The adult I may have become

Sarah Swainstion

I sometimes wonder if I had not become mentally ill. At seventeen I was head girl at school, doing well in my A-level course and on target for entry to medical school. From eighteen to twenty I was a medical student, doing reasonably well and enjoying life. At the age of twenty, I suddenly and unexpectedly crashed into a depression that lasted several months and required ECT even to begin to lift it. At twenty-two I returned to medical school better, but a different person. Once you have looked into that black empty hole, the memories never quite fade.

At the age of twenty-one. It was brought home to me by a film Shine, which is about a brilliant young pianist whose future is suddenly lost contact with some of my friends but it never occurred to me that I might have lost contact in a way with my previous self.

Over twenty years later and following several more episodes, it has finally dawned on me that I have never grieved for that lost love. But I was young, on the whole optimistic and assumed that my life would continue on its previously smooth road. I knew that I had lost contact with some of my friends but it never occurred to me that I might have lost contact in a way with my previous self.

When someone loses a leg we understand the loss; when a couple has a disabled child, we recognise that they need time to work through their grief. When working with an adolescent with a chronic illness we try and help them come to terms with the loss of the adult they could have become.


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