

Michael's Story

(By: Janet Scott)

4:00 P.M.

Michael jumps down the bus steps clutching his creative writing paper in his hand. He couldn't wait to show his dad the A+ he got for his poem on hunting.

He bounds up the back porch steps, racing into the kitchen nearly knocking over his Mom, "Look, Mom, wait 'til you see my English paper. An A+! What's for supper?"

"Wow, Honey, that's great. Your dad will really be pleased. We're having spaghetti, tossed salad, and garlic bread for supper. And guess what? I baked your Halloween cookies for the school party tomorrow."

"I hope you didn't put raisins in them," Michael groans.

"No, Michael, I used chocolate chips instead."

"That's good, I don't want the kids to think I have a nerd for a mother. Michael hesitates, "You're not going to be sick again tomorrow, are you?"

"Michael, I know I haven't been party Mom for a while, but you know I couldn't help it. I'm really looking forward to going to the party tomorrow and helping Mrs. Jones."

"Well, she said to remind you not to forget this time."

7:30 P.M.

"Mom, I'm starving! Where's Dad? Do we have to wait for him to eat?"

Mom tenses and sighs. She hopes there wasn't a problem at the regional sales meeting. It's getting late and she and Michael can't wait all night. He should have called if there was a delay. Bad sign.

"Sure Honey, let's go ahead. Daddy can eat when he gets here."

Michael's Story (continued)

Mom and Michael dig into dinner as they discuss tomorrow's Halloween party and what costume Mom should wear to serve her cookies and help Mrs. Jones. Just then, the front door bangs open.

"God damn it, Helen, how many times do I have to tell you to make the paper boy put the paper inside the front door, not on the lawn? Can't you even do one simple chore right?" Ed throws his briefcase across the kitchen floor and continues:

"It certainly was nice of you to wait for me for dinner. I don't know why I even bothered to come home."

"Gee, Ed, it's seven thirty. We were hungry. But sit down while I get yours. We just started, really. Ed glares at Michael and casts a disgusted look at Helen.

"Hey Dad, look at the A+ I got on my poem!"

"An A+ on a poem, Michael. Let's get serious. What are you a wimp or something? Science and math are the subjects to get A's in. Real men don't write poetry!" he grunts.

Michael is about to protest that it was about their hunting trip together, but Helen interrupts, "Ed, please, not tonight. I worked for hours on dinner. Can't we have just one dinner in peace?"

"Well, didn't you have a tough day? Did your girlfriends come over for coffee this morning? Did you talk all afternoon on the phone to you sister?"

Helen says nothing, but glances at Michael who is playing with his food. Ed takes a bite of his spaghetti. "God, Helen, this is mushy. Can't you do anything right? he screams.

Michael whispers under his breath, "It's your fault. You were late."

Ed slams his fist on the table, knocking over Michael's drink spilling it all over his poem, "That's enough out of you, young man. Go to your room!"

Michael's Story (continued)

Michael's eyes glaze over, but he blinks back the tears and swallows hard, and runs to his room. In his room, he turns on MTV. The music bounces and rocks to a beat that doesn't quite muffle the noises from the kitchen.

"Please, Ed, don't!" A jarring sound, wall pictures rattling, glass breaking, and muffled screams. "Stop! Stop!" his mother begs.

"Come back here, bitch. This is all your fault. Don't even think about running away from me!"

Michael pounds his fist into the bed and hides his head under the pillow, sobbing.

7:00 A.M.

Michael wakes up from a troubled sleep and remembers his parents' fighting. He tentatively slips past their bedroom and into the kitchen. His mother sits at the kitchen table, her head down over a cup of coffee. "I'm sorry, Michael, I'm too sick to be homeroom mother today. She raises her head. Michael sees that her eyes are swollen from crying. Her lip is cracked and bloody and there are marks around her neck.

"My stomach hurts. Can I stay home too?" Michael pleads.

At this point, Michael's father enters the room and says, "There's nothing wrong with you get dressed, you're going to school!" Ed looks at Helen sheepishly and stammers, "Honey, about last night. I'm really sorry. I promise, it will never happen again. You and Michael know how much I love you."

Michael has heard this before, sighs heavily, and trudges back into his room to get ready for school.