“My First” by Candice Schneider

I remember the gut sickening feeling I had the first time I knew I had to take the long walk to the principal’s office. It all started in the 3rd grade one fall day after school. My strict teacher Mrs. Nightingale used to walk our class to each of our individual busses to go home. As the class lined up one by one, my friends Lindsey and Sarah motioned for me to follow them to the end of the line. When we turned the corner to head outside to the parking lot, they pulled my arm, and we dashed secretly into the girl’s restroom.

“What are you guys doing?” I asked, shocked in their sneaky ways. We were not allowed to separate from the line, especially at the end of the day. “We have to go the bus, otherwise we are going to be stuck at school all night!” I exclaimed before they could get a word out.

“We’re just taking a short cut,” reasoned Lindsey.

“Yeah, she always takes too long. If we cut through the playground, she won’t see us, and we can get right on our bus,” Sarah explained.

I wasn’t sure about the sneaking around and away from the class, but I was positive no one would notice us gone from the line. Typically it was the “bad kids” that Mrs. Nightingale had to keep an eye on at the end of the day. “And what was the harm with it anyway?” I reasoned with myself inwardly.

Once we knew the class line was out of the door, we darted out the side entrance through the playground. I’d never seen the monkey bars so empty and cold, nor the swings so abandoned and still. I could smell the near but distant smell of bus exhaust pipes, smoking in impatience. My third grade self could have stayed right there all night, between the playground set, imagining new worlds and soaking in possibilities of games un-entered.

“Come on!!!!” Lindsey shouted at me.

I realized I had stopped running and paused to stare at the sand, where a giant game of X’s and O’s had been interrupted by a playground whistle earlier that day. There were two X’s about to be crossed by one, life altering O. “I’m coming!” I hollered back. We made it to our busses, and I couldn’t shake the feeling the whole ride home that this was not going to be something I’d get away with.

As I stepped off of the bus, and walked through my garage door, I met my mom’s grave disappointing expression as I stepped into the kitchen.

“Explain to me why I got a call from your teacher today,” she spoke with a voice about to crack with anger.

“I’m not sure. What’s wrong mom?” I asked.

“Mrs. Nightingale called to see if you made it home alright. She was concerned that you were not in her bus line today after you left the classroom.”

“Oh,” I let out lightly, my stomach starting to sink with dread.

“I told her I was sure you would be fine, but I would call her back when you arrived. Go to your room please, while I call to discuss your consequence,” she stated like a dictator.

Knowing my punishment would be worse when my dad got home, I turned with my backpack and shoes still on, and headed down the hallway to my safe harbor. I laid down on the bed, and tears started to stream down my cheeks. I never get in trouble, at least not at school. I couldn’t believe I had been so dumb as to follow those girls. They were barely my friends anyways. What was I thinking?

As I pondered my fate, my face burned with worry as the fire rolled down my cheeks and soaked my pillow. A few hours passed, and I was still in the same exact position on my bed (shoes still laced, ready to run, I might add). I heard murmuring in the kitchen, and smelled the faintest hint of chicken and pasta. I tried to inhale and exhale, reminding myself that indeed, I was still alive.

My mom walked in and said, “It’s time for dinner. Your dad is home.” With the pit in my stomach weighing me down, I trudged to the table. Needless to say, dinner was less than pleasant that night. While my dad is well loved by many, he is terrifying if you ever go against his wishes. And his wishes for me to be successful and a good girl are one of his passions in life. I remember the veins in his neck as he screamed his disappointments at me.

The macaroni casserole with chicken and peas was pushed to the left of my plate, then to the right, with my fork acting as its traffic director. “Why couldn’t I just go back to the moment and make the right choice?” I yelled in my head, while the deafening silence began to fill the kitchen air. My dad’s scolding had silenced both my brother and sister. They both finished their plates in one breath. I was left, an only child, to face my consequence.

“You will visit Principal Jennings tomorrow,” my mom stated as a matter of fact. “Dad and I are hoping this will be consequence enough to remind you to make the right choices in the future.”

“You will never visit the principal’s office *ever* again! Do you hear me?” my dad yelled as his face reddened.

I couldn’t even get a sound out of my mouth. I nodded as more tears joined my cheek. I couldn’t believe I had any more tears left to join the rest. My only comfort was my dog’s fluffy white coat underneath my feet. Max always sat underneath my feet, because I would give him the most attention and love. He must have been confused at his lack of table treats tonight.

After what seemed like hours of silent punishment after the storm, my dad took his plate emptied of macaroni casserole and walked to the sink. When I heard him heave out a sigh and sit down on the couch in the living room, I felt like I was finally released from my invisible shackles and given permission to return to my prison cell – my bedroom. I wanted to sleep in my closet that night., underneath my 3rd grade wardrobe of pink. I didn’t feel like I deserved the comfort of my pillow, nor the safety of a blanket.

The punishment at home far outweighed my trip to Principal Jennings the following day. Sometimes the mental punishments we afflict on ourselves are torture enough. If my tears were fire, my entire face would have melted off. If the sick feeling in my stomach could talk, it would tell of my own personal disappointment. But if my dad’s words were daggers, my heart would have been pierced through. Looking back as a grown woman now, I recognize this pivotal moment as not only the first time I went to the principal’s office, but also the first time I disappointed my dad. The latter was punishment enough. I would spend the rest of my childhood continuing to make him proud, never choosing to carelessly follow others’ poor choices.

**Directions:** Look back at the story and use complete sentences to answer each of the questions.

1. Every good narrative has a hook that keeps readers wanting to keep reading. How does the first sentence hook you?

2. Describe sensory details from the story. What details include

Sight:

Sound:

Touch:

Taste:

Smell:

**Foreshadowing** is when an author gives hints or clues of things to come later.

**Symbolism** is when a writer uses objects or surface level things to give understanding to a deeper message or part of the story.

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3. How could the following passage from the story be an example of Foreshadowing?

4. What deeper conflict could the X’s and O be symbolizing in the story?

5. Describe two different settings in the story. (Place and time) What details help to paint a picture for the reader? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

A.

B.

6. What is the main conflict of the story?

7. How does the dialogue add to the suspense and make the story more interesting? Use an example from the text to support your answer.

8. What is the resolution of the story?