

Manaly Talukdar

Persona Switch

It was nearly impossible to be myself around her- my sister. Alice was painfully difficult to comprehend, at least that's what I could definitively say about the shifts in her temperaments. It was neither predictable nor comprehensible. I've been stuck questioning my actions, analytically dissecting my moves ('where did I go wrong? did I say something stupid?') when she soured at the flick of a switch. One moment she'll gleefully savour in blueberry puddings, and the next moment curse the same dessert for its wrong texture or its extreme sweetness. Literally shoving the plate aside like it was her arch-nemesis. She had the power to be both kind and yet cruel, absolutely judgmental and yet empathetic. It's like she was a coin with two sides marked in different languages—an entity you couldn't make sense of, compelling me to walk on broken glass on multiple occasions. Simultaneously, I had to be careful while speaking up my mind, or else I wouldn't have much choice but endure her 'I am always misunderstood' victim narrative for an entire day.

I remember the time Alice was ecstatic to invite me for a weekend getaway with her friends— her group of tight-knit friends. Enthusiastically persuading me to find an excuse for why I wouldn't be able to complete one of the semester's assignments that very weekend. To be fair, the teacher had allotted a strictly limited timeframe to research on 'the causes of changing societal norms' (though at the least giving us leniency for choosing any topic related to the contemporary times). If a proper paper was to be done on it, a minimum of a few weeks was a necessary requirement.

'Your teacher is an asshole. If he was serious about giving good grades, he wouldn't set petty traps just to find a way to throw his frustration on your batch.' Alice reasoned.

'That's true.' I agreed. Her final attempt to lure me in was when she tried to tempt me with the idea of delicious food, great wine, and nonetheless a good time. 'Making memories, that's what's life is all about.' Alice preached. I was a gullible human being, what else could be expected? I tried to find a common ground during our negotiations. The age difference of ten years factored in as well. Most of the time, I had to accept her opinions and choices for what they were cause the seniority in age embedded a belief in my mind that she knew better. A lingering belief that she has experienced more in life, that she has dealt with more complicated situations compared to an undergraduate.

The travel to her beach house took less than an hour. As I stepped out of my four-wheeler, I saw her friends basking in the scorching sun on the spacious balcony situated adjacent to the entrance, tanning their skin cause why not follow the trend? Whereas Alice was inside setting the table for lunch. The mahogany surface held platters of varieties of meat, baked mushroom excessively topped with parmesan cheese, rice and a basket of flatbread.

'Great! You're on time! Lunch is almost ready.' Alice said in a hyper tone. 'Let me call Jen, Triss, and Ree.'

The scent of the food wafted through the dining hall but it was no antidote for my nausea. I was vulnerable to motion sickness, specially when driving downhill. 'I can't eat now. I lost my appetite on my way here.' I said in exhaustion.

'That's alright. Motion sickness sucks, big time. I will keep your share in the fridge. Just microwave it later.' She genuinely smiled while offering me a glass of lemon shot sprinkled with sea salt to cut through the queasiness and a fluffed up pillow to lie down on the couch. I could hear giggling and chitchats in the background for which I used a sofa cushion to cover my face as I turned to the side— my back facing their seating area. Tired as I was, I dozed off until the sun was descending in the horizon, the sky painted in pale tint of orange.

As I stretched out from a pleasant siesta, I found myself alone in the living room. They were all out on the beach, playing volleyball. Alice was happy being a spectator and far from athletic, ever. I waved and yelled out to them,

strange that they didn't care to turn in my direction. When I walked over and asked if I could join the sport, they simply ignored me like I wasn't there. I turned to Alice, told her that I was ready to microwave my lunch. She just gave me a nod without a single eye contact. Strange, indeed.

It was almost dark out, so Alice's three friends and herself trotted back in. They said nothing, neither did I. For the rest of the evening, they kept conversing with each other, excluding me, no matter how much I tried to keep up with them. And as a result, I resorted to scrolling through my phone, jumping from one app to the next. Jen, Triss and Ree were obviously strangers to me, exchanging nothing more than a polite 'Hello' and 'How are you?' in our previous encounters. But, today was different. They were intentionally ignoring me, like I was invisible, as though I was not there. The weirder part of this moment was that whenever I tried to strike a conversation with them and pathetically failed, I witnessed Alice smirk from the corner of my eye. She found my embarrassment amusing.

Alice was doing the dishes, which she was comfortable with, unlike me. I hated touching soggy food on the utensils or using my literal fingers to clean out the sinkhole. Worse than motion sickness. The trio had gone upstairs, it was just us sisters in the dining room now.

'You should've made the effort to sit through lunch.' Alice chimed in. Her voice ice cold.

'Hm..?' My attention reluctantly made sense of the words.

'It's simple manners.'

'How do I keep track of my manners, if I don't feel well?' I asked, sarcastically.

'You literally covered your ears with a sofa cushion while they were talking.' She was curt.

'I covered my face cause of the god damn pounding headache!' My voice on the verge of a scream. Alice never failed to never yell, shout or shriek at anyone, not once. She spoke her mind eloquently and for that I knew she pulled every nerve in her body together to maintain her composure just for the sake of articulating her words as clearly as possible. 'Remember, the world doesn't revolve around you. Next time, try to make an effort to socialize no matter how you feel.' Alice concluded with her words of 'wisdom'. Mind-boggling. The best I could do is leave the scene. Better yet, leave the premises. I immediately grabbed my airbag, which I didn't take the time to unpack (saved my precious minutes), hurdled myself in the driver's seat, and roared off into the night. I'd rather work on

my assignment, then be treated as an unwanted guest for the rest of the weekend. Been pushed around a lot by her but not anymore. Tolerating her passive aggressive nature along with the sudden change in her moods is one thing, however that doesn't extend her right to trash talk about me in front of her friends, just so they are on the same page of mistreating me. All because I didn't behave as she expected me to behave. If she wants to use someone as a punching bag, she can use a mirror for it. Curse at her own reflection. Or get a Maize ball, and find a healthy coping mechanism for all that repressed anger. Either way, she'll have to figure that out on her own.