

Invisible Beauty

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Monday morning. Last thing I wanted to hear was my alarm clock, rousing me from my dream- I don't remember what, exactly, I was dreaming about, but anything was better than waking up. I groaned as I slapped the off button and swung my legs over the side of my bed. "Turn off the light," I growled at my sister who was doing her makeup in the mirror across the room. We'd been sharing a room since we'd moved the previous summer; I hated it.

I stumbled into the kitchen where my mom was making lunch. "Morning, Kasey," she said cheerfully. She opened her arms for a hug.

"Close the shades, Mom, it's so bright in here," I snapped, dropping into a chair and pouring myself some orange juice. In my periphery I could see her frown slightly, but she said nothing.

The rest of my morning was a disaster - I took too much time in the shower, so I missed the bus. I wanted my mom to drive me to school, but she was late for work, so I begrudgingly slung my backpack over my shoulder and walked. "Ugh, why is it so warm in New Jersey?" I muttered to myself as I stepped onto the hot pavement. My hair was already stuck to my face and neck, and I wished I hadn't worn jeans.

It wasn't until art class seventh period that I actually had a conversation with someone. My best friend Leanna sat across the table from me, leaning on her elbow and sketching with her free hand. "Hey, Kasey, did you see that sunset last night? Oh, my goodness, it was just amazing! I don't think my backyard has ever looked so incredible - it just took my breath away."

I rolled my eyes and laughed. "You say that every day, Lee. It's just a sunset."

"What do you mean 'just a sunset'?" She set down her pencil and leaned back in her chair. "I imagine the sky as a canvas, and God is the Artist Who creates all the intricate details using only His words."

I wasn't feeling it. "Whatever. I'm not like you."

"You don't have to be like me." And then Leanna leaned across the table and said words that would come back to mean so much to me later: "Open your eyes, Kasey."

I didn't think much more about Leanna and her sunset obsessions; I needed to talk to my history teacher after school so I was again compelled to walk home. I was just turning the corner to my street when I saw something that caught my eye: a girl sat on the curb, alone, with a sketchbook and pencil in her hands. I judged her age to be about fourteen; she was slender with straight dark hair and olive-colored skin. She was pretty, I thought. But what stuck out most to me were her eyes; they were brilliantly blue and clearer than crystal, and held a sort of far away gaze, like she wasn't really there at all, not seeing what she was looking at. As I stared, I wondered if she knew I was even there.

And that's when it hit me. She was blind.

I must have gasped or something, because she suddenly cocked her head a little in my direction. I felt bad for staring, so I awkwardly blurted out, "Hi."

"Hello," she replied, calmly. "Are you looking for someone?"

"No," I answered breathlessly. I'd been taken so off-guard that I wasn't sure what to say. I couldn't stand awkward silences, though, so I ventured a question. "What are you

drawing?"

"The clouds." I was dumbfounded - I mean, this girl was blind, how could she draw anything? One thing I knew was that it happened to be a perfectly sunny day - there were absolutely no clouds in the sky today, only pure, unadulterated sunshine and a couple of lonely airplanes. "I know what you're thinking. You're right, I can't see, at least not the way you do."

"I - I didn't mean- I'm sorry, I just -" I stammered helplessly, trying to make this situation less uncomfortable. Why was I here anyway? Oh, why didn't I just keep walking? I wasn't trying to offend her; was it wrong for me to notice her blindness? Maybe I could just slip away and act like I'd never been here. But she kept talking.

"I'm just trying to see the invisible." She sounded animated as she continued. "'Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others.' Jonathan Swift said that. You can see the sky and the people and the street, but that doesn't mean I can't see, too. I see what you can't in the same way you see what I can't. There is so much beauty that you don't need your eyes to see. I have appreciation for little things like the sound of music and the smell of rain that most people are immune to. I can see because I'm blind!"

Whoa. My head was spinning as I tried to take in everything she'd said. I knew she was right - I was immune to all the beauty around me. I never thought twice about all of the little blessings that I didn't really need, but without which I'd definitely complain. I found myself staring hard at the girl, wondering what she saw without eyes. She was sketching now, drawing her clouds; they looked nothing like real clouds, but to me, they were more beautiful. I watched and waited for her to continue, but it seemed she had nothing more to say. I walked on toward my house, slowly at first. "Nice talking to you!" she called over her shoulder.

Honestly, I had no idea what a blind girl was doing sitting alone on my sidewalk like that. I've never seen her since. I didn't even know her name. But I remembered what she said; as I walked, I tried hard to take in everything around me: how vibrant the colors of the cherry blossoms, how cheerful the birds sounded as they sang up in the trees. I found myself running, faster and faster, my mind racing faster than my legs. I burst into my kitchen where my mom was preparing dinner. "Mom, it smells amazing," I enthusiastically declared as I wrapped her in a hug. In my forceful excitement I almost knocked her over.

She laughed, surprised, and said, "Why thank you, Kasey, you must have had a good day today." I just nodded as I hastily made my way into my bedroom; my sister had forgotten to make her bed in the typical early morning rush, so I eagerly smoothed the blankets and arranged the pillows in the way I knew she liked. I needed to show her I appreciated her somehow, and this seemed like the best way.

By that night, I had calmed down, but there was still one more thing I needed to do. I opened the living room shades and knelt down by the window. I motioned for the rest of my family to join me in watching the sun go down over the hills in the distance. For the first time I noticed the brilliant colors, textures, and patterns the light cast on the landscape, and it truly took my breath away. I remembered Leanna's words from earlier that day: "Open your eyes, Kasey." I had opened them. And what I could see was incredible. Right in my own backyard, God's artwork.