

Bandaged Moments

Joshua Unikel

Together/Alone
Afterward—it was like living in a forgotten dollhouse.

Fact/Fiction

Some say that having pets helps you learn what death is, helps you become comfortable with the natural cycle of life.

Bullshit. No one knows what death is. No book has that answer in the back. And the death of a cat doesn't "help you cope" with the death of a loved one. Not when it's your twin sister. Not when you're sixteen.

Jenifer/Joshua

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: *On August 27, 1985 at 4:00 AM, the twins Jenifer Denise and Joshua Eric Unikel were born at Magee Women's Hospital to parents Constance and Harold Unikel. Siblings to Emily Beth and Daniel Benjamin. Grandchildren to C. Louis and Suzanne Kingsbaker (maternal grandparents) and*

Freda Unikel Bregman and the late Edward Unikel (paternal grandparents).

Identical/Different

My favorite early memories of Jenifer all involve the window sill in her room. *The Perch* is what we called it. With eight-year-old imaginations, Jenifer and I spent hours playing there. I had my Ninja Turtle action figure, Raphael, and she played with Isabelle, her My Child doll.

I'll save you, Raphael would shout, marching across the sill over a molten abyss.

Careful! It's not safe—there's lava! Isabel would call back. *Hurry, Raphael, before King Koopa gets me!*

I'm coming! Raphael would say, running across the white wood. Then, in one final burst, he'd leap from the sill into the air and crash through the Lincoln Log castle where the heinous Puffalump, *King Koopa*, held Isabel as his captive.

She was saved just in the nick of time—weekend after weekend.

Now, I sometimes wonder how the game would've gone if Raphael had died instead.

Memory/Creativity

Jenifer was gifted at the violin, but we knew better than to ask her to sing. Though the few times she did were memorable. One night, we were eating steak and French fries for dinner. Mom made sure the meat was well-done. It was the only way Ron, our former stepfather, would eat it.

Somehow that didn't stop him from saying, *You know, your parents would never even think about eating this.*

So? Mom said. *What difference does it make?*

They're too good to have their steaks well-done. That's the difference, Connie, he said. *They only eat hoity-toity filet mignon that's practically bleeding.*

All right, that's enough, Mom said.

Oh, no, nothing is ever good enough for Sue and Lou Kingsbaker, he said.

Enough! Mom shouted. *Can't we just eat dinner?*

You know, I'm tired of this, he said. He dropped his silverware onto his plate, then stood up, sending his chair falling back against the dishwasher. *Don't think I'm afraid to leave, Connie! I'm two steps away from the door at this point.*

Jenifer stood up on the bench where we were sitting next to our brother, Daniel. In one wobbling crescendo, she erupted with Elton John's "Levon." She sang as loud as she could, throwing her voice high then low then high again, donkey-like.

Everyone stopped.

That night it was "Levon." Other times it was Genesis' "In Too Deep" or "Stars" from *Les Misérables*.

Secret/Rumor

The official medical report read *Multicausal Systemic Quietus* as Jenifer's cause of death.

We knew better. The doctors had done my mom, a nurse, a favor by bandaging the truth. *Multicausal Systemic Quietus* was a jargonized way of saying, *It could've been anything, and we can't say exactly what.*

Logic/Emotion

When I was barely fifteen, I lost my virginity on a synagogue playground. Afterward, I sobbed in Jenifer's room.

I thought I'd see God, I said, *and we'd feel like we were one, and it'd be great. Everyone always tells us that we're mature for our age. But I'm not—I'm not.*

But, Josh, that's not how it ever happens, she said. *Seeing God just isn't in the cards.*

Yeah, but it's not supposed to be all messed up like this, Jenifer, I said. *I finished inside of her—unprotected! Don't you get it? She promised me that she had this thing where her liver or appendix was in the way of her fallopian tubes or something, that she couldn't get pregnant, but how do I know? And what if she gave me some disease? And I have to tell Mom; it's the only way I'll—*

Don't tell Mom, Jenifer said. *Just cool it. We'll know one way or another soon enough. Then we'll just go from there.*

The next day, she went to the school library during lunch and

printed out forty pages on STDs, emergency contraception, and teenage pregnancy.

Turns out the girl didn't have any diseases but did have a stash of morning-after pills.

Identical/Alone

There are more of us than you know.

Wikipedia.org: *Liberace, impresario (twin died as an infant); Philip K. Dick, American writer (twin sister, Jane, died after birth); Alanis Morissette, Canadian rock singer/songwriter (twin brother, Wade); Ed Sullivan, TV host (twin died as an infant); Andy Garcia, actor (parasitic twin brother removed from Andy's shoulder; died soon after); John Elway, NFL quarterback (twin sister, Jana); Lillian Asplund, last American survivor of the Titanic disaster (twin brother, Carl Edgar, died in the sinking).*

Music/Words

She was more eccentric than angsty, even in seventh grade. A week after her electric violin was delivered, Mom and I went with her to Pittsburgh Guitars on East Carson Street.

She walked in ahead of us and right up to the counter, all ninety-five pounds of her.

Something I can help you with, sister? The guy by the antique register asked with a condescending smirk.

Matter of fact, yes, she said smartly, plopping her slim hard case on the glass counter. It was already covered with stickers for obscure bands: Blunderbuss, Thinking Fellers Local 282, Sleater-Kinney, and the like. Looking him in the eye, she opened the case and said, *I want the grittiest sound you can give me. Any chance we can hook this up to something with a built-in pre-amp?*

She was dead-serious and polite. Not to mention passive aggressive.

After he realized that she knew about gear, he sold her the kind of amp she wanted as well as an overdrive/crunch pedal, a distortion pedal, one fifteen foot quarter-inch cable, two four foot quarter-inch cables and massive DJ headphones.

She used just under five hundred dollars of her Bat Mitzvah

money and never regretted a nickel of it.

Alone/Logic

We're a confluence of all the different selves we've been.

I personally love the goth look on you, Jenifer said during junior year. She wore the same kind of band T-shirt and thrift store corduroys she'd worn from seventh grade on.

Yeah? I asked.

Absolutely. All black, all the time! What's not to love? she said.

We both laughed.

It's a whole lot better than the preppy-thug look freshmen year, she said. *Even if that "gangster" dragon chain was in style, it needed to go.*

Yeah, it did, I said.

And let's not forget about those crazy-big JNCO elephant jeans in middle school, she said. *Twenty-five-inch legs—every mother's favorite!*

Especially when you walk home in the pouring rain—without an umbrella, I said.

Joshua/Fact

If they ever talk about it, they call it my "absent months." The five months I spent in my room after she died.

I remember the first night. Locking my door then falling against it, wishing she was on the other side and hating how I always got too emotional. Especially that afternoon.

All of it haunted me—the smell of kugels seeping in under the door, lulled voices echoing condolences through the keyhole, conversations between crawling car tires, and wooden floors shifting the weight of mourning.

I could hear Rabbi Chuck leading a useless Kaddish in Hebrew: *Yit'gadal v'yit'kadash sh'mei raba ...* His words were muted by carpeting and avoidances.

Later, Nick and some of my other friends stopped by. They asked me through the locked door in hushed voices if I'd be at school on Monday. They promised they'd help me get caught up. I could copy their homework when I came back. If I came back. But I didn't that year.

Together/Words

HowStuffWorks.com: *The idea that twins develop entirely fabricated secret languages that only they use and only they can understand has long been a source of fascination for scientists and lay-people alike. This is known as twin language, ideoglossia, or cryptophasia.*

Memory/Secrets

Everyone forgets that Jenifer stopped being the violinist they wanted her to be. From second grade on, she played in the school band at Minadeo then Reizenstein then Allderdice. But she only liked her classical repertoire until the end of eighth grade summer.

Why don't you play that Offenbach piece that I loved from your recital? I asked. We both knew I could hear whatever she played leaking out of her oversized headphones.

Because it's so lofty that I feel like dust might as well be coming out of my violin instead of notes, she said. *Besides, it's not even as complex as Don Cab, let alone as hard-hitting as Trumans Water.*

I didn't know who she was talking about. I just smiled and let her play the cover she wanted, listening as I pretended to read whatever high school literature I'd just been assigned (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Wiesel's Night*). Or I'd act like I was thinking my way through another poem about some fracture in my teenage Romanticism.

She'd play for hours, forgetting about chores, homework, or even coming down for dinner a lot of the time.

I suppose some part of me foresaw that eventually Jenifer doing her own thing meant doing it without her twin brother.

There are some things that you despise life for making so.

Identical/Fact

Encyclopedia Britannica Online: *In North America, DZ [dizygotic or fraternal] twins are more frequent than MZ [monozygotic or identical] twins, the relative proportions being 71.8 to 28.2; similar proportions hold among other populations of European origin.*

Emotion/Jenifer

Our brother Daniel came out of the closet in his sociology class. It was his senior year.

Jenifer combated rumors in her quiet way, asking people, *What does it matter if he likes guys instead of girls?*

I side-stepped the issue, saying, *If that's his thing, that's his thing, but it's not mine. I'm not him. He's my brother, but I'm not him.* No matter how many people I told that to, still others thought that *I* was the gay Unikel.

I was on the second floor in our massive high school, heading to Mr. Lowe's room, when all of it became too much. A crew of juniors ran past, almost shouldering me, saying that there was a fight by the third floor annex. Just starting. It was my brother. Some guy brushed into Daniel in the hall, saying that my brother tried to touch his dick.

I bolted down the hall, pushed past kids in the stairwell, ran into the circle of cheering high-schoolers.

Jenifer was a few feet over, in the front—staring, still.

The guy was shoving Daniel.

I snatched Jenifer's violin case from her, ran into the center of the circle, and laid into the guy's back as hard as I could.

He hit the ground, stayed down on the tile.

Jenifer and I got our brother out of there while everyone cheered, and security rushed in to break things up.

Together/Secret

If we could ghost in one another's living rooms, we'd know that everyone's family hides its birthmarks and scars. When we see friends or acquaintances in class, in the grocery store, or at work—we pretend that we're more okay than we feel. We play normal. We simply can't see that everyone else is playing as well.

Alone/Music

There was a moment when I knew childhood had gone. I put my ear by Jenifer's door, thought I heard her playing unplugged but knew that she hadn't really been around for weeks. I went in

anyway. It's what I always did when she was there, when she was in the middle of practicing.

I stepped in and closed the door, figured I might get some idea of where she'd been.

Her cassettes piled by the stereo, dirty clothes strewn across the floor, a book on her desk, ticket stubs on her bureau, cables and amp by *The Perch*, violin waiting to be played.

I walked over to her desk and the book—a copy of *The Complete Works of Corelli*, gold print, thick volume, leather-bound.

Not a real book, I thought. *It's just sheet music.*

Picking it up, I remembered when Madga, her violin teacher, gave it to her on stage after Jenifer's first real solo recital.

I smiled, opening the cover for posterity's sake. But I could only leaf through the first few pages.

Jenifer had glued the rest together and carved a square into the center. It was a hiding place for her little trophies: random scraps of paper in different handwriting—guys' names and phone numbers with dates in her tiny print.

Turning the book over, I let the scraps waft to the floor.

Creative/Facts

Wikipedia.org: *An **autobiographical memory** is a personal representation of general or specific events and personal facts. Autobiographical memory also refers to memory of a person's history. An individual does not remember exactly everything that has happened in one's past. Memory is constructive, where previous experience affects how we remember events and what we end up recalling from memory. Autobiographical memory is constructive and reconstructed as an evolving process of past history. A person's autobiographical memory is fairly reliable; although, the reliability of autobiographical memories is questionable because of memory distortions.*

Jenifer/Memory

Mom asked me through my locked door to give the eulogy.

I can't, Josh, she said. Don't make me do this. You knew her better than anyone. She would've wanted you to give it.

Her eulogy was the only time I went out in public during my “absent months.” I didn’t even change for the speech.

In the limousine ride to the funeral home and during the service, no one said a word about my T-shirt and plaid pajama pants. They could barely even watch me give the eulogy. I imagined that it must have been like watching Jenifer speak in front of her own casket.

I spent two whole days deciding what I’d say, writing and scribbling things out. I couldn’t come up with anything of my own that didn’t at least hint at her secret.

So I read an Emily Dickinson poem from my copy of *Final Harvest*:

*The soul has bandaged moments -
When too appalled to stir -
She feels some ghastly Fright come up
And stop to look at her -*

*Salute her, with long fingers -
Caress her freezing hair -
Sip, Goblin, from the very lips
The Lover - hovered - o’er -*

...

Memory/Creativity

Jenifer and I made up our own game. We called it *Re-Remembering*.

It lasted, off-and-on, from second grade to sixth or seventh. Without warning, we’d start:

Last week I was playing violin outside Phipps Conservatory, Jenifer said. *Just really digging in and forgetting about everything. Playing “Mr. P.C.” at something like 175, sticking to the music, improvising, and when it was all over I just let out this huge sigh.*

Though Jenifer didn’t speak up much when she was younger, she loved to play in public. Give a humble little *Thanks* to even the biggest compliments.

When I opened my eyes there was this small crowd that

gathered, she said. Families of kids and grandparents, Pitt students, and a bunch of others. They all clapped and said nice things. And they weren't just local yinzers—one of them was Matt Jencik!

Who? I asked.

Are you even listening to the music in this city! Matt Jencik, math rock bass player. Plays in Hurl, used to play in Don Caballero, she explained. Anyway, not only did he say that my playing was great, but he also said that I should come jam with him and some other guys sometime.

I looked skeptical.

He even gave me a free ticket to his band's show this weekend. Jenifer, are you re-remembering?

Course not.

Then where's the ticket?

She checked her pockets, trying not to let her smile break through. Eventually she started laughing. Hey, I had you there for a little while!

In Re-Remembering, we'd take our memories and add in details as we went along. Details that, by chance, didn't technically happen. But could've. Sometimes we'd make people up. Sometimes we even forgot where the memories ended and the make-believe began. But the point was to keep the other person from knowing the difference.

Sometimes I still play it with other people, as a way of remembering her.

Secret/Fact

*No one, including the doctors, ever knew why.
Except me.*

Jenifer/Logic

Jenifer thought in solutions and strategies.

Hey, Jenifer, our older sister said. All my friends are going to this upperclassman party on Saturday night. How do I get around Mom's curfew?

Just ask Mom if you can sleep at Rachel's or Natalie's instead,

Jenifer suggested. *I mean it's not exactly a lie: you probably will sleep at one of their houses, eventually.*

Jenifer was ten or eleven at the time.

Together/Music

We grew up on cartoons, Nintendo, and street games. But unlike the other Montclair Street kids we played Spud and Run the Bases with, we had The Tape Game.

All right, let's see who can guess the band, album, or song first, our step-sister, Rachel, would say, sitting on the other side of a cobble stone road of cassette cases. She'd cover the tape as she put it into the stereo. Careful so that no one got an unfair look.

Then she'd play the tiniest snippet of some wild tune.

Sonic Youth, Daniel guessed.

Guns 'N Roses, I shouted.

The Smiths, Emily tried.

No, it's The Cure, Jenifer said. "*Open,*" I think.

That's right! One point for Jenifer, Rachel said.

Hey, that's no fair! I protested. *She borrows that tape from you all the time.*

She did. She borrowed it again after that game, too. Forgot to return it to Rachel before our step-sister moved out.

Jenifer looked up to Rachel. Thought she was so hip and free-spirited, two things that Jenifer wasn't. But that didn't stop her from listening to The Cure then and more obscure bands later on.

I think it was the Tape Game that started her love of cassettes. She bought all of her albums at Eide's or Dave's Music Mine on cassette. And when tapes were taken over by CDs, she stayed true to her thick plastic things. Shopping around or special ordering. Sometimes she'd even go to The Exchange, buy a whole bag full of twenty-five-cent bargain tapes, and record over them with indie rock from WPTS or songs she was recording herself. She had learned how to unlock tapes. Something about a small square latch on the thing.

Creative/Facts

Reference.com: **Confabulation**, also known as **false memory**, is the confusion of imagination with memory, and/or the confusion of true memories with false memories. Confabulation can result from both organic and psychological causes.

Secret/Difference

The only things that I kept of Jenifer's were her secrets.

One was that she was into experimental sex. She told me about it at the beginning of our eleventh grade year. On one of those nights that I'd hear her sneak in late, and I'd join her on the roof outside *The Perch* window.

I first tried it at the end of last year, she said, without any questioning or prompt. That's how Jenifer was with telling me things. *Mike said that blindfolds would make our sex better*. She turned to look at me. *He'd waited a year and a half before I let him have my virginity. So of course I trusted him. We tried the blindfolds, then fuzzy handcuffs, then after about a month of those, we tried pillows against the face, then ...*

What? I asked.

Nothing. Nevermind. She stared out through the sky. *You know, I'm not even really sure why I like it or even why I started doing it; it just feels good. Feels better, more thrilling than normal sex.*

I hadn't asked her about it. She just told me, cold turkey.

None of my friends really know about it, she said. At least I haven't told them. Just the guys I do it with know, so it's better if you don't tell anyone.

So you've done it with guys besides Mike? I asked.

Fiction/Logic

Any fiction writing manual will tell you that using brand names can be an effective way of convincing as well as engaging the reader. From a list of brands or proper nouns from pop culture, you should choose number twelve or thirteen instead of number three or four to effectively use *brand-name realism*. It's the difference between Dizzie Gillespie and Joe Venuti, a Butterfinger and a Zero bar.

Together/Emotion

When we put all of Jenifer's things into storage, everything went. Her RC Cola ringer T-shirt and her prized Blunderbuss set list. Even her electric violin.

Josh, I know there are things that you want to keep, Mom said to me through my door a few days afterward. There are things that we all want, hoping that it'll somehow bring her back. But it won't. Nothing will. It'll be better for all of us if we just store it, put it away so that we don't have to stumble across it and remember.

Identical/Together

Technically, I was the older twin by one minute. But Jenifer and I took turns being the older twin. Everyone knew about my *breaks*, uncontrollable emotional meltdowns, but Jenifer had her share in the dark, too.

There'd be a timid knock on my door. *Josh?* She'd ask, her voice quiet but without its familiar assuredness.

I'd get up and open my door. *What's wrong?* I'd ask, letting her in and closing the door after her.

I don't want to talk about it or try to figure it out, okay? she said the first few times, quietly. She was reasonable enough to know that Reason couldn't do anything for her in those moments. *I just need you to tell me that everything's okay.*

So I did. I kept saying what intuitively came out: *You'll be all right, and It's okay to cry. You're safe here,* holding her. They were things that our mom used to say to us when we were upset. They were the only things that ever helped me get through crying and curling up and wailing.

Jenifer's *breaks* were like spider-cracks in glass. Silent yet problematic. I've never heard anyone cry so quietly.

Memory/Alone

Sometimes my brother or someone would see me in the middle of the night during my "absent months." On a trip to the bathroom or to the kitchen for something small.

At first, they tried to talk to me. Then, in time, they stopped.

And then, seeing me would scare them. I could see the split-second it took for them to realize that I was supposed to be in their house, that I wasn't Jenifer's ghost.

But I was.

Fact/Memory

Wikipedia.org: *The **Zeigarnik effect** states that people remember uncompleted or interrupted tasks better than completed ones.*

Russian psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik first studied the phenomenon after her professor, Gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin, noticed that a waiter had better recollections of still unpaid orders.

In Gestalt psychology, the Zeigarnik effect has been used to demonstrate the general presence of Gestalt phenomena: not just appearing as perceptual effects, but also present in higher mental processing (e.g., memory). The effect is in use as a plot device in TV series and movies for maintaining viewer interest (by use of a cliffhanger). Another implication of the effect is that students who wish to remember material better should leave learning unfinished when taking breaks.

Jenifer/Emotion

The first time I smoked pot was with Jenifer. It was the spring of our tenth grade year. We used a glass bowl she'd borrowed from someone and Chanukah candles to light it. All she had were matches, so instead of burning herself again and again, she told me to run down to the dining room closet and see if I could find the candles.

They were there. The familiar blue boxes with a multicolored Jewish family lighting the menorah. *I've done much worse*, I told myself as I hurried back upstairs.

She finished her first hit and passed it to me.

I inhaled then let out the smoke, telling myself, *It's Jenifer. It's okay. She's the reasonable one. She wouldn't let you do anything too bad. Besides, she can get anyone out of trouble.*

Stop worrying so much, she said, taking a long, deep drag. *Just*

enjoy it—let go. She blew the smoke out her window and toward the Zimmermans' roof.

I knew I could be a little anxious sometimes, but the real reason I smoked with her wasn't that I needed to let go. It was because that was what she wanted to do and doing it meant I got to share something with her again.

Creativity/Fact

Most contemporary theorists agree that memoir and memory are an intimate blend of fact and fiction. Like the game Jenifer and I played.

Makes you wonder which is which.

Makes you wonder if opposites are actually Siamese twins.

Music/Logic

Jenifer started getting passionate about the violin during sixth grade. That's when she met Magda, a tall, slender Romanian woman who wore cashmere scarves even in the spring.

Magdalena Swardanjzov was a patient of our mom's and the second chair violinist in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

Is that Beethoven or Bach, young lady? Magda asked her, smiling as she walked over to where Jenifer was playing, sitting on a brick wall outside of Mom's office in Oakland.

Jenifer stopped moving her bow, jumped down off the wall and said politely, *Oh, that wasn't classical music at all. It was "Jackie's Strength" by Tori Amos.*

I know it wasn't classical, dear, she said, looking at Jenifer and her violin. *You're Connie's daughter, aren't you?*

Yes, she answered. *My name's Jenifer.*

Nice to meet you, Jenifer, Magda said, reaching out to shake hands. *How would you like to really learn how to play that thing?*

Jenifer looked toward the ground. *I don't know. I mean everyone tells me I'm good at it and all—but I don't know.*

Tell you what, I'll teach you violin. Give you lessons absolutely free. It's the least I can do for all the medical advice your mom's given me.

Jenifer smiled, intrigued by the prospect of lessons. She thought

that Magda was so cool with her scarf and surety.

It'll be classical music mainly, Magda explained. That's just what I know. But with what I'll teach you, you'll be able to play whatever you want.

Magda was right. After three or four years, Jenifer could play anything, from Bartók to Nocturnus, phusion to lo-fi.

Different/Jenifer

Emily Dickinson:

...

*Unworthy, that a thought so mean
Accost a Theme - so - fair -
The soul has moments of escape -
When bursting all the doors -*

*She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
And swings upon the Hours,
As do the Bee - delirious borne -
Long Dungeoned from his Rose -*

...

Rumor/Alone

At the beginning of eleventh grade, I could see that Jenifer was starting to disappear.

Dude, I heard these guys in study hall talking all about Jenifer, Nick, a former friend of mine, told me on a walk home.

Seriously? I said.

Yeah, I mean I didn't hear everything, but it was something about the one guy wanting to hook up with her.

That's it? I said. *Come on, man. Just tell me.*

It's really not worth repeating—it'll only make you crazy.

Whatever. Just tell me, Nick.

Okay. So the guy sitting next to him—I don't know his name—said something about how any guy who wants to can hook up with

Jenifer Unikel. Just get a couple of drinks down her and let on he's willing to do some hard-core dominatrix, and he's in.

Damn it! I yelled along a residential street.

What? See! I knew I shouldn't have said anything.

Memory/Fact

Our memories capture us like cameras, freeze-framing smiles, flowers, and the photogenic picturesque. Except polaroids have too much flash for bruises and moments of weakness.

Word/Fiction

Encyclopedia Britannica: *The counterintuitive nature of Einstein's ideas makes them difficult to absorb and gives rise to situations that seem unfathomable. One well-known case is the twin paradox, a seeming anomaly in how special relativity describes time.*

Suppose that one of two identical twin sisters flies off into space at nearly the speed of light. According to relativity, time runs more slowly on her spacecraft than on Earth; therefore, when she returns to Earth, she will be younger than her Earth-bound sister. But in relativity, what one observer sees as happening to a second one, the second one sees as happening to the first one. To the space-going sister, time moves more slowly on Earth than in her spacecraft; when she returns, her Earth-bound sister is the one who is younger. How can the space-going twin be both younger and older than her Earth-bound sister?

Emotion/Alone

I don't care.

Secret/Facts

I wasn't there when their music blasted all too loud. Aggressive indie rock from Jenifer's room on the third floor and some booming Broadway melody from Ron's den.

My stereo's only at a four right now, Connie, Ron said to our mom. I'll be happy to drown out your daughter's garbage if you don't say something to her. He was built like a defensive tackle but

never wrestled issues head-on.

Mom, exhausted after work, trudged up the stairs to Jenifer's door and banged hard against it.

There was only music.

She barged in, ready to ground Jenifer for forever and a day. But she couldn't. She just froze, mid-motion. Standing only a foot or so into Jenifer's room, she saw her daughter lying there on the floor. Jenifer's hands clutched around the cables attached to her amp and distortion pedals. Amber orange medicine bottles that'd splayed out their tiny contents across the floor.

Caplets and capsules that our mom took daily for extreme arthritic pain, not pills for her daughter to swallow all at once.

Emotion/Words

I didn't say anything else after I finished the poem at her funeral. Just walked away from the podium, through the center aisle, and out to the limousine driver. I asked him to take me home.

Everyone else was stock-still and shell-shocked.

Together/Words

WebMD.com: *Vanishing twin syndrome is a condition in which one of two fetuses disappears sometime during the first 12 weeks of a pregnancy.*

Early in a multiple pregnancy, it is possible for a woman to miscarry one fetus and to notice some vaginal bleeding or to notice nothing unusual. Sometimes the embryo or fetus is reabsorbed by the mother's body.

Vanishing twin syndrome may be caused by too little of the hormone that supports pregnancy (human chorionic gonadotropin, or hCG). It does not appear to harm the mother or the surviving twin.

Identical/Secret

When you're someone's twin, your skin expects you to be like them.

Jenifer/Secret

We were both at the same Amanda Ghost concert toward the end of junior year. At Club Laga in Oakland. I waited for hours before the show to be first in line, meet the band, and get a spot right against the stage.

Jenifer must've showed up late. I kept looking behind me and never saw her.

I held my bladder through the opening band. Nudged through the crowd, hurried to the restroom. But someone grabbed the door, kept me from closing it.

It was Jenifer. She barged in, shut the door behind her, and shoved her little body up against it. *I'm only going to say this once, and I'm only going to say it to you, so you better keep your mouth shut.*

I looked around us at those lipstick red walls, covered in graffiti tags and memento concert dates. So this was the place where we were going to catch up after barely seeing each other for weeks.

I don't want any of that Lifetime movie crap, she said.

Okay, sure, whatever, Jenifer, I said.

The reason I stopped seeing Mike was because once he didn't stop, she said. *And if you really want to know, he didn't go easier, either. He didn't listen, he didn't care, and he didn't let go before I blacked out.*

I started crying, deaf to the fifteen-foot speakers.

Stop the waterworks, Josh, she said. *There isn't always a reason why people do things to each other.*

Emotion/Memory

When you outlive your twin, your face is always covered in hers.

Alone/Alone

Emily Dickinson:

...

*Touch Liberty - then know no more -
But Noon, and Paradise -
The Soul's retaken moments -
When, Felon led along,*

*With shackles on the plumed feet,
And staples, in the song,
The Horror welcomes her, again,
These, are not brayed of Tongue -*