

Timothy Li

Age: 14, Grade: 9

School Name: Vestavia Hills High School, Vestavia, AL

Educator: Virginia Hackney

Category: Short Story

Photo feud

I nibble on the soft golden crust of a slice of bread. My little sister Emma whines in the backseat, and I finish my portion, reaching for more, but my mom smacks my hand away, confiscating the plastic bag.

“Mooom! I'm still hungry!” I whine.

“No Tristan! We need it to feed the ducks in the garden. Plus, you *just* ate breakfast!”

As the engine silences and the car rumbles into the parking space, I kick my mom's chair, “Where's the bread? I promise I won't eat any, and I can carry it to the ducks!” My mom hands me the remaining white fluffy slices from the bag with a watchful eye, and my older sister Christina also requests for bread. Instead of giving her any, I pack the provisions into my pocket, and I seize the door handle. The seatbelt clicks as the clasp comes out.

Yanking the car handle, I rush out, but my parents grab my hand. I try to jerk away, but my dad's grip detains me.

My dad straps Emma into the stroller as we saunter through the entrance to the garden.

Christina demands for the bread. I sprint ahead with the stash. Each step brings me farther. Christina chases after me. My mom shouts.

The musty, but refreshing smell from the pond lures me to the ducks. They line the bank of the pool, wading out and shaking their wings dry. Breaking off some bread, I hurl the flaky pellet towards them and watch it tumble through the water. A blur of feathers, droplets, and beaks; all the ducks attack the bread, each escaping with a small chunk.

As I reach into my bag for another handful of white bread, Christina attacks my wrist.

"Get off of me! This is my bread!"

"No, it's *mine!*"

I clench the bread harder in my fist, raising it behind me, above my head, but Christina smacks it out of my palm.

“Stop fighting you two!” my dad exclaims.

My dad seizes the bag, and we smack his hand. Without success, we let go, and he plucks several pieces of bread out of the bag and gives them to me and Christina, splitting the rest between him and my mom.

The flapping birds migrate from the corners of the garden to us. The horde of beaks nips at our knees, and we chuck the bread at them. I rub the bread in my fingers until it disintegrates my bread in my fingers, feeling the coarse grains, and sprinkling bits near the water by my feet. Several ducks waddle towards me.

A flurry of feathers. A chorus of quacks. They peck at the bread, the splashes disrupting the mirage.

On the field, statues of chicks, shined by water, stand between the path and the pond, “Let's take a photo beside the statues. Emma, get over here!” my mom says.

Emma bolts out of the stroller, sprinting into the water. “Ducky! I want to play with the ducky!” Pursuing, I hook Emma's hand and usher her back to the stroller.

Once I place Emma back in the stroller, we return to our positions. My mom holds up hand signals and yells, “Look at me! I'll give you candy at home if you behave.”

We follow the path around the mire, and arranged flowers surround the trail in front of the forest. Rays blocked by the leaves smother the air in a green smog, and the melodious chatter of the leaves, birds, and water silences us.

After walking for several minutes, we reach the bridge across the entrance, and I collapse onto a bench.

"Do you have any food Mom? I'm *soooo* hungry! Can we walk home quicker?"

“No! didn't you *just* eat some bread in the car? Also, we need to observe nature carefully when we go outside!”

I gaze across the pond and watch the ducks poke at each other with their beaks. My stomach whines and complains. I gnash my teeth.

Taking off her hat, my mom wipes the sweat off her forehead and remarks, "I want a picture in front of this beautiful landscape!"

“Please, can we just go home?” I cry. “What if this picture takes 10 minutes like the last one?”

Christina yanks my arm. "Stop whining. You'll survive." My legs struggle to hold me up, yet I keep my posture and a

steady grin.

I beg my dad afterwards, "Can we *please* stop taking photos? We already have enough to last a million years." He nods, yet watches my little sisters play around.

Every second, emptiness jabs my stomach, slowing me down. Near the end of the path around the pond, my parents drag me down to a deserted wedding venue closer to the edge of the water.

Christina winks at me, then announces, "Oooh, can we take a photo here? This place is so beautiful."

I grab a stick off the ground and fling it into the pond. My dad smiles and nods at Christina and I moan, burying my face with my palms. Suddenly, I rise. "OK, fine, We have to take this photo in less than a minute!" I count under my breath and I grind my teeth under the smile. The last click of the phone echoes, and my parents nod at the photo.

Towing my parents, I scamper back to the car. Foot taps. Piercing breathes. Heart drumming. The door opens, and I scour the backseat. Spotting and grabbing some cookies left in the car, I stuff my face. Each addictive bite swarms my taste buds, and the growling lion leaves my stomach. I collapse in the car and fall asleep.