*Alex – Tuning In*

*997 words*

“Alex, pay attention,” my math teacher says as I daydream about recess. The rubbery smell of the playground swings calls me.

I’m trying to focus on my math problems when I hear a voice talking. It sounds like my friend Joe is saying something about division. I look at Joe and see his lips aren’t moving, but I still hear him talking. *What the heck?*

I hear more voices that sound like other classmates, but their lips aren’t moving either. *What is happening? Am I losing my mind?* As I continue to listen, I grasp I must be hearing their thoughts. I try to ignore them.

I go back to my math problems, forty-five divided by five, and a voice pops in my mind. *Nine*. I look around. No one said anything out loud. I double check the problem and conclude nine is the correct answer. I move on to the next problem, six times twelve, and hear another voice. *Seventy-two*. I double check, it’s correct. I look around the room to see if anyone else is hearing any of this. Everyone seems completely unaware of what’s happening. But we all seem to be working on the same math problems. *Okay. This is starting to get really weird.*

I listen more. It sounds like someone thinking about the notes they are taking in another class. It actually sounded like the school bully, Victor. *Ugh! Not the thoughts I want to listen to.*

The bell rings before I can finish my math problems.

“Recess!” My friend, Joe, yells as he runs past me. I sprint outside to the swing that looks like a flying saucer. I’m the first one there. I start pumping my legs and get so high I feel as if I am between the right side up and upside down. It was only for a split second and then I was right side up again. I realize I haven’t heard anyone’s thoughts in my head I wonder what happened to the voices. The bell rings for lunch.

In the cafeteria, I can smell spaghetti, and my stomach growls. I’m starving.

While I eat, I hear kids thinking about weekend plans, boring. I hear teachers’ sentiments about TV shows, dull.

I pick up the school prankster’s thoughts. I adjust in my seat and listen. Tommy is planning a prank, and it sounds like a good one too, involving a water balloon on the bus home. I’m vested in these shenanigans and want to watch. I concentrate harder, and I find out the target is me!

*Crap!* I worry for a moment, but I have the upper hand here as I know what’s about to happen. *He picked the wrong kid to mess with!* *I’ll be ready.*

When it’s time to get on the bus, I contemplate how best to avoid the water balloon. I listen to confirm the prank is still on. Tommy’s plan is to drop a water balloon on my head as I step onto the bus. I can see kids looking at me from the windows – they must be in on it. The bus driver isn’t in his seat, or they wouldn’t be bold enough for a prank like this.

I smirk and take a deep breath. I grab the cool metal handrail and move like I’m going to take a step up. I hear a whoosh and quickly catch the water rubber balloon with my right hand. It jiggles and I almost drop it from the water shifting inside. I run up the steps and nail Tommy square in the face with it. A satisfying amount of water explodes and soaks his head and clothes. Cold and shock are words to describe the look on his face. A good amount even gets his friend, Victor, in the seat with him. Tommy’s buddies erupt in laughter, and he joins in the laughter as well.

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The next morning was blissfully quiet on the bus ride to school. I enjoy having my own thoughts to myself, when I hear my least favorite kid, Victor, talking to his friends. *What is he up to now?*

I register they are actually talking out loud. Victor is crying. From the conversation, I gather he’s upset because an important school assignment is missing. He’s already doing bad in class and his dad said he will ground him if he doesn’t improve.

“It was in my backpack,” Victor cries. “My dad is going to kill me.”

I hear someone laughing. I look around to see who would be so bold and cruel. No one is laughing out loud. It sounds like Joe’s laughter. I look at Joe and he’s looking at Victor with a smirk on his face. He really doesn’t like Victor and has told me numerous times he plans to get back at him for all the years of bullying.

Did Joe take Victor’s assignment? As Joe and I walked to class, I wondered if my friend would really stoop so low.

I stop and face Joe. “Did you take Victor’s assignment?”

“How did you know?” He whispers so no one else would hear.

“Come on dude, just give it back. What if a teacher catches you with it?” I glare at him. “You are not a bully, Joe. This isn’t right.”

“Fine,” Joe says and gives me the assignment. He looks disappointed, but hands it over anyway.

I find Victor and hand him his assignment and say it must have fallen out of his bag on the bus. Victor sniffles and thanks me.

As I walk back toward Joe, I hear his thoughts. He’s looking at me with a puzzled look on his face. *How did Alex know?* He wonders.

I want to tell my friend I can read minds, but that will have to be another day. For now, I need to keep it a secret. Besides, we have recess coming up soon and I am determined to be the first one on the swing!