**The Good Kids**

**by Jacqueline Miller**

 “What the hell are we supposed to do now?!” Sam’s voice was stricken with panic. She looked at her shaking hands. They were drenched in bright, fresh, crimson blood. Her entire body ached immensely, but the adrenaline toned it down to a dull roar. Sam wrung her hands together nervously. She bit her plump pink lip hard enough to leave a brief dent. It didn’t much matter. The makeup she had so carefully applied to achieve her ‘natural’ glow was now smeared all across her face in odd, obtuse swipes. She glanced around as quickly as she could to see if she and Austin were alone.

The broad hillside was silent. After a few moments some crickets gave away their presence. They chirped loudly in the warm, moist summer air. A swift breeze glided through the trees. To anyone else, the breeze would carry notes of peach trees and perhaps a faint trace of fresh linens hanging on clothes lines in distant backyards. But to Sam, it just stirred up and intensified the stench of blood and sweat.

 Austin’s car was parked just a few feet away in a small clearing. If you knew it was there, the sleek Solstice looked out of place among trees this dense. The navy blue paint was gleaming. However, when viewing the scene with a dazed half-consciousness, the car seemed to almost fade into the speckled darkness of the night. No headlights were coming up the secret dirt road. Sam and Austin were alone on the romantic hillside—well, almost.

Sam looked down at the previously pale yellow picnic blanket. Austin had just bought it today for their romantic picnic. It was brand new. It too was drenched in blood. She averted her eyes, not wanting to acknowledge the third presence now lying on the bloodied blanket. Sam looked instead at herself. Her formerly pristine, crisp, white blouse would never be the same. Blood was caked in the ridges of the fabric. No amount of bleach could get that out.

Her taupe pleated skirt had unfortunately met the same fate as her blouse. It had the faintest trace of pink pinstripes in it when she bought it. They could not be seen any longer. There were distinct markings from Sam’s own grip. She had grasped the skirt in a frenzied moment during the ordeal and clutched it in her dripping fist. The result was similar to a bloody tie-dye. There would be no fixing these. She wanted to do something with her dripping palms, but could not bring herself to wipe them on her outfit.

“Should we call 911?” Austin was looking away from the plaid blanket as well. Sam turned to him and realized that his entire tall and lanky frame was covered in layers of blood and sweat as well. He was still holding the pocket knife, the one he had gotten in Boy Scouts so many years ago, in his quivering hand.

“No! We can’t call anyone! What are we going to tell them? It was an accident?”

Austin faced her. He looked like a little boy who had just been told everything he had ever feared was real, and it was coming after him. There were slimy, sharp-toothed monsters in the closet. The Boogie Man was lying in wait under the bed. Hell existed and all its fiery fury was preparing to engulf him.

“It was an accident! People will believe us!”

“Right!” Sam turned abruptly away from Austin’s gaze. She crossed her arms over her chest.

“Austin? No one will believe us and even if they do… this could ruin us. Forever. People don’t just get over things like this. It follows them for the rest of their lives…”

“Our parents will believe us! We just have to explain! We have to tell them the whole story, and they’ll see it was just an accident! We can’t just not tell them!”

“You’re wrong! That’s exactly what we have to do! We can’t tell anyone! We’re on our own here! And we need to figure out what to do next!” Sam’s voice had escalated to a roaring scream. She took a moment to inhale some fresh air into her lungs. She unintentionally smelled her own sweat mixed with the blood all over her. Some of it was hers. Some of it was not. It nauseated her.

“We need to figure this out together.” Sam steadied her voice as much as she could. She felt dazed and unsteady. Suddenly, the bones seemed to liquefy in her legs and she fell helplessly to the ground in a torrent of uncontrollable sobs. Austin heard his girlfriend’s cries and came to her immediately. In his panic, he hadn’t realized that he wasn’t the only one in shock. Sam was a victim, too, probably more than himself. He subconsciously kicked himself for being so selfish.

Austin walked over to Sam, sidestepping the blanket that had been between them. He knelt down in front of her and pulled her to his chest, resting his chin atop her head and rubbing her shoulders as she wept.

“It’ll be okay, Sam. I promise… shh…it’s okay… listen… c’mon…shh… it’s okay…”

After a few minutes, Sam regained control of herself and pushed the tears back down inside. She looked up at Austin, who looked so handsome in the moonlight. He was faintly smiling at her, trying to mask his own panic. Austin always did that. Whenever he did something he shouldn’t, a guilty grin plastered itself across his face. She reached her hand up to caress his cheek, and Austin leaned into her touch. The red stain on her hands reminded Sam of the situation she was in. She dropped her head.

“What the hell are we supposed to do now?” Sam asked, barely above a whisper.

 “We can’t just leave the body here, Sam. On a bloody blanket on the hillside? What if it’s not dead? Then we’re murderers…”

“I don’t see any movement or anything…” Sam stole a glance at the blanket just to be sure that what she was saying was still true. She would have rather been proven wrong. She wanted to look at the blanket and wake up staring at the stars in the sky, lying peacefully Austin’s arms again.

“But we don’t know that for sure. What if we’re wrong? What if we leave and something horrible happens? I don’t know if I could live with that… that guilt…”

 “Something more horrible than what’s already happened?”

“You know what I mean.”

“We have to do something quick. We can’t be out all night… our parents will worry that something awful has happened…”

“Something awful has happened.”

“But they can’t know that, Austin.”

Austin nodded.

 “We couldn’t just leave anyway. What if someone else came up here? Other kids from school are always coming up here. Someone would stumble here eventually.”

“I know you’re right but… what else can we do? Hide the body? But then we run the risk of someone finding it. And I can’t just throw it in the river. I just can’t!”

“I know this is a dumb idea, but what if we went to the hospital, left the body there, and drove away?”

 “Are you kidding?!” Sam jerked backwards out of Austin’s arms and nearly fell over. She began shouting again.

“My parents work at the hospital! There is no way we can just drive up and get away before someone sees me and knows who I am! And plus! There are cameras there! Dozens of them! They’ll see our faces, your car! Everyone in town knows your car! They’ll look at the tapes and know it was us! There has to be another way!”

“Sam… calm down… I said it was a dumb idea…”

“Taking him to the hospital?! That’s practically suicide! Hell, it is suicide! My parents will kill me!”

Austin was silent. He knew the idea wasn’t going to go over well.

“Wait…” Sam looked up and grabbed Austin’s face with her slender hand. She held his chin so that his eyes ran parallel with her own.

“Is your mom showing any houses around here?”

Austin’s eyes grew wide as he realized what Sam was really asking.

“You want to stash a body in an abandoned house?! That’s crazy, Sam!”

“No, listen! Drop it off in a place your mom is showing soon! Like tomorrow! Then someone is bound to come by beforehand to bake cookies and do all that other stuff they do to sell houses. They’ll find the body there and just assume…”

“Assume that the son of the real estate agent ditched it there!”

“Well?! It’s better than your idea!”

“…actually… Sam… that movie came out tonight, didn’t it?”

“What? What are you talking about? A movie? I don’t know! We have a little bit more important things to be worried about here, Austin!”

“That movie. With the actor you love so much. The premiere was tonight.”

“What are you talking about? Okay fine, yes! The premiere was tonight. We were supposed to go, remember? Before all this happened!”

“What time do you think it will get out?”

“Austin! Focus! I don’t understand you! Why does the movie matter? We didn’t make it! We’ll go see it some other time! We have to think of something, fast!”

“I’ve got it, Sam! I’ve got it! That movie! It’s supposed to be really long, right? About three hours? Well, then it hasn’t let out yet! That means there are people there!”

“Yes! And?”

“So, we take it there! Then maybe someone else can take it to the hospital!”

 “What about all the security cameras in the parking lot, Austin?”

“I worked there last summer, remember? They’re just for show. They’re just plastic boxes, really. No one in this town does stupid stuff like vandalism.”

Sam’s stomach rolled over on itself. Could she really do this? She would have to. She meekly smiled at Austin. The night had taken its toll on her, and this final task would be the most daunting of all. Sam summoned all of the resolve she could muster.

“Ok… Let’s do it.”

Her long, thick hair had all fallen into her face, but she was not aware enough to push it back into place. Austin brushed the sweat-soaked brown hair behind her ear. He noticed for the first time how much her makeup had run. Through the sweat, tears, and streaks of black mascara, he could almost see what her face looked like naked. It was beautiful.

“Are you sure you’re up to this?”

“Of course. I’ll be fine. I can’t let you do it by yourself.”

Austin kissed Sam as if to say he loved her. They silently walked over to the bloody blanket and each grabbed an end. Together, they dragged it to the trunk of Austin’s car. They could not bear to look long. Sam slammed the lid as soon as all of the blanket’s edges were inside.

“My heart feels like it’s going to explode.”

Those were the first words Sam said when she sat down in the passenger’s seat of the car. Austin turned over the engine. The silence of the romantic hillside was shattered as the Solstice roared to life. It startled Sam and she began to shake again.

“It’s almost all over.”

Austin gently took Sam’s hand and began reversing the car. The ride to the theater was tense and contemplative.

“What happens if we get pulled over? Look at us.”

Sam spoke in an absent, abnormally calm voice. Her tone was cut with a trace of latent panic which she was obviously attempting to conceal.

“We won’t get pulled over. I won’t speed. I promise.”

Austin squeezed Sam’s hand a little to reassure her. She did have a cause to be concerned. He talked his way out of a speeding ticket frequently. Being friends with a good majority of the police force had its benefits, but it would be significantly harder covered in blood. Sam squeezed Austin’s hand all the way to the movie theater. The streets in their small town were well lit but fairly abandoned. It was the middle of the week. Most good kids like them were home safely by now.

The parking lot of the movie theater was brightly lit, but around the back in the employee parking area, there was hardly any light at all. Austin drove up the back road behind the theater so no one would see his car from the front desk. He shut off his car’s lights and pulled up next to the employee exit. After a silent moment of preparation, he and Sam got out of the car and opened the trunk, staring inside. They took the blanket and its contents and fumbled them haphazardly onto the sidewalk right beside the employee exit.

Austin and Sam got back in the car as if running from explosives. They raced away from the parking lot with Sam in tears, but neither of them looking back. Austin drove with his left hand and stroked Sam’s back with his right.

“It’s okay… it’s all over now.”

“It will never be over.”

“C’mon Sam… it’ll be ok… it’ll all be ok now… we have to get home. Our parents will be worried… but first we have to clean up.”

“The lake,” Sam said meekly. “We can take a dip there. Our parents will believe that.”

Sam could no longer collect herself. She bent over with her head situated between her knees and cried the entire way to the lake. She went from sorrow to apathy throughout the night. As soon as they arrived at the lake, she collapsed in breathy, choking sobs for quite some time. Austin just sat and held her. When she was able to stop for a moment, he suggested gently that they go for a swim.

“Sam… Sam… Come on, Sugar. Let’s go get cleaned up.”

Sam nodded as she caught her breath. She peeled the now-crimson blouse off of her body. The skin underneath was stained as well. She unzipped her skirt cautiously, with quaking hands. Her hospital-ridden grandmother had steadier hands. As her clothes dropped to the grass, Austin picked them up and folded them in a pile.

“Please, Austin, I don’t want to be alone right now. Come in with me?”

“Sure.”

Austin didn’t know what else to say. He shed his own clothes and set them next to hers. He was upset to see that his favorite Star Wars tee and his best khakis were ruined. His mom would certainly have questions as to their disappearance when she went to do his laundry. He would have to think of some excuse later.

The water was lukewarm. The blood ran off of their bodies in amorphous clouds looking somehow unnatural as it distorted. As it blended with the water, it turned a sickly shade of innocent pink. The blood came off of their skin with only a little difficulty. Sam, however, found that she had gotten some in her hair and was trying desperately to rinse it all out. Austin gently took her hair in his hands and squeezed repeatedly as she floated on the water’s surface. He ran his fingers through the long brown and red strands until the red was gone. He leaned closer and whispered in her ear.

“Samantha Lee, I love you, Baby.”

Sam burst into sobs once again. She felt as though everything in her was irreparably broken. She fell into him and wept as chill bumps covered her skin.

 “I’m so sorry,” was all Austin could say.

Sam again composed herself long enough to finish washing.

“What do we tell our parents?” Sam asked.

“We can tell them we went swimming in the lake since the weather was so nice and some kids thought it would be funny to prank us and steal our clothes.”

“That’s a good idea,” Sam said, absent-minded again.

They stood in their undergarments around an impromptu fire, another product of Austin’s Boy Scout years, and watched the last of their evening turn into ash. Between the bursts of sobs, there was nothing but silence as Austin drove Sam home. Her parents were asleep by then. She had anticipated they would be up and full of questions for her. She was wrong. Perhaps now that she was seventeen her parents had decided they could trust her more. And they liked Austin. He was a year older and her parents knew he was just a harmless, nerdy kid. Sam snuck up to her room completely undisturbed and she could only hope Austin would be as lucky.

The light of morning came too soon. Sam wanted last night to be a horrible nightmare, but in her heart she knew otherwise. She donned her favorite white robe and went down to breakfast. She figured it would be best to maintain normalcy unless someone else brought something up. Her mother was making biscuits and sausage gravy. The smell permeated the entire household.

“Morning Mama,” Sam said as she kissed her mother on the cheek.

“Morning, Samantha dear. Did you and Austin have a good time last night?”

Sam gulped and nearly vomited.

“Yes Mama. We had a lovely time.”

“Good. He’s a good boy, that Austin.”

“He sure is.”

Sam skated through the kitchen as quickly as she could and ran into the nearby living room. She turned on the television to avoid any further discussion with her mother. The news began and Sam tried to change the channel, but her father’s entrance stopped her. They always watched the news in the morning. Sam’s father kissed her forehead and sat down in his arm chair. Just then, her mother sauntered in and stood above Sam, who was seated on the plush white couch. She fiddled with a stand of Sam’s hair.

“In our leading story this morning, local movie theater staff found a newborn baby abandoned just outside the employee exit late last night. The infant was wrapped in a picnic blanket and covered in blood, but miraculously survived…”

“Oh my! Who would do such a thing to their poor baby? What kind of person does that?” Sam’s mother screeched.

Sam replied as honestly as she could.

“I don’t know, Mama. I just don’t know.”