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“Why didn’t you tell us?”

“Dad, I don’t feel so good.”

The blue light from John’s phone illuminated his face. He scrolled through Facebook. Bill’s son just graduated high school and was the valedictorian of his class. Cathy’s first daughter just got married, and her other daughter just got published in a scientific journal for groundbreaking research on cancer or something. John sighed. He scrolled a little further, and stopped at a link that said, “Watch Your Kids, Not Your Phone.” He clicked on it and began to read.

“Dad?”

John looked up. Makayla, his only daughter, was two feet from his face. He registered that she just told him that she felt sick. He glanced at her. She sounded and looked normal. She was probably just trying to get out of school.

“Get me the tylenol, I’ll pour you a teaspoonful.”

Makayla held onto the counter to stabilize herself on her way to the medicine cabinet.

“Hurry up, you’re running late. Your mother is already in the car.”

She reached the medicine cabinet, pulled out the tylenol bottle, and struggled back to her father. He looked up and poured 2 teaspoons of the thick, gritty liquid into the plastic cup. Makayla cringed as she swallowed it. She thought to herself, *Whoever agreed to call this flavor*

grape has never tasted a real grape in their life. She put the bottle back, grabbed her backpack, and stumbled out to her mother's car. As she sat down, she felt her chest start to twitch.

Maria checked her backup camera and slowly pulled out of the driveway. Her hands were shaky. She forgot her coffee, and wouldn't have time to pick it up on the way since Makayla couldn't get herself ready fast enough. She looked down at her outfit: a black blazer, a purple blouse, and a pencil skirt that wasn't too short, but wasn't too long either. She definitely wouldn't be in the position she was in today if her skirt was too long. She had a big meeting at the office at 2:00. She knew her boss would not be happy. Sales were down this month and people kept missing important deadlines. Maria drove in a trance, and the time between her home and the school seemed almost nonexistent.

By the time Makayla arrived at school, she couldn't keep her body from shaking. She looked at her mother, desperately hoping that she would say,

“Jesus, Makayla, you really don't look good. Maybe I should just take you home.”

Makayla would deny it for a few minutes, and then finally give in, “Okay Mom, you're probably right. Drive me home, I can call Grandma while you drive. She can take care of me.”

“No, no. Don't call grandma. I'll call Mr. Richardson when you get home and tell him I need to take off work.”

But instead, the only thing her mom said was, “Have a good day at school, sweetie. Call me when you get off the bus.”

Makayla took one more second before opening the car door to try and make eye contact with her mother. She saw that her hands were gripping the steering wheel a little too tightly and

her heavy lipstick was steadfast on holding the same fake “Have a good day” smile. Makayla tried on her mother’s smile and confidence and got out of the car.

Maria called John on her way to work.

“John, did you see Makayla before she went to school? Did she look okay to you? She looked a little bit under the weather to me.”

“She seemed fine. She complained she felt a little bit sick, so I gave her some tylenol. It’s probably kicking in right now.”

“Oh, okay.”

“Stop worrying so much, Maria. She’s fine. And if she’s not, she will just go to the nurse and you can pick her up.”

“You know I can’t pick her up today, John. I told you this.”

“Yes, yes, of course. You have the... thing.”

“What do I have, John?”

“The... the... doctor’s appointment.”

“No, John, I have the meeting. You never listen to me!”

“Your mom will pick her up then. Carol still drives, right? I have to go, I’m going to be late to work.”

John hung up the phone and went back to playing Candy Crush.

Makayla made it to her locker. She was still shaking, and her hands felt cold. She smiled when her best friend showed up. They were locker buddies. Makayla had locker number 24 and Jillie had locker number 25.

“Hey Makayla! My mom finally let me watch the movie you were talking about. She thought that Zombies would be too scary until I told her it was on Disney Channel and she looked it up and said it was fine! Oh my goodness Zed is so cute and so sweet. I want him to be my boyfriend!”

“Me too! He’s so cute!”

“Makayla, are you feeling okay? You look kind of off.”

“Yeah I’m fine. I can’t stop shaking and I feel really dizzy. But my dad gave me tylenol. He says that will make it better.”

Makayla felt a tickle in her throat. She began to cough and could not stop. Jillie looked at her more closely. Her face was really pale on the inside and looked more red towards the outside. She could see Makayla’s sweat, and it worried her how much Makayla was shaking. Makayla’s usually so much more upbeat and excited about Zombies. It is the only thing she’s talked about all week. Once Makayla could breathe again, Jillie carefully said,

“Makayla, you really don’t look good. Maybe you should go to the nurse.”

“That’s nice of you, Jillie, but I really think I’m fine.”

The bell rang, and 20 fourth graders funneled into Mrs. Kelly’s fourth grade classroom. Mrs. Kelly’s heart drops every single time she hears that bell. Today, like every day, the kids walked in and stood around like they were lost in a different dimension, even though they all knew fully well they should be at their desks with their spelling books. She had to shout to get their attention.

“Boys and... Boys and girls! Are you listening to me? I need you to be at your desks.”

A few kids turned around, but none of them did anything. She slammed her desk and repeated,

“Go. To. Your. Desks.” The kids began to meander to their seats.

“Who has their spelling book with them from their backpack?” Ten kids shout,

“Me.”

“Raise your hands if you did not bring your spelling. If you didn’t, go get it from your locker, come back, and sit down silently.”

About a minute and a half later, everyone was finally sitting, but no one was quiet. Mrs. Kelly already had a migraine. She began to teach the next vocab unit, and slowly, the kids began to listen. Everything was going okay, until Jason shouted,

“Kelly, I need to go to the bathroom.” He got up and started walking towards the door.

Mrs. Kelly took a breath and said,

“Jason, try that again. Go sit down, raise your hand, and ask nicely if you may go to the bathroom.” Jason kept walking with a mischievous grin on his face.

“Jason, go sit down. See how nicely Makayla is sitting, raising her hand? Yes, Makayla?”

“Can I go to the nurse?”

“Can you wait until the vocab unit is over?”

“Yes.” Jason walked out the door. Ms. Kelly thought, *I’m not being paid enough for this. I could have gone to trade school and not have had thirty years of student loans and never had to take any sass from any of these ADHD-infected freewheeling brats. Hell, I could have married rich and not have had to work at all! I could be on a yacht right now, and here I am teaching ten-year-olds what the word “dissatisfied” means.*

Ms. Kelly did not remember to let Makayla go to the nurse after vocabulary. Makayla's nose began to stuff up. She kept feeling the same tickle in her throat, and it made it difficult for her to breathe. She kept swallowing to make it go away. She did not want to start coughing again and disrupt the class.

11:00 rolled by and it was time for Ms. Kelly's class to go to gym. Makayla's chills returned and her coughs made her throat hurt.

Mr. Hough watched from his office as his third class of the day meandered in. He took a sip of the Redbull on his desk, lifted his shoulders, and opened his door. The kids were already screaming. He appreciated the energy, however misdirected. He placed his whistle between his teeth and took a big breath in.

Mr. Hough made the kids run for at least 10 minutes in the beginning of class. Makayla started falling behind her peers quickly. Mr. Hough shouted,

“Pick it up, Makayla! This will reflect in your grade!”

Makayla felt shame roll over her body. She prided herself in having all fours (the equivalent of perfect) on her report card. She couldn't imagine seeing a three under the category called “physical education.” She held the tears in and forced her weak legs to take her faster. Large black orbs shifted into her vision. Stars clouded the corners of her eyes, but she kept pushing her legs to go faster. Soon, she was on the floor with the gym teacher and all the other kids were hovering over her.

Mr. Hough picked Makayla up and put her on her feet. He noticed Makayla's sweaty, colorless face. He thought back to the 504s he skimmed over at the beginning of the year. Was Makayla the one with asthma or was that McKenzie?

“Makayla, do you have asthma?”

“Yeah.”

“Hang on, let me go get your inhaler.”

On Mr. Hough’s jog to his office, he thought about how much trouble he could get in for this. He knew how to bullshit his way through a normal parent phone call so the blame would be on the child and not him, but when things started to go through the nurse and 504s were involved, it was out of his hands. It would reflect poorly on him if he sent her to the nurse. Who knows what Makayla would tell her parents? The overachievers were always snitches. He grabbed the inhaler bag and jogged back. He thought, *Makayla only passed out for a few seconds. She would probably be fine with just the inhaler.*

“Makayla, I am going to make you a deal. I will let you sit out for the rest of the class and it won’t reflect in your grade at all. Just take your inhaler and sit on the stairs. Better yet, I’ll bring out my special office chair and you can sit in it. But I really don’t think it is... serious enough where you need to go to the nurse, per se. You were only out for a couple seconds anyway, and now you have your inhaler. Sound good?”

Makayla lost her voice, so she nodded her head and Mr. Hough wheeled out his desk chair. Makayla closed her eyes and just tried to focus on getting air in and out of her lungs, drifting from conscious to unconscious. Jillie touched her hand every time she ran by, trying to check if she was awake or not. It brought Makayla closer to lucidity.

Ms. Kelly walked in at the end of the period to watch the last few minutes of class. She spotted Makayla in the corner asleep. She stormed up to her and said,

“Makayla, are you here because you are misbehaving?”

Makayla pried her eyes open and opened her mouth to speak but couldn't say anything.

"You're here because you're punished, yet you are sleeping? How disrespectful. Mr. Hough works hard on his lessons so that you can have fun in his class and you take it upon yourself to..."

Ms. Kelly talked more, and the shame in Makayla's body returned. She still could not speak or move, and could barely keep her eyes open. She could not focus on a word that Ms. Kelly said, but she knew she was mad. A few minutes later, Mr. Hough came over and said,

"She's not in trouble. She just was tired and I decided to give her a rest."

"That is so sweet of you, Mr. Hough."

"Yeah, I guess your sweetness is starting to rub off on me."

Ms. Kelly giggled, and said, "So... I'll see you later at my place?"

"I'll bring the wine."

Jillie helped Makayla onto her feet. Makayla held her hand as they walked to lunch. Jillie saw Ms. Kelly blushing the whole way.

Jillie always sat next to Makayla. The second they sat down, Makayla put her head on the table. She did not eat anything. She did not even touch her lunchbox.

"Maybe eating would make you feel better, Makayla. I got a GoGurt if you want it. It's your favorite flavor!"

Makayla did not respond. Makayla absolutely loved strawberry GoGurt. Jillie always hid it from her so she wouldn't steal it.

After a few minutes of sitting at the table, a lunch monitor walked by. The lunch monitors made sure all the kids ate their lunch so the teachers wouldn't have to deal with kids saying they

were hungry the rest of the day. Ms. Jennie was the newest lunch monitor. She never worked with kids before in her life, and this job was a rude awakening for her at how terrible kids could be.

“You,” she said in a piercing voice. “Why aren’t you eating? Why isn’t she eating?” she asked the other kids. Jillie said,

“She’s sick.”

“Really. Are you sick?” she asked. Makayla looked up, and didn’t say anything. Ms. Jennie never saw anyone who looked that sick in her life. Pale face, sweaty, obviously shaking. Absolutely disgusting.

“Ew. Take her to the nurse. I don’t need another kid puking in this cafeteria this week.”

So Jillie dragged Makayla to the nurse. Makayla felt like she was climbing a cliff as she walked across the smooth concrete floors to the nurse’s office. Her muscles ached and her chest hurt from the exercise. Makayla got to the nurse’s office and collapsed into the chair.

“So what brings you in here?”

Makayla managed to mumble,

“I don’t feel so well.”

The nurse didn’t look up from her desk. She was filing the field trip paperwork for the fifth graders that she put aside until the last minute.

“Did you feel sick when you got to school?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

“Well, you can’t go home then because your parents know your sick. Come back in 30 minutes if you still feel sick.”

Makayla used the hallway to balance on her journey to Ms. Kelly's class. Makayla still felt sick thirty minutes later, but she didn't have the voice or energy to say so. She kept coughing, but Ms. Kelly seemed really distracted and didn't notice. Maybe it was Jason always leaving the classroom without telling anyone, or maybe it was her date with Mr. Hough. Jillie took her to her bus, and said,

“Call me when you get home.”

Makayla got home and collapsed on the couch and started coughing. She coughed until she couldn't cough anymore. And when she stopped, she couldn't breathe. She felt like someone was strangling her from the inside. She inhaled hard to try to get air into her lungs. Her brain started to work fast. What should she do? She tried to wake up her muscles so she could go find the phone. At least 911 would come to her house, even if she did not say anything. Her brain was exploding with desperation but her muscles felt like concrete. Suddenly, her mind slowed way down, along with her heartbeat. She never felt so uncomfortable in her life. Soon the familiar black spots returned to her vision and the sparkles made their way across her view. As she sunk into a realm of unconsciousness, she thought about Jillie, her parents, her grandma, and Ms. Kelly.

“You can stay home if you are really not feeling well,” said her father.

“I made you some warm soup,” said her mother.

“Of course you can go to the nurse, Makayla, What's wrong?” said Ms. Kelly.

“Makayla, are you feeling okay today? You usually run a lot faster than this.” said Mr. Hough.

“Let me take your temperature. 101.4? You’re burning up! I am going to call your parents right away. Why don’t you go lay down on the cots?” said the nurse.

The day went perfectly. Someone caught her every step of the way. She was not alone in a cold house struggling to save herself.

“Makayla, I have some bad news. Mom’s going to have to bring you to the hospital. Your fever is up to 102.3 and we really just want to have a doctor give you a look over. Everything is going to be fine.”

John and Maria both arrived at the hospital at the same time. They clung to each other as they entered emergency room. They walked up to the tired looking nurse at the front desk. She was nearing the end of a double shift, and was definitely not in the mood to be friendly. She understood that these people were having issues but that didn’t mean that she wasn’t.

John jogged to the desk, and put his hand down. The nurse jumped in her chair and looked up. She knew right away that John was going to be as annoying as he possibly could.

John said, “I need to find my daughter.” *Wow, what a hero*, thought the nurse sarcastically.

“What’s her name?”

“Makayla Anderson.” *And he named his daughter Makayla. How original.*

“Let me see your I.D.... Okay, have a seat please. Someone will come and get you.”

“No, I need to see her now.” *I need an iced latte and here I am having a conversation with you.*

“Sir, please calm down. We will be with you shortly.”

“Listen, woman, your personality is charming and all but I need to get to my daughter right now, she’s sick, and I don’t know what is wrong with her.”

“Sir, all these other people are waiting, too.”

“Well I don’t give a flying fuck what these other people are doing. Take me to my daughter.” *I thought working at a children’s hospital I’d maybe get to help, I don’t know, children? The only people I “help” are their parents. No one appreciates the people who aren’t in back actually taking care of the kids.*

“Sit down and someone will be with you shortly.”

John and Maria waited for almost an hour before the doctor took them to their room. John went up and yelled at the nurse two more times.

The second Maria saw Makayla, she felt an immense weight fall on her entire body, a weight that told her that her young daughter would never be the same. She wanted to rip all of the tubes out of her poor body. She had never seen anyone so pale and lifeless. She reached for Makayla’s hand and held it tightly. The monitors were screeching. Makayla didn’t seem to be awake, but her eyes were wide open.

Maria and John cried, “We could have helped you. Why didn’t you tell anyone? Why didn’t you tell us?”