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## The Wait

My story begins almost exactly ten years ago, in a small yet welcoming-looking office.

I was in second grade, and was still naïve enough to believe that everything in the world functioned as it should. I had loved going to school back then- I strived to help my teachers in any way that I could and I read any book that I could get my hands on. The concept of “going out into the world” and learning something new almost each and every day thrilled me- even if that new thing was as simple as how to spell a new word or how to add two and four together. All in all, I was utterly, sickeningly optimistic and unassuming about whatever was around me.

It was only a few weeks into the school year and I had just received my first pair of glasses a few days prior. As you, dear reader, can only assume based on what I just revealed about myself, wearing glasses was as exciting to me as being given a giant bowl of ice cream would be to any normal child my age. I was in awe of the newfound sense of clarity I now possessed, of the way that owning this pair of glasses suddenly made me feel so much older and more mature. As someone who – even as a child – was inherently competitive by nature, I was eager to do anything I could to set myself apart from the rest of what seemed like hundreds of other second graders at my school.

That being said, I was still breaking in the glasses at the time. Though everything was certainly clearer, it was –quite literally – *painfully* clear. As anyone who has ever worn glasses will know, one is likely to get headaches the first few days after wearing new lenses and I was no exception. Perhaps my headache was an indicator of unfortunate events to come, but at the time that was the furthest thing from my mind. The school day had just come to an end and I, as I did every day after school, rushed outside to the parking area where parents had already arrived to pick up their children. I waited for my mom to come and pick me up. I lived about five minutes away from school but wasn’t allowed to walk home unless I had someone to take me there, as getting lost on the way or getting eaten by a stray coyote that had come from the forest nearby were *always* constant fears. So I waited.

And waited.

And waited.

Hmm, I was starting to become worried. My concern, however, quickly disappeared as I looked around and happily realized that there were still several other students who were still waiting for a parent or neighbor to pick them up. But then I waited some more.

By this time the parking lot was almost empty, and there weren't many other people around me. Trying to think rationally, despite my worry, I decided to go into the main office of the school and ask the secretary if she could call my mom or dad and figure out why nobody had come to pick me up. First I asked her to call my home phone number. No answer. Then my mom's cell phone. No answer. My dad's cell phone. No answer. My stomach clenched with panic. I think the secretary told me not to worry, and that she would call all three numbers again in a few minutes, but I couldn't be sure- the ringing in my ears made everything sound muted.

I collapsed into one of the gray, stiff looking chairs behind me with disbelief- how could both of my parents somehow forget to pick me up? I began to feel hurt and betrayed until another thought occurred to me- what if something happened to them? Had they gotten into a car accident? Was someone in my family sick? As much as I hated thinking of these possibilities, as I did so I became more convinced that there had to be some rational reason for why I was still alone at school.

So I waited some more. Fortunately, another child who looked a couple of years older than I was entered the office a few minutes later holding a book of crossword puzzles. Looking back, he must have been waiting for his parents to pick him up as well, but all I cared about at that moment was that I finally had something to do. I badgered the poor kid with question after question about what his favourite colour was, what grade he was in - all very important information, as I'm sure you'll agree. Not to mention that I took the utmost pleasure in filling in words in his crossword puzzle, taking any opportunity I could to try to show off and impress this wise, older student.

But soon enough he left and I was alone again. Without anything to distract me, my thoughts quickly turned back to my parents. Out of a combination of paranoia and boredom, I began to envision the increasingly horrible situations that my parents could have gotten themselves into. They had taken an impromptu trip to Africa and were now on the run from an angry herd of stampeding gazelles! Or perhaps one of them had been invited to board the next shuttle to space without my knowledge. They could be trapped in a malfunctioned shuttle with limited oxygen and no food while the other remained at home sobbing and praying for their well-being. "Oh, what a terrible child I am!" I thought to myself. "Look at me complaining about having to wait here at school when my parents are probably on the run or fighting for their lives or-"

“Sweetie, your father has just arrived at the front of the school. You must be relieved after all that waiting!”

I turned to the secretary in confusion. I must not have heard her correctly. Did she just say that my father was at the front of the school and not in the midst of some life-defying situation? Sure enough, she led me outside and there he was, not a scratch on him. He did, however, look very guilty as he explained that he had decided to work late and simply forgot that it was his turn to pick me up.

I didn't understand. He wasn't sick or in danger? I quickly asked him about my mom and he replied, with a look of surprise, that she had just arrived home from the grocery store and that although she was wondering where I was, was not sick or in danger either. As I got into my dad's car and we drove off, I didn't say a word. I *couldn't* say a word. Would this sort of thing have happened if my brother was in my situation? Was I not important enough to be remembered? Always over emotional- whether the emotion was positive or negative- I took my glasses off and I tried to wipe away the tears that were threatening to form. Through my watery eyes I glanced at my glasses. What had brought me such excitement and joy just a few hours earlier suddenly seemed insignificant and useless. As trivial as the incident may have seemed to my parents, the feeling of rejection seemed to grow inside of me with every passing, uncomfortably silent moment. I couldn't rid myself of the nagging thought that I couldn't completely rely on or trust my parents like I had always thought I could - a thought that would seem to flourish as time went on. But I didn't say any of this out loud. I simply wiped my glasses clean, put them on, gazed through the window at the multiple cars and other vehicles that passed by us, and remained silent.

Looking back on this memory now, I wonder about the thousands of other people who must have been heading home at the same time that I was. Most of these people were probably adults who were already aware of how to navigate the potentially dangerous and unreliable roads, conscious of the obstacles they may have had to face. But some of the people in these cars were children - children who remained in the backseat while their parents drove home. Children that were blissfully oblivious of whatever was directly in their line of vision and not realizing that their feeling of boundless trust for the person in the driver's seat wasn't going to last forever.