

“That girl is cute.” Scott stares off into the far corner of the room, where a group of girls are working on their math... which is what Scott is suppose to be doing.

“What girl?” James turns his head around, looking behind him to where Scott's eyes are directed.
“Which one?”

“The girl with a pink ribbon in her hair,” He sighs deeply. “She is so smart, ya know?”

“Sure...” James hasn't reached the point where girls are cute, but he is only in the fifth grade. He never was at the point where girls were gross, though. He thinks girls are... girls - odd creatures that lurk the halls, watching people with curiosity. To James, guys are just as odd as girls. He stops worrying about Scott and goes back to his homework. It doesn't take him long to look up and see what is going on in the corner of his eye.

“Alex, may I ask what you are doing?”

James is in his designated math group with three of his friends – Scott, Alex, and Tommy. His other two friends are working on their math as much as Scott is, who begins to draw hearts onto his math assignment.

“Playing with these paper clips Tommy brought to school.” Alex looks up. “Want one?”

“No. I want to get this done.” James goes back to his math.

A few seconds later, James feels something hard hit him in the side of his head. Without lifting his head from his work, he darts his eyes over at Alex and Tommy. They avoid his gaze.

“Cut it out, dorks.”

“Sorry. I wasn't aiming at you.” Tommy says.

James groans.

“That freak in the corner won't stop watching us like that,” Tommy whines.

James's curiosity gets the best of him. He lifts his head and looks over at the kid Tommy is complaining about. Leaning backwards in a chair, the kid is watching them strangely, as if they are bugs climbing up the far wall. He has two girls sitting with him, both of them working adamantly on their homework.

“Ugh, if those girls can work on their math with that guy looking creepy, then I can get mine done with these three dorks!” James scolds himself under his breath. He turns back around and looks at Alex and Tommy directly. “Guys, we need to finish this before—” James is cut off by the loud clangs of the old-fashion bells, which have been around since his parents were at the school, signal for the start of recess.

Alex and Tommy quickly shove their assignments into their bags and run out of the room, with the paper clips in hand. Scott slowly puts his things away, watching the girl with a pink ribbon in her hair go out the door. She catches him watching her; Scott drops his gaze and quickly gets his supplies put away. The girl giggles, causing Scott to blush.

“Isn't she adorable?” Scott whispers to James, who hasn't packed up any of his papers.

“Not really. You head out, okay? I'm going to stay in and finish this so I don't have homework.”

Scott shrugs and leaves. James lowers his head and continues to work.

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James is able to finish his math with fifteen minutes left of recess. When he gets outside, he finds Tommy and Alex throwing paper clips at a group of girls. They were screaming in fake horror.

“And how did they make it into the fifth grade?” James asks himself. He wanders over to the last available swing. This is his favorite spot at recess; going high up into the air, the feeling of his stomach moving upward into his lungs, and then the falling backwards with the sense that he is floating in the air. As he falls, all he can hear is the rushing of air moving fast past his ears. Everything else is muted. James enjoys when things are quiet – everything is calm and simple.

Just as he leaps off of the blacktop onto the gravel rocks, someone else walks over and sits in the swing. James stops in mid-walk, his right foot hovering above the ground, looking astonished. The girl came out of nowhere and he has never seen her before in his life. She watches him, swinging back and forth slowly on the swing that James has been waiting all day for to get on.

“Um... why are you watching me?” She asks, still swinging back and forth at a steady pace.

James blinks and puts his right foot back down on the ground. “I was going to get on that swing.”

She opens her mouth to answer him. What James hears instead is a loud, high-pitched scream. He whips his head around to find Alex on the blacktop, pounding on the kid that had been watching them during math. Tommy is pulling on Alex's shirt collar to get him off.

“Do you know those kids?” The girl on the swing appears next to James, looking concerned.

“Sadly. I think they are going to see the principal if Alex doesn't stop soon.” James mumbles. He looks at the girl who is making painful expressions as she watches Alex slam the kid into the ground.

Alex is ranting, “You jerk!” while the kid beneath him is repeating over and over, “I'm sorry! Please, stop!” Tommy occasionally screams, “Help!” in worry that Alex will kill the guy.

“You can have the swing. I have to go save my brother.”

James watches the girl walk briskly over to the scene. In one swift motion, she slaps Alex hard across the back of the head. He stops to see who had hit him.

“Who are you?” Tommy asks; hand still in a fist in Alex's shirt collar.

“I'm his twin sister. Let go of him so I can deal with him, okay?”

Tommy jerks on Alex's shirt. Alex falls backwards against him, bewildered that the girl had come to the boy's rescue. The girl pulls the bleeding boy to his feet and drags him away from the scene to against the brick walls of the school.

James walks over to the astonished boys. “What happened here? What made you explode, Alex?”

“That kid, his name is Levi, was teasing Scott. Scott ended up bawling and running inside to the bathroom.” Alex rubs his cheek. Levi had gotten a few blows himself before Alex pinned him to the ground.

“Then Alex stormed over and began to argue with him. Next thing I know, I'm trying to pull them apart. I'm surprised a teacher didn't see.” Tommy releases his grip on Alex's shirt.

“A teacher didn't see,” A hand lands firmly on Alex's shoulder. “But I did, and let me tell you something Alex.”

The three boys trail their eyes upward to see who the hand belongs to. They find it to be attached to the head-honcho himself.

“What's that sir?” Alex gulps.

The principal lowers himself down so he can talk eye-to-eye with the frightened Alex. “You are going to apologize to that boy, and if he did tease your friend then he will have to apologize to him as well. But because you took actions into your own hands - you will have to suffer the consequences for them.” The principal grabs Alex's hand and pulls him to his feet. He then has Alex march in front of him inside the school to the bathroom, where Levi has been taken by his sister only seconds earlier. She is sitting outside of the bathroom. She stands up quickly when the principal walks up.

“Where's your brother?” The principal inquires.

She points to the boy's bathroom. “He's talking with Scott. I made him.”

The principal smiles. “Thank you. Now get in there Alex and resolve this.”

Alex slowly walks into the boy's bathroom, with the principal trailing behind him.

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James works on the combination to his locker. He has a hard time remembering locker combinations and is struggling to remember the three numbers for his. He hasn't seen Alex after he was taken into school, nor Scott, and Tommy was pulled out of class after recess to go see the principal. The whole class cooed as he walked out the door in shame. The teacher threatened them with a reading assignment if they didn't quiet up. It worked quickly.

“Gosh darn it! I wish Alex was here.” James jiggles the lock and bangs his head against the locker door. “And I'm really hungry.” He shares a locker with Alex, despite wanting to share with Tommy. Alex has poor organization skills, which irritates James beyond anything when their items get jumbled together in a giant mess.

“Need help?”

James looks to his left, where the girl who had taken his swing at recess is standing. He lowers his gaze in embarrassment and notices a familiar pink ribbon around her wrist.

“You're in my class aren't you?” James asks.

She nods.

“You had the pink ribbon in your hair but now it's on your wrist.”

She nods again, clapping at his discovery with a sarcastic smile on her face. James frowns.

“I hate pink and my mom made my hair this morning. I didn't even know what color it was until I pulled it out at recess. Then I put it around my wrist and hid it under my jacket.” She pushes James

sideways and begins to work on the lock. He watches her silently, and soon she pulls the lock open and is smiling at him.

“How do you know the code?” James arches an eyebrow.

“Alex told me. I went into the nurse's office with my brother and Alex told me you wouldn't be able to open the locker because you can't remember those kinds of things.”

James sighs and opens the locker door. “Yeah...” He pulls out his lunch box and shuts the locker. “I'm assuming you can?”

“I repeated it in my head until I got to class, then I wrote it down.” She pulls up her jacket sleeves and shows him. Sloppy numbers in red ink were written large on the inside of her left arm. “You are welcome by the way.”

“Thank you. My name is James.” He holds out his hand.

“Angelica. Nice to meet you.” She shakes his hand. “Mind if I sit with you at lunch? Or have I embarrassed you enough today?” She smiles a bit.

James blushes slightly. “Sure. Just to warn you, Scott sits with me and he might stare at you the entire time.”

“I noticed that in math today. I never went through that stage where guys were icky, and I haven't hit the stage where guys are cute.”

James grins and starts to walk down the hall. She follows next to him.

“Scott might not even be in there, though,” James says. “After the recess incident, he might have gone home.”

“He didn't. He's just in the nurse's office waiting to go see the head dude of the school. Levi sort of hit him and bruised his eye.”

James winces.

“Yeah. Levi can get aggressive,” Angelica says sadly.

“Why did he tease Scott anyways?” questions James.

“Levi didn't tease anyone. He has no social skills and he just wanted to play with Scott. Scott teased him about the way he approached him and got nailed in the eye. Alex just saw the punch Levi gave and assumed things.”

James snorts and enters the cafeteria, taking a seat near the door. He watches as Angelica goes over to the long lunch line and waits to get her food. James opens his lunch box and thinks to himself.

Scott, you are a freak. No way are you going to get to know Angelica if you mess with her brother. Alex, stop acting like your dad. Tommy... stop bringing paper clips to school. And to myself, Angelica is cool. She can take my swing any time...

“Yay! My mom packed M&M's! Love you, mommy.”