

THE SUN WILL COME OUT

By Kristen S., River Ridge, LA

Come home and turn on the lights-- only if it were too dark to see. Do the laundry-- only if I had nothing clean. Go to the grocery; cook dinner-- only if I were hungry enough to tolerate another lonely meal. Wipe counters; clean the dishes; sweep the floors-- only if I were too anxious to sit still. Clean the bathroom- only if it were too dirty for my own comfort. In and out as I please, but be home for curfew-- what curfew? Follow the rules-- only if I made them.

My parents have been divorced since I was eleven. My two brothers stayed with my mom, and I lived with my dad. Well, I lived at my dad's house, anyways. My dad stayed at his girlfriend's house in Laplace close to five nights a week. When he came home for lunch, I was at school. When I came home from school, he was at work. I cheered twice a week, and was working about three. On the weekends, neither of us was to be found. Surprisingly for as little contact as we had with one another, my father and I had a very personal relationship. We always kept in touch, and the scarce times we did have dinner together, we would talk about private issues and problems in our lives. I loved my dad, but I loved my freedom, too.

On the other hand, my relationship with my mother was, well-- different. Actually, my relationship with my mother was nonexistent. I probably haven't slept at her house in four months, don't remember the last time I saw her, and haven't spoken to her in almost two weeks. Noting that for the first five years of the divorce my parents had joint custody of my siblings and me, things have clearly gone downhill in recent years.

My dad had moved in with Aggie Mama, the only grandparent I ever knew, when she became sick. She had passed away the summer before Katrina, and my dad has been living in that house since. The three-year anniversary of her death passed this summer, around the time when her five children were involved in complete anarchy during the war over money and control. Aggie Mom's children: two jealous, overweight daughters--both divorced, unsettled, and unhappy; a 60 year-old homosexual ex-priest-- still trying to find his major; and two always popular, health- and- exercise-obsessed twin boys-- my father and my favorite uncle. Uncle Mitch has a decent career, a fancy car, and well-enough money to live comfortably; in essence, he lives in basically a shack in the mountains in Oregon. He has always been the bachelor, with no wife or kids to spend his money on (only because he's too far away to spend it on me).

Sometime during the summer, my dad's greedy, older siblings demanded us to either buy out the house completely or pay them their share of the property. A whole month went by from the time this notion was conceived and the time my entire life was upside down, as my aunts and uncle naively hoped to restore their sorry lives. My uncle living in Oregon had scheduled a trip down to New Orleans for the 4th of July, hence he, too, was expediently present for the turmoil. My dad's non-materialistic twin, my father, and I were all defending the homeland, while the garbage men/ eviction officers abruptly invaded our lives. Vaguely aware of the future changes impending in my life, I had already leased and moved into an apartment during the first week of July. My best friend since grammar school, whose parents were deceased, was moving out on her own for the first time, too. It was only fate that we were shoe-ins for roommates. After bouncing social security checks, stumbling into the Emergency Room, adopting a dog, popping a tire, skipping a bill at a Chinese buffet, and nearly getting arrested, needless to say in twelve full days I was throwing my bags back onto the floor at my dad's house. I couldn't tell you the last time I had been so excited to eat a meal by myself.

With a full week of summer partying ahead of me, I enjoyed the familiar feeling of living under my parent's roof again. I took some time for myself, and tried to relax for once during the summer. This feeling, however, was especially short-lived. Saturday morning the phone rang.

"Oh hey, sweetie! You sleeping?" It was the voice of my gay uncle, always organizing some sort of construction project. His unexpected visits were growing old.

"Yeaahh.. Uncle Skip?" I asked, not even trying to sound enthusiastic.

"Yea hi, Kristen. Productive people are up before 9 a.m.!" he exclaimed, as he laughed at his own joke.

"Yea, ha," I mumbled, as I sat up and opened my eyes.

"Anyways, your Aunt Susie is coming over today to work on the house and the garden out front. Ya daddy tell ya we were putting the house up for sale?"

"Yea, he mentioned it. He said we'd be out at the end of July so yall could paint my room and stuff," I said, as I looked around at my green and blue striped bedroom walls. Then my thoughts quickly shifted, trying to remembering what day

The author's comments:

“ This is the story about how my life took a 180 degree turn, possibly for the better; however, at the time, it was one of the most traumatic things I ever had to deal with. This narrative is written in a positive light-- a little less dysfunctional than how it occurred. ”

it was. July... 20-- his rambling voice suddenly brought back my attention.

"Yea, well, hmmm it is the end of July! We sent an e-mail to everyone in the family with information about the house and when we would renovate it. Everyone is coming the week of the 22nd, since your Uncle Mitch is in town. That means you gotta have your room cleared out by Monday."

"Ummm, okay.." I responded, partially confused. I don't even check my e-mail; what was he talking about? I hung up the phone, ignoring his annoying comment good-bye, much too joyful for me to handle at this time in the morning. So, today was Saturday, I had work at five tomorrow, and my room had to be empty by Monday. Sweet. Since I recently moved in and out of an apartment, all of my belongings were scattered throughout my bedroom and the adjacent living room, which I long-before declared as my space, as well. I took a look around my cluttered room. I picked up about four articles of clothing; my eyes skimmed around the chaos once more. Turned my head-- more stuff. This was when I panicked. I ran in circles to find my cell phone-- wait, it's still on the charger! I was sure I had lost my mind. Overwhelmed, I quickly called my mentor, my comfort level, my saving grace. My best friend, Clare.

"Heyyyy," she answered the phone eagerly (we usually called each other on Saturday mornings to discuss the intro to the weekend the night before). "What's up, girl?"

"Clare, what the hell?!" I couldn't even manage to blurt anything else out.

"What's wrong?"

"Okay, so you know how my dad said we had til the end of July to move out the house? Yea, well my uncle calls this morning and was like 'Have all your stuff out by Monday.' Clare, that's in like two days. How the hell do they expect me to have all my crap out of here in like a day?"

"Wait, you needa get out so they can paint your room, right?"

"Yea, they need to redo practically everything in here 'cause the house is a P.O.S., and they actually think they're getting money out of it. This house is so old. You know, we had the house appraised last week, and come to find out, my dad's been paying them almost double of what it's worth the whole time! Ahhh! This is so messed up, what am I gonna do?!"

"Okay. Take a deep breath. We're gonna figure this out," Clare reassured me. I already felt better, for those famous words she often used usually foreshadowed some good advice. "I'll be over in a minute." We hung up the phone, and I did the best I could to collect myself.

Later that afternoon, Clare and I were at my house ready to tackle the task of reconstruction. Unlike my brothers, who came over every now and then for dinner, for me that house was what I called home. I stayed there every night and assumed control over the house, and all of my personal items were kept there. We took a brief pause to deliver an extremely fake and forced greeting to my aunt, who had showed up to start the garden work. Focusing back on my room, we first refreshed my memory of the color of my carpet, while we removed layers of clothing from the floor. I decided to organize my jewelry into separate boxes: necklaces, bracelets, earrings, etc. Six full boxes of accessories, alone; we had a time-consuming road ahead of us. Magazines were stacked sky-high, multiple boxes of product and cosmetics were taped shut, and my clothes were thrown into oversized garbage bags. I modeled every Spirit Day costume since the 8th grade for Clare, who goes to Ursuline Academy. The first twenty minutes, I'm not going to lie, were actually a little revitalizing. Still, nothing could top the sight of my plump (with an ego to match) and lethargic Aunt Susan panting, sweating, and getting stung by a bee (ha ha!), as she tried to dig up the unkempt garden. Her periodic rests were so predictable, they could almost be timed; even more, they endured almost as long as her labor phases. Maybe my aunt lost a few pounds out there, but anyways, the front row view from my window was priceless.

Working nonstop through the remainder of the day, Clare and I had pretty much the bulk of things inside some form of traveling device: gift bags, shoeboxes, wastebaskets, a flower pot. Whatever. To top off a beautiful day (not really), my other aunt and uncle arrived at the house at the same time my father returned from work. Just in time to irritate me even more, I guess, my Aunt Joan asked,

"Kristen, so you've packed up all your stuff, I see. You gonna bring it to your Mama's now? You know, get your stuff out the way," Aunt Joan said. I couldn't help but wonder how anyone could look me in the eye and say that with a straight face. As if I wasn't moving out of their way quick enough? Please! I had been working all day to salvage my things, knowing they would get rid of it if I didn't move it myself. I was exhausted, and now I have to get it all out the house, too? "Oh, and tell your brothers to come over and get what they want, too. Anything left in here when we're ready to paint is gonna get thrown out," Aunt Joan warned. Who did she think she was, anyways?

With my car troubles conveniently occurring at this exact week of the year, Clare and I walked to my mom's house and literally, showed up at her doorstep. For as close as my mother lives to my dad, it's a wonder we wouldn't have more contact with each other in public places, like the grocery store. Nonetheless, the first conversation with my mom face-to-face in a long time took place on our front lawn.

"Hi, Mom." Silence. "Can I use your van to get some of my stuff from Dad's and bring it over here?" I knew it wasn't the sweetest introduction, but I'm sure she heard from my brothers that we were moving out. I wondered if she anticipated me to live with her again. Either way, without asking further questions, she handed me the keys.

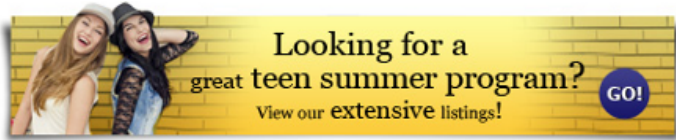
And just like that, Clare and I were loading everything into my mom's van and transferring it to my new home. Stupid me-- I thought it would be okay to only pack the most cumbersome items and leave the nonessential ones for another day. Oh, did I assume wrong.

When I returned to my dad's for Day 2 of moving, I noticed the drenched piles of debris covering the curb, an absolute mess because of the rain. As I walked inside, I instantly gaped at the remainder of my things, which were shoved carelessly into a massive, random box. Everything was miscellaneously combined together, most of it smashed, and pushed to the side. In the middle of my empty bedroom laid a garbage bag, not for packing, but for objects considered "trash". As I dug through the garbage bag, in which someone emptied a real trashcan inside, my blood came to a raging boil from beneath my skin. Magazines, books, candles, a spilled bottle of some kind of grease. Socks, dried up flowers, letters from my friends, a leaking can of wood glaze. Artwork from the wall, a cardboard box adorned in graffiti, every fifty-cent Spirit Day costume I had collected from the past four years, dripping sponges and dirty rags. I was in shock as I peered into this hopeless sack of ruined memories.

Who the hell ever said their opinion mattered?! I didn't care if they assumed those articles were worthless! I didn't care if my art was the hideous they had seen in their lives! That stuff mattered to me! Those dead flowers were important to me; that trash came from a very close friend's funeral, something I could NEVER have returned. My family had crossed my line too far this time. I wasn't holding my tongue anymore.

That night I had it out with my aunts and uncle. I said some really not-so-nice things, furious that they had gone through my stuff and took it upon themselves to throw stuff out. Tears blinded my vision, for irreplaceable items that were lost could never be retrieved. That night I left the house I called home for the past 5 years with such ill feelings, I was nauseous. I never went inside again.

To this day, I have still not found things that were lost in the move, or should I say, the eviction. And although it was extremely awkward moving back in with my mother, positive results came out of this experience. My mother and I are now good friends, and we get along so peacefully, it's scary. It is a comfortable feeling to have a guardian watching over you, not to mention giving you money, and always having a home-cooked meal on the table. My dad and I are also still very close, and I think he may marry his girlfriend soon. Ultimately, this experience made me realize that after surviving the tormenting nightmare, I could probably overcome anything. Overall, when the storm has passed, the sun really does come out in the end.



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