

ORIGINAL FIRST CHAPTER OF FIRST DRAFT FOR CLICK HERE

THE ORIGINAL TITLE OF THE BOOK WAS *MY OWN TWO FEET*

CHAPTER ONE  
MOURNING IN THE MORNING

I heard somewhere that when someone loses an arm or a leg, or a hand or a foot, their brain still sends signals to it. There is a tingling sensation and pain, because the arm or leg, hand or foot, isn't there anymore to get the signals.

That's how I feel. My brain and heart are still sending Jilly Bean signals, but Jilly Bean isn't just around the corner anymore to receive them. She's clear across the country. And it hurts.

June 15

Dear Jilly Bean:

I MISS YOU. I can hardly stand it. I can't walk down your street. I can't even look at the street sign when I pass it. It makes my stomach clutch and I get all choked up.

I know what you mean about your heart. Mine feels the same way, all tight and shriveled up. I said something to my mom and she said kids don't usually have heart attacks. "Your heart hurts because you're sad." She gave me a hug but it didn't help. Much. I do know you can die of a broken heart. My grandma Swift died two months after Grandpa did. My dad said it was of a broken heart. She missed him too much.

Maybe that's what's happening. We're dying of broken hearts. But I wonder. Do people who are dying still crave pizza? We're going out for pizza tonight and I can't wait. That doesn't hurt your feelings, does it?

When are you getting your computer set up so we can do e-mail and Instant Messaging??? Even though I've gotten a letter every day, it still seems like forever till the next one. And I never used to hate Sundays. Now I do. There's no mail on Sundays. And Mom has now banished me from the phone (as you know). She got the phone bill, which had the first part of June on it and nearly hit the roof.

“One hundred and fifty dollars?” She held the paper out but when I tried to look she snatched it back.

“I only called nights and weekends,” I said, remembering all those commercials.

“But you talked for hours. Look, this call on June eighth was for eighty-seven minutes. Eighty-seven minutes, Erin. What can you possibly have to say for eightyseven minutes?”

Obviously my mom has no idea what it’s like to have a best friend who moves away when you’re eleven. Eighty-seven minutes was not nearly enough time, was it? We had just gotten started. Anyway, she took the phone out of the family room and the phone in her office lights up whenever someone is on the home line so she’s always shouting, “You’re not calling Jilly Bean, are you?”

So, I’m stuck with waiting for your next letter. Hurry and write! Could you write three a day? That way I can read one at breakfast, one at lunch, and one at dinner. That will keep me going.

Okay, don’t forget to write three letters a day. I really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really, miss you (I didn’t use the copy and paste feature for those “reallys.” I typed each one individually.)

FFL (that’s my new thing--Friends for Life--do you like it?), Erin

June 15

Dear Jilly:

FF (Friends Forever) is a good one, too. Maybe you can sign yours that way, and I’ll sign mine FFL. What do you think of that?

Yuck. I can’t imagine feeling like I’m sweating all the time. And I can’t imagine having air so thick I could almost squish it between my fingers. Weird.

You’re lucky you get to take boywatching lessons from Becca and Molly. Your sisters are the coolest. So what kind of shades are you wearing these days? And what does your new swimsuit look like? Do you think I should get a one-piece or one of those two pieces that has the long top? I’m not ready for anything too revealing since I have nothing to reveal.

I’m sorry your room sucks. If my mom said I could do anything with my room (which she never would), I’m not sure what I would do either. It’s funny how that

happens. Suddenly you have all the freedom in the world and you don't know what to do with it.

I'm glad you like my letters. Be on the lookout for many more!

FFL, Erin

June 19

Dear Jilly:

Do you know that according to Mapquest you are 2199.7 miles from Denver? That's about as far as you can get without leaving the continental United States!

My dad said, "2200 miles. That's quite a ways."

"2199.7 miles," I corrected. That's better than 2200. Kind of like when something costs \$9.99. That sounds better than \$10.00. I guess that's why they do it that way.

Mom says I have to quit moping. That's what I do now, if I'm not writing you a letter. I mope. Today I moped in the family room, near my soccer trophies. Yesterday I moped in the kitchen, where the food is.

"At least I move around when I mope," I told her. When she's bummed out, my mom goes to her room and mopes with a book and a glass of wine.

"Try moping outside," she said today. "Get some fresh air." I don't know why grown-ups always want you to go out and get fresh air, especially when they never do. It's just a way to get us out of their hair. Actually, I was looking outside today and what she really should say is "Go out and get some fresh smog." Sheesh. I can see the brown cloud over Denver from here. It's disgusting. I told my mom we should stop driving our cars and she said she that was fine. "I know you'll enjoy carrying your suitcase when you walk to Salt Lake City to see Grandma Stone." Nice, huh?

"Why don't we take the bus?" I said. I knew I had her because she scowled and told me to go out and get some fresh smog.

"Breathe it deeply, Erin," she said. "And don't come in until you're about to keel over from all that brown air." Mothers and sarcasm seem to go hand-in-hand.

Is there a lot of smog in Bangor?

Mom dropped me off at the art class you were supposed to take with me. I waited till she drove off and then went next door to the toy store. I just couldn't go in without you. I didn't know anyone in the class and they all looked like they were artists. You

know I can't draw a squiggly line. When Mom picked me up she asked me what I did in class. "It's still drying," I said. I felt bad lying. But I feel worse that you're gone.

Write soon!

FFL, Erin

June 21

Dear Jilly:

Molly Brown Middle School is BIG. We went to pick up a form from the office and I nearly fainted. Not only is it HUMONGOUS, it's confusing. Just thinking about it freaks me out.

"Why are you hyperventilating, Erin?" my dad asked me last night at dinner.

"I'm not," I said. "I'm practicing a new breathing technique." I was hyperventilating--about school--but I didn't want to tell them that.

"For what?" he asked.

"To avoid breathing in too much smog," I said. "When I'm sent outside to get fresh air, I have to breathe a certain way to get the air and not the smog."

He glanced at my mom, who rolled her eyes and took a bite of her carrot stick.

"Can you teach me?" Chris asked. Of course, Chris already knows how to make himself faint, which you taught him. Remember how mad my mom was? I thought she would make us stop being friends but she didn't. I was so happy that she wasn't banning you from our lives that I didn't fidget once during her entire lecture on how he could have fallen on a sharp object or choked on his spit or something.

And I don't know why they think visiting a school for a few hours will make it easier when you go there in the fall. Molly Brown Middle School is the biggest, scariest place I've ever been in. Did you get to visit your new school this summer? Or will you just go in cold turkey? Knowing you, you'll do the turkey walk, no problem.

I wish you were here. Who's going to tell me what I should wear on the first day?

Fashion Disaster and FFL, Erin

June 23

Dear Jilly:

So you can walk to your new school? (Ack. The dreaded "s" word again) I remember the days we walked to elementary school in the freezing cold! Remember

how we held our mittens over our faces the entire way and they were big soggy messes when we got to school? Blech.

I'll be on the bus this year, which won't be too bad, except you won't be at the bus stop with me.

Tell me more about this cute guy you saw at the pool who also lives near you. Is he our age? What does he look like? Do you think he goes to your school?

I have seen no cute guys around, but that may be because I'm not going anywhere. I did see Rosie Velarde at the mall. Remember her? Always picked first like me for teams, kind of a loud mouth, a little bit of a show off. You always thought she was a show-off, didn't you? She acted like she didn't see me but she had to. I was only about twenty feet away. Whatever.

Gotta go. Get that Internet connection!

FFL, Erin

June 24

Dear Jilly:

It's not that I wanted Rosie Velarde to look at me. It's just that it bothered me that she didn't. Like she was better than me or something. I don't know. It wasn't like we hung around or anything in elementary school. Maybe she didn't recognize me.

But why did I recognize her?

FFL, Erin