

The sun hung lazily over the park, casting a dappled light through the trees onto a small park bench where they gathered, a snapshot of youthful camaraderie fronting the eternal flow of Spring Run.

Elena, in her oversized glasses, lounged back, letting the warm



rays kiss her legs as she scrolled through her phone, occasionally raising it to snap candid pictures of her friends. She held out a picture on her phone for the group to see, “It’s that Chloe. The new girl. From Oglebay,” she announced. Sam asked what she was reading. “That new ‘Survival Guide’. Chapter 2. In The Magnolia. Apparently, ‘adulthood’ is a *scam*,” Elena added.

“Nice shorts!” Sam snarked at the screen, mouth comically agape. Elena smacked the back of his head.

The air carried a sweet scent of grilling meals, the squeals of children and dogs barking, mixing with the faint, familiar backwater refrains of the River.

Sam returned to fidgeting with his tropical-patterned shirt, the bright greens and yellows almost too vibrant against the earthy backdrop. His gaze was distant, lost somewhere between the soft gurgle of the Run and the whispered promises of summer adventures.

Maya, next to him and ever the lively one, balancing aquatic-themed deely bobbles on her curly head, took a bite from a crisp piece of apple, her eyes sparkling with mischief. “Bet you can’t guess what I’m thinking,” she teased, her voice a melody of challenge and curiosity.

Jade, beside her, barely looked up from her phone. Her red hair caught the wind, a flame flickering against the gentle greens of the park. “Something ridiculous, *My-ya-a-a*,” she purred, thumbs dancing across the screen, a wry smile tugging her lips.

On the ground in front of them Lily sat, her floral swimsuit blending with the scattered wildflowers around. She glanced over her shoulder, her hair a cascade of golden waves. “I’m thinking,” she began, her voice thoughtful, “that days like this won’t last forever. We should make the most of them.”

For a moment, silence embraced them, filled with the gentle rustle of leaves and the distant bleat of a boat horn. Then, Maya broke it with a laugh. “Lily’s right. Let’s do something wild today. It’s the first ‘R’ month. Before we know it, Christmas will be here, and this whole place will be end-to-end ‘*Rent-A-Trees*’. How about a swim?”

Sam finally smiled, his earlier melancholy evaporating like morning mist. “A swim sounds perfect,” he agreed, standing up and stretching. “And what’s wrong with *Rent-a-Trees*?!” Someone muttered, “*Grinch!*” and they all laughed, Maya included.

As they gathered their things, the bench creaked in relief, and they made their way along the sidewalk and up to the City Pool, a small band of friends ready to weave memories into the fabric of their soon-fading summer. The Run flowed on, uncaring and eternal, but for that afternoon, it would become their background, a silent witness to their fleeting, precious youth.

- EDITOR

