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Scholarship  
1207 Words

Terminal  
Davis

Benjamin never liked hospitals. Whether the maddening chaos of the ER or the stale silence of the waiting room, every breath he took of the stress-saturated air felt like a desperate clutch at life. His knee bounced with his nervous tension as he glanced towards the blank metal door which led deeper into the hospital for what felt like the millionth time. He shook his head and straightened up in the uncomfortable waiting room chair, running a hand through his already disheveled blonde hair.

His eyes fell to the meager stack of magazines piled on the table adjacent to his seat. Celebrity news, cooking recipes, landscaping... hesitating for a moment, he scooped up one at random and thumbed, unseeing, through the worn pages. Eventually he glanced up and looked around at the other occupants of the waiting room. At this hour, there weren't many; a mother with a young boy, an elderly couple, and a girl around his age with at least a dozen piercings were his only company.

Movement at the door caused Benjamin's head to jerk up, only to have his shoulders sag as a doctor called for the elderly couple. He watched as they squeezed each other's hands, and then the woman got up to follow. Benjamin let out a slow, shaky breath. He had to relax, he would drive himself insane at this rate...

The blonde thought back to how this night had begun. He'd gotten out of his meeting early specifically for this night, dodging the calls for drinks from friends, beating the evening traffic rush, and entered their quiet country home an entire hour earlier than usual. He'd been greeted with darkness, of course, but that had been the point, and with anticipation he'd hug up his coat, dropped his briefcase, and set about the kitchen to prepare a very special dinner: Homemade sushi.

“Partied too hard?”

Benjamin jerked out of his memories and met the aquamarine eyes of Piercing Girl. Her lips quirked. She crossed her legs. Benjamin, with an inward sigh, grimaced and shook his head. He pointedly raised the tabloid magazine, and had read the sentence ‘Star X was seen with Actor Y last week’ three times in a row before her peppy adenoidal voice scratched through the air again.

“I mean, that’s why I’m here.”

Benjamin shot her a glare.

“My friend Stacy and I were at this *wild* frat party, like, all these super hot guys were there and they were passing out something. I don’t even know what it was but it did *crazy* shit to my head,ahaha!”

“Interesting.” He droned and flipped the page.

Where was he...

He’d just finished the last roll when the front door swung open, and a soft, ‘I’m home!’ drifted into the kitchen. His heart jumped, just like it had the first time, like it had every time since. He set the knife aside and moved to greet the newcomer. With a warm ‘welcome home,’ he had wrapped his arms around the other and everything was alright. Everything was supposed to have been alright. How had it come to this?

“You’re a good ‘un, I can tell.”

Benjamin looked over to his right, locking eyes with the elderly man who smiled, crow’s feet crinkling in the corners of his eyes.

“You got the look a’ someone who cares a lot. Who are you here fer sonny? Little brother? Mom or dad?” The man asked, and Benjamin shook his head.

“No...”

He couldn’t say it out loud. He was already a nervous wreck as it was, and so Benjamin tried his best to crack a smile through clenched teeth and stinging eyes.

“...we aren’t related by blood.”

Just then the man’s wife came back out to the waiting room, and he stood to embrace her. Watching them, Benjamin’s heart seized; he remembered the frantic rush to the hospital, how horrible the experience had been. He had never been so terrified in his life.

A hand on his forearm jarred him out of his thoughts, and he turned his head to meet the soft brown gaze of the woman who looked to be in her mid-forties, her son distracted by some toy across the room.

“Don’t worry, I’m sure your wife will be fine.” She told him in a warm, maternal voice. Benjamin ducked his head and stared at his feet, trying to muster his voice once again. It was difficult, his throat feeling as if it were a mangled rope.

“Thank you... for your kind words...” the response was generic, programmed in him through years of training.

A doctor appeared in the doorway and Benjamin’s head shot up. The doctor locked eyes with him and his stomach turned into a solid piece of lead. Pity.

He stood and crossed the room in five long strides.

“Where is he?” Benjamin all but demanded, hating the way the doctor shied away from him but right now it was necessary. The directions were barely out of the man’s mouth before Benjamin took off running. He dashed through the halls of the hospital, barely glancing at the medical staff he disrupted with his panic. It took way too long to reach his destination.

He stopped in front of the door to the hospital room, taking a deep breath and trying to recompose himself. It wasn’t easy, but he managed to steady his breathing at the very least. He stepped through the door and immediately his eyes were trained on the single person occupying the room.

Jacob looked so frail, laying in that hospital bed, and for the first time Benjamin was able to see what his husband had been trying to hide from him. The dark circles under his eyes, the unnatural paleness of his skin, the sunken cheeks. If it weren’t for the heart monitor’s constant reminders, he would have thought him dead.

“Benjamin. You shouldn’t be in here.” Despite his obvious exhaustion, Jacob’s voice was steady and his eyes bright.

“What happened back there?” Benjamin asked, trying to imitate the firmness in his voice and failing. “Jacob, what is going on with you? What are you hiding?”

Jacob looked away, a trembling frown on his ashen lips. Silence stretched between the two of them and as it did Benjamin felt an echo of the fear that crashed over him like a rogue wave when Jacob had suddenly collapsed getting ready for bed. The way he had struggled for air as if he had holes in his lungs. The blood that sprayed from his hacking coughs to spatter the bathroom tiles. The foreign terror on his face.

“You’re sick.” Benjamin hated the way that Jacob flinched, as if struck. His pale hands balled up the cheap hospital bed sheets and, like a soldier raising the white flag, his shoulders sagged.

“Yes...” Jacob murmured. “I am sick. Very sick.”

Jacob turned to meet his gaze, a deep and aching sadness evident in his eyes that nearly broke Benjamin’s heart.

“It’s a hereditary disease. I’m sorry, Benjamin. I should have told you but... but I didn’t want to hurt you.” He took a deep breath, struggling to get out the words that Benjamin had never wanted to hear.

“My illness is terminal. I am dying.”