

All Good Things Come To An End

I remember exactly when it hit me.

The staff had just called for all ticket holders in our seat category to go through the security checks, and everyone was frantically gathering their belongings before hurrying to their feet. The anxiety came like the tide, slowly but surely, creeping and washing over me. *This is it*, I told myself. *The day that I had been looking forward to for so long*. In a matter of hours, I would finally see them perform live. Yet, there was a part of me that wasn't quite looking forward to it, and I couldn't figure out why.

As the lights dimmed and the band took their places on stage, the tide swept in again, this time stronger and steadier. *This is it*, I firmly reiterated to myself. *The concert is starting, and I have to enjoy it while it lasts*. I had to savour the moment, memorise the way the strong bass reverberated around the stadium, the way the humid air felt against my skin, the way the crowd swelled and roared with the beat of the music. I had to make the moment stay, because it'd be a long time before I'd ever experience something as good as this again. I hated the fact that this moment would end.

But that's the thing, isn't it? All good things come to an end. The passing of time is inevitable — it waits for no one, and I hated my complete lack of control over it. In a desperate attempt to rebel against nature, I channelled this anxiety into a form of attempted mindfulness, to memorise every single aspect of the good times and carve it into my memory.

Yet, the irony is that when I look back on these good times, I can barely remember them. I try to recall how I felt during the concert, but I only remember the anxiety. Despite my attempts to memorise that moment, I don't remember how the band looked up close, performing the songs I loved. I don't remember how it felt like singing along with the crowd, shouting the lyrics at the top of my lungs. I don't remember how everyone around me looked as the band made their speeches during the closing moment. I don't remember anything at all.

I had wanted so badly to enjoy the good times and make them stay, but in the process of attempting to do so, I had allowed them to slip away.

To some extent, all of us crave control. It is our safety blanket in a world that is uncertain, in a universe that does not care about us. When it comes to time and its passage, we crave control even more, because it is the only way we know to deal with its inevitability and unstoppable. The river of time is ever-flowing, its current strong. We may obstinately stand in its way and try to go against the tide, but eventually we will tire and be swept away.

In my futile attempts to immortalise my concert experience, I was standing in the way of the river of time. By trying to assert control, I had given in to the anxiety and fear, allowing it to control me I couldn't truly be in the moment, to experience and to feel; I was trying to control something that was not meant to be controlled, and inevitably I would fail.

The truth is, the only way to stay afloat is to go with the flow, to accept the tide and allow it to carry us wherever it goes. The river of time is so much more everlasting and bigger than we are, and we will never win against it. Time will forever be beyond our control, and the only thing we can change is our response to it. In a sense, the only way we will ever have anything close to control over time is to accept that we have zero control over it, and to take it one step at a time and truly feel each and every step.

Life comes and goes, and we will move on. The passing of time is inevitable and it waits for no one, but maybe we don't need it to. Perhaps one day, if the band comes to Singapore to perform again, things will be different. The tide of anxiety will not overwhelm me; I will embrace it and live in the moment. I will focus instead on how bright the members smile as they perform, how our voices echo around the stadium as we sing along, and how it feels like to be surrounded by so much shared love and joy. I will know that all good things come to an end, and that's okay.

Word count: 794 words

We Only Live Once — The Big Bang Theory

No one *wants* to die; it happens whether we want it to or not. The fear of dying is so jarring that most people avoid thinking about it entirely; it gives us some comfort, perhaps, to pretend that we can live forever.

As a 16-year-old, death ranks pretty low on my list of things to worry about, below homework, projects, and exams. It seems so far away that it almost seems impossible.

There is a place, however, that tells otherwise – *Pointe de Dinan*. If I close my eyes, I can almost imagine myself standing there now, the shy caress of the ocean breeze in my hair, the cadence of waves brushing against the rocks below.

It was June, and my host mum for the immersion programme had taken me for an hour's drive in her cramped Toyota, only gracing me with a secretive grin when I asked where we were going in my stilted French. In the silence, my mind wandered for the thousandth time to the pile of homework I had left untouched in Singapore.

We arrived at the bottom of a hill. She led me up the steep incline, weaving through whispers of passage through the grass with an astonishing agility for her age.

When we finally reached the top, the ocean unfurling before my eyes, I felt my heart lurch; there were no railings, let alone any semblance of protection, to prevent me from tumbling down the cliff and into the Celtic sea.

My legs stiffened as a primal fear took over me, four-letter words running through my head. I had never been afraid of heights, but the lack of restraints distilled the once pleasurable thrill into nausea.

My host mum, however, was completely unfazed, perching herself on a rock near the edge of the cliff. *Is she crazy?* I thought hysterically. She beckoned for me to join her, struggling to hide her amusement at my horrified expression. "*C'est sûr*¹," she reassured,

but my common sense told me it would only take one stray pebble to send me plummeting to my demise.

I did *not* want to join her.

But when she came to my side and took my hand, giving me an encouraging smile, I felt myself waver. That hopeful, incandescent smile was all it took for me to change my mind.

My skin buzzed in trepidation as I followed her. Those 8 steps to the brink seemed like eternity, my hands trembling as I neared the precipice.

Once I inched myself carefully onto the rock, an arm's length away from the 200-foot drop, she patted my knee.

*"C'est beau, non?"*²

I was delirious with fear. The sun and the sea and the sky swallowed me whole; I felt like I was floating in the air, every nerve in my body alight with adrenaline. I gathered the courage to peer down the cliff, and my head spun at the truth I saw down by the rocks below - *I could literally die now*. If anything went wrong, if I slipped on a stone or lost my balance, everything would be over.

Sitting there, time seemed to stand still.

After I descended the hill, I found myself wondering what would have happened if I had fallen. I didn't *want* to fall, of course I didn't, but if I *had* fallen, I wondered if I would have been okay with it. If I could have told myself honestly that I was happy with the life I had had, and that I could leave with no regrets.

To be honest, I wasn't ready to die. And that was exactly the wake-up call I needed.

¹It's safe

²Isn't it beautiful?

Being conscious of one's mortality is a remarkable thing. At times, our fear of death paralyses us, overwhelming us with the reality that we haven't achieved what we had set out to do in our lives.

Yet, it is also essential. It helps us to see the bigger picture, and to narrow our focus to what's important to us. No one can predict when life will be snatched away from our grasp; how can we afford to waste our time fretting over the little things when there could be so little time left to do what matters more? To spend time with our family; to tell someone we love them; to leave our mark on this world. After all, we only live once.

Arriving back home, I found myself hugging my parents a little tighter, all school-related anxiety gone from my mind; the near-death experience had shed a light on what truly mattered to me.

Every now and then, I remind myself of that day to ground me to the present. Living is easier in the light of death, for consciousness of our mortality helps us live freely, as if every day were our last.