

The Thespian

“Oh my God, I can’t believe Saturday finally got here,” Kandy said into her cell phone. Her pink nails, glimmering and painted a pastel that’d fit in a baby girl’s room, tapped the cover of her more vivid, hot pink phone. Her smile was wide and perfected with lip-gloss, even though the only thing she was smiling at was her phone and it didn’t really care. “Seriously, Ari, we’ve got to do something today. Call me later, okay? I’m busy until later – oh Jesus, yeah, it’s that thing my parents signed me up for – I know, right? Like, it doesn’t matter anyway. Okay, yeah. I’ll call when I get out. See ya, girl.”

Kandy pushed the “end call” button with the flourish of a painter adding the last stroke to a landscape. As she did, the smile dropped off her face and she sighed heavily. That Arizona, she just wouldn’t stop bothering her until they did something together. The new girls in school were so clingy.

With the grace of a pianist, Kandy tapped in the number of another friend and called. The moment she heard someone on the other end pick up, the smile was back. “Hey Tiff, guess who!” She laughed. “Oh my gosh, guess who’s begging me to hang out with her again. Yeah, Arid Zone-a. I know, I can’t believe her. You’d think she’d give up by now! Look, she’s a family friend; I can’t just blow her off, no matter how boring she is. Mom would kill me. Hey, call the others, okay? If I’ve gotta baby-sit Arid Ari, I want you guys there, too.”

Kandy listened as Tiffany replied, and laughed again. “Aw, Tiff, you know I love you guys. We can go out for pizza, ‘kay? Great, thanks. I’ll call you when I get out...”

yeah, *that* thing again, Lord. As if school isn't enough, they have to destroy the weekend, too, right? Okay, later. Bye, girl!"

An artistic flourish, and the call and the smile were terminated. Kandy rolled her eyes at nothing, sliding her cell phone into her pocket, and uncrossing and re-crossing her legs on the bench in front of the bus stop. "I swear, they don't realize how annoying they are, do they?" Kandy asked.

Grant, her boyfriend, was sitting beside her on the bus stop bench, chuckling to himself. His smile was almost as wide as hers could get, exposing perfect teeth behind gorgeous lips, but most of the time Kandy only concerned herself with his lips. "They're all just so shallow, seriously," he said. He had a guitar case in his lap and was tapping his fingers on it like a drum. Grant was a senior in high school, a year above Kandy, but he was going to try out for an alternative band consisting of students from the community college in town. "They don't think any deeper than what's coming down the road, you know? It's like, all they've got is today. But this," Grant gave his guitar case an extra hard tap, "is totally my future, Kan, and you know it."

Kandy smiled supportively at her boyfriend. "Don't call me Kan."

"Sure thing," he said, and looked up as a bus pulled up. "Oh hey, is this your ride?"

"This is it!" Kandy stood up, then bent down again to give Grant a quick kiss. "Let me know how it goes!" she said cheerfully, swinging her skirt in his direction as she got on. She took a seat next to the window so she could wave at him as the bus pulled away, but the smile vanished as soon as they turned a corner.

Musicians. Grant had been a football player when they'd started dating, but he had "discovered" himself over Christmas break. Kandy wouldn't be sticking with him long, she thought, pulling a small star-shaped mirror and tube of lip-gloss out of her pocket.

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When the therapist came in, Milena was rubbing the chipped, uneven nail polish on her left hand. It didn't quite fit with her skin tone, though it might have if her skin was darker; she was pale, not quite a sickly shade but almost. She looked up and performed a smile, exposing braces with red and yellow bands, her school's colors. She thought people would notice and appreciate her if she showed some school spirit. "Hi, Dr. Cooney." Her voice was shy, but it wasn't scared. "How was your week?"

"It was just fine, Milena," Dr. Cooney said, rolling her chair out from behind her desk and putting it beside Milena's. She found that the high-school girl was much more comfortable talking to her when it was more sociable. "But we're here to talk about you, remember? How was your week?"

Milena's smile faltered. "It was... I think I did better this week."

"Did you?" Dr. Cooney nodded, leaning forward. "Tell me about it. Are you making friends more easily?"

"Yes, ma'am. I met a girl called Arizona, but everyone calls her Arid Zone-a." Milena screwed up her face, as if she didn't like the taste of the words. "She's... I think she's kinda like me, right? I mean, she doesn't really play her part right."

"Her part?" Dr. Cooney repeated.

“Yeah. It’s like everyone at school has a role, right?” Milena said. “There are the students you know will go to, like, Yale or Harvard, either because they’re smart or they’re rich, and there are the ones who join gangs and stuff and you know they’re not going to get out of that...” Milena ran one hand through her hair, short, dark brown, and almost completely unstyled. “I think that’s what I have the most problem with at school, like when I try to fit in. Everyone else got a script but mine was lost in the mail, so I’m doing an improv skit.”

Dr. Cooney nodded again. “That’s very interesting, Milena. What’s your solution?”

“I dunno. Maybe acting lessons?” Milena smiled sheepishly. Before Dr. Cooney could cut in, she continued: “The best thing, I think, is trying to find a role to fit in. That’s the quickest way to get through high school. Join the play, learn your part, and stay in character until the end.”

“I, um, I don’t think that’s what you should be aiming for, Milena,” Dr. Cooney said. “You’re trying to grow into your own person, not learn how to play a role.”

Milena dropped her gaze from Dr. Cooney, looking at her legs. She wondered if she needed to shave, brushing her hand over her knee. She didn’t think so, but she didn’t want anyone to look at her and think differently. Would anyone notice? What if the light hit her legs funny? It was too dim in the therapist’s office for her to tell if it would show up under brighter lights.

“Milena, do you understand?” Dr. Cooney asked. “We want you to be an individual.”

Milena nodded, “I understand,” but Dr. Cooney could tell she had stopped listening. She sighed; the girl was so bright. It was terrible that she was so lost in her high school. Her parents had brought her in because they suspected she was depressed, and thought she didn’t have many friends. Her parents said she was doing better now, much better, but Dr. Cooney thought otherwise.

She sighed. “All right, Milena. That’s all for today. We’ll talk more next week, okay?”

Milena looked up from her legs. “Thank you, Dr. Cooney,” she said. “Have a good week.” She stood up, smoothing her skirt down.

“You too. And remember to think about what we discussed!”

“Yes ma’am!”

Milena left the therapist’s office and signed out at the front desk with her full name: Milena Kandice Sewick. She dotted all three i’s with hearts. As soon as she left the building, she pulled out her pink phone, tapped out the number of her new friend Arizona with her chipped, pink pastel nails, and put the phone up to her ear.

The other end rang four times before someone picked up. Instantly, Milena smiled, her glossed lips displaying her teeth and their yellow-and-red braces. “Hey Ari-girl, it’s Kandy!” she said. “Look, I just got out of the therapist’s – oh God, yes, I know, I can’t stand going – and I was like hoping you could give me a ride? I don’t want to stand around waiting for the next bus. Daddy’s so paranoid, he won’t let me take the car.” She listened a moment, nodded. “Okay, thank you so much! Hey, by the way, there’s going to be some other people hanging with us – I dunno, like five, six? Is that okay?”

Of course it was.

Ari said something else, and Kandy's smile shrank a bit. "Did I talk about you?" she repeated, and then laughed. "I confirm and deny nothing, girl! Ya know it's all confidential, right?" She sat down at a bench outside her therapist's office. "Oh, hey, after we like finish with the others, I totally want to talk to you. I can explain some stuff about our school, okay?" She listened, nodded. "Yeah, I know, you're not exactly the most popular girl in school. Listen, it's like life is one big show, and you just joined our cast. I, uh, I c-can explain more later." Her voice had almost broken. She had never dared to go out of character like this when she was talking with her friends. "Well, we can discuss that, like, later. Bye girl!"

She hung up the phone, put it in her pocket, and let the smile slide wearily off her face. She could rest now, but in a few minutes, the smile would have to be back in place. After all, the show must go on.