

Sidney Parker

Creative Writing Fiction Final Portfolio Exert

### When We Were

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The dusted dirt that my car had displaced is finally settling into the silence of the night outside. Inside the obnoxious chatter of my thoughts and my memories drift around as I've sat here for several minutes. I turn the key of the shabby suv and the engine humming cuts off; it's my mom's and it taught five kids how to drive. Some days it seems like a miracle it still turns on when it groans, let alone the squeals when it drives. Mom wants to get a new one, it just hasn't been the top priority, especially since no matter how many times you think it wont work, it pulls through. The car might be the most reliable member of the family. That's why I came out here tonight alone with just it, that and the fact that the memories and feelings that won't stop bugging me are sewn into the fabric seats.

The moon peeks out from behind a small set of clouds that look out of place in the otherwise cloudless sky and I remember the last time I drove the car out here. The night then was fully clear. The moon was the brightest I'd ever seen it and the stars stuck out like pin pricks through paper against the navy blue of the universe. As I glance out the driver's window now at the clearing off to the left side of the road, I wonder if that night really was as calm and beautiful outside as it is stored in my memories. Everything about that time in my life is romanticized by the things I was putting in my body and the deluding of who I was being forced upon my psyche.

The night I spent here, most of a year ago, was full of the squabbling of myself, Emma and Maria. We were having a sleepover at my house- mom was skeptical at first to agree to it. Things had been rough between us, but she caved and allowed the two of them over. She didn't know they were part of the instigation around why things between us had been so bad.

Mom had let us borrow the car after dark to go for a drive through the rural roads and moon kissed fields. It was an ideal early summer night. We had the windows down and the sunroof open allowing the warm sticky May night air to tangle our hair and cling to our exposed skin. I was speeding along the dirt roads kicking up the dry particles that then also stuck to our sweaty skin. Emma was blasting her shitty music Maria and I always complained about through the aftermarket stereo my brother installed back when he was still living at home. Even though Emma and I were best friends we hated each other's taste in music with the passion of as many

swear words as men in a bar fight. The agreement was if I got to drive she got shotgun and could play her music, if she drove I got shotgun and the music controls. Emma is a terrible driver, so I sacrifice my ears for our lives and wellbeing. Maria, when she was with us, always got the backseat and had to listen to either of our music. Maria didn't get her license till a few months prior to that night, so she never drove. It didn't seem to ever bother her that Emma and I were obviously closer and the dominant forces in our group. Maria is chill like that.

When the car had arrived at the pull off I turned it off and with it the music. Emma made some smart ass comment about me being noise conscious or something and that I needed to live a little. It was close to midnight and we were technically about to be trespassing, while intoxicated- adding her shitty music at full volume seemed like extra flames to the fire we didn't need. It was also a battle we were used to picking with each other, so I didn't feel bad telling her to get over it. She didn't harp on it for too long as she took another hit from her dab pen, blowing it out the sunroof as I looked out at the field. It was lit perfectly from the moon and a trio of birds dashed across it low to the grass. There was a second moon, this one slightly distorted in the small ripples of the water surface of a small pond beyond a gentle sloping stretch of greening grass. The only other thing between the car and the water was a rickety wooden fence with a mid-sized black and orange sign strapped to a cross pole that hadn't fallen over yet.

'Private Property: No Trespassing'

The sign is still here, the cross pole its on is tilted and fallen over though, with the left side residing in dirt now. The age of the wood is apparent with the fence slowly decaying one stretch of wood at a time. The grass is less green due to unusually low snowfall this year, so more of it looks dead. There are also still two moons; but no trio of birds.

Back then I could see my eyes in the side mirror of the door, because the window was down. They were navy night ocean blue and they looked hollow like the eyes of a person I once might have known. They were easily blurred out by the exhale of misty vapor from my mouth and the distracting light of the pen as I had handed it back to Emma.

Tonight my eyes are different. Not just because I see them in the reflection of the window instead of the side mirror. There is no gray cloud to obscure them. They are still the same colors they have been since I first opened my eyes at birth, but are no longer hollow and borderline lifeless. Tonight they aren't exactly that of the person I was before everything changed, back when I was young and daydreaming off ferry boats. But they are the eyes of someone I believe I

recognize looking back tonight. It's strange. They are the same as any old version and they are also organically new. It's oddly poetic, but I don't dwell on it for very long.

A year ago I know we had sat in the car for another few minutes with the windows down, passing the pen and scattering the blitzed light it emitted in the otherwise natural night. Then we had put it in the car cup holder and opened three doors for us to leave. We all wore some variation of shorts and tank tops with sandals on our feet. Underneath each of us wore bikinis. We gently closed the car doors, Maria grabbing a collection of towels from the backseat, before we walked down the ditch to the fence. Emma didn't pause at the sign or the fence. She placed her right foot through the two layers of cross poles and bent down into the level of some spare pieces of grass and swooped her body underneath and up the other side. She turned to grab the towels from Maria, before she continued down the sloping hill to the water. Maria climbed over the fence with ease and followed Emma. We were always following Emma. I had paused for a moment at the sign, taking in the gravity of what we were doing, where we were doing it, and how it had gotten to this point, somehow all in a split second. Emma called something else snarky from halfway to the shore encouraging me to "hurry my ass up". I pushed my thoughts aside as I ran my tongue over my teeth; I could still taste the vapor. It was just another second until I was catching up in pace with Emma and Maria and another minute before all three of us were at the water shore.

Tonight I get out of the car with just a small little bag in my hands. Its purple and about the size of a pencil case, might even have been what it was originally bought as. I stole it from one of my sisters, I don't remember which. I have on loose cuffed jeans, a baggy t-shirt that was my brothers and a pair of white high top converse. I make my way down the ditch and step over the fallen cross post and sign. I'm down by the shore quickly, yet I stay in my mind as no one is here to rip me from my thoughts, invalidate them and shove their own in.

Emma had quickly stripped down to her swimsuit top and shorts once we arrived at the water. I noticed how the glow of the moon accentuated her figure, but quickly glanced away and brushed that thought from my head. We all sat down on a collection of rocks along the shore and took in the sight for ourselves. I could feel the effects of the weed starting, my head was free, my thoughts loose and my body escaping me. *I was free of the problems between mom and I; I didn't have to worry about the fact my dad was dead; so what my brother and I had been drifting apart.*

I missed him often, we used to be attached at the hip, and I was upset that mom and I were on the rocks these days even though I was the one who messed that up.

I had Emma, the weed and Maria. That's all Emma repetitively said I needed whenever I voiced concerns to her about my family situation. She must have said something that I didn't hear in the silence of the night because she snapped her fingers in front of my eyes. "Amelia, stop thinking." She commanded. "We came out here to not think and to forget it all." She grinned with her cocky smile.

"I wasn't." I lied.

"Bullshit. That was your thinking face." I glanced over at her and she had the 'I'm right and we all know it' look on her face. "You don't need to worry about anything right now." She had reached out and put, contrasting to the warm night, her cool hand on my shoulder. My skin burned from the sensation and I had inadvertently smiled over at her. On the other side of her Maria had stood up and was taking off her clothes to reveal her swimsuit before moving into the water, leaving us alone on the shore. "No dead dads or divorced parents or personal struggles." She said in a hushed tone even though Maria was gone. Not like we were trying to or had kept any secrets from Maria, but Emma and I were closer and shared details or feelings we just didn't with Maria. I rolled my eyes softly glancing away from her and then out to the water, I felt her hand firmly on my shoulder still.

"Want to talk about it?" I had offered, even though I knew she'd decline. She shook her head.

"We came out here to forget, remember?" She smiled, giving me a wicked smile and shaking my shoulder a little. "Enjoy ourselves." She winked.

"I talked to Luke the other day." I said looking down at the blades of grass around us, running my fingers through them. I had felt the hand on my shoulder leave as I finished my sentence and it sunk in to her.

"I thought you said he'd stopped talking to you."

"He had." I had picked up a blade and was twisting and contorting it. My eyes were still away from her. "But he said he's coming back at the beginning of summer, and wants to try and help me figure things out." I could feel the cold and icy stare I knew she was giving me. It was the same one that always occurred when I talked about my brother, usually followed by a list of reassurances I didn't need him around anymore regardless of how I perceived what I needed. My

brother had cut me out of his life after our mom cut alcohol out of hers when she found me passed out drunk. Luke and I had been super tight as kids and even through our early teens until he discovered I'd started getting into things. Then he started distancing himself and warning me until he discovered my stubbornness bordered on idiocy. I hadn't talked to him in several months until he texted me to say he was coming home and wanted to try to change things between us again. I'd missed him a lot, he was my best friend growing up and oftentimes took over the missing space of my dad being gone. "He wants to help me actually stay clean, a restart between us since he's had time to figure his stuff out. He doesn't want to see me like this, he misses me, like the real me. He sees through it all, knows I'm lying through my teeth to mom about it, and I think I want to let him try and help."

"I said I don't want to talk about anything." She snapped back instead of replying anything to the words I had actually said. I know she doesn't want me to back out of it all.

"You said you didn't want to talk about your problems. I'd like to talk about mine."

"You don't need to Amelia. That's why we are here, that's why we are always here." I knew she didn't mean at this pond, this was the first time we'd stopped here along the road. "Get that in your fucking head for Christ's sake. How many times do I have to tell that to you so you'll actually get it." She had practically yelled back, with the emphasis but not the volume.

"You can't tell me what I do or don't need." I shot back half assed.

"You don't need Luke, you guys outgrew each other. Your relationship was built around him filling in for a figure you will never have. That's all. He left you to go live his own life, because he can't stay around waiting for you to grow up. He enabled you." I was watching her now, the glare in her eyes was a mix of Emma and of hazy smoke. "Luke left like your dad did and like your sisters, and now like your mom basically has." I wanted to speak up and say something, because she was wrong, I think. But my mind was numb from the weed, and in a way I also believed her, I had always trusted her so why couldn't I not now. "They will all leave you and hurt you, trust me." She had reached her hand back out and taken my hands. "But I won't, Maria won't, these nights were reality is whatever we want won't. We won't leave you. So let's enjoy them." She squeezed my hands again with the smile I could never resist and moments later we had found ourselves splashing in the cool water.

Now here tonight no conversation occurs, mostly because I am alone and I did that on purpose. I do wonder if I had called Emma up for shits what the conversation would be, if it

would even be at all. I prefer the latter, as I don't think I'd want to know what she has to say about it all now. She was opinionated then and I'm sure still is. As I stand at the shore I bend down and run my right hand in the stagnant water. It's still cold. I wipe my hand on my knee and unzip the bag I brought with me. I pull out the pen from that evening all those nights ago. It's blue with purple designs, even though Emma always thought it was purple with blue designs. Maria was impartial. I run it between my fingers and I feel the slight rise of the purple, suggesting it is the design color. When I hit the button with my finger nothing happens as its run out of battery from months of no use, even though I know if I reach back in the bag the charger is there. I glance back up again at the water and then my gaze falls back to the rocks I'm next to. I stand up and look back down at my hands as the conversations play over and over in my head. A rush of emotions- hurt, anger, happiness, longing, admiration, hate, love- about it slams through me. I lift the pen up over my shoulder, ready to chuck it towards the water, when a single bird flies across the water surface. It's alone, unlike the trio I saw last time. I pause my movements watching it dip towards the water, a wing brushing the surface before it flies off with a sad squawk. I pull my hand back down with a sigh. It's alone, as am I. Even if I'm the one who left them. I twirl the pen in my hand once again before without much thought, I slip it back into the bag I walked it down here in. It feels heavier in my hand than it ever has, holding the lies, the broken intentions and the conflict. I take one more look at the pond before I turn and walk back up the hill to the old car. Maybe I wish Emma and Maria were here after all- in some ways I miss them and who I was with them.

The car grumbles but starts easily. I speed away down the dirt roads in the moonlight, more dirt flying up in the air. I turn on the radio and my music connects through at the perfect volume. The little bag sits in the passenger seat that Emma used to claim; I'll shove it in the secret space hidden up under the seat before I park. I know when I get home Luke will greet me on the porch steps with two glasses of lemonade and a smile because he'll be proud of what he believes I went out here to do. What I thought I'd be able to do, but maybe never will because I'm scared of letting this thing and the things it brings or means, go.

Some things in life change, while others don't.