

The first time I watched *The Lovely Bones* was over winter break. My roommates had left to go back to their hometowns, and I had to stay longer to work the next day. I sat in my room trying to find things to do. I had books to read but no patience to read them. Crafts to make but no will to actually complete them. So I settled for finding something to watch.

Now, *The Lovely Bones*, is not a movie I went in blind to. I fully knew what to expect, hell I knew everything. If you're wondering if I read the book, no I did not. I was banned from reading it by my mother because she said it was "too scary" and "I did not need to be reading that." At the time I was mad. It was just a book, and surely, I could handle that. No need for sheltering.

Mom didn't budge and I let it go. A couple years passed and I would see clips online from the movie, a familiar interest sparked in me to understand what everyone else knew. Too nosy for my own good. I looked the movie up, reluctant to see that it was two hours long. That was a bit more than I wanted to dive into at the moment, I was just so curious about the story. So I pulled up its Wikipedia plot summary. Read through it, felt sad, and moved on.

That night I'm scrolling my phone, more clips of *The Lovely Bones* popped up. I briefly think about watching it going to scroll away before deciding, you know what? Why not? I've got all this time why don't I put it on. My fingers thud against my screen typing the movie into my browser again; just my luck it's on every streaming site I don't have. Guess it's back to my roots, good ol' illegal streaming sites. I swipe through the popups the website throws my way, exiting out of tabs it opens and finding the correct server to play the media. Finally, the circle in the middle of the screen begins to spin loading up the movie. I settle deeper into my blankets as the stars shoot across my screen and align in an arc around a mountain, "Paramount" sits in its bold cursive atop it.

The movie is a roller coaster and I'm a little shocked by the sheer amount of emotion the film sparked in me. Obviously it's a sad movie, I mean the whole thing surrounds a child's murder, but I didn't expect to be sobbing. I mean like snot dripping sobbing. It took me like five minutes to console and collect myself. During this time I went through this movie's typical stages of grief, anger at Susie's murder, the profound sadness of her body *never* being found, the way her family slowly fell apart, and the grief over Susie's life being ripped from her.

In the voice-over narration of the movie, Susie lets the audience know the date she was murdered. December 6, 1973. My mom was born in December 1973, so every time I see any correlation to that month or year, I think of her. Susie saying this reminded me of my mom during the movie.

And how she was probably right to not let me watch the movie when I was younger. I was nineteen when I watched it of my own accord, and like twelve or thirteen when I wanted to read it for the first time. I'm gonna have to side with Mom on that one, waiting was a good call. Apologies to younger me. But I mean come on. The final thing she says to the audience is, "I was here for a moment, and then I was gone. I wish you all a long and happy life." Immediately I'm sad again. No, I will not be recovering. I'd still like to read the book. But it might be a while before I have the courage or will to put myself through that experience again.

This notion of self-preservation is confusing to me though. I've read scary stuff before, I've cried at sad books and movies, and I've smiled with the characters. So why was *The Lovely Bones* so different? Somehow, I think my mom knew.

And no, I don't mean that she knew that a book about a child murdered would sadden and scare her preteen child. I mean that in some way she must have known from her experience how it would affect me. My mom didn't watch the movie, she read the book.

My mom and I have been extremely similar my entire life. We think the same, which is a good thing and a bad thing depending on the way you look at it. When I think I'm right, she thinks so too. When I'm wrong, she'll tell me I'm wrong. Our reactions to things are opposite and equal.

This summer, we fought over something, and it was so dumb that I literally don't even remember what the hell it was about (my pride however, will tell you that even though I don't remember what we fought about, I was definitely right and she was definitely wrong. Ask my mother the same thing and you'll get the same answer.) What I do remember was that we both went zero to one hundred. She yells, I yell, I cry, she cries. My siblings don't live at home anymore and my father sits at the table eating his pancakes utterly confused. He attempts to cut in, trying to settle us down. It does not work, he retreats.

We're both so mad now that we can't be around the other. Mom goes upstairs, I go outside and sit on the deck. I don't see when she leaves and I don't know where she goes, but I heard the car pull out of the driveway and drive off. After a bit of sulking, I complain to my Dad, the unfortunate mediator in this scenario. Agree with mom, and I'll be pissed, but if he agrees with me, mom'll be pissed. He's somehow maintained this very irritating, but very helpful neutral ground between us. He is Switzerland. Yay for him, but at that moment I didn't care, I don't want to hear about how mom and I were both wrong yada yada yada. I tell him I'm not mad at him, but I'm leaving for a bit.

I don't know where I'm gonna go at first, until I remember Grimes Farm. I haven't been there in a while, and hell at least it's warm out today. So, I get in my car and drive out there. I walk the observation tower loop. It's maybe one and a half miles, nothing bad. About two-thirds of the way in I reach the tower. It's rustier than I'd like and the way it sways in the wind, I'm

sure it's bound to topple if the gust was just a bit stronger. Still I climb up, looking out at the views of the cornfields below me. Curiosity gets the better of me and I want to know where she went to. What was her location of escape? I open my phone, fingers finding the "Find My" app. Clicking on find my friends, I click on mom's name. The screen takes a moment to load before popping up in Ames. You've gotta be kidding me. The little blue dot that represents my mother moves slowly, traversing through the paths of Ada Hyden Park. Can't even have my own cool off period without her thinking the same thing as me. The only difference between us is that I opted for the closer trail.

It's comical when I think about it now. Of course we would have chosen the same thing but, clouded by my anger I was pissed. She was a copycat! (Even though she left first...). The other thing about my mom and I is that we like to hold grudges. . . for maybe an hour and then were bored of them. I got bored of sulking at Grimes Farm, so I left. I got a call from my mom when I pulled in the driveway at home. Apparently she was just as bored. She'd left Ada Hyden and made her way into town, finding the Tropical Smoothie while driving aimlessly.

I pick up the phone, "Do you want a smoothie?" she asks. Her tone is hurt and her words are short.

"Sure, thanks."

"OK."

There's a pause between us, "I'll be home soon." And that's it. She hangs up and I shut my car off. I go upstairs wanting to shower off the dirt and dust from my walk. Awhile later when I was done I came back to the kitchen and opened the fridge to find a Blueberry bliss smoothie (the best kind) marked with a 'T' in sharpie. Of course she knew the kind I'd want.

The smoothie, the park, the book. Mom always knew where my mind would go. Fortunately and unfortunately, we are two sides of the same coin. She knew I wouldn't react to the book well, because she didn't react well. I mean don't get me wrong heavy emotions were still very much present while watching the movie, but I could handle it. I could understand the grief I felt and work through it. Maybe that book was a butterfly effect, and it set me on a completely different path by not reading it, maybe it wasn't. All I know is that if my preteen daughter ever comes to me and asks to read *The Lovely Bones*, I will think of my mother and say, "No."