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$2+2=5$

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## 2+2=5

*Henry Knutsen*

*The stars appear every night in the sky. All is well.*

I remember the looks on their miserable faces. The guards were hicks, fat with southern accents. They frisked nine-year-old Elijah like he was a drug smuggler.

I don't remember what we talked about in the visiting room. We sat there for hours, playing cards and eating food from the vending machines; our big bag of quarters waned slowly. I remember the patty from the cheeseburger. I remember the potato skins were bacon flavored. I remember that your gray hair had multiplied since the last time we visited. I don't remember the inmate who took our photos. I do remember the water in my eyes because it was the first time we had been together in years. I remember the old English "D" for the Detroit Tigers in the background of our family photo, now tattooed on your left forearm. I remember the smiles on the prisoners and their families' faces.

The guards are the ones that needed punishment for the way they treated you all like dirt, and us like criminals. I remember trying not to let my anger overcome me and to appreciate the time we finally got to spend together. I remember the feeling of leaving and not being able to take you with me. I remember the need to escape.

Sticky and humid. Michigan summers left any adventurer's underwear and socks stained with sweat. Drops fell off my forehead. A slight burn when they landed in the cracks of my eyes. I cared about none of this.

Hand firmly gripped on my makeshift torch. Twine wrapped tightly around the top of the stick and tied off, showered in gasoline. Running around the jungle in our backyard, avoiding dog poop, and the singed twine floating down in the dark purple summer night. A 5-gallon red gas can, a stick, twine and you. The smell of smoke comforts me.

I remember my chest rising and lowering like the pistons on a four-stroke engine. Darting through the backyard like a manic child high on sugar. Fear of the sting of bright colored paintballs kept me moving. The green greasy paint left a blinding smear on the goggles built into my black mask with small slits in the bottom. The ventilation was terrible. I used the five maple trees as cover. They always seemed to leave partially exposed limbs I didn't know were exposed until I got a painful reminder. The red skin raised up under my armor, which consisted of two hoodies, a T-shirt, and a pair of sweatpants snug underneath denim jeans. Turned into a blue and green welt the following day. I wore these battle wounds with pride.

I remember our boxing coach, an old school black man in his early fifties. He had a small gut that hung over his gray sweatpants, and his name was Curtis. Don't let the gut fool you,

he still had it. We had just taken a water break and class time was dwindling. Push-ups then sit-ups and class would be over. You wore a red shirt and white shorts that rested well above your pale knees as you stretched out over the big inflatable yoga ball. The bulky nineties tennis shoes lost their grip and your head full of curly black hair collided with the concrete floor. Curtis let you sit out the remainder of class after having probably concussed yourself. Knowing you were watching, I flung my shoulders up and down as quickly as I could in weird fishlike movements. I watched grown men beat each other, then hug afterwards, blood occasionally dripping down their noses. Curtis was hard but kind. He gave us an outlet.

I don't remember cutting up the mango. But I do remember the chunks were neatly placed an inch apart on all three levels of the plastic dehydrator. It sat on top of the counter in the dark garage. The orange yellowish skin was dry. Sweet and chewy on the inside, it always managed to get stuck in your molars. Savoring the tropical fruit, we sat in the doorway to the backyard, the cool draft from the garage grazing the backs of our necks. Bailey lay in the freshly trimmed grass, soaking up the sun until it got too hot. The dehydrator didn't last long. The tangerines were the end of it.

I remember unpacking the brown box you brought home for me. I watched your hands alternate and energy radiate off your body in a trancelike state. The new drumsticks sporadically

smacked the snare's rim, leaving little chips in the hickory. You sang along with Thom Yorke over the computer speakers. Eyes closed, paying careful attention to each accented note. Your movements were liberating. I closed my eyes and mimicked you. The rattle from the drum traveled through the air vents, filling the house, letting the world know, *we're here*.

I remember when you worked for Saturn and we did the promotional stunt for them. I don't remember watching the game. The Kalamazoo Wings or K-Wings were the local hockey team. At intermission, when the players headed to the locker rooms, we made our entrance. Gliding onto the ice in the black Saturn SUV with our sunroof open, I was strapped in the passenger seat. I watched the orange rubber pucks fly towards the car by the dozens. The SUV was borrowed. The overenthusiastic commentator's voice brought life into the cold arena. The pucks were autographed in Sharpie. Whoever was lucky enough to make it in the sunroof also had to make it through my careful selection to win the prize. I still remember the sounds of the pucks hitting the sides of the car.

I remember you coached our soccer team for a year. Later I learned you knew nothing about soccer, but nobody could tell. We needed a coach and you stepped up. We flew around the field, not like green dragons, but more like black flies buzzing around aimlessly. I remember our green striped jerseys and white knee-high socks. Occasionally, forgetting which side the

opponent's goal was on, we shot on our own goalie. The sweet airy donuts and Sunny D or Capri Suns afterward were most kids' incentive. I don't remember who we played or any of my teammates. I do remember when a little black and yellow wasp landed on the warm donut in your hand, its feelers investigating the shiny glaze as its wiry legs sunk in. You had no idea until you bit down and the stinger sunk deep into your tongue. A sugary crunch.

I will never get sick of talking about these moments. No matter how high they hike up the prices of phone calls or how much they charge for emails. They can continue to extort the families of prisoners; I believe they will pay for it soon enough. They can never take these memories from me. I put the weed and alcohol down, so I can remember them clearly. I will hold them tight in my mind until the last breath leaves my lungs. I appreciate these memories more than you will ever know.

Gotta go. Love you Dad.