

They gave me thirty-six hours to live. I'm adrift in a nightmare as they talk about grief counselors and hospice. No one prepares you for the fragility of life, nor the urgency of its inevitable end. Unfulfilled dreams consume my thoughts, each as insignificant as a deflated balloon. Because now, more than ever, all I want is to live. A nurse joins us in the exam room that already feels suffocating. She apologizes, and mutters something about mixed-up files and identical names. Confused, I burst into tears of relief, before I'm overwhelmed with grief for whoever death is pursuing today.



Today's story was inspired by a [writing prompt](#). It started out sounding serious, but at one point I imagined the person with the bad news dying their hair a vibrant shade of orange and then their mother asking if their homework was done, or some other trivial task we dislike dealing with.

A comical ending didn't fit the dramatic opening, and I spent some time wondering what one would do if they learned they only had thirty-six hours to live. It made me consider bucket lists people make filled with grand ambitions. My mind wandered to friends who've received life-altering news, and their priority was fighting for their life.

Then I thought about the life-changing news we received years ago. We experienced both relief and grief simultaneously, minds whirled with all the plans for the future. Vacations laid aside, parties adjusted to meet the needs of the afflicted, even everyday conversations were impacted.

I imagined the alternate possibilities if a nurse had entered the room and casually uttered the word, "Whoops."

If you think it never happens, I'm here to attest it does. Back on the island, my mother-in-law faced a health crisis that landed her in the emergency room. When I went to pick her up, I

bombarded the doctor with a half dozen questions about the new medications, flustering the poor woman. Her response was, "She only takes an aspirin a day."

I disagreed, and the doctor stormed back to the small cubical my mother-in-law occupied and inquired about the aspirin. A voice from the curtained cubical beside us said, "That's me."

The Reluctant Author

