Heart Condition

February 1, 2007 By Jesse Cameron Alick

I fall in love constantly. I'm 25, after all. And a fine black brother. And a poet. I can't believe I didn't mention that first! Falling in love is in the job description. But love hasn't been the same since I found out I was positive. The clichéd seas of romance are now littered with debris: disrobing, disclosing my HIV, pretending passion can ultimately protect me against the pain of rejection. I decide after my last breakup that it just isn't worth it. I give up.

Three months after I swear off love, I walk into the first rehearsal for a play my theater company is doing. Not only does the director cast me in a makeout scene—he casts a hot guy as my makeout partner. The beautiful Middle Eastern actor comes in. It's been raining, and his shoes and socks are soaked. He takes them off while I watch and then squeezes the socks over a garbage can.

"You see that?" He laughs.

I smile at the floor in shame, for surely I cannot be worthy enough to touch this person. The battle begins inside me: the HIV positive man versus the poet; virus warring verse. How can anyone love when they have so many issues pressing down on them? How can anyone not? And then I unmake my resolution: I might have a disease that persuades me to give up on love, but I still reserve the right to fall at any time.

God bless my changeable mind.

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