

When David was a child he found a coin. It was an ancient coin with a square hole in the middle and strange characters around the edge. If you asked him where he got it he would tell you that it was just a stray that got tired of its life on the street and had decided to go home with him. The first thing he did when he found it was try to trade it to his friend for some playing cards.

“It’s probably an ancient treasure!” he said. “Some lost artifact from another age. And those symbols on it, look they’re elvish. I bet it has a spell on it, and if you can figure out how to translate it you can use it.”

His friend asked his mother if she spoke Elvish, but she said the symbols were in Chinese and that she didn’t. He then tried to use the coin in a vending machine but made David trade back when it kept spitting the coin back out. David put the coin back in his pocket and sulked, spending the rest of the day regretting not having said “no backsies”.

He kept the coin for several months before it gradually grew lucky through an unclear process. He strung a piece of twine through the hole and wore it as a necklace. When he was nervous he would grasp the cool metal with his hand and feel reassured. He imagined that all the world revolved around his coin, and that if he held it tight he could stop the world from moving for just that moment. His mother told him that he should take it off when he showers or it will rust, but he couldn’t untie the knot so he just kept it on. The coin didn’t rust but the twine eventually rotted and snapped, sending the coin rolling under a chest of drawers. He tried to move it to get his coin back but the old wooden chest tipped over and fell on him, breaking his arm. When he told his father how it happened he said “It doesn’t sound like a very lucky coin to me.” David got a chain necklace and kept wearing it anyway.

A year passed before new neighbors moved in. They had a daughter his age named Sara, a short girl with straight brown hair and dark eyes. They came over to visit one time and the parents went off into the kitchen to talk of grownup things. He thought he was a grownup too and wanted to sit in the kitchen but his parents told him to entertain Sara in the living room.

“I like your necklace.” she said.

“It’s not a necklace. It’s a charm.”

“Where did you get it?”

David couldn’t remember. He must have had it always. “My girlfriend gave it to me.” he said, wanting to sound mature.

She went very quiet and spent the rest of the visit kicking the footrest of the couch while their parents talked. That’s the day I was born, although David hadn’t realize it yet.

My name is Lisa, and I’m David’s imaginary friend. When you’re imaginary it is quite an experience to just suddenly exist one day. Sure people are born, but they don’t really appreciate it from the start. Some people never appreciate it all in fact, and those I feel sorry for. It takes them years and years until they’re even conscious, while an imaginary person is born with all of their faculties intact. I suppose it would be akin to waking up one day and not having a past: terrifying and exciting and hopelessly alone.

The thing about imaginary people is that they live in someone’s consciousness, so the more people that know about them the stronger they are. I listened one time when David was in

church and I heard about God. I guess that's why he's so powerful, because he has so many people thinking about him.

"Whose imaginary friend do you think God was?" I asked him afterward.

"Don't be silly, he's not imaginary he's real."

"I don't see what one has to do with the other." I said.

David was impressed by how easy it was to get Sara to believe him when he made me up, so he started telling all his friends about me. They asked him to describe me and he told them I had soft curly blonde hair and bright blue eyes. I rather liked the idea, and as soon as he said the words they were true. I tried to think about what I looked like before he said this but it was inconceivable. Those aspects of me he hadn't thought of before simply did not exist. I became more real with every word and I was truly happy. If his first conception of me was my birth then each detail was akin to me growing up. Only I did it in the matter of seconds and minutes instead of years and years.

He told the lie so often that he became very practiced with all the details and everyone believed him. In fact he told the lie so often that David began to believe himself as well. When he was alone he would talk to me and I would listen very carefully. I was his best friend, and the more he told people it was so, the more minds I touched, the stronger I became.

"Why did you give me the coin?" he asked, as he believed himself when he said I had given it to him.

"I'll give you anything to make you happy." I said, and I meant it. I've heard stories where lovers say 'you are my world', or 'I am nothing without you', but those are figures of speech for them. They are quite literal here.

"How will it make me happy?"

"It's a magic coin."

"No it's not. The letters aren't even Elvish, it's in Chinese."

"The Chinese have magic too."

He hadn't considered that, and he fell silent. After a pause he asked: "What's it do?"

"It lets you find true love." I answered.

He said he loved me and I laughed and said that it must be working then. I told him the coin was a link between us and lets him talk to me, and he said that made sense because none of his friends could hear me.

Years passed as they tend to if left unnoticed and David entered high school. His friends stopped believing in me and began to tease him for not doing the same. He started spending more time around Sara because she always believed every word he said, wide eyed and wordless. He would tell her about my soft curly brown hair and bright blue eyes. I had thought I was a blonde but on closer inspection I realized I must have had brown hair all along. I was a little jealous at first, but I had to exist in people's minds so I didn't protest. It hurt when his other friends kicked me out of their heads. People don't start disbelieving something in an epiphany though. They don't even notice the moment when they have stopped believing. For them the whole process must be like growing old: their body changes and loses function so gradually that they don't even notice having lost it until they can barely remember what it was like to be strong. I noticed it though. I felt the waning warmth of each candle in their minds that dimmed through the years and each sharp pang when one was extinguished.

I didn't tell David I was growing weak but he noticed in time. How could he not, with us so close? He asked me if he could let his friends hold the coin so they could talk to me too. He thought that if they could hear me they would believe again. I said I was too shy and that he must never do that. In truth I was scared. If someone else held the coin and still couldn't talk to me, would he finally realize I wasn't real too? I can only assume that I'd die, though there was no way to know for certain. Do ideas continue to exist outside of consciousness, at least for a little while like a fish out of water?

The next night he went to a party and played truth or dare. I watched them all sitting on the floor with their backs against couches. Sara went before him and picked dare and they all made her do a handstand just because she was wearing a skirt. She tried it anyway, trying to hold her skirt up with her knees while she went upside-down, then falling into a great pile of cloth and limbs and laughter. Then it was David's turn and he picked truth because he was afraid of what they'd do to him.

"What's the deal with Lisa? Seriously now." They asked him.

"What do you mean?"

"Why hasn't anyone ever seen her? You picked truth so you've got to tell us: is she actually real?"

He solemnly crossed his heart and nodded. I grinned. They laughed at him, calling him a liar. Teasing him again.

"She's imaginary! Just admit it!" He looked right at me. I don't really know how, I don't know where I was only that he was looking at me.

"What's one have to do with the other?" he asked me, but they all heard him and laughed all the more. I wasn't laughing.

He was so embarrassed that he left the circle where they sat on the floor and retired to the couch by himself. Sara got up from the floor and went to sit beside him. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and leaned in close to speak softly.

"Why do you keep telling stories? Everyone knows it isn't true. You're just making this hard on yourself." she said.

That hurt me; she was supposed to believe in me. It hurt David too and he didn't know how to respond. David undid his coin and gripped it between his hands in silence. Sara reached across the infinite distance that separates two people close together from touching to grasp his hands. I silently mouthed that she can't be allowed to hold the coin, but I don't think he would have heard even if I had screamed it.

"You've got the same dark eyes as Lisa." He said.

"She's not real."

"I am! I want to be." I whispered.

David pressed the coin into Sara's hand. "Just listen to her." David said.

To her credit Sara tried. She closed her eyes and listened very hard.

"Though I'm alone I'm not afraid / for I am grown and not hand-made / Let me go before I start to fade / My life for yours is what I'll trade." I couldn't think of a thing to say so I started reciting song lyrics, one line after another as fast as I could remember them. I wanted her to hear me so badly I could barely think. As soon as I forgot what came next I started making up my

own words just to have something to say. Sara furrowed her brow in concentration and the glimmer of recognition appeared in her dark eyes. I continued desperately:

“I wish I was real not imitation / I miss the feel of my creation / let me in before you let me go / just try to hear me before you say no.”

She shook her head, growing flustered. “I feel so stupid for actually trying that. I was on your side you know! Stop lying and grow up already.” David snatched the coin back and ran out the back door. Sara called after him but he was gone, out into the night streets.

“I’m sorry, I had to try, I’m sorry.” David kept saying as he ran. I said nothing. I hadn’t felt so weak since the moment I was born: no, even then Sara believed me right away. Now I only have David, and he must hate me for making him into an outcast. I kept telling myself that at least I had him, that it was enough to keep me alive. I wasn’t enough to keep him alive though, he needed other people and as long as I was there they drive him away.

He was my world, and stopping myself from talking to him was the hardest thing I’d ever done in my short life. I had hoped he would go straight home and sleep until he forgot about me. I had hoped that he would wake up and be grown up. I had hoped that he would be able to laugh at how silly he had been for holding onto me for so long. He almost did. He made it all the way back home before pausing at the doorway to turn around.

“Where did you go?” he said to me. I wadded up a piece of my shirt and bit down hard to keep myself from talking. I don’t know if it was necessary though, I was fading fast and might not have been able to talk even if I wanted to. If I could just stay quiet, if he could just forget, this would all be over. If I could just stay quiet he’d think I wasn’t there.

He sighed and sat down on his door step, sweeping the coin off his neck to hold in his palm. He traced its edges with his index finger in thought.

“I can wait out here all night, I’m not going in there alone.” he said aloud.

He was alone though, he had always been alone. I just had to stay quiet, how hard could that be? Nearly impossible when I just wanted to say goodbye. I spit my shirt out of my mouth and was about to speak when I heard hurried footsteps and hesitated. My hesitation succeeded where my resolve had not and I saw Sara jogging up the sidewalk to stop before him.

“Who were you talking to?” she asked, catching her breath. She sat down on the sidewalk beside David.

“No one I guess.”

There was a long pause before she blurted out “I’m sorry I didn’t mean it I really shouldn’t have said-” but he cut her off.

“Don’t worry about it, she’s gone.”

“Where did she go?”

“I don’t know. She’s just gone. I just got a flash of her straight hair falling slack around her pillow and I don’t know. It’s my own fault. She told me not to let anyone else hold the coin and then I... I just wanted...” He looked up from his feet at Sara and took a deep breathe. “She looked a lot like you, you know.”

“How come you’re still holding your coin then?”

“It’s my lucky coin.” He said stubbornly, clutching it to his heart.

“You’re a mess, it doesn’t seem very lucky to me.” They both laughed.

“It’s a magic coin.” I mouthed the next words with him as he said “It helps me find the one I love.”

“Does it work?”

“Yeah.” He grinned.