

**Dealing With a Feeling**  
**By Kennedy Ryder, grade 5**

It's silent at the dinner table. This is the first meal me and Dad have had together since Mom passed away.

"Elena, can you pass the salt?"

"Sure Dad"

Another moment of silence goes by. "So, how was your first day back at school?" he asks. Awful, tiring, draining, is what I want to say. I couldn't stop thinking about my mom. I couldn't focus. But, instead of saying all that, I just look straight at him, into his gentle hazel eyes, and say nothing. He understands. Sometimes one look can say a whole lot more than words can. He runs his fingers through his brown hair, mutters something to himself and continues to eat. The rest of dinner is silent.

"BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!" I groan. My alarm clock is going off. I unhappily get out of bed and start getting ready for school. It's not that I don't like school, not at all. I love school! It's just that, with everything going on, it can get really stressful to keep straight A's, and my grades might be the only thing keeping this family together right now. It's a lot of pressure for a fifth grader.

When the school bus arrives at my school, Darwin Academy, I head straight to my classroom. My first class is English, and after that, social studies. Once I finish those two, I meet up with my closest friend, Hana, for recess.

Hana and I look like total opposites. Her, with curly, chocolate brown hair, and me, straight, platinum blonde. She has big, radiant blue eyes and I have unnoticeable, muddy brown eyes. And, not only do we look completely different, we also have completely different personalities. I have straight A's, but Hana's

failing every class. I'm shy and keep to myself, yet, Hana is the biggest social butterfly. I used to be like that. Used to have that light behind my eyes, excited to socialize. Not anymore, not since Mom died. Funny how that happens. One thing is taken away and a different thing appears. A different food, different word, and in my case, a different personality.

After recess, during math class, is where the flow of my day gets interrupted. I'm sitting in my chair excitedly waiting for my test to be handed back. But as soon as it's layed down on my desk, that excitement gets washed from my chest. 18 OUT OF 25?! No, this can't be! I make sure my name is on the paper. It's right there, smiling at me. But not in a nice way, in a taunting way. I try my best to hold back my tears.

"How did you do?" Hana asks. I was about to tell her the truth. That I did awful. But I then remember that I need to act strong.

"Fine" I decided to say. It felt restricted. But if that's the way it has to be then so be it.

The next few days are pretty normal, until Friday. On Friday I got another test back, and I got a 23/28! *What is happening!* I think. Then it clicks. I can't stop thinking about my mom. What she smelled like. What she looked like. Her beautiful blonde hair. Just a tad bit darker than mine. It must be distracting me. I make a decision right then and there. I am not allowed to think about my mother. As much as it hurts, it's the right thing to do. What matters right now is fixing this little academic stump that I have faced. So I shove all of the bad feelings and thoughts about my mom into the back of my brain so I can focus on my studies. It'll all eventually leave, won't it?

As I'm pouring my morning cereal, Dad walks down the stairs anxiously.

"Elena, I need to talk to you about something." he says to me.

“What's wrong?” I ask tiredly.

He takes a deep breath, setting an angsty vibe in the room.

“Your teachers tell me your grades are dropping.” he says.

My stomach turns. He continues to talk, but I can't focus on his words. My brain is focused on what he just told me. I already knew I was dropping, but hearing it come from my own dad hit me hard. I feel the tears in my eyes, but I've gotten good at keeping them in. I don't know how I'm going to fix this. I just want to be perfect again. I just want everything I had back. As soon as I see the bus in front of my house, I escape out the door. Today is gonna be rough.

I arrive at school and head straight to first period. I'm still shaken to the core. I don't know how I'm going to get through today. I sit down at my desk and wait for class to start.

“Hey, you okay?” Hana asks.

“Yeah, I'm fine.” I say.

“Are you sure? It looks like you've been-”

“I'm fine!” I yell at her.

A variety of looks are thrown our way. Hana looks at me with a confused and hurt look on her face. I realize what I've done. Just as I'm about to apologize, class starts. Great, now I'm disappointing everybody. I need to get out of here. Soon enough I'm going to fall apart, and I can't let anybody see that. “May I use the washroom?” I ask.

“Sure.” Ms. Feldon, my teacher, says.

Yes! Once again, I can escape. I run into a small stall, take a seat on the toilet, and then I cry. I cry, and cry, and cry, and sob, and cry. I cry a little more, and then try to calm myself down. I've never felt like this. This god awful feeling that the world is ending. I can't breathe. I can't think. I'm just numb. And the worst part about it all is knowing that I'm going to have to walk right back into that

classroom and pretend like everything is fine. Like my mom's not dead and my grades are great. Like I'm perfectly fine.

Right at that moment I hear a little knock on the stall door.

"Hello?" I called out.

"Elena?" I hear a soft female voice say. "My name is Ms. Lynn, I'm the school's guidance counselor. Your teacher told me to come check on you."

"What! I- I'm fine!" I say frantically.

She sighs "Why don't you come back to my office and we can have a little chat?"

My heart races "No seriously this is a huge misunderstanding! I-"

"Elena" she says in a quiet voice "It's ok to accept help."

That throws me off. I take a second to think about what she said. What if I say yes? What if I let my guard down, and say yes? I look at myself. Do I really want to sit on a toilet shaking and sobbing for the rest of my life?

"Okay," I say, surprising myself.

"Awesome, come out of the stall and follow me," she says.

I sit down in her box shaped office. Surrounding me are baby blue walls with natural light peeking through the square windows. Before me is a circle shaped, wooden table. I sit down in a nylon chair and wait for Ms. Lynn to speak.

"So, your teachers tell me your school work hasn't been its best lately. Why might that be?" she asks.

"I don't know," I say.

"C'mon, You don't just start getting a whole bunch of marks docked off for no reason," she says.

"I just have a lot going on right now!" I say in a voice just short of a yell. A flash of satisfaction fills her eyes.

“Hmm, would you mind sharing?” she asks. “I know it's a little scary, but I might be able to help you.”

I remain silent. I have zero hope that she will be able to help me. But I remind myself why I came here - to feel better. Even if she doesn't help, it's better than doing nothing. So, I take a big, deep breath, and tell her everything.

I tell her about my mother. I tell her about the thoughts and feelings I've been getting. I tell her how I've done everything I can to help my grades go up, and how hopeless I'm getting. Every single little thing I've had balled up for weeks comes pouring out of my mouth. It's scary to say out loud, but it also feels a whole lot more natural than pretending everything's fine. I grab a tissue to wipe my tiny tear droplets away. I didn't even realize I was crying. Once I'm finished, I look up at Ms. Lynn and wait for her to speak

“First of all, I just want to say thank you. I understand that that was very hard to share,” she says. I give her a weak smile as a “you're welcome”.

“Now, I think the first thing we need to do to help you is inform your teachers,” she states in a formal tone. I tense up.

“I know it seems scary to do, but you need time to grieve your loss. Your teachers will understand,” she says in a reassuring voice. That calms me down a bit.

“Okay,” I say, still a little unsure.

“Alright, now that that's out of the way, I would love to talk about some of the feelings you have been experiencing,” she says.

“Sure,” I say.

We talk for hours and hours, week after week. We talk about my feelings. We talk about my mom. We talk about every little thing that has been going on in my mind. She teaches me strategies to feel better when I'm having little “panic

moments”, as she called them. I start to understand what has been happening for the last few weeks.

Once I started seeing Ms. Lynn weekly, things took a turn for the better. I explained to my dad why my grades were dropping, that I have just been really overwhelmed with all of these new feelings coming from my mother’s death. I told him that I was starting to work through everything, and that my teachers are more aware of everything going on now. He completely understood, and told me that he was there for me if I needed a hug or a study buddy. I then made up with Hana. It was time to put off the “I’m fine” act. She forgave me and told me that she was always there if I needed to talk to someone. Class started feeling like a safer place knowing I had my teachers and Hana in my corner. And, my grades did end up getting better. I still get gloomy thoughts and feelings, but I've learned how to deal with them... properly.

Looking back at it all, I realize something. I was able to get better because of one thing. One scary decision; showing that I need help, and accepting It.