

Lena is different from everyone else because of the way she looks, live, talk, and feel.

With three nonchalant elder brothers, two constantly fighting parents who rather beat her silly than help with anything, “the group” bully at school who live to taunt her, and Zoe, a friend she isn’t so sure about, her life is neither fun at home nor school.

Then an extreme assignment is forced on Lena. She must deliver, but how can a poor girl living off the trash of the wealthy and written off as “brainless” take on this extreme assignment? Lena finds a way, and in the midst of it all, she gains much more than a friend. Then Miracle Miller arrives the scene...



Angie Adeyi is ten years old and currently in fifth grade. Her love and passion for fiction writing have led her to win various writing awards, including *Author of the Year* award in her school district for four consecutive years.

Angie is hardworking, creative, and talented in diverse ways. Her father, Wole Adeyi, also an author inspired and mentored her into writing. She hopes to

grow to become a light and a blessing to her world through her works of fiction. “I AM ME” is her first book.

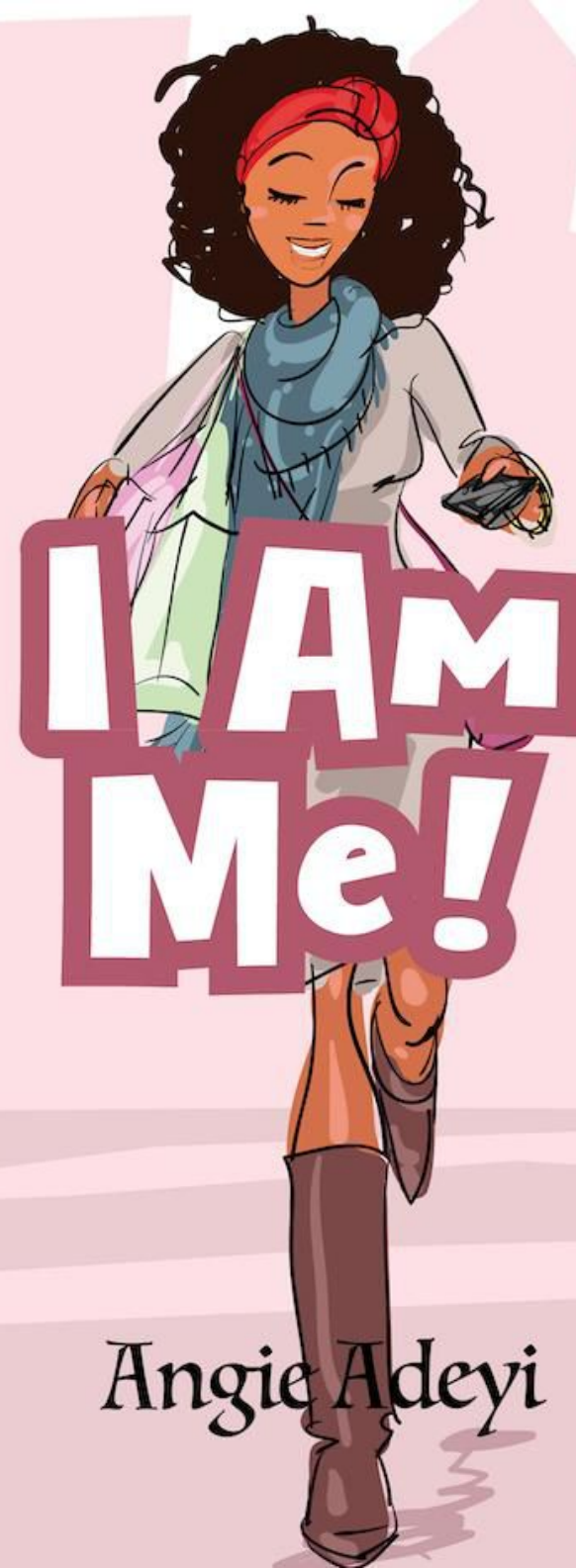
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Angie Adeyi

I AM ME!



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1

Lena Clark

Hi! I'm Lena Clark. I'm currently in 5th grade and ten years old. This is the story of how my life changed forever.



I'm an African American girl born in a little

town in Alabama and treated unfairly in life. I am the last of four children.

I never really liked life at school or at home. At school, I never really listened or cared about a thing and at home, my three elder brothers and two constantly fighting parents never really help with anything. I went to school with raggedy clothes and some homemade, plastic bottle sandals. If you really want the truth, my family is extremely poor, but between you and me I think I'm the only one in my family that believes God will help us out.

Most mornings when I wake up, I eat a mint to make my breath good; we can't afford toothpaste. I spray some perfume on myself that I found in some dumpster in a wealthy neighborhood. Oh yeah; that's right, I often go to wealthy neighborhoods to search their dumpsters for some nice trash I can use. While my lazy parents are still sleeping, I go to the fridge and drink a year old spoiled milk. Trust me; it only gets worse from here. I walk to school and go to

my first core classroom, which is English, taught by Mrs. Waldin. We learned about *Indefinite Pronouns* and some other stuff I wasn't listening to. Then Mrs. Waldin called me up to present a project I was supposed to do two weeks ago but didn't. I went up and made things up from the top of my head.

"So I'm going to be talking about...." I said, pointing at Mrs. Waldin because I forgot what I was even supposed to be presenting. It doesn't matter anyway, everyone thinks I'm "brainless," so no disappointment there.

Mrs. Waldin interjected, "We are learning about how to find Indefinite Pronouns, and you are supposed to be telling us how to find them."



Right then I wanted to throw a rock at her but of course, I couldn't. So I decided to make up something from the top of my head and started with a question.

"Indefinite Pronouns are when you find a pronoun that's not definite?"

The whole class stared and whispered, but I didn't care, the last thing I would have done is cry. Mrs. Waldin told the class to stop and asked me to sit down. So I did.

Then we had lunch and recess after which I went to Mr. Starry, my Math teacher. He's hilarious at times but super sensitive once you get to know him. We were taught *Order of Operations*. We played this game where we get a question and if you get it right you get to roll the dice. Whatever number the dice lands on is how many times you have to jump. I didn't understand how this was supposed to be fun. But every other kid was smiling, including Zoe (you will find out about her later). At that time she turned around and waved at me. I waved back. Some of Zoe's other friends are popular,

though she is not as popular, they still like her, thinking that she is rich. Sometimes I wish people could do that to me. Love me even though I'm not perfect.

Right after that class, I go to Mrs. Olivia, my Science teacher. She's probably my favorite since she allows us to talk, which is what we got to do today. So I went over to Zoe and her friends Mckayla, Chloe, and Presley, who all snicker once I get there. I say hi, but only Zoe responds. We both just wasted so much time staring and didn't even get to talk. The "group" (Zoe, Mckayla, Chloe, and Presley) walked away and rolled their eyes.

Zoe secretly whispered sorry to me, and I just nodded. Presley walked with one of those sassy walks and purposely bumped into my shoulder. So, I bumped into her on purpose too, pushing her into a hard metal chair. And of course, she started to cry. Mrs. Olivia sent me to the principal's office, but before I got halfway to

the door, I looked back to see the smirk on Presley's face, as she picked up her school bag from the floor with Mckayla and Chloe laughing at me, but I didn't give a care about that. Zoe had left them to go sit down.

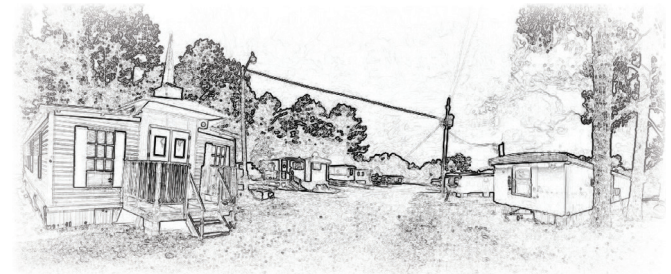


As I walked down the stairs slowly, I thought about the day I met Zoe outside of school.

2

Meeting Zoe

I woke up earlier than everyone in my family, well that happens every day. I went outside just to look at the early morning clouds. But suddenly I saw Zoe. Unsure of what I was seeing, I rubbed my eyes to see if it was really her because I'm pretty sure that no one would have imagined the teacher's pet on the streets of the poor. Well, that's what I call my neighborhood.



So, I called her name out loud, “Zoe! Zoe!” She turned back and looked into my eyes, but she just ran off sadder than she came. So I got up and ran after her to see her on the edge of a bush.

“What’s wrong?” I asked

She just shrugged her shoulders. I waited for her to pick up her courage to speak.

After 12 minutes she said, “Everyone thinks I’m perfect, but I’m not. I live in this sloppy dump, and my parents are the worst.”

I offered her a hand so she could stand up from the ground. She said thank you. I simply nodded.

From that point, I think she understood that I felt her pain. Just from eye contact, we could understand each other, and I think we became friends. Then I left her and went home to play on my flip phone. Not like the phone is anything to brag about...

Lost in thought about how I met Zoe, I did not notice the school bag in my way, so I tripped and fell over it, snapping me

back to reality. Some rich kid must have forgotten it there.

“Where was I...? Oh yeah; heading to the principal’s office, no thanks to Presley.”

As I was slowly walking down the stairs, trying to recover from the fall, my brain was going crazy. Is Zoe really my friend? What is the principal going to say? What are my parents going to say? Then I told myself: it’s ok; you are going to be just fine.

I finally get to the office and tell the secretary that I’m Lena Clark. She tells me to follow her to Mr. Harvard, the principal. As I walk in, I see his mean, old wrinkly face with a giant frown.



I sit in the chair and wait. He's just looking at me as if I'm crazy. In my head I'm thinking, is this old man going to talk. However, after that thought he did.

"Do you know why you are here, Lena?" He asked.

I simply nod.

"What is the rule we say on the announcements every day?" He continued.

"To keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself." I answered.

He then told me that my punishment will be to write Presley an apology note and also miss recess, doing some work. With that, he dismissed me.

I went to my next class, which is Mr. Lovato, my Social Studies teacher. Since I already missed half of the class while in the Principal's office, Mr. Lovato said I could just color, which I did. Everyone else was pointing and laughing at me, but I just kept smiling and drawing pictures of the moon. Twenty minutes later, it was time to go home.

After what felt like forever walking home, I finally get to my house and opened the door, waved to Zoe who was on the other street. As I walked into my house, my dad had the whipping cane, which is used to spank my brothers and me.

"We got a call from your principal, and we did NOT like what we heard!" My mom said sternly.

Then my dad got up and I got about three more marks on my body than I did before.

3

Lena's Assignment

I woke up the next morning to the shaking and shouting of my brother. His shaking and shouting is a regular occurrence in the house. So, I ignore it and get ready with my daily routine. I go out the door and walk to school with Zoe for the first time, and who also for the first time was wearing an outfit that looked like it got thrown up from a dumpster into another dumpster. Once we got to school, no one cared about what she was wearing. Sometimes I wish people loved me without a care of what I'm wearing.

After school, Mrs. Waldin called me up to a room where Mr. Starry - Science, Mrs.

Olivia - Math, Mr. Lovato - Social Studies, and of course, the woman who brought me to this torture, Mrs. Waldin. As I examined all the teachers smiling, I got suspicious; no one ever smiles at me in school, as I never seem to do anything right. My forehead grew bigger from nervousness, and Mr. Lovato told me to sit down.



As soon as I sat down, Mr. Starry said, "Lena we have seen you glaze off and misbehave, and we believe that you can do so much more."

As he was speaking, in my head I was telling myself that everything he was saying is so true.

Mrs. Olivia continues after him, "So we are assigning you to do..."

Right then I stopped her and asked, "You want me to do something?"

All the teachers nod.

"Yeah; in that case, I'm out," I said.

I stood up halfway, but I get stopped by Mrs. Waldin.

"Sit down!" she said sternly.

So I sit back on my seat in frustration.

All four teachers' sigh.

"Now, as we were saying, we want you to do something special for this school." Mrs. Olivia continued.

"And why should I do that?" I questioned.

"Well this school does pay for you to come here so this should be a way to say thanks." Mr. Starry answered.

"Whatever," I said defiantly under my breath.

I ask them if I can deliver pencils that may or may not be already broken.

Mrs. Waldin boldly said, "NO! You must do something extreme that everyone will love, like a fundraiser of some sort."

I couldn't take any more of this, so I just said, "Ok! Ok! Can I leave now?"

"Actually, yes you can," Mr. Lovato replied.

I rush out of that musty, old classroom, run down the stairs, and bust open the entrance doors. I start walking angrily down my walk route. Only after three minutes, I noticed a stray cat on the sidewalk. So I went to it and picked it up. It was super feisty, but gave up afterward and let me take care of it. I found a plastic bag and put the cat inside, leaving its head out so it can breathe. Then I continue walking home with a smile on my face.

I got home 30 minutes later, but that wasn't a good thing. I had to get ready for my parents to yell at me and tell me to drop the cat. Before I walk in, I think about what my family could be doing. I bet my brothers are fighting and my parents are shouting over the bills. Surprisingly, as I walked

in, my brothers were watching animal documentaries on our old television since we can't afford Disney Channel or Nickelodeon. My parents were reading magazines that were probably published at the same time they were born. At that moment everyone turns to look at me even the cat.

My dad's eyes widen, "What is that thing doing in here Lena?!"

I try to say it's a stray cat, but before I can even open my mouth my mom said, "That thing has to get out!!!"

My brothers didn't care; they were just petting the cat. I took the cat from them and went outside to sit on the wobbly chair and thought about my life. Then I looked at the cat and said sorry. From the way it looked at me, I could tell it understood what was going on and what I said.

Through the window, I could hear my family throwing a fit over the cat. I looked sadly at the cat I would soon have to leave. I

said sorry once more, took it out of the bag, put it on another sidewalk and ran inside to my room to cry. I cried myself to sleep.

4

Extreme Project

I woke up the next day and did my usual morning routine but in a different order. I wasn't in a great mood because I had to give up a sweet cat and I still have to do my "extreme" project for the school. I went on my walk to school with a frown. I was early to school, and my first class was language Arts - Mrs. Waldin. She was already in the class waiting, so I walked up to her and told her I was still thinking of ideas for the project, before going to sit down. We had a Language Arts test that morning, and I got a 96. No one thinks I'm smart enough for that type of grade, but they never give me the time to explain.

Next we went to Mr. Starry and played the math game again, but of course, I ended up doing it even though I didn't want to. "The group" snickered, as expected. We went to lunch and recess after.

My next classes were Mrs. Olivia and Mr. Lovato. Then we were dismissed to go home. I got to walk with Zoe, but we didn't talk. I think she felt the sparks of sadness on me. When my house was in sight, I said bye to her. However, I stayed outside because there's nothing else I can do than watch animals in their habitat or play on my flip phone. After a very long time, I got bored outside and went inside.

Surprisingly, no one was inside the house, which I should have noticed if I paid attention to the fact that my dad's lumpy, old car wasn't there. But I didn't care I went to the kitchen to eat the first Pop-Tart that Zoe gave me, my first ever Pop-Tart.

Twenty minutes later, my parents and three

brothers came in, they were all laughing and happy. It made me feel left out. This is really how I always feel. No friends at school and no real family members at home. The truth is no one cared that I was black; kids at school are bothered because I smelled like cigarettes since my parents smoke, my hair is always rough and dirty, and I'm not confident about my body. My parents greeted me, and my brothers waved. I told my parents about the assignment I have to do. They didn't really care though. I asked if I could go to Zoe's house to see if she would help me. They said yes. I packed papers, bags, and one more Pop-Tart, and left.

On getting to Zoe's house, my heart dropped. I saw moving trucks in her driveway. She saw me and came running to me. She had tears on her cheeks. I asked her what's going on and she said, "I'm so sorry, I was going to tell you earlier, but I noticed you were upset then." I asked how this happened, pointing to the moving truck, because she told me her

family doesn't have enough money for ANYTHING!

"My dad won the lottery - five billion dollars. So he just bought us a new house on the other side of town. But it's okay, I'm still going to the same school," she said.

Turns out the tears were tears of joy and freedom from poverty. I sighed.

She asked me why I came, and I said because I needed help on a project. I told her everything the teachers told me to do.

"I have an idea, that's if it's not about you becoming whom everyone wants you to be. And this can come from your experience. You may have had to go through life like this, but I promise you things WILL get better. Plus I will help you all the way through." She said.

"Wow that is awesome, I'm totally going to do that!" I said, shocked by her response.

I was so excited that I started running home but remembered I had to say bye to Zoe. So I turned back with tears even though we are still going to the same school. I go back and hug her like I've never hugged anyone before.



We say our goodbyes, and I leave. I was encouraged and I told myself that I would give attention to this project. So I started planning and noting down ideas.

After I picked my favorite one, I put it in action. My plan is to show the school that we are more than we appear. We don't have to be whom everyone wants us to be, we are

stronger together, and we can be different. I feel that this relates to me so much. I spent most of the day planning and working till I fell asleep. Zoe was lucky; at least she's moved to a whole new place.

I go to school the next day, and it's official that Zoe has moved. I ask Mrs. Waldin for a large piece of paper. She gave me an extremely long paper, which is exactly what I needed. I go through school minding my own business, until the last period in Mr. Lovato's class when "the group" comes up to me and Presley purposely steps on my foot. But I just keep working with Zoe on my side.



When school was over, I called my mom with the school phone to tell her that I will come home late because I'm working on my project. But of course, she didn't care. Mrs. Olivia and Zoe stayed with me as I finished my poster that said: "BE DIFFERENT."

I already talked to the principal to place me in an event during school so I could present my accomplishment. The event will be in two days. I have my speech, poster, and slideshows done.

Then I walked home when I was all good and ready with the project. Zoe had left me 15 minutes earlier to go home to help her parents with unpacking their things at her new house, after we were done with the last piece of the slides. When I got home, I studied my speech a little more before going to Mrs. Olivia's house. She had asked me to come to her house after getting home, and she called my parents to let them know. Not sure why she wants me over at her house, which is on the other side of town; we left school together.

5

Lena's Presentation

Finally, the day comes for me to present my project. I'm at school early wearing this beautiful blue silk shirt and a black skirt that Mrs. Olivia gave me. She also had my hair shampooed, flat-ironed straight and packed it together at the back of my neck with a blue ribbon, making my dirty, rough, curly hair look clean and smooth; she even covered most of the cuts and scratches on my face with foundation. She had my overgrown, dirty fingernails cleaned and trimmed; I thought my fingers belonged to someone else. I looked different and really good; it made me feel very confident.

I'm on the stage now, but curtains are still drawn to cover it. I hear hundreds of people behind the curtains, but I'm not scared. I'm not sure if Zoe is coming.

"I'm proud of me, I can make a difference," I say to myself, gently patting my chest. I peek through the curtains and see my family in the front row. I am so shocked to see them here; even more shocked to see my dad wearing a tie!

"Lena," a familiar voice whispered.

I turn around and see Zoe. I run and hug her like she just came back from the dead. She told me that she invited my parents. She said they didn't even know I had an event. "They were actually happy to come," she added.

I smiled.

"This is your time to shine Lena, go show this school that you are stronger on the inside than the outside." Zoe said proudly.

Ten minutes later, the principal announces my name as he draws the curtains apart.

Everyone was silent as I said, "Hi my name is Lena Clark and I'm here to show this school that you can make a difference."

Everyone claps for me, even my family. I continue, "Well, everything I'm about to say is based off my experience. I had a friend help me so I can't take all the credit."

The poster I made was up on the screen already, it was time for my slideshow.

"I have some slides to show you; the first slide says, *Be Yourself*."

"Being yourself is a big part of life because if you act like someone else that's not truly you, then no one will know the real you..."

I pause as the audience claps.

I flip to the next slide that says, *Be Different*.

"Being different isn't a crime, you're just taking your stand in the world and showing the world that you are amazing the way you are..."

I pause again, as the audience claps.

The next slide says, *Run Your Own World*. “Running your own world isn’t as diva-like as it sounds, it just means that your world is yours and your actions control it...”



From that point, the audience got on their feet clapping and cheering me on, and for the first time ever I could see the look of pride for me on the faces of my parents.

Having done with the slideshow, it was time for my actual speech, so I began when the audience quieted down:

“Now as I said earlier, my name is Lena Clark; I’m different from everyone else because of the way I look, live, talk, and feel. I’m different,

and I like that, I love that I have haters because they make me stronger. And I love my family and friends. I encourage everyone to spread kindness, positivity, be yourself, stay strong, run your world, be whom you were created to be, not whom people want you to be. I am me; very proudly me, and you too should be proudly you, only then can you indeed run your own world; if not others will continue to run your world for you until they run you aground...”



EVERYONE stood up and started clapping; from owners of businesses down to my parents, the principal, teachers and other students. Afterward, my parents hugged

and kissed me like crazy. Zoe came down too, and we hugged for a long time because she had to go back to her new house, which isn't that far from the school.

I went back home with my parents and something changed that day. They apologized for all the ways they've treated me, and we discussed a few changes that needed to be made, and we decided to move to a new house!

My performance went viral, and people know me all over now; I got much goodwill and made some money. My life got better, and I got more friends. I love my life now, and it wouldn't have happened if I never accepted myself and rose to the challenge. I am me, and I won't sell myself short by trying to be anyone else. Moreover, by embracing that, my life changed for good!

6

A Changed Life

It's been two years since we moved to our new house. My brothers are so nice, and my parents are sweet. Life is just going great. I would never ask for anything better. Zoe and I are best friends, and so are our parents. I know I didn't tell you this before, but Zoe is an only child.

Oh, guess what?! Zoe and I eventually reported the troublemakers, "the group" (Mckayla, Chloe, and Presley) for bullying, and they got what's coming to them. Life is going so well now at school.

From the things you've heard so far, it seems

like everything is that magical heaven. But then it's not so, a problem occurred. I think I'm going way too fast, so let me start from the top.

Back to the day of my speech: When my family went home, my brothers immediately went to bed. After they were snoozing like pigs, my parents showed me a picture of our new house. It was big and gorgeous. The best part is that Zoe and I are neighbors. My parents told me that the Millers (Zoe's family) would help us out with paying our bills. It took a while to pack, but we did. My family moved to our new neighborhood. The houses were big, and I loved them so much, but after a while I got used to the house and it wasn't that big of a deal anymore.



One amazing day, my birthday, to be precise, I woke up to the sound of knocking on my wooden, glass screen door. It was Zoe and her family. They all had packages in their hands and brought their dog, Scruffy. I invited them into the living room. Scruffy loves me, so he came straight to me. My parents and brothers - Samuel, Daniel, and Isaac, came from their rooms upstairs to greet the Millers. They also had packages in their hands. When they all sat down, I had a feeling that they planned this. Three seconds later everyone shouted, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY!"

It was so great to be friends with the Millers, even if they were white. Black and white people can be friends, but it seems that some people have problems with that. I said thank you to everyone as we ate cake and opened my presents. Scruffy obviously can't talk, so he barked a lot to show that he loved me as much as everyone else.

Zoe and I persuaded our parents to let her

stay so we could have a playdate. They said we could, but we only have five hours. As soon as they said yes, we raced to the top of the stairs. We played hide and seek, board games with my brothers, called friends, baked brownies and finished the whole tray. Unfortunately, Zoe had to leave, and I had to get ready for church.

Oh yeah, I didn't tell you yet... my family goes to church now. The Millers influenced us. I have some more big news.

Since my parents got some help from the Millers to cover all our utility bills in the house; this was part of the goodwill I received after my speech, and so we save money on bills, they bought me dresses and my brothers' tuxes. I picked out this shimmery blue dress to wear to church before saying goodnight to my family members, one by one. Oh yeah, I forgot to mention, one of my birthday gifts was an iPhone XR, and it's amazing. I say a thankful prayer, and drift off to sleep.

The next morning, my alarm clock wakes me up. I hop out of bed straight to the bathroom across the hall and brush my teeth with some pink-colored toothpaste that tastes like cinnamon. I take a nice warm shower; I love showers, in our old house we had to get a bucket of cold water. I apply lotion to my body and put on my dress. I style my hair, and I wear these pretty wedges, which is basically heels, but minimal heels. I look in the mirror one last time before I go downstairs to get my Bible, eat some pancakes and get on my phone.

Five minutes later, everyone is ready to go, and we go over to the Millers' house, they are ready too. We split up into two cars:

Car 1: Daniel, Samuel, Isaac, Mr. Miller, and my dad.

Car 2: Me, Zoe, Mrs. Miller, and my mom. Scruffy stayed home; I know, it's sad.

Our church is twenty minutes away. Zoe and I use that time to study our bible lessons from last week. Once we get to church we

all exit the two cars and enter the church, greeting a few people. Zoe and I go directly to our class and my brothers go to their youth church. Service starts, and we start learning. Today we learned about Joseph and his brothers. We learned that Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, so they take off the coat of many colors that Joseph's dad gave him, they put Lamb's blood on it, and sold Joseph to some merchants, who took him to Egypt. With the lamb's blood on Joseph's coat as evidence, they convinced their dad that he died even though he didn't.

That was all that we learned because we didn't have much time. All the kids left, including Zoe and me. We went to our parents who have already picked up my brothers; we all got into the car and went home.

Once we get home; Zoe and I had chores to do and homework to finish, so we can't play much, since we also have school tomorrow. We still go to the same school.

I'm always remembered for my speech or for being "the girl who changed lives". I went to bed around 9:30pm with my clothes already prepared for school tomorrow. I am going to wear skinny jeans with an oversized T-shirt. That's my style, and I don't care if someone likes it or not.

A Note from Zoe

I wake up at 7:30 because my school opens at 8:30. I got all ready wearing my skinny jeans and my oversized t-shirt, brushed my hair and put it in a bun. Then I went down to eat breakfast. I walked to the bus stop with Zoe to wait for the school bus. We waited a while before the bus finally came and we got on. When we got off the bus and entered the school, we noticed “the group” walking to the principal’s office. They looked embarrassed by the way that everyone was looking at them. They went into a closed room, also known as Mr. Harvard’s office. In the halls of the entrance, everybody booed them, even Zoe and I.



On hearing us boo “the group” in the hallway, one of the teachers came out and asked us to go to our classrooms. Then Zoe and I went up to our class with Mrs. Waldin and learned about punctuation, after which

we took a test over it and I got a 100. Zoe got a 90. This one kid who thinks he's the smartest in the class got an 80; his name is Bowen. Presley, Mckayla, and Chloe who came back from the office in the middle of the test all got 90. That's no shocker they always give each other answers. Jack, the class geek, got a 100. Carson, the "coolest" in the class got a 70.

The next class was with Mr. Starry, the math teacher. We learned about subtracting and adding fractions. We practiced a few problems and the class ended. We went for lunch, and recess after.

At Mrs. Olivia's class, we learned about circuits and how energy flows. Then, we had Social Studies next where we learned about the Revolutionary War and the different types of colonies.

At the end of this awesome day of school, we finally got to go home. Zoe and I got on the bus with some of our other friends,

Megan and Maddie. Although we have these two friends, Zoe and I promised to always think of each other first. Megan and Maddie are great, but they don't live in our neighborhood, so they get dropped off long before us. After a while, which felt like forever, the bus finally gets to our stop. We exit the bus and walk home.

Zoe opens her house door, and we both go inside. I can't go to my house because my parents are at work.

Yep! I said it; my parents now have jobs! I am so proud of them.

As we enter her house, I see Mr. and Mrs. Miller and I go over to give them hugs.

Mrs. Miller asks, "What do y'all want to eat?" Adding that we had a choice of either tacos or spaghetti. As soon as she said that, Zoe and I looked at each other, thinking the same thing.

"Spaghetti Tacos," we shout, as Mr. and Mrs. Miller laugh.

She always lets us have it; they're really good. Spaghetti tacos are basically taco

shells with spaghetti in it.

At 5.30pm, my parents called Mr. Miller to say they are back from work and for me to come home. I said bye to everyone and went on my way. Before I left, Zoe slipped a note in my hand written, “Lena,” and gave me a wink. I went out the door and went next door to my house.

I said hi to my parents before going upstairs to my room. My mom was baking brownies while my dad was working. On my way up I said hi to my brothers that just came back from high school. The oldest one, Samuel is a senior, Isaac the next oldest is a junior, and then the youngest, Daniel, a sophomore.

Samuel is going to college next year, Isaac, in two years; and Daniel, in three years. For me, I have thousands of years ahead. But you know time flies when God is on your side. My brothers are awesome. They all play football and are going to college with a scholarship. I’m so proud of them.

Now settled in the privacy of my room, I open and read the note Zoe gave me. It said that her mom was pregnant. I was so happy. Fireworks and screams were going on in my head. Every night we have family prayers; we had one tonight, and we all took turns saying prayers, I prayed especially for Zoe and her family, careful not to mention the unborn baby out loud, but prayed for him or her in my heart, since I wasn’t sure if my family knew about it.

I went to bed really happy wearing joggers and a shirt with a heart, instead of my nightwear. In my excitement I forgot to change into my nightwear. I whisper a thankful prayer once more and fall asleep.

8

The Baby

I woke up the next day with a huge smile on my face because of what I found out yesterday. ZOE IS GETTING A BABY! I forgot, she didn't tell me what gender yet. But no matter what I was still happy for her. I get on the bus with Zoe after eating breakfast.

"Did you read the note?" Zoe asks. "Yes!!!" I shout right in her face excitedly, grabbing her in a tight hug.

I ask her what the gender is and she said that her parents are finding out today. We sat in the bus full of happiness, holding each other's hands till we got to school.

On getting to school the principal called Zoe in. She turned back to look at me once more; I could tell she was worried, but I had to go on to Mrs. Waldin's class. We were still learning about how to know when to put a punctuation mark and know which one to use. Zoe came back after the class was over. She looked disappointed but happy at the same time.

She came up to me and said, "My mom is in the hospital bed right now. The baby is a girl and is soon coming. My dad called Mr. Harvard to let me know."

I was happy for her, and hugged her, telling her everything would be okay. We continued the rest of the day as nothing happened. At lunch and recess, Megan and Maddie kept asking Zoe what happened, but she just kept saying nothing.

At the end of school, we went on the bus, but when we got dropped off instead of going to Zoe's house we went to mine. We couldn't go to hers since her parents were in the hospital. When we walked into the

house, there was so much air of depression. There were tears on the faces of my parents and brothers. Zoe and I walked faster, and I asked, "What's wrong"! I was panicked.

My mom said, "Zoe when I say this I want you to be completely calm."

Zoe tears up and nods. My mom continues, "We got a call from your dad and..." My mom couldn't even continue so my dad did. "We got a call that the baby came too early and that the surgery didn't go well. The baby may not make it and your mom is not doing well either"

Zoe blows up with tears, and so did I, in fact, everyone did.

My dad goes to hold Zoe to calm her, "Zoe, your mom is not dead she is just sick. We are still not sure how this happened though."

Zoe's eyes are fire red from crying. She feels like thousands of bullets hit a rock and fell on her. She ran up the stairs, grabbed our house phone and called her dad who was in the hospital. I ran after her and sat on the couch with her.

When her dad answered, she said, "Dad,

what happened!"

"Zoe, I'm so sorry the baby came out at the wrong time; your mom and the baby are very sick." Mr. Miller replied.



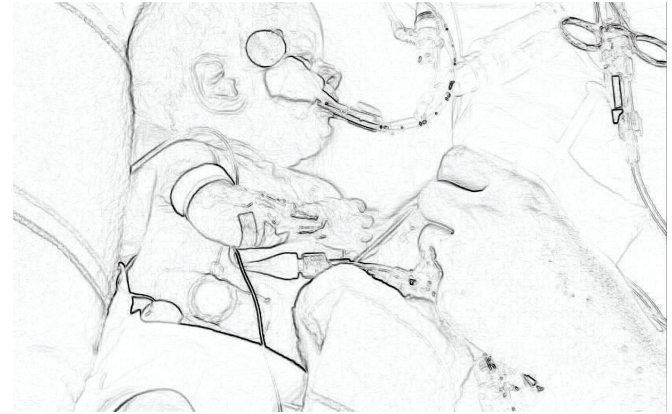
Both of them were speaking with shaky voices as if there was an apocalypse and they were the last alive. Zoe and her dad say a quick prayer. When they're done, I greet Mr. Miller and tell him sorry for this painful route his family had to take.

"Lena, I can't thank you enough, I'm so sorry for this. Please take care of Zoe; I'm going to stay at the hospital, just in case my wife or even the baby get better" He said with tears, and hung up.

Zoe gets up and hugs me. She wipes her tears and motions for me to follow her. Past the middle of the stairs she says boldly, “We can’t control everything that happens, but we can at least enjoy what we have left. Everyone we have to get up and enjoy now, rather than sorrow for 15 more hours!” Everyone giggled with tears still on their faces.

First, we use a key that Mrs. Miller gave us to go into Zoe’s house and get Scruffy, then returned to mine. We spend the rest of the day baking, sorting through items, cleaning, and playing family games since we consider the Millers as family. My parents called the school and told them we wouldn’t be attending school on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

We spent those days visiting the hospital to check on Mrs. Miller and do whatever we can to help. The doctors said the baby is gone but Mr. Miller said, “That baby is NOT dead until God allows it to be and my wife WILL be okay!”



If it weren’t for Mr. Miller we would be planning funerals by now. But every day we would go there and pray like we’ve never prayed before.

It’s been a week now since Zoe and I have not been to school. There has been some progress on the baby and Mrs. Miller. Both of their lungs had a few breaths, but we continue praying and God does the rest. Every Sunday we still go to church. We’ve had a few people visit to greet the family. Scruffy doesn’t have an idea what’s going on, in fact he’s having one heck of a time. We’ve waited day after day believing God will help.

On this particular day, probably the best day of our lives, the baby started breathing on her own; everyone cheered in the hospital, even the workers. But Mrs. Miller never improved.

Three weeks later her funeral was held at Baptist Church of God. People were sad, but we all comforted each other, believing she's in a better place now. Mr. Miller let Zoe and I name the baby. We both decided on, Miracle. We picked that name because her being alive is a miracle.

When both families settled back into some semblance of normalcy, my parents told us that we have to go back to school now. That sucks because now I have so much more to learn. But that's not so bad. Everyone at school said sorry to Zoe for the loss of her mom. People also congratulated her for her new baby sister.

Zoe, Isaac, Samuel, Daniel, my mom, my dad, Mr. Miller, Scruffy, the new baby,

Miracle, and I are now one big happy family. Oh, and "the group," who are they again? Totally humbled, powerless, and forgotten!

9

Miracle Miller

My name is Miracle Miller. I'm in 6th grade.



My elder sister, Zoe and her best friend, Lena are in college and have only a few weeks left. Lena's brothers; Samuel, Isaac,

and Daniel are now married. Their weddings were beautiful. I was the flower girl for each one of them; and I call them my brothers, just as I call Lena my sister. Both our families adopted each other as one big happy family. That means I have two sisters and three brothers.

Ever since my brothers and sisters left, it has been boring at home. My dad is an only parent since my mom died while having me. My dad is basically a grandparent since my brothers have their own kids now, but he's not that old. We still go to church. I go to a different school from the one Lena and Zoe went to; I go to one really close to home just in case my dad needs me. I'm really smart, I get all A's and have many friends. Sometimes I consider myself a cool kid, but something happened that changed my mind about whom I want or don't want to be!

I was about 4 years old when I first found out I didn't have a mom. I would go to the

stores with my dad and hear kids saying the word mom. So on one of those days, I asked my dad about my mom, and he told me what happened at my birth. After he'd shared the sad story with me, we both agreed my mom is in a better place. My brothers; Samuel, Isaac, and Daniel, also told me not to worry, that she is with God.

However, now I'm 11 years and in 6th grade. I attend P.3 Sanders Intermediate School, and my teachers are Mr. Brown - Science, Mrs. Hernandez - Language Art, Mr. Norlin - Social Studies, and Mrs. Landing - Math.

I care a lot about my fashion; I can never wear a Nike jacket with Adidas shoes. I can't have blue shoes with a green shirt. I usually pick a color every day and wear that same color. That's just me.

I know that I'm lucky to be alive but life would be better if my mom were here; we would shop, bake, and do everything

together. My dad is still awesome though, and he's hilarious. I can't help but worry about him sometimes though, so I treat him like every day is his last day on Earth. I love him, but we both know he's getting old and gets sick more often now. Sometimes I cry myself to sleep from the thought of ever losing him. I call Lena all the time because she soothes me and makes my mind relax. She tells me to always talk to God about everything.

Samuel, Isaac, and Daniel visit a lot with their wives; it's always so fun when they visit.



Sometimes, they take my dad, Mr. and Mrs.

Clark and I out to entertainment centers and it's always fun. I know my dad misses my mom but it's not like there's something we can do. I would've loved my mom alive to make my dad happy rather than me alive. I just wish there's something I could do. Words can't explain how much I love my dad and I want what's best for him.

Most Sundays, I go to church with my brothers while my dad stays home with one of their wives. Whenever I have to go somewhere, someone always has to watch over him and Mr. and Mrs. Clark. That's a good thing.

This Monday morning I don't have to go to school because it is a student holiday, and Zoe and Lena came home for a visit. Mr. and Mrs. Clark came over to the house. We all had so much fun. My dad smiled cheek to cheek. We had such a great time. We played bible games, watched TV, and just talked.

At some point, my dad got emotional and

said, "Just like old times but without my wife. However, I'm happy that I didn't lose both of you. I love you, Miracle, I want you to know that, always."

I smiled, and we continued our family fun. Suddenly Zoe and Lena said that they have good news.

"We are graduating in a few weeks and will be able to see you every day from then; well, at least till we figure out our next move!" Zoe announced.

I was excited I would be able to see my sisters every day in a few weeks. We spent the rest of the day having a blast. Unfortunately, my fun had to be cut short as I had to go to bed early for school tomorrow, so my dad sent me upstairs to my room.

10

New York City

Much later that night, I heard voices downstairs that roused me from sleep, so I sneaked halfway down the stairs to check, and realized it was the voices of Zoe, Lena, Mr. Clark, Mrs. Clark, and my dad. I leaned in close to the wall separating me from them, to listen and made sure they didn't know I was there. I could only make out a few of the words they were saying. I heard Mrs. Clark say, "You have to tell her someday; she is 11 years old."

I think she was talking to my dad.

And Lena added, "It's better to tell her now before she finds out on her own."

I was breathing so hard that they all

looked back as I ran to my room, leaving them downstairs believing no one was there. I just went to bed, thinking that they would tell me whatever it is soon.

Today is Tuesday. I will be wearing navy blue overall jeans dress, a blue T-shirt, and white Nike shoes. I start the day with my daily morning routine. I take a shower first, brush my teeth, apply some lotion to my body, and then brush my hair after I put on my clothes. I make way downstairs with the memory of what happened last night. There's something my dad is supposed to tell me but I couldn't stay long enough for more gossip. I pray to God it's nothing bad.

I go downstairs to see everyone still there: Lena, Zoe, Mr. and Mrs. Clark, and my dad. Zoe tells me to sit down, pointing to one of our red, puffy chairs.

Mr. Clark noticing how nervous I am, starts, "Miracle, do not be nervous, it's nothing bad."

I sigh in relief and wait for someone to tell

me what's going on!

My dad finally speaks, "For a few reasons and since your sisters are going to be out of college soon, we may have to move to New York City for a bit. One reason is that we have to..."

I stopped him! How was this supposed to be good news! I stormed out of the house and saw my bus already waiting there at the bus stop. I ran to it and went inside.



As I sat down with my friends, I told myself to forget everything that just happened. My best friend, Sophia reminds me that we have a test in Social Studies, I respond with a groan and we both laugh.

All of my other friends, Sophia, and I just talk about random things that pop out of nowhere. I try to turn the New York City problem into an awesome celebration. "I'm moving to NYC; I'm not sure when but my dad says pretty soon."

Everyone becomes silent, and they all look at me, including the bus driver. All in sync everyone says things like: I'm going to miss you, you are so lucky, and some just stared in surprise at me. But after a while, everyone said that going to New York City is awesome. On my face, I have a teeny weeny smirk, but in my head, I'm going crazy! Everyone thinks I'm cool for some reason.

This news spread among us 6th graders like wildfire because people would come up to me and start telling me how lucky I am or make some money signs with their hands because they think I'm rich.

People would always hang out with me, but now I feel bad because they see me as this cool kid who is also now moving to New

York City, the city of stars, and so it's going to be to party all day, every day. I don't even know the reason why we are going yet.



However, I continued the day like nothing ever happened. Then Sophia told me that my going to New York City was all over the school. I just don't get it, my going to New York City isn't even that cool; why is everybody making it such a big deal? I mean it's like someone saying he or she is going to Maryland; only that New York City is prettier. I don't know why I keep getting this feeling that I'm lying. Wait... I AM! But the only thing I have to do is find out why we are going; then I would know if

it's for a cool reason or not. If it's for like a one-time event then, yeah, I'm a goner.

A few hours after school I get on the bus with people asking me questions about New York City. It's gotten old, like seriously, who talks about the same thing for eight hours?!

11

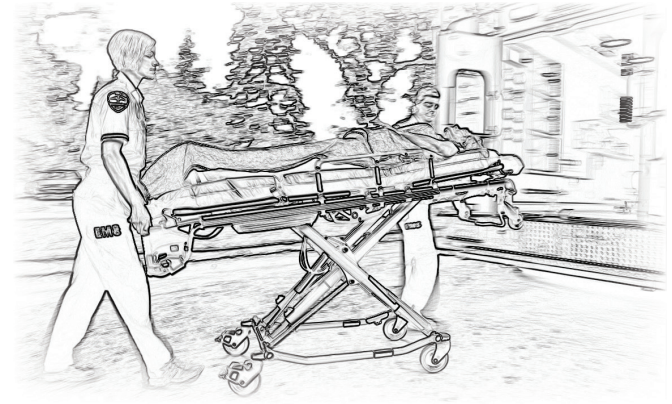
The Reason

I got off the bus at my stop and walked over to my house, the door wasn't locked, but it appeared nobody was home, so I shouted, "Anyone Home!"

No one answered. I walked into the kitchen and started screaming as I saw my dad laying down on the floor with medications in his hands. I got my phone and called Zoe. She doesn't answer. I called the Clarks; luckily Mr. Clark answered. I told him that my dad has collapsed. He hung up, and in the next 20 seconds he was knocking on the door.

He ran in with Mrs. Clark when I opened the door, and immediately called for an

ambulance in a panic, while gently scolding me that I should have called 911 before I called him. A few minutes later, the ambulance arrived at my house and in no time, they wheeled my dad into the vehicle and sped off to the hospital; Mr. Clark joined him in the ambulance, while Mrs. Clark drove us in her car to the hospital.



This moment got me thinking if this is how my family felt when my mom and I were sick. I CANNOT lose my dad; he's too important to my life. I started praying with Mrs. Clark.

We got to the hospital and had to wait in the Waiting room, Mr. Clark was already

there. I see people praying, crying, and some shouting at doctors to see their family in the hospital room. Forty-five minutes later, the doctor called us to come see my dad. My dad opens and closes his eyes; he looks exhausted. The doctor tells us that he's quite ill. I am in shock because I didn't know he was that sick, no one told me.

My dad weakly signals for me to come closer. He held my hand and told me the only reason why we are going to New York City is because he is very sick and each day I leave for school the Clarks take him around to different hospitals seeking medical help for his condition. Everyone knew about this except me.

"We tried to tell you this morning but you left in anger. I have a bad heart and require surgery to fix it. The hospitals in our little town are not well equipped to handle my condition. We've been referred to a hospital in New York City and we confirmed they could help me, but to give me the medical care that I need, the doctors say I have to

go to New York." My dad explained.

"But why were you laying on the floor? You got me so scared!" I said.

He told me that it was because he wasn't getting the proper medical care he needs and we're going to New York City this week to get it. I didn't argue; I would rather move somewhere far from my friends than lose my dad.

I asked him one more question. "Why does this involve Zoe and Lena? Do they have jobs there? Are they coming with us to New York City?" Ok; maybe more than one question.

He answered all of them, "It involves them because, yes, they may get jobs there; they have the final interview for the jobs there this week. They are coming with us to New York City. And we are going to stay there for as long as necessary, but the plan is to return home whenever the doctors clear me to come back home..." He paused to take a breath.

"I know that you are asking yourself if this is going to be fun and I'm going to answer

that for you; it will be fun once I get better.”

He closed his eyes and slept. The doctors told us to come back tomorrow when I get back from school.

That night I stayed over at the Clarks and they let me sleep in the guest room. We told Zoe and Lena what had happened and they said they would come with us tomorrow to visit my dad. However, before I slept, I promised myself to tell everyone the truth at school about moving to New York City, and then I laid out my clothes ready for tomorrow: a pair of cheetah print sweats and a black T-shirt. I said my prayers and drifted off to sleep, feeling disappointed in myself for trying to be a “cool kid.”

I wake up in a start to the sound of my extremely loud alarm. I got ready, and went down to eat the breakfast Mrs. Clark made for me. She made me two slices of toast bread, one strip of bacon, eggs, and orange juice. It was really good.



I hug Mr. and Mrs. Clark goodbye after the breakfast, as they reassure me I need not worry about my dad, and I head for my bus stop.

I got on the bus and sat beside Sophia, as I prepared for how I was going to tell everybody that I’m going to New York City because of my dad’s health. So, I first tell Sophia about it, but before she starts to open her big mouth, I put my hand over her mouth and announced in the bus, “I haven’t been very clear about the reason why I’m going to New York City. I’m going to let everyone know the reason now.”

Everyone nods even though I was talking directly to Sophia.

“I’m not going there to party and meet famous celebrities. I’m going because my dad needs a good hospital to help him. He’s really sick and the hospitals here aren’t well equipped to manage his condition. I will only be staying in New York temporarily and will come back when my dad recovers. I don’t know how long we will be gone.”

Some people looked disappointed, but everyone seemed to understand.

Sophia then speaks for everyone, “We understand, but next time we want you to know that we don’t care if you’re going to Hollywood to pick up trash, we still love you and thanks for telling us the truth.”

Sophia hugs me and I sigh in relief, telling myself that being a “cool kid” SUCKS!!!

Now I would just have to wait for the end of school for the word to spread.

Throughout the day people gave me winks, and from that, I was really confused.

However, later on in the day, I learned that the reason people winked at me was to give me support for my dad. No one cared that I’m not going to party and see celebrities in New York City. Everyone actually helped me go through my dad’s illness. But I told myself that I WILL NEVER BE A “COOL KID!”

By the time I got home, Mr. and Mrs. Clark, Zoe, and Lena were ready to go see my dad in the hospital. When we got there he was already on his feet. We were all so excited, and we took him home.

The next day, after my dad left the hospital, we started packing our bags, and two days later, we were aboard our flight to New York City.

When we arrive at John F. Kennedy Airport, New York, my heart skips a beat. The buildings are gorgeous! The roads appear glossy, the sky is a bright baby blue, and the air is full of daisy aroma.

I didn't want to leave, I wanted to enjoy the view, but my dad is scheduled for his surgery later on today.



We went to the hotel, which made me feel like I was in the White House. We hurriedly unpacked our bags and took a taxi from the hotel to the hospital. It was huge, but I had no time to admire it, we rushed inside and the doctors, who were already waiting for us, took him and placed him on the stretcher bed and rolled him away, while the nurse spoke to us and asked us to come back tomorrow.

The doctors prepped him for surgery and

took him to the Operating Room. I whispered a prayer for my dad as Zoe, Lena, Mr. Clark, Mrs. Clark, and I leave the hospital.

From the hospital, Zoe and Lena went straight to their job interview for photography; while Mr. and Mrs. Clark take me out to explore New York City! I got to see the Statue of Liberty, ate at this fabulous restaurant, and shopped for outfits.

A few hours later, Lena and Zoe came back to the hotel frowning.

"We didn't make it...", Lena said; looking a bit serious while Zoe tried so hard not to burst out laughing.

Everyone frowned.

"That's something we would say if we didn't make it...", Zoe said, still struggling not to laugh.

"WE MADE IT!!!" They both shouted, with Zoe laughing so hard.

We all go into a group hug, really happy, congratulating them, and talking excited-

ly. Mr. and Mrs. Clark go over to the only couch in the room and sit with their heads together in pure joy and gratitude for their daughters, and also how much their lives have changed because of them.



Two hours later, we all settle into our beds to get a good night rest after praying for my dad.

The next day, my brothers arrive New York City, and we all go to see my dad, who's already awake in bed, though he looks weak, but welcomes us with a weak smile on his face.



He's finally getting the proper medical care he needs; the surgery was successful, and we look forward to having fun with him soon as he is fully recovered. After spending two days with us in New York, my brothers left because they had to go back to work.

I love this; Zoe and Lena have jobs and just got an apartment in New York City. My dad is going to be ok. My family is here helping Zoe and Lena settle into their new apartment, and the best part is I can visit them every holiday when school is out. In two weeks my dad, Mr. and Mrs. Clark, and I will head back home to our little town in

Alabama; I have to go back to school, and I know for sure, I am not going to be that “cool kid!” It’s all so fake and way too much hard work to keep up. I’m just going to be myself; I refuse to be defined by what people think of me. I am me! I run my own world. And for now I am having a blast with my sisters in New York City.



