

When the Birds Wake Up

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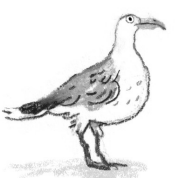
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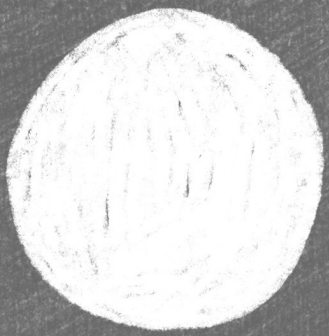
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For Amelie and Jack, with my whole heart.
Look for the moon, it will always be there.
– JME

For Rachel
– SB





PART I – Full Moon

The moon was whole.
Nothing missing,
not even a tiny piece.



Me

When I'm not liked by others
I forget I like myself, too.
Does that ever happen to you?
Vanishes. Pfffft into smoke,
no memory of memories of
all the likeable things that
make me, me (I'm Pear!).
So I'm writing them down
in purple gel pen
in CAPITAL LETTERS with !!!!
so that next time I'm not liked
by someone else,
I can still be liked by
myself.

LIKEABLE ME THINGS!!

I can blow BUBBLEGUM BUBBLES!!
the size of tiny planets.
I always MOVE SNAILS!!
to stop them being shoe-crushed.
I am the KEEPER OF SECRETS!!
even when I'm dying to tell.
I know hundreds of RANDOM FACTS!!
– Robins are always the first birds to wake up.
I'm the kind of friend who's a KIND FRIEND!!
I'll tell you your horse drawing is brill
even if it looks more like an aardvark.
I have a talent for making ORIGAMI DOGS!!
and I'm a future real-dog owner (manifesting it).
I can play the VIOLIN (pretty well)!!
because I started young, at three,
when I found my grandma's in the attic.
I take the time to NOTICE THINGS!!
like how frost makes spiders' webs
look like they've been dusted with stars.
I always win the COMPETITION!!
for eating sugary doughnuts without licking your lips.
I absolutely LOVE MY GRANDMA!!!!
and she's one of my favourite people in the whole world
even though grandparents aren't cool . . . apparently.

Old Biscuit Tin

Still smells of sugar when the lid *clicks* off
and a little bit of sea from the crab claw I added.
I lift out the dog collar to check it's still round
and daydream for one second, then *sigh* for two.
Shell check count – one, two, three – yep, all there
and so are the beads and the buttons and
the broken string from my first violin.
Emergency packet of strawberry laces
for a midnight snack – yep, still there, too.
Special things should be kept in special places
which means this isn't an old biscuit tin
it's a special things tin
which needs more special things in.
LIKEABLE ME THINGS!! list popped inside,
purple pen and gold paper lifted outside.
Time to write to Annie, my BFF, my always,
even when we don't talk for ages.

Dear Annie,

Is it just me?
Have you ever wished
blowing out birthday candles
or the seeds from dandelion heads
that you could change something about yourself?
Make yourself more pickable
as a partner in PE or
make something smaller

or neater
or bigger
or faster
or less sticky-uppy
or thicker
or more flexible (t h e s p l i t s)
or taller
or cooler
or louder
SPEAK UP
or narrower
or stronger
or rounder
or flatter?
Me too.
My biggest wish?
To make my big EARS smaller.
Blowwwwwww
Dandelion seeds everywhere
Must go, Mum is calling
Pearrrrrrrrr from downstairs.
Grandma has come to stay with us,
and they're back from seeing a specialist
who I guess is special in 'ist' things?
Artist, stylist, or violinist perhaps.



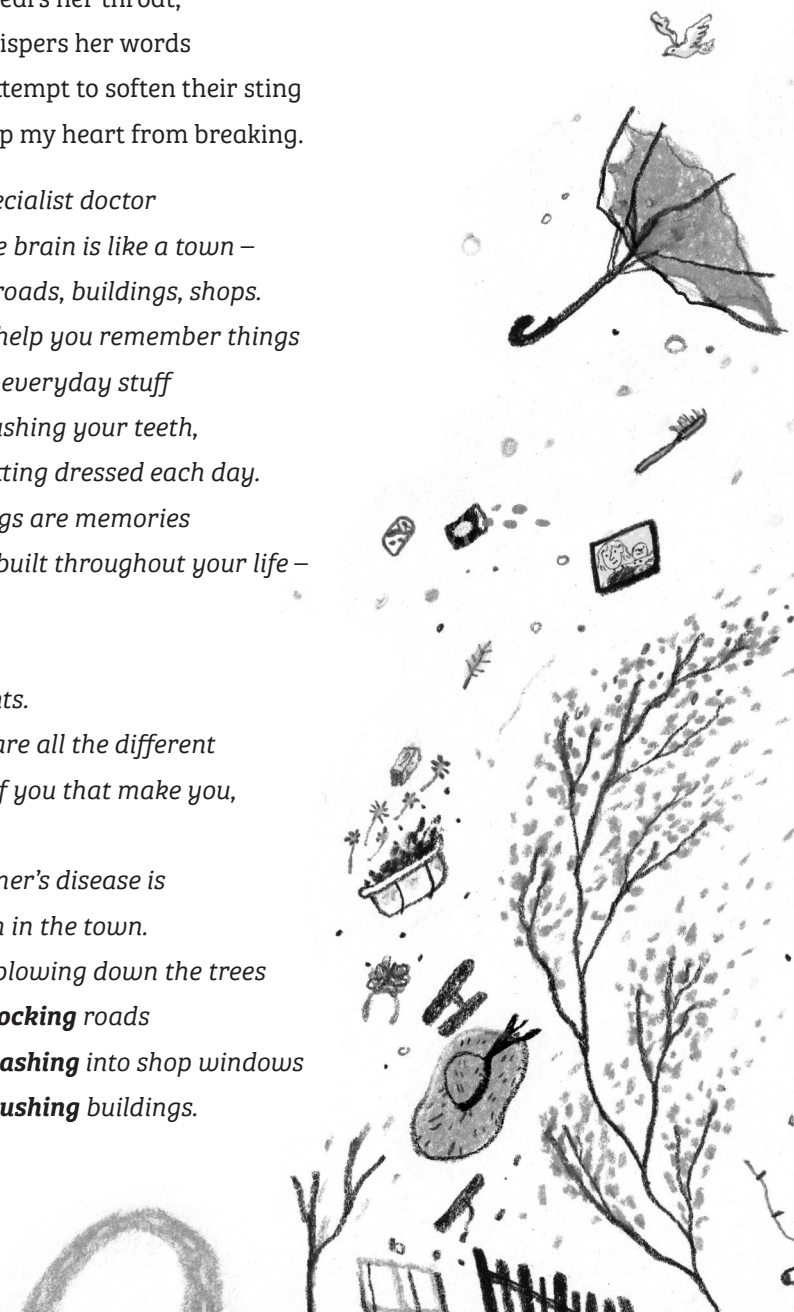
Love and hugs,
Your friend always there,

Pear x

When Everything Changes

Mum clears her throat,
and whispers her words
in an attempt to soften their sting
and stop my heart from breaking.

The specialist doctor
said the brain is like a town –
lots of roads, buildings, shops.
Roads help you remember things
and do everyday stuff
like brushing your teeth,
and getting dressed each day.
Buildings are memories
you've built throughout your life –
people,
places,
moments.
Shops are all the different
parts of you that make you,
you.
Alzheimer's disease is
a storm in the town.
Winds blowing down the trees
blocking *roads*
crashing *into shop windows*
crushing *buildings.*





Mum looks at me.
I look at Dad.
Dad looks down at his shoelaces.

After Everything Changes

They pretend everything is fine
for my sake,
I pretend everything is fine
for their sake,
everyone pretends
for each other's sake,
and nothing is fine.
What would you like, Pear?
Listening to the dinner options,
I stare.
I don't know:
Scampi and peas
Burger with fries
Bangers and mash
Why don't we have . . . fish and chips,
my favourite,
Grandma says.
How long will she know
that it is her favourite?
Will this new Alzheimer's storm
change it one day
to a jacket potato?

Still Life



Weeks have gone by
and Grandma still has
a black cloud storm in her head
and now the world feels different
but, somehow, it still works the same.
I still have to brush my teeth
and planes still crisscross in the sky
and the neighbour still walks his sausage dog
and I still have to force down broccoli on a Sunday
and chlorine still stings my eyes when I go swimming
and I still lose the TV remote down the side of the sofa
and umbrellas still go inside out in the wind.
I still love Grandma
so, so much.

P.S. RANDOM FACT!!
The proper name for a sausage dog
is a dachshund
and a dachshund measures
about two thirty-centimetre rulers long
from its nose to the end of its tail.

Pinky

Grandma always says,
I'd move Heaven and Earth
for you, Pear.
Heaven,
Earth,
two things
impossible to move.
Unchangeable elements.
The skies, our planet.
But she would
move them anyway.
I always say,
I'd do the same
for you, Grandma.
That was the agreement,
our pinky promise.
But first we
(Mum, Dad and me)
are moving into Grandma's cottage
to help look after her,
which means also moving school
and moving my whole life.
Heaven,
Earth,
will have to wait.



ALMOST HALF A YEAR LATER (163 days)

Change

It's been eight days
since we packed up our stuff
and left our home and our town
car full of boxes
stomachs full of butterflies
and moved into Grandma's cottage
in the village where she's always lived
to take care of her
the way she once took care of us.
Rails put along walls for her to hold
and a stairlift to lift her up the stairs.
Grandma's bedroom is now downstairs
and is the little yellow room
just off the conservatory.
Funny how a room becomes a bedroom
as soon as a bed is put inside it.

That Summer

Tap, tap, tap
on the door to the little yellow room.
Grandma, I've brought you a cup of tea.

Come in, darling, she says to me.
I put her tea down
and sit on her bed.





She snaps her biscuit in half
and picks up the photo of us
at the beach
that sits on her bedside table.



Oh, do you remember
when we went to Margate?
Just the two of us.
Just for two days.
It was so hot, too hot.
Lulu's Gelato
as soon as we got off the bus.
You had mint choc chip
I had strawberry
we both had tons of sprinkles
and chocolate sauce.
Do you remember, Sweet P?

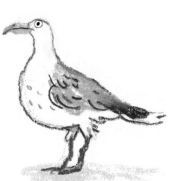
Rucksacks carried along the street
to our tiny little fisherman's house,
crab paintings on its walls.
Just two single beds.
The bedroom was tiny, so tiny.
Rods and nets propped up
in the wardrobe.
Do you remember, Sweet P?

Dreamland in the afternoon,
the carousel and helter-skelter,
candyfloss threads on our cheeks,

2p machines
where you won the keyring
that was hanging on the edge
of a cliff of coins
for far too long!
Seagulls dived to catch chips
that we threw to them
as we sat on the steps.
We watched the boats come in
bobbing along
back to the shore.
Do you remember, Sweet P?



The following day
after a big, deep sleep
from all the sea air
and tangled knots in salty hair
we crept out of the house
as night greeted day
still in our pyjamas
we made our way
to the beach.
Under the blanket
we waited,
hot chocolate from the flask,
the sea snoring, still sleeping.
And I told you what I always tell you.
When the birds wake up,
that's the world's way



of saying we can start again
no matter what yesterday didn't fix.
And the birds did soon wake up
and they sang with all their heart
as the sky became smudged
in pink and orange.
Do you remember, Sweet P?





A seaside holiday with you,
my granddaughter.
Who I love with
my whole heart.

Pastels

Homely is a feeling
and I've always felt it
at Grandma's.
I don't know the recipe
of how to make homely,
but Grandma does.
Grandma calls sweet peas
my flowers
and had started seeding them
every year
from the first year I was born.
Pastel blues and pinks
and whites and purples

line the path
to her cottage front door
every early summer.
Look, Sweet P!
They've sprung just in time for your stay,
she'd say,
grabbing my squished duffel bag
from Dad's car boot
my cheek being squished by Grandma
between her finger and thumb.

School holidays were always
holidays for me at Grandma's cottage.

Now the cottage is my forever home
I feel like the homely feeling has gone,
but I'm sure it will come back again
like the sweet peas always do.