

My Corner of the World

I thought I saw my dad today. Standing barefoot in his blue khakis, ocean water hit his feet as he stood on top of the rocky shore. I saw him overlooking the sea like a captain setting sail towards a new adventure. An adventure that would finally lead him home. I saw him stand like I had seen him stand a hundred times before— as though the sea was the only thing he could possibly need. The sea and me.

The world was his to take, and yet, at that moment he already had it all. It was enough for him. It was enough for me.

Then, the sun moved from behind the clouds and illuminated his mirage like a spotlight. An actor bowing to the silent sound of clapping, *bravo*, they all chanted. He was a magician, and as quickly as he was there, he was gone.

I stood on the sand as my gaze fixated on the gentle ray of light hitting the rocks. It was as though God was taunting me with his beauty. God's unforgiving, tantalizing beauty, that laughed at me as I mourned the image I had just seen. Only making it more vivid. A fragile wind moved the hair from my eyes making me see, the constant sound of waves against the rocks made me hear, and my heart sank deeper into my chest making me feel – everything that wasn't there.

I saw myself eight years old in a white sundress. Laughing in hysterics as my dad chased me on the sand. Then the clouds would roll away as we watched the sunset on the ocean. God has always loved metaphors.

I remember sitting on wet sand as my dad told me stories of his day at work, in which he became a wizard and fought pirates as he spoke to his clients. I remember the breeze moving the waves forward as he pointed to dolphins moving in the distance. Then, my dad would hold me tight. He'd hug me for no other reason than because he loved me. Nothing more than that.

I laughed as I fabricated the memories of my childhood. Where could I have made that up from? A movie I had seen? Stories I had heard? Soon I'd start to believe it was real, maybe I already was. I knew my dad and I knew he loved the sea. What I didn't know was if he loved me.

He had left only a few years ago, but my firm grasp on his memory was slipping. My mom told me stories of how he would take me to the movies when I was younger. How he would play tag with me, and take me to get five-dollar ice cream every Tuesday. The thing I remember the most was the sea.

Where was he right now? Probably taking shots in Croatia. Maybe he was smoking a blunt while eating lobster in Maine. He could have decided to take all his friends on an overnight trip to a high-end cabin in the secluded woods, drinking beer and complaining about football. Or maybe he eloped in Vegas, where the sound of an impressionable Elvis drowned out his memories of me.

With the song, “Can’t Help Falling in Love with You,” playing as a loop in my head and the vision of a fat Elvis singing in a stuffy chapel, I decided to stop my walk along the shore and go back home.

Like a river flows

Surely to the sea

Darling, so it goes

Some things are meant to be

I came back to our little house on the hill. The house that overlooks the little corner of my world. My dad bought this lot when I was eight and built our dream on top of it. We were convinced life would finally be perfect. My dad would look out to the ocean every morning through sheer, beautiful glass windows. My mom could bake pancakes in her new modernized kitchen whilst also scheduling new clients in her “open concept” photo studio. There was a towering bookshelf just for me, and lots of constant rain, which my mom and I both thoroughly enjoyed. Everything would be perfect.

Until he bought a boat.

Then a new car,

and another car,

then a motorcycle.

All of which were paid in large government-funded dollar bills.

I walked through the front door and threw my coat onto the couch. I walked through my house and into my bedroom. The glass was caked with dried droplets of rain, and our modernized kitchen was tarnished with wood chippings on cabinets and a broken fridge. My bookshelf is broken, and books lay on top of one another.

I reached under my bed and pulled out a stack of Dominos. My fingers played with a small Domino as I reached into the bag and placed it on the floor. I placed the dominoes in a circle, stretched out around me in a very organized manner to not break their intended ripple, and

sat on the floor cross-legged with my elbows outstretched on my knees. The blocks had grown hypnotically around me. Almost spinning around me like I was sitting in the eye of a hurricane.

I heard a knock on my door.

–Julia? Can I come in?

–Yeah.

I heard the creaking of the door as my mom walked inside.

–Hey.

There was something in her voice. An encoded message, trying to tell me something was terribly wrong. I turned.

– What’s wrong?

– You dad. He’s here– to take you out.

Taken aback, our silence filled the room. Both our mouths were ajar, searching for words to share how we felt. How does someone express an emotion in both a world where you’ve just been brought to heaven but woke up in hell?

– We’ll be in the kitchen.

She left me in my stupor and closed the door behind her.

My dad was here? My dad, who would send me postcards in Vienna while writing to me about the karaoke bar he attended the night before? My dad? My dad, who would read me stories before he tucked me into bed, an hour after my bedtime? He was here?

The spotlight shone through my window and lit my face. I traced my memories for proof I didn’t create them as just another story. Another facilitated lie. My dad wasn’t real. He couldn’t be. At least not the dad I knew.

I fell back into my familiar motion of sitting cross-legged and moved the singular Domino through my fingers once again. I felt the smooth slab of the block as my fingers sat the Domino down on the floor. Setting the block in an exact position, I used my finger to gently push the block into the next. This created the ripple effect I had spent so long fabricating. Each slab masterfully replaced the next, finding a calm rhythm and moving in a pattern that swirled around me as I carefully watched my blocks fall to the floor. In a moment, all my work was on the floor. And I was left alone.

