

## “My Sister’s Keeper”

Mia absent-mindedly drummed the steering wheel waiting for the light to change. She was engrossed in absent, random thoughts as she hummed to the music.

“Do you ever get tired of this?”

The sound of Casey’s voice brought her out of her thoughts. “Huh?” Casey raised a hand to turn down the music.

“Do you ever get tired of this?”

“Tired of what?”

“Cleaning up Dina’s bullshit.” Mia shot him a look.

Casey shrugged and put his hands up defensively. “I’m just saying. You get a call about her at least once a week. How you gon’ be able to kill it over at Bella Mag if you gotta run behind her every day?”

Mia thought for a second. He was right. “Well I can’t really worry about that until I knew for sure if I got the job.”

Casey smirked at her. “Baby you are the best person they interviewed. You got this. But I do know that if you don’t stop letting your sister hold you back, you’re gonna miss out on this and a lot of other opportunities.”

Mia didn’t respond but kept her eyes locked on the Marshall County Mental Health Facilities sign approaching in the distance.



Mia could hear her before she could see her and it didn’t sound like she was on her meds. “And my earrings better be in here, minimum wage. They’re real, and they cost more than you made last year, bonuses and all.”

Mia rounded the corner and caught a glimpse of a beet-red, angry-faced guard and Dina. Dina clutched a clear plastic bag in between them at eye-level. The only thing missing was a whistle for the steam coming off of Dina.

“There’s only one in here. Find the other one or I’m telling everybody that you touch the patients.”

The guard looked like he wanted to rip her head clean off of her body. Mia was sure Dina was off her medicine, but the guard apparently couldn’t tell or didn’t care. But that was how it always went. Dina didn’t “look” crazy so people never handled her like she was sick. Before Dina could make a bad situation worse Mia stepped in between them.

“I’m here to pick her up. Please just find her earring and I’ll take her home.”

The guard stared at Mia and carefully. She could tell he didn’t want to do a damn thing for

either of them. He gave Dina a death stare before tossing the missing earring on the counter. “Fucking asshole!” Dina balled up her fists like she was about to jump over the counter. And Mia knew she was good for it. Mia locked eyes with her sister and gently shook her head. Dina growled at the guard in disagreement but flopped angrily in shoes without laces to where her earring had landed. Mia glared at security.

“C’mon sister. Let’s go home.”



“Morning sister. I made your favorites.”

Mia grabbed a piece of bacon. “Good. I’m pretty hungry seeing as I didn’t finish dinner last night.” Dina shrugged and continued buttering the biscuits. “You should’ve.” Mia rolled her eyes. “They said if I wasn’t there by the time the bus came they were shipping you off for the weekend.”

“And?”

“And how the hell were you gonna explain that to Mommy and Daddy?” Dina turned to face her sister. “Look, I hate the meds they have me on right now. Yeah I don’t feel crazy but I don’t feel *anything*. I’d rather hear voices than be a zombie.”

Mia sighed and shoved a piece of bacon in her mouth.

Dina’s voice grew soft and sincere. “I know I say it all the time but I’m sorry I’m crazy.”

Mia shook her head. “You’re my sister, Dina. And I’m my sister’s keeper. We just gotta figure something out.”

“I know...I heard you and Casey arguing last night.”

Mia tucked her hair behind her ear and avoided Dina’s gaze.

“You haven’t told him I’m the schizophrenic, bipolar, depressed, bisexual family deviant?”

“Not yet,” Mia said between chews.

Dina nodded. “Tell him. Might get him off your back. Just keep it on the need-to-know, you know?”

Mia nodded. Dina gave her a serious look. “I’m serious, Mia. I know you love him, but he doesn’t need to know everything. It’s none of his business.”

Mia shifted uncomfortably but nodded.

Dina grinned and extended her pinky for one of their pinky promises.

Mia smiled and locked pinkies with her sister. Mia turned to head back to her room. “Well, I’m heading to campus. I find out about Bella Mag today.”

Dina’s eyes lit up. “Call me first thing you hear something. Even though I know you got it.”

Mia nodded and grabbed another piece of bacon. She kissed Dina on the cheek before walking back toward her room.

“Mia?”

“Yeah?”

“Cover that big ass hickey before you go.”

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“I got it! Out of five hundred people! I got it!” Mia jumped into Casey’s arms. She giggled as Casey spun her around. He loved seeing Mia happy. She spent so much time worried about her sister; it was nice to see a smile reach her eyes.

“I knew they would! I’m so proud of you, baby. Looks like we’ll get to be together in New York this summer after all.” Mia grinned and leaned to kiss him. But he could see that her smile had faltered when she pulled back.

“What?” Mia bit the inside of her bottom lip the way she did when she was thinking.

“I’m just nervous about leaving Dina right now, babe.”

Casey tried not to show his angst. “Mia, baby. I keep telling you that you gotta live your own life. Dina has hers.”

Mia opened her mouth to respond, but her voice was replaced by her ringtone. Casey grabbed the phone out of her hands before she could look at the screen. “I’m taking you out to celebrate and I don’t want any interruptions. You gotta make last night up to me.” Mia smiled at her boyfriend.

“Deal.”

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Dina stared out at the sunny, cerulean sky stoically. Her mind looped the argument between she and Taj.

“Dina, we gotta talk.”

“I know, I meant to ask you yesterday if you were coming to the party with me.

“You think I didn’t hear about that shit?”

“What are you talking about?” Dina gave him her best doe eyes.

Taj waved her off. “Miss me with that. Do you think this is funny?”

“Yeah, I love being put in the mental hospital. I think it’s hilarious.”

“Dina, you wouldn’t have to if you would take your medicine.”

“I keep telling ya’ll I hate those damn pills. They don’t work.”

Taj shook his head. “They must! Baby they’re picking you up like once a week now. It’s crazy.”

“*I’m* crazy.”

Taj stood and tried his hardest not to speak evenly. “I hate seeing you like this. I can see it in your eyes that you’re not okay in there, Dina. I thought we were working to get you better?”

“I am!”

“No Dina, I am. Mia is. Your parents are. And you? You won’t take the meds, won’t talk to the doctors, won’t tell anybody when it’s getting bad. It’s like you don’t wanna get better.”

He stopped and shook his head. He grabbed his jacket with his head hung low.

“Taj,” Dina started. He put his hand up. “Dina I love you, but I can’t do this. Call me when you’re really ready to get better. I’m out.”



“I am so full.” Mia pushed away a mostly-eaten bowl of pasta.

Casey wiped his mouth. “Yeah that was amazing.” Mia used the linen napkin to wipe Alfredo sauce from her lips.

“I’m gonna run to the bathroom.” Casey nodded and dug in his pockets for his wallet.

He felt vibrating against his leg for the millionth time since they’d sat down to eat.

His blood pressure boiled when he saw Dina’s face on the screen. He looked to see if Mia was around.

“What’s up, Dina?”

Dina paused. “Where’s my sister?”

Casey shook his head. “Trying to have just one meal without you interrupting it. You gotta grow up. You’re older than Mia and she can’t depend on you for nothing.”

“Oh, I didn’t know you were an expert on siblings. They teach you that at the group home?”

Casey clenched his jaw so hard it hurt.

“I’m not gonna keep letting you keep doing this to her after we move. From now on, call a therapist.”

“Move? She got the internship?”

“Yeah, Dina. She did. We’re at lunch now celebrating.”

“She was supposed to call me.”

“She’s supposed to live her life.”

Dina didn’t say anything.

“I think it’s time for Dina to take care of Dina.”

Dina hung up.

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Through a drunken tears Dina could make out four prescription pill bottles on the floor of her car. She didn’t feel anything. She reclined her seat and listened to the radio frequency of voices in her head hum. “I just want them to be quiet.” She mumbled to herself. “I just want them to stop. I’m sorry, Mimi.”

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Mia stood in the mirror fluffing her full curls. Twist out gone right. Finally a good day. Dina was going back on her meds, Casey was supportive and fine as hell, Bella Mag wanted her... From deep in her bag her iPod dinged. It had been going crazy since she’d sat down to eat.” I just want it to be quiet,” she mumbled. It dinged again. Mia stared at the screen. Missed calls, 7. She frowned and unlocked the iPod. *Dina, Dina, Dina, Dina, Dina, Mom, Dina...* She threw the iPod back into her bag and ran out of the bathroom.

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“Babe, I need my phone.” Mia’s voice was shaking and he could see the worry in her eyes. “Dina tried to call me a bunch of times. I’m worried.”

“How you know Dina called?” Mia stared at him blankly. “Because my iPod is connected to my phone. I saw the missed calls.” Casey sighed and tossed his napkin on the table. “She ruined lunch anyway.”

Mia’s eyes got wide, alert. “What? What did you do?”

“While you were in the bathroom she called. I told her that she needs to grow up.”

Mia stood up so hard the table shook. Mia’s blood ran cold. “Give me my phone. Now.”

“Mia, you gotta-” Mia slammed her fist on the table so hard the silverware rattled. Other patrons turned to stare. “Give me my damn phone. Now!” The restaurant stopped on a dime.

Casey stared at her for a moment. When the shock settled, he tossed Mia's phone and the money for their meal next to it. Mia snatched the phone off the table and ran toward the car.



Mia tried to call Dina. No answer. Casey tried to call Mia. She didn't want to answer. She was terrified that he may have said something to push Dina over. She was mentally exhausted herself. She looked down at her phone to call Dina and looked up just in time to slam on her brakes. Her phone slid out of her hands and under the seat.

"Dammit!"

When the light turned green, she went around the car in front of her. She never saw the car behind her.



Dina was pulled from the deepest sleep she'd ever been in by the most violent vomit ever. She guzzled a day-old water bottle from the backseat like liquid gold. The first day back on her meds was always the worst. It tore her stomach to shreds. She shuddered at the taste of lingering bile in her mouth. "How long I been out here?" She asked herself out loud, yawning. She grabbed her phone. Few missed calls from Mia, then Taj, then her parents, a random number, Taj, her parents three more times... Her phone blinked and vibrated in her hand.

"Hey Mom. What's..."



Dina sat alone in Mia's room. Even the nurses were too scared to tell her to leave. Mia's pretty face was so swollen her eyes looked like thin black lines in her face. Every part of her seemed to be broken. Her lips were dark purple and a patch of her hair had to be shaved so they could drill a hole in her skull. Nobody knew who she would be once she woke up. That was the part that scared Dina.

"I still think she's the prettiest girl in the world."

Dina's temper spiked hearing Casey's voice. He walked around the bed without taking his eyes off of Mia. He sat down next to Dina. She stared at him in disgust. He extended a Burger King bag after a few awkward seconds. "I know you and Mia like all the same shit. She loves chicken fries." His voice cracked a little. Dina let his arm linger in the air. He gave her an exasperated look. "C'mon Dina. I know you're hungry. You haven't moved in three hours."

She hesitated a moment longer, but took the bag and scooted closer to her sister. He stared at Mia sadly. "The visitation room is overgrown with flowers and people and cops. Everybody is here for her." He wiped a lone tear away before Dina could catch it. "The medics found her phone fifty yards from where she crashed. Say she tried to call you thirty seconds before."

Casey looked at Dina. Dina dipped her fries in silence. He cleared his throat. "I owe you an apology, Dina." Dina chewed in silence. He cleared his throat again. "I thought I was protecting Mia from you. I-I didn't know about you being sick. Or about what happened

when ya'll were kids..." Dina's blood ran cold and her eyes snapped to meet his. Casey had fresh tears in his eyes. "I know, Dina." Dina stared at her sister.

*"She broke our promise."*

"Get out, Casey." Casey sighed and stood slowly. He gave a last sad look at his girlfriend and her sister.

"I think you eventually gotta talk to somebody, Dina. It's gonna kill you if you don't." Dina had her eyebrows furrowed in defiance. He nodded and half-smiled. "She told me not to ever tell you I knew." He wiped his face. "Dina, Mia has a long way to go. I'm gonna need your help. You gotta get better now. Whatever happened then, get help so it can let go and so can you. If not for you, at least for her." He turned and shuffled back toward where everyone else was congregated. Dina scooted closer to the bed so she could lay her head next to Mia's mangled hand. She closed her eyes and smiled.

"Don't worry, sister. Me and the voices are gonna make you all better."