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**My So-Called Life: Final Stories**

**My Mother and her Cancer**

One calm night in May, when I was in the seventh grade, my mother had called me and my brother downstairs to the living room. In short, it was to tell us she had been diagnosed with stomach cancer. I was only twelve years old at the time but even I could tell she had a hard time trying to put her dilemma into words. Now sure, I knew cancer was bad, and deadly. I was told my grandmother lost her battle to brain cancer. I even saw her in her deathbed when I was only six. But the thing is, living with someone who has cancer is so much more different than just knowing someone who has it. I saw my mom’s every change.

Following the diagnosis, she took a leave of absence from a job she started only 6 months prior to the diagnosis. Mind you, this was a job that saved us from losing the house. Then her chemotherapy treatment began that summer; three times a week. Her hair pulled off her head in webs and her body began to thin to a twig. My school nurse would always ask me how my mother was doing. “She’s fighting like a soldier”, I’d always say, not knowing how long it would last.

In September my mother finally had her surgery for this demon. We all decided to visit her the next morning. That day marked the beginning of her guaranteed recovery, but ironically, it was also the day was terrified for her. She laid in that hospital bed, no hair, tubes connecting her to a machine, and her frail body concealed but hinted at by the hospital gown. It was then I realized how close I was to losing my mother, and it made me so grateful to see her nursed back to her former self. She’d always put on a calm face at home but she was really at the edge the whole time. Without my mother our family would fall apart. After all, what family wouldn’t fall apart if their family left it? In Chess the queen is the most powerful piece in the game. After seeing my mother go from a hard working parent to being on the verge of losing the battle with cancer and back to normal, I know for sure that she is the most powerful piece in my life.

**My Stolen Love**

At my dance studio we host social nights every saturday, and one night in October she had shown up by herself. I recognized her from the beginner class on sundays. Her name was Kaitlyn. The most odd thing about this confrontation was how focused she was on me the whole time. By tradition it’s the man who generally asks the lady to dance, but she asked me first, and not to one but many songs. We’d go for walks in the night talking about school, astrology, the future, relationships with people. She was someone who no longer used social media either. To me she felt like a gift from the universe. I kept believing that; I was amazed by how much she and I had in common.

After a few weeks I courageously asked her on a date and she said yes almost immediately to my surprise. We agreed to meet at pelham bay bridge, where I began the evening by giving her a lone white lily. I took her to an Italian restaurant called “Pasta Pasta”, and when we walked in it was almost empty. We loved the silence though, accompanied by a light piano in the background. We spent most of that night talking about new things like politics, halloween, family, culture, religion, etc.. I never thought I’d stumble upon someone who would challenge my thoughts more than my teachers in school ever could, and the feeling was so beautiful; she was beautiful.

We’d send each other positive messages before our days started. Then on some nights we’d spend it on FaceTime. I personally despise facetime, but if it meant seeing Kaitlyn I was willing to make an exception. She even got me reading again. I’d never touched a John Green novel, and until Kaitlyn told me about *Looking For Alaska* I didn’t know what I was missing out on.

One Sunday morning I showed up to the studio with a feeling in my gut and in my hands a bag of chocolate pancakes straight from the “Shore Haven Diner”; Kaitlyn’s favorite. She wasn’t there. Of course I was a tad disappointed because now I had to eat them, otherwise they would’ve went to waste. The feeling in my gut worsened; the whole following week I got no texts from her, no calls from her, nothing. I thought to myself “maybe she’s just busy because it’s finals weeks”, and then I thought, “But a simple text like ‘Hey, sorry I’ve been busy lately’ wouldn’t be too hard, right?” I went to the studio again next sunday and I wasn’t surprised to not see her there. I went to her job to see if she was there, and her boss’s words gave me hell.

Kaitlyn had passed away last Sunday. I had been trying to contact a dead girl for 7 whole days. The cause of death: Suicide by jumping from an eighth floor window. I felt so, so stupid in the weeks to come. There was so much I loved about Kaitlyn, yet instantly she indirectly proved to me that I knew so little about her. My thoughts raced with questions, “I was supposed to know she was depressed? She always smiled and was so happy!” I blamed her for things, too. “I would’ve known something sooner if only she was on social media.” and “Why would she just leave me? Did I mean nothing to her?” Kaitlyn De La Rosa passed away on January 14th, 2018.