

Best Friends by James Watts

The news was never good. There were anxiety-inducing delays and ambiguous results that had to be analyzed and discussed. More samples were required. New tests. The outcome was always grim. She was only 17, and she had leukemia.

For him, the waiting room had become a second home. He knew the nurses and doctors by name. He even knew how many chocolate bars had been purchased from the vending machine since his last visit. He recognized the other patients by face, if not by name. Most importantly, he knew that she was fighting for her life—and that she needed him by her side.

They met in eighth-grade English class with Mrs. Kaufman. She wasn't the most remarkable teacher, but she had introduced her students to Shakespeare—specifically *Romeo and Juliet*. These were turbulent times for teens in the classroom and Verona. Like the titular characters, their budding love was both accidental and innocent.

When they read their lines aloud for Mrs. Kaufman, a spark ignited:

Romeo:

Juliet:

That spark grew into their first date, then their first kiss. People said it was just “puppy love,” destined to fade. But four years later, they were still together, proving everyone wrong.

At 14, they were healthy and full of life. Both were on the track team, both swam competitively, and both excelled in school. They were popular and well-liked by their peers. But in 11th grade, things started to change.

She felt exhausted, and her lap times began to slow. At first, she chalked it up to growing pains, but she decided to see a doctor when she couldn't concentrate on studying for her January exams. One blood test later, her world was turned upside down.

Suddenly, everything felt pointless—school, relationships, swimming. She was dying. When she told him, he was stunned. The dreams they had shared, their plans for the future, were all consumed by a vicious and unrelenting enemy.

He hesitated, but only briefly. Once he made up his mind, he stayed by her side, unwavering. He was furious when a friend suggested he should leave her and move on with his life.

She endured appointments, treatments, tests, and endless waiting for results, and he was there for all of it. Together, they researched her illness and became self-taught

experts on leukemia. They learned the jargon, the history, the treatments, and the odds for young patients like her. Knowledge gave them hope, and hope gave her a psychological edge in the fight.

Even through her illness, she wasn't one to give up. Together, they worked on their school subjects, and their grades actually improved. By graduation in June, she had lost most of her hair. In solidarity, he shaved his head—and so did many of the boys in their graduating class.

But the latest report wasn't good. There were grim faces, shaking heads, and glassy eyes among the medical staff. The disease was relentless, attacking in unpredictable ways. The doctors were at a loss, but she understood her condition better than anyone. Though she shared everything with him, she couldn't describe the feeling of being consumed from the inside out or what it was like to try to sleep, knowing that a relentless monster coursed through her veins.

He did everything he could to support her. He held her hair back when she vomited after chemo. He read to her when she couldn't focus. He fed her when she was too weak to lift a spoon. And most importantly, he listened—listened to her dreams, her fears, and everything in between.

She died at 10:15 a.m. on a rainy Monday morning in March. She had fought valiantly, but the disease finally overwhelmed her. Cornered by cancer, there was nowhere left to go but the "Great Beyond."

He gave a speech at her funeral that left no dry eyes in the room. Her family wept openly; her father was inconsolable. Her friends mourned the loss of someone so vibrant, so full of promise. He was the last to leave her graveside.

Yet, life continued. At the funeral parlour, he met a girl who had come to say goodbye to her grandfather. They went to a movie the following evening and have been together ever since.

I guess that's life.

Analyze and then write an analytical essay on this story. Use the outline on the English page of the website.