

# Bright Stars and Black Holes

The girls exited the mall, bags in hand, and their chatter filled the cold air, bounced against the falling snowflakes and carried high towards the rooftops where he was watching.

He crouched on his legs, a gargoyle adorning the building. Narrow and calculating, his red eyes peered out of the grey hood and watched the three girls walk away from the mall, happy and content. He envied them, but accepted that this happiness would not be his, could not be his. So he convinced himself that it was theirs to keep, that it was selfish of him to desire it. He sighed and saw his breath billow out in a small vapor before dissipating.

An olive-skinned beauty, with curves and medium-length dark hair, led the way. It was obvious that she cared about fashion, what with the designer jeans and fur boots. The other two trailed: a taller, pale one with longer hair and a shorter one with shorter, curlier hair; all easy on the eyes, with pleasant voices and laughs. The onlooker smiled at their jokes and watched as they went into a nearby convenience store.

He crossed rooftops to get a better view of the entrance to the store and waited. He reflected on his own life and the various happy moments he'd had: outings, celebrations, dances, significant events in his friends' lives. He lied down and looked up at the dark night sky. It was hard to see very many stars usually. But it was Christmas Eve and everyone had gone to sleep, turned the lights out. So he could make out millions of stars, radiating. He thought that perhaps there was a star for every good moment in a person's life, every great friendship that had been made.

But stars also die, and so as there were many fiery stars illuminating the universe there were other stars that had died, collapsed, into black holes sucking everything in. There weren't enough black holes, though, to keep the sky dark, he thought; he pitied those who couldn't see the light because of them. Only recently had he begun to know how it felt.

The clamour of bells roused him from his meditation to watch the girls once more as they exited the store, undoubtedly bound for home. They'd bought some things that he couldn't see through the bags and beverages that looked sweet with pearls at the bottom.

The road was barren, almost ominous. Out of a side alley, a man in a black overcoat and bowler hat approached the girls. The onlooker became curious, alert.

Menacingly, he advanced towards them. The man demanded money from the girls; they politely refused. The onlooker dropped down from the rooftops and landed nearby, startling the group.

"Leave them alone," he said.

"I was only asking them if they needed a ride home," Bowler-hat said, feigning innocence.

“Bullshit,” the onlooker replied. He met the hatted man’s gaze without faltering. “We both know what you were doing, now leave them alone.”

The man laughed, “Who are you? The police?” and reached into his overcoat.

The onlooker charged him.

The two crashed to the ground and the girls were able to see their savior for the first time. His hood having slipped they saw his dark skin and acute facial features. He could not have been much older than them.

A punch. A swing. A blow. A pistol slid across the icy sidewalk some yards from the brawl. It was Bowler-hat’s and the boy was now on top of him, raining blows across his face mercilessly, his blood boiling. Bowler-hat shoved the boy off and punched him square in the face, knocking him off. He then scrambled to his feet and made his way to the gun. The olive-skinned girl was about to stop him, but the others restrained her, deeming it unsafe.

The boy staggered to his feet and ran at the man, slamming him into a nearby wall. He gripped the man’s collar and threw a punch that knocked him to the ground. He’d tainted the white snow red. The man lay there, apparently unconscious.

The trio rushed to the boy’s side, shooting off questions asking if he was okay and who he was.

“Don’t you remember me?” he asked, visibly disturbed.

The pale girl touched his face, outlining its features as the girls simultaneously shook their heads.

“I’m sorry, but we can’t say we do,” she apologized. They gathered their belongings and walked past him, the pale girl lingering a bit longer. Then they briskly made their way around the corner, out of sight. He watched them go, puzzled and hurt.

A sharp pain pierced his heart.

He clutched at it and his hand came away covered in a scarlet, viscous liquid. The world turned in front of him as he dropped to his knees. He looked at the sky and fell on his back, gasping for breath.

The bleeding hatted man moved into his sight. He smirked at the boy as he tucked his still smoldering gun away and told him “Look at you, all alone, lying there in your own blood. Who’s gonna help ya?” he cackled, “No one! That’s who!”

The boy attempted to grab the man’s leg. The man shook off this attempt and kicked him in the chest. The boy coughed blood. His scarlet essence pooled in the pale snow as the man walked away, laughing.

For one last time, the boy gazed upon the stars, the millions of burning stars and those that were dying. But those stars had shined at one point; they had burned hotly. He concluded his

was a happy death. He'd had his share of great moments and happy memories. Great friendships and ones that'd faltered.

He didn't regret saving them. They could burn on, like so many of the stars in the universe. He wouldn't become a black hole. Even though his own light was fading.