The House on Montrose Ave

I am the first to wake up, my eyes sore and crusted with the slight remnants of last night's makeup. Rebecca lies asleep still in my bed, opting to sleep in my room last night instead of downstairs with her boyfriend like usual. My room has more space than it used to, yet the mess of clothes scattered across the floor remains. Decorated with outfit rejects, discarded from the night before, and the makeup bags arranged at the foot of my floor-length mirror. It looks how it normally would after a night out or a party (like we usually have), but I make sure to allow myself to really take in the mess as it is, in this room, in this house.

Crawling over my best friend, trying not to wake her, I make my way down the stairs, past the streamers hung around the banister, and into the kitchen. The faint smell of sweaty socks, spilt beer and cheap gin enters my nostrils. *Ahh,* I think to myself, *the markers of yet another great party at 219 Montrose* (with only a hint of sarcasm in my inner dialogue). I began to clean the mess of scattered cans and bottles, crushed Solo cups, and pizza crumbs when I heard a soft grumble coming from the living room; some of the others must be awake by now.

The house gradually comes alive. Darren, Lucas and Mason emerge from the living room, hair in disarray and Mason's glasses askew. "Well, don't you three look absolutely dashing this morning," I say (this time with the utmost amount of sarcasm). "I don't want to hear it from anyone, especially you, Zo!" Mason says to me, "Not after you got to sleep in the same bed as *my* girlfriend." A voice calls from the stairs, gradually getting louder as I see my best friend Rebecca, her hair also in disarray. "I'll sleep wherever I damn wanna sleep, okay Mason?" she says, scurrying to my side, where I embrace her with a hug. "Especially on a day like today." Mason shoots us the middle finger, and I relay it back with my free arm. "Okay, okay," I say, "in all seriousness, who wants a cup of coffee?" Darren shouts, "Me, please!" while Lucas utters a soft, "Ugh…not so loud," clutching his head, his long mane of hair covering his face. He looks up at me and says, "I would love one, Zoe, thank you."

Digging through the cardboard boxes marked 'kitchen (Zoe)', I pull out the silver Moka pot that Christian's mom got for me last Christmas. As I go to the cupboard to retrieve the espresso, I stop for a minute, remembering that the cupboards are empty, nothing but the pantry liner remaining. I redirect myself to the other cardboard boxes stacked in the kitchen corner to get the espresso and resume making everyone coffee. As I turn on the faucet, I hear a few more footsteps come piling into the kitchen. Michael and Veronica emerge from their bedroom just off the kitchen, Michael's mess of curls tangled into a mop atop his head, while Veronica's lay neatly tucked beneath her silk bonnet. "Well, good morning, everyone," Michael says through a broken yawn, stretching his arms. Veronica comes to greet me with a hug. "Is there anything I can help you with, Zosie?" she asks. "Yes, love, could you go into that other box over there and grab 6 mugs, please?" I reply, pointing to the stack of boxes in the corner. She returns momentarily with

6 plain brown mugs; I pause, thinking *these aren't mine*. "Sorry, love, these are Christian's, I think. Did you grab them from the box marked 'kitchen *(Zoe)*'?" "Yes," she replies, "that's all the mugs that were in there."

As if on cue, Christian comes barreling into the kitchen, frantic as always and out of breath. "HAS ANYONE SEEN MY CHROME BELT?!!?" he yells. "I HAD TO BE AT MAUD 20 MINUTES AGO!!!!!" His girlfriend, Rhea, comes quietly down the stairs after him. "Christian, you guys closed the store today, remember? Because of the massive party we threw last night," she says calmly. "Oh! Right! Thanks, Peb," kissing her on the cheek, "Don't know what I'd do without ya," he says. "I don't know either…" Rhea mutters under her breath. "I FOUND IT!"

Christian yells from the living room, carrying a box marked 'kitchen (Christian)', he makes his way into the kitchen, placing the box on the counter. I open the box to find ALL of my mugs neatly packed into *his* box. I punch him in the arm. "Ow!" he yelps. "What the hell was that for?" "*That*," I say, "is for taking ALL my mugs and putting them in *your* boxes. What else of mine have you packed away into your stuff?" "I swear that's it! I mean–maybe there might be one or two things I thought might be yours–but I'm pretty sure they're mine!" he exclaims in defence. "Well, I don't want to have to chase you down in a few months after we're all gone just to get my favourite mug back!" I say with a laugh. However, that laugh slowly fades. Taking into account what I just said, I pause. Everyone is quiet for a minute. A few moments later, Darren says, "Why would your chrome belt be in a box marked 'kitchen' anyway?" and the laughter resumes.

Using the mix of mine and Christian's mugs, I pour everyone a cup of coffee and start making breakfast. "Just use the paper plates from last night, Zo. I don't want to have to do any dishes," Michael says, "or dig through any more boxes." Nodding, I start plating pancakes and distributing them amongst my friends. Just then, Alex finally appears in the kitchen carrying a garbage bag full of cans, paper plates, and other party remnants. "Just so you guys know, *that* was definitely our last party. I am *not* doing that again, for real this time," and he forcefully tosses the garbage bag with the rest of them. Passing him a cup of coffee and a plate of pancakes, I say, "Don't worry, this will be the last, trust me on that," followed by a bittersweet smile. He returns my gesture and begins to eat.

As I sit here in my kitchen, surrounded by my friends–my family, really–I think about the last four years we've spent together. It looks different now, that's for sure. Boxes sit stacked in the corner of our rooms, half-taped and waiting. Just for now, though, the coffee is still hot, the pancakes are fresh, and everyone is still here.