

The rain isn't falling terribly hard, but even a sprinkle of water on a cloudy day will add to the feeling of misery. It seems quiet in the woods behind Randy's house. He is underneath a thick, tall, dark-green Evergreen that stops most of the rain from hitting him. He doesn't care about it at the moment. He is going to be damp, whether or not the weather wants to share his emotions. Randy isn't sure why he is crying - he just is. A person doesn't have to have a reason for his brain telling his eyes to water. The brain does what it has to. If crying helps the brain deal with the rush of hormones, due to puberty, then so be it.

“What is going on?” Randy whispers, while rubbing his eyes with the palm of his hands. “I hate all this confusion. It was simple, then it got complicated, and after what? What changed in my head and everyone's around me?” He runs a hand through his thick, blond curls. They're slightly damp, so out of habit he shakes his head like a dog. The trees around him spin for a slight moment. The shake is enough to send Randy onto his side in the dirt – his brain is very fragile at the moment. The ground feels like a feather-stuffed pillow that has the ends of the feathers poking out of its fabric covering. Randy likes cotton much better, but he isn't looking for comfort. He knew he wouldn't receive any.

He knows everything began to change only a few months before. He had just started middle school; that day seemed to be his last normal day...

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“Randy! My man!” Alan, Randy's close friend, comes bounding down the sidewalk along the side of the parking lot, where Randy is just getting out of his mother's van. He doesn't stop his charge and hits Randy with full force - plus backpack.

“Ouch!” Randy hits the car door. “It's better than the ground,” he thinks out loud. “Hi, Alan.”

“Hi Mrs. Randy's mom!” Alan pulls off of Randy and waves to his mother.

She returns the wave and smiles at her son, who is fixing his hair. “You two have a good day at school, okay?”

Randy leans into the car and gives his mother a quick good-bye kiss. “I will mommy. Bye.”

Alan grabs a hold of Randy's backpack and begins to drag him to the front entrance of the school. Randy quickly shuts the car door and watches his mom drive away. The idea of walking into a place he hasn't been to before, for eight hours, makes him want to reattach the umbilical cord to himself and his mother. He felt that when he first moved to the district two years earlier, but the only difference from then is that he didn't have a friend who will die if he isn't attached to the hip of him. That makes the whole middle school thing more bearable.

“Why do you call her mommy? Come on we aren't in elementary school anymore.” Alan continues to drag Randy into the school. Randy lets him, still watching his mom drive away.

“I like my mommy. Me and her are really close.”

“You mean she and I dumb-bell. Get it right.”

Randy turns around and hits Alan in the back of the head.

Alan lets go of Randy's bag to rub the sore spot. “Would you rather a teacher said it?”

“Zip it.”

Randy and Alan walk through the doors to the school. They both seem a little hesitant as they walk down the main hall to reach the commons.

“Don't you have to eat here?” Randy asks.

“That is what I get for being poor.” Alan watches as an eighth grade girl passes them to enter the gym. “Dang...”

Randy can tell he is staring at her well-developed chest. “I don't see why you have to stare. They aren't that interesting.”

“Gosh man, you are late with everything!”

The girl disappears into the gym.

Alan takes his attention back to Randy. “Have you hit puberty at all?”

“Well, I'm getting hair in places I didn't have hair... I have fuzz on my chin!” Randy juts his chin forward to show off the tiny blond hairs.

Alan snorts. “That's nothing. Man... one of these days you are going to see the world a totally different way. Last year, I didn't really understand why other kids have to bring money for lunch and I don't. I didn't understand why my mom always sighs when I tell her my plans to become a millionaire.”

“Oh right, that. Don't you want a pool full of jello?”

“That would be sweet. But over the summer, something happened and now I know what money really is. I know I will never be rich and I can't be what I want to be.”

“If you stick to your goals, your dreams will come true.” Randy walks over to a table and sits down in an empty chair. He watches as Alan walks into the cafeteria and disappears from his view.

I don't see what changed. Everything is the same. I hope he becomes a millionaire cause I want to jump into a pool of jello. Green jello would be cool... no, blue!

Alan returns to the table with a small cinnamon roll. He takes a seat next to Randy.

“I'm poor Randy. I probably won't be able to get a good education because I can't afford it. Besides, the rich people are in business and I suck at math.”

Randy arches an eyebrow. “I still don't get it. You can do anything if you set your mind to it. Teachers have told us that since I don't know, first grade?”

“You'll understand it soon Randy. Trust me. I'm changing, and right now my priority is eighth grade girls.” Alan smiles and winks at a group of girls who walk past their table. They giggle and keep walking. When their backs are to them, Alan begins to eat his breakfast.

Randy watches him closely. He now can see hair growing on his face. It is dark, black hair that is obvious to the eye. Randy has blond hair – no one can see that.

Randy later finds out that Chris joined the football team and they have two completely different schedules.

“We'll still hang out right?” Randy asks Alan at lunch.

“Totally man.” Alan hugs Randy tightly. “We are best friends for life.”

Randy begins to discover that middle school is a whole new ball game from elementary school. In his fifth grade year, him and Alan always played together and would pick on girls when they were at recess. They would also talk about what they wanted be when they grew up. Alan wanted to be rich, and Randy wanted to become a rock star. He loved music and was the top of his choir class.

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Now in sixth grade, the promise Alan made didn't last. Since Alan made the football team, he sits with his other team members at lunch and Randy isn't allowed to sit with them – no one is. Instead of tackling Randy when he got to the school, Alan tosses a football back and forth with Tony, the football team captain, in front of the school to show off for a group of girls. Randy doesn't join them because he can't throw to save his life, and girls aren't cute for him yet.

He thinks that maybe Alan is one person at school and another afterward.

A month into the school year, Randy takes a trip across town on his bike over to Alan's house. Instead of getting invited inside to Alan's room, his mom answers and says that Alan is with Tony at the park.

“You can take your bike down their and play with them. I'm sure they will let you. Tony is a very nice boy.”

Randy nods. “Thank you. Can you call my mom and tell her I will be over there instead?”

Alan's mom nods. Randy smiles and leaves. He reaches the park about five minutes later, keeping an eye out for Alan. When he spots them in the grass, he sets his bike on the ground and takes off his helmet. He starts to walk towards them.

“Alan!” Randy yells.

Alan and Tony both look up.

“Hey, can I hang out with you guys?” Randy asks, scratching his head.

Tony looks at Alan, says something, and then Alan stands and walks over to Randy.

“Um... no.”

Randy's smile falls.

“We're just... you know, we're talking about stuff that you won't get.”

“I'm not an idiot Alan. I can get anything.”

“Just go home, okay?”

Randy frowns. “You've changed Alan. What happened to 'we'll always be best friends' and stuff?”

“Go home Randy.” Alan says sternly.

“I have every right to be here as you do. It is a public park, ya know.”

Alan sighs and walks back over to Tony. Randy slowly follows behind him. Once Alan gets to Tony, he says something into his ear. Randy stops walking when they look his way. They quickly stand and run across the field, far away from Randy.

Randy watches them as they get farther and farther away. He assumes that Tony had Alan choose between them, and Alan had made his choice.

I thought he was my friend. What is going on? What does Tony have that I don't? I can get anything... Randy rubs his face. He pulls his hands down and sees they are wet. *I'm not little. Little kids don't cry.* Randy runs to his bike. He pulls it off the ground and walks it to the side walk. Leaving his helmet on the ground, he peddles as fast as he can away from the park.

This isn't the only time Alan makes it clear that Randy isn't his friend any more. Whenever Randy passes by Alan's group of friends, they yell out different names. Instead of standing up for him, Alan joins in on the name calling. It made Randy cry a few times; that doesn't help the matter any.

Randy begins to separate himself from everyone. In the morning, he hides in the large bathroom stall on the second floor boy's bathroom. At lunch, he gets his food and takes it outside. He isn't suppose to go out there, but he does anyways and no teacher stops him. Once he finishes, he locks himself back in the bathroom stall until his next class. It becomes regular routine, and his parents don't know this goes on... until a phone call is made by his school counselor.

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It is raining much harder now. Randy slowly stands up and presses his body against the tree, avoiding as much of the rain that is blowing underneath the branches that he can. He turns his back toward the wind and puts his forehead on the tree, breathing in the scents around him. Pine, sweet sap, the dampness from the rain; they all mix together in his nose and seem to calm him down some. He slowly stops crying and takes in a deep, deep breath that relaxes his muscles.

I hate change. I wish I was in elementary school again. Then it seemed okay to go to your mom and get a hug. I now know I'm going through some sort of change because nothing makes any sense.

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“Randall, you're coming to that age where everything is going to be... well, different.”

“I know what you mean.” Randy leans back into the couch.

His father has set him down in the living room. It seems to be the perfect place to have deep discussions. When Randy wants to tune out, he leans back and snuggle into the softness of the couch.

“Hair is going to be in odd places, girls are going to be very fascinating, you're going to-”

Randy stops his dad right there. “What are you talking about? Girls are weird and I don't even have hair on my face, just fuzz that even mom has on her face.”

His dad arches an eyebrow. “You haven't-”

Randy shakes his head. “No. I thought you were going to tell me about friends ditching you and why everything doesn't make sense anymore.”

His dad leans back and watches him for a long while, obviously thinking. Randy knows when his dad is thinking because he sort of looks down at his chest but is also staring into space, and his arms are

crossed over his chest with his foot propped up on the opposite knee.

“Randall... I think Alan doesn't really hang out with you because he's going through the stage that you obviously are late on.”

“Late? I know I'm changing but not like you're saying.”

“I don't think it's bad, but... he is moving on. He is making new friends and you are... how do I say this?”

“I'm what daddy?”

His dad covers his face with a hand, groaning. “You should be calling me dad for one thing.”

“Why?”

“Daddy is for little kids and girls. You are not little and not a girl. You are a boy who should be a man!”

“Honey, stop yelling at him,” Randy's mom says, walking into the room.

“My son hasn't started puberty yet. He's a little wimp when he should be on the football team and talking about girls. He hasn't even started to grow hair!”

“What the heck!” Randy stands up. He has to throw himself forward because he has sunk into the couch cushions. Randy always felt they were made out of clouds. “Who said I had to join the football team? Can't you help me understand why everything seems to be all weird now, like you for instance?”

“Honey, our son doesn't have to be like you,” Randy's mom states, folding her arms across her chest. “He is a mix of both of us; he is going to be different. Answer his question and stop worrying about everything else.”

Randy's dad protests, “He calls me daddy still. He should be calling me dad.”

“Are you serious? You are his father, you shouldn't care!”

“Don't you care that our kid doesn't like girls?”

“Girls aren't important right now. Answer his question!”

Randy doesn't hear anymore of the conversation. He is already on his way out the back door into the woods that is their backyard. He knows his dad wasn't going to answer anything for him.

So this is what this is about? Having hair in your pants and liking girls and throwing balls back and forth and tackling each other and being popular because of these things? No wonder Alan doesn't want to hang out with me - I haven't grown my “set” yet! Well... screw him. Screw my dad. Screw my mom. Screw girls, not literally. Screw football. Screw the whole world. I don't care anymore!

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Randy punches the tree. Instead of hurting the tree, the tree cuts his knuckles slightly. “Dang it,” Randy whines. He rubs his fist gently. “I hate my dad. And I hate Alan. I want to just... hit him.” Randy blows a raspberry at the tree and turns his back to it. “I also hate this tree.”

Randy looks up into the sky; it is a dark gray and the rain has stopped. But it doesn't take an idiot to

know that it will come back, probably soon. The sky seems to be like his head at the moment, cloudy with a chance of hormones. Randy begins to walk back to his house. He jogs through the back door when the rain starts up again and finds his parents still arguing. Randy walks past them and into his room. He aches and wants answers. What he needs is sleep.

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“How was your Thanksgiving?” Alan walks up behind Randy the next day at school.

Randy turns his head and looks him in the eye. “Go away?” Randy shuts his locker and heads up the stairs. He doesn't know why Alan is all of a sudden talking to him. He wants to go to his bathroom stall and hide.

“I know I haven't really hung out with you for a while. But it was football season. It's over now.”

Randy keeps walking. “No excuse.” He walks into the bathroom and into his stall.

Randy shuts the door in Alan's face.

“I'm... sorry man. You're my best friend. Tony only hung out with me during football cause the coach wanted him to be nice to the new kids. He doesn't care about me.”

Randy sits down on the toilet and listens to him.

“You're not a little kid at all. You and I are the same age. You haven't hit puberty yet. So what? Half of our grade hasn't. We teased everyone. Now that the season is over, everyone has gone back to there own clicks and will ignore each other till next year.”

Randy snorts. “That makes no sense. That really makes no sense.” *Another thing that doesn't make any freaking sense!*

Alan takes off his backpack and slides under the stall door.

“Hey!” Randy shrieks.

“I know you aren't using it because I know you hide out in here.” Alan leans against the wall by the toilet. “I really am sorry. Middle school isn't supposed to really make any sense.”

“I guess...” Randy sighs. “I just don't get what is really going on out there; in school, at home, in the whole world!”

“You will man. Don't worry.” Alan pats his shoulder. “Friends?”

“I guess,” Randy looks down at his shoes.

Alan hugs Randy tightly, who grunts.

“Maybe I don't want to understand everything.” Randy says.

“Be glad you don't because it really sucks when you do. Ignorance is bliss.”

Randy sighs and pushes Alan off of him. “Stop with the hugs, please.”

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That evening, Randy is in his bathroom brushing his teeth. His parents walk in and shut the door.

“What?” Randy asks snidely; the toothpaste that is in his mouth spits out onto the mirror.

Randy's mom looks at her husband. “Your father has something to say to you.” She motions for him to start talking.

He sighs and walks up behind Randy. “There isn't anything wrong with you.”

Randy spits into the sink and keeps brushing.

“I love you very much. You are my son and no matter what I will love you. If you don't like girls yet, that is fine. You need to worry more about school.” Randy's dad looks at his wife, who motions for him to continue.

Randy knows she told him what he is supposed to say. His mom fusses over his learning, and his dad worries about everything but his education.

“Sports are for fun and you choose if you want to do them, not me,” Randy's father continues.

Randy spits again into the sink. H washes off his toothbrush and rinses out his mouth.

“I'm done with my speech.”

“We love you honey.” Randy's mom adds on for emphasis. “We only want what is best for you.”

“I know,” Randy mumbles. “I'm just... confused right now and I want to figure it all out. Obviously you guys won't help so I have to figure it out on my own. I don't want people telling me what to think.”

“Don't worry Randall. You'll make it.” Randy's dad pats his shoulder. “How is school going by the way?”

“Fine. Alan and I are friends again.”

“That is great honey!” Randy's mom kisses his head. “Get a good night sleep, okay?”

“I will. Love you mommy,” Randy looks at his dad, “And night father.”

Randy's dad slightly smiles. “Night squirt.” He ruffles his hair and follows his wife out of the bathroom.

Randy turns around and looks in the mirror. He leans over the sink and stares at his chin. He runs a finger over it.

“I want hair.” He walks out of the bathroom and into his bedroom, turning off the light in both rooms. He climbs into his bed and stares out his window at the moon.

This world is so different all of a sudden. Even the moon isn't just the big white thing in the sky any more. I don't really know what it is exactly, but it is more than what it was yesterday. Hormones, can you do me a favor? I would love it if you would hurry up this puberty thing. It sucks!