



WHERE

WE

GO

FROM

HERE

LUCAS ROCHA

TRANSLATED BY LARISSA HELENA

PUSH

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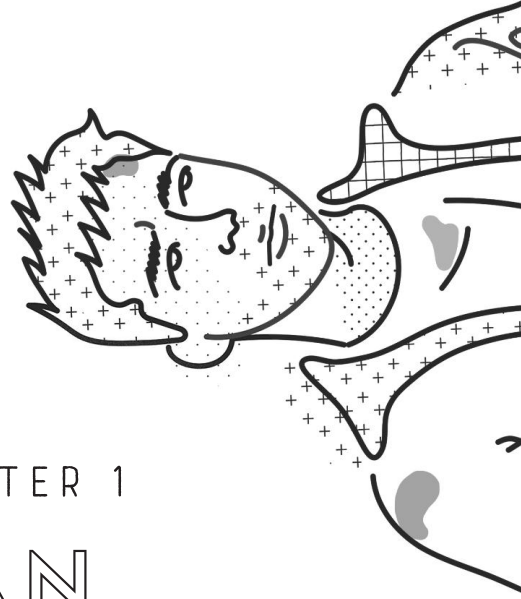
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CHAPTER 1

IAN

THE FIRST STEP IS ADMITTING to yourself that, no matter the outcome, life goes on.

The clinic is packed with people walking in every direction: To the left, a child is running in circles while an exhausted mother tries to calm her down. To the side, a man in his seventies rocks back and forth on a cane, refusing every courteous offer of a seat. A little farther down, the door to one of the exam rooms is ajar and a doctor is scanning a medical chart for information while a woman sitting across from her waits anxiously. To my right, a tall guy with a blue streak in his hair is staring at his phone, his foot tapping as nervously as mine, and I can tell that even though he's looking at the device, he's not paying the slightest bit of attention to it.

And in the middle of all this hubbub, of doctors and nurses walking this way and that, of people dissatisfied with the long wait time for appointments and a dusty fan that makes more noise than ventilation, I wait.

“Ian Gonçalves?”

A woman with shoulder-length blond hair and the coldest blue eyes I’ve ever seen looks at me; a folded piece of paper rests in her hand as she closes the door to the lab behind her. She has wrinkles that she’s probably tried to cover up with Botox injections and the full lips of someone who’s tried rejuvenating fillers, and there’s a gold necklace with a heart-shaped pendant hanging from her neck.

I press my finger against a cotton ball that absorbs a drop of blood (I had to come back in for a second rapid HIV test because they told me my blood clotted the first time and they needed another sample) and ask myself if those cold blue eyes bring good news or bad.

I nod, and she signals for me to stand up.

“This way, please.” She turns her back to me and walks to a door at the end of the hallway. She doesn’t even look to check if I’m following her. Maybe she’s just used to the veiled nervousness that comes with getting tested for HIV.

The blue-haired guy next to me waves and parts his lips into a supportive smile, as if wishing me luck. His finger is also pressed against a cotton ball as he waits for his own results.

I go down the hallway, and it morphs into a blur; I’m dizzy with anxiety, sweaty from the heat, and exhausted from all the waiting. It’s been only thirty minutes but feels like an eternity.