

I reached max fourth grader brain usage figuring out when my older sister Anita's phone would die. If her phone is at 25%, then I estimate 20 minutes until it reaches 7% - but what if she decides to take a nap instead of talking to me?

And when we finally did talk, it was about the flyer at school, a dip in the road, a flick of paint drying on the wall. I wanted the juicy, deep stuff – the romance, the betrayals, the exes. If you asked Anita, an Airpod in one ear blasting music, keeping her entertained, she'd say we were sisters, but about Greenland's distance to Chile away from being friends. If I couldn't make friends with the person I live across from the hall with, the person I had shared a womb with, how could I make friends at all?

Just perhaps this fear explained my mid-elementary personality shuffle. How I could never walk to class alone, I had to follow someone, be a part of some rando group, be next to someone, anyone. Anita, on the other hand, picked and chose her friends precisely. She didn't pick me. Whether it was at home in that seemingly small hallway between our bedrooms or in the school hallways, I was always seventeen steps behind.

Boom. Deadly pandemic hits. People cough. People die. People stay at home all day. We stay at home. All day.

"Mom! I can't focus when Amanda keeps coming into my classes!"

"I'm on lunch Anita! What do you want me to do, not eat!?"

We ended up dividing the house up, she gets the first floor, I get the second floor. That worked for maybe two days. I had to eat lunch, she had to nap between classes. At some point we figured, she had nowhere to run, I had nowhere to run, we might as well run towards each other. Stroll. Cautiously. Friend-ly?

"Amanda, I'm going to Taco Bell." She grabs her keys and walks to the garage.

I scramble to grab my phone, step on the heels of some tennis shoes and run out the door after her, five steps behind.

Food does wonders, even if it's a rich fatty mystery cheese shoved into a tortilla. It was in these moments, crouching on the hot Californian leather of her car together, when we saw each other most. Because now in my eyes, she wasn't this exhausted, hormonal teenager, always either lacking the care or too physically tired to talk to her premature sister. And in her eyes, I wasn't this slow, awkward kid constantly playing catch up and trying to find her place amongst strangers solely to dodge loneliness, the company of her own thoughts.

One day while we were waiting for our boba order, she told me about her boyfriend in high school. I had known absolutely nothing about it. She told me about the guy, I can't remember his name anymore, and I could only think of her phone. It was wrapped in this little tripod attached to the car fan. A Snapchat ding here, an iMessage dong there, and she was talking to *me*.

She's moved across the country now. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Forbes Avenue. I still glance once, twice, three times, at anything and everything even remotely off-putting. She called me on FaceTime yesterday; we talked for five and then I hung up. Math test.

I want to buy some chunky platform shoes, a pair that asks for nobody's opinions, it doesn't need them. It'd stomp on the opinions. Then I'll walk to Biology alone.