

Taking Chances

“Are you excited to see this on the big screen?” Mr. Wolbrink asked, rubbing his hands together mischievously, a dark glint in his eye.

“I would rather be euthanized,” I deadpan.

“Oh c’mon, you worked hard on this, it’s okay to be proud,” he replied, doing his best to sound admonishing. The jokes on him, he possesses as much authority as a three-legged kitten.

“I am proud of it,” I mumbled. Mr. Wolbrink gave me a dubious look. “I promise,” I said emphasizing my otherwise monotonous tone. I turned back to my computer screen, reanalyzing each frame, triple checking to ensure every detail was satisfactory. He was right, I hadn’t only worked hard, but I’d poured my heart into this film. However, admitting any sense of grandeur and pride was something I was not yet capable of doing. I spent countless hours neglecting my surroundings, friends, and even family, making sure this film got finished. I was vibrating with nerves, experiencing an unfamiliar, but not quite unwelcome rush.

One Month Prior

Representatives from Compass College in Grand Rapids came to our high school looking for students to participate in their short film festival. They told my class that select films would be shown at their theater, where winners would then be announced. The more I listened to the representatives’ presentation, the more ideas I could feel in my skull, begging to be given life. After the representatives left, my favorite teacher Mr. Wolbrink approached my desk.

“You’re entering right?” he asked. He was wearing his most-prized Sandlot shirt, the characters wiggling every time he moved. He’s a tall man who towers over everyone else in the

room, intimidating too, at least until he opens his mouth. Then, you realize he's about as scary as a doorknob.

"I'm not sure, seems like a cool opportunity though," I replied nonchalantly, trying my hardest not to look too eager.

"It's right up your alley, I can practically see the ideas bouncing off your big forehead"

"Has anyone ever told you that you have the eloquence of a semi-truck?" I ask in lieu of response, giving him my best death glare.

Mr. Wolbrink just laughs, used to my antics by now. "All I'm saying, kid," he says as he walks away, "is that it's a great opportunity. Think about it." So, I did. And a week later, I started filming.

Narrowing down an idea was a challenge. I wanted to create a vivid story that would resonate with the audience. The only issue with that is my fear of vulnerability. I detest emotional expression and my crippling fear of rejection ignites a forest fire every time I attempt to put myself out there, engulfing any confidence I might've had in flames higher than Mount Everest. But for this project, I finally worked up the courage to set aside those fears, at least temporarily.

Soon enough, I landed on an idea. The editing process went smoothly, and when I could reenact each frame in my head and each movement on the screen, I knew I had watched the film enough times that it was ready to be turned in. Finally, I had Mr. Wolbrink look over it, fixing and tweaking a few errors here and there. When it came time to submit, I hovered my finger over the button, too nervous to click. With the computer illuminating my face, I took the deepest breaths I could muster, in and out, in and out. I could feel my heart racing, practically see the

organ beating out of my chest. With one final exhale, I hit submit, and just as quickly it was done. Now all I could do was wait.

A Few Weeks Later

“Hey Aubrey, can I talk to you for a second?” Mr. Wolbrink asked, motioning with his finger for me to join him at his desk. Instantaneous goosebumps rose on my arms, cold sweat ran down my back. My mind was a flurry of thoughts, each one more devastating than the last. Am I in trouble? *That’s impossible, I haven’t done anything bad...recently. Oh, my god who died? I swear if someone died...*

“What’s wrong with your face?” Mr. Wolbrink asks, interrupting my thoughts, simultaneously flicking one of the thirty bobbleheads at his desk. I watch the bobblehead move around and around, up and down, imagining I look similar, with all the thoughts bobbing around in my brain.

“There’s nothing wrong with my face,” I replied, knowing there was definitely something wrong with my face if it reflected even a fraction of the emotions I was experiencing. Mr. Wolbrink looked at me speculatively, squinting his eyes as if he couldn’t quite see me clearly, before eventually moving on.

“I figured I’d tell you in person before the emails from Compass College go out...” My breath caught and suddenly, my surroundings faded, and my hands turned clammy. This was it; he was letting me down easily. I hadn’t made it. I swear, I’m never making anything remotely vulnerable again. It will be nothing but robot documentaries from here on out...

“You’re in!” He beamed. Mr. Wolbrink was smiling, or at least I think he was. I couldn’t see much of anything, all senses failing me except my hearing. It felt as if all my senses sat on

the back burner, my body knowing the only thing that mattered was listening to the words that had just fled his mouth. I had done it. I made something that was worthy, and the judges liked it. In one sentence he had spoken away most of my fears, if I squinted, I could've sworn I saw doubts leave my mind, scattering away into thin air.

"I am?" I asked, disbelief lacing my tone.

"Of course, you are, I never doubted you" he replied, a smile still plastered on his middle-aged face. *But I did.* I doubted myself so frequently it was hard to believe that something I had done would work out in my favor. But I had done it. I made a film, pouring my creativity onto the screen; blood, sweat, and tears hiding in the background. And it had paid off. I learned at that moment that it didn't matter if I won the whole festival, or if I had barely made the cut to be shown. I had achieved something I never thought possible, and professionals enjoyed my work enough to display it. For the first time in a long time, I could sense pride emerging from the darkest corner of my soul, slowly circulating through the rest of my body. It was a breath of fresh air, it felt like learning to fly. It might seem inconsequential, it's not as if I won an Oscar or anything. But it was a reminder that hard work, a little vulnerability, and simply putting yourself out there can pay off.