

DEAR LITTLE RED BALL

SUMMER TURNBERG

March 23rd, 2013

Hey there,

I saw your golden locks chasing that little red ball today. It's the fastest I've seen anything move around here. I must admit, I hoped that ball would've come in here. Surely we would have found something to talk about, even if it were a simple sorry followed by a smile. These chairs around me are getting pretty dusty, maybe your pursuit towards that ball would've stirred up some dust bunnies. You headed back to the other room pretty quickly. What was that, three doors down? I wonder if it's a Grandma or Grandpa.

I guess it doesn't really matter who it is. Nobody should have to be sentenced to this ward. It's nice to have your family around though. I wish I had mine.

March 24th, 2013

Hey Goldilocks,

You're back for the second day in a row. I wonder if it was a surgery that brought you here. Maybe your whole family is in there, supporting whoever went under the knife. I must admit, Goldilocks, I would be a little jealous if this were the case. It's scary to wake up from surgery and not know anybody in the room with you. Trust me, I would know.

Today I got a glance of that smile of yours. Your freckles line your cheekbones so perfectly, eyes bright and teeth missing, you remind me a bit of my younger self. Nothing too extreme. If I could leave this cold, sterile hospital room, I would grab that picture of myself hung up in my old home. It was taken at my 10th birthday party. That must be about your age, right? Times were different back then. You probably aren't the runt of the family, but I sure was. The hot summer sun was always tanning my skin and making my

hair that nice strawberry blonde color, pretty close to yours, actually! I think we would've been friends. I could find entertainment in the smallest things (like that little red ball you have!).

At that birthday party, we had a potato sack race. I won. I'm not so sure if it were out of true talent, or because people wanted the birthday girl to win. I always felt like people took pity on me as a kid. I remember this one time I was playing baseball with my brother and I swear he--Nurse just came in. Until next time.

March 27th, 2013

Dear Mini Me,

I tried to talk to you today. Boy, was I the fool. Sometimes when you don't talk to people much you forget about your trach surgery. I guess that isn't really a common thing, though. It hasn't really struck me yet that I am not common anymore. But I guess nobody really is. Every day I am surprised by the fact that there is something wrong with me. I hope I didn't scare you with the groaning noise of me trying to say "Hello". Maybe you just thought I was snoring. Right before the surgery, they said I could pick one of their voices. I guess they would put some sort of fake voice box in my throat, but all the options sounded like robots. It's not like I need to talk to anyone anyways. I'll save the insurance company a few extra bucks.

One day I am sure you will come in here and I can grab my whiteboard and tell you about my life without sounding like a robot. I just want someone to know. Someone once told me that you die twice: the first time is when you pass and the second time is when your name is mentioned for the very last time. I doubt my daughter is mentioning my name.

Hey, if we get close enough, you might even read this! If you are reading this: Hey! I hope this doesn't freak you out. I just decided to write this to stop this feeling of isolation. It's a silly little project, but it's really the only thing I have. Whenever I see you running around these halls, it gives me a feeling of hope. Like everything is going to be okay. Maybe one day I will see my grandchildren again. Or my own children. I would write all about you to them. I would say, "This little girl is the reason I made it out of the hospital! The reason that I defied all the doctors predictions on how long I will make it!" I think you would be friends with them. I hope you

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would be. Maybe I can ask the nurse for some stamps. They have to have my wallet somewhere.

P.S. I found out it's your mom in that room. I am sorry to hear that. I lost my mom at a young age.

March 29th, 2013

Hey there,

It's been a rough day. Everything seems so wrong. I miss my Joseph a lot. You would've liked him. Maybe you would have even called him Grandpa. He only died 4 months ago. Maybe he would have talked with you about that little ball of yours.

I feel a duty to tell you about life. The doctors say that mine is ending, so I must have lived it to the fullest. Here's one thing about it: it hurts like a bitch. All your life you go around looking for the things to make you happy. At 10, maybe it's a toy to distract you from your Mother being in the cancer ward, 15 it's love, 30 it's children and a home, 50 it's grandchildren, 60 it's vacationing. You keep filling your life with things to distract you from the fact that you will die. Soon enough you're 70 with a dead husband, no grandchildren that visit you, and no toy to keep you distracted. You have to accept life at face value. I often find myself staring at this tile ceiling wondering if I would change what I've done in life. I don't think I would. The good has outweighed that bad and at the end of the day, I tried my very best.

Writing to you has given me time to reflect on what life has given me. Every prick of a needle into my bruised and prodded veins is worth the times I saw my daughter smile. Every time I need to get my port readjusted is worth the times I would wake up next to Joseph. Every time I try to speak and can't, it is worth knowing that I have grandchildren who will share their voices to bring an end to this terrible disease. Maybe me and your mother will both die, but maybe that will give you the inspiration to go forward and try to end this disease. What I really mean, little red ball, is that there will always be good and bad parts, but in the end, all is equal. I am sure you are feeling like everything going on in your life right now... rightfully so. It'll bounce back though. You just need to give it time to.

I wonder if this is my punishment.

March 30th, 2013

Dear little girl,

They changed my IV's today. Hurt like hell.

You weren't here today. I wonder why.

April 4th, 2013

Hey you,

Today, you came in here so wound up, I thought you were going to pull down the curtains that separate me from my roommate. I would like to know what they look like. I imagine it's a guy in there based on his horrendous coughs and how many times the RN has to change their catheter. No woman would be messing with that area so much.

The image of you being so scared of me can not get out of my brain. I promise that I didn't mean to frighten you. I swear, those green eyes of yours expanded to half the size of your face! You said "Sorry, Miss" and then ran out of my room. I really don't bite! Some people are so grumpy on this floor. You probably thought I was like the rest of them.

I don't really blame them. This is where you come to die. If they had any idea of what joy you can bring to their lives with your sunny disposition, they wouldn't act that way. Even just seeing you around, I don't feel lonely anymore. Even if I am just writing to your future self in this little purple notebook.

I find myself wanting to spoil you. I guess that is just in my nature. I wanted to spoil Rebecca, too. She was the youngest of the bunch, kind of like me and you. Mothers naturally want to protect the last one they have and I guess I just fell into instinct.

April 7th, 2013

Hey purple notebook,

Dying is rough. I think that it's everyday I change my mind as to whether or not I am dying. It might be time to start facing reality.

I wish I could write more. Every time the IV tugs, I feel my guts being ripped out.

April 10th, 2013

Hey future you,

I decided that I need to be honest about what is happening with me (or for whoever may be reading this manifesto). I hope that I can share this with you while I am still here and still alive. The second best option would be me leaving and getting to see my family, leaving this little notebook while I am leaving these hospital doors. Hopefully it doesn't come to the worst option which is you reading this after I have passed.

I have cancer, just like your mom over there. I am not sure what she has, but mine is centered around the Larynx. I noticed it after I had just gotten over this terrible sickness. For some reason, I could not get rid of this sore throat I had. I went to the doctor thinking that I would be diagnosed with strep throat and be prescribed antibiotics. Instead, I found out that I had stage three cancer and I was prescribed chemotherapy. Just like me, that cancer was stubborn and wanted to stay. Our last resort was surgery. With this, I would lose my voice. There were, of course, options for me to talk again, but most of the voices sounded like robots. So, I got the trach surgery done. I should have recorded my voice or something before. You never really expect to never be able to speak again. It's not something you can really prepare for.

I miss eating a lot. Not that the food here is good, but I really wanted to go back home to my kitchen and cook up one last meal while I could still eat it.

I got like this from smoking all my life. I am sure everyone around you has been telling you not to smoke. Listen to them. I had nobody around me to tell me that when I was a kid.

My family is never going to come. Apparently the nurses have tried contacting my daughter every other day and she has not picked up once. Her and I haven't talked much lately. I think it has been hard for her to be a 'real' adult. I babied her a lot as a kid. It's an easy thing to do. She was an only child, and I didn't know the line between being her best friend and being her mother. I never knew that you could be abusive just by showing love. It was really rough on me when Joseph died, to not have anyone there. Going through all his things afterwards, I would look at pictures of our family and it almost seemed like it wasn't mine. It was like looking at a Macy's

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Christmas ad. At the time, I really thought I was doing what was right for everyone.

She didn't talk to me much at the funeral. In fact, she only said one thing. She had a nice speech about how her father meant so much to her, practically raised her, and gave her the tough love she needed. She wasn't there for her father's death either. It was just me. I didn't talk at his service. I had said all I wanted to him while he was still alive.

After the service she came up to me, in her boyfriend's arms with an engagement ring on her finger. I'd only met the guy once and I had wondered if Joseph knew. Surely he would've said something to me about the engagement in the last days. You would think someone would have told me. Anyways, she came up to me with her reapplied makeup to cover the mascara marks and said "You lost your chance to be my mother. This is goodbye."

I haven't seen her since then.

Sometimes I feel like writing to you is a way for me to prove again that I can actually care about someone.

It's truly a blessing

I hope you stumble in here again soon.

April 11th, 2013

Hey there little warrior,

I heard the alarm going off in your Mother's room last night. I hope you weren't there to hear all the chaos. I think they saved her. I hope they did. I hope you'll still be around. I don't know what I will have to look forward to if you're not here.

April 14th, 2013

Hi there sweet girl,

I want to talk to Jessica so bad. I don't have a cell phone or computer, access to stamps, or even a voice to talk to her on the room telephone (which, it's torture that they kept it in here). I think I messed up in her teen years. As a kid, she got all the stuffed animals, makeup, dance lessons, and ice cream she wanted. I continued to supply those wants throughout her life. When I was 16, you really had to know someone to get a little dope. They didn't care if you were dying of cancer and needed a little THC to cut the pain. Once I was first diagnosed, I thought I would be generous and help

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out her and her friends. They seemed to be having fun, but that was around the time when the distance started. It hasn't really ended since then. I wonder if she was afraid. I would've protected her if anything went wrong. I would always protect her.

If, for some reason, you find her after reading this, tell her I'm sorry. I don't think I'll get to see her again.

Stay close with your Mom if she survives this thing. The heartbreak of losing your youngest is worse than any cancer symptom.

April 23rd, 2013

Hello,

I must admit to you, I haven't been feeling too well lately. I have been sleeping most of the day. Probably why I haven't seen you. I can't remember the last time I got up and walked by myself. I am scared to die. I don't have a religion, I don't know if I will be able to see my husband again, I don't know what my girl will want done with my body. I don't know if I'll even have a funeral. At least I have this and the hope that you will read it one day. I hope you can make your life better than mine was. I hope you learn from mistakes while still making your own. I hope your mom recovers and I hope she will get to see you walk down the aisle with the love of your life.

For my sake, I hope I live.

A nurse came to collect the things from Mrs. Mary Hawkins room. Her right-brain self organized Mrs. Hawkins belongings into 2 piles: things for the family, and things to be thrown away. Glasses went to the family. The old spirometry could be thrown away. Notes written by Mary to the doctors would be given to the family, then they could decide if they had any meaning to them or not. It was always hard for the nurse to determine what would be important to a family after their loved one passes away. Had the family even come in? Did they know that Mary had died? She shook her head, that was a problem for the front desk to deal with, not for her to worry about. She looked over at Mary. "They'll clean you up soon. You'll be out of here in no time." She, of course, understood that Mary had no way of hearing her, but she wanted to make a personal connection with the corpse while rummaging through her stuff. It seemed less invasive that way.

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With all piles sorted, the nurse began bagging everything up. While putting the items for her family into a Staples cardboard box, the nurse noticed a notebook under Mary's hand. How did she miss that?

Flipping through the pages, she read the passages written by Mary. The little girl? There was only one on this floor that had been hanging around. The nurse looked at Mary. The drooping of her eyes almost made her look like a puppy dog, begging to give the book to the little girl.

The nurse was shocked to read about all that Mary had done. Memories of doctors talking about dying people getting their 'last kick' in their final weeks began to emerge. She felt bad for Mary and simply wrote "died in her sleep April 23rd, 2013 11:13 pm" in the back of the purple notebook. The story seemed incomplete to her. Looking at the clock, it was apparent that she was taking too long with this task.

The nurse took a deep breath, touched her rosary beads under her scrubs, and placed the notebook into the rightful pile of the two.

Mary's daughter received a package of her Mother's things. Inside there lay: glasses, notes she wrote to the doctors, her wallet, and the news that her Mother had died. The little purple notebook

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While she is passionate about science, Summer Turnberg has found comfort in using the arts to understand the personal stories behind medicine. Around campus, Summer can be found in the Center for Student Involvement, in the science building, or lounging on the lawn during rare moments of sunshine.