

Even on the quietest nights, I could hear the echoing faulty faucet from the downstairs bathroom. The drips punctured the night's silence with inconsistency, a sound I couldn't weave into my dreams. It didn't feed my imagination, it was annoying. It would cut off and start again, ruining your hopes of the droplets ever ending. The drips would get faint when the doors were closed, but in a crowded family room, the sound almost vanished. My father, who frequently fixed the bathroom, claimed it was fine while my mother assured me that it's a problem that exists in everyone's home — so why bother fixing it?

When the faucet handle was turned on, the water would soak the entirety of the bathroom. When you were the only one around it, it rang in your head as if someone was constantly banging a bell. My hatred for this faucet was beyond the normalities of what should be hated in this world. But, it made sense why it bothered me so much. It reminded me of myself.

As a child, I believed my sink was fully functioning. I was unknowing of the scratches that hammered the pipes underneath. My parents divorced when I was in kindergarten, beginning the cycle of leaks that happened to display themselves with breakdowns at school. Despite school counselors and therapy, I believed that adults couldn't see into the world of how kids feel because they weren't them. "Crybaby" Kayla didn't attract friends like I wanted to. So I convinced myself I felt nothing and bottled her up. I had to make sure no one saw the imperfections that made me feel so different.

My high school experiences felt just as faulty. As a freshman, my opportunities to make connections evaporated after I was diagnosed with FND, a condition where my brain fired signals that would cut off my ability to walk or think and start again. I spent two months in the hospital, and when I returned to school, I found my friends had already formed new groups. I'd

always struggled to match others' "vibes," but I tried to fit in, believing my best friends would help me blend in. My conversations would start with an overachieving "Hey!" or a joke to break the ice. Instead of coming off as friendly, I appeared desperate. The way I'd drift into conversations only to be cut off abruptly left me with the same frustration the sink did.

As the clock ticked, my ghost-like persona was suffocating me. Each drop was a moment lost, a conversation that went down the drain. I tried to laugh it off, to wash away the feelings of isolation, but the echo of my unfulfilled connections was relentless. I soaked in the depths of social media to mask the emotions that made me uncomfortable, but I knew it only pulling me deeper into the deep end. I clung to hope because I still had my best friends, and we shared small moments. Yet despite these interactions, I felt nothing but alienated. How could I blame them? My door was closed. They didn't know what was going on. My feelings sometimes seeped through, but they couldn't hear the cries of my soul drowned out by the noise of happiness I projected.

On those nights I'd go home and turn the faucet on. Not the one downstairs but my own. My tears, spilling everywhere, mirrored the aching sound of that faulty faucet. I could picture it: the rusted handle, the puddle forming beneath. It was the perfect metaphor for my life, always on the verge of overflowing but never quite full.

One day I decided to tell my friends about how I felt. Their responses, though well-intentioned, felt hollow. Their offers to help looked nice but when you walked closer you could see the rust forming around their faucets. I heard the comments about how I was "fine..everyone goes through the same problems". From that moment I knew my trust in telling others was futile. Friends weren't my only problem, but also my condition. I'd frequently have

non-epileptic seizures in the halls, which prompted the kids who saw it to take pictures and mock me. That completely shattered me.

One evening my dad walked into my room and saw me upset. He sat down, in an attempt to make me laugh, and said,

“You know I tried to fix the sink. I tried so many times, but the screws just weren’t right. I had to get a plumber to remove the pipes, so much money, but hey, it’s fixed now, right? No more complaining!” As simple as it sounded, it made me think. Was I using the right methods to fix my own sink? I had bottled up my feelings for too long, but that approach just didn’t work. It was time to remove my old pipes, which meant moving on from friendships that no longer served me. I stopped relying on others to tighten the screws and instead sought out those who truly understood my struggles, offering me support without judgment. Even if it took time, I learned to lift the cap I had placed on my younger self so long ago. I wasn’t just a crybaby; I was a girl with feelings, deserving of expression. I put down social media and immersed myself in the peace of living authentically. Talking to someone trustworthy took effort, but it eased the weight of loneliness and allowed me to embrace my true self. In the end, I discovered that fixing my sink was just the beginning. It was about rebuilding my connections and nurturing the parts of me that had long been neglected. Life is about learning to flow, just like water in a well-maintained pipe, sometimes you have to let go of what’s broken to make room for something better. And now, with each new conversation and connection, I felt like I was finally embracing the growth that comes from a faulty faucet.

