

# CASE X

## Treatment 1.



But who, you wielding your Dr. Who toolkit? Once upon a time, in your mind, late fall. Lawns cold, yet still green. Streets show signs of potholes after rain followed by bitter freeze. Seasons march on, but you feel time has a different meaning for you now — gone splat into a *Zeitspalt*. The fire of yesteryear replaced by the cold of today — barometer falling and the wind from the west. In your former life, time arrowed forward effortlessly, memories were sporadic and inconsistent; yesterday's Novembers celebrating your sister's birthday barely recalled. You had allowed yourself to be carried away by this fresh weightless contraction of a hardly begun day and in your notebook would express this *élan* in weird scripto-visual abstractions. The look of the daily world was then governed only by which point you happened to be focused on at a particular time. But NOW you're an encumbered self locked into a blanked out space, your shiny mirror of perception replaced by a dim-mirror naught formula. Y-O-U, you ask? Why, oh, you? Weakness, fluidity, concealment, and solitude assume their place in a kind of dream world. Feeling self-pity, you invert a Muslim prayer, "Lord, *decrease* my bewilderment," face the opposite of the Qiblah direction from Chicago to Mecca, feeling like fleeing to a more hospitable country. These thoughts will follow you home today from the radiation center and onto the El and then into your waiting car for the drive home during which you will feel an intolerable sadness as you pass a large blue house a block west of the expressive face of your own street and house. But right NOW — what the %@&#! — you are bummed out in a clean well-lit place — a *potenza* approaching possibility. But blind. Yet you see an odd chronology (in Hobo bold font) running like movie credits before your startled inner eye:

**Nineteenth Century — have a heart.**

**Twentieth Century — have the stomach.**

**Twenty-First Century — lose a parotid gland.**

You feel like a hobo, the opposite of that 'oceanic feeling' you once experienced on a bus from San Francisco to Sacramento in 1976; have that not-oneself sense one gets in medical situations when one's body seems more powerfully biological and complicated and therefore unfamiliar. You used to be able say with confidence: *I am the space where I am*. Less so now. At best you can assert, "Where it is, shall I be," just before laying down on a movable platen in a featureless white room, a kind of guarded enclave, a *loculus*. You, an at-risk cancer patient, are in 'it', a big radiation machine. In defense, you call forth a gaggle of engrams via axons, dendrites, and ion channels — accelerate to 'V-one' and 'rotate,' lifting off into memories of what brought you here: skin cancer metastatic to the left parotid gland, surgical removal of same, resulting in permanent numbness in areas of the left cheek.

A minute ago you were on your back, staring at white walls that echo the blank white page of your large Clairefontaine® spiral bound notebook wherein you scribble 'n sketch. "Notebook of a Return to a Return to Tomo" is scrawled on the cover. *Was, is, will be* — between the tenses of the verb — your body now serves as conduit for hopes and memories. Memories, a deep resonant word so evocative and full of meaning, experiences and anticipations formed in your 'concentration station' where all thoughts unfold into oblique autobiography, a genre New York artist Robert Morris

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described as "the trace of a wave goodbye made with a slightly clenched fist." This sterile white space — an internal pocket of the system where a game of life and death is played out, site of your melancholy, sadness, joy, terror, anger, and blissful recollections — is a hot-shot hospital's radiation therapy treatment room (a TR) on the Midwest prairie in that "toddling town," Chicago. Therein time eddies, a vortex, not a riverbed.



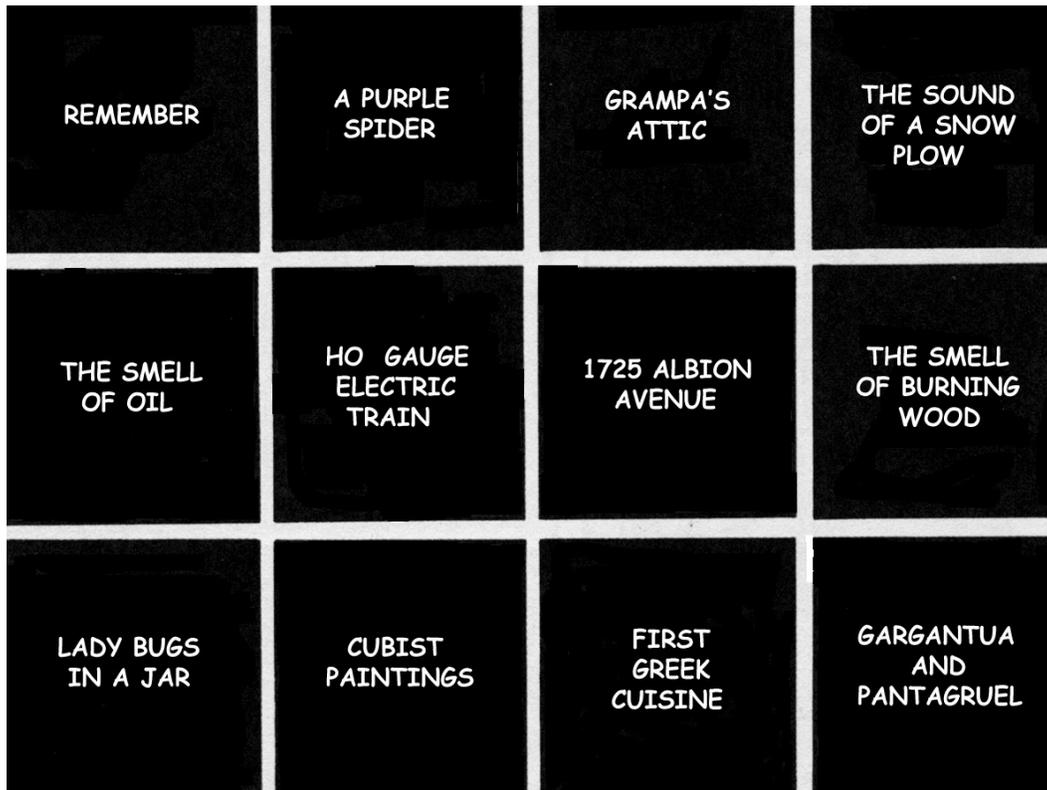
Minutes ago, arms akimbo and sporting a Howdy-Doodo mask, you say "Howdy-doodo" to "Tomo," confronting your high-tech torture chamber with a flair that says, "Look out Tomo, I'm comin' atcha'." The nucleus of that image before you is all verb, the seen availing itself to your seeing. You are asking more questions these days, so inquire of Tomo: "Who's afraid of you, snow-on-the-leaves melting away? I mean, where's your gun, your money, big mouth! [Louder.] We gonna get along?" You imagine the reply: "Where were you before you got here, dude? Where are you going after you leave?"

Did you really want to insult it? Confuse it? Maybe get a cheap laugh from a rad tech? But the laugh was on you; the French-accented technician placed you on the intake platen and yelled in the direction of the control room window, "Le Poptart ez en zee plat!" Ironic, as you are especially sensitive to how your gourmet cuisine is plated for you. After your rad session you sketched the platter upon which you were served up to Tomo, on which you will be repeatedly pulled between physical reality of place and metaphysics of mental space, a fleshy driftwood swirling through time (like Doctor Who) and your unconscious, your Portable Circus Velodrome of Camouflaged Sensations (P.C.V.C.S).

Swarming lab coats meticulously prepare you for treatment; strap 'the body' to platen inside a form-fitting protective plastic *recticulum*, a meshed head-torso mask that reminds you of a Giorgio de Chirico mannequin head. Motionless will be your course work. You find it synthesizes everything. During treatment, after tuning out the machine's noise, you will experience the 23 kinds of silence touted by Indian mystics. Wearing it, you are not "you," but "not you" either. For a duration of fifteen minutes, for five days per week, for six weeks, your existence will shrink into this clinical space (staff call it "your lifebox") where you will be in a state of legitimate attack, one treatment ladling into another until you march toward cancer-free status. Today, your first treatment, you look worried. One of your three techs (Chinese) advises: "If someone chase you down street with knife [jabbing motions with hand], you just run, you don't turn round to shout, 'Give it up!' [hands up like a football official signaling a touchdown]. Was heap big champagne-winning urbane track star at Champaign-Urbana. You just go." That relaxes you, then. But now, so compressed is your head in that mask, that your *cabeza* feels like a new species of Spanish grape in an ancient Roman, Horace approved, *torculum* (wine press). For the next six weeks — no! no! no! no! no! no! — that mask will block the real, while opening uncharted interiorities to be positively discovered. Inside a machine, inside a mask, you will become the creative nothing, the nothing out of which you yourself as creator will create everything.

Insertion into an O-shape device. Reminds you of a sculpture you encounter at MoMA once, a painted wood construction, six feet high, in the shape of a huge capital letter O which, when rocked, emitted odd noises like *baling-balong*, *ed pelut kondo*, *myoing-nyang*. Stuffed inside, you experience a greying to darkness; you — a photomaniac, a scotophobe — whisper a prayer to Janus, pagan god of doorways. You are not sure if your eyes are open or closed as there is a **dark** that has no depth to it and no boundaries inside the machine's tubular opening. The TR's white walls vanish, only thought or memory relieves the porridgy oneness that now fills your mind. You know yourself vaguely as consciousness, but your dimensional body seems to dissolve. Someone heel-clacks in and snaps in an older woman's voice — "Ya got mascara and deodorant? Use it!" — probably directed at *la*

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*mademoiselle* as your Asian tech's grooming is as meticulous as women featured in Chinese Cultural Revolution posters. A word in this artificial night is like a shaft of sunshine. You imagine the older lady exhibits a marked rigidity around her mouth recalling the face of a stubborn child.

Life is beautiful, but you have to take care where you sit or recline. Or you might end up where you are now, cloistered within the high-tech maw of this *everythingisterrible* space, where you fear a between-time wherein you may start to feel the earth's rotation and the vibrations of matter or flashes of energy rather than the stability fixed perspective. As a countermeasure to this fear, you start to glean shards of recollections and exercise your imagination by applying what you call "skull-time" (a term copped from one of your heroes, writer-photographer Wright Morris) to ameliorate your confinement. Your theory of life has varied according to the sum of your experiences. Now, here, you will permit your past to replay in screened footage. Prone, inside your horizontal Whosian TARDIS, you — with a face of waxen pallor appropriate to major occasions, rouged with a ruddy, bloated left cheek, blue eyes exuding a discursive charm — knock down that wall of words that is time, returning to an initial experience that has yet to cease occurring.



"Dr. Who," the TARDIS time machine as featured on the British TV show

You live in a "ctrl+S" world of Total Information Awareness, inhuman memories stored in and circulated by machines. A supermarket of memories of mostly when the great dark birds of history screamed and plunged into our personal weather: the sinking of the Titanic, World War I, Great Depression, Pearl Harbor attack, the D-Day Invasion, atomic bomb

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dropped on Nagasaki, V-J Day, Ghandi's assassination, Truman's very close Presidential victory, Sputnik, the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show, JFK's election, Martin Luther King's assassination, the Kennedy assassinations, Apollo 13, Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison's deaths, Kent State, Arab-Israeli War, massacre of Israel's Olympic team, end of the Vietnam War, John Lennon's assassination, Challenger space shuttle explosion, Israel invading Lebanon, Israel bombing Palestine, the Khobar Tower bombing, the Lockerbie Scotland airliner bombing, the first home computers, the start of the Internet, President Clinton's sexual misadventures, the Bosnian War, advent of Facebook and Web 2.0, Columbine and Sandy Hook school massacres, 9/11, the start of the Iraq War, Saddam Hussein's execution, the space shuttle Columbia disaster, Osama Bin Laden's execution, devastating Japanese quakes, the Indian Ocean tsunami, hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, Michael Jackson's death, Lance Armstrong's disgrace, Syrian war atrocities, Veteran Administration abuses, mass kidnaping of Nigerian children, Middle Eastern beheadings, another terrorist attack on another American embassy, "et cetera, et cetera, et cetera" (as Yul Brenner repeatedly put in *The King and I* and which, as a child, you repeated endlessly).

But this patient-hungry machine you've been inserted into, where you come around for private lessons, is more conducive to *personal* thoughts. William James said the Self, full of "infinite inward iridescences," distilled from a world that is "big blooming buzzing confusion," consists "mainly of peculiar motions in the head and between the head and the throat." Strapped immobile inside a large machine, head and throat encased in plastic, your body is physically frozen, but your mind is free to explore iridescences all your own, a private mental space where past and present come to form a new constellation. Might evoke an elegy of your lost childhood (if you had been born one day later, would've been a Cancer on the Zodiacal calendar!), a time when you were less preoccupied with suffering and death (you prefer the abrevé ' \_\_\_\_th'), and were able to stare wonderingly at the simple, immediate realities of life and the incomprehensible moon. If only you can relax your body to reach a deep level of concentration in this point in space. Ludwig Wittgenstein somewhere wrote that a point in space is an argument place, a place where *Practicemakesperfect*. But when you speak to yourself from that point, you speak with the silent sounds of others, an inner voice that is a copy of other voices. Whether those voices are scientific (applying to your physical woes) or wacky like your riff on Gertrude Stein: "Near ear cheek nuts, look at that. Neck. Let it strange, in a WR with herds of same" (which seems to address your mental response to your bodily situation).

Okay. From that starting point you try your hand at describing your experience after insertion into a space that seems to ache with an unfulfilled, uninhabited air that desires a patient to complete it. For you there is: white, white, grey color now, more grey color, more more grey, then dark, darker, followed by a real nerve-jangling *arga, arga warga, wurra, wurra, wurra, chink, chink, chink* machine noise attacking your cochlear nuclei, brain stem and cerebellum. Imagining the number five brings to mind the color red, recalling the taste of Wisconsin cheddar cheese makes you hear a D-flat, and the ambient smell of the TR evokes an image of dill pickles.

Yes. You are inside, pinned by that plastic mask. Eyelids parallel to parallel lines, parallel eyes perpendicular to vertical lines. You fight a panic response to the confinement as the rest of your body seems to disappear. The Equanimity of Complete Despair. Transducer for an Eye Show, eyes toward blues that deepen like vertigo into permanganate purples, purples to blackness, to nocturnal, cloudy darkness. A brink of nothingness. Brings to mind that Russkie Kazimir Malevich's pre-Revolution modernist-minimal canvas *Black Square*. Analogous to that Frenchy, Yves Klein, you are Jacques le Monochrome, a figure melting into the ground, but a black one, rather than that artist's International Klein Blue. Although black, the space seems to see you as its fragmented and technologized subject. You see shapes flatten and spread in the dense, two-dimensional atmosphere, without contour; soon no plane is presented as stable visual fact, you are experiencing the 'hysterical sublime' of a *Ganzfeld*. You suffer three of the "four privations of the sublime" as noted by Edmund Burke:

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vacuity, darkness, and solitude (you wish you suffered the fourth, silence, but the machine forbids this).

You are being *platformized* into something like an undressed piece of wood nailed in place or a motionless log. You no longer look human. You have no choice but to turn inward as defense, press to your center and see what's there, slip into super-added thought, what you call "skull-time," the hypertrophy of your visual imagination, where you can counter your discomfort in no uncertain terms with a silent, but hearty: *Itjstduzzentmatta*. What *mattas* is are you greater, finer than you were yesterday — practices of self-examination and self-transformation as culled from the wisdom of ancient Greece, a time when fact and value had not yet been separated. Inside this machine can ask if you've fulfilled your possibilities, made the most of your potentialities. What are you now and what are you now becoming? Your mind is not a place, but a process where a raucous parliament of cells endlessly debate what should become conscious. Can your writing probe such? Poetry sways matter, *your brain* certainly responds to it. In your writing, you've striven for an immutable artistry that evokes thought; can you maintain such now as you fight your recent tendency to sleep fitfully beneath a chill blanket of worries? Oh yes, your wife has noticed you've been droning under your breath melancholic lyrics from the opening title sequence to Elvis Presley's film *Flaming Star* [The King's one serious Hollywood film, a dark western scripted by famed Hollywood writer Nunnally Johnson, ed.].

*Ev'ry man has a flaming star  
A flaming star over his shoulder  
And when a man sees his flaming star  
He knows his time, his time has come*

*Flaming star, don't shine on me, flaming star  
Flaming star, keep behind me, flaming star  
There's a lot of livin' I've got to do  
Give me time to make a few dreams come true  
Flaming star  
(Flaming star) Chorus by the Jordanaires*

*One fine day, I'll see that flaming star  
That flaming star, over my shoulder  
And when I see, that old flaming star  
I'll know my time, my time has come*

Your wife, looking up at the ceiling, affirmed that she hasn't noticed a shooting star lately, nor is it near the solar time for any major meteor showers. "Your time hasn't come," she insisted. Remember Bob Dylan once remarked (sounding like a Chinese fortune cookie's advice): "He not busy being born is busy dying." "Get it?" But you still find yourself, almost unconsciously, reciting each time you try to fall asleep, "Flaming star, don't shine on me, flaming star. Flaming star, keep behind me, flaming star." *Think, think. Yes, that's it, good, yes, now you're good, now you're fine. Yes, that's it. Steady, steady. O night guide you. O night more lovely than dawn.* You are now moving toward a fullness-emptiness, a sort of Buddhist plenum-void, a *domaine poétique*, in which one thing leads to another to another to another. Next you silently chant: *Laar, Lita, Ondoe, Endu . . . Laar, Lita, Ondoe, Endu*, a magical incantation plundered from the titles of light-environment artist James Turrell's early work and meant to ward off bad stuff like your Elvis mantra is meant to do). *Give me time to make a few dreams come true, Flaming star.*

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That gets you into You-Time, the good blanket of the boundaryless self, that promotes the perceptual unity with your dream screen; helps you defend against mind-contracted muscles bouncing anxieties off your platen-splayed body, like fists in the boxing ring, where you breathe with difficulty through your woven mask. Air comes slowly, surely slower than when you breathe in words and words breathe you into creative inspiration. But you will find in doing skull-time the ability to escape — you sometimes have to ask yourself if you are *there* or *here* — and listen to the murmur which rises from the dark streets you mentally trod. Sometimes you will find yourself working cubes and square roots, or drifting into reverie about your dead sister, or wackily associating the idea of cockroaches with the idea of fish, or get the two words *black* and *great* to remind you of some poignant scene from the past or from a wonderful repast you and your wife have enjoyed. Sometimes you will find yourself digging into the universe's largest knot — your brain, that myelinated mass of fissures and folds — for what neuroscientist Christof Koch has dubbed "the neural correlate of consciousness (NCC)" where you would find what Virginia Woolf called "a queer amalgamation of dream and reality, that perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow."

Whimsically recalling salamanders or quail may send you into a complicated meditation leading to metaphysical soliloquies. You may, in fifteen minute treatment segments, take on those eternal questions: What is life? Is life possible on another planet? Do you believe in metempsychosis, in the immortality of the soul, in the inviolability of the laws of nature, in ghosts foretelling disasters to come, in the subconscious of dogs, in the dreams of owls, in what is enigmatic about cicadas, quail's heads and the spotted skin of the leopard, in enigmatic elements in all things, animate and inanimate?

When you've found a sign, you turn it around and, like De Chirico's surreal character, Hebdomeros, look at it front and from the side, take a three-quarter view a foreshortened view, remove it and note what form be the memory of its appearance. If the poet Lorca can will deer to dream through the eyes of a horse, what might you be capable of? Command mulberry trees to tear themselves up and transplant themselves into the sea? [Luke17:6, ed.] But you are content to prowl your elders' attics, marvel at a purple spider, recall the first time you tasted Greek food, play again with your HO gauge train. Bingo! In a flash you are now in a horrible dark green room; back in 1951, seeing in your mind's eye a faded photo of your young mother watching you play with toys in a depressing Pittsburgh apartment, while she casually smokes a Camel in a large room with dark forest-green walls, equipped with a Queen-size Murphy bed; followed by a 2000 A.D. memory of your chain-smoking elderly mom's weak body coughing, wheezing in late-stage emphysema; now you are way back in 1975 watching a younger teacher's assistant version of yourself in basement classroom, diligently sweeping up your graduate school mentor's pile of half-smoked cigs accumulated during an all afternoon art critique slug-fest; quickly followed by another basement classroom, the one in which you delivered your first professorial lecture at a small Lutheran College. Blinded then by neophytic jitters, you see yourself once again step unawares into a huge dome of dog doo in front of twenty bemused pupils, shit smeared shoes spreading a pox in brown footsteps back and forth before rows of laughter. **Class temporarily canceled due to malodorous fumes and uncontrollable cachinnation.**

Yes, in Tomo you discover a love for certain aspects of the past, especially the past as found in your family's photo album. You revel in the hidden you can re-reveal. Each movement forward into Tomo is actually a catching of what is coming at you, thoughts to be written down in a delicate balance between the necessity of plot and the blindness associated with the repetitive experience. A mystery of thought only to be solved by thought itself, worked up during your trial and tumults at the Radiation Treatment Center. Strapped inside Tomo today, you replay your nervous arrival at the sign-in desk today: stumbled in with a worried, thoughtful appearance; an abrupt halt, a military salute as clicking heels on the decisive syllable of your odd last name given at the front desk where

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the receptionist replied in deliberately elongated syllables as if she wanted to caress the sound she put into them. Your uniform of the day: jeans and a black T-shirt under a purple western-style shirt.

Standing, looking for a seat, you noticed patients staring at you with the intent of archaeologists watching a statue being unearthed; you self-consciously took your seat in the WR (waiting room) where no one knows each other, but each wears an anxious irritated expression, and alignment accords to race. You will come to think of them as *knot-people*. Your gaze riveted on the call of the squint-eyed man. A face pockmarked, battered, granulated with a skull flat, a worried forehead, eyes vacant, merely a rim of a well, the well itself, colorless and with no intensity. A man with a disquieting manner, muttering something that sounded like, "I'm a butterologist." When someone came into the room, he'd say "Someone's floating in." When they sat, he'd say, "It looks like someone just stopped floating." The stink of brandy floated on his breath. Your stomach turned, and you turned your eyes toward the wide-screen TV, preferring the dullest stereotypes of name brands and generic celebrities to his severe topology and the winds blowing across it. Sound muted and text in white below lily-white, blond announcers, like an ecology expert waxing eloquent: . . . *involves creating a simplified problem description in which the amount of small isolated forbidden zones and their removal becomes the determinant of water balance.* (After six weeks of Fox News with blue-eyed blonds watched in the WR, you notice that everything false looks more real on the screen.)

You are startled to see a woman apply lipstick to only the right side of her lips (you will later find out she suffers a brain tumor resulting in *visuospatial neglect*). A frail man sitting like death on a soda cracker, suddenly shot from his chair, repeating "grabbedy ain't gonna stop me." His verbal engine coughing a kind of last breath before \_\_\_\_\_th, he grabbed for his aluminum walker. You wanted to flee, to flee, yes, to flee; no matter where, no matter how, simply to flee, to leave the place, to disappear. Before you can, you too were summoned (name mispronounced) to your TR, freed from this awkward-feeling situation, only to be recaptured, restrained, and fed into the O tunnel of a large Corvus system Tomotherapy machine for your daily dose of intensity-modulated radiation in a slice-by-slice fashion — where everything has its number and limit — as deadly rads are precisely aimed at areas along your face's left side where remnants of cellular dissonance might lurk near where a prominent surgical scar now pouts its proud flesh.

You were first introduced to Tomo when you arrived the day prior to your initial treatment to have your denuded head molded to fit that awful plastic mask, a near-suffocation torture that sent the most mysterious of shivers through you. Tomo's large circular tube, both Cyclopien eye and giant birth canal, aroused sublime fears, and when you did emerge after twenty minutes from the suffocating face mold, an awful fluorescent light had filled the TR and you tasted worn-out metal. That day you behaved with a disturbing mixture of timidity and boldness. Perhaps, why you tried to hide your discomfort by boldly confronting Tomo today, asserting a proleptic 'destruction survived' body language. But Mr. Cautious warns of that tempting demon: *Oh, gentle lamb platen-fed into Tomo, don't count your chickens before they're hatched. You may still be badly batched in the prematurely snatched.*

Hereafter, your submission to this restricted position is briefer, a milder hibernation during which you quickly learn to mutely watch a prisoner's cinema of memories and projections. Your mind in here becomes an exuberance of distraction. One minute you recall a weather dream you recently had — who but you dreams about weather? — about a tsunami sweeping you up off a Southern Californian beach and floating you inland, or write about seeing the wind chasing clouds, a desperate flight of the moon behind them during which the moon disappears for a while and the whole earth is muffled like a wooden bell; but then moon rays pass through the clouds again as the wind blows them apart. Or you are watching yourself watch a setting sun light up a Midwestern cloud that leans over the whole sky like a pink sail pulling the earth into the harborless night. This is today's weather — pure verb around which nouns pile up thingified.

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Yes, you keep your weather-eye open — to Weather Channel broadcasts and sing out every time — much to your wife's annoyance ("Whether weather is weather; it just don't matter, silly wabbit. Such Trix is for kids."). She is well-groomed, your wife, the image of classiness. From early childhood her character of mind was self-determining and, by obscure transitions, attained the immanent proportions where the self is affirmed for what it is. A wife who's read *Declining to Decline* by Margaret Morganroth and meticulously calculates her hormone ratios; a stubborn woman of seventy years who has wholly rejected U.S. consumer culture's new mask for post-menopausal women: obligatory serenity, sitting cross-legged, yogic hands pressed together, eyes staring off in space, face blank. She hates to see you reduced for six weeks "to the boredom of a life adjusted to the hands of a watch, essentially logical, but it's curative and maybe not lacking in poetry."

You imagine your whole body transform (Holy Ovid, Vat Man!) into a tongue walking through the world, not just tasting what it collides with, but tasting itself taste, every sensation the inevitable proof of yourself still being you — the gourmand-you from pretreatment days! Inside the device, your brain's usual processing of the flux of the surrounding world goes quiet, linear time dissolves, and your mind gains a new exuberance where it becomes so convinced of its own omnipotence that the TR's walls and the machine's constraints cannot hold its prolific internal imaginings. Language seeps from inside Tomo to emerge and cover the hospital highrise, a building designed by a famous architect with initials in between his name and surname. You experience free deviation of mind into limitless seas of thought which then wash up on your notebook's white beaches. Here knowledge comes flashlike, your text the long roll of thunder that follows. Thus, you ameliorate the many mental/physical side-effects of such suffocating treatment; such evoking, catching, fixing of memories and phantasms your wife once referred to as, "Having pictures from over the years right between the ears," as she kissed you after your second treatment, kissed you like you were going out to do interplanetary battle and might never come back.

Yes. You are discovering your POWER as you start to sharpen the strange, indistinct images formed in your inner vision; are less distracted by Tomo's metallic drone. The **YOU** expands into Skull-time where, knowing you are an equation without a set answer, you try to solve yourself as you confront a hard, unaccommodating Actual. Initially, you learn you can wax rhapsodic about custards and croquettes, curs and *cuvées*, and *les petits vol-au-vents à la Nesle* served *à la russe* (the latter dish calls for two calf udders, twenty cocks' combs and testicles, four whole lamb brains, boiled and chopped, two boned chickens, ten lamb sweetbreads twenty lobsters, and, just to bind everything together, a few pints of heavy cream). Thus, you gastronomically avoid unpleasant thoughts of spam omelets, breaded cucumbers, and sprat casseroles. This is followed by imagining the sight and smell of sun-charged clepsydra. This leads you to examine the geography of woman's pleasure while enjoying the color of a glass of wine for, for you, wine is also a sensual liquid knowledge. Touch, eye and palate are always informed by the twin forces of expectation and memory which bring forth excellent topics for your musings. Some are hilarious, like how when you were in Vienna last winter, lost your mittens and went into a clothing store; asked the clerk, "Got mittens?" She, thinking you said, *Gott mitt uns* (German for "God is with us") castigated you for your *Amerikaner arroganz*. Confirms American author Robert James Waller's famous observation, "Life is a word problem." This dictum is further confirmed in a wishful vision where you compose a desperate telegram to Tomo.

In Tomo, second-order observations with one perception moving instanter on another: now you are watching the Koran's vision of Paradise, the middle of a vast inner courtyard with artistically laid out gardens and sunny corners where grow fruit trees and flowery arbors, with fountains ornamented with fine statues, and even pools where fish swim and where swans of immaculate whiteness glide with their breasts to the wind, and where one can find streams of diluted honey running from ornate faucets, and under the Islamic arches grow stone stalactites, *muqarnas* of such beauty your pulse briefly stops. Thereafter, you examine with a magnifying glass a nineteenth-century oil by

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## Western Union

I WANT YOU TO STOP  
STOP  
PLEASE ADVISE  
STOP

Spanish artist Julio Romero de Torres hanging in an all red room somewhere in Seville, Spain. Then, politics (an excellent topic for utopic imaginings or just plain twaddle) where you delight in giving selected Republican Congressional members their marching papers, or get Speaker of the House John Boehner to smile, altering his perpetually constipated grimace, or delight in seeing a fat and flustered Rush Limbaugh drop his jaw when handed his pink slip. You time travel back to shake hands

with Gore Vidal, or sip sherry with your sister and discuss the merits of involuntary reflex, of **repetition**, in Gertrude Stein's *oeuvre*. Other times you hug your wife tight, although flattened fast on a platen, a hunk of human flat bread. Yes, the mental terrain is wide open, albeit, sometimes things take on a *calcined* quality as a leaden pall descends on you and you must amp up your art-titled mantra. When you do so, hard enough, you can be at a podium giving an acceptance speech for winning the Nobel Prize for Literature — and, why not? — in here you are both Potentate and Subject. Suddenly, you are standing in a small, unsteady boat trying to yank in a record-setting monster Muskie from the river waters of Wisconsin's fish-rich flowing Flambeau. Swept into fluid time, like you are swept down that river, you just go on your nerve. Call it *the gossip of the mind*. Stuff awakened naturally by memories and desires. Yes, you were born with a vivid imagination and now have stuffed your head with ideas acquired from thumbing a zillion books and working a million crossword puzzles. And you stubbornly refuse to believe that the concept of 'the jig being up' is itself up.

Yep, you are catching archive fever — memories, softened by the veil of years pass in a silent flutter of wings — beginning to add recollections to the growing edifice of your past — showers of fading snapshots fall through the air — and making new ones. You want to sculpt with text, data mine, suck on words, see everything clearly, hunt yourself down, struggle with yourself — get to the Void Bang in the middle. Means you can go on imagined journeys and adventures in exotic lands, traveling far into the steppes of central Asia, descending toward the seas of the Sonda to explore lands stretching from Ecbatana to the Sakhalin island. In your invisible domains, you may go exotic and harbor live elephants, dromedaries, hippopotami, crocodiles, panthers, lions, bears, blackbirds, mute cicadas, griffins, jackals, hyenas, centaurs, wild men, horned men, fauns, men with dogs' heads, giants forty cubits tall, a Cyclops, and especially a bird called Phoenix. All are legitimate escape modules from Tomo, from your fear, anguish, weakness; from the slow confession of the old violoncello and morbid thoughts about that tall, dried-up old man, sporting a skull-bead necklace, seated with a thoughtful air between a scythe and a clepsydra, as he awaits to clean the meat off patients' emaciated bodies.

As these phantom objectivities fill your TR's white space, narration starts to fill white notebook space, experience becoming a text in which you play with the esoteric qualities of the noun before the alarming frankness of the verb. You use Tomo as a time machine to propel yourself both backwards and forwards. Yesterday, as you jumped ahead to see a portrait of your wife, during which your Leica lens tracks her eyes, her age wrinkles, and settles on the fierce, somewhat tragic, expression on her face as she asks you what your treatment was like. "It is much easier to say what it is not," you reply. She warns: "Inside that thing you could vanish and reappear in any imaginable heaven or hell."

You have started to parse your existence into a pair of two halves: your presurgical life and your post-surgical life, your home life and your hospital life. In the TR, that cold, stark white room of fears, your world, and that of your ethnically diverse rad techs (you dub them your "Um-Gang"), will overlap for six weeks, ending on January 17, which in Misterbianco, Sicily, marks the day the arm

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of Saint Anthony the Great is publicly displayed. You mention this obscure factoid to your suave-looking Hispanic rad tech who replies, winking: "Didjaknow, *hermano*, Santo Blaise is *el santo patrón* of radiation patients? Pray to him 'Senor Tan Solo' and you will be tough enough *estar a la altura de las circunstancias* [to cut the mustard] here." He goes on to mention with an air of reverence that his grandfather was a famous *curandero*, a shamanic healer in the Mexican state of Puebla and had a reproduction of Frida Kahlo's painting *Recuerdo de la herida abierta* (Remembrance of the Open Wound, 1938) on a wall in his hovel. Says he recalls the old man uttering indigenous Totonac verbs, but forgets their meaning. Bodes well for you who is posed eloquently in Tomo and, like a vulnerable St. Sebastian, take the arrows of radiation with a cool conquest of emotion. Tan Solo? You think it's a riff on the brave, dauntless Han Solo of filmic fame, but your French rad tech clues you in when he is out of earshot: "Heyy! Eets Spanish *pour* 'So Lonely,' a bad pun about you being alone in Tomo, geetting your left cheek tanned. Geet it?"

Numerous times in your life, you've found use of Odysseus' words of self-encouragement: "Be strong, my heart, you've endured trials worse than this." Adversity — that visiting of great pains upon one — always has been filtered through your peculiar sensibility as *spoudaiogeloion* (a Greek Cynic's philosophic term for 'serious-funny,' humor mixed with weighty matters). For decades, that balance has kept you sane in an insane world where the absurd truth of your Sisyphusian fate becomes the key to your freedom. Now you draw upon "good ol' Spoud" (your term) and Albert Camus to deal with your new situation — **cancer**. Something you thought only other people got or wrote about. Your sixty-plus old white corpus starts to generate a parallel textual corpus giving voice to your pain, both physical and mental, a text that should prove to be as macaronic macaroni as your previous writings. Your wife, an opera fan whose ancestors were among those it cost less money to murder, always complains your previous books are too long; you counter, "It's pointless asking Wagner to reduce his entire *Ring* to the size of a Chopin scherzo." You dwell on this today, along with how fortunate you have entered the tunnel of a spanking new radiation machine at a University Medical Center (MC) that prides itself on shit-hot medical attention given in ten-minute zaps of cell-killing rays. As the awful *arga warga, wurra, wurra, chink, chink, chink, arga warga, wurra, wurra, chink, chink, chink, arga warga, wurra, wurra, chink, chink, chink* rattling sounds of the rad-machine you love to hate ratchets up (your ear's hair cells are sensitive to sounds hurling through space at 1,100 feet per second at atomic dimensions, which means you literally can hear the Brownian motion, the random jostle of atoms) you hasten to add a countermeasure as backup to your classical repertoire of relief — the famous Spartan funerary inscription:

*Do not account life or death good, / But to live or die well — this is what is good.*

Retrieving from your vast academic database, you take additional inspiration from Homer:

*Hero and coward both meet the same end.*

Yep. Your place of unrest gives good time for severe thought, skull-time in which you are safe due to its *watertightbulkheads*. It lets your brain resurrect yourself through stochastic details, like picking Scrabble letter tiles out of a bag, placing them to form words and sentences. Like in this witty ditty:

**A g e o v e r t a k e s m e  
Y o u t h a b a n d o n s m e  
M e m o r y r e m a i n s w i t h m e**

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"For those who humanely seek the evocation of a memory, what relief these tangible images provide!" so wrote French surrealist Claude Cahun. Like Simonides, ancient inventor of the art of memory, or Chris Marker's filmic shaping of memory into art, or Jorge Luis Borges' gifted and cursed character, Funes the Memorious, you activate your photographic memory, insert your skeleton key into the right lock and open onto Halloween, two months ago. You retrieve your four-hour bout under the knife to remove your left salivary gland. That parotid gland had become fleshy soil to a mean squamous carcinoma that journeyed from below your left ear, to your central cheek area, to your lower neck, then into a salivary gland.

That operation was, over a lifetime, your seventh. You need to walk through something like that seven times before it ceases to be frightening. So you were calm that day. Still, a "Dachismo" (Web 2.0 entrepreneur Jeff Dachis' preferred airline drink mixed, literally, on-the-fly with three bottles of airline vodka, splashed with tonic) hovered before you as a lure to dull your recollection of the facial disfigurement suffered by cancer-stricken film critic Roger Ebert. Yet his adoring wife responded to the unapparent in appearance, touching him tenderly, mysteriously cooing, "You are without why." Your wife might do the same, repeat that observation at your wake. After all, you both are remarkable foci of a romantic ellipse.

Thoughts of mortality. Is \_\_\_\_th an unassailable rampart on top of a mountain or a simple parchment partition that the soul passes through like a bullet? Your vulnerability on the operating table to mistake or infection getting you mentally listing of your good traits, items you could recite to gain entry at the Pearly Gates: tolerance and respect for others; a sense of responsibility; disdain for everything garish, rowdy, tasteless; a hatred of cruelty; a wonderful sense of theatre, love of beauty, poetry, refinement; protection of the weak; love of animals; extravagance; energy, poetic imagination; creative force; a ceaseless astonishment with life; scrupulous and scandalous candor; a need for perfection that enhances all the above. You imagine your grave's epitaph:

**He suffered with daring**

**He died without complaint**



You concentrate, recalling your hospital surgical scenario with its pre-op parlay with staff, paperwork to be signed, the smell of antiseptic. In a vivid image, you again see the hospital gurney rolled in and you being assisted onto it. (Staff call gurneys "flat bread," adding "with meat" if a patient is supine thereon; they have odd names for things; bronchitis is called "brown kittens," like prison slang.) Oh that odd feeling of motion under you as you were pushed toward surgical mask-muffled medical voices; you sense it again despite your immobilized body. Those voices did not seem to belong to the faces hanging over you as they joked, gave assurances, a diversion to get you to ignore the prick of the knockout needle. You fell asleep like a huge balloon gently deflating.

If you had been conscious, you'd have seen a plague-doctor masked team in scrubs around you — in a strange loop of consciousness, you try to imagine it — overhead drumlights shining like the sun on a hazy summer day, and the surgical nurses building drapes around the incision so the surgeons do not see your face, becoming just 'Case X' to them so as to avoid every thought of emotions, and so forth. Reason is obvious: it's almost impossible to work with tissue if you grant it powers beyond itself. Your surgeon, a chubby

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man with jowls, round glasses, a full head of dark hair, and of Italian heritage, has a body so highly trained it does things of its own accord. He surveyed your newly flayed neck flesh from some interior distance. His surgeon's rubber gloves, grasping a scalpel freighted with dark pains, endured his hairy, yet elegant hands, hair like on some expensive Austrian stuffed animal, as he cut and snipped, flayed, fussed with sterile gleaming instruments. Out popped one cancerous parotid gland. A little sew 'n sew, a stitch in time, and you were on a "flat bread," unconscious "meat" heading down newly constructed corridors to Recovery.

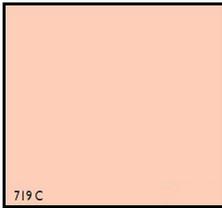
During a two hour slow journey back from Lethe, testified to by staff and your med records, you were oblivious to humans in nurse-white or green scrubs, necks sporting badges on lanyards in various bright hues as they buzz about your bed constantly making wisecracks you can't hear. Your brain brushed off the ticks of clock time. Groggily grasping at consciousness, one moment you felt disorganized, bereft, the next intrigued with these very sensations. Then voices, but fragmentary, for the most part incomprehensible. You heard a nurse mutter under her breath that a certain surgeon was "like a vet, who doesn't have to listen to his patients."

Suddenly, it was morning and you were in a dull, diffuse funk. Someone looking at you. You tried to focus your eyes. No go. Later, you opened your eyes to see the world slowly reform through a haze of light and cloud-forms. Eventually, resolving it into a nurse examining your vitals on an electronic readout over your bed. You saw her clearly, eyes are like two tiny pistols trained at those glowing green digital readouts: blood pressure, heart beat, pulse-rate, and temp. Noticing your attention, in a voice as hard and musical as a radio she quipped, "There's only data now, experience no longer exists." You are lucid enough to observe that something has long gone dry in her face, giving it a severity that masks her exact age. As a name would give her more form, flow into syllables and juncture and there take shape forever, you focused your weary eyes on her official name tag and read in white Helvetica Bold on an International Klein Blue field the name (appropriate to Klein's spiritual hue), MISTY, (but inappropriate for its bearer). In your bizarro denominating mind, you dubbed her "GearedRude," imagining it displayed in famous psychedelic sixties' Bubble Letter font inside a comic balloon hoisted over her head. Groovy! And you were *sure* she lived alone. But you can't throw the first stone of approbation, you yourself live in a world of words and books that brooks no looks. Post-op, your world was nearly substanceless, while your body, which you experience as 'the body,' became increasingly palpable.

You review that stressful day during Tomoic immersion, sensory deprivation now allowing you to see it like watching a film which has inscribed on its surface *RRReeeaaaddd ttthhhiiss fffiiilllmmm*: Your bed was raised as you made your lucidity grew and with it the awful realization you felt like a MAC truck had hit you — a round of pain, that inept abomination, a sob at the base of your body. You tried to express this, but it came out an inarticulate stammer, the words forming in your mouth like dry big lumps of dough. Your eyes recovered more quickly, noticing it was afternoon, the sun already low in the oversized windows of the long ward. Soon the sun died in your eyes. You felt thirsty, as if you'd run for miles, like Cornel Wilde in Hollywood's African adventure film *The Naked Prey*.

Soon you were (as newspapers put it) 'joking with nurses,' listening to muffled conversations. Your perceptions slowly achieving seriality, replacing post-op tendencies to multiform, instantaneous, and random bits of experience that suggested that earlier your present was presenting only itself over and over as simple particulars. Your memories, just a garbage heap earlier, began to take on classification, hierarchy, deepen in vividness, and so evoke stronger emotions. The TV overheard featured a lady lifting her toilet tank to find a small yachtsman, on the deck of his boat, in the bowl; a hideous family pledged itself to margarine, a woman spoke of detergents; a man with fixed dentures bit into an apple.

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You were relying on ego and stored intellectual fuel to *get back your game*. When your brain started to reflect upon the state of your brain, as revealed in comments to your emotionally-strained wife — her face was like someone starting to fall asleep on the subway — she pulled a mirror from her purse and held it to your swollen, bandaged face. You saw mostly white gauze that hid a long, curving suture befitting Frankenstein. You recognized your physiognomy, yet it seemed to belong to someone else. On a better note, your exposed flesh had regained the healthy hue of **Pantone 719C**.

On a bad note, you demonstrated the affect of a tornado survivor, and all she heard coming from you, Case X, was an edited voice of *ughs*. What you were trying to say was: "O sweet wife, leave the dread flower of your grace between the leaves of my books." She wore a dress of thought.

A blond nurse, easier on the eyes than Gertrude, approached, rubbed your thigh with alcohol, smoothly administered an injection you hardly felt. Changed your bandage, took your wife's mirror, showed you the long suture running down your neck. Wound's proud flesh the color of unevenly translucent stone, marbled in shades of aged honey, petroleum jelly, and nicotine; the damaged edges of flesh repaired with stitches as long as comma-crammed run-on sentences (one of Proust's ran 356 words long). No pain after that.

That day, Halloween, the earth was 228,400 miles from the moon and 93,000,00 from the sun. You were all red and white and blue and red, like a self-restarting American flag. Tired, like jet-lagged. You always seem to exist in your own personal time zone, so it upset your wife to see you so off kilter. It's as if she saw a couture dress that's been mistakenly thrown in the wash with the gym clothes. She snapped your poor attempt at a smile, but it looked forced as if emanating from a flexible squeeze-toy she recently gave to her grandchildren. Besides, the flick is too blurred. You later gave her a look of inevitability and admitted, as a way of letting her know her anxiety-fed technical screw up registers low on your annoyance scale, "It was a mug so ugly that digital cameras forget they've seen it." You get the expected *laughandsmile*. This told you her graphic sadness had shifted to hope. You managed to shift position on the bed, noticed she's wearing new dark blue gym shoes with the faintest line of red edging the sole, a line mimicking the incision on your neck. You two are always in sync.

As your surgery and anesthesia receded in time, new modes of wound and pain control were needed. Trick was to keep your wound draining from a tiny tube, the treat was morphine. A much needed treat. Otherwise, your system would flood with adrenaline, cortisol, producing a reality too clear to endure. For hours came the drip-drip where you are nothing but a limbic mind grooved by irrational fear, caught in some frustrating semi-sleep loop, slow and circular, in which your affect roller-coastered and where crudeness of mind begged to be protected by some psychic callus. Your mind suffered creepy and broadly overlapping categories of weak-thought, became an impoverished and dangerously curious fiddler with its own hidden architectures. Wacky delusions cometh, like seeing an encyclopedic array of spring sneakers tinted like jelly beans or a vista of green field overtaken by dandelions upon which a Nazi tank idles, a library of scars, hieroglyphics waiting to be traced. But no one was there to trace them. At another point, you hallucinated a visit by two brothers, twins, with matching eyeglasses and chambray shirts. Once you were sure you overheard an exchange between a female relative and a male doctor discussing a patient in the adjoining bed: "Quietly stubborn, huh?" . . . "Yes, but beats being violently obstreperous."

Alone in a bed. You wanted to get out of that white frigidaire and **LIVE**. But new pain, insertion of a tube, indignity of a violating foley catheter draining away urine that wouldn't flow and has bloated your belly. You felt like a word in a dictionary that no one would ever look up. Meal cart arrived — with dishes meant to be hot never quite as warm as those that were meant to be chilled — pushed by a black guy with a generous smile and warm words: "Eat, O friend. Drink. Yea, drink

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abundantly." Even now his face stares back at you. "Wow! Huh?" you uttered at the man's friendly breaking of your solitude with: "It's your morning feeding and as children nationwide recover from their sugar fixes, you can dab a torn toast-finger into the runny yellow eye of an over-easy fried egg, bite off half of it, chew, nod, swallow, and wipe your lips with napkin." This was followed by a poem of pain meds — you slept 'til noon, but not before seeing a patient knock her breakfast tray over, her food landing in precise shape of a face — two fried-egg eyes and smiling bacon mouth. Good omen.

"Huh? Wow!" you exclaim — as opposed to the more confusing and medically telling "Wow! Huh?" of your last feeding — as lunch of baked beans, pork, and toast is set before you. Suddenly, with Proustian immediacy, you recalled a sentence from some lame late-career William Gibson novel: *He forked baked beans adroitly onto toast*. The fact that your incision-drain drained nothing but clear ooze, that you could swallow your breakfast *adroitly* ( you like how that word feels as it comes rolling out your mouth, *add-dwaaa-tleee*), and that your world took on an ever-increasing perimeter of pleasure, all proved to observant staff that you (a man minus a gland and yet a man, old and yet young) are "fit for discharge" and "dim-clear of cancer," with follow up radiation six weeks hence.

When your wife arrived in her dressed-up-for-work duds to retrieve you, you thought: *Fan-fucking-tastic!* She tossed her hand open, flicking her wrist at the same time in an expression of possession and command, the kind fairy godmothers might use to grant a wish. Her intelligence protruded through her beauty as she listened to last minute instructions concerning your dressings. A wheelchair — a fancy new model looking like it was designed for high speed, low drag — pulled up before your bed wheeled expertly by a male assistant with short black hair that looked like something sprayed from a nozzle. After placing you in the chair, he stood erect, very erect, holding elbows

In and moving from the shoulders; light of foot, he kind of swooped you along across the stage of your confinement toward freedom as your spouse gathered your personal effects. You clearly see yourself being pushed down the new hospital's cheerful, gleaming halls (always feels weird to be so pushed, the strength of another human being working invisibly behind your gaze); on those walls hung watercolors and unpeopled landscapes. Halfway to the elevator, you came face-to-face with an old man on a gurney suffering sun-damaged skin, unreadable tattoos, eyes peering at you from a face suggestive of gas-station taxidermy. A body nearly dead at the symbolic level. As dispiriting to behold as a bridge hand with nothing in it but threes and fives and eights. Your wife, running interference, refused to notice him. That day, she only had eyes for you, seeming to say in them, *Today I passed your bed and my heart fell at your feet*. In turn, you give her your loving *That's all there is — you, jazz, and rock 'n roll — the rest is term papers and advertising* look. Her sparkling eyes assured that today everything was ruled by lightning. She read the profligate generosity of your heart responding to hers.

Pair of spry geriatric men with Viagra smiles briskly passed you on their way to the stairs, seemingly unaware that when you are old, you remain in shadow, even when you have wit and can still get it up. You waited at the elevator. When the door opened, a thirty-something guy with a curious lack of definition to his features, clad in black suit, wrinkled and baggy at the knees, stands next to a young girl in black leather whose hair, dyed Goth black; she lets out a whooping warpath body language conveying universal diss. As you are wont to do with strangers, you imagined their respective trades and gave them your own secret names. You really love to give names, a name to anything, really love names. As you once explained to your wife, Somerset Maugham's name jumps out at you because Somerset has both 'summer' and 'set' as in sunset, and Maugham sounds like the name of a South Pacific island, and Maugham wrote a biography on Gauguin. You took the black-suited dude for an incompetent periodontist and dubbed him "His Pants." That cranky girl, probably a poorly-trained reflexologist, you dubbed "Heidi Hyde". You figured her figure hailed from Las Vegas, a town where half the pickup trucks stolen in surrounding states are routinely recovered in casino parking lots.

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This amused you during the descent to the lobby, suffering a watchful video eye, trying to ignore a bodiless voice: *This is a park and pay facility, have your parking ticket or pass ready . . . This is a park and pay facility, have your parking ticket or pass ready . . .* During descent, you held your breath to ward off the musty leather smell emanating from Heidi's black duds. Your low-level POV gave an intimate crotch closeup of tailored seams worn to the color of dirty parchment. DING! You were rolled out of the crowded lift into an equally crowded lobby; a kid hidden behind adults on the elevator whispered in your ear: "You think she's pretty [pointing to Heidi], you should see my sling shot." This as your wife goes to bring her car down to patient pickup and you imagine streets cleared of traffic except for ambulances. During what seems an interminable wait, you noticed the new millennial gestural language of public places where pinching pixels on cell-phones has replaced snapping lighters followed by puffs on cigarettes. The Brownian motion of noisy bodies in the Miesian space, reminded you how much you like furniture stores, those oases of calm, usually. You find them soothing, their bookcases stuffed with mass-purchased odd books where once you found a first edition of Raymond Federman's experimental, typographically novel, novel — *Double or Nothing* — and swiped it. Sent it to Federman for his autograph; he complied, even returned it **PRIORITY MAIL**.

A uniformed young man directed traffic up to the hospital's loading zone. He exuded youth, bottled and corked. Or maybe it was just your sense of physical devastation that made him seem so potentially bubbly. You noticed he had an air of hip innocence — a rhetoric of studied clunkiness and sophisticated duh — about him. As your spouse's familiar colostomy-bag colored Toyota Camry pulled up — its license plate sporting a red cardinal indicating part of the registration fee went to ecological awareness — your chair attendant helpfully opened the car door, you received a wink from the driver's seat, the sort of effortless wink that involved no other features. As you were rolled across rain streaked concrete toward that inviting wink, you heard the tweets and twitter of small birds lurking in sparse trees. With relief, you climbed into the passenger seat, butt bouncing on brown leather, as the phrase "without further ceremony" zipped through your *cabeza*. Speeding homeward in the Chicago vehicular madness, late-fall vegetation hurtled past at a stroboscopic 78 r.p.m., punctuated by a dark staccato mix of our arboreal cousins and power poles that kept beat through changing colors and patterns to the Red Hot Chili Peppers playing on the radio. Outside, what was left of flowers and plants, even each remaining blade of grass, turned toward the sun by small sudden clicks. Everything alive like you, everything breathing. But soon will start the trial separating the men from the boys, **radiation**. This you will counter in a scripto-visual flurry of literary plundering that will shake texts like hurricanes.

You arrived home, smelling of hospital. The living room beckoned to you with its walls falling away in a delirium of joy at your return. *Never will never leave, love everything here, in love with everything here*. You are greeted by a large, wacky Get Well card from your publisher signed "Mr. Language," in crazed handwriting that to anyone else would suggest mental confusion. He offered you upbeat advice given in his usual telegraphic brevity: *Increased risk, increased opportunity. Crank up your computer, chemo sabe. In warrior cultures there is no failure. There is only victory or death*. Your wife sat you at table. In three microwave minutes, she replaced that card with a white ceramic steaming bowl of potato-leek soup. Okay, there was a hair in the soup, but you still marveled at the perfect color and smell and gave forth *pleasantverbalsoftthanks*. Your eyes met hers in mutual relief as the surgeon declared you cancer free, no chemo needed, no *chemo sobbie to suffer* as your publisher put it. Just some radical rads needed to brighten your left cheek. Your wife, predictable and reassuring, is like that large stone on the edge of her garden path. You've been known to call her "The Rudder."

Thoughts of that soothing soup started a rumble-dumble of the tum-tum just as you are pulled from your past, pulled like a dummy from Tomo's maw, completing your initial radiation treat-

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ment. Ethnic heads emerge and female hands are reaching toward yours, so you dumbly aim your mitts, thumbs grasped by your fingers, in their direction. You feel like your body lacks measure, like a goat forced to give birth to a dog. But you are being congratulated! "You no longer just virgin! No longer *yellow*, what we call here a 'Banana,' what in Chinese be *xiāng jiāo*," your Chinese rad tech exclaims. Makes you to feel like a celebrity. Today (and from now on) your submission to the restricted treatment position is much briefer than it was for your initial mask-fitting. And, today, you've learned to launch countermeasures — skull-time, the raw, the unrefined find-again in your cooked mind — to neutralize the claustrophobia experienced in that awful head-to-torso mask. As your body is helped off the platen into distasteful fluorescent light again — *Dura lex sed lex!* — you muse how, like detective fiction, your writing about your experiences here must tell ever-new stories yet reproduce a scheme always the same due to the serial nature of your treatment. A narrative of advancement and return, perfectly figured by a cycloid curve as described by the rolling wheel of your first 10-speed bicycle.

To kick start your departure from Tomo's maw, you mentally recite the following litany as you make your way to the mens' room, *loo* as Brits put it: *This is the best way to do things. This is the very best way to do things. This is the very best way to do things exactly right, right now. With the right people doing the right things at the right time and these really are the right people doing the right things at the right time in the right places and right ways. Right? RIGHT!* From *loo* to El platform you walk swiftly in silence (your wife complains you have "soles of wind" and that "walking is *not* a sport"); wait with multitudes, then hop and ride a crushing, noisy train to your lonely parked car, jump in and zoom homeward to horn blasts and police sirens to quietly await your wife's soft-voiced return.

## Treatment 2.



So just where exactly are you now *vis-à-vis* the snapping jaws of life? Six weeks post-surgery. First week of December and exactly a week since your last gourmet meal for awhile (radiation is contraindicated for astute taste buds) at a noted Iberian restaurant, Mercat a la Planxa. You thrill now to recall how you and your wife consumed with gusto a *tapas* selection of squid, Iberico ham, chili peppers, chorizo sausage, and cured pork loin, all washed down with a bottle of

Viñedos de Párganos La Nieta, Rioja 2010. Such past cuisinal events are never long forgotten; they simmer again in the 'foodie' stories you tell friends, in the blogs your wife posts for relatives along with her photographs of each delectable enjoyed.

This has become the drill each time you and your spouse perform a "Foodies' Night Out" at some new local gourmet magnet recently featured on the "Check Please" TV show, ordering the *dégustation* with wine flight, filling the air with sounds of your satisfaction. You fear your taste may not, post-radiation, return, or that the soured taste (soon to come) will linger and match the experience of that penitent saint, Joseph of Cupertino, who dined on an herb so bitter and disgusting that even to lick it with the tip of his tongue nauseated him for several days. Your wife counters your fears with the example of Chicago's master chef, Grant Achatz, whose successful bout with tongue cancer returned his edgy gustatory gifts intact.

You get cancer, you hang out in waiting rooms. The WR at your treatment facility comfortably holds you in cushiony chairs until you are called and make your way to that sterile, cold room. Kept cold because Tomo's zapping electronics need be kept chilled. Therein, you assume a