

## Lift you up

It was a cold winter night. I was snuggled up in front of the fireplace, an hour past my bedtime, when my grandmother walked in. "What are you doing up so late sweetie?" She asked before taking a seat in her rocking chair.

"I'm not that tired." I told her

"I'll make you a deal. We can sit here for 5 more minutes and then off to bed. It'll be our little secret."

"Ok." I said, while slowly crawling towards her. When I reached the base of the chair, she lifted me up onto her lap.

"I heard you had a fight with your friend the other day. Jason was it?"

"He took my lunchbox and wouldn't give it back. He was being mean for no reason. I hate Jason."

"Let me tell you something Kenny," She said with a soft voice. "When you're young, everyone will seem like they are trying to bring you down. Look instead for the one who will lift you up." I spent the rest of those 5 minutes thinking about what she said, and before I knew it was the next morning. I wished I had known at the time, but those were the last words I would hear from her.

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Fast forward many years, and I'm 17. A junior in high school who is struggling in every aspect of life. As soon as I got into high school, my parents decided to get a divorce, the untimely passing of my grandmother still scared my father. I gained a lot from him, like his sensitivity. I feel like everything he does hurts me.

Neither of them wanted custody of me, my mom moving away to somewhere in Europe, and my dad an emotional mess. It's great to know your parents don't have your back. I ended up moving in with my mom's step sister, who while kind, decides to use me as a house maid, while she stays at home and relaxes all day. Her two young girls, Kris and Beatris depend on me for making food, their breakfast, lunch, and dinner. However, make it any point in the day besides then, and I'm just another annoying boy who they hate. My uncle works hard, and he respects me, but I still get no 'thanks' or 'congratulations' from a single person in this house.

I was on my way to school one cold morning in February, when I felt something on my shoulder. I felt really gentle, and I assumed it was a fly. I gave my shoulder a slap without looking. "Ow." a faint voice replied. I looked on my shoulder to find a small hand resting on top of it. I turned around to see whose hand this was, only to my surprise it was that of a girl.

She looked around my age, maybe a year or two younger. She had long, silky smooth hair, all of it a nice dark shade of black. She wore a grey sweatshirt with no design, and light blue denim jeans. Her face was comparable to that of an angel, and I was no less than stunned. “Oh, sorry...I thought...there was a fly...” I stuttered. I had no experience with girls, besides the two demons I live with.

“Oh no, it’s fine.” She spoke quietly, with a very gentle tone

“Did you need something?” I asked nervously

“I just... I just moved in the neighborhood...I was hoping you could show me to the school.”

“Oh um...sure.” I said. This beautiful girl just asked me for directions and I responded with ‘sure’.

After that there was no talking, until we reached the entrance of the school gates. After a bit of preparation I turned around to talk to her to find her gone. When I turned back to the school gates I saw her walking quickly towards the building. I had no clue when she passed, but I knew that I blew whatever was going on there.

I continued onto my first class of the day, which was so boring I forgot about everything that had happened before. After more boring classes it came time for lunch. I scouted the cafeteria for my friend Albert, but I couldn’t find him anywhere. I sat down at a random open table, but not long after I heard someone sitting down next to me.

“About time,” I said. “What class did you have that took you so long to get...:” I turn around to see the girl to be the one sitting next to me. Once again I embarrassed myself by misunderstanding who this girl was. Her face was a bit shocked, but she almost looked more embarrassed rather than confused.

“Sorry I thought...I thought you were my friend.” I said

“Oh no.. It’s fine. I just... I didn’t really know anyone here so...” She responded, looking more embarrassed then before

“Oh yeah...that’s...cool...”

There was dead silence for a while, the awkward tension even brought in a couple people’s gazes. I could feel the cold rath of their judgement chilling down my spine. It was then that, after she probably felt it too, she decided to say something.

“Name?” She said, it sounded forced, but her voice was still soft

“Huh?”

“What’s your..name?”

“Kenny,” I told her. “You can call me Ken though. What about yours?”

“Katelyn...you can call me Kat...”

“Ok Kat, nice to meet you.”

“Likewise”

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We went the rest of lunch learning about each other’s past, I told her my story, and she told me hers. Her father just recently passed, making her an orphan, as her mom died giving birth to her. She then just moved into her Grandmother’s house, who she didn’t even know until her fathers funeral. It was a sad story similar to mine, but we both respectfully listened to each other. Not long after talking about her past, the bell rang, symbolizing that lunch was over and classes were about to start again.

“That was nice talking to you Kat.” I said, walking towards my next class

“You too Ken. See you around sometime.” She replied. Her voice was still gentle, but as time went on it got louder.

I walked away happily knowing I just made a new acquaintance, but I wasn’t quite sure if we were to ever talk again after this. Even though we did get along well, she only sat with me because she had already sorta met me, maybe she did that because she was trying to repay her debt to me. Either way, I was still happy from talking with someone like her who understands what I have been through.

When I got back to my house I went straight to preparing dinner. It was already sorta late, around 5ish, as I did a quick stop at the local grocery store for some cooking supplies. When it was time to eat, it was my job to also get the girls from their room, my least favorite of each day. They would either talk with each other and try their best to make sure I wouldn’t hear a word, or they would be playing with their toys and dolls and would refuse to come eat.

“Girls time to eat!” I said while knocking on their door with a very big sign that read ‘No Boys Allowed!’.

“Go away loser, we’re not hungry!” Kris replied.

“Yeah loser, we don’t want your sucky food anyways! You suck!” Beatris yelled. Their hostility seemed awfully strong, but I was always prepared for situations like these.

“Well, if you guys don’t want my food then I guess you don’t want the pudding I just bought in your lunchboxes tomorrow! More for me!” Suddenly the door opened, and the two girls went running to the table to eat. Another crisis averted.

While we were eating, my aunt cleared her throat as if she was about to say something important. “Kenny, could you go to the store and pick up some paper towels please?”

“I checked this morning and I saw 5 more rolls in the cabinet. Also I already went to the store, why wouldn’t you tell me earlier?”

“Well 5 isn’t enough! And you don’t talk back to me you hear! Now after you finish cleaning the table get yourself out of the house and be useful for once damn it!” She screamed. Her words rang through my ears. I felt more than anger

“Kenny, you should go now. Girls you too, I need to have a word with your mother.” My uncle said. I let my anger flush out a little, and nodded towards him. He gave one back to me, and I headed out the door.

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Although I calmed down a bit, anger wasn’t the only emotion that stuck with me. Doubt filled my mind, “*Am I really that useless*” I thought to myself. “*I cook, clean, take out the garbage, I do practically everything in that house. Is it still not enough?*”. It was then I realized something. All I ever wanted in the past 2 years was to be thought of first. I wanted someone to think of me before anyone else, for at least a second. I wanted to find the one who would lift me up, just like grandma said.

I looked up from the ground to realize I already walked way farther than I had thought. It had already been an hour since I left the house, and I passed the store a while back. I turned to my right, to see a poorly lit alley, and on the other side of it a sketchy hotel. It looked like the kind of hotel that you only go to for shady business, or other illegal things. Outside of it, was a man in baggy pants, a backwards hat, a flashy jacket and had a lot of gold chains around his neck. He was talking to a girl who seemed uninterested, but the man had a weird smirk on his face that made me feel uneasy. I was never one for intervening, but I felt like I had too this time. As I got closer, I heard more of their conversation.

“C’mon baby girl, just one time” The man said, pulling out five \$100 bills out of his left pocket.

“I already said no you creep,” The girl spoke quietly. “Now get away from me”.

“If you don’t come with me for money, I’ll just take you for none!” He barked, grabbing the girl by the arm. The girl looked frightened. She seemed familiar to me, like I had seen her before. I took one more step closer, and then a chill went down my spine. It was Kat.

I had never seen this before. I had never thought I would ever see this before. But at that very moment, something happened to me. I broke into a full sprint, my hands curled into balls. I wasn’t much of a fighter, but as soon as I got right next to them, I hurled my right arm towards the guy’s face. As he fell to the ground, I snatched Kat’s hand and screamed, “Let’s get out of here!”

We kept running, until we got closer to the store, and when I turned around I saw tears rolling down her face. “I...I...” She whimpered.

“Don’t worry,” I said. “Your safe with me”

She leaped forward and hugged me, her tears like rain as they dropped to the floor. That is how my life changed. If none of the bad things that happened to me occurred, if I never had to leave the house at that exact moment, her life would have changed forever. I thought about it for a bit, I was wrong. I do matter, because even if life strikes me down, I can make life better for others. My life, your life, and everyone’s life, matters.