

## Un día todo estará bien

The scratching and scribbling sounds of my pen against the cold paper bounce around my dorm room, punctuated by the rustling and shimmying of my shirt against the desk. There is a moment of satisfaction as I pull my hand away from the drawing, contemplating my work, but the feeling is quickly ruined, replaced instead by frustration when I notice the entire thing is crooked. With a sigh, I start erasing the offensive artwork, my ears flat against my head.

“Why can’t this just... work?” I huff, my hand flying across the paper, stamping out the fruit I had just drawn. Or tried to, at least.

The sheet does not seem to like the mistreatment I’m putting it through however, and it rips in half under the tension. I curse under my breath in Spanish, leaning back in my chair. It takes me a moment to calm down, to stop myself from balling up the two pieces and throwing them in the trash. The words of my professor come back to mind, and I close my eyes.

“Every failure is a step on the ladder to progress,” she said.

I breathe in, and breathe out. I could not quite understand why myself, but I had been taking this art class a lot more seriously than I ever thought I would. I would not say I have an artistic soul, or anything of the sort, but... creating things with my own hands was a pleasant endeavor I was having a lot of fun with. When it worked out, that is. There was another thing as well — call it a competitive streak, or a friendly rivalry, but having Ben with me has made me more eager to draw, to improve... to *show* him how I’m improving, as well.

Still, I need some time away from art right now. With a sigh, I grab the ripped sheet of paper and file it in its respective folder. Kicking away from the desk, I roll my chair back and reach out for my bag tucked against the bed opposite mine, placing the folder inside. Not having a roommate with me has been a blessing in disguise... and the first time I’ve had an entire room to myself. It seems I have unconsciously begun to spread my belongings out and about thanks to all that available space. I place the bag back at the foot of the bed, and as I reach down, I notice one of my boxers under the bed. How did that even get there? I usually fold all my laundry on my bed before putting it away. Maybe I kicked it away while going to sleep one night, and then pushed it deeper in while cleaning the room? Shaking my head, I kneel down and reach for the underwear. I groan with effort, my fingers *barely* just able to touch it.

“Come on...”

After almost half a minute of struggling, I managed to get a good hold on the fabric and pulled it out with a victorious grunt. Something else catches my attention, as it seems the stray boxer is not the only thing I salvaged from underneath the bed. A piece of black plastic seems to have been caught alongside it, knocked loose and rolling a few centimeters away from me, swaying on the

carpeted floor. I toss the boxer onto my bed and grab the unknown item. I inspect the dusty object with an expression of confusion.

“¿Qué es eso?”

I notice a small indent, and realize what I'm holding once I press the button. A rectangular piece of aluminum juts out from the plastic, revealing the object to be a thumb drive.

Did I lose a thumb drive...? Maybe it belonged to the previous tenant of this room. But I found it with my boxer, so that does not make a lot of sense. I sit up, huffing and panting a bit.

Maybe my aunt is right, I could stand to lose a bit of weight... I roll my eyes as I walk to my desk once more. It is likely the dongle is mine, but for some reason I feel like I should not touch it.

Pushing aside those superstitious worries, I slot the key inside my laptop. The old computer whirs to life for a minute, and I stare at my messy desktop. I find it easier to keep my room clean than it is to keep my virtual desktop orderly. At least I'm able to comprehend it enough to use it.

Once the laptop has spent enough time ventilating and making noises and I'm about to give up on the USB entirely, the screen comes alive with a folder named “Portable Drive”. I click on it, not quite sure of what I could find on it. Hopefully, it did not in fact belong to the previous tenant of this room.

The computer once again roars to life, and slowly but surely, dozens of various folders pop up one by one. I squint to read them... They are marked with names like “PEMDAS”, “second semester carlos report”, “US history”, “life science”, “andres 2007”...

Every folder brings back wave after wave of recollection, of memories that felt long buried, but were just waiting to come out. I spend a good half hour navigating through the folders, looking at my old homework and report cards. I guess mom kept good track of everything, somehow.

My heart twists inside my chest, longing for those days where things were not as complicated as they are right now. I try to stay clear of Andres's things, out of some sense of respect for his privacy, but... keeping my curiosity at bay proves to be a difficult task. I find myself wandering through his report cards as well. I knew Andres was a model student back then, but I never remembered just how well he did. Not that I was doing poorly, either. A strong B+ student, at least... but I had to put a lot of effort into everything. For Andres, it was like everything came naturally to him.

Until it didn't.

I'm about to close the window, my curiosity satisfied, when I notice a file different from the rest. Instead of a text document, it's an image. I click on it, and my brain needs to catch up to what my eyes are seeing.

The memories flood back, as if I was reliving that day all over again.

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“Guys, any longer and we’re going to miss Halloween completely!” Mom’s voice echoes from the kitchen.

“Coming ‘ma!” I call out back. “I just can’t get this costume to stay on!”

I’m wrestling with the cardboard, trying my hardest to make it stay whole. It’s not really working, though. I turn to face my brother, who’s busy putting the finishing touches on his costume.

“Andres, gimme the tape please!” I holler at him, probably a bit louder than I intended, pointing to the tape by his side.

He looks at me with a perplexed look, as if I’d just asked for the moon. “Lil’ busy here, man,” he says as he wraps another roll of wrappings around his head, “If I don’t get this on right, this shit isn’t going to hold.”

“Hey, no swearing dude. If mom hears you, she’ll freak out.” I whisper back, moving in to grab the tape myself.

“You swear all the time!” He scoffs, turning back to face the mirror.

“Shut up, dude.” I walk back to my own mirror, tearing a large chunk of tape to apply on the cardboard armor around my shoulder. “I think that should hold...” I turn around, hands to my hips. “How do I look?”

Andres turns around after adjusting the bandage around his head. “That’s not too bad. The girls did a good job.”

I smile back. “I know, right?” I take another look at Andres. “You look good too.”

He cocks his head, one of his bandages coming loose. “Really? I feel stupid. It was mom’s idea, she didn’t wanna buy any costumes this year. You’re lucky the girls made yours.”

I stick my tongue out. “We know who’s the favorite brother now!” I say, winking at Andres. He rolls his eyes back at me.

“Whatever. I don’t care.” He pushes his chair under his desk a bit too forcefully, making it scrape against the floor. I’m about to apologize when mom pokes her head in.

“Andres!” She starts. “I told you, don’t scrape your chair against the floor! I don’t want any scuff marks, got it?” I wince as Andres gets yelled at. That was kinda my fault too.

“Anyway,” she continues. “You both look adorable. Now, get to the kitchen so we can start, the girls are making a mess waiting for you two.” And just like that, she walks out. Andres follows close behind, his mummy wrappings hanging on for dear life to his thin body. I adjust my costume one last time, and head out.

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“Gah,” my brother walks up to me, a bag full of candies in his right hand. “Any more walking, and I’m just gonna be a dude in a black bodysuit for Halloween.” By now, Andres’s lost about half of his mummy wrappings, collecting them in his candy bag.

“Relax, we’re almost home. And at least you’re wearing something underneath. That’d have been really bad if you weren’t!” I crack a joke, trying to lighten his mood. Andres flashes back a grin, giving my cardboard armor a knock.

“Heh, yeah that woulda sucked. How did this cardboard thing even hold out this long with how wet it is tonight, anyway?” He looks at me up and down, a confused look on his face. “Isn’t that super guy you’re dressed as supposed to be wearing a helmet?”

I shake my head with a sigh. “Francisca broke it when she was running around our room.” Andres smirks knowingly, but before he can say anything else, I see two of our sisters about to jump in a puddle from the corner of my eye, my mom too distracted to notice. “Gabriela! Maria! Don’t you dare jump in that puddle!” I hiss at them.

The two eldest sisters stop right as they’re about to jump in, giving me a dirty look. “Carlosito! We weren’t gonna do anythin’!” They whine out. Andres chuckles as he hangs a few steps back, letting me deal with the situation.

I crouch next to them. “I totally saw you, don’t lie to me. You don’t want to make mom mad ‘cause you ruined your beautiful costumes right? You made them yourselves too.” I adjust Gabriela’s witch “costume” which is really just a black shirt and skirt, with a cardboard witch hat she made.

Maria pouts, annoyed by the attention I’m giving her sister. “Well, she stole my witch idea!”

Gabriela gasps, as if Maria accused her of a grave crime. “No, I didn’t! I had it first, you liar!” she shouts back. What would mom say here...?

“You two are the prettiest witches around. God just gave you both the idea because He knew you’d look great.” I say in a comforting tone. “You can’t go and ruin all the hard work you put in!” The both of them nod in unison, apparently convinced by my argument. I stand up, leading them by

the hand around the big puddle.

I see Andres talking with our other two sisters, teasing them about how much candy he managed to get compared to them. I know my brother, though. Unless it's those sour dipping lollipops, most of his haul is going to go to the girls. And me.

Mom is trailing behind in a heated discussion over the phone in English. I can't understand it very well, but she doesn't sound too happy. It's not often that mom sounds happy, to be fair.

She doesn't tell us much, but ever since she got pregnant again, she's been on the phone a lot. She's pretty close to delivering now, and she hasn't been able to go to work a lot.

Andres walks up to me, leaving Francisca and Leticia with mom.

"I dunno how we're gonna handle another baby, man." He shakes his head. "Mom must really love kids, for some weird reason."

I nod back, watching Gabriela and Maria run ahead up the sidewalk. "I guess. I hope it'll be a boy this time."

Andres looks ahead, keeping a close eye on our sisters. "I know. Girls are exhausting," he says. "And at least a guy wouldn't beg me to do my hair for me! And boys don't get angry with our "friends" every week."

"Yeah. It'd be nice to have someone else to play fighting games with." I say with a hopeful smile. I love my sisters, but they're a handful. Taking care of them all the time is so tiring, and since we don't have many interests in common, keeping them busy can be boring at times. Although, at least I can watch telenovelas with them. Andres says it's too gay, but he never explains what makes it gay.

"Girls, don't run too far ahead!" I shout to Maria and Gabriela, and they come to a stop before turning back, giggling. I fail to notice the wet manhole cover in front of me, and my right foot slides over it. Andres grabs hold of me just in time, preventing me from eating dirt right there.

"Sh-shit!" I yelp out, holding on to my brother's shoulder to keep my balance.

"Hey, language man." Andres says, his voice dripping with sarcasm. I blush, turning around to make sure mom didn't hear me. "Watch where you walk! If you bite it, it'll be just me against all the girls!" He jokes.

I scratch the back of my head. "Not if we get another brother by the end of the year."

Andres scoffs. "As if. I bet it's gonna be a girl, and mom just didn't tell us."

I nod. "Yeah, I know."

“Carlosito! You said a bad word!” Maria runs up next to me, Gabriela in tow, a look of shock painted on their faces. Well, fake shock. They’re both already concocting a plan, I can tell. The little devils.

“Yes, I did, but don’t tell mama, okay? I’ll give you two lots of candies if you promise you won’t tell.”

She smiles a big smile, one that reaches ear to ear. “Promise!”

I give them a big grin in response. “Thank you. C’mon, we’re almost home.”

Andres runs up ahead, climbing up the steps to our house. Maria grabs my hand, and as she does so —

“Whiskey!”

— I barely register my mom’s voice when a camera flash blinds me as I turn around. I hear mom laugh, and the girls join in. I laugh alongside them.

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I’m lost in memories for only a moment, but the moment seems to last a lifetime. When I finally emerge from my recollection... I feel like there is something stuck in my throat, and nothing I do seems able to clear it.

Not too long after we took that picture, Alana, my youngest sister, was born. We never got a little brother like Andres and I hoped, but we already knew that, even back then. Things got pretty rough after that. With another mouth to feed, mom was almost never home, and it was up to me and Andres to take care of girls. I... do not know if I did a good job or not.

Silently, I close out the picture. I even consider deleting the file for a few seconds. Everything about it... it felt wrong now. A window to a different life, sitting there, *mocking me*. With a sigh, I take out the thumb drive, and place in a metal box, with other assorted mementos. Maybe one day, it will feel right again.

One day.

