

MIDDLE Call Me 'Om 1

Call Me 'Om
Middle School Entry

Tom Trenton could not pronounce the letter “T”.

He didn’t know why. Nobody did, to be honest. It was just a fact of life.

Reasonably, his parents regretted the name they had chosen for him. Their neighbors would occasionally hear an anguished cry of “Why? Why couldn’t it have been Edwardo?” emanating from the Trenton’s modest townhouse. No one was quite sure if they were lamenting the name and speech predicament of their son or watching a cheesy soap opera.

Tom wasn’t looking forward to his first day of sixth grade. Honestly, who would want to be friends with someone who couldn’t say their own name, flunked kindergarten due to the unfortunate fact that they couldn’t see triangles or the color purple, and had an inexplicable fear of pencils?

Nobody, that’s who.

“Tom Trenton.” The teacher looked up from her attendance sheet.

“Here,” Tom said quietly. He was glad beyond words that “here” didn’t have a “T” in it. It was the only word he was planning on saying all semester.

Mrs. Wellsworth continued to take roll. “Jessica Deep?”

A freckled, blond haired girl cheerfully waved her hand in the air. “That would be me.” She winked at Tom.

Tom blinked back in surprise. No one had ever smiled at him like that before. After a moment's hesitation, he smiled shyly back.

The morning went downhill from that. He got in trouble with his art teacher for spilling a bottle of purple paint that he swore he didn't see. His math teacher gave him extra homework because he couldn't complete his triangles worksheet. By the time lunch rolled around, his head hung as low as his spirits.

He made his way to the lunch line. It moved painfully slow, and the things that the trays being carried out by chatting students were laden with didn't look particularly appetizing.

"You're welcome," the lunch lady growled beneath bristly eyebrows as she glopped a scoop of *something* onto his Styrofoam tray.

Tom eyed the food warily. It looked like it might crawl away if he didn't keep an eye on it.

He scanned the cafeteria for an empty table. No such luck. But there was one in the corner that looked reasonably empty.

Sitting down, he tried to ignore the giggles and whispers of the other kids. But some of their conversation still filtered through his mind as he halfheartedly poked at his lunch with a plastic fork.

"It's that weird kid from art. You know, the one who spilled Miss Itaria's paint. He's such a retard."

Tom was so preoccupied with trying to choke the inedible cafeteria food down past the lump in his throat that he barely noticed someone plunk their tray down next to him.

“Hi. You’re Tom, right? From homeroom?”

He looked up. It was Jessica. “Yeah.”

She smiled at him. “Mind if I sit with you?”

“No.”

They ate (er, make that they made sure that their lunches weren’t growing legs) in silence for a while. Eventually, Jessica turned to him.

“You don’t talk much, do you?”

Tom shook his head.

“Why?”

“I... I’s complica’ed.” He mentally cursed himself. *Way to showcase your little problem*, he thought bitterly.

Jessica tilted her head, scrutinizing him. She opened her mouth to speak, but was interrupted by a burst of noise as one of the other kids at the table spilled their milk.

Once the giggles and shrieks died down, she turned back to Tom. “What?”

Tom took a deep breath. “I can’ say the le’er e.”

She frowned. “E?”

“Uh... the le'er af'er 'Q, R, S.”

“E' doesn't come after...” Realization dawned on her face. “Oh. You mean 'T'.”

“Yeah.” He looked at the floor.

“Cool.”

Tom stared at her in shock. “Wha'?”

“It's cool. Got anything else up your sleeve?”

He blinked. “Well, I can' see the color purple. Or 'riangles.”

She laughed, her nose crinkling. “No way. You're kidding.”

“Nope.”

“That is just awesome.” She grinned at him.

“No' really.”

Her face became serious. “Oh. Sorry.”

Tom shrugged. “I's okay. I's a lo' nicer than wha' mos' people say abou' me. And I don' know why I'm like this. I's jus' like I'm ... I'm incomple'e, you know?”

Jessica nodded. “I see.”

He smiled at her. He'd never had someone who understood him before. He'd never had a friend before.

Days grew into weeks. Weeks wore into months. Tom was happier than he'd ever been.

Kids were kids, and it was second nature for them to be mean. They still made fun of "that weird kid" and tried to avoid the fabled wrath of Jessica Deep.

The principal's voice crackled through the aging PA system. "Ms. Edwards? Will you please send Jessica to the main office?"

Jessica looked up to the round, flat speaker on the ceiling. Groaning, she gathered her English supplies.

Tom caught her eye. He raised one eyebrow. She shrugged.

The heavy door to the office squealed as it pivoted on its hinges. Jessica walked in, not bothering to look up.

"Hi, Sweetie. How was your day?"

She froze, slowly fixing her eyes on the man rising from his chair. Whenever he showed up, things got complicated.

"Hi, Dad."

Her dad smiled, showing his toothpaste-white teeth. A sickening feeling started in Jessica's gut.

James Deep was one of the finest agents in the current espionage world, and part of one of the most prestigious agencies, ██████ (Unfortunately, I can't tell you because I'm not supposed to know either, and I'd prefer to stay alive for the time being). He spoke seventeen languages like a native. He moved like a shadow. There were fifteen different recording devices ready for use in his front right pocket alone.

Of course, with all this, he had little time for his daughter. Jessica's mother had died of cancer when she was two. She wasn't too sad about it. Sometimes she wished she had a mother, or at least a dad who wasn't always away on classified business trips, but she couldn't really miss something she couldn't remember.

"We're going on vacation," Mr. Deep announced.

"What? Now?" A spew of questions poured from Jessica's lips. "Why didn't you tell me? What about Eva?" Eva was her au pair.

"It's just a short trip. I'm sure she'll be thankful for the break."

"Mm-hmm." Often, her dad's idea of a "short trip" was a few months' difference from Jessica's.

"Come on, Sweetie. It'll be fun."

She sighed and looked at the ceiling. "Fine."

Jessica sat in the passenger seat with her arms crossed, staring straight ahead.

“Where are we going?”

Her father ignored the question. “I need to talk to you about something.”

“What?” Jessica put on her best annoyed-teenage-girl face.

“It’s about my work.”

That got her attention.

“It’s confusing, but try to keep up.”

“I’ll do my best.”

Mr. Deep took a deep breath, his eyes fixed on the road. “About every... oh, 120 years or so, a group of people--kids, really--are born.”

She looked at him like he was crazy. “Uh, Dad? People are born, like, every two seconds.”

He shook his head. “Not the Incomplete.”

“The Incomplete? What are they?”

“In a word, geniuses.”

Jessica rolled her eyes. “Well, that clears it up.”

Mr. Deep shrugged. “Like I said, it’s complicated. There are certain things an Incomplete is not able to do when they’re young. Like, say, hear a cow mooing. Or...”

“Seeing triangles? Pronouncing the letter ‘T’?” An idea was beginning to form in Jessica’s mind.

“Atta girl. I knew you’d catch on quick. Anyway, when they get older, the incompleteness goes away.”

“And then they’re ordinary, normal people?” She wondered how Tom would react if she told him he’d be average someday.

“Anything but ordinary. Extraordinary.”

“And you’re telling me this, why?” She had the feeling that she already knew the answer.

“The [REDACTED] has reason to believe an Incomplete attends your school.”

“So you want me to find them.”

“That would be the general idea, yes.”

“Consider him found.” Mr. Deep turned to look at her, moving so abruptly that the car swerved and nearly hit a parked truck. “Dad!”

“Sorry, sorry.” He regained control of the vehicle. “But you know who he is? Do you know him personally? Are...”

“I wasn’t finished.” Jessica adjusted the sun visor, squinting from the glare until shade fell across her eyes. “Yes, I know him personally, and yes, we’re friends. But no, I am not going to drag him into this.”

The car stopped at a red light. "Please, Sweetie?" her dad pleaded. "Could you just ask him if he wants to go on a cruise to the Caribbean with us?"

Jessica looked out the window. "Do I really have a choice?"

"Probably not," Mr. Deep admitted.

"Fine. I'll ask him."

"Will all employees please report to the bow immediately? We are having... technical difficulties--" The captain's voice suddenly broke off as the radio died.

Mr. Deep stood up, trying unsuccessfully to mask his concern. "Excuse me," he said, making his way past Tom and Jessica.

"Dad--"

"Just stay here."

Jessica sipped her soda, all the sweetness gone from it.

"Wha's happening?" Tom asked nervously.

"I -- I'm sure it's nothing."

"Sure. I's abou' me, isn' i'."

"No... why do you ask?" She feigned innocence.

Tom looked at her meaningfully.

“Okay, okay. I guess you know. But this might not-”

She never finished her sentence.

A blaring alarm shrieked over the commotion of two hundred innocent, screaming, cruise-going tourists. Jessica grabbed Tom’s arm and dragged him towards the front of the ship.

“Come on!” She pulled him through a maze of hallways.

After what seemed like hours, they found themselves standing in front of the door to the captain’s quarters. It was a hulking thing, basically just a huge slab of gleaming, watertight steel.

“I bet they’re in here.”

Tom nodded wordlessly. He took a deep breath and opened the door.

The agents were in there, sure enough. They were bound, gagged, and tied to folding chairs, but they were there. Someone else was, too.

“Ah, our guests of honor,” a middle-aged man announced. “I was wondering when you’d show up.”

Only two words could describe him. The first was *gray*. His hair was the color of storm clouds. His eyes were the color of thick fog. His suit was the color of dirty dishwater. Even his skin was a slightly ashen shade.

The other word was *evil*, and that was fairly self-explanatory.

Jessica took a step back. "Who-- Who are you?"

"That's not important. What *is* important is the boy," he said, looking at Tom.
"He is what we're after."

"Wha' do you wan' from me?"

The gray man looked at him innocently. "Nothing. We just want to help you. We just want to keep you safe."

Tom looked from the man to Jessica to the bound agents. "I was pre'y safe un'il you showed up."

The man shook his head. "Wrong. These men were planning on er, *experimenting* on you, to put it nicely. They didn't even tell you, did they?"

"Ell me wha'?"

"I swear, we were going to --" Jessica started.

"Lies!" the man snapped. He turned back to Tom. "You are an Incomplete. You are one of the most powerful people in the world."

Tom looked at him, not sure whether to believe it.

"If you come with me, you can be whatever you want to be. You can be normal."

Tom's breath caught in his throat.

"All you have to say is yes."

Tom looked at the gray man, at the agents, at Jessica. Who was he supposed to believe? Who could he trust?

“Tom...” Jessica pleaded.

Was it possible for him to be normal?

No, a little voice inside of him said. *Not with this man.*

Tom took a deep breath. “I won’.”

“What?” The gray man said, eyes wide.

“I won’ go with you. Now, the Coas’ Guard is on i’s way. So if I were you, I’d le’ these men go and ge’ ou’ of here.”

The man glared at him. “Fine. Just mark my words; you have not seen the last of Sebastian Grauschimmel!”

And with that, he strode angrily out the door and was gone.

Tom’s head was spinning. “So I’m an... Incomple’e? And Alber’ Eins’ein was also an Incomple’e?”

Jessica nodded. “Yep. And he wasn’t nearly the smartest.”

Tom grinned. “Maybe being differen’ isn’ so bad af’er all.”

“Who said it was bad in the first place?”

“Nobody.” He thought for a moment. “Wai’. Didn’ you say tha’ there were others? Others like me...”

Far away, back on the mainland, Jane Fonder stared glumly out her window, feeling just a little....

incomplete.