

Lucy's Wish

By Camryn Small

As I weave between the beanbags and plastic chairs all I can think about is the bubbling feeling of hope in my heart. I haven't felt this way since Lucy was diagnosed. For a long time I thought it had been crushed to a million tiny pieces like a delicate china doll. I gaze around at the town square. We've dressed it in its finest; fairy lights and bunting hang along shop windows and the dusty pink sky is beginning to fade into the night. The smell of paella wafts through the air as Judy stirs the rusty pan. She's set up a marque out the front of the restaurant so that we can drape the white cloth over the shop entrance. Now the only thing we need to do is to set up Maeve's projector. Before I can take out my phone and ask where she is, hands grab my shoulders and I turn around to see Toby.

"Hey Tilda, how's the set up going?" I gesture for him to look around at the vibrant square and he looks ecstatic.

"Geeze, you and Judy have truly transformed this place," I smile, knowing it's true. It's a large contrast from the tiresome atmosphere that people drag through this village. Paint is peeling off the bakery walls and the lighting is always dim in the grocery store. There's too many cracks in the pavement and the bins are overflowing like a waterfall of rubbish. Tonight, that's all changed. Everybody will be together again. Together for Lucy. I'm about to ask Toby if he put up all our event information posters around town, but he's suddenly distracted by the food.

"Get your dirty hands out of the paella!" shouts Judy as she grabs Toby's wrist and pins it against the table.

"Mmmm, delicious!" he mumbles cheekily, stuffing rice into his mouth with his free hand. I enjoy watching the dynamic between Judy and Toby. It's so different to what Lucy and I were like. They always fight in the way that siblings do. It's obvious that Judy has more power against him now that she recently turned 18 and is in training to take over their parent's restaurant, Rice Republic.

"Shoo, or I won't let you have any at all. Why can't you just be as patient as Tilda for once," Judy hands me a spoonful of paella to try and Toby scowls. Having Toby as a best friend since kindergarten has meant that his family trusts me to taste test all of their new recipes. I swallow the spoonful and am amazed by the powerful flavour and tinges of spice.

"That's amazing, Judy! But we better get back to setting up the movie night. The whole community is due to come in 30 minutes," I realise that Maeve is still not here and the bubbling hope is now fizzling with doubt. My thoughts are interrupted when my phone begins to vibrate. I slip it out of my pocket, hoping to hear Maeve's soothing voice. Instead I answer the call to my flustered mum on the other end.

"Tilda, I'm so sorry. I know how much work you put into tonight for your sister but..." I know what she's going to say next. I sink down to the floor like a flooding ship underwater. Strong waves crash against my head, drowning me out from the conversation. I cover my ears so that I can't hear mum but Toby picks up the phone instead. He nods his head and hangs up before melting down beside me.

"They had to rush Lucy to the hospital again this afternoon. She wasn't feeling well after her treatment. Your mum doesn't think that she'll be able to make it tonight." my arms enclose around me like a protective shield as I bury my head deeper. I think of Lucy's wish and how she desperately wanted to raise money for cancer research to help kids like herself. We spent late nights in bed together

brainstorming ideas before Lucy started chemotherapy. After that, there were no more sleepovers or brainstorming sessions and no hope to fulfill her dream.

It feels like I'm fully immersed in my shame. I know I've failed, I could never organise a fundraising event by myself, not without Lucy's bubbly energy and audacious personality. I sit there as tears trickle down my cheeks. I sense Toby leave my side and I feel more alone than ever before. More than the nights that Lucy spent in hospital, or the times when I wasn't allowed to visit her ward.

I sit in silence until I'm unsure of how much time has passed. Seconds, minutes, an hour? My body is shaking from the cold and my legs are aching. I'm surprised when I hear a familiar voice. A warm, reassuring voice. Maeve's voice.

"Til?" When I lift my head to see her glowing face, I glimpse the blur of people entering the town square. They are all here to see Lucy, to support her, and all we have is an empty bean bag longing for her company. More people I recognise are dropping coins into the donation buckets and lining up in front of Judy's paella stand. Mr Margot from the bakery is laughing with John from the grocers and chairs are filling up rapidly. I even notice my prep teacher from the local school. She taught Lucy too and I'm sure that's why she's here. Lucy was involved in many activities around the town. Bake sales and sporting matches, debating and bookclubs as well as working with Judy at Rice Republic. Judy and Lucy were always close, having known each other through Toby and I. Sometimes I worry how Judy is coping, but she seems hopeful tonight. Does she know that Lucy can't come? Everybody looks like they are having such a good time and Lucy is probably in a pale hospital bed, far away from any joy. I wish she was here, sitting beside me watching all our favourite childhood movies. It's as if Maeve can sense the hurt in my heart. She grasps my hands and pulls me up from the dewey grass, leading me along until we reach Lucy's beanbag. I can see that the projector is finally set up. We asked our school librarian if we could borrow it over the weekend and Maeve promised to go and pick it up today. I knew I could always rely on her. In the past I've been able to talk to Maeve about everything. She always knows what to do and has the perfect advice to give, especially after everything that's happened this year.

"I'm sorry I was late. Your mum let me know that Lucy couldn't make it here tonight, but I still wanted to make it special for her. So I stopped off at the hospital." Maeve reaches over to her computer and suddenly Lucy's face is lit up across the white movie screen. "I hope you don't mind. Lucy wanted to film this video to thank everyone who came to support her tonight. Would you like to do the honors? Just go ahead and press that button..." My hand hovers over the play button on the computer and everybody falls silent as Lucy begins to talk. She's wrapped a bright yellow scarf around her head and it makes her pale features gleam.

"I wanted to start by saying thank you to everybody who made it tonight. Your donations to cancer research have given me so much hope for our future. This whole process has been a challenge, but I have continued to hold my chin high. That's why we have decided to watch *Annie*. It's one of my favourite films because I am constantly inspired by her resilience and strength. I might not be with you all in person, but I'm still here no matter what happens. Finally, I wanted to thank my sister, Tilda. I love you with all my heart and I want you to know that you are the reason I will continue to fight. One day I will look back and see that we made it. Not just me, but my amazing family. Thanks for all the hope you have given me." I smile and wave at Lucy as she fades into a black screen. Everybody cheers and I can hear Toby whistle behind me. As *Annie* begins to play on the big screen I make a promise to keep

fighting. Through the pain and all the hard times. Because I have hope. And hope can heal anything if you want it to.