



Quiet

SCOTTY HINDS

In this moving and richly textured personal narrative, Scotty Hinds recounts his parents' divorce and the ominous quiet that characterized this period of his childhood. Hinds's immersive storytelling highlights the importance of reassuring children during traumatic times. This essay was written for Writing I with Dr. Ben Wetherbee.

BY NO MEANS IS THIS meant to evoke pity. It's been eleven years since everything started, and I have since come to terms with all that has happened. My one regret is that while part of me knew what was happening, and though my parents were communicating with us, I simply didn't understand.

My parents divorced in 2008. My siblings and I had taken notice of the escalating arguments and muffled shouting matches coming from the kitchen and our parents' bedroom. We certainly noticed how frequent they had become. We would hide in our rooms even long after the arguments ended (though they were never truly resolved).

We had been attending DC4K (Divorce Care 4 Kids) at Frasier, a church in Montgomery, Alabama. I never really understood what it was, and especially not what we were doing there. All I knew was that we would get either Subway before or Dairy Queen after our

sessions. Still, I could tell something wasn't right. After all, we had only started these classes when our parents started fighting vehemently.

We were sitting at the dinner table one evening, the yellowish light above our heads accentuating how dark it was around the house. One of the parents asked us what we thought about the classes.

"It was sad," one of said.

"Yeah. I'm glad you guys aren't getting divorced," I added. My mom turned to me.

"We are, Baby."

It was quiet. It was the eerie kind of quiet where one sits there dumbstruck as they hear the last words bouncing around like a bullet, ricocheting off the inside of their skull as it deals untold trauma to the brain. I sat there in such a manner. I cried.

I don't remember finishing dinner that night, but I do remember that night being the one of the last times we ate dinner together while Mom and Dad were still married.

That summer had an eerie atmosphere about it, even when we went outside to play. It was like we should have been having fun, but we were physically incapable of doing so. Mom had moved into a small apartment. The house was quiet. It was the kind of quiet that is commonly associated with a funeral march. It was akin to those who mourn walking slowly forward as they carry the weight of a coffin, the hollow container for that which is dead.

My dad was a ghost, silent and dead as he sulked and shuffled around the house. There was a factor of awe in that. To see someone who had been a towering paragon of fortitude be reduced to a lifeless, empty shell of something almost human that drifts aimlessly around the hallways was, in a way, terrifying. I had never seen my dad in such a state, and I pray that I never have to again.

On the other end, things weren't looking too different. The apartment Mom moved into was a dreadful place. For three children

and one adult, the size of the place was almost comedic, and it wasn't uncommon for fire ants to get inside in their search for food.

As for my mom, she had become frantic. As a RN who worked at Jackson Hospital in Montgomery, she was always busy. Mom had also picked up a nasty habit. If she wasn't dashing around and had time to sit, she would go out to the back porch and smoke a cigarette.

My dad remarried in 2009 to a woman named Angie, whom he had met in church one day. As if meeting her wasn't awkward enough, I now had to attend the wedding. Regrettably, I would have rather done anything else at that time.

I was quiet. I was the kind of quiet that one would find with a mousetrap, sitting quiet and still, but ready to snap if something so much as brushed the trigger. It was great that Dad had found someone who made him happy, and it was also good that he was back to his regular and healthy self, but, for me, the wedding meant that any hopes of my mom and dad getting back together were now futile. It also served as a reminder of everything that had happened in the past year, and I resented that with every fiber of my body. While I was happy for my dad, I was very unhappy in general.

My mom would remarry later that year to a man named Shane, who was a paramedic. For some reason, I felt less awkward about Shane than Angie. I speculate that this is mostly because they had gotten married only after Dad and Angie. Regardless, it was nice to see everyone happy for once, and I was starting to see the silver lining in all that had happened.

When I print this paper, it will be 2019. Things seem to be going very well. I have a six-year-old sister named Hannah, whom I love very much. I'm at the college of my choice studying the things that drive me to get out of bed in the morning alongside my now close friends. Still, I think of how things have changed since 2008.

By far, the worst part is that for around ten years I blamed myself, of all people, for what happened in the span of two years. It wasn't until more recently that I finally got some closure when I told my dad about this.

“It wasn’t your fault. None of it was your fault.”

I wish I had heard that when I was younger.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Mom would’ve said as I wept at the dinner table.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Dad might’ve uttered as he slinked miserably around the house.

I wish I could have curled up in a tiny ball of flesh, bone, and emotions in my mom’s lap as she rocked us gently in my favorite rocking chair as she whispered in my cheek, “It wasn’t your fault. None of it was your fault.”

Looking back, I can’t help but think about how quiet it would be. It seems strange—ironic, even—that moments of quiet would appear in a time when in my mind I had none. ►►