

Working Title: The Sleeper Effect

The scene opens in my memory. It is Christmas Day. My brother has just opened his last gift, and the two of us are smiling and eager to play with our new treasures. In my memory, my parents are holding hands, clinging to each other, as if they could provide each other with strength, a particularly ironic sentiment given the circumstance. I see the carpet very vividly, the ugly black, red, yellow and white shag carpet that would have been intolerable had it not represented home.

It has sound, too, crystal clear despite the years. Mom says, “Damon, Anna, we have something important we want to tell you. Your father and I are getting a divorce.”

Fade to black.

Oh, how the magician in my brain has deceived me.

It wasn't Christmas at all, and my mom tells me that she thinks they told me in my bedroom (adorned with white and blue carpet). The fact is that even though I was seven when my parents decided to divorce, and eight when the divorce was finalized (my dad remarried days later and my half-sister born just weeks after the legal formalities), I don't remember it at all.

I don't remember crying. I don't remember moving, or the first time that I met my stepmom. And I don't remember anything at all about my parents' relationship before they got

divorced. I don't remember if they were affectionate with each other, nor remember them fighting. It is as if someone has erased the tape.

I do remember chewing bubble gum with my best friend on the stairs of my childhood home. I remember the feeling of having a cat fall asleep in my arms, and thinking how much that creature trusted me. Your parents relationship isn't important to a child. Until it is gone.

I don't remember understanding.

In a new house, at new school, with a scrambled memory, life as I know it began. In my new elementary school, residing in a working class neighborhood with plenty of newly made single mothers, it seemed to my third grade mentality that there were two kinds of kids; those with divorced parents, and the lucky ones. I belonged to the former.

But at least in elementary school it was standard stuff to have divorced parents. The pervasive normality of it is, I believe, why I never really questioned it and why I never felt that it was worthy of grief. As a youngster, I didn't make a conscious choice to set out to show everyone how "okay" I was, but that was the result. Everyone marveled at my ability to be so "well-adjusted" at such a young age.

The tape rolled on, capturing the moments of my life: Middle school, high school, college. Reviewing the footage, the every-other-weekend-and-Wednesday-night crowd, slowly disappeared from the action. What happened to those kids that I went to elementary school with? They became statistics of the effect of divorce on children while I took the world by storm. Speech competitions, show choir, sports, academic achievement, a slew of friends, scholarships, and a precarious peace with all the members of my family.

The images show how it looked, but never how it felt.

The sleeper effect. I never had a name for it until reading Generation Ex, but it is the definition of my story, the working title to my life.

I prefer to work alone. Independence should be my *first* name. Do I trust people? About as far as I can throw them (I'm a pretty little person, so that doesn't amount to far). Perfectionist, controlling, I have little faith in anything I can't do myself. You act confidently so people won't see your fear.

And I am so afraid.

I am afraid of ending up alone, afraid that as all those around me find happiness, I will look in my hands and find they are empty. I am afraid of being abandoned. I question how God could have let these things happen to my mother. I saw my mom feel alone and abandoned and lose faith and it hurt. It still hurts. Typical of a child of divorce, I feel the parental need to make my mom's pain go away, and hope that maybe it would make mine dissipate as well.

But I don't want to live in fear anymore; I want to rename my story.

I grew up, like most American children, on fairy tales. I grew up with Hollywood and Disney - ninety minute rollercoasters of emotion with a happy ending. We like our endings larger than life, want to go through hell and live to tell the tale. We want to be bruised, but not broken. I wish my life was a fairy tale, or even a Hollywood blockbuster, but perhaps it is an Indie film. There are loose ends, and questions left unanswered, and even dark endings.

I would love to write that reading this book has helped me figure it all out, has made me a better person, and helped me grieve. I would like to be able to write the picture perfect ending - that I have found peace in my faith, trust in God's plan, and recognition that marriages are never

perfect, that faith is essential - and now everything is roses and rainbows. While it is true I'm making progress, unfortunately, I can't yet yell "that's a wrap".

For the truth is, I still am afraid.

But every day, through growing faith, patience, and trust, I am a little less.

And the reels are still rolling.

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