

The Spectators of Junior High

By Leila Rucker

Do you know of the people that are just there? They've always just been there. They are like extras in a movie. You don't pay attention to them, but they are just there. To someone else you might be the person that's just there. It's different for everyone, but have you ever heard of the story about the person that's just there? Probably not because you don't pay attention to them, they just seem to go unnoticed right?

I knew a girl whose name was Alyssa. She wasn't popular but, she wasn't mean or, nerdy or, anything really. She sat with a group of girls that didn't pay much attention to her. All she did was spectate. She watched as their emotions could change things someone specifically would do, but everyone was so busy that Alyssa's the only one that noticed. She watched as a girl was trying to speak about her parent's divorce, but it was covered up by the noise of unimportant middle school things. Alyssa felt for the girl who was unheard by her fellow "friends." After school, Alyssa met up with the girl. "Hello, I heard how you were trying to talk to your friends about your parent's divorce . I'm very sorry." Alyssa said. The girl gave her a mean snarl and walked away. Alyssa didn't understand. She walked home that day wondering why the girl had been so mean to her. She got that it was hard to talk about, but just moments earlier she had tried to talk about it with people that didn't even care.

Then, that day Alyssa decided something. She wasn't going to be the spectator anymore; she wanted to stand out as much as possible! She wore the clothes she wanted, she said whatever she felt fit. But she still made time to pay attention to other people. People like the girl who tried to talk about the divorce. She listened to those kinds of people, but she still talked and stood out and said things to new people. Unfortunately Alyssa still dealt with the snarling mean comments and looks that came her way. In the mirror she asked herself, "Is it the way I look?" No it couldn't be, she thought, she had always thought she was moderately "pretty" but was she **too pretty** or was she ugly? She stared at herself for a long time in the mirror. She couldn't decide if she wanted to stand out and talk or did she want to spectate. Alyssa had to admit she kind of missed her watch and observe days. But also she thought, was there a difference at all? She still got the rude comments. It was all so confusing. What was the right thing to do?

Alyssa had an older sister Hallee. Alyssa decided to ask her. She considered her sister an outgoing adventurous person and she still hadn't heard Hallee's experiences with the snarky comments and rudeness of Junior High. All she had ever heard about was how wonderful it was with all her friends. Occasionally, Hallee would talk about her

dates with her boyfriends, but that was about it. Alyssa knocked on the door, "Hallee I have a question for you." "What do you want, Ally?" That was Hallee's nickname for Alyssa. "I can't seem to do the right thing at school. I either am quiet and observe people or I am myself and talk and laugh. The problem is I still get mean looks and rude things said to me even though I've tried both ways. I don't get it, I can't seem to fit in!" Alyssa cried. "Don't worry Ally, it's going to be okay. When I was in middle school I felt the same way. It's all about the people. Who are you talking to? Do they accept you? Are they really good friends?" "No their not! No matter what I do I have to be just like them. I don't get it Hallee!" Ally was upset and Hallee could see it. What could Hallee do though? Tell the girls to be nicer? No, that would make things worse. Alyssa left in tears, she was embarrassed, no wonder no one liked her, she thought. Then she remembered it was her mean "friends" that judged her, not her sister.

The next day at school, Alyssa made a decision she would do what she wanted. She asked the lunch lady if she could move seats. "Yes you can move seats but this is permanent." said Mrs. Bark. Alyssa had been eyeing a group of girls and boys that were in her art class. They looked nice. "Um, hi can I sit here?" asked Alyssa. "Of course you can!" a girl who was a few seats down the table said. Everyone smiled and watched her sit. "What's your name?" Alyssa asked the girl next to her. "My name is Bailey! This is Garrett, Mia, Allen, Ollie, Cara, Gillian and Jake. What's your name?" asked Bailey. Alyssa was overwhelmed by so many nice people. Wow, she thought! "I'm Alyssa, hello everyone." The conversation carried on as if nothing had happened. Something was different though, people would ask her what she thought. "Let's ask what Alyssa thinks," Mia said. "Who would win in a fight, The Hulk or Superman?" "Um, I think The Hulk would win." Half the table said "What! No he wouldn't" and the other half said "Yeah! I told you!" Alyssa finally felt like she belonged. Questions like that continued and Alyssa wasn't going to stop them.

That day on her way to English the girl whom she had tried to talk to about her parents divorce stopped her in the hallway, "Where were you today? We noticed you were gone, where were you?" The bell rang before she could answer. Did the people at her old table really miss her? This made her happy, it felt good to be missed. It was great, it's all she thought about in English. The next day, the morning periods flew by and before she knew it, it was lunch time. Alyssa thought to herself I feel bad for leaving them. I'd better move back. She got her lunch and walked over to the table only to find that her seat had already been replaced. She stomped over to them and said, "Guys! What the heck?! I thought you said you missed me only to have me replaced in one day!?" "Who are you again?" said Ava. She was the meanest of the group. The other girls laughed at the comment and Alyssa walked away furiously. She sat down at her new seat with all the nice people who actually talked to her. She stared at her food.

Bailey noticed and said, "What's wrong Ally? Is it okay that I call you that? No. But seriously, what's wrong?" "Nothing it's my stupid ex-friends. I thought they actually missed me, they already have me replaced." "It's ok Ally, that's tough I remember when I used to sit with them. Remember that guys?" "Oh I remember!" said Mia "Those are the people I sat with last year." "Me too" said everyone else. They had all come from that group of girls. "That's why we made it like our own group of people," said Gillian. Everyone nodded. Alyssa still felt a little betrayed but she was reassured that these were, well, her people.

For the next few months of school she bonded with the group of people she was with. Cara had invited the whole group to a big party. Alyssa loved it; she loved the sleepovers, and the jokes, and that they believed everyone's opinion was valid. It wasn't about looks or who we were dating. It was about being fun. Sometimes real personal topics were explored. Alyssa wasn't the only one who cared about people. She was overjoyed with the support and love she was receiving!

Alyssa thought her life was going well with new friends, a happy family, and good grades. The middle school dream. Then one day Alyssa came home to her parents sitting on the couch, her mother sobbing and her Dad comforting her. "What happened?" Alyssa asked. With a choked voice her Dad told her, "Your mother went to the doctor today because of her head pain. Apparently she hasn't been telling anyone but, she's been going weekly for MRI's. Today they finally got a result, she has a brain disease called Chiari Malformation." Alyssa's knees wobbled as if they would give out at any moment. This couldn't be happening. Could this kill her? Was it contagious? Is it like migraines or headaches? Is there a cure? "What are we going to do... will this kill her? Is she gonna be okay? Mom, Dad answer me!" Alyssa shouted. She fell to the ground crying. Her Mom and Dad ran to her, hugging her, as if everything was going to be okay.

Later that night Hallee walked through the front door not knowing that this news would ruin her whole day. Alyssa decided to go up to her room. 30 minutes passed and she was still on the phone when she heard a scream from Hallee. It was a scream Alyssa had never heard before. Alyssa ran out of her room and practically flew downstairs to see Hallee on the floor just like she had been. She wrapped her arms around her and didn't let go for a long time.

A while passed since they found out and her Mom went in for countless appointments. In the meantime Alyssa read books from the library on Chiari. It was a brain disease that affected your cerebellum. It was basically unstable and was falling down out of its place. After a while of it slowly dropping, it reaches your spinal cord

causing there to be so much pressure on it. This also gave symptoms like, shaking hands, numbness, and worse things that luckily her Mom hadn't experienced yet. Alyssa learned that her Mom's head pain grew worse depending on the weather.

It was around the end of May and it was the last week of school. Her mom's Chiari had gotten better with the medication she was on. Her Dad was at a conference so he wouldn't be there for the last day of school dinner. After the long week she had experienced, she and Bailey left middle school for the last time for two months! "Meet me at my house tonight at 7:30 I have something to show you," said Bailey. She rushed off before Alyssa had a chance to say no.

It was 7:30 she walked up and rang the doorbell. Bailey's mother answered and led her to the basement. "What is happening?" Alyssa said. She opened the basement door to see all of her friends waiting for her! And her Dad?! What was this? "Surprise!" they all shouted. "For..for me? I love it, thank you guys so much!" They sat and ate cake, dinner, and talked about funny stories.

"I've got clean up Ally, don't worry about it!" said Bailey cheerfully. "Thank you Bailey I've never had someone do this for me before. You know what I've been through these past couple of months, and it means so much to me," replied Alyssa. Things were hard this year but she had good people in her life. One thing she knew for certain was that her old friends would never love her like Bailey and the others did now.

Looking back at the beginning of the year, Alyssa remembered how hard it was just being a spectator. She realized that she can watch and observe those around her, but that she also has a voice worth listening to.