

Creep

by Kezia Bechtoldt

One. Have to wash those hands.

There's this creepy guy in my Biochemistry class. I made the mistake of being nice to him on the first day of class and now, he sits behind me everyday. Everyday, he lumbers in, all tall and gangly with his sloppy tennis shoes and t-shirt that's half tucked-in, and he smiles at me like we're best friends. He won't leave me alone. He's always got some question about how my weekend went or whether I had done my homework and I always feel compelled to answer since it would be impolite to ignore him. The thing that bugs me is as soon as I turn around to face the teacher, I can feel his eyes on the back of my head, on my hair, on the tops of my ears - it makes the hairs on my scalp stand on end. Every time I get up to leave, I can feel his eyes on my ass. He's such a creep! I wish I'd never said a thing to him!

Two. Get those hands clean. Wash them good.

He breathes really hard too. Some days it sounds like wheezing. Other days, it sounds like how fish would sound as they were drying out under the sun. On good days, he doesn't wheeze as much. At best, his nose would whistle.

Three. Okay, now my hands are clean.

I'd be concentrating on the quaternary structure of a protein and how this relates to protein function, or on the chemical structure of lipids and what drives micelle formation in aqueous solution ... or whatever ... and then, there it would be - that incessant whistling through nostril hairs peeking out from under his nose.

One. Dry those hands.

What I don't get is why he doesn't just pluck those hairs out. I mean, they're THERE. He can see them when he looks in the mirror. They are practically waving at him as he looks at his face every morning. I mean, how much do tweezers cost these days?

Two. Dry them, dry them, dry those hands.

Ninety-nine cents. That's what they cost.

Three. Okay, now my hands are dry.

Once, he and I walked out of class at the same time. He was walking ahead of me with his head down, staring at the ground, and avoiding the lines marked out on the concrete as he walked. **I laughed, because I was doing the same exact thing. I couldn't help thinking - Finally!** Someone who sees things the way I do! I realized that I had written him off as a complete loser in the past, **but I have always been a forgiving person. Just because a person doesn't dress or act the way they ought to does not necessarily mean I should completely discount them as decent people. There are hidden shades to everyone. That's just common knowledge.** Obviously, this guy was a little rough around the edges, but I could see that he wasn't a lost cause. **He knew the basics, but maybe he needed a little more direction on the rules. After all, it wasn't too long ago that I had no idea what the rules were either.**

So I watched him skip over the lines on the concrete and could barely contain myself, I was so excited. I carefully walked towards him and I chanted the words under my breath softly, **thinking maybe he'll join in when he hears me: One, two, three steps between the cracks each time --- don't let your foot catch a crack or you'll fall - deep into the abyss. One, two, three steps between the cracks --- got to ward off the ghosts, the vampires, the werewolves, and the doppelgangers. One, two, three steps between the cracks ...**

Hey, think what you like. It's a mantra to keep the demons away.

One. Pull that jacket on. Pull that jacket off.

And then, he looked up and smiled at me in mid-stride. And he stepped on a line. Just **STEPS** on it ... and I am like, what the fuck? Is this a game to you?

Don't think I said anything to him though. What do you think I am? Crazy? Anyway, I was too shocked. I couldn't believe he broke a rule as basic as that when he was doing so well. Didn't he know? It was inevitable, now that he'd broken the rules. They were on their way. I could feel the demons with their squirrely eyes and quick sniffing movements, rising up from between the cracks on the concrete behind me like wavering ghosts, like black mist ... like fog. If I didn't get out of there soon, they would catch me, but not before they swallowed him up first. Of course, since HE stepped into the abyss like an idiot, they'd have to get him before they even looked in my direction.

Hey, don't judge. I'm not heartless. I'm just practical. If I had stopped to help him, they would have caught me too! Guilty by association, right?

Two. Pull that jacket on. Pull that jacket off.

That nose-whistling fool just didn't seem to care. **He just smiled at me all neutral and benign then asked what I thought of the exam from last week.** It was then that I realized that he **really didn't see anything at all. He was as oblivious as the rest of the myopic masses milling around this microbe-infested shit hole,** like cattle waiting for their turn at the slaughterhouse. He **didn't see the greedy black mist coming for him from the fringes and I should have warned him. I really, really should have.**

It's just that I had a feeling he wouldn't have appreciated the warning. After all, this is the kind of guy who enjoys having his nose hairs stick out three yards in front of him. Like flags in the breeze signaling – Come on! Come and get this delicious treat!

Three. Pull that jacket on. Now, you're perfect. You can go.

He's such a creep anyway. Who cares what abyss he decides to fall into? Honestly, I don't know why it bothered me so much. I'm not usually this invested in anyone. Not since I gave up trying to get people to see the world the way I do.

Why did I give up? Let me tell you a story. True story, I swear. My best friend Alice used to talk to her mother every night. In fact, we would talk to her mother together. That was until the jerks at the psych ward convinced her that her mother had died when she was just a baby. They **were just jealous. They couldn't see Alice's mom so they didn't want me or Alice to see her either.** None of those jerks ever saw anything. Or, if they did see it, they either denied the obvious or took some pills to make the truth go away.

That's what Alice did. That's what she told me to do. She told me that I would feel better as long as I tell them what they want to hear and take the pills they wanted me to take. I tried to tell her that the way she saw the world without the blinders was so much truer, so much more beautiful than the **sorry excuse for reality everyone else wanted us to live. But she wouldn't listen.**

Every day, I watched as a dark mist rose up from the ground and swallowed her whole. Each time she took a pill, each time she went to therapy, the mist grew darker, grew dense, began to take shape, until you could only see the tips of her toes and fingers as she walked down the

hallway. She wouldn't admit to seeing anything anymore. She wouldn't admit that we had seen the demons together, that we had watched them digging their long black claws and jagged teeth deep into the people who were walking around us. These demons would hold on to them so tightly that **I wondered how anybody could breathe or even think the way they're surrounded so completely.** These people kept walking around as if they didn't have anything heavier than air wrapped around their limbs and their heads. They must have gotten so used to carrying those demons around that they hardly noticed anymore.

I used to try and warn people, but the demons glared at me with their golden eyes and whispered ideas into their ears. I think I must have warned enough people that the demons began to consider me a threat. **To this day, I'm convinced that is the reason how I ended up in the psych ward.** Probably the psychiatrist with his team of demons got together and decided I needed to be stopped. **So now, I just don't tire myself out by warning people anymore. It's useless. I have never met anyone brave enough who'd let me help them take their blinders off, so I gave up the superhero gig.**

Well, of course you don't believe me. Trust me, I wasn't holding my breath for you.

I want you to know, though. It sucks to be so unappreciated. That's why I'm only looking out for myself now. **It's the only way to survive anymore. So, there. All you morons are on your own.** The rest of the world can fall apart, and it will. As long as I hold my end together, it'll be okay.

Really. It'll be okay.

One.