

Kim Turrisi

Just a

After you lose everything ...

Normal

what's left?

Tuesday



*If you are reading this,
I am already gone.*

It's just a normal Tuesday ... until sixteen-year-old Kai finds a suicide note from her beloved older sister, Jen. Now Kai is the only child in a family reeling with grief. Unable to make sense of her sister's choice, Kai begins to lose control. She cuts class. Lashes out at the people closest to her. Pops the same pills that killed her sister.

As she spirals toward rock bottom, her parents offer her a lifeline: a summer away at camp. Grief camp ... for teens. Kai reluctantly agrees to attend, even though she's not exactly in the mood for s'mores. But she finds solace in meeting kids like her, and slowly she begins to come back to life — and even love — at The Treehouse.

With biting wit and exquisite sensitivity, debut author Kim Turrisi tells a story of loss and hope, rooted in personal experience.

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KCP
Loft

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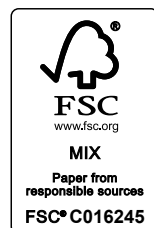
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For my sister

Prologue

Today is such a Monday kind of Tuesday. It's blistering hot, I left my English paper on the dining room table, the Tater Tots — which are the only edible thing in the cafeteria — were gone by the time I got to lunch *and* Mrs. Lindley gave us a pop quiz in Algebra.

When my best friend, TJ, and I meet up after our last class, we do what we always do: dissect the day.

“Worst day. I got a C on a paper I was certain was a solid B. Then I got paired with John Lozano for a Biology project,” he complains.

“Pop quiz that I know I tanked,” I say, trying to one-up him because that's what we do.

“Not even close. I so win,” he argues.

“I'll give this round to you. The Lozano factor pushed you over.”

TJ and I land at the first bank of ugly drab metal lockers that cover the hallway walls of Parkland High School. I grab the dial of my locker without paying any attention: eleven to the right, seven to the left, eleven to the right again. It pops open with a familiar click. November 7 is my sister Jen's birthday. Easy to remember, plus they're

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my two lucky numbers. The vertical grayish-brown door swings open and hits the locker next to mine with a metal-on-metal ting.

The inside of my locker is decorated with photographs and postcards. My favorite is one of Jen and me standing in, yeah *in*, Westcott Fountain at Florida State when she graduated. It's a rite of passage for the seniors to jump in the fountain so I jumped in right along with her. We look nothing alike. Not our hair, not our body types. Nothing. Jen's curvy, I'm thinner. My hair is dark and hers is light brown.

"Maybe Mom had an affair with the FedEx guy," Jen says. It's her go-to explanation.

Six years my senior, Jen has always taken care of me and shielded me from any family discord. I was her baby when I was born. She traded Barbie and the other dolls in for yours truly. Her gregarious personality is bigger than life, and she's my biggest ally. She's Jennifer to my parents, Jen to her slew of friends and Jen Jen to me. When I was two and a half, she laughed at the way I said Jen, so I'd repeat it over and over to get her to smile.

It worked every time so it stuck.

A glossy postcard of the Eiffel Tower is taped sideways next to a picture of TJ and me holding a sign that says PARIS OR BUST in giant red letters. We're taking a gap year after graduation to backpack around Europe. Not that my parents know that yet. It isn't in their plan for me. Jen's on board though, and has a surefire plan to make it work.

As we walk toward Gertie, TJ's blue Jeep Wrangler, my green flip-flops stick to the hot blacktop.

"It's so fucking hot," I say, stating the obvious.

“Global fucking warming,” TJ replies, pulling out his signature Blu electronic cigarette. He lights up and takes a long drag. I don’t get the whole electronic-cigarette thing, but I have too much on my plate with this book report and our secret gap year plans, not to mention the SATs, to question his bad judgment. Besides, Thomas James McAndrews pretty much gets a pass for anything from me. We’ve been inseparable since I moved here over ten years ago. For just a split second we were boyfriend and girlfriend in middle school, until after a game of truth or dare gone awry, TJ realized he’d rather have his tongue in Jason Taylor’s mouth than mine. His long, messy brown hair and gangly body make him a dead ringer for Jesus, depending on how the light hits him. The scar above his right eye is courtesy of his stepfather, who is one mean drunk.

TJ unlocks my door first and lets me hop in.

“McDonald’s?” he asks, already knowing the answer. The Golden Arches is our place. I turn up the radio, the latest song by The National jams and we both sing along all the way to fast-food paradise with the promise of six fried nuggets and zesty barbecue dipping sauce on the horizon.

Today we opt for the drive-through window and take our food to go.

Then TJ turns to the elephant in the Jeep.

“Are we going to this end-of-the-year prom thing or what?” he asks. He can’t really invite the person he wants to since that would require officially coming out and possible danger at home.

“We have to go for yearbook. It’s the last big event before it goes to print.”

“You know Chris’s band is playing, right?”

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Sophomore-year heartache stabs at me once more.

“I couldn’t give a shit,” I lie. I do give a lot of shits. I lost my virginity to Chris, a guy who whispered all the right things in my ear and managed to cloud my judgment with empty promises. I should have known better. Thankfully, I’ve managed to avoid him since the ugly incident.

“I’m wearing a powder-blue tux with black Vans. Totally retro,” he says.

“Really?” I never know when he’s joking.

“Rad, right?”

“Well, it doesn’t exactly reinforce the straight thing.” We come to a screeching halt at the end of my driveway.

“See you later? It’s Taco Tuesday at Casa Azul,” TJ says.

“I’ve got to write this paper. I just have to get it over with. Text me later,” I say, grabbing the silver door handle.

“Come on, study break for tacos?”

“All right, all right. You win. How about seven-ish? That should give me time to crank this out.”

“Peace out.” He waves.

I watch him speed off as I saunter up the ornate driveway of my parents’ dream house. They spent hours choosing pavers that would be covered by cars anyway. What was the point? My sister and I mock them all the time.

I hear Duke’s incessant barking and can just picture him running in circles inside as I slide my key into the lock. Crap, I forgot to grab the mail. My dad is so OCD about the mail. Whoever gets home first has to get it immediately. Never know what could be in there, right? I mean, who wouldn’t want to steal the discount pizza coupons

and the endless catalogs? But my dad is Mr. Litigator so I've learned not to argue about things unless they really matter to me. I pick my battles. The mail isn't one of them.

Duke is still going nuts as I grab the mail from the custom oblong mailbox that mirrors the colors of the house. My father's pride and joy. He obsessed for days over the design of it. What he spent on that mailbox could feed a family of ten for at least a month. I tuck the stack of mail under my arm.

When I push the decorative hand-carved front door open, Duke greets me with sloppy kisses and muddy paws. Retriever-size paw prints decorate the Spanish-tile floor. Looks like he had a party for one in the backyard today. Mom will lose it when she sees holes in her prized garden. I ignore Duke's mess and head straight up to my room. I can't procrastinate any longer. I've gotta write this paper now if there's any hope of making it to Taco Tuesday.

I throw my books on top of my 1960s aluminum desk — the cardboard tucked tightly under one leg keeps it from wobbling — and move across my room toward the turntable. Vinyl is the only way to go.

Jen found this classic desk at a garage sale for like twenty bucks and said if I was going to be a writer, my desk had to mirror my style. Vintage, quirky, retro, that's me. The classic Rolling Stones *Tattoo You* album is just getting going. Perfect vibe. I toss the stack of mail and watch as it slides across the slippery surface of my desk. That's when I glimpse an envelope skidding out of the pile like it's stealing second base. The lettering on the envelope matches the postcards in my locker. Jen's writing. Odd that she'd send a letter but she does love to write.

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I pick up the envelope and am immediately struck by the weight of it. Two stamps on the front. I'm ultra-careful not to rip it. Learned that the hard way when my grandparents sent money and I tore a crisp hundred-dollar bill. Jen knows I'm saving for my trip. Could she be sending some cold hard cash? That would be so like her. First thing I see is a note.

*My very bestest sister, Kai
If you are reading this, I am already gone.*

I scrutinize the stationery. It's definitely my sister's handwriting. Slanted, looping, like art. If there were an award for best cursive writing, Jen would bring home the hardware, hands down.

*I've watched you grow up since you were a baby.
You've turned into an amazing person. I know you know
how much I love you and have always wanted the best of
everything for you. Please don't be disappointed in me for
being too weak to face down my demons.*

Demons? Disappointed? I snag my phone from my pocket and choose her number in my Favorites. Sometimes it's just easier to talk than read stuff that makes no sense. Like this.

Straight to voice mail. I return to the letter, curious.

That's when I see the word ...

funeral.

The gravity of that word knocks the wind out of me and, literally, my legs out from under me. I land on my bedroom floor with a thud.

I didn't set out to hurt you or Mom and Dad. I hope this doesn't cause you any embarrassment but there is no way out for me. I know this makes me a coward but I can't take the weight of things any longer.

“What the fuck are you talking about, Jen?” Through an onslaught of tears, I keep reading.

Mom understands you more than you think. Let her in. You can trust her. Please don't wear black to the funeral. Don't mourn me. Celebrate the wonderful life you have ahead of you.

This handwriting isn't art. Far from it. With each new paragraph, the letters are slanting down to the right and the words are bunched together, barely legible. A knife navigates its way from my gut to my sternum, filleting me, as I realize the magnitude of what's happening.

When she says *gone*, does she mean *dead*?

I leap toward the wastebasket. The vomit comes fast as my cries mix with anger. After I wipe my mouth off, I finish reading her last words to me.

This world is a terribly flawed place for someone like me. Don't ever let anyone change your outlook on life.

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Get everything you can out of every minute and always work hard to get what you want. Everything I have is yours. It's not a lot but you'll have the car you've been asking for and some extra cash. Use it to get to Europe. If you don't go, you'll regret it. No looking back. Only forward.

It's like I'm caught in the current under a waterfall and can't find my way to the surface for air. I sound more like a wounded animal than a human being and tears stream from my eyes so fast they're blinding me.

Kai Bear, I don't expect you to understand this, but I'm not scared of death. The alternative is too painful. That pain is over now.

Please don't cry for me, I am finally at peace and pain free. You are strong, unlike me. Use every minute of your life doing what you love and loving what you do. Be happy. I will watch over you for the rest of your life and will always be in your corner.

*Forgive me,
Jen Jen*

I hear an earsplitting scream and realize it is coming from me. I breathe in and out, attempting to calm myself down. I refold the handwritten pages and it takes me four attempts to get them back in the envelope. This might be the last thing Jen will ever give me. Will ever say. The last. *The last?*

Chapter 1

I strain to focus on the situation at hand. Her apartment is less than twenty minutes away. There's a chance.

There just has to be.

Instinctively, I call TJ, my rock. Per usual, he picks up on the first ring: "Missed me, I see." When I hear his actual voice, I catch my breath for a moment.

"It's Jen. I think ... I think ..." I start wailing. "I think something horrible happened." I struggle to get out more. "I have to get to her. Please. I need you."

"Leaving now. Stay put, Kai, I'll be there in five."

I frantically hit my mom's number. It goes straight to voice mail. Fucking voice mail!

"Why can't you answer the phone, Mom? Just pick up the goddamn phone!" I screech. I hear the tone and I have to say something!

I steady my voice as best I can. "Mom, call me as soon as you get this."

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I hang up and attempt to reach my dad. Same thing. “Daddy, call me,” I say. I haven’t called him Daddy for at least five years.

I bump the desk and the rest of the mail drops to the floor, raining bills and two more letters with handwriting that is all too familiar: one addressed to Marie Sheehan, the other to John Sheehan. My parents.

Jesus Christ.

I race down the stairs and wait in the driveway for TJ. I try to reach both of my missing parents again, just in case.

“Something terrible has happened, you have to call me. Now!!” I scream. Do I need to send up a flare? I start to text them just as TJ is skidding into the driveway. He jumps out of his Jeep and I rush into his waiting arms.

“What happened, Kai?”

I’m on that razor’s edge of believing she might still be alive and knowing the truth is she could be dead. I steel myself to say something I never dreamed I’d ever have to say to my best friend. Waterworks take over and I have no control over the ache that is squeezing my heart. “I think Jen killed herself. I don’t even know when. I just saw her on Sunday. We have to get there. Maybe she’s still alive. I don’t know.”

He turns ashen. TJ holds me so close that I can smell the distinct odor of his soap. Eucalyptus.

“What do you even mean ‘killed herself?’” he asks.

“She sent me a letter. Said she had demons. She couldn’t take it anymore. I don’t know, TJ. Please, we have to go to her. I can’t find my fucking parents anywhere.” I know I’m not making any sense but none of this makes sense.

TJ steadies me, helping me into the passenger seat, reaching across my lap to buckle me in. He looks at me with sad dark eyes that are welling up. “I think we should call the police or 911.”

I nod and punch three digits on my phone.

“I’ll take side streets, I know a shortcut,” he says as he navigates his way down streets I didn’t know existed.

The 911 operator answers and I jump right in. “It’s my sister. She might be dead. Please help me.”

“Miss, I need your name. Where are you?” an ultra-calm voice says.

“Kai Sheehan. In a car. Going to my sister’s apartment. There was a letter from her when I got home from school. My parents ... I don’t know ... Please.”

“What’s the address?” she continues, keeping her composure.

“I can’t think. Please,” I whimper. *Please* is on repeat in my head. Like, *Please do not let this be happening. Please.*

“I’ll stay on the phone with you. Try your best to remember,” she encourages me without being too pushy.

“It’s 2421 Ocean View Terrace, apartment number 2,” I manage. TJ rubs my back with the hand that isn’t steering us through the side streets of Fort Lauderdale.

“I’ve dispatched an ambulance and the police. They’ll probably get there before you arrive. Are your parents with you?” she asks.

“I can’t reach them. No one is answering their phones,” I sob.

“I’ll stay right here with you,” the stranger on the other end reassures me.

All I can do is pray silently to a God I don’t really believe in.

“Is this really happening?” I ask, hoping the answer is no. I just can’t go to that place yet.

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TJ reaches for me, gently drawing my head to his shoulder.

“I’m so sorry, Kai. I don’t know what to say.” I feel his tears spill onto my cheek.

We ride in penetrating silence until the moment TJ wheels into my sister’s art deco apartment complex. There is a sea of flashing red lights and a twisted maze of police cars, a lone black car and an ambulance. They line the road inside the secluded complex. Tucked away in a cul-de-sac, the fifteen units encircling the pool were built in the 1940s. It had the charm and privacy that Jen craved.

“Oh my God,” I say.

TJ takes charge of the 911 operator. “Ma’am, thanks for staying on with us. We’re here, so are the police and everybody else.” I snatch the phone from his hands once the operator hangs up. I have to get to Jen.

So many lights.

So many people.

The vehicles are all parked haphazardly in the middle of the street outside the busted-in door of Jen’s tiny one-bedroom place. No order whatsoever. Car doors left wide open. I leap out of the Jeep before it rolls to a complete stop. I’m blinded by the need to get to my sister and help her. My legs start running and one of the police officers stops me with his extended forearm. I struggle to get away.

“My sister is in there!” I yell. I shove and flail. I have to get to her.

“Your parents are on the way,” he offers.

“How? What?” Nothing is computing.

“We found your father’s office number in her phone. It was on her nightstand. I’m so sorry,” I hear him say through the fog that has rolled into my head.

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TJ sprints toward me but not before I break free from the police officer's arms.

I rush through my sister's living room, dodging the ottoman, blowing by her oversize leather chair, passing through throngs of uniformed officers, into her bedroom.

Then everything stops.



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Photo by Brandon Anthony

A graduate of Florida State University, KIM TURRISI has built a successful career in film and television. After winning a Daytime Emmy for a web series she created and wrote, she went on to write for ABC Family's webisode series *Pretty Dirty Secrets*, the online companion piece to smash hit *Pretty Little Liars*.

Kim lives in the Los Angeles area, working as Director of Special Projects for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. Born in Hawaii, she credits her love of travel to her early life as an Air Force brat. When she isn't writing or reading, she can be found obsessing over her dogs, Riley and Rocco.

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“The anguish of loss. The hope in recovery.
A brave, real, impassioned debut.”

— Ellen Hopkins, *New York Times* bestselling
author of *Crank*

“There is grief and there is grace, and this book
is full of both. A look at love, loss, and learning to
live with questions that have no answers.

Kim Turrisi is an exquisite new voice.”

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finalist for the *Kirkus Prize*

“*Just a Normal Tuesday* is raw, real, and absolutely
beautiful. It’s a rare book that can make you
cry, laugh, swoon, and cheer. I loved this
wholeheartedly and never wanted it to end.

— Veronica Rossi, *New York Times* bestselling author of
Under the Never Sky



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