

*The Illusion of Life*

The concept of death becomes more plausible when the illusion of longevity has vanished. Everyone must die someday. However, for some unfortunate souls that fateful day comes sooner than expected. It will soon come to pass that two of these very souls will find out their comfortable life was not destined to last forever.

A young girl around twenty sits stoically on a stiff chair in the middle of a whitewashed, disconcerting building known as The Truman Heart Center. Her name appears to be Illya, but at the moment only one name is important to her: Brugada Syndrome. The cardiologist affirms her suspicion that something is wrong with her heart and indifferently lets her know that sudden death is a high probability. Illya's anxiety proves itself to be evanescent as she puts on a persona of courage. As she reenters her busy life, the rest of the world carries on as usual while her world shatters into thousands of broken pieces that can never be mended back together. Physical wounds are devastating, but nothing is more detrimental than wounds of the mind and spirit; at this moment, although she doesn't broadcast it, Illya's spirit grows faint just as her weak heart refuses to beat normally.

Just around the other side of the small clinic a similar young man bursts through the doors of the Oncology department. His impromptu visit was spurred by a recent scare of coughing up blood. His name seems to be Ashton but he is too anxious to remember it when prompted by a concerned nurse. He busies himself with his thoughts: maybe it's nothing special, maybe it's curable, and for God's sake could someone turn down the ringing in his ears? As a doctor gets back with him on the situation he reminds the poor boy to pay for his last visit whilst

revealing to him that “Oh! By the way you have lung cancer and it is unfortunately too late for treatment”. As the doctor bounds back to his office, Ashton turns towards the exit doors, cautiously padding his way there just as his soul draws ever closer to the menacing gates that once closed, never open again.

As Illya and Ashton spend their days reflecting on their lamentable situations, the time that used to drag slowly on passes at a now frightening pace. As Ashton spends his limited time taking aimless walks down the street, the sound of a woman crying directs his attention to a rusty metal bench near a park. There he finds Illya, a frail woman in blatant distress. Ashton takes it upon himself to sit next to her and assist however he can. Illya doesn't react to her newfound bench-buddy. “My name is Ashton.” Illya hears the stranger softly mutter to her. “I'm Illya.” She mumbles and raises her head to look at the strange man. As the two make eye contact no more words are necessary. Their souls intertwine like two parallel rivers reaching to finally meet each other. Breathless, the two see a myriad of memories flash before them and for a brief moment all is calm. Illya doesn't find herself staring into the deep chocolate eyes of a man doomed by fate. She sees a young boy riding his bike for the first time, a cautious teenager caring for his friends, and a lonely college student scared to face the fact that he has no goals in life. Ashton isn't staring into the bright aqua eyes of a woman faced with death. He sees a little girl donning huge glasses and braces, a grateful middle schooler crying over her new puppy, and a fearful woman too scared to live her life like she wants. For this brief, blissful moment, the two find solace in their mutuality. Though no words are spoken, the two come to know each other better than they could ever dream.

As day turns to night, and the moon shines brighter than ever before, the two souls traverse together from this world and into the next. With so many words left unsaid, and so many

things left undone, Illya and Ashton leave their regrets behind them and fate claims its new victims. If they had only known what was coming, they wouldn't have let the illusion of longevity control their lives. If they had only known, maybe they would have lived like they were dying.