

Sooz

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My existence ought to be described in terms of a cage imprisoning my spirit. My mother, Molly, was the stout bars that parted me from the world, and my sister, Lilly, was the aethereal spaces between these bars that grant me vision upon life outside confinement. Lilly was my precious little window, and there would never have been life in me without her. We have spent our lives ridiculously close to each other since the moment of our conception. It may sound silly, but I think I fell in love with her the very first time I opened my eyes inside Molly's womb. These two women have shaped my years. Everything I am is their manufacture.

During my early years, I was nothing but a strange appendix of Lilly. It was only after we turned five that we started spending time apart. I was born physically challenged, and it was not until I reached that age that I was strong enough to develop my own identity separated from my sister. Lilly started going out and meeting new friends as soon as we divided. Maybe I was slowing her down, and she never had the heart to tell me. I didn't follow her outside. I couldn't. I think it was around that time that Molly first regretted having me.

Mother used to get awfully mad whenever I called her Molly, especially if I yelled her name after waking from a bad dream at late hours in hope for a comforting embrace. I guess that is why I stopped calling her at all. She used to get terribly angry the few times Lilly called her Molly too—she could undoubtedly perceive my words in her mouth. I have never actually been in good terms with Molly. I think she never really wanted me around. She always considered me a burden. There used to be a time when I cared about it. It was the time when I cried every night and hated myself for being such a pathetic worthless creature, but now I know it was foolish of me to think like that since I could not do anything to mend my physical condition at the time. I was born with limitations, and no body should have held me responsible for it! I think Molly treated me so dreadfully because it was easier for her to hate me than to hate herself for delivering me into this world. Motherly frustration strangled her life, and the traumatic experience of giving birth to Lilly and me persuaded her to never have children again. I guess she did not want to commit the same mistake twice. She didn't want to have another Sooz in the house—that was clear. The truth is that Molly was a sad woman until the day of her death.

I never got to know my father. Molly never talked about him, where he lived, or what he looked like. I never really cared either; however, sometimes when it was hot and sunny outside, and Lilly was not around to keep me company, I drew portraits of him in my mind, just to entertain myself, and later I would ask Lilly to put them on paper for me. Since I have no drawing skills, I constantly asked my sister to do it for me. We made the perfect team. I was the painter and Lilly was my paintbrush. I guess I'll never know just how she did it, but every feature and every expression I detailed to her were recreated on the paper exactly as they were in my mind. Our pictures were not merely limited to portraits, not at all. We constantly created magnificent sceneries. A personal favorite of mine was that of a misty forest with such tall and leafy trees where the sun could never touch the ground and with animals that hugged close together trying to escape the cold wilderness. I loved it when we painted together. I always felt very proud of our art. Lilly, on the other hand, would often cry after we had signed our masterpiece. I think that was just her way to react to beautiful art.

Lilly was the perfect child. Her gorgeous hair was black and fell to her back in the roundest and shiniest curls you could imagine, and its blackness beautifully contrasted with her white and doll skin. Her big brown eyes were two little mirrors that trapped your image in her pupils. None on this earth would have rejected such blissful imprisonment, for to be part of her was simply delightful. Her gaze was so intense that she could make people shiver just by looking at them. She looked radiant at all times. Molly always said *she* was the most beautiful child in the world. I wish I had received such a compliment some time. My sister used to say, all the time, that we were identical. But I have always known that even though we are twins, our beauty cannot be compared. She has some kind of light I lack, easily perceivable in my opaque eyes. Lilly was not an empty case. Even though many loved her for her beauty, many more loved my sister for her spirits. She had a gift for dealing with others, and her compassion was often overwhelming. She was kind to every being she knew. She was also very popular when she was a child, and I was... Well, Lilly was my only playmate. Social life can be very painful for a five year old with my limitations.

My physical conditions imprisoned me in-doors. I was made believe the outdoors were my doom. It was hard to live like that, especially those times I saw other children playing outside, running, jumping, and doing all those exciting things that I was never to enjoy. At that time, I could not understand why Molly always wanted me inside. Lilly often told me that she saw other children like me and that they were everywhere. She saw them at school and at church. She told me they played in parks and had fun around playgrounds too. Life seemed so unfair.

Once, Lilly and I tried to convince Molly to let me out. I rarely saw the old woman as angry as then. It might sound stupid, but I often reacted furiously to Molly's censure, and these responses just made everything worse for me. My efforts to create big scenes of rant and rave were often frustrated by my limitations, like when I was mad and wanted to run away and slam the door behind

me, but the best thing I could do to show my anger was to knock down a portrait or drop a glass on the floor.

Molly constantly brought strangers to the house, saying that they were specialists in cases like mine. They all were supposed to be very professional and experienced; yet, they never really helped me. They always made me feel worse. While some of them visited my house anxious to practice strange techniques on me, others just came to study me as if I were one of those hopeless mice they use in laboratories. The truth is that I hated them and their commanding way of speaking to me. They made me feel odd.

One afternoon, after the visit of one of these “professionals,” I went to sleep. I fell into the deepest and quietest sleep anyone has ever fallen into. I do not know how long I slept, but when I finally awoke, Lilly had become a grown woman. She started dating men and wearing formal suits. She grew too fast, and I could not catch up with her. I started feeling childish around her, and I couldn’t stand it. I think what I hated the most was the tapping of her walk, the sound of those high-heels echoing on the floor. I just wanted to play and paint as we used to do, but she constantly ignored me. Soon she met this *man* whose name I can’t remember, and everything suddenly cracked. She would not care for me anymore.

This *chap* was the first man to enter my life, and he was the one that changed it forever. By putting an end to my precious existence, he, paradoxically, conceived a new life for me. He indirectly made me aware of my true nature. He awoke me. Every time he was invited to the house, I hid inside Lilly’s closet or under her bed, so I could listen to his secret conversations with my sister. They were usually very dull, romantic-stupid kind of dull, but there was one particular talk that outshined all the previous and made me open my eyes.

“If you want to spend your life with me, there is something you need to know first,” said Lilly in an unusual heavy mood. Then, after a little pause, she continued without raising her gaze from those grownup shoes of her, “My mother’s pregnancy was highly problematic. You see... She was carrying twins, my sister Susan and me.” I had rarely seen Lilly as nervous as in that moment. Her fists were wrapped up in tension. It was painful to watch her, and it made me mad not to know what was making her feel so uncomfortable. “The problem,” she continued, “was that her body couldn’t manage the burden of two children. Even though I was born extremely thin and fragile, I was strong enough to survive. My sister was not that lucky.” Her voice was breaking. “She... She couldn’t make it. When the doctor pulled Sooz out of my mother, he pulled only a soulless corpse. My sister’s heart ceased just before stepping through the threshold to this world.” The man’s expression of surprise was nothing compared to mine. My ears were deaf to the rest of the conversation, and with the world spinning before my opaque eyes I ran out of the room.

Moved by disbelief, I rushed to a mirror and watched my whole body. Standing in front of me appeared the figure of a little girl, a five-year-old darling with black hair and dead pallid skin. It was me, the very same image of the girl that separated from Lilly at turning five. Had I spent all my life with my eyes closed?

Why? Why didn't I realize before? I felt dizzy. How do you react when you are spat with the truth of not being alive? Rage overtook me. I felt my head burning in flames of wrath, the same wrath that has started wars and ended millions of lives. I felt dead, but suddenly, I tasted power. I began to comprehend everything I was and was not. I became fearless and reckless. No one could stop me, not even Molly this time. If Lilly did not love me, I would make her love me. I decided I would do anything to regain her attention.

From that moment, night after night, I made my presence noticeable. I started doing all those foolish tricks ghosts are said to enjoy in gothic stories, like crying and making funny noises at night. I loved being feared. I also grew fond of my appearance. The huge wall mirror in Lilly's room became my favorite place in the house. With time I learned not only to appreciate my figure, but also to let others see me, as if it were some sort of window into my realm. Frequently, when Lilly sat in front of the glass to comb her hair before going to bed, I devoted some time to brush mine too. I didn't really need to take care of my hair, but I enjoyed spending some quality time with my sister. I also developed my ability to draw and paint. I spent hours painting on the walls the most beautiful and meaningful designs. At that point, I was particularly fond of drawing a multicolored afternoon in a park. Full of details, the picture showed a cloudless sky and a wooden area where I sketched myself lying on the grass, exhausted after running and playing all day, and it showed several tenuous sunbeams that filtered through the leaves of sky-high pines and gently touched my cheeks with golden fingers in what I could only imagine would be gentle touch. That made me smile. It was my favorite creation, and it was a shame that, even though my skills improved day by day, my art was hardly appreciated by others. I didn't care much about that though.

Visits from specialists became frequent again, but this time I had the strength and wits to fight back. It was delightful. Either as a phenomenon of nature or as a devil, I was untouchable. No scientist could catch me, and no preacher was saint enough to stain me. I enjoyed watching these men's eyes filled with horror below their sweaty eyebrows as I made them mine. There is no image more pathetic than that of a grown man crying in panic. Molly often tried to stop me as well. Her pitiful soldiers were no challenge for me anymore, but she still wanted me destroyed. She declared war on me, and I simply accepted this. I wouldn't have hurt her if she hadn't asked so badly for it.

One lovely rainy afternoon, I was looking at my mirror when she entered the room. Her eyes turned red with fury when she saw me on the glass. She grabbed the mirror and smashed it to the ground as she loudly cursed my name. My beautiful window to the world exploded in a thousand pieces. Naturally, my response was no less impulsive. I was furious. I rushed to Molly and pushed her with all my strength. She fell to the floor which, sadly for her, was covered with sharp broken pieces of glass. The tiny and sparkling pieces of crystal penetrated her skin like knives and caused her dozens of deep cuts in her back and head. She fell asleep on that bed of spikes. I observed amazed how the dense and dark blood slowly poured down to the uncarpeted floor creating

a great puddle. Moments later Molly was taken away by two frowning men and a weeping Lilly. It bothered me to see Lilly crying her heart out. I don't know why she even cared about that witch. She prompted her own end.

Not long had passed after my little quarrel with Molly, when I realized Lilly was changing again. I knew she was upset because Molly didn't seem to rally from her accident—she was in critical condition at the hospital, and doctors didn't have much hope. However, there was something else afflicting Lilly. I perceived something odd in her, something I could not understand, but I needed to comprehend. Then, I decided to be even more radical. I sneaked inside Lilly's body again. Once more we were one, just like when we were little. It took me some minutes to get used to the warmth of her body, but then, after exploring a while, I could see *it* inside her. I could feel *it*, the being growing inside her. It looked just like Lilly.

The baby had inherited many of Lilly's features, including her bright eyes. She was such a beautiful creature, and she looked wonderfully delicate and tender. I felt sick. I couldn't stop thinking about how she would affect my life. Her preciousness and fragility would soon become the center of my sister's cares and worries. I couldn't bear it. I needed to get out. I exited Lilly's body with a shattered heart.

After that for sometime, the bluest thoughts painted the walls of my mind and numbed my senses. I couldn't stop thinking about those beautiful sensations I was never to experience. I would never age or find love. I was never to feel a being lingering in my womb. I would never experience life. I reflected on what I had done with my existence. It was nothing. I was tired of hurting people. All those horrid games I had been playing only brought me temporary hollow satisfaction. I was tired of feeling angry and staying in the shadows. All I had was me, and I didn't even like myself. I wanted more, and that is why I had to do what I did.

Soon after I discovered she was pregnant, Lilly gave birth to a precious girl. The little creature was brought home the day after she was born. She was lying on Lilly's bed when I first saw her. The child was the vivid image of Lilly when she was a baby. She was there, alone and motionless, calm and quiet. It was the time to act. My furtive steps towards the baby reproduced those of a panther approaching her clueless prey. I recall hesitating for a moment, but her tender spirit allured me to take over her body. Oh my precious golden fingers! Her spirit was young and weak, and it put on little resistance. I quickly strangled her will and extinguished her ghost, leaving a gorgeous empty case.

I now possess a new body, flesh that links me to this world, and I now have access to it all. This is not like when I lingered inside Lilly's. I was just a guest then, voiceless and insignificant, but this body is all mine; it is all me, now. I will find in it what I have been looking for all my life, a chance. I am a phoenix. Tonight I ceased, and tonight I was born again, resurrected.

Those first moments as a part of the world were wonderfully intense. I love the outside world, the leafy trees, the enormous buildings, the fast moving cars and the multicolored semaphores. I could feel the air flying through my nostrils.

I even enjoyed the cold weather that made Lilly's warm chest feel even more comfortable.

A little while after I took my new body, Lilly carried me to Molly at the hospital. She wouldn't let the old lady go without meeting her granddaughter. The dying woman was breathing heavily as we entered her room, but she drew a smile on her face when she saw me. "She looks exactly like you when you were a baby," she whispered to Lilly's ear. "But her eyes..." Molly opened her eyes wide in horror and between gasps tried to sigh a sentence, which Lilly never heard. Then she expired.