

KIDS WILL BE KIDS

Feb. 16, 2014

They were sitting on the grass across the street. It was dry now, but it wouldn't be later. The rain always came in the afternoon and most of the time after he had taken lunch. It never lasted long, and it was never cold enough to need a jacket, but every day the rain would come.

It was something the man had come to expect and it didn't bother him anymore. He wasn't certain, but they looked like they were wearing the same clothes as last night.

There were two girls leaning against each other and two boys sitting on either side of them. A third boy lay with his head in the lap of the girl with jean shorts and a new tattoo. One of the boys, the one wearing a yellow hat, stood up. He wobbled to the right, leaned to the left, and then he fell down in the same spot he'd been sitting. The group erupted in laughter and across the street the man continued walking.

One of the girls took a sip from a can of beer and placed it on the grass beside her. She pulled out her cellphone and said something to the others. The girl next to her was playing with the hair of the boy whose head was in her lap. He looked up at her curiously and she smiled. Her cheekbones were framed by her short, slightly tangled hair and she smiled back at him. The boy wearing the yellow hat pointed at the man who'd been watching them.

He looked down when he realized he'd been caught staring and began waking faster. A nervous wave of self-consciousness washed over him when he assumed whatever they were saying was related to him. The only reason he'd been watching them was because he remembered the girl with jean shorts and the new tattoo. She had come in three times last night, each time a little more drunk.

She spoke with rapid, confusing English words and while the man couldn't understand it, he liked her voice. It was soft and clear, but also piercing in its honesty. Walking along the sidewalk the man tried to listen to her foreign words and wondered if he would ever learn English.

Across the street he saw one of the boys grab the hands of the boy who had been laying down and pulled him to his feet. The others stood and they all looked towards him.

There was no doubt anymore; he knew they were going to follow him and he walked faster. Without slowing, he bent down and picked up an empty beer bottle from the sidewalk, and stole a quick glance towards them.

The girls adjusted their shorts and tops. One of the boys put his arm around the girl with the new tattoo, but she slid out from under his arm and turned around to face him. Grabbing both his hands she began skipping backwards; leading him, and the group, playfully across the street.

The man saw that they were getting closer. Suddenly he felt rushed. He stubbed his toe and stumbled, but used his good hand to keep hold of the railing as he climbed the short staircase. The group had almost crossed the street when he looked back again.

He wondered how long they had been waiting for him when he reached into his pocket and pulled out a key ring with keys of all shapes. He coughed a little, cleared his throat, and then bent down on one knee to open the giant padlock. He jiggled the padlock loose and with a surge of effort stood, sliding the shuttered metal door upwards. It clicked loudly at each fold until it was open.

He slid a different key into the second door and turned it clockwise until he felt the deadbolt drop into the lock. Swinging the door open made the bell attached to the hinge of the door jingle.

The sound had been burned into his memory and by this point gave him a feeling like *deja vu* every time he heard it. Taking one final look over his shoulder he shuffled inside as fast as his old body would let him.

The group jumped up the stairs cheering.

The beer store, was now open.