

All this because

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+2646

if you were to be an animal, which animal would you be?

This is what Miss Samira asked us today.

In class, everyone raised his hand – everyone but me.

Alex?

A dolphin, I answered.

Why so, dear?

Dolphins can decide to stop breathing. That's why.

+140

[Sunday afternoon. In the luxurious kitchen of the Pandolfino couple. Festive music, kept low volume. Everywhere you look decorations and sweets remind you of babies. Everything is rainbow coloured.

Not exactly everything.

The cake, on the large table in the middle, was covered with white cream. Right in front of it, then, was the Pandolfino couple, resplendent in colourful clothing and youthful smiles, as if they were about to get married for the second time.

Norma Pandolfino's belly is bloated.

Bloated with Alex.

And, around the couple: the guests, even they are dressed for this joyous occasion, full of cheer, waiting for the couple to cu-

And the cake was cut.

And the horror on the couple's face.

And the breath of collective confusion, of the others.

And the sliced piece of cake was slammed down on the table].

Norma: No, no, no ...

[The filling of the piece of cake was not rainbow.]

+273

While giving birth, Norma Pandolfino could not stop asking herself why she hadn't had an abortion.

Shout.

Why?

She had ended up alone.

Shout.

Why?

Not exactly alone.

Shout – a different one.

Why?

Because the shout was mine: Alex Pandolfino.

From now on, only I will narrate.

+2685

Aunt Taylor told me, they try to strangle your voice from the womb. But since you managed to get out, don't let them.

I think I understood.

+1372

Pink and blue! That's how I wanted the walls of my room. And the furniture. And the curtains. And the toys. Everything all pink and blue. Not red, or orange, or yellow - pink and blue, pink and blue!

They are not for you, my mum told me. You have all the colors and you want those two!?

And I cried.

I cried until I couldn't talk anymore.

Sorry, aunty.

+1421

I still didn't want to play with cars. Only with dolls.

So my mum got angry. Very angry. She

picked up all of my dolls and threw them away. Even the black one that I loved so much.

And I cried again.

Even if I had promised aunty Taylor that I was not.

+1422

I waited until my mum fell asleep and I went to get the black doll from the bin.

I hid it.

No, I won't tell even you where.

+2671

Me: Mum, I need to go to the toilet.

Mum: It's always at the supermarket that you need to go!

Might she be noticing?

Mum: Go, go. Once you're done, come straight back here, ok?

Me: Okay.

I know the way by heart.

Not to the toilets.

No.

To the last aisle on the right.

I go in and stop exactly in front of them: the clothes shelves underneath the one of the boys.

And my eyes scrutinise them. They scrutinise the pictures attached to them.

And I feel like, I don't know how.

Like something strange happening inside me.

Something that makes me blush, makes me sweat, makes me nauseous - but I seem to enjoy it too.

I feel like this for quite some time, there, until I realise that it's time. Before I go out, I make sure that no one is looking at me, I take off one of the pictures — the one with the red boxer — and I hide it in my pocket.

Like this I discovered that I am not like my mum.

I'm different.

+2356

Aunty Taylor: [To me] Hiding and lying are the best friends of people like us.

+2672

At the Marine Park.

Sadness. Like. So much so that my mum paid for me to be able to see a dolphin up close.

The trainer: Touch her, my dear. Don't be afraid! She's not going to bite you ... her name is Finnley.

I touched her. I squatted next to her. My face next to hers. When my mouth met her ear, I whispered my secrets to her.

I know, she told me, and I love you the way you are.

And she hugged me.

And we cried together — in joy.

+1826

It's my birthday again and nothing is pink. Or blue. Now I'm used to it. I don't cry anymore.

What's important is that you're here, Andrea.

I couldn't stop looking at you.

And when we gathered to play and I told you that I wanted to play the mother's role and you that of the father's, only you didn't make a face and laugh at me.

Only you didn't insult me.

And when everyone left and only you stayed and not even my mum was there with us, I told you in your ear, I like you, Andrea, and you, after checking that my mum was not in the room, even if you knew she wasn't in the room - like, out of habit — you told me, I like you too, Alex.

And I kissed you on your beautiful lips. And you let me. Kissed me back.

And I felt the enormous butterflies in my stomach lift me up like a balloon.

And I felt myself.

And then you pushed me away from

you and got confused, until

Mum: Andrea, your mum is here to pick you up. And you ... [To me] Billie's father called me and told me you played the roles of mother and father!

Me: What's wrong with that?

Mum: You don't know? You cannot play that game. Not with Andrea and -

Me: Why?

Mum: Because it's not normal, okay!?

And stop speaking back!

But that day I felt like speaking back and I kept speaking back and when you left, my mum hit me and told me, no more parties and you won't be going to Auntie Taylor anymore because she's a snake who wants to make you like her. And it didn't matter. It didn't even matter whether I cried or not. Or whether that which I was doing was normal or not ... now that I couldn't stop thinking about you.

After that day, nobody played with me anymore.

Nobody but you.

+2921

Grandma Sunny: [To me] Oh you're growing so fast! [With a laugh] When are we going to meet your girlfriend, hmm?

And everyone continues to stare.

Nobody says anything.

+2455

Today at school I found a word carved on the surface of the table. The surface of the table is mine.

A word written big in capital letters with a black marker. A permanent one.

I had never seen this word nor heard about it before.

Miss Samira asked us who had done this, but nobody spoke up. Then she told us that she should never say this word. Never.

Because it's vulgar.

Because it's dirty.

Like the table she changed for me, and it wasn't mine anymore.

+2456

Billie, Charlie, and the others are always calling me that word that we're forbidden to say.

I think it was one of them who wrote it on the table.

+2457

Today they beat me up.

Billie: My father said that your mother wanted to kill you when you were in her belly!

Charlie: [Laughing, he spits on my face] It would have been better had she done this!

Billie: You should just leave the school and the world! Eughh!

My mum had to come from work and after she spoke to the Head, she told me to go home. But when we entered the car, she didn't start it immediately. Instead, she started to cry and hit the steering.

Mum: I brought you up well. Gave you a normal upbringing ...

Me: What happened mum?

Mum: What happened? It's you! That's what has happened!

I think what Billie's father said about us is true.

+2674

You think if I stop looking at the pictures of the supermarket before I go to sleep, I'd become like the others?

I tried, but it was all for nothing.

+2458

Auntie Taylor knows that my mum isn't letting me go to hers. So she's coming to ours. Even if she knows that my mum doesn't want her to.

Auntie Taylor: They're doing this to you because you're different from them. And

since you're different from them, you're more interesting than them too.

Mum: Could we change topics?

Aunty Taylor: No amount of punching will take away this quality from you. That's why they fear you. People like you and me have been given a gift, not a punishment. Keep this in mind. And when they tell you –

Then she mentioned that word and my mum started shouting and aunty started shouting even more than her and mum kicked her out of the house and told her not to come at ours anymore.

But I had managed to understand something.

Aunty said that I should wear that word as a badge of honour.

+2459

Lately I've been really looking forward to leaving from school. Not because they are bullying me, but because before I go home I am meeting you. There, next to the boys' school pool. At that time there's no one there. Nobody but you. I always find you there, before me, waiting for me beautifully with that smile of yours.

But we pay attention. We don't stay out too long, lest our mothers realise.

Today you kissed me, and bit me and made my broken lip bleed.

I told you, I want you to be my boyfriend and you laughed. Then I told you, I think I'm falling in love with you and you laughed again and your beautiful face lit up and I realised that it was true.

+2007

It's PE lesson. Waterpolo.

It's only me who is left to be chosen for the game.

Skyler: Alex is with you.

Kit: No, he's with you.

Skyler: Ok fine, whatever.

I despise sports.

Instead, I think about the dolphin who once talked to me and I wish for him to come hug me again.

+2100

The Religion teacher says that whoever is old and is like me and like you and like Aunt Taylor is committing a mortal sin, meaning that when he dies he does not go to heaven but goes to burn forever in hell.

So it is written in the Brown Book.

But the teacher also told us that the world was made by God and in the next lesson the Physics teacher told us, no, the world started with the Big Bang.

And when I asked her about the sin, the Physics Miss told me, in Physics there is no sin, dear.

So now I am believing in Physics.

+2460

They killed around 12. They shot them. I forgot where.

According to Charlie, it's because they were like me and you.

+2468

I kept going to Aunty Taylor's house, without mum knowing.

Today she gave me a book. It's called Rome and Juliet.

She told me that it's a version for children, like me.

She also told me that for a long time, many books would be censored, meaning that nobody could read them. Even films and music and other arts.

Because of us.

But not anymore.

She told me that she lived during a time when they would burn everything, even people like us.

I gave the book to you.

I told you that when I grow up I want

to be like Shakespeare. And you told me that you want to be like Messi.

You also told me that apart from kissing each other on the lips, adults who love each other, do other things to each other. Touching each other's private bodies and kissing them and putting them in each other's private bodies and in each other's mouths too and much more than that. Eww, I told you, and you laughed, and told me, no, they have a lot of fun doing that, you know.

And you told me that you saw the adults do this on uncle's laptop. In different films to those which we usually watch. Films that are supposed to be watched only by adults.

And you let me see your private body and I touched it and it grew and we laughed and I put it in my mouth until it couldn't grow any more and something watery came out of it and I drank it and I grimaced because it tasted funny but you told me that you enjoyed it a lot and I enjoyed it because I saw that you had fun.

Then I let you do the same to me.

Not exactly the same.

And you told me that that's how we came into the world, because that's how a man and a woman have children.

+1571

I took Auntie Taylor's lipstick. Half pink half blue. So so beautiful.

I hid it in my room, in the place that only I know about.

When mum is asleep, I put it on my lips.

And my face feels beautiful. Very pretty.

And I feel happy, seeing it in the mirror.

I wish I also had clothes of the same colours!

Then I feel like this. I don't know how.

So I run to wash my face in the sink and scrub and scrub and scrub in it and wash and wash the sink until there is no pink or

blue left anywhere.

Mum can't know.

+2456

Aunty Taylor: Do you remember I once told you that hiding and lying are our best friends?

Me: [Bobbing my head up and down, twice].

Aunty Taylor: Add shame and guilt to them.

+2470

Mum went shopping at the supermarket. She went alone, because I told her I had a headache.

It wasn't true.

As soon as she closed the front door, I sprinted for her laptop.

She was supposed to buy me a cellphone for Holy Communion.

But for now we only had her laptop.

I turned it on and entered Google. In the search bar I typed 'naked boys sex' and when I pressed 'enter' the movies you mentioned came up.

And I sat watching them.

And I felt like I feel in the supermarket when I go in front of that shelf.

Then, in the evening, a beating.

You can forget your mobile phone, my mum told me.

I forgot to delete the search history.

+2114

We got a new teacher. His surname is like mine, Pandolfino.

Billie: It's not only the surname that he has in common with Alex!

Because Mr. Pandolfino wears a blue and pink wristband.

+2115

The teacher realised that I was being bullied. He shouted at the others so much.

He showed us a clip from a movie called Love Is All You Need?

I remembered the name, because it sounds like that of a song that Aunt Taylor likes. Not exactly, but.

In it, children like me and you are the majority in the world and all the others are the few.

Opposite to our world.

And there was a boy who the others bullied him so much that he cut his hands I don't know why and he bled a lot and I don't know if he died.

I understand him.

+2200

Ever since they watched that film, the others weren't bullying me as much.

I wanted to hug and kiss Mister Pandolfino. To buy him a beautiful present. But many mothers and fathers came to talk to the Head and he got fired.

Because he showed us that film.

+2002

I found out that this month is dedicated to us.

And on television, during the news, I saw a lot of people waving flags of my favourite colours.

They looked happy.

Then mum started insulting them and switched the channel and we had to sit and listen to someone called a Pastor who started saying the same words that the Religion teacher says and the same words that are written in the Brown Book. But he also said that I chose to be like this and then I could change and become like the others. This is what Jesus Christ wants us to be. So I asked mum how I could change and she told me that I didn't have to change because I'm not like them and I told her, yes, I'm like them! and she told me, if you are like them I will kick you out of the house and you will end up

alone forever and I asked her something else and she told me to stop it and to go to my room.

I listened to her.

I don't want to end up without a home.

Or alone forever.

+2003

I told you about that man on TV who said we can change and you told me that, no, we can't. And you said to me, do you know that, if we could change and you decide to change and really change, you wouldn't be able to love me anymore?

So I decided that I want to stay as I am.

+2601

Miss Samira asked us to choose an animal and do a project about it.

I chose the dolphin, for my surname.

+3000

I had to confess because of the Holy Communion.

I told the nun about me and you. I was afraid that we'd really go to hell forever.

She made a big deal out of it.

Then, before she let me go, she told me, it's a phase that you're going through.

Once I grow up a little more, I were to find a girlfriend and everything would be okay.

+3011

When I went to the pool today, you weren't there. You used to always be there and I was afraid you weren't coming. I thought something happened to you. Or that you decided you weren't going to meet me anymore.

Then, after a long time, you came, with that smile of yours and handsomely dressed in the Holy Communion dress. Even I had on the dress, because everyone who did the Holy Communion in the girls' and boys' school

today had to go in it. But my dress was really bothering me because I didn't want to wear it even to Mass, let alone for another time, considering how ugly it was.

But yours was beautiful. Like you.

And now we should have had Jesus in us, but I told you that I did not feel him.

And we did as we usually do.

And suddenly, out of nowhere, Charlie and Billie came and grabbed us. And when you realised you pushed me away from you like the day of the party and they started teasing us and you told them that it wasn't true that I liked you and that it wasn't true that you were my boyfriend and that you hated me like all the others and that you don't want to see me anymore and you ran away.

You left me alone with them.

And I burst into tears and started calling you, but you still didn't come and Billie started punching me in the face and everywhere and wherever, and pushed me harder than you until somehow I ended up in the pool with a Holy Communion dress and they told me to swim like dolphins since I like them so much.

And I didn't swim.

And

at Marine Park Finnley the dolphin swam to the bottom and did not want to come back up and stayed there until she died.

+3012

At the hospital.

All of this because I'm a girl and I like boys.

+6474

Aunty Taylor's wedding. And Toni's. Uncle Toni's, now.

Aunty again found a man who made her happy.

I found you too, Max. And you also made me happy. More than that. And now we are hand in hand at the wedding. No hiding, no lies, no shame, no nothing. In front of my mother (my mother!), your mother and your mother and all others, straight or not.

That we are a woman and a man, together, and not a woman and a woman or a man and a man, no longer makes much difference.

It's surprising what change a few years can bring with them.

Although, as you always tell me, there is still a lot of progress to be made.

True.

And until, who knows, maybe one day we will get married too.

Or maybe not.

+2459

Aunty Taylor was right.

When someone calls me kattara, I shouldn't take it to heart.

+6646

At the psychologist Dr. Zerafa's office.

If you were to be an animal, which animal would you be? She asked me.

What a déjà vu!

A dolphin, I answered her.

And why?