What is a Metaphor For, Anyway?



One of our standard holiday activities is a ridiculously complex and near-impossible jigsaw puzzle. It lasts for days – weeks, even – and gives everybody a little diversion.

For Thanksgiving, the puzzle was a watercolor drawing of Shakespeare Books in Paris. Colorful. Fun. Aggravating. As always, we would get to the point where we joked about how there just had to be pieces missing, damn these people, &c. The joke behind the joke is that we have always made this complaint, and it has never turned out to be true. We always find that damned piece we were sure was missing, and we finish up with a sense of smug triumph.

Not this year. The bookstore puzzle had three pieces missing. Even stranger, there were four pieces that were clearly part of the bookstore montage, but that did not fit anywhere. Just random extras that must have belonged in some other bookstore puzzle.

Stanwyck lodged a complaint. The company, filled with remorse, offered a replacement of any puzzle in their inventory. We picked the one pictured up top here, a kitschy postcard from the town of my birth.

It arrived in time for Christmas. It proved to be ridiculously difficult, and most of the family gave up on it after a few days. But I am a stubborn – and/or obsessive – sort, so I kept at it. For weeks. Naturally, I complained that pieces were

missing, but what are the odds two times in a row?

When I arrived at the progress pictured above, it became clear. There were pieces missing, no doubt. Even better: The last four pieces that would complete the diver's thigh did not fit the cut of this puzzle. They were close, but definitely not right for this puzzle. After a full month working this damn thing I tossed the pieces in the box in disgust.

And now, the hinge point of this little essay, because what is meta for if not to extrapolate metaphorically?

For the past year or so I have known what is expected of me at pretty much any given moment. Submit to treatments. Endure the repercussions. Repeat. It was simple and straightforward and, frankly, about all I had energy for. I showed up when I was supposed to, took my medicine, and managed not to decease. Bravo, well done.

Now that I am 'cured'More or less; there really is no cure for AITL. Yet. I find myself at loose ends. What am I to do with my newfound state of curedom?

Well, obviously, I should write and read and embrace my second (or third) chances, live life large and all such as that. I am *normal* again, or so it might seem. Get cracking!

Goddammit. I think there are some pieces missing from this puzzle. And a few others that don't seem to fit.

First off, I don't feel *normal*. I still struggle with energy and stamina issues and I continue to grapple with finding the right, um, the right…

Word. That's it. The right word.

I do not feel bad. But I don't quite feel great either. Some folks who have this transplant report that it took them three years to get back to whatever normal looks like. I did not believe that when I first heard it, figured it was some

lollygaggling candy ass making excuses.

I believe it now. Hoo boy. Now add in this cruncher: What am I to do for my Third Act on the mortal stage?It is arguable that my Third Act already transpired after the Incident of the Tick and I am well into Act Four now. Which means I have overstayed my welcome and the cheap seats will be tossing overripe fruit any minute now. TBH, I felt like my recovery from the tick was a mistake. I recall clearly a moment that summer when I was pretty sure I was a goner. Maybe I was, and I'm in some sort of Twilight Zone episode where I refuse to admit that I've up and died already.

I find myself hesitant to commit to any kind of scheduled activity, uncertain if I will have the juice when the time comes to show up. It took all my willpower to pull the trigger on a flight and hotel commitment for Big Ears. I'm going come hell or high water, but dog knows how much juice I will have for the festivities.

Reading is getting better. I can stick with it for long stretches and actually absorb what I'm reading. I'm getting damn good at the NYT crossword. The greatest cognitive challenge now is difficulty in generative thinking. I've always been quick at synthesis of wide ranging ideas and formulating ways of re-casting them. Now, not so much.

I have article pitches teed up. But will I have the wherewithal to actually meet the commitment? Hard to say. Some days I'm cooking with gas. Other days it's all I can manage to drink some coffee before I go back to sleep. The pitches remain in the drafts folder.

I'm working on an idea for a novel, but find myself overwhelmed. Naturally, because I am stubbornly ob- and ex-cessive, it is preposterously ambitious. I don't have any idea how to write a novel – aside from writing one not very good one, my experience is thin. It's like someone who has built a

couple of crappy birdhouses – or maybe just one – trying to build a mansion.

So what to do? Or even bigger: What should I be doing? And where the hell did that *should* come from, anyway?

The hell if I know. But I feel like I should be doing more. (That damned *should* again.) I feel like I should feel better. (I don't feel bad, but I don't feel especially good, either. I'm like lukewarm water.) This comes along with not-a-little bit of survivor guilt. As much as I believe the whole thing is random, I can't help but occasionally fall into some bathetic *what was I meant to do with this second (or third) chance?* line of thought.

And then there's that ever-present nagger of the possibility of recurrence.

Come on! Take the good news and quit yer bellyaching! Reckon oughta. Good news is that this is nothing that nags at me while I'm awake. It only comes when I'm sleeping. Mostly.

Right now, I can't make the pieces fit. I've got a sneaking suspicion that some pieces might have fallen off the table and down the HVAC vent. Or maybe the dogs ate it. Whatever. Unlike that puzzle up top – depicting the place of my arrival – I can't sweep this puzzle aside.

Only one thing to do, reckon.


KEEP FUCKING GOING