

Blimp, Virginia was a quaint, irritable secret. For most of its citizens, the robotic days turned into robotic years, which then turned into robotic lives for robotic generations to come. Time slunk through the small town like a slug on holiday. Each Blimpian wore claim to some sort of “good deed.” *Some*, including Joseph McSchmidt, Rodney Rogerstein, Allen Crowder, and Peanut (last name unknown) made their claim to many unseen acts of heroism. Archibald Goode Elementary School’s Principal Montauk certainly owned a few as well. He “badges of goodness” wore on his smiling face like a crown shining atop his balding head.

Mr. Montauk was an oak.

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“A Blimpian’s spirit is unbreakable,” the proud principal once said during his bid for Mayor of Blimp sometime in late 1991.

A short time thereafter, he woke up on a fall, Friday morning and made breakfast for his four-year old daughter, Lulu. This happened to be the conclusion to his Monday through Friday, two-hour shift as maitre d’ at “Lulu’s Special Breakfast Place.” Lulu was specific when it came to morning cuisine. Mr. Montauk knew her mental menu. Pancakes, muffins, and “dippy eggs” were on the standard rotation.

Friday’s were an amalgam of the week’s greatest hits based on the critic’s response. If Mr. Montauk deviated in any way, Lulu caught him on it and his morning would gain yet another frustration. Mr. Montauk didn’t like walking into the school worn from a morning of dealing with Duncan Hines. Being the principal of an elementary school was one thing, but having a four-year old food snob often jabbed at his unwavering patience.

Despite his careful morning preparations, he managed to spin out an expert assortment of blueberry and raspberry muffins, along with a small scrambled egg and a cold, unicorn glass of milk. Mr. Montauk turned off the small kitchen television just as The News Channel began a third hour of coverage about rumblings of a possible war in the Persian Gulf. He laid a folded napkin next to his daughter’s meal set atop her plastic “dining room” table. Mr. Montauk slid the blue and neon flowerpot containing Lulu’s favorite plastic lilies toward the table’s upper corner, away from the food.

Lulu skipped downstairs with joy in every bounce. She stopped in the underpass between the kitchen and living room. A mess of blonde hair covered her puffy, gray eyes. Lulu flipped a slab of her mane to the side and inspected her father’s culinary production. A grin stretched out on her face. The smile decided to lie there as Lulu sat down at the grand, purple breakfast table.

“Thank you, Daddy,” Lulu said as Mr. Montauk helped scoot Lulu in her small pink chair up to the toy table.

“You’re very welcome, Miss Lulu.” Mr. Montauk addressed all children in typical, “kid-formal” fashion. Kids sent to his office for misbehaving received the full adult treatment: first name basis only. No one usually talked to those kids much anyway.

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The creek that ran along Chickapee Avenue veered away from Archibald Goode Elementary School toward Vih’en, the next town over from Blimp. A half of a mile south of the creek’s curve rested a wooden bridge that connected Chickapee with Balron Park. This small meadow housed another one of Blimp’s dangerous playgrounds. Playgrounds

are imaginary kingdoms for children, but for some reason, the fun zones sprinkled throughout Blimp were physical challenges.

Balron Park’s devices weren’t as vicious at A. Goode’s, but a challenge for Blimpian’s bravest nonetheless. The bridge itself was an old one: wooden with wrought iron linkage and sturdy. It was at least sturdy enough to hold up Joseph, Rodney, Allen, and Peanut. Due to its lack of use, the boys hid their fishing equipment under the bridge. Their rods were neighbors with a nest of Black Widows who protected the equipment for the boys. At least, that’s what the boys hoped the insects of death were up to.

About fifteen minutes later, the boys began to wind down their brief, Friday morning expedition. Joseph already put his rod away along with the rest of their lures on top of a large tackle box Rodney “found” one day resting outside of the Gilmeyer’s Antiques. Rodney sat down on a wet wooden plank and buried his face deep into his gray, Batman book bag. He frantically searched for the previous night’s homework assignment (which still laid crumpled next to his bed.)

“Well, *shits*,” Rodney said as he zipped up his book bag.

“Dumb-butt. You forgot your homework again didn’t you?” Allen asked from a distance. He put the finishing touches on his combed, blond hair while using *the big ol’ truck’s* window as his mirror. The monstrosity sat upon a patch of grass on the outskirts of the park next to the bridge. No one knew where that dark blue Dodge came from or why Allen thought he was the Fonz for a month in the fourth grade.

That stupid truck rested catty-corner to the bridge for as long as the boys all knew one another. If they weren’t fishing on Friday mornings, they were usually conversing in the bed of that old pickup. Allen put the finishing touches on his styling. “Ms. Euglwie is

going to put some sort of curse on you, Rodney. Its going to rain deviled eggs at your house for a month straight or something.”

The boys believed their fourth grade teacher, Ms. Euglwie, was a witch. She arrived at A. Goode Elementary the second week during what was already a bizarre beginning to the boys’ fourth grade year. Ms. Rozzy, the spunky teacher Ms. Euglwie replaced, went over to Nigeria as a part of an international teaching exchange program. This was all part of the Reagan administration’s *Excellence In Education* initiative. The “EIE School of the Futures Award” gave a national elementary school’s staff the option of opting out for work overseas. This move paid a’ plenty. A. Goode Elementary won the previous school year. Hence: Ms. Euglwie.

“I swear to Jesus I saw ‘Ms. U’ turn the chalk a different color last Wednesday during Bingo,” Allen continued.

The boys had no proof Ms. Euglwie had any sort of mystical powers. This was yet another idea Rodney got in his head one afternoon while sitting out in the hall. That day, he contemplated whether or not “speaking when not spoken to” was all it was cracked up to be. This was a common occurrence.

“Shut up, Allen. I did my homework. It must still be in my room. *Shits*,” Rodney said with an aggressive zip of his backpack, “I guess it could be worse.”

“Like for *this* guy!” Peanut said, still fishing. He whipped his reel over the head of Joseph, reading a comic book while sitting in the middle of the bridge.

“Hey, watch it!” Joseph said as he ducked out of the way.

On the end of the lure was a wiggling brook trout. Peanut swung the rod back around, flinging the terrified, orange blur into an oak tree stuck into a muddy edge of the creek. The smack of the fish against the tree conjured up a giggle out of Peanut.

“What’re you doing, Pea?” Joseph asked as he got up from his comfortable morning reading.

“I forgot my lunch. This here fish will make up for it. I’ll just sneak into the teacher’s lounge and jack some bread from their cupboard,” Peanut said as he drew the trout back for another meeting with the bark. He whipped the reel back around. The fish extinguished upon the final blow. “*Dead.*”

Joseph watched Peanut take the expired fish off the lure. The brook trout wasn’t too torn up aside from a few torn gills. Peanut reached into his black book bag. He ripped out a few sheets of loose-leaf from one of his notebooks. Peanut placed the trout on one of the sheets of paper, threw another sheet on top, and folded the papers over the wet fish. Peanut put his catch of the day into the front pouch of his book bag.

“That’s gonna stink,” Joseph said.

“Ah, nah. It won’t too bad.” Peanut said as he handed Joseph the fishing rod.

Joseph took the rod down into their concrete shelf under the bridge. He tipped his Washington Redskins cap to a few lowly Black Widows creeping about the shaded stoop.

Allen checked his digital watch. Beep. “We still have about fifteen minutes before we need to head to school.”

“I won’t be able to run home in time. Shits,” Rodney said still worrying about his homework. The boys shared a laugh at Rodney’s expense as they hopped into the bed of the old Dodge pickup for a final few minutes of scholastic freedom.

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Lulu gobbled down her last bit of egg. She wiped her mouth on a napkin in one clean, gentle stroke, and walked into the living room to finish her morning cartoons. This is how she rode out the final minutes before going to the babysitter’s. Kathy McInnis became fast friends of the Montauks since their arrival in Blimp. When Mr. Montauk’s wife passed away from ovarian cancer a year after Lulu was born, she helped Mr. Montauk look after his little girl. Kathy was born without a left hand. She received manageable increments from the government, which allowed her to maintain an active lifestyle. Rodney claimed a shark bit off Kathy’s hand. This is a fact that has still yet to be proven by any Blimpian, although Rodney manifested a lot of these “facts.”

A 1984 syndicated cartoon, *Pole Position*, played on the living room television box--Lulu’s favorite early-morning entertainment. Some kids in town thought that WBLI-59 forgot it was still running. During the workweek, the cartoon came on around the time Lulu finished her scheduled breakfast. This morning was no different. Lulu was just in time for the gear-shifting intro. For a four-year old, Lulu was ambitious. At an early age, she wanted to become a racecar driver like the cartoon kids in the series.

The phone rang. Mr. Montauk’s long and lanky frame stepped out of the bathroom, wrapping his blue and yellow-striped tie around the neck of his ivory dress shirt. He snatched up the phone off the wall receiver.

“Hello? Hello? I’m sorry.” Mr. Montauk tucked the phone under his chin. “Lulu? Please turn down your racecar cartoon,”

Lulu leaned forward and turned the volume knob down then plopped back down, crisscross-apple sauced.

Mr. Montauk raised the phone back up to his ear. “Go ahead, Ms. Garrett.”

There was a usual pause when Ms. Garrett made a call to Mr. Montauk’s home early in the morning before school. Either one of two things happened: 1) An emergency involving the school and/or a student(s), or 2) Ms. Garrett couldn’t hold in *any* good news whatsoever. She called Mr. Montauk at any hour of the day, whether it pertained to Mr. Montauk or not. This was an “Option #2” morning.

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Joseph sat on the hood of the big ol’ truck. He flipped through an issue of *Marvel Tales*. Joe’s eyes looked beyond the pages. The other three boys rested on the truckbed reading and daydreaming.

“I had another dream about Miss Oaxey,” Joseph said closing the comic book.

The others groaned.

“Joe, are you *now* just saying this stuff to gross us out, or what?” Rodney asked.

“No. I’m serious. I think I’m having *pre-current* dreams,” Joseph said. He climbed up on the roof.

“You mean *reoccurring*.” Allen was the smart one. He never gave Joseph a glance as his head was buried in *Asimov’s Chronology of Science and Discovery - Our Angry Earth: A Ticking Time Bomb*.

“Right. But yeah, guys. I honestly can’t *look* at ‘Miss O.’ the same way anymore,” Joseph said of his teacher of the prior school year.

“Was it the same deal?” Peanut asked as he sat up in the bed.

“Yeah. Pretty much. I was the only one in the classroom. In walks Miss O. She’s wearing that white dress with the boobs. She tells me to take off my clothes or she’ll send me to see Vice Principal Justice. So I do. But then--”

“*Then* she makes you put your clothes back on. We’ve heard this shits numerous times,” Rodney said.

“But this time ‘V.P.J.’ helped me put them back on! Then she told me to take them off again! I don’t know if this is a nightmare or if they’re the type of dreams Tommy used to have when he was growing up. Rodney, remember when he was telling us about how he would pee out sun tan lotion and--”

“Joseph, easy. My brother Tommy is crazy. It’s documented.” Rodney said as he mimicked his hand as a gun, put it against his head, and acted like he shot himself.

“Dark,” Allen commented as he continued reading.

“Speaking of *dark*.” Rodney poked Allen, which broke his concentration.

“Stop!” Allen said. He snapped his library book shut.

“We know Joe has a thing for Miss O., but ol’ Al here has got something *deep* for Ms. Euglwie,” Rodney said.

Allen looked up, then back down at the o-zone layer. “I do not.”

“*Totally*. We’re getting older now. I understand.”

“We’re eleven. Do you even know what you’re talking about, Rodney?” Joseph said.

“*Totally*.” Rodney folded his arms, sure of himself.

The other boys groaned in disbelief. It was unfortunate Rodney’s recently committed brother Tommy was such a grand influence on this collective the year he

failed his final suicide attempt on the front lawn of A. Goode Elementary School. The third grade was tough.

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Mr. Montauk was still on the phone with Ms. Garrett. He paced the house, straightening picture frames, and raising blinds. As he put the finishing touches on Lulu’s bedroom window, he looked out of his corner of Blimp. In his direct view were the boys atop the big ol’ truck many yards away from Mr. Montauk’s home off of Chickapee. His focus remained on the phone conversation. To Mr. Montauk’s surprise, good news poured.

“Yes’ sir. Looks like you’re gonna be clear on your way back up’t our nation’s capital. *Again*,” Ms. Garrett said crackling through the handset, “*fan-cee*, sir.”

“Wow, that’s just great. Won’t the kids just love-”

Ms. Garrett interrupted Mr. Montauk. “I don’t want to be a bug-a-boo, but the news folks have already arrived here. Probably gonna need you to get here sooner than later.”

“Now? I’m still--you know what? I’ll be there in five. No, gimme ten minutes, Margerie, just ten minutes. I have to drop off Lulu at Kathy’s.”

Margerie was Ms. Garrett’s first name. She didn’t look like a “Margerie” but more like a “Mayblean.”

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The last few minutes ticked by in the bed of the old Dodge before the boys’ immanent departure for the shock of their fourth grade year.

“Hey, you guys. What ever happened to Zeb Tedford?” Allen said.

The three other boys were befuddled. This was the first time the boys thought about Zeb since he went missing two months earlier.

“Good question,” Joseph said, “he was here for half’a school year and now he’s gone.”

Peanut sniffed inside his fishy book bag. He winced at the smell of the dead minnow. “I didn’t really like the kid.”

“I don’t know why he just came to mind. Funny,” Allen said, “he’s been gone a while now.”

“I have a *query*,” Joseph said.

“You mean *theory*.”

“Right. Remember what happened the last day we saw him?” Joseph hopped over the bridge’s ledge forgoing the steps.

“Yeah, I do. The peckerhead kneed Josh Nixx in the nards during Warball and got sent to Mr. Montauk’s,” said Peanut, who zipped his bag shut.

“You know what I heard? I heard that ‘the Bat’ got him,” Joseph said with a smile as he jumped into the bed as his arms sprawled an imaginary cape.

“Guys, I’m serious,” Allen said.

“No shit, it was all over the *pavemeeeeent*.” Peanut chuckled. The Saturday before, Joseph and Peanut watched 1989’s *Batman* three times consecutively. The film was still fresh.

Allen hopped out of the old Dodge. “Enough. I don’t have time for the *Batman Brothers*.” He checked his watch yet again. “Let’s head to ‘the ward.’ Hopefully we’ll get to go outside today for gym.”

The four boys hopped out of the abandoned pick-up. Allen started off ahead of the group.

Joseph caught up to Joe. “So what’s your *query* about Zeb?”

Allen stopped in the middle of the road. “Are you going to quote another movie?”

“Promise,” Joseph said flashing the Boy Scout salute as Peanut and Rodney followed in toe.

“Let’s hear it.” Rodney walked in tandem with his comrades down Chickapee.

“I don’t think Zeb vanished. I think he might be buried under the school with all of the other bodies,” Allen said as he looked to his friends for some sort of agreement.

“Other *bodies*?” Peanut tripped over his feet.

“Man, I don’t know. That’s crazy. I know we’re just kids ‘n all, but still,” Joseph said.

In the second grade, Rodney’s older brother Tommy told him the school was built on top of an old Civil War burial ground made out of quicksand. The school was sinking.

“I talked to Tommy about that shits.” Rodney said.

“What did Tommy say?” Joseph asked.

“School’s cursed.”

“Yeah, of course he did,” Joe said while shaking his head, “I don’t know man. Maybe Zeb just had one of those weird families. Like Amy Churn and her dad.”

“Oh yeah, that *was* weird,” Allen recalled, “remember when he would show up to Mrs. Ashford’s door and wave at her until she cried? My mom knows about all of that or whatever.”

“I remember that and the Blimp cops showing up outside of the busses one afternoon because he parked for too long in the school parking lot or something like that. My momma knows about it too,” Peanut said.

Amy Churn’s father abused both Amy and her mother. It got to the point where Amy and her mother lived in five different towns in three years. Amy’s dad wouldn’t leave them alone. Then one afternoon, as Amy’s father waited for her in the parking lot, Mr. Montauk--aware of the situation--took matters into his own hands and called the Blimp Sheriff’s office. Despite Mr. Montauk doing all he could for the Churns, Amy wasn’t seen at A. Goode after her second grade school year.

“I think Ms. Justice killed Zeb,” Allen said.

The boys stopped in their tracks following Allen’s claim.

“I think so too,” Rodney said tucking his hands into his dungarees.

“Really?” asked Allen.

Rodney turned back to the boys. They were all confounded, even Rodney was for saying it.

“I’m thinkin’ you two’re what my daddy calls a *fatal fist*.” Joseph said kicking a rock down Chickapee Avenue.

“Fatal-*ist*, Joe. Not your dad’s video game,” Allen said.

“Right. Ya’ll are one of *those*,” Joseph said.

“Well, call us whatever. Ms. Justice scares the living shits out of me. I hear she’s got a paddle with spikes on it,” Rodney swung his arms as if there were a racket or bat in his hands, “If there’s quicksand, that crazy lady may have put it there.”

“Aw, come on, Rodney. Ms. Justice didn’t kill Zeb. I’m just foolin’ around,” Allen said, “he probably moved away or something.”

Rodney shrugged his shoulders. The boys continued their stroll.

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Lulu sang along in her head to *Pole Position*’s closing theme. Mr. Montauk whipped through the house, a whirlwind of toothpaste and excitement. His used a gust of energy scooping up Lulu off the carpet.

“I need to get you over to Ms. Kathy’s. Daddy’s got to go to school early today,” Mr. Montauk said, keys now in hand.

“*I’m* going to school to be a driver,” Lulu said.

“You’re *totally* going to be the best driver in the history of the world!” Mr. Montauk said in the closest version of a Cornish accent he could muster.

Mr. Montauk kicked open the side door exiting the kitchen. He carried Lulu around to the rear passenger’s side of his red Jeep Wagoneer, which was parked at the tip of the driveway’s incline. “In you go, young lady.”

“I want to sit in the *pulp position*,” Lulu said.

“I think that will be fine. No wiggling.”

“No wiggly.”

He popped open the front passenger’s side door and plopped Lulu down in her seat. “Big girl.” She grew enough now to stay strapped into the front seat. Lulu liked to wiggle around.

She grinned and gave her dad the “thumbs up.”

Mr. Montauk circled the Wagoneer, entered the vehicle, and started the jeep. As he let off the emergency break, Mr. Montauk realized he was missing his lucky hat.

“Sit tight, Lulu. No wiggling,” Mr. Montauk said exiting the jeep.

“No *wiggly*.”

Mr. Montauk’s grey Tryoline was considered to be a charmed garment according to Ms. Garrett. All of Mr. Montauk’s triumphs while serving as A. Goode’s principal seemed to be recorded wearing that grey Tryoline. He knew it wasn’t “charmed,” but there was a secure aspect of his favorite hat he couldn’t leave to miss such a glorious day.

The screen door of the Ranch-style house closed. Mr. Montauk sprinted to his bedroom. Lulu hummed the *Pole Position* theme inside the Wagoneer. The sun peering through the windows sparkled upon the gear shifter. Much like her cartoon heroes, she leaned over and gripped the knob, and then gave it a shake. Lulu mimicked being the driver of the jeep, changing gears and switching lanes. She kicked her legs out in excitement. Her left Ked slung off her foot and popped the knob’s white, cylindrical tip, which shifted the car into neutral.

“Uh-oh. *No wiggly!*”

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The boys reached the corner of Chickapee and Shelly Beans Drive. Mr. Montauk’s house set up on a hill at the intersection. Rodney noticed Mr. Montauk’s Wagoneer creeping backwards down the long driveway. “Geez. Mr. M.’s late getting to school this morning.”

“He’s always the first one there,” Joseph said.

“I’m sure Ms. Justice will call for his job,” Rodney said.

The boys veered left onto the front lawn of A. Goode. Each boy still had a corner of his eye on the car, still slowly working its way backwards onto Chickapee.

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A pick-up truck whizzed around the corner of Chickapee and Solomon. It was Friday. The weather was scheduled to be warm and sunny throughout the day. The gas worker navigating one of Blimp Gas Company’s field trucks wanted to read his meters and get home as fast as he could. It was payday.

Mr. Montauk stepped through of the screen door. His nerves severed. The jeep containing his daughter was headed toward a tragic end. His right leg swung out so hard that it propelled the rest of his body to spin out of the house toward his heart and soul.

“Lulu!” Mr. Montauk was frantic.

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Joseph swung around at the sound of Mr. Montauk’s cry. “Oh no!”

The other three boys turned to witness the tragedy commence.

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The gas truck barreled its way up Chickapee. Mr. Montauk reached the driver’s side door right as the sixty-seven foot driveway dipped at a forty-five degree angle for the remaining ten feet. Mr. Montauk clutched the door. For a moment, he thought he was stopping the jeep’s momentum. Was this the freakish strength humans were rumored to have when their adrenaline was at an all-time high?

No.

Lulu grinned and clapped her hands together. She approved of her father’s heroic efforts. His job, however, wasn’t done. The jeep dipped. Mr. Montauk had only managed

to open the door. As the car sunk toward its end, Mr. Montauk hopped in the driver’s side, right leg first. His calf cramped as he stomped the break. With all the love he had for his daughter, Mr. Montauk yanked on the emergency break. The jeep grinded it’s way into a skid. The tires screamed and whispered, *HEEEEEEEELP!!!!*

Mr. Montauk managed to somehow keep a smile on his face for Lulu. For as long as the memory branded itself in Lulu’s memories, she always noticed her father’s Tryoline hat tipped without using his hands. That hat showed its appreciation for resting on the head of a hero. Mr. Montauk was genuine; A. Goode’s most prized possession. Mr. Montauk leaned out of the jeep and snatched the handle of the driver’s side door to pull it shut.

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Peanut first noticed the wooden light pole in a short devil’s strip at the end of Mr. Montauk’s driveway. Each of the other boys soon became cognizant. Breaks locked.

No wiggly.

Stillness sat in on the scene for only a moment. The snap of Mr. Montauk’s neck against the post literally and figuratively echoed throughout Blimp. Every Blimpian could hear it if they wanted to. No one did.

The driver’s side door recoiled. The steel corner of the door jabbed Mr. Montauk in his temple just before his head bounced off of Chickapee the first time. The devil’s strip gawked at the thud. Mr. Montauk rolled into the street soon after the gas truck whizzed by. Lulu watched the Tryoline roll across Chickapee in order to get away from worst thing to ever happen to the small community of Blimp, Virginia.

The boys huddled together, eyes peeled on the catastrophe as they watched Principal Montauk’s “badges of goodness” spill out onto the Chickapee asphalt.

“*Shits,*” Rodney said.

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Early on the following Tuesday morning, Allen called the rest of the gang to see if they were going to the funeral. None of his buddies were attending. Both of Allen’s parents went to A. Goode as children. Mr. Montauk was Allen’s mom and dad’s age so there was a connection and report whenever they went to “Back to School Night.” Mr. Montauk had a lasting impression on everyone he met.

Rodney, Joseph, and Peanut all had parents that moved to Blimp from somewhere else in Virginia. Rodney’s parents were planning to go to the service out of respect for Mr. Montauk. During the previous school year, Rodney’s older brother, Tommy Rogerstein, walked down the hill from the boys’ neighborhood and attempted to blow his head off with a revolver on A. Goode Elementary property. He failed and was committed thanks to the calming influence of Principal Montauk talking him down in time for the authorities to arrive. No one knew at the school until later that day after the coast was clear. Mr. Montauk covered up Tommy’s “accident” and only people who were on the need-to-know *knew*.

Unfortunately, a long Sunday night at Lonnie’s Pool & Pub prevented Rodney’s folks from attending the funeral. With Rodney’s absence, that left Joseph and Peanut. Peanut fell back asleep after waking up at the normal time. He headed off to school. No boys by the creek. No cars in the school’s lot off in the distance. The black ribbons on the school’s front doors sent a lightning bolt to Peanut’s brain. “Oh yeah, Mr. M’s dead.”

That left Allen to give Joseph a ring. He never got an answer. On the way to the service Joseph asked his parents if they knew anyone else going to the funeral. Joseph heard his mother tell his father that Joseph’s mom and dad were devout Southern Baptists. The fact that the service commenced completely in and around a catholic church scared Joseph’s parents to death. So Joe was a no-go.

Almost every citizen of Blimp traveled to Vih’en for Mr. Montauk’s funeral. The cemetery outside of St. Andrew’s Catholic Church filled up with so many people from the area whose lives were in some way or another affected positively by the good principal. After a warm and memorable service, people stood outside of the church and gravestones sharing memories of Mr. Montauk’s famous good deeds.

Allen sat with his parents and thought about the time Allen and Rodney were caught attempting to flood their first grade bathroom during recess. Mrs. Ward, one of the student teachers that year, found water pouring out from the bathroom door and onto the tile walkway separating the closets and sinks from the carpeted classroom. She overacted when she found both boys down to their underwear, stuffing the rest of their clothes in the sink and in front of the cracks in the door. There were screams and a, “what in the fuck do you think you two are doing?”

Mr. Montauk was first on the scene. He just happened to be moseying by the first grade classrooms. In lieu of Mrs. Ward’s exclamations, Mr. Montauk gazed upon the shoddy attempt to create a literal “pool room.” He respected the first graders attempt at home improvement but soon walked the wet boys in their wet clothes down to his office. Allen remembered he told Mr. Montauk, “We just had to know, Mr. M. Like that guy in the *Dirty Harry* movies.”

Mr. Montauk squinted his eyes and twirled a pencil at his desk. “That’s not the same, but I think I understand where you are coming from,” he said, “Now, I’m going to call your parents. Is there anything you want me to tell them once I’m done explaining what you two did to that bathroom?”

“We just wanted to swim. It’s hot outside today. The class was playing kickball. I wanted to prove a room can also become a pool,” Rodney said.

Mr. Montauk grinned and pumped in nostrils. He looked over at Allen, who simply shrugged his shoulders. Allen gave a slight shrug of his shoulders as the memory concluded, as did the funeral service. Allen and his parents soon made their way out to the church’s courtyard adjacent to the cemetery.

Kathy McInnis stood on the edge of the courtyard near the first batch of gravestones. She took temporary custody of Lulu following Mr. Montauk’s death. As Kathy reminisced with a few of A. Goode’s faculty, Lulu sat in a blue dress, crossed legged near Kathy’s feet, but far enough away where Lulu couldn’t pay attention to the conversations. Freshly cut grass provided Lulu a soft cushion as she wore a heavy burden: Lulu thought she killed her father. She didn’t say a word in the days leading up to the funeral despite Kathy’s best efforts. She began to worry.

Allen snuck away from his parents’ conversation with two local restaurant owners. He strolled over to the edge of the courtyard. The lines of gravestones stretched out across the valley beyond Vih’en. To his right, he saw Lulu’s blue dress stand out amidst the black and grey. It was either that or the sadness. Allen decided to approach Mr. Montauk’s only daughter.

“You don’t know who I am,” Allen said kneeling down in front of Lulu, crossed legged picking at the grass near Kathy’s feet, “but I just want you to know that your dad was one of the coolest dudes ever. You don’t get a clear-cut meaning of the word “respect” when you’re my age. Mr. M. showed my pals, myself, and all the kids in Blimp respect every time we passed by him in the halls or were sent to his office or *whenever*.”

Lulu fiddled with a few more blades of grass, never making eye contact with Allen. “No more wiggly. No more ‘Special Breakfast Place.’” Her voice was soft and broken.

Lulu voice buzzed in Kathy’s ears. She looked down at Allen who glanced back at her. She mouthed a “thank you” and continued her conversation with Ms. Euglwie and a few other attending faculty members. Meanwhile, Kathy kept one eye on Allen and Lulu’s conversation.

Allen returned focus on Lulu. “What was that?”

Lulu’s watery gumdrops blinked a tear down her cheek, “I hurt daddy.”

“What? No you didn’t. Your dad--he needed to go do something more important. He has a bigger job and God called him up.”

“More important than *me*?” Lulu asked, pausing from the grass pulling.

Allen backpedalled. “Of course not. I’m pretty sure you’re the one whose ‘pictures’ of racecars were sprawled across Mr. M.’s office. I never saw any other pictures.”

Lulu furrowed her brow and asked, “Do you think daddy went to go race racecars? Like *Pole Position*?”

Allen paused. He flipped his eyes up to Kathy to who heard Lulu’s question. She pursed her lips and scrunched up her shoulders.

“Yep. In heaven. Mr. M. was needed by the big man to help race cars for him in heaven,” Allen replied reverting his attention to Lulu.

Lulu cocked her head at an angle. She studied Allen response with as much comprehension as she could muster. Her eyes were staring into Allen’s imagination, much like her father had done many times. She accepted it, at least for a while after. “I hope so,” she thought.

Kathy broke away from her recollections and knelt down beside Allen and Lulu. “Lulu? How are you doing, dear?” Kathy asked.

“This boy just told me daddy’s in heaven doing *Pole Position*?” Lulu said.

Kathy raised an inquisitive eyebrow at Allen.

“It’s a racecar cartoon and video game,” Allen said.

“Oh. Well I think that suits your father, Lulu. What do you think? He sure did a lot of ‘race car driving’ while he was here. All those morning he brought you over to my house?”

“Heaven needs a good wheelman,” Allen said as he smiled at Lulu. She didn’t return with one. All Lulu responded with was a nod.

“Ms. Kathy? Can we go get some ice cream now?” Lulu asked as she rose to her feet. Blades of grass spilled down her dress like clumps of snow descending a mountain to avoid an avalanche. She reached up and clutched Kathy’s hand.

Kathy’s eyes welled. “I told you, Lulu. You can call me Kathy if you like.”

“Yes, Ms. Kathy.”

Allen cracked a smile. Kathy returned with one in the same.

“You enjoy that ice cream,” Allen said.

Lulu nodded as if that were inevitable. She and Kathy turned away from the remaining attendees and exited the courtyard off to endless ice cream.

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One week after Mr. Montauk’s funeral, Vice Principal Justice became the interim Principal at A. Goode Elementary. The first Monday back to school after an extended seven-day weekend provided two things: First, after a reasonable amount of juvenile investigating, Justice did not, no matter what Rodney said, use her alien mind powers to cause Mr. Montauk to get squished. Second, the bright light that protected the halls of A. Goode from any sort of evil darkness slowly swept away. Lady Justice was now presiding.

The memory of Mr. Montauk still resides in Blimp. Somehow after years of stories about what exactly happened to Mr. Montauk that morning, most believe the story about Mr. M.’s secret life as a racecar driver. The origin of the story is unknown to anyone. Well, almost anyone.