

Inside and Out

Prologue: January 2019

“Here tonight, we have Dr. Kathryn Stevenson to speak to you about obsessive compulsive disorder,” I hear the host announce and I take a deep breath and make my way to the stage. “Good evening everyone and thank you for joining me tonight,” I say. “My name is Kathryn Stevenson and I am a child/young adult psychologist,” I pause for a moment before continuing. “In society today, people often refer to obsessive compulsive disorder without realizing what it actually is. OCD is a mental disorder in which people have unwanted and repeated thoughts, feelings, ideas, sensations, and behaviors that drive them to do something over and over. But, I’m here tonight not only to tell you what OCD is, but also to help you recognize the signs of this disorder and the impact that it can have on someone's life,” I stop letting the information sink in. “In order to do this I would like to tell a story of two girls I knew growing up. Their names were Kate and Lexi and they were identical twins. The difference between the two was Lexi battled OCD and Kate did not.”

Part 1: Freshman Year 2004

Lexi: I stare at my reflection in the mirror. I see bright blue eyes with a few swipes of mascara, sun kissed skin from just the right amount of time in the New Jersey summer sun, and perfectly styled curls cascading in soft waves down my back. Wait, crap! That one curl looks out of place!! Quickly, I plug the iron back in, desperate for my hair to be perfect. After all, it is the first day of high school. “Relax Lexi, you got this,” I say to myself for the millionth time. I just want everything to go smoothly. Fifteen minutes later when my hair is finally to my liking, I softly tiptoe down the hall to my room to get dressed. I pass my twin’s room and I can see Kate just tumbling out of bed. It always amazes me how quickly she can get ready in the morning. I reach my room and carefully dress in the outfit I selected last night. “Hmmm converse or sandals with it?” I ask myself unable to decide.

Kate: I wake to the sound of Lexi scurrying around in the bathroom. My poor sister is so nervous for today. I am slightly anxious as well, but I have to put on a brave face or Lexi will never leave the house. “Converse or sandals, converse or sandals,” I hear from across the hall. “Just pick one Lex it doesn’t matter,” I mutter. Knowing my sister she will pick one then decide to change at the last minute. It’s way too early to be dealing with my perfectionist sister. I grab a pair of jeans and the pretty blue shirt that Lex got me for my birthday last year and quickly throw

them on. I go to dump my pajamas on the floor, but decide not to torture my neat freak sister for once and throw them on my bed.

Lexi: “Wait let me take a picture!” my mom exclaims as Kate and I try to sneak out of the house and into dad’s car. My mom snaps the picture and comments, “Even with Lexi’s curly hair my babies still look the same,” she says smiling. It’s true. Kate and I look like mirror images of each other. Same blue eyes, same wavy golden brown hair, same soft cheekbones, same 5 foot 9 slender figure, same everything. We are finally pulling out of the driveway when I realize I can’t remember if I made my bed or not. “Dad stop the car!” I shout. “I have to go check something.”

Kate: “What was it?” I ask my sister when she returns to the car. “I had to check that my bed was made,” she replies, fastening her seatbelt. I roll my eyes at my crazy twin and pray that this is only a first day nerves thing. Jack is waiting for us when we reach his house. Jack lives two houses down and has been one of Lexi’s closest friends since 1st grade. As only a fourteen year old he is already over 6 feet tall. He is a lanky guy with big brown eyes and wavy brown hair. I’ve imagined how soft those locks would feel if I ran my fingers through them, but then I remember who I’m talking about, Jack, the loud outgoing guy who is always glued to my sisters side. I shake my head to clear the image and step out of the car for my first day at Greenville High School.

Lexi: By the time I reach my first period class, most of my nerves have worn off. I am thrilled that Jack has almost all the same classes as me! Jack is my best friend and knows me better than anyone except Kate. I swear Kate has a crush on him, but I can never get her to admit it. The rest of the day goes smoothly and by the time Kate and I get off the bus in the afternoon I think I have convinced myself that I can survive high school.

Kate: Lexi and I may be identical twins on the outside, but my other half has always been smarter than me. Everyone says I am the better basketball player, but I think people just say that so I don’t feel bad; Lexi and I are equally strong at the sport. Her smartness used to bother me, but it isn’t Lexi’s fault that she simply inherited the genes of our brainiac parents. Our father is an emergency room doctor and our mom is an adult phycologist. They are both crazy smart and work crazy long hours. I’m not surprised at all when they text Lexi and me saying they both will not be home until after seven p.m. I head upstairs and find Lexi in her room. I walk over to her and wrap her in a tight hug. I feel her shoulders relax and the tension leave her body. The poor girl really hates change. “You okay,” I silently ask her. She nods her head in response, but I can’t help feeling that something is not quite right.

Part 2: Sophomore Year 2005

Kate: As Lexi and I walk into school for the start of sophomore year, I reflect on the amazing first year of high school that Lexi and I had. We both had amazing grades and were starters on the JV basketball team. I was eventually able to shake the idea that something is wrong with Lexi. She is my other half, she would tell me if something was wrong. When we walk into the building Lexi and I immediately see Jack. Lexi runs to him and gives her best friend, who spent most of the summer with his grandparents across the country, a huge hug. Jack looks away from Lexi and says, “hey” to me. That is the moment I realize that has become seriously hot over the summer. His lean body is filling out and he looks like he just stepped off the beach. Trying to compose myself, I blush and say “hi” back.

Lexi: My anxious mood dissolves the moment I see Jack. Gosh I missed my best friend over the summer. I blame it on the anticipation of school starting up, but I have been so anxious the past few weeks. I am constantly on edge and I can not seem to relax. I’m hoping that being around Jack will calm me.

Kate: “It’s game day!” I say cheerfully to Lexi. “Ahhh I’m so excited!” “Same,” Lexi mumbles obviously thinking about other things. After what seems like eternity, 3:30 rolls around. The referee blows the whistle and my teammate jumps for the ball. I race up the court loving the adrenaline rush I already have. I steal the ball and take off for our net. I see Lexi ahead of me. “Lexi!” I shout heaving the ball towards her. She catches it, dodges the defender, but as she jumps to shoot she is smashed to the ground by a girl from the other team. Whistles blow and I immediately rush to her side. “Lex, Lex are you ok?” “Owwwww,” she moans. “My arm.” Sure enough her arm is at a funny angle. “Shhhhhh it’s gonna be okay Lex,” I sooth her even though it’s obvious the bone is broken.

Lexi: It’s been three weeks since I broke my stupid arm. Everyone was sympathetic at first, but I can tell that they are sick of my crabby mood. I can’t help it though. The simplest tasks are so frustrating and my skin is crawling because my life is a mess. My room isn’t cleaned and I can hardly put my own hair in a ponytail let alone style it. The pain is finally starting to subside and I am finding that I miss it. The hurt was something to focus on and now my mind is free to wander again.

Kate: I love being able to drive. It is so nice to be able to get out of the house, especially with Lexi being in such a terrible mood lately. I know she is upset about her arm, but she doesn’t have to take it out on me. I turn into our development and I pass Jack’s house. I pull into his driveway remembering that Lexi asked me to drop off his math

homework since he left class early. As I walk to the front door I realize I can't remember the last time I was alone with Jack. It's always Jack and Lexi or Jack Lexi and I. This only has to be awkward if you make it awkward. I tell myself. He opens the door and I thrust the papers at him. Why am I such a spaz? "Thanks Kate and uh you can come in if you want," he says to me. Nervously, I step into the house. "So what's new with you?" he asks. Okay so we are going with small talk. "Not much," I say boringly. Then he switches topics and asks me if I think Lexi is okay. "She seems so down all the time," he says looking worried. "She will snap out of it soon, it's just her arm," I tell him. "I don't know, I feel like it could be something else," he says not looking convinced. "I'd know," I tell him. Of course I would, I'm her sister. Nothing is wrong with Lexi. "Alright good," he says looking relieved. As I turn to go he says, "We should hang out sometime." "You, me, and Lexi?" I ask, confused because this already happens. "No I mean just you and me," he says and his face turns bright red. I can't stop the smile that spreads across my face as I agree.

Lexi: I'm driving down the road and all of the sudden I think what would happen if I drove off the bridge. What is wrong with me I would never do that! Why am I thinking that? Oh my gosh am I becoming depressed? My mind is swimming right now and I don't know what is happening to me. I feel the urge to do things like clean my room or fix my hair or check that a door is shut, but I've never considered harming myself. I ignore the thought and try to go over everything I need to do when I get home. It works, but I know the thought will be back, that is just how my brain works these days.

Kate: "Earth to Lexi," I say. "Oh what sorry," she mutters shaking her head. "What were you saying?" "I was saying that Jack asked me out!!! Like can you believe it!!!" "It's about time. I always knew you two liked each other," she says with a little laugh. Is she jealous? "Well why didn't you ever say anything?" "I knew you two would figure it out eventually," she tells me. "Are you ok with it?" I ask her carefully. "What? Yeah of course," she says clearly back in Lexiland. "I'm happy for you," she says. Gosh when did my sister get so damn spacy?

Part 3: Junior Year 2006

Kate: "I don't want to play basketball anymore," Lexi announces at the first family dinner we have had in at least two weeks. "WHAT?" I gasp, my fork clattering onto my plate. "I just don't think it is for me anymore," Lexi replies not meeting my gaze. "Why don't you join the track team instead, honey," my Dad offers calmly. How are they not freaking out about this? Basketball is what Lexi and I do. "Um I guess I could do that, but I wasn't planning

on doing a sport,” Lexi says. “You have been running all summer, and I think it would be a great.” After dinner I corner my sister. “What is wrong with you Lex? No more basketball? Your arm is fine now,” I accuse her. “I just don’t want to anymore,” she snaps and storms away.

Lexi: “Madison and Jenna want to know if we want to go grab some dinner with them” Kate says sticking her head into my room. “I’m not really feeling great,” I lie. “Just go without me.” “Come on Lex you never hang out with us anymore,” she whines. I almost give in, but I really don’t want to socialize tonight, I just don’t have the energy. Finally Kate rolls her eyes and tells me that I better come next time and leaves the room.

Lexi: My arm has been totally healed for months now, but I still feel like I am in a funk. “Hey Mom,” I say stepping into her home office. “What’s up Sweetie?” my Mom asks me. “I think I’m depressed,” I tell her. “Oh Honey, you are not depressed. You are just still recovering from your injury.” “Mom, my arm is fine now.” “Sometimes it takes a little longer than we think to heal,” she tells me. “Mom I’m serious. I don’t feel like myself anymore. I get these strange thoughts and I feel like I have to listen to them,” I say begging for her to listen to me. “You’re fine sweetheart. Everyone has crazy thoughts sometimes. In a few weeks everything is going to be alright. Go clean your room or organize your closet and I’m sure you will feel more like yourself,” she smiles at me. “What if I act on them?” I ask her. This is it, she is finally going to connect the dots and help me. “Lexi, I know you. You would never act on some crazy idea in your head. I do not know why you are worried about this, but you need to let it go,” she tells me. “Isn’t this what OCD is?” I try one last time. “Alexandra that’s enough. I would know if you had OCD. You don’t,” she sternly tells me, letting me know this conversation is over. My heart sinks. My Mom doesn’t believe me and now I feel more alone than ever. That night I silently cry myself to sleep.

Kate: I look up from my phone at the kitchen as Lexi bursts in the house. Her cheeks are bright red and she is drenched in sweat from the warm spring weather, but her eyes are brighter than I have seen them in months. “Why are you so smiley?” I ask her then immediately regret it as a little bit of that light dims. “I’m going out tonight,” she says. “You are?” I ask surprised. Lexi hardly does anything anymore, always claiming to be tired or have homework. “Um yeah Noah asked me to go to this party with him,” she says. “NOAH FINSLEY???” I shriek. “As in the hot football player that literally every girl in our grade would die to talk to???” “Yeah him,” she says as she runs upstairs to take a shower before I can respond.

Lexi: Noah asked me for help with an assignment last week and I helped him out. He didn't seem to get the hint that I wanted to be left alone, so he invited me to a party tonight. The old Lexi would have been thrilled. She would have been gushing over how cute his sandy blonde hair is and the fact that he wants to spend time with her. The current me is still willing to admit he's gorgeous, but all I can think about is how messy the house is going to be and how I will be itching to fix everything. I am also terrified of losing control of myself. What if those horrible thoughts come back and I try to crash the car or something worse. Oh gosh I can't do this tonight. I stare at the girl in the mirror and wonder how I got to this point, afraid of myself. It is all too much and I just want to be someone new for the night. Without thinking, I find my push up bra and grab the skimpiest shirt that Kate owns. I apply thick layers of makeup until I hardly recognize my own reflection. Then, throwing a jacket over my outfit, I slip out of the house before I can change my mind and I wait for Noah to pick me up.

Lexi: The music is already blaring when we walk up to the house. "Did you lock the car?" I ask him. "Yeah I think so. Why?" he asks looking at me funny. I have the urge to go check it. "I um left my lipgloss in there that's all," I lie. "Girls are so weird," he laughs and pulls me towards the kitchen for a drink. With two solo cups down, I'm feeling so much better. I haven't felt this free in months and the giggles escaping my lips sound foreign. Eventually, I make my way to the bathroom unable to hold my bladder any longer. My reflection sobers me up quickly. Too many pieces of my hair are no longer straight. The sweat from my neck is stealing it away. I feel my heart begin to pound and my fingers start to shake. It's okay, it's okay I try to tell myself. But I know it's not. I don't actually care how my hair looks, but my brain can't stop thinking of the messed up strands. My feet carry me towards the stairs and all I can think of is that I have to find a straightener in this house. My brain is consumed by that one thought. I am nearly at the top when Noah's voice halts my ascent. "Where are you going?" he asks in a sexy tone. "Um nowhere I was just looking for something," I stammer as my hands get clamier. "Need some help?" he asks as he moves towards me. "No that's okay," I say backing away. I have to find it. I have to find it. "Lexi you good?" his voice snaps me back to reality. My brain is panicking and I am seconds away from having a panic attack. I have to find the straightener. I know what he wants and I can't give it to him, not in this state. Sensing the panic in my eyes he softly asks, "Would you like me to drive you home?" say yes Lexi, say yes. "Yyyes ppplease," I stammer, but I don't move my feet. I can't, they are glued to the floor. "Are you coming?" he asks. "Can you carry me?" I ask weakly.

“Uh okay,” he says and gently lifts me. As we silently walk to the car I pray that he consumed enough alcohol to not remember this embarrassing night. Then, I focus on not hyperventilating.

Kate: It’s after two in the morning when I finally hear Lexi come home. I hear the loud snores of our parents as I walk down the hall to see how the party went. I find Lexi in the bathroom puking into the toilet. “Are you drunk?” I ask shocked. She answers by retching once again. “Oh my gosh you are drunk!” I laugh. Never in a million years did I ever expect to see an intoxicated Lexi. I lift her hair away from her face and realize her skin is clammy and her body is shaking. “How much did you drink Lex?” She doesn’t answer. Instead she starts breathing faster and her eyes widen like she is struggling to breath. “Relax it’s going to be alright. It’s just a little bit of alcohol Mom and Dad will never know,” I soothingly tell her. Because that’s what she’s upset about, right?

Part 4: Senior Year 2007

Lexi: “I’m going to American University for basketball!” Kate screams. I give the least fake smile I have given in months as I hug my sister. I am so proud of her and I give her the little emotion I have left in me. I am so tired, so mentally drained from my constant fight. I should be stressed that I do not know where I am going to college, but I can no longer muster that much energy. All of my energy is fed to my anxiety, the growing storm that is quickly taking over my body. I have to escape, but I have nowhere to go. “I’m going for a run,” I tell Kate and I dash upstairs to get changed. “Enjoy it!” she says already texting Jack to come over. In less than two minutes I am out the door doing facing my problems in the only way I know how: running.

Kate: “Do you think something is wrong with Lexi?” I ask Jack as I snuggle into him. “Other than her chopping off her hair and the fact that going running is her new favorite thing?” he asks burying his face into my neck. “I’m serious,” I tell him attempting to push away. His arm snakes around my waist, bringing me closer to his chest as he says, “I’m sure she is just stressed about college. Not everyone is as lucky to have everything figured out as you,” he reminds me. “What happen to you two? You used to be so close,” I ask him. “You happened baby. And she just distanced herself,” he tells me. “Don’t you start feeling bad about it.” he says reading my thoughts as always. “She made her choice, I haven’t gone anywhere.” “You know me too well,” I respond bringing my lips to his; all thoughts of my sister quickly disappearing.

Lexi: Please no please no I beg myself, but it’s no use. My hands grasp the scissors and cut a sharp line down my wrist. It’s like I don’t even control my own body. I don’t want to cut myself, but once the thought is in my brain

there is nothing I can do to stop it. I am powerless to stop the demon inside of me. I miss the days when I was compelled to check that my bed was made or felt that I couldn't leave the bathroom until every hair was in the proper place.

Lexi: "Happy Birthday to you Happy Birthday to you Happy Birthday Kate and Lexi Happy Birthday to you," my parents sing. "Make a wish girls." I wish someone would listen to me. I wish someone could fix me. "Now blow the candles out." I huff as hard as I can, but it's not enough to extinguish all my candles. I guess I really am doomed.

Kate: "Hey can I talk to you for a sec?" Lexi asks me after school. "Yeah sure, what's up?" I ask her. Before answering she looks down at her hands and that's when I notice. Her fingernails are all bitten off. The raw skin is angry and red. I look up to meet her eyes and I see the dark circles and surrounding pale skin. Her cheek bones look sunken in and she seems so much older. "Lex is everything alright?" I ask, concern lacing my voice. How have I not noticed this before? "I dddonn't know," she says. And wait what is on her wrist? Is she cutting herself? No, even this new emotionless Lexi who spends all her time running would never do something like that. "That's what I want to talk to you about," she whimpers quietly. "I just don't feel alright latel-" she gets cut short by the front door opening. Jack walks in and sees us sitting on the couch. "You ready to go Kate?" he asks. "Oh my gosh I totally lost track of time," I exclaim. I look over at my twin begging with my eyes for her to understand that I have to go. "We will talk later I promise Lex," I tell her as I bend down to give her a hug. "Yeah okay sure," she mumbles as I leave the room.

Lexi: I text the girls I call my friends these days that I'm coming to the party after all. Might as well try to drown it all out for a little while. I make my way to the party and within a few minutes I have a random drink in my hand. The cool liquid burns as it goes down my throat, but I embrace the pain. I continue pouring the amber substance down my throat until I practically choke. The sound quickly manifests into a cackle. It is all too damn funny. My mom is a physiologist and she can't even see the problems in her own kid. My dad tells me stories all the time about people like me who end up in the ER. I hear Kate's voice in my head telling me "we'll talk later I promise. BS she's too obsessed with Jack to give a crap about me. Then there's Jack. My former best friend is too busy with my sister to care about me. It's all just too much. They all see right through me and I'm so sick of it. I'm sure I look like an idiot, talking to myself and drunk laughing, but I'm too far gone to care. The funny thing is I'm still sober; I've barely had one drink. I toss the cup to the ground suddenly needing to get away. I don't bother saying goodbye to

anyone because no one really cares that I'm here. My breath comes out like chaffs of smoke and my boots bite into the frozen earth. I start my car and begin the fifteen minute drive home. I gain speed as I peel up and down the windy back roads. The dark of the night matches my thoughts and I think I know what is going to happen before it does. I bend around a sharp corner and suddenly I swerve the steering wheel before I can stop myself. Time stands still. I am aware that I don't actually want to die. That this is not the real me. That I wish I had spoken up again. But I am also aware that I no longer have control over myself. That little flick of my wrist that I couldn't control, that was the compulsion winning, claiming me. Then I see her in the distance. It takes a second but she becomes brighter. She walks towards me and that's when I feel it. Before me is the girl who got help; the one who was able to rise above anxiety and depression. She is the version of myself that was saved by her family. As she turns and walks away I hear the glass shattering and the scream escape my lips. The car flips over and metal crunches as my head thuds into something hard. The world goes black.

Kate: My eyes blink open as I hear my phone ringing. Groaning, I untangle my legs from Jack's and stand up to answer my mother's call. "Mooommm. It's 1 am and you know I'm at Sara's," I whine. "It's Lexi," she sobs into the phone. "She's been in an accident..." I don't even bother to say anything to the shocked looking Jack. I take off for my house.

Lexi: There she is! Please save me," I beg of the healthy Lexi. "Wait come back," I plead as she disappears. Please don't leave me.

Kate: I burst into the room. Around me I faintly hear, "coma, brain damage, OCD, depression." I block it out and gasp at the person in front of me. Her skin is paper white and her face is puffy and swollen. Scratches and bruises mar her skin where there is not dried blood. Her legs are at funny angles and there are way too many tubes poking into her skin. "Lexi?" I whisper. "Lexi come on!" I say louder. "LEXI YOU HAVE TO WAKE UP!" I shout as sobs begin to wrack my body. Strong arms pull me away. I can't tell if they belong to Jack or my dad or my mom. I don't care; I hate them all. They did this to her. I did this to her. I did this to her I realize. I failed to listen to my twin. I don't need investigators or doctors to tell me what led to my sister's accident. I know what happened, all the signs are there. The obsessive hair routines, pale skin and lack of sleep, the running. All those times she tried to tell me something was wrong and I never listened. My sister drowned in her own anxiety. She called out for help, but none of us were ever there for her.

Epilogue: January 2019

The applause ends and I walk off the stage towards the board room where I left my belongings. My fingers are brushing the door when I hear, “Kate?” My head whips around because I haven’t heard that name in years. I frantically search for the source of the voice and I freeze when I see who it is. Jack. Even after fifteen years he is still gorgeous. “How is she really?” he asks softly as he approaches me. “She’s alive,” I reply with a voice barely above a whisper. Of course he knows who the story was really about and of course he lives in Chicago now. “She still has severe brain damage and is paralyzed from the waist down, but her anxiety is finally under control,” I tell him. “And how are you Kate?” he asks looking into my eyes. I glance away before replying, “Kate died the day of the accident, but Kathryn is alright.” “I’m not the same either.” he says quietly. After a moment he adds, “And dammit I’m sorry I just disappeared and never reached out. I just couldn’t handle it. We should have known something was wrong and helped her,” he shouts clearly still tormented all these years later. “I’m her twin how do you think I feel?” I fire back. All of the anger and guilt I spent years controlling comes rushing back. “My sister was practically brain dead and you just left me. You moved away and never even told me where you went,” I choke. “Then you show up fifteen years later with an I’m sorry?” I can not believe him. He looks at me and I see the sadness and guilt behind those piercing blue eyes that I used to get so lost in. The therapist in me knows he regrets his actions and knows the memories of our Lexi still haunt him. His phone rings before he can continue and I watch his face light up when two high pitched voices yell, “Hi Daddy”. I watch as he comes alive talking to them. “Were those your daughters?” I ask when he hangs up. “Yes those were my four year old twins, Violet and Olivia.” “May I see a picture of them?” I ask. “Of course,” he says pulling one up from his phone. “They are so beautiful Jack,” I say. I stare at the identical young, innocent faces, and I can’t help but see my sister and I. “I’m so scared Kate,” he whispers and I know we must be thinking the same thing. My sister could have had an amazing life if only one of us had listened to her. “Not a day goes by where I do not wonder if I am going to fail them,” he tells me. I look at the broken man I used to love. Gently, I take his hand and say, “Jack, you get to choose whether you see what you want or who they really are. We failed Lexi, but you won’t fail them.” “Can I see her sometime?” he asks. “Of course,” I tell him. “Will she remember me?” “I don’t know.” I say sadly and he looks devastated. “She’d forgive you Jack. And she would want you to be happy.” I see the relief in his eyes at my words. “Thank you Kate, I mean Kathryn,” he says. “Make her proud.” I whisper as I walk away.

