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THE SINGLE GREATEST PIECE OF NEWS OF ALL TIME

Mr. Arredondo must truly think he is the smartest teacher there ever was. I'm not so sure. Our class didn't even have a gift exchange like the rest of the fifth grade and when I went up to his desk to ask him about it last week, he just said, "I've got it covered," like that actually meant a single thing. When the bell rang and we all grabbed our backpacks and started stampeding toward Winter Break, he stood by the door and pulled out this stack of red envelopes and that got everybody lined up real fast.

He passed out an envelope to each of us with each of our names written on the front of them and somehow he gave the right name to everyone, first try, like somehow he knew just what order we would get lined up in, but that couldn't be true.

"Good luck, Astrid," he said, as I took mine.

"What do you mean, 'good luck'?"

"You'll see."

I gave him a look, darted into the hallway and ripped the envelope right open.

I noticed part way through ripping that he had written on the back

**DO NOT OPEN
UNTIL HOME**

but of course I had already gotten this far, so...



Inside was a crisp five dollar bill and another note printed on paper the same color red as the envelope:

USE THIS FOR SOMEONE WHO NEEDS IT.

I didn't know what that was even supposed to mean but I shoved the envelope and the five and the note into my backpack and walked outside to the second grade pickup area where my little brother Gabe gets out. I get to retrieve him here every day partly because I am pretty responsible and partly because my parents say they have had enough of school pickup for a lifetime. They also say that we can handle walking home by ourselves because they used to walk home all by themselves, and parents always like to tell you things are just the same as they used to be.



While I was waiting for Gabe, I saw out of the corner of my eye that a bunch of kids from my class had also ignored the instructions on the envelope and were waving their money around like they had been given one of those jumbo-size checks for one million dollars instead of just a nice five. Damien and Mo rushed at the man with the snack cart and the ice cream and I was so distracted by this that I didn't notice Gabe was already standing right next to me, ready to go. I grabbed him by the wrist and dragged him back into school.

“C’mon, Gabe. I left something in my class.”

I led us back to Mr. Arredondo’s room and walked in, right to my desk, like I really did forget something. Gabe followed close behind like I had him on a leash or something which he gets like

sometimes when he is around grown-ups but almost never otherwise.

“Can I help you two?” Mr. Arredondo asked, amused, looking up from packing his desk.

“Yes, I just wanted to say that I saw some people already opened their envelopes and are just waving around their five dollars.”

“And how did you know the envelopes had five dollars in them?” Okay, he had me there.

“Well, I just mean, I get it, okay, like it’s supposed to be for a homeless person or you know, charity, so I just wanted to tell you that I saw Damien and Mo using it to buy each other Hot Takis, and I just—”

“You’re tattling, Astrid.”

“I’m not *tattling*, I just thought you might like to know that certain students are not following your instructions.”

Gabe gave me a look, like, a *you tricked me and please now let’s leave* look.

“Which part of my instructions?” Mr. Arredondo asked. “Maybe Mo felt he really needed to be bought some Hot Takis.”

“What is this? Some sick joke?”

This made Mr. Arredondo laugh, which I liked, even though I wasn’t really meaning to be funny. This is a problem with being eleven, nobody takes you *seriously*.

“Listen, you decide what to do with your five dollars, and that’s all you can do.”

“So I can just go out and decide to buy myself some snacks?”

My teacher smiled and put the rest of his papers in his bag. “If that feels right to you, sure.”

It didn’t. And I could tell that he saw on my face that it didn’t. He walked past us, toward the door, then turned back and gave a single wave.

“Adios, Astrid. Like I said, good luck.”



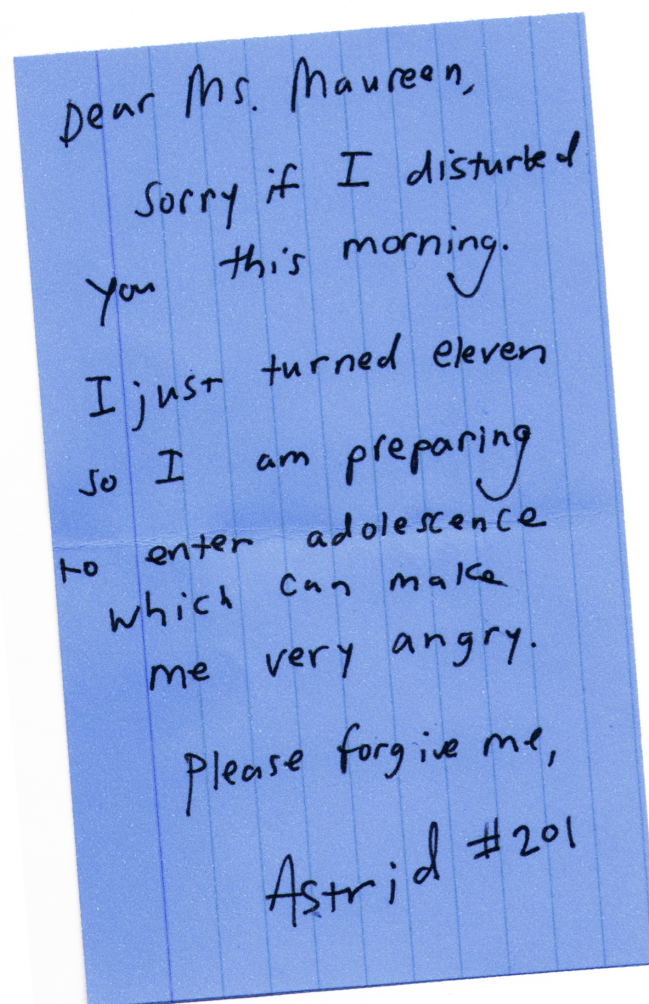
We got back home to find the single greatest piece of news of all time just taped to our apartment door like it was simply a normal announcement. I snatched at the folded paper before even pulling out my key.

Every single year for the last five years I have formally requested to reserve our building's first floor community room on Christmas Eve, from 6-7PM, so that I can put on and perform a one woman Christmas show. I have a set list. I have choreography. And every year I am rejected and the community room sits locked and dark and empty on Christmas Eve, so it's not even like there was another, more important event booked or something. Ms. Maureen, our property manager, rejects me every single year because she hates Christmas. Probably. Or maybe children. Or at least, me, which I might understand.

See, we live in the apartment right above Ms. Maureen's, the #201 to her #101, which is just no good, because you just can't have any fun. Or walk any louder than a tiptoe. Or have a single exuberant feeling between the hours of 8PM – 8AM. Since I learned to walk I have been a stomper, a door slammer, and since I learned to write I have been punished for being too loud for our downstairs neighbor and the punishment is always the same. I have to write an apology note and leave it for Ms. Maureen. My mom says I always have to knock first, but she never, not once, has answered the door for me. So usually I slide the note under and scurry back up the stairs.

This happens unfortunately a lot. More than you'd want to be apologizing to your apartment property manager.

I do try to be as honest as possible.



Dear Ms. Maureen,
Sorry if I disturbed
you this morning.
I just turned eleven
so I am preparing
to enter adolescence
which can make
me very angry.
Please forgive me,
Astrid #201

Dear Ms. Maureen,

Sorry if we woke you
this morning. We
decided to play wrestling
match and my mom
assures me this was
a very bad and loud
idea.

Please forgive us,

Astrid

GABE

Dear Ms. Maureen,

Sorry for Stomping
this morning.

Gabe used my special
hair spray and that
made me very angry.

Please forgive me,

Astrid #201



I had to read the words **RESERVATION REQUEST APPROVED** over and over at least seventeen times before I began to believe it. Casa Vista Community Room. 12/24. 6-7PM. Astrid Wells, #201. **RESERVATION REQUEST APPROVED.** I dropped the form and made a sound totally unlike any sound I've ever made before, like I was reading out a typed page of *eeeeeeeeeeeeeeee's*.

"What? *What?*" Gabe was alarmed. "What's wrong?"

I grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him with my excitement.

"It's happening! It's happening, Gabe!"

I shoved the approval form into his hands so he could see for himself.

"Your Christmas show?"

"My Christmas show."

Naturally, the first thing to do was to make a flier.



ASTRID'S

ONE WOMAN

CHRISTMAS

SHOW



DECEMBER 24th
6-7 PM

COMMUNITY ROOM
FREE!

