Zach Palmisano

CW 104

13 March 2017

Radiation

It took about thirty seconds for Phil to walk through those double doors and saunter over to the main desk, all while the stringy-haired, late thirties looking receptionist rolled her eyes onto him like she's counting bricks, cooperatively sizing him up to determine his mien as customer. Not too tall, not too big, not too old, and bearing a stark normalcy to his gait and facial expressions, enough to bring out a brief but sincere look of surprise on her face. Phil was proud of this part of himself. He had spent a great portion of his youth studying and cultivating this reaction in the friends he chose, and though he had never been explicitly told this by anyone, he saw his own image in the world as that of a comfortable middle ground balanced with such equanimity that he would shock others with his surprising habits—both good and bad—in proportions which no one would have guessed would be possible in a human being. He can see all this in her eyes.

"Welcome to Sunny Rivers, how can I help you?" she asked.

"Yeah, I have a reservation for the weekend,"

"Ok, your n—"

"Phillip Dickson," He didn't mean to cut her off, but __,"My name should be in the system, I've been here before." He waited a few seconds and tapped his fingers some,

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 4:49 PM

Comment [1]: Decide what tense you're using in this paragraph – to avoid thinking about it, maybe change this to "as if"

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 4:51 PM

Comment [2]: I don't think "bearing" is necessarily the right word here – makes me think you're going to say "bearing a stark resemblance to" something. Or maybe "stark" is the wrong word; it's usually used as a referent, indicating contrast.

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 4:52 PM

Comment [3]: I've thought about this a lot and I still don't get why she (and the "friends he chose") is so surprised – is it because normal-looking people don't usually come in?

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Comment [4]: Sounds like his equanimity is supposed to be balanced with something (maybe contrasting since his habits are both good and bad?)

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Comment [5]: LIKE WHY THO

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Comment [6]: I don't know if this is the effect you were going for - I get that he[1]

<u>just</u> as the receptionist had been tapping at her keyboard. "I don't have to fill out everything for insurance again, right? It was all taken care of the first time?"

"Just need a quick update. Initial here, sign here, date here," She pointed at each consecutive black space. Phil liked signing things. He was under no delusion that his signature was more valuable than anyone else's, or that one's frequency in participating in the act of writing one's name had any bearing on social status of any kind, nevertheless, it gave him a certain sort of concrete and mild satisfaction which pricked his back up for a couple minutes afterward. It let him know that he was still a functional unit in society, the teeth of his cog firmly wedged in among the cogs of his fellow men in the real world.

The pen was a little dry at first, and it kind of ruined the clean single-stroke look he had been going for.

It was only Phil's second weekend trip to Sunny Rivers; although, with it being so soon after the first trip, he felt as if his leave for home was more of a vacation itself a break from his break where he would have to get some productive work done so he didn't feel too sloth-y. He waited in a contemporary looking chair that was just about as comfortable as it looked, glancing around at the homogenous pale walls in the small waiting room. He shifted around in his seat with increasing regularity. Though he had tolerated his previous Session well, being only a few months ago it was still fresh in his mind, and what he assumed to be and could only describe as the emotional density of the

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Comment [7]: Maybe change to "mild yet concrete" because these words are contrasting

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Comment [8]: Redundant – maybe delete productive?

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:05 PM

Comment [9]: Uncomfortable? Unless it looks comfortable but my impression is that modern furniture looks bare and shallow

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:06 PM

Comment [10]: Pale what? Give a color

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:08 PM

Comment [11]: Later the doctor says one month has gone by – choose a time frame

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:09 PM

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experience was beginning to come to the forefront of his brain, and some deep part of him feared for such a perspective-altering experience to ever occur again.

His forehead started to bead with sweat. It had been a good five minutes since he was told it would only be a few minutes. He was just about to get up to inquire about the delay when the doors to the room opened, flush to the wall and sealed enough that a Lucasian *whoosh* bounced off and forced its way into his face, pushing him off his feet and pulling him in, into that doorway and into that room, into a memory shorted for time.

"Morning, Phil," said a jolly doctor behind him.

"Morning."

Dr. Sullivan is a nice guy. A doctor who seems close to your father's age.

"So," he walked around Phil and pulled out an LED-laden cabinet, "glad you came back."

"Yeah, I had some vacation days and they don't carry over after the year ends, so, you know." Phil sat down in the recliner and thumbed its seams. Dr. S. continued to work at the lights. Every couple of seconds he would glance up at Phil; their eyes met each time, probably because Phil was staring at him. Phil noticed this much too late, far too late. "Kind of feels like being home was the vacation," he said, and the Dr. furrowed his brow. "Because I feel like I was just here."

Dr. S. smiled. "A month goes by fast." He gestured to the table. "Have a seat."

Phil sat down and inhaled, reassured by the flashing lights as the doctor lowered a helmet around his head.

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Comment [12]: This is a really long sentence – consider breaking it up

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:10 PM

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Comment [13]: I would have him wait longer here, 5 minutes isn't really that long and is a reasonable time to wait when told "a few minutes" – unless the effect you're going for is that he is irrationally impatient, then maybe make that more clear

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:12 PM

Comment [14]: I read this part like 17 times and I don't understand what is happening. Is flush the color of the wall? Is air being flushed out of the doors? What's pulling him in? is it something physical or intangible?

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:14 PM

Comment [15]: Like anyone's father?
Maybe make it more personal to Phillip and
say his father – unless it is a point you want to
make that he is consistently looking like his
patients' fathers to make them more
comfortable, make it more clear

Sara Caputo 3/8/2017 1:43 PM

Comment [16]: So like how big is this cabinet? Is there anything in it? I feel like there could be more with this cabinet

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:14 PM

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:16 PM

Comment [17]: Reflect the consequence of this delayed reaction by making his response more awkward – maybe make it seem like it's jolting or like he's searching for something to say quickly?

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:16 PM

Comment [18]: Here's what I was talking about earlier – choose a time frame

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:17 PM

Comment [19]: Where did he get the helmet? Was it in the cabinet?

"The Transcranial Magnetic Inductor does something surprisingly close to what its name implies and, as one board member with an engineering background had pointed out, it isn't an inductor at all in a technical sense. In fact, calling it such will only lead to skepticism over the scientific and clinical merit of a product with enough controversy as is. Despite this chatter, we reaped the great benefit of not really having to advertise." Dr. Sullivan's voice pierced through the nothingness all around, never quite disappearing, echoing and reverberating with itself a million times over, "Does that answer your question?"

"Just about," Phil said. He didn't quite remember what he had asked. He had been thinking. Ten years ago, Phil had set out on a week-long camping trip with a bunch of his college buddies. The other day he had a protein bar. Protein.

Suddenly the train returned, Phil was back in the room and bolted up in his seat to be vanked back down on account of the helmet being fixed to the chair.

The doctor chuckled. "A little overboard," he said, turning back a dial "Qk, now, do you remember how that felt?"

Phil took a moment to collect those thoughts that had so recently flown across his attention span. Though he had no specific train in mind, he remembered the general fog of it, the dense and dead webs of half-baked thoughts spinning his mind into a cocoon. "Yeah, I do."

"Alright, alright," Dr. S. said as he turned dials and pushed buttons and slid sliders, "Now, tell me which is better: that one, or this one." He turned and pushed and

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Comment [20]: Redundant, maybe delete "with itself"

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:21 PM

Comment [21]: I get that he's starting to be affected by the helmet, but you might want to make that more clear b/c the reader doesn't really even know that it's on or that he's feeling anything at all

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:21 PM

Comment [22]: Is this like a real train or a train of thought

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:22 PM

Comment [23]: If the helmet is fixed to the chair he couldn't really have anywhere to bolt up to, maybe say he tried to or find a way that the helmet could be attached by a something that is flexible but unyielding at a point

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Comment [24]: I don't think something can fly across your attention span – it's referring to the period of time in which you can pay attention to one thing – maybe change this

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:24 PM

Comment [25]: I really really like this description

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:24 PM

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slid some more until Phil moved back into the fog. A different fog, though, much <u>clearer</u> than the last.

"This is better," Phil said, "I feel like I can carry a conversation."

"Good, alright. Calibration is just about over." The doctor picked up his mug, which Phil had not previously noticed, and took a loud sip of what smelled like a hazelnut-flavored coffee. He swiveled around in his chair to the counter adjacent, placed the coffee down, slid a cabinet that only needed sliding, and rolled back, all with the automated finesse of a sequence of movements long since committed to involuntary action. Phil saw no immediate driving force behind this. He could not understand why someone would want to spend every day swiveling back and forth to a cabinet, only to push and slide and turn the same equipment, day in and day out. Then he supposed there's not a lot he wouldn't do for the hefty salary given to these doctors. He stared at the back of Dr. Sullivan's head, a shiny bald spot staring right back at him and forcing him to contemplate his own aging body and how he would maintain it. Phil didn't want to go bald. Most people don't. But given his family history it would seem it's right around the corner. His father had begun to bald at age thirty (which was just around the corner for Phil), and his father's father and mother's father at near the same age. It was a genetic inevitability, much in the same way that a woman with a family history of breast cancer might preemptively elect for a mastectomy to avoid the possibility. At some point he had seen a woman like that on the news. He wondered if he should do something similar with his scalp.

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:25 PM

Comment [26]: Adjacent to what

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:24 PM

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:27 PM

Comment [27]: You're technically only introducing Phil's perspective here (besides the coffee), when I feel like the sentence before this is seen as more of the narrator but it seems like it's supposed to be Phil's observation/commentary – maybe insert a "phil watched" or something to make it clear that his train of thought is beginning to be altered

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:16 PM

Comment [28]: Oops later I say you don't spell out his name after the first mention but you do here and you should pick whether to call him Sullivan or S and stay consistent after the first usage

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"Phil? Need me to turn it down again? You don't seem to be very responsive," said Dr. Sullivan.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I was just thinking."

"It tends to do that," he let out another hearty chuckle.

"Ok, yes, turn it down a little bit."

"This will be your second Session, and it's going to be a lot more verbally involved, just as a warning. You're going to need to pay close attention to my words and wording. There needs to be a dialogue here and you need to trust me if you want to get the most out of your weekend," The doctor looked right into Phil's eyes, smiling.

Reassurance was given to him. "All the settings are saved, we've got all the paperwork sorted out, I think you're ready to go for tonight. Remember, water only, no food intake between now and the Session." The doctor removed the helmet and stood up.

"Sure thing," Phil said as he sat upright. He looked back out through the doors and into a boring waiting room.

Like the rest of the facility, the dining hall was brand new. But it didn't possess the same sort of sterility and futuristic smooth lining that decorated everything else. It seemed to be designed primarily with attention of easy maintenance, which is understandable. As a biotech company that focuses on the neurological fine tuning of the brain and its complex chemistry is not going to want to be taken down by a health code violation stemming from cheap frozen food being stuck in the crevices of the same

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:29 PM

Comment [29]: It being the helmet? Like it makes you think? Be more clear

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Comment [30]: Change this to avoid passive voice

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Comment [31]: So is it like bad that immediately after this he goes and gets pizza?

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fringed decorative plating found on almost every wall in the lobby. Instead, Phil noticed, they opted for concrete.

He had ordered a slice of pizza last time, which he remembered tasting quite bad, but seeing as nothing else on the menu looked to surpass it in quality and given that it's rather hard to screw up cheese and sauce on crust, he bought it again anyways. A young-looking girl wearing a pale-yellow sundress walked by Phil, also bearing a slice of pepperoni. She sat down somewhere in the maze of winding and curving tables, which off-balanced the cold feeling of the concrete enough to draw your attention to it but not enough to successfully perform its intended task of rectifying the stony vibe of the room.

Phil ought to sit next to her.

"Hi, I'm Phil."

"I'm Karen," she smiled and didn't make eye contact.

"You ever been here before?"

"I think this is my sixth time."

"Holy shit," He took a bite of his pizza, and she too right after him, "Does it change at all? This is only my second time, not quite sure what to expect." The cheese of the pizza was at prime gooeyness level, where it stayed on the crust but affined into a web of cheese strands when pulled just right. It was better than last time.

"It's different every time. It can get strenuous at points but I always feel better afterward," Karen said with a mouth half full. She dabbed at her face with a napkin.

Phil had always had a bad habit of wandering into a day-dream, even midconversation, but this one had a particular appeal given his situation. Two broken people,

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:41 PM

Comment [32]: Okay you need to specify how old this girl is, or call her a young woman bc otherwise it's weird later when he sexualizes her – he's not a diddler im assuming

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:36 PM

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:37 PM

Comment [33]: Are they like connected? How are they winding?

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:37 PM

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Comment [34]: You don't actually say that he does this though

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:39 PM

Comment [35]: Cool word

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:39 PM

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meeting at a mental health facility (although neither they nor the staff preferred to refer to it in that way), finding a commonality during their proffered visits, talking more and more each successive time until one day they realize how much they enjoy each other's company. He stole glances down her body when she wasn't looking, and saw something he liked. She was beautiful, what Phil would consider out of his league. But this was a new Phil. This Phil came back this weekend on a quest of self-improvement, a fulfillment of his true and ideal self, a coming of age. This was the capstone of his journey, and soon he would enter his rightfully earned epilogue, riding into the proverbial sunset with sundress girl in equanimitous bliss and even tone. And that would be it.

"Then why do you come back?" he asked immediately regretting it. She pushed her hair back.

"Um..._I think it was something I needed," she said as she crossed her left leg over her knee.

"I feel that," Phil said. He wasn't quite sure what comes next.

"Listen, I have to go to my Session now. It was nice meeting you, Phil," she said, tossing her napkin on her half-eaten pizza.

"Nice meeting you too. Good luck." He scoured his mind for something to say as she walked away, ever closer to approaching that unspecified distance where she is too far to say anything. She might have already passed it. Should it matter to Phil, though? Probably not. He should talk to her; he should say something. Something innocuous but charming to ensure a fruitful future conversation. To plant a seed in her mind that someday, maybe, perhaps, they might be each other's capstones, that they might share the

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:42 PM

Comment [36]: She has a name now, call her Karen

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:42 PM

Comment [37]: You already used this as a cool big word, pick a new one maybe

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:43 PM

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 10:57 PM

Comment [38]: Pick a tense – wasn't sure "what was supposed to come next" maybe?

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:43 PM

Comment [39]: So she's breaking the no food rule too?

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 10:58 PM

Comment [40]: Do you want all of these variations of maybe here?

same daydream as she went off to her Session and her mental state is forever seared into her psyche.

Maybe he would see her later.

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:45 PM

Comment [41]: Pick a tense

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 5:45 PM

Comment [42]: Pick a tense

Strapped back into the recliner and beginning to sweat through his pits, Phil tried to control his breathing to enter his desired state of total Zen. His breaths were uneven and shaky, like his hands, and being in such a small room made these breaths particularly audible, further distracting him from a calm he was unfamiliar with.

"Alright, Phil, you ready? Feeling good?" Dr. Sullivan said.

"Ready as I'll ever be," said Phil, bringing another hearty chuckle out of the doctor. Phil stopped tapping on the arm of the chair. The doctor swiveled over to that same cabinet, and rolled it back to the recliner. He plugged in any wires that needed plugging. Most of the settings had been taken care of carlier in the day now it was a matter of pressing only one button.

"Here we go."

The room shrunk back into the doorway, curling in on itself and folding with that same woosh into a thousand different creases and angles reflecting from the lone drop of lighting from the ceiling tile. As the room continued to slink past him, Phil listened intently for a voice.

"We're going to begin the cycling soon, so be prepared. Keep in mind it's all artificial, just a bunch of thoughts in your noodle. But once it starts I'll have no way of

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 10:59 PM

Comment [43]: From his pits or through his shirt pits? Like are you saying he's getting pit stains

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 10:59 PM

Comment [44]: I'm not sure this should be capitalized

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:00 PM

Comment [45]: Is he trying to get calm?

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:01 PM

Comment [46]: You may want to change this to Dr. S. just to keep consistency because you haven't spelled it out since the first usage

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:01 PM

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:02 PM

Comment [47]: Wait so the cabinet can be rolled? I'm confused as to what this cabinet looks like and I feel like it's important

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Comment [48]: Shrank? idk

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:03 PM

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Comment [49]: Was there a woosh before

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:15 PM

Comment [50]: Cycling? Of what

knowing if you want me to stop," Ribbons of blue cascaded around Phil's head, as Phil did what he thought was nodding. He entered the world. He walked into the void, his brain taffied into a million cheesy strands by his own train of thought, moving toward crystalline perfection, to the ideal.

......

"I think we made a lot of progress. Although, I'd suggest you come back within the next couple of months. Insurance should cover__and I'd have to check on this__but it ought to cover at least 90% of the cost."

"Gotcha."

"You're probably going to feel fairly groggy for the next couple of hours. I'd get some rest back in your room if you could, and try not to linger on any of the Session too much, just let the thoughts slip by. You did good. Have a good one, Phil." Dr. S. walked down the hall among the offices, slipping into one of them. Out of one of the offices walked Karen, again walking away from Phil, again at a distance ambiguously far enough where it was ostensibly too far to say something to her. Again, he said nothing. But he would see sundress girl again. Maybe next month, maybe in a couple weeks; he could feel it, and he knew it to be true. He would talk to her, at which point she would see his exquisitely balanced character and be drawn in to the paradox, and the room would sink back with them.

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:14 PM

Comment [51]: With what? What's the progress? What's the goal?

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:06 PM

Comment [52]: Maybe it's a style choice but it really should be "you did well"

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:06 PM

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:06 PM

Comment [53]: This makes it seem like he's going in and out of all the offices – maybe change to "past" or something

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:07 PM

Comment [54]: Change one of these "walking"s - maybe the first one, to indicate a sudden appearance

Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:08 PM

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:09 PM

Comment [55]: Either call her "karen" or "her" – it's weird to call her sundress girl after you already know her name

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Sara Caputo 3/6/2017 11:10 PM

Comment [56]: This closing sentence kind of confused me – what's the paradox? His personality? Would they do a session together? It's dramatic and everything but I'm not sure the meaning comes across