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# AND, FINALLY, I CRIED.

IVELISSE MANDATO

The bus lurched forward and my stomach churned. No – this couldn't be happening. I took my medication. I know I took it. I think I took it... Did I take it? As we continued to roll through the early morning traffic, I came to a conclusion – I didn't take it. My eyes began to dart around the bus, wondering if anyone could see my panic. This couldn't be happening. I ripped the window open and the frigid, winter air flooded in. "The other people on the bus will understand," I hoped. With my head halfway out the window, fighting for fresh air, I thought "You can't do this. You CANNOT do this. You are already the girl with cancer." My knuckles whitened as my hands gripped the seat. Eyes tightly shut, I begged myself to hold on just a little bit longer. Thirty minutes. Twenty minutes. My hands grew clammy and the nausea moved its way up to my throat, at first slowly creeping, but now all at once. Fifteen minutes. Ten minutes. Tears pricked my eyes as I realized I wouldn't make it. I was so close.

The bus pulled up to a red light and I flew out of my seat. My feet slammed heavily onto the floor as I raced to the front of the bus and searched for the words I learned in Spanish class. The words that I hoped would overcome the language barrier. The woman driving looked at me with widened eyes, first startled, then concerned. My face burned. I couldn't meet her gaze as I choked out, "Basura? Por favor! Lo siento." She frantically searched the front of the bus before thrusting a plastic bag into my arms. I spent the walk back to my seat staring at the bag. It was fuzzy – a white blob. I blinked back the tears. "You can't vomit AND cry on this bus. You just can't." As the bus moved forward, I shoved my face into the bag. Bile was the only thing that came up. I hadn't eaten breakfast yet, there was nothing

else to throw up. I spent the rest of the bus ride dry heaving into the bag. Too afraid to meet the eyes of the other girls, I stared at the cloudy, yellow liquid until the end of the ride. Breathing in and out, I felt the embarrassment seep in. I was acutely aware of the discomfort I was bringing everyone else by forcing them to listen to my retching. I didn't need to look up - I could already see their faces. It was the same face that I saw when I walked past them in the hallway. Eyes darted from me to the wall. Back to me. Back to the wall. Should they say something to me? Should they ignore me? The emotion on their faces always the same. Pity – always apparent. The pity that I never wanted. The pity that I hated. I shot up as the bus stopped and the doors began to open. Brushing the shoulders of the other girls, I stared at the ground as I briskly walked from the bus to the building. I watched as the black plastic flooring became gray concrete, which quickly turned into tile. I was inside. Clutching the plastic bag, I made a beeline to the bathroom, I locked myself into a stall, and – finally – I cried.



# G LASSES

Quinn was always a troublemaker at camp. Some counselors say that she didn't get enough attention at home, so she would act out more frequently here. So when another one of Quinn's crying fits came along one Friday afternoon, only an hour or so before everyone was ready to leave, people were just brushing her off.

I was sitting at the front desk, doing my administrative work when I heard a commotion coming from the back room. It was a first-year counselor – I never got her name, but she was always nice to me and good with the kids – holding Quinn's hand. They were walking to the nurse's office, which is right next to the front desk. The counselor said they were outside on the playground when Quinn started to feel dizzy, talking about her grandfather who died over 6 years ago. The little girl just stood there, hysterically crying, on the verge of hyperventilating. She pulled away her hand the counselor was holding to wipe her nose, rubbing the lenses of her pink unicorn sunglasses with her left hand.

At the sign of crying, everyone's heads turned and worry filled their eyes. But then they noticed the tears came from the eyes of little Quinn, the same eyes who cried 4 out of the 5 days that week. "What is it NOW, Quinn?," they would say. "Stop crying, Quinn," "Just. Calm. Down, Quinn." Usually the attention of adults even noticing her crying was enough to quiet the girl. But with the day being nearly over, even this was too much to attempt to quiet Quinn who often, literally, cried wolf.

MATTHEW DAVIS

Yet I knew this was more than just one of her usual attention-seeking stunts. I saw this before. I knew what she needed. And it was not being told to calm down.

I got out from behind the desk, squatted down to her eye level, and encouraged her to keep breathing. "Inhale deeply. Exhale slowly." I told her that I was there with her, there for her, telling her that whatever she saw, heard, or thought of, was okay. It will all be okay.

In the face of that little 7-year-old, I saw the face of a boy. Slightly chubby. Thin glasses. Older than I'd like to admit. I shook that thought out of my head and continued my conversation with Quinn.

I told her how much I liked her pink "shades," as she called them. She started to smile slightly, out of the left corner of her mouth. Within minutes, the nice counselor was taking a now calm, albeit red-faced Quinn back outside to the other kids.

I went back to my desk, adjusted my own glasses, and finished my work.