

Home Videos
Tatyana Singh

The camera lens shakes into view, the blurring figure finding focus once the light adjusts. The woman sitting there looks ordinary, like someone you'd see in a dream. *They say most of the people you see in dreams are made up of faces you pass by in everyday life. The guy chasing you? You were behind him in line at the coffee shop two days ago.* The woman has ashy brown hair pulled back into a loose ponytail, dark eyes circled by darker circles, and a muddy brown cardigan swallowing her form. She's sitting on a swivel chair, hands folded in her lap.

"H—" she coughs, clearing her throat. "Hello, my love." She shifts in her seat.

"If you're watching this, I'm...I'm not there so say it to you myself. So... Happy First Birthday, Meli." The video shutters into a new take.

"Hi Meli! Happy Birthday, my darling girl. It's mo—" A coughing fit squeezes the air from her chest, the skin in her cheeks hollowing out. The video shutters again.

"I'm the worst mom ever I think, not even making it to your first birthday." Her hair is out of the ponytail now, as if her hair can hide the paleness of her skin. "They said having this mutation is likely what caused me to develop it. That you could be at increased risk too. If I'd.. If I'd gone to my appointments or we had the insurance.." She trails off, staring at something behind the camera. "It doesn't matter now, I guess. But you better go to all of your appointments. And I already instructed your dad about getting you tested for the marker. They say if they detect the gene there are options to prevent it from ever happening. A mastectomamy or mastectomy? They just.." she swipes her hand down over her chest, a swooshing sound escaping softly. "This is a conversation for your 17th birthday video maybe? Let me start over." The video shutters.

“Meli, Happy 3rd Birthday! I bet you’re dressing up as princesses now!” Her smile is forced, and unshed tears make her eyes shine a bit too brightly. “Or maybe not huh? Are you a pirates girl?” She forces a laugh, a few tears slipping out. The video shutters.

“When I found out about you, I cried. When your dad and I decided to have you we talked about what you’d be like when you grew up. Stubborn like me, or a sore winner like him. We fought once because he insisted that you’d look more like him than me. I cried so hard. It doesn’t even matter though; I just want to be able to see you grow up.” A few hiccups escape. More tears trail, and then a gasp. Her shoulders shudder as she curls into her knees. “I just want..to see you.. grow up.” She continues sobbing until the video shutters.

She’s wearing a different outfit now, her hair is wet, and her face a raw red. You can’t tell if it’s from rubbing away tears or the steam of the hot shower she just took. “My favorite color is green—it’s my good luck color. And I love the icecream bars with the chocolate covering it and there’s crushed pistachios with it? My favorite food is potatoes because you can eat it a million different ways, but the best way is mashed potatoes. And my middle name is Geraldine. I hate it, but it’s your great grandmother’s name. I think in photos my eyes pinch too tightly when I smile, so I always keep a straight face like this...” she pinches her lips closed, and looks directly into the camera. “..I had my first kiss when I was 13, way too young! My first love was your dad. And you may not want to hear this but he was my first... everything. Sex... sex is meant to be good, Meli. If you love the person, it makes it so much better, but never be ashamed of who you are, your body, or who you want. Your dad and I are here for you always. He gets to have the conversations with you, but I’ll be your listening ear, okay?” The video shutters.

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“Hey Meli. Dad thinks I should explain things more to you in case he can’t after I’m gone. He wants you to be able to check for the signs too.” A cough wets her cracked lips. “So... let’s do this together, yeah? I didn’t notice anything until I got this cough. It just wouldn’t go away. I let too much time pass. By the time I got the tests done... I’ve got triple negative breast cancer, but it’s metastasized to my lungs. Triple negative is... hard to treat. It’s like an enemy that’s got no face. This whole thing is an enemy that’s got no face, and it’s my body. How could my own body...? Well, the doctors said other things were signs too. I would’ve found a lump if I’d checked. I had a rash... and my armpit was so sore.” She laughs. “I just thought it was sore from trying to do pull ups at the gym with your dad. I was trying to get rid of the extra rolls your pregnancy had given me. Now... well I’d keep them if it meant I could keep being with you. And these tiger stripes. I’d wear them with pride any day.” The video shutters one more time.

“Say hi, Meli.” The woman is skinny, and her hair is wrapped back in a bandana of sorts. She seems to barely have a hold on the plump and bright-eyed baby in her arms, her fingers wrapped gently around the baby’s wrist, making her wave at the camera. “Say hi to big Meli. Here we are together. Meli and mommy.” She’s smiling effortlessly now. Her nose nuzzles into the baby’s pink cheeks. “You smell like sunshine, Meli. And I can’t stop saying your name. Meli, Meli, Meli. My Meli.” She sighs, closing her eyes, and leaning her head against the baby’s ashy brown hair. “If you remember nothing else about our time together, I want you to have this moment of us, recorded for you to always remember. I love you so much, my love. My Meli. Be strong for mama. Take care of your dad for me, kiddo. It’s you and him against the world now.” The video shutters one last time.

The screen turns black. Sitting in the chair in front of the television, is an ordinary looking woman. Her ashy brown hair is pulled back into a loose ponytail, dark eyes are circled by darker circles, and a muddy brown cardigan is swallowing her form. She's sitting, hands folded in her lap. She hits record on the camera.

“Happy First Birthday, Emmy.”