

Little Tear Drops

By Conor Ryan

So here we are, life is coming to its borderline. It sucks. This abrupt end is like an author had ripped out the last chapter of their novel. You'll never know how the characters managed to come back fighting. The adventure just stops. Boom!. The end. That's what the higher power in the mind tells you, nothing else, that's it... that's what this illness is like, an unfinished and torn story...

I'm lying here surrounded by counterproductive doctors, nurses and four monotonous walls with a closed window showing the latest picture of Dublin covered in a blanket of beautiful white rain. In all my years I've never seen the capital so clean.

My grandson Brendan is with me though spending our last chapter together. He's a wonderful kid. Brendan has my sons sky blue eyes, the pearl charm and the attitude of a superhero. I think of my fallen son every day and I'm reminded graciously through Brendan. I recall hanging the linen out to dry one evening just watching Brendan sprint around the small back garden with a drenched maroon towel tugged at the back of his shirt just flying around in his own crafted world. It frustrates so much that I won't get to see Brendan grow into his father's loafers. I'm not that old, I could've made it to Brendan's wedding but then again he's only been walking nine years.

I raised Brendan with my wife since he was only a young lad. Poor kid never got to see his parents with eyes he'll remember them from. Brendan knows he was once held by his mam and dad. He keeps a picture of them on his bedroom shelf.

One night my wife and I had a chat with Brendan accompanied by mugs of green tea after he'd asked us why he doesn't have a ma or da. Brendan questioned this before after a hurling match when seeing his buddies with young parents. That night we told Brendan but strangely I never got a definite answer on how he felt about losing his parents. Brendan declares that he's "*grand*" about it but I'm afraid he's being a typical man just pulling back his true feelings from escaping his mouth. The day after he just continued being Brendan, this happy, popular and animated kid from Dublin. How I was so so wrong...

Brendan and I were still boxed in the hospital and the doctors couldn't come up with an answer. I thought this crowd were a bunch of bloody academics, supposedly not. I looked over to Brendan and he was still wasn't himself.

"What's on your mind Brendan?"

"Ah It's...It's nothing grandad."

"Where's the smile gone?"

"Eh... I dunno"

"Okay... Brendan you do know you can tell me anything right?"

"I know, I know."

"It's easy to say that your grand Brendan but If you keep your thoughts locked up in a chamber you could start losing yourself completely."

"How can you lose yourself?"

“Well kid the thoughts that you hold onto change your attitude in your actions, the happiness in yourself and you start to watch the world turning against you when really... It's just trying to help.”

“Is the world helping me grandad?”

“Absolutely son, you just need to let it.”

“But how do I let it help me.”

“Just talk Brendan, talk, talk, talk.”

“But I always talk?”

“Oh I know Brendan, my ears can back that up but it's not just about talking about hurling and video games, it's about talking about your thoughts too.

“Never really thought about that sort of stuff though.”

“It's absolutely okay Brendan you're only a little lad at the end of the day, The world is too big to face alone Brendan, we all need help no matter how strong you think you are. It's a problem boys have, they think their own strength is all you need to fight the pain but really it's the strength of others you need. *Please* remember that Brendan.”

“I will grandad.”

I wish I had that small chat with Brendan before we ended up here. Our lives were just too busy to realise that we should've put more attention to the well being of our fragile and intricate minds. The condition of our mind is guarded by our own will to keep it hidden from the physical world, some will let their guard down but the others will guard the mind until it falls just like Brendan had.

“Where's Granny off to?”

“She should be back soon kid. She's gone to get us a surprise.”

“A surprise?”

“There's the smile! You'll have to wait though kid, Granny said I can't tell you!”

“Hmm... is it a football?”

“Ah nope”

“Is it... a puppy?”

“God no”

“Is it... another 50's mixtape?”

“Nope but I can organise that.”

“Aw Granny's gonna be forever though”

“Ah she won't be Brendan but I might know how we could manipulate the clocks a bit. How about I tell you a story while we wait for Granny to come back Brendan.”

“Cool okay, what's the story about?”

“Okay, so the story is kind of similar to your situation Brendan only it's basically the story of me. I too had my own lingering demons when I was a little lad like you. My confidence was on bottom ground and I struggled to keep my chin up and forward. I strolled around Boston for 19 years back in the 1950s before moving to Dublin and i'll tell ya one thing, the 50s was the summit of all that's great about existence. The atmosphere was just astounding Brendan. The sun in the sky, the people, jazz bands playing around every street corner, women's bright dresses illuminating the paths and the cars, oh boy the cars were as shiny, colourful and stylish as the men's fedoras. To

sum it up it was just simply a time where we dressed better, the music was better, the women were better and mostly importantly the strawberry milkshakes were better.”

“Hey what's wrong with our milkshakes?”

“Trust me kid, the texture is all wrong and the luscious strawberry flavour just doesn't cuddle around the tongue anymore. It lost its touch.

I tried to search for the perfect strawberry milkshake when I moved to Ireland and I ironically found no luck. Don't get me wrong there's some stiff competition but it just doesn't get any better than the 50s I'm afraid.

“Fair enough.”

“Okay so I was a kid just like you, well not exactly like you, I wasn't as brainy or much of a ladies man as yourself.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah.”

“Not kiddin' Brendan, you're one of those lady magnets, I see those girls eyeballing you all the time when I pick you up from school, Hell you'd stick to a fridge if you walked by one.”

“No comment grandad, no comment at all, nope.”

“I'll leave you alone on that one kid. Anyway I was in class more bored than the drooling kid next to me and suddenly time started lagging behind. I couldn't believe what I saw coming through the door. It was like an angel had dropped down from the infinite blue skies just for me. Blonde curly hair, a sun coloured dress and a smile sweeter than strawberries. My heart fainted when the teacher asked this new girl to sit beside me. She was as quiet and shy as myself. My eyes were locked to the blackboard for the entirety of the day. I couldn't even remember what angel looked like.

The final bell rang and everyone made a rush to the fresh air. I saw the angel walk down the street towards The Red Sweet Diner, the home of classic milkshakes.”

“You didn't follow her did you grandad like one of them stalker people?”

“Ehhh.. well... okay I know it looks bad but technically my heart was following her.

“Wow grandad”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah you'll understand when you're older kid. So anyway I saw angel face walk into the diner and I couldn't help but catch a glimpse of her and you'll never guess what she ordered...”

“A milkshake?”

“Oh no no Brendan, a STRAWBERRY milkshake.”

“From that point onwards I knew she was the one but the problem was I'd never spoken a word to her. I wanted to head inside the diner and greet her but the force of hesitation was pulling me back. The local quartet began their gig just outside the diner inducing the area with romantic melodies. It gave me a kick behind my back to open the door though. As usual a wave of coffee and freshly cooked burgers hit my nose as I stepped foot inside, one of the many things I loved about this place with its rich addiction to red and its fine magnet to attract the local mumbling citizens of Boston which always kept the atmosphere breathing. The brunette waitress saw me coming a mile away, poor college girl was sick of making me milkshakes.

The new girl sat by the window alone just watching the world go by and I was looking at her inside my own. I just stood there in the middle of the diner soaking up my thoughts while trying to blend in with the air. After minutes of playing hide and seek with ghosts I leaned myself a little closer to her and held onto my shaking hand and took a few steps forward. I froze when she turned her head. I couldn't believe it when she said she'd recognised me from school. I thought I was invisible in class but she could actually see me. She offered me a seat and my heart started pounding. I sat down opposite her and tried to keep my cool. There was awkward silences and a little small chit chat but soon we just started talking, just like that and she had the most beautiful name. Dolores.

She even offered me some of her strawberry milkshake Brendan. I didn't know what I loved more, the milkshake or Dolores. But what she said later on that evening was difficult for me to comprehend. Dolores told me that the only reason she's sitting in the diner was to see what happiness looked like one more time. Dolores planned this to be her final day under the sun. Everything was going well for her, a loving family, good grades, achievements in music and had aspirations to hearten the stage of Broadway. I just couldn't understand why Dolores was thinking this way. Dolores talked and talked even more just giving out to the world, I just listened. From her cloudy feathered eyes came little tear drops. I said something my mother had said to me one night. "Darling don't cry, the author isn't done with you yet, your story, your journey, your path all still have to be walked." I held onto her agitated hands the whole evening and walked her home along the view of the black pier lighted by the moon of the muted night.

We became best of soulmates and promised each other to meet every day in The Red Sweet Diner. I spoke out my thoughts and she did too and the audience in our minds and on our shoulders left their seats from the boredom of seeing a happy life, they couldn't laugh at us anymore.

At 19 we got engaged and left home. I asked Dolores at The Red Sweet Diner and the ring of course was at the bottom of her milkshake. To this day I think the ring still smells of strawberries."

I remember Brendan's subtle smile as he closed his eyes just as I end the story. I never saw Brendan so at rest. Dolores had arrived holding three strawberry milkshakes and rested her hand on my shoulders.

As loud as the hospital was,
there was a brief moment
of silence, momentarily
broken as we heard
Brendan's..
final..
breath..