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Fiction Workshop III  
Workshop Submission I  
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\*This is meant to be a complete short story. I feel like more could be added, and I have some ideas, but what do you guys think? Should more be added? What, if anything, feels like its missing? And anything else that comes to you, of course.

*The End of an Era*

*3 Months Before (Early May)*

We were sitting on a pier, looking out across the Pacific Ocean, the sky filled to the brim with stars. The ocean waves crashed rhythmically and endlessly. Mike and I sat off the pier, letting our feet dangle just low enough to get wet every time the waves crested. I had one arm wrapped around him, drawing him close for warmth; his head lay on my shoulder.

“It’s a beautiful night,” I said, closing my eyes.

“Mmm-hmm.”

“Are you really sure you want to do this? Leave all this behind?”

“For the hundredth time, no. I’m not sure. But I’m going to do it anyway. I love swimming, and it’s just not possible to do it along with Scouts.”

I sighed. All my begging and pleading had had no effect on him. “You know, if you stayed in another year, you’d probably be the Senior Patrol Leader.”

“I know. Which is why I can’t. It would be too much for me to handle, doing both.” We lapsed back into silence. “Would you do it? If they asked you?”

I mournfully kicked at the water. “Probably. I mean, I think it’d be really cool.”

We lapsed back into silence, letting the unspoken stay amongst our thoughts, neither one of us wanting to break that final moment, which would mean the end of an era in our lives.

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Mike shared his decision to leave with our Scoutmaster, Mr. Forster, a week later. I knew it was coming, but it still broke my heart to see him go. I cried when the meeting ended. Mike, being the annoying sweetheart that he was, spent the night with me, and made me promise I wouldn't quit Scouts, because I could still be useful to the Troop. I doubted him, but I promised none the less.

As the summer wore on, however, the doubt began to take over: I was not given a leadership position when I went to the summer camp, the new boys shied away from me and most of the older Scouts (I swear we weren't that tiny at that age), and nothing, not even hours at the shooting range, could fill in the missing hole that was Mike.

So when it came down to go to the start-of-the-year retreat where we selected our Troop Leadership for the year, I had lost interest. Dad, of course, was also getting on my case about it. "No! I've already told you that I don't want to go!" I told him defiantly.

"Chris, I don't understand. You used to love Scouts and going camping. Now you treat it like a punishment."

"Ever since Mike dropped out last year, it hasn't been the same."

My dad sighed. "And what about all those younger Scouts who'd like to go camping with *their* friends? The troop needs leaders. And you'd be great. I know you would." When I still shook my head, he sighed and leaned his forearms on his knees to look at me. I knew what was about to come, and I couldn't stop it. "I could force you to go... I could ground you if you didn't,"

The thought made me laugh. My parents had never grounded me once in my life.

“But what good would that do? It’d only make the trip as miserable for the other kids as it would for you. I’ll make you a deal: go on this trip, make it a good experience for those kids, and then, if you still don’t like it, I’ll let you explain to Mike why you quit.”

Damn. He wins every time.

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*Beginning of the new school year, opening camping trip*

*Beep beep beep bee*– I had set my watch for 6:50 in the morning, and after yawning with a good stretch, I felt surprisingly awake. I unzipped my sleeping bag and lay there, enjoying the privacy of a personal tent, one perk of being part of the leadership, or in this case being considered for it. After a few minutes, I put some clothes on and walked outside.

Almost as soon as I was out of the tent, the aroma of the salty sea air intensified, and I took a deep breath. It was a pity that the ocean was to the west; I would have liked to see the sunrise over the ocean. As it were, I tied my shoes and walked down to the shore. It was remarkably calm. The sky was a pale blue, all the stars vanished by this time. Clearly the sun was rising, but the Olympic Mountains stood in its way, casting a strong, almost purple shadow over our campsite. I enjoyed the coolness of the air, and the occasional spray of salt-water splashing on my lips. I wished Mike could have been there to share the moment with me.

The silence was almost magical, and I knew that with the Scouts having to get up in a few minutes, it wasn’t going to last. I looked back towards where the cars had dropped us off the night before. The one cool part about this trip was that adult leaders weren’t there for the first half of the week. The backpacking was truly led only by Scouts. We left the food cooler in the bear container for the leaders to pick up, and we wouldn’t see them for another three days. If only Mike had been there, it would have been the best Scouting trip I had ever been on.

When at last the sun reached over the mountains, I slowly made my way back to the campsite to a couple of groggy looking Scouts starting to get up.

“Morning Chris.” Grant said automatically, passing me on his way to the latrine. I smiled in return.

“Hey Chris, tell Peter to move his fat ass, he’s not getting up!” Jack’s voice called out to me from the direction of the tents. I sighed silently. After watching the sky blurring colors in magical ways, I was so not ready for this.

“Yo, Peter,” I said, violently shaking the tent. “Get up. It’s time to start packing.”

He merely groaned and rolled over in his sleeping bag.

I was filled with a sudden urge to slap him, but restrained myself. The most selfish people on these trips don’t eat the most. They sleep the most, and keep others from enjoying the planned activities. I turned to Jack. “Just start cleaning up your stuff and get ready to hike out.”

About a half hour later, Jack, Grant and Kyle were standing in front of me, casting longing looks towards the food I had set up for them on the camp table. “Where’s Peter?”

The synchronized eye roll told me all I needed to know.

“Go wake him up. No one’s eating breakfast until he’s up and his stuff is put away.”

The others groaned.

“Attack him for all I care,” I added in an undertone.

Instantly Jack and Grant took off in delight. Kyle stayed behind, looking shyly towards me. I shrugged at him, and sat down at the table.

It wasn’t long before the tents were packed up and the campsite was clean. Jack, Grant and Kyle were all happily eating breakfast. Peter however, was sitting at the picnic table, his arms tightly crossed. “Eat,” I told him.

“I’m not hungry.”

“Bullshit.” It kinda just slipped out. It really isn’t good form at all to swear at younger Scouts, but this was not the morning for bullshit. “You’re hungry now, and you’re going to be hungry later. If you don’t eat breakfast, you’re not getting food until lunch. Eat.” I placed a blueberry muffin in front of him. He glared at me with reproach before picking up the muffin, but I didn’t care. I was going to squeeze him and shove him like stuffing a sleeping bag this whole damn trip if I had to. Then I was going to tell my dad *and* Mike why being a Scout sucks.

“How long are we hiking today?” Kyle asked.

“Not far. Only about five miles, and then we’ll meet with John’s group for lunch, just before reaching our campsite.”

Once we started hiking, it wasn’t until we stopped for our first break that we noticed Peter wasn’t with the rest of the group. I growled in annoyance, set my pack down, and hurried back along the path. As it turned out, he was less than five minutes behind, but I caught him pissing right on the trail, not bothering to cover for privacy. “There are so many things wrong with that,” I told him, walking up as he zipped his pants, “that I’m not even going to try to explain it to you. Come on, you’re fifteen years old. You should know better than that.”

He merely rolled his eyes, and walked past me without a word.

The little ass. How does he live with himself? Then I thought that maybe I should have given him more privacy, or warning at least. But how was I supposed to know he was *pissing* on the trail? Coming back to the group, I took a sip from my Nalgene water bottle. “Peter, I want you in front of the group. Take the pace for our next segment.” Without a word, they all hoisted their packs up, and continued on the trail. Quickly it became clear to me that this was a mistake as well. Soon he was out of sight.

“Shouldn’t we go after him?” Kyle asked me uncertainly.

“Let him go. If he gets himself lost, he’ll be the one to come back whining to us.”

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I had barely finished setting up my tent before the quarrelling started.

“Give it back!”

“Give what back?”

“Give it BACK!”

Growling, I stood up and walked over to Kyle and Peter fighting. Kyle was on the verge of tears, his face bright red, and Peter was calmly smirking. “What’s going on here?” I demanded.

“Peter stole my journal that my mom gave me!” Kyle shouted.

“I did not!” he protested.

I said nothing. We had a staring contest for about ten seconds before he finally caved in.

“I wasn’t going to *steal* it, Kyle said I could borrow a few pages,” he said spitefully, throwing it at Kyle. Then he stalked off, but I caught up with him and cut him off.

“Listen Peter,” I said in as low and menacing of a voice as I could. “You want to act like a brat? Fine. You want to act like a selfish pig? Fine. But I will not let you ruin this experience for the other Scouts, just because you want to be at home playing on your Xbox One, ok?”

He wrenched his wrist free from my grasp, and walked off, casting me a malevolent glare.

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The darkening dusk brought with it a crescendo of cricket chirps and swarms of mosquitos. I sought out privacy. I was desperate for it. Junior high schoolers are unbelievably

aggravating. I left behind our campsite to head towards the alpine lake, with towel in hand, to where I knew a deep section was. Deep enough, even, to swim. Standing on the shore, I stripped completely naked, and jumped into the lake, knowing that it would be the only way I'd get myself into the melted mountain snow. God, I felt myself shrink so much in the cold, I was surprised there was anything left.

As the last dark purples of sunset faded to black, I stared up at the starry sky, gently floating on my back. I was completely at peace, surrounded by starlight reflecting in the swirling waters I swam in. The cold attacked my body from all sides, so I turned onto my stomach and started swimming laps in the deep end of the lake. I enjoyed the feeling of my muscles sweeping through the water, and for a brief moment, I understood why Mike had left camping for swimming.

After I was sufficiently tired out, and thoroughly cold to the bone, I finally got out and dried myself off, letting the warm air envelop my naked body. For a minute, I stood there, dropping my towel, enjoying the freedom of standing in the open, completely exposed and unshrinking again. Then I heard a voice coming from the wood, and instantly became self-conscious and wrapped the towel around my waist. Then I listened curiously. It wasn't someone talking. The sound was sniffing, and the voice kept catching, the way it would if someone were crying and they were unable to silence their sobs.

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The towel wrapped tightly around my waist, I slipped my feet into my sneakers and went to investigate the sobbing. Surely Kyle couldn't still be upset about his journal could he? Then I felt guilty for thinking that. It wouldn't have been beyond Peter to actually rip out a few of the pages, like he claimed he was going to.

He was there, sitting in a clearing under the moonlight, his face pressed to his knees, with his arms wrapped around his legs. But it wasn't Kyle sitting there crying. It was Peter. Not sure what to do, I decided to go sit down next to him.

“Go away,” he said, before I could speak, not lifting his face from his knees.

“Peter, what's wrong?”

He ignored me, and just kept crying. I wasn't going to relent so easily however. I decided to sit there silently, until he either spoke, or moved away. Finally after 30 minutes or so, he lifted his head. I thought he was going to leave, but he spoke instead. “Nobody likes me here.”

I was so surprised, that I almost asked him to repeat it. “Peter, that's because you don't give anybody a chance to like you.”

“But nobody's ever liked me. Even when I moved here at the end of last year, nobody would talk to me.”

“That's because you weren't exactly Scout of the Year then either.”

He looked confused at me, but he was finally dry-eyed.

“I mean, if you want people to be friends with you, you have to be willing to be friends with them first. People aren't just going to approach you because you think you deserve it. If you want proof, apologize to Kyle tomorrow. Go see what a difference it makes.”

We fell into silence. I saw him look over at me from the corner of my eye. “You've got a nice body,” he said. “I was watching you swim. You should be a swimmer.”

I was glad it was so dark, so he wouldn't see me blushing. “Do you want to go for a swim?” I asked suddenly. And before he had time to refuse, I grabbed him by his hand and pulled him to his feet. I dragged him down to the shore, where reluctantly he agreed and stripped down as well. We went skinny dipping together, and we had fun splashing each other and



wrestling a little in the icy cold water. Finally, breathless and sweaty, we climbed out and collapsed next to the shore.

“Thanks,” he whispered, slightly out of breath.

“No problem. That was fun,” I responded. But he was already asleep.

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The sunlight was streaming through the woods, just beyond the pond’s shores. I was warm. Unusually warm. It took me a moment to realize that it was more than just the sun on my face. Peter had wrapped an arm around me in the middle of the night, and now we were both laying with our legs extended, fully naked, his body pressed against mine. I felt my face grow red, and I grew stiff as well, even though it felt totally wrong. It wasn’t like I had never slept with guys before, and I certainly didn’t ask for this or want this. And this wasn’t even that bad, but... shit. Mike. Then in a moment of panic, I realized that any of the other Scouts could have already seen us like this. I quietly slipped out from Peter’s arms, and put some clothes on, quaking at the thought that someone might have seen us. I needed to let Peter know later that I couldn’t be there for him. Not like that.

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We had arrived back in base camp an hour early. We were the only group designated to hike right into basecamp, and clearly we had caught the adult leaders by surprise, for they were still lounging around with coffee, enjoying a late brunch.

Mr. Forster came up to me, as I set my pack down. “Well, it looks like your group had a lot of fun,” he said, pointing to Jack and Grant laughing, and Peter and Kyle whispering stories to each other. “I’ll be curious to hear how you got Peter involved in the group.”

“It’s an interesting story,” I told him, grinning.

That day ended up being another beautiful sunny day. Done with the individual packing trip, I sat down in a camp chair and closed my eyes. The breeze whispered across my face, and I could hear birds chirping up in the trees, out of sight. The sun was gentle, and finally I felt relaxed. The trip was over.

I must have dozed off, because suddenly Peter was shaking my shoulder. “The Scoutmaster wants to see you.”

Dread flooded me. Surely someone had seen Peter and I sleeping together and reported it to him. I started preparing excuses in my mind, and my offer to drop out of consideration to be SPL, and even the Troop if it was necessary. Since May, I had always pictured dropping out of Scouts. But not like this. Not after navigating years of dating Mike. Finally I arrived at his tent. To my horror, the previous Senior Patrol Leader, John, was there too.

“Hey Chris, thanks for coming over. Sorry to wake you up from that nap. John and I were talking, and we were discussing who would make a good replacement. We were talking about it, and felt comfortable asking you first, if you would like to take his place?”

My mind reeled at the request. I stared back at Kyle and Peter, who had now joined in with John’s group in running around and laughing.

“It’s clear you’ve got some talent somewhere,” Mr. Forster said.

“I need to think about it. Can I get back to you?”

“Of course.”

Slowly I wandered away. So sure, I had been, that I was about to be kicked out. Before I made up my mind, I needed to call home and check in. I stared at the contact “Dad.” There was someone else I needed to call first though.

“Hey, Chris! Everything ok?”

I took a deep breath. “Everything’s great, actually,” I said, my throat throbbing as I heard Mike’s voice from the other end. Suddenly though, my head cleared, and I knew what choice I was going to take. So instead, I said, “You’ll never guess what happened this week.”