



## IT STARTS WITH ME . . . . .

"You look omnious Linda," Olive muttered under her breath.

I clicked back from my gyre of thoughts to the green room.

Drops of perspiration, clinged to my forehead and I noticed that the Ac was blasting at 18° C. I wished over and over

again that I could dash out of my soul; I felt like a pris oner to my thought demons. I kept falling through the

tightening gyre of these baseless thoughts, and getting back was really strenous. My thoughts were worn over

and around my soul like a baseless fabric and truth to be told, I was struck. The more I tried to tear away

this obnoxious fabric of dizzy thoughts, the more I was tightened around it. I was supposed to smile today. I

was supposed to be giddy and overwhelmed. I should have danced with joy and should have shared a cup of

champagne with my colleagues, so as to celebrate my accom plishment. But this is what I felt like. I was miserable

to the core and felt like a rag with innumerable sra- tches. I felt hopeless and heartless, just like a dead

doll. There was this screeching sound of pain and lone-

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liness erupting from the thousand voids in my heart.

My hardwork and seamless efforts were going to be noticed, but here I was, drowning in my own sea of miseries.

"Linda, you alright"? Olive asked for the hundredth time in a row.

"I'm fine", I replied nonchalantly.

"You look green"? God, she was persistent.

"I'm fine" I nodded back, again.

"Linda Isabelle Tristan Armiger!", Olive chanted every syllable of my name in my face.

"You dare try to lie to me, huh?, Do I look like a fool to you? I talked about Dr. Rodriguez's unsuccessful cerebral spectodectomy for the past hour and you haven't wavered. What's up with you Linda"?

"It's just . . . . .", It's just something that no one would ever know. It's something that my therapist failed to find. How could I explain to her that my thought demons were devouring me?

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"What is it, Linda?, This is the day you've been looking forward to for the past four years. Your hardwork is going to be noticed. . . . You are going to be felicitated by MAC. ARTHUR." . . . ; Olive said hotly. she is right. After all the struggles and losses that I have endured in my life; this day was supposed to be my happy haven. My thoughts were possessed by my inner demons and they were killing me from inside. They were poking my heart with the most miserable memories. My heart and soul were ripped apart and tied again, only to be ripped off later. My thought demons were controlling me from inside. I felt like a prisoner in a long lost island, except that there was no peace. To an outsider, I was an ambassador for perfection. To the world outside, I was a young and beautiful 27 year old neurosurgeon and a successful oncologist who completed her Ph.d using the prestigious Mac. Arthur grant. I was a successful person to the many keen outside eyes; but they would never know my rough roads. My path was nothing but shattered glass and thorns; and I walked thro

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gh each of them. I worked hard and long day and night and still, the person who yearned to see me as a successful figure was gone. He held my strings and walked me around only to throw away my strings. My life and soul, that was knotted to the one person was utterly stranded now. My colleagues were jealous of me as I was the first female neurologist cum oncologist to graduate from Stanford. But truth to be told, all these successful attires meant null and void to be. Who am I supposed to share my success with? What am I without a long life devoid of hopes and happiness? Why was I the only unlucky daughter in this realm who got to see her parents dying in front of her? How can someone look at me with envious eyes when my mother died in my hands? How can I be hopeful? Maybe, these thought tortures were my punishment for failing to save my mom. Maybe, I don't deserve this felicitation.

"Ms. Armiger, you are wanted outside"; I clicked back to reality with a start. I was sweating profusely under

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the heavy graduation gown but the AC was still blasting at 18°C. Dr Rodrigues was waiting outside the room to invite me out. I felt heavy with main. I tried to stand up, but felt crushed from inside. I could feel a hundred boulders pressing down on me.;-the weight of despair was weighing me down. I stood up clumsily and looked myself down at the mirror. There were dark crescents under my eyes; the sovereigns of my hard work for four years. There was a prickling sensation behind my eyes and I looked up. No, I can't cry. I can't show the others how pathetic I am. I wished for a cañude from my dad; his soft fingers ruffling my hair or a hopeful smile from my mother. Death, one inexplicable truth has robbed me off years ago. No matter how much I yearn, this is how it is going to end. I wasn't prepared to face the crowd yet, there was a subtle possibility that I might start seeing my parents in the crowd.

"Ms. Armiger . . . . .", Dr Rodrigues sounded a little impatient and I prepared to walk out of the green

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room. "They'll be proud Linda," Olive whispered near me as I walked out of the room.

There were more than a hundred people in the crowd. My grads waved at me eagerly and I even spotted two of my patients. There was a wave of applause as I walked over to the dais from the aisle and I was astonished to see the biggest prodigions in neurology, waiting for my talk. Each clap felt like a knife piercing my soul and each applause felt like the beeps in an OR (operating room). There were a hundred barbed hot wires cutting me open from inside, as I searched the crowd for a familiar face. No, they can't be here. The dead never come back. Mr Adam Mac Arthur, the lebron in oncology research and my grantee shook hands with me and congratulated me. I "hmm'd" and "yeah'd" for his questions. As I looked over the horizons of Stanford Medical Centre, I saw two faces looming over the setting sun. Tears prickled my eyes and I

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felt the bile rising in my throat. There they were; my hope and strength, my life that was taken away from me a decade ago. My Dad was smiling at me from afar and Mom was giddy with happiness. Hot tears rolled down my cheeks and they felt like blood. I felt like screaming to my Dad and apologizing to my mom for letting her down. But my mouth was jammed shut. I felt like bursting out of inexplicable sadness and I cursed my barbarous fate. Why did they take away my safe abiditory. Why did they take away my home of hope? Fate, the barbarous reality that robbed my tranquil life . . . . . How am I ever going to forgive you?

"Ladies and gentlemen, put your hands together for the star of the day, the young prodigy of Stanford Medical centre; Dr. Linda Armiger. . . . ." the anchor's voiced boomed through the crowd. "Dr Armiger is the first neurosurgeon cum oncologist to graduate from Stanford University. She completed her Ph.d in oncology specializing

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in cerebral aneurysm. She successfully completed her research program using the Mac. Arthur prestigious Mac Arthur Grant and have published a thousand reviews on the Lancet. She invented biomarkers that could identify the tumours in cerebrum as early as stage one. She is the first doctor to perform a successful cerebral laparoscopy without using a catheter. She also the anchor drowned on and on I felt numbivagant for a second as I saw them walking towards me. Dad placed a hand on my shoulder and kissed me on my forehead. "We love you Linda, we are so proud of you!". He hugged me and caressed my hair. There were a million things that I wished to say to him. But my tears spoke before I could open my mouth. He cupped my face and wiped my tears. "I saw you grinding away day and night Linda, I saw you. You are a hope to the million patients waiting out there. And I know that you would never fail them..." My Dad hugged me

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closer as he spoke. " But I failed Mom,  
I couldn't stop her bleeding Dad... I..."  
I couldn't complete my words. I choked on my tears  
and stopped " You never failed anyone Linda, It  
was never your fault. You were the one big hope  
for your Mom to die peacefully and you gave her a  
chance to die <sup>happily</sup> ~~peacefully~~. I want you to give the  
same hope of rebirth for every patient that you  
treat I want you to try your best to maintain  
someones life. I know that you would never fail  
me Linda... You can make this place a realm of  
hope for the hopeless and the ones in despair...  
Be someone that evokes hope before success; that's  
what I want from you. . . . " Dad caressed my  
hair as he said poke. spoke. I burst into tears and  
I felt myself easing up in his hands. I hugged him  
back and wished that I could stay like that for  
ever. I felt a wave of calmness crashing to my  
heart and taking me to the shore. I came  
here to save and survive. And that is all what

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my life is about. The wave of tranquility washed over me and I felt in ease for the first time in a decade.

"Ms. Armiger. . . ." ? I clicked back to reality as the anchor called me. "Ms. Armiger, please share a few words with us? . . . . ." the anchor said again.

I stood up from the chair and looked over the horizons of Stanford. They were still there. As the setting sun cast a shadow of hope over the pillars of Stanford Medical Centre, I took a selfless oath, a never breaking promise to all the eyes waiting for me to break the silence . . . . .

~~This is~~. I'll be your hope . . . . .

For long as I live . . . . .

Let the game begin . . . . .