

Courage

Day 1 - Saturday

I've got to move to a new school. Again.

They say school is the energy for your soul, the saviour to your worries, the work you need. But it's only been a burden for me.

I don't know why my school decided to split our year up into two buildings. We were all happy at the Lower building. But now I've got to split away from all of them into a new building, full of intimidation; a building where only the most known of people or the tallest of people enjoy the fruits of life.

And the process is the longest thing ever. I had to do 2 tours, go to classrooms, look extremely unusual in a new place. I prefer being in that comfort zone, being in that box; that would help me.

When all my friends at the old building I'm moving from found out they were upset. Not because I'll be away from them but because some of them knew I would suffer, with all the older students potentially wanting to eat me alive.

I really don't want to move.

Day 2 - Sunday

After buying the uniform for the new year, I decided to take some time to reflect on who I am.

Everyday I'm always in the same situation.

I'm not like everyone else at my ends. Everyone's busy getting adds on Snap or getting into relationships or being known. They have lots of friends, lots of followers on Instagram; they got a nice life.

They're social and happy.

I'm antisocial and unhappy.

I'm just a big guy with buck teeth. No girl considers me relationship material, no boy wants to shake my hand. I'm usually picked on for my looks, being smart, making mistakes. For being Somali. For trying too hard. For being myself.

So, I've always had to deal with loneliness.

Battling my inner demons has always been a struggle for me. Sometimes I struggle to hold back my anger. I would always have warm tears dripping down my face with my fists clenching, as if I wanted to kill if somebody wronged me. My blood would boil rapidly as if it had a low boiling point. It was hard to control. All of this was due to loneliness.

I've come to grips with who I am and what I want to be. I want to be someone who fits in. Someone who is happy. Someone who isn't scared or afraid to meet new people.

I just hope that this time I can finally reach my happiness.

If I don't, I give up; I would rather be lonely for life.

First day of school!

I put on my (very long) tie ecstatically as I wait for my new, fresh opportunity to get to grips with my demons. It was only a 15-minute walk away, so I made sure I had some time to reflect and hold onto who I really am.

I really and truly had a smile on my face.

So, after I decided to quickly eat my cereal, I said 'Ma'salaam' to my mum and ran out of my door.

The building was bigger than I imagined. There was a lot of people rushing to the gate, smiling, with their friends. So instead, I went to the office, where I was welcomed by the kind-hearted office-clerk. I was printed out my timetable and was immediately asked to get to my lesson.

It was so intimidating. Swarms of people ran to lessons like bees. Loud voices on top of loud voices as if a sandwich was being made. Teachers screaming at students to get to lessons. I couldn't wait to step into a classroom.

As soon as I get to my lesson, you know what I hear first? No welcome, no 'How are you?', no smile.

It's 'What you saying Abdi?'

Why do people always call me that? My name is Omar. Just because I look Somali does not mean I'm Abdi.

I didn't answer his question, so I just walked straight inside. But I DID give him this look:



Otherwise, my classes were normal for me. Everyone was (surprisingly) quiet. I did my work. We listened and left.

Break time was full of confusion. Some people just asked who I was and that was it.

Suddenly, I hear that SAME voice:

'Ayo Abdi, why'd you air me for?'

All of a sudden, every single painful moment of my life, every harmful word that was said to me, soon came back:

'Eee, look at this fatty.'

'Bugs bunny, bugs bunny!'

'SOMEONE COLLECT THEIR BRO!'

'Someone record, content content!'

'UGLYYYY.'

I was too scared to utter a single word to him. Every single moment of anger and sadness I experienced soon came back. My head consistently rolled left to right. The force that came from the clutching of my fists was stronger than I had ever felt. My mind, my blood, my heart was full of hatred.

I was always taught to control my emotions and maintain my anger. My religion taught me and logic taught me. I didn't want to show my hatred; I wanted to turn it into kindness.

So, I stepped away from them, I said 'I'm alright,' and ran away.

My bag started to shake; tears turned to rain as I continued to step away.

Day 4

My mental state was in a place of confusion and anger. Why did all those emotions come to me because of a single stereotype?

I don't want to have friends anymore, I'm tired of all these negative emotions. I would rather be lonely.

So, during my time in school, I decided to keep myself to myself: confined and blunt.

Lessons were the same as always. Quiet if we had our regular teachers, loud if we had a supply. I just decided to keep quiet through it all.

I missed my old friends at my previous school. Although I only had a couple of true friends, they were the best towards me. Now I am separated from them. This only increased my loneliness.

It's as if a huge underlying shadow invades you, takes over your soul, commands you to show its feelings to the world. It's won both the battle and the war.

I never wanted to be in this situation. I only want to love people, show affection and kindness towards others, excel in my schoolwork and hope for the best.

Now I know that's never going to happen. I had to come to terms with what I really am.

Alone.

A few days later

For the past few days, at break and lunch, I've been sitting at the bench, to pass time.

I've been reading a book called 'The Art of Being a Brilliant Teenager'. It helped me to pass time while going through the dread known as Break and Lunch time.

I was deep into a sentence when I hear someone speak to me.

'Hey, are you okay?'

She had a mix of black and brown in her puffy hair, huge brown eyes and a nice, wide smile. The way she asked me was as if an angel's hand came out forward to help me.

'I'm alright man. How are you?'

She called all her friends over and they all sat with me.

'You're so cute man, how comes you're by yourself? Where's your friends?' One of them asked.

I told them all my situation.

I never experienced kindness until this moment. They brought a smile on my face. Then they said something which not a lot of people had said to me.

'We can be your friends!'

Although I didn't show it, the amount of happiness and kindness in my heart was immeasurable. I didn't know anyone would be this kind towards me.

We then did a lot together for the next few minutes. We spoke about our favourite songs and movies. Two of them wanted to start on YouTube, so I gave them tips on promotion. We spoke about their dreams and my dreams. The number of smiles they gave me was infinite.

They wanted to take a snap with me so we did. We took a huge group selfie.

I think I now know the value of empathy because of them.

A few months later

I'm still in the same school. Surprisingly I did last.

The feelings of empathy also lasted within me.

The pain and suffering of others can be everlasting. You don't see what others see. Someone could be with you and have the biggest smile on their face but could have immense anger and sadness in their heart. Every single tear dropped, every wail cried, every scream of anger – it's rarely seen.

And the thing is that you may seem happy, you may enjoy the fruits of life but others won't. You are made up of the feelings that surround you. If others are always negative, it will poison your happiness and lead to your own negativity.

Ships don't sink because of the water around them, ships sink because of the water that gets inside them.

Being empathetic is a trait that's hard to develop yet it's worth it in the end. It doesn't mean you have to sacrifice your own happiness or feelings.

It just means to be kind.

Choose kindness, for kindness in this world leads to prosperity. Being that helping hand forward, being that role model, being an inspiration – that's what we need in the world. Someone must change someday. But that someday is today and that someone is you.

A question: what makes a good first impression?

Is it your looks? Your smell? Your smile?

It's your character.

Your character – your kindness, your friendliness, your manners, your excellence, your happiness, your sadness, your anger – that's what makes up who you are.

You don't know if your words can change a life or ruin it. The human heart is special yet fragile; feelings can break people or make them feel special. Never underestimate the small gestures, the difference between compassion and aggression. Your etiquette is what makes a human heart flutter and shine.

If those people didn't help me, I would have never made new friends. I wouldn't be as confident as I am now. I would not be House Captain for my school. I would not be in my school debate team. I wouldn't have written this story. I would still be lonely. And, most importantly, I would have a lack of empathy.

Every bit of happiness they gave to me, I gave it to them, 10x back because I love them for what they did.

I'm not telling you to go above and beyond to care for someone. But when you see someone sad, share a smile, as a smile can even be considered an act of charity. Ask people how their day was. Reassure the worried. Enlighten the upset. Calm the angry.

Our differences make us the same and we are all human at the end of the day.