

Donor
By Marie Potoczny

I do not want to give my sister a kidney. My parents say I should; it is the nice thing to do, and the pressure is getting fierce.

“You will be a great humanitarian,” they say, looking poor and pale while sitting on my front room settee—unwanted missionaries. I am unmoved by their approach.

Then they try to get me to hand it over by saying I should just do it so I won’t be an asshole. After all, “You have two perfectly good ones, and she has none,” they say. But I am rather attached to my kidneys.

It is really not the kidney, however, but my sister. I do not want to give it to her—to her!

“She used to have good kidneys but the first one she took out and used as a pin cushion,” I remind them.

“She was young then. As parents we didn’t love her the right way; that was her way of hurting us.”

And then I say, “But the second kidney she unzipped out of her guts and used as tennis ball in a game of doubles.”

“We know. We don’t approve, but that’s just how Sandra is.”

My mother wears an eye patch. My father, a prosthetic leg that squeaks when he walks. They give Sandra body parts all the time. They seem to think nothing of an extra foot of intestines, or a blood transfusion. Sometimes when they are tired and low, my parents will say to me, “We’re so grateful you turned out so well and don’t need any skin grafts.” But they really love Sandra more than me because she needs their skin grafts and ocular transplants.

“We would give Sandra our kidneys but we already used them up on her,” they say. Now they need mine.

Mom and Dad do most of the work for getting this transplant, like coming over and looking forlorn. But Sandra wants it too, of course, and she calls every couple of weeks to influence progress by reminding me what great sisters we once were. We never talk about the kidney, but Sandra is trying to wear me down with the raspy, weak sound of her voice. I can feel her fingers scratching at my sides and reaching for my organs when we talk about which shampoo gives shinier hair, or whether it will snow at Christmas. It’s not like she’s going to die if she doesn’t get a kidney. I know it sounds like she will, like you can’t live without one, but she can. And I’ll tell you that it doesn’t mean you’re living even if you have two, good ones.

“Appeal to your greater self,” my parents say, our coffee cups are now down to the last dregs. I continue to remain unfazed by their persuasion. It is all wrong—mostly because I do not feel a greater self, just a very small self. But I am not resilient in the face of this pressure. I feel so tired when they talk at me about my good kidneys. I am suspicious they have slipped something into my drink, and I will wake up in a bathtub full of ice with my side stitched up.

“What if something were to happen to my last, good kidney? Where will I get another one?” I want to know. I imagine my sister using the one I gave her as a chew toy for the dog.

“Sandra would give you a kidney if you needed one!” my parents insist, and so I say, “I do need a kidney!” But they don’t get what I mean.

“We’re going to lose our daughter,” my parents cry, and they are angry at me. I wish it were me they were afraid of losing, but it is not. This is what makes me think for a second that if I give Sandra my kidney my parents will love me because I saved their favorite daughter, and will therefore become their favorite daughter. Thinking I could be their favorite intoxicates me. I am weak and sleepy now. My parents stare at me, wanting.

I take out both my kidneys and they are shiny and pink and fresh. They are little and look like fetuses sucking their thumbs. I am holding them in my hands and my parents are shaking a little as we move closer to make the transfer. And I know now that what I really want is for my parents to see the kidneys, see how beautiful they are, and to tell me to put them back.

But instead their hands wrap around mine and they are tugging. “Let go!” they say. Every second the kidneys are out, they are weakening, but I do not want to let them go. The kidneys are weakening and I am feeling them shrivel and shrink in my palms. I hold on to them until the kidneys are dried up into hard brown raisins.