

# Eve, Not Everleigh

By Nya Mancell, grade 6

It's okay if you want to stare. People stare all the time. No matter if it's through windows, or behind their shaded sunglasses. I'm used to it. People always do the same thing. They look, then look away, then look back, not sure if that's what they really saw. My name is Everleigh Clark, and I have incurable cancer.

In my opinion, life kinda sucks. I mean, I like the things like pretty sunrises, fresh strawberries, and fluffy waffles. But there are the things that sort of take the joy away from those things. Like the countless pretty sunrises I've seen from inside of a hospital room. And the strawberries that aren't so fresh at the hospital cafeteria, and the fluffy waffles that I'm now not allowed to eat because I'm only allowed to eat certain foods. If you're wondering why I'm talking about things like sunrises and waffles, I'd like you to know that this is a letter. This is my final goodbye.

Mom, I want you to know that I really don't like your mac and cheese. I've always told you that I like it, but dried cranberries and sunflower seeds just don't go with cheesy pasta. Also, I threw out that checkered hat you gave me. I know that you bought it for me to wear to school to hide my baldness, but Uncle Mike gave me a much cooler one last year, so I wore that one instead. I found your secret stash of chocolate in the third box to the right of the pair of high heels on the top shelf in your closet. I know that the doctor

said I shouldn't eat chocolate, but whenever I'm not in the hospital, I always sneak up to your room and have some. I really like how when you laugh, you throw your head back and don't worry about how loud you're laughing, even if people stare. I remember one time, you were in our kitchen, and the sun lit up your face as you laughed. I think you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen laughing.

Dad, I'm sorry that you never got to take me fishing. I know that one time we were all set up to go, but then Gracie and Luke came to the door and asked if I could go play baseball with them. By the way, I was the one who hid your model plane collection. It's because when people came over, it was kind of embarrassing to see a bunch of model planes built by a grown man. Don't worry, they're not damaged. They're behind the old mirror in the third room to the left in the basement, in a cardboard box. That one time you took me to the zoo, I told you that I felt sick, and we went home. But it was really because there were some girls from my class there, and they were all staring. I feel bad about it, because you went and bought me ice cream so I would feel better. I know that you've always told me to go outside proudly, with my IV and no hat. I've had trouble doing that in the past, but I hope that in heaven, I'll walk around as proud as you wanted me to be.

Maggie, I was the one who stole some of your Halloween candy. It was because I was mad that I was too sick to go trick or treating, so when you were asleep, I snuck into your room and stole some. I realized that the handful I grabbed was mostly trash candy, like Tootsie Rolls, and mints, so I stuck it inside my jewelry box and never ate it. If you

still want some, it's there. I remember that one time my hat fell off in front of everyone at recess, and the whole courtyard went silent. There had been a rumour spreading around that someone in our grade had cancer, and when my hat fell off, I felt so embarrassed. And then you came and said that you were the one who had cancer, and I had just shaved my head in support of you. Everyone in the entire second grade was really scared of you, like cancer was contagious. Eventually, they found out that I was the one with cancer, but thanks for saving me from a few months of staring and whispering. If there was an award for best sister, you'd win it for sure.

Now, since this is the last thing I'm ever going to write, readers should get to know a bit about me. I'm not scared of dying. I haven't been scared since the doctors took my parents into a room and whispered with them, and Mom and Dad came out crying. I haven't been scared since my cancer reached stage four, and the doctors told them that I would die in two months. I haven't been scared since Mom started to go to expensive clothing places like Zara, and buying me a phone, VR headset, and toys, because she was blowing through all of the money she had used up for me, and she knew that she would never buy anything for me again.

I wonder where I'll be when I die. When our dog, Honey, died three years ago, Mom and Dad took her to the vet to die. I hope that I'll die at home. I wish that my friends like Gracie, Luke, Abby, and Miles could be there when I take my final breaths, but I don't think a kid dying is exactly PG for ten year-olds. I'm going to ask Mom to dress me in my comfiest clothes, and I'm going to lounge on the couch and watch TV.

Hopefully we'll order McDonalds, too. But from experience, I'll probably die in the hospital. Whenever something goes wrong, I always end up in the hospital. Maybe if I do my best puppy eyes and clasp my hands together like I'm praying, they'll let me die at home. But probably not.

One thing that's really annoying in my life is when we run into people we know. Mom will start talking to them, and they'll say hi to me, but sounding really sad. And they don't even know that my cancer is incurable! All they see are the IVs, and my bald head, and the occasional oxygen tube. It's really disappointing that they can't see past the 'Cancer Everleigh', and see the 'Real Eve'. If I could, I'd like them to know that I love soccer and writing stories. Maybe I'd tell them that I really like jellybeans, but the cheap kind, not Jelly Bellies. And I'd tell them that I'm usually pretty good, and I try to keep my faith. Our church visits became very infrequent when I got sick, but I still try to remember to pray every night in my hospital room.

At my last birthday party, my tenth one, I invited practically everyone in the entire grade. Mom and Dad and I had booked the entire bowling alley, and I had spent hours filling the goodie bags. Most people said that they could come, and I had a good forty kids who said they were available. Well, when the time actually came, about fifteen showed up. I was close to crying, and Mom texted all of the other moms to see where the kids were. Most of them just made up lame excuses, and you know what was dropped off at the front of the bowling alley? Around twenty-five gifts. So they got a gift for me, but didn't even bother to come? Later, Abby called me when I was in the hospital. She told

me that everyone said they didn't want to be seen with me, and that she was really sorry. So, yeah. No one wanted to be seen with the bald, ten year-old cancer kid. Story of my life.

I'm in the fifth grade right now, but I wouldn't say that I'm *really* in it. My cancer hasn't been doing well, and I've missed a lot of school. In fact, it's April, and I'll say I've probably only made it to a couple weeks of school. I remember in the third grade, I was doing so well. I had been really sick in the first and second grade, but after I started chemo again, I was pretty healthy for almost the entire year. I remember water park visits, field trips, and being able to run around at recess like all of the other kids. But in the summer between the third and fourth grade, my cancer rebounded, hard. I spent most of the year in the hospital, holding back my tears. I was so, so close to having a good year! When I came back for a week in November, a few of the kids had even forgotten my name.

The best friend I ever had was Elliot, who I met when I was six years old. His curly red hair was always messy and unkempt, and his ice blue eyes sparkled when he laughed. We were both new to our school, and we both joined in October because we had been under treatment during the summer and September. At first, when I walked in the classroom door, I saw him and narrowed my eyes. I recognized him from the hospital, where he once had snitched on my secret bundle of candy under my bed. We didn't speak much to each other, and when we did, it was short and snappy.

But it all changed one day when Mom was late to pick me up from school, and I was waiting on the front steps. I heard a commotion over between the park and our school, so I went to go check it out. What I saw was Elliot on the ground, two sixth grade boys hovering over him. We were only in the first grade, so for boys as old as eleven to be hitting him enraged me. Elliot was curled into a ball, trying to protect himself. On the ground, he looked small and skinny. Weak. Alone. Just a little kid with some red fuzz on his head, shaky arms, and a baggy sweatshirt to hide the monitors on his arms. I had yelled at them, but they had brushed me off and laughed. Finally, when I pretended that my mom was there and I called for her, they scurried off through the field. Once they were gone, I came over and helped him up. My tanned hand locked around his pale one, and I helped him up with my skinny arms. I could see that the right side of his face was swelling up, and he was clearly favouring his right leg.

We both stood in silence for a moment, and that's when he dug out a paper bag from his pocket and handed it to me. When I peeked inside, I saw that it was full of candy. For snitching on you, he said. Then he told me that his mom wasn't going to be here for another twenty minutes, and I pulled on his arm, leading him to my car, which had pulled up during the whole ordeal. After our moms had texted, we arranged for him to come with us for ice cream. And there we were, two sick kids eating ice cream and laughing in the sunshine like we had no care in the world. But not all endings are happy.

Only three years later, a few weeks before his ninth birthday, Elliot passed away. It was so sudden that we were called by his parents while we were in the car driving to the hospital to visit him. I remember that we were just sitting in the car, in silence, because Dad had pulled over when we got the call. Mom was crying, but I was just staring out the window. My fingers were clenched around the plushie that I had saved up for with my allowance that I was going to give to him so hard that my knuckles were turning white. Finally, I asked them if he at least got to eat McDonalds before he died. Mom turned around in the front seat and grabbed my hands. Then she told me that she hoped that he did.

My hand is getting tired, and my headache is killing me. It's now past midnight, and I'm writing this by the light of the monitor hovering over my hospital bed. I'm really tired, and I'm going to go to bed now. Hopefully I haven't made this letter too sad, because I wanted it to be happy. I know that not a lot of happy things have happened in my life, but I try to focus on the ones that do. Anyway, I think a nurse is coming down the hall to check on me, so I gotta go. Love y'all. Peace out!

-~~Everleigh~~ Clark