

Outside

By Sofia Nemeth

Bleep, beep! That's my alarm. First day at my new school. Honestly... not that exciting. New or not, who would be excited about school? I grab an old concert shirt that probably belongs to my dad and my red faded flannel hanging off a chair. I quickly change and look out the window. The sky is dark and cloudy as usual. I grab my backpack and head out the door out into a completely grey city.

Grey streets, grey sky, grey buildings. Grey people. All of them. Just walking head down with a glow on their faces. Expressionless. Emotionless. Like life doesn't exist within them anymore. The beeps and roars of car engines are only sound to be heard. I start walking. I memorized my route beforehand so I wouldn't get lost. I walk, glancing at the people and cars around me. The cars seem like the most colorful thing in sight. Blurs of red and blue make their way down the road. Yellow taxis and white vans speed towards their destination. Those cars look like the most alive things in this city.

I head down to the metro. It's even darker down here. Lights flicker, making the station look more shabby than it really is. The glows of peoples' faces are even more prominent here. The metro arrives in less than a minute. Inside the train is quiet. No one talking, no one giggling, not one bit of chatter. Only the sound of the train rushing through the tunnel is heard. All seats are taken. All off them with people looking down with glowing faces. The metro stops. It's not my stop yet. An old man enters. Walking with a stick and struggling to stand. He slowly wobbles over to the girl in the seat next to the door. "Excuse me." he says. "Would you mind letting me sit in your chair?" The girl ignores him. The man tries to get her attention again, but she doesn't even look up. The man looks down at the source of the glow. The black, shiny rectangle in every person's hand. He slaps it out of the girl's hand yelling "What's more important on there than what's happening now kid?!"

"What's your problem?" the girl yells back at him. They glare at each other for a second before the girl picks her phone up and continues staring like nothing happened.

"Stupid phones." he said.

"Life used to be better before they turned smart."

He turns to me. "Good for you, kid. You're living in reality. Not in some fake reality."

I get off at the next stop. My new school just a few steps away. The closer I get to school, the more people of my age appear. All of them looking down, with glowing faces towards their smartphone. None of them really care about being here. As long as they have their phones.

I enter the school. It's filled with people and the sound of keyboards and notifications. Everyone is looking straight down to their smartphone. I walk down the hallway, with no idea where I'm going while trying to look casual. I look for a sign that says office since I know there will be a teacher there to help me. While looking at signs I bump into someone. "Watch it!" he says and continues on. Then I hear a click. Someone took a photo. A keyboard clatters and simultaneous notifications sound. Shoot. This wasn't supposed to happen. Now everyone's on the hunt to find my profile. Any profile. But they won't find one. At least I hope...

"Hey!" someone taps my shoulder. I turn around. It's a really dressed up girl. She looks like an ugly wannabe model. "What's your name?"

"Mike Gazinsky." She searches me up. I turn and start walking away. "Hey, wait!" she shouts and runs after me. I quickly walk into a crowd. "Which one?" she says but I'm already out of sight.

I find my classroom. Now everyone is busy looking at their phones and my face, trying to find any profile of mine. Then the teacher comes in. No one bothers to look up.

"Good morning class." the teacher says. Nothing. No reaction. No acknowledgement. Nothing. "Now put away your phones, please and take out your tablets." People keep on tapping. He sighs. "PUT YOUR PHONES AWAY!" he yells. The class groans but they do as he says.

The teacher starts lecturing. After a while, I hear some snickers. I lean to the side and find my classmate in front of me sneakily scrolling through his phone. I look to my left and there's another classmate doing the same. The same on my right. I lean over to the left and try and catch a glance at my classmate's screen. There's a post. "OMG teachers are so annoying our like teacher just yelled at us as soon as he entered like what a psycho i hope he loses his job". 59 likes?! It's only been a minute since this was posted. And the likes are growing too. So many students must be sneakily scrolling.

During break I wander the halls, trying to find a place where no one can bother me about my profile. Then I spot the janitor's closet. No one bothers to go in there. I enter

only to find wannabe model tapping away at her phone. She doesn't notice me entering. I close the door leaving a small crack open. I lean over her shoulder to see what she's doing. There's a picture of her but prettier. She's photoshopping! I shut the door, causing her to notice my presence. She lets out a small shriek.

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing much. You?"

"N-nothing. Did you see anything?"

"Umm... depends. What was I supposed to see?"

"Please, whatever you saw here, don't tell anyone."

"Sure."

"And that includes posting."

"Whatever."

"Don't say that! You could ruin my life."

"What life?"

"I could lose all my followers, my fans, my likes. Everything!"

"What kind of life is that? It's not even real?"

"So what? People love me."

"Do they really? Or do they love your online persona?"

"What's wrong with you? Everyone cares about this stuff."

"I guess I'm not everyone."

She bursts out of the room. I wonder if she'll post a rant about me. How twisted will it be? How many likes would that have?

As I leave school I hear cameras clicking, taking pictures of me. All of them are going to post them, asking if anyone knows who I am. Kind of like a lost or wanted poster. Any bit of info gets ten bucks. That kind of crap. I decide to walk home, to hear something more than smartphone noises. Those things are really smart, they're taking over their owners' lives. As I walk, I see the old guy from the metro. He probably remembers me too as he limps over to me.

"A lovely dystopia we're living in, don't you agree? Back in my day, people predicted this would happen and tried to get people off their screens and live a bit of life offline. But I guess we were too late or people wouldn't listen and take action. Back then we were scared that robots would take over but look at us now, we're the robots."

I take a look around me and wonder how the world looked before we became electronic zombies.

"Sir, what was the world like? Before it became like this?"

He told me of so many things. How people would go to places called libraries and look through shelves trying to find a specific book to get info or learn about something. And books were physical things back then. He told me how people would go out into the woods with everything they needed in one backpack and would stay out in the wild for fun. People used to have maps that didn't show where they were or where they were headed. They used to write instead of type. Kids would go outside and run and be noisy and do dangerous things just for fun. Life was so different back then. I never lived that life, but from what I'm hearing, life seemed to have more life back then. More struggles that made life less smooth but more like life with actual ups and downs. I wish I could have lived in times when we could go back, but I feel we have already passed the point of no return. The old man was lucky. He at least got to experience that life. There's no way to live it now. Maybe the best way is to give up on that and join the present. I reach for my phone and tap "sign up."