

# But Not Forgotten

by Zoe Rose

It was a bright summer day when Cierra finally talked about the sister that was gone. We were outside in the garden eating mangos and a breeze had picked up in the treetops, swaying the world around us. It was a clear day, that much I'm sure of. Not a cloud in the sky, and it seemed like there never would be. Up until then we had been enjoying our paradise in silence. I don't know what made her start talking, but suddenly she did, and I kept quiet.

"Sometimes I wish she had just never existed in the first place," she began her eyes fixed on the bowl of mangos between us. "It would have saved you, me, and everyone else a whole lot of suffering. Herself too, I guess. I loved June, I really did, but sometimes I wish she had just never existed in the first place."

She stopped, looking up at me like I had done something wrong. I kept quiet, still and she continued. "Summers were our best times. We used to make hammocks out of plastic bags and string them between the palm trees in our front yard. We'd carefully bring home hardback classics from the library and read them in the hammocks. Almost every night we'd end up in vicious arguments over the works of Hemmingway and Steinbeck. But we'd reconcile an hour later over our mutual love of the Bronte sisters. She dragged me to every corner of town to get something or another for her art. One thing I couldn't deny no matter how jealous I was of her, was that she was an artist. Or how happy she always was. Every day was always a great day to her. If it was raining, she'd beg to go into the woods and marvel at how green and alive everything was there. When she cried, she would laugh at the same time. She never wanted to be sad."

I don't remember much of June. I had always been the youngest one, the kid sister. She had always been this sort of ghost in my life, the glamorous older one that I thought was so pretty and who'd only give me a red painted kiss on the cheek at bedtime. But I miss her all the same.

A bird called out from somewhere and Cierra watched it fly away. After it had disappeared from sight, she turned back to me. "She was a passionate person, more than anything else. June would hug strangers if they looked like they needed one. But she would just as quickly key the car of a stranger if they looked like they deserved it. She had this very specific idea of right and wrong, and it would usually get her into trouble. But somehow, she'd always emerge from it relatively alright. That's how it always was, I thought she'd always be alright, always be right here."

I began to grow uncomfortable at the talk of the sister that was gone and my tongue itched to change the subject. Biting the inside of my cheek, I kept it together for Cierra's sake.

"She needed me. I think in that last summer, she sort of knew she was going to leave. She never wanted to leave, but she knew she was going to. I remember in that August before school started up again how she'd be able to write and write and write. Nothing about her leaving, just

harmless poems about school field trips and our old dog Phoebe. But they were beautiful pieces. I wish I could read them all, again. But all those papers went with her. A few nights before she left, she sang. I was used to her hum the melodies of hippie bands nobody else knew, but this was different. We had been walking down towards the gas station when suddenly she ran ahead and started singing, just twirling around under the streetlights and she was belting out like she had never felt so free before in her life. But she's gone now." She sighed, smiling sadly. "Nothing we can do about it."

In that moment, June was infinite. She was in the grass we sat on and the air we breathed. She ran through the river behind the house and danced in the flowers that got picked up by the wind. She was gone, but right then she was there beside us. She always would be, if we needed her like that again.

"I wish it would rain," Cierra slowly decided. "The world is too beautiful right now, it needs to rain, even for just an hour. Then everything would be okay."

It rained for a week after that, and then for another. She was distant during that time. Mom told me to let her be alone, and so I didn't argue when she wanted to go to the woods by herself. Sometimes I would climb up on top of the house and see her from the roof, bright yellow in her school sweatshirt against the dense green land. I wasn't spying, just checking on her. I didn't want her to get lost, too. Just before the fourth of July, it stopped raining.

The sun came out and so did Cierra. I thought she would be different somehow, but she was still just the same Cierra I always knew. That day we wore crowns and daisy chains and taught out younger cousins how to swim in the river, and everything was okay.