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English [course]
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Assignment #2

A Case of Bad Judgment

They were all idiots. My heart was pounding. I looked down to see the beads of sweat on my arms, accenting the protruding veins and lines as my muscles seized. My jaw moved back and forth as I ground my teeth together, slowly and mechanically. I balled my fist, digging my fingernails into the fleshy portion of my palms. As I slammed the door to my bedroom I screamed, "Fuck off!" Mission accomplished.

Behind the door I stood bent over, like some sort of deranged being, my anger bathing over me in waves. My breathing was labored and my muscles had yet to relax. As my thoughts raced I began to regret my last statement. I wasn't so much concerned that I had just told my little sister to fuck off. In fact, I wasn't concerned by that in the least. Was that really the best I could do? Did I lack the intelligence necessary to come up with something a little more potent than a common exchange between drunken strangers? Something. I needed something. I raced to my speakers. Vulgar, I thought, I need expletives. As the music resonated in the room, loud enough to be heard throughout the house, I collapsed on to my bed in a dazed awe, like an addict who just got their fix. It was her fault. She's the one with the messed up boyfriend.

Every night before I go to bed I stare at the freshly painted ceiling of my dorm room. I know that under this fresh coat lie the patched old ones, hiding so that no one can see. As I turn over and close my eyes my mind flashes back through the last two years. "No one wants to see" I whisper.

After a couple of hours I slowly raised myself out of bed and turned off the music. I glanced at my reflection. I looked savage-like; my eyes were bloodshot, my head appeared far too large for my thin frame, and my limbs were awkwardly disproportionate to the rest of my body. Excellent, I thought, I look like one of those preadolescent boys from the *Lord of the Flies*. At least I can seek comfort in my sweet disposition and charming personality. I listened for a moment to hear the muffled sobs of my sister in the next room. Yeah, sweet and charming.

My sister is a beautiful girl. Her long blonde hair falls just above the small of her back and sweeps across her face, drawing attention to her high cheek bones and petite facial features. Her piercing blue eyes reflect her inner competitive nature and she gives off an air of self-assured perfection that borders on narcissism. That isn't to say the attitude's not warranted. [sister's name] is a star athlete, first in her class, friend to many, and is respected by all. It's actually quite annoying. Needless to say, she could have an array of formidable suitors at her beckon call. But she picks *him*.

My hometown is small. The "I know you and yes, we're probably third cousins" kind of small. If there was top to the hick hierarchy, I was convinced I was on top of it. I attended two different high schools where, as an insufferable know-it-all, I boasted 4.0's, was captain and an All-State runner on the track and cross country teams, and volunteered in my spare time. I didn't have the time to give a shit about the latest adolescent gossip; [boy] sleeping with [girl] because he got high with [boy] despite fathering [girl's] child didn't concern me in the least- but *he* did.

He has blonde hair, blue eyes, and stands about 5'10" with a lean yet muscular frame. He is, I suppose, attractive by the standards of most. He is also an idiot. I felt that the word "idiot" did not fully convey my pure contempt and his true level of stupidity, so I turned toward more

creative alternatives; my favorite of which combined the first two letters of his name and “Fuck face.” Yes, I was very creative. Were these hostile feelings warranted or was I a self-absorbed hypocritical bitch? Of the former I remain uncertain; of the latter I am assured.

Before track practice the athletes could usually be found lounging on the football field, baring the cold spring temperatures and gusty winds in attempt to catch any sun that may darken their pasty-white complexions. One day, as I lazily pulled the puke-green grass from the field, I was approached by a relatively attractive freshmen, whom I knew was once very taken with my sister. I tried to suppress my I-don’t-give-a-shit look and forced a smile. “So ah, your sister and [individual’s name]?” he inquired. I could suppress my look no longer. “Yes?” I asked irritably. “Well, it’s just weird, cause he’s all stoner-like with his friends and brother and she’s just, well, at least I thought you guys weren’t for that,” he said. “Unfortunately, a dumbass epidemic has broken out, I advise washing your hands frequently,” I muttered as I walked briskly toward the school to find [sister’s name]. As I stormed into the entrance, prepared to raise Hell, a friend of mine shouted, “Hey- has [individual’s name] porked your sister yet?” I stopped in my tracks, seemingly rooted to the spot, my depraved mind mulling over my various options. “[Friend’s name], c’mon it doesn’t look good when the captains are late for practice” my co-captain called. I clenched my jaw and glowered at the empty hall before turning my shoulders and jogging to practice.

He wasn’t good enough for my sister. In my ever-so –humble opinion he was a loser; the product of oblivious God-worshipping parents and a rebellious attention-seeking older brother. I believed he aspired to corrupt my sister, to ruin everything she had worked for in her life. He would tarnish her reputation, consequently tarnishing my own. That wouldn’t do. Unfortunately,

her fourteen years of life experience rendered her a naïve child who could not fathom the consequences of this relationship. Fortunately, I had sixteen years.

She claimed that he was clean. That he had changed his life for the better. That he wanted to focus his energies on his school work. That he was going out for the track team. My blood was boiling- nay it was vaporizing. My track team. He had the nerve to join my track team? I looked at her with disgust and in the most condescending tone I could muster asked, “Are you that fucking stupid?” and walked away. Apparently profanity was the only way I could emphasize meaning or convey emotion. Impressive.

Months passed and she was still with him. Each time he came over to our house my mother would caution me to be civilized. Civilized, I wondered, when was I not civilized? It’s not as if I intended to poison him with an alkaloid-laden dart or chant curses in foreign tongues condemning him to a torturous demise. I just wanted him out of her life. I conveyed my disapproval in ever-so-subtle ways; loudly proclaiming that they were probably going downstairs to have sex in the basement under the guise of “watching a Disney movie,” innocent name calling, and death stares. All the while, unbeknownst to me, my family started liking him. He played videogames with my little brother, hung out with my other sister, respected my father, and ate my mother’s vegetables; a sacrifice that none of us, save my father, were willing to make. I was thoroughly convinced that their idiocy knew no bounds. Was I the only sane rational person in the family? I began to feel isolated. I coped with this self-induced isolation with anger- as any sane rational person would.

I felt as though I needed supporters, people who would agree that he was a loser and that my sister was an idiot. As I poured over my biology book during lunch I would be approached by a series of different people; the handsome “if only it were legal” underclassmen, the scantily

clad upperclassmen who disregarded this legality, and the occasional savior of our morally corrupted generation. It was always a forced look of concern and, “So I hear your sister is dating [individual’s name].” My usually anti-social persona dissolved and I’d gently close my book, force a worried glance, and reply, “Isn’t she an idiot?”

In retrospect I suppose that I wanted to find a facet of the population where I belonged, where people agreed with me. These weren’t my real friends. As hard as it is to imagine, I had very few real friends, and I was pushing my best friend away. I assumed that my self-induced isolation was the byproduct of two different views; my perspective (the right one) and their perspective (the wrong one). My assumption was undoubtedly incorrect. The self-induced isolation was a byproduct of two different actions; my actions (the wrong ones) and their actions (the right ones).

Things got uglier. One day, as per usual, my sister and I were quarreling over some life-altering issue (albeit the topic escapes me at present, one could safely assume it was about whose turn it was to clean the bathroom, the person that played the television too loud the night prior, or the unprecedented thievery of one’s favorite pair of jeans). In my mind such arguments resembled a chemical reaction. They were the catalyst necessary to spark the “your-boyfriend-is-a-tool” fight, which happened to be my personal favorite. As my sister and I stood there arguing at the counter, my little brother and his friend (preadolescent boys) were playing videogames in the living room. “You were probably too busy having sex with your boyfriend,” I screamed as I flew down the stairs. This comment was ridiculous on a couple of different levels. First, it wasn’t conducive to my argument in the slightest. Second, the comment was completely inappropriate. I can only imagine the horrors (and probably wonders) going through those young boys minds at my casual use of the “s word” in regards to my sister. I am embarrassed for my past self, yet at

the same time I am just as embarrassed for myself at present; the words we say don't go away just because we think we've changed. My actions were wrong, and so was I.

I didn't make stupid mistakes; I made really stupid conscious decisions. "Mistake" seems to imply that I wasn't aware of the consequences of my actions. I was completely aware. I knew that my inappropriate remark would send adrenaline pulsing through her body. I knew that, given the option of fight or flight, she'd stand and fight 99.9 percent of the time. But I was pissed off- why shouldn't she be? Why shouldn't other people have to feel the anger and isolation that I felt? Why should I feel miserable when they felt fine?

I made myself angry, isolated, and miserable. I would never concede that I was wrong; that maybe he was a good guy, maybe people messed up sometimes, that maybe I wasn't exempt from making mistakes. I just kept trying to make everyone else feel as bad as I did. I would force people to relive their own mistakes, recalling the moment whenever I was feeling down about myself, or dismiss their accomplishments on the basis that "someone has already done that, and they probably did it better." That being said, it is amusing that I was taken aback when my sister retorted, "None of us can wait until you're gone: mom, dad, all of us. We all hope that college changes you; makes you a better person. You continue to cut people out of your life, just like you've cut all of us out, unless you idolize them for some insignificant reason. Yeah, you might be "successful" by some standards but when you look back on your life what are you going to have to show? What relationships are you going to have that mean something? You're going to regret this. I hope you regret this." All I can say now is, good for her.

If my memory serves me correctly that wasn't quite my reaction at the time. I stormed into the house and confronted my mother. How dare she say those things about me? She said that my sister had taken their conversation out of context and that she would never say those things

about me. It was a loving, caring, and protective move on her part; but I hope it was a lie, because everything my sister said was true.

I proceeded to cram clothes, a toothbrush, and my laptop into a couple of sports bags. They didn't want me there? Fine. I'd leave. I walked out the front door, cursing loudly under my breath as I left. It was cool for August and a steady rain drove down from the bleak sky. Despite being chilled from the rain I continued to walk lopsided, the bags unevenly weighing on each shoulder, up the hill leading away from our house. I frantically muttered under my breath, trying to convince myself that my actions were logical. A half mile later my mom pulled up next to me, "so what are you planning to do?" I didn't look at her. "You don't care what I do. You don't care about me. I'm leaving, just like you want." She looked at me, genuine concern and sadness in her gaze, and told me to get in the car. My heart constricted, forgetting momentarily to relax, as I opened the door with a trembling hand. As I sat down I leaned my head against the seat and let the warm tears fall silently down my face.

A miraculous change in my personality would have been the fairytale ending to an important life lesson. Life is far from a fairytale. I attempted to smile a little more, say awful things a little less often, but in all honesty I was still that same old self-absorbed hypocritical bitch. Before leaving for cross country camp in August I hugged each one of them goodbye. We took turns staring at each other and in that moment I realized that they all loved me, that they all wanted me to be happy. As we sped away my stomach knotted- I felt wrong.

U of M has changed me. I don't want to get too carried away; I am not all rainbows and butterflies. In fact, I'd say I'm only about five percent rainbow and seven percent butterfly. But I am far less judgmental, and that is an accomplishment for me. Being tossed off my pedestal,

where I was the brightest and “bestest” in all the land, was the best thing that could have happened to me. I slowly began to realize that I was in no way qualified to judge other people. I didn’t have to like them- but it wasn’t my place to judge them either. I began to see my own vices, and they are, for the record, worse than most I’ve come across.

My college experience has also exposed me to another strange phenomenon; missing the people I love. I want nothing more than to be sitting on those old brown sofas in the basement, talking with [sister’s name], [individual’s name], and the rest of my siblings, or playing basketball with them in the dark of night, guided only by the headlights of my father’s pick-up. It is inevitable that one of them has done something “stupid” in the last six months, something that I could look down upon, but I couldn’t care less.

My sister’s boyfriend is a great guy. For Christmas he bought me toothpaste and a card that read, “In case you ever get an icky taste in your mouth from swearing profusely.” I bought him a felt-coloring page of a cartoon that looked somewhat like [sister’s name], so that he “never had to miss her.” The bottom line is that he makes her happy. The fact that she is happy makes me happy. Tonight, when I stare up at the ceiling I’ll see that fresh layer of paint; only left to wonder whether it could be there without the old patched ones that lie beneath it.