole fleshy shape wobbled with the impact of the back of the driver’s seat hitting as far back as it would go—and the widest parts of her mama’s stomach *still* edged against the steering wheel.

“*Thaaat’s* better…”

The subtle grumble that had crept into her mother’s voice had been something that Lucy couldn’t ignore. It was like, alongside the rest of her, even her *voice* was getting too heavy to lug around. As the bangs on Linda’s outdated hairstyle framed her chubby cheeks, Lucy couldn’t help but gawk at the sight of how big her double chin was getting. Flabby arms, side rolls so thick that she could grab them by the handful, Lucy was absolutely entranced with the transformation that had piled pound after pound on top of her mother’s formerly svelte shape.

“Here’s hopin’ you take after your daddy.” Lucy’s mother said in vague reference to the ever-present “family curse” that justified every extra bite, “Turnin’ forty in our family’s a dang *threat!*”

Lucy watched as her mama’s big belly bounced ever so slightly with her mirthful laugh, punctuated by an obnoxious sip on the last remains of Lucy’s frosty. If she hadn’t known better, Lucy might have been able to believe in the Tamberland Tonnage the way that her mama had—content to blow up twenty years down the line as long as it meant being able to suck down whatever she wanted in the name of keeping her belly full and her conscience clean.

But then, Lucy *did* know better.

As long as she kept her mama in the dark about what was really happening, the only direction that her weight was gonna go was up and up and *up*…