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Inflation

Arilina was twirling around her whistle in her hands while she sat at the table waiting for her mom to finish dinner. Usually she didn't take her whistle out at home so she wouldn't lose it but today it was her brother, Marcus' turn to watch the television and she was bored out of her mind. Marcus was watching some type of documentary about whales. There wasn't a lot to watch on tv because the government controlled what was on tv and they just repeated a lot of programs.

"Ari, put that away. I don't want you losing it, it's very important," Mama says as she sets down food on the table.

Arilina gets up and puts the whistle in her tote bag that also had her pocketbook and some gum in it. She carried her bag everywhere she went. It was her prized possession.

"Guys come eat," Mama says as she sits down at the table.

Ari and Marcus go to the table and see that there is spaghetti and a piece of garlic bread for each of them. This was Arilina's favorite food. Mama made it once a week as a reward to her and Marcus for working hard at their jobs.

"Yay, thanks Mama," said Ari as she sat down.

"No problem, mi hija. Marcus, how was work?"

"I mean it was ok, the usual," Marcus says as he's chewing, "You can't really expect much from a 13 year old working at a construction site."

"I know baby, but I'm glad you're not having any difficulties. You didn't lose your whistle and pocket book right?" Mama asks.

"No, Mom," Marcus responds.

Mama nods and continues to pick at her food. She seemed antsy. Like she had something to say but didn't know how to say it or what to say. Arilina was expecting her to ask her about her day at work too but there were no words said to her.

“Welp, I'm done. I'm gonna go to my room and chill,” said Ari as she got up and put her dishes in the sink.

Mama's mouth opened as Ari got up but she slowly closed it reminding herself not to tell her just yet. She didn't want Ari to get worked up just yet but something big was happening and Ari and Marcus needed to know.

“I'm going too,” Marcus says as he gets up.

“Okay baby, let Arilina know that I need to talk to yall later,” Mama responded.

“Alright,” Marcus assures while he puts his dishes in the sink.

Marcus walks down the hall to his room. He passes Ari's room and stops by her door to check up on her. He noticed that she was writing notes in her pocketbook. That was confusing for him because Mama didn't want them writing in their pocketbook like a diary. She only wanted them to write down the things that they buy and the inspirational quotes that she tells them everyday. But Marcus ignored it because he didn't really care as much.

“Hey, um Mama said she wants to talk to us later,” Marcus said.

“For what?” Ari asks.

“I don't know,” Marcus says as he tries to get some leftover spaghetti out of his teeth, “I guess it's important because she seemed serious about it.”

“Okay,” Ari responds.

About 2 hours later, Mama finally decided that she had to tell them.

“Guys! Come to the living room please,” Mama yells down the hall.

Ari and Marcus slowly come down the hall to the living room with a worried look on their faces. They had no clue what was going on. They both just sat there waiting for Mama to get her words together.

“Okay. So I’ve been meaning to tell y’all this but I didn’t know how to,” Mama says as she sighs, “So, I got a call earlier saying that all the jobs in Atlanta had to lay off their workers. I don’t know why but it’s what’s going on. Since we all were working, it was a little easier to keep the house bills under control and buy food. But now I don’t know how we are going to survive knowing that we have no money source. This just randomly happened and there’s no way we can change it.”

“What?” Marcus asks rhetorically.

“I’m so confused, so basically we have no way to buy anything once all our money is gone?” Ari asked, interrupting Marcus.

“Yeah basically but I’m going to find something I promise,” Mama responds.

No one in the family knew why this was happening. It was 50 years later from 2022 and inflation continued to get worse. In 2022, inflation increased 3.8% a year. But now inflation increases 10% a month due to the world not having enough resources. Every month there are about 100,000 deaths in the US because families don’t have enough money to survive. Since Arilina is 15 and Marcus is 13, they meet the age requirement to work also while their mom is working. This was a bonus for their family because they were able to stay in a financially stable place where they could live in an apartment and have food. But that wasn’t the case for everyone. The government has done nothing to help anybody with this issue; they basically went on silent mode. Nobody has heard an announcement from them in 30 years. The last announcement was a

couple of words from the president saying “Good luck and God bless you all.” That was it. Life escalated very quickly after that speech was made.

A couple days passed and Ari was walking down the street. While looking at what little the city had to offer due to it not being taken care of, she noticed this poster on a pole. It said something about giving up a male in the family to be in the military, for the rest of the family to be in government controlled housing. Arilina thought that this might be their only option. They were recently kicked out of the apartment and were living on the streets. They only had \$100 left to live on and even just a bottle of water was \$90. Arilina took the poster down and brought it back to where her, Mama, and Marcus were staying. It was a tent with a fire pit on the side and all their necessities on the other side of the tent. They ended up leaving everything else behind in the apartment, knowing that they couldn’t bring all that stuff with them.

“Hey Mama, look what I found,” Ari says as she hands the poster to her mom.

While Mama was looking at the poster, Ari was fidgeting with her safety necklace that Mama gave her since they were out on the streets while looking at Marcus reading. She couldn’t stand giving up her brother but this was a chance for them to survive. Who knows what would happen once they ran out of money.

“Arilina. I love you, but we can’t-” Mama says as she gets cut off.

“Mama. This is a chance. We can have a home if we do this. We're gonna die if we continue to live like this,” Ari says when she interrupts Mama.

Mama sighs and looks back at the poster.

“Okay, fine but don’t tell your brother until we get there.” Mama responds.

“Okay, Mama,” Ari responds.

1 day later, the family rides a bus to the military base. But once they get there, they notice it doesn't necessarily look like a "normal" military base. It's almost as if the men there are doing labor rather than training. But Ari and Mama knew nothing about what they do for training in the military so they didn't question it. Marcus was confused as to why they were there but he kind of just went with the flow thinking they were staying somewhere safer.

"Okay, Marcus, I love you so much and I will always keep you in my heart. I don't want to do this but this is the only way our family is able to survive. It's hard to explain what's about to happen, but I want you to know that you are not alone. Me and Ari are always here with you. This necklace is just like the one Ari has. It has a flashlight, an alarm, and a picture of all of us on the front. Don't hesitate to ever use it if you feel like you're in danger," Mama says as tears roll down her face, handing Marcus the necklace.

Marcus was so confused that words couldn't even come out of his mouth. He grabbed the necklace from Mama's hand and examined it. He realized that they were all wearing the same necklace. As if it was some type of symbol of the family. Arilina was crying while watching Marcus walk off the bus. She didn't understand why inflation had to make their life so hard but it was the only choice.

"He's going to be ok," Ari says to assure herself.

Ari takes out her pocket book as the bus drives off from the military base. She writes down her feelings trying to help her cope with this situation. She could see out of the corner of eye that Mama was fixated on seeing how far they were going from the base.

The bus pulls up to the housing complex and everyone gets off the bus. The bus sits there for a while, while the bus driver helps everyone get checked in.

“I heard that the men that get sent to military bases end up getting killed,” a random lady says to her friend near Ari.

Ari hears this and runs to her mom.

“Mama! We have to go back! They’re going to kill Marcus,” Arilina says as she pulls mom to the bus.

“What? They’re not going to let us go back,” Mama responds frightened.

“I have an idea,” Ari says as she runs towards the bus pulling her mom's arm.

Ari notices that the keys are still in the ignition. She signals her mom to drive and they run into the bus and drive off as fast as they can. They get to the military base and notice Marcus still waiting to get inside the entrance. Mama stops and Ari blows her whistle signaling Marcus to get in. He runs to the bus and Mama drives off as soon as he gets in.

“What’s going on?” Marcus asks.

“I’ll tell you later,” Ari responds.

As they drove to nowhere, nobody knew if they were going to be okay. Let alone if anyone was going to be okay. But in order for them to survive, they had to believe that they were going to be okay.