

Chiara Hrstka



To a lost soul

21.02.2018

I felt weird when I woke up today. I didn't quite know why but I had this strange knot in my stomach. Nonetheless, everything seemed fine to me when I walked down the stairs. Just like every other year I got greeted by loud cheers from my family as soon as I walked into the dining room. The dining room was decorated with big pink and purple balloons surrounding a big banner that read "Happy Birthday Kathleen". On the table I spotted a big bouquet of pink roses and a few presents wrapped in purple wrapping paper. Mom, Dad and Mike had obviously put a lot of thought into the preparations as everything in the room was colour themed. It was all very beautiful but what really caught my eye were Mom's famous chocolate chips pancakes. Mom only makes them for special occasions and my birthday was definitely one of them.

In the evening guests started to arrive, Josh and his wife were the first followed by Grandma. She hadn't even made it through the door before she started attacking me with kisses, telling me once again how much I've grown. Not long after, the living room was filled with my entire family watching me open all my presents. I got spoiled this year. Josh insisted that it was normal to get treated like a princess on your eighteenth birthday, mentioning that Mom and Dad had done the same for him. I was just telling everyone how grateful I was for everything when Mike dimmed the lights and Mom walked in with the cake. She placed it in front of me and everyone started singing. Dad's off-key singing made all of us giggle. Mom hectically pulled out her phone to snap a few pictures while the candles were still lit. Soon enough, the song finished, and it was time for me to blow out the eighteen little candles. I took a big breath in but paused for a second keeping me from exhaling. I realised why I felt weird. An image of two identical girls blowing out the candles came to me... This was the first birthday since I found out about you... I didn't get to think about it too long before Josh got me out of my trance, lightly hitting the side of my arm, urging me to blow the candles out. I did just that and my guests started clapping. I quickly smiled so no one would ask questions, but this weird feeling didn't leave me. I kept forcing a smile on my face until the very last guest was out the door. I then turned to my Mom and Dad thanking them for the evening and told them I would be heading to bed. I stopped by Mike's room on my way up to wish him a good night as well before getting ready for bed and finally lying down.

However, I still can't seem to fall asleep. The image of us two blowing out the candles together is still haunting me. We had huge grins plastered on our faces while the people around us were clapping and wishing us a happy birthday for the hundredth time. It looked like a happy scene taken out of a movie. When I compare our big, genuine, happy smiles to my actual reaction

after I blew them out, I can't stop wondering if I actually could have smiled like that if I wasn't by myself.

22.02.2018

How do you write to someone that doesn't exist? How can I write to you? You who never got to see the light of day.

My birthday has never been a big deal for me but now that I know I was supposed to share this precious moment with someone else, it feels utterly meaningless. We both would have turned eighteen yesterday, yet only I did. We were supposed to share this special day. It should have been our birthday, not just mine. But you never got to celebrate a single one. You didn't even get to live a single day. It's so unfair.

I didn't know about you until a few weeks ago, yet you've always been a part of me. I now realise that you have been in my life in many different ways. When I was little, you were my imaginary friend. I would always tell Mom and Dad about my "sister". They, of course, knew I was too young to understand that the sister I was imagining was my vanished twin sister. Then, I grew up and you became this emptiness inside me.

I always felt like a part of me was missing, like I was incomplete. Turns out, you were that missing part.

23.02.2018

Did you even exist? Will I ever know?

24.02.2018

There is something I don't understand. How come I feel this deeply pained and affected by the discovery of your existence? I understand that a twin's bond is very strong and is already established in the womb but how can I be affected by it if you're not here to share it with me?

25.02.2018

On a Sunday a few weeks ago, Josh and Bethany visited us after we suggested they come over for dinner. Mom and Dad had prepared a delicious meal while Mike and I had been in charge of going to the bakery around the block to buy dessert. I handed everyone a plate of the delicious pastries. Bethany kindly turned down the glass of champagne Dad was offering her, "She can't drink" Josh told us with a huge grin on his face. We all looked at each other, confusion written on our faces before they proudly announced they were having not only one but two baby girls. We were overflowing with joy after hearing the good news! We all congratulated them and asked them to tell us more. On hearing that my brother's wife is pregnant with twins, Mom casually mentioned that I could have been one. The room suddenly became quiet. Had I heard that correctly? Everybody was looking at me, proving I had in-

deed not misunderstood what she said. After a short moment of silence, I asked Mom what she meant by "I could have had a twin sister". She simply repeated that it was very likely she lost one of the maybe two babies in the womb and told me we'd talk about it another time not wanting to get too deep into the subject when we were all supposed to celebrate Bethany's pregnancy. I tried my best to put on a smile and to forget the matter, just for the evening at least, but I couldn't properly concentrate on anything else but the knowledge of...you. Mom had never mentioned you, never in all these years but suddenly drops this bomb on me, as if it were nothing. But isn't it something?

The earliest you're able to find out whether you're carrying twins is between 10 and 14 weeks. Before that, it is hard to tell on an ultrasound how many embryos there are. Mom experienced spotting which turned into heavier bleeding and cramping early on in her pregnancy. Therefore, she got an early ultrasound, but the doctors told her the baby seemed fine. Mom only found out later she was likely to be in a kind of denial about her miscarriage but never felt the need to tell me. She thought it wasn't necessary, that it wouldn't affect me later in life and that it wasn't important as there is no evident proof of your existence. The early threat of a miscarriage was forgotten by holding a living healthy baby, me, in her arms.

Yet, now that we have talked about it, she's nearly certain that I really did lose my twin. Maybe she's wrong, maybe you didn't exist. But then why did this discovery affect me so much? One person in 10 is a womb twin survivor. What if I am that one person? It would explain so many aspects of myself that I've tried to understand and figure out for so long. However, what if I'm just looking for something to blame these aspects on?

I've tried to convince myself that something else must be missing and that you couldn't be the reason I feel incomplete. But what if you are? Is that even possible? Doesn't it make sense?

The scene on Sunday won't stop replaying and all the questions it brought still linger in my head. I thought maybe writing it down would make it easier to understand but now that I have, I still feel just as lost.

04.03.2018

Unconsciously, I've always known about your existence. When I was a child, you were present as my imaginary friend. Except you were real for me. I told everyone about Momo. Momo, that's what I called you. I would tell Mom and Dad about our adventures in the forest or in the backyard. I'd spend hours with you, certain you were a real person. Our parents knew you were just a figment of my imagination and had to teach me not to set an extra plate on the table or not to insist our brother leaves some space for you on the couch.

I tried convincing them otherwise multiple times, certain you were simply invisible and unable to touch anything.

As time passed, I saw Momo less and less until she was completely gone. Your presence as a reassuring friend disappeared and instead, you resurfaced as an empty space I felt the need to fill. The missing part had to be a person. I spent middle school latching on to different girls. I thought they would fill the emptiness I felt inside me, and that all I needed was a best friend to complete me. I tried my best to keep them around me, and formed unhealthy attachments to them, caring more about their wants and needs than my own. I did everything I could to make them remain my friends, not wanting to lose any of them. One friend, or I guess ex-friend, took advantage of this bad habit of mine, Emily, she was perfect. We looked very alike, her blond hair was a bit ashier than mine and her features were a lot sharper than mine but nevertheless we still thought we were very similar. Therefore, I was very fond of her. I absolutely wanted to be her best friend and when she gave me that chance, I wanted to make sure she'd never feel the need to replace me. She noticed how desperate I was to keep her as a friend and used it against me. She would tell me to do things, threatening not to be my friend anymore, if I didn't do them. The things she asked me to do were dares like throwing a paper at the popular boy in class or spill the content of someone's pencil case on the floor. I didn't want to, but I still did them. On other days she'd randomly tell me our friendship was over only to tell me the next morning she'd be my friend again. She knew very well I would go home and cry all evening when she did this but to her it was a fun little game. She found playing with my emotions amusing as she knew I'd always end up wanting her back no matter what. Looking back, I feel so stupid for letting her control me like that. Thankfully, my friend Maddison noticed this very vividly toxic friendship and convinced me to cut ties with Emily. It took a lot of convincing, but I did end up severing all ties with her. Maddison's friend group accepted me with open arms which made me feel a bit better already and, in the end, they became very good friends of mine. I ended up having multiple good friends, but it never fully filled the empty space. Sure, having them made me happy, but I was never satisfied.

Sometimes, they would move away, sometimes I would. When I was separated from one of them, I had a hard time dealing with it. I still remember the day Luna moved away. She had been my neighbour and friend for 5 years so you can imagine how emotional I got when I stood in the driveway watching her help her dad put her last few boxes into the car. She then slammed the trunk shut before turning to me. She put on her best smile and engulfed me in our last big hug. We stayed like that for what felt like a full minute before she pulled away. "I'm going to miss you" she said to me before we parted ways. Her dad started the car and drove away. She looked out the window waving

goodbye to me. I put up my hand to wave back, trying my best to hide the pain I was feeling with a smile whilst I watched her figure slowly disappear in the horizon. It felt like I was back at square one. I considered her a sister. I thought if we hadn't parted ways, perhaps I would have finally felt whole. But I know now that it wouldn't have changed anything, my loneliness didn't come from a lack of friends, because I had quite enough of them.

Over time, a feeling of hopelessness overtook me. I wouldn't let anyone get close to me anymore and found it difficult to open up to people. I would self-sabotage any chance of a new friendship as I knew they could never make me feel whole. I often felt alone, even when surrounded by people, and I still do to this day.

15.03.2018

I feel so lost. No matter how hard I try not to think about you, I fail each time. You are constantly on my mind.

02.04.2018

Why you? Why me? What did we do to deserve this? Why didn't you get a chance at life? I truly don't know but I am so furious. You deserved a life! I deserved a twin sister! But all I got was this emptiness and anger inside me.

I was in a store when two girls walked into the dressing room, giggling about trying on matching outfits. Once I laid my eyes on them, it was evident they were twins. It felt like seeing double. They both had the exact same short black hair, the same big bright eyes, the same body, everything was the same. They even had the same laugh! I felt like looking at the exact same person twice. I had never seen two people this similar yet alone be this close. They seemed perfect, too perfect if you ask me. I didn't expect it to make my blood boil, but it did. Why did they get what I was supposed to have? I want and have always wanted such a bond with somebody I would consider a part of me. But I'll never get that, I'll never have my other half. My other half is gone, gone before our life together even started. Heck, you never even had a life! We were supposed to be two, but no, it's just me. No one seems to understand how much this affects me. They say "why are you like this, you never even knew her". Yeah, I never knew you, but I am too familiar with the emptiness you left behind. Some part of me obviously remembers a moment of two hearts beating together.

06.04.2018

You left me! You left me all alone. I can't cope with this.

11.04.2018

If you hadn't disappeared, I wouldn't be feeling like this right now. You are the cause of my pain! No one will ever be able to replace the part of myself you took with you. I will forever remain incomplete.

16.04.2018

Why did you leave me? What could have been done to save you?

18.04.2018

Whose fault is it? There must be someone to blame for your disappearance!

Should Mom have been more careful during the pregnancy? Maybe then you would be alive and next to me right now. If only she had gotten medical attention sooner. Were the doctors not competent enough? Mom and Dad could possibly have gone to another hospital! A hospital with better doctors that would have detected a problem! One that would have found a way to save you!

Is that even possible? Would you not have survived anyway?

I want answers to all my questions! Yet I can't seem to find a single one...

03.05.2018

I have always loved seeing my reflection. No matter if it was in a mirror, a window, the water or so on, it always felt so right. It made sense to see another me, someone identical to me. I recently found myself staring at the mirror for what seemed like forever. It felt like you were staring back. Your long hair was flowing with the occasional breeze because of the open window causing a few strands to sometimes fall on your face. Nonetheless I still could make out all your features perfectly. Your lips were curved in a soft smile which made your cheeks appear a bit fuller and your nose slightly scrunched. But what stood out the most were your big blue eyes. I could stare at them for hours. They showed nothing but love and comfort. This is how life should be. Me and you. Together. You raised your hand, reaching out for me. Wanting to feel your warmth, I placed my hand on yours, but you were cold, too cold.

I knew I'd never have this. You'd never stare back at me; it would forever remain just my reflection. I would stay alone. You would never be with me.

I screamed out loud and hit my fist against the cold reflecting surface, shattering the mirror. I didn't care about my throbbing bleeding knuckles. My inner pain was so much more excruciating. The person in the mirror wasn't you. The calm, reassuring person I was staring at before was gone. Your soft eyes were replaced with my bloodshot eyes and your soft smile had disappeared. Tears were streaming down my cheeks, you were gone. I hit the mirror again and again until it was completely in pieces. I didn't want to see myself anymore. Mom came running into my room and enfolded me in a strong embrace while I screamed and sobbed. She obviously thought I had gone crazy and even after we'd talked it out, she still doesn't understand why this affects me so much. Am I crazy? Should I not be affected by this? I can't help it! It pains me to know that the reason I feel the way I do is because of you! It's devastating to miss someone you've never known.

17.05.2018

No one understands me or my pain. People think it's cool I was a twin, but they have no idea of what is behind it, they don't really care either. It doesn't matter to them if I'm struggling with this loss, they can't comprehend it. They can't see how incapable I am of feeling like an authentic self because a part of me is missing.

22.05.2018

If we hadn't been twins but just sisters, would you have made it? What if you solely didn't survive because we were two in the womb? Would you still be alive if I had been the one that vanished? Am I the reason you didn't make it? Perhaps it should have been me. I should have been the one to disappear, not you. I feel like I don't deserve to be alive. I should have vanished. I feel like I don't belong and shouldn't be here. Not without you at least...

27.05.2018

I want to scream at someone, tell them it's all their fault, yell in their faces that they are the ones to blame. But I don't know who to blame. We were both in the womb. You vanished early on. Nobody could have done anything to save you, and it angers me. Your chance at life got taken away before you really got it and there isn't anybody, I can hold accountable.

05.06.2018

I sometimes happen to see twins when I am out and about, and it gets me thinking. How different would my life have been if things hadn't turned out this way? I like to think about the life we would have together. I imagine us as inseparable. You'd be my sister and best friend at the same time. We'd share and do everything together. We'd walk to school hand in hand. Maybe we would even prank the teachers and switch classes just like they do in movies. Making up a life with you is so much fun. But then I remind myself, I'll never know what a life with you would have actually been like. Would we even be close? I always wanted a twin because I thought we'd be best friends from birth. But what if we didn't even like each other? I'll never know, but I guess it makes me wonder. Would we dress the same way? Would we fancy the same things? Would we have the same group of friends? What if we were polar opposites? All these questions won't ever leave my mind and I know I'll never get the answers.

16.06.2018

My friends suggested we go eat at our local diner after watching a movie, but I really don't feel like it. I told them I was sick and couldn't make it tonight. That was obviously a lie, I haven't done anything the whole day. I tried to convince myself to go for a run or at least a walk but I ended up staying in

bed sleeping and listening to music all day, only leaving it to go to the bathroom. I didn't even eat anything today! It's fine, I'm not hungry anyway.

I've been doing that a lot lately, cancelling plans, finding excuses for why I can't join them. It is starting to get difficult. I'm running out of ideas.

Am I a bad person for not wanting to go out with my own friends? Is it bad that I'm lying to them? Maybe... but I have to. I can't just tell them I'm not coming simply because I don't want to leave the comfort of my bed. They'd get mad if they knew I'd rather stay at home and do nothing than spend the night with them, right? It's better if I lie. If I tell them the truth, they'll think they are the reason I don't want to go out. They aren't. I just don't feel like doing anything at all, doesn't matter where or with whom. At least if I lie, they won't feel bad about themselves.

24.06.2018

I can't seem to fall asleep. My alarm clock shows it is ten minutes to two in the morning, yet I'm wide awake. I've been lying in bed for hours, staring at the dark ceiling, thoughts racing through my mind. I can't stop thinking about you.

30.06.2018

I feel so lonely... I want to be with you.

13.07.2018

School has finally ended. I am exhausted. I spent the past few weeks simply going through the motions. Earlier today, I observed my friends engaging with each other, laughing about all sorts of things, but this invisible emotional barrier kept me from joining in on the fun. They noticed I wasn't very lively but shrugged it off at first, continuing to laugh with each other. We were having lunch in the school cafeteria meaning we only had three more hours of school and then we'd be out of here for a few weeks. They were all very excited, already planning all the things we should do together. Danny suggested we all go spend a weekend at his lake house. Johnny, Maddison and Rose were all on board immediately. They were practically bursting with excitement. They all stared at me and wondered why I was just sitting there with a blank expression. Truth is no matter how hard I tried nothing seem to make me excited lately, so I just listened to their conversation without giving my input. They told me I shouldn't just sit there with such a gloomy face and to just cheer up. They proceeded to trying to make me laugh and even though I appreciated their efforts I didn't feel like fooling around. So, only to please them, I tried my best to appear cheerful, curving my lips into fake smiles to hide my real emotions for the rest of the day. Needless to say, I wish you were here. I'm sure school would have been bearable if you had been with me.

24.07.2018

I haven't left the house in a week.

Mom told me she is starting to get worried. Dad said I look like a zombie. He isn't wrong though. I feel like one as well.

My lifeless appearance speaks for itself. I look terrible. My appetite has disappeared. I haven't been in touch with my friends: no interest in what is going on around me. I think my best friend tried to call multiple times and has left messages, but I haven't answered to any of them.

I spend my days wrapped in blanket on the couch, watching TV without even paying attention. Once I'm bored of the screen in front of me, I walk to my room and take a nap. As soon as I wake up, I'll force myself back to sleep. To avoid real life.

It has become my escape. While I sleep, my mind goes blissfully blank and I don't feel pain anymore. It allows me not to have to deal with anything, to put my life on hold. It's like being dead but still breathing.

26.07.2018

I feel like I'm drowning in a huge black ocean, no one hearing my cries for help and I don't have the strength to swim back up to the surface.

29.07.2018

Earlier today, I found myself staring at the mirror once again, longing for you to replace my pathetic reflection. I wish you would come out of the mirror, take me into your arms, tell me everything is going to be okay whilst I cry my eyes out. My suffering would end. You'd help me get back on my feet.

I hopelessly pray every day and night for you to come save me from my sorrow.

04.08.2018

Does this ever get any easier? Because right now I don't see myself getting better any time soon. I feel helpless, lost, like I'll never be happy again.

15.08.2018

I had that nightmare again. I dreamt it countless times when I was little but hadn't for years, till last night. I remember it perfectly every time:

I find myself in a cave with a person who looks exactly like me. My surroundings are very dark and humid and the air around me is freezing cold. I have only taken a few steps when I notice the girl has disappeared. Panic takes over me. I have to find her. I run in the direction I last saw her. The darkness makes it hard to see but I don't slow down. Where could she be? I scream. I run, going left and then right. I look everywhere but I can't find her. I have lost her. I start crying and have trouble breathing. It feels like the space between

the cave's walls is getting smaller and smaller. Desperately, I look around hoping I will spot the girl somewhere, my vision starts to get blurry. I try to breathe but I can't fill my lungs. I scream out for the girl one more time before I black out.

Each time I have this nightmare, I jolt awake, panting. It has always been a horrible nightmare but now... Now at least it makes sense. You are that girl I lose. I never understood why I was losing myself in that cave. Well, turns out it wasn't me; it was you. I just thought it was myself because you looked like me. Something in me broke when I realised, I had been dreaming of you before I even knew of your existence. You were always present in me; I just didn't know it.

31.08.2018

My days are all the same. I wake up at lunchtime when Mom and Dad have already left for work. If on that day I feel like eating, I'll head downstairs to get breakfast. Sometimes, Mike sits at the table eating lunch. He'll ask me how I slept, if he should keep some of the food he prepared for me to heat it up later or something along those lines. I usually answer with very few words and head back upstairs locking myself in my room and leaving him alone downstairs. Once back in my room, I either turn on some music or the TV. It's nice to have some background noise. From time to time, Mike will suggest something we could do together, but I shrug him off most of the time. The rest of my day is then spent in bed till Mom comes home from work and asks me to set the table for dinner. At dinner our parents ask us how our day was which I let Mike answer since he actually has something to tell them. Today he told us he went surfing and suggested we should go together in the next few days. I answered I'd think about it knowing very well I won't want to get out the house in the next few days either. I don't want to nor actually do anything anymore. I have this strange feeling like I don't exist anymore. I'm still living but don't feel alive anymore.

07.09.2018

If I can't live with you, then I don't want to be here at all.

13.09.2018

I want things to get better. I don't want to suffer anymore. I'm sick of feeling all these hurtful emotions.

30.10.2018

I'm sorry for not writing to you for so long. The last few weeks were hell. It had come to a point where I was scared of myself. I had such dark thoughts and came so close to doing something stupid so many times.

Mike and I were home alone for the weekend. I had locked myself in the bathroom and had been crying for hours but crying soon turned to another

panic attack. This wasn't the first time I was having one. I've been through this a few times already. I couldn't get enough air, no matter how much I tried. My heart was pounding out of my chest, I was sweating, and I felt extremely dizzy. My vision was just as blurry as my thoughts. I couldn't think straight. Mike must have heard me because he lightly knocked on the door, asking if I was okay. I didn't respond. I couldn't. I tried to speak but no words would leave my mouth. He got worried, knocked again and tried to open the door. After trying a few more times and got seriously worried, he went to get the extra key and unlocked the door. The second he laid eyes on me and saw my curled up and shaking figure, he immediately ran to me and took me in his arms. He tried to calm me down by soothingly stroking my hair and telling me to take in deep breaths. I gripped his shirt tightly and balled my eyes out. We stayed like that for at least half an hour until I had calmed down, he then carefully lifted my chin for me to look at him. I hadn't noticed until I looked at him that he had cried as well and still had tears in his eyes. It had pained him to see his older sister in this state. His voice cracked from all the crying when he begged me to talk to him. He told me he had seen I wasn't doing well and had tried so many times to make me open up but unfortunately, he never managed to break through the walls I had built up. I realised then that I wasn't the only one hurting. He was suffering as well. He had felt useless seeing me in pain but not being able to help me no matter how many times he tried.

So, on that same night, he made me a hot chocolate, we grabbed some blankets and sat on the porch to get some fresh air. Then, I opened up. I finally voiced my thoughts to someone. I talked to him for hours. I was so shut off for weeks and kept everything bottled up inside me that it was incredibly relieving to finally let it all out. Mike had always been an amazing brother but that night he was so much more. He attentively listened to everything. He assured me I wasn't crazy and that what I was feeling was completely valid. He told me he was glad I finally told him what was going on. He had noticed my suffering but since I never made an effort to explain anything and had kept him out, he couldn't possibly know what was bothering me especially not that it was the discovery of your existence. Neither one of us wanted to be alone tonight so we brought his blanket and pillow to my bed and fell asleep together. And for the first time in a long while, I didn't feel lonely anymore. I had someone with me.

06.11.2018

I went to my first therapy appointment today.

Mike had suggested I seek professional help the morning after he heard me out. I thought about it and agreed it would be a good idea.

Josh was so kind to pick me up this morning and drove me there. Mike came with us. He told me he wanted to be there for emotional support. I think he

felt guilty for not “being there for me” before. He shouldn't though. He had tried so much but he didn't succeed because I shut everyone out. There is no way he could have done anything. I feel bad for acting the way I did; he had tried nothing but to be a good brother to me and I had rejected all signs of help and support he was showing. Josh also showed signs of guilt. I could tell from the way he looked at me or talked that he regretted not noticing earlier I wasn't doing well. But there was no possible way he could have. We don't live in the same house anymore and when we did see each other, I acted as if everything was fine. I tried to reassure them both that they had done absolutely nothing wrong and told them I was grateful they were with me now.

After a short drive to the city centre, we reached the tall building and I signed some papers once inside. Both my brothers stayed with me in the waiting room until a young woman called my name. They both gave me a thumbs-up and said they'd be back to pick me up in an hour. I smiled before turning around and walking to the woman. She had a warm and welcoming smile and small yet comforting eyes which immediately made me feel at ease when she stretched out her hand for me to shake it. She introduced herself as Dr. Keating and led me into her office. It was pretty small with very little furniture but the few artworks on the wall gave it a cosy and welcoming feel. Her desk was situated right next to the door where she picked up a notepad and a pen. She then signalled me to take a seat on the big black leather couch opposite a matching armchair on which she sat down. She set a glass of water in front of me on the small coffee table between us. I thanked her before she asked me why I wished to see a therapist.

So, I told her about you, how I found out about you, how you've been stuck in my head, the many different emotions I had felt and do still feel, etc. I didn't think it would be this easy to open up to a complete stranger about all of this, but I was very happy when I noticed how comfortable she made me feel. Sure, it's her job so she has to make me feel comfortable but something about her made me feel like I could say anything without being judged. She told me that all of this was normal to feel, reassured me I wasn't crazy. By the end of the session we had talked a lot and I already felt a bit lighter. We scheduled another appointment and before I left, she told me about a support group for people who are suffering from the loss of a twin. She suggested I try going there at least once, that it could do me some good to talk to people who went through something similar. I accepted the card with the support group's information and thanked her again before walking out and back into the waiting room where Mike and Josh were waiting for me just like they had promised. They both hugged me and walked me out; each with one arm around my shoulders.

Josh drove us home and once it was just Mike and I, I thanked him. I wanted him to know how much he had done for me. I know he felt like he didn't do

much but if he hadn't been there for me on that night, things wouldn't have turned out like this. He managed to pull me out of this huge black hole I was in. Thanks to him I can try to get better now. I'd probably still be moping in bed if it wasn't for him. He was happy to hear he had managed to help and said I should go surfing with him tomorrow to show him exactly how thankful I am. It made me chuckle. I swear this kid always finds a way to make me do the things he wants. He had been trying to get me to go surfing with him for weeks and I didn't because I was too busy doing absolutely nothing in bed. This whole time he was just trying to get me to have fun and I completely shut him out. Obviously, I told him I'd love to go surfing with him.

Now that I'm writing about it, I realise I felt a bit of hope today. Things might be looking up after all.

28.11.2018

I've been going to therapy for a few weeks now and Dr. Keating has been helping me a lot. I haven't been having as many panic attacks and when I do, they don't last as long anymore thanks to her advice. Yet, what really has been helping me is the support group. I had felt so alone all this time. I thought I must be the only one feeling like this, but I couldn't have been more wrong. We're a little group of five plus a therapist. We've all lost our twin. We all share similar pain. In the group there are three girls including myself and two boys. We all shared our stories and struggles. One of the girls mentioned she suffers, not just with self-identity like the rest of us do, but also from mild gender dysphoria that she thinks might stem from losing her male twin when they were only a bit less than a year old. The other girl mentioned she had fallen into the bad habit of using substances that are damaging to her health after the death of her twin a year ago. The two girls and one of the boys both lost their other half after birth, but we still share a few of the same struggles. The one I've connected with the most is the last boy who seemed to be just a few years older than me. He mentioned he had, just like me, lost his twin in the womb. I wasn't the only twin survivor. It felt weirdly comforting to hear him talk about what he had been going through. I could finally relate to someone.

I was surprised at the end of today's meeting. He came up to me and asked if I was free to grab a coffee. I was even more surprised when I accepted. I hadn't gone out in so long, but I didn't hesitate before telling him I'd love that.

We settled for a cute little café a few blocks away and decided to sit outside as the weather wasn't too bad. We had a great time and talked a lot. At first, we asked each other questions about each other's twins, how we imagined our life would have been different with them and so on. He told me he was an only child, so he always thought that was the reason for this loneliness he was feeling but when he was a bit older his mother told him about the brother

he was supposed to have had. It made sense to him that he should have had a twin brother. He told me he had gone to therapy when he was younger up until about a few years ago when he moved here and decided to come to the support group because a dear friend of his has mentioned it to him. He wasn't struggling with it that much anymore and instead had learnt to embrace his lost twin brother. I felt hopeful after hearing someone who used to be in the same place as I am in right now got better. After talking about our lost siblings at the café for a bit, we went for a walk and actually started to get to know each other for who we are, lost twins aside. We found out we both have a great fondness for art, and he suggested we go to an art museum or gallery together one day. My other friends weren't huge art enthusiasts, neither had I gone to a lot of museums in my life, so I liked the sound of that a lot.

A few hours later, we had talked so much that we had walked all the way to the beach as it was a pretty nice day for November. We sat down and continued talking for a bit before a silence fell between us. It wasn't an awkward silence at all. We were both enjoying the calming sound of the waves, looking at the beautiful red and orange sky as the sun slowly started to set in the horizon. Alex moved bit closer to me, his small eyes still steady on the horizon, so I could feel his presence more, yet remained silent, allowing us to stay lost in our thoughts a bit longer. His face was aglow with the last orange rays before the sun would fully disappear. I wish you could be here with me to see him with your own eyes. He is a sight for sore eyes. Although his jawline and most of his other features were very sharp, his plump pink lips were curved in a soft cute smile, just enough to show that he is enjoying the moment. A few hours earlier his hair was still styled upward to reveal his forehead, but his blonde strands were now slightly covering his forehead, flowing in the breeze. He looked so peaceful. He unconsciously made me realise something today. Why did I let you become this bad, hurtful thing in my life? You wouldn't want me to suffer like I did. Alex had managed to embrace his lost twin. He didn't let that loss destroy him. But I did. I had let it eat me up completely instead of doing something to get better. I realise now that you aren't the one that made me suffer, I am. I'm sorry for ever blaming you. Only I have the power to decide whether I let you be this excruciating internal pain forever or if I try to get better; be at peace with it just like he is.

10.12.2018

You are gone, vanished. I can't change that. No one can. And that's okay.

I'm sorry I tried to blame you or anyone else. No one meant for this to happen. It did, and it hurts like hell and probably always will, but it is nobody's fault.

It wasn't your time. You weren't ready to walk this earth.

Or maybe Mom wasn't ready for two new kids and you knew so you let go so that I could go on.

If you had survived, then perhaps Mike wouldn't have existed instead. And as much as I'd do anything to have you in my life, I wouldn't trade Mike for anything. He deserved his spot on earth and he was meant to be in our family. I've come to accept that, sadly, you weren't.

I like to think that you're watching over me and our family from above and will wait until it is my time to join you. I felt very guilty for being the one that got to live and not you so I thought a lot about death, hoping it might bring us together but, just like it wasn't your time to come to earth, it isn't my time yet to leave either. I wanted to be with you so badly that I was ready to give up on everything. I couldn't possibly do this to my family, to my friends, to myself. You wouldn't want me to give up on my life. I don't even know why I thought that was an option, because it clearly isn't. I blamed you for leaving me alone all this time, but I now realise that you didn't abandon me, and I am not alone either because I am blessed to have such amazing people in my life. You gave me your strength so that I would be strong for the both of us. So that's exactly what I must be.

28.12.2018

I finally hung out with my friends again today and I even introduced Alex to them. I invited them over to my house a few days ago and told them about what had been going on with me. They were very understanding and glad that I was doing better. I had mentioned you to them a long time back, but they never knew it was such a big deal for me and apologised for it. I told them it was okay. I had always resented them and others for not understanding what I was feeling. But, let's be honest, how could they have? They never had to go through something like this so why was I expecting everyone to magically understand my situation if I hadn't even taken the time to properly explain it to anyone. I should have been open like I am right now from the beginning, if I really wanted them to fully get it. I also told them about Alex, how he had helped me realise certain things and ended up becoming a person I like a lot for himself and not just because we went through the same thing. When I mentioned the museum date he took me on, they were then all very eager to meet him. So today, I invited Alex to eat with us at the diner my friends and I always go to. I was glad when they all seemed to like him. Later on, they confirmed their liking towards him over text in our group chat. I'm sure you would have loved him as well. Actually, I'm sure you would get along with all of my friends because they are all amazing in their own way.

I wish I hadn't shut them out for so long. I felt very happy today. I'm doing better. I hope you're proud of me.

12.01.2019

Alex took me to the beach last night. I had told him on the phone about everything I was feeling, what I had realised. He told me to get dressed and to be ready in twenty minutes. I didn't know what he meant by that, but I did as he told. Exactly twenty minutes later, he picked me up in front of my house and we drove to the beach. I was very confused as to what we could possibly be doing at the beach so late in the night. The beach was completely deserted, no one was around. He took my hand in his and walked till we were only a few meters away from the water. There, he carefully dropped my hand and reached into his bag. He pulled out a white sky lantern and a lighter. I was still pretty confused at that moment, so he told me how his Mom had taken him to a park to light a sky lantern to metaphorically let go of his pain and that he thought he could do the same for me. While I processed what he said, he looked at me with the softest eyes I've ever seen and handed me the lantern and the lighter with an adorable comforting smile. I took it in my hands and thought that this could actually be a good idea. He helped me hold the lantern and I lit it. I slowly raised it and let it float away. I let it and the pain go.

Tears started to build up, but they weren't tears of sadness. I was overwhelmed but, just like it had seemed the first time we were at the beach together, I was at peace with myself. Alex hugged me from behind as he let me silently cry. We watched the sky lantern slowly float away until it was just a tiny dot of light in the distance. I had held onto this pain so long and I finally let it go. Launching a lantern into the sky seemed like the perfect way to make sure everything I had let go of before I called Alex, would stay gone. I don't want you to be something negative anymore. You were never supposed to be in the first place so from now on I'll make sure you won't be that anymore. I'll embrace you and our bond.

21.02.2019

I woke up very happy today. I could immediately smell the amazing breakfast that was waiting for me downstairs. I wasted no time and ran down the stairs after getting dressed. I was warmly welcomed by the birthday wishes from my family as I looked around the dining room which was, once again, beautifully decorated. This year, Mom, Dad and Mike settled for blue and white as the colour theme for the balloons and presents. The pink roses from last year were replaced with snow white roses but like always, the big "Happy Birthday Kathleen" banner hung above the dining table. Mom urged me to sit down and eat her special chocolate chips pancakes when she heard my stomach growl in joyful anticipation.

In the evening, the guests arrived. Grandma beat everyone to it this year. She was the first to arrive followed by Maddison and Rose. Unlike last year, I decided to invite my friends as well. The two girls, Johnny, Danny and Alex were

all very excited when I told them I wanted them over to celebrate my birthday. Josh, Bethany and the twins arrived late. He told me it was because of traffic but Bethany told me it was actually because Josh spent too much time getting the twins ready that when they were supposed to leave, he hadn't even showered yet. Josh handed me his present telling me it would make up for being late. Them being late hadn't bothered me anyway, all that mattered was that they were all here now, but the beautiful necklace would definitely have made up for it if it had indeed bothered me. After everyone else handed me their presents and I had thanked them, Mom and Alex quietly left the room and she gave Mike the usual signal that it was time for cake. Mike dimmed the light and everyone started singing when Mom walked back in with a beautiful white cake. The candles were reflecting in her big eyes as she put it down in front of me. I stared at the beautiful cake in front of me, when everyone finished the song, I took a big breath in, made a wish, and blew out the candles. Everyone cheered and I genuinely smiled before tilting my head up and meeting Alex's sparkly eyes. In his hand, he held a beautiful tiny white cupcake with a single candle on it and a lighter in the other hand. He smiled at me and handed them to me. "Your Mom and I thought you might want to light a candle for her" he told me. This thoughtful act touched me deeply. I took the lighter and lit the candle for you. I was staring at the dancing flame in front of me. I had felt so cold looking at my birthday candles last year. Looking at this single flame on the little white cupcake Mom had made for you, I felt warm, untroubled, happy and complete!

Happy Birthday, I love you.

Chiara Hrstka
1st November 2020