

Fair-Weather Best Friends Forever

by Smiley McGrouphants

We went as far as the car would take us.
After that, we were on our own.

I asked Mike: "Why didn't you practice playing the drums?"
Stepping lightly to avoid stepping in dogshit, he replied: "I don't know how to bother. It confused me."

He beamed a smile at me.

Then, he tugged on his hat — an out-of-state major baseball team's.

"Like my 'lid'?"

Neglecting Mike's needs for validation, I scurried ahead and accosted Viktor. (The car had broken down, alas, and we *still* had a long way to go!) It took some doing, to attract his attention away from *himself*.

"Hey, Viktor!"

"Oh, — hey!" He noticed me. Laboriously, he shifted attention from "inside" to "outside" — it was like watching a relay click, or The Terminator turn his head to apprehend an intruder. "How — *are* you?"

"Good, good . . . you know, I was just wondering — "

"Shoot!"

"Why did you keep rewinding that VHS tape of *The Survivors* to the part when Robin Williams rolls over in bed in his hospital gown and you see his balls?"

"He didn't roll over," he said, instantly pissed.

"Are you gay?"

He looked at me like he was going to kill me.

Scared, I ran up to Ben, who seemed to have been waiting for me.

"Blow it off!" he said, then rolled his eyes, to show he was just kidding.

But: he *wasn't*.

Still, it was a welcome relief.

"Yeah, yeah, I guess . . . "

But then: I looked at him, peering closer.

"Blow *what* off?"

He looked scared.

Mikey took his "L L Cool Bean" t-shirt off, replaced his cap, threw it over one shoulder, and, having paused in surveying the trail ahead and returned to give me a full report, instead opted to belch in my face.

"Mikey," I said, ignoring his gaseous emission as it floated up my nostrils (as best I could anyway), ". . . it's the middle of the night!"

"I know," he said, glaring at me in the full-moon moonlight. He hated it when I called him "Mikey," but I was in a bad mood.

"Where's your flashlight?"

He moped around looking at his shoes, waiting for the moment to pass, waiting for the moment to pass . . . looking around, looking around.

I think he muttered something.

Then, he brightened: "What do you think of my 'lid'?"

"I think it sucks," I snapped. "Fuck you and your whole face!"

Viktor overhead this, and decided to stick up for Mikey — like he had anything better to do.

"This is important!" he pronounced, as though an ostensible thought-train wasn't as necessary as a declaration of what he was doing. "I'm cutting in here," he continued, "to say this is wrong."

"Thanks, Viktor!" Mikey replied, looking confused but grateful for the validation.

"You dipstick," I rejoindered, making a reference so pointed Viktor winced. "CHECK THE FUCKING OIL NEXT TI—"

"Yeah, yeah," he muttered, losing interest, in either the destroyed car or the conversation, what's the difference.

Mikey started to cry. "I know I should have tried to practice hard to study to do," he said, making no sense whatsoever.

At that, Ben's ear perked up, as though an antennae for nonsense — which was proving to be his specialty.

He ambled over.

He stood before us, and proceeded to wet his pants.

I couldn't take this shit anymore.

Further up the trail, I found it: the house we'd been looking for.

"Is that it?"

"Have we found it?"

"What do we do now?"

I couldn't believe I'd known these jerks — since *kindergarten* — and relied upon them for my "moral support."

This was the last week-end before summer before college.

Now was the time!

"This is really important," I said, bullshitting with every breath as the thoughts came to me, "there's a big . . . *dog?* . . . inside, and — "

"How big?" Ben asked, with his finger in the air, like a pupil in class.

"*Very*," I imported, looking him right in the eye.

He pondered this, and withdrew his line of inquiry, with a *no further questions* look on his face.

"Now, I'm afraid it might . . . *scare* you? So — "

"How scared?" Mikey said, not wanting to find out, and already looking pretty nervous.

"*Very*," I seconded, in case he didn't "get it."

That shut him up.

Viktor, for some reason, had withdrawn previous to this conversation, and, awaiting its outcome, had been mewling to himself in the crook of a tree.

I heard their frantically-whispered discussions behind me as I strode on towards the house:

“What'd he say?”

“You won't believe it.”

“A big dog?”

“Gosh! He's so —”

They faded out as I reached the doorstep.

“KNOCK KNOCK!”

I hoped I looked decent.

“Yes?” A pretty, short-haired female in a “Death to the Pixies” t-shirt opened the door a crack.

Blonde, with librarian glasses, nice chest — oh! Um:

“Benediction.” (It was one of those “code word” parties.)

“Just you?” She unlatched the chain.

“Yup,” I faltered, inwardly, but didn't have much trouble maintaining an outward façade. “Just me.”

