

The teacher sighed, walking in to her classroom to see yet another room full of half-asleep brats. They always set themselves up in the room the same way, the nerds in the front rows, with their perfectly organized notebooks and fresh pens ready to take notes on every little thing she said, relevant or not, that compare who has the most digits of pi memorized in their free time. The bullies were in the second row, ready to pull the nerds' hair or stick something on their backs as soon as her back was turned. The delinquents were in the third row, not caring enough to take notes but trying to copy one another's homework assignments in the halls before class. The ordinary kids and the outcasts sat in the back row, texting under the desks when they thought she wasn't looking, passing notes about the next party they were going to. She mumbled out a "Good morning class" and heard the six voices of the nerds respond with "Good morning"s and "How are you today Miss Wilson"s. She walked up to the front of the room and wrote two words on the board: malignant and benign.

"Can anyone tell me what these two words mean to them?" She asked the class, fully expecting someone to give the out-of-dictionary definition rather than what she asked. As was to be expected, all six nerds' hands went up as soon as she finished the question, but surprisingly, so did one of the outcasts'. "Howard, what do you think?" She called on a nerd, following the basic teacher stereotype.

"Well, Miss Wilson, technically speaking, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, malignant means tending to cause death or deterioration, especially tending to infiltrate, metastasize, and terminate fatally, and benign means of a mild type or character that does not threaten health or life, especially not becoming cancerous. Both are commonly used to describe tumors of any sort," the boy nerd recited. Typical that he would have the dictionary memorized.

"Yes, that is technically correct; however I asked what it means to you. Not what the dictionary says." Like that, five nerds' hands went down, while one hand in the back stayed raised. "Pamela."

"Benign means hope, while malignant means terror, and grief, and worry of what will come next. Malignant means fright that you won't live another day. Benign means a hope that you will live a full life. Benign means a temporary hope, however, as benign can become malignant. Malignant means loss; means death. Benign means life." By the end of her passionate little speech, the girl Pamela had tears running down her tan cheeks, cascading like a waterfall from her auburn eyes. She was trying hard not to sob, biting her cherry red bottom lip to keep it from quivering, her eyes somewhat squinting to stop the tears. Some others in the class had glistening eyes, the waters ready to spill over.

"Pamela, are you alright?" She asked, somewhat concerned, for this was not the norm of the class, to have anyone cry. People usually got their feelings out through note taking, bullying, texting, sleeping, passing notes, never through the open display of weakness in the cruel world known as high school.

Pamela nodded, sniffed, and wiped her blue sweater across her face to stop the tears and make herself somewhat presentable, only resulting in smearing her makeup more. A phone buzzed and the girl looked down, to see that it was her phone. The teacher was too stumped for how to respond to a spontaneous sadness attack to chastise the girl for having her phone out. The girl calmly read who the message was from, and then a visible shake racked her body as she read what the message contained. She shrieked, dropped the phone, stuffed something in her pocket, and ran from the room, leaving her things haphazardly on her desk.

“Class, let’s get things wrapped up here. Joey, you bring me Pamela’s things. To my desk. Yes, now!” The teacher became more frustrated as the bully boy seemed shocked that the teacher had addressed him and he wasn’t in trouble for something. He got up and gathered the weird chick’s things and carried them to Miss Wilson’s desk, depositing them in the one free corner.

The teacher rooted through Pamela’s backpack to find her phone, still unlocked after her sudden exit, and scanned the message. Sadness and sympathy flashed across her face, followed by understanding, after which she quickly masked her emotions as is expected of a teacher. She gave her students an in-class assignment and sat, dwelling on the situation at hand. The bell rang, and she got up, telling the students they could go. The nerd boy tentatively asked, “Miss Wilson? You forgot to assign us homework.” Five other heads vigorously nodded, while twenty three others groaned or shook their heads.

“No homework tonight. Just be ready for class tomorrow.” Like that, six gasps arose and twenty three cheers rang out, as the normal brats figured out they had free time and the nerds wondered what to do with theirs. The teacher watched all the students file out, then organized Pamela’s things and took them to the front office, explaining what had happened.

The next day at school, an announcement came over the PA system.

“We take this moment of silence to remember and honor Pamela Johnson, a girl in many of your classes, though no longer. While in Miss Wilson’s class yesterday, she received a message that her mother, her only remaining parent, was in the hospital and her stage four brain cancer was finally taking her. She had made her way to the hospital, but was too late. As she came upon her mother’s room, the buzz of the flat-line on the heart machine rang out, and her mother was gone. In a moment of pure grief, she stabbed herself repeatedly with the IV that had been dripping medicine to make her mother comfortable as she died, knocking herself out from the medicine while she bled to death. Though she was in a hospital, doctors could not save her as she had cut through her stomach and pierced her heart and her head. Her memorial service will be held on Thursday in the cafeteria. You may get out of class to attend if you get a pass from the front office saying that you knew Pamela and will be there. Thank you, you may return to your normal routine.”

As the buzz of Pamela’s death ran through the school, Miss Wilson calmly walked to the front office and filled out resignation papers.

