

Never

And then. With her last breath. My life ends, too.

I hold her hand as she is struggling to breathe. I don't notice I am crying until a tear drops onto her hollowed cheek. "You promised." I whisper. Or maybe I just think it, I don't know. She looks at me, or rather through me, as if she can already see where she is going.

I spend every day at the hospital now, in the palliative care unit, watching over her, completely unable to do anything, just watching her waste away. Angry at God, angry at anybody whom I can blame. How dare they, how dare anybody take her away from me. The five steps of grief are bullshit. I am still angry, as angry as I was the day she got diagnosed. And I still won't accept what I know she has for a long time. And that also makes me angry. How can she just give up? Why won't she keep fighting? Rationally, I know of course that everything that is possible has been done. I know how hard she has fought. But still. She promised.

All by myself I go to the hospital week, after week. She is in intensive care now. But she is still fighting. That is what I am telling myself every day I walk through those god-forsaken doors. Some people find their faith in trying times. I feel like flipping off the cross that's hung above her door every time I come visit her. I feel like He is mocking me, He looks smugger every time I pass. Some people find comfort in their faith, they feel less alone. I have never felt this alone in my entire life. I've always had her. We've always had each other. And now she's in here and I am out there. We no longer share a world, a reality. I come as often as I can, as often and as long as I am allowed, but it's not enough. When I am out there, I feel like I am sleepwalking. How I still have a job, I don't know. They probably feel sorry for me. It's hard. And it hurts. But I am here, by her side supporting her, putting on a brave face, being hopeful. It is too much to bear sometimes. But I must keep doing it. She mustn't worry about me, and I must keep supporting her.

I am devastated. On my bed in the foetal position, sobbing uncontrollably, shaking. It's been like this for almost an hour. She's in hospital. Like, properly. They won't give me a date, even a cautious one for when I can expect to take her home. She is there indefinitely. I have just come home from visiting her for the first time there. It's so sterile, and it smells weird. Like death. She's still optimistic, of course she is, God damn her. But she is getting weaker. I can see it in her eyes, no matter how much she smiles, I can see how tired her eyes are. But she tries. For me. And I try for her. We try for each other. It must be hard for her. She has taken care of me for so long and she still wants to do it, but it's my turn now, it is now my responsibility to take care of her, and I fear I am failing. She's been this big presence in my life, always there, my anchor. And now, she looks so small, so lost.

The first chemo has failed. The cancer is back. We were so hopeful.

The Cancer is gone! I am crying. Again. But it's tears of joy this time. She told me over the phone. She is going to come over as soon as possible. I feel light as air, and I can't wait to see her. This is going to be our first care-free evening in years. She will bring wine. We will drink, we will talk, we will laugh, she will make plans again. We can make plans again. Taking that cliché road trip, we've always dreamed of. She can look for a new job, she is so smart, and she loved her work so much. We can write applications. She has a future. I won't be alone. I know it's selfish, but I don't know what I would do without her.

Chemo is going well. Of course, she is really tired and weak, but the doctors are hopeful that this round will be the last one she has to go through. She is so strong. It would be high time, too. It's been almost two years since her diagnosis.

She has been diagnosed with cancer.

I might be happy. But I'm not sure. What does happiness feel like? Is it like being in love, do you just *know*? Is it simply the absence of grief or pain? Is it the same as being content? Is there even such a thing as happiness? This is a spiral I fall into a lot lately. And although I start out pretty sure that I am, in fact, happy, at the bottom of the spiral I am usually quite sure I'm not. Not spiralling is a big part of what I am trying to do in therapy. What I am trying to say, is that I am good. My job is good, my friends are good, what little family I have is good. The weather is nice. Maybe that is all there is to happiness?

She is with me every day. She needs to be, because if she's not coming over, I'm not getting out of bed. She is so worried about me. I know she is. And I want to get better, I really do. Most of the time. Sometimes, I just want to let go. But I keep going. For her. Because I promised her, and I am going to keep my promise. I am pretty sure I will. She has found me a therapist and I am going to see him today for the first time. I hope he can help me; I truly do. She is so optimistic.

I am not well. I know I am not, and I know I haven't been in a long time. I can't remember when I last felt well. I don't even know what well is. But I don't know how to tell anyone. I don't know how to tell her. Sometimes, it's almost funny. Almost. I walk through the halls of my university; I smile at people I know. I attend my classes, and I do okay. I joke with my friends as we eat lunch, and they laugh at my self-deprecating humour. And I laugh along. Although most jokes aren't jokes. I laugh along although I feel absolutely nothing. How do you describe to someone how utterly empty and hollow you feel when there is absolutely no reason for you to be sad? I don't know. But today, I will try. Today, I have to, because she has to know. Because I promised, we promised. Too often have I contemplated it lately, to just stop and give into the nothingness that consumes me. It's only my promise to her that pulls me back from the brink of the abyss. The sweet, sweet nothingness. I have to tell her.

People just keep leaving. I hate it. I have attended too many funerals for the relatively short time I've been alive for. I hate funerals. All of them. But this one especially. It's my mother's. So, everybody wants to express their condolences, but I don't want to hear it. Everybody expects me to cry, but I don't. She was my mother, but I hardly knew her. She's been sick for

as long as I can remember, either in hospital, in her room, or somewhere by the sea trying to regain her strength. My grandmother raised us as good as she could. It's been me and her for almost our entire life. At night, after the funeral is over, we lay in our beds in the room that we share. All is silent until she starts to speak. "Promise me to never leave me." For the first time today, tears gather in my eyes. "Never." I promise. And she echoes. "Never".

A childhood without parents is never a good one, I guess. But ours is as good as can be expected. It's a wild childhood with no one really looking after us. We spend hours in the forest, playing games, looking for trolls and fairies. We are both firm believers. Grandmother doesn't like us talking about magic, because there is no such thing, there is only Jesus. But we have seen the fairies in the forest, so we know better, because Grandmother has never seen Jesus. I am glad I have her, because otherwise I'd be alone, as alone as I was before she came along. I can hardly remember those days with nobody to play with, nobody to tell my stories to. Grandmother doesn't want to hear them, and mother is too busy to listen to me. Even when she is well, she isn't really there. And father is long gone too. But now I have her.

I am all alone. And I am so bored. It's dreadful being alone and bored. I go see what Grandmother is doing. She is watching TV, but it's boring TV and she shushes me when I try to talk to her. Mother is gone, I don't know where. And father is gone too, but he has been gone for a long time. Mother hadn't been gone for so long. I wonder whether she will come back. She does. Eventually. But she isn't alone. She brings someone with her, a small someone, a baby. Her. And then. Just like that. I am no longer alone.