

The Muslim Girl

By: Anna Turner

“Sidni May...Ma...Maheendur?”

“It’s actually pronounced exactly like it’s spelled: Ma-hin-dar.”

“Oooh...how interesting. What ethnicity is that?”

Here we go again. It is the same with every new teacher. What ethnicity is that? Iranian. Are you from Iran? I was born there but we moved to the U.S. when I was three. How interesting! What religion are you? My father practices Islam, but my Mom is kind of just whatever. So you’re a Muslim, then? Uh...half-Muslim, I guess. How interesting...

And from that point onward, I am known as “the Muslim girl.” Not Sidni, the third wheel. Not Sidni, the girl with no cell phone. Not Sidni, the daughter of a pop star. Not Sidni, the MVP soccer player. Not Sidni, the ex-employee of Fifty Flavors Ice Cream Parlor. Not Sidni, the pyromaniac. Not Sidni, the owner of the mailbox-eating dog. Not Sidni, the candidate for Diversity Council President.

Just Sidni Mahindar, the Muslim girl.

Bradley Chesney and I had been neighbors since my first day in America. I was three and three-quarters, he was three and three-quarters. I was in Miss Niely's preschool class, he was in Miss Niely's class. I didn't like Oreos, he didn't like Oreos. I thought red Playdough tasted best, he thought red Playdough tasted best. We really had no choice but to be best friends.

Fourteen years and sixty days after our first meeting, Brad and I were eating lunch in our high school cafeteria, trying to decide whether or not we should go to the homecoming dance.

"But it's our senior year, and we've never been to a single school dance." I pointed out, realizing that boys don't care about these things as much as girls do.

"True. That's because we never *wanted* to go to a school dance."

"But I want to go now."

"Why? Why do you all of a sudden want to partake in high school social life?" I shrugged, knowing that he had a point. It *was* odd that I was intrigued by the idea of spending time outside of school with people who usually made my life hell—the popular kids couldn't get past the fact that I was Iranian, and therefore thought I was a terrorist, or at least that my Dad was a terrorist, and never let a day go by without making some sort of entirely inaccurate Jihad comment. Meanwhile, the unpopular kids shunned me because I was not well-versed in Dungeons and Dragons, Magic: The Gathering, Pokemon, or band instruments. All of the other kids—the ones that were not popular or unpopular—were nice to me, but never hung out with me beyond the cinderblock walls of Monroe High.

"I don't know, Brad, I just...It's our last homecoming dance. Besides, you're nominated for homecoming king. You sort of have an obligation." Brad groaned and rolled his eyes. He,

unlike me, was extremely well-known and well-liked, despite the fact that he hung out with the weird Muslim girl. Because he was on the higher end of the high school popularity spectrum, he was the top contender for homecoming king.

“I know. I just...” I tried my hardest to muster up a pleading face, puppy dog eyes and pouting lips included, hoping that after all our years of friendship, he would do me this one kindness. Brad wrinkled his nose in a mixture of disgust and annoyance. “If I say yes will you stop making that hideous face?”

“YES!” I exclaimed, clapping my hands in excitement. Brad just sighed, knowing he would regret this decision later. “I’m so happy you said yes, because I already bought my dress.”

“Of course you did.” Brad said flatly, finishing off his lunch with a hearty belch.

“That’s disgusting.” A clipped voice made both Brad and myself look up to see Amanda Boggs, one of my friends from Academic Superbowl, standing over our table.

“Hey Amanda.” I said. Brad gave her an appraising nod as she took a seat next to me.

“Hey Sidni. Listen, I was wondering if you had done the reading for Advanced Chem?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Did you understand it at all?”

“Amanda, go to homecoming with us.” Amanda and I both looked at Brad in complete shock. Had he really just asked someone else to go to homecoming with us? The boy who was so intent on *not* going? Amanda looked hesitantly from me to Brad, not sure what to say. A

hard kick from Brad under the table encouraged me to convince my nerdy friend that homecoming would be a blasty-blast.

“Yeah, you should!” I said, feigning sincerity. It wasn’t that I didn’t like Amanda—I did! But I knew that she had a thing for Brad and I would have to spend the entire night watching her shameless flirtation. Amanda, like every other girl in the school, knew never to pass up a night with Bradley Chesney.

“Okay. Yeah, that sounds fun.”

“Great!” Brad said, gathering his things. “Well, I’ve got to get going. See you girls later.”

“Later, Brad.” I said, giving him a look. He grinned mischievously at me before throwing away his tray and heading toward the math hallway.

“Oh. My. GOD!” Amanda gushed. “Brad Chesney just asked me out! *Brad Chesney* asked *me*, *Amanda Boggs*, out!”

“Yeah, I know, I was there. And technically he didn’t ask you out—he asked you to join us. We were already going.” This bit of truth couldn’t dampen Amanda’s spirits. She shut her chemistry book and jammed it in her backpack, completely forgetting why she had approached me in the first place. “I have to find a dress! I have to find something to wear! I have to learn how to put on make-up!”

“You don’t know how to put on make-up?”

“I can’t believe he asked me out!” I didn’t have the heart to tell her he had done it out of sympathy—no one had ever asked out Amanda Boggs and Brad felt bad for her. “I’ll see you

later!” Amanda and her rolling backpack wheeled away with more pep than usual. That same pep returned Saturday night when the three of us were taking awkward pre-high school dance pictures in Brad’s living room. Both of Amanda’s parents were there, as well as her grandmother, great aunt, and all four of her little sisters.

The entire Boggs family tree insisted on getting a picture of just Amanda and Brad since they were clearly under the impression that Amanda and Brad were on a date and I was just the weird girl tagging along. How do I know this? Because her great aunt said,

“I don’t know why you couldn’t just find your own date. Won’t it be uncomfortable, trailing these two while they’re at the dance together?” I sighed, looking at Amanda check her braces for any leftover food before she and Brad took their seventeenth picture together.

“Sidni, you want to take a photo with us?” Amanda asked kindly, almost sympathetically—as if she were saying, *we’ll let you take a photo with us so that you don’t look stupid going stag.*

Sidni Mahindar, the third wheel.

Brad and I tried to at least look interested, but a tour of a meat factory is perhaps the most mundane thing on this earth—and possibly on any other earths that might exist in parallel realities. The only thing that got me through the tour from hell was the shiny new cell phone in my hand. I couldn’t stop looking at it—so sleek and modern and cellular.

“Sidni, he asked you a question.” Amanda’s voice interrupted my cell phone reverie.

“Who?”

“The tour guide.” I looked past Amanda to see our entire economics class staring at me with expectant faces. Our teacher was also waiting for my response to the question I had not heard.

“Um...I don’t...I mean...what was the question?” The teacher scowled at me, disappointed that the Muslim girl was not paying attention.

“Perhaps you should put your phone away and learn about beef processors.” He suggested, looking pointedly at the cell phone in my hand. I nodded and slipped the phone in my pocket.

Five seconds later our tour group witnessed the apocalypse a la Bernard Meat Factory: the machines angrily halted, crying out in protest. The lights switched on and off, on and off, on and off—trying to warn us. Diabolical sparks were flying from a circuit box, threatening to start a fire at any moment. The foreman began shouting a stream of obscenities that may or may not have actually formed a sentence.

Then everything went dark.

Needless to say our tour group left immediately, terrified that the death trap we were touring would collapse.

Everyone was gushing with excitement when we got back to the school, ecstatic to have such a dramatic story to tell classmates and parents. I was no different, and mentally rehearsed telling my Dad of the meat factory disaster so that by the time I got home, I was more than ready to relive the epic adventure.

“DAD!” I called, running into the living room. A visible wave of relief washed over my unusually nervous father, who leapt up from the couch and enveloped me in an uncomfortable hug.

“Sidni! I was just watching the news and—”

“You’re not going to believe what happened, Dad!”

“—they’re saying that Bernard Meat Factory short-circuited today, obstructing a fiber-optic cable. I was so worried that your class was still on the tour, why didn’t you answer your phone? I called a million times. I was so worried!”

“Dad, calm down. I’ve had my phone on...” I paused, a nuclear bomb of panic exploding inside me. My phone wasn’t in my pocket...My hand felt nothing but the cotton lining and a dime. Maybe I hadn’t put my phone in that pocket, maybe it was in my other...Not there either...My back pocket! Surely I put it in my back pocket...Other back pocket...

“And now half of the city doesn’t have power because the fiber-optic cable is shot.” I wasn’t paying attention to my father’s report—I had lost my phone! My new, beautiful phone! “And all because some idiot threw their cell phone into the main grinder.”

We were standing over the main grinder when I put my phone in my pocket...No, there’s no way...

My suspicions were confirmed when a live report from Bernard’s blared through the TV, showing the twisted remains of my new cell phone at the bottom of the now-drained grinder.

Sidni Mahindar, the girl with no cell phone.

“You see, Sidni? When you wear nice clothes, not sweatpants and a baseball hat, you look semi-attractive. Right now you’re about a three or a four, and there’s no reason you shouldn’t be a six or a seven.”

“Wow, thanks for being such a great Mom.”

“Of course. Now, let’s go get those eyebrows waxed. Those things aren’t supposed to cover your entire face—you look like Sasquatch.” I closed the dressing room door behind me, thankful that this week’s shopping spree was over. As I put my sweatpants and baseball hat back on, I could hear an excited voice coming from the other side of my door.

“...like Rashniya. I’m sure you get that all the time.”

“I do, actually. That’s because I *am* Rashniya.”

“Are you really? Oh my god, it’s an honor!”

“Yes, I’m sure it is. Put your hand down, I’m not going to shake it.”

“You were my hero, really. You are so talented—I loved *My Oxygen*, such a great song!” Much to my horror, Mom started singing the chorus of *My Oxygen*, her only popular song. The delighted customer squealed with excitement as Mom belted out the final line of the refrain—*how can I breathe without my oxygen?*

I emerged from the dressing room, giving Mom my stop-that-singing-right-now-or-I-will-move-in-with-grandma look. Per usual, Mom ignored me and kept singing.

“Mom.” I said firmly, hoping she would take the hint and end this sad trip down memory lane.

“You were there for me when I needed to breathe—”

“MOM.”

“—and you were there for me when I needed to see—”

“MOM!” Finally the singing stopped as both Mom and her only remaining fan looked at me in annoyance.

“Is this your daughter?” The fan asked, giving me a measured look.

“Yes.” Mom sighed, slinging her designer purse over her bony shoulder.

“She doesn’t look anything like you.”

“I know. It makes me sad that my daughter didn’t inherit my physical attributes. Look at her knobby knees and these lanky arms. She’s like a stick figure!” I could hear my Mom and the rude fan laughing behind me as I left the dressing room.

Were I not so used to Mom’s degradation, my feelings might have been hurt, but the thing about my Mom is that she honestly believes I single-handedly destroyed her music career. “If I hadn’t gotten pregnant with you, Sidni, then I wouldn’t have gotten fat and I could have gone on an international tour!” How many times a week did I hear *that* line? Add one more tally, because she dropped that bomb on the drive home from the store.

“It would be different if you were talented—then I could live vicariously through you. But no, it was just too much to ask for a gifted daughter.” I refused to acknowledge my Mom,

choosing instead to watch the raindrops rolling down my window: *Which one will reach the bottom first? It's a close race, with the left raindrop gaining quickly on the right drop.*

And the right raindrop wins by millimeters!

“Oh well,” Mom said, sighing. “I guess it’s enough that you’re the daughter of a pop star. You don’t need any talent yourself. Thank god, right?” Mom chuckled to herself as she popped a disc in the CD player. *My Oxygen* crept through the speakers, reminding me that this song was the only claim to fame I would ever have.

Sidni Mahindar, the daughter of a pop star.

“MAHINDAR! YOU’RE UP!” My coach’s harsh voice sliced through the rain like a nuclear missile. I glanced up at the scoreboard: two minutes left and the score was 17-2. We were the two.

“Are you sure?” I asked, deserting the warped wood of the bench and joining my coach on the sideline. Coach didn’t acknowledge my question, she just threw a goalie jersey and some gloves at my face and told me to hit the field. “But I’ve never played goalie before!” I protested, my voice lost to the wind and rain. “I’ve never played anything before! You always bench me!”

“Listen, Mahindar, I know you’re a freshman, but that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t get to play.” I stared at her in disbelief. After four years of playing for her, she still thought I was a freshman?

“I’m a senior.”

“Then why are you on the freshmen team?” *Because you said I wasn’t good enough for Junior Varsity*, I thought. “Whatever, get in the goal!” As the other goalie ran off the field, Coach shoved me onto the wet, green grass that I had never set foot on before—except during practice. I numbly headed toward the goal, my legs like lead, my arms hanging uselessly at my sides. I knew that no matter how horrible I was, we would still lose. That gave me some comfort: at least the game was out of my hands.

“AND MAHINDAR!” I turned to Coach for her final words of encouragement. “IF YOU LOSE THIS FOR US, IT’S TWENTY LAPS. IN THIS WEATHER.”

Great. Twenty laps of rain-serenaded running awaited me as soon as the game ended.

Paralyzed, I stepped in front of the goal. I could see Brad in the bleachers, cheering me on. Amanda sat beside him—Amanda had somehow weaseled her way into me and Brad’s friendship and now never let us out of her sight—wearing a bright orange poncho that was very similar to a circus tent, both in shape and size.

“SIDNI! PAY ATTENTION!” A loud voice made me turn around just as the soccer ball collided violently with my face. I stumbled backwards into the goal, the ball not far behind. I heard the other team erupt in cheers—eighteen goals in one game. It soon became nineteen (I got caught in the netting of the goal), then twenty (I slipped in the mud and did the splits for the first time in my entire life), then twenty-one (the girl charging me weighed 300 lbs., I would have been crazy *not* to move out of her way), and finally twenty-two (I had just given up at this point).

“MAHINDAR! TWENTY-TWO LAPS!” Coach yelled as soon as I returned to the bench for some water.

“But you said twenty!”

“ONE LAP FOR EVERY GOAL YOU LET IN!”

“But seventeen of those goals weren’t my fault!”

“START RUNNING!”

As I ran my first lap, I did the math in my head and figured that twenty-two laps was not that bad. If I averaged five goals for every two minutes of play, forty minutes per half, two halves per game that means, if I kept up my average, I would have let in two hundred goals. Player of the year award goes to me, I guess.

After a thousand hours of running, I was more than ready to go home, pass out, and sleep the rest of my life away. Unfortunately, Mom was having one of her infamous Karaoke parties. These “parties” consisted of her washed-up friends getting drunk and listening to my equally-wasted Mother sing every Madonna song to ever be recorded. The night would always end with Mom’s friends confidently telling her that *My Oxygen* was a million times better than any song Madonna ever did.

I went downstairs around midnight to ask the forty-year-old has-beens to please quiet down—I had school the next day. When Mom saw me she immediately stopped singing and gave me a huge hug, sloshing red wine down the back of my pajamas.

“Oh, honey! Congratulations on winning your soccer game! Nessie told me that you scored twenty-two goals!” Mom’s friends all “oohed” and “ahhhed” in excitement, impressed with my skills. I couldn’t kill their buzz by telling them that it was the other team that scored

twenty-two goals, so I just smiled and nodded in confirmation. “My little daughter! Best athlete at Monroe!”

Sidni Mahindar, the MVP soccer player.

Brad and I had worked at Fifty Flavors Ice Cream Parlor since ninth grade, and it soon became the only time we spent together without Amanda latching onto us like a leech. It was also my new favorite place because I could earn money to buy a new cell phone—when my parents found out what had happened to my other one, well...Let’s just say they are never buying me anything again.

“Sorry about your soccer game, Sid. That kind of sucked.” Brad said, eating Rocky Road ice cream right out of the tub. I was doing the same, only with Cotton Candy ice cream. Business was slow, and our manager, Kelly, was in the back office talking to her eharmony.com match, Dustin, online, so we were free to devour any ice cream we wanted.

“Oh, it’s okay. I don’t know why I put up with soccer to begin with. I’m horrible.” Brad nodded in agreement—he was never one to skirt around the truth. “But at least that was my last game.”

“Amen to that. I mean, no offense, but your games were always so boring. Excluding the last two minutes of your final game.” I let out a deep sigh, nodding. Brad had come to every one of my soccer games even though I never played—not even during the freshmen games. I had hoped that all those hours of watching me on the bench would amount to something—maybe me shooting a winning goal—so that Brad didn’t feel like he wasted so much of his life. As if

reading my mind, he added, “Not that I didn’t like your games. It was always entertaining to see how many Gatorades you could chug in one game. I think seven was your record, right?”

“Nine.” Before Brad could say anything else, our first customer all afternoon sauntered in. The forty-something-year-old male approached the counter cautiously, looking at the menu with intensity. I smiled and said, “How can I help—”

“Shhh.” The man said, holding his hand up to silence me. “I’m trying to decide.” Brad and I exchanged sidelong glances. I waited patiently for the man to make up his mind. One minute passed...two minutes...three minutes...Another customer came in and Brad helped her before the man spoke again. “You only have thirty-three flavors.”

“Pardon?” I asked, caught off guard that he was talking. He had been silent for so long...

“Thirty-three. You’re supposed to have fifty. This is Fifty Flavors Ice Cream Parlor, isn’t it? Not Thirty-three Flavors Ice Cream Parlor?” I heard Brad stifle a laugh.

“Well, we have mix-ins, so you can create your own ice cream. That actually means we have more than fifty—”

“Do you have strawberry-mango-chocolate?” I paused, wondering where on earth anyone could find strawberry-mango-chocolate ice cream.

“Um, no... We have strawberry-banana and chocolate chips as a mix-in.” I suggested. His lips twisted into a scowl, and I could tell that strawberry-banana was not his idea of a delicious snack.

“Oatmeal raisin cookie dough, then.” Did he really think that was a real flavor?

“Do you mean chocolate chip cookie dough?”

“No, I meant what I said!” He hissed, losing his temper and slamming his hand on the counter.

“Well, we don’t have oatmeal raisin cookie dough.”

“Seriously? You’re telling me that Fifty Flavors doesn’t have oatmeal raisin cookie dough?”

“I don’t think anyone has oatmeal raisin cookie dough ice cream, sir. We have strawberry cheesecake, that’s my favorite.” I said, hoping that he would realize how delicious it sounded and just order that.

“I’m allergic to strawberries.”

“Then why did you ask for strawberry-mango-chocolate earlier?” He paused, glaring at me, and I was sure he was going to punch me in the face. Brad could sense it, too, and had walked over to where I stood, standing a foot taller than both myself and the angry customer.

“Maybe you’ll be able to help me, young man.” Brad narrowed his eyes, doubtful. “Can I have some French cucumber candy with peppermints mixed in?” Brad knew that this guy was just wasting our time, so he cleared his throat and said as professionally as possible,

“Sir, if there is not anything on our menu that suits your needs, you will have to go elsewhere.” The man pouted, let out a little grunt, then raised his chin superiorly and said,

“I demand to see your manager.”

“Right away.” I said, heading over to the back office and knocking on the door. Kelly tore herself away from instant messaging Dustin to see what the commotion was. When the customer explained to her that I was being surly and would not fill his order, she apologized and gave him a free dish of whatever he wanted.

“All I wanted was some cookies and crème. In a waffle cone.” He said innocently. Kelly turned to me, glowering, and said severely,

“Sidni. Please get this man some cookies and crème, like he asked.” I wanted to protest. I wanted to tell her that he hadn’t asked for cookies and crème. I wanted to tell her that he had looked through our entire menu and named off things we *didn’t* have and then ordered those. I wanted to tell her he was a liar. But instead I got him his free cookies and crème waffle cone and smiled as I did to nice customers.

“Thank you, sorry about all this!” Kelly called as he left without so much as a backward glance. She slowly turned on me, took a deep breath, and asked me to turn in my nametag and apron.

Sidni Mahindar, the ex-employee of Fifty Flavors Ice Cream Parlor.

I was hanging the final ornaments on the beautiful spruce taking up our living room, the calming voice of Bing Crosby wafting through the surround-sound speakers. Mom was drinking red wine (surprise) on the couch, listening to the classic lyrics of “White Christmas” and most likely thinking, *I could have sung this much better.*

Dad came out of the kitchen, frowning at my choice of décor. Tinsel and garland shrouded our humble home, the lights from Eid-al-Fatr still glowing outside. In my opinion, they complemented the Christmas aura wonderfully. In Dad's opinion, the holly and mistletoe was offensive to the lights that symbolized the end of Ramadan. Agree to disagree, I guess.

“Sid, how many more years are we going to have to put up with this Christmas nonsense?” Dad asked, joining Mom on the couch. *So much for agreeing to disagree.*

“I like it.” Mom said, supporting me the first time since...well, ever.

“Thank you, Mom.” I turned to my Dad, hands on hips in a very authoritative manner. “And as long as Christmas is around, you'll have to put up with this Christmas nonsense. Can you hand me that ornament right there? The fat elf one?” Dad ignored me, choosing instead to look through that morning's newspaper.

“Why do you read those things?” Mom asked, gesturing toward Dad's *New York Times*. “All they do is talk about death and destruction and how Iran is single-handedly going to destroy the free world. Which is ridiculous.” I sighed. It looked like another hour of Mom and Dad discussing racial profiling and how we had to go through extra security checks at the airport.

I focused on the Christmas tree, breathing in its refreshing pine fragrance. The cinnamon-apple candle I had recently purchased was also filling the air with Yuletide greetings, and there was something else...Something heavy and full of holiday...wait a second...That's a little *too much* cinnamon-apple...

“SIDNI!” Dad hands grasped my shoulders and yanked me away from the blazing inferno that had once been my beautiful Christmas tree. “GET THE FIRE EXTINGUISHER!”

He instructed. Mom ran into the kitchen, yelling something or other about calling 911, while I frantically unhitched the fire extinguisher from its niche in the front hall. My hands fumbled as I tried desperately to pull the pin out of the handle.

I had learned in school how to use a fire extinguisher (remember the acronym PASS: pin, aim, spray, sweeping motion) but somehow it was extremely different in real life. I forgot to aim and sweep, which would explain why a forceful tsunami of foam engulfed my body. I stumbled backwards, coughing and spluttering as the fire extinguisher continued to assault me. Dad yanked the red tube of death away from me and aimed it at the tree. Within seconds he had reduced the fire—and half my tree—to a smoldering pile of ash.

The firefighters arrived a few minutes later and doused the smoking remains of my Christmas tree with water, preventing any further fires from erupting. They also instructed that I shouldn't put cinnamon-apple candles so close to a tree. One of the firefighters caught sight of me and furrowed his brow in confusion. I figured he was confused about me looking like the Michelin Tire man, but it was something else entirely.

“Are you Muslim?” He asked, nodding toward the photo of the Royal Mosque in Esfahan, Iran. I looked at the framed 16” x 24” colored photo, the only piece of art in our living room.

“Yeah.” I said through a mouthful of fire extinguisher foam.

“Then why do you have a Christmas tree?”

“To set it on fire, clearly.” I joked, trying to laugh but choking on more foam and going into a violent coughing fit. The firefighter did not think my joke was funny at all, and I got charged with arson.

Sidni Mahindar, the pyromaniac.

Brad and I were sitting on my front porch, watching Roman, my dog, run around the yard. Roman was roughly the size of a horse, and he ate anything he saw. At that current moment, he was gnawing on our fence.

“How old is Roman, anyway?” Brad asked. I shrugged—I really only kept track of things Roman ate, not how many years he had been alive.

“Well, he started with jewelry, then remotes, then clothes...” I listed the things off on my fingers as Brad listened, growing nostalgic at each fond memory of visiting the vet’s office for x-rays of Roman’s digestive system.

“Don’t forget the time he ate your left shoes.” I nodded at Brad’s comment. That was probably the worst of Roman’s shenanigans: He devoured each of my left shoes, rendering all of my shoes useless because a pair of shoes doesn’t work if you only have the right one.

“How’s work at Fifty Flavors going?” I asked, changing the subject. Brad chuckled bitterly.

“It’s...great.” Sarcasm drenched his lie, and I knew there was a good story coming. “Kelly hired her internet boyfriend, Dustin, in your place. He is so creepy. All he talks about is the Third Eye.”

“What is that?” I asked as Roman leapt over our fence and strutted across the cul-de-sac to the Littleton’s yard. This didn’t concern me—Roman wandered off all the time and would return with something new and exciting making its way through his large intestine.

“The Third Eye is apparently like the mystical world or something. Like, he was telling me all about how, in his past life, he stabbed Napoleon to death.”

“But...I thought Napoleon was poisoned or something.”

“Yeah, well, I’m going to go ahead and say Dustin is a more reliable source than history books.”

“I read it on Wikipedia.”

“Well, better than Wikipedia, then. He also survived the Black Death and set Rome on fire.”

“So, he was Nero?”

“No, he did it before Nero had the idea.” I nodded, glad that I would never get the opportunity to work with Dustin. Before Brad could go into another Dustin story, Roman made his way back to our yard, something black hanging from his mouth.

“Oh god, what now?” I asked, walking over to the omnivore (in the fullest sense of the term) and yanking a mailbox door out of his teeth. “What the...”

“Wow. Impressive.” Brad said, looking across the street. I followed his gaze to find that the Littleton’s mailbox was no longer a box, but was instead a pile of black shreds scattered

around the cul-de-sac. I gaped at the extent of the damage—Roman had ingested a large part of the mailbox post along with the mailbox itself.

Sidni, owner of the mailbox-eating dog.

Amanda had once again joined Brad and me at lunch. I realized that we would never get rid of her, so I should just get used to her side ponytail and overalls. After all, I had adjusted to not having a cell phone or a job, I could totally adjust to Amanda Boggs telling me she had signed me up to run for Diversity Council President.

Wait...What?

“You did what?”

“Signed you up for the Diversity Council elections!” Amanda said, smiling widely so that the fluorescent light of our cafeteria bounced off the metal factory in her mouth that was her braces.

“Why would you do that?” Brad and I asked in simultaneous puzzlement.

“Because! The only reason people know Sidni is because she’s Muslim, right? She’s ‘the Muslim girl.’”

“OK, true, but losing the Diversity Council student elections will just make me ‘the Muslim girl who ran for secretary.’”

“Diversity Council President. The old president quit or something, so now they’re holding elections—it’s a great opportunity!”

“Then why don’t you run?” Brad suggested. Amanda snorted in laughter in an extremely unattractive way. Four years later, she stopped her oinking and said,

“Speeches are this afternoon, so you really don’t have much time to campaign, but oh well! Write a three to four minute speech about why you should be elected. I have to get to Trig, see you guys later!” She rushed off, her rolling backpack laughing at me as it turned the corner and out of sight. Brad and I exchanged looks, processing what just occurred.

“Do you think I can just not show up?” I asked. Brad shrugged, and his not immediately agreeing with my bailing idea made me uneasy.

“Maybe it’s not such a bad idea. I mean, Amanda has a point: People only know you as the Muslim girl. If you got involved with something, you could change that.” I gaped at him. Was he really supporting Amanda’s ludicrous notion that I should run for Diversity Council...what was it? President?

“I’m sorry...What?”

“I think you should run. You should do it.”

Thanks to my not having a spine, Brad’s vote of confidence was enough to get me behind the podium in front of the Diversity Council members. Amanda and Brad sat in the back of the room, smiling encouragingly. I cleared my throat, wishing I hadn’t elected to go after the boy from Ghana who spoke better English than I did.

“Hello.” I started nervously. A titter of responses filled the room as twenty-odd expectant faces waited for my next word. “My name is Sidni Mahindar, and I am...well, I’ve never been part of Diversity Council before, but I would like to join...because...Well, everyone

kind of just knows me as ‘the Muslim girl.’” I looked back to Brad, who nodded at me to go on. We had rehearsed this, I could do it. “But I’m actually not Muslim, really. At all.”

“You look Muslim.” One of the Diversity Council kids said. I was caught off guard by the interruption and my breath caught in my throat as I struggled to remember what I was supposed to say. What had Brad told me to say if I get caught? *Just say whatever you’re thinking, people like honesty.* I took a deep breath...what was I thinking?

“But, I’m not Muslim. I mean, technically I’m half-Muslim because my Dad is Muslim and I celebrate Ramadan or whatever...but I never really go to Temple. And besides, even if I were Muslim, I’m not *just* Muslim. I’m not *just* the Muslim girl.” If people like honesty, I’ll give them honesty. So...here it goes. “I’m the girl who dropped her cell phone into a meat grinder, and I’m the girl whose Mom relives her glory days as a pop star via Karaoke parties once a week.” Confused glances were passed around the room, but I soldiered on. I had been waiting a long time to say this to someone besides Brad, and this was my chance. “I’m the only girl to ever be on the freshmen soccer team all four years and I’m the girl who got fired from Fifty Flavors Ice Cream Parlor. I’m the girl who set a Christmas tree on fire and has a dog that eats mailboxes.”

“That was *your* dog?” Brandon Littleton demanded angrily. I had momentarily forgotten that it was in fact the Littleton’s mailbox Roman had so heartily consumed...

“What? No. I don’t...I don’t even have a dog, so...”

“But you just said—”

“The point is,” I took a deep breath, knowing that I had reached the end of my spiel, had finally said what I had kept inside for so long. It only took me my entire childhood to say it. “Being Muslim is a part of who I am, but it is not the *only* part. I’m a lot more than Muslim.” Finally, self-actualization. “I’m Sidni Mahindar, and I am not just ‘the Muslim girl.’”



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