

Warning:

This barely qualifies as erotica. It also barely qualifies as a naked in school story. It's there, but in the background. Sex happens, but is alluded to, not described. If you're looking for a stroke story, this is most vehemently **not** it. It's also a lot shorter than my other NIS stories.

In this, we reintroduce Michelle Ingemi, Amanda's mentioned-but-not-really-seen friend; and Eric Andrews. Unlike the others, I'm telling this one completely from Michelle's POV.

One other warning: there is a passage in this story that will probably offend any religious believers. Since Mish's views closely mirror my own, I'm not going to apologize for it. And please spare me the "corrections" to Mish's views, because I've heard them all.

This is **the** hardest story I've ever written. It's also the one I **had** to write. You will understand why at the end.

NAKED IN SCHOOL MICHELLE'S STORY

It was the first full week of my senior year in High School when I got called down to the office.

I'm Michelle Ingemi, Mish to my friends. I figured I was going to be put into the Naked In School Program, to kick off senior year. That was fine. I had no problems with my body.

I'd been sexually active for quite some time. My friend Amanda Frazier jokes about me being "into watersports"—you know, peeing—and there's some truth to that, but it's exaggerated. I've done it a few times, and found it nastily erotic and exciting, but it's not something I do **all** the time. However, I think I waxed rhapsodic about it a bit too enthusiastically to Amanda once or twice. Oh, well!

What I **do** like is sex. I don't apologize for it. I don't think I have a list like our other friend Maggie Benson, but I've had enough. I figured, I'm young, now's the time, right? However, lately things had changed.

Anyhow, I walked into the office, and smiled at our principal, Mr. Tilling. "I take it you called me down here to get nekkid?" I joked.

"Yes, I did," he laughed. "We're just waiting on your partner."

"And that would be?"

"Eric Andrews."

Eric. Now, **this** was gonna be interesting!

Eric was the reason things had changed for me lately. Now, I've known Eric all through high school. I think we were attracted to each other right from the beginning of freshman year, but we never acted on it. I think I knew, deep in my heart, that if I ever ended up in bed with Eric, that'd be **it**, that I'd never be able to look at another guy again. I think he suspected the same thing. Anyhow, we were friends, good friends—but that was it. I made my rounds through the guys in the class, and Eric was a confirmed pussyhound—and, being a football player, he had no trouble getting any.

Until, towards the end of the last school year, he asked me out. I eagerly accepted.

I guess I was ready—**we** were ready. Just sex had lost its appeal to me. So, we started dating. We didn't even sleep together. We decided to hold off on that—to try to get to know one another, as people who were dating, before we did anything seriously physical. Weird, for both of us, but we figured we had time. And, you know what? I was right. Even **without** sleeping with him, I wasn't caring about any other guys. Just going out with him was all I'd anticipated. We really **did** click. I'll admit it—I was falling in love with him, and I think he was, too.

This went on from about mid-May to about mid-July. Suddenly, he called me, and said he had to go out of town, and wouldn't be back until the school year started. Something about a "family emergency." He sounded really upset. He wouldn't tell me more, though, said he'd discuss it when he got back. I was upset, of course—not having the guy I was dating, and rapidly falling for, around for half the summer was no fun. But I adjusted. He even gave me permission to see other guys if I needed to. I didn't.

Anyhow, here we were, the first day of school, and I hadn't seen him. He hadn't even been around for football practice—I'm a cheerleader—and he was supposed to be the starting running back. I still couldn't wait to find out what had happened in his family to take him out of town for six weeks **and** wreak havoc with football.

Until he walked into Mr. Tilling's office. And then I knew. I **knew**. And my stomach dropped to my toes.

Eric was muscular—of course he was, he played football. Well, he **had** been. His muscles were gone. His face was sunken, with bags under his eyes. He was pale. And all his hair was gone.

Oh, please, no, I thought. Please, no. But I knew. And, looking up at him, I said it.

"Cancer."

"Leukemia, actually," he replied. "I'm sorry you had to find out this way, but I just got back in town. They sent me to Baltimore, to Johns Hopkins, for the beginning of the

chemo. I can do the rest outpatient, at Westport General, but they wanted to start me at Hopkins. I have it every three weeks—I have it this Friday, actually.”

I was dying. Inside, bit by bit, I was dying.

“We offered to exempt Eric from The Program, but he wanted to go through with it.”

“Let’s get it over with,” he chuckled. “Let ‘em see me in all my chemo-ravaged glory. That way, I’ll only have to answer all the questions all at once.”

He seemed to be taking this well. This made one of us.

I had to ask. I didn’t want to, but I had to ask. “Did they give you a prognosis?”

“Good,” he said. “Better than fifty percent. Well, what the Doc said was ‘well better than fifty percent’. You know those guys, they won’t put a better number on it. But it’s not one of the more virulent strains of leukemia, and they caught it early.”

He was optimistic. Chipper, even. Me? **Death**. That’s all I could think about. I’m seventeen years old, looking at the man I love, and thinking about death.

I couldn’t handle it. Could **not** handle it. And I did something that I’m not proud of. I bailed.

I spent the first day and a half of The Program completely avoiding the guy who was supposed to be my Program partner—not to mention was supposed to be my **boyfriend**. I just went out of my way not to have any contact with him. He even called Monday night, and I made an excuse about homework.

I had my reasons. No, what I was doing wasn’t fair, wasn’t right, wasn’t generous or loving or all those things I had always supposed I was. It was rotten. But I had my reasons. And I just couldn’t deal with it.

Until I got called on it—by my best friend Amanda’s boyfriend, Jared.

“How’s Eric?” Jared asked.

“I don’t know. We haven’t really talked.”

Amanda, who knew my reasons, gave me a look of sympathy. But Jared—who didn’t—was just dumbfounded.

“I thought you guys were going out! In fact, it looked like you two were really falling for each other.” I just shrugged. “C’mon, Mish, he’s going through hell! And you tell me you guys haven’t even talked?”

“I can’t,” I said.

“You **can’t**?” Jared said. “You can’t support your sick boyfriend. I thought you were a better person than that.”

“WHAT THE HELL DO YOU KNOW ABOUT IT?” I burst out—then ran out of the cafeteria in tears.

I sat in the stall in the bathroom crying for five minutes. I hadn’t cried since I found out. I felt better. I also realized that Jared was right. I at least had to **talk** to Eric.

I went back into the lunchroom and found Jared and Amanda.

“Mish, I hope you don’t mind,” Amanda said, “but I told Jared.”

“No, that’s fine,” I said.

“Mish, I’m sorry.” Poor Jared looked miserable. “If I had known, I wouldn’t have said all those things.”

“It’s OK Jared,” I said with a watery smile. “Because you were right. Maybe I needed someone who doesn’t know to kick me in the ass.”

When Eric and I met at the entrance, I asked him to meet me after cheerleading practice. He came towards the end, was warmly greeted by his football buddies, who asked about him, showed concern, tried to keep his spirits up. All the things I **wasn’t** doing. Some girlfriend. But this was so **hard**. At least, after today, he’d know why.

After everyone had gone, we sat down in the middle of the football field.

“You’ve been avoiding me,” he said simply.

“Yes.”

“I thought we had something,” he said. “I thought I could count on you.”

“You should be able to,” I told him. “This isn’t about you.” Then I said it. “This is about my little brother, Danny.”

“I didn’t know you had a little brother,” he said.

“I don’t anymore.”

He looked at me, his eyes wide with shock. “Oh, God, Mish, **no**.”

“He was three years younger than me,” I went on. “He was six when he was diagnosed. Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, and the worst kind of it there is. At least you got a better prognosis. His was, basically, plan the funeral. He beat the odds by lasting two years. He

was eight when he died. I was eleven.” I took a breath. “You know I live alone with my father?” He nodded. “That’s why. When he was diagnosed, my mother left. Couldn’t deal with it. Just took off. I haven’t seen her since I was 9.” I needed to take another breath. “So, when I was between the ages of 9 and 11, I had to deal with a dying—and then dead—little brother, and a completely devastated father. With no help. When my own heart was in tiny, shattered pieces all over the floor.”

“Oh, Jesus, Mish, I’m so sorry.”

“That’s why, when I saw you yesterday, I just couldn’t deal. It all came back to me. I know you have a better prognosis, but it all came back to me. Plus, you seemed like you were handling it so well, and it made me such a basket case, I was afraid I’d bring you down.”

“Handling it well?” he snorted. “Not **hardly**. Mish, I’m terrified. Absolutely scared shitless. Look at me. I’m seventeen years old. What’s ‘better than fifty percent’? Is it seventy? Eighty? Even at that, I’m seventeen years old and I’ve just been told I have a twenty or thirty percent chance of not seeing eighteen. I’m scared out of my mind. I have my whole life ahead of me. College football. Med school. And, I was kind of thinking, you. And the dream just got very cloudy.” He took a deep breath. “My parents are frantic. My younger brother and sister are worried sick. **Somebody** has to keep a stiff upper lip. So I do it—and cry alone in my bed at night.”

“That’s why I’m here,” I managed. “Jared yelled at me at lunch today,” I smiled. “He didn’t know about Danny, so thought I was just a callous bitch. Said it wasn’t like me. He knows now—Amanda told him, so he wouldn’t keep thinking I was just a callous bitch—but it really didn’t matter. I needed the kick in the ass, because he was right.” I took a deep breath. “Eric, do you know how much I resent my mother? You could probably even say I hate her. She ran out when we needed her. And left a nine-year-old to pick up the pieces. And, here I’ve been, the past two days, doing the same damn thing.”

“No, not even close. I’m not your son, or your husband.”

“Close enough for **me**,” I maintained. “Close enough to make me examine just what in the hell I was doing. Eric, when you left—well, I knew what was in my heart. I just hadn’t worked myself up to saying it yet. I was waiting for the right time. Eric Andrews, I love you. And I can’t turn away from that.”

“I love you, too,” he said. He chuckled. “I was waiting for the right time, too.”

“I can’t promise you that it’ll be easy. I can’t promise you I’ll be able to keep a stiff upper lip. The only thing I can promise you that I’ll try. And that I’ll be here.”

“That’s good enough for me.”

We had been sitting side-by-side on the field up until then. We hadn't touched. Then we found ourselves in each other's arms. He hugged me so hard I thought he'd break my ribs. That was fine with me.

"Do me a favor," I whispered. "Don't cry alone in your room anymore."

He didn't. He cried right there in my arms. I did, too.

After we parted, and I was headed home, I felt strangely better. Look, worry and guilt are a particularly unhealthy combination. I still had the worry, but the guilt was gone.

When I got home, I told Daddy. He took me in his arms on his lap like he did when I was a little girl and let me cry it out some more. I think his eyes were wet, too. Then he looked into my eyes and said, "I'm your father. You're my little girl. I'm supposed to protect you. And you have been through more shit in seventeen years than most people go through in fifty—and I haven't been able to protect you."

"You're right, this is something you can't protect me from," I told him. "What I realized today was that I can't protect myself, either. I can distance myself from him, back out of his life, leave him to face this alone. And what if the worst happens? I'd **still** be devastated."

"Yes, you would. Look, he's not Danny. We all knew that Danny wasn't going to make it. Eric has a better than average chance of making it. But, honey, you know—and I'm sure he does, too—that he has to fight." He looked at me. "He loves you." It wasn't a question, but I nodded anyway. Then he smiled at me. "You know, one more reason to live never hurt anybody."

Daddy's been through a boatload of shit himself. Somehow he still always finds the right thing to say to his little girl.

After that, I went to my room, halfheartedly did some homework, and lay in my bed to think.

This is where I'm supposed to tell you that I prayed to God with all my might to save Eric. I didn't. I don't pray. I tried that with Danny. Look where it got me.

When Danny died, what killed me was the platitudes. "God called him home" and "He's in a better place" and all that. It made me furious. He was **eight** years old! He never hit a baseball, never fell in love, never drove a car, never kissed a girl, never graduated from high school. He never got in a fight. Never tagged around with his big sister and her friends bothering them. Never did a multitude of things. "God called him home"??? What was the fucking point of sending him here in the **first** place, then? For eight lousy years, a quarter of which he was sick? You watch an eight year old boy waste away to nothing and the whole 'just and merciful God' stuff looks like a joke—a big fat joke. I haven't been in a church since the day they put Danny in the ground. I don't ever plan on going again. If God exists—which I highly doubt—he's a sadistic asshole. If he wants to prove he does

exist and he's **not** a sadistic asshole, he knows where to find me. He can give me a sign. My boyfriend getting leukemia, by the way, was **not** it.

And I may be many things, but a hypocrite is not one of them. So I didn't, and won't, pray. Wish and hope? Those things I can do. I fell asleep listening to some of my favorite music, wishing and hoping.

When I got up on Wednesday, I felt better. Not necessarily **good**, but better. I met Eric at the entrance, where we did the traditional Program stripping in front of an audience. For the first time this week, I managed to have fun with it. I sat next to him in the morning class we have together—which I had avoided—and we ate lunch.

"You're in a better mood," he pointed out.

"I had a nice talk with my Daddy. He pointed out to me that you have to fight right now."

"Yeah," he agreed. "I absolutely plan on beating this thing."

"He also asked me if you loved me. When I said yes, he pointed out that, when a guy's in a fight for his life, one more thing to live for always helps."

The grin he gave me right then lit up my world. "Your father's a smart guy."

He came to practice again. He was, of course, miserable that he couldn't play, but just being around the guys seemed to help. We ended up on the field again. After a while of just chatting, I asked him, "How are you feeling? Physically, I mean."

"Good," he said. "The chemo's in three-week cycles. I have it Friday, so this is towards the end of the cycle. The first week after, I'm a wreck. The second week's a little better. The third week, though, I'm fine. Right now, I feel pretty much like my old self."

"Good," I said. "Because what I want right now, most of all, is for you to make love to me."

He paused. "Are you sure? Look, Mish, I plan on beating this thing. But if I don't...."

"You're going to," I said. "And if you plan to beat this thing, you need to live. You can't fight for your life if you're putting it on hold. You know we were building up to this."

"Oh, you betcha," he grinned. It made me laugh. Thank goodness. "I'm just worried about you."

"Don't," I said. "You need me. And the truth is, I need you, too. In every way." Then I dropped my voice to a whisper. "And, no, if the worst should happen, I won't regret this, if that's what you're thinking. Not for a second. I'd regret **not** doing it." Then I looked into his eyes. "You're my boyfriend, and I love you. I'm your girlfriend, and you love me."

Live your life, Eric. Make love to your girlfriend—because she wants you so bad it hurts.”

He did. Before then, we hadn’t even so much as touched, really. We spent a very long time on that darkened, empty football field, touching, kissing, fondling—and then making love. It was the most beautiful thing I’ve ever experienced. It was so beautiful I might’ve been tempted to cry—except I think I was all cried out by then. Instead, I just glowed.

Then I took him to my house, and he stayed over. We did it again in the morning. We did it again Thursday. Each time, it was beautiful and glorious. He was strong, feeling good, and he made me feel **damn** good.

It was an illusion, of course—my strong, healthy, football-playing boyfriend who fucked me senseless. It was an illusion. The reality was Friday. That was the day I insisted on going to the hospital with Eric, and holding his hand while the drugs that would hopefully kill the leukemia were sent into his body. That was the day that I took my boyfriend to his house and held him over the toilet while he vomited. That was the day that I climbed into his bed and held him as she shook, and kept holding him as he finally fell into a restless sleep. **That** was the reality.

When I awoke on Saturday, Eric was still asleep. Knowing he needed the sleep, I padded downstairs to the kitchen, looking for coffee. His Mom was already there. She came over and wrapped me in a hug.

“Mish, I can’t tell you how glad we are you’re here. Eric told us about your little brother. This must be so hard for you.”

“I can’t do anything else. I love him. And he has a chance, and a good one. Danny didn’t. I couldn’t do a damn thing for Danny, and I knew that from the start. Eric, I **can** do something for.”

“You are. Just by being here. Do you know that’s the first time he’s slept at **all** the night of chemo? That’s because you were there with him.”

You know, I haven’t felt as good about myself as I did right at that moment. That’s when I knew, I **knew**, I could do this. That’s when I also knew, somehow, that Eric was going to be fine. Don’t ask me how I knew, but I did.

Eric woke up, still exhausted and sick, but still managed to give me a big smile. I took him downstairs and cuddled with him on the couch. I made him tea and toast—the only things he could hold down. His Dad came in and we all watched college football—and his Dad made us roar through most of it. His dad is a funny guy. I was supposed to be at a high school football game myself, cheerleading. I didn’t go. Some things are more important. I stayed there all weekend. I stopped into my house at one point. Daddy told me, “I’m fine. You’re where you should be, where you need to be.”

At one point, I was lying in his arms, and the words just came out. “For better, for worse; in sickness and in health; until death do us part.”

“That sounded like a proposal,” he grinned.

“No, silly, that’s your job,” I giggled. “Look, I’m counting on all going well. I’m counting on the rest of high school, and college, and then you can make a proper proposal.” Then I dropped my voice. “But, just in case—what I said wasn’t a proposal—it was a vow. I just wanted you to know.”

“After what you’ve done this week, I already did.”

What I found out the next couple of months is that I’m stronger than I thought I was. I also found out all about love, all over again. From Eric, of course—the gratitude in his face that I was there for him spoke volumes. But not just from him—his parents were thrilled I was there. His mother told me over and over how happy I made him, how much of a help I was, and how much they loved me as much as he did. And his brother and sister loved me, too. His sister was 14, and loved having a “big sister” around. And his 10-year-old brother took one look at me and launched into full-blown hero-worship.

It made me think of Danny. It made me think **good** things about Danny. It made me remember how cool Danny was, and how much I loved him.

I pretty much spent the whole fall practically living at Eric’s house. When he was in between chemo, we made wild passionate love as much as we could. When he wasn’t up to that, I took care of him. And it was good. After all that, it was good. I think I helped—and that was really good.

If Danny were here, I think he’d be damn proud of his big sister.

I read back on this now. I wrote those words a little under two years ago. I just found my journal from that year.

It’s late summer, now, and I’m preparing to go back to my sophomore year in college. I go to State. Quite a few of us from the old crowd did. Not all. Jared and Amanda, the brains, went to Princeton. And Mike and Lily both got scholarships to USC. I watched on TV as they led USC to the College World Series championship. Lily not only was the first girl to appear in the CWS, she was the first girl to ever pitch the winning game. A three-hit shutout, even. Mike hit a homer.

But the rest of us are at State—and all the relationships that were fostered by The Program have survived.

Yes, that includes Eric and me.

Eric ended his chemo that November, and has been completely in remission ever since. No trace of the leukemia at all. Every clean bill of health he gets makes his chances higher. Of course, he won't be considered "cured" until five years. There's always a doubt—he's still a few months shy of how long Danny stayed in remission—but the doctors are very optimistic.

After his chemo ended, we managed to spend the second half of our senior year as just another high school couple in love. Well, there were a few exceptions. I was pretty much living with him—not a common situation with kids still in high school. I worried about Daddy being alone—but Daddy had managed to find a girlfriend. Good for him. They got married a few weeks ago, and my stepmother is the coolest.

But, outside of that, we were normal teenagers in love. Did the prom, the whole bit. With chemo over, Eric became stronger—and we made love more often. And it just got better and better.

We came to State and got an apartment together. No separation in dorms for us. Though the prognosis was good, we still knew that nothing was guaranteed, and every minute apart was a minute lost. Eric lost his chance for a football scholarship by not being able to play senior year—but got an academic one. State invited him to walk on to the football team, but he decided not to. "I can think of better things to do on Saturday afternoons," he told me.

There's no guarantees. There's no certainties. But I think we're going to make it—I think he's going to make it. I like to think I helped. Love's a powerful thing. I'm glad I realized that.

A note from the author.

This story is dedicated to the memory of M.E.P., 1964-1979. We never had the relationship that Eric and Mish have—we were just friends, but I had known her since birth. She never got Eric's prognosis—she got Danny's, and beat the odds by a considerable amount by living 2 ½ years. But she couldn't, finally, beat the leukemia that took her life at the horrific age of 15. She's been gone 24 years and I still miss her.

I ended the story proper somewhat ambiguously. However, in my mind's eye, Mish and Eric are married. They're in their mid-thirties. They live in pretty house in Westport. They have a little girl, and Mish is pregnant with their second. Eric's an oncologist, and Mish taught school for a while before deciding to stay home with the kids. They're in love. They're happy. That's what my mind's eye sees.

I could have invented that scenario for Mary, but it would have been a lie. I know the reality all too well. So I gave it to Mish and Eric. Because someone deserves it.

If there's a better reason why I write fiction, I can't come up with it.

And, so, that is why this is the story I **had** to write.

Thanks for reading,
Frank