

## Looking Back

I was a kid. I was in eighth grade, but by age and age alone, I should have been in fifth. She was in Seventh grade, but she was a little young for 7th... unlike me though, she wasn't home-schooled until the previous year, so she had quite a bit more social intelligence than I did. I always saw her with her friends looking on at us as we played "Butt's Up", a game where each player lined up and took turns bouncing a tennis ball once on the ground before hitting a wall. If you missed, or your ball bounced too much, you had to try to run and touch the wall. While you were running, everyone behind you would scramble for the ball. You could never look back. You had to run because if somebody got the ball and hit the wall before you got there, you had to line up against it and he would throw the thing at your ass. It hurt too, but I'd never show it with the girls watching.

Once, on her birthday, I brought her this stuffed beanie baby. When I saw her, she looked so damn pretty... Luckily, she didn't see me. I threw it behind a bush and was going to walk home, but I just kept walking back and forth. I must have looked like a damned idiot. Finally I grabbed that childish thing out from dirt and shrubbery, marched right up to her, red-faced, and put it in her hand, covered with grass stains that would never come out, and said "happy birthday" through my teeth. I barely waited for the timid "thank you" before walking, legs shaking, around the corner. I told myself not to look back, just like I did in Butt's Up, but this time I did. She was damn surprised I'll tell you that much; I'd never said a word to her before.

I didn't realize that, at that point, there wasn't a single thing that I could say or do that would land me that girl... first impressions are everything, and for some reason I didn't see her as a human being. She was this eternal thing that would see through that boy who reddened the cheeks of other boys on the wall. She would see my soul and realize how much I loved her. I went home and furiously crafted a love letter, which I put into her backpack the next day. Weeks went by. I hoped that somehow she would find that letter and love me. Finally, I walked up to her to ask her if she wanted to eat lunch with me. That poor girl saw me, marching up, red-faced once again, and shouted at me: LEAVE ME ALONE YOU FREAK! I felt bad about that for years... I still do, really. Part of me has always been worried that I'm still some insane kid who doesn't know how the world works. She was the first girl who broke my heart...

*Each time it happens we break a little bit more, until one day we care so little that we can actually sustain a relationship.*