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Gladiators

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“Stop facing at me!” This phrase still seems to roll off of my tongue so easily. As a girl growing up with three older brothers, my childhood turned out to be quite the challenge. I had quickly become accustomed to the rough-housing and name calling, though I was never very good at either. There is quite a separation of age between my brothers and me. The eldest, Daniel, is 12 years older than me. This being said, I didn’t necessarily have the opportunity to “grow up” with my oldest two brothers. I spent the days of my adolescence with Aaron, who is only six years older than me. Whenever I think back to my time of juvenility, he is the one person I can vividly remember being by my side. While, not always in a positive way, he was still always there.

When I close my eyes, it instantly takes me back. I can see Aaron and myself playing in the backyard. My lengthy, chocolate brown hair is carelessly pulled up into a ponytail, dirt is streaking down my face, and there are grass stains marking the knees of my pants. Aaron is over by the young dogwood trees searching for the perfect branch to shape into a spear. His wispy copper cut is sticking to the sweat beginning to form upon his head. His lucid blue eyes glimmer in the sunlight finding its way through the leaves. He turns to me in an excited manner. “Hurry, we’re the gladiators now!” he says, with a whimsical sense of confidence. Re-enacting our best Russell Crowe fighting abilities, we carry on battling the enemies of our imaginations. The steak knives we confiscated from the kitchen emerge from shrubs throughout the yard. I discretely smile to myself. My brother is my best friend, and it will always be this way.

When I open my eyes, like any fleeting moment, the memory has quickly slipped away. We’re no longer little kids playing in the backyard. Time has taken its toll on both of us. We’re standing in a dingy cluttered room glaring fiercely at each other. The gleam in Aaron’s eyes has been replaced with an intense look of disgust and anger. I begin to yell, “Let go of me!” His grip gets tighter with every jerking motion. I can feel my blood boiling beneath my skin. I begin waving my arms haphazardly in hopes of gaining my release, and I am finally able to free myself. As I rush down the stairs, I can hear his footsteps behind me, getting louder and closer with each passing second. Once my feet are planted on the floor, I feel Aaron’s strong hands grasp my shoulders and my body being pulled in the other direction. I look to see Aaron doubled over with tears swelling in his eyes. This is a sight that I have never seen before. My heart aches as I watch droplets fall from his eyes and soak through his shirt. I find myself weeping as well, my aggression rapidly vanishing. “Bryce, all I want to do is protect you. I’m not trying to hurt you, but I need you to listen. This is a tough time for all of us. We are all hurting. I know I can’t possibly understand what this is like for you, but I want to help. You’re my baby sister and my first priority. Stop trying to push everyone away. It’s not up to anybody else, but us, to get through this. So, come on. We’re the gladiators now.” I feel safe in his arms as he grips me tighter. Once again, I grin. This really is my best friend.

I will never forget the times I’ve spent with Aaron. These memories, good or bad, are ones I want to hold onto for the rest of my life. Even though we may grow apart throughout the course of time, a certain unspoken bond will always remain between the two of us.