

The Cripple in the Bleachers

There stood a figure, nothing more than a shadow really, standing near the home team gate. The figure's hair was greasy and his feet were bare and he depended on a tall, narrow crutch to aid his right leg. The football team, burdened in shoulder pads and helmets, came bursting out of the gate in an explosion of laughter and flamboyance and sweat. The team approached. The figure remained standing in their path, but he might as well have been invisible; the boys paid him no attention.

A flurry of emotions flit across his dog-like face after the jocular boys had passed. Jealousy and anger were prominent among the emotions, but overwhelmingly his face seemed to radiate sorrow and sadness. The figure stood for a moment as if waiting for someone to witness his pain, but nobody was watching. The figure limped over to the bleachers and sat. He pulled a bruised, anemic looking apple out of his pocket and began to eat slowly with no sign of either enjoyment or distaste.

People passed by the figure. Girls in tight clumps avoided even glancing at him. Other boys his age would mock and jeer. Through it all, the figure sat, eating his apple and wondering. Wondering about cruelty and about friends, about loneliness and about companionship.

The figure sat for a long while just thinking, mulling, and wondering. Eventually he pulled out a scuffed leather journal and a pencil stub. He began to draw. As he drew, the lines in his face eased and his hand moved with an easy grace across the page. First a foot formed, and then a leg and then a body, all in perfect symmetry. There were no faults in the drawing; the girl was gorgeous, with an easy going smile and the most perfect legs. The boy drew as the sun blazed in the evening sky. However, the evening was fleeting, and as the last rays of sunlight slipped below the horizon, the wind blew furiously. It roared and writhed and screamed like a savage animal in the night. The wind tore the notebook from the boy's hand, and the notebook spiraled upward until it disappeared among the stars.

The boy howled then, a deep, guttural sound that was only part human and conveyed all of the boy's pain and anger and hurt: his anger at not fitting in, and having nothing, and living like an animal under the bleachers because there was nowhere else to go. He allowed himself one small happiness and it was ripped away. All of this was told through his keening howl. When at last his air supply was exhausted salty tears streaked the boy's face and dropped and then mixed with the falling rain. The boy wept on the bleachers hoping, yet not daring to hope, that someone, anyone, would understand.

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