

JULIE

EPISODE 19: SHORT STORY EXCERPT (LITERARY) - MIDDLE GRADE: STACK UP THE WORDS BY BAILEY TAMAYO

SHOW HER THOUGHT PROCESS, TOOLS NEEDED.  
WHAT DID SHE PLAN TO DO ONCE SHE BROKE IN?  
GIVE A REASON FOR HER ANGST AND NEEDING TO BREAK INTO SCHOOL.  
WHERE IS HER MOM?  
IS THERE A SIMILAR DAD STORY LIKE SKRITCHSKRITCH?

**Summary: Elliot breaks into the middle school mostly because she can. It's not as abandoned as she thought.**

The Beatles' "She came in through the bathroom window" is playing in my head.

She breaks into the middle school because it looks abandoned, and because it's easy, and because it's there. It's <sup>9:00</sup>nine PM on a Tuesday, and she has nothing better to do anyway.

combine

Give a better reason.

Elliot She climbs into the <sup>middle school</sup>cafeteria through the open window <sup>but</sup> she doesn't even know if it

counts as breaking in when the thing's unlocked <sup>she</sup> and listens to the screech of the window echo around the room and come back at her. Her phone buzzes in her pocket, too loud in the quiet; she ignores it. Stepping <sup>How? It's dark</sup> further into the dark she surveys the room: the <sup>watery</sup> moonlight throws

distance not depth

shadows across the floor and it seems smaller than she remembers. A second later the lights flicker to life <sup>and startle her</sup> but she's nowhere near the switch. It's not easy to surprise her, but she's got to

say, she wasn't expecting the janitor.

The janitor is

He's a monolith of a man, a big, solid rectangle, all muscle. Older, early thirties at least. He's wearing a janitor uniform and he's got a mop in his hand but there's military in the set of his spine, in the hard, regimented lines of him, in the way his eyes track the room. He's got scars, some subtle, some not so subtle. There's a definite gravity to him, his mass has a pull that draws all her attention, and she can't help but stare. But maybe that's just his hair. It's a wild thing, dark and everywhere and anything but the regulation crew cut she's familiar with, held back from his face with a band. It looks like it's trying to eat his face and his head and his body and sort of everything. He's staring back at her, a crinkle in his heavy brow.

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crowd

"Hi," <sup>s</sup> she says. <sup>she</sup> Walks up to him and offers her hand, because if she doesn't have to be on this guy's bad side she doesn't want to be. "I'm Elliot."

"Hey" ?  
she wouldn't offer her hand to shake  
maybe nod her head  
bangs  
obscure eyes

He frowns, but at least he doesn't say, "That's a boy's name" which wins him points in her book. He has soldier's hands, scarred and rough and dwarfing her own in sheer size, but he takes surprising care in folding their hands together and shaking, once. It's very warm. She says, "What's your name?"

He doesn't answer for a moment, just keeps frowning with both hands back on the mop, and keeps on frowning until she thinks he's going to kick her out. But then: "Ende."

better?  
jerk?

His voice is ~~gruff~~, but it's <sup>3</sup> not as gruff as she expected. She likes it immediately; it sounds the way her mom's hand felt when she skritchd it through her short hair. "See you later, alligator," she would say, and skritchskritchskritch.

"Is that your last name?"

He nods once.

"You're working this late?"

They often do.

He lifts the mop as an answer.

"Can I stay?"

His frown cuts a little deeper, and she says quickly, "I won't bother you. Just a little while, and then I'll go."

Lucie  
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He still looks like he's going to say no, but his mouth twists up and he nods again. He dips the mop into a bucket that she didn't notice and then he <sup>returns to work</sup> ~~working~~, paying her no mind, just like that. <sup>thought she was observing</sup>

She bites the inside of her cheek to keep from smiling. He sweeps the mop in big swirling circles, his face contorted with the painstaking care he takes, and she goes back to sit on the window sill as he works. She plays games on her phone and she plays music, first with headphones and then out loud, to see what he'll do. Continue to not pay attention, apparently. <sup>Why?</sup>

Start tapping his foot, later – she has to bite her cheek harder at that. She sits on the sill and ignores the buzz of messages on her phone and watches the floor on its steady progression from dull to shine, until, finally: “Hey.”

The janitor – Ende – is looking at her. He holds up a ring of keys, tilting his head towards the doors: time to lock up. The floor is spotless and gleaming, and for a second she's hesitant to put her sneakers down, but then she figures that if he minded he wouldn't have let her stay. She scoots down from the sill and stuffs her phone back in her pocket.

“Thanks for letting me stay,” she says, and he nods. There's a softness around his mouth, she thinks, that she didn't see before. It reminds her of her mother's smile, even though his mouth is still unsmiling. “I know a diner around here that serves burgers half off after eight. Come with me.”

She's already out of the cafeteria, heading to the front doors. Behind her Ende is frowning again as he closes the doors and twists the keys in them. “You should go home,” he says, but follows. He walks almost like he's marching, each step measured and solid. She finds it a familiar comfort.

Are there corners outside the school?

Really?  
He shouldn't.

Really?  
she's a teenager.

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"Curfew's not 'til later," she says easily. Not a lie. Her phone buzzes away in her pocket.

"We'll have to walk to the diner, not supposed to get in cars with strangers." *That's where she draws the line?*

So they walk to the diner. It's ten thirty and the place is mostly empty. The hostess has painted lips and they twist down at the sight of them; Elliot's not surprised. They must look funny: she's pretty small as it is, but next to Ende's hulking mass she must look miniscule. He has to hunch to get through the doorway. Under the hostess's scrutinizing glare, she thinks he might be twiddling his thumbs.

She orders a soda and a burger – half price, like she said and he doesn't. He gets a milkshake, chocolate. Surprise number two, thinks Elliot. "I thought you'd get a burger," she tells him, "or a steak." When they get their food she tucks into her burger right away; he wraps both hands around the glass and takes small sips. *Her eyes widen.*

"Do you have a speech problem?" she asks. He looks up from his milkshake, one brow raised, but doesn't say anything. Shakes his head.

"You just don't like to talk."

He nods, and she nods back, considering.

"That's cool. Do you mind that I talk?"

Head shake.

"Good."

*More details*  
*Dialogue-*  
So she talks. She talks and chats and fills the silence up, layers upon layers of words, until the space between them is full of her voice. She's a master of small talk. Every now and

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then he grunts or hums in acknowledgment, or asks one word questions. The military never leaves his shoulders, but some of the rigidity does. The ends of his hair get in the milkshake. It makes her smile.

At length she asks, "What branch were you?" He stares, and she says, "My mom's in the military, you look like her," by way of explanation. Not a lie, not really – well, half of one. Half-truths are the best lies, she's found. He does look like her, the way he holds himself so soldier-like, the way he holds his milkshake so mom-like. Careful, with both hands around the glass. The lie is in the present tense.

*Now*  
"Marines," he says, *and she says*, "Why'd you leave?"

*would he?*  
His mouth goes tight around the corners and his entire expression goes dark with the motion; it's amazing, she thinks, how such a tiny detail can make such a huge difference in the composition of his face. She only realizes a few seconds later when he says "Hair," that it's because he's trying not to laugh, and it takes her a few seconds more of staring at his very non-reg hair to realize he's making a joke. She laughs so hard she snorts soda up her nose.

"Hey," she says, still snuffling into the paper napkin he handed her, "do you work tomorrow too?" He nods. "Can I come by again?"

He frowns. "Parents," he says.

"They won't mind," Another half-truth. She really doesn't think her mom would have minded. Her phone's on the table, and when it buzzes it skitters an inch or two. Ende eyes it.

"Parents?" A question this time.

*JULIE*  
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"No." Not a lie, because it's not her parents, plural, it's her dad, singular. Ende's eyebrows sink on his face. He doesn't believe her.

"Should answer it."

"It's fine."

"Probably worried."

"He's not." The phone buzzes just as she realizes that she gave away too much. She stands abruptly. "I should go."

His eyebrows have climbed back up his forehead now, surprised, but he doesn't stop her. He does slide some bills onto the table as she's sliding her phone away and fumbling for crumpled money in her pocket. *shouldn't she pay?*

*Will there be time? = next time?*  
"Thanks for the burger," she says, already walking backwards to the door. "I'll buy next time."

She flicks her hood up, pushes the door open-

"Hey."

She turns. He's watching her, frowning, still sitting at the table. His heavy brow is lowered, the tips of his wild hair still coated in chocolate, his hands still wrapped around the glass. They look better like that, she thinks. They're better as milkshake glass hands than soldier hands. Ende says, "Be careful," gruff and sincere, and Elliot thinks of her mother, thinks skritchskritchskritch. *Would he really with = be a teenage girl?*

*Andrew*  
*Too casual and intimate for strangers.*  
"Yeah," she says. "Sure. See you later, alligator."  
*Would he?*

Jenn's Comments

I'm enjoying the story!!  
I think it's more YA, not MG.

**Summary:** Elliot breaks into the middle school mostly because she can. It's not as abandoned as she thought.

She breaks into the middle school because it looks abandoned, and because it's easy, and because it's there. It's nine PM on a Tuesday, and she has nothing better to do anyway.

What ~~is~~ the motive/goal brings her to the school. Is there a connection to her mother?

(Nice first line.

She climbs into the cafeteria through the open window – she doesn't even know if it counts as breaking in when the thing's unlocked – and listens to the screech of the window echo around the room and come back at her. Her phone buzzes in her pocket, too loud in the quiet; she

ignores it. Stepping further into the dark she surveys the room: the watery moonlight throws shadows across the floor and it seems smaller than she remembers. A second later the lights flicker to life, but she's nowhere near the switch. It's not easy to surprise her, but she's got to say, she wasn't expecting the janitor.

He's a monolith of a man, a big, solid rectangle, all muscle. Older, early thirties at least. He's wearing a janitor uniform and he's got a mop in his hand, but there's military in the set of his spine, in the hard, regimented lines of him, in the way his eyes track the room. He's got scars, some subtle, some not so subtle. There's a definite gravity to him, his mass has a pull that draws all her attention, and she can't help but stare. But maybe that's just his hair. It's a wild thing,

dark and everywhere and anything but the regulation crew cut she's familiar with, held back from his face with a band, ~~it~~ looks like it's trying to eat his face and his head and his body and sort of everything. He ~~is~~ starting back at her, a crinkle in his heavy brow.

this wording is awkward

If you're too out of it for the story, she's off

closing

she's out of middle school?

hehe  
her mother's age?

tells held back

Why is she familiar with it? Does she know him?

Great description of how menacing he is. What's going through her mind? Is she

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*lower case* (why does she take this course of action rather than run? show us her thinking.)  
"Hi," She says. Walks up to him and offers her hand, because ~~if~~ she doesn't ~~have~~ <sup>want</sup> to be on this guy's bad side ~~she doesn't want to be~~. "I'm Elliot."

He frowns, but at least he doesn't say, "That's a boy's name?" <sup>Does she go to this school? Can she say she's in the 6th grade or something so we know how old she is?</sup> ~~which~~ <sup>this</sup> wins him points in her book. He has soldier's hands, scarred and rough and dwarfing her own in sheer size, but he takes surprising care in folding their hands together and shaking, once. It's very warm. She says, "What's your name?" *How is she so familiar with the military? How old is she?*

He doesn't answer for a moment, just keeps frowning with both hands back on the mop, ~~and keeps on frowning~~ until she thinks he's going to kick her out. But then, "Ende."

His voice is gruff, but it's not as gruff as she expected. She likes it immediately; it sounds the way her mom's hand felt when she skritchd it through her short hair. "See you later, alligator," <sup>Mom</sup> she would say, and skritchskritchskritch. *Awkward wording. How does she feel when reminded about her mother?*

"Is that your last name?"

He nods once.

"You're working this late?"

He lifts the mop as an answer.

"Can I stay?"

His frown cuts a little deeper, and she says quickly, "I won't bother you. Just a little while, and then I'll go."

*Why does she want to stay?*

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She bites the inside of her cheek to keep from smiling. He sweeps the mop in big swirling circles, his face contorted with the painstaking care he takes, ~~and she goes back to sit~~ <sup>sits back</sup> on the window sill as he works. She plays games on her phone and ~~she~~ plays music, first with headphones and then out loud, to see what he'll do. ~~Continues~~ <sup>until he</sup> to not pay attention, apparently, ~~Starts~~ <sup>starts</sup> tapping his foot, ~~until~~ <sup>until</sup> she has to bite her cheek harder at that. She ~~sits on the sill and~~ ignores the buzz of messages on her phone and watches the floor on its steady progression from dull to shine, until, finally: "Hey."

The janitor – Ende – is looking at her. He holds up a ring of keys, tilting his head towards the doors: <sup>time to lock up</sup>. The floor is spotless and gleaming, and for a second she's hesitant to put her sneakers down, but then she figures that if he minded he wouldn't have let her stay. She scoots down from the sill and stuffs her phone back in her pocket.

"Thanks for letting me stay," she says, and he nods. There's a softness around his mouth, ~~she thinks~~, that she didn't see before. It reminds her of her mother's smile, even though his mouth is still unsmiling. "I know a diner around here that serves burgers half off after eight.

Come with me."

She's already out of the cafeteria, heading to the front doors. Behind her, Ende is

frowning again as he closes the doors and twists the keys in them. "You should go home," he says, but follows. He walks almost like he's marching, each step measured and solid. She finds it a familiar comfort.

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So they walk to the diner. It’s ten thirty and the place is mostly empty. The hostess has painted lips <sup>which</sup> ~~and they~~ twist ~~down~~ at the sight of them; Elliot’s not surprised. They must look funny: she’s pretty small as it is, but next to Ende’s hulking mass she must look miniscule. He has to hunch to get through the doorway. Under the hostess’s <sup>Elliot</sup> scrutinizing glare, ~~she~~ thinks he might be twiddling his thumbs.

She orders a soda and a burger – half price, like she said – <sup>but</sup> ~~and~~ he doesn’t. He gets a milkshake, chocolate. Surprise number two, thinks Elliot. “I thought you’d get a burger,” she tells him, “or a steak.” When they get their food she tucks into her burger right away; he wraps both hands around the glass and takes small sips.

“Do you have a speech problem?” she asks. <sup>4</sup> He looks up from his milkshake, one brow raised, but doesn’t say anything. Shakes his head.

“You just don’t like to talk.”

He nods, and she nods back, considering.

“That’s cool. Do you mind that I talk?”

Head shake.

<sup>Man</sup> “Good.”

So she talks. She talks and chats and fills the silence ~~up~~ layers upon layers of words, until the space between them is full of her voice. She’s a master of small talk. Every now and

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then he grunts or hums in acknowledgment, or asks one word questions. The military never leaves his shoulders, but some of the rigidity does. The ends of his hair get in the milkshake. It makes her smile. *(It was pulled back in a bun)*

At length she asks, "What branch were you?" He stares, and she says, "My mom's in the military, you look like her," by way of explanation. Not a lie, not really – well, half of one. Half-truths are the best lies, she's found. He does look like her, the way he holds himself so soldier-like, the way he holds his milkshake so mom-like. Careful, with both hands around the glass. The lie is in the present tense.

"Marines," he says, ~~and~~ she says, "Why'd you leave?"

His mouth goes tight around the corners and his entire expression goes dark with the motion; it's amazing, she thinks, how such a tiny detail can make such a huge difference in the composition of his face. She ~~only~~ realizes ~~a few~~ seconds later when he says "Hair," that it's because he's trying not to laugh, ~~and~~ ~~it~~ takes her a few seconds more of staring at his very non-reg hair to realize he's making a joke. She laughs so hard she snorts soda up her nose.

"Hey," she says, still snuffling into the paper napkin he handed her, "do you work tomorrow, too?" He nods. "Can I come by again?"

He frowns. "Parents?" he says.

"They won't mind," Another half-truth. She really doesn't think her mom would have minded. Her phone's on the table, and when it buzzes it skitters an inch or two. Ende eyes it.

"Parents?" A question this time.

What branch?

Mom  
this  
up in  
the  
story.

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"No." Not a lie, because it's not her parents, plural, it's her dad, singular. Ende's eyebrows sink on his face. He doesn't believe her.

"Should answer it."

"It's fine."

"Probably worried."

Let him speak a few full sentences. He's coming across as a simpleton but I know he's not. I like him, he's very endearing.

"He's not." The phone buzzes just as she realizes that she gave away too much. She stands abruptly. "I should go."

(What is going through her head right now? Why is she running? Give us a ~~glance~~ glimpse into her head.)

His eyebrows have climbed back up his forehead now, surprised, but he doesn't stop her.

He does slide some bills onto the table as she's sliding her phone away and fumbling for crumpled money in her pocket.

(Does she not find any \$ in her pocket?)

"Thanks for the burger," she says, already walking backwards to the door. "I'll buy next time."

She flicks her hood up, pushes the door open-

"Hey."

- he frowns a lot.

She turns. He's watching her, frowning, still sitting at the table. His heavy brow is lowered, the tips of his wild hair still coated in chocolate, his hands still wrapped around the glass. They look better like that, she thinks. They're better as milkshake glass hands than soldier hands. Ende says, "Be careful," gruff and sincere, and Elliot thinks of her mother, thinks skritchskritchskritch.

(How does she feel when she thinks of her mother?)

"Yeah," she says. "Sure. See you later, alligator."

Mention her mother's military experience briefly on the 1st page. It will eliminate some confusion & clarify her connection to Ende.

?

- I really like this!

**Summary:** *Elliot breaks into the middle school mostly because she can. It's not as abandoned as she thought.*

- excellent word choices

2 great characters

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- why 3rd person? never mind! I see why now.

- can I please see the rest?

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Head shake.

“Good.”

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“Should answer it.”

“It’s fine.”

“Probably worried.”

“He’s not.” The phone buzzes just as she realizes that she gave away too much. She stands abruptly. “I should go.”

His eyebrows have climbed back up his forehead now, surprised, but he doesn’t stop her. He does slide some bills onto the table as she’s sliding her phone away and fumbling for crumpled money in her pocket.

“Thanks for the burger,” she says, already walking backwards to the door. “I’ll buy next time.”

She flicks her hood up, pushes the door open-

“Hey.”

She turns. He’s watching her, frowning, still sitting at the table. His heavy brow is lowered, the tips of his wild hair still coated in chocolate, his hands still wrapped around the glass. They look better like that, she thinks. They’re better as milkshake glass hands than soldier hands. Ende says, “Be careful,” gruff and sincere, and Elliot thinks of her mother, thinks skritchskritchskritch.

“Yeah,” she says. “Sure. See you later, alligator.”

DAVE

**Summary: Elliot breaks into the middle school mostly because she can. It's not as abandoned as she thought.**

*I'm totally with you and these characters. I'm seeing a Juno-like character. There is an immediate gravitation with these two 'outcasts.' I'm willing to continue to find out how things turn out. Great job.*

*You have to adhere to grammatical principals, though. You'll turn off average readers with punctuation and grammatical errors*

*Needs a setting. Is the school in a crowded urban setting? a rural dead end road? Where are we other than outside an abandoned middle school* She breaks into the middle school because it looks abandoned, and because it's easy, and because it's there. It's nine PM on a Tuesday, and she has nothing better to do anyway. *(I'm not sure abandoned is the right word. Perhaps, closed for the night and empty. Abandoned suggests closed up and not used any more.)*

She climbs into the cafeteria through the open window – she doesn't even know if it counts as breaking in when the thing's unlocked – and listens to the screech of the window echo around the room and come back at her. *(nice image)* Her phone buzzes in her pocket, too loud in the quiet; she ignores it. Stepping further into the dark she surveys the room: the watery

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moonlight throws shadows across the floor (and) *delete*. ‡ It seems smaller than she remembers.

A second later the lights flicker to life, but she's nowhere near the switch. It's not easy to surprise her, but ~~she's got to say~~, she wasn't expecting the janitor.

He's a monolith of a man, a big, solid rectangle, all muscle. Older, early thirties at least.

WREN  
He's wearing a janitor uniform and he's got a mop in his hand(,) but there's military in the set of his spine, in the hard, regimented lines of him, in the way his eyes track the room. He's got scars, some subtle, some not so subtle. There's a definite gravity to him, his mass has a pull that draws all her attention, and she can't help but stare. But maybe that's just his hair. It's a wild thing, dark and everywhere and anything but the regulation crew cut she's familiar with, held back from his face with a band. ‡ looks like it's *(be a little more creative. Avoid the general, Use a specific noun)* an animal trying to eat his face and his head and his body and sort of everything. He's staring back at her, a crinkle in his heavy brow.

"Hi." She says. *(Grammar- "Hi, she says. She walks up to him... .)* Walks up to him and offers her hand, because if she doesn't have to be on this guy's bad side she doesn't want to be. "I'm Elliot." *(I'm Elliot," she says.)*

He frowns, but at least he doesn't say, "That's a boy's name" which wins him points in her book. He has soldier's hands, scarred and rough and dwarfing her own in sheer size, but he takes surprising care in folding their hands together and shaking, once. It's very warm. *(new paragraph)* She says, "What's your name?"

He doesn't answer for a moment, just keeps frowning with both hands back on the mop, and keeps on frowning until she thinks he's going to kick her out. But then: "Ende."

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His voice is gruff, but it's not as gruff as she expected. She likes it immediately; it sounds the way her mom's hand felt when she skritchted it through her short hair. "See you later, alligator," she would say, and skritchskritchskritch.

"Is that your last name?"

He nods once.

"You're working this late?"

He lifts the mop as an answer.

"Can I stay?"

His frown cuts a little deeper, and she says quickly, "I won't bother you. Just a little while, and then I'll go."

He still looks like he's going to say no, but his mouth twists up and he nods again. He dips the mop into a bucket that she didn't notice (*before*) and then he's working, paying her no mind, just like that.

She bites the inside of her cheek to keep from smiling. He sweeps the mop in big swirling circles, his face contorted with the painstaking care he takes, and she goes back to sit on the window sill as he works. She plays games on her phone and she plays music, first with headphones and then out loud, to see what he'll do. *He Continue continues* to not pay attention, apparently. ~~Start~~ *She starts* tapping his foot, later – she has to bite her cheek harder at that. *?huh* She sits on the sill and ignores the buzz of messages on her phone and watches the floor on its steady progression from dull to shine, until, finally: "Hey."

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The janitor – Ende – is looking at her. He holds up a ring of keys, tilting his head towards the doors: time to lock up. The floor is spotless and gleaming, and for a second she's hesitant to put her sneakers down, but then she figures that if he minded he wouldn't have let her stay. She scoots down from the sill and stuffs her phone back in her pocket.

"Thanks for letting me stay," she says, and he nods. There's a softness around his mouth, ~~she thinks~~, that she didn't see before. It reminds her of her mother's smile, even though his mouth is still unsmiling. "I know a diner around here that serves burgers half off after eight. Come with me." (*Who is talking?*)

She's already out of the cafeteria, heading to the front doors. Behind her(,) Ende is frowning again as he closes the doors and twists the keys in them. (*new paragraph*) "You should go home," he says, but follows. He walks almost like he's marching, each step measured and solid. She finds it a familiar comfort.

"Curfew's not 'til later," she says easily. Not a lie. Her phone buzzes away in her pocket. "We'll have to walk to the diner,(,) ~~not~~ *Not* supposed to get in cars with strangers."

So they walk to the diner. It's ten thirty and the place is mostly empty. The hostess has painted lips and they twist down at the sight of them; Elliot's not surprised. They must look funny: she's pretty small as it is, but next to Ende's hulking mass ~~she must look~~ <sup>SHE</sup> miniscule. He has to hunch to get through the doorway. Under the hostess's scrutinizing glare, she thinks he might be twiddling his thumbs. *Huh?*

She orders a soda and a burger – half price, like she said – and he doesn't. He gets a milkshake, chocolate. Surprise number two, thinks Elliot. "I thought you'd get a burger," she

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tells him, “or a steak.” When they get their food she tucks into her burger right away; he wraps both hands around the glass and takes small sips.

“Do you have a speech problem?” she asks. He looks up from his milkshake, one brow raised, but doesn’t say anything. Shakes his head.

“You just don’t like to talk.”

He nods, and she nods back, considering.

“That’s cool. Do you mind that I talk?”

Head shake.

“Good.”

So she talks. She talks and chats and fills the silence up, layers upon layers of words, until the space between them is full of her voice. She’s a master of small talk. Every now and then he grunts or hums in acknowledgment, or asks one word questions. The military never leaves his shoulders, but some of the rigidity does. The ends of his hair get(s) in(to) the milkshake. It makes her smile.

At length she asks, “What branch were you?” He stares, and she says, “My mom’s in the military,(.) *You* ~~you~~ look like her,” by way of explanation. Not a lie, not really – well, half of one. Half-truths are the best lies, she’s found. He does look like her, the way he holds himself so soldier-like, the way he holds his milkshake so mom-like. Careful, with both hands around the glass. The lie is in the present tense.

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“Marines,” he says, and she says *(asks)*, “Why’d you leave?” *Every time there’s a new speaker, begin a new paragraph.*

His mouth goes tight around the corners and his entire expression goes dark with the motion; it’s amazing, she thinks, how such a tiny detail can make such a huge difference in the composition of his face. She only realizes a few seconds later when he says “Hair,” that it’s because he’s trying not to laugh, and it takes her a few seconds more of staring at his very non-reg hair to realize he’s making a joke. She laughs so hard she snorts soda up her nose.

“Hey,” she says, still snuffling into the paper napkin he handed her, “do you work tomorrow(,) too?” He nods. “Can I come by again?” *New line*

He frowns. “Parents,” he says.

“They won’t mind,” Another half-truth. She really doesn’t think her mom would have minded. Her phone’s on the table, and when it buzzes it skitters an inch or two. Ende eyes it.

“Parents?” A question this time.

“No.” Not a lie, because it’s not her parents, plural, it’s her dad, singular. Ende’s eyebrows sink on his face. He doesn’t believe her.

“Should answer it.”

“It’s fine.”

“Probably worried.”

“He’s not.” The phone buzzes just as she realizes that she gave away too much. She stands abruptly. “I should go.”

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She flicks her hood up, pushes the door open-

"Hey."

She turns. *New paragraph.* He's watching her, frowning, still sitting at the table. His heavy brow is lowered, the tips of his wild hair still coated in chocolate, his hands still wrapped around the glass. They look better like that, she thinks. They're better as milkshake glass hands than soldier hands. *New paragraph.* Ende says, "Be careful," gruff and sincere, and Elliot thinks of her mother, thinks skritchskritchskritch.

"Yeah," she says. "Sure. See you later, alligator."

*I'm fascinated with these characters. I can only guess that both are outcasts. The girl is a social outcast. The janitor is an outcast because of wartime injuries and resulting disabilities. We'll see.*

*This has great potential.*

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**Summary:** *Elliot breaks into the middle school mostly because she can. It's not as abandoned as she thought.*

She breaks into the middle school because it looks abandoned, and because it's easy, and because it's there. It's nine PM on a Tuesday, and she has nothing better to do anyway.

She climbs into the cafeteria through the open window – she doesn't even know if it counts as breaking in when the thing's unlocked – and listens to the screech of the window echo around the room and come back at her. Her phone buzzes in her pocket, too loud in the quiet. She ignores it. Stepping further into the dark, she surveys the room. The watery moonlight throws shadows across the floor, and it seems smaller than she remembers. A second later, the lights flicker to life, but she's nowhere near the switch. It's not easy to surprise her, but she's got to say, she wasn't expecting the janitor.

He's a monolith of a man, a big, solid rectangle, all muscle. Older, early thirties at least. He's wearing a janitor uniform and he's got a mop in his hand but there's military in the set of his spine, in the hard, regimented lines of him, in the way his eyes track the room. He's got scars, some subtle, some not so subtle. There's a definite gravity to him, his mass has a pull that draws all her attention, and she can't help but stare. But maybe that's just his hair. It's a wild thing, dark and everywhere and anything but the regulation crew cut she's familiar with, held back from his face with a band. It looks like it's trying to eat his face and his head and his body and sort of everything. He's staring back at her, a crinkle in his heavy brow.

— I think this is either  
Young adult or adult,  
not Middle grade.  
Probably YA.

Commented [s1]: Good description (sound, sight, etc.)

~~Commented [s2]: ?~~

OK

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"Hi." She ~~says~~ <sup>walks</sup> up to him and offers her hand, because if she doesn't have to be on this guy's bad side she doesn't want to be. "I'm Elliot."

Commented [s3]: How old is she? The language isn't that of a middle school age child.

He frowns, but at least he doesn't say, "That's a boy's name" which wins him points in her book. He has soldier's hands, scarred and rough and dwarfing her own in sheer size, but he takes surprising care in folding their hands together and shaking, once. It's very warm. She says, "What's your name?"

He doesn't answer for a moment, just keeps frowning with both hands back on the mop, and keeps on frowning until she thinks he's going to kick her out. But then: "Ende."

His voice is gruff, but it's not as gruff as she expected. She likes it immediately; it sounds the way her mom's hand felt when she skritchd it through her short hair. "See you later, alligator," she would say, and skritchskritchskritch.

"Is that your last name?"

He nods once.

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His frown cuts a little deeper, and she says quickly, "I won't bother you. Just a little while, and then I'll go."

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Commented [s4]: Why?

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“Good.”

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*—really talking to her mother*

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Commented [s5]: No need to use so many semi-colons.

"Hey," she says, still snuffling into the paper napkin he handed her, "do you work tomorrow too?" He nods. "Can I come by again?"

He frowns. "Parents," he says.

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“Yeah,” she says. “Sure. See you later, alligator.”

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The story is good; very-well written, I don't at all think it's Middle Grade, Elliot's thoughts are those of a seventeen-year old at least, if you're trying to stick to someone on the younger side. But I'd say 22 at least. I'd like to read the rest of the story. In my opinion, change your audience and you're all set.