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Dr. Grate

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Brandie

Standing in the middle of one of the hospital rooms in Arkansas Children's Hospital, I smell the stench of the hospital's distinctive scent. I take in a deep breath and look around the room. I see chalky colored cords sticking out in every direction. The tan torn leather wheelchair sits in the corner of the room. I stare at her mangled body, as it lies there flat, on the pale blue thin sheets. The monotonous beeping of the machines continues, which just means the heart beats but not that it's alive.

*Frustration takes over all my emotions as we wait for Mom and Aunt Debbie to get her wheelchair out of the white minivan. Hunger takes over to the point that only killing a mammoth would satisfy it. Standing in the line of the dirty fast food restaurant bathrooms, Aunt Debbie begins to dance around the room.*

*"Do you have to pee?" She questions Aunt Debbie.*

*"Yes," Aunt Debbie says, "I do. Don't make me laugh either."*

*A burst of laughter comes from her. She can't stop. By now, my patience becomes as thin as a sheet of notebook paper.*

*"I am going to wet my pants! Stop laughing!" Aunt Debbie yells at her.*

*She can't stop; she won't ever stop. So full of life, laughing while making everyone around her laugh, but why do I still feel frustrated, angry, and upset with her? Why couldn't I laugh, or even just crack a little smile? Why couldn't I have just enjoyed the moment with her?*

*This kind of stuff happens everywhere we go when we take her with us.*

Barely touching the tips of her fingers now, shivering on contact, I gaze at her. It doesn't feel real to me; she doesn't feel real to me. So what now? Do I say goodbye to this body; do I look at her face; what am I supposed to do? I just talk. I know it is useless now, but what the hell could it hurt? I talk to her about her stuffed rabbit with the big floppy ears and blue jean overalls; she has had for as long as I can remember. I never could say goodbye. The words were like vomit on my tongue, I just kept swallowing them down until it came to a point that the words burned in my throat.

*"You can't touch the ground; you can't let her touch you; and you can't let the stuffed animals hit you," I panted as I leapt back and forth from an enormous pillow, to an undersized pillow that I could barely fit my foot on. Almost touching my arm I leaped onto the bed and yelled, "Home base!" Whipping around her wheelchair, she speed down the hall to try to get her sister, Ariane, who I could hear laughing and screaming in the distance. Suddenly, I hear the sound of wheels moving and patting of feet on the carpet, coming towards me. Ariane bounces on the bed and screams, "Home base!" We all continue to laughing so intensely our stomach muscles ache with pain.*

I look at my step dad, standing in the corner of this room, which seems to get smaller when I notice him standing there. Studying his face I see no emotion. I sit on the cold pastel blue plastic chair, trying to hold on to the good memories, the happy ones. Memories like this one hardly crossed my mind; I usually remembered the upset or annoying times. I wish I could go back and change some of the things I did or said. I wish I would have become closer to her; spent time with her, really got to know who she is. I wish I would have realized that living to be an old age never has been a possibility for her.

She has taught me so much about myself. I need to cherish those around me; as I think about her sister, Ariane, sitting in the waiting room not more than a few hundred feet from where I sit. I need to be more open and forgiving with people. I try to empathize more with people instead of just sympathize for them. Be more thankful for my time spent with my family; don't take them for granted. I look at other people's lives around me in a different perspective now; I know anything can happen in one split second and it's usually when you least expect it to.

She has muscular dystrophy, which weakens her muscles and gets worse over time. As I stare at the torn tan leather wheelchair in the corner, I remember how she used to be able to walk a little, but in time her muscles became weaker and she was put into a wheelchair. I don't really think of her walking, I just see her in that leather wheelchair. She can't speak very well, but if you stay around her long enough she will talk your ear off, being able to understand every point she tries to get across. She never really has been able to use her facial muscles to smile, but you always know when she is smiling.

Her life in a wheelchair has shown me that I need to be thankful for the positive aspects of my life. I look at her hand now and I think of how accustomed I became to people staring at us, as we pushed her wheelchair around; eventually we would make a joke out of it and stare back at them. She has always been so social, has so many friends, which makes me jealous of her because it is so easy for her to interact with other people. She cares so much for the well beings of others. She wants the people she loves to be safe and happy. I try to be positive and stay smiling because I know that's what she wants our family to be like.

*"Momma my head hurts and want to go home," she whispered to Aunt Debbie in the dark auditorium.*

*“Ok, wait for Ariane to dance and then Daddy can take you home,” Aunt Debbie replies.*

*“You want to come with me Jess I have to use the restroom?”*

*The black elevator doors open and I hear the high pitch ding. Aunt Debbie and I try to push her through the doors. We are having trouble with getting the wheelchair through; a little rise between the level of the elevator and the level of the floor makes this difficult. Of course, Aunt Debbie starts to dance around. She has to use the restroom making the whole situation funnier. Aunt Debbie pushes and shoves getting a little mad at her now because she will not helping us push her in. I just laugh. I can't stop; I won't ever stop. Complaining that she doesn't feel well, she still joined in on the laughter. Finally clearing the doors and shoving her in the back corner of the elevator, tears stream down her face. Aunt Debbie tries to comfort her, and tells her she will be home in no time to lie down.*

I remember this thought so well sometimes it hurts; the last memory I have of her really alive. I try and forget that mangled body lying on those pasty white plastic sheets with the chalky colored cords coming for all different directions, and the beep of the machines that show us that she's "alive". The last time I saw her was not in that hospital room, it was in that small elevator laughing hysterically. I just think of the redness exploding from her cheeks; how happy she looked, how tired she was, but still was enjoying herself. That body lying in that white walled room no joy, no happiness, that's not her, that's not my cousin Brandie.