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ENGL 1191

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February 22, 2026

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Sounds feel louder to me. Each morning the refrigerator sounds like its breathing and gets slammed shut multiple times. The clock clicks loud, like a rhythm. My mom leaves the lights off for me, because she knows the yellow light hurts my eyes before I put my glasses on. My sister makes the morning feel like a normal routine, like what other kids do. She moves as if the world belongs to her. She brushes her teeth without having to be reminded. She gets dressed on her own. She eats breakfast and talks. Her words come out fast, as if she doesn't have to think. She talks as she does everything, to anyone who will listen.

She has a license and a car, so she drives herself to school. I don't think I'll ever get to learn to drive, so I will just watch her, I guess. She drives her car to normal school. At least that's what I call it in my head. She has classes with thirty other kids and only one teacher. The building smells like pencil lead and sweaty socks. I went once for an event she had for the national honors society. The big confusing hallways intimidated me and all the sounds the bells made hurt my ears.

My school is different. A quiet and smaller place. The kids are like me and there are less of them. The lights can be turned down when I get overstimulated. The smell of turkey sandwiches always hurts my nose. But, at my school, they let me go outside when the smells bother me. The nausea from the smells make my stomach feel like butterflies are having a playdate inside of me. Going outside makes me feel better. I like my school, but I don't like explaining why I go there.

My sister never has to explain.

When she leaves for school in the morning, she slaps on her backpack like it's a bag of bowling balls. She groans like going to school is the worst thing that's ever happened to her. I watch from the couch because my bus comes later. Mom kisses the top of her head and wishes her a good day at school despite my sister's dirty look on her face. The door slams shut and the house shakes. I squeeze the couch cushions to calm my annoyance down. I count to ten then continue to twenty to feel okay.

At my school, I have a friend named Jordan who organizes his pencil in rainbow order. I sit next to him, because, like me, he doesn't love to talk. We often just exist next to each other, but his presence is comforting. During recess, we play video games together. The controllers are smooth and familiar, and the rules make sense to me. Win or lose- the rules are clear. In the games I feel my confident self, I know what to do, it feels comfortable. When I win, my chest fills up like a balloon. When I lose, it deflates, but that's okay. Balloons can be re-filled.

At lunch, I eat the same thing every day. Peanut butter sandwich. Apple Slices. Oreos. No surprises, the same thing everyday. Surprises feel like tripping even when the ground looks flat. The teachers are proud that I completed my lunch. Finishing a normal task is something that feels good for me.

My sister goes to sleepaway camp in the summer. She goes for seven weeks, and has been since she was eight years old. Away from our family, living in a bunk with other girls, and constant activities all day long. I'm happy for her. Each summer I ask my parents every night if they received any pictures of her. I love seeing what she's doing. I'll never be able to go, so the pictures give me a taste of what I'm missing.

When she leaves for camp, the house feels wrong. Her room is spotless. Her voice is not heard from the bottom of the stairs. My mom attempts to be cheerful, but I know she's missing a

piece of her heart, even though she pretends she's not. My dad tries to hold up, but making one less hamburger on the barbeque makes him choke up a bit.

We go visit her in the middle of each summer. The day is filled with a long car ride, more people than I can count, and endless treats. The lake is massive. It looks fun with all the inflatables, but swimming with all those people seems like a gross task. There's no quiet, even at night the bugs make screeching noises. Each drive up to camp looks the same. I sit with my headphones and ipad in an overly squished car that smells like the local bagel shop mixed with spicy tuna. My stomach twists the entire ride as the hills grow larger. Mom said the same thing each year. "Spencer, how are you feeling, just breathe, it will be a fun day". Yeah, maybe for her to reunite with her friends and see my sister. But for me, it's a day filled with discomfort.

If I could explain things like a "normal" person, I'd tell my parents that I'm jealous of my sister. I'm jealous of her bravery. It's not her fault that she gets to do things that I can't. Sometimes I imagine myself going to sleepaway camp, a hypothetical version of me, not the real me. A version of me that could sleep in a bunk and keep up with the activities. My words are slippery, they slide away before I can grab them. I remain quiet instead.

One summer afternoon, I went to the park with my mom. I hate the park - too many kids and too many sounds. I choose to hide in the corner under the trees and watch the dogs run free. The dogs run around with their tongues flowing around. The dog runs towards me, eyes filled with joy. I flinch at first, but then kneel down to greet the dog. The owner apologizes, and I wonder if he knows I'm "different". The dog sits down next to me as if we have been buddies forever. I love dogs, they don't know about my struggles with autism. For a moment, my brain goes silent.

At night when my head hits the pillow, I lie and think deeply. I think about the world. How loud everything is, how bright the sunshines, how confusing people can be. I think about my video games, my escape from reality. I think about my sister, moving swiftly through a world suited for her. She can keep up, I can't. She still chooses to slow down sometimes for me. Those moments remind me of the little things that matter.

I don't talk much. Silence is how the world sees me. On the inside, I have my own world. There's a whole story going on that no one else can read.