

A Pair of Allowances

by Bennett Elliott

“Your mother enjoyed apples and made you wear unfashionable pants; she was a bitch. From now on we eat only candy bars and we wear only shorts. But first, four hours of video games!”

Elbows sprawling on the dining room table, Lawrence Carter turns over this new existence. Opposite his father and chewing spoonfuls of cookie-type cereal, he kicks dangling feet above the uncarpeted floor and imagines a life with separate everything. With double everything. Swallowing another spoonful, Lawrence wonders the details of a life abundant in shorts and name-brand hamburgers.

Would his father—currently reading the paper in his bathrobe, glasses pushed to the center of his nose, hair a mess—favor these changes? In the old house, the old life, every ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ issued from Lawrence’s mother, not his father. Maybe now, living in his father’s house, things would be different. Mom no longer there to thwart him, could he eat chocolate *whenever*? Play video games *all the time*? Stay awake *until 10*?

One thing is for sure: Lawrence Carter doesn’t know the words ‘issue’, ‘thwart’ or ‘bitch’—those words are mine. Lawrence Carter is eight, dribbles milk from his mouth as he eats, and does not bother with wiping away sunrise-boogers crusted in his eye corners. Concerning the exact grammar of Lawrence’s thoughts this morning, his initial conjuring of the pretended fiat employs simple adjectives, a work bench of eight year old descriptives: ‘meaney’, ‘mud-face’, ‘crap’.

Wiping his mouth with a pajama sleeve, Lawrence daydreams and scans the undecorated room. Taped up boxes of still-packed dishes, clothes, toys, DVDs, tax documents, photo albums, tools, and etc. line the dining room, the kitchen, the living room. Outside he hears birds argue. Three gold rhomboids stretch over the tabletop through the window in back of his father. Lawrence sinks

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the head of his spoon beneath the milk, tapping it repeatedly against the bottom of the bowl. A thick ruffle issues from his father folding the front-page. The gold beams illuminate dust motes, a lazy spiraling nation of particles swirling over the tabletop. Round and round, some descend to the table, some to the parquet. He imagines an Apache riding a shooting star, riding it like a bronco, then has another bite of cereal. A wrinkled face—mushy.

Nudging soggy bits of imitation cookie with a spoon fished from the cardboard box labeled 'silverware', he stares in silence at the swirls and the gold beneath them, thinking.

'But what if...': school-night sleepovers, extra Christmas presents, double summer vacations, a new game console; double allowances. Both feet swinging from his chair, 'life' reconstellates. Visions of bb guns, hang-gliding and ninja-themed birthday parties. There are no obstacles in this new life, a life with two of everything and no nagging mother. Nothing is impossible.

"Lawrence," his father shouts while leaping onto the Ikea dinning table, "I'm composing a missive to your teachers stating that recess is the only subject you'll be taking under *my* watch! From hence forth, a prohibition on seatbelts, and I'll insist on *you* driving the car *as fast as you deem fit*. We will only rent movies rated R—*the R standing for Radical!* But first, start the Chrysler, Lawrence, you're driving us to the courthouse and we're legally changing your name, today this minute, to *Puma Robotsworth!* And you just let that bitch of a mother attempt to stop us. Ha! We will eat ice-cream and laugh, laugh, laugh into her unpleasant face!"

A power of fantastical imaginings crowd the cereal chewing head of the young Lawrence Carter, dust dancing before him in the golden table-light of a brand new house. Amid stack after stack of sealed possessions, half the items he owns closed in boxes surrounding him, none of the many scenes he dreams in the breakfast-quiet are negative. As the story's narrator I can assure that the imagination of Lawrence Carter is completely devoid of anything approximating a sad consideration, an unhappy imagining. Relating to his views on the future, Lawrence's

predictions are as uncomplicated and soft-edged as his vocabulary. 'Awesomeness' is a matter of quantity, not quality. Just *how much* bounty and *of what sort*? How many smiles? How many trips to the water-park, the amusement park, the baseball park?

In just two months since the finalizing he has already received items and privileges previously inconceivable—an increased allowance, extended Internet hours, a flying saucer bed, Mario Kart Wii. Life is in bloom. All is possible. In the course of his daydreams, these new privileges and items tornadoing about him, Lawrence sometimes finds himself short of breath from the excitement of it all. Literally, he becomes short of breathe. Life is unhindered possibility.

But, of course, Life is not unhindered possibility. Not that this consideration, this reality, has occurred, or will ever occur, to Lawrence.

Lawrence, you see, is self-centered. Many of you might call it innocent, but I assure you, it is not. Lawrence Carter possesses the capacity for worry, for doubt, for confusion. Eating his mushy cereal, sitting there in that Swedish-made dining chair, the idea could occur to Lawrence that emotional trauma has descended upon his mother, his father, and could possibly descend upon him, *if he would allow it*. Allowing it, however, would considerably dim, if not entirely dissolve, the daydreamed wonder of extra allowance, new video games, and extended curfews.

So Lawrence concentrates instead on what he knows, and what he knows about divorce from his friends' stories: double vacations, double presents, double houses, double everything. Currently learning multiplication tables in school, the repercussions of divorce he reasons as esoteric mathematical calculations of the most stupendous sort: two people separate, both have less money, and somehow he gets more, more, more of everything. He is oblivious as to how this works. Too busy envisioning vacations by helicopter to the North Pole, it is dismissed as something to be explained in the future, revealed at a later date in school—probably the fifth grade.

Lawrence does not know of the awkward weekend drop-offs. He has never walked into the kitchen and found his father crying, drinking with the lights out. Adults shouting at one another over a failed cease-fire of a Christmas dinner. “No! Fuck You, Walter! I’m not the one that fucked the babysitter! Enjoy your goddamn Turkey!”, is beyond the consideration of young Lawrence, far more unimaginable than a hover-board or an extra ten dollars a week.

Slurping the milk from his bowl, drops splashing onto his pajamas, Lawrence has never witnessed a lonely drunk father, a happy, single mother. And while inexperience plays a part in his failure to consider, he might at least wonder ‘Man-oh-man, gee, gosh (whatever the appropriate, G-rated generational interjection is) perhaps there will be a downside to this. Maybe someone will not be happy.’

That’s not Larry’s style, though. Oh, no; Larry’s in it for the toys, for the treats, for the allowance money and the two houses and the spaceship bed and the extended curfew. Yes, Larry—clacking his milk drained bowl onto the table as his father mumbles into the paper—is a proto-fuckwad, the seedling of a self-congratulatory, cash grinding, narcissist, with a shatter-proof sense of entitlement, his text-book lack of empathy already intact.

Licking his spoon while staring blankly across the table at the sun washed, semi-transparent Sunday paper in his father’s hands, daydreams of waterslides and rock concerts flashing through his mind, Lawrence Carter is already the vicious asshole he will become.

Nothing bad could ever happen to Lawrence, because nothing bad deserves to happen to Lawrence. Lawrence only considers Lawrence and what Lawrence will gain from this divorce. He kicks his feet, heels bumping against the chair in rhythm. Tapping his spoon on the table, he stares into the living room at a box labeled ‘Shirts’, imagining purchasing the world’s most hi-tech water gun with the money he will save up from his two allowances over the next few months.

You’re a shit-head, Lawrence.

What's that? You're imagining a brand new remote control car? You'll race it against your schoolmates, defeating them all in a glorious televised race, earning you the love and attention of everyone around you? Haha! Yes, that's just the thing for you and your heinous trapdoor of a soul! Something gets near that you don't like? Flip the lever and woosh it out of sight! That's it, Larry: break the terrifying circuit of your own imagination! Whatever you do, don't complete the full speculative rotation that will deposit you at the unavoidable conclusion, at the imaginative nadir, that you are the source of this muted atmosphere of unhappiness! Double allowance, Larry! Lazily jab that spoon at the uneaten remains of your milkless cereal!

Yes, congratulations, Larry: most people with self-absorbed parents embroiled in a horrific divorce and the subsequent childish guerilla war for the emotions of those near them only take up crass materialism *after* the fact, as an attempt to cover up the hurt. You've skipped that all together. Let's all go to Disneyland! Let's put a swimming pool with a slide in the back of the house! Let's only drink chocolate milk!

That's the spirit, Larry, push that bowl out of the way. You're finished with stupid breakfasts—time for more blurry, cartoonish, escapist, bullshit! Time to hit the crack pipe of imagination, you uncaring shit!

Kicking open the door to the house, Larry's emotionally scarred father exhibits uncharacteristic energy and cheer—something unseen in the maelstrom of depression and accreting money troubles that has swallowed almost every particle of either over the two year process of his divorce. Nevertheless, his dad is wearing mountain climbing gear, and for some inexplicable reason, a katana on his back, a gauntlet on his hand, and gripping an A.K. 47. “Lawrence!” he shouts “desist with shredding awesome solos on your electric space-guitar! The hovercraft waits outside, and we must depart immediately! We ascend Mt. McKinley tonight! Grab your light saber and machine gun; your bulletproof armor and jet-boots are already packed. Let the radical adventures begin!”

Oh my God, you little shit. Seriously? You're in an unfurnished house, boxes pitched all over the place. Your father's reading the paper and hasn't said a word since he handed down the box of cereal; he's clearly, clearly an immensely unhappy man—near suicidal. You're aware of the fact he doesn't really like you, right? On several occasions, he has fantasized about abandoning you.

Examine him for a moment, Larry. He's reading the leisure section and drinking coffee, straight across the table from you, in silence. No acknowledgement, of any sort, is coming your way. You are a non-entity, an appendage he would sever if it were at all possible.

Huh, what's that, oh, oh now you're imagining that you go to the water park five times in one summer. It will make the other kids so jealous! Make them jealous...yes!

This is really what you think about with your life packed around you in boxes? Your mother is crying right now, Lawrence, crying in your old living room—not that you would care if you knew, not that you can hear me or would listen to me if you could. You'll get more, won't you Lawrence? More fun things. And how can more fun things be bad? Fun!

From experience, I could tell you from experience what's going to happen to you in a divorce, Lawrence, but you wouldn't give a hot fuck. You are a goddamned pajama-ed goblin, Lawrence. Kick your feet, stare at the spots on the table, imagine brand new roller-skates and Happy-meals from both parents; you despicable fuck.

Here, let me reveal to everyone, in words even Lawrence can understand, the source of his parent's bitter, alcohol fueled, infidelity strewn divorce: They didn't want to have you, Larry!

You were the worst mistake either of them ever made, and some day, one of them will transmit this information to you at a baseball game, or in the mall while shopping for a new pair of running shoes! And what do you think about that, Larry, about your misfired existence?

Oh, you're not think about it at all? Instead you're fantasizing about owning the coolest skateboard in school. Excellent! Again, in Prince Shit Head's own words: "Dude this is the totally awesomest skateboard ever. It was made in Japan by ninjas and King Arthur and it goes a thousand miles an hour and cost a thousand dollars, but I bought it with my *two* allowances. Because my parents are divorced and I get two allowances, and my dad and I killed an abominable snowman this one time, with a bow and arrow, and the arrow had a flaming tip, like in that one Shia LeBouf movie, and I get to watch rated R movies and stay up until ten thirty every night."

You will never own that fucking skateboard, Larry! You will never impress anyone with it! You will not kill a Yeti with your father; you won't even go to an amusement park with your father! You will simply purchase and purchase and purchase SHIT, Larry. And you will do it because IT IS ALL YOU KNOW, because Lawrence Carter is the center of the wheezing universe.

But then, since you can't think beyond how superb everything in your life is destined to be, perhaps the emotional implosion and low-balled psychological reconstruction of the people responsible for your existence will never register. Maybe you won't drop out of school, work a galaxy of unsatisfying odd jobs, finally settling on that of a short story narrator. A job that pays horribly, has few benefits, and offers the worst hours. Could be that you won't get up at nine on a Sunday morning, watching a complete shit stain of a man-child eat cereal while his clearly hungover father reads about the upcoming Fall TV lineup and compresses his battered psyche with bland, entertainment based observations so that he doesn't hemorrhage a mindful of suicidal thoughts.

But I hope not, Lawrence—because I hate you. I hate everything about you, as you sit there, observing dust swirl in the sunlight, daydreaming about remote control fire engines, tapping your spoon on the table, despising your mother because she insists you arrive to school on time. You are a pointy-toothed beast, an ambulating, demanding cum-shot of a thousand million advertising

campaigns. Simply floating invisibly in this goddamn room, watching you sit on the floor and daydream about money while your father thinks about going upstairs and jerking off in the shower...FUCK! I want to break something. You're a paycheck to me, Larry. That's all you are, and after this is over, I hope you're dead! I hope you fucking die! In fact, you know what, they can fire me, Larry, they really can, but your TIME'S UP, MOTHERFUCKER!

Lawrence's father folds the paper and drops it to the table. An echo sounds through the room, dust clearing from the golden light. He takes a sip of coffee.

Pushing up off both elbows, Lawrence meets his father's eyes. "Dad, do I get two allowances now?"

Leaning back in his chair, his father knits his fingers together and wrests the tangle of them on the belly of his dirty t-shirt. Reclined towards the light of the window, his outline darkens. The features of his face, of the front of his body, fade out; he is almost a silhouette.

"Mom said it was okay. She said she would do it." Lawrence replies, breaking the silence.

Lawrence's father stands. Walking to the kitchen, he finishes his coffee, stopping in the doorway. He turns to Lawrence. There are bags under his eyes. Wrinkles stab from the corners of his mouth.

"Sure, whatever. If that's what she's doing, then, yeah. You can have two allowances." Stepping in to the kitchen, the coffee pot rattles as he removes it from the machine. "We'll start next week. Ten dollars." He pours another cup of coffee and walks back, leaning against the kitchen doorframe. "Ten is what she's giving you, right?"

Visions of videogames and bicycles sweep through Lawrence's head, a hyper-sonic collage of top of the line sneakers and air-guns. "No. She changed it to twenty."

"Twenty? When did she change it to twenty?"

"After court." Lawrence replied, hanging his head.

A sigh from his father. "Twent..."

Sharp vibrations accompany a flash of white light that explodes through the windows. In the instant that father and son are launched off the ground, each bursts into flames. In the second that proceeds their disintegration, an omnipresent high frequency shriek, followed by a 'whoomf' suffuses them. Remnants of the east facing wall and the yard blast through and past them as the house, in a solitary hydrogen sneeze, dissolves into a mass of powder. Glass, drywall, wood, parquet, plastic, metal, flesh, bone—in one white blast of atomic heat, in a single flash, everything is clapped into a exploded surge of dust—burning hot dirt from uncountable particles suddenly and violently shifted out of place, firing horizontally over the surface of the planet in a crackling, irradiated wind. All of which swirls together in the subsequent orange glow of a flamed earth-scape, a blizzard of simmering dust tinted golden under a burning sky that rolls up in column of deafening smoke.

And there never was another trace of fucking Lawrence Carter. He's gone—one less fart in a world of assholes.

If that conclusion doesn't suit you: get fucked; complain to the employment agency that hired me or the writer contracted them, or what-fuck-ever. Piss up a goddamn rope. I quit this fucking job.

The End.

