Anna heard Ryan laugh loudly and from nearby. She didn’t really know what was happening but Ryan’s fear was enough to get her to do as she was told. As soon as the nursery door was closed she had stripped down and changed into the diaper and onesie Ryan had brought her. She then got some of the toys out and scattered them in front of her. She quickly dropped down on to her now padded butt just as the handle on the door started to turn.

When the door opened she was sat on the floor with a pacifier in her mouth and pretending to play with some stacking rings. She looked up to see Ryan, looking very pale faced, walking in followed by an older man she didn’t recognize.

“Here she is, Howard” Ryan said as he stepped out of the way and indicated Anna on the floor, “You’ll have to forgive her, she’s quite shy.”

Anna watched as the dour looking man, Howard apparently, walked inside and looked around. As he went over and peered into the crib Anna looked at Ryan who gave her a quick little nod. She assumed that meant she was doing the right thing. Behind her she could hear the sheets and blankets on the baby bed being moved.

“This doesn’t look slept in.” Howard said as he turned around and made a note in his pad.

“Anna knows to make her bed after she gets up.” Ryan quickly lied, “She’s very diligent with her household duties.”

Howard continued looking around. Anna was watching him but when he looked down at her she quickly turned her attention to the toys again. She absolutely hated being treated like this but it was clear it was important.

“The nursery is very clean.” Howard said.

“I’ll take that as a compliment.” Ryan replied.

“Can I check the bedroom?” Howard asked as he walked towards the door.

Anna saw Ryan freeze and felt her own fear grow as well. She absent-mindedly put a ring on top of another one causing the whole tower to fall over. It briefly distracted the two men.

“The bedroom?” Ryan asked. He swallowed deeply, “That’s a bit personal, isn’t it?”

“Your father requested I be thorough.” Howard replied simply.

Anna watched Howard walk out into the hallway and towards the bedroom. If Howard was already suspicious of the nursery not being lived in he would have it all made clear if he saw Anna had definitely been in the bedroom a lot. She saw Ryan looking utterly terrified and knew she had to do something. It was clear Ryan didn’t want this man going into their bedroom. She acted without thought. On the wall behind the crib there was a large red button. It was a fire alarm button, presumably it was in there for emergencies since a woman in the crib would be trapped if there was a fire or something.

Anna pressed the button and an alarm immediately started blaring. She ran back over and sat down with her toys to make it look like she hadn’t moved. Howard suddenly appeared in the doorway again. He was frowning and cast a look into the nursery.

“What’s happening?” Howard asked with obvious annoyance.

“That’s the fire alarm.” Ryan said, “We have to evacuate the building right away.”

Howard looked at Ryan for a hot minute before let out a sigh of annoyance and nodding his head. Anna stood up in her infantile clothing and walked over to Ryan, she did her best to act like the good little girl she was expected to be. Together the three of them left the apartment and went downstairs. Anna was red in the face for being dressed this way in front of everyone else that was making similar movements to leave the building.

As Ryan, Anna and Howard emerged outside they saw some people were already standing around waiting. There was a low murmur of discussion in the crowd as people discussed what was happening. Anna was happy to hear that most suspected it was a planned drill rather than anything more malicious.

Anna noticed that Howard was looking very impatient to go back inside. He was flicking through the pages of his notepad and tapping his foot. Ryan subtly motioned for Anna to move a little way away from the crowd and the two went to lean on a nearby low wall as if they were just relaxing.

“Good thinking.” Ryan muttered under his breath as he covered his mouth by pretending to scratch his nose, “You saved our asses there.”

“Are you going to tell me what’s going on?” Anna quietly replied.

“After he’s gone.” Ryan answered.

The two of them lapsed into silence as Howard came walking across towards them. He was frowning as he stomped each footstep and looked at his watch. He stopped in front of Ryan and then looked back at the building.

“How long is this going to take?” Howard demanded.

“I don’t know.” Ryan shrugged. Then a couple of seconds later he was struck by inspiration, “Last time they let us back in after a couple of hours…”

“A couple of hours!?” Howard replied indignantly.

“Well, they have to go in and make sure it’s safe.” Ryan reasoned.

Anna knew there had been no previous drills and this was indeed the first time she had heard the alarm go off. Ryan was lying but thankfully he was pretty good at it, after all she had no idea he wasn’t like any of the other horrible men until recently. She watched as Howard looked back to the building and then at Ryan.

“This is nonsense.” Howard said, “There’s no smoke in the sky and the alarm seems to have stopped. I’m going back in there.”

Howard started to turn around but Ryan reached out and grabbed his arm. When Howard looked back at him his expression seemed to suggest “you had better have a good reason to grab me” and Anna could only hope he had some sort of plan.

“Howard, you should let me go in.” Ryan said with a smile, “If something goes wrong I would hate to deprive father of his most trusted advisor. Look after Anna and I’ll be back in a minute.”

“Are you-” Howard started.

Ryan was already marching away before Howard had a chance to respond. Anna watched him go with some trepidation, she always felt very unsafe whenever he wasn’t around. She saw Howard look at her with some disgust before he folded his arms in front of his chest and watched Ryan enter the building.

It was several anxious minutes before he returned. Anna saw him whisper to Paul who was stood near the door and gradually people started going back inside the building. Howard didn’t wait for Ryan to come over and started marching back in himself. Anna, crinkling with her diaper only covered by her onesie, hurriedly followed anxious not to be left alone.

By the time Anna reached the apartment she could see Ryan and Howard going into the master bedroom. She could only hope that Ryan got everything done that he needed to. She went back to the hated nursery and waited. After a few minutes she saw Howard walk past the doorway followed by Ryan. She crawled over to the doorway and leaned out just enough to see what was happening.

“Satisfied?” Ryan asked as he opened the front door.

“Just remember that your father has expectations…” Howard said. He looked over Ryan’s shoulder at Anna, “It would not be wise to fail to meet them. Oh, and before I forget…”

With that Howard handed an envelope to Ryan and left the apartment. Whilst Ryan closed the door Anna immediately started taking off the onesie and ripping off the diaper, she couldn’t wait to get back into her pull-up. When she went into the bedroom to get dressed she saw that all her stuff had been moved, she looked around and when she opened the closet door a lot of her things came tumbling out. She quickly grabbed a new pull-up and got dressed again.

“Sorry.” Ryan said from the doorway. He nodded to the closet where all Anna’s stuff was laying in disarray, “I had to make it look like you never stayed in here.”

“What was that all about?” Anna asked.

“That charismatic man was Howard.” Ryan said as he walked in and sat on the edge of the bed. He seemed tired out, “He works for my father, has done since before I was born. He was here to check to make sure I was treating you properly. Like I’ve said before my father has very exact expectations for the way women are to be treated, if he found out I wasn’t meeting those expectations…”

“I see.” Anna said, “Why would your father think you was letting him down?”

“Howard said they were tipped off by someone.” Ryan sighed as he massaged his temples.

“Who!?” Anna asked.

“I don’t know.” Ryan shrugged, “It might have been an excuse to come in or my father might have someone watching us. Well, I know he has people keeping an eye on us but maybe we have to be a bit more careful about things.”

Anna sighed and lowered her face to her hands. This was all so complicated. She just wanted to live her life, be as free as she could in that cursed society but even the tiny amount of freedom she had was enough to have people asking questions. She was struck by the unfairness of it all as she uncovered her face and looked at Ryan’s hand.

“What’s that?” Anna asked as she nodded to the envelope.

Ryan looked at the white rectangle and then started ripping it open. He took a moment to read the contents and then shook his head in apparent annoyance.

“It seems we have been invited to my father’s home for Thanksgiving…” Ryan said as he handed the invitation to Anna.