

Ellaheh Gohari

Age: 15, Grade: 10

School Name: American Heritage School, Plantation, FL

Educator: Diana Adams

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Thoughts of a Future President-hater

When I first met Gloria Avner, she told me she was going to be President one day. I laughed at her—thought it was a joke, at first—but she didn't seem to share my sentiment. I felt the disdain in her gaze as she handed me a plain white napkin, the only marking on it her loopy signature.

"Keep it," she had said. "You're going to want it when I get to the White House."

Suffice to say, I hated her immediately.

Unfortunately for me, she was right. Of course she was. Only a future President could balance soccer, mock trial, Model UN, and student council with spare time to bother me. And boy was she an expert at that.

"What's the matter, Rich?" she would taunt from her seat at the lunch table—she purposefully called me Rich to bother me, I just knew it—"Why are you sitting alone? Come sit with us!"

As if she hadn't seen my father yell at me in front of the whole school, cursing the world for giving him a failure for a son. "Why can't you be more like Gloria Avner?" he had asked me.

The other students around at least had the decency to ignore the situation. Not Gloria, though. Never Gloria. She just *had* to rub it in that she was better than me in every possible way, even in my own father's eyes.

"Don't play dumb, Gloria," I would snap. She would frown, give me that judging look again, and maybe I would feel a little bad, but I didn't care enough to apologize.

I hated her, after all.

It didn't help that we shared nearly every class together. Every single day I would see her stupid hand shoot up, ready to answer another question. Sometimes, the teacher would get tired of her, give someone else a chance to answer. I liked those days, except when *I* was the one who got called.

"Uh..." I would always flounder. Gloria would stare at me, that 'I'm-so-much-better-than-you' sort of look that made my insides churn.

The teacher would give up on me after a while. They all did. I wasn't worth the trouble. Gloria, on the other hand, never got a question wrong. I could tell she was purposefully answering after me, just so she could further prove her superiority when she got it right.

It was only a matter of time before she was assigned to be my peer tutor. I could already picture the pretentious smile on her face. Yet another instance of Gloria Avner besting her most ardent hater. Par for the course at this point.

We started the lesson—Calculus, my worst subject—in silence. I didn't want to hear what she had to say; I could figure out derivatives for myself, thank you very much, despite what she or anyone else believed.

Gloria stared at me, her eyes narrowed in the same uppity way they always were whenever she looked in my direction, as I worked on the first problem.

"Rich..." she finally said, breaking the silence. She began playing with a lock of her wavy brown hair. "Rich, why don't you like me? What did I do wrong?"

I couldn't help the incredulous laughter that poured out of my mouth. "I should be asking you the same question! You're always trying to one-up me in everything. And don't get me started on calling me 'Rich.' Is it because my dad's got money? I can't help that!"

Gloria had the gall to look surprised. "What? No, it's because your name is Richard. The other nickname for Richard is... well... rude. And I'm not trying to one-up you! Not everything is about you, dude."

"Well then how do you explain the judgy glares you give me every time I get a question wrong, or do

anything not up to your high standards?”

Gloria slammed her hands on the table. “That’s just how I look!”

I opened my mouth, then closed it again. I blinked at her slowly. “B- but why do you keep inviting me to sit with you, huh? Just to make fun of me, rub it in that my dad likes you better than he likes me?”

Gloria groaned, dragging her neatly manicured fingers across her face. “Has it ever occurred to you that I don’t have ulterior motives? That I just want to be nice?”

“But why me? Why be nice to me?” I whispered, or tried to, but she heard anyway.

“Look, I see how you act, how you pretend you don’t care about school or people’s opinions of you, and honestly, I envy that. I wish I could stop caring about certain things. But... as much as you pretend, I think you *do* care. I think you want a friend. And I want to be that for you.”

“...Oh,” I mustered.

Gloria rolled her eyes. “Yeah. *Oh.*”

An awkward silence fell over us again. I sighed, staring at the floor and wishing it could swallow me up.

Again, it was Gloria who broke the silence. “You actually got this question right,” she told me, pointing to the annoying derivative problem I had been working on. “I knew you had it in you!”

Funny. *I* didn’t know I had it in me.

I looked directly at her, wanting to seem as sincere as possible. “Thanks.”

“For what? You did this yourself.”

I brushed her statement off with a flick of my hand. “No. Thanks for trying to be my friend even when I hated you.”

Gloria gave me a self-satisfied smirk. “I don’t think you ever *truly* hated me. Only tried to.”

I hated that she was right.

But... I didn’t hate *her*.

“Can we start over?” I asked.

Gloria grinned at me, sticking her hand out. “Nice to meet you. My name’s Gloria Avner, and I’m going to be President one day.”

I took her hand in mine, giving it one firm shake. “I can’t wait to see it.”