

The Sun and The Moon

Do you know what it's like growing up as the younger sister of someone who's beautiful and intelligent? It's a nightmare. Laura is four years older than me, I was always in her shadow. During childhood, when my parents were telling me off for yet another misdemeanour, my 'perfect' sister was always referred to.

'Why can't you be more like Laura?' or 'Your sister would never let us down like you do Natalie.'

The more I was compared to Laura, the more I rebelled. At the age of 14 I watched my sister dating handsome boys, studying for A' Levels, choosing a university and winning every prize going. Of course, she went to the Grammar School, I'd failed to pass the test to get in, it was the local comprehensive for me. I mixed with the 'wrong crowd', I thought the best way to get boys' attention was by smoking behind the bike shed. I'd hang around after school, rather than going home and studying. As the summer evenings got longer, we stayed out later. We moved to the park, then the boys started bringing booze; bottles from home or cans of cider.

Rows at home became more frequent, Laura didn't get involved. She barely spoke to me. I felt like I was something unpleasant on the bottom of her shoe. But the thing was, I didn't want to be like Laura, quite the opposite.

September came and Laura went off to University, the house seemed weird without her. It was like a light had been switched off. Mum and Dad became quieter, no doubt they were missing her. Strangely they stopped getting on my case all the time. The less they complained, the less I rebelled. I started to like going into the quiet house and studying. Autumn was coming, I wanted to be at home in the warm with the cosy lamps on. Freezing behind the bike shed in the dusk lost its appeal. Mum started asking how my day was, Dad asked what I was reading in English. I began to realise I was now the shining light in their world, I was never going to achieve as much as Laura, but I was no longer the naughty little sister.

Laura came home at the end of October for a reading week, I didn't feel a nuisance to everyone, I was actually included in the conversation as we sat around the table.

"How's things Natalie?" Laura smiled at me.

"Oh, not too bad thanks. I'm studying King Lear in English. Do you know there's a reference to an eclipse in it?"

Dad nodded, "Why are you mentioning that Natalie?"

"Because I used to feel eclipsed by Laura if she was in the room, nobody saw me."

Dad looked from Laura to me,

"You girls are our Sun and our Moon, opposites but equally loved."

I didn't ask if I was the sun or the moon, but I knew he would never compare me to my sister again.