

A Small Fish in a Big Pond

Do you ever wish the ground would open and swallow you whole? It's weird how in a school full of people, you can feel so alone. I'm that girl who sits by herself at the back of the class. You feel like you stick out like a sore thumb when in reality no one really notices. But it's always me. I'm always getting picked on. My brother used to go to my school but he graduated last year. He was always a support person for me. Someone I could go to if something happened or if I had no one to hang out with. Since he left, life has been a living hell. I'm quite lucky; I have loving and supportive parents. But no one knows how I'm bullied and tormented nearly everyday at school.

"Wake up," my mum softly whispers, sliding open my curtain, letting the light stream in. For my sleepy eyes it feels like the floodgates of heaven have opened up. I sigh knowing my week of torment has just begun. Five whole days till I'm free.

"Ugh, I hate Mondays!" I mutter under my breath.

Monday's are swim days and are awful for someone like me who just wants to blend in. I dread going into a changing room full of girls that hate me. All they do is make me feel small.

Eventually I admit defeat, rise out of bed and sluggishly walk over to my worn out uniform. When I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror, my dark as night curly hair pokes out in every which way, and acne sits on top of my olive skin. Emerald green eyes pop out with my protruding eyelashes above; one of the only things I actually like about myself. I drag my feet to the kitchen and swiftly scoff down my breakfast while preparing my bag for school. Reluctantly, I scoop up my bathing suit, my insides churning with fear already.

Slowly I stroll to school, killing as much time as possible before I get there. The sky was awash in gray, a pretty miserable summer's day. A soft breeze crawls down my neck and tickles my spine. The hum of the wind is soon blurred out by pre-teens deep in gossip sessions as I arrive at school. There she is. Emerson. The school bully. She stands by the cold metal lockers with her minions by her side. It infuriates me so much how one person can mentally destroy someone and not even care. Her beach blonde hair sits perfectly on her shoulders as she waves to another one of her minions. A freshly coated manicure graces her hand and privilege flows straight from her. A giant oversized T-shirt hangs on her covering her shorts; a puka shell necklace hangs around her neck. Shuffling over to my locker I realise the one she's leaning on is mine.

"Hey Marina!" they all chime in a sing songy voice.

I politely nod and squeeze past to get to my locker. In a flash they tower over me and that's when I realize just how short I am.

“What. Did. You. Just. Do?” Emerson says in a commanding voice and in those flooded hallways it feels like the entire school goes quiet.

I don't even squeak.

“That's what I thought!” she hisses in my face, shoving me as she walks off.

I'm so fragile at this point that I can't hold back the silent tears that roll down my face. Worried about what people might think, I take a deep breath and pull myself together.

The bell rings for first period. First period is swimming. Teachers say it's exercise but for me it's just another reason to get teased for something like my appearance, which I can't actually change. We arrive at the pools. The stench of chlorine from the pool wafts around and the loud fans whir, cycling the air. The boys and the girls separate to their own changing rooms. I choose a spot at the very back away from everyone. I quickly try to change into my bathing suit without anyone noticing but as usual, it all goes wrong. Emerson struts over to me and I know I'm in trouble.

“Hey Mar-” she pauses and slowly glances down, “Eww! Have you ever shaved your legs? That's so gross!” she yells, in front of the entire class, causing the classes attention to be on me.

“Ever heard of a razor?!” another student mocks.

I squirm around trying to cover my legs. A heavy weight drops in my stomach and in that moment I want to disappear. I think back to every other time this has happened and I feel my cheeks burn. The words hurt more than any physical damage. They stay with me, gripping tight and tearing apart my heart. My mind can barely remember my favourite family holiday but I can remember every single time Emerson has tormented me. Soon I worry these bad memories will take over the good ones.

“Hey, hey!” she claps furiously in my face, and I return back to Earth.

I mentally prepare myself for the onslaught that will invariably follow.

When in that sea full of people one small voice spoke up.

“Why are we doing this?” she paused then quietly sighed, “Teasing a poor girl over and over again, to make ourselves feel powerful?”

I recognized her. I'd always seen her by herself, never bullied just alone. Her name was Eeva and in front of the entire class she stood up for me. Never before has anyone ever done that for me; the look on Emerson's face was priceless.

Since that moment, Eeva and I have been inseparable. I'm still somewhat traumatized about that day. Over something as small as a bathing suit. But on the nights when I can't sleep, I think, isn't it amazing how in a sea of people, one person can make such a difference?