

Your Story, My Story

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Connie Palmen's *Your Story, My Story* reimagines the volatile relationship between Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, two gifted poets whose coming together was like the collision of asteroids, at once luminous and destructive.

Written in Hughes's voice, the book reveals a relationship initiated amid omens and warnings, and a brief marriage that was marked and governed by Plath's struggle with clinical depression. A perfectionist who craved recognition, Plath's severe lows alternated with frightening exuberance that alienated her friends. Hughes—a private, sensitive man—did his best to shield her from disparaging remarks. The lovers became inseparable; for a time, Hughes relished the “breathtaking idea of being so important to her that she couldn't do without me for a second.” It was a recipe for disaster.

The novel follows along as Hughes's confession of a life-affirming affair results in Plath ordering him to leave. Hughes suffers over their separation: “I had ended up—slowly and without noticing—under her bell jar, cut off from myself, gasping for air.” After Plath's suicide, Hughes details being ostracized and reviled for having caused her death; he regrets that, though he thought their separation would be brief, Plath's inner demons, and his need to be free of them, led to her tragic end.

Within the book, Hughes's silence about his troubled relationship, compounded by the rise of the women's movement in the 1960s, contributes to Plath being cast as a martyr. But bold descriptions of a first kiss that drew blood, and of Plath's destructive rages alternating with long periods of silence, tell another story. *Your Story, My Story* is an inventive, profound novel that brings balance to the perception of the volatile relationship between Plath and Hughes, whose tragic love was instrumental in bringing their work to the world.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January / February 2021)

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