

Eric Seiley

Burning Bridges as We Go

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Cold Tombstone

The storm was a rumor come true and now the sky was delivering. Heavy rain pouring down with lightning charging across the sky. Till thunder -- loud, booming thunder-- called the night back into darkness again.

Paige didn't mind. It made the cemetery feel lyrical somehow. Note perfect for someone wanting to hide beneath umbrella and trench coat while visiting the gravestone of their twin sister. Her *dead* twin sister, whom, honestly, hadn't been any nearer and dearer in life than she was now buried six feet under.

"Happy birthday, sister," Paige said sweetly, reading the name chiseled across the headstone -- Madeline Tallulah Millbrae, Loving Daughter and Sister, 1994 to 2012. "I hope you're doing well. You might not believe this, but it's been a whole year since we last spoke. I'm sorry for not visiting sooner, but I started college in the fall and, you know, with classes and social life, busy, busy, busy. Plus it's true what they say, time *does* fly when you're having fun. Oh, I have so much to tell you."

With every lightning strike lighting up, Paige quickly warded off evil spirits nearby by crossing herself, kissing the Virgin Mary pendant hanging at her neck, and saying a brief Prayer of Deliverance. Madeline --- or "Maddie" as she was called in life -- would've been annoyed by such religious affectation going on above her grave. She'd always considered herself the pragmatic sister who insisted on logic and reason above

fairy tale and superstition. Which included rejecting Paige's embrace of Catholicism by the time they were twelve.

"Don't think me insincere when I say I feel closer to you now," Paige commented. "Cause I do. I understand you so much better now. Sure, we weren't necessarily friends when you were alive, but neither were we enemies. At least not from my end. Just polar opposites who had a hard time showing tenderness. You know what I mean?"

Most of their lives, Paige and Maddie held opposing reputations within their family -- one for being good and the other bad respectively -- not always earned, but consistently applied. Paige always the good. Maddie the bad. Angel and devil. Yin and yang. Sweet and sour. They'd been born physically identical with nary a physical difference, but their personalities weren't as aligned if one cared to pay attention. Still, most people couldn't tell them apart. Not even their own mother.

It was true. Sandy, their mother, couldn't tell. Not physically. Not when changing diapers, or washing their tiny, chubby bodies with soap and water, or breast feeding. One was an exact duplicate of the other. But she could certainly tell Paige was the good baby and Maddie the bad. She knew it deep in her bones. Which is what she told the girls' father when he returned home from work questioning why she was quietly cuddling Paige while Maddie lay next to her in the bassinet crying.

"They're not the same. They may look the same, but they're not," Sandy insisted. "This one," pointing down at Maddie, "is much worse somehow. She'll watch me. Watch everything I do without making a peep. But, ohh, let me pay attention to Paige, feed Paige, or hold Paige, and she'll start crying and carrying on. Then when I do pick her up, to feed or cuddle her, she'll bite down hard on my nipples till they bleed. And, I swear, she giggles when I yelp in pain."

"She's a baby," their father replied. "I doubt she's trying to be anything but be a baby. A hungry baby at that. But maybe she's also colicky. We have an appointment with the pediatrician next week, but I think I'll call Dr. Rankin and re-schedule for an earlier time. Have her checked out to be on the safe side."

"No, I don't think you're hearing me. Maddie's not colic-y nor is it some infant malady. She's just different. Somehow more, oh I don't know, insidious or something."

"That's crazy. Babies aren't anything but babies. All they need is to be cared for. But you're tired, I can see that. The pregnancy was hard on you and you need rest. Things'll look much clearer after you get some sleep. Why don't you go lie down while I look after the twins?"

But Sandy never saw things differently. Paige was good, Maddie was evil -- plain as day and night. Where Paige made her feel like a loving mother, cooing and cuddling the day away, Maddie was the kind of baby that made you understand why so many mothers shook their babies by nightfall. Always demanding, always crying, always red faced. Never settled.

Nor did it change as the twin babies grew into twin toddlers.

"Caring for Paige is effortless," Sandy tried to explain to their increasingly disinterested father one evening after he returned home to find Maddie locked away in the hallway closet he hung his overcoat in. "She just gets it. She's sweet and kind and picks up after herself. Does what she's asked. Not so with Maddie. There's something about her -- she'll do the same things, but in a way you know she's just bidding her time. Did you know Maddie likes to sneak into rooms and watch without a sound? And if you happen to notice her and yelp in surprise, she'll laugh and walk away like nothing happened. She does it so much, I feel like it isn't safe to sit down in my own house. I always feel nervous. Like she's planning something evil."

“She’s just being a playful little girl,” her father argued. “All children play hide and seek. It’s a game.”

“No, I don’t think so. And there are other things. Like do you know I found a kitchen knife in the girls’ room today when I went up to wake them from their nap? It was under Paige’s bed, but I know Maddie put it there. And I could see Maddie lying there, watching and smirking. I’m also certain the knife wasn’t there when I put them down. That’s why she needed to be locked in the closet today.”

“Maddie and Paige are five years old,” their father growled. “I don’t think they even understand such things. You’re casting dispersions over benign moments when you should be more careful. You probably had the knife with you after lunch and didn’t realize you were holding it. Which makes me concerned you’re growing unbalanced again. Remember, per the doctor, we may have to send you away if you grow worse. Are you taking the Prolixin pills the doctor prescribed for you?”

“I don’t like those pills. They make everything feel...oh, I don’t know...so muted and muffled.”

“The doctor said it might take a little time to get used to the medication, but they would be incredibly helpful stabilizing your mood swings. So you should take them. Here, let me go get one for you and you can take it with some water in front of me.”

Sandy never felt stable, but she took the pills. And went to confession to implore the 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.”

“Oh, my dear, 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 and wants you to raise them under the sacred promise of Our Holy Father’s Divine word. So let the Virgin

Mary be your guide and have patience. For your sins, say three *Hail Mary's* and five *Our Father's*. Until next week then, God be with you."

During her late night prayers, Sandy begged God, "Please Lord, take Maddie and her wickedness from me. Just leave me with Paige." But God refused to listen.

Sandy felt trapped, which led to thoughts of suicide. Suicide and pedicide. Both unforgivable sins, she knew, but considerations, nonetheless. But, for Paige's sake, she wouldn't go beyond prayers. Just push it all down and do as expected. Take the pills the doctor prescribed and soldier on like a good catholic wife and mother -- cooking, cleaning, sewing, and all the duties of a stay at home mother running a household.

Despite nothing ever being overtly said to them, both girls grew up knowing this. All throughout their formative years, and well into their pre-teen and teenage years, it was plain to both. Paige, for her part, felt sorry for her mother and the burden her illness imposed. So she chose to be what her mother wanted. She became pleasing. Neat and tidy, thoughtful and caring. Always with a smile to light up whenever people spoke to her. Coquettishly giggling to hide her blush whenever someone complemented on her increasing beauty. Sweetly kind. Sweetly amenable. The kind of girl next door type everyone wanted to be around.

Maddie, who was equally as beautiful as Paige and could've chosen the same path, did not feel sorry for her mother. She despised her and refused to be all sweetness and kindness and princess in pink for her. Her mother should love her for who she was and not some paranoid delusion of who she thought she was. But the reality Maddie quickly realized, well by the time she reached middle school, was her family all looked like a proper family on the outside. But inside, her mother was broken, her father neglectfully uncaring, and her sister a mewling, sycophant. Nor could she rely on them to provide what every girl wants – a loving family inside a safe home.

Maddie resented them all. Still, she knew she couldn't just walk away. Not without resources. Not till she was eighteen when her father would send her and Paige away to college. Which meant, till then, she would have to stay in her pretend prison. Though that didn't mean she couldn't exact some measure of revenge for the injustice of their prejudices. At least so long as she wasn't too obvious.

Maddie took pains to imitate Paige in dress and demeanor for camouflage. Which wasn't too difficult and easily fooled most everyone. But, in the home, she added a twist -- sarcastic comments, cunningly hurtful observations, and guilt inducing commentary, just to see the look of confusion and hurt cross Sandy and Paige's faces. Maddie liked how offended she could make them feel. And sometimes, when the opportunity presented, make them feel scared.

"Mother," Maddie once said, by way of example, "I noticed you left your prescription pill bottle downstairs on the kitchen counter. You probably shouldn't do that because it would be so easy for someone to tamper with those capsules. You know, replace the medicine within with, ohh, I don't know, rat poison or some such dangerous powder. What a tragedy that would be if you swallowed poison. Anyway, I returned your prescription back to your medicine cabinet, all safe and sound." Maddie smiled at Sandy's look of fright.

Maddie tormented Paige here and there too. Hiding homework she'd worked hard on so she couldn't find it on the day due, but have it re-appear a week later. *Accidentally* leave an open bottle of ink on her chair just as she sat down -- ruining her brand new cheerleader's skirt. Defacing her favorite posters hanging on her wall. Childish stuff like that.

Maddie probably would've let everything go once she left home for college had several incidents not happened during Paige and Maddie's senior year – which set in motion life changing events.

First, Paige got a boyfriend, which their parents sanctioned, but Maddie didn't like.

"Aren't you two just the perfect couple. You're the head cheerleader this year," Maddie observed, "and you decide to date the captain of the football team?! How cliché can you be? Why don't you just hike up your skirt now and get date raped so you can save yourself a torn cheerleader outfit. Then drop out of school when you get pregnant and become a good catholic wife like Mom? Or maybe have an abortion? Of course then Dad will kick you out of the house and you'll have to start waitressing down at Tom's Diner because you can't do anything else."

"What a terrible thing to say! Why do you say such things?"

"I just call them like I see them."

"Well, that's not going to happen. Jason isn't like that! And I like him," Paige replied defensively. "He's a nice catholic boy. Do you know we've gone out many times and he's never been anything but a gentleman. And do you know what? He has yet to mistake me for you like everyone else does. Not even once! Don't you think that says something about him?"

"It's not that hard to distinguish you from me when you wear your stupid cheerleader outfit all the time now. Don't be so naive."

"No, he sees me. He really does. He's very sensitive. And he's good. He hasn't tried to pressure me into kissing him or anything since we started dating. All he does is hold my hand. Isn't that sweet?"

"Sounds like he might like boys."

“No he doesn’t. He’s straight. He’s just sweet and honest and good.”

“If you say so.” But now Maddie had an idea working at the back of her mind.

Maddie developed outside interests too, since her mother was often busy volunteering at St. Joseph’s, her father practically living at the Westchester Country Club, and her sister spending most of her time with her jock boyfriend and his family. So Maddie took an afterschool job doing books for a little construction company downtown – which gave her access to older men her father didn’t know. Her father was the town’s premier dentist and so knew most every family in town -- the blue collar families who frequented his practice or attended St Luke’s. And the white collar elite whom he socialized with at the club. But he didn’t know those men who worked in the rough trades of the street. Maddie did. She liked construction workers most -- because they were transitory and didn’t stay long after the jobs were complete. And the married ones best because they tended to be less rough, knew how to keep secrets and didn’t pressure her beyond their simple needs. Recently though, Maddie was growing bored and considering acting on a little passion play closer to home. There was a new high school counselor, John Oxbridge, whom she’d taken a fancy to.

John Oxbridge was twenty-seven, having recently graduated from Boston College with a master’s in psychology, when he was hired by St. Mary’s Preparatory high school to be their student counselor. And one of his first tasks assigned was to interview the dozen students who were on campus the evening some unknown person graphically defaced the school’s student counsel posters. Including Paige Millbrae’s student council for president flyers.

John didn’t know Maddie committed the vandalism, he was just performing his due diligence. But he did know almost immediately how much he desired her. It was

something more than her beauty. It was the look in her eyes, the dark raven quality there, that she obviously took pains to conceal behind a somewhat sunny disposition – a fairly good imitation of her twin sister, Paige, too. Whom John had also recently met and recognized was playing her own role – although in different way. Which fascinated him.

“Forgive me for saying,” John gently spoke, “but, from our last few conversations, Miss Millbrae, you seem to inadvertently display animosity toward your twin sister. Nothing outlandish, mind you, but I do detect some friction. I’ve read it’s not unusual for twins to resent each other over constant, often unfair comparison. Particularly if one twin is, shall we say, perceived as the more obedient, *Pollyanna* type. 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, but your bearing is much more weighted than hers. I can see it in the way you carry yourself. You have a strong desire to be respected because you don’t feel loved. Where Paige, well, she’s more concerned with being well liked, isn’t she. Almost worshipped. Ironically for the same reasons. I wonder, do your parents see you this way?”

Maddie was surprised. Delighted and a little taken off guard. No man ever spoke to her like that. Most just wanted carnal attention. But this man wanted to expose her camouflage. Which, by her way of thinking, was both titillating and insulting.

“Everyone loves Paige,” Maddie cooed. “And of course I do as well. She’s wonderful. I’m blessed to have such a wonderful sister and more than happy to let her shine.” Maddie smiled.

“Forgive my French, but bullshit,” John replied catching Maddie off guard again with his direct approach. “Mind you, I don’t normally swear as a practice unless it’s called for. And in this case, you’re damn right it’s warranted.”

"I see."

"Please, Maddie, don't think me rude. I am here to listen if you wish. And I won't pry further if you prefer not to discuss anything beyond official school business."

"Well..."

It took Maddie less than a month discussing "school business" in John's office till he, overcome with passion, took her on the carpet beneath his desk. She acted surprised, but was more impressed he'd held off so long. She vowed it wouldn't take her another month to destroy him.

Which it didn't.

"I can't help myself," John confessed some weeks later after becoming a nervous wreck. "But this has to stop. I'm anxious all the time worrying when I'll see you. And then depressed when I don't. I'm worried over being discovered. And then anxious I won't. I'm scared our whole affair will get out or someone will see us. And scared about what they'll do. I can't separate my love from my desire. And I'm more than sure others will see it all as wrong and exclusively blame me. Not you. Then I'll lose everything I hold dear, including you, Maddie. I have to stop this before it's too late. This affair will undue me. How did I let myself get into this predicament?"

Maddie, for her part, never said anything. She just let her eyes reflect whatever John was thinking -- secretly enjoying his torment. And her masterful way of handling him. Then she upped the ante by tearfully confessing she had missed her last period and might be pregnant. Oxbridge's world collapsed.

"Oh, Lord, what have I done?" John cried. "I'm such a fool. I'm sorry, dear, but we'll have to arrange for an abortion."

“Oh, John, I can’t do that! I’m a Catholic and that’s a mortal sin. To kill a child. Plus, when my father finds out, he’ll never forgive me. I’ll be lucky if he doesn’t cast me out and take away my inheritance.”

“Then we’ll give the baby away. Adoption. I know several organizations that will help. You can move upstate into the Sienna House for unwed mothers till you have the baby and then give it up for adoption.”

“Oh, John, I can’t give the baby away. That would be the most terrible thing for a mother to do -- abandon her innocent baby. My mother would never forgive me or speak to me again. Can you imagine?”

“Then we’ll just get married. I see no other way. It’s rare, but certainly not unorthodox or outside the realm of the church’s acceptable solutions. I can get a job upstate and we can move away before anyone knows you’re pregnant. Then we can set up house and no one will be the wiser.”

“John, you can’t ask me to leave my family! Or to marry a man nearly twice my age! To be so duplicitous and leave with a man I barely know just to raise his child in isolation? Not to mention, I’m still a senior in high school and would have to drop out. My father won’t hear of it. In fact, we’ll be lucky if he doesn’t kill you for taking advantage of his daughter and then kidnapping her away. At least that is how he’ll see it. He’s very conservative, you know. He’ll probably even file a police report and have you arrested.”

“Oh, Lord, what have I done?” John cried.

Actually, Maddie wasn’t pregnant. Nor had she missed any of her periods. She just wanted to see how far she could push John before he broke. Which he did. Not even three days later. John Oxbridge killed himself in his office late that next Friday night

after everyone had gone home for the evening. Except the janitor, who found him, but reported not finding any note or reasons why explained.

After, everyone just assumed John had been unstable. He was new and no one knew him well enough to say otherwise. Though they had noticed he was anxious all the time. And, according to a few rumors, his demise was over his involvement with a student – male or female wasn't known. But he probably killed himself out of fear of exposure and the shame and disgrace that would follow.

Maddie was sad to see him go. She'd greatly enjoyed their relationship. He had, in his own way throughout their post-coital discussions, helped her clarify a few things about her own future. Namely what she was going to do.

Feeling newly empowered, Maddie returned her attention to Paige and set her new plan in place. It didn't take as long as she anticipated.

"Your boyfriend, Jason, stopped by the house today," Maddie told Paige not even a month later, when football season had ended and basketball was now the winter sport everyone was caught up in. Winter also meant a change to the cheerleader outfits -- heavier skirts and sweaters taken out of storage and the summer/fall pleated skirts and sleeveless jerseys put in. Which provided Maddie with the opportunity to "borrow" Paige's summer/fall set without Paige knowing.

"Jason wanted to talk to you about the winter formal, but I think that was just pretense. He seemed very keen on finding you home alone. The boy seemed, ohh, interested in taking your relationship to the next level. I guess you two hadn't gotten much past handholding yet."

Paige looked at her sister in confusion. She'd just returned home from working with the freshman cheerleading squad and in the kitchen looking for something to eat when Maddie approached her. So she wasn't clear what Maddie was talking about. "What

you mean? Jason knew I was staying at school late to help the girls with their pyramid setup and not going to be at dinner with his family tonight," Paige replied. "He's coming over tomorrow, though, to pick me up before the game. Then we're going up to the lake with friends after for a bonfire."

"Well, tra-la-la. Aren't you the popular girl? I think you're going to find him a bit more familiar tomorrow."

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

The video clip of Paige having sex in her bedroom with Jason wasn't downloaded to any Instagram or Snapchat or online forum. It wasn't even made public. But it was emailed directly to their mother's home account and to their father's office where the receptionist would open it for him.

Their mother, Sandy, just couldn't believe it. Or understand why Paige let herself be recorded. If she had meant to. But it was plain, in the clip, it was Paige in her room wearing her fall/summer cheerleader outfit, with her hair pulled back in her regular ponytail, having sex with Jason on her bed. "What have you done, Paige?!" Sandy cried that evening. "Did that boy force you?! He must have because you wouldn't have done it otherwise."

"I didn't do anything, Mother! That isn't me in the video!" Paige knew it wasn't her, but she was still in shock that Jason was. "That is Maddie having sex with Jason! How could he!?"

Sandy believed her. But their father didn't. He was more embarrassed she'd sent it to his work, which the receptionist opened and showed him. "It's bad enough what you've done," he yelled, "But why embarrass me with your filth!? I can't believe you sent that to my work. Are you trying to rebel? To tell Daddy he hasn't done enough for you? Paid enough attention to you? And then to absurdly lie and try to blame your

sister, who has done nothing here, makes it worse. As far as I'm concerned, I'm done. I'll have nothing more to do with it! Or with you. I've deleted the whole thing, and the whole matter!" He was still wearing his white dentist coat when he stormed into the house. And still wearing it when he stormed out again heading for the club.

"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 told him to. And barely penetrated me before he came so fast. What a loser."

Paige's mask slipped when she confronted Maddie that night. "You're sick! You're horrible! I'll never forgive you for what you've done! As of this moment, I refuse to be your sister."

"I don't have a clue what you're talking about," Maddie remarked, all innocent. "If you're feeling guilty over committing such a terrible sin, don't transfer that onto me. Go to church and ask God to forgive you!"

"It was you and you know it! You're a liar and I hate you!"

"Now, Paige," Maddie smiled, "that's the most honest thing you've said your entire life."

Paige broke up with Jason immediately. Much to his confusion. And unexpectedly dropped out of cheerleading and all after school activities. She still went to school, since graduation wasn't far away, and was still kind to everyone. But refused to explain her reasons for any of it to anyone. Though people noticed she did begin going to church every day before and after school.

Sandy came up with a believable cover story. She went around telling people Paige had had a spiritual awakening and was now taking steps to enter the convent and become a

nun after graduation. Which was why the sudden change. Most people shrugged and bought it.

Maddie, for her part, just smiled through it all. No one really knew their family well enough or asked her anyway. Plus, Sandy now avoided her, Paige wouldn't really speak to her, and her father was rarely at home. So there wasn't much more to do at the moment but smile. Oh, Maddie still had more up her sleeve, but knew it wasn't wise to add too many insults too close together.

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 way. She's confused about what happened that day and thinks the worst. Which honestly isn't far from the truth, but she's too afraid to say anything. It's tormenting her too. Ohh, and Dad officially left. But you know him, he was hardly there before that and never really cared anyway."

The lightning streaked again and Paige crossed herself.

"Oh! And get this! After you died, the insurance company 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 after the fact. So Mama received a check for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars from the insurance company and another hundred thousand to put in trust for me, the surviving sibling. Plus, I received another one hundred and fifty thousand separately for suffering the trauma of seeing you die violently. Don't you think that's fortuitous?"

Lightning cracked and the thunder boomed again like a recrimination from the grave.

“Ohh, don’t be angry! I am sorry in my own way. It’s not like I planned your *murder*. Not really. But when the universe offers up an opportunity, you have to grab it. And I, as you well know, am nobody’s fool.”

Paige thought back to the day Maddie died. Only, everyone thought it had been Maddie. Actually it was Paige who died. A little confusing, but here’s how it happened.

That day had been stormy too when Sandy let the girls take the station wagon to school. Paige drove in the morning, so it was Maddie’s turn to drive home in the afternoon. Which she did. But when she opened the garage and pulled in to park, Paige reminded her, “Mom will want to park in the garage next to Dad’s car when he gets home. It’s her spot so you better not park there. Just put the car in the driveway now or she’ll just make us re-park it when she gets home. And I’m not going to take the blame either because you drove and knew better. I’ll tell her that too!” Paige then got out of the car and slammed the door shut.

Maddie, a little pissed, threw the car into reverse and backed out -- realizing too late that Paige had walked behind the station wagon.

“If you hadn’t been so annoying, I wouldn’t have been distracted.”

When Maddie heard the thud of hitting Paige and dragging her under, 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 continue rolling backwards till she felt the next satisfying bump of the front tires running over her sister. She got out and closed the garage door. Then she put her plan into motion.

It was shocking how quickly Maddie transitioned herself into Paige. And how calm she felt doing it. First, she ran into the house, up to her room, and pulled out Paige’s cheerleader outfit – the one she’d been hiding. Then, after changing into it and tying

her hair back in a ponytail, she looked in the mirror to ensure she looked like Paige. Which she did. Then she raced back downstairs.

Definitely dead, Maddie thought staring down at Paige. *I'm glad she quit cheerleading practice because it would've been hard trying to change clothes on a dead body. But I should undue her pony tail.* Which Maddie did. She also checked Paige's pockets to make sure there wasn't anything inside to identify her. And took Paige's backpack for herself while dropping her own on the ground next to Paige. Then she opened the garage door and looked around. The street looked quiet.

Maddie called 911 and started CPR – which was just for show and ensured plenty of blood would get splashed around. It wasn't too hard to become hysterical while pushing on the chest of one's dead sister. And no one seemed willing to question the incident further, or that it had been an accident, further. The paramedics, the firemen, the police, they all just accepted her word as authentic. That she was Paige and had accidentally run over her twin sister, Maddie. They even felt sorry for her and went to great lengths trying to comfort this obviously hysterical, pretty girl in a cheerleading outfit.

Would they have gone this far if they knew I was Maddie and not Paige, Maddie wondered. *Well, screw them and screw her. I've got a new life to live now.*

Everyone outside the family believed Maddie was Paige and treated her as such. After all, the girls were identical twins, and Paige the sweet, catholic girl who was going to become a nun. Sandy didn't believe it, but she had a track record of making bizarre, paranoid statements. So no one listened to her. And their father, well, sadly, he hadn't cared for some time.

"So you see, sister, everything has turned out for the best. And, ohh, being you is so much fun. Everyone is super nice to me now and no one looks at me like I'm some evil

doppelganger anymore. Or like some inferior piece of trash sister. Well, Mom suspects, but she's always been off her nut, so who cares. And Jason is happy to be dating you again. This time, with benefits, of course. And I'm doing well in my classes. I'm thinking of going pre-med and becoming a doctor."

The storm clouds parted, easing up on the rain so the night stars shone through.

"Ohh my, look at the time. It's getting late. Sorry, sister, but I have to go. I'm supposed to meet Jason in an hour. But I won't leave you without finally admitting – I was always jealous of you. I didn't want to be your sister, I wanted to be you. And now I am."

Paige traced her fingers across the name etched on the gravestone. M-A-D-E-L-I-N-E
T-A-L-L-U-L-A-H M-I-L-L-B-R-A-E.

"Rest in peace, sister. I'll visit you again when I have the chance. I promise."

The End.