Can you believe

this is where we met?

1.

The two teenagers sat next to each other. It was a beautiful Tuesday, as the whole week had been sunny. Some said later that it had been a good omen for them, this beautiful long-lasting sun in rainy England. They sat on the ground and smiled at each other. They were so young. One was fifteen, and the other had just turned fourteen. It didn’t matter which was which. They looked calmly at the sunflower field, not talking, not just yet. He was a little nervous, if he was being honest. His light freckles almost disappeared in the slight redness of his face. He looked at her, scanning her face, her lips, her eyes, her hair. Drinking in every little detail, as if he would never be able to see her again. Then she turned her face towards him, and he quickly looked back to the field, embarrassed. It made her smile. He seemed so innocent, so young. They were so young.

His friends were playing tag not far from them. He had been playing with them, just a few minutes ago, but had been distracted when he saw her. He had stopped running, and had been deemed “boring” and “no fun”. He had kicked himself out of the game to sit next to her. They had booed him, but had the decency to do it discreetly, so she wouldn’t hear. She did, but it only made her smile, and she said nothing.

Her friends were in the field. They were sitting down, paper on their lap and pencil in their hand. They wanted to figure out who would draw the most beautiful sunflower. She hated drawing, wasn’t patient enough for it, so she had excused herself, and left them to their art.

He had asked her if she maybe wanted to play tag with them. She had politely refused, saying that it was too hot for her to be running around and that, besides, wouldn’t boys be annoyed to have to play with her?

He had told her that no, they weren’t that shallow, but it was, indeed, quite hot. Instead he had asked her if he could sit next to her, and she had smiled, and said yes.

“Can you believe this is where we met?”

He smiled, reliving the memory in his mind, again and again, reliving all the feelings and thoughts that had gone through his head, back in the day. He looked at her young girlish face, not entirely changed by puberty yet.

“I remember that like it was yesterday. It was so long ago.”

She nodded and closed her eyes, enjoying the wind in her hair.

“So many years… We were so young.”

“We were so young”, he repeated.

She turned to him, her eyes shining with happy memories.

“Could you have imagined? Back in the day?”

He smiled and dropped his head, playing with his hands.

“I would never have dared to imagine, no. I still can’t believe I had the nerve to talk to you”

She laughed and laced their fingers together. Even now, that small gesture still made him tremble with happiness.

“I was so glad you did”

They talked for hours, long after their friends had left to go back home. Her mother must be getting worried, she said. He looked at the sky to see it had darkened, and asked her if she wanted him to walk her home. She, of course, said yes. She would tell him later, but she was very scared of the dark. He would never tell her, but so was he.

“My mother was so mad that I was back home so late. I missed dinner time, everything had gotten cold”, she laughed.

“I remember. She wasn’t too happy to see you walk up to the house with me, either. She almost kicked me out of your property right there and then”

She stroked his hand with her thumb, smiling again at the thought of her mother. She was harsh but she never meant harm. She just wanted to protect her.

“It wasn’t much of a welcome, I’ll give you that. She never liked you very much, did she?

He scoffed, looking at the sky before turning back to her.

“Very much? She hated me! I could see on that very first day that she wanted to kill me”

Her mother scolded them, and he almost left running out of embarrassment. And then her father walked up to them in silence. He stood tall in front of him, and then extended his hand. He hesitated, but gathered his courage and shook it. Her father thanked him then, saying that he was a fine young man for walking her back home, since the streets weren’t so safe these days. He told her to say her goodbyes and go back inside to eat her dinner. After she smiled timidly, thanked him and walked away, her father turned back to him, to tell him that he sure hoped they would see him again. Her mother wasn’t so happy, but he smiled and nodded.

“My dad loved you from the very beginning, though”

He nodded, remembering the old man. He used to scare him a little, when he was a boy. He was so big and tall, towering over everyone.

“He was a good man. Scary at first, but nice and fair”

“Good thing he was there to protect you from mum, too! She would have sent you away every single time if he hadn’t been there. He was the only one who dared telling her no”

“I would always pray for him to open the door when I knocked. The first time she opened it, I really thought she would slam it to my face. She would probably have if you hadn’t showed up”

“She did hate you. I never quite knew why”

“She was a bitter old woman that’s why”

She pinched him playfully and laughed.

“Don’t say that! She was just worried about me, I supposed. You appeared out of nowhere and suddenly I saw you all the time”

“I guess she didn’t like seeing her little girl grow up. I sort of get it. It’s never easy for parents”

He came back to see her the very next day. She wasn’t allowed to go out, she told him, she was grounded. He said that it didn’t matter, and sat under her window, before asking her about her day. She felt like Juliet in that very moment, looking at her Romeo without her mother knowing. He came back the next day, and the day after that. Then he asked her if he could walk her to school, since it was on his way to his own. It wasn’t true, and it made him late every single day.

“You got in so much trouble for never being there on time. It was months before you told me that your school was on the other side of the town!”

He laughed and shrugged.

“It was only a few minutes. You were always an early bird, I never turned up that late. Anyway, you know it didn’t matter to me. I got to make you smile every day, first thing in the morning. I was the luckiest man in the world”

“You were maybe the luckiest boy. We were only children, after all. We were so young”

“We were so young”, he agreed.

2.

The young man stood under her window. It was a Thursday evening and it was cold, his hands were freezing and shivers kept going up and down his spine but it didn’t matter, and he did not complain. He was happy he was there, they both were. One would soon turn sixteen, and the other would be fourteen for two more months. It didn’t matter which was which. They were whispering, as they always did in those circumstances. Her mother would throw a fit if she knew he was there.

He was telling her about his school’s ball, the one that would happen on Saturday. He had been talking about it for the last week, but she never seemed to take the hint. She had been anxious for him to ask her to go with him, but he never seemed to realize. Her friends kept telling her that he would never gather the nerves, but she was sure he would. He just had to take his time, it would come eventually.

He was getting annoyed with Daniel, he said. The bugger already had a girl going with him, and he had been bragging about it for days non-stop. It would be embarrassing, he said, to go without a date, especially since he had this one girl he really liked and had never dared to ask on a date.

She said the girl would be very lucky, and probably very happy to go with him, she was sure. He smiled, and stopped himself from dancing in happiness, as he felt like it would be too early in their blooming relationship to ridicule himself in front of her yet, and asked her when he should pick her up.

She laughed, and told him she never agreed to go. But she probably would, if he asked properly.

He looked around himself for a few seconds and hesitated, standing in front of a bush of gorgeous flowers. He prayed her mother would never find out he touched her roses, and snapped a little blooming rose. He put it between his teeth, careful not to hurt himself with the thorns, and started to climb the tree next to her window. It wasn’t like in the movies. It took him an ungodly amount of time to climb, and there weren’t enough branches for him to climb high enough.

So, he extended his arm, holding the rose, as far as he could, and asked her, very politely, as his father had taught him, if she would please consider going to the dance with him.

She blushed and laughed again. They both knew she wouldn’t be able to reach the rose even if she tried, but it didn’t matter.

Of course, she said yes.

“Can you believe this is where you asked me on our first date?”

They were standing near her small childhood house, looking at that tree, and the little bush, at the window where she had stood so often. He laced their finger together and sighed.

“Of course. I don’t believe I had ever been so nervous in my whole life”

“I know, you were trembling”

“I was cold!”

“Sure, you were”, she smiled.

He shrugged.

“Alright so I was a little nervous, I’ll admit it. It was the first time I asked a girl out, it was a lot”

“My mother wasn’t very happy about finding out one of her roses had been taken”

“Your mother was never happy about anything. Remember you had to lie to her and tell her you were going with a bunch of friends?”

“I even had to ask my friends to lie about it and tell her they were with me if she ever asked. Good thing she never did, they would have been so uncomfortable I’m sure she would have seen through it”

“Your father did see through it”

“Did he?”

“Yeah. He came to find me the morning before the ball to ask me to get you home by 10”

She put her arms around him and hugged him as hard as she could, remembering her late father. She had never stopped missing him in all those years.

“He loved you so much. I don’t think we could count how many times he covered for us and lied to my mother’s face”

“Thank God we had him”

He smiled, and hold her tighter.

It would be ten soon. He whispered in her ear that they had to go now if they didn’t want to get caught. She nodded and took his hand, waving goodbye to Daniel. He didn’t notice but his girlfriend did, so she figured it was good enough.

They went through the noisy crowd, avoiding the drunk dancers and got out of the gymnasium. He stepped first into the chilly evening and immediately took off his jacket and draped it on her shoulders. She scoffed and told him she was fine. He answered that he felt too hot anyway. She would never tell him, but she was thankful he did it. It was a really cold night. He caught a cold the very next day. He blamed it on his morning walks to school. He knew she didn’t believe him, but it didn’t matter.

They walked silently, holding each other’s hand. He was a little nervous, if he had to be honest. So was she. She shivered and he smiled timidly at her, putting his arm around her shoulder.

They walked and walked, and he stopped abruptly before entering her alley. They noticed that the lights were on, which meant that her mother was probably still up, waiting for her to come safely back home.

He hesitated, and told her that he probably shouldn’t go any further then, or they would get in trouble. She agreed. She thanked him for the night, and squeezed his hand one last time before letting it go.

This time he didn’t hesitate. He grasped her hand back and slowly pulled her back to him. He looked at her face, her eyes, her lips. He slowly dipped down before stopping, and asked her if this was okay.

She said yes.

“Our very first kiss”

“the first of many”

“Don’t be cheeky!”

He held her a little tighter again.

“I ended up getting home late that evening”

“It’s my fault, I couldn’t let you go, I was so happy”

“And I didn’t want to go either. It was beautiful. I couldn’t have dreamt of a better first kiss”

“And I got to call you my girlfriend afterwards”

“You sure didn’t forget to mention that to Daniel”

He laughed, a little apologetically.

“I know, I’m sorry, I was just so excited. You were my very first kiss”

“And you were mine”

They looked back at the house, the place that held all their first memories. She dropped her arms from his sides and walked slowly to the wall that had been hiding them all those years ago. She touched the old stones with her fingertips, feeling all the ridges under her skin. She smiled.

“We were so young”

“We were so young”, he agreed.

3.

They sat next to each other on a small table in the corner of the town’s library. She was reading about biology out from a huge book that made it look like her arms would break in two every time she carried it. She never let him carry it for her, so instead, he carried her bag. She always told him she didn’t need help, and she was right, but he liked to think that chivalry wasn’t dead. One was seventeen, and the other had just turned sixteen. It didn’t matter which was which.

Every time she found something interesting, she wrote it down as a little note in a small notebook that contained information about everything, and nothing at the same time. On page four, there was a note about bees and their hierarchy. On page fifteen, there was something about a football rule she didn’t know about. On page twenty-one, she had written something about how Newton had made a discovery. It didn’t matter was she wrote about in the notebook, she never read the previous notes again. When he had asked her why, she had just laughed and called him silly. He never asked again. He liked that about her.

He also had a book open before him. A crime novel of some sort, but he wasn’t looking at it. He actually hadn’t registered a single word written in that book. He couldn’t keep his eyes of her. He thought to himself that he would never get tired of that sight.

He watched her small hand scribble the small note in the corner of an almost full page. He looked at her eyes, already seeking new information in the written lines before her. He counted the freckles covering her nose, got distracted, and counted again. He watched her bite her lip and frowned as she read something she wasn’t quite sure she understood, and saw happiness illuminate her face when she found that little detail that she had missed.

No, he knew for a fact that he would never get tired of that sight. He would never get bored of her. She finally felt his gaze on her face and looked up, smiling, before asking him why he wasn’t reading. He didn’t hesitate. He didn’t even think about it. The words just came flying out of his mouth. And he told her.

“Can you believe that this is where you first told me you loved me?”

He looked at her, just as he had looked at her all those years ago, and smiled.

“And I told you every single day after that. I don’t believe I ever missed one”

“You never did. I would light up my day without a miss”

He looked back at the table and touched its surface, feeling old the ridges and splinters.

“It was a lifetime ago”

She turned her face to him and scanned his face. He wasn’t the only one who could look at the other for hours. Puberty had hit him like a truck, and he had gotten so tall in just a few months that he almost reached her father’s height. Gone was the boyish face that she had known back in the day.

“That was around the time that you decided to let your beard grow”

“If we can call that a beard. I still can’t believe you let me do that”

She laughed and stroked his face.

“You were so proud, I didn’t know how to break it to you”

“I thought I was finally becoming a man”

“You were. You should just have kept the facial hair for a little later. It didn’t make you less of a man to me”

She looked back at the table lovingly, her heart full of sweet memories.

“I was so happy on that day”

He laughed and shook his head.

“Now, now, if I remember correctly, it didn’t go that smoothly, did it?”

She glared at him for a little while. He suddenly felt insecure. Did she not feel like him? Didn’t she love him as much as he did her? Without saying anything, she slammed the book close, put the little notebook in her pocket and grabbed her bag. He looked at her, eyes wide, and a little scared, if he was being honest. She opened her mouth and pointed her finger at him and, for a second, he thought she was going to yell at him for some reason, but then she seemed to change her mind. She closed her mouth, stood up, and left.

For a minute or so, he didn’t move, and he wondered if he had ruined everything. He thought hard about it, trying to find out where he could have possibly gotten the wrong signals. Was it too soon? It sure as hell didn’t feel too soon to him, it seemed even quite late, and from what everyone had told him, he wasn’t the only one to think so.

Or maybe she wanted something more romantic? But from his experience, she didn’t like great gestures, she hated getting all the attention, and, to be fair, she wasn’t even really a romantic at heart. Every time he tried something romantic like they used to see at the movies, she would laugh at his face and stroke his cheek lovingly, before telling him that it was sweet, but this was real life, not Hollywood.

He closed his novel, put it back on the shelf and turned his head towards the window. He blinked a few times, looking outside. He thought that she would be far away now, probably going home to tell her mother she was right and he was an idiot. But there she was, pacing in front of the window, hands in her pockets. He looked at her for a few seconds, confused. She then noticed him looking, and stopped walking. She got closer to the window and tapped her watch, before making a gesture with her head, indicating him to come outside.

Still confused, he packed his things and walked out of the building. There she was, arms crossed, waiting for him. She asked him why he had been taking so long and he hesitated. He then told her that he figured maybe she wanted some time alone, or maybe she even never wanted to see him again because of what he had said. Since she didn’t answer, he kept talking, and apologized, asking her if it was a mistake on his part.

She looked embarrassed and stared at her feet. She seemed to be lost for words and blushed. She opened her mouth and told him he was going to laugh at her. He scoffed and said that, considering the situation, it was very unlikely. He repeated his question, and asked again if it had been a mistake on his part. She didn’t look at him when she told him that that wasn’t the problem.

He roared with laughter, remembering that very moment.

“Stop laughing, silly! It wasn’t funny!”

“It was! I thought it was something bad”

“How could it be something bad, you knew we loved each other”

“Yes, but we had never said it!”

“Yes well… I wanted to be the first to tell you”

His laughter came back even stronger.

“Even after all those years I still can’t believe you got so mad at me just because I said it first!”

“I had a whole speech prepared just so I could tell you, you ruined it”

“But you were never one for romantic gestures, you hated that!”

“Well yeah, but you like it”

He last sentence made him pause. He took her hands in his and tilted her face upwards so their eyes would meet.

“I did always like it. But that didn’t ruin anything”

“The romantic side of it was dead”

“That’s true, that wasn’t the most romantic love declaration ever. But you still said it back, didn’t you?

She smiled and looked down.

“Of course I did, silly”

“Then it made it perfect”

She stayed silent for a few minutes and then looked back at the window. She put her head on his chest and hugged him tight.

“We were so young”

“We were so young”, he agreed.

4.