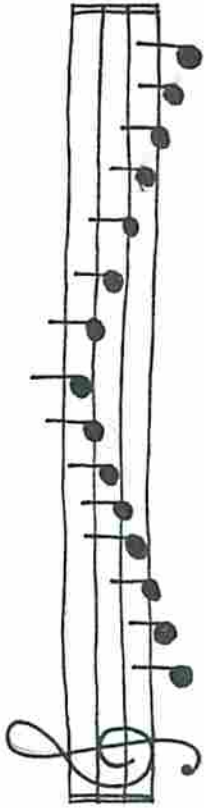




More than anything, Lucy loved to play the saxophone.

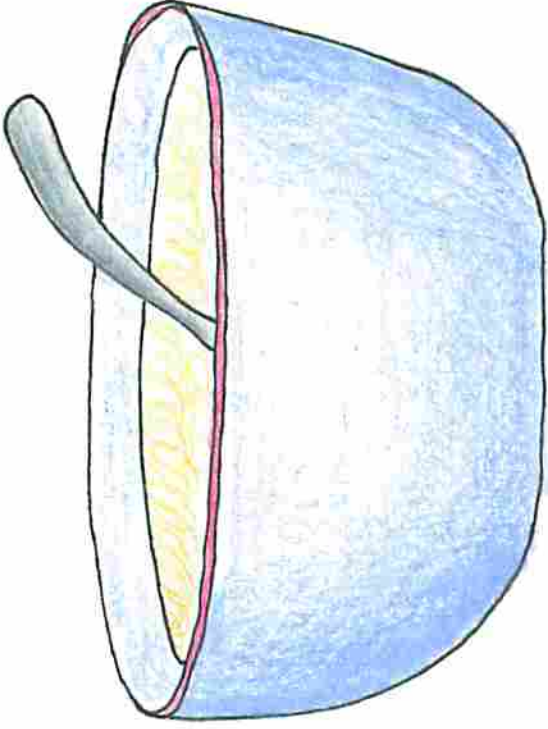


She practiced her scales in the shower every morning before she went to school; she played in the yard at recess and wowed all her friends with the quickness of her fingers and the way she said “sax,” instead of “saxophone.” She composed a procrastination song while she was supposed to be working on her homework, and perfected her B flats very quietly under her covers at night after her parents had tucked her in. Lucy cleaned her instrument every day, and sometimes, seeing her small face stare back at her from the shiny body of her saxophone, she felt as if her saxophone knew how she was feeling even better than she did herself.



Doo
Doo Doo
Doo Doo Doo
Doo Doo Doo
Doo Doo Doo
Doo Doo Doo
Doo Doo Doo
Doo Doo Doo

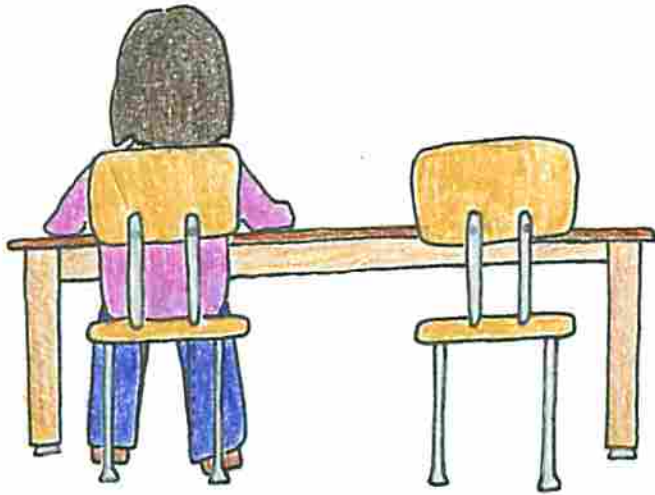
went Lucy's saxophone. It was Monday morning, and in keeping with her daily routine, Lucy was practicing her scales in the shower. Up up she went until she couldn't go any higher, and then back on down down down.



"Lucy!" called her mother from hallway, "Come on and hurry up! You're gonna be late for school!"

"Just a second!" Lucy answered, finishing up one final scale and then turning off the water. Stepping out of the shower, she grabbed a towel and dried off her saxophone first. Freshly polished, the golden surface was even shinier than usual and she caught a glimpse of her smiling face as she headed towards the breakfast table. Today was going to be a good day; she could feel it.

Lucy noticed as soon as she walked through the door to her classroom that the chair next to hers, usually empty, was occupied. Sitting in it was a girl Lucy didn't recognize. As Lucy made her way to her seat, her teacher, Ms. Greenspan, stood up from her desk in the corner and cleared her throat.



“Good morning, everyone,” Ms. Greenspan chimed cheerily. “Today, we welcome a new student. Everyone, this is Maria.” Ms. Greenspan motioned towards the girl sitting next to Lucy. “Maria has come to us all the way from Bolivia. Does anyone know where Bolivia is?”

A couple of hands raised hesitantly.

“Yes? Kayla?”

“Umm... New York?”

“No, but good try. Felix?”

“South America?”

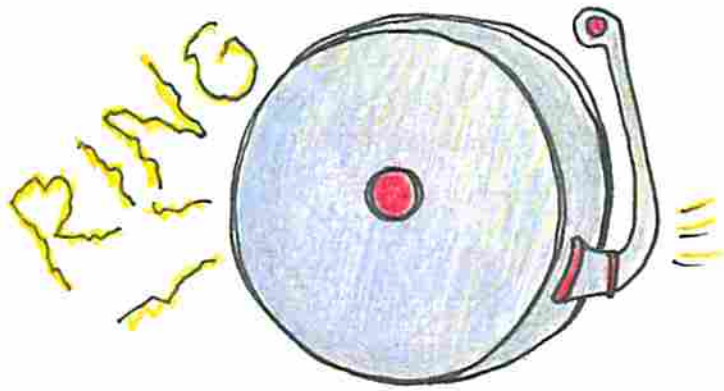
“Yes! Very good.”



"I expect all of you to make her feel welcome." Saying this, Ms. Greenspan's eyes rested an extra long time on Tommy who had a history of making people feel unwelcome. "Everyone, say hello to Maria."

"Hello, Maria," said the class.

"Good. Now let's begin."



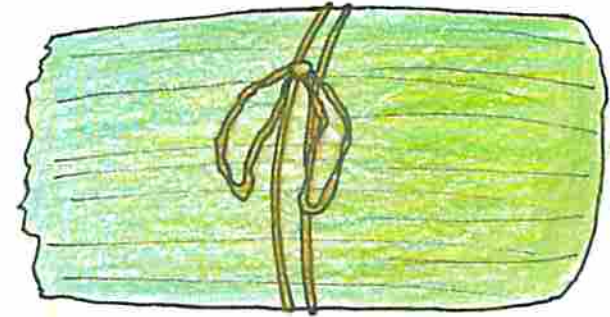
Lucy was more than ready for recess when the bell rang. Saxophone in hand, she rushed out to the play yard. The rest of her class was already there, along with Maria. But while everyone else in her class was happily playing in the yard, Maria sat on her own on the grass, eating her lunch. Lucy approached her slowly. She felt sorry for Maria. She understood it was hard to be new.

Lucy sat down next to Maria and gave her a big smile.

Maria smiled back.

"Hi," said Lucy.

"Hi," said Maria.



Lucy looked over at what Maria was eating. It was a small stack of little green bundles that looked sort of like burritos, only the outsides weren't made of tortillas, they were wrapped in leaves. "What do you have for lunch?" Lucy asked Maria.

"These? These are called humitas," replied Maria with a smile. "They're from Bolivia. Do you want to try one?"

Lucy was about to nod, but just then, a ball bounced over and rolled to a stop in between her and Maria. Following close behind was Tommy.

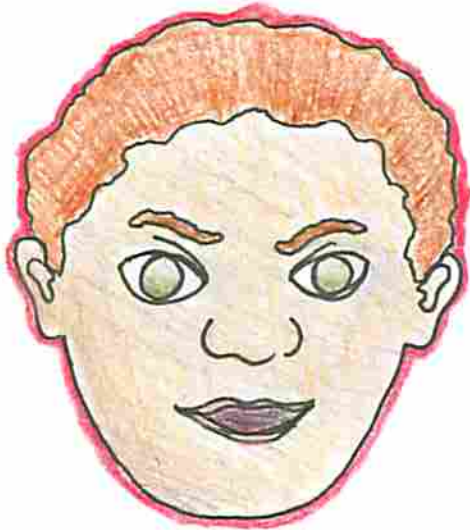
“Ewww!!! What’s that?!?” he yelled rudely, pointing at Maria’s *humitas*.

Kayla, Felix and Julian ran over to see what all the fuss was about.

“Gross,” screamed Kayla.

“What ARE they?” yelled Felix.

“Why are they green?” said Julian, cruelly wrinkling his nose.



They all turned towards Lucy, waiting to hear what she would say.

“Well? What do you think, Lucy?” asked Tommy.

“Isn’t Maria’s food gross?”



“Umm...” Lucy didn’t know what to say. Her classmates looked at her expectantly.

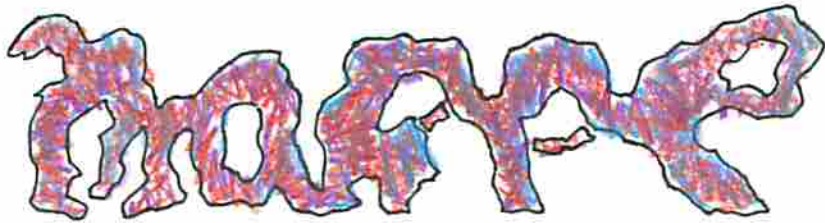
“Don’t tell me you’d eat food like that,” said Tommy with disgust.

“Umm,” Lucy said again. The judgment in her classmates’ faces was too much to bear. “No way,” she said, “never.” She looked at Maria who was staring sadly at her *humitas*. “Gross.”

Tommy, Kayla, Felix and Julian laughed. “Come on, let’s go play some more,” said Tommy, running off with the ball. Kayla, Felix and Julian followed him. So did Lucy. It made her feel bad to see how sad she had made Maria.

By the time Lucy had gotten home from school though, she was feeling much better. She hadn't really been that mean, she told herself, and she had had to say those things anyway; Tommy had made her.

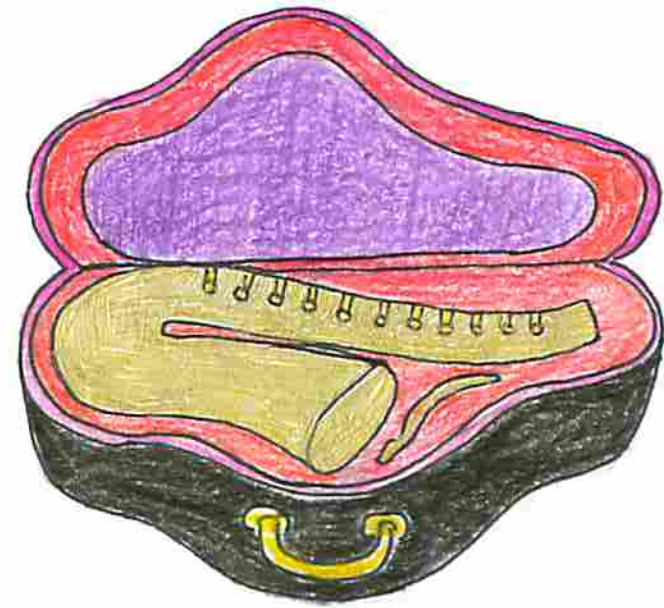
She grabbed her saxophone... set her fingers... and blew.



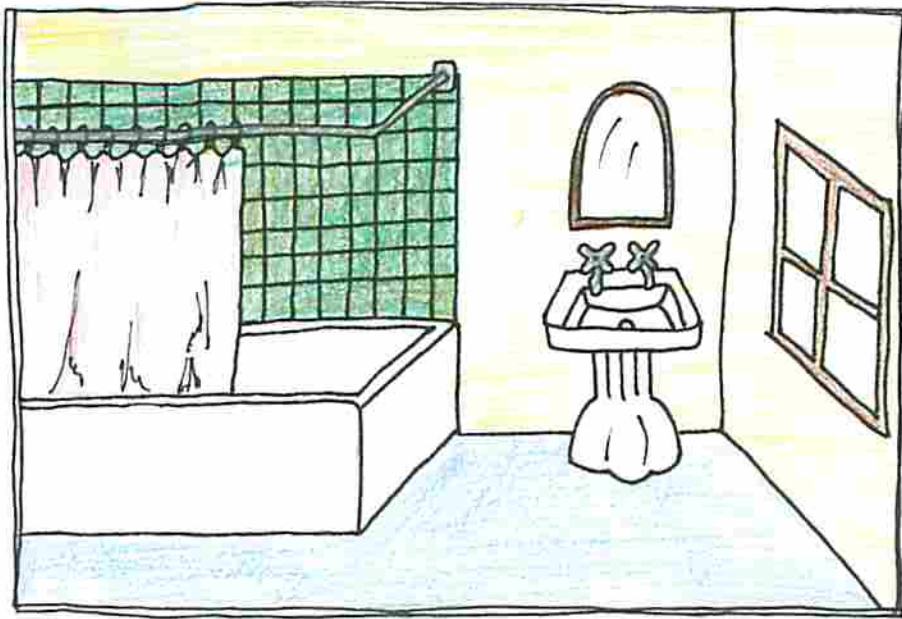
went the saxophone. Lucy was shocked. Something must be wrong with my fingering, she thought, and so she readjusted her fingers so she was sure they were all on the right keys. She blew again.



went the saxophone. Uh oh, thought Lucy, what's going on? She pulled the saxophone away from her and examined the body all over. Everything looked perfect. So then what was wrong?



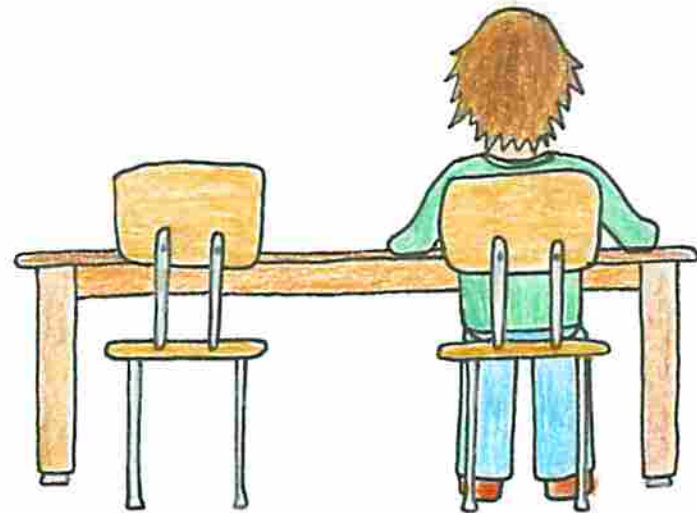
She caught her reflection in the side of the instrument. Her face looked like Maria's had after Lucy had said those mean things to her. Lucy tried to reassure herself that it wasn't her fault that she had insulted Maria, but she was having a hard time believing it. Sadly, she put her saxophone back in it's case.



Lucy tried playing her saxophone a couple more times that week, but each time she did, she could only think about how mean she had been to Maria, and her saxophone ended up sounding terrible. Things didn't improve at school either. Tommy and the rest of her classmates kept teasing Maria. One day about her accent, another about her clothes, still another about how she wore her hair, and although Lucy wanted to stand up for her, every time she ended up joining in with Tommy and the rest of the group. Even more than wanting to be nice to Maria, Lucy didn't want to become the victim of her classmates' cruel teasing.

The week passed until all of a sudden it was Friday. Lucy took her shower saxophone-less and was early to school. She still brought the instrument in its case everyday, although by this point it was more out of habit than anything else. When she got to the classroom, she went to sit in her seat. Ms. Greenspan was just leaving.

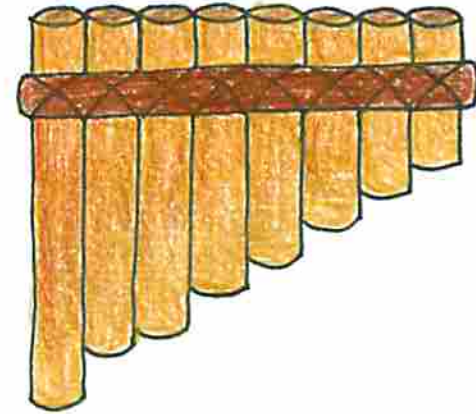
"I just have to check something with the office," she told Lucy, "I'll be back soon."





Lucy was the only person there. Then Maria walked into the classroom. She quietly put her coat up at the back of the room and came to sit in her seat next to Lucy. After a few minutes she picked up her bag off the floor and took something out of the front pocket. Lucy was too embarrassed after teasing Maria to look at what she was doing, so she was shocked when she heard music coming from Maria's side of the table. It sounded like a flute, and Lucy couldn't contain her curiosity. She turned around.

Maria was holding a flat bundle of wooden tubes to her lips and blowing into them. The sound that emerged was beautiful. Lucy was very impressed. Then Tommy walked in.



"What's that?" he mocked, pointing at the instrument.

"These are panpipes," replied Maria quietly.

"Well they sound stupid," said Tommy. "Don't they sound stupid, Lucy?"

Lucy was silent. She thought they sounded beautiful, but she wasn't sure if she wanted to say so. Would Tommy start teasing her when she was playing saxophone if she didn't agree? But if Tommy did tease her when she played her saxophone, she would want someone to stand up for her, she realized. Maria probably wanted the same thing.

“No,” said Lucy.

“What?” said Tommy. He was shocked.

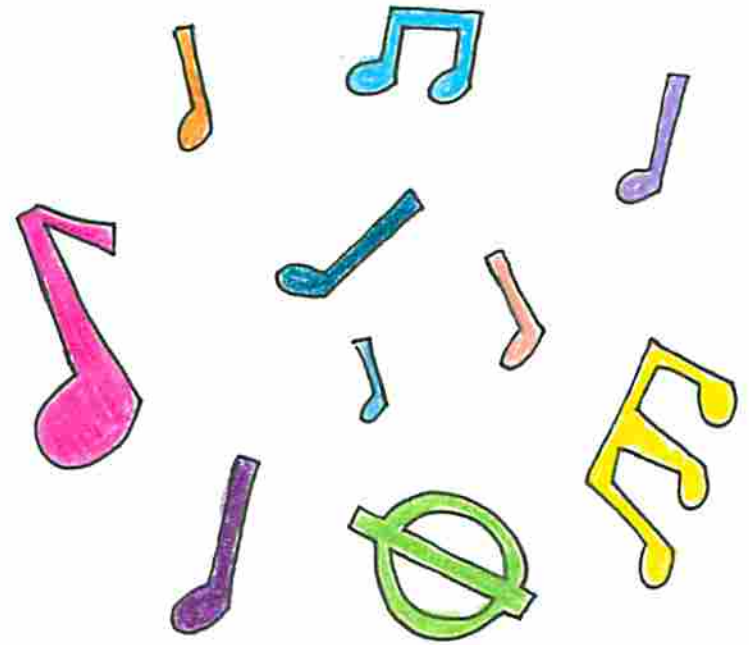
“I said No,” repeated Lucy, “I don’t think Maria’s pan pipes sound stupid. They sound beautiful.”



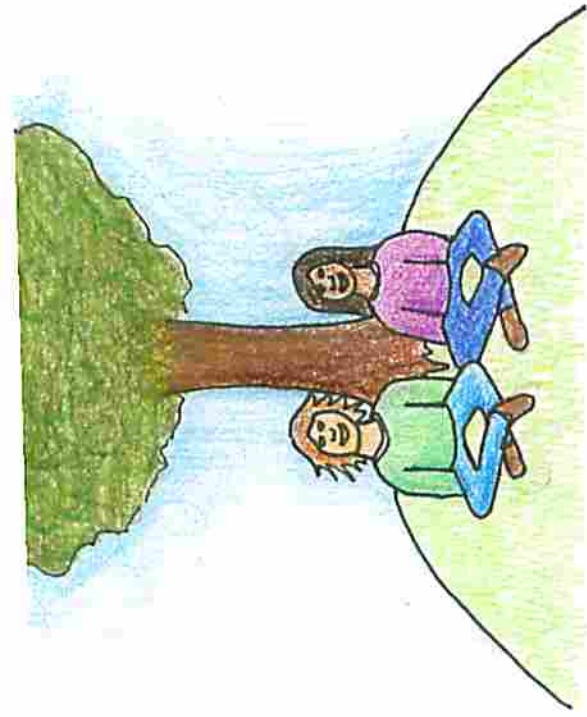
Tommy was speechless. Lucy took advantage of his silence to take out her saxophone.

“Want to play?” she asked Maria.

Maria just smiled and nodded.



Lucy and Maria played all the songs they could think of together, and made up some of their own as well. All of a sudden, Lucy could play the saxophone again, and it sounded even better than before with Maria’s pan pipes. When the rest of the class arrived, they were so impressed with Maria and Lucy’s playing that they forgot altogether to tease anyone and joined in. Tommy was mad for a while, but after everyone else started singing, he couldn’t help but join in too. By the time Ms. Greenspan had returned from the office, the class was in an all-out jam session.



That recess at lunch, Lucy went over to the grass to sit with Maria. She had *humitas* again.

“Hey, Maria,” said Lucy. “I just wanted to say I’m sorry for how mean I’ve been this week.”

“It’s okay,” said Maria.

“And I think you’re really good at the pan pipes,” said Lucy.

“Thanks. You’re pretty good on the saxophone.”

The two girls smiled at each other.

“Lucy?”

“Yeah?”

“Do you want some *humitas*?” asked Maria.

Lucy laughed. “Of course I do!”

The End