

Slughead

Ethan was different from all the other students at his school, and he knew it but couldn't do anything about it regardless of how hard he tried. All he ever wanted to do was fit in and be accepted by his classmates, but thanks to a mental disability he struggled with day-to-day tasks including socializing. Thus, making it very difficult for him to fit in. Ethan had been run over by a car when he was very young, the tire had caved in one side of his skull leaving him with permanent brain damage, and a unique appearance. The kids in school had given him the nickname of 'Slughead' due to his appearance. It hadn't been easy for him growing up, constantly being made fun of and picked on by the kids in school for the way he looked and spoke. The accident had affected his speech as well leaving him with a bad stutter and inability to pronounce certain letters and words correctly. His parents had been loving and supportive as you'd expect parents to be, but they could only do so much for him. Ethan took it hard when his dad had passed away in a robbery gone bad about a year ago. His mother and himself had to sell the house he had known since birth and move into a cheap apartment in a shady part of town. She had been working two jobs just to afford that place alone. Losing who Ethan considered his best friend had taken its toll on him. He wanted to fit in with his classmates even more now and longed for the companionship that he had lost with his dad's passing. Today he told himself that he was going to give it his all and do his best.

The class was loaded onto the bus and getting ready to head off to the state park for a field trip. Ethan hated busses, crowded, noisy, but most of all because he struggled with bladder control and had a constant fear of soiling himself in front of his classmates. He had made sure to use the bathroom a few times before loading onto the bus and taking his seat next to the teacher. His mom had put his favorite stuffed animal in his backpack to help comfort him, which at his age was odd enough, but he loved that stuffed animal. His dad had got it for him for a birthday gift one year, and it had been special to him ever since, more so now that it reminded him of his father. He pulled the animal out of his bag and grasped it tightly, leaning over it so that the other kids couldn't see it. The teacher looked over at him and gave him a comforting smile, ensuring him that he'd be ok.

The bus had just pulled into the dirt parking lot at the beginning of a hiking trail that led to some of the more scenic sights in the park. Ethan quickly stuffed his animal back into his backpack before the other kids began to stand up and move towards the door on the bus. He tightly gripped his teacher's hand as they exited the bus first so that she could get a headcount of kids as they exited the bus.

"Mrs. B isn't your mommy Slug!" Some of the kids remarked and laughed at the sight of Ethan holding the teacher's hand. Other kids chimed in with a remark here and there, most of which Ethan just ignored as his dad had taught him to do. Once all the kids had gotten off the bus they all made their way to the trailhead to begin their hike. Walking amongst the trees, and listening to the teacher pause and talk about this plant, or this rock from time to time wasn't so

bad Ethan thought. He could handle this, no problem. Ethan was admiring a small waterfall cascading down a rock face a short way off when he heard one of his classmates call to him.

“Hey Slug! I mean, Ethan!” One of the boys shouted while walking toward him. “Hey man, whatcha looking at? The boy peered off in the same direction Ethan had been looking. “Oh, the waterfall? That’s pretty cool, isn’t it? Hey, you should come to walk with us in the back man, you seem like a fun kid, and I’m sorry some kids are mean to you.”

Ethan just stood there for a minute and tried to process what was going on. This kid had been one of the kids that always called him names, and laughed at him for having accidents in class. He couldn’t figure out why he now wanted to be his friend, but it didn’t matter, perhaps this was the acceptance he had been searching for. Ethan excitedly agreed and walked back with the kid where he was greeted by three other boys. They walked along listening to the teacher for a while and Ethan was finally feeling like a part of the class. They were joking with him, and laughing together like a normal group of friends. Ethan was happier than he had been in a long time, and he was on the verge of tearing up over it.

The class rounded a corner and one of the boys stopped motioning the others to do the same.

“Guys, let’s go this way and look at the waterfall. I know Ethan wants to see it, he was staring at it a while back.”

The other boys thought this was a good idea and waited for the class to continue around the corner and out of sight. Once outside the group of boys walked down the hillside toward the waterfall, encouraging Ethan along the way and even helping him down some of the steeper parts. They reached the pool of water that was just below where they stood, about an eight-foot drop or so. They could see the waterfall clearly and hear the water rushing down the rocks.

“Pretty cool huh Slug.” One of the boys said with a chuckle.

Ethan admired the sight for a second when he realized that the other boys were all whispering to each other and giggling.

“If Slug wants to be our friend he needs to pass the test.” One of them said,

“Oh yea, the test.” The others chimed in all snickering. They had grabbed his bag from him and began opening it.

“N-No.” Ethan stuttered, afraid of what they would think of his stuffed animal hiding inside.

“Oh, what’s this?” One of them said as they pulled out the animal. “A little toy for Slug?” They all chuckled at the remark. “Did you forget your blanks at home?” They continued to make fun of him. Ethan wanted to say something but couldn’t find any words. The boy threw the stuffed animal down and they began taking turns stomping on it and grinding it into the dirt with their feet. Ethan began to cry and wanted it to stop but couldn’t process anything, he felt frozen. One of the boys picked up the dirt-torn stuffed animal and threw it over the side and down to the water.

“If you want to be our friend, you don’t need that.” He remarked. The other boys laughed in agreement, all high-fiving each other.

Ethan was full out crying now, he couldn’t describe what it was that he was feeling, but he needed that stuffed animal back. He needed his dad back. Before anyone knew what happened Ethan threw himself off the ledge and down into the pool of water in an attempt to save his stuffed animal. The boys stood there in disbelief and awe before continuing to laugh and make crude remarks.

They waited for Ethan to come back out of the water for a while before they realized that he wasn't coming back. Ethan had drowned trying to save his stuffed animal that had reminded him so much of his father, the only comfort that he had known since his dad died.