

I sat there, in the second row, three seats in, watching the hand move gracefully through the air as if it were a column of fabric being trailed through water. A slow hum emanated through the room from the back and hung expectantly in the air, waiting for an answer. Slowly and softly, a reply came from my right. The handoff was almost seamless, as if two clouds met in a short embrace, momentarily becoming one, and then parted.

I was greeted by the undying urge to close my eyes, allowing the low and melodious notes to carry me through a world unlike my own. I could picture it all as if I had once lived inside of it; vast rolling meadows becoming brisk with the first kiss of fall. A grayness covered the sky, only permitting a small pocket of sunlight. There was a beautiful sadness about this place; a heavy feeling of mourning hung about on every particle, every atom, and every piece of matter.

As I stood in the meadow, I could feel my arms lifting a long cylindrical piece of metal towards my mouth. I began to add to the heavy atmosphere, accumulating the weight on my surroundings.

As I continued to play, the meadow became increasingly ominous. The winds picked up and the quilt of clouds choked out the small pocket of sunlight until there was nothing left but darkness. Feelings I couldn't explain, feelings of anger and remorse, consumed my body to the point where I collapsed and fell to my knees.

There was nothing left to do but to continue playing. Breath after breath and note after note, the storm around me slowly, unwillingly, reached its peak. There was a small break and the wind stopped. The meadow was completely still.

Then suddenly, without warning, the clouds broke and a majestic beam of light was shot into the meadow, piercing through the darkness. I was washed over with a final feeling of tragic loss, but was welcomed with the promise of acceptance. Trembling, I rose to my feet.

The clouds cleared the sky as the world around me started to dissolve. With another blink of my eyes I found that I was sitting, once again, in the second row, three seats in. Silence.

Everyone held their breath as the hand of our teacher hovered above the podium with such a presence that it may as well have been clutching our souls. A moment's hiatus, and the hand fell. Everyone quickly scrambled to grab their cases and to stuff their music back into their folders as the inevitable ringing of the school bell loomed over us. We had two minutes.

After a chaotic moment of disassembling my flute and returning it to my case, I grabbed my music folder, stepped around my teacher who was consulting a student, and headed towards my locker. He was there, just as I had hoped, waiting for me. My heart filled with joy as I saw him, standing coolly against the pale metal bars of the band lockers. He smiled when he saw me and I smiled in return. Never before had I truly known happiness until I met him. Serenity flooded my body as if I had subconsciously been worrying, yet as soon as I saw him it all melted away. He seemed to complete me in a way that felt like he had always been a part of me.

My fatigue, the visions of the music, previous agitations, all vanished at the sight of him. He helped me to gather my things for my second hour and as we waited for our bell to ring I could feel him lace his fingers through mine. I couldn't suppress the smile tugging at the corners of my mouth.

The combination of his hand's embrace, his subtle musky aroma, and that gorgeous smile was enough to reduce me to a giggling-school-girl state. My longing to be back home, wrapped up in my comforter fast asleep, had almost completely dissipated. Wherever I was, as long as I was with him, I was home. I was complete and fulfilled. He didn't even have to say anything. Simply being with him was enough.

He handed me something – a gift, he said. He had, for some strange reason, found it in his room. It was a hairpin with a purple flower on it. So simple, yet so sweet. That was what we were. Simple and sweet.

For a brief moment, a sadness washed over me. Haunting words from a few weeks previous twisted through my thoughts, poisoning the happy moment. It was all going to end eventually. I was knowingly riding on a train that was headed for a broken bridge. So why did I stay on?

Just the thought of his absence left me feeling empty; similar to the song I had just played – alone in a cold, empty field. Why was I doing this to myself? Delaying the inevitable heartbreak, only putting it off so that I could fall harder in the end. In the beginning I would've brushed it off, *obvious*, I would have said. I knew he wasn't my forever. But as time went on, our connection became stronger and stronger. Now I wasn't sure.

His fingers squeezed mine affectionately. I looked into his eyes. Those brilliant blue eyes that appeared as a speck of dust bursting forth to form a marvelous nebula of playful wonder. Unable to resist the power of his gaze, I smiled and slipped the flower into my hair.

The simplicity of it all warmed me from the inside out. I was suddenly seized by a thought. It was such a silly thought yet it held such a profound impact on me. I looked at him, taking in every inch of him. He was mine. I had managed to steal the heart of the only boy in the entire school whom I had admired. Me. The “forever single” girl who paraded around giving other people dating advice when I personally had none. Yet there I was, under the arm of a boy who claimed that I was the prettiest girl he had ever seen. And there was no way to describe how he made me feel. That was why I rode on. Because I loved him.

The dull buzz of the school bell brought me back to my senses. I began to think of my classes, what needed to be done, what I already had done, and what I could accomplish in my given time. We didn't say much as we walked. I felt like there was something that I was dying to tell him, yet, for some peculiar reason, I knew that there was nothing to say. I attributed it to the morning, we were both tired, and we were also in a leisurely rush to get to class.

We walked up the main stairwell. He took the steps two at a time so I had to work twice as fast to keep up with him. It made me think of physics and what we were learning. The current unit was on circular motion, a paper cup will spin on a table instead of going straight due to the differing sizes of circumference; the bottom of the cup, the smaller end, will have to move half as fast as the large end of the cup because it has to cover a much smaller distance in the same amount of time. I imagined the two

of us, in some strange way, working in circular motion but in a straight line. I symbolized the larger end of the cup because I had to move faster than him.

As we entered the main hallway I found myself looking at everyone we passed, wondering; what did they think of us? I liked to fantasize about that. I would imagine jealously bubbling deep within the passersby as we walked in the opposite direction, close, giggling, and smiling like idiots.

I also wondered what I would think of us. I began to realize what Nick Carraway once meant by being “within and without”. I could see myself passing by all alone just as I could also see myself from the other perspective, coming down the hall in close proximity to a boy I never even thought I’d meet.

It was simply baffling to me to be momentarily living in that sort of split world. It was immensely more perplexing to imagine exactly where I would be had I not met him. I watched as my imaginary perspective passed by and faded away, thus erasing that path of life. The path that will never be but once could have been.

Our journey came to an end as we said our goodbyes at the intersection of the hallway and turned in opposite directions. The fact that our hands slid slowly apart, as would be captured in slow motion in any romance film, was yet another subtle reminder that I was still on the train. There was only a small hint of sadness at the thought. I knew that when the moment came, I would be utterly devastated, but in the time I was in then I had to be happy. I had to enjoy what I had while I had it.

There was no sense in being sad over something that hadn’t happened yet. There was no sense in wasting the precious moments that I had with him only focusing on the bad. As long as I was happy, he was happy, and as long he was happy, so was I; so there was no sense in bringing us both down. As far as I knew it may never happen.

I silently scorned myself for thinking about it. I could just picture him in my head. He would be a little sad at the thought of my melancholy and would immediately try to lift my spirits. He would look at me with those wonderfully playful eyes and say, with as much compassion and love as he could, *cheer up, Buttercup*. And no matter how hard I tried, no matter how upset I wanted to be with him, I couldn’t.

Wherever my train decided to take me, I would sit back and enjoy the ride, because even if it ended in disaster, at least I'd have a whale of a story. I decided that he would like that way of thinking, so I smiled and walked into my second hour.