

Brittany Pollock

Mr. Schreurs

Creative Writing: Fiction

12-19-13

piece

### Time Well Spent

Looking back, the first time I fell in love was when Katie and I were five years old. We had known each other for what seemed like forever, because that's what it was to us. She was my other half, my best friend, living across the street.

We went on little "dates" to the school playground or to the tree house, and we went everywhere together. In the summer we would be so dirty from blowing bubbles and tracing each other with chalk that his favorite blue soccer shirt was certainly never clean.

That day was not only the first day of kindergarten, but it was also the first time I had ever held Katie's hand.

"Do you have cooties?" I asked as I release her small hand.

She gave me the most sincere look. I could tell something was different. She was no longer my adventurous best friend.

"I do not!" She immediately took my hand again.

I was nervous that day, but I never would have admitted it. Liam was the only one I knew I could count on. He and I were there for each other no matter what. The first day of school was nerve-wracking, and holding his hand made me feel better.

The beginning of the year started off great. Mom tied my ponytail with a pink bow, and Liam and I took off for school. He held my hand as we walked to school, him in his soccer shirt and me in my cowgirl boots. This quickly became our daily routine.

I remember our very first argument. The kindergarten teacher asked us each to draw a picture of our family. He kept telling me my hair was red, but I insisted it was yellow. He pulled my ponytail over to the crayons, but my hair was neither red nor yellow. I was so angry at him for pulling my ponytail for no good reason.

Katie was always stubborn about her hair. That winter I stole her favorite pink bow and buried it in the snow. She looked as though she wanted to cry. Her face was so angry that we spent what seemed like hours looking for it again. That day I also found out the worst news a five-year-old could hear.

It was cold and snowy that December day. It was one of those grey, do-nothing days. Both our families sat in her living room, which was odd. It was not Halloween or Thanksgiving or even New Year's Eve. Katie and I sat racing cars, while our parents talked. Then, my mom started to cry. I looked to Katie in confusion, but she refused look back at me.

"Tag! You're it!" she shouted as she bolted from the room. Then, Mom motioned for me to come to her.

"Honey, Katie and her family are moving. They are going to live in a new house in Kansas City." She looked at me as if I was supposed to know what sadness lied behind those words.

Just looking at his face, I could tell he was mad at me. The thought of losing my best friend was terrifying. He wanted me to stay in Indiana, but my dad received a promotion. Liam and I decided we were going to find a way to stay best friends.

"Why don't we just live in the tree house?" I offered.

"But it's cold outside," he said. "You could live with my family." He offered, but what was I supposed to do?

"What about my Mommy and Daddy?"

"Stay with us and we can walk to school every day!" He sounded so hopeful, but I was told we could not stay.

For the next two months, Katie and I walked the block to school like we always had. We still held mittens and pranced through the snow. Part of me thought that if we forgot she was moving, it wouldn't happen. But it did.

Her family packed up and prepared to leave the next day. I went outside to see Katie waiting for me as she held a small, folded paper in her tight grip.

"I made this for you," she said slowly handing it to me.

It was a picture she drew of us. She drew me with a soccer ball and my blue soccer shirt. Her self portrait had the cowgirl boots, a pink skirt, and red-yellow hair up in a ponytail. It was the ideal representation of the two of us, in the minds of two five-year-olds. What made it absolutely perfect was the depiction of us holding hands.

"I'll be right back," I said sprinting toward my house.

Liam turning away made me realize I was actually leaving. When he returned, I could not believe my eyes.

"You can have my soccer ball," he said.

Then it finally hit me. "Liam? Can we still be best friends?"

"You are my best friend. You will always be my best friend."

I pulled at the pink bow from my ponytail, tugging until it came loose, and then handed it to him. I did not understand why I gave it to him at the time, but it was easier than saying goodbye. My family and I stepped into the unfamiliar, new house. I managed not to cry until that moment, all because I didn't say goodbye.

The last memory of Katie I had was those cowgirl boots climbing into the packed SUV. I managed not to cry until I had to walk to school with no one to hold my hand.

\* \* \*

My mom really started to worry about me during high school, because my grades dropped compared to previous years. I became the popular, hot-headed soccer stud, and I grew impatient and unmotivated. However, I made it to college after all. Luckily, I kept my grades high enough to get an athletic scholarship. Without soccer, I don't know if a university would have been an option for me.

I had a great high school experience. My friends and I were really close, but I was not "little miss popular cheerleader." My grades were great, and that's mostly why I got into college. Those grades led to scholarships, which bailed me out of overwhelming student loans. I finally decided to go to the University of Missouri-St. Louis. It was a little quieter than Kansas City. I think I chose St. Louis because it was less rushed, but still had that big city feel. The one thing I did not expect from UMSL was the flashback to my childhood.

I drove up to the university with my girlfriend, Sara. She and I had been together for nine months, which set my personal record for "longest serious relationship." I was somewhat relieved when we pulled up because she was starting to annoy me with how often she changed the song. We got out, and she began a conversation I paid little attention to. Then she headed straight for the admissions office.

I couldn't help but roll my eyes as I began to unload the car. As much as I felt she was the one for me, Sara had her annoyances. As I pulled my soccer bag off the top of the stack of luggage, I noticed a girl crossing the quad. She seemed vaguely familiar.

I could not believe my eyes; I was shocked more than anything. When I first noticed him, he was with an unfamiliar girl. I assumed right away it was his girlfriend by the way he held her waist before she walked away. The way he rolled his eyes, however, threw me off. He had the build and tan of a soccer player. His curly brown hair was short, and his style matured from Nike shorts to khaki ones. He wore a

maroon UMSL soccer shirt and tennis shoes. Suddenly, I didn't know whether to approach him or tell myself that was not Liam Costa.

I made an effort to walk just close enough to decide whether or not it was really him. While he was unloading the car, I realized I was being conspicuous. I felt as though I wasn't thinking clearly or I had first day jitters. I turned back slightly, hoping this "stranger" did not notice me.

I first noticed the cowgirl boots. I did not think twice about the jean shorts or V-neck, but the cowgirl boots made me flash back to the memories I had of Katie Hall. That was the first time I saw Katie since she left our sleepy town. She was different, but the same all at once. She ditched the bow, kept the boots, and exchanged pink for purple. I was certain that it was her. She had a light tan now, but her strawberry blond hair was still tied up in a classic ponytail. She was undoubtedly quite stunning. Her persona was different; she seemed less sure of herself than I remembered her. That was the cause of my skepticism.

I was not going to just stand there; I was determined to talk to her. Was it really Katie, after all these years? She had to remember me, right? We were, after all, best friends. What if I introduced myself and she had no idea who I was? What if she did remember me, but never felt the kind of innocent love I felt for her way back then?

She looked even more alarmed after I put the bag back into the car.

He was acting funny and I thought he saw me, so I panicked. I started walking a little faster, hoping maybe this was all in my head. I mean, how could it be Liam? I was obviously being ridiculous. I rolled my eyes, convincing myself I was just nervous, considering it was the first day on campus. I stopped dead in my tracks and turned back around to look at him one last time, just to be certain.

*Get over yourself, man!* I thought to myself. *Just go talk to her! What's it going to hurt?*

So I headed straight toward her. When I was just a few feet away, she turned around and looked straight at me. There was obviously no getting around it and no time to turn back now.

"I'm sorry, um, Katie? Do you remember me?" The way I said it made me wish I had put more thought into what I was going to say to her.

"Liam?" I asked. I was so relieved he remembered me. I thanked God it was him! I guess I was not as completely mad as I presumed.

"Yeah! How are you? I haven't seen you since, well-"

"I know. It's been so long." We shared a somewhat awkward hug, and it was hard to interpret. Was it a friendly, acquaintance hug or an "I missed you" hug?

"It's so strange seeing you here. I never would have thought to see you here of all places and after all these years. How are you, Katie?"

"I actually go by Kate now," How could he have known that, "but I mean you can still call me Katie. Anyway, I'm doing really well. What about you?"

"I'm great, now that you're here." He blushed sweetly, reminding me of our kindergarten days. He was obviously regretting that last part. I, on the other hand, was quite pleased by his little interjection. There was somewhat of an awkward pause, but I had nothing to say. Actually, that was a lie. I had so much to say, but the words refused to escape my mouth. There was a barrier between my over-flowing mind and concealed lips.

"We need to catch up! Do you want to get coffee later?"

I could not have been more excited he asked. I momentarily thought of the girl I saw leaving his car, but was that going to hold me back? The fact that he asked to catch up meant something, didn't it?

A small smile tugged at the corners of her mouth. "I would love that. Can we meet back here at seven? I need to unpack and get settled."

“That sounds perfect.” And it was.

\* \* \*

“Your mother was so beautiful in that moment.”

“Oh, stop it!”

“Well, honey, it’s true.”

Katie reaches for my hand, and I look into those big green eyes in return. We are married twenty years today, but it only seems like one. I don’t regret any moment of my time with her because she is and will be my life for as long as we make it here on this earth. That is what I most cherish.

It is amazing how time goes by so quickly; with time come great memories. Liam is in almost all of my best memories. Even after kids and challenges, fights and make ups, leaving and returning, he will always be my other half.

“Looking back, I suppose the first time I fell in love was when your father and I were five years.”

