

would prescribe a blood thinner for me.

He told me that I didn't have to worry about those, that I should cut back on the drinking, and that he

"What about loss of memory, paralysis—should I stop drinking?"

"Then you won't notice a difference."

I said I did.

"Nothing's for sure. You'll likely get headaches, but do you get headaches now?"

"Well I have any side effects, any dizziness or blindness or headaches?"

fill that space. He just stared off down the corridor like he was marking the moment I'd drop.

It was no help, precisely zero information. The news had emptied me and Dr. Owen gave me nothing to

natural life as well as anyone else, or you could take two steps away from me and fall to your death."

"Well, no one can really tell you that. These things, people die of natural causes with them still intact,

"So am I the walking dead, then?" I asked. "How many months?"

I wasn't quite clear on what he was telling me that I had to ask.

"Suit yourself," Dr. Owen said, obviously disappointed.

I heard him pick up the scan, but I kept my left eye shut so I wouldn't have to see it.

your head."

"OK," he said. "But in case you're curious, it looks like two snakes swallowed rabbits then crawled inside

"No, I don't wanna—why would I wanna—I don't," I said.

"Do you want to see the scan?" Doctor Owen asked.

an incomprehensible wall around my head that kept me from concentrating.

I closed my left eye, but kept my right one, behind the bandage, open. I liked the fuzzy darkness. It built

be for naught."

said. "It's not an easy procedure, but it's safer than walking around with a time bomb up there. But if we

"Normally, if we had caught one aneurysm, I'd say we should open up your head and get it out," he

Guinness Book.

such advanced aneurysms so close together, he assured me, as if I should be proud. Like I was up for the two

over my brain, ceasing thoughts, functions, memories—irreparable damage.

blood vessels that could, given enough emotional or physical stress, burst, sending squid clouds of blood

The CAT Scan had shown I had an unusual condition in my head. Two aneurysms, side-by-side. Two bloated

This was good news. I was happy my head had made it out OK. Dr. Owen started in on the bad news.

your eye being open on impact, no major damage at all."

"The good news is that you don't have a concussion, and other than a weird-looking shine, on account of

"This seemed to me a fair deal.

going to give you the good news first."

"I have good news and I have bad news," he told me. "And the bad news is more complicated, so I'm

beard played along his chin, wispily and ugly.

a nineteenth-century way, slightly stooped and with glasses slightly larger than his eyes. A white idea of a

Bed 3 now so permanent on the whiteboard they'd have to use vinegar to wipe me out. The doctor was tall in

Dr. Owen arrived after a long time, long enough to make me think I'd been forgotten. Soccer Head in

me into the scan. I decided not to ask the nurses to fetch them.

my teammates were. A few of them had been beside me when I'd awakened and yelped, but they didn't follow

and I made a game of pressing down around the socket, to determine where it hurt most. I wondered where

the chair just below mine, I read Baby Truman, and I decided to stop reading. My right eye was bandaged.

Shoulder. I saw my name under Bed 3—"Soccer Head," it read. I liked that. I noticed that in Bed 11, listed on

here were just being dispatched, but not to the grave. Someone down the hall in Bed 8 was labeled Knife

brought with it an anxiety. I had to listen hard to ensure it wasn't because someone had died, that the patients

the nurse's desk, where I could watch them mark and erase names on a giant whiteboard. Every erasure

concussion, as I might have had, but Dr. Owen didn't notice. When it was through, I sat in a station just off

I fell asleep in the CAT scan, which I don't think you're supposed to do, especially if you might have a

smashed in the bare eyeball were not in effect. I agreed.

wasn't any hemorrhaging anywhere, that my retina was intact, and that various other side effects of being

a CAT scan, an expensive procedure that my insurance would largely cover and would ensure that there

was being cure or not, said I was probably fine, which I knew. But, he said, it would be important to take

surge, calling himself Dr. Owen and not telling me if that was his first or last name so I couldn't know if he

hangover and the bare eyeball contact that this man nodded at me to go past. The doctor, a quack, I'm

shivering and sweating, who looked like his skin was possibly falling off. I looked so bad on account of the

quite a shock, and I yelped a bit, which I think got me in to see the doctor quicker than even the guy both

and boots. I in my indoor track shoes, Umbro shorts and ratty T-shirt with my name on the back. It was

up stuck to a vinyl chair, surrounded by coughing and bleeding people sensibly dressed in winter parkas

associate with it if I actually associated, rushed me to the hospital. I came to in the emergency room, waking

and mental. My team, acquaintances from work and their friends and some other people I would never

I tell you this because it explains just how important Azofefia is to my current condition, both physical

my eyelids, and the ball hit my bare yellow eyeball and it is here, of course, that I stop remembering

reflexes so poor, my headache so monstrous, my fleeing love for Azofefia so pure, that I couldn't even shutter

there, in front of my face, and here we see the consequences of my momentary obsession with Azofefia, my

that defied physical laws in a most real way, and the ball now coming alive and growing so large that it was

with a cecited speed and growing larger by the second, it could only be described as magic, this bicycle kick

appearing two-dimensional before he touched it, but now, in Azofefia's universe, it was a living thing, spinning

and again with the suppleness of the quad, and the kick, connecting with the ball and sending this object,

hastened back down he lifted his right so that it emerged above him, an obtuse angle on the Azofefia plane,

in the air parallel to the ground, just buffeted by the wind, gravity at the whim of Azofefia, and as his left leg

such girth and animal likeness that I quivered, but then, his torso realigned, so it looked like he was reclining

in front of him like a ballerina, and I noticed that his thigh muscle, I believe it's called a quadriceps, was of

knuckled through the air, no spin at all, just a flat and boring thing. I watched Azofefia leap, his left leg kicking

because the magic is the best part—Azofefia took two confident strides away from me, and as the ball

magical happened—and I'd like for you to understand the magic of it before I tell you the consequences,

air, in my peripheral vision, and I saw Azofefia take two confident strides away from me and then, something

and playing against a World Cup competitor, as this thought crossed my mind I saw the ball emerge, in the

thinking this, just watching him, Azofefia—such a name!—wondering if I was in the presence of greatness

member of the Brazilian team, his shorts blue and new enough, his socks pulled high enough. And as I was

T-shirt, Terry. I was staring at the name Azofefia, wondering if this guy, Azofefia, if he could possibly be a

at the back of his jersey, at the name, Azofefia. Such a name, Azofefia. Beats the name on the back of my

on the back. It was some obscure player, I found out later, the guy was such a fan. But for a moment, I stared

There was a guy on the other team wearing the Brazil national team jersey—it didn't even say Ronaldo

wasn't a surprise, in retrospect. It took me off-guard, but I should have known it would happen.

into the season. Unhappily, unenthusiastic, nearly undead. My headache, the one from the hangover, had me

don't, you look like me; tired and still not entirely clear on why you're playing in this league, some five games

of athletes you've never heard of, with the walled soccer fields and artificial turf like hot steel work. Huge pictures

think you'll see the inside of, with the walled soccer fields and artificial turf like hot steel work. Huge pictures

span. But there I was, hangover on a Sunday morning, in one of those indoor sports facilities that you never

It's all because of my poor reflexes. A case of having little physical skill, sure, and maybe a short attention

"So there are no ill effects?" I asked.

"Well, as I said, you could die."

I looked him in the eye, my one good eye flicking back and forth between the two of his.

"So, if you had to give me odds for living another forty years, say until I was seventy, what would the odds be?"

"I'm not very good at that sort of thing."

"Ten to one? One hundred to one?"

"I've never really understood what that means," he said.

"Just give me the odds."

"Of you living till you're seventy?" he said. "I'd say it's thirty-five, seventy-five."

I shook my head. Dr. Owen and his nineteenth-century frame, blunt disregard for my need to be

reassured and fucked-up math was too much. This man was making my world small. I imagined he was a

moon who had just eclipsed me.

I walked into the waiting room and saw that the team had left. I walked out onto the sidewalk and

stared at the sun, out of my one good eye. I imagined Azofefia, so fleet and at ease in his body. My feet felt

magnetized, drawn to the core of the earth, leaden. I tried to imagine that gravity was pulling my blood

down, sucking it back out of the swollen ice-purple bruise around my right eye, out of the one aneurysm, and

then out of the other. Things moved inside me, as I stood still, my feet pulling down.

At the bar, later that afternoon, with the team all still wearing their T-shirts and all buying me beer after

beer and slapping me in the shoulder once they got drunk enough to stop treating me like porcelain, with

everyone there with their names across their backs exulting at having gotten out of the game before they lost,

thanks to my eye injury, I couldn't decide if I should tell them. It's not really a topic for bar conversation,

or that's exactly what it is, but not this type of bar conversation. I wanted to sit down with somebody, didn't

matter who, sit down across from each other at a table not too far from the jukebox, and sip a beer and tell

them that it could be the last beer of my life, or it could be just another, I would never know. And the whole

thing made me feel stupid, like I was writing a poem for a high school literary magazine. I'd think it was

important and deep but the grammar would be all wrong and adults would secretly laugh at me. I wanted

to change the name on the back of my T-shirt, or I wanted to keep it exactly the same but be somewhere

where no one knew it, or I wanted the people who surrounded me in the bar to remember it without having

to secretly lean back and read it, or I wanted to be Azofefia, spin off into the Azofefia orbit, free in a different

way. I stood up from my bar stool and planted my feet on the floor, the magnets returning, draining that blood

out of my brain, the aneurysms thinning, the rabbits emerging whole from the snakes' mouths and bicycle

kicking, their little rabbit feet flipping through the air. I closed my good eye and opened my bad one and

stared out into the fuzzy darkness around me, the atmospheric wall built by me, built out of my slow reflexes,

my brief and weird obsessions, my inability to react, and I wondered what I would do next.

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