

## Why I Have a P.O.

Everything was going just fine until Dad went and told us Crystal couldn't sleep over at our house. I was living at home with my parents, but I had my own room and space. It's just a man's right, isn't it? To have his space; his freedom to life and liberty? That's all I wanted. But then Dad said it was his house, so he got to pick the rules. "His house," but where was I supposed to go? It wasn't like I was a major burden! Kept to myself, did the laundry sometimes, brushed my teeth. And a guy gets some leeway, right? All I wanted was for Crystal to sleep over sometimes, when she didn't want to have to drive home at night. But "his house."

Then Karlie came back from college with that hipster boyfriend of hers, Frankie (it's *Francis*, he always says). I'll be damned if I call that poser *Francis*. Wear normal glasses, you douche! And where's he gonna stay? The extra bedroom was full of junk, so in Karlie's room, of course! The goddamn hypocrisy of the situation is what gets me. Give a rule if you have to, but don't you treat me any different than my sister. Just since she got in at Colorado State. I'm gonna be assistant manager at the bike shop in a year or two, you don't see me bragging. But there they went, him staying in her room for spring break.

"Don't you have a house?" I asked Frankie.

"Kyle!" yells my mom. I knew he did—his parents have a huge place up in Aspen. She went there to snowshoe with him over winter break. Yeah, *snowshoe*. She came back all bubbly, talking about how *sensitive* he was. "*Francis* likes to walk out to the forest where no one can follow and think poetry. He never writes it down, because that's selling out. He said he'll tell me some, one day." I know he just goes out there 'cause it's the only way to get far enough away so his parents won't smell the pot. Karlie never mentioned the weed part to Mom

and Dad.

Karlie told me she'd never try it, but I know that's not true. Once she was dropping me off at work and I wanted gum so I opened the glove box and there was a bowl! Right there! She slammed it shut and acted like nothing happened, but I knew what I saw. I told Mom and Dad that evening, but of course by then she'd taken it out and hid it someplace new. I got grounded for a week for "making up lies about my sister after she did me a favor." Perfect Karlie would never lie to our parents!

Well as I said, things were fine until Dad says Crystal can't stay over and then lets Frankie feel right at home in Karlie's bed all spring break. Her childhood bed! I mean she slept there when she was eight and now they're doing God-knows-what in it! It's sick. And so the first night we're gonna have a big dinner, and Mom says "Why don't you invite Crystal?" probably just so she could rub in the hypocrisy. But I guessed it would be better to at least have her there so it wasn't everyone against me like it always is. See Crystal and I are *actually* in love. And we don't have to talk about it all the time like Karlie always does, either. We know what it's like so we always take each other's side, Crystal and me. That's how you know it's love, you know? You just want them to be right all the time.

So Crystal comes for dinner and it's the six of us—Mom, Dad, me, Crystal, Karlie and Frankie—all sitting at the table, even though we have to squeeze since it was really just made for four. So of course I gotta sit next to Frankie and he keeps asking stupid things like "Do you know if these almonds were grown locally?" and talking about something called kale.

"*Francis is a vegan,*" Karlie reminds us, proudly, even though she didn't have to since Mom was being "considerate" and cooked a whole meal vegan for him. The only thing I

recognized on my plate was the spinach, which apparently isn't as good for you as kale. Other than that, there was something like a yellow cucumber and some sorta bean I'd never seen before. When Frankie said it was a good try, Mom actually took it as a compliment! I couldn't believe what they could get away with, since they go to college!

Well I was getting real sick of Karlie always talking the whole dinner and my parents just eating it up, so I just asked Crystal how her day was—fair enough question, right? “Don't interrupt your sister!” says my dad. I mean how long can she go on about her “Philosophy of Whatever” class? We get it! You think a lot of shit! But I let her finish because I guess I'm the only one who knows how to be polite to a guest in the house, and then I ask again how Crystal's day was.

“There was this real doucher who came in and ordered the fried steak and eggs, but then he says the shit's too well-done. I'm like, 'this is Denny's, we only got one kinda fried steak,' but he's still pissed so I get my manager, and then that dick yells at me, like I'm supposed to somehow go back and make his steak less fried. Anyways, the manager says we'll get the guy another steak 'on the house,' so we do and this one must've been alright, since he ate it and the other one. And you know how much that assclown tipped? He left some change on the table! I was like what the fu—.”

“—I really wish you'd watch your language, please,” says my mom, with her little pursed lips. If you could see the look on my girlfriend's face—she was so embarrassed and downright shocked. I mean she was just telling a story and my mom couldn't even do her the courtesy of letting her finish! It was the last straw! They could insult me all they wanted and take away my freedoms, but when they went against my Crystal I knew I had to do something.

I tell you what, I didn't say another word the rest of that dinner, except maybe to ask for salt. It was just so unfair how we were treated while perfect little Karlie and Frankie could do whatever they wanted. While Frankie was clearing the table (he's such a suckup sometimes) I pulled Crystal aside and I told her my plan. When the night was winding down, she was gonna drive down the street a bit, then park and I'd let her in through the basement. If my parents would allow Frankie to stay, then I was gonna allow Crystal. It was only fair.

After dinner, Karlie wanted to play a game so of course we had to do that. "*Cards Against Humanity*?" my Dad suggested. But no, apparently Frankie didn't like that one. "Francis says that game exploits differences, when we should be celebrating them. He's so right, isn't he?" Karlie said. Don't know why he couldn't spout that bullshit himself.

"Okay, well how about *Monopoly*?" My mom tried this time.

"Um—" "Oh what now?" Alright that time I cut off my sister.

"It's just that...don't you think that game propagates a capitalist ethos that we're a little, you know, better than?" Seriously? Is she like a socialist now or something? It's *Monopoly* for Christ's sake!

"No. I don't think so. But whatever. Is *Catch Phrase* okay by Frankie's standards?" I asked. I was getting real sick of this, but at least she agreed to that one.

So we're playing the game and I'll tell you what: if Frankie actually lives on the same planet as us I'm a rat's ass. Like one time it's his turn and me and my mom are on his team. He starts off, "Okay so the first name is the same as the best lyricist of our time." He paused and looked at us like that meant something. "Bob Dylan?" Mom eventually asked. "No, sorry, *our* time," he said, this time looking right at me. Great, now I gotta try to figure out what the hell he

was talking about. "I really don't know, man."

"Come on! Okay, lead singer of Death Cab for Cutie! Postal Service?! None of this ringing a bell??" He wasn't mad, he actually just seemed disappointed. Like a grandfather whose children haven't heard of Mr. Rogers or something.

"I guess I've heard of them...but I don't know anything about those—" Just then the buzzer went off, so we lost the round.

"BEN!" My sister shouts. "Ben Gibbard. Right, Francis?" Her face...how much she needed his approval right there. It was sick. The rest of the game went pretty much like that. Francis talking about things that no one had ever heard of, except Karlie, who wasn't on his team anyways. That game's fun with a bunch of people who get normal things, but with that group it just sucked.

The plan went perfectly. After a couple hours of horrible conversation my dad sighed and said it was time for bed, meaning Crystal had to go. Well she went: two blocks down the street. Ten minutes later, I let her back in and we snuck to my room. The next part is none of your business, but after a while we decided it was time to get some sleep. We set an early alarm so that Crystal could get out before anyone woke up in the morning, laid down, and closed our eyes.

But try as I might, I just couldn't fall asleep. It all seemed so wrong. Why should I have to smuggle my girlfriend in like some illegal immigrant? It was my room, after all! I kept turning it over in my head, but it just wasn't right. Frankie sleeping down the hall in my sister's childhood bed. Bet he sleeps naked too, because it's more "natural." Well they just kept at me, those thoughts, till finally I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep at all unless I went to check on my sister.

They had to be asleep by then and it just wouldn't be right for him to foul up her bed like that. I wasn't afraid of seeing anything either—he's just a guy like any other and something had to be done!

So I crept out of bed, not wanting to wake Crystal, and tiptoed down the hallway. It was eerily quiet and it all just felt a little off, like a house does at night when something doesn't fit. I slowly, quietly opened the door to my sister's room but it was pitch black and all I could make out was the shape of the bed. So I walked closer, trying to squint in the dark and see what was going on. Suddenly my foot caught on something that made an "oof!" and sat up. I fell forward and landed on Frankie, who musta been sleeping on the floor. Karlie told me later he's "saving himself for marriage." Prude.

Well the noise woke up Karlie, who shouted something, though you couldn't really tell what, since she was still half asleep but pissed as all hell. The shout must have woke my dad, who came running in, rubbing his eyes like mad. By then I had got back up but I didn't know what the hell my story was gonna be. "Kyle what the hell are you doing in my room?" Karlie was screaming. I looked around the room but I really couldn't come up with something. It's just so hard to think in those situations, you know? I was saved from answering though by a scream from my room. "RAYMOND!"

When my mom used my dad's full name you know shit was hitting the fan, and in this case there was shit all over my perfect plan. I guess they had split up when they heard the shout and my mom went to my room, where Crystal was sleeping. I walked, scared shitless, behind my dad down the hall, back to my room. Crystal was sitting up, clutching the covers like some goddamn movie. "OUT" yells my mom, so she scrambles for her clothes and runs out all

scared. That pissed me off but I knew better than to open my mouth with that look in my mother's eye.

Thank God my dad stepped in and said "let's all just go to sleep and we'll deal with this in the morning." Usually that guy just cares about himself but at that moment I coulda kissed him. My mom didn't say anything but just left, and so did my dad. Took me a while to fall asleep, since I was so scared, but I texted Crystal and she was alright, so I fell asleep eventually.

The next morning I woke up but didn't want to get out of bed 'cause I knew I'd have to go face my parents. I didn't feel sorry, really. It was their fault anyways. But I didn't know what they'd say or how they'd punish me. Eventually I knew I had to go and face it so I did—I'm not a coward or anything. Well everyone was just sitting at the table, eating breakfast. But no one was talking and I could just feel the tension in the air.

I put a couple Eggos in the toaster and poured some orange juice, but nobody was saying anything, and it just felt so uncomfortable. I kinda made myself clear my throat a little, but still nothing. It was torture, don't you know? Just standing there in silence, watching my Eggo's toas, waiting for someone to say something. Finally the toaster pops, and I sat down at the table. Of course the only seat left is next to Frankie again. Well I sit down and I look around me but everyone's just looking at their food and I don't want to say anything. So I start buttering my waffles.

And Frankie opens his mouth. "You know Kyle, I used to do a lot of things just to make my parents mad, when I was your age. Sometimes it seems like everyone's ganging up on you. But it's just a phase that you'll grow out of and someday—" I never found out what would happen someday, since right then and there I stabbed him in the thigh with that butter knife.

And that's why I have a parole officer.