

Bouncy Balls

Nathalie McLean

May 3.

MY SISTER TOLD me about her amazing dream that she had last night. She stood at the very top of our street, right upon the hill that overlooks the city, when suddenly a wave of rainbow colours came and swept her off her feet, over the tops of the houses like a magic carpet and up into the stars. She said it felt so real.

“You watch way too much Disney, Kaylee.”

“Do not.”

“Real life isn’t a fairytale you know.”

“I know.”

May 23.

Mum let Kaylee have the day off. Apparently she’s sick. Bad flu or something. I wished I could have stayed home too. I had a presentation due today and I really hate public speaking. It’s nearly the school holidays anyway.

May 27.

I had been getting the bus to school all week. I don’t mind it because it’s not too cold yet, but it’s better when mum drives us. She’s at home looking after Kaylee again today. I think she’s getting worse; it’s weird. Her holidays are going to suck.

June 13.

I opened the front door.

“Hi sweetheart.”

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“Hi Mum. What’s up? You look like you’ve been crying, were you chopping onions? What’s for dinner?”

“Will you come and take a seat in the living room?”

“OK, sure.”

What the fuck have I done? Wait a minute, she said “sweetheart” so that means she can’t be mad, right?

Dad.

Mum.

Kaylee.

Doctor Nguyen?

My mind started racing.

“Take a seat, Aislin.”

I sat next to Kaylee like I always do. She grabbed my hand tight and looked me in the eyes as hers welled up like little pools of melted dark chocolate.

“I have cancer.”

June 14.

Was last night all a bad dream? I wiped the sleep from my eyes as I rolled over. She’s not there. I screamed out. “WHERE’S KAYLEE!”

“It’s alright dear, she’s just taking a shower. I brought you some tea and pancakes.”

“I’m not hungry right now. Sorry Mum.” Sleep. Sleep. Sleep.

June 16.

I felt like today I may have been able to talk without sounding selfish. I promised Kaylee I would help her get through this. I felt awful for telling her fairytales aren’t real. *What would I know? How could this be happening to her, to us?* Poor Mum, and Dad just seemed so lost.

June 20.

The doctor said it’s aggressive. Chemotherapy is required. I promised Kaylee I would help her get through this, and I’m still helping.

June 27.

Chemo. I held her hand tight. We went to the hospital. Eerie clown smiles and biohazards surrounded us. I tried to say nice things so that Kaylee didn’t feel scared. Mum had a whole box of tissues in her handbag, but she looked strong today. It was going to be a long day.

June 29.

Chemo. I held her hand. We went in. Nine hours later we came out. Kaylee vomited loudly into a bucket, handed the bucket to me, then lied down in the back seat of the station wagon and closed her eyes. It smelt rancid. I hoped it was all the cancer coming out of her.

July 1.

Chemo. I held her hand. We went in. Needle. Intravenous. The usuals and some apple juice. We watched reruns of *The Nanny* so time went quicker. I hated that show. Great, school holidays. Kaylee's first week of chemo was done.

July 4.

Held hands. Went in. The usual suspects were there again today.

"Prettiest twins I ever saw!" said one of the old men in the waiting room.

Kaylee mumbled, "I don't feel very fucking pretty," quietly under her breath as she forced out a smile.

July 6.

Chemo. The usuals. Kaylee spewed. We went home.

July 8.

Chemo. The usuals. Spew. Her hair's started to fall out. We've always looked identical. This felt strange. *How much longer until she's better?*

July 11.

Chemo.

July 13.

Chemo.

Chemo. Chemo. Chemo. Most people go to the gym or to the movies, but we went to chemo.

July 16.

On most weekends Kaylee and I hung out with friends, frolicked in the parklands, painted abstract portraits and wrote songs together. We argued like normal sisters did, but most of the time we'd understand each other. We only wanted the best for each other, just like best friends. This weekend had been pretty boring so far.

July 17.

I walked past the bathroom earlier today. The door was ajar and I could see Kaylee standing naked in front of the mirror. She was pale and boney. A lot skinnier than me now. Her breasts were smaller. It was scary. It was like looking at a deteriorating reflection of me. I felt like I was losing a part of my identity.

“Aislin, will you come in here for a moment?”

Shit. I think she saw me staring. How do I act like I'm not freaked out by all of this?

“Can you help me find dad’s clippers please? I want to shave my head.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“I’m dead serious,” she said with a smile. “Now are you going to help me or not?”

“OK, fine.”

BUZZ. BUZZ. BUZZ.

What was once luscious locks of auburn strawberries was now brittle spaghetti being snapped up by the clipper jaws and disgorged all over the bathroom floor. Like Britney Spears all over again. Kaylee did most of it, and I helped with the parts that she couldn’t see.

“OK, now it’s my turn.” I grabbed the clippers. “Wait! Don’t do it Aislin!”

“We’re twins Kaylee, we do everything together!”

“But I don’t want you to shave your head. We’ve worked so hard at growing our hair; it’s a part of who we are.”

“But you have cancer; I don’t want you to be in this alone.”

“All I want is for you to grow your hair so that it’s long enough for the both of us.”

July 20.

Chemo. School. Chemo. School. Chemo. All the days are feeling like one big, long, never-ending day. We’re in this together.

August 1.

For some reason I had remembered Kaylee’s dream from a while back. The one with all the colours boosting her into the starry sky. *Why do the most miraculous moments only ever happen in dreams and the worst ones in reality?*

August 23.

I pushed Kaylee up the hill in her wheelchair to the top of our street. She was too weak to walk today. Her skin glowed in the sun and didn’t look so pale. Her lips were the colour of a robin’s breast. We were dressed the

same. Plain black pleated knee length dresses over sheer black stockings. We both wore our straw bowler hats. Kaylee had a red ribbon tied around hers. I rested my pastel pink, vintage suitcase on her knees.

“What’s in the bag?” She asked.

“It’s a surprise.”

“Well it’s really heavy!”

At the very top of the hill was a park with swings that overlooked the city. Such a beautiful view. If you looked half way down our street, you could see our house.

“OK Kaylee, now close your eyes.”

I flipped the buckles on the suitcase and lifted the lid. “Alright, now open them!”

Inside was over 500 multi-coloured bouncy balls. Kaylee’s face lit up.

“I was wrong to tell you fairytales aren’t real.”

Kaylee looked me in the eyes and grinned, then together we tipped the suitcase over. The bouncy balls went high into the air and all at once fell like a miniature meteor shower. They hit the ground in a surging rainbow of pinks and purples, greens and yellows. Blobs of blue darted down the street as the orange afternoon sun twinkled amongst the intergalactic spheroid shower.

It was breathtaking. Like a dream come true.