

DAY 1, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2001

CHERYL PREFERS THE CANYONS. Benedict, Coldwater, Beverly Glen. Days earlier, we tried the 405 South coming in, then north on the return, but the bends and the breezes were not the same. Too many taillights. We've been to UCLA Medical Center many times already in preparation, and she likes the canyons best. Her head lies back on the headrest and the shadows comb her face. She relaxes driving in. The music plays better in her quiet, short-haired head. She seems at ease going to war.

On previous days, I'd look over to see her staring out the window. She watches the trees in the canyon, and I borrow her eyes to imagine what she sees. Maybe the colors of autumn she always loved in our park back home. Mill Creek Park. It's a National Park, you know, and Cheryl will miss her autumn there this year. I use her eyes as we drive, and try to see Lake Glacier, the Old Mill Museum, and the miles of trails chocked by the glorious yellow and massive oranges and reds in the dying leaves. All of our lives we've talked about its visual majesty. Anxiety and distress don't live there, so she used it for medication. It's one of the stunning places on our planet, so her head leans back running Mill Creek movies and better days of bliss there. That is my guess. She is autumn, but this one she'll miss.

Today it began. Today was the milestone, September 10, 2001. The day the killing started. Cheryl left her life back East to come this distance to kill cancer, and today she lay on the cold table, undressed and brave, and took in the lethal doses of radiation that will kill the enemy.

Since her arrival two weeks ago, I watch her daily and I see her for who she is. Her temperament is good here. Maybe it's the palm trees. Maybe it's the KFC. I think it's the quiet and simplicity that helps her feel the ease only a Californian feels. It's a good place to cure cancer. Not so much confusion. She laughs more now than when she first came. Maybe the jokes are getting better. I have an easy way around her and never pose a problem. She does better that way, and it shows her dignity when illness is trying to steal it.

Today marks the beginning of her victory. She's in a war, and today she took a hill. I liked being part of it and hope I am helping. I liked parking in Westwood for 25 cents. There was already an hour and twenty minutes in the meter when I pulled up. Got away cheap today...I am known to be cheap on meters. Tomorrow we'll take the canyon, and, tomorrow, kill some more.