



Another Day in the Life

My red Toyota Matrix looked like nobody loved it. Crumbs and pizza sauce crusted the upholstery in the backseat. Evidence from an attempt to have quality time with my kids: it was quality time, not quantity time. The fossilized remains of pizza crusts lay abandoned on my floormat with the dried mud, in the back, and my passenger seat was repurposed into a purgatory for Monster cans, my favorite energy drink. The windows were decorated with smeared fingerprints that were supposed to be “cave paintings.” This artwork was a reminder of why I did what I did every day.

“You could do what I am doing. According to Darwin’s theory of evolution, all creatures can adapt to their environment. I have a cat who cannot hunt, but he opens doors. He knows where the easy food is.” I said into my cellphone.

I could almost hear the click of my front door, and that stupid, black fur ball marching in the house like he owned it. That cat looked smug, and I hated that.

Michael laughed, and it bubbled out of him like a joyful brook. His laugh matched his personality. I could picture his azure eyes: they sparkled, and they crinkled in the corners. Talking to Michael felt like a gentle breeze by the ocean. He felt peaceful; he felt safe.

When was the last time that I had truly laughed-like really laughed? It felt like a long time.

“I’m not sure if I could?” he continued. “Being a single mom makes you superhuman! That job alone is impossible, and, on top of that, you are in full time school, work part time, and carpool kids; also, don’t forget Jacob: he has special needs!”

How can he say that?

Michael was an emergency room doctor. He was a modern-day superhero, but instead of a cape he wore a white coat.

It felt good to be appreciated, but it was hard to believe that what I did was so spectacular. I was a poor, 33-year-old college student, still in my first year.

Not a lot of people had faith in me.

“Well, I have an hour drive home still, and kids to put to bed.” I paused. “If I stay parked here at the college any later, somebody is going to call security.” I was trying to be funny, but it wasn’t.

Michael humored me with a small chuckle. “Any time Sarah. You got this.”

He was always so optimistic, but I was less so.

“Thanks Michael, I appreciate that. Have a good night.” And with that, I hung up the phone.

An hour, or so, later, I gently pulled into my driveway. The snow lightly fell from the sky, and it crunched under my tires. I had a full view of my country house. It was a larger character home, painted white, with a tin roof. It faced East. From the addition on the south, to the carport on the north, it formed a ‘U’ shape. Brown and red curtains covered the windows inside, and the light radiated through.

Looming above the house was a crescent moon.

Was it waxing, or was it waning?

I did not know.

I sat there for a moment before pulling in, fully, under the carport and turning off the ignition.

It was breathtaking, until it wasn’t. The scene was a disguise. It was not real. It reminded me of something else that looked good on the outside, in the dark, to the oblivious onlooker; but what was seen was not how it really was.

A different kind of darkness swelled inside of me.

In that moment, the front door opened. Emma, my four-year-old, rushed outside without any coat, socks, or shoes on.

I tried to push the negativity out of my mind.

I opened the car door, and the air was so crisp that I could see my breath. “Mommy!” Emma shouted. “You’re home!”

Her round little face grinned from ear to ear, and her chubby cheeks were pink from the cold. Her squishy hands were up by her face, as she hopped from foot to foot in the snow. She simply vibrated, and her grey eyes sparkled with energy.

It was cold outside, but she made me feel warm. I opened the driver’s side door wider. “Get inside little woman!” I shouted at her. “You’ll catch a cold: it is freezing out here!”

“I just needed to see you! Why did yah take so long?” she questioned.

I exhaled.

“School just took a little longer than I’d planned. Hurry up and get inside before you die! I’ll be inside in a moment.”

The night air prickled my face and hurt my ears. I quickly grabbed my hippie purse and my oversized backpack, locked the car door, and rushed inside. I was relieved to feel the warmth of home.

The door was jammed, so I squeezed tightly inside the narrow doorway that led into our entryway made for tiny people. It was too small for the six people who lived here.

My heart sank. No wonder the door would not open wide enough: there were dripping boots, coats, and snow pants piled high in a puddle on the floor. At least the backpacks were neatly hung; only they were unzipped with homework and lunch kits hanging out of them.

Why did nobody put their stuff away like they were supposed to?

I strategically side stepped and shut the door, trying to keep winter outside and everything else inside. I kicked off my boots, hung up my things, and tried not to look directly at the mess.

I worked my way into the living room.

Four of my five favorite people were there, and all their faces were glued to the television screen like zombies. Bodies of all sizes lazed on the crooked furniture with pillows and blankets. This was the YouTube generation. Kids preferred to watch people do things rather than experience life for themselves.

Emma had hopped up with her older sister Grace, who was nine years old. They were wrapped in a pink duvet. Grace had one arm around Emma and the other around Oreo.

That smug, little cat.

Nobody heard me, and nobody moved. An atomic bomb could have gone off and they would still just sit there, faces forward, glued to that stupid screen!

Hunter, who was six, sat entranced with his mouth hanging open. His honey-brown eyes said that nobody was home.

Noah, my fourteen-year-old, was not any better. He was sprawled out on our second-hand sofa. He lay with *my* favorite quilt, the one with the rosebud pattern. One of his long hairy legs was draped over the back of the couch, and the other was resting on the arm rest. He was a big boy, and he was only going to get bigger. His shoe size matched his age, and I swore that he was going to eat me out of house and home.

I marched over and turned off the TV, only to receive groans of dissatisfaction.

“Glad to see you too! Can somebody please tell me what’s going on here? Why does everything have to be a pigsty all the time?” I complained.

“A simple ‘hello’ would’ve been sufficient, Mom, and a ‘Thanks Noah for babysitting,’ would’ve been nice, too.” Noah spat.

My heart ached.

Why did I just say that?

“I’m sorry you guys, but this is unsatisfactory. A mess follows me everywhere I go these days, and things need to change.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t have had so many kids then...” Noah muttered under his breath.

My blood pressure began to rise.

“Excuse me. What did you say? Don’t give me that cheek. I really appreciate all that you do, but I don’t deserve this kind of treatment from *you*.” I said sharply.

Noah’s lips tightened, but he stayed silent.

I tried to change the subject. “Where’s Jacob?”

“I put him to bed at seven because he got into the mayonnaise and sour cream again. He was fisting it into his mouth like a barbarian.”

“Did you feed him anything?” I asked.

“Well, I gave him crackers and juice. Does that count?” Noah said sarcastically. I was really starting to get annoyed.

“He probably got into the fridge while you were watching TV, didn’t he?”

Noah glared at me.

“Well, I guess you got what you deserved for not watching him properly.”

“No, I didn’t because I left it for you to clean up. Good luck!” And with that he pushed past me with his shoulder and stormed down the stairs.

I followed him, and my heart pounded in my ears.

“What the Hell Noah! What’s wrong with you?”

His fists were clenched, and he had his back to me.

I grabbed his shoulder and tried to turn him around, but he was too strong for me, so I went in front of him.

“I said, what is wrong with you?”

Noah’s eyes were wet, and his shoulders trembled. Immediately my frustration dissipated and turned into concern. “Noah, what’s wrong?” I said more gently this time.

“It's YOU!” he sobbed through angry tears.

“It’s because of YOU that we’re not a family anymore; it is because of YOU that we’re going to move and leave all my friends; it’s because of YOU that you’re never home! I AM TIRED OF IT!”

This is what my son thought of me?

“Noah, it’s not as easy as that.”

“What do you mean it’s not as easy as that? It is easy. Figure your shit out so that we can be a family again! I don’t want to leave my friends. I love this village. It doesn’t have to be this way!” He shouted through thick sobs.

I wanted to reach out and wrap my arms around him to comfort him, but I knew that he would not let me.

“Noah,” I said more calmly this time. “Being an adult is complicated. Being married is complicated. These are adult problems that adults need to deal with right now. I’m so sorry that you’re hurting. We’re all hurting.”

“No, YOU are not hurting. WE are hurting!” He pointed forcefully at the ceiling towards the other children above us, and with that he turned, stomped to his bedroom, and slammed the door.

I stood there frozen.

I will let him cool down.

I slowly walked up the stairs, and I paused when I reached the top. My hand gripped the railing. It was dark, and everyone had already gone to bed.

I turned right and made my way down the hallway that led to the other three bedrooms; the doors were all shut tight. I reached out a shaky hand towards the first door handle, and then hesitated.

I was a failure.

Instead, I turned and opened the door to my very own bedroom. It was dimly lit; the only light was a small antique lamp on the side table. This was a spacious room, but there was not much in it. It felt hollow. This room was a constant reminder of another time—a time of sex and sometimes warmth—now it was cold and empty. I crawled into the bed with my clothes still on and pulled over the covers. I switched the lamp off, lay my head down, and cried myself to sleep.

It was just another day in the life.