

Next Door to Happy
By Allison Weiser Strout

Excerpt for Rockstar Book Tours

ONE

EVER since they moved in next door last week, I've sat on our front porch watching them. They're out in their yard all day long—laughing and screaming and playing with each other—until their mother calls them in. So far as I can tell, they're a real family. Which means they're the opposite of mine.

This morning the kids are in the yard again. There are five of them—two boys, three girls—and they have divided themselves into two uneven teams for relay races. The kids at the front of the lines crabwalk across the lawn and onto the driveway, where they each bounce a soccer ball once on one knee before hopscotching back across the grass to tag their teammate's hand. A yellow dog stands on the lawn next to them, barking as they cheer one another on.

Every minute I sit here, I want to be there even more. It's been a long summer. I spent the first part as a counselor-in-training at my old day camp, and now my best friend, Katie Patterson, is at sleepaway camp. My heart is crazy with desire, which is just the kind of emotion that my dad tells me I should try to tone down.

It's been almost a year since he moved out, and at first, I was pretty upset about his leaving, but there were some good things about it. For one, he bought me a phone so that I could call him regularly. Every Wednesday and Saturday I spent the night at his apartment, and we went out to eat at the diner. He would always get the day's special like veal shank or stuffed cabbage, which kind of grossed me out, and I would get some pasta dish. After we ate, we would go back to his place. He let me sleep in the bedroom while he took the fold-out couch in the living room.

But in June he got a job at a different company and started flying from New York to Atlanta every Monday and coming back on Friday, and now I only see him on Saturdays.

Dad's always telling me how he thinks I need to realize that life isn't perfect. It makes me kind of angry because if anyone knows that life isn't perfect, it's me. Maybe he should be telling me instead to grab the chance to be really happy when I get it.

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