

“My sister didn’t believe in the paranormal or the supernatural. What she didn’t realize is that it wasn’t her belief that mattered.”

-Katie Edgecomb

ONE

KATIE EDGECOMB'S FRIDAY started much like any other weekday. She ate a quick breakfast of eggs and sweet potato, grabbed her coffee to go, and walked to the preschool at the edge of her neighborhood. It was April 30th, and the weather was unseasonably warm for a Seattle spring. Katie didn't complain about the near constant cloud cover and consistent drizzle of Seattle winters, but she was still overjoyed about the premature return of the sun and the opportunity to leave her coat at home.

She moved around Busy Bees Preschool, preparing the building for the day's activities involving many dozens of sticky fingers, more toddler wipes than seemed appropriate, and the

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beautiful sound of uncontrolled laughter that children have before they learn to keep themselves small. Katie loved this space. She loved the brightly colored ABCs painted on the wall and the wall of chalkboard paint where little hands drew nonsensical worlds from the imaginations that owned them. She loved the rug that had a built-in street on which miniature cars raced and went to work. But most of all, she loved the children who occupied this space five days a week.

Katie spent the day helping four year olds write their names, refereeing disagreements, and unleashing chaotic creativity upon Busy Bee's art room. Fridays were painting days at Busy Bee and one of Katie's favorites because of its penchant for pandemonium. Many teachers would have ended Paint Fridays when faced with the prospect of so many little hands covered in paint, just dying to share their creation. Katie luxuriated in it. She loved the layers of color that ended up on her own hands as little ones grabbed her and guided her across the room to another finished masterpiece.

Each student's apron started the year as a perfectly plain beige frock. By the end of the year, it was a chaotic myriad of colors, a story of the year's Fridays spelled out in paint. Katie started each year with her own fresh apron, keeping the soiled ones

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from years past as a sort of yearbook signed by each little soul she had the joy of teaching.

Of course, the problem with Paint Fridays was that the paint didn't always stay on the aprons. The school warned parents at the beginning of every year, and eventually they learned to send their children to school in older clothes, or the clothes that already carried the stains of Paint Friday.

Katie usually wore older paint-worthy clothes on Fridays as well, but this Friday, it was Katie's birthday. After work, she was expected at a party where a Paint Friday outfit would be deemed unacceptable. Katie could tell that the sunny weather was having a positive impact on her students' feelings by the amount of yellow, green, and pink paint that drying on her blouse and jeans. Students had covered large pieces of paper with scenes of flowers growing, boats on the water, and suns shining over tall buildings.

During the afternoon break, she sent a quick text to her husband Jason. *Gonna need you to bring me a new outfit. Paint Friday strikes again.* Her phone buzzed almost immediately, and Jason's reply brought a smile to her face. *Already had an extra outfit hanging in the car's backseat. See you soon.*

Jason was the most thoughtful person Katie had ever met. They'd been in the same environmental

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science class their sophomore year of college, and he'd chased her down the corridor when she'd left her pencil behind on accident. Katie thought he'd gone through an awful lot of trouble just to return a pencil she could replace at the Dollar Tree, so she asked him if he'd like to get coffee with her. The pencil had been an excuse for Jason to approach Katie, so he'd accepted readily. That pencil encounter quickly grew into a whirlwind romance. Katie felt safe, cared for, and heard when she was with him.

He'd proposed by placing a ring on a pencil and presenting it to her as though she'd dropped it. It was corny and ridiculous but also perfect. They married shortly after graduation and started their adult lives together. Jason was in marketing in a tech firm downtown, and Katie made use of her early childhood education degree in Busy Bees Preschool. Katie wasn't sure how she'd started living the dream, but she was eternally grateful that she was.

The end of the day came quickly—snacks, nap time, free play, and then the alphabetical lineup for a structured pickup. Jason pulled up to Busy Bees just as Katie was handing over the last paint stained, chatty four year old (Yunker, Ainsley) to a bemused parent. Katie waved as the vehicle pulled away and let out a contented sigh as Jason planted

a kiss on her cheek and placed his hand over her stomach.

“I can’t wait till our own Busy Bee walks home with you, covered in paint every Friday.” Jason’s happiness was palpable and contagious. Not that Katie needed much of a boost in the happiness department for their future child.

“I can’t wait to see Liz’s face tonight when I give her this birthday present.” Katie half laughed, the excitement shining out of her face. Jason handed her the extra outfit and gestured toward the door of Busy Bee. They had little time to make it to the venue, and Seattle’s traffic was a cruel mistress when on a time crunch.

Katie daydreamed about Liz’s reaction to her news. Liz and Katie were fraternal twins and enjoyed a seemingly supernatural connection they had deemed “twin sense.” Though they had a deep understanding of each other, they couldn’t have been more opposite in personality and appearance.

As children, Elizabeth and Katelyn Hanover had gotten into as much precocious trouble as any children could. Liz had always been the mastermind behind whatever ludicrous plot the twins were scheming and dreaming up, but Katie never let Liz take the fall for anything they did. Katie may not have been as mischievous as Liz, but she followed

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her sister willingly, and often happily, into dangerous territory. She came to Liz's rescue every time they'd been caught in the act (or after the act). If Liz's antics lead to injury, Katie would care for her before their mother ever needed to place a kiss on a scrape.

As adults, Liz's fearlessness morphed into ambition, and Katie's loyalty morphed into nurturing. Liz was a couple months away from finishing her law degree and already had corporate firms in the city courting her. Katie had discovered a love for teaching small children as a teenager, babysitting the neighbor's kids. She'd stuck with that love and found the perfect career for her.

The only thing missing from Katie's life was a baby. This was also Liz's opinion. Liz had never wanted children; she just wasn't much of a nurturing type. She did, however, aim to be the coolest aunt on the face of the planet and had consistently cheered Katie on as she and Jason tried for a baby.

Katie knew it would overjoy Liz that a little Edgecomb would soon debut in the world. Truly, she couldn't think of a much better birthday present for her and Liz than the news of an addition to the family.

TWO

KATIE'S VISION SWAM in bright circles of color as camera flashes flooded the back room of Harley's Pizzeria. She could feel the warm comfort of Liz's body as they squished together to lean over the cake. Her vision cleared after the rousing and spectacularly off-key rendition of "Happy Birthday" came to a close. She spared a glance at Liz's smiling face and drew joy from her sister's sparkling eyes. Liz always looked as though she were sitting on the punchline of a joke or a major piece of good news. Her face shone with joy and a hint of mischief as she bent, pulling Katie down with her to blow out the twenty-five candles on the cake. Applause exploded around them as tiny tendrils of smoke curled into the

air above the cake.

As their father, Tim, started cutting and disseminating pieces of the cake, Katie pulled Liz off to the side of the room. Katie was ready to share her secret with her sister; keeping anything from Liz was difficult for Katie. After all, they'd shared everything since the day they'd come screaming into the world.

It was Katie's turn to let her eyes sparkle with mischief as Liz slowly unwrapped the gift, as though she were suspicious that the contents might jump out and bite her. She looked down upon the t-shirt that was carefully folded to show the words "Auntiesaurus Rex." Her face played quickly through looks of puzzlement, dawning comprehension, and then rapturous joy. Liz launched herself at Katie, practically taking both of them to the ground with her exuberance.

"Jason and I aren't telling anyone else yet, so keep it a secret. It's still early, but I just couldn't keep this from you." Katie laughed as she hugged Liz.

"Cross my heart and hope to die," Liz replied, making the X motion over her heart as she pulled away. "I'm so thrilled for you. Your life is finally your literal dream. How lucky are you?"

"How lucky are *we*?" Katie said, looping an arm

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through her sister's and turning them to look out at the room of their family and friends.

The crowd was a delightful mix of corporate suits, denim vests decked out in spikes and patches, and brightly colored, comfortable chic. The corporate suits were mostly Katie and Liz's mutual friends. Their father was a partner in a large corporate law firm, and the twins had made friends with the other lawyers' children at company retreats and picnics through the years. The spikes and patches were all Liz. Despite her ambitions to be a corporate lawyer like their father, she had never let go of her alternative style.

Even now, just months from graduation and with multiple firms ready to make her offers, her pixie haircut held streaks of bright pink. She wore a perfectly tailored black pantsuit over a bandeau top. Liz had dubbed herself a "corporate punk" and threw herself wholeheartedly into her eclectic fashion and personality mix. The suit drew attention to Liz's angular features. There had always been something hard about Liz, both physically and emotionally. She was all sharp angles and sinewy muscle on the outside. Liz kept a rigorous exercise schedule. Just looking at the gym selfies on Liz's Instagram made Katie tired.

Internally, Liz was highly skeptical of the entire

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world. She was slow to trust, with a keen sense and little patience for bullshit. Katie knew she was going to be a shark in the courtroom, and she was frequently grateful that Liz was always in her corner instead of the opposite.

Katie was a good balance for Liz, in all things. Where Liz was hard and angular, Katie was soft and round. It wasn't that Katie was large; both twins were five foot four and small of frame. Katie didn't much care for the gym and opted for slow and steady walks on trails and beaches. There was a softness to her body that showed that she was much more likely to be lifting books than weights, and she was perfectly okay with that. Her blonde hair fell in soft and often unruly waves to her shoulders, though it lived most of its life caged in a high ponytail. She was more open to the world and could more readily accept things that didn't have an explanation. Katie attributed her openness to consistently looking at the world through the lens of her students, who still found wonder and fascination in the smallest things.

Katie fit right in with the brightly colored, comfortable chic faction of the guests. They were her friends from college, teachers from other preschools in the area, and women from the hiking book club she ran. Each month, she led a group of ten women

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on an easy hike that ended in a picnic and the discussion of the month's book. Her blouse was a flowy boho affair in a sunny yellow that made her hair look lighter than it really was. Paired with stretch skinny jeans and flats in the same shade, she looked like she'd be more at home at a festival or beach than a party in the city.

"This party looks like Ms. Frizzle took the principal to a Green Day concert," Liz said, eyes dancing wickedly. Katie looked into her sister's face, trying to determine exactly how much trouble they were about to cause.

Despite the differences in their appearance, there was one attribute that made it obvious they were sisters. They both had eyes in a strange shade of blue that was almost gray, and sometimes held hints of darkest green. Jason had told her that her eyes were like the ocean just after a storm when the sun was peeking out from behind the dark clouds. Looking at her sister, Katie recognized what an apt description that was. Except, at this moment, Katie was pretty sure the storm was just brewing and had not yet passed.

"Liz, what have you cooked up now?" Katie asked, eyes roving the pizzeria for booby traps. Liz widened her eyes and smiled sweetly, the perfect picture of innocence.

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She was still smiling sweetly at Katie as their mother, Angela, and their maternal grandmother, Virginia, walked up. Angela was beaming, ever the delightful hostess. Only a slight tightness around her eyes showed she was wrestling with other emotions. Virginia was more open with her emotions. Her lined face set in a grim pattern made her look even older than she was.

“I can’t believe my babies are twenty five,” Angela said, voice thick as she tried to hold back tears. She laid a hand on each of the twins’ faces, her eyes dancing over them, memorizing every line and curve.

Angela’s face lost its pretense of happiness, and her striking resemblance to her mother moved Katie unexpectedly. She wondered if she was looking into the future as Angela spoke again.

“Promise me you’ll hold on to this memory. And to the memories of your childhood. Life is so cruel and unfair, and you may not always have each other.”

Liz groaned aloud and Katie felt her sister’s body stiffen, the tension singing down the arm that touched her own.

“Mom, please,” Katie said quietly. “Today isn’t the day for your superstitions and sad stories.”

“Today is exactly the day,” Grandma Virginia

said, voice hard and ever so slightly tinged with fear. She pulled a silver cross out from under her floral sweater and tugged it back and forth on its chain, as though the movement were a type of silent prayer.

Angela waved her mother off and nodded a little too fast. “Of course, girls. You are happy today, and that’s all a mother really wants for her daughters. But please at least promise me you’ll be careful on your way home tonight.” Angela wiped her palms on her thighs, smoothing non-existent wrinkles out of her tasteful black cocktail dress.

After many platitudes and promises to be careful—“We won’t drive after we’ve been drinking. You know us better than that. No, Mom, we won’t light any candles at home tonight. We’ll take the stairs, not the elevator.”—Angela gave her daughters a wistful smile and drifted off into the party, Virginia in tow. Katie felt Liz let out a gust of air and turned to look at her sister, her head shaking and a laugh building deep in her chest.

“I am so glad that after tonight we will never have to hear their superstitious drivel again!” Liz exclaimed.

Their mother and grandmother had been pounding family superstitions into their heads since they were young. They had been scared at first,

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spending many a night shoved into Liz's twin size bed, holding onto each other for fear that one of them may disappear. As they entered their teenage years, they realized that the family's superstitions did not differ from any other tales meant to scare children into behaving. They no more believed in the family "curse" than they believed in witches that lived in candy houses and ate children.