



Send

By Patty Blount

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*It's been five years since I clicked Send.
Four years since I got out of juvie.
Three months since I changed my name.
Two minutes since I met Julie.
A second to change my life.*

All Dan wants for his senior year is to be invisible. This is his last chance at a semi-normal life. Nobody here knows who he is. Or what he's done. But on his first day at school, instead of turning away like everyone else, Dan breaks up a fight. Because Dan knows what it's like to be terrorized by a bully?he used to be one.

Now the whole school thinks he's some kind of hero?except Julie. She looks at him like she knows he has a secret. Like she knows his name isn't really Daniel...

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Editorial Review

Review

"Blount writes smoothly and gives Ken/Dan an authentic character. " - *Booklist*

About the Author

PATTY BLOUNT works as a software technical writer by day and novelist by night. Dared by her 13-year-old son to try fiction, Patty wrote her first manuscript in an ice rink. A short version of her debut novel, *Send*, finished in the top ten of the Writer's Digest 79th Annual Writing Competition.

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Starting Again...Again

A punch to the jaw wasn't how I imagined starting my first day at another new school, but fate had a warped sense of humor.

As a big jock pinned a skinny nerd to the dusty hood of a Civic, I wondered how I, a guy famous for causing a tragedy, was now the only person around to prevent one. I scanned the parking lot, but it was deserted except for the two guys locked in a tense clinch and me. If I'd left a minute later or gotten stuck at one more traffic light, I could have been just another kid on the cafeteria line, hearing the buzz. "Hey, did you hear about the fight in the parking lot this morning?" Instead, I was the skinny kid's only hope.

Can you say "ironic"? an annoying voice asked in my mind. Suppose you plan to swoop in and save this kid or something.

On a rising tide of panic, I realized I had no other choice. The skinny kid looked ready to pee his pants.

The voice in my head snorted. You're an idiot.

I rolled my eyes but didn't bother saying anything out loud. Engaging the voice in conversation only amped up its determination to annoy the crap out of me.

You have two options, the voice said. Do something or do nothing.

Yeah. Thanks for that probing insight. With a loud sigh, I cursed my luck and the god who took such perverted delight in twisting it. I guess suffering the kind of trauma I had probably caused some mental health issues.

Probably?

Okay, I amended with an eye roll, definitely some mental health issues. As long as I didn't actually listen to a thing the voice told me to do, I wasn't technically crazy, right? I didn't need help, especially the kind that comes from a little white pill or, worse, a mandatory hospital stay. I had it under control.

Dude, be smart. You break up this fight, you're making an enemy, and you can't afford that, not if you want to keep your secret. Just ignore it.

For most people, the little voice in their heads was the voice of reason, a conscience or something. But mine

was more like a mirror that reflected the things about me I wished nobody could ever see. He said to ignore it because he knew I'd want to more than anything else in the world.

Because he knew I couldn't.

"You're a loser, Dellerman! Always were, always will be."

Cruel words, words I'd heard-worse-words I'd used dozens of times struck the kid called Dellerman, making him flinch.

I grabbed the door handle.

Don't do it, man.

Save your breath. We both already knew that I would. I lived with one kid's blood on my hands. I couldn't handle one more.

The jock was built like some prehistoric caveman, all protruding facial bones and muscle. Lots of muscle. He hauled Dellerman off the Civic's hood by the kid's shirt and shook him. The tendons in Dellerman's thin neck popped into view as he struggled. I opened my car door, rehearsing how I'd tell my parents why we'd have to move again after what I was about to do.

You think saving this one is gonna make up for the one you killed?

The words pounded a stake through my heart. I shook it off with a don't-you-get-it laugh. I was hoping to save three, not one. Forgiveness was too much to ask for, and I understood that. But maybe a bit of mercy wasn't. If I did enough good things, maybe I wouldn't spend eternity barbecuing over an open pit in hell. Sure, I didn't want to see this Dellerman kid beaten up, but I also hoped to spare the caveman from the regrets that kicked my ass every damn day.

The caveman would probably not understand my decision to butt in. Okay, he definitely wouldn't understand. But eventually, everybody looks back on the stuff they used to do and winces. For most people, that regret doesn't set in until some milestone birthday, but for me, it happened when I was thirteen and a judge sentenced me to nine months in juvenile detention. I'd regretted a lot of stuff since then.

"I'm saving us all," I said, too loud. Captain Caveman spun at the sound of my voice as I shoved out of my car. He appraised me but didn't release Dellerman. He wasn't as tall as me; I knew he was considering his chances. He didn't know they weren't very good.

"Who the hell are you?"

I shrugged. "Don't worry about it. Just leave the kid alone and I'll leave you alone."

He taunted me with lips curled into a mocking grin and a bring-it-on wiggle of his fingers. "Oh, I'm not worried about you."

He should have been worried. If he had a brain, he'd have been terrified. According to the state of New Jersey, I was dangerous, a menace to the society it had removed me from for nearly a year.

He threw a punch that I easily blocked. I heard running footsteps behind me and spun. A security guard and a teacher were coming for us. I also saw something else.

A girl. Staring at me from the front seat of a black pickup.

Dude, duck. The warning came a second too late, which he'd probably planned.

The fist that connected with my face clinched it for me. God was bullied as a kid.

First rule of engagement: never turn your back on a threat.

I was on my hands and knees on the grassy median that divided the parking lot, my head thick and curdled from being sucker punched, but even that wasn't enough to silence the voice.

When I look inside me for the voice, I see me but yet...not me, not exactly. More like a version of me, the me I used to be at thirteen. All gangly limbs, big feet, and bad skin. I call him Kenny and try to keep him bound to a dark, empty corner of my mind. If I could find a way to gag him too, I'd be psyched. As hard as I fight to forgive myself for what I did to Liam Murphy, Kenny fights as hard to make sure I can't. I figure he's just one more part of God's Wrath Plan I'd put in motion five years earlier when I was thirteen.

"Shut up," I told him, out loud.

"What?"

That wasn't Kenny's voice. I forced my head up. My eyes blurred and finally focused on three worried faces, four if I counted the one that existed only in my mind. And I didn't.

Like I care.

I squinted up at the most beautiful girl I thought I'd ever seen. I was having trouble focusing on anything but her face.

"What happened?" the teacher had asked. My stomach pitched when I got a clear look at him. He wasn't a teacher. He was Mr. Morris, the freakin' principal. He was the reason I was at school so early. We had an appointment before first period.

Dude, Kenny chuckled. You're so doomed.

"Jeff Dean was going to beat up Brandon Dellerman, but this guy jumped out of his car, walked right up between them, and stopped them. Jeff hit him when he wasn't looking."

Her words somehow penetrated the thick swamp that still choked my thoughts. She saw me jump out of my car? She saw me step between them? If she saw all that, why the hell didn't she try to stop them? She was a girl. She would have been safe from the caveman, and I would still be the nameless new guy.

You don't know that for sure.

True, I was forced to admit. But still. Breaking up fights before the first bell wasn't the best way to stay invisible.

The girl turned back to me and asked with a taunting grin, "You okay?"

Hatred, waves of it, rolled over me, pulling me under. She'd stood there, cool and blond and...and...fucking

perfect, watching, just watching. She could have stopped it, could have helped. Instead, she'd done nothing. Damn, she was beautiful, like ice in sunlight. Her eyes, a cold blue with black rims, mocked me from behind trendy wire frames. Gold hair spilled around her face, but there was nothing, nothing but the cold. I hated her, hated her down to my bone marrow for what she'd made me do, what she'd made me risk. Mostly, I hated her because she had no idea.

"I'm fine." I scrambled to my feet, my face hot.

"Mr. Ellison, I want you to go straight inside and see the nurse," the principal said. "Our appointment can wait until after."

Mr. Morris knew about my record. That's why he wanted to talk to me. There was no reason why that meeting couldn't take place. My head and face ached, but I'd live. I opened my mouth to tell him so, but he turned to the cold blond.

"Miss Murphy, show Mr. Ellison to the nurse's office and then come see me. I want to hear exactly what went on here." The principal turned to address other students now gathering around to watch.

I groaned, but it wasn't at the bark of laughter from inside my head or Miss Murphy's huff of annoyance. It was her name. Of course, it would be Murphy. I turned my eyes to heaven and cursed again. I'd met a Murphy at every school I'd attended, just one more daily reminder of the kid I'd killed.

My face heated as Miss Murphy continued glaring.

"You're shaking." She put her hands on me, eyes narrowed, searching me up and down for signs of serious injury, but it wasn't concern I saw in her eyes.

It looked a lot like satisfaction.

Fuck this. Fuck her. As I shoved past, I got a good whiff of her, and my mind blanked on everything except how freakin' good she smelled. She smelled like the beach. Tropical fruit or something exotic. Like sunblock lotion. I loved the beach. Of all the things I'd missed during the months I'd spent in juvenile detention, summer on the water headed the list. Long Island had tons of beaches, another reason I was determined to not mess up this time. Holtsville was the fourth or fifth town we'd tried since I'd killed Liam Murphy.

I wanted to stay here.

Liam killed himself, Kenny corrected, and I sneered.

See, Kenny thinks he's playing me. A few minutes ago, he's making digs that I killed Liam and now it's "Liam killed himself." If I say "up," he says "down." That's what he does. Since the first night I spent locked up, he water-boards my soul. Relentlessly. I knew his game now, so I didn't reply. I couldn't. Not out loud anyway. I was having such a great first day of school; talking to myself would have made it just perfect. Come to think of it, ruining my first day at another new school was probably Kenny's plan all along.

Yeah. I live to serve.

"I'm fine." I shrugged. "Just got the breath knocked out of me."

Miss Murphy's eyebrows shot to her hairline. "Yeah, well, Jeff Dean will be telling a totally different story."

My vision reddened at her taunt. "Oh, I'm sure you'll set everybody straight, since you saw the whole damn

thing." I heard her suck in air. Good. I guess nobody ever talked to Voyeur Barbie like that before. I scanned the parking lot's trimmed lawn, tree-lined borders, and rows of parking spots but saw no sign of the caveman. "What happened to him anyway?"

"Security hauled him inside while you were out." Brandon Dellerman answered with a jerk of his thumb toward the building.

I drew myself up to my full height, all six feet three inches of it. "I wasn't out. I was just, uh, catching my breath."

Miss Murphy's smirk warned me she didn't buy it.

"Come on. Nurse's office is this way."

Brandon put out an arm, tried to steady me. I took a step, stopped, waited for him to let go.

"Uh, you sure you're okay?"

I grinned down at him. He was like a foot shorter than me. Even if I wasn't okay, I doubted he'd survive the 220-pound impact if I fell on him.

"I should be asking you that."

He let go of me, shrugged, turned red. "I'm okay. Thanks. For helping and stuff. I'm, uh, Brandon. Brandon Dellerman."

"Yeah, hi. Daniel. Dan."

Liar.

Kenny, it's not a lie. That's my name now.

You keep telling yourself that, Danielle.

I ignored Kenny. I ignored Miss Murphy, but she was determined to obey the principal's order. As she led me down the first corridor, she shot me a look so cold I was willing to bet it could freeze a nuclear explosion mid-mushroom cloud and still have enough power left over for the fires of hell.

In my mind, Kenny gasped. I braced for his usual spiteful comment, but it never came. That was a first—a profound moment in our history. Because Kenny exists purely to torment me, letting an opportunity go could only mean one thing. He had bigger, more painful retribution planned for later.

Inside the nurse's office, I was anxious to be rid of my escorts so I could talk to Kenny and manage the situation. "Well, we're here." I didn't bother to thank Miss Murphy and quickly turned to Brandon. "Brandon, watch your back. That Jeff Dean guy is dangerous."

The office looked the same as all of the other nurse's offices at all the other schools I'd attended. Posters hung on every wall, warning me to "Drive Responsibly," "Say No to Drugs," and "Pause to Think" before I acted. Another one said this was a "Bully-Free Zone."

I paused to appreciate the irony.

Brandon ducked his head, shaking strands of greasy, colorless hair in front of his eyes, but I could see the fear in them and something else. Something that looked like defeat.

"If you want, I'll give you a ride home after school. Just in case."

Ah, ah, ah. Kenny waved a finger in my head. Did you forget? You're not allowed to be alone with kids, remember?

I gritted my teeth and wished I could forget. Even for just a minute.

Brandon's face paled, his acne standing out in sharp relief. "I'll have my car tomorrow."

I blinked. I figured Brandon for a freshman, but he was at least a junior if he had a car. "Offer's good anytime."

Brandon stared at me, his eyes awed. Nodded.

An older woman, like my mother's age, maybe older, approached me wearing scrubs and glasses on the tip of her nose, carrying a folder in her hands. A name tag pinned to her shirt said she was Mrs. Rawlins. She tossed the folder to a desk, grabbed a square packet, and squinted at my jaw. "Daniel Ellison? Wanna tell me what happened to your face?" She tore open the packet, dabbed a gauze pad on my chin, and a hot belt of pain lashed at me.

"Jeff Dean," Brandon answered for me.

The nurse frowned and nodded, requiring no further explanation. I guess I underestimated Dean's reputation. My breath hissed past my lips when she rolled a brown-tipped cotton swab over my chin.

"This could use some stitches."

No way. My eyes snapped to hers. "Steri-Strips are fine."

Her eyebrows lifted. "I take it you've seen your share of emergency rooms."

Something like that.

"Your shirt's all bloody. Why don't you use that room to change into your gym shirt?" Mrs. Rawlins indicated the door behind her, where another poster warned me to wash my hands during flu season.

The scars. Jesus, the scars. I can't take off my shirt. Shame congealed the blood in my veins.

"You two. Out. Get to class." Mrs. Rawlins had to have noticed the horror on my face.

I knew without looking that the blond was gone. I didn't smell the beach anymore, and I felt cold.

"Have a seat, Mr. Ellison." Mrs. Rawlins indicated a row of chairs by her desk. "Let's call your mom and have her pick you up."

Oh, not a chance. I moved to a chair, taking my sweet time, and planned my next lie.

Users Review

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