

## Proper Young Woman

"This," Emma said with a forced smile, "is your room."

It wasn't a large room. Really, it was barely more than a storage closet. The place her mother had kept... Her mother...

Emma gulped, turned away from her aunt and blinked the tears away before they could form. Slow, deep breaths, she told herself. Getting upset over it wouldn't change anything. She had to control herself.

"Lots of boxes," Aunt Serena said in her beautiful, feminine voice. "Dusty. We'll have to get cleaning it right away!"

"I- Ah..." Emma turned to face her aunt. "I can't. I have homework..."

The smile didn't vanish from Aunt Serena's face, not did she show any outward sign of disapproval. But, even so, Emma couldn't help but imagine the woman's disappointment. Having come all this way, travelled across the country, and instead of resting upon her arrival, she had to *clean*?

"I'm sorry!" Emma blushed.

"Don't worry, child," Aunt Serena smiled. "I understand. This is exactly why my brother had me come here."

To clean?

Made sense. Her Dad was a lazy piece of shi-

No. That wasn't fair. It wasn't Dad's fault. He wasn't the one she was *really* upset at. He wasn't the one who'd ran off...

*Why, Mom? Why did you do it?*

"Right," Emma said, looking down at the floor.

Her smiling aunt peered at her, watched her with keen eyes. Which only made Emma blush all the brighter.

Aunt Serena was beautiful.

Elegant and refined, with flowing dark hair and red lips. She had a figure that Emma couldn't help but feel a little envious of, but didn't flaunt or show it off like some women might. Her clothing, Emma decided, was inspired by the fifties housewife look. Traditional and homely, modest.

Nothing like Emma's mother.

"I should go," Emma said, fighting down thoughts of the woman who'd abandoned her husband and daughter, decided to run off with another woman. "Homework 'n' all."

"Chin up," Aunt Serena said, voice tickling the back of Emma's skull. "Eyes forward. With a nice smile on your lips."

Emma looked up, stared at her beautiful Aunt, couldn't help but grin at how upbeat and positive Aunt Serena seemed to be. How graceful and happy. With a nod of her head, Emma left her aunt to clean her new room, went back to her own.

As much as it'd been an excuse, she really *did* have homework to not do.

Three taps on her bedroom door and, before she could even open her mouth to speak, in he walked. Not a care in the world that she might be naked or changing or anything.

"Emma," her Dad said, closing the door behind himself. "I think it's about time we talked."

She looked up at him, did her best to hide her annoyance.

The least he could do was wait for her to let him in! He didn't have to barge in, not when she was an adult woman in her own damn bedroom. What if she'd been undressing? What if she'd had a *boyfriend* over?

Sure, she didn't technically *have* a boyfriend, but still...

"Uh," Emma said, setting down her phone as her father sat down on the edge of the bed. "Sure? What do-"

"Your mother," her Dad said, voice gruff. "The *whore*, was not a good wife. She wasn't a good mother."

Emma gulped, nodded her head.

Mom hadn't been great, sure. But compared to Dad...

"I should never have married her," her father said, shaking his head. "I was young and dumb. I thought I could fix her tomboy ways and make a respectable woman out of her. But I couldn't. I failed. I failed her, and I failed you. And now she's gone. If only I'd been firmer with her, if only I'd... Well, it's too late for her now."

What was she supposed to say to that? Lips pursed, all Emma could do was listen and nod her head.

"I won't make the same mistake with you, Emma," he continued, gently patting her leg. "That's why I've invited my sister here to live with us. Serena will teach you all the things your mother couldn't. She'll show you what it means to be a proper young woman. From now on, you are to listen to her and obey her in all things. Is that clear?"

Dumbly, Emma nodded.

What in the hell was he talking about?

"Starting tomorrow," her father said, pushing himself up off her bed, "you'll be home-schooled."

"What?!"

Her father's head snapped to glare at her in an instant, eyes hot.

"Your mother sent you off to public school to be indoctrinated by their agendas. No, not any more. Everything you need to know will be taught to you by Serena. She'll fix you well, don't you worry."

"This is so dumb!" Emma grunted, tossing her cleaning cloth away. "We don't live in the dark ages any more. I shouldn't have to-"

"Clean?" Aunt Serena smiled. "What about when you move out and live alone, Mrs Independent Woman? Are you not going to have to clean and wash everything then?"

"That's different!"

"How?" Aunt Serena asked, tilting her head to one side. She stopped scrubbing the kitchen counter, focused all her attention on Emma alone.

"Because I'll *have* to do it then," Emma grumbled. "And it'll be my own messes I'm cleaning, not-"

"No," Serena shook her head. "You won't. Have to clean, that is. You'll be able to put it off, ignore the mess, do nothing about it until it's too much – then do the bare minimum cleaning required."

"I'm not-"

"Responsibility," Serena said, returning to her scrubbing, "is a woman's trait. Men? They're not programmed that way. They're driven to succeed with a competitive nature, 'win at all costs'. Ambition and responsibility are natural contradictions of each other, and so men lean one way while women lean the other."

"Not true," Emma smirked. "Mom is as ambitious as-"

"Yes," Serena interrupted. "Your mother is indeed ambitious. But she's not responsible; as evidenced by the fact that she abandoned you and her husband, ran away to go chase some romanticised lesbian dream. Even before then, she didn't take her responsibilities as a wife and mother seriously. I mean, just look at the gunk we're having to clean. Years and years of built-up grime in hard-to-reach places. Your mother, like you Emma, only ever does the bare minimum required of her."

Emma's aunt set down her cleaning cloth, walked over to where Emma stood and, bizarrely, she reached out her hands. Before Emma knew what was happening, her aunt had her in a warm, tight embrace.

"I know you're uncertain and confused, I know every instinct you have is telling you

that this is stupid and backwards. But give it a try. You've been misguided your entire life, shown an improper way of doing things by a woman who didn't know any better herself. She ran away to chase happiness, but she won't find it. Because happiness is in acceptance; accepting our responsibilities as women and doing our duty. You'll see that for yourself soon enough, I promise."

It was dumb. Stupid. It sounded so silly...

But, there was no harm in trying, right? Worse case scenario, Aunt Serena was wrong and wasted Emma's time.

Slowly, crushed in a loving embrace the likes of which her mother had never given her, Emma nodded her head. Save for an odd tickling in the back of her skull, she felt warm and comfortable.

This was amazing!

No stress. No worries. Just the task at hand and a drive to complete it. Tidy the bed, wash the dishes, scrub the toilet, clean the bathtub. One goal, one purpose, one desire.

Emma hummed to herself as she did her duties, careful not to get her pretty dress and apron too dirty.

To think, she could've been this happy all along.

If only her mother had taught her properly. If only Emma's mother hadn't been caught up in such unwomanly things as having a career and goals outside the home. She could've been happy, too. Now, she was off *pretending* to be happy somewhere with her lesbian lover.

She could never feel satisfied with herself, being with a man. So she ran from him. From everything.

Emma pitied her.

But she'd made her choice. And Emma had made hers.

She'd chosen happiness!

Following Aunt Serena's instruction and example had brought nothing but joy and certainty to Emma's life. She'd been so lost before, hadn't even know it! Now, though, she was happier than she'd ever been before. Learning all about femininity and womanhood from the most beautiful, radiant woman she'd ever met.

It was amazing. Pure and simple!

When her aunt called her to the kitchen, the women's sanctuary in the house, Emma skipped there without hesitation – a pretty smile on her lips and a bounce in her step.

"It's time," Aunt Serena said, "for your final lesson."

Emma beamed, focussed her attention on Serena entirely.

"This is, by far, the most important role a woman can have in the household. The thing that will make of break home life. Do it well, and your man will love and adore you. He'll be happier than you can imagine and..."

"In his happiness," Emma repeated the motif, "you'll find your own!"

Aunt Serena smiled.

"The first few times will be awkward, I'm sure," she went on, watching Emma closely. "But you'll get used to it. Will even learn to enjoy it. And, trust me, the man of *this* house is better equipped than most."

An odd tickling in the back of her skull. A sliver of doubt removed.

"I am, of course, speaking of 'intimate relations', as I'm sure you've guessed by now."

"You..." Emma gulped. "You want me to have sex with my father, don't you?"

"It's not what we want that's important," Serena said, smile never wavering. "All that matters is what our man wants. And my brother has expressed his desire to bed you, Emma."

"I..."

"What is our role as women, Emma?"

"To take care of our men," Emma said automatically. "To take care of their home, to be responsible for them."

"Your father wants you," Serena purred. "Just as he wanted me. Go to him, Emma. And don't fret. You'll learn to enjoy sharing his bed, just as I do. Just as your poor, foolish mother couldn't."

Slowly, Emma nodded her head.

"He's in his bedroom now," Serene said. "Best not to keep him waiting."

"Yes, Aunt Serena," Emma said with a little curtsy. "I'll go to him right away."

Emma held a hand to her bulging belly, unable to stop herself from grinning. Looking over at Aunt Serena, who likewise was massaging her own bump with a loving smile, Emma decided that – in that moment – life couldn't possibly get any better.

The ultimate role of any woman was to carry their man's child, to birth him heirs.

Her mother had failed there, as in so many other things.

Emma would not. She'd give her father the son he'd always wanted.

So fulfilled she was that, when the home phone began to ring, she began singing a little tune to its chimes. Voice soft as silk and sweet as cherries.

She picked up the phone, answered it, held it to her ear.

"Hello?" A familiar woman's voice said.

"Mother?" Emma asked, too stunned to react any other way.

"Emma? Hi sweetie. How've you been?"

Silence.

"Me and Penelope have finally found a nice place to settle down, a little community outside of-"

"What do you want?" Emma asked, trying to keep her voice as calm and serene as possible – despite the sudden boil of resentment flaring from within.

"I just wanted to let you know," her mother said defensively. "I thought you might want to visit. We both know how overbearing your father can be. If you want, you can come stay-"

Emma hung up the phone, stared at it for a moment; waiting to see if it'd ring again.

But no, her mother wasn't one for responsibility.

She wouldn't call back, not if her daughter obviously didn't want to speak to her. She'd just shrug, go back to whatever silly, unfulfilling life she was living. Not a care in the world.

Emma shook her head.

A woman like her mother could never be happy. Not truly.

She smiled, walked away from the phone, returned to cleaning her father's home, humming little tunes all the while.