

Cool Kids

It was a stinking rotten place before I got my hands on it. Everything was stupid; stupid yellow walls and a stupid yellow carpet. Sometimes I think that everything that's stupid in the whole wide world is probably yellow. I hated the way the whole stupid yellow room looked. I just wanted the place to look cool.

In the morning, when I get all dressed up and I put on my jean jacket and mom, when she ties up my trainers and tells me that I'm gonna be the coolest kid on the playground, I know she's right. And in carpool, Michael, he looks cool too with his jean jacket and his white trainers, and me and him, we're the two coolest five-year-olds in kindergarten.

Most of our class is just dummies. All the other girls wear dresses and cry. They try and play with me. One time Alyssa told me my jacket was cool and I said I knew my jacket was cool but that her dress was stupid and she was just baby guts and she cried and told on me, but me and Michael were already on the see-saw so even the teacher didn't bother us, cause even she knows how cool we are.

In the winter time when it's so cold that when you breathe smoke comes out, me and Michael would lean on the wall and pretend to smoke just to show everyone that when we get big we'll smoke real cigarettes and be even cooler as big kids then we are now, and we're really cool now. Sometimes, my mom lets us rent PG-13 videos on our way home and instead of playing with stupid Barbies like my mean older sister, me and Michael watched explosions and kissing and we would get everything, even if my big brother laughs at jokes and tells me I'm too little to get it. Me and Michael never play with dolls. Dolls are for girls and even though I am a girl, I still think dolls are stupid and

only stupid girls like Alyssa and all the other girls that wear ugly dresses in my class play with dolls.

I like sports because sports are cool. Cool people like Michael Jordan and Scotty Pippin play sports and they both play on the Bulls so when my big brother bought a Bulls jersey I stole it, because he wasn't cool enough to wear it anyway and now I wear it and my sister told me I looked stupid cause its too big and it might as well be a dress, but if I ever had to wear a dress, I hope it would be my Bulls jersey. I steal a lot of things from my brother because he's not cool enough for some of the things my mom buys him and I gotta show him how he can be cool.

My brother and sister think they're cool and once I did too, but they laugh at me for being little, or for saying funny things, that I don't think are funny one bit, and they tell me my homework is for little kids and their homework is for big kids, and my sister gets a crush on a boy and I read how much she loves him in her diary, so I know they can't be cool. Because other cool kids don't have princess diaries and other cool kids know how cool I am and don't tease me. Michael knows how cool I am because he's cool too.

Michael is so cool that when his mom takes us to CVS we always get a pack of tic-tacs and when his moms not looking we swallow them whole and pretend we're grown ups taking pills. I don't know why grown ups take pills but Michael says his mom takes pills to "nub the pain." Well, I don't know what nubbing means but she takes them an awful lot so I sure do feel sorry for her. And anyway Michael says grown ups take all sorts of pills to feel good and that if grown ups do something that doesn't make any

sense, well it must be cool. And I thought that Michael must have been the smartest, coolest boy on the block and so we swallowed tic-tacs until the pack was empty.

Michael knew a lot of grown up stuff that I didn't know. He said his dad kept falling off the wagon, so when we took turns pulling each other in our big red wagons around the block we always made extra sure to fall off and try and see who could get the bigger scrape on their knees or elbows. I always won because I wasn't afraid of anything and even though Michael was cool, sometimes he still got a little scared. Michael also knew an awful lot about doctor and when we played he told me I had privatlitis and he had to check my naughty parts with a spoon. It was always really cold when he touched me there but I didn't mind too much and when it was my turn I thought his naughty bits looked scary so I did my spoon tests quickly. Michael always wanted to play games like that. Games for grown ups that I didn't get one bit, but they made me feel a funny thing inside and I didn't like it.

Sometimes in the morning, when we picked Michael up for carpool he looked really weird and I thought about teasing him, but he was just sad and I was his best friend and even cool kids can get sad. I got sad sometimes too and Michael would put his arm around my shoulder and tell me I was his best friend and if anyone wanted a piece of me they'd have to get through him. Well, I thought that was the toughest and most coolest thing I'd ever heard so when Michael looked all weird and sad, like someone had turned him upside down and hit the fun right out of him, I'd lean over and whisper that he was the bestest friend in the whole world and that I'd help him tease the baby guts kid that mad him look so wrong. But he'd just pat my shoulder and soon enough he'd be smiling

again, so we never got to fight and I never did figure out which kid was giving him a hard time. All I knew was that when Michael looked like that it gave me the same funny feeling inside that his grown up games gave me.

One time me and Michael were under the jungle gym and he told me he never wanted to go back home again and well, I thought I might miss dinner but also that it was the coolest most scary thing ever. So after school me and him packed our things and walked all the way to the Christmas tree farm *three* streets away and played there for hours, only his face looked the way it did in the morning time and I had that weird feeling all over again, so when my dad drove by on his way home from work, I asked if he could take us home because my belly was growling and Michael was making me sad and even telling him he was the coolest wasn't making him any better. Mom said we could run away again after we had eaten, but by then it was dark and I'm not supposed to be outside after dark.

Michael always talked about big ideas like that, like running away. He talked about a big wide world that we would explore together and be the coolest kids ever in it. He told me that there were buildings that poked the clouds and water so deep no one knew where the bottom was and that if we closed our eyes and really dreamed sometimes he felt like he was in one of those clouds or at the bottom of that ocean so that he never had to come back to this stinking place where nothing was as cool as we were.

Michael always talked about how much he hated the yellow walls of the classroom. He said he didn't hate school so much and that school was really a cool place because we ruled the school, but the yellow walls reminded him of his dad's den and he hat-

ed that den. Once he told me that secret things happen inside there and when I wanted to go in and find the secrets he yelled at me and said he would never be my friend again if I went in there because that was his dad's place and only his dad was allowed in. But I didn't believe him because one day Michael was late for carpool so I ran inside and I heard noises in the secret room and when I yelled "Michael" as loud as I could, I heard things break inside there and I heard Michael crying, and I thought that I'd tease him because only babies cry, but then Michael and his dad came out of the secret room and he had that same weird look, so I didn't say anything more about that room. All I knew was that I saw that the walls matched our classroom and it was that same stupid yellow.

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One night when my mom was putting me to sleep the phone started ringing and usually mom ignores the phone because I'm better than the man on the phone, but this time mom went to answer it and I heard her sounding sad as she talked. When she came back she gave me an extra big kiss and told me I couldn't see Michael for a little while because him and his mommy were going away and that I could say goodbye to him if I wanted. I nodded my head and followed her to the car, but the whole time we drove she looked like she wanted to cry and I felt like one of those times when my brother would laugh at jokes in the PG-13 movies and I would say I got it because I didn't want him to think I was too little, but really, deep down I knew I wasn't cool enough to get it yet.

When we got to Michael's house the inside looked all broken and there was a policeman with sad eyes and Michael's mom was eating so many pills I thought she must have had a lot of practice with tic-tacs when she was little.

Michael's dad wasn't there but I could see through the door that his den was all broken and the yellow walls were staring at me and they made me feel all funny inside and I don't know why, but they just seemed as broken as the rest of the house. Michael was wearing his jean jacket and trainers just like I would have been if I wasn't going to bed and even though he had that weird, fun-less look, he gave me a high five and said that I was his best friend in the world and that when he got big he'd come back and we'd paint a whole world cool enough for just us all over his daddy's stupid yellow walls. I thought that sounded like a great idea, but something in the way he said made me think that he might be lying and he might never be back.

When I got home I was sleepy and scared and I didn't know why so I asked my mom why people get scared when they don't even know what's scary and why Michael always looked that way. She said that sometimes we don't have to understand everything to know that things aren't right, but I'm not sure I got that either. My mom didn't make me go to school the next day and when I finally did go back Michael wasn't there.

I didn't see Michael at all after that. So when Alyssa tried to play with me again, I told her she was too stupid and she'd never be as cool as me or Michael and that I'd paint a whole world inside the stupid yellow walls of the classroom where only cool kids like me and Michael could live and I ran inside, and then the teacher came back and saw the buildings that poked the clouds and oceans that were so deep you couldn't see the bottom of them covering the stupid yellow walls. I told the teacher that I made a new place where only me and Michael could live because no one was as cool as us and she said that my world seemed like a wonderful place and that she hopes that one day me and Michael

could be there together, but that drawing on the walls was against the rules and even though she looked really sad doing it, because she knew I was too cool, she still gave me a time out. So I sat in that corner all day while they scrubbed my world off the walls, but when they were done the bleach had made the yellow all wrong and worse than it was before so they painted the walls white and then I forgot what Michael's daddy's den looked like. And when my mom came and picked me up I told her that I thought that Michael was probably wearing his jean jacket and trainers just like me at his new kindergarten and that he was probably the coolest kid in the class just like I was.