

Pax D'Alba

October 21, 2022

English 2

Mr. Kay

Anomalous

While getting ready to start my day, I think over everything I must do to not be suspected of being an anomaly. Ever since more and more people started complaining about people like me, and more and more bills got passed, making life harder for people who are different, I have to be more cautious about how I behave in public. I have to make sure not to walk weird, act weird, talk weird, underreact, overreact or do anything that isn't deemed normal. I can't seem different, I can't be anomalous. At home, I can unwind, I can relax, I can be me, but out there... It's easier just to avoid people so I am not suspected and taken away to be changed...to be fixed.

I pick up my sturdy blue headphones, running my fingers over the soft padding and putting them on my head, making me feel safe and secure. The ability to listen to music as well as block out outside noise is helpful to prevent overstimulation, which, if it happens in public, could be the end for me.

I open the door and make my way down the street, headphones on, trying to avoid eye contact with anyone who passes. As I'm counting the number of sidewalk squares I walk on, I hear my name called faintly. "Nova!" The voice grows closer and louder. I take my headphones off and look up to see Calder.

"Oh, hey," I reply, analyzing the symbols on his shirt.

"How have you been?" he asks.

“I’m okay. How are you doing after...” I trail off, scared to say what happened out loud.

There is a long pause that makes me want to hide away like a turtle in its shell before he responds. “It’s been rough. I’m taking care of myself because my mom is gone. After they found my brother out, she got scared. You know, it being genetic and all. The government is looking for her so they can run tests, and as much as I miss her it is probably best for her to not come back just in case,” he tells me as I try to hide my uncomfortable fidgeting and desperation to look away.

I don’t know what he expects me to say so I just reply, apologize, and hope he doesn’t want more.

“It’s fine... I’ll get through it. Besides, this is what’s best. If my brother is an anomaly, it’s in his best interest to be fixed right?” He sounded unsure, but the comment still made me uneasy. *He was my friend, and if he found out, is this how he would feel about me? Would he want me taken away too?*

“Yeah... well, have a good rest of your day,” I reply, trying to bring the conversation to an end. As I start to walk away, he asks if I want to go to his house tomorrow, to which I say yes. I missed hanging out with him while his family was in shambles, so I’m excited to bring the good times back.

The next day I show up at his house and ring the doorbell. He happily greets me and lets me inside. “Do you want a snack?” he asks, bringing me to the pantry and showing me a plethora of snack options. I grab a bag of pretzel sticks and we walk up to his room. I put my headphones around my neck, and sit on his bed, as he sits criss-cross on the floor.

I am scared to say the wrong thing, so I don’t talk at first. Luckily, he breaks the silence by asking if I wanted to play cards, to which I eagerly said yes. We played rummy, and after a

few rounds of laughter, yelling, and pretzels being thrown at each other, he won. We talked for a bit longer, then I went home.

This routine continued every other day for months. Seeing Calder, losing to rummy, eating pretzels, it all felt safe, it felt normal. We both had an unspoken agreement to never change this routine, which was the most comfortable thing, as routine changes are often overwhelming. Over time I felt more and more at ease around him, but there was still a nagging in the back of my mind. I could never feel fully free with him not knowing my secret. I decided that next time I would tell him. Next time, I would tell Calder that I was an anomaly.

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Once again, I sit down on his bed while he retrieves the cards. As I'm snacking on pretzels, headphones around my neck, listening to Calder talk as he deals out the cards. I tremble with anxiety and excitement. Today is the day, today is when he finds out. After today, I can stop pretending. I can stop having to look uncomfortably into his eyes as he talks, and stop having to think through everything that comes out of my mouth ten times before I say it.

Calder finishes speaking and looks at me and grins. I put my headphones on the floor and sat down with him. "Calder, can I tell you something?" I ask shakily. Was I really doing this? The worst-case scenario really is the worst. I could get sent away, I could end up in an institution where people like me are brutally mistreated.

"Sure, what's up?"

"I'm..." The words roll around in my mouth, fighting to come out. "I'm an anomaly," I spit out. I am able to look up at him and he doesn't look mad. He looks betrayed.

"You're...what? You can't be, y-you're normal, you're not like them. Nova, you're lying to me," He looks scared like I might hurt him. Maybe he should be scared because I'm outraged.

“Normal?” I shout, making my throat hoarse. “I’m not like them you said, like *them*. Calder, I am them. I thought you of all people could understand,” I scream all of this at him through tears, each word a punch to the gut. I step closer to him, to which he moves back and I hear a loud crack. We both locate where the sound came from, and I spot my headphones crushed. The bridge was broken into pieces, wires and plastic sticking out everywhere. I run to grab the headphones, trying to piece them back together. Calder stands there frozen, staring at me. After a frustrating minute, I throw them at him and run out the door.

I run down the street and stop on a street corner. All of a sudden, a group of people come out of a truck and start walking towards me menacingly. Two big men grab me, and someone shoots me in the arm with a needle. I try to struggle against them, but I feel weak, as everything grows darker and darker and the world feels like it comes to an end.

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All of a sudden I hear a loud “Genavieva Kay” and my eyes open quickly, adrenaline rushing throughout my body. I look down to see myself laying on a blue cot, dressed in a dotted white gown. Hearing my full name sent a wave of shock through my body. I notice an IV in my arm and started to panic. I look around and see others lying on blue cots, wearing the same white gowns, with IVs in their arms as well.

“Genavieva, you have been reported by Calder Ledger to be an anomaly. In the last week, we have been running tests on you as you sleep, and have come to the conclusion that you are anomaly number twelve million, six hundred and fifty-two. You will be kept in this correctional institution until we see you fit to leave,” A blonde woman with a clipboard tells me. It’s hard to listen to her clearly recited and repeated speech when a million thoughts are racing through my

head. *How long have I been here? How did I get here? When did I become unconscious? Why can't I remember how I ended up here? How could Calder do this to me?*

I get taken to a room where a group of people are all sitting with wires hooked up to them. The blonde lady tells me to sit down and then hooks me up to the same wires. She leaves and I look around the room. I notice a clock on the wall, and people sitting on the other side of the room with buttons. One person walks in and tells me to make eye contact with him and be silent and still. I am told I will be moved to the next room in three hours, and every time I break contact, move, or make a sound, he will press that button, and I will get shocked.

After a painful three hours, I am taken to another room. Then another, then another. I feel tortured like my mind has been placed in a box half its size. Weeks of this pass, every day, worse than the last. After another terrible day, the blonde lady comes into my room.

“Genavieva, after 100 days, you have been deemed irreversible, and there is nothing more we can do to help you,” she tells me blankly.

A rush of relief falls over me, as I think I'll be free. “Does this mean I get to go home?”

“Yes Genavieva, you get to go to where you belong” I hear as a needle is stuck into my neck. I feel my eyes droop to a close, the world fading around me, my mind shutting off, then, I feel nothing at all, forever.