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Ici-bas!

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Ici-bas!

Abstract

High school student Moses King isn't a goody two-shoes, but the bully Samuel doesn't understand (or care) about this fact. In this story written by Nicholas Koloian, Moses finds his retribution through his bold friend, Henry, who must overcome his own problems in a tale exploring race, sexuality, and high school bullying.

Keywords

LGBTQ, African-American, Second person, high school, bullying

Disciplines

Creative Writing | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies

Comments

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Ici-bas!

You, Moses King, feel sick of being bullied nonstop by Samuel. Especially when he calls you a faggot after your French class. He thinks, for one, that you don't act masculine enough, not buff or cool enough to be a "real" black kid. This insults you. He's Filipino but doesn't look it the least bit—he seems more like the Spanish colonizers than the country's natives, which somehow feels fitting for a bullying turd who won't leave you alone. The irony of someone who doesn't look like a "real" Filipino calling you out for not really being black isn't lost on you.

This whole fiasco with Samuel feels like something out of a James Baldwin novel, at which point you want to tell him, "Hey, he was gay *and* black, why can't I be?" But your common sense tells you this won't end well. He probably doesn't even know who James Baldwin is, let alone anything about *Go Tell it on the Mountain*.

So, he calls you that horrible "f" word walking out of French class. It all comes after the French teacher, Dr. Pasteur—a nice lady from the Ivory Coast who's too overqualified to teach at St. Joseph's Catholic High School—calls out to the class, "*Où sont mes amis?*"

Silence floods the room. You could practically hear the crickets. Nobody in this class studies their French or takes it seriously, so when the teacher asks you, "Where are my friends?" you suddenly shout back "*Ici-bas!*"

Down here. Over yonder. How ever you want to translate it, Samuel thinks it's the epitome of being a sissy. He tells you as much after he calls out that ugly word, and then sneers at you in the halls. "You think you're *so* smart. That's why you can speak French, right? Actually, you're probably too busy sucking dick to speak it outside of class." Which is just ridiculous, because you've never even kissed a guy. He smirks and he tilts his head back to laugh. You catch sight of his slick black hair, shoulder length, hanging down while he laughs—

which is awkward, because the long hair instantly gives you Disney princess vibes. You refrain from mentioning this to Samuel. Even if you wanted to say it, he's already gone.

You walk over to Algebra II. On the way, you run into your friend Henry. He seems happy to see you, although a bit shaken by something. He explains. "Mr. H saw me in the hallway just a few minutes ago. 'I graded your test,' he said. 'I think you got like a thirty.' "

"Thirty out of..." You try to figure this out.

"Percent." Henry looks on.

"Are you sure he meant that?"

"I'm scared to find out." Henry looks sheepish, uncharacteristic of him. He's usually so bold. You envy his bravado, his ability to brush off any haters. Not that he has many. Normally he walks with the swagger of a marching marine, but now he shuffles slowly as the two of you go through the halls.

When you arrive in the Algebra II classroom, Mr. H hands out your tests. You see that it is a percent-based grade, and you got a ninety-five. Henry gets his test, takes a quick glance at his paper, and turns it facedown so fast you can't see the grade.

"Don't worry," you tell him. "I'll help you study for next time."

He gives a sign of assent, that it would be good if you helped him. You spend the rest of the class paying attention to Mr. H, not because you love math, but because you are committed to exceling in your studies. Yet it's not all pleasant. From time to time, Samuel comes back into your head, hurling ugly words at you. It seems so apparent that he picks on you because you're at the top of your class, and therefore a goody two-shoes and a teacher's pet. He always comes out at the bottom of his courses. You heard he once got a twenty-two on a chemistry test, and feel a bit bad for him, until remembering that Samuel is, in fact, a prick.

The day goes on. Classes end. Before they do, Henry tells you he'll ask a girl out. Abigail Payne. All the guys talk about how attractive she is, and you can understand why they say that, but you don't feel it yourself. You've never felt that way toward any girl. You have the right, you believe, to wait for an angelic-looking man to sweep you off your feet. A chorus would sound in the background. Samuel wouldn't be there. Maybe Henry would give you moral support if you ever decided to come out. So, you agree to give him moral support while he asks Abigail out. You and he have English with Abigail, the last class of the day. The teacher drones on. You're interested, but Henry is obviously thinking about Abigail. It's clear from the way he keeps looking at her, almost like there's a twinkle in his eyes—it's a romance movie cliché, but sometimes you enjoy a good romcom.

Class ends. The big moment. All of the other students and the teacher clear out, except for some random dude in the back, but Abigail is hanging out in the room, putting her stuff away. Henry walks up to Abigail. You hang out in the background so as to not be obvious or intrusive. The other student messes around on his iPhone. You hear the sound from the phone speakers: *ba dum tss*. The classic drum riff that you always hear when a character cracks a lame joke in a TV show. He plays it again. *Ba dum tss*. And again. You're not quite sure why, or what's going on, but the student doesn't seem to be paying attention. Then you see Abigail shaking her head at whatever Henry just said that you couldn't hear. Her expression is devoid of any feeling at all. Henry walks to you, sulking, and then you hear it again: *ba dum tss*. Henry huffs, turns to the student, looks angry—you see the fire and brimstone of hell in his eyes. He walks out of the room.

Confused, you turn to the student. "What just happened?" you ask.

He looks up. “What? I was just playing this from a soundboard. Why? Something wrong?”

So he was playing from a soundboard. For what? Shits and giggles? Fun? Henry looked really upset, so you go to try and find him. You walk out to the back of the school. You hope you won’t see Samuel, so of course he’s waiting in the back. *You’re* the one who usually waits out here after school is done, so this clearly seems like a premediated plan.

“Looks like the pansy finally came,” Samuel says.

“Why? Why are you doing this?” Frustration creeps into your voice, frustration and bewilderment.

“ ‘Cause I don’t like sissies, and my friends gave me twenty bucks if I’d do this to you.”

You’re about to ask what, and he punches you where no man ever wants to be punched. You can’t remember the last time someone hit you in the balls, but this will stick out in memory for a long time. Agonized, you clutch your hands over your private parts, waiting for the pain to pass. Samuel just stands there, laughing.

Henry walks in from the back entrance of the school.

You point at Samuel. “He just punched me in the nuts.” Speaking is difficult when in this much pain.

If Henry is still upset about being rejected, that doesn’t stop him. He runs forward and kicks Samuel in the nuts. He’s much more athletic than you. Samuel takes his blow worse than you did. He doubles over, almost crying in pain.

“What the fuck? What...” he sputters, like the very act of speaking is too much in this sort of pain.

“You bother him again and I’ll kick you twice as hard.” Henry looks at Samuel, smug. Samuel just runs off—well, as best as someone can run when kicked in that area.

“Thanks,” you say, your voice cracking a bit—you’re genuinely grateful.

“I don’t like seeing him pick on you.” You feel a wave of satisfaction when Henry says this.

“Are you still upset about Abby? I talked with the guy who played—”

Henry waves his hand. “Don’t worry about it. I talked with him too. He apologized when I explained, said he was playing it because he thought it sounded funny. He didn’t know I just got rejected.” Then Henry shakes his head, looking almost as detached as Abigail did. His messy brown hair sways as he does. “It’s no big deal.”

“Samuel hates me because I’m gay.” You throw it out there on impulse.

Henry just nods, like he understands perfectly. “I said I don’t like seeing him pick on you. I meant it. Don’t let that douchebag get you down. If you ever need to talk, my door’s always open.”

Your friend stuck up for you. Suddenly, your surroundings are quite pleasant. The wind feels pleasing against your skin. The sun shines in the sky, and in the moment, it looks like it’s shining just for you. The light even illuminates Henry’s face, who looks happy with what he did—confident, the light going back into his eyes. The world didn’t exactly fall off its axis with what Samuel did—you just plain felt bad. For now, with Henry’s help, it’s abated.

Henry smiles. “You give me moral support, and I’ll be your avenging arm,” he says.

“More like my avenging foot.” You laugh. He laughs. Samuel gets what he deserves, *icibas*, down here at the back of the schoolyard.