

Cecily

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I quietly pick at my nail polish, listening to my mom hum along to Jack Johnson. She always plays him on road trips. She says they're just not the same without him, and at this point, I must agree. I glance out of the window at the fields of strawberries and yellow flowers. The air smells sweet as my mom rolls down the car window and breathes the air. The sunlight streams through and illuminates her cinnamon hair. Her smile glistens from end to end. I can feel how happy she is. I lean back and close my eyes, wiggling my toes in my shoes which are way too tight for me. I remember the day I got them. My best friend Alesha and I got the same ones together. Black Converse high tops. We could hardly wait to wear them to school the next day. Thinking about that makes me feel old... I'm glad to be home now, even though I miss the country. We went to my grandparents house for a week. They live in Leebrook in the Irish countryside, in a tall yellow house with a white picket fence and bursting garden, full of honeysuckles and small blossoms. School is next week and I'm excited...I think

Last year, I hung out with Alesha almost every day. Sometimes, on hot days, we would skip third period and run to the corner store to buy slushies. She would get cherry and I would get blue raspberry. Then, we would skip down the boardwalk together and feel the icy ocean spit at us as we leaned over the lookout on our tippy toes. And sometimes, when dad came home, I would go and sleep over at her house. We would paint each other's nails and dance to her Taylor Swift record in her room, rattling the chandelier.

She went to Iceland this summer, so things have been a bit lonesome, but I still call her every night. I turn over in my bed and stare up at the little glow in the dark stickers on my ceiling. Alesha will be in a different class than me this year...but I'm trying to convince myself that it will be alright. I'll

still sit with her at lunch like old times and see her in the halls...

I think too much...

I jolt up at the blaring sound of my alarm clock. I must have put the volume up too high the night before. I survey my dark room, ears ringing, then, slip out of my sheets and let my legs dangle off the bedside. I hear the floorboards creak as Murphy, our tubby calico cat creeps in and leaps onto my lap. I stroke him gingerly, letting my fingers run through his thick fur, till I place him down on the cold wooden floor again.

In the low morning light, I sit at the kitchen table and gulp down a glass of silky orange juice. I begin to feel the butterflies pounding at my insides, trying to escape but I try to ignore it. My mom sneaks up from behind me, planting a kiss on my head.

"What'll it be for the eighth grader?" she asks in her thick Irish accent I adore. I shrug. "C'mon Cecily" she says with sincerness in her eyes.

"Surprise me" I tell her. I try to smile.

I stamp my feet into my new shoes. I can feel it like an icy hand at my throat. My anxiety won't let me go. I fling myself out of the house and feel the fresh morning air on my skin. I start to run, almost watching as my own feet fly out in front of me.

We have a big flower garden, guarded by a thick border of black pines. Past that, a long staircase that leads out to a vast and open landscape where the water meets the lilac sky and the air smells of salt. Not even the sea birds are awake yet. The only sound is the hushed roaring of the waves rushing onto the shore, and the distant sounds of Tralee waking up.

I skip along the shoreline. The sounds of the city stir and the lights dance on the horizon. I'm trying to stay calm, but I can hardly breathe. What's the problem anyway?

Once I arrive at the school, the light is brighter and an explosion of purple clouds paint the sky. I tiptoe up the steps and come face to face with the distasteful green doors. I take a deep breath and slip through them.

"Crap" I whisper and it echoes. The hallways are barren and scattered with muddy footprints. I approach the door, digging my nails into my palm. Almost immediately, the laughing and talking halts as I walk in. I sense an erosion of red spreading over my cheeks and I feel their eyes on me.

"Her face looks like a tomato", someone whispers. I start to back out of the door till I see the teacher's demanding finger, beckoning me.

"You're 10 minutes late" he tells me. His voice creeps with frustration. "But I'll let it pass." I let out the breath I was holding in. "I'm Mr. Davids and I'll be your history teacher for this year." he says, putting out a giant hand and meeting me with a smile.

"Cecily" I reply, smiling back.

I sit down at the back, in a desk across from a girl and a boy. They both turn around and look me up and down. My face feels hot.

"Hey" the girl says.

"Hi" I say in almost a whisper.

"What do people call 'ya?" she asks, her voice kind but her eyes in a glare.

"Cecily" I reply like I'm unsure.

"Weird name" she says, wrinkling her nose like it gives off a stench. Then, she leans in as though to whisper something. I can feel her grape scented breath on my face. She spits into her palm, eyes locked on me and sticks a purple ball of gum onto my desk.

"See ya round" she sneers, and turns back to the front. I glance up and the boy gives me a sympathetic smile. I try to smile back, but I want to cry.

I'm so paralyzed, I can't even eat. I've been scanning the lunchroom for Alesha , but I can't seem to find her. I pull out my phone to text her.

"where r u?" I ask, which she almost immediately sees. I pop in my earbuds and wait. I can barely hear my music over the hum of the crowded lunchroom. I see that boy from my history class. He has a group of friends huddled around him, punching him in the shoulder playfully and laughing. For a moment, I forget about everything else, and it isn't until after he meets my eyes that I realize I'm grinning. He smiles a toothy smile at me, then waves off his friends and starts walking towards my table.

"Hey" he says.

"Hi"

"You're Cecily right? I didn't mean to eavesdrop but uhm..I uh-"

"Yeah" I cut him off.

"I'm Benson, but you can call me Ben if ya want"

"Sure" I say.

"Whatcha listening to?"

"Jack Johnson" I reply. "My mom loves him. She plays him all the time on road trips." I blush. Why did I say that? He doesn't care!

"That's so great" he says. I look up. "I mean, he's great but that's also like... nice too and uhh-"

"I understand" I say. He looks down. I feel bad, so I look away. Just then, I see Alesha dart past the lunchroom with a group of people behind her.

"Hey, uh, I've gotta go" I tell him quickly and start to get up from the bench.

"Hey, hey..W-wait" he stammers and puts a hand on my shoulder. I immediately stop and sparks shoot up in me.

"When will I see you again?" he asks. His kindness breaks my heart.

"uhh,I uh...I really gotta go" I reply and pull away from him. I start to zig zag through the crowd and dart around the corner, just at the right moment and I crash right into the girl from my history class. My drink dumps all over the front of her shirt, and her smoothie is all over the floor, which I slip on and land on my stomach. The whole hallway goes quiet, and my guts churn.

"Heyyyy" I look up. A girl stands in front of me, Alesha behind her. "You're that drunk's little rat, aren't 'ya?" Her words clutch at my throat, and I can't breathe. Laughter erupts from the swarms of people, gathering around me like flies. I know my face is red, and it burns as I grind my teeth. "Everyone knows about your little mishap" she sneers.

"W-Wha?" I manage.

"Your father came home totally plastered, didn't he?" she says, and a horrible smile teases her lips. "Even tried to throw a punch at your mother, didn't he?" Her words seep into me like poison. I feel stupid and small as I sit on the dirty floor in front of her—yogourt dripping from my nose. I look up at Alesha, but she only looks away in embarrassment. My heart drops. I wipe a tear that falls, along with smoothie, from my cheek, and begin to stand up, trying to push down the growing lump in my throat.

"What a dumb gurl!" someone whispers.

"Her veins proly run with alcohol like 'er father's." Is the last thing I hear before I push through the crowd and for a second I meet Ben's eyes. His face is full of sympathy , but I

could never even try talking to him without bursting into tears, so I look away and run out of the school doors.

Every part of me is shaking. I need to cry but I can't. I don't know what to do or where to go.

I've been walking slowly. I'm not sure where I'm going or what to think. The tips of my fingers are numb.

Once I'm here, my mind goes blank. When Sersha died, I thought I could never come here again. My heart is struck with a hard pang of sorrow, but the warmth of my memories overpowers it.

“C'mon Sersh—you wanna help me out?” I say, and her tiny fist clings to my pinky finger. We made this hideout when dad was fine. When cancer hadn't struck her down, and when I still had my little sister. Large, hot tears fill in my eyes, and drip down my cheeks. Once it's over, I feel better. I take a sharp breath in and open my eyes. A large blob of ink had formed on my homework from my tears, and was pooling into tiny streams all over.

“Crap! Crap!” I whisper. I attempt to dab it away, but it only smudges. My eyes start to fill again till I see it. I blink and see a quick scribble of numbers on the corner of the damp page. My eyes dart to the left, and I see the name “Benson” beside them.

I showed him the hiding place a week after. He promised to meet me there after school every evening, so that's what he did, and still does.

If I'm being truly honest, it was awkward at first. We both just looked around and pretended to be distracted. But now, it's comfortable. He brings lollipops and we talk about our days, and I often wonder what Alesha thinks of me. I keep reliving the moment, as if that's supposed to help anything. I keep remembering my teary eyes staring up at her and her just

looking away. I know i should confront her. it's been weeks and it's like i never knew her.

Suddenly, she enters the lunchroom. She walks with her tray, alone and without those nasty girls she follows around. I get the urge to walk over. To go up to her and say everything I have wanted to her face. Everything I need to.

“Oh my god” I whisper and start to get up from my table.

I Stand in front of her. She isn't sitting down. she doesn't even look up at me. I sit down and she starts poking at her sandwich.

“Why are you sitting alone?” I ask in the calmest voice I can muster.

“cuz” she answers and stares at me with her head in her hands.

“Where is Regina George and the Plastics?” I inquire, laughing at my own stupid joke, then covering my mouth with my hands when i see her death glare.

“What's it to you?!” She growls.

“Are you being serious?! After all this i'm the one who should be bloody mad, not you!” I bark.

The volume in the room shrinks down and my face turns pink. I shrug my shoulders at Ben, who is dumbstruck.

“Sorry” She murmurs.”I guess it just felt good to fight in for once you know?” She says. She looks so sad. “No...i don't know,” I say. I still feel angry.

“Does it feel any good now?” I ask.

“Well...” She starts. “No.” She looks down at her grey sandwich. “ I see you and Ben, and you always look like you have so much fun together .” She answers solemnly. Then she smiles up at me.

“Stop it” I laugh. Then I scolded myself. I still want to be mad at her. “What do you and those

girls do?" I ask, I'm genuinely curious.

"M-mostly play truth or dare" She twists her lips. I roll my eyes heavily at that. "I'm so sorry
Ce

Ce I'm so sorry" She says. I know she's being honest.

"It's all right." I say. She smiles a tiny smile.

It's nice having two best friends, even though Alesha says that Ben is something more. I never
get picked on by anyone anymore. Now, all three of us hang out in the hideout. I feel more
like myself. I have been wondering about Ben. I think Alesha has got to my head. I never
thought he liked me. Well, not like that at least. Until the day i came home to a small bokay of
Cicily flowers, all tiny, delicate and white as snow, resting on the mint green table cloth. Of
course Alesha went berserk after that. So did i. He even decorated the hideout with them!!!
I feel more free around him. He set loose the net of butterflies inside of me, and sent them
fluttering through me. I feel more like...Cecily when i'm with him. When I was alone at
school, I felt like "that shy girl" that everyone talked about. Now...it's just me!

I have come to the conclusion that it is not the past that makes us who we are now, it's the
present and the people around us! I am a 14 year old irish girl who lives in Tralee with her
beautiful mother and tubby cat, with the best friends she could ever have. I am Cecily Ronan
and I am not afraid.

Listening when i need help, hugging me when i feel lost and once...kissing me on the cheek
just to really show how much you love me. I will always hold close and cherish every little
thing. You hold my hand and run with me, through the endless chaos that is my life, never

letting go. Because..that's what friends are for!

Now that you have read this short story, go call a friend! And make sure to cherish every little moment.

-Linnea Price