

# Brynna's Letter to a Bully

excerpted from

*Inferno*

by

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## **ABOUT THE BOOK:**

The heat is on, and a new threat to humanity has risen...

Nick has his driver's license and he's not afraid to use it. But turning sixteen isn't what he thought it would be. While other boys his age are worried about prom dates and applying for college, Nick is neck deep in enemies out to stop him from living another day. No longer sure if he can trust anyone, his only ally seems to be the one person he's been told will ultimately kill him.

But life spent serving the undead is anything except ordinary. And those out to get him have summoned an ancient force so powerful even the gods fear it. As Nick learns to command and control the elements, the one he must master in order to combat his latest foe is the one most likely to destroy him. As the old proverb goes, fire knows nothing of mercy, and if Nick is to survive this latest round, he will have to sacrifice a part of himself. However, the best sacrifice is seldom the sanest move. Sometimes it's the one that leaves your enemies confused, and you even more so.

And sometimes, you have to trust your enemy to save your friends. But what do you do when that enemy is you?

## **WHY THIS LETTER?**

In the book, *Infamous*, a classmate terrorizes fellow students by spreading lies and posting a site that exposes everyone's secrets. Brynna is the first and primary victim. Because of those lies, she is still, a full year later, having to deal with the fall-out. With the help of Nick and LaShonda, she finds a courage she didn't know she had and she ends up writing the manifesto for the ABB. It's excerpted here so that it can hopefully help those who are going through a bad time. Please feel free to share this.

If you're the person in need, please hang in there. Believe me, no one knows your pain more than I do. I know what it's like to be a kid who has no haven. To wake up every

single day, praying that your whole life is nothing but one long nightmare and that today, you're finally going to see that none of it was true... Only to be slapped in the face, literally and figuratively, the minute you open your eyes. I know the pain of not being able to tell anyone. That fear. That horror. The part of you that dies a little every day while you bleed internally and silently where no one can see. I know what it is to walk the halls of a school and be mocked for things that you can't help: Your dark broken teeth that haven't been fixed. Teeth that were shattered when you were hit in the mouth with a glass Coke bottle. Your unfashionable hand-me-downs that don't fit. To graduate in a borrowed dress that is beige and not white because it was all you could get. To not have your diploma right away because you couldn't afford the fee, or a class ring. Not even invitations for graduation. To sit in class every day while your stomach rumbles and gnaws, and to swallow air because you're starving and you don't have money for lunch, and breakfast is something you only see on TV.

My family situation was bad. The kids at school were worse, but some of the things that stung most were from teachers who mocked me, too. As a young woman and child, I kept thinking, "Why can't you just leave me alone? Can't you tell how much pain I'm in? Can none of you see that I'm barely hanging on?"

But then, I was good at hiding my pain. I had to be in order to survive. Let no one in. Trust none. Any information about you, can and will be used to torment you more.

I still believe it doesn't have to be like that. When I was in eighth grade, my lifelong best friend (who became my friend because I fought a bully who was picking on her), asked me if I was afraid to have children. "Aren't you afraid you'll abuse them, too?" I was horrified. "I could never make a child of mine feel like this," I assured her. "I wouldn't do this to my worst enemy." And I've lived my life by those words.

I wish I could say my bullies ended with my school days, but they didn't. I was penniless and homeless a few years ago and I saw a side to people that I wish to this day I was still ignorant of. But through it all, I refused to let those "haters" turn me into one of them. I will not be that person. I will not lash out and I refuse to live their horrid life. As Socrates said, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." I don't know what demons drive them to their cruelty, and I'm grateful that I don't. Even though I've seen it firsthand, I don't understand how anyone can laugh while they hurt another. How someone can take pride in their cruelty.

When I die and face my creator, I want to be able to say that while I might have stumbled and fallen a few times in my life, I never, ever lashed out intentionally at anyone. I don't want to be one of those bitter old creatures who robbed me of my childhood and innocence. One who, when they died, people applauded. I don't want anyone to curl their lips when they think of me and to say, "You know dead just ain't dead enough." When I die, I want to be like my older brother and have people smile with tears in their eyes and say, "Dang, I really miss her. She was fun. This world just isn't as bright with her gone."

Life is hard and there are no guarantees. There have been so many times when I wish I could go back to me in those hours that were so dark and that seemed to be unending and say, "It does get better, Sherri. I promise." Because back then, I didn't know for sure. I hoped, but that hope came with a high price as I questioned my intelligence and sanity for believing in something that seemed ludicrous. "After all you've been through, girl, how can you have anything left? What kind of stupid can't let go when it's obvious this is the best there is? They were right. You ain't nothing but an ugly waste of space."

But don't give up. Don't give in. Do not listen to them or you when your mind echoes their cruelty. Fight for your life and your happiness. Believe in yourself. You are beautiful and you deserve your dreams. You do, and if you keep going, they will come to you. I have been kicked down so many times and so hard that I swear I have a boot heel permanently pressed into my forehead. You can't imagine how many people have come at me for no reason whatsoever. Even now, all these years later, I have a hard time sleeping at night. I hear those voices and their hatred. They are the demons that continue to stalk me, but you know what?

They lost. I'm still here. And in spite of them and everything they tried to take from me, I am happy. I have three wonderful sons who mean the world to me- boys who love me, flaws and all. And I have a husband that all the experts and critics told me I couldn't have. He is a man in every sense of the word and he has held my hand through the worst imaginable nightmares. I am nothing special. Believe me, I know. I come from unbelievable poverty (my childhood home didn't always have running water or heat or electricity and for most of my life I didn't have a bed). I was that dyslexic kid who was mocked to the point that as an adult, I won't do a public reading. It even manifests verbally. Because I was hit in the mouth so much as a child, I had a horrendous lisp that made three different speech teachers tell me that I would never have a job where I had to speak in public. I was mocked for my accent, my heritage, my poverty, my stupidity and my special needs sister. I was ridiculed because the police came to my house so much that I was on a first name basis with the officers.

But this isn't about me. I only talk about my past now because I don't want you to give up. No one told me that I had a hope or a chance. I found salvation in fiction. That was the only place where people like me survived and things got better.

Now as an adult, I've met plenty of others that no one talks about who don't just survive. We thrive. We are normal. You can't look at us and see the scars we hide. But we are here and you will get through this, even though you doubt it right now. A better future is there. I promise you. This is your life. Make it shine. Remember that no one can make you feel inferior without your permission. There are those who will always try to "keep you humble" or think they're "telling it like it is." But they're not. They're being mean. Resist the urge to return it. Find your inner peace and bask in the knowledge that you are better than that.

The buck stops here and it stops now. We can break the cycle. We *must* break the cycle.

Raise your fist to the ceiling and shout: I am human and I matter. This is my time and my life. I am beautiful in spite of what you say and think. And if you can't see that, it's your loss.

Then blow them a raspberry and remember that you might be down today, but tomorrow is another chance for you to shine and to dance like no one's watching. Spend your time on the things that matter... making the most of your life. There will never be another person like you ever again.

We will all be remembered by the tracks we leave in the hearts of the people we meet. You can be a light in the darkness or you can be the demon you hate. The choice is yours alone to make. The consequences are yours to face.

As for me, I have seen where that bitterness leads, and it's a bad, bad end. No happy person attacks another. There's no need. And there's no limit on happiness. Believe me, there's more than enough to go around and I don't want to hoard it. So if I have to spread something, I want it to be warmth and laughter. And while I may not help everyone, if I can reach that one person like me as a child and young woman who just needs one moment of escape, one tiny word of encouragement, then my life wasn't the waste they told me it would be. And maybe, just maybe, I'm not that disgusting, stupid, broken buck-toothed dog they called me. Maybe I'm not invisible anymore.

So put on your swan hat and hold your head proud. As my older brother used to tell me, we are all Veterans of a Screwed-up World. No one gets out of life unscarred. But we do reap the seeds that we sow. Bitterness gives a bitter harvest. It takes strength and determination to drive out the snakes and keep the weeds from growing in our garden (they can be insidious and crop up when we least expect them). And though we hate it when it pours, rain makes the wheat grow stronger. So send me your storm and I will dance in the eye of the hurricane and laugh while the wind challenges me. Most of all, I will relish every second of every day I live and use those lemons not only for lemonade, but furniture polish and to scrape the grease off my dishes so that I can wash it down the drain and bid it adieu.

Love and hugs to you, always! May the best day of your past be the worst day in your future.



## BRYNNA'S LETTER TO A BULLY

Dear Tormentor,

Today, you made me cry. You made me feel like the lowest piece of dirt that has ever walked this earth. You stole a piece of my heart and soul, and my self-esteem. Just when I had finally managed to convince myself that I wasn't quite the ugliest or dumbest person alive, you came in and reaffirmed that never ending playback in my head that insults me even when you're not around. The same playback that tells me, over and over, life sucks, and it's never going to get any better no matter what I do, because I don't deserve anything better. I am nothing and nothing is all I'll ever be. Even when I try my very best, like I did today, it's not good enough to make me human or worth something in the world's eyes. I don't need you or anyone else to reaffirm something I already know about myself.

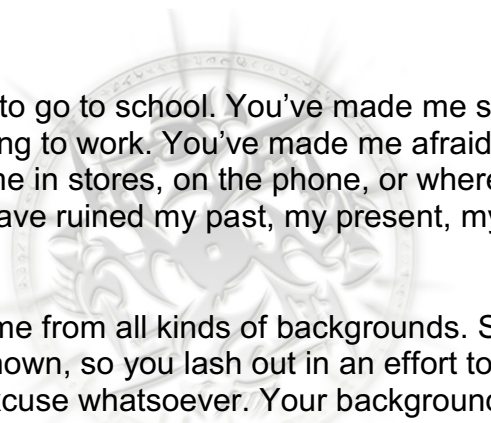
My hurt didn't show on the outside because I learned a long time ago to make sure that you couldn't take that pleasure, too; that you and the others who think you're funny or witty or cute, or are too afraid of you to do anything more than follow along, couldn't see how much pain you've caused me. The times in the past when I made the mistake of letting you see my tears, all of you laughed at me over them, and you made it worse. You made me choke on my dignity, and hate that which had been a source of pride until you mocked it.

You have kicked me in my heart, and ravaged what little self-worth I had managed to scrape together.

But that's okay, because that is what makes me stronger than you and your followers. I don't have to point out someone else's flaws. I don't need to put someone else down or mock someone in order to feel better about myself, or to prove my worth, authority, power or intelligence. The mere fact that you do proves that we who refrain from such cruelty are a superior species. We are the ones who have evolved beyond simple animal behavior that makes a base creature attack something it doesn't understand; something that is different or not as strong.

It doesn't take superior intelligence to tear down someone and/or their hard work. To mock their best effort or a physical trait that can't be helped. It doesn't prove that you're more intelligent or better in any way. A stick of dynamite can level a building, but it can't build one.





You have made me afraid to go to school. You've made me sick to my stomach whenever I think about going to work. You've made me afraid in my own home. You have needlessly insulted me in stores, on the phone, or wherever I accidentally stumbled upon you. You have ruined my past, my present, my day, and stolen a part of my soul.

Like the rest of us, you come from all kinds of backgrounds. Some not very happy, and cruelty is all you've ever known, so you lash out in an effort to ease your own pain. Others like you have no excuse whatsoever. Your background is above reproach. Rather, it's a vicious need inside you that we don't understand, and it's why it's so hard to identify you at times. You've been my teachers, clergy, my fellow students, coworkers, bosses, principals, sometimes you were a former friend or even family I once trusted.

You've taken things I told you in utter confidence, and twisted them into lies to be used against me. Without cause, you have told lies about me. You have refused to see me as a human being. You have kicked me when I was up, and you have kicked me when I was down.

But today, you will kick me no more. I will no longer be your verbal or physical punching bag. Today, I discovered the secret that will never allow you or your friends who will one day turn on you too, to hurt me again.

Today as I lay broken and bleeding in that dark place I crawl into when I think I can't take it anymore, I found something extraordinary.

My humanity.

As my soul screamed in bleeding agony and I wanted to die rather than live one more day in a world where you exist, I realized that my tears and ability to feel pain without lashing out to return that hurt to someone else makes me human.

I find my pleasure when someone smiles over something I've said or done. When I make them feel better about themselves and their lives. When I look at an okay drawing and tell the artist that it is a work of art, worthy of hanging in a museum. The smile on their face, the pride that glows in their eyes, the happiness I see inside them makes my heart swell. It gives me a joy you can never understand.

Kindness costs nothing to give, but to the person who receives it, it could be the one thing that saves their life. The one thing that gives them hope in their darkest hour. No act of charity or kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.

In the immortal words of Maya Angelou: ...people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Whenever they think of me, I want them to smile... And I will never allow you to take

that from me.

No matter how you taunt or beat me, I will not become you, and pay your cruelty forward. In time, you will be gone from my life, and I will move forward to become even stronger and smarter than I am today. Because I can celebrate with others and applaud their efforts with an open heart capable of love and acceptance, I will evolve to an even greater level of happiness while you lay mired in your hatred and bitterness.

More than that, I discovered the best secret of all. I don't care what you think because I don't think enough of you to listen. You're not worth the energy it would cost me to hate you. There is nothing about you that I want to be. I don't want your clothes. I don't want your friends. Your job. I don't want your life, and I definitely don't want to live an existence where I have to hurt someone else in order to feel good about myself.

I will not let you steal my humanity. You will not teach me your hatred or intolerance. Not today. Not ever.

In spite of what you think, you're not anonymous. You're ubiquitous. No matter where you come from, or the clothes you wear, or the computer screen you hide behind, you are just like all thieves. Rather than work and create something yourself, you prefer to steal from someone else. Even your emotions are stolen.

And while I might not be able to see the future today, I know it will come through this darkness and free me from this ugliness. If I hang on with both hands, my strength will save me. My life is a gift and I will not let you take that from me, too. You're definitely not worth it.

I am here and I am important. Maybe not to you. But to those I make smile, to the ones who see the beauty inside me, the ones who seek me out because of who I am and because of the positive emotions I give to them, I am irreplaceable.

You are not. Should you die tomorrow, no one would weep. I've been to your funeral and I've seen that truth, too. When you die, there will be another bully, just like you, spewing the same cruel lies and lines that never change, to take your place. As I said, you never change. You're all alike.

But we are not. We are individuals. We do matter, and to those closest to us, we are the entire world. Our loss would cut them to the core of their hearts and they would weep forever. Our death would leave a hole inside them that never closes. We are the fragile flowers that spill our fragrance into the world, and bring beauty and smiles whenever we're spotted by those capable of seeing us in all our glory.

And so I finish my letter with this. Go ahead and laugh at me. Mock me. Insult me. Tear me down. Do your worst. Because through it all, I will do my best in spite of you and your cruelty. From this day forward, I will never hear your ugly words again. I will live my life for me and those few who love me, the ones who cannot imagine a world without

me in it. From now on, I will laugh at you when you start in on me because I now know the simple truth.

Animals attack what they fear. And you, in spite of all your bluster and bragging, fear little old me. If I truly were insignificant and worthless, you wouldn't bother tormenting me. So I will continue living my life for me with the happy knowledge that I threaten you.

Meanwhile me and the rest of my real friends won't bother talking about you. You don't matter enough to us to take up time better spent on preparing for a future where you don't exist. Time changes everything and everyone. Today you're the bully. Tomorrow someone will bully you. And when that happens, unlike you, we will reach out to you in sympathy and love, and try to make you feel better. Because that is who and what we are:

Intelligent and beautiful human beings.

Forever yours,

The Anti-Bully Brigade