

Highland Middle was a spacious school for Nikolas Clements, a prison more like.

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The alarm clock rang like a crazed drunkard screaming in my ear. I hate that terrible sound in the morning forcing me from my slumber; my sweet, sweet slumber... "Niko, Niko wake up! It's not a snow day remember? Wake up, you're going to be late for school!" In this case my mother was the crazed drunkard. Couldn't I stay aboard my drowsy vessel any longer... "Nikolas, wake up now!" my mother shouted, she then grabbed my blue, comfortable sheets and pulled them right off me kind of like peeling a banana, a cold sleepy banana. I started shivering and then when I saw I had lost the battle I got up, opened my crusty eyes, and looked around my small bedroom; I really enjoyed the light yellow tone of the walls. I looked out the surprisingly large window, at the precious snowflakes. I knew why I was tired; I had stayed up 'till 1:00 in the morning finishing a "quick sketch" I made of her. I then swung my legs across the bed and ran into the bathroom at the end of the hall upstairs.

I quickly entered the doorway but I saw that my brother Victor already occupied the shower; steam was escaping through the sheets that hid his naked body. He had gotten there first; I almost said something obscene, but somehow managed to refrain myself. "Dang it Victor!" I whispered angrily under my breath. He always got in the shower first; how is it he wakes up so fast?

I stormed back to my room as my mother walked past our rooms. I unclothed myself and grabbed my undergarments, sliding it on. I also put on my green shirt and jeans as well as my socks. Today was supposed to be a snow day, meaning that there was too much snow or ice on the road for students to be able to arrive at school safely. But an increase in temperature overnight melted some of the snow making it "safer" to get to school. As if.

I walked out of my carpeted room onto the carpeted hallway. My steps were making small indentations on the buttery yellow carpeting. I paced along the stairwell down to the spacious living room, with its walls similarly colored to the ones in my room, the exception being all the antique paintings my father had inherited from his great-grandmother, now long dead. The grandfather clock on a wall reminded me of her, almost bringing tears to my eyes.

I suddenly felt my eyelids get heavier and heavier. I sat down on the beige couch that happened to be near me, next to the television. But I remembered my mother's temper and got up. It wasn't a good idea to get my mother mad, and so close to my birthday as well.

I stepped along the smooth wooden floor, feeling its cold almost freezing my poor toes but my socks acted like a protective force-field retaining at least some of my heat.

I finally arrived at the kitchen. I stepped onto the black and white checkered floor and pulled out a wooden chair from under a wooden table. My mom was near the table to the left, cooking up something for me to eat at school.

My mom was a great cook able to produce some wonderful concoctions; she could make long, tender spaghetti almost swimming in creamy Alfredo sauce. She could also prepare a delicious steak and create a wondrously sweet yet smoky barbecue sauce which she poured onto the yummy meat, and this is only the beginning of her restaurant's menu. Although some kids at school do tend to get a little jealous watching me eat my home-made cuisine as they sit across from me chewing on their puny meals, usually an ordinary PB&Js (which my mom could probably make, twice as good at least).

Everyone in my family told her to open a restaurant some time, but she told us in a modest way, that the prices would be too expensive. But if she did open a restaurant, I think it would beat all the rest.

For breakfast she had made me... oatmeal? I thought she knew I hated oatmeal; the gloppiest, most disgusting mixture of grains ever created. I don't understand how I hate it though, even with my mom's special touch. I just do. Because I always spill it on myself and the taste is just so plain and ordinary.

I grabbed the spoon nearest to me and I scooped up some of the oatmeal out of the white bowl. I began to elevate my arm up to my open mouth and I then closed my mouth over the spoon, but I took it out too quickly. I frickin' spilled it all over my pants!

And then Victor had to come along and say to my mom, "Thanks mom, I really love oatmeal to tell you the truth." That's it! I stood up and ran back up to my room to replace my dirty pants. Why did that have to happen? Does the universe hate me or something? Uh oh, the oatmeal dropped on the carpeted floor. Mom would be really steamed. But no time for that, it was, oh no, 7:45!

I ran downstairs again. I quickly grabbed a spoon and started devouring the oatmeal in a beastly manner. I know that it was bad manners, but I was going to be late. And I wasn't even sitting while eating the oatmeal.

I dashed back upstairs and went into the bathroom. I grabbed the blue toothbrush off the pale-white sink counter. I messily squirted toothpaste all over my toothbrush and stuck it in my mouth. I started brushing like a maniac while looking in the round mirror. A pale-skinned, dark haired, slightly handsome teenager looked at me through the mirror and I looked back. His dark eyes penetrating my own, curiously trying to unravel my secrets but with a sly, arrogant smirk; did I look that mischievous to everyone?

I quickly spit the liquid tooth-paste out of my mouth and into the sink. I turned the faucet and water poured out aggressively. I managed to get a hold of the water into my cupped hand and then splashed it into my face to wake me up even further, but I didn't splash the water into my face like the people in those cheesy Olay commercials. I also took the water onto my fingers and started rubbing my eyes to get the eye-crust off. I then quickly rinsed my mouth several times and turned the faucet again.

I literally sprinted out of the bathroom and down the stairs to the closet near the large looming, wooden door. I took out a blue wind-breaker type coat as the closet doors made an annoying creaking sound. I looked at the old grandfather clock and saw it was 7:57! Oh no, oh no, oh no! I ran to the mahogany door that led to the garage and pulled on the door knob as it swung open quickly.

My mom was waiting in the front seat; a grumpy frown was imminent on her face. I ran up to the shot gun seat on our inferno orange Chevy Sedan, the 2013 Sonic edition and put on a watch that said 8:00! I personally quite liked it but Victor always had a pessimistic comment about it, usually about the color. He better hope he keeps his mouth shut today. I opened the door and saw my neat, efficient little ocean blue backpack next to my petite blue lunch box (it wasn't really a box, more like an oval).

Slam! "Nikolas, don't shut the door! Too much door slamming can't be good for the car..." "Shut up Victor!" I shouted right in his face; today just wasn't my day, and Mr. Perfect here wasn't going to ruin it any further for me if it's the last thing he does. Click; ding, ding, ding, ding, vroom! So the car finally wants to start, the universe definitely hates me today.

My mom reached her hand into her baggy purse with graphics depicting a beach scene; she took out a gray remote control and pressed a button. The garage door began to lower down, but then it stopped, and then it ultimately closed; at long last. Today was a nervous day for me; I was in a new city with a new school. Why did my dad's job take him this far from San Francisco?

And I may have been drowsy today, and I admit, grumpy as well, but the scenery was just spectacular. A beautiful long, black road and snow falling gracefully all around; pine trees, with their sleek blades dusted gently with frozen precipitation: a poet's wonderland. My mother decided to break the peace, "Honey remember, today is Monday; if you lose anything it goes to the lost and found, waiting to be disposed by 10:54. So you better not lose any of your belongings." Thanks mom, disrupting my good mood.

When I arrived at Clarence Academy that my mother chose for me because of good teacher reviews and other irrelevant reviews mothers look for in a school, I was completely and utterly alone. A few weeks ago at Highland Middle School when I started seventh grade, I had

lots of friends, and I was expecting to see them after “summer” break (I now lived in the famously cold Stone City, up in Alaska). But my mom always thought she had my best interests in heart so she switched me to Clarence Academy; “great” switch huh. But I guess I have to buck up, like I always do.

Clarence Academy was intimidating at first sight. The school was thin and looked more like an apartment building than a school. Placed on a hill (unusual for Stone City because of all the flat plains I had seen on the long drive to the small town) a smooth stone courtyard fenced in with bluish metal walls; red brick walls that indicated 5 floors (weird for a school). The Clarence Academy also looked like an island surrounded by the huge parking lot around it as well, the sidewalk on the inner side looked like a dock.

My mom drove up to the dock and unloaded her cargo as I opened the upholstery door. “Remember, your first hour is music.” I swung my legs over from the seat and then jumped out of the car with the blue backpack on my back and lunchbox at my side. I slowly paced warily as I arrived at the entrance, staring at the looming building; ominous, essence of. The cold was almost biting away at my skin.

I kept walking and when I looked back at the car it had already become an inferno orange blur followed by a small dust cloud. The first day of school, as sad as it was, wouldn’t dare pass as fast.

I continued to tread, my slow saunter becoming a faster stride until I finally began to scuttle along the courtyard like a bug trying not to get squashed. But getting squashed was too imminent for me, the unlucky bug never perfect, never right. I long for the day for that all to change.

I quickly sprinted down the courtyard to the bottom of the hill and stimulated a dash that brought me over to the other side, full of life and excitement and first day jitters. I also saw a few unfortunate kids that had forgotten their winter wear and were freezing their butts off, almost causing an earthquake from all the shivering.

I looked at the blue watch I had acquired on the way to school. It was 8:04 which means almost time to go in at 8:10, and realizing that it takes me about 3 minutes to get to school; I hadn’t noticed how close I lived to the school. I guess that’s a good thing (?). But it gave me enough time to draw, which was my passion. If I wasn’t able to graduate college I would definitely become a professional artist. Since I was about 4 years old, everyone had been telling me how advanced and intricate my artwork was.

I took out my small drawing pad I had previously packed into my backpack. I also took out a pencil case (I wasn’t good at coloring). I took a sky blue mechanical pencil that was fully

loaded with lead so I would never run out. And when I pressed the pencil down to the smooth papery surface I let my imagination soar to unimaginable heights (how ironic). I looked out at the snow and imagined a monstrous being constructed fully of snow; I began to draw a large lumpy oval that was its face and added large slits for eyes. But its pupils were quite small and beady. I added a wide yet short mouth with grotesque long daggers of teeth, the definition of deadly. I started to draw the wide torso that would later melt into the ground, as it had no legs.

I heard a bell in the background. I looked up as everyone started swarming toward the door. I started to put my blue drawing pad back into my backpack but someone with jealous blue eyes opposite to my dark eyes snatched it right out of my hand! How rude. I'm going to get it back no matter what it takes, that pad had the drawing I was going to give my mom and now it was gone. But what's done is done; I guess I'll just have to buck up like always. Sigh. I started to walk back toward the door again and walked through it as it closed behind me.

The halls of Clarence Academy were moderately sized in the height and width aspect. The gray tile floor and walls gave it a depressing look. And there were many small/big black doors lining the walls. There was also a grand glass display located straight down from the entrance on a wall showcasing a variety of trophies, medals, and signed pictures. One picture was placed in a large elegant frame and was located in the most visible spot in the showcase.

I kept walking along trying to find the music room. The sounds my shoes made when hitting the floor were becoming easier and easier to hear as everyone was arriving to their classes. I walked over to a short Chinese man in a navy blue suit and asked him, "Excuse me, where is the music room?" and he replied, "It's the door right there and I'm the music teacher: Mr. Lee; I'm so glad you chose music this year, it's a fun class." True to his word he walked over to one of the larger black doors with the number 207 over it.

I followed him and walked into an almost empty, spacious room with gray carpeting; seems the school is good at following up its depressive mood. There were also 4 children on 4 out of the 6 pianos occupying the walls. I wonder why...

"Hello, I am Mr. Lee and welcome to piano class 207," wait, did he just say piano (?) "You will be learning how to play the piano this year and believe me it is worth the wait. Excuse me, what's your name?" asked Mr. Lee and I responded, "Nikolas, sir." His mouth opened again, "Could you move to piano '5' please; they each have labels." I sauntered over to the piano that had the white laminated label saying '5'. I took my coat and backpack off and set them down next to the piano. I sat down at the chair and noticed a short boy with really curly blonde hair but I couldn't see his eyes; I did see his face and noticed his focused expression. He

also had a notebook on his lap and a pencil in his hand. He was drawing a very crude, ugly figure; I guess he's not as good as he might wish.

This class proved to be really boring, and an hour felt more like a year; but at least the teacher was nice. And we had no homework today, score! "Ring, ring, ring" the bell screeched out. Class was over, and I remember my mom telling me something about math being my next class; sounds like "fun".

This time I didn't have to ask a teacher for directions because Mr. Lee had given us schedules with lots of writing on them. Mine said: 1st hour-Music 207, 2nd hour-Math 438, 3rd hour-Science 111, 4th hour-Art/Advisory 574, 5th hour-Cafeteria 100, 6th hour-Language Arts 258, 7th hour-History 632; my schedule also said: Locker= 210, Combo= 12-5-0. So I guess my locker should just be 3 doors down from here. Wow, I can see it from here; a shiny black door with the number 210 on it, just for me.

I went up to it and noticed a key-board with 10 numbers on it, a dash arrow, and an enter key. I pushed the numbers 12 dash 5 dash 0 and pressed the enter key. I heard a click and the door opened up the slightest bit. I grabbed the edge of the door and opened it up. I zipped open my blue backpack and got a good grip on all the new school supplies I had. I put most of them in the locker and shut it as I bent down to grab some blue folders with bright white labels saying math and science. I also grabbed a thin pencil case that happened to be blue as well.

I started walking toward the stairwell at the end of the hall and saw the boy with the blonde curly hair approaching me. I noticed his blue eyes. "Hey there Nick, I hear you're an artist. I like to draw too; what's your favorite color?" he asked me and I answered, "Blue, and what's your name?" Then he winked and ran off, weird. Wait, how did he know I liked to draw? Oh no, he's the one who took my note pad. But he was so nice to me, why would he do that?

I kept walking to the stairs and started up them and saw the blue-eyed boy already at the top. I started to sprint up the stairs but when I arrived to where he used to be but he'd already disappeared down the crowded hall. I started to walk slower down the hall and began to take in how many people actually went to this school. I continued along the hall and arrived at another sleek black door with the number 438 on it.

I opened the door and entered the similarly spacious and gray room of math; except this room was lined up with wooden desks and lots of white boards. Everyone was also sitting in their desks as well. I think you could choose.

There was also a tall, really skinny, wrinkly woman with long, dirty blonde hair that made her look even taller. She also had naturally mean eyes that inspired fear to everyone in

the class. The only nice thing about her was her white dress, pearl necklace, and white stilettos. She seemed to like the color white.

“Everyone choose your seats wisely or I might have to make arrangements. Christian and Angelo, bad choice; sit as far away from each other as possible! My name is Ms. Rivers,” Ms. Rivers said in a falsely happy tone.

I looked around and saw that almost every seat was taken. The only seats left were at the direct front of the class. I now understand why they’re the last seats left. I decided to sit in between a really tall boy, who was also skinny, and a girl who was about my height and who had venomous green eyes and short brown hair. “Hi my name is Iris, and I’m inviting people to a party I’m having this Saturday. I was wondering if you’d like to come?” she said in a surprisingly kind tone; I guess you don’t judge a book by its cover. “Sure I’d love to come, you can tell me about the details around lunchtime.” I responded.

I stopped paying attention to the teacher as soon as she began to talk; math talk was always boring. I began to think back toward the blue note pad, I would see the boy again tomorrow, possibly today, because my mom’s birthday was today. And I wanted to give her the drawing as a gift.

“Excuse me, what’s your name?” asked Ms. Rivers and I responded, “Nikolas.” “Please try to look like you’re interested in this because you look half asleep.” So I did my best to look “interested” and just stared at Ms. Rivers while she was explaining her boring math curriculum. Then the bell rang 3 times and I got up and exited the classroom.

I saw the curly haired boy run past me again as I was exiting the room, but he winked again and kept running. I decided to catch up to him; I ran after him but then he stopped abruptly so I crashed into him and fell to the ground. He then started running off again as people around me giggled and snickered; I know I won’t fall for that again.

I looked at my schedule and went to Science 111. “Hello everyone, sit down at the desks I will assign you. Nikolas desk 1; by the way they have labels. Jane desk 2; George desk 3...” and the teacher continued calling names as I sat down at the desk closest to the back of the room. But I noticed that George had curly blonde hair and blue eyes; he was the boy that stole my note pad! “Hey George; where’s my note pad?” I asked in a demanding tone, “I swear she made me do it. That girl in the front, she made me sell the drawings and then give her the money. I had nothing to do with it, I promise. But I do remember that I sold it to Ms. Drain, the art teacher. I swear I’ll help you get it back,” he said desperately and I noticed his mouth twitch; I decided to trust him. “Which girl?” I asked and he replied, “The one with the cute green eyes and short brown hair. Her name is Iris, and she tricked me. Don’t worry we’ll get your notebook back.”

And then the class started with the teacher slowly walking toward the front of the class, mysteriously leaving the room. And she didn't come back for at least 47 minutes. "Ms. Dry isn't here yet, let's pretend to write a pass so we can go to art class." Suggested George; so I took a pencil and on a little piece of paper that said 'pass' I counterfeited the teacher's signature and George and I got the piece of paper and went over to the front of the class where the door was.

We exited the room and I remembered Ms. Drain was in room 574. So George and I went over to the stairwell and ran up the stairs to the art room. But when we finally arrived at the black door with the numbers 574 above it, I began having doubts about my "friend" George; he was just too good to be true. And wasn't he the one who stole the note pad, the one that started it all? If he really cared about preserving our friendship he wouldn't have been so easily "convinced" in the first place.

"George, I don't think you're telling the truth about Iris. She invited me to her party straight off without even getting to know me. She seemed like a nice girl who wouldn't hurt a fly; I'm pretty sure you're lying. Where's my note pad?" I demanded in an almost terrifying tone. "It's already 10:50, it'll be gone in 4 minutes you know. And you'll never know where it went; your mother will never get her precious little present," He muttered avariciously as an envious sneer began forming on his face "With love, your Niko." He was mocking me.

"I guess I'll have to check the lost and found right now then. Don't want to lose anything to the disposal crew." I shouted victoriously; there was still time. His face then lost emotion and he charged at me, but I moved over to the side as he crashed painfully onto the wide, hard array of black lockers and slumped onto the ground; he stopped moving as he lay on the ground, knocked out cold. I checked my watch, it was 10:53!

I began to run down the gray hall and saw 6 tall men in blue custodian's uniforms with empty black bags slumped over their backs. The disposal crew! I quietly followed behind them until they reached a tall, door-less room with lots of musty yellow shelves, almost empty except for a blue note pad just lying on the top shelf.

I ran past the men and quickly climbed the shelves. I reached out and grabbed the note pad; then I jumped off and ran past a group of surprised looking men, back out toward the stairwell leading to room 111 as the man started shouting after me. Mission accomplished!