

## Turning Around by Hannah Kilgore

I sat and stared at the wall. I was sitting on an uncomfortable booth in a twenty-four-hour rest stop. The West Virginian mountains provide few places to choose from, but even by those standards, this place wasn't much. It was one of those places with lots of cigarettes and few actually edible items on its shelves. God, I didn't want to be here. I wanted to be miles away, in another state, lying in bed and listening to the comforting sound of my roommate's snores. I did not want to be sitting under florescent lights, squinting at a road map and wishing very hard for a caramel latte. Which is where I was.

I was here because I couldn't run from my problems anymore. I was here because I...I didn't want to leave things the way they were.

I felt very alone. It's like when you're a kid with your mom, running errands in a frequently visited grocery store. One moment you're looking at the ice cream section and the next you find yourself utterly alone, wondering where your mother could have gone. Suddenly the store seems huge and imposing and frightening without your mother's hand in yours. That's how I felt. Like a little kid who's lost in an unknown world. A world that's too big to navigate without someone else's help.

Without realizing it I had started crying. There were wet splotches all over the map. God, what the checkout staff must think of me. Some crazy girl, who had come stumbling in two hours previously and hasn't said a word except to order some crappy, watered-down coffee, is now crying her eyes out while staring listlessly at a road map of West Virginia. Weirdo.

I realized my thoughts were now officially bordering on multiple personality disorder, but I was too numb to care. A middle-aged woman in a bright orange apron came over to my booth. She smelled of cigarette smoke and her nametag read: HELLO, MY NAME IS: Deloris.

"Is there anything I can get you, hon?" She looked at me sympathetically, as if she knew just what was wrong with me. She had no idea, but that didn't matter; she was sincere.

I gave her a watery smile. "No, thank you. I'm gonna get going." I turned back to my map and carefully folded it up and placed it in my dark blue canvas bag. The bag was housing my toothbrush, some sweatpants, and extra underwear. I had left in a hurry and didn't take the time to really pack. I slung the bag over my shoulder and stepped past Deloris, out of my orange booth, and out into the rain.

I didn't bother trying not to get wet; I would be soaked soon, anyway. I glanced at the surrounding scenery. Coniferous trees grew on a steep incline up and away from the road that was indented into the mountainside. This shabby rest stop was the only sign of civilization for miles in either direction.

The neon OPEN sign sent my shadow in front of me as I trudged towards my car. I opened the door to my beat-up Nissan and threw myself into the front seat. I sat still for a moment before I realized that inside the car, it was still raining. I looked up and groaned; my sunroof was open and the entire interior of the car was wet. This, on top of recent events, was too much for me. I collapsed forward with my head resting on the steering wheel and started sobbing. Big, shuddering, gut wrenching sobs that shook my whole frame. I was coming undone at the seams.

As I sat there shivering, I thought about why I was in this situation. When I had checked my e-mail that morning, I hadn't been able to believe my eyes. I'd had an e-mail from my dad. I didn't know what to expect when I opened it. Whatever I had been expecting, it wasn't what I'd gotten. He wanted me to come out to his house in the mountains for a visit.

You see, my father wasn't exactly in the picture while I was growing up. He left my mother and me when I was young and I haven't seen any evidence of his existence aside from a monthly check with his return address on the envelope. My mother made efforts to get in touch with him so I wouldn't be deprived of a father, but he had spurned most of her attempts. She obviously had gone so far as to give him my new college e-mail address. I hadn't been sure of what to do. I harbored no affectionate feelings for my father. I actually think I was bitterer towards him than Mom was.

Mom. I would call her. She'd probably tell me things I didn't want to hear, but I had been willing to take that risk.

"Mom." I had said into my cell phone.

"Oh! Hello honey! How are you? Have your classes been good so far?" She'd gushed.

"Yeah, Mom. Things have been great." Until now. "Hey I was just calling to ask you if you knew anything about this e-mail I got from...Dad." It was weird calling someone that after so long.

"What? Your father sent you an e-mail? What does it say?" All of the warmth had disappeared from her voice. Though she wanted my father and me to have a semi-normal relationship (those wishes were in vain), she had no warm and fuzzy feelings left over for him from their short marriage.

"He wants me to come out to his mountain house for a weekend. I don't think I'm going to go." I had replied.

"Well", she'd said hesitantly. "I think you should go." This was where the aforementioned 'things I don't want to hear' came in. "If he wants to reach out to you, you should receive his attempts gracefully."

"But Mom. What about all of those times *you* tried to reach out. I don't think his response to *those* attempts could be call 'graceful'." I had started to get a bit ticked off. I'd at least wanted my mother to say something negative about him so I wouldn't have felt like the only grudge-holder.

"Sweetheart, you're a big girl. I can't tell you what to do, but if I could, I would advise you to meet him." She'd had her therapist voice on then. She spent a good part of every day listening to other people's problems, but it seemed to me that she tried very hard to ignore her own.

"I guess I'll meet him." I had said reluctantly. "Love you."

"Love you, too, Casey. Bubyee." She'd hung up.

I sat there listening to the silence on the other end for a moment and then I'd hung up, too. I quickly replied to my father's message:

*I'll be there tomorrow. See you then.*

~ Casey

He'd left me little time to prepare for the trip. It took a good ten hours to get to his house and it had already been pretty late in the day. I'd yawned and glanced at my watch.

Eleven o' clock. Well, I'd thought, might as well get started. I threw some things into my canvas bag and headed towards my car.

And that's how I got here. Eight hours and five coffee stops later I was sitting in a wet car crying on the steering wheel. This is just great. I can hear the conversations now. "I went to my uncle's house. He lives by the beach. What did you do for the long weekend?"

"Oh, I just drove three quarters of the way to my absentee father's house and then sat for two hours in a rest stop parking lot thinking deep, introspective thoughts about the meaning of my life."

"How nice!"

Yeah. Right. I sighed, stemming the flow of my tears until it was bearable to sit up and glance in the rearview mirror. Oh, I was a mess all right. I had lines of mascara running down my cheeks and my eyes were all puffy and rimmed in red. I groaned and sat back in the seat. I bet my dad was sitting by the fire in his pretty, immaculate mountain home. He had caused all of this. He had abandoned my mom and me and left us with nothing more than a serious need for therapy. (Which was ironic, since Mom was a therapist.)

Suddenly, I realized that I wasn't sad. I was *angry*. I was mad that after all of this time, my "father" thought he could just call and I would instantly put everything off to go and try to salvage what's left of our nonexistent relationship. And I was furious at myself for doing just that.

I realized that no amount of weekends would fix what he did to me. We could keep making these sad attempts, but it wouldn't change anything. This revelation is what caused me to reach up, close my sunroof, and put my key in the ignition. I put my car in first gear and pulled out of the parking lot, going in the direction that I'd come from. I decided to do some well-deserved leaving of my own. My father couldn't be the only one who got to walk away from his obligations.

So, with this in mind, I headed back towards my schoolwork and my computer. The latter of which would probably have a message waiting for me that I wasn't quite sure I would answer. I guess I would decide in the morning.