

At The Edge Of The Woods

Sabree

Sabree was ready. She was prepared. She knew that she had it in her to make the switch and to make this year, sophomore year, better than the last. *Last year:* Sabree couldn't help the chills that crawled down her spine. Just thinking about the version of herself as a freshmen; that made her head spin and her whole body ache. She forced herself to put those thoughts aside, turning to face the car window, trying to find another train of thought as she watched the landscape passing by. In a perfectly timed manner, and to her luck, a notification from her phone made a loud enough *ding* for just that.

“Are you excited, Bree?” her older sister, Carolyn, in the driver seat asked her just as she unlocked her phone to investigate the text message she received. Sabree looked up from her phone to make eye contact with her sister from where she sat in the passenger's seat. Now they were at a red light and things outside and inside the car were awfully still. They held each other's gaze for a few seconds longer, as if they were starting a staring contest, before Sabree looked back down at her phone and her sister started driving again in response to the light turning green.

“Really Carolyn?” Sabree started to say, “one, it is now the third day of school so the excitement has pretty much worn off, and two, you already asked me that yesterday and on the actual first day of school.” Carolyn, with her 20 year old or so has-been-alive-for-2-decades wisdom, just shrugged her shoulders with a sort-of smile plastered on her face.

“I'm just saying Bree, sophomore year of high school was one of the best years of my high school career, I want you to feel that way too.”

“Mhm,” was all Sabree said in response, by now she had turned all her attention to her phone after she noticed that the text message was from the group with her two favorite people in the world. She clicked on their chat and read the text:

Christan: Hey guys, I'm going to be late to school :p.

All Sabree could do was let out an airy sigh as she laughed to herself. “That’s so like Christan.”

“What is?” Carolyn had questioned just as she pulled up in front of the school.

“Oh, nothing, I can tell you about it later,” Sabree ended as she climbed out of the car onto the sidewalk and closed the door behind her, now outside and the autumn air felt crisp and cool also tasting a little bit like pumpkin spice. She watched as her sister just gave her a thumbs up and drove off down the street. Now she stood, at the edge of a sidewalk, and in front of her future ready to take it on.

Christan

“WAIT!!” Someone from behind yelled, but already he was dashing across the floor of his living room. His sneakers made a high-pitched squeaking sound against the hard floor as he slid out the front door, and just barely made it through the screen door. “Okay fine, have a good day and try not to be late for your first week of school!” The exasperation in his mothers voice was a little more muffled once he was out, and Christian now cursed himself for being late and forgetting to set his alarm because he didn’t grab a jacket and he was freezing in his short sleeved shirt. It didn’t help that it was thin too. It was only the third day of the new school year and he was already showing up late. He guessed that he just wasn’t ready to move on from summer.

In his defense though, who would be ready for school, ready to move on from summer, after the chaos that was last year?

Christan at least made it to the next bus on time, too bad that bus was twenty minutes too late to be at school in time. As soon as he stepped on and the doors had already closed, he got a text from his mom.

Mom: You forgot your lunch by the way.

It's alright, he replied. Even though he said it was alright, Christan thought that his mom might try to drop it off at school anyways. That's just what she does. He then looked back at his text that he sent about being late to the group chat with Sabree and Keria, Sabree had sent a crying-laughing emoji and Keria quoted the assistant principal who always told them how important it was to be at school on time.

They were his best friends since third grade so he loved them and even thought them to be like his sisters, like his family. Christan was sure he would do just about anything when it came to them.

He was at school now and currently in the process of retrieving his lunch from the office where his mom dropped it off. He gave her a quick hug and said thanks when he saw her, then was heading down to meet up with Sabree and Keria in the cafeteria.

“Christan, over here!” Sabree yelled when she spotted him.

“Hey, what’s up?” he plopped down in the seat next to Keria, dropping his bag to the floor next to hers.

“You’re unbelievable,” Keria said but she had a smile forming on her face so he guessed that he wasn’t in that much trouble.

“Who, me? You mean a guy can’t be late once in a while, come on.”

Both Sabree and Keria were in a fit of giggles after his remark. It got quiet afterwards but it was a comfortable kind of silence. Sabree was the first one to speak up. “So,” she said, making them both look up from what they were doing on their phones, “you both remember our agreement we made at the end of the school year last year, and what we were talking about at the beginning of summer, don’t you?”

The air had suddenly become very tense as they were all staring at each other. “Yeah... I remember,” it was Christan who spoke this time.

“Me too,” Keria said shortly after.

“We should fulfill our promise to go to those woods today,” Sabree said, and soon they were on their way.

Keria

Keria was starting to wonder why they ever left the lunch table. Just earlier today, she was waving bye to her mom and dad, and younger sister and brother, then got to school and was just hanging out with her best friends, completely content with all that was happening, and thinking the most trouble that they would get into that year would be shoplifting a few packets of gum or being half an hour late to curfew. She didn’t expect to find herself standing at the edge of the woods, staring into a darkness that stared back at her, gripping both of her best friends' hands a little too tight.

“Ow, Keria,” Sabree spoke with alarm when Keria squeezed a bit tighter, but her voice was soft, like she was nervous too but was trying to be brave for them.

“Oh, sorry Bree!” Keria quickly apologized, in a rushed whisper.

“Guys I got my flashlight to work!” Christan said, making both girls jump because of his louder than necessary voice. “My bad,” he apologized.

“Okay guys look,” Keria was starting to say, “we came here because we wanted to lead different lives than the lives we led last year, right? We wanted to honor the incident that happened with our classmate, and start the year differently. So let's do it, right now.”

With that, Sabree and Christan looked reassured, seemingly deciding to trust the words that Keria was saying, and letting her guide them like a beam of light on a dark, cloudy day. They each took a flashlight in hand, and linked arms as they headed from the edge of the woods, into the jungle that awaited them. Each of them making a silent promise not to let their family go.