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Since You've Been Gone

By Tamara Palmer

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Chapter One

The limousine arrived at 10:00 am sharp. I watched as the driver combed his hair in the rearview mirror and picked at the spaces between his teeth, which was no surprise because there was a half-eaten poppyseed bagel on the dashboard. He climbed carefully out of the limo, all smooth and elegant like, palming the wrinkles out of his jacket and straitening his tie. His face looked heavy with sadness and I imagined him applying the emotion like makeup, before he left for work. What did he have to be sorry for? He didn't know us; this was just his job. Day in and day out, he took people to bury their dead.

He paced himself as he slowly approached our white-washed brick steps, carefully climbing each one as if it were the most strenuous activity he'd taken on in months. When he got to the top he cleared his throat, took a deep breath, and knocked on our front door.

"They probably can't hear you," I huffed, rocking back and forth on the porch swing.

“Oh! I'm sorry, little lady. I didn't see you there,” he jumped a bit, but maintained his practiced politeness, hands held behind his back, and gaze angled downward. Puke.

“They're on the back porch,” I called. He tipped his hat at me, said nothing more, and walked down the stairs, disappearing around the side of our house.

I continued to swing, pulling my legs closer to my chest and thinking how I probably should have shaved them. I didn't even care that you could see my underpants through the gap between my legs.

The driver returned with a procession of family members dressed in black. As they reached the limo, I could hear them calling to me. I didn't want to leave my swing for the suffocating tomb of a car, but I had to go. Everything was unbearable — walking, moving, even breathing. I dreamed myself an angel — my body floating effortlessly off the swing, and down the steps. In reality, though, I stumbled my way to the car. The high-heels I fought with Mom to wear killed my feet.

My black sundress billowed in the light breeze, and my orange scarf floated up to tickle my face. Mom called the orange "inappropriate," when I put it on. I told her to leave me alone. It was Tyler's favorite color and that's all that mattered. She should have known that. I closed my eyes for a second, trying to drown in the sensation of the scarf dancing on my face.

“Dammit!” I screamed, as my knee collided with the door of the limousine.

“Kit, watch your mouth.” Mom shot me her usual 'watch your manners!' glare, which ended up looking more like a cry of despair than anything else. It was only as an afterthought that she reached down to pat my knee and make sure that I was okay. Inside the limousine I tried to melt into the cool black leather seat. I didn't hyperventilate, like I thought I might. I was too

numb to breathe. Who would have thought that my first limo ride would be to my brother's funeral?

At the cemetery we all took comfort in the shade of the rent-a-tent. I grabbed on tight to my grandmother's pale, soft hand, and kept a watchful eye on dad. His normally tanned face was blank and colorless, making it look like he too had cut out of his time on earth, but had forgotten to tell his body. The service dragged on and on. I tried to focus on what the Rabbi was saying, but half of it was in Hebrew, and hell if I knew what any of that meant. I closed my eyes while they lowered the casket into the grave. I heard the heavy clink of it sinking into the ground, and a wave of nausea overcame me. A hint of bile crept up my throat, and I was worried that I might be sick. Luckily, I choked it back. Mom's heavy sobs drowned out the violinist. In spite of the music and Mom, I was acutely aware of what was now Dad's signature silence.

The past few days lingered in my mind like a bad dream: the reporters, the television crews, the hospital. That phone call. That awful, dreadful, phone call.

Standing in front of Tyler's grave it was Brandon, Tyler's best friend, who was there to console me. His hands gently massaged my shoulders. I wanted so badly to feel the pain of my sunburn from just last week when Tyler and I spent too much time goofing off in Brandon's pool and we all turned into lobsters.

Aunt Deborah gave me a stiff nudge. It was my turn to stand up and throw dirt on the casket. The lump in my throat fell like a rock into my stomach as I reached for the shovel. I couldn't do it. I couldn't have any part in burying him. I hadn't agreed to this. The casket was barely visible from where I stood looking down into the open grave. Mounds of dirt were already hiding much of the beautiful mahogany. All day my mind had been picturing him lying

in there, hot and sweaty. No air. I started coughing uncontrollably while beads of sweat poured down my face. I could feel all of my relatives' eyes on me, as I begrudgingly reached for the shovel. The weight of it was more than my shaky arms could bear. A shudder rippled through the crowd. I looked down in horror. The shovel had fallen in.

The world faded gray, then turned black.

I awoke to find myself in the backseat of the limousine. My head was in Brandon's lap, and he was patting wet paper towels on my forehead.

"What happened?" I asked, clutching my aching head.

"You passed out," Brandon told me as he continued to cool my face. The paper towels felt heavenly.

"Where are we?"

"We're still at the cemetery. We'll be heading to your Aunt Deborah's pretty soon. The ceremony's nearly over."

"I missed the rest of it?" I attempted to sit up, but everything started to turn gray again.

"Slow down there, Spunky," Brandon laughed, gently, but firmly pushing me back down.

"Shit. My head is killing me."

"Relax," he said, staring blankly out the window, as if he'd lost a part of himself but couldn't figure out which piece.

"I'm sorry Brandon, but I'm actually glad Crissy couldn't make it today. I needed you."

"Even if she were here Kit, you'd be my main priority."

I smiled at Brandon and closed my eyes and saw Tyler. It was like a movie playing on the backs of my eyelids. We were six or seven years old and sharing a bedroom. I had the

bottom bunk and he had the top. I woke up screaming in the middle of the night from a bad nightmare. Tyler started screaming too and slid down the ladder, like a fireman who'd gotten the midnight call. He climbed into my bed and held me tight.

"Sshh..." he sang to me like Mom often did. "Don't cry Kit, don't cry. I'm here, it's just a dream."

Aunt Deborah's house was a buzz of pesky fly-like people, busy crying and hugging one another. From the second I made my entrance I was passed like a toy doll from relative to relative, many of whom I'd never met. At least the funeral was over. I could put up with anything after that.

The house dated back to the Victorian era, a fact Aunt Deborah didn't let anyone miss. Tyler and I liked to refer to it as being on the hysterical, as opposed to historical society registry. It felt like being in a museum — a boring, musty museum. Knick-knacks and pictures covered every square inch of furniture, so it was impossible to set a glass down without having to move something. The antiques were so fragile I couldn't help fearing that one false move would send something crashing to the floor, and I'd had my share of near misses.

"Kit, you remember your cousin Mordechi? He lives outside Baltimore?" It was more of a statement than a question as Mom pulled my arm and shoved me in front of her like some sort of trophy.

"Hi," I mumbled. Mordechi had gray tufts protruding from his ears and a horrible comb-over, a vain attempt at hiding his bald spot. I wasn't sure how someone with gray hair could

technically be a cousin and not a great-aunt or great-uncle. Maybe he was a great-cousin. Does that even exist?

"What a little angel you've grown up to be. Let me get a good look at you... Ah yes, you look so much like your mother did at that age, such beautiful dark hair and deep green eyes. You're going to be quite the heart-breaker." I rolled my eyes at Mom. I never enjoyed being complimented about my looks, especially by gross old relatives.

"So tell me again how old you are?"

"Fifteen," I huffed and looked around. Where had Brandon gone?

"Such a tragic day. Such loss, such loss..." he said in a creepy tone that made me think that possibly something even worse had happened and I was about to find out about it.

My head nodded in mute agreement, as my eyes darted around the room for an escape route. I didn't want to be here with all of these people. I felt like screaming, "None of you miss him as much as me!"

"Well, you take care." He extended his arms for a hug. I leaned over, offering only half a hug, my shoulders pressed against his. His onion breath could have made a flower wilt.

I wandered aimlessly in search of Brandon. At the far side of the kitchen I spotted him cornered by some little old lady who used to work with Mom.

"Now, you're Katrina's boyfriend, right?" I heard her ask. Poor guy.

"No. I'm — I mean, I was Tyler's best friend. We've been best friends since first grade," he said, pushing a lock of blonde hair out of his eyes and coughing. He always coughed when he was nervous.

Brandon was letting his hair grow out, so it was in that in-between, funky stage where it wasn't long enough to look cool, or short enough to look stylish. No matter what length his hair

was, though, there was no doubt that he and Tyler were the true heart-breakers of our high school. I swear that girls would follow them around like they were rockstars. I loved teasing, "Can I have your autograph, Brandon?" while I'd bat my eyes. If I ever did that at his house though, I usually ended up straight in the pool – fully clothed or in a bathing suit, it never mattered.

"Oh, good. Kids are dating way too young these days." The old lady mumbled something else under her breath and looked in my direction. "Why, there's Kit now!" she exclaimed.

"Yeah, it's me." God, I needed to get out of that house! "Brandon, I've been looking for you."

I could tell that he was relieved to see me, as he flashed his widest smile, which always triggered a dimple.

"So are you enjoying being tormented by my amazingly bizarre family?" I asked, as I led him away to the kitchen.

"Oh, they're fine. She was sort of sweet. A bit crazy, but sweet. Who is she, anyway?"

"Haven't the foggiest. Hey, I'm gonna pass out again if I have to stay in here much longer." We sighed in unison when we saw the deck swarming with people. "Let's cut out to the backyard through the downstairs."

In the family room, at the bottom of the stairs, we stopped abruptly. Someone had covered the fireplace surround with pictures of Tyler through the years. There were so many candles it looked like a Catholic altar. I lost my footing and plopped right down on the new carpet that lacked the cushion of the seventies shag it had finally replaced. Another bout of hysterical crying kicked in. I felt so completely out of control. Brandon came up behind me and

lifted me to my feet. He propped me up against the wall so that I was looking right at him, then he took a wad of toilet paper out of his pants pocket and started towards my face.

"Gross! Is that t.p.?" I forced a laugh through my tears as I pushed his hand away.

"Fine!" he huffed, stuffing the mass back in his pants pocket. "Come on, let's look at the pictures."

We walked closer to the fireplace, and I kicked off my heels. "Check this one out. It's you, me and Tyler at Waves of Wonder in Philly. Remember when he and I tricked you into going down the Death Spiral?" Brandon smirked.

"Don't try and cheer me up."

"We want to hear! We want to hear!" A group of kids appeared from some far corner of the basement. I forgot that Aunt Deborah still had a play area in the back, even though my cousin Ari was seventeen and unlikely to create Lego villages anytime soon. I recognized the kids as belonging to various friends of my mom.

"Hi Kit!" a blonde one named Kaleigh sang as she came running at me, grabbing my legs in a bear hug.

"Hi," I sang back.

Brandon looked at me with a grin and a flash in his eye as he started the story. The kids huddled around his feet like it was Saturday afternoon story-time at the library. "There's this ride at Waves of Wonder called the Death Spiral. Tyler and I had been down it a few times, but Kit had never been. We told her that it wasn't as scary as it looked, and dared her to go on it, calling her a chicken if she wouldn't." At that, the kids started snickering and looking at me like I was some kind of an idiot.

"I did go though," I added.

"She did," Brandon agreed. The kids eyes darted between us like a ping-pong tournament. "She was wearing this silly bikini, see, and the top came off halfway through the ride! By the time she made it to the end of the slide, she was stuck in the bottom pool with no top! A lifeguard pulled out his bullhorn, turned to Kit, and screamed, 'No one in their right mind wears a bikini to a water park!' They stopped the ride, while Kit hid under the water until someone found a towel for her to wrap herself in. They never did find her suit."

The kids hiccupped laughed and I turned beet red, just as I had that day at the park.

"Yeah, that was hilarious," I scowled at Brandon. "How about this one," I said, cautiously joining him at the fireplace. "You and Tyler dressed up like monkeys at Halloween. Whose idea was that, anyway?"

"That was all Tyler. For some reason he was into monkeys that year. I can't remember though, was that before or after the weasel phase?"

"I just remember the rats. Remember when he thought rats were the coolest animals ever? He had rat stationary, toy rats, and then he brought a real one home! Remember that? It completely freaked out Mom! He said he got it at the pet store, but I swear he pulled it out of a gutter." I was laughing too, and suddenly the guilt of it was so intense that I felt myself tearing apart. "Isn't it horrible that we're talking about him in the past tense?" I asked, as I started crying again. My legs felt like rubbery sticks super-glued to my waist. Brandon continued staring at the pictures, but I noticed that he was crying too.

The kids began fidgeting, but I didn't have the energy to make them feel better. Right on cue, someone from upstairs called down for Emma, and one of the girls raced up the stairs. Next there was a cry for a Caleb, then one by one all the kids left, and Brandon and I were alone. I settled into the old couch across from the fireplace, and dropped my head into my hands. I was

shaking my head no, but I didn't even know what I was saying no to. I just wanted to be alone. I'd never wanted to be more alone in my life.

"I brought a flask," Brandon whispered in my ear. I looked up to see him wiping away his tears with a strip of toilet paper.

"You what?"

"I ditched it under the front porch. It's got Jack Daniels in it. I swiped it from my folks' liquor cabinet. You want some?" Brandon flashed his mischievous grin, the one that made all the girls fall for him, sometimes even me.

Right then Mom came half-way down the stairs, calling my name into the expanse of the basement. My eyes dashed around for a place to hide, but as soon as I stood up she made eye contact with me. She had with her another distant relative who looked vaguely familiar. Was it necessary to become reacquainted with my entire family on the worst day of my life? Our family was so enormously huge that I couldn't keep straight second cousins, and third cousins, and the twice-removed stuff. No wonder they made family trees.

"There you are, Kit. We've been looking for you," she said, coming all the way downstairs. "You remember your Dad's Cousin Lorraine?" The smell of Mom's perfume made me want to cry. I thought of the comfort I used to take in it, and how it was all just a stupid illusion. She couldn't really protect me from anything. Maybe once upon a time she could, but not anymore.

"I'm sorry to hear about Tyler, Katrina," this Cousin Lorraine said as she reached out for a hug. "I can't begin to feel your grief."

I nodded my head like a mute. Why did adults always feel they needed to use your formal name at such times? I hated my name.

"It's hard to lose a sibling," she continued, "and Tyler was a very special person."

She combed my hair away from my face with her hand, but I flinched back and shook it out so it fell back in my eyes, shielding me like a curtain.

"At least you have your whole summer vacation ahead of you. Heck, before you know it you'll be back at school, and life will be back to normal."

"Normal?" I demanded, finally at my boiling point. I ripped myself away from her clutch and started walking towards the screen door. "Nothing will ever be normal again!" I screamed at her, but looked straight at Mom, then shook my head as I forced open the door. I ran into the backyard, not caring that I was barefoot. I ran past a crowd of people by the picnic table, but I didn't stop running until I reached the hammock, at the far end of the yard.

Enclosed in the safety of the hammock, I tried to calm down. I realized that I'd left Brandon in the house, but I didn't care. Mom could parade him around for a change. I closed my eyes and started some of the deep breathing Grandma Carlin taught me a few days before, when I was hyperventilating. I thought back to the campouts we had had on so many summer nights. Somehow cousin Ari always got the hammock first. In the middle of the night, though, Tyler would flip him out, and then wake me, and we'd both climb in. Ari had already left for Israel for the summer; funny, he probably didn't even know Tyler had died.

None of these people honestly knew Tyler. They said they understood how I felt. They didn't have a clue! I was his twin sister — nobody could be closer than that. We shared a bond that these people would never understand. They all got to go back to their lives after this. I had to live in this hell forever. I felt certain that somewhere up above Tyler was looking down and

feeling exactly the same way. I looked up at the sky. It was still a deep, crisp blue; not a cloud to be seen. Somewhere, I was sure, maybe in the treetops, he was smiling. So with a forced smile and tear-stained eyes, I sniffled and waved back.

“Kit, wake up,” Brandon demanded as he rocked the hammock. He had Melissa with him. Of all the people I didn't want to see, Melissa was at the top of the list. She and Tyler had been going steady for the past school year, and she was the shallowest person I'd ever met. I couldn't figure out what Tyler saw in her. She was the queen bee of the rich crowd at our high school. Besides prancing her around and showing her off to his friends, I don't know what they could have done together, or talked about. Brandon thought that deep down Melissa and Tyler were in love, but I didn't buy it. Brandon was such a hopeless romantic.

Atlantic City High School was divided into sections sort of like a puzzle. The Longport/Margate rich kids (Melissa's posse) were mostly cheerleaders and fancy jocks who were on the tennis team, golf team, or any other country club sport. The rich kids overlapped a bit with the jocks who played the real sports, like football, basketball and track. They came from all areas of the island. Tyler was like the Ferris Bueller of our school. He could hang with the rich kids, theater kids (he was in every school play), jocks (since he was on the track team) and sometimes even the punks and Goths. Me, I was pretty much Tyler's side-kick. In junior high I was part of the popular kids. Then in high school my best friends Ashley, Lindsey and Emma all transferred to Holy Trinity, the Catholic high school, leaving me to find a new group at A.C. High. I tried to hang out with my old friends after school and on the weekends, but as the year went by they stopped including me. By March each one had a boyfriend and cared more about hooking up than hanging out. It was April when they no longer included me in their I.M. chats,

and by May school was ending and I was just as girl-friendless as when I started the year. It was easier to hang with Brandon and Tyler and their group than make one of my own.

Melissa looked as though she had not slept or eaten in several days. Her eyes were watery and bloodshot with dark circles underneath; in a way she appeared more upset than me, and that just amped up my anger.

“Hi, Melissa,” I said, wishing I could have drummed up some of the plasticity that the limo driver had, but I’m a bad liar.

“Hi, Kit. I tried to say hi at the funer...” her throat caught the last word like a bug. With her monogrammed handkerchief, she delicately removed the mascara running down her beautifully painted, rosy cheeks. The pink letter M on the handkerchief was now stained black. She carefully held onto a plastic cup of sparkling grape juice as though it were actual crystal instead of a disposable cup from Safeway.

“It’s okay,” Brandon said, putting his arm around her waist.

“Crissy really wanted to be here,” Melissa told me, and then Brandon chimed in to finish her thought.

“Yeah, I told Kit that Crissy was in Florida at her Grandma’s. She’ll be back next week, though.”

Crissy, Brandon’s on-again, off-again girlfriend, was Melissa’s best friend. She was actually way worse than Melissa, talk about a super manipulative bitch. It was also what made her attractive to guys, well, that and her chest size and reputation. Rumor had it that she’d slept with half the basketball team and she was only a freshman. Even though Brandon could have his pick of girls in our class, it was always Crissy that he went back to. Seems like a high price to

pay for a sure thing, but what did I know, I hadn't kissed anyone in over six months. I certainly hadn't found a guy worth going all the way for.

"Why Tyler?" Melissa asked with a dramatic flair, tossing the non-crystal-carrying hand into the air as if she were back in cheerleading practice. "Give me a Y!" I imagined her screaming.

She asked the question as though we all hadn't asked ourselves that same question over and over. I watched as she nervously twirled Tyler's junior high class ring. The yarn that was wrapped around to make it fit had faded with time to a robin's egg blue.

"You don't mind if I keep it, do you?" she asked me, lowering her head and looking like a sad puppy. What a drama queen! Of course, I minded. I wanted everything that was Tyler's. Brandon's eyes were digging into me so I backed off.

"Yeah, that's fine," I gave in, plotting all the while how I would get it back.

"Thanks, Kit. Brandon said you wouldn't have a problem."

I shot Brandon a look, but he smiled and rolled his eyes, as Melissa leaned over and kissed him on the cheek.

"You're a real sweetheart," she cooed, batting her heavily-mascared eyelashes. I couldn't believe with all the crying that she still had on any mascara.

Melissa fidgeted and I tried to ignore her. I wished she would disappear. She'd made her appearance, couldn't she go? Minutes turned into longer minutes and she and Brandon started whispering.

"I'm going to go help your Mom," she said out of nowhere and sashayed away, her shiny blond hair swinging behind her.

"Thank you," I whispered.

"For what?" Brandon smiled.

"For getting rid of her," I fake punched him in the arm. "But I want that ring back."

"I know."

"You better get it back from her."

"I will."

"Soon?"

"Chill."

"You better, because...." I began to warn, but before I could finish, Brandon jumped into the hammock, nearly flipping us both out in the process. "Watch your suit!" I cried.

"Who cares?"

"You promise you'll get that ring back? I don't want her to have it."

"Kit, give it up. Listen, we need to get back in the house. Your mother actually sent me out here to find you."

"I smell booze on your breath."

"Yeah, well, I got tired of waiting for you, so Melissa and I helped ourselves. Want some?"

"Do you have it with you?"

He pulled the silver flask out from a hidden pocket inside his blazer. I took a swig and the alcohol burned my throat and made me cough like crazy.

"How can you drink that stuff?" I gasped between breaths.

"It tastes better the more you drink." He winked as he offered the flask to me again.

"No thanks. I'll handle my pain on my own."

"We should probably head in."

“No. I can't take anymore of this sitting shiva shit,” I snickered. “I've wanted to say that all day. But really, I'm sick of all these people. I can't believe this is only the first day. I have to do this all week. Do you think Tyler would want us to sit in this house with the windows closed for days on end? It's summer!”

“Seems weird to me. What exactly is sitting shiva, anyway?” Brandon asked as he took a swig from the flask, stretched out along the hammock, and stared up into the sky.

“If you're Jewish, when someone dies the rest of the family sits shiva. In our case, we're supposed to come back to Aunt Deborah's every day this week and ‘mourn’ while friends and other family members come by and pay their respects, you know, bring food and stuff.”

“But I thought just your Mom was Jewish.”

“Yeah, but in Judaism it doesn't matter if your parents are two different things, you're always what your mother is. And because Mom's family is so religious, and Dad doesn't care, we'll be here all week.”

“Gotcha. So if my Mom is Methodist and my Dad is Presbyterian, does that make me Methodist?”

“I don't know how it works in other religions,” I said. “In my opinion, the whole shiva thing is complete bull.”

“Have you had to do this before?” Brandon asked, taking yet another swig from the flask and looking so comfortable about it, yet making me more uncomfortable in the process. I began to wonder if this was something he and Tyler used to do a lot, and if so, why I never knew.

“Sort of. Once, when I was nine years old, I remember going to some relatives' house in Philadelphia when someone died. All of us cousins played in the backyard, while the adults sat around the house crying. I was probably like one of those kids in the basement.”

“Probably.”

“Wanna’ hear something really creepy? Someone told me that if you actually do shiva right, you’re supposed to sit with the body for a week,” I said.

“Oow. That’s disgusting. Does anyone do that anymore?”

“Don’t know. Maybe Orthodox Jews.” I eye-balled the flask, wondering if I should give it another try. Brandon didn’t see me look and I didn't say anything.

Brandon glanced at his watch and put the booze back in his jacket pocket. “Kit, go back in the house and make your Mom happy. I’ll be here with you as long as I can. And our friend Jack is here to help anytime,” Brandon smiled as he patted his jacket.

We didn’t make it home that night until after 11:00. Aunt Deborah and Uncle David live in Mays Landing, about a half hour drive from our house in Margate. New Jersey’s a small state, so it doesn’t take long to get anywhere. I learned that the true meaning of shiva was to keep you out of your home for as much as possible.

We thanked our neighbors, the Roswells for watching our house. It completely creeped me out that people actually get robbed while they’re at funerals. Mr. Roswell said that several people called and hung up without saying who they were. Dad read the phone messages out loud. Cousin Janie from Seattle called to share her condolences, as did one of Dad’s old sailing buddies, Bruce, who had just read the obituary. And Dr. Bremer’s office called to remind Tyler of his appointment to fill a cavity, on Monday at 10:30. Mom began to bawl all over again. That got Grandma Carlin and me going, and we reached out for a group hug. Dad looked at us, turned his back, and left the room.

Since that night at the hospital, Dad had done a total 180. He would talk to me, but then walk away before I could respond. He'd taken on an annoying habit of leaving the room when Mom and I started talking. He was also drinking more, which was weird because Dad was never a big drinker.

It was only in the past few years that Tyler was old enough to race sailboats with Dad, especially since he was nearly as tall as him. They had plans to sail to Ocean City, Maryland, together in July. Dad was always bragging about Tyler, and Tyler would do anything to make Dad proud. He was going to grow up and race professionally.

"I'm gonna' win the America's Cup for Dad," is what he used to tell me.

The kitchen table was covered in floral arrangements. I thumbed through the cards, only half paying attention to who they were coming from, out of state relatives, friends of my folks, then there was one from Dylan Ryerson addressed specifically to me. "Kit – Thinking of You. Dylan." Dylan was on the track team with Tyler and Brandon and I, but I didn't remember he and Tyler being particularly close. The thought of track and our whole group of friends was too overwhelming. There's a good chance I wouldn't see most of them until next school year.

I collapsed on the couch, turned on the T.V., and scrolled through the channels until well after midnight. By the time I made it to bed, I was so exhausted that I didn't even bother washing off my makeup. But, as tired as I was, my mind wouldn't turn off. As I lay there in the dark it raced through the birthdays we had shared together and the late nights on the boardwalk. I saw us hiding plates of liver and lima beans under our napkins. I imagined us learning to walk. The perfect twins were no longer perfect. With one gone, what was going to happen to the other? Could I even call myself a twin anymore?

I lay in my section of our bunk bed while the other bunk was just beyond the wall in his room, a room I was now forbidden to enter. I curled my body up as tightly as I could and began to shake. Tears were streaming down, matting my hair to my cheeks and falling into salty pools in my mouth. I shook the images from my head and tried to fall asleep.

