

What's Next?

A short story by Imogen Hennell for the Bayes essay competition 2023

“It is completely normal to feel a sense of loss and sadness when thinking about your future. It is okay to grieve for the experiences and opportunities that you will not have. It is important to acknowledge these emotions and give yourself time and space to process them. However, it is also important to remember that you still have the present moment. You can still find meaning, joy, and fulfilment in the time that you have left.”

I lay in my hospital bed, staring up at the plain, white ceiling. The sound of the machines keeping me alive fill the otherwise silent room.

Her words from the day before consume my thoughts.

As I lay here, I can not help but think about all the things I will miss out on. I have spent the past year in and out of hospitals, fighting for my life, and I can not help but feel cheated. Will I just cease to exist? Will I go to heaven, or will there be nothingness? What happens when I take my last breath?

When she told me to consider my future, I am sure she was hoping I would come up with some electrifying tale of the triumphs and achievements that will fill the next seventy years of my life, but thinking about my future is a hard pill to swallow when I have to swallow pills to survive.

The irony of what I am about to say does not escape me, but can they not just *let a girl live*? My mother insists I remain on top of my school work, but surely a thirteen-month life sentence should grant me immunity from the trials and tribulations of a creative writing assignment.

My tutor visits me every Tuesday, reeling off my educational tasks for the week ahead.

Yesterday her eyes were filled with sympathy, and I did not miss her commiserative tone when she explained that my English Literature coursework requires me to write a short story regarding my future.

“Or my lack of.” I mumbled as she hurriedly exited the room.

It is not the pain I am in, or even the fear of dying, it is the loss of all the things I wanted to do that gets to me.

As I lie here, I think about the things I could have done differently, the things I could have said.

But it's too late now.

Life is not fair, and I know that now.

My pencil rests in my hand, poised to begin writing, but my mind feels numb.

To my classmates and peers, I am sure this task is just another hurried piece of homework where they each list off their desires to become a doctor, a teacher, a god damn post man. But for me it feels insurmountable.

Tears blur my vision, and as they fall, they leave a watery trail down my crisp, white notebook page, a river of salt representing my admission of my future.

Death.

I lay back on my pillows and gently wiggle my toes. I softly hum my mothers favourite song. An Elvis Presley classic that she used to sing to me as a baby, a comfort that allows me to be transported back to when my life was filled with love and laughter.

“Wise men say, only fools rush in,” I croon, my voice weak, but determined. “But I can't help falling in love with you.”

As I quietly sing, the melody lifts my spirits, and I feel at peace.

“I'll stay,” I whisper, closing my eyes, “Would it be a sin?”

“For I can't help falling in love with you,” I finish, my voice trailing off.

Initially, the gravity of my situation had hit me hard, and I had hoped to remain positive in the face of my dire prognosis. However, I quickly resigned to the fact that the chance of having my own children was slim, my chance of growing old was slim, my chance at life, *was slim*.

Are there any positives when you are fifteen years old and facing a lifetime of non-existence?

Maybe, just maybe, there is something beyond this life. Maybe there is a place where I can be happy and healthy again, where I can do all the things I never got to do in this timeline.

It is a comforting thought, and I hold onto it tightly as I close my eyes and drift off to sleep.