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**9th Grade**

**Once There was a Little Girl**

There once was a little girl. She loved to play. She kept things simple.

There was once a little girl who didn't care what she wore or what she looked like.

There was once a little girl who played in the mud all day and scraped up her knees from running around in the fields with sticks and rocks.

There was once a little girl with an imagination like no other, who pretended she was in another world with another name.

There was once a little girl who could play alone with her toys for hours on end with soft whispers and a fond smile.

There was once a little girl so innocent and kind.

There was once a little girl that laughed and rolled and jumped and had so much energy that she would never be walking.

There was once a little girl who loved animals and anything associated with them.

There was once a little girl who cried when she got yelled at, but never did it again.

There was once a little girl who had so many dreams and wishes and ideas.

There was once a little girl.

This little girl died on her 13th birthday.

This little girl was present at her own passing.

This little girl reached out for the birthday cake, but couldn't touch it.

This little girl watched someone else, a stranger, in her body, but then didn't recognize her body either.

This little girl watched as this other girl smiled awkwardly and wished that she was back down there with her family.

This little girl watched the stranger.

This little girl watched the stranger put up all her toys.

This little girl watched the stranger sleep in her room.

This little girl watched the stranger ignore her pets, of which she loved.

This little girl watched the stranger, in her skin, fix up her hair and take such a long time to try on new clothes.

This little girl watched the stranger walk slowly and leisurely, and was forced to go at the same pace as the stranger, even if she resented it.

This little girl watched the stranger grow up.

This little girl was put to the back of the stranger's mind.

This little girl was eventually forgotten.

And this little girl finally cried, because she realized that she would never play again. And that nobody she knew or cared about even realized she was gone.

Until *she* did.

There once was a stranger who looked back upon her memories.

There once was a stranger who was no longer little.

There once was a stranger who felt the sudden urge to go and play but squashed it down and did homework instead.

There was once a stranger who was going through some very hard times.

There was once a stranger who was so busy that she never had time for anything she used to enjoy.

There was once a stranger who no longer smiled.

There once was a stranger who turned around one day and saw a little girl.

And they stared at each other for the longest time.

And the stranger looked so sad and sorrowful and oh so very tired.

And the little girl looked back in naive confusion.

And the stranger, for all her wisdom that she learned as she grew up, couldn't fathom why she felt so hollow inside.

And then the little girl smiled.

And the stranger realized she had made a mistake.

*What would you say to this little girl if she was sitting right beside you?*

*“Go get your toys, it's time to play.”*

And the stranger realized how much she thought that little girl would be disappointed in her.

How much she expected it, and how much she feared it.

But that same stranger realized that the little girl she once was didn't care about any of that. All she wanted to do was play.

And so, the stranger remembered.

There was once a little girl who loved the world.

And through the stranger the little girl lived again.

And through the little girl, the stranger gained a name.

And through it all, they both realized that they were one and the same.