

Without Mom and Dad

Alex Adler

Bye mom! I'll miss you! Alright, one more hug. Okay that's enough, I think it's time for you to leave. Yes, I'll call you this weekend. Fine, one more hug. What's that? My neighbors are outside? Alright let's all go talk to them for a while. I'm glad you are here to supervise my first impressions. It's a good thing their parents are also here, helping them move in, otherwise this conversation might have lasted less than twenty minutes. Yeah, the weather here is so nice. And of course we have to talk about the view. Okay, can this be over now? Yes, but no. The conversation 'ending' means it is time for the all important exchange of phone numbers. As the four cell phones are passed around I realize that I'm about to be free from this wonderful company forever. Not forever, I suppose. But at least until thanksgiving. I can't wait.

~ ~ ~

It was quite a surreal feeling the first time I took a shower in my own apartment. To walk in and see none of the familiar soaps or shampoos my parents used to buy me felt a bit like I was off in some foreign country. Unsure of the water pressure, the angle of the spray, and especially the temperature range, I tentatively turned the knob and began my mental preparations. I tried to hype myself up, telling myself *it's just a shower, you have nothing to fear and you've taken thousands of*

showers in your life, this won't be any different.

As I slid open the glass door and stepped under the soft, soothing downpour, I felt a sort of universal loneliness wash over me. After spending ten minutes in that shower, I realized that I had been alone for (almost) every other shower of my life, but not like this. I felt like Bear Grylls in the wilderness, with no one to turn to but myself. I stepped out and began drying my hair, unaware of the fact that I wasn't nearly as alone as I thought.

I was feeling chipper, freshly cleaned, just about to leave the bathroom when I spotted a fly, landed on the faucet of the sink, staring up at me with compound eyes. Marvin¹ seemed to taunt me, gently wiggling its antennae as if to say *go ahead, try and swat me*. Naive as I was, and without the clairvoyance to realize what a significant part of my life Marvin would become, I made a feeble attempt on his life. Of course he swiftly avoided my swing, taking flight and making a few laps around my head for good measure. Though I failed in my first effort to rid myself of Marvin's presence, I was optimistic that he would soon be gone, so I casually left the bathroom to go about my day.

I think Marvin liked me; at least I can say he put up with me. I showed him the same tolerance for about twelve hours, after which I was pretty much done with his shit. Which is a bit silly, because 'his shit' was

1 At the time I did not know the fly's name, but some time after our first encounter I decided I should call it Marvin.

usually just him sitting still on a wall while I happened to be in the same room (and happened to be naked?). I decided that I did not like Marvin and wanted him to leave, even though he'd really done nothing wrong. I expected that Marvin, polite as he was, would notice that I didn't like him and leave me out of sympathy, but after a few more days and a few more showers, it was apparent that Marvin wasn't going to leave of his own accord. One day I noticed a pair of flies whizzing by and realized that Marvin was no longer working alone; that was the last straw. Living with one fly was a burden I could bear, at least briefly, but two or more? Don't be ridiculous. I could no longer sit idly by while these insolent insects acted like they owned the place. I decided to launch a household campaign to eradicate the entire bathroom fly population by any means necessary. I would not rest until I had definitive evidence that Marvin and his friend(s?) were gone for good.

The trouble is, killing a fly is a Herculean task. Don't let anyone convince you otherwise. Have you ever watched someone try to kill a fly? Usually a human's first instinct is to swat. Without proper equipment, or a Mr. Miyagi-esque level of focus, a direct strike will often miss as flies can literally see things moving in slow motion.² After failing a swat, being embarrassed by the tiny tactician, a person either a) surrenders unconditionally to the fly's demands, or b) becomes deranged and manic, losing all inhibition and destroying much of the environment around them as they try with increasing effort to take out the clever avian menace.

I found myself more often in the latter camp when dealing with Marvin, unable to contain my rage on the

battlefield. The specific terrain on which we dueled certainly did not help my case: my bathroom takes up forty square feet and is cluttered with all of the usual water closet accoutrements; standing in the center of the room, I couldn't fully extend either of my arms without encountering some sort of collision. I was always swatting at half mast to avoid knocking over a shelf or putting my arm through a mirror, and Marvin and his friend knew it. Eventually the flies seemed to become excited when I entered, as if our great conflict was the highlight of their day. I was far less sportsmanlike, becoming consumed morning noon and night by thoughts of Marvin and his friend and what possible strategy I could conjure that would rid me of these pests permanently.

As the war raged on, Marvin gradually appeared weaker and more tired. I noticed after a week or two both of the flies began to slow down, spending more time sitting in one place than zipping through the air. Looking back, it's likely that at this point they were both growing old; an adult housefly's life expectancy is only somewhere between two weeks and a month³ after emerging from the pupa, so they were certainly past middle age by now.

I first thought that this was an opportunity to finally eliminate the flies once and for all, but I noticed that in their old age they had become significantly less annoying to me. I actually grew to appreciate their companionship now that they weren't flying up in my face all the time. Of course they only flew up in my face when I first attacked them, but that's beside the point. They started to spend a lot of time hanging out in the space between the two halves of the shower's sliding glass door, which was ideal because there was virtually

² Johnston, Ian. "Q. Why Is It so Hard to Swat a Housefly? A. It Sees You Coming in Slow." *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 20 Sept. 2013, www.independent.co.uk/news/science/q-why-it-so-hard-swat-housefly-it-sees-you-coming-slow-motion-8818124.html.

³ Sanchez-Arroyo, Hussein, and John L. Capinera. *House Fly - Musca Domestica Linnaeus*, University of Florida, Aug. 1998, entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/urban/flies/house_fly.HTM.

no chance of us coming into contact with each other, but I could still acknowledge them and strike up a conversation on occasion. I finally accepted that Marvin was a part of my life.

The next day I found Marvin lying dead on his back on the countertop.⁴ I should have seen it coming, I should have been happy that he was gone, I shouldn't have cared so much one way or the other about a fly. But seeing Marvin belly up that morning hurt like hell. In that brief moment looking down at him, I saw Marvin for who he truly was: a friend. I had tormented Marvin throughout the prime of his life, and he had always put up with me. I finally understood the reason I resented Marvin so much was because he didn't resent me. For all I know, he loved me. He had been the bigger man, always tolerating my outbursts, and that only made me hate him more. I felt terrible for the way I treated Marvin, and I wished I could make it up to him, but of course it was too late. I picked up his body with a paper towel and threw it away.

When I lived with them, I tormented my parents almost constantly, and they always put up with me. Growing up, there were times I resented them, but they've never resented me. As far as I can tell, they love me. They always tolerated my outbursts, no matter how hard I tried to convince them that I hated them. The shower feels mighty lonely now that the flies are gone. The house feels mighty empty without mom and dad.

⁴ Technically I can't prove that the dead fly was Marvin and not his lifelong companion or some other fly, but I could feel it.