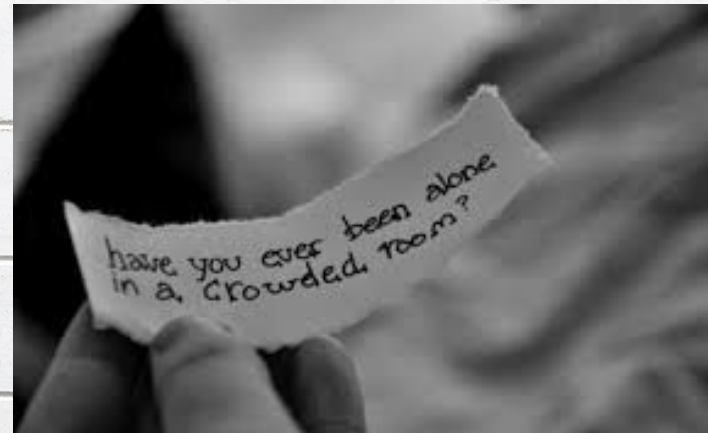


Existing

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You never know what God will bring you. What joys, what fears and what surprises. Everything's not always normal, they are not always fine. When something bad happens, it might just be the fact that you made bad choices or done something wrong. I wish I hadn't told my brother. I wish I wasn't so stupid and stubborn at that moment. I wish I was thinking effectively enough. Mature enough.

I wish. But I wasn't. He would never forgive me for what I did. I bet.

I slammed my head on my pillow. It'd been a tough day. I finally understood what regretful and helpless felt like. Your brain goes blank, and everything you could think about is "Why me?"

See, if someone living under the same roof with you pretends you don't exist, doesn't utter a word to you or look at you for two years, tell you what, it sucks.

There's no such thing on earth that could fix regret. So, think well before you do anything...

"Dad, which hotel are we staying——" I asked. "Shut up! Can't you hear he's busy?" my brother snapped at me.

He's always like that. Sarcastic and mean. But my parents just told me to be "kind" and "thoughtful" for my brother because he reached a point where he'll always struggle and have a lot of pressure. How does that even make sense?

It had been raining hard outside. My brother and I were on vacation. We just got off the plane. With the rain clouds above us, we're now heading to the hotel. The clammy air is making me sweat. Dad's on his phone and talking to someone. The driver's in front, fumbling with his phone too, trying to find a path that doesn't have traffic. I could hear the beeping going on outside while raindrops hit hard on the window. It's hard to see even within 10 meters. The sky's covered with thundering clouds, from my experience, days like these are always "bad hair days".



Shortly after, we arrived at the hotel, everyone got droopy eyes and looked exhausted. Like that we went straight back to our rooms and went to bed. It was already close to midnight. Dad had the rooms connected with a door, so you could just open the door and step into the other room.

It's near midnight now and I'm about to sleep, but then, I heard noises from my brother's room. What is it?

I don't want to disturb him, so I just tiptoed over to the door barefoot. The cold floor without carpet is freezing but wearing the slippers would just make the "Splat" noise and wake my brother.

That's the last thing I want to do.

The door was in the dark corner, and I just stood there, barefoot, listening. No sounds. Nothing. The silence is making me squirm and feel uncomfortable. I'm about to turn around and just call it a night, but suddenly, I heard my brother's voice. *Is he talking to someone? Is it my dad?*

My mind's racing. *What was he doing?*

"Quick, player 3, shoot him!" My brother shouted under his breath.

There's rustling noise and a blurry noise and you can't quite identify.

Then, it hit me.

I snatched open the door, and gasped, but not surprised. Just like what I've guessed, he's gaming. With all the lights closed and the screen light reflecting off his face. Not to walk on the boring side but doing that could damage your eyes, and, get more rest is more important than gaming. At least get a few hours. Honestly, it seems to me that my brother is not even sleeping. Not even for a few hours.

He's gaming. That got me wondering. How? I guess my brother is good at sneaking.

It's such a big shock and it took time to sink in. I caught my brother sneaking an iPad into his room. And he's secretly gaming.

Again.

I stood there. And waited. It's had been a whole minute. My brother is so into the game he hasn't noticed there's a 140cm girl in pajamas, standing right in front of him.

I kept waiting. He still hasn't noticed me there. Finally, I gave in.

"What are you doing with that? Again."
My brother jumped.

"Well, I am just, um..."

He seemed shocked. Me too. It's been the fifth time I caught him in these three months.

I rushed back to my room. Locked the door so my brother won't be able to come in. I could hear him begging me to not tell, but I decided anyway.

While dialing my dad's room number, I felt a wave of stubbornness through me and thought my brother deserved being grounded and lectured for secretly playing games, what I'm doing is good to him.

That's what I think. My decisions are always right. But the thing is, I haven't realized how my brother felt. Regretful. Probably. And he needs to face the problem.

Though, I could've chosen to talk with him and communicate how to fix this problem. He could've explained the problem to me. But I didn't. I told dad instead.

And that might be the worst choice ever.

The next morning, during breakfast at the hotel, me, my brother and dad sat together, and the air got thick.

You can describe the situation as awkward.

Dad's giving us the death stare, my brother looks blank and I'm just acting normal. This is none of my faults. Right? There's nothing to do with me. Right?

I wish.

I peered over at the window and stared blankly at it. People are rushing in different directions, cars zooming past, leaving a cloud of dust behind. Finally, my dad cleared his throat.

"So, I heard from your sister last night that you've been gaming."

Personally, to me, my dad sounds like my brother got caught taking drugs or something. And like gaming is illegal. He's emphasizing the word a bit too hard.

I took a glimpse at my brother and was so shocked. He's on the verge of crying.

What? But...

This doesn't make sense. He doesn't cry that much. It's rare to see him in tears.

Though, I am feeling kind of guilty now. For no reason. Or maybe because I feel bad for him.

Or was he... *faking* to get some pity?

My dad told me to sit at another table. He wants to talk to my brother privately. After that conversation with dad, everything went back to normal. Though, I noticed something.

Odd.

It's my brother. He's not quite talking to me anymore. He's not teasing me. He's not even quite looking at me! I observed him for days. He always looks uncomfortable when I came close to him.

"What's wrong with you?" I demanded.

I guess I gathered enough courage and asked him. I've no idea why I'm scared.

Surprised, he completely ignored me. Stared straight ahead blankly and pretend to not hear a word.

Well, I guess he'll get over it and everything will get back to normal. Right?

Again, my brother surprised me, he didn't get back to normal. For weeks. I don't know what's wrong. Did I do something?

I thought hard but can't think of any reason why.

After the vacation, I once tried standing in my brother's way while he's walking down the stairs, but he just keeps walking and stares straight ahead. We bumped into each other, and my brother will say something like "Why can't I get down the stairs?" and something like weird to my mom like "Mom, is our house haunted? The lights just opened by itself." when I turn on the lights.

My mom's annoyed with the situation between me and my brother right now. But my parents can't fix this. They tried though. My parents forced, bribed, explained and suggested my brother forgive me. And did my brother listen?

No.

This problem keeps going on for about 2 years. And I've already accepted it.

Living without a brother. Not even existing in front of him. But really, who could I possibly blame?

"Even though everything won't be always fine, at least remember they will always get better..." I mumbled to myself. "Sigh..."