

Marty stood completely still and completely silent as what little was left of his life unraveled around him. The air had completely gone out of the room and the only sound was Keiko crying.

“But,” she sobbed. “The tumor was gone. You were well.”

After giving Marty a chance to respond that he didn’t take, Tammy spoke.

“It came back,” she said.

Keiko kneeled down and picked up one of the scans of his brain. She stared down at the flimsy sheet, her tears dropping onto it.

“This is why you left,” Keiko gasped between cries.

She was growing inconsolable now, her breath coming in sharp inhales between sobs. She slowly got back to her feet.

“Tell me this is why you left me,” Keiko cried out.

Marty looked at her but this just made her cry harder. She stumbled back, hitting the wall. Marty stepped towards her to help.

“Leave me alone!” Keiko shrieked.

She turned and ran from the frat house, the brain scan still clutched in her hand. Marty stood and stared after her, not wanting to turn back and face the rest of the people in the room. After studying the papers on the floor for a few more moments Blake took a step back.

“Obviously this is a family matter,” he said.

He glanced back down at the papers one last time. Ken watched him closely, a dark feeling coming over him from the expression he saw on Blake’s face. Blake turned and left. After a few moments of silence Tammy spoke.

“Taking a job in Canada? Those were to be your final words to your family?”

Marty slowly turned back around but didn't look at her.

“You want to feed that crap to mom and dad, fine, you know I understand that. But why me, Marty?”

Finally he looked up at her. He had known that his deception would hurt her but had always assumed she wouldn't find out until after he had died. She was staring at him hard, demanding an answer.

“Your life was going good Tammy. You wasted enough time by my side while I was sick the first time,” Marty said.

She looked hurt by his words.

“Wasted? You're my little brother.”

At some point during the conversation Ken had moved and he was now standing beside Marty.

“What did mom and dad say when you told them?” Marty asked.

He knew the answer immediately by the way she shifted her weight and looked away.

“Let me guess. Dad said that if I wanted to be left alone then I should be left alone and mom didn’t believe you and still thinks I’m healthy happy and wealthy in Canada,” Marty said.

Tammy looked down at the floor, indicating that her brother had hit it right on the head.

“You know that they love you, Marty,” she said.

“No, I don’t know that. I didn’t know it the first time I was sick and I don’t know it now.”

Marty hated this. He hated thinking about it and he hated talking about it. Too much of his young life had been spent dealing with brain cancer. He had desperately wanted his final years to be completely free of that. He had just wanted to be normal for a few years before passing away. But first the scrolls had come along and now this. He hated it.

“Why did you do this? How’d you even find out?” Marty asked.

Again, Tammy looked hurt by his words.

“A job in Canada? I may get too busy with my own life sometimes but I’m not an idiot. When I started looking into it, it just didn’t make sense. You had left forever, I could feel it. So I made friends with someone at your old Doctor, got them to get me your medical records. After I saw them I had to find you. So

I hired someone who specializes in finding people and,” she paused and held out her arms. “Here I am.”

He wasn’t sure why but Marty was getting angry.

“But why not just leave me alone? The doctors said there was nothing we could do this time!”

“That’s not true!” Tammy shouted.

She stepped towards him.

“There are experimental procedures, new technologies, there are things they can try!” she said forcefully.

Marty stepped back and shook his head.

“No. I won’t be lobotomized by some procedure that has a one percent chance of saving my life.”

“Marty Wayne Schultz!” Tammy shouted.
“You are coming back to Florida with me and we’re going to find a way to beat this thing!”

Again he shook his head.

“I’m never going back there.”

Tammy let out a long, angry sigh. She was beyond frustrated and for the first time since she had been there she looked at Ken. He smiled.

“My name’s Kenshin but everyone calls me Ken but if you want to call me Kenshin please do,” he said quickly.

“You’re tall,” Ken added, a moment later.

Tammy gave him a confused look and then returned her gaze to Marty. They both had been shaken by this conversation and she knew that pressing him further right now might not be the best thing. Tammy gathered up the papers from

the floor and put them back into the folder. She stood back up and faced her little brother.

“I’m going to leave now but don’t think we’re done talking about this,” she told him.

“I’m going to be in town for a while.”

Marty nodded as she walked past him towards the door. She stopped before going out and looked over her shoulder at him.

“How long?” she asked quietly.

He knew what she was asking but hesitated. It would be the first time he voiced this to anyone. Speaking it made it real and he had to force himself to get the words out.

“They weren’t sure. Four or five years, and that was two years ago,” Marty answered.

Tammy nodded and then left.



Created and Written by A.C. Hall

EPISODE FOUR

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(IMPETUS)

Following his conversation with Tammy, Marty spent the rest of the day hiding out in his room. Upon waking up the next morning he had briefly considering doing the same thing again but at the last minute decided to go to class instead. He finally made a trip to the campus bookstore and found it to be packed with students as usual. After fighting through the

crowd to get his replacement textbooks he was in an even worse mood than before which was something he hadn't even thought possible.

Marty felt like a black cloud was hanging over him as he stalked down the campus hallway towards his first class. He found every noise he heard to be an annoyance, every step he took to be an inconvenience. A student who had to have been a lineman on the football team was walking down the middle of the hall, coming towards Marty. People scrambled to get out of his way and seeing as he was built much like a truck that seemed to be a smart course of action.

Marty gritted his teeth and continued walking straight towards the man, engaging him in a game of pedestrian chicken that the massive guy had no idea he was involved in. The wall of a man came crashing into Marty, knocking him

to the floor. He sat there for a moment, feeling foolish and angry. Someone reached a hand down to help him up and he reached up to take it. At the last second he looked to see who it was. Blake was standing there, hand outstretched. Marty got up on his own. He turned and continued walking down the hallway. Blake fell into step beside him.

A fight broke out in the hallway in front of them and the two stopped. People were whooping and hollering as two members of the football team rolled around on the floor, grappling. After just a minute a few of their teammates had broken it up and the crowd started to disperse.

“Insanity in individuals is something rare but in groups, parties, nations and epochs, it is the rule,” Blake said.

Marty didn't respond as the two continued their walk down the hallway.

"That's Nietzsche," Blake offered.

Marty stopped and turned towards him.

"What do you want?"

"Tell me you're not going to class," Blake said.

"Of course I'm going to class. I'm a college student and I'm going to class."

"Sloan knows your schedule, I guarantee it."

At the mention of Sloan, Marty turned and continued walking towards his class.

"You're a broken record, man," Marty said.

"I'm trying to help you here. You're underestimating Sloan Scott, and people who do that end up dead."

“I’m not estimating anyone!” Marty shouted, his patience wearing very thin. “I’m just trying to be a normal guy going to class.”

Marty picked up his pace, hoping to leave Blake behind.

“You’re not a normal guy, though, Marty,” Blake called out.

His classroom was just a little ways down the hall and Marty reached it quickly. He shot Blake a dirty look before going inside. The class was about to start and most of the desks were already taken. One in the very front was open and Marty walked towards it. Before he sat down he noticed an unusual character sitting in the back corner of the room. He was a Latino man with long, stringy black hair. He looked to be around forty years old and he had a nasty scar that ran up the side of his neck.

Marty's heart started pounding as he sat down. He hated to jump to conclusions but he just couldn't believe that this person was a student. He chanced a look over his shoulder at the man and saw that he was staring right at him. He turned back around, his heart beating even faster now.

The professor entered the room. He was a short round man who looked like he'd be more at ease rolling places than walking to them. He wore the world's most obvious toupee and carried an oversized briefcase.

“Good afternoon class. We need to do roll call before starting on today's assignments.”

He pulled out a sheet of paper and began reading off the names. He would call out a name and then mark beside it when the corresponding student announced their

presence. Marty tried to watch the Latino man out of the corner of his eye but could barely see him.

“Schultz, Marty Schultz,” the professor said. “Oh never mind, it says here he’s deceased.”

Marty cleared his throat and raised his hand.

“I’m Marty Schultz.”

The professor clicked his tongue.

“Have some respect young man, Marty Schultz is dead.”

Marty was about to argue when a noise in the back of the classroom captured his attention. The Latino man had stood up, his chair scraping the floor as he did so. He stepped forward towards Marty.

“And who might you be?” the professor asked loudly.

The man stopped. Marty was breathing hard and considering making a run for it.

“Lorenzo. I’m ... auditing.”

The man’s voice was harsh and scratchy. Marty jumped up and sprinted for the door. He flung it open and ran out into the hallway. He took a few steps before he noticed a person in the distance coming towards him. It was the older woman from Sloan’s place. Marty saw a door to his right and went through it.

He stood in a large classroom. He knew it would just be a matter of seconds before his two pursuers came in after him and he took a few running steps, looking around for an exit. The room extended so far that there was a second door at the other end that led back out into the hallway. Marty ran towards it as fast as he could. He covered the ground quickly but right

before he reached the door it opened. Lorenzo stepped into view, his hand raised, pointing at Marty.

“Ankho,” the fearsome Latino growled.

Marty stopped and his eyes went wide. It felt like someone had their hand around his throat and was choking the life out of him. He grasped at his neck with his hands but felt nothing there. Lorenzo stepped closer. He raised his arm up slowly and Marty felt himself being pulled up into the air. Lorenzo’s spell had him hovering three feet above the ground as it choked him.

Marty kicked his legs and clawed at his throat, trying anything to break the power of the spell. His lungs were burning and his mind was panicked. His eyes were locked on those of Lorenzo. There, Marty saw the eyes of a killer,

a man who was in the process of doing the thing he loved most in this world.

He could feel himself fading as the burning in his chest increased tenfold. He tried to call up a spell, any spell, but his mind was screaming for air again and again, leaving no room for further thought. Blackness began gnawing at the edge of his vision as unconsciousness threatened to overtake him. It pushed in further and further until all Marty saw was Lorenzo... and then Blake.

Blake had come through the door behind the murderous Latino. He extended his hand and an icy club formed. Blake swung it hard, hitting Lorenzo in the back of the head and knocking him out. Marty dropped and hit the floor hard. He gasped for air, pulling it in so fast that it hurt. Blake knelt down beside him.

“You okay?”

Marty couldn't respond. All he could do was breathe. He lay there for several moments, trying to recover. Blake remained knelt beside him, his back to the far door. He was completely oblivious to the fact that the old woman had stepped through it. Marty saw her, but when he tried to warn Blake his air starved throat was unable to give sound to the words.

She was forming a large ball of water in front of her and was preparing to launch it at them. Marty extended his hand and tried to call up the details of one of his spells. It took a moment but finally the symbols locked into his mind. He concentrated on the word. Aerios.

A powerful blast of air shot from his outstretched hand. It picked up a wave of desks as it traveled and Marty concentrated hard,

curving its path until it was sending them all towards the woman. She looked up in horror, her spell forgotten as the desks crashed down upon her. The spell filled the room with a hurricanes roar that faded as fast as it had appeared.

“We need to get the hell out of here,” Blake said.

He reached down and pulled Marty to his feet. The two of them rushed out into the hall. Blake led the way as they left the building and fled across a courtyard. There was a common area around the next building and they stopped there at a table. Marty sat down and continued to take deep breaths, just now feeling like he was recovering from the choking spell. Blake sat across from him.

“He won’t stop Marty,” Blake stated.

Marty covered his face with his hands. He didn't want to hear this. For the second time in a week he had come mere moments from being murdered by magic wielding psychopaths. He sat like that for several minutes, wishing everything would be back to normal when he finally removed his hands.

“How long have you known you had brain cancer?” Blake asked.

Marty laughed. It was a weary, bitter laugh. It was all he had in him at the moment. He kept his hands over his face. Even once the secret of the scrolls had been unveiled to him and had complicated his life, he still had his illness under control, still had it secret from everyone. In a way, it had become secret even to himself. He had gone so long without talking about it or seeing a doctor that it was like it wasn't even

real. But now Tammy had ended all of that. Blake knew, Ken knew, and worst of all, Keiko knew. A week ago he had his quiet, contained life that impacted no one. Now he had nothing.

Marty stood up. Blake started to say something but Marty just held up his hand and shook his head. He then turned and walked away without a word.

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Ken sat completely still on his bed, a comic book clutched in his hands. He was more tense than he could ever remember being in his entire life. He stared across the room at Tammy.

Marty's sister showed up twenty minutes ago and insisted on waiting there for him. She was sitting on his bed. Then things got even more

awkward when Keiko showed up a few minutes later, saying she needed to speak to Marty as soon as he got home. She was sitting at the computer desk.

He looked slowly from one to the other. Both looked angry, emotional, and at least in Ken's eyes, scary. They had been sitting in silence for almost ten straight minutes. Finally he could take no more and Ken loudly cleared his throat. This caused Tammy to look at him.

"I think we're probably the same age," Ken said with a smile.

"Ken!" Keiko yelled. "Don't be an idiot."

He threw up his arms.

"I was making a witty observation!"

"There's nothing witty about saying you're the same age."

Ken sat back.

“Well, no one was talking,” he said.

Tammy shifted and faced Keiko.

“Did you know Marty was here? Is that why you transferred?” Tammy asked.

The hurt was easy to hear in her voice.

“What? No, Tammy, if I had known I would’ve told you. You are my... or were my...” Keiko paused, trying to find the right words. “You were supposed to be my sister. I wouldn’t have kept this from you.”

After a moment she continued.

“I transferred here with my new boyfriend.”

“He’s a real winner, by the way,” Ken said sarcastically.

Keiko shot him an angry look.

“You don’t know him. He’s different when no one else is around,” she said.

Ken laughed sarcastically.

“That’s the sign of a real winner, a guy who can only treat his girlfriend right when no one else is around.”

Keiko was about to respond but stopped when she heard Tammy inhale sharply. She looked over and saw that Tammy was wiping a tear from her eye. Keiko immediately felt guilty. This was no time to sit and argue with her estranged brother. Ken sensed the same thing and stood up slowly.

“I’m going to get a cheeseburger,” he said.

He opened the door but paused and looked over at Tammy.

“I’d be willing to go vegetarian for the right girl,” Ken said.

He stepped out and quickly shut the door behind him. After a moment Tammy laughed. Keiko joined her and the two laughed for

several minutes. They both sat in silence after that, catching their breath.

Slowly but surely the weight returned to the room as the reason they were both there returned to the forefront of their minds. They sat, the silence growing heavy between them. Finally Keiko gestured to the large stack of papers sitting beside Tammy and spoke.

“What is all of that?”

Tammy looked down at it for a moment before answering.

“Research on some new experimental treatments for brain cancer. I’m going to try to convince him to come home to Florida and at least attempt to fight.”

Keiko nodded, suddenly finding it hard to breathe. She hated hearing his illness spoken about. It made it real again. The first time had

been so terrible for Marty, but together they had fought through it. And then he had left her.

She turned away so Tammy wouldn't see the tear run down her face. It had taken Keiko a long time to get over Marty leaving. She had finally accepted that he was just a jerk, a horrible person who had wanted more from life. But now she found her hard fought battle to gain peace with his departure was completely null and void. He hadn't left because he didn't love her; he had left because he did.

Tammy watched as Keiko struggled with her emotions.

“He loves you, you know,” Tammy said.

“He only left to protect you. I'm sure of it.”

Keiko wiped more tears from her eyes.

“I need to hear that from him,” Keiko said.

Tammy nodded and both of them fell silent, alone with their weighty thoughts.

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Annabel Lee Gregory was lost in thought as she walked down the dark sidewalk towards The Seasoned Reader. She didn't notice the person hiding between buildings as she moved past and jumped when they spoke.

“Annabel,” Marty said.

She turned and saw him standing there in the shadows.

“Marty? What are you doing?”

He stepped closer but stayed far enough back to avoid being illuminated fully by the nearby streetlight.

“You scared me,” Annabel said with a smile.

“Sorry, I just wanted to get your attention.”

He sounded sad. Annabel moved closer, wishing she could fully see his face.

“Is everything okay?”

There was a pause before he answered.

“Yeah. I won’t be taking any shifts at the Seasoned Reader for a little while though.”

Her mood dampened at this.

“Oh,” she muttered.

Marty loved working at the bookstore but after spending most of the day thinking about what Blake had said he decided it would be best to avoid places where he was easily found.

“There are some other things I need to focus on right now,” Marty said.

“I understand,” she said, trying to hide the disappointment in her voice.

The two stood there for several moments.

“I’m actually heading into work right now,” Annabel said.

“Right, sorry. I stopped you because I was hoping you could do me a favor.”

“Okay, what is it?”

“The scrolls that get traded in there. Will you bring any new ones that come into the store to me?” Marty asked. “I’ll pay you for them and then you can just take the money back to the store on your next shift.”

Having learned all too well the dangerous ways in which the scrolls could be used Marty had decided he wanted to limit who could get their hands on them. He had no way of knowing how the collectors were using them

and felt safer just keeping as many as possible out of circulation.

“I know it’s an inconvenience.”

She shook her head and smiled.

“Of course, anything for you,” she answered.

They stood in silence again before she finally took a step away.

“Well, see you around Marty.”

“See you,” Marty responded.

She took a few steps down the sidewalk and then turned around quickly.

“Would you like to maybe go to dinner sometime or something?” Annabel asked.

Marty stared at her dumbly. He hadn’t been expecting anything like this to happen and he fought to find an answer. He liked Annabel, enjoyed being around her, but hated his life

right now. With the spells, Keiko, the cancer, his sister, Sloan, Blake, it was hard to even consider something as normal as going to dinner with someone like Annabel.

She sensed his hesitation and her cheeks flashed red.

“Never mind, it was a stupid idea,” Annabel said quickly.

“No, it’s not, it’s just that...” Marty began.

“Let’s just forget about it,” Annabel interrupted.

She spun around and walked away before he could respond. He watched her go, feeling powerless and more frustrated than before. Marty briefly considered going back to the frat house but instead set off in the other direction, content to just wander the dark streets of the city instead.

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It was late by the time Marty returned to the Beta Theta Pi fraternity house. A few of the frat members were watching TV but most were already asleep. He walked up the stairs and down the hall to Ken's room. The door was unlocked and as he stepped inside he saw that the only light in the room was coming from a computer screen. Keiko was sitting on Ken's bed, her laptop open in front of her. She looked up at him.

Marty glanced over at his own bed and saw that his sister Tammy was asleep there. He looked back at Keiko, who offered him a weak smile.

“Hi,” she said quietly.

Marty closed the door behind him but stood beside it, unsure of what to do. He stared at Keiko. She looked beautiful bathed in the light from the computer. He stepped closer and started to sit on the bed beside her. He thought better of it at the last moment and walked across the room towards the computer desk. Then he felt foolish for doing this and stopped again. He turned back towards her and saw that she was smiling at him. He smiled back and then walked over and sat down beside her.

“Were you waiting for me?” Marty asked, careful to keep his voice down and not disturb his sister.

“I thought we should talk,” Keiko answered. She reached over and touched his arm. It was the first time she had touched him in over two years and Marty felt like he had stuck his

finger in an electrical socket. The jolt moved through him from head to toe and for a moment he felt lightheaded and stupid and completely and totally in love with her. There was an intoxication in that touch, an overwhelming power of familiarity.

They both felt it. Marty didn't look at her, afraid what he would see in her eyes, afraid there would be no choice but to kiss her and further complicate his life. Finally he pulled his arm away slowly, trying not to be too obvious about it. He was relieved when her hand fell away.

“Were you ever going to call me or write me?” Keiko asked.

He thought about lying to her but decided against it.

“No,” he said. “I hired a lawyer back in Florida. He has some things that he’s supposed to send out after I die. I left some things there for you. A letter.”

Keiko took a deep breath as she tried to keep her emotions under control. She nodded.

“Did you leave to protect me from having to deal with your sickness again?” Keiko asked quietly.

The question hung there in the air. It was Marty’s truest motivation revealed and yet he feared greatly confirming it for her. He was still going to die and now with Sloan Scott after him there were even more reasons for him to want Keiko to stay as far away as possible. Still, he didn’t want to lie to her.

The door to the room swung open.

“Marty!” Blake said as he flipped on the light and stepped inside.

“Shhh!” Marty said, gesturing towards his sister.

Tammy shifted in the bed but didn't wake up. Blake either didn't notice or didn't care. He stepped into the room and stood in front of Marty.

“We're in the middle of something,” Keiko said angrily.

Blake ignored her. He held out a sheet of paper.

“What is it?” Marty asked suspiciously as he took it.

He looked at it and saw that it was a picture of what looked like a scroll, but different from any he had seen before.

“It’s a single cast spell. These only work once and the scroll disintegrates once you use them,” Blake said, a smile on his face.

Marty had never seen him so excited and it unnerved him. Keiko was confused and turned towards Marty.

“What is he talking about?”

Before Marty could respond Blake spoke again.

“That right there is the reason you’re going to help me take down Sloan. That scroll contains a spell with the power to fully cure any one person of everything that ails them. Sloan has it locked away in his vault. You help me get rid of him and that scroll is yours.”

Keiko sat up, disturbed by what Blake was saying.

“What is he saying Marty?” Keiko asked.

Blake leaned down towards her.

“I’m talking about a way to use magic to cure Marty’s cancer.”

She laughed.

“Magic isn’t real.”

Blake smiled and extended his hand.

“Blake, don’t,” Marty said, realizing what he was about to do.

Ignoring Marty’s words, Blake cast his ice spell. A small gathering of ice grew above his outstretched palm. He shaped it into a ball that grew in size. He leaned forward and blew on it. It broke apart into shards of ice that fell onto the bed in front of Keiko. She stared at it, her eyes wide. There was a confused expression on her face and Blake sighed heavily and then cast again.

This time he fired out a stream of ice into the pillow she was resting her arm on. He kept it trained there until it turned into a block of solid ice. Keiko cried out and pulled her arm away. She fell over onto Marty as she tried to scoot away from it.

“Shh,” Marty said, trying to keep her from waking up Tammy.

“What is he, Marty?” Keiko yelled.

“What’s happening?”

Tammy moved and Marty stared at her, desperately hoping that she somehow remained asleep. The few areas in which he had kept his out of control life contained were quickly falling apart. He hadn’t wanted Keiko to learn about the scrolls but saw no way to reverse that now. At the very least he wanted to keep Tammy from finding out. She slowly sat up in bed and

looked over at them, a sleepy expression on her face.

“What’s going on?” she asked.

END OF EPISODE 4

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