

Numb

They always told me to smile more, as if it was so easy. I mean, in theory, it's supposed to be. Move some of your muscles and your day's supposed to be brighter. So why was that so hard for me? Why did I have to be so angry, so sad and so...so different? And above all else, why couldn't I stop thinking? Why did this have to be my train of thought as I walked from fourth hour to fifth?

Although I had always been this way, or at least as long as I'd been paying attention to it, it still vexed me. I don't know how exactly to explain it, it's as if everything is blurred. Almost like all my emotions are just dimmed to different shades of the same thing. Like I was numb.

As always, hours flew by in a haze of dull learning and the final bell was ringing seemingly as soon as the first one. I didn't exactly realize that this bell signified the start of Christmas break until the surge of chanting and celebrating kids that ran through the hall reminded me. This was a moment of dread for me, realizing the hoard of family telling me Merry Christmas or be happy – it's the holidays! As is the concept of happiness is so attainable.

I got home and saw my mother hanging the Christmas lights. I know this is supposed to spark some feeling of happiness, of joy, but it did not. Instead, my emotions lay dormant, hiding away from the surface. My mother told me to go inside and help with the tree. And while hanging the ornaments, I still felt no different from when I'd been at school. Just sad, always sad and angry.

“Luke, come on, hang the tinsel!”

Breaking me out of my haze my sister, Liv, handed me the silver tinsel for me to hang, which I did, sloppily. Then when everyone got distracted I snuck off to my room, picked up a book from my desk and flopped on my bed, opening the book's velvet red exterior.

I did this routine daily. Go downstairs for a couple of minutes, go back to my room with a book or computer and completely ignore my friends and family. Wash, rinse, repeat. It seemed in no time that it was the day before our family's Christmas Eve party and my oldest brother, John, barged into my room.

“Can I help you?” I said, snapping my book shut.

“Mom wants you downstairs. Something about Christmas cleaning.”

I got up and made my way to the door but at the last moment, my brother shoved me into the wall and walked out. I grunted and instantly grabbed my shoulder.

“Baby!” I heard him taunt from the hallway. I got up and steadied myself, already feeling a bruise forming. I went to the bathroom and took my shirt off and, sure enough, a dark purple mark was etched on my shoulder. I slammed my fist on the bathroom counter and heard something rattle. I tried to locate the noise and saw a razor blade placed near to the faucet. My fingers made their way to it, and for a dark and lonely moment, the thought crossed my mind. Would it matter? Who really cared?

“LUKE!” My mother's voice carried up the stairs. “COME ON! WE GOTTA CLEAN!”

“COMING MOM!” I set down the razor carefully and left the bathroom. So I mopped, swept, dusted and helped my mother with everything else she needed. She set up the food and I went to sleep, dreading the party that would soon come.

When I woke back up, I checked the clock only to realize I had an hour before people came. I must have overslept. I hated this. I hated all of this. Why couldn't I just be left alone in my misery? I quickly fixed my hair and got dressed in something decent. I ran downstairs and realized I didn't have time to eat and my mother wanted me to get out of the kitchen since she

was cooking. People started coming not long after. Kids annoying me, adults excluding me, just like every party.

“Luke, come here,” Liv said behind me. “Am I the only one who hates these parties?”

“Oh, thank God, I thought I was the only one!”

“They’re depressing,” Liv said jokingly.

“Oh...you don’t know the half of it,” I said under my breath.

“What?”

“Nothing. Look, I gotta go,” I told her, already walking away.

“K. Bye,” she said, scrunching up her eyebrows in confusion.

I walked off knowing that conversation was a waste of time. I was a waste of time. I saw my cousin and brother talking and against my better judgment I went to join them.

“Hey, cry baby,” my brother taunted, while my cousin Hailey just rolled her eyes. “What you gonna do? Cry again?”

“You know what John, I came here to actually talk to you like an adult, but obviously you can’t handle that.” I turned to walk away but my brother stuck out his foot to trip me and made me stumble a few feet. I walked away in a huff but I felt my cousin’s hand on my shoulder after a couple steps.

“Luke, just ignore him,” she said.

“Easier said than done,” I argued.

“Look, Luke, don’t get so much in your own head. Just realize that you’ll be happier ignoring him and having fun with the family!”

“Hailey, it’s not that sim-.”

“No, but it is that simple. Just realize that people love you. We all do.”

“Yeah, whatever.”

But that did get to me in a way. I just kept thinking about how she said that I got in my own head. I couldn’t help but think if what she was true. I just kept walking around remembering when I was decorating the tree. Everyone was having fun and I still couldn’t let myself join in. They were happy. I could be happy if I just opened up to people. And as I looked around at my smiling, happy family, I knew for certain that I’d be OK.

---Max Mylan