

Emily's Birthday Getaway

By Chantal Bellehumeur





n the evening of August second, two days before Emily's twentieth birthday, her husband William Mancini came home from work and told her that he was taking her out for dinner rather than order the usual peperoni pizza with extra cheese like he did every Friday. He would not take no for an answer, even if Emily complained about being really tired.

Their six and a half month old daughter Nadia had been fussy most of the day because she had started teething recently. On top of that, Emily had found her daughter playing with the nasty contents of her diaper after her afternoon nap and ended up having to clean a very sticky and stinky mess. Emily didn't feel energetic enough to go out.

"We can go out tomorrow or on my real birthday," she suggested in a yawn. Nadia was starting to fuss again so Emily gave her a blue teething ring from the freezer. The baby threw it on the ground. Emily was running out of patience.

William took Nadia and continued to insist that they go out tonight. Emily was starting to suspect something, but kept it to herself. She finally went to take a quick shower, put a black clip in her wet curly auburn hair, and slipped on a simple black spaghetti strap dress over black lacy undergarments. Emily had a nice figure that made heads turn even when she was in her "mommy clothes," as she called them. She still liked to wear a sexy bra and underwear set when she went out because it made her feel good.

While Emily was getting prepared, William got Nadia ready. She needed a diaper change and a fresh set of clothes.

Emily found her little princess wearing a cute flowery summer dress with a matching hat. Emily did her best to entertain her baby lotion scented daughter while William took a quick shower of his own. He came out of the bathroom wearing a pair of blue jeans and a tight black shirt that showed off his arm muscles.

When William was ready to go, he took Nadia to put her white sandals on. Emily tried not to laugh at the sight of Nadia giving William a hard time. The baby would not stop moving around.

Emily slipped her cheap dollar store flip-flops on her delicate feet, but grabbed a nice pair of zebra print high heel sandals to wear at the restaurant. It matched the purse she used for special outings, which she now filled with her wallet, keys, and a stick of strawberry lip balm.

William finally managed to buckle both of Nadia's shoes and strap the baby inside her stroller, which already had her diaper bag in it. The couple were on their way.

They walked to Emily's favourite Italian restaurant, which took fifteen minutes.

The terrace was completely packed and Emily was a bit disappointed. She liked to eat outdoors

when it was nice and warm out. She loved being in the sun.

When they got inside the restaurant, Emily saw that both her and William's families as well as Emily's closest friends were all sitting together at a row of joint tables. It was decorated with a centrepiece tied to a few floating helium balloons that had the giant number twenty on them. "Surprise!" they all shouted.

Emily was very happy to have listened to William. He had obviously gone through a lot of trouble to organize her birthday party, and she would have felt really bad if she had argued with him about coming to the restaurant.

While William placed Nadia in a highchair that was already brought to one of the table ends for her, Emily gave everyone individual hugs. She was then told to sit next to her best friend Katy Smith, right beside a pile of sealed envelopes and a flat gift. Emily did as she was told, then switched shoes. Katy laughed at her, yet she was no better when it came to collecting footwear.

Like Emily, eighteen year old Katy had shoe storage units under her bed. The girls often borrowed each other's shoes since they wore the same size. Katy was bigger boned and therefore a bit meatier than Emily so the friends never exchanged clothes, but they had the same taste in fashion. Tonight, Katy wore a pair of blue sandals with thick high heels to match a short sleeved dress that she had made herself. She had left her long black hair loose.

Katy took a sip of her strawberry daiquiri. Most people had already ordered beverages. "What do you want to drink?" Katy asked Emily. She gave her friend the cocktail menu to make her choice from. A couple of weeks ago Emily might have declined an alcoholic beverage, but she had stopped breastfeeding Nadia the second she saw the hint of her first tooth because she was afraid of getting bitten. Pina Colada was Emily's favourite, so that is what she ended up asking for.

Everyone soon placed their meal orders. William put a cloth bib on Nadia and started feeding her some baby food; mashed peas and carrots as well as chicken. Nadia could hold her plastic spoon herself, but was very slow and messy at eating. William often preferred to just do it himself.

While everyone waited for their plates, Emily opened up her birthday gift and numerous cards. She received a new scrapbook, a couple of gift cards to her favourite fast food restaurants, a lottery ticket, checks from both of her divorced parents, another check from the Mancinis, and some US money. Emily thought that was a bit strange, but she wasn't about to complain about receiving money.

Katy had insisted that Emily open her envelope last. Inside her hand made birthday card were two tickets for the Broadway Mama Mia! Emily got overly excited about that fact because she had been wanting to see the popular musical for a while.

“I didn’t know the show was coming to Montreal,” she said after calming down. “It’s not,” Katy responded with a big smile. “We’re going to New York city!”

Emily didn’t know how to react at first. She couldn’t afford to go on a trip right now, and knew that Katy didn’t have that much money either since she was a University student. “I won a three day trip to New York, so I am taking you with me,” Katy explained. “We are leaving tonight.”

Before Emily could say anything, William told her that he had already packed for her, using a list Katy had provided. “When?” Emily asked. “Last weekend, when you and Katy took Nadia to the park.” Emily was curious to know where he had hidden her suitcase. “In the storage area,” he proudly answered. “I have your passport,” Katy added.

“You guys are the best!” Emily shouted. She got up and gave everyone more hugs. Nadia did not like it when William paused from feeding her to return Emily’s hug. Emily gave her daughter a kiss on the top of her soft head. She was no longer wearing her hat.

William finished feeding Nadia her desert of unsweetened applesauce as the waitress started bringing plates of warm food to the table. Emily sat back down in her chair. She saw William clean Nadia’s chin and hands with a fresh baby wipe. He then gave her a bottle of prepared formula. “That will keep her occupied for a while,” she thought.

It did not take very long for Nadia to start getting bored though. William did his best to entertain her while trying to eat his lasagne. When Emily was done her own pasta dish, chicken alfredo, she switched places with William so that he could finish his food. She played peek-a-boo with Nadia a few times, then took out a cat puppet made with the same type of material as a towel. It was actually a fun washcloth, but Nadia seemed to love it very much so Emily and William used it to entertain their daughter outside the bath.

A birthday cake was eventually brought to the table and everyone joined the restaurant staff members in singing happy birthday to Emily. She made a silent wish before blowing out her numbers two and zero candles. The chocolate cake was then cut into small equal pieces and served.

Soon it was time for everyone to leave. Emily gave another round of hugs and thanked her friends and family for the nice surprise as well as the birthday gifts. The leftover cake was taken by the waitress and brought back to Emily in a styrofoam container.

Katy offered to drive Emily, William, and Nadia home since she was going to their apartment anyways. “We don’t have the car seat,” Emily said. “Go with Katy,” William offered, “I will walk back with Nadia.” Emily gave both her husband and daughter quick kisses before parting.

The girls ended up arriving at the same time as William and Nadia. Emily explained that they had made a quick stop at the bank so that she could deposit her checks.

Emily felt the need to go over her packed items and make sure that everything was in order. It's not that she did not trust her husband or best friend. It is just that she had personal preferences when it came to clothing and accessories. She also wanted to make sure that she had extra batteries for her digital camera, as she was always fearful of her batteries dying at a picture perfect moment and not being able to capture it on film.

Katy had already taken care of the snacks and drinks for the road so Emily did not have to worry about that. She just had to put Nadia to bed once her precious daughter fell asleep, and sit around until it was time to leave.

The original plan was for William to borrow Katy's car while the girls were away. He would have driven them to the bus station, but Emily did not want Nadia to be woken up just for that. So, the excited girls just called a taxi when it was getting time to go.

Emily could not help herself from sneaking into Nadia's bedroom and whispering "bye" before leaving. She always said good night to her sleeping child before going to bed herself. Emily fixed Nadia's pink blanket as she always did, caressed her head, blew her a kiss, and slowly headed for the door. She closed it behind her.

The girl's bus tickets were for an eleven thirty departure, but they managed to get on an earlier bus. Nothing was really reserved; it was more on a first come first serve basis and buses from Montreal to New York left regularly.

Emily and Katy sat side by side on the bus. They got as comfortable as possible and slept as much as they could. The male driver unintentionally woke them up by announcing that they were behind schedule because of traffic.

They ended up stopping at the US border at around one in the morning, and going through customs took over one hour because all the passengers had to get off the bus and enter a small building to get clearance before boarding again.

The tired girls tried to get some sleep again.

The bus stopped again in Albany to refuel. There was absolutely nothing to do inside the terminal. The single store as well as the restaurant were both closed. All Emily and Katy could do was wait around for their bus number to be called. At least they had been able to find a bench to sit on. They ate some of the junkier snacks that Katy had packed, and giggled at nothing.

The girls talked about their childhood, reminiscing on some of the fun and creative things they had done together. Having lived right next door to each other for as long as they could remember, they were almost like sisters.

“Remember all the random crafts we made and sold to our neighbours?” Emily asked. “Our parents bought a lot of ten cent bookmarks and puzzle books!” Katy replied. “And \$3 dolls,” Emily reminded Katy. They had made small dolls using mini mops and handkerchiefs purchased from a dollar store. “They were actually not that bad,” they both said together. The short wooden mop sticks had been the bodies, all the white string attached at the end became the hair, and they had tied the handkerchiefs together to form dresses, complete with arms. “I think I still have one somewhere,” Katy told Emily. “Me too,” Emily responded in a tired giggle.

Emily and Katy laughed at the memory of all the random shows they had put together, forcing their parents to come watch. They did dance routines, roller blade choreographies, and demonstrated what they had been taught in their gymnastics classes.

“Remember our fun club?” Emily asked. “How can I forget?” Katy responded. “The stickers we made were still up in my garage until last week. My dad actually asked if it was okay to take them down.” Emily imagined Mr. Smith asking the question. He was a very intelligent man who sometimes did or said very odd things. He almost had Emily and Katy convinced that the reflexions of the Northern lights they had witnessed one summer night were actually some sign of extra-terrestrial life.

After conversing for a good half hour, the time to get back on the bus finally came. Emily and Katy were able to get some uninterrupted sleep during the rest of their trip.

They arrived at the New York central station at around eight thirty in the morning. The girls collected their small suitcases and hopped on a local bus to get to their hotel in Secaucus, New Jersey. It was only a fifteen-minute ride away, but it seemed longer because they were both very eager to start sightseeing.

The girls wanted to quickly check in to their hotel and head right back out but their room was not ready yet. They were still able to get some of the paperwork signed, and the hotel staff stored their luggage in the storage area for them.

Emily and Katy left the hotel. It was boiling outside. They ate some healthy carrot muffins and bananas from Katy’s bag on the bus back to New York City.

Despite the fact that they had just been sitting down for hours, Emily and Katy decided to buy tickets to a double-decker hop on/hop off bus once they were back downtown New York. Their tickets were good for four different tours; the downtown loop, the uptown loop, the Brooklyn tour, and the night tour.

There was a bus ready to leave for the guided Uptown tour so they got on and walked up the stairs to the top deck. They found available seats in the back. Everyone was free to get off at any stop

and hop on the next passing bus later on. Emily and Katy just enjoyed the ride and took pictures as they passed by Columbus Circle, the Lincoln Centre, the Dakota Apartment and Strawberry Fields, the American Museum of History, the Cathedral of St John the Devine, Riverside Church, Appollo Theatre, Central Park Gardens, the Smithsonian National Museum of Design as well as the Jewish Museum, the Guggenheim Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Winery Museum, Central Park Zoo, and the rest of Central Park.

When they returned to where they had originally started, the girls got off the bus and walked around to find a restaurant. Although Emily loved terraces, she felt that it was much too hot to eat outdoors and suggested they dine inside an air-conditioned place. They found a nice restaurant that served a bit of everything at affordable prices, and enjoyed their first real meal in New York.

As they ate their recommended cheeseburgers with a side of spiced up home fries and salad drenched in the restaurant's special house dressing, the best friends started discussing their childhood again, and moved on to talking about some of the guys they used to have crushes on.

"Do you remember us daring each other to kiss the lips of cute guys on posters?" Katy asked. "We left lip gloss marks on the paper," Emily responded laughing. Katy laughed along with her.

After their delicious meal, the girls opened up their fold out bus tour map to find one of the bus stops for the downtown tour. They did not have very far to walk, and a bus arrived at the same time as them.

They got on the top deck again, and took more pictures as they passed by Times Square, the theatre district, Macy's store and Madison Square Gardens, the Empire State Building, the Flatiron Building, Limelight Marketplace, Union Square shopping District and Ground Zero of the Twin Towers, the Rubin Museum of Art, Greenwich Village, Soho, Chinatown, Little Italy, City Hall, and Brooklyn Bridge.

The only time they got off at a sight was to see the Statue of Liberty. Unfortunately, the ferry going to Staten Island had stopped running by the time they got there, but they could still get a glance of the famous three hundred and five foot statue from a distance.

Their short stop gave them a chance to splash a bit of cold water on themselves since there were cool jets of water shooting out of the ground in one area. Many children were having fun running around through them.

Ice cream and popsicles were sold here and there, along with cold drinks. Emily bought herself an ice cream cone, which was melting faster than she could eat it. The chocolate flavoured liquid was running all over her right hand. "I am worse than Nadia!" she joked. Luckily, she was able to wash her sticky hand in the water jets when she was done eating.

The girls enjoyed listening to the live musicians playing on their drums and watching some of the other tourists dance around to the music.

Eventually they got back on a bus to finish their tour. They passed by the seaport, lower East side, East village, United Nations, Rockefeller Center, Central Park, and Winter Garden Theatre.

Emily and Katy got off where they originally started and decided to explore on their own. They spent a lot of time walking around in the heat among the crowds of other tourists, venders, artists, and various mascots trying to make money by having their pictures taken with them.

They could barely move around. Emily felt that there were way too many people in New York. She had always thought that movies and television shows exaggerated. She was now witnessing the abundance of people as well as the ridiculous numbers of yellow taxis in the city. Sometimes, they were the only vehicles seen on the streets.

Emily was half tempted to go for a taxi ride just to say that she had been inside a New York taxi, but figured it was probably a waste of money. It looked like it was faster to walk around anyways. Unless you had very far to go, it wasn't worth paying for.

The girls entered a lot of souvenir boutiques, sometimes just to cool off. Most stores were just as crowded as outside.

The three story M & M shop was fun to visit. The shelves were not only filled with decorative boxes and plastic trinkets containing the popular candies inside them, but also had games, stuffed toys, clothing, accessories, jewellery, temporary tattoos, stickers, and all sorts of other items with the M & M figures on them. There were even large colourful statues of some of the figures in various costumes within the store. People could also bag their own candies from individual tubes that held a different M & M colour each for every single type of M & M. The girls found it amusing to watch people make their selections.

Emily found the Hershey store interesting too since it sold giant chocolate bars; they were almost half the length of one of Emily's arms. The Reese's peanut butter cups and Hershey kisses were roughly the size of her head. Emily didn't buy any chocolate since she figured that it would surely melt within seconds of being back outside, but it was very tempting. Instead, she simply had Katie take a picture of her holding one of the Hershey bars. She then purchased some cocoa powder to make some hot chocolate back home.

"How can you be thinking about a hot beverage right now?" Katy asked. "It's the caffeine I am thinking about," Emily responded. "I could actually go for an iced cappuccino." Katy liked that idea so the girls headed to one of the many Starbucks for a liquid treat. Emily wasn't sure that she would be able to use the gift certificate she had received for her birthday because of the currency difference, but she tried anyways and there was no problem. She ended up paying for Katy's cold drink. It was

the least she could do to thank her for taking her to New York.

The girls resumed their shopping, looking at many cool shoes and purses. Emily kept telling herself that she did not need a new pair of shoes; especially at the prices they were being sold at. The purses were a little bit more reasonably priced, but again she didn't really need a new one. She ended up buying a big bag because she knew that she would have more use for it. It was black with the words New York written all over it in white and gold letters. Emily bought herself a few Broadway t-shirts as well.

Emily made sure to get both William and Nadia some gifts, not just things for myself. She found a cute white teddy bear wearing a Statue of Liberty costume for Nadia, and an I love NY t-shirt for William. He had actually asked her to bring one back for him because he had visited the city as a child and had outgrown his souvenir shirt a long time ago.

Emily found a giant toy store that had a ferris wheel inside. There were so many cool things she wanted to buy her daughter, but knew that Nadia would not know what to do with any of it. She was still too young to really appreciate anything. Emily could not stop herself from buying a pretty rag doll nonetheless. Her excuse was that she would save it for Christmas or Nadia's first birthday.

Aside from doing a lot of shopping, the girls spent some time hanging out in Time's Square. It was really nice at night when everything was illuminated.

They were on the screen of a giant outdoor television for a few minutes. Not just Emily and Katy, but part of the crowd in Time's Square. The girls had fun trying to locate themselves and taking a picture of the screen once they knew for sure that they were on it.

Emily was on another television screen when she went inside the info center. This time it was just herself waving hello. She wasn't sure exactly where the camera was. She just followed the directions that were written on a large circle located on the waxed floor. Katy did the same afterwards.

After taking all the city attraction brochures they wanted, the girls headed to the nearby wax museum. They saw many lifelike figures of famous people and super heroes. They had fun getting their pictures taken beside most of them. "Do you think we could pass these off as real celebrity meetings?" Emily jokingly asked. "Maybe if you only show a couple," Katy suggested.

The girls had the opportunity to create a hollow wax form of their own hands, at a price of course. However, they were warned that the melted wax would get pretty hot on their skin. Emily asked if the wax might melt in the sun. There were no guarantees, so the girls passed on the creation of the souvenir, even if they thought that it would have been pretty cool to do.

There was a short 3D movie playing inside the museum as a last attraction. Emily thought the spe-

cials effects were absolutely amazing. She loved how her theatre seat had moved or vibrated every so often, and the way random jets of water had sprayed her lightly during the action feature. She could not stop talking about it once they left the museum. “William would have loved that!” she exclaimed. She was starting to miss him. She missed Nadia too.

The hungry girls passed by a McDonalds that had a walk through window, as opposed to a drive in. They were not in the mood for that type of food though. Instead, they bought some chicken kabobs from a sidewalk vendor. The seasoned meat was grilled right in front of them.

Emily and Katie did some more random walking around, stopping by another vendor for a giant salted pretzel each as well as cold drinks. The heat had died down, but it was still fairly warm out.

Just as the girls were about to head back to their hotel for the night, they spotted a haunted house called Times Scare and were much too curious not to go check it out. They were greeted by a male zombie at the door, and another one at the ticket booth. “This is already interesting,” Emily told Katy. Katy did not look as thrilled as Emily.

The girls walked up a large flight of stone stairs. On the sombre second floor, there was an open coffin with a prop skeleton inside. The whole thing was full of fake cobwebs. A female zombie came out of a room and asked the small group of humans that had formed to join her.

Once the guided tour started, Emily wasn’t the least bit scared. As she entered the first small room, she actually gave a little smirk. Emily thought that all the gruesome props and acting along the way were very well done regardless of her lack of fear. She felt that everything was very realistic. The other girls in the group, including Katy, were screaming a whole lot. That actually amused Emily as much as the haunted house itself. She also liked their original use of a human heart drawing for their “I love New York” merchandise.

The girls ended up going to the Times Scare bar afterwards. A smoke machine had been set up inside the small space to create a spooky atmosphere. They both ordered bloody marys. The male bartender, dressed as a zombie, served the red colored drinks in skull shaped glasses. Emily found the beverages alone expensive, but realised it was well worth paying the high price for the original experience.

The same zombie who had greeted them at the front entrance pretended that he was not going to let them leave the haunted house, then followed them outside. Emily had Katy take a picture of him pretending to choke her. The scene made curious people stop to see what was going on.

Emily and Katy finally headed to their hotel. They were able to officially check in, get their luggage, and find their room. It was located on the twentieth floor. “Fitting,” Emily thought.

The hotel room was pretty cozy. The girls first came into a small living room complete with a couch, a long dresser with a flat screen television on it, as well as a writing desk that had a phone,

a note pad with the hotel logo on all the light beige papers, a black hotel pen, and the hotel room service booklet on it. A comfortable looking chair sat right in front of the desk. To get to the sleeping area, the girls passed by a large bathroom as well as a separate little area with a sink. There was also a large closet with shelves. The sliding doors were long mirrors. The last section had another dresser with a television on it, matching end tables with lamps as well as an extra phone beside another bad of paper and hotel pen, and a double bed.

The girls did not mind sharing a bed. They had done it many times in the past.

Emily and Katy started talking about the fun sleepovers they use to have as kids. They often made indoor forts by weighing down one side of a large blanket or sheet on the top of a big wooden desk in Emily's playroom, and placing the other side of the cover on some chairs with more heavy items. They would bring sleeping bags inside and stay up late drinking soda and munching on potato chips or popcorn while telling each other ghost stories. They would point a lit flashlight towards their own face when it was their turn to speak, to give themselves an eerie look.

In the summer, the girls often slept inside a pitched tent in one of their backyards. They pretended to roast giant marshmallows around a fake fire. Sometimes, Emily's mother would make them yummy smores. She would serve them with her special hot chocolates, which included a whipped cream topping with chocolate sprinkles as well as a mint chocolate stir stick. Katie's parents usually left them bags of their favourite candies. The sugar rush kept them up for most of the night.

Emily's father had built them a small tree house one year. They shared many secrets there. They also shared their playhouse with a family of chirpy birds one spring. The girls witnessed three eggs hatching. Unfortunately, the baby birds ended up dying a few days later. Emily and Katy had buried them in the flower garden after doing a funeral for them. They even made some miniature tombstones in the shapes of crosses using wooden popsicle sticks and had written the names they had chosen for each baby bird; peep, chirp, and singer.

"Do you remember the snow forts we did every year?" Emily asked. "Yup," Katy answered while yawning. "We were never able to convince our parents to let us sleep in them." As a mother, Emily could now understand her parents reasoning. "It really wasn't safe," she said before falling asleep.

The following morning, the girls got ready and headed to the hotel restaurant for a bite to eat. A buffet was set up so they were able to select a variety of delicious looking cold and warm foods as well as beverages. They grabbed some fruits for the road.

Emily grabbed a free local newspaper from a stand on her way out of the hotel. She read her horoscope on the bus. "You will meet some special people today," it said for Leo. Emily shared the news with Katy, who was curious to see what her own horoscope said even if she did not believe in astrology. For Virgo, the comment was very similar to the one for Leo. "You will run into people of interest." Their short horoscope discussion soon got replaced by their usual girl talk.

Once downtown, the girls started walking towards Central Park. They stopped in numerous souvenir shops along the way. Most of them had repetitive items, but Emily and Katy spotted a few different things in each store.

Emily wanted to purchase herself an “I love New York” frame as well as some nice postcards, but her credit card ended up being declined. She thought it was a mistake because she had very good credit and had paid her last bill just a few days ago. Plus, her credit limit was higher than she ever spent.

The patient man at the cash swiped Emily’s Visa card again, but he got the same result. Emily was both embarrassed and confused. She didn’t understand why her card would not work. Then she realised that she had not called her credit card company to advise them that she would be travelling like she normally did. “I think the bank froze my card because they think it might have gotten stolen,” she told Katy. Katy offered to pay for Emily. “You can just pay me back when we get home,” she suggested. Emily did not like owing money so she just ended up using her interact card to pay for her desired items.

After visiting more shops, some of which owners annoyingly followed them around inquiring about what they were looking for and pointing out different things they could get good deals on, the girls finally made it to Central Park. It was filled with hundreds of tall leafy trees as well as healthy green bushes and wild flowers. The park appeared very well maintained. Not a single piece of garbage could be seen on the ground.

Emily wanted to take a horse carriage ride but almost died of shock when the driver told her how much he charged; ninety dollars cash for a half hour ride on the busy streets and partially in Central Park. She ended up negotiating a much lower price for a shorter ride within the park only and to get dropped off right in front of the zoo entrance. Katy paid for half.

The girls visited the Central Park Zoo. There were very few typical zoo animals. Emily and Katy saw several exotic birds, snakes, bats, turtles, red pandas, deers, snow leopards, snow monkeys, an owl, penguins, a polar bear, and various sea birds. They stood around a circular aquarium for a short sea lion show. That was Emily’s favourite part.

Since they were back near the entrance, the girls decided to get some fast food from the cafeteria and eat lunch on the patio. Small brown birds came close to their table and looked at them like they wanted to be fed. Emily finally caved in and threw a few tiny pieces of her grease soaked burger bread on the ground. That attracted more birds.

The girls finished up their unhealthy trios and headed for the petting zoo. There were many pretty flowers, plants, and small waterfalls on the way. Some plain white butterflies casually flew by. The zoo itself had rabbits, ducks, pigs, goats, lambs, cows and a single bull.

The childish side of Emily felt the need to feed some goats. So, she put two American quarters into the slot of a food machine and cranked it to let some small greyish cylinder shaped pellets out. Only a few came out, and the animals were pretty greedy. The majority of them stuck their heads through the gaps of the thick wooden gate as soon as they realised that Emily had food. Emily was only able to feed a single goat. It took two seconds for her hand to be empty, and slimy with goat saliva. She washed it with hand sanitizer.

Emily and Katy then walked out of the zoo and into Central Park. They continued along a paved path and started hearing people signing. They followed the sound of the voices and found a talented choir performing under a bridge. They listened to them for a few minutes and headed towards the nearby lake, where several people had rented canoes, kayaks, or paddleboats. The girls thought about doing the same, but finally decided to just remain on foot.

During their pleasant walk, they passed by the usual artists, street performers and food vendors. There was a large kid's playground, a fair, as well as an individual indoor carousel. Emily laughed at the fact that there was a souvenir stand for that one random carousel. A lot of people were buying the overpriced merchandise related to the two-minute kiddie ride, and Emily quietly made fun of them.

Katy soon reminded Emily of the souvenir she bought herself after her first roller coaster ride at La Ronde during a school outing. "Did you not buy the t-shirt that read I survived the Goliath?" Katy teased. "That was the scariest ride ever!" Emily said defensively. She then repeated exactly what they had seen on a brochure that year. It's the largest, tallest, and fastest roller coaster in Canada." Katy had been too afraid to go on the ninety-six second ride so she said nothing further.

Emily and Katy decided to go on a few rides at the fair. They bought a sheet of tickets each and acted the same way they had as teenagers, down to eating pink cotton candy and trying to win a prize at a game station. They ended up winning a small stuffed animal by playing a horse racing game against each other and one other person. Technically Katy was the winner, but she gave Emily the stuffed brown monkey; "For Nadia," she said.

A vision of Nadia smiling and laughing filled Emily's head. "I can't wait until Nadia is old enough to enjoy going to zoos and fairs," she told Katy. "Then you'll be telling me you wished she was still a baby," Katy laughed. Emily knew that her friend was right. It seemed like she had only given birth a few days ago but Nadia was three thousand five hundred and ninety grams heavier and sixteen centimetres longer as per her last doctor visit. Nadia rolled around, crawled, held her bottle... Soon she would start walking and...Emily didn't want to think about it anymore.

The girls found a bench within Central Park and relaxed for a little bit. Their feet hurt from all the walking they had done.

A juggler came by to entertain them. He wasn't very good though. Emily could appreciate his

efforts since she was unable to juggle, but he repeatedly failed to catch one of his three multi-coloured balls. The man never attempted to juggle anything else either, so his performance became monotonous very fast. Nobody put money inside the hat he had left on the ground in front of him.

When the free show was over, the girls resumed their walk. Their goal was to find the path that would lead them in the direction of downtown. They managed to find it by looking at the tall buildings ahead. Emily thought it was weird to be surrounded by the peaceful nature and see the skyscrapers.

Just before exiting the park, the girls decided to get their caricatures done by an artist. He only charged five dollars for his coloured work, as opposed to the fifty-five dollars fee Emily and Katy were used to seeing for the same type of artwork in the Old Port of Montreal. They had a good laugh at the finished products. The artist had captured their traits very well.

Emily and Katy took a different street to get to Times Square in order to see new things. Along the way, they passed behind the theatre where they would be seeing *Mama Mia* later on.

As luck would have it, part of the cast was outside signing autographs. Emily and Katy took pictures then got in line with some people who had just seen the afternoon show. Everyone had programs with them. The girls rummaged through their purses for paper as well as their tickets to show that they were going to be in the evening audience. The actors ended up signing Emily and Katy's tickets. "Break a leg!" Emily told them.

The girls resumed their walk, unable to believe what had just happened. "I guess both our horoscopes were right," Emily commented.

Emily and Katy passed by a bakery that had several giant cupcakes on display in their window. "I know you want one," Katy teased. "I see one with an Oreo cookie on it," was all Emily had to say for the girls to walk into the bakery.

Katy refused to let Emily pay for her own cupcake. "It's your birthday," she said. "This one is on me." The young female cashier overheard and offered Katy a white birthday candle and some matches. When the girls sat down at a table, Katy inserted part of the small candle on the top of Emily's cupcake, lit it, and sang her happy birthday. A few people joined in the song and clapped when Emily blew out the small flame.

"So what did you wish for?" Katie wanted to know. "I can't tell you or it won't come true." Birthday wishes was the only thing Emily never shared with Katie, or anyone for that matter. It did not stop Katie from asking every year anyways. Emily confessed that all of her reasonable birthday wishes had come true so far, so she didn't want to ruin the trend by revealing her wishes.

The girls went in and out of more stores. They found a boutique that sold only Christmas deco-

rations. Emily bought Nadia a discounted baby's first Christmas ornament with the year written on it. There was room to put a picture inside and Emily already knew that she was going to put one of Nadia sitting on Santa's lap.

Emily eventually looked at her watch and suggested they find a place to eat soon. They ended up going to Friday's, a popular pub style restaurant, for dinner. They were able to walk to the theatre without rushing afterwards.

Right before going to see Mamma Mia, Emily found a shop that sold only Broadway merchandise and debated for a while on what theatre mask she should buy. She ended up getting ceramic black and white ones. She went back to purchase one of the paper maché "Phantom of the Opera" masks even though they were a bit pricey. She knew that she would regret it later on if she didn't.

Emily and Katie excitedly entered the Winter Garden Theatre where Mamma Mia would be playing. They sat impatiently in their seats. When the show started, Emily was filled with glee. She wanted to sing along with the performers during most songs; she knew them all by heart.

At the end of the two and a half hour long musical, which included a fifteen minute intermission, everyone clapped as loud as they could and gave the performers a well-deserved standing ovation. "That was an excellent show!" Emily exclaimed to Katie.

Both girls left the theatre, happily singing at the top of their lungs. They did not care about all the funny looks they got from other pedestrians. They were having fun. Eventually they quieted down to humming; that got replaced by their usual chatter.

The girls made fun of some of the signs they had seen in the City, such as "No Standing. Anytime. " and "no honking. Fine of ... applies."

As they continued to walk along the crowded sidewalks, they saw an artist use spray paint to make portraits of New York City. They stopped to see his demo. He worked very quickly, and Emily was amazed by the man's talent. She bought a small flat canvas of the artist's representation of New York at night, which included a perfectly round white circle for the full moon.

Emily made an effort not to look at any other items for sale to avoid making another impulse purchase. She and Katy just walked on by the vendors, simply glancing at all the items for sale.

The girls saw a hotdog stand right in front of the bus station and realised that they were actually hungry. They each bought a giant barbequed hotdog in a bun for the ride back to the hotel. Emily took hers all dressed.

Once they were back in their hotel room, Emily quickly contacted her credit card company to set things straight. The customer service representative apologized for the inconvenience.

It took no time for the girls to get ready for bed and fall asleep. They did not chitchat.

The girls headed back to Montreal the following morning, right after breakfast.

In the bus, Emily took the time to write personal messages on her postcards and address them all. She was able to mail them during their half hour stop in Albany. Even though it was a bit early for lunch, the girls had a quick bite to eat at the fast food restaurant before boarding the bus again.

Going through the Canadian customs took longer than the US one. Rather than getting off the bus and simply show their passports to an agent, they also had to take all their luggage inside the building with them. Everything had to be reloaded in the bus's baggage compartments afterwards.

William was waiting for them at the Montreal bus terminal with Nadia. "Mama," Emily heard her daughter say as she took her in her arms. "What did you just say?" Emily said surprised. "Mamamamamama," Nadia repeated. "She's been saying it non-stop since yesterday afternoon," William announced. Emily became very excited. She then whispered to Katy, "my birthday wish this year was that Nadia's first word be mommy. I think this counts." "It sure does," Katy agreed.



(I want to dedicate this story to my friend and past co-worker Marianne Riad, who always looked forward to my stories and proofread them after she remembered not to get lost in them. Lol You are missed!!! Chantal Bellehumeur 2013)

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