

## **how you felt when I disappointed you**

I had this friend in high school who kept an old pen up on the top shelf of his locker. We used it to alter our report cards. The school district had budget problems, so all the report cards were printed in a lazy, faded blue which merely required a hazy, fading blue pen to award yourself with the grade you desired. He'd open up the envelope in homeroom and sigh and say, "Yep, looks like it's time to visit the pen."

One day my friend announced he was going out for the football team. He was fast and athletic. We had played basketball together for years. He used to talk like an announcer all the time, but not in a boastful way, more because he'd do these amazing things. He'd even do instant replays every now and then. "Let's see that again," he'd say as if proudly freezing a play in his head forever.

He was damn good; he could be a running back, or anything really. I was kind of jealous, you know, imagining him in that slow motion, scoring touchdowns and hanging out with all the football guys at that pitch dark pizza place after games on Friday nights. He'd have cheerleaders around him and get treated nicely by everyone. His life would be that of a celebrity, mysterious and unpredictable. Could you picture anyone being so lucky in all your life? Could you?

For a few days I was weighed down with those thoughts, my mind wet with photos of him in the newspapers and yearbook, dreaming it was me and not him. I'd bring him along to the pizza place and introduce him to all the cheerleaders, maybe even set him up. But gradually I knew that he would be him, and I would be me, and he would be introducing me to them. I wondered if he'd forget all about me, you know, like a mild cold.

I found out a week later that he couldn't go out for the team. I overheard some guy mentioning it real casually as I was settling down in the cafeteria. He had to work on the farm after school and couldn't get a ride back into town or something.

I sat there in the cafeteria as people came and went, getting up and sitting down with their books and lunch trays and backpacks, coming and going, bitching about some teacher or some girl. I pictured him with those cheerleaders and those touchdowns and those popular people, experiencing those exotic places on Friday nights, being a part of something. He had a herd of friends, all of them pretty and self-assured. I saw him laughing and making out with that Michelle girl, real slowly in the leaves, like golden

blankets under a tree in the moonlight, the blankets rolling and twisting and glowing. I felt good for him there, proud as hell, sweating with pride for him, like he belonged there. And I was good there too, cheering for him up in the stands on crisp, dark fall nights. So good that I felt terribly bad inside. A hazy, fading blue sky bad, like I was being crushed, like he had died away years ago and I had just happened to remember him for that moment, that fading moment, picturing him with his touchdowns and with her under that tree at midnight - as if I were reading his mind.

By Tony Rauch – copywrited material