

## **The Drive Between Homes**

by **Chris Davis**

The red Miata behind us slams on its horn, letting my dad know—in the rudest way possible—he hadn’t merged quickly enough. The speed limit on Central Expressway is only 45mph, but people always seem to treat it like a freeway. Buildings fly by the window in a blur: Fry’s electronics, where my mom took me to buy my first iPod; St. John’s Bar and Grill, where my Dad and I used to get burgers and watch Sharks games; Fair Oaks Skatepark, where I’d split my chin open and the only witness had decided to leave, rather than make sure I was all right. It all seems insignificant as we now cruise comfortably down the road. The car behind us may have been in a hurry, but somehow my dad never was, even though he knew my mom would yell at him if he dropped me late at her house again.

“Make sure you bring those pants back next weekend,” my dad says.

*Not again.* I close my eyes to the buildings outside the window. What is it about the short drive from his house to my mom’s that makes my dad think I need to hear all about how my mom’s the worst person ever? *His* parents divorced—shouldn’t *he* know how it feels? *Who’s* the adult, here?

“Your mom always complains about me never buying you clothes, but every time I do, they go to her house and she sends you back with ratty ones. She’s manipulative like that, your mom.”

I scoff under my breath. My mom says the same exact thing, ironically, on this exact drive, but in reverse. I count the lines on the road as they blip by, trying to count them. Anything to distract me until we get there.

“Did she ever tell you I used to come over all the time and fix things for her? She’d call me up and demand that I fix the washing machine or change the oil in her car, and I’d always do it.”

I try not to picture the scene, but the frustration of hearing contradicting sides of these stories mounts again. I remember him coming over and fixing the fridge, the dishwasher, her car. And I believe him when he says he did it just so he could spend a little more time with my brother and me. But my mom tells me one thing and my dad tells another. Somewhere, the details are frayed, and each of them describes themselves in saint-like recollection, while the other acted out of unprovoked malice and genuine ill-will.

“She’d never say thank you or try and pay me for helping her out. It was always, ‘Louis, you need to fix the refrigerator,’ or ‘Louis, the air conditioning isn’t working.’ Never even a hint of gratitude.”

I roll my window down in an attempt to drown out the rest of his annoyingly calm ranting. The warm summer air beats my hair around my forehead, but my dad’s voice somehow permeates the cab of the truck like smoke. The thing is, I have my theories. I can make a pretty safe guess who was “at fault” from hearing both sides of the stories. But truthfully, does that matter? At all? And how exactly did *I* become the judge?

“And that’s another thing, she always claims I owe her more child support. I don’t know where she gets this stuff. I pay the agreed-on amount every month—I even keep records of it—and she *still* tries to weasel more out of me.”

I clench my eyes shut, trying to just get through this stupid car ride, but I can’t shut out the memories in my head: my mom stirring a pot in the kitchen to the crackle of my dad’s record player, while my dad, my brother and I race slot cars in the living room of what used to be called “our house,” before it became “my dad’s house.” I open my eyes to the passing scenery, begging it to stop the mental films playing in my mind—I just want them to stop. I don’t care about who was right or who acted vindictively or who said or did or claimed what. Whoever’s in the wrong—I still love both of them, but I just can’t do it anymore.

“Did you know she told all of her family not to talk to me anymore? As if the divorce was *my* fault? The whole reason we divorced is because *she*—”

“You can’t do this anymore!” I burst out, addressing the window, rather than my dad. My voice cracks as I say it. I hadn’t meant to shout, but the tears muddying my vision tell me it’s far too late for restraint. This isn’t a thought-out, well-prepared

speech—this is unspoken, unrealized torment spilling out of me for the first time. “I don’t want to hear it anymore.”

I can feel my dad’s eyes on the back of my head as I look out the window, not seeing. I can feel his confusion. Looking away from him can’t hide the fact that I’m crying in earnest and shaking as I speak. I feel the truck turn off the expressway as more sporadic revelation pours out of me. “I don’t care if she’s the worst person ever or what she’s done, you can’t talk about her like that. Do you know what it’s like? Do you have *any* idea what it’s like to have your parents tear each other down all the time? To have the two people you care about the *most* in the world tell you what a horrible person the other one is?”

The truck stops at the far end of the parking lot and my dad places a hand on my back that helps me ease my breathing.

“I just can’t do it anymore,” I sigh, and there’s a sense of finality in the words. All of what had been holding inside for years was out, and I knew there was nothing else to say.

Wiping my eyes, I see we’re in front of the Home Depot my dad and I frequent on weekends for his work. Memories surface in my head: riding on the flat platform truck as my dad speeds around the store, loading it with lumber that I then hid under; being rolled up by my brother in the giant hanging carpet samples; putting on every piece of protective equipment I could find to pretend I was a superhero. I wish I could be rid of them.

“I’m sorry,” my dad says, and I comprehend a lot more than just the two words.

**Chris Davis** earned the title of “least prepared person to ever enter space” by NASA, farmed exotic guinea pigs in Peru, and was once bit by a goat. His interests include above-ground spelunking and writing fake bios. He recently graduated the fourth grade and owns over seven houseplants."