

Fiction

I'm not used to her smiling. Her small, yet cherry lips expand and her cheeks light up like a stop light. She's never this... joyful.

She flounces down the concrete, the sun shining in her platinum hair. Her floral shirt was loosely soaring behind her, like Mother Nature was chasing her across the pavement.

As if she could hear my thoughts, she looked at me. I saw her teeth for the first time in ages: twenty-four glittering jewels shone and almost blinded me. Her eyes also sparkled in sunlight. Two amber crystals I had never admired until now.

She skipped her way to me. She sat next to me on a broken concrete wall. More people passed by, also admiring her beauty by not letting their wandering eyes release from her view.

"What happened?" I asked her.

"Nothing's wrong," she giggled. "I can just finally let my soul be free!"

She stood up again and jumped on the broken wall, only a few feet high. She was now balancing next to me, her arms parallel to the Earth below us, although the Earth is polluted with trash and empty beer bottles. Her arms flailed from side to side, becoming unbalanced like the Earth itself.

"Are you sure nothing's wrong? It's a bold choice you're currently making," I asked.

She looked to the left of the wall. A small pond from all the recent rain had puddled behind the broken building on the corner of Harris and Bingley.

"I'm one hundred percent, Sweet Pea!" She stepped down from the wall and sat right back down next to me. Her foot crunched a family-sized Doritos bag as she sat.

Sweet Pea? I forgot that's what she used to call me.

When we were young, her mother owned a garden. It's still there, but it's old and withered, but before, it flourished with life. We tended the garden with her mother almost everyday, picking ripe strawberries, sweet sweet peas, and plump watermelons exclusively in the summer. She had lovely flowers as well, ranging from yellow sunflowers to purple tulips. Her mother adored her flowers, yet it was her daughter that kept them blooming. She loved the sunflowers the most.

It was strange to see such a green garden in an apartment balcony on Harris Road, for everything else around the garden was dead and gone. But, her mother kept it up. I lived across the street in an apartment building on Bingley Street. I saw her and her mother study the patterns of growth and care for those plants for years and years.

That's how I met her.

She was happy as a lark in those days. There was nothing to worry about when days seems like years and years seem like eternity. There was no excessive homework, boy trouble, girl gossip, or family deaths, until it all came to reality too fast.

Her mother died during those days, the days of joy and nurturing. Her mother was all that was left of her nuclear family. I felt pity for her.

She was too young, both her mother and her. I did all I could to help her. I even offered for her to stay with me and my father. Although, I can now see why she declined that offer.

My parents divorced in my youth. I still see her to this day. In fact, on this particular day, I was on my way to see her. Every other week, I traded houses and stayed with different parents.

I hate my mother, by the way. Just thought I'd say that. I'd prefer my alcoholic father than my obsessive mother any day, weirdly.

But my amber-eyed friend was alone. Loneliness leads to unfortunate accidents. I remember seeing her hold a handful of pills to her mouth. I caught her atop a stool with a rope necklace. A silver knife played gently on her wrist while she went for an innocent bathroom break.

"I just want to see my mother again," she would always say.

I remember crying for her, not like she needed more tears for her pain.

"You need help."

"No I don't."

"You can't keep doing this to yourself."

"I need to see her again."

"I know."

"I just want to see my mother!"

She'd yell and cry and cry and yell. If she yelled loud enough, her mother would hear her from her unfortunate watery grave.

It was an accident, her mother's death. It wasn't a tragic suicide like the news portrayed it, but an accidental push from atop a bridge above a pond on Harris Road, since then has been called Luna Lake, named after the woman who drowned there.

She would sit on the edge of the bridge with me. She would dangle her legs over the crystal water laid with beer bottles and grocery bags. I'd sit with her, in case she gets any ideas. Her head would rest on my shoulder, her yellow hair mixing with my dyed, red hair.

She would cry often. Cry like a baby with a missing mother. That's what she was.

"Sunflower," I told her at the wall. "That's what I called you, right?"

Taking a second to remember, her head cocked to the side and she stared at the clouds.

"You sure did," was all she mustered.

I took a second to collect my thoughts. I wanted to ask what changed her mind. Before I could think, her head rested on my shoulder and I forgot everything.

I forgot how much I admired her.

My Sunflower. Her hair as yellow as the petals on the brightest flower in a garden, her garden at least. Given the chance to grow, her soil became dry and her water supply went dry.