Escape Artist

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I stare at the blood as it leaves my arm and crawls into the vacuum tube. It's a dark burgundy. It's the stuff of life. It's the stuff of legend. It's food for vampires. It's death, infused with a virus. It is who I am, and yet I part with it every month.

I think about the people I have outlived. And I often wonder why I've outlived them. My decision to stop meds a year ago was, to my friends, the equivalent of dropping out of college. They respected my decision but thought I was an idiot who, they hoped, would reverse course sooner rather than later.

I have lived with HIV for 13 years. Lived with AIDS for 11 of them. Lived with AZT monotherapy and Viracept and about three dozen other names and abbreviations. Had OIs and STDs and STIs and all that junk. And I am still here. I am still alive.

I have made monumentally bad decisions on all fronts, from dabbling with drug adherence to dabbling with love. (Neither will work, by the way, unless you really commit.)

I am still here. And so many people are not. And I do not know why. My doctor does not know why. I stare at the blood as it leaves my arm. I carry the ghosts of braver, more beautiful, more worthy men and women whose blood is dust. Their hopes and dreams and love and bravery are legacies I feel compelled to perpetuate. I am luckier than I will ever know.

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