

Unfinished Business

By: Brandon Fries

I scoured the tent, looking for the only polo that I brought for the summer. This would be an incredible night. The surge of adrenaline sped through the highway of veins, making it challenging to think.

"Damn it," I said. "I know it was here somewhere. Chad, have you seen it?" I was running out of places to look.

"Is this it?" He said holding up my oversized maroon polo that my parents bought for the spring awards ceremony. "It found it's way into my dirty clothes," he said.

I grabbed it and put it up to my nose. Standard Boy Scout smell check protocol.

"Oh man, that funk is bad, oh well, it'll do. We need to hurry, it's starting soon."

I shook the shirt violently, to get rid of the fine dust that plagued the camp. No matter how hard you tried, the powdered dust got everywhere. I pulled the shirt over my head and heavily sprayed it with my generic *Cool Waters* cologne.

I grabbed my mirror to check out my hair, only to find a matted mess. I took my comb and scanned the tent for some water, but came up empty. Shrugging my shoulders, I gathered the liquid from my mouth and dispensed it on the comb and ran it through my hair until I glued each hair down on my head.

Today is the day.

Chad comes around and puts his hand on my shoulder.

"You look sharp," he says, looking at me through the mirror. "Are you ready?"

"As ready as I can be," I say.

We go out the door and walk down a meandering trail. The leaves applaud with the wind and the fresh pine brings back memories of a simpler time. I look down at my freshly polished shoes and I feel a tickle in my nose, a lump grows in my throat, water builds on my bottom eyelid.

"I got to head to the bathroom," I say. "I'll meet you there."

"You OK?" Chad asks.

"I'm fine, it's just allergies," I say, pointing to the yellow cotton candy floating from the pine trees.

I turn around and quicken my pace back to the room. Sweat forms on my forehead and little streams of sweat tickle the hairs at the back of my neck. The water under my eyes thicken as my stomach slushes from side to side, orchestrated by each step.

I enter the room and make a left into the bathroom.

My mouth filled with water.

My stomach lurching.

Grab the bowl

Let it go.

Momentary relief.

Tears.

We arrived at the hall and pushed open the two enormous wooden doors. Chad entered first—he was always first.

The air inside was stuffy despite the desperate attempts by the two large ceiling fans. I followed the pine beams to the end of the hall where a large granite chimney stood erect. Lights flashed off the large beams and screams from the motley crowd roared as they jumped offbeat to Red Hot Chili Peppers.

The weekly dance was always something we dreamt about, and this was the first time that I could make it.

"I can't believe these many people are here," Chad said.

"It must be Regatta weekend," I said, smiling at our luck. The regatta

came to the lake once a year, and we must have forgotten. "We hit the jackpot. All the city girls will be here soon. It will be our night."

We made our way through the crowd to the bar. Frank, the town bartender, greeted us with an enormous smile and a shot of cheap whiskey—we were underage, so anything with alcohol in it was welcomed.

We slowly sipped our drink, since we never knew when Frank would change his mind. It was harsh. The alcohol forced a wince, but I pushed it down and smiled afterward to hide my reaction from Chad.

Simply put, Chad was the man. I was lucky that the two of us were friends. Everyone wanted to be his friend, yet somehow we became bunkmates and ended up as friends.

"Do you think she's going to be here?" I asked.

"She has to be. I saw her family at the Shell station getting gas two days ago. They are normally in their cabin for a couple of weeks, and it's the big weekend."

"I only saw her for a moment last summer, when her family dropped Aaron off at camp. I've never seen anyone like her. She's perfect."

"Check her out," Chad said pointing to Monica, a fiery redhead.

"Dude, I don't know why you're so hung up on her. I think everyone in camps been inside her already—and it's only the first of July."

"I know, but there is something about her, man. I just don't know what it is."

I was looking at Monica, wondering what was so special about her when the entire energy of the hall changed. The music was brighter. The light dimmed, but a spotlight focused itself on the entrance. The sweetness of the pine beams became my aphrodisiac. She was here. Without seeing her, I

knew she had arrived. I felt her. God had arranged this moment for the two of us. I would remember this for the rest of my life.

The music changes.

The doors open.

There she stands.

The lace covers her face and her dad stands proudly next to her. The gloss from her lips shows as she grins and tucks her head down. It's her big day.

Chad looks at me, and we smile. Ten years pass so quickly. Each step is graceful—rehearsed for weeks on end, ensuring the pacing is perfect, precise, and with the beat. Nothing got by her.

The straps from her white dress hanging off her shoulders and gently caresses her breasts. The silk top perfectly reflects the succulents of what is beneath it. It clings to her body, plunging past her waist and then exploding at her knees. Perfection. Exactly what she's always wanted.

The crowd reveres her elegance, and I anticipate her arriving at the foot of the stairs.

She stops at the bottom, and the pastor says something witty.

The audience laughs.

I don't.

I'm fixated on her.

"Today is her day," I whisper.

Chad and I were on our fourth drink, and the liquid courage was setting in.

"Dude," Chad said, "are you going to do anything? Watching her won't get you anywhere, but maybe in jail as a stalker." He smiles and downs his glass.

"I've never seen such beauty," I say.

"Trust me, she looks hot," Chad retorts, "but she's not the only hot one

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out there. Have you ever been with a girl?" He asks.

I pause, and the silence grows.

Chad looks at me, waiting for an answer.

"Absolutely!" I reply.

"Really? NEVER?!"

Another long pause.

"I—I've been with a girl."

"Dude, no you haven't. Not even a kiss."

I speak quickly to fill the void.

"Of course, I've kissed a girl. I'm seventeen. That would be embarrassing." I lie.

I always took my virginity as something to be prized. I didn't want to give it away. I wasn't religious, but I wanted the right person to receive this gift from me.

It was a choice, but if she wanted it, I would give it to her