

Usochi Ilozumba

Daniel Gellasch

Moral Compass Competition

Interesting thing about Usochi: When I was little, I used to fight a lot with my younger sister and one day we got a 2-days suspension from school due to a fight. Now, we are the best of friends.

Its moral dimension: I was faced with the dilemma of controlling my temper and facing the consequences or having it out with my annoying sister. I chose the latter and I regretted it!

Interesting thing about Daniel: When I was about 4 years old, I was offered a piece of candy that another child had stolen from a basket on the teacher's desk.

Its moral dimension: Faced with the idea of complicity for the first time.

Our story:

Characters: Jade, Diane, Gwen, and Stan

Plot: All close high-school friends. They are in that early teenage years when boys think they are men but hardly know themselves; and girls are finding their feet and eager to explore forbidden boundaries. Diane, sweet as a pie but extremely nutty; Jade, the pranks mastermind; Stan, the scary cat and Gwen, the tough cookie. Having been born in a wealthy home with strong moral discipline,

Jade decides one morning, to Stan's horror, to steal the key to his father's cellar. Gwen and Diane jumped on the idea while Stan was deeply troubled by the thought of them getting caught.....

Moral dilemma:

Hint: Any ideas for a story that includes self-control in conflict situations and ideas of shared complicity?

Story:

It was one of those summer mornings when the no-school, nothing-to-do sluggishness that inevitably grabs ahold of bored teenagers shortly after breakfast had begun to do its work. They were all laying around Stan's garage. Gwen and Diana were draped across the worn, faux leather couch, sending each other screenshots of different parts of the internet and occasionally letting out a single beat of silent laughter. Jade sat perched on the concrete floor, her chin resting on the graffiti-covered chest that served as a coffee table. She looked over at Stan as he flipped through a milk crate of his father's record albums.

"It's only 11am and I'm already more bored than is allowed by local ordinance." Stan paused the running of his fingers and looked back at her.

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“Well, that’s summer for ya. I’m broke, you’re broke, and the wonder twins over there are broke as well.” He gestured with the corner of a Fleetwood Mac album at Gwen and Diana, who had now handed their phones to each other.

“It’s true,” they said in unison. “We’re broke.”

“There’s got to be *something* we can do!” spat Jade. “Is there anyone we haven’t pranked yet? What about Fischer? He only lives a block from you, right?”

“No Fischer,” replied Stan. “His mom still doesn’t want to see any of us since you convinced him to help us cover Coach Ibarra’s car with silly-string. I haven’t even walked through their block since Ms. Fischer called my mom.”

“This is stupid,” said Jade. “Sometimes I just wish-“ She was interrupted as a faded brassy glint caught her eye. There, on a nail sticking out of one of the exposed studs by the door that led into the house, was a single skeleton key.

“What in the world is *that*?” she cried.

“What?” asked Stan, following the invisible line from Jade’s eyes to the key. “Oh. That. Just the key to my dad’s cellar.”

“Your dad’s *what*?” asked Gwen, lowering Diane’s phone into her lap.

“Cellar. You know, like a wine cellar? He’s been making wine since before I was born and I guess that’s where he keeps the bottles so they can age correctly or whatever. Nobody’s supposed to go in there.”

Diane looked across the couch at Gwen, then over to Jade. “That’s awesome,” said all three in quick succession. Stan’s eyes widened.

“No. Nope. No. We’re not doing this. We’re not having this conversation.”

“Let me get this straight,” said Jade, slowly standing up from beside the chest. “You’ve got a skeleton key that unlocks a forbidden cellar *in this very house*, and you’ve never even told us about it?”

“Yeah,” exclaimed Gwen. “I’m feeling a little betrayed that you didn’t think this kind of Scooby Doo weirdness warranted our immediate attention. This is an *adventure*.”

“An *adventure* . . .” whispered Diana under her breath. She nodded in agreement.

“Guys, I’m serious. My dad will literally, directly, physically, tangibly *kill* me. The wine’s like, his *thing*. It’s like a straight-up Bluebeard rule of the house that nobody goes down into the cellar.” Stan had already begun to think of the various means and methods his father had at his disposal to make his upcoming senior year miserable: no car, no job, busywork around the house, father/son fishing trips. He shuddered.

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Gwen stepped across the space between the couch and the chest, standing on top of the table with her hands on her hips in her best silhouette of obstinate resolve.

“We’re going down there. I’ll tie you to that chair if I have to, but we’re doing this. This isn’t a negotiation, Stan.” She stepped down from the table and crouched down beside the crate of records, bringing her eyes to meet his. “The only thing up for debate is whether you’re gonna be cool about it and join us, or if I’m going to have to murder you and hide you in your dad’s creepy cellar. Your choice.”

“What if we rig it up with some kinda booby trap?” Jade had already begun to formulate several plans for leaving the space more comedically hazardous than she had found it.

“It’s a call to adventure,” said Diane, peeking around Gwen’s shoulder. “I’m not one to shirk destiny and whatnot.”

Stan slowly stood and looked around the room at his three friends, quickly trying to weigh what was at stake: Solidarity with his peers, a sense of excitement on an otherwise eventless day, the desire to belong, and -perhaps most strongly- the desire to not frame himself as a coward. But then he thought about his father. About how hard he had worked over the decades slowly honing his hobby. He remembered his dad telling him about his first few batches, and how long it had taken him to get the grapes to do what he wanted. About how he’d someday show Stan how to make it, and how to take over the cellar when he was gone . . .

“Well??” demanded Gwen, stepping even more into Stan’s space and jabbing a finger into his chest. “What’re you gonna do?”

Stan thought for a brief moment, then opened his mouth to reply. . . .

Announcer: “Tune in next week to find out what Stan will do on *After School Ethics Special*. . .