

For the Love of Joy

By

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EXT. SCHOOL BUILDING - DAY

A small brick building sits squarely on a plot of grass, pine trees framing it on either side. Many of the tall, plexiglas windows are propped open with bedraggled textbooks.

A few stray, dead leaves drift along the sidewalk, caught up in the breeze. The sound of the wind rattling the trees is overpowering.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The breeze from the windows rattles the papers on students' desks. Children of six and seven years hunch over their cramped desks, holding onto their worksheets. Their pencils scribble hastily, flying down rows of mathematical questions.

SAM, 7, chews on his eraser and stares up at the clock above the door.

The second hand inches closer towards twelve.

EXT. SCHOOL BUILDING - DAY

The school bell rings.

The building is overwhelmed by the sudden uproar of children's voices and chairs being scuffed out from underneath desks.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Children leap from the chairs, running towards the front of the class and slamming their papers down on the teacher's desk.

TEACHER

Don't forget your reading assignment! 30 minutes! Not just tonight but Saturday and Sunday as well!

The students tear their backpacks and coats down from their cubbies, and struggle to squeeze out of the classroom door all at once.

EXT. SCHOOL BUILDING - DAY

The front doors open and a horde of schoolchildren come pouring out.

They stream down the sidewalks, walking in large groups. Several run over to the bike racks and pull their bicycles off, one right after the other.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

A group of young boys stroll down the sidewalk leisurely, bumping shoulders with one another and pushing each other playfully.

Another boy on a bicycle rides past them, ringing his bell at them. The group of boys call after him enthusiastically.

One of the younger boys jumps on another's back, squealing "yip-ee" as the taller tries to buck him off.

A jangling, sound-board cover of a pop song and the high-pitched moan of an overworked battery is heard off-screen.

From behind them, a small, pink 12-volt cruiser approaches, going no more than two miles per hour. It crawls up beside them, bedecked from bumper to plastic windshield with flower stickers.

The boys all turn around to stare, just as the bicycle horn on the dashboard is honked.

JOY FLORENCE, 7, in a little yellow dress with purple polka dots, gives the boys a regal wave as she pulls up alongside them. Her short, curly hair sticks out in all directions.

JOY

Hello boys.

The boys throw an apathetic look at her. The kid carrying the other on his back gives her an unenthusiastic wave.

KEVIN

Hey, Joy.

JOY

Any of you gentlemen care for a lift?

(CONTINUED)

TOMMY

Ewwwwwwww...

A couple of the boys erupt into laughter. Joy frowns at them.

SAM

No way.

KEVIN

I wouldn't be caught dead in that thing.

TOMMY, the boy riding on KEVIN's back, bursts out in laughter and falls onto the sidewalk, clutching his side. Joy glares at them.

JOY

That can be arranged.

The boys give a collective "Ohhh." Kevin raises his eyebrow at her.

KEVIN

Is that a threat?

Joy twirls a strand of hair between her thumb and forefinger, eyeing him thoughtfully.

JOY

Depends. How much homework do you have?

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Joy runs in through the front door, throwing her backpack carelessly off screen. We hear something crash.

JANELLE (O.S.)

Joy?

JOY

I'm going outside!

Joy sprints to the hall closet, throwing it open. On her hands and knees, she chucks sneakers and high heels over her shoulder, tearing coats from their hangers as she searches hectically.

Finally, she uncovers a cardboard box of water pistols and foam pellet guns.

(CONTINUED)

JANELLE (O.S.)

Don't you have homework to do?

Joy freezes. She throws her head back and groans dramatically.

JOY

But ma!

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Joy's hand flies over her homework, completing the worksheet entirely in pink gel pen and signing her name at the bottom, decorated with many little hearts.

INT. FRONT HALL - DAY

Joy stands at the door, one hand on the knob. She has a massive water gun slung across her back and stripes of glitter glue decorating her cheeks. She fastens a purple bandanna around her head.

JOY

Okay, I'm going out now, see you later Mom, bye!

JOY opens and slams the door behind her. After a beat, the wreath on the door crashes to the ground.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The forest rolls with low hills, the red clay ground covered in pine needles. Children's foot prints are sunk into the slightly moist earth.

Up on a high hillside, a thick branch has been jabbed into the ground. A mud covered sock dangles from its end like a flag.

Joy peeks her head over a ridge directly across from it. She lowers herself down the other side, ducking. She cradles her water gun in her arms.

By her feet, another stick has been placed into the ground with a purple sock tied off at the end.

Joy raises her water gun and inches forward on her haunches, diving behind the nearest tree trunk.

(CONTINUED)

She peers around it. She can just faintly make out the shapes of boys pressed up against the backs of trees, trying to make themselves smaller.

One of the boys moves out from cover crawling on his belly. Joy looks up at the sock flag on the hill. It is unguarded.

Getting on her belly, Joy inches along the ground. She makes her way around, until finally, she lies at the base of the boys' hill. She holds her gun to her chest, eying the skyline. She sees none of the boys behind the trees.

Slowly, she stands.

Not a movement stirs in her surroundings.

With a battle cry, Joy charges up the hill.

Before she has even crested the top, she is assaulted by a stream of water on all sides.

TOMMY

Got you!

SAM

You're dead!

Joy sinks down onto her knees for a moment, shrieking, putting her hands up against the barrage of water.

She looks up at the sock flag up on the hill. The paint under her eyes is dripping. With a scream, she sprints forward, spraying her gun around wildly.

The boys chase after her. The sock flag is only a few paces away.

From behind, Tommy tackles her down onto the ground.

JOY

Get offa me!

TOMMY

You cheated!

JOY

I said get off!

TOMMY

You're supposed to stay down!

(CONTINUED)

JOY  
GET OFF!

Joy swings her elbow back into Tommy's face, catching him in the nose. Tommy reels backwards. Kevin and Sam lurch forward and pull him away.

TOMMY  
You stupid little - !

KEVIN  
Forget about it, Tommy!

Kevin throws his friend roughly aside. Tommy is clutching onto his nose, checking his hands for blood.

TOMMY  
She broke my nose!

Joy sits up on her knees, glaring at the lot of them.

JOY  
You deserved it! You wouldn't let me go!

TOMMY  
You were *supposed* to stay down when you got hit!

SAM  
C'mon, let's just go.

JAMES  
Yeah, this is boring.

Kevin, Sam, and JAMES turn as if about to leave.

JOY  
Wait! C'mon! You haven't even captured my flag!

KEVIN  
We all know we would have won anyway.

JOY  
You don't *know* that.

JAMES  
(laughing)  
It's all of us against you.

(CONTINUED)

KEVIN

You were helpless.

Joy goes red-faced, her fists clenching at her sides as she watches them all turn away. She gets to her feet.

JOY

I AM NOT HELPLESS!

As her voice echoes around the woods, Tommy shoots her a dirty look over his shoulder. He draws a finger across his throat.

Joy takes a threatening step forward. Tommy turns away, trotting to keep pace with the other boys.

Joy is left standing alone in the woods.

Drenched in water, her normally frizzy hair now flattened and wet, she stomps up their hill and yanks their flag out from the ground.

She holds it over her head, waving the flag through the air triumphantly.

JOY

I am the king of these woods! I  
make the rules! Not you! Next  
time I see you around these parts,  
I'll make trophies of your spines!

The woods are silent but for the reverberating sound of her shouting. She listens as a flock of birds takes flight overhead.

JOY (CONT'D)

Do you hear me?

There is no response. Joy lets the flagpole slowly drop by her side.

LIZA (O.S.)

Joy?

The voice comes from far away, outside the woods. Joy raises her head.

LIZA (O.S.)

Joy?

Heaving a sigh, Joy flings her water gun over her shoulder and marches down the hill, using the boys' flag as a walking stick.