

Meet Richie . . .

Hey. I'm **RICHARD CASEY**, aka **the Incredible Dying Boy**. I'm seventeen years old, going on eighteen—or eternity, whichever comes first. I've got Somebody Up There Hates You (SUTHY) Syndrome, and it's landed me in this hospice unit in Hilltop Hospital, Hudson, New York. You'd think dying would be boring, right? But there's a whole lot of crazy interesting stuff that goes on here, in our little hospice home. And some really interesting people. So let me introduce you to my crew.

AND HIS CREW . . .



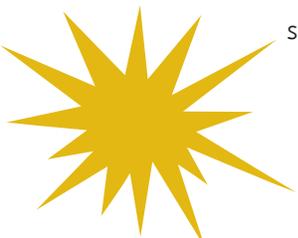
SYLVIE

My partner in crime, **SYLVIE CALDERONE**, is fifteen years old and she's got SUTHY, too. Me and Sylvie, we're the only patients under thirty in this whole place. And, man, does she keep things lively. See, pre-SUTHY, Sylvie was rich, pretty, smart, popular: As in, she was the kind of girl who wouldn't look at me once, never mind twice. But now? Now we're together in the biggest fight of our lives. And when it comes to fighting, Sylvie is fierce. And when it comes to loving? Oh yeah. Let's just say I'd do anything—and I do mean anything—for this girl.

KELLY-MARIE



But there's also this **other girl**. First time I met her, it was Halloween night and she was dressed like Marie Antoinette, carrying her bloody head. And we had, well, let's just call it a "special moment" outside a bar, in a dark alley. Let's leave it at that, okay? Anyway, then she turns up as her own self, Kelly, at the hospital to visit, and she meets Sylvie and . . . maybe I better leave it right there.



MOM What can I say? I mean, she's my mom and she had me when she was only seventeen herself and for all of my life, it's been just me and her. And, you know, **she never, ever leaves me**. Except the week she got the flu and wasn't allowed into the hospital. So she went kind of nuts and she called in reinforcements to watch over me. Here's the thing I can hardly say: I love my mom and, yeah, I'm aware that I'm hurting her more than any other human on earth ever could, just by being sick. That makes me so mad, so crazy, and so sad that I can't even talk about it. That's SUTHY, with a vengeance.



EDWARD This guy, swartogod, is the **World's Best Nurse**. He goes, like, three hundred pounds and he can lift me like a feather. Edward is on my side, totally. He's got my back. So I'm sorry that I got him in all sorts of trouble, helping me and Sylvie have our time together and all of that. Because Edward is a prince among nurses, and if I had my way, they'd double his salary.



MRS. JACOBS Well, at first, she seems like the scariest nurse ever: You know, the kind that wears the white starchy dress and the white cap with the ribbon on it? The kind that frowns at teenagers, just on principle, and never, ever breaks a rule? Yeah, that's her. Except, as I find out one day, **Mrs. Jacobs has troubles of her own**. As Edward tries to teach me, I'm not the only one suffering around here.



GRANDMA How different can my mom and her mom be? I mean, yeah, they both had babies real young—by accident, of course—but otherwise? It's like they're from totally separate planets, with orbits that meet every fifty thousand years or something. It says a whole lot that Mom called her crazy mother to watch over me while she can't be here. Grandma is about fifty, with bright red hair and fingernails. **She smokes. She drinks. She gambles**. She actually thinks that kids in hospice should fool around, should have some privacy, and should be together. I couldn't agree more.



UNCLE PHIL My mother's black-sheep younger brother. Phil's great: **He smells like cigarette smoke and bacon—my idea of heaven**. Phil's whole life has been what Mom calls one sorry mess . . . fights, jail, divorce, more fights, drinking, another divorce, and more fights. But, you know, Uncle Phil gets me. I mean, he remembers what it's like to be a teenager and he encourages all sorts of bad behavior. It's Uncle Phil who springs me from hospice on Halloween night and takes me into the streets of Hudson for one bad-ass fling. And, for that, I'll always love the guy.



MR. CALDERONE Sylvie's father: Now here's a guy that scares the bejesus out of me. He smells like **hellfire and Jack Daniels**. He is so furious, so nuclear-blasted by what's happening to his little girl that he glows orange, I swear. Flames flicker around his mouth. Sometimes I think he isn't even human. Really, he's a dragon, a beast that would be happy to roast me alive. And I'm not so sure I blame him. I mean, I get it. Sylvie is worth fighting for, any day, any time, any how.

