

No More
By Lucien Maier

Clara wanted nothing more than to curl up in a ball and remain in her bed the rest of the day, where it was safe. They would be on the bus waiting for her. It had all started in the second grade. Clara had been very open and very excited about school and friends.

But that year Jen started to criticize how she dressed. It was petty at first, but within two years Jen had recruited two of her friends and the teasing had become merciless. Every year it had gotten worse.

So Clara had pulled further and further away from everything. Reading had become an escape of the years and the books leaned more and more towards stories of people finding their own place in the world.

A hour later she stood on the corner, and grimaced as the bus came around the corner to pick her up. The bus stopped and the door opened with a woosh. She boarded and walked with her head down to the seat she sat in everyday.

"Nice shirt, Clara." Jen barked.

She ignored her.

"Where you get it at, the old folks home?" One of Jen's flunkies chimed in.

She ignored her too. As best as she could.

"Wow." A voice came.

He was in the back of them and they had paid no attention. He had moved into the neighborhood a week ago. He was a senior and Jen and her friends had now become very interested in the new guy on the bus.

Clara could not believe her luck, hopefully they would be too preoccupied making goo goo faces at this new guy, and not harass her the rest of trip. She was wrong, but it would not be as bad as she thought.

Jen had misread the "wow" out of his lips as a sign that he was okay with the teasing. She started back in on the shirt.

"Do you always wear shirts from your Dad's closet?" She laughed out.

"And what if she did have to borrow clothes from her dad?. Which by the way, is not what it looks like to me. But if she did you really think that criticizing her about that is funny?" He said in a smoky voice.

"Oh don't worry about her, no one cares about her. My name is Jen, what's yours, sexy?" She asked in her best flirty tone.

"Not interested." He said.

"Whatever, side with the loser I don't care. No one likes her, hang out with her and you're nothing at our school." She snapped now angry. Her attraction to him made her rethink. "But you don't know any better." She smiled. "If you want you can come sit by me." Jen asked him.

She was encouraged when he got up from his seat. But he did not sit next to her. He walked to the seat next to Clara.

"Mind if I sit here?" He asked with a smile.

She stared at him blankly for a minute. Not sure how to react to this. He stood patiently smiling for a moment longer. "If you want I could go back to that seat." He said, his shoulders slumping a little bit.

The confidence he had around the bullies he did not have around her.

"Sorry, sorry sure you can sit down." Clara replied, she could not help a glance back at the girls who had tormented her. They were all straight green jealous.

Then she turned her attention back to the guy.

"Hi my name is Randy." He said holding his hand out to shake.

"My name is Clara." She said holding onto the hand shake a bit longer than she should have. He smiled shyly as the handshake broke. "You just move in?" She asked.

"Yeah, it's killing me the moving truck should be here today with my bike and then I won't have to ride the bus anymore. But for today I am stuck." Randy replied.

"Well the school is a couple of miles I don't know that you want to ride a bicycle." She commented. Hoping he would not rush off the bus.

"Oh sorry its not a pedal bike. I have a motorcycle." He said nonchalantly.

However, everyone in earshot was trying to listen in on the conversation. The mention of a motorcycle and the new guy were driving curiosity levels on the bus very high.

They continued with light small talk. As the bus pulled into the school, Clara face was starting to turn down, she knew once the school had him he would never talk to her again.

However to her surprise he asked "Can you show me where the office is?"

She quickly replied that she would be happy to.

This started the best day Clara had experienced at school ever. Randy carried himself with confidence. A confidence high school kids hardly ever get. By proxy she flowed with him through his day.

They did not have any classes together but since he was a senior he only had 3 classes in the morning and the rest of the day he went to her classes because he had to wait for the bus to get him home.

On the way home, he made a point of asking for Clara's number in front of Jen. About a half hour after she walked in the door of her house, she got a text. it read:

"My bike came! come see it!"

She rushed out the door, and rode her ten speed to his house. and there he was in the garage. Happily tinkering on his bike. It was not large, 500cc older bike from the eighties. It was apparent he had spent a long time bringing the bike to level it was at now.

"Wow its awesome!" she said as she rolled up.

He looked up with a big grease smudge across his nose. She could not help but giggle. He looked at her confused, she reached out and rubbed the grease from his nose, then held the dark finger up to him.

He smiled curled his lips and he began to laugh. "That I am afraid, is pretty much par for the course for me."

She sat in the garage until eight that night. He taught her about the bike as he went through everything. She was so engrossed she did not realize what time it was and wound up rushing home two hours late.

Her mom was mad, but Clara was preoccupied with thinking about Randy, and didn't mind too much being sent to her room.

The next morning came, and she was unhappily waiting at the bus stop. Randy would ride his bike in today, which means she would be left alone with the bullies.

She was wrong. As the bus turned the corner a bike shot in front of it and pulled in front of the stop. "Come on." Randy said.

She ran over and she could feel all the eyes of the bus on her. He handed her a helmet, which was too big, but she strapped it on as best she could and climbed on and they took off.

A few moments later they pulled into the school, again all eyes following them. She had a good day at school. However the dread started to build and build after Randy had left after they had lunch.

She would have to ride the bus home alone.

Jen had her number too. The two days of envy opened fully on that bus. The three girls said things to Clara that she would never forget. It was not even half way through the ride and Clara was crying full force.

The bus finally got to her stop. She rushed off the bus, and like an angel there stood Randy with a smile on his face. It dropped off quickly when he caught site of Clara's face. He eyes now burned with anger.

"Wait here." He said and walked over to the bus as the driver was closing the door. Before the door could shut all the way a black motorcycle boot stuck in the door. He pushed it open and walked on the bus. He looked at the driver. "Leave it open."

Randy walked to the back where the three girls sat looking confused at him. "NO MORE! You're leeches." He said directly to them. "You're pathetic to pick on a girl just because you can. It's sad really." His voice got louder. "But the saddest thing is that all of you allowed it." He said waving to the bus. "How many stupid comments have you all over looked, out of fear of becoming their next target?? That you somehow respect these girls is beyond me. But that you allow them to do this is criminal. None of you deserve to have someone treat you, like Clara is treated every damn day. Wouldn't you want someone, anyone to stand up for you?" Randy asked.

"You know, my folks said I would love this town for the rest of my high school. Well I am glad I meet Clara because as for the rest of you I would really do not want anything to do with any of you." Randy said, and as he walked out he looked at the driver. "This is your job to stop this garbage, next time do it." Randy said and walked out to Clara.

Everyone was quiet on the bus as they pulled away.

"What a jerk." Jen said.

But three people looked at her and told her to shut up. Her power had been stripped away. People looked at her with disgust.

Putting Clara back together would prove much harder over the next few days. Randy had taken her home and explained the situation to Clara's mom. Who had probed her daughter before but she would never admit to any problem.

Her mom was so much more understanding than Clara had thought she would be. She even called the school to let them know of the situation. Clara's mom asked if she could stay home from school for a while until Clara could collect herself.

That night Randy came back over with a beat up old paperback. She read the book about a seagull who would not accept the limits that were placed on him. Although it was a small book she read it twice that day.

The next day after lunch time she went over to Randy's house. He was not home yet but his mom asked her to wait he would only be a moment.

Randy pulled up on his bike a few minutes later. She walked over to him "You read the book?" He asked.

She hugged him. "It was exactly what I needed to hear. Thank you so much." She said.

He smiled, "Well good. Now we need to teach you to fly."

Behind him his Father pulled up with a truck, behind the truck on a trailer was an old beat up 250cc bike.

"You got a new bike?" She asked.

"No, you got a new bike." As he said it the mirror fell off the bike. "Well maybe not new." He smiled.

They spent three days together in that garage, slowly bringing the small motorcycle to a point she could ride it. Then he taught her to ride. They were even able to get her to the DMV to take her motorcycle test that Friday.

That weekend she rode with Randy and showed him all around the town. They had long conversations, but more importantly she had long conversations with herself in the silence that only comes when riding.

Sunday night rolled around and Randy had been asked by Clara's mom to join them for dinner. They ate and talked and Monday morning came up.

"I want to go back to school tomorrow." Clara said.

"Are you sure, honey?" Her mom asked.

"For sure, I am not the girl that rode that bus anymore Mom. I can handle it." She replied.

Sure enough Clara was ready to ride to school as Randy pulled up. They passed the bus on the way to school. Now all the kids knew Randy's bike by now but they didn't know who was on the second.

Clara may have been right that she was not the same girl, But what she had not expected is that the whole school would have changed too. She was pulled into that principals office, He apologized over and over.

He let her know that Jen had been suspended and would not be allowed to bother her again.

So it was. Clara was not bothered by anyone, And although Jen never said anything, the other two girls apologized to her many times. People at school treated her much better, but not only that, they watched out for others.

They had taken Randy's words to heart. They decided as a school that they would not allow it to happen to anyone at their school. The year was amazing until the summer. Randy graduated and then announced he would be going to college out of state. It destroyed Clara.

"How the heck am I going to get through next year Randy?" she asked him one night before he left.

"Get through? I expect a lot more out of you than just getting through. Why do you think I wanted to know you that first day on the bus?" He asked.

"You felt sorry for me." She answered matter of fact.

"NO!" He replied. "I saw me in you. I came from the same thing. They used to tease me so much. But when I hit sixteen I got the bike and stopped taking crap. I stopped letting them

define who I am. I decided that was my job. Once I took that power out of their hands they could never get it over me again. And now You have now done the same thing.” Randy said.

“With your help.” She added.

“Maybe that is true but I suppose that means you have to help someone one day too.” Randy replied.

A few days later Randy was packed up and gone. It was not easy for Clara, but she was able move forward.

He had been right, they were never able to exercise power over her again. They asked her to speak at her graduation. She walked up to the podium.

“NO MORE.” She started. “Those two words changed my life. You see, I was picked on through my younger years. But one day a guy came along and he said :NO MORE.” She said, trying to hold back tears in her eyes. “And you know what?, he changed everything, he had the courage to stand up and tell them to leave me alone. And he had an open heart to show me how to be strong. Its hard because I miss him everyday, why? Because I see him in all of you everyday. He made us a better school, and he made us all better people. I have tried to make sure that no one is allowed to be bullied in our school. I am glad to graduate, but I hope you will make it a tradition in our school that we will never allow it to happen to anyone.”

The audience erupted in cheers.

More importantly, her words stayed with them. And every year they hung a banner that said “NO MORE” in the main hall. They became a model to all the other schools of how to root bullies out of the system.

After a graduation dinner many of her friends went off to party. But she rode home with her mom. To her surprise there sat Randy on his bike in the driveway.

“Good speech.” He said smiling as she ran into his hug.

“Thanks, I had good inspiration.” She said.

“Wanna go a for a ride?” He asked.

“Be right back.” She said and rushed toward the house. She stopped.

She turned and walked back to him. She kissed him long on the lips. After the kiss broke Randy was bright red. “I have been wanting to do that for an awfully long time.” Clara said.

“I am glad you did.” Randy said, She ran in the house and in a moment she was in her riding gear and they disappeared down the road.

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