“**HELP WANTED**” it’s different than “**I NEED HELP**”.

Jaline read the sign with curiosity, the man holding it was hunched over, counting the change of the past few days, given to him by those who were “helping” him out.

“What’s your name?” she asked the man.

“Thomas” he responded.

He looked up at her and brought his arm forth to shake her hand. His hand was weak, as his greeting, but his sincerity was stronger than anyone she had ever encountered. She decided to sit down next to him but was immediately pained with the feeling of giving him just pity, simply struggling with the urge of trying to help beyond giving him dollars or coins. He looked at her a little shocked for a moment and then began to look for something. She decided to *people watch* and received mostly negative stares from people walking by, as if they themselves were doing any better really. They both sat in silence for a while, watching people come and go out of a doughnut shop. The buses that went by provided a familiar background sound, the 151 bus went by with an internal Bears advertisement heard only when the doors opened. Thomas smiled at the people who watched him, sign in hand, cup of change on the side, but said nothing, except to me.

“Who would miss me?” he asked me.

“I’m sure many people who have been in your life or even who have seen you will miss you” she said

He received a few coins from a woman with her two daughters and he told her to have a

Blessed Day”

“But who would truly miss me if I walked away right now, and never came back?” he asked, this time looking at me

“I would miss you” I said trivially

“No” he responded, “you would miss learning from me”

Jaline thought about Thomas a while after their encounter. Each Wednesday after her lecture in the Gage building she would make sure she had time to chat with him. Weeks of seeing him went by but his situation had not really changed. He was in need of care, much medical attention due to his diabetes. There is a lack of urgency for a disease like Diabetes due to the progression of medical avocations for it, nevertheless it takes the lives of many each year. Over 441,000 people with diabetes and over a million volunteers are active in advocating for others with the disease according to the American Diabetes Association. But Jaline thought, what might explain why charities generalize disease and the victims under them? Was Thomas simply not helpless enough to get help? Jaline made a point to visit him continuously, despite her duties at home and her work and school life in need of a great balance. Her husband Maurice advised her to continue to try to get him to a free clinic, but every time she tried, Thomas had refused. He felt betrayed by the people he knew and the life that he had, this must have, in his mind, been some kind of punishment. She pursued however, and one day he said yes.

“They told me I could be helped only if I keep receiving their help for the rest of my life” he said coming out of the doctors’ office

“But this won’t be able to claim your life anymore!” she responded positively

“Yes but what kind of life do I have now?” he asked her. “Why can’t there be a cure by now, and why have people moved on?”

It was then that Jaline began to restructure her way of thinking about disease, charity, and being a victim. What happens after? How do you being to restructure your life when you discover what you’re options are? The main goal of charity is to raise money, that’s it; the need for a cure, the awareness towards a disease, and the fight for those to survive are all essentially secondary compared to the monetary goal. Thomas was asking for money to help himself, but the money going to places like the free clinics are really what he needed to survive, not the coins in his cup. Charity presents a power disconnect and asks the question: Who is allowed to make a profit? Jaline’s husband Maurice was able to work with her in getting Thomas a place to stay, despite her efforts for weeks, she couldn’t help feeling terrible that she was taking pity on him as a person, devaluing him as victim of a disease. Nevertheless, he thanked her repeatedly, and she couldn’t help but wonder if he felt the same ways she did about this situation.

“I don’t want you to feel as though I feel bad for you or that you would never be able to help yourself” she stated.

Thomas continued to clean the room he was in without looking up.

“I know you are an actual person with value, and I would never want to use you as an example of how hard to fall or where to not end up” she continued.

There was silence for a while and then Thomas looked up and responded

“I really appreciate you saying that”.

Jaline would have loved for Thomas to have gotten a six figure salary job at a big firm and lived happily ever after without her help, but the truth is, he needed help for a long time. And long after he ended up losing his battle, she missed him and she hoped that he knew that.

“I’m home” Maurice said walking through the door.

It was Friday night and time to relax. Jaline was sitting on the floor painting her toenails and watching a movie she had already seen before. Maurice went straight to the kitchen to find something to eat. Jaline couldn’t help but notice it was uncomfortable to bend over to paint her next foot, a discomfort she had secretly been ignoring for a while but it seemed to have become more of an issue recently. She called Maurice into the room and explained that she would have to make an appointment. They both had a terrible idea of what could be going on, the disease was in Jaline’s family, and despite this she hadn’t been keeping up with her annual appointments out of fear. But Jaline knew her case was different, when the doctor said they detected a cancerous tumor in her breast she did not resort herself to a room with no windows or shun herself into a box with no way out. She had a way out, she was one of the lucky ones, even with a foundationally incurable disease. It was in this moment she decided to exploit the charity, not the case. With Thomas in mind, Jaline gave herself a research question, and like Thomas her own charitable association. What is the relationship between Susan G Komen for the cure and the cure?

A few weeks passed among her preparation for treatment and she began to realize the world that surrounded her, pitied her. “I’m so sorry for you” and “God be with you” became routine, and although intentions were good, it became scarier when she realized she was on the good side of things. According to their website, Susan G Komen is not just the country’s but the world’s largest breast cancer organization, funding more research than any other nonprofit while providing real time help to those facing the disease. Jaline asked herself what kind of “real time” help was being advocated here, the language that was used was very questionable.

“Maurice do you know anyone who has gotten aid or help from the Susan G Komen foundation?” she asked him

“Nope, I can’t think of one person, and both of our mothers had it” he responded, bringing food into the room.

She continued to search through things, if her treatment was going to be the same as it would have been 30 or 40 years ago, where were the supposed millions of dollars in the cure and advanced medical treatments going to? “A charitable organization must benefit broad public interest” Jaline read to herself. It was an article on the first page in the Courier Tribune by Chip Womick. This meant that the Susan G Komen foundation owed to the victims, of the cancer they are continuously fighting, an explanation of how they are being helped. She decided to record her findings and organize them instead of tabbing them on her screen confusing other research. If she was going to go through this she knew she wanted to be informed, much like her real life job enables her to do.

“This nonprofit foundation is cloudy in comparison to the technicalities of other nonprofits” she explained on the recording.

“How so?” asked Maurice overhearing her

“For instance according to this article in the Huffington Post it says that “so far, Komen has identified and filed legal trademark oppositions against more than a hundred of these Mom and Pop charities, including ‘Kits for a Cure’ ‘Surfing for a cure’ and Cupcakes for a Cure’—and many of these organizations are too small and underfunded to hold their own grounds” she responded. (Basset, “Susan G Komen Elbows out Charities Over Use of the Word Cure”)

By researching further Jaline was able to make conclusions in her personal journal on the matter. Connections referred back to her language point she stated earlier to Maurice.

She decided to do another recording herself again:

“Susan G Komen has marketed not only language but the disease itself by using pink and a pink ribbon on everything. This also reinforces gender biases associating only women to breast cancer and following, only women to pink. Where and why do the priorities remain in money? The small groups who the Komen foundation attacked had to call a trademark to keep their heads above water. This was more than unjust and unfair”.

“It’s time for bed, you sound like a news reporter” Maurice said waking up to the computer light.

“Just a few more minutes” she responded typing. “And I am a news reporter, sort of”

He stared at her waiting for more of an answer.

“I report legal news to a judge...sort of”

He smiled and her and snuggled under the covers; she kept working.

The sun shone in and Jaline couldn’t be happier it was Saturday, she stayed up all night. She snuggled under the covers next to Maurice’s snoring and went to sleep for a while. When she woke up her sources were considered in a different light amongst even more questions. But she knew she wouldn’t have the time or the energy to do this herself after a while.

“Hey you awake?” she asked Maurice shaking him awake.

“No” he responded

“I’m going to start attending that community group for men and women with breast cancer. I heard about it from Shane”

“The crossing guard?”

“His wife has breast cancer”

“Oh”

“Anyway, they meet every Monday and Friday at 7 and I am going to try to attend at least one a week”

“Do you want me to go with you?”

“Yes please”

Jaline got out of bed and immediately got dressed and went downstairs to the home computer

“Hi honey” Jaline’s mother responded over the phone.

“I still don’t understand how this organization is even running, what if I needed their help”

“I’m doing fine just worried about you” her mother responded sarcastically

“I’m going to start attending a support group and ask them about this” Jaline responded

“That’s a good idea, let me know if it helps” her mother responded.

After talking to her mother Jaline decided to go for a walk. It was very windy and she immediately regretted not carrying a heavier jacket. Her next doctor’s appointment was tomorrow and she wasn’t as worried for herself as she was for those people who can’t come up with the courage or funds to even go. There were several people walking their dogs out, including a man who looked kind of like Thomas.

“Good afternoon!” he said to her smiling.

“Good afternoon” she responded.

She thought to herself that that could have been Thomas, happily treated, with his pet on the leash, strolling in the park of his own free will. If only he wasn’t ignored by the very charities she gave to in order to help.

“Hey Jaline!” Shane said from across the street as she approached the end of the park.

“Hey Shane, how is Melanie?”

“She’s doing well! We are dipping into the savings a bit but we caught it in time so that’s good”

“That’s great!” Jaline stated with relief. “I’m going to start attending the meetings”.

“Oh, I’m so sorry Jaline! I had no idea!” he exclaimed

“No need to apologize, I’m one of the lucky ones” Jaline responded.

After a very warming hug Jaline headed towards home, Maurice was standing outside with Jennings in his arms.

“Why are you and the cat casually standing here?” she said trying not to laugh

“He wanted some fresh air” responded Maurice. Jennings purred loudly at being held like a baby

After walking inside Jaline checked her email and saw the latest one was from the breast cancer support group. Initiation night was tonight at 7 to make any newcomers feel welcome. She decided what she was going to wear and decided to watch a movie in the meantime.

“Have you seen Pink Ribbons Inc?” she asked Maurice as he walked inside the house

“Nope, but it sounds interesting” he responded

The film began by showing women in pink about to start the breast cancer walk, the “Susan G Komen Global Race for the Cure”. The first quote of the film by Barbara Ehrenreich, writer and social critic, resonated with Jaline

“When I was being treated for breast cancer in 2001 I did a strange thing, I did not research the science, I became fascinated more by the breast cancer culture that I was encountering on the internet and other things at the time…what is with all these with all this pink ribbons and everything?”

The film went on to explain just how problematic the breast cancer pinkwashing campaign like Susan G Komen can be. The victims themselves are secondary to their actual survival count and resorted mostly to their monetary contributions to the charity and the disease prepped up with cancer walks, jogs and other activities. Jaline and Maurice watched professional opinions alongside the clips from those who walked, including one from Dr. Samantha King, author of Pink Ribbons Inc, Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy.

“It wasn’t until Regan came into power that we saw explicit policies designed to shift responsibility away from health and welfare from the government towards private entities, philanthropic organizations and the encouragement of specifically of cooperation’s to participate in that. (Pink Ribbons Inc, 2:33)

Jaline took notes on that fact with a plan to add it to her previous research. Politics intertwined with charity had the potential for changes seemingly to be mostly just negative. Referring to Dr. Susan love she remembered that there needs to be an effort to re-politicize this combination. This can point out to people that they don’t know where the research is going and why they should get involved with the answer. She looked forward to seeing what other women had to say about this organization and the disease after the film had finished.

“Are you nervous?” asked Maurice

“No I’m excited” said Jaline putting on her jacket

When they got to the Center for Cancer Treatment and Support there was commotion coming from the main room. When Jaline and Maurice walked in they were welcomed by a woman with the nametag “Susan Brend”.

“Hello you must be Jaline! Come join us!” she stated

Jaline couldn’t help but notice the pink ribbons on each of the women, there was a table with information on breast cancer stages, treatment and other ways to support, including giving to charity. Jaline opened the pamphlet to see a personal memoir from a person in a cancer support group called IV league stage four cancer support.

*“In 2004 [I was] rediagnosed with stage IV and when you’re in stage IV it means that the disease has spread to some other part outside of the breast. It’s also known as metastasis and the only thing I ever knew about stage IV was that you die when you get to stage IV, that that’s the stage before you die, there’s no stage V” –Sandy Coogleman* (Pink Ribbons Inc, 30:13)

“*There are very few of these..you go to a regular breast cancer support group and you’re the elephant in the room. They’re learning to live, and you’re learning to die” –Jeanne Collins* (Pink Ribbons Inc, 32:00)

Jaline’s excitement left immediately, she put the pamphlet in her purse and took a seat.

“We want everyone to feel welcome, who would like to start off the group with a story, personal reflection or thoughts and intentions in the group?” asked Susan

Jaline raised her hand, but Susan called on a lady in the back.

I would just like to reiterate something my boss Dr. Susan Love, President of Dr. Susan Love Research Foundation stated, and that is that “we are still doing the same things, which I have been known to call slash, burn and poison. Which are really crude ways of dealing with disease, I meant that’s what you do when you don’t understand it. And I really felt I needed to get involved in figuring out how to stop it” (Pink Ribbons, 37:08)

“Very good point Lilian” Susan responded

One woman stood up and waited for everyone to look at her.

“I’m tired of all this fucking chemotherapy” she said before sitting down

A few women clapped and others silently nodded. Jaline looked around the room at all the women very upset at their current state, as they should be. Why then, would they support a foundation that actually exploits them. Jaline stood up instead of raising her hand

“I was diagnosed with stage II and I am one of the lucky ones  
 Jaline stated, at this point everyone looked up.

“ It is my mission to make people, especially women aware of the pinkwashing detrimental effects of the Susan G Komen campaign and that women may have good intentions but they are raising money and sending it for research they get no results on. There are other things that can be done” she stated

“Like what?” said one woman still reading the pamphlet.

Jaline turned to her and responded. “Part of the issue according to Barbara Brenner, executive director of Breast Cancer Action, is that the wrong message is being delivered. A lot of women think that if they get regular mammograms they won’t get breast cancer, and that is simply untrue. The message in media changed to “Early detection is your best protection, how many of you have heard that?”

A few women raised their hands in hesitation

“Mammograms don’t keep people from getting cancer. They aid in hopefully getting treatment for a disease that can affect anyone. Early detection is your best protection against what?” Jaline asked. No one responded. Susan cleared her throat and stood up

“That is also a good point, anyone else?” she stated.

“My name is Nataline Cort and I agree with Jaline” she said standing up. Susan sighed

“When I was going through chemotherapy my friend Barbara Ehrenreich agreed in that I was completely baffled by the language that I was “battling” a disease, I wasn’t battling anything I was forcing myself to comply with the treatments that were recommended” she stated. (Pink Ribbons 50:11)

A few women nodded in agreement. Susan looked at her watch.

“We will be ending this session a little early ladies” she stated.

The women looked at her a little annoyed but began to put things into her purses. Jaline tapped Maurice to ask what time it was.

“Jaline can I speak to you for a moment?” Susan asked

“Sure” she said

“Look, I know you’re new to this group, but I don’t appreciate you getting these women all riled up, especially against an organization that’s on your side”.

“Excuse me?”

“I do the Susan G Komen for the cure breast cancer walk every year, and this organization has donated over millions of dollars to the fight for a cure, if you don’t want to help defeat breast cancer that’s fine but don’t put that kind of negativity on others in the group” Susan said reaching for her phone

“But I—“

“Excuse me” Susan answered a phone call and walked away

“Wow that was rude” Maurice said from behind. “Are you going to come back?” he asked

“Oh of course I will” Jaline said putting on her jacket. “I have some more research to do.

When they got home Maurice went straight upstairs for bed while Jaline turned on the home computer. Jenngings was on the keyboard purring and she completely ignored him. She ran across something called “ThinkBeforeYouPink” and read the mission statement:

Think Before You Pink®, a project of [Breast Cancer Action](http://bcaction.org/), launched in 2002 in response to the growing concern about the number of pink ribbon products on the market. The campaign calls for more transparency and accountability by companies that take part in breast cancer fundraising, and encourages consumers to ask [critical questions](http://thinkbeforeyoupink.org/about-us/?page_id=13) about pink ribbon promotions.

She saved the link to her file and recorded the new research results.

“The results from Charity Navigator, a reputable site, gave the Susan G Komen foundation a rating of 78.97. The total revenue being $228, 394, 992, with fundraising events being at $110,595,295 but absolutely no indication of the money that is donated for the research to end breast cancer, lead alone what kind of research that is. There is a reason Think Before You Pink is a project running on the concern that the funds are misued, and the disease is exploited. For example the pay package of CEO and founder of Susan G Komen’s foundation, Nancy Brinker has a disproportionate amount compared to the charities’ numbers. In addition she received a 64% pay raise. This is all according to an article in nbcnews which also reported that Charity Navigator president Ken Berger suggests it may get worse before getting any better. He is quoted

“When donors realize that (Brinker’s) salary is so high and so out of comparison to what it normally would be, I a certain there are going to be some donors who are no longer going to support this organization because they have lost trust in its’ decision-making” (NBC, Susan Komen CEO’s Salary Draws Fire as Donations Drop, Races are Canceled). This raises a lot of eyebrows for those Susan G Komen supporters I believe. One thing is for certain, the money, however and wherever it is being allocated is not being represented by any charts or success stories to the public. Jaline put her research away and rested, ready for a new day of treatment. Before she knew it, months went by, and her moods were declining as a result of the routines. Maurice would come in and check on her as often as possible.

“Can you go to my meeting today for me?” She asked weakly

“Of course” he said, I will be back as soon as it’s over, and I’ll take notes for you.

“Thank you” she said smiling

Maurice walked in a little late to a woman speaking

“I think that what this ties into, is the very warm and fuzzy sentimentality around pink which is supposed to be a comforting thing, rather than something that is jarring to people. My question would be what does lighting up Niagara falls for 24 hours in pink really do to affect change? (Pink Ribbons Inc, 1:26)

It was a statement sounding verbatim to Dr. Charlene Elliot-Associate Professor, Communication Studies at the University of Calgary. And Maurice thought, she must have seen the documentary.

Susan looked very irritated but before she could speak Maurice stepped in and shared with the group.

“My wife, Jaline couldn’t make it in today. Most likely effects from the treatment you are all aware of. I would just like to make it known that because of her and her diligent research I have been more than invested in finding out about the charity impact on those it advocates for, in this case breast cancer”

A few women nodded.

“How many of you know the terms for breast cancer?”

No one raised their hand so Maurice went on

“Well I came to find out there are different types and I don’t think many women are aware of them. According to the American Cancer Society, there’s carcinoma, adenocarcinoma, carcinoma in situ, invasive or infiltrating carcinoma, and sarcoma. In men there is ductal carcinoma in situ, paget disease of the nipple, infiltrating or invasive ductal carcinoma, and more” he stated. “It is important to research your diagnosis because it isn’t your disease your fighting against, it’s your life you’re fighting for”

There was a pause after Maurice sat down, followed by a round of clapping from the women.

Susan stood up once more and settled everyone down. “I really don’t understand why you and your wife want to disrupt the necessity of cancer research organizations and benefits, nothing either of you have been saying has been helping”

A lady in the back spoke up. “Susan which one of the cancer terms does Susan G Komen support?” she asked.

Susan just stared at her.

“Susan” said another woman, “writer and social critic Ellen Leopold said to me that “instead of telling you what has come out of this investment they tell you all the money that went into it. Susan G Komen has invested over millions of dollars but in my opinion have little to show for it. This is how capitalism works, they are looking for markets and expanding their markets….medicalize American women” (Pink Ribbons 1:20)

Maurice scanned the room, seeing the faces of women change over the past few weeks from passively accepting the state they were in to standing up, literally and metaphorically to change the ways in which they and the disease were treated was heartwarming. He recorded all the opinions and changes into Jaline’s notebook. After the session was over, Susan was the first one to leave. When Maurice got home he went straight to the bedroom to check on Jaline, she was breathing fine and Jennings was cuddled next to her. He decided to make a recording for her

“Today’s meeting proved to me that women who are victims of a disease are not victims, they are activists, fighting for themselves and others so that they won’t have to suffer. Susan G Komen for a cure is an organization founded on good morals, saving the lives of women who have breast cancer, but go about doing it in questionable ways. If women who believe there is a cure knew a better way to find it they would do so themselves, they walk and run miles, jump out of planes and even buy products in the name of this “support” without giving a second thought to their money being misued. Even diseases are marketed, even lives and victims can be used for a profit”   
Maurice ended the recording and cuddled next to Jaline until the sun shone into the room. Jaline got up and went straight to her research table. Her book of findings was coming together quite nicely. And after a few more days of preparation, she decided to bring it to one of the meetings.

“You’re back!” Said one of the women

Jaline smiled and gave her a hug. Susan walked passed her without saying a word and instead put on a video for the group. It was Ambassador Nancy G Brinker- CEO Susan G Komen for the Cure, the video was a short clip that stated:

“since our inception, we have donated to this cause, to this mission, over a billion and a half dollars. Well over 600 million of it has gone to basic and clinical research. And at any one time we will have hundreds and millions dollars of grants that are acted and carefully looked at by teams of what we believe to be the best scientists in the us, patient advocates” (Pink Ribbons Inc, 40:00).

After the clip was over, a few women glared at Susan, some looked for an answer for Jaline and the others looked for something to read. Jaline decided to make Susan’s issue with her, public.

“I’m not trying to say that the money you have invested was to waste, or that there is no cure or that charity is pointless” Jaline said “But I am saying you need to reconsider all of these things in a different light, one that exposes the inconsisties of the foundation”. Jaline handed Susan a smaller version of the book she had been working on.

“The first article is about how Baker Hughes is selling over 1,000 drill bits painted pink in support of this research ordeal. But the company is involved in hydraulic fracking operations, and I’m sure you know about that” Jaline stated.

Susan nodded silently.

“I’m just saying, reconsider” Jaline said sitting down.

By the end of the cancer sessions Jaline had attended, no one, including Susan was wearing the pink ribbon. A picture of Charlette Haley, creator of the first ribbon for breast cancer for a real awareness to its’ issues was hung in the back. After the treatments Jaline kept a better eye on her health instead of hiding from it, always aware that a clean bill of health was not always a gurantee, in fact in a lot of cases the cancer returned for some.

“You should publish that book you know” Maurice said to her one morning

“Yeah I should, but I don’t want people to have to buy it” she responded

“I’ve been using that site you told me about, SkinDeep to find the carcinegic materials and chemicals in the products we’ve been using and you have to stop buying that lipstick”

“Awwww the purple one?”

“Yeah I know it’s bold but…”

“Okay, Okay”

Maurice hugged her and went into the living room, Jaline looked at her book and opened it to the last page. She decided to add a few more words and quote.

As my doctor, Dr. Olufunmilayo Olopade who is the director of Cancer Risk Clinic at the University of Chicago would say, we just haven’t done the research to tell us exactly what to do. Categories of pink washers include cosmetic companies, companies that make food (specifically dairy and alcohol), and companies that make cars. In charities like Susan G Komen for the cure, the message is heavily obfuscated, the victims of breast cancer are devalued and the “fight for the cure” is ambiguous language meant to create a market for change, monetary value at the forefront. It is a shame, but it is reality in the current state.

“For people to finally rise up and reject, …they have to be aware of the magnitude of the lies they are being fed” and it is tempting to say that they [Susan G Komen] must be in a conspiracy, but that’s way to easy. I wish it were, because if it were a conspiracy, then we could expose it and people would be aware. But it’s not, it’s business as usual”- Judy Brady, writer and activist.

“**HELP WANTED**” it’s different than “**I NEED HELP**”.

As in the title, it isn’t just about the economic market of charity. It’s about the cognitive dissonance between charity and activism. Act in the life you live, and reconceptulize your power in the likeness to social justice; harness your ability to create change. It’s you for the cure.

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