

DAY 5: Zippos in the Jungle Somewhere



We have arrived at the Great Decline, the leading edge of the Great Divide, beyond which is the Great Resurrection where Robo v2.0 either hums like a fine Swiss watch or reminds everybody of Windows Vista.

I am effectively stripped of my immune system at this point. The technical term is neutropenia. For the med tec(k)s among us, the details are: WBC<0.1; ANC=zero; Hemeacrit 33.7; and platelets at 19. This last number means that I will receive a platelet infusion over the next hour.

As my old pal Frankie told me about his chemo a few years back:

Basically they have to get you as close to death as they can without actually, y'know, killing you.

That is some hardcore torch-the-hamlet-in-order-to-save-it mentality right there.

As much as I resist, current conditions lend to metaphor. I am filled with a polyglot of chemicals and isotopes and re-jiggered stem cells and antibiotics and probiotics and stem colony growth factors. There is a system wide negotiation at play on multiple levels. Cells and mitochondria are at war. Molecular conflict is rampant. Organ functions are under close scrutiny to ensure no unexpected rebellion. System

interactions are unreliable: One minute fine, the next as weak as a kitten. Treason and treachery may be afoot.

To be honest, it feels as if I am just a bystander to the whole shooting match, kind of like when the swells in DC took a day tour to watch the Civil War get decided in an afternoon.

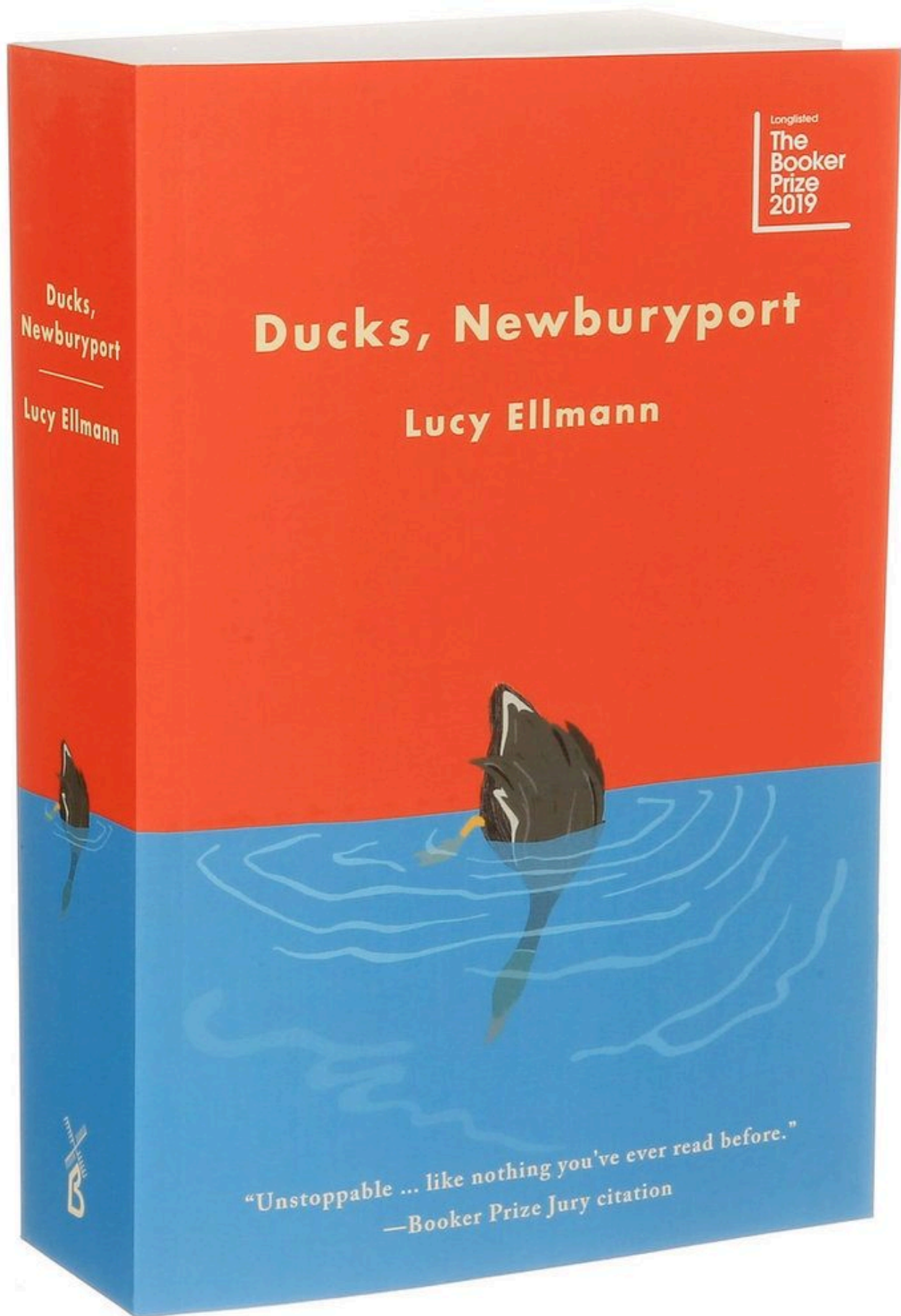
“Oh, look there, Jedediah, those stem cells are skirmishing up the left flank.”

“And what ho, Sweet Nellie Constancy! Look at the way those cancer cells are on the rout! War shall be over by Christmas, most certainly.”

Twas that it were true. Recovery will be a many months affair, no matter how soon I blow this chicken shack.

The calendar looks more or less like this: I will likely remain neutropenic for another 4-7 days. My system will slowly begin to recover over the following days until, the good Dog willing and the stem counts rise, I might get out of here as early 9/15. After that, it is the Cancer Halfway House for 1-3 weeks so the team can have me close at hand in case anything goes all spritzinpoppin. Best case for getting home to dogs is late September.

That’s aggressively optimistic, sure. But I just executed an act of purest optimism by ordering this book, described by NYT as “a 426,100-word sentence that stretches over 1,000 pages – occasionally interrupted by a more traditional story, albeit one from the point of view of a mountain lioness.”



Longlisted
The
Booker
Prize
2019

Ducks,
Newburyport
—
Lucy Ellmann

Ducks, Newburyport

Lucy Ellmann

“Unstoppable ... like nothing you've ever read before.”
—Booker Prize Jury citation

Aside from *the fact that* this kind of thing is pure catnip to

me, I ordered this with the old Vaudeville joke in mind.

I'm so old I won't even buy green bananas.

The low down here is that I feel pretty bad, but not terrible. FWIW, the Great Tick Apocalypse of 2014 was far more physically grim. I am starting to develop the mouth and alimentary canal irritation that I was warned about. Nothing tastes or smells good. One sip of coffee this morning and I nearly wept at how bad it tastes. I am flat down zero on energy, and reading or typing for too long tends to make me woozy.

So here I sit, the boy in the bubble and the baby with the baboon heart, a prime demonstration of what the amazing minds of medical science can come up with. FWIW, that whole 'bubble boy' thing was a short-lived approach and is exceedingly rare these days. It turns out that while external agents can cause an infection or sepsis, it is far more likely that that which is already within me will serve as the source of aggravation. My usual biome may well loom as the greatest threat. Only time will tell.

These are the recited facts. Please do not feel bad for me at this time. There is way worse suffering out there than my own, and the fact is that I am damned near drowning in gratitude and love right now. It means so much to me to see that people are starting to visit this site regularly and spend some time with my witterings. If you know or are a writer, you know that kind of this means more than it might should. But no matter. Thank you all. If friends are wealth, I'm at Croesus level accumulation here.

Besides, I am indeed the world's luckiest boy. Stanwyck is by my side throughout, and while the circumstances are grim, we have enjoyed some of the deepest and most rewarding time in our 36 years together. We are starting to talk about plans for

after: Trips, activities, physical fitness.

This saga – perhaps the Greatest Story Ever Told – is ongoing and exceedingly rich. Something deserving of extended rumination and belletristic treatment.

I have begun each day here with Sister Mavis's version of "Hard Times." It is a solid reminder that our troubles may be plenty, but this too shall pass. And while we are at it, there are plenty of people around us who need compassion and a helping hand.

So you know what comes next, right?

LOVE EACH OTHER MOTHERFUCKERS!

It matters a difference.