

### Can you see me?

She used to be so close with him—so wild with imagination. They were inseparable, she and our father. Rain was never rain, but rather the uproars of the gods upon a chaotic sea, a turbid battle in the gladiator arena, a gentle mist gracing the tallest cliffs. A walk to the beach was a story in itself, thrusting a blind audience in medias res with her uncontrolled adolescent mind. Each step, a violent earthquake to shatter her stereotypical principles and prove her goddess prowess. Her arms, once fluid as the waves along the surface of blue, danced through the thick air as if humidity sizzled at her cool touch. My father would laugh; she was clumsy, and so was he. But they loved it. He would pick her up out of this trance and set her on his shoulders, spinning around in the sand as to dance with her. Mother and I were always curious about what they were dancing to: there was no music. Only the faint whispers of the water lapping at the land—and yet their smiles said differently. Mother and I could never dance with them; we would try, but how does one dance without music?

Instead, we just watched their ventures. Many times I couldn't quite tell what was going on through my sister's head—what land she was in, what people she was with. Often I thought about how she saw me, but most of the time she seemed distracted; she barely saw anyone besides our father.

I would ask, "Basil, can you see me?" as I stood in front of her. Her eyes would dart away. She would look behind me, possibly at the dragons she would spot out the window or the lizards crawling along the walls. At the time I couldn't seem to grasp why my sister was unlike the rest—why she wasn't normal. Father would simply smile if I asked, then repeat,

"Basil would not be Basil if she was any different." Of course, this response was never the answer to my quandaries, and so off I would go, asking that same question time and time again; the response was always the same.

When our father died, it brought us to the raw truth of reality; no longer were we the comprehensive family built upon the haven of joy, but rather the wounded group of fragmented

coherence. We felt broken, and those little ventures to the beach became vicariously lived through the screen of our television.

It affected us all in tremendous ways of grief, but it was Basil who was affected the most. Floating in a world of her own, there was no longer that string of reality to keep her steady; she disappeared into her adventures like a frail balloon caught by the wind.

Moments at night, I'd find her bed absent and the window to her bedroom gaping open; hours it would take to find her, those times she'd run off into the forest behind our house. My sister would never willingly come back until we found her, skipping stones across a pond in her drenched skirt, or sitting in one of the tallest trees. Perhaps she wanted to swim in the darkened waters as a mermaid or look out at the kingdom beyond the horizon; I was so eager to know backthen. Mother and I both were.

I wanted to know why my sister didn't see me, my mother, to have her daughter back. Soeagerly did we want to see what the young girl saw. We never did get any answers.

When the eighth grade started, Basil was then in the same school as me, as a sixth-grader. With her so close, constantly at my side, I grew angry. Angry at my father for leaving, angry at my mother for giving up, and most prominently, angry at Basil for being Basil. She had no friends, never spoke nor raised her hand, and seemed to barely comprehend any material; classmates liked to call her "brain-dead", and although I knew it wasn't true, I joined in. The oneI grew up with, the girl I once loved, was then made my enemy. I hated her.

All because I didn't understand.

The rift grew between us, and after I finally graduated, Basil was still being held back a few years, trying to pass the tenth grade for a second time. I paid no attention to her, for the stupidity of adolescence corrupted me. I felt she was the bane of my existence, the consequence of an unwanted world, and even the reason our father died. I saw her as everyone else did. Howfoolish I was.

The day I left for college was a day of relief, freedom. The bilious brother I came to be sought to

escape and finally live a life that was my own, for how angry I was at this once pure family. My mother wilted after our father passed, and simply became an empty shell of a once strong woman. She felt love for us, that I know, but just like Basil, she became barren when expressing it. She was a ghost, capable of conveying the base of parental endearment. And as for the girl from my childhood, of course, I could never understand. After kissing my tired mother goodbye, I brushed past the young girl and walked out the door. A simple glance back and I caught the glossy eyes of a fragile young spirit—the glossy eyes of a prisoner pressed against the glass. So blind was I to understand what she needed at the time as my habitual rage kept me from stopping. Stopping to give the fragile girl a hug, to give the prisoner a hug, to give my sister a hug. She saw me, and yet I kept walking.

I was twenty-five when she killed herself. I woke up to a call from my mother in complete disarray, clinging to panicked words like an animal struggling against the tide of a river. She couldn't quite get a hold of herself, only managing Basil's name, and for some odd reason, even with that simple detail, I knew. With the few capabilities Basil had, I doubted for a long time she could do such a thing, or have any sort of complex thought. Throughout my adolescence, I thought of her as an antique doll, unresponsive and daft... But I was the daft one.

All the moments of our childhood were simple cries for help, suffocated by the ignorance of those around her. I attended her funeral, as many did. My sister's funeral. And all the while, as these long sermons preached for love and acceptance, my mind wandered. Off into a far land, away from reality, just as she did, to the beach we once danced upon. The warm sand pressed against my bare feet with the gaze of that homey sun blanketing my shoulders; Father was laughing and spinning Basil around, his eyes cracked in joy, as Mother and I smiled and continued to build our sandcastle. The grains scraped against my nails as I dug, filling my fingertips with the refreshing coolness of wet sand; I dropped some onto my mother's leg with a wide and goofy smile, in which she pushed me over with a laugh. Father and Basil came to join, and pretty soon we were caked in mud from head-to-toe. Before I could realize

it, while sitting in the church pew, I was smiling. These memories made me happy—this feeling of detachment brought me away from my shattered reality. It helped me to cope.

My sister was exactly like me. She did not leave reality because she did not like her family, friends, or life; it was because she was scared. All this time, my hatred toward my sister festered and fumed just because I didn't understand what it was she was doing: she was escaping. All those moments of asking her if she saw me were in vain, for, of course, she did, but in her own reality. A reality where Father was alive, where Mother never faded, and where I never left. Basil was the smartest of us all... for all she wanted to do was be happy. She missed the beach, just as I did.

I chose to not understand—to judge instead. So ashamed I was to call her my sister that I was blind to see the beauty of her existence—her creativity, her love, her adventure, her strength. And now, as I grow old and worn, I understand my father's words, for Basil would not have been Basil if she were any different. My sister, my dear sister, was a miracle struggling with the same things as I. She saw me. I chose not to see her.