

# Futures

## We regret to inform you that your choice of Deathday is no longer available

A change of pace. By Dawn Bonanno



ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

**H**ilda Evelyn Astor opened her morning mind-messages on 2 April 4242 to a notice from Fountain of Youth, Inc. that ruined her day. *We regret to inform you that your choice of Deathday is no longer available.*

"It's my 400th birthday," she complained when Chloe in customer service answered her call. "Surely, you can find a way to fit me in?"

"I am so sorry this happened to you on such an important day." Chloe's voice was chipper in her mind. The visual was rich and vibrant, clearly showing the sympathy in the young woman's face. The image was clearer when Hilda looked at a plain white wall, but it worked nearly as well as she gazed at the Arizona sky. "And I'm afraid the schedule is completely booked."

"When is the next Deathday available?" Hilda kept her temper in check. Patience would yield better results.

"Not for another 3 years, ma'am."

"Well, that won't do, at all. How am I supposed to wait until then?"

"Have you tried international travel?"

"Who hasn't?" Hilda moved out onto the sunny balcony. It was a beautiful day, with a warm breeze carrying the scent of desert roses. A perfect day to say good-bye to everyone. She'd already sent out all the invitations. All 1,562 of her descendants were going to be on her video feed in two hours. She sipped her mimosa, disappointed that she'd splurged on the orange-peach-mango juice for what was supposed to be her last breakfast. All that hype, and the drink was ruined.

"Have you tried every ice-cream flavour?" Chloe asked.

"Twice."

"What about a hydro-train tour? There are more than —"

"I am not interested in distractions," Hilda said sharply. "I am simply done. Immortality has lost its spark."

The woman's voice softened. "I am deeply sorry we cannot accommodate your Deathday request, Mrs Astor. If you don't want to reschedule, is there something else I can do for you?"

"Are you certain the Deathday Cocktail is the only way to reverse the Fountain therapy?"

"Yes, ma'am, it's foolproof."

Hilda snorted. "Interesting choice of words." "Sorry?"

"Here's the problem, Chloe," Hilda said and paused to sip her sinfully sweet mimosa. She was going to enjoy it, whether or not the day, year or century were ruined. "My son had the Fountain Effect therapy when I did. He's forever 33 years old and looks like a Greek god. You know how many kids he's fathered in the

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past 100 years alone? I've lost count. And those kids grew up to have kids, and their kids, and now I have 1,500 descendants, and there is no way I will be able to knit blankets for all 472 babies due in the next 9 months."

"You knit? I didn't think anyone did that anymore."

"Of course I knit. Every new baby in my line gets a blanket. Until now. I'm bored of knitting, bored of reading, bored of games, and there isn't a country I haven't visited less than three times. What solution does Fountain of Youth have for someone who has thoroughly enjoyed her extended life and is simply ready for her Deathday?"

"As compensation for the inconvenience", Chloe said, "we can offer you a weekly shipment of yarn until your Deathday arrives."

"Can I choose the colours?"

"Absolutely."

Hilda grunted. "That helps, but it's not enough. I need a challenge. Life is too easy. Everyone is too happy."

Chloe sighed. "Not everyone, Mrs Astor. You should hear half the calls I take. Once upon a time, people were surprised by their death. Now they get to choose when it happens, and they are miserable about it."

Hilda set her glass down. "You don't say."

"Honestly. You've been kind about it, but this mix-up happens all the time. Between you and me, Fountain of Youth had no idea how quickly immortality would bore some people."

"Chloe, it sounds like you need a break. Some R&R. When was the last time you took a vacation?"

"Mrs Astor, I'm not allowed to talk about my personal life, it's unprofessional."

"This is just between you and me, Chloe. I vented to you, now it's your turn."

Chloe's face twisted in conflict, but then she nodded. "I started a sand collection, but I've only been to six beaches. I've been too tired from working to bother with travel at the weekend."

"Can you take a day off? Even immortality

doesn't last forever."

"I haven't taken the therapy yet." Chloe paused, silent for a long moment. "I just haven't had time to decide."

"You'll never make the decision if you're stuck in that cubby hole talking to miserable folks all day. Chloe, let's trade places."

"You ... want my job?"

"The chances of talking to someone other than my kin is pretty high, right?"

"Sure?"

Hilda downed the last of her mimosa. "Tell your supervisor. I'm coming in, with my knitting needles. Order my yarn, and I'll talk to people all day. You take that hydro-train tour and visit every beach your heart desires. I'll be sitting at your desk, waiting to hear all about it."

**Dawn Bonanno** suffers from an obsession with pens, paper and fixing things, so it only makes sense that she writes stories. When her feline overlords allow, she blogs at [www.dmbonanno.com](http://www.dmbonanno.com).

## THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

**Dawn Bonanno reveals the inspiration behind *We regret to inform you that your choice of Deathday is no longer available*.**

Many of my stories are about death, sacrifice and relationships. Deathday explores all three with some dark issues behind its light-hearted tone. As I sculpt my characters, I try to flesh out who they are, and put in something of my own experience to bring them to life.

How many times have we wished our loved ones, or ourselves, had more time? What would we pay to obtain that extra time for ourselves? Much like Chloe, I would love to visit every beach, and fill my soul with the beauty this world offers far from cities of steel and glass.

Hilda though, she's been grandmothered out of usefulness. She clings to her knitting, determined to stake a place in her family history, offering love where it won't suffocate her kin, to the point it's suffocating her. This is the end that I fear. And just for this moment, I hope I can be like Hilda, reaching out beyond my own discomfort to bring joy to someone else.

Fountain of Youth, Inc. is its own character, and did not have the foresight to consider that maybe folks don't want to live forever. It became a stand-in for much that is wrong with the world today, and the helplessness and the doom-scrolling. A society that doesn't fix its flaws will spend eternity reliving them. If it has that much time.

My fear of death has never been about how much time I have left, but how I choose to spend it. After a lifetime of working hard, my father retired because of cancer, and died battling it. My mother spent the remainder of her time depressed. We don't get to choose our ends, but we can choose what comes before it.

Although I will probably die with a pen in my hand and ink on my fingers, I hope the Hildas of this world are sharing their love, and the Chloes are with their loved ones, collecting fine sand and drinking in ocean breezes.

