

The World of Terminal

Contents

Walton High School	1
Through My Eyes	3
Skylar	4
Avril	7
Land-Speed Record	9
Through My Heart	11
Bruce Bashewood	12
Substitute Walton	14
Walton Waltz	15
A Glimpse into the Future ...	18

Walton High School

Walton High School. As I stand at its grand looking gates—crafted from marvelous, smooth black steel—I can already see and hear the shuffle of the chaotic crowds. The first day of the school year seems to have clung to its tradition. I breathe in the cool air of the outside one last time before puffing up my chest and taking my first confident strides forward, straight into my senior year.

As I approach the entrance, someone calls out to me. I turn to see my overly energetic friend, Skylar. He, like myself, is adorned in the Walton High uniform; gray jacket, plain white shirt, and worn black pants. His long blond hair looks tussled. Just like him to be lazy and leave himself looking like a bird made a nest on his head.

“Can you believe it?! It’s the first day of our last year in high school!”

“Why are you so energetic? And your hair looks terrible...”

“Does not! In fact, I think it looks kind of cool.”

“Sure it does... Mind the lamp post...”

“Huh?” he said dumbly, disregarding my advice completely. Soon after I heard a bone-snapping crack followed by a yelp that was reminiscent to that of a dying animal and Skylar was back by my side, pinching his nose to stop the blood from coming out of his nose.

“You break it?” I smirked at him.

“No way! My nose is way too tough to break like that!” he said acting tough, but I could clearly see he was holding back tears of pain.

We both stepped into the school and my nose was once again filled with the smell of our questionable lunch food. On the outside, that stuff looked pretty appetizing, but on the inside... I’ve seen that food do things no edible material should do, like cheese bouncing and milk bubbling for no apparent reason. After my sophomore year, I swore off the stuff. The bacon and cheese wrap was probably more likely made of bacon flavored paper and plastic that somehow tasted like bad dairy.

Suddenly, a loud and invasive noise pierced through my ears and into my unsuspecting brain, rattling what little enthusiasm I had had about being at school out into empty space. Then the loud static screech of the morning announcement’s old and misused microphone, which was strange; morning announcement didn’t start until after 7:30 and it was barely 6:50.

“Good afternoon students!” said a booming voice from the speakers. ““Good Afternoon?”” mumbled a few students incredulously. It seemed as if things were already off to a good start, but I shouldn’t have really been surprised. The same mistake was made every year and the same person was always responsible. “I’d like to personally welcome you all to this beautiful, white walled high school,

Walton High. I am your majestic and all powerful King, Mr. Walton.” I glanced around precariously at the freshmen and was amused to see the usual response: A look of sheer, indescribable confusion. A few of the doubtful students mumbled things like “Is this for real?” and “Did I go to the wrong school?” That’s when my friend, Avril, walked up to us, her eyes full of life. Her melodious voice comes as a surprise to me, despite me having known her for a number of years.

“Hey guys, looks like Principal Walton’s at it again.”

“Are you kidding me?” I laughed out loud. “This is practically tradition.” That’s right, yet another quirky “tradition” at this turbulent, melancholic high school.

“Hey Avril, looking good sporting Walton’s black and gray,” Skylar chirped smugly.

“Har har, very funny Sky,” she said, twirling some of her silky hair around her finger and—Wait, what the heck am I thinking?! Her voice interrupted my thoughts and sent me reeling back into reality; “Which class are you two in?”

“The one and only Class A-1 of course,” Skylar said in a deep, dramatic voice.

Avril’s eyes widened in excitement as she replied “Wow, I’m actually in the same class as you two this year! Looks like we’re all in the top class! I’m kind of surprised you made it into A-1 Skylar... No offense.”

“Gah?! What do you mean by that?!” he screamed, waving his fist at her with such ferocity you’d think his life somehow depended on it before he hung his head limply in disappointment. I have to admit, I didn’t see that coming, Skylar or Avril being in Class A-1, especially not both.

“Really?! Hmp... Looks like my enthusiasm for being here has just returned...”

“What?” they said both at once.

“Nothing... Anyway, let’s get to class already.” They nodded in agreement and we all walked together. It wasn’t a far walk from where we’d been; in fact, it was just down the hall. The sign jutted sharply out of the wall, proudly declaring the room that we stood before as being the famed A-1. Only Walton High’s brightest and most prestigious ever made it here. As I wrapped my hand around the cold, metallic door handle, we all took a deep breath and I swung the door open. Time to face our final year in high school, together. Another one of life’s adventures, no doubt; best to take it in stride and live it like it’s my last day, enjoying every moment I can.

Through My Eyes

I have to argue; things at Walton High couldn't be more simple... Or more complicated. I've been going to this school for 3 years up until now and I still find myself surprised at a few of the things that happen here. Take Avril being in my class for example; an event no one could have seen coming. If it had been someone's intention to catch me completely off-guard, then I must admit, their mission was a resounding success. Ever since we entered high school, it seems almost as if the teachers have purposely keep her apart from Skylar and I; although, we were quite the well-known trio during the 8th grade, both for the right and wrong reasons. But aside from her, Skylar is going to have to be kept in check, for his sake and mine; he's always getting into trouble and the last thing either of us need is a trip to the office. Not that I was afraid of Mr. Walton, in fact, it's the complete opposite of that. Mr. Walton... How should I put this...

Mr. Walton's like a kid. He often acts childish and in a sporadic nature. Every time someone inquires upon his strange habits, he replies, "Live life to the fullest!" or "Do I run your life? Thought not! Now if you'll excuse me..." In the end, I suppose that Mr. Walton runs the school for 2 legitimate reasons: 1. It was passed down through the generations and straight into his possession. For anyone shocked at this fact, I'd invite you to once again look at the school's name: Walton High School. If the fact that the man's name matches the school's doesn't peak your interest, let alone his behavior, then very few things will and 2. He has a good sense and always acts in the best interest of the students. This really shows on a day to day basis, especially in the classes. During my freshmen year, many of my peers would often complain about the apparent bland nature of the history program. What no one expected was the response that followed one morning:

"Good morning my students, Prince Walton speaking! I've been about the grand hallways as of late and I have made a startling discovery; no one likes our history program. So from this day forth, there will be no history classes! Thank you for your attention." As you can imagine, this was not something the history teachers wanted to hear... Them or the school board. Despite the students' delight of not needing to have history taught anymore, the event overall was short lived. The next day, Mr. Walton made another announcement:

"Students of Walton, I apologize sincerely, but it would seem that the school board has refused the idea of removing our history program from the curriculum. As your dear Prince, I fought valiantly to preserve your ideals and wishes, but I'm afraid this is a matter that is out of my hands."

It seems that in this time and day, people have come to appreciate the little things in life less and less. That why, even with such a seemingly meaningless event as Avril being in my class this year, I know I should try to appreciate everything good that comes my way.

Skylar

I walked into class a little later than usual one day. I had a bit of time before the bell for the first class of the day sounded off, so I wasn't particularly worried. As I took my seat, I glanced briefly over at the lifeless form on my left, slumped forward with a hoodie pulled over their head. I sighed and reached out, shaking them gently.

"Hey... Hey... HEY!"

"Gah! Wh-what?!" Skylar shouted as he whipped his head back, his eye pupils dilating as he breathed rapidly.

"Calm down before you make a scene," I said in a hushed tone, even though almost all the heads in the classroom were turned our way already. Skylar looked around in confusion before reaching up and scratching his head and yawning sleepily.

"If class hasn't started, you shouldn't wake me up..." he said groggily, starting to send his head straight for his desk again.

"No you don't!" I said, grabbing his shoulder, jerking his head to a stop just a few centimeters from the comforts of his makeshift pillow of stray assignments and crumpled papers. "You need to wake up *now* before class starts. Look, if you really need it, I'll even go buy you a drink, on me." Skylar's ears seemed to perk up at the mention of a free drink.

"On me', you say? As in... *You?*"

"That's right, I'll buy you whatever you'd like from the machines," I said, immediately regretting my choice of words as a mischievous grin worked its way across his lips.

"Alright then, deal." And that is how Skylar managed to con his way into 3 drinks from the vending machines. "You said 'whatever you want' man and I *wanted* 3 drinks, it's not my fault you didn't think before you spoke!" he laughed as he sipped down his coffee. As we made our way pass the lunch room, a surprisingly sweet smell wavered its way out and into our unsuspecting noses. "What... Is... That?!" Skylar practically screamed in an overly enthusiastic squeak of excitement. We both stuck our heads in and right away spotted our answer. Over at the far end of the lunch room, all the girls of the culinary class sat at a table full of breakfast foods and pastries. "Gah! Breakfast produced by the angels of the culinary class! And it smells equally divine!" he chirped, his eyes sparkling. He turned to me and put on his best pouty face. "I want you to buy me something!" he half asked, half demanded. It was my turn to laugh now.

"Sorry friend, no can do; I blew all my funds back at the vending machine. Looks like you're all out of luck." He frowned, fiercely thinking.

"All hope is not lost... Ah!" he cried suddenly, an idea coming to mind.

“Ah!?”

“Ah! Indeed! I know what I must do! If I can’t pay for one of those wonderful looking pastries, then I’ll just have to use some of my boyish charm instead! It’s a dangerous risk, but it’s one I must take!”

“I know it’s dangerous, but it’s arguable who it’s dangerous to...” I mumbled, shaking my head in bemusement as I followed Skylar in. He streaked towards the table, a wild look in his eyes and he skid to a stop just before hitting the table, expertly turning and leaning in with the force of his skid, coming to a final resting position with his elbow propped on the table, his hand under his chin, and a devilish smile on his face.

“Hello ladies,” he said in a smooth, charming voice. All the girls seemed taken aback by his sudden, dynamically performed action, but one of them recovered and managed to respond.

“H-hello! We of the Culinary Class are here to present you with Breakfast and Pastries today only! Everything is very fairly priced so go ahead and choose what you’d like and we’ll send it away with you just in time for class!” she said with equal charm to Skylar.

“Hmm... Interesting... Well, here’s the thing girls, I’m all out of funds. Think you can do me a favor and give me just one freebie, just this once?” At first, it seemed his charm was working and the girls all giggle, looking at each other as if to pass around a silent agreement before the same girl finally responded:

“I’m sorry, we aren’t allowed to give out free hand outs...”

The disappointment and shock was apparent on Skylar’s face as his visibly rocked backward for a moment. But he was undeterred and quickly recovered.

“I *know* you’re not allowed to, but that’s why I’m asking this as a favor,” he said in a sing-song voice, winking at the girl.

“But... Bu-but I really can’t—”

“Please,” he said simply and made his face serious, carefully maintaining his charm. That was the moment that the last of that poor girl’s will melted away. A smile slowly broke onto her face and she handed him a small blueberry muffin. Satisfied, Skylar carefully took it from her hands. “My sincerest thanks,” he said, blowing her a kiss as she blushed profusely.

Skylar walked away, his feast in hand and the girl seemed to notice me for the first time called to me, “Would you like anything?”

“Me? No thanks, I’m just his chaperone.” I smiled in satisfaction as a few of the girls laughed at my lighthearted remark. “Here; it’s not much, but it’s better than nothing,” I said as I fished out the last of my money and placed it on the table, then turned on heel and headed after Skylar.

“Thanks!” they all cried out to me and I waved a hand over my head in acknowledgement of their response.

We both made our way into class with about 2 minutes to spare. Skylar lined up his bounty on his desk, placing his muffin at the front. For a brief moment, he stared longingly at it before finally scooping it up and biting a large chunk out of it. At first, he seemed to be enjoying his early morning snack, but soon his face turned downward and a look of something reminiscent of annoyance and confusion crossed his face and he forced himself to swallow the lump of muffin.

“What the hell?!” he exclaimed. “This muffin is under baked!” I couldn’t help but laugh at him as he scraped his tongue with his teeth.

“I hope this teaches you a lesson my friend; always be suspicious of the food that comes out of our school’s cafeteria!” I said laughing uncontrollably.

Avril

Life seems to like making it so that anything good has a catch; take Avril finally being in the same class as me and Skylar since the 8th grade for instance... While he and I are seated right next to each other, she is on the edge of the room, a considerable distance away from us. That's probably best for both of us.

Anyway... Avril has been a close friend of mine ever since our unlikely meeting back in the 7th grade. We accidentally dropped our locks on the floor one day and we later came to realize that we'd accidentally switched them. It's funny, really; I always used to sort of hate her for being so mean to me. Always acting so selfishly and swinging her locker door wide open as if to say "I own this space, you just happen to be here". Looking back at those instances, no one, not even I could guess that we would be such close friends. Her personality in a nutshell; she's sort of a tomboy, spunky and tough, definitely a girl capable of holding her own. Bad mouth her and she'll cuss you out. Hit her, she'll bite you back... hard. But if I had to name one of her best qualities, it would have to be that she's not afraid to dip her hands into something new.

In fact, that reminds me of the time I brought sushi to school once as my lunch. After a week of gagging down Walton's putrid grub, I finally relented and bought something decent for a change using the money out of my own pocket. As I approached the table, I noticed only Skylar was present for some reason. I was about to call out to him and ask why when suddenly a cold chill ran down my spine and a voice whispered into my ear.

"Boo."

I nearly dropped my lunch as I jumped and wheeled around to see who had taken me by surprise and my breath caught in my throat.

"Hey, stranger," Avril said as she coyly beat her stunning green eyes at me.

"Did you really have to scare me like that?!"

"Actually, yes. I wanted to see if I could get you to drop your lunch," she said innocently as if it wasn't a big deal. I was about to tell her off, but one good look into her green eyes was enough to change my mind.

"Alright, well please don't do that next time," I replied as we sat down at the table next to each other and across from Skylar. As I set down my platter, he glanced over at my food, his eyes immediately lighting up.

"Hey buddy..." he said slyly. "I see you've got that nice looking lunch there... Looks like a lot for a guy to handle and, as your very close and dear friend, I would be happy to take some of those off your hands..." I looked over at him and huffed.

“Yea right man, you’ve already eaten through way too much of my money. If you want a *sample* of some of this, then how about paying me back what you owe me,” I smirked. After that remark, he opened his mouth to reply and stopped himself. After a moment of thought, he let out a deep breath and went back to his own lunch.

“What is that stuff anyway?” asked Avril in genuine interest. Her questioning issued a gasp of terror from Skylar.

“What did you say?” he said in disbelief. “Do you *seriously* not know what that is?!”

“Nope, not really.”

He took a moment to compose himself before responding, “This ‘stuff’ just happens to be one of the world’s greatest culinary inventions.” He paused dramatically for effect. “Sushi.”

“Sushi? It looks like a bunch of fish with rice all rolled up in a fancy little morsel if you ask me. Liam, mind if I give one a shot?” I shrugged and carefully place one small piece on her plate.

“I’ll start you simple; it’s a California Roll. Chances are if you don’t like this one, then sushi isn’t really your thing.”

For a moment, she stared at it as if I’d placed a worm on her plate. I remember when I did that for real actually... Now that’s not a story everyone can stomach... But Avril is fearless. Without so much as a second thought, she scoops it up and gives it a try. When she’s finally finished, neither me nor Skylar can tell what her opinion of it was as she simply goes back to eating her own lunch without another word. She says nothing for the rest of lunch and Skylar gets up and leaves. I’m ready to do the same when I’m suddenly yanked back into my seat by Avril who is beaming at me.

“That sushi stuff is awesome! Mind bringing some for me sometime?” she says sweetly. It’s already hard enough to resist her charm, but I manage to provide a reasonable excuse.

“I would, but Skylar would end up wanting some, too.”

“Well then, how about taking me to a nice sushi place... tonight?”

I had no money, barely enough to have bought this and yet I felt strangely compelled to take her up on her offer. I finally decided. Turning to look at her, at that brown hair girl who I met from the 7th grade, I nodded.

Land-Speed Record

“Yo, guess what?!” an enthusiastic Skylar greeted me one day.

“I don’t know, what?” I chuckled.

“I just look at the school’s land-speed record for the 100 yard dash and it’s only 11.19 seconds!”

“You say that like it’s no big deal,” I said flinching. “Are you seriously fast enough to beat that? That’s a pretty solid time if I do say so myself...”

“After school, you and me will go out to the track with a few cameras and a stopwatch and capture the moment! How about it, you up to it?”

I looked at him skeptically. “I don’t know about this... Don’t they let a guard dog wander around on the track and field after school hours to prevent anyone from stealing any equipment from the sport teams?”

“Yea, but I’ve got that all covered,” he said, calmly brushing away my worries. “So how about it? You in or what?!” I sighed and shrugged.

“Hell, why not? Besides, I think it’ll be fun seeing you stumble around the track.”

“Oh really? Well, be prepared to eat your words and your doubts good sir.”

I sat impatiently outside the gate of the track. It was a half an hour past school’s end and I was getting tired of waiting. If Skylar didn’t show up soon—

“Heeeeeeyyyyyyy!” came a shout from my left. I glanced over to see Skylar running at an incredible speed and my jaw slackened a bit. He skid to halt in front of me wearing a ridiculous get-up. I couldn’t help but snicker. “What? Never seen a guy in a running uniform with spikes before?!” he said accusingly.

“Pffftttt, short shorts...” I snorted immaturely and he rolled his eyes.

“Come on, I’ve got the cameras ready. Here’s your stopwatch,” he said handing me the small, black device. He opened the gate and we walk in. It was a perfect day for running; green grass, clear skies, warm glow of the sun, and a low breeze, but just enough to keep you cool. Over by the edge of the track was a camera on a stand and a box. Skylar walked over to the box and pulled out a weird looking headband. On a second glance, I noticed a camera attached to the front of it. He saw my questioning look and answered my question before I could even ask it. “This is so I can get a first person view of the entire thing. You know, something to pass around to my close friends,” he said peevishly. “Anyway, looks like everything is all set. You go stand over there, just beyond that white line with the

camera and when I shout 'Go!', hit record and start timing, got it?" I nodded in affirmative and within a few moments, we were all set up. Over by his starting point, Skylar jumped around and got himself warmed up. Soon, he was ready and he signaled me to get ready. I turned on the camera and signaled back. "Aaaannnd... Go!"

I hit record and started the timer and looked back up at Skylar. That's when I saw it. The massive Rottweiler that was charging along after him. Panic shoot through me and I started running towards the gate while shouting "The dog's loose!" Skylar quickly turned his head in mid run and when he saw the dog he screamed in panic and suddenly started running even faster. But the dog was moving fast and gaining on him. By that time, I was already beyond the gates and I shouted back at him "Forget the record! Get the hell out of there!"

I'm not sure if he heard me or not, because at that moment, three things all occurred at once. One. Skylar crossed the finish line and I stopped the timer out of instinct. Two. The dog finally caught up to him and leapt up onto his back, digging his teeth into his shoulder. Three. Skylar ate dirt.

A few hours later at the hospital, Skylar moaned as he finally woke up. He caught sight of me and Avril standing over his bed and he smiled drowsily.

"Ughh.... What happened? Am I in the hospital?"

"You were trying to beat the school's 100 meter dash record," Avril said helpfully. "You were running when the guard dog jumped you."

"But I left him something to eat so he wouldn't come after me," he explained. "Guess he isn't interested in cheese snacks..."

"And another thing; you never told me that you swiped the keys from the athletic office! In fact, if you hadn't gotten hurt in the process of all of this, you and I could have gotten into serious trouble," I informed him pointedly.

He took a moment to register all of that before asking, "Well, how did I get out without being mauled?"

"You sort of lucked out on that one. Turns out the gym teacher was walking by just as everything went down. He commanded the dog to back off and he let you go. By then, you had been roughed up a quite a bit and you had passed out, so they called in an ambulance just in case. They also said your injuries are minimal and that everything other than that shoulder of yours should heal soon." Avril gestured at his wrapped up arm.

"And," I interjected, "everything was caught on the two tapes. The video is actually quite funny. Oh, and as for the school's record..." I took a moment to show him the stopwatch. "10.49 seconds."

Through My Heart

My feelings for Walton High and its inhabitants tend to be fickle. It really all depends on the sort of day I'm having I suppose, but it's safe to say I tend to like Walton. Most of the students are cheery, optimistic people. When someone is surrounded by good vibes like that, they almost always echo back, unless you're like Skylar and sometimes you let music shut it all out.

Which brings me to say: While Skylar is my best friend and all, sometimes he can be quite a handful. His tendencies can lead him to be selfish sometimes and he can become full of himself. I'd like to think that it's not entirely his fault though, that he sometimes just gets caught up in the moment. We all do every once in a while.

And then there's Avril. I... can't really say too much bad about her... hmm... I guess sometimes Avril can be a bit chaotic. She has a love for pulling pranks, especially ones that cost the receiver some of their dignity. I would know, being her favorite victim all of the time. But in the end, I always look back and I have to remember her smile; she only does her pranks in light-hearted fun. Even if I don't like it or I feel annoyed by it, that *is* sort of the point of pranks after all.

While I tend to look at things in an optimistic sort of view, I constantly need to remind myself not to shower every little moment with flowers and sunshine; not everything that happens in life is good or fair. Sometimes, things can be rough. While school isn't normally too much of a challenge to bear, other times it can induce an incredible amount of stress and there's only so much you can ever handle. Certain things like when I'm walking across the school ground and I look at the middle school just on the other side of the road and catch my sister outside in her gym class. I'm reminded that not everyone's lives are as easy and simple as mine is laid out to be. While everyone runs around having fun, she often sits on the bench, coughing and out of breath. Those sort of things just ruin my day completely and I find myself walking home, depressed and blank-minded.

Our lives are all very delicate. Generally, we forget just how fragile the balance of things really are. Days like that fateful Friday afternoon when Mr. Walton spoke in a quiet and respectful voice about the girl who sat in the back of our room, about how she decided to end her life the previous night. You don't need to relate to things like that to feel the hurt, the grievance of others, the pain and sorrow. That night, I cried over the life of someone I never formally knew. Looking back, I really don't know why, other than that I was sad that someone would do such a thing to themselves.

Life can be tough but, at the end of the day, life's worth living for, even through all the pain and frustration; that day, I cried for a better tomorrow.

Bruce Bashewood

I don't think I'll ever know what it was about him, but when I first saw Bruce Bashewood with my own eyes, there was something about him I couldn't stand. Apparently, the feeling had been mutual.

"Hey!" he had yelled at me one day as we passed each other in the hall one day. He grinned from ear to ear as he spoke in a sarcastic tone: "I like that book you're reading... what's it about?"

I cast a look at the cover of the manga I was reading and replied, "It's just a book I'm reading." He nodded and once again spoke in his smug-sounding voice. "Know when you're going to get done with that? I want to read it next." I was getting tired of his feigned interest, but I remained cool.

"I don't know, but you can check in tomorrow if you really want to read it." That's where he crossed the line. He didn't jump over the line per se, he just stuck a toe in, just enough so that I knew he meant to do me trouble. As he went to walk away, his shoulder hit me with unnecessary force and all my stuff flew out of my hand. I cringed and went to pick it and, looking back at him with a rueful expression.

"I'm sorry, I'd help but I'm running late for class." He snickered hysterically as he left. I knew he had been lying; class wasn't going to start for another 5 minutes.

That's only one example of Bruce being a jerk for no good reason. To summarize, he's done plenty of things just to get under my skin, such as drawing immature things on my folders at lunch when I wasn't looking or taking my things and hiding them in trash cans or toilets. Bruce wasn't anyone special, just your regular brand bully; taking pleasure from making other people's skin crawl at just the sight of him. He was unbiased about the people he'd pick on, from students to faculty; there wasn't a person who wasn't free of his lecherous presence. But the things he did to me were mostly impulsive and lacking personal flare... At least, it was until that day where he'd picked a fight with Skylar during our sophomore year.

Skylar had always poked fun at people, especially when they got into a messy situation together. Bruce's reaction to getting sloppy, half-rotten lunch accidentally being spilled onto him wasn't at all what Skylar had expected. He was in the middle of his usual routine of getting the other person to laugh at their predicament when out of nowhere Bruce takes a swing and nails Skylar in the side of the mouth and sends him reeling. Luckily, I was sitting at one of the nearby lunch tables and I got between the two of them. Unfortunately for me, Bruce was all hyped up on hormones and adrenaline. He had no intention of stopping, so he takes a swing at me and then an all out brawl ensues. Somehow, we end up fighting our way into the hallways and Bruce has done a decent job at roughing me up a bit up until that point. After he lands a solid punch to my gut and knocks my breath away, he gets cocky. That's when things turned around in my favor. Bruce was wide open and I send a wild shot at his side and I heard a bone snap. As he reaches down at his side, screaming in pain, I grab him by his hair and slam his face

into a locker. I have to admit, I was having a considerable amount of fun banging him into the locker door, but that quickly ended when a bunch of teachers jumped us.

Long story short, Mr. Walton let me off after I explained the situation to him in account for my clean record and Bruce got a suspension, but I doubt he cared. It's practically giving him a vacation for what he did. Either way, from that day forth, things got more personal. We didn't get into another fight, but Bruce did go out of his way to bug specifically me in any way he could. I guess that was good for everyone else though. He seemed so focused on ticking me off that he didn't even bother with anyone else after that. It was like I was their sacrificial lamb or something. But he was suspiciously careful, to the extent to make sure I didn't snap on him. Maybe he feared me, maybe he was doing this so he could convince himself that he was in control of me, but whatever the case maybe be, when people try to make things sour for me, I make sure they know that I won't take me for easy bait; I'm not afraid to protect what I hold near and dear to me.

Substitute Walton

Another regular seeming day for all the students of Class A-1 at Walton High School. They all chatter about their weekends and their class assignments; some cram-session with their friends in order to catch up with their ever increasing workload. But as the door to their classroom creaks open, every student falls silent and turns to the front of the classroom, ready and eager to start their day. No one there understands why their Principal, Mr. Walton, walks into the room instead of their teacher. The mystery grows as he closes the door behind him and calmly makes his way to the front of the classroom. He walks up behind the podium in front of the classroom and straightens his tie. They stare at each other inquisitively for a moment before he turns around and silently picks up a piece of chalk and begins to write in large letters along the board: "Substitute Walton". He turns to the students, revealing his white teeth.

Suddenly he begins to gesture dramatically and shouts, "Good evening my students, I am your Prince, rather, your humble servant for the day, Mr. Walton. Your teacher is out sick for the day, but fear not! It is my duty to serve your young minds knowledge and I have prepared a delicious heap of learning for you today! As my first order as your teacher, I declare all of your assignments completed!" He then proceed to run around the room, rapidly signing all their assignments with things like "A++" "Excused" and "Prince approved!".

The poor students were unprepared for such an unexpected surge of energy. Their brain short-circuited as he danced from row to row, finally leaping his way back up to the front desk. "Alright now class," he said in a stern voice, "Today we are going on a field trip." At this remark, all the student's brain clicked on and a cheer went through them, reverberating at the front of the class. Their enthusiasm was short lived when they realized that the so-called "field trip" was just Mr. Walton carting them around the school and teaching them the history about their fine educational system and how he had worked with his grandfather when he was only a boy to build that crumbling wall by the tennis court and other similar things.

By the time they got back to the classroom, the bell had rang an hour ago and the students all rushed to pick up their things and the room was soon cleared of everyone, except Mr. Walton. He sat silently at the front desk, remembering back to the days when he sat in that very classroom, knowing that he would someday be in charge of teaching everyone who came to learn at Walton. He went over to the desk and looked for the name of the person who was sitting in his old spot. His eyes came to rest on the name of a boy he was fond of; Liam. He was a kind and free-spirited boy. If Mr. Walton had to bet, he would say that Liam would someday faced with a tough situation, like he once had. In the end, if he came through it and took with him valuable life lessons, he would live a long and happy life. Wordlessly, he tucked away the seating chart and quietly walked out of the room, closing the door behind him.

Walton Waltz

“How about we eat lunch in here for a change?” Liam asked. Avril and Skylar nodded in agreement. Avril retrieved her stuff before coming and sitting down at a desk nearby them. They all opened their lunches simultaneously; Liam had bacon and cheese wrap, Avril had some pasta, and Skylar had a ounce of ice cream.

“Really? A tub of ice cream?” Avril asked incredulously.

“Hey, don’t judge,” Skylar said defensively as he shoveled a large scoop of rocky road into his mouth. All of them ate in silence for a while. Finally, Avril decided to start a topic.

“So, you guys all set for the dance?”

“Hmm?” Liam said through a full mouth, swallowing before he continued, “Umm... What dance?”

“Seriously? You guys really don’t remember what I’m talking about?” At this point, even Skylar had abandoned his tub of ice cream in order to hear. Their confusion brought a cat-like smile to her face and she purred, “Oooohhhh... Looks like you boys are in trooooooble.”

“Come on Avril, cut the games and give us the scoop already,” Skylar said impatiently, his eyes already drifting back towards his ice cream. She shook her head in disappointment.

“If you two had only been listening to the announcements... Alright, I’ll tell you what I’m talking about. The Walton Waltz.” Liam and Skylar’s expressions remain unchanged and she continued. “I thought you two were totally raving about going this year. After all, it’s only in three days.” At that moment, Liam and Skylar’s eye grew wide and all their recollection suddenly rushed back at them. They suddenly grew panicked and Avril’s smile widened as the bell rang. “Well, I guess I ought to wish you guys luck on finding dates.”

The two of them looked at each other as she walked away and they each began to quickly brainstorm what to do in their heads. Finally, Skylar spoke first.

“I’m just going ask the first cute girl I see!”

“You sure that’s going to work?” Liam said, unable to come up with any better ideas.

“Yea. Heck, when this works, I’ll let you use my idea and I won’t charge you anything.”

“As if I’d pay to use your idea...” Liam said, but Skylar ignored him and was already walking up to a particular girl at the far end of the room. She was going to her seat and Skylar intercepted her, pulling out her chair for her to sit in. She blushed and thanked him and Skylar looked over at Liam and winked, a silent message passing between them: “I’ve got this.”

Within a minute, Skylar returned to his desk, his head hanging dejectedly.

“Already had a date?” Liam asked expectantly.

“Shut up,” Skylar mumbled in confirmation.

Liam watched Skylar get more and more determined with every rejection he encountered and every time, he became more and more convinced to just go with his gut and ask the first person who had come to his mind. But he knew that if he asked her, things wouldn't be the same between them. After all, they were friends, nothing else. He hated to admit it, but his mind would go and wander to her if he didn't keep it in check. He drilled his idea into his head until finally, at the end of the day when the ball rang, it was decided upon; he would ask her tomorrow for sure.

It was ten minutes until the end of the school day of the dance and Liam tried to mentally prepared himself. He wasn't completely ready when the bell rang, but he still launched himself forward with hope, his resolution unshaken.

“Hey Avril,” he said as casually as he could. She nodded at him as she picked her stuff off of her desk. “Remember how's there's that dance thing tonight? Well, I was wondering—”

“Want to go to the Walton Waltz with me?” Liam and Skylar said at the same time. They noticed each other then, and their eyes thinned at one another. Both of them secretly willed her to choose them, sweat practically beading on their brows. Avril looked at both of them in surprise. Then, she slowly open her mouth and—

Laughed.

She laughed and laughed until she was nearly out of breath and the two of them looked at her the same way they had on the day she had mentioned the dance to them during lunch. When she'd caught her breath, she wheezed, “I'm sorry guys, I'm flattered, really, but I can't go the dance this year.”

“What?!” they both squeaked.

“Yea, I've got to go to my grandma's to help her clean out her garden. Mom insists,” she shrugged. “Well, I best be off. See you two later!” she said coyly and she made her way out of the room. “Oh, and one more thing,” she said turning to them. “Next time, don't wait to ask; go with your gut.” She said this and blew them both a kiss as she disappeared into the busy crowds of the Walton's hallways. Both boys sighed as they stared after her. They glumly looked at each other and Skylar shook his head in attempt to clear his mind.

“Aww, who needs the dance. There’ll be more anyway... Wanna come to my house to play games?”

“Sure,” Liam said and that night, they played the night away.

A Glimpse into the Future

Before any of them realized it, it was over. The senior year of Walton High had graduated. All the classmates there were happy and excited to finally be getting to move onto their futures, to embrace their destinies. Mr. Walton had never once been so upset to see a group of students leave his school. Everyone was shocked to see him openly weep at the end of the ceremony and some of the students wept with him. But when it was finally over, everyone was glowing with joy.

A particular group of three friends laughed as their gowns fluttered in the breeze, each of them holding their high school diploma in their hands. Three promising individuals, ready to go out into the world and make a difference in society, providing anything they could to make the world a better place. One of the three, unfortunately, might not get a chance. His body has weakened under the weight of the world and even though he doesn't quite know it, his condition has worsened. It's terrible... he has never aware of this illness of his. Perhaps he will soon confront it in the future or maybe it will come to haunt him. Either way, his time seems to have finally be nearing to a close. The reality of his departure from the world without so much as a "goodbye" to the people he knows, the people he loves... Is his life at an end or is it just beginning?

As his terminal illness eats through his body without his awareness, Liam smiles and laughs at his friends, unaware of his uncertain future.

Terminal

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