

# The Days Left

A short story by John Currivan

“Once upon a time, there was a beautiful...”.

”OH FUCK OFF!”

Flo’s words chopped across the therapist’s reading like an axe.

“You don’t want to hear it?”

“Fucking right I don’t. Now piss off.”

“Floridita.”

“Don’t call me that, my name is Flo!”

“Calm down... please.”

“GET-FUCKING-OUT!”

Flo lay on her side and turned her back to the ward listening to the therapist’s footsteps leaving, then tried to block out the constant blip-blipping of the machines poking at the silence.

Eventually she sat up and stared at the empty bed opposite her. Charlie’s bed.

Flo had been in foster care her whole life. In and out of other people’s homes, and because she was sick so often she’d been in and out of hospitals too, but she’d had enough.

She decided then, that tonight, she would run away.

Sneaking out was easier than she’d expected. She simply walked out the front door into the snowy darkness.

She ran ignoring the road and entering the forest.

At first she was excited and nervous but as she ran further and further, she felt a stickiness, like jellyfish growing in her chest and before long she started coughing violently.

She had forgotten how sick she was.

She spluttered and coughed, still lunging through the trees until she could run no more. In a small clearing she leaned against a tree heaving hard, almost choking with each cough and eventually she could breath again and settled.

Looking up and she saw the stars shimmering through the trees. Then peering closer she saw one of the stars growing. It grew from a dot, to a penny, to a small plate. She then realised the star wasn't growing, it was falling right out of the sky and was going to land on the spot where she sat.

Flo leapt into the trees as the fireball blasted into the ground with a colossal \*TTSSSHHHHOOOOOMMMM\*.

As the smoke cleared Flo was surprised to see that it was a car. A white two seater sports car. The door opened and the glowing figure of a man stepped out. He was smartly dressed in a wine coloured suit.

“Wassssaaaap!?” he said, waving at Flo.

“Sarah Rogers my little dear, have no fear, your fairy god-brother is here.”

“My name is Flo.”

“You’re not Sarah Rogers?”

“My name is Flo.”

“Awwwww FUCK!” said the fairy.

“Who are you?” asked Flo, flabbergasted.

“I told you, I’m a fairy god-brother.”

A million thoughts stampeded through Flo’s head, maybe she fell asleep and was dreaming, maybe she was hallucinating, maybe this was some elaborate trick but all she did was snort and say:

“You don’t look like a fucking fairy.”

Joe squinted.

“How would you know?”

“Fairies aren’t real.”

“Excuse me?”

“I’m probably just seeing things.”

The fairy flicked Flo on the forehead right between the eyes.

“Ow!”

“Did you just ‘see’ that?”

“Why’d you flick me?”

“Why are you talking to yourself?”

“I’m talking to you dickhead.”

“How can I be a dickhead if I’m not real, bitch”

They were beginning to like each other.

Then the fairy god-brother said. “I’m sorry. Let’s start again. Hi Flo, I’m Joe.”

“Joe isn’t a very fairy name!”

“Don’t start that shit again! Look! What are you doing out here in the woods?”

“I got lost on my way into the city.”

“Right...” Joe looked at his watch, “...well officially I’m not Sarah Rogers’ fairy god-brother till midnight, and I’m going into the city anyway so...”

“So?”

“I dunno. You wanna get some hot chocolate?”

He clicked his fingers and the sports car pulled itself up between them, its doors open.

“Come on.” said Joe, “I ain’t no big bad wolf.”

It had all happened very fast but for some strange reason Flo trusted him and she climbed in.

Joe started the engine.

“You ready Flo?”

“I’m ready Joe.”

“You sure?”

“I’m not a baby, Joe”

“So let’s go!”

And BOOM! The car exploded faster than a rocket into the woods, the car veered madly dodging the trees, then it accelerated right off the hill and soared above the city.

This was insane, Flo thought.

Then they began to descend, the buildings came rushing closer filling up the windscreen, and they landed with a \*BUMP-SCREEEEEEEEEEEE!\* the car skidding across a fairground car park and jolting to a halt; perfectly parked between two cars.

They got their hot chocolates, and together they meandered through the fair.

They went on all the rides and ended up on the ferris wheel.

As they rose higher Flo had time to appreciate how cool the city looked from above. All the lights flickering in the distance like small faraway problems.

Then a thick fit of coughing rose in her throat, the cough grew chestier and started to hurt. She shuddered heavily with each cough and could feel the gunk in her lungs and she was scared she might vomit.

Joe held out a handkerchief.

“You think you maybe should’ve stayed in that hospital?” he asked.

“Who told you I came from the hospital?” replied Flo, taking the handkerchief.

“Bitch, please. I know everything.”

“I’m sick of that place.” said Flo angrily, “See, I have this... virus I got from my birth parents. It means I get sick much easier than other kids, so I’m always in hospital. Doctors say I’ll have that virus forever. Anyway, I have no friends there.”

“What about Charlie?” asked Joe gently.

“What do you know about Charlie?”

“He’s your friend isn’t he?”

“Yeah, but he left the hospital last week.”

“Where’d he go?”

Flo paused. “Eh... he went home DUH!”

“Oh right.”

“Charlie was a pain in the ass, and he was a cheater. He won almost every game we played, but I know it’s only cos he cheated!”

“He sounds like a real bastard.”

“See, there were ten of us on the ward he was the youngest. I was second youngest and I always teased him, cos even though he won all the games and stuff, it didn’t matter cos I was gonna turn thirteen before him!”

They both laughed.

“Seems to me you really liked him.”

“He was ok.”

“Only OK? Why’d you kiss him then?”

Flo was horrified. It was as if Joe had poured ice down her back "How did you know that?"

"I told you, I know everything!"

It had started one night when Charlie snuck over to Flo's bed and asked if he could kiss her. She said no. He tried to lean in and snatch a sneaky kiss off her anyway. She pushed him off and thumped his arm and said that she'd rip him a new asshole he tried that again. But deep down Flo wanted to kiss him. The next night Flo snuck over to his bed and pulled the curtains. Without saying a word they kissed. It lasted a full five seconds. She pulled away when he tried to stick his tongue down her throat. Then she thumped him on his arm and said she'd rip him another new asshole if he told anyone about this.

When they were at the top of the ferris wheel. Joe turned to Flo and said "Hey! I know where Charlie lives. We should call in."

"No."

"It'd be fun."

"I said no!"

"Ok. Jeez"

They began to descend, and when they were near the ground Joe turned to her.

"You should go back Flo, running away while your sick I dunno, seems kinda... stupid"

"Who you calling stupid, you prick!"

"You, you idiot!"

"I'm not an idiot, you asshole."

"Goddamn it Flo. It's winter and you have nowhere to go."

"Fuck you. You're not even supposed to be my fucking fairy god brother. You're meant to be with Sarah fucking Rogers."

“I fucking know!” said Joe. “I’m here, off the clock, doing you a favour.”

“You can’t fucking tell me what to do!”

“Listen...”

“FUCK OFF!”

The ferris wheel had carried them back to the platform and the carriage door opened with a click.

Flo jumped out of the carriage and leapt down the platform steps, leaving Joe behind her she ran as fast as she could. She turned a corner and saw Joe blocking her way. “Where you gonna go, Flo?”.

She pushed him aside and ran on. She turned another corner but he was there, “Where are you gonna go Flo!”.

She turned back and ran out of the fairground, then she saw that somehow she was on Main Street. Across the road was Joe saying “Where you gonna go Flo?”. She sped away and into a swarm of people passing by hoping to lose herself in the crowd. She squirmed shouldering people aside, when something scratched her hand. Suddenly she realised that it wasn’t people around her but trees. She was back in the forest.

Thorns and branches cut at her arms but she kept running. A distant voice shouting “Where you gonna go Flo?”. She tripped, falling face first into what she expected to be hard soil but landed instead in soft sand.

Gazing around she saw a vast and endless desert. In the distance the glowing silhouette of Joe approached her.

“Why are you doing this?” she screamed.

“Tell me where are you going to go?”

“I don’t fucking know. Ok?” she said.

“Tell me what you’re running from then.”

She didn’t respond.



"I already know the answer Flo."

Flo turned to escape and found herself standing at the edge of cliff, the waves of an infinite blue ocean crashing against the rocks below.

Joe spoke softly "What are you running from?"

Flo's footing gave way and she toppled into the open air behind her, towards the briny surf beneath.

She landed on her hospital bed and sat up. Joe was at her bedside.

The ward was silent. Just the blip-blipping of the heart monitors. Flo felt a wave of delight on looking across the room and seeing Charlie in his bed opposite her, safe and sound asleep. The scene was all too familiar, and a torrent of horror hit Flo as she remembered what was about to happen.

Charlie's heart monitor stopped its rhythmic blipping and let out one long continuous sharp ring.

A team of doctors and nurses darted to the bed. It was chaos, everyone doing different things, checking different wires, holding fingers against Charlie's wrist and throat. Then one doctor began shoving down repeatedly on Charlie's chest. Pushing down so hard that his body sank limply into the mattress and Flo was worried that his little ribs might snap. The rest of the nurses and doctors fussed around, panicked. Then suddenly the curtains were pulled and the scene was hidden.

Flo's hand slid across the bed and found Joe's. She held onto his fingers squeezing hard. Joe stroked her white knuckles with his dark luminescent thumb.

For the next forty minutes they both sat up listening to it and all the while the ceaseless piercing ring of the machine told the world that Charlie's heart had stopped. Flo was squeezing Joe's hand so tight that her hand quivered and her knuckles turned pale. Joe squeezed back gently.

When the nurses re-opened the curtains Charlie's face was covered with a sheet. Then the bed was wheeled out, and Charlie was gone for good.

"All I could think," said Flo "was that now I was the youngest and Charlie wasn't ever gonna turn thirteen."

Joe silently opened his arms wide. Flo grabbed him and buried her face in his chest sobbing uncontrollably. Joe just held her and he was ready to stay there holding her for as long as he was needed.

"Can you bring him back?" asked Flo.

Joe shook his head.

"But that's what fairies do. They grant wishes! They make sure the story has a happy ending."

"I can't bring anyone back. He was born with the virus, like you, Flo."

"I'm scared Joe."

"I know Flo."

"I'm sick all the time. I don't want to live like this, I can't. I'd rather just..."

There was no need for Flo to finish the sentence. They both knew what she meant.

"Can I show you something?" asked Joe.

Flo nodded.

Joe clapped his hands and they were back in the city, alone on an empty main street.

"Look between your feet," said Joe.

Flo was standing on a cracked concrete slab, and in the crack was a little green stem with a single leaf at its end.

"What the fuck is this?" asked Flo, sniffing.

"Well, you got your attitude back quick enough." laughed Joe.

The pair bent down, "This," said Joe "is a miracle."

"Are you shitting me?" said Flo.

"What does this little green leaf say to you." asked Joe

"It doesn't say anything. It's a leaf."

Joe just laughed.

"Well to me this leaf says, 'I made it'. It says 'I was born under a goddamn rock and I made it.' It says 'I had no air, no sunshine, barely any water. I couldn't run away, and I had to fight to live. I had to grow as much as I could, when I could, cos I wasn't going to let some dumbass chunk of rock decide whether I lived or died. I had to grow, I had to grow like no goddamn seed had ever grown before.'"

"Imagine that this plant," continued Joe "tries and tries to grow for years and gets nowhere: and then one day, it sees a crack, sees the light, feels the air and it says, 'Here we go motherfuckers I'm gonna make it!' and it does cos, POP, a little leaf comes out. Now this stem might look small to us but for that little seed to break out through concrete... that's like climbing a million mountains at once.

Flo looked at Joe now, a glimmer of understanding in her eyes.

"Thing is Flo, we're all born, we all die. That is the truest truth of them all. But everybody has got their own concrete blocks to break through and that's just the way it is. But you can't run away forever. Life is not about happy beginnings or happy endings. It's about trying to have a happiest middle you can, and Charlie, he knew that. He knew that every hospital visit could've been his last. He wanted to make sure that if he was going to die that he'd enjoy whatever days he had left. So he made at least one new friend in every ward he was in. That was you. He really liked you, Flo. You were his first kiss."

Flo stared at the green leaf beneath her. It was her first kiss too. And she realised that if Charlie hadn't introduced himself when she came on the ward first she'd never have met him.

Flo looked up again and saw Joe walking away towards his car.

"I'm sorry Flo, but I gotta go. I'm late. I was meant to catch Sarah Rogers at midnight! She's already halfway to the airport."

"What do I do now?" shouted Flo.

"You'll be OK." said Joe

Flo tried to chase him but her chest was full of gunk again and she coughed. She tried to breathe but couldn't. She coughed again and again but something was stuck in her throat and she could hardly breathe.

A nurse ran to Flo and raised her bed so she could sit up helping her to get all the coughs out.

"It's OK," the nurse said, "You'll be OK."

When the coughing fit had subsided the nurse fetched some water and said, "Right, drink some of this. I'll check on you in a minute."

Flo sat back on her pillows breathing slowly.

It was early morning and dark and Flo looked across from her and saw that the empty bed opposite her wasn't empty.

There was a girl in it. She looked scared.

"Are you ok?" asked the girl.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"Are you sure?" asked the girl, "That cough looks bad".

"It was. I'm ok now.", and then added, "What's your name?"

"Rhona, but everyone just calls me Ro"

"Hi Ro, I'm Flo."

THE END