

One Breath Away

Inside, Uniquely You

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Introduction

This short story was first written for teenagers.

Not because adults do not feel lonely too,
but because growing up in today's world can feel especially intense, confusing,
loud, and overwhelming.

No generation has ever grown up exactly like this before.

Constant information.

Constant comparison.

Constant pressure to fit in, perform, react, and stay connected.

And underneath all that, many teenagers quietly carry something they rarely speak
about:

a strange loneliness.

Not always because they are physically alone.

But because they often feel unseen in what is really happening inside them.



Less Tight

He dropped his backpack on the floor and closed the bedroom door with his foot.

Finally.

Not that being home always felt better.

Just... different.

His phone buzzed again.

Probably the class group chat.

Or Dylan.

Or another video someone thought everybody had to see.

He sat down on the edge of his bed without taking off his hoodie or shoes.

His room was a mess, but not bad enough yet for his mother to start talking about it again.

He unlocked his phone.

Scroll.

Scroll.

Scroll.

People laughing.

Perfect faces.

New shoes.

Gym bodies.

A guy from school pretending not to care about anything.

A girl crying on a livestream.

News about war.

An ad.

Another ad.

He kept scrolling even though he wasn't really looking anymore.

His chest felt tight.

Not panic.

Not exactly stress either.

Just... tight.

Like something in him had been bracing itself all day without permission.

A message popped up.

You coming tomorrow or what?

He stared at it without answering.

What if he said no too many times?

Would they stop asking eventually?

Maybe that would actually be easier.

He threw the phone beside him on the bed and rubbed his face hard with both hands.

Why did everything always feel like so much?

School.

People.

Messages.

Trying to say the right thing.

Trying not to look stupid.

Trying not to think about money when everybody else suddenly had expensive shoes again.

He leaned forward, elbows on his knees.

Then suddenly his body pulled in a deep breath.

A really deep one.

Almost like he had forgotten to breathe properly all day.

He slowly exhaled.

Weird.

For one moment, everything inside him relaxed a little.

Not fixed.

Not gone.

Just... less tight.

He sat there quietly for a few seconds.

Then he reached for his phone again.

But something felt different.



Easy to Be There

Finn noticed Lucia walking beside him before she said anything.

“You going this way?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

She adjusted the strap of her bag and matched his pace naturally, like it wasn’t something to think about.

For a while they just walked.

Cars passed beside them.

Someone yelled across the street.

A dog barked behind a fence.

Finn waited for the usual feeling that he should say something interesting.

But it didn’t really come.

Strange.

Normally silence with people felt like a test you were slowly failing.

With Lucia it didn't.

It was just... quiet.

Easy to Be There.

"You always wear that?" Lucia asked after a while, nodding toward the pendant hanging partly outside his hoodie.

Finn looked down automatically.

"Oh. Yeah."

"It looks old."

"It kind of is."

She waited, not in a pushy way.
Just waiting.

Finn rubbed the pendant lightly between his fingers.

"It belonged to my little brother."

Lucia looked at him for a moment.

"What was his name?"

"Sam."

She nodded softly.

"My mom had this made after he died."

The words sounded strange out loud.

Not dramatic.
Just true.

Lucia looked ahead again as they kept walking.

Then after a few more steps, she unlocked her phone and held it out toward him.

A photo filled the screen.
A man sitting on a beach, smiling into the sun.

“My dad,” she said.

Finn looked at the picture for a second.

“You miss him?”

“Yeah.”

That was all.

Cars passed beside them.
A bike rattled over the sidewalk.
Somebody laughed loudly near the supermarket entrance.

But the silence between them didn’t feel awkward anymore.

Just... calm.

Finn noticed himself taking a deeper breath again.

Not on purpose this time either.

Like his body already knew something his mind was still catching up to.

At the end of the street Lucia slowed down.

“This is me,” she said.

Finn nodded.

“Okay.”

“See you tomorrow?”

He shrugged lightly.

“Yeah. Probably.”

She smiled a little.

“I like walking with you.”

Then she crossed the street.

Finn stood there for a second longer than necessary.

Something inside him relaxed again.

✧

Something Stayed

That evening Finn kept thinking about the walk with Lucia.

Not in some dramatic way.

Just... every now and then it came back.

The way she waited when he touched the pendant.

The way the silence hadn't felt uncomfortable.

The way she said:

"I like walking with you."

He lay on his bed scrolling again, but slower this time.

A video.

A joke.

Someone arguing in the comments.

A football clip.

Another ad.

None of it really stayed anywhere inside him.

But the walk did.

Weird.

His mother knocked once before opening the door.

“You eating with me or in your cave again?”

Finn smiled a little despite himself.

“I’m coming.”

The kitchen smelled like pasta sauce from a jar.

His mother looked tired.

Not dramatic-tired.

Just normal tired.

There were unopened bills near the fruit bowl again.

Finn looked away automatically.

“How was school?” she asked while stirring.

“Fine.”

“You always say fine.”

He shrugged and opened the fridge.

Nothing else came.

Later that night he stood in the bathroom brushing his teeth when he suddenly noticed something strange.

His shoulders were lower.

He actually stopped brushing for a second and looked in the mirror.

Then he laughed softly at himself.

What was he doing?

Still... something felt different.

Before sleeping, he touched the pendant once more.

Not because he was sad.

Just because he wanted to.



Across town, Lucia was lying sideways on her bed with one sock still on.

Her homework was open beside her, untouched.

She unlocked her phone and looked at the beach photo again.

Her father smiling into sunlight.

Wind moving his hair sideways.

She missed him suddenly.

Sharp and quick.

But underneath it was something else too.

Relief maybe.

She had shown the photo to someone.

And somehow it had felt safe.

Her mother called from downstairs.

“Lucia! Did you empty the dishwasher?”

“In a minute!”

“You said that twenty minutes ago!”

Lucia smiled faintly.

“Yeah, I know.”

She put the phone down and stared at the ceiling for a moment.

Finn’s face appeared in her mind unexpectedly.

The quiet way he listened.

The way he didn’t rush to fill silence.

Most boys at school acted like silence was dangerous.

With Finn it wasn’t.

It was just... there.

And weirdly, that felt good.

Lucia slowly breathed out and closed her eyes for a second.

For a moment she felt closer to herself somehow.

Not fully.

Not forever.

Just enough to notice.



One Breath Away

A few days later Finn was sitting in math class pretending to listen.

Rain tapped softly against the windows.

Someone behind him was whispering about a party.

Two girls in front of him kept taking selfies while the teacher tapped impatiently through slides at the front of the class.

Finn looked down at his phone hidden under the table.

Three new messages.

A video.

Something about football.

A meme he had already seen twice.

His thumb stopped above the screen.

For some reason he suddenly didn't want more noise inside his head.

Weird.

He slipped the phone back into his pocket and leaned back in his chair.

Then he noticed it again.

That feeling.

Small.

Quiet.

But real.

Like there was a little more space inside him than before.

Not happiness exactly.

Just... room to breathe.

Finn slowly inhaled.

Then exhaled again.

Nobody noticed.

The class kept moving around him.

Pens clicking.

Chairs scraping.

Rain against glass.

But something inside him settled slightly.

And strangely, he wanted to keep that feeling.

Not because somebody told him to.

Not because it was some life lesson.

It just felt good.

Real.

Like something that belonged to him.



That afternoon Lucia sat cross-legged on her bed while music played softly from her laptop.

Not loud music.
Just background.

Her phone lit up every few seconds beside her.

Messages.
Videos.
Drama in the group chat again.

Normally she would open everything automatically.

Today she didn't.

Instead she stared out the window for a moment.

The trees were moving in the wind.

That same calm feeling returned again suddenly.

The feeling from walking beside Finn.

Not needing to impress.
Not needing to explain herself.
Not needing to become louder to stay visible.

Lucia pulled her knees closer.

It was strange.

The feeling was small.
Easy to lose.

But now that she noticed it, she realized something else too:

she missed it when it wasn't there.

Her phone buzzed again.

Lucia picked it up automatically, opened the class chat, stared at the messages for a few seconds...

Then locked the screen again.

Not now.

She placed the phone beside her and took a slow breath without really thinking about it.

The room felt quieter afterward.

Not outside.

Inside.

And for one small moment, Lucia had the strange feeling that whatever she was searching for all the time...

might already be closer than she thought.

Just one breath away.

✧

When Things Get Quiet

They started walking together more often after school.

Not every day.

And not in some official way.

It just kept happening.

Sometimes they talked.

Sometimes they didn't.

Both seemed fine.

That Friday the air smelled like rain again.

Lucia walked with her hands inside the sleeves of her sweater while Finn kicked a loose stone along the sidewalk.

"You ever get tired of your phone?" Finn asked suddenly.

Lucia looked sideways at him.

"Constantly."

Finn nodded.

“But I still keep checking it.”

“Same.”

A car passed loudly beside them.

Finn shrugged slightly.

“I don’t even know what I’m looking for half the time.”

Lucia smiled a little.

“Probably the same thing as everybody else.”

“Yeah, but nobody even looks happy when they find it.”

That made her laugh softly.

Not loud.

Just real.

Finn noticed himself smiling too.

They walked another few steps quietly.

Then Lucia spoke again.

“Lately I sometimes just stop for a second.”

Finn glanced at her.

“Like... breathe?”

She nodded.

“Yeah.”

Finn looked ahead again.

“I’ve been doing that too.”

The words hung between them for a moment.

Not awkward.

Just new.

Lucia kicked lightly against the curb.

“It sounds stupid when you say it out loud.”

“A little.”

She laughed again.

“But it actually helps.”

Finn rubbed the back of his neck.

“Everything feels less tight for a minute.”

Lucia looked at him immediately.

“Exactly.”

Something inside Finn relaxed again at being understood that quickly.

They crossed at a traffic light while bikes rushed past around them.

Lucia waited until they reached the other side before speaking again.

“I think I like myself more when things get quiet.”

Finn looked at her.

Not because the sentence sounded deep.

Because it sounded true.

He thought about it while they kept walking.

Then he nodded slowly.

“Yeah,” he said quietly.

“I think I do too.”

For a while neither of them spoke again.

The city moved around them.

Cars.

Voices.

Notifications buzzing from someone’s pocket nearby.

But inside that ordinary noise, something small and real kept growing between them.

And neither of them wanted to lose it.

✧

More Myself

A few weeks later Finn was standing near the football field after school while two guys from his class argued loudly about something online.

“You seriously posted that?” one of them said.

“Bro, everybody already saw it anyway.”

Finn half listened while checking his phone.

Messages.

Notifications.

Videos.

Noise.

Around him everything felt fast again.

Loud again.

One of the guys shoved the other jokingly too hard.

Someone else started filming immediately.

Finn suddenly felt that old tightness returning in his chest.

The familiar feeling of needing to react.

Say something.

Fit into whatever this moment was supposed to be.

For a second he almost grabbed his phone again automatically.

Then he stopped.

Just stopped.

He inhaled slowly.

Cold air.

Rain somewhere nearby.

Voices.

His feet against the pavement.

Then he exhaled.

The tightness didn't disappear completely.

But it loosened enough.

Enough for him to notice it instead of becoming it.

"Yo, Finn," somebody called.

"You coming or not?"

Finn looked over.

Normally he would have said yes automatically.

Instead he shrugged lightly.

“Nah. Not today.”

Nobody cared as much as he thought they would.

One guy nodded.

Another already looked back at his screen.

That was it.

Weird.

Finn felt something inside him settle again.

Not confidence exactly.

Just... himself.



That evening Lucia sat at her cousin Emma’s house while music played softly in the background.

Emma was talking about boys from her class while painting her nails dark blue.

Lucia smiled and listened.

“So?” Emma said eventually.

“What about you?”

“What about me?”

Emma looked up suspiciously.

“There’s definitely someone.”

Lucia laughed quietly.

“Maybe.”

Emma immediately sat up straighter.

“I knew it. Okay. Tell me everything.”

Lucia opened her mouth.

Then stopped again.

How could she explain Finn?

It wasn't even about the usual things.

Not really.

“He's just...” Lucia searched for the words.

“Different.”

Emma groaned dramatically.

“That tells me literally nothing.”

Lucia smiled and looked down at her hands.

Then she tried again.

“I think I can actually be myself around him.”

The room became quieter for a second.

Emma looked at her more carefully now.

“Oh.”

Lucia nodded slightly.

“And when we’re together... everything inside me gets calmer somehow.”

Emma stared at her for a moment.

“That sounds kind of nice actually.”

“Yeah,” Lucia said softly.

“It is.”

Her phone buzzed beside her.

Lucia glanced at the screen but didn’t pick it up immediately.

Outside, rain tapped softly against the window again.

For one small moment she noticed it clearly:

the world around her was still loud,
fast,
confusing sometimes.

But she didn’t feel as lost inside it anymore.

And maybe that was enough for now.

✧

Epilogue

A few months later Finn was lying on his bed when a message popped up from Dylan.

hey bro
what've you been up to lately?

Finn stared at the screen for a moment.

The strange thing was...

he didn't really know how to answer.

Not because nothing had happened.

But because the important things would probably sound stupid if he tried to explain them.

Walking more.

Being outside more.

Breathing sometimes before grabbing his phone automatically.

Actually noticing when something felt real instead of just distracting.

Lucia.

Finn smiled slightly to himself.

Then he typed:

idk

just different lately i guess

A few seconds later Dylan replied:

bro that sounds suspiciously deep

Finn laughed quietly.

Maybe it did.

Outside his window the evening sky was turning dark blue.

His phone buzzed again with more messages, videos, noise, plans for the weekend.

Finn put the phone down beside him for a moment instead of opening everything immediately.

Then he took a slow breath without even thinking about it.

Something inside him still felt steady there.

Small.

But real.

✧

That same evening Lucia sat on the kitchen counter at her aunt's house while her cousin Emma talked nonstop about people from school.

At some point Emma suddenly nudged her knee.

“So,” she said.

“How’s Finn?”

Lucia smiled automatically.

“He’s good.”

Emma narrowed her eyes dramatically.

“That smile again.”

Lucia laughed softly and looked down at the mug in her hands.

“It’s not even like that.”

“It’s exactly like that.”

Lucia shook her head, still smiling.

Then she grew quieter.

Emma noticed immediately.

“What?”

Lucia searched for the words.

“He just...” she stopped.

“I don’t know.”

Emma waited.

Lucia looked toward the window where rain moved slowly down the glass.

“I think I like myself more around him.”

Emma blinked once.

Then her expression softened.

“Oh.”

Lucia nodded slightly.

“Everything gets quieter somehow.”

Not outside, obviously.

School was still loud.

People were still confusing.

Her phone still stressed her out half the time.

Life was still life.

But inside herself...

she now knew there was also something else there.

Something calm.

Something real.

Something that felt like her.

Emma smiled a little.

“That sounds rare.”

Lucia smiled too.

“Yeah,” she said softly.

“I think it is.”

Her phone buzzed again somewhere in her bag.

Neither of them reached for theirs immediately.

Outside, rain kept falling softly through the dark.

And somewhere underneath all the noise of the world,
something inside Lucia remained quietly there.

One breath away.

✧ ✧ ✧

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in cost
and in spirit.