



Nadia's First Birthday

By Chantal Bellehumeur



n the Wednesday morning of January 22nd, Emily Jacobson woke up thinking about the joyful day she had given birth to her precious daughter Nadia. She was nineteen years old at the time, and although her pregnancy had been a hard one, Emily and her fiancé William were very happy to welcome their baby into their young lives. They had seen their unborn child moving as well as sucking her thumb during ultrasound appointments, and held on to the printed black and white pictures given to them by the technician, wondering what their baby would look like once it was out of the womb.

Emily had shared a very special bond with Nadia before she was even born, feeling the little kicks and punches of the human being growing inside her. When Emily saw her newborn daughter for the first time after over eight hours of being in labour, it had been love at first sight.

Even when Nadia had been really fussy, refused to go to sleep at night or take naps, misbehaved, or woke up super early in the morning, Emily continued to love her. She always forgave everything bad Nadia had done when she watched her peacefully sleeping.

Nadia was generally a cheerful baby who usually woke up in a good mood and occupied herself in her crib for a while. She was fairly vocal nowadays when she played, and more so once she started getting bored.

After hearing Nadia calling out “Mama” a few times on the baby monitor, Emily got out of bed. She walked to her daughter’s bedroom feeling nostalgic. It felt like only yesterday she had been holding a tiny fragile baby in her arms. She remembered Nadia’s thin velvety hair, her soft wrinkly skin, the way the 8.2 pounds baby looked at her with her clear blue eyes...

Emily had loved bonding with her precious baby by breastfeeding her. The noises Nadia had made while suckling gave Emily an inexplicably warm feeling inside. After she stopped nursing, the sounds Nadia made while sipping milk from her bottle and now from her sippy cup reminded Emily of those bonding moments as well as a time where her baby totally depended on her. Not that Nadia was completely independent now, but she could feed herself using utensils and was moving around on her own. Emily found that Nadia was growing up way too fast.

“I can’t believe that you’re already one year old!” Emily said as she took her happy child out of her crib. Nadia smiled at her like she always did in the morning. “One!” Nadia said.

Emily’s heart sank for a second. Time had just flown by. She would soon have to start working again, which meant finding a daycare for Nadia. Emily could not stand the thought of having somebody else take care of her child. She was afraid that Nadia might feel abandoned.

In the past, Emily had been away from her daughter during leisure trips and had felt so guilty for leaving Nadia behind on those occasions even though the baby had been in very good hands. Nadia had stayed with Emily’s mother while Emily and William went on a weeklong Mediterranean cruise, where they ended up getting married. During Emily’s birthday weekend, Nadia had stayed alone with William while Emily went to New York City with her best friend. She had missed Nadia very much during her travels.

Emily was aware that being away from Nadia for a few hours was quite different than parting from

each other for days. Nadia sometimes got babysat by close friends or family members so that Emily and William could get some alone time. Going back to work would be a good thing, but Emily still had a hard time thinking about leaving her daughter in the care of another every day; especially a stranger. Emily wanted to believe that all caregivers could be trusted, but she had read and heard negative stories in the past. On the flipside, she was selfishly afraid that Nadia would end up bonding too much with her new caregiver.

“What if Nadia starts to call her caregiver mom?” Emily had asked in tears one day. William reassured her that Nadia would always know who her mother was and would always be happy to see her. Emily still had doubts because when she had gone with her friend Veronica to pick up her twin daughters at their part time daycare one day, the kids didn’t want to leave. Veronica had said that it was a good sign because it meant that her daughters were enjoying their time there and liked their caregiver. Emily wanted Nadia to continue having fun at home with her, but knew she had to let go. It would be good for Nadia to interact with other children on a regular basis.

Both Emily and William had done some extensive research on local public daycares and had visited a few of them a while back, knowing that the waiting lists were very long. Emily had started calling some of them recently to see if they had space for Nadia now, but they all told her that they were still full. Emily was relieved in a way, but knew that she had to get back to work for the extra income.

William found an available daycare near his workplace and Emily had agreed to give it a try. However, a single visit made her cry and she told William that she could not in her right mind leave Nadia there. William didn’t argue with her. To Emily’s relief, he told her that he completely agreed with her.

When they first arrived at the public daycare, they noticed that some children around the age of two were playing or simply standing outside in the cold. They could see their own breath and the wind was blowing pretty hard, yet not all of the young children were dressed up warmly. Some of them didn’t have a hat or gloves. Although Emily knew it was the parents’ responsibilities to provide such articles of clothing, she felt that it was up to the caregivers to make sure the young children wore them. She also felt that the children should not be taken outdoors if they didn’t have the proper set of clothes. That winter day had not been a good one for anyone to be outdoors, even if they did dress up appropriately. Emily had been all bundled up and still shivered. She felt really bad for the kids who were getting frostbitten. Some of them were crying.

The caregiver on duty didn’t seem to care so much about the children’s well-being. She just stood there looking bored and holding a travel mug with what appeared to be a warm beverage inside. Steam was coming out of it. She looked unaffected by the cold, but wore a long parka with a hood along with a hat, a scarf, thick mittens and high snow boots.

After taking a sip from her mug, the caregiver finally took notice of Emily and William standing on the sidewalk by the busy street and looking into the yard. She slowly approached the short metal gate, passing by pitiful looking kids with runny noses, and asked in an annoyed tone of voice if she could help. When Emily told her that she and her husband had an appointment, the woman opened up the door to the yard to let Emily and William in. Without a word, she then went inside the dull

daycare building, leaving the children alone with William and Emily. “We could easily kidnap one of them,” Emily had told William sounding worried. She admitted that if she were at an orphanage rather than a daycare she would be tempted to bring all the children home and give them proper care. “I’m sure it’s not as bad as it looks,” William responded. He did not look very convincing though.

During the tour of the entire daycare, Emily didn’t find that any of the children looked all that thrilled to be there. None of them were smiling and there were no drawings or projects on display anywhere. The atmosphere was rather unpleasant. It almost felt like a penitentiary to Emily.

A little girl no older than two got yelled at for not making it to the toilet on time. Emily could tell that the girl was already embarrassed by her accident, and was shocked at the caregiver’s way of handling the situation. Emily felt that the caregiver was being fairly abusive with her words. She was unnecessarily putting the child down, which made her cry more. Emily’s maternal instincts wanted to go comfort the girl. But, she and William were led to another part of the daycare.

The nursery was the worst. All the babies sat in car seats. Emily and William were told that they were only taken out of their seats to eat or nap, as though that was completely normal.

Emily didn’t know if the kids’ parents were clueless or desperate, but she could not keep her mouth shut about what she had witnessed. She called social services as soon as she got home, and admitted to William that she wasn’t sure she could trust a daycare now. “Nadia can barely talk,” she had said in sobs. “She wouldn’t even be able to tell us if she was miserable or poorly treated.” “I am sure that she would find a way to get her message across,” William had responded. “But I see your point.”

Veronica had tried to pull some strings and get Nadia into the same daycare as her daughters, but there was no space available.

Weeks later, Veronica suggested Emily only work part time. She offered to watch Nadia on the days that she wasn’t working until Emily could find a good daycare, but Emily did not want to impose. She didn’t know when a good daycare would be found and could not let Veronica babysit for free on a regular basis even if she said that she didn’t mind.

William had encouraged Emily to consider home daycares even though they were much more expensive because they were generally not subsidised by the government. Emily visited a few, but didn’t really like any of them. Although all the caregivers had seemed nice, they didn’t do any special activities with the kids nor did they provide meals or snacks. Emily felt that their weekly fees were quite high considering that the kids were basically left to play on their own or watch television. They were supervised, but not entertained except for the occasional craft.

“Stop being so picky,” William told Emily after she had given him another excuse as to why another daycare wasn’t good enough for Nadia. “Don’t you think Nadia deserves the best?” she had replied. William told her that as long as Nadia was being treated well he would be happy. Emily realised that she had set very high standards since visiting that awful public daycare. Plus, part of her still wanted to continue staying home with her child.

Emily considered opening a home daycare of her own so that she could stay with Nadia and make money at the same time, but it involved making a lot of changes in her apartment. Plus, she didn't like the idea of having to depend on others to make money. She wanted stable paycheques.

Emily decided to stall a bit and wait until Nadia turned one before continuing her daycare search.

"It's your birthday today," Emily told her daughter as she selected an outfit for her. "How about your favourite cereal for breakfast, and later we can go eat at McDonalds?" Emily didn't really like to give her child fast food, but Nadia loved chicken nuggets and fries. What child didn't? "Donalds!" the child enthusiastically responded clapping her hands together.

Emily had taken Nadia there for the first time a couple of months ago, when Veronica had invited her to go with her three children.

Veronica's almost two year old twin daughters Melody and Cloe loved to play in the indoor play structure. The girls had asked to go play before their food was ordered and continued to ask their mom before they all found a place to sit. The twins ate their Happy Meals really quickly. Before they were finished, they both said that they were full and asked again to go play. Veronica answered that they could go in the structure but had to clean their hands first. The twins ran off, wiping the salt, grease, and ketchup from their fingers on their long sleeve shirts before Veronica could hand them a paper napkin. Emily had laughed at how carefree they were. Nadia was going through a phase where she didn't like to be dirty, so Emily had to wipe her hands often when she was eating and change her clothes right away if Nadia dropped something liquid on them or noticed a stain. To prove a point, Nadia had started complaining about some BBQ sauce that got on her sleeve.

Veronica's son Michael, who had just turned thirteen, had passed the phase of wanting to play in the McDonalds structure and did not care too much about cleanliness. In fact, according to Veronica he complained a lot about having to take his shower every night. His main priority in life aside from hanging out with friends was eating. He had devoured a double Big Mac with a side of large fries as well as a large soft drink and had still been hungry. Emily remembered giving him the rest of her fries because she could not finish them. Michael had politely taken them and even finished off the untouched food that his sisters and Nadia no longer wanted.

Veronica had talked about Michael's growth spurt and the huge appetite that came with it. Emily could not remember her or any of her girlfriends needing to eat that much as a teenager and figured it had to be a gender thing. She had joked with Veronica about saving on groceries by having a daughter rather than a son, but Veronica had responded that the money she saved on food would be spent on makeup, clothes, shoes, and fashion accessories. Apparently the twins had already started wanting pretty things. Nadia would most likely want those things too, unless she became a tomboy.

At the moment Nadia loved her dolls and other toys that were typically for girls, including the princess figurine that came with her Happy Meal, but that could change.

Emily was not ready to see her daughter grow up, but she knew that it was unavoidable and that it would happen in the blink of an eye. She also knew that Nadia might not end up having the same interests as her or her father. Emily told herself that whatever interests Nadia would develop over

the years she would continue loving her and knew that William would too.

William and Veronica's husband Scott had both stayed home on that Saturday afternoon when Veronica and Emily decided to take the kids to McDonalds, but they were present during another outing at the popular fast food restaurant; this time for dessert. By then, Nadia already recognised the yellow double arch and was very excited. "Donlads! Donalds!" she kept saying.

There was a group of young children present for a birthday party that day and Emily had considered having one there for Nadia, but then realised that she might be a bit young for that sort of party.

Instead, Emily and William decided to have a simple celebration at their apartment. Nadia didn't have any friends yet aside from Cloe and Melody so it was mostly family members and friends of both Emily and William that were invited. Emily had made all the invitation cards herself and mailed them out two weeks ahead of time.

The birthday party wasn't until Saturday but Emily still put up a few decorations when she had the chance; a shiny Happy Birthday sign on the front door and some pink as well as purple coloured balloons plus matching streamers in the kitchen. Nadia seemed to really like them, until one of the balloons randomly popped. It made a loud sound like a gunshot and she started to cry.

Emily comforted her daughter and showed her that balloons could be fun. She threw one of the pink ones up into the air and watched it slowly come back down. Nadia soon mimicked her mother with another pink balloon.

Next, Emily rubbed a purple balloon on her curly auburn head to create static and stuck it on the wall. Nadia wanted to do the same but only managed to mess up her reddish hair. Emily laughed.

The girls continued to play with the balloons for a while.

When Emily's stomach started to growl, she and Nadia headed over to McDonalds for an early lunch. Emily didn't know why, but she ended up telling the friendly cashier in her late teens that it was Nadia's birthday. The cashier gave a big smile, showing off her metal braces, and wished Nadia a happy birthday. Emily noticed afterwards that an extra toy had been put in the cardboard Happy Meal box. It's a good thing that Nadia had two hands because she did not want to part from either one of the light coloured winged ponies after she was handed them. When other kids came running by she held the toys close to her chest like they were going to take them away from her. Cloe and Melody had taken toys from her before, just to look, and Nadia had not liked it one bit.

When Emily felt that it was time to leave the restaurant, she had to quickly get her daughter's winter gear on so that Nadia could resume playing with her ponies. Emily was afraid that Nadia might not be able to keep her new toys in her hands once her mittens were on, but Nadia was able to get a good grasp on them and she held on tightly.

Outside, Emily placed Nadia in her wooden sleigh and started walking back home. She reached the halfway mark and started crossing the busy street once her light turned green. Nadia began crying before they reached the other side.

When they were on the snowy sidewalk, Emily stopped walking to see what was wrong with her daughter. As she bent down to get to Nadia's level, she noticed that Nadia only had one of her new ponies. Emily looked ahead and saw a small purple blob in the slushy street. She would have to go back and get it at the next crossing opportunity.

"Don't worry sweetie. Mommy will go get your toy." Nadia understood so she calmed down, but still had a few sobs left in her. Emily did not like seeing her daughter like this. She looked so pitiful. Nadia did not always get what she wanted by crying, but Emily felt that this was a time that she was allowed to get her way; not because it was her birthday, but because what she wanted was reasonable.

Emily remembered accidentally dropping her favourite doll in the artificial lake of the Old Port when she was a child, and her father going out of his way to get it back. He had to rent a paddleboat to get to it, but he told her later on that the smile and hug she had given him for returning her cherished "Marcy" had been worth it.

Nadia did not have any favourite toys yet. It was more like the pick of the day. Today it was the ponies and Emily would do almost anything to get back the one Nadia dropped, hoping that no cars would run over it now that the light had changed.

When all the cars started zooming by Nadia started crying again. She pointed in the direction of her purple pony with her right arm. "Don't worry," Emily told her. "You'll have your toy back soon." She hoped that she was right.

Emily saw the lights to her left turn yellow and the cars in front of her slowly coming to a stop. Nadia's pony looked untouched.

When her light turned green again, Emily quickly walked on the street with Nadia to get the toy. She waited until she was back on the sidewalk to give the pony back to Nadia, just in case she dropped it again. Nadia smiled when Emily handed her the toy, and Emily imagined that she had looked similar to that when her father had given her back Marcy.

Emily was starting to understand more and more each day how her father felt about seeing his princess (that was his nickname for her) growing up. One day she needed him, and the next she was independent. She didn't want to think about Nadia not needing her anymore. I guess in a sense she always would, but she would leave the nest one day too.

"Okay. One thing at a time," Emily told herself. "She's only one."

Emily thought about a special activity she could do with Nadia on this special occasion. She could not think of anything, but ended up doing a small detour to go to the library. She picked some books and a movie for Nadia, who was still holding on to her ponies.

When the librarian found out that it was Nadia's birthday, she gave her a shiny star sticker. "Say thank you," Emily told her daughter. "Tankou" Nadia said, and they were on their way.

Emily let Nadia continue playing with her two new toys before her afternoon nap. She even let her take the ponies in the crib with her even though she normally did not allow toys in there, to separate sleep time from playtime. Nadia treated them the same way as her stuffed animals so Emily did not see the harm in letting her hold on to them while she napped.

Nadia fell asleep rather quickly.

When Nadia woke up, Emily put on the movie she had borrowed from the library and sat down on the couch with Nadia and the ponies to watch it. It had a lot of singing and dancing, so Nadia did not sit still. She slid herself off the couch and tried to do the same thing as the characters on screen, while hanging on to her new toys. Emily thought it was pretty cute.

Nadia's cuteness wore off when it was time for Emily to start dinner. The child kept getting upset because her ponies didn't always stay standing up when she placed them on the kitchen floor. She actually yelled at them.

William got home from work slightly later than usual. He brought home a McCain chocolate cake. "Should we give Nadia her first piece of cake today or wait until the party?" he asked Emily. Emily would have preferred to wait until the party, but since William had gone out of his way to buy a cake for his daughter on her birthday she answered that tonight would be okay. Besides, Emily thought that the cake might cheer Nadia up a bit. She had not really gotten over the fact that her ponies were not co-operating with her.

Nadia was still a bit fussy when it was time to eat, but the fact that Emily had made her favourite meal distracted the child from her worries. That is, until she decided that eating spaghetti with her hands would be better than using a fork but wanted to keep herself clean. Every time she would put cut up noodles covered in red meat sauce into her mouth she wanted her hands washed. Emily and William stopped giving into her demands and told her to finish eating everything. Nadia eventually gave up on her cleanliness and ate everything within her pink plastic bowl. The second she was done though, she wanted somebody to wipe her hands and mouth clean. William took his last bite of pasta and excused himself to go get a damp cloth.

When Emily was done eating, she got up and rinsed all the dishes. She then put a pink birthday candle on the cake William had bought and lit it. She and William started singing "Happy Birthday" slightly out of tune to Nadia, who looked rather confused.

Emily didn't want Nadia to touch the hot flame on the candle, so she blew it out for her right before putting the cake in front of Nadia. The child just stared at the cake, looking unsure of what needed to be done.

Emily took the candle out and licked the light chocolate icing off the bottom. It was her favourite. She then cut a small piece of cake and put it directly on Nadia's plastic eating tray. Nadia still looked at the cake without doing anything.

"You know, apparently my parents shoved my face right into my first birthday cake," William confessed. "We are NOT doing that to Nadia!" Emily exclaimed horrified. She did dip her daughter's fingers into the chocolate icing though. To Emily's surprise, Nadia started to cry. "Way to go!" William teased.

Emily tried to make things better by grabbing the piece of cake and trying to get Nadia to take a bite. The child just shook her head and pushed the piece of cake away, making her fingers dirtier. Nadia cried even more. Emily realised what the problem was and cleaned Nadia's fingers. She then gave her a fork.

Nadia still would not touch the piece of cake so Emily grabbed the child's fork and took a small piece of the dessert with it. She tried to feed it to Nadia, but the one year old stubbornly kept her mouth shut. Emily ate it herself instead.

William took his turn at trying to get Nadia to take a bite of her birthday cake and was as unsuccessful as Emily. He did the same thing as Emily and ate the piece that Nadia refused. William then tried to give Nadia her fork back but she threw it on the floor. The child still wasn't interested in the cake at all. "You would think we were trying to feed her broccoli," Emily joked. Nadia hated green vegetables.

Emily would not normally force a child to eat cake, but she knew that Nadia would like it and it was supposed to be a special treat. "It's from McDonalds right?" she asked William and winked. He answered that it was. "Donalds?" Nadia asked. Now the child looked curious. "Mine," she finally said pointing at the fork her father had picked up from the floor. William rinsed the utensil and gave Nadia back her fork to let the child take a piece of cake. When she put it in her mouth, her face lit up. She quickly ate what was left from her tray and asked for more.

Nadia did not get to enjoy cake again until her birthday party.

With William's help, Emily put up more pink and purple birthday decorations throughout the apartment. In the living room, the couple set out paper plates as well as napkins and plastic cutlery beside some snacks; a bowl of plain potato chips, a vegetable platter with ranch dip, a plate of various cheese and crackers, different types of cold cuts, and an assortment of cut up fruits.

While her parents worked, Nadia was happily playing with a pink balloon the way Emily had shown her. Up it slowly went, and then back down... Sometimes she would pick another balloon before the first one made it back on the floor.

William passed by and gave Nadia a little bump on the head with a pink balloon that he caught in mid-air. It made her giggle. The child picked up another pink balloon and bumped her dad on his left leg. It all started a mini game of balloon tag.

William pretended to have a hard time catching up to Nadia when she ran away half laughing and half screaming. He always let her easily catch up to him when he ran off after giving her the tag. Emily eventually joined in the fun. Nadia kept a balloon with her at all times and just had fun hitting her parents with it and running off. They got tired in no time and sat Nadia down for a calmer game. The child was given her large multicoloured blocks to play with and she built her usual uneven tower. Both Emily and William decided to build little pens for the ponies Nadia still loved.

When it was close to party time, Emily put on Nadia's favourite CD. "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" was playing when the first guest arrived. It was Emily's best friend Katy, who also happened to be Nadia's godmother.

After giving Emily a hug and looking around, Katy asked where the birthday girl was. Nadia came running towards the front hallway wearing a pretty pink dress and some cute white shoes. She had a big smile on her round face.

Katy wished Nadia a happy birthday. "Apybirfday," Nadia replied. "No. It's YOUR birthday," Katy said giggling. "And this is for you." Nadia took the pretty present that was handed to her and shook it. It made noise and Emily figured that it was a puzzle.

"Let's go put that on the table okay?" Emily told her daughter as she moved towards the living room. Nadia didn't want to let go of the present. She seemed to remember from Christmas what it

was and started unwrapping it right away.

The small puzzle box showed a colourful picture of cartoonish ponies, so Nadia left to go get the toys she got from McDonalds and then came back to show Katy. She was now comfortably seated in the living room, grabbing a handful of chips.

Nadia sat down on the couch right beside Katy. She looked at the chips in Katy's hand and then at the plastic bowl sitting on the coffee table. Emily could tell that Nadia was thinking about taking some. Nadia put her ponies on Katy's lap. "Wow!" Katy told Nadia. "You're a lucky girl." She then turned to Emily as Nadia dug into the bowl of chips. "Remember when we used to play with those types of toys?" Emily confirmed that she did and helped Nadia prepare herself a little plate of munchies.

More guests started showing up.

Emily's mother arrived with a small platter of hors d'oeuvres, and William's parents arrived with some prepared food as well.

Emily's father came in with two bottles of homemade red wine. "Whoa. Nadia is a bit too young to start drinking," Emily said laughing. "It's for the adults," Mr. Jacobson replied even though it was obvious. "And this is for the cake," he added as he handed Emily a fancy looking candle.

Emily put everything in the kitchen after offering her guests drinks. William helped her bring plastic glasses of water, juice, and pop to the living room.

One right after the other, not allowing any time for Emily or William to sit down, William's three brothers arrived with their significant others followed by Veronica and her family. Nadia was really happy to see Cloe and Melody. Michael didn't come because he had another birthday party to attend. Veronica told Emily that he had one almost every weekend now. "I asked him to stop being so nice to everyone." The girls laughed.

"Would anyone like anything to drink?" Emily shouted as she walked back into the living room. Everyone who wanted something started speaking at once and stopped as soon as they realised that they were all talking at the same time. Emily thought it best to ask people individually. She took a mental note of what everyone wanted and went into the kitchen. Veronica helped her distribute beverages this time.

Just as Emily and Veronica finished handing out everyone their drinks, the last guest arrived. It was William's best friend James. He was studying outside the city but came back to town for this special occasion. "Sorry I am late!" he said. "I forgot how bad the traffic is here, not to mention finding a parking space." William laughed and asked: "Did you check the parking signs?" James sarcastically replied that he parked his old car near a sign that said that he was allowed to park on the left side of the one way street on Saturdays between the hours of twelve and four, but only during the month of January. "Sounds about right," William said. Parking regulations were kind of ridiculous in his neighbourhood.

Nadia came into sight. She was being chased by the twins. James did a double take. "That's not..." "Yes it is!" William proudly answered before his friend could finish his question. "No. But she was so tiny the last time I saw her." James put his hands about two feet apart as he said that. "She's one now remember?" William said laughing. "Let me reintroduce you to her." The last time James had seen Nadia face to face was a few weeks after she had been born. "You look good by the way," he told Emily. She thanked him for the compliment.

"Nadia. This is my friend James," William said as he caught his daughter in mid-run. "Say hello." Nadia gave a shy hello and hid behind her dad. A few seconds later, she peeked her head out between her dad's legs and shyly smiled before hiding again. She did that a few times. "I think she's flirting with me," James joked. William nervously laughed.

Emily figured that William was thinking the same thing she was. What would she be like later on

if she was already flirting. As though James read her mind he said “I’m sure she will break lots of hearts.” Emily knew he meant it as a compliment, but she didn’t want to think about her baby being courted. Neither did William it would seem. “I won’t let her date until she’s 30!” he joked. “That’s what I said about Emily!” Mr. Jacobson yelled out from the living room. Everyone laughed.

With all the guests present, Emily and William decided it was a good time for cake. They brought Nadia’s booster seat in the living room and strapped the child in. She didn’t like it at first because she wanted to play, but when she saw her mom with a cake she started kicking and waving her arms in anticipation. Everyone sang “Happy Birthday.” Emily’s father changed the last lyrics to “you act like a monkey, and you look like one too.”

Emily tried to blow out the single candle for her daughter but the flame would not extinguish. She tried over and over again until she realised that it was a trick candle. Emily’s dad was laughing at her so she told him that he should give it a try. He took the candle and dipped the flame in his glass of water. The flame disappeared like magic and everyone applauded. Even Nadia joined in.

Emily quickly showed Nadia her birthday cake. It was rectangular with white icing, and had the picture of two ponies on it in pastel pink and purple icing. The words Happy Birthday Nadia were written in cursive fuchsia letters at the top of the image. Emily had ordered it from the grocery store’s bakery.

Before cutting the pretty cake, Emily took a few pictures of it. She then put even square pieces of cake on paper plates. William handed them out along with plastic forks, starting with Nadia.

Nadia had no problem getting dirty to eat her piece of cake this time. She ended up with vanilla flavoured icing all around her mouth and on her hands.

Emily took a lot of pictures of her daughter and realised that she had forgotten the birthday party hats. She went to get them for the kids.

Veronica helped Cloe and Melody put their pointy cardboard hats on. William tried to put one on Nadia but she wouldn’t let him so he put it on his own head instead. “Anyone else want a hat?” Emily asked. Her father decided to take one. Emily handed her dad a hat and put one on too.

Seeing that more people were starting to wear hats, Nadia wanted one now. Emily put one on her head and was able to take a single picture before Nadia took it off. She guessed that Nadia didn’t like the way the elastic felt under her chin. Nadia had the same reaction with her summer hats.

A few group photos were taken around Nadia by using the timer on Emily’s digital camera, and then it was time for Nadia to open up her presents.

Emily cleaned Nadia’s face and hands, then sat her down on the floor. Nadia unwrapped her first present. It was a doll from James. “I didn’t know what to get her,” he said. “I figured girls like dolls right?” He had chosen well. Nadia was hugging the rectangular cardboard box in which the doll was still in. “Now go give James a hug,” Emily said pointing in his direction. “And say thank you.”

Nadia took her doll with her to give James a hug. “Let me get the doll out of the box for you,” he said grabbing the box. Nadia started crying. “Don’t worry,” Emily said. “He’ll give it back.” Nadia continued crying so James hurried up to get the doll out. As soon as he handed it to her, she quickly took it and gave him a dirty look. “Nadia,” her father said in a reprimanding tone. “Say thank you.” With tears still rolling down her cheeks, she said thanks and walked away holding the doll tightly against her.

Emily was about to hand Nadia another present, but asked her to smile first. Nadia did as she was told and was given a large gift bag with thin white paper sticking out of it. She put her new doll between her legs while she took things out of the gift bag and unwrapped everything. Nadia revealed a series of books from one of William’s brothers. Nadia was told to go give him and his girlfriend a hug. She took the doll with her. After each present was unwrapped she gave a hug to whoever gave it to her, bringing her new doll along. She would not let anyone touch it.

Emily wanted Nadia to learn how to share, so although she understood why Nadia wanted exclusivity with her new doll at the moment, she encouraged her to let Cloe and Melody play with her other new toys such as a tea set, a picnic basket with fake food made of felt, a purse that came with a brush as well as a mirror and fake lipstick, a princess castle and plastic figurines, and small farm animals.

The last present was from Emily and William. William had to go get it from storage. It was a plastic kitchen set. Nadia looked very impressed, but still would not let go of her new doll. She held it with her right hand as she examined the small plastic pots, pans, and dishes as well as play food with Cloe and Melody, who seemed to really love the set. "They can come over and play any time," Emily told Veronica.

The kids continued to play harmoniously together while the adults talked.

Mr. Jacobson eventually opened the bottles of wine he had brought and offered a small glass to all the adults. The kids were given some juice.

Emily was happy to see everyone enjoying themselves. She had been afraid that people might find a one year old's birthday party boring. The only complaint had been about the kiddy music, so Emily finally changed it to some modern dance tunes. Luckily, Nadia didn't seem to mind. She gave everyone a little show by showing off her cute dance moves. Everyone clapped when the first song was over. This encouraged Nadia to dance again when the next song came on. She was full of energy.

"Must be the cake," James said. "Nope. She's pretty much always like this," Emily said. "She drains me." Emily realised that her workdays would probably be less exhausting than taking care of Nadia all day. She felt a little bit bad for having that thought, but knew it was true.

A few days after the party, Veronica called Emily to let her know that a spot in her daughters' daycare had finally opened up. Emily knew she had to take it right away if she did not want to risk losing it, so she called the daycare right away to say that she was interested. She visited the daycare with Nadia that same day and Nadia seemed to like it; especially when she spotted Cloe and Melody in one of the playrooms. They would not be in the same group, but it still helped that they would be there.

Emily met the two caregivers in charge of Nadia's age group, Diane and Yvonne. She liked them right away. They had just finished singing "Mary had a little lamb" with the young kids when Emily entered with Nadia. All the children in the room looked happy, and both caregivers were very welcoming. This made Emily feel good about leaving Nadia in their care.

Because Emily had not found a job yet, Veronica had suggested that Nadia only go to daycare part time at first. Emily was afraid of losing her full time spot by doing this though, so she signed Nadia full time.

When William came home from work, Emily told him she had found a daycare for Nadia. She was crying when she said it so William made fun of her. "Is that good news or bad news?" "Good," Emily said wiping her tears and smiling. "I don't know why I am crying."

After William was done pleasantly laughing with her, he gave her a hug and told her that everything would be okay.

The following day, Emily got Nadia ready for her first day of daycare. She explained to Nadia that she would be going to play with other kids and would be picked up later on. Nadia didn't argue, but Emily knew that she didn't really understand what she was saying.

When Emily got to the daycare, she took off Nadia's winter coat and boots. A coat hook had already been assigned to her. She put the coat on the pink hook that had Nadia's name above it, and her boots under the little yellow bench. Emily had prepared a bag with extra clothes and pull up dia-

pers as requested. Everything was labelled with Nadia's full name.

Nadia's daycare group was called the lambs and Emily took her to the first room on the left, where her new caregivers were waiting. "Hi Nadia!" a plump woman with short black hair joyfully said. "Remember Diane?" Emily said to Nadia. Yvonne greeted Nadia next.

Emily gave Nadia a big hug. "Have fun! I'll be back later."

Nadia seemed like she would do just fine, but when Emily turned around to leave she heard her cry. Emily started to tear up too. She could not just walk away.

Diane told Emily that Nadia would be okay in a few minutes and that the best thing to do was to casually leave. Yvonne agreed and encouraged Emily to exit the room without making a big deal out of it. "I'll close the door behind you."

Emily had a hard time leaving because when she finally walked away she could hear Nadia screaming for her.

Once she got to the daycare entrance she started to cry. Veronica arrived with her daughters at the perfect moment and Emily was very happy to see her. "She'll be just fine," Veronica reassured her. "I promise."

Veronica was right. When Emily came to pick Nadia up she was playing with other kids and looked like she was having a good time.

Diane called out Nadia's name. "Mommy's here!" Nadia put her toys down and yelled out "Mama!" as she ran to Emily with a big smile on her face. Emily welcomed her daughter with open arms, then told Nadia to go pick up the toys she was playing with. Nadia obediently did as she was told and ran back to her mother.

Before leaving, Nadia waved goodbye to her new friends as well as Diane and Yvonne. "She is an absolute sweetheart," Diane told Emily. "She got along with all the kids and she listens well." Emily was very happy to learn this. The first day of daycare was not so bad after all.

The second day of daycare went even better than the first. Nadia did not cry when Emily was leaving, and was just as happy to see her mom later in the day.

Emily found a full time administrative job at a travel company and rather enjoyed being around other adults during the day. Of course, she still missed her little one, but working was a nice break. She kept a framed picture of Nadia taken during her first birthday party on her desk and smiled every time she would look at it. The thought of picking Nadia up from daycare gave her something to look forward to each workday.

With the extra money that Emily was providing, she suggested putting most of it aside to take Nadia to Disney one day. William said it was an excellent idea and they opened up a savings account especially for that. It helped Emily focus on her work on days that she didn't feel like going to the office. Her goal was to take Nadia to the famous amusement park before she started elementary school, another step Emily knew would be hard for her.

Emily kept telling herself that if she was able to get through Nadia's first day of daycare then her first day of school should be fine as well. Graduation would come next, and then university... But all that would be in a while. Emily knew she still had a lot of time to enjoy her daughter's youth.



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