

TWO SUMMERS PAST

By Nikki G., Indianapolis, IN

I opened my eyes and all I saw was open space, the clear blue sky hanging over my head like a canopy. For a September afternoon it was warmer than usual, but the first signs of fall were coming fast - the once green leaves turning pale, the cool breeze brushing against my cheek, the porch lights coming on before dinnertime.

It's funny how something as simple as a song can bring you back to a memory. How our minds somehow link words to a moment, a sound, a smell, a touch. I closed my eyes and suddenly found myself drifting, the music in my earphones blending into the background of my thoughts, the songs bringing me back to that summer.

"Do you want me to sing you a song?" he asked, an acoustic guitar clutched in his hand. He sat a few feet away from me, his eyes steady, as if at any moment I might fall apart into a million pieces.

Here I was, sitting face-to-face with a boy whom I had known my whole life yet knew almost nothing about. I went through day to day without even a second glance, the silhouette of his body simply standing in the background. To me he was always nothing more than a stranger, just another face in the hall. It never occurred to me that he had emotions, thoughts, opinions.

There's no telling how or why I ended up here. How I stormed out my front door that day and just knew. How I let my heart lead my feet, and my feet lead my body, right up to his front doorstep.

As I sat there, my eyes bloodshot and swollen, my heart throbbing in my throat, I suddenly felt embarrassed. But he smiled at me, as if he had sensed exactly how I was feeling, and began strumming, humming a soft tune along to it.

His voice wasn't loud. In fact, in that moment, it felt as if it were only a whisper, keeping the world secluded in the background as I had to him all my life.

Only I would have noticed the way the sunlight shines perfectly on his dark curls, the blue of his eyes impeccably matching with the sky. Everything seemed to fit together and I listened, the song going on... if only for a few more moments.

As the song shuffles I find myself transitioning to another memory, the saturated sunlight seeping through the cracks between the blinds in his room.

"Stay here," he had told me minutes before, "I'll be right back." Since then I had curiously bounded up his staircase and into his room, which was dark, my footsteps hardly visible as I made my way across to open the blinds.

As the sunlight poured into the room the first thing I saw were the blinding white walls, covered with picture frames and posters. I was immediately drawn to the mirror on the far wall, a Polaroid taped up on the glass.

It must've been taken a few weeks ago at most and I immediately recognized it because I was the one behind the camera. He was sitting in a plastic lawn chair, his front side facing the horizon with the exception of his head, which was turned, his lips forming a small grin. He had his acoustic guitar in his lap as he blocked the sun, making his body dark but forming a radiant white glow at the edges. I remembered. It was a completely stolen shot, yet it turned out perfectly.

"Nikki? Nikki?" I heard from a distance. Footsteps bounded up the stairs and turned to find him standing in the doorway.

"There you are," he said, "Didn't I tell you to wait downstairs?"

"Oh," I replied, an embarrassed look on my face as I looked down and twirled my thumbs, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to..."

'It's alright,' he said with a smile, walking further into the room and looking at the same photo I had been moments earlier, "It's weird sometimes, knowing that someday I'll look at this picture as a changed person."



Image Credit: Lauren R., Edmond, OK

The author's comments:

“All of the very true events in this short story were written for that boy who lived down the street. You know who you are and I hope, more than anything, that you're reading this. Thank you so much for being such a wonderful part of my life, even if it was just for a little while.”

"You say that like it's a bad thing," I said, now facing the window out to the soccer fields. The sun was ripe in the sky, an orange glow spilling onto the grass, "I'm always, constantly, waiting for change."

"Why is that?" he asked.

"I feel like the world is just... spinning," I replied, pausing to gather my thoughts, "And sometimes, I find myself thinking, 'God. There's gotta be something better out there.' Y'know?"

"What's wrong with right now?" he asked. Now he was standing beside me, leaning on the wall, his eyes content on mine.

"I don't know," I said, "There's just something missing." He looked away and out the window, his eyes narrowing.

"Sometimes," he said, his voice almost in a whisper, "I'll sit here and stare out the window... for hours, just to think. Sometimes I feel like I'm on top of the world. I can see for miles and miles... and being here, with you, and the whole world in front of our eyes, I wish time would just stop, in this moment. Nothing is missing, Nikki. Nothing. But things will change. I can't promise you that I'll always be here, and I can't promise that the world will always be out there. We have to enjoy what's happening right now. Because eventually it'll just be a memory."

With that we both turned to the window, sharing a comfortable silence between us. And as he wrapped his arms around me I closed my eyes, with only the sound of nothing and the beating of his heart.

That was the very last time I would ever see him the way I'd known that summer, for August came and, as he promised, so did change.

Less and less did I see him after that day, the sound of him singing and strumming his guitar no longer being heard from his back porch. When I did see him he looked distraught, avoiding eye contact as he replied to my questions with one word answers. His once bright eyes were now dull and lifeless and I think that's what hurt the most.

In time I stopped trying, waking up to sunny days only to roll over and try to go back to sleep. I hid myself from the world as he slowly returned to being what he had been to me all those years ago - nothing but a stranger.

I opened my eyes and saw absolutely nothing. It was completely black, and I started to panic before I saw a big halo of light illuminating down on me - the moon. It was cold and I exhaled, breath pouring out of my mouth.

I sat up and took off my earphones, my iPod smooth, cold and dead like all the memories of that summer, only to be reminisced on those peculiar days when I find myself in the world and not behind the bedroom window.

As I stood up and blindly made my way across the field in the dark, a light illuminated from his bedroom window. I stopped and looked up as he slowly made his way across, sitting down on his bed and putting his face to his palms.

His dark brown curls were long now, enough to cover his eyes. As he pushed his hair back and looked to the horizon, he suddenly stopped. He stood up, walking towards the window pane and staring down at me.

I saw a sad expression come across his face, the first sign of real emotion I've seen from him since that day. And suddenly I realized that he knew. He always knew. I can't promise you that I'll always be here. I tried my hardest to hold back my tears.

It's funny how a memory can seem so simple until you find yourself on the other side. I was once in that window, looking down on the world. And as I stood looking up at an old friend I suddenly found myself in the world instead of watching it unfold in front of me. And that's when I realized just how lonely it can be.

As I began to walk away he put his palm up against the window pane, and I stopped. I looked up one last time, my arms folded across my chest. And as his eyes were steady on mine I smiled a little, nothing in my sight but the light in his window shining in the darkness, like an island of hope in a sea of sameness.



bRealTime banner ad on the left side