

Always There

Suzannah

When I was born, my sister Eliza was already a three year old who knew how to be a mom to her collection of baby dolls. So it was no surprise to anyone that she was ready to take charge of being a sister. She started to learn how ^{to} Velcro the diaper shut and put just enough baby powder on my bottom. When I would cry she would run into her room and get her favorite stuffed animal and give it to me. I memorized that bear's face and when I saw that gray teddy bear face my tears disappeared.

Time passed and I was ready to jump into pre-school. Eliza loved to visit me there. Sometimes we played dress-up with my friends and she would be the mom. She would cover herself in pearls and jewels and lipstick that was more around her mouth than on her lips. She wore high-heeled shoes, slipping over herself every two steps. But to us she was beautiful.

In the afternoon we would have snack. I would sit her down and carefully take out every animal cracker and name them. There was bear and dog and rhino and lion. Eliza taught me that they were so much better dipped in apple juice.

And later, when we all started to yawn, and our eyes began to drop, we would tumble into our cots and hug our stuffed animals. My sister would pat my head with her smooth hand and I began to slowly drift off to sleep. My sister was always there.

Every night as I grew older. When the dinner was set and the sun was slowly inching down, she was there. She was there to help me with my spelling homework. She was there to teach me how to play checkers. And she was there to look at our baby pictures, laughing over funny faces.

Finally my sister and I were in the same school. I was so happy to wave to her in the halls and jabber to her on the bus, to always sit next to her at lunch. When she walked me to my class in the morning, I would show off to my friends that I had a big, fifth grade sister and I loved her. My sister was always there.

My sister and I have shared one room for a long time, so long that another name for it could be "memories".

We choreographed dances in that room, pretending to be Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. We slid and glided across the floor. In our dances we would swirl and soar into a new world. We would laugh too hard from twirling and tumble onto the floor, falling into the walls outstretched arms.

At night when my sister and I have our teeth brushed and hair combed and our pajamas hug us, we snuggle onto Eliza's bed. We lean our arms on pillows covering heaters to keep us warm.

We press our noses up to the glass forming nose prints and stare out into the night with binoculars. We peer onto the streets below. We watch people wearing tired and cranky faces coming home from work. We watch doormen standing outside their buildings breathing in the cool night air. We watch people who are walking their dogs down New York City streets. We giggled about how the dogs looked like their owners.

We give these people lives and personalities that we think suit them. We talk about them as if we have known them our whole lives.

Sometimes we hold hands between our bedside tables. That's how we fall asleep. Or sometimes we pass notes because if we talk mom will get mad. The notes say little things that make us happy and we slowly sink into sleep.

When I was eleven and Eliza 14, everything changed. We shopped for wall-to-wall carpeting, wall paints and new lamps and bureaus to fit in our new rooms.

Now as I lay in bed at night, in my own private room, I play the movie mind pictures of us growing up. I recall animal cracker naming, the waving in the halls, the peering down to the streets below, the choreographing dances, the passing notes and holding hands. This way my sister will always be here.