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## Sunny Days

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# Sunny Days

Edgar had become accustomed to the idea that he would be miserable here. In fact, he had assured himself of his own misery as soon as he walked (or more appropriately shuffled) through the glass doors of the blue-walled building. It was too bright in here, and the nurses always smiled for a little bit too long, and the halls had an overpowering smell of ammonia. One of the overly chipper nurses had checked him in; he didn't remember which one. They all had the same cooing voices, the same style of colored scrubs, and the same highlighted hair that was cut right above the shoulder.

Part of him understood why he was here. He had to admit that he wasn't walking as well as he used to. But another part of him thought that even if he had to lean on every object and person that he walked past, he was still walking, right? And fine, maybe his driving skills weren't as good as they had been, but the accidents weren't so bad. He wouldn't even really categorize them as accidents. No one was dead; everything had worked out fine in the end. No problem.

His family, however, disagreed. First, they came for his keys, and the process of wrestling them out of his grip had taken over a year. It had involved the smiling eyes of his grandchildren, the desperate mouths of his children, the flaring nose of his wife, and some help from the growing confusion of his mind. Then, a doctor had mandated the use of a wheelchair. Edgar had refused, but whenever they went anywhere after that, the wheelchair was brought, and he ended up in it halfway through the excursion. He told himself that it was just to placate them, but he knew somewhere inside him (likely in his shaking knees) that he needed it.

Then, his car accidents had turned into just plain accidents; his legs were the consistency of unknaded dough from lack of use, and his diet consisted solely of chocolate milkshakes and spaghetti. His wife was forced to turn

into his caretaker, a job that she endured gracelessly. It certainly wasn't what she signed up for, and Edgar didn't make it any easier due to his unassailable hatred of being looked after. Edgar had noticed his family having countless hushed conversations while he watched TV, but he didn't think much of it. Everything had seemed hushed to him lately because he had been refusing to put in his hearing aids. When they finally told Edgar what they had been talking about, Edgar felt that he had been sent away to die.

This is a thought that was quite frequent in his mind during the first few weeks: *I have been sent here to die*. As he watched people being wheeled around, he couldn't comprehend the idea that he was one of them. The other residents talked or they didn't talk; they sang or they didn't sing; they sat and they watched the TV in the Big Room after dinner until they fell asleep or yelled for one of the nurses to take them out.

It was in the Big Room that he had met Helen for the first time. Their wheelchairs had been set up next to each other after dinner while the TV was playing, and Helen had noticed him looking at one of the nurses in confusion. He had forgotten her name again. He still couldn't figure out how to distinguish any one of them from the other.

"Her name is Blue Scrubs," Helen had said with a knowing grin. "But only for today. Tomorrow she'll be named something new." Then, she had nodded wisely and turned away, seemingly entranced with the program on TV, a soapy kind of drama that Edgar could sometimes bring himself to enjoy. He had merely given a grunt in response, but from then on, he always thought of them as Green Scrubs or Flower Scrubs or Pink Scrubs, and it was somehow easier. The days began to pass in a sort of haze after that, punctuated only by calls from his family and the occasional Fun Activity. Edgar felt certain that the person who had created that name had never been forced to experience one of them.

Today's Fun Activity came in the form of a tiny, smiling woman with an uncontrollable mane of faded brown hair and skin so grotesquely tanned that it looked as if her freckles were tiny scars running up and down her arms. Edgar didn't pay much attention as one of the nurses explained what she was there to do. Instead, he thought of the newspaper in his room wistfully, squinting his eyes as he attempted to remember how it had said the Mets were doing. But he supposed that it didn't really matter. For a long time now, no matter the season, the one constant was their abysmal performance. He sighed and turned his head towards the tiny woman who was now gesticulating wildly in the front of the room, her hair bouncing up and down as she spoke.

"This is some bullshit, isn't it?"

Edgar started and turned toward the low, nasally voice that had just spoken right next to him. “Are you talking to me?” he asked, his eyes resting on the overly rouged woman sitting next to him. Helen.

“Well, I’m not talking to Paul,” she said with a quiet laugh, giving a nod at the man sitting across from them who was staring blankly through Edgar as though he wasn’t even there. “He’s not really...here anymore. And, I would know. I can get *anyone* to talk, and he won’t even say one word to me. But yeah, I’m talking to you.”

“Oh, I—”

“And I was saying that this is some bullshit, isn’t it? The amount of money I saved for this place, and this is what they bring in? I mean, look at what she’s doing now!” Edgar focused his attention back on the tiny woman who was now slowly moving her hands close to another resident’s head, her brow furrowed in concentration.

“What—”

“It’s some hippie crap about channeling energy. Ree-kee? I don’t know. Just bullshit.”

“Yeah,” Edgar echoed, “Bullshit.”

“I bet Maureen isn’t going to be standing for it much longer though,” Helen said with a wry grin, pointing surreptitiously at the resident who had the tiny woman’s hands an inch away from her face. And she was right. A second later, Maureen began to shudder so violently that she seemed about to jump out of her own skin. She began to move her mouth, saying something that Edgar couldn’t hear from across the room. Green Scrubs cheerfully guided the Reiki practitioner to another table while she apologized profusely, and two other nurses began the process of removing Maureen from the room.

This proved to be a difficult task as Maureen had begun to wail, and her hands were now flailing wildly in all directions. Some of the other residents looked up briefly at the commotion, but seeing that it was Maureen, they returned to what they were doing before with little more than a second glance. Pink Scrubs, the nurse who was standing next to them, ran over to help, and then Helen turned her body back to Edgar, her wheelchair rattling with the rapidity of her movement.

“So, this seems as good a time to talk as any, doesn’t it?”

“Sure,” Edgar said. He attempted to shift himself farther away from her.

“You’ve been here for a few weeks now, haven’t you? And, to be honest, it really doesn’t get much better than this,” she said, gesturing at the three nurses who were still trying to subdue Maureen without much success. “But I’ve got something that’s a helluva lot more interesting, if you’re...interested.” She batted her eyes, and Edgar again attempted to shift himself as far away from her as possible.

“Wha—I’m not interested in—”

“What? Honey, no!” Helen gave a cackling laugh that pierced through Maureen’s sobs. “You haven’t heard about me from anyone else yet? Huh, that’s surprising. I thought I told them to—well, nevermind.”

“What do you mean, then?” Edgar said gruffly, feeling his ears turn a bright red. He looked down at the table, feigning interest in the napkin that had been left there. A small smiling sun was printed in the corner of it, along with the words SUNNY DAYS SENIOR LIVING, which were half covered in some brown substance that Edgar was not eager to find out the source of.

“Well, I supply this—this pill to people here. I call it,” and here she paused for dramatic effect, “Reminall. It really gives you something to look forward to. This place gets bland real quickly. Don’t you think?” Edgar agreed, but he didn’t want to give Helen the idea that she knew anything about him, so he merely gave a shrug in response. Helen, however, took that as a sign that he was still interested and powered on, her mouth gaping wide open with each word she spoke. “Ask anyone! They’ll all vouch for me! Well, not Paul. But, ya know, he can’t vouch for anyone.”

“I’ve even got a couple of different choices,” she said, opening her mouth even wider as she continued her pitch. Edgar noticed that half her red lipstick was on her teeth. He wondered absently if she put it on herself every morning or if one of the Scrubs had to do it for her. “Package Number One *is* cheaper, and you get the same sort of, well, the same *incredible* experience! However,” she paused here, her eyes wide, “when those Scrubs are looking at you, they’re gonna be just seeing a pure vegetative state, you know? And some of them do get concerned about that, especially for you since you’ve been so talkative here.”

“I don’t talk that much,” muttered Edgar, still distracted by the lipstick mixing with the yellow of her teeth. He could imagine his wife and her friends laughing about it over their sewing needles and unread books. Edgar suddenly felt a rush of pity for Helen, but not enough to fully listen to what she was saying.

“You talk enough. So, that’s why I got Package Number Two. More expensive, but they see you talkin’ and there’s even a bit of singing thrown in, huh? So they have no idea that anything’s different and they don’t go getting anybody worried, you know? And I got the delivery service down pat so you wouldn’t have to worry about a thing. You know what? I’ll even give you the first one for free, just so you can try it out.”

“I don’t want—”

“But you think about it all and let me know. We can’t be talking about this when *she* gets back.” She gestured at Pink Scrubs, who was coming towards them with an enormous smile on her face and a broken fingernail. Helen smiled back, her eyes still on Edgar. “So, Edgar, what’s your necklace about?”

“Huh?” Helen pointed at the golden  $\pi$  on his chest, widening her eyes and tilting her head towards Pink Scrubs. “Oh! Oh, it means—well, it means ‘life’ in Hebrew. It was my father’s.”

“Well, the more you know.” She laughed quietly, and then turned to Pink Scrubs, holding her stomach. “You think you can take me back to my room, hun? I’m not feeling so great.”

“Of course! Nothing too horrible, I hope? And, oh, isn’t it nice that you’re making friends, Edgar!” Pink Scrubs trilled, her eyebrows disappearing into her uneven bangs. Edgar gave a small nod and turned his head to face Paul, still watching Helen out of the corner of his eye. She gave him a painful blink that he assumed was some sort of attempt at a wink, and then began jabbering to the nurse about nothing as she was wheeled out of sight. Edgar wondered how she was able to get out of a Fun Activity so easily; if he had said that he wasn’t feeling well, they would probably give him a cheery suggestion about doing some arm stretches and tell him that it would be his turn with the Reiki woman soon. Well, at least Paul wouldn’t bother him.

He hummed quietly to himself, thinking again of the newspaper sitting in his room. He had barely had the chance to read it before he had been dragged out of bed. Maybe next time he could bring it, and then he wouldn’t have to be bothered by Helen or whatever horrible idea of an activity that this place came up with. What had she even been talking about? Some sort of pill. And he couldn’t seem to remember what she said it did. Whatever it was, he reasoned with himself, it didn’t matter. He was fundamentally opposed to the idea of it, both because of his sixty-year avoidance of drugs based on one unfortunate instance with a brownie in college, and his immense dislike of Helen and her lipstick-stained teeth.

When he finally returned to his room, he certainly did not feel as if he had been imbued with any sort of healing energy. In fact, the activity had only reminded him that he was miserable, and he would continue to be miserable until the day that he died. Pink Scrubs had helped him out of his wheelchair and into his bed, and he reached for the newspaper that he had left on his nightstand. But it wasn’t there. He scanned the small room with confusion, looking for any other place where he could’ve left it.

Then he spotted the newspaper on the chair that was sitting next to his TV, a mere five feet away. But Edgar was already in bed, and the sheer impossibility of getting out of it suddenly dawned on him. He could have called one of the Scrubs to help him, but the idea of talking to one of their too-bright faces right then filled him with a dread that he couldn’t quite explain. He would just be watching TV tonight. Maybe the game was on.

He grabbed the remote from his nightstand and pressed the on button, sighing as he stared at the newspaper that seemed to be mocking him with its closeness. He looked back up at the TV and realized that it hadn’t turned on.

He was sure that he had pressed the on button...he pressed it again, and again, and again, shaking the remote as if it would signal to some electronic god the aching need he felt for it to work. For something to work. But it didn't. And then, Edgar realized that the remote was making a sort of clacking sound. Was it broken? His remote had never broken at home, but, of course, this place would ruin it.

He held it up to his ear and shook it once more; again, he heard that same noise. He opened up the part of the remote where the batteries were and immediately realized the problem. In place of any batteries, there was one small, nondescript white pill. Edgar picked it up and stared at it for a moment, struggling to understand how this atrocity had occurred. And then it clicked: Helen. Of course. Because of her, he now had one pill and no TV. He was sure that she was somehow the reason why his newspaper was now sitting in a chair. He looked at the nurse call button and sighed, his frustration building. This button, unlike the ones on the remote, worked almost too well. Only a few minutes after he pressed it, Purple Scrubs appeared in the doorway with a smile as big as Edgar had feared it would be.

"Is everything alright?"

Edgar grimaced at the cheery voice. "The TV won't turn on, and the remote it's...ah...well, Helen..." He couldn't find the right words to describe his current situation, and Purple Scrubs' widening grin certainly wasn't helping. It was moments like these that made him think it would be easier if he was just dead. He smiled wryly as he thought of how his daughter would react if she knew that he was thinking that. She would probably yell at him. Edgar wondered if she would visit soon.

"Yes, you were talking to Helen today, weren't you? I'm so glad that you made a new friend here! Oh, why did you put your batteries here?" Purple Scrubs asked kindly, gesturing towards the nightstand and carefully pulling the remote out of his hand. Edgar turned his head. The two batteries were sitting next to his watch on the nightstand between his necklace and a cup of water. Had they been there the whole time?

"No, I—" But maybe they had been. He couldn't seem to remember. Purple Scrubs just smiled again and placed the batteries back into the remote.

"There, it should work now!" She turned on the TV with a flourish. An infomercial for Wearable Towels began to blast throughout the tiny room. "Perfect!"

"Thanks." Edgar knew he could've done that if he had seen the batteries, so he didn't feel the need to say anything else.

"And what do you have there?" Purple Scrubs asked as she continued to smile. Edgar looked down and unfurled his fingers. He had almost forgotten; resting in his palm was the white pill that had been in the remote.

“Oh, you. You know you have to take everything we give you to make you feel strong! That’s your Donepezil from dinner, isn’t it? You really are a tricky one!” She laughed and then narrowed her eyes at Edgar as if he was a child who was trying to get out of eating his vegetables.

“No, I’m not. I—”

“Don’t worry about it, honey. I’m just *teasing* you. Here’s some water.” She picked up the cup that was sitting on the nightstand. Edgar bristled, but he still took the cup from her. He was pretty sure that he had taken all of his pills with dinner. But Purple Scrubs was still standing there watching. Waiting. She raised her eyebrows at him, and he gave her an unhappy smile as he placed the pill in his mouth, taking a sip of water to swallow it. She took the cup out of his hand, and Edgar closed his eyes. He could still hear the woman on TV raving about the Wearable Towel, but it sounded fainter. Maybe Purple Scrubs had turned down the volume.

But when he opened his eyes again, he was blinded by light and had to shield his face with his hand. He could feel sweat on his forehead, and all over him. But his muscles weren’t aching, and he could feel the balls of his feet and all the way up his leg. And he was standing! Edgar was standing without any sort of support or struggle, as casually as he had when he was young. He looked down at his arms and almost screamed. The arms he saw were tan and muscled and strong. They were young arms, ones that had deteriorated a long time ago into the pale ribbony ones he now possessed. Could this be a dream? He’d never had a dream like this.

His mind felt awake, pulsing with thoughts and half-washed away feelings that were becoming clearer the longer he stood there in the baking sun. He had just asked Penny to prom. She had said yes. He’d never thought that she would say yes to him. Everyone had said that she was still in love with Jack, but maybe she wasn’t really because she had said yes. Jack was an asshole anyways, and he didn’t deserve her. But some of Edgar’s friends had said that she had only said yes to make Jack jealous. He tried to ignore the idea. It couldn’t be. She wouldn’t have said yes if she wasn’t into him, right?

He looked down at his watch and realized that he had just been standing in the middle of the sidewalk for five minutes. Damn it, why did he stop? He was supposed to be practicing every day, and he couldn’t afford to lose a second of time if he wanted to beat Jack in the next meet. He began to run again, his feet hitting the pavement hard, each step bringing him closer to Penny, to the irrational hope that she would love him if only he could get three seconds faster for the 800. That’s all he needed. Three measly seconds. He couldn’t get distracted, couldn’t just stop in the middle of his workout.

He kept thinking of *her*. Of Penny. How he had smudged her red lipstick and how she had rubbed it off his face, laughing. How her eyes had lingered and how she had smiled at him before she walked back to her friends. Maybe



at prom they could get somewhere far away from everyone else and they could—No. He couldn't get distracted now. He had already wasted too much time. Stay focused stay focused stay focused stay focused...he could feel the sweat pouring down his face, and he blinked it out of his eyes. As he did, the light began to change and refract around him, becoming somehow artificial, cooler. The heat felt like it was sliding off his body, melting into nothing.

When Edgar opened his eyes again, he felt the weight of his body sag back into his bones, his mind slowing from the breakneck speed that it had been going a second before. He blinked again and found himself sitting in the Big Room with the other residents, facing the TV. He looked down at his arms, at his hands, and they were almost translucent again, the blue veins looking almost as if they were above the skin rather than beneath it.

"You tried it, didn't you?" Helen was next to him again, and her wide eyes and stretched out smile made her face look like that of a bullfrog. "I knew you would. You said you didn't want it, but I knew you would in the end. And you enjoyed it, didn't you? Huh?"

"Yes," Edgar whispered, his hands shaking. "Yes." He didn't care anymore about her lipstick and odd comments, how she pretended to know everything. He had been young again. If only for a short while, he had been young again. And the aching of his body and the slowness of his mind had never felt more prominent to him than in that very instant.

"We can talk about prices for more soon," Helen whispered. Edgar had to strain to hear her. "I think Maureen's gonna lose it in a few, and then we can talk." Edgar nodded, trying to stop himself from shaking. He hadn't thought about Penny in years. And he kept going over in his head--the sure beating of his heart, and the way his legs had worked like machines, pumping in succession with his arms as he ran. He laughed under his breath and felt tears coming to his eyes. He had been young again. He looked back at Helen, but her smile was gone, replaced with a somewhat glazed look.

Then Maureen began to moan, and Helen shook her head, her eyes clearing. She straightened in her chair, becoming a businesswoman again. "I gave you Package Number Two for your first experience, and none of the Scrubs knew anything was up. You'll be wanting that again, I assume?"

Edgar nodded more vigorously than he intended to. "I don't have money in here with me. I don't know how I would pay."

"Oh, don't worry about that. I don't have anyone pay with money. It's more of a bart—"

"Get away from me!" Maureen screamed, drowning out Helen's words. "I want my babies! Helen gave me my babies and then she took them away." She began to sob, her frail body bending as she hugged herself tightly with her arms. Helen watched the spectacle as if it was nothing more than a program

on the TV, and then continued to speak when Maureen had decreased to an acceptable volume.

“As I was saying, it’s more of a barter system. I get what I want, and you get what you want. Much easier than money. Money’s exhausting; when I worked in sales all I got was money, and all *that* got me was this.” She gestured mindlessly at their surroundings. “I’m sick of it.”

“So, what do you want?”

Helen smiled again, and for the first time since Edgar had met her, she looked almost bashful. “I want your necklace,” she said, pointing a wizened finger at his chest. Edgar looked down at the gold π and his stomach began to churn.

“My—”

“Yes.” Her eyes were clear, calculating. Edgar dropped his gaze to his legs, to his unmoving feet. If he had one of those pills, he would be able to walk again. He would have control. But he couldn’t give her his necklace. It meant—well, really, what did it even mean to him anymore? His wife would be angry if she found out that it was gone, but she hadn’t visited once since he got here. She probably wouldn’t even notice. And he had been planning on giving it to his son, but he seemed wholly disinterested in anything Jewish or anything related to Edgar, so there wasn’t really any point in that.

He couldn’t seem to find any reason in his mind for keeping it; all he could think about was breathing fresh air through his lungs and walking on his own two legs and kissing Penny in his car, fucking Penny in his car. It had been that old green Chevy that had stopped working after a year. He grinned. And why had they broken up? Maybe she had gotten back together with Jack. He couldn’t remember.

“Are you gonna give me an answer? Come on. I’ll make it—I’ll make it two pills for the necklace. You’re killing me here.”

Edgar nodded. He lifted the necklace over his head and dropped it into Helen’s outstretched hand. Her claws quickly retracted, and the tiny π, along with its chain, disappeared from view.

“I’ll switch one of your pills at dinner with Reminall for the next two days,” she whispered, and then turned her head back to the TV, smiling about her latest acquisition.

The thought of the Reminall waiting for him made the always-smiling Scrubs and their enthusiasm easier to bear, and he even managed to give a respectful nod at Maureen while she was wheeled by. He made it through the rest of the day in a sort of daze, muttering to himself about Penny and sweat and lipstick and running faster, faster, *faster*. When Blue Scrubs finally handed him his usual seven pills, Helen nodded at him from across the room, and he gave her a short nod back. Almost mechanically, he reached for the water and quickly swallowed everything that was given to him. The room began to

blur around him, and he could feel his heart beating faster and faster with every second.

He blinked his eyes rapidly and was then immediately attuned to the fact that this was quite different from last time. He was sitting alone in a classroom, his classroom from when he taught ninth-grade math at Lindham High School, his back aching slightly from the rigid chair that he was sitting in. Edgar felt a pulse of disappointment when he realized that this memory would not have Penny in it. This quickly faded, however, when he looked at his familiar cluttered desk covered with ungraded papers and the lopsided wooden  $\pi$  that his students had given to him the year before with all their names signed clumsily on it, and the picture of his family that rested on top of three textbooks. He, his wife, and his daughter were all grinning from ear to ear. His son's face, however, was distorted and red, and he looked as if he was attempting to squirm out of his mother's arms. Edgar smiled softly.

He didn't even mind the heat of the stifling classroom. Anything was better than the unbearable chill of SUNNY DAYS SENIOR LIVING. He looked down, and in front of him sat the lesson plan for the day and multiple unfinished seating charts. He was switching up the seating again as some of the students had grown too comfortable with each other, and it had become impossible for them to focus in his class.

"Mr. Applebaum?"

Edgar looked up and saw one of the boys from his fifth-period class standing, timid, in the doorway. "Aaron! How can I help you?"

Aaron inched into the room and looked at Mr. Applebaum while tapping his fingers anxiously against his leg. "I—umm—well, I was just—I got really confused on the homework, and I know that you said that it's really important for the Regents, but I didn't really understand it in class and then I got really confused at home and now I don't have it done and I don't want to not know how to do it for next unit because you said that we would need to know this to do well with that and I really don't want to fail the Regents and I was wondering if maybe you could help me." By the time that Aaron had reached the end of this statement, he was quite out of breath and his entire body was shaking.

Edgar gave him a reassuring smile and covered the seating charts with a textbook that was lying next to him. "I'd be happy to help. And as long as you study and keep doing what you're doing, you should do fine on the Regents. I know you're a hard worker, and this unit is really difficult. We're going to be going over it in class, but come sit here. You'll know it as well as I do by the end of this."

Aaron gave him a disbelieving look but nodded, walking up to the chair next to Edgar's desk with less trepidation than he had had originally.

Edgar smiled at him again and began to take out the worksheet that had been assigned for last night's homework. "Alright. Let's get to it." Edgar began to sketch out a parabola to explain the first problem, and Aaron's hurried questions started to become more relaxed as he understood the concept. After five minutes, he had stopped shaking, and by the time they had been working for twenty, he was almost smiling. Edgar picked up his pen to write one more note on his paper, but as soon as his pen touched something solid, he saw Aaron's body begin to melt into the desk, the blue of his shirt and the pink of his skin slowly solidifying into the wood. Edgar grabbed at him desperately and cried out, but when his arm touched Aaron it began dissolving into the wood and he closed his eyes in horror.

When he opened them again, he was seated at the table the next day for dinner, and his breath was coming out in quick, shuddering gasps. Helen grabbed his arm and whispered, "Calm down! It was just a bit of a reaction. You're fine. You're fine!" Edgar nodded and looked down at his hands. He grasped for his necklace before remembering that it wasn't his anymore. "Quick, relax! Or a Scrub will notice. What did you see?"

Edgar didn't answer for a few seconds, smiling slightly despite himself, despite the horror of the memory's final moments. His voice had been so sure, so confident, so capable. He couldn't remember the last time he had felt certain of anything. "I was—I was a teacher again."

"Alright, you're good. You're good," Helen said, relaxing, her face breaking out into a smile again.

"Where are my pills?" Edgar said in an urgent whisper. "I want to take it now. I need to—I can't be *here*." He hated the desperation in his voice, but he was too shaken to have the ability to mask it.

"Just—just wait a few minutes, okay? Catch your breath again." Edgar nodded, and started to take deeper breaths. He looked at the food on his plate and saw that it was half eaten. Strange. He took a sip of water and then reached up his hand to call someone over to get his usual—

"Edgar! Edgar, honey, you have a phone call!" Pink Scrubs came rushing over to his table, a cellphone in hand.

"Who is it?"

"It's your daughter! Isn't that nice?" she cooed.

"Yes, it's very nice," Edgar said. He took the phone. "Hello?"

"Hey, Dad!"

"Hey, kid. What's going on?"

"I—I just wanted to see how you were doing. I just—I was setting up my classroom today and I was thinking about you." In that moment, Edgar hated her. He hated his daughter more than he had ever hated anyone. He hated her for being able to live memories rather than merely reliving them and dangling that knowledge in front of him as he sat here, useless. "And—I don't know

why, but I was thinking about that time when you took me sledding the first time it snowed that winter when I was like seven because I wanted to go so badly. Remember how pissed Mom was? She was yelling at you about how you could still see the grass on the ground, so there was no way that we could go sledding. But you took me anyway.”

“Yeah, I think I remember.” And then Edgar felt so guilty for his hatred that he couldn’t stand it.

“When we got to that big hill close to the house, we really couldn’t sled because there was only the thinnest coating of snow and the grass was still poking through.” She laughed, and Edgar laughed too, a quiet laugh, but a laugh all the same. “And you said that it didn’t matter, that we could still have a good time. And we stuck out our tongues and caught the falling snow on them and—I don’t know why I was thinking of it but—” and then her voice broke, and Edgar could hear her trying to stifle a sob. “I miss you, Dad.”

“I miss you too.”

“I’m gonna come and visit you really soon, ok? And we can all go out to dinner. But—shit, look, I—I’ve gotta go. I’ve got to make dinner for the kids. But I love you so much, and—”

“I love you too, kid. Talk to you soon.” Edgar handed the phone back to Pink Scrubs and stared straight ahead, his face blank. The nurse handed him his pills with a smile. Edgar took them from her and stared at them for a moment, his hands shaking as he held them up over his half-eaten meal of dry chicken and spaghetti. He wondered vaguely when his daughter would visit. And then he placed one of his pills in his mouth, wincing slightly at the bitter taste as he let it sit for a few seconds, and then swallowed it. And he did the same with the next one and the next one and the next.

“What are you doing?” Helen whispered, her eyes wide. But Edgar didn’t answer. When he finished, Edgar closed his eyes, leaving a certain white pill to dissolve, slowly, on his tongue. When he opened his eyes, he could almost see his daughter standing next to him, her face red with cold, the two of them catching snowflakes with smiles and frozen tongues.