Day 3, November 2014

And what now? Well-meaning male physician friends quietly explore the literature and seek second opinions, but there is no clear path through the red seas of missing data. I need a doctor to say, “This is the way to go,” but they can’t do that because they don’t know themselves, given the lack of evidence. They tell me the choice is mine — a modern-day medical cop-out — just when I need and would welcome a bit of good old-fashioned paternalism.

I wake up one morning, and I know. I face being sliced in half down below,

but not on a spectacular mountainside. Emasculation is a certainty — they don’t mess around with high-volume high-grade cancers anymore. Then radiotherapy, feminization and god knows what other adverse effects. Who knew that “high grade” would mean something so different later in life?

I have gone through some staging, and the cancer journey takes shape, and my days as a traditionally functioning man are running out. Without doubt, “the ringing of the division bell” has begun. If the bone scan is okay, the knives will be sharpened. Although my best female friends tell me that I will

still be a man, I harbour a picture of myself in a bar standing outside the “not sure” door to the washrooms. I have condemned my two sons to testing when they hit 40. I know I’ll overcome all of this in time, but for now I’m still at the stage of — and I make no apologies for how my Oxford-educated brother so eloquently summed it all up — “Shit, shit, shit, f...ing genetics.”

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POETRY

Biocompatibility

In the PACU, my wife breaks a decade of silence. She touches me with whisper, unsure what we will feel. Her song rejects

the dark sequestration of my slumbering cochlea. I look to the sounds of her mouth. The shine

of words, their fragrance and glare startles me. She coaxes me to her. Sounds, soft on soft,

code her inside the fresh platinum coils on my acoustic nerve. Waves break

from her lips to splash against the device and reflect in electrical dot-dashes. The sultry woman

returns after ten years away. My immune system tastes foreign metal; maybe the sound of this

woman’s voice will woo it, pacifying the Self that has known too much of rejection.

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