

26 - Bump in the Night

Impatient couldn't even begin to describe how she was feeling.

Every few moments the sound of wet skin slapping against the tiled floor could be heard.

Was it dry yet? Emily rubbed a strand of hair between her fingers. She could feel a few drops of water secrete from it.

No, of course not.

She went back to tapping her foot again, staring at her displeased self in the foggy mirror. Couldn't this thing dry any faster?!

She was a mess. While she was confined to the bathroom, everyone else was probably getting all the food out and ready. Her ears could have been playing tricks on her, but she was at least 99.99% positive she heard Joyce leaving to go pick up the food a while back.

They were probably eating without her already; enjoying such delicious, scrumptious, fattening foods. Crispy, golden fries, oily and vinegary subs and savory, cheesy pizza... She could imagine each one of them enjoying it all to their hearts' content. Everyone was feasting. Everyone but Emily.

"Come on...!" Emily started to moan to herself, specifically her hair. "Can't you dry faster?!" Little did she know, a blow dryer could have solved her dilemma or at least minimized it, but a hungry stomach has been known to distract the mind.

There was a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" Emily called, but never looking away from the mirror. Maybe she could use a second towel...

"It's me?" Joyce spoke from the other side. "Can I come in?"

Was she just here to tease Emily some more? Make fun of how she got to eat food and Emily didn't? Food really did make her crazy. She unlocked the door and in came Joyce. Joyce, and something else...something far too tempting for the girl.

“Is your hair done drying yet?” She spoke so casually, as if she didn’t know what she was doing, the demon.

Emily wordlessly stared at what was in her hand.

“Emily? Hello? You-houu?”

“Did you just come here to tease me?” Emily annoyedly huffed. How could she not? Joyce was holding what Emily revered most.

The french fry.

All in its golden splendor, Emily’s worst fears had come to pass. They already started eating without her. Everything was going to be gone by the time she was anything less than dripping!

Clearly the gravity of the situation wasn’t the same for Joyce as she chuckled, trying to piece together what heightened fantasy might be going through Emily’s head.

“What are you talking about? If you want me to tease you, I can think of plenty of things I could do, but what is it that I’m supposedly doing right now?”

Was she really going to make her say it? “You just came in here to dangle food in my face! You know I want to eat, too!”

Joyce looked a bit stupefied, given the bizarre accusation, but cracked an odd smile. “So...you thought I came in here to...” she had to remember what she was holding. “To tease you with a french fry?” Obviously she thought Emily was being a bit silly, but that didn’t change the grave look on the other woman’s face. Simply, Emily nodded.

Joyce blinked. She couldn’t remember Emily ever being like this. Granted, takeout in this house didn’t come terribly often, and they had yet to get food like this. Apparently she’d found a big chink in Emily’s armor.

But now wasn’t the time for burning bridges or rattling cages, hence why an olive branch was extended in the form of feeding her charge.

It was sudden, but the crispy warmth in Emily’s mouth was heavenly. It was everything she’d been dreaming about.

“I came to check on you? We’re getting a little impatient waiting for you, you know...”

Waiting?

She finished chewing her spoils. “Wait, you guys are waiting for me to start?”

“Of course we are, dummy.” With both hands free now, Joyce decided to accelerate the process. “And why isn’t the hair dryer out? They’re pretty good at drying hair than just pacing in front of the mirror.” She was already looking in the large cabinets.

“Here, use this.” Joyce offered as she plugged the tool in. “Meanwhile, I’m going to get another french fry since *someone* stole my last one...”

“Wait!” Emily called just before she could leave. “Could...could you dry it for me?”

“I don’t see why not?” Joyce turned back around and picked the dryer back up. “No fidgeting though, got it?”

Emily nodded, then let her get to work.

“B-besides,” Emily weakly added. “You need to repay me somehow...for getting me dirty and everything...”

“Hoh? Is that so?”

A sudden hand grabbed the bottom of Emily’s large towel, lifting it nice and high from the back so a hot torrent of air could blast on her bare bottom.

Emily yelped as she stumbled forward, losing her towel in the process. Joyce of course watched with a look of devious mischief. Yet she still had the gaul to say, “I thought I said no fidgeting?”

“I changed my mind,” Emily grumbled with an arm over her chest and a hand on her privates. “I can dry my own hair.”

“Sorry, no refunds.” Joyce shrugged, as if her hands were tied. “Butt back over here, please.”

Apparently it’d become water under the bridge, or at least a buried hatchet as Joyce was gleefully back to handling the girl’s hair, all smiles while Emily was a mix of content and distrust.

“You know, if I didn’t know any better, I’d almost think you’re trying to keep me here because of the food?”

“H-huh?” Emily stayed ignorant. “What are you talking about?”

If Joyce could pin any specific trait to Emily, it’d certainly be her distaste for being the odd one out. If she wasn’t part of the norm that meant she was either missing out or sucking in all the spotlight. Naptime was a perfect example of that. Last night’s early bedtime too... If it was just Emily going to bed, of course she hated it.

“Well...if I had to guess...” Joyce pretended to ponder an already finished thought. “You’re just keeping me here so I can’t eat without you?”

“No, I’m not. I just...wanted you to dry my hair...” she blushed a little. “That’s all.”

“I’m already committed, so you can be honest, you know? Though, word to the wise would be that this doesn’t stop mom and dad from eating first; all your precious french fries are probably going to be gone by the time we finish here... Such a shame.”

She was kidding, right? It had to be a joke. It was a joke. She needed it to be a joke. The fate of french fries was no laughing matter, and Emily couldn’t bear to imagine something so heinous as Mary and Frank devouring the perfect accent to her equally as mouth-watering entree.

“...They wouldn’t eat them all, right?” Apparently Joyce hit the nail right on the head. She couldn’t help but start laughing as Emily retreated into her shell.

“Kidding~” Joyce kissed the top of her head. “Still, you can be quite the monster when food is on the line, huh?”

“Stop teasing me...” Emily mumbled. She really didn’t have much of a defense anymore.

“Okay, I’m sorry.” Joyce apologized, going back to fluffing up Emily’s hair.

“I never win against you...” How many times had she already faced this? Never once did it seem like Emily could pull one over on Joyce. Well, maybe there were a few key moments dotted throughout their time together, but by a large margin did Joyce control the tide of the battlefield. It was her rules and her board, and Emily was a piece in her hands.

“Wrong.” Joyce plainly corrected. “It’s not about winning or losing. We don’t compete. We’re a team, remember?”

A team with a pecking order... Emily might have added, though she chose not to. Joyce did just say something fuzzy-feeling, after all.

Finally the hair dryer clicked and the device was off.

“Okay, all dry.” She looked around. “Did I ever bring you clothes to wear?”

“No,” Emily answered, and Joyce was already going for the door. “And no pajamas, please?” She had a sneaking suspicion Joyce might try something like that.

“I know, I know,” Joyce waved her off. Had her parents not been here it most certainly would have been pajamas, though if today taught Joyce anything it was to constantly remind herself of boundaries. Still, she couldn’t help but smile imagining the fit Emily might throw if she did have to wear pajamas early.

“Then tonight you shall be wearing...” Joyce murmured to herself as she searched through the drawers. She settled on shorts and a short-sleeve, considering Emily might be a bit reckless once she gets to the dinner table... Joyce shuddered with a giggle. If one french fry could practically intoxicate her, she couldn’t fathom what an entire smorgasbord might do to her.

Everyone shared in a round of satisfied sighs, all pleasantly stuffed full of delicious food. Though, what loomed over the quartet was a silent understanding of the groggy hole they’d dug themselves into. It was all delicious, but ever so fattening.

“I can’t remember the last time I ate food like this...” Joyce said oddly. She was equally pleased with the choice as she was ashamed by it. For the sake of her physical health and Emily’s, a treat like this wouldn’t be happening often...

“Basic takeout is always a guilty pleasure.” Frank chuckled, wiping his mouth with a napkin. “Makes me want to make my own pizza, though. What do you say? Round 2 will be homemade this time?” All his suggestion got him was a round of groans, likely because the mere mention of food had everyone’s stomachs straining.

“Can’t...eat anymore...” Emily moaned, yet still eyeing a small pile of crumbs, along with one last french fry. “But we need to finish the job...” Sluggishly so, Emily leaned in for the last fry, yet it looked as if her heart had been stepped on once a different hand got to it first.

“I think we’re all full,” Joye paused to chew the final morsel. “But you look to be in the worst shape, Emily. I think you’re one fry short of a total food coma.”

It took willpower not to cry over the fallen soldier.

“I think I wanna lie down...” Emily slowly stood herself up, clearly too winded for formalities, not that anyone but a sober Emily might care about. Mary and Frank watched Joyce choke down a giggle as they watched her saunter off.

“Didn’t she get a whole sub?” Mary asked, looking at the remains of her spot, which were little to none.

“Yep.” Joyce said, sharing in her surprise. How that girl could fit the whole thing down was truly a mystery, especially with how her stomach still looked relatively flat.

“Well, how about we clean up the kitchen, then call it an early night?” Frank suggested. “Your mom and I still need to wash up anyways.”

“I like the sound of that.” Mary agreed. “I think the plane ride over here is finally starting to hit us... Before that, do you need to wash up at all, Joyce?”

“Mmm...for the most part, no.” She was already stuffing their empty containers into a much larger bag. “I can finish up in my own room. You guys have the greenlight.”

“Sounds good to me,” Frank took the bag over to the trash. “A hot shower sounds pretty good right now.”

Mary chuckled. “Well, suit yourself, because I know I need to try the bath at least once.”

“Well, whatever you two do, enjoy yourselves for the rest of the night.”

“And also, I was checking the weather. We got pretty lucky with today, because I guess it’s gonna start raining tonight.” Mary said.

“Really?” Joyce was trying to remember. “It must have been sudden. I don’t remember seeing that in the forecast... Whatever, not that it affects us now.”

All three gave mini-goodbyes as the two parents made their way down the hall and Joyce crept up behind the couch.

“Not passed out yet?” Emily was on her side somewhat, curled up into the corner of the couch.

“Nope.” Emily blankly answered. She was too sluggish for emotions.

Joyce laughed a little. “You quite literally *inhaled* that food, my little black hole.”

“Don’t say it like that...” Emily whined. “I don’t wanna sound like I’m fat!”

“Believe me, you’re far from it.” Joyce’s hand was suddenly lightly pressing into Emily’s certainly flat stomach. Normally it’d transition right into a tickle, but Joyce was afraid she might not be able to keep the food down otherwise... “And even if you were, I’d love you all the same!”

“Okay...” Emily was staring out one of the windows, then up at Joyce. “So now what?”

“Now what?” Joyce repeated. “You’re already itching for *more*?” Clearly she wasn’t, but that didn’t mean Joyce wasn’t going to tease.

“Oh yeah, sure. Sign me up coach, let’s hit the amusemen...” She was so sluggish, she even gave up her act halfway through. Joyce couldn’t stop laughing. Emily found it hard not to smile either.

“Mom and Dad are gonna wash up for the night, then probably go to bed. That means it’s just us now.” There was a moment of silence in the room, but it was a warm silence. One that made the atmosphere still feel tender.

Then, Emily looked at her with a quite confused look. A look that was unsure of herself.

“I think I want ice cream?”

Joyce smiled with a slight chuckle.

“Absolutely not.”

“Come on...! Just a little?” Emily could already feel her stomach compressing its contents, just enough to make room for its most esteemed guest; dessert.

“We don’t even keep ice cream in the house, you know?” And it would seem that was a good judgement call. In-house sweets were probably a temptation Emily couldn’t resist, so why give her the chance to fail to begin with?

Though, whether it was the playful part of herself feeling aroused or simply feeling suspicious, Emily said “I bet you’re lying.”

Joyce raised her brows. “Oh? Lying, am I?”

“Yep.” Emily rolled a little, finding a softer spot in the cushions. “Just so I won’t go looking for it.”

“Hmm, well, you are most certainly right that on any other day of the week I’d be lying to you,” she drew a fingernail up the girl’s neck, creeping and scraping along the surface of her skin so slightly it caused Emily an infectious giggle. “But, this time I mean it. So in that case, how about I get you some water instead?” She was already getting up.

“I like my vanilla with whipped cream, please!” Emily called to her.

“Those expectations better be severely lowered by the time I get back in there!”

They were not, which is why you can imagine the slightly soured expression on Emily’s face, partly standing up from her spot just to see Joyce come back with not a bowl of delicious sweetness, but a rather bland glass cup of transparent liquid.

“But I wanted ice cream?”

Joyce simply rolled her eyes with a smirk.

“Drink. This might help your tummy feel better.” She handed off the glass to Emily who stared at it curiously for a moment. There wasn’t a straw, so she’d need to go straight in with a normal sip. She sort of giggled. It felt...intimidating, in a way?

“What’s so funny?” Joyce was walking around to get a seat right beside her. Thankfully she was late to the party, though...

“Hm? Uh, nothing.” Emily dismissed her concern and her laughs as she reeled in for a large swig. It was essentially like drinking from the bottles or sippy cups which she’d become so used to. For the uninformed, the trick was simply to tilt it nice and high to gravity could help you--

“Emily!” Joyce shouted, but it was too late.

As Emily leaned her head back and with both hands held up the glass, she realized too late that her motions were too ambitious as a large amount of water flowed past the corners of her mouth, onto her face, including her shirt, shorts and the couch.

Joyce took the glass from her and stood her up, meanwhile Emily was somewhat astounded, trying to realize what had just happened; how things could have slipped from her so easily.

“I...” She watched Joyce press her hand onto the couch, feeling where the water had hit it. Watching her so engrossed in a mistake Emily caused... Emily bit her lip, sniffing. Was she really going to get so worked up over this?

“Emily, do you think you could go--” Joyce was turning her head to Emily and was surprised to find her choking down a sob. Did she feel bad? Joyce knocked herself over the head. Of course she did.

“Honey, it’s okay!” Joyce laughed, hoping to make the moment feel lighthearted. “It’s just water!” She pulled her in for a hug.

“I’m sorry I spilled it...” Maybe if she hadn’t been so excited and stopped being so silly this wouldn’t have happened. Even when she tries to let go she seems to mess it up...

“It’s fine, Emily,” Joyce said again, this time looking at her with a genuine smile. “Can you go and get me a towel though? We should dry the spot off as soon as possible.”

She nodded her head and walked down the hall.

Joyce sighed a little, now on her own. “Let’s see...” She pulled out the cushion in question. It was possible some of the water soaked inside the cushion, which wasn’t too big of a deal unless it’d be a lot of water that was spilt... Thinking about it, more water seemed to have gotten on Emily than the couch... They’d need to take care of that next.

Emily had knocked on the bathroom door, hearing Frank’s voice from the other side.

“Who is it?” He called.

“I-it’s Emily. Could you hand me a towel, please?”

A few moments went by until a crack opened and a hand extended outward with a bundle of fluffy cloth.

“Thank you,” Emily received it.

“I brought some...” she said a bit sullenly, walking back into the room. She could see Joyce was looking the cushion over. Was it that bad?

“Thank you very much,” Joyce made a point to smile again as she took one and pressed it firmly into the cushion. Emily only watched with a growing self-consciousness.

“I-I can pay for it...” She’d do anything to make things right. Joyce looked at her with a perplexed look. “Just let me know how much and I can give it to you...” She could. It’s not like her money had been going much elsewhere, after all.

“Emily, you made a silly mistake, that’s all. You can’t really think I’m going to charge you for damaging our furniture, do you?”

“But...but I...” It was the first time she’d done something like this to Joyce. Sure, she was a freeloader, but she wasn’t one that inflicted harm on the home itself. Not until now. How couldn’t she feel bad?

Joyce sighed in front of her this time, worsening Emily’s expression a little. She really was annoyed... She stood up, putting her hands on Emily’s shoulders.

“The only thing you could ever do to *really* get under my skin is by doing one of two things. One, catching another guy or girl flirting with you. If you haven’t guessed already, I’m quite protective of my possessions,” she rubbed noses with her on that, chuckling herself. “And second, seeing *you* in a bad mood. You may not believe it, but you’re my top priority whether we’re playing or not. So if you’re going to feel sad over something that I said, just know you’re going to cause me stress too, okay?” She smiled, hoping that it’d convince her somewhat.

Emily kept looking to the floor, still struggling to cope with herself.

“Of course, if you really do want to feel sad, that’s up to you,” Joyce shrugged. “But, I’m gonna use every trick in the book to try and change that...!” and like magic, mysterious prickles; pins and needles began to erupt on Emily’s sides, working their way under her shirt and up and down her skin. The touches were too sensitive and the places they struck were too vulnerable. Emily couldn’t help but erupt into a shower of giggles as Joyce tickled her all over.

“Stop! Stop!” Emily pleaded. She’d tried to run, but Joyce had wrapped an arm around her waist and held her close. There were tears, but thankfully not the bad kind.

“Stop?” Joyce gawked. “Not a chance! Just so you can be sad again?” She forcefully sat herself on the floor, Emily included as she trapped her between her thighs and kept an arm strapped around her.

Emily kept kicking, lightly slapping her feet off the floor, suddenly thinking about something much more worrisome.

“Y-your--hahaha! Your p-parents are gonn-a hear!”

“Really? I wonder what they might say?” Joyce couldn’t be bothered to think about what they might say. It was her last worry in the world. “Well, if we don’t want them to, that means you should probably stop being so gloomy, huh?”

Emily kept laughing, nodding her head. In truth, she was being strong-armed into submission. Well, quite literally so, on top of being “strong-tickled,” if that made any sense...

A god did exist somewhere in the world, because the tickling did come to an end. Emily was wiping her eyes, but thankfully for the right reasons.

Joyce had set the cushion on the towel laid on the floor, standing back to admire her work for one last second.

“Okay...that should be good there. But *this*,” she turned and tugged on the front of Emily’s shirt with great enunciation, “is not!” She tutted disapprovingly. “And we just got you dried off...”

Emily didn’t respond so much. She knew she was supposed to take it lightly, but causing disaster after disaster made her feel less and less like the champ Joyce wanted her to be.

Maybe it’s time to move her permanently onto sippy cups? Not actually, but it was still funny to imagine... Joyce shared a smirk with herself, leading Emily onward to the bedroom.

“I can do it this time,” Emily declared, stripping herself already.

“Do you want to wear pajamas now?” Joyce was already looking into the dresser for her. “I’ll wear them if you do?” Now her offer was tempting. If Joyce did it, that means it’s what all the cool kids were doing, so how could Emily miss out?

“Uhm...you pick.” Emily mumbled through a mouthful of upturned shirt covering her face. She grimaced, feeling the wet sensation in her underwear. The water really did soak through her... She sighed. “Could you please get me some underwear, too?”

“I figured those didn’t survive, either...” Joyce spoke passively, adding one more item to her checklist.

“...I’m sorry for getting the couch wet.”

“I’m sorry for not making it clear we had no ice cream,” Joyce spoke, reflecting on the past with a greatly feigned regret. “I guess we let someone get a little too excited...”

Finally, Emily’s lips did spurt something out, and it rang like music.

“Fine!” Emily huffed. “I’ll make sure we *always* have ice cream. It’s your fault for giving me water in the first place!” Of course! How was it only clear now? Water was the root of all evil. Had there been delicious sweets to intervene in plain old H₂O’s devious plans, none of this would have ever happened.

“You’re funny when you’re joking, you know that?” Joyce snarkily fired back, tossing a pair of underwear on the bed. Thankfully she had the thoughtfulness to close the door this time. She still couldn’t shake that paranoia from earlier...

“Nope! Dead serious. If you won’t get it, I will.”

“For your health and to preserve your cuteness, sweets should be few and far between in this household.” Joyce shoved the girl, giggling over her yelp as she crashed into the bountiful mattress, sheets and cover.

“Oh yeah?” Emily cockily muffled with her face in the bed, turning herself around. “What are you gonna do about it?”

Joyce's eyes widened. "Oh-hoh-hoh, you *really* didn't just say that, did you?" Her hands were already looking grabby, and with the wiggling of her fingers...probey, as well.

And just before she closed in on her, she stopped.

"Actually, I thought of a better idea."

"Y-yeah?" Emily was forcing a smile, hesitating to consider a fate that was worse than tickles.

"We'll buy ice cream, but that just means I'll need to look into getting a top-freezer fridge..."

"A...what?"

"You know? A fridge where the freezer is on top?" Currently, the freezer was a bottom drawer that afforded a shorter girl like Emily easy access. If it were at the top she could still reach it, but maybe not the farthest point on the top shelf... "It'll need to be taller, too...otherwise you'd be able to reach it."

"Uhm...nevermind..." These were definitely the times when Emily hated Joyce's omnipotent nature. She could never tell when the woman was simply teasing her or genuinely considering future fantasies.

"Oh! Or, do you think we could put a lock on the freezer? Like a keypad? Maybe we could get something like a wine cooler for that..." She laughed, her eyes twinkling. "Maybe ice cream isn't so bad of an idea?" Ice cream behind bars was no ice cream for Emily.

"...I won't buy any ice cream..." Emily mumbled with red cheeks. She felt like she'd lost in more ways than one. Not only was she denied her ice cream, but also yet another opportunity at spending her own money.

"Thank you for the ideas~" Joyce kissed her on the forehead, feeding into Emily's growing concerns.

"Now, I thought you said you could undress yourself?" Joyce jokingly admonished. "When I do it," right then, Emily could feel two hands burrow themselves under her and suddenly cup her bum cheeks, slipping between her skin and underwear. "We go..." and suddenly with a quick yank they were off her waist, legs and feet. "Lightyears faster!"

“Maybe if you didn’t tease me so much you’d think differently!” Emily didn’t bother to cover herself up, standing in a dominant pose, as dominant as you could be while flashing your privates, then pulled a new pair of panties up her legs.

“Well, I can’t imagine seeing you in any other way...” Joyce thought out loud, pretending to wrestle with a half-truth.

“Hah-hah! See? Easy!” So to prove it, Emily spun on her heel 180 degrees then planted herself firmly, giving her bum a slap on the cheek. Meanwhile Joyce was finding herself quite frustrated. After all, the possibilities were endless with this little girl...

“Okay, last call,” Joyce broke herself out of a trance. “Are we wearing pajamas or regular clothes?”

“Mmm...pajamas.”

“I like that choice too.” And so they went with that. Emily went with her polka-dot set and Joyce decided on a short-shirt pair.

After that, it was a quick trip to the kitchen so that Emily could actually drink a few glasses of water this time, only now under strict supervision. Though, looking back on it, it sort of was funny to think how she could have somewhat confused it with a bottle.

“Couch time?” Joyce asked as Emily already flopped herself on it.

Joyce had given the cushion a little more time to dry. Satisfied, she put it back in place.

“Movie time!” Emily cheered back, so unreasonably ecstatic just to be in thin clothing while embracing such a cushy sofa.

“Movie time?” A much deeper voice answered back. Both female heads looked in its direction.

Joyce was already sitting herself next to Emily. “Finish your shower, Dad?”

“You bet I did. Would’ve been longer had your mom not kicked me out so soon...” An unfortunate memory to stew over, by the looks of it. “But, anyways, that bathroom really is nice. I wouldn’t be surprised if your mom doesn’t come out of there until it’s time for our flight back home.”

“Well, Emily and I should be good for the night. We’ve got an extra bathroom on standby.”

“That’s good. With the pace your mother goes at, you just might need it... But anyways, heard you two are gonna watch a movie? Think you can fit a third?”

All cozy and well-fed, the energy levels were still high. “I think we can manage a third...!” Emily, surprising Joyce, haughtily spoke.

“Oh? Well, thank you ever so much for fitting me in, your majesty!” And with a grand bow, Frank sat himself on the far end. Emily couldn’t help but snicker. “What’re we watching?”

“Zero idea. Not sure yet.” Joyce had just finished turning the tv on.

“I’m sure there’s something to watch. Either of you two watch anything new in the theaters?”

Joyce and Emily exchanged looks.

“I think we went one time not too long ago...”

“Yeah, right after I got over that stomach bug thing.”

“That’s right,” Joyce agreed somewhat plainly. She didn’t like to think back on that, considering the pain Emily was in. “Glad we’re over that now...”

The trio watched as the list of movies went on and on. On and on until...

“Oh, hey, how about that one?” Frank interrupted the search.

Joyce stopped scrolling. “Which one?”

“That one right there? I think it says ‘Hilltop Inn’?” The cover was something to say the least. Basking in the moonlight sat a rickety old mass of shacks and roofs with boarded-up windows interspersed throughout. Only in one of them though was there the silhouette of a figure...

Wait, was this movie a--?

“Is this a horror movie?” Joyce was the first to ask. She didn’t bother reading the bio for it, as if she were already about to write it off.

“Of course it is! Remember when you, me and your brother used to watch one every weekend?” Thinking back on it, that did happen a lot...

“Really? You guys did?” Emily seemed curious.

“Oh yeah!” Frank was quick to confirm. “You couldn’t get this one away from the tv. She was a little horror fanatic!” This was a little hard to buy, considering Emily rarely ever saw Joyce watch movies. She even gave her a look.

“W-well...maybe just a little...” She’d fallen out of the habit, but maybe there was a tiny craving for it every once in a long while. She’d somewhat satisfied that feeling last time with Emily, though she remembered how that went last time.

“But anyways, how about we watch something less scary? Maybe a comedy?”

Frank came off as surprised. “You don’t want to watch it? Did you already see it?”

“It’s not that...” Joyce trailed, realizing too late that would have been a good excuse.

“...Oh, well, that’s fine. I’m sure we can find something else.” He seemed to have come to his own conclusions, which invited some self-consciousness into Emily’s headspace.

“I...I want to watch it, too.”

Both sets of eyes fell on Emily.

“I wanna watch it. It seems, uhm, interesting.” Frank smiled at her, while Joyce was trying not to roll her eyes. It was obvious what she was trying to do...

“Are you sure?” Joyce tried to make his voice as little as indicative as possible, though she desperately hoped Emily could read between the lines. With her dad in attendance, she didn’t want to be so transparent about Emily’s less-than-ideal affinity for scary movies.

“Yes, I am. I kinda like them, anyways.”

“Really?” Frank sounded enthusiastic. “Joyce, you really know how to pick ‘em!”

While Frank couldn’t see it from his angle, the look Joyce gave Emily was one that was less than impressed. Whatever ‘bravado’ the girl thought she was showing, Joyce didn’t see it that way.

“I’ll be right back,” Frank stood himself up. “Do you guys keep any popcorn here?”

“It should be somewhere in the kitchen,” Joyce answered while she turned her head to him. “I’m not positive which cabinet it’s in though, so you might have to look a little...”

“No problem. I’ll manage.” And then there were two.

Emily was the first to start. “Joyce, I know what you’re--”

“No,” she bluntly interrupted. “That’s my line. I know what *you’re* trying to do.”

“But why not? He said you guys watch them all the time!”

“Yes, we did, but that was then. Now I’m with you and I know you don’t do scary movies.” Need she remind her of how the first movie night went?

“Come on! They’re only here for one more night! You guys should do something you used to! I can handle it!”

Finally Joyce’s sternness did soften some, “You’re sweet, but you know when we’re at home like this you don’t need to act so tough. Thank you for thinking about us, but I want to watch something we’re all going to like.”

“Then...I’ll just go to bed early while you two watch it. I want you guys to watch something scary.”

The two were at odds, fighting for what they believed would best benefit the other, funnily enough. In all honesty though Emily was starting to annoy Joyce. If the roles were different, she wouldn’t have to compromise so heavily...

And then she stopped herself.

She sighed, realizing just what an idiot she was. She really did have some work to do on keeping her Mommy-self in check...

Emily was an adult. She was her girlfriend. She has every right to decide what she wants to do and watch whether Joyce liked it or not. The best she could do was heavily advise against it, but it would seem advice this time wasn’t going to work.

“Fine, you can watch it.” That made Emily let out a little giggle. “It wasn’t my decision to make from the get-go. I just don’t want to see you scared.”

“I’ll be fine! F-I-N-E!” Emily started to get herself cozy again.

“Uh-huh.” All Joyce did was let her watch the movie. That didn’t mean she’d believe for a second she was going to be “fine”.

It wasn’t fine.

“Emily?” The mere sound of another voice startled the girl. She collapsed from her fetal position on the bed before she could distinguish friend from foe.

The girl looked as if she’d been through hell and back; tortured by souls of the lost and witnessed her life itself hang in the balance of suspense and terrifying thrill. Joyce, on the other hand, looked quite sympathetic.

“I told you we shouldn’t have watched it...” she rubbed the girl’s shoulder. Compared to the first scary movie, this one was actually halfway decent by Joyce’s standards, so objectively speaking for Emily it was the difference between a five and a ten.

“I thought it would be okay this time,” Emily whimpered, pulling herself back together. She even used all the strategies! First and foremost was cuddling with Joyce. Being a lone soldier was never destined to work, and Emily knew that. The other was regularly interrupting herself for water. The first two times she could comfortably remove herself from the couch to get a drink, but then when the movie really started to set in she had to start asking Joyce to come with her... A little after that, and she’d given up on trying to move entirely. The couch became her final oasis.

They’d moved from the living room and into Joyce’s bed. She was expecting a much more intimate arrival, but instead had to deal with the creeping fears of the imaginary lurking throughout the house.

“Next time can you please be a little more honest with yourself? I won’t tell you ‘no’ unless you want me to, but I really don’t like seeing you like this.”

“Did you like the movie, at least?” Emily asked while panning her eyes over to the halfway-shut door. The hall lights were off, so that meant pure darkness seeped from the crack in the doorframe. If she looked hard enough...squinted enough...the darkness moved.

“Yes,” Joyce turned the girl’s head back to her. “I did.” Unfortunately, that was more of a lie than a truth. The movie was okay, but real terror was constantly trying to imagine how your significant other might be reacting to their kryptonite being force-fed down their throat. All she could do now was let the girl feel like her efforts weren’t in vain.

“How about we get some sleep? Maybe dream of something better than that movie?”

Emily silently nodded, still looking at the doorway somewhat.

With a soft smile, Joyce went on to ask, “Would you like me to close the door?”

“Yes, please...”

A pair of warm lips hit Emily’s temple before Joyce got up.

And with the shutting of a door the monsters of the night had been banished. “See? Now it’s our own little fortress,” Joyce chuckled. “Just you, me and Pip.” Criss-crossed now on the bed, Emily had been stuffing her hands into him while he sat in her lap. It was kind of endearing how she’d taken to him so quickly.

“I’m sorry I’m such a scaredy cat...” With everything Joyce did for her, making her feel better over the smallest things, she really did feel needy regardless of the time or place. Under the right circumstances that was her job, but this wasn’t supposed to be one of those times.

“Don’t be. I like being able to do stuff for you, and I especially want to be the person you can always turn to; whatever the reason.”

“Thank you.” She played with Pip’s squishiness a bit more. “And you know I’d always be there for you too, right?”

“Of course I know that,” Joyce paused to exchange a brief kiss. “But don’t think that I don’t want to hear you say it anyways.”

Joyce slipped herself off the bed to pull back her corner of the covers.

“So are you okay with tonight? Sleeping with me?”

“Of course I am,” Emily didn’t dwell on it much, warming Joyce’s heart. “But I would be lying if I said I wasn’t nervous at least a little...”

“Nervous how?”

“Nervous as in...I don’t know. It’s another step, I guess. We’ve done a lot more...*intimate* stuff than this,” need she reference what had to be done in her diapers, “but I guess as far as regular things normal couples do, this is something new for us.”

Joyce nodded, collecting her thoughts.

“I can see that. It is different in a way, isn’t it?” Joyce laughed a little. “We definitely have pushed the bar in a lot of other ways though. Would you honestly rather the couch tonight?”

“No.” It was somewhat of a deadpan response and Joyce, smirking, knew exactly why.

There was no chance in hell Emily was leaving that room tonight. Not when a serial killer was still on the loose from Hilltop Inn. Those were the worst kinds of movies; ones that had a bad ending and the killer got away... But, in fairness, there was a much more meaningful reason to stay.

“I said I was nervous, but that doesn’t mean I’m not a lot more excited. It’s a big step, but it also means we get to be closer...” She kneaded her hands some and wove her fingers, “I like being closer with you.”

“You’re really cute when you try to sweet-talk me, you know?”

“W-well, you don’t have to say it out loud...” The abrasive choice of words had her looking beat-red, though that was somewhat expected. It was likely a quality that’d never change about their relationship. Even if they recognized each other as equals, there was always going to be someone more dominant of the two. Not that either of them minded.

“Ready to get under the covers?”

“Yeah, just a second...” Emily hopped off the bed, giving Joyce a nice view of her behind as she bent over, slipping off her pants.

Joyce slipped in between the cover and sheets, and Emily soon did the same. Only a handful of inches apart, they laid there somewhat stiffly. Was this awkward?

“Well, uh, how about I turn off the lights?” Joyce asked. The ceiling light was off, but there was still the warm glow from a nearby lamp on the nightstand.

“That’s alright...”

She leaned over, brushing her finger over the sensor.

Apart from the distant city lights reaching the floor-to-ceiling windows, everything was now dark. Very dark. Extremely dark. Oh-so very absolutely chillingly terrifyingly dark.

Emily pulled up the covers a little bit, scolding herself. How could she be making such a big deal out of this? It was just a movie! She is in a safe place!

Her eyes were playing tricks on her. In the deep corners of the room were the figments of her imagination; festering into creatures, goblins and ghouls, all waiting for her eyes to shut and to leave herself vulnerable. Her legs shuffled a little, accidentally brushing Joyce’s.

“Sorry about that...” Emily quietly whispered.

She spoke in such a way that you could tell she was smiling. “Don’t worry about it.”

Laying there, soaking in the black atmosphere, Emily wasn’t feeling any more accustomed.

“H-hey, Joyce?” She was hesitant to speak, afraid she might disturb Joyce.

“Uh-huh?”

“Did I leave Pip on the bed?”

She felt terrible once Joyce started to stir, watching her sit up, rousing herself out of a comfortable spot just to satisfy her selfish wishes. “Mmm...yeah, he’s right here.” Emily with her head laying into the pillow was joined by a stuffed piece of mochi right by her side. “Better?”

“Yes. Thank you...”

“You’re welcome.” She laid back down.

Now with a friend, she stared into his lifeless eyes, hoping they might inspire some form of tiredness within her, but she was too high-strung for that. Not when the boogeyman was hoping for the same exact thing.

“J-Joyce?” it came as a half-whimper.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m...I’m still scared.”

“Wanna come a little closer?”

“Yes, please.”

Pip was politely moved to the side and in his place was Joyce, holding the cover up almost like a tent from her position so Emily could slide over easily. It was a mix of shame and relief that washed Emily over. On one hand, she kept bothering Joyce over the tiniest and smallest things, but on the other she was getting comfort after comfort.

With the two both sleeping on their sides, Emily pressed herself against Joyce’s front, sitting slightly lower on the bed, meaning she could set her head somewhere between Joyce’s head and chest.

“Better?” Now her voice was much closer, but it rang like a soft lull with its tender nature.

“Yeah...” and she really did mean it. She didn’t know how Joyce would react to it, but Emily set one arm over Joyce’s waist and kept one hand on the top of her bosom.

Then, Joyce’s legs surprised Emily when they adjusted themselves. The one farthest from the mattress had moved itself forward, slipping right between Emily’s legs and nuzzling its thigh right along Emily’s crotch. She could feel the slight press from her skin; just enough to know it was there, but stimulating enough to want to press back...

“I’ll keep you safe from all the monsters, and make sure you have no nightmares too, okay?”

“Huh? How can you keep me from having nightmares?”

“Well, that’s easy enough.” She paused to give Emily’s forehead a long, uninterrupted kiss. “And like that, I’ve placed a magic spell on you. Good for one whole night’s sleep, no bad dreams are allowed inside your head.”

“Then how come it’s only good for one night? Shouldn’t it be forever?”

“Silly, did you forget I’m a businesswoman?” Both snickered. “You wouldn’t be my customer anymore if I only needed to give you a one-time solution... This way I get to keep kissing you forever and ever! And don’t forget your debt...” She pecked Emily on the lips. “Those belong to *me* now, so don’t get frisky with anyone else, got it?”

Emily cracked a toothy grin. “Wouldn’t *dream* of it!” She started to laugh while Joyce rolled her eyes.

“Okay, I think I’ve had enough of you for one night. Time to sleep.” Joyce took her free hand and cupped it around the back of Emily’s head, guiding her head into her chest where two generous, soft mounds lay like cushions.

“Night, Joyce.”

“Goodnight...”

And finally, at some point along the way, they both did drift off, sleeping soundly for quite some time.

Then, much later, hours later, Emily opened her eyes. It was a slow reveal, treating her vision to a set of boobs she was using almost like a pillow. She had to think of where she was right then, not completely sure with the darkness shrouding her vision. Then she remembered where she was and who she was with. Smiling just from the sweet reminder, she reeled her lower half into Joyce’s a bit more, feeling her crotch run along the woman’s bare thigh.

But now she knew why she woke up.

Her bladder was painfully full. The simple motion of her waist was enough to make it rise and stir in its own way. Joyce was still sound asleep, as Emily could feel the faint exhale from her nose while she slept.

Why did she have to get up now? There were a few reasons why she didn’t want to. One was how comfortable she already was, sleeping with Joyce. They were wrapped in each other's arms,

once sleeping so soundly. Another was having to leave Joyce, meaning to leave her one safety in such a big and dark house... She could already feel the movie getting to her again, and that was enough to quietly whimper. If only she had been wearing a...

She paused her thought for a moment, blinking.

Was she about to think what she thought she was? Easier to wear a...diaper? It wasn't so much disgust that she regarded herself with, but instead simple wonder and curiosity. Before she'd thought of this whole routine as strange and different, but of course it had started to grow on her. So much now that Emily considered it a valid solution, apparently.

But alas, she wasn't wearing one and there were none in the room. She didn't have a crutch like that to fall on, because after all, she was supposed to be acting like an adult right now, even if the circumstances were making her wish she really wasn't one right now.

Her head turned over to the door, leading into the hall. Just seeing the panel of wood alone was daunting enough. Who knew what was creeping beyond there? She could already imagine the hundreds of eyes peeking at them from the outside, sharpening their fangs and hiding themselves in all the right nooks and crannies to catch Emily by surprise. Her heart was beating a mile a minute just from thinking about it.

She hugged Joyce a little tighter. Even if she wasn't awake, Emily could still feel the warmth radiating from her.

Why did she have to go and watch that stupid movie?! Joyce was right the entire time. All of this was Emily's fault and she had no one to blame but herself.

She didn't want to leave Joyce. So much of her wanted to wake her up and bring her on such a terrifying journey. But her conscience wouldn't let her do that. After all the trouble she'd caused, something as petty as needing someone to take you to the bathroom crossed a line.

And so with great reluctance, Emily separated herself from Joyce, letting her feet touch the carpet. It was so cold without her lover... Emily managed to find her pajama pants on the ground and pull them up her legs, adding one more layer of armor before needing to face the monsters.

And just before she did start to move, she saw Pip on the bed. Unlike Joyce, she hardly minded bothering Pip. Whether he was trying to sleep or not, he was now Emily's knight in shining armor, as with two arms he was securely strapped to Emily's stomach.

With baby steps she walked over to the door. Slowly she turned the handle, opening the door, little by little, feeling the cool draft enter the room.

You can do this. You can handle this.

Total silence filled the rest of the apartment, meaning at a moment's notice something could go bump in the night. She was trying to be slow and cautious, but her bladder felt ready to burst. Hopefully nothing did lash out at her, otherwise they'd be covered in her pee...

One last time she looked at Joyce sleeping in bed. She looked so at peace; comfortable, content and slumbering so sweetly. All the reasons why Emily couldn't bring herself to ask her for help.

She couldn't see too much in the hallway, nothing other than outside darkness peering through the windows down the hall from the living room.

At the same time the pressure she was feeling was unbearable. With one arm around Pip she used the other to press into her crotch, hoping that it'd help keep back the need to go.

She kept looking over her shoulder as she moved down the hall, keeping the wall close to her shoulder, just so she'd know when she was next to the bathroom. After a few more glances the door to Joyce's room was feeling awfully far away. Hopefully Pip was going to keep her safe...

Then, she turned her head back.

Someone was there.

At first she glanced over the edge of the living room she could see, thinking nothing but of the windows she could see out of. Only when she looked at the couch did she realize someone was sitting on it. The round shape of their head, covered in lumpy hair was impossible to mistake.

Her heart skipped a beat and she made a tiny noise of panic, nearly losing her balance once she saw it. There really was someone in their home! It was real, she had every reason to be scared, she needed to run, hide, scream, tell anyone that their lives were at stake! Everything about the chilling situation was paralyzing.

Just then Emily felt something warm seep into her hand, the one cupping her crotch. Just as it happened she did her best to taper it, realizing just as fast that it was her bladder that was scared the most.

No, no! Please!

Her mind was frantic now, trying to contain herself. She hadn't been spotted yet, so it had to be okay, right? She could still sneak back to the room and wake Joyce up... Doing her best to take a breath, she managed to calm down the tiniest bit.

With a plan set, she was ready to act.

In another moment of silence, the same panel windows in the living room, once black as the night, erupted into bright, blinding godrays. It was a brief flash, Emily hadn't even pieced together what she'd seen. But after the flash came a crippling, deafening, quaking boom.

BOOM.

The noise was loud and sudden, Emily shouted in pure fear as she fell to her knees. Was she being attacked? What was even happening? She was too scared to think about anything, holding onto Pip with both arms for dear life. Immediate regret was all she could feel, wishing she'd never had left the room. Wet tears rolled down her cheeks as a stream began between her legs. She could feel it pooling around her, leaking through her pajamas and soaking up in other places.

She didn't have the composure to try and stop herself, merely trying to scramble back to the room, trying not to grimace over the warm and wet clothes that clung to her skin and somehow forget about the stranger sitting in the next room over. She was alone and afraid. She desperately needed to go back. Fear itself roamed these halls and she was glad to make herself scarce. Trying not to break into a full cry, her heart thumped to a heavy beat as she managed to get herself back in the room, quickly closing the door behind herself.

What was she supposed to do? Go back to bed? Maybe then the killer wouldn't get her. But what was that boom? It scared her too much to think about it, hoping she would never encounter something so terrifying ever again.

"J-Joyce?" Emily sobbed, trying to jostle her shoulder. She may have been dripping on the carpet, which only made her feel worse, but she wanted more than anything to feel safe right then. She needed Joyce.

After enough gentle rocking, Joyce did start to stir, though the sudden break from her sleep had her up with somewhat of a start, catching Emily by surprise a little.

“Wh...what...?” Joyce, sitting up, looked to her side, seeing Emily wasn’t where she had been before, then looked to her right, finding the distraught girl next to her bedside. “Emily...? What time is it?” She looked at a digital clock. Working some more sleep out of her system, only now did she see the girl was crying. “Sweetie, what’s wrong?” She leaned over to the lamp, turning it on.

Both were blinded for a second, adjusting their eyes, but Joyce could now see the dark stains on Emily’s pajama pants, starting from the crotch and leading elsewhere down below.

“What happened? How did your pajamas get wet?” She swept her legs out from under the covers, standing up.

“I-I...” Emily had no idea what to say. She was too ruined to think sensibly or figure out what needed to be said first. The killer? The big boom? The pee in her pants? The inability to speak only added to her woes, hence why she could cry harder.

“Okay, okay, it’s alright...” Joyce pulled her in for a hug, though still somewhat confused. She happened to sniff, catching a faint scent of something embarrassing. “Did you...did you have a bad dream?”

She shook her head no while Joyce guided her around the bed. She had to rub her eyes again just to adjust. “It’s alright, you’re gonna be fine,” she tried to calm Emily, but there was little that could be done for something as severe as this... Verbally, at least.

Joyce kept a hand on her shoulder while she leaned in to kiss her. “Can you help me take of your bottoms? I don’t want you to smell like pee too...”

Emily hiccuped, nodding her head. She didn’t even need to say a word and Joyce was already figuring things out. It was a testament to why Emily felt so relieved when relying on her.

BOOM.

It sounded off again and Emily yelped, grabbing Joyce’s arm as she felt another tiny bit squirt out of her. She winced, hearing it hit the carpet.

Joyce heard it too, but she didn’t seem to mind so much.

“I-I’m sorry, it-it’s...”

“It’s okay. I’m not mad...” she stroked the top of her head. Joyce looked out the window, watching as the raindrops started to hit the glass. “It’s just some thunder, okay? It was supposed to start raining tonight...”

That’s what it was? Thunder? How could it have been? It felt so much like the word itself had been shaking! Her imagination was too excited to see it as anything less than absolute, mortal danger.

There was another thunderous boom, and it did startle Emily a little, but not so much this time.

“You wait here for me, okay? I’m gonna go get a towel.” She was already leaving for the door.

“N-no! Joyce, wait!” It was the first sentence she could muster without a complete stutter.

“Why? What’s wrong?”

“Th-there’s someone out there! I saw someone on the couch...!” The panic in her eyes was genuine, but it only made Joyce look troubled.

“I’ll go and look, okay? You wait here.”

“No, please don’t!” Emily pleaded, looking as if nothing had mattered more in her life than this one simple request. If she had anything left in her power, it was to protect Joyce, the one she loved most. She couldn’t risk losing her to some deranged killer in the apartment!

Joyce walked back over, taking Emily’s hands. “Do you trust me?”

Trust? What did trust have to do with anything right now?

“Y-yes, but--!”

“Everything is going to be perfectly fine, okay? I promise.” Even with a tired expression, Joyce looked nothing short of absolute.

“B-but...” Emily knew she could believe in Joyce, but it was like trying to accept that apples were red while you looked at a green one. It was yet again that irrational side scaring her half to death.

“Just give me two minutes, okay? Think you can count for me?”

“What if you don’t come back then?”

“Then I’ll let you start paying me rent.” She snickered. “Here, let’s start.”

“One banana...two banana...” She waited for Emily to join her, nodding her head with each count.

“T-three banana...” Emily started, then continued.

Joyce counted in unison, slowly drifting to the door and into the hall, leaving just a crack in the doorframe behind her.

Apart from peeing herself, Joyce could only think of Emily’s other worry; a stranger in the house. She’d never call Emily a liar, but she found it hard to believe someone could break into the apartment building itself unnoticed, much less their exact home on one of the highest floors...

As she walked down the hall, stepping in a lukewarm puddle ceased her pace. Looking down at what her foot had just stepped in, she could see the faint outline of liquid on the floor. Pip happened to be sitting partly in it, as well... Needless to say, it had an unfortunate distinct smell to go with it as well.

“Poor thing...” Joyce quietly whispered, her heart already lurching in pain. She really looked as if she’d been put through a scare... The movie had certainly affected her, but her imagination really seemed to have dogpiled on her, considering what was left in its wake.

Walking around the puddle of pee, she leaned her head into the living room. She scanned it for a minute, though admittedly her heart did jump a little when she saw what she thought was a head resting on the cushion. Turning up the dimmer from a nearby panel, she sighed a little, realizing what she actually saw.

There was no head, just a clumped up blanket partly rolled into a ball resting on the couch. The dark really did play tricks on you...

She turned the lights off after knocking the blanket back over, figuring that must have been the culprit. She didn’t spend long in the bathroom, finding a towel, then walked back to the room.

“Eighty-four banana...eighty-five banana...” Emily was still well-within the two minute estimate, but that didn’t mean she was any less worried. What if the monster got Joyce? Then she’d have to somehow get across the hall unnoticed to warn Frank and Mary...but then Joyce would still be in trouble...!

The opening door spooked Emily, finding herself a fresh wave of tears when she saw it was Joyce. With a towel in hand, she looked awfully accusatory.

“You’re still counting right?”

With a smile of stress being lifted off her shoulders, Emily nodded. “Eighty-seven...”

Joyce looked quite smug. “And you doubted me...” She was laying the towel out on the floor.

She was back, safe and sound, but that didn’t say anything about the person in the living room. “B-but what about the--”

“The head you saw on the couch?” Joyce waited for a response, and Emily did so.

“I was a little surprised when I saw it too,” Joyce rambled, trying to make it seem lighthearted. “Turns out it was just a blanket though. The dark really knows how to play tricks, huh?”

Just a blanket? This was feeling like the thunder example as well. Did she really blow it that far out of proportion? And she most certainly did, considering a blanket made her accidentally wet.

“Okay, let’s get those jammies off...” Joyce took her pants by the waistband and lowered them, whilst Emily felt the cool room brush her skin and the wet pants peel off her legs. It smelt like urine...

“Panties, too,” Joyce added. Since they were a dark pair to begin with, you might not think much of it by looks alone, but logic dictated that the pee had to go through them first before they could reach the pants.

“I’m sorry,” Emily meekly spoke. She’d woken up Joyce just to deal with her own mishaps. And the worst part? Not a single part of Emily regret running to Joyce. Despite the stress and busywork she caused her partner, nothing felt better than to be comforted by her.

“Don’t be. This is one of my jobs, isn’t it? Comforting you?” She ran her hand through Emily’s hair, then went for her shirt next. “Your shirt might not be wet, but we don’t want the smell to stick...”

With all her clothes piled on the towel, all that Emily had left on was a bra.

“I’m sorry, but is it okay if we break our promise a little? To be honest, I’d do better at cleaning this kind of thing up in the nursery...” Frankly, it was the truth, considering it was a surprise that Joyce had to be dealing with pee during her parent’s visit. Not that she’d ever reprimand Emily for it.

Joyce took a moment to rub her own foot on the towel before they walked into the hall. Joyce had done her best to calm Emily’s nerves, but she wasn’t going to chastise her over still insisting that Emily held her hand along the way.

They were careful this time to navigate around the puddle, Emily feeling quite crestfallen when she saw it. Now that they moved farther beyond the point where she stopped, there was a better view of the living room, though there was no supposed head on the couch this time. That somewhat put Emily’s heart at ease.

Slipping the key into the lock, with a turn of the handle the door had opened, inviting the pair into a room neither had expected to find themselves in again so soon.