

## Being accepted

August

Admit it, we've all made terrible decisions in our lives. For me, it was my fateful decision to undergo surgery and --- you know what, let's save that for later, I don't want to spoil this. Anyways, decisions are dangerous. And most of the time, they're pretty extreme: it's either a yes or a no, without any in-betweens. A single choice can alter your life. And that is exactly why I hate making decisions.

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So. Here's an important fact that you probably should know about me:

My face is deformed.

Didn't expect that, did you? To put it in a nice way, I have a 'facial difference'. Which basically means that no one treats you like a normal human being.

Of course, I'm not exactly the most ordinary person. Mom says I'm 'extraordinary'.

My mother is an...interesting...person. You know how some moms are overprotective of their kids? Well, my mom is one of them. I guess I can't blame her for that. When your kid is deformed and constantly depressed, it's natural for you to be protective of him.

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Ever since I was born, my life has been pretty dull. But everything changed on October 3, exactly one week from my 11th birthday.

I had a dream that night. Not just a normal dream, but the kind that makes you want to contemplate your life.

I saw a boy standing under a tree all alone, watching a group of kids his age play tag. He looked so lonely, with his shoulders hunched forward, that I suddenly had the urge to walk over and yell at those kids, for not joining the boy in their game.

Then something unexpected happened. A tall, skinny girl noticed the hunch-shouldered boy and beckoned him over with the wave of a hand. The boy wore a surprised look on his face as he approached the group, and in that moment, I suddenly understood the sheer *joy* of being accepted.

I woke up the following morning to realize that the dream was a huge metaphor of my life, minus the part where the boy got accepted by the other kids. I was the boy standing under the tree, watching other kids have fun, and Mom --- Mom was *me* in the dream, the one watching the lonely boy and feeling anger bubbling within her. Anger at the unfairness of the world, at how it refused to accept the boy, her child, who was born different.

It was right after these thoughts that I made the worst decision of my life.

## Mum

On the night before Auggie's birthday, I asked him what he wanted most for his birthday. He hesitated a moment, then looked me square in the face and spoke a sentence, one that would haunt me for the rest of my life.

"I want to look like other kids, mom."

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We ended up discussing this the entire night, me trying to convince him out of it, not because of how much the surgery would cost, but of how I would never see his real face, the one I've known all my life, again. But he was determined. And I understood. How he felt all these years, like he was a monster, scaring kids away. In the end, I relented. I promised Auggie that he would look like a regular kid. And I told myself over and over again that I was making the right decision.

Of course, I was wrong.

---3 months later, January 27 4:15a.m. ---

"What on earth? You're telling me the surgery...what?"

"I understand that you are distressed, madam, but your son August has only few hours---"

"Dammit, what? I thought you were professionals!"

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I charged into Auggie's hospital room, my eyes searching wildly for my son, my dear son August...

He was hooked up with three or four IV tubes, with a faintly beeping heart monitor on his bedside table. I did not see his face through my blurred vision. I knelt by his bed, gripped his hand, and suddenly the world was just the two of us.

"Mom..." Auggie whispered.

I held back tears. It wouldn't help Auggie if I broke down in front of him now.

"I...I love you, mom...I love you..."

I nodded, sobbing hysterically now. I couldn't bring myself to speak. I clasped his hand in both of mine, and waited, for that dreadful moment.

The heart monitor went silent.

I shut my eyes and let the tears flow.