

My mom was crying when we pulled up to the two-story apartment building well after bedtime. She was still crying two weeks later, after all of our boxes had been unpacked and everything was more or less as good as it was going to get, considering the circumstances. It seemed a common thing for her, crying that is. After all, we'd left everything we'd ever known in the middle of the night. During a rainstorm. A dark rainstorm with a wind that tore at our clothing underneath the darkest grey clouds ever. It was more of a shit storm.

Arriving at the apartment in the middle of the night was mom's plan B. Plan B wasn't even close to plan A. Her plan A was to stay at home with dad and live a happily ever after life in marital bliss. But that all changed when we came home early one afternoon and caught dad in Jenny's bed with our next-door neighbor. They were naked and sweaty, grunting and swaying. Screaming, Jenny was the first to discover them tossing and turning on top of her Winnie The Pooh blanket. When my mom saw what was going on, she went absolutely ape-shit. I don't know what mom was more mad about, seeing her husband screwing the next door neighbor, or the fact that he was doing it in my sister's bed.

Mom's plan B. I heard her talking about it after the fact, after we'd moved and settled into our new place, which was about a million times smaller than our old place. I heard my mom telling my aunt Beatrice on the phone that she'd suspected that dad had been screwing around for some time... for years... that asshole, and with that uptight bitch from next door to top it all off...

"That fucking tramp. Who the hell does she think she is... walking around with her spray on tan and hoochy nails... Seriously, she's the fakest piece of white trash I've ever seen... really, I feel sorry for her... I want to go and kick her veneered buck-teeth in... fuckin pill popping slut..."

Mom then said that she'd thought more than once about going over there when the bitch was out in order to fuck her fifteen year old son, just to get her back. But that didn't sound like a very good plan B to me, because even to me that kid was as ugly as a dog turd.

Over the space of a year, Plan B got more detailed with mom's suspicions, and took flight on its own when dad got caught nailing that bitch right on top of Winnie and Tigger. Her suspicions had led her to buy a four-plex in some town I'd never heard of, on a whim. The thing paid for itself she said, a place that she could rely on, even if her suspicions about dad weren't warranted.

After mom had finished crying, or after her tears had dried up and left her the hell alone like she'd left dad, she suddenly changed. Her language got more colorful. And she started smoking. And drinking. After years of being polite and always scolding us when we said 'damn' or 'crap', she started saying things like 'dog fucker' and 'cock sucker'. My ears were constantly burning from her language, and that went nicely with my eyes that had started burning from her smoking.

And that didn't include her daily drinks. She always had one in her hand. She'd gone from a glass of wine at Thanksgiving and Christmas, to having a fully stocked bar and something always cold in the fridge. Gerry from downstairs called her Highball Alice. He

could talk though. Thankfully, my mom was a million miles better than my friend's mom, who twirled on the front lawn daily before taking a nap on the grass. Mom was just more consistent when she had a drink in her hand, more able to cope, able to patiently explain things like where clouds came from or why dad lived on his own in the big house while we were all cramped into a little apartment. "Why can't we live there," I asked, frustrated about being in a small two-bedroom apartment far away from all my old friends and school. We'd come from a four bedroom house with basement on a quiet street where the trees were shady and large, to a four-plex on the edge of town with a view of nothing, "why can't dad live here instead?" She took a long drag of her cigarette before answering. "Because, I'm going to get him back... and I just need some time..." And that's all she ever told us, that she was going to get him back. It sounded menacing and ominous. I felt sorry for my dad that mom was going to get him. I wondered some times if she was going to try killing him.

Five months after leaving him, my mom finally got my dad back. And she got him good. In a cruel twist of fate, for my dad that is, it turned out that it was her name on the house title. He wasn't even mentioned in any of the documents. Sure, he'd paid the mortgage and his name was on the utility bills, but as for owning a house, my mom described it best when she said that "he doesn't own shit... he was too worried that owning a house would affect his income tax or something blah blah blah... you know how paranoid he is... so, basically, I checked with my lawyer then had the house listed, and the realtor showed it on weekdays when the motherfucker was at work... you should've seen his face when the lawyer delivered the papers saying that he had a week to pack and move out, since the house had been sold... hahaha... that cocksucker's face puckered more than the neighbor's dried up asshole after riding his limp dick..."

Thinking about dad getting it, I realized I didn't want to know too much. Seriously, it was too weird, going from having a mom and dad and a big house, to living in a small apartment with my mom and sister, listening to my mom drop cuss words into every sentence, just to spice shit up.

Maybe that was what bothered me. Maybe I didn't give a rat's ass about my dad. Maybe watching my mom harden was what really bothered me, seeing her change from what I'd known all my life into this street hardened landlord who didn't need any cheating good for nothing men in her life. It all sounded like those old sad country and western songs that my uncle Pete listened to, always someone singing about someone doing them wrong.

After the tears had all dried up and my mom's feet were standing steady on solid ground, we finally got to go visit my dad. He had changed too, like everything else in our life, he had changed. Jenny and I insisted on dressing up, wearing our finest dresses and combing our hair until our scalps were raw and scratchy. Looking our best wasn't my mom's first choice. She wanted us to look normal, to look like we hadn't even thought about him since we'd left.

But it had been months. I had never gone more than a few days without seeing my dad. It felt weird going without him for so long.

Right away, seeing him in his new place, it didn't seem right.

The first thing I noticed when I walked into his townhouse, which was still way bigger than our apartment, was that the place didn't look lived in. There should've been pizza boxes on the coffee table and chip crumbs all over the couch, expired milk in the fridge and laundry hanging from the ceiling fan. There should've been empties stacked head high in a pyramid in a dark corner of the living room, right underneath a poster of the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders.

The second Jenny and I walked into dad's place, I immediately wished that I would've worn dirty clothes, with muddy shoes. It looked like a furniture showroom. The couches had plastic on them. The armchairs were covered with slipcovers. There were ugly pastel pictures on the walls and on the floor was the whitest carpet ever. White carpet. I wondered what kind of dad with kids gets white carpet? It looked like a set from Miami Vice, and I half expected Crockett and Tubbs to come around the corner any second. My dad, he looked the part as well. He had white pants on. I could see his red underwear right through them.

My dad had some stubble. He had highlights. He looked like a drug dealer.

The first thing he said to us when we walked through the front door was to take our shoes off. It wasn't 'you've grown' or 'I've missed you so so much...' it was just 'take your shoes off'. Then he made us wash our hands so that we didn't leave fingerprints everywhere. He then hugged us, slightly, but never said that he missed us.

We stayed inside his place for no more than ten minutes before we were herded outside like dirty pets. Jenny asked him if we could look around the townhouse, maybe find our room to see what it looked like.

Dad said that he didn't think that would be a good idea.

I understood. There was no bedroom at his place for us. This was going to be a day trip. Good thing my mom had insisted on keeping our backpacks, stuffed animals and pillows in the trunk of the car, just in case.

Being with dad was uncomfortable. I didn't hate him, not like mom did. To be fair, she told us to figure out how we felt about him ourselves. "Don't hate him because I hate him... love him if you want. He's your dad..."

Jenny asked him more questions than he could deal with. They came rapid fire out of her mouth. She asked him about why he'd moved into that townhouse with the white carpets. She asked him about where all the old furniture had gone. She asked him about the neighbor and her bed and told him how mom had made her throw out all the sheets and bedding, because mom said that the sheets were probably full of crabs and lice and shit. Dad didn't say much. He always looked like he was checking out his reflection in the mirror.

And checking his watch.

We walked along the boardwalk beside the lake. He bought us ice cream without asking which flavors we wanted. I got bubblegum, Jenny got Peanut Butter Chocolate. He'd forgotten that Jenny was allergic to peanuts. We switched cones when he wasn't looking.

Faking that I had to go to the bathroom, I called my aunt Beatrice, and asked for my mom to come get us.

My mom never asked why, or how come, or told me that we had to stay until our visiting time was up. She just said that she would be there soon, and that I should just be patient and strong.

In a parking lot by a playground, we got into our car and drove away without saying a word. My dad didn't say anything when I told him that mom was coming to pick us up soon. He didn't protest or say that he would try harder, that he would be more fun and would ditch the blond highlights in his hair and would stop driving around in a little red Fiero that only had seating for two.

My mom didn't say anything either when we silently got into the car, after trying to give dad a hug, which had turned into a stiff awkward embrace. Once we started driving, she started crying. She cried all the way home, for four solid hours she cried and wiped her eyes and blew her nose. Our car wandered all over the road.

I looked out the window, watching the land pass as we whipped along the highway. I wondered if I should be crying too, since it was more than obvious that my dad wanted nothing to do with either me or Jenny, and thinking that, it made me want to swear and start smoking, just like mom had done.

To me, there didn't seem to be a better way to deal with rejection than swearing, since I was too young to drink or smoke.