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# A Neighbor's Strife

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Caitlyn Heisser

*A Neighbor's Strife*

It's seven o'clock in the evening: the time of day when the Johnsons settle in to decompress and forget the troubles of the day. Outside, the sky is purple and the New Orleans streets are filled with pedestrians hustling to get home. The sound of crickets screeching fills the warm, moist evening air. In their quiet house, the Johnsons can hear the traffic racing through the streets.

The mother leans wearily on the counter as she watches her husband cleaning the kitchen after dinner. They chat contently, discussing their busy schedules for the remainder of the week and their plans for the weekend. Meanwhile their three children sit quietly around the dining-room table, finishing homework, and softly humming.

The television blares in the background, the family not really listening attentively. Until something catches the mother's attention. "BREAKING," the television reads, "severe flooding plagues Baton Rouge and surrounding areas of southeast Louisiana." Her heart drops as pictures of the damage are flashed across the TV screen. Her mind immediately wanders to her aunt and cousin who live in Baton Rouge: dead in the center of the disastrous flooding. She looks back at the screen: "Several injured and few dead," it reads.

Compassion is the heartbreak that comes from a neighbor's strife, the pain of seeing a best friend cry. Compassion is the urgency that surfaces when a friend is in need, and the willingness to enter into their suffering to pull them away from it. Compassion surpasses selfishness and extends the greatest generosity.

Her heart begins to race as she rushes to the phone to contact her family, hoping that they are safe. She remembers the suffering that her family endured after Hurricane Katrina. Her heart

beats loudly in her ears as she anticipates an answer on the other end of the line. After what seemed like an eternity of ringing, she hears “Hello?” A warm wave of relief overcomes her and she lets out a sigh. She begins to throw countless questions at her aunt. “Where are you?” and “Are you safe?” and “How’s the house?” Her heart breaks as she learns that her aunt’s house has been destroyed, just ten years after she had moved to Baton Rouge from New Orleans, where Katrina had destroyed her home.

Remembering the tremendous generosity of several donors after she and her family lost everything in Hurricane Katrina, Mrs. Johnson, without hesitation, offers her aunt and her cousin shelter in her own home back in New Orleans. “Anything you need, please, do not hesitate to let me know,” she pleads.

She hears a crack in her aunt’s voice as she tries to get out an “okay.”

In about two days’ time, the aunt pulls up to the Johnson’s house. To Mrs. Johnson’s despair, her aunt slowly steps out of the car with a single bag, flimsy and half full. This was all she had taken with her. Mrs. Johnson immediately runs to the car and tightly embraces her aunt, because this was a pain oh too familiar. “We are here as long as you need.” She wanted nothing more than to abolish her family’s problems, but she knew that this was only the beginning. The aunt sank heavily into her arms. This family, a family that was not even her blood, but one that had taken her in when she’d previously fallen on hard times, had proven themselves true family. They had done it again. In this moment, she could only think of her gratitude. She had never met anyone more compassionate. “Thank you,” she whispers into Mrs. Johnson’s shoulder as she sheds a sad but grateful tear.