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Cold is Warm

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Cold is Warm

By Axeri Ramirez

She waited for the bus to arrive in the uncomfortable gray weather. 7:25 a.m. The bus should come in four minutes like she's calculated many times before. The sound of air screaming through the rusty engine alerted her that the bus was right around the corner. She quickly nonchalantly fixed her hair. She didn't know it then, but no one cared how she looked. She got in line and entered the yellow bus. The smell of different status entered her nose. Must and sweat, she often felt like she was drowning and had to fight to breathe. She sat down and placed her head on the window. Her mom waved her goodbye, she smiled to herself. She knew her mother worked her life away to a schedule from eight to five. So why did she feel embarrassed when her mom came with her to the bus stop? Maybe it was because she came in pajamas. Maybe it was because her "friends" could see her mom from the bus. Maybe it was because her mom would wake up too tired to do her hair. Maybe it was because of all of them. Only she knows why, that is, if she even knows herself.

She waved her mom goodbye and kept her eyes on her until she couldn't see her anymore. She watched as she passed the same streets she had memorized by now. Like a maze, she knew what street could take her out. Minutes passed silently but slowly. The glass from the window was now warm from her head. The streets were wet and cold. She blinked and saw her cousin on the street. She hadn't seen him in months, she had missed him. She grew up with him, he was more of a brother to her than a cousin. Strange, the streets were passing but he stayed. Wherever her eyes landed, he was on that street. A man, no, a teenager, she couldn't make up her mind. She watched this person come up to her cousin and stab him in the stomach. He ran and left her cousin on the wet floor. Warm blood and cold water mixed on the ground. Now he laid on the ground and was passing with the street. She turned her head until she couldn't see him anymore. Confusion, worry, disbelief, fear and shock soaked up her whole body. She tried to look back but couldn't see anything anymore. She looked ahead at

the old brown seat. It was getting harder to breathe, she had never experienced that type of fight for air. Did no one else see that?

“Hey move your bag.” The sound of those words grabbed her by the hand and returned her back to reality. Was she still sleepy? She looked up to a familiar face. Weirdered out but decided to act normal, she moved her bag. “What were you thinking about? You look so depressed.” He said as he sat down next to her. She looked down at her Converse and decided to not tell him. He might think she was a weirdo or mentally unstable.

“Nothing, just spacing out.” She felt the vibrations of her voice. She wasn’t dreaming. She was daydreaming.

“Dude, I literally space out all the time, it’s kind of relaxing. Yo, but guess what happened yesterday?” She shook off the incident, she convinced herself she was just daydreaming nonsense. The rest of the day was filled with crumbs of happiness and joy. The joy you experience everyday but don’t pay attention to. She walked home by herself, she listened to the earth talk but couldn’t understand it just yet. Black dirty Converse mixing in a dirty but clean puddle of rain. She remembered the secret shortcut her cousin showed her when he used to walk her home every day. Memories melt in and she remembers the times filled with adrenaline and laughter.

“Okay these apartments,” her cousin tells her, smiling with his two dimples that always formed on the side of his face. “Wait, is it? No-yeah it is. Always remember that it’s the blue apartments okay?” His face was smothered with excitement as he spoke.

Confused but intrigued she answered, “What is it?”

“A shortcut to our apartments, come look,” he walked on the property’s lawn and quickly walked towards the backyard. She followed, scared of getting in trouble, his legs were longer than hers, so she picked up the pace. “Come on hurry!” He said smiling as they both ran closer to the broken fence. Completely intruding without a warning. Two kids laughing off adrenaline and

excitement. As they were running the screams of an angry man echoed into the backyard.

“You stupid kids.” She couldn’t see her cousins face but without of doubt she was sure he was smirking. She was scared but ran faster to the fence. They both walked over the broken fence into their apartment’s backyard and ran to the front.

“See? Shortcut.” He was out of breath but she could tell he loved the adrenaline that danger contained. Even though they were both younger back then, she knew he was a special person.

Now she always smiled as she walked past the blue apartments, old times she knew to cherish. She got home, ate, watched a screen for four hours, took a shower and slept.

She smelled that same smell again, grey, cloudy, used. She looked at her mom next to her and told her goodbye. She got on the bus and chose a seat where she could be alone for the next forty minutes. She waved her mom the last goodbye as the bus started again. Another day in the maze, the streets always looked the same. The trees were the only sign of life but during this time all the trees were tired. Different day but with the same routine as the day before. She watched as the sun slowly conquered the sky silently. At a bus stop, she saw her cousin walking on the sidewalk again. She watched him, confused, is this happening again? In the corner of her eye she saw the man with the hoodie. Her heart started to heat up, the bus driver uninformed waiting for kids to arrive. The guy went up to her cousin and stabbed him. He fell and in no time the warm mixed with cold. She screamed in her head, the bus was leaving him. She watched him slowly fade as the bus driver drove. She was not going to leave him there, this time she was going to do something. Without thinking she yelled at the bus driver to stop and explained to her she had to get off. The bus driver let her off and she ran off back to her cousin. She didn’t look back, she ran so fast she arrived at his side in no time. She held him and looked at the red that was surrounding them. She was too small to pick him up but she held his back to try to prevent him from drowning in his own blood.

"Hey!" She looked at him but couldn't see his face clearly, she looked around to find the bus gone. "Help! Please help him!" She yelled so loud but the streets were deaf.

She woke up. 6:50 am. A nightmare. She controlled her breathing, the dream felt too real. She calmed down, got ready for school and woke her mom up. They walked to the bus stop, she was scared but didn't want to tell anyone about her weird imagination. She saw her cousin again but this time she was daydreaming. The same scenario happened, all she could think about was her cousin. This went on for one week or two, she stopped counting. She later thought it was a weird daydream she created because of shows she watched and stopped worrying. Several days later she walked back to her home with the same dirty chucks. She noticed a lot of cars parked outside her apartment building. She only had two neighbors and one of them was her cousin's family. She entered her home to find a lot of kids playing in the living room. Her mom and dad weren't home so she figured there was a party next door. Although she was in her last grade of elementary school, she thought she was grown enough to see what the adults were doing. She walked out of her apartment and knocked on her aunt's door. Family friend opened and she peeked in to see sad faces. The woman didn't say anything to her but let her inside. There were a lot of people inside, she was confused why they were crying. She walked to someone she knew who was on the couch and asked what was going on. He told her to ask her mom, that she should tell her. So she left and made her way to the kitchen to find her mom. She found her aunt crying as she hugged her nephew, he was also crying.

"I told him, tía. I told him to stay out of that stuff," he said breaking down as her aunt nodded but couldn't answer. She looked to her right and saw her cousin's sisters and her mom.

"Mom, what happened?" she said observing her mom cry. Her mom said no with her head and told someone she shouldn't know. There was talk for a second and soon the girl found herself in her cousin's room. She looked at the made bed that she and her aunt made for her cousin when he came back. It looked

untouched, she sat on the bed and looked at her cousin's black converse next to his closet. Her cousin's sister, L, was there too, she had tears running down her face without needing to blink.

"Hey mija um," L controlled her voice before she spoke again, she kneeled down to look up into the girl's eyes. The girl could tell she was trying her best not to cry. "You know my brother uh- he's well, he's not here anymore mija. He's in a better place than here, somewhere where he's probably more happy." The girl oddly understood but wanted to act strong for L. "Some bad people took him from us- they killed him. I know this is something so strong but we can't lie to you, so please know we are all going to get through this okay?" L looked into the girl's eyes. The girl wasn't crying but instead looked into her eyes. "Mija, are you okay?" The girl nodded and got off the bed. "Ok, let's go outside," L watched as the girl opened the door and walked out. The girl walked into the living room and left. She went back home and climbed her bunk bed. She put an object under her pillow and prayed to God that when she woke up she wouldn't find that object under her pillow. She hoped it was all a dream.

"God, please," she said. She heard the kids play in the living room but she was completely alone. Now that it was only herself, she let go. She cried so hard her eyelids felt like sandpaper. She kept talking to god, praying it was all a dream and that this wasn't true. She still couldn't believe it, she was certain he was still out there somewhere. Were all those daydreams a warning, a sign? She cried until she couldn't, darkness took over and she woke up the next day. She looked at the ceiling and talked to God once more. She slowly reached under her pillow. It wasn't a dream.

Now six years later, I still wonder if I could have changed the outcomes. His birthday is coming up again. He would've been 22 years old. His name was Jesus Garcia, they took him away on December 17, 2014. Three people, one teenager. Gang related. To everyone else it's just another case number, another sad story of the dangers of gangs. Joining a gang doesn't just affect you, it affects the whole family. When someone gets killed, their family members die that same day too.

I hate the what-ifs but, what if I would've told his mom about my dreams. People often don't believe me when I tell them this story. A "coincidence", they say. They can't believe that the universe sends you messages. Except back then, I kept pressing decline. Time is a funny thing, a phenomenon that amuses me. At the age of ten, I grew up. At the age of 14, he died.