

Julius Kingsley

by J. Brosinski

Julius Kingsley stared at his reflection in the bathroom mirror – golden eyes, a small nose, full lips and hair so blond it was almost white. ‘I so don’t want to be me’ he thought. “Two weeks, I can handle two more weeks” he mumbled to himself. He finished brushing his teeth and prepared himself for another day at Argo High School.

Even though the windows were open, the classroom was still five degrees too warm to concentrate. Summer had arrived early this year, if only the same were true for graduation. Julius looked out the window for lack of anything better to do. He heard Mrs. Penn’s voice in the background but it wasn’t until she said the word quiz that he decided to paid attention.

“I’m very disappointed with the overall results of last weeks quiz. I know that it’s hot and you all have summeritus, but hang in there and make use of your higher brain functions until summer vacation officially begins.” She past out the graded quizzes one by one making comments as she went by each student.

“Good job Mr. Kingsley” she said as she dropped his quiz on top of his desk. Julius was happy to see the B that was written in red ink across the top of his work.

“Excellent Mr. Bradey”

Julius turned his attention to Jim, who unfortunately sat next to him, and saw the big A+ that Mrs. Penn dropped on his desk. He couldn’t believe his eyes. ‘How did that meathead get a higher score than me?’ This question immediately ran through his head and without realizing it, his eyes had affixed themselves onto Jim’s desktop.

“What are you looking at, Freak?” Jim said to Julius as soon as Mrs. Penn’s back was turned.

“I was just admiring you’re A+” Julius said with a high pitched crack in his voice.

“Admire your own score” Jim snarled back while simultaneously kicking Julius’s chair out from under him. Both Julius and his chair, which was attached to a big armrest, crashed loudly to the floor. All heads turned to look at him before uncontrollable laughter spread through the classroom.

“Class, that’s quite enough!” said Mrs. Penn trying to regain order in her classroom.

“Mr. Kingsley, please try and stay in your chair.”

Julius was about to defend himself but he felt Jim’s icy stare on the back of his neck.

“Sorry, Mrs. Penn” he said instead. He picked up his chair, sat down, and tried his best not to make eye contact with any of the other students for the remaining class period. It felt like an eternity before the bell finally rang but when it did, he was the first one out the door.

“Julius, over here” said Craig waving his hand in the air to get his friend’s attention.

Julius signaled back to his best bud, walked over to where he was sitting and dropped his tray of food on the table.

“Uh-oh, somebody’s upset” said Craig.

“I can’t believe that Jim Bradey got a higher score on a math quiz than I did.”

“Maybe he cheated.”

“That was my first thought too but Mrs. Penn makes it virtually impossible to cheat in her class. During quizzes and exams she has two student teachers come in to do nothing but watch us during the test. Cheating would require some pretty crafty scheming.”

“Ouch!”

“Jim kicked my chair right out from under me during class today and left me there looking like an idiot in front of the entire class.”

“Wait a minute... he did that to you but you’re more concerned that he got a higher score on a quiz?”

“Well... yeah, I guess. He’s Jim, people know he’s a prick but I didn’t think he had any brains.”

“Ever heard of evil geniuses?”

“Oh no, don’t do that. Jim and the word genius don’t belong in the same sentence. In fact, they don’t belong on the same page or in the same book.”

“Whether you believe it or not, Jim is actually quite smart” a soft voice said. Julius was caught off guard. Bethany Karpinsky was standing directly behind him.

“Hi Beth, I didn’t mean that in a bad way.” Julius tried to cover.

“How else did you mean it then?”

“Well... um...”

“Yeah, like I thought” She walked away and took her place at the *popular* table. Julius hung his head in his hands.

“After all these years you still have the hots for Beth” commented Craig.

“I do not!”

“You don’t really expect me to believe that, do you?”

“Is it that obvious?”

“Oh yeah! That’s probably why Jim treats you like crap. He doesn’t want you stealing his girlfriend.”

“That is so much bull! Beth made her choice years ago and Jim isn’t exactly the insecure type. He’s a jerk by nature.”

The bell rang. The cafeteria quickly cleared.

“Later, Craig”

“See ya”

The rest of the school day was pretty standard but Julius was happy to be walking home. The weather was beautifully warm and the trees were already a nice shade of green. As the wind blew softly, Julius was reminded of the Beth’s perfume which smelled like Gardenias. He began to daydream and didn’t see the elderly Mrs. Harriett struggling with her groceries down the sidewalk.

Mrs. Harriett saw him coming but, being 85 years old, wasn’t fast enough to get out of his way. He crashed into her nearly knocking her down. She dropped her bag in the process and now groceries were spread all over the sidewalk.

“Young man, what’s the matter with you? Is there something wrong with your eyes?”

“I’m so sorry, Mrs. Harriett. Here, let me help you.” Julius quickly gathered all the food and put them back into her bag.

“I guess I was daydreaming” he said while he worked.

“About a girl” Mrs. Harriett said finishing his thought.

“Ah... well... yeah” answered Julius. He had no idea why he told her that he had been daydreaming.

“Don’t be embarrassed, darling. A pretty little thing like you shouldn’t have girl trouble.”

“I’m Julius”

“Darling, I know who you are. You don’t have to tell me. I’ve watched you play in the sandbox when you were in diapers with your pail and shovel. Good Lord, I’m old! Help me carry all that stuff in, would you?” They were standing almost right in front of her house.

Julius carried the groceries up the steps. When she opened the door he stepped into a very clean and tidy living room. He was surprised to see modern furniture and décor. It was not the usual old folks home and it didn’t have that old people smell.

“Put the groceries on the kitchen table please. Would you like something to drink?” She opened the kitchen window and lit some incense to freshen up the room.

“No Ma’am, I must be going; I’ve got finals to study for.” Julius felt a tickle in his nose. It took a few seconds before a humungous sneeze finally escaped.

“ah ah raah!”

“Good Lord! I’ve never heard anybody sneeze like that before. You better take care of that if you have final exams soon.”

“Yes, Ma’am” said Julius holding his nose. Mrs. Harriett searched for some tissue that was hidden in her purse. As she handed it to Julius she looked into his watery eyes.

“Cats eyes” she said fearfully and backed away from him.

“Please leave my house” she said firmly.

“Have I done something wrong?”

“Please leave my house” and she backed away even further from him.

“Okay, sorry for the trouble with the groceries.”

He left her house wondering why she was all of a sudden afraid of him.

The last few days went by in a blur, but today is different. All the events of today will be etched into the minds of the students who had the misfortune of taking part, especially Julius.

All through history class Julius wiggled in his chair wondering why he had not gone to the bathroom during break. The lecture went through one ear, missing his brain, and out the other. 'Who cares about the past? I'm about to pee my pants' he thought. His brain did, however, pick up on the words pop quiz. Just Great! Now he was not even allowed to ask for the bathroom pass. Class rules strictly forbade anyone from leaving during any form of exam. He stared at the questions that were dropped on top of his desk. Multiple choice. His bladder ached and that prevented him from thinking. So, he blindly circled his answers and wiggled his way to the front of the room.

"Here's my quiz. May I please have the bathroom pass?"

"There's only ten minutes of class left, you may leave class early."

"Thanks" Julius ran out the door holding his book with one hand and his crotch with the other. He rushed into the nearest bathroom and found himself standing in the middle of a smoky haze. Mr. Forcer had Jim pinned to the bathroom wall.

"Don't ever let me see you smoking again on school grounds!" Mr. Forcer yelled as he gave Jim a bloody nose.

Under any other circumstances Julius would have quickly exited the scene but nature was not going to wait for him any longer. He dashed into the nearest stall and emptied his full bladder. What a relief. Now that he was feeling better, his nose caught a strong whiff of the smoke.

"Ah ah raah!" Julius let out a roar of a sneeze.

"Kingsley, get your ass out here this instant!" demanded Mr. Forcer. There were five seconds of silence before Julius clicked the stall door unlocked. Mr. Forcer then shoved the door open, grabbed Julius by his shirt and dragged him out. He pinned him to the same wall that he had pinned Jim.

"Listen you cowardly maggot. One word about what you saw in here and you'll never see your diploma. Do you understand?"

Julius was so terrified that he didn't answer the question. The smoke was still tickling his nose but he was straining to hold the sneeze back.

"Are you on drugs? Your pupils are strangely oval. Answer my question!" Forcer slapped Julius across the face.

"No sir" Julius answered.

"Well, I'll just have to make you understand then."

He punched Julius in the stomach dropping him to his knees.

"Do you understand me now?"

"I understand. I meant no, I don't use drugs." Julius held his stomach and grunted with pain.

"Smart kid." Mr. Forcer washed his hands thoroughly before he left the bathroom. Julius was still on the bathroom floor. Once Forcer was gone, he finally let out his sneeze.

"ah ah raah!" Julius watched as his hands turned into hairy claws. He slowly got on his feet and looked in the mirror.

"What's wrong with my eyes" he whispered to himself. His eyes were even more golden yellow than before and his pupils were shaped like big black vertical almonds. He tried to touch them with his hands but decided that wasn't such a good idea. They had turned into paws with razorblade sharp claws.

"What's happening to me?" he said aloud. He stood there staring at himself in the mirror until his eyes went back to normal and his claws retracted, giving him back his hands.

Sixth period English. What a snore. Julius sat in his chair looking at his empty desktop hoping that his teacher wouldn't call on him. He had forgotten his English lit book again.

'Who reads anyway?' he thought. 'If the book's any good then someone would make a movie out of it. Hmmm, I wonder if *The Inferno* is in movie format.' His thoughts led him back to the recent events of the bathroom: Mr. Forcer, Jim Bradey, his eyes, his hands. Did that all really happen? His sore stomach proved that he wasn't going insane but he felt like he had somehow slipped into a really bad movie.

“Attention students and faculty of Argo High. This is a hostile take over. All will report to the school gym. Anyone and everyone who does not comply will be shot.” The sound of a round of gun shots rang clearly through the intercom.

“You have ten minutes” the husky voice concluded.

‘Oh shit!’ thought Julius ‘I’m in the frigging twilight zone’.

Everyone was way too scared to panic. The classroom took the lead of the English teacher and walked to the school gym. The hallways were filled with hushed chatter some of which Julius overheard.

“Is this a joke?”

“This can’t be happening.”

“How many are there?”

“I’m going to be sick.”

Julius looked around him and all the exits were guarded with men carrying guns. People were shoving and pushing.

“We’ve got to hurry. They said we have only ten minutes.” A voice shouted from the sea of students.

The crowd pushed ahead faster and soon they were all climbing the bleachers. Julius climbed all the way to the top and took a seat.

‘What in the world is going on’ he thought. He was scared. This wasn’t some kind of phobia. This was justified fear; the kind of fear that rushes through your body the precise moment when you realize yourself in an unavoidable car accident. With only one difference. A car accident only last a few seconds but this was going to last a whole lot longer.

When everyone was in the gym and had managed to sit down, the doors were closed and guarded by two men. The show was about to begin. In the middle of the gym floor was a small table with a lantern on top and a bag underneath it. There was a chair standing next to it. A man, wearing a red mask, walked to the middle of floor with a microphone. He made a signal and three of his men, wearing black masks, went to him. He handed them something that looked like a post card or was it a photo? They then walked through

the bleachers looking at the crowd while the man with the microphone sat patiently in the middle of the arena. After about twenty minutes one of them said, "I think this is him!" "Bring him to me" the red masked man said into the microphone.

All heads turned to look at the unlucky guy who was dragged kicking and screaming to the center of the gym floor. It was Mr. Forcer.

'Mental note, don't piss off karma' thought Julius.

Mr. Forcer stood in front of the kidnapper face to mask.

"Drop him to his knees" the man with the red mask commanded.

One of the black masked men kicked Forcer in the stomach and he crumpled to the floor.

"Do you recognize my voice?"

Mr. Forcer whispered his answer.

"They can't hear you" said the kidnapper holding the microphone to Forcer's lips.

"No" answered Mr. Forcer.

"This serves no purpose if *you* don't know who I am." The kidnapper removed his red mask revealing his face to everyone.

"Oh Shit!" exclaimed Forcer.

"Exactly. Let me give your audience a little background information. You see, Mr. Forcer here framed me for possession of *his* drugs three days before graduation. Ain't that right, Teach?"

He held the microphone to Forcer's lips but he didn't answer.

"What's that... no comment. Well, isn't that a surprise?"

"Everyone knows your face. You're not going to get away with this" said Forcer.

"Don't intent to. You see, that's how much I hate you." He said this with so much hatred in his voice that it gave Julius goose bumps.

"Take off your clothes" the kidnapper commanded Forcer.

"No"

"You can take off your clothes or my friends here will do it for you."

Mr. Forcer looked at the gun men before deciding to take off his own clothes. He stood there half naked looking quite embarrassed.

"The underwear and socks too"

"Come on... have a little mercy" Mr. Forcer wined.

“Did you have any mercy when you expelled an innocent student three fucking days before graduation? Tell you what; I’ll set a nice cozy romantic mood for you.”

The lights dimmed, soft music played over the intercom, and a scented candle was lit and placed in the little lantern on the table. Sweetly scented, soft smoke began to spread through the gym. The whole setting humiliated Mr. Forcer even more.

He slowly took off his socks and then his underwear. He was left standing completely naked in front of his students, co-workers, and peers. He covered his face with his hands in shame.

As much as Julius hated Mr. Forcer, he felt sorry for him. There was a strange feeling in the pit of his stomach. It was a mixture of sorrow, pain, and premonition. He could feel that his body was preparing itself for danger. His limbs and organs became stronger. A surge of courage ran through him followed by a wave of calm. He wondered about the outcome of the movie which he was trapped in. It continued, but just like his premonition had warned – it got worse.

“I need a volunteer” the kidnapper announced. No one raised their hand.

“I didn’t think so. Fellas, find me a volunteer.”

One of the masked men went into the audience and quickly volunteered some poor soul, which happened to be none other than Jim Bradey.

‘Karma is indeed a bitch’ thought Julius.

Bradey was now standing next to Forcer. The kidnapper reached under the table for the duffle bag and pulled out a black whip when he then handed to Jim.

“Give this man ten strong whips across his back”

“Wouldn’t it be better if you do it?” responded Jim.

“If I do it then I can’t see his face cringe with pain.”

“Then have one of your men do it.”

“Hey, I’m in charge here. I’m holding the gun and I’m asking you to do it.”

“I can’t do it while my girlfriend watches” Jim looked at the audience in Beth’s direction. The unmasked kidnapper followed his gaze and climbed the bleachers. He stopped in the row where Bethany was sitting.

Jim realized that he had made a big mistake.

“No... No... leave her alone!” he yelled from where he was standing.

“Which one is she? I bet she’s the prettiest gal in school” the kidnapper asked teasingly using his microphone. He walked until he was directly in front of her and then stopped. She was sitting beside another pretty girl so he wasn’t sure which one was Jim’s girlfriend.

“The prettiest girl in school” he repeated looking at them both.

“That must be you” he said to Bethany. “No offense to you young lady” he said apologetically to the lesser attractive student.

“None taken” she said with relief.

“You come with me.” Beth went with him cooperatively.

She was led to the gym floor and instructed to sit down in the chair. The unmasked man pointed a gun to her head.

“Either you whip him in front of her or I will shoot her in front of you. The choice is yours”.

Julius watched everything from where he was sitting in disbelief. He was uncomfortable in his own skin. The smoke from the candles had finally risen to the top of the bleachers and was now tickling his nose. He was concentrating so hard on not sneezing that his eyes were half closed. The crack of the whip and Mr. Forcer’s scream jerked them completely open. His concentration was broken.

“ah ah raah!” A huge roar echoed off the gym walls. He was now the center of attention and could feel hundreds of eyes staring at him. He looked at his hands and they had already turned into claws.

“Bring Sneezy to me” the unmasked man commanded. He was annoyed that his public whipping was interrupted.

Now that Julius was closer to the candles, it made him sneeze even more.

“ah ah raah! Ah ah raah!” His blond hair turned into a bushy mane. His face changed from that of a man to a great cat.

“What the fuck is this!” exclaimed the kidnapper in horror. Everyone that was standing on the gym floor moved away from it and the audience in the bleacher stood up to get a better look. The arena was filled with gasps of disbelief and confusion.

Julius had literally broken out of his skin and was now standing in the middle of the gym transformed into a great lion. It slowly moved toward the unmasked kidnapper and let out an even louder roar. He was so afraid that he had wet his pants. When he remembered that he was holding a gun, he shot at the great lion hitting it in the shoulder. His hired men and everyone else ran for the gym doors. There were people screaming, shoving, and crying with hysteria.

The lion, ignoring his wound, pounced on the kidnapper. With its mouth, it took away his gun, then turned and headed for the door. The terrified crowd cleared its path and it was last seen running away from Argo High.

Julius opened his eyes and looked around. Everything was in white. He tried to move his arm to rub his eyes but it was attached to a needle. His shoulder was bandaged and his body ached.

“Good morning” a nurse said chirpily as she came in the room. She stuck a thermometer in Julius’s mouth.

“You have unusually beautiful, golden eyes” said Julius with the thermometer still in his mouth.

“You can flirt with me after the thermometer beeps” the nurse scolded.

“You’re a lion too?” Julius asked when he was officially allowed to speak.

“Oh dear, you’re delirious from the pain medication but that’ll wear off soon” she paused to write something on her clip board.

Julius waited for her to look up from her writing so he could get a better look at her eyes.

When she was done, she went closer to him.

“Lovely cologne, it’s a shame that I’m allergic to most perfumes” she said as she adjusted his pillow.

“Then I’ll stop wearing cologne immediately” Julius flirted.

The beautiful nurse held her hand over her nose and mouth before letting out a big sneeze. “ah ah raah!”