

T H O U G H T S

on living with the inevitable

Sometimes I think: “incurable” — that’s a statement about cells. Not about my life. The tumor is there, it is what it is, and nothing changes that. But between what happens to me and what I make of it, there’s still room to move. Small, maybe. But mine. And that’s exactly where the things that still matter play out.

Death itself doesn’t give me meaning. For a long time I assumed that would sound harsh, and it does sound harsh. But it also takes something off my shoulders. I don’t have to make anything of my dying. I don’t have to wring meaning out of it, or completion, or some beautiful shape. The ending says nothing about everything that comes before it. And everything before it — that’s still me. Awake. Here. Choosing. The meaning of this time isn’t handed to me by death. I hold it myself. And the strange thing is, that doesn’t feel like a burden. Not like more loneliness piled on top. It feels like something that belongs to me.

Because there’s this calm. I spent a long time wondering whether I could trust it. Whether it wasn’t just looking away — a kind of anesthesia. But no — it doesn’t look away. It keeps all of this in view and is still quiet. It went through the fear, not around it. Whether it’s the quietest form my freedom can take, or already something else — a letting go that reaches past choosing — I don’t have to settle that. Maybe it belongs to this calm that it can’t be filed away. That it’s simply there. At some point what I live moves out ahead of everything I’ve thought about it, and that’s how it should be.

My work is where all of this becomes tangible. Strange, really: out of the most concrete thing there is — my hand, the material, the resistance — comes the least

graspable thing of all. A meaning that can't fall ill. In death I'm handed over to other people's eyes whether I want to be or not; they'll interpret, and I won't be able to defend myself anymore. But in the work I give myself to that gaze on my own terms. Not as someone something is taken from. As someone who offers something. It's the one gesture that gets ahead of being handed over and turns it into something of my own.

And still: it doesn't save me. Doesn't make me immortal. And it isn't supposed to. I think I'd be lying to myself if I made things in order to remain. The work doesn't have to outlast me to be true. It's enough that it happens now. That it offers itself. Maybe something has even shifted in the process — away from wanting, from forcing, toward letting things come. Less fist, more open hand. Work that no longer has anything to prove, nothing to hold onto, that doesn't even need to last. And that's exactly why it's freer than anything else.

That's what it comes down to, if I put it to myself plainly: I'm this body — sick, finite, bound to a place and a time — and I'm the one who takes a stance on that. Both. I don't have to escape into either one. No one guarantees me the meaning of this time, and that's precisely why what I make of it is truly mine. The calm needs no lie. The work needs no eternity. And the life that's left doesn't want to be arranged around death. It wants to be lived, as long as it's here. Nothing more. And that's enough.