

## Let Me Ask--This One Time

Do you know that when you complain about each other, you complain about me?

Could you listen to me this once, because oddly, though I tell you this, I can't precisely explain it myself. I'm not sure I'll ever be able to say this exactly right. And there seems no safe place in the middle of your hurt and rage for me to try.

I came from each of you. Half from you, Mom, and half from you, Dad. What's wrong with me that you find so much so sick in my halves?

Yours were the voices I trusted to tell me how safe the world would be. When I was hungry. When I was tired. When I was sick. When I was all alone. Mostly when I was scared. That time at the lion's cage. And then standing in line to meet Santa. And the first day at school when I knew no one and had no friends. And when the hurricane was on television and I thought it was coming to our house. I don't remember deciding to trust you. I just don't remember feeling I had a choice.

I soak in what you say, today as much as ever. And I can't stop wondering, how will I make it with my halves so wrong, disgusting, and, what did you say, selfish? Everyone else looks so normal compared to me. Well, they should look normal. You're talking about my halves, after all.

Do you know that after you stop, I can still hear you?

Where can I find a reason--any reason--I should be allowed to be happy? Or to succeed or to finish anywhere but last? I've stopped being able to concentrate. And as I fail at more and more, I can see clearer and clearer how right you are.

Tonight you're screaming again to tell me my halves are worthless, that in me lives a liar and a fool and a jerk and a thief. If I show you I accept that judgment, will you stop? If I get sick? If I drink or I'm arrested or expelled? If I quit everything and run far away? Will you find in my destruction a reason finally to go on?

Once I tried to stop you. At least I think I did. I can't remember anymore. I think I begged. No. No, I guess I didn't. But I should have. I imagined what it would be like, but I chickened out. I should have, but I didn't. I was too afraid. I should have, but I didn't. Me, the liar and fool and jerk and thief, on top of that a coward.

All your fights are about me. All of them. I have to get you to stop. But I always fail. I have to, but I'll fail. I have to, but I'll fail. What would you expect from someone like me? But as I think over and over to myself, "I have to, but I'll fail; I have to, but I'll fail," I sometimes stop and notice I haven't breathed in a while and the back of my throat aches like a knife sticks out of it.

I won't ask you to stop anymore. You would know. You always have. I still have no choice but to trust you.

--"Jessica"