

RECOVERY

Despite my utter confidence, I needed to admit to myself that I still wasn't doing all that well. I had none of the frightening episodes which had characterized my illness. But that hardly meant that I was running around and playing with my brothers and sisters. There was a long way to go before I could again stand up. So I accepted my present state and worked from there.

To speed up my recovery, they continued to bundle me up and have me sit in the warm sun. I could now feel the heat pulsate through my body. I was convinced that this would be successful in helping me to get better.

The world remained distant from me. Other people were continuing on with their lives. And I remained in virtual isolation. When I was really sick, I really didn't take notice of such things. I was just trying to survive. But now it became all the more apparent to me.

It was enough that I was suffering from general fatigue. I wasn't even doing a thing, but I constantly felt exhausted. Now I was attentive to the hours ticking away, and the waiting drove me crazy. I noticed signs that I was getting better. But that didn't stop the process from feeling interminable. Even if I was aware of how I was doing, my concentration hadn't returned. So I'd just head into a trance. I had trouble sustaining thoughts for very long.

I considered how tortuous it might be to hear about my condition while my listener was in complete health. Maybe, the person would want to express concern. But I wasn't ready to engage them in much of a conversation. I hardly felt like talking. I'd nod my head a few times. Then I'd just lose my train of thought. If I had the words, what could I really say? I couldn't see myself rattling off a checklist that indicated how each body part was functioning. That hardly seemed entertaining. There was a lot of information that was better kept to myself. We may have an interest in learning the hidden secrets about a person's character. But that hardly means that we're interested in their toilet talk. We weren't made to listen to such bizarre catalogues of the human anatomy. I recognized that there were a few unusual sort who found pleasure in the minutia of others. For my part, I didn't like talking about my hacking cough with my friends.

My boredom was my most prevalent indication of my getting better. When I was convulsed by the disease, I couldn't focus long enough to maintain my attention. I still wasn't at the level that I could follow a logical argument. So I had difficulty taking a thought very far. That would only add to my restlessness. I wasn't sure what I was supposed to be doing. I couldn't read. And I wasn't able to sleep all the time.

The whole family was weaving together their connected tale that left no room for me. They kept doing their part to help me improve. But they didn't want to become too involved in my dilemma. This would mean avowing their own weaknesses. No one else wanted to go through what I went through. It wasn't simply a matter of being contagious. Everyone believed that just thinking about the disease for too long made a person a potential victim. Now more than ever, they were reminded of that basic truth.

At time, I pretended that I was a scarecrow who was there to frighten off the pests. I couldn't imagine a bird roosting on my shoulder. I would sit there in my solemn pose from day to day. If only I was blessed, I could be preparing myself for transcendence.

I had cleared the first stage of my spiritual development. I had cast off my attachment to things of this world. Now I would have to learn to find delight in the mundane. After that feat, I

would be able to take flight in my mind. Perhaps, I was on to something. I was reaching a new contentment.

My strength first manifested itself in my hands. I held them out in front of me. They were a revelation of my potent connection to the world. I moved my fingers up and down. It gave me a sense of confidence. I squeezed my fingers together and made a fist. It was a little difficult at first. But I could feel the blood flow. I could sense the power.

It wasn't enough just to see. I needed to hold things in my hands. I stretched out in an effort to grab hold of what was closest to me. I still couldn't move out of my chair. So my gesture was only symbolic. I imagined pulling an apple from the tree. I moved it back and forth from hand to hand. Knowledge was such an intricate coordination among all my senses. I was learning about life from the beginning. Did I want to take a bite out of the apple? Desire meant the ability to reach out for what delighted us. If we couldn't taste the marvelous ripe apple, its appeals were somewhat limited. We were denying what was essential about its nature. That cloying tartness was enough to send us into a lovely delirium. I bit into the glorious fruit and let the wondrous flavor transport me.

My imagination was as powerful as it had been during the worst moments of my illness. Without the ability to measure my mental estimations by actual contact with the world, I risked becoming overwhelmed by my dreams. Even in sleep, I had the sensation of satisfying my curiosity. When I was awake, there was this immense gap between what I observed and my the actual range of my interaction. I was always coming up short. I gripped my chair with my hands in an effort to compensate for my shortcoming.

I should have accepted the miracle that had been granted me at this stage in my recovery. But my accomplishments only shone a light on how weak I remained. Not only was I a spectator, but my frustration was as great as it had ever been. I had trouble letting my patience take hold. This only made me irritable. I didn't expect everything to change overnight. I just felt that I needed a little more consolation. Maybe if I had wings, I could fly away. But my hands could do little else but flap at my side. They didn't offer me the mobility that I craved. I knew that I was too weak to do much else.

I could move my legs in place. I did this. But I didn't dare try to stand on my own. Even if I could manage it, I only had so much energy each day. And I didn't want to sap what little I had. So I plunged in a sea of my own making, and I swam like a dolphin. Even if I could never manage this ability, my dreams gave me a feeling of might. And I made this imaginary home my own.

When I was led back to bed, I recognized how far I had come. My body tingled all over with the activity of the past day. I remained somewhat discouraged by the immense struggle that remained. But I took it all in stride. And I pushed on.

My sleep was so restful. Obviously, I was tired from the day's activities. But there was a natural progress to my rest. I had not been so totally drained that sleep was unable to rejuvenate me. And I awoke with more energy than the day before. I couldn't expect anything more.

After waking up, I sat up in the bed. I had to restrain my urge to stand up. At least, the motivation remained. I did my best to restrain myself. I didn't want to fall down on the floor. I knew that no supernatural force would be able to hold me up. Despite my best intentions, I would come right down. So I waited anxiously for someone to come and get me.

I was lucky that just about everyone was up and dressed. I wouldn't have to delay my awaited rescue. John pulled me from the bed. He was a powerful man. I felt like a calf who was being led around the barn. Once downstairs, I was able to eat. The morning greeted me with a solemn reverence. I was getting better!

I felt as if I was ready to walk on my own. This feeling was so much stronger than before. But I was still this bundle who had to be placed in a chair. My will was so strong. But my body had a long way to go.

If my illness hadn't have sapped my body, my inactivity in itself would have been sufficient to limit me. I moved my legs in place. But whenever someone tried to help me up, I would test myself. If they hadn't been around, I would have just fallen to the ground. Not only was afraid to test my legs, I understood that I lacked the concentration to maintain myself. My guardians would pretend to walk me back inside. But nothing like this was really happening. They knew that they were supporting me all along the way. Eventually, they would have to pick me up and carry me the rest of the way. I could keep on with the pretense that things would change sooner. I knew differently.

What was it going to take for me to make my first steps? I couldn't try to stand on my own. Someone would have to hold me up as I tried to move my legs. Even then, I couldn't rest myself on my own two feet. This was going to take an intense application. They were going to have to work with me.

I didn't feel ready yet. Maybe I had become too accustomed to being waited on. I realized that I would have to strike out on my own. I was adamant. I would have to provoke the others. Still, I wondered how seriously they took me. I still seemed too stricken to achieve the necessary determination. It was easier for them to dump me back in the bed.

I was going to have to force things. When they weren't looking I practiced sitting up. I would move myself a little, then I would slip right back on the bed. It was such a give and take only to make a little progress. I couldn't even brace myself with my hands. They were so weak. So I tried working on my hands and my wrist in preparation for a more thorough attempt at sitting up.

When I finally was able to sit up for a protracted period of time, I did what I could to move my legs. This was going to take more than a little effort. I imagined that I could be at this a year. Each day I seemed to be moving a hairbreadth. It seemed like some kind of puzzle before I would finally achieve my goal.

It became lot harder hiding my attempts at getting out of bed on my own. Eventually, I reached a point where I could be ready for the person who came to get me.

"You have made a lot of progress!"

I wanted to say something to Danny, but the words lodged in my throat. I lightly coughed. I wondered if he understood.

I knew that it would take even longer to get me up on my own. I was still the mummy that they carted from one location to another. My increased movement allowed me to temporarily entertain myself as I sat out there by myself. But the boredom would again set in. As I became tired, I found it harder to keep moving. My fatigue was much more severe than that of the average person. I simply shut down completely.

I imagined that I was a prisoner in my own body. No one knew what I was thinking. I

didn't have the mobility to express my true feelings. It was amazing to recognize how a full sense of movements was at the heart of our ability to communicate. Even a casual gesture was based upon the elaborate grace of a hand movement. Our intent was tied to an elegant dance that we performed with the world around us. When I had the full use of my limbs, I could make up for my present limitations. At the same time, I wondered if I might have stumbled on an understanding that was too all-encompassing to sustain in my future state of awareness. What was the wisdom that I had culled from my particular frustration?

I had spent all this time walking on a tightrope. If I never looked down, I could pretend that there was a net there. This made me more accustomed to risk. Now, I no longer had the extreme drama to define my days. I had to learn to get over the boredom. This may have been a welcome change, but it felt so excruciating.

Would my complete recovery again give me the opportunity again to challenge myself? Was danger the only thing that I really understood? Our family was so naturally adventuresome. We were restless and couldn't stay in one place for very long. I feared the routine. At the same time, I wanted to embrace a mundane existence and allow it to sustain me. But I knew that I could only contemplate the stuff of real adventure. Since I was restless, my body would suffer the internal conflict.

Like Helen, I found a daring appeal in the images of the movie screen. But I could not cast myself in one of those tawdry dramas. I like to watch from afar. I valued my secure view. I kept inching closer in the hopes of getting a better look. This movement on my part was always sufficient to get me in trouble. I refused to give ground. So I considered myself lucky that I didn't get in any real scrapes. I only aggravated my own weakness. My sickness had been the result of my flirting with danger. I really hadn't done anything of significance. But my body felt as if it had been through an ordeal. Thus, my resistance was lowered, and I was more vulnerable to the disease.

I wasn't afraid of life. But I tried to maintain my safety. And in this middle ground, there were so many threats to my well being. I had always got my nightly rest. I wasn't gallivanting at all hours of the night. I hardly played fast and loose with the creatures of darkness, but they seemed to find me. So I had to bear the burden for my curiosity. If I my eyes were open for even a second beyond my bedtime, I could feel these intruders make their way into my consciousness. And they lodged there until I gave way to sleep.

I was such a practical person. So I hated to admit that these demonic forces could make their roost inside of me. I had to admit to a slew of bad dreams. I wasn't really haunted in my waking life. But my dreams showed the nasty effects of a cavil of monsters. For that reason, my days had a pallor that made me more susceptible to the variations of the spiritual world. It was almost as electrical currents were running through my body not so unlike the flashes of lightning. All these interruption wreaked havoc with my mental stability.

I had brought a happy face to my experience. And I told myself that all the drama really had nothing to do with who I really was. That assurance had stood me well until I became sick. The sickness had exaggerated all my former weaknesses. I didn't see it as only a phenomenon of the body. This was a deeper revelation of my inner psyche. So I needed to respond to all these disruptions. For once, the specters had their way. They tossed me back and forth. I just flopped around as I was knocked every which way.

Why did I feel the need to constantly test myself? If I had felt more at home, I could have relied on all the references points of my world to soothe my unease. And I did my best to stake my claim among the world of the living. But my illness demonstrated how potent was the contrary argument. I did what I could to stake my claim. However, a mere inkling of fatigue had been enough to wear me down. I didn't want to give in. I only had a few tools to fight with.

I didn't want my life to be a witness to my aches and pains. There was so much more to who I was. But I wanted to explore my inner world. This was the only way that I could investigate the oddities. If I was at risk, that would hardly dissuade me from continuing further. At the same time, I didn't want to give to much of myself to this pursuit.

I looked up at the night sky with a sense of trepidation. I had come so far, but there was something fundamental that remained unsolved. I had battled within myself. But there was a world that remained separate from me. And the sky seemed to bear witness to what was happening. There was such a broad expanse or experience. The stars twinkled for eons. And I wanted my brilliance to complement these flares. I had trouble rivaling this intensity. The star spoke to me. But they couldn't engage the conversation. I aspired to speak for the entire heavens. My frustration reminded me how far I needed to go to satisfy the urge on my part. It wasn't so much that I had endured the ill effects of my sickness. The disease shook me down to the foundation of my being. But I wanted to reflect the same turmoil upon the universe. How could I attain this immense reach. If my illness expressed a deeper truth, it was how separate I was from mastering the cosmos. This truth alone was enough to shake me down to my very core. I had rivaled the being that spun these heavenly bodies around each other. I was suffering for my blasphemy.

The sky was telling me that my complete recovery depended on overcoming the obstacles in my way to a total domination of everything that I could see. Especially at night, I could calculate all the contours of the observed world. The stars seemed to fold down to a geometry that I could render and place in my pocket. I closed my eyes, and I could recall everything around me. No wonder I was inspired with such massive goals.

All the while, I was seeing myself as this little speck among the millions of miles of the universe. My illness still made it mark. And this was the ultimate effect of my all-encompassing gesture. I was being punished for my pride.

I still didn't want to let go. Was that why I was still weak? I wanted the ultimate knowledge. And I wanted it to write its message all over me. Thus, my existence could embody the reality that I contemplated.

This was too much to bear. I was not meant to extend myself. For the time being, even the simplest task seemed analogous to stretching myself the breadth of the shining world. No wonder I was still exhausted. Would I have to fully expand myself so that my reach could push out to the farthest galaxies. It was all starting to make sense.

I had already charted this massive course. I had accustomed myself to these twisting distances. The heavens only represented a journey that I had traversed second upon second. More recently, my sojourn had become incredibly involved. I was doing much more than a simple tracking of the cosmos could accomplish. My forays into inner space were entirely more variegated than anything that could be discovered in the outside world. I had reason to feel tired.. I had traversed millions of miles. I was not ready to stop. I just needed more strength.

I was seeing my recovery as having a greater purpose. I didn't want to appear vain. This was how it was. I was only trying to make sense of all the things that had transpired over the last while. I only wished that my self-discovery could yield further gems for our understanding of science. I felt almost tongue-tied when I wanted to explain the full character of my breakthrough. I had to be content with the feeling that pulsed through me. This was why I felt so excited about my liberation. At the same time, I felt dwarfed by the night sky. It told me that my accomplishments had spun me around a giant spider's web. Even if I familiarized myself with its form, there were so many other mysteries that remained beyond me. I was in a trap. The image of the sky made that so clear. I looked up and beyond myself. Hopefully, I could catch a glimpse of something beyond this glitter. While I reached up to the stars, I was reminded how I was still rooted on earth. This truth made me extra tired.

As I regained my strength, I could feel my heart beat with more authority. I could almost sense the blood pulsing through my body. This was the source of my vitality. Even as I was still weak, I believed that the relentless beating would enliven my muscles and allow me to assert myself.

Despite my renewed energy, there was still something seriously lacking. Of course, I felt enlivened. But there seemed something faint about my heartbeat. It was almost as if I had the heart of a little bird. I was used to pumping blood to my small body as I soared in the heavens. But once I had to accommodate myself to my human form, I could never get off the ground. I had the desire to do great things. But my heart would not give me the boost to attain my dreams.

I needed to resist my growing impatience. After such a scary battle, it was only natural that I would want everything good to happen all at once. I needed to take it slowly. But the initial burst of excitement was rather unsettling.

I started to wonder if I really had enough in my frail body to get over the hump. Sure I could subdue my illness, but I started to recognize a more prevalent weakness in my health. I could have used the opportunity to set myself on a solid foundation. But I only had so much to work with. I noticed a vulnerability in my nature. My fainting spells at church anticipated the severity of my illness. I felt like a tree that was getting blown in the wind. I had survived a tornado. But it would just take one nasty gust to uproot me completely. I dreaded the approaching storm.

This may have been my destiny. I looked to the stars in the hope that I could attain flight. But I remained on this earth. While my soul floated in the heavens, my body could never achieve lift off. Happiness was forever beyond me. At the same time, I waited while my wings were still patched up. There remained the hope that I might aspire after the heights. Indeed, true majesty was out there and beckoned to me.

Any weakness that remained was a vestige of my former nature. If I was ever going to be able to live independently, I would have to strip away this confining mantel and let the transfigured self shine. I needed to draw inspiration from my feathered origins. Maybe my body didn't have the power to glide in the air, but I seemed to remember a past when I challenged the mighty eagles in their lofty abode. As I let myself dive from on high, I understood the bloodlust of the falcon as it swooped down on its prey. The skies were my own. If I could only see a clear line on the horizon, I would truly appreciate the glory of my state.

I was pushing beyond imagination to a remembrance in the flesh. I remained inextricably

connected to my former life. It was not simply an affinity. I shared my being with something other than myself. The more that I ruminated about this fact, the more comfortable I was with what I had become. My extreme denial had left me subject to physical attack. But my knowledge informed me how I could permanently resist. I could spread my wings.

I would have to deal with my inherent frailty. If I acted like a hawk, then I could assume all the splendor of the magnificent bird. My wingspan gave me the leverage that I needed to navigate the blue yonder. Flapping my wings, I was now far above the tree tops. I could look down on the world and draw solace in a transcendent vision. What other mortals had finally gained the keys to Olympus?

I sat back in my chair and closed my eyes. The vigor ran through my insides. I welcomed my liberation. There was a light breeze, and it reminded me of my ancient self. This little bird found its perch near the house. I held my place nervously. Could I push myself a little further? I wasn't even walking yet, but I felt as if I was already flying.

My sense of elation only confirmed a long held suspicion that I had had about my illness. Our journey to the water was filled with this aura of fear. Despite my hesitation, I felt attracted to the place. It was so different from what I was used to. It was not barren; it was full of life. My body was flush. I felt full of desire. I wanted to strip off my clothes. I wanted to frolic in the sun.

Even as I gave in to my feelings, I realized that something was wrong. It was all so ambiguous. I was taught not to trust such confused emotions. I had done nothing unbecoming. But I felt guilty. I knew in my heart why. It was just that I didn't want to admit to such feelings about myself. In a sense, I was totally defiant. For all my body had undergone during my recovery, I remained stubborn. And my steadfast nature would not allow me to forgive myself completely for what had occurred.

I continued to dwell on my visit to the river. The waters became more vibrant in my recollection. And life was all the more potent. Indeed, I had tasted the poison. I recoiled. As much as I felt enticed by the experience, I was frightened by overall sensation. It had overcome me and spread over my entire body.

My trepidation became more crushing as I remembered further details. I had never felt so out of control. I had been afraid of losing myself completely. Now I was reliving those events. In my thoughts, I felt carried out to sea. The water had already been so awe-inspiring because I couldn't swim. Once I was out of my depth, there was nothing that I could do to resist the currents. I fought to stay above the water as I was being pulled underneath.

I was drowning in my own emotions. I couldn't let it happen. It wasn't as if I could simply give in. The rapidity of the changes did not allow for surrender. I was just getting pulled away from shore. And there was nothing that I could do. If I just resigned myself to what was happening, I would get pulled under deeper.

I focused on the dream image of the dead girl. I had tried to put these thoughts out of my head. But I felt excited about her inspiration. Her death did not seem merely accidental. She had understood the risks in venturing down to the water. But she also knew about the revelation that awaited her if she continued her journey. Nothing in her life had stimulated her so passionately. The waters spoke for everything in her world. It gave voice to that silent person who had hidden from everyone else. Once she had made her way, there was no turning back. She

accepted an eventual end. It was all part of her dedication. She wanted to see something that was forbidden. She was willing to transgress every lesson that she had been taught.

I knew that her rebelliousness was the very thing that stuck in my system. It was my sin of pride. As long as my intent resisted full penance, I could not toss off the wickedness that was at the heart of my being. I did not want to serve a higher power who curtailed my dominant impulse. I could pledge myself to a vague form of asceticism. But I refused to subdue my independent streak. I felt that I could make some kind of deal to retain this part of myself even while I sought final absolution.

I contemplated life down river. This was where others fell as they submitted to all the carnal pleasures of the body. I wanted to avoid this delirium. My compromise had been my vision of the raging waters. This was a force greater than anything unleashed by the body. It took every bit of the human will not be torn asunder by the dastardly currents. The temptation alone had been enough to upset the healthy balance of my physical being. I wouldn't let the idea die. I didn't want to relapse. But that wasn't stopping me from engaging the same turmoil that had done me in.

As I renewed my fealty to the waters, I observed a livelier rendition of my own conflict. I loved music. And I liked to move my body. But I saw people given to a frenzy that seemed too overwhelming for words. It was almost as if a lizard-like nature inspired the metamorphosis. The appetites were crazed. Mouths gaping wide open trying to entrap the prey. Tongues would reach out and snap at the air as if these driven souls were trying to catch insects. Even the physical embraces had an air of possession. Everything mixed together. The lines of personality blurred. It became impossible to define a unique self.

The portrayal was too frightening overpowering to contemplate. That should have been reason enough to put it all out of my mind. But there was something in these absurd movements that appealed to my curiosity. I knew that I should turn away. But I wanted to see more. This was so unlike me.

It made sense to me what overcame the young people around me. I noticed this change in my brothers and sisters. They wanted to throw themselves into the action. But their rewards were all so temporary. My depiction was much more animated. There was no hiding in the stark relief of the surrounding countryside. This was the kind of behavior that was part of city life. All the brash noises and shrieking crashes spoke of a feeling of displacement that only made its character known at night.

I didn't want to be part of any of this craziness. I wanted to take the search all the way to the heart of the matter. There was no distraction in my vision. I was engaging the very fever that allowed the body to become our home. That was why we were warm-blooded. We had not dispossessed the serpent within. We made his being vibrate along with our most basic desires.

I was able to cheat the effects of my exploration. But I was still subject to the mighty aftermath that ensued. My disease was only a portend of this more engaging phenomenon. I was adding the final touches to my demonic compact. It was a secret that I would never admit to. Since I hadn't gone all the way down river, I told myself that I couldn't be bought off with the delights that had consumed everyone else. I maintained my sainted nature. But my will was driven by the very wild hare that led the most frenzied participant into the total surrender to his passions.

By steeling my will, I was able to increase my distance from what seemed vile and dirty. At the same time, I was not admitting to the same terms that the convert accepted as the hallmark of her eventual forgiveness. I was taking that long road back. While I told myself that I had been redeemed by the experience, I was not yielding completely to my guilt. I took this as the source of my wellness. The only way that I could end the reign of the illness was to make my will strong.

I didn't want to accept sickness as my way of life. I realized that the urban maelstrom that had frightened me so much would only drag me down. But I wouldn't let go of my attachment to the adventuresome life. Even as I found my inspiration in motion pictures and the stories of my father, I wouldn't give myself up completely to the contemplative life. I couldn't see myself as cut off from the world. I was just how unsure how to effect my agreement.

I believed that I was inoculating myself against a future outbreak. I was learning to introduce these germs into my system in smaller doses. That way I could satisfy my curiosity, but I would not become overtaken by my impulses. I accepted this sense of restraint. I was learning how to stretch my limits. I was fortunate that I had not collapsed permanently due to my efforts. As much as I had made my amends, I refused to abandon the search. I was dealing with the side-effects of the vaccination.

The disease had separated me even more from those who lived around us. I never wanted to get involved petty squabbles. And I realized that I wasn't one for gossip. Our family struggled for our livelihood while others in the community seemed to feed off the troubles of their neighbors. Even as I tried to stay out of the drama, I realized that there was a severe moral tone to all their stories. People liked to learn the tawdry secrets of their acquaintances. They could live vicariously through these tidbits. Heaven help us if these miscreants weren't punished in the end. This especially justified the snooping. It was all leading towards the timely demise of the villains. More than that, the stories encouraged people to see their other people as their enemies. It exaggerated their strangeness. Thus, people could avoid their own foibles. I myself felt somewhat drawn to this same belief. My illness had struck me down due to my own wickedness. If I observed the shortcomings of others, I would feel less terrible about my own situation.

Local gossip was hardly entertaining enough. I wasn't drawn to the high life of Hollywood stars. But movies gave me a chance to gratify my curiosity. A little outrageousness was important to a good story. The film maker could explore all the salacious rumors about the heroine. In the telling, all the foul details were concocted to produce the effect, and she was never as daring as she seemed. This always meant that the worst scandals occurred behind closed-doors. And the irreverent chatter-boxes would have to be disciplined for speaking out of turn.

I could indulge myself in these matinee idols who seemed to get everything that they desired. Sure, they were challenging conventional norms. But these were good girls at heart. Modern time never gave them a chance so they had to react again cages created by eager men. Through it all, she always believed that she could find true love.

The movies dirtied the image. And she played her schemes in a world a little darker than normal life. That only made her more appealing. She proudly wore her make up. She wasn't afraid to let people see her attributes. But she maintained an air of modesty. Otherwise, who

know what she might be up to.

If the onscreen role found its adherents, then the actual life required some understanding. These women were under a lot of pressure. They couldn't expect to accede to the whims of their suitors. Trashy magazines would speculate about their illicit encounters. But for these gossip rags, everything was forbidden. That only gave the reporters an excuse to pry.

I told myself that I deserved the same respect that I afforded the girls on the screen. This may have contradicted what I had learned in my recovery. But if I was going to live in the world, I had to learn how to make my own rules.

I realized how silly it might sound to take my models from the movies. But no one drew their self-portraits so literally. We were attracted to a pose or an attitude. And we learned how to adapt these elements to our own circumstances.

What was most prevalent in our thoughts was how we didn't need a man to rescue us. There were all these leading men hanging around. But they often treated us with suspicion. Movies showed us how to respond to their over-zealousness. We weren't there to break hearts. We didn't need to be babied. We only needed to protect ourselves from the damages brought about from romantic love. That was the appeal of detective movies. Nothing was ever for certain. Even the attachment to the law could be a ruse for a crafty con artist. Our success meant immersing ourselves in danger. I could engage this fantasy without having to deal with the destructive end that I had suffered due to my illness. I was overjoyed that my imagination was again playing in my favor.

As the days wore on, I was finally able to walk on my own to my chair in the sun. I was still all bundled up. And I soaked in all the heat offered me by the sunshine. Now I could take a book out there with me. The experience had become something entirely different. I was enjoying a country outing. I was not strong enough to walk much farther. It was enough just to enjoy such a reward.

I had learned a profound lesson about time. All the while I had accustomed myself to waiting. Try as I might, I could not infuse these dead moments with life. Where I could, I needed to learn how to fill up the time with something productive. This became almost impossible when my thoughts were muddled by my poor health. Will power was not sufficient to counteract such a severe illness.

I thought that it was my duty in life to always keep myself busy. Although I would rest up when I really needed it, I wasn't the sort who loved lazing around in the sun. Since my illness, I began to recognize a new perspective about myself. It seemed as if I was always fighting to stay healthy. Sickness was almost a way of life. So I couldn't afford to let down my guard. That gave me all the more reason always to stay preoccupied.

I even took reading as a kind of enrichment of the self. I wasn't simply entertaining myself. If I was reading *Jane Eyre* or absorbed in Tennyson, I was creating a world for myself. I was using each second to lay the bricks alongside each other and applying the mortar. Such elaborate walls would serve my time of need. All the while that I became weaker in the body, my spirit was able to renew my soul. And it was that persistence which saved me. The poet has a special ability to tame the mighty sea. He can shut down the enraged mountain lion. And he can bring peace to the troubled self.

If my illness had not been so devastating, it might have proved an inspiration. It has

allowed me to escape myself. I could see my life in an entirely new light. All this should have provided me with a deeper revelation. But I hardly emerged with a sense of enlightenment. Instead, I was struck by the utter darkness of the experience. I did not become a holier person. I just felt lucky for my deliverance.

I hadn't been robbed of my memory. But the duration was almost like a blank spot. It was impossible to fill in for what had happened. It wasn't like amnesia. There had simply been this absence. I couldn't make up for the experience. In a fuller sense, I recognized what had happened as a pattern for every single day. It was impossible to catch all the things that were going on around me. I would watch a fly buzz past me, and then I would lose his path. Even a deep thought would flit away like a random insect.

The poet tried to find a design in these haphazard wave sthat rolled over us. He mapped the currents that pulsed in time. He sketched the concentrations of energy that attracted the human psyche. And he traced these pools of thought as they collected for us to marvel upon. I could feel these time flows as they brushed past the soul. And I did my best to capture the sense of exhilaration that inspired me. But I didn't have the same skill that I observed in these seers.

In response to the poetic wonder, I tempered myself to the constant rhythms that held me closer to the ground. I needed to discover the torrid patches of earth that seemed to swell in the heat. As much as I could feel this phenomenon within, so much of it swirled around me. In the very rude contours of the countryside, I was held by an immediacy. But I could feel the warm breeze rush over me. There was a magic that clamored somewhere else. All this passion would soon quiet down, and I would again be left without noting to show for my immense efforts. This was the very nature of my recovery. I was left with a desire that I could not satisfy.