

Dan's daughter had been in the bathroom for seventeen minutes now. He wouldn't have knocked if he didn't think it was serious, let alone his own bodily emergency. He hoped this wouldn't be one of the most intrusive mistakes he made as a father. After all, there are just some things fathers can't understand. He knocked anyhow.

"Lou, you okay in there?" he asked cautiously.

"Yeah, Dad. I'm just—

"Yep, you don't need to tell me, I promise, it's fine." Dan cringed at himself as he began to quickly walk away and leave his good intentions behind him. Girls shit too, he reminded himself. He should know. He was the one that changed her and trained her.

Dan didn't take five steps down the hallway before he heard, "Hey, Dad?"

He turned towards the bathroom door. "What's up, honey?" he called.

"I'm bleeding, I think I—"

"Did you cut yourself doing something?" Dan asked as he made his way back to the door.

"No."

"Do you need me to come in there and help you?" Dan's hand was gripped on the doorknob now.

"No!"

Dan's grip loosened. "Okay. You sure you don't need anything?"

"Dad... Dad, I'm *bleeding*, like..."

Dan's insides hollowed. He didn't know what to do.

"Oh!" was all he could muster before he asked, "Do you have enough toilet paper in there to, you know—"

"Yes, Dad! But it—it doesn't work like that! It never worked like that to begin with, anyhow!"

"No, I know, I know." But Dan didn't know. He leaned against the wall facing the bathroom door and ran his hands through his hair, trying to feel for a solution.

“I mean, I can run to the store really fast and grab whatever you need if you want,” Dan finally offered.

“And you’re just gonna leave me here on the freaking toilet?”

“Louise, I literally don’t know what else to do. Unless you wanna fold up some toilet paper and pad your—”

“No! God, I can’t even think straight right now.”

They both paused, waiting for one another to say the right thing.

“Fine,” Louise said, “You just make sure you lock the door on your way out.”

“Promise, honey,” Dan replied, “Hang in there, okay? We’re gonna figure this out.” He began to walk away and shouted, “I’ll just grab everything I see!”

He began to walk out of the hallway as he heard Louise yell, “We have no other option! You leave me here long enough, and my legs will fall asleep so bad I’ll become a freaking paraplegic!”

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“Lou! You still in there?” Dan shouted as he approached the bathroom door with everything he thought Louise would need.

“I don’t know where else I’d go, Dad,” Louise replied.

“Good.” He began pulling products out of the grocery bags. “Now, I have a little bit of everything because I don’t know what’s going on. If you want, I can stand out here and read out all the details and—”

“Can you just toss it all in here?”

Dan felt that wouldn’t be the best solution.

“Are you sure?” he asked. “I can help you figure this out, I’m sure. It doesn’t look all that hard from the fine print here.”

“Yeah,” Louise answered, “Please. Literally don’t read any more of the boxes. That’s really weird.”

Dan was relieved, but also a little defeated. He felt his daughter’s uncertainty through the doorknob as he cracked the door open, wide enough for his arm to wiggle through and pass the

pads and the tampons over the sink and the weight scale, along the parallel wall into what sounded like Louise's lap. He asked if everything was at least in her reach, but there was no response.

Dan closed the door and leaned against the wall opposite. He slid down the wall until he found the floor, and he hung his arms about his propped knees. He waited for anything other than the sound of Louise rummaging through what she thought would work. He didn't know if he should leave Louise to it or not.

"How are your legs feeling?" Dan asked, attempting to lighten the mood.

"They're the only parts of my body where blood literally isn't rushing to right now, Dad," Louise flippantly responded.

Dan chuckled to himself out of discomfort.

"Damn it, Dad! What's so funny!" Louise exploded.

"Nothing, honey, nothing! I'm sorry, I—"

And in the midst of his sporadic apology, Dan heard his daughter gasp for air in a way he knew carried her tears. Her breath rendered him silent. He knew Louise was crying, even though all he heard were her exasperated inhales. All he could do was sit there.

"God, Lou... I'm sorry. I wish you could tell me what I can do."

Louise sniffed before groaning to herself.

"I just wish Mom was here right now, Dad, okay? That's—that's all I want!"

Dan's heart swelled as he breathed in. "I know." It shriveled as he breathed out.

"And I'm so lost without her that my—my own body is a stranger to me! I don't understand what I'm thinking, or how I'm feeling, or how I'm supposed to be! What I'm supposed to do! And I can't even, like, talk to you about it, Dad! How can you know?"

"I can't," Dan responded. It was the only truth he could offer.

"God, we knew this was gonna happen, too, Dad." Dan heard Louise ripping open a box of something, shuffling her fingers through plastic wrappers. "And I know you can raise me the only way you know how, but you can't help me now, okay? I really just need you to stay out of this."

Louise's cries grew more audible. Dan writhed his fingers behind his neck before moving his hands to the ground and hoisting himself up.

He then grazed his finger along the bathroom door. "Louise."

There was no response.

"Call if you need me, Louise."

Dan sighed as he walked out of the hallway, into a new stage of life out of his control. But he couldn't cry about it. Louise might see, and she might not know how to handle that.