Bullies

The text message said that Lucy Josephs was a failure. It said she was ugly, had no style and the world hated her. At least that was what it said to her. It said that and a whole lot more that she was struggling to understand. The actual text of the note said that she better not show up at the party tonight, because it was going to be bad enough already! Lucy, who had started receiving these messages a few weeks ago, tapped the mobile screen to make the message disappear from view. She only wished it was as easy to tap her heart and erase the trace the message had left there. 'Was that another one of those messages?' her mom asked, who was driving the car. She confirmed her mother's suspicion was founded as she answered dejectedly, 'I'm sorry to say it was.' 'Haven't you reported it yet?' asked Jill, her older sister who was sitting in the passenger seat. 'Yes,' she replied, lying through her teeth. That she should not let the messages get to her and that the sender was only jealous were her mom's arguments, in an effort to comfort her daughter. Her mom suddenly felt guilty, for she had been the one to buy the phone for her just a couple of months ago. She then admitted her regret about the phone was still bugging her out loud as she sighed, 'I never should have given you that phone Lucy.' 'No, it's fine. I love it,' she said knowing that affording the phone had been no small thing for her mother. It had been nothing but trouble though. She did not know who it was that was sending her the messages, and she did not know how they had got her number, but whoever it was, he or she had slowly taken over her life. She was getting several texts a day now, all of which were abusive and hurtful. She wondered what the person who was messaging her might be thinking or trying to achieve with all of their hateful messages. As the car pulled up outside the school, which looked like a large shadow in the darkness of a November evening, she felt a shiver run down her spine. Hastened by Jill, who did not want to be late to her own concert, she hesitantly stepped out of the car and walked toward the school. It was Jill who in her final year of high school had become involved in helping organize this year's school talent show, and she took her position very seriously. She hurried behind Jill, pulling on the worn, oversized coat that had originally belonged to Jill, in order to keep her dry as the raindrops fell all around them. As the sisters entered the hall where the show was to take place, Jill filled with excitement while she regretted that she had promised her mother she would participate in the show. 'To waste your talent would be a real shame, for you have such a beautiful voice,' her mother had argued two months back, when the concert was first announced. She had been considering it, for she did love to sing. That very night, the first text message had come through. 'How does it feel to be tall and lanky like a giraffe?' it had asked, taking her by surprise. One of the popular girls, she had always known she wasn't, but before the messages began, she had always been quite proud of being a little different. But text by text, her self-confidence had deflated and, in the end, it had taken some doing to get her to agree to perform in the show. Now, however, she had no choice but to make her way towards the stage where Jill was beckoning encouragingly to her. She was the first performer. Announced by her sister to the audience, she was all nerves as she walked out onto the middle of the stage, where there was nothing but a microphone and her. She heard the audience applaud and could feel a sense of anticipation emanate from the other side of the heavy curtain. As the curtains began to part, she cast a worried look at Jill in the wings, who assured her with a positive thumbs up. She thought to herself that she could not go through with this and that she, unlike her older sister, was not confident enough to put herself before the judging audience. The crowd looked up at her and she was ready to run when the first notes of the music sounded out and a sudden calm settled over her. She closed her eyes and shut everything out, including the audience, the nerves that threatened to take over, the text messages, and the way they made her feel. It was just her and the music, and it was a love story that had been going on her whole life. She began to sing, and all the pain and confusion that the messages had been causing inside her just flowed out. The words were not important, for it was the feeling behind them that she latched onto. She was in the heart of the song with the rest of the world slipping away. When the song finished and the last note died away, she opened her eyes. To see the whole audience on their feet and the hall filled with cheers and applause was not what she had expected. She allowed herself to enjoy the sense of achievement and belonging that she had not felt in a very long time. Then she saw her mother, who was cheering the loudest of all in the crowd, and Jill, who was beaming at her with pride from the wings. She knew she owed them big time for reminding her what she was capable of and who she really was. The next time her phone bleeped she would tap the message straight into oblivion where it belonged.