



EMILY

I wanted to yell at her and tell her not to do that again, but her child-like innocent laughter kept me from saying anything. Each and every time she would take off, my heart would race into my throat. But I knew that as much as I wanted those moments to last forever, I couldn't always be there when she landed. I couldn't always stop her from falling off and crashing to the ground.

“Judy!” That’s my name, I think to myself, don’t wear it out.

“Judy!” That’s the big, fat judge calling my name.

“I’m not going to ask you again,” he pauses and I know he’s going to ask me again. “Can you stop ignoring me and explain why you think you’re innocent?” His eyes glow with frustration. He’s not going to give it up and just gives me the stare down, which really bothers me. It’s not intimidating, just annoying. Besides, what’s he going to do, chase me down and make me answer? Yeah right, not with those legs he won’t.

I stare back, I’m not as good at it though; I tend to just smile, distracting myself by staring at his *ness*. His *fatness*, his *annoyingness*, his *hairiness*. There’s a lot of *ness* going on with that man.

“Sir, my client here does not wish to answer and has already pleaded the fifth.” That’s Cindy, my attorney. “Maybe you should buy some hearing aids,” she scoffs to herself before impatiently stating. “She’s been interrogated and tried several times. There is no *real* evidence.”

Cindy is the only person I truly have left on my side, not counting my sister— wherever she may be. Cindy has been trying for months now to get me out of this god-forsaken place. Like I said though, pointless. I’ve told them what happened. She told them what happened. No one cares what-

“Judy!” Cindy’s voice goes cold for a moment, “Can you please stop staring at his—“

Whatever respects the judge and spectators had for me, slim to none, I lose within seconds of Cindy opening her mouth. My eyes begin to run with water and my face muscles become sore from laughter. I should probably listen to her, but I don’t let anyone try to control me. I will do what I want. I’ve been on this stand for so long that it’s only become a game. There isn’t anything I can do to get myself out of here since I’m the only suspect, and until they dig up some more evidence to *prove* that I’m guilty I’m just going to end up back in my cell.

“Out! Get her out!”, the judge strikes his gavel on the stands. “I want her *out* of my courtroom!” Furious with hot rage, the red-faced tomato ostracizes me from the courtroom, refusing to deal with my shenanigans any longer.

In a quick march, the officers, in their black and blue too-tight-for-jelly-belly outfits pick me off the stand like an ant from a picnic table. The thirty seconds they drag me from the courtroom are mine. Everyone’s staring at *me* waiting to see what I’m gonna do next. Scream, kick, and throw a fit? Say a smart ass comment to someone who called me a ‘crazy bitch’? Maniacally laugh the whole way out or cry like the innocent person that I truly am? I hear the silence grow and see the venom-spitting mandibles hit the ground as I appear to calmly exit the room of haters and disbelievers.

Glad that’s over. Now all I want is to sit in my heatless, heartless cell. But I know I have at least an hour yet, an hour that will go faster than the years I have spent in that courtroom the past several months. The group of oversized jelly bellies, who ate one too

many friggin' doughnuts and smell like coffee stains, lead me to the room with no eyes—the only place in the world I can safely talk to Cindy and be entirely alone with her.

Before Cindy is allowed in they have to chain me down since I'm a *supposed murderer*. This is the only time I truly feel like the monster law officials play me out to be. But just like the courtroom, I act like the shackles and the handcuffs are no big deal. It doesn't matter what I say or do, they won't listen anyway. This bothers them, the way I act so smoothly when they chain me down. It's almost like they want me to act up, to fight against them. But I don't. I don't let them win this little game of theirs. I wouldn't want to give in and have them think I'm guilty.

Several minutes pass, and the clip-clop of Cindy's high heels can be heard outside, a sigh of professional composure and the heavy metallic safe-like door swings open.

"Can you leave now?", she questions impatiently to the guards who are obviously lost in her beauty. Cindy looks really tall, but it's just those heels of hers. In reality, she's no taller than I am, a shorty of five foot five inches. Her curly, blonde hair bounces when she walks and her petite curvy figure can make anyone stop and stare. Underlying her beauty, her sarcasm and lawyer tactics perch on her emotions, ready to spring at virtually any second.

"That was a good show you put on today.... But, if we are ever going to get you out of here we need to get some facts. Tell me again what happened."

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I try not to remember every detail from that night, but every now and then it haunts me and it's then that I know I'll take those events to my grave. The weather was hot and

humid, one of those days where a cold shower or dip in the pool doesn't even cool you down. Only the serenity of my air-conditioned room kept my skin from melting.

Emily was four years younger than me. It was the summer before her freshman year of high school when the incident occurred. I remember Emily would try to talk with our parents about the 'problem', but then shrug it off afterwards when Dad or Mom would try to help her. She'd put on a fake smile and say, "It's okay, I just thought you should know," and my parents would buy every bit of how it wasn't really a big deal. I did too, sometimes she just acted like a stereotypical teenager—not many people would have thought anything of it. Looking back, only now do I realize I should have picked up on her façade.

When Emily was younger, I always felt the need to be around her—to protect her. I would stay home to play with her, rather than sleep over at a friend's house or walk with her to the park after school when it was nice out. She loved going on the swings—and not the baby swings either, even when she was just a little, little tyke she despised them. She loved the ability to go up high into the clouds without restraint, always wanting to be free from earth.

"Higher! Higher, Judy, higher", she would shout and giggle, leaning back as the swing arched up so that her tiny white shoes looked as though they were a part of the clouds.

"That's high enough, Emily. If I push you too high you could fall and hurt yourself." I always sounded like a paranoid parent, but I couldn't help it. She was my little sister and I was her big sister—her playmate, her best friend, her protector.

Then just before I go to slow her down, when my fear of her diving into the ground became unbearable, she would take flight, jumping with all her might, spreading out her arms, soaring to the mulch below and bracing her legs for impact. I wanted to yell at her and tell her not to do that again, but her child-like, innocent laughter kept me from saying anything. Each and every time she would take off, my heart would race into my throat, but I knew that as much as I wanted those moments to last forever I couldn't always be there when she landed. I couldn't always stop her from falling off and crashing to the ground.

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“I need to go, is our hour up?”, I sniffle, my teary eyes and reddened face explain my wanting to leave. I try not to let people see me cry anymore, except for Cindy. She has become more than just my attorney; she's my best friend, sister and mother.

Both of my parents have disowned me. Every once in a while within my first two months of being locked away I would get visits from them. Each visit slowly became more and more awkward. My mother would sit across from me, playing nervously with her hands and always glancing around. She looked like a paranoid patient who escaped from the loony bin. Her eyes would twitch from one spot, to me, to the guards, to my father—never resting for more than a few seconds on one single object. She never said very much; each forced word exhausted her wits and I became more disgusted with every jaw movement.

All I wanted was for my mother—no, my mommy—to believe that I *wouldn't* and *couldn't* be a monster, like everyone else seemed to believe I was. I wanted her to hold me and kiss my cheek, tell me everything was okay—to see the light that once occupied her

eyes. The light that once shone brightly whenever she used to see me or mention my name.

“Mom, please... do you really believe that; that I could do that to my own sister? How can you believe *them over me?*” I would cry, pleading and begging her, not understanding why she couldn’t just listen to me. Then she would rise very slowly, as to make a show of everything, and storm away leaving my father and I alone.

I’d always thought my father understood me more than anyone else, and looking at his sullen, shadowy figure, I searched for something to give me hope—to make me feel loved again. Don’t get me wrong, my Mom and I were close, but there was something missing... something she just didn’t understand about me, and I’ll never know what or why that was.

Daddy and I were almost as close as Emily and I once were. Some of my best childhood memories are with him—bowling animals, football games, little league, just watching a funny movie.

“Sweetie,” a tear slid down his face leaving behind a trail of salty remorse, “I don’t know what to do for you.”

To be honest, I didn’t want to talk about how he didn’t know what to do for me because only my sister could help me and I wasn’t sure that was possible. “Daddy, do you remember when we went animal bowling?”

That old smile of his returned, as he flashed his silly, toothy grin and—for a moment—we were no longer in a prison, but at our favorite bowling alley. Animal bowling was something we enjoyed doing as often as we could. We would each choose a different animal to act like, a chicken, a monkey, or an elephant. The object was to do as

many animal-like actions and loud noises before rolling the ball down the alley. Yes, everyone around would laugh at us (or with us, as we would say) and probably think we were very strange, but as long as we were having fun it didn't much matter what anyone else thought.

"Yes, I do remember," his toothy grin fading into nothingness. I stared, watching every word pass through his lips. His face tensed and I could see his entire body switch gears. His shoulders hunched up and his eyes followed my mother's trail, leading out of both the prison and my life. His mouth moved again, but only enough for his words to barely squeeze by, "But that's in the past now Judith."

I thought words couldn't hurt, but this was different. It felt like he was stabbing me in the back with a spear, trying to rip my heart out all together, shoving his little Judy in the darkness of the past and forgotten. At that very moment, I knew I lost him. His voice had become a frozen monotone abyss. His mind overrun by a black hole sucking away the rays of sun left in my life. But I could tell, for that split second, that he wanted to believe me, wanted everything to go back to the way it was. But he couldn't, because it didn't feel right. Because my mother was a paranoid freak-a-zoid and he had to be there for her.

"But what about me? You can't just leave me here all alone..." I was going to cry. It was inevitable, but what girl in my position wouldn't cry after realizing her parents were deserting her?

"What do you mean?" His eyes softened for a second.

I knew this wasn't going to be the easiest thing for me to do, but I had to stand up for myself, "I've lost Mom already, it's pretty obvious, in case you couldn't tell. The baby

can't sit still long enough to take a breath or blink an eye. Yeah, you *think* you have to be there for her, but what about *me* Dad? Who do *I* have?"

"This has been hard on us Judith," he said without looking at me. My blood began to boil and for the first time since I was here I felt the chains were necessary for his safety. I no longer cared that he was my father. If he truly were my father, he would look at me and say he was there even though he didn't know what to do. If he were my father he would support me and *try* to believe me, no matter how hard it was.

"It's been hard on you? Dad, I'm the one in the cell—not you," I searched his face for any sign of support. "Who do I *fucking* have if you leave?" I continued, sneering, trying not to yell and speaking grotesquely through my teeth, "No one. I thought if anything, I would have you. After all that we've been through, after being so close, I *thought* that I would have you." I could taste the hint of salt lingering on my lips, "Well, apparently not—"

"Look, I'm sorry, but I can't—"

"You can't... Why *can't* you Dad? Is that what you told Emily, I can't be there for you? You left her to deal with her own problems even though she *tried* to ask for help. Do you see where that's gotten us?" He did not reply, "Huh?"

"I...I...I'm sorry, I have to leave," and like that he was gone.

I haven't seen or heard from him since, not that it surprises me anymore. Looking back, I might have been a little harsh on him. I know I shouldn't have said that about Emily. Emily and I were just as close as they were, and I didn't try to help her either. At the time though, I had refused to believe he wouldn't stand behind me. I was afraid of being alone—now, I'm used to it.

“Hello? Judy?” Cindy’s voice brings me back from the horrible nightmare and I slowly become aware of my surroundings once again. As she wrapped her arms around me, I tried not to think of my parents and pulled myself together. My cheeks stung with remorse. I just needed to be alone.

“Come on, I’ll walk with you back to your cell,” she disappeared for a second, only to return with a new set of jelly-bellies.

Toilet. Bed. Walls. Bars. Heatless, heartless. My lungs shiver and I cover up with my paper-thin blanket, trembling with coldness. Despite the temperature, I’m thankful to have time to myself. Even though I feel alone, I’m usually heavily guarded or talking with Cindy. Sometimes, when I become overwhelmed with emptiness, I imagine myself as Emily. She must have felt so alone to allow such evil to take her over. I try to imagine myself doing what she did—even in this place, as heartless as it is and as alone as I feel, I still wouldn’t be able to.

EMILY

That was never my intention, to kill myself. Although, I did try to see how far I could push myself. I would try to see how close I could get myself to heaven, just to get a glimpse and see if it really existed. Then I’d stop and apply pressure; my head would spin in circles as I tried to keep my heart beating, waiting for my soul to completely return.

Once I started, I couldn’t stop. It was my drug. I lived for that rush of relief—that out of body experience where it felt like my soul could fly; a feeling that I was finally free from earth. My parents raised me right; I knew what was right and wrong—that I needed help. I knew that what I was doing was dangerous and if I ever took it too far I could kill

myself. But after having so many unaddressed issues and feeling like I couldn't trust anyone, I needed an outlet. I was becoming more and more depressed every time the sun rose. My world was like the nighttime sky—dark, but seemingly perfect with specks of light all around. I would be lying if I said there wasn't at least one reason for me to be happy. But at the time my senses became numb, my feelings almost non-existent.

I only did it because I wanted to be someone else; I hated my life. Now, after having months to reflect, I'm getting closer to accepting what I did and why. I've been going to Judy's trials, dressing in all black like I'm attending a funeral and sitting right in the middle of everyone. I never make eye contact and never speak. I listen, waiting for the minute she confesses and they sentence her to death.

During the early months she was a wreck, snotting all over the place whenever she would answer. She couldn't speak a single word without losing her composure. To people who didn't know her, it looked like an act to make her appear innocent, but to me it was real. And I felt terrible. But as the months dragged on, and the court hearings became repetitive, she began to put up a shield. Only to me, it wasn't a shield, but a window to her emotions. She was a crumbling castle on the inside, with a fortress of smartass comments and showstoppers protecting her. If it weren't for the circumstances, I would laugh. She is quite hysterical and her comments remind me of home again—or at least of our old memories. But because this is entirely my fault and her life is in my hands, I cannot laugh.

I have often wished to call out to her, to stand up and tell the truth—but how would she react? Would she hate me because I let this go on for so long? That I let this happen at all? That shouldn't matter though. She knew all about my problem and didn't do

anything to help me. She just stood there and stared at me, mouth to the floor, her face twisted in horror. She was supposed to be my big sister. My protector.

“Don’t say a word,” I growled, hissing and spitting, threatening her with the crimson point in my hand. “Don’t even think about it.” I was scared at the thought of anyone finding out and didn’t think she would actually keep it hidden.

Now, it’s been five months. Everyone that once knew me thinks I’m dead. My sister is in jail and I’m too gutless to step forward and tell the truth. Not once did it occur to me that they—my own parents, the police, neighbors, and friends—would blame her.

JUDY

I shouldn’t have kept that secret, but she threatened me; I thought she would kill me. Her wrists were slashed horizontally and fading, pink, cat-like scratches ran up and down the entire length of her arm. Her eyes were glowing with evil spirited darkness. She was not my sister. She was possessed and I was scared. I could only wish that her innocent laughter was present and that the blood oozing slashes on her arms weren’t really there. Deep down I had known that I couldn’t always stop her from falling, and often wonder whether or not she is alive.

“See you later girls,” my Dad shouted up the stairs. It was Saturday night, which meant my parents were ‘going out’. In other words, they would have dinner and my mother would drink a lot of wine. She wasn’t an alcoholic and she was never drunk when she would come home. At least, that’s what she would say. “I iths nowt da-runk,” she would slur, stumbling doltishly up the stairs.

Emily and I hadn’t been getting along since I found her slicing herself like a chunk of meat. It’s been three weeks. We haven’t even glanced at each other and my parents

didn't notice. If they did, they didn't say anything and certainly didn't make an effort to try and mend things between the two of us.

I had been spending nearly every day in my bedroom, reading a book or just sitting there. I tried to listen to music, but as soon as I'd put on the headphones and start to slip away I would be jolted back, seeing nothing, but my sister holding that bloodied knife, threatening me. I could barely sleep at night, thinking she would murder me so I couldn't tell anyone she cuts herself. She needed help and I didn't know what to do. For the first time in my life, I failed her.

Once my parents left, I continued to sit quietly in my bedroom staring blankly at the wall. She was moving around out there; I could hear her downstairs in the kitchen and wondered what the hell she was doing down there. She never used a knife directly from the kitchen; always using the crimson, stainless steel knife she hides in her bedroom, where Mom and Dad wouldn't find it.

It sounded like a war zone. I could hear the drawers being opened and silverware flung around the kitchen. Sounds of shattering glass and obscenities reached my ears and I began to cry, rocking back and forth by my bedside. I could see my cell phone, just inches from my body, but I was too afraid to pick it up. My trembling hands covered my ears. I felt small and out of control and couldn't stop my emotions from pouring out of me. She was insane, and I thought my time had finally come.

"Where is it?" She burst through my door and I slid back. Her eyes were blood red; her wrists already gently slashed and her hair standing up as though she had been trying to pull it out seconds before entering my bedroom.

"Wh... where... where is what?" I stuttered through my fear.

Her eyes shot right through me, as if searching for the soul she seemed to have lost. Seeing her like this, my protective instincts toward her briefly took over my body.

“The damn alcohol you stupid-

“I don’t know.” I tried to look past all of her craziness and see the little girl still inside of her. As much as I searched, I couldn’t find it. I gathered up my last ounce of courage and stood up, pushing her backwards, out of my room, “What has happened to you?” I was still terrified of her, my insides were shaking and I thought I was going to pee my pants. All I wanted was to feel like I was in control and her big sister again and for this monster to go away and bring my little Emily back to me. She landed against the railing in the hallway, just a little harder and she would have stumbled over. I didn’t want to kill her. As crazy as she was, I never wished she was dead. I just wanted to help her. All I ever wanted to do was help her.

“Get your grimy hands off of me, *you bitch*,” she sneered, shoving me onto the floor, my head hitting the bottom of my bed.

“It’s,” I broke down again, she may have been younger, but she was dangerous. I had no choice but to tell her, for fear that she may actually kill me, “it’s in the basement.” And that was the last time I saw her. The last time I talked to her. The last time I didn’t want to be around her.

THE JUDGE

“Those two frustrate me more than missing my morning coffee,” the judge evinces to the jelly-bellies standing near by. He finally managed to move his rolls out of the

courtroom and into his office, wheezing and holding his chest until his ass hit the duct-taped cushion on his rolling chair (made especially for lazy people like himself).

“Leave me,” he respires, still trying to breathe. “I need some time alone. They tire me out and make my brain ache. Leave me.”

Dutifully, the jelly-bellies leave him and his façade falls flat to the ground. This case has stunned and confused every cell in his body, but there was no way he could let this fade away unsolved. There was no body ever found and the blood trail eventually ended. Nothing was ever found in their yard or those nearby, the woods, the basement. No more blood, no hair, no body parts. Nothing. And only two people know the truth: Emily and Judy.

But one of them could be dead and the other wouldn't crack. Judy's been on the stand for months and never once pleaded guilty, but she's holding back. Her face spasms like she's remembering a wretched nightmare whenever questioned about the details of the incident. But she has tried to build herself up, barricading her emotions. To the others in the courtroom, it works. He can tell she is holding back on him and as horrible as it may seem she needs to either plead guilty or tell the truth.

The judge acted tough, like he despised Judy, but he didn't necessarily hate her. He didn't appreciate her withholding information, but didn't have the heart to sentence her to jail... let alone death.

Judy put on a good show, all right, but didn't come across as the type of girl that could murder anyone, especially her own sister. Investigators interviewed neighbors, teachers, friends... and they all said the same thing: Judy was the best big sister anyone could ever ask for. Still, something just didn't make sense. Judy didn't have the ability to

hurt her worst enemy and there's a possibility that Emily may still be alive due to the lack of evidence against Judy. But, how could someone leave her family in shambles, framing her own sister? It didn't add up. He just wished someone would come clean and stop this disaster while they still could.

EMILY

Thump. Thump. Thump. I roll over and the blue neon numbers of my clock read 12:01 am. Who is making noise at this time of the morning? Thump. Thump. Thump.

“What the hell?” I groan, falling out of bed, clambering to my bedroom door. Just as my hand reached for the knob the noise stopped again. I didn't know what it was, but I was about to find out. My phone was lying on the nightstand by my bedside. I grabbed it and pushed the home button, lighting up the screen. Waving it around my room, I spotted my old softball bat sitting next to my closet. Thump. Thump. Thump.

I snatched up my bat and took a few good, hard practice swings, making sure not to knock anything over and then slipped out of my bedroom door and around the corner. I was on a stealthy mission. I was a ninja, tiptoeing through the hallway and down the stairs. The thumping became louder as I neared the rear door of our house. The lock clicked, I threw open the door and flipped on the light, running outside swinging the bat above my head and yelling like a maniac until a cold, wet, hard blob hit me smack in the face. I wiped some of the snow away. Feeling the remainder of the snow melt from my face, I looked up just in time to swing my bat and smash the next snowball coming my way.

“Ha-ha!”

“Judy?”

“Yeah...jeeze...calm down. Look what I did for you.”

“Oh...” I looked up to see a giant number fourteen, made entirely of snow in my yard and felt like a total idiot.

I walk to the rear-facing window and see him trudging through the woods, backpack in hand, snow flakes covering his hair. I first met AJ after coming to this run-down, forgotten farmhouse. When I was younger, before my Nan died, my family would go on long day trips to see her. We used to pass this house every time, so when I needed a place to go, I came here.

The day after my incident had hit the news, I met him wandering in the woods behind the house. At first, I thought he was going to yell and run away or drag me to the police. And he probably would have had he not noticed the scratches running up and down my arms. My most recent wounds were still pink and on the verge of reopening at the slightest hint of the wrong movement. He didn't say a word while standing there in his tight, black Under Armor shirt, sandy-brown, curly hair matted to his sweat soaked forehead.

Then he started to take off his shirt. My eyes, unlike other girls my age, were drawn to the hint of red on his arms; his scars—fading, but still there—were still visible to the eyes. We stood there staring at each other's battle wounds. For the first time in months, I didn't feel alone. He would understand. The one person that would be able to say, “I know how you feel” and not be lying. And maybe it was too late for him to save me, but I may be able to help him. I didn't realize that at first, but once I started to miss my family I knew I had to save him.

“There’s my girl!” he smiled, entering the house, coming over to give me a hug. It was comforting, like the hugs I used to get from Judy.

“I brought some good stuff for you today,” he pulled out some food and a gallon jug of water

I only had a few precious hours to spend with him and wished that they would never end. His smile warmed my heart, making me feel loved and accepted. I often wonder how different my life would be had I met him before the incident. Would I have done such idiotic things, like fake my own death? Would I have cut myself at all? But I can’t waste our time together wondering about what-ifs, so I let my guard down and sink into him. The smell of old-spice and greasy car parts entrance my mind in a world of possibilities. Before leaving, he gave me a birthday card with twenty dollars in it and a quick hug, then disappeared until next time. AJ gives me twenty dollars every week to pay for my bus ride to the trials and to pick up extra things if I need them.

The sun will set soon. I build a fire and fetch a few buckets of clean snow to boil for my bath. Stripping down, my fingers trace along my scars. They aren’t gone like AJ’s, but close. It’s been four months.

JUDY

She haunts me in my dreams. Sometimes, the dreams make me think I am crazy. I see things that I know, or thought I knew, but I hadn’t seen in real life. I see these horns coming from the top of her head, but they aren’t really there. It’s like they are made of smoke and simply hovering over her head. Then I see flashbacks to her on the swings. I see the two of us having sleepovers. She would pack a suitcase full of clothes and bring her sleeping bag to my room. We used to set up a campsite in my bedroom and put up a

tent and the indoor smores maker. Our parents wouldn't let us build a fire since we were inside, so we had to use the smores maker. It ran on a light bulb and so it took a while for the marshmallow to get squishy, but that was all part of the fun. She would stay for the whole weekend. Often times, we didn't even leave my bedroom, unless of course we had to use the bathroom. My Mom would pack snacks, sandwiches, and drinks into a cooler and have my Dad carry it up to my bedroom. I remember the first time we had ever done this. My one friend from school said she went camping over the summer and I thought it sounded like fun. When I told Emily about it, she got so excited. Her face lit up and she shrugged her shoulders up, squishing her face and smiling. She did that all the time when she was little. It was so cute. I wish she did that now.

Anyway, we told my parents about it and of course they said we couldn't go camping now, it was the dead of winter. Emily still really wanted to go, but was too young to understand why we couldn't. She was turning four the following weekend, so my Dad suggested we go camping in my bedroom for the weekend. That was the happiest I had ever seen my sister. The whole weekend, she kept squishing up her shoulders and she was so cute.

The horns return above her head, I'm in my bedroom on the floor again. I see her wrists and her hair. I hear her talking to herself. Those horns. It's the horns, I realize. They changed her. I didn't know what it was. I didn't know who it was. All I knew is that they were the reason my sister went crazy.

I wake up, my cot is full of sweat—my whole body is drenched. I know in my heart I did not see those horns in real life, but my mind is trying to tell me otherwise.

CINDY

She just sits there staring at the wall, silently crying. I watch her from afar tonight knowing that it won't do either of us any good to approach her. She needs to be alone while she grieves for her sister.

“Judy, you will get out of here,” I say under my breath. I know that something is missing from the story she has told me. Every time we are alone and I ask for details, she looks down, biting her bottom lip, covering her face with her long, auburn hair. She knows something about what happened that night, but all she says is, “my parents left for the night and I stayed in my room listening to music and doing some homework. I got thirsty and went downstairs to get a drink and I saw smashed glass, silverware all over the place and a blood trail that lead outside.”

I have a younger sister of my own and like Judy, I would do almost anything for her. Judy is a very strong willed person; after all, she is sitting innocently in jail for Emily. I'd like to believe that this is just a nightmare and we all will wake up soon. Some days I want to give up, throw away my papers and research and just walk away. But something is keeping me here. Maybe it's seeing Judy sit in that horrid cell, crying for her sister and being treated like a creature of darkness. Maybe it's because I know what I would do for my own sister. But I'm not so sure that's it. It's this feeling that's been tugging at my innards. It feels like something big is about to happen. Like Judy is going to need me soon, more than ever. I know I can't desert her after all that we have been through these past few months.

EMILY

You see, the problem isn't that they think I'm dead. The problem is that I'm still alive. The problem is that I lied. The problem is that people are suffering. The problem is me. Sometimes, when I sit and think about what I have done, I wish I were never born. If I were never born, Judy would have lived. I mean really, truly lived. She wouldn't be in a jail cell. She wouldn't have been made fun of because she felt the need to take me with her wherever she went. She could have become someone who would positively influence the world. She could have lived her own goddamned life. Instead, she is stuck in a hell hole. But, let's say I died. I mean actually died. They would have found a body, suffered, and moved on. I would no longer feel the pain. I would no longer hear the Demon's voice.

I can remember the only dead body I've ever seen in real life. I was used to seeing them on the TV. It didn't even freak me out. They just seemed so fake. Plus, I didn't know them, so why would I think anything of them? My Nan was the first and only person I had seen dead in real life.

I was thirteen, still young and innocent—right before I went all-weird inside and basically sold my soul to the devil. I can still picture myself walking by her casket. She looked so natural and unnatural at the same time. She looked like Nan, but not like her usual self. Parts of her looked grey, others a purple color. Her still-blonde hair was too stiff, it was usually light and fluffy, blowing all over the place. Her legs were hidden, which made it look like they had been cut off.

My Dad and Mom touched her arm and kissed her face as they walked by. I watched as my sister followed them. She didn't touch Nan, but stayed close to her body. I kept a two-foot space between the body and I due to the childish fear that she would reach

for me. As I sat down and listened to the Service, I simply stared. The preacher read a few lines from the Holy Book—I'd never read it, so I didn't know what he was talking about. I stared at her mouth that was sewn into a smile. The preacher asked family and friends to share stories about her life. They talked about how she always laughed. But, the smile her lips were now sewn into was so generic it could have been anyone's. It certainly wasn't Nan's smile. I stared at her pale eyelids, now forever covering her eyes. My Grandpa cried as they talked about her laughter. Grandpa always said she smiled with her eyes too. Then I stared at her chest. The preacher read another line from the Holy Book. Her chest did not move. I kept staring. The preacher said that even though her breath is gone, she is still with us. Her chest still did not move. I stared at it for the third time, trying to tune out the voice of the preacher and the voice of Him.

All I wanted was to see a movement. I just wasn't able to wrap my mind around it. I couldn't figure out how her brain wasn't thinking, how her heart wasn't pumping, how her lungs were not moving. I couldn't understand how she did not know that she was dead. I just didn't get it.

Now when I think about death, I know my family could have gotten past all of that. I mourned over Nan, we all did. But, we all accepted her death and chose to remember her life. If I were dead, I would be gone and no longer causing pain—at least after sometime. But as I continue to live, pretending I am dead, I realize how selfish I am. I realize how my family will *never* get over this. It is then I wish I had never been born. I begin to hear the only sense of comfort I've felt for a while now. I turn myself over to the darkness and encase myself in His embrace, allowing myself to be swept away and my

mind be cleared. I only hope, as I do every time this happens, that my old self will still come back—that the darkness won't always be the only light left in my life.

JUDY

There are few days I spend the entire day alone in my cell. I don't leave to eat or even for my twenty minutes of fresh air that I've been so generously awarded. I cry and think and grieve. Before I became Emily's prisoner, I rarely shed a tear. I had nothing to worry about. I had a loving family and sister who I cared for more than anyone in the world. I had no reason to cry. Even now, I do it mostly when I am alone. I think about my past and wonder, if I died tomorrow would I be happy with the life I have lived? Would anyone truly miss me, or even care? Sometimes, I think about trying to end this nightmare on my own. The only thought stopping me is that I would be no better than my sister. Yes, I still love her. That's why I'm still protecting her—still her prisoner—despite her death. But, I resent her for making me feel so horrified and small. Not once did I ever do anything to harm her, and up until she threatened me I did everything in my power to keep her safe, away from the monstrous people like she eventually became.

Tonight, I know Cindy is watching me. I cannot see her, nor do I wish to. But, I hear the quiet clip-clop of her high-heels stop some distance away and know that she is supporting me from afar—her soul floating through the dingy light, brushing across my shoulder to wipe away my tears, never quite returning to her body.

EMILY

Nan's funeral continues to cross through my mind, from the viewing to the burial, and her casket—closed forever on her beautiful, once warm body—being lowered into the forever-cold depths of the earth. I remember how long it took my family, myself included, to stop mourning and begin celebrating in remembrance of her wonderful life. We remembered how many people she touched, and how she never had a bad word to say about anyone. I thought about my own life. I thought about what I would want people to remember about me, if I really were dead. I would want them to remember the good times, not the bad. I would want them to overlook this monster inside me and see the slight hint of silver that still remains within the depths of my heart. The more I think about this the louder his voice becomes, but I know that there is still some good left in me. I know it is going to be hard to overcome him, but I have to try. I have to try and overcome him. It is my only chance. I don't really know where to start, but since Judy is sitting in jail, this seems like a good place to try. She is suffering the most from my selfish actions. I decide to write her a letter and have AJ mail it for me.

Dear Judy,

I know that you have had a rough couple of months, and I am sorry that you have to go through this. I have had a rough time too. I feel so guilty for what I did and just wish I could take it all back or change what is happening, but I don't know how. I don't know what sort of reactions I will get. I don't know what will happen to me. I don't want to lose the person I care for the most. Hopefully, I will see you soon. I just have to figure out what to do.

Love,

Madison

I just wrote. I didn't know what else to say or how to say it. I wanted her to know, but was afraid of her finding out. I didn't even sign my first name. Will she even remember? Will she even believe I'm alive? Will she put aside her feelings and just listen to what I have to say?

My Dad always told me, "Emily, don't ever let fear get in the way of your dreams. Be a leader and tempt the unknown. Throw it a cookie every now and then." I'd sit next to him and laugh, never understanding what he meant—hoping that one day I would. As I count the days since the incident, I realize that my only dream was to be free, and I freed myself from everything except the real problem. I have a tombstone sitting in the cranky earth somewhere with a ghost lying in my coffin. My parents are childless and my sister is devastated. AJ wants to help, but doesn't want to risk losing me forever.

I look like I'm improving. The deep pink scratches have almost disappeared. The faint, whispering dark Demon stays away most of the time. I don't look deranged anymore, but I don't always feel better. I have nothing to do in this house except go to Judy's trials and see AJ. When I'm alone, my mind wonders. I begin to think and think and think and think. I think about life. I think about death. I think about the simplicity of the snow as it falls. I think about what I want to be when I grow up. I think about myself. I think about life. I think about death. I feel like Giles Corey. I imagine how the stones weighed on his chest until it was so unbearable his ribs cracked and he was swept from this world. The sun no longer shows its face, my eyes are a shade darker.

My father's voice stings my brain, and I know he's right. It's time to throw the unknown a cookie and put aside my fears. But am I ready? Holding my breath, I finish

placing the letter in the envelope and licking it shut and placing my thoughts on pause and squeezing my eyes shut, letting a single tear escape. I realize that it doesn't matter anymore and I know that whether I'm ready or not, the time has come to finally do something right in my life.

JUDY

It's been a few days since Emily's birthday. I'm feeling better and have finally gone back to my usual routine: eat breakfast, talk with Cindy, go to my cell, go to lunch, go outside for twenty minutes, talk with Cindy, go to my cell, sleep and then wake up. My next court hearing isn't for a few more days, so I try and take the much-needed break as leisurely as possible. I take deep breaths, and just clear my mind. I'm beginning to feel so drained, but I know that as much as I love my sister I'm going to fight through this. I will not plead guilty, especially for a crime I did not commit. I can hear the clip-clop of Cindy's heels coming down the hallway, and I know something is up.

"Judy, you have a phone call." It had been a long time since I heard those words come out of Cindy's mouth.

"Me?"

"Yes, Judy, you, you have a phone call."

"Who—who is it?"

"Sounds like your Mom... she says her name is Madison."

"Um... okay?"

She slipped the invisible leash and collar around my neck, and I dutifully followed her to the phone booth. I could feel the hateful thoughts slicing my skin as I passed the inmates and jelly-bellies.

My hands trembling, I slowly answered the phone. "Hello...?" My voice was dry and weak.

"I'm sorry!" Click.

I sat on the hard chair next to the phone, confused. Pulling the phone away from my ear, I stare at it, still puzzled, and then return it to my ear once more, "MOM...Hello?" The only answer I received was the monotone dial tone of nothingness. I return the phone to the receiver and walk to the door, waiting for Cindy to put my leash back on.

EMILY

I feel the pain again. It begins deep within my chest. It's like an itch I can't quite scratch and the more I fight it, the more it hurts. It spreads from my chest to my brain and begins to take over. It spreads to my arms and legs, moving my body for me. It seeps through my veins and takes over my blood. I'm becoming the pain. I knew that writing the letter would make him begin to come back. I knew that calling her *and* writing the letter would definitely make him come. I knew that it may be too much for me to handle, and that I may have just pulled the trigger to my death. But, it has to be worth it if I can beat him. My thoughts begin to cloud, that silver part way inside me begins to shrivel and the darkness I have been evading for months has completely returned once again.

My mind races and I picture the letter. I begin to battle myself. I knew writing it was the right thing to do and yet I want it in pieces, unable to be read by anyone. I shouldn't have called her. I shouldn't have listened to my father's voice. The Demon is

returning. He whispers in my ear, “The kitchen. The kitchen. End the pain, you don’t have to feel the pain.” My legs move, my mind hazes over and my eyes become covered in a milky whiteness.

JUDY

Cindy walks me back to my cell, but can tell that the phone call has me dazed and confused, so she has yet to leave my side. Scribbles and stars dance around my head. Madison. Madison. Emily Madison. Emily Madison Penoso. She looked like my Mom, sounded like her too. But it wasn’t possible. It wasn’t... a hand warmed my shoulder. Cindy.

“Judy?” Her motherly, concerned tone makes me miss my parents’ warm embrace, for the first time in months.

“She...she...” I choked on my words, snotting all over myself. I didn’t understand how she could be alive. It had to be a joke. Why would someone do this to me? Why would *she* do this to me?

“Shh...don’t talk...it’s okay.” Sitting on my cement bed, she took me in her arms, rocking me quiet.

“Em...Em...Emily.” I couldn’t even begin to try and express myself. I couldn’t wrap my brain around the fact that she may be alive.

“I know...shh...shh...” She kissed my cheek, smoothing my hair away from my face. “I know how hard it is for you, sweetheart. I don’t know how I would handle my own sister’s death. You are so strong...shh...it’s okay.”

“Alive...she...she’s alive...” I didn’t know what else to say. Part of me hoped I was right, the other part wished she were dead. If she is alive that means she’s been

torturing me by allowing me to take the blame. That means she isn't really my sister. But, I'm supposed to be her big sister, her protector. If she is alive, shouldn't I be happy?

EMILY

"The kitchen... kitchen...kitchen." The hissing in my mind won't go away. Tears stream from my eyes and the constant, pounding voice in my head won't leave me the hell alone. I haven't cut myself in months, yet I haven't felt this much hurt in one instance. The Demon was starving. I knew I should have left well enough alone. I don't know why I bother to do good things in my life, clearly I'm not meant to be that person anymore. I felt a squeeze on my brain, and my thoughts of goodness temporarily stopped. I see a hand reach for the knife drawer, it looks like mine and moves like mine, but it is not mine

"Those won't do. You know they won't work. Bigger, Em." I can feel the Demon's breath on my face; perspiration burns my forehead. The hand stops and the Demon moves my eyeballs, using them for binoculars, searching the surrounding Darkness for the right tool.

"There, Em." The hand creeps forward. I want to shout, look away, grab the hand, but I can't. None of it is mine. The hand. The eyes. The voice.

I feel a tear escape from His eyes, "It's okay, Em. Don't cry..." His voice echoes, pounding louder in my head, "It's been a while since we last saw each other." The sharp coolness of the tip touches the arm. I shudder in remembrance.

"Now, Em... do it now...I'm hungry... and so are you. The pain will end. Just make a slice. I'm sure you remember how." The steel edge pierces the skin; I am no longer remembering, no longer a spectator just hearing Demon's voice. We are the same.

My pain flows out onto the floor in streams of scarlet. “Shit!”, my voice works again. Paper towels won’t make it stop. I rip off my shirt, but within seconds it becomes stained with violent vermillion. I try to think clearly, but every time I reach for the silver part within my chest a hard squeeze takes over my brain, making it hard to think of anything except the Demon’s commands. The wound is beyond compare; the pounding in my head feels as though He is becoming more than just a voice.

“Breathe, Emily. Breathe, my sweet one. Do you really believe that after all we’ve been through I’d let you go so young?”

“Leave me the *fuck* alone! Just go away!” I can’t fully comprehend what’s happening. Another squeeze takes over my brain, and all I hear is the devilish, wind-like whispering pounding through my skull ready to burst out at any second. I don’t want to die. I don’t want to die. He can save me. He’s left me with no choice but to beg Him for mercy. I have to accept Him and allow Him to have my body or die for real this time.

You don’t really want me to leave you alone, now do you Emily? My mind sizzles and shakes, verging on insanity.

“Save me! Oh, please...please. I don’t want to die.” Sobbing uncontrollably, I shout at the voice in my head.

Please, *Demon*. He sneers, correcting me.

“Please, *Demon!*” My head circles the kitchen. I begin to panic. Too much blood, I’ve lost too much. But, after saying the demanded words a wispy Snake wraps around my wrist, my heart thump-thumping in my arm.

“That’s better,” He whispers. His tongue flicking over my wound, stitching it shut. My body trembles, shuddering with fear and excitement, “Thank you...”

The world begins to spin once more. The snake slithers back through my skin, but not before stopping to look into my eyes. I'm not sure what I expected to see—nothing, a black pit and fire... But all I saw were my own two tormented eyes staring back at me. The reminiscence of excitement still lingering around my body, sweat-soaked and bloody. I continue to stare at myself—at the snake—and realize we are one. I begin to let myself relax and allow the snake to reenter my body when I hear a sound in the distance. It sounds like a mile away, but nonetheless a voice other than His.

“Emily!” My ears open up and for the first time in an hour I hear another human voice.

The squeezing on my brain has eased up. It takes me a minute to register the voice, and I can tell that it's AJ. I can't let him see me like this, but I know that if I don't get help I will die. The Snake can close the wound, but He can't replace my blood loss. I yell with my brainwaves, too weak and scared to speak.

“Emily!”

I... I...

“Em-“ His voice trails off and my mind goes black.

JUDY

“What?” Cindy stopped rocking and stared down at me, failing to comprehend my snotty English.

“She-” I sniffled and regained some dignity, “She's alive.”

“Emily?”

“Ye... Yes.”

“How...? How is that possible?”

I didn't know how my dead sister was still alive. And I didn't know what to do or say or anything. I didn't know if I should be happy or sad or just plain pissed off. Crawling out of Cindy's loosened hug, I curled up in the farthest corner and cried. I cried like the night of the incident. I cried like I did when my parents walked out of my life. I cried because if she's alive I should be protecting her. Emily needs me to protect her, now more than ever. I cried because if she was my sister, why did she do this to me? She waited five months to contact me. I cried because maybe this whole thing was my fault. If I would have just told someone when she threatened me the first time. If I would have at least tried to help her, maybe this whole thing could have been avoided. If I...

"Judy..." She started to walk closer to me.

If I...

"Shh.. shh.. Judy. Please."

She placed a caring hand on my shoulder again, but this time I didn't want it there. Standing up, I threw her arm in the opposite direction and punched the wall.

If I....

"Contain her!" Once the jelly-bellies heard the commotion occurring in my cell, they ran. Cindy lay there holding her arm. It wasn't broken, but she certainly looked like she was in pain.

If I...

They rushed at me as I tried to flee, kicking and screaming, hitting the wall.

If I... If I... If I....

EMILY

Circular whirlpools of deafening silence echo around my soul. The whispering Demon voice is no longer present, but the Snake tightens around my singed, lingering being—trapping me forever, binding me to Him beyond death. Halfway between here and there, a sweet, distant—yet familiar—voice pushes through the silent sound barrier.

“Em...Em...Come back to me. Come back to me, Em...” AJ’s voice bounces off the surrounding walls. I could feel the vibrations and see his lips moving, but the sound of his voice was still a few miles away.

“Once more, that’s all you get.” The squeezing on my soul became almost unbearable, but once again my voice succeeded in failing to work. I began to float downward like a leaf unknowingly gliding to the earth below, preparing to become part of the ground once more. I began to lose hope and began to accept my death. I could see the cloaked figure off in the distance. I knew it was almost my time. The figure was close, but far enough away for me to push once more and fight for my life.

“Em... please... please...” His tears ran down my cheek.

“Go to him, my sweet one. One last time.” The Demon lifted himself from me. My eyes fought their way open to see the only person I have left sobbing over my inanimate body. Suddenly, I realized how precious life is. This boy—this young man—whom I loved so much, could lose me. The only person I have yet to run from could become another shredded memory of my past. My bloody hand painfully brushed his face.

“Em...”

Relief washed over AJ’s face, before being swamped with worry once again, “We need to get you to the hospital.”

I knew he was right and I wanted to tear the worry from his face, but I could not go. He began picking me up. “No... ouch!” My throat felt scratchy and sore, my body ached and blood was still trying to dry. Platelets rushed to the surface of my skin, the Snake had done his job and stopped the bleeding, but with one bend of the arm the stitches would tear, ripping my soul from my body, never to return again.

He froze, not wanting to injure me even more, “You have to see a doctor.”

“AJ...” I swallowed hard, putting aside the nagging scratchiness in my throat, “I’m dead.”

“No,” he sat me down as gently as his anger would allow him to. “You’re *supposed* to be dead... but you aren’t. You are alive and breathing for the time being. You have to go.”

“I’m alive to you, not to them.”

“It doesn’t matter who knows, you’re still *alive!*”

“They can’t know...” My battery was running low; I wasn’t sure how long I could keep going. The cloaked figure moved closer. A big, black hood covered his face, but as he lifted his head up I could see his rotten, yellow smile. A chill ran down my spine.

“Do you *want* to die?” I relax my head, lying flat against the cold kitchen floor. The bloodstained knife visible in the corner of my eye. “Do you want to *die*, Em?”

I close my eyes. I don’t want to think about what is happening. I don’t want to see the cloaked figure or AJ’s face. I don’t want to be here. I want to be five-years-old again. I want to be on the swings, getting ready to jump. I want to be scaring Judy because she thought I was going to injure myself. I want to be having campout sleepovers in Judy’s room. I want to be anywhere but here, fighting death and dealing with an incurable mess.

CINDY

My arm is wrapped and I'm supposed to stay home. The judge and army of jelly-bellies don't want me around Judy anymore. They say she is too dangerous and any evidence supporting her has gone down the drain. Now, everyone truly believes she is capable of murder.

She's been moved to the mental unit in the prison, wearing a straight jacket and locked in a five-by-five, dimly lit, barely-padded cell. But, I don't want to be kept away from her. She isn't crazy and being in that place, where all a person can do is think, she soon will be. She may even die.

After five months of being locked up, protecting someone she believed was dead, and finding out that person—her own sister—may be alive, I can't blame her for what she did. I wasn't expecting it, but had the roles been reversed, I probably wouldn't have acted any differently.

A person's heart can only handle so much pain in a lifetime, especially at a young age. Thump-thumping can only go on for so long; the fluttering of wings can only keep a sad soul upbeat for a small period of time. Everyone has his or her breaking point, and I'm afraid that if I can't find a way to get to her—or her sister—it may be too late.

JUDY

The white jacket from Hell is turning into the yellow pit of snot. The hard, squishy padding becomes soggy by the second. White and yellow begin to blind me. I need to get out of this place, but can't even tell where the door is. My arms, with red wrists, are tied fast to my pulsing body, so I slam my shoulder into the walls.

I throw my weight against each wall, releasing some anger and hoping to feel, to feel the pain Cindy felt when I pushed her to the cement floor, to feel something, so I know I'm still alive and sane. Crazy people don't feel. I want to feel the pain I hope Emily is feeling—the person who was supposed to be my best friend, my sister.

I want to feel and not think. My mind is a trash can full of cuss words, anger and nonsense, that needs to be emptied out and removed from this room. This place is purgatory. I'm going to Hell now, and I hope she enjoys climbing the fucking stairs to Heaven.

EMILY

“Em, don't you quit on me now!” My eyes have shut down, but my mind is still processing. Demon's voice echoes through my skull, “One last time... one last time.” This could be the end. My options of dying or being alive in the world again weigh on my conscience. I can feel AJ shake my shoulders, the empty lump on top jerking back-and-forth.

“Em!” The battery inside my body beeps at twenty percent, but I need to see him and talk to him. I don't want to, but I know I can't die without telling him how I feel. I can't lose him before I'm gone. I've fucked up many times already and I don't need to anymore.

“Wake up! Em, wake up!” I hear a distant whistling sound and know he's calling, trying to save my life.

The faint, whistling sirens were coming for me, just like the night of the incident. The sweltering heat pried at my body, tempting me to collapse as I dragged myself away

from my past. I hid by the brush pile at the edge of my house and passed out, waking up to the sounds of sirens and the Darkness encasing me.

I wasn't going to run, but I had already let my parents down. I saw no point in returning to an empty house. My feet moved and my mind raced faster, dropping one tear at a time from my bloodshot eyes. The whole thing wasn't planned out and I didn't want to do it, but the Demon had stopped whispering and had begun to yell. I needed to satisfy him. I talked to myself and people thought I was nuts. I wore long sleeves during the middle of summer. My parents argued constantly unless they were drunk, and Judy didn't even acknowledge my existence.

The only person who acknowledged me was Demon. He talked to me like I mattered, calling me His sweet one, treating me like my friends used to. The day before, He started whispering about the two of us leaving, going to a better, less painful place. I considered, but wasn't sold on the idea and He knew it. He crept into my dreams that night and showed me my life—how it was and how it could be, a bottle and a knife.

He wasn't there when I woke up. The only person I had to talk to abandoned me, and I wanted him back. I thought about the dream. I remembered seeing myself smiling and surrounded by bright darkness. Then I saw myself living in that house, miserable, unloved, and unwanted. I thought about the bottle and the knife—my knife—the one I used to free my soul.

I tried to ask Him what to do, but he wouldn't answer me. I snuck into the kitchen and found a small bottle of rum. As I inched forward, I could hear a screeching sound. I backed up. It stopped, and I knew what I had to do to bring Him back.

* * * * *

That night was ‘get drunk’ night for my Mom, so the timing seemed perfect. Not long after they left, the bottle was mine and the screeching returned. It was screeching a jumbled message, and was too unclear to understand. But, it was back.

As I unscrewed the cap and began to pour some into a cup, I could make out a few jumbled words. It sounded like he was saying ‘bottle...bottle...bottle’. But his screaming was too loud and raspy to be positive. I was willing to take a chance though, and took a swig.

The Demon’s voice became a little clearer and he gargled, “More...” I drank more and soon half of the bottle disappeared, but my friend was back. I had done it—done something right—so I finished the bottle to congratulate myself.

“Good job, Em...” The Demon’s voice was clear once more, but He wasn’t completely satisfied. I could feel He wanted something more and thought of my knife.

“No, Em... not yet. Drink more, the alcohol won’t kill you.”

I didn’t want more. The need to cut was becoming an itch I couldn’t scratch. The blood pounded inside my arm, screaming to be let out, but He wouldn’t let me. I ran my nails up and down my arm. They didn’t puncture the golden seal of my body, but it would have to do. I didn’t want Him to go away again; so I followed his orders and began to open the cabinets and drawers, only to find an even smaller bottle. I chugged it down, knowing it still wasn’t enough to satisfy him. I flung pots and pans, silverware, plates and cups, cleaning out almost every cabinet and repeatedly coming up empty-handed.

“I need more, Em,” Demon said. I ripped open the fridge door, smashing anything non-alcoholic; He was becoming impatient. “Em, now. I’m going to leave you,” He

threatened. I didn't know where else to look. I pulled on my hair, taking out a handful, frustration radiating off of every one of my cells.

"I can't find it."

"Go to her." He spoke and I followed, trusting my friend and master. He was right, she would know. She knew everything. She was my parents' pride and joy.

JUDY

Tick-tock. Tick-tock. The imaginary clock tick-tocks. I don't know whether it's night or day, how many hours have passed, or what awaits me in my future. But, if you want to know how many tears I've shed, bruises I have, or the number of padded squares on each wall, I could tell you. My shoulders hurt from running into the padding, but somewhere within my frustration I was tackled to the ground and my nerves began to slow. I've been okay since then, at least better than before. My stomach growls and I realize I have not eaten since before the phone call. They can think I am crazy but they cannot starve me. I have nothing to do besides sleep and think, so I shut down my brain and try to rest, saving my energy for whatever comes next.

CINDY

I've been hanging around, begging, pleading for just five minutes with Judy. I heard about the tranquilizer and I have to know that she is okay. But, the judge coughs and wheezes, insisting she be left alone. My brain waves morph into a sea of gray and black, twisted plans. I've never gone against the rules set in place. But, before I act I pressure the fat man once more, "Please, sir. I just need five minutes. Not even. Just give me a chance to speak with her."

“No.” His lips motionlessly form the words, his face a boulder—big, hard and emotionless.

“Why?”

“She pushed you down and almost broke your arm.”

“Sir, she was upset. The phone call...”

“What about the phone call?”

“She believes it was her sister.” He struggled to remain unemotional—his eyes softening, threatening to reveal his inner thoughts. Outside of the office, a fist pounded impatiently on the wooden door.

“What?” He shouts, throwing his arms in the air as though he was surrendering.

One of the jelly bellies burst through the door, rushing—or trying to rush, it seemed more like he was trying to swim through a pool of caramel—towards the judge’s desk.

“This letter...” He huffs and holds up his index finger, signaling that he needs to lose some weight because he can’t go ten feet without needing to catch his breath. “This letter is for Judith.”

“Penoso?”

“Yes, your honor.”

“Well, give it here. Who’s it from?” The letter travels from one set of fat bear claws to another.

“It doesn’t say. There’s no other name or address on the envelope.” The judge begins to tear the envelope, but I can’t let him open it. Judy is the only one who should read that letter, no matter who it’s from.

“Don’t open it!” I shout, fully aware that I am yelling at a court official, and if I kept it up I would find myself in some serious trouble.

“*Excuse me!* I’ll do as I please... seeing as how she is unstable—”

“Stop!” I could feel my face becoming flush, “She is *not* mentally unstable. In fact, she has done and said much worse in the courtroom, yet—until now—you didn’t find her dangerous or unstable.”

He looked as though someone had insulted his mother, but I pushed further. I was a lawyer. My tactics perched on my emotions, ready to spring at virtually any moment. My inner feelings were never revealed—until now—when my tactics took flight, leaving my anger with no choice but to snowball into his fat, stubborn face.

“No one,” I snatched the envelope from his chubby sausages, “but *Judy* will read this letter unless she approves otherwise.” My legs act as though they are two-years-old and storm my body out of his office before they can process the words that I just smeared in their faces. Once out of his office, I sprint towards the mental unit with one thought pulsing through my veins, “Find Judy... find Judy... find Judy...”

EMILY

My eyes penetrated her weak, scared, little body. “This will be a snatch, Em,” Demon whispered in my ear. I could feel my lips forming a nasty snarl. He could feel that a small part of me didn’t want to hurt her and I saw him divide himself in two. While part of Him remained behind to corrupt my thoughts and speech, His other half attached strings to my limbs and floated above my head—invisible to Judy.

“The damn alcohol, you stupid...” His voice, heard in my head, echoed throughout the house.

My sister was trying to be fierce, coming at me with full force, shoving me into the hallway, my back slamming into the railing. I could feel my hand raise and feet move, “Get your grimy hands off of me, *you bitch.*” Judy stumbled backwards, falling and smacking her head on the bottom of her bed. Deep within myself, where Demon could not see, a tear rolled down my cheek. I hurt my sister and He didn’t care. Once He knew where to find the treasure, it was time to leave.

I tried to fight Him inside my mind, but He threatened to leave me once again. I was hypnotized. I was His slave once more.

“Move guys, move!”

“Hurry up!”

“I need oxygen!”

“Get the stretcher in here. Get her on!”

“Hurry! She’s lost a lot of blood already.”

“Move! Move! Move!” Several different voices swim around my head, but I’m still unable to respond in anyway.

CINDY

Find Judy... Find Judy... Find Judy. I slide to a stop once I’m in the mental unit. Since they haven’t allowed me to see her, I don’t know which padded room is hers. So, I have two options: open each door and hope to find her before crazy lunatics attack me or ask someone where she is. Neither choice suits me.

“Judy!” I yell her name, hoping the sound of my voice penetrates the hard, padded walls. “Judy! Judy!”

“Excuse me, ma’am. Can you please stop shouting? You’re going to disturb some of the unstable inmates.”

“Judy! Judy!” I stop shouting long enough to see if she will help me, completely ignoring her request. “Do you know where Judy Penoso is?”

She hesitates before bluntly replying, “She is not allowed to have visitors... and if you’re the annoying attorney, you have been told to stay away—haven’t you?”

“Look here, missy.” I no longer find respect for these people, “This letter is addressed to her. Therefore, she is to be allowed to read it.”

“You cannot take it to her.”

“I don’t recall asking you what I could and could not do.”

“You asked—”

“I asked if you knew where she was. Now, tell me where I can find her or I’ll go find her myself.” I start walking forward, sensing I’m not going to receive an answer, when her arm shoots out to stop me.

“I cannot let you through. Only certified staff and approved visitors may see her. None of which are you.”

“Take me to her. You give it to her then, but I’m coming along.”

“I cannot—”

“You didn’t say you couldn’t take it and I couldn’t tag along. Now, let’s move it and stop giving me bullshit answers.”

“I...”

My patience wore out. I grabbed her by the hair, forcing her to look at me, “Now!” When I release her she whimpers and goes off, leaving me with no choice but to run and catch up.

“Give it to her and leave.” She acts as though I just cracked an invisible whip and doesn’t hesitate to follow my orders.

“Judy...” She waits for a response, but there is none. She opens the door to find her asleep and places the letter next to her, before closing the door once more.

“Go.” She scampers off, leaving me alone to wait for a reaction by the door.

JUDY

“Don’t say a word...” Her voice bounces off the inside of my skull, the crimson image circling my mind, haunting and torturing me. My stomach growls and I blink my eyes open, escaping the horrible nightmare. I roll over and find a white envelope, addressed to me in sloppy cursive and already partially opened. Instincts tell me to reach for the envelope and open it, but I forget my hands are not free.

I bend down onto my knees and lean over, picking the envelope up between my teeth. Then, I allow myself to fall onto my rear-end and move backwards until I am against the padded wall. After a few struggling minutes, I manage to place the envelope between my legs, holding it still so I can attempt to rip it open with my teeth. Soon, the corner of the envelope becomes soggy with drool and I am red with frustration.

“Hello? Is someone there? Help me! Help, can someone help me? Please...” The door cracked open, as though someone was waiting to see what I would say or do. I

shrunk backwards, not knowing who was about to come through the door. Maybe this isn't a real letter. Maybe this is a trick—

“Judy?” A sweet, angelic voice reached my ears and innocent blonde hair came into my padded cell, covering the face I've been longing to see.

“Cindy...?” As she became fully visible, I spotted the carefully-wrapped Ace-Bandage on her arm. Tears poured from my drained body as she approached me.

“Judy, I'm okay. Don't worry about me, okay?”

“But—”

“Shh... let's not forget why I'm here, why you yelled for help.” For that brief moment, I had forgotten all about the envelope. I bent my head forward, wiping my face on the snot-colored jacket from Hell.

“I can't.” I inhaled deeply, trying to recover from my meltdown and focus, like Cindy said. “I can't open it because I have no hands.”

In an attempt to make me smile, Cindy retorted. “Yes, you do. Unless... they cut them off.” I smiled for the first time in weeks. I didn't bother to tell her that it wasn't her remark alone that made me smile. I smiled because no one else had even attempted to make me laugh or had even bothered to speak to me the past few days. It was nice to finally have some human interaction.

“I mean, hands I can use. Open it for me?”

“Nope.”

I was about to ask her why the hell not, when she turned me around and began fidgeting with my back. Soon, I began to feel the jacket loosening and after a few minutes, she slipped it off my arms. I was free once more and felt like running around with my

arms outstretched, pretending I was an airplane and singing a song. But, I didn't. I'd save that for later.

Instead, I picked up the envelope and tore it open, unfolding the paper to find it signed by my sister. I wasn't sure what I expected exactly, and once I saw her name (her middle name that is) I wasn't even sure I wanted to read it. This letter is her second attempt to communicate with me. Reading it only confirms my belief that she is still alive.

Once again my mind buzzes with questions because I still do not understand why she would do this to me. Then again, it has been a while since I actually understood her at all. After all those years of being so close, why couldn't she just talk to me about her problems—or whatever you want to call them? Why couldn't she—

Footsteps interrupt my train of thought. I look over at Cindy, who must have heard them too. We exchanged glances and headed for the door.

THE JUDGE

After Cindy stormed out of the office like a child, the judge and his jelly-bellies wanted to follow, but the sound of his emergency phone made them stop. The last time that phone rang, Judy Penoso was arrested. He picks up the receiver, "Hello?"

"Your honor, I need your entire team on the scene immediately."

"Where?"

"The hospital. Set them up as backup around the entire facility and send two of them in with you."

"Why?"

“Emily Penoso isn’t dead.” He dropped the phone and began barking orders. The judge, himself, and his prison police are rarely called out, unless it’s a special situation. And *this* was a special situation.

He knows they need to get there ASAP, but he must find Cindy. That woman annoys the hell out of him, but if anyone has a right to know she does. He sends two officers to look for her while he gathers the remaining crew members. He’s still unsure as to why they need everyone. After all, they’re going to a hospital—how dangerous can she possibly be if she’s in a hospital? He wonders, but knows it’s of no use and drops it as he begins to send his men out in teams of four.

JUDY

We head for the door and run through the hallway of mazes, hoping to escape our pursuer, thinking as a single person, always knowing where the other is going. I begin to feel as though my heart is going to explode, after being locked up for so long I haven’t really found the time to work on my running skills.

Despite being athletic before my arrest, this place has definitely taken its toll on me. We stop for a break. I can’t breathe and Cindy kicks off her shoes. I guess one can only run so far in high heels. I can no longer hear the footsteps over my heavy breathing and hope we’ve lost them.

Our luck runs out within a matter of seconds though, as a jelly- (I’m surprised he’s still standing and breathing) comes around the corner, shouting Cindy’s name. Glancing at each other, we know we could outrun him if we wanted to, but where would we go?

“What?”, she says, and not very politely either.

“Judge wants you to come to the hospital with us. She’s alive.” It takes me a minute to process the information. Emily is alive. I believed she was and even hoped she was, but now I’m not so sure.

CINDY

She was right. “Judy’s coming with us.”

“Sorry, Ma’am. I can’t allow that.”

“Why the hell not—

“Ah! Ah! Ah!” Judy begins to scream, but it’s short-lived and she passes out on the cold floor.

“Judy... Judy!” I rush over to feel her chest. She’s still breathing.

“Ma’am, we have to go now,” the jelly-belly states. “I’ll take care of her. You go.”

Reluctantly, I let her go. If we can’t both go, one of us has to. One of us has to see if this is real. I don’t want to leave Judy behind, feeling she deserves to go more than I do, but knows she can’t. I just hope that she will be okay; hopefully this nightmare will shortly come to an end.

EMILY

All I remember is waking up in the hospital, the bright, yellow light beating into my eyes. I squinted to see where I was. Wherever I was, it smelled clean, and I could see the tubes hooked up to my arms. Bags of blood were being filtered into my body, my cuts bandaged up and a morphine IV in my right arm. I couldn’t feel much of anything and felt a little dazed. Once my eyes adjusted, I could see AJ standing just outside the room talking to my parents and Judy’s lawyer.

I started to have a panic attack. Why is AJ still here? Why is Cindy here? Where is Judy? Am I going to jail? Am I going to live? Do my parents hate me? Will AJ leave me? Will AJ get in trouble? What's going on? What's going to happen with my life—? My panic subsided and my world went black.

I woke up several hours later much calmer than before. It must have been all the drugs. I thought back to my panic attack and couldn't remember hearing or seeing Demon. The drugs must keep Him away. I tried to stay calm and allowed my eyes to adjust to the lighting in the room. My parents and AJ had moved inside the room and were patiently waiting for me to regain consciousness. AJ explained to me that he only wanted to help. He couldn't bear to live knowing he did nothing to try and save my life. My Dad smiled at him. I guess my Dad didn't hate me, if he was happy I was alive after all this time. My Mom explained to me that I would have to see a psychiatrist as soon as I was a little better. She said he would be able to help me. I was too weak to answer her so I simply nodded my head.

A few weeks later I had gained enough strength to go home and had my first meeting with my psychiatrist. He was nice, but asked a lot of questions.

“How do you feel when you cut yourself?”

“Good, like I'm relieving pain, but disappointed in myself at the same time.”

“And how do you feel about that?”

“Umm, happy, sad and confused.”

“Hmm,” he nodded his head and wrote down some notes on his giant yellow tablet. “What makes you feel the need to harm yourself?”

“I don’t know... I just kind of freak out and panic and then the cycling starts.”

“The cycling?”

“Yeah,” I was afraid to talk more about it, afraid Demon would return.

“What is the cycling, Emily?”

“I don’t really want to go into detail because I’ll panic and He will come back.” I had never told anyone about Him before. This guy is probably going to think I’m nuts. Hell they already think I’m nuts, isn’t that why I’m here in the first place?

“Who is He? What does He do?” My psychiatrist questioned. I felt like his eyes were trying to pry into my soul.

“He controls me.”

“How does He control you?” He asked. My palms were beginning to sweat. I was getting nervous, but so far He hadn’t returned. “How does He control you,” he asked once more.

“I...I hear His voice. He tells me what to do.” He wrote some more notes and just nodded his head. “You think I’m crazy, don’t you?” I asked.

“No, not at all, Emily.”

“Why? Its not normal for me to hear voices and stuff.”

“What do you mean by ‘and stuff’?”

“Why do I have to answer your questions, when you can’t even answer mine?”

“Okay, I’ll answer your questions if you answer mine.”

“Okay. So, why don’t you think I’m crazy?”

“Emily, it’s okay to not be normal. Some people have diseases that make them do things they don’t want to. It’s a psychological issue, but I can’t tell you what exactly is wrong unless you answer my questions, okay?”

“Okay.”

“What did you mean when you said you ‘hear voices and stuff?’”

“ That I’m not even me.”

“But, it’s your body Emily. How is it not you?”

The more I talked the more comfortable I slowly became. I just had to keep telling myself that the meds I was on kept Demon away. I told myself that I needed help, that I didn’t want to die. I told myself I had to answer him no matter what.

“How is it not you?” He asked me, patiently awaiting an answer.

“It feels like I’m watching it happen. I watch Him grab the knife. I watch Him slice the arm. I feel it, but it doesn’t seem like it’s real. It’s kind of like a dream.”

“So He talks to you and controls your body?”

“Yes.”

“Does He demand you to do things if you don’t cooperate? Does he get angry and violent?”

“Yeah and He makes me hurt people I love.” A tear ran down my cheek as I remembered the way he made me shove Judy to the floor.

“Its okay, Emily. You don’t need to cry. He isn’t going to be able to hurt you or the people you love anymore. I’m going to help you and make you better. I have one more question for you, okay?”

“Okay,” I sniffled, trying not to completely break down.

“Does this voice have a name? Does He make you call Him anything?”

“Demon. He makes me call him Demon.”

JUDY

“By the power vested in me by the United States Government, I hereby declare Judith L. Penoso innocent.” A cheer erupted from the spectators that once hissed at me and called me a ‘crazy bitch’, as the judge finally declared my freedom.

My sister, as it turns out, was alive all along. I don’t know why she would fake her death; she says it wasn’t planned. I’ve tried to talk to her on several occasions, but my feelings are too mixed up. When I’m away from her, I want to be with her. When I’m with her, I want to grab ahold of her shoulders and shake her, trying to figure out what the hell was going on in that mind of hers. But, I can’t do any of that.

She was in the hospital for almost three weeks. Once released, she was immediately transferred to the nearest juvenile detention center. This was the first time anyone had ever faked a death where we live, so the officials had to do some research before releasing the accounts on which she was being charged with. She will spend a minimum of seven years behind bars. Once she is of legal age, she will be transferred to the prison I spent the last five months in. Every week she meets with a psychiatrist. She’s been diagnosed with schizophrenia. This makes me picture a complete psycho. However, after Emily shared what was really going on with her, I have to agree that the symptoms fit.

Emily told us that she heard a voice in her head, known as the Demon. He talked to her, told her to cut herself and made her drink. He was controlling her like a puppet and as much as she tried to fight Him, she couldn’t. The things that ‘Demon’ made her do and

feel, her psychiatrist describes as hallucinations; that this is typical of schizophrenics. Other symptoms seem small and like a normal part of a teenager's life, such as feeling out of touch with people. Others, like feeling little emotion, may come across as one simply not caring. Her psychiatrist talked to my parents and I, and that's when I began to make all the little connections. I began to understand her a little better. It's still mind boggling, but it helps me retain myself from shaking the hell out of her when I visit.

When I do visit, we don't talk about the incident, but it's always on the tip of our tongues. It's the giant elephant in the room. We know it's there; we know we want to talk about it, to clear the awkward air and try to start over, but we never do. Actually, we don't really talk that much. But, it's nice to see she is alive.

As her big sister part, of me still feels as though I need to protect her. But now that she is on medication and is locked up, it's not really necessary. Instead, I show up and try to let her know that I am still there for her. I'm not going to do to her what our parents did to me.

I've moved out of my parents' house and now live with Cindy. She's helping me get a job and get back on my feet. Hopefully, I can manage to graduate next fall by making up all of my work and attending summer school. I want to go to college too. I want to work with juveniles—to make a difference in their lives and help them the way that Cindy helped me.

EMILY

I still see my psychiatrist on a daily basis. He diagnosed me with schizophrenia about a week after our meetings first began. He put me on some medication that helps me keep the Demon away. I don't fully understand what is wrong with me and why it got so

out of control. But, my psychiatrist is helping me. He told me that as long as I take the medication, Demon should stay away. It helps balance out the chemicals in my brain. He is also teaching me some techniques to manage my stress and anxiety. I described to him the events that led me to cutting and he said that stress and anxiety make me panic, which makes Demon come out. Well, that's part of the reason. So now whenever I think something is going to be difficult, I do deep breathing exercises. I also try and write down why it stresses me out and what exactly I think makes the task or experience difficult to cope with. This helps me identify the real problems. Once I am aware of them, it is easier for me to keep control over my mind and body.

Judy comes to visit me, usually after my meetings with my psychiatrist. She is doing okay with seeing me alive. I thought she would hate me and never want to see me again. I thought that if she knew I was alive she would just wish I was dead. But, she's kind of in the middle. She said it's hard for her to fully understand what is wrong with me and what makes me injure myself. But, she knows now that I can't help it. She knows that I need lots of support to be able to manage my disease. So, that's why she sticks around.

My parents are about the same as Judy. I don't think things are settled between Judy and them yet, though. But, I guess that may take a while, seeing as they deserted her when she needed them the most. At least they realize they can't do that again. They come and visit a few times a week. At first it was very awkward and we didn't know what to say to each other, but it's slowly getting better with each visit.

The person who comes to visit me the most is AJ. He started seeing my psychiatrist too. He isn't schizophrenic like me, but suffers from depression. He said that I made him happy for once in his life, so he wanted to help me. He said that he also wanted

to help himself, also because of me. The psychiatrist gave him some anti-depressants and he is doing much better. He has his days, but so does everyone. He hasn't cut himself in about a month. Slowly the two of us are improving.

As for myself, I think I'm just going to get all the help I need over the next seven years. I'm going to try and mend things between my sister and my parents. I just want to get better. I want things to go back to the way they were when I was younger. I want the Demon to be gone forever. Sometimes I wish that he had never appeared to me, but sometimes I'm thankful for my disease. I guess I should be okay with what is wrong with me. It makes me unique (and some what dangerous if I'm off my medication). It makes me who I am and right now I just need to be okay with that.