

EXPOSURE

I was fighting off my sickness, but it kept getting worse. I couldn't control the hacking cough. My parents were planning to send for Dr. Grayson. I felt that I could do OK without a doctor. But I agreed to let him see me.

Dr. Grayson was a particularly unique individual, almost the last of a dying breed of country physicians. When he listened to my cough, he gave a face of profound dismay.

"She's got a pretty bad infection. I have my suspicions."

He felt that he didn't have enough information yet to elaborate.

"We're going to have to do quite a bit to build up her strength."

"It's not just a bad cold or the flu?" my father asked.

"I think that this is pretty serious."

"How serious?"

"You're going to have to keep a constant watch on her. She really should be in the hospital."

I knew that they were talking about me. And I could barely understand their words. I only heard the word *hospital*. I told myself that I would be up in no time; it wasn't going to be that easy. Even trying to raise myself in the bed only sent the blood rushing to my head. My body was working against me. This made no sense. I wanted to get better. But I could feel the congestion getting deep in my chest. I was trying to figure out how to cough it up. I just didn't have the energy.

I had had colds in the past. And there were weeks when I was down for the count. The severe weather would knock me for a loop. But nothing was like this. The longer that the illness hung on, the more that I felt debilitated. So I didn't have much to fight with.

For the first while, everyone would gather around me. They were concerned if I was going to make it. But they weren't able to sustain their interest. They had their own lives. Ultimately, they were afraid to be around me.

The doctor told them that I needed dry air. On warm days, they would wrap me up and sit me outside. The sun was supposed to do the work of healing me. I hoped that it would do it would help. But it was all so slow. I wasn't sure what I could do to speed the process along.

My life was being spun along one track. All the contours were ground down. With so little variety to encourage me, I found it almost unbearable to occupy my mind. I would constantly drift in and out. Since I wasn't sleeping consistently, I existed in a dream world.

At times, I felt like a giant doll who was being displayed for the world. They would hide me during the evening. Then they would take me out in the sun. It felt so absurd. I would stay there in place and hardly move. I was a spectacle in my own right.

From time to time, I would relapse. I was so worn out that I was surprised that there was anything left in my body. The cough would shake me all over. I felt as if I was about to throw up. But nothing would come up. Just more coughing.

Danny did his best to entertain me. But I was frightening him too. He was in such good physical shape that I represented a threat to his own health. He was afraid to admit this to me. He was fighting off his own demons so he sympathized with my situation. That gave him reason enough to spend time with me. He didn't want to let on how serious everyone considered my

disease. He tried to maintain a happy face. There was also a strange fascination for him in observing the nature of life. He wanted to discover the mystery.

After a while, I entered an even more extreme phase of the disease. The coughing was so irritating, that I was afraid when an attack hit. The phlegm had pink streaks in it. I attributed this to the fact that I was coughing so much. I was breaking blood vessels. But then things became so much worse. It was evident that I was coughing up blood. I thought that my insides were going to come out.

They served me hot tea in the hopes that it might make things better. Dr. Grayson made a special effort to stay informed about what was happening. He kept up with his cheery demeanor, but I could recognize his own pallor that revealed more clearly what he was thinking.

This continued. I was really getting afraid. If there was something in me that was taking me over, I wanted to figure out how to get rid of it. My concern for my own survival now progressed to the next stage. I was sure that I was on my death bed. I imagined that I was looking at myself lying on the bed. All that I could see was how terrible I looked. There didn't seem to be the slightest hope that I would make it another night.

I wondered what the blood really meant. Was I being eaten away from the inside? When the disease had consumed all of me, I would just give out. It scared me just to contemplate. It hardly seemed that there was anything that could be done. I anticipated the sheet that would spell my final decay.

I was conscious for shorter and shorter periods. They stopped the pretense that I was going to get better. They didn't even wheel me outside. I remained upstairs in the dark by myself. They bundled me up. They would put hot compresses on my forehead. More hot tea served to help stabilize my condition. But I no longer had any illusions.

I had wanted to believe that my body offered me the power to overcome even the worst. But there was no way that I could do a thing to counteract all the things were occurring. The utter sameness of it all only made it harder to find some inroad to begin my battle. I imagined myself a jellyfish swimming in a vast ocean. There was less and less form to my existence. When I was finally beached, there was nothing more that I could do.

A coughing fit caught me in the middle of the night. There was so much racket that my mother got up to check on me. I could see the panic in her face. I could almost hear the bells toll for my final end. She rushed to make me some tea. She felt as if she was pulling me back from the jaws of death.

Even if her efforts weren't stopping the onslaught of the disease, it gave me a little comfort. I wanted to believe that I could work this feeling to my advantage. She helped subdue the cough. I let my feeling work its way inside me. I could feel my resilience grow. Even if this was an illusion, I wasn't going to surrender to the illness. If anything, I had my pride. And it still mattered for something.

My mother was doing her best to help counteract the ill-effects. However, she understood how bad it had become. That morning she again sent for Dr. Grayson. He seemed even more focused. He had already recognized the seriousness. But he had believed that he was achieving some success. He now recognized a set back. He wanted to tell himself that this was the very character of the illness. There was no straight line to recovery. This had gone beyond

that. He couldn't connect these disparate moments. He couldn't see a thread that would lead to eventual cessation of the illness.

I could hear mumbling downstairs. Their words were even fainter. They were talking about me. This was the only hope that I had. But there was nothing that I could do to hear better what was being said.

“Isn't it time to bring her to the hospital?”

I imagined that I knew what they were saying even if I was way too dazed to make sense of the words. In fact, I was ready to wake up somewhere else. So I was surprised to see daybreak from my own bed. I could feel a sense of fear remain. But there were going to treat me at home.

“There's not that much that we can do for her if she's in the hospital.”

That was that. The issue had been decided once and for all. Unless, I became critical, they would minister me at home.

I couldn't imagine that things could get much worse. And if I remained like this, I was sure that I couldn't survive. They were propping me up for the time being. I pretended that this was some kind of crisis. If I could pass through this moment, then things would improve for me once and for all.

My absurd beliefs were all part of my sickness. There was really no improvement. Although the coughing wasn't as severe, I still had the bouts. I was so weakened, that there was nothing more to fight with.

When things would quiet down, they would again take me outside. But a couple of scary nights caused them to again sequester me in my bed. They weren't sure where this was going. They needed to go through the motions. Everyone would stay around just enough to feel good about themselves. They would try to be cheery. Then they would go on their way.

I stopped anticipating any sort of recovery. I was trying to brace myself against another attack. I knew that these after-shocks could be more ominous than the initial effects of the illness. I was losing the war of attrition.

Outside of my world, life was teeming with activity. I wanted to throw myself in the action. The hustle and bustle would have been the solution to my lethargy. My heart would beat again with its former vigor. And my will would be enriched. Then I would collapse in the street. And people would just walk over me on the way to their destination. So much for an easy victory.

I was back here in nowhere land. I felt fortunate that anyone even knew that I was alive. But I continued to hold on. My thread was getting frayed. And I was doing what I could to patch it up. Every time that I tried only strained things more.

The hospital would have been an even worse place for me. They would have done everything that they could to patch me up. After that point, they would realize that I couldn't be helped. So I would be abandoned to my room. When they did their morning rounds, they would glance my way, make a few notes, and whisper to themselves.

“She is a hopeless case.”

“Indeed, she is.”

If not for the location, they would be strained to fill my bed with another patient. They

were all on death watch.

I opened my eyes to my room again. They were trying to get me stronger so they could use the sun therapy. I played along with their game. This was my only possible reprieve.

Another restless night made me think that I was going nowhere. The piercing coughs seemed to shake the foundation of the house. I was sure that my siblings were growing more than a little impatient with me. Would I ever get over the disease? I was the nuisance in their world.

I knew that I was feeling more than a little sorry for myself. What else could I do? I wanted to counteract the fear.

I had been fighting this disease for over a week. It had been tough at first. But I really thought that I was making progress. Now things looked much more bleak. I just didn't seem to have any strength to overcome the illness. I could barely breathe; therefore, I couldn't reach deep into myself to ward off the coughing. The congestion was unbearable.

I often would lie on my bed like a skeleton. I would let the waves of coughing pass over me. Then I would go back to my immobility.

I wanted to use mind control to make the disease leave me for good. I had seen them hypnotize people in movies. I tried to do the same to myself. I listened to the ticking of the clock. I timed my breathing to match the clicks. Just at the moment that I thought that I had succeeded, the coughing would hit me again.

The regular visits of people bringing me tea were such a welcome relief. Even if the benefits were illusory, they gave me enough comfort to carry on. They also broke the monotony of my constant watch. The visits were also my only argument against my hacking cough.

If the disease was going to take me for good, I wondered why it was so cruel. Why wouldn't it would do its work in good time? It was all about its trickery. It offered me hope only to dash it on the ground. Just as I would make sense of its routine, it would disrupt the pattern with the intent of throwing me off.

I was a witness of a wildcat storm. It had come upon me unpredictably. And the more that I tried to accommodate myself to what was happening, the worse that it became. The lightening chained itself to cover the longest distances. And the rain came down with all its fury. All the while, the wind sent the water shooting everywhere. I was soaked through and through. As much as I tried to escape, the deluge followed me everywhere. My body knew no place of rest.

I didn't want to see the illness as the result of some kind of curse. But its precipitous arrival made it difficult for me to think otherwise. It was so totally stubborn. I did everything that I could to shake off its influence. It had become part of me. Not only had it turned my life inside out, it made it impossible for me to imagine any time in the future without its effects.

At night, I would lie awake in bed. I wanted sleep to help subdue my illness. But I had been immobile for the whole day. I felt as if I shouldn't sleep. I needed to recover my strength. I was doing awful. I tried to stretch out more. I wanted to cover my head. I started coughing.

There was no clear strategy that would help me overcome what was happening to me. For a moment, I tried to see myself from a distance. Here was a helpless girl lying in a bed. And I was watching while I was sitting in a chair. But even my observation was interrupted by a coughing spell. I was back in the bed as I tried to fight off the effects of the disease.

It had cooled off significantly. But I felt as if I was burning up. They wanted me to stay covered up. But I wanted to peel off all my clothes. Momentarily, I dozed off. Then I woke up in the middle of the night. I had slept for a while. It just didn't seem like it.

If the sickness had become worse, I was ready for whatever might follow. I was clearly scared. There were no longer any reference points that I could use to measure the changes in my condition. And no one else had any idea what was going on.

I had believed that I could somehow escape myself and limit my suffering. This had always worked before. But I was now subject to a new geometry. My inside had become my outside. Even my efforts to escape the poisonous disease only added to the theater. I was looking at myself like a crazed torturer finding delight in the cries of my prisoner.

I felt as if I was going backwards. I had already dismissed my uncertainty with regards to my faith. Now my stability was again being threatened. What had I done to merit this kind of setback? I didn't want to think that I was born under a bad sign. The cards were just stacked temporarily against me. I could do a new shuffle, and things would start to look up for me again.

My illness wasn't really a product of my attitude. I could tell myself all day that I had done something wrong to merit this kind of treatment. But it wasn't so. I had left the river with such a great perspective on life. However, I got thrown back in the doldrums. I tried to attain a level of physical well being that was impervious to any physical ailment. But there was so much of our existence which was developed beneath the surface of our observation.

From my limited experience, I was no big fan of vertigo-inducing amusement park rides. But I was in for the roller coaster ride of my life. And I didn't want to look down because that would only add to my fear. Just as I thought that I was getting control of my life, I could feel my stomach drop. There was nothing that I could do.

I didn't want to appear helpless. But it wasn't as if I could hold my breath forever. There were limitations on my desire. I could starve myself for a few days. But I would eventually have to eat. And this was no different. The only problem was that my recovery was taking so long. I only had to eat a meal to banish my hunger pangs. On the other hand, a bad cold could hang on for weeks. This was almost the same.,

I realized that patience was an essential part of my getting better. I worked to subdue my anxiousness. But I was only cheating myself. I was just as nervous as before. I was just telling myself different.

There were parts of our bodies which wouldn't yield to our instructions. They forever remained a mystery. I didn't like this state of affairs. I was the tiny ship negotiating a massive ocean. I would just have to deal with the perils. It wasn't going to be enough to eat healthy and get plenty of rest. Even constant activity was no certainty against the ailments of the flesh. When these storms flared up, I would have to hold myself as steady as I could. And that was that.

All my hopes were pinned on my ability to make it through this crisis. And magic still seemed in pretty short supply. I was hanging on the best that I could do. I was feeling more and more like a spectator in my own life. And I wasn't enjoying the show.

I originally wished that the good doctor would pull some remedy out of that little bag of his. None was forthcoming. He had saved his tonic for other more suitable patients. I waited on the outside for whatever remedy he might have available. I didn't want him doing something unusual to my lungs. And I felt that any sort of final judgement would be premature. I just

wondered if some hocus-pocus might be better than nothing.

His honesty might have been refreshing. Any quack might have dreamed up a cure for a fee. But he wasn't going to promise something that couldn't be delivered. An intelligent doctor understood the ways of the body. And he wasn't about to predict an hospitable end if it was not warranted. He did what he could not to alarm us. And that's where his prognosticating ended. I accepted his limited abilities. That was why he was such a valued practitioner. This was hardly as simple as setting a broken bone. Any cutting wouldn't have helped the situation. He relied on time. Often, that was the physician's best friend.

In the past, some had gone to extremes. Science had given way to superstition. And the patient was at the mercy of the doctor's wild antics. Dr. Grayson had left these tricks to the Middle Ages. His method was circumspect and forward-thinking. And I thanked my lucky stars that I was under his care.

Not only had my journey to the river provided me with self-knowledge, it also offered me a picture of the universe and my place within it. I could not expect that my illness would offer me such insight about my body. It almost worked in the reverse. I was becoming more and more estranged from my body. More than ever, I felt as if I was coming out of my skin. I had previously felt such discomfort. But it had become much more pronounced. At the same time, I almost felt this aching in my bones. This pain seemed to pulsate from within. When I coughed at the same time, it was the most excruciating pain.

There were doing their best to restrict my diet. It was very bland. I was eating a lot of dry toast and tea. My stomach just felt empty. I knew that I would get sick if I ate much more. It kept on like this for a while. They suspected that some food might aggravate my condition. Not only could they upset my stomach, but there could also be things in the food that might react with the disease to make it worse. I still would get stomach aches. So I thought that it was fortunate that I didn't eat much else.

Before I got sick, walking was my main exercise. I walked so much that I felt healthy. It helped me create my view of the world. There was nowhere that I couldn't reach on foot. Now my perspective was reined in even more. I was watching the world, but I couldn't to get any closer to what I was observing. The distance seemed to exaggerate the drama of what I was seeing. I couldn't verify if the surrounding illusions were simply the stuff of my imagination.

At dusk, or when it rained, the shadows took on a life of their own. These lively forms passed in and out of each other. I could no longer travel out to see the source of the mirage. And the more delirious that I became, the more that I attributed an independent reality to these vague shapes. I needed someone to acknowledge my conditions, and these sprite visitors were thrilling enough to capture my attention. At times, I would get so involved in the magic that it would become the foundation of my experience. I was doing what I could to make it back to the world of the living, but I was surviving among the walking dead.

As I became entirely accustomed to this state of affairs, these monsters of the night would even speak to me. Their discourse was all the more articulate, and it seemed to suit my needs more than any discussion with my family.

I refused to endorse a belief in ghosts, but I couldn't help my fascination for the fantastic creatures that now filled my life. There were long stretches when I couldn't even tell if I was actually awake. But I would be immersed in a dialogue about some tidbits of knowledge. A

little while later, I would have no recollection of what had transpired. No wonder people in less distress than myself had a tendency to jump to conclusions about others. That was reason enough to leave this insular little community of ours. Now things were so much worse.

I couldn't let these phantoms drag me down. I would just stare straight in front of me, and these images would have a field day with my mind. There had to be some way to cast out these demons permanently. But the more that I tried, the deeper I sank into the morass.

Sickness really afforded the body little luxury. It was just the upset of normal bodily functions. I felt that my sanity was at risk. And I did all the steps to try to get my life in order. But it was silly if I really thought that my efforts could make any difference. Things would settle down momentarily. Unfortunately was only in the eye of the storm. Then the craziness would start anew. And it would be even more chaotic than before.

My muscles were so weak, and this was another reason for my psychic imbalance. I could no longer apply my strength of will to a particularly nasty situation. I just became overwhelmed by the smallest gnat or the peskiest house fly.

The longer that I was sick, the more that it was becoming clear how separate from everyone else I was living. This only reinforced a feeling of profound isolation. If not for my incredible weakness, this might have proven a boom to my will. As it was, it only underlined my utter helplessness.

Ultimately, I was afraid that my solitude was only making matters worse. And I was digging myself into a hole that I could never crawl out of. There was little respite for me to put aside my melancholy. I hated the sense of eternity that accompanied my debility. But it wasn't as if I could just wish my malady away. I didn't want to imagine that this was my end. I looked forward to a time when I could dispense with these shackles. For now, this was my world. And I had to face the consequences. It wasn't something that I could just put out of my mind. But it was hardly the result of my feeling sorry for myself. And I couldn't be blamed for dwelling on my own problems. This was what I had become. I couldn't just close my eyes and tell myself that everything would be fine

What trapped me even deeper in my hollow was the simple fact that nothing that I did amounted to a scintilla of a difference. A good attitude wouldn't have changed a thing. I couldn't sustain a thought long enough to matter in a positive or negative way. I just as riding a wave wherever it took me. Some moments I would feel totally exhilarated. And such highs would be followed by bouts of complete hopelessness.

I needed to be honest with myself. I was at the mercy of my body which offered me nothing to work with. I couldn't down a spoonful of sugar to make my spirits feel uplifted. Tranquil moments were always interspersed with these stabs of piercing discomfort. Moreover, I no longer understood my limitations. If I took any chances, I was afraid of aggravating my condition. I had no idea what was going on. On the one hand, the least little thing could push me over the brink. And I truly was afraid of complicating things. On the other hand, there was little that I could do to make matters worse. I felt as if I was so far gone that nothing short of my precipitous demise would change things one bit.

My family did what they could to be sympathetic. But they weren't living the illness in the same way that I was. I couldn't expect them to. Their lives continued on without me. I remained in the bubble. If I eventually recovered, I understood that there would be something

about my experience that was so intense that I would never be able truly to share this with anyone else in my family. My life had practically nothing to do with theirs. It was more of a motivation to leave when I was old enough. If there was some lesson to be learned, it was that my future was to be completely my own. Once and for all, I had been excised from the world around me. There was no going back. I could be affectionate with regards to those around me. And I could feel a vague nostalgia for my years growing up here. However, my sentiment was nothing that I could sustain. I would never be able to transform my feelings into a desire to return here for anything more than a visit.

As much as I had resolved my future with regards to this locale, I was hardly out of the woods yet. And in this dark place, there was a real question if I could actually survive. I could tell myself that I was battling for my life. But that would imply that I was taking active steps to overcome the disease. It didn't work that way. There was a process going on inside of me that didn't need my cooperation. If I was lucky, I was going to benefit from the results. Generally, it took too much effort for me to root one way or another. I remained a spectator. At times, even if I could only move my eyes back and forth, my body would not at all oblige. I'd catch myself fading out as I stared into space.

I didn't want to think of my life as progress from one crisis to another. But such events seemed to bring out a part of me that I was trying to suppress. I became convinced that the only way to avoid future disasters was to reach deep into myself and activate that part of my will that could resist all these negative influences. It was particularly hard to recognize this path since I was so beset by an illness that totally sapped all my strength. But the sickness wasn't going to go away on its own. I wanted to live. And something inside me gave me the power simply to say I resist. That spark alone was enough to get me going. At least, that was what I wanted to believe. I was doing my best to marshal all my powers. Every relapse only reinforced my feelings of insecurity. And I thought that all my advances had just been in vain. It was as if my body was playing tricks on me. Still, I wouldn't give in.

I wasn't sure what had put me in this kind of fix. Sure I was ravaged by this incredible disease. But it exposed how weak my mind was. For all my striving, I felt as if I really lacked confidence. I was chasing my tail. I believed that there was something that kept me hanging on. No matter how cursed I felt, I wasn't going to give in to any obstacle in my way. I was just sitting here quite defenseless in a chair. But something was going on to give me an edge. If that was the best that I could do, that was more than enough.

My momentary victories registered in my brain. And a sufficient amount of these successes created a pattern for me. All the while, I could sense contrary forces. I couldn't rush to put out these fires. So the conflagration burned all over me. Even when it was consuming me, I told myself that nothing of the kind was occurring. When my strength returned temporarily, I could tell myself that I was right to have placed my faith in these glimmers of hope.

I was plagued by an even greater fear. I almost seemed to enjoy my down time. It gave me an excuse. And people seemed way more concerned than ever about my well being. I didn't mind the extra attention. At the same time, I didn't want to think that I was staying sick just to mine people's good will towards me. On the other hand, it didn't hurt. That should have been enough for me to stop playing the game. But I really was sick. And my illness was way beyond

anything that I had ever experienced before. I was starting to feel as if this was permanently my way of life. However, there was no way that this could last forever. The disease would finally break me for good. My only hope was that there was some kind of break just around the corner.

If I ever made it out of this mess, I would have a whole set of strategies to fortify my personality. Since the ill-effects were so crushing, I could take little consolation from these terrible events. This degree of discomfort was beyond anything that could be remotely qualified as a learning experience. Why did such extremes of pain not sap my faith? Why would we have to undergo such arduous inordinate suffering?

I barely had the energy to reason through my dilemma. However, at my hour of need, I did not feel abandoned. The fact that my belief was sustained under such incredible conditions made me realize that there was some substance to my feelings. On first glance, this perspective might have seemed ridiculous. I had every reason to let go. Simply because I held on gave me argument enough to maintain my view of the world. This may have been the foundation of insanity. But without this narrow sliver of understanding, I would have nothing. And my body still resonated with the sonorous rhythms of the universe. Even my time of despair was a positive of expression of my will to live. I was giving voice to my negative feelings. I was not surrendering to my weakness.

I staked my place in the assertion of my will. I was a thinking individual. No kind of tortuous experience could rob me of that legacy.

The more that I thought it about it, the more that I felt that this was my last day on earth. And that sharp flash passed over me as if this indeed was the end. There was nothing that I could do to stop the inevitable. I felt a cascade of emotions roll over me, and I was slipping further and further down. I was already so sick. But this realization added to my weakness. Then and there, I was going to explode.

This was nothing less than the cauldron of the self. And all the pressure was pushing down on me. I feared that I would see no more suns. It was already a serious endeavor just to grasp what was going on around me. Even as I made sense of each day, it only blurred into the next.

If I had already experienced torrential rain, the storm now attained epic proportions. It needed all its force to confront a resilient self. Even if my physical strength had been completely drained, my awareness had been nurtured by the my days of wrath. I had stitched together a new defensive front. My weakness only reminded how little that I had left. If I was going to be brought down permanently, then my eyes were going to be open to every aspect of my demise. I hated the acute awareness that now impressed itself on me. It seemed to aggravate the pain. But I didn't want to let go of my ability to attend to my condition. There wasn't much fight left in me. At least, I would see the blow finally took me to oblivion.

My eyes were wide open. I had navigated through these dreary times. I would have to accept whatever might follow. And that was the ominous reward for having endured all the bitter suffering.

If the constant subterfuge of my persecutor had been the hallmark of my sickness, the recent effects were even more devious. The brain fever heightened the delirium. The fires now burned without letup. I tried to ride these waves. But I was tossed against a stone wall time and time again. My solitude was now scarier than ever. I couldn't cry out. No one knew that these

were my last moments. To try to counterbalance these deleterious effects only brought my end closer. There was a gasp before giving out.

Everything came to a screeching halt. All perception had ceased. What remained was a definitive judgement. I had a recollection of something burning. This was punctuated with a sickly sweet smell, maybe toothpaste. But these were only the glimmer of memories. And that was that.

I had relished my ability to hold on to that point. If I was no longer there to witness what followed, I only wished that someone might be able to figure out a little of what I was thinking. Was there a reaction on my face that might have revealed to an observer my sentiment? Was there even anyone else around to see what was going on?

Someone wanted to restart the machine. But it wasn't possible. I was lying on the bed. I wasn't moving. Did I even have a pulse?

It was all finished!

In the cleanup that ensued, I would no longer be part of the process. There was sadness. But life continued in a way that could never encompass the full nature of those final moments. The story had ended once and for all. The sickness never allowed for a true comeback. The spectators could tell themselves that I was going to get better. I never improved. I just careened down the embankment until I came to a final rest at the bottom.

Where I had been, I no longer was. The drama was over so there was no record of the full conflict. Others had seen what was going on from afar. When things became truly nasty, they all turned their heads so that they didn't have to see what was occurring.

When I awoke, my fever had passed. I had no idea what had really transpired that night. I wanted to think that forces out of my control had rescued me from the other side. Whatever had happened, things would never be the same. I was hardly out of the woods. The therapy would have to carry on. But I was no longer wracked by the momentous debilitation that I had endured for weeks.

There was still a cough. But I wasn't spitting up blood. And I stopped viewing the disease as an enraged phantom that was pulling me in every direction. Everything was subject to a clear cause and effect. And my will was again in play. I would need my strength to lead me through my recovery.

I was sitting up in my bed waiting for something to eat.

My mother teased me, "You're going have to get up like everyone else."

I made a motion with the covers. She put her hand over them to show her actual intention. She was surprised when I smiled.

My death ceased being about this crisis of the self. All that had passed. What remained was a simple reminder of everything left undone. I would have to use my earthly powers to tackle all the tasks that remained for me.

My mother spoke, "You won't be getting out of this bed for a long while."

I was still very weak. This unspeakable tempest was now a more manageable cold. My cough sounded terrible. But I terminated the echoing in the corridors of Hades.

My siblings didn't seem afraid of me anymore. I supposed that I ended my ghostly nature. I was back among the living.

My appetite had not completely returned. And they wanted to maintain a full recovery so

I had to keep on with the program.

Dr. Grayson visited me later that afternoon.

“You’re looking much livelier than the last time that I saw you. But we still have a long ways to go.”

I smiled.

“We haven’t seen that in weeks.”

I knew that my smile couldn’t chase away all the foulness. I welcomed the sunny day, and it ability to make things right.

I had never known anything like the previous night. And it was premature to try to create some kind of lesson from my recent experiences. Even if I was a little chipper today, I was still down for the count. It would take quite a bit for me to spring to my feet. All that I really had was hope. It was something that had been relatively non-existent before today. But I couldn’t use my realization to work miracles.

After the doctor left, I fell asleep. This was the kind of rest that I had needed for quite a long time. It was little wonder that I didn’t wake up until the next day. To say that I was dead tired was a perverse understatement.

The next day was not premised on my rescue from the jaws of death. Indeed, it was the beginning of a true recovery. From this point on, it seemed easier to establish a schedule for myself. I was no longer subject to any relapses. There were no more backsliding. My progress was very slow. Sometimes it would hardly be noticeable. But every second now rung out with a joyous expression of life. I was again whole.

It would be quite a while before I could walk on my own. Everything was a chore in itself. But I could relate to the world in a more ordered fashion.

I had a dream that all the horrendous effects returned with more might than ever before. I wanted to understand the creature who was behind all the knavery.