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Slipping Under

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Slipping Under

Author Bio

Lori Atinizian is a Cinema and Media Studies major with a double minor in Writing and English. She loves going to the theaters and watching the Oscar Nominated shorts every year. Films that stimulate her brain and make her question life are particularly interesting for her. One of her favorite novels is Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, which she has read many times ever since she first read it in the sixth grade.

Slipping Under

My fingers get all itchy and hot. I need to climb above the monkey bars before I slip and fall. I swing my legs until they're hooked onto the last bar. I let go with my hands, and my hair falls, and I can see my classmates upside down. Life is more fun with the world upside down. Everyone is silly, and they don't even know it. I know it, but I'm special that way. I can see them frowning instead of smiling, and that makes me happy.

They play with each other upside down, always stumbling around, laughing. Today, most of my classmates play tag—you're it! But I guess the monkey bars are right for me. They keep me good company.

I look toward the slide and see the regulars. Emily will push Amanda down like she does every day, over and over and over again. I wonder if maybe Emily wants to be pushed down the slide this time...

Nope, it's Amanda's turn again. Down she goes!

But really, Amanda and Emily are boring. They never do anything different. Michael over by the swings does the same thing, too. He just swings back and forth and occasionally jumps off mid-air like he's cool or something. Everyone can do that, though. Well, at least I can do that. But I know it, and that's enough for me. I don't need to show off.

My vision blurs, and everything hides behind the black spots I see when I'm upside down for too long. I grab the second bar with my hands and slip between the two bars, up and up until I'm sitting across all of them. They're not running around upside down anymore, but at least I can see them all more clearly than before.

The monkey bars are my turf. The world in every angle—all mine. If I ever left them, someone would take them from me. They'd take it and never ever give it back. I'd be over in Michael's seat right now if those weren't the rules of the Big Toy. Take what's yours and don't cross any lines.

Once, I sat on the swings, and Michael called me a butthead.

I looked in the mirror when I got home. I went into my mom's room where she had one of those big tall head to toe mirrors to see if Michael was right. I saw the resemblance and everything.

"Recess is over!" Mrs. Moriarity shouts.

I join my classmates in a single-file line. We march toward our classroom and sit in our assigned seats. I've been sitting in the back of the room for a few years now. I actually like the back.

I lift the top of my desk and pull out a pencil I got from the Museum of Science. The tip is messed up, the lead pushed back with force. It was probably Amanda again.

I get up and walk over to the manual, revolving pencil sharpener. Brittany is just finishing her pencil. She checks her progress every few seconds until it is perfectly pointed.

She looks down at my pencil and asks, "Did someone break your pencil?"

Right as I finish my laps around the bars, I swing back to the top. Michael hoards the swings again, and Amanda and Emily hang out above the slide. Everything is as it should be, no crossing borders or starting up trouble.

“Do you want to know what color underwear I’m wearing today?”

A familiar voice grabs my attention. Brittany looks up at me, waiting for an answer.

“Yeah,” I say, ignoring how crazy she sounds.

She stretches the top of her sweatpants and stares down.

“Blue with white stripes!”

That’s funky. Neither colors that I love, but her face is too excited to even notice. Blue with white stripes, she says. Her shirt is also blue. Her eyes—bluer than her faded top.

“Wanna come up here?” I regret asking right away. I know better than to invite someone into my area, but I did it anyway. She starts the first bar.

“What about you?”

“Just green.” I’m tempted to check, but she won’t notice if I were wrong, would she?

“That’s my favorite color.” Her eyes grow bigger. She keeps swinging toward me on the monkey bars. I was wrong. Her eyes are green. “Can I come up top?”

I scoot over, giving her space to join me in the place that’s always been mine.

No, not just green. In the center is a yellow sunflower inching toward the edge of the green borders. My eyes are brown with a black dot in the middle. I’m common.

What should I say now? Her favorite color is green. But if I don’t talk, maybe she won’t have a reason not to like me. But then she also won’t have a reason to like me. I feel sick inside. She keeps staring at me, waiting for me to say something.

“My favorite color’s yellow,” I spit out.

Her face squishes, “Ewww.” I’ve said too much. “Yellow’s gross.” Yellow—the sun. Yellow—the dandelions I pick for my mom every day. “That’s what my pee looks like.” Or yellow—the color of pee.

“You’re right. My new favorite color is purple.” Purple is a far more reliable color. I’ve double-crossed Yellow. I’m a liar.

“That’s a pretty color,” she smiles. I am filled with relief. I could get used to purple, I think. Purple—the rim around our salad plates. Purple—lavender that grows in our backyard.

The unmistakable smell of lavender clouds my nose, and my body aches. I’ve just remembered: I hate lavender. My dad, who sleeps on a pillow lined with crushed, dried lavender, can’t get enough of it. He’d drown in it, if he could. Purple—the *destruction of my family*.

“It reminds me of a toy Granny gave me before her accident. The whole thing is purple, even the hair.” I think I’ve seen that toy before. I didn’t realize it was hers until now.

The rest of the conversation keeps rolling, one thing leading to another. I can’t even really remember what we talk about because we talk about this and that and everything. It seems like everything, but it can’t actually be everything because that would definitely take forever to talk about. By the end of the day,

I call her my friend.

Friend. Best Friend. Best friends for life. I've found her. She's the one. Brittany and Lori. My teammate. My ally against all things unpleasant. Her underwear: blue, green, pink, purple with white dots, turquoise, indigo, sea-foam green, magenta, brown, tangerine-orange, rose-red, white.

The year ends.

This is the first summer I'm leaving something behind. My heart feels all funny, like it's twitching.

Brittany leaves me and goes to summer camp. I leave her and go to summer school. She sends me mail. Her rock-climbing is apparently really awesome, and she misses me.

My mom helps me buy a BFF charm bracelet. I'll give it to her the first day of 4th grade. She'll wear it forever, and I'll wear mine for longer.

September 2nd: the day after Labor Day. Ms. Holmes welcomes us to a new year, a different year. Our class is bigger now, and that means we have to separate into two separate groups, but I feel unwelcomed when they tell me my group doesn't include Brittany. They must have known and purposefully separated us, something about "socializing" and making new friends. It doesn't matter, though. Once I give her the bracelet, we'll be complete.

After a class called "Biology," we are taken out to the Big Toy. This year is different. We only get 10 minutes instead of 15. I begin to run over to my favorite spot. The people from the other group must have finished their class early, as they've already begun running around, laughing and screaming.

Michael glides back and forth on the swing. The closer I approach sanctuary, the more I see. Brittany waits for me on top of the bars. There's another figure next to her, but I can't make out who she is. Her back is turned, and she's just sitting there, not doing anything.

It's Amanda sitting in my spot beside my best friend. When I get there, I raise my arms to feel that burn around my hands as I did every day last year.

"What are you doing?" Amanda snaps.

"Coming up top," I look over at Brittany. The remains of a sunflower stare back at me.

"No, you're not."

My hands drop. I motion Brittany for help. She's just staring at me. Why is she doing this? Why isn't she *helping* me?

"I thought we were friends." *Don't cry.* Amanda glares at me. *Not now.*

"We weren't friends. I was just pretending because I felt bad for you."

Amanda's scorn turns into pride. Her face is beaming.

Walking away from the monkey bars, I search for an empty patch on the field, a place no one has taken. I decide on the spot where Mrs. Moriarity used to call us back into class.

Green and dark brown separate me from the Big Toy. I can cry now; nothing's stopping me. But before anything comes out, I see a familiar figure in the distance dressed in purple swinging viciously across the bars.