I’m sitting outside on a bench when I see a young girl walking behind her older brother into an ice cream shop. The boy must be around sixteen while the girl looks a few years younger. It’s clear that the young boy is the heartthrob of every other teenager in the shop, including the dazed cashier. He gets shy smiles, coy waves, and stammered greetings as he waits in line.

The handsome boy’s sister seems to be his opposite. Where he’s tall and charming, she looks almost frail. She’s all sharp elbows and hunched shoulders. She would fade into the background of the scene if it weren’t for her brother’s attention fixed on her.

The young girl is perusing the ice cream choices when her brother smiles at her and asks a question. I can’t hear from outside, but I imagine he asked what flavor she wanted. Instead of some animation from the girl, she seems to hunch down into herself further with the question. She doesn’t look up into his smiling face when she mutters an answer, her lips barely moving.

I find it strange that the girl would be so unhappy with her kind older brother taking her to get ice cream. He has an arm around her shoulder now as they order and pulls money out of his pocket to pay. I grew up an only child, so this scene is straight out of my dreams of having a sibling. She doesn’t realize how lucky she is.

The pair gets their ice cream and leaves the shop, the girl looking around furtively as the boy strolls to the door, arm still around her. He leads her outside and back the way they came. “How sweet” I sigh as they walk down the newly paved sidewalks. They disappear from view.

A few minutes later, I find myself still staring after the siblings. There’s a dark nigglng in the back of my mind, like maybe the girl looked like she was limping. Or was it that the boy’s hold on her seemed a little too tight? I wave away the thoughts along with the gnats starting to swarm. I’m worrying for nothing; those kinds of things don’t happen here.
Two weeks later I catch the news playing in a café. The girl died while hiking with her brother.

Poor boy must be all torn up about it.