

The Beginning

Her short obsession began in her senior year of high school. It was then that she moved to Kansas. It was an excruciatingly slow town, even for Kansas. Nothing was flashy and everyone knew everyone, but Holly usually merged easily with the environment and little to no attention was paid to her after the initial shock of “the new girl” wore off and her painfully unsociable aura became known. She was used to it, of course; they hadn’t called her a ghost at her last school for nothing.

Coming into her new classroom, there were a few murmurs and grunts but the conversation soon quieted down when her gaze remained downcast as she avoided the gaze of everyone. Holly duly noted the voice of her teacher, letting go of it as the raspy, masculine tone faded to simple white noise in her head. Different thoughts began to run through her head and she configured her hands into different positions, beginning to make her first observations of the setting and characters of the room as she normally did. Her problems always got integrated into her stories, and in general, school and people had always been big problems to her. It was a way to cope. Finally noticing that her teacher’s voice had ceased and a few claps were now cropping up in the room, her gaze traversed over her new peers until something caught her eye, something ostentatious and grand. He was a boy her age, one who surely didn’t belong in the school she’d walked into that morning. The boy was separated from the class, wearing a bored expression and a lavish suit to match. He was...captivating, to her. She raised her palm to her mouth and smiled delicately behind it, fingers spread on her cheek.

It was then that her teacher coughed rather loudly as an invitation for her to pick a seat in the room of her choice. She returned to herself, glancing passively behind herself. Holly noticed her name on the board and she frowned imperceptibly, noticing her last name was spelt wrong, once again. She erased the “c” with a flick of her thumb and uncapped the dry-erase marker sitting in the gutter below the board, sticking the cap on the other side. She filled in the space with a “k” in scratchy handwriting, promptly dropping the marker into the groove before turning

around and padding towards the desk behind the boy, head ducked down at the ground and eyes only half open as she took in the whispers around her.

Smoothly slipping down into the cold, plastic seat, she draped her ridiculously long locks over the back of the chair, running through the strands with skeletal, pale fingers as she made sure not to catch it on a bolt. Having done that, Holly focused on the board, squinting as she futilely attempted to decode what the numbers the teacher were scribbling were supposed to mean. Deciding that it wasn't worth it to pay attention to either his voice or his writing, she focused her attention back onto the boy in front of her. As he adjusted his tie, she cupped her chin in her hands, staring at his back. Lost, she barely felt the sharp poke in her back. It took a few more before she turned around, slightly annoyed.

"Hey," the girl behind her whispered.

"...What?" she responded shortly. Holly decided to risk conversation with the girl, figuring that she might be able to glean some information from her.

"Hi." Holly bit her cheek, sighing faintly. She wanted to talk to her, then.

"..." Her dead stare bit into the girl behind her, her expression staying completely flat as she considered different responses. The girl squirmed underneath her gaze. "Who's that?" Holly crooked her neck subtly towards the boy in front of her, eyes wandering slowly around to his back again.

The girl's eyebrows scrunched together as she considered further whether or not it was worth it to talk to the new girl. "...Arthur? Oh, no, he's kind of a jerk. His parents have got this big inheritance for him because they have this successful lumber company or something. Who knows why he lives here," she scoffed, trying to keep quiet in order to stay under the teacher's radar as well as to not poke the bear currently sitting in front of Holly.

Holly's eyes narrowed and she twisted back around in her seat, deciding her discussion with the girl was over. She'd make her own assumptions, and she'd do her own investigations on his character. It was something she was fairly sure no one else at that school had done.

The Middle

Lunchtime contained the most precious hours of her day, but not for the reason that she had a chance to chat with her friends or that she got to eat. In fact, those exact two things might've been the two things that she looked forward to the least through the course of her life. Instead, she was thoroughly pleased with toting one of the many notebooks she owned to the cafeteria to collect her thoughts as well as others'.

Carefully stepping around puddles of questionable liquid, Holly entered the cafeteria and took in her surroundings. There were few tables, due to there not being many students and the tables being large and rectangular in shape, with long benches hooked to the sides of them. Despite this, Holly noted that Arthur was sitting by himself. She trudged over to his table, sitting down at the very end of his bench. She was the only other person at his table, at yet she was farther from him than most. She plopped her thick, black notebook onto the surface of the table, along with a reliable green pen and a grapefruit that she set neatly down next to the ensemble.

Yes, she'd done a fantastic job this time around. Already she'd faded into the background, although not naturally. It wasn't as if someone like her could simply be overlooked, rather, people were purposely ignoring her. News of her estranged and dissonant personality had caused them to alienate her from any kind of group she might've been accepted in. Satisfied, she began her work, uncapping the pen. Holly closed her eyes, listening in on conversations and digging into the thoughts in her head.

“...the orchestra concert...”

“...but only if you don't...”

“Do you have your extra...”

She wrote all of the sentence fragments down, hoping that some of them would spark with her. Holly listened in on her thoughts and wrote them down, too. Some of her likes and dislikes, her general confusion with technology, her opinions on people...those all went down on the white canvas of the paper. She'd mastered writing with her eyes closed long ago, so her pen flew freely.

Now came the best part. Her eyelids flickered open and she squinted, getting used to the light again. She barely glanced at the time on the clock, noting how long she had before her time of observing would be up. Her vision flashed wildly around the room as she collected minute gestures of people divulging electrifying stories to their friends and the friends who recuperated back with small nods of encouragement. These, she took care to explain in full detail in her notebook. Finally, her eyes trained on him. Holly watched him leisurely, making sure to catch every little movement he made as he ate a neatly packed lunch of surprisingly fresh meatloaf. And as most people do, he felt her eyes drilling into the side of his head and turned around to challenge her with his own stare. Their eyes locked and she broke the contact after a few beats, only to write it down in her notebook. The bell rung and Holly shut her thoughts closed with a “thump”. She tossed her grapefruit away with another. It was back to passive observing.

The End

A couple weeks later, there was a particular day in which Holly felt like she was bursting with courage. So at the end of the day, she decided to follow Arthur home. It was rainy that day, and she made sure to keep several paces away from him at all times, lest he find her out. She didn't want to alarm him, and she certainly didn't want to intrude on his family or his property. No, there was only one thing that she didn't know about him yet, and that was his home life.

Strangely, morals and insecurities came into effect for one of the first times for Holly. She grimaced outwardly due to the sudden barrage of oppositions to what she was doing brought

on by her own mind. Usually she didn't care about what people thought. Why now? Or maybe she had cared? Maybe it was just Arthur. Because Arthur was like that.

Almost shamefully now, she continued to tail him with only the pitter-patter of raindrops to occupy her mind. But suddenly, the bobbing umbrella in front of her stopped. Arthur turned around on his heel to face her.

"...Why are you tailing me?"

She froze, not wanting to answer his question.

"You really are obsessed with me, aren't you?" He moved closer to her. It was a rhetorical question, and if it wasn't, Holly would've been too mortified to answer anyways. "What drives you to do these things? Do you even care about what people think about you at all?" By that time, he was standing right in front of her. And then he did the unthinkable.

He dug through a pocket in his bag and brought out a pocketknife. Alarmed, Holly's eyes widened but she still couldn't move from her spot. Arthur reached out from under his umbrella, getting the arm of his suit wet in the process. He grasped a lock of her hair in front, running down it until he was holding the very end of it. Carefully, he brought his pocketknife to it and sheared a large section of it off of the bottom of the strand of hair. The section fell to the ground, staying in one solid chunk because of the water that soaked it through. He held her hair a little longer before he dropped it. It fell back to Holly, now only the length of her shoulder rather than down to the middle of her thighs.

"I've wanted to do that all week..." Arthur looked over the damage he'd done. "I'm sorry. I don't know...what compelled me to do that. I'm sorry." He turned around quickly, bolting in the opposite direction from Holly. She didn't follow.

Holly fingered the cut strand of hair as the rain poured down harder, soaking her to the bone through her thin dress. Her hair had always been the one thing that she'd remained

confident about in her lifetime, even through the cajoling of her family. It was the only form of personal expression she didn't expel from herself for the betterment of observing and retaining information about how people worked. But, even though he'd basically cut her identity off, she wasn't upset. Because, in a way, she loved him and he'd helped her see the way she ignored herself, even though he'd never really spoken to her. Realizing this, the buzz in her head slowly faded. She dropped her hair, resolving to have a proper, normal conversation with him the next day.