I Hear You

Chloe Spencer

 Yes. I hear you.

 I’m an inconvenience. I’m a liability. I’m overreacting.

 No. You don’t need to say it again. I got the message.

 But I have a message too. I won’t shout it across a classroom or tag you in in on social media. Here I will write it. Here it will stand.

 You love to tell my story. You love to judge me and correct me, but until you endure the hospital visits; until you wear the bracelet telling the world to watch out; until you sit as your Halloween candy is taken year after year; until a city summer camp closes its doors to you because you’re a liability; until you’re the odd one out at every single family gathering; until your boyfriend has to brush his teeth before your first kiss because his lips hold a poison only you can taste; until you drift in and out of consciousness, looking into your mother’s panicked eyes while your lungs close and your body shuts itself down, only to survive not one, two, but three times and to be called an exaggerator; you will never know my story. You will never know what it’s like to live with anaphylactic food allergies.

 Those two words. They brought a thousand other ones into your mind, so while you’re already thinking them, let me clear up the things that a food allergy is not. It is not a dislike for a certain food. It isn’t a diet to lose weight. It isn’t trendy or hipster or even hippie. It isn’t just an itchy mouth or an upset stomach or a little gas.

A food allergy is a disease affecting the immune system.When an allergen enters the body, the immune system mistakes it for something harmful. It does what it normally does, only this time it’s attacking the body. Some people get hives. Some people swell. Some people, like me, have their airways close and die within minutes.

How humbling is that? That a food, lifeless and yet required for life, can be the very thing to take my life at any moment.

It’s with this forced humility that I share this part of me. My anger and hurt is evident, yet in this moment, I am so vulnerable. You read all of these words, and yet they’re just facts to be filed in you brain between fonts and football. *Food Allergies:* not hippie, immune system blah blah blah, people can die, made this girl’s life hard.

This is my life, but this is the part I brush of, I keep hidden. I’m independent, but I cling to my epi-pen. I’m outgoing, but I feel alone. I’m booksmart, but I don’t have the answers. I’m a “strong young woman with my eyes on the future”, but that future can be destroyed with a cheese-flavored potato chip.

I keep brushing. You keep yelling. I’m hear to tell you that I hear you.

I hear you when you try to shove your food in my face, but yes just one little bite really will kill me.

I hear you when you tell me that you couldn’t live without that food or that my life must suck, but while it’s been difficult, your bragging about how amazing that pizza is hasn’t made it any easier.

I hear you when you complain about not being able to put cinnamon in your Pi Day pie, but that one pie is absolutely nothing in comparison to the daily struggles to find non-deadly food.

I hear you when you try to kick me out of your restaurant because I brought my own food, but don't worry, I'm used to sitting and watching everyone eat while I hold my own food under the table until I'm allowed to eat outside of your precious restaurant.

I hear you when you won't eat the food I brought to class, but seriously, eggs are only a binder; my food isn't missing anything. But I couldn't possibly know anything about food.

I hear you when you push me out of your classroom for my own good. I hear you when you joke about how easy it'd be to take my life. I hear you when you constantly pick fun at my disease . I hear you when you tell everyone that the *high school child* died because of his own fault.

And I hear everyone's silence.

It's funny how loud silence is.

The silence tells a little girl on the playground that she's worth less than the other kids. The bullies get in trouble for making fun of the boy with the hearing impairment, but she's fair game. And when it's time for class parties, she has to sit in the silent hall. She'll put on a smile because people just don't understand… But she understands the silence.

Although I once was she, I've grown stronger. I've set my path on a life helping other she’s out of their bad relationships with food. I've conquered the pain and insecurity and loneliness, but I'm overwhelmed by how many others haven't.

And now I'm handing a piece of it to you.

Please hear us. Just ask, we’ll tell you how to keep us safe.

Please hear us. We need a compassionate ear; we’re already overwhelmed by shouting voices.

Please hear us. We're normal people too.

We hear you.

Now will you listen?