Peanut Butter and Butter Sandwiches

By Kate Brennan

Lunch - Bathroom

The single thing that was consistent every single day.

After a gruelling period of maths or science or English or another horrible subject I would shuffle towards the girl’s bathroom near the cola, the one that never had an toilet paper and scrawls of J+S=love on the walls. I would pull a familiar banana and peanut butter sandwich from my bag and spend my lunch on the lid of a toilet listening to the same tunes.

I wasn’t shy, I wasn’t severely introverted, I just didn’t fit. I was the strange puzzle piece in the bottom of the box that didn’t quite fit next to any other piece. I wasn’t part of the whole.

I was me. Singular.

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I liked Wednesdays. I was yet to understand why though. The subjects I usually had were average at best. But something about the way it sounded made me happy.

First: Maths.

A new girl was shoved into the room by our over-energetic principal. It was hard to make out her face from beneath a head of hair almost as unruly as mine. She wasn’t anything extraordinary but who was I to talk? I wasn’t even bordering on ordinary.

There was a smattering of words around the room, whispers. The girl next to me swivelled in her seat to face me.

"Why would you come in the middle of term, let alone middle of the week?"

I shrugged as the girl turned back around to her gorgeous blonde friend next to her. This was how it always was. I should’ve jumped at the chance to chat, the chance to finally remove myself from the grubby toilets at lunch. Instead I barely said a word and watched as the girl continued to gossip to her friend.

This was how it usually was.

Me, on the edge, looking in.

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The toilets always had the familiar smell of a lifetime worth of different deodorants and the faint smell of old cigarettes. My legs were propped up against the door. Partly because the lock on the door had been chiselled off a long time ago and partly because if someone did perchance come in here, my feet would be hidden from view.

My sandwich tasted the same, a little too much peanut butter and not enough banana. I ate it quickly anyway, flushing the crusts down the loo.

Footsteps. That was odd. No one came down this end of school, and if they did it was to shove their tongue down their significant other’s throat, or if they were not available, any other person that
seemed to be available at the time. But whoever was coming was singular. And then they turned and they started to echo around the room.

Who came to these toilets?

Whoever it was shuffled into a stall across from me. I waited for the sound of water or the like but there was silence. I held my breath but the occupant of the stall didn’t seem eager to be anywhere either.

When the bell went I hurried out, not really ecstatic for the person in the stall to catch a glimpse of the loser girl’s face who sits in the toilets every single lunch.

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“Darling!”

My mum’s voice barely made it through the music coming from my earphones. I knew not to mess with her. I jumped down the stairs, narrowly missing the bottom step. I landed with a loud ‘thump’ on the carpet. I looked up in just enough time to see mum screw up her nose slightly.

“I’m leaving now, I’ll be back early tomorrow.”

I nodded quickly, pulling the tangled tunes coming from my ears. I wasn’t quite sure if mum was on a night shift at work or she’d found someone new to bring home at 12 o’clock. She leaned down to kiss me from her towering shoes. A quick peck and then she was gone, leaving only a faint trace of her perfume that made me want to be sick, and her almost mentally unstable daughter behind.

It was kind of humiliating that my forty-five year old mother, who on occasion bleached her moustache, had a better social life then me. But I was needed at home. Who would eat the cold lasagne from the fridge? Or who would leave all the lights and the television so it would appear to neighbours that there wasn’t just me, night after night.

See? I was very important.

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“Your mark is barely above passing, I really expected more from you.” I peaked at my mark on the paper through my fingers. The teacher gave another grumble and continued to hand out the results.

I lent my elbows on my knee and tried to keep my cool. It’s not like I could explain to my awful English teacher that the night I had been trying to write my essay was the very same night that my mother and been puking up her insides into my ensuite bathroom. Or that the next night that I had tried I’d been too busy mopping up my mother’s tears.

“I expected more of you.” Well suck it up so does everyone else.

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I shovelled through my bag, maybe it had fallen out? Maybe it was squashed down the bottom? Maybe someone else in my class had a taste for peanut butter and banana sandwiches. I covered my face with my fingers, took a deep, shaky breath and tried with everything I had not to cry. And then, everything was tumbling out. My neglectful mother and never there father, my terrible results, not just in English but every other subject, and finally my missing sandwich. I sat gasping and strangling for breath.

“Are you alright in there?”
I hadn’t heard someone come in.

“I forgot my lunch,” I ushered out, surprised that I could actually form words in my state.

“Do you want some of mine?”

A hand was thrust under the cubicle wall.

“What is it?”

“A peanut butter and banana sandwich.”