

The Bad Place

No one wants me. No one wishes for me. Never. I bring the darkness, fading out their world until it's all midnight. I am necessary though, to see how gorgeous the light can be. But that may be something they will never understand. A concept too confronting. I am called many names. Some are clinical, some are euphemisms, and some are downright rude. But I'll survive. I'm thick-skinned. Resilient. I've been around forever. I am the universal experience. I could be something that brings them together. But very often I am the thing that keeps them apart.

A girl forces a smile as her friends laugh. The sunny sky bestows a cheerful day. From someone else's perspective they would simply see teenagers having fun. But I see it for what it is. Fake. That girl isn't happy. She loves her friends, but this day isn't hers. It's mine.

He's reading a book on the train, feeling superior to the device users. The story, however, twists. Eyes cast downwards, the reader hurries, wanting to get to the end, his stop only a few away. He wants to be able to close the cover, keep me inside. But I can't be contained.

Her ponytail swings from side to side as she forces herself forwards. She keeps pace with the music pounding in her ears. The clear sky stretches above her, but she

does this no matter the weather. I remember when she left her hair greasy, and rain was an excuse. I guess times are a-changing.

A chorus of birds accompany the yogi as they stretch in the park. Inhale, exhale. The wind should distract them, but they work with it. One posture, then another.

Seamless transitions. Practice is how you get that sort of tranquillity. Not yet am I needed. Soon though.

The school corridors are filled with chaos as students hasten to pack their bag, ready for the summer holidays. One boy, however, slows. He lets others go to their locker first. He talks to people about their holiday plans. He stalls. He doesn't want to go home. Because, at home, I am waiting.

The movie continues playing in the background. Popcorn, untouched, sits in front of them. This is a rare case. Coincident. Their thoughts spiral, not focused on the show. Frowns crowd the room. They'll be okay in the morning though. Trust me.

She sits in a small, quiet café. A steaming mug warms her hands as she surveys her surroundings. I used to come to her all the time, one of my regulars. But she went to a doctor. I won't be able to visit as often anymore. Guess I lost one. No matter. There are plenty more.

They laugh cruelly as they run away from him. He pulls himself to the wall and wipes his gravel-imprinted hands against his legs. Tears tumble silently onto his bruised knees. The people who did this shifted me onto him. I suppose everyone has a different way of dealing.

A calming bundle of soft fur sits in her lap. On the porch, a spare chair is next to hers. We met when she sat in that hall, dressed in black, with a broken face. I won't ever fully go, but I think she has come to accept me. Understands that I'm going to stay.

The beeps remind him he's alive. The surrounds stay artificially white as he lays there, watching the ceiling. He appears silent, but his mind is chaotic. I only arrived when he came into this place. But he won't be going home alone.

They sit, row after row. The clock ticks ominously and the invigilator speaks loudly. The paper lies still, pencils neatly beside. The students aren't allowed to start for five more minutes. Must be agony. This season is always busy for me. Too many meltdowns, not enough time.

He sits in that room and talks. Every fortnight. There are colourful vases and hard candies. The woman with the kind smile listens. It makes him feel safe. A supposed escape from me. He has become sick of me. After years, it gets that way. I shouldn't be offended.

It may seem like a lifetime before I go. You might spend your days wishing me away, and your nights in dread. But after every period of darkness, you will see daybreak. Remember that everyone has met me. For some it's a passing acquaintance, for others a long-term relationship. For everyone I am different, but for everyone I am here. Some day.