

My Kingdom, My Escape
by Alyssa Steele

When I was younger, I would stay at my grandmother's farm for the majority of the summer. Technically, she was not really my grandmother, she was my stepmother's mom, but I loved her as if she was blood.

I lived with my mother in the city. I hated the city. I hated how it was so overcrowded and big. Taking the city bus to and from school was a fear-filled adventure, and I was never sure if I was going to make it home again. Not that I really wanted to be there. My mom's boyfriend was a jerk and he did nothing but yell at me. He yelled if I was late, he yelled if I was early, he yelled if my room was dirty, he yelled if it was a mess; I could never win. I didn't want to be there, so I was ecstatic that for three months out of the year I got to get away from it all. I loved going to my dad's for the summer because he always let me stay at grandma's farm.

Behind my grandmother's garden was a 25-foot tall rock that became my castle. I would climb up the side with my dogs or my sheep and sit there, watching over my kingdom. I even built a chair out of a stump, but it wasn't just a stump to me, it was a huge, gold, jewel encrusted throne sitting in the tallest tower of my stone castle ..

Half of all American children will witness the breakup of a parent's marriage. Of these, close to half will also see the breakup of a parent's second marriage. Among the millions of children who have seen their parents divorce, one of every 10 will also live through three or more parental marriage breakups.

The first summer I stayed there was 2000, I was nine years old. She gave me two orphaned lambs to take care of. A boy and a girl that I named Oscar and Mary. I had to bottle feed them, and they followed me like I was their mother. Grandma wouldn't let them sleep in the house, so they slept on the porch and waited for me to come out in the mornings.

One day I looked out into the cow field, which was the peasant 's village in my mind, to find a stray dog chasing the cows. I raced down the rock and rushed out to the field with a giant stick in my hand No way was I going to let some knight from another kingdom come and terrorize my villagers. I chased the dog off into the woods and walked gallantly around the boundaries of my kingdom, searching for any more signs of danger.

We had to get up at 4am to feed the cows, the sheep, the pigs, the chickens, and the rabbits. After that, we would go to my aunt's house to help her feed her animals. Then I would go horse back riding or run around with my cousins: Alex, Amy, Aubrey, Christopher, Delbert, Georgina" Krissy, Ryan, Roger, Vicky, Wesley and William. We always had so much fun because we were all young with wild imaginations. I think that was the most fun I had ever had in my entire life. I joined the local 4H club, and in August of each summer, we went to the fair for a week. I loved it. Grandma's farm was my kingdom. and fair was a whole separate world. My imagination ran :£Tee, in both places.

Forty percent of children growing up in America today are being raised without their fathers. Of all children born to married parents this year, fifty percent will experience the divorce of their parents before they reach their 18th birthday.

I went on a "quest" with my little brother to scout around my kingdom for new land to conquer. We were walking down the road when he pointed out some odd-looking tracks in the mud Looking hack, I realize that they were most likely tire tracks from a bicycle, but being young and naive, I convinced him we had a dragon loose ill the kingdom, and the tracks were from his tail. I had him get the knights together for a hunt.

The "knights" consisted of my brother, two of my dogs and my cat, who only came occasionally. We walked around the farm for several hours searching under rocks and in bushes for the dragon. We were terrified that he would eat the chickens or rabbits or even a cow; we had no idea how big he was.

For the entire day and into the evening we searched. and eventually had to go inside for dinner. The next day we examined each animal for any signs of trauma, then came to the conclusion that the dragon had simply flown off. The rest of the week, we were on red alert, wondering if the dragon might ever come back

Studies in the early 1980-s showed that children in repeat divorces earned lower grades and their peers rated them as less pleasant to be around. Teenagers in single-parent families and in blended families are three times more likely to need psychological help within a given year.

Until I was 12, my summers consisted of days on the farm and a week at the fair. I would not have wanted one detail to be the slightest bit different. Then, at the fair of 2003, my father pulled me aside. Well, he actually pulled up beside me in his car and told me to get in. I refused because I was with my friends until he screamed. "Get in the fucking car right this instant."

My last year at the fair was when I found Utopia My father had recently explained to me that Utopia was a wonderful place, a perfect society, and I found it in the middle of the woods. My friend, Adam, and I had decided to go exploring, when we found a small stream. We followed the water for about a mile when we came across a large culvert with an old dirt road on top. The culvert was just tall enough for Adam and I to walk through so we went to the other end and pushed aside the tree branches.

Compared to children from homes disrupted by death, children from divorced homes have more problems that are psychological. Children of divorce are at a greater risk to experience injury, asthma, headaches and speech defects than children whose parents have remained married.

What he said next threw my entire world off its foundation. "I'm divorcing your step-mom. Enjoy the next few days while you can because this is the last year you'll be going to fair or staying at the farm." I cried, I was angry, I went into denial, I bargained, I became depressed, and it was hard but I

finally accepted it. I went through the five stages of grief as if I had lost someone. In my eyes I had. The farm, the fair, my cousins and mends; it was an escape for me. I used them all to escape an unhappy home and a crazy city. And it was gone, all of it.

Following divorce, children are fifty percent more likely to develop health problems than two parent families. Children living with both biological parents are 20 to 35 percent more physically healthy than children from broken homes.

That's when I saw Utopia. It was a small pond, about 10 feet diameter and 10 feet deep. There was a small tree with branches that hung over the pond and on one of the branches was a rope swing. I jumped in without a second thought and Adam followed close behind. We swam around for an hour and crawled up onto the bank of the stream.

"We have to come here every day, ., I told Adam. Then he kissed me. It was my first kiss and it was with the sweetest boy I have ever known in the most beautiful place I had ever been. We did go back every day until fair ended and then I returned to my father's and never saw Adam again.

I'm 18 now. I've grown up. I no longer speak to my ex-step-grandmother. I haven't visited the farm in nearly six years. The last I heard, Mary, my little orphaned Jamb, had passed away. I have no idea what has happened to the numerous other animals I had accumulated. I ran into Amy a year ago. She's engaged and everyone else is doing well. I miss her horribly since we have lost touch again. When I look back on those days of summer fun, I feel happiness and grief all at once. I have forgiven my father, but I will never forget the time I spent on Grandma's farm.