

# My Name is Kyle

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To know me is to love me. To know me is to love me. Isn't this what people say of themselves? I don't know about these things very well because I have autism. Autism means that you can't do things other people can. Some autistics could barely speak, having to communicate through the madness of obsession. I myself have a fascination with books, writing, cartoons, and I even met my favorite author once when my Dad took me to his book signing. When my Dad introduced me to DiTomasso, he explained to him that I have Asperger's. This means that I'm not a regular autistic person. I am a little more advanced. Although I think it's funny that people could use the word advanced in the same sentence as autism. I don't know. I find people funny. I laugh inside myself all the time. My dad will notice my inward grin and look at me with disapproval. He wanted me so badly to be normal. Actually, I think he wants me to be perfect. I don't understand this word. I understand millions and millions of words since I have a photographic memory, but this one, this word...what could possibly be perfect?

Well, if you are to love me, to know me, you should know how I came into the world. It was very cramped in my amniotic sac. I had a brother with me, my twin, and we tried to swim together in the salty water. But there was a problem. My Mom had things called polyps. They grew too large and my brother and I couldn't grow properly. I got very worried because he looked smaller and weaker than me. I was always trying to untwist from my umbilical cord just to brush the palms of his hands. We touched frequently but only for short moments. Things kept getting worse and worse for us here in my Mom's womb. It was like time had sped up, and the mounds of tissue kept filling and filling up our space. I saw with shock that my brother was starting to choke. I tried desperately to help him. But I couldn't. Before I knew it, I was hanging from the hand of a doctor, upside down and I had no idea where my brother was. I looked down and saw a lot of blood.

Where was my brother? What was happening to my mother? The blood kept flowing, racing down the legs of my mother, spilling into bedpans and emesis basins. It seemed like the whole room was full of blood. I screamed.

Now I am in a kind of plastic space, and I can feel a breeze that I guessed was oxygen, rushing into my tiny mouth and nose. I was really tiny. You should know that, when I was born, I only weighed about one pound. This seems absurdly small, doesn't it? I knew I would die. I could just feel an angel tugging at me, imploring me to return to heaven. But I didn't wanna go. I felt strange here, yes, but I felt something awaited me. I don't know why I felt so contrary: stay, go, stay, go, but going seemed all the more probable. I felt myself slipping away most of the time and I could hear the beeping of machines every time my heart stopped beating, which was often. I could make out all these white coats milling around and around, making me dizzy, but I couldn't see very well. In fact, the doctors later told my mother that I wouldn't be able to see, hear, or possibly even speak. If I lived, my life would be hopeless. But I didn't care. Since I didn't know where my brother was, I wanted to find him, to see him (if I could ever see) before the angels had their way.

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But I survived. No one knows how. As I grew up, I found that the doctors were wrong. I could speak, hear, and think, in fact, I could do these things very well. I did need a lot of help. All kinds of therapists kept visiting me. There were occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychiatrists, and probably more that I didn't know the name of. I had to go through some surgeries because some of my fingers on both hands were fused together. But, I kept growing and growing and it even seemed like I wouldn't stop as I got to 6 foot 3 by the time I was eighteen. Now I am 21, and I finished high school with very good grades. How could I do otherwise? I am a genius, but they call us savants. At one time they used the word "idiot" before savant, but they stopped, probably not out of concern for how we would feel about it; more out of a concern to get the picture of us right. We weren't exactly idiots just because we didn't fit in society very well. We fit in society very well as a matter of fact. We fit in so well, that upon the event of my graduation, I got a job in a library.

This was a great job for me. I love books. I even write books and draw cartoons. A character popped up that I named Oscar. Actually, he turned real. I

saw him all the time. In my cartoons, you could see his head bobbing in between several other characters, and I tried very hard to get his likeness just as I would see him, standing in the living room, wanting to speak, but speech always seemed to fail him. I really couldn't say if he was actually real or not, but I did see him, all the time. He was real to me. But my Dad, if I ever talked about Oscar, would instantly tell me to shut up. So I rarely talk about Oscar. We have our sort of telepathic conversations whenever he appears to me, and I feel tranquil to have such a good invisible friend. My uncle would later suggest that who I am actually seeing is the soul of my departed twin, with the idea of my brother being dead not really known or understood by me very well, so I didn't really know how to regard my suddenly sometimes appearing playmate. I just don't know. I don't know a lot of things even though I am a genius, just a label perhaps. Perhaps I am as ordinary as you, but because I can do things you can't, you naturally assume I'm superior to you in some way. How farther away from the truth could this assumption get? I am autistic. I will always be limited with breathing problems from under developed lungs, psychotropic drugs to keep me even, and social problems that make my family have to tell me when I'm being inappropriate. Maladjusted. That's what I am. It's the only thing that makes me different from you. You probably don't know it, but you are a genius too. Everyone is in some way or another. I began to notice this phenomenon when, as I attended high school, I saw kids who had graduated go to these big expensive schools called the Ivy League and I know I could never do that because Asperger's like me have a problem with math, maybe not our fault, but it seems that society won't make the effort to help us just enough to have the same opportunities as the other geniuses, perhaps because of the label.

I often wonder about the whole idea of labels. Weren't labels used for things such as food, to tell us what brand of clothes we are wearing? I look out through my blurred very coke bottle glassed eyes, and wonder at the weird things that exist in the world. I have trouble understanding why people so want to name things. We come into our world with a name, almost as if a name were necessary to be fully human. But now I'm getting caught in my thoughts. My father is calling to me now because he can always tell by the blank stare in my eyes when I have left behind reality for my dreamworld. At least that's what my father says. I don't agree with him. I think dreaming is really great. I join Oscar in my dreams,

I even have a hint of my brother, with his glazed over dead eyes staring up at me, at birth, even smaller than me, just a tiny dot of a being ready to be discarded like refuse being thrown into a bin. I'm sniffing now. I really think God has treated my brother horribly by not letting him be with me. I am even beginning to think that there were no angels for him. Perhaps devils, but no angels. He had been yanked from my mother's womb, perhaps even alive for a while, but probably not. If we were smaller than me then the odds of him surviving can almost be calculated at zero. There are so many tiny people, unable to emerge from the vaginal cavity, dead before they are alive, so many millions upon millions of lives snuffed out just because they are small. But there is my Dad calling to me again. I better close this thought with the door of my suffering side to myself before my Dad makes the suffering worse because I think there are very few people who can possibly understand me. My Dad doesn't. He's kind of smart man, but a little dead inside. I always try to wake up his heart, but it's miniature, bloody world won't pump out the necessary thoughts for change.

## 2

"Come on, Kyle," my Dad says impatiently. "You know I'm waiting for you. Can't you just get ready faster?"

My Dad is a really impatient person. He knows I have these rituals I have to do like now I'm parting my hair very carefully to one side, making sure it stays perfectly in place, and when just one strand pops up like a cowlick, I spend a lot of time making sure it flattens. I also have to brush my teeth over and over again, massaging over the molars and canines time and again as I know the mouth is a very dirty thing. I have these duties to do to get ready, and my father knows this, and yet he keeps pushing me to go faster. I don't know why.

"Come on, Kyle! I'm telling you for the last time. Come now, Come now, for God's sake, come now."

Oh, by the way, you're probably wondering what happened to my mother. She almost died the day I was born. All that blood I saw came from her. She had been laying on the bed, the blood flowing furiously out of her vagina and the doctors almost couldn't stop it. In fact, my mother nearly died. Her eyes would

roll back into the sockets and the doctors were ready with the paddles in case they had to shock her back to life. Actually this idea was worthless. She was bleeding out too fast. Her heart was actually pumping too hard, not hard enough. This doctor obviously didn't know what to do. Just as my mother almost died, a new doctor rushed into the room. He knew what to do. First he grabbed gauze and then he was just tearing up his coat into shreds stuffing and stuffing material into my mother's womb. This staunched the blood somewhat, but the doctor was grabbing a scalpel even as he seemed to almost magically slip into latex gloves. He consistently yelled at the nurses to follow his lead and while he made a cut just above my mother's pubic area, the nurses too were tearing off their clothes until everyone in the room was standing in their underwear. The amount of bloody clothes on the floor kept stockpiling. One of the nurses even quickly removed her panties and suffered the embarrassment of being bottomless even as she stuffed her stuff into the hole that would not plug. Finally the doctor had made his incision and was quickly sewing up something inside my mother. After a few tense moments, everyone in the room sighed when my mother's eyes gained back their life and now she was saved. Almost all the women and even the men had kept stuffing in their clothes to stop the flow of blood and they didn't seem to worry about their unprofessional nudity. They had just saved a life.

I have just a barely conscious memory of bodies floating just inside my line of sight, and the lights above were so bright, I felt my eyes hurting. But I didn't worry about this. I still scanned the room for a sign of my brother, and I thought I saw a barely discernible body on the floor, floating on top of all the blood. It was just a glimpse. So I didn't trust my eyes. I could barely see anyway. But the thought that my brother had been discarded with all the bloody clothes laying around, the people smeared in it, but not caring as they watched the lungs of my mother slowly expanding and contracting, and all the people in the room private parts either showing or dangling were now rushing outside of the room to usher in more help. I'm sure the other people in the hospital were probably wondering about the sight of naked health care workers. But they didn't mind. They had just saved my mother, and that was enough.

"I'm telling you for the last time, Kyle!" my father shouts. He's always shouting. I guess it should make me annoyed but I don't have regular emotions. I don't really feel things I kind of bunch up my emotions inside my brain and

transfer all the sensory information into words I can understand. I am just wired this way. Don't ask me why. I came into the world differently from you, and now I will travel through it differently from you.

"Okay, Dad," I shout back. "I'm coming." I quickly make one last swab across my hair and almost run out of the bathroom.

"There you are you little bag of bones. It's about time."

"It's exactly time," I say. "There is no such thing as exact time, Dad."

"Oh, spare me your mental gymnastics. We will have enough of that ahead."

"Why? Where are we going?"

"I've got to meet my friends." But there is kind of a weird, almost dirty look in his eyes that I knew I shouldn't trust. But he is my Dad. What can I do?

He pulled my arm, leading out to his white Cadillac. I love our car. It is always shiny and new. I imagine myself getting behind the wheel, but my Dad says driving is impossible for me.

"Just don't talk for a while, all right Mr. Burmeister?"

My Dad is always inventing different names for me. Yesterday he called me Mr. Belvedere. I thought he would laugh so hard that his sides would split. But he calmed down. He always does this. He gets worked up, calms down, gets worked up again and I can catch him sneaking a pill into his mouth, what kind of drug it is I don't know. I don't dare ask.

"Buckled up?" My Dad says to me. I nod.

"Come on. Spock and all the crew of our little Cadillac Enterprise will be sailing in for the monthly check up at the space station soon." And my Dad cracks up.

I smile at him. We always make these little jokes between ourselves. He knows how much I like science fiction, so he is always saying things like this.

"How long to touchdown, Dad?"

"Just five yards to the end zone." He laughs again. I know what this is. It's a mixed metaphor. We're always experimenting with different ways to be funny. Even though my Dad can be a quiet, somewhat distant man, he has a good sense of humor. But it seems I'm the only one who gets to see it. Awkwardness. Perhaps he is autistic too but doesn't know it. Who wants to admit they have some sort of awful disease? But that's not what this is. It's who I am. It's my identity.

We are moving down the road very fast, and a recent rain has flooded the streets and my Dad is laughing as he steers the car into little streams running alongside the road. When he does this, he's always splashing a person walking along the road. "Don't you love this?" He says.

I'm not sure how to respond. It seems mean. But then again he's my Dad. Who am I to know more than him?

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Now we are standing in the bar with smoke so thick I think I might choke. People aren't supposed to smoke in bars anymore. But the bartenders never enforce the rule. My Dad knows I can't take the smoke, remember my lungs, so he quickly gets me into a back room where there are pool tables and people crowding around them, their sticks like weapons, but turning into funny walking canes as they lower their bodies over the tables, the occasional "bridge" barely holding up a stick trained on the cue that is too far away to reach.

I can still smell the stink of smoke but the smoke in here has faded from the stubs. There are a lot of rough looking people. But they also seem nice. My Dad pushes me slightly forward in front of him. There is a grin on his face. "How much you wanna bet that my son can beat everyone of you without ever hitting a ball?" he says to everyone in the room. One dirty looking man steps forward. He has a full beard and long matted hair. I think he kind of stinks. But he pulls out a big wad of money and lays it down on the table, saying, "Impossible."

"Oh come on," my father pleads, "Nothing's impossible. What do you say? Five hundred bucks?"

"Too rich for my blood."

"Too rich for my blood," my Dad mocks. "What are you afraid of a retard?"

The skin the beard can't cover is glowing red. He raises his cue as if he wants to swing it, but in what looks like a sudden surge of cowardice, lowers it while my Dad laughs at him.

"Two hundred bucks. You'll get no easier money than this."

"All right," the gruff man says. He reaches in his pocket slowly, pulling out a money clip and laying down two one hundred dollar bills on the table.

“Okay,” my Dad says, snatching up the money and holding it up for others to see. He walks in a slow circle. “What you will see here, ladies and gents, is a pure display of magic. No one in the world can pull this off. What do you think? Anyone else want to join the action?” But my father is being too bold. There is a woman in leather that barely covers her breasts and there is a piercing in her bellybutton. I like looking at girls. But this one is different. I stare at her for a long time, drinking in her strangeness and odd beauty, taking note of the tattoos that dress her shoulders. “Kyle,” my Dad says. “Eyes here.” And he takes two of his fingers to point at his eyes. I look at him for a moment but I can’t help looking at the girl. She’s just about my age. I wonder what makes her dress that way. I don’t know if I can say that I’m aroused or not. I’ve seen naked pictures of girls in Playboys, but I’m never sure how to feel about their naked bodies. Naked bodies just seem, well, I don’t know, just normal. I’m always looking at myself in the mirror naked, holding my penis in my hand and wondering what I should do with it.

I see the girl begin to step forward as her boyfriend tries to grab her arm, but she shakes it loose. “I’d like to see the boy do it, whatever trick you’ve planned.” She reached into her leather halter and pulls out some money. I wonder, does she like me? Her lips part with her tongue swiping her lipsticked lips, revealing incredibly white teeth. I can notice how beautiful she is, especially her beautiful mouth. But I never quite know what to think about girls. They’re not like me. I don’t know what I’m supposed to think about them. Of course I notice how pretty they are but I just sink into confusion about what the whole idea of a female is for.

She steps forward with money in her hand, two hundred dollars. “This is a bet against him.” And she gestures to the man betting against me. Against me? What am I supposed to do?

“And I’ll double it if you will,” she says. The gruff man strokes his beard and pulls out another two hundred dollars. “This is gonna be easy, Verlaine.”

Oh, they know each other. She’s probably playing some kind of game with him. I get the idea that they do this all the time. I wonder who usually wins.

My Dad picks up all the money on the table and suddenly, people are laying down bets all over the place. There seems to be an equal amount against me as there is for me. But I still don’t understand.

“Be ready to be bewitched,” my Dad says and I steal a glance at the girl in leather. She seems to be winking at me again. I begin to admire her eyelashes.

“Let’s get on with it,” the gruff man says.

“What, no more foreplay?” my Dad says. The gruff man seems to get more and more angry, but he’s trying to hide it. Everyone else looks like they’re expecting me to be funny just like my Dad, so I just stand there, waiting for my Dad to tell me what’s going on.

“Come here Kyle,” my Dad says. I approach him. “Tell me. When I hit this white ball here on the table, point to where it’s supposed to wind up.”

“What?”

“Give me a prediction.”

“Oh. Let me look.” I study the table and the angles produced by the shape of it. Complex calculations start working in my mind. But, actually, what I see is a picture. The white ball is moving in my picture. I see it bouncing off the sides. I’m looking at the way my Dad is holding his cue stick, and, knowing all his habits, I easily make my decision and, very quickly, I point to a spot where I know the ball will stop.

“See here?” my Dad says. “Take a look at where he’s pointing. Here.” And he grabs an ashtray off a table and puts it upside down on the pool table so that a black spot appears where he pointed.

“Oh come on,” the pretty girl’s boyfriend says. “That’s impossible.”

“No,” Verlaine says. “I think this will be very interesting. I think I’m going to make a lot of money.” I saw her wink at me again, making me feel something. But I couldn’t interpret it. In fact, this whole thing is making more and more confused. I was just doing a simple Einsteinian fourth dimensional space mapping. Anyone could do it. It’s so easy. What did Dad hope to accomplish? And why is the girl paying so much attention to me? I am utterly confused. But then I watch.

My Dad is leaning over the sides of the table, carefully, or at least pretending to size up his shot. He’s using a lot of drama, so I laugh at him. The gruff man shoots me a dirty look. But there’s the girl again winking at me. I notice her stroking her bellybutton piercing, and she licks her lips, revealing those beautiful teeth like someone in a toothpaste commercial. Now I laugh at her. And surprisingly, she breaks out laughing too. She walks over to me, still laughing.

Now she pats me on the head and just before she goes back to her boyfriend, she taps me on my bottom. What does this mean? Confusion again.

Dad is striking the ball. It seems to almost curve as it hits against a side and then moves rapidly to bump into side after side rapidly. He hit the ball hard. And it is moving around the table like a rat in a maze. Everyone is watching closely. Except for Verlaine. She is focused on me. What is she doing? But then the ball is slowing down. It stops. The gruff man grunts. "Ha. Missed."

"Look again, Vaughn," Verlaine says. She's looking at me the whole time she's talking.

Dad picks up the white ball and right underneath it is the black stain he had put there. Everyone gasps.

"How is this possible?" the gruff man pretty much yells. "The little fuck..."

He's coming at me with his cue stick raised, and I'm looking on in terror, but Verlaine steps in between him and me, and she grabs his wrist. He sinks to his knees in pain. My Dad laughs. "You should know her better than that," he says.

Verlaine has released the gruff man's wrist and he sits on the floor rubbing it. Verlaine suddenly spits on the ground next to him. "That's for thinking he's a retard, you retard." And there is real venom in her voice. Ignoring her boyfriend, she walks over to me and kisses me on the cheek. I'm shocked. And somehow, as my Dad is moving me quickly out of the bar, I find a matchbook in my hand with a phone number on it. I show it to my dad. His laugh booms.

"You've just been picked up."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you're about to become a man."

I have no idea what he's talking about.

"You're about to get some."

"What?"

He grabs my head and cradles it in his arm, rubbing the hair on my head.

"We're going to have the talk."

I look at him like he's crazy.

## 3

I'm sitting on my bed looking at a stack of books. I want to read something, but I almost feel like going eeny, miny, mo. I have so many books. And I read so fast that my Dad makes me donate the ones I've read to the library. But still there are stacks and stacks of books, which I continually, well, I guess I could say kind of almost drink through. The words, like water, pass through my brain until catching on something, where they will stay forever.

I hear a knock on the door. I get up from my bed, walk down the stairs, and approach the door. I feel a moment of fright because people rarely come to the house. I think it must be one of Dad's friends and open the door.

There's a girl standing there. She's wearing a pretty blouse that is kind of short and I see the bellybutton ring and I seem to remember something about this girl. I look at her mouth, her hair, and my eyes trace her exposed legs since she's wearing shorts. I finally look up into her face. "Hi, Kyle," she says. She kind of has a shy look on her face and she looks down for a minute. I look down too and notice that she has bright red polish on her toenails.

"I hope you don't mind, I, uh, I was thinking, oh damn." And her voice trails off. I wonder why she's having trouble. I instantly want to help her. And then the memory comes. It's the girl at the bar. I reach out my hand. "Nice to meet you, Verlaine." She looks up, breaking into a wide smile.

"You remember me."

I laugh. "I remember everything."

"Oh, yeah. I forgot."

"Forgot, remember. That's funny."

Her face brightens even more. "Do you mind if I come in?"

"Oh sure, Verlaine. I'd very much like to talk to you."

"Just talk?" she says. And then she just waves her arm at me, her hand slightly connecting with my shoulder. "Just kidding." I have no idea what she means.

"Please come in," I say. She enters and I lead her over to the couch and when we sit down, I notice that she's holding my hand.

"You're very pretty," I say.

"You are too."

I laugh. "You're supposed to say handsome."

She laughs too. Then I get concerned since her face kind of darkens and she looks down at our clasped hands, stroking my finger.

"Did your father die?" I said.

"What? Oh, no. Why would you say that?"

"I don't know," is all I will say.

"Really? Did you intuit something?"

"You're supposed to say I'm being inappropriate."

She laughs. "No such thing."

She tickles me then, and so I brush my hand across her exposed stomach, hoping to keep her laughing. She doesn't look right, so I ask her about it.

"Are you sure you're feeling okay?"

"Oh, you don't want to hear my problems."

"Yes, I would. I'm a genius." We both laugh.

She is still holding my hand and then she lays her head on my shoulder.

"Good bye, blue sky, good by." She's singing. I know the song. It's from Pink Floyd. Very good band.

"You sing nice," I say.

"You really think so?" I nod with a smile on my face. "When I was younger, I sang in the chorus. My teacher told me that I have real talent. But then my Dad died, and my mother, well, you don't need to know about her."

"Yes I do." And the suddenness of my response brightens her face again.

"Wow, well, okay. My mother wasn't really a nice person. Not anything like your Dad. She did drugs, turned tricks, and would bring men home, men..."

"Continue." I see that there are tears in her eyes.

"Men that did awful things to me. Sexual things. I finally ran away and then I met my first boyfriend, Terrence. He was really nice, at least at first. The day he hit me I walked out. I lived on the streets for awhile, oh dear, I'm telling you my life story."

I am still smiling at her, so she says, "Oh you're so nice. Okay. After that I managed to get a job keeping books in a funeral home. They even taught me how to do the hair on the dead bodies. Am I making you uncomfortable?"

"Oh no. I'm fascinated."

“Yeah, well, I worked there for quite a long time. It actually was pretty okay. I felt like I was doing something important, doing something for somebody’s family. And then the funeral home just closed because the owner didn’t want to keep it running anymore. They’re still nice to me. They even give me money sometimes.”

“And your new boyfriend?”

“Oh, he’s not really my boyfriend. We just hang out. But he’s a pretty good guy. I mean he got me into the leather outfits, and of course, the tattoos.”

“Oh, I see,” I say, looking at the snaking design posting itself on her bicep.

“You don’t mind tattoos, do you?” she says lifting her head and I can see real concern in her eyes.

“Of course not,” I say. “Yours are really beautiful. Just like you.”

Her face turns red and then she quickly leans over and kisses me on the lips. This feels really good. “You can do it again.”

She pauses for a moment and looks into my eyes. I see those tears kind of just in the background, almost hiding in her pupils. She takes my face in her hand and then I see her open her mouth. The pleasure I feel now I didn’t know what to do with. I kissed a girl once when I was eight. But it didn’t last half this long. As her lips pressed harder and harder onto my mouth, I opened mine and felt her tongue twining with mine. She stops for a minute and looks into my eyes. “It’s okay, isn’t it?” I’m a little bit scared but I also feel good. I nod my head yes and then wait for her to kiss me again.

Now Verlaine is standing next to the couch, and she is straightening her blouse, tugging at the tufts at her shoulders. “Do you feel good,” she asks me. “I mean, have you ever...?”

I say no, and she smiles. It makes me melt. I’m not so sure what just happened but I have a really good feeling all over my body. “Put your pants on dear,” she says. I dutifully comply. Now she sits next to me.

“I wanted to see you because there’s something else you should know. My brother is autistic just like you. Well, not just like you. He can’t be as normal as you can.”

“Normal?” I say. And I laugh.

“Oh of course you’re right. Who’s normal, right? I’m certainly not.” She smiles at me and I smile back. She moves over to where I’m sitting and kisses me

again, straightens up, and then leaves out the door. I thought it was kind of funny that she didn't say goodbye. People are supposed to say good bye. But she seemed kind of different from most people. I start to think about her and the more I do, the better I feel inside myself. I knew then I had a good friend.

Dad comes home and I tell him what happened.

"Did you like it?" he asks.

"Like what?" I say.

"You know it. It. The thing. Did you like the thing?"

I blink at him feeling a little perplexed about what he wants me to say. "She's very pretty."

"That's it? That's it?" He shook his head like he was trying to get something stuck in his hair out. I just look at him placidly.

"But. Oh, Jesus. Did you like it?" I still stare at him. "You know, it. The thing, the thing."

Now I think I know what he's talking about. I nod my head. "Oh yeah. It was okay. She's really a nice person. I like her a lot."

His tense face is softening now. "Do you have any idea...oh, never mind."

I went to bed and had an awesome dream. There were rainbows and unicorns and just before I woke up, I experienced an incredible feeling of joy. I thought maybe it was the angels the ones trying to tug me back to heaven. I thought that they probably give gifts. They do love us after all. I so hoped they were giving gifts to Verlaine. She really needs it.

I walk down to the kitchen where my Dad has placed my breakfast on the table. I'm a very slow eater. This also annoys my Dad. Come to think of it, almost everything I do annoys my Dad. But I don't mind. He might not understand me all the way, but he's a real nice Dad.

"Are you ready for school?" he says to me really softly. There's something different in his eyes. "I'm really glad about you and Verlaine. She can come over anytime you want."

"Thanks Dad," I say smiling. But then again, I smile a lot. People always notice it.

As I stand to get ready for school, my Dad takes me into an embrace, saying, "My beautiful, beautiful boy." He holds me out at arm's length for just a moment. "Have I ever told you how much I love you?"

“All the time Dad.”

“I really mean it, you know.”

“I know.”

So now we're back in our great Cadillac and we drive to school. I get out and Dad says, “Have a nice day, huh?”

I nod, turning to enter the school.

I'm sitting in the class as it starts and I notice we have a new teacher. He is pretty old. A lot older than my Dad. But then I begin to meditate on the word wisdom. Could this man tell me things about the world I don't know? Not many people can.

“Your teacher couldn't be here today,” he says, “so you'll have to be very good little boys and girls. Any kind of funny business and I'll throw you out. You see that door? That's right where you'll be going.” I notice that he has an ugly smile.

“Today, we're starting the Vietnam War,” he says. Someone is talking softly in the back of the room. The teacher stops talking immediately. He walks toward the person who was talking. “Out!” he says. He's almost yelling. “Out! Now! Go nowhere except to the principal's office. Tell him what you've done.” We're all afraid now even as the person he just threw out seems to slink through the door and I can just see the sole of his shoe as he begins to almost run.

He stands at the front of the room, clearing his throat, and tugging at his cashmere blazer. He begins his lesson again.

“The Vietnam War was started by...who, can anyone tell me?”

A really smart girl in the class raises her hand, and he points to her. “The Vietnamese Communists,” she says.

“Good girl,” he says.

I interrupted his next sentence. “Actually, the French colonization of Vietnam could be said to be the real beginning of the conflict. There's still a lot of debate over whether the Gulf of Tonkin incident was the real beginning of the war or the covert CIA advisors to the French who kind of took over once the French were sick of what they thought were just an annoying bunch of rebels. At least, that's the opinion of Doris Kearns Goodwin.”

The teacher looks at me for a long time. He's staring at me for so long, I actually check my fly and sigh with relief when I find it zipped.

“What did you say?” His face was getting red. “What could you possibly know about something that happened forty years before you were born?”

“Oh, I read,” I say thinking he’ll be pleased. He comes over to my desk and stares at me. It feels like his eyes are examining me head to toe. I have a vague thought that perhaps he’s some kind of doctor or dentist who has to stare at people a lot in his regular job.

“Don’t try to show off,” he said.

“I...” he cuts me off. “Do you know what we have here class?” he says, backing away from my desk and walking around. “What we have here is a smartass. Can anyone tell me what a smartass is?”

No one says anything.

“A smartass is someone who doesn’t know what they’re talking about but think they need to run off of the mouth. Doesn’t someone like that need to be punished?”

Everyone is almost frozen. They hang on his words like he’s about to chop someone in two.

“You!” he says. “What’s your name?”

I look up into his face slowly. “Kyle. K-Y-L...”

“Just get out,” he says and I don’t know that he’s talking to me.

“Go on. Get out.”

Perplexed, I get up and leave.

I’m looking at the principal now, but he’s looking at me like I have two heads after I tell him what just happened.

“You mean?”

I get his point. “Yeah, he was yelling. I don’t why he was so mad at the other boy. He wasn’t really talking that loudly. I think if the man just told him to stop that he probably would have.”

“Yes Kyle,” the principal said. “Marcus came in just before you did. I was shocked because he is almost never in trouble. I can’t remember one time when I ever gave him even one detention. The fact that you’re here...well, I’m just perplexed. Tell me what else he did.”

As I told him about how he scared the whole class repeatedly, I could see on the principal’s face the redness of anger grow. He finally gets up and grabs my hand. “I want you with me Kyle.”

He walks quickly to my classroom and we enter. The teacher is talking and doesn't think to stop even though he sees us. The principal folds his arms across his chest, his foot tapping against the floor. The teacher finally pauses, and since he heard the principal's agitated foot, he turns toward us, producing what is obviously a fake smile.

"Are you here to check on my naughty class?" he says. He's trying to make a joke but the principal's eyes are like daggers. He can't hold back his anger any longer. His face turns scary, so scary that I back off, wishing I could squeeze myself into a corner.

"What, exactly, are you doing?" the principal asks him feigning calm.

"Hello, Dr. Fitzgerald. I was just giving this fine class here my best lesson."

"And does that include scaring my students?"

"Uh, uh...I'm not sure what you mean."

I see all kinds of different emotions come and pass across the principal's face. But he still keeps his cool.

"What was Marcus doing in my office?"

"Well, he was being bad. I sent him off to be punished."

"Do you realize that you're just a substitute?"

"I don't understand."

The principal is deadly calm now. "This is not your class. Not in any sense of the word. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?"

The teacher looks like he's going to faint. "I was, I was just..."

Then the principal's anger flashed up in his face, pushing hot angry words right through his mouth.

"Get out of my school right now, you bastard." Now he shouts. "And I mean now!"

The man is like a dog who has put his tail in between his legs. "I, I, I just thought..."

"Now!"

The man breaks into a run as he exits and I could hear the click, click, click of his wingtips slowly fading.

"Everyone," Dr. Fitzgerald says, now completely serene. "You may go home now. You needn't come back until Monday. I will contact each of your parents. No need to worry. This will never happen again. I can promise you that."

As the students stand to go, I could see that everyone's faces had changed. Our beloved principal had saved us.

#### 4

Actually, as a class, we now have three days to do what we want, especially since it will be the weekend soon. Dad comes through the door and comes over to me where I'm watching Scooby-Doo on TV. He's standing next to me and then he wraps his arms around my head and presses my face to his chest.

"I'm so sorry," he says. "I'm so sorry about what happened to you at school. Dr. Fitzgerald just called me. Whaddya say we go over to the mini-golf and then have some ice cream?"

"Sounds good," I say.

"Very good, Mr. Bojangles. Let's get our tap shoes on."

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That night, after I explained to my Dad how our principal had saved us from an evil man, my Dad and I have a long talk. Actually, a really long talk.

"People may try to treat you differently, Kyle, because you're different. But the way you are is perfect. You are an amazing child. You will be an amazing adult."

Oh, I forgot to tell you. Even though I already graduated from high school, my Dad and the principal decided that perhaps I should stay one more year in high school since I'm so comfortable there. I thought it was a great idea. I love my school, I have so many friends. Plus, I'm working in the library. I'm a little nervous there because I don't have to use the computer to help people. I just take their hand, go into the stacks, and pull out the book from the shelf. Most people really like it, and they are always surprised about how I know these things so easily. They can't possibly know that I'm a talented genius. They would probably be scared of my intelligence. So now I just pretend to use the computer so the others I work with won't be jealous. Now I see them checking to see if I'm using it just to make sure I'm doing things right. I've found that people are really into

following rules. If you don't do things a,b,c then they think you're doing something wrong. I'm not doing anything wrong. I know it. I believe, in my heart, that people rarely do things wrong, and if they do, it usually isn't their fault.

Dad is finishing our conversation and I see real emotion in his eyes. He and I lock eyes for what seems like a long time. He's talking about Verlaine, my library job, the evil teacher, where my mother went when she left us, almost the whole universe of ideas possible for us to talk about. This will go on for over an hour. I really liked it. I never felt so close to my Dad. Although it made me think of children all over the world dying of starvation and seeing their parents killed in awful civil wars. My Dad is always remarking on my compassion. He finds it really interesting that an autistic kid could form such deep emotions. The truth is we're not supposed to be able to do it. Autistic kids just don't connect. But then again I'm a little more advanced like I told you. Actually, I seem to have insights that not even genius normal people have. Sometimes I look up at the stars at night and think about the positions of the stars, the rotation of the planets, and especially I focus on the spin of our own globe keeping us from flying around. There was an eclipse of the moon a few nights ago. I felt like the moon and the sun were eating each other in some way. The food of the Gods. I chuckled to myself. I wondered if we aren't food for them too in a way. The multiple mouths of the multiple gods masticating us like Mexican burritos spicy and warm on their tongues where their digestion poops us out as human beings in all our messiness. The thought of people wandering around as feces...the thought made me laugh so hard that I laughed out loud. My Dad, who had been standing next to me, shoots me a dirty look, and I just fall quiet.

## 5

One day I was manning the information desk in the library. And a little girl comes up to the desk. I can tell she's kind of shy. She just shifts from foot to foot for a moment until I realize she's expecting me to speak.

"Can I help with something?" I say. I can see she has big beautiful eyes and I calculate that her age is probably around twelve or thirteen.

She just stares up at me for a second and then her eyes drift in a downward direction.

“Do you want me to find you a book?”

“I’m not sure,” she says, batting her long eyelashes.

“Well,” I say. “What kind of things do you like to read?”

Her face lights up. “Oh I love to read. I read a lot.”

“So do I. What...”

“Oh I like adventure stories.”

“Hmmm, yes. I know just what you would like. Would you come with me please?”

She nods and I come out from around the desk. I start to move towards the stacks and I notice that she has taken my hand. I glance down for a second and just shrug, thinking what a nice little girl she is.

I lead her into the adventure story section, walk over to the shelf and pull out a book.

“Robert Louis Stevenson,” I say. “This is a great book. Maybe one of the best of all time. It’s called *Treasure Island* and it has all kinds of things in it like pirates, buried treasure and X’s marking spots. Would you like to read it?”

She nods yes. I put the book in her hands. And I walk her out to the library door she still clinging to my hand until I release her hand and watch as she turns to wave good-bye. I wave back with a big smile on my face. I love to inspire people to read. I privately believe that books talk to us with their words like aliens communicating from another world. I read one guy once who called this kind of thinking, thinking in archetypes. The archetype is a very old symbol system that contains things called universals people have to sort of untangle as a way of wringing the meaning out of what is actually an underground meaning system. I don’t pay much attention to ideas like this because, when I think, there are pictures there that I then have to translate into words. Sometimes I wonder if people are kind of trapped by words. A picture is worth a thousand words. Isn’t this what people say? I revel in my thoughts on this and turn to the computer and Google Carl Jung, so, now that I’m thinking about it, I can get some essays on him for more information.

A few days later, the little girl has come back, seeming to pop into existence as if she were newly born.

“You want another book?” I say to her. She nods, and suddenly becomes talkative.

“Oh the book was so great. I couldn’t put it down. I had to keep reading and reading. I thought I’d never stop. But then I came to the end. I felt kind of sorry that the book had to end. I think books should never end. Endings, even when their good endings, are always bad.”

I fill with pleasure. Someone who likes to read. What a great thing.

“Please show me another one?” she asks.

Without saying anything, I come around again and this time I intentionally take her hand. I’m getting a fatherly feeling like I’m really her Dad. I wonder if sometime in the future I could raise a little girl like her.

I walk right up to the book I want to show her. It’s Charles Dickens.

“This one should be fun,” I say. Furtively and quickly, she takes the book, and as I go to walk her out, she walks next to me, grabs my hand, giving it a little squeeze, and then she’s gone. My eyes feel a little wet. If only I could parent a girl such as her.

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Dad is waiting for me outside, standing by the Cadillac, and I notice he’s wearing white shoes. How funny, I think. His shoes match the car. I break into a wide grin as I approach. He holds up his hands, and then I have to laugh. I can’t help it. He’s splaying his fingers in the famous Vulcan greeting.

“Live long and prosper,” he says. I don’t start laughing until I return with, “Goddamnit Jim, I’ve given her everything she’s got,” in a perfect Scottish accent of course. He grabs me and ruffles my hair. “Everyone knows Uhuru’s the best.”

As we get into the car, I dip into my memory, and start viewing the Star Trek episode that is probably the best, “The City on the Edge of Tomorrow.” Jerome Bixby. His “It’s a Good Life” probably ranks up there with the best SF stories of all time. But then again, I like “Flowers for Algernon” the best of all.

Dad’s is talking to me about something but I’m not listening because I’m in my dreamworld. I see Oscar clapping. He’s doing a standing ovation. I don’t know what makes him do this. But Oscar is always doing ironic things. It seems to be his personality.

Once we reach the house, I have a moment of shock and pleasure when I see that Verlaine is standing in front of the door. I feel a little shy about seeing her. I don't know why. But she instantly makes me feel comfortable when she meets me at the car, takes me by the arm, and escorts into the house, the door almost slamming shut as my Dad comes in talking excitedly.

"I invited her over," Dad says. "I thought I'd surprise you."

Verlaine is in her leather and I have this sudden insight. She really looks good in it. It really suits her. She squeezes my arm and gives me a quick peck on the cheek. I can't help thinking, you know, she may actually look better in the leather. Last time I saw her, I thought the blouse was better, but she has this kind of rugged look the way she's dressed now. It gives her a sultry appearance. She looks at me with a warm look.

"You are surprised aren't you?" she asks. I just punch her in the shoulder. Wait a minute, and punch her again, a little harder this time. She grabs my hand and now as we sit on the couch, she decides to tell me about her brother while she's holding my hand.

"I think you'd like him," she's saying. "He's not very vocal. But I'd like you to meet him. I think you'd be an awfully good influence."

Unconsciously, I change the subject. "Do you have a nice boyfriend now?"

She looks at me like I'm crazy. "You're my boyfriend, silly."

She then gets a little more serious. "Actually, I've already cheated on you." And she laughs. "I met this really nice guy the other night. He reminded me of you so much that I kind of got caught up. He's a literature major at North Texas University. He was really fascinating. We talked about literature all night. He could see that I didn't know a whole lot, and when I saw that he really likes to help people understand him, I got really interested."

"Oh, that's great," I say. "Maybe I'll get a literature degree sometime."

"What in the world would you need a degree for, silly? Tell me, how many subjects can you lecture on already?"

"I'm afraid of looking like a show-off." I really do think this. I'm always having to disguise my intelligence. People almost to a man react badly when I appear too smart. That's why I like the library. People pretty much leave to myself and I just have to pretend sometimes that I don't know anything. Actually, this is the sad part of my life. I never really feel like I can be totally myself. It seems like

Verlaine notices this as my face takes on a kind of sad look. She strokes my hair as she says to me, "You don't need to hide from anyone. You're perfect."

This is the second time I've heard this. It takes me back to the time I was born, the time when the angels wanted me to go back with them so badly. Nobody's really perfect, but perhaps when we're that young we are, especially if we come into the world like I did.

She's rubbing my shoulder and then she gives me a playful nudge. "Come on," she says, "let's play a board game. I heard that you like Monopoly."

"I'm afraid I'll be too good for you."

"Honey, you're too good for anyone." I smile.

## 6

Now I'm back at the library. School tires me out, but by the time I get to the library, I recover my smile. Everyone likes me, well, everyone likes me now because I seem to be following the rules. And then I see my darling little faux daughter, only this time she's holding a man's hand. They come up to me and the man extends his hand out to me. "I'm Goldie's father," he says, and I take his hand and we shake. "I'm so glad you met my daughter. She never stops talking about you. What's your secret?" But I watch as his face darkens. Oh no, he can tell I'm autistic. I get this kind of thing a lot. But I've learned to defuse it.

I motioned for him to lean in with a wag of my finger. "I'm secretly James Bond. MI-5 only lets me help little girls so I'll stay away from the women." It's something my Dad taught me. He's so good at jokes.

The man laughs. I told you it works every time.

"You're so clever. No wonder my daughter's taken to you. I really would like to thank you. I mean she's a reader anyway, but now, you should know that she's taken to going through our volumes of encyclopedias. She's reading so much I thought it might begin to become unhealthy. But I saw when she finished the A-L encyclopedia, that she was able to recite the whole thing back to me. I had no idea my daughter is a genius."

I don't get it right away until the irony sinks in. Another talented genius, and we spend our time together acting like father and daughter. With this thought in mind, I look at her and wink. "Have your new book?" I say.

She holds one up. "Yep. *Les Miserables*."

"That's my girl," I say suddenly conscious that my phrases were acting like a term of endearment. Her Dad seems to think I'm being too intimate. So he grabs her hand kind of roughly and wheels around, heading for the door, and I knew I had just scored both a success and a failure. But really, aren't the two concepts just the same after all? Think about it and then get back to me with your idea.

## 7

Somehow the news spread. Everyone was beginning to understand not only my helpfulness but also my strange ability to read minds about what people want to read. So now as I stand at the information desk, a line forms. There are four people in the line, and they are waiting patiently. The first person I meet looks up at me with expectant eyes. I'm not sure whether I should speak or not. The silence is getting a little to long so I say, "I suppose you'd like me to find you a book." The woman just nods and now she's following me into the stacks. She won't say anything to me, so I have to guess her interests. I bring her over to the classic romance section. And I pull out *Little Women*. She shakes her head no. So I think for a moment and then pull out *Pride and Prejudice*. She eagerly nods her head yes. I put the book in her hands with her still not speaking and then I watch as she walks away from me.

The next man wants science fiction the next philosophy the next has a keen interest in quantum physics. And just as I clear out this line, another one forms. People wanting to see me keep piling up like emptied champagne bottles being discarded by a waiter who can hardly keep up with the demand of people thirsty for a celebratory experience. Indeed, I feel like I'm at a party that doesn't want to end. I'm starting to get tired, so the head librarian steps in and goes along the line taking names. Once her sheet of names is filled up, the people in the line walk over to take seats.

“My goodness, Kyle,” she says. “What in the world did you do to these people?” I just shrug and say, “Well, all I did was help a little girl.”

Her eyes widen and she pats me on the shoulder starting to chuckle. “Out of the mouth of babes.”

I recognize the Biblical reference.

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Eventually, the word spread around our city so much that it is becoming impossible for me to meet absolutely all of the people who seem desperate to see me. They tell me to stay away from the library for awhile. But then I get a call from the principal.

“Kyle,” he says on the phone. “I have great news for you.”

Yes?”

“I’ve acquired a grant from the Department of Education. Do you understand what this means?”

“No.”

“Well, to put things simply, you won’t be working in the library anymore. We’ve found an office for you in a building. It’s on the third floor, I hope you don’t mind.”

“I’m not sure I understand,” I say, understanding that I’m not going to be working in the library, but this office idea...what is it? So I just say to my principal, the thing exactly in my head, “What is it?”

What it is,” he starts to explain, “is that you will be advising people on what to read in your own office. Do you understand now?”

“Have things really gotten this bad?” I’m starting to wonder if I’ve done something wrong.

“No, no. Let’s see, the best way to explain this to you. The head librarian came up with the idea. Someone, I’m not sure who, has taken to calling you Dr. Kyle, so the librarian thought, ‘Great. We’ll call him a doctor of books, a book doctor.’”

I’m still leery but I say with partial understanding. “Okay, I think I get it. You really want me to have my own office?”

“Of course. I even just got a call from CNN wanting an interview you’ve become so famous. So tell me. Will you do it?”

“Yes.”

Next thing I know I’m sitting in my “office.” I look at the fish tank and the bookshelves stuffed with books. My chair is comfortable and there is a computer on my desk that I have opened to Google because I use that a lot. As people come to see me, I find that things are changing. Now sometimes I’m talking about books and sometimes people are asking me for personal advice. This is fine, but I feel the need to brush up on counseling skills. So I scan through all the books I can find on the topic but still feel a little concerned about my skills. So I start attending a local college. They teach me a lot. I only have to spend one month in an otherwise two year program so I get to get a degree. I realize, at graduation, that they have just given me a master’s degree. Whatever. I don’t care. All I care about is helping my clients.

I’m in my office kind of yawning. The principal and the librarian decided that I only should see five people a day because they’re worried I might get overtired. They’re probably right. I’ve just met with my last client, and I’m feeling fatigue set in. Then my last person of the day walks into my office. He’s dressed very well. He’s wearing a suit and tie, and the tie is a bright yellow. I can tell by looking at the suit that it’s a one thousand dollar Armani, so I think he must be really rich. He sits down in front of me and extends his hand.

“Hello, Dr. Kyle,” he says in a kind of serious voice. “I’m the President of Rice University and there’s something I would like to discuss with you. Do you know that you’ve created a movement?”

I shake my head no. I don’t keep up with the news. I did watch myself on CNN when they aired my interview. I didn’t think I did very well, but my Dad said I looked like a genius. Need I say more?

“Yeah. There are pockets of people starting a campaign they’re calling ‘Calling Mister Book Doctor.’ People like you are popping up everywhere across the country. I think very soon you may be world famous.”

“I didn’t mean too....” looking down.

“No, no. This is tremendously positive. So positive that the students at my university have come to me asking me to give you an honorary doctorate. That’s why I’m here.”

“Really,” I say.

“Yes, really.”

We both kind of chuckle together and he rises from the chair, patting me on the shoulder. I smile at him and thank him for coming thinking nothing about it.

## 8

I thought on the ceremony with fondness after it was over. After they made the announcement about me, they draped a cloth sash over my robe and handed me a framed document. There it was. “Kyle Turner, Doctor of Philosophy.” Wow, a real Ph.D. Now I feel pride that I had just equaled my Ivy League going classmates. What irony. A dummy passing up real geniuses. It makes me feel very proud. Now I want to tell you about what happened to Dad and I when we visited what became our favorite bar. I will tell you in real time and slowly because the experience was, well, the experience was holy.

Dad and I walk into the bar and we see everyone we know, lounging in booths or occupying barstools. I see Verlaine and she waves me over. Vaughn is telling her a joke and there’s the new boyfriend, ironically named Kyle. Kyle is instantly friendly. He drapes an arm around my shoulders and says, “Verlaine has told me all about you. It’s wonderful, so wonderful. I even saw you on CNN. You’re famous. Isn’t that great?”

I nod. Vaughn has just told Verlaine a joke, and she’s laughing without stopping, also putting her arm around me, and now I’m being hugged by two people at the same time. Verlaine is pounding the bar a little while she’s trying to calm down from the joke, and feeds me a chip from a bowl sitting on the bar. Then I feel Vaughn tapping me on the shoulder. “Like a game of pool?” he asks, a big, wide smile breaking out, seeming to push the hair on his face aside.

“Uh, no thank you, Vaughn. I’ll play with you later.”

“Very good. Maybe I’ll actually win this time.” He winks at me and pats me on the shoulder, turning to leave for the pool room. Verlaine and Kyle are still hugging me, and I feel like a kind of human sandwich. The thought makes me laugh, and I just turn to look into Verlaine’s eyes, and when our eyes lock, she

starts cracking up until her shoulders shape into a full-fledged laugh. And she starts to rub my back. I feel wonderful. So good in fact that my life flashes before my eyes. I see myself, first touching hands with my brother, then my head fills with all kinds of ideas and memories, and there he is, Oscar, doing another standing ovation. He winks at me and I wink back. I feel such a presence of love in the place that I think I will cry. Images flash. My mother, my brother, my father, all of my clients, and I feel such bliss that I think I might bust in two. But then again, I am two. I am half. Half a brother. Half autistic. Half a doctor. I am who I am. And my name is Kyle.