

"Marley"

Kathryn Segner

I walked down the church aisle with a single white rose in my hands. My father was at my side, guiding me towards the front of the sanctuary. In the first pew sat my teary-eyed mother, praying to the Lord to help her let go. She couldn't hold on to her youngest daughter forever, try as she might.

A preacher stood at a podium, ready to do another routine service. He would attempt to personalize it, to bring out the heart of the strangers he was praying over, but he would disappoint. He didn't know Marley, and he didn't know me, so he would fail.

As I made my way past rows of turned heads and familiar faces, my mind was unnaturally numb, unable to process the event at hand. The emotions I was feeling were so far beyond any I had ever felt before. Only one sentence could be strung together in my head, and as such was repeating over and over in an unbelieving, monotonous voice. *I'm actually here, this is actually happening.*

When we got to the front of the church, my father abandoned me, leaving me to absorb the moment as best as I could. I stared at Marley's youthful face, at brown curls that framed tan freckles and blue eyes.

Those same blue eyes had a glossy effect, like they were glazed over. They saw without seeing, and would no longer light up with laughter, or swim with heartbroken tears. An organist started playing a mournful tune, and I gently laid the rose on Marley's folded arms. I retreated back to my parents as the organist broke off.

The preacher began the funeral of my little sister, Marley.

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Last March I had the flu. I would lay in my parent's bed all day and watch *Scooby Doo* reruns. Every half hour--or so it seemed--a wave of nausea would overtake me and I would dash to the bathroom across the hall, just making it to the toilet before I'd start heaving.

I would wretch, and when my stomach had nothing more to

give, I would gag, spitting out vomit-tinted saliva. I'd hold my stomach with one hand, and lean exhaustingly against the toilet with the other, praying for it to stop, just stop. Sometimes I'd sit there for ten minutes, sobbing, begging for it to be over. Yet a small part of me was dreading that moment.

I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, and if I had to hear "ruh-roh" one more time, I might just scream. That's what I had to look forward to.

Just then, as though set on an invisible time, my queasiness would diminish and a small portion of my strength would return. I'd slowly stand up, using the toilet to steady myself, and flush the puke away. After rinsing out my mouth, I'd drag myself back to bed, where I would find that against the TV schedule, *Tom and Jerry* would be playing, saving me from a depressing boredom.

Until, of course, it all happened again, a half hour later.

As I walked to my room after the funeral, I couldn't help thinking that the way I was feeling just then was a lot like having the flu. All I wanted to do was die.

Except, there was one, very big difference between the two: the flu lasted two days then was gone. The loss of Marley, the feeling of emptiness and desperation, I wasn't sure that would ever leave.

Not even looking, I grabbed random clothes from my dresser and went to my bathroom. Whenever I was upset I would take a shower. They would sometimes last an hour, sometimes longer, and I always felt better afterward. But I didn't have high hopes for this one.

As I pulled the shower curtain back and stepped inside, I was pelted by small jets of frigid water, ice against my pale skin. I didn't turn the handle to make it warmer. My heart was cold and my mind was numb; why bother making my body any different?

A shiver ran up my spine as I held my face under the pouring liquid, which was faithfully unrelenting. It was only then that I let myself cry. I opened my mouth slightly and the bitter, salty taste of tears caressed my tongue. It was a taste I would come to savor.

After mindlessly washing my hair, I left the shower and wrapped my towel around myself. A look at the mirror told me that the mascara and eyeliner I was wearing at the funeral was not waterproof; it had smeared under my eyes and down my cheeks, giving me the look of an orphaned waif, pathetically clutching my towel to my chest.

I looked into my soulless eyes and a wave of hopelessness washed over me. I sank to my knees, and bile rose in my throat. Without the strength or will to swallow it down, I simply spit it into the toilet, tears streaming down my face, dripping off my chin.

I prayed and begged it would end, but I knew it wouldn't be over, and I wasn't sure I could handle facing it.

It was like having the flu. All I wanted to do was die.