

Second Place, Prose
Grades 7-9

“Airpods,” Benny Marmor

I stared at the whiteboard, watching my teacher, Mr. Galanter, write the difference between a subject and a predicate with a blue marker for us to reference when doing our worksheet. Looking around the classroom, I looked at the desk a few desks in front of me.

My best friend, Alex, looked back at me and gave me a look that said, isn't this so boring. Alex was tall, with wavy blonde hair. His parents always got him whatever he wanted. I go to his house all the time to play Rocket League with him.

As I pulled up the document on my computer, I remembered my conversation with my parents the night before. It had started at the dinner table.

I had been eating the chicken my mom had made. I decided to wait until the right moment, when my parents were in a good mood, to ask for airpods. I had been saving my money for a year, and now had enough money to pay for half of the price. I had mowed lawns, washed cars, raked leaves, and even cleaned toilets.

I really wanted those airpods. I wanted to stop having people stare at me every time I took out my ugly, black headphones, that made me look like a nerd. I wanted to feel the music in my ears, and not have to strain to hear the music. I wanted to look like Alex, like a kid whose parents got him whatever he wanted.

I wanted to ask once my parents looked relaxed and in a good mood. I picked at my mashed potatoes, while half listening to my sister talk about her friend who took her toy from school. Finally, I heard my mom sigh, as my sister finished her story. I seized the opportunity to get a word in before anyone else in the family could talk about their day.

“Mom, can I have airpods? I now have enough money to pay for half of the cost, and can you please pay for the rest? Plus, everyone in my class has airpods. I really want them.”

“Why do you need airpods,” she replied? “ Don't you already have nice headphones.”

“Yes, but my headphones are ugly. They are big, and clunky, and they make me look like a nerd. Besides, everyone in my class has airpods so why can’t I have them?”

“Everyone? Does Bennett have them?” My mom asked me with a tone that said, nice try.

“No.” I replied seeing where this line of inquiry was headed.

“Does Kellan have them?” “No.” I said, but thinking, so two people don’t have them. Most of the people in my class do. It is so unfair. My parents are so annoying.

“Does Jerome have them?” My mom's face lit up, she knew victory was close at hand.

“No,” I said, feeling my stomach begin to feel heavier than it should have been, even after a large dinner. I won’t be getting those airpods, I thought.

“Does Lucy have them?”

“No.”

“So not everyone has them. Wh-”

I rushed to cut her off before she could finish her argument. “But Lauren has them, and Max has them, and AJ has them, and my best friend Alex has them. And Jessica said that her parents said they would get her some in a month.” I almost yelled the last bit at my parents.

“ENOUGH.” My dad slammed his fist on the table. “We are not helping you pay for a 250 dollar set of headphones when you already have perfectly good ones. In fact, we will not even let you get them if you save up enough. We want you to use it for something worthwhile, not on some fad.”

“Actually I only want the airpods which cost 160 dollars,” I muttered under my breath.

The unfairness, I thought, as I filled in commas.

And as if the world just wanted to rub it in, today at the bus stop Alex teased me about how I did not have airpods. I could still hear his teasing in my head, “Wow, the sound on these things is amazing.”

I kept working, but I couldn’t stop thinking about how angry I was that I wouldn’t get airpods. I tried to focus on my worksheet but couldn’t.

Finally the bell rang signaling the start of recess. Everyone was getting ready to play outside, switching from studious to loud and rambunctious. Everyone, that is, except me. I was lethargic and had a gloomy look on my face that said, “leave me alone.”

“Danny, can you stay for a second?” asked Mr. Galanter, his eyes saying it wasn’t really a question.

“Sure,” I said, sitting down at the chair in front of his mahogany desk. The last kids looked back at me. One even gave me a look that plainly said, “Loser.”

“I briefly glanced at one of the worksheets you turned in, and you got a lot of the questions wrong. I would like you to stay in from recess to do some extra practice, is that okay with you?”--again making it sound like it wasn’t really a question.

“Sure,” I said again, but a lot quieter this time.

“Great, here are the worksheets. Give them to me at the end of the day, okay?”

“Will do,” I said, taking the worksheets.

“And Danny, you know you can talk to me if you are having trouble, right?”

“Yeah,” I said, but really thinking, who would be so lame to ask a teacher for help?

I walked back to my desk, the feeling of anger and frustration even more pronounced. It's all my parents’ fault, I thought. It’s their fault for not getting me the airpods and their fault for making me mad so I couldn’t concentrate on my worksheet. I sat down and stared at Mr. Galanter as he left the room.

After he left the room I continued to let my eyes wander. I won’t do the worksheets, I thought to myself, I will leave school before he can find me, and there will be nothing he can do about it.

Since I wasn't going to do the worksheets, I got up and started to walk around the room. I started walking towards the bulletin board, to look at the posters for various activities. I walked past AJ's desk, Kellan's desk, and then got to Alex's desk. As I walked past Alex's desk, I saw a small white case, just sitting there. AirPods!

I stared at them. I imagined taking them, slipping them in my pocket, walking home after school, and telling my parents that I found them lying on the street. I imagined putting them on the next day at school, and finally looking normal. I imagined listening to music and being able to hear it. And I imagined not being the only one whose parents don't get them what they want.

But STEALING!, countered the other side of my head. And this is your best friend. The person you play video games with. The person who was nice to you on your first day at a new school. The person who never forgot your birthday, and always was there when you needed him.

But AirPods!, countered the bad side. This is what you wanted so badly, and it might be your only chance to get them, and also Alex was mean to you about you not having airpods.

I imagined an angel and the devil debating in my head. I felt so conflicted. I kept going over it in my head. Do I steal them or not?

Suddenly I jumped. I heard the sound of the bell again. Recess was over. I grabbed the airpods and slipped them in my pocket. I rushed to sit down at my desk and pretended to work on the worksheets. I watched as the class streamed into the classroom. They were laughing, hitting each other, and having fun.

As the last kids went through the door, I saw Alex. He was laughing at a joke our friend Owen had just told. When he got to his desk, I saw his eyes look around his desk for his airpods. As he slowly realized that the airpods were not there, I saw the expression on his face shift from confusion to annoyance, and then as he realized that the airpods were not in his desk either, to tears.

I saw tears beginning to well up in his eyes as he realized that someone probably took them. I saw him sit down, and struggle with himself to try and keep the tears down. He sat down. I think that he realized that someone stole them. We have

had multiple thefts in our class. I didn't think that he thought it was me, or did he?

Mr. Galanter started the lesson, science, but again I could not concentrate on the subject. I bombed a science quiz, even though I knew all the answers because I had studied them the night before. I forgot the name of the 17th president when called on in class, and I forgot the date of the start of the First Barbary War.

As the school day drew to a close, I felt sweat beading my forehead, a sinking feeling in my stomach, and a painful lump in my throat. The angel and the devil started to fight again.

"You feel guilty. You should apologize for what you did and give back the airpods."

"Are you an idiot," the devil replied. "If you tell him what you did, he won't want to be friends anymore."

"You know the right thing to do," the angel said, and the argument with myself stopped.

I did know the right thing to do.

The bell rang, signaling the end of social studies. I packed up my things and walked up to Alex.

"Hey, ready to go?"

"Yeah," he replied quietly, making me feel even worse.

"Great."

We walked out of the classroom, into the hallway, and out of the school. Once we got away from all the crowds, I decided to tell him.

"Look, Alex. I have something to confess to you. I am the one wh-," my voice faltered as I really realized the magnitude of what I had done. "I am the one who stole your airpods."

I took them out of my pocket and gave them to him. Alex looked really hurt. I rushed on.

“You know how I really wanted airpods and was saving up for them? Well, I asked my parents if they would help me pay for them, and then they said they wouldn’t even let me buy them if I could pay for them myself. So when I saw your airpods on your desk, I thought that it might be my only chance to get them. I am so sorry. I betrayed you.”

Alex had a pained look on his face. He took a long time before saying anything. Finally, he said quietly, “What the heck, dude. I thought we were friends. You can walk ahead of me. I’ll take the next bus.” My face fell. I had thought that he would accept my apology.

I ran ahead of him and got to the bus stop. The bus came over to the side of the road and opened its doors with a hiss.

I walked into the bus, sitting at the very end. I saw the rest of the kids who took the bus shuffle in, staring at their phones as if they were magic.

AJ sat in the seat in front of me. He switched the orientation of his phone, so that it looked like a mini TV and reached into his pocket to take out his airpods. I saw him slip the airpods into his ears.

I felt a little bit of disgust with myself. I had ruined my friendship just for two pieces of metal and plastic. I had sunk to the level of a thief, just so I could look nice. I had betrayed my friend, and I would never get him back.

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