

The

Misunderstood

Moodswings
of Malia Morse



The beeping alarm drones on and Malia desperately searches for her snooze button. She feels as if she's just gone to bed, but then again, she feels like that so much more often these days. This is her first year at Fulton High and she...well, she dreads every living day of it.



Malia finds the snooze button and presses it.

Again. She lies in bed, her head on the pillow a smushed so her lips make a fish face.



She opens her eyes and closes them tightly, again. *Monday*, she thinks.

Three minutes is up before she needs it to be, and soon thereafter, she hears her delightful mother shouting,



“MALIA! GET UUUUUUPPPPP! I should NOT have to tell you more than once. Now, GET UPPPPPPPP! You’ll be late for school and make ME late for work!!” The only thing going through Malia’s mind is how much she just wants, no needs, to stay in bed and go back to sleep.

Nevertheless, Malia rolls out of bed, gets on her dirty jeans (they haven’t been washed since last Wednesday), much to her mother’s dismay, and thuds down to breakfast. Of course, Malia’s mother has not made anything but Malia knows where the cereal bars are. Malia opens the pantry door, reaches her hand in the Quaker Oats box. With a sigh, she removes her hand...empty. “Mom! We’re out of breakfast bars, Mom!” No answer.

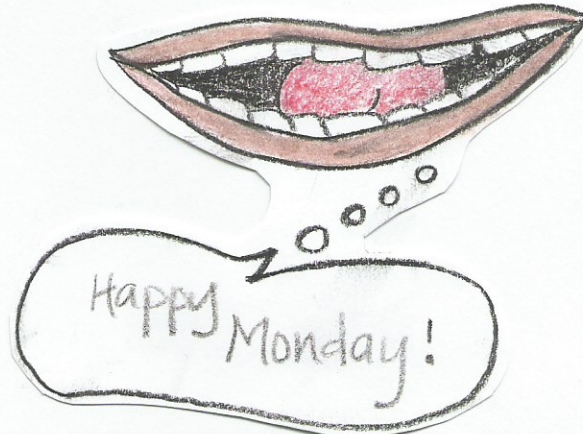
Malia shuffles to her mom's room where she finds her putting on make-up and looking at her "bump-it" hair so the height is juuuuuust right. "Mom, what did you have for breakfast? We're out of breakfast bars..." "I just made myself a smoothie. Get some breakfast at school! We're on that list, so why don't you use it?" Malia turned on her heels and walked to get her backpack. *Free breakfast? Blergh. The free breakfast sucks and I don't like eating in front of people.* She thought.

On the way to school, the haze pretty much engulfs Malia. It follows her out of the car, through the hallways, and into the 9th grade cafeteria at school. The 8:30 bell rings.

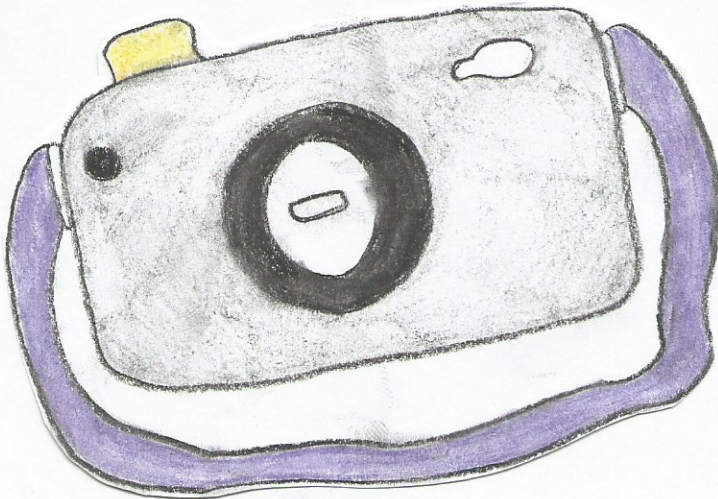
Alright, time to start the show.



First period, Chemistry. Mrs. Sabin. Short, unaware, happy—too happy—Mrs. Sabin. Mrs. Sabin's smile made Malia want to puke.



The thought of smiling at all made Malia feel like her face was made of porcelain and would break into a thousand pieces if attempted.



Second period, photography.

She thought she'd end up *liking* photography.

But, even this class... yuck.

The only upside?

The dark room.

The wondrous dark room lulling her off to her haven of sleep.

The day wears on, history, where they began something about early river civilizations.

P.E. where Coach Bunting relentlessly bellows on about how,

“Fitness is the key to success!

Fitness releases endorphins resulting in happiness.

Happy people exercise!”

Yes. Exactly. Malia thinks.

H.A.P.P.Y. People.



Geometry, where Mr. May says,

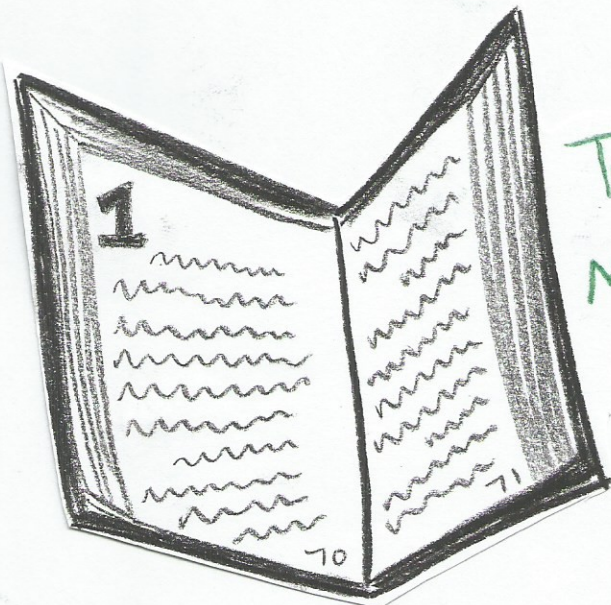
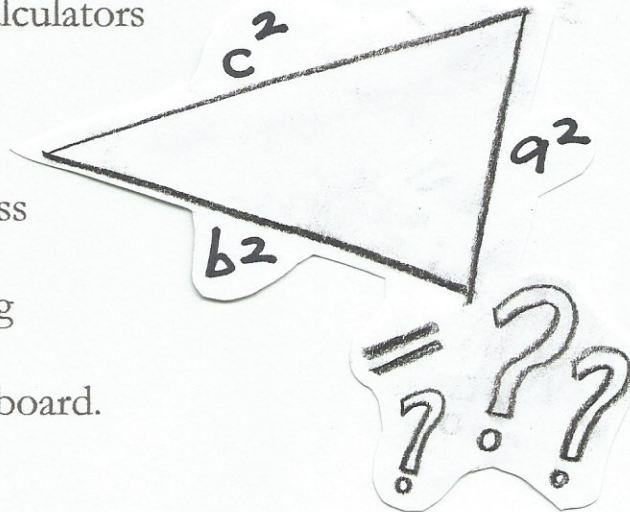
“Hello! Get your graphing calculators

and your text books, please!”

And turns his back to the class

for the next 50 minutes doing

the entire homework on the board.



To Kill A Mockingbird
-Harper Lee

Finally, English.

1 is the lonliest number...

There was a girl in her English class, they used to be friends. Now, Malia just doesn't feel much like talking to her. The effort, well, the thought of the effort is exhausting to her, so, she just gave up. Ms. Walker, Malia's English teacher, often writes her little notes asking if everything is ok. Malia always looks at the post it, rolls her eyes, and thinks to herself, *What does she care? She has to ask me...she doesn't really care.*

'Malia, see me after class today. Thanks, Ms. Walker.' The note glares at Malia. She huffs loudly and feels a 90 foot wave of anger combined with a rush of exhaustion intense enough to tranquilize an elephant come over her. All she wanted to do was cry, sleep, retreat, and freak out; all together.





When the bell rings, Malia stays
after class. She remains in her desk
with her arms folded.



“Malia, thank you for staying after to talk with me a bit today.” Ms. Walker says. “I’ve noticed a little change in you since the first of the school year. Is everything ok?”

“Mmmm, yeah. I mean, I guess.” Malia responds. She feels her eyes begin to fill with tears. She begins to feel white hot anger simultaneously.



Who does she think she is?

What right does she think she has?

I don't deserve to be put on the spot like this!

What does she think she's doing?

I hate her. I hate her!



“Well, I can only help if you tell me what you need. Are you sure there isn’t anything going on? Your grades are slipping and your class participation is dwindling.” Ms. Walker pleads.

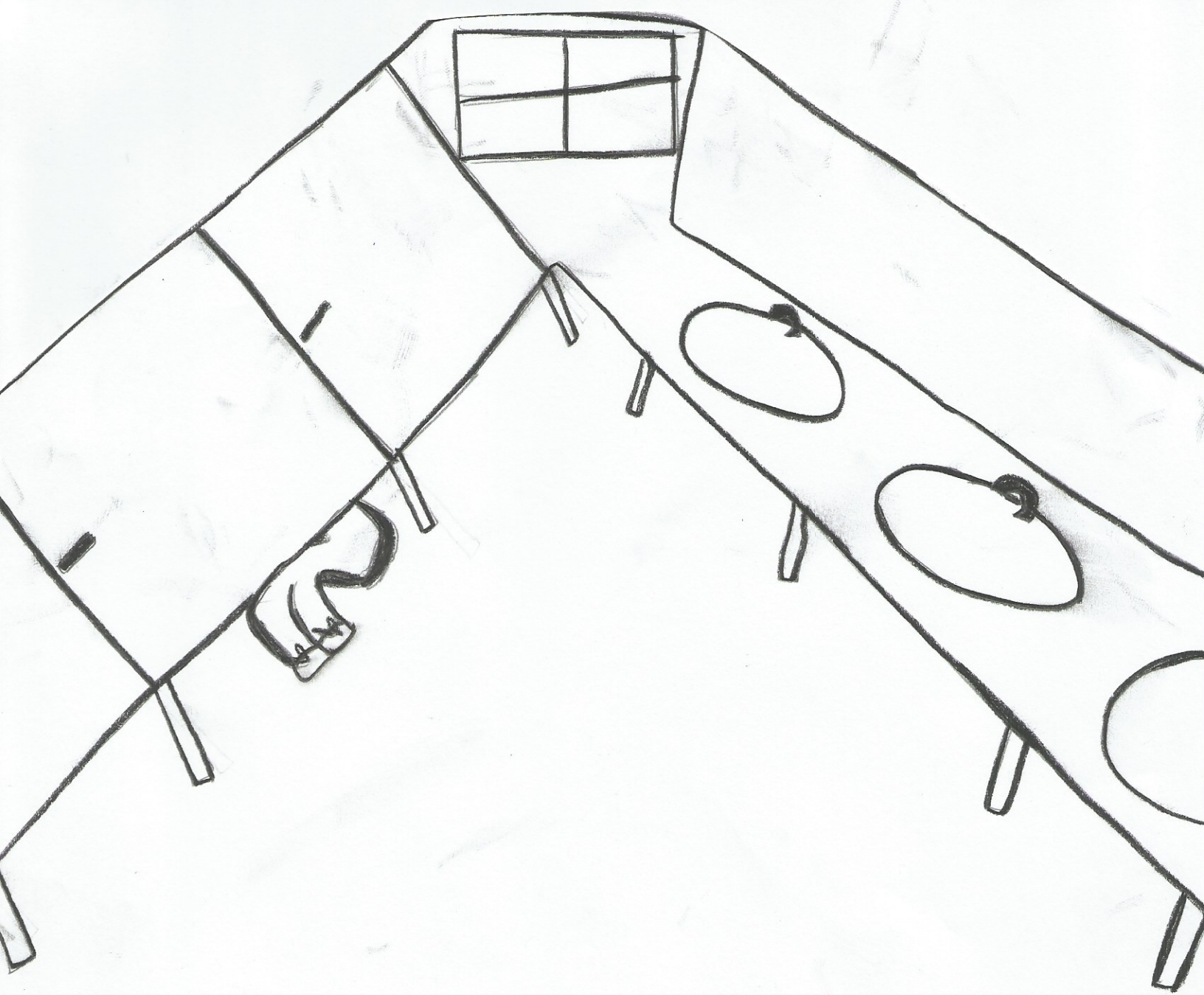
Malia’s anger is surmounting.



Her knee, rapidly bouncing, and her breath becoming increasingly bated. All of a sudden, Malia jumps up out of her desk, she begins to cry and shout at Ms. Walker, and she says, “Just leave me alone, ok? Just get out of my face and leave ME ALONE!” With that, Malia storms toward the door, picks up the garbage can and throws it toward the center of the class room. She then opens the classroom door, slams it quickly, re-opens it and runs out slamming it again behind her.

Ms. Walker sat there stunned not knowing what is happening with Malia right now. She calls Mrs. Skinner, the 9th grade counselor to find and, hopefully, help Malia.

Mrs. Skinner and Ms. Walker meet where they speak about Malia’s decline in class as well as the outburst. Mrs. Skinner then goes to look for Malia in the girls’ bathroom. Malia is slumped down outside the stalls with her head in between her knees resting on her elbow.



“Malia?” Mrs. Skinner asks, calmly.

Malia does not respond.

“Honey, I’m not here to talk about school. I’m not here to ask you anything but if you are ok.”

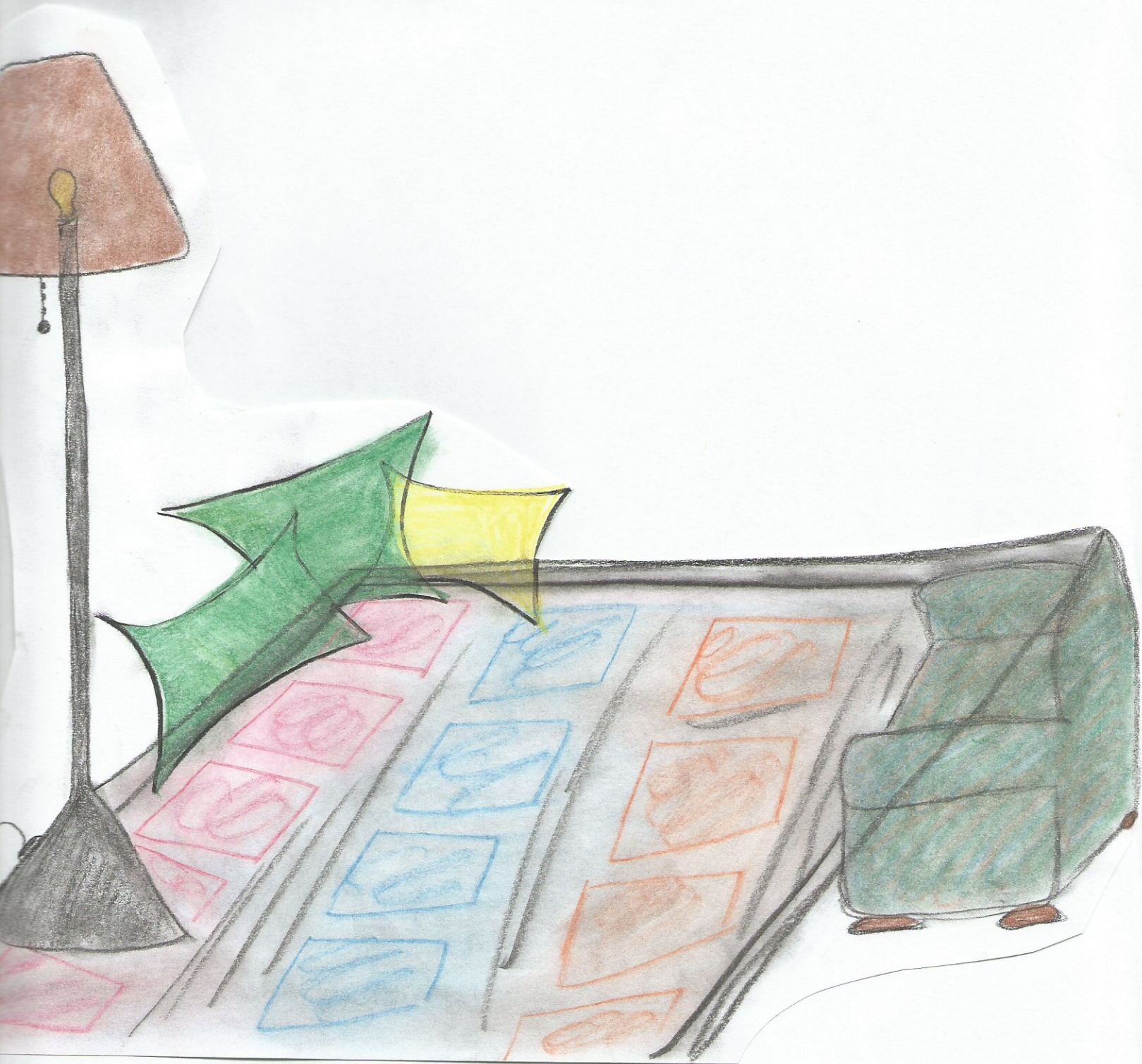
Malia sighs, exhausted.

“Malia, would you like to come down to my office so we can talk about what’s going on in private?” Mrs. Skinner gently asks.

Malia picks her head up and Mrs. Skinner can see tears streaks on her cheeks and a fading redness. Malia shrugs her shoulders, “I guess.”

Mrs. Skinner extends her hand to help Malia up. Malia reaches up and feels Mrs. Skinner’s papery thin yet grandma-soft hands. She feels instantly calmer. They walk downstairs to Mrs. Skinner’s office which is decorated with two bookshelves loaded with all kinds of books, two small rugs where big comfy chairs and squishy pillows make up reading and/or relaxation corners, quotes and pictures all over the walls, and nice lamps to light the room. Malia continues to feel calmer.

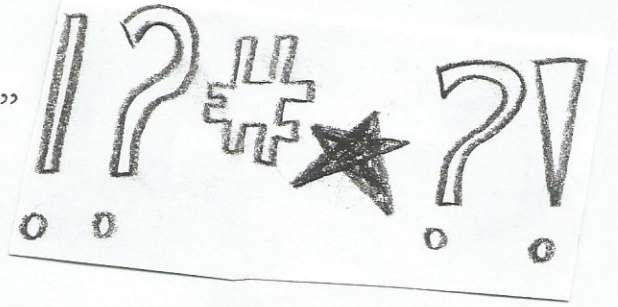




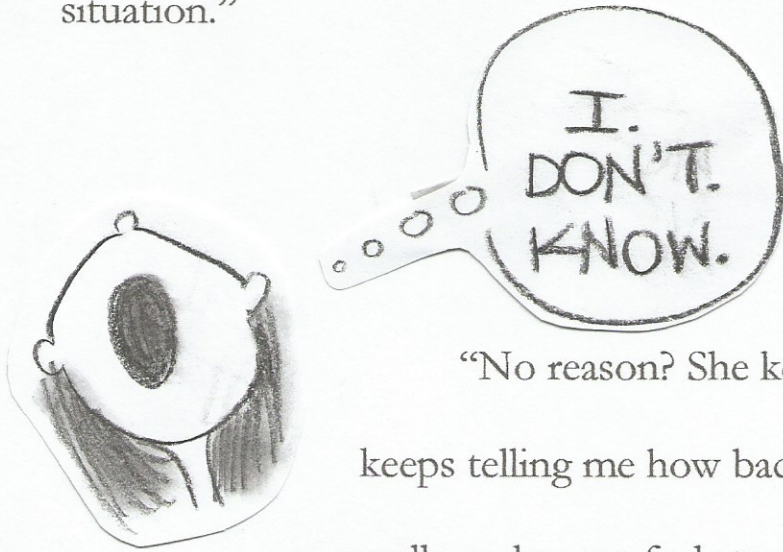
Surprising herself, Malia chooses to sit in the pillow corner. Mrs. Skinner smiles and follows Malia to the squishy pillow corner and sits down on the rug beside her.

“Do you want to talk about today?”

Malia says, “Sure.”



“Ok, what was all that about? From what Ms. Walker said you became very angry for no reason. I’d like to hear what you think of the situation.”



“No reason? She keeps asking me if I’m ok. She keeps telling me how badly I’m doing in school. It just... really makes me feel stupid. I don’t know what’s going on! I don’t know what’s happening. She keeps asking me and I don’t know either!”

“So, do *you* think there has been a change in your personality since the beginning of the school year? Do you think that something different is happening? Even if you don’t know *what* it is or *why* it’s happening, do you sense a change?”

Ch-ch-Ch-ch

Changes...

“I mean, yeah. I do. I guess. Yes. I feel different.” Malia’s eyes begin to well up again.

“Ok, my goal is not to make you sad. You let me know if you want to stop talking or if we can keep talking. Mrs. Skinner pats Malia’s hand to comfort her.

“Ok. We can keep talking”

“Can you tell me what you feel is different about you?”

Malia shrugs her shoulders.

“Do you feel, sad often?”

Malia nods.

“Do you feel more tired lately? More... groggy?”



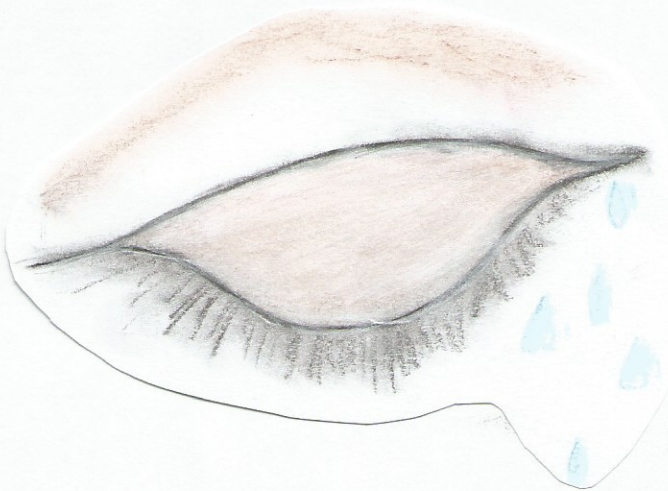
Malia nods again. “I just feel so, tired. So tired. Like, it’s hard for me to get out of my bed in the morning. And then I have my mom yelling at me to get up and she wants

she wants me to smile and be happy and laugh and love her, but it's just...so much work. I'm just, well, just tired."

"Do you feel like this exhaustion, your tiredness turns into anger and sadness sometimes?"

Malia shrugs her shoulders. "I mean, I guess."

"Do you feel like you're on an up and down roller coaster ride? Like, one minute you're ok, the next you are just plain tired, but then the next you're insanely angry or tragically sad?"



Malia nods and begins to cry silently.

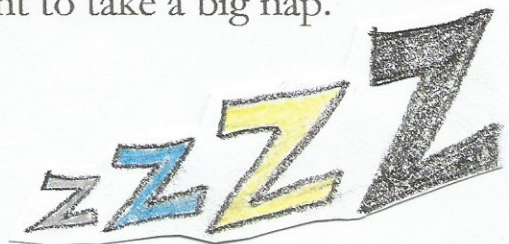
"Yes. I feel that way.

Sometimes I just don't know what

I'm feeling

but whatever it is is too much and then,

I just want to take a big nap."



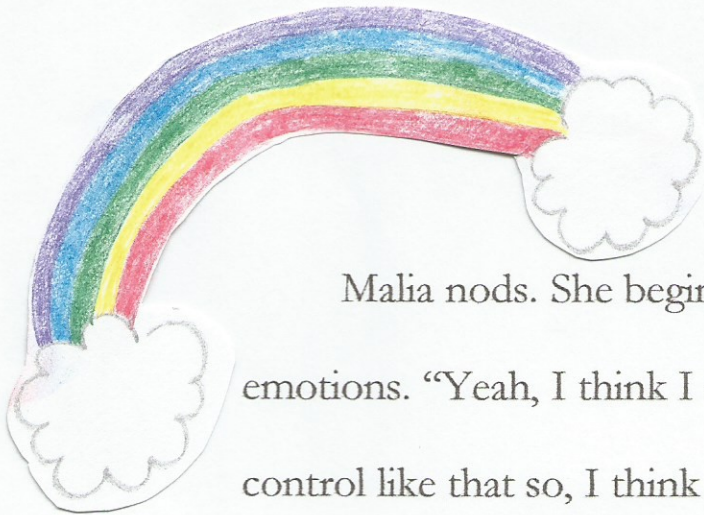
Mrs. Skinner nods and listens for the next hour as Malia tells her all about the ranges of emotions Malia feels on a daily basis. About all of the people around her wanting answers and actions and how Malia just wants to be left alone.



In the end, the two of them devise a beginning strategy for Malia to try out to help moderate her emotions.

“Let’s try this first,” Mrs. Skinner says, “when you begin feeling down and tired, try sketching in your journal that you carry around with you. You don’t have to write, you don’t have to talk about it, and you don’t have to let the emotion overtake you. So, try drawing something! Sketch your feelings. How do you feel after P.E.? Exercise can have really positive effects. Try, before school, to do 20 jumping jacks at home. Doing something like this can really help your mind focus and channel your energy into a good place. Lastly, for now, if you ever begin to get super angry, try to focus on a time where you were very happy. Let the happy

image, the sounds, the smells, and the positive emotional feeling overtake you. This might help calm your anxiety and stress to a manageable level.”



Malia nods. She begins to feel optimistic about managing her emotions. “Yeah, I think I can do that. I just, I don’t like being out of control like that so, I think I can try this stuff.”

“It’s not going to perfect right off the bat, so be patient with yourself, ok? Keep these strategies in mind and I’ll speak with your teachers about letting you take breaks if needed, you know what I mean? We’re all on your side, ok?”

Malia nods, tears well up in her eyes again, but this time, they are reassured tears. Right now, she doesn’t feel so alone. She feels like maybe there *is* someone who wants to understand her. Malia leaves Mrs. Skinner’s office with a few new tools to help moderate her emotions and her depression (later on, that’s what they figure out is up with Malia). Malia looks onto the rest of the week with open eyes and an optimistic attitude.



the end.

