

I fight the urge to follow Miranda and go to her house for the afternoon. The orphanage wouldn't miss me; they didn't the last times I arrived back late. But I know Miranda. She would want to share secrets the moment her room door closed. And I can't trust anybody with my secrets. I shake my head to her invitation.

"Sorry Miranda. I promised I'd be home in 15 minutes." I say, my voice taut.

"Aw, Anika, but you never come over!" replied Miranda, the edges of her mouth turning down in a pout. "Please can you come?"

"No," I say, turning on my heel and walking out of the playground. I don't look back to see Miranda's reaction, as I head back to the orphanage. A tear drips out of my eye as I think about the only people I could have shared secrets with- my parents. My mind wanders back to that day when I was sitting in the emergency room, in tears, clutching my aunt's hand, watching and waiting. My parents never came out. I was only five then, and I couldn't and wouldn't accept their death for two months.

My parents were going out for their anniversary dinner, when a drunk driver hit them from behind while they were on a bridge, not to mention the driver was sending nonsense text messages to random people. My parents spun around, crashing completely through the barrier on the side of the bridge and fell, being killed almost instantly.

I near the neighborhood my orphanage is in. Quickly, I wipe my tears away. Avoid the questions. You don't want the questions. Especially from those sympathetic adults, always trying to make you feel better, hugging you, breaking into your personal bubble. Always asking questions.

"Anika! Anika! Please, can you come over today? You said maybe! Please?" a voice breaks into my thoughts.

Oh, no, not Lydia. Lydia is a small, home schooled, over-friendly ten-year-old girl who lives on the neighborhood behind the orphanage. Quickly, I pretend I didn't hear, but Lydia just runs up and grabs my arm.

"Anika, can you come over? Please?" pleads Lydia.

"I-" I stammer. Lydia's eyes light up.

"Oh, or can I come to your house? Yes, can I? Can I? Can I meet your parents? Do you have any brothers or sisters? Please?"

My eyes fill up with tears again.

“No,” I reply, moving my arm to shake Lydia off.

“Then I will follow you,” concludes Lydia. Immediately I resolve to take the long way home, hoping Lydia will get tired and go back to her own house. As I walk on in silence, I can hear barely Lydia’s little pattering feet following me. I walk up the steps to the orphanage and I hear her gasp.

A feeling of dread fills my heart- I forgot all about Lydia! Now the secret is out! Now Lydia will tell all of my friends and they’ll be so mad at me for not telling them. They’ll never want to play with an orphan!

“You’re an orphan?” gasps Lydia. “Oh why didn’t you tell me? I wouldn’t have told anybody!”

“You wouldn’t?” I ask. I turn to face Lydia, my voice growing louder. “Get away from here, and don’t you dare tell anybody!” Lydia’s eyes widen.

“Oh why couldn’t you see I didn’t want you here?” I scream at her. With that I slam the door.

I storm up to my room, which I share with another small girl named Isabelle, whose parents died in a fire. Isabelle is shy and usually keeps to herself. The day she moved in, I had made a wall out of pillows between our different sides of the bed. Isabelle had looked at it with wide eyes, but hadn’t said anything.

I slam the door to my room. My face hits the pillow, and the tears flow.

Oh how tired, how sleepy... today’s events were exhausting... I guess a small nap would be okay... calm my nerves a bit...

Suddenly, a woman in a flowing white dress appears beside me.

“Mother? Mother, is that you? No, you’re not Mother. Who are you?”

“Trust, honey,” she replies in a silvery voice. “There’s people to trust and people not to trust. You must learn.” With that the woman began to fade.

“What? I don’t understand. Don’t go! Please, don’t go! No...”

I wake up with a start. That dream... it was so real. What had that woman said?

“...There’s people to trust and people not to trust...”

I knew that already. She had said one other thing that I didn't understand. What was that?

"... You must learn." Yes, that was it. Haven't I already learned? I could have trusted Mother and Father, no one else. Or did she mean that I was supposed to trust someone else? No, it can't be! I will never be able to trust anybody else, ever! It must have been like a regular dream. Based on random thoughts in your head, never really actually helpful. Yes, that has to be it.

I put my head back down on the pillow. I really wonder what that "Trust Woman" had meant. She was really persuasive. Oh, now I'm believing it. Well, I'll just have to do my best to push her out of my mind.

I check my watch- it's 8:30. I guess I'll try to go to bed early tonight, though my nap might make it tough to fall asleep.

Sure enough, I lie in bed awhile before I finally drift off.

"Anika, please, listen to me! Anika!" Lydia? Oh no, not Lydia. Run! Get away from her! She'll ask questions, the unbearable ones, the endless stream of questions!

I awake, shaking with adrenaline. Inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale. Oh, how relieved I am that that was a dream! Automatically, I get out of bed quietly, assuming Isabelle is still sleeping. Her school starts later than mine, so she usually gets up after me. But when I see she isn't in bed, I whip my watch to my face- its battery is dead!

"Oh, what time is it?" I mutter. I run to the room next to me- everybody is awake already! There is nobody to ask- oh I'll just get ready. No use running around wasting time if I really need to go. Besides, when I grab my breakfast for the walk to school, I'll be able to check the time on the microwave. I struggle with my shirt for at least a minute. I'm positive my hair is a mess, but I can't check because I don't have any time to look in a mirror or brush my hair.

The clock reads 8:30, thirty minutes after the time I should already be at school! Not only that, but I missed the bus. Maybe I should just say I'm sick... no, I have my speech on the desert savanna that I have been practicing for weeks today. I can't afford to miss *that!* I'll just get there late and tell them I felt sick with nervousness for my speech... no, they'd

never believe that. I have never been bad about these kinds of things. I'll think of something on my run to school!

I shove the door open and run outside, letting the door slam behind me. A cool spring breeze hit me in the face. Yes, spring is coming! No time to think about that now though, I've got to run! So indeed, I do run, taking a few shortcuts, remembering the way the bus always goes.

Lydia's high-pitched voice sends my heart beating fast. "Anika, I'm sorry about what happened yesterday. But why can't you just tell people? Just think about it please. Why can't you trust us?" Suddenly Lydia is right in front of me, her eyes pleading.

"No," I hiss in her face. "You're wrong! Nobody has to know. You shouldn't even know!" I shove her aside and run toward school, praying she won't run after me and attract more attention.

That "trust" came up again. I wonder what it really means!

It isn't long before I reach school. It is then that I realize I don't have an excuse- I'll just have to tell the truth.

The school day is filled with the speeches and other exciting things, but my mind is on something else. What Lydia had said is sticking to me like a burr that I can't get rid of. My mind does a tug of war with it. It is true, but I don't want it to be true. Most of the time the "truth" gave in and the "I want" side won. The "truth" was weak, but it was strong enough that I really thought about it for a while.

I pass Lydia's house again on the way home, forgetting completely about her.

"Anika, please listen to me!" She attempts to get me to believe her again. I run the rest of the way home, trying to beat into my head to not go past her house again.

But yet still, even when I avoid her house, she catches me and talks to me. And man, she is persuasive! The whole day and at night, I think about what she said, trying to defy her words.

I sit in my room after school, pulling my socks off.

"Anika, you have a visitor. She asked to meet you in your room alone," called one of the workers at the orphanage. I sat up, suddenly alert. Who could it be? Should I let that person in? Oh, no, it must be Lydia, she is the only person I know that knows where I live. But it would sound rude to say no! Oh, I'll just let her in. I won't listen to her anyway.

“Okay, you can let her in,” I call to the worker.

The door opens and reveals Lydia, just as I suspected.

“Oh I knew it was you,” I say, trying to hide my feelings, though I know she probably already knows them; I had expressed them every time to her each time I see her. “What do you want?”

“Anika, please, think about it-“

“*I have been!*” I shout, a little too loudly, because somebody from the room next to me opens my door and tells me to be quiet, completely oblivious to Lydia.

“Okay, well, Anika, I won’t bother you anymore after this.” I breathe a sigh of relief. “But please, just, think about it. Why can’t you trust? Trust isn’t always easy, but it should be sometimes.” With that she walked out the door.

Whoa, that was not what I was expecting.

I go on with my daily afterschool stuff, such as homework and studying for tests, tests, and more tests! I feel like I can’t concentrate though, I am thinking too much about the small speech that Lydia just gave.

What’s the reciprocal of $1\frac{3}{8}$? How do you flip a mixed number? Oh yeah. Change it to an improper fraction. So that would be $\frac{12}{8}$? No, it’s $\frac{11}{8}$. Oh, that needs to be simplified. That would be $1\frac{3}{8}$. No, I *need* the improper fraction! So the reciprocal of $1\frac{3}{8}$ is $\frac{8}{11}$. Got it.

I scribble that down in my notebook.

You’d think I would learn from that. But no, I keep simplifying the improper fraction, each time!

How is trust ever easy? Maybe when you have your parents it is, but I guess Lydia just doesn’t understand what it’s like not to have parents around all the time. It feels impossible if you don’t have the people you grew up trusting. I never really had friends when I was young either, so I don’t have good friends that I can trust now. Trust is never easy for me.

I yawn, thinking how grateful I am that it is now weekend.

But how can I know what trust is like? I hardly remember my parents; I was so young when they died. I haven’t tried to trust for seven years. Maybe I should try... no, I

can't! I might end up having to tell people that I'm an orphan. But isn't that part of trust? Do you have to tell secrets to truly trust? I hope not. I really don't know what to do.

A worker at the orphanage holler out that it's time for dinner. Today's is spaghetti and meatballs, though I like my noodles plain. But when the noodles are whole grain, I put sauce on just to cover over the grainy taste. I hope there are plain noodles tonight.

The dinner passed quickly with nobody to hold me back. I found myself trying to talk to a few people, just to see how it felt, but nobody at the orphanage is friendly enough to invite somebody new to their table.

That night was a dreamless night, although I couldn't sleep much since I kept thinking about trust. I am lucky that that was a weekend night or my teachers would not be happy with me since I was late yesterday.

The weekend passed slowly since I had nothing to do. I don't have much homework because of the speeches. The orphanage is usually pretty dreary on these days because a lot of people are like me- quiet and keeping to ourselves, with no friends to play with. There are hardly any people that come to look at us to possibly adopt us, and each time there is, I always put on my grumpiest unhappiest face so that people won't adopt me. I would never be able to adjust to another family. Last year there were only three adoptions, all three kids being teenage boys. The families were obviously looking for someone who could help them with work. Probably nobody would want me anyway. I'm not very appealing to people. I'm too rude and messy. I have heard the workers whispering about me. They try to teach me, but I don't like to listen to them.

Isabelle bursts into the room, smiling, grabbing her overnight stuff hurriedly.

"What's the rush?" I ask her.

"I'm going to Jessica's room for the afternoon, and I get to sleep in her room tonight!" she replies. Jessica is Isabelle's only friend. Jessica is like a fashion model, her golden hair hanging down to her waist in waves, her clothes always the perfect match. I'm not so sure Isabelle and Jessica are true friends though, because Isabelle seems to be drawn to Jessica because of her beauty. I have noticed though that Isabelle is always in better mood after she visits with her friend. Apparently, Jessica was abandoned and found in the streets in below zero temperatures. Why would her parents not like her? She is the dream

child of many parents! She is polite *and* beautiful. I hope the people who adopt her aren't as cruel as her birth parents.

It's dinnertime. I rack my brain to try to remember what dinner is today. Oh yes! Today's dinner is my favorite- tacos! I stuff myself, the taste rolling around my mouth. I notice Isabelle and Jessica sitting together at a table. They aren't whispering secrets to each other, but they still look happy. It looks like they're just talking about life, what they enjoyed, what's going on in school... and they look happy. I haven't felt genuine happiness like that since my parents died. I feel a longing pang of sadness in my heart as I realize what I need.

A friend. I really need a friend. A real friend to help me along the bumpy journey of life. To hold me up and encourage me when things get tough. To push me on when I give up. I fall asleep, wondering what I'll do on Monday.

"Hey Anika!" calls Brittney, a girl in my class. "Can you come over today? You never go to anyone's house, ever. Everyone else goes to other people's houses. It would be great! We could bake cookies, or do crafts, whatever you like! Hey... I don't actually know what you like to do," she calls across the playground after school.

Automatically I think "no", but then I remember about trust and friends. Brittney is an eager friendly person, always ready to help.

"Yeah, I guess. How long?" I reply.

Brittney is taken aback. "Oh, really? Oh, can you stay for dinner? Will it be okay with your parents?"

It was now that I realized that I wasn't quite ready to tell people my secret.

"Yeah, I'm sure it would be fine. I can text home," I say. I'm not lying when I say this. You have to inform the orphanage before you stay out late. I whip out my phone and sent a quick message to the orphanage. I'm not surprised when I don't get a reply.

"Okay, lets go," I say. "Lead the way."

I follow Brittney to her house. Her house smells like cinnamon and cookies. The smell brings back small memories of baking cookies with my mom.

"Hey, baking cookies would be great. I used to do it sometimes for fun. I haven't in a long time," I say, a little intimidated.

“Yeah, that would be great!” Brittney and I start talking about life, school, and ourselves but I didn’t mention my family at all.

As Brittney and I take turns mixing batter, I realize probably the most important thing I’ll ever learn.

Trust is good.