

Alone

Alone. That was in one word, the perfect description of the scene I took in as the subway tumbled beneath the congested streets of Manhattan. With a quick glance around the over-stuffed train car, anyone could have seen that there were teenagers dressed all in black with grotesquely pale faces, dark, hateful eyes, and untamed hair. With their hardened exterior, most tried to avoid these lost people like the plague. I had learned long ago that they were just trapped in their own self-loathing with no one to turn to. They were alone.

Leaning against the railing as we sped through the underground tunnels, I intently studied each lost, lonely being. Suddenly, I was bathed in memories that washed onto the shore of my mind and then quickly receded back into the depths. I was taken back to a time when I thought I understood the whole world. I was nineteen years old and had taken a much deserved beach vacation.

The sun beat relentlessly down on all of the bathers – scorching and punishing anyone who had forgotten to apply sunblock. I relaxed back in my hot pink chair beneath the protection of my umbrella and black sunglasses shading my eyes. The tumble of waves, the ring of delighted families, and the screech of seagulls all created a symphony in my head. Then an unexpected, but welcome interruption broke the beautiful string of notes that had been woven together. The joyous chime of one little girl's voice sounded among the chaos of the beach. I surveyed the scene, attempting to seize a glimpse of what human being could make such a blissful sound. And there I saw her for the first time.

Prancing along the shore, with a bouquet of hand-picked daisies clenched tightly to her chest, was a small girl no older than five-years-old. She had deep blue eyes, the color of the ocean, which seemed to carry in them an old woman's wisdom. Strands of light blonde hair whipped around her face, framing her wide, sincere jack-o-lantern smile. She was so busy in her cheer, that she did not see the man that obscured her path.

"SMACK!" The little girl collided right into the stranger. She stumbled backwards, her gay frolic temporarily impeded upon. Gaining her bearings, she turned her head towards the sky to see what had blocked her path and interrupted her joy. Her gaze was greeted by a pale-faced, scowling young man. Hate was written all over his sickly body. The girl gave him an inquisitive stare. Then her eyes darted to the flowers she was clasping in her hands. She kept looking back and forth between the hate-filled boy and her white daisies. Then the smile propped her cheek bones up again and she held out one of her flowers for him to take.

“Go on, take it,” I whispered so that only I could hear. I was studying every move that they made, suddenly fascinated by what was happening. The boy reached out to take the flower. Something in his eyes changed. The hate had vanished. He stood there stunned at this small act of kindness, something which he had never experienced. The girl apparently saw the same change I did because her grin instantly grew larger.

“Th-thank you,” I heard the boy mumble.

I could not help but smile myself at the situation. Then without notice, a woman with the same colored eyes as the little girl, bustled between the teenager and five-year-old.

“Come on, Sweetie. It’s time to go,” she gave the boy a cruel glance that told how furious she was that the boy had made contact with her daughter. As she briskly strode away, dragging the little girl, her eyes fixed on the boy, I heard her mumble, “I thought I told you never to talk to strangers. Especially people like that who hate the world.”

“He doesn’t hate the world mommy,” the little girl corrected her mom, not keeping her voice low from the ears of nosy listeners such as myself, “He just doesn’t love someone who loves him. He’s alone.”

How could a girl no older than five be so accepting of a person so seemingly scary? She was just a little girl. But maybe that was it. Her innocence gave her clarity. If only we could capture that innocence and see the world like she did.

That night, a storm came to visit the beach and the inhabitants that lived there. It tore through the air, ravaging the beachfront property. I stood at my window, watching the rain hammer at the glass and the winds bend the trees. As I stared out my window, I saw a dark figure standing on the beach as the waves grew larger and larger, threatening to swallow him. By the size of him, he seemed to be a young man – a teenager. His gaze wandered from the incoming tide to something he held in his hand. I realized with a sinking feeling that he clasped in his hand a flower—a daisy.

Alone. The little girl’s words rang in my ears. That boy was alone. He was thinking the waves would take him away to meet death. Only death could keep him company. Despite the thrashing rain, I threw open the door and ran straight into the chaos. Rain immediately cascaded down my face, or were they tears?

“STOP!” I screeched at the top of my lungs. But it was pointless because my voice was merely swallowed in the confusion. I battled the wind that pelted against me. It took every ounce of strength I had, but I ran through the storm towards the boy. I could not let the waves pull him from this earth. Not when I realized that all he needed was someone, like that little girl, to show

him love. The waves were building and approaching the spot where the boy stood, still as stone.

When I reached the place I had seen him stand earlier, he was no where in sight. I came to the awful realization that he was gone. His quest was complete. With a heart heavier than I could bear, I went back to my hotel room and readied to leave the next day. I would not be able to spend another day in that lonely, lonely place.

As the subway whined to a halt, I realized that that five-year-old girl was the most important teacher in my life. Leaving the train, I wished that all the other passengers could possess the same innocence and acceptance of the little blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl. My gaze shifting to the dark-clad teenagers, I reminded myself once more that all they need is to know that someone in this world love them. Some will always call these young people lost. But as for me, I will forever strive to keep them from being called the one thing that can hurt them the most: Alone.

First Place
Junior Short Story
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