

Siblings

Emma Cole

“Fey! Fey!” The girl is running toward me excitedly, but I don’t recognize her. The people she passes turn their heads to look, and I panic more the closer she gets. She continues calling out, her eyes locked with mine. “Felicia, I’m so glad I found you!” She drops down next to me on the bench. “I knew I could find you here.” I’m still wearing my uniform from the ice cream store where I work. I always wander around the mall after my shifts; but how does this stranger know that? I hope this is all just a hoax, because I honestly don’t recognize her.

“Um, do I know you?” She furrows her brow and tilts her head for a second, then she throws back her head and laughs.

“Ha-ha, nice one. You had me worried, Fey.” She grins and I start to slowly shake my head.

“I don’t know you,” I say, lowering my voice.

“Fey, what are you talking about?” She looks concerned again.

“I don’t know who you are and no one has ever called me Fey.” I tell her, looking right at her; I realize that her eyes are like mine.

“Felicia, it’s me, it’s Sophie. Your sister.” Sophie’s face is dead serious. I stumble up off the bench and grab my things.

“I...I don’t have a sister.” This girl sounds crazy. Her familiar eyes widen and she now looks panicked.

“Felicia! Felicia? What’s going on? What are you talking about? Don’t you know me?” She’s hysterical now. I start to back away and then start walking and then running. I get lost in the crowd, and hear Sophie cry out “I’m your sister!”

“Did you see her again?” Damian asks when I’ve finished my story.

“No. I just left,” I tell him, and take a bite of the lasagna dad made.

“She sounds crazy,” Damian decides. He’s only eleven, and ‘crazy’ is currently his favourite adjective.

“She’s probably not crazy, Damian. Just...confused,” Dad suggests.

“She seemed pretty sane. Except for, you know, thinking she was my sister.” I look around at my family, our red-brown hair and our gray eyes. Thinking back on how she looked, Sophie would fit right in at this dinner table. “Maybe she’s a relative?”

“I can’t recall anyone called Sophie in the family,” mom says.

“I guess we’ll never know.” Dad shrugs.

The doorbell rings later that night, when mom, dad and I are watching TV in the front room.

“I’ll get it.” I jump off the couch and head to the door. When I open it, Sophie’s face looks back at me. I consider shutting the door, but I don’t.

“You need to go,” I say quietly.

“Please, Fey, don’t. I’m so confused, I’m scared, Fey. What’s going on?” Sophie sobs and her shoulders shake. Her hair is wet and frizzy, and raindrops slide down her jacket. She must have walked all the way here from the mall in the rain.

“How did you find my house? Did you follow me?”

“No, Fey. This is my house. I know where it is because I *live here*. The kitchen is down the hall, double doors to the back garden, the chandelier over the dining table has one broken light. Upstairs is the bathroom, our bedroom, Damian’s room, and our parents’ room. Our bedroom has green walls because green is your favourite colour.” Sophie takes a deep breath after her unprompted spiel.

“Stop; just stop.” My head shakes and I hold up my hands. “How do you know Damian? How do you know this house? How long have you been following me?” Sophie looks shocked. Before she can respond, I hear footsteps behind me.

“Felicia? Who is it?” Mom stands next to me and looks Sophie over.

“Mom?” Sophie’s eyes water again. Mom glances at me. There’s desperation in Sophie’s eyes; there’s pity in mom’s.

“This is Sophie. She knows the layout of the house, mom; she knows Damian.” Mom looks Sophie up and down once more.

“Sophie, why don’t you come in?”

“Damian’s upstairs. I don’t think we need to bother him with this,” Dad says as he descends the stairs. He reaches for the remote and changes the TV to the fireplace channel. Sophie, from her seat in the armchair, chuckles slightly.

“You always put that on. Every Saturday while you read.” Sophie’s eyes are still misty, but she’s calmed down a little. Dad looks uncomfortable.

“I’ll get you some hot chocolate, Sophie.” Dad walks into the kitchen. Mom is out in the hallway, making a call. Now it’s just me and Sophie, sitting on opposite sides of the room.

“You still don’t believe me, do you?” Sophie frowns. She looks down into her mug. She knows the answer and she doesn’t want to hear it.

“Not really,” I admit.

“You think I’m crazy.” I don’t respond. Sophie reaches for the nearby bookshelf and pulls out a photo album. I stop myself from telling her off. This house is not hers; she has no business looking through our things.

“I was there for this. When we went to Disneyland. Damian complained so much, and we stayed up late to see the fireworks. But I’m not in any of these pictures.” Sophie smiles then frowns.

“We didn’t see the fireworks,” I correct her.

“No, I remember, I convinced you guys; I held my breath until mom agreed to let us stay up late to see them.” Sophie looks so sure of herself. But I remember that trip, and Sophie was not there.

“No, we didn’t. And you weren’t there. I don’t know who you are, but you’re not my sister, Sophie,” I try to sound calm and comforting, but from Sophie’s face I can tell I was nothing but harsh. Sophie doesn’t say anything, she just closes the album and puts it down. For a moment I think that in her situation, I’d be doing exactly what she is. If for some reason I woke up and no one knew who I was, I’d try to tell them every single detail I could remember to convince them. But then I remember that Sophie’s situation isn’t real. There’s no way that could happen.

Dad comes out of the kitchen and hands Sophie a mug filled with hot chocolate.

“Sylvia and I have decided that you can stay with us tonight, Sophie. But only tonight, until we figure out what’s going on.” Sophie nods.

“I understand. You still don’t believe me.” She tucks her knees up to her chest and takes a deep breath.

“Can you blame us?” Dad tries to laugh.

“But how else can you explain what I know? I know that this is Felicia’s usual mug, that you’ve had a guitar in your room for ten years and still don’t know how to play it. I’m your daughter. After tonight, where am I supposed to go? My own family doesn’t know me,” Sophie says, her voice breaking. More details. How does she know all this?

Mom walked into the room and sits down next to dad. They hold hands and look at Sophie.

“Sophie, why don’t you just tell us what happened today. Where were you before you found Felicia in the mall?” Mom asks.

“Well, I left about an hour after Fey went to work; dad was cooking, and you were playing a video game with Damian. Then I...” Sophie trails off and furrows her brow again. I

catch her eye for just a second. “I just went around town, shopping. I lost my phone and wallet at some point; I must have left them in a changing room somewhere. I was close to the mall, so I went to find Felicia,” Sophie says slowly.

“Okay. Well.” It’s clear none of us know what to say. Her story is pretty flakey. “It’s late. I’ll make up the guest bedroom.” Mom leaves and dad mumbles some excuse. I move closer to Sophie. She looks at me and smiles.

“That scar.” She points to the scar on my temple. “I was there when that happened; you fell down when we went biking for the first time without our parents.” Sophie’s facial expression can only be described as pain. Longing. Desperation, again. How can you still think I’m just a crazy person? What do I have to say for you to realize that I’m your sister?” I don’t know what to say to her. What can I say to her?

“That was a lie, wasn’t it? What you told mom and dad about today?” I ask.

“If I told them the truth, they’re *really* think I’m insane.” Sophie rolls her eyes.

“Tell me.” I can’t deny that I’m intrigued.

“Okay. I did leave the house, but I didn’t go shopping. I went to this...psychic.”

“You went to a...psychic?” I raise my eyebrows.

“I know, it sounds stupid, and it probably was, but I was curious. So there’s this tiny shop close to the mall. All dusty and mysterious. You know how I can’t resist stuff like that,” Sophie stops herself and glances down at her hands. “Well, I guess you probably don’t.” She takes a sharp breath and continues. “Anyway, I walked inside, but as soon as it did, it just felt really...odd. I felt dizzy. I was stumbling around; the last thing I saw was my reflection in this huge cracked mirror, and then I must have passed out. When I woke up, I got the hell out of there. My wallet and phone were gone, so I ran straight for you. But when I got there, you didn’t recognize me.” Sophie finishes her story and looks at me expectantly.

“Oh. That’s quite a...story.” I cringe as I say this, knowing how I sounds.

“I’ve got nowhere to go, Fey. If my own family doesn’t believe me, who will?” She’s crying again, like she has been on-and-off all night.

“I should...um...go.” I get up off the couch and walk toward the door.

“What do they call you?” I turn around.

“What?”

“You said no one calls you Fey,” Sophie explains. “What do they call you?”

“Oh. Lee.” Sophie laughs softly at this.

“What?” I ask.

“It doesn’t suit you.”

In the morning, I look around my green bedroom. Sophie said that we'd shared a room. Where would her bed have been? Would we share a desk? Did she have her own?

"She doesn't know who she is, we can't take care of her." I hear my mom whispering outside my room.

"But the *police*?" My dad whispered back. I jump out of bed and open the door; mom and dad have moved down the hall, toward the stairs. Unfamiliar voices come from downstairs. I walk a few paces behind my parents. Dad stands to the side, mom shakes the hand of a police officer. Another officer is leading Sophie toward the door.

"Sophie?" She turns her head and locks eyes with me. The familiar eyes that cry. She looks so scared.

"Ma'am, we're going to need to speak to you as well." I don't listen, I don't answer the questions. I just watch at the window as they lead Sophie into a car, and drive away.

After everyone's gone and the police have packed up, mom says it was for the best, that Sophie was never our problem. I tell her she's wrong.

"You may not believe her, but there's no denying she's connected to our family." I go up to the guest bedroom. On the floor is a jacket. I recognize it as the one Sophie was wearing last night. Picking it up, I feel around the pockets, hoping to find some kind of proof. To prove anything at all. I just need something concrete. In the bottom of an inner pocket, one so small and inconvenient I almost didn't notice it, I find something. It's crumpled and frayed. But it's there. A photograph of Sophie, Damian and me, just a few years ago. Laughing, smiling; like siblings.