

# Learning to Live

I remember the pitter patter of the rain against the windshield. Seconds later, I was blinded by a bright light. I remember thinking somebody was driving on the wrong side of the road. Within the split second it took me to realize it wasn't me, I heard the sound of screeching tires and a loud crash. Then everything went black.

The next thing I remember was waking up in the hospital. Well, at first, I wasn't really awake. I drifted in and out of consciousness for a while, though I don't think anyone noticed. I vaguely recall hearing the doctor telling my mother if they didn't find a donor I wouldn't make it. Then I slipped back into unconsciousness.

The first time I opened my eyes the room was dark, cold and full of hissing and beeping equipment. I reached over for my mom's hand and she grabbed mine. She flipped on the light over my head before she spoke.

"You really like tempting death don't you?"

Though I smiled at her words, the tears in her eyes told the real story. They hadn't found a donor.

"How much time do I have?" I've never exactly feared death. It's a part of life. We all come into this world and we all gotta go sometime. I've lived my eighteen years to the fullest. If it's my time, then I'm ready.

"You've got all of the time in the world."

"I know about needing a donor."

She lowered her head, busying her hands adjusting the blanket drooped over my lap. She was dreading telling me the truth. "We're waiting for the doctor to return with the test results." She turned her back to me, not able to look me in the face when she said the words. "You're liver was badly damaged. If you don't get a replacement then..."

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“You still didn’t answer my question.”

Sighing loudly, my mother gave her usual response to a question she didn’t have an answer for, “It’s in God’s hands.”

Silence hung between us. I was thinking about what I wanted to do in my last few hours. She was probably thinking her baby was going to die and there was nothing she could do about it.

“They tested your father and I. Hopefully one of us will be a match.”

“I can’t allow you to give your lives for mine.”

“It wouldn’t be like that. The doctor said if either of us is a match, they’d just need to take a piece to replace yours.”

The doctor interrupted our conversation. He quickly averted his glance from mine whispering something to my mother. I knew he carried bad news. Neither of my parents could give me the liver I needed to survive.

“I’ll be back in a minute sweetie.” She said to me.

I hate it when she does that. I’m not two anymore. He could have told me. Of course, wouldn’t want to patient hearing she’s going to die.

She returned within a couple of minutes. The only reason I knew was because I was staring at the clock watching my time slipping away. I didn’t say anything; I just stared blankly at her. She shook her head from side to side confirming what I already suspected.

I have family all over the place so mom and dad started a mission, contacting everyone to have them tested. I’d never been sick like this before though I’ve had my share of run-ins with near death. To my surprise, a few hours later, I was wheeled into surgery. Apparently, my cousin was a close match. She was a few years older than me and we hadn’t spoken in years, but

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her mom and my mom were really close so I guess mom guilt tripped her into taking the test.

Four hours later, the monitors in the ICU startled me from sleep. Lethargy entrapped my limbs but I still had enough strength to turn my head. I watched the nurses moving too and fro through the glass window. When one of them realized I was awake she came into the room.

“How are you feeling?”

*What a dumb question. Hello, I just got out of surgery.* “Fine,” I said.

“Your folks should be in soon. It’s almost time for visitation.”

“What about my cousin?” I managed.

She picked up my chart reviewing the information. “I’ll check for you.”

My parents came in before the nurse returned.

“How are you baby?” My father asked.

*There’s that stupid question again.* “I should be asking you the same thing. How’s Kim?”

“Doing well. She should be out of recovery in a little while. The doctor says you’re doing well too, but there’s still a chance your body will reject the liver. We’ll just have to wait and see.”

They only stayed a few more minutes, something about visitation being in short spurts for ICU patients. I was sort of glad. I was tired and wanted to sleep.

I don’t know how long I was out, but when I opened my eyes this time, more tubes protruded from my body and more monitors beeped at my head. Looks like I’m back where I started. By the look of things, my body must have rejected the liver. Oh well.

The doctor waddled his way into my room. This wasn’t the same doctor who’d informed my mother neither of them was a match. He sat in the chair next to the bed and after looking

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over my chart, he spoke.

“I have good news and bad news. Which would you prefer first?”

Finally, someone who was going to tell me what was going on instead of my parents. I am old enough to make my own decision.

“Good.” I replied.

“We have another donor. A young woman involved in a car accident. Her parents have donated her organs, including her liver. The tests have come back a match.”

“And the bad?”

“Well, since your body rejected the first transplant, the likelihood of it rejecting the second is high.”

“What are my options?”

“If you’re willing, there is an experimental drug that may keep your body from rejecting the liver. But there is no guarantee and I can’t say for sure how your body will react to the medication.”

“Do you think it’s worth a try? I mean, taking this organ means someone else will have to wait.”

“The decision’s yours. Like I said, the drug is experimental. I think you have a fifty-fifty chance of it helping.”

It only took me a moment to make my decision. I didn’t want to tempt death anymore.

“Let’s do it.”

A few days of doctors pumping obscene amounts of drugs into my system and I again opened my eyes. This time, I was in a regular hospital room. I heard voices near the door, but my view was obstructed by the wall. Calling my mother’s name, she, my father, and two adults I

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didn't recognize came around the corner.

"Shonna, there are some people here who'd like to meet you."

The man and the woman introduced themselves. They were the parents of the young lady who'd given me another change at life. My eyes filled with tears of gratitude.

"Thank you so much. You've given me a chance to live," were the only words I could manage before emotion overwhelmed me.

"We're just glad our daughter's death wasn't in vain. We know it's what she would have wanted. She always talked about donating her organs. She believed in giving and even in her death she'll continue to give through you. Just make sure you take care." The woman then turned and with her husband wrapping his arms securely around his now emotional wife they left my room.

I still visit the young lady's grave each year on the anniversary of the day I got another chance at life. I've changed my ways. I don't tempt death anymore. I'll never forget the stranger who gave me the greatest gift, and I'll never let anyone else forget her either.