

Sidney Parker

Creative Writing Fiction Workshop 1

Will you Run With me

At five I knew what it was like to lose a parent, and subsequently along with him the rest of my family. We were a family of six, at one point in time, preserved in a minimal selection of polaroid and kodak photographs. It was the epitome of a dream, and looking back now it feels like perhaps, in all reality it was. We were a mom, a dad, a brother, three older sisters and me - now simply five people with less meaning associated with the roles we were assigned. I am five years younger than my next youngest sibling. With our fathers death our family splintered and those five years meant a lot. I had had at least five years less with him; I would only get five years with him; I was only five so maybe I'd forget him. Those were just some of the phrases tossed my way about it before my siblings left me alone, mostly as one by one they grew out of the house, and assumed I had processed the whole ordeal. Afterall I was *only* five.

I don't believe anyone can fully process grief and I hate the number five.

Now as I count the clicks on the geometrically designed dab pen, I resent the fact it takes five clicks to turn on and five clicks to turn off. I resent a lot about the pen- my reliance on the cannabis content the most and the least. I know it's a problem, I think. It was a problem when it was alcohol before my mom caught me and stopped buying alcohol for herself to keep in the house. She doesn't drink anymore because of me, and she will tell anyone that's why. It was likely a problem when I went to my first highschool party in the ninth grade and discovered I had a crush. Not on any guy, or girl, in my grade, but on the substance. Really any substance, my attraction to them doesn't seem to be specific. I like the feeling they all give me and while I'd like to think I could stop, that's likely a lie to add to the list of my life.

Mom doesn't get it. It's complicated to explain.

It's on now, as my right hand has stopped clicking the damn thing. I put it up to my lips and inhale before removing it and exhaling. I can't see the content that leaves my breath, the night is too dark and the air too warm for my breath to fog. Five more clicks and I put it in my shorts pocket.

Emma and I are two silhouettes sitting on a roof, of a house, in the middle of my mom's rural Montana property littered with grass and big overbearing trees. One tree not very far from the house, but isolated by the grass of the yard, contains a tree house. The structure is weathered from the winters and five kids and our friends using it over the years, and it has lacked repairs since the person who originally built it is not around to keep up with it. Like I said, dead dad. And now as four of the five children have moved out, it has been basically forgotten about, just like me. So instead of the two of us sitting in the treehouse we sit on the roof of the main house, and ignore the treehouse of my childhood. I used to spend a lot of time up there, before I grew too old for it to be considered acceptable to play in it and before it gave free splinters with every visit. Those aren't as attractive as substances or hanging out with Emma, and I haven't given my mom an ultimatum to truthfully quit because we both know that's not how this works.

The two of us had climbed out of a window on the second floor of the house. Through the window that belonged to my brother's room, which is rarely used now that he is further south along the Rockies, and almost finished with college. The screen hadn't popped out easily until I jimmied it out with a multi tool stolen from the unused tools in the garage that were once dad's. Mom couldn't ever bring herself to donate them, so they'd sat there all of my life; a multi tool, a few variations of pocket knives and a hammer wouldn't be missed. They hadn't yet. I had popped the screen in a way I knew we'd be able to put back, I'd had enough practice with the screen of my own bedroom window on the other side of the house. But that window is met with the branch of a cottonwood tree. It is good for sneaking out and away from the house, not stargazing like the incline of the roof outside my brother's room. Tonight there was no need to sneak out, mom wasn't home, no one to sneak away from and the person I'd have snuck away to visit was next to me.

Now we are outside. The grass surrounding the house is sprinkled with rare fireflies coming out and dancing in the fleeting darkness as the singular cloud shielding the moon exits. The house lights are completely off and the property is large enough the only other civilized lights are small flecks in the distance from other houses along the rolling valley. The place is covered in a shroud of silence that is only broken by the occasional whisper of the wind or the movement of one of us. Or the five fucking clicks of my pen. It is a peaceful night that rarely occurs at my family's property these days. Between arguments I have with mom because she's growing rightly suspicious I'm on something else and parties I throw when she's away for more

than just a long evening like tonight. It is the first time in a long time I haven't had dozens of people over or gone somewhere with them to fill and erase the physical and mental silence. But sitting here in silence with Emma is even better, because it's just us, even with the intruding presence in my shorts pocket and the constant nagging of it in my thoughts.

It is hard for me to clear my mind; I'm always thinking about things that rarely get said.

We are sitting next to each other looking out over the tranquil scene and up at the vibrant stars, our bodies huddled close and our knees bent up meeting to support and rest against each other. Our hands lay where our knees touched. One hand, my left and Emma's right, connect in a finger-laced fist. A new, and solitary, gold ring with a turquoise gem sits upon my left middle finger. A present she had given me when we first came out here tonight. She had said she just found it and thought I'd like it. I do. It's a nice ring. She had also added that my half birthday was just a week and a half away and she knew my mom would forget. No one in my family celebrates half birthdays. I didn't even know my half birthday was coming up. My birthday is in November and it's May now.

Emma is the kind of person who knows these things though, or at least about me. It's part of our slightly odd friendship, we know things about the other no one else does, and I'm not talking about deep secrets, even though we share some of those as well. I know that when we are driving somewhere in her shifty 13 year old jeep, because I don't have my own car being the youngest, regardless of which one of us is behind the steering wheel, the music always has to be set to an even numbered volume level. Just because it must be. She knows that I hate the texture of wet clothes. She knows I always put ice in my water bottle before the water, and does it that way when she fills it for me even though she thinks it's backwards. I know the only food from Starbucks she will get is a cheese danish and when she orders an iced dirty chai she gets a pump of vanilla added to it. She knows I switch lotion scents by season and knows them by name. She knows I will never sleep with socks on but always cuff my jeans. I know she hangs her baseball hat collection on the wall in the order she does so the first letters of the places or logos on them spell fun or made up words that change every time she gets a new one, and that she won't wear a graphic t with a hat from different states or towns. She won't paint her nails, I won't dye my hair.

The list goes on of quirky yet highly important things we just know about each other. Many would say it must be from years of friendship, and while we've known each other since we were little we weren't casual acquaintances till later middle school and weren't close friends till

sophomore year. I use the term friend very sparingly- because it can mean a lot of fake things- so it's used almost exclusively for her. Length of knowing one another isn't where it came from. We are just different. It's something we've been tiptoeing around recently as both of us start to realize, but both of us are also afraid to change anything.

I was watching her face from the side of my eyes as she took in the fireflies. Being a warmer than normal May, where all the snow has already melted, they've just started occasionally appearing at night. She looks amazed, like a little kid. I think she senses my focus on her because she turns her head to meet my gaze. A soft smile forms on her mauve colored lips in the moonlight. Her eyes sparkle and her head appears to nod slightly. She leans towards me and our gazes break to look at the fields again. Our heads meet and rest together as the wind blows my brunette hair and her blonde hair across our faces. Somehow I think as our shoulders rise and fall in synchronous breath we silently addressed it, at least part of it, the very beginning of it resolved by one knowing and understanding look.

It's again, something that's complicated to explain. Something in the air around us feels different, and it's not the immediate lack of weed for once.

She squeezes my hand periodically as the silence doesn't drag on due to the wind rustling the leaves on the trees and I feel a cool presence settle over us. It's five squeezes before she stops for an extended amount of time. I squeeze back once and dip my head onto her shoulder and the crook of her neck. I can smell the vanilla of her hair and it reminds me of the few times my sister Lucy would bake when I was younger. Emma leans her head over the top of mine to reconnect them. She's someone I hope will never leave my life, like so many others. In most ways her presence is better than a substance and in all ways better than my own mind. She's been my anchor in the storm that is my life, even if only recently, but I don't think time matters here. As we take another breath together and the sky fills with more fireflies I remember again despite the unusual warmth it is actually May, and that's why they are starting to come out. An out of place gust of cold air ghosts by and the goosebumps on my exposed shoulder raise for a limited existence.

I'm not superstitious, and I don't believe in a god, but I hate the number five.