

Wishful Thinking

Zachary M. Alley

CHARACTERS

Jackson, 15

Brett, 16

Kevin, 13

TIME

Present, midafternoon

PLACE

Hospital, children's cancer ward

SCENE 1

As lights come up, JACKSON, BRETT, and KEVIN are in JACKSON'S hospital room. JACKSON is in his bed. BRETT is sitting at the foot of the bed. KEVIN is sitting in a chair by the window staring outside.

BRETT

I knew you were stupid, but this is impressive, even for you.

JACKSON

It's not stupid. In fact, it's almost noble.

BRETT

Nah, man. You're an idiot.

JACKSON

You wouldn't understand.

BRETT

Oh no. I understand. You had an opportunity to have almost anything in the world and you said no.

JACKSON

But I don't need anything.

BRETT

None of us really need anything. But think of all the cool stuff you want.

JACKSON

There isn't really anything I want either.

BRETT

I don't think you're grasping the concept here. These people can make anything happen. It's not your mom asking if you want her to grab some Doritos from the grocery store. This is legit. You can meet one of your nerd heroes. Or they can get you on the set of some show you obsess over and nobody else cares about. Or get a huge personal library full of those boring books you're constantly reading. You have to think big. What did you pick, Kevin?

KEVIN

(was not paying attention to the conversation and turns towards them after hearing his name)

What?

BRETT

For Make-A-Wish. What did you pick?

KEVIN

I...I don't really want to talk about it. Those things are private.

(KEVIN turns and continues staring out of window.)

BRETT

Nice try, man. Spill. It's probably something sappy and boring knowing you. And safe, of course. Let me guess, you wanted to give away baskets of kittens to old people? Or release a hundred doves into a rainbow? Okay, Kevin's a bad example of how to make a legit wish.

Moving on.

JACKSON

Kevin probably picked something decent. Unlike whatever idiotic thing you're going to come up with. I'm actually kind of curious though. What did you pick, Kevin?

KEVIN

(shifts uncomfortably before finally facing the two again)

I...I asked to meet Katy Perry.

(JACKSON and BRETT are stunned silent and exchange a look. Finally, BRETT bursts into laughter.)

BRETT

You really had me going there for a second.

KEVIN

I'm serious! I really like her music. And she seems so nice. And pretty.

JACKSON

You're breaking my heart. You of all people couldn't have seriously asked to meet some vapid celebrity?

BRETT

Personally, I'm proud of you Kev. She's a total babe.

KEVIN

Shut up. Both of you. She isn't vapid. Whatever that means. I just like her, okay? If that is so dumb, let's hear your great ideas.

JACKSON

That's the thing. I don't have any. I don't want to have some meaningless material gift

or go to some theme park or meet some rich jaded whoever. I'm going to die. I want something...something I'll remember. Something unique. Tons of healthy kids get to go to Disneyworld or bump into a famous person. I want something...I don't know. Crazy. Scary. Life affirming. Don't you want to do one of those things that people always say they wish they could do if they had another life? Or didn't have to deal with the consequences? I'm sort of in that situation. I want a chance to truly do whatever I want since I won't live long enough to experience the fallout.

BRETT

That sounds a bit insane, bud. And depressing.
(pauses a moment and stares out of same window as KEVIN before looking back at JACKSON.)

What kind of stuff are we talking about?

JACKSON

I don't necessarily mean kill a person or anything, but something sort of along those lines. You know like one of those things people would really want to do before they die, but don't want to admit.

BRETT

Gotcha. So just something like murder. But not actual murder. Totally sane. I always knew kids as smart as you were secretly nuts.

JACKSON

Just forget about that. You're failing to grasp the spirit of what I'm trying to convey. It's kind of like what you were saying. Thinking big. Bigger than some cookie-cutter media-friendly wish that will make people shed a tear when they read about how some cancer-ridden kid got to meet his hero before deteriorating into nothing before everyone's eyes as some disease spread through his body. What if there was a no-holds-barred Make-A-Wish? An extreme version. One that let people really do something insane and out-there before they died.

BRETT

Interesting idea. So what kinds of things are we talking about here? Please don't say something like murder again. You're getting as creepy as space cadet Kevin over there.

KEVIN

(while still staring out of window)
You guys are the creepy ones.

JACKSON

I don't know...anything. Like steal a car. Drive across the country. Crash parties. Sneak into

bars. Hang out with complete strangers. Set something on fire. Kiss a girl. Anything. Get out of this soul crushing purgatory and live it up while we still can.

KEVIN

What about your family? And your treatments? And all the staff here? You wouldn't feel bad abandoning all of these people who care about you?

JACKSON

Maybe. My family is fine. The doctors and nurses are fine. I have nothing against the people, but sometimes a smile and encouraging word aren't enough. It doesn't change anything.

BRETT

As cool and unlike you as all of this sounds, I'm sort of worried about you. Are you okay man? Something going on?

JACKSON

No. Well...yes. I don't know. I hate this. Hate that I am burdened with this disease. It's so random and terrible and stupid. I want control of something for a change. What happens if I die next week? What have I really done with my life? I know I'm young, but I've always played it safe. Read about adventures instead of having any myself. Worried about my grades to secure a bright future while ignoring my dull present. I always thought that one day I would get to do all of these cool things. But I won't. It's driving me crazy. I have to do something besides sit here and wither away while my family watches. Don't you guys feel trapped? Feel like escaping? Not just this place, but this condition? This cancer? This role of pitiful sick child that we were forced into?

BRETT

You'll make it through this, man. We're all in a bad spot, but you have to have hope.

KEVIN

Jackson is right.

(JACKSON and BRETT turn towards KEVIN with surprise.)

BRETT

(looks back at JACKSON)

Now you've got little Kevin feeding off of your pessimistic talk. Cut it out man. Stop making everything so dramatic. Just pick a wish, tell the nice people, and get on with it. Don't turn this into one of your philosophical epiphanies that you seem to have every week.

JACKSON

I'm not being pessimistic. And I'm not going to actually do any of this stuff. I'm just talking. You're right though. I should probably just come up with something normal and make everyone happy. I'm just in a mood, I guess. Forget it.

(A long awkward pause fills the room as JACKSON and BRETT avoid eye contact. KEVIN's gaze remains fixed out of the window.)

BRETT

(Finally BRETT smiles and faces JACKSON.)
So you've never kissed a girl, huh?

JACKSON

I was just naming off random things.

BRETT

That's what I thought. You haven't.

JACKSON

I'm really not in the mood for you being a jerk to me.

BRETT

You should be telling some girls that you've never kissed someone. Not confessing to me and little Kev.

JACKSON

What are you talking about?

BRETT

Girls our age eat that up. Especially from dying people like us. I should know. I use the line all the time. You have that whole angsty sensitive intellectual thing going for you too. A broken heart that needs the right girl to fix it. You spill that sappy rant to the right girl and she'll plant one on you for sure.

JACKSON

(smiles reluctantly)

Thanks. I'll be sure to remember that excellent advice when I've sunk so low that I want my first kiss to be out of pity.

BRETT

That right there! That's perfect. You depressing moody mystery man, you. Biting sarcasm to hide all the pain in your heart. A bleak outlook of the world. A regular tortured soul. Let me be the girl to capture your bleeding heart. Let me be your Bella.

(BRETT moves towards JACKSON with arms outstretched and puckered lips while JACKSON laughs.)

KEVIN

And I'm the creepy one.

BRETT

(After settling down, BRETT walks towards window. BRETT stares outside for a moment before turning to face JACKSON.)

We should do it.

JACKSON

Easy there. I appreciate you wanting to help me out, but we're not doing anything like that. I'll talk to a girl if it means that much to you.

BRETT

No, not that. Your idea. Let's make our own list of wishes. Crazy stuff we want to do. And do it. I bet we could actually knock out most of that stuff you said.

JACKSON

I was just ranting. I'm not actually doing that stuff.

BRETT

Why not? Worst case scenario we die before we have to deal with the consequences. If we get caught early, who the hell is going to punish a group of kids with cancer? We seriously can get away with this.

(KEVIN slowly turns to face them and listens)

JACKSON

You really think so?

BRETT

Most definitely. I have a car. You can take money from your loaded parents. None of us are so sick yet that we can't go out and party for a while. The longer we wait the worse our health will be and the less chance we have for something like this. I say we do this thing tonight. We have to stick together though and watch each other's backs. Kevin, you better not rat us out either. People are going to ask you about us and you just say you don't know anything.

KEVIN

I'm going with you.

JACKSON
(stares in shock at KEVIN)
You can't. Something bad could happen.

KEVIN
Like getting cancer?

BRETT
(laughing and patting KEVIN's back)
The balls on this kid. I love it!

JACKSON
You really need to pay attention to your phrasing more.

BRETT
You know what I mean. Kevin is even on board. We are totally doing this. The cancer kid crew is rolling out tonight! Get some paper out. We're making a list. Then I'll grab my keys, Kevin will bring his Katy Perry mixtape, and you can swipe some cash from your parents. This time tomorrow we will be legends.

SCENE 2

TIME
Early morning, weeks later

SETTING
Small town diner

(As lights come up, JACKSON, BRETT, and KEVIN are sitting together in a cramped booth. The table is covered in half-eaten breakfast foods. BRETT has a black eye. A television screen on the wall behind JACKSON and BRETT shows the morning news.)

JACKSON
We're going to be the fattest chemo patients in the world. I love having an appetite again.

BRETT
Amen, brother. You know, I actually feel better now than I have in weeks. I thought we'd hate our lives by now.

JACKSON
Not me. I always felt like that medicine was killing me more than helping me. I know that technically the cancer is doing that, but I still dreaded my treatments.

BRETT

Maybe pancakes, bacon, and chocolate milk are more effective at curing cancer than that garbage we've been putting up with. I'll gladly do a clinical trial for that.

JACKSON

This whole experience feels like it's healing me. Spiritually and physically. I've never felt more alive in my life. Thanks for making me do this. Both of you. I'm really glad you're both with me. I know we might miss our families, but the letters we left them were a better good-bye than having them watch us slip away slowly and painfully. They know we're happy. And I really am. Although if greasy diner breakfast really is curing us we might be screwed in the long run. If I don't die soon my parents will do the job if I have to go back there. Cash is starting to run out.

BRETT

Maybe if you didn't spend it all on hookers we would have some left.

JACKSON

Keep your voice down.
(looks around and speaks in hushed tones)
And I didn't get a hooker.

BRETT

My bad. Tried to get a hooker. And failed. Which is sadder since she still took off with your money.

JACKSON

At least I didn't get punched in the face for chasing her down and trying to get it back.

BRETT

Excuse me for being a good friend. We made a certified business transaction. She can't take the money and then suddenly find the morals not to give a kid a quickie. That was messed up. Apparently she thought helping one kid out was wrong, but punching another in the face was perfectly acceptable.

JACKSON

Which was money well spent to see. Way more satisfying than any disease she would have given me to complement cancer.

BRETT

Whatever. I'm pretty sure we can take Kevin on a college tour and live off of his beer pong winnings anyway. I don't know if I was more amazed by how much money frat guys are willing to bet against a little bald kid, or how insanely good Kevin is at that game.

JACKSON

Seriously. I'm the one supposed to be going to college early, but Kevin was acting like he had been there his whole life.

BRETT

(stares at KEVIN and tilts his head in confusion)

What's up, man? You're being more quiet than usual. Still feeling hung over? It's a good thing you're as good as you are because if you had to drink more than those two beers I'd hate to see what it would do to you.

(KEVIN stares at television and nods at it. JACKSON and BRETT turn around to watch it.)

REPORTER ON NEWS

(voice fades in as group gets quiet and watches)

Nearly thirty-five million dollars in scam. Doctor Eldrige is currently in jail without bond. He faces charges for intentionally misdiagnosing potentially hundreds of patients over the past 2 years with cancer so he could profit off of chemotherapy treatments paid for by the Medicare program and insurance companies. Patients of Doctor Eldrige are encouraged to seek medical attention elsewhere and get a second opinion. Many who were led to believe that they were suffering from terminal cancer may actually be completely cancer free.

Reports show...

(voice fades out as the boys look at each other)

KEVIN

We have to go back. Now.

BRETT

This...this can't be happening. I mean...this is great news I guess, but...but we're in so much trouble. We've committed crimes. Snuck into R-rated movies. Oh God, I watched little Kevin touch a boob! He's just a boy! His parents are going to kill me. My parents are going to kill me. We can go to jail. Actually jail might be safer. What are we supposed to do? Is it bad if I would rather stick around? Maybe hang out and travel a few more days? I can't go back and deal with this. Not now. What do you think Jackson?

JACKSON

I think a chocolate milkshake sounds awesome right about now. And after that I'm probably going to go in the bathroom and cry. You guys want anything?

(Blackout)