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maybe  
one  
day

HARPER **TEEN**

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Maybe One Day

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kantor, Melissa.

Maybe one day / Melissa Kantor. — First edition.

pages      cm

Summary: "Zoe thought that being cut from her ballet program was the worst thing that could happen, but when her best friend, Olivia, is diagnosed with a life-threatening disease, Zoe quickly learns that not being able to dance is the least of her problems"—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-06-227920-0 (hardcover bdg.)

ISBN 978-0-06-232839-7 (int. ed.)

[1. Best friends—Fiction. 2. Friendship—Fiction. 3. Leukemia—Fiction. 4. Sick—Fiction. 5. Ballet dancing—Fiction. 6. High schools—Fiction. 7. Schools—Fiction. 8. Family life—New Jersey—Fiction. 9. New Jersey—Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.K12823May 2014

2013008064

[Fic]—dc23

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Typography by Andrea Vandergrift

13 14 15 16 17 CG/RRDH 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



First Edition

## 4

Livvie woke up with a fever Sunday, and she missed school Monday. Monday night when I talked to her she said she'd be in school Tuesday morning, but then she texted me and said she'd woken up with a fever again and her mom was taking her to the doctor.

I called Livvie at the start of lunch Tuesday, but she didn't pick up the phone. I was standing by my locker, finishing leaving her a message, when Mia Roberts turned down the corridor.

Mia was the girl on the soccer team I knew the least. She'd been new freshman year (before coming east she'd lived in L.A.), and unlike the rest of the team (who hung out pretty much exclusively with one another), Mia hung with a lot of different people. And she didn't just not hang out exclusively

with the team; she also looked nothing like the other girls we played with, all of whom—whether white or black, Asian or Hispanic, freshmen or seniors—were very . . . American-looking. Clean-cut. Like, you could use any one of them in photos for an antidrug campaign.

But Mia's hair was bleached white except for the tips, which were blue. When she wasn't wearing her soccer uniform, she wore black pretty much exclusively, down to black motorcycle boots or Doc Martens.

"Hey," she said. Today she was wearing a pair of black leggings with lace at the bottom and a black tank top. Her dark eyes were heavily made up with black liner.

"Hey," I said. I put my phone in my bag.

"You heading to lunch?" Mia asked. I nodded, and she gestured for me to accompany her. "Let's do it." She was chewing gum, and while I watched, she blew a small bubble, then cracked it loudly between her teeth.

I fell into step beside her. "I love cracking my gum. It drives my mom batshit when I do it, though."

"Well, your mom's not here now, is she?" Mia reached into her bag and pulled out a pack of Juicy Fruit.

I eyed the pack suspiciously. "I don't know. Sugar gum. Kind of a gateway drug, isn't it?"

"Try it," she said, wagging the pack at me. "The first slice is free."

I reached for a piece, unwrapped it, and popped it in my

mouth. “Oh my God,” I said as the fruity taste exploded on my tongue. I had to close my eyes for a second to savor the experience. “This is the first nonsugarless gum I’ve had in years.”

“I know, right?” said Mia, smiling triumphantly. “The dentist loves me. My mom says I’m sending his kids to college.”

“It’s worth it,” I assured her.

We passed a circle of football players, including Calvin and Jake. Each guy was surrounded by a healthy harem of cheerleaders. Jake looked up, saw me, and waved. I waved back. Calvin glanced my way also, but even though we were both at the Grecos’ practically every day, his glance slid over me as if I were some exchange student he’d never seen in his life.

Inwardly I rolled my eyes at what an ass he was.

“So,” said Mia, “how come you don’t do soccer anymore?”

“Um, because I so totally sucked at it?” I offered.

Mia laughed, but she didn’t correct me, which I appreciated. “Does that mean you went back to dancing again?” she asked.

Here was concrete proof of how little anyone outside the dance world understood it. I imagined a universe in which Olivia and I had randomly decided to take a year off from dancing and then—equally spontaneously—decided to return to it. I let myself see the two of us as Mia must have seen us. In control. Masters of our destiny.

The fantasy was awesome, which may explain why I lied to her. “Nah. I was kind of over dance.”

“Got it.” We turned down the hallway toward the cafeteria. It was more crowded here, with some people shoving to get in and others shoving to get out.

“You know,” said Mia, turning to me, “freshman year I was überintimidated by the two of you.”

I practically choked on my gum. “You *were*?”

“I *was*!” Mia imitated my tone exactly, then laughed. “Is that so surprising? You’re both tall and gorgeous. And you disappeared into Manhattan after school every day.” We stepped into the river of kids headed to the cafeteria. “I saw you once at *The Nutcracker* when my mom and I took my niece. I mean, I didn’t *see* you see you. Like, I couldn’t pick you out. But your names were in the program.”

I shook my head, as much at the idea of Mia’s being at the ballet as at the thought of her searching for us in a sea of dancers. “That’s so weird. I mean that we were on your radar like that.”

Mia raised an incredulous eyebrow at me. “It’s not weird, Zoe. You and Olivia were famous. I figured you were way too cool to hang out with regular people like me.”

“*Really?* You thought we were *cool*?” I squeaked, so uncool that both Mia and I laughed. She held open the door to the cafeteria and I followed her in. As we joined a table, I composed a text in my head to Livvie, telling her about how cool and terrifying the population of Wamasset had once found us.

\* \* \*

I was irritated that Livvie didn't respond to my text, which was, frankly, hilarious. Wasn't she just sitting in the waiting room of Dr. Weiss, our pediatrician? Or sitting at Driscoll's Pharmacy waiting for her mom to fill a prescription? Or sitting and waiting for me to call her? I didn't stay home sick from school all that often, but when I did, that was my routine. The bell rang, ending math, our last period of the day, and Mr. Schumacher nodded in my direction. "You'll give Olivia the homework."

"Sure," I said, then muttered under my breath, "if she ever texts me back."

I went to my locker and slowly made my way outside. It was sunny but way cooler than it had been that morning, and I shivered, wishing I'd worn a jacket. The football team was heading out to the field all the way on the other side of the campus. I considered asking Jake if he knew where Olivia was, but the team was so far away I couldn't even figure out which of the uniformed guys he was.

Just as I decided it wasn't worth bothering, since Jake wasn't going to have any idea anyway, my phone rang. *Livvie!* Finally. I dug my phone out of my bag.

But it wasn't Livvie. It was some 212 number I didn't recognize. This was getting so *annoying*.

"Hello?"

"Zoe?"

It *was* Livvie. But why was she calling me from an unfamiliar number?

“Livs!” I was so glad to hear from her I wasn’t even mad that she hadn’t called me back earlier. “Where have you been all day? Whose phone are you calling from?”

“My phone’s out of juice. Zoe, I have to tell you something.” Olivia’s voice sounded thin, as if she were calling from far away on a line with a bad connection. It didn’t help that it was super noisy in front of the school, where all two thousand members of the student body seemed to have chosen to gather before heading off to their afternoon activities. I pressed my free hand to my ear, trying to hear better.

“Where are you?” I moved away from the crowded concrete circle by the front entrance and onto the lawn.

“Zoe, I’m . . . I’m at the hospital.”

“The *hospital*?” For some reason, I thought of the twins. Could one of them have been in an accident? The possibility made my heart drop. Tommy and Luke could be super annoying, but they were also adorable. Last year, when they were in second grade and neither of them had their front teeth, Tommy would pronounce Zoe “Thoe.”

“I’m sick, Zoe,” said Livvie.

“Wait, *you’re* sick?” I was still thinking about the twins. “Hang on a second . . . what?”

“I’m at UH,” said Olivia.

University Hospital was only a few blocks from the Fischer Center, where NYBC was located. We’d driven by it every day on our way to and from dance classes and performances,



its glass towers telling us we were just minutes from our destination or that we'd begun the journey home.

"But you were just at the doctor's office." I knew, even as I said it, that it was a stupid thing to say. It wasn't like there was no way to travel from the doctor's office to the hospital.

Olivia's voice was freakishly precise. "The doctor found a bruise on the back of my leg," she said.

"I saw that!" I shouted, remembering the bruise from when I'd slept over Saturday night. It was dark purple and spidery, and I'd almost asked her about it, but then we'd started talking about something else and I'd forgotten.

Livvie continued. "Well, she saw it and she asked how I'd gotten it, and I said I didn't know, and then she found this other one on my arm—on the back—"

"I didn't see that one," I admitted. Why was I interrupting her? I pressed my lips together to get my mouth to stop asking questions.

"It's there," Olivia told me, as if I'd doubted her. "I saw it in the mirror. Anyway, then the doctor started asking about the bruises, and how long I've had the fever, and then my mom said that I'd been really tired lately and she asked if maybe I could be anemic. And Dr. Weiss said she wanted us to go to the Med Center."

The Med Center was a cross between a doctor's office and an emergency room. They had X-ray machines and doctors and stuff, but I didn't think you would go there if you were

having a heart attack. “Yeah,” I said, “I know where that is. Remember when my dad stepped on a nail last summer? My mom and I took him.”

Looking back at that conversation, I can’t help wondering: Did I know? Did I know what was coming, and did I think that as long as I wouldn’t let Livvie say the words, they wouldn’t be true?

“They took blood,” she went on. “And they found abnormal cells.”

“Abnormal cells,” I echoed.

“Abnormal cells,” she repeated. “And they said they wanted us to go to UH so they could do a bone marrow aspiration. That’s when they take some bone marrow out of your pelvic bone with a needle.”

“A *needle*? Oh God, Liv.” I clutched my arm in sympathy, even though I knew that wasn’t where your pelvic bone was.

“My dad came,” Livvie said. Her voice caught for a second, but she didn’t cry. “He came to meet us, and the doctor said that they’d found blasts in my bone marrow.”

“What does that mean?” I whispered.

“They admitted me,” she went on, ignoring my question, “and they put in this thing called a central line. It’s so the medication gets right into your body.”

“The medication?” My voice was a whisper.

“I have leukemia, Zoe.”

I gasped.

“But that’s . . . that’s impossible.” It *was* impossible. I knew it was impossible. How could Olivia have leukemia? “There’s a . . . I mean, there has to be some mistake. How could you be getting medicine already?” Somehow that was the most implausible part of what she’d told me. I’d slept at her house Saturday night. She’d been fine. I’d talked to her *this morning*. Eight hours later she was in the hospital and getting medicine? How could they even diagnose what she had that fast?

“It’s true, Zoe.” Olivia’s voice quivered. I heard a voice in the background, and Livvie said, “My mom wants me to get off the phone. The doctor just came in. Can you come? I need to see you.” It sounded like she was starting to cry.

“I’m on my way,” I said, my voice fierce. Then I said it again, as if maybe she would doubt me. “I am *on my way*.”

“Okay,” said Livvie. “Love ya.”

We *always* said *Love ya*. We ended every phone call, every chat, every conversation the same way.

*See you tomorrow. Love ya.*

*Gotta go. Love ya.*

*My mom’s calling. Love ya.*

*I have leukemia. Love ya.*

“I love you, Livs,” I said, my voice nearly breaking on her name.

“I love you too, Zoe,” she answered. I could hear that she was crying. And then she was gone.

I stood on the edge of the lawn, the phone still pressed

to my ear. Cars pulled in and out of the parking lot, and kids tumbled from the building, taking the stairs two at a time as they raced into the liberty of the afternoon. The sky over my head was almost painfully blue, the grass a bright and vivid green. It was a crisp, beautiful, perfect fall day.

All that beauty was completely wrong. The sky should have been black, the grass withered, the students wailing with grief. *Olivia is sick!* I wanted to howl. *What are you people doing? My friend is sick!* It was impossible—the sky, the cars, the kids walking around as if it were a day like any other day. Nothing made any sense.

Before I could start screaming, I turned and raced for home.

## 5

My dad was in Washington on assignment, but I didn't even think to be relieved when I saw my mom's car in the driveway—what if she'd been at the gym or a meeting and I'd had to wait for her to return my call and come home, had to sit there on the front porch cooling my heels and losing my mind while Olivia stared at the door of her hospital room, expecting me to walk through it any minute? I flew up the wooden steps of our front porch and into the house. Flavia barked as I entered.

*"Mom! Mom!"* I could hear the hysteria in my voice.

My mom's an architect, and her office was in the back of the house, but she must have been in the kitchen because she appeared in front of me about a second after I threw open the door. "What is it? What's happened?" She was holding

the coffeepot, like maybe she'd been pouring a cup when she heard me yelling.

Still panting from my sprint home, I managed to choke out, "Livvie's . . . she's sick. She's in the hospital. We have to go."

"Olivia's sick?" My mom's eyes popped wide with concern.

"We have to go, Mom. She's at UH. We have to go right now." I started pulling on her arm, like when I was a little kid.

"She's in the *hospital*?" My mom grabbed my elbow.

"That's what I *said*." Why was she not moving? "Now let's go."

"Zoe, sweetheart, you have to explain what's going on." Instead of racing for her keys and shoes, she put her hand on my shoulder. "Calm down. What's wrong? What's wrong with Olivia?"

"Mom, I *told* you! She's sick. She has leukemia. She's in the—"

"She has *leukemia*?" She dropped my arm and pressed her fingers to her lips. "My God! When did this happen?"

"When do you *think* it happened?" I slapped my forehead. "Oh, yeah, it happened last week, only I forgot to tell you about it."

"Zoe, there's no need to get—"

"Why aren't you *hurrying*?" I ran over to the stairs and grabbed a pair of shoes. "We have to go." My voice was shrill, and my eyes stung.

For a second, my mom stared at me from across the room as I stood there, holding her black ballet flats out to her. If she didn't put on her shoes and get in the car, I was seriously going to take the keys and drive myself. I had my learner's permit. I'd been driving (with one of my parents in the car) for months. I would make it.

As if she'd read my mind, my mother crossed to where I was standing. Her hand shook, and she had trouble slipping her feet into the shoes. By the time she was done, I'd grabbed her bag and gone to the front hall. Without saying another word, we headed out the door.

My mother's a talker. It's like the monologue most of us have running in our head at any given time is, in my mom's case, dialogue. *Should I have the chicken salad sandwich . . . oh, it's kind of crowded in here . . . I better not forget to write this down . . . it's really taking a long time for the light to change . . . I think I should buy this T-shirt in blue and black.* The whole drive into Manhattan she talked and she talked and she talked.

"You know, honey, I went to school with a girl who had leukemia, and she was *fine*. And that was *years* ago. They've got treatments now that are much, much better than the ones they had then."

"Mmmm-hmmm." What *was* leukemia? I didn't even know exactly. I knew it was terrible. I knew people could die from it. But what *was* it? Olivia said they'd found something

in her blood. . . . I picked at a split nail on my thumb, biting and pulling at it.

“And University Hospital is the best. Just the *best*. If any one of us got sick, I’d want us there. And do you remember my friend Beth? Her brother-in-law is the head of . . . cardiology there, I think. Or it could be dermatology. Anyway, he’s a big, big deal. Maybe I’ll ask Beth to call him. It’s always good to know a doctor who’s on the staff when you’re a patient.”

“There’s nothing wrong with Livvie’s heart, Mom. Or her skin.” The nail split low, and I peeled it off, glad to focus on the pain.

“Well, it’s always good to know a doctor,” she repeated. We were driving up West End Avenue. The Fischer Center and NYBC were just north of us; my mom and Olivia and I must have done this drive a thousand times. Ten thousand times. Our being in the car together driving to Manhattan after school would have been perfectly normal if Olivia had been sitting with us and my mom hadn’t put her blinker on for another five blocks.

“Now . . .” She leaned forward and peered out the windshield, then braked for a yellow light. I wanted to scream at how slowly she was going. The back of the hospital loomed to our left. “I *think* the main entrance is right around the corner, so I’m going to . . . No. Wait. I can’t turn here.” She clicked off her blinker, even though there was no one behind us. “Maybe I’ll just look for a spot.” She leaned forward again



and squinted. “Does that sign say ‘no parking any time’?”

The light was still red. My finger where I’d peeled off the nail throbbed. Something inside me felt tight, as if I were a balloon that had been blown up too big. I reached for the door handle. “I’m going to meet you inside.”

“Just give me a second to park.”

I opened the door. The cool breeze made me realize how stuffy it had been in the car. Why had we driven all the way with the windows closed?

“Zoe, wait!” The light south of us must have changed. Cars came up behind ours and started honking. My mom’s voice was shrill. “Zoe, the light’s changing.”

Actually, it had already changed, but I was out of the car. I slammed the door shut, ran three long steps, and, without even meaning to, did a grand jeté onto the curb as if I’d turned back the clock and Livvie and I were still ballerinas together.