

BELLY KISSES

Written by  
Lisa Gold

917-334-3191  
Jlsagold@gmail.com

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. NIGHT

KATIE (33) a nurse with sad eyes, walks out of a hospital room, a DOCTOR stands next to a bed. There is a small child in the bed and the sound of the FLAT BEEP of a HEART MONITOR pierces the still air. The doctor turns it off, and the sudden silence makes Katie pause at the door. She doesn't turn around.

KATIE  
(Sadly)  
Shit.

Katie hurries to the door marked "Lounge"

INT. NURSES LOUNGE. NIGHT

Katie enters the room and immediately goes to her locker. She fumbles with the lock.

KATIE  
Shit, shit  
(Crying)  
SHIT!

She bangs angrily on the locker door, as she finally gets the lock to open. She pulls out her cellphone and turns it on. There are no new notifications, no new texts. She dials.

KATIE (CONT'D)  
(Into the phone)  
Hey, it's me.  
(beat)  
Katie.  
(beat)  
Oh, OK, sorry. Well can you call me when you have a chance? It's been a rough day.  
(beat)  
Please?  
(beat)  
OK, I understand. If you have a chance. Hello?

Katie looks at the phone.

KATIE (CONT'D)  
Of course.  
(Throws her phone into her locker)  
Shit.

At the bottom of the locker there are several journals in a pile, each with names on them. "Benjamin", "Sarah", "Connor" and Katie stares at the pile for a moment then grabs the one with the name "Madeline" on it.

Katie brings the journal to the table in the center of the room.

She opens the journal and opens to a fresh page. She sighs deeply then starts to write.

KATIE (CONT'D)

"Madeline Harris became an angel on Monday

(looks at her watch)

June 14th. What we don't know is that HAD she lived she would be going to the elite school "Dalton" in two years as a Kindergartner.

Katie pauses to wipe a tear from her cheek.

KATIE (CONT'D)

She will soon become known as "Maddie" and the other kids are drawn to her bright smile, infectious laugh and creative mind"

INT. DOCTORS OFFICE. NIGHT

LEXI and AL HARRIS, both with anguished faces, sit in the doctors office, there is a COUNSELOR, a woman with harsh features, sitting next to Lexi. We don't hear what is being said, but we see Lexi gasp and bring her hands to cover her face as she doubles over and her husband Al grabs for her as we see he is crying too.

The doctor looks grim as he watches them. The counselor gently speaks to the couple.

KATIE (V.O.)

"Maddie does well in Kindergarten, she shows respect for other children, her teacher and the class rules. There is one student who she is not fond of, Dillon, because he is always acting out. Maddie always tells her mom that Dillon is a pain in the neck. 'Mom' she says 'Dillon doesn't follow the rules, he's a pain in the neck!'"

Lexi cries and struggles out of Al's arms. She stands up from the chair and runs to the door.

AL  
"Lexi!"

Lexi runs down the hall and shoves her way through the door marked "Lounge".

INT. NURSES LOUNGE. NIGHT- CONTINUOUS

Lexi leans heavily on the door once she is inside and starts to cry and slowly slides down the door to the floor.

KATIE  
UM, can I get you something. Or  
someone? To help?

Lexi, startled, looks up.

LEXI  
(Wiping her eyes)  
Sorry I didn't see you there.

KATIE  
It's OK.

Katie gets up from the table, leaves the journal open, walks over to Lexi kneels down next to her on the floor.

KATIE (CONT'D)  
I was one of Madeline's nurses. I'm  
so sorry for your loss.

LEXI  
Oh.  
(focuses on Katie)

Yeah, Katherine?

KATIE  
Katie.  
(Beat)  
Can I get you some water? Can I go  
get your husband, or the counselor?

LEXI  
Were you there? When she died, were  
you just in there with her?

KATIE

Yes, I'm really sorry.

(beat)

I think there are some tissues  
around here somewhere.

(Looking around)

Lexi gets up off the floor with Katie's assistance. Katie starts to look for tissue and moves to the sink to get a glass of water for Lexi.

Lexi walks toward the table to sit down.

As Katie is turned pouring her a glass of water, Lexi looks at the journal seeing the name "Madeline Harris" on the top line. She pulls the journal toward her and starts to read.

Katie returns to the table with the water and tissues, and sees Lexi with the journal and she stops short.

LEXI

(Quietly)

What is this?

(Louder)

What is this?

(Screaming)

What is this?

KATIE

It's nothing

Katie reaches for the journal, but Lexi holds on to it.

KATIE (CONT'D)

It's my notes on treatment.

Lexi starts to read it out loud.

LEXI

"Had she lived she would be going  
to the elite school "Dalton" in two  
years.." What the hell is this?

These aren't your treatment notes.

(getting hysterical)

What is this?

KATIE

I can explain.

(desperate)

It's, it's something I do when I am  
treating a terminal child.

LEXI

What do you mean, its something you do?

KATIE

It's private, no one sees them. I just do it, its like  
(searching)  
therapy.

LEXI

Them? There are more than one? You make a habit of writing about your patients?

Lexi is angry, and Katie is embarrassed.

KATIE

No one knows, just me, its something that I need to do. It helps me.

LEXI

You said that. It helps you how? What in the world would you have to say about my child that could possibly help you? What do you know about her? About us?

Lexi gets up and starts to walk toward the wall of lockers. She tries to open them, she works her way down the line.

KATIE

What are you doing? Those belong to the other nurses and doctors!

LEXI

I don't give a shit who they belong to.

Lexi continues, but Katie runs over to the lockers and stands in front of hers trying to block her locker.

LEXI (CONT'D)

Thank you for pointing out your locker to me.

Lexi opens the locker and sees the stack of journals on the bottom. She takes out the first one.

LEXI (CONT'D)

Benjamin.  
(Opens the book and reads)  
(MORE)

LEXI (CONT'D)

"Benjamin took two years off before college to go to Costa Rica with the foundation Builders Beyond Borders"

Lexi drops the journal onto the floor, Katie quickly picks it up, hugs it to her chest.

LEXI (CONT'D)

Sarah

(opens the book and reads)

"When Sarah was fourteen she found her passion for Science and technology, and competed as the only girl on her school's Robotic team"

Lexi drops this one on the floor. Katie picks it up and hugs it with the other one.

LEXI (CONT'D)

Connor

(Opens the book and reads)

"has a gift for creative writing and often acts out his stories with dramatic gusto using his Lego mini-figures and creating stop motion animated videos which he posts onto YouTube"

Lexi drops it on the floor. Katie picks it up.

LEXI (CONT'D)

And we know where Madeline's is.

Lexi turns back to the table and picks up Madeline's journal.

Lexi faces Katie, sees her clutching all the journals.

LEXI (CONT'D)

I should report you to the hospital.

KATIE

You don't have to do that, I'm not hurting anyone, its not anything anyone needs to know about.

LEXI

(emphasizing)

It's just not right. You are pretending these kids are alive! Are all these kids dead? Were they all terminal like Madeline?

KATIE  
 (Shaking her head)  
 I'm not pretending they're alive.

LEXI  
 Well, it's wrong, whatever you  
 think you are doing. I really  
 should tell someone.

KATIE  
 (Softly)  
 Please don't.

LEXI  
 Why shouldn't I? If you were me,  
 you would report this. If you knew  
 another nurse was doing this,  
 wouldn't you report them? I think  
 you've got a screw loose. Should  
 you even be working here?

KATIE  
 (Panicked)  
 I'm not crazy. This is what keeps  
 me from going crazy. I have to do  
 this. Let me explain.

LEXI  
 Why should I listen to you?

Katie gets up and stands in front of the window and looks  
 out. She is still holding the journals.

KATIE  
 I watch children die. I watch  
 families fall apart. That is  
 essentially what my job is. I try  
 to prolong these children's lives,  
 but there are no cures, and the  
 families never lose hope. I know my  
 job just prolongs the pain of  
 watching their child lose a battle,  
 of watching their child be in pain.

Katie turns to Lexi.

KATIE (CONT'D)  
 My job is to provide comfort, but  
 primarily our goal is to prolong  
 their lives and that often means  
 that I prolong their pain.  
 (beat)

(MORE)

KATIE (CONT'D)

And at the end of the day I watch the children pass away. Can you think of anything more awful than that?

Lexi looks down and shakes her head.

LEXI

Why are you a nurse in this unit if you hate it?

KATIE

I don't hate it. I love it. I fall in love with these kids, as if they were mine. And when I fall in love with them, I begin to have hope for them. I imagine just like a parent does.

(beat)

I pray for a miracle, for each and every one of these kids, I pray and I always have hope that they will be OK. But deep down, I know my role, and I know the reality. These kids are dying. And the parents that I've come to know are going home without their child.

Katie walks to the table, places all the journals down gently and picks one of them up and holds it out to Lexi.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I go home with another type of loss, of emptiness. Of guilt. Every child that comes into my unit I feel responsible for, and the guilt I feel for not being able to save them... is overwhelming.

LEXI

You can't save them, they're terminal. We hope you can provide comfort and lessen their pain, but we don't expect you to cure them.

KATIE

(Incredulous)

NO? There's not one little part of you that hoped one of us here, a doctor or a nurse, would think of a brilliant new therapy that might be the key to curing Madeline? I think every one of the parents holds on to that hope.

(MORE)

KATIE (CONT'D)

And I don't blame them, I would.  
And I do. I fall for it every day,  
as I treat these children, I get a  
renewed sense of hope at the  
beginning of every shift. Most days  
I can go home with out my hopes  
being dashed. There are even some  
good days where my patients are  
responding well. Hope is what gets  
everyone through their days here,  
whether you are a nurse, Doctor,  
parent or patient.

Katie picks up Benjamin's journal.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Benjamin's mom kept saying to her  
husband "This is the best hospital  
for cancer, with the best pediatric  
cancer unit. Benjamin will be fine,  
you'll see he'll be fine!"

(beat)

And you start to think that you  
will! He has a good few weeks and  
you start to think you are doing  
something right, and your spirits  
soar!

(quietly)

And then things start to go  
downhill. And I pick up my journal  
and start to write about all the  
hopes and dreams I have for  
Benjamin.

(Leaning toward Lexi)

He was their second child. His  
older sister used to bring him  
Lincoln Logs to play with and they  
would build things on his bed,  
amazing structures! His sister was  
8 and Benjamin spent his 6th  
birthday in the hospital. But they  
were builders and I like to think  
that had Benjamin gotten out of  
here, he would have continued his  
love of building. I dream of his  
future with his sister, building  
homes in Costa Rica. It's the  
exercise of dreaming for them that  
makes me feel better as their  
health declines.

LEXI

I would think that would make it harder not easier. Thinking of all the things they miss out on.

KATIE

(Forcibly)

NO! It's like creating a Fairy tale ending when there is none. I can go home at the end of the day to my empty apartment and not feel completely devastated.

Lexi looks sympathetic.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I'm not crazy and I'm not a monster. I don't think what I do hurts anyone. But it helps me. I don't think I could do what I do every day if I didn't have some type of closure other than their death.

LEXI

Does anyone know you do this? Another nurse, a friend, boyfriend, husband?

KATIE

(smirking at the inside joke)

No, there is no one.

Lexi reaches out to take Benjamin's journal.

LEXI

Tell me more about Benjamin.

KATIE

I can't tell you about his illness.

LEXI

No, tell me about his life.

Katie thinks about it for a moment.

KATIE

After he completes a second year with Builders Beyond Borders, he goes to Rhode Island School of Design and completes his Bachelor degree in Architecture.

(MORE)

KATIE (CONT'D)

His sister went to Cornell School of Architecture and they give each other a hard time about who is a better architect, the logically educated Cornell graduate or the creative but not logical designer from RISD!

(smiles, as if in memory)

They grow older and they still manage to have their rival debates over Thanksgiving dinners. First as new graduates, then as newlyweds with their spouses, then as new parents. Every year, around the growing Thanksgiving table the same good humored debate.

Lexi and Katie sit quietly for a moment.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Can I ask you something?

LEXI

Sure.

KATIE

Did you have dreams for Madeline?

LEXI

Yes, of course.

(starts to cry)

I tried not to think about the future. I tried to focus on the day, and getting through each day. But in moments of weakness I allowed myself to dream of her future.

Katie looks at her expectantly but knows she has no right to ask her what her dreams were. So she sits quietly.

LEXI (CONT'D)

But the one thing I dreamt about everyday wasn't for her. It was for me.

(Wipes tears from her eyes)

I watched her body slowly get weaker, and the weaker she got the more tubes and wires seemed to get connected to her. By last month, she wasn't eating so she got a feeding tube.

(upset)

(MORE)

## LEXI (CONT'D)

And I was so afraid of touching her and knocking something off line, that I would hurt her or cause the monitors to go crazy. And this fear of hurting her made me anxious that I wasn't touching her enough. I knew she needed me to touch her, to hug her to make her feel me.

(beat)

Holding her hand didn't seem like enough.

(beat, frustrated)

I wanted to lie next to her and cuddle but there were so many wires and tubes, there wasn't enough room for me!

(long beat, softly)

But then I kept thinking of when she was a baby, and that beautiful belly of hers was always ripe for kisses. Big soft belly kisses. The kind that made Madeline giggle hysterically. Those were what I missed the most, when Madeline was a healthy baby, and all was right with the world and I would just lay next to her and give her belly kisses. And that was what I dared to dream about. I swore that if those tubes and wires were ever removed that I would smother her in belly kisses.

KATIE

I'm so sorry.

Lexi gets up from the table.

LEXI

I should go. I am sure Al is looking for me.

She turns to Katie.

LEXI (CONT'D)

Look, I don't think what you are doing is OK, but I also don't think it's wrong. I've no right to ask you to stop, and I won't say anything.

KATIE

I never meant to upset you, anyone  
for that matter.

LEXI

I know.

(beat)

Oh, and thank you for your care of  
Madeline over the last four months.

Katie watches Lexi leave the room.

Katie looks at the journals sitting in front of her.

She picks up Madeline's journal. She sits down, opens the  
book and starts to write:

KATIE (VO)

Maddie's mom, Lexi, teaches her how  
to deal with Dillon and other  
school problems like most good  
mom's do. Maddie and her mother  
have a special tradition; snuggle  
Sundays. Every Sunday morning  
Maddie jumps into bed with her  
parents and Lexi tickles and  
snuggles with her until she laughs  
with abandon. The kind of laughs  
that transcend all thoughts of  
time, desire, needs, illness and  
death.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END

