

FALLING FOR KINDNESS

You were wearing your old converse. The one you used to doodle on when you were bored in class. You had your headphones down to your neck and the classic military hoodie, but the thing that brightened you the most - the thing that caught my attention the moment you walked into the refectory - was your smile. That *adorkable* smile you had on as you laughed about probably some joke Mason had made. You glimpsed at me – just barely – and waved. And only then and just for that, for the first time in my day, I smiled. Lately, your smiles were the only source I could find to plug mine into.

Life was getting hard. I couldn't stand gravity pulling me down anymore. But when I looked at you, I felt your lightness. The way you just *lived*, when I was having trouble surviving. It was hard to believe we both belonged in the same world, but again – maybe we didn't. Because I didn't want to believe that you knew what was like in my side of the world. The side that people didn't see you as a human being, but as a house party, where one could simply walk in and trash - in all the ways possible - and then flee, leaving all the mess behind.

I was alone at the table, as usual. I could sense the stares and the whispers behind me. Today was no better than the other days. I didn't even know what rumors my name had gotten into this time – but they were there. The most famous were the ones about me sleeping with jocks in the school's parking lot – every day it was a different name, a different guy. But my favorite rumor was about me being in love with Kyle Logan. We weren't even friends – I mean, we had talked previously during biology, and I lent him a pencil once for a test, but that was about it. But then suddenly, I was in love with Kyle, and suddenly, he stopped showing up to biology. Later I found out he had changed his whole timetable so we wouldn't have classes together.

But I guess people suck like that. They believe in what they want to believe. They are afraid to ask the truth, or they simply don't care. But it always results in the same things: the avoiding, the whispers and the gossips. And I guess it's funny – people don't care to recycle your name

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to use it for the new rumors. My name had gone to places and done stuff I didn't even know about.

But you never cared about any of that. You'd smile to me and wave. You'd ignore what your friends were saying about me and would even tell them to shut up sometimes. I remember last month when the list had made its way into your hands and you just got up in the middle of class to throw it in the trash. And then afterwards, when the bell rang, you came to me and asked if I was okay. And I didn't nod nor smiled. I didn't say okay like I was already wired to. I left saying nothing because I didn't want to lie to you. I didn't want you to believe I was okay. You made me feel safe enough so I'd not have to wear my fake smile as a shield. Maybe you thought I was rude, but I was just finally being me. Thank you for that.

Yesterday, you walked me home, after rescuing me from their laughs. And I didn't know when it was the last time I longed for human interaction, but I didn't want you to go away. I don't think you noticed this, but I took the longest way home. Every time your fingers brushed in mine, I felt as if a shield would fall upon me, protecting me from all the evil I was constantly exposed to. You offered me your hoodie when you saw I was trembling with cold. You talked about how Legolas and Gimli were the greatest literary friendship of all times. You laughed. And you didn't mind the fact I was quiet the whole time. You just kept making sure I was okay. You didn't even mention the fact I smelled like sanitary water or about what they had written in permanent white ink on my backpack. You just kept being you. You just kept levitating me. And when we finally made it home, I felt an urge to beg you to walk in and stay forever. But I kept my mouth shut as you only stared at me, waiting for me to say something. Your eyes undressed me, I swear to god.

But I let you go. I couldn't invite you in. I couldn't let you walk into my dark and chaotic world. I couldn't bring myself to ever touch you, because everything I touched, I destroyed. And if you were going to be the only thing in this world that I knew that was gentle and kind

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and funny, I had to keep my distance from you. My world was too ugly for someone so beautiful as you. I found out you were kindness, but kindness was a key and I was a prisoner of cruelty, so I had to keep you hidden, otherwise, cruelty would just take you away from me.

So today I was good with just watching you having lunch with your friends. The sight of you – with your freckles and your dimples and that *adorkable* smile - always gave me the strength to endure whatever these evil hallways had prepared in store for me. I was good with falling in love with you silently. I was good with never touching or tasting you. It meant I was keeping you safe.

You were my only rose in this garden of thorns.