

### 3 Red Balloons

Have you ever wondered what it's like to die? Do you really go to heaven? Or do you just sit there with your eyes closed in a wooden box under a bunch of dirt? Well I would know because I have died.

Bang! Bang! Bang! I open my eyes and I am lying on my bed with my dark black hair sprawled across my face. I check my clock and it says 11:05, I have never slept in that late. I get up and look through the window, there is a big crane, with a wrecking ball smashing down the old building next door. I never really paid much attention to that house all I knew is that the people that had lived there moved out long before I was born. "I wonder what they will put there now?" I think to myself. Leaving the thought open, I go over and look into the mirror, my hair is curly and messy. My eyes are deep blue this morning, unlike last night when they were hazel. It's weird how they change color over night sometimes, but I get used to it. I am only half awake when the sudden smell of smoke fills my nose. Of course, my mom is cooking again. I head down stairs into the kitchen and see my mom flipping pieces of bacon that are as black as my hair, I look over and see a stack of what looks like my mom's famous rockhard pancakes. "Oh I see you're finally up." She says with a smile. She turns off the stove, and walks over to me. She pushes my dark bangs away from my forehead and kisses the top of it. "Go get dressed, we are going to the library to return that book I borrowed." "What book?" I ask confused. "*War And Peace*" she says softly. "Did you like it?" I ask her. "I never read it" she said embarrassed. "Do I have to go?" I asked unenthusiastically. "Go Katie." She said in a stern voice. I dragged myself back up the stairs and into my room. I looked around my room at all the pictures that were hung up on my walls and one caught my eye. It was the one of my dad and I. We had gone on a trip to Hawaii, he wanted to take one last trip with me before he left to go fight in the army. After he left, I never saw him again. He was going to be fighting there for one year then coming home. But he was shot three months into the year. Thinking about it made me want to cry, but before I could shed one tear I heard my mom calling to me to hurry up. I tore off my pjs and ripped through my drawers to find something to wear. I threw on some old jeans and a stained striped T-shirt. I ran down the stairs and my mom had put the burnt bacon on a plate and was waiting by the door with her purse and the book. She opens the door and it creaks slowly. I cover my ears because creaking doors is like nails on a chalkboard to me. I walk out the door still covering my

ears while the door creaks as she is closing it. We walk down the steps into the garage and get into the old dark green Chevy Malibu. I have told her time and again that we need a new one, it has broken down so many times I have just stopped counting. The paint is chipped and the leather seats that were once nice, are now cracked and torn. "I'm sick of this car" I say in a sort of sharp tone but under my breath. She hears me, and tells me the same story she tells me every time I make a comment about the car. And I make a lot of comments about this car, so I have heard this story enough times that I have memorized it. She tells me about how my dad had bought her this car the night he proposed. And how she doesn't like any other cars. But I know, somewhere in her, she is longing for a new one. She puts the key into ignition and starts to back out of the garage. As we are on our way to the library my mom is talking about how she is going to try and read the whole book next time she gets one. I'm not really listening, I just can't manage to move my gaze from out the window. Then there is a loud honking sound and what sounds like the skidding of tires. All of a sudden there is a huge crash. I don't think it was us, but the car that was right in front of us. Then with another big crash I can feel my head shattering through the window, sirens start blaring and I know what has happened. I can't take my mind away from the throbbing in my head and the blood running down my shirt. "Katie! Katie!" I hear a familiar voice shouting my name. But I can't move, not like I'm stuck under something, but my body just feels paralyzed. I manage to open my eyes just enough to see my mom with a black eye and tears running down her face. I look up to the sky, and to my surprise I see a little red balloon floating across the pale blue sky. It looks like a scene taken from a movie. "Katie?" The shouting of my name turned to a soft whisper, I realize that the voice was my mom. She sounds like she was trying to hold back tears. The little red balloon floats away from the sky and everything goes blurry. I can't explain the feeling of what happened next. All I know is that I wasn't at the crash anymore. Not with the little red balloons, not with my mom and her tears. Maybe it was all just a dream. Maybe I am still in my cozy bed with burned bacon on the counter down stairs. Maybe. I wake up, and I am in a bed! Thank god, I tell myself, it was a dream. But hold on, This isn't my bed. The sheets are kinda itchy and there is no comforter. I blink my eyes open and the room I'm in isn't the deep yellow with pictures sprawled everywhere. And for some reason, I don't feel like the same person at all. I slowly bring my hand up to my head and I am surprised to feel nothing but a cold and empty surface. I peel the itchy sheets off from me and walk out of the empty room. I turn my head left and it takes a moment for my eyes to take in the image before

me. It is a long bright white hallway with nothing and no one in sight. I take one step into the hall and suddenly feel a chill. Then I look down and realize I am not wearing the the old jeans and T-shirt that I threw on this morning. I am wearing nothing but a thin white dress, it looks like the ones people wear in the hospital. I start to walk down the empty hallway. As I am walking there are rows of doors along the hall. I look into the first one and it is empty. I move on. The next 4 doors are also empty but once I get to the the next door, there is a man. He is lying in the a bed with his eyes closed. The man looks familiar so I quietly tip-toe into the room and as I walk up next to him I can't breath. I break down crying. It can't be real. It isn't real. But it is. I am here, in an empty white room with...my dad? "Dad!" but he doesn't respond. I'm so confused. I look around the room and in the corner of the room, there is a red balloon. Just like the one I saw at the crash. Before I can think about it anymore I hear someone calling my name. It sounds like it is coming from down the hall. I don't want to leave my dad. He needs to wake up! He needs to know that I am here. With him. No matter how much I don't want to leave him, something pulls me out of the room and as soon as I know it, I am jogging past the 5 empty doors and back to the uncomfortable bed that I woke up in. I climb into the bed and try to sleep. The voice is still calling I open my eyes and I am still in the itchy sheeted bed. But the room is not empty, my mom is sitting over me smiling. I start crying again and try to lean over to her but I can't. I nearly fall out of the bed. My mom starts crying and then starts telling me something that makes me get the same feeling I got when I saw my dad lying in the bed in the room with the red balloon. She tells me that we got into a car crash, and that I was sitting wrong. I hadn't thought much of how I was sitting in the car, but now that I look back on it I was sitting with my legs crossed. Apparently when we crashed something happened in my leg muscles, and now I'm paralyzed. I can't really take in what I am hearing, but I will have plenty of time to. We sit there for another hour talking until a nurse comes in with a wheelchair. I cry at the sight of it. Just knowing that the wheel chair is going to be what I'm using for the rest of my life. The nurse lifts me into the wheelchair and wheels me out into a waiting room. I wait for a good ten minutes while my mom fills out some paperwork. We leave the hospital and my mom picks me up and transitions me from the chair to the car. She puts the wheelchair into the trunk, sits down in the driver's seat, puts the key into ignition and pulls out of the parking lot. I don't realize the car that we are driving in is new until we are about halfway home. But I don't make any comment. I look out the

window and up into the sky and see something that puts a smile on my face, it gives me hope. A little red balloon.