

Snapshot

My name is Allison Margaret McFadden. Everyone calls me Alli Mac. I'm in the fifth grade at St. Dunstan's and I don't take shit from anybody. I have two older brothers: Rory and Mike. They go to St. Catherine's High School and are on the rugby team. They taught me everything I know about fighting. If anyone tries to punk on me I know to go for the eyes or the nuts. I've been suspended twice. Once for punching Jimmy Murphy in the nose after he called me a sissy, and once for throwing a basketball at Maggie Callahan's stupid face after she picked on a second-grade girl at recess. My mom said if I get suspended again she's not going to let me go to the end of the year altar server picnic. There's waterslides, go-kart racing, and all the Dippin' Dots you could possibly eat. Everybody who's anybody is going to be there, and I'm finally old enough this year, so I've been on my best behavior. Of course, there's been a few minor slip-ups, but nothing my mom would ever find out about ... unless Karen Grimaldi snitches on me again.

Mom started working from home ever since my oldest brother Rory was born. She always says, "Before you kids, I used to take muni to the Financial District with the rest of the nine to fivers. Now my only coworker is Sully." That's our 90-pound teddy bear of a chocolate lab. I like having mom around all the time because my dad stays at the firehouse a couple nights a week and I don't get to see him as much. My dad saves people from fires and helps old ladies when they fall down the stairs. He has worked at Station 11 in Chinatown since I can remember. It's his home away from home.

Mom hates when Dad has an overnight shift at the firehouse, especially when he stays more than one night in a row. Dad loves his job. He comes in for career day every year at my school and everyone thinks he's super bad ass. Mom knows his job is important for the

community, but she gets mad at him all the time for working too much. When he's home, she complains that she does all the parenting and she doesn't want her kids to grow up with an "absentee dad" ...whatever that means. I overhear her yelling at him all the time. I swear that's all they ever talk about.

Uncle Rick works at Station 11 with my dad. He isn't actually my uncle; I just call him that for some reason. I've known him since I was a baby. He always makes me a special treat when I come by the firehouse. He even lets me slide down the fire pole when my dad isn't watching. When Rick isn't at the firehouse he lives in a house by the beach. Whenever my brothers and I walk Sully on Sunday afternoons, we stop by Rick's to say "hi." Sometimes he pays me ten bucks to wash his old blue and white Bronco. I'll have enough cash to buy the new polaroid camera I really want if I keep the Bronco looking brand spankin new.

Dad and Rick work opposite schedules, so mom sometimes invites him over for dinner with my family when Dad's staying overnight at the firehouse. He always brings those cookies from Safeway that have the colored frosting on top with sprinkles. Those are my favorite. Sometimes he even stays and watches *The Bachelor* with me and Mom after we eat.

Dad was home on Sunday night after being on duty for 48 hours straight. Whenever he gets a Sunday off, we like to go out to dinner as a family. It won't be long before Rory goes off to play rugby at Cal next fall, so Mom is trying to do things as a family as much as possible. "Rory, Mike turn off ESPN and get your shoes on. We're already late for our reservation." Mom is a bit of a control freak and has every hour of every day scheduled into her Blackberry. Blackberry? Yeah my mom still uses one. She believes it is a "superior machine" to the iPhone. There's nothing that could convince her otherwise. It doesn't have all the cool Apple stuff, but she's pretty stuck on that phone.

Dad couldn't find his wallet anywhere and was busy cancelling his credit cards the whole ride over to Original Joe's, "Yeah I could have sworn I left it in glove compartment of the truck. God dammit all my fucking credit cards plus our Paradise Pizza frequent buyer card was in there. We were one short of the freebie. Unbelievable." He was kidding, but also pissed at the same time. That's how Dad always was. Even if something really shitty happens, he's only mad for a couple minutes. Then he just makes a joke out of it. He couldn't hold a grudge if he tried. He doesn't know that I know this about him, so I pretend like I'm scared when I get in trouble, but I know I won't be in trouble for long.

We were too late for our reservation and they gave away our table, so we sat in the foyer while dad went to the bar for a Jameson and ginger until the server ushered us to our table. "Sorry for the wait guys, we've been swamped tonight. My name is Gigi and I'll be your server for the evening. I'll bring waters for the table and give y'all a little time to look at the menu." I wasn't sure if she was from Louisiana or if she just said "y'all" to sound quirky. Either way it bugged me and it replayed in my head over and over again, "Y'all...y'all...y'all."

"Alli? Alli! Are you listening to me?" my mom said, "Are you going to take a look at the menu or just sit there and stare at the wall?"

Mike chimed in, "Yeah, Alli get your head out of your ass. I'm starving."

Mom snapped back, "Watch your language, Michael. You and Ror are the reason we were late anyways."

"Dubs were down 2 heading into the last 30 seconds against the Cavs. I couldn't have missed the look on LeBron's face after Steph hit a buzzer beater on Cleveland turf."

Dad said, "I'm with Mike on this one. That was a hell of a win."

Mom's number one pet peeve is when Dad defends one of us kids against her. She always takes it way too personally. She tried to stay calm. She slowly folded her napkin on her lap and spoke in a low tone gritting her teeth, "Y'know, we're supposed to be a team here, Willy. Thanks for the support...Get the waiter's attention. I'm ready to order."

She always took it to another level. She is constantly nit picking everything Dad says. Dad doesn't seem to mind. He just continued to butter his bread, while making eye contact with our waitress and mouthing, "We're ready to order" with exaggerated facial movements like he had peanut butter on the roof of his mouth.

Mom wouldn't let us get a second bread basket or more soda, so I made sure to roll my eyes extra hard when she began her tired speech about "trying to be healthier as a family." Family my ass! We barely ever get to go out to eat, and we never have soda in the house. Why can't we get a treat once in a while? If she weren't here, I know Dad would have let us get a couple of Cokes.

The next night, Dad was at the firehouse, so Uncle Rick brought over some pizzas and we watched the Dubs play the Clippers. Blake Griffin is the king of flop. He is a total bully on defense down low, but if one of our guys even slightly taps him on the shoulder, he acts like he got shot.

Rory said, "Draymond better calm down. We don't want a repeat of last year's suspension for getting t'd up too many times"

"He's a hothead. There's always one on every team. Whether a coach uses him as an asset or downfall is up to him," Rick replied.

"I love to see a little emotion on the court, but he's gotta get it together."

The Dubs won again and I was feeling another finals series win to make up for last year's bullcrap. Rory and Mike went to their room in the garage to finish their homework. I swear ever since they moved in there I barely every see them anymore. Most of the time they don't even eat dinner with us, they just microwave hot pockets and instant noodles. The house is a lot quieter and smells better without them, so I'm not complaining.

I went upstairs to brush my teeth and get ready for bed. Mom and Rick stayed downstairs and watched the news. I could hear it from my bed, "The clear coastal skies are coming to a wet and windy end midweek. You better bring your umbrella to work because starting tomorrow, there will be showers on and off up until the weekend." The carbon monoxide detector's battery must have been out because a beep coming from the garage was keeping me from falling asleep. I stared at the glow in the dark star stickers on my ceiling for hours.

I was wide awake at 6am and my alarm clock doesn't go off until 7:15. I got up anyways and took a shower. I walked back to my room in my robe. Mike must have stolen my other towel for my hair, so my curls tracked water through the hallway on the hardwood floors. When I got back into my room the sun was rising, so I looked out the window and saw red skies. It reminded me of the saying my dad always told me, "Red skies in the morning, a sailor's warning...red skies at night, a sailor's delight," which then reminded me of what I heard on the news last night, so I looked under my bed for my pink polka dot umbrella to stick in my backpack. I looked out the window one more time as the sun was almost all the way exposed behind the Twin Peaks, and saw Rick's Bronco still parked in front of our driveway. He must have fallen asleep on the couch last night after the game.

I finished getting ready for school and sat in bed going over my vocabulary words for my quiz in Ms. Ortega's class. I didn't see mom all morning, but when Rory, Mike, and I left for school, the Bronco was gone.

Later that week Rick came over again for dinner. Mom called me downstairs when the food was ready. Rick was sitting at the head of the table and there was a small gift bag sitting in front of him. He handed it to me and said, "I was cleaning out my garage and found an old Polaroid camera from when I was in college and remembered that you were saving up to buy one."

"Oh my gosh! Thank you so so so much Rick! You are the best. I can't wait to take Sully to the beach and take pictures to put up in my room."

"Anything for you Allison Margaret. Thanks for always being such a good hostess when I come over. You're going to grow up and be just as beautiful as your mom one day."

My mom blushed and rolled her eyes holding back a smile. She doesn't know how to act when someone says something nice about her. Sometimes she pretends like she can't hear them, and I get that. Like how do you even respond? Thanks Rick, you're beautiful too?

I made my brothers turn off the Reggie Miller *30 For 30* that they've seen a thousand times so we could watch *The Bachelor* after dinner. Mike groaned and shuffled outside to the garage. Rory quickly followed him and slammed the door. This was the one show that I got to watch during the week. Otherwise, it's 24 hour sports...which is okay. I like sports. But I also like *The Bachelor*.

After the show, I set my alarm for before sunrise so I could try out my new camera. When I got up, it was a little foggy out, so the sunrise wasn't as pretty as it was the other day, but I still wanted to take a crack at it. I threw on one of my brothers' varsity jackets

that was hanging off the back of the couch and went outside. I took one picture of the sun as it was just barely peeking through the fog. It was really cold out and I wasn't wearing any shoes, so I ran back inside as it developed. The stairs creaked as I ran up to my room. I looked up as I got to the top and nearly ran into Rick. He stepped back when he saw me, not scared but surprised, like when you sneak into the kitchen to get the last cupcake and you turn around and your brother is looking at you. That happened once to me, and I said, "Oh, I was just getting this for you."

Here's what Rick said: "Uh, good morning, Alli. What are you doing up so early?"

I knew he'd be happy that I was using my present. "I was taking pictures of the sunrise with the Polaroid! Did you fall asleep again here by accident?"

My mom walked out of her room wearing a big t-shirt. It was a Raiders shirt. I didn't recognize it. My dad hates the Raiders. Someone must have given it to him as a joke.

She said, "Yeah we must have lost track of time watching TV. I let him crash here. Go get your brothers up and start getting ready for school."

Dad picked me up from school that day. We had early dismissal at noon. Dad always grabs me on minimum days and we go to Bull's Head. They have the best milkshakes in the city.

"How was school?"

"It sucked. Ms. Ortega gave me a referral slip for calling Karen Grimaldi stupid. I couldn't help it. She couldn't remember the five types of triangles: right, acute, equilateral, obtuse, and isosceles. She got the first four, but blanked on isosceles so I whispered, 'isosceles stupid.'"

"Alli..."

“What? The teacher just said it like 30 seconds before! She’s a full blown imbecile!”

My dad always called people imbeciles. I got that one from him. He always has the best insults. They’re a perfect balance between funny and offensive.

“I don’t care if she’s an imbecile. Keep it to yourself.”

“Look what Uncle Rick gave me!” I pulled out my new Polaroid camera from my backpack and put it on the counter next to my milkshake.

“I remember when he used to bring that out to bars with us in college. Every Sunday morning we’d have to drive over to Joxer Daly’s and pick up that camera, his jacket, and his debit card because he’d leave his tab open all night, get trashed, and forget about his shit. Now *he* deserved to be called an imbecile.”

“He brought it for me at dinner last night.”

“Rick came over for dinner? That moocher’s always looking for his next free meal. He steals my leftovers at the firehouse.”

“He’s had dinner at our house a lot lately. He’s even slept over a couple times. He must get lonely at his house all by himself.”

“Wait a minute. Rick did what?” Dad clenched his fork and swallowed a big bite of hash browns that he’d already put in his mouth. “He spent the night?”

“Yeah, a couple times. I saw his Bronco parked out front when I woke up before my alarm.”

We boxed up the rest of our food and Dad left cash on the table for our waitress before she even brought the check. He didn’t talk much on the car ride home. I turned the radio to Katy Perry’s “California Gurls.” Dad usually changes the channel whenever I play pop music, but he didn’t seem to notice it was even on. When we got home, I sat down at the kitchen table

and started my homework. Dad walked straight to Mom's office and closed the door. I could hear them fighting, but couldn't make out the words exactly. Dad started yelling. Something must have been really wrong because he came out of the office and it looked like there might have been tears in his eyes. His face was red. He took a deep breath and patted me on the shoulder when he walked by. He turned back and said, "Alli, grab your toothbrush and some clothes for school tomorrow, we're going to have a sleepover at Station 11 tonight."

"On a school night?"

"Yeah, it'll be fun. It's chili night. The boys can't wait to see you. You haven't come by in a while."

Dad pressed his lips together like he was holding his breath. He drove really fast and kept slamming on his brakes before almost rear ending the Prius in front of us.

"Is everything okay?"

"Yeah Al, I just have to talk to Uncle Rick really quick before we go to the firehouse. Won't take long. Stay in the car...I'll be out in a minute."

Rick had one of those gates that you can use a buzzer to open it from the top of his steps. The buzzer hadn't been working for a while, so he came downstairs to let my dad in. They were talking in the entryway into his house. Rick kept opening his mouth to say something, but my dad kept talking and wouldn't let him get a word in. Finally, Dad stopped and they both just stood there looking at each other. Rick started to say something and my dad slugged him in the face. He walked back to the car leaving Rick on his knees with his hands over his face. Blood was seeping through the cracks of his fingers.

"Why did you do that?" I said, and I don't know why, but I was crying.

“Rick and I have some unfinished business. Don’t worry, everything is going to be fine. I just let my temper take over...like the boys do when someone cheap shots them in rug.”

I didn’t know what to say. I was pissed at my dad. Why did he have to do that? Rick is my friend. He’s always nice to me and Mom. He gave me a camera, for Christ’s sake.

I didn’t talk to my dad for the rest of the night.

Rick doesn’t come over anymore. Dad’s been working a lot extra and sleeping on the couch when he is home. I don’t know why he had to ruin everything.