

### **Respect for the older**

My secondary school years were sometimes complicated. I stopped being a “smart kid”, had almost any friends and fell involved in a series of catastrophic events. This is one of those stories.

Everything started when he entered the classroom two months after school started. We were in grade 8, but he was three years older than us. Thin as a needle, taller than any other kid in school, with brownish hair on the side of his head and a face that looked drained like a dehydrated grape, his name was Reyes.

At first we were friends. He was the old cool guy. He apparently knew about life and, of course, we were mere pre-teens compared to him. He was almost a man to us. He always talked about how school was completely useless, especially because his dream was to join the circus, become a nomad, and travel town to town bringing joy to others. Well, I just made up the joy part, actually he never talked about that. But he really wanted to have his own ride in the circus and live in a van.

When the teacher didn't come on certain days and we could do whatever we wanted, all the boys gathered around him to listen to his stories. Apparently Reyes was not living with his parents because his father didn't want him. He used to smoke weed inside his house, so his father screamed at him until he ran away. When he was outside, he smoked wherever he pleased, especially when police were around. He enjoyed just smoking until policemen were next to him and then just throw the joint to the floor and step on it. When the police came and tried to scold him, he smiled at them, thinking how clever he was.

That also applied to teachers. He perfectly understood that any authority figure didn't really care about him (or his education, or his well being, or his lungs...). They just wanted to be respected. So his favorite hobby was pushing the limits, trying to see how far away he could go. He had different ways of doing that: punching walls in front of the teachers, smoking inside of school, confronting anyone that questioned him, and whistling in classes everytime the teacher looked at the whiteboard. That was exactly what happened one of those days, with the exception that the teacher wanted him to confess. It was the last class of the day, math. The teacher just started with a simple premise: if the bird who whistled didn't go out of their nest, all the others would have three times more homework each day. Everyone panicked.

So I just did what I thought was better. Pointing my hand towards him and just saying, "It's obviously him who whistled". He looked at me with rage. After that class, which was the last of the day, he came to me.

"Explain why you say that. It was not me!".

I answered frankly, "I saw you doing it. You whistled".

I was not scared of him because I thought he was just a normal boy with some problems. And in that moment, we made peace. He accepted my answer and went away. So we all headed downstairs. I was talking to a friend, and Reyes was a few steps behind. So I said to my friend, "What a hard day. I feel so angry with everything. I could punch anything". Those words travelled to Reyes's ears, and then to his brain, which translated it as, "What a hard person. I feel so angry with him. I want to punch him". And after that he blew his top.

He started pushing me while we went down the stairs of the second floor, trying to make me fall while shouting, "You are dead! I'm gonna kill you. I'm gonna kill you. You are a dead man. If not today, tomorrow!".

His face stopped being a dry grape and became a red plum. His eyes were full of rage and violence. I just walked away, trying to process what was going on. Reyes stayed inside the main door and I went out, directly entering my mother's car. After a few minutes of silence, looking nowhere and trying to understand reality, I told her.

"Mum, this guy was really angry at me today. He told me that tomorrow he was going to kill me. I'm scared".

She answered "Well, go to school tomorrow, and, if something more happens, we will do something".

I looked into space for a few more minutes in the car, and then a few more hours in my room, and then all night in my bed. What kind of logic was that?

The next morning, a cold day of November, I arrived late at school with the hope of him being already inside. Of course, he was at the door, waiting for me. I saw a little group of people entering at that exact moment, so I just stayed behind them and put my hood up. I looked back, and he was in the same position looking at the gate. When all my classmates saw me entering alone, they had a horrendous gaze in their eyes. There was no possible way for me to enter without any damage. They all knew he was waiting for me at the entrance, and they all started talking about me while entering the room. I had two options, or I could beat his ass or make myself invisible. But then he just appeared behind me.

I sat at one of the desks in the front and tried to focus on the class. Of course, it was impossible. So I tried to make a plan. After the class, he dashed off, like lightning. He was already out before anyone else got up. At that moment I didn't have real friends. The people I used to hang out with during the break, ran away from me. Three other people stayed with me, hoping that their presence would make him leave me alone. Surely he wouldn't do anything in front of witnesses.

I walked the aisles of the school, made out of bland and ugly green tiles, turning each corner with the fear of finding him waiting for me. There were three different floors in the high school, and my next class was on the top one, so I had the hope of choosing the one where he was not waiting. After arriving at the end of the first floor and just before starting to climb the stairs, he appeared. He stared at me for a few seconds, maybe reflecting if it was worth getting in big trouble. Then he jumped the stairs and ran towards me.

I remembered perfectly how he confronted me at the same time a teacher walked next to us. This old man, with gray hair, tiny glasses and a white shirt, just looked at him pushing me and went away, without saying anything. Reyes started punching me while yelling, kicked my leg and made me fall. I stood up, let my backpack drop behind me, and looked up at him. One foot and a half taller than me. But I decided to at least retain my dignity. The three classmates that stayed with me were just behind me, looking and telling him to stop. He answered back.

“Come and defend him yourselves if you want me to stop. It 's easy.”

He pushed me again. I held my ground. He screamed “You are dead!”.

Someone walked past him. Another tall boy. He said to him, "Calm down man, it's not worth it. You are making things worse than they are". The two went away together, with the new boy pushing him upstairs and trying to made him think. I walked to my next class. The other students went away to tell the head teacher, so I stayed alone. In the corridor I cried a little, and then entered the classroom. Everyone looked at me.

The class was English, with an old woman called Prado, who hated education. She was a poor teacher, but sometimes she tried, although not with much effort. I sat in my place and she asked me a question.

"Everyone told me that something is going on between you and Reyes. What happened?"

All eyes fixed on me. My face flushed and I almost cried.

"Reyes was angry with me".

After some moments of compassion by the teacher, she started behaving as usual "Well Alejandro, I see you English keeps being pretty bad. You should study more. Not even doing the basic exercises correctly". When the class ended, everyone left and Reyes didn't come back.

I left the school, and my mother picked me up. I stayed silent at first, but after getting close to the outskirts of town, where we lived, I told her what had happened. I asked her to stop and got out of the car.

"Go back home. I will come back later" I said. She didn't leave immediately, but I went away.

I walked along a dirt road, completely opposite direction to my house, continuing the path for half an hour, trying to think how could my luck get worse each day. I saw a little construction in the distance, a small house that

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used to belong to an old farmer some time ago, but that nowadays was completely disused. I went there and sat on a pile of old bricks. Some birds started whistling in the distance. I just laughed.

Reyes never came back to school, because the principal called him that same morning, he insulted her and got expelled. After some time, I made real friends. Life went on. At the moment, I felt rage for how unfair it was that this boy made my life a little more difficult. But now, I just feel grief for how things had gone for him.