

MARCUS

9:00 AM and Marcus was already sitting in the Dean's office. He had been sent out of first period English for mouthing off to the teacher. On top of it, he had not done his homework – he never did his homework. The ear buds for his ipod were dangling down the sides of his hoodie. "Marcus, get in here," called the dean. As Marcus stood, he had to grab the waistband of his jeans to keep them from falling down.

"Thrown out again," began Dean Jones. What is wrong with you?" I don't know why we keep you here. I have 5 referrals with your name on them from just this past week. – sleeping in class, not doing your work, talking back to the teacher, fighting in the hall. And while we are on the subject, look at your grades – straight fails."

"Except art." Marcus murmured.

Elementary school cumulative records indicate he was an average student. He seemed to like drawing and producing projects. When he matriculated to middle school, trouble began. He started skipping school. His teachers in sixth grade said he hung out with a bad crowd. He didn't seem able to concentrate. The school work he did turn in was sloppy and incomplete. Soon the referrals began.

By seventh grade his behavior was even more disruptive. He started to get into fights both in and out of school. His report card at the end of the year – all fails except drawing.

Eighth grade was a repeat of seventh. Most teachers, when they heard Marcus was in one of their classes dreaded the experience and were on guard, ready to toss him out at a moment's notice.

In spite of failing grades, Marcus was socially promoted to high school.

As Dean Jones looked over Marcus's cumulative record, not much had changed in three years. Marcus had only 30 credits for his two years in high school. He was below standard in both math and English on standardized tests. He had many ISTAR entries.

According to the PSA report, Marcus lived in a gang infested area of town with his grandmother; mother's whereabouts unknown; father unknown. Marcus has two siblings; one currently in the military. The other dropped out of this same high school two years ago.

On the computer screen Dean Jones noticed a notation from Marcus' counselor. The grandmother had died three months ago and Marcus was now residing with an aunt.

CRYSTAL

"Where oh where is Crystal?" wondered her 10th grade history teacher? Crystal had promised to be here today. Her group was doing their presentations and Crystal was supposed to have completed the chart that was to be handed out to the rest of the class. She had only been in class one day this week. In fact, Crystal had missed about two thirds of class this entire semester.

The teacher sent a note to the counselor. When the counselor opened the note her heart sank. She liked Crystal. Everyone liked Crystal, but this past year, Crystal had changed. She stopped doing her school work. When she did come, she often fell asleep in class. Her dress was not as sharp as it used to be.

Once again, the counselor perused Crystal's cum. In Elementary school she was a good student. In Middle school the same. Her standardized test scores were all average and above.

The changes in Crystal began about a year ago. Recently, when the counselor tried to reach Crystal's mother – there was no father living at home – there was no answer. The phone had been disconnected. When the counselor called Crystal into her office to discuss what was happening, she was met with a stone wall.

Her teachers reported that Crystal had trouble following directions. She had started to exhibit some self-control issues. On a day when the counselor knew Crystal was in school, she summoned her to her office. Crystal never answered the summons. Busy, it was not until the next period that the counselor could pull herself away from her desk. She went to Crystal's class and found her not there. The teacher said she never showed up. Crystal had left school.

The counselor stopped by the nurse's office on the way back to her office. She asked if Crystal was there. The nurse replied no, but added that Crystal had been in her office several times last semester complaining of an upset stomach, and as a result had been sent home four times. The nurse questioned Crystal about the possibility of her being pregnant. That was the last time she saw Crystal. The nurse reported that this semester Crystal hadn't been to her office at all.

EDDIE

“Sit down, Eddie,” called the teacher from across the room.

Eddie walked back to his desk, smacking Freddie on the back of his head.

“Is your work finished?” asked the teacher.

“What work? That stupid worksheet?”

Mrs. Smith walked over to Edie’s desk. There was a jumble of papers on the desk – drawings, notes on a computer game, and other such things. Buried underneath was the worksheet. The teacher pulled it out.

“You haven’t even started it.”

“Its stupid. All the stuff you give me to do is stupid.”

Eddie was in seventh grade. At times he felt the world was closing in on him. People just didn’t care. They didn’t understand he wasn’t interested in this stuff. Most of the time, people just let him be. It was easier for them to ignore him then try to really understand him.

True, Eddie knew, he didn’t make it easy for them. He had trouble focusing. He had trouble sitting still. But that didn’t mean he was stupid. Like that Ms. Humphries who handed him a packet and told him that he wasn’t keeping up with the rest of the class and he should work on the packet by himself. She had said it out loud. Right in front of the rest of the class. They all laughed. That’s when he made a farting noise. The class laughed.

“You’re out of here,” shouted Ms. Humphries as she handed him a referral to the principal’s office.

That was three years ago. Much hasn’t changed with Eddie. When he entered high school, he and his parent’s had to meet with a group of teachers about his grades and behavior. Afterwards, his mother told him he was going to get special help. He didn’t want special help. He just wanted someone to understand him, to know that he was not stupid.

The information on My Data indicates Eddie is scoring above average in math, but below basic in ELA. His report card grades are all over the board: high grades in math, PE, and drama: barely passing in the other subjects. He has been suspended from school three times and is frequently given detention.

JACKIE

Monday morning. Jackie blew in to school. Mr. Garcia, her first period teacher, didn't focus on her tattoos, pierced nose, black clothes, combat boots, black nails, or black lipstick. It was her hair that caught his attention – bright pink and spiked above her small head.

Jackie refused to make eye contact with Mr. Garcia.

What happened now he wondered?

Jackie was a special one. In a short story she wrote in class last week, the main character was a nine year old girl who had been molested by one of her "uncles." Mr. Garcia had been grappling all weekend with whether or not he should confront Jackie about this as well as whether or not he should report it to the proper police agency. But the character had been nine years old. Jackie was fifteen.

If Jackie was being molested, or had been, wouldn't someone have said something to her teachers? Did anyone know? Did it even happen?

He knew Jackie was bright, very bright. Her writing was excellent. But her behavior was for the most part atrocious. She was constantly getting in fights. She didn't seem to have any friends. She was very distrustful, and didn't let anyone get close to her. She never took a leading role.

Her appearance was a contradiction. It seemed like she was trying to look as freakish as possible.

In elementary school, she seemed to be well adjusted. Her grades were all fine. They continued to be fine in middle school. At this point though, teacher reports begin to indicate a change in Jackie. She begins to act out more in class. Instances of verbal attacks on teachers are reported. Jackie is removed from her home by DCFS and is placed in foster care.

By the time she reaches high school, her angry, anti-social behavior has really manifested itself, yet, she still maintains an above average GPA.

McKAYLA

8:00 AM

McKayla slunk into class just as the bell rang. She had on her usual head scarf. As she quietly slid into her seat, she looked up to see if anyone was watching her. No one was. The others were used to ignoring her, shunning her like someone with the plague.

"Take out your completed homework and place it on top of your desk. I will be coming by to check it. In the meantime, take out your books, turn to page 127, and begin reading," said Mrs. Perchenko.

As Mrs. Perchenko approached McKayla's desk she steeled herself for the inevitable. She doubted McKayla had completed the work if she even remembered to do it at all. McKayla, Mrs. Perchenko knew, was completely incapable of remembering facts, unable to recognize patterns, and lately even remembering to do the homework assigned to her.

McKayla's was a sad story. She had seen her brother shot right in front of her when she was twelve years old. From what Mrs. Perchenko knew of the history of her school work, McKayla's grades had been deteriorating rapidly for the last three years. Other teachers reported that at first McKayla seemed just sad. Recently she seemed to be withdrawn, anxious, and even disoriented when spoken to. A look at her cumulative record showed over the last three years McKayla's classroom grades falling from a B average to barely passing. Her recent standardized test scores were all below basic.

Mrs. Perchenko had gone to the nurses office when McKayla at the beginning of the semester and the nurse if she was aware of McKayla and her behavior in class and whether or not the school was doing anything to help McKayla. The nurse responded yes to both questions, but offered no further information.

On ISTAR, Mrs. Perchenko read that a year or two ago McKayla had been involved in an altercation, a one time event according to the report.

RANDY

Mr. Boyadjian, Assistant Principal in charge of discipline, walked into his office. Seated across from his desk was Randy.

Well, here we go, he thought. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small packet of marijuana that he tossed on his desk. He could see Randy wince.

"This was just found in your locker. Want to tell me what you were doing with it?" asked Mr. Boyadjian, though he didn't really need to ask.

The school had long suspected that Randy was selling drugs. Just yesterday a boy had been found vomiting in the restroom. When taken to the nurse's office, he confessed to taking some pills Randy had given him in first period.

"You've only been back here from camp for three months. You've been thrown out of one class after another for talking back, not doing your work, tardiness. Yesterday, during first period, you asked to go to the restroom and never came back to class. Where were you, Randy?"

Randy did respond. He just slumped back in the chair and adjusted his neatly pressed khaki pants.

Why am I even talking to this kid? Wondered Mr. Boyadjian. He glanced at the computer screen in front of him. Randy had been a student at River High nine months ago. Then he was convicted of stealing a car and sent to a juvenile correctional facility. He had been back at River High school for three months. Since returning, based on the many referrals in his file, he wasn't doing much in the way of school work.

His home life was atrocious. He lived with his single mother, herself a victim of a long ago absent abusive husband. They lived in the gang-infested projects just north of school.