

Knock, knock!

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She closed the door. She didn't let anyone in.

People were coming in and going out, but she didn't allow anyone in. She was surrounded by familiar faces, eyes she had seen before, mouths she had kissed and hands that had wandered over her skin. But she never allowed anyone in. Some people knew every corner of her apartment, every spider web she hoped nobody would notice. In fact, she was just like her home because everyone who really knew her could see the spider webs and the mess within her, especially in her head, but it was a forbidden territory for every single person in her life. She could clean up herself and never needed anyone else to get rid of the mess. She tried to cover it all and even put up some art pieces she had bought at a flea market, signed by an artist she later looked up on the internet, finding out that he had not a single original idea and was doing everything for the money. She, herself, was a masterpiece, so people would pretend to be distracted by her imperfect perfection. They didn't know they were stepping on a mine field, and she was the ticking bomb.

Now, she couldn't look people in the eye, not even a glance at her own eyes. She shattered the mirror. It was the first thing in her new apartment that reminded her of home. Broken pieces she could see bits of herself in.

Just as she was thinking that she didn't want history to repeat itself, her mum called. This time it was a new ringtone because the old one reminded her of people she had let in in the past.

"Hi, *mama!*" she said even though she would have liked to listen to the new ringtone a little longer.

"Oh, Em, you sound... How are you?"

"I'm fine, mum. Just a bit tired", Em said when she actually meant to say that she is tired; tired of seeing herself in the broken pieces sitting at the dinner table every Friday evening.

"Just wanted to ask if you're alright with stuffed peppers on Friday?"

"Yeah, sure mum. I'm fine with that." she said, not wasting her mother's time by telling her that she didn't like peppers. She had never liked peppers. And she had never told her that.

"Perfect, Em! See you on Friday! I miss you!"

If there was one thing she was more tired of than of being reminded of who she was by looking at her broken family, it was the fact that her mum kept calling her Em. Her name was Violet Emaline, but she always introduced herself as Vio. Her mum told her that she loved the violets bejeweling her weekly walks along the river. So, she named her Violet. But the truth was Violet only reminded her of the colour of the bruises her husband put on her body to mark his property. He always said it was an act of love. So, she never called

tired of seeing herself in the broken pieces

(→ It was now the first thing in her new
reminde her of home.)



her daughter Violet. Emaline means *peaceful home* – her mum looked it up before deciding on a name and that's exactly what she had hoped for after Em's birth. She still hoped for it.

After the call, Vio opened the window because the walls were suffocating her. She wasn't used to being able to open up when she felt her air was being taken away. It was hard for her tongue to carry the weight of her thoughts, so she stayed silent and checked again that her door was locked.

Vio was never told the stories her mum carried with her all along since they never talked about such things. It just wasn't their thing, not only because they were a happy family, but they were a happy family in a happy home, so nobody wanted to destroy that family portrait of theirs. When Vio was little, her mother read bedtime stories to her and sang lullabies. So, Vio never had the feeling that there were monsters living under her

bed. She heard the monster after her mum sang her to sleep and went to the living room, where the monster showed his act of love. The monsters weren't under her bed, she knew for sure. The monster fell asleep on the sofa in the living room every night and made her breakfast the next morning.

When Vio moved out, she felt guilty for leaving her mum behind. But nobody knew that she felt closest to home when she was furthest away. She felt lonely; lonely but safe. She never talked about her longing to share her solitude with someone. Until one day, when looking through the peephole, someone she couldn't recognise was hiding behind a bouquet of violets.

Knock, knock

"Who is it?" she asked, hesitating to even unlock the door.

"It's me, Vio. It's me."

Her eyes lit up and she felt a tear making its way down her cheek. It was the gentlest voice she had heard in years.

She let her in. She let her in, the one who would give her everything her mum never had. Safety. Love. A home. But she didn't know it yet. She didn't know what was to come. For a second, before she opened the door, she forgot about all the happy sad moments and the sad happy people in her life. She felt worthy of her name. *Emaline.*