

Fish Out of Water

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“BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!” My alarm clock slashes through my peaceful slumber, forcing my body to groggily wake up and face the real world. Today is a *bad* day for that interruption. The morning is like a hazy blur, my mind too sleepy to process it. All I can think about is how I’m going to be the new kid in the middle of the school year. It would be great if that was the worst of my problems, but I am going to be the only Jewish girl in a Christian private school. I will be the fish out of water, and it will be horrible.

I hop into my mother’s minivan, too nervous to process anything that she is blathering about for the next fifteen minutes. It is like my stomach is a cage, ready to explode because it is unable to carry all the butterflies fluttering around inside of it. As we pull into the place where I will be spending most days of my life from now on, I am greeted by a large cross. I tug on my Jewish star pendant, instantly reminding me of my best friend. Right before we moved to the middle-of-nowhere, three thousand miles away from my true home, my best friend’s mother gifted us with matching Jewish star necklaces, signifying that we would always be connected. This reminds me that I have no friends in my new home. I inhale and exhale, attempting to seal the cage in my stomach, and step out of the front seat into a new universe.

I enter a gorgeous chapel. It is decorated with oak and breathtaking stained-glass windows. The ceilings are high, and there are rows of benches decorated with maroon leather. As I intake my surroundings, I notice groups of students in clumps, separated by their friend groups. All of them contrast my short stature and black ringlets with their slender pale bodies, pin-straight blonde hair, and deep blue eyes. I spot them staring at me, some pointing directly at my neck. I am confused, but I look down to see my Jewish star pendant. Are they staring at my necklace? There are now whispers, sharp knives aimed at me, their sole purpose to cause me harm. I want to crawl into a hole and never come out, but I know that doing that will greatly satisfy them. Instead, I hold my head up high, spreading my false confidence into the air.

The school bell rings, and everyone rushes to the benches in the chapel. I choose a seat in the back, far enough away from the students in my class to avoid more humiliation that they might cause me but close enough to the pulpit that the teachers in the room will not motion for me to come closer to my other classmates.

I learn that they begin each day with a chapel service that is mandatory for all students. I groan, more things that make me a fish out of water! I snap out of my daydreaming and tune in to whatever the pastor is saying.

“We will be starting a brand-new program called ‘Chapel Chums,’” the pastor continues. “In this program, we will pair you up with one of your classmates, and you will sit together during this time and do activities with each other throughout the school year. Now, your chum may not be one of your close friends, but your teachers have paired

you with someone with similar interests as you.” I roll my eyes. How tormenting can this day get?! Everyone in this school seems to be rude and the polar opposite of me!

I get paired with a slender girl with silky blonde hair and icy blue eyes. “Hi! I’m Kate! What’s your name?” she asks me cheerfully. She is surprisingly kind and friendly.

“Hi! I’m Noa.” I respond.

“Nice to meet you!” she answers “Wh-”

“We will now be starting prayers!” the minister interrupts. The whole chapel automatically breaks into a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. Well, except for me, I’ve never heard these words before. I try to fit in by searching for a Bible, but there are none in my sight.

The prayer ends and the minister says, “Let’s be sure everyone is chanting with us.” I notice the minister staring at me so hard that he could drill a hole in my forehead if he wanted to. My face is as red as a tomato. So is Kate’s.

“I think he’s talking to you,” Kate whispers quietly. My embarrassment shifts into fury in its purest form. Is she making fun of my religion? Is she trying to ostracize me more than I already am? I thought that this school would be better than my first impression of it, but I was fully incorrect. Everyone here is horrible. I am so furious that I feel like I will explode.

The rest of the school day feels like a million years. I’ve sat in the back in all my classes and have not spoken to anyone.

It’s finally my last class when my teacher announces, “We have a new student! Noa, please come up to the front of the class and tell us a bit about yourself!” I groan. This could be more humiliating than the chapel incident!

“Hi, um, I’m Noa, I just moved here and um yeah. Any questions?” I mumble. My stomach is about to explode from all the butterflies inside.

Hands pop up, and I pick on Kate.

“Your necklace is so cute!” she states. All the girls nod in agreement. My lips form into a smile as bright as the sun. Kate isn’t rude. She just wants to be my friend. I was overreacting, and I don’t think they were staring at my necklace to be mean. Everyone here seems really sweet. Maybe being the fish out of water isn’t so bad after all.