

FIRST PLACE, YOUTH FLASH FICTION
BROOK WALLACE

Unseen

School Yard - An Old Book - "Not For You"
Contestant YF13

My butt ached from sitting on the cold, hard concrete and my fingers fidgeted with woodchips meant to prevent teenagers from hurting themselves when they inevitably did dumb things. My back rested on the rough brick wall of the school that shaped me more than Michelangelo with chisels in his calloused hands. The creak of the school entrance opening and banging shut shook me out of my nervous stupor and made me turn my head to look so fast my mind spun to catch up. Was rehearsal done already?

"Miss Meridia Cari, do you need a ride home?" Miss Fawnie, the selfless, blonde receptionist who worked at the front desk and went on hikes with my English teacher asked. "Nah, I'm waiting for someone," I replied, looking into her dark brown eyes creased at the edges with concern. She nodded and glanced at me before continuing to her tiny blue car, heels clicking loudly against the cement and arms wrapped around countless binders. The truth was, I was terrified for my waiting to be over because that meant confronting the feelings I'd been running from. But somehow, I couldn't wait for it. It's crazy how the contradictions inside didn't make my head explode into a million broken pieces. I opened the old book my dad had shoved into my hands to "challenge" me. I lost myself in two old-fashioned words I'd never understand, starting at a suspicious stain while lost in thought. What would I even say? I had to say something, or Ben would. And if Ben kept his big mouth shut, I'd live in fear of Acacia revealing my secret again. I'd rather move schools or, better yet, live isolated in Alaska than go through with it.

I closed my book and took out my black phone, checking the time. The ensemble should be done at any minute, Ben among them. I sighed, not wanting to deal with him. "Well, well, well. Cari," the most annoying voice in the world called out to me, exiting the school that towered over all other aspects of life.

"How old *are* you, Ben, eighty or fourteen? George Washington was the last person to call someone by their last name only," I remarked with as much sarcasm as I could muster, every cell in my body despising him for getting me into this mess.

"Woah! Sass much, Cari? What did I do to deserve this?" he said dramatically, fake hurt painted over his stupid face.

"You know exactly what you did," I said, spying the bouquet in his hands. "The flowers are not for you," Ben said, his already sunburnt face turning scarlet.

"Cool beans," I said, rolling my eyes.

"Anyway," he said, quickly changing the subject with anxiety written all over his freckled features, "are you gonna do it?"

At that moment the door opened again and a mob of bright-eyed ensemble members chatted out of the building until they were across the schoolyard, meaning the leads would be out soon.

“Yes. You didn’t give me a choice,” I whispered, standing up to get close and personal with Ben so no one would overhear us.

“Well, good luck. I’d bet your emo-ness that this isn’t his first time, so…”

It wasn’t much of a secret that half the grade had a crush on Quinn Evans at some time or another. Mine began when I set eyes on him in sixth grade, and I’d almost made it through middle school without anyone finding out. But, a month ago my best friends, Acacia Reign and Deci Johnson, who thought I was this emotionless tough girl, discovered who my crush was. A couple of weeks later, Acacia “accidentally” blurted that fact in front of Ben, who was besties with Quinn. One thing led to another and I was about to confess myself to my long-time crush.

Ben gave me a sympathetic smile and hesitated as if there was something else he wanted to say, but he seemed to think better of it and continued.

Quinn…popular, cute, funny. With his dark curls and dimpled smile, it’s no wonder I swooned at the thought of him. All I wanted to do was talk to him, but I couldn’t. You don’t just talk to people unless you absolutely need to…teenage law forbids it. And here I was, about to do it anyway.

The door swung and Acacia exited, wearing one of her signature 60s jumpsuits, sleeveless and green, her wavy, caramel bob bouncing as she skipped along. “Hello, my fine friend,” she said joyfully. I grumbled back. Undeterred, she made her way to her parent’s car. Dread filled my body because seeing Acacia meant the leads were done and I would have to talk to Quinn soon.

And then the door opened one last time, my heart fluttering.

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Miss Fawnie: She thinks herself unloveable, trying every day to make herself beautiful but never thinking she’s enough. Little does she know, almost everyone she’s met has instantly taken a liking to her and more than one person is in love with her.

Acacia: She was severely punished whenever she kept a secret at home, so she felt she couldn’t keep Meridia’s and thought that telling a friend of Quinn’s would help her. Quinn: He was a jerk. He and Meridia date for a bit, but she quickly realizes her mistake and vows never to think about boys until she’s thirty.

Ben: Everything he does is for Meridia. He’s loved her since kindergarten; how she acts rugged and serious when her favorite color is pink and her favorite animals are unicorns. The flowers were for Meridia as an apology, but he chickened out. He felt horrible for causing her so much pain and stopped being friends with Quinn out of jealousy when he heard of Meridia’s feelings for him. It takes him a lot of procrastination but he finally professes his love for her ten-ish years later.