

Novel Excerpt

Her name was Heather, and Brad was nineteen at the time. The two of them sat in the back seat of his car. She was only seventeen, a junior in high school, and he was currently failing out of his one and only semester of college, but the fact that he was in college was the leverage he had used to get into this position.

To her, he was a man, not a boy like those who went to her school. His dreams seemed bigger, a college man earning the respect he needed to enter into the working force, an adult world. Most of these ideas he'd placed in her head, exaggerating as best he could the grand importance of his future.

Drinking was only something he did with his friends, and in his recently purchased car, he truly did feel like an adult. The fact that he still lived with his parents weighed on his thoughts and brought him back down to reality, but that was something Heather didn't know. She thought he lived at the dorms and an annoying roommate prevented them from spending time in his room.

Whether or not she would still be in the car had she actually known the truth about Brad was debatable, and something Brad would simply never know, though he'd consider it quite a bit in later years. But at that moment, his hands climbing up her back, towards the latch on her bra, their lips interlocked, he couldn't care less about what he would someday think and what his future held. The moment captivated him, and making sure she went as far with this as he wanted her to.

In truth, he felt something lingering in the back of his thoughts that he didn't quite like. He almost thought he was afraid of what might happen if she attempted to stop him

and the sex that would surely occur. His hormones raged too strong for that too happen, and too strong for him to stop.

The violence in his past was all too obvious. He knew that if she did attempt to reject him, he might just take what he wanted whether she agreed or not. She was in no position to fight him, and his mind made a mental note of this.

Luckily for both of them, Heather didn't fight him that night, but did exactly what Brad wanted her to. This would be the first of exactly nine sexual encounters between them, but it would be by far the most memorable, though, not because it was the first for both of them. Brad would linger back to that moment in the back seat of his car for other reasons as the years passed. He'd think not of the sex itself, but of the realization that he'd been willing to take her by force if the need arose.

“You're not looking so good,” Peter stood at the opening of Brad's trailer.

“I'm keeping up aren't I?”

Peter could detect a hint of anger in Brad's voice, something he hadn't heard in a long time. What he said was true, and Brad had been keeping up, not just today but every day he'd worked in the past two weeks. At first Peter simply chalked it up to that fact that Brad might be getting stronger from work, but as time continued he noticed other changes.

Brad had become irritable. He snapped at coworkers when they joked about his drinking habits or lack of grooming. Peter could see a fire in Brad's eyes that he hadn't seen in so many years he'd thought it long since extinguished. The Brad of old was dead to his knowledge, but apparently he'd been a little premature in his assumption.

“Yeah, you’re keeping up. That’s not what I’m talking about.” Peter jumped up into the trailer and paused to take in Brad, who held his gaze, another little trait that had changed.

“Then what are you talking about?” Brad continued on with his work, almost throwing some of the boxes he moved so fast. The strain was evident in Brad’s face, but apparently he didn’t care about what would happen if he threw out his back. Maybe that’s what he wanted.

“You just look run down. I think you’re pushing yourself too hard.” Peter wanted to say more, other thoughts on his mind, but he left it at that.

“Just trying to do a good job.”

“I just don’t want you to hurt yourself.”

“Don’t worry about me. Surviving is what I do best.”

Peter wasn’t quite sure if that was entirely true, given the nature of Brad’s life. In his opinion, calling Brad’s steady fall surviving was a little misleading, but at the same time didn’t feel like starting an argument, and something told him Brad wanted to argue. He could see it in every gesture, things Brad wanted to say, not just to Peter, but to everyone.

“Okay,” was all Peter could think to say, and Brad grunted in reply without looking back. After a few seconds Peter turned around and jumped down from the trailer.

The night before they’d all gone out just like every other Thursday, and he knew Dennis saw the change as well. The cheerful Brad that was always looking for his next drink had vanished, replaced with someone they’d once known and long since forgotten.

It really was an odd experience, that Thursday night, as if a dead man sat at their table. Well, man wasn't right, but boy, for that's what Brad had been the last time he'd shown the traits he was redeveloping. They'd once been friends with this person, a bossy child who pushed others around. Who barked orders to show his importance to the world.

Both he and Dennis had been partially afraid of Brad when they were younger, and neither could deny it. Even before what happened with Kyle they'd been afraid, because they knew the potential Brad had in him. His temper was like nothing they'd ever seen, and getting on his bad side was a serious offence.

He didn't lose his temper often, but when he did, they stood clear. Violence was only sometimes used, the act of anger nothing more than yelling insults, some of the worst they'd ever heard albeit, but still just insults. And both had felt a secret joy when they saw the changes after the incident with Kyle.

Peter wasn't sure what had brought on this change in Brad, and didn't like it. After all, they weren't children anymore, and losing your temper now could result in a lot more than just hurt feelings.

He paused and looked back at the opening to Brad's trailer. He felt a familiar fear, just like the old days. Brad had been suppressing things for most his life. Just a month before Peter knew all of that suppression would end in suicide, a fact Brad himself wouldn't have disagreed on. But now, Peter still believed it would end in death, just not Brad's.

That Friday afternoon after work Brad saw him again. He walked down the street, a girl at his side, his arm around her waist. She was a different girl than the one he'd seen at the laundry mat, but that didn't mean she was any less breathtaking. Her shirt was cut short to expose the top of her breasts, and she obviously wasn't wearing a bra. The skirt she wore clung to her legs, though the skirt itself was so short its presence was almost nonexistent.

Brad held a paper grocery bag in his hands; various alcohol bottles filled it, on his way back home from the liquor store. He'd looked over by chance, just scanning the crowds as he walked, and there, who should he see, but Kyle and another woman who wouldn't even bother glancing Brad's way.

Kyle wore a casual outfit today, his shirt a white sweater, sleeves pulled up, and khakis to complete the look, hair just as well groomed as ever. A smile was etched across his face, teeth as white as a movie stars, all of them visible as he laughed at something or other—maybe a joke the girl made or one of his own, it really didn't matter either way.

The sight made Brad stop mid-step, no real emotions of any kind stirring in his mind just yet as he watched them walk. If Kyle saw him, Brad didn't see any recognition on his face. Their walk didn't falter, smiles never leaving their faces, and if they'd seen Brad, he was sure a look of revulsion would've been given. After all, who couldn't help but wrinkle their nose at the sight of him?

But this momentary loss of thought didn't last long, and the emotions soon bubbled up, overflowing, and his hands crushed down on the paper bag. His head turned to follow them and he watched as they continued by, and he watched still as they entered a restaurant.

All the things he wanted to do flashed through his mind, and he almost acted on them. He saw himself run over and grab Kyle by the throat to finish what he'd failed to do all those years back, and finally end Kyle's life. That was the only thing that seemed fair, given the amount of pain Kyle had caused Brad.

Reason kept him at bay, what little of it was still left in his mind, and his shoulders slumped instead. His eyes never left the closed door of the restaurant. His hands released their grip on the bag. What little strength he had had flowed out of him along with the anger.

Brad continued on his way, hands barely holding the bag the weight seemed so horrible. When he arrived at his house he set the bag down and pulled out a bottle of beer, downing most of it faster than he'd intended. He hadn't had anything to eat yet that day, and with this thought came the restaurant again. While he sat hungry, Kyle ate out with a girl.

Anger would've come before, but not now, and Brad only dropped himself into one of the remaining two kitchen chairs, and stared at the wall. He watched for a time a cockroach exploring the wall, but didn't do anything to kill it. Did it really matter if he tried to kill the insect? There would be others; there were always others.

After he finished the bottle he grabbed another, and then another after that. He drank away his memories, as he'd done on so many nights before, but tonight was just a little different, and he already knew it. Tonight he'd lost something, the second sight of Kyle removing the last remains of will power Brad had left over himself.

When he walked down into the basement, an activity that had become a nightly venture, he wouldn't just stare at the barrel; he would pull the trigger. The alcohol would

remove that last little inhibition, the one that had lasted for so long, and it was an inhibition he wanted to lose so badly.

But was it the inhibition he really wanted the alcohol to remove?

Bourbon, vodka, whiskey, among others, were poured into his cup as the night continued on. At first it was to truly make himself lose hope and finally pull the trigger, but the more he drank, the more he realized another solution to the problem. He'd been unwilling before, but maybe his death didn't really need to be a physical one.

He'd pull the trigger, yes, but it wouldn't be a metal bullet ripping through his skull, but a mental one, ridding him of the pathetic waste of life he'd become. If ever there was a man who needed to be put out of his misery, it was the man who he'd been for the past ten years of his life—the pathetic alcoholic who drowned away his feelings of impotence and depression.

A smile touched Brad's face and he laughed just a little to himself as he took another shot. He wasn't even sure how much he'd had, and given how little he'd had to eat, he knew he should stop, but he didn't. This was the bullet that would kill his former self, not metal, but liquid. When he woke up in the morning, he'd be a new man, capable of getting what he truly wanted out of life.

The room began to spin, but Brad didn't care. He felt it in his stomach, and nearly threw up after taking a shot, but was able to hold it in. After two more beers he found himself on the floor, not quite sure how he got there. The feelings of worthlessness had started to vanish as the alcohol just kept coming.

Without memory of the walk, he found himself in the basement, gun in hand, rubbing it, talking to it, though the words he spoke were lost even to himself. A chuckle

sounded in his throat, which turned into a bout of laughter he couldn't stop. His gut hurt so badly, but all he wanted was another drink. Just one more drink, and then another one more after that.

Now he stood in his room, the world spinning faster and faster, and he knew he had just thrown up because his shirt was covered in it, still slick, but Brad didn't care. He held a bottle of something or other in his hand, and could feel there was still liquid in it. The bottle was raised to his lips, sweet whiskey pouring down his throat, then pouring down his chin.

Only after he sat on his bed did Brad realize the gun was still in his hand, and that made him laugh for reasons he didn't know. When he saw the box of bullets on his nightstand, he laughed even harder until he was coughing, and then another drink.

Tonight was Friday, or Saturday morning if one wanted to be technical, and there was no work to go to the next morning, not that work would've stopped him to begin with. He had so much time and so much more liquor to drink before the night was done. This was a moment of enlightenment he found himself in the middle of, and Brad knew it.

No, the word enlightenment didn't sound grand enough, for it implied only knowledge. What he was going through was a form of evolution, a metamorphosis, his old skin thrown to the ground. The person he'd been for so long was dying tonight, both a funeral and a rebirth in one.

Some gesture seemed needed, an act worthy of representing this occasion, but Brad could think of nothing, so he just opened up another bottle and kept drinking. It occurred to him that this might all be a dream, the liquor no longer really there, only

figments of his mind. Perhaps he was passed out at the kitchen table right now and would awaken in the morning with nothing more than a bad hangover, still the fool he'd been. But no, that couldn't be the truth. He felt it, not just in his thoughts but in his body, that what he was experiencing went beyond anything his mind could ever conceive.

The world wasn't just spinning anymore but changing, melting away into a better life. The dark and dank home he'd lived in for so many years turned into a well-decorated and cleanly kept house. He walked through the lighted hallways into the master bedroom where he found her waiting for him. Waiting to take him inside of her.

Brad knelt beside the bed, and was aware long before he touched her skin that he wasn't himself anymore. He wasn't even the self he was changing into, but Kyle, in Kyle's home, wearing his skin. This wasn't a dream he was experiencing but reality, truly seeing through Kyle's eyes, for the two of them were connected now.

But the image didn't last long. The real world came back into view, a dirty bedroom that reflected Brad's life. Despair took him and he wrapped his arms around his chest, but things weren't the same. Even now he could still feel the anger, held back for the moment, but not for long.

And with one last drink, a drink that seemed to never end, the world faded before Brad's eyes, and the last lingering remnants of who he was vanished. He stood up from the ground, a smile stretched wide across his face, and walked downstairs. His anger couldn't be ignored and it couldn't be suppressed. To end the rage he needed a sacrifice, and knew exactly what that was going to be.

The morning sun stirred life back into Brad's fallen body. His eyes cracked open just a little, aware of a headache coursing through his temple. He wanted to move but found he had no strength just yet.

He reframed from his attempts to open his eyes and just remained still. He tried to take in his surroundings without sight. He was sitting, the ground rough and unyielding, as was the object behind his back. He heard the rustling of leaves as a breeze blew against his face. Apparently, he was outside.

Headache beginning to ease, Brad opened his eyes once more and squinted against the glare of the rising sun.

He was indeed outside, his back against the garage, the remains of his car directly in front of him. The already broken vehicle had been decimated. Someone had taken a bat to the car it appeared, and when Brad saw the metal bat at his feet, he realized who that someone was.

Every muscle ached from the work last night. While drunk he had destroyed one of the only things he cherished from his youth. A part of Brad almost wanted to cry, but he didn't. Instead he stood up and stumbled to his front door. What he needed right now was food and coffee.

He paused in front of his door, aware of eyes watching him, and turned towards his neighbor. The seventy-three year old man stood on his porch, bathrobe and slippers on, staring over at Brad. The man's eyes moved between Brad and the remains of his Lumina, disgust evident on his face.

At first Brad thought he would go back in his home and nothing more, but the man took a few steps closer, and shouted, “Next time you feel like getting drunk and causing a racket, I’ll call the cops. We’ve tolerated enough from you.”

Brad felt every bit the drunk he knew he was. He made no comment in his own defense, because what was the point? He merely stood and stared at his neighbor, then glanced back at the remains of his car, before he met the glaring eyes.

Normally Brad would’ve apologized at the most, or walked into his house, ignoring his neighbor at the least. Instead he spoke without really thinking about it, something else conjuring up the words, and said, “Fuck off old man.”

He didn’t wait to hear the response, but walked into his house instead and closed the door. With his back against his front door, Brad stared into his house and thought not just about last night, but what he’d just said. Only bad could come of it, and he knew it, and yet the words had still come out.

Something was happening to him and he didn’t like. He needed to get something to eat and some water to drink; then he’d feel better.

Or, better yet, he needed a drink.