

## **Beginnings and Endings**

**By: Nora Diffily-Kenney**

### **Lorelei:**

Lorelei had always thought she wouldn't be *that* mom. She didn't think she'd be the one constantly fighting with her kid or constantly having to scream to get a point across. She thought she'd be the mom that was her kids' best friend. The mom that everyone came to. The one who had their kids' friends say she was cool. That was not the reality she was living.

“Taylor! Is your homework done?!” There was never a response. Sometimes he wasn't even there to reply, but she didn't worry about it that often. She was busy. A doctor. A good one. She was at the hospital 80 hours a week. It was her safe place.

She'd been through a lot in the past six years. First it was Christophor leaving. Then Taylor hit his teenage years and things had been going downhill from there. In the beginning, it was just little disagreements, but as time went on, there was yelling, then screaming, and then, no talking at all. Their relationship hadn't been solid for years. Her therapist suggested that it was because Taylor had “unresolved anger and grief” over his dad. To her, that sounded reasonable, but she never got the chance to ask him. He never wanted to talk.

### **Taylor:**

Taylor had always been the kid that the “no dad” jokes had been directed at and even though he always laughed, he never thought it was funny.

All the “My dad can't take us, can yours? OH WAIT,” shit that was **always** stupid and most of the time made no sense, but he would always laugh along and try his best to change the subject. He had a pretty normal life for a 17 year old. He was popular. He was on the basketball team and he was pretty decent at it. Good enough to not ride the bench at least. He even had a girlfriend. Summer. She was his favorite person. He had friends of course, but Summer brought out happiness that he hadn't felt since his dad left. Something his mom could never understand. She talked to him like he was stupid. Something his dad would never do.

**Lorelei:**

“Well, I certainly had a hunch.” May 22nd, 1:54PM, she was sitting in front of MRI scans looking at what she thought to be three separate tumors. She felt nothing. Like it wasn't real. Maybe all the people were going to come out now with confetti and balloons and reassure her it was all a prank. She couldn't think straight. The world felt like it was spinning, She knew this diagnosis. She had seen it before. Treated it before.

“Lorelei, I'm so sorry. We can try chemo. The chances are slim but it's not impossible.”

Lorelei was a doctor. She had delivered this news millions of times. She had seen the effects of chemo and how it destroyed lives that were already ending. Squamous Cell Carcinoma. An extremely rare type of cancer. It had one of the worst prognosis. Of course.

“I'll think about it.”

“Please consider all your options. You have a son. I know he'd be lost without you.” She wanted to believe it, but she knew Taylor would be fine. Maybe even happy his mom wasn't around.

When she got home, she was met by an empty house. Again. She assumed that Taylor was at his girlfriend's house. He was always there. She walked slowly over to the couch and threw herself onto the pillows. "4-6 months. Only 4-6 months." she thought. She had so much life to live. So much to do. What about being in medical journals? What about having grandchildren? What about finding love again? It was all too much to think about right now. She turned on the TV and flipped through the channels until she found Judge Judy. No better cure than watching other peoples stupid problems. As she watched, slowly, she started to float away.

**Taylor:**

When Taylor woke up, he checked his phone. 8:47AM. It was a warm Saturday morning. He rolled over to find Summer wasn't next to him, but he heard her in the next room, so he put a shirt on and walked out into her kitchen. There she was, almost glistening in the sunlight.

"Hey sleepy head. I'm making pancakes, want any?" she asked. "Yeah of course I do but I have to get home soon or my mom will go batshit on me."

He was right. She did go batshit.

"Where the hell were you last night?!" she yelled.

"Just at Summers. I hate it here." he replied.

"There's no excuse for me not knowing where you are." She started to raise her voice even more.

“Mom, I'm over there like 24/7 and I'm almost an adult. You are not my parole officer.” After he said that, he saw her eyes go blank, then red like how they do in cartoons. It was almost like he could see the steam coming out of her ears. He just stood in the doorway as she screamed at him. There was no point in arguing with her anymore. He knew her routine. What pissed her off. How to get under her skin.

**Lorelei:**

She knew she shouldn't have yelled at him. It was the wrong thing to do. I mean, she had a lot on her mind and she just wanted to yell. She needed to. But she knew it wasn't right.

When she went into the hospital later that day, she realized it wasn't her safe place anymore. It just couldn't be after yesterday. Usually, she would be walking over to the PEDS ward right now, but she wasn't. She was walking to the cancer unit.

“Lorelei, can we please talk about this?!” She didn't want to go through chemo. That was final.

“I know what it does to people. If I only have a couple months, why go through all that pain and lose my hair and feel miserable for the rest of my life?” There was silence.

“I mean, am I wrong? I watch kids go through this every day and yes, I see the success stories but I also see the tears and the screaming and the gaping holes it leaves in young lives. I don't want that for me or my son. It's final.” After that, she got up and left. There was nothing else to say. She was dying but she wasn't dying without hair.

**Taylor:**

He wasn't trying to snoop and he certainly didn't mean to find all his mom's paperwork. At first, he thought it was patient stuff and he started to put it down but then, he saw a flash of his mom's name and paused. *LORELEI ELIZEBETH HART*. It was a DNR. Do not resuscitate. Then he found the release forms. The ones saying she wouldn't be taking chemo, dated, six days ago?! "What the fuck?!" He rushed downstairs to find his mom sitting at the kitchen island. Working. Like everything was normal? Like she didn't have cancer? Like she wasn't going to die?

"Mom?" he said quietly, "what is this?"

**Lorelei:**

Lorelei felt her heart stop beating for a second when she turned around and saw Taylor holding all her paperwork. She didn't know what to say.

"Let's sit down sweetie." Sweetie. She never called him that.

"I recently found out that I have stage four Squamous Cell Carcinoma. The doctor said 4-6 months. It could be longer than that or it could be much shorter. Cancer is unpredictable." She felt herself going into doctor mode. Explaining things medically instead of carefully to spare the person's feelings. She stopped herself. This wasn't the time. "I know this is a lot to take in honey. I'm so sorry." Taylor was staring blankly at her. She couldn't figure out what that meant. But then, she saw tears forming in his eyes. He still didn't say anything.

**Taylor:**

He felt nothing. Numb. As his mom continued to speak, his eyes went blurry and everything seemed to be moving in slow motion. She was saying something but everything was too slow for him to understand. He didn't even realize he was crying until his eyes started to sting and he tasted something salty. Tears. They wouldn't stop. His mom reached out and pulled him into a tight hug. They hadn't done that in months. Maybe even years. He just sat there in her arms, crying like a little baby for what felt like hours. The air felt thick. Like it was suffocating him, and then, he was floating away.

**Lorelei:**

It had been a couple weeks since Taylor had found out about her diagnosis and things had actually been good between the two of them. It was like her impending death was bringing them closer. He was out of school, but Summer had been over at the house almost every day to help out.

Lorelei had been feeling light headed and dizzy for the past couple days. Taylor suggested they go to the hospital and Dr. B said she had a room for her.

People always say doctors make the worst patients and Lorelei was no exception. She *wanted* to do everything herself. To go back home as soon as she could but that was hard. The cancer had progressed a lot faster than anyone had expected and now, she was bed bound. She was sleeping most of the time. Out of it.

**Taylor:**

It was hard seeing his mom like this. Dr. B was starting to think she had a couple days left in her. He thought she had months left with him. What happened to that? She said to start saying his goodbyes and to call anyone he needed.

“T, you don't have to be strong. I know this is heartbreaking and I'm so sorry. Even if you didn't have a good relationship with your mom, she's still your mom and you still love her.” Summer was hugging him in the hall outside of his mom's room. She had just been put on a ventilator but she could still open her eyes. It was up to him whether to take her off or keep her on it.

**Lorelei:**

She was touch and go. Sleeping 22 hours a day and when she wasn't, all she could think, all she could feel was the tube down her throat. Once, she heard Taylor crying but she just closed her eyes and tried to shut it out. She couldn't think about how this was gonna affect him. She had accepted her death and just wanted to be let go. She wanted to be able to float away, freely.

**Taylor:**

“I know she's ready. I'm ready too.” Summer squeezed his hand. He picked Dr. B's cold, heavy pen and signed the paper that would end his mother's life. The paper that would let her go.

“Alright Taylor, it's time.” The words Taylor had been dreading since finding out about his mom's diagnosis. “I'll be right outside T. I love you” Summer hugged him and then he walked into his mom's tiny room. 489.

She looked so small. Laying in that bed with all the tubes and wires surrounding her. The beeping and scuffs of feet outside seemed to have gone silent. He'd seen all the trashy hospital shows but they never actually showed the reality.

“Hey mom. It's Taylor.” He walked over to her and sat in the little uncomfortable chair next to her bed. He was careful about where he put his hands. Making sure he didn't hit anything or disturb the scene in any way. He knew she couldn't talk which made it even more painful. She couldn't tell him anything. Reassure him everything was going to be alright. She couldn't be his mom.

**Lorelei:**

She wanted to tell Taylor how much she loved him and how sorry she was for all the years of fighting. Taylor was sitting next to her, his hand in hers telling her how much he loved her. Steadily, Dr. B was moving tubes and she felt more sleepy. Her eyes were heavy. She wanted more time. She wanted to look at her son one last time. It was all ending. She was so tired, she was finally floating away.

**Taylor:**

Her heart monitor went flat and he knew it was all over. He felt dizzy. He kissed her head. “I love you mom.” and walked out. There was nothing left for him to do. She was gone. Summer ran over to him and wrapped him in a huge hug. He cried into her shirt like a baby. She walked him over to the couches and he laid down with his head buried in her arms. The two of them sat there for a couple hours until Taylor fell asleep.



The next couple of weeks were weird. Taylor was staying at Summer's house and he wasn't going to school. There was a funeral for mom. Lots of people came, even some of her patients.

“Today we are honoring, celebrating, and remembering my mother, Lorelei Elizabeth Hart. She was a woman of grace and courage, with a stubborn streak that showed up when she set her mind to something. Like going out of her way to help her patients. As many of you might know, my mom and I didn't have the greatest relationship through my teenage years and every day I regret the fact that she wasn't my best friend. She dedicated her life to helping others and I am constantly humbled by her beauty and love. As her son, I feel like I grew up with the most incredible role model. She pushed me to accomplish the things that I love. I am heartbroken that I was only able to spend 17 years with her. I wish she was by my side to support me for the rest of my life but I know she'll always be with me in one way or another. The memories of us dancing in the kitchen to “My Girl” or sledding down the hill and flying through the snow. I have all of those to remember and cherish. Family means having people who love you unconditionally, even in your shortcomings, and my mother never left my side even if I didn't want her there. I love you so much mom.”

**Artist Statement:**

My story “Beginnings and Endings” is written from two perspectives. Lorelei and Taylor. Mother and son. The two of them have a very complicated relationship. They fight all the time and there never seems to be moments of peace between them. When it comes down to it, family is people that stick by you in your hard moments. They are the people you can rely on when you have no one else. Even with their strained relationship, Taylor stuck by his mom in her sickly and dying days. Additionally, his dad not being present and his mom's ultimate death, shapes him completely and changes his perspective on what family really, truly means.

When including snapshots, I included one for Lorelei when she first got her diagnosis and one for Taylor once his mom told him. Including these snapshots was extremely crucial to the story's development and was supposed to provide readers with a deeper look into the way they respond to the news, individually.

Dramatic irony is included in my story when Lorelei knows about her diagnosis and her fate but doesn't tell Taylor. They continue to fight and not hash out their feelings because Taylor doesn't know about his mom's limited time. They spend six days like normal. Fighting and ignoring each other.

Thoughtshots are integrated when Lorelei is at the end of her life. She wants to tell Taylor lots of things. How much she loves him. How sorry she is. But unfortunately, she can't, so the words she wants to say, becomes a thoughtshot. Readers are told, not shown and are led into the mind of Lorelei.

In “Beginnings and Endings,” the motif is floating away. It is brought up mostly when one of the two characters is going through or feeling a lot of emotion. It centers the story and

connects the two perspectives to each other. It also provides a peaceful ending for Lorelei when she dies and “floats away peacefully.”

Lastly, my choices for dialogue in this story were focused around how my characters interact with each other. (especially the fighting between Lorelei and Taylor) It also moves the story along. With each piece of dialogue, readers are receiving a deeper understanding of the characters and their individual personalities.