

## Pride

Matthew Ban (2023)

It was mostly his fault, right? Well, maybe mostly hers. Okay, maybe, almost entirely her fault. But still, it was just a stupid rabbit statue. Why in the world had he placed it at the end of the stair banisters anyway? Apparently, everyone had agreed that it would look best there, but no one had told her.

She had just slid down the banister as usual, like she did every morning. Round and round towards the bottom. Then she had seen, too late, James' prized possession—a rabbit sculpture he had purchased recently. The pieces had gone everywhere.

'Kempsey? I said the class can go, but before you do, please deposit your work here on my desk. It's due today,' said Ms. Montague, snapping Kempsey out of her reminiscing.

'Yes, sorry, Ms. Montague, I'll go now.' Kempsey packed up her things, then headed to Ms. Montague's desk. She left her notebook there, still daydreaming.

'Kempsey, this notebook is filled with scribbles. Are you sure it's yours?'

Kempsey peered at the notebook. It wasn't hers. It was James' notebook. He must have swapped them on purpose to get his revenge!

'Sorry, Ms. Montague, I think that's my brother's notebook, not mine. I'll go get mine from him now.'

'No problem, dear, but don't forget, it's due today.'

Kempsey dashed out of the classroom, heading outside. James was sure to be around somewhere. It was the lunch break now. She still remembered what her mum had told her before she went to school, 'I want you to apologise to James. It was entirely your fault.'

If Kempsey didn't apologise to him first, he probably wouldn't give her notebook to her. By now, he had probably hidden it somewhere. In a school as large as theirs, it could take her years to find it. It had been trouble enough to find James.

So now, Kempsey trudged over to James, who sat slumped under a tree. He didn't even look up as she approached. 'Kempsey.'

'Hello James.'

‘What do you want now?’

‘I-I just wanted to say ...’ she said.

‘Yes?’

‘Alright, I’m sorry, okay? I’m sorry I broke your statue. But you know, it wasn’t my fault! You shouldn’t have left it there! Now give me back my notebook!’

‘B-but I t-told you!’

‘So what? I didn’t hear you.’

‘B-but I tapped you on the shoulder, and you told me to go away!’

‘You still shouldn’t have taken my notebook, though! Give it back to me, and I’ll admit it was my fault.’

‘I-I didn’t take it!’ James said, sniffing.

Spotting his bag next to him, Kempsey grabbed it, then started searching for her notebook. An apple, a sandwich, a popper, some stationary, some other miscellaneous items, but no notebook.

‘Where did you put it, you little thief?’ she asked.

‘I told you; I didn’t take it!’

Kempsey tossed his bag at him. ‘Get lost, you little liar!’

James gave a sob then tore away, down the hill. Kempsey glared at him. All of this had tired her out. Maybe she would just take a short nap ...

After a couple of minutes, she was woken by Timothy, James’ best friend, who looked concerned. ‘Kempsey, have you seen James? I can’t find him anywhere.’

‘No, I haven’t, now leave me alone. I was dreaming of something nice ...’ Kempsey closed her eyes.

‘Is this girl his sibling?’

‘Y-yes, our records show she is. I’ve already called the parents. This really is so tragic for them.’

Kempsey woke up at the sound of voices. She looked up. A police officer stood there, along with the school principal.

‘Are you Kempsey Ortega?’ asked the police officer.

‘Y-yes,’ stuttered Kempsey. She rose to her feet.

‘Kempsey, I’m Sergeant Brown. I have some very sorry news to tell you.’

‘What?’ asked Kempsey, her heart thumping.

‘I’m here to let you know, that today, at 12:11 pm, your little brother, James, was hit by a car outside of the school gate. He appeared to have been running away. Unfortunately, the car was travelling at high speed. I’m very sorry, but he did not survive.’

Kempsey staggered backward, reeling. James was dead? It couldn’t be. This had to be a dream. She tripped over a branch and hit her head on the tree trunk, then darkness encompassed her like a blanket. She heard a voice, low and chanting:

*‘Eons ago, a promise we made  
If one should fall not yet of age  
Another should be given a chance to aid  
To re-live that fated day, to rewrite the page*

*But get they, one chance only  
So should they in their task fail  
The ill-fated life would, to no assail  
Be thereby gone, unchangeably.’*

Kempsey sat up, her heart racing. Where was she? She looked around, then realised she was in their car. James was next to her, his hood over his face. She looked over at the display. 11th of May, 8:47 am. This couldn’t be! She had already gone to school, gone to class.

But that voice, it had said something about being able to relive the day, to change what had happened, to save James’ life.

‘Alright, we’re here,’ said their mum. She pulled up at the school. Kempsey opened the door, shaking. James swung open his door, then, lugging his bag after him, slammed it shut.

Looking after him, their mum sighed. 'I want you to apologise to James. It was entirely your fault.'

'Yes mum,' Kempsey said, still shaking as she got out of the car. 'I'll make it up to him.'

Looking surprised at this change of heart, her mum waved goodbye, then pulled out of the driveway. Kempsey took a few deep breaths and ran after James.

'You know, I'm sorry for breaking your rabbit.'

'You said it was my fault!'

She bit her tongue. Before time had reset, she had said that.

'James, I'm sorry, I didn't mean it.'

'I don't believe you! Go away!' he said, then dashed away to his classroom. Kempsey looked after him. Instead of consoling him, she had only made things worse!

The bell rang. Kempsey ran into her classroom, thinking hard. She would have one more chance only. The lunch break. If she didn't manage to console James during it ...

'Kempsey? What is the square root of the two different sums?'

Kempsey startled. She had been so deep in thought about how she should word her apology that she had completely ignored Ms. Montague during the entire class. 'Umm, sorry, could you repeat that?'

'Kempsey, have you listened to anything I have said the entire lesson?'

Silence. A few classmates giggled.

'As punishment for not listening to me, Ms. Ortega, you will stay in during the break and write lines.'

Kempsey gasped. 'But-but I have something important to do during the break.'

'That's unfortunate. You will have to wait until later then. The rest of you, you can go after you've left your work here. Enjoy your break!'

Kempsey looked at the doorway, her heart still racing. She had only one more chance at this. Forget what everyone was going to think. She shoved Ms. Montague aside and dashed for the doorway. Down the hallway, and to the main hall.

Oh no, oh no, where was James? Not in the library, not in his classroom and not in the playground. Had he already left the school grounds? The first time, he had been under the tree on the hill, but he must have been so upset by the confrontation earlier that he had already left.

Kempsey dashed towards the gate. The guard tried to stop her, but she dodged him and ran down the driveway. She could see a small figure up ahead, also running towards the road. It rounded the corner, then disappeared.

Kempsey was hyperventilating. The highway was right next to it! 'James! James, I'm sorry!'

She rounded the corner. Cars zoomed past her, so fast they were gone before she could blink. Did one of them kill James?

She caught movement on the other side of the road, and without stopping to think, ran across. As she was halfway across, a truck horn blared. She turned to face the truck as it approached. Time seemed to slow down, then someone dragged her out of the way just in time. The wind from the passing truck slammed them both into the ground.

Kempsey gasped. She looked at her saviour. Something about him looked familiar. 'James?'

'Kempsey,' he murmured.

She looked at him, wondered what she would ever do without him, and in one moment, swallowed her pride. 'I'm sorry for breaking your rabbit statue, James. It was my fault.'

James smiled at her. 'It's all right, Kempsey. Oh, also, I found your notebook in my lunchbox. It's got all kinds of complicated writing in it, but there was no food in it. Where did you pack my food?'

Kempsey smiled and hugged him. Everything was going to be all right.