

## **Beginning a New End**

And that's when it happened.

The boy looks at me and I look back. I hold his gaze for a moment before awkwardly turning away.

I can't really remember much of what has happened today, but I know that it's near the end of the day; one more lesson, and no one takes it seriously. I'm sitting next to a new kid, a boy I've never seen before. We've arrived early and we're waiting for our teacher.

"I'm Daniel, by the way." I get a brief smile.

As he's reading, he runs his fingers through his hair. It is blonde and curly, and his fingers are long and graceful. His uniform is clean and new and suits him well, but somehow he looks out of place in a classroom. I get the feeling that he would look out of place no matter where he was.

I'm suddenly hit by a feeling of déjà-vu, as if I've been in this very instant before, but this time the feeling is stronger than usual. It's disorienting, but after some time I'm able to get my bearings again. I realise I'm staring. I don't stop.

He laughs at the book and as he flips the page I notice something I hadn't noticed before.

"Wait. I'm confused." I'm not sure if what I'm asking is a question or not, or why I am even asking it, but I ask it anyway.

"Things will make sense soon," is all that he says.

The boy looks up at me, giving me a half smile, as if he gets a joke that I'm not a part of, then returns to his book. Something about the way he behaves makes me feel that he's different.

"Is it a good book?" I ask.

"Maybe." He sighs. "Perhaps I could explain it, if I had someone to talk to. To really talk to."

"That's..." I don't really know what word to use, so after a long pause I say: "...odd." After thinking it over, I ask: "Isn't that what we're doing?"

We stare blankly at one another for a while, until he says, "Sometimes I find that doing something backwards is the right way to do it."

“What do you mean?”

“I tend to do it a lot with books. It's quite simple. I read the last paragraph, then the second-last, and keep going like that until I'm back at the start. I find that reading a book backwards, paragraph by paragraph, can often produce some pretty interesting results.”

“How?”

“Have you ever noticed how most stories start happy and normal, and everything's perfect, but then, when something terrible happens, nothing is ever the same? Even with the happy ending, things are still different, and I hate that feeling. The feeling of change. But if you read a book backwards, then you end with everything being normal and right, and that's even better than a happy ending. You should try it sometime, and see where it leads you.”

I like the sound of his voice. It's somehow comforting and I want him to keep talking to me. After a moment, he does. “Some people don't appreciate a good story. Some people are too impatient to look for the true meaning. But you seem different. I think you'll get it.”

I look at him inquiringly, knowing that's not all he has to say.

The boy pauses for a moment. “It’s a love story,” he says, showing me the cover of the book.” If you know how to read it, that is...”

(589 Words)