

JUNE 3, 2020 ALYSON SHELTON

## My Mean Girl: Or Being Told Your Forehead Is Too Big For Anyone To Ever Love You



It was my second day of ninth grade at Centennial Middle.

That morning, my mom gave me the usual rah-rah speech that was featured on after school specials during that time.

"Just be yourself. You'll find your people." I was more than doubtful.

But magically, on that second day, Shelby grabbed my hand and asked me over to her house after school. I blushed and nodded like it was true love and inside I screamed,

"She wants to hang out with me!!!"

The glow of acceptance followed me through the day. I was seen and judged worthy by someone who barely knew me. Yay, me!

After school, we sat at her table, munching on our snacks.

Shelby asked, "So how's it going? How do you like Centennial?"

Hmmmm. How much should I lie? I took a deep breath, and decided to lie a lot.

"I like it. People are pretty nice. I mean, you invited me over to your house and it's only the second day of school, so..."

Shelby threw her golden hair over her shoulder and leaned in.

"I only invited you over because I'm looking out for you. I mean, I like you, but most people don't, most people hate you."

I almost choked on my Chips Ahoy! But managed to sputter out, "What do you mean?"

"People are talking about you. How you think you're so special, because you're from California. How you're a rich, stuck-up bitch."

I didn't pause. I didn't take a deep breath. I didn't take a moment to think,

"Hey, I only started school here yesterday, how is everyone finding the time and opportunity to talk about how awful I am? The logistics seem untenable,"

Instead I thought, "YES, everyone can see right through me. I'm so beyond liking even relative strangers can figure it out."

"The boys too. Everyone?" I asked, terrified of the answer.

"Oh yeah, the boys think you're ugly. Josh told me you have a big forehead, and that you're gross."

Again, there was an opportunity here to wonder, "Big forehead. That's a really specific insult for a 14-year-old boy to have. When did he and Shelby have this heart to heart?"

Instead my hand flew to my forehead, feeling the undebatable immensity of it.

"I've never noticed."

"You've never noticed, wow. It's huge."

A girl with confidence would have stood up and left. A girl without any confidence would sit there for another two hours, listen to a detailed litany of her shortcomings, start crying and not be able to stop and only leave when Shelby told her it was time for dinner and she should leave now cause, "this is getting weird."

I wandered home in the coming dusk, wondering how I would ever go back to school again? I considered moving back to California, in fact I pitched that plan to my mom the minute I got home.

"Honey, you can't move back to California, we live here now."

"Mom. Everyone HATES me. I can never come back from this."

"I don't think that girl Shelby was telling you the truth."

What? What? Shelby is my only friend, the only one brave enough to tell me what a wretched person I am, without her I'd be thinking people liked me and going to school and having fun—wait. Now I take that pause.

"You think she lied to me?"

"Yes, of course. How could everyone hate you? You've only been there two days."

I wiped more tears from my face. I had one of those dehydration headaches you get when you've been crying so hard your whole head is like, "What the Hell, knock it off, drink some water, lay down, just please stop doing THIS."

"She wouldn't do that. She's my only friend"

The idea that my only friend would rip my confidence to shreds for sport was difficult to contemplate. I'll spare you the back and forth we had on this point for quite some time. Eventually we got here.

"I'm never going to school again!"

Being a parent is complicated. My mom got a big win by convincing me I wasn't a trash bag full of personality defects but now I didn't want to go to school or live in Boulder.

We spent another hour going back and forth. Cue the cliches.

"You don't want Shelby to think she's won."

And

"Just ignore her and be yourself."

I stayed on message.

"I'm never going to that school again!"

When my mom was tired enough of my sweaty, tear-stained face it was agreed upon that I would not go to school the next day. Once I fell asleep, I slept like a corpse for 12 hours. I awoke rested and full of purpose.

"I could go to a different school." At least ten times to my mom.

"Homeschool?" More pleas to mom.

"Private school?" Really anywhere other than Centennial will do, Mom. Mom? Are you listening?

My mom tried to be patient with me, but I was relentless. The combination of my insecurities ratcheted up to 100 and the first flickers of righteous indignation about the whole situation was making me insufferable.

"Centennial doesn't even deserve me."

My mom sat down with me at dinner and explained in her most calm tones,

"You're going to school tomorrow. You'll get through this."

As I was about to rip my mom's head off for being such a clueless monster, the phone rang.

It was Michelle, a popular girl, and she was asking for me.

"How come you didn't come to school today?" Michelle asked.

"Um..."

"Is it because of Shelby?" Michelle wondered.

"Um..."

"She told us what she did. That was really mean. If you want to hang out with us this weekend, that would be cool." She offered.

"Will Shelby be there?"

"No, we didn't invite her." Michelle confided.

"OK, yes, that'd be great."

And it was.

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