

Dinner was served.

The clinging of forks with plates was the only noise that filled the humble kitchen. Her mother had cooked her favorite dish too. Spaghettis with meatball! She had went out of her way and budgetto buy a cellphone for her only daughter.

Wrapped in bright paper, Emma's gifts were laid on the table neatly.

"Jack bought you-"

Her step father widened his eyes playfully at his wife.

"Honey, what did we say about keeping secrets?"

She laughed earning his heart warming smile. He leaned towards her, pecking her chubby cheek.

"Emma?" He called her so ly and her hands stopped moving.

A small smile on her delicate face as she looked up at the couple.

"You have to know," he said, waving the fork in his fingers, "your mother nearly killed my wallet in order to get what she wanted-"

"Oh please!" She waved her hand. "I would buy the world for her." She said glowing with maternal love. Her beautiful daughter had turned 19! She went from a little ball of joy to a beautiful swan. She deserved to have everything a girl her age did! Sure, they were always trying to make the ends meet but it didn't mean she couldn't spoil her on her birthday.

Emma had grown into such a sensible girl. She smiled when need be. She nodded when need be. She never argued. Never complained.

Helen was a rebel by heart but Emma was the exact version of her Dad. Timid and so all around. Well, she didn't inherit anything from her mother except her chocolate brown eyes.

"Thanks mom." Emma said as she swallowed a meatball.

"Now go to your room and check out what I got you." Jack grinned. He was a 40 years old man but he seemed younger than his age. Her mother was watching him with a tender look on her face. It was obvious, Jack was her entire world.

Emma nodded. "I'll."

"It's about time you call me daddy." Jack chuckled lightly. "Whaddya think, Helen?"

Helen glanced at her daughter, opening her mouth when—

Emma stood up, smiling at the both of them. Her brown eyes had nothing but adoration for them. To any other person they looked like the picture perfect family.

"I'll wash the dishes." Emma said taking up her plate.

Helen jumped at that.

"Don't you dare. It's your birthday! You're not allowed to do any chores till tomorrow." Her mother said sternly but her eyes were lit with humor.

Emma tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "It's okay I can-"

"Put it back. This instant." Jack said in a hard voice and Emma had to put the plate back on the table.

"Alright then. See you lovebirds tomorrow." Emma grinned at them as she took the gifts to the table and giving them one last look. She went towards her room.

Her spine chilling.

Her fingers shaking.

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As soon as she entered her room, Emma transformed from the dainty little Daisy to Lara Croft. She hurled the gifts in the air. The both of them went down towards the wooden floor with a hard thud. She didn't bother to give them a second look. In one quick motion, she was against the door, checking the bolt by pulling at it with all her might.

In case it fell down.

But it was working just fine.

She bolted the door.

And next thing she did was latch it up. She installed it last month on her own money. Her mother had continuously asked her about it but she kept dodging her question le and right.

Done with the door she stepped back, admiring her work but one thing was missing.

Quickly, she went over towards the only pair of table and chair in her room and dragged the chair by its back. Careful not to make any sound. And she stacked it right under the bolt.

Her heart was racing when she stepped back.

Emma kept looking at the door and she couldn't help but feel her heart shrinking at the sight of it. How long. How long will it keep her safe? How long till—

A sparkle caught the corner of her eye.

And she turned at it, looking at the gift wrapped into a green glittering paper.

Her heart thudded loud. A bone deep dread filling her insides at the sight of it. Slowly, she went down on her knees, her hand outstretched towards the square box.

The tips of her finger shook as they wrapped around it.

"You can do this. You can do this. You have done it before." She kept saying it over and over again. Unwrapping the gift.

Darkness pooling at her insides.

She ripped over the glittering paper from the box.

The paper revealing a brown box with a sticker on top.

To my daughter

Her nostrils flared as she tore the sticker over and ripped the top of the box over, taking a look inside—

She dropped it. Like it was made of fire.

Biting her bottom lip. She tried so hard not to let it affect her. Why did it still affect her? She should have gotten used to it by now. Then why did it feel like the thing in the box weighed more than her?

Her gaze flickered at the piece of clothing peeking out and she shut her eyes. Not able to stop the sudden sob that wretched from her heart at what laid on the floor.

A skimpy blood red bikini.

An innocent note was stuck to the bottom of the bikini.

**Would love to see you in it someday, forever yours.**

**Daddy.**

"Don't...don't you dare cry.", She whispered fiercely to herself.

"Don't your dare, Em. Don't you-"

She covered her face with her hands.

And cried her heart out.

It happened every single time. She would tell herself to be brave. To always be brave and the second it happened to her. She would break down all over again.

After five minutes, she had somewhat calmed down. Her breathing was getting normal. Her nerves were unknitting. Wiping her eyes fiercely, she snatched the piece of clothing and stood up.

She knew what to do with it tomorrow.

Going towards her wardrobe, she opened it up and tossed it away, slamming the closet shut. Then she took the note over of the floor and went towards the bathroom.

Switching the lights on, she pitched the note in the flush. Ice cubes seemed to be falling on her heart as she watched the note swirl away.

Fisting her hands, she repeated the vow for the millionth time.

She was not going to back down.

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Sleeping early had been her motto of life since he arrived in her life.

Early sleeping meant early rise.

Early rise meant, she was going to get out before seeing his face. She had asked Jerry to give her the earliest of shifts.

**1 : 30 PM**

A hammer was pounding on her head. Emma groaned turning around on the single bed but it continued!

Kept going.

And then as if her gut recognized what actually was happening, her eyes ripped open and she sat up. Breathless.

Her door was being rapped at.

The rapped turned into punches.

Her body turned ice cold and she looked around wildly- looking at the familiar sight of her bag- a picture of her father smiling down at her- her favorite pair of sneaker-

Vile curses were lured her way.

But her head had blocked it out.

"Shhh. It's going to be okay, Em. You're almost there. It's gonna be okay."

The punches reduced to knocking again. And after a few moments silence enveloped everything again.

She was frozen on her bed.

Not daring to move or breath.

What if he heard her move and came back again? What if he heard her breathing and came back again?

The cold dread she felt was melting away slowly. The pit of her stomach aching. She knew what it was.

It was the feeling of not knowing whether you will survive the next night or not.

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