

NOTEBOOK

A CRFH!!! Story by Maritza Campos

Chapter 1– Attention.

What is this? Pay more attention! 😞😞😞

In red marker.

All over his English essay.

“This is going to ruin my whole day,” Dave thought, but he wasn’t even close to the truth.

Facing the perspective of asking Miss Plumtree why he had got a C- in his English essay and what was the meaning of the cryptic message, Dave pondered just letting it go. He couldn’t do it, however. Because if he didn’t know what was wrong with it, and it came up in a test, then he’d have the wrong answer. And if it was an essay question and therefore worth a big percentage, then he could even fail that test. And then if the question came up again in the finals, he could even FAIL that too. And his whole life would be ruined, forever and ever AMEN.

“You’re a failure, Dave. You’re an academic failure. Unfit. A reject.” Billy said, matter-of-factly.

“Oh, rub it in.” Dave said, depressed.

“It’s a C minus. Seriously. Not the end of the world. You’ll live.”

“It’s a C minus. Seriously.” Dave answered.

“Besides, I bet you can change that to a C. But you have to work at it. Cry a little or something. And Miss Plumtree has a crush on you.”

Dave shot Billy a dirty look. Miss Plumtree was like 100 years old, take or give ten.

“Good job, David.” Billy cackled, imitating perfectly the teacher’s voice, and gave Dave a pat on the head.

Another dirty look, but Dave was having a hard time trying to stay serious.

“I am disappointed on you, William. Sorely disappointed.” And then patted himself on the head. Dave couldn’t help but laugh this time. Billy could crunch numbers like crazy, but English was not his thing.

“At least I’m not going to be the first illiterate astronaut on Mars.”

“At least I’m not going to kiss that old tree for a C+.”

“Um.” Dave looked down at the red message, his good mood vanished. “Do you have any idea what I did wrong here?”

“What, you mean you didn’t cook up this thing at 1 a.m. like me?”

“I was actually expecting a good grade. At least I... I, I *worked* for it.”

That wasn’t exactly a lie. More like something Dave didn’t realize. Truth was, he was orbiting the planets while writing that essay. The whole three hours it took.

“Sorry, can’t help you there. Got a D, myself. I guess I’m going to need help for the next essay. Oh wait, I can’t, because you’re usually the one who helps me with wordy things, and now? Failure.”

“Oh, what’s the use.” Dave’s shoulders slumped.

“That’s right. Better do it right away before she leaves. I’ll wait for you outside with a snake bite kit.” And with that, Billy vanished. Only Dave and the teacher remained on the classroom now.

Miss Plumtree, the veteran English teacher, was gathering her stuff in her usual energetic fashion. She was clearly in a bad mood. But Miss Plumtree always had liked Dave. A lot of teachers liked him, especially the older ones, who considered most youngsters of the present generation as regrettable by-products of a careless society. Noisy, apathetic and rude. In comparison, Dave was quiet, worked hard and was always polite. But younger teachers often found that he got on their nerves. After one of Dave’s usual after-class round of questions, the biology lab teacher, just a few weeks ago, had shouted at him that he had to “RELAX”. Then she had buried her face on her hands. She apologized a few days later, but Dave started running to the door as soon as the bell rang marking the end of her classes.

He had asked no more questions.

But even if Miss Plumtree liked him, she WAS in a bad mood. Maybe it was best just to leave it for some other occasion. Except the teacher chose that moment to raise her eyes and saw him. It was too late now.

Dave cautiously approached the desk, his essay crumpling in his sweaty hands. He cleared his throat.

“Um, Miss Plumtree?”

“Yes. David.”

God, she had eyes like a hawk. And she was staring at him. Like a hawk. Staring at a bunny.

“Ah um, about my essay...”

"I'm not going to change your grade, young man. You should consider yourself lucky. I was going to make it a D-, but I was willing to go light on you, since you usually work so well. But of course, I can always change my mind."

"... okay."

Turn around and run turn around and run run run RUN RUN!

"Ah, I, I was wondering..."

HAWK. He considered very carefully what he should say.



"For the next essay? I don't want to make the same mistakes. So, if, if you can give me some pointers..."

"Here's a pointer, David. Next time. Read the BOOK."

Dave blinked.

"But I did. I did read it. It took me a whole week, but I did. It was the most tattered copy of the library, but I did!"

"I am ABOUT to reconsider your grade."

Dave froze.

"I'm disappointed, David. Sorely disappointed. I expected more from you. At least, more than this. This... joke."

"But it's not fair!" Dave protested, unable to stop himself. "I have no idea what I did that was so bad!"

"Young man," Miss Plumtree snapped, "'Animal Farm' is NOT a LOVE STORY!"

"Have I mentioned that Plumtree is a completely ridiculous last name?" Dave said, frowning into his mashed potatoes.

"Only a zillion times." Billy managed to say through a mouthful of turkey sandwich.

"It's like something out of a kiddie show. A tacky one. With hand-painted backgrounds and cardboard bushes and paper flowers. And a smiling sun."

"Oh, now you're depressing me."

"I know." Dave was idly poking holes in the unappetizing white mass. "I'm back to square one, man. This is going to come up in a test and..."

"Haunt you relentlessly like a Japanese ghost. A hairy, groaning one."

"It could happen. And knowing my luck, it will. So, what WAS 'Animal Farm' about?"

"I believe it was like a sociopolitical thingie. A fable. I think it was about capitalist pigs or something."

"That doesn't sound so bad. You wrote that?"

"Probably. Maybe. It was 1 a.m. and I didn't really read the book."

"Well, I did. Big fat good it did, thought."

"I bet that pissed the old girl even more. Did it seriously take you a whole week to finish 'Animal Farm'? It's not that long."

"I read a chapter a day. The last three the day I wrote the essay."

"Oh yeah, the patented super-efficient Dave Jones' Studying Method."

"It works. Mostly. But I still don't know what to do about this. I guess I'll have to read the book again, or look for a review somewhere."

“And I suppose I will have to help you do it, if only because I don’t really want to spend a whole week talking about this book.”

“Geez, I don’t do that kind of thing on purpose, you know.” Dave shrugged. He had no appetite at all, but he couldn’t afford the luxury of wasting food. So he chewed furiously to finish soon.

“Either you’re really hungry or you have somewhere else to go.”

“The library. Sorry, but this is driving me crazy.”

Billy rolled his eyes, as if Dave was a hopeless case. But suddenly, there was a twinkle and a spark on them. He leaned over the table, speaking in a most conspirational tone.

“Hey, here’s an idea.” Billy chuckled maliciously. “Why don’t you ask someone else? Someone who got a nice grade on that essay? Mmmh? Know who I’m thinking about?”

Dave felt the hair on the back of his neck rising.

“Oh God no. I couldn’t. Never.”

“Why not? You only have to show her your red frowny marker faces. She’d get a good laugh, and you’d get a good IN. Everybody knows you usually have good grades, so what’s so strange about asking for a little help? See? From time to time, something good comes from bad things.”

Dave turned his head for a little look. She was still safely afar from the conversation. Eating her lunch and studying, as always. He didn’t have to look for her, because she always was the first thing he spotted in a room, and he’d always choose his place according to that. Not close to draw her attention, but always in a way he could look at her surreptitiously. And there was plenty to look at.

Instead of the usual brown curls cascading down to her waist, she was wearing her hair up today. What a shame. It was probably because of the food. Hunched over the table like that, her hair would probably end up soaking in the gravy or the cheese sauce.

The mere thought of walking over there and talking to her was so terrifying his intestines cramped.

“Screw this essay. You’re right, I’ll live. High school education is not that necessary after all. I can always... I dunno. Wash cars or something?”

“C’mon. Seriously, what is she doing to do? What’s the worst thing that could happen?”

“She could... uh. Snap my collarbone. Kick me in the nuts. Behead me with a cafeteria tray.”

“Dude, you’re going to ask her to let you take a look at her essay, not her boobs. In the worst case scenario she’d just tell you to get lost.”



"That's encouraging. No. I don't think so." He turned around again to look, like a moth hypnotized by a candle. He was like that for a long while, so long he forgot where he was and what he was doing. He woke up to Billy saying something.

"Uh?"

"I said she's about to finish her lunch, so it's now or never."

"What?" And she was. He got up, all his wariness forgotten. He swayed a little in place, still not sure if he was actually going to do it or not.

"The love bus is leaving. Better hop on it." Billy chanted.

"You're always sending me off to kill dragons, and for that, I hate you forever."

"If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't even kill an already dead mosquito. Go, Gadget, GO."

Next thing he knew he was standing by her table. Surely he couldn't have just teleported there, but he didn't actually remember walking, either.

He waited to be acknowledged, but she wasn't looking up. He might as well have been a ghost, a statue, or the goddamn Easter bunny. He wasn't exactly complaining, though, because from his point of view, he could see a glorious portion of exquisite cleavage. His mouth dried up instantly and without warning: this, of course, only added to the difficulty of talking.

"Mmmmmargaret?"

"Hm?" she grunted through a mouthful of biscuit and turned her blue gaze to him.

"I was just wondering if you could show me your English essay?" he said, in a voice so low that nobody but him heard it, and even that, barely. There was a tremendous racket going on inside his body, with his heart on the drums and his lungs on the pipes.

"HM??" she grunted again, frowning. She was looking at something on his shirt. He looked down and there it was, a huge ketchup stain that was almost as red as his face at that exact moment. But even worse, he noticed his heart was visibly beating inside his chest. Why did he had to wear his most tattered, thin shirt to school that day? Was that what she was looking at? The stain, the shirt, his chest?

Oh God, just finish this, he thought. Dave gathered all the courage he could, then he spoke louder.

"I was saying. I was wondering if you could show me your chest."

There was a second or two of silence on both parts. Then he suddenly realized what he just said. There was only time for an abject horror to set in, and then he saw the green cafeteria tray, traveling at light-speed to meet his forehead.