

THE BALD AND THE BEAUTIFUL

By JJ Jonas

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CAST: one female

A teenage girl named MARIANNA carefully removes a colorful scarf from her head to reveal that SHE is bald. SHE opens a makeup case before her and lifts from it a crown, admires herself in the mirror and then frowns frugally, appraising her own appearance, but without any sign of depression or low self-esteem.

****Most people performing this piece will have hair. The words and the actor's body language will create the illusion. The crown may be pantomimed.***

MARIANNA

I think it might have looked better with hair, but still... not bad, not bad at all. Good bone structure (***SHE passes her hands over her cheekbones with upward strokes, still appraising***), yes, very good bone structure (***SHE then lifts the crown and strokes over the top of her sparse head***), yes, even here, good bone structure. (***SHE smiles***) Now, how many people would look this good almost bald? (***SHE laughs at herself humorously, self-amused and with a sense of pride.***)

(SHE sets the crown aside and selects some lipstick from the makeup case and applies it meticulously, first with a lipstick pencil and then the filler. SHE tilts her head in all directions, examining the angles of reflection in her mirror.)

You might think me vain, but I honestly think I am pretty. (***SHE smiles knowingly, but not too smugly***)

Yes, even without the hair. (***one more look in the mirror***) Absolutely stunning. Have you ever seen such a winning smile?

It wasn't always there, you know. I think my smile is more beautiful today than before I got sick. (***pause***) I think... I think it's because it is more... real. (***SHE looks in the mirror again and finds herself smiling genuinely at the reflected image***)

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(Slightly pensive) It took a long time to learn to smile this way... a long time. But maybe, just maybe, it was worth it. **(Looking back up)** I did have some help, you know.

(SHE digs through the makeup case to bring up three locks of hair, each tied in a separate colored ribbon. One is a chestnut brown and the other two are a shining strawberry auburn. SHE admires them cherishingly)

You won't believe what good friends I have. **(SHE set the locks of hair down beside her gently, smiling)** The best.

When I was first diagnosed with leukemia, I thought it was the end of the world. **(pause)** Well, now that's not quite true. At first, I just didn't believe it. Denial, my doctor called it. Then I went through the tragic heroine phase, I think. Romanticized it. But it is rather difficult to feel romantic and beautiful when vomit is dripping from your lip. **(Slight beat)** I'm sorry, it's just true. There is just not much romantic about chemotherapy treatments and hospital visits and needles and a churning stomach. It is not even a pleasant experience. **(SHE looks directly at audience wryly and her tone changes from teen slang to an older, wiser voice of experience)** What a euphemism. What a joke. We are given terms like 'oh, this might cause a bit of discomfort,' or 'you might experience some slight queasiness.' The truth is you're wrenching your guts out and your insides are on fire and you never felt closer to hell. It is not discomfort. That's the word they use so you won't get 'freaked out' before you go in. It's a little like saying, "Now, Marianna, I'm going to hit you with a sledgehammer numerous times. You may experience some discomfort."

Maybe I'm being a bit harsh on the medical profession, but you know, I'd rather have known "straight up" what to expect. I would have been more prepared... and felt less betrayed. Yeah, I know. They want to keep your mind in a positive state, keep all the feel-good endorphins flowing as long as possible. Because when the cold reality sets in and you're throwing up and your hair is falling out on the floor in clumps as you're hugging the toilet or drooling over some steel bedpan, there's very little chance of producing anything that makes you feel good.

You go through all the typical emotions, only they are not typical to you. Only to those who have seen them in a thousand patients before, right? And you start to hate their cheery dispositions, promoting positive attitudes and you start to snarl a bit. Baring your teeth at them, all the

nurses, every medical technician, every intern who sees you as a statistical learning experience, no matter how well-meaning they are.

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