

Little Sister

Louise takes one look in the mirror and sits back on the floor, she can't even look at herself without feeling shame. She's woken by a knock at her door. For one instant there is no fear, then the events of the previous night tear her apart, all over again. She sits bolt upright, jumps away from the door and pulls her dressing gown tighter around her. Fearing who is on the other side of the door,

"Morning sleepyhead," Clare calls through the door. "Are you ready?"

Shit. Louise's body relaxes on hearing Clare's voice, but she had forgotten all about her normal Saturday morning yoga. She and Clare always go together, but ... she can't. She can't face the thought of seeing anyone, or talking to anyone. Not today, maybe not ever. She's wondering if she will ever have a normal routine again.

Clare tries the door, which for the first time in five years is locked. "Louise, are you ok?"

"I'm fine, sorry. I've got a headache. I must have drunk too much last night. Apologise to Michelle for me."

"Ok. Jenny and I are leaving now, you have the house to yourself. Do you want me to swing by the bakery on the way back? It will help with the hangover." Clare shouts as she makes her way down the stairs.

"Sure." Louise feels sick at the thought of eating, she is not sure a blueberry muffin is going to be able to fix this. She can't help but wonder, if Jenny hadn't stayed over last night would she now be heading to yoga? Would she feel normal? Would her life still be the same as when she put her head on the pillow, and went to sleep, last night?

She stares at the photos on the wall of her family and friends. The light dances into the room through her summer curtains and highlights the pictures, normally a sight that brings her joy. Today, she can barely stand to look at all. She doesn't need to look, to know who will be gazing back at her. But she looks anyway, at the pictures of her and Brian, both of them smiling, hugging, laughing. She doesn't recognise either of those people anymore.

She wants to forget, but her mind won't let her. Every time she closes her eyes the night replays all over again. The pain just gets worse, as a little bit more of her dies at each memory. As much as it breaks her, she begins looking for clues, looking at her behaviour, trying to figure out if it was something that she did. Was it something that she said? She can't work out how someone she trusted with her life, could be the one to destroy it.

It was three years ago, on the first of what would become the traditional Friday night after-work drinks, that she had been introduced to Brian. He was thirty-one, a few years older than

Deleted: She

Deleted: goes back to bed

Commented [SH1]: Needs rewording, as she cannot look in the mirror before she's woken up?

Deleted: is not yet ready to face the world.

Deleted: led

Deleted: for yoga

Deleted:

Deleted: routine

Deleted: ,

Deleted: s

Formatted: Tab stops: Not at 1 cm

Deleted: Lost in thought, she hears

Deleted: y

Deleted: ¶

Deleted: her tone starting to show her concern.

Deleted: Just feeling a bit sick, I think I'll give yoga a miss today, have fun though

Deleted: she says in a forced tone of happiness, trying to hold herself together.

Deleted: &

Deleted: , I'll go to your favourite bakery on the way back, a blueberry muffin will make you feel better,

Deleted: and a cup of tea

Deleted: problem

Deleted: Lying in bed, in a room she knows like the back of her hand, s...

Deleted: looks

Deleted: doesn't even notice

Deleted: Her eyes land on a picture of her and Brian, on one of their previous adventures. She can't

Deleted: Instead she starts to replay the night again.

Deleted: L

Deleted: She can't figure out why everything had to change.

Deleted: It started out like every other Friday had for the past 3 years since starting her dream job in one of the major radio stations in London. She couldn't believe her luck.

Deleted: ,

Deleted:

Deleted: first night that she met

Deleted:

Deleted: ,

Deleted: h

Deleted: a few years older than Louise at

Deleted: 31

Louise. He was kind, and she had to admit, attractive. They'd had one too many that first night, and ended up kissing, a drunken decision, they both regretted, and laughed about in the years following.

He'd become a good friend, and after a few months, even began sleeping on her living room sofa after nights out, as he lived on the other side of town, and could never face the commute back late at night.

Since their drunken kiss she had never thought of him in that way. In fact, their relationship had evolved into a special sort of platonic closeness that was more like having an older brother she actually liked. She told him this once and he had laughed and forevermore insisted on calling her 'little sister'.

The night before had started like every other Friday night. They'd been drinking with colleagues, and Brian had yet again come to the rescue when some guy didn't know when to give up. It was an uncomfortable few minutes, Louise trying to edge away while a much older man chatted her up.

"I'm really not interested in another drink, thanks," said Louise.

"Oh, come on," the man slurred. "These younger men don't know how to treat a lady. Let me show you what it's like to be with a real man."

A hand landed on the older man's shoulder. "I do believe, the lady said no." At 6'3, and muscular from years of playing rugby, Brian could be quite intimidating.

"I'm sorry," stammered the man, "I didn't realise she was taken."

Brian stared at him with no hint of a smile. "Well, now you do." Looking over to the barman, he nodded, "Rob over there is going to call you a taxi, I suggest you get in it."

The man walked away sheepishly, without so much as a glance back.

Brian turned to Louise, a huge smile on his face. "You really do attract the best men."

Louise laughed. "Tell me about it, story of my life."

Their friends came back from the smoking area and seeing the laughter, Jenny asked, "What did we miss?"

Louise gave a self-deprecating laugh, "Just Brian coming to my rescue, yet again."

Jenny smiled, and shook her head. "It's my round guys, who's in?" All hands went up.

A couple of hours later and the group had gotten progressively drunker and merrier. Louise was enjoying herself, but she knew she was going to have to call it a night soon, as she had to get up for yoga. As she hauled herself up to start saying goodbye, Brian asked if he could stay at her place like usual.

Deleted: but h

Deleted: and...and she had to admit, attractive. They'd had one too many that first night, and ended up drunkenly

Deleted: that

Deleted: . Something they both

Deleted:

Deleted: of hers

Deleted:

Deleted: regularly sleeping on the ...ofa in her living room

Deleted: at

Deleted: first

Deleted: ...I

Deleted: that

Deleted: changed so much that she always referred to him as her big brother, and he'd refer to...her as his...'little sister'. Something changed that night though.

Deleted: had for the past three years

Deleted: as normal. ...rian had yet again come to the rescue when some guy didn't know when to give up. It was an uncomfortable few minutes, when ...ouise trying to edge away while a much older man was being ...hatted up by a much older, drunker man

Deleted: I have one already

Deleted: he...slurred. "you don't want to be with t

Deleted: t

Deleted: , l

Deleted: ...could be quite intimidating at 6'3 with his

Deleted: ¶

Deleted: ¶

Deleted: ¶

Deleted: kwards

Deleted: ,

Deleted: to wait for his taxi.

Deleted: know how to

Deleted: She laughed as she said

Deleted: L...ughed. ¶

Deleted:

Deleted:

Commented [SH2]: Consider re-wording, using another

Deleted: ed harder

Deleted: she said. ...ll hands went up, the group continued

Deleted:

Deleted: It was getting late and Louise had to call it a night

Deleted:

Commented [H3]: I'm a little unsure about this one! It

Deleted: ¶

“Sure, I know you hate that commute.” Louise replied, completely forgetting that Clare had a friend staying that night. They said their goodnights, though the rest of their friends were too busy dancing and hollering to pay much attention. Louise was glad to be going home.

It was only when they were off the train and walking up her street when Louise remembered that Clare had a friend staying. “Crap, I forgot, the sofa bed is in use tonight.”

Brian laughed, and slung an arm around her shoulders, in his way that always made her feel safe. “All good, little sister. I’ll just sleep in your bed, if you’re ok with that?”

She smiled easily. “Sure, just don’t snore, all right? I’m up early.”

They got back to the house and quietly made their way through the living room, so as not to wake Clare’s guest. Louise made her way to the bathroom to get changed in private. She found Brian already comfortable in bed when she returned to her room. They stayed up chatting for a little but Louise had to get some sleep.

“Goodnight Brian, remember no snoring!”

They both laughed.

“Goodnight Louise.”

Louise turned onto her stomach, her favourite sleeping position, and soon drifted off.

At first she didn’t know what had woken her. She always slept heavily after a few glasses of wine, but even as she struggled to pull herself out of the fog, she knew something was wrong. She felt panicky, she couldn’t breathe, it was dark, she couldn’t see, but she couldn’t move either, something was pressing her down into the mattress, a heavy weight, a person’s weight. Brian’s weight.

“Brian. No. What are you doing? Stop. Please stop,” she managed to gasp.

His voice punctured the darkness, right above her ear. “You know this is what you want, you’ve always wanted me.”

Louise barely recognised his voice, it was Brian, but it wasn’t the Brian she knew. Her wrists felt like they were clamped in a vice, she couldn’t move any part of her body. She had no control.

“Please, Brian, I’m begging you. Stop. This isn’t what I want.” She could feel his breath on her neck as he got closer to her, twisting her face toward his own. She wanted to scream but she couldn’t, she was locked inside herself, unable to stop what was happening.

Deleted: at this time

Deleted: said

Deleted: the rest

Deleted: looked like they were in for a big night

Deleted: ,

Deleted: missing it

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm

Deleted: Once they were nearly home, Louise suddenly remembered about Clare’s friend.

Deleted: ¶

Deleted: his drunken laugh, and smiled that familiar smile that always

Deleted: ¶

Deleted: ,

Deleted: ¶

Commented [H4]: New para indent?

Commented [EC5R4]: I feel like it is the start of a new section which is why I went with a space instead of an indent

Deleted: to

Deleted: not

Deleted: Finding

Deleted: Once she returned to her room he was already comfortable in bed.

Deleted:

Deleted: She then turned

Deleted: .

Deleted: ,

Deleted: All the wine had made her fall into a heavy sleep, but she woke in the night and something wasn’t right, it was too dark to see, her body felt heavy, she was struggling to breathe. Panic started to engulf her. She needed help, she wondered where Brian was, then suddenly realised the weight she felt pressing down on her, was him. ¶

Deleted: said

Deleted: though her tears.

Deleted: ¶

Deleted: ,

“You knew the sofa was taken, you wanted me in your bed,” he snarled, his fingers pressing into her cheeks, as his hand covered her mouth, making it impossible for her to scream, even if she could. She didn’t recognise the eyes she was looking into, they sent a cold shiver of fear running through her entire being. Her tears on his hand seemed to enrage him further. Pushing her face into the bed with such force she thought her neck was about to snap, he got off the bed and grabbed his clothes.

“You are such a god damn tease.”

Louise didn’t recognise the man that just left, the anger within him was so palpable it was coming off him in waves, threatening to engulf her. She scrambled from the bed as soon as the shock wore off, fumbling with the lock on the door and turning it. She didn’t feel any safer. She didn’t have the strength to get back in bed, she sat by the door for hours, barely noticing the cold, which sent shivers running up and down her body. All she could think about was the betrayal she felt. Tears silently dripped down her cheeks, and onto her neck. She cursed herself for letting him sleep in her bed, wishing she could undo the past few hours, wishing she hadn’t gone out, wishing she hadn’t drunk so much. Wishing she had just told him to go home. But, of course, she never would have done that, would she? Because she trusted him, with her life,

Shortly after, Clare left. Louise’s phone beeps. She grabs it and checks the message, it’s from Brian. “I’m sorry, I don’t know what came over me, it must have been the drink. I’m so sorry, can we please forget about this? Can you please forgive me? We can sort this out, I know we can.”

Her stomach knots into a tight ball of rage, she throws her phone at the wall, reaches for the bin beside her desk and empties the contents of her stomach into it, as the previous night keeps replaying over and over in her head. It’s like her body is rejecting the message, rejecting the thought of ever forgiving him, of ever forgetting.

She’d spent most of the night blaming herself. But that text changed something within her. She started instead to realise it wasn’t her fault. They were friends. She was meant to be safe with him. She was asleep, she couldn’t have consented. It wasn’t her fault.

She goes to the bed and starts ripping the sheets off, she doesn’t want any more reminders. She puts them in a heap on the floor of her room, along with the pyjamas she was wearing last night.

She catches sight of herself in the mirror. Her normally immaculate hair is all over the place, her eyes are puffy, and Jack her usual sparkle. Even her skin has taken on a different

Deleted: The tears running onto

Deleted: Brian stopped what he was doing.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.5 cm

Deleted: “I’m sorry, I thought this was what you wanted. I thought you wanted me too,” he said. ¶
“Get. Out. Now.” she said with the last bit of strength she had. ¶
“I’m so sorry,” he said as he left.

Deleted: ¶

Deleted:

Deleted: that

Deleted: ing

Deleted: followed him to the door and locked it, hoping that she would feel safe. She didn’t. She felt anger that he could do that, she was angry with herself for letting him sleep in her bed. She lay there all night, wishing she had done things differently, wishing she hadn’t gone out, wishing she hadn’t drunk so much, wishing she’d told him to go home.

Moved down [1]: She’d spent most of the night blaming herself. But this morning she found a little bit of strength from somewhere deep inside herself. She started instead to realise it wasn’t her fault. They were friends. She was meant

Deleted: ¶

Commented [SH7]: Or reword to; ‘Shortly after Clare ...

Deleted: Her

Deleted: ed

Deleted: bed

Deleted: ed

Deleted: was

Deleted: ted

Deleted: ew

Deleted: ed

Deleted: couldn’t stop

Deleted: being sick

Deleted: last night

Deleted: t

Deleted: pt

Deleted: was

Deleted: wa

Deleted: was

Moved (insertion) [1]

Deleted: is morning she found a little bit of strength from ...

Deleted: went

Deleted: ed

Deleted: idn’t

Deleted: ught

Deleted: drained of her normal exuberance

tone, it too looks like it has been drained of life. Not something that you think is possible unless death has occurred. There's a part of her that wishes it had, that she was. This realisation makes her reach for the bin again.

There was a tentative knock at the door. Clare was back from the yoga class.

"Louise, open up, I know you're not OK, just let me in. Please."

Unsteadily, Louise made her way to the door and unlocked it.

Clare had never seen Louise like this, she looked like a shell of her former self. "Oh,

Louise. Come here. I know something happened. I'm here for you," she said.

Louise knew she was barely holding it together, but somehow, seeing Clare's kind, worried face, hearing the soft, gentle concern in her voice when she spoke, was all it took for her to crumble.

She just cried as Clare hugged her. Unable to speak for a long time, she allowed herself to be guided back to the bed, to be wrapped in a blanket and Clare's embrace once again. She could feel Clare looking around the room, knowing she was seeing evidence of Louise's meltdown, the broken phone on the floor, the pile of sheets in the corner.

Finally, Louise spoke. "I need your phone."

Clare handed her the phone, no questions asked. Louise took a deep, slow breath, knowing that nothing would ever be the same again, that she would never be the same again. Her hands were shaking as she dialled, She caught Clare's eye, as a woman's voice answered,

Before she had finished speaking, Louise interrupted,

"I'd like to report a rape."

Deleted: .

Deleted: sick once again

Deleted: yet

Commented [SH8]: Deleted sentence not needed. Or insert at beginning of line; 'Between the tears and the throwing up, Louise heard a tentative knock at the door.'

Deleted: , between the tears and the throwing up Louise heard her at the door.

Deleted: open this door now

Deleted: She

Deleted: unsteadily

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm

Deleted: ¶

Deleted: She helped Louise off the floor and to her bed, wrapping her in a blanket.

Deleted: ¶

Deleted: , I've seen you when you're sick, this isn't that. Please Louise you can tell me anything, I'm here for you,

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm, Line spacing: 1.5 lines

Deleted: She

Deleted: as she opened the door

Deleted: Louise

Deleted: ¶

Deleted: Louise

Commented [IA9]: As we're still with Louise here, she might be a bit harsher on herself, hence calling a normal emotional response a meltdown.

Deleted: . Clare took in the room, it seemed different, she spotted Louise's phone broken on the floor. She didn't say anything else, she just hugged her friend and wiped her tears.

Deleted: Louise just cried as Clare hugged her. Unable to speak for a long time. Clare took in the room, it seemed different, she spotted Louise's phone broken on the floor. She didn't say anything else, she just hugged her friend and wiped her tears.¶

Deleted: inhaled

Deleted: their lives

Deleted: nev

Deleted: ,

Deleted: she

Deleted: looked

Deleted: at

Deleted: the call

Deleted: .

Deleted: ,

Commented [SH10]: Check use of tense on this last section, as it has changed from present, to past. I.e., shoul(...