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The Incurable

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The Incurable

The plaid knit scarf around your neck unraveled as you walked up to the San Francisco General Hospital. Scratchy wool fibers tickled the under-side of your chin as it slid to the ground. You could feel the damp surface of each existing lesion on your neck meeting the surrounding air; the wind licked at them with thirst. The soft, pink tissue's vessels constrict at the slightest bit of contact.¹ It overwhelms you. You once tried wearing copious amounts of band-aids, specifically the ones that said they'd blend into your skin color, but they attracted too many eyes. So, the pads of your hands hovered over the blemishes on your neck, as if slightly covering them would make a difference. People's eyes would still wander regardless of your efforts to hide them.

Your paper body folded to retrieve your scarf, filling you with a dark fatigue. Your field of view was impaired by a haze, followed by light sensation that made your knees give. You try to get past the feeling, but the tips of your digits grew numb the longer they grazed the pavement in search for your garment. But you couldn't see. Your limbs disassembled one by one as they unhinged from the ball-in-socket joints, giving way to the pressure of darkness.

When your eyes un-fogged, they were intimately met by a few small pieces of rock. Coarse cement that pressed against your cheek left indentations in their place as you brushed them away. This wasn't completely unfamiliar to you, although it was strange. Your body was always tired. It was exhausted. And the weaker you became, the more you fell. Each time you'd

¹ Symptoms of HIV/AIDS are observed to include persistent fatigue, skin lesions and sores.

wake on the ground, the harder you would find it to get up. It was like your body was begging your mind to rest, to let go. Your body was tired of fighting. If only you would listen.

You laid there for a moment, allowing the blood to flow back to your head as you regained your strength. You squeezed your hands into fists. The sensation of a tight grip assured you that some of their normal function had returned. A low ache arose as your head rubbed against the striated pavement to face the sky. It left you wondering how long you had been there.

You then notice the vacant space around you hovering with a peaceful silence. Surprised, the crisp leaves that littered the pavement were your only company. With two hands, you levered your torso off the pavement and then your lower limbs. Your weight alternated from one foot to the other as you brushed debris off your pants. After leaning forward to re-tie the thin, cheap cloth around your neck, you continued your walk towards the hospital entrance as if it were just another day in the office.

Tall, thin glass walls that trailed to the ceiling naturally lit the bare atrium as you entered. It really had a pleasant way of exposing the thick film of grime that had engrained itself into the tile floor. Your father would have never let a floor get as mangled or neglected as this one. He would have cleaned it as soon as it showed any signs of wear, tear or usage. He believed that maintaining the space around you reflected how much one valued their possessions. He was right. Your father would have thought the lack of attention to this floor's condition to be wasteful. In all honesty, it was. It made you miss his appreciation for the things that weren't typically paid attention to. It made you miss him, in general.

The vibrations of your sneakers hitting the ground ping-ponged off the walls in the hallway. Your eyes searched the space and were met once again, by the only thing that brought you a little ounce of warmth. It was the same re-printed picture on the wall of the Fisherman's Wharf that was commonly displayed at local restaurants in the San Francisco area. You walked by it when it was first hung up over a year ago, no longer than a few weeks after you were first diagnosed with HIV.

It reminded you of Sundays. This was when your father would take you out to the Fisherman's Wharf to buy freshly baked sour dough bread. The bread masters that made them would mold them into all various types of shapes, but your favorite were the ones that resembled little turtles. Occasionally, your father would also get a bowl of warm clam chowder for you two to split if you were on good behavior. You'd share the savory treats together on a park bench where seagulls surrounded you, waiting for a liberal donation. His remaining thin hair would twist in the ocean's breeze as he laughed at the growing flock of birds. He would always rip off a piece and toss it to them while making jokes about leaving you to support his gull family. You'd sarcastically encourage him, like he'd *ever* leave you. It once seemed impossible to ever walk this earth without him—he was your greatest friend. Your father left you on different terms, though. Pancreatic cancer took him about two years ago, not a gull family, and you have struggled ever since. Sometimes it does feel better to think that he left just so he could join a pack of birds. Sometimes it doesn't. This came to be yet another reason why your doctor thought you could use some "*extensive support*" during this *difficult* time.