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DIAGRAM

I LEAD A LIFE in Switzerland. This life came to me about ten years ago. It is approximately what I have here. I match myself, you know: the same age, living under this name, and myself in appearance. All my traits and personality are manifest in Switzerland. ATM screens make me nervous. I am clumsy with small objects like house keys or paper clips. I like serious newspapers about economics and business affairs. Lone hairs probe between my eyebrows. My wide feet stretch out their shoes. I am told I snore in the night. Everything that makes me, all of it migrates over to Switzerland just fine, and there it coheres as a life of momentum and purpose. That comes from where the two lives diverge. These divergences are crucial. My voice in Switzerland sounds just like what you hear now, but it talks in German, clipped Italian, fragmentary Romansch, and puddles of French. I speak these fluently in Switzerland. I cannot do that here yet, although I'm trying with the CDs and the workbooks. Another example, my career: I am a physician with a small family practice in Zurich. I do not know why or how, but it really is so. I made a diagram to explain all this to myself. The quality of life in Switzerland, the diagram shows, offsets everything that has happened to me. It shows I should be happy.

MOUNTAINS

You know what? In Switzerland, I own a goddamned fast Mercedes. It shines like a big sacred meteorite under the parking-garage lights. The car is an anonymous black, and I never allow anything like a map or briefcase or plastic water bottle to be left in the car. I am almost reluctant to touch its door handles, let alone drive the Mercedes. I have never owned anything like it, so I measure my use of the car very carefully. Yet this exact Mercedes is ubiquitous in Zurich, and I see it throughout Switzerland.

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Say I have a woman I am seeing, a girlfriend, or maybe even a wife—in thinking about my life in Switzerland this proposition is a variable. So maybe it is a male friend, a colleague from Basel. I take this person out in the Mercedes some afternoon. We head south through the valley before turning up into the mountains above the city and beyond. The magnitude of the Alps is tremendous. They are everything that Mom and Dad described. One mountain after another, three thousand meters, four thousand meters, jutting against the horizon, layering together in compositions their varying depths of distance. What I like is how a mountain that might appear nearby and small in scale is in fact some distance away and insurmountable. Or how two mountains, which might look to be totally separate works of geology, make up a single massif. The sky is a solid sheet of color overhead. Far off, weather halos the country. A train rides into sight then vanishes. The black highway banks, ascends, wrapped on either side by a warm, green world.

Just before dark the Mercedes takes us into one of the villages for an old-fashioned Helvetian dinner. Each valley has something a little different to offer visitors, though a few are trapped so distantly in the past as to be beyond recognition, their history having ended a hundred years ago. My colleague and I—no, that colleague has gone and now it is again a woman I am with—find a more populous, busier village where there is a restaurant in what was once a carriage house. Its food is heavy but fresh and homemade. We drink digestifs in the garden before she and I walk out into the square to sit beside an ancient rural fountain and smoke her Gauloises. I promise myself that such trips are just fractions of longer trips to come. In a few years, I would like to take a long vacation, maybe even the whole month of August. We listen to the fountain.

In the villages, where everyone goes to bed early, evening delivers an almost rigid calm to the streets, the buildings, the treetops. Does darkness render the world so still? Or does stillness invite the dark? Switzerland steadies itself in imitation of the Alps. She rides home in the Mercedes with her feet tucked beneath her, her bag on the floor. The dashboard's orange lights exhume from the dark the necklace I gave her. An illuminated Zurich greets us upon return and the Mercedes goes back to its garage to wait for its next trip into the mountains. I leave nothing inside.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Switzerland is autonomous. It unfolds continuously. It is going on right now, parallel to my life here. I receive it as moments of solid sense, though I can also remember it and imagine what might happen there. The train rides, the boat rides, the walks home from my office with a cigar and the folded *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*—these all occur while I am driving to work, pulling together my invoicing for the week, heating some cans of soup at Dad's new apartment, where he lives with Sandi, who is his wife now. I am never fully gone from Switzerland any more than I am ever fully here in this life, at this desk or in my chair at Dad's eating Sandi's vegetable lasagna.

There are moments of total penetration, when Switzerland captures me in the shower or walking into the grocery store. I can feel the little coffee spoons in my fingers. I can read the board at the Hauptbahnhof while I wait for my train to Basel. I can almost reach for the blue Gauloises box in my girlfriend (wife)'s purse. These experiences have lasted hours at times, especially when I was younger, in my twenties. I could spend a whole afternoon on Switzerland.

Every once in a while, maybe twice a year, my Switzerland life signals to me here. I should have tried to record these in a notebook, in case a special field of science emerges around the interplay between doubled lives. Once, for instance, out of my office window, I saw the guys getting the first mock-up for the Mount Sinai Hospital job ready for delivery. (I am the business manager at a privately held illuminated signage fabricator and my office looks down on our shop floor.) They had it leaning against a bend press across from the truck dock. It was on a square sheet of plywood backing, taller than a man. Gary held out the power connection they put on for the site test. When Wilmer brought up an extension cord, they mated, and the sign switched on. The plywood backing eclipsed my view of the sign itself, but I could see it on the men, on their faces and their clothes. The emergency red fluorescence cut out all kinds of shadow animals against the floor and shop walls: the presses, the screens, the crate wood, the chains, the heads and hands and legs of everyone working here. Inside the giant red fluorescent panel, unseen but known to me, was a white cross. And I remember the little pin Dad wore on his sweaters back when we were kids, the Swiss cross.

CAREER

I meet lovely people traveling the SBB between my practice in Zurich and the laboratory outside Basel. I am light and use my hands as I speak. I do a lot of talking in Switzerland. My hands are convincing. Pronounced whorls, wavy like the backgrounds of currency, mark the windows where I tap out landmarks to tourists. I am a carefree person. Once aboard, I never worry about the time. I drink strong little coffees or, if it is an evening train, a neat American whiskey. It is not because it is more lucrative that I work in both cities. With a dozen or so colleagues from Europe, East Asia, and North America, I participate in an advanced specialized research program. Is it the application of nanotechnology to prosthetics? Is it pediatric neurological disorders? Either way, we work out of a laboratory on Hünigerstrasse, Basel. These gaps of mine are shocking at times, while at others they are cause for relief. My Switzerland life is evolving. Why can't it go undecided, just both ways all at once? The team has made significant inroads over the years, publishing our work widely in journals and winning acknowledgment from medical communities worldwide. Government and private funding now backs the group's research, citing our team's efforts as indispensable.

No, my conventional family practice in Zurich suffers not in the least. I always put my patients and their families first. They understand this when I sweep into the room, light and talkative. Good morning, good morning. *Grützi, Doktor*, they say, as if the title were carved from a block of wood. Doctor, I've just read all about your work in the newspaper. Then I'll maybe say: It is really quite good news. We're verging on some major breakthroughs.

In Zurich, I am able to walk to work from my apartment to the Old City, stopping on my way for a strong little coffee and today's *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. Once my charts are finished in the evening, I pour a neat American whiskey and scan the lights of the city, that darkness of the Alps that is no more than black construction paper under the spotlight moon ratcheting up into dark-blue air. My practice is on the fourth or fifth floor of a building unlike anything we have here in the U.S. It is modern and all white with plenty of glass. No, that's not it. It is a classic nineteenth-century apartment house converted to professional offices. Just down the street is the brand-new Kunsthaus, which is modern and white and glassy. The Kunsthaus I can see from my desk, while our building's lobby is a blue-gray marble the color of Lake Zurich with brass sconces and grilles. My office

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has plenty of light; it is very clean. Zurich I prefer to Basel, where we work within a kind of campus. The research program comprises many square meters of laboratory space. In the yard out back there is a beautiful linden, beneath which the staff eats lunch during fine weather. If newly arrived researchers appear shy or awkward, I apply my outgoing nature to make them feel at home. Everyone is at ease. No one is made to eat lunch in his car.

FRIDAY EVENINGS IN ZURICH

I like the weight of the old handset on the landline for my professional calls during the week. Outside of work, I use a mobile. Like when I call one of the women I am seeing or perhaps this so-called girlfriend (wife) I have discussed. Perhaps I meet her for dinner. Perhaps I dine alone and then we meet somewhere near her apartment. Or is it indeed the case that I am married in Switzerland and have given up on the other girls long before? If I am married, we eat together in our own home. My wife is also very light and herself a great talker, someone skillful in her way of looking at the world. She draws me out of my inward tendencies, this focus on my professional life. Then again, maybe I do not want conversation? Maybe I want someone to push around, to twist, to tease? Or is it that I am to be teased, to be twisted, to be pushed? I am a contortionist, after all.

JENNY

Genevieve appears in Switzerland too, under her full first name. My sister is safe from herself at last. I travel to see her and Jurgen Quist, the skinny Hamburger she married, a junior partner in a tiny but prestigious law firm. As I understand it, each year Jurgen brokers a few sensitive international business contracts that require painstaking negotiations. He speaks pieces of all languages, even Mandarin and functional Swahili. Outside the office, Jurgen wears pastel shirts with metal cuff links and boat hats. Jurgen collects hats and always has on a new one when we take his sailboat out on Lake Lucerne. When work is not too busy I go out for a day with Genevieve and Jurgen and their two boys. We all go sailing. I bring Jurgen one of my cigars from that shop in Zurich. We laugh as he tries to teach me to

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sail, and I challenge him to tennis, the game his long body is built for. I play tennis in Switzerland.

"Competition isn't my way," says Jurgen. Sailing, he says, creates an alliance. "The ship, the water, the wind—and us, the sailors."

Jurgen Quist is difficult for me to see, but I know he is totally different from Genevieve's other men here. Her creative energies achieve fruition in Switzerland, not solely because of Jurgen, but, yes, he is very supportive of her. You know what? She works in her own studio. She is not just a weekend watercolorist and a hostess at Pointe Restaurant. Turns out painting is only one of her gifts. Does she want to be an illustrator? A fashion designer? Even a landscape architect? She is all these things at once and more when I see her in Switzerland. While her husband and I work with the sails and boom, Genevieve is there on the shore by the line of trees and benches, painting our distant shapes against the tall ceiling of a Saturday morning. From where she stands, do the water and the air dissolve into a single, blank brilliance? It might be like in the photograph Dad took of Lake Lucerne years ago: an old man in a hat seated on a bench, studying the waters. The blank brilliance seen in his photo now hangs in a frame on a wall in my living room here. The photograph is fading, already half lost. I can tell that the man in the hat on the bench will be the last part of the print to decompose.

Would Genevieve be too generous a mother? Would she lavish her boys with protection and comforts, ending each day exhausted while the children become delicate and overly sensitive? No, she is the opposite of Mom. Jurgen too would do right by the boys, always telling them the truth even when the truth is difficult and none of their business. Were either of them sick, you know, Genevieve and Jurgen would tell the boys plainly what was happening. They make a great team.

Everything would come together for Jenny at last in Switzerland.

CUSTOMS

Last Saturday I decided to make a purchase. I drove to the east side, to the Galleria, where there is a Saks, to buy the black Rado wristwatch that tells its hours, minutes, and seconds on three separate faces. I have been thinking about this Rado watch for months now because I wear one in Switzerland. Over the past few years I have discovered that it's possible to import some elements of my Switzerland

life. I have acquired, for instance, a black leather billfold with a crimson interior, silver bullet cuff links, a money clip, a white hat like the one Jurgen gave me, and a tourist map published by the city of Zurich. I have coffee cups, teaspoons, artist monographs, a photograph of a concrete bridge in Salgina. I paid for the watch with one of the credit cards. The clerk, a young woman, asked if I would like to wear the purchase right away. No, I told her. Not now. These imported items I leave outside my daily routine, reserving them for times when I can concentrate and focus on the details coming from Switzerland. Seated in my car, I place the Rado against my wrist and hold my arm up to the light. My eyes catch themselves in the rearview mirror.

If I had the money, it might be possible to import my entire Zurich apartment into this life. I have a nice stereo because I know music so well in Switzerland. Weekends, before I drive down to the airport to pick up my girlfriend (wife), who is returning from a business trip, I make time to listen to new work by a young composer or a new album from a new English band, always on headphones first while sitting in my leather chair, gazing through the windowpanes at the city, the Alps. The music unfolds continuously. A good new television hangs on the wall too. My tablet computer rests on the end table. Looking around the apartment now, there are a few color photographs matted inside black frames. There are valuable pieces of mid-century modern furniture I have collected plus some upholstered wooden chairs handmade in Lugano. No memorabilia, absolutely none. No images of me doing anything or standing anywhere. I own two clocks, a wall-mounted thermometer, and a barometer I keep on the kitchen counter. Elsewhere are soaps and a few cacti. Occasionally, when I know that the girlfriend (wife) has had a difficult day, I bring home a beautiful orchid or a potted succulent. If I am seeing a new girlfriend, I put simple wildflowers in the living room.

But there are limits to what I can bring over here. At the border between my two lives strict customs are in place. That lightness and outgoing personality I have in Switzerland, for example, I cannot import. When I am alone, I can envision myself surrounded by friends and colleagues, all of them laughing out loud with me. It is as if I am leading them in song. I see the effects that my words cause. The exact words themselves, though, are lost to me, as if I were trying to read a phone book in a dream. I know *how* I would live in Switzerland—the trains, the jokes, the whiskey, the girlfriend (wife), weekend rides out of town to see Genevieve and Jurgen with their boys on the sailboat, the smiles of my patients—yet I do not know *how* to be a physician.

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Mom said, in one of our early-morning conversations: "I always thought you would do better, Scott." The television's light flared in her glasses. I sat with my barn coat over my legs, bare feet on her hospital bed. "I saw you as a physician or a financier or a business owner of some kind. I thought you would have a *practice*. I thought you would be rich and take your family to Switzerland in the summers." She was at a kind of threshold then.

I said I thought so too. I had counted on it.

She said, almost over her shoulder, as if she were about to leave the room, "That would be absolutely fascinating." Then she was asleep again.

DOES IT HURT?

Normally, as I go about my day, Switzerland comes in and out of reception. One reason the objects imported from Switzerland are so valuable is that they bridge the two lives. They keep me in contact. There are times, though, when Switzerland dims, winks. It guttered pretty badly when work slowed down a few years ago and I had to look for part-time bookkeeping. I had to focus my memory to recover Switzerland. This is a source of grief—because I do not want to lose Switzerland—as well as a source of embarrassment, because I am ashamed how much I need it. This is one way in which Switzerland hurts.

Then there is that idea represented in my diagram. My life in Switzerland, an undeserved gift, is meant to make up for all that happened. I am a physician with a small family practice. I am cherished by patients, esteemed and well liked by colleagues. The Friday evenings in the streets. The summer afternoons in the lake. Mom, alive. She is healthy, and living in an old house in a valley with a glacial lake and islets to look out upon. She comes to Zurich on the SBB. She sees my practice in the old classical building. We take her to dinner and she flatters the girlfriend (wife) or, if we are alone, she just enjoys herself with me at a small table near a window in my apartment. And yet all I can do is watch Switzerland, dwelling on it, because Switzerland is a kind of screen or monitor and not a window that can be opened, that can be smashed. I want more than to watch Switzerland and bring into my life articles that resemble what I have seen there. This leads me to worry that Switzerland is not meant to make up for what has happened, as I thought my diagram showed.

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Rather, what if it has permanently cast my family's history into the contours of my present-day life? I am afraid. If I could even do so, would I choose to forget Switzerland?

"Won't it be lovely?" Mom said. "It will be lovely."

Twenty years have passed since we planned our family trip to Switzerland. We heard about it for months. Then, the weekend before we were to leave, Dad discovered that there were no reservations, no plane tickets, nothing. She had done nothing except talk about where we would go and what we would see. I have tried to discuss this with Dad and Jenny. But each of them long ago gave up Switzerland. This is why at moments when I begin to forget Switzerland, an incredible anxiety overcomes me, as if I have mislaid crucial paperwork or left something valuable in the car overnight on the street. Were I to let go of Switzerland, the memory would be extinguished. The house, open to the summer air. The meals at our glass table. All the photographs from their trip in 1975. Were I to let go of Switzerland, no one would remember how it was. We were a family.

SUMMER AFTERNOONS IN ZURICH

I want to describe my favorite activity in Switzerland for you. Zürichers know all about it—our quality of life here is so high. With the hot sunny days in August comes air so heavy that any degree of work indoors becomes too much to bear. On this kind of afternoon I go to the wardrobe and take out my white towel and dark-blue swim trunks. Down at the bathing pavilion on the Limmat, I leave everything behind. Shoes, pants, collared shirt, belt, dark socks, sunglasses, Rado watch, money clip—part of me means never to come back. Then I dive into the freezing Limmat. I take my time swimming alongside park benches, the docked boats, and the quay's stone walls with iron railings. Out beyond the bridge opens Lake Zurich, black and blue, knit by small sailing boats. There are other swimmers in the lake too. Some strangers, some friends. We all speak loudly above the chill in the water. We splash, we race, at times we touch by accident, at times on purpose. We meet, we part. I swim as far out into the lake as possible, again like I never mean to come back at all. My body floats on Lake Zurich. There is the city and the surrounding mountains beyond, plus all that sky. The sun is true. For a blue instant, everything that has happened is no more, and I am no one. I do decide to return after all, to go back to my cares, my practice, the

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girlfriend (wife), Genevieve and Jurgen, Mom at her glacial lake. I am drawn back against the Limmat past the quays to the pavilion. I climb out of the river and identify the pile of things that make me up in Switzerland. As I piece myself together then, in the face of Zurich, I find the daylight has warmed my clothes for me.