

The Race to Save the Park

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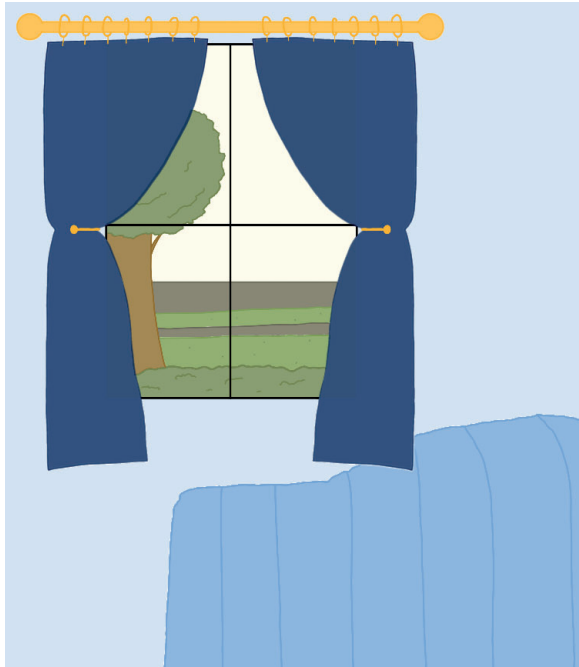
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This morning, the glow of the summer sun shines through my bedroom window, finally forcing me to get out of bed. I walk over and open the blinds, looking out at the beautiful summer scene outside. Kids of all ages are playing in the warm air and bright sunshine. Saturday mornings in the summer are my favorite. Birds are chirping, the sun is shining, and the temperature is perfect for a day outside. Plus, Ryan and I always end up at our favorite place, doing our favorite thing, playing at the park.

“Luke, are you up yet? It’s 10 o’clock, sleepyhead,” Dad calls from downstairs. I can’t complain about summer mornings, since Dad always makes a tasty breakfast before he leaves for work. I open my bedroom door and immediately smell bacon and pancakes.



“Yeah, I’m coming down for breakfast,” I shout back. As I race down the stairs, I already know my plan for the day. “Hey Dad, can I go to the park today? It’s a nice day outside,” I ask as I shove a piece of bacon into my mouth.

“I don’t see why not. Just make sure you’re with Ryan and stay safe,” Dad replies.

While we eat, I try to focus on the conversation with him, but there’s really only one thing on my mind, the place where I’ve made so many memories playing with my friends. The beloved town park.

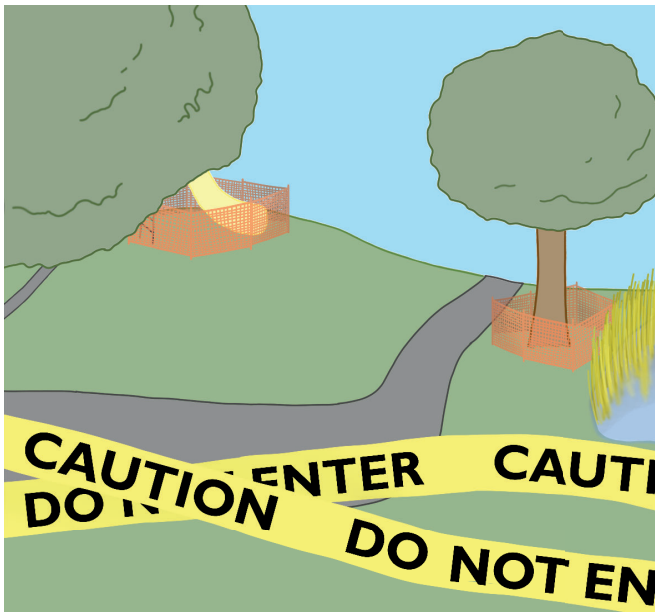
As soon as we finish eating, I’m practically out the door. Dad stops me while I’m putting on my shoes so I can say goodbye. After the short walk down the street, I’m standing on Ryan’s porch, knocking on the door to ask the ultimate question.

“Hey, want to go to the park?” Without hesitation, Ryan starts putting on his shoes.

“So, what’s the plan today? I grabbed a football if we want to play that,” Ryan says.

“I don’t know, I just want to be outside. But that sounds good,” I reply as we keep walking. Within a few minutes of walking through our quiet suburban neighborhood, we finally reach the park, but something is wrong.

We stop dead in our tracks, staring at it in disbelief. “I don’t remember these fences being here the other day,” Ryan says, staring with a confused look on his face. I can’t believe it. The entire park is surrounded by tall construction fences with colorful flags waving like warning signs. Inside, people in hard hats walk around with clipboards while loud machines whiz back and forth.



Ryan and I exchange worried glances, completely confused about what's going on. We move closer to the park, carefully stepping around the randomly placed flags and cones, but a man stops us before we get too close.

“Can I help you two with anything today?” the construction worker asks politely.

“Um... yeah, we wanted to play in the park,” Ryan says, hesitating.

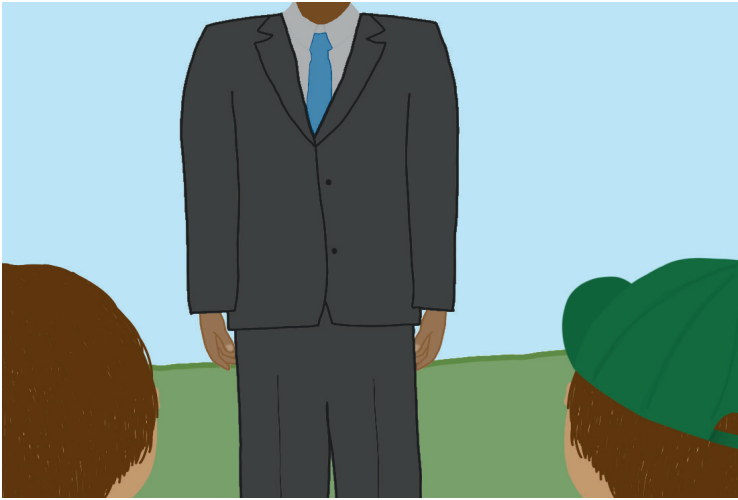
“Unfortunately, not today, or possibly ever. We're building a new business building for your town,” the construction worker explains, pointing at the machines and piles of materials. “Isn't that cool?” he adds, probably trying to make us feel better.

“No. We wanted to play,” Ryan snaps, frustration building in both of us.

“Well, you'll have to take that problem up with him,” the worker says, pointing toward a man in a suit standing near a large set of blueprints.

The man in the suit notices us staring and begins walking toward us, his polished shoes crunching against the gravel. “Hey boys, what seems to be the problem?” he asks, adjusting his tie.

“We want to play at the park, but he says we can't,” Ryan explains, sounding as innocent as possible, like maybe they'll just let us in.



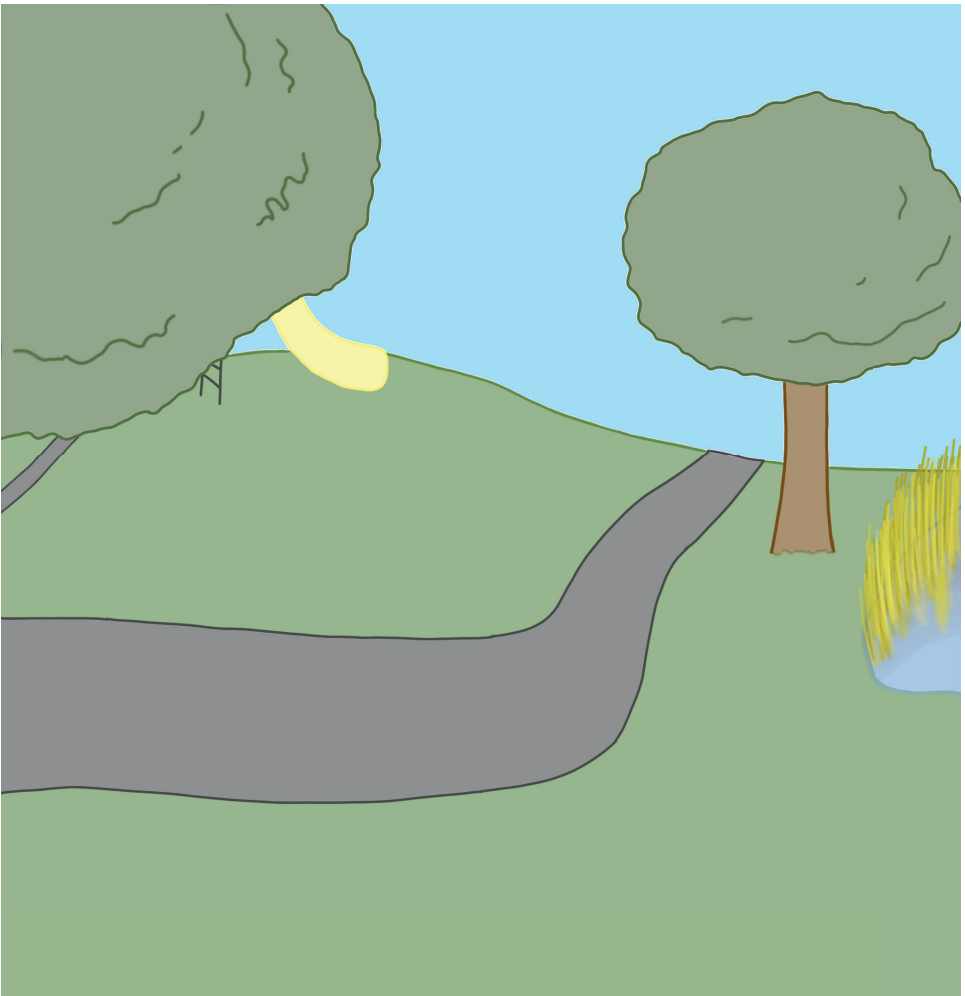
“Well, you see, this park is going to become a new business building,” the man says. “There are many other parks you boys can go to, but this is what’s best for the town. I should know, I’m the mayor,” says the man while trying to hide a smirk.

“But this one’s our favorite,” I finally say. The mayor chuckles at first, but when he realizes we’re serious, his smile fades.

“Well, I’m sorry, but there’s not much more I can do. Everything’s already planned.” We want to argue, but we’re just kids. What can we do?

He gives us a quick nod, like that settles everything, then turns and walks away. Ryan and I stand there, clueless. His words feel like heavy stones sitting in my stomach. I try to think of something clever or powerful to say, but the machines keep roaring, the workers keep moving, and the man in the suit is already gone. For the first time, the park doesn’t feel like ours anymore, like it’s slipping right through our fingers.

“They can’t do this to us,” I say. “What about all the kids who play here every day? What about them?” It’s a rhetorical question, and we both know it. Memories start flooding into my mind as we watch the workers measure the ground, dig into the dirt, and haul equipment across the field where we used to race each other. We take another lap around, just to make sure our eyes aren’t lying to us. But they aren’t, it’s true, our park is gone.



Eventually, we head back toward our homes, hoping we can find something else to do today. Still, I feel heartbroken knowing the park we visit almost every day won't exist anymore. Dragging our feet, we try to brainstorm what to do on a day like this.

“Are there any other parks we can go to? Or anything we can do to have fun?” I ask.

“Well, I mean, we could go to...” Ryan starts.

“That's close to home, and where we won't get in trouble,” I interrupt, remembering that Ryan would happily get us into any situation.

Ryan goes quiet for a moment, thinking, “Oh... then no. Not that I know of.”

We keep walking down Main Street, passing local shops filled with customers and people enjoying the sunshine. “See? Everyone's outside enjoying this nice day,” I say, trying to lift Ryan's mood, “Now we just have to find something.” Ryan goes quiet again. I look over at him as we walk, one foot in front of the other. Suddenly, Ryan stops, staring across the street at something, then nudges my side to get my attention. What is it?

Without saying a word, Ryan and I look at each other and immediately decide to cross the street to investigate. At first, it looks like a regular alleyway. But it isn't. It's oddly bright, almost like the sun is shining directly through it. The entrance is lined with plants that frame a narrow walkway, and the path almost feels like it's calling us.



“We’re going to get in so much trouble, aren’t we?” I ask, glancing over at Ryan. He’s wearing the biggest grin I’ve ever seen.

“Stop worrying about that. This is a glowing tunnel we’re talking about. We’re doing this!” he says as he grabs my hand and pulls me forward through the plants and into the alley.

The alley is covered in beautiful plants and colorful murals painted along the walls. Honestly, it makes me feel a little better about this whole thing... especially since there’s no turning back now. We have no idea what to expect on the other side.

When we finally step out of the alley, it looks like we've just ended up on the next street over. But something feels wrong. The air feels heavier... warmer too. The sky has a slightly hazy tint, like an old photograph. The world looks different, but I can't quite figure out why.

Ryan walks ahead at his normal pace, not noticing anything strange yet. I hurry to catch up, and as I do, I notice him starting to slow down. He's beginning to see it too.

As people pass us on the sidewalk, we notice their clothes. They definitely aren't normal. Men wear button-down shirts tucked into high-waisted pants. Women walk by in bright, patterned dresses that look like they stepped right out of a history book. I glance down at my own clothes... then at Ryan's. We stick out like sore thumbs. We're wearing shorts and T-shirts, bright summer colors that make us stand out even more compared to the dungarees the other boys are wearing.

"See? I told you we shouldn't have gone through there," I say, my voice shaking. "What's going on? People here are dressed differently, and home doesn't look like home."

Every street corner, every storefront, every sign looks familiar... but not quite right. It feels like we're trapped inside some weird version of our own town. We keep walking, trying to think of an explanation, but mostly we stay quiet, still in shock.



As we get closer to the town school, I see a group of kids out front playing on a patch of open lawn.

There's no playground, no bright plastic slides, no jungle gym. Just grass and a couple of jump ropes. Ryan slowly walks up to them.

"Hey... what is today?" he asks.

The boys stare at us in confusion, probably judging our weird clothes. "June 25," one of them answers.

Ryan pauses, thinking. That's the same day as when we woke up this morning. "What year?" Ryan asks.

Now the boys look even more confused. "1965," one of them says as the others start giggling and whispering to each other.

“Do you think we should head back toward the alley... and go home right now?” I ask, trying to hide the panic rising in my voice.

Ryan shrugs slowly. “We could,” he says, “... or we could use this day to our advantage and go to the park. Come on, it’s a nice day, and we don’t have anything else to do. What’s holding you back?”

“We’re sixty years in the past! That’s what’s holding me back!” I shout, finally giving up on trying to stay calm.

Ryan raises his hands, trying to calm me. “Okay, okay, fine. We’ll go home,” he says. “But I think we should at least walk past the park and get one last good look.” I hesitate... then nod.

As we walk back toward where the park should be, I start noticing even more changes around town. Storefronts have old-fashioned lettering. Houses look newer, almost like they’ve just been built. When we finally reach the spot where the park should be, we stop again, just short of the open field.

We’ve gone too far back in time. The park isn’t under construction. It isn’t even built yet. Where I saw construction tape and heavy machines earlier today, there’s now just a wide stretch of open grass.

People wander freely across the field, strolling, picnicking, tossing balls, and chatting in the warm afternoon sun.



The playground... the walking trails... the benches... everything we know and remember, none of it exists yet.

“Well... what do we do now?” I ask, staring out at the wide open land. Ryan scans the area, and I can practically see the gears turning in his head.

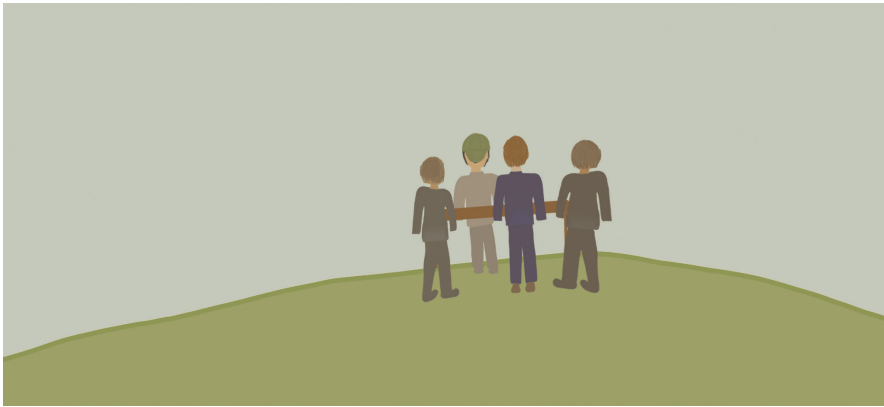
“This is... weird,” he mutters. “It’s like the park is waiting to be designed.” We start walking across the lawn, watching how people use the space.

As we wander farther across the field, I notice a small group gathered around a folding table near the far edge of the grass. Large sheets of paper are spread across the table, held down with rocks so they don’t blow away. A man stands at the center, sketching quickly with a pencil while talking to a small group of adults.

“Is he drawing something?” Ryan asks.

“What would he even be drawing?” I say. “And why would someone try to draw outside? It’s way too windy.” From where we’re standing, I can’t see the papers clearly, so I slowly move closer. Ryan follows behind me. The drawings look like maps with scribbles all over them. But they feel strangely familiar. Then it clicks. They’re maps of the park.

Ryan squints at the papers from a distance. “Do you think they’re designing something?” he whispers.



“I think...” I say slowly, finally putting the pieces together. “...I think they’re designing the park. This park.” Ryan looks at me... then at the papers... then back at me again. I see the moment the idea clicks in his head. We exchange a look. And suddenly we both realize what this means. This isn’t just the past. This is our chance to see how the park was created in the first place.

As we get closer, I can see the man more clearly. His sleeves are rolled up, a sun-faded hat sits on his head, and a pencil is tucked behind his ear.

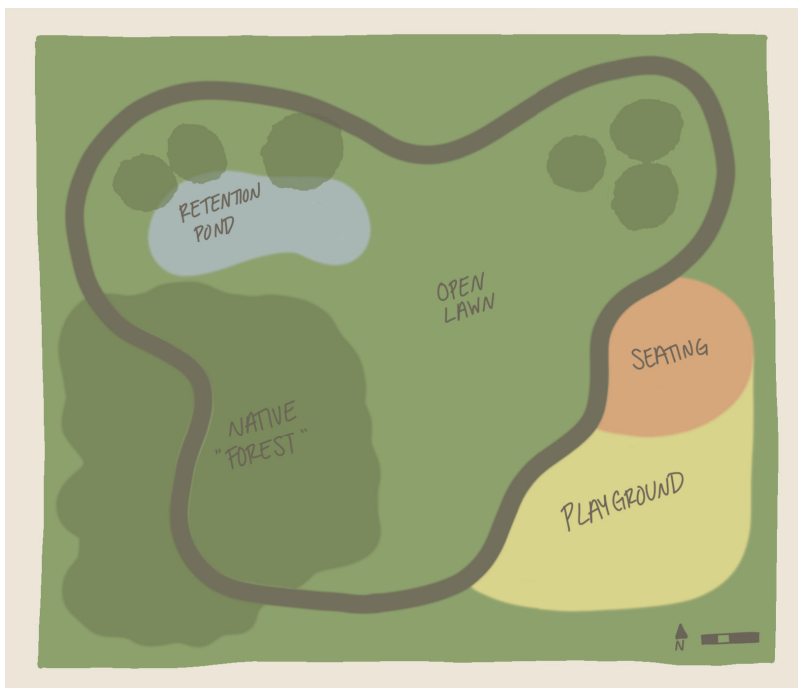
He's studying a large map of the land we're standing on, covered in scribbles and notes. The drawings show winding paths outlining green spaces, clusters of trees, and a playground.

"Excuse me," Ryan says, his voice curious but steady. The group of men turns toward us. The man with the pencil smiles.

"Well, hello there. What are you two up to?"

"We were wondering what those are," I blurt out, pointing at the maps.

"Oh, these?" he says, glancing down at the papers and then back at us. "We're designing a park. Or at least, we're trying to." He looks back down at the plans with pride. "What do you think?" he asks. "Looks like a park you'd visit?"



Ryan and I stare at the drawings in shock. Our jaws practically hit the ground. The winding trails, the playground equipment, the open lawns, it's the park we grew up playing in. "Thoughts?" the man asks, rustling the papers slightly.

We know we can't tell him about the future. If we do, we'll give everything away.

"It looks..." I stare at the plans, imagining myself running along the trails and playing in the grass. "... awesome. The playground is in the perfect spot, and the open grass is great for throwing a football or something."



"Great!" the man says as he begins sketching again. "That's exactly the goal."

"Can I ask a question?" Ryan says.

The man looks back up. "Ask away."

“Why are you building this park?” Ryan asks, glancing across the open lawn where people are already enjoying the space.

The man pauses for a moment before answering. “Well, before I explain that, I should introduce myself. I’m Mr. Walker. I’m a professional landscape architect.”

Ryan and I exchange a quick look. “To put it simply,” Mr. Walker continues, “designing parks is my job. But on a deeper level, parks are places where families, wildlife, and entire communities can come together.

They’re spaces where nature and people share the same ground.” We stare at him with wide eyes, hanging on every word. “Think of it this way,” he says. “Open spaces like this help cool the air during summer. They absorb stormwater when it rains. They give birds and small animals a place to live. Nature does a lot of work for us without most people ever noticing.”

“So why add playgrounds and other things?” I ask. “People already enjoy the space the way it is.”

Mr. Walker smiles and glances at the other men around the table before answering. “Parks aren’t just good for the environment. They’re good for communities, too. Parks bring people together. They give neighbors places to meet, kids places to play, families places to spend time together, and everyone a place to relax.”

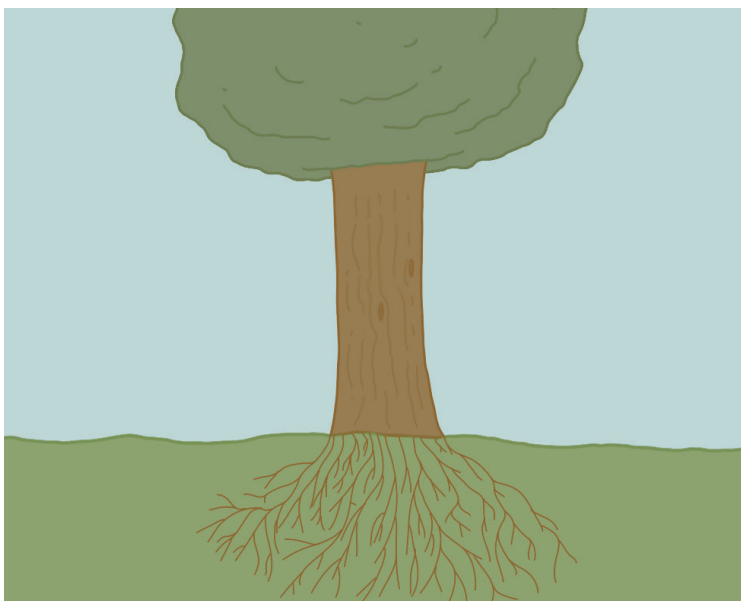
He pauses, thinking carefully about his words. “A town without a park...” he says slowly, “...doesn't really feel like a community.” He rests his hands on the table and studies us with a curious smile.

“You two seem awfully interested in this project,” he says. “Most kids only care about where the swings and slides will go.”

Ryan and I glance at each other, trying to think of what to say. Ryan shrugs. “We... really like parks. And we're interested in why they get built.”

Mr. Walker chuckles softly. “Well, I'm glad to hear that. But the reasons behind it are bigger than you might think.” He walks around the table to the other side, and I follow him closely, with Ryan right behind me.

Mr. Walker points to a shaded section of the map. “See this area of trees?” he says.



“They’re not here just to make the park look like a forest. These will be native species, like oaks, maples, and hickories. Their roots soak up stormwater underground, so nearby neighborhoods don’t flood every time it rains. They can also act as natural barriers against wind and harsh weather.”

I lean closer to the map. “So, the trees and plants help the environment around town?”

“Exactly,” Mr. Walker says with a smile. “Most parks are created for environmental reasons first.”

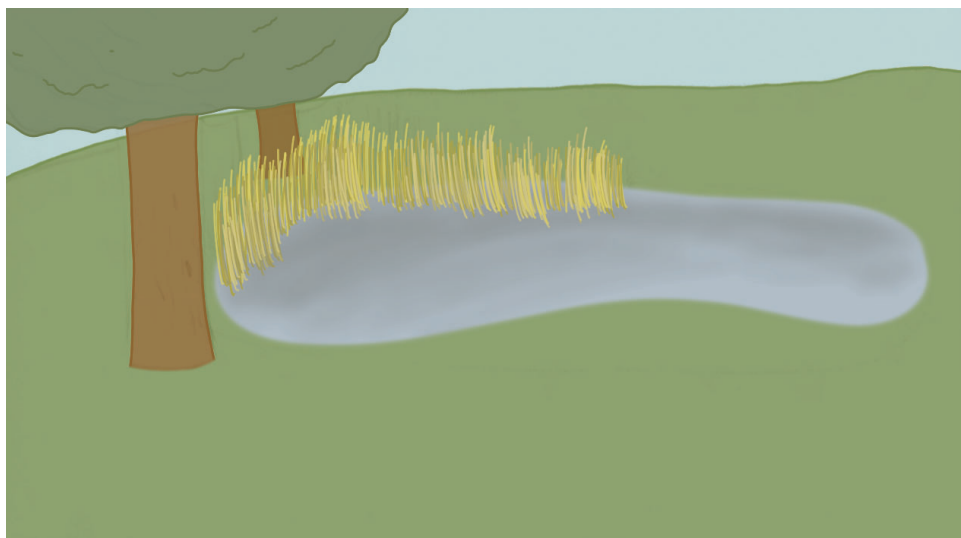
Ryan pauses for a moment before asking another question. “But why make a park at all? Why not just build a building?” I glance at him, knowing exactly why he asked that.

Mr. Walker’s expression softens. “Because a town needs more than buildings to feel like a hometown,” he says gently. “It needs places where people can breathe, relax, and connect.” He taps the center of the map. “They’re the heart of a community.” I stare at the plans in awe.

“Like this,” he continues, pointing to the large open space. “This lawn would be perfect for picnics, games, or just lying in the grass.”

“So, it’s important for people, too?” Ryan asks.

“Of course,” Mr. Walker replies. “And see this pond here? People can sit nearby and relax. But it will also attract birds, frogs, and butterflies, bringing lots of wildlife.” Ryan and I smile.



“So, everything can exist together here,” Ryan says.

I nod and interject, “I never realized how many environmental benefits parks bring to a town.”

“A good park can teach you something every time you visit,” Mr. Walker says. “Maybe you spot a bird you’ve never seen before, or you notice the leaves on a tree and learn about a new species. Parks make people curious.”

Ryan looks out across the open field. “And everyone can use it?”

“That’s the idea,” Mr. Walker says. “Kids, families, elderly people, and everyone in between can enjoy the public space because a park belongs to everyone in the community. It’s one of the few places where everyone is welcome.”

“I didn’t realize parks were this important,” Ryan says quietly, staring at the plans.

“They’re more important than most people realize,” Mr. Walker replies. “A good park can make a town healthier, happier, and more connected.” Ryan and I exchange a look, half amazement, half disbelief. We’re standing face-to-face with the man who designed the place we love most. And after hearing why the park exists, I know one thing for sure. We have to save it.

“Thanks for telling us about the park,” I say.

“Yeah,” Ryan adds. “Who knew parks were so important?”

Mr. Walker smiles. “I’ll always happily talk about my work,” he says with a chuckle. “Now, why don’t you two go find your families and play? That’s what a park is meant for.” We wave goodbye and take one last look at the plans before walking away.

“Well... that was interesting,” Ryan says. “What do we do now?”

“We have to save it,” I say. “But how?” We stop under a large shade tree. A tree I recognize immediately. It’s still here in the present-day park. As I run my hand along the rough bark, something clicks in my mind. This is why we were brought here.

“We need to go back to the present,” I say. “We need to tell people why this park matters.”

“But how?” Ryan asks. “We can’t just say we traveled back in time and met the designer.” We sit quietly for a moment, trying to figure out how to make people listen.

“Well,” I say finally, standing up, “for starters... we should probably go home.”

“Which means finding that alley again,” Ryan adds.

As we start walking away from the park, I notice the groups of people scattered across the open lawn. Families sit on blankets having picnics. Friends walk through the grass, talking and laughing. Even without the design, the space is already alive. It’s strange to think that one day this peaceful field will become the park Ryan and I know so well.

When we reach the sidewalk, I glance back toward the table where the plans are spread out. The men are still gathered there, the papers fluttering in the wind as they measure and mark the land. They’re designing the future park. A park that Ryan and I have already spent years enjoying.

We step off the grass and onto the sidewalk, the sounds of laughter and conversation fading behind us. As we start walking home, I notice even more differences between the past and the present. Storefronts stand in the same places, but their signs are painted in bold, old-fashioned lettering.

“It looks so... new,” I say quietly. It’s like the entire town has just been built, untouched by storms, kids’ games, and time.

When we turn down the street where the alley should be, we start searching for the bright glow and the plants we saw earlier.

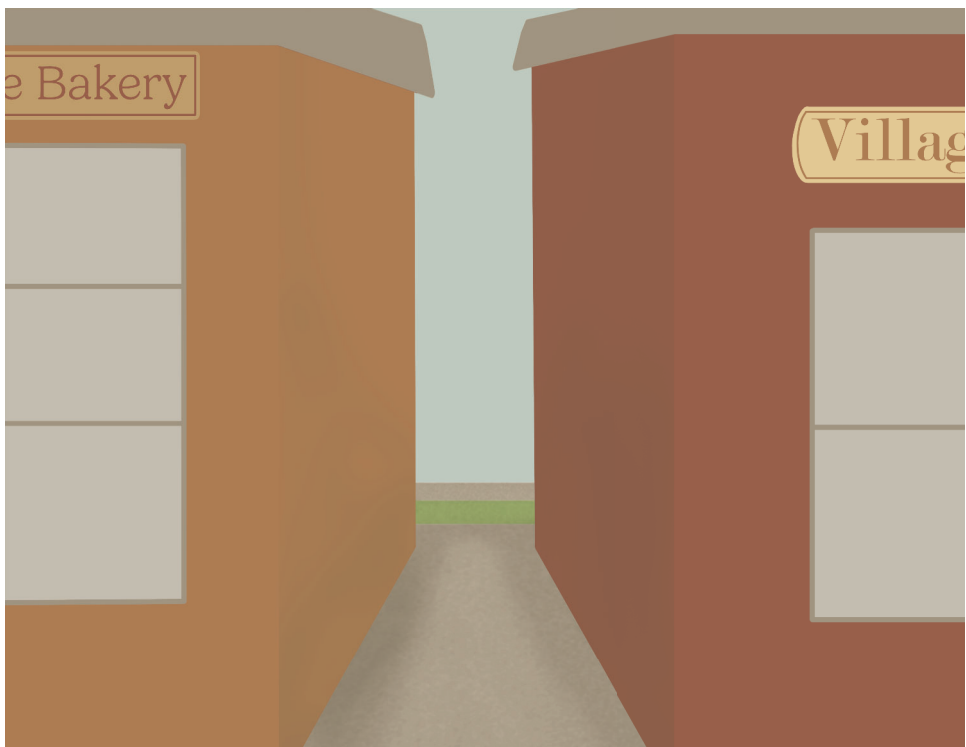
But something feels different. “I thought it was up here... on the left,” Ryan says, hesitating as we keep looking.

“Wait... is it that?” I ask, pointing ahead. The alley doesn’t look the same. It’s dimly lit, and there were no plants surrounding the entrance.

“It has to be,” Ryan says as we both walk toward it.

I stop at the entrance and ask, “Do you think it’ll still work?”

“It has to,” Ryan says. “It’s our only way back.” We exchange one last look, half nervous, half determined, then take a deep breath and step into the alley, hoping the dim light will take us home.



As we walk deeper inside, I notice the light slowly growing brighter. I remember how the alley looked the first time we walked through, full of color and life.

When we finally step out the other side, everything looks normal again. Just to be safe, I immediately look around for someone to ask the date. We aren't wasting any time.

"Hey, sir!" I call out to a man across the street. He turns toward us, confused.

"Uh... yes? Can I help you, boys?"

"What day is it? And what year?" Ryan shouts over the sound of passing cars.

The man looks even more puzzled. "June 25... 2019," he answers slowly. Ryan and I try our best to stay calm, so we don't attract attention.

"Thank you," we both say quickly before walking away. We hurry down the street until we're far enough away to panic.

"We're still not back yet! What is going on?" I shout.

"It's okay," Ryan says quickly. "There's probably a reason we're not home yet. Think, what could we still do to save the park? Maybe there's... I don't know... unfinished business here?"

"This isn't a movie, Ryan," I say, completely losing my composure. "What do you mean 'unfinished business'?"

“No, I’m serious,” he insists. “Think about it. What can we still do in the past to help the park?”

We start walking again without thinking, heading toward the park out of habit. As we walk, I notice the town looks closer to what we remember. People wear normal clothes again, which makes me feel a little better. At least we don’t stand out.

“Well... the only thing I can think of,” I say as we turn the corner toward the park, “remember how we planned to talk to Mayor Bryant when we got back?”

Ryan nods.

“What if we talk to him now? Maybe if we explain why the park is important, he’ll protect it before anyone even tries to destroy it.”

Ryan’s eyes widen. “That might actually work!”

We immediately turn around and rush toward City Hall. Luckily, it’s only a block from the park, so it doesn’t take long before we’re standing on the front steps. A woman opens the door and holds it for us as we walk inside. Ryan and I stand in the lobby for a moment, unsure where to go, until we hear footsteps behind us. A man in a suit approaches.

“Hello,” he says kindly. “How can I help you two today?”

We slowly turn toward him. “Hi... can we talk to Mayor Bryant?” Ryan asks, trying to sound mature.

“I believe so,” the man replies. “Follow me.”

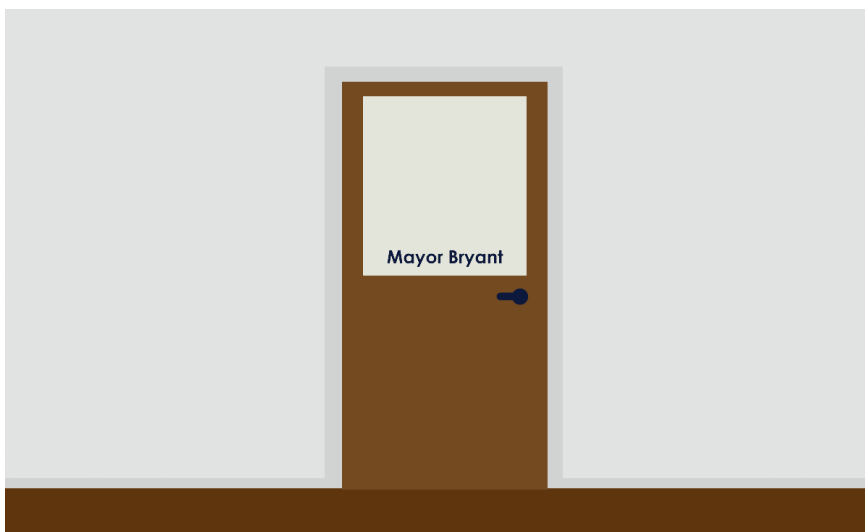
He starts walking, and we hurry after him. “May I ask why you’d like to speak with the mayor?” he asks as we climb the stairs.

“We want to talk to him about the park,” I say quickly.

“Oh? Is something wrong with it?”

“No,” Ryan answers. “We just want to talk.”

The man furrows his brow, confused, but thankfully, he doesn’t ask anything else. Instead, he leads us down the hallway and points to a door labeled **Mayor Bryant**. “Well,” he says with a smile, “I hope your meeting goes well.”



We step up to the door. Knock. Knock. Knock. “Come in,” a voice calls from inside. We open the door and walk in. The mayor looks up from his computer.

“Hello there,” he says. “How are you two doing? Is there something you want to talk about?”

“Hi,” Ryan begins. “We’re Luke and Ryan, and we wanted to talk about the town park.”

“Of course,” Mayor Bryant says, leaning back in his chair. “Is something wrong with it? Or do you want to talk about it?”

“We just wanted to tell you how much we love it,” I say. “And how important it is.”

“For everyone,” Ryan adds. “And for the environment.”

The mayor nods thoughtfully. “Well, I’m glad to hear that you boys enjoy the park. It’s always nice hearing from members of the community.”

“It’s not just us,” I continue. “The park supports a lot of wildlife too, like birds, insects, and fish. It’s really important for the environment.”

“And the trees help clean the air and absorb stormwater,” Ryan adds. “So, the streets don’t flood.”



“And it brings people together,” I say. “Families, friends, people of all ages. It’s where the community connects. You can’t replace that with a building.”

“Not that you’re trying to build one there,” Ryan quickly adds.

“No, I mean...” I start, trying not to panic. “The park is just really important. And you shouldn’t replace it without thinking about everything it does for the town.” Ryan and I exchange a nervous look before turning back to the mayor. The room goes quiet for a moment. Finally, Mayor Bryant smiles.

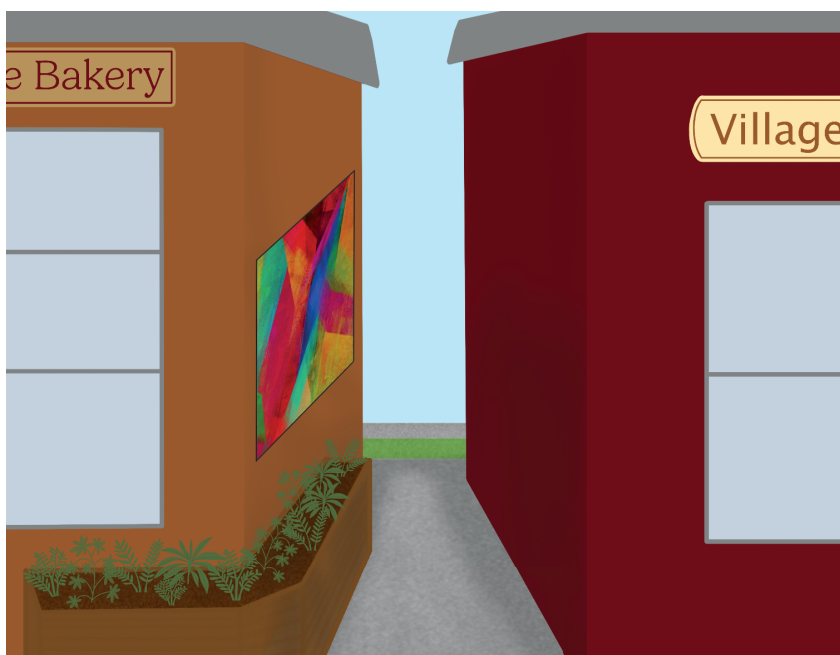
“Well,” he says, “I’ve never thought about changing or demolishing the park. But thank you for sharing. It’s very insightful, and I’ll certainly keep it in mind if that question ever comes up.” He gives us a firm nod. To me, that nod feels like a promise.

“Thanks for letting us talk to you,” I say as we head toward the door.

“Of course,” he replies with a wave, “Anytime.” As we walk out of his office and back towards the lobby to leave, we’re as silent as a mouse, thinking. Once we step outside City Hall, I turn to Ryan. “Do you think that worked?”

“I don’t know,” he says. “But I really hope so.”

We hurry back toward the alley. It doesn’t take long before we spot the bright glow and the tall green plants lining the entrance. “We found it!” Ryan says. We practically run toward it.



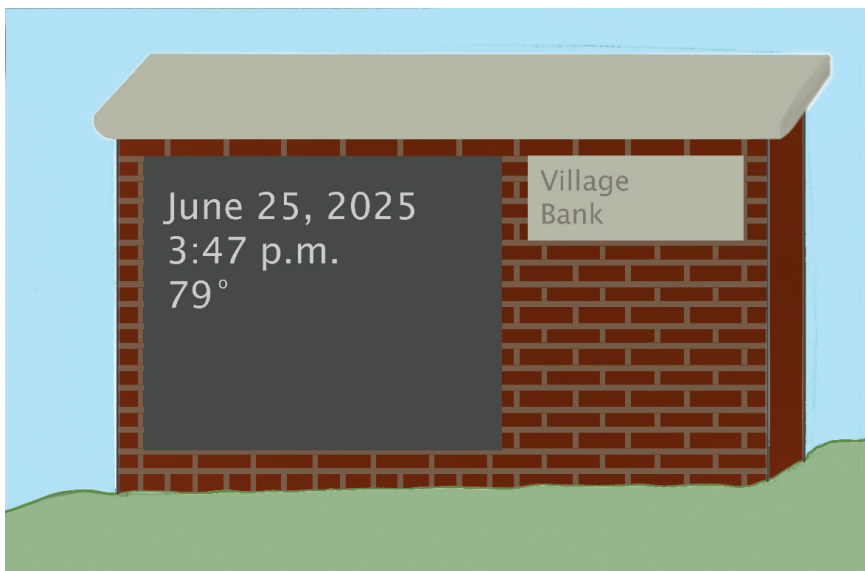
I'm exhausted from being stuck in the past, and I'm hoping this finally takes us back to our own time. Without hesitating, I step inside.

As we walk deeper into the alley, the glow grows brighter and brighter. The plants look taller now, their flowers finally blooming. The light surrounds us as we walk until we are out on the other side. Ryan and I blink in disbelief.

Everything looks normal again. The same cracked pavement. The same brick walls. The same alley we walked through earlier that morning.

But how do we know we're back? I start looking around for anything with a date on it or if there's anyone around. But I don't see anyone nearby. We start walking around to find something that'll assure us we were back in the present.

As we turn onto Main Street, I see the bank's large, animated sign with, finally, the correct date. June 25, 2025.



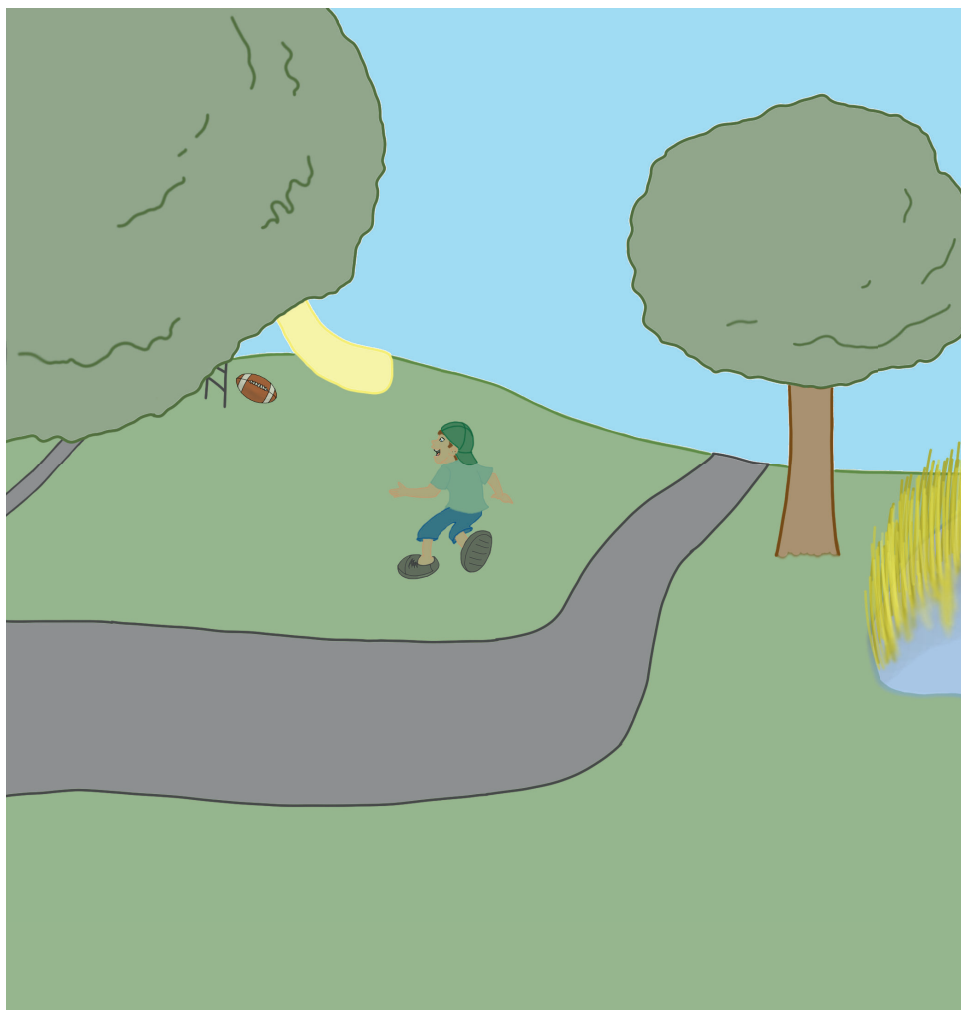
I turn to Ryan, "We're back," letting out a deep sigh of relief. "We actually made it back."

"Thank goodness," Ryan says. "Now we need to get to the park!"

We sprint toward the park as fast as we can. When we finally arrive, we stop at the edge of the grass. The park is still there. Ryan and I immediately start cheering, running across the field.

"I can't believe it worked!" I shout.

"I knew it would," Ryan says, tossing the football toward me. "I trusted him to keep his word." We spend the rest of the day playing in the park, happier than ever. Because the park is still here. And the community around it is too.



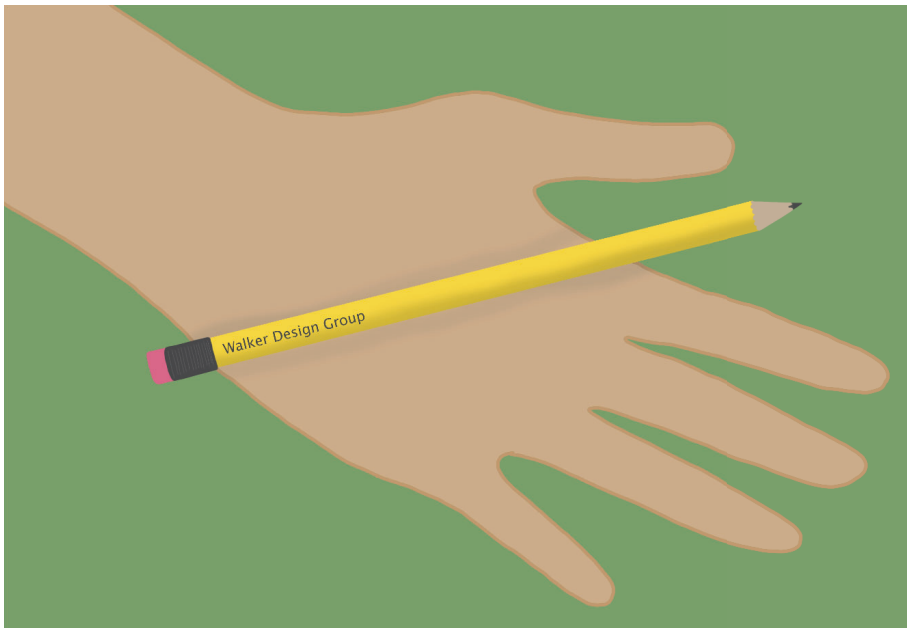
But after a long day, we start heading back home and reflect on everything that just happened. “What if this was all a dream?” I begin to ask, hoping I don’t sound insane.

“What do you mean?” Ryan asked back.

“Today just seems like it would be something out of a dream. How did an alley take us back in time? What if it wasn’t real and it was all in our heads or something?”

Ryan, trying to calm me down, said, “It was insane what happened today, but it was real. People might not believe us, but we know it happened.”

“Yeah, I guess,” I mumble under my breath as we continue to walk. As we approach Ryan’s house, I feel something in my pocket that I don’t remember from earlier. I reach in and grab a pencil. One I picked up from the ground while talking to Mr. Walker.



“Is that...” Ryan starts to ask as we exchange a look, knowing what this means, “There’s your proof!” Both our faces light up. “People might not believe us, but we have the proof! We successfully saved the park!”

Luke and Ryan visit the park almost everyday during summer break. It's their favorite place, of course. They have the freedom to run around and play in the beaming sun and fresh air. Who wouldn't love it there?

Or so they thought. Until one day they visit the park and find it under construction. What will they do now? What are the lengths they are willing to go to save the park?



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