

Written by Bessie Yuan

Chasing sunset

'I'm scared, Sean.'

'I'm really scared.'

We're sitting together, two best friends side by side at the top of a sea of green grass.

The wind picks up, playfully toying with the multicoloured leaves of the massive oak tree we're under, sending ripples through the thousands of individual blades of grass.

I watch her profile, the curve of her forehead, the smooth button nose, the straight teeth a splash of white as she bites down on the cherry red of her lips, the slender neck, down to the swell of her breasts, all silhouetted by the dying sunlight.

The sunset; a painting of the nostalgic reds of a thousand experiences shared, the orange shades of a desperate wish to continue an uncertain journey and the yellows of an unpredictable path towards the future.

If I tried hard enough, maybe I could see the individual cells, the capillaries, the veins that saw the blood that ran through her body. The faint outline of the abnormal growth of her tissues, manifesting as the 'lump'. Perhaps I could watch as the 'lump' spread, thriving as it advanced past the safety of her left breast.

'Me too.'

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We met on the third day of my summer holidays as two kids who never really fit in.

Our mums were friends, we were both dragged to an afternoon barbeque at the beach.

When we met eyes, she smiled shyly, a single dimple making an appearance, her face framed by the sand blond strands of her fine hair.

'Do you like surfing?'

'Yeah?'

The easy bond between two naïve children was born under the dying rays of the day I met my best friend.

We spent our holidays as two eleven-year-olds, experiencing the everlasting sunsets of youth.

She was with me as we caught the first waves of the day, as the sea salt crystallised in our hair, as we scoured the beach for shells, tiny crabs scuttling under the safety of the rocks as our conjoined twin shadows lengthened.

And I was with her as we started school, as the years passed, as her mum was diagnosed with breast cancer, holding her as she cried, the wind whipped fine grains of sand onto our hands, into the crevices of our bodies, mixing with the salty tears spilling out of her overcast grey eyes.

I was with her when her mum passed away, two years after that day.

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We're sitting side by side, ice blocks cupped in our hands; the raspberry red melting ice cream leaking down her hand, spreading in rivulets down the length of her arm.

The wind sends the leaves rustling, dancing, twirling in an everlasting cycle of regrowth.

It whistles past barely disturbing our matching scalps. Mine, cropped short in a desperate attempt to make her smile. Hers, fragile tufts, slowly fading away.

* * *

I'm at the beach again. I stare out at the endless blue, framed by the fading orange.

The smells, sights and sounds hit me all at once.

The smells of the salty ocean breeze, lacking the familiar scent of her sunscreen.

The painting of a sunset, the sun an untouchable golden orb slowly slipping away under the horizon, lengthening the single shadow of a boy.

The sound of the crashing waves, peaceful, sporadic, hollow without the sound of her voice.

I realised, in a moment of pure clarity, that she was truly gone.

And yet, the light faded away, the sliver slip of the crescent moon surrounded by an infinity of glistening stars, just like every of the melancholy days we'd spent together.

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Breast cancer is an abnormal growth of a woman's breast tissue, with the potential of spreading across the body. Breast cancer is treated through varied combinations of chemotherapy, surgery, radiotherapy and hormone treatments.

It is the most common cancer in Australian women and the second most common cancer causing death. In 2018, there were approximately 18, 087 women diagnosed with breast cancer in Australia, with a five-year survival rate of 90.1%.

In recent years, breast cancer rates have been increasing. In 2016, approximately 15,930 were diagnosed with breast cancer, while in 2018 the number of women diagnosed increased to 18,087. This figure is expected to increase with our aging population, as 79% of the new cases of breast cancer in 2018 were women over the age of 50.

The increasing diagnoses of breast cancer can be attributed to a variety of causes, with no particular cause being largely to blame. Some reasons include: screening, where increasing the number of women attending screenings could increase early stage diagnoses; lifestyle, with women who drink more alcohol, are obese or overweight, have a higher risk for breast cancer; age, where women old than 50 are more likely to be diagnosed, and history, with women who have a strong family history of breast cancer having an increased risk of breast cancer.

While breast cancer rates have been increasing, survival rates have also increased. This is due to progressive research, improved treatment options and early detection programmes. In Australia, between 1982-1987, the 5-year survival rate from breast cancer was 72% compared to the 5-year survival rate between 2006-2010 which has increased to 89%

Breast cancer affects millions annually, globally. It brings with it unimaginable effects, mentally and physically to both the patient, family and friends.

Together, our society needs to increase our efforts, whether through supporting those who are sick, donating to fund further cancer research or raising awareness for the millions diagnosed, in order to create a future where no more women will lose their lives in a battle against breast cancer.

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