

Holding on to Hope

An original student-led showcase

Lost

Written by Sofia Gomez

The alarm goes off at 6:50 in the morning, too early. Athena wakes up in her teal blue bed sheets she's had since 5th grade. She checks her phone:

No notifications, she sees on the screen. She rolls her eyes and puts her dark brown, curly hair up with a gray scrunchie that tugs a bit too hard. Athena sits up in her bed, opens her curtains to let some light in, and winces at the brightness. Her eyes adjust, she walks over to her desk, and opens the Chromebook she picked up from the school at the beginning of the year to check Google Classroom.

Click, click, click. The Google Classroom "To Do" list pops up: **Missing, Missing, Missing, Missing, Missing, Missing, Missing, Missing.** The missing assignments go down longer than she can scroll. *My mom is gonna kill me, she thinks, biting on her nails. Whatever, I'll finish it later,* she says to herself like she always does.

Athena walks downstairs to get her morning coffee. Her bare feet touch the cold kitchen tiles, she shivers. It smelled like burnt toast. *No one has been down here, that's weird,* she thought.

"Morning hon!" her mom says optimistically. Athena jumps, not expecting her mom to be up so early. She turns to see her mom in a lavender robe at the dining table with a cup of coffee and a copy of People magazine in her

left hand.

"Oh, um, hi mom." She responds flatly.

"Did ya sleep okay? You look tired, and stand up straight hon! You're slouching," her mom critiques. Athena's posture doesn't change.

"Yeah, I slept fine." She says, exhausted from the conversation already. Athena opens the fridge, looks up and down for two minutes, and closes it. She walks back upstairs without coffee or breakfast.

She hasn't spoken to her best friend Erin for two weeks. *She's probably sick of me. Of course she's sick of me. Even I'm sick of me,* she thinks. Athena hadn't talked to anyone in a while. Except for Lemon, her cat who keeps her company all day. She was sort of okay with it though, Erin hadn't treated her like a real friend for a while and *that's not something you need.* She realizes that now.

Athena spins around on her spinny chair and looks at Lemon who sits still on her bed.

"I might need some human friends soon. What do you think Lemon?" She waits for a response she knows she's never going to get. "Yeah, I really need some human friends," Athena says with a chuckle.

Quarantine was a pain, obviously, but other

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kids seemed perfectly fine, they hung out with friends, posted on social media, and had fine grades. Why didn't she? Athena tries to forget about these thoughts for as long as she can until they come back and hit her like a punch in the stomach. For now, she does her homework—well, tries to do her homework. Every day feels the same though, just a constant boring cycle of homework that never gets done, Zoom meetings, and absolutely nothing to do. The days just feel. . . lost.

"You need to tell me what you are going to do. Do you want to go back to in-person school or not? I need to email the district by tonight," Athena's mom asks as the two sit in the living room looking at her mom's computer screen.

Athena stares at it thoughtfully without making a sound. "Okay. I'll do it. I'll go back," she finally responds. "This is a really important decision. Are you sure?" her mom asks once more. Athena takes a breath and looks up at her mom. "Yes."

Wearing the same dark green hoodie she has been for the past week and some black leggings from Old Navy, Athena waits for the bus. It was cold but she didn't mind it, she liked the feeling. The bus pulls up to the curb and she hops on. *Only 3 kids on here. . . Weird*, she notices. She sits 5 seats away from the front and puts on her headphones to listen to some music.

Athena gets off the freezing bus to find herself standing in front of the entrance. She stares for a moment looking up at the school sign: Evergreen High School. The school was full of students meeting up with friends while she stood

alone and anxious. She feels a backpack hit her from behind.

"Hey watch where you're going!" scolds a tall boy. Athena's face gets hot, and she moves into the school with the mob of kids.

203, 203, 203. Where is it? I'm so lost. Athena thinks to herself looking at her class schedule on her phone. Laughs and whispers circle around through students. *They must be talking about me*, she thinks while her anxiety is spiraling. Athena feels her face grow warm and her hands become clammy. She looks to the left where she sees a blue door and above it, 203. She walks into her first period and finds a seat near the back of the class. Her heavy breathing calms down.

The seats were separated about six feet from each other. A red-haired girl with little beaded braids sits next to her, pulls out a notebook full of stickers on the front, opens a page to doodle, and smiles at her. Athena smiles under her mask and pulls her computer out from her backpack. She seemed so cool, but Athena could never say anything first.

"Hey! How's your first day back been?" the girl asks.

Athena is surprised someone is talking to her but quickly responds, "Oh, um, good. You?" Athena asks back.

The red-haired girl laughs. "It's been a little crazy, but good," she replies. Athena realized her leg was shaking like it does when she gets nervous. She stops it.

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"Gosh, this class can get boring. That's why I draw in this class, because my mind feels so lost. . . hey, what's your name?" the red-haired girl says.

Athena replies, "Yeah, I get it. My name's Athena. What's yours?"

"Athena! I love that name. I'm Nyla!" Nyla says enthusiastically. "Gosh, I have no idea what this assignment is about. You should come to hang out with me after school. I'm going with some of my friends to the coffee place down the street. Then we could do some of this god-awful homework." Nyla suggests with a chuckle.

Athena hadn't hung out with people in months, maybe it was time she made some new friends. "Yeah, that would be cool. Thanks," Athena finally says.

The bell rings, zippers zip, and so does Athena. She rushes out the door and leaves for the coffee shop.

Athena scopes the area looking for bright red hair. There is Nyla, waving her down with three other kids. Athena walks over and pulls out a chair. For once, she says something first, "Hi, I'm Athena."