

On Coming Out

Gracie Terrall

The lump in my throat forbade me to speak. If I opened my mouth, I would most definitely throw up. The clouds swirled around in my brain making it difficult to form a coherent sentence. I had struggled for months trying to tell my sister that I was gay, but I couldn't shake the thought of her hating me. Every hypothetical conversation between my sister and I played through my head; none of them ended well.

It makes me uncomfortable to be around you, Gracie.

I still love you, but I can't support you, Gracie.

I'm ashamed to be your sister, Gracie.

There was a white-hot knife lodged in my stomach, keeping its hold on me. Who put it there? My sister? Myself? I had to tell her now or this gut-wrenching feeling would never go away. Rip it off like a bandaid right? My heart started pounding—boom boom BOOM— I was sure she could hear it from across the couch. My legs bounced and twitched as I grew more uncomfortable in my skin. The ringing in my ears needed to stop or I would never hear her response. Then again, did I really want to hear it? I would lose the most important person to me: my solace, my confidant. The words rose from my throat, along with a wave of nerves and anticipation, and I couldn't help but think about what was ingrained in me as a child. Ingrained in me and my sister.

I thought it was wrong. For such a long time I had been told it was wrong. Pastors would preach about the purity of heterosexuality and how my sins would earn me a one way ticket to hell, to be damned for eternity purely based on a preference out of my control. The lectures from pastors and

silent condemnations from family members forced me to keep my secret away from the world. For years I embraced this mindset suppressing my feelings and urges.

"God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve," I would say.

After slowly coming to terms with my homosexuality, I gained my own voice and my own thoughts that weren't strategically put there by my all too Christian family members. I wanted to tell someone. I yearned to. To reveal a secret I had harbored for years.

I imagined telling my mother. She wept.

I imagined telling my father. He left.

I imagined telling my best friend. She laughed. Laughed and disappeared.

I was left with one person to confide in: my sister, the person who knew me better than anyone, who was always there for me. We shared secrets and often had the same views on things. But would we agree on this? Nothing told me otherwise, but my paranoid brain convinced myself she would hate me.

I picked the day to tell her. It was nothing special, just a hot, summer afternoon while my mom was at work. We were both sitting on the couch watching Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire. The surly sour, tainted memory of this conversation would ruin our favorite movie forever. The sun's beaming rays beat down on me through the window—taunting me. Preparing me for the beating I would soon receive. I prepared myself to become an only child, ready for my sister to denounce me as disgusting and unholy. I savored what was to be my last happy moments with my sister. My forehead collected sweat while my breaths grew staggered and restrained. This was similar behavior to when I gave speeches during class. Somehow, uttering those two short

words—*I'm gay*—was worse than any speech I had ever given.

“Carlie,” I blurted out, “I like girls!”

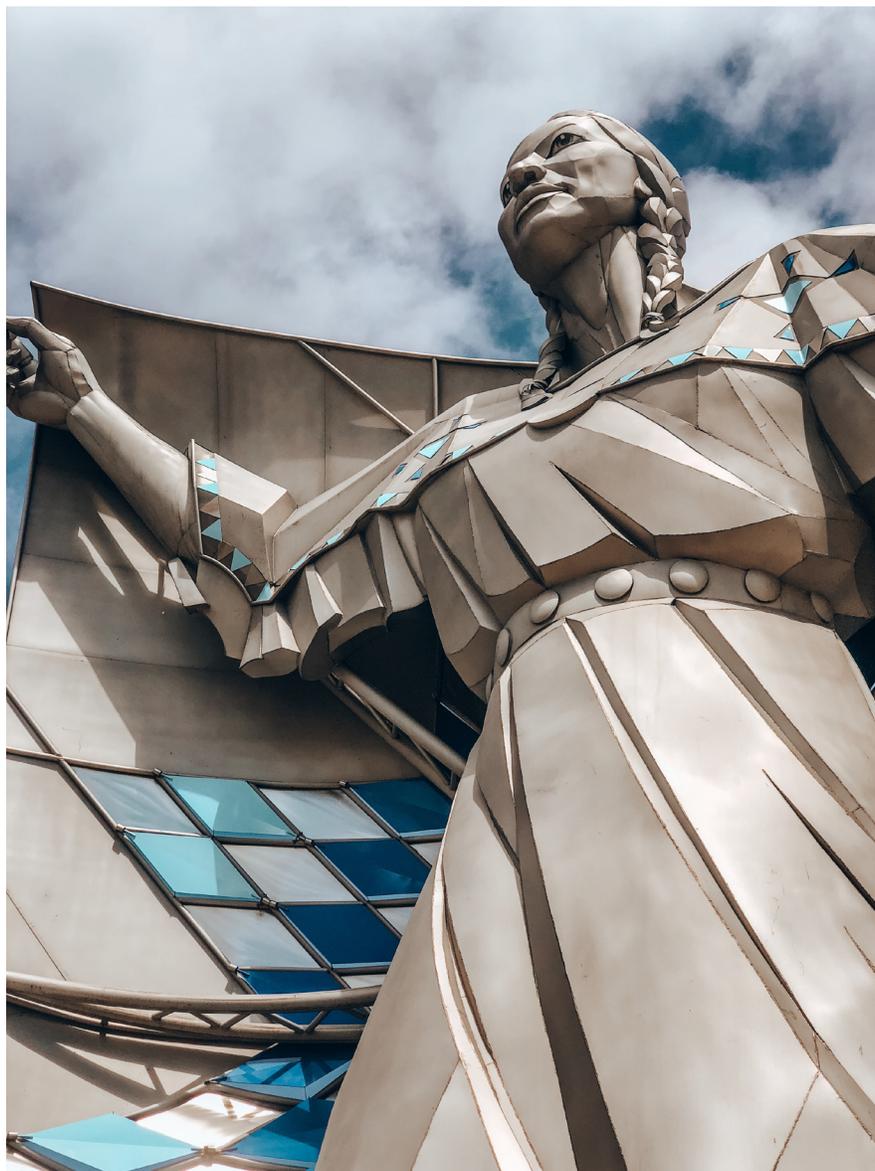
I waited for her response.

One, Two, Three, Four. I counted in my head, trying to match my breathing to the steady pace of counting. It didn't work though. I let loose a staggered breath and forgot what number I was on. I forgot what numbers were, what anything was.

All I could think about was the look on my sister's face. Well, the look she was about to have. She just needed to process what I said, to put two and two together before she started to inch away from me. Before she started to inch her way out of my life.

As I waited for the yelling and the disgust, she replied,

“Oh...cool.”



Dignity

Sofiya Zybaylova