

I have always lived with certainty about who I am. My life has always been calm, and somewhat boring. But as soon as something changed, I felt my existence crumble around me.



My house was an old, brick building with creaky floorboards and secret passageways. As children, Catarina and I had snuck through them to our room, our safe haven. It was a tiny room, with walls covered with drawings and floors covered in blankets. We shared a mattress on the ground that was just a little too small for us both. We spent all of our time together; it was Catarina and Juliette against the world. We walked to school together, down cobblestone streets in the rain, passing the Eiffel Tower to walk into the old, ivy-covered school. But over time, soldiers stood on street corners, fewer people walked the streets, and signs went up on storefronts.

We still walked to school every day and bought bread at the market. It seemed as though the chaos around us couldn't affect us. My mama would make creamy potato soup and french bread and we would all huddle together in our tiny apartment and talk about our days. But in the evenings, the radio would bring us back to reality. It spoke about the war, how the Germans were coming and how air raids were killing many. When an air raid came, we raced to the air-raid shelter in the basement of the nearby business with a huge group of people, hiding under the blankets trying to block the noise. Babies cried, women yelled, and children wandered,

disoriented by the noise. We would sit on the floor, holding each other. Catarina and I talked about anything we could think of, waiting to be allowed to return to our little room.

One day, we were eating dinner, a simple soup with stale bread, and the sirens went off. We got up to leave when Catarina looked up at me, terrified. She stared into my eyes, saying,

“I can’t do it! I can’t leave! All we have left is this little room in this little apartment. I’m staying here! You can’t convince me otherwise,” My mama and I both tried to reason with her. She was so smart; she knew that if she stayed here, she could die, but she wouldn’t leave. She ran into the room and hid under the blankets. My mom ran in after her, but I stood there, frozen on the spot. A bomb detonated outside the apartment, rocking the building.



I have looked back on that day for many years. How she perished, but I did not. It never set in: my sister was dead. I still saw her in my dreams at night. Us, sitting in our little room with the stars glistening outside. We were so happy and innocent, protected from the brutalities of the war. After that night, I lived in a constant state of shock; that our perfect little bubble could be ripped apart so ruthlessly.

I endured the rest of the war, but never returned to our apartment. I moved to Montreal, where I felt a connection. It reminded me of the community we had around us before the war. I worked as a librarian for many years, spending all my free time reading.

But after I married Phillippe, I felt forced to talk about the past. When I told him, he said that he felt I needed peace; closure. So we went on a trip to Paris, in hopes that the monsters from my past could be forgotten.

We walked down a quiet street admiring the beautiful architecture until I saw it. I gasped for breath and fell to my knees. It all came rushing back; the little room with two sweet little girls, laughing and playing.