Palliative and Supportive Care

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Decision Day

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Poetry

Cite this article: Xiang DH (2022). Decision Day. *Palliative and Supportive Care* **20**, 614–614. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478951521001905

Received: 2 November 2021
Accepted: 17 November 2021

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She reaches for the tissues that I hand to her gently, carefully wiping tears off her cheeks. This is D-Day, the doctor tells her. We can make a good case for her, he says. By year's end, you should have a new heart. You can go back to college, you can have a normal life. She crumples the tissues in her right hand. Her left pulls a strand of hair out of her face. Put me on the list, she says. I will do whatever it takes.

The doctor tells her the average life expectancy is around 10 years. The body can only tolerate newness for so long. Miracles can happen, but are not prescribed. Instead, we grab fistfuls of hope whenever we can. We celebrate the little victories. With artificial means, she can likely live much longer. But she will have machinery in her, strapped around her. It will be a burden, a lower quality of life. Her parents urge her to reconsider. They do not want to outlive their only child.

We give them some time alone. In the next room, I feel a man's wrist. I feel no pulse, just a constant whirring. He smiles at me, and points to the metal around his waist, batteries laying beside his left arm. I lived a good life, he tells me. I have nothing to be sorry for. The anxiety of charging, the rashes and soreness, he has made peace with. He is waiting to see his first grandchild, and then he will move on. He knows he will be reunited with his wife soon, he murmurs to me with a small smile. I have so much to tell her, he says.

In the exam room, she says that her decision has not changed. I notice that she has given the tissue box to her parents. Her expression is steady, with the sadness of a moon realizing sunrise is coming. Which is to say, not sad at all, but beautiful. The doctor repeats the pros and cons. Asks her if this is her final decision. She says yes. That endless miracles have already occurred. To be speaking with you, to have my words take shape in memory. To hear the footsteps echoing behind the door, mimicked by the beating in my chest. And if it means only 10 more years, then so be it. Life is already short. And so, so joyful.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478951521001905 Published online by Cambridge University Press