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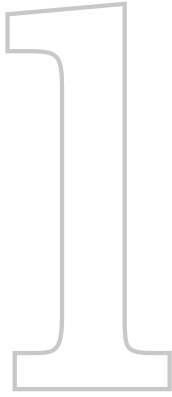
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The Swing

LAUREL LEIGH PHILLIPS



I end with a sigh.

It is the taste of memory—the smell of raw cinnamon and evergreen, the night air rushing at my fingertips, that song of hopes and dreams. I am swinging through the night, high into the trees, until I feel the chill and fall.

I dreamed I held you again. Your empty stare became a hole in my arms. I couldn't find my breath in the question. Why?

It's my birthday. The junipers sway in the summer night's breeze. You carry me through the darkness after cake and clowns and silver ballerinas. The moon lights a hole in the trees, and it waits under a blanket of leaves.

I leap from your arms, reach for the seat. You lift me up, but I beg not to do it alone.

We swing to the rhythm of nursery rhymes and circus tunes. I hold my breath. We fly to meet the hole in the trees, where the moonlight dances with our shadows. You hold me tightly on your lap and I throw my arms up to sweep the star-dusted sky. We swing even higher and I shudder—a strong temptation, my soul's only secret. We jump and land softly with a graceful pirouette. The grand finale.

I drew the dry piece of wood from the ground. I held it to my ear. It told stories of a missing mother, flowing river, empty creek. It clung to my hands, and I carved roaring lions, bouncing balls, and a girl flying on the trapeze.

I chose the tree with a hundred cradling arms. I bound the branch in splintering rope and gentle promises. I begged the seat to hold you close, to never let you go. An unforgiving knot, the test of time, secured your fate.

It is years of unfound dreams, save one. Nightfall whispers and I answer its song. I flee with arms outstretched, grasping the breeze as it slips through my fingers.

I reached for your hands in the shadows.

It is adrenaline pumping and ecstasy and bliss as I inhale life from the biting wind. It is dreams and promises flying past the moonlight glowing through the hole in the trees. It is fear, a loss, a moment, slipping away.