

Brent stood there quietly tolerating Kyle's punches, not attempting to fight back. Brent was not even upset with Kyle. After all, it made sense that once you hurt someone they would want to hurt you back; at least that is what he figured. Not that Brent tried to hurt people. It was just his character. He was cursed always to cause ill fortune. No matter what he did, he always seemed to produce a calamity, usually scarring people emotionally. One day in the third grade Brent had asked Kyle in front of the whole class why he still wrote letters to Santa Clause. The class had laughed and squealed and Kyle turned bright red. Since then Kyle had rectified his reputation and was now popular, but he never forgot the pain he felt that day. He kept trying to get back at Brent, but never seemed to succeed.

That was just one of many cases where Brent inadvertently hurt someone. Long ago, he once upset his foster care chaperon so much that she sent him to the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist burst out of the room after just ten minutes into the session. Brent was only six years old at the time.

He was fifteen now, taking life day by day. People treated him like a plague at school, not that he felt any anger towards them. In fact, he never felt much of anything. He waited patiently until Kyle was done, and with a threatening, "This isn't the end of it," Kyle eventually stopped the beating. Brent got up and assessed his injuries in the boys' bathroom mirror. His untidy black hair hung unchecked over his dull, green eyes. He would have a couple nasty bruises, which would stand out against his pale complexion, but nothing too severe.

After school, he went to the abandoned beach cost. Only hooligans and criminals ever frequented this trashed place. Passing graffiti covered trees and scattered litter he stood beside the water. He watched the seagulls dive and frolic above the waves as they rode the wind's thermals, free of any burden. He closed his eyes and pictured what it would be like to be one of those birds, wild and free.

"Kinda' chilly out to not have a jacket," a voice broke through his daydream. He turned cautiously to discover a girl standing beside him. She had long blonde locks and cheery features. Her cheeks were a ruddy pink from the wind's bite. Brent shrugged, not engaging in conversation. If he left others alone, he generally found that they dismissed him as rude, and left before any pain could find them. "Don't you wish you were a bird," she sighed, now staring out at the flock above the lake.

“Yes, but that makes me a queer person,” Brent cuttingly replied, realizing his mistake instantly. He had felt attracted to this girl for some reason, but now she would turn away, rebuffed by his direct response.

“I guess,” she sighed, for some reason still talking to him. Brent did not understand that. “I mean, most people look at me like I’ve grown a second head or something when I say stuff like that. I’m glad I’m not the only ‘queer’ person though.” Her eyes shone with a bright light. Brent felt himself being pulled deep into their depths.

“Congratulations,” he said sarcastically, his voice becoming huskier than usual. He abruptly turned around and left, before something he truly regretted would happen. He got to the street when he heard her pounding footsteps trailing after him.

“Hey, wait a-” she broke off as a speeding car nearly careened into Brent. It swerved at the last second, scarcely missing him, barreling straight into a maple. He somberly gazed at the wreckage; the car twisted like a pretzel around the tree. “Are you okay?” the girl ran up beside him, wide-eyed. Her blonde hair was gracefully tossed in the wind, and her eyes held a sort of innocence that should never be tarnished.

“If you’re wise, you’ll avoid me. Bad luck always follows in my wake, and you may end up like that car,” Brent gestured to the vehicle, watching her pupils dilate in fear. He hated to scare off the first person that had been kind to him in so long, but he did not want to hurt her.

Life continued as usual, pain and tears followed in Brent’s wake. Then one day at school, he caught a glimpse of her. He backed up before he could control himself and watched her laugh. “Hey,” he caught a girl passing by.

She stopped, nervously. “Who is that?” Brent gestured to the girl from the beach.

“Oh that’s Isabella Romona, Kyle’s girlfriend,” she responded quickly, then dashed off.

“Kyle’s girlfriend, of course,” Brent thought to himself, and then the girl looked up and her deep blue, soulful eyes penetrated deep into him. As he left abruptly, she caught up to him.

“Hey, how’s it goin’?” she smiled, matching his long stride effortlessly.

“Bad,” he responded, and then internally yelled at himself. He could not seem to restrain himself from talking around this girl.

“Oh,” she paused for a moment, and then continued on, even more chipper. “Well, at least you’re honest. I get the impression so many people say that they are feeling good, without actually feeling *good*, y’know?”

“Yeah, dishonesty is an accepted practice everywhere.”

She lighted a dazzling smile at him. “I’m sorry if I’m bothering you, there is just something different about you.”

“I’m sure you’re not used to seeing many doom and gloom weirdoes.”

“You’re strange maybe, but not exactly bad. If anything, I think you might be lonely from isolating yourself. Still, the way you are, it’s unusual. I like it. You make me feel different Brent, and not in a bad way.”

“How do you know my name, Isabella?” Brent raised an eyebrow at her.

“Well, I-” she flustered, cheeks scarlet, “I asked around, if you must know.”

Brent nodded.

A silence fell between them. “Do you want to go miniature golfing with me?” she suddenly burst out. Her blush, which had finally faded, came back, brighter than ever.

“Sure,” Brent replied, before considering. He once more internally kicked himself, but could not bring himself to say no. They went to the miniature golf course and waited in line for their balls and clubs. A bored employee in a neon green putter golf shirt accepted their money and handed them their supplies. He repeatedly checked the clock on the wall. “If you are really so tired of this job, why don’t you find something better?” Brent asked him.

The guy looked up, startled, then immediately became tense. “As if a kid like you would know anything about jobs,” he retorted nastily. Brent did not know what he did to provoke such an attitude in the employee. He quickly walked off with Isabella.

They started the game and it was quickly determined that Isabella was talented at miniature golf, and that Brent was not. The course was not especially crowded, but for a few other people. Small children dashed about, tripping over themselves in their fun of being armed with long, metal clubs. Tired parents ran after them, good-natured smiles vanishing one by one.

One little boy carelessly climbed on everything. His mother continuously scolded him to get down, and when he finally did, she let him continue playing, without administering any of

the repercussions that she had previously threatened him. Isabella seemed oblivious to this, but Brent's gaze kept straying towards them "You do realize that empty threats are useless," Brent informed the mother.

"I know how to raise my own children," she sniffed spitefully.

Isabella looked up from her intense concentration, watching the mother storm off. Several more people got mad at Brent throughout the day, and he felt Isabella's gaze on him every time. He knew that she was staying with him out of pity now, that whatever "unusual" thing she had seen in him would be forgotten.

"Let's go to the beach," Isabella suggested at the end of the game, of which she had beaten him mercilessly.

They watched the sun paint its astounding colors over the water. The pinks, yellows, and oranges glistened and rolled with the water, a master artist's canvas come alive. "You don't have to spend time with me," Brent finally spit out, the words burning his throat. He had felt something special about the girl, but soon it would fade.

"Why would I do that?" she looked at him, genuinely mystified.

"You saw how repulsive I was today."

"No, I did not," a burning intensity entered her eyes. "I witnessed how observant you are, how you see things in people that they don't see in themselves. You may think yourself unlucky, since no one likes to hear about their flaws, but you really just have a special insight that they don't appreciate."

"What about the wrecked car earlier?" Brent asked suspiciously, not quite ready to accept a new concept about something that had haunted him his entire life.

"People speed on the road behind us all the time; wrecks are nothing new." Brent sat in doubtful silence, not confirming or denying her statement. "Seriously," Isabella said, wanting to make sure Brent understood who he was, "if anything, you may divulge your insights just a little too much. People do not reveal their complete ideas all the time, lying or using selective truths instead. That, if anything, is why you are so different."

"Yeah, I think you may be on to something." In the sun's fading light Brent smiled at the pretty girl that made him understand who he was, suddenly feeling something. He felt a warmth come over him. "We should go; the nights get chilly out here. I would like to see you around," Brent said, feeling timid for once.

“I would like to see you too,” Isabella returned his smile.

They headed back to the road, a spirit of fellowship, and possibly something more, about them.

“Hey,” they looked up to find Kyle across the way. He stalked them and stopped a few feet in front of them, glaring into Brent’s face. “Stay away from my girl.”

“Kyle-”

“You stay out of this,” he roared at Isabella.

“Leave her alone,” Brent’s voice became deadly silent.

Kyle looked up at Brent, startled. Kyle suddenly noticed how much bigger Brent was than himself. “Or what,” Kyle sauntered around Brent, not showing any of his newfound unease. “You couldn’t stop me to save your life,” he sneered now, confident in his own abilities.

Brent felt a new something bubble up inside of him, a searing heat, more fierce than he had ever felt before. His eyes hardened and his hand formed a fist. He drew back and punched and Isabella, seeing what was to come about, knocked Kyle out of the way. Isabella flew from the punch’s force back into the road, right as a car came about. She was clipped by it and spun around; she appeared as a gruesome image of a guardian angel, as she fell to the ground. Kyle whipped out his phone and called 9-1-1, but Brent just stood there stunned.

Isabella was admitted to the hospital. She had a mild concussion and some scrapes and bruises, but was otherwise, miraculously unharmed, considering what she had gone through. Kyle visited her every day, but Brent did not.

Isabella on her last day at the hospital received a letter. She opened it full of curiosity, and quickly read its contents. She dropped it suddenly to the ground, tears welling in her eyes. Later, a nurse picked it up and read it.

Dearest Isabella,

I cherish the time we had and the way we spent it. You may say I am not bad luck, but you do not know. The moment I started to believe that, everything I had ever cherished fell apart. I need some time to ponder this, to discover if what you said is true. So, I am leaving this small town, and all of its memories. The limited time we spent together is the only thing I am taking with me. Maybe one day I shall come back; I do not expect you to wait for me. You should continue on with Kyle. I hope you understand what I am doing will be better in the end, though I do not know if I shall ever see you again. Thank you, for the best time of my life. You are my good luck charm.

Sincerely,

Brent

Brent went to the beach one last time. He visited the putter golf course and the place at school where he watched Isabella laugh. He knew life would be difficult now, since he was leaving the only one for whom he had ever cared. He had to though, for he could not stay here, so close to his love, when he knew he would bring bad luck to her.