

RACISM AND REVENGE

**ALWAYS BE
BIGGER THAN
YOUR BULLIES**

written by

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This morning my dad woke me up earlier than I needed and he was really pissed off. He told me to come downstairs and I went down and followed him outside. There was toilet paper all over our tree and styrofoam plates of actual shit on our driveway. He showed me someone left a note on our door that said "I thought this is what your people eat for breakfast."

**I hate being here. I hate McLean.
I hate everyone here. My only
friends that get me are Christine
and Izzy and they hate it here too.
I can't wait till I'm a senior and can
go to NYC.**

**I don't know what to do. I hate this.
My dad is so fed up. Last week
someone left a dead possum on our
doorstep. And this is the second time
someone toilet-papered our house.
He thinks it's my fault and that I'm
bringing trouble to me.**

**I think it's JS and L. I'm going to
kill them. They're such LOSERS.
If they have problems with ME
then why are they doing this to
my DAD'S HOUSE. They should
talk to my face and not act like
such losers.**

Sweet Yumna,

The slam of your bedroom door was so loud that I thought I'd come check in on you. It's me, you, sixteen years from now. I see that you've locked yourself in your bedroom after a pretty rough day. Well, maybe a pretty rough few years. I see you screaming into your pillow and wondering why you even exist. I see you. You're fourteen and you are angry. I'm thirty now and I'm writing to you because, in this moment, you think you are completely alone in this strange world. I know you can't imagine having to deal with it for any longer, but look, you've made it this far. And you'll make it further yet.

Two years ago, the whole world flipped upside down. On September 11 2001, America was struck by a series of horrible events which shook the country. Hijacked planes crashed into the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington DC and a field in Pennsylvania, and many people were killed. Tensions began to rise between the Western world and the Middle East. Up until that point, Yumna, you were just another kid in the suburbs of Washington DC: you went to school, you played instruments, you had friends, you played soccer. After that horrific morning, you were from the same place as the terrorists, your father worked for an Arab government, your skin was brown, you were Muslim and your

holiday trips to see family in the Middle East were suddenly questioned. For the first time in your life, you were different.

It was weird to realize that you were from the same place as people who'd done something so damaging to the country you were born in. It was heartbreaking to learn that people could have such bad intentions. But, through all of this confusion and hurt, you've started to learn some harsh lessons about the politics of the world. Sometimes those in power choose to target a specific group of people as a way to justify their actions, and to make a show of revenge. There's a darker side to the power structures of this world and, although it feels horrible, this will inspire you to fight for fair treatment of all.

You, Yumna, are a clever little creature and you have a desperate need to learn. Pain and trauma will be the keys that open a door to learning about your place in the world. Your job will be to help defend all those who have been shamed because of the actions of a few. Although it doesn't seem like it right now, this is the greatest gift to you because it will inspire you to work harder, and feel deeper.

The next few years as a young teen will not be easy. Going to school has never been your favourite way to spend your time, and your schoolmates are now far and few between. Kids can be evil, and I'm

sorry to say that you will come into contact with some of the worst kind: bullies.

One month from today, the summer holidays will be over and you'll be back in school for another year of dread. A few days later, a boy, let's call him Jamie Smith, will throw a full, open bottle of water at the back of your head. You will feel your first taste of absolute rage and it will finally click that it was him harassing you, your family and your home over the last year.

No, it is not cool that he has toilet-papered your house twice now. It is definitely not cool that he burned a live animal on your doorstep. And it is straight-up disgusting that he has spent the time leaving faeces in your driveway. Let me say this loud and clear: THERE IS NOTHING OK ABOUT JAMIE SMITH. He is an outright horrible person and the people around him applauding his actions are weak humans he's manipulated into being his friends. This goes further than bullying. This is hate crime. You in no way, shape or form deserve the treatment he's given you.

The day he throws the water bottle at your head, you will snap.

After school, while he's on "The White Path", where the cool kids go to hang out

**“You
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behind the school, smoking cigarettes with the rest of the losers who will end up doing nothing with their lives, you will lash out and beat him up in front of all of his friends. He will punch you back in the face.

Now, I understand your anger. But this is not the appropriate way to handle the situation. You should take a few breaths and try to ease that anger before making heated decisions. I know that you will feel there is nothing else you can do to make this stupid boy stop harassing you. I know you will think your only option is to take physical action, but let me remind you that you are living in a place where your every action is judged. If you physically attack someone, no matter how deserving you believe your action is, you will only continue a vicious cycle of racism. Others are waiting to call you an angry terrorist; they think that people like you are always violent. Prove them wrong with your patience.

But the heat of the moment will force you into a corner and your emotions will run over. You will do it anyway.

The next morning, you will be called into the principal's office to explain your side of what happened. Your friends who witnessed the fight will also testify to the pain Jamie has caused you which has led you to take this action. You will be suspended from school. He will not. You will experience your first

interaction with institutionalized racism.

You will wonder: did they not see your scabbed nose from the punch he threw? Were you too upset to explain fully that the bottle he'd thrown at your head was full of water? Did you mention that he burned a live animal on your doorstep? How is it that you are suspended and he is not?

“You will be suspended from school. He will not. You will experience your first interaction with institutionalized racism.”

Sweet Yumna, the anger you feel today will multiply by the hundreds. You will question yourself. You will question a system that is supposed to have your back. You will question whether or not your friends did defend you when they were speaking to the principal. You will wonder what Jamie Smith will do next.

I want you to know that it is OK to be this angry, but please remember that you do nothing to deserve this. Your friends love you and will be by your side for the rest of your life. They are your family: keep them close. It's a question of what you will do now with your anger.

The majority of people at your school are white, including the administration. People throw the word “terrorist” at you like it's a joke. Because you physically attack Jamie Smith, the administration of your school

will feel the only right thing to do is reprimand you, the Arab, for being “violent”. They will advise your father that you will “be watched”.

I know you might not realize it just yet, but this is racism. Please, calmly call everyone out when they use the word “terrorist” to describe you. It is a racially derogatory word. They have no idea the weight it carries inside of you and will never understand because they are blinded by their own privileges.

Don't let this break you. Your dad is on your side, and although he's angry right now, it is because he loves you and hates to see you being bullied. Explain, in great detail, what Jamie Smith has done to you. He might have a solution a lot more powerful than your emotional rage.

The only adult on your side at school during this traumatic experience will be Mr Stokely, an African American police officer. You will realize that Mr Stokely has an attentiveness to detail when he asks you questions that the rest of the administration does not. Mr Stokely will personally go to your house and apologize to your father for what has happened as a result of Jamie Smith's actions. He will inform your father that Jamie has not only targeted you but many others in the school. He will let your father know that it is Jamie who is being watched, not you. In a few years, this man, your saviour Mr Stokely, will be the

one to put Jamie Smith in jail after he is involved in a drink-driving accident and seriously hurts a young family in the other car.

You will learn what solidarity means.

Over the next and last few years of school in DC, your anger will harden your heart towards your town and your school. You will want to escape and will try to find various ways of doing so. You might skip class so much that you almost do not graduate. I get it, Yumna. It's not easy. Find solace away from school learning about the complexities of the world around you and why these complexities exist. Speak to your father more - he may be suffering from the same pains you are but in his work environment. You can be there for one another, and it will be beautiful. His age and social status mean he will be taken far more seriously than you. He can help you, and he will.

The day after you graduate high school, you will move to New York. It will seem like a dream, and you'll be surrounded by beautiful, inspiring people. This is the place where all those like you have come to find one another, and you'll feel a peace that you've never felt before. For the first time, you won't feel alone.

Racism and ignorance will continue to grow in America and, trust me, sometimes it will

“This is the place where all those like you have come to find one another.”

feel like it is only getting worse. Speaking live from the future, I can tell you that things look pretty bleak. But for the amount of stupidity this world can offer, you will find an equal amount of solidarity along the way - always. Feed your brain, learn your histories, and take care of yourself. Escapes, like drugs and alcohol, are temporary, and you will always have to pay for them by facing an even darker void soon after you try to run away. Don't go there.

Instead, you will learn how to control your temper and fight back with your wisdom and art. But please, don't forget to love yourself along the way. You are so smart, so powerful, and you have so much to offer this world. Don't let insecurities hold you back.

Over the years, you will realize that the media has shaped so much of others' perceptions of who you are. Your job is to unlearn the noise and the messages you have internalized, and ask people to join you along your journey. You will inspire so many more like you to fight back with wit and courage, not violence. Your gold will be the generous and inspirational people you meet along the way, the knowledge you gain, and your family. Stay opinionated and do not ever hide the strength that has been inside you since birth. Always question the world around you and never accept the easiest way out. This includes acting on pure emotion. That's too easy, and you're smarter than that.

