

Iron Bars

Sarah

Iron bars. They're the first thing I see in the morning and the last thing I see before I go to sleep. The iron bars, the cold, hard bed, and my next meal are all I can think about now. That's all I allow myself to think about. If I let my mind wonder, it'll run free like a dog breaking away from its leash. And that can never happen. The last time I let myself go is the reason I'm in jail. The doctors say I have a disorder, a disease, and my lawyer tries to plead insanity, but I know what I am. I'm crazy, and every minute I spend rotting away in prison, not being able to apologize for the sins I've done, makes me crazier.

Caitlyn

Mommy holds me tight as we both cry our hearts and souls out, enough to fill a river, a lake, even an ocean. No one thinks I understand what happened to Jamie, but I do. Jamie is dead, killed by her best friend Sarah, the same Sarah who taught me to play the piano, who always brought me Pop Tarts, and let me hang out, even when Jamie said no. But Sarah killed my sister, and for that I'll never forgive her. Now, because of Sarah, we're surrounded by gravestones and flowers, wearing all black and walking on people who're long gone, part of the earth now. I may be only nine, but I understand it all.

Sarah

I'll never why know I did it. My therapist tells me that to get over something, you have to first relive it, but I'm too scared to go back to that place in my mind. If I go back, I don't know what I'd find, and I'm not ready to face that yet. I don't think I'll ever be ready. So for now, my thoughts are back to iron bars. The bars are the only thing keeping me sane right now. They're my rock, my life support, the roots of my tree of life.

Caitlyn

Each day, I have to live without Jamie makes the already gaping hole in my heart even bigger. I want to visit Sarah in jail, and ask her why she would ever kill her best friend, but I don't. Mommy would let me visit her, but I guess I'm too scared of what I'd try to do to her if I saw her. I know that Sarah's 18, and way bigger than me, but Jamie always used to say that if I put my mind to it, I could do anything, and making Sarah pay for her crimes counts as anything. I wonder if Sarah misses Jamie and me, or if she's too heartless to care.

Sarah

Visiting hours are the worst part of my day. Seeing all the other inmates visiting with their families and friends makes me feel even more alone. My parents refuse to visit me. I guess they can't stand to think that their perfect Sarah is actually a crazy murderer. If I were them, I'd feel the exact same way. I do wish that Jamie's family would visit me though. They always were more like a family to me than my own parents. I especially miss sweet little Caitlyn. I'd do anything just to see her bright, innocent face beaming up at me again. But who would want to visit a murderer, locked behind iron bars.

Caitlyn

Mommy and I get out of the car and walk up to the prison. As I push open the cold, heavy door, I feel a small twinge of regret that I asked to see Sarah. But when I see her pale, gaunt face, the regret is replaced by sympathy. The person who I looked up to, who in my eyes used to do no wrong, was broken down to a ghost in an orange jumpsuit. Mommy and I walk over to Sarah; I'm hiding behind her like I did when I was younger.

Mommy says, "Hello, Sarah, how are you darling?" while I wave timidly.

Sarah's downturned mouth breaks into a smile, and it lights up her still beautiful face, like the sun breaking through the clouds on a winter day.

Sarah

The first thought that crosses my mind when Caitlyn and her mother walk in is that my family is finally here. I haven't thought of my own parents as my true family since I was six and became best friends with Jamie. When I saw Caitlyn's angelic face look shyly over at me, I felt my mouth break into a smile so big it hurt my cheeks. I hear Caitlyn and Jamie's mother, Mrs. Anderson, ask me a question, but all of my focus is on the fact that Caitlyn's not smiling her burning smile back at me. Instead, she's glaring at me with more hatred than any seven-year old should possess. What'd happened to the shy little girl I'd just seen?

"Mommy, I'm ready to go," Caitlyn announced.

"Why so soon, sweetheart?" Mrs. Anderson replied in a questioning tone.

I spoke for the first time, "Because she doesn't want to be around a murderer. I don't blame her... if I could run away from myself, I would."

I could almost feel the shock coming off them, and the tension in the air was almost unbearable.

"Sarah, dear, surely you don't mean that!" sputtered Mrs. Anderson.

"I do mean it, and I'm sorry I ever bothered your family," I said, jumping up out of my chair and sprinting out.

I felt the hot prick of tears behind my eyes as I ran back to the security and dependability of the iron bars that I've come to love.

Caitlyn

Seeing Sarah was either the worst mistake or best decision I've ever made, but one thing's for sure, I need to see her again. When I got home after visiting Sarah, the first thing I did was go to

Jamie's room. I don't think I've ever missed her more than I had in that moment, laying on her bed and pressing my face into her pillow, just trying to catch a whiff of her cinnamon perfume. That was when I found the note. It was crumpled up inside the pillow case, and almost ripped in half. I smoothed out the note and Scotch taped the pieces back together, but the handwriting was so messy it was almost illegible. The only person that handwriting could belong to was Sarah. But why wouldn't the police have found this when they searched Jamie's room? My hands are shaking as I start to read the letter, but as soon as I'm finished with it, my whole body is trembling and wracked with uncontrollable sobs. The letter was a suicide note from Sarah that was dated from the day she killed Jamie.

Sarah's note

Dear Jamie,

When you find this note I'll already be dead. On Saturday, April 7th, 2018, I am going to kill myself. I wrote you this note to tell you how much I love you, and how I'll never stop being your best friend, even from Heaven. Since the first day I met you, you've always been there for me, no matter what. Jamie, I just wanted to thank you for being my family when I had none, for always cheering me up when I'm down, and most of all for being the very best friend anyone could ever ask for. Being a part of your life, even if only for twelve years, has been the greatest gift God has ever given me. I'm honored to call you my best friend. When I die, I'm only giving you two days to miss me. After that, you better get up off your butt and continue on with your life. I want you to go to Stanford, meet your geeky but cute husband, and have two kids, just like you planned. I don't want my death to hang over you like a dark cloud for the rest of your life. We're just going our separate ways, and when we meet up in Heaven, we'll just have more stories to tell. But until I see you again, I want you to remember that I'll love you until the end of time.

Love, Sarah

Sarah

Seeing Caitlyn made me realize that my therapist is right, that you have to relive something to get over it. Before, I'd been scared of myself, and what I'll do to other people if I relive the worst

day of my life. But now I know that I owe it to Caitlyn, to Jamie, and most of all to myself that I let my memories float to the surface instead of trying to push them to the back of my mind. I close my eyes, take a deep breath, and dive back to the one Saturday that changed everything. Jamie and I were laying on her bed, just chilling, when she suddenly hops up and exclaims, “OMG Sarah! I totally forgot I bought brownies for us!” she sprints out of the bedroom and barrels down the stairs, almost tripping while she goes. “I’ll be right down!” I call, knowing that I won’t. I reach into my backpack and feel my hand close around the cold handle of the gun. My note is already in her pillowcase, which is our place where we put the stuff we don’t want Mrs. Anderson to see. My hands shake so hard I almost drop the gun, and my palms are sweating so hard it feels like there’s a river running through them. No turning back now, I thought as I lifted the gun to my temple. But right when I was about to pull the trigger, Jamie flies into the room with a tray full of brownies. I jerk back, and feel the gun fly out of my hands, but the damage was already done. I’d pulled the trigger, and the gun was pointed at Jamie. She doesn’t even have time to scream. I watch Jamie fall like she’s in slow motion, crashing to the floor, covered in blood and brownie pieces. I sink to my knees beside her and try to close the wound and stop the blood, but it’s too late, her eyes have already gone glassy and her pulse is gone. My scream is the shriek of someone who just lost everything. And I had. Jamie was my life, and a small piece of metal had taken her away from me.

Caitlyn

For the second day in a row, I enter the jailhouse, only this time I feel no regret or sympathy, only the need to figure out what really happened to my sister. As soon as I see Sarah, I run over, leaving Mommy behind. I pull the note out of my pocket and silently hand it to Sarah. She takes it and quickly reads it, her eyes widening as she recognizes the words she wrote a month earlier. After what seems like an hour, Sarah whispers, “You want to know what really happened?” I just nod as Sarah launches into her heartbreaking tale of how she got put behind the iron bars.