

Honorable Mention, Prose, Grades 10-12, Etty Last

The Puzzle

Hiding all the time can be exhausting, and Luke Hensler was super good at being exhausted. He was super good at sitting in class and drifting off to the world of dreams and wonderful blurriness.

“Luke Hensler,” shouted Mr. Buntly, “pick up that head of yours and pay attention!” and all the wonderful blurriness sadly went away.

“I’m up,” Luke said.

“Amazing! Now, let’s talk about how World War two ended! Yes, Malinda.”

“Didn’t Hitler die?” Luke looked at her and started to pay attention.

“Well he killed himself, but yeah he died,” Mr. Buntly replied, “No one ever found his body, what do you guys think about that?”

Luke watched as people started to think. He saw the wheels turning and watched as his hands went up.

“Maybe he’s not dead”, a kid in the back said, “maybe he got away, and those witnesses who saw him explode were lying”.

“Well that’s an interesting idea, but that’s not what happened and you all have nothing to worry about”, he saw the tense faces, ”Hitler is dead”.

Luke was sitting at the diner and overheard a group of twelfth graders talking about the woods and how people stopped going there; how they should go hiking there, and how it could be fun.

“I saw this lake that's really mossy and thick! I couldn't see my toes when I stepped in,” said one of the boys.

“You stepped in?! Brent, you're disgusting!” said one of the boys, his name was John.

The boys laughed about the misty woods then seemed to forget about it completely.

The next day Luke was walking in a store, he passed the TVs and saw a group of girls giggling about how Johnny Depp almost died in Pirates of the Caribbean. They talked about how a character had died when they tied a brick to his shoes and sunk him to the bottom of the sea. They talked about how he was thought to be dead but then miraculously turned up again.

“Like I freak out! I mean his father was alive now! But then he gave his heart to save his dad, and was like wow!” The other girls were hanging on her every word.

“Did you see the post-credit scene? It was so cute!”

The girls screamed and continued their banter, not noticing Luke walking on.

Luke was walking toward the woods. No one saw him go there and no one saw him come out ever again. The town looked for him for days but he never turned up. His missing person sign still hangs in every gas station, grocery, and lamp post, but no one ever found Luke again. Rumors spread of how he ran away, or how he was recruited by the CIA. In the end, no one knew what happened to him.

But you know what happened to Luke, don't you?