



“Watch Your Words/Swing Your Sword” by  
Annabella Elliott  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place, Informal Essay 13-15

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Date: Thursday, Nov 26, 2020, 11:36 am. (9 months later)

To: Kelly

*< I know I might seem like a crazy person to do this ... but if there's even a slight chance you'll see this then I'll take it. We made a support group chat for you, and I planted a yellow and purple flowered plant in my backyard to remember you. I just wanted to wish you happy Thanksgiving even if you're not here anymore. I know you'll always be with us. Hope you're happy wherever you are. :) >*

*< no response >*

It was ten at night. I was on the verge of falling asleep and closing my book when I suddenly heard the familiar sound of a Facetime call ringing from my iPad. Warily, I reached over, wondering why somebody would be calling me at such a late hour on a school night? I saw my tired and dazed face staring at the reflection as I answered it. It was my friend Kylie. "Kylie?" I asked tiredly. "What happened? It's ten." I mumbled shortly. I finally came to the realization that she was sobbing and got a horrible sense of dread in the pit of my stomach. Till this day, I still hear the words, "Kelly killed herself," echo from time to time in my mind. Kylie's voice was

shaky and could barely utter the words through the immense tears pouring from her eyes. My brain not registering what she was telling me at first, I muttered “Kelly?” Before a cold wave of shock hit me like a freight train and my reality seemed to stop in that moment. It was her, Kylie’s friend that I had walked to my car with every day after school for the past few weeks. The girl that seemed like there was something a bit off about her, like how she had this blank stare all the time, as if her gears were constantly turning. I barely knew her, but hearing those words caused me to burst into tears. My mind consisted of a variety of questions like “why would an eleven-year-old end her life so short?” . . . which I knew would never be answered.

There is no doubt, that losing somebody even if you just met them a few weeks prior is a traumatic and earth-shattering experience. It is a sense of horror that somebody who once walked, once breathed in the same world as you, is not there anymore. And I believe that the hardest part after tragedy is accepting it. Now I know why people go into a state of denial when faced with a traumatic event.

I did not know much about Kelly while she was alive. It seemed mostly what I knew about her was after she passed. Our school did not ignore her death, and to this day I am thankful for the amazing staff that set up an assembly after lunch for us to mourn our loss, for some were closer to her than I was. We released purple and yellow balloons into the sky, where I liked to imagine Kelly was, watching us from the clouds. I cried, of course, but was somewhat relieved I could finally let her go. What I think was the most depressing part was the fact that her parents were there, and I still remember the mom weeping and hugging Kelly’s father.

Even with all of this though, there was no escaping the harsh reality that Kelly was only eleven when she committed suicide. An age that I never thought such a horrible thing would ever cross somebody's mind. I am not afraid to admit that Kelly had once said that she wanted to kill herself to me, but not knowing her well enough I didn't take her words seriously and brushed them off. Looking back, I wish I would have paid more attention, but I was only twelve, a child. I never thought she was serious. At least my last words to her were, "I accept you no matter what," and I hugged her. What mortifies me most, however, is knowing that Kelly was bullied.

It has been two years since Kelly's death, and while some things have changed, some have stayed the same. With the pandemic, the whole world went into a state of panic as they searched for an answer, just like I did. I switched to e-learning for seventh grade, and while most people hated it, I quite enjoyed it. It's not like I'm alone. I have good friends at school and I'm not bullied, but I enjoyed feeling like the world outside of my house did not exist, like I was in outer space . . . drifting. By August, I was really scared to re-enter the world. I had distanced myself so much from people that I did not know how to interact with others. I felt as if I were an alien on a foreign planet. And I foolishly believed that with all of the tragedy around the globe, that my school would be full of kids with empathy and kindness. Boy, was I wrong.

In 2021, I still see the same cruel and uncaring behavior from the kids at my school that plagued Kelly. In many ways, I'd say it's worse. In fact, Kylie, my friend who informed me of Kelly's death, is now having the same thing happen to her. Kylie has been called atrocious things such as "faggot" and has even been told to kill herself multiple times, and on top of that has been handed a suicide hotline number from kids that she doesn't even know. History is repeating itself, and it is baffling that I, as someone who barely knew Kelly, has felt more remorse and

total devastation than the people who influenced her demise. It seems that kids not only at my school, but everywhere around the world have no idea how much their words can impact a person and their actions.

And what I want to say is . . . words matter. They can seep into your mind and tear you apart from the inside out. They can flip someone's world upside down and crush it effortlessly.

People have no clue how words so meaningless to one, can mean so much to another.

Someday, my dream is to become a fictional writer. To help people understand the realities of others. To provide a place of comfort for those who are struggling. I want people to feel like they are transported to a different world when they read my books, and that they can escape from the hardships of their reality. Imagining people finding peace, tranquility and understanding in my books would mean the world to me, and I hope it would to them too.

Kelly was one of many examples of how just a few words can change someone's life forever, and I hope that one day my words will inspire others and help people of all kinds through whatever challenges they may face, big or small because, ultimately, words and I can change the world . . .