



A Mother's Love

by Chantal Bellehumeur



Eighteen-year-old Emily Jacobson left the mall's pharmacy with the urgency to go home and get her pregnancy test over with. She wanted the simple reassurance that her late period was not what she was afraid it meant. After all, she had always been irregular. Just because she had not menstruated in two months, it did not mean that she was with child. And just because she felt the need to urinate often didn't mean anything either because she had always been that way. She had been feeling very tired these days, but was studying a lot for her upcoming exams. She had not suddenly become sick in the morning lately so...

As she went through various logical explanations in her head, not paying much attention to her surroundings, Emily ran right into a girl friend from school. She realised that her recent purchase could be slightly seen through the thin white plastic bag the male cashier had put it in, and she casually hid it behind her back as she quickly came up with an excuse not to stay and chat with Natalie.

Natalie had a big mouth, and the last thing Emily wanted was for her to tell everyone that she suspected Emily was pregnant. She knew that people would talk behind her back, whisper about her when she was near, and judge her. They had all done it the year before with another female student who got knocked up.

Emily rushed through the crowded mall feeling dizzy. She was sweating despite the fact that it was cold inside. Her head was spinning like crazy as she passed by young children accompanied by adults. Some were pleasantly laughing together while others angrily screamed and shouted at each other. Emily was glad when she finally reached the exit because she could finally get some fresh air.

The heat of the early June sun hit Emily, and she automatically felt the need to sit down. She rested on a nearby hard wooden bench for a few seconds, hid her pregnancy test inside her backpack like she should have done in the first place, drank some lukewarm water from her metallic water bottle, and continued on her way.

The downtown condo Emily lived in with her forty-two-year-old mother was just a ten-minute walk away, but it felt a lot further. She considered taking the bus, but it would not bring her very far as she would have to get off at the next stop. The wait would be longer than the bus ride, and standing in one place did not appeal to Emily. There was no breeze to cool herself off, and she felt like she was going to pass out at any moment now. She needed to be back in an air-conditioned place fast.

When Emily finally made it home, she nervously locked herself inside the bathroom and carefully read the instructions written on the box of her pregnancy test. She took a deep breath as she pulled the white plastic stick out. Her hands were shaking. Emily exhaled slowly and did what she needed to do. When she was done, she placed the semi-wet pregnancy test on

the counter and waited. It was the longest two minutes of her life. When she saw the results, Emily's heart started pumping faster. "No," she whispered to herself. "No, no, no no..." she continued, while pacing around the small room with the pregnancy test still in her right hand. She looked at it a few times as though one of the thin blue lines would magically disappear. She refused to believe that she was pregnant. She did not want to disappoint her parents.

The thought of having to give her newly divorced parents the bad news made Emily burst into tears. She knew that they would not be happy with her, and she would have to go through the motions of announcing her unwanted pregnancy twice. "Maybe they don't have to know," she thought. For a brief second, Emily considered having an abortion. But, deep down she knew that she would never be able to go through with it. She loved kids too much, and was a very emotional person. She did not judge those who chose that path, but it wasn't the one for her.

Needing to calm herself down, Emily ran herself a bath and soaked in the hot water until it became cold and her skin was all pruned. Then it was time to face reality.

Emily called her twenty-one-year-old boyfriend William Mancini and told him that he was going to be a father. He actually took the news quite well, which was a big relief for Emily. She had heard so many enraging stories about guys abandoning their pregnant girlfriends. William was different though. He reassured Emily that he would be there for her, no matter what she decided to do. He even encouraged her to have the baby and told her that she could move in with him so that they could both share the parenting responsibilities.

Emily had not planned on moving on her own until after she graduated from University, but she had money set aside in a savings account and a part time job that could help pay her share of rent, bills, and groceries, plus all the baby stuff when the time came. William currently had a roommate, whom Emily got along with very well, so having her move in would mean splitting everything three ways.

Although her conversation with William had gone very well, Emily wasn't anywhere ready to tell her mother she was pregnant yet. Mrs. Jacobson was going to arrive from work soon. So, as soon as Emily got off the phone with William, she put the evidence of her pregnancy in the condo building's garbage room to avoid having her mother see it.

She then booked an appointment with her family doctor. Despite William's support, Emily was still kind of hoping that the pregnancy test results were wrong. But, her doctor confirmed that she was indeed pregnant. She was pretty far along too.

Dr. Godbout asked Emily in a scolding tone why she had never told her that she was sexu-

ally active. "I would have prescribed a birth control pill for you," she added. Emily just shrugged, avoiding eye contact with the woman who was giving her an unexpected lecture. Emily knew that she had not been very smart. She and William had not used any form of contraceptive even if they were both fully aware of the possible consequences. "I didn't think it would happen to me," she thought to herself. At least Emily was not showing any signs of having an STD. Just to be sure though, Dr. Godbout sent her to do some tests. They all came out negative.

For the next couple of days, Emily secretly spoke to a friendly female counsellor from the local CLSC about her pregnancy. She was given helpful pamphlets to consult as well as book recommendations. She was going to borrow some of the books from the library, but was afraid of being seen with them. She was so ashamed that she had not even told any of her friends yet. She didn't plan of telling any of them until after graduation.

Emily didn't think that she would ever be ready to tell her parents that they were going to be young grandparents, but she could not keep her unborn child a secret forever. When Mrs. Jacobson came home from work that night, Emily told her petite mother that she needed to talk to her. "Why? Are you pregnant?" Mrs. Jacobson joked. Emily's silence and facial expression made her mother faint.

When Mrs. Jacobson came back to consciousness, Emily reassured her mother right away that her and William were going to take care of the baby on their own and were not expecting her to take on the responsibility in any way. Although Mrs. Jacobson knew that her daughter would be a very good mother, she was still worried and a bit sad for Emily.

After working very hard in school and focussing on her studies, Emily had received a scholarship and had been accepted in the biology programme at Concordia University. She was supposed to start her classes in the fall. Emily had such potential. Mrs. Jacobson did not want her daughter to throw away her dreams. She felt that Emily and William were still very young to be starting a family.

Mrs. Jacobson liked William as a person and she knew that he had made her daughter very happy during the four months that they had been together, but she felt that their love for each other had been premature. Plus, she did not feel that William was financially stable enough to be able to support Emily and a baby. He had been jumping from one programme to another at McGill University, not really sure what he wanted to do with his life. He never kept a job for very long because he got bored easily and preferred to get work through a temp agency. Mrs. Jacobson knew that Emily had lent William a large sum of money once so that he could pay his rent on time, and she didn't think that he had ever paid her daughter back.

Emily was aware that things would not be easy; not just for her but for William as well. He

liked to go out a lot so he would definitely have to limit his outings. Emily had never been much of a party girl, but knew that she would have to change her lifestyle too. She would not be able to hang out with her friends as much. Her baby would have to be her number one priority and she would have to make William understand that he had to be more careful with his money. She would have to convince him to stop smoking and not drink so much without sounding like she was his mother.

The thought of William's mother gave Emily the chills. She was nice when things went her way, but was not an easy woman to talk to. She liked to be in control at all times, and that included meddling in her four sons lives. Emily had always felt that Mrs. Mancini disliked her even though she had always been very polite during her visits. She didn't smoke or do drugs and she barely ever touched alcohol. She had always done well in school and had many artistic talents, but never acted like she was better than anyone. She wasn't high maintenance either. Her parents would have never allowed her to have such attitude. She was a down to earth girl who was liked by everyone, except her boyfriend's mother it would seem.

William's father was a bit more reasonable than his wife of thirty one years, but Emily still did not want to be present when William gave his religious parents, both from Rome, the news about her pregnancy. Telling her own Catholic parents was hard enough. Besides, since neither Emily nor William owned a vehicle, they would have to get picked up as usual and then be stranded in Vaudreuil until they could get a ride back to the city. The trains from Montreal to Vaudreuil and vice versa did not pass very often. Trips had to be perfectly timed. Plans to go to Vaudreuil had to be made ahead of time.

Emily needed to start re-planning her life.

For several days in a row, Emily sat alone on a wooden bench near the park after school. She pretended to read a romance novel, but was really watching other children play. She also observed the interactions between each child and their parents or caregivers.

Although Emily would have preferred to wait until she graduated from University to have a baby, she was slowly starting to like the idea of being a mom. She had done a lot of babysitting in the past and was confident that she had what it took to properly raise a child. She just hoped that she didn't end up with a complete brat. Her parents had often told her they wished she ended up with a child just like her when she didn't behave. She did not know what kind of child William had been, but she imagined that he probably acted like a little devil most of the time. He had a bad-boy attitude as it was.

Emily tried to imagine what her child would be like. She also tried to picture what it would look like. She hoped that if it was a boy he would have his father's tanned skin and muscular structure, and that if it was a girl she would have her and her mother's delicate body type,

curly auburn hair, and dark green eyes.

William accompanied Emily to her first ultrasound. During that time, they both saw their tiny foetus move and heard its heart beat. It was amazing!

The nice female technician printed a couple of black and white pictures on glossy paper for Emily and William to keep. A sideways silhouette of the entire body could be seen. The young couple could faintly see the head, including a tiny nose that stuck out. The little stick like arms were bent and the foetus appeared to be sucking its right thumb. They could also see the bent legs and little feet. There was no way of telling if the baby was a boy or a girl, but neither William nor Emily really cared about that.

Emily got the sudden urge to share the news with her best friend Katy. She trusted her not to tell anyone. Katy didn't know how to react at first, but when Emily said that she was happy Katy congratulated her.

Despite her newly found happiness, Emily continued to stall to tell her father about the unplanned pregnancy. She was terrified of his reaction. As an excellent defence lawyer and partner in a well known firm, Mr. Jacobson's natural severe tone of voice and facial expressions kind of scared Emily. Plus, his massive body structure and high posture was intimidating. Most importantly though, Mr. Jacobson had never approved of William because he felt that he was not responsible and had told Emily on several occasions that she deserved better. A few months back, she had gotten into an argument with her father about her boyfriend and had dramatically stormed out of the house. She had moved in with her mother shortly after, and had only seen her father twice since.

Emily knew in her heart that she was welcome back at her father's any time. Her old room was still hers and most of her things, including her queen sized bed, were there. She slept on an old springy hide-a-bed at her mother's place because there was not much space for a full bed in the spare bedroom. Her mother was still not settled in, and wasn't making much money doing reception work. She refused Mr. Jacobson's alimony because she wanted to prove that she could still make it on her own. She was a very intelligent woman and had obtained a good paying job within the provincial government before getting married.

Mr. Jacobson already made a lot of money when he got married, so when Emily came along he had convinced his wife to stop working. She was already doing so much at home, and Mr. Jacobson felt that she did not need to tire herself out. He was perfectly fine with her talking care of all the cooking and cleaning without tiring herself out with a stressful job on top of it all. They could have hired a maid, a cook, and even a nanny for Emily, but Mrs. Jacobson had always preferred to take care of things herself. She had not needed to go back in the work field until her divorce. Mrs. Jacobson had taken a few courses to catch up on technology.

William made use of the internet to tell his parents about Emily's pregnancy. He scanned one of the ultrasound pictures and sent it along with a brief message. He avoided his enraged parents afterwards, not going to Sunday dinners or even taking their phone calls. Emily thought that was rather cowardly of him, but understood how he felt. She thought about just sending her father an e-mail, but he deserved better than that.

Finally, Emily got the nerve to call her dad and tell him that she wanted to come over because she had something very important to discuss with him. He told his precious angel when he was free and Emily agreed to see him on the first evening available.

When the day came to visit her father, Emily got extremely nervous. She considered cancelling on him and just quickly giving him the news over the phone. But, she took the metro and the bus to his big house in Westmount and waited for him to arrive from the office. She went through the different ways she could give him the news over and over again in her head. Unfortunately, he called and told her that he would have to work late and could not see her that night. They would have to talk some other time. Again, Emily thought about telling her daddy dearest she was pregnant over the phone, but her throat became dry and she lost her voice.

When Emily was finally able to see her father, she blurted out that she was pregnant. Mr. Jacobson told her that he was not surprised, making Emily feel like a whore. She knew that a lot of guys found her attractive and she had always been pretty flirtatious, but William had been her first and only sex partner.

Mr. Jacobson told his daughter that he had raised her with good moral values, and blamed himself for not being stricter with her. Emily tried to tell her father that he had indeed taught her well and that she had simply made a mistake, but Mr. Jacobson would not listen. He slowly got up from the oval kitchen table and went outside to sit on the wooden steps of the large front porch.

Emily cried by herself for a while. Once she was out of tears, she joined her father outside. She wanted her daddy to forgive her and tell her that she was still his princess. Emily tried to converse with him, but he seemed to be ignoring her. Even when Emily sat right next to him, he kept quiet. He did not even look at Emily.

Katy had always been there for Emily, but today she was not home when Emily rang the doorbell next to her father's home. Fighting back more tears, Emily took the bus and metro back to her mother's condo. Lucky for her, Mrs. Jacobson had gotten over the initial shock of her young daughter's pregnancy and was able to bring her much comfort.

In time, Mr. Jacobson accepted Emily's pregnancy too, and welcomed the fact that he was going to be a grandfather. He even accepted William as a new member of the family, and had given his full approval when William had asked him if he could have Emily's hand in marriage.

William proposed to Emily on her nineteenth birthday by giving her a red candy ring pop and telling her that he was going to save to get her a real ring. His next move was to place a small light pink heart-shaped candy with the fuchsia words *will you* written on it next to a little black velvety box. Inside the box was a gold ring with a tiny white sparkling stone. It wasn't a diamond, but Emily loved it for what it meant.

Most of Emily's friends thought that the engagement was a bit early in the relationship, and Emily ended up telling them about the pregnancy. She made it clear that she would have married William even without the baby on the way. This was just a good excuse to do so. To Emily's surprise, her friends embraced her and offered their help for when the baby would be born. They all accepted the unborn child into their lives.

William's strict parents became accepting of the pregnancy as well. They eventually stopped putting pressure on William and Emily to get married before the birth of their baby to avoid having a "bastard" child.

To help out, the Mancinis decided to buy a nice wooden bedroom set complete with a crib, a dresser, and a change table for the baby as an early present. The Jacobson's pitched in. Emily and William were extremely grateful because they had looked at the prices of baby furniture, among other things, and found it ridiculously expensive. They had been lucky in finding a playpen, a high chair, as well as a big stroller, all in very good condition, at the thrift store.

Emily moved in the area of Cote-St-Luc with William and her new roommate Sam on a rainy day. William rented a small Uhaul truck for her, and loaded it with the few items Emily owned on the Saturday morning of July fourteenth. Emily had been forbidden to do any lifting and felt pretty useless watching William and Sam unload the truck. At least she was allowed to unpack her belongings. She had brought along some of the childhood toys that her parents had kept in storage for her, and got nostalgic looking at them.

One of the toys made Emily really laugh. It was a small puppet-doll she remembered being quite attached too, but that everyone else found hideous. Its head looked like a potato stuffed within a stocking and it had tiny little eyes, a weird looking nose, and a closed mouth all sown onto it with thin black thread. Emily put her right hand inside its pink dress and began to play with it. William walked in and asked her in a not so polite way what she was holding. Emily began to cry like a child, and William soon regretted his question. He quickly apologized,

and when Emily had calmed down he left her to go finish unloading the truck with Sam.

To thank the boys for their hard work, Emily cooked them both dinner. Or at least, she tried to. The hamburgers she attempted to make using a frying pan on one of the burners of the gas stove ended up turning the smoke alarm on. Emily burnt the meat pretty badly and burst into tears because of her failure. William and Sam tried so hard not to laugh because they both knew how hormonal Emily was right now, but eventually they cracked up anyways. Emily joined in. Pizza was ordered, and Emily made a mental note to ask her mother to give her cooking lessons.

Mrs. Jacobson had cried to see her only child leave the nest. The divorce had been very hard on her because she had been a housewife for almost twenty years. But most importantly, she had been a full time mom. She had raised Emily almost on her own, and had always been there to make Emily her breakfast in the morning and greet her with a home made snack when she came home from school. That had not changed when Emily became a teenager. Her and Emily were very close.

Although it had been her decision to leave her husband, mainly because he was rarely ever home, Mrs Jacobson had never wanted to leave Emily behind. She had originally asked Emily to move in with her, but Emily wanted to stay in the house she had always lived in. She liked the fact that Katy lived right next door. They were like sisters. Emily never realised how much that decision hurt her mother.

Just like Mrs. Jacobson previously had a hard time getting used to living on her own, it took a while for Emily to adjust to living with William and sharing a bedroom with him. They did not always get along. Sometimes, Emily even fought with Sam. Emily was getting moodier, making it very hard for William to quit smoking like he promised. His cigarettes were the only things that could calm his agitated nerves. Whenever he was out of his cancer sticks, as Emily called them, he would simply ask Sam for one. His friend never refused despite Emily's obvious disapproval. Both chain smokers had tried the patch and even the nicotine gum in the past, but that had not helped with the unhealthy cravings.

While William and Sam constantly fought the urge to smoke, Emily started wanting the weirdest foods; things she didn't even like before. She prepared the most random dishes, but did not always end up eating what she made.

Emily's morning sickness hit her later than normal. She did not understand why it was called that way since she didn't only feel like throwing up in the morning. She was sick at random times of the day.

Emily was given full time hours for the summer, but ended up getting fired from her cashier

job at the clothing boutique because she would often be sick in front of potential customers. Her male employer knew that it was something she could not control, but randomly throwing up inside a garbage can every so often made people leave the store and that was not good for business. Plus, Emily had started taking too many bathroom breaks and needed to eat all the time.

After she got the bad news over the phone, Emily instantly began to cry. She kept repeating to William that it was unfair. Emily wondered how she was going to pay her share of things and save money for the baby now, not wanting to ask her father for financial help. She knew that he would not refuse to help her if she really needed it, but she preferred to try and do things on her own like she had been taught. Mr. Jacobson had spoiled Emily as a child, but had never given his daughter every single thing she wanted because he wanted her to fully appreciate what she was given as well as all the outings they did together and family trips they took. He taught her the importance of saving money, starting with her weekly allowance, and how to budget when she got old enough to understand what it meant. Emily had never been a big spender. She always thought twice before making a purchase.

William referred Emily to his temp agency, who helped her obtain a full time office job as an administrative assistant. It was much better for her than standing on her feet all day long. She got exhausted pretty fast these days, and her legs could barely support her for extended periods of time. Plus, her back hurt. So, Emily now took the loss of her previous job as a blessing in disguise.

When Autumn came, Emily did not start University as planned. She had considered taking correspondence classes, but was beginning to have trouble concentrating and felt too exhausted after work. She slept every chance she got. Emily felt it best to delay her studies. William postponed his studies as well and started working full time in a warehouse. He did his best to take care of Emily when he was home.

Emily's body was changing and she no longer saw herself as the attractive young woman that she was. She disliked not being able to fit into her favourite clothes, and complained that her new maternity outfits were not fashionable. William would tell her every single day that she was beautiful, but she did not believe him. She was starting to feel like a whale; especially when she moved around in bed.

Because her stomach was becoming bigger, Emily was starting to have difficulty bending over to do simple things like shave her legs or put on socks. She didn't like having to ask William for help but did not have much choice.

Despite everything, Emily rather enjoyed being pregnant. She liked feeling her growing baby move inside her. The baby was often active when Emily took a bath because of the heat.

Sometimes the baby would move around when Emily placed a mug with a warm beverage inside it on her naked stomach. That made both her and William laugh. Every so often, Emily could see a handprint or a foot print as the baby pressed hard on her stomach.

It was becoming hard for Emily to get some decent sleep because the baby already had a different schedule than her. It moved a lot at night for some reason. But, Emily loved her unborn child none-the-less. She would talk to the baby and sing songs in a soft voice. She encouraged William to do the same. They started reading children stories together before going to bed. Sometimes the baby would respond with a light punch or a kick.

Mrs. Jacobson organized a fun baby shower for her daughter. Emily was surprised to see most of her and William's female relative and close female friends at her mother's condo when she came back from doing some shopping with her mother. They played games, shared stories, and ate some good food prepared by Mrs. Jacobson; she had always been an excellent cook and loved to entertain so the food on all her platters were not only delicious but nicely presented as well. Mrs. Jacobson had baked a vanilla flavoured cake in a pan shaped like a stork holding a baby in a blanket, which she decorated with colourful icing.

Emily received a lot of nice presents. Not many articles of clothing had been given though, because she kept the sex of her baby a secret. Only William knew because he had been present during Emily's second ultra sound. The technician announced the sex, having gotten confirmation that the parents-to-be wanted to know. That day, Emily and William started discussing possible names for the baby. There was only one name they both liked.

About three weeks before her due date, on a nice December day, Emily went shopping at a thrift store with William for some baby clothes because there was a fifty percent off sale. While she was collecting cute articles, Emily began to feel some light contractions. That was normal though. She was used to random contractions now and ignored them as best as she could. William however, was always worried that Emily's water would break prematurely.

When Emily and William left the store, the temperature was still as mild as it had been when they had left the apartment. A few snow flakes were lightly falling from the dark sky. They were the first of the year and Emily was happy to see that they might actually have a white Christmas.

The couple stopped for a quick bite to eat on the way home because Emily was having severe hunger pains. She was also craving poutine. She knew it was not the best thing to eat, but felt that she needed it anyways. William knew better than to try and stop her. She had sent him to get random foods at the store or restaurant several times during her pregnancy. Even though Emily was often too nauseated to eat the food William brought back for her, he absolutely had to get it because Emily demanded it.

Back home, Emily's contractions were becoming more frequent and a lot more painful. William tried to help Emily relax by giving her a shoulder massage but the pain became too much for Emily. "I think it's time," she told William. At that moment, the phone rang. It was Mr. Jacobson calling to check up on his daughter. William immediately told his soon to be father-in-law that Emily thought the baby was coming. "But she's not due until after New Years!" Mr. Jacobson replied. "I guess the little one didn't want to miss out on all the holiday fun," William nervously joked.

"Your father is on his way," William told Emily after hanging up the cordless phone. Mr. Jacobson arrived shortly after. By then, Emily was already dressed in her long white winter coat. She had been unable to make use of the metal zipper for quite some time now so it was purposely left open.

William helped Emily tie the laces of her black boots and picked up the small overnight bag as well as the baby car seat she had left by her side. They both went outside, surprised by the drastic change in the weather, and got into Mr. Jacobson's BMW. The white car was barely visible in the blizzard.

Mr. Jacobson drove as fast as he legally could on the slippery roads to the hospital. He almost got into an accident, but managed to press hard on the breaks just on time when he saw the blue car ahead suddenly swerve sideways and come to a complete stop.

Emily was in too much pain to pay attention to where they were going once they started rolling again, so when her father dropped her and William off in front of the entrance to go find parking she did not realise that they were at the wrong place. She went in, looked around, and with a confused look asked the plump security guard on duty where they were. "The Jewish general hospital," he kindly answered. Emily wanted to give birth at St-Justine, which was further down on the same street. William tried to convince her to stay where they were but Emily would not listen. All the paperwork was already done at the other hospital and she really liked her doctor.

William tried to call Mr. Jacobson on his cell but there was no answer. Emily gave out a cry of pain and the security guard offered her a wheel chair. Emily sat down, but still insisted they go to St-Justine. William tried Mr. Jacobson's cell again, but there was still no answer. He left a message. Emily gave a few more cries of pain, leaving William in a state of panic.

William's cell phone rang. It was just Sam calling to see if he could eat the leftovers in the fridge. After William ended his short conversation, he noticed that he had a new voice mail. Mr. Jacobson had called to say that he had been unable to find parking in the hospital's lot, but had managed to park on the side of the street a few blocks away. He had put some

change in a parking meter and was now on his way back to the hospital.

Emily wanted an update on when they would be leaving to go to St-Justine. William called Mr. Jacobson but he wasn't picking up. He arrived shortly after and was confused to see William and Emily still in the hospital entrance. William quickly explained the situation. "This was the closest hospital honey," Mr. Jacobson told his daughter in the most calming and soothing voice he could manage. "They will let you give birth here." Emily burst into tears, stating that she wanted to go to St-Justine.

Mr. Jacobson did not want to argue with Emily. So, he went back into the storm to get his car, which was already completely covered in snow. He pulled in front of the hospital to let his daughter and William in. Mr. Jacobson then drove to St-Justine and restarted the process of dropping off his passengers and finding parking. Luckily, he found a place right away because somebody was just leaving.

By the time Mr. Jacobson arrived in the maternity ward on the sixth floor, Emily was already waiting in a room wearing a large blue hospital gown. William was waiting by her side looking puzzled. When he saw Mr. Jacobson, he informed him that Emily's contractions had suddenly stopped.

The male doctor on duty suggested that Emily walk up and down one of the flights of stairs a few times to see if it would start the contractions again. Nothing happened. It no longer looked like Emily and William were going to spend the holidays as new parents. Emily was sent home with an order to go on maternity leave early anyways.

For three long weeks, Emily stayed indoors. She only left the apartment to go to her regular doctor appointments. William always came with her. For the most part, Emily kept herself busy doing crafts while listening to festive music. Some of the things she did were for the baby, but she also made a lot of Christmas decorations. She and William had put up a real pine tree in the living room and it seriously lacked ornaments.

Emily would have spent some of her free time decorating the baby's room, but Sam was still occupying the small room of the apartment. He only planned on moving out sometime after the baby was born.

The crib had been temporarily installed in Emily and William's big bedroom, right next to their double bed. Surprisingly, they managed to fit the rest of the baby furniture in the same space. It was a tight squeeze but it worked.

Emily was able to find a good place for all the baby items and made sure that they were not missing anything. She made William buy more bags of diapers and baby wipes than neces-

sary, but she felt that it was better to have too much than to run out at an inconvenient time.

When her due date came, Emily was showing no signs that the baby was ready to come out. During her next doctor appointment, she was given a date to be induced.

On the early Monday morning of January fourteenth, Emily and William got ready to go to the hospital. William took a picture of Emily with his digital camera right before she put on her coat. Her stomach was huge.

Because Mr. Jacobson had to be in court that day, William had arranged a taxi to drive him and Emily to their destination. The old male chauffeur arrived on time.

William helped Emily slowly walk to the taxi, fearful that she might slip on the ice that had formed overnight. He then opened the back door for her like he always did, and made sure that she was buckled in before shutting the door and making his way to the other side of the car to get in.

"St-Justine hospital please," William calmly told the driver when he asked where to go. Emily held her covered stomach with both of her gloved hands and looked at William with a big smile on her face. They were soon going to see what their child looked like.

Emily was very anxious, but also scared. She was mostly afraid of the pain that she would have to endure. She hoped that her labour would not last long, and that everything would go well.

At the hospital, Emily stayed calm. She tried to hide her fear but William could see right through her. "You're going to do just fine," he told her.

When Emily was lying on the hospital bed, William was starting to look just as nervous as her. He took her right hand into his own and told her again that she would do just fine. It sounded more like he was trying to reassure himself rather than Emily.

A young looking female nurse soon came to examine Emily. Then came Dr. Darwin, a tall woman in her mid-forties who never seemed to stop smiling. She had a way about her that was always reassuring. Emily felt very comfortable with her.

Emily's water was broken with a tool that looked like a very long knitting needle to William's eyes. He was glad that Emily had not seen it.

Soon, Emily started to feel contractions. They were tolerable at first, but became stronger. Emily had already decided that she was going to get an epidural, so she asked how long it

took for the medication to kick in. She was informed that it took about twenty minutes. Emily was also told that it was too early for an epidural. She had only asked so that she would know when to request it.

Emily did her best to try and ignore the growing pain. She focused on her breathing, just like she had been taught in her prenatal classes. William wanted to encourage Emily, but she gave him a nasty look that told him to shut up.

William attempted to hold Emily's right hand again, but she squeezed it so hard during one of her contractions that he regretted his move. He understood to just leave her alone and accept all the curses she directed at him. William had never heard her swear so much.

For over six hours, Emily endured pain. She once complained that she was hungry and was given a cup of ice cubes to chew on. That did not impress her.

When Emily felt that she could no longer bear the sensation of her insides being torn, she demanded her epidural. Emily flipped out when she was told that a doctor could only see her twenty minutes. She would rather die than have to wait twenty minutes for her injection and another twenty for it to kick in. "I can't wait forty minutes!!!," she shouted. "I need drugs NOW!!!"

For the first time ever, William was actually afraid of Emily. He was also very concerned and wished that he could instantly take away Emily's pain. "Isn't there something you can give her?"

A dose of Morphine was given to Emily, who soon calmed down a bit. A doctor came in later than planned for her epidural. When William saw the big needle, he almost fainted. Emily did not see the needle, but she would not have refused the injection even if she had seen its size. She really did not want to feel the baby when it came out.

Emily soon lost the feeling in her lower body. Her toes, feet, legs, and stomach felt completely numb.

When it was time for Emily to start pushing, William stood by the doctor to fully witness the birth of his child. He was about to videotape the whole thing, but Emily yelled at him not to.

Emily had to be told when she was getting contractions because she could not feel a thing. She pushed a lot harder than she should have, eager to get the birthing process over with.

One hour later, Emily was about to get an episiotomy but she ended up tearing naturally. Thanks to the continuous effects of the epidural, she had no knowledge that this even hap-

pened. But, William saw all the blood come out of Emily and had to look away. He could not watch anymore.

Emily soon gave birth to a healthy baby girl. As soon as she heard her daughter's first cry, Emily felt relieved. She was exhausted.

But her labour was not over. She still had to push out the placenta. Emily felt like crying. She really wanted to rest now. She also desperately wanted to see and hold her newborn.

William cut the umbilical cord. The crying baby was weighed; 8.2 pounds. The blood was then cleaned off and the bald baby was wrapped in a soft white blanket before being placed in her mother's welcoming arms.

Emily looked into her daughter's pale blue eyes and let some joyful tears roll down her cheeks. She could not remember a day in her own life where she had been happier. William felt the same.

The proud new parents looked at each other and agreed on a name; Nadia.

Nadia was soon taken away from Emily. The placenta had to come out. Emily was then given stitches because of her previous tear. She still could not feel anything from the waist down, so that was good.

Emily was eventually taken to a semi-private room. She politely asked for some food and was given two plain brown toasts. Unfortunately, Emily was unable to stomach them. She threw up after only four bites.

The new mother Emily shared her room with started breastfeeding her newborn boy. A nurse who obviously loved her job very much soon came in with Nadia, now wearing a hospital bracelet around her tiny ankle, and helped Emily do the same. It took a few tries for Nadia's small mouth to latch on properly to Emily's left nipple. Once she started suckling though, Nadia looked like she was never going to let go. She seemed to be really enjoying her liquid meal. Emily loved watching Nadia and hearing the little swallowing sounds she was making. The mother-daughter bond was absolutely wonderful.

While Nadia was drinking her mother's warm milk, her tiny hand rested on Emily's swollen left breast. She looked up at her mother as though to say thank you; thank you not only for the food, but also for the life she had been given.

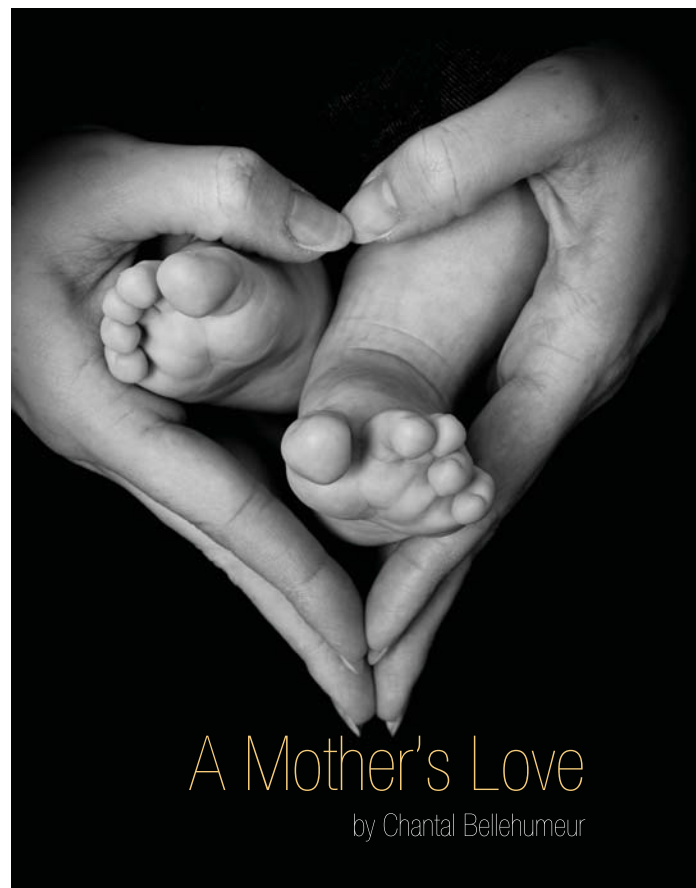
When the nurse asked Emily if she wanted more kids, Emily answered yes right away without even having to think about it. Despite everything she had gone through and all the challenges

she knew were coming, Emily could already see that being a mother was one of the most special things in the world.

Emily already wanted what was best for Nadia and planned on teaching her daughter everything her own good parents had taught her. Also, she now understood her mother for always saying she loved her, even when she was being bad. A mother's love is unconditional.

Chantal Bellehumeur (2013)

(This short story is dedicated to my mother as well as my son Aidan. I love you both!)



To find out more about Chantal Bellehumeur's work or to purchase one of her novels, please visit www.Amazon.ca (If you enjoyed reading this story, you might also like "Veronica's Soap Opera Life", "Veronica's Attempt at Romance" and "Veronica's Happily Ever After".)

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