

## **His Lie, His Truth**

by Grace Ferguson

“Patrick, I want you to be honest with me. Did you take James’ black iPod Classic?”

Patrick Hardy wondered why his English teacher didn’t believe him. “No, Mrs. Plummer. Like I just told you, there were a lot of us in the locker room and I don’t know why James is saying I took it.”

“Because Mike Fenton said he saw you take it!” James Mansfield said, his flushed face steaming with fury.

The eleventh-grade class fell into a deafening hush.

Patrick strode from Mrs. Plummer’s desk to Mike’s seat.

“Patrick Hardy,” Mrs. Plummer said, “you get back here!”

Patrick ignored her, glaring at Mike.

“You saw me take the iPod?”

Mike looked at the floor. “No.”

“We can’t hear you, Mike,” Patrick said.

Mrs. Plummer rose from behind her desk. “Patrick! If you are not back at my desk in the next few seconds, you will be serving detention.”

“Then detention it is, Mrs. Plummer. Mike?”

Quivering, Mike glanced around the class, then at Patrick. “I never said I saw you take it. I said I’ve got this *feeling* you took it.”

“Same thing, if you ask me,” James chimed in.

Patrick eyed James. “How is it the same thing when Mike just said he didn’t see me take it? You’re desperate to find your culprit, so what’d you do? You run with the first opinion that comes along.”

Mrs. Plummer struck her desktop with a steel ruler. “Patrick, get up here now! James and Mike, you too.”

She checked her watch. The bell would ring in one minute. “Everyone else, you’re dismissed.”

Though the students wanted to see and hear more, they shuffled out in haste.

Patrick, James, and Mike stood before Mrs. Plummer, who was visibly annoyed. Nearly six feet tall, she appeared older than her forty years.

“Mike,” she said, “you just admitted to having only a feeling about Patrick taking the iPod, a feeling you should have kept to yourself unless you had proof. I can’t punish you for having your own thoughts, but next time, be more careful to whom you reveal them. You’re dismissed.”

Relieved, Mike left.

Mrs. Plummer looked to James. “James, you won’t fare as well as Mike. You instigated gossip amongst your classmates and slandered Patrick. I’m sorry about your iPod. But twisting a simple truth just to satisfy your chase is unacceptable. You will write a letter of apology to Patrick and you will serve detention. You can go now.”

James wished she’d stopped at the letter. Due to the detention, his parents would know about his offense, and that bothered him because they’d prohibited him from taking the iPod to school. He was bound to receive a double penalty.

“I said you can go now,” Mrs. Plummer repeated. “Or should I add more to my list?”

“No, Mrs. Plummer,” James mumbled.

He scurried from the room, while Patrick awaited Mrs. Plummer’s judgment. Patrick wished she would hurry up and get through her sermon. Since he’d already denied taking the iPod, he didn’t get why he was there or why she was angry with him.

Mrs. Plummer observed Patrick. A lanky kid with shaggy black hair, he wore spectacles that enhanced his intelligent-looking eyes. He was her best pupil, but he puzzled her. He seemed honorable, but she wasn’t so sure. She saw Mike Fenton’s point.

“Patrick, I understand you were defending yourself, but the next time I instruct you to return to my desk, I expect you to do so immediately. And for that reason, you will serve detention. That’ll be all for today.”

When Patrick arrived home, his mother told him Mrs. Plummer had called to assure her that his detention was solely because of his disobedience to her command and not because he was guilty of the alleged offense. Neither Patrick’s mother nor his father faulted him for his stance against what they viewed as a conspiracy against him.

But Mrs. Plummer continued to worry Patrick. He didn’t get why she doubted his innocence and was hurt that she hadn’t believed him. He respected her more than she knew. She was his favorite teacher and he wanted her to regard him in a positive light. She was the reason he scored consecutive A’s on his essays, and through her assignments he’d discovered his fondness for the human mind.

Patrick remembered that other time he’d been victimized: in the fourth grade, when a classmate accused him of stealing her new markers. There were no witnesses or evidence to support the accusation. Patrick defended himself with vigor, and he was declared innocent. Consequently, he steeled himself for the next possible encounter.

The following afternoon, Mrs. Plummer ordered Patrick to remain behind after class. She locked the doors, went to Patrick's seat, and stooped beside him, unnerving him with her imposing presence.

"How are you today, Patrick?"

Patrick averted his gaze to the chalkboard ahead. "I'm good, Mrs. Plummer. How about you?" Then with languid ease, he graced her with his attention.

She stared into his chameleon-like eyes, wondering whether he was truly interested in knowing about her or whether she was just a mere pawn in his kingdom. She had to hand it to the kid. He was stellar. "I'm doing just fine, thank you."

"Okay," Patrick shrugged. Silence ensued. "Mrs. Plummer?" he said. "Can I leave now? Or am I supposed to be here for a reason?"

Mrs. Plummer cleared her throat. "Patrick, have you ever felt like you were alone in your own world?"

"What'd you mean?"

"I mean so alone in your own world that no one can touch you there because you've become so unreachable. Have you ever felt that way, Patrick?"

He shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Plummer, but you're confusing me."

She sat in the chair in front of Patrick's. "Have you ever been in a world so different that soon it becomes a place where only you can understand its meaning?"

"Mrs. Plummer, are you trying to tell me something?"

"It's just a simple question, Patrick."

He twitched. "Mrs. Plummer, you're making me very nervous right now."

“Patrick, as your teacher, I want you to know that I find you quite interesting. I believe you could go far in the field of psychology.”

Despite his fascination with the human mind, Patrick hadn't given any thought to psychology from a career standpoint. Moments like these made him appreciate Mrs. Plummer. She was his most encouraging teacher. “Psychology, huh? You think so?”

“I do. Your essays transcend eleventh grade's requirements. I believe that one day you could become a great mind specialist. But before a surgeon of the mind can achieve greatness, he or she must understand the profound complexities of the mind. Which leads me back to my question. Have you ever been in a world so unique that only you can understand its meaning?”

Patrick tried to look away, but Mrs. Plummer trapped him with her penetrating stare. He wondered why she taught high school English instead of psychology. He shifted his gaze to the door. “No, I haven't. Mrs. Plummer, I get the feeling you think I'm hiding something and you're trying to get it out of me. You can dig for an eternity, but all you're going to find is this... I'm just a kid who won't back down when he's been wronged. Mike and James could have blamed anybody, yet they chose me. Why? Because I fit their profile. Or so they thought. I never say much, and I have no friends... I'd say that makes me a pretty good target. But I showed them, Mrs. Plummer, that not everybody who's like me is going to stand for the injustice.”

Mrs. Plummer wondered about the passionate, aloof, engaging, flippant, rebellious, and well-mannered young man before her. She found him brilliant.

“Patrick, there's no proof to support James' claim, so that issue is closed. But there is something I'd like you to do for me.” She paused to find the right words. “After you graduate from here, I'd like you to study psychology at university. I want you to be hailed as one of the

greats, right up there with Freud, Jung, and Maslow. But I'd also like you to learn the art of separating fantasy from reality. Fantasy is illusion, make-belief. This illusion can become so entrenched within us that we begin to view it as fact, though in reality it's fiction."

"Once you're able to separate fantasy from reality, you'll be able to effectively manage reality. Then, you'll have no trouble spotting that dichotomy within your patients. And in case you're wondering, I majored in psychology a long time ago. I simply enjoy teaching English more. But every now and then, I like to share my knowledge with a worthy candidate."

Patrick shifted in discomfort. Mrs. Plummer thought she knew him so well. "Can I go now?"

Mrs. Plummer studied Patrick. "Yes. But I'm here if you'd like to discuss this further."

After school, Patrick rode the school bus home. He waited for the bus to disappear from his sight, then traveled to his newfound spot: an open tract of land, a quarter-mile distance from his subdivision. Hardly anyone ever went there, and the government probably had plans for it. Meanwhile, it belonged to Patrick. He went to the far end of the gravelly terrain, invisible from the street. He dug into the earth and retrieved an airtight Ziploc bag containing a black iPod Classic.

He sat on the ground, unsheathed the iPod, put in the earphones, and listened to his favorite songs. Still, he kept remembering his session with Mrs. Plummer. He got the impression she was hinting again that he'd stolen James' iPod. An unlikeable person, James was hated by many of his peers. For that reason, Patrick felt anyone could have taken the iPod. Yet, some chose to brand him as the villain.

With methodic precision, he put the iPod back in the bag and placed the bag in the hole, which he then covered with dirt. As he walked home, he reiterated to himself that he

hadn't taken James' iPod. He would keep fighting to protect his character, and he would not confess because he believed he was innocent.

But Mrs. Plummer's insight haunted him, forcing him to question his fate. Would he encounter more battles to combat? Or, would he become her vision one day? He had a feeling her words would plague him until contented.