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Two Rooms

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Author Bio

Marion McKenzie is a junior from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. She is an Environmental Studies major with a Mathematics minor and enjoys writing outside of her math and science classes.

Two Rooms

I twisted my hands around the straps of my overnight bag as, panel by panel, the industrial-size sliding door closed behind us. Forty-eight hours left in this new place, and I was already anxious to leave. The slamming of the car doors echoed throughout the parking garage as we made our way toward the elevator, my brother and I silently gawking at the unfamiliarity of our surroundings.

As soon as the elevator doors reopened, we stepped into the fluorescently-lit hallway. The smell of spaghetti mixed with stale cigarette smoke hit me like a brick wall. Bag still in hand, I watched my dad locate the apartment key among various others. As I stood there wondering if he still had the one that would bring him home, he swung the heavy door inward, allowing my brother and I to pass through the threshold.

The walls were all white. There was no trace of the warm tan color from the living room in our family home, reflecting the crackling embers in the fireplace. No yellow tint of the dining space that held memories of Christmas cookie decorating, pumpkin carving, and countless after-school snacks. Instead, the sides of the kitchen, leading up the narrow staircase into the open bedroom were all freshly coated in a color that expressed no emotion: a color unable to hold memories.

Other than my dad's inquisitive "What do you think?" no one had anything to say. To be honest, my dad hadn't had much to say for the past seven years, so I wasn't surprised by our lack of conversation. It was almost like he was a stranger to me, an ominous figure that had provided for the rest of my four-person family while only actively participating in larger family functions when work refused any more overtime.

Now, it was this moment that defined how I would view my father for the rest of my adolescent life. Our wandering eyes quickly settled on the television screen set as a main focal point of the living space. As we sat eating our greasy, sad supper in front of the flickering screen, I allowed myself to harbor further resentment towards my apathetic father. Not only did I believe that choosing pizza for dinner reflected his carelessness towards us, but I had convinced myself that he was more interested in some History Channel special than his own children.

I knew my definition of "family" had changed significantly since the divorce, but I knew my definition of family would never be this. "Family" meant mom's home cooked meals and cuddles with our puppy. "Family" was Sunday afternoon cookouts and the tire-swing hanging from the oak in the backyard. It was not awkward silences and stumbling into uncharted territory. It was most certainly not this two-room apartment.

I considered the choirs of "How was your weekend?" that would ensue once I returned to school the following Monday and couldn't help but cringe. I bargained with myself that I'd either lie, or, if I couldn't mask my disdain, simply evade the question entirely if it was ever directed my way.

So, as we extended the futon and inflated an air mattress, transforming the living space into a bedroom for my 5-year-old brother and me, I began contem-

plating future excuses to escape a weekend at my dad's. With exactly forty-two hours left in those uncomfortable rooms, I became unbearably angry. I had no desire to return to this place: empty, forbidding, embarrassing. Hot tears started streaming down my cheeks as I laid in the dark, allowing them to slowly lure me to sleep.