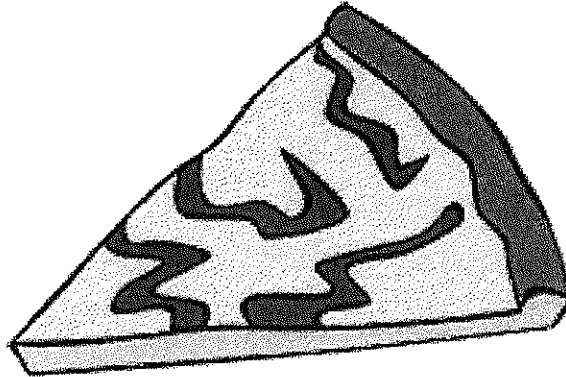


28.

**The Divorce**  
By ReadWorks

Lexile: 480



Emma's parents were in the midst of a nasty divorce. Her father had left her mother, and her mother wasn't taking the news well. Each morning, Emma's alarm clock would go off at 6:30, and she would get up and get dressed, brush her teeth, and eat her breakfast without saying so much as a good morning to her mother, who typically stayed in bed with the shutters closed all day. When Emma came home from school, she knocked quietly on the door, then opened a window and sat on the bed and asked her mother how she was doing. Her mother would mumble a response, look up at Emma, and smile as she stroked her cheek. Every time Emma entered her mother's room, it was dark and smelled stale. She wasn't entirely sure how long her mom had cooped herself up in there; it didn't look like she ever left the room, but sometimes Emma found empty cartons of Chinese take-out food or half-eaten pieces of fruit in the small wastebasket next to the door.

In the evenings, Emma's mother came downstairs to heat up frozen pizza or make a salad or grilled cheese. She would stand in the harsh light of the kitchen's fluorescent bulbs and say, to nobody in particular, "I might be down, but I can still make my own daughter dinner."

Emma heard the pronouncement each night from her bedroom, which was right off the kitchen. She didn't understand how preparing one meal a day kept intact her mother's sense

of motherhood. When she tried to discuss it with her dad, he just told her to be patient with her mother; that she was going through something tough.

“This isn’t easy for anyone,” her dad said on the other line, sighing.

Emma pressed the phone close to the side of her head. “It is for *you*,” she said before hanging up on him.

The truth was, it probably wasn’t easy for her dad either. Besides feeling guilty for breaking up his family (as he told Emma each time they spoke on the phone), he was the one dealing with all the lawyer stuff. Even so, Emma couldn’t help feeling angry, hurt, and betrayed by both of her parents.

At the kitchen table during dinner, Emma’s mother would take a few bites of whatever meal she had prepared and then watch Emma eat it quickly.

“How was your day?” her mom asked, forcing a smile.

“Fine,” Emma shrugged. “Pizza’s good.”

“Thanks,” her mom said.

Emma couldn’t tell if her mother’s unhappiness was caused by the divorce itself or by her mother’s feelings of failure. She chewed on the still-cold pizza, watching as her mom rested her head on her hands, as if the weight of her skull was too much for her neck to carry, even sitting down.

Once, during one of their drawn-out dinners, Emma’s dad walked through the front door like he used to when he was still living with them.

“Hi,” he said, pulling out a chair. He sat at the table across from Emma, and looked at his soon-to-be ex-wife. “Thanks for letting me try this,” he said.

Emma’s mom rolled her eyes.

“What’s going on?” Emma said.

Emma's dad moved his chair closer to the table and reached for a piece of pizza. "Your mom has agreed to let me come by once a week to have dinner with the two of you," he said.

Emma's mom stood up abruptly. "I agreed to let you come by to have dinner with *Emma*," she said. "Not with me." She left the kitchen, and Emma heard the telltale plops of her slippers as they smacked against the stairs as she went back to her bedroom. A few moments later, the door to that room slammed shut.

Emma and her dad were quiet. Her dad sighed and finished the pizza in eight bites.

"Why do you want to eat with us?" Emma said, feeling suddenly defensive of her mother.

Her dad reached for another piece of pizza. "Look, I still love your mother," he said. "And you know how much I love you. Just because your mom and I can't work things out between us doesn't mean we can't have a good relationship as friends and parents to you." He chewed his slice of pizza thoughtfully. "I wish things had turned out differently. You deserve a happy family. But the problem is, your mom and I just can't seem to work as a couple."

Emma rolled her eyes, painfully aware she was mimicking her mom. "That's not true. You probably just want to be with someone else," she said.

"That's not fair, Em," her dad said. "It's more complicated than that."

"Whatever," Emma said. "You're not the one lying in bed all day."

Her dad didn't respond. They finished the pizza, and Emma cleaned up the paper plates and napkins. Her dad went upstairs, and Emma heard him knock on her mother's bedroom door and go inside.

Emma settled down at the kitchen table to do her homework. Her dad was inside the room for a while, and Emma couldn't hear anything they were saying, probably for the better, she thought. Even though she felt she should protect her mom from whatever excuses or demands her dad might make, she didn't want to hear their arguments.

Her dad finally came downstairs as she was getting started on her math homework and kissed her on the top of her head.

“Bye, Sweet Pea,” he said.

Emma didn’t look up from her worksheets. She knew that upstairs, her mom would probably be crying. She was so tired of the cycle her parents were in—tired of her mother staying in bed, tired of her father making just a small effort to make things right. Emma could barely remember the time before the divorce. It seemed like it had taken up her entire reality.

Late that night, just as Emma was finishing up, her mom came back into the kitchen. Her eyes were red, but she was wearing jeans and a sweatshirt for the first time in what seemed like months.

“How’s it going, Emma?” she said.

Emma was surprised to see her there. “Fine.”

“Do you want some tea?” her mom asked.

“Sure,” Emma said, closing her notebook, three-ring binder, and textbooks. “I’m tired.”

“It’s late, you should go to sleep soon.” Her mother plugged in a hot-water boiler to the kitchen counter. “You have to wake up early,” she said, pulling out two mugs from the cabinet.

When the water was ready, Emma took a steaming cup from her mom. Maybe things would get better, Emma thought. Maybe her mother would stay out of bed and would start caring for her. Emma took a sip of the tea. They sat in the kitchen until it was time for Emma to go to sleep.

“I’ll throw out the pizza box in the recyclables in the morning,” Emma said, dumping the tea bag into the trashcan.

“Don’t worry about it,” her mom said. “I’ll take care of it now.”

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What are Emma's parents in the midst of?

- A) a disagreement
- B) a conversation
- C) a honeymoon
- D) a divorce

2. How does Emma's view of her mom change during the story?

- A) At the beginning of the story Emma does not feel like her mom is taking care of her but at the end of the story Emma thinks that her mom might start taking care of her.
- B) At the beginning of the story Emma does not want to have dinner with her mom but at the end of the story she does want to have dinner with her mom.
- C) At the beginning of the story Emma does not think her mom should wear pajamas all day but at the end of the story she thinks her mother should wear pajamas all day.
- D) At the beginning of the story Emma thinks her mom has too much energy but at the end of the story she thinks her mom does not have enough energy.

3. In the text, Emma's mother makes a frozen pizza, salad or grilled cheese for dinner, but Emma doesn't understand "how preparing one meal a day kept intact her mother's sense of motherhood."

Based on this evidence, what conclusion can be made?

- A) Emma thinks that her mother shouldn't take the time to make her something for dinner every night.
- B) Emma thinks that her mother is very busy during the day doing things around their home.
- C) Emma thinks that her mother needs to do more than make one meal a day in order to fulfill her role as a mother.
- D) Emma thinks that she should be able to make dinner all by herself and that her mom shouldn't do the cooking.

4. Emma's mom and dad talked together in her mother's bedroom. Afterwards, Emma's mom came downstairs and her eyes were red. Based on this evidence, what conclusion can be made?

- A) Emma's mom was smiling.
- B) Emma's mom was crying.
- C) Emma's mom was singing.
- D) Emma's mom was sleeping.

5. What is this passage mainly about?

- A) the dinner options available to Emma's family
- B) the effect of divorce on Emma's family
- C) the sleeping habits of Emma's mother
- D) the way Emma prepares for her school day

6. Read these sentences from the text.

"In the evenings, Emma's mother came downstairs to heat up frozen pizza or make a salad or grilled cheese. She would stand in the harsh light of the kitchen's fluorescent bulbs and say, to nobody in particular, 'I might be down, but I can still make my own daughter dinner.' Emma heard the **pronouncement** each night from her bedroom, which was right off the kitchen."

Based on these sentences, what does "**pronouncement**" mean?

- A) speculation
- B) decision
- C) statement
- D) agreement

7. Emma's mother and father are in the midst of a divorce, \_\_\_\_ Emma's father still wants to have dinner with them one night a week.

Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

- A) thus
- B) but
- C) also
- D) soon