

“Irenneeee, fooodddd,” my sister whined as she tugged on the hem of my plaid, satin skirt.
“Food, food, foooddd.”

“I’m doing my homework,” I brushed her off as I finished another SAT reading comprehension problem. “Go take a nap or something.”

Laura started to poke me on the shoulder. “Foooddd?” she softly pled and pointed to the tray of half-empty Oreos next to me.

“Not now, I’m busy!” I angrily spun around and snapped at her.

Laura stuck out her tongue at me. “Meanie!” she shouted as she stormed off. I rolled my eyes as I reached for more of the crème-stuffed chocolate treats.

Now, this may seem like the usual baby-sister and teenage-sister quarrel, but trust me, it’s not. I might have left out one little detail.

Laura’s 21 years old.

Yes, that’s right. She’s 21, old enough to drink. She was born 3 years before me on October 31, 1992. Mother still despises Halloween, and blames herself for giving birth to a blemish within the picture-perfect Savoy family, Manhattan social royalty.

Mother had told me that the moment Laura came out of the womb, she could feel something was wrong. Laura’s eyes didn’t follow any movement, and her fingers couldn’t grab onto anything. The moment the doctor confirmed that Laura was mentally retarded was the moment that Mother lost interest in her.

“Zip me up, darling?” Mother asked as she descended the marble staircase.

“Another party?” I asked her, already knowing the answer. She was hoisting up a long, strapless, and shimmery red gown over her peep-toe black heels, and her strawberry blond hair was swept into an elegant twist bun. I grabbed onto the zipper and it effortlessly glided up.

“Charity gala, for your information,” she corrected. “Do you want to go?”

It didn’t take me much thought to answer her. “It’s ok, I’ll stay home tonight. I should work out and study more. SATs are next week,” I sighed. “I don’t remember an invitation coming in the mail. What charity is it? You never mentioned anything...”

“Did you try the new yoga routine I told you about? It’s supposed to make you drop 10 pounds in a month,” she chirped as she started stepping out the door. “And lay off the Oreos!”

“Oh... ok. Wait, what about Laura?” I asked her, and her bright expression slightly saddened.

“Oh, don’t worry about her, hun. Just enjoy your evening!”

“Ok. But where’s this gala? Who’s going? Where’s the invitation?” I questioned her, but Mother skated by the questions.

“Silly little details. I’ll be back before midnight!” She pranced towards the door and left the house.

“Laura, dinner!” I shouted up the stairs.

“Food!” she gleefully yelled back as she skipped towards me. “Yum!” She eagerly pulled up a chair and patiently waited for me like a loyal golden retriever. I placed dinner- Fettuccine Alfredo with chicken and peas- and a fork in front of her, and she wasted no time digging in. That is, digging in with her hands. The silver fork was left untouched, and looking at her now, she seemed more like a gorilla than a human being. Well, admittedly prettier than a gorilla. What Laura lacked in IQ points she made up for in her looks. Her gray eyes with the subtlest tint of blue, while lacking that spark of intellect, were absolutely stunning, and her light brown lashes were naturally curled 24/7. Every time she smiled (which was a lot because she laughed at everything), she lit up the entire room. Her hair was a cascade of shiny honey-blonde waves that came all the way down to her enviably miniscule waist. Laura was blessed with Mother’s figure, and was at least 5 sizes smaller than I am. Mother would never let Laura go shopping at Barney’s, so I was the one who had to take her to buy new clothes. When I zipped her up in the fitting room, the zipper flawlessly skated right up with a crisp *zzzippp*, a sound that would never come from my dressing room.

Now, I made up for my body with my intellect. I would say I was quite smart, definitely above average at least, and with the highest GPA in my grade and academic trophies lining my walls, I think I’m right. But still, I would be lying if I said I wasn’t jealous of her natural beauty. I had similar eyes, except mine seemed cloudy and murky without that subtle tint of blue, and my eyelashes went straight down. We shared the same hair color, but mine was stick straight and no matter how many hair products I tried, it never shined like Laura’s. And don’t even get me started on our weight. She was probably less than 100 pounds, and me... well, let’s just say I should lay off the junk food.

“Ok, it’s time for bed now,” I told Laura. “I’m getting sleepy, too.” I took her hand and led her up the staircase. Laura tried to turn the doorknob to our room, but her hands didn’t know which way to twist.

“Here, I’ll get it.” I opened the door and helped her into her pajamas, making sure her arms went through the right hole. As soon as we were done, Laura jumped onto her bed. “Night!” she chirped.

Irene’s mother barged into the room. “Hi, hi, sorry I’m late, I couldn’t get out of the house,” she apologized to the woman staring at her.

“Oh, um, hi, Ms. Savoy,” the woman greeted her. “You’re a few minutes early.”

“Please, please, don’t be so formal. Call me MS! You never know if there are paparazzi around,” she winked. “So, here’s my invitation.” She took out a small, white card and handed it to the woman with a wrist flip.

The woman took a brief look at the card, and nodded. “Well, looks like you have the right invitation. But before you go in, would you mind me interviewing you? Just for a couple of minutes?”

“Why, of course not!” Irene’s mother perched on a chair, straightening her ruby dress and flipping her hair off her shoulder. “What would the inquiring public like to know?”

The woman took out a notepad. “Well, I-”

“Oh, this is completely off-the-record, by the way, but, I’ve been having some problems with my daughter lately,” Irene’s mother leaned towards the woman. “You columnists always like this type of dirt.”

“Oh, what kinds of problems?” the woman seemed interested.

“Well, this is off-the-record, but she has these mental issues. She cooks herself two dinners and eats them both, talks to herself, and buys clothes that are way too small for her. She’s become clingy; she asks a billion questions before she even lets me leave the house,” Irene’s mother divulged. “Oh, and, again, completely off-the-record, but I feel like she’s crazy. She talks to this girl, Laura, about me. But there is no Laura.”

“Are you sure? Maybe she’s a friend from school.”

“I think I would know if I gave birth to a second daughter.”

The woman kept on jotting everything down. “Well, maybe I could see your daughter some time, maybe talk about what’s bothering her,” she suggested. “Would you like that, MS?”

“I would love that! She’s been very worrisome lately. How would you help, though?”

“Oh, I know a renowned psychiatrist who’s very good at her job. Same time next week? Bring your daughter this time.”

“Oh, sure, sure! Thank you, you’ve been very helpful for an interviewer!”

“Well, thank you. Being helpful is part of my job... I mean being helpful to the public,” she took a look at her notes. “Anyway, from my knowledge, imaginary friends are a very common symptom.”

“Really? Then your psychiatrist friend can help her, right? She can make Laura disappear?”

“Well, I’m sure she’ll do her best, but I’m not certain Laura will completely disappear. After all, this sort of thing runs in families. It’s genetic.”

“Oh, it must be that silly father of hers. He was always a little off, even while I was married to him. Always too concerned about where I was.”

The woman wrote more down on her notepad. “Well, I’ll... I mean, the psychiatrist will discuss this with her later. Same time next week, MS.”

“Yes, yes, of course! I had a marvelous time at the party. I expect that this interview will be put to good use,” Irene’s mother strutted to the door and blew a kiss as if she were on a red carpet. “Ta-ta!”