

EMILY'S FIELD TRIP

A SNOWMALLOWS SHORT

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Emily Griffin was odd for her age. Unlike most six-year-olds, she liked when her sneakers were white, her pink backpack was clean, and her long, dark hair was tied into a neat, straight ponytail. Having things orderly made her feel calm and in control. So, when Mr. Perry, her first-grade teacher, handed out the permission slips for their spring field trip, Emily couldn't think of any place she wanted to go less than to a messy dairy farm. Thankfully, the trip was scheduled for Mom's day off from work at the hospital, so Emily's plan was to stay home instead. Unfortunately, some days just don't go as planned.

On the morning of the field trip, Emily wandered down to the kitchen in her pink, gingham pajamas and her clean, white kitty slippers. Emily poured herself a bowl of her favorite cereal, Fruity-O's. Her 11-year-old brother, David, was just finishing his breakfast and was already dressed and ready for school.

"Why aren't you dressed? We're going to be late for school."

"I'm not going to school today." Emily turned on the TV and sat down to eat her breakfast. "Mom said I could stay home."

"Well, Mom might've said that, but the hospital called this morning. She had to go in to perform an emergency surgery. She told me to take you to school. She even gave me the signed permission slip for you to go on your field trip."

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Emily could almost feel the Fruity O's starting to come back up her throat.

"What? But I don't want to go to the farm. They'll be so much... *dirt*."

"Sorry, Em. I don't make the rules. Just put on your old shoes. You'll be fine. Now hurry up or we'll both be late."

As Emily tried to think of other options, Grandpa walked into the kitchen. She ran to him and hugged him like a drowning person clinging to a life preserver.

"Well, to what do I owe this nice greeting?" asked Grandpa.

Emily looked up at him with the wide eyed, pleading face that usually lead Grandpa to say yes to her requests. "Grandpa, can I stay with you today, so I don't have to go to the dirty dairy farm with my class?"

"Sorry, Em. I'm not going to be home today. I have a meeting about a research grant to study weather patterns in Antarctica."

Emily's wide eyes suddenly closed, her arms dropped to her sides, and she let out a deep, discouraged sigh. When she opened her eyes, Grandpa's head was down, his eyebrow was raised, and he gave her a questioning look over the top of his glasses. "I've never heard of anyone who didn't want to go on a class field trip. Care to tell me what's bothering you?"

Emily sat down at the table again and slumped back into her chair. David spoke up for her. "It's the usual. She's afraid she'll get dirty." Then he walked to the opposite side of the kitchen and started packing Emily's lunch.

Grandpa still looked confused. "A little dirt never hurt anyone, did it?"

Emily wiped away the tears that were starting to well up in her eyes. "Mom and Dad always say that they have to keep things clean at the hospital because germs spread

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when things aren't clean. Imagine how many *germs* there must be at a *farm*." She shuddered a little when she said it.

Grandpa pulled up a chair and sat down next to her. "I understand that you're afraid. And sometimes fear is good when it keeps us away from things, like germs, that might hurt us. But fear can also keep us from doing good things – things that can help us grow."

Emily continued staring at her slippers. Grandpa turned her face toward his. "You're right, Emily. The dairy farm will have some places that are dirty, but it'll also have a lot of things that I think you'll like if you give it a try. Do you want fear to stop you from experiencing good things?"

Emily was still nervous as she rode the bus to the farm. Her classmate, Ryan Redmond, sat in the seat next to her. His red hair looked like he'd forgotten to brush it and there were spots of dried chocolate milk at the corners of his mouth. "You don't look too good, Emily. Are you alright?"

Emily nodded. "I'm a little nervous." She looked out the window. She didn't want to talk to Ryan about it. He was nice, but he was always a little messy and you never knew what he was going to do next. She was only sitting next to him because she got there late, and it was the last seat left on the bus. So far, Grandpa's speech about good things wasn't coming true.

Ryan smiled. "Don't worry. We're going to my uncle's farm and it's fun. Stick with me and I'll show you." Now Emily was really afraid. "Look," said Ryan. "There it is."

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To her surprise, Emily didn't see the mess of mud and muck she expected to see, she saw neat rows of young green plants growing in a wide field. She didn't think she could have made the rows straighter if she planted them herself. *Pretty*, she thought.

"That's corn," said Ryan. "It's for the cows to eat. Uncle Bill puts it in the silo over there and stores it for winter."

Emily could see the tall, silver silo and the dark, green barn in the distance.

The first place Farmer Bill took Emily's class was to watch the cows being milked. They passed the green barn on the way to the milking barn. Flies buzzed lazily around the ears of the cows standing inside. Emily tried to discreetly cover her nose with her hand to block out the barn's smell. She didn't want to seem rude.

Ryan walked beside her. "You'll get used to it," he whispered.

She sheepishly lowered her hand. She wished he'd stop watching her. Thankfully, Ryan's uncle waved for him to come look at something, so he rushed off to the front of the group.

When they reached the milking barn, Emily was happily surprised to find that it was cleaner than the green barn. The cows were lined up in small, freshly rinsed stalls and attached to machines that milked them. The milk went up through pipes and into another room where a large, shiny, silver tank stored it. Farmer Bill told them that a company would pick up the milk and transport it in a truck to a place where they would process it and then send it to stores. Emily had never seen anyone milk a cow before. *Neat*, she thought.

One of the workers brought in a few buckets of milk and set them in a big sink in the milk storage room. Farmer Bill took two large plastic bottles and filled them with

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some of the milk from the buckets. He covered the bottles with tops that made them look like oversized baby bottles. He held one up. "Who wants to feed a calf?"

Before she knew what was happening, Ryan grabbed Emily's arm and lifted it into the air. She didn't even know he was standing next to her again. "Great, Ryan. Bring your friend up to the front."

Emily froze. Ryan pulled her to the front of the group. She saw Sarah and Lily snickering and whispering to each other as she passed them. Emily could feel her face burning red with embarrassment. There was no turning back now.

Farmer Bill rinsed the outside of the bottle to get rid of any dripping milk and dried it with an old towel. He handed it to Emily and led her and the rest of the class out to a small, pen with wooden rails where a calf was standing. Its chin rested on the top rail. The calf seemed to be staring straight at the bottle in Emily's hand. Its long, slobbery tongue stuck out of its mouth and wiggled around as if it was waving at her. Emily's hands shook as Farmer Bill helped her lift the bottle up to the calf's mouth. The calf grabbed hold of the tip in its mouth and took deep, sloppy, slurps of milk. Emily was glad Farmer Bill was helping her hold it – otherwise the calf probably would have pulled the bottle right out of her hand.

It wasn't as clean a job as she would have liked, but it wasn't as bad as she thought it would be either. In fact, it made her smile to see the calf's brown, fuzzy ears and big, black eyes up close. *Cute*, she thought.

"Wow! Look at Emily," said Sarah.

"That's cool!" said Lily. "Can I try next?"

Emily was glad she was the first one to get a turn.

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Farmer Bill helped Emily wash her hands in the big sink in the milk storage room. Then the class took a walk around the rest of the farm and finally ended up at a small stand near the road. This time, she wasn't surprised to find Ryan standing right next to her. "Do you like ice cream?"

Emily nodded.

"That's good because they make really good homemade ice cream here. People come from all around to get it. The chocolate chunk's my favorite."

As Emily waited for her cup of vanilla ice cream with chocolate sprinkles, a familiar car came into view. "Grandpa!" Emily ran to greet him.

"Thought I'd check on how you're doing."

Grandpa got himself a chocolate cone and sat on a wooden bench with Emily. She filled him in on all the events of the day as she ate her delicious cup of homemade ice cream.

Grandpa finished his cone and wiped his hands with a napkin. "I have one more surprise for you. Just let me see if Mr. Perry will allow me to take you away from here for a few minutes."

Emily wondered if Grandpa was taking her home early. Inside, she was disappointed. She wasn't sure she wanted to leave yet.

After speaking with her teacher, Grandpa went over to see Farmer Bill. Soon Emily and Grandpa were following him and Ryan back to the dark green barn. "Where are we going?" Emily asked.

"To see the kittens," said Ryan. "It was too hard to show them to everyone, but you can see them because you're my friend."

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Emily sighed and shrugged. She was just happy that she'd be allowed to see the kittens. She really loved kittens. They kept themselves so clean.

When they got to the barn, Farmer Bill stopped next to the stairs that led to the hayloft. There was a small space under them where several small, fluffy kittens of various colors were wrestling with each other. But there was one kitten standing away from the others watching them play. It was the cleanest, whitest kitten Emily had ever seen. It jumped back and licked itself clean every time one of the other kittens fell out of the wrestling pile and landed on it. *It's just like me*, thought Emily.

Emily found a nearby stick. "Come on little guy. Come out and play. You don't want fear to stop you from experiencing good things, do you?"

She dragged the stick back and forth in front of the white kitten. The kitten watched it move from side to side until, finally, it jumped on the end of it. Then it fell on its side and rolled into a ball with the stick between its paws. Emily smiled up at Grandpa when she saw the kitten wasn't afraid anymore.

"I guess that one's the winner," said Grandpa.

Emily was confused. "What do you mean?"

"I saw a sign for the kittens when I was pulling up and I called your mom. She agreed that you could have one as a reward for standing up to your fears today."

On the bus ride back, all Emily could think about was the new kitten that would be waiting for her at home. Ryan was sitting next to her again, but this time she didn't mind. "Did you have a good time today?" he asked.

"I didn't think I would, but I did," said Emily.

"What are you going to name the kitten? I think he looks like a cotton ball."

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"I think I'm going to name him for my Grandpa."

Ryan looked confused. "You're going to name him Grandpa?"

Emily laughed. "No. Grandpa studies weather, so I think I'm going to name him Snowball."

"Cool. Can I come visit him sometime?"

Emily looked at the spots of chocolate chunk ice cream splashed down the front of Ryan's shirt. She shrugged again. "I guess." Ryan wasn't exactly what she would have pictured in a friend, but after today, she wasn't so afraid to take a chance.