

## Lungs

In my 35:th year I had to go see a doctor, as I was beginning to experience trouble breathing. Whence this *maladie* came, I had no idea. At this time I led a stable and orderly life. No debts, no physical ailments (up until now), no messy relationships, sparse but functional living quarters, a relatively boring but “safe” job. But over the last few weeks my breathing had started acting up. I would wake in the middle of the night with apnea, with bile rising up my throat, with a pressuring weight bearing down on my chest and which did not abate until I had walked back and forth in my apartment for a while. At certain times during the day and the night, I had also begun to experience bouts of sweating, which was completely new to me. Although these episodes were quick in duration, they started to become more and more frequent, worrying me. Thus, I made an appointment with my physician.

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The doctor put the stethoscope away, sighed hastily and regarded me with watery grey eyes. He had a kind face, completely and strangely devoid of wrinkles or furrows. I did not know his exact age, but he was a specialist, sported extremely bushy eyebrows and on his desk he kept a framed photograph of three children and two adults, one of which was an older woman I supposed was his wife.

“Alright, I’ll tell you what your problem is,” he said. “You have no lungs.”

“Beg pardon?” I said.

“I can hear absolutely nothing. We’ll have to do a radiograph to be sure, but frankly, I think it will be completely unnecessary.”

Not an inkling of irony in his voice.

“Uhhh ... what?”

“Lungs. You don’t have them. Sorry.”

“But what do you mean —”

“Listen here. There’s really nothing to worry about. You can live an entire life without lungs. There has been a lot of research done on this matter.”

“But hey, wait a minute here ... then what is there? If —”

“Emptiness. Nothing. *The final frontier.*”

I guess my face had grown rather pale by now, because suddenly his eyes went dark and the skin around his mouth and nose grew taut, as if he were gathering strength before a difficult task.

“You. Have. No. Lungs. Live with it. No danger, like I said. Organs are overrated anyway. My ex-wife says I don’t have a heart, just to give you one example. I don’t know. I have an EKG scheduled for next week, that’ll clear things up. But I wouldn’t be surprised if she turned out to be right.”

For a moment he looked as if was going to cry. The grey eyes clouded over with something I can only describe using the word *grief*. But it only lasted a couple of seconds, and then his gaze returned to normal. He pressed my hand, in this way signalling the end of the consultation.

“Make a follow-up appointment with the reception desk,” he said. ”Standard procedure.”

The reception area was empty. An unnaturally bright light washed everything in white, and I had to squint. My head was void of everything but this thought, that *I could think nothing whatsoever*. Any moment now everything would come rushing back in, like that enormous wave everybody talks about that is called reality. Though, actually, solid land is what belongs to the dream, and not the frothy, fretting ocean. But when that realization comes most people have already succumbed to the cramps.

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“Do you have a high-cost protection card?” the woman behind the counter asked. She was beautiful in that classical way. Her skin was smooth and had a hue of vanilla, but the kind that is usually marketed as “exclusive” and “creamy” and has that discreetly yellowish hue. The cheekbones were accentuated with a modest dash of rouge. Her eyes were blue, clear blue, but the way the light slanted made them shift slightly, appearing green, which made her look young; or timeless, rather. How old could she be? Thirty? Forty?

“Yes, but I forgot it at home ... somewhere,” I said.

“Well, it’s of no use there, is it?” she replied and smiled.

She had neither teeth nor tongue.