

Riverbend Memories

Four Short Stories About
Mud, Muic, and Almost
Moments

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Field Note Fiction

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The Mud King & Queen

*A*iden—age 5

I don't want to go to kindergarten.

I already hate sitting still in Sunday School. I already hate sitting still in preschool. I think kindergarten is just more of the same—sit still, be quiet, no fun. Mommy says it starts in a week. Whatever.

I'm outside on our patio, feeling grumpy. I like what I do now—playing with cars and Legos, making mud roads and dragon castles. Ivy plays with me every day. We live together. Well, not *together* together. My house is white. Hers is blue. But it's close enough to count.

Then I hear the sliding patio door swoosh from Ivy's house.

"Hey Aiden!" she yells, marching barefoot across the wet grass.

"Hey Princess," I yell back. I love calling her that. Her daddy does it too. The grownups always smile funny when I say it, like they know something I don't.

She's the best kind of princess—the muddy kind. Not like the frozen ones who sing and cry and wear gloves. Ivy's the kind who laughs at poop jokes and runs fast and never cares about getting her feet dirty.

It rained hard last night. Mommy called it a *deluge*. The grass is stills quishy. There's puddles everywhere, and Mommy's vegetable garden is just mud now. Way better than when it had gross tomatoes.

"Come look!" I grab Ivy's hand and pull her toward the garden.

The mud is thick and perfect. Ivy spots a lumpy pile and points. "That looks like horse poop. Like from the parade."

I laugh. "It's not poop. It's a mud monster—and it's gonna EAT YOU."

She shrieks and runs. I chase her through the wet grass, but then I slip. My feet slide out and—SPLAT—I land right in the middle of the mud.

"You fell in the horse poop!" Ivy giggles.

"It's not horse poop!" I roar. "It's mud! And now I'm the Mud Monster King!"

"Nots cared of you, you mucky, muddy, monster mess!" she teases.

"Not just a monster. I'm the KING of the mud monsters! The *muddiest* of them all!"

I scoop a big handful of mud and plop it right on top of my head. Ivy laughs so hard she slips too, sliding down next to me in the garden. We're both covered now—grass, mud, everything.

I roll onto my side and look at her. Her blue eyes are still bright under all that dirt.

"Hey Princess. Wanna be my mud queen?"

"Why?"

"Cuz I'm the king, and you're the best princess I know. We gotta do royal stuff—build mud monster guards and protect Mudland."

Ivy makes a face like she's thinking hard. "Okay. But only if I don't have to sing like Frozen Anna. I *hate* Frozen Anna. Emilia sings that song *all* the time."

"Deal."

So we build our army of mud monsters. We stack them around the edge of the gardenlike guards. We name them. We give them squishy hats. We are majestic. We are royal. We are very, very muddy.

Then Mommy calls from the house. "Aiden, bath time!"

Ugh. That's the end of Mudland. My grumpy comes back.

But Ivy's still laughing, and her laugh makes my heart feel all bouncy again.

"You're gonna make the bath dirty instead of the bath making *you* clean!" she says, giggling.

I growl. "The King of Mudland fears no bath! No kindergarten either!"

Ivy's smile fades a little. "You don't wanna go to kindergarten?"

I shake my head. "I don't wanna sit still. And I don't wanna be in a different class than you."

Her eyes go big. "Mommy said she's getting us in the same class."

I freeze. "Really?"

"Really. We're gonna be in kindergarten together."

Every part of me wants to jump up and yell. Instead, I just grin so big my cheeks hurt.

"See you in class, Mud Queen," I say.

"See you in class, Mud King," she says back.

I think Mudland is probably the best kingdom ever. But being in the same class as Ivy?

That's even better.

When Music Found Me

*I*vy — age 6 and up

The first time I heard a cello, I was six years old.

My parents had taken me to the town's annual Heart Festival. It was a mix of crafts, food stalls, and community performances—exactly the kind of place where you can smell kettle corn from five blocks away. I remember licking sugar off my fingers when the music started.

My mom is a music teacher. She plays piano and viola, and that day, her string trio was scheduled to perform. I'd heard her practice plenty of times, and even then, I thought she made magic when she played. But I had never heard her *group* play together until that moment.

As they started, something changed. The three instruments—violin, viola, and cello—wove together like a story. But it was the cello that caught me.

It didn't just *sound* pretty. It *felt* like something. The low, rich notes wrapped around me like a hug. The high, singing tones made my heart

feel like it might float. I didn't know music could hold happiness and sadness in the same breath, but the cello showed me it could.

After the performance, my dad led me over to where the trio was packing up. I couldn't stop staring at the cello. It was so big, almost taller than I was. The woman playing it had closed her eyes during the performance, totally wrapped up in the sound. I wanted to know what that felt like.

My mom noticed. "What are you doing over here, sweetie?" she asked. But then she followed my gaze.

"I want to play *that*," I whispered.

The next week, they surprised me with a cello—smaller, the right size for a six-year-old, but still full of possibility. I remember hugging it like I'd been waiting for it my whole life.

From that day on, the cello was mine. My voice. My way of understanding things I didn't know how to say. I practiced every day, not because someone told me to, but because I *wanted* to.

While other kids were signing up for soccer or riding bikes down the block, I was sitting in my room playing scales and learning pieces that stretched my fingers and my focus. Even Aiden didn't get it at first.

"Don't you ever get bored?" he asked once, flopping onto my bed while I practiced.

"Not really," I said, tightening the bow hair. "It makes me feel... whole, I guess."

He nodded, like he wanted to understand, even if he didn't. That was enough.

By fourth grade, I was playing real pieces—complex, beautiful ones. My teacher started talking about competitions and recitals. I was terrified, but I also couldn't wait.

Meanwhile, Aiden was off falling in love with basketball. He never stopped moving, and he dragged me to the park more than once to

show off whatever move he'd seen on TV the night before. I didn't always understand his world, but I saw that same spark in his eyes that I felt when I played.

We were starting to live in separate rhythms—his full of squeaky shoes and court drills, mine with metronomes and finger exercises. Still, he came to my recitals. I went to his games. And somehow, that was enough.

Mostly.

Sometimes I'd wonder: what if the music made me too different? What if it took me somewhere Aiden couldn't follow? What if he thought it was weird—I was weird—for caring so much about a wooden instrument and four strings?

But then I'd play. And when I played, all those thoughts melted away.

Because the truth is, the cello didn't just become something I did. It became part of who I am.

Tyler's OG Nickname

A iden — Age 9-ish

I've been playing basketball since before I could walk. At least, that's what my mom says. I was still in diapers the first time I launched a ball in the general direction of a mini hoop. Once I could walk? Slam dunks all day—on a toddler-sized hoop, but still. As I grew, so did the hoops. And the basketballs. And my dreams. My dad played in high school—his team went to State but lost in the final. I like to tell him not to worry. I'll bring the championship home.

I thought I got my love of basketball from him, but honestly, my mom might deserve more credit. She went all-in when I was little: basketball birthday cakes, basketball pajamas, even basketball slippers. One year, she got me a door hoop. That was great—until the thudding nearly drove my parents up the wall.

Somewhere in all that, I picked up a basketball bro named Tyler. We met at summer basketball camp after first grade. He was loud, fast, and

already trying out bad jokes. We clicked immediately. Tyler became part of everything after that—practices, tournaments, weekends, car-pools. He was more chaos than I was used to, but he made me laugh. Still does.

One Tuesday night, we were riding to practice in my dad's truck. Tyler had barely buckled his seatbelt before groaning dramatically.

"I swear, man, Emilia is out to get me."

I smirked. "What'd you do this time?"

"She's been calling me *Prince Butthead* all week," he huffed.

I choked back a laugh. "Is that... a new one?"

"It started Monday," he grumbled. "And she hasn't let up. 'Oh, your royal highness, would you like the crusts cut off your sandwich?' 'Is the gym floor too hard for your delicate princely feet?' If there's a teacher around, she just says 'P.B.' with a little bow!"

"To be fair, you *did* start it," I pointed out.

Tyler blinked. "What? No I didn't!"

"You were teasing me for calling Ivy 'Princess.' Emilia heard it. She doesn't take kindly to people teasing her cousin."

He stared at me like I'd just told him the sky was green. "I wasn't making fun of Ivy. I was messing with *you*."

"And now Emilia's messing with *you*. That's balance."

Tyler crossed his arms. "This is not balance. This is psychological warfare."

I laughed. "Maybe just... be nice to Emilia?"

"Dude, she's scary. Like smile-while-scheming scary."

"She's also smart. And funny. You'd actually like her if you stopped lobbing sarcasm at her face."

Tyler looked out the window, grumbling under his breath. "Can't believe I'm getting roasted for something I didn't even mean."

"You meant it enough to get nicknamed. That's Emilia's law."

He sighed, then made a dramatic kissy face. "What, you want me to start painting nails and playing smoochy-smoochy now?"

I gave him the world's longest deadpan stare. "Dude."

"I'm *joking!*" he said quickly. "Still. Friends with girls? Complicated."

I shrugged. "Girls are people. Emilia's actually really cool once you talk to her like she's not a cartoon villain."

"Yeah, yeah," he muttered. But his voice had less bite.

The next day, I found Emilia by the water fountain between classes.

"Hey. Think you could go a little easier on Tyler?" I asked.

"Prince Butthead?"

I smirked. "Yeah, him."

Emilia crossed her arms. "Why? He's annoying."

"He is," I agreed. "But he's also my friend. I think you two would get along...if you weren't both trying to win."

She tilted her head, considering. Then she sighed. "I'll do it for Ivy."

"Thanks."

But just before walking away, she smirked. "I reserve the right to call him P.B. if he starts it again."

"Fair enough."

Trivia for a Kiss

*I*vy — somewhere between teasing and telling the truth

It was a quiet Sunday afternoon, the kind where the sun landed soft and golden across everything. Aiden and I were stretched out on the porch, half-talking, half-laughing, both pretending not to notice how close our knees kept drifting.

That glint was in his eyes—the one that meant he was about to start something.

“You’re stalling,” I said, giving him a sideways look. “You’ve been trying to guess that band for ten minutes.”

He groaned. “Just give me a clue!”

I tapped my chin, fake thoughtful. “Okay. The name starts with ‘A’ and ends with ‘-lyptica.’”

Aiden snapped his fingers. “Apocalyptica! That’s the one!”

I laughed. “Honestly, I might as well have just told you.”

“Hey, a win’s a win.” He leaned back, smug. “Your turn.”

I braced myself. Aiden’s trivia always meant basketball.

He tapped his fingers on his knee like a coach about to drop a play. "What's it called when a player dribbles, stops, and starts again?"

I blinked. "Uh... double dribble?"

He slow-clapped, full of fake drama. "Look at you! That was a solid guess, even if it took you a little too long."

I rolled my eyes. "I was letting the tension build."

He grinned. "Let's make this interesting. First to five right answers gets a kiss."

I arched an eyebrow. "This your way of sneaking kisses past regulation?"

He shrugged, all charm. "Can you blame me?"

I shook my head, already smiling. "Fine. But don't expect me to go easy on you."

"I wouldn't dare."

We traded questions like a game of catch—music for basketball, cello terms for NBA trivia.

"Who wrote the symphony with the 'dun dun dun DUN' opening?"

"Beethoven's Fifth!" he shouted, triumphant.

"What's a pump fake?"

"It's when a player acts like they're gonna shoot but passes instead."

The score inched forward—3 to 3, then 4 to 4. Every answer got a little more playful, a little more competitive. We were toe-to-toe on the porch now, knees touching, hearts maybe doing a little too much.

Finally, I asked, "Name a rock song with a full string section. From a playlist I shared with you. Last week."

He squinted. "Hey! I listened to it. You sound like you're doubting me."

I nodded slowly. "Okay, prove it, Hot Shot."

He leaned forward, his smile lazy and sure. “Drops of Jupiter by Train. That’s five.”

“I went too easy on you,” I muttered.

“But still,” he murmured, closing the gap, “a win is a win.”

His kiss was soft. Warm. The kind that says we both knew where this was heading—even before the trivia.

When he pulled back, I raised an eyebrow.

“I guess this is one way to make sure you actually listen to the playlists I make.”