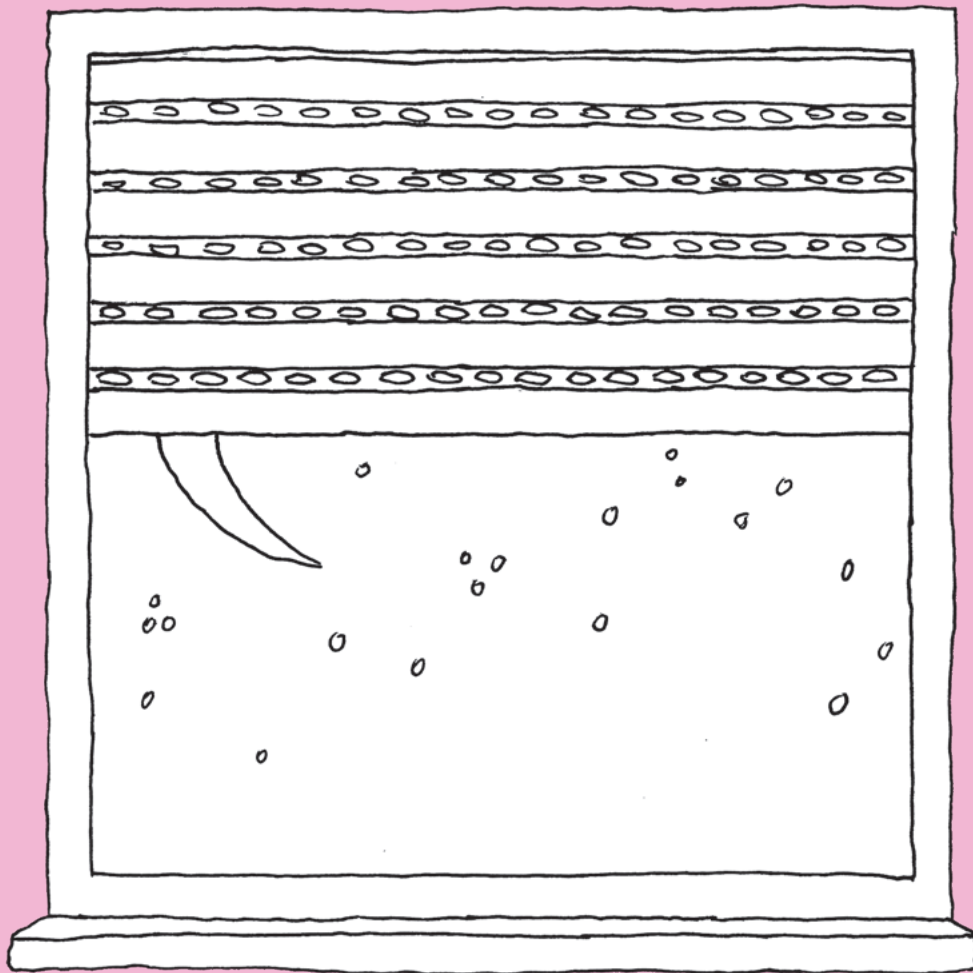


LUCY IS SICK



A COLORING BOOK

ROEE ROSEN

Roe Rosen

Lucy Is Sick

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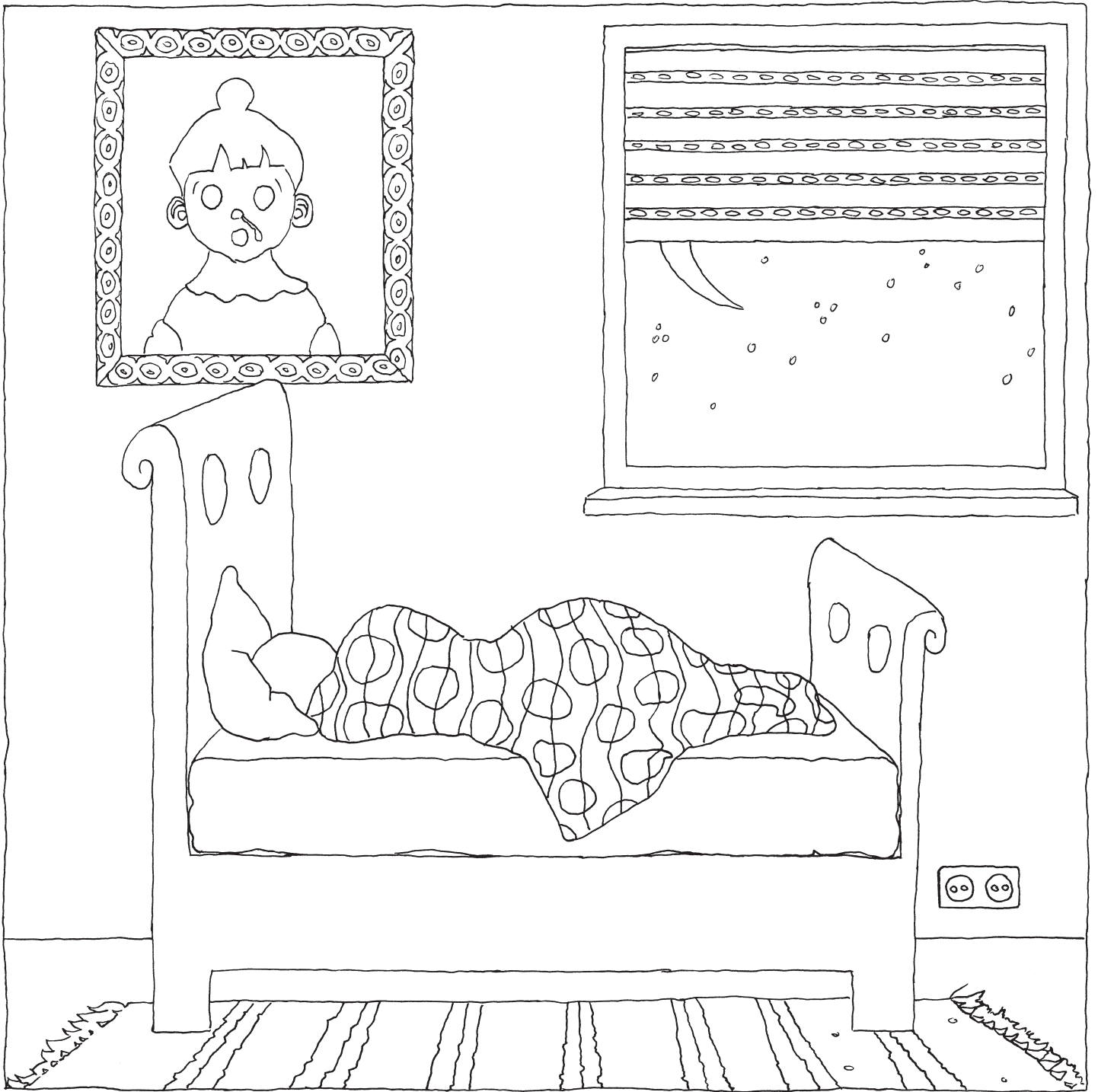
1.

Is Lucy a prophet? Long before the coronavirus quarantine, Lucy thought of doing a series of indoor documentaries, not biographical, but rather scientific, natural, social, and political. He thought, for example, that a sleeping man might be shown with a voice-over purporting to present the very first cancerous metastases occurring inside that still body.

So, in a way, Lucy was planning in advance, for both his own cancer and for a long-term practice suitable to the quarantine.

On the next page, you will find an almost identical picture of Lucy asleep.

As you color the pictures, can you find three mistakes in the second picture? Can you find more? What do you think went wrong?



2.

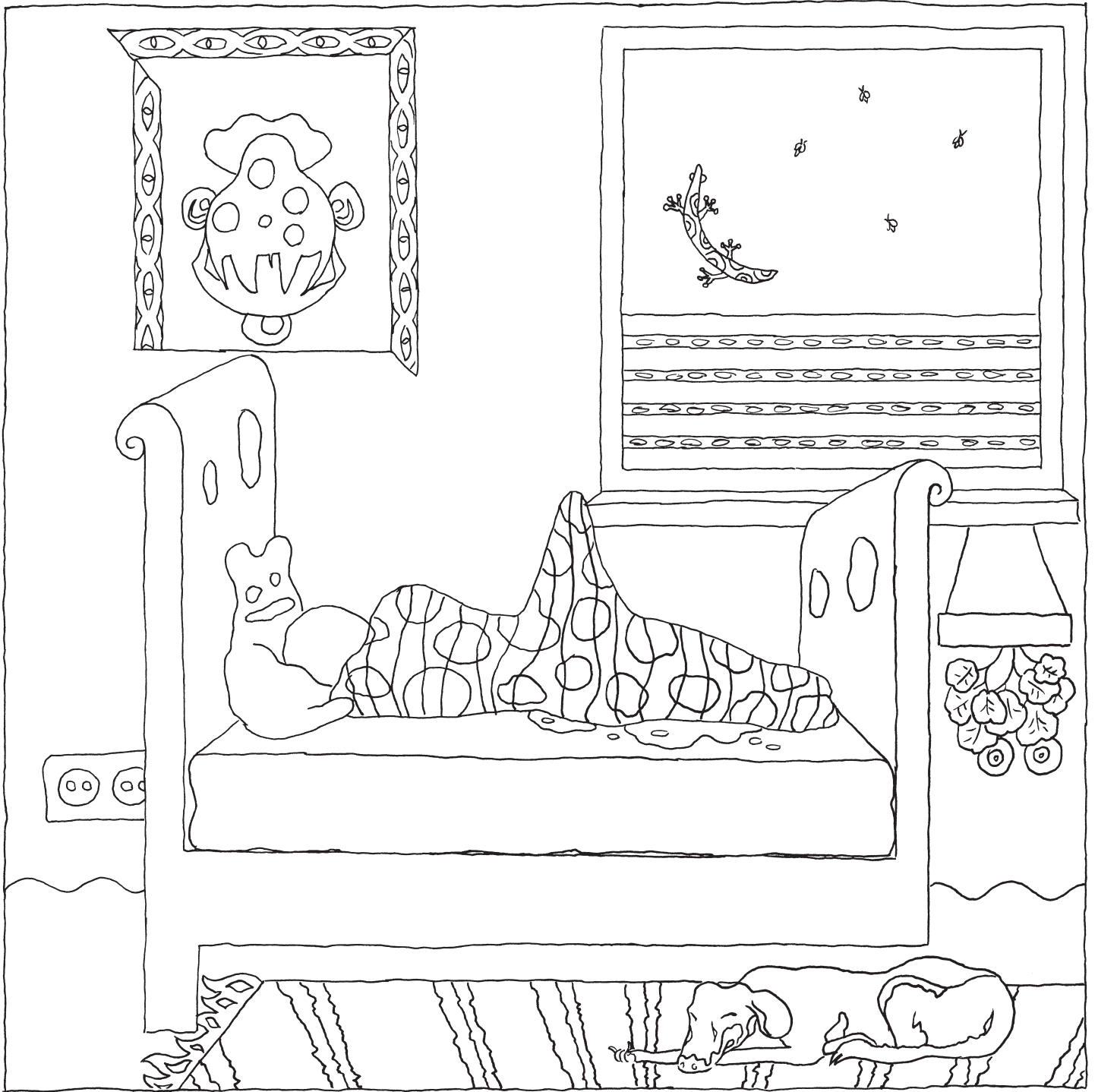
Lucy reads and watches depictions of diagnosis as a shocking surprise. A patient who feels fine or only marginally wrong is confronted with the harsh language of a sudden verdict, the presence of a tumor on a screen. Suffering and pain will soon follow.*

Lucy's is a different breed of cancer, the verdict arriving late, preceded by crippling pain and a mistaken diagnosis. When he is finally told he has multiple myeloma, he does not recognize the name; it is evasive, fluid and formless, never one, not a tumor.

Errant plasma cells mutate and multiply, conquering the bone marrow, destroying the body's immune system, encouraging the destruction of the bones. The *multiple* of the name indicates the variety of skeleton sites those cells might afflict, resulting in a plenitude of suffering, each Myeloma patient with her own bone lesions, specific pains, and different disabilities.

Everything is already wrong when you learn that everything is wrong. By the time he got his diagnosis, Lucy was bearing his pain like a waiter carrying a tray full of glassware, knowing that breathing too deeply or raising his arm might cause him to break.

* Anne Boyer writes: "To be declared with certainty *ill* while feeling with certainty *fine* is to fall on the hardness of language without being given even an hour of soft uncertainty in which to steady oneself with preemptive worry" (Boyer, *The Undying. A Meditation on Modern Illness*, Allen Lane, 2019, p. 15.)



3.

No one knows why and when this illness starts.

Several months earlier, Lucy stumbled and broke a couple of ribs. He took some painkillers and went on flying around the world. He fell asleep while teaching (severe anemia, he would later learn), woke up from the pain, and told himself it was fatigue, treating himself with another painkiller and a bit of self-deprecation.

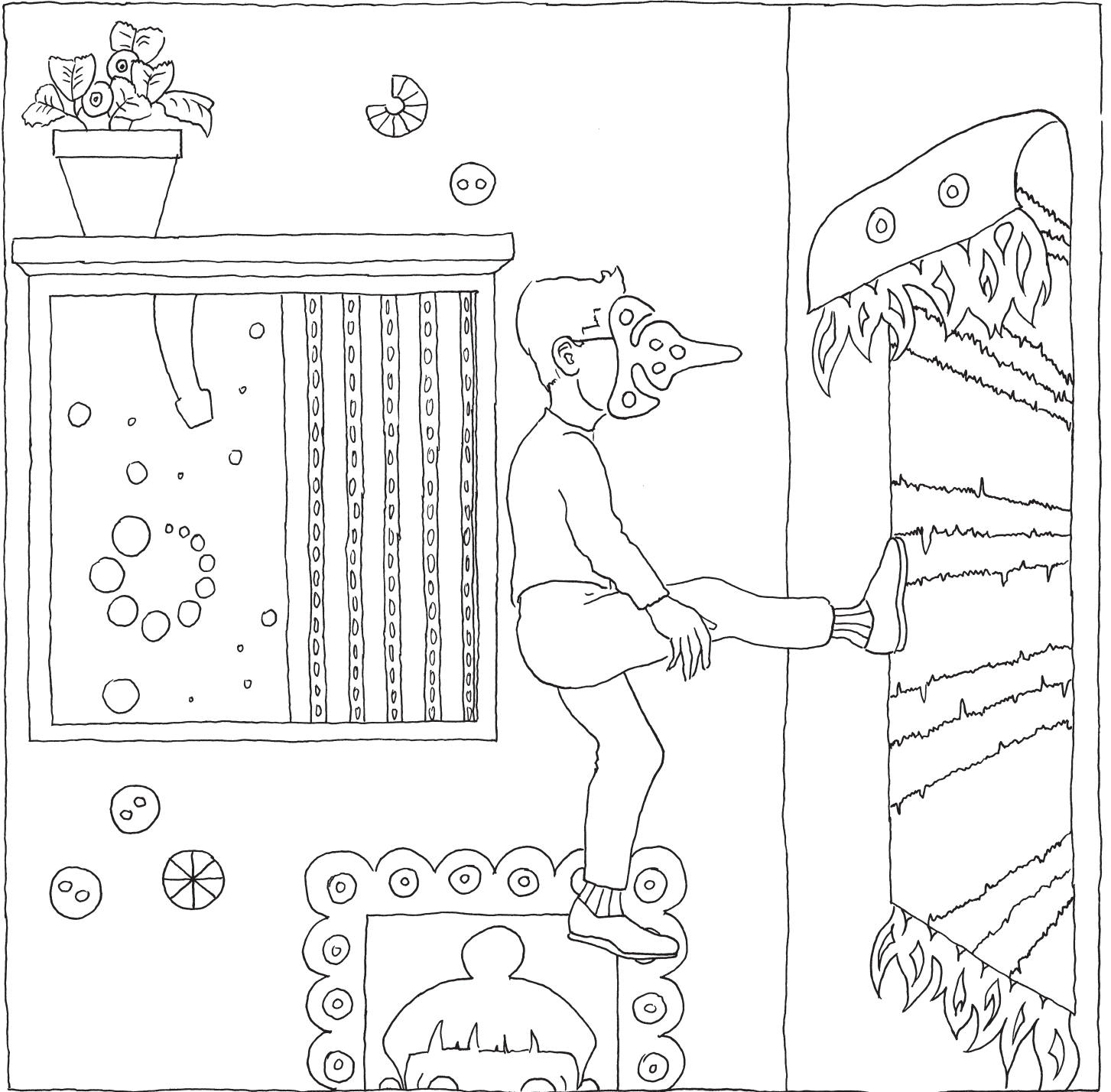
When pain continued to nag after the ribs mended, he finally went to the family doctor, who thought nothing of it. He deemed Lucy's breaking bones to be an indication of osteoporosis, which he confirmed by a bone density test. The blood panel included one freakish result, but the doctor took it to be a mistake. And so, he gave Lucy some lethal medical advice: take your time, there is no rush, let the body slowly heal. When the pneumonia suddenly erupts for a second time, he gives Lucy antibiotics.

One morning, it seemed as if Lucy's spine had cracked. He could not straighten up. He was bent forward at a ninety-degree angle, like Bruce Nauman performing *Beckett Walk*.

The pains were now searing, constant, and indifferent to pills. Lucy moved in grotesque slow motion, trying to emulate normalcy as he inched across the college lawn, hoping his grimace resembled a smile. Then, at the end of the last class, he realized that he could not lift his handbag.

He couldn't imagine now that he had ever worn his wool coat, it seemed heavy beyond belief. Light cotton shirts also became a burden, and he could not put them on or take them off on his own; his wife had to do all of that.

Lucy's gallerist, Zaki the Nice, seeing he could hardly walk, called his friend Avital, a restless rehabilitation specialist with whom he drank wine. Avital, whose son is a video artist Lucy likes, took it upon himself to instill in Lucy a sense of urgency. He would call in the mornings to have Lucy meet the internist, do the MRI, take the blood tests today, hurry up. This is how Lucy was saved.



4.

On Thursday evening, Lucy and his wife first met Yael, who would be Lucy's oncologist. She wanted to lose no time and scheduled the biopsy for Sunday morning. But the cancer must have overheard her. Realizing that it had been discovered, it rushed to kill Lucy.

That Saturday, Lucy met his friend Maxim. They were set to edit little Lucy-effigy-films, to be used in upcoming events he now knew he could not attend. Lucy could hardly walk and his studio was on the second floor, but he was lucky: Ziva, a resourceful yoga teacher, had instructed him in Ujjayi breathing. It alleviated the pain and made actions like sitting down and climbing the stairs possible (and the teacher, by the way, was lucky too, to have such a curious pupil who could only do breathing exercises).

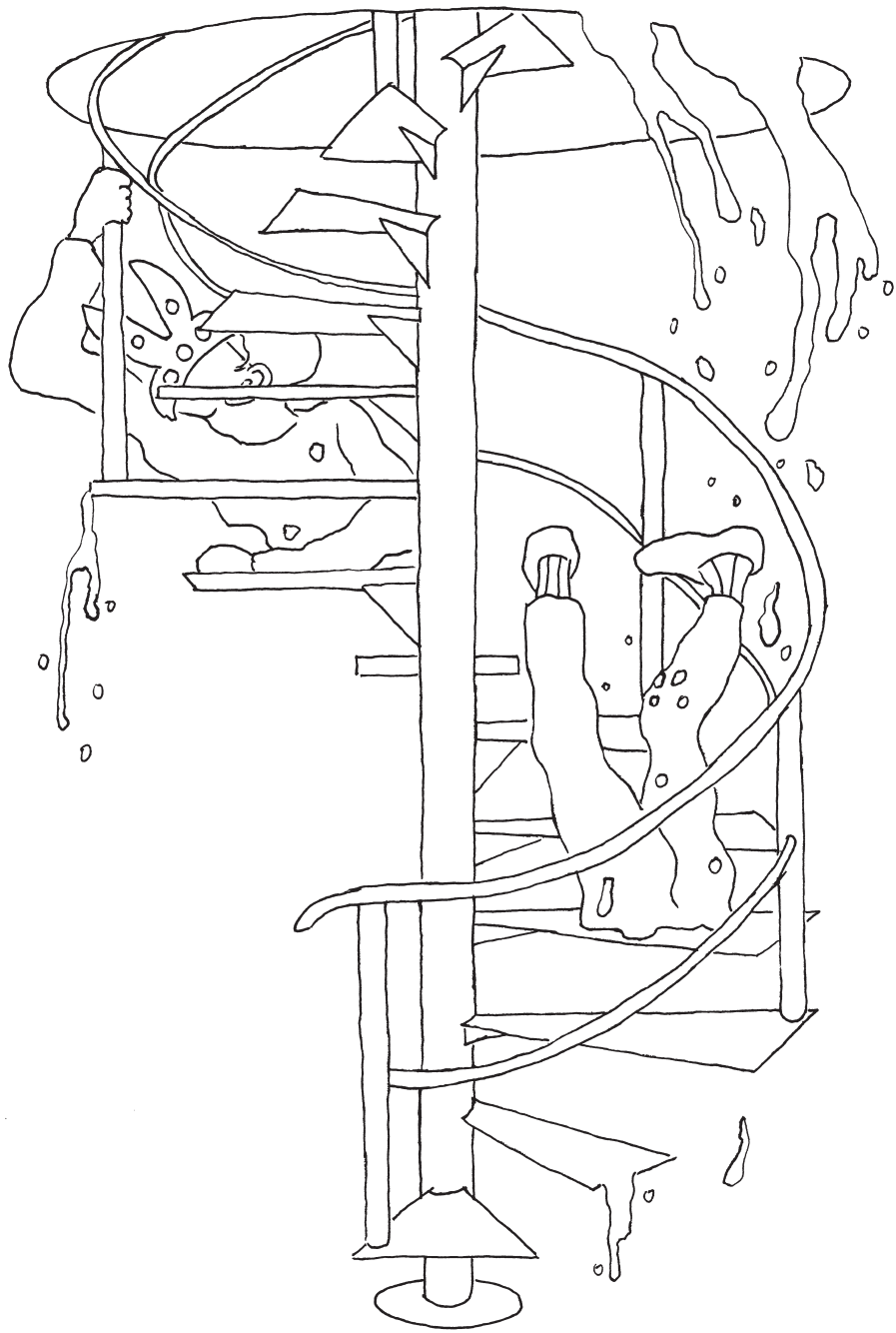
And so, Lucy went up with the power of his Ujjayi protocol: raising a foot as slow as a Butoh dancer while exhaling loudly through his nostrils, resting his foot on the next step while inhaling, holding fast to the rail with both hands, and then exhaling again while lifting carefully the lower foot, to be repeated fifteen times.

Yes, he made it all the way up!

But when the time came to descend, as his foot reached out to take the first step, his pelvis was pried open by a killer pain. He collapsed on the stairs. The pain literally took his breath away. To avoid suffocation, he tried to raise his upper body with his arms, to ease the pain. He was aware of his mortified, helpless friend and tried to signal that all was well, but the message probably didn't come across.

Lucy once painted a fake martyr, a cheat: a monkey trying to commit suicide by raising his hanging rope, and his body, in the air with his own arm, so as to defy gravity, and die. The goal now was the opposite, that is, to breathe and live, but it felt equally unattainable.

This is how Lucy departed from his studio. In a day or two, raising a pencil to draw in one hand while supporting his upper body with the other became impossible as well, and he could no longer paint or draw.

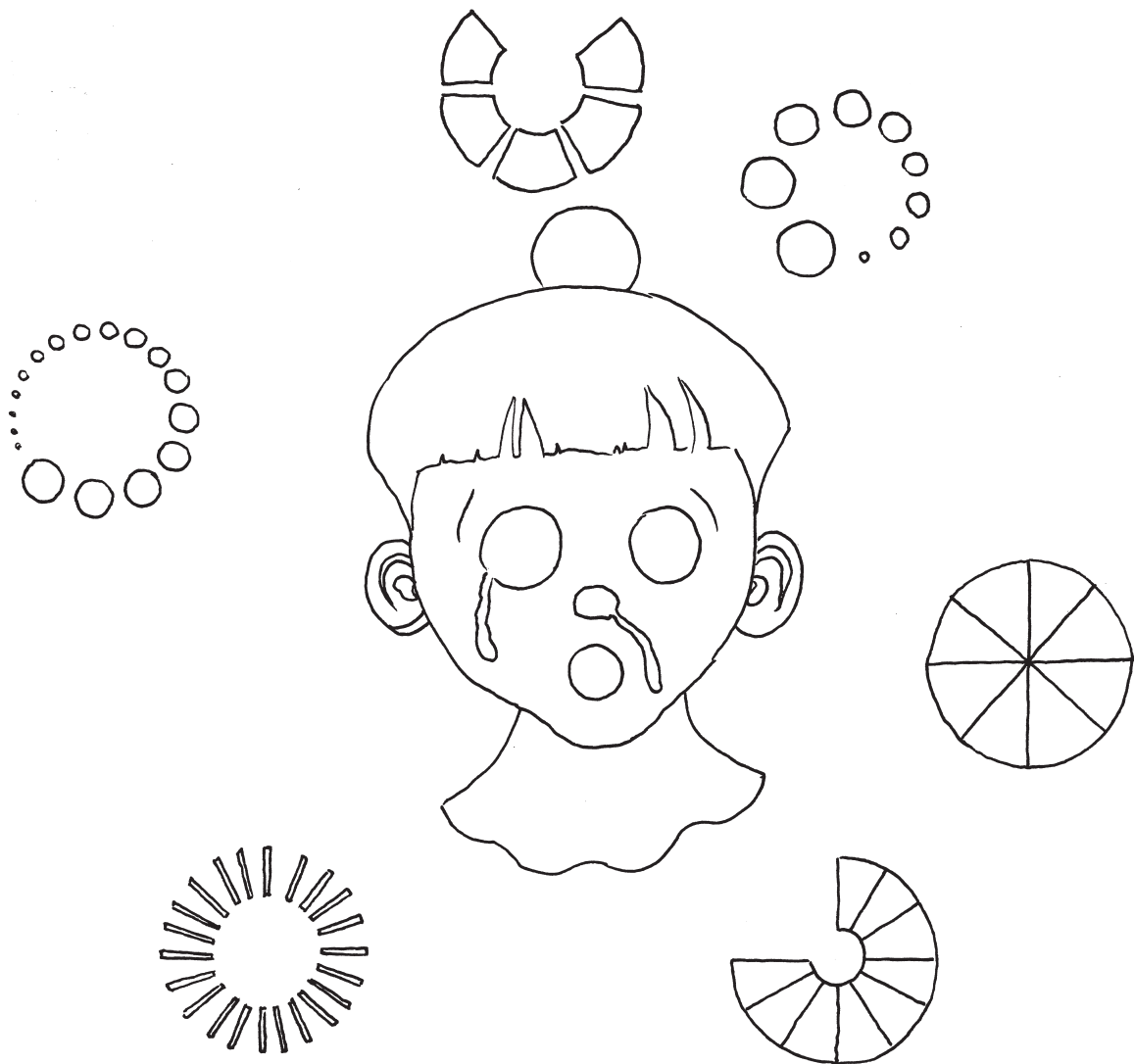


5.

The passage of time is never regular, but its flow is even more peculiar under the conditions of illness. Monotonous, habitual, empty, lonely time is often mistaken for time moving slowly, but most people who have experienced such timespans (for example, under coronavirus quarantine) know that repetitive, hollow time flows faster (it is two o'clock, dawn, Tuesday, August already). Busy, hectic, eventful time of the sort that people characterize as running or flying, when it actually creates immeasurable expanses, dense with details.

Thomas Mann captures this in *The Magic Mountain*; Hans Castorp's first day at the sanatorium consumes a third of the first volume, while in later chapters, months and years fly by (at one point in the distant past, Lucy published illustrations in New York as Anne Kastorp; later on, that female persona was promoted and became a scholar of Russian literature).

The first weeks of treatment were made up of such impossibly long stretches. Certain days were eras, and certain eras were entirely wiped from memory, perhaps because so much time passed in a day, perhaps because things were too painful or frightening.



6.

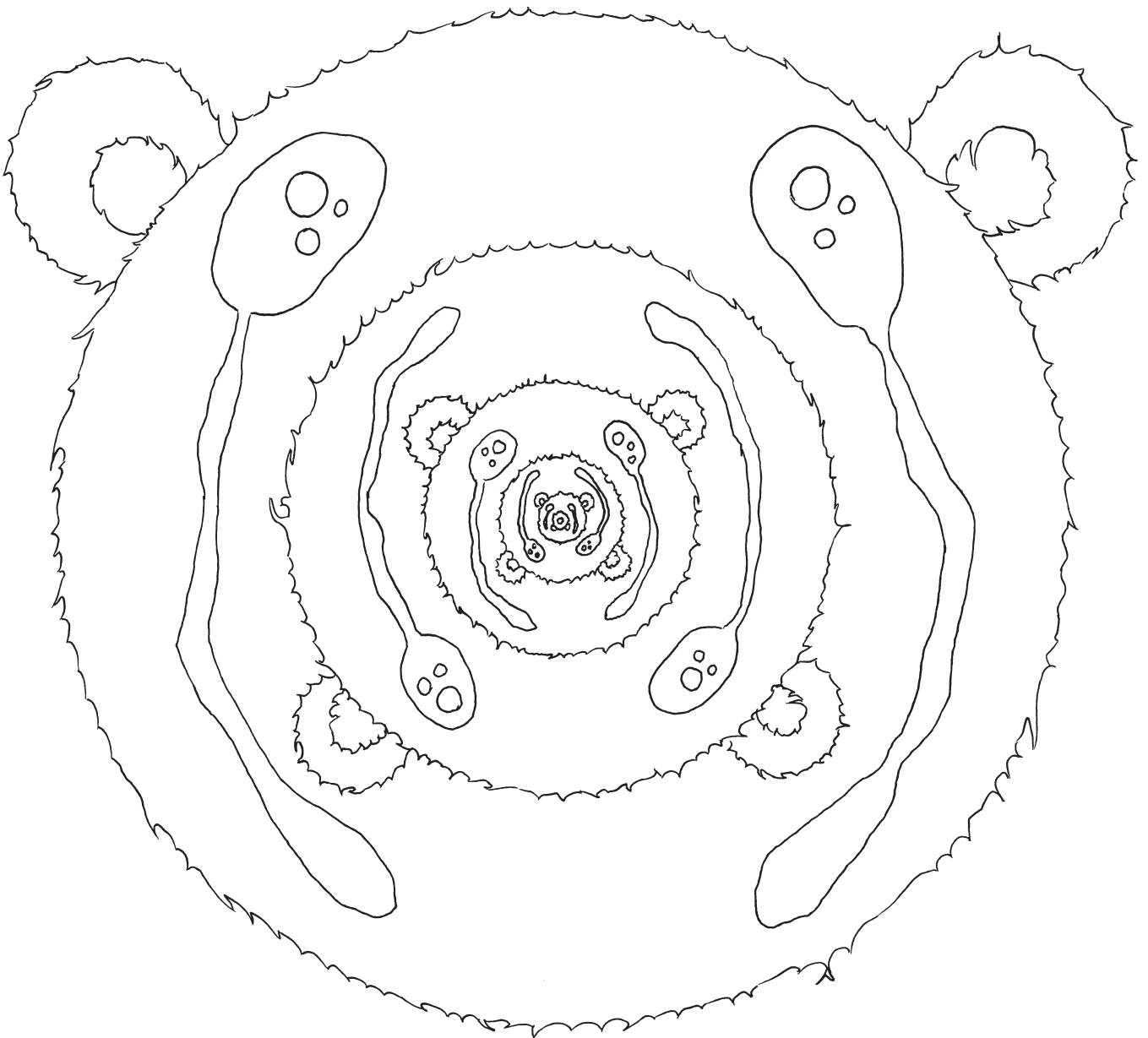
Lucy is set to write on an exceptionally long day: his first day of treatment in the hospital, on architecture and horror, significant details of interior design and the smell in the elevators, morning, waiting, afternoon, tests, injections, staff, forms, evening.

But his mind refuses this neat order, it gets stuck earlier, with an insignificant scene—the journey to the hospital. It begins with the momentous and grueling shifts from lying to sitting, and from sitting to standing. Then there is the cautious process of being dressed by his wife, which only vaguely suggests humiliation.

The twenty-meter route from the front door to the car is carefully planned in advance to meet challenges such as the intimidating three stairs. After reaching the car, Lucy begins the intricate, prolonged choreography of entering and sitting, accompanied by its own soundtrack of hissing and groaning, performed by Lucy a cappella. With the drive comes the horror of the speed bumps: Lucy's wife has to bring the vehicle to an almost complete halt, and then have it glide softly over to avoid causing Lucy pain, although the horror of the next bump cannot be avoided.

Lucy's wife was glum during the ride, as healthy people are on their way to the hospital, but Lucy was in a celebratory mood; the beginning of the end of the suffering was imminent. So when they arrive, his exit from the car is too abrupt, based on the speed of a healthy body that has not been entirely erased. His pelvis again pulsed with unbearable pain, and he collapsed on the pavement.

But Lucy was lucky: his son arrived running with a wheelchair. It was Lucy's first time meeting people's glances at waist height, as his son pushed him towards the elevator.



7.

Lucy is lucky many times over.

First, while there is no cure for multiple myeloma, it was a mostly terminal illness only two decades ago, nowadays it is treatable. Also, Lucy is lucky to get his cancer at a relatively young age. It is explained to him that older patients cannot withstand taxing procedures such as self bone marrow transplant preceded by aggressive chemotherapy, whereas for someone as young and relatively resilient as Lucy, the doctors unanimously favor these harsh measures.

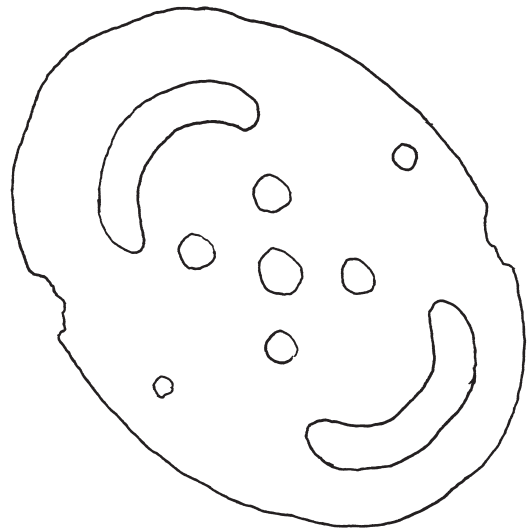
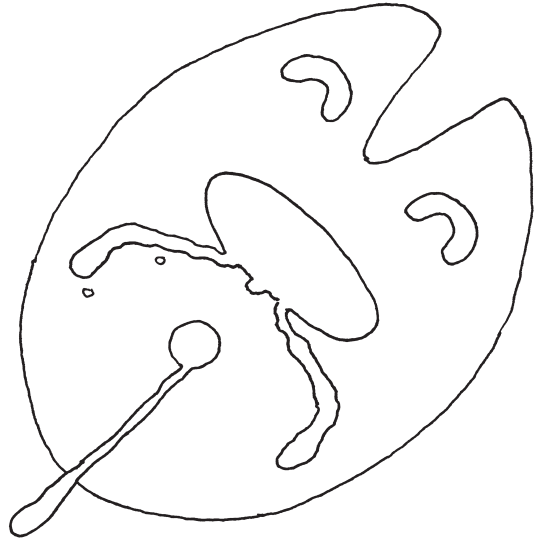
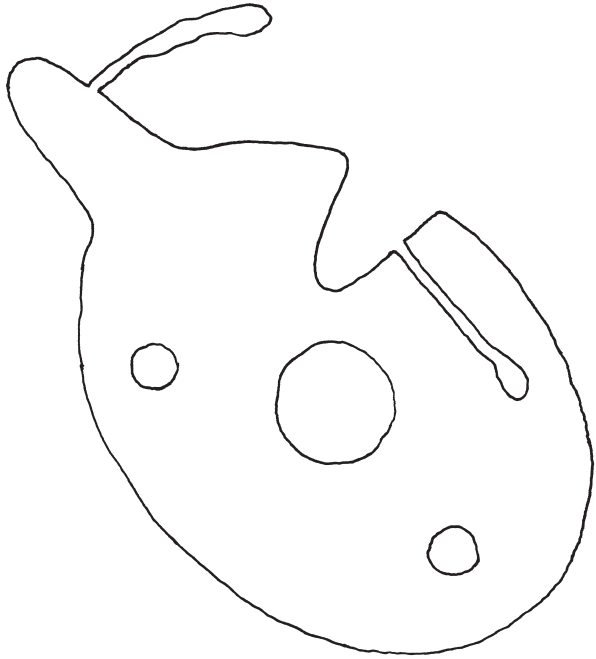
But this unwholesome affair, with its imposed isolation and gruesome side effects, still lies lurking in the future; right now, Lucy is lucky enough to be treated only twice a week. He goes home once the procedures have ended.

Lucy cannot believe his good fortune when his doctor informs him that she expects the pain to recede in five or six weeks, and that he will be able to walk again in three months. *Cannot believe*, here, is not a turn of phrase, but a factual description. Lucy is happy to learn of this horizon of pain-free agility, but it has no plausibility for his body.

Lucy recognizes that he is exceptionally lucky when he sees lonely patients. He has his wife, joined by his son, Hillel, on Sundays and his friend Max on Wednesdays. Lucy is lucky to negotiate with Hillel and with Max the relation between uncontrolled laughter and its price in pain.

As the first biopsy is carried out, a needle enters the pelvic bone and draws bone marrow, and then a thicker needle collects a small sample of bone, and Lucy is curled up in horror, awash in sweat. He is lucky and thankful when his doctor comes in to hold his hand.

He is lucky to have his wife administer two little shots of blood thinner each morning. He is lucky that his favorite nurse, Inna, always comes to give him the big belly shot herself.



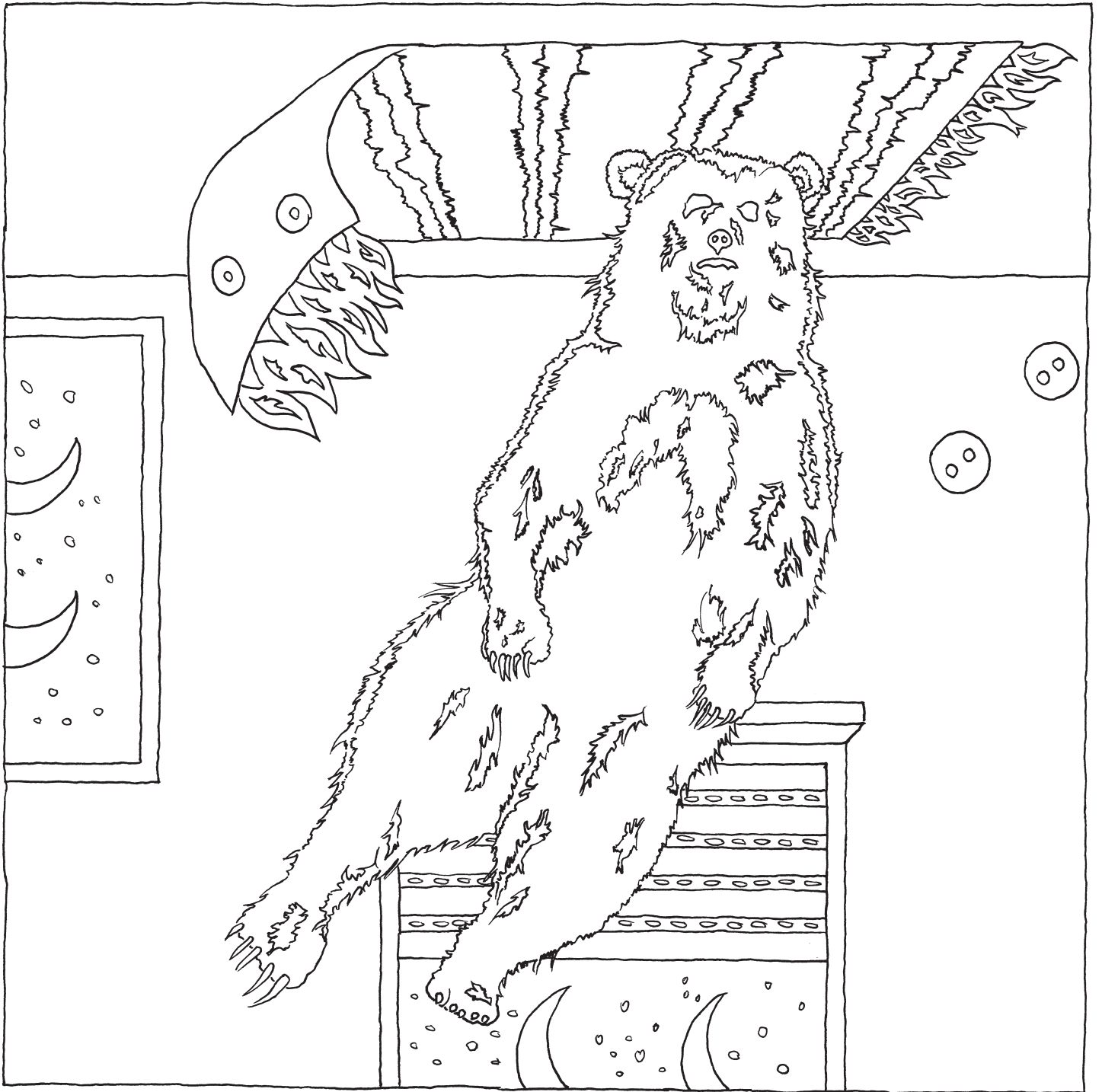
8.

After weeks of being trapped in complete immobility, Lucy had a lifelike daydream. His body escaped from within his body. One Lucy remained imprisoned in his chair, while the other rose up, naked and barefoot, and escaped the house unnoticed. The free body knew its time was limited. It only had a few minutes. So it fled to the nearby fields, running as fast as it could, relishing the wind stirred up by its own movement, enjoying the moderate and rhythmic waves of pain as his soles pressed into the gravel, with each step, a pain with direct, explicable, willed causality. Then, Lucy's body turned back on the same road, rushing to return on time to its invalid shell.

A year later, Lucy has a dream. In it, he received as a gift a big, black female bear. It was explained to him that this bear is the best and most advanced hi-fi system: you have to sow a turntable into the bear's belly; its enormous size, its organic warmth, and its silky long fur provide celestial acoustics, further enhanced by the burdened bear's strained, tiny movements.

In the dream, Lucy understands that though monstrously cruel, this is the way things are. Furthermore, he cannot insult the unknown gift giver by rejecting the bear. Instead, he decides to adopt the animal as a pet. Lucy and the bear curl up in bed, and somehow, watching the animal's big dark claws, he believes that he might be safe. His bear will almost certainly not attack him.

Initially, the dream seems inexplicable, unlike the escape fantasy. But, if you think of animals and people, perhaps it is just as straightforward.



9.

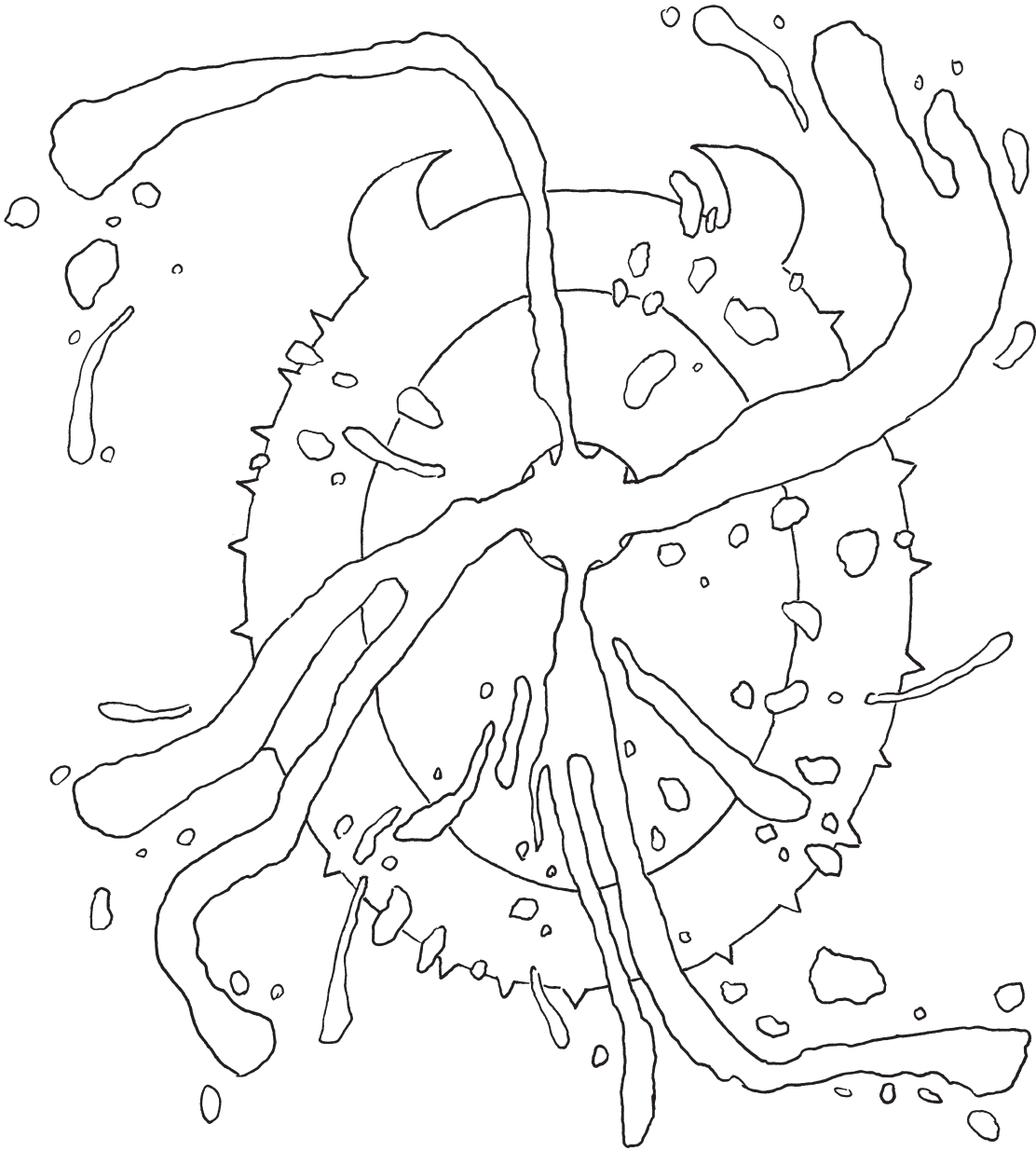
In the outpatient ward each room is divided into sections separated by a curtain, and at the center of each is a large, soft, adjustable armchair.

In the early days, this armchair appears to Lucy as a monstrous trap that send shivers down his troubled spine. He can imagine his body sinking in, contorted within the folds of this spongy, quivering blob, knowing full well he would not be able to lift himself when time came. He understands that this is only him. He sees other patients sitting in their armchairs, some actually asleep as they get their transfusion or wait for treatment. But Lucy will stay in his wheelchair, thank you, with its stiff, trustworthy, artificial leather back.

The armchair is scary, but it cannot compare in the emotions it evokes with the water drainage contrivance in the restroom.

This was a stainless steel button above the toilet seat. Reaching it was a bit of a strain, but pressing it was impossible; one's whole body had to provide leverage for arm, hand, finger. If the metal button yielded at all, it would sink to one side. Water would flow only if you pressed the hard center. How could the designer be so criminally negligent? At some point, Lucy actually suspected that the button was a sadistic contraption set to humiliate patients such as himself. He would not only have to be wheeled to the restroom door by his wife—she would need to come in with him to tame the widget.

A few weeks later those buttons began to change, until eventually they became nondescript and easy to use.



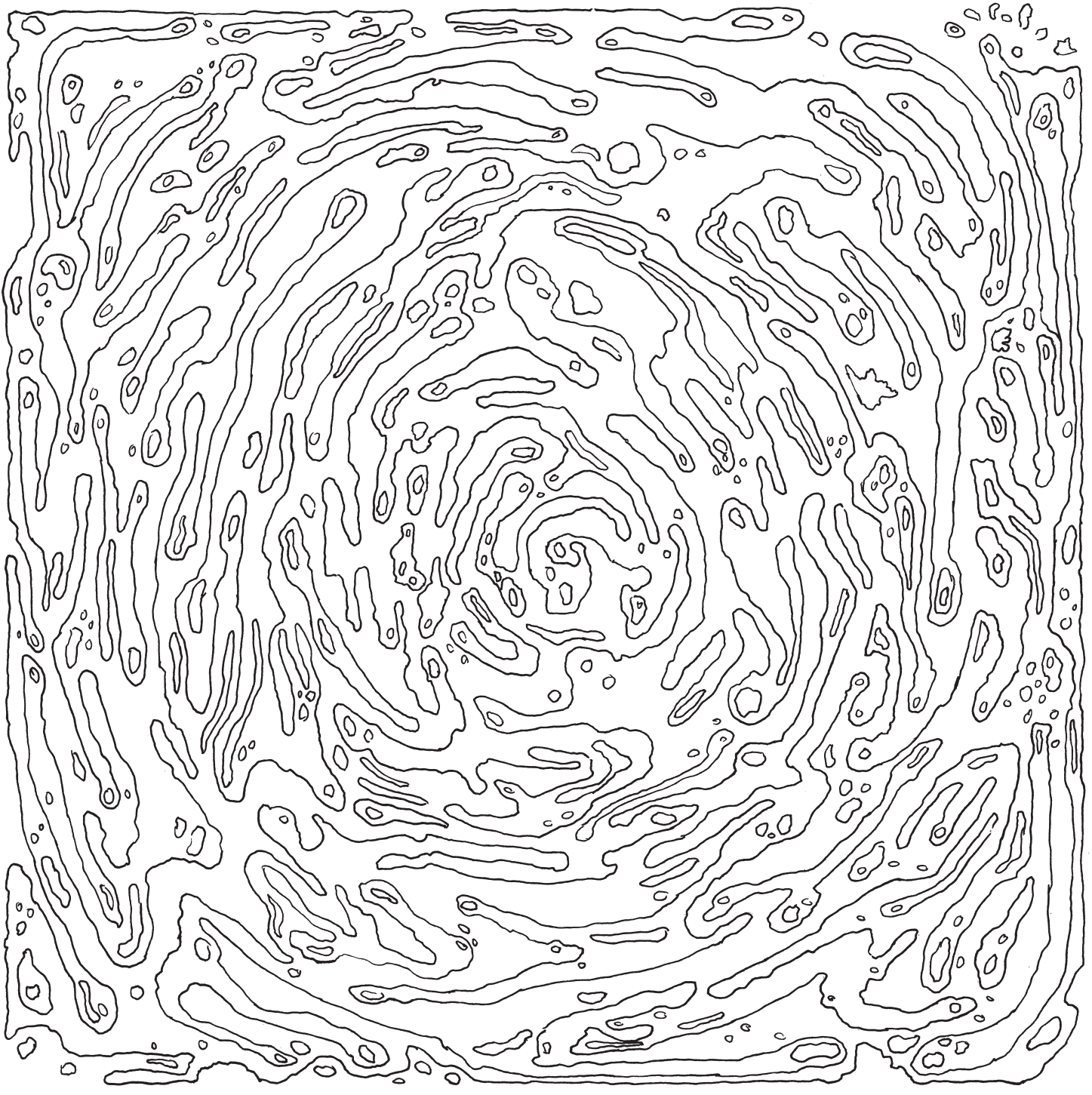
10.

Throughout life, fictionality was Lucy's mighty superpower. Fictionality emancipated the body from its prescribed anatomy. Fictionality transported the past to the present and changed it. Fictionality revealed the truth in fantasies and exposed the fallacies of the real. Fictionality fought resiliently against excessive narcissism, heroism, self pity, and authority. Fictionality was a superheroine with an infinite number of costumes and weapons.

But with cancer, fictionality became a thin gown, similar to the one you mistakenly put on your naked body with the laces on the front, only to be corrected by the nurse. This happens when you are waiting with other patients from other oncological wards to have the chemo conduits inserted into their bodies, so that blood could be drawn out and chemotherapy funneled in over time. Some would have ports installed in their chests so that they could be filled up with drugs for months, while the lucky ones, like Lucy, will have a PICC line (acronym for peripherally inserted central catheter) sown into their arms. Lucy is set to have his immune system destroyed and stem cells transplanted into solitary confinement.

But I am getting ahead of myself.

TO BE CONTINUED



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