

Friday, May 18, 2012, 4:31 p.m. The Harrington family of Miramar, Florida, had been packing for their Alaskan cruise all afternoon. The mother, Emelia, was 47 years old, half Tanzanian and half Spanish. She stood five-feet-seven and was trim, with deep brown eyes and wavy dark brown hair and a friendly smile. Emelia dressed well and often got compliments on her appearance. The previous week, she had gone shopping with her 17-year-old daughter, Kim, for shoes. For the last hour, Kim had frantically searched for her prized purchase. She spoke to herself in an intentionally high-pitched voice while frantically searching. "I totally can't find them. Can this day possibly get any worse? My life will end this very second if I cannot find them! Is anybody listening?"

Kim's younger brother, Jacob, popped his head into her room. He stood five-feet-eleven, with wavy black hair. Jacob was 15 years old, smart, athletic, and had a great outlook on life. He said in a playful voice, "What's with you? You have more drama in your life than two hundred television channels. Calm your fashion ass down. And! How many times have I told you to stop talking like a Valley Girl? Nobody talks like that anymore. It's really annoying!"

"What did you say?! What did you say? My shoes are my life! These are matte black Saks Fifth Avenue Erika leather point pumps made in Italy by the finest artisans. Do you even, like, know how much these shoes cost? Who are you to tell me to calm down? And! I will talk any way I want! Besides, Jen and I made a pact to talk like this for six weeks, and I am totally committed."

"All right, all right. I will *totally* wait out the six weeks. I'm not trying to be mean or anything. Do you need my help?"

"No, I'm just venting. Packing is a major stress. I bet Natalie Portman doesn't have to worry about this kind of thing. Did you know she is about to marry Benjamin Millepied?"

Jacob took a deep breath to calm himself and said, "You know that I don't know about that Hollywood stuff. Remember, we agreed our common conversation ground is basketball. Do you need my help or not?"

Kim held her shoes up and said with a victorious smile, "I found my pumps. How long before we've got to go to the airport?"

"Two hours."

"All right, all right. If I rush, I think I can make it."

Jacob rolled his eyes and left. Kim madly scrambled to pack while thinking about her mother's order to leave her cell phone behind. She did this to keep Kim from spending the entire trip talking to her friends.

An hour and 55 minutes later, Kim finished. She came down the stairs with two massive suitcases and a stuffed carry-on bag to see her father, Calvin. At 48 years old, he was a tall man at 6'3" with a full head of curly black hair, and despite not working out, a body built like a tank. His Jamaican and Cuban heritage gave him a dashing, exotic look that Emelia appreciated every time she gazed upon him. Calvin tried to pick up her suitcases. "Hold it, Kipper," he said. "This is too heavy. What have you got in here?"

"Just clothes," Kim replied with embarrassment.

"Kipper, you have way too many clothes. We will only be away for seven days."

"Dad, I totally *need* my clothes, and only Mom gets to call me Kipper," Kim complained.

"Well, the airlines only allow one suitcase and a small carry-on per person. Also, the suitcase must weigh less than fifty pounds."

"I neeeeed my clothes. Without them, I'm defenseless," Kim whimpered.

"Defenseless?!" Calvin laughed and continued in an amused voice. "Well, Kipper. I mean, Kim. The airline has strict luggage rules."

Twenty minutes later, a deflated Kim finished packing and looked up to see her 22-year-old older brother, Marcus. He stood six-feet-two and always had a confident smile. Today, he had combed his hair to the side and wore a stylish basketball-themed shirt. Marcus greeted her with a big grin. "Hey, Spud."

Kim shot back in a mocking tone, "I don't like it when you call me Spud! Especially your college-educated butt!"

"Let me help with your bags," Marcus offered.

"Thanks, brother. I love you, but I'm way stressed."

The family all walked toward the black Ford Explorer SUV with Marcus carrying Kim's suitcase. Emelia addressed the group, "Do we have tickets, homework, and swimsuits?"

Kim looked guilty, and Emelia said in an angry tone, "Go back and get your homework. You cannot miss a week of schoolwork."

"I did all my homework for the next three weeks."

"Bring your books anyway."

"I don't need them," Kim protested. "Besides, that aptitude test proved that I need to skip ahead two grades."

"We already discussed this. The test had to be wrong. Nobody is that smart."

"I want to retake the test!" Kim demanded.

"Kimberly! Homework! Now!"

A deflated Kim walked upstairs and returned with a book bag and a folder. She also brought a swimsuit and a bottle of sunscreen. Emelia said, "We are going to Alaska; you don't need sunscreen."

"Why not?"

"It's overcast in Alaska, not like Florida."

"Oh, Mom!"

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The flight from San Jose to Seattle would take off in three hours. Thirty-four-year-old Gabe Alexander's comprehensive work email made him leave work an hour late, and his wife, Lydia, was waiting at the front door of their house with an angry expression. She spoke in a raised voice with a slight New York accent, "You're late and haven't packed. Did you buy sunscreen? I told you to buy sunscreen!"

"Hello, honey. Did you have a good day?"

Lydia stared daggers at Gabe, and she turned away from the door. He went inside, put his work items away, and walked up to his older daughter's room. Gabe walked inside, and Christy looked up from her phone. She had her hair in a bob and wore gray jeans with a blue T-shirt. He asked, "Hi, Krispy, how's it going?"

Christy muted her phone and yelled, "Stop calling me Krispy! It's Christy. My day was fine! Dad! I'm on the phone! Dad!"

Gabe mused Christy had a lot of insolence for an 11-year-old, and he said in a pleasant voice, "You need to finish packing. We are leaving in 15 minutes."

"Got it! Daaad!"

Christy returned to her phone conversation, and Gabe shook his head. He reminded himself that all girls had an attitude at this age, and with some luck, it would soon pass.

Gabe walked to the next bedroom, and his nine-year-old daughter, Victoria, met him at the door. She had the same flowing brown hair as Lydia and had put it in two ponytails. Victoria treated her life as an adventure and had fun no matter what circumstances she encountered. Today, she dressed in a pink polka-dot dress with a pink bow in each ponytail, and she sported a friendly smile. He looked down at Victoria, smiled, and asked, "How's my little sweetie?"

"I had a good day, Father. Mommy has been going crazy about the trip."

"Thank you for the update. Please be ready in fifteen minutes."

"I will be ready. I love you, Daddy," Victoria said with a smile.

"Love you too, sweetie-pie."

Victoria's kind words melted Gabe, and he knew his vacation would be fantastic. He walked toward the master bedroom and saw Lydia sitting on the edge of the bed, staring at a wall. His forty-four-year-old wife had flowing brown hair, gray-blue eyes, and stood five-feet-six. She looked modestly pretty, fit, and dressed well. But her intelligence always attracted Gabe, and he felt lucky to have such a wonderful woman in his life.

Gabe opened his already packed suitcase, checked a few things, and sat next to Lydia. He began massaging her shoulders and asked in a soothing voice, "Tough day?"

Lydia did not answer, and he continued. "I'm sorry that I didn't get the sunscreen. We have some from last year's trip. I checked, and it is good for three years. Plus, there isn't a lot of sun in Alaska. The girls said they would be ready in fifteen minutes."

Lydia continued to stare forward, and Gabe continued, "Boy, did I have a rough day. That Sato is a real piece of work. He changed all the specifications, and I told him that would delay everything by six months. Then he threatened to fire me because we are going on vacation. So, I went to Al. You remember Al. He owns the company. Anyway, I explained what happened, and then he—"

"I do everything here!" Lydia cut Gabe off.

The remark hurt Gabe, and he said, "I don't understand."

"All the packing, all the cleaning, all the shopping, and I still go to work five days a week!"

Gabe sat back for a minute to reflect. This week he had done all the shopping, cooking, and cleaning. Last night, he packed until 2:00 a.m. while Lydia read a book and went to sleep at 9:00. Also, he had done all the trip planning. Gabe now understood it would be a long flight.

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The Harrington family owned sixteen dry-cleaning stores in the South Florida area. Calvin started the business by purchasing a single failing dry cleaner from a friend. Everybody in the family worked hard to make the company a success. Marcus worked together with Calvin on finances, employees, and business strategies. Emelia did marketing, and Jacob handled maintenance along with customer complaints.

Kim handled the company's online presence. However, she wanted to work with finances, but Calvin would not allow her to help. Kim's online promotions brought many new clients, but Calvin did not give her much credit. She often wished her eleventh-grade classes covered marketing for dry cleaning.

When they got to the airport, Calvin parked their SUV in long-term covered parking. They took the airport shuttle and checked in.

Kim's suitcase weighed twelve pounds too much, and Emelia opened it. Clothes came tumbling out, and Kim buried her head in her hands while Emelia discreetly repacked items into other suitcases. She whimpered, "This is going to be the worst trip ever. I'm major embarrassed, and I'm sure that Halle Berry never had to put up with this."

"Kipper, everything is fine," Emelia said in a reassuring voice. "Did you bring your new shoes?"

"Yes, Mom."

"Well, I'm sure they will look good. All of us are going to have a fun trip."

The plane landed in Seattle, and the family took a shuttle straight to their hotel. That night, they had an uneventful late dinner at the hotel restaurant. The following day, they had a tasty breakfast at a nearby restaurant and took a shuttle to the cruise ship.

The family had taken many Caribbean cruises, but this was their first Alaskan cruise. Calvin had used his business connections to score a free cabin upgrade.

Kim had been looking forward to not sharing a cabin with her brothers or parents for the first time. However, when she saw her small single cabin, she said to her family, "It's, like, so small compared to yours."

Marcus smiled and said, "Trade you. You can sleep with the snore monster."

Jacob threw a pillow. Kim became defiant and said, "I don't want a trade. I totally want an upgrade to something with a balcony and better room service."

Kim's statement angered Calvin. "Do you understand how much this trip is costing me?!" he asked in a raised voice. "You've got to appreciate what you have and how much things cost. Now, unpack, and let's get some lunch. And. And! Stop that 'totally' and 'like' talk. I do not want to hear that whiny voice anymore. It's annoying."

Kim walked back to her room, knowing she had upset her father. She carefully unpacked into the small amount of storage space. *Hmm. I could bring a boy to my cabin. My brother's room is only five doors down. But if we were quiet, it might work.* The thought made her giggle.

Kim had a boyfriend she'd met at school. Brian stood six-feet-one. He always looked great, was smart, and had a great attitude. Kim loved to hear him laugh, and they made a cute couple. She told her friends they were exclusive, but they did little together outside of school.

Kim changed her outfit and looked into the mirror. She stood five-feet-eight, was trim and athletic with flawless light bronze skin. She had adorable ears, sharply defined cheeks, twinkling brown eyes with jet-black straight hair. Plus, a perfect nose, well-defined butt, busty chest, long shapely legs, and immaculate nails. Kim was a perfect combination of her Tanzanian, Spanish, Jamaican, and Cuban heritage. She always took care to look her best and lived for the compliments she often received.

Kim expertly applied her makeup and looked into the mirror. She often compared herself to the actress Jennifer Hudson, whom she considered her alter ego. Kim's good looks intimidated boys, and she relished the power of her beauty. She looked straight into the mirror and gave her reflection a confident smile.

Kim performed one last check on her hair before starting her mirror routine. "I'm hot, I look great, and I'm everything you want!" She spoke out confidently to her reflection, formed her lips into a kiss, turned her head, then spun back to see her smile. Kim's family teased her every time they caught her doing this routine, but she ignored their remarks because she felt the routine was an essential element to her fashion success.

Kim left the cabin and met her family in the hall. Emelia said in an upset voice. "Kipper, what are you wearing? We're going to the lunch buffet. Not boy hunting. Go put on shorts and a T-shirt."

"Mom!" Kim pleaded. "I want to look good on the first day! What if somebody wants to take my picture?"

"Put on some sensible clothes. Quickly! Chop, chop!"

Kim knew this was not the time to argue, and she changed into a fashionable T-shirt with a big, neon pink kiss in the center. "That's better," Emelia said. "Let's go."

After the meal, Kim walked back to her cabin, changed into a fashionable light blue summer dress, grabbed several fashion magazines, and found a place near the pool to read. Thirty minutes later, three girls approached, and one of them asked, "Is that Selena Gomez on the cover of *Cosmo*?"

Kim liked that there were indeed civilized people on this cruise ship and answered in a confident voice. "Of course. There's, like, a great article in this month's issue. They get way deep into her relationship with Dylan McDermott."

One girl motioned, and Kim handed her the magazine. The three girls read the article with great fascination. One girl said, "Oh, you're completely right. That Dylan McDermott is a massive stage hog. I wonder how he ever got a job. Say, we're going to Club Z around 10:00. Why don't you meet us there?"

"Oh, totally. I'm Kim."

A girl pointed to herself and said, "Janice, Nadia, and Kim. Hey, I just realized something; there are two Kims! We will have to invent a nickname for both of you. This evening is going to be a blast. See you."

Kim returned to her magazine and thought about the encounter. *This vacation might be all right, after all. There will probably be lots of cute boys at the club.* Later that evening, the family went to dinner at the best restaurant.

"I met the three coolest girls today," Kim began. "They are actually best friends with Selena Gomez. How great is that?"

"I know I will regret asking this," Marcus said. "Who's Selena Gomez?"

Kim rolled her eyes and replied, "Only the hottest actress, songwriter, and fashion model Hollywood has ever seen!"

Calvin interrupted, "All right, enough. Let's try to get through this meal without a fashion lecture."

"Well, we're meeting after dinner to talk all about what Selena Gomez is really like," Kim said in an excited voice.

"Where?"

"Near the main pool."

"That's fine," Emelia said. "I want Marcus to go with you. You cannot wander around the ship alone."

"Oh, Mom!"

"And be back by 10:00."

"But, Mom!" Kim protested.

"By 10:00, Kipper, and that's final."

After dinner, Kim changed into black capris and a tight shirt to go dancing. She read magazines while she waited for Marcus. When he arrived, he asked in an unconcerned voice, "So, where are we really going?"

Kim could not believe Marcus had identified her confident lie, and she quietly answered, "To Club Z. Please don't tell Mom."

"You can't get into Club Z. They check your age at the door because they serve alcohol."

"Can you get me in?" Kim pleaded.

"No."

"But you totally got Jacob into a bar on the last cruise," Kim protested.

"That's different."

"How?"

"Look, I can't. Mom and Dad will kill me if I let their little *Kipper* into a club. I mean, they would throw my ass off the ship along with buckets of blood to attract sharks. This idea is completely off the table. Not going to happen."

"But I promised Janice, Nadia, and Kim that I would meet them at 10:00 at Club Z," Kim again protested.

"Be home—I mean, in your cabin by 10:00. And before you say it, yes, Selma Gonzales or whoever had to deal with this at the same age."

"It was Selena—"

"I don't care about her name," Marcus interrupted. "Look. You are my sister, and I love you. I would do anything for you. You know that."

Marcus thought for a moment and said, "How about this: We can hang out in front of Club Z, and you can say hi to your new friends. It's the best you could hope for. The Club Z police will not let you in."

"But what if they let me in?" Kim asked in a hopeful voice.

"No buts. I'm not getting in trouble with Mom, or even worse, Dad. They would take my car away again. You remember what happened when Mom found that empty beer can in my room."

Kim remembered the beer can tirade and the resulting weeks of intense punishment. She agreed, and they explored the ship until 9:50. At the entrance of Club Z, Kim watched a crew member checking identification at the door. They heard loud music and saw everybody inside having a great time. Kim moved to the music and said, "Wow, this is cool. Look at those major disco lights and the pattern on dark walls."

The scene impressed Marcus, and he said, "You know it! Where are your friends? It's almost 10:00."

"Oh, they're *fashionably* late."

"We have to go soon."

Several minutes later, the elevator opened and Janice, Nadia, and Kim walked out. They had changed into evening outfits, and all giggled while talking. Nadia smoked a thin brown cigarette, looked intoxicated, and used the wall to steady herself. The three girls walked up to Kim. "Me-row!" Janice said in a slurred voice. "What a hunk! How wrong har de two of view been day-ting?"

Janice belched loudly and looked embarrassed. "This is my brother, Marcus," Kim answered.

"Are you single, Mark-os? There is plenty of room innnn my wife for somebody like view."

Janice's drunk behavior did not impress Marcus, and it took all his patience to speak in a civilized voice. "I have a girlfriend in Florida."

Kim knew Marcus did not have a girlfriend, and she tried to make the best of the unpleasant situation. “What have you three been up to?”

“We got sooo wasted!” Nadia answered in a slurred voice. “Then they cup us off. Let’s get hamored! Come on, Mark-us. Shake dat booty.”

“Um, well, we have to be off,” Marcus said in a calm voice. “It’s getting late, and we only wanted to say hello.”

“What’s de problem?” Nadia asked.

Janice looked up and ran toward a nearby restroom. The other Kim watched her run away and said in a slurred voice, “Janice can’t hold har booze. She’s slow wasted! Let’s go, you. You? What your name?”

“It’s—it’s Kim.”

“It’s—it’s Kim, let’s go.”

“I’m not 21.”

Nadia looked at Kim and said in a disgusted voice, “You’re not 21? What a loser. We’re out of here. Let’s go, Kim. Not you, Kim; her, Kim.”

Nadia and Kim walked inside. Marcus saw that the remarks made his sister feel hurt and said in a soft voice, “I know that felt bad. Look, those girls are complete drunks and didn’t even get my name right. We don’t need people like that in our lives.”

They walked to the elevator, pressed the button, and waited. Janice came out of the restroom with a long orange stain on her dress, and she announced in a slurred voice. “I totally puked in there. I’m so vasted! Where dib Nadeem and Ken go?”

Marcus answered in a reserved tone, “Inside.”

“Great. Hey, Leo, thanks for waiting for me. Let’s grow.”

“Club Z isn’t our crowd.”

They entered the elevator, leaving Janice perplexed. When the doors closed, Kim said, “Thanks, big brother. I’ll always look up to you.”

“Good to know, Spud. Now, let’s get some sleep. It has been a long day.”