

WRITING

Marcela

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TYPE

NARRATIVE

GENRE

GRADES 9–12

He gets up from his bed, navigating through the Barbie dolls and makeup sets that he left on the floor. He was Barbie’s makeup artist yesterday, and today he’ll be her hairdresser; at least that’s what he’s planning. There’s not one day where he neglects his dolls after school. Right after he finishes his homework, it’s off to play pretend, to remove himself from reality and be what he wants to be.

He goes to the bathroom, brushes his teeth, looks at himself in the mirror, and thinks: I wish my hair were longer. I wish my eyelashes were longer, too. He pouts and continues to get ready for another day of school, another day where the world revolves around him. He truly is the definition of being the center of attention.

His place in middle school is the celebrity that nobody likes; however, he’s still successful. He’s unforgettable, everyone is talking about him, and he’s extremely rich. Rich in confidence, in pride. That is

him. He may be one of the youngest in his grade, but he has already turned more heads in the last few months than the eighth grade's basketball team captain turned in three years. And today, he will do it again. He doesn't plan to, but he will.

"Marcus? Are you ready for school?" His mom calls him down. He's already dressed, and as his accessory, he is wearing the biggest smile you'll ever see. Marcus makes his way down the stairs, wishing his mom could see the outfit he has put together today. She has no idea what her son is wearing or what he looks like, but she knows who he is. She hears what her son says quietly under his breath. She hears the way he talks. She hears him crying when he can't get a hairstyle right. The sound of the styling gel container popping open and the combs falling

into the sink. She notices all these things about her son, and she still loves him. The son she gave birth to eleven years ago, the one she held in her hands with so much love and happiness. There's nothing her son could ever do that would make her lose that feeling.

"Mama, I'm more than ready," Marcus says, tippy-toeing with excitement.

His mother's eyes are directed straight ahead. She's not sure if she's looking at her son or a wall. Her hands guide her down from his shoulders to his shirt and then to a piece of fabric, something from her childhood that she recognizes. She recognizes the three buttons on the front, the two deep pockets on the side, and the cutoff at the bottom with the soft lining.

“My skirt, Marcus,” she whispers in a breathy voice. “My pink skirt... you’re wearing it.”

He nods proudly.

“My pink skirt?” He asks, hoping that his mother will agree to his proposal.

“Yes, my love. It’s yours,” she laughs emotionally, sniffing her nose and caressing what she knows is her son’s cheek. “Anything that’s mine is yours.”

Marcus’s arms wrap themselves around his mother’s waist, gripping her with gratitude and affection. Her hands meet his head, and she kisses him on his forehead.

“My pink skirt,” Marcus repeats happily to himself.

After that moment with his mom, he says goodbye, getting ready to board the school bus outside the house. His head is held up high. Nothing you could say to him would affect him. He’s the protagonist, and we’re the extras.

The bus driver, Mr. Campbell, is quick to shoot Marcus a look of pity, but Marcus beams at him, says “good morning,” and walks to his seat. He already knows that everyone on that bus is looking at him, but he feels the same—positive and optimistic, completely unfazed.

The girls laugh at his outfit, even though they’d most likely wear it themselves. The boys call him gay and weird, even though they have no idea about Marcus’ sexual orientation. Still, Marcus feels like a shooting star, speeding through the aisle and stealing the attention of everyone around him whether they are mesmerized or not.

He sits alone in the back of the bus, peeking at the girl sitting across from him. She's not alone, but she sits on the aisle side of the seat, one leg folded on top of the other.

Marcus copies her and does the same. The girl doesn't notice him staring at her; she might be one of the prettiest girls he's ever seen. He loves her long hair, her eyelashes, and her toned face. He feels guilty for noticing how physically mature the girl is at a young age, but he only admires her beauty for a long enough time until (for the first time in a long time) he starts to feel just a little pessimistic about himself.

Marcus stops looking at the girl and stares at his lap, sighing deeply. He comes to the realization that he doesn't look like this girl, he doesn't sound like this girl, and—looking at the tag on her bookbag—he would never have the same name as this girl.

But he remembers: Nothing is impossible. Never say never.

The bus starts to move, and he lays his head against the window, watching a flock of birds in the sky fly by. His lips curl on the side, and he almost lets out a chuckle; even though the birds fly together, they are individually free to fly anywhere.

One day, he thinks to himself. One day, they'll be calling me something else. One day, Mama will help me change my name.

And when he finally thinks of one, he grins.

When the bus finally stops at school, Marcus is the last to get up from his seat and depart. Mr. Campbell twitches his eyebrow, somewhat bothered that he can't get to the

kid.

“What is it, Marcus? Am I going to have to deal with this little whim of yours each time I drive you to school?” Mr. Campbell knows what he says is a risk and that he can lose his job for harassing his students. It’s not a problem with Marcus, however. He holds an invisible shield that Mr. Campbell always bounces off of.

“Marcela,” Marcus corrects him, eyeing him with the same charming grin from before.

“Call me Marcela.”