

# Intertext

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## Mary Janes

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# MARY JANES

Sophia Carnicelli

I spent most of kindergarten in the dim school hallway. I refused to enter, being a strong-willed five-year-old. Instead, I stood in my black Mary Janes, sulking at my own reflection. It became an ongoing joke at Christmas, with family members saying, “Maybe that’s why you have always struggled with science” or “How are you surviving at Syracuse if you didn’t go to Kindergarten?”

Looking back, I know exactly why I didn’t go into that classroom.

My refusal to enter became a routine. Lily, my twin sister, would happily march past me into her class next door, ignoring the dramatic scene I made. On the days that my endlessly patient teacher finally coaxed me

into class, I stood in the back with my coat on, refusing to sit. This continued for nine months, much to the dismay of my parents.

Without even realizing, my six-year-old self struggled with the exact same thing I struggle with today as a nineteen-year-old girl.

My jaw never unclenched; my shoulders never relaxed no matter how hard I tried. An absurd number of butterflies would fill my stomach. Crazy how something in your head can affect your body. It must have something to do with biology.

*One word. 7 letters.*

Little things always get to me for no reason. Like going to class.

I know it starts at 11:30. I know it's a 5-minute walk. So why do I keep leaving at 11:00?

I know it starts at 11:30. So why I can't stop double checking my schedule?

I know it starts at 11:30. So why can't I stop for a coffee? Because what if there is a long line in the coffee shop. Then I will be late.

And if I'm late, my teacher will get mad.

Then the teachers won't like me, and I definitely won't get a good grade in the class. And if I don't get a good grade in the class, it will bring down my GPA.

Living in a world with a constant fear something is going to go wrong is a world I no longer want to live in. My mom tells me to "look at everything in a positive light," but that sounds so impossible.

Stop setting six alarms in the morning, the first one will wake you up. You know that, you've known that for years now.

*One word. Seven letters.*

There is a pile of agonizing thoughts that never disappear no matter how hard I try. I had to tell Claire that I was shaking because I had three coffees that day, but truth be told I didn't stop because I thought I would be late. It wasn't the coffee making me shake.

"It's the coffee." "I'm always cold."

What a lame excuse. If you own up to it, maybe it'll go away.

I try journaling about it, writing my feelings down, so I don't explode like a can of Pepsi that's been rolling around in a car all day. Like being vulnerable will make me stronger:

But it won't really.

I get bullied by the employees of Jenny's

Nails since my nails are always too short to even file. My fingers bleed around my chipped blue nail polish. I've gotten used to just rubbing at the blood until it fades into my skin.

The turf burns from lacrosse season have turned into scars from the constant picking. My thighs are permanently marked from the countless breakdowns I've had, each a different memory I carry with me.

One symptom that lingered was the eating. I don't eat when I'm anxious. The pit in my stomach doesn't let me.

But what if I pass out because I'm not eating? But what if I feel sick because I'm not eating? I need to eat something, or else I won't feel good.

But if I eat too much, I won't fit into my size 27 Urban Outfitters jeans. I won't be skinny like I'm supposed to be.

132 pounds. I was 125 last year.

No, I just won't eat. But then what if I feel sick?

I'm gonna go to the gym after class. It's supposed to release endorphins, or at least that's what my doctor told me. I have my Spotify playlist pulled up but I'll connect my AirPods outside the gym, so I won't accidentally blast music. That would be embarrassing, wouldn't it?

I have to run 3 miles to burn off all the food I ate. Or didn't eat.

132. 132. 132.

I guess the gym helped a little. Just a little. An increase in Serotonin for the day.

I'm gonna call my mom, she always makes me feel better. Lily does, too. She didn't pick up. But she has her Apple Watch, so it's not like she didn't see it. Where is she? What is she doing?

Immediate thought: *A car accident. Is she dead?*

Morbid thought, but it's the first one that comes to mind. What would I do without her? I can't do it without her. One day, I'm gonna have to.

That day might be the hardest day of my life.

*One word. Seven letters.*

Stop thinking about that. I need to get it out of my mind. But I can't. It just keeps repeating. Will it ever stop?

I start texting mom.

*Call me when you can, please?*

*Mom calls me back.*

The pressure on my shoulders lightens, not all the way.

Talking to her helps.

She asks me what I did that day.

Everything is fine until I hang up the phone. Then once again I am all alone with my thoughts.

There have been the bad panic attacks where it feels like an eternity, where everything goes dark for a while. The worst ones are the silent ones. The ones that happen in the bathroom, using the flushing of the toilet to muffle the sounds of me gasping for a breath of air.

It peaked when I left for Syracuse. During those first few weeks away from home, I frequently looked at the quote I'd found online and set as my phone wallpaper—"So far you've survived everything you thought you wouldn't"—just to remind myself how far I've come since the days I spent staring at my tear-stained Mary Janes.

Some days I would cry myself to sleep and others I couldn't be happier. It was a real rollercoaster of emotions.

Shane helped me a lot during that time because he would listen. He would listen to me during my excessive number of mental breakdowns. He would talk to me in a calm voice, never judging me.

I try to tell myself that I can't rely on one

person for my source of happiness, but at that moment, I only had him and my spine-chilling thoughts.

I don't know what I would do if I lost him. He has taught me to love myself. He's on my mind all the time. I don't mind, I can never get sick of that beautiful smile. He has seen me at my worst, crying in his arms, but I wouldn't want to be crying in anyone else's arms. He has seen me at my best when my mental state was peaking. The first thing I think about in the morning and the last thing I think about before I fall asleep. The best boyfriend in the world, but that's just my opinion.

To be back in his arms. It's the best feeling in the world.

Lily also helped. This was the first time I would be without her for more than three days. Crazy, right? We had literally been hip-

to-hip since we were born. Not seeing her face every day broke my heart.

It was the first time I'd celebrate my birthday by myself. It was the first time I was just Sophia, not Sophia and Lily. And that scared the shit out of me.

I've gotten used to it by now. We do Face-time at least twice a day. She understands it, too, the way I feel.

Even though she did actually attend kindergarten.

*One word. Seven letters.*

That one cruel word.  
Seven letters that have been haunting me ever since those black Mary Janes.

*Anxiety.*