

Walking To Gibraltar, Epigram & Chapter 1: So It Was Cancer

by Frank Indiana

Walking To Gibraltar

Part I: Temporary

(Epigram)

Temporary

I would have a permanent tattoo in
tattoo blue, one that sun and soap
could not fade nor the passing of years
the sentiment diminish; a dark bird
on my wrist or spider on my ankle,
or a tiny heart-shaped box to remind me
of when we loved each other better; perhaps
an admonition to Live Well or Party Naked
or even a simple Nike swoosh.

Any one would remind me of you:
flying, crawling, pining, the ideals,
the debauchery, the eventual slide
into competitive consumerism,
memorialized in a thousand pricks,
and the idea of this inkblot as the last
thing made by hand and meant to endure
forever.

Chapter 1: So It Was Cancer

So it was cancer. And so he was screwed, royally screwed. He was
screwed all the more because he knew how screwed he was. He had
to carry the shame of knowing, as much as he wanted to deny it,
that this had been his first thought when he found out about her
cancer: *I am screwed.*

His first thought was about himself. About how cancer screwed up his plan to leave her. *Their plan*, actually. The one he'd agreed to so reluctantly. The one he'd fought against for more than a decade in spite of everything: all the baseless accusations, the fear, the hiding, the denial. The disappointment—the aching disappointment of a life wasted in a bad marriage. He'd been the one who wanted to stay. And now, when he'd finally agreed to leave, finally come to terms with the idea of creating a life that might make him happy, finally had *a fucking plan*—

Cancer.

Astrid wasn't home when the surgeon called. She'd left alone, too nervous to take the call herself. "Maybe he won't call tonight," Frank told her. "He said it might not be tonight." But she wasn't going to take the chance. "I'm going to Borders," she said. She grabbed the car keys and left. As if leaving would make everything—Frank, the call, the prospect of cancer—go away.

The phone rang ten minutes later. "May I speak with Astrid, please?" asked the man at the other end of the line.

"She's not here. Is this Dr. Dresser?"

"Yes."

"I'm her husband, Frank. She asked me to talk with you if you called."

Dr. Dresser told him about the cancer. "Tiny," he said. "It's possible we removed it all when we did the biopsy. But there's no doubt about the diagnosis."

"So what does this mean?"

"Surgery, first of all. And probably chemotherapy and radiation, and perhaps hormone therapy. She's very lucky. She's young and she's strong and more and more women are beating breast cancer."

"Are you going to be there for a while, Doctor? Can I have her call you?"

"I'll be here until nine."

He put down the phone. *Fuck*, he thought. *I am screwed.*

It was ten minutes after eight. He called her cell phone but got her voicemail. He called again and again. He grabbed his car keys and drove to Borders.

Darkness had fallen over Indianapolis. Chain restaurant signs—Chili's, Applebee's, O'Charley's—illuminated the strip mall parking lots. He didn't know what to say to her. What could he say that made any sort of sense? That would keep her from completely freaking out?

And what was he supposed to do now? There was no way he was leaving, no way to leave. It was a cosmic screw job, and the screwiest part of it was that she would be as resentful as he. Jesus. He thought *his* plans were ruined. The separation had been *her* idea. She was screwed, too. *And* she had cancer.

And he didn't feel sorry for her. He felt sorry for himself.

He found her sitting in her car, talking on the phone, probably with the boyfriend. She practically sneered at him as he approached her Miata, top still down, as if she had no intention of entering the bookstore at all but was just looking for a dark, quiet place to be away from him.

"I gotta go," she said, staring at him. "Call me later."

"Astrid, come home," he said. "You need to call Dr. Dresser."

"Did he call?"

"Yes. He said cancer."

"Oh, my god."

"You need to come home and talk with him. I have his number. He'll be there 'til nine."

"What else did he say?"

"I think you should talk with him yourself, Astrid," Frank said.

"Come home. Do you want me to drive you?"

"No." She turned the key and pulled away, leaving him standing in the parking lot.

She'd expect him to be right behind her. She'd treat him as if he weren't there when he arrived home; he imagined she'd lock herself in the bedroom with the phone. What would it matter if he drove in the other direction? Cleaned out the bank account and fled to

California? What if he walked into the convenience store and bought a cup of coffee, stopped at the liquor store for a bottle of gin? She probably wouldn't even know.

He would know. And he already knew too much.

