

**Philippus Paracelsus**

**1493-1541 Switzerland**

Maslow prepares to perform the ritual. Not sure of the result this time. A woman he worked with last week has it. She says she feels like she's been thrown against a wall and stomped on.

As he opens the rapid-test box, he visualizes the scene. A big conference room. Everyone vaccinated. And boosted. A little lax in the mask department, but they were pretty spread out. He's been getting regular texts from the others. They are testing obsessively. Waiting for a shoe to drop...actually a little pink line to appear.

Maslow spreads out the instruction sheet, even though he's done the routine a half-dozen times. The pictures are large and clear. A five-year-old could understand them. Some adults, he's not so sure. It seems there are many ways to screw up. Touch the wrong part of the test piece at the wrong time. Get some of the reagents in the wrong hole. Pull the swab out by the swab end. Stick it up your ass instead of your nose. That's not funny.

He carefully counts the six drops into the top hole, wondering if it would make a difference if he did four...or eight. He puts the tip of the swab in his left nostril, makes 3 circles, and repeats in his right. What if he doesn't go deep enough? What if he goes too deep? He slides the swab into the lower hole and up

until it appears in the top, twirls it slowly around three times as instructed, takes the seal thing off, and shuts it like a book.

Maslow goes into the living room so he won't be tempted to peek. He has a cup of coffee and a crossword puzzle ready. Settles himself in. *Four Score and \_\_\_\_\_*. That's easy. Seven. *Lunch artist*. Huh. Six letters. Munch? No, that's five. Not Dali. Oh...Rubens. Of course. Good one. *Lucky sidewalk grate*. What? Seven letters. *Lucky sidewalk grate*??? Weird. Then he pictures it. Oh, Jesus. M-a-r-i-l-y-n. What was that movie? Look it up later. That gives him two letters of a long one. Ten letters: *Alchemist without Equal*. Marilyn's "R" for the third, Rubens "U" next to last. What was his name? Hahnemann? No that was the homeopathy guy. A letter short anyway. Hippocrates. He wasn't really an alchemist. Maslow closes his eyes, tries to quiet his mind, and waits for the name to appear.

"It's positive." A deep guttural voice. Germanic. Long pause as if waiting for Maslow to nod in agreement. "Don't worry. You will live. For now. It's of little importance unless you heal your SELF."

Maslow carefully puts the pencil and puzzle down. Picks up the coffee cup and takes a sip, clearing the here and now for the there and then. But where? And when?

"Humanity will go on. For now." The voice is resigned. Weary. "It's of little importance unless *it* heals its SELF."

Maslow feels the vibration in the back of his throat. A little anticipation. Trepidation. These audio hallucinations? They no longer surprise...or intimidate. The top of his mind scurries to identify the voice. Definitely not a king or queen. An artist or a warrior. A prophet, perhaps? Philosopher? But underneath the guesses, there's stillness.

“Do you know where disease comes from?” The voice pauses. “Air...borne pathogens?” There's a touch of sarcasm, but mostly bemusement. As if Maslow has given a wrong, but close, answer on a test he hasn't studied for.

Maybe it's a professor?

“You've called it so many things. Vapors. Humours. The revenge of jealous gods.” This last said with a tone of thoughtfulness, as if he's considering the possibility.

“Your discoveries about the symphony of life inside your bodies are brilliant. And the instruments you've invented to look closer.” He sighs. Wistful. “I had not even a microscope. But I knew how to *see*. Few of you do.”

Oh. It's a scientist.

“But someday your explanations will appear as naive as those of the ancients who had only the stars to guide them. Which, in truth, have more information than you imagine.”

No. it's a physician, Maslow thinks. Greek? Roman? Medieval? Indian?

Chinese?

“Listen! Soul spirit body. Soul spirit .... Each...a role in disease...healing.”

Maslow has begun to miss a word here and there. Like a cell phone signal interrupted. He slides back in his chair and relaxes his forehead. Listening to the voice like it's a friend on the other end of the line telling a really good story.

“Every disease has a meaning, a *purpose*. For the soul of humanity. For the spirit of every organism it touches.”

This is more than a physician...a shaman?

“Every organ. Every cell. They, too, are being born and dying every moment. And being reborn again either in this life or the next.”

Maslow hears a laugh. Dismissive, rueful, but compassionate in its way. The visitor is shaking his head. He is determined to be heard but assumes he won't be.

Maslow is, in turn, riding his *own* edge. Between determined skepticism and hunger for wonder. Surrendering to the words while challenging their reality.

Either the voice is real or not. He tests it. Takes a peek at a clue. *Fleet of foot*.

Seven letters. Runners? No, the last letter is “y”. “Quickly?”

“Yes. Let's talk about alchemy.” As if Maslow has been waiting to do just that.

Ahh, Maslow smiles. It's the *alchemist without equal*. The voice, reading his mind, chuckles. Turns conversational. Settles in. “Well now, my friend, but if you

could turn any base metal into gold then gold would be worthless, would it not? Far better the miracle of mercury.”

Of course, Maslow thinks. Mercury. The God. Fleet of foot. But why Mercury? If anything, this voice is Saturnine. And what has it to do with gold?

“Mercury, in proper measure, can extract gold from simple stone.”

Is that true? Maslow wonders.

“But that is nothing. In minute doses, mercury can extract disease from the body. Yes, it’s a poison. EVERYTHING is a cure or a poison in proper measure. Even the most virulent of poisons can be a remedy in the hands of the true healer.

“Disease can destroy, yes, but, also cleanse. You. The earth. Humanity. It can poison. It can cure. And it can *transform*.”

Maslow’s mind has finally quieted. He can’t keep up with the words. He can only collect them. To parse and contemplate later.

“Try to understand! The sick perform a great, even noble, service. They are—I don’t expect you to grasp this—providing a home, and a final resting place, for tiny organisms who struggle for life as much as humans do. The healthy, too, perform a great, even noble, service. They maintain a balance. Ultimately, health is as contagious as disease.

“Although the organisms you wage war against inside you are far the wiser. They willingly let go once their work is done. Humans thrash like fish at the end of

the line. And what is their work?" He pauses. "What is yours? I must go slowly here. I will be misunderstood. If understood at all. As I was so often in that lifetime. Listen. Please. Slowly: Their work? To cleanse your body. To help it evolve. Your work? To cleanse your spirit. To help it evolve. Your spirit's work? To cleanse the soul of humanity. To help it evolve. Humanity's work? To cleanse the soul of the earth. To help it evolve...and, in turn, the evolution of all creation. All do their work in proper measure. In sickness and in health. In life and in death.

"So who is more righteous...the well or the sick? Those visited by the disease or those who are immune? You are so quick to blame and shame. There is no right path. There is no wrong path. There is only *your* path."

He sounds disappointed. Almost hopeless. How can he explain it?

"I assure you, this has little to do with your ideas of good or bad, or right or wrong. NO!" The word is shouted. "No one *deserves* to suffer. No one *deserves* to be unwell. The disease is an opportunity. For those who stay well. For those who become sick. For those who go on living. For those who pass on.

"It serves everyone, in equal measure.

"Listen to me! Please! The true healer is a *guide*. He leads the patient not *back* to health but *forward* to health."

Maslow starts to think. He can't help it. Ideas crash into assumptions. He struggles for quiet.

The voice waits. Patiently. Now returns.

“So you see? We are born to serve something unfathomable. In ways that, too, are unfathomable. For reasons, too, are unfathomable. Even to myself.”

This said with surprising humility.

“Listen.” They are confidantes now. “You are to all of humanity as those tiny organisms are to you. Like them, you will serve unknowingly. It is a mystery. Can you live with that? That mystery? Will you go gracefully when your work is done?”

“You are here to heal YOURSELF! And, in that...” A deep sigh from the eternal... “heal all creation.”

“Oh...if I could but transform the wisdom of the dead into the understanding of the living that, that would be alchemy.”

Maslow waits. But he knows the voice is gone. It's like awakening from a dream. Or, rather, perhaps, like going back to sleep yet again. He picks up the crossword puzzle, looks at it, and nods his head. Then, he walks over to see the result of the test. But he already knows what it is.

And now he also knows the name.

Paracelsus.