

## Thoughts of the Lyric Artist on the Day Before Treatment: Updates in HIV Therapy

**W**ith my computer, rebooting is easy. To clean up my mess and start anew with a clean slate I need only press one button. Just one. One button. Virus gone. Press one button and my computer is clean and ready to start anew. Ready to erase the old mistakes and face the new ones along its path.

I do not reboot so easily.

It was this thought that helped explain what I was thinking as he walked behind me as I stood in the corner of the bar. It was this thought that helped me explain what I was thinking as he walked behind me as I stood in the corner of the bar, and waited. I did not turn to look. That would have been too vulnerable a thing to do. I waited. I did not turn to look. I did not turn to look vulnerable. Instead I waited. I waited and watched with eyes opening and closing in the back of my head. In the back of my head. My eyes were opening and closing and watching him.

The words then came one by one. One by one and in an order I could not comprehend, getting lost in the music and the smoke. I heard the words *I* and *40 seconds* and *I don't know* as they floated from his mouth to the back of my neck and lingered in my inner ear and I nodded. I nodded pretending to make semblance of everything in the world at that moment. We talked of Senate confirmations and dying Popes, life support systems, three centuries of folk and decorative art, terrorists among us. We talked and we tried to make semblance of everything in the world at that moment. And one by one his words played themselves in my head like a grammar lesson out of sync with the rest of the conversation. *I arrived just 40 seconds ago.*

At that moment the world seemed so solvable.

*It was your aura I felt.* This is what I later told him when his tongue allowed mine to speak. *It was your aura I felt, breathing its warm breath on my back.* *It was your aura I felt,* I told him.

His wink: *That was not my aura.*

I do not reboot so easily. I repeated this thought over and over and over again. Reboot.

And I did not turn to look at him. Turn to look vulnerable. Instead I waited as his aura caressed me and breathed its breath on my back. I waited as it pulled me toward him. Pulled me like a beautiful magical thread through the eye of a needle. The pull a magical thread. It moved me out of his range of vision. Moved me to help him see the universe spin before us. I moved. Moved again. Stepped back. Mumbled out of the corner of my mouth, *See anything you like?* Mumbled, all the while feeling the pull.

We were watching the universe unfold before us and I asked if he saw anything he liked. I coughed. Coughed as if to stop my words from leaving my mouth. I coughed and wanted at

that moment to tell him that was not me. That was some voice that infected me and now looks like me and speaks like me and acts like me but that was not me. It was my viral twin. Not my thought. Not my words. Not me.

I moved to help him see the universe spin before us. I moved. Moved again. Stepped back, somehow knowing what would happen. As predicted: *What brings you to town?* He muffled through the sounds of the crowd. The sounds of the crowd the sounds of cigarettes being snuffed out. The sounds of feet shuffling. The sounds of glasses breaking and always always the pulsing bass. The bass pulsing. Always. What brings me to town is what caused the hairs on my neck to straighten. To free themselves of the warmth of his words that floated from his mouth to the back of my neck and lingered in my inner ear. *What brings you to town?* What brings me to town is the treatment for this virus that snaps itself inside me and regenerates like his words repeating themselves. Like his words repeating themselves in my inner ear. Regenerates like his words. My stutter was not accidental: *I'm here for treatment. I'm here. Yes, for medical treatment.*

Words, repeated often enough, can choke a person.

Virus scan. Infected. Repair. Reboot.