



His Life

A boy sat down on a tree stump, feeling its rough, freshly cut top with one hand, and looked down at his other crumpled, bleeding one with pink, swollen eyes. Two screaming voices came from inside the simple house in front of him. Tears fell from the boy's face only to sting the cuts on his hands. A summer breeze blew through the freshly painted screen door, taking fresh air into its moist, dark interior. The boy jumped at the sound of a slap, and he looked at the door, eyes wet.

"I wish he was dead!" he cried between panting sobs that threatened to rip the innocent soul from his tiny body...

A teenager sat on an uneven tree stump and put ice, wrapped in a dirty plastic bag, over his swollen eye. Tears and cruel laughter came from the darkness beyond the peeling screen door. Cracked windows had shaken minutes earlier when three people began to argue, but now there were only two. A bitter tear ran from the teenager's one good eye.

"I want him dead!" he exclaimed, grimacing after accidentally jostling his hurt hand. A sudden cry for help brought him to his feet. A screen door creaked open and slammed shut. The screams and yells started again...

A young man sat on a smooth tree stump, gripping a handkerchief smelling of lavender and roses. People dressed in black milled about the property and eyed the house's screen door, hanging by a thread, but politely refused to go in when asked. Many of them couldn't help but send a stray thought and look at him from time to time, but few came to talk to him.

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He stared at the handkerchief, forcing back tears, while others looked on and whispered to himself. “He *will* pay for this...”

A man in his thirties sat down on an old stump, gently handling an old handkerchief smelling faintly of lavender and roses. He looked at the house and then toasted it with a shot of whiskey before gulping it down. He sucked back a breath and regarded the decaying structure accented by broken windows. An empty doorway leading into the darkness beyond harbored distant echoes of arguments, screams, and hushed words.

“I can never forgive you.” The thirty-something got up from the tree stump and waved to his kids as he returned to his car...

A man in his fifties sat down on a grey stump, taking a flask of whiskey from his coat pocket. He waved away the sound of his wife calling him from the car and took in the sight of his childhood home. The house’s walls had been forced outwards at an odd angle when the roof had collapsed sometime in the last year. Bright sunlight poured through the doorway where a transparent man stood, head bowed.

“I can forgive you now,” the silver-haired man called out to the specter, raised his flask and took a sip before returning to the cacophony of his grandkids bugging each other in the minivan. The image of a one-time father and husband faded into the light behind him as he went...

An old man leaned on his cane as he lowered his aching body onto a rotting tree stump which nearly gave way under his weight. He stared at a low mound on the ground, covered in wild grass and saplings. The elderly man took a flask of whiskey from his pocket and raised it to the ruin, taking a sip. He sputtered and nearly lost the cap of his flask when a voice he hadn't heard in decades called his name. The scent of lavender and roses came in on a light breeze breaking the summer heat of the afternoon.

"I'm glad you're here," he said before the stump gave out from behind him. The man tumbled from it, falling to his side, and smiled up at a face he hadn't seen in decades...

An old lady hobbled to the fallen man's side, knelt on shaking knees and caressed his face with both hands, her wedding band gleaming in the bright, midday sun. She looked into his vacant eyes and then shook her head. "God's will be done."