



Facing Defiance

November 8, 2009 By [Richard Ferri, PhD, ANP](#)

I am slowly sitting up in the dimly light room. I am naked but I make sure my crotch is covered with the thick warm blankets that have been provided for me. My eyes are adjusting to the dimmed light. The mirror that is staring back at me is a little harsh. I am, having a hard time seeing the muscles that take hours of work and religious devotion to grow and maintain. All I can see is the crevice. The sharp demarcation of the stigmata that is slashed on the left side of my face.

For all of my bluster and bullshit it is starting to happen. I am wasting. My face is sinking in and I hate it. I shrug into my 501s as there is a light knock on the door.

“Come in,” I say.

“Well, what do you think?”

I smile and half - lie, “You did a great job.”

The woman smiles warmly at me.

“It was pleasure,” she says. “I hope the next time you’re in New York you will come back for another facial.”

“You know it,” I respond half heartedly. “You do good work.”

She smiles again as she picks up my shirt. As she steps closer she spies me looking at my face.

"I did the best I could with the left side."

"I know," I answer far too quickly. "Nothing to be done. It is the disease you know."



Sadly she says, "I know." She hands me my shirt and provides the usual instructions to meet her up front after finishing dressing. .

Before heading to pay my bill I hit the men's room where all the forgiveness of stilted light disappears. The contrast is stark. I pee and look in the mirror. The magic of the lighting has been switch to off. I glare at myself glaring at me. I try not to get mad at what I see, and I don't actually. What I feel is sadness and loss. No matter how much I work out and how well I take care of myself the fucking virus always sneaks in and sends off little bombs in my mind. Today my mind noise is in full fledged battle and not the usual skirmish.

My face sticks in my mind like an ice pick. As I walk up Fifth Avenue I keep my head down and avert the dangerous reflections along the way back to the hotel.

I know I am luckier than most and this bout of self absorption is beginning to get on my nerves. However, I also I am just like everyone else in the world living with HIV. I want a day without reminders, pills, or thoughts about the fucking virus. However, that is day is not coming and I have to deal with it.

Back at the hotel I change clothes and look for any other tell tale signs of the virus. I stare at my naked body and it looks okay. I can still pass I think. But pass for what I wonder?

Ah, screw it I say to myself and I hear these lyrics in my head instead of the bombing... *I think I'll try defying ...you won't bring me down.**

May I can just pretend I tell myself. Then I look again. No use pretending I say to myself as I pull down my ball cap hard and to the left.

* "Defying Gravity" lyrics by Stephen Schwartz

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