

A Short Story: No Time [B1]

Entrare in coma per quindici anni o scontare la pena in prigione? Samson ha preso la sua decisione, ma forse la scelta non è stata la migliore.

What was better: fifteen years of prison or fifteen years of unconsciousness? That was what Samson was trying to decide with his lawyer, Jared. Had he been sentenced to prison years ago, he would not have had this decision to make. He would have gone to prison for fifteen years, simple as that. But in 2055, the UK had introduced the option of No Time, where prisoners were placed in an AI-induced coma for the duration of their sentence, instead of in a traditional prison. It had its pros and cons, which Samson had been considering since he'd been arrested on multiple [charges](#) of fraud. He had defrauded hundreds of vulnerable and desperate people, often taking every [penny](#) they had. He didn't [regret](#) his crimes, but he did [regret](#) getting [caught](#). Next time, he'd be more careful. The [advantage](#) of going to prison was that he'd get to live the next fifteen years of life, to be alive and conscious. But he had no idea what the quality of that life would be. Perhaps he'd develop connections with other criminals and learn to defraud more effectively. There was a risk, of course, that he would be attacked or even murdered. There would be no such risk if he was in an induced coma. But then if he chose No Time, he would be unconscious, so effectively not alive, for the next fifteen years, while his body continued to [age](#). He was thirty-six now, still relatively young. By the time he would emerge from his coma, he'd be middle-[aged](#), and so would his wife, Muriel, who he knew would leave him long before then for a richer man. She'd married him for his money, but that was all gone now, confiscated by the authorities. "Jared says you might not survive prison," said Muriel slowly. She had supported him through the [trial](#) in the hope that he'd be [acquitted](#), and they could continue their opulent lives together. "Did you actually say that?" Samson asked Jared. Jared [sighed](#), "I'm sorry, mate, but you [ripped off](#) old ladies and single mums, and your crimes meant a lot of children went hungry. Some [inmates](#) might have you for that." "So you [reckon](#) I should go for No Time." "That's what I would do." Samson considered his options one last time. Whatever he decided, he'd be fifteen years older at the end of his sentence, but at least if he was in a coma,

he'd be [unharm](#)ed. "No Time it is," he said, decisively. As Samson lost consciousness in the No Time capsule, he expected his next moment of consciousness to be fifteen years later. But then he heard an AI voice say, "Welcome to No Time, where criminals experience the impact of their crimes." "What?" He was alone in a white room. "No, this is wrong!" he said. "I'm supposed to be unconscious." "Your body is unconscious but your mind is awake," said the voice. "Think of it as a lucid dream." The white room transformed into a hospital room and he was lying in a bed with a tube down his [throat](#). Beside him was a young woman, [holding his hand](#). He lay like that for weeks, as medical personnel came and went, and the woman remained an almost constant presence, sometimes with a boy by her side. He knew that he was in an intensive care unit, that he was paralysed, that the woman must be his mum and the little boy his brother. "That was Keith Brandon," said the AI voice, as the hospital room disappeared and Samson became himself again. Keith was the son of one of the women he'd defrauded. She and her children had become homeless, and had been brutally attacked one night, an attack that had left Keith paralysed. "That wasn't my fault," said Samson. "That mother's [victim impact statement](#) said it was," said the voice, "and the judge agreed with her. Next, you'll experience the impact of the crime on his mother." "No, that's not necessary. I know what I did was wrong, and I'm sorry," he lied. "Perhaps, but you'll be sorrier after you've experienced the impact of your crimes from the victims' point of view." "This is not what I agreed to!" said Samson. "This is a violation of my rights! I demand to see my lawyer!" "I'm sorry but that won't be possible. When we first implemented No Time, our clients were completely unconscious for the duration of their sentence. But this offered no opportunity for positive transformation or rehabilitation, so we developed this updated version instead. When you return to consciousness at the end of your sentence, you won't remember any of this; we don't want to dissuade others from participating in the programme, which is more rehabilitative and less [costly](#) than traditional prison. But you will have a profound sense of empathy. You will feel any pain that you cause, and so be incapable of causing pain to others. Now, let's continue..." As Samson protested, the room transformed again, this time into a [council house](#), and he became a single mother of two.

Glossary

- **unharmmed** = illeso
- **age** = invecchiare
- **acquitted** = assolvere
- **holding his hand** = tenere la mano
- **trial** = giudizio
- **inmates** = detenuti
- **caught** = catturare
- **sighed** = sospirare
- **ripped off** = truffare
- **victim impact statement** = dichiarazione della vittima
- **costly** = caro, costoso
- **charges** = accuse
- **regret** = pentirsi
- **throat** = gola
- **council house** = casa popolare
- **penny** = centesimo
- **reckon** = pensare, valutare