

BAM! BAM! BAM! I was sure that soldiers in Afghanistan were marching to the beat of my heart, so loud it was. I knew what was coming, but didn't want to. Needed to know, but couldn't. All I really did know in that moment was that there was so much pain and finality rising to the surface of their faces that I couldn't take another millisecond of it. Really, I couldn't. It was torturous. And then, in the split second after they told me, I would have given anything for the pleasure of the preceding anguish- not knowing.

AW, MAN!!!! I messed up. I watch, defenseless, as on-screen my Pikachu perishes at the paws of a wild ChimChar. I hear footsteps. I don't turn around. Maybe whoever it is will leave me in my protected video game world, where I don't have to clean my room or answer to anyone. My elbows are on the bottom bunk of my unmade bunk-bed. I'm kneeling on the ground, leaning forward.

Creak! My door needs oil. I turn my head begrudgingly halfway around, and my sight falls on my mom's face. Her mouth is a straight but quivering line. Her eyes are wide and shocked, like someone has just slapped her.

"Abby?" She sounds scared.

"Sorry, I forgot to clean my room." I turn away, ignoring the nagging sensation everywhere except for my control center, which I keep under lock and key, safely rational. She had just gotten back from a weekend at her friend Liz's earlier today, which was an action that had happened after me walking in on her crying with her mom, my Grandma Debi. I don't know why she left. Have I done something wrong?

My mom snaps me back from my coma of thought by saying the perfect thing to spin my thoughts into complete irrationality.

"Sweet, it's time for a family meeting."

I stand up so quickly that I slam my head on my bunk-bed ladder. "Oooooow!" I howl, sinking to the floor.

My mom grips my hand, perhaps more tightly than she usually would, and I get the sense that she's doing it for her own stability as well. But why? As she pulls me to my feet I think maybe I know. The nagging gets more insistent. I start to piece together some things that make a very ugly puzzle picture.

I take care to place my footsteps carefully, treading on the old, dark wooden slats of our farmhouse floor with the utmost trepidation. My socks have never been so interesting- loose white things with Hanes clearly printed just below my toes.

As we walk outside, my earlier uneasiness turns into butterfly circus performers shooting out of cannons and ricocheting around my inner calm, blasting everything into panic far more effectively than usual. My dad is already sitting on the rusty, white-washed porch swing. We join him. My mom's rocking nervously back and forth on her heels in a steady rhythm, and doesn't even dust off the cushions before we sit. I do, though. I'm squashed between my mother and father, focusing firmly on the maple tree in the front yard, their firm thighs trapping heat, almost unbearable in the pounding August sun. But I don't want them to let go.

"We thought it would be better to just rip the bandage off," my mom starts, entwining and unentwining her fingers, and now I start rocking- back, forth. Back, forth.

"And just know that whatever happens, we both love you very, very much," my dad breaks in, pronouncing the words emphatically. Back, forth. Back, forth.

They both sigh, as if bracing themselves for something awful, and I want to know so badly what it is, so badly and intensely so that I cease rocking.

"We're getting a divorce," they say, almost simultaneously. They stare at me expectantly, then. And what do I do? I laugh.

"You're joking." I want so badly for this to be a cruel joke.

My dad shakes his head, and I realize that for the first time in my life, he's crying.

The rest of the day is sort of a blur. I don't remember who held me, or when, just that tears were streaming down my face, a soundless howl pouring from my throat, and there was nothing, nothing, that anyone could do to make it better. I do remember my mom standing up determinedly after a while, my dad sort of collapsing back vacantly. The one thing I really see even all these years later, though, is searching their faces. Beseeking them, silently pleading with them this one thing: Please, please, please don't do this.

"I'm going to go to my mo- to Grandma Debi's house," my mom says, her eyes filled with so many emotions. "Would you like to come?"

And then I'm nodding dumbly, racing back to my room, which was not long ago a happy place, and grabbing my overnight bag from under my bed.

I open bureau drawers blindly, shoving froggy pajamas, T-shirts, socks around in a frenzy. Somehow, we make it to Grandma Debi's alive. I stagger away from everyone-I'm not in the mood to stomach another hug.

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Laying on Grandma Debi's smoky, dirty mattress in her cramped guest room with no bed and rarely used plastic toy cars was the worst moment of my life. Because for the first time since my mom had arrived at my bedroom, I really allowed myself to think. But I knew it had to be that much worse for mom, who, a little while later, came in and layed down next to me. My flow of emotions was mostly released as I cried into her shoulder, and after a moment, she cried too. More than she had on the porch swing. More than she had when she almost broke her arm falling on the cement floor of our old basement.

Soon, and I'm not really sure how soon, she called my dad. She cried again, and she was silent for a long time. And then I heard her say, almost indistinguishably, "Okay. Bye." I'd never heard her say "bye" like that to my dad before. It had always been, "love you sweetie! See you soon!" or "I miss you already. Come home and see me." Or at least, "I love you!" you know, something you'd see on a greeting card. Something that happily married people say to each other without thought. And it struck me a second time that my parents were not happily married anymore. I knew they had been at one point.... When did everything change? But all thoughts like those were wiped clean away when my mom came in and said, "You'll be seeing your dad soon." I cried again, I know. But I am so grateful that she never once said, "We're better off without him." She may have said, "I'm better off without him," but she never dragged me into it. They never dragged me into it. When they went to court, I didn't know. When they fought, I was never around to hear it. Even if they couldn't be married, they could be co-parents. And really special, amazing ones. They could, and can, even be friends.

My life has never fully gone back to "normal," whatever that means. I guess for me it means before the divorce. But I now know that I can't go back to normal, and I can't really go forward to it, so I've decided

to just “keep on rolling,” and build one up again. I was born into a “normal” that was already created, but now I get to find my own. I stay with my mom half the week, and my dad the other half. I’m happy. Three and a half years later, I’m happy. Two weeks later, I was happy. My brain has carefully omitted certain details of the weeks following the divorce, so I can’t tell you how my homecoming with my dad went, or how my parents finally became friends. I can just tell you that I’m doing great.

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Now, I know this whole story has been about my parents getting a divorce, and how I recovered, and how everything’s great. And I know that there are far worse things in the world than going through a divorce, and that not everyone recovers so quickly and cleanly from it. And not to say that my life’s perfect now, or that I never think about what my life would be like if my parents had stayed married. Because my life’s not perfect. My mom remarried, a Mexican who was really tough to understand- and that was the least of it. They are going through another divorce right now, and my mom had another child with him- a baby boy who I named Fox. I don’t think that Fox will see his dad ever again. My mom’s ex-husband, Mario, was and is an illegal citizen. I live with my godmother’s parents in Jackson when I stay with my mom, and my chosen grandmother in Chelsea, Bev, when I stay with my dad. Not to say that this is bad, because it’s not. It’s just a lot of change. And I do think about their divorce.

I’m going to end with a message to all of the people and animals out there who read this story and think something. Maybe it’s “oh, you should stop feeling so sorry for yourself,” or “wow, I really connect with that story.” Maybe you don’t think either of those things, and maybe you think nothing at all. Maybe you just move onto the next story after reading this. But I know there are some people out there who don’t have parents, or are like my half-brother Fox and never really see their dad. I know there are kids who went through divorces just like mine. I wish I could say I empathize, that I know what you’re going through. I’m sorry that I can’t, at least not with all of you. My parent’s divorce ended really well, and I was mostly kept out of the way of my mom’s second divorce. But just know that I can sympathize, and I can sympathize a whole lot. Because I know at least part of what you’re going through. And I hope that you get my message that even if it doesn’t seem like it right now, life’s going to be okay. And I know it’s such a cliché, but everything’s gonna be alright. So keep living, keep dreaming, and remember once in a while that you deserve some of the good stuff. You deserve to be happy. So no matter what it takes, make it happen. Thank you for reading my story. I hope you remember it, but if you don’t, I’m just overjoyed that someone is going to read my words. So once more, thank you. Thank you thank you

thank you. And I will end by sending laughter and love your way. Use it well. Because a little laughter and a little love can conquer the Universe.