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Dr. Amare

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### Finding My Home

I used to dream about living in paradise. Paradise encapsulated waking up to the soothing sounds of the crystal-clear waves crashing onto sandy beaches. As I ventured outside my home, I could feel the cool ocean water misting my face as I saw dolphins leap in the distance and feel the sand weave through my toes as I made my way closer to the alluring sea water. But it was only a dream.

It was an unusually hot day in June 2010 in Senatobia, Mississippi. I woke up to my dogs' barking at some invisible thing. I rolled over to the scent of fresh, hot-out-of-the-oven cinnamon rolls. Entering the kitchen, I spotted my mom and my great uncle Charles, drinking coffee and reading the paper. Wishing me a good morning, my mom sat two cinnamon rolls and a glass of orange juice in front of me. I gazed outside and realized how great the day was going to be. Like I had never eaten before, I scarfed the down my breakfast and juice, then quickly changed into my play clothes and bolted out the door before anyone could say another word. The wind was blowing like there was a tornado in the forecast. My tire swing was swinging so fast that I thought it was going to break. The wind slapped me in the face from all angles as I tried to seek shelter in my secret hideaway in the bushes. My 10-year old self-continued to play as the sun met the moon and the street lights flickered on. Hungry and tired, I corralled my dogs and shuffled inside to find dinner being served. My mom had cooked my favorite dinner: spaghetti and garlic bread sprinkled with parmesan cheese with a Dr. Pepper to drink. My uncle and my

mom were talking about something in the back of the kitchen, but I was hardly listening; I was too busy thinking about how great my day was and how I was going to do it all again tomorrow. After dinner, I helped my mom clear the table and wash the dishes; then, we settled into the couch. I prepared myself to watch another one of my mom's boring shows, but then something unheard of happened: she handed me the remote. I was shocked, but I didn't dare question the move. I switched the TV to my favorite show, *SpongeBob SquarePants*. After one episode, my mom revealed that there was a surprise in the fridge: three slices of strawberry cheesecake with actual strawberries. I cut into my slice, and the sweet sensation of strawberry goodness consumed my taste buds. "This *was* the best day ever!" I thought to myself.

As the clock struck 9 pm, I knew it was my bedtime. The TV screen switched to black, but when I stood up to head to bed, my mom grabbed my hand and sat me back down. Sighing, she looked me in the eyes and began the conversation that would alter my life forever.

"Mireille, I have something to tell you."

"What is it, Momma?"

"Remember when you said you wanted to live in Pensacola, the last time we visited?"

"Yes, I remember, but I didn't mean it." She hesitated, and I started to realize where this conversation was heading. The ticks of the clock hand began to echo louder and louder.

"Well, what would you say if I told you we were moving to Pensacola?"

My heart broke into a million pieces. "No, thank you, I want to stay here."

"Well, it's a little too late for that."

I couldn't hide the disgust. I felt in the pit of my stomach as the cheesecake was set to make a return, and it read all over my face. I thought of all my friends, my gymnastics team, my family, and my life in Mississippi. How could she do this to me?

"One more year," I pleaded, "Please, just one more year." I knew it was a long shot, but to my surprise, my mom replied, "Alright, one more year for us to say our goodbyes and to plan everything out. When the time comes, you better not give me any trouble."

"I won't give you any trouble, thank you, oh thank you!" And a deal was struck.

The year flew by. As my sixth-grade year came to a cruel halt, I walked the halls of East Tate Elementary School for the final time. I reminisced about all the years past, remembering my first day of kindergarten when I cried every day. My mom was the librarian, so each person knew me because of her. I envisioned that the last day of school would be an emotional rollercoaster with numerous devastating loops and turns as everyone tries to hold back the tears. In all actuality, it was barely a kiddie roller coaster. Imagine the Tilt-A-Whirl at the county fair, going around in circles, constantly spinning at different intervals. That's how my last day was: my friends telling me that they would miss me, repeatedly. Making unreasonable pacts to never forget one another, we said our final goodbyes. No tears were shed until my very best friend and "twin," or so we called each other, F'nesa Rowland and I said our goodbyes. She was my only true friend who knew me in that town. With a final ring of the bell, I knew my time was up. The move date was set for June 31, 2011.

We arrived in Pensacola late that night. I spent the summer swimming in the pool at the apartment, but with the blink of an eye, I was school supply shopping. I was registered to start

seventh-grade at Bellview Middle School in the fall, and I despised going to this school even before I started attending.

The first day, I woke to my mom shaking me. “You’re going to be late!” my mom screamed as I came too. I quickly showered, brushed my teeth, got dressed, and headed downstairs for breakfast. Since I was running late, I had to take my blueberry Pop-Tart to go. My mom walked me to the bus stop, and I saw there was a group of kids already standing there. None of their parents were there, and I already felt embarrassed. I nudged my mom and looked intensely at her, hoping she’d take the hint to get lost. She smiled at me, “I’m not leaving until you get on the bus.” I hoped the bus would never come, but here came the yellow wagon from Satan. I hesitantly boarded the bus. Making my way to an open seat, taking each step carefully not to trip and make a fool of myself, I took my seat in the very back, and the bus started to move. Looking back, I always hated that bus. There were only three good things to come from riding that cootie-invested germ mobile: I met my three best friends, Elaina, Tasha, and Holley.

After seemingly forever, the bus arrived at the school, and we all filled off like ants on an ant hill. I tried to wrestle my way through the crowd, but I didn’t get very far. “RING, RING!” The bell chimed through the hall, and I knew that was the bell was really ringing “Be in class. Now.” I slowly made my way to homeroom with each step more painful than the last. My backpack seemed exceedingly heavy as I entered the class and walked to the desk with my name on it. I saw a familiar face sitting beside me; she was on my cootie bus.

She saw me staring and smiled, “Hey, I’m Elaina.” This pale, freckled girl with strawberry blonde hair smacked on her gum, waiting for my response.

I smiled back, “Hi, I’m Mireille.”

She looked confused. “Wait, what’s your name again?” This response was one thing I dreaded the most because at my old school, everyone knew my name and knew how to pronounce it.

Sighing, I said it again but this time, slower: “It’s Mireille.”

She began to say something else, but the teacher cut her off. “Good morning, seventh graders.” She was abnormally cheerful as all of us groaned looking at the clock every other minute, wanting time to go faster.

My next classes drained on; I was barely paying attention. The final bell rang, and I sprinted to the bus like my life depended on it. I was one of the first people on, so I got to choose where I wanted to sit. I choose a seat in the middle this time. Elaina soon boarded the bus and sat next to me. Elaina and I talked about many things on the bus. She introduced me to two of her friends, Tasha and Holley. The bad thing about being the last pickup is that you’re the last drop off. Finally, it was my stop. I thanked the bus driver, and she gave me a sucker and said “See you tomorrow.” I almost vomited hearing those words roll off her lips. I had to do this all over again, and I wasn’t going to make it out alive! Exiting the bus, I saw my mom, my great uncle Charles, and my dog waiting for me. I had never been so happy to see them in my life. On the walk home, we casually chatted about our day. “Did you make any friends? How were your classes? How was the bus ride? Did you eat anything?” I didn’t feel like answering any questions, but I answered them anyway.

As the school year came to a halt, my mom asked if I still wanted to move back home. I glared at her. “What are you talking about, Mom? This is home!” Both of us smiled at my reply and came in for a long, teddy bear hug. The next morning, I awoke, excited for the first day of

summer. My mom told me to put my bathing suit on but that we weren't going to the pool. We loaded the car and were on our way. A few stoplights later, we had arrived at our destination. As I stepped out of the car, the crisp salty air flowed through my hair as the sun kissed my skin. There was sand for miles. I couldn't believe the sight, so I bit the inside of my left cheek to make sure I was awake. It was paradise.