

A Life Worth Living

Eden Coffey-Cockram, aged 13, 1st prize

When life pauses there's only two choices. Play or Stop. The fast forward button of my life continuously jammed, there's never a chance to see the outcome, and why would I want to rewind? Live through the pain I've already faced. Play or Stop. But the choice must be made before the batteries run out, from then on there's no going back.

I woke to up knowing something was wrong. I knew where I was, on the damp concrete of Alfred Street, and how I'd got there. The scene of screeching tyres and glaring headlights fresh in my mind made me wince. And then I realised... where was the pain? Shouldn't I be in agony? Don't get me wrong I was glad about the whole not-hurting thing, I was a wimp when it came to discomfort, but it wasn't normal. Was it? I worked my way up my body stretching and flexing my muscles. I seemed okay. I glanced down briefly and didn't see any blood, always a good sign, although I did notice something else. With a little more confidence I examined my gangly frame. I looked like normal, wearing my signature dark skinny jeans and Kermit tee shirt; but my body was different. It was like looking at water through frosted glass, solid yet translucent. I seemed to shimmer slightly. I rubbed my eyes; blinking hoping it was a trick of the light. But when the sun filtered effortlessly threw my eyelids and I could see the dark cloud grouping above me, I knew I had changed. I stood up and ran. Not sure where I was going or if I was coming back. At that point I didn't know what I'd become, then the rain started. It fell though me like I wasn't there but it was somehow warm and comforting in the strange world I'd be dragged into. Only then did I guess; I realised what I was. I wandered scared and alone, never before had I found Bath so intimidating. I hoped and prayed that I would wake up from this dream, yet I knew it was no good. Weeks could have gone by as I drifted the streets, mingling in with crowds; it just took me a while to realise I wasn't the only one.

"Hey! You!" I called; surprised to hear my own voice after my time of silence. A boy, well a young man, about my age, strolled up Milson Street, with the same, yet more distinctive clarity about him. He turned towards me, his eyes narrowing before a smile stretched across his face; making his mint green eyes come alive. Like me, his probably once vivid features had toned down to a pastel pallet. He glided effortlessly towards me, his eyes never leaving my own as he bowed slightly. I made an awkward curtsy which made him chuckle.

And we became friends: Jesse Curtis, son of a Georgian businessman, and me, Nell Grithens daughter of an IT consultant. Both from different times, from different worlds, but both the same, in the place we loved. We even died a similar death. When he told me he'd been crushed by a horse and cart, I laughed humourlessly, our lives both ended by careless drivers.

With every day we became closer. I started to build a life here, in this strange new Bath I'd come to know and love, where everything but the people changed.

I soon meet Jesse's family or substitute the family, as they were known. But with five little words everything changed, the cosy little life Jesse, my sub-family and me had built hung in the balance.

"She's made the choice then!", Jesse's little sub-sister said looking purposely at our interlocked hands, her red ringlets bobbing with excitement. At once everyone fell silent. Jesse's hand tightened around mine, and anger filled his eyes briefly, before his face became blank, unreadable. I turned towards my new family scared by Jesse's reaction, the usual Jesse never had anything but a smile on his face.

"What choice?" I asked, my voice breaking slightly at the tension in the room. And then it was explained to me, my body was left lying in a coma on a hospital ward waiting for me to return. I could either go back to my old life or stay here, never changing, never moving on.

"But if I left, won't I just come back here when I died?" I asked,

"No" Jesse replied in a monotone, "Only the people who die before their time come here, and the rest move on to heaven or whatever you believe in. You can go and finish your life... But you can't come back." His expressionless mask faltered slightly, and I saw the sacrifice in his eyes. His usually perfectly smooth brown hair was jutting out at angles from where he ruffled it; he did this when he was stressed. He didn't want me to leave.

Looking at myself, as someone else would see me was strange. I looked pale tired, lost in a world of beeping monitors, and tubes feeding me fluids. My Dad sat firmly next to my body, his hands rested on mine, and I yearned for its warmth. With Jesse's hand still in my left, I carefully put my right hand tightly in my Dads. I knew it was time to make up my mind, by how could I choose? The love on both sides so strong, so different, yet both the same.

It was time.

Change could be good, or so I thought. But as the seconds tick continuously forward, the stronger more defined you become, making it harder to turn back. But when you're old life offers so much, and the others in your position would give anything to have a choice. That choice, between living, or existing, isn't the decision already made. Living or existing? Is there ever a choice?

I let go of his hand.