

Journey inside social media

Breaking news, Headbook, one of the biggest social media and owner of others such as Instantaneousgram and HeysApp, has just returned to their normal activity since yesterday's latest cyberattack, the most damaging they have suffered since- the television was abruptly turned off by Leslie, leaving the remote control on the table he was sitting at, his phone to his left and a small notebook to his right. Leslie was wearing some old black sneakers, a pair of grey jeans, and a large turquoise hoodie.

He sighed, snatched his pencil and resumed writing:

"What did I do to deserve this?
Why does it have to be me?
It seems like I'm falling
Falling in a dark abyss
Drowning in sorrow and pain
Failing at rising back again
Fake smiles plastered on my face
I always feel worthless
I am so useless
What 's going on?
I can't hold on
Not anymore"

Suddenly, his phone beeped and the screen brightened, showing a notification from Instantaneousgram. He clicked on it and a new post from his classmate Chloe appeared, posing in front of an expensive shop. Leslie started reading the comments, girls wanting to have such a stunning body, and boys praising her beauty. Leslie closed the app, throwing the phone carelessly on the table.

-This is stupid, I don't know what they see in all that nonsense. - said Leslie, continuing to write and doodle in the notebook.

Just as he was about to get up to prepare a salad for lunch -as his parents were out of town on a job trip and he had the house all to himself-, the screen on the phone started lightening up. The light it emitted was so bright he had to closed his eyes, the brightness too strong for him and, straight away, he felt nauseous as the brightness became more intense.

-What's going on? - he didn't get the chance to finish because, instantly, the phone slowed him down, absorbed him, and the house fell silent.

When Leslie came to, he found himself lying on fluorescent blue corridor floor, white stripes coming and going every now and then, as if they were electrical currents. He got up and looked around, trying to find out where he was. As he was about to turn around, he heard a rumbling sound, and suddenly there was a wall with a beige door. He grabbed the golden handle and opened it, just from looking in, it appeared to look like an infinite room, with no windows or walls, just like the same fluorescent blue floor. The ceiling was similar to the floor but it was more like a reflection than an actual ceiling, as if the light was projected from a mirror. He turned around to go back but both the door and the wall had vanished, leaving more of an empty space that seemed to be the room.

-Where am I and what is this place? - Leslie asked himself. If he was lost before, now he thought he had to be dreaming, because that was impossible, nothing vanishes like that, and he had never seen a place like this before.

-Hey, here, miss! - Leslie heard a voice on his right, and turned to see what it was, and it looked like an elf, beckoning him to go where it was. It was wearing a strange uniform with matching shoes, but the most striking thing was its skin. It was almost identical to the floor, just a shade or two lighter, and it had a perfect white smile and electric green eyes. You could have confused it with the floor if it weren't for the uniform and its neatly combed burgundy hair.

Leslie turned around to see if there was someone else there, but it was just him and that rare creature. He looked again at that being and asked: -Are you talking to me? - pointing his left thumb to his chest.

-Of course I am talking to you, young lady! Who else would I be talking to? - it said, as if it were an obvious fact.

-Sorry, but I'm a boy, not a girl- said Leslie as he began to approach the elf-like being, and stopped in front of it.

-Oh! Excuse my ignorance, young man. I thought you were a miss because of your long hair and name. I'm Ted, nice to meet you- replied the pixie.

-Nice to meet you too, and no worries, it's a long story; Leslie is kind of a unisex name, so... Anyhow, ¿what are you? And more importantly, where are we, what is this place? - asked the boy, feeling quite uncomfortable at being referred to as a girl.

-Right, right! Sorry, I get excited. - Ted laughed sheepishly - We are inside social media and I'm your virtual guide. At your service, mister! - he ended with a proud grin.

Leslie stood there thunderstruck, looking around and finding nothing. -Um... this isn't exactly how I imagined social media but whatever. Why am I here? -

-Well, we are *inside* social media. As for why you are here, I am afraid I can't answer that, only the higher ups know that for certain, but I guess it has to do with how you understand social media. If what your report says is correct, you believe everything here is "nonsense", so I think it is because of that, young man. - finished Ted.

-There's no need to be so formal, just call me Leslie. -said the boy, not used to being treated so nicely, even less by a stranger. -Alright, so we are inside social media and you're my guide or something like that, but how do I go back home? -

-We'll complete the tour, obviously! So, let's get going. - said Ted. And with a flick of his wrist, a door appeared, he grabbed Leslie's hand and dragged him through the door.

They went to a similar room, but this one was full though.

-Let's begin, shall we? - as Ted said that, they started moving forward. -As you can see, to the right you have influencers and the like, and to the left artists. -

Ted continued talking and explaining but Leslie didn't listen much, he could only observe how people looked after every post or story they published. Thin girls taking off clothespins from their skin, which made them look skinnier than they are, good-looking ones ripping off their cheerful masks to show tears streaming down their cheeks and sobbing. Artists recording themselves singing or playing an instrument in playback, dancers imitating others, and so much more. All Leslie could sense was sadness and despair all over the place.

As they kept going, everything around them just showed Leslie how fake everyone was on social media, no matter how many likes or subscribers they had, they just looked so... miserable, dejected and sorrowful.

- . . . that's all, Leslie. - he heard his name being called and returned from his thoughts.
-What? - asked the boy, not having listened to a single word.
- I said that we've reached the end of the tour, so that's all, Leslie. - repeated Ted, a sympathetic and sad look in his eyes. -Well, there is something more, but it isn't part of the tour. Do you see those dark silhouettes over there? They are called dark souls; they are everyone who has lost themselves to social media, never to be again who they once were. - explained Ted solemnly.
-Dark they are, indeed... - agreed Leslie, looking at them with something akin to grief and resolution in his eyes.
-Well, this is the end. You may go home, but remember, no one can know about this - Ted warned him. -Just take this lift and before you know it, you will be exactly where you were. -
-Sure thing. Thank you for the tour, it gave some things to think about. - said Leslie, marching towards the lift.
-One more thing, just a little tip of advice: put those poems to some use- said the guide with an encouraging smile on its face.
-Believe me, I will- answered the boy with a smirk.
-Farewell, Leslie. -
-Goodbye Ted. - and just as the boy said those words, the lift closed its gates and a blinding light appeared, before everything went dark.

Leslie woke up at the table he was earlier at, and as everything came rushing back, he took his notebook and started writing.

"Let's stop pretending
We're all the same
We're all human beings

No more faking it
Don't be ashamed
Be who you want to be

Fight for what you aim for
Just follow your dreams
Don't feign anymore

I know how hard it seems
But as Martin Luther King said
Don't let your dreams be dreams

I say no to façades"

This turned out to be Leslie's very first post of several more to come.

THE END