

Division 4 Humanities

Ally

IOROW Short Stories

Story 1:

All that was in front of me were three pairs of footprints on a dirt path lit by a flashlight. The trail led the opposite direction I was going. All I had to do was track it back to the car and leave. Dead leaves and sticks crunched beneath my feet as I rushed through the woods. The wind chilled me to the core. I saw the path open up onto the gravel road we had so often visited. Although there was no laughing this time; no shoving or piggyback rides or racing to get to the car to secure a shotgun.

I reached into my pocket to grab my keys, but felt nothing. I checked the other pocket. Nothing. I threw down the flashlight and ripped off the denim jacket I had been wearing, letting the cold grip my bare arms. I searched through every pocket, the inside pockets, the outside ones. I checked each pocket four times. Nothing. I picked up the jacket and shook it, whipping gravel dust straight into my eyes and down through my lungs. They weren't there.

I couldn't go back. I wasn't going to. I wasn't going to walk back through the brush on land shut off to the public since as long as we could remember. I wasn't going to hop the rocks through the stream where Sid slipped and knocked out his front tooth, smiling all the while. I wasn't going to run up that hill braided with tree roots where Charlie had slipped on a muddy day and scraped her knees up, but she insisted we kept going. Or the willow tree I climbed one day on a dare, only for the branch to break under me. All to get to that little circular clearing, surrounded by dense raspberry bushes and filled with dewy green

grass and ferns. How many secrets that little piece of heaven has heard. I smiled. I couldn't comprehend why our parents, despite countless injuries, continued to let us go.

Then I came back to reality. I was alone, trespassing in the middle of the night. I was shivering and my eyes were puffy and my throat hoarse from yelling. I wasn't going back there. I was the villain to them, I was the one who didn't care. I thought they'd be happy for me. I thought they'd grow up and realize that a promise we made when we were ten in that little clearing wasn't real. I wasn't going to go back and be the one to apologize.

I picked up my jacket, shook it off, grabbed the flashlight, and left. I only looked back when I got to the fence. It was then I figured out I would never be back, and that the piece of heaven--this paradise I've filled with good memories--will be closed off, forever.

Story 2:

"I'm going to college," Charlie chuckled, crossing her legs on the mossy rock near the center of the clearing.

"You're telling me that you dragged us all out here at ten-o'clock on a cold Saturday night just to tell us something we all already knew?" She laughed through the sentence, not actually minding being there. She looked to Sid, expecting him to be having a similar response, but that's not what she saw. He hadn't broken eye contact with May, his dark brown eyes reflected the stars above; it seemed he knew everything. He had always been the smart one, the kind one, the self-aware one. He balanced out Charlie's temper and May's

impulsiveness. She often felt bad for him, wondering if being friends with them was more of a chore than a gift. Although whenever they approached him about it, he shook his head and smiled, saying he enjoyed spending time with them.

That wasn't the look he had then. His eyes were cold. Charlie thought back to what May had said. "I'm going to college." The words got stuck in her throat, the sentence janky and slow. She was looking down when she said it, no light on her face, but Charlie finally figured out what it looked like. Her face flushed red.

"Wait are you fucking kidding me? All this, all these years-"

"Charlie shut it!" Sid snapped, looking away from May. Charlie was taken aback, sitting deeper into her stone. She wanted to sink below, deep into the moss and the earth of this clearing. "May, say it." She didn't. "May! I'm not going to sit here and play guessing games! Fucking spit it out!"

"I'm going to college!" she snapped back! "I'm going to college in California, because I got into my top school!"

"You didn't even tell us you applied to a school on the other side of the country!" Charlie shouted, hoping to replace her shock with anger, an emotion she understood a little better.

"Because I knew you guys would react like this!"

"Because you're breaking a promise!"

"A promise we made when we were ten!"

"You promised--we all promised we would stick together! Go to school near each other and-"

“Oh, grow the fuck up, Charlie!” May’s voice echoed. Charlie felt a knife twist in her gut. She tried to yell, but she had no breath to shout.

“Fuck you,” she said, cold, blunt. She turned and pulled the hood up on her sweatshirt, covering her face from the cold and from May and Sid. As she reached the edge of the clearing she could hear them yelling. Sid had finally reached his limit.

She had no flashlight, but she didn’t care. She knew these woods like the back of her hand. Although the moment she reached the willow tree she stopped. She wanted to keep walking, but it felt like she hit a brick wall of memories. The day she dared May to climb up the branches of the willow tree, knowing full well they could break. May wasn’t sure, but she pushed. She remembered the crack and shuffling of leaves as they parted around May’s body. Charlie shuddered a bit, still feeling guilty for something that happened eight years before. It was that day that she had carried May on her back into the clearing, because she refused to go home after that fall. And it was that day that May made her and Sid promise that we would always be friends.

Charlie broke through the wall of memories by turning off the main path. Sometimes when Sid and May were busy, she would come here and find all the little paths that lead to the clearing. Although, with the rush of college and school she hadn’t taken it in months. The strength of her anger no longer outweighed her sadness, and she couldn’t push back her tears. She buried her head in her sweatshirt sleeves, crouching down and crying silently.

For maybe thirty minutes she sat there, never looking up. She was stuck, remembering everything that happened in these woods. All of that was gone; their little piece of heaven shattered by May's words.

Something rustled in the bushes on the side of the path and Charlie panicked, thinking it was one of the coyotes they encountered multiple times over the past few years. She jumped back, bolting off the side path into the woods, feeling keys slip from her pocket. She looked back over her shoulder, scanning for the keys and the animals, but the moonlight was blocked by the foliage. She was blind. She couldn't see the ground falling away into a steep hill, or the roots of trees that weaved through the ground. All over again, she tripped, but rather than sliding back down like she had before, she rolled, rocks and branches taking the air out of her lungs. Before she could breathe again, she struck a rock, a mossy rock, and sank into the ground. The forest claiming her, forever.

Story 3:

"Sid! Go talk to her!" He sat, unmoving. "Sid!" He didn't look away from the mossy rock Charlie had been sitting on. "Sid, you need to get her to hear me out!"

"It's not my fucking job!" His head whipped up, locking eyes with May. He didn't yell, but his voice filled the clearing with a pressure. "I'm done with this shit! Go fix your own fucking problems, okay?"

"You've always done this! It's never been a problem before!"

"Well, I just didn't fucking tell you! This was your fault! You broke the promise!"

“Wait, are you upset, too? I was expecting support from you guys, and this is what I get!”

“I’m not upset you’re going. I’m upset you didn’t tell us.” A pause. May opened her mouth, but couldn’t say anything. “You lied to us. We’re your friends, and we do support you. But you can’t expect us to not be angry that since the beginning of our last year in school together you hid things from us.” He sighed. “I’m going to look for Charlie. We can walk back. Spare you the awkward car ride.” He stood slowly, and walked out of the clearing.

He quickly noticed under the light of his phone flashlight that there were no footprints of Charlie going this direction. He figured she took a turn off, as she does sometimes. She showed them the side paths one day, navigating the woods like she lived there. She gave them a tour of all of her favorite spots besides the clearing, a large boulder she said you could see all the stars from, a perfect tree for climbing, the best blueberry and raspberry bushes. Sid hoped she would be in one of those spots, unless she already started walking home, which he doubted. Charlie’s parents would ask too many questions if she came in upset.

Sid continued down the path, before seeing a glimmer reflecting into his eyes from his flashlight. He looked down and noticed May’s car keys. Charlie must have taken them for her. Once again, he noticed the footprints darting off into the woods. No paths. He continued to follow them before he noticed the hill. He saw the roots and rock before anything else. And then he saw her.

He couldn't remember anything else that happened, or rather, he didn't want to. All he could think of was that this was the one thing he didn't try to solve. The one time he didn't play peacekeeper. And this is what happened. He lost both his friends and their little piece of heaven, forever.