

The Wednesday after school, dozens of students file out of the school except for two students, Trent and Val. Trent is another freshman, but had just turned 15 not too long ago. He wears his uniform without the school blazer, which often gets into hot water with hall monitors screaming, “Put your jacket back on!”. But Trent doesn’t care. It’s spring, so the weather is starting to get warm. And they don’t switch to summer uniforms for another month or so. Trent comes from an Indian family and has thick, black, wavy hair that always droops in his face and enhances his uncaring demeanor and style.

Val is a junior whose family comes from the Philippines. He wears his uniform properly. Blazer buttoned up, tie adjusted to the right length, freshly-ironed pants and regularly-waxed dress shoes. Val isn’t a nerd, but he does do well in all of his classes and is a proper, although soft spoken student.

The two are in an abandoned classroom. Val is sitting at a desk while Trent sits criss-crossed on top of another desk.

“What’s the deal with Marika telling us not to come to school on Friday?” Trent wonders.

“I don’t know, but I’d trust Ms. Marika’s judgment. She’s been at this way longer than either of us.” Val hums in response.

“I’d ditch this place WITHOUT her asking us to. But I don’t think I can afford to skip again, not with the hall monitors chasing me.”

Val replies, “She said she’ll excuse our absences that day.”

Trent lights up. “For real? Free day off? God, I’d kiss Marika on the mouth if I could.”

“You don’t even know why she’s advising us to stay home. This isn’t a game, Trent. What if it’s something actually dangerous?”

“You think it could be about that creepy old man stalking the outside of the school?”

Trent asks, suddenly getting serious. “I feel it every time I walk past that guy.”

“‘It’?”

“That magnetic pull towards someone. No matter how much you try to avoid them, they show up. That feeling where you don’t even have to look at them to know that they’re there.”

Val thinks to himself for a moment. “For the past few days, I haven’t been able to focus at all in class. Something keeps drawing me to the front gate, where the old man is staring at us. I know he’s there, even if I never actually see him that day.”

Trent strokes his chin. “You think he has one of them?”

“It’s the only thing that makes sense.”

“Then we’ll be fine. Let’s just ditch Friday and go somewhere fun. You thinking of hitting the pizza arcade?”

Val plays with his tie. “Sure. I need a rematch with you after you cheated in Space Rangers.”

“I ain’t cheating. Your aim is just that trash.”

Val chuckles at him. The two continue to chatter about their plans for their unscheduled day off.