

Diary of a Teenage Girl

Maya Book No. 1

A  
Not-So-  
Simple  
Life

a novel

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May 10

These two things I know for sure: (1) nothing about life is fair, and (2) it is not going to get better. How's that for an optimistic way to begin this journal? Not that I'll continue this exercise in depressing futility. I mean, how can writing about my miserable life improve one single part of it? The only reason I'm even attempting this now is my cousin Kim Peterson. A cousin I didn't even know existed just a couple of weeks ago. Not that she's actually related. Not genetically anyway. Kim's mother, who died before I could even meet her, was my mom's sister. I suppose if I'd known her, I might've called her "Aunt Patricia." Or not. But Kim, since she was adopted from Korea, is *not* an actual relative. Although I suppose that I sort of wish she were...but that's my secret.

Anyway, as if I needed help to confirm my theory (that life is not fair), by the time I learned about this mystery aunt, she was already dying from cancer. My "cousin" Kim (who I think is seventeen—anyway she's a couple of years older than me) had done an extensive online search to dredge up Shannon (that's my mom). Kim's plan had been to reconnect the

two sisters. They'd been out of contact for more than thirty years, and Patricia was longing to see her younger sister before it was too late.

As fate would have it, that happy little family reunion never took place. And naturally, I blame Shannon for this unfortunate fact. Although she knew her sister was terminally ill, instead of booking the next plane out there, she went shopping. Shannon, being Shannon, set out for the swankiest shops in Beverly Hills in search of the "perfect" outfit—something she planned to wear in order to "impress" her dying sister. As it turned out, she wore that stupid outfit to Patricia's funeral.

My aunt's funeral still feels rather surreal to me—like I wasn't actually there, or perhaps I was simply watching a movie about some nice family who had lost a loved one. And as I sat there in the front row with my mom and Kim and her dad, listening to the preacher going on and on about how wonderful this Patricia person was and how everyone who knew her loved her, all I could think was how totally unfair it was that I'd never known her. And how I never even got a chance to meet her. Never said hello or good-bye. Nothing.

Because it occurred to me, sitting there and staring at a small sea of flowers, that I would've liked this woman. She sounded kind and thoughtful and truly good. Good in a way that you just don't see down here in L.A. And although I don't

consider myself to be “good” in that sense, I do think that in some small way I might be a little bit like my aunt. But now I’ll never really find out.

Of course I blame Shannon for that too. And rightly so. For starters, she never even told me that I had an aunt. And then when Kim contacted her, Shannon acted as if she’d been the one cast aside by her older sister. Come to find out, it was Shannon who had run away, leaving her home and family far behind, and then never getting back in touch with any of them. It’s hard to admit this, especially here in Beverly Hills, where they’re a dime a dozen, but my mom is a real phony.

“Patricia is dying,” she had sobbed to me after the phone call a couple of weeks ago.

“Who’s Patricia?” I thought it was probably one of her drug friends, perhaps someone who’d OD’d or gotten in a car wreck while driving under the influence. These things do happen...I know.

“*My sister!*” Shannon cried out, acting like I should’ve known this already, like it was an established fact.

“What sister?”

“Patricia Peterson—she’s my older sister. That was her daughter on the phone. Patricia is dying, Maya! My *only* sister is dying!”

Then instead of hopping on a plane like a normal person who had just learned her long-lost sister was dying,

Shannon insisted on taking me shopping for most of the following day. She claimed I needed something “decent” to wear for the trip. Of course, this was totally bogus, but feeling sorry for her, I played along. So it wasn’t until later that evening that Shannon finally did a quick online search for cheap airline tickets. She wanted to get a deal on airfare—and that same day she’d just paid more than twelve hundred dollars for a Dolce & Gabbana purse!

So it seems that stupid designer bag, which not only looks almost exactly like another purse in Shannon’s cluttered closet but is also made of real leather (suggesting that an innocent cow gave up its life so my mom could spend way too much money on a purse that she didn’t even need), was the main reason we missed the opportunity to see her sister while she was still alive. Okay, it sounds like I’m blaming the purse. As usual, the only one to blame here is Shannon.

Perhaps now you see how my theory about life *not* getting any better proves itself once again. And Kim wants me to write about all this in a stupid diary! Like she thinks it’s going to be cathartic and revealing and “spiritual” (that’s what she told me). But instead, I’m feeling more bummed than ever. Recording the sad bits and pieces of my life in a journal feels like one great big downer. And yet, I think it’s for Kim’s sake I am still writing.

I don’t know why I even care about her. Furthermore, I know I made the worst possible impression on both her and

her dad. Normally, I wouldn't give a rat's rear end about what other people think of me...but something about those two took me by surprise. Just sitting with them at my aunt's funeral, observing their faces, their sadness, or the way they interacted with all their friends—their many, many friends. Well, as much as I don't want to, *I do care*. And that bugs me. But the fact is, I like them. I like them both. Not that they would have the slightest clue of this. No, there's not a chance they would suspect as much. Because I'm absolutely, positively certain that they both think I am (1) a totally spoiled brat, (2) a moody, self-centered adolescent, and (3) just plain rude.

Oh, did I mention that my mom and I got into a huge ugly argument right after we met Kim and my uncle? Uncle Allen was driving us home from the airport, and he and Kim were being rather quiet—probably still dealing with their own shock and grief. Patricia had been dead for less than twenty-four hours at the time. And admittedly, her death had taken my mom and me by surprise as well. Not that it gave us an excuse to act like morons. So when Shannon made some stupid comment that suggested she was the only one hurting over Patricia's death, well, that just got to me.

And Shannon and I got into the worst catfight ever—including a colorful exchange of some foul words I'm sure neither Kim nor her dad has ever used. Not one of my proudest moments. And yet, I just couldn't stop myself. That's how

much my mom gets to me. Sometimes I hate her so deeply that I think I could kill her while she's passed out on the sofa. Then sometimes I feel so brokenhearted sorry for her, and I realize that I'm the only one she has, and I am torn in two—split right down the middle.

Take today...or what actually began yesterday morning when Shannon was in one of her moods. She was stomping around the house, acting like she was the only one in the world who had ever suffered.

"Your father is late again!" she snapped at me, like it was my personal fault that my dad's monthly alimony and child-support payment hadn't arrived yet. I mean, at least the guy pays.

"So..." I just shrugged and started to make coffee.

"So?" Now Shannon was in my face. Without any makeup, her normally angular face looked puffy and blotchy, the telltale signs of a late-night drinking binge. And just a couple of days ago she told me she had quit. Again. "So, that means we're out of money, Maya. Out of money."

I shrugged again. Nothing new about that either. Still, I kept my thoughts to myself. I know my mom's moods well enough to know when to hold my tongue. First her mood swings, and next it's her fist.

"Well, in case you've forgotten, no money means no food."

I opened the fridge to see that, as usual, it was fairly empty. A couple of microbrew beers, some Dijon, a jar of



olives, a hard wedge of cheese, and several bottles of Evian. Fortunately, I'd been learning to garden this year. And being a vegan, I usually subsisted by what Shannon called "grazing" out in the backyard. I was growing several things, including tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, green onions, and the start of some good-looking white corn. It was better than going hungry.

I'm sure this would seem ironic to some people, since we live in a house worth at least three million. Or it was worth that much before Shannon mortgaged it several times. Who knows what it's worth now? Or who owns it? The bank or my mom?

"He'll pay." I poured coffee beans into the grinder. "He always does...eventually." Then I turned on the small appliance, allowing the loud noise to block out Shannon's response to my nonchalance. It worked. Because by the time I finished, she was gone. But she was still fuming. And before long she left the house without saying where she was going or when she would be back. That's when I knew it was going to get worse.

But having learned the art of denial from the queen herself, I pretended nothing was wrong. As usual, I got on my computer and began doing schoolwork. Oh, yeah, did I mention that I'm "homeschooled"? Or at least that's what we call it. The truth is, I school myself. After I got into trouble in middle school and after Shannon came down to the school

and made the trouble much, much worse, it was decided that I would be homeschooled.

I didn't complain about this decision. At the time, it sounded like a nice escape. It wasn't until a few months had gone by that I realized what I'd given up. But by then I was worried that I couldn't get it back. Even if I could slip back into classes—and I've always been smart—I just wasn't sure if I could slip back into my friends. I guess you could say I'd burned a few bridges. And so (perhaps this shows what a coward I really am beneath my bravado) I continued on with this farce of an education. But by the time my peers were entering high school, I decided that I didn't want to grow up to be a total idiot, so I forced my mom to order some real curriculum, which I access via my laptop. And I suppose that, for the most part, I am keeping up. But really, who knows? Who cares?

I do know that I envied Kim and her friends from school while we were there. I watched her classmates interacting with her after her mom's funeral. I saw the way they hugged her and spoke to her and seemed to genuinely care about her. And I tried not to notice how many stopped by her house in the following days. All expressing love and grief and what seemed like sincere friendship. And as I pretended not to witness these irksome things, I was fully aware that I was missing out on something important. Even now I feel like I've been robbed or cheated, or maybe I'm just stuck.

But back to Shannon and how she was AWOL all day and all night yesterday. And as they say, the writing was on the wall. It started with her drinking binge, followed by the fact that she was obviously out getting high. She'd probably called Luis (one of her favorite drug buddies) and told him her sob story about losing her only sister to cancer. I'm sure that must've been worth a pretty good hit of something. And when she finally came home this afternoon, she was totally wasted. I'm not even sure how she could drive, but her car seemed to be intact. Now she is sleeping it off—or else she's dead—but she hasn't moved for hours from her position on the living room sofa. And now it's evening, and I am back in the attic. This is where I usually end up after she falls off the wagon.

Don't get me wrong. It's not as if my mom sends me up here as some sort of punishment for her stupidity. No, that might be considered abuse or neglect or just plain parental meanness. No, retreating to the attic has been my own little escape plan over the years. I feel safer up here, and so far she has yet to figure it out. I have an old denim futon and a lava lamp and a few other comforts. And if I open both windows, the cooler air eventually flows through. Really, it's not so bad. And it's quiet. Although there are times when my little hide-away feels more like a prison cell than a private retreat. And sometimes, like tonight, I wonder why I do this to myself. Even more than that, I wonder...will this ever end?

Speaking of ends, I hate to end my first entry in my first journal on such a depressing note. Therefore I'll take a small detour now. Perhaps I can even consider this part of my homeschooling. Like anyone is paying attention. Just the same, I've secretly dreamed of having my own "green" column. Or perhaps my own "green" blog. Hey, I may not be Ed Begley Jr., but I can do my small part to save the planet. So I will practice these earth-friendly tidbits right here in my journal. And who knows...maybe someday they will be read by others. Anyway, here goes my first attempt.



### Maya's Green Tip for the Day

Did you know that we consume nearly thirty billion bottles of water in the United States every year? That's mountains of plastic water bottles that have been used once, then tossed out. My state actually recycles water bottles but only when we collect them and turn them in. Here's what I do. I have several reusable water bottles that can go through the dishwasher. And I've found that water from the tap isn't much different than what can be purchased, so I keep a refillable water filter pitcher in the fridge. I use that to fill my water bottle with cool, clean water and—presto—I'm ready to roll.

