

LAST
YEAR
WITH
MADDY

by Anna Rosner



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For Sarah Holmes and her brother, Tim
and
for the Victoria Street Girls

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CHAPTER 1

by Aviva Adelman

I didn't mean to lose my only friend.

Even though I just turned twelve, I've apparently lost more than a few. According to my mother, at least. She says that when I was in kindergarten, I would invite a different friend home from school every week to play on my swing set. When she saw a new girl walk through the door, my mother would just look at me sideways and ask where last week's friend went.

I don't actually remember any of that, but I do remember losing Henrietta Schultz in grade one. She said my red overalls made me look like Elmo. I wasn't really sure who Elmo was until I watched *Sesame Street*, and that was it. I never spoke to Henrietta Schultz again.

I lost Amelia Frank when she cancelled our playdate

for a better deal, which is to say a party at Kim Plotnik's house. Kim was popular, even though she had bad breath, and she didn't invite me. So that was the end of Amelia. Her mother made her call me and say she was sorry, but I just hung up the phone.

My mother says I'm *too sensitive*. She also says I overuse italics when I do assignments for school. So for *revenge*, I'm going to use *lots* in this *book*.

Which brings me to an important point: why I'm writing this book at all. I did have one friend, for a long time. A best friend. It must have been destiny, because Madeline Li-Quinn, or Maddy, was my neighbour from birth. I think her name sounds like a poem because it has lots of different "i" sounds. Her mum is Chinese and her dad is Irish, but Maddy looks more like her mum. Apparently when Maddy and I first met as babies, I reached over and pulled her black hair, which was sticking straight up from her head, and she smacked me in the nose. My mum says I was probably jealous because I was still bald. To be honest I think I'm still kind of bitter about the hair thing, because my curly hair makes me look like I stuck my head in a blender.

So Maddy was the first playdate I ever had, and as soon as I could dial, the first friend I ever phoned. Since

grade one, we called each other every day, even though she lived three houses away. If our parents told us to get off the phone, we'd just meet outside and sit on the curb, sometimes in our pajamas. There were almost no cars in our neighbourhood. Every once in a while, if one came, Maddy and I would stare down the driver and give them *nasty eyes* so they wouldn't come back and disturb our street. Maddy made nasty eyes better than me. She could do it without her eyes rolling back in her head.

Maddy was a different kind of girl, like me. When I say *different*, I mean we didn't like any of the things the girls in our grades liked. Especially Petite Pennies, which were *everywhere* in grade two. Petite Pennies were these weird dolls that fit in your pocket, and you could carry them around, like hamsters, only they had a way creepier face than a hamster. Maddy's mother said that if she ever needed to perform an exorcism, she would use a Petite Penny. You could buy the dolls clothes and exchange them to declare your undying love to a friend, but if anyone ever asked me if I wanted a Petite Penny, I would suggest they give me their cookie instead. I mean, at least the cookie would serve a purpose.

So Maddy and I, we never bought in to the latest

craze, or as Maddy used to say, the latest *crazy*. And there have been lots of them over the years. Petite Pennies were replaced by Tinkle Trinkets, which were ugly plastic bracelets (*definitely* toxic), and then Bobble Babies, which were just stuffed animals. We saw absolutely no reason to call them “babies.” Girls at school would squeal, “Look at my new baby!” and cradle it in their arms like an actual baby, but Maddy and I, we’re more *literal*. So we would just roll our eyes and pretend to barf, because we’d already donated our stuffed animals to Goodwill years ago.

After the Petite Pennies and the Bobble Babies, the Regular Kids in our grade started doing the Skanky Leg, which is a weird dance that makes people look like they have to go to the toilet. So Maddy and I just decided we’d better check out of elementary school for good. Mentally, anyway. I mean, that stuff was *weird*.

Maddy and I liked other things. I guess those things made *us* kind of weird. What made Maddy different from the Regular Kids is that she was a musician. I don’t mean she took violin or piano like any Regular Kid did, playing horrible scales out of tune until the neighbours turned on their hairdryers to drown them out. I mean Maddy was a real musician, like one that

gives concerts. She started playing the violin when she was three. *Three*. She had this tiny little violin that had stickers on it to show her where to put her fingers, but after a while, she didn’t need the stickers anymore. Her hands just knew where to find the notes, and she almost never played out of tune. So she graduated from playing “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” in about a month, and now she plays Bach and Mozart and lots of other FDGs, as she calls them, which means Fossilized Dead Guys. But since we’re *staunch feminists* Maddy always learns pieces by women, too, like Clara Schumann and Rebecca Clarke. Sometimes Maddy even plays music by women who aren’t dead. You don’t have to be dead to be good, she says. Or maybe I should say she *said*.

I figured out Maddy was special after I went to this violin competition with her when we were six. She played in the finals of the Kiwanis Festival and there was a grey-haired judge and everything. He looked like he was about five minutes from a quadruple bypass, which is probably what happens when you have to listen to little kids play the violin all day. He never smiled at the competitors and just pressed his fingers together like he was listening to the Pope in church or something. Anyway, all these kids got on stage one by one and played

so badly I could have sworn there was a narwhal dying in there. I mean, the way Maddy played was just totally different. She sounded like *music*. And while we were waiting for her turn, my eyes just got bigger and bigger because I knew she was going to win. And when she went on stage to accept her trophy, which was silver for some reason, even though it was first place, I clapped so hard my hands hurt. They were still red when I got home.

Even though I didn't play an instrument, I started to learn about all the stuff Maddy was doing because I spent a lot of time at her house. She practised before and after dinner, sometimes two hours a day. And I guess I got used to classical music, even though the only thing my mother ever listens to is Nina Simone and Aretha Franklin, who are from the sixties. I like them, too. They are *staunch feminists*.

My father, on the other hand, has no time for music. He's busy searching the universe. No kidding. My dad is a professor in the Department of Astronomy. You would not believe the nerds in there. My mother and I always giggle about the professors who wear the same brown clothes every day for months. My dad changes his shirts (I think), from one brown shirt to another, and

on special occasions he might go wild and bust out a blue shirt, but there is no one less interested in fashion than my dad. The annual department photos are hilarious. Maddy and I always try to guess how long it's been since they've had a shower.

Anyway, my father researches the *composition of stars*, which are sometimes filled with gold and silver. That's a fact. As far as dads go, mine isn't mean but he literally has his head in the clouds. My father loves space, and I think most of him will be up there forever and never come down. The stars are serious business.

The truth is I like stars, too. We rent a cottage in Muskoka in the summertime, where I am now. Here, away from the city lights, you can see millions of stars. They're beautiful. Sometimes there are shooting stars, which are actually meteors. My dad says that some stars are so far away that by the time we can see their light, the star is already burnt out. I don't really understand the science of that, but I know it makes me sad.

And another factoid about my dad: he's old. Not like my Bubby Clara old, who's my mum's mother, but he's old for a dad. My friends' fathers are all about forty or a bit more, but my dad is almost sixty. Nineteen years older than my mother. Now that I understand where

babies come from, a big part of me wants to know if my three-year-old brother, Ethan, was an *accident*. Which is a word that never made sense to me. Accidents are for cars and for when you drop your sandwich. Anyway.

When she isn't taking care of my brother, my mother is busy painting in her studio, which is downtown in the slummiest part of London, Ontario. Artists like to have their studios in slummy areas because it makes them feel *authentic*. My mum's a famous artist, or kind of. She has exhibitions all over Canada and sometimes in the US. Once she even went to France, where she showed at a gallery in Lyon. I've only seen photos, because she didn't invite me.

I didn't want to see France anyway.

My mum's also one of those people who became a mother because that's what people are *supposed* to do, but in truth I don't think it appeals to her all that much. She'd rather be thinking about art. In fact, the very first exhibition she ever had was about the *oppression of motherhood*. She took my diapers and painted them all sorts of colours and hung them on a clothesline. Weird if you ask me, but the newspapers thought it was *genius*. So she's busy a lot, and I can't bug her when she's working at home, because she sometimes paints in the basement,

too. *Not now, Aviva*, she says, *just give me a few more minutes*. But minutes always turn into hours. So I learned a long time ago that if I had a problem, I had to go to Maddy.

Only now I can't anymore.

I have to start grade seven without her.

I wonder if she'll even look at me.

CHAPTER 2

Missing Maddy Metaphors (or MMMs) #1: It feels like there's a hole inside of me I can't fill.

Wow, I typed nine pages yesterday. Pretty good. I typed so late that my mother got annoyed and came into my cottage bedroom (which is more like a broom closet) and gave me this whole dramatic *Aviva-Marilyn-Adelman-it's-almost-midnight* sigh. So I gave her back a *Rebecca-Hannah-Adelman-did-you-forget-it's-summer* whine. My middle name is Marilyn because she was my dad's mother, who died before I was born. And my parents called me Aviva because my dad likes palindromes, or words that are spelled the same backwards and forwards. I have no idea why that's a good thing, but whatever floats your boat.

I noticed that it's getting dark earlier in Muskoka.

School is only a few weeks away, and the thought of it is giving me a stomachache, but that could also be the weird fish we had for dinner. I guess I haven't told you the reason I am a *different* kind of girl at school, and maybe everywhere else. Actually there are probably *reasons*, plural, and most of them are depressing. My brother might be part of the reason, because windbag Sophie Lalonde has a sister in Ethan's daycare and Sophie blabbed the whole story, but I'll get to that.

So one reason I'm different is that I'm not allowed to have a phone like most kids in my grade, and neither is Maddy. Our parents say we have to wait until we're in high school. I don't really care that much because I have a computer in my room for the Internet, and Maddy and I are always together anyway. Well, we *were* always together.

The second reason I'm different is way worse. I don't know why, but I always say the *wrong thing* when I don't mean to, and then after, I feel like shrivelling up like a raisin and disappearing into the floor. Sometimes kids roll their eyes at me or call me stupid, and I have to swallow hard to get the lump in my throat to go away.

The third reason isn't so bad, and I guess you could say it's even good, but it definitely makes me different

from the Regular Kids: I like to read. I *really* like it.

When I was little, I read all kinds of things that Regular Kids didn't, mostly poems. At first, I only read poems for *young people* but then my bubby gave me a giant book of poetry for adults and I just kept going. I really like one poem by a man named Tennyson (another FDG, or Fossilized Dead Guy, in case you forgot). It's about the Lady of Shalott, and my bubby explained the whole sad story to me. She even took me to see a painting of the Lady of Shalott in the Art Gallery of Ontario. So here's the short and skinny of her, or whatever that expression is: The Lady of Shalott is cursed and imprisoned in a castle. She can only look at the world through a mirror, and if she ever looks out the window, she dies. But one day she sees a smoking-hot knight, Lancelot, and she's done with prison. She leaves the castle, finds a little boat, writes her name on it, and drifts down the river. Brace yourself for the unhappy ending: she dies in the boat. But she has a note pinned to her dress:

The web was woven curiously,
The charm is broken utterly
Draw near and fear not, – this is I,
The Lady of Shalott.

I guess the point is, everyone saw her for the first time, and everyone learned her name. She *existed*.

Another poet I like is Leonard Cohen, because he sings, too, though my bubby says he misses the low notes and the high notes and the notes in between. His poetry is also a little easier to understand. Don't get me wrong though: my *staunch feminist* brain means I love women poets, too. I like Edna St. Vincent Millay and Maya Angelou and Margaret Atwood and even this French poet from the 1500s named Louise Labé, who had no luck with boys. She was one awesome feminist and she even jousted, but she fell in love with a nitwit and started writing poems about him. Anyway, the love didn't work out but some of the poems are good. Labé tells women to stop sewing all the time and *write*. That's pretty brave for the 1500s. So I figure that right now, I need to be brave like her and write.

Truth be told, there's a *lot* I don't understand in poems. If I can't figure it out, I call my bubby in Toronto to discuss. My bubby is hilarious because when she talks poetry, she makes Earl Grey tea and tells me to do the same. *Fancy a cuppa?* She says to add milk and *one lump of sugar*. Then she puts on this really upper-class British accent to make her explanations sound like she's a pro-

fessor at Oxford. Sometimes we talk for an hour. And when she's done explaining she says things like *Toodeloo, my duck, don't forget to give me a tinkle on the blower*, which sounds like it means *don't forget to pee on my hairdryer*, but it really means *Goodbye, sweetheart, don't forget to call me on the phone*. I think it's safe to say that everyone in my family is slightly bonkers, but not in a bad way.

Sometimes I ask my librarian to explain poems, too, but Ms. Novak usually says that whatever my interpretation is, it's good. Except if there happens to be hanky-panky in the poem that I didn't quite catch (hanky-panky is what my bubby calls *sex*). Then Ms. Novak just blushes and says, "Uh, maybe ask your mother about that one, Aviva." She also wants me to start writing my own poetry, and I have tried, but for now this book is plenty enough. I guess my brain can't stretch that far. It's busy thinking about Maddy and organizing my mental list of *VIT* or *Very Important Things*, which keeps getting longer.

My little brother is definitely a VIT, and maybe my mum's chocolate chip cookies when I'm hungry, but these days, safety is pretty high up there, too. I'm prone to panic, which probably comes from saying the *wrong thing* all the time. It's not the serious kind of panic where

you feel like you're dying, but the sweaty palm kind that makes you feel like you need to sit on the toilet. Those episodes come and go. More so now, since I lost Maddy.

I don't really want to remember the last year we were friends, but unfortunately my excellent memory doesn't let me forget much. Here in Muskoka, I like to go down to the dock and listen to the water and the loons, which look a bit like ducks but don't quack. They wail, mostly to find out where their family is, and the family answers back. It always makes me think of Maddy, and I guess I look pretty miserable. So last week, when my mum was watching me stare across the lake for the thousandth time, she suggested I write down everything I was feeling. She said I should write a book about Maddy and me, and even about my brother, Ethan. At first I wasn't sure I wanted to face it all, but then I thought of Louise Labé.

I spent some of Last Year with Maddy, but mostly without her.

This is harder than I thought.

I think I have to take a cry break.

CHAPTER 3

When I told my mum I thought writing about Maddy was going to be too hard, she said to start with some good memories before I tackle the Last Year. So here's a list of the top three:

Good memory #1: My parents took me and Maddy to the Dominican Republic when we were ten. We only had enough money for one room, so the hotel put two cots in the living room and Ethan slept in a crib next to my parents. It was a beautiful hotel, but the cots smelled like my bubby's closet and had a metal bar in the middle that could slice you in half, so Maddy and I decided we would share the couch for the week. I slept one way, with my feet in her face, and vice versa. Her feet smelled. Believe me, I did not smell any better, especially after I threw up one night when I snuck a Banana

Mama cocktail after dinner. It didn't even taste like alcohol, just bananas and strawberries, but apparently it's got lots. I remember lying with Maddy's feet in my face, smelling like Banana Mama barf and giggling about everything, including lines from stupid movies that Maddy repeated all week. I think about that vacation a lot because I remember being so happy and feeling so very lucky that we were together. It was the best vacation ever, and we swore we'd be friends forever. Go to university together and all that. Two hearts, or sisters, or whatever you want to say.

Good memory #2: Brace yourself for this one, because it was totally out of character for us: Once Maddy and I went to a Ricky Martin concert. Ricky is this gorgeous gay singer from Puerto Rico who looks good in plastic pants. I saw an ad for one of his concerts online. Ricky was pretty far from cool then, but I wanted to go anyway. It didn't matter that Maddy played Mozart and I read poetry, we wanted to have to some fun, and we knew we'd have a blast at the Ricky Martin concert. Who wouldn't?

Anyway, the day the tickets went on sale we decided to go out for lunch and buy them in person at the concert

hall, so my mother drove us downtown. The first thing I noticed was that there were tons of cool dudes waiting in line. I mean these guys didn't look like Ricky Martin types at all. They looked like they just rolled out of bed and had spent the night watching *alternative movies* where the plot makes no sense, but everyone just nods and says *yeah, man, yeah*, and pretends to like it. So we met the guy in front of us, this long-haired, dopey-looking dude, and of course he loved Maddy from the first minute. He told us he was buying tickets for a heavy metal band called Crush Head. I said that sounded painful. Maddy admitted that we were going to Ricky Martin but made him promise not to tell anyone. He promised. But right after he bought his tickets, he turned to the long line of people behind us and screamed, "HEY! EVERYONE! CHECK OUT THESE GIRLS. THEY'RE GOING TO A RICKY MARTIN CONCERT!!!" All the cool dudes laughed and booed. And then he gave Maddy a five-star grin and a five-star wink and left.

Good memory #3: Maddy understood my brother even when no one else did. But more about that later.

I made so many mistakes this last year. I don't want to

remember them. I want to remember smelly feet, boys in the hotel pool, Ricky Martin in his lime-green tight pants, and laughing with Maddy. But as my mum says, if I don't write about it, it might eat me up. I'm not sure what would happen after I'm eaten up but I guess nothing would be left of me. So I'll write down what I can, because there are some things I can never write, ever, or even say or even think. Like the last time Maddy and I spoke.

That, I will have to live with forever. I won't talk, write, or even *think* about that.

It's getting dark in Muskoka. I can hear the water lapping against the dock, and the moon is coming through the window where I'm typing on my dad's laptop. It looks beautiful over the lake.

I wonder if Maddy is looking at the moon, too.

~

I'm really liking these little symbols that my mum showed me, called *tilde*: ~. They're from Spanish and they make the letter "n" sound like "*nyeh*", as in *señor*, but I just use them for breaks. It means I can stop when the memories get too hard, or when my bladder decides it's time to pee, or when it just feels like the right time

to stop.

You won't understand Last Year unless I tell you what happened to Maddy. Maybe I should say *to us*, because in some ways it happened to me, too, but it really happened to Maddy. And Last Year has a lot to do with last summer, the year we turned eleven.

What happened to Maddy is the reason her father doesn't live with her anymore.

Maddy's parents fought a lot. There was always some *kerfuffle* in her house, as my bubby would say, but it got worse. That spring, her parents were arguing non-stop. But one evening when I walked into their house without knocking (which I did all the time, sometimes just to get a popsicle if we ran out), they were so angry that they didn't even tone it down when they saw me.

"Everything is my responsibility," yelled her mother. "The violin lessons, the house, the cleaning, the shopping, the cooking! Just one day of my life I'd like to come home to a meal cooked for me. We've been married fourteen years and I'm still waiting."

"That's your complaint? What do you buy the food with, huh? *My money*. My money, Simone. You'd be homeless without me."

Maddy's father is a criminal lawyer.

"So I'm a slave in this house?" she yelled. "Excellent lesson for our daughter."

"The only lesson you're giving Maddy right now is that you're a lunatic."

"Me? *I'm* not the lunatic here, Liam."

And on and on it went like that. I walked right by them and up the stairs, where I could hear Maddy's violin. I knew she was trying to drown them out.

"You okay?" I asked.

"Yeah," she said, shaking her hand back and forth to make a note vibrate. Her black hair was pulled into a ponytail so it didn't get caught in her bow. She sat on the bed, still holding her violin, and closed her eyes. Maddy had big, sad eyes. My mother once said they were *filled with a thousand souls*.

"What are you playing?" I asked.

"A study. It's hard for me."

I wasn't sure if she meant the study or her parents' fight, but I bet on her parents, because nothing was too hard for Maddy on the violin.

"What started it this time?" I asked.

"Who knows?"

"Want to go outside?"

"Do I ever," she said, and put her violin in the case

and snapped it shut.

We lay down on my front lawn and shared some licorice. There was a half moon in the sky, and I pointed it out to Maddy. She nodded but she was pretty quiet. I mean, unless she was having a giggle fit, she was always a quiet sort of girl, because her head was filled with music. But she was especially quiet then.

Usually, Maddy's parents calmed down for a while after a big blowout like that. They would apologize to each other and go back to somewhat normal, even though I wasn't quite sure what normal was because my parents didn't talk to each other much, unless my dad was yakking about the stars. But this time, the arguing stayed at Defcon 2 level (which, if you didn't know, means *on the verge of a nuclear war*). Every time I went over, there was a new argument brewing. Even when Maddy and I tried to listen in, none of it made much sense. I told my mother, but she just sighed and said, "Marriage is hard," or something like that. And I of course felt like saying how would you know, because if you barely see someone how hard can a relationship be? My parents just turned around each another like planets around the sun. (That last line was a *simile*, or a comparison. I was trying to be a poet.)

So after a couple of weeks of Maddy's house at Defcon 2 and sometimes Defcon 1, which is even *worse*, she showed up at my door.

"My dad threw something," she said.

"I hope it wasn't a glass."

"It was a glass," she said, and fell onto my bed. She looked up at my poster of Leonard Cohen singing "Hallelujah."

I was worried. "Maybe we should tell my mother."

"What's she going to do?" asked Maddy. "Paint them a picture? Not going to help."

"Ouch," I said. "My dad?"

She gave me a look. She was right. My father would probably just tell them weird stories about Andromeda and Perseus, whose eternal love is written in constellations in the sky.

I pointed to the poster. "Should we tell Leonard?"

Maddy put a pillow over her head.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"I guess," she said, her voice muffled. Then I didn't know what to say, which happens to me a lot. But with Maddy silence doesn't feel weird.

Then I had a *brilliant idea*, if I do say so myself.

I asked Maddy if she wanted to hear a poem.

“Sure,” she said, taking off the pillow. “What have you got?”

I knew I had the perfect one for her. It was an Edna St. Vincent Millay poem called *Exiled*. I like Millay because she was an *awesome feminist* even though she lived a hundred years ago. I flipped through my giant book and read the first verse:

Searching my heart for its true sorrow,
This is the thing I find to be:
That I am weary of words and people,
Sick of the city, wanting the sea.

I stopped there. “You know what that means?” I asked.

Maddy rolled over on my patchwork quilt. “It means my parents are annoying and we should go to the beach?”

“Right,” I said. “So maybe we should.”

Maddy’s eyes got brighter. “Really? You think we could get to the lake?”

“You know my parents love it,” I said, “and it’s the weekend. Let’s ask.”

“You’re a perfect friend,” she said. And I remember

being really happy because I had never thought of myself like that. I was happy even though Maddy was sad, which, come to think of it, probably didn’t make me such a perfect friend after all.

My parents did take us to Lake Huron that day, and we had a picnic supper with sandwiches and blueberry cake. My dad explained why sunsets are red (scattering blue light blah blah wavelength blah blah), and Maddy and I pretended to listen while we watched the waves roll in. I even waded into the lake with Ethan in my arms, but after a minute my ankles started to ache, and I had to run out and wrap them in a towel. When we dropped Maddy off at home her dad’s car was gone and I was glad.

A few nights later, summer temperatures hit us like a ton of bricks, even though it was only the beginning of June. I had to sleep with the windows open because as an astronomer, my father is a *staunch environmentalist*. The fact that there is space pollution floating up there makes him want to stick his head in the toilet and flush it. So here on Earth, he’s always turning off lights and taps and taking the bus and recycling everything, which also means we don’t get air conditioning unless it’s a gazillion degrees out and our health is in danger from

the heat.

So it was the middle of the night. Since my windows were open, I heard a door slam outside and a car peel out of a driveway, which was *really* strange for Victoria Street. I guess I fell back asleep, but the next day, when I went to get Maddy to walk to school, there was a police car in her driveway and two officers with Maddy's mum, Simone. One was fat and the other was skinny, just like on those cop shows. They both looked me over when I walked in, which made me feel guilty for some reason. I wanted to yell, *I didn't do it, I'm innocent!* But then I figured that would be stupid.

When Maddy's mum saw me, she looked really embarrassed.

"Oh, Aviva. Maddy's not going to school today, okay?" Her eyes and face were red.

"Yeah," I said. "Is she sick?"

"Probably just a cold," said Simone.

"Can I go up?"

"No, you'll be late for school," she told me. "Just go ahead. I'll tell her you said hi."

Fat Cop and Skinny Cop stared at the ceiling, waiting for me to get the heck out of there. Which I did. But I didn't go to school right away. I went to the front of the

house and looked up at the window of Maddy's room and just knew.

Maddy wasn't sick at all.

Maddy wasn't there.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Though all the characters in *Last Year with Maddy* are fictional, the story has many autobiographical threads.

The character of Ethan was inspired by the years I worked as an aide for children with various developmental delays, including deafness and autism. Ethan is a combination of many children I knew and loved. *Last Year with Maddy* portrays characters on different levels of the autism spectrum, from the mild to the profound. Every family's experience, and every child, is unique, as are the terms they choose to describe autism.

Aviva's parents share the same professions as my own: my mother is a visual artist and my father a retired professor who searched the stars. I am so grateful to have been witness to my parents' creativity over the years. It's thanks to them that I became a musician as a child, and yes, messed up a flute competition that was nowhere near as daunting as Maddy's. But I got over it

and still play today.

The feelings of grief Aviva experiences as Maddy slips away are also my own. I lost my best friend, Sarah, who took her own life when we were both thirty-seven years old. *Last Year with Maddy* draws on the last year of Sarah's life, when I tried to fix what I couldn't and often said the wrong thing. Sarah and I grew up together just a few houses apart, along with three other Victoria Street Girls who still remain close fifty years later. Sarah was everybody's favourite, adored throughout her life by everyone who knew her. Her father, Wayne, was a gentle angel, and her family was her greatest support. As an adult, Sarah completed a master's degree in social work and counselled troubled youth. She understood people intuitively, just like Maddy.

It is my greatest hope that everyone experiencing grief, depression or anxiety will seek help from a friend, parent, teacher, or mental health professional.

Finally, so as not to end on a sad note: it's true that Sarah and I went to the Dominican Republic together and slept with our smelly feet in each other's faces. Also, we saw Ricky Martin in concert, but we were in our thirties. We were the oldest people there by about twenty years.

He was *FABULOUS*.

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