

1989

Hospitals are overwhelming, that much is obvious. The lights are too bright, there's always something beeping, and the stench of saline lingers everywhere. However, none of that was bothering the family in room 307. The Sinclairs were there to bring home a new baby girl. Hillary Sinclair was laid back in her hospital bed, a thin white blanket covering her protruding baby bump. There were plastic cups littering the room having once been filled with crushed ice, the only thing distracting Hillary from the baby attempting to leave her body. Robert Sinclair sat in the wooden chair next to his wife's bed, his video camera sitting fully charged on his lap.

"Love, how are you feeling?" he asked his wife.

"Like I'm about to push a 10 pound bowling ball out of the smallest part of my body."

"Do you want me to get you more ice? More water? Are you hungry?"

"Can you just hold my haaaaa..." Hillary screeched while putting her hands under her bump.

"Ok, Love, I'm gonna go get the nurses and I'll be right back." Robert was about to drop his wife's hand to leave until she was hitting the "call nurse" button on her bed with her elbow. Their nurse entered the room with a cold rag in her hand. She gave the rag to Hillary and sat by her feet.

"Okay, Mrs. Sinclair, are you ready to push?" The nurse asked in a tone that said even if she wasn't ready, it was time to push.

"Already? I'm not ready! Rob, we still have to call your parents and your sister and it's not even close to midnight. If she's born today then we'll share a birthday and I want her to have her own day to celebrate."

"Honey, if she's born today, if she's born tomorrow, it won't matter. We are going to love her all the same." Robert responded while rubbing his wife's shoulders.

“God, okay. Okay you’re right,” Hillary looked at the nurse, “I’m ready.”

“Great, I’m going to get the doctor and I’ll be right back.”

Hillary looked at her husband as he went to pick up his camera.

“No, absolutely not. I don’t want to be filmed doing this.” She said while putting her hand in front of the lens.

“Don’t you want to look back on this moment someday when we’re old? Remember what a beautiful time it was?” Right as he said that his wife let out a scream in pain.

“No! This isn’t beautiful! I’m about to shit out a baby!” Hillary squeezed her eyes shut as the pain took over. The doctor entered the room with his staff and got set up between her legs.

“Okay, Hillary, it’s time to push. Robert, put on this gown.” The doctor gave Robert a light yellow dress to put over his clothes. He then got everything set up around the end of the bed.

“Hon, look at me, okay? Don’t focus on what’s happening down there.” Robert said to his wife.

“I’m scared. What if I’m not ready? I don’t know how to be a mother! What if I mess our child up?”

“Then we’ll mess them up together,” Robert said, attempting to make his wife laugh and failing,

“You are going to be the best mother in the world. You already love our little girl so much. I know you love her more than me, and that’s okay!” That finally made her chuckle.

“Mrs. Sinclair, we need to do this now,” said the doctor.

“Hold my hand.” She put her left hand out to her husband who took it gratefully.

“I love you, now let’s meet our girl, yeah?” Robert whispered while wiping away his wife’s faint tears.

Evangeline Marie Sinclair was born at 1:28 a.m. on June 15, 1989.

“Evie! Did you find your shoes?” Robert yelled up the stairs to his daughter. It was the day of her 4th birthday and the small family was about to celebrate at the park.

“I can’t find them Daddy! I think someone took them!” Evangeline walked downstairs, her small hand barely fitting around the handrail.

“You mean you think somebody took them? Who would have done such a thing?”

Hillary then walked into the living room holding two little light up sneakers.

“Looking for these, hm? I found them in the backyard...” Evangeline knew she was supposed to bring anything she takes outside back inside when she’s done playing.

“I don’t know how they got there. Maybe Herbie took them outside.” Evangeline looks at the family’s dachshund hound sitting in front of their couch. Robert took the shoes from his wife and put them on his daughter’s feet.

“Let’s just hope he doesn’t forget them outside again,” He said. Evangeline got up once her shoes were tied and ran to the garage.

“Can we please go to the park now?”

“Yes, Sweetie, let’s get in the car.” Hillary responded as she helped Evangeline into her car seat.

“All set back there?” Robert asked, looking at his daughter in the rear view mirror. Evangeline gave a thumbs up and the trio drove to the local park.

The car ride was only 10 minutes long, yet it was enough time to play “Baby Shark” 5 times in a row, per Evangeline’s request. They all got out of the car, Hillary getting Evangeline out of her car seat as Robert got the cooler out of the back.

“Can I go on the playground before we eat?” Evangeline asked.

“Sure, Sweetie. Just let us pick a spot to sit so we make sure we can see you.”

The park was swarming with children and their families. Parents sat on picnic blankets all around the playground. Robert and Hillary found a spot a bit further from the playground than they would have liked, but they would still be able to see their daughter from where they were.

“Okay, Evie, you can go play but please stay where we can see you. If you want to go to the jungle gym on the other side of the park let one of us know and we’ll take you over there.”

“Okay Mommy!” Evangeline ran to the monkey bars first. She inherited long arms from her father, making her the best monkey bar climber in her grade.

Richard and Hillary laid out their blanket and unpacked the cooler. Hillary made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in the shape of stars and hearts that morning. There were ziploc bags of Cheez its, Gold fish, and fruit. She also made sure to pack plenty of Capri Sun and water. The couple snacked on some grapes while they watched their daughter run around and make new friends.

“Have you given any more thought into her starting Pre-K soon?” Hillary asked her husband.

“Oh trust me, I think about it all the time. I know she’s ready for it. Look at her, she loves making new friends. She’s super smart and really creative. I know she needs to go. I’m just...”

“Not loving the idea of her growing up? Me either, Love.”

“I know she has to, I just want her to stay little for as long as possible.” Robert leaned his head on his wife’s shoulder.

“I know, I know. But she’s still so young and she’s always gonna be our baby gi...” The alarm of their car started going off behind them. Hillary looked in her purse for the keys and gave them to Robert to silence the car.

“What was that about?” Hillary asked.

“I’m not sure... I’ve been telling you we need to get a new car. We’ve had that thing since we got married.” Hillary laughed and rolled her eyes. She looked back at the playground trying to see Evangeline.

“Do you see Evie?” She asked. Robert looked at the playground with his eyes squinted.

“Uh, no, just let me go over and see where she is.”

Hillary had a sick feeling in her gut as her husband picked up his speed as he got closer to the playground. She continued to look around the park for her daughter when she saw Robert rushing back to their spot.

“She’s not over there.” Robert said with wide eyes.

“What do you mean? Where is she?”

“I don’t know! I went over there and she’s, she’s not there. I don’t know where she went.”

“Oh my god, oh my god my baby. Did you look at the jungle gym?”

“Yeah, I went over there and didn’t see her.”

“No, no, no. Somebody took her, somebody has my baby!” Hillary yelled, grabbing the attention of the parents around them.

“It’s okay, I’m gonna keep looking for her and I’m gonna ask if anyone’s seen her. You stay here in case she comes back. Okay?” Robert told his wife as he took off in the direction of the trees behind the park.

“Evie! Evangeline! Where are you? Sweetie! Evie!” Robert yelled amongst the trees.

“Baby shark do do do do do do...” He heard a small whiney voice near him. Robert ran through the trees and saw Evangeline curled up in a ball, crying and sitting in the mulch.

“Evie! Honey, there you are,” Robert knelt to the ground and wrapped his daughter in a hug, “We were so worried. What are you doing back here?”

“A man told me there was a bunny asking for me in the trees and then... and then he grabbed my wrist and it hurt really bad!” Evangeline cried as she showed her father her red wrist. Robert picked her up and carried her back to her mother who sprinted them when she saw them walk out of the trees.

“Evangeline! Oh my gosh, I’m so happy you’re okay,” Hillary broke down as she took her daughter out of her husband’s arms, “I thought we lost you, Baby. Evie, what happened to your wrist?”

“We need to leave and we can talk at home.” Robert cut in.

“Okay.. Evie, I’ll sit in the back of the car with you. How does that sound?” Evangeline nodded and the family got in the car, thankful to go back home in one piece.

1998

The sun rose over the Sinclair house early that morning. The air was warm and the grass was damp. It was the perfect day for a pool party. Robert had woken up at 6 a.m. to make sure everything was set up for his little girl’s party. The backyard was covered in blue and green party supplies, Evangeline’s favorite colors. A large vanilla cake with “Happy 9th Birthday Evie!” written on it sat on the kitchen counter. Hillary was upstairs getting Evangeline ready in her swimsuit before her friends got there. The two went shopping that week specifically for a new swimsuit Evangeline could wear on the day of her pool party. She ended up getting a blue one piece and a rash guard with frogs all over it.

“Are you excited for today, Evie? Get to see all of your friends from school!”

“Yeah, I’m excited.” Evangeline said quietly.

“What’s wrong, Bug?”

“Well... does Thomas have to come? He’s been picking on me all week at camp.”

Evangeline is on summer vacation, but she spends most days at camp at the neighborhood’s church. The Sinclairs never really went to church, but when they found out they could have Evangeline go to camp for free, they decided they would go every once in a while.

“What has he been doing?”

“He pulled my hair when we were on the inflatable slides and he stepped on the necklace I was making for you.”

This squeezed Hillary’s heart a little bit. The fact that her daughter was making her a necklace and that a boy stepped on it.

“Have you tried talking to him about it? Asking him why he’s bothering you?”

“I always tell him to stop! And then he just keeps picking on me!”

“Okay, well it might be too late to uninvite him now, but this could be a great opportunity to sit down with him and work this all out.”

Evangeline agreed with her mother and the two went downstairs to finish getting the party set up.

Kids were jumping into the pool while parents lounged around and drank punch. Towels were thrown around the backyard. The cake was half gone by now. Evangeline was standing alongside the pool with two of her friends when she felt someone grab the strap of her swimsuit and let it go.

“Ow!” She cried and looked back to see Thomas with a shit eating grin on his face.

“Hey DUDE!” Thomas laughed at the irritated look on Evangeline’s face.

“Stop calling me that! I’m not a dude!”

“Only a dude would wear a swimsuit like that. Why don’t you go shop in the girl’s section next time?”

“Shut up! I did buy this in the girl section!” This caught the attention of her mother who then made her way over to the children.

“Hey, what’s going on over here?”

“Thomas said I got my swimsuit in the boys section after I told him I’m NOT a dude!”

Evangeline yelled while looking at her mother.

“If you don’t want to be called a dude, then stop dressing like a dude.” Thomas responded before pushing Evangeline into the pool.

Evangeline swam back up for air and tears fell from her eyes.

“Thomas! Why would you do that?” Hillary asked the young boy.

“Cause she’s annoying. That’s why.”

Hillary knelt down beside the pool so she could pull her daughter out of the water. She rubbed her daughter’s back as Robert brought her a towel.

“Okay, I think the party is over. Thank you everyone for coming and celebrating with us!”

Robert said, loud enough to get the attention of everyone in the yard.

Everyone left, but not before Hillary could talk to Thomas’ mother.

“Did you see what your son did? He has been bullying my daughter for, who knows how long now.”

“Hillary, I am so sorry. He’s been in a weird rebellious phase recently. I just keep telling myself, ‘boys will be boys!’”

Hillary shook her head, confused by everything this woman was saying.

“That is a horrible thing to say. He doesn’t get to pick on my daughter just because he’s a boy! He needs to leave her alone.”

“I understand you’re upset. But boys this age are awkward and, who knows, maybe he even has a little crush on her.” Thomas’ mom said with a wink.

“I don’t want to see him talking to her again. Have a nice evening.” Hillary said before shutting the front door. She walked into the living room where her husband and Evangeline were sitting on the floor playing with Herbie.

“Boys will be boys’ can you believe that? What kind of excuse is that for his behavior?”

Robert got up to help calm his wife down.

“Why don’t we... go out for dinner tonight? You feel up for that, Evie?”

Evangeline nodded and picked Herbie up, taking him to her room. Hillary walked towards their bedroom with Robert behind her.

“You know, if we made excuses like that for Evangeline, we would be seen as the worst parents in the world. Did you grow up getting away with stuff like that? It’s ridiculous!” Hillary said.

“Well as someone who grew up with 4 sisters and a single mother, that phrase would’ve caused World War 3.”

“What do we do about him?”

“I think the only thing we can do in this situation is make sure Evie knows how loved she is and that she’s bigger than what some little asshole kid makes her out to be.”

Hillary gave her husband a hug and mumbled against his chest.

“You’re right. We’ve got a great kid.”

The sound of feet hitting the floor upstairs can be heard in their bedroom. They barely hear Evangeline say, “Herbie, you have to put your shoes on!”

“Yeah, even though she’s a bit of a handful. She’s the best.”