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Slippery Slopes

“Grab my pole!” The heat of my words wasn’t only heard in my tone, but seen in the puff of warmth which emerged out of my cracked chapped lips in the frosty air. We were within the mountains of Squaw Valley Ski Resort in Lake Tahoe. My brother’s Irish, Bostonian girlfriend Emily was sliding down what was intended to be a black diamond. She would’ve most certainly been its victim if I hadn’t absentmindedly followed her off the green. We were supposed to be following the green trail from the ski lift, but due to her being incapable of turning, and to my wandering mind obsessing over the inner bitterness inside me about being on this trip with her in the first place, there we were: sliding into the grasp of the intimidating black diamond before us.

As soon as I realized we had left the path of our intended course, my first instinct was to body slam Emily into a pine tree in order to save us both from breaking every bone in our bodies. Looking back now I realize this action may have been a subconsciously aggressive desire I had been waiting for an opportunity to do.

I knew it was Emily’s first time skiing...ever. And needless to say, my family understood how fearful she was towards this spring break trip. Months before we even scheduled the trip, all she and my older brother Luke insisted on was going someplace tropical instead. *It is so unlike Luke to do so. He had always been the one when we were growing up to pull me out of my bed at six in the morning to get the skis ready and ride out to the hills. Back when we were kids we’d spend our weekends in Pennsylvania living in the snow and going skiing for the entire day. He loved it so much he had his very own pair of skis and all the fancy gadgets boys think*

they need in order to go skiing. However, ever since Ms. Emily stepped into the picture, skiing, and much more that I took for granted, ended up at the very back of his mind.

So, here I was, yanking Emily, who was probably two of me combined, back up the freezing, and windy ski hill. Her skis were sliding backwards towards the black diamond she had mistakenly brought us towards. In order to get her up, I kept one pole dug into the ice sheeted ledge behind me. I knew if we got up to the ledge, which was a steep six feet up, we'd be back on the green course we *should* have followed in the first place.

What passed my mind countless times upon arriving on the black was how it'd be easy enough to get back up on the green on my own. And yet, if I let Emily slide down the hill, she wouldn't only be on a black alone, she'd also end up risking another knee injury. She had had surgery done on it a few years back and activities such as black diamonds take a toll on anyone. So, I was stuck here, pulling up the girl I experienced countless battles with over the past two and a half years.

Emily and I had met on a family vacation at the end of my freshman year in college. She had been studying abroad for the past semester, and jumped a plane from London to Tokyo to share in our family's Asian vacation adventure. Everyone else but me in the family had met this mysterious, darling girl named Emily. I knew her only through the stories my mother told about her. These stories featured my mother saying how "She's such a sweet girl! I love her so much!" and then the following up with the sentence of "She's nothing like you though!" Which of course made me love her right off the bat, right? So sweet, nothing like me? Thanks mom.

Leading up to the trip I kept asking my brother simple questions in order to get a better understanding of this hidden figure. A lot of the questions were silly, like what was her favorite

color, food, actor, books, and so on. My brother, being a man of little words, either ignored the questions, gave simple one-word answers, or a grunt which he had picked up at the age of two from our grandpa Jim. Thus, getting off the plane, the anxiety of meeting this 'perfect' girl hit me. The questions were no longer silly. Instead, they turned cynical. Would this girl like me? If she didn't like me, why? What made my brother like this girl? Why was she nice, and why did my mother say she's nothing like me? That *must* mean we won't get along. I ended up deducing within the time of grabbing my carry on, and the time it took walking through the airport to baggage claim, was that this girl must hate me.

Once I did lay eyes on Emily, all I could see was a girl with perfectly flawless skin, light brown hair with a tint of auburn. She was someone who seemed to act with manners, and was excited to see us. Sure, she walked like an athlete, which I later found out she had been in high school, and spoke in ways of superiority, which would be a cause of confrontation later on, but other than that she seemed quite normal.

Yet, what did not escape the inner resenting skeptic within me was the way my family had received her. My mother embraced her like she was an angelic being, and hugged her like a giant teddy bear. This was a greeting I barely had received by her in years, due to my mother's belief in giving me her guiding motherly and condemning and insight about the many wrong paths I had taken. All since my life up to this point hadn't been what she had imagined for me. Even my father spoke to Emily with inquisitiveness and intently listened to her stories. Stories that, if they had come from my mouth, would have not even been acknowledged. Emily though, had their full attention, smiles, and nodding of heads.

The worst of it was how the deathly silence, which my brother normally held, was no longer surfaced. Instead he became chatty and genuinely interested in her well being, a behavior I hadn't experienced from him since I was a sophomore in high school and was picked on by some other kids.

He always did have my best interest in mind growing up. Though we were two years apart, there was always just the two of us. Ever since we were little we'd been tied at the hip. I was the only girl he ever bothered to be around. There were times at school where as a Senior in high school he snuck me out at lunch time with him to go to Starbucks because he saw some kids picking on me. Later on I'd learn he not only gave me an escape from my highschool hell, but protectively confronted these girl after school. It was the last time I was bothered by them. My brother put my well being first, even over his own or my parents...at least he did back then. Now I realized, someone was taking my place among my family, the spot I believed I already owned. I wasn't ready.

Now it seemed as if Luke wasn't on my side, defending me against the bullies. But instead he was dating one. And I was expected to move aside and allow her to replace me at the family table.

"I can't move!" Emily shrieked from sliding backwards towards the bumpy, steep hill behind her. Her face, was unprotected and exposed to the sunlight because she was too stubborn to use the goggles I told her to wear in order to keep her face from getting burnt up the color of a lobster. Burning was a common occurrence with her because of her exceedling, white, lightly freckled, Irish skin, but of course she wouldn't listen even though her entire back had gotten

sunburnt the day before. This is a very hard thing to do to oneself. For if one is wearing a winter coat, how can one possibly get a sunburnt the color of a freshly caught lobster? Then again it's Emily, and I put nothing past her. The way her eyes formed to wide marbles showed how terror struck she was. I knew it was a matter of seconds before they subdued to weeping. "You'll be fine, we've got this," I said. "But, will you listen to me?"

The reason I asked this question was because it had become habitual for her to discount anything I said, did, acted upon, or even thought. To her everything about me was wrong. I learned this early on in our relationship because each vacation we had been on, we were forced to be roommates. It was only this past trip that my parents relented and kept us separated. They were truly afraid of one of us sinking our teeth into the other when everyone else wasn't looking.

I remember making my own threats to my parents about having to spend time with her. My mother knew everything between us was an argument. But no matter how hard I argued, I always lost. I lost not because I wasn't right, but because I was fighting with *her*: the girl the family adored.

Even though she told me I walked wrong, I slept weird, I shouldn't like the certain type of music I listen to, and even went as far to say I surrounded myself with the wrong friends. Needless to say, she had never even met any of them. And of course she should know right? Because ten days in Asia, eight days in Hawaii, a few weekends in Boston and Austin, and a night in New York City definitely gave her the right to know every piece of information about me. She was an expert on Krista, and knew exactly where to stick a blow at me and when to do it, including a time when she purposefully socked me in the right side of my stomach when I was

going through kidney stones and was very vocal about no one touching me. The shooting pain caused my distaste for her to only grow....

Of course, the same goes both ways. I knew everything about her and could bring up what she did as well that I didn't agree with. However, if I complained, I was the whiny little sister searching for attention. We always disagreed on the meaningless topics of life, such as whether the sky was baby blue or powder blue, an actual disagreement we had in the town of Rockport, MA one day. All seemed to be even more meaningless in this very moment. But I needed to know she would listen to me, and trust me.

And here we were, stuck on a black diamond together. Emily's gaze studying me over after my fatal question of whether she'd trust me or not. I could tell she was skeptical. Her hesitation as to whether or not to fall down the black diamond or actually trust me was of no surprise. We fought as if World War III was breaking out, but in this moment we were in this mess together. It's true that both of us would have agreed on one thing this very instant, and that is we were both the last person either of us would want to end up with on a snowy mountain cliff side. It made it worst that we had to rely on one another to get up to the top safely. If she kept sliding, I'd eventually be pulled by her and my pole would come out of the bank which was holding us to the mountainside. If I let her go, I'd watch her ski down a black diamond backwards, and no matter how much distaste I had for her, I knew I couldn't do that to my brother who was watching us at the bottom of the green hill through a bed of trees. And that's when it clicked for me.

His stare reminded me of the times he made sure I was alright as child. He stood up for me countless times, even to teachers. Luke was the one who was there when my dad left for

weeks at a time, truly the only male influence I had in my life for quite awhile. He was my playmate who played in the 'jungle' of our backyard, who flipped my canoe in the lake but always helped me back up, and who later on did my brain teasing math homework while I worked on his poetry assignment. And I was afraid of losing him.

Even though she and I didn't get along, I realized the farther I pushed her away, the farther my brother would go too. If I didn't want to lose him completely, I'd have to make the effort to make our relationship at least tolerable. I owed Luke for all the times he took care of me, and Emily is what makes him happy. As I instructed Emily to take off her skis one at a time and dig her ski boot in the snow, I understood she was trusting me, if only for this one time. As she followed my instructions I knew this girl may not have been *my* first choice in someone who would one day become my sister, but if worst came to worst, we can rely on one another, if only for the sake of my brother. Being on the slope highlighted the slippery slopes I had gone down when making assumptions about what this girl would do to me. I believed she was taking away what was rightfully mine. Jealousy had me believe that if I let anyone even have a sliver of him, I'd lose all of him. This truth I told myself, was a lie.

The mountain showed me in order to be the sister my brother deserves, I needed to put in effort to not always fight or wait for this girl to 'slip' up, because it wouldn't happen, the innerness in me already knew that. I understood the reason I felt threatened and replaced by this girl, was because she deserves a seat at the family table. She was no longer taking my own chair from me, but instead, taking an empty space among us all. Only a girl worthy of being in the family would be able make room for herself among our table.

We will never be best friends, but we will be cordial. One thing we have in common is the importance of my brother's happiness. This is why we could interlock our hands and hike our way up the slope. Together, for a few minutes, we smiled and laughed at our tantalizing fifteen minutes of fear. As we skied down to meet the rest of the family I believe my brother realized something, because later that week, after another aggressive comment from Emily, he pulled me aside and said, "Don't worry, I'll talk to her." Now I know he'll always be my protective big brother. I just have to share.

Authors Note: Reviewing this article, I realized how much detail I wanted to put into the piece. It was hard cutting many details out or replacing them. I do believe it reads better without the obsessive amount of details I originally had. I am hoping people read it and can relate to it somehow about a person they might dislike but have to get along with as well. I'm hoping people don't find it whiny. I didn't mean to necessarily vent or complain about her or our relationship as much as it seems to do so in this. It's still strange because now I realized when I was writing this my brother and Emily were not officially engaged, but this past weekend changed that. So revising this makes it ever more real about having to tolerate this girl. I still seemed to have trouble not adding in everything my brother and I did as kids, but I hope I made it clear about the importance he was to me and how he functioned as a role model for me as a kid since my dad was gone quite often or how he'd get home at nine at night and leave at four in the morning for work. It was also troubling not including everything about Emily and mine relationship, I added in the kidney stone story to highlight just how far we'd go to 'pester' one another. I could have added more detail to that story, but my page count was running out. Staying in the page number of 7 was the hardest part now that I look back on it! However, now I know I have multiple things

to write about Emily if I ever need too. We've had many interactions together and I'm not sure if I highlighted enough our strife which we have between one another. I still avoided diving into her and Luke's own relationship and how they even came to be a couple, I didn't think the readers needed that information. I also got rid of her troubles with her sister and roommates because I understood that this was a narrative about Emily and me, not Emily and other girls she's wronged as well. Overall, this article was challenging to write about because I have never disliked anyone. I promise this is true! But Emily is the first person I would ever say I actually disliked. I even love her siblings and parents, just not her. I still didn't know if I should have added that into the article or not, but I chose not to.