

...from 'Maisie'

Maisie's fall was an accident. I told her to wait but she took no notice and started off by herself. I suppose she was too busy thinking about how pretty she looked to concentrate on the stairs. One foot caught in the hem of her long dress and that was it. She lost her balance and fell. I tried to catch her but I wasn't close enough. I did try. Really I did.

They say your life flashes before you at a time like that. I doubt if Maisie was capable of such a thing, but I was – even though I wasn't the one falling.

"Why has your Maisie got funny eyes?" Belinda asked.

It was the first time I remember anyone saying anything odd about Maisie. Everything was different after that.

We were five years old back then, Belinda and I, and we were best friends. Belinda had a little sister too, but her Gracie didn't have "funny eyes". Grace was three, like Maisie, but Grace could walk and talk, and she followed us around whenever I went to Belinda's house to play. At our house, Maisie would just lie in her cot or sit in her high chair until Mum came to feed or dress her, or to pick her up and put her into her special pram to go shopping.

I'd never asked Mum about Maisie's eyes. Until Belinda's question I suppose I'd never noticed. I was only two when Maisie was born, so as far back as I can remember she'd always been around and she was just Maisie – part of the family; part of the furniture.

"Why has Maisie got funny eyes?" I asked when I got home from school that day. I recollect quite clearly that we were standing in the kitchen and Mum was peeling potatoes. I don't recall all of Mum's words, but I know she explained that Maisie was different because of something inside her body. I do remember Mum saying that Maisie was special and would need extra care.

Was that when I started to resent my little sister? Was it because Mum had called her "special"?

Sue Hoffman