



ONE

I am half a person.

The darkest half. The half that isn't quite 50 percent.

It's time to check my fire alarm, so I stand up on my mattress and press the test button. It bleeps. I test it again because I read on Quora one time—a comment embedded deep inside a thread—that it's possible to get a false positive.

Sometimes I feel like I am a false positive.

Not sometimes. For at least eighteen of the past twenty-two years. Since I was four years old. That's when I realized two important things in life. First: there are no such things as identical twins. Second: the universe conspires to trip you up.

I test the alarm one more time and it bleeps.

I lie back down on the bed, and the four baby-safe pillows compress under the weight of my head. Pillows made with air holes. Breathable pillow slips. It's rare that a full-grown adult woman suffocates from lying facedown in her sleep, but it is not impossible. There was a reported case in South Korea last year.

On my bedside table rests a knife with a three-inch blade. It's

legal because it does not lock and the blade is short, but I made sure to order the toughest knife available. It's a balance of risks. Being incarcerated, even short-term, even just being questioned by the police, versus the risk of being violently attacked in my own home.

My entire existence is made up of balancing risks. KT, my twin, has never felt the need.

I want to move to the kitchen to make a cup of tea, but I will not leave while my phone is charging. Reddit taught me better. A retired firefighter shared his top three tips for avoiding house fires. This wasn't his opinion; it was his conclusion after years of experience. First: avoid electric bed blankets. Second: avoid cheap Christmas lights. Third: never leave your phone charging on a flammable surface. I don't watch my phone the whole time it's charging, I'm not insane, but I do lie or sit next to it, within arm's reach of my fire extinguisher and emergency fire blanket. There's another pair of extinguishers in the far corner of the room. Another pair in every other room of my small Camden Town apartment. I believe in forward planning.

Camden may not be known as the safest area of London, but again, there is a balance to be found. Most people look at crime statistics and property prices and then they make their decision. I need to avoid crime and I need to avoid bankruptcy, both serious risks living here. I'm also mindful of other pertinent factors. My real estate agent was more than a little surprised when I asked for the exact elevation above the River Thames. Like he hadn't heard about rising sea levels. Like he hadn't watched the documentary by a Dutch scientist on YouTube about how the Thames Flood Barrier is already outdated and how if we suffer

a once-in-a-century storm surge much of London will end up underwater.

When I calculate my budget, I always try to keep some money back for Mum in case she ever needs it again. Five years ago Dad's business almost went under. Mum has no job, no qualifications, no income. He doesn't want her to work. I don't feel comfortable with that setup, that lack of autonomy, so I try to save a few pounds each month in case she ever needs it.

Next to my phone is a photo of them both. My parents: Paul and Elizabeth Raven. Good people. Caring and straightforward and down-to-earth. Honest, mostly. Mum is, at least. Next to that is a photo of me, Molly Raven, and my monozygotic twin, Katie, or, as I call her, KT. I don't use the term *identical twin* because it's a blatant lie. A travesty. Our base DNA is identical, sure, but that's about all that is.

We were once one person.

We are not anymore.

The photograph was taken last year before KT moved to the USA. She had already broken the news to me, and I can see that loss in my expression. The trauma of it.

We are not identical; she is prettier and funnier, and she doesn't need to constantly assess threats. "I'll try anything once," is what she always says. Why would you do that? And why would you be proud of it? Back in our three-bedroom Nottinghamshire house growing up, she'd be the one trying ice-skating for the first time while I sat in the café with Mum, watching. She'd be the one volunteering for things in class, whereas I never volunteered for anything unless it made one or both of us safer.

If I look closely at the photo, I can see the scar in her eyebrow from when she fell on a Cornwall beach when we were seven. I was the anxious one even back then. KT was the adventurous one, always rock-pooling and fishing crabs and wanting to swim. I was left on the beach, slathered in sunblock. Always safe. That day, when blood was dripping down into her eye, Mum and Dad trying to wash the wound from a bottle of water, I walked away. I couldn't deal with the drama. The stares from other beachgoers. Or the fact that we looked so completely different in that moment. Mum and Dad worked hard to make sure I could handle everyday life, to ease my anxieties. But in that moment, they were so focused on KT that they forgot about me. I walked off to sit on some rocks and nobody noticed. Mum and Dad were comforting KT, and in that instant they looked like a perfect family.

But she is my twin. That's precious. She is the closest person to me in the whole world. We are not like other people. We were an egg cell—a singular, beautiful egg cell—that split in utero.

KT took half of me, and I took half of KT.

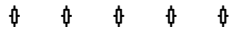
In the other corner of my room is a fireproof safe. In there I store my unused passport and my unused driving license and my unused credit cards. I keep my documents up to date in case I need them for ID, or in case there's a war and I need to flee. Ordinarily, I have no interest in international travel, even with all the insurance in the world. I will not drive, because according to the Office for National Statistics driving is the second most dangerous everyday travel activity after motorcycling.

I'm curious to check my phone's battery status, but I will not be tempted to touch the screen. Never touch a phone that is being

charged from a wall socket unless it's to disconnect the plug. Never take that unnecessary risk. I read somewhere online that to touch a connected phone that is charging increases the already heightened electrocution risk by up to 3 percent. The charger will need to be replaced next week: it's already a month old; the wires inside will be degrading.

My sister wouldn't think twice about it. She's so spontaneous and carefree that she manages to live life for the both of us. Has done since we were young girls. These days she's so addicted to her phone, her likes and retweets. She told me last year she once took it with her into her bathroom using a fifteen-foot-long electrical extension cable. I could hardly breathe when she said that. And this was in New York City, half a world away, and I told her, I said, "KT, you must swear never to do that again. You must swear it to me."

She did swear.



I'm sitting on the bed, putting on hand cream, when my phone rings.

It vibrates, and the vibrations make it slither slowly across my bedside table.

I check the screen. A number I don't recognize.

A siren rings out in the distance, but I can't see flashing lights through my window. The noise grows. It intensifies and then I notice the police car speed by.

The phone vibrates in my hand.

I take a deep breath and then I accept the call. "Molly Raven speaking."

There's silence on the line, and then the sound of someone sniffing.

"Who is this?"

"Oh, Molly. It's . . ."

"Mum? What's wrong?" Mum never cries. She is a composed person. Methodical and calm.

"Molly, it's . . ." And then the sound of a cry.

My stomach pulls tight in my abdomen. "Mum, what is it? Are you safe? Talk to me."

But now it's Dad's voice on the phone. Soothing. His usual kind and patient tone. "Your mum, she's . . ."

"Dad, you're scaring me."

"Moll, I don't know how to tell you this." He pauses. "Oh, God. It's . . . it's your sister. I'm so sorry."

I hear Mum sobbing in the background and my body turns to stone.

"She's gone, Moll."