

## Milo Mills

"I can't wait to get out of this fucking city," I said as I threw my bookbag onto my bed. My head started to throb. It was Friday afternoon and I was ready to go home. It was a pretty good day until I was outside waiting for the bus to bring me home, then dickhead Lance came and bothered me.

I sat in my desk chair in my room and took out my notebook. I needed to get some stuff off of my chest and writing it in my notebook was the only way. I wrote about the day I had.

I had arrived at school in enough time to get some breakfast. *Good*. Then I went to my favorite class, English. We had to read a Shakespeare story about some crazy couple that planned to kill the King and take the throne. Mr. Long didn't look too good though. The rest of the day was just a blur. I tried not to remember my days at this dumb school because I never wanted to be there. Finally, when I walk outside to the part of the school where the buses pick us up, Lance comes. I sat on the bench at the very end of the sidewalk. He still managed to walk all the way down, hit the back of my head, then slap my notebook into the street. Luckily, it was still early enough so that it didn't get run over by a bus. However, that wasn't the bad part about it. After he slapped my notebook, I heard him call me "fag." *Bad*. Does he know that I am gay? He shouldn't. I haven't come out yet. I thought that he was just a regular jerk but he's homophobic too? I'll have to talk to Jacob about that. He has kept it a secret for three years, so surely he wouldn't blab about it now. He came out at the end of last year, and was proud of it. *Why is it so hard for me?*

I sighed and closed my notebook. I was about to stand up, when my mom walked in. I could see that she had on a short red and white floral dress under a thick, fur overcoat. She had on red wedges with straw heels and a hat so big I barely saw her face. I smelled her perfume from across the room.

“I am going to be gone for a couple of days. I left some money on the counter for food.” That was all she said to me before she turned back around and closed the door. No “goodbye” or a day that she will be back. I doubt she even wanted to come back. She was another reason that I couldn’t wait to get out of this stupid city. She’s left me here for weeks on end with only twenty dollars to spread out so many times over the past ten out of my seventeen years that I’ve lost count. She didn’t tell me where she was going. All I can tell from the pictures she had posted on Facebook, is that she was always at some resort with some rich man. I guess he was the one paying for the bills around here too, because she sure didn’t have a job. I don’t think she’s had one since dad left.

I sat back down and wrote in my notebook some more. I felt better after thirty minutes of scribbling on the page.

I walked to the kitchen to see the lone bill on the white counter. I swiped it and shoved it into my pocket. I had to go down the street to the corner store to get some food for this weekend.

~\*~

I walked through the front doors of my school around 8:55 on Monday morning. Five minutes before the late bell rings. *I couldn't get breakfast.*

My stomach began to rumble as Jacob walked up behind me and slapped me on the shoulder. I felt a sting from his hit, but I knew he didn't mean to hit me that hard. He was too strong for his own good. He smiled as he started to walk next to me.

"Hey man, how's it going?" We headed to our first class of the day.

"It's going man. You?"

"Ehhh." Jacob pulled on the straps of his bookbag.

There was little sound in the hallway because most of the students were already in their classrooms. The building was warm compared to the bitter cold of a New York winter.

When the bell rang, we sat in our usual seats in the back of the classroom. I looked at the woman that had walked into the room a few minutes afterwards. Her black, curly hair was tied in a bun at the base of the back of her neck. She was wearing a light brown sweater with black slacks. She smiled at us when she stood behind the desk, the freckles on her cheeks and the bridge of her nose wrinkled as she did. She was not the usual male teacher that we had for this class.

"Where is Mr. Long?" Someone shouted from the otherside of the classroom before she could even open her mouth to speak.

"He is ill and won't be returning until February. I'm Ms. Carson. They pulled me in at the last minute, but I will be your substitute teacher until Mr. Long is back and feeling better." Her New York accent told me that she has been here her whole life. "I wasn't prepared to be placed in a class this early on. I am a professor at Stony Brook University, and I just started doing

substitute teacher jobs. So, I guess for today, I will have you all write a short narrative on your life." She looked at the board and grabbed a dry erase marker. She started to write as she spoke. "You can write about anything; family, friends, whatever. I just want it to be two pages. I am giving you the liberty to write whatever you feel like writing about." She put the marker down after she wrote her instructions. "I just want to get a feel of your writing styles and aptitude."

She sat behind the desk and started to organize the mess that Mr. Long had left from the day before. The other students in the class started to take out paper and talk to their friends so I leaned over to Jacob. "You didn't tell me how it's going."

He turned and smiled at me. "It's shit."

He laughed and reached down for his black Nike bag that he had thrown under his desk when they walked in. He handed me some paper and a pencil and took some out for himself.

"My mom kicked me out again," he said, then he wrote something on the paper.

"Shit, man. Isn't this like the third time this month?"

"Yep." He looked up to me. "You wouldn't believe why this time."

I looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

"Because I didn't pack the leftovers from dinner and put them in the fridge."

"Wow. That's dumb." I wrapped my arms around my stomach and leaned forward on my desk.

"You good, man?" He leaned closer to me. "Did you eat this morning?"

"No, I came to school late." I turned to him and furrowed my eyebrows. "You practically came in with me."

“I know that. Your mom hasn’t bought groceries?”

“She left on Friday and only gave me twenty dollars. I don’t know if that was all she had or if that was only what she wanted to give me from the money she gets from her boyfriend. Besides, I can’t even remember the last time she had bought groceries.”

“Geez, dude. We can talk more about this later. I may need to come back to your place tonight again.”

“Yeah, dude. No problem.” I started to write my story. Only it’s not really the story of my life. It was the story of what I wished my life was like. Where the mother didn’t leave for weeks on end without leaving an explanation or enough money. Where the dad didn’t leave when you were three. Where the home was actually a warm, comforting place, and not a cold, empty space. I couldn’t write about what my life was actually like. I didn’t want anyone at this school to know, because even though I’m hungry all the time, I didn’t mind being alone in the house. It gave me more time to focus on studying and writing.

Before I knew it the bell rang right when I was about to start a fourth page. I grabbed my bookbag and put the papers on the teacher’s desk as I left. Jacob did the same and met me in the hallway by my locker.

“You didn’t say a word the rest of class, dude. You must have really been into that story.”

“Yeah, I guess so.” I opened my locker and grabbed my math notebook out of it. The front cover of it had been torn in half.

“What happened to your notebook?” He tried to find my eyes but I avoided him. I was ashamed of the truth, but Jacob already knew.

“It was Lance again, wasn’t it?”

“You two gay fucks whispering about me?” Lance shouted.

My body stiffened. I looked around. *He won’t hit me here. Not in front of Jacob.*

“Got nothing to say fag?”

I couldn’t respond to the horrible name he called me. I closed my locker and walked to my next class, hoping that Jacob would follow. I didn’t want him to confront him. I couldn’t imagine not having him at school with me for two weeks because he got suspended.

He arrived into our next class a second after I did. The teacher was standing at the board, writing page numbers for us to look at for the assignment we would get.

“Why do you let that bitch pick on you? And why did he call us gay? Does he know?”

I couldn’t respond. My stomach tightened again from the lack of food and the fear in my stomach. *I hope no one heard him.*

I went through class silent again, not even attempting to peek at Jacob, who was sitting in the stool right next to mine. He understood that we would talk later about it so he didn’t bother me about it while we were in class. We focused on our assignments for the rest of class. The rumbling in my stomach made it harder for me to focus. It had gotten worse by the time I was in my next class, biology. Lunch was right after that so I didn’t think too much about it.

Forty-five minutes later, I went to the only lunch line that was nearly empty and grabbed the most food that was allowed. This would be my only meal today. Jacob grabbed his food and joined me at our usual table. The cafeteria was loud and smelled like old pizza.

“What do you think happened with Mr. Long?” I asked after a couple minutes of eating the warm pizza on the white styrofoam tray.

“Maybe he’s dead. He did seem sick yesterday.” Jacob responded. His sense of humor was always on the dark side.

“Dude, that’s fucked.”

“I’m just joking.” He drank the rest of his chocolate milk. “That woman said he wouldn’t be back until February. It’s November now, so it has to be something serious.”

I looked down at the empty tray. I managed to eat two apples and two slices of pizza, but my stomach was still hurting. Jacob gave me his apple when he noticed me.

“Thanks.” I took a bite.

“No worries, man. I don’t even like apples.”

I looked at him and smiled. “Isn’t your favorite food apple pie?”

He laughed and leaned back in his chair. “Shut up, man.”

The bell rang for us to head to our next class. The rest of my classes I didn’t have with Jacob, so I wouldn’t see him until it was time to go home. We arranged for a spot to meet so he could get on the bus with me at the end of the day.

My next two classes were a blur, Health then World History. That was usually how school went after lunch, because I couldn’t care less about those topics.

I told Jacob to meet me at the bench at the end of the sidewalk from Friday. Lance started to walk down here too until he saw that Jacob was meeting me. *Coward.*

“Hey dude, want to go get snacks before we get to your house? My treat.”

I was hesitant to accept his offer, but I already knew that nothing was in my house for us to eat tonight.

The bus pulled past us as I nodded my head in acceptance.

~ ~ ~

We arrived back at my house with a brown paper grocery bag filled with snacks and drinks for us to share. Jacob put the bag in my room while I used the bathroom. As I was washing my hands, I looked at myself in the mirror. My thin shoulder length black hair, my skinny pale arms, the heavy bags under my eyes, they started to reveal that I wasn't eating as much as I should. I don't want anyone to know. I had to get better at hiding it. *I can't be taken away from Jacob.* My heart started to race and I felt light headed. The room started to spin.

I heard a knock on the bathroom door.

"You alright in there?" Jacob asked from the hallway.

I wiped the sweat off of my forehead. "Yeah." I opened the door. "I'm just hungry."

"Oh, well, I got plenty of snacks for us."

We sat back in my room and I ate a bag of chips. Jacob didn't say anything to me until I was finished.

"So, you wanna tell me what that was with Lance?"

"What else is there to say? You saw everything." I grabbed another bag of chips and sat in my desk chair. They weren't satisfying my hunger.

"Does he know that you are gay?" Jacob asked as he sat on my bed. His voice was low and calm. It was comforting.

"How would he know that? I wouldn't have told him. I haven't told anyone else." I threw away the two bags of chips and grabbed my notebook from the desk drawer. "But I hang



around you all the time, so I guess he just figured it out.” I slumped back into the chair and turned to write.

“We aren’t dating, so there’s no reason for him to think that. Guys can be friends too.”

“Yeah, but you can’t be just guy friends with a gay guy I guess.”

“Shame.” He stood behind me and slapped both of his hands onto my shoulders. “We are so much fun.”

The black pull over I was wearing softened the blow a little, but I could still feel pain in my arms. I winced and Jacob stepped back.

“Sorry.” He rubbed my shoulders.

I swiveled around and punched his stomach. “It’s okay.”

I wrote in my notebook about my day again, but this time it went a lot better.

Only a little bit of harassment from Lance this time, but I doubt it would get much better. He hasn’t bothered me this much before Jacob came out. That’s not why he bullied me. Was it? I hope not because that would just make Jacob even more mad. Other than that, I was finally able to write fiction in English class. Mr. Long never let us do that before. He only made us write essays and read books written by people in the thirteenth century. I liked the stories, I just preferred modern authors like Stephen King and Nora Roberts.

Jacob tapped my shoulder.

“Hey, I’m here. Did you want to hangout or write for the rest of the night?”

“Fine.” I put my notebook back into my desk drawer and picked up the paper bag, which was half full by this point. Jacob had continued to eat the snacks while I was lost in my writing.

We sat in the living room and played on the Playstation for hours. Jacob ordered a pizza when the grocery bag was emptied. Pizza was my favorite and he knew it. I fell asleep on the couch while he continued to play the game.

~\*~

I arrived at the school the next day and grabbed a tray. It was french toast sticks with a small plastic container of syrup. I grabbed some extra fruit and milk and walked to the table. It was thirty minutes until first period so after I ate the french toast sticks I took some paper out and started to write.

Ten minutes later, Jacob stood across from me. He left my house earlier in the morning to change his clothes and brush his teeth. I guess his mom brought him here afterwards.

First period started in five minutes, so Jacob and I headed to class.

Mrs. Carson was standing at the board with a dry erase marker in her hand, writing the instructions for class again. She smiled at us as we passed the threshold for the classroom.

“Are either of you Milo?”

“I am.” I approached her desk, Jacob went to his desk.

“Did you write this?” She held up my paper from yesterday.

“Yes. Did I do it wrong?”

“No, not at all. It is actually really beautiful. Are you into creative writing?”

"I write sometimes."

"Well if I must say, you have a talent here. Have you taken any classes before?"

"I haven't really thought about it that much. It's just a hobby that I have."

"Well, if you want, I can have you come to one of my creative writing courses. It's directly after school though, if it is okay with your parents that is."

I didn't respond. I thought of my mom on vacation 40 weeks out of the year, of my mom going to college, of my mom even caring that I was going to college. My stomach burned.

"Yeah, that sounds good."

"Great, if you meet me here after school then we can head on over. It's just a twenty minute drive from here." She continued to tell me more about the University until the bell rang for class to start.

I joined Jacob at our desks. I was curious about the situation but I knew that my mom didn't care if I was home because she wasn't even there. I sat for the rest of my classes looking up information about this school. It sounded beautiful, warm, and inviting. I had to go to this college if I wanted to be able to escape this terrible life I had, having those creative writing classes just made it sound even better.