

Aika (eye-ee-ka) is in school, sitting in the back, near the windows. She looks outside, barely acknowledging what's going on in class. She is not happy, nor is she sad. She doesn't fit in with the rest of her classmates, even though they were in the same school uniform, the boys in slacks, the girls in skirts. This doesn't bother her.

She glances back to the class, being aware but not. The teacher has asked the class a math question. A classmate in front of her is counting it out on his fingers. He triumphantly raises his hand to indicate and says "Five". His middle and ring finger are missing. She doesn't react.

The teacher is pleased with his answer. The class is looking at him and saying good job. They are a friendly bunch, even to her. Everyone is happy because, as the teachers say, "The only way to be happy is to be happy". Everyone but Aika, who sits in the back looking out the window.

The bell rings, time for lunch. She has a friend she eats with in the cafeteria, Kione (Key-o-nay). She meets her at the door, she is so happy to see her again. They go inside, get their trays, their food and their meds. Kione wants to eat in the courtyard, on this particularly sunny day. Every day is sunny, but for some reason Kione thinks this day is the best. Aika doesn't mind or care. She follows her friend outdoors and to a nearby table.

They sit, they eat, they talk. Kione wants to know if Aika wants to smile. She doesn't. Kione is so happy, so bubbly, sometimes Aika wants to smile, and at times when she does it's a small one. Aika is more than happy to let Kione carry the conversation. But sometimes, like today, Aika's mood is too much for Kione. She acts impatiently trying to get more from Aika, but nothing comes out. Frustrated, she gets up, grabs her tray and leaves, but not without cheerfully saying "See you tomorrow!"

Three students walk by her table talking about fighting robots. One of them has a tube in his head, just dangling away. Aika decides that it's time to leave. She walks through the crowd

to the front of the school where the school buses are waiting. She enters the first one and finds a seat near the front of the bus. Other students also enter the bus, she has to share her seat with a boy she never met, but who is cheerful none the less.

Once the bus is full the driver declares that we're off. He steers the bus down the long drive and onto the avenue. But there is so much traffic the driver can't turn left, so he has to turn right. And right and right and right again, at every corner, so that they wind up back at the school. He pulls into the drive, saying "Sorry kids, I gave it a shot." The kids console him, telling him he did his best. They didn't really want to leave anyway. Aika doesn't react.

She exits the bus with everyone and re-enters the school. She walks through the hallway, which is always full of people walking this way and that, students and teachers alike. Everyone smiling, everyone happy. She notices on a wall the words "Be Happy" painted on it. It wasn't there before, but looking at it you could tell it was there for a while. The paint looked faded and worn. She doesn't react, instead she enters the bathroom.

All of the bathrooms were unisex, L-shaped rooms. When you entered into the bottom part of the L the first thing you saw were the sinks on the right, and to the left were the toilets. The stalls were against both walls and the standing urinals were set in the middle, back to back, so that while you were peeing you could have a conversation with the person on the other side.

Aika goes to the sink, turns on the water and splashes some on her face. While she's doing this three students enter, two boys and a girl. They go to the urinals, unzip, and start peeing. The girl has lifted her skirt to pee. They spoke to each other quietly but then began to take notice of her. Looking at her in the mirror one says "Where's that smile?" Aika says, "I must have left it home." This catches them by surprise, and they start laughing. Another is complaining that he's going to miss the urinal, he's laughing so much. Aika doesn't react.

After drying her face Aika decides she has a headache and needs to see the nurse. She left the bathroom, back into the hallway. The hallway crowd has thinned, but not by a lot. There must be several tests going on. Some of the students in the hall looked older, some too old to be a student.

A short walk to the rear of the school, a right turn and the nurses office door on the left. She entered, and saw, sitting in three chairs against the nurses desk, three bodies, wrapped from head to toe in shrink wrap. Students, from what she could see through the plastic, their clothing pressed into their skin.

The nurse noticed her enter and came out front, asking what was the matter. Aika told her she had a headache. The nurse, a very kind lady, offered her three more meds. "This should take care of that nasty old headache." With the cup of water the nurse hands her she takes the meds, and the bodies begin to fade away. But not completely, they hover between being there and not being there. All the while she doesn't react.

She can't react. She has seen what happens when you do. She didn't understand it before, how when one student was suddenly screaming about monsters in the cafeteria, why he reacted so badly to whatever was wrong with him. But as she adjusted to the meds, which was for a couple of weeks now, she saw. And understood. And knew that reactions were the worst thing you could do. You didn't have to smile, but you couldn't frown. And most of all you couldn't react.

She thanked the nurse and left, going back to class, any class. As she passed one room she noticed, looking through the door, a student laying prone on the teacher's desk. The teacher was surgically removing his kidney, all the while giving a lecture on ancient history. The class was busy taking notes, even the one being cut into. Aika wondered how good those meds were, as they seemed to take away all pain.

She entered the next class and took her customary seat in the back, by the window. The lesson was math, again. Somehow

she kept picking math. The teacher was describing word problems and asked for a volunteer to help her at the board. All hands went up, all but hers. Something else she discovered, if you volunteered for anything, anything could happen to you. The teacher chose one of the older students and had him stand in front of the board, facing the class. As she talked she opened his shirt, pulled out a scalpel, and started carving off a piece of his chest. Aika didn't react. She was becoming used to it. She had control over her fear. To lose control was to let fear in, and once in it would make her react, and she couldn't react, not now, not ever.

The teacher finished carving, rubbed a gel over the fresh wound, and thanked the student for his help. The piece she carved off went into a tray on her desk, and she continued with the lesson. When it was over it was back into the hall. By this time the meds had worn off again, and she could see the many trays being carried from the classrooms, some containing flesh, others organs, and even some limbs. No one else noticed, and telling them would not help. They were all under the influence of the meds.

And the walls, everywhere, were painted with those same words. Be Happy.. She also saw the tags on everyone's uniform, even her own, describing blood type, genetic codes, ethnicities, where they were from. She saw the teachers and what they really were, she saw some of the bigger operating rooms. And she saw the blood, everywhere. Not smeared or sprayed, just drippings from a tray not carried correctly, or on someone's uniform where they just had some work done. You didn't see them when under the meds, at least not consciously. And everyone was so happy it must be working.

Kione spotted her and came running. Half of her face and scalp was missing and covered in gel, but it didn't stop her from smiling. She was happy to see her, maybe they could go to the next class together. Aika said sure, why not.

Turning, they almost bumped into a teacher. He was seven feet tall, fleshy, and slug like. His body tapered from a broad bottom to a narrow top, with two eyes that hung on short stalks. His clothes were also tapered, actually more of a one-piece. Having no legs he carried himself around planted in a small cart, like all of the teachers. "Careful now, you almost made me drop my books." In his spindly arms and hands he carried a tray with what looked like a human liver in it.

Kione was very apologetic, asking forgiveness. Aika didn't react. "Now, now young ones, nothing bad happened," said the teacher/alien. "Now you get yourselves to class." It looked at Aika, said "You don't look too happy. how about a smile?"

Aika faked a half grin, something the alien took to be a good sign. It's mouth, at the top of it's body, seemed to take the form of a smile, and it said "that's a wonderful smile. Ok, you kids enjoy yourselves. And remember, the only way to be happy is to be happy."

As it rolled down the hall on it's small square cart, Kione was grabbing Aika's arm, rushing her to the next class. It didn't seem fair, but Aika was trying to figure out a way to get out of there without Kione. Doubtful she could talk her into it anyway, the meds had her, as they had everyone there. She didn't know what was beyond the never-ending traffic outside of the school, she didn't even know where she was. But she knew the illusion was complete, from the buses to the classrooms to the teachers to the dismemberment. And she was determined to find out, very carefully, very subtly, how to get out of there, and all without reacting.