

I had this system for getting exactly what I wanted out of people. I considered it a talent, almost a power. I knew:

1. Make a good first impression on everyone. You never know what you may need from them.
2. Charm them to get what you want.

If not...

3. Find a bruise and push, hard, only until it they groan. Threaten to make it worse, threaten to make them cry. Threaten to ruin them. Or create your own bruise and pretend it hurts. Use it to get their sympathy.

That's how you get what you want.

I thought that I could get anything. I thought wrong.

It all changed when I met Mina. She was different from anyone I had ever met. She was rich but she acted like everyone else. She never talked about her family. Her goal was always to blend in. Dark clothes, large sweaters for a small girl, but when she laughed golden musical notes would fly into the air tinkling against each other, flowing, sparkling. For me, it was even worse when she smiled. Her eyes would light up and glitter, that made it even worse when they became dark and lifeless.

It was the first day of ninth grade. I immediately noticed Mina, I knew none of the students and wasn't interested in getting to know any of them, in fact I considered myself better than everyone surrounding me. The golden music notes from Mina's laughter gripped my ears and dragged me toward her.

I had to introduce myself.

I don't know.

I had to.

And then she smiled. I stood stunned for a second and then attempted to casually walk towards her.

"Woah! Excuse me...?" she hesitated. Yeah, the first time I met her I bumped into her and she bonked into the girl next to her.

"Um. I'm sorry. I, I go by Jones." I mumbled.

"Is that your... first name?" she asked.

"Oh, um no. That's just what people have always called me."

"That's cool. I'm Mina" she grinned. Her kindness shocked me. Most people probably would've shouted at me for bumping them but not Mina.

"That's a pretty name."

"Thanks. See you later."

I was left in a daze as she walked away. I shook myself out of it and walked to first period. During lunch, I saw her weaving through the lunch tables by herself. I waved her over to me.

"Mina!" When she saw me she smiled and waved.

We began to get to know each other. Everything went well, until I asked about her family. The glitter disappeared from her eyes and they became dark and cold. She just said her family had a lot of money. I saw her tug up her sleeves to cover her arms, I glimpsed her red, swollen marks that looked like she had been beaten. That wasn't what stuck into my mind until later though I know that it should of. I continued to hear her voice in my mind saying

"We have a lot of money, that's all." a lot of money. I didn't think I had enough money. My goal was to be rich someday. I was upset when I realized Mina just had money. I thought she didn't have to work for it. Why did she just have money? She doesn't deserve it anymore then me. I decided to use my power. I wanted to find some way to exploit her money. I somehow convinced myself that I deserved it more than her. It wasn't so much that I had been blind to the truth, it was just that I had seen the truth differently. I let my jealousy overcome me. I became aware of myself when I felt Mina's voice drag me down out of the storm clouds drooping above my head.

"Jones? JONES!"

"Um, yeah, yeah, what's up?" I said quickly.

"What about your family?"

I knew that I had to use my power now or never.

"Oh, that's a sensitive subject." I said nervously as my conscience suddenly kicked in. But even though I hadn't said anything else I was already in too deep. I wasn't myself. I was greedy and selfish.

"We...we, have some financial issues, we are having trouble getting meals on the table, but my parents are brave and I believe they can get us out of this." I lied.

"Oh. I'm sorry," Mina said with a supportive glance, "Listen, why don't we go see a movie, just to hang out, you know? And, don't worry, it's my treat."

And that's how it started. With Mina's kindness. I hate to admit this but I took advantage of her by pretending I was bruised. I thought that my "bruise" would get me what I wanted but barely knew what that was. Whenever money came around, she would offer to pay. Eventually the favors became larger. For a few months I complained about my lack of a laptop, hoping secretly that Mina would buy me one. When my birthday came around, she did.

After that, her arms began to look worse, more broken and hurt. Once I touched her wrist and she let out a small yelp. I began to become concerned. I knew I cared about Mina but when she yelped, it was like a part of my heart turned to ash. My mind eventually became occupied when an old best friend of mine arrived at our school. She and Mina became good friends and I knew it was only a matter of time before the walls of my magnificent money palace would come crumbling down. I knew that if I was ever the topic of their conversation my lies would be revealed. Lies are like rubber bands.

Depending on how hard you pull and pry at them they last different amounts of time but they eventually crumble, crack, or break.

Then all of a sudden, what had seemed like a sturdy rubber band suddenly snapped. I knew it when I saw Mina's dark, cold eyes approaching me.

"You know" I said, more coldly than intended.

"What? Do you think I'm an idiot? Did you think I would never find out? Oh yeah, let's use Mina for money and pretend to be her friend. Yeah, that's a great idea. Really Jones?"

"Listen Mina, I-"

"No. I've been listening to you cry about your horrible life for weeks now! Jones, I was trying to help you, do you understand what you've done to me?"

"Yes and I'm sorry, I know I shouldn't of used you for your money but,"

"Are you joking? You think that's what this is about?"

"What are you talking about? I'll try to pay you back"

"Jones, did you think my mom hasn't noticed the missing money? I never told her what I was using it for. She didn't know where it was going and all she cares about is money. She has fits about it. She blames my dad for everything just because he's gone. She-"

"Why don't you just live with your dad if your life sucks so 'much?!'"

"Because he's gone! Forever."

"I-I" I didn't understand why Mina never told me this, why she had lied to me. But then again why did I lie to her?

"Jones, whenever my mom notices the missing money, she beats my arms"

"What? I-"

"You didn't know. Yeah, I know. Bye Jones, I don't want to see you again."

This was all my fault. Mina's suffering was all my fault. I thought her life was my dream. My life was a fantasy compared to her's. I have two loving parents and a greedy heart. Mina has one abusive parent and loving heart. She didn't only have an abusive parent she also had an abusive friend. I only pretended to have bruises but that created real, tangible bruises for Mina. I thought I was benefiting myself but I was only slamming harder and harder into a wall to make my resulting bruise larger. Now that I had lost my best friend our bruises slowly began to heal but neither me nor Mina would ever be the same.