

The Taming of Mr. Brent

By Brian Gallaher



I will never forget 1987, that was the year I moved to a new high school and met Mr. Brent. I remember feeling the butterflies in my stomach as I walked through the heavy doors of the main building for the first time and the terrible feeling of awkwardness that comes with not knowing anybody. When I finally found my locker there was a pretty blonde girl standing next to it. She looked at me and introduced herself. ‘Hi, my name is Sarah.’ ‘Hi, I’m Brian.’ I shuffled around stupidly for a moment not knowing if I was supposed to shake her hand, finally I just ran my hand through my hair hoping to look cool. ‘So I’m looking for Mr. Brent’s class room 302, can you help me?’ ‘Yeah sure, that’s where I’m going too. Just, um, don’t look at his eye.’ She spun around and started walking before I could ask what she meant about his eye. We got to the classroom and I took the desk next to Sarah. Mr. Brent began the class by introducing me, the new student. ‘Good morning class, we have a new student joining us this morning. Sarah said not to look at his eye and that made me curious, if she wouldn’t have said anything maybe he wouldn’t have caught me staring at his glass eye. He slowly walked up to the front of my desk; he didn’t say a word he just looked at me. The other kids started chuckling and still Mr. Brent silently looked at me. I couldn’t hold his gaze but every time I looked up my eyes went straight to that glass eye and I knew I was making him angrier but I just couldn’t help it. Finally, after what seemed like a lifetime, Mr. Brent bent down so close to my face that I could feel his breath blowing against my skin. ‘Do you have a problem with my eye?’ ‘No sir, its fine, no problem.’ ‘Its made of glass you know,’ he took a pencil and tapped the eye three times

without blinking. Through gritted teeth he growled at me, ‘ I lost the real one to a piece of shrapnel in Vietnam; I guess an ungrateful smart alec like you wouldn’t know about that would you. I’ll tell you what, since you like it so much, why don’t you hold on to it until the end of class.’ He took his fingers and dug the eye out of the socket. Then he slammed it down on the end of my desk and he made a point to turn it so that it was looking right at me. That was the longest class of my life, and when it was over he was sure to tell me that he would keep an eye out for me. I went to my parents and asked them to transfer me out of his class. My dad being the awesome guy that he is talked me out of it. ‘Son, how do you know that God didn’t put you in his class for a reason? Obviously the man is hurting and I doubt that his eye is the real problem. A lot of the Vietnam veterans came home without much welcome, after all they went through they came home to find a country that didn’t seem to care.’ I knew my dad was right. The next day when I got to his class I mustered up my courage and said, ‘Mr. Brent I want to say thank you.’ ‘Thank you for what?’ ‘Thank you sir for what you did in the war. I just want you to know that I am very grateful to you and people like you. If it wasn’t for people like you we wouldn’t have a country.’ Tears began to fall onto his desk. ‘Nobody has ever said that to me before, thank you.’ Then I really felt bold, ‘Can I pray for you sir?’ He looked up a little surprised but he agreed. From that day on Mr. Brent was a little nicer.