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Burning Bridges as We Go
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Stone Cold Gravestone

The storm was a rumor come true and now the sky was delivering. Heavy rain pouring down across the cemetery with lightning flashes lighting up the gravestones till thunder called everything back into darkness again.

Paige didn't mind the rain. It made the night more lyrical somehow when she was able to conceal herself beneath umbrella and trench coat. Poetic even as she placed flowers on her sister's grave feeling, honestly, *nothing*. *A cavernous space of emptiness*. Oh, perhaps there was a touch of pride with a genuine sense of connection to a sister who was now no more than a skeleton six feet under. But it took death to rekindle such a connection that hadn't existed since the womb.

"Happy one year anniversary, sister," Paige said. "I hope you're well. It's true what they say, you know. Time does fly whether you're having fun or not. I've so much to tell you."

With every lightning strike, Paige mouthed the name carved on the headstone and leaned forward to kiss the name three times – once for the past, one for the present, and one more as a promise to the future. It reassured her, though she was certain whatever plane of existence her dead sister was now living on, she would probably consider the gesture no more than an artificial expression of tenderness.

“Don’t think me insincere or anything when I say I feel closer to you when I visit. Cause I do. I know we weren’t necessarily friends when you were alive, but neither were we enemies. Just polar opposites, I think, with tenderness hard to come by. It’s complicated, you know?”

For most of their lives, Paige and Maddie had reputations for being good and bad respectively - Paige always the good while Madeline, “Maddie,” the bad. Angel and devil. Yin and yang. Sweet and sour to just about everyone despite being born monozygotically identical twins.

Their mother, Sandy, even from birth, insisted she could see differences between the two. Or so she told their father. “They may look the same, but they’re not. She’s very different. Much more difficult.” And here Sandy pointed at Maddie. “She’ll watch me. Watch everything I do without making a peep the entire time till I pick up Paige. Then she’ll start crying. And she won’t stop either till I put Paige down. Then when I do try to feed her, she’ll clamp down hard on my nipples just to cause pain. And I swear she giggles after.”

“She’s a baby,” their father said. “I doubt she’s trying to be anything but a baby. Maybe she’s a little colicky though. We do have an appointment with the pediatrician next week. I’ll call Dr. Rankin and re-schedule to an earlier time if you like.”

“No, I don’t think you’re hearing me. It’s not colic. And it’s not some infant malady. Maddie is just different. Somehow more, oh I don’t know, insidious or something.”

“That’s not a fair thing to say. Babies aren’t anything but babies. And they need to be cared for. But you’re tired, I can see that. And you need some rest. Things’ll look much clearer when you get some rest. Why don’t you go lie down while I look after the twins?”

But Sandy didn't see things differently. Where Paige made her feel like a loving mother, cooing and cuddling, Maddie was the kind of baby that made you understand why so many mothers hated their children. Always demanding, crying, and red faced. Never settled. And it didn't change as her babies grew into toddlers.

"Caring for Paige is effortless," she tried to explain to their father one night after he returned home from work and found Maddie locked in her room. "She just gets it. But there's something insidious about the way Maggie never settles down. Do you know I found a kitchen knife today in their room when I went to wake them from their naps? It was under Paige's bed, but I know she put it there. Paige was asleep, but Maddie was lying there watching me. And I swear she was smirking. I'm certain that knife wasn't there when I put them down. I don't even know how she got it in the first place since we have kid locks on all the cabinets."

"I don't think Maddie or Paige would do something like that. Maybe you forgot you had it with you when you went to wake them? Children just don't take kitchen knives up to their room. Anyway, you shouldn't be locking Maddie in her room. It's not healthy. Are you taking the Prolixin pills the doctor prescribed for you?"

"I don't like those pills. They make the world feel...oh, I don't know...unbalanced."

"The doctor said you might not be used to the effects in the beginning because you've never taken meds before. But that you should continue. They're very helpful in stabilizing your mood swings. Here let me get one for you and you can take it with some water in front of me."

Sandy went to confession to implore her priest, Father Murphy, to understand.

"Forgive me, Father, but in my heart I love Paige more than Maddie. Paige is a loving child where Maddie is harsh and vengeful. I know it deep in my bones. A mother knows."

“Ah, my dear, these children are a gift from God. And God would no more give you a vengeful child than a vengeful heart. He loves all His children. Children are to be raised under sacred promise, so let the Virgin Mary be your example of love. For your sins, say three Hail Mary’s and five Lord’s Prayer. Till next week, God be with you.”

Sandy felt trapped by her circumstances. Occasionally though, when guilt broke through, she tried to believe she was just being overly anxious like any new mother. But with each passing year, she felt she was living a lie – the mother who loved both her children equally.

It’s the way Maddie likes to torture Paige, Sandy thought. I can’t stand it.

As toddlers, Maddie followed Paige everywhere and when Sandy wasn’t looking, liked to torture her. Sandy never actually caught Maddie doing this, but there was always the aftermath with Paige injured and Maddie defiantly standing nearby with arms crossed, smirking. For example, Maddie would pinch Paige so hard, purple welts would instantly appear. Or pull her hair hard enough to remove strands. Or try to trip her down the stairs. Always staring at Sandy after - her arms crossed - practically daring her to do something about it.

“She seems to take delight in hurting her sister,” Sandy complained. “Like she’s trying to show me up as a bad mother by hurting Paige and proving I can’t do anything about it. I don’t know what to do with that child.”

“That *child* is your daughter,” their father scolded. “And I’m sure it’s not as bad as all that. Every sibling goes through a rivalry phase trying to get their parent’s attention. Maybe try to give her some special one on one time and not to be so intense about it all, huh? Children need to feel safe and accepted.”

During her late night prayers, Sandy begged God, “Please Lord, help me change her. Make her grow out of her wickedness.” When that didn’t happen, Sandy prayed, “Let

my mother or sister or someone else come to watch her for a while. Just for a weekend, or a day, or even just an hour." Just so she wouldn't feel constantly afraid and bitter toward one of her own children. But that never happened either.

"Everyone," Sandy complained to her husband, "seems to sense Maddie is trouble and difficult to handle. I can't get any help."

"I've never heard any such thing. But maybe I can get *you* some help. I set up a counseling appointment for you next Tuesday. At the very least, till then, you need to stop castigating your thoughts onto them. It's not good for either girl."

In her darkest hours, when she was most bitter because no one would believe her, Sandy prayed in soft whispers for God to have Maddie taken from her. In whatever way God wanted to accomplish it. Forever. Just leave her Paige and she promised to be a better Catholic and a better mother. But that never happened either.

It was for Paige's sake Sandy never went beyond prayers with Maddie. Or so Sandy told herself.

Paige, for her part, grew up quiet and pleasing. She was neat and tidy, thoughtful and loving, and lit up with a smile whenever people spoke to her. And she grew into the kind of little girl teachers rave about and everyone likes because she was invariably polite. She learned early on this was important and people appreciated her for it.

But Paige would also tell you - if you asked, which no one ever did - being the good twin was a heavier burden than it appeared. Aside from never wanting to cause a fuss—and even good little girls could get frustrated and angry sometimes—there was also Maddie to consider. Paige learned to watch her back because Maddie had a fondness for pushing her from behind when she was near stairs. Or slamming doors in her face at the last minute causing nosebleeds. Or accidentally closing car door on her hand.

"I want to be the one who screams," Paige told her table of stuffed animals during tea time. "And I want to be the one sweeps all the dishes off the table and knocks all the books flying the shelf. Then maybe she'd leave me alone. But I don't think Mama could handle it. And, oh, I don't want to be unfair to Mama."

Two girls acting out? Heaven forbid. One was enough to produce a weariness in Sandy so deep, you knew it reached right down into her soul. So Paige tucked every bad thought or feeling inside and stayed good.

"If Dorothy can deal with Elphaba" Paige encouraged herself, "And Cinderella the indignities of her evil step-sisters, then I can bear with Maddie for a few more years till I'm old enough to move out."

If Maddie had a motto, or ever prayed, she didn't share it with anyone. Not the priest at St. Joseph's where Sandy took them every Sunday for services and confession – at least until middle school when Maddie refused to go any longer. Not their father, who had for some time now become much more interested in his dental practice, the country club he frequented, and the women he met there every evening who appreciated him as a successful, urbane professional suffering through marriage to a repressed and difficult wife. And certainly not their mother, Sandy, who always going off her meds and looking at her side eyed with deep suspicion.

But if Maddie did have a motto, it would be 'psychological pain runs deeper than physical.' Hiding a book report or homework Paige worked hard on to complete could torment her for a day or two. Placing an open bottle of black dye on a chair seat just before Paige sat down, spilling ink all over the back of her cheerleading skirt and making it look like she had soiled herself – all while claiming it was accident - brought days of stoic anguish. And "secretly" defacing her student council flyers with indecent

imagery kept Paige off balance and embarrassed for weeks. No one could ever say it was Maddie, but both Sandy and Paige were cautious around her.

“Dear, you did the work and that’s what counts,” Sandy tried to console Paige. “We’ll just tell the teacher the dog ate it or something. And I’ll find a way to buy you a new uniform. It won’t be a problem. The poster incident I already reported to the principal and they are looking into it. No one blames you. Or will hurt you further.”

“I don’t care about the homework. Or the uniform. Or the posters, Mama. I refuse to let it bother me. *C’est la Vie. Quel dommage.*”

“You’re such a good girl.”

Paige didn’t do it to be good. She just learned it was easier to keep her head down. And easier to give up cheerleading. And easier not to run for student council. She never responded to any of Maddie’s abuse because to do so meant Maddie would win. Better to be docile so Maddie became bored and left her alone for a while. But she still locked her bedroom door at night to be safe.

Once, at the end of their junior year, Paige noticed Maddie stopped torturing her for quite a long spell and wondered if she had finally outlasted Maddie’s abuse. She had not. Maddie was just distracted by a new high school counselor, John Oxbridge, who had recently graduated from Boston College with a masters in psychology, and been hired by the school principal to close out the year.

Oxbridge’s first meet with Maddie was over the defaced student council flyers. He didn’t know Maddie committed the vandalism, he was just performing due diligence interviewing each student who had been at the school the evening the vandalism occurred.

When it was her turn, Maddie was called into his office at the very back of the administration building. She wasn’t worried. Most adults weren’t that bright. But

talking to Oxbridge, Maddie was surprised to discover he was not only very astute, but perceptive and sensitive.

“Forgive me for saying,” Oxbridge gently spoke, “but you seem to have a certain animosity toward your twin sister. Nothing outlandish, but I do detect some friction. I’ve read it isn’t unusual for twins – those who desire their own identity in the face of always being compared to the other - to lash out. Especially if the other twin is, shall we say, more the *Pollyanna* type than the other. Forgive me, I intend no offense. But if you don’t mind, I’ve noticed there *are* differences between you and Paige. Maybe not so physically other than the obvious way you both style your hair different, have different fashion sense, and choose to wear make-up or not. But your bearing is much more weighted than hers. I can see it in the way you carry yourself seriously. You have a strong desire to be respected. Where Paige comes across as caring more about being genial and liked. Do your parents see you this way?”

Maddie was surprised. Delighted and taken off guard. No adult ever spoke to her like that. And because he did, she realized she desired him. She wanted him. She had already had men, but his insight excited her with how gently and masterfully he penetrated her psyche in a way she had not experienced. But that didn’t mean she was going to foolishly tell him her parents played favorites from the very start. Or reveal herself to him.

“Everyone loves Paige. So do I. She’s wonderful. I’m blessed to have her as my sister and more than happy to let her shine,” Maddie smiled. *While I remain the attached and forgotten appendage, Maddie thought to herself. Even God ignores me to bless Paige. So why not star in the role I’ve been cast in?*

Why not? Maddie thought. Why not get angry because her perfect, pristine sister wasn’t scolded for spilling ice cream down the front of her Easter dress while she was

criticized for simply fidgeting too much in hers. Why not cut off a hunk of Paige's shiny blonde curls because Mark Malloy claimed her hair was prettier – which was unfair because they both were the same. Or why not smash Paige's finger in the car door because she was lucky enough to win that stupid plastic diamond ring from the gumball machine while Maddie received a lame "You're cool!" sticker? Why not?! She could tell Oxbridge a hundred stories like that, but the truth was it got old. She had long ago accepted that Paige received the best of everything while she not so much. Her revenge was pulling strings behind the scenes whenever she liked, but never letting on that she did. Or so she thought.

Maddie wasn't going to confess to anyone, let alone Oxbridge. "Thank you for your thoughts on the matter, John. May I call you John? I feel like I know you because we've been speaking on such intimate terms." And here Maddie reached out and touched Oxbridge's arm. Despite himself, his training, his efforts, he felt turned on and knew it. "Maybe we can meet again next week to discuss it further?"

Against all better inclinations, Oxbridge couldn't help himself. He wanted this dark, little flower. And it only took Maddie two more weeks privately meeting in his office till he, overcome with passion, took her on the carpet floor beneath his desk. And another two months of weekly trysts till, one day, she tearfully confessed she had missed her last two periods and might be pregnant. Oxbridge's world collapsed.

"Oh, John, I can't have an abortion. I'm a Catholic. It's a sin. And my father would never forgive me. Nor could I give the baby away. That would be the most terrible thing for a mother to abandon her innocent baby. Can you imagine? And I can't raise this child. I'm a junior in high school and you're a grown man. It would ruin my entire life."

Actually, Maddie wasn't pregnant. Nor had she missed any of her periods. She just wanted to see how far she could push Oxbridge before he broke. Which barely took one more month. One more month of him angst ridden over the unsureness of it all.

"John, is everything alright?" the principal asked. "You've been quite distracted lately. And you've been neglecting your duties. You've missed three days this week and fifteen since the start of the semester. What exactly is going on? Did I make a mistake hiring you?"

"I've been sick, sir. It's my stomach. No relief. The doctors are having a terrible time trying to figure out what's going on, but I have hopes to be well soon."

"John, when was the last time you ate?" wondered his fellow school counselor. "You're all skin and bones. Don't you have anyone cooking for you at home?"

"I've been sick lately and not able to eat much. I'll try some chicken soup later."

One more month of hiding his nervous anxiety over what he had done and picturing the shame he would experience when it all came to light. A month later Maddie finally told Oxbridge she had thankfully had her period and all would still be secret between them. But it was too late for him. It had gone too far. He broke. He had a nervous breakdown, quit his job, and moved back to Boston the very next day. And no one except Maddie knew why.

Maddie was sad to see him go. She had greatly enjoyed their three month relationship. Feeling newly empowered, she returned her attention to Paige as they began their senior year in high school. And as it so fortuitously happened, Paige had gotten herself a boyfriend during the summer. Brian Bagmen, a senior who also had a reputation for being polite, respectful, and good.

"Your boyfriend, Brian, stopped by the house today," Maddie told Paige one fall evening not long after the semester started. "He wanted to ask you to the prom. But he might have other things on his mind now."

Paige had just returned home from her volunteer work at the hospital and was in the kitchen looking for something to eat when Maddie approached her. So she wasn't clear what Maddie was referring to.

"What you mean? I told Brian I would be busy volunteering at the hospital," Paige replied. "But he's coming to pick me up in the morning. We're going to drive up to his parent's cabin with Betsy and Jack so we can go hiking in the mountains this weekend."

"Well, tra-la-la. Aren't you a popular girl? I think you're gonna be infamous from now on."

"Now what does that mean?" Paige asked as Maddie walked away laughing.

The video clip of Paige and Jason having sex wasn't downloaded to Instagram till late Saturday morning after Paige and Jason left for the cabin. But by Monday everyone had watched, spreading the viral video from peer to peer, parent to parent, teacher to teacher. And despite Paige's long standing good girl reputation, no one suspected it had not been Paige in the video because the girl in the video obviously her. No one imagined it was Maddie having sex with Brian and not Paige. Now *that* had been fun. Maddie used Paige's room, wore Paige's favorite Pollyanna sweater and skirt outfit, and pulled her hair back in ponytail-style just like Paige. She even washed her face free of eyeliner and make up so no one would even remotely suspect it wasn't Paige.

"Best part of all," Maddie laughed to herself, "that hypocrite boyfriend of hers - Mr. Catholic-Jock-I'm a Good Choir Boy, didn't even question why. Or hesitate in the least. He just dropped his pants in a hurry when I took off the Pollyanna sweater and came fast when I begged him to deflower me."

Everyone who watched the video believed it was Paige with Paige's boyfriend. Shocked and titillated sure, but never questioning who it was. Because her face was clearly visible on the video. No one knew the truth except Maddie and Paige – because Maddie had been there, obviously, and because Paige was still a virgin intent on saving herself till marriage. Which Maddie learned several days earlier after stumbling across her pathetic diary - the pink patent leather one that looked like it belonged to a twelve-year-old. Which is where the whole idea of virtually deflowering Paige and her reputation came to mind.

As expected, Paige broke up with Brian immediately. Much to his confusion because he didn't understand why. Why would she film them, download the video, and *then* break up with him? Was it just so she could lose her virginity and not feel guilty about it? People assumed he had made the video and released it which could've spared her. But his reputation didn't suffer in the least while hers did. It didn't make sense to anyone, but there it was.

Within days of the video, Paige's good-girl reputation took a near fatal hit – the pious girls calling her tramp and cutting her off completely while the not-so-pious girls crowed to see Ms. To-Good-For-Anyone had fallen hard off the high road. Paige was just embarrassed. Sandy was concerned and immediately took Paige to see Dr. Rankin to start her on birth control. And then to Father Murphy for counseling and confession. Something Maddie had stopped doing years before.

Only rarely – in her quietest moments – did Maddie ever wonder who she was if she was not Paige's doppelganger. She spent a lot of time investing in tormenting Paige and keeping everyone else at bay. Would anyone even notice if she was gone? Her father wouldn't notice. He had split years ago when both girls were still young, it being no secret his decision to leave centered on the behavior of his *maniacal, manipulative, psychotic wife*. Both girls heard him scream this at their mother.

“I can’t *STAND* what you’re doing to the girls! And to me!” he screamed, “You weren’t like this when we met or first married. You need therapy. But since you refuse to take medications or go to therapy, I won’t be a party to it any longer. I’ve had it with your insane accusations and delusional attitude. You should be committed!” And so their marriage—which had once been a true love affair though neither girl would ever know this—dissolved as he packed a bag, walked out the front door, and drove away in his 1972 Red Chevy Corvette with white leather interior. A new family and new life were his intentions.

Lightning spliced through the night again bringing Paige out of her reverie. She traced the lettering on the face of the grave marker and whispered, “To be honest. I’m glad you’re dead. I know that’s not a nice thing to say, but it’s true. You should know, surprisingly, Mama doesn’t feel the same. She’s confused about what happened that day but is too afraid to say anything. She went into the hospital for a while after and now she sees a psychiatrist once a week. He’s prescribed her Lithium and some other medications she takes every day. She’s very different now. Very docile and not at all nervous like she used to be. Oh, she wonders and I think suspects what happened. Sometimes I catch her looking at me side-eyed during dinner and I can tell she’s trying to decide if what she believes is true or just more of her delusions. It’s tormenting her. But you know how she was.”

The lightning streaked again and Paige kissed the gravestone three times. Again.

“Oh! And get this! The insurance company finally ruled on Dad’s appeal and decided, just because he paid the life insurance premiums all those years, it didn’t entitle him to change the beneficiary or receive one cent of the payout from your “accidental” death. Mama received a check for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars from the insurance company - half of which she’s already put into a trust for me and I received another one hundred and fifty thousand separately for suffering such trauma as your only surviving

sibling. I'll be eighteen in a few days, but you knew that of course. When I am I can legally take control over my trust fund and do what I want."

The thunder that followed made it sound like a recrimination from the grave.

"Hey, I'm sorry. It's not like your *murder* was premeditated or anything —in any real sense. It really was an accident. But when the universe offers up an opportunity, you have to be a fool not to grab it. And I, as you well know, am nobody's fool."

Paige thought back to how it all happened. It had been a beautiful October day with both girls heading home. It was Maddie's turn to drive which placed Paige in the passenger seat sitting in stony silence —the fallout from the boyfriend betrayal still a fresh wound. Neither spoke. But when Maddie pulled into driveway in front of the garage and stopped to let Paige out, she instantly remembered their mother would be home shortly and would be angry if she couldn't park in the garage. So without really thinking further, Maddie threw the car into reverse and started backing out. Only she didn't realize Paige had exited the vehicle and was walking around the back of the car to get her things out of the trunk. When Maddie felt the heavy thud, followed by a high pitched girls scream, she instinctively slammed on the brakes. But then she realized...and then she thought....and then she took her foot off the brakes and let the car roll backwards further till she felt a satisfying bump-bump as the tires ran right over her sister. It was shocking how easy it had been and the sense of *calm* she felt after. But then Maddie jumped out of the car and saw Paige lying crushed underneath.

Definitely dead, Maddie thought.

Of course, the aftermath wasn't pretty and, despite having a strong stomach, Maddie vomited into the bushes several times after seeing the remains of her twin's face— identical to her own—smashed on the driveway.

Almost by instinct, Maddie knew what had to be done. She looked around, but their residential street was still empty and no one watching. Maddie ran upstairs, washed her face, pulled her hair into a ponytail, and put on Paige's Pollyanna skirt and sweater.

"I still had your Pollyanna skirt and sweater in my room," Maddie told Paige. "You didn't even think to ask for it back. If you had, I would've given them to you and maybe we could've finally gotten a few things out in the open? But you didn't. You wanted to be the hurt little Bambi sucking up all of Mama's love."

After Maddie ran over Paige, ran upstairs and changed, then ran back down to the driveway, she picked up Paige's backpack and put it on. Then she placed her own into Paige's dead hand.

I can be Paige, Maddie thought standing over Paige. Give a good performance and you can be free. You can have the best of both worlds – everybody will love you and you will be an only child.

Maddie worked herself up into a frenzy, called 911 and started screaming. It had taken her less than fifteen minutes to run upstairs, change, wash her face, and run back down. And now she was Paige.

Sandy drove up minutes later and ran to her. "Oh my God, Oh MY GOD! What HAPPENED? Are you OKAY?! Is that? Is that.....Maddie?"

"Oh, Mama, it was an accident. Oh my Lord, I'm so sorry, Mama. I don't know how it happened. It was an accident. She must have been behind the car when I backed up, but I thought she was in the house. I think I accidentally back up over her."

Sandy looked confused for a second. Even though the girl standing in the driveway looked like Paige, sounded like Paige, and was wearing Paige's favorite skirt and sweater, her first impression was it hadn't been Paige but Maddie.

“Strange,” Sandy later told the psychiatrist who had her committed, “what comes to mind when you find yourself under stress. I don’t know why I thought that. I should’ve just believed her. Are you sure, doctor, my daughter Maddie is dead and Paige is alive?”

The police believed Maddie. The Coroner believed her. Even the insurance company believed her though they didn’t like discovering accidental death and dismemberment, when it occurred at a home, was listed under their policy for payout. Just about everyone believed Maddie was Paige, and that Paige had accidentally backed over her sister, Maddie. Sandy remained unsure.

There been a closed casket funeral for *Madeline Lynn Hershel* two weeks later, but the turnout low. Not really hard to figure why with everything that had recently happened. Besides, what could you say to a family when one sister accidentally killed the other? *Sorry for your loss?*

The sudden, uncomfortable appearance of their father at the funeral made Maddie feel even more awkward. She was still adjusting to being Paige and seeing him again threw her. He patted her shoulder like she was a horse in a stable he no longer remembered. And barely spoke the entire time. He just stared at the casket and, for one moment, Maddie swore she saw tears gathering at the corners of his eye. Had he once loved her? Then why had he let Sandy drive him away? Why had he not taken her with him if he loved her? It would’ve made a big difference in her life.

Maddie half expected him to stick around. Maybe with her sister out of the way, the three remaining Hershel’s - her, mom and dad - could form a nice, normal family. She was “Paige” now after all. But he took off after, faster than he had the first time. He didn’t even come to the internment at the cemetery which left her no opportunity to ask for his number and home address.

The rain was starting to let up now and the thunder and lightning had stopped. And though she thought it best to go home now, Maddie really didn't want to leave yet. She was feeling a sense of...electricity, connection, purpose visiting her sister's grave. When a new thought intruded.

"Maybe I could've overlooked our differences in life and been closer to you. Maybe you were simply playing the role you were cast in too from birth, same as I. I will tell you this, being Paige this last year hasn't been as easy as I imagined. Everyone is super nice, sure, but that's about as far as it goes. No one cares what I think or how I feel as long as I am sweet and kind to them. Not even your boyfriend, Brian. You're back together with him, by the way. But it's all so superficial. How could you stand it?"

Maddie as Paige traced her fingers across the name on the stone. M-A-D-E-L-I-N-E L-Y-N-N H-E-R-S-H-E-L. She did it as a way of saying good-bye. Trace the name, whisper "I love you" into the darkness, and leave a final kiss on the chilly stone before standing up. Smiling knowing the name on the gravestone had once been her name and she had cheated death.

Maddie as Paige had another intrusive thought. No cared about *her*. Even when people showed her kindness, or respect, or in Brian's case, puppy like love and devotion, they weren't really showing it to her. They were giving it to Paige. Not her. Paige. Because she wasn't Paige. At least underneath the façade. And that wasn't such a good thought to be having. Maddie felt the realizations start to haunt her.

"Well, goodbye Madeleine. I'll come the next chance I get, but I've been accepted into Clemson and plan to move to South Carolina to attend university. And then I might travel a bit on the settlement money once college is done. So I don't know exactly when I'll be getting back to visit you. Rest in peace."

Maddie turned to leave. And as she did, out of the corner of her eye, she swore she saw a hand reach up from the ground, grab her ankle, and pull. She tripped hard, landing against the base of the grave marker, but quickly scrambled back to her feet. When she looked down at the grave, the soil damp and spongy from the rain, there was no hand. And no hole in the ground. The grave appeared undisturbed. But she still had a very eerie that feeling that Paige was trying to reach up for her. Maddie turned again to leave, more cautiously this time, and quickly started walking away using every bit of her self-control not to look back.

Don't look, she thought, If you look and see your dead sister climbing out of the grave, coming for you so she can reclaim her identity, you'll go insane.

Maddie as Paige began running for all she was worth.

The End.