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Maybe It's Me

Done. Finally. I slammed my computer shut not even bothering to close the tabs. I placed it in my backpack, making sure I didn't scratch it. It was school provided, and if you broke it you would have to pay. We can't afford that right now. I hung my bag on the handle of my door and sat on my bed. I looked around my room. It was small. Really small. It took about five steps to get from one side to another. I had a twin bed, a desk, and a small dresser. My sister slept in my parent's room. I told them that I didn't need a room all to myself. That my sister and I could share. But they insisted because I'm in high school. My sister is seven. Her name is Megan. She's the most lively person I know. There's never a dull moment with her. I always want her to be happy but deep down I know she's only really happy because she is not old enough to see the problems that take away your joy bit by bit until it's all gone. And no matter how much I try and shield her from the real world, I know it's bound to catch up to her. I just have to hope it likes her a little more than it likes me.



I took a shower and changed into my pajamas, which were really just comfortable clothes. I went downstairs and set the table. Megan followed. I couldn't even sit down before Megan started gulping down her food.

"Slow down, Meg," Mom said. "That's all you have." Megan acted like she didn't hear.

"So, Miguel, how was your day?" my dad asked.

"Fine, I guess."

"Anything big happen?" My dad always tries to see the good in every situation. So even when

you're two months late on rent you still have a roof over your head. I wish I thought that way, but I think more like my mom. She worries about the future and the past and the present all at the same time.

"No," I replied. I feel like even though I hide the fact that school isn't good, they still know. I only hide it because I don't want them to feel bad. The only reason I get bullied is because of my clothes and bag and stuff. They are either old hand-me-downs or from really cheap and unknown stores. I don't want them to think it's their fault.

"And Megan," my dad asked. "How was your day?"

"It was good! We did dividing in math. And today Kayla told me that her mom is having a baby. Oh and we switched desks today! I'm in the front of the room! And-."

"Cool Megan," my mom interrupted. My dad gave my mom a glare.

"Mommy," Megan said. "I'm still hungry." My mom's heart sunk. I could see it in her eyes.

"Meg, we don't have-" my mom started.

"Here Megan, have mine," I said.

"You're not hungry?" She replied.

"No." That was a lie. I heard the mailman outside. He shuffled through the letters and bills and checks. He dropped some at the door. I knew my mom and dad would start yelling at each other about adult stuff that my sister doesn't need to hear. I tell Megan it's time for her shower and take the dishes to the sink. We just make it upstairs before my parents start arguing about the bills.

"Miguel," my sister says in a hushed voice "Why do we always run upstairs after the bills come? Why do Mom and Dad always start yelling?" I sigh. I always forget she's seven and that she's starting to pick up on these things. "Nothing you need to worry about," I reply. Satisfied, my sister grabs her towel and goes into the bathroom. I step into my room and shut the door behind me. I climb into bed. Right as my head hits the pillow I fall asleep.



6:14. I stare at my clock. It feels like it's been 6:14 for hours. The colon between the six and the one blinks rapidly. Blink. Blink. Blink. Blink. I try to turn away, but I can't. 6:15. My alarm goes off. I roll out of bed and throw on an old pair of jeans and an oversized T-Shirt. I half crawl half walk into the bathroom to brush my teeth. "Meg," I call. I walk into my parent's room, they had both already left. Her feet are on her pillow and her head is under her covers. I walk over to the small mattress. "Megan," I whisper. "Come on, Meg."

Megan whines as she tumbles off the mattress and stands up. She goes to brush her teeth, and I go downstairs. I opened the fridge. It was a very small fridge. The top light was broken and the left shelf was slanted. I pull out a loaf of bread and some cheese. One piece left. Great. I take out two slices of bread and put the last piece of cheese on Megan's sandwich, and then made my sandwich.

"Time to go!" I called.

"Coming!"

I open the door as a burst of sunlight comes flashing into the living room. We step outside and start walking down the block. Well, I'm walking, Megan is skipping. I wave to our neighbor, Miss baker. She used to babysit me when my mom couldn't be home. A couple of blocks go by until we reach the public elementary school.

"Here we are," I say.

Meg squeezes me. "I love you," she says, then runs up to her friends. I check the time. Shoot. 7:00 I turn around and run in the direction we came, passing Miss Baker and then our house. It gets harder to breathe after each step as if someone is squeezing all the air out of my lungs. It feels like I've been running for hours, but in reality it has only been ten minutes. No time to stop. After a couple more blocks I reach the bowling alley where I work.

"Michael," I call. He's my boss.

"Hey! Hold on," Michael says. I hear a loud crashing noise in the back.

"You okay?"

"Yeah," he says as he walks out. "Here for your money?"

"Yeah," I reply.

"Here you go," he says. "Well deserved." I smile.

"I should get going," I said. I shove the cash in my backpack, turn around, and run out the door.

After about ten minutes I make it to the doors of my high school. I take a deep breath. "Whatever they say, tune them out," I tell myself as I step past the doors.



Periods pass. They all feel the same. A desk in the back, a teacher ranting about something, a clock ticking too slowly. Walking through the halls is the worst part though. Some people pity me, some laugh at me, and some just pretend I'm not there. I really don't get it. Yeah, my clothes aren't clean or new. And yeah my family can't afford a computer for me, but why is that funny or a way to make fun of me. I just don't get it. I'm always in the back corner so I can have eyes on everything. Mostly I'm looking out for Jake. He's made my life suck for years. He's cool and funny and the person whose bad side you don't want to be on. He always has a bunch of people trailing him through the halls like minions. After dragging myself through the rest of my classes I'm finally done with school. I head to my locker, checking the time frequently. I don't want to be late to pick up Megan again. Ouch! Shoot, it was Jake. He tripped me.

"What's up loser," he said, looking back at his minions for reassurance as if he wanted to make sure he was being funny.

"Please don't do this," I say, struggling to get the words out of my mouth. I push myself backward on the floor. I felt my backpack rip open.

"Well well well, what do we have here," he said reaching behind me. He takes the stack of money

I earned this morning. "I'll tell you what. If you let me take this then I'll let you go," he gives me a nasty look.

"N-n-no," I said.

"Well too bad," he says. He passes the cash back to minion number two, smiles at me then walks away. I want to run up and punch him, but I'm frozen, stuck to the ground.

"Mister Diaz," my geometry teacher calls from behind me. "Off the floor."

"Miss Smith they took m-."

"I don't want to hear it, you were supposed to be out of this building 5 minutes ago."

"Bu-."

"Leave!"

I stand up. I'm shaking. I pick up the rest of my fallen belongings and shove them in my bag. I didn't even care if it scratched my computer. I swing my bag around my back and run out the door. It wasn't sunny anymore. I start crying. My vision starts to blur as my tears fill up my eyes. Why does this have to happen to me? I'm just trying to make sure my family can make it through the year. How does that make me such a target? That was a week worth of money that was supposed to cover a restocking of the fridge. Ugh! Jake is a bad person. His life is so easy so he has to do something to make his life a little less smooth. "That's why he does this," I tell myself as if I'm deciding on that.



I made it to the elementary school. I stare through the windows. Megan's smiling, she's happy. And for the first time today, I smile. She walks toward the door. I wipe my tears as quickly as possible.

"Hey, Meg!" I say in an obnoxiously cheering voice. I'm worried she's going to see right through me, but she didn't look too suspicious.

"Hi!" she says as she waves goodbye to her friends.

I don't know what I'm going to tell my mom. She can't deal with this right now. If I tell her, she'll know about me being bullied, and then she'll feel even worse. Ding! I got a text.

Mom: Hey can you bring Meg to Gram's. She says she has some food.

Me: Yeah. Sounds good.

"Hey Meg, wanna go to Gram's," I say.

"Yes please!!!" she replied.

A few blocks pass when I hear someone call my name.

"Miguel!" Was that Amara? Uh oh. It was Amara. She's been Jake's girlfriend since like kindergarten. I kind of feel bad for her. It's like she's forced to stay with him or she'll be right where I am in the high school hierarchy. At the bottom of the bottom. I was in the section buried under the pyramid. My instinct told me to run. Who knows what Jake sent her to say or do. And whatever it was there was no way I would let it happen around my sister.

"Hey, wait up!" Oh boy, there was no escaping this. I take a deep breath then turn around. "Hi!" Amara said.

"Hey," I say, making sure to keep my head down.

"I brought you this," she said, holding out my week's earnings. "I wanted to apologize on Jake's behalf."

"Thank you so much," I say.

"Don't thank me," she replied. "And about Jake, I know some people just see his mean side, but he can be sweet. He doesn't have the easiest home life. His parents are getting a divorc-, oh shoot! You didn't hear that from me. I think he just doesn't know how to cope with the pain so he takes it out on other people. I mean everyone has their own way of dealing with things. Like you-," she stops herself.

"Never mind."

"No," I say. "I want to know."

"Well, you..." she continues. "You are afraid people won't understand what you're going through and that they may make fun of you, so you tune them out. No offense, but do you have a friend your age?" I keep my head down, looking at my untied shoes.

"No."

"Maybe try giving people a chance, but what do I know?" Her phone pops up with a message from her mom.

"I should get going," she says.

"Thank you," I say. "For everything." She smiles at me and walks away.

"Oh wait," she says. "Here." She hands Megan a lollipop. "I just bought a dozen."

Megan's eyes widen as a smile breaks out on her face.

"Thank you," she says, unwrapping the rainbow candy.

"See you at school!" Amara says.



We make it to Gram's house 10 minutes later. Megan runs straight to the kitchen to show Gram's her lollipop.

"Miguel! Can I use your phone?" Megan says bolting out of the kitchen.

"Why? What's wrong," I ask.

"I need to tell mommy what I got," she said, shoving her lollipop right up close to my face.

"Okay, okay," I said, handing her the phone. I went to the kitchen to say hi to Grams.

"There he is," she said squeezing my cheeks with her soft and wrinkled hands. "You must be starving. What do you want? Do you want chicken? We have chicken. Or potatoes. Or a sandwich. Do you want a sandwich? We have salad, yogurt, rice, curry, soup-"

"Just some rice would be fine" I say, smiling. A few hours passed and it was starting to get dark.

I called Megan from upstairs and gave Grams a kiss. It started raining outside. Just a drizzle. Megan loved the rain because she could splash in the puddles, but mom always got mad because she would ruin her shoes. She still did it anyway. The rain started to come down harder. It started pounding on the top of cars and parents started rushing their children inside houses. Meg seemed unbothered, still admiring her lollipop. She's had about two licks, but I think she likes staring at it more than she likes eating it. I've never seen her so happy. It was only after staring at the expression on her face that I realized I was smiling. For the first time in a long time, I didn't worry about money, or school, or Megan's happiness because she looked pretty happy to me. I didn't worry about my mom or my dad or the rent, and most importantly I didn't feel bad for myself. For so long I thought that my life was harder than everyone else's, that bad things were happening to me, and that I was the victim. But I was wrong. Everyone has their own story. Like Jack. I let the world believe I'm sad and have it hard while he hides it. This whole bully thing is an act. I thought about what I said earlier about how Jack was just mean. And don't get me wrong what he did was awful, but maybe he just wanted to see that other people felt that pain as much as he did. For a second I thought about what he must feel. That the two people that love you the most don't get along, constantly fighting while you are in the middle of it. Amara was right, he dealt with his pain by inflicting it on other people. I, on the other hand, had no social interaction whatsoever. I don't really know why I shut people out, to be honest. My mom has always told me to be a kid while I can. She said that I'm giving up my only childhood to be an adult. I guess she was right. I felt a heavy raindrop on my head that brought me back to reality. Megan gallops in front of me hanging on to her lollipop with every ounce of strength she has. Megan has something most people don't have, she can smile and everyone would smile back. She is the spark of light in a pit of darkness. But I always wonder who her light is. The one person who guides her on the right path. It's probably my mom or maybe my dad. Or maybe, just maybe, it's me.

