
The Swings and the Sun

Sophily

Runner Up

When I was alive, Bella wasn't. I was one; she hadn't been born yet.

When I was eleven, Bella was ten; we hadn't met yet, but I would've been in middle school and she would've been in elementary school. When I was sitting alone during lunch, she was probably out on the play structure during recess on the swings pumping her little legs so she could fly as high as the chains would allow her.

When I was fifteen and Bella was fourteen, I was in tenth grade, she was in ninth. She was a freshman, new to our school and our town. I was a sophomore. I didn't know her then, but I had seen her around before— with a group of friends who were the type of people who were fake in a way that you knew was fake, but were always afraid to say it out loud to their faces.

When I was sixteen and Bella was fifteen, we had a single class together and that was enough. Something about me must have fascinated her like she had fascinated me because she continued to talk to me and we got closer— became friends even.

When I was sixteen and Bella was fifteen, we went on a field trip together for school but it was just a hike in the forest and everyone had already hiked through the gravel sidewalks before, but Bella hadn't, so I got to show her all the little paths and places that my mom had showed me when she first brought me there. I didn't say that though because saying it would have made Bella's smile a little smaller and her eyes a little dimmer and mine too because neither of us wanted to talk about moms.

When I was sixteen and Bella was fifteen, we went to an observatory to look at the stars. I wrote a poem about her that night— though I never showed it to her or anyone else— about how she was my sun and all the ways she was colorful and beautiful and bright. I wrote about her smile and her laugh, how it was the genuine type of laughter that made you want to say something funny again just to hear it again except when anyone ever mentioned or asked about her dad because then it would turn into a bittersweet sort of laugh to mask her pain. The kind of pain she didn't want anyone to see so she hid it behind a mask, but the kind of pain that I was able to see because I could tell from the sadness in her eyes the mask didn't quite cover up.

When I was seventeen and Bella was sixteen, we celebrated her birthday together in her empty house, curled up on the couch watching movies eating snacks and a store-bought cake— just the two of us. She fell asleep at some point, her head resting on my shoulder relaxed and I watched her chest go up and down as she breathed and I felt the warmth of her body against mine as I fell asleep too.

When I was seventeen and Bella was sixteen, we went out to the forest again but this time not during school. We went deeper into the forest because there were no teachers or supervisors keeping us from doing so. Because it was nighttime, all the sounds of the forest seemed to blend together to create a hushed melody carried by the wind playing just for us. We walked so far we found the old honey locust tree “Lover’s Locust” with of all the couple’s names carved in hearts scarred into the tree’s wood. I remember how good the wind felt on my face that night.

When I was seventeen and Bella was sixteen, she and I would go to the park so late at night that it was technically morning. She would go to escape her home and her dad, and I would go just to be with her. The park’s play structure was rusted and old and we couldn’t play on it even if we wanted to; our bodies too large to fit through the kid-sized gaps. But we would sit on the swings, our legs in the air, competing to see who could go the highest, the furthest, until our legs got tired and our swinging slowed and the sound of the squeaking swing hinges died down. She loved the swings and I loved her.

When I was seventeen-turning-eighteen and Bella was sixteen, my birthday present from her was a large stuffed shark. She was so proud to give it to me too, holding it up to her face and saying to look at how big it was! It was so long that it reached from the tip of her head to her knees. I laughed and smiled a lot on that day.

When I was eighteen and she was seventeen, Bella died.

When I was alive, Bella wasn’t. They found her body in the lake, and I didn’t want to believe it at first because she had always been the girl who wanted to fly so badly; away from this town, away from here; so she couldn’t have jumped.

Why did she have to go do it? Why did she have to sink?

This is my second poem to Bella though I know she will never see it and I wish I had shown her my first, I want to put into words just how brightly she shone. How she was my world and my best friend and the love of my life all in one. She was my sun but not in the way that I was Icarus, but maybe instead she was Icarus and I was her sun. I write this poem as I leave this town

And as I walk past the playground past the swings she used to love

I will look at them one last time

Before saying goodbye

to Bella.