

Joe Bruner  
Fiction II  
How It All Starts

The sun beat down, trapping me in my own personal sweat box disguised as a tuxedo. Standing in front of the Justice of the Peace, I stared at Eric, and felt the intensity of a hundred eyes staring at me, anticipating the impending moment. The sky was pale, birds were chirping and the backyard garden was exploding with colors.

“Do you, Eric, take Justin to be your husband?”

I watched Eric grin and his mouth move, though I did not hear his I do. Then it was my turn to repeat the vows, and my mind drifted in a trance, not really believing it was happening, but not disbelieving.

“I do.” I said.

We fell into an embrace, and kissed for the audience, and received a standing ovation for our performance. In that moment the sun was as bright as I had ever seen it, the grass as green as it had ever grown, the sky as brilliant as it had ever been, the birds’ song as sweet as I had ever heard it, and all the world as ever real as I had ever felt it.

Before that, the sun was setting, casting a blood red tinge in the sky. The fireflies were out, suspended in the air, particles of light drifting gently in the warm, friendly evening. The park lamps had just turned on, and sparrows darted across the sky, swooping into the trees, no doubt returning to care for their young ones.

Eric and I were walking along the brick pathway, in silence. Others were in the park, a family – two young boys and their mother, playing Frisbee with their golden retriever – an

elderly couple walking tenderly on the path, a college student dressed in his hoodie and backpack with his ear buds tucked tightly into his ears.

“Justin,” Eric stopped and turned to me. “I have something I’ve been wanting to ask you.”

I tore my gaze away from the park and glanced over at him, as he bent down on one knee.

“Will you marry me?”

Before that, it was raised voices and slammed doors. It was mean words and hurtful messages. I watched as Eric walked out, slamming the door behind him so hard the picture frames rattled, one even fell.

Exhausted and upset, I walked over to pick it up and noticed it was a picture of us standing with the ocean to our backs, smiling, because we had reason to smile back then.

Before that, we were on the beach, running and wrestling, stripping off our clothes until hot and sweaty, we lay down and counted the stars. Sunset moved to darkness, and entertainment moved to passion.

We made love that night, between the stars and our towel, our rhythm matching that of our hearts, beating in one.

Before that, we were up high on the rocky bluffs. Having just sprinted through a pine forest, we were covered in sap and the scent of pine, overlooking the ocean and its stupendous sunset, bursting with reds and magentas and heat.

We kissed for the first time that night, witnessed only by the stars, burning bright with mystical power.

Before that, we were up late at nights at my house, struggling to finish the latest lab reports, while simultaneously reading textbooks and Shakespeare, and studying for that next Spanish test.

Before that, it was night and we introduced ourselves, new members, at the book club's latest meeting.

Before that, we glanced at each other for the first time.