

Opposites Attract

Reynaldo Sylla

My father and I put the last of the bags into what would be my home for the next month and a half. A slow glance around the half empty room and a couple of sighs represented our reluctance to accept the truth. I walked my father back to the car. He shook my hand, said, “Just stay focused; you’ll be all right,” and left. I watched him drive away. Apprehensive thoughts about the next six weeks in this summer program for entering students at BC ran through my head. Mixed feelings of sadness, curiosity, uneasiness and excitement scurried around inside my head. I began to unpack as I fearfully awaited the person who owned the name next to mine on the door. Never had I lived away from home for six weeks, let alone shared a room with a stranger.

Christopher Kirby was the name on the door. To calm my nerves, I spent the next ten minutes trying to picture a Chris Kirby. I figured he was probably Caucasian. I don’t know if that was ignorance on my part or just that every “Kirby” I met, saw or heard of was white. Other than the skin color, I had trouble envisioning my roommate-to-be. My mind shifted from Chris’ probable appearance to his personality and character. Before I met Chris Kirby, I had already given him a race and turned him into my ideal roommate. Chris would love all the hobbies I loved, he would love all the shows I loved, he would sleep when I slept, and he even would have an extreme obsession for Vitamin Water—just like me. As I unpacked and continued to picture my roommate, reality slipped away. Instead of awaiting Chris Kirby, I created him. From my own flesh and blood (or from

my mind, thoughts and imagination) I molded Chris Kirby into my image. I was setting up my clock when reality stepped in.

I heard the stiff words, “Hello sir,” and I turned around. Standing at the doorway was a Chris Kirby defiant to my imagined-but-ideal roommate. Immediately it seemed as though we would have nothing in common except the number of syllables in our names. Although shocked, I smiled and made sure to use the politeness my strict Haitian parents had beaten into me over the last seventeen years. We began to converse a little when I realized how different we really were. He spoke to me as if I were interviewing him for a job. I felt as though I was handcuffed to a chair in a lecture hall, listening to a speaker go on about government and politics. Professor Kirby was the teacher whose words made every thinking cell in my brain want to explode. My mind was trapped in a maze full of ridiculous vocabulary with no way out. My head shook in an up and down motion to display interest and agreement to whatever he was talking about.

There I was, a tall, black man from Boston, Massachusetts with a 5’4’ white roommate from San Diego, California, with blonde hair that belonged in a Grease movie. Our very regions represented how different we were. Only one black family resided in Chris’ hometown, a fact that I had trouble believing, since my town was overpopulated with black people. In my neighborhood, every time a white kid walked down the street, conversations were shushed, basketballs froze in mid-air, and birds stopped chirping. I live in a town where the only way you knew about Starbucks was through a commercial advertisement that rudely interrupted your favorite TV show. The differences between Chris and me were endless. But these differences went deeper than our four-inch height

difference, his golden blonde hair and my suave black hair, his pale white skin and my smooth brown skin, his Starbucks and my basketball.

After brushing up on my vocabulary with Webster's Dictionary, words flowed more freely with my roommate. We learned more about each other. Chris grew up without parents and had been raised by his grandmother. I could not relate. I was raised by two parents whom I believe to be perfect because they have cared for me endlessly and sacrificed all of their time and energy for the benefit of their children. My family has a bond stronger than any atom. Although I grew up in this close-knit family, I was raised in a dangerous environment, an environment that Chris knew nothing about. He could not relate. Yet these dissimilarities somehow drew us closer, showing us that our lives were far from simple. Due to the complications and struggles that Chris and I had both endured, we were able to discuss our tribulations, and bask in our perseverance. Chris was an ion with a negative charge and I was the positive ion. The clash formed a newfound friendship, a newfound understanding, and a newfound perspective.

I grew fond of my living situation. Through the first few days and the rest of the six weeks, Chris and I respected each other's belongings, sleeping habits and personal space. While others had to live with heavy snorers and ministers, we found harmony. By the end of the first week, the cloudy thoughts in my head had cleared away, my jaw picked itself up, and I retired the dictionary. No longer was I trying to comprehend why I felt unlucky to have such a roommate. I came to realize that I was blessed to learn new things about someone completely opposite from me, even if it felt like taking an extra class. Although my grade point average did not increase and I did not receive any additional credits, I was rewarded with a profound new perspective.

Chris and I were not poles apart. Okay, I lied. We were from opposite sides of the spectrum. But at second glance, I was able to also see similarities we shared. Chris and I shared our differences with each other. The two of us were able to understand one another's backgrounds, hobbies, and goals. We stood tall (well, not really Chris) as dapper young gentlemen with a shared purpose: to improve himself in any aspect. Even though Chris led lecture hall, I came to realize that instead of being taught, I was teaching myself. With special thanks to Chris, I skilled myself to become a better person by adjusting to what I thought would be hell in a dorm. The outcome was self-discovery and friendship. Now, as I lie in a new room, near a minister and a couple of heavy snorers, I reminisce on how spoiled I was last summer. Man, I miss Chris Kirby.