SHORT STORY
FICTION

THE GIRL WHO REMEMBERED BOOKS.

ENGLISH
2025

My words got caught in my throat as I wished to speak. Yet no sound would form. That my classmates know about it is more than enough." She mumbled under her breath as her mind was filled with storms that ruin the garden that her thoughts hold.

But from behind the cold, plain, curved wall of the school hallway, I listened. No words followed after. Just her quiet cries breaking through the silence. Perhaps I was never meant to hear them. Perhaps this moment was never mine to witness. Yet, I could not turn away and pretend I was never there. I wanted to sustain her knowing it wasn't what she expected. *'When everyone leaves you on the sideline, who is there to trust?'* I knew that feeling all too well but I wanted to lend a hand. Even if I no longer knew how. The corridor was just dimly lit, except for the corner where she sat, hidden in the only space that was covered in darkness. She almost became invisible. The once popular and joyful girl now covered in the shadows of who she once was. Hiding not just her face or upper body but her entire being, from toes to soul. It was clear that she didn't wish to be seen, or to be found, not after what she had gone through. Because if the world knew, if the whispers of the Quantum-web itself reached beyond these walls, she would be hunted for life. Not for what she had done or what others had seen but for who she was. Even she knew that the school once had been alive. The corridor where she is sitting, once echoing with laughter, the rustles of pages, the rhythm of footsteps carrying books that were heavier than the people itself. But that was long ago, years before the transition to the fourth Quantum age. The libraries were ruined and we received new machines in exchange for the books. Not just mere computers, but gateways into the unseen technique of thought itself. They were introduced to us as *supercomputers* but soon.. People started seeing them as gods. As things that stood way higher than us. The government claimed that they were for learning, for the progress of the younger generations. Yet students used them for power; to invade, to humiliate, to destroy. What once was just a scene for a movie, now turned into real life events. People started using them in the wrong ways. What once had been curiosity, now turned into cruelty. And she, Brönte, suffered the most of all. Once adored and cherished, now reduced to whispers of cruelty and embarrassment. They always called her a fluxer, the one who could remember all of the information given to them, the one who could feel the resonance of the quantum field. Almost half human and half code. But admiration turned to envy and envy turned to fear. Now nothing is sure anymore. And people started searching everything about everyone. As soon as I hear movement, I blink with my eyes and get back into the reality of now. To get back to her. The girl in front of me, still silently waiting and wondering why I out of all people chose to come over to her and help her. Her long brown hair fell over her eyes as her knees hit the ground. Her voice, just an echo of the melody she once sang. With small steps, I walk around the corner, my voice slightly trembling. "Brönte?" Then she notices me. She, the one girl I never expected to even look at me. "Emily?" She whispered back, as though my name was a fragile thing that might shatter if she spoke too loud. I never expected my name to be heard in her voice, but now it did and so I nod back in response. I reached out my hand to her. "Come. Take it" I say with a slight chuckle to break the ice. But as soon as I do so, people start to walk by us and whisper words of disapproval. Some hearable, some just shadows of the words that were spoken. *"A learner with a liar? It matches!" "Is she fully 100 in her mind? Helping the traitor?" "Well she is a learner herself"* I've heard so many things by now, that I don't even care anymore. I just ignore it but I can see that

it hits her. She isn't used to people talking down on her, for sure. So I reach out my hand again and this time she takes it. "So now you do want my help?" I say teasing. Then her fingers brush against mine,just for a slight moment before she lets go as soon as she stands up. Her fingers were cold and hesitant. Then it looks like she notices my hair; Blond, slightly curly and in a messy bun. Just a few loose strands that cover a small part of my right eye. I hear a quiet mumble coming from her mouth as she grabs my hand, but it was loud enough for me to hear; "Your clothes.." A small chuckle appeared across her lips. "You look like you came from a whole century ago." I look at her clothes and around me to other students then glance down, half laughing. "Perhaps I have, my lady" I say with an excessive bow towards her. I can see a small laugh across her face, even if she won't let it show. But around us, students pass by. Eyes full of disapproval as their quantum devices glow softly in their palms. No books, no pens, no traces of the world like how it once was. Only data and technology. Out of the blue I grab her wrist and pull her into a new classroom filled with computers which was once the library. "I know I'm not supposed to ask this, just to hide my own rank but how do you know that my outfit is so old?" I ask softly. "Only learners or nulls are supposed to know that sort of information. You're a Fluxer, they say that your mind is basically connected to the whole quantum web itself so that doesn't add up. How do you know so much? Everyone is brainless nowadays since they don't have to do anything on their own. Only the people who want to learn, actually learn stuff." She looks at me with big eyes, not replying to my question so I ask again. "Brönte. How do you know that?" A few more moments it's quiet. No movement, no students, no mumbles, no whispers but then she moves. She puts a finger on my mouth and tells me to be quiet. Our eyes locked for just a moment, still holding her hand for five seconds was the best I could get. She speaks to me again, this time her voice sounding vulnerable and quieter than normal. The way I have never seen or heard her before. "The ones that want to learn? They are the outcasts. If they discover that I like books. That I got a small library at home, with actual books of paper? Then I'm the strange one… They will destroy me." Then she goes silent. Her hands were clearly shaking. Her words got caught in her throat. "P-People already don't like me Emily, I need to prevent that from happening. It can't come out." As she finishes speaking, I take her finger off my mouth and I turn to face her "Then let them Brönte. *"We know what we are, but not what we may be"* I quote from Shakespeare and I'm entirely confident she recognises the quote too. "Im a learner and I wouldn't switch to any other rank for the world, no matter if that was possible or not. I love learning things and reading and being curious. See it as a gift not a bad thing. Yes, I know that the world sees it as a bad thing but I don't and I never will. Even though we've never talked, I will be here and I would love to learn new things with you. The greatest rebellion left in this world is to think for itself. Make your own choices and be you." As soon as I finish talking, I look down to the ground. I feel so guilty and embarrassed for how much I just spoke. Then her soft voice interrupted my thoughts "I always thought you loved computers" I look up at her, quietly listening to her words. As soon as she finishes her sentence I look confused and slightly chuckle "Me and computers? No, no thank you. Liora, my best friend, is the one that does everything with computers. She is a synth so it makes sense but still. She loves everything to do with the new tech in the world. Plus! She is one of the only people who actually knows how to efficiently use the Quantum-web instead of the normal internet we use. She was able to shut her own and my emotions off from the Quantum-web." As I'm talking, I can see that I'm confusing her so I came up with a suggestion "Do you want to meet her?" But little did she know that I was saving her all along, that I asked Liora to shut her emotions off from the Quantum-web as well. That I asked my best friend for a favor, just so I could silently help her without knowing. But me and computers? Liora has everything exactly figured out, how to use every single button on the supercomputers, how to

make them do things that others thought were impossible and so much more!! Like how most people just use them to hack others, to make them do things for them, etc. She does the opposite of that. She could use them to make music, communities, new computers and even entire robots if she took the time. Give her a few seconds and she could create a whole new platform. But as I think of something, there is more that I want to tell Brönte. "Liora would try to explain it to me, so I could do it one day. However, I'm the type of person that wants to learn about the art of writing, not the art of science. People have always seen me as weird for that, but I embrace that about myself and I got my friend to help me when it comes to computers. The world changed so much over the years. Books are almost completely gone and very hard to get. But if you want to learn how computers work, she is the best one to teach you!" I get too excited and grab Brönte's wrist to pull her out of the classroom with me to the opening of the school so we can go and meet Liora. I didn't even give her time to respond to my request but from the sparkle in her eyes, it was clear that she was curious and wanted to know more.

'My eye has secretly always been on Brönte. The breathtaking popular girl, up until the century of the computers. Liora is the only person to know about it and I would love to keep it that way. Thankfully for me, Liora shut both Brönte and me off from the information of the Quantum-web. But if others were to know about my little crush? They would say that I'm obsessed. I know so much about her that it is almost creepy. And maybe I am.. Like Brönte's enemy was one of the first people to discover how to make the computer hack someone in no time, he never learned how to use the quantum-web but he got access to the supercomputers as the first person in the world since his father is a Synth and created them. So he got some time ahead to study how they work and because of that, a lot of students' secrets got leaked. including almost all of Brönte's secrets, but the worst of all? The one secret she was trying so hard to hide. The one that she thought could ruin her whole reputation, but instead it were the small ones that did. She does not know that my best friend prevented that one big secret from ever coming out to the whole school, she never has to know. She can't even know that we know about that secret of hers. Cause if she does? Then she will either thank me for that and maybe even want to be my friend or she will absolutely try to murder me. But if the first thing happens? Then I don't want it to go that way, I want her to be friends without me without me needing to do something for it.'

As I stare into space, lost in my thoughts, Liora wakes me up. "Hey sleepy head, I explained the entire quantum web to your new friend over here." And I look over to Brönte who looks so much at peace and the sparkle in her eyes is amazing to see. Then Liora tells us something "In the age of machines that think, and do everything on their own. It is easy to forget the importance of thoughts. The fragile sound of the human soul and the one thing that robots can never have." Brönte looked at Liora and then at me, her eyes shimmering with something I haven't seen before. "Do you ever wonder," she whispered. "If the Quantum-web dreams of us as we dream of it?" I smiled faintly as I scratched my head. "Perhaps it does, we won't know. But even if it does, I would rather remain awake."

And as the screens of Liora's computers flickered with the pulse of new data, I realized that learning. True learning and curiosity. Has become the rarest form of rebellion in a world like ours.