

Flying Free

A Poetic Response to Illness



Rachel Sutcliffe

Flying Free

A Poetic Response to Illness

Rachel Sutcliffe

Flying Free
A Poetic Response to Illness
Copyright © 2018 by Rachel Sutcliffe

All Rights Reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the author except for brief quotations in a book review.

First printing, 2018

ISBN:

Published by Misfitbooks Press

Introduction

I have suffered from a serious immune disorder since my early twenties, throughout this time writing has been my therapy, it's kept me from going insane

I always loved reading and creative writing. As a child I had a great imagination and loved inventing stories. As I got older I also began to write poems as well as various articles for the local paper.

For a while my writing took a back seat as I discovered the joys of foreign language learning and went on to complete a degree in French and Spanish and spend two years teaching abroad; nevertheless I remained an avid reader.

My interest in the English Language was reawakened when studying for a PGCE and then an MA, both in English. Whilst I was undertaking these studies I was struggling with my health. A long, difficult period of diagnosis followed, which eventually led to me having to leave full time employment.

Since then I have really begun to concentrate on my writing again. I am an active member of the British Haiku Society and several online writing groups and have had my work published both online and in print. Writing is a great emotional outlet and something I can continue to enjoy and be successful with despite the limitations of chronic ill health.

I hope this collection of work offers an insight into debilitating, incurable illness and provides others with some of the comfort and solace that writing it has given me.

Rachel Sutcliffe

<http://projectwords11.wordpress.com/>

First it took my finger nails and then it took two stone,
Then it took my energy and had me flown back home.
Next it took my relationship and my freedom to roam,
Then it took my fertility, the future I'd made my own.
It even stole my memory and weakened every bone,
It almost took my sanity, never leaving me alone.
In exchange it gave me focus, the present my only zone,
And it gave me courage, to brave this path unknown.



This book is dedicated to the family and friends who have stood by me over the years and helped me stay strong.

In memory of February 21 2001

One day in February I took the train south

Le Havre-Paris

Paris –Bordeaux.

Time to swap students

And marking

For chatting and chilling.

One day in February

I stepped off the train

And the arms of a friend wrapped round me

As the city I loved held me close.

Next day in February I woke to sunshine

And shaking

As I staggered

To the shower room

Legs folded

And I fell

To the floor.

That day in February I realised

All

Was not

Well

As I tried to stand

Sweat soaked and spinning.

That day in February I flew home

For treatment

To get better

And return.

Each year in February

As I wake

At home

I remember

One day in February

I took the train south...

Have you

Have you ever
Had your new life packed in boxes
And airmailed home?
Have you ever
Listened to your doctor break the news
And had your world come crashing down?
Have you ever
Dreamt of holding your child in your arms
But known it will never happen?
Have you ever
Wondered just how much more
You can lose?
Have you ever
Thought 'I can't do this anymore'
But still carried on?

I have
Have you?

Not me

Where am I now?

Why am I here?

This isn't

Where

I want

To be.

Who am I now?

How is this me?

This isn't

Who

I want

To be.

This can't be me

Here where I am?

I never

Wanted

This

For me.

The Lodger

It starts
As a passing worry
Nothing more.

Then it reoccurs
The fleeting concern
And reoccurs

A nagging trouble.
Each time you feed it
A little more thought

And so it grows,
Swelling stronger
Lodging itself

Firmly
In your skull.
And still you feed it,

And so it seeps
Making endless circuits
Through your mind.

And now you can't
Not feed it,
So it invades

Every waking moment,
Fills
Every sleepless night.

You've no escape,
Anxiety.

Monday

Normally I rise as early
As my body lets me.

Not on Mondays.
On Mondays
I rise at dawn.

Normally I get ready
In the time it takes.

Not on Mondays.
On Mondays I get ready
Racing the clock.

Normally morning rush hour
Happens to others.

Not on Mondays.
On Mondays morning rush hour
Slows me down.

Normally I spend my morning
At home.

Not on Mondays.
On Mondays I spend my morning
In hospital.

Normally
I love the morning.

Not on Mondays.
On Mondays,
I cry.

Monday
Is treatment day.

Cold longings

Nurses move
Steadily,
From patient to patient,
As the monitors by our beds
Beep in turn.

The tea lady
Wheels her trolley
Up and down
The ward,
‘Tea, coffee, biscuit?’

‘Just some water for me, please.’

I crave the coldness

‘There you go love.’

I sip,
Eyes closed,
Pretending
The tepid offering
Is freshly chilled.

Will you?

You say,
'We just have to hope.'

But I can't,
Can't even hope.
I'm too tired,
Of trying.

After so many
Steps back,
I can't
See forward.

I'm just
Too busy
Getting through.

So I say,
'Hope for me.'

Sleepy eyed

Sleepy eyed,
but through my window
I see
life carry on.

So many hours
spent resting.

Yet life tires me
steals my strength.

But I remember
when life
was to be lived.

I rub my eyes,
head downstairs
give life another try.

Moments later
it seems,
it's bedtime.

Tomorrow
I'll keep on trying.

Coffee and cakes

Eyes lose focus
Mind drifts away
Far from this,

Far from the noisy cafe
Far from our coffee and cake
Far from you.

Body tenses
Face contorts in pain
Hit by the horror within,

‘Where have you gone?’
You say, and I smile,
Here and now is all that matters.

Stone Walls

Day by day
You chip away,
Chip by chip
You remove each brick,
Brick by brick
You demolish the walls,

My walls.

You broke in,
But you won't
Break me.

Storm at sea

Dedicated to my family and friends

My boat and I
Ride
The rolling waves.

Sailing through the calm days
Makes the journey
Worth it.

Though the rough ones
Always threaten
To sink us.

Waves lash,
Soaking us
In salty spray.

Sails creak,
We lunge
Drunkenly.

The waves
Are winning,
For a while.

Till we righten,
And sail on
My boat and I.

‘But,’ you ask,

'When we can't
Be righted?'

And I say,
'Then you calm the seas
You are the anchor.'

To keep us steady,
Strong.
To face
The next storm.

Flying free

Seagulls
Swoop and soar
Through white clouds,
Calling shrilly
From above.

Blue sky
Soaks seamlessly
Into a sea
Of gently
Lapping waves.

Moored boats
Bob steadily
Up and down,
Sails creaking
In the breeze.

The air
Tastes damp
And salty
On my tongue.

In my mind
That's where I am

Not here,
Laid under glaring lights
Listening to machines
Whirr and beep.

Not here.
In this hospital bed
Chained still
By tubes and drips.

In my mind
I fly free.

Some of these poems have appeared in:

Have you, Monday, Cold Longings, & Flying Free

The Survivor's Guide To Bedlam, by Brian Wrixon & John Hirst &
Poets with Voices Strong, 2012

The Lodger

A New Ulster Northern Ireland Literary and Arts Ezine, Issue 5,
February 2013