

LETTER

Don't Let Go

A mother's letter to her daughter, read on her wedding day

A letter to Emma

Emma,

I'm writing this before the day gets too full to think straight, before the music starts and everyone wants a piece of you. I wanted a few minutes where it's still just us, the way it's been since the beginning.

I keep thinking about that hospital you ran out of your bedroom, back when you were small enough that every stuffed animal outweighed you. You bandaged each one like its life depended on your attention - the bear with the torn ear, the rabbit missing an eye, all of them tucked in and checked on and loved back to health. I didn't know then that I was watching the beginning of who you'd become. Now you do that for real, for strangers, in the middle of the night, in a job that asks everything of you. And you still show up at people's doors with soup when they're sick, like it's nothing, like it's just what you do. I don't think it's nothing. I think it's the same little girl with the bandages, grown into a woman who shows up.

I also keep thinking about the day you learned to ride your bike without training wheels. Do you remember how you kept shouting "don't let go, don't let go," long after I already had? You were halfway down the block, pedaling on your own, before you even noticed I wasn't there anymore. And when you did notice - when you looked back and realized you'd been doing it by yourself the whole time - you were so proud you cried. I was proud too, and a little undone, watching you fly off without me like that. I think about that moment often, actually, now that we're here. Because today is a little like that too. I'm letting go again, in my way, and you don't even need me to tell you that you're ready. You already know. You've known for a while.

I want to tell you something about marriage, since I've had the years to learn it and you're only just beginning. It's not the big, dramatic moments that carry a marriage, though there will be some of those, good and hard both. It's the ordinary Tuesdays. It's choosing each other again on the days when nothing special is happening at all - when you're tired, when the laundry's piled up, when one of you is short-tempered for no good reason. Love holds up in the small, unglamorous hours. That's where it's built, actually, more than anywhere else. I hope you and Jonah find a way to keep choosing each other in the Tuesdays, not just the days like today.

And I have to tell you what I love about him, because I don't say it enough. It's the way he listens when you talk. I've watched him do it - really listen, not just wait for his turn - and I don't take that lightly, not for you, not for anyone I love. You've always had so much to say, even as a little girl bandaging stuffed animals and narrating every bit of it to me. You deserve someone who wants to hear all of it, every day, for the rest of your life. I believe you've found him.

Whatever happens, in all the years ahead - the easy ones and the hard ones, the ordinary Tuesdays and the days that upend everything - I want you to know you can always call me. That doesn't change today. It doesn't change ever. You will always have a mother who answers.

I let go of the bike a long time ago, Emma, and you flew down that street all on your own, so proud of yourself you cried. I have a feeling today is going to look a lot like that. Go on. Fly.

With love,