We are standing in the kitchen, bare feet on this wooden floor that screams cold in such overbearing tones. You are facing me, one face masked in shadows falling from the cupboards, and another face masked in tears. I’ve never seen you like this before. Never with questions. Never asking. Never me.

“Have I been a good sister to you?” you say, and the silence is deafening because as always, I do not know what to say.

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As anyone who has ever had a sister knows, they’re impossible to forget. Dictionary definitions—they hardly compare to what being a sister truly means. Being a sister is not merely a title, but a responsibility…is not merely a birthright, but a privilege.

Of sisters, I have two. I have had them for all my life, and this only makes it harder when looking back, to determine which memories belong to me, and which to them. The threads that tie us together are as thin, as invisible, and yet as strong as the strands of life a spider weaves behind her. So delicate, and yet along these threads, we have managed to hang memories of our lives and pieces of ourselves, so that we often melt together and, at times, become one another.

In my book of definitions, you would find simplicity: sisters—what I call a bond incomparable.

***

Sisters look the same.

“I enjoyed your talk today, Noelle!”

“Oh, sorry. I’m Rachel, but I’ll tell her.”

You would think that after living in the same ward for ten years, people would be able to distinguish between the two of us, you being three years my elder. But no. The same thing happens at school because it
doesn’t help that you were known, and that I had at least five of the same teachers you did. It wasn’t long before Noelle became my second name.

But to most people, we are the same. Even when I am 18 and you are 21, we are two nearly identical Asian sisters; we both have dark, raven-black hair (frequently forgotten is the fact that mine is a mushroom cloud, while yours is a bit tamer); we both have glasses; we both have miniscule eyes and almost nonexistent noses. To most people, we are the same.

Yet, in my eyes, they could not be more wrong. Because in my eyes, you are not at all what they see.

In my eyes, you are my older sister. You are wiser, have always been. While you might be thought of as tiny, you have enough strength in you, enough wit and anger to hurt anyone who dares question you. I know this because I have done it and because I have been hurt.

***

Sisters are there for each other.

On my first day of middle school, terrified as I was, you were there for me. You didn’t sit beside me on the bus by any means, but when you got off, you let me follow you to my classroom while you walked ahead of me with a friend, so as not to be seen with a lowly 6th grader.

***

Sisters know the truth.

I would have been fond of bus rides home. They meant freedom for the day, and it was ever so warm, with the cracking brown seats that I loved to run my fingers over, finding in them wrinkles and playful variations of texture. The sun would shine out smiling, the windows would be pulled down, and my hair would spin around me as our massive ride would reach amazingly high speeds of 40 miles per hour.

But I was shy. The best part of these rides, if there was one, was that I could be alone in my own mind, untouched. This contrasted with your idea of a bus ride, however, and it nearly became tradition that at the end of each ride, that loud and obnoxious boy (who you said was not your friend) would always start calling you “pechudna” and oftentimes, when you would tell him to be quiet or that he was stupid, he would try to get me to say it too.
Not that I really cared either way; you were a genius to me, even though you hated that name. How could you keep denying this? You would get straight A’s in all your classes throughout high school, while I would get two B’s. You would at one time be ranked fourth in your class of over 900 people, while the highest I ever ranked was 37th. You, on the other hand, would rank in national accounting competitions without even studying and be president of National Honors Society—a club that I could not even enter with only a 93.88 GPA. To me, you were a genius, and even though on these daily bus rides I never said a thing, for once, I knew what you did not.

***

Sisters are not truly separated by 1000+ miles.

You went off to BYU, so far away. You didn’t cry, not like Sara when she left. You were strong like that, I suppose, independent. It felt pleasant not to be needed by you and to know that you would never think of me.

Only a few months later though, the family moved from our glorious home of ten years in Lawrenceville, Georgia, to a rather foreign, podunk little place called Meridian, Idaho. You were disgusted that we were going to be closer to you, thinking we were following you around, and you always complained that you never got to go home to Georgia for Christmas. I suppose you didn’t realize that none of us would.

***

Sisters define each other.

Whereas in Georgia, I was known by your accomplishments, for the first time, in Idaho, I was known by mine. You were no longer the adjective that described who I was because no one knew who you were; for the first time, I was no longer known as Sara’s Sister, or more commonly, Noelle’s Sister. For the first time, I was Me without restrictions, and for the first time, that was fine.

For the first time, I was free from teachers’ expectations that I be genius, from peers’ expectations that I be witty, funny, kind. For the first time, I was Rachel, and that meant something.

***

Sisters can be friends.
You called yourself anti-social, and I never really understood why. You had friends; I ran into you every once in a while at school in the hallways, and there would be at least ten people sitting around you, you stuffed comfortably in the midst of all of them. And how would you explain why, when it was the school’s pick-a-twin day, you didn’t have just one twin, but 15 others? After all, when you called one night to tell us you were named Prom Queen, I’m sure my immediate thoughts were—yep, definitely anti-social.

But sometime in the summertime, as I ventured forward into lands unknown, into a place far from home and full of strangers, we became friends. And suddenly I realized that all along, we were the same; two people in search of friendship, love, understanding. And that summertime, we both gave it to each other, exchanged love in such a land unknown, far from home and full of strangers.

***

Sisters share good things with each other.

When my oldest sister somehow picked up a copy of Jodi Picoult’s newest book, she made sure you got a copy as well. And a good thing, because otherwise I never would have picked it up, and we never would have known. My Sister’s Keeper became more than a simple book to all of us because we understood it. It made sense then, when the two of us went to Target one day nearing Christmas, and we decided to buy three copies, one for the each of us.

The cover was so simple, the author’s name stretched out across the top in plain bold, white letters, with a light blue banner behind it. Below were two sisters, so obviously sisters, sisters leaning against one another, as sisters are wont to do. But there was a problem, something that was simply wrong—for one of the sisters was falling, and the other only kept her stance, straight and tall.

***

Sisters learn from each other.

The best thing about older sisters is that they tread the paths ahead of you and are scratched by the newer, fresher brambles and thorns, becoming knowledgeable enough to warn you beforehand: I came to BYU frantic and lost, worse than I had ever been in my life. Angry, scared, meandering between the lines of child and adult—you were the one who helped me through these times, far more than any friend I had back home or any
miraculous chocolate bar I could buy at the Creamery on Ninth. You knew what it was like already, and you understood. And so for the first time in my life, I let myself fall upon you completely for support—and you raised me up, far greater than any other had.

***

Sisters are sisters.

We are who we are, separate from one another, yet made together a part of each other, all at the same time. You are you, with your brilliance, logic, independence—and I am me, with my ambiguity, dedication, and thoughtfulness. Hang our memories upon this thin line that is our blood, that is our connection, and you will find beauty and tenderness, flawed yet perfected. You will find that this line extends farther than either of us can see, that together we have breached eternity.

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We are standing in the kitchen, bare feet on this wooden floor that screams cold in such overbearing tones. You are facing me, one face half masked in shadows falling from the cupboards, and another face masked in tears. I’ve never seen you like this before. Never with questions. Never human like this. Never so fragile in your fear of failure and of defeat.

“Have I been a good sister to you?” you say, and the silence is deafening until I realize— you are my sister, neither good nor bad. Simply my sister, and I love you.