

I didn't like her from day one, and it may have been even before that. My mother, Phoebe, told me there was a lot of movement during her pregnancy, and the last three months were the worst. I was constantly changing positions, searching for my own space. At thirty-six weeks, when I had grown to about seven pounds already, I decided I had enough. There just wasn't enough room for the both of us.

When I was four Kate would chase me incessantly. I complained to my mother, the best way a four year old could, by whining and throwing tantrums. Kate meant well but she never left me alone, and, worst of all, she never shut up. Her endless jawing in my ear started before we could even speak actual words, and, with our vocabulary growing, it certainly wasn't going to get any better. Even worse than the chatter itself, as we grew older Kate's speech became bizarre, to the point that she would say things that either made no sense or made me question her intentions.

"I wish I could be a wizard, and make it all disappear."

I usually just ignored her until she became quiet, and then grumbled to my mother later.

"Mary," my mother chastised, "Calm down and play nice."

I wasn't fond of my mother's short answers. They provided no tangible solution to what I considered a living, breathing, ongoing problem, and instead just allowed her to turn the other cheek. I tried to cut her some slack as I got older. She was a single mother, one who had previous dreams of becoming a physician but instead settled as a nursing assistant due to an unfortunate and untimely pregnancy. My father was a loser, in and out of jail for ridiculousness like petty theft. I met him when I was eight and that was enough for me. I decided that being in a loving relationship with only one parent was far better than forcing a relationship with two just because the other happens to be my father. I often wondered how someone as smart and sophisticated as

my mother could be conned by such a worthless individual with no money, no prospects, and half a dozen other girlfriends.

“You would be surprised how people have the ability to talk you into believing things they think are actually true,” she answered.

I always wondered what she meant by that.

In any event, despite my mother’s half-hearted efforts, Kate continued to earn my abhorrence. When we began school she always wanted to be included with my friends, wanted to take the same classes, and even berated me into taking the violin with her in orchestra instead of the flute, which I preferred. Kate tried hard to get me to like her, but early on I deemed her a giant annoyance, especially when she would pester me about our father.

“Don’t you wonder about him? I think we should escape from here and go visit him.”

“Kate, he’s 3000 miles away,” I answered definitively.

She continued her pursuit.

“We could steal a car, or hitchhike across the country. We could panhandle so when we got there we could buy him something nice.”

I disregarded her nonsense, which I did often when she made such suggestions. Sometimes she relented and let me be. Other times she would persist until I would have a fit or concede to her plan. By the time I was a teenager I decided to not bother mom anymore with Kate’s absurdity. I figured that I had finally grown into a position where I could handle her myself, for which I was unfortunately mistaken.

I started dating my first boyfriend, Jason, in November. Even though we were only sophomores in high school, and we fell into the throng of teenage love, we fit well together. Jason was a typical loud, obnoxious jock, whereas I was the quiet, subdued book nerd. I earned

my quietness quite by accident – usually Kate did all the talking, and the more I engaged her, the more the conversations would linger. As such, I learned to be silent. However, despite our difference in personality, Jason and I enjoyed each other’s company, and we spent most every afternoon together after school. It was a well received break for me – even the worst day in Jason’s company was more enjoyable than the best day in Kate’s.

One evening, about four months into our relationship, Jason and I were embraced on the couch enjoying a predictably bad horror movie. The living room in his home was encased in six foot, floor to ceiling windows. I thought my mind was playing tricks on me, that is was just the movie influencing my senses, but I knew I saw her. There she was, peering through the left window, her identical blue eyes staring right back at mine.

“No way,” I whispered, breaking a long silence.

Jason sat up, startled. “What is it?”

I ran to the front door, threw it open, and stood with my arms up screaming at the darkness.

“Get out of here! You’re such a lunatic - get away from me! Leave me alone you freak!”

Though I heard scuffling, I lost sight of her but continued to throw my voice into the night.

“Why are you such a psycho? Can’t you live your own life?? I wish you would leave us forever!” By now my face was crimson and tears were streaming down my cheeks. Jason came behind me and hugged me, trying to subdue my thrashing, gently coaxing me to calm. I turned and buried my face into his chest, silently asking God why I was born into such a nightmare. Why couldn’t I just live a normal life without this irreverent follower? What purpose was it to torture me day in and day out? What did I do to deserve this?

After a few minutes when I was calm, Jason raised my head in his hands, looking at me through worried and anxious eyes.

“Babe, who are you yelling at?”

“It’s...her...” I sniffled. “I can’t get rid of her. She won’t leave me alone!”

Jason smoothed my arms and embraced me, for which I was thankful. He let out a long, deep sigh.

“Let’s take you home,” he said finally.

He would be the first of many boyfriends I lost to her. By that time my mother’s excuse became “just wait until college - you’re almost there and then things will be much better.” I had my hopes on several state schools that had decent pre-medicine programs. I really wanted to become a psychologist, considering how much practice I felt I had already experienced. In high school I commanded several advanced placement and SAT prep classes which qualified me for even more difficult programs. I had my choice of more than ten schools, but in the end I chose State College. Kate, ironically enough, had no interest in medicine or psychology. She preferred art, music, and the abstract. However, she was equally as smart and just as qualifying for any college. As such, to no shock of mine, she chose State College.

“Maybe we can be roommates,” she suggested one evening during a study session for finals. I stared at her blankly, not wanting to address her. She continued in a soft tone.

“I think it would be great...we make a good team...”

I left abruptly during her proposal. When I became a psychologist, I decided, Kate would be my first case. Why was she so delusional? All my life I poured my hatred onto her, yet she never surrendered. She simply wanted to be by my side, no matter how much I disregarded her

or how ignorant I spoke to her. How can one person hate themselves so much to make their only friend a person like their sister who abhorred her? How can someone have such a self-loathing personality?

I leaned on the countertop to think. Maybe it wasn't Kate. Maybe the problem was me. Perhaps I was the awful person and Kate was simply trying to help me find the good in myself. Possibly Kate felt sorry for me and was attempting to be the one friend I could always rely on. Maybe she wasn't delusional, but passionate and fervent. I thought at length about our relationship, and how a well-trained psychologist would evaluate the situation. Kate, though annoying, had never done anything to really harm me. Her persistence to be in my presence despite my detestation allowed me to consider that she was conceivably a better person than I, as she was forgiving, sympathetic, and, most of all, patient. Instead of receiving her adoration with open arms, my gratification was to loathe her more, and to be cruel and deflecting. All those years I made Kate into someone terrible, when really I was the one more appalling. All along I made her to be crazy when it was I who was acting insane.

I looked down at my bleeding wrists as my mother walked in the room.

"My God, Mary, what have you done?"

The paring knife lay next to me, and I started feeling faint.

"Hurry," I said to my mother apologetically, "before Kate sees me like this."

When I opened my eyes my wrists were bandaged and bound tightly to metal bars. The light was too bright for me to focus initially, and I could only concentrate on my back pain from the hard mattress underneath me. I heard whispering near the right side of what I determined to be a hospital bed. Statements like, "it will be a shock," "you should call her father," and "no

State College for a while.” I started floundering against the rails to attract attention. Better get it over with, I thought.

My mother walked over and petted my head, her porcelain face now in focus.

“My sweetie,” she cooed, her eyes gazing at me pathetically.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

She sighed and answered, “You really did a number on yourself this time.

“I never figured you would go as far as to hurt yourself. The fits, and the anger – I always hoped you would grow out of it. I’m sorry that I was so wrong. Now look at you,” she trailed off, sobbing. I watched her gently catch tears from her high cheekbones for a few minutes.

“You will need to stay here a while,” she said at last.

I lay quite for a moment. Maybe this was better. Maybe being here would help me be the sister that Kate always wanted me to be. I hoped it would inspire change, and help me grow and improve. I became excited with the thought that I finally understood what was happening all those years, that I would finally have a strong, positive relationship with my sister. Ironically, after all the times I wanted to be left alone, I suddenly felt the urge to see Kate right away. I wanted to tell her what I had learned, and that I was sorry.

“Where’s Kate?” I asked.

My mother shuddered.

“Oh, baby, shh,” she said, resuming her head petting. I grew frantic.

“Mom answer me! Where is my sister? What is going on? Is she hurt – is something wrong?!”

My flailing set off the bed alarm and the nurses ran into the room in droves. One came near me with a syringe, trying to steady my left arm while I continued to berate my mother.

“Where is she?” I screamed. “Where is Kate?”

It took only moments for the drugs to filter through my veins. I became lethargic, and my questions became slurred.

“Where...is...my....sister?”

Finally, Phoebe answered me.

“Mary,” she said sternly, “there is no Kate. I have only one daughter. I have only ever had one daughter.”

I closed my eyes, falling victim to a syringe that would keep me filled for months to come. There would be no State College for a while.