

**HANNAH K. GALVIN**

**Open letter to my teenage patient with congenital HIV and a CD4 count of 0 after she told me going back on antiretrovirals was “pointless”**

You've had plenty of time to perfect your slouch over the molded moss-back of plastic chairs, folding yourself rendshadowed into the arms of your hoodie like a necklace of weathertorn bones dropped by some careless angel.

Time is not what concerns you.

It hovers like your dry swallowed pulse in the yawn of pharmacy counters lined by last year's frosted tinsel, the vacant hope only adults cling to with their high-pitched snapdragon lips and the sour aftertaste of regret.

Pity is only one part nausea. The rest is mirror, or rather the chalk outline of its missing shards. I know how it follows you, with its ripper stealth and whole tone footsteps, the way daybreak chases a sundial gnomon toward eyelash.

It oak rings your face with its echo, slips only stale apologies onto your finger.

So when you tell me it's pointless,  
how can I argue with someone who learned to write their epitaph before their name?

And when you wide-angle this world, comb cloudburst to find Jacob's Ladder descending into a lover's quarrel of sewer grates, when you capture the emulsion of its stagnant puddle water and speak the mothertongue of ashtrays, as if no other language could spin silk strong enough to hold you,

This is how life revolving doors into unblinking cell phone lights, the stiff rash of hospital sheets and so many crumpled Dixie cups of time you did not ask for.