

The Pain Disguised in the Beauty

As the beaming fluorescent lights shined on my face, I sat on the hospital bed with hopeful eyes knowing Dr. Green was going to give me an answer to the problem other doctors failed to solve. My feet swung from side to side, as my fingertips tapped on the crisp paper lining the bed. My heart was like a drum being pounded after a basketball player makes the game-winning shot before the buzzer blares. The butterflies in my stomach wanted to be released into the jet-black sky outside.

“How was your day, Luke?” Dr. Green quietly asked.

“Well, time was like a snail today. When my parents told me you had an answer so soon, I knew it was important,” I exclaimed in one quick breath.

Sitting still only irritated the butterflies in my stomach. As they became restless, they raced through my veins into parts of my body that would grab my attention. With a flutter and flick, my right heel quickly moved from left to right. Their flapping wings separated the skin from my bones, and their antennas poked my nerves. While my nerves fought back, the oxygen around me seemed nonexistent, as I struggled to find any source of air.

“Luke, I can hear you breathing. Are you okay?” Dr. Green calmly asked.

My teeth released my bottom lip from their pearly white cage, and my eyes stopped vigorously twitching. “Yes. I’m fine. My right heel is just doing what it always does now. I wish it would stop,” I remarked.

Dr. Green softly stated, “That’s why we’re here.” He stared at me with his dark brown eyes, and I stared back. His eyes were like emotionless pits, gazing from person to person in an attempt to feel something. As he glanced down at his clipboard, my eyes slowly drifted to his mouth. In the silence, his mouth remained flat. From one corner to the other, the lid to Pandora’s Box formed... an interesting sight. While my teeth engulfed my bottom lip once more, my fingers felt the cool, crisp paper for seconds at a time.

In a trance-like state, my eyes remained fixated on Dr. Green as he turned his attention to the computer next to him. His fingertips gently tapped on vowels and consonants creating a sequence of letters that was unique to him. With a sigh, every muscle in his body was put at ease, a normal state of being for Dr. Green. However, upon inhaling, every muscle again tensed, a motion I only seemed to notice. This only agitated the butterflies in my right heel. They furiously flew up and down, left to right, and side to side. My irritated nerves felt the wrath of the swirling kaleidoscope, swinging punches in unimaginable ways. Before I knew it, my fingertips felt my blazing skin, skin that wanted to escape from the fluttering, flying creatures.

With his straight face, Dr. Green said, “Luke, I can tell that your right heel is bothering you, so let’s get down to business.” His voice became quieter as a new sound entered my ears. *Ba-bum. Ba-bum. Ba-bum.* “This morning, I looked at the MRI you had yesterday of your right heel.” *Ba-bum. Ba-bum. Ba-bum.* “I know you all are looking for a definite, concrete answer, but it’s unclear what *exactly* is wrong with Luke’s heel.” My fists slowly unclenched, and the sound got louder. “Worst case scenario, Luke has Ewing’s sarcoma. I advise not Googling this.” *Ba-bum. Ba-bum. Ba-bum.* “Best case scenario, Luke has some type of blood infection. We would run tests to figure out exactly what kind of infection it is, and this would be treated with antibiotics.” *Ba-bum. Ba-bum. Ba-bum.* “We know one thing is for certain. There is a mass of some sort in Luke’s right heel.” The sound was deafening. “From the looks of it, this seems very treatable, but I have to contact my colleagues at Children’s Hospital.”

Dr. Green was hitting his fingertips against the table, but I couldn’t hear anything. Even though I noticed his knee frantically moving up and down, my ears were consumed with the sound of percussionists smacking, slapping, and striking drums. I glanced at my parents for help, but they were frozen in time, real-life sitting statues. Their eyes were locked on Dr. Green, like hawks spotting mice in the prairie fields. The beaming fluorescent lights only amplified their facial features. My dad’s mouth hung slightly open as if Medusa had caught him off guard, stuck in a poorly-cushioned, gray chair with a

moonlit backdrop. My mom's mouth was frozen shut while her brain tried to sort letters into words to create a sentence.

With an assertive tone, my mom blurted, "Are you trying to tell me my son has the C-word?"

Dr. Green's knee was suddenly motionless. As his emotionless eyes aligned with my mom's frozen eyes, he opened Pandora's Box, saying the answer to my problem. "I am deeply sorry to tell you this, but Luke has some type of cancer."

The percussionists sprinted off the stage, leaving nothing but an empty, lifeless room behind. My ears desperately searched for mallets hitting timpani, but it was no use. They were consumed by the silence.

Blood coursed through my veins as the mass of butterflies continued diving into the skin of my right heel. Even though they were flying in the right region of my body, they were doing so much wrong. The butterflies swung their wings, and I felt my nails dig into my skin. As the butterflies spun into each other, I gasped for air. How could something so beautiful cause so much pain?

Before I could inhale, I felt a cold substance race down my cheek. First, it was one. Then, it was two followed by a third, fourth, and a fifth. The room became blurry as cracks started to form at the bottom of the dam. At any moment, the dam could burst, and the flood gates would open. My fingertips lost their sense of touch upon feeling the salty substance running down my face. Through my impaired vision, I saw a silhouette of Dr. Green sitting in his five-wheeled chair talking to my parents. He was at the edge of his seat like a super fan anticipating the opposing team's game-winning home run. Sitting like The Thinker, his hands moved frantically up and down as if "everything was going to be okay," even though that was unknown.

In desperate need of comfort, I looked at my parents. In an instant, my hands temporarily patched up the dam with one, brisk wipe. I had one second of clarity followed by multiple seconds of ache. My parents were the same statues I had seen moments before, only this time they were hollowed, emotionally

drained by my diagnosis. I looked into my mom's eyes, the windows to her soul. They were empty spheres, failing to exhibit my mom was somewhere inside that hollow statue. It was like every feeling she had ever felt vanished, absorbed by a sponge and rung out in a sink. In that second, I saw a paralyzed person, a paralyzing I had caused.

As my senses became numb, my eyes hysterically searched for tranquility, anything that could take the pain away, but it was no use. I was falling, arms flailing and legs kicking, into a dark abyss of my thoughts, feelings, and hurt, hearing silence and stillness, touching air and wind, feeling nothing and everything at the same time. I was floating, surrounded by pitch-black walls. My thoughts circled me in a tornado of agony. It was like I could grab them, physically feeling depression, anxiety, and disappointment.

“How did you not know it was cancer?”

“Months of excruciating pain should have been an indicator that it was worse than a bone fracture.”

“Am I going to die?”

“How are my classmates going to look at me?”

“You should have expressed better how much pain you were feeling.”

“People will never look at you the same way.”

“Look at all of the pain you caused your parents. How could you let that happen?” All of the air I had once touched was gone. It was like I was alone in space without a spacesuit. As I tried to catch my breath, I felt my eyes become the size of Mercury, reaching maximum volume. A familiar beat filled the atmosphere. *Ba-bum. Ba-bum. Ba-bum.* My ears were doomed. My lungs were decaying. My body was dying.

“Luke, are you okay?” Dr. Green asked, teleporting me back to the room with beaming fluorescent lights, poorly-cushioned, gray chairs, and crisp paper.

“No,” I squealed with my last breath of oxygen, leaving nothing but angry butterflies in my body.