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Tell Me About It

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Tell Me About It

60:00

“Coming in.”

I tap lightly upon her partially open bedroom door. It is barely enough to sound like a half-knock, but my knuckles still ache from the barely-there impact. The cool draft from the ceiling fan greets me while the ache subsides, and my body shivers in response. “Hey Bumblebee, do you have everything you need?” I ask once I step over the threshold into her room. My daughter is sprawled out on her bed with a book in hand. She turns a page slowly as if she is still reading the words that are folding away. Sometime between our breakfast-for-two this morning and now, she has dressed herself in denim-shorts and a worn t-shirt. Her sneakers lay on the floor, ready to be laced and out of here. I wonder if she’s bored. Our house is a grey shadow that dulls any sunlight and my pajamas can prophesy how our day is going to go. It’s not fair. I know fully well that this isn’t fair. This is her first day of summer break. This is her first day going through my daily routine. I want to tell her how I’m sorry that we can’t go out. *Mommy is sick*, I want to say. *I don’t have the energy*. I don’t, because she knows about it all too well.

She knows I’m here, but she doesn’t take her eyes off the pages in her hands. What is so interesting? For just a moment, the suspense hangs off the swirling string which clacks with each rotation of the ceiling fan, until she finally speaks. “I’m good, Mom.”

“I’ll just be down the hall. It won’t be too long.” I reassure her.

She turns another page. “I know, Mom.”

Should I tell her that I’m sorry? This is our life now.

I think I hate it more than she does.

“You can call your dad if there’s an emergency.” I wish he were here to keep her company. He and I fought this morning. I hope she didn’t hear him call me weak. “I’ll just be down the hall.” She probably did hear it. I still can.

I spend a minute listing the different flavors of Maruchan ramen we have (beef, chicken, and shrimp) and I explain how to use the rice cooker. “There are tortillas on the counter and lumpia in the clear tupperware. We have ice in the freezer and don’t use any knives--” Her bedroom door creaks when a breeze flies through her window. It’s whistling for me to go, and soon she joins in.

“Mom, I’m okay. Harry Potter will keep me company. Plus, he’s a wizard.”

I want to ask about Harry Potter, and I want to know why she has so much faith in a wizard, but a familiar ache runs through my body.

I gather my supplies and go.

50:00

I am alone. The doors to my room are closed and locked. I pull the curtains over the window. A slip of sunlight escapes through, illuminating the IV pole that I slide next to my bed. No one can come in now. I take off my shirt, pull down my high-waisted underwear, and look at my stomach. I feel like an alien. I look like one too. Take a right turn at my belly button and you’ll find that my smooth skin turns into a wrinkled gap with a tube sticking out. My doctor called it a catheter when he explained that I would need to begin dialysis to survive this disease. I call it an unwelcome guest, but it gets the dialysis done. Half a year ago, they put the catheter in me when my kidneys decided to stop working.

It keeps me alive.

But I would gladly tell it goodbye.

I just wish I could stare it away.

I think about pulling it out.

I wish my kidneys were alive again.

I lean my head against the cool metal of the IV pole and sigh.

49:55

This is the first time for today that I feel like dying. It will happen again at least five more times before I cook dinner and at least three more times before my husband comes home from work. Occasionally, the thought pops into my head when I am sitting on the couch and watching television before bed.

I pick up a bag full of liquids and hook it to the IV pole. This is what I do. The medical term for it is peritoneal dialysis. I don't know where they got the name from, but there are three sections in my day that last for fifty to sixty minutes where dialysis is my only way to survive.

It's tempting to just cut the survival part of it all out.

A life like this is not a life I want to live.

Can anyone really blame me for that?

I kind of blame myself for it.

My daughter is usually at school, but today is different. Summer break is here and I find myself thinking of all the things that could happen while I'm here trying to survive this.

If she gets hungry, will she try to cook something?

Did I tell her how to use the stove?

Will our condo burn down?

Did she drink enough water today?

What if someone breaks in?

Is the front door locked?

It is too late to check on my worries. I have to let them be. I sterilize my hands as if I am performing surgery on myself. I put on a face mask because I am afraid of my own germs. I have two bags.

One to be filled. One to be emptied.

They say this is vital to my survival.

30:00

Half way in to the session is when boredom creeps along the walls. It stares at me from the same place where a spider has set up a web in the top left corner of my room. The doctor did not warn me about the down time that happens when you're waiting for liquid to transfer in and out of your body.

I stare at already dry paint.

I should have brought a book.

15:23

Knock.

I hear it, and I assume it's my imagination playing tricks.

Knock. Knock. "Mom?" The door knob rattles until she realizes its locked.

I am suddenly aware of my breath, and I suck in air nervously. I don't want her to see me like this.

Knock. Knock. Knock. “Mom? Are you okay?”

“I’m here,” I answer. “What happened?”

It’s silent for long enough that I assume she’s back in her room. I touch my catheter and wait for this to be done.

I’m worried. “Sweetie? Bumblebee?”

No answer and I try again. “Allie, are you okay?”

“Mom.” She’s still there. “Does it hurt?”

Oh.

“No, sweetie.” I say first. My instinct is to protect her from this reality. It’s not good to lie to your children, though. “Not always,” I answer again.

“Can you tell me about it?”

The bedroom door shifts slightly as if she sat down and leaned back on it.

“You know how you have a heart and lungs?” I ask her. “Those are your organs. They keep your body alive. Kidneys help you stay alive too.”

“But yours don’t work.”

“Mine don’t work.”

“Mom?” She pauses. “Does that mean you’re going to die?”

“I won’t die. No, you don’t need to worry about that. I’ll be fine.”

“What’s going to happen then?”

“Well, I have to do this.” I gesture to the bags, tubes, gauze, sanitizer, tape, towels, clothes, gloves, and sense of desperation that surrounds me. She can’t see it through the door, I realize. “Hey,” I say.

“Yeah Mom?”

“Tell me about Harry Potter.”

0:57

“ . . . I can’t believe he said that! Dumbledore is the best. Oh, Mom. You’d love Hermione. She’s my favorite character. You need to read this one part. It’s so funny. Are you done yet?”

I am taping the catheter to my skin and I pull my clothes back into place. With everything hidden away by sweats and t-shirts, I can pretend to be a normal mom again.

“Almost,” I call out to her.

“Can you read with me for awhile?”

I open up the door and there she is book in hand.

“Let me change out of my pajamas first.”

0:00