What’s Lost Can(not) be Found

Margaret

I look into the mirror and I see her. "How is it?" She asks, so painfully innocent and gentle that it feels like she shouts and screams. For a while, I watch her. I can’t form a response, my throat is numb, and my tongue is wrapped up like the Christmas present she wanted and finally got. A slinky dog, like the one from the movies. I didn’t have the heart to tell her that I lost that toy. I didn’t have the heart to tell her that it’s gone forever. I don’t know how to tell her that I lost the slinky dog and we lost the cable TV that would play while she sat in grandpa’s lap and shoveled her way through thin mint cookies. I can’t tell her that she will fight her way, tooth and nail, to get where I am now.

Her crooked gap teeth are on display, her lips are outstretched in a wide smile. She is waiting, and I’m standing, dumbfounded and stretched out like a violin. How do I tell her that everything she knows is going to turn inside out? How do I tell her that nothing will ever be the same? She is half my size, but her hair is much longer than mine. She has a pretty little outfit, her Hello Kitty bag slumped over her shoulder in preparation for the bus to arrive. She will soon have her first first day, and I will soon have my last first day.

We are vastly different, but I can still find myself in her. She has a freckle that dances along her face as her expression contorts into one of utmost confusion. Her glasses are thick, and she scrunches her nose to fix them, effortlessly sliding them up along the bridge of it. I can vaguely hear her yelling off to her grandma in the other room, "See you later alligator!", and
her grandma’s response of, ‘‘After a while crocodile!’’. She’s got two little smile lines that decorate her face, etching their little designs and patterns. Her face is worn from use, little wrinkles around her eyes and on her forehead, which further transform her into a piece of art.

I reach out to intertwine our hands, wounded nail beds brushing against each other, bringing the nervous nature we share to light. Neither of us can make direct eye contact, and we stare at the pair of shoes across from one another. Both are beat up and worn, but one pair light up as she shuffles her weight in the midst of her fidgeting. Her blue light up Sketchers have turned into my black and white Vans. I suspect that underneath the thin outer layer of her shoe, her toenails are also a pretty shade of blue. It’s her favorite color, after all. I no longer paint my toenails, and my favorite color is yellow.

So many things have changed, and she feels like a whole different person, but some things have never changed. We share the same best friend, the same academic determination, the same love for all things living, the same fear of the dark. I am not a part of her, but she is forever a part of me. Buried deep down, she is kicking and screaming to be seen. I had become numb to the noise as it simply reduced to a constant buzz, a feeling of longing and desperation that I could never truly diminish. I now understand. I finally see her.

For a long moment, we are one. Tears are welling in our eyes, and yet we don’t move to swipe them away. Nothing else matters as I envelope into a hug, and time is frozen until I nod and softly respond, ‘‘Yeah. But you’ll be okay.’’