

Cheated

Lizzy Lee (2013)

If I'm being honest with myself, I almost felt cheated. At the moment when he brought up the word tumor, my face paled, and I felt the world slowing down. There was no way that I could possibly have cancer.

Six weeks to live, at best. That wouldn't even allow me the chance to drink legally; it would cut me off three months early.

We would leave the hospital, and I would say nothing. My father, who usually could whip up some joke to make me laugh stupidly at him, wouldn't even be able to think of something to say. On the way home, I'd text my mother, tell her. These kinds of things should be dealt with face-to-face, but I wouldn't be in the mood for it. It was three hours from the hospital near school to the house. I wouldn't make her wait that long to hear from us. She'd assume it anyways.

I wouldn't say anything to my friends, not yet. They didn't know I had an appointment with the doctors, so they weren't worrying. I would think of ways to tell my grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and the like. I wouldn't deal with it; I'd make my parents. My job would be living life to the fullest before my three short fucking months ran up.

I would first call Jenny. She and I had been friends since middle school. The first weekend I was free, I would take a bus to visit her. I didn't usually do that sort of thing, so she would of course ask what the special occasion was. I would explain to her in the simplest way I could:

"We never truly know when we'll die. I don't want to spend my life waiting for the right moment to start living. I've procrastinated my life long enough."

She would be wise, though, and ask what was up. I would try the, "Nothing. My eyes have just finally been opened, and I'm not taking risks," explanation, but that would only make it more obvious. I would have to tell her, and at first, she wouldn't react. She would just stare at me until it sunk in, then she'd begin to tear up. Seeing her cry would finally push me to my limit, and I would burst into tears. I'd cry, not because I was dying, but because I would have to leave my best friend.

She would be mad at me, now, because I would only have three months to live, and my trip to visit her would be a waste. With news like that, there would be no way her and I could have fun and relax that weekend. She would tell me I should have told her before so that she could have been prepared to deal with it and have fun. I would ask her if that would've been better, and at her own defeat, she would admit it wouldn't have been. There's no better way to deliver this news, we would both agree.

I would have to leave, though she would try and protest. I would promise I'd be back, and she would look me in the eyes and tell me not to make such a promise. After the time I missed spending time with her during summers when I would coup up and hide from the world, I would tell her nothing could keep me from seeing her again.

I would return back to college at the dismay of my spiraling mother, but only to spend time with friends. I wouldn't go to class. I was only beginning the second semester of my junior year, and there would be no way I could focus on academics, or make it worth my time.

Telling Angela, my roommate and best friend, would be my next task. We would sneak alcohol into the dorm, some fruity mixes that gave guys reason to call us lightweights. I wasn't the type to drink or party, but Angela wouldn't think to ask of my change in heart.

Halfway into our supply, I would look her in the eye and spill the verdict. I wouldn't mean to, but alcohol makes us do things we don't always plan on doing. She would take the news well, the alcohol clouding her judgment.

She would try and convince me to tell Mark how I really felt. "You only have three months, damn it!" I would tell her it'd be a moot point, and she would reply with, "You can't leave this world without fucking someone at least once!" We would decide to spare Mark the pain of sleeping with a dying cancer patient, and decide to call Andrew instead. I didn't care for him, but if one wanted meaningless sex, he was the prime candidate at this school.

At that point, I would be drunk enough to accept the mission. Normally, I didn't dare speak to the opposite sex about these sort of things. Hence my being halfway to being a real forty-year-old virgin.

I would send Andrew a text message, telling him I felt empty inside and only he could fill the void. He could have taken it sentimentally, but there would be a ninety-nine percent chance he would take it sexually; that would be the goal. It would be close to two in the morning by now, and if he was still awake, he would be as plastered as Angela and me. He would reply, telling me he would be there in five minutes. I wouldn't even question his ability to drive.

The next morning, I would wake up to Angela storming into my room. Andrew and I would scramble to get dressed, but she wouldn't even notice. Our heads would be pounding, but the look on her face would make me forget it. She would demand I tell her my confession last night was a lie. Andrew would ask what she meant, and she would cry out, "She's dying of fucking cancer." Andrew would apologize for my inconvenience and leave.

Angela would still beg me to tell her it was all a sick, cruel joke. I would silently shake my head, wishing for the same thing in my head. She would hold on to me, and her tears would soak my sleeve. "This is the kind of thing you see in movies. You don't actually live these kinds of things," would be her argument. As if it would make God realize he shouldn't be doing this.

The next weekend, to please my parents, I would go home again. After the week I would have just had, I was probably closer to dying of cirrhosis of the liver than cancer. But it would have been the first week I really lived.

Next, I would face my grandparents, the gentlest people I knew. I would drive up to their house, and almost dread walking up to their door. It was hard enough facing my friends with this news. My grandparents would be in tears the instant they saw me, and I wouldn't be able to stay strong. I had never cried in front of my grandparents before. It would almost kill me to do so now.

I would knock on their door, and not a minute later, my grandmother would answer. She would just look at me, pull me into her arms, and not let go. I would try my hardest not to let the tears spill over, but I wouldn't be able to breathe. She would gasp for air through violent sobs, and that alone would be enough to make me lose control. We would sit on the couch, crying into each other's arms. Previous to this moment, I tried to live in a bubble thinking I would never lose

my grandparents. Saying goodbye to them wouldn't be any easier when you were the one leaving. If anything, seeing my grandmother in this much pain would be worse.

I don't know how I would do it, but I would eventually go back home. The visit with my grandparents would make this whole thing more real to me, and I would go home, still crying, and cling to my parents. I would get the image of a five-year-old clinging to their mommy on the first day of kindergarten, and it would infuriate me. They would see their mother after school. At the end of this, I wouldn't see my mother. I would be crying so hard, tears could no longer be created, my throat would be so tight, and I would hardly be able to breathe. I would think of all the fights we had when I was a teenager, and it would almost make me hate myself.

The next week, I would take a bus back to Jenny, as promised. I would almost feel relieved that I could.

She would greet me with a hug that would make me feel she would never let go. If only she could really hold me here forever, I would think. The week with Jenny would be different from a week with Angela, but it would be just as satisfying. We would do all the things we should have done on the weekends and summer vacations during middle and high school, and the breaks between semesters the last three years of college. I was a shy, almost anti-social person, though Jenny had always tried to break me from that habit. We would both be mad at me for waiting until I had weeks left to finally start living.

I would have felt content with this, because I would have finally had a life and given it meaning. But the tumors in my ovaries were benign, meaning they were non-cancerous, and I was disappointed. It was sick that I felt this way towards the lack of abnormal cells uncontrollably dividing in my body, but I soon realized why. I was waiting for a starting gun. And I knew, without something cutting my life short, giving me a deadline to have a certain host of life experiences, I would never grow some self-confidence, take risks, and open up. And because of this, I felt cheated. I would continue living, and continue procrastinating the start of a real life.