



I'll Fight 'Til the End

Breanna Shanley writes a powerful poem about growing up with HIV.

August 14, 2024 By Breanna Shanley

A baby is born with a shocking fate,
a beautiful face,
"Oh, but such a shame,"
the doctors say,
"limited are her days."

I didn't come for a fight, but I will fight 'til the end.

Five years is the time they gave her to live,
her body filled with
a grave illness.
So, they Made A Wish:
"Let these days be filled with happiness."

I didn't come for a fight, but I will fight 'til the end.

The child grew up, yet still doomed to die,
but so full of life,
met the world with wide eyes
unaware of her strife,
dreaming at night that she could fly.

I didn't come for a fight, but I will fight 'til the end.

Long nights in hospital, testing her blood,
testing her brain,
testing her strength;
her tears fall like rain
just from the pain,
not from the fear.

She watches the needles pierce right through her skin,
steal blood from her veins
year after year
she won't look away;
doctors shy from her gaze
knowing her fate.

I didn't come for a fight, but I will fight 'til the end.

Everyone's so surprised that she's still alive,
a miracle child.
and so, they decide
once she reaches grade 5
to tell her just why she fought for her life.

Perched on a hospital bed swinging her feet,
waiting to see
what could possibly be
so important today;

They all watch her silently,
trying to gauge what she'll say.

As it turns out, she says nothing,
just thinking away,
while they tell her the reasons
she's been living this way.

"It's not normal, your life,
all these hospital stays.

Not everyone has to
take these medicines every day.

Where most kids are healthy,
your body decays."

She stares at the floor and quietly says,

"I kinda figured that out anyway,

But I don't really care."

I don't care that I'm different,

My friends will understand.

We learned about this in school,

This disease that I have.

The video said that it's perfectly fine.

They can't get it from sneezing,

or kissing, or—"

"No, no, my dear child, you don't understand,

Nothing in life really goes how you planned.

You must not tell anyone,

Not anyone!

Do you hear?

If you tell them,

You'll be hated,
You'll be shunned
You'll be feared.

People don't like what you have,
It's better off secret."

"But I have some nice friends,
and I know they would keep it—"

"They would not keep it secret,
They would let it all out,
They would tell, one by one,
'Til the whole school found out.

Is that what you want?

To be bullied and teased?

To be a joke every day?

Just listen, dear, please.

You cannot tell anyone.

Just leave it at that.

You cannot have sex,

if you even know what that is yet.

You cannot fall in love

because who'd love you back

with a disease like that?

No, my dear child,

life is different for you.

Luckily though,

you're so good in school.

Just keep to your books

like you always do,

and you'll still come to see us

every month or two.

Now, how do you feel?

It's a lot to take in."

"I feel all right,"

She said, and she smiled.

But she sat on the bed and thought for a while.

I don't know what sex is,

but I don't think I want to.

I'm just 10 years old

but what can I do?

Maybe they're right,

it's better off secret.

Who can I really trust,

who do I know that can keep it?

I guess I'll just keep doing the same,

the same things I love to do every day.

After all, not much has changed.

I still love my cats, and my books,

and I still have my brain.

I know that I'm smart.

My teachers, my Gramma,

they said I'll go far one day.

I'll go as far as I want.

I'll be a vet like I planned.

I'll just carry my secret

like a ghost in my hand.

I didn't come for a fight,

but I'll fight 'til the end.

"I feel all right," she said, and jumped off the bed.

The child grows up with no plans to die
but so full of life,
meets the world with wide eyes,
now aware of her strife.

I didn't come for a fight, but I'll fight 'til the end.

