

Missing
A Short Story Based On "Hatchet" by Gary Paulsen
By Irish Gabriel Gallagher

Josephine Robeson hung up the phone, knowing that her ex-husband, William, would call again in an hour to check if Brian was still en route to Canada.

But, Will did not call an hour later. Nor two hours later. Nor three, nor four, and so on. At 9:00 that night, he finally called. And at 9:00 that night, she was sure that Brian was with him. She was sure that they were in the woods, camping and hunting. Little did she know, he *was* in the woods. Just not with his father.

"I'm sorry to call again, Josephine. But I'm concerned. Didn't you say Brian's plane left early in the morning?" Will said on the phone.

"Yes," Josephine spoke softly into the phone, her voice tired. She was terrified to ask why, but she dared to.

"He should be here by now," he said, "and he isn't."

So they set up a police investigation, but it wasn't working so far.

One morning, she awoke and for just a heartbeat, she forgot. But then, it all came flooding back to her like a wave hitting someone who didn't know how to surf.

She thought about how none of this would've happened if it weren't for her. *I was selfish*, she thought, *I let my feelings and my impulses get in the way of my family*. For if she hadn't done what she did, she and Will would still be together. And if they were still together, Brian wouldn't be on his way to Canada to visit his dad for the summer, and he would still be in her arms. If she hadn't done what she did, right now she would be making eggs for Brian as she hummed the sweet song he played for his last piano recital. If it wasn't for-

No. She wasn't going to think that way. No way.

But she couldn't help but think about the time she found Brian's diary while cleaning his room a few months ago.

Dear Diary-

Today, I saw Mom with her so-called work friend, Zach. I couldn't believe it. All this time, she'd been cheating on Dad! They were at the park, kissing on the bench. I'm really mad at Mom, and I think I might have to tell Dad. Still, I gotta think it over. She may be a cheater, but she's still my mom.

-Brian

Will found out from the man she was having an affair with, and he left her. He was mad for a while, but the forgiving man he was, he accepted her apologies, but never went back to her. And, well, here she was.

She opened Brian's top drawer and dug under his clothes, unfolded, of course. Finally, she found the diary, and opened it up to that page.

She may be a cheater, but she's still my mom.

Josephine read these words over and over again, tracing them with her finger. Then, she started to cry. Little tears at first, slowly drizzling down her cheeks like tiny worms. Then, she really began sobbing. She cried so hard that there was a puddle at her feet.

As the days went by, she called the police five times a day for any updates, but after two weeks, they stopped looking. Through all this, she had not one time called Will.

She didn't want to. She was worried about her son and she didn't want to revisit her failed marriage. Besides, he reminded her too much of Brian.

But then she realized that this is what tore apart their family in the first place-her putting what she wanted ahead of reality and what was best for the family.

"Josephine! I've been trying to reach you!" Will cried when she finally dialed his number.

"Yeah, I know," she said slowly. There was a long moment of silence. Finally, Will shed the first tear.

"I'm sorry, Will. I'm so, so sorry."

He took a deep breath and softly whispered, "Look outside your window."

She threw open the curtains, so hard that they dropped to the floor. It was the first light she'd seen since she found out her son was missing. And there he was. Standing there with a goofy smile and his arms wide open. She didn't know how he got there, but she didn't care. She ran downstairs and into his arms. "I love you," he said. She repeated it and smiled, her first smile since Brian disappeared.