

### Fireflies (Fiction 3: Stephanie)

I cannot keep still. The bounce of my seat ~~only~~ fuels my anxiety as the carriage makes its way along the Missouri roads. ~~The f~~Fields fly past my window; yellows and purples of wild flowers dapple them and the surrounding hills. The woods are flushed with vibrant greens and rich browns. The colors run together in my vision as the carriage sways from side to side. The scenery brings to me days long past, and I cannot help but remember.

\* \* \* \*

Every summer, I visit ~~with~~ my grandparents. Every summer, I go to see him. We met four years ago, the summer of my fourteenth year. There is a field not far from my grandparents' house that was our little secret. I had ~~narrowly just~~ escaped the house and another tireless conversation with my grandparents and decided to go for an evening walk. The breeze was ~~ever so~~ inviting, and the fireflies danced through the air around me. I saw a worn path meandering into the trees and decided to follow. The yellow light from the fireflies lent ~~me~~ a hazy view of the path ahead. I walked for a long while, not caring about where I was headed or how long it would take me to return.

The path suddenly ended, and a small meadow opened up before me. I had never seen anything more beautiful in my life. Fireflies were everywhere, floating lazily around the edges of the field. The moon shone bright and full in the center of the trees, casting shadows against the pale emerald floor. But more beautiful still, a boy lay fast asleep in the center of the field. ~~laid a boy fast asleep~~. Upon approaching him, I found him to be a few years older than me. I could not help but ~~to~~ sit by his side and look on his innocent face. I was entranced. I stopped myself ~~several times~~ from shaking him awake several times; I never understood why I did not.

The amber lights seemed to grow dimmer as I watched his face, and I felt as one asleep. Indeed, I woke the next morning in a cloud of mist, and found that the boy had vanished. My summer dress of blue and white would have to be furiously scrubbed. I took the path back, at the end of which I received a ~~dire~~ terrible scolding. My grandparents did not believe ~~me or~~ my fairytale of some angelic boy in a field of fireflies, and I was forced into silence. That night, I defiantly opened my window and peered out into the trees in search of the truth. I knew all too well that it could have been a dream, but holding onto the fantasy proved more exciting. I sat in my long blue nightgown on the window seat, watching the trees sway in the wind.

A light caught my eye in the trees on the fringe of the garden, but it was gone before I could make sense of it. I felt restless, and so I decided to pursue this questionable light. When I reached the place I thought I had seen it, I found a yellow rose ~~there lay a yellow rose~~ on the path. My heart sputtered in my chest, ~~but~~ and I could not refuse my excitement. I ~~lay~~ laid my inhibitions behind me and hurriedly followed the path to the meadow. Upon entering the clearing, I found that my memory had not done it justice. The moon was brighter still, and the dance of the fireflies went on unhindered by the wind. ~~He~~ The boy stood there waiting for me, a bright gleam in his eye. ~~Not a thing~~ Nothing could have prevented me from approaching him. As I drew near, I could not help but ~~to~~ smile at him.

"Boy, what is your name?"

He smiled in turn, ducking his head in a bow as he offered his hand. "I am Peter."

I curtsied as elegantly as I could in my nightgown. "And I am Lily," I said as I placed my hand in his.

**Comment [J1]:** This sentence has no context and seems to come out of nowhere.

We glided through the clearing in graceful circles, drifting among the fireflies, joining their dance. His eyes were aglow, never once straying from mine until we fell to the ground in exhaustion. I lay staring up at the stars, feeling the ground quiver beneath me as my mind continued to spin. Peter's laughter broke through the silence like the tinkling of bells, and soon both of us giggled beneath the night sky. Each night after the first was similar, yet somehow more enchanting. The days of that summer were filled with walks in the woods, chasing fireflies, dancing under the moon, and laying beneath the blanket of stars. The summers passed quickly, each more enjoyable than the last. Each time we ~~would meet~~ met in our field again, ~~and~~ it was as if nothing had changed. But though I grew older with each passing year, ~~but~~ Peter did not change. He did not age.

~\*~

Now, I am finally eighteen. ~~I am~~, as old as Peter. I shake myself out of my reverie to find the carriage has stopped. I hurriedly push open the door, ignoring the hand of the driver, and race towards the house. ~~The~~ Dust follows me in small puffs and collects around the bottom of my new summer dress. The scolding will be well worth it. I make quick pleasantries with my grandparents before racing up the stairs to my bedroom, to find it there on my desk. I pick up the delicate yellow rose, caressing its soft velvet petals and taking in the intoxicating scent. I almost turn to retrieve my bags from the floor but catch the white of paper that was beneath the rose.

*I'll be waiting.*

It ~~was is~~ unusual for Peter to leave a note. Looking back, I cannot remember him ever leaving one. I smile to myself and tuck the note into the front of my gown. I set to placing everything in its rightful place, trying to enliven the room with colorful fabrics of blue and green. I place the rose in the vase that always sits on the windowsill, the best place for the summer breeze to carry the wonderful scent.

After a well-well-deserved bath, I slip into my white evening gown. The tightness of the bodice makes me look shapelier than I am; I cannot help feeling but to feel slightly embarrassed. I would change, but for my grandmother's insistence that I wear this tonight. I peer closer at my reflection, noting the hollowness of my cheeks and the length of my auburn hair. I have changed, even from a year ago. I can only hope Peter can see it, too.

I make my way down the oak staircase, and ~~reach the landing to~~ find that a second carriage is in the drive when I reach the landing. My heart ~~begins to~~ quickens; it feels nothing ~~similar to like~~ how Peter ~~can~~ makes it quicken. My mood is immediately dampened; ~~I~~ have waited all year to see Peter, ~~and even but~~ now I will not be allowed out until after dinner. Upon entering the dining room, I find that everyone is seated. The guests and their son are friends of my grandparents ~~and their son~~. The only empty chair is conveniently beside the young man his. He stands awkwardly to wait for me to be seated and nearly trips trying to get back into his chair. I suppress a giggle, and turn my attention to the conversation.

There is not much ~~that can be~~ said between the adults that captures my attention. After trying to follow a discussion on how harvesting has really changed in the past century, I focus on the food itself. Plates of roasted duck and mashed potatoes are served first. The smell almost causes my stomach to grumble, and I dive in before giving it another chance to embarrass me. The Flavors explode in my mouth, and I remind myself to slow down when I see my grandmother giving me a strange look.

**Comment [J2]:** Why is he laughing?

**Comment [J3]:** Change from passive voice to active voice.

**Comment [J4]:** The word "race" was already used earlier in the paragraph.

**Comment [J5]:** This would not be served as a first course but as the main course.

**Comment [J6]:** Explain how this detail is important, and if it is, lead up to it.

I take a sip of the bitter wine, letting its flavors cascade over my tongue and down my throat. As I set the glass down, I catch a movement to my left. Turning my head quickly, I find Peter's eyes on mine, peering at me through the balcony window. I am momentarily frozen, captured by the beauty of his visage. His auburn hair lies elegantly on his well-rounded shoulders and shines ~~dully~~ in the soft light.

I come back to myself, only to realize that a smile is on my face, and the dinner party has gone quiet. Blood floods my face, and I turn once again to the food without explanation. The conversation ~~starts to build~~ again, and I slowly release the tension in my shoulders. Sneaking a glance at the window, I ~~catch glimpse~~ the edge of Peter's green coat ~~just~~ as it disappears from the balcony.

When I am satisfied, I excuse myself and wander out onto the balcony. I search the surrounding woods, but know that Peter has already returned to the meadow. In the past, whenever I ~~am was~~ restrained to the house, I ~~have~~ found Peter ~~on more than one occasion~~ looking after me ~~on more than one occasion~~. Sometimes, while gazing through the window, I have seen him wandering the grounds, and even before I fall asleep, I feel him close. I only have a few minutes of rest before I hear someone clear their throat behind me. For a split second, I think it could be Peter, but find the son of my grandparent's friends before me.

"H-hello, I am Michael. We met a few years ago, but I ~~don't do not~~ expect you to remember that." He fidgets with the front of his jacket, looking everywhere but at me.

"Yes, I do remember you. We had a picnic once when our families ~~got together~~."

He looks directly at me for the first time, then briefly smiles at my remembrance. "Well, Miss Lily, I would quite enjoy taking a walk in the garden. Would you like to join me?"

He looks extremely nervous as he offers me his arm, and I return the smile. As I draw closer to him, though, the strangest feeling comes over me. It takes me a moment to realize I have never accepted any other arm but Peter's. I take an unsteady step back and see a hurt and puzzled expression cross Michael's features.

"~~I-I'm-I am~~ sorry, I cannot accept your invitation."

It is my turn to be awkward, and before he responds, I walk around him and hurry into the house. I follow the hall back into the living room and turn to ascend the stairs, but pause when I hear urgent ~~talking-voices~~ coming from the dining room. I creep towards the cracked door, treading as softly as I can. I have never heard my grandparents' ~~speaspeechk~~ so lively, and curiosity steals over me.

"They should be walking in the garden by now," someone whispers excitedly.

"Yes, how perfectly this has all turned out!" my grandmother replies.

My grandfather jumps in, "I do believe it all worked out for the best, I ~~shan't should not~~ be surprised to be holding the wedding here by next summer."

I ~~am running~~ up the staircase, unable to listen any further. Tears stream down my face as I throw myself down onto the bed. I do not understand how they could speak ~~so~~ of me ~~so~~. I pull the crumpled note from my dress, dripping tears onto its surface and blurring the ink. I sit up and try to collect my feelings. I should not be crying right now. Pulling off the white gown, I quickly change into my light blue dress. It's his favorite. Clutching the note ~~tightly~~, I make my way ~~silently~~ down the stairs and out the door to the back. My tears are drying, but could come again quickly.

The familiar path leads me through the ancient trees. They whisper among themselves as the wind passes through them, rustling my hair and dress along the way. Before I know it, the glowing meadow opens up before me, revealing the dance of the fireflies and my Peter. I rush to

**Comment [J7]:** This sounds modern, unlike the rest of the piece, and sticks out.

embrace him, but see anger in his countenance. I pull my outstretched arms back, unsure of how to react.

"Are you angry with me?" I ask feebly. I ~~can almost~~ feel the tears coming as my vision blurs.

~~The Peter's~~ anger turns to sadness as his eyes search my face. He turns ~~to face~~ toward the open sky, struggling with something unseen.

"No, I could not be angry with you, Lily. I saw the carriage tonight, and I know what this must mean."

I gasp and turn my face away, not knowing what to say.

"They will take you away, and everything we have will be lost. You will be married to a man you'll never love, have children, and soon grow old. You have wondered long about why I have no home." He turns to me then, a fierce look in his eye. "I ran away for this precise reason. I could not be tied to someone I had no affection for. I could not be married to anyone other than you."

Before I have time to respond, he wraps his arms around me. I'm enveloped ~~by~~ in his embrace, and the tears finally come. I do not know how to make this right, and I realize what will truly ~~will~~ be lost by this union.

"Peter, I love you, and would marry you if I could. How do we make this right? I cannot live with anyone else by my side."

He pulls himself back to peer down into my face. His eyes are deep pools ~~that I will never reach the bottom of~~ with bottoms I will never reach. His lips are on mine, moving with a passion I have never known ~~before~~. Without speaking, we begin to dance, twirling and spinning ~~dizzily~~, trying to make the world around us disappear.

We fall to the ground, arms entwined and leaves tangled in our hair. The ground moves and the stars blur, and I hope in vain for the dawn to never come. We stare for hours into the heavens, before the veil of daylight starts to trickle from the horizon.

"There is something we could do, if you are willing," Peters' eyes are inches from mine as he ~~appears~~ leans over me.

Before I can speak, he disappears from my vision just as quickly, ~~and~~ I push myself up from the ground to face him. "I will do anything," I eagerly reply.

"Then follow me."

~~I am tugged~~ Peter tugs me to my feet and I follow ~~Peter~~ him down a new trail I have never been on. The fireflies create a halo of light around us, urging us onward. He clutches my hand tightly as we twist and turn through the trees. The light steadily climbs in the sky until there are ~~a scarcely any number of~~ stars twinkling above us.

Finally, Peter stops in front of me, and turns to block my passage. "I would wish for any other way to be with you, Lily, but believe me when I say this is the only way. I would run to the farthest reaches of the earth ~~to be with you~~, but I cannot leave."

When I receive this message with a quizzical frown, he continues, "Before you is where I am. I exist because of this place. Do you feel ready for the truth?"

I have never been more frightened than ~~in~~ at this moment, but I force myself to nod. I do not understand what Peter means, but I trust him with my life. He gives me a serious look before turning and pulling me to the edge of a pond. A wild bush of yellow roses grows ~~wildly~~ across the pond, reflecting yellow points onto its face. Through all ~~of~~ my explorations, I have never seen this place before. The sight of it ~~only manages to~~ jumbles my thoughts. I turn to question

him, but he shakes his head and points to the water. As I watch the surface, it starts to change. I see movement, but it does not appear to be coming from within the water.

A person travels on the water, as though moving pictures were flashing across its surface. It is dark, but a moonbeam pierces ~~the person's~~ face, and I gasp. ~~It is Peter.~~ This must be a vision of what happened long ago. I watch as Peter runs through the woods, racing ahead blindly to get away from his life of bondage. A hill comes before him, but he notices too late and ~~starts falling~~ falls. A rock meets his temple, and he rolls into the water. He does not come back up. I feel arms around me before I realize I am screaming. I turn to the water again, but ~~see that~~ the image had disappeared. The arms release me when I quiet, and I turn ~~quickly back~~ to Peter again.

"Why did you not tell me of this before?" I ask quietly. "Why have I never known that you are —"

"Dead?" He finishes my sentence with a look of disgust.

I can feel his unease, and know he has regretted showing me this. His features are twisted in pain, but I can find no ~~voice~~ to comfort him.

"I feared you would hate me, and I see now I had reason to fear. I know I cannot ask this of you, I am sorry for ever bringing you here." He walks ~~passed past~~ me to the water's edge, peering into its depths and beyond. I know that he will leave me now, unless I stop him.

"Know this," he ~~says~~ somberly ~~says~~ without turning, "I loved you since that day we met, when I awoke to find a beautiful girl ~~laying~~ lying beside me. I have been here for too long, and selfishly wanted you to stay with me."

He turns and steps towards me then with tears in his eyes. My heart skips a beat, and I feel my chest tighten with sorrow. I love him, yet I am afraid.

"I love you, Lily, and always will." He kisses my forehead quickly before turning to the water again. He slips his right foot into the water, causing no ripple or disturbance. I feel him drifting away ~~with from~~ me, ~~with~~ each step he takes into the water. It is nearly up to his chest, now, and I cannot stand by.

"Wait! Please, let me go with you."

He pauses in his descent, and turns to me. "Do you really want this?" ~~He~~ asks after searching my eyes for the truth. He ~~is making~~ makes his way slowly back to the bank. Before he steps out, I leap into his arms, spraying water everywhere and sending ripples across its surface. I look into his eyes for a time, and know there is no other way.

"Yes, this is what I want. I love you, and nothing else matters." I pull myself up to reach his lips, and ~~the warmth~~ flows through my veins. He smiles at me, then, no trace of uncertainty left in his eyes.

"~~Ok~~Okay, let us go." He gives me one last smile before we make our way deeper into the water. My body trembles, but I know this is right. The water is nearly up to my shoulders, ~~and~~ Peter turns to face me. He suddenly laughs, and I give him a nervous look.

"~~I'm~~ I am just glad you wore that dress, ~~it's~~ It is my favorite." He pulls me into his arms, and says, "Take a breath." The water envelops us as we fall into its depths, bodies tangled together, sinking into darkness.

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The moon shines ~~into~~ the clearing, where the trees sway and the fireflies dance. A boy and a girl in a beautiful blue dress twirl in circles across the clearing, wrapped in each other's

**Comment [38]:** Is this supposed to be "words" instead?

**Comment [39]:** The warmth of what? His warmth? The warmth of the kiss? Need a clarifying phrase here.

arms. They fall to the ground and stare into the heavens, the stars twinkling above and the fireflies glowing below.