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This would have been easy enough a few years ago. (Such a statement might imply that there was a time when I was not deteriorating, and I assume this must have been the case, but the truth is I have no memory of it, this time before my deterioration. Which is not to say that I have no memory of this time at all. What I mean is that I have no memory of what it was to have a body which was not in decline, which was not curling in on itself in a way that has led to the one I inhabit today, where any degree of uncurling - which is to say any reversal of the curling process - seems frankly implausible. Which would appear to beg a further question; was there a time when my body was on the advance, bettering itself, progressing towards a peak from which any further progress could only have meant reversal, and deterioration? I can only assume that there was, and that this is what was happening before, during the time of which my memory fails. After all, things do not stand still where bodies are concerned, they must be moving one way or the other, they must be on the rise or the fall, it is their nature. If I cannot remember the rise, it must have been a long time ago, before the various elements of the fall arose to claim the space in my memory. I remember a kind of rise; growing out of my clothes, achieving a dusting of adolescent hair and suchlike, but it seems to me that my body was in decline even as it was increasing in size. Perhaps the fall began when I was very young, before my memories could form? Perhaps it began in the womb itself? Perhaps it began at the very start, when that first cell split, and the only time I stood flawless, with the promise of a rising road ahead, was at that moment of conception - a single cell, pure and undivided?)

A few years ago, yes, this would have been easy enough. I know this not from any true appreciation of what it was to inhabit a body with potential intact, but rather from the simple facts as they occurred. I remember what it was for my feet to alight on the floor and propel me in the direction of my choice. I remember myself poised over the pan, trusting in the act of relief. That I have no recollection of some of the intermediate steps serves all the proof I need that these caused me no difficulty. The separation of the fly piece, the slipping of the thumbs inside the waistline, the slow descent of the drawers, leave no imprint today, yet there can be no doubt that these actions, or some equivalents resulting in the same effect, must have taken place. They would have been preceded, perhaps, by a loosening of the belt, in which case the fingers, in their former flush of delicacy, would have been involved. It is also possible that there was no belt. In fact, assuming that the time I am recalling only barely precedes the start of my deterioration, this must have been the case for this was the stage at which I, and those who ministered to me, began to favour elastic for its greater comfort (me) and simplicity (them), not to mention its logic (style being a minor consideration). More recently, of course, even the elastic has become de trop. More recently the

very contours of what I hesitate to call my body (in case this brings to mind an uncurled backbone, a pigeon chest, a serviceable set of limbs) have mitigated against the need for elastic at all, which is to say that the angle between waist and pelvis makes it almost impossible for a conventional lowering of the drawers to be accomplished.

Yes, a few years ago my progress between rooms would have raised no eyebrows among casual observers, if such figures could be imagined loitering here on the upper floor of the house of my twin, midway through the afternoon of a normal working day. A few years ago this movement by itself would have resulted in both feet being established – planted - on the floor. There is a temptation, which I resist, to ascribe squareness to the mode of this planting, or at least to its outcome. No movement of mine could have been described as accomplished squarely, in the sense that any pair of limbs could be induced to oppose one another by right angles (or divisions thereof). No, even those few years ago, a spry forty-five degrees would have been barely conceivable. (Of course, there is no methodological reason for such a mathematical constraint, and it might seem obtuse to suggest one, but do not imagine that, given the right geometric instrumentation, I would not have coaxed them towards precision of this sort. Do not imagine that I haven't the time or the inclination to cater to any whim I might conceive, once I have established its plausibility.)

The current tendency of my upper body would induce it to topple forwards well before the feet make contact with the floor. A low bench or equivalent might be proposed but this would only demonstrate the proposer's ignorance of this tendency. My centre of gravity, if such a thing can be imagined on a body like mine, disposes me inescapably forwards without the compensation of an equivalent reversal, so that I may be seen to rock, advancing slowly until I am brought up by the collision of my face (poor battered me!) with the floor or, if I am sufficiently nimble (a rapidly reducing probability), through a hastily extended arm. The prospect of facial distress has more or less eliminated any appetite I might have had for leading with my feet. These days a more forgiving approach is needed. Picture an athlete, a high jumper using the old-fashioned straddle approach. She leads with her leg, true, but the rest of the body must be hauled across the void before the other leg can be given its chance, begrudgingly it seems, almost, one can hardly avoid concluding, as though the jumper would prefer it not to exist, would perhaps welcome its timely excision, like a lizard's tail, lest it be permitted, once it has served its purpose of propelling her into the air, to risk its own calamitous contact with the bar. My attitude between bed and floor resembles the athlete's in a way. (Disregard the obvious distinctions and I think the comparison stands.) The main thing to envisage is the brief clenching of the mattress between the knees while I ready myself for a landing on the

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rug which it is the clench's endeavour to postpone (but not, alas, to avoid). The rug (a sheep's flayed hide, unshorn and laundered, a nice fleecy destination for an ordinary pair of feet) is not a pleasure to which I can aspire but at least it is an improvement on the unforgiving boards that would await me on the other side of the bed.

Safely down now, I must transport myself the short distance required without compromising the bedroom floor, and especially the clean white fleece thereon. A chariot (of sorts) awaits me, next to the open doorway, but this is no longer any use to me alone, without assistance. It has the glistening wheel rims with which the muscular young, almost exclusively crippled in motorcycle accidents, are wont to perform applause-worthy feats of athleticism, but even if I was able to climb aboard without tipping the whole thing over, the curve of my body would not permit my hands to emerge at an angle with which it would be possible to make use of them. There was a time when I might have been able to clamber into position and somehow heave my body weight (which after all has never amounted to much) forwards. But in those days it was easier, truth be told, to walk the short distances I was capable of propelling myself, and I only submitted to the chair for the convenience and, let us be honest, the conceit, of others. How much more would my companions rather be seen to wheel me, with all its attendant self-regard, than to walk with me, exercising their forbearance in private, while I turn every simple trip into an expedition, doubling, tripling or otherwise multiplying its duration without any obvious compensation to them?

The position in which I find myself is not a promising one from which to begin this next stage of the process. From the outside it may resemble nothing more than an inclination to take up the least amount of space, not just in the two planar dimensions but in their cuboid equivalent as well. But there is little that is willed or controlled in the way these terms are usually understood, that is, as a result of knowingly made choices on my part. (I might as well make the observation here that my willed movements add up to little more than a striving against my body's relentless tendency to curl, the arc of my torso being merely the most evident in a diminishing series of whorls and spirals that culminate in the talon-like twists of my fingers and toes. I have even thought of leaving the nails uncut, to encourage a tendency I have observed towards their own quite satisfying coils. Suitable instruments would no doubt highlight the curl's perpetuation through scales too small to be seen unaided, down to the very crescents described by my cells as they pull apart from one another.) Useful motion would be much less fraught if the floors in this part of the house were left uncovered. White tiles, which encase most of the ground floor, are a considerable aid to the traction I require even if they tend to be unforgiving (and even quite icy during the winter months). My preference,

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though, is for polished boards, parquet if possible, which is what I suspect lies beneath these lush carpets. It more readily takes on the temperature of its surrounds, it has a certain give when compared with tiles, even a kind of softness that affirms its comparatively recent incarnation as living tissue (although we should not forget that what has ended up as tiles was once itself the crumpled shells of ancient sea creatures) not to mention a degree of grip that can be extracted from its grain (although I don't rule out the possibility that this may be wishful thinking on my part). Carpets allow for no semblance of slip or slide and certainly no prospect of building momentum. Inching is the only means to progress and it cannot be initiated in the parts more usually associated with self-propulsion, the feet, or possibly the hands. Both sets of limbs are too caught up in their own struggle against the curl to be of much use in this. It is the buds of the limbs, mainly the shoulders, where I have found the most promise. It sometimes seems as if these arms are actually superfluous and would better serve this purpose in truncated form, minus the fingers or hands, or even perhaps the elbows.

I will now describe how I may be seen to advance. Here is my chin, almost grazing my folded knees, and as it does so it is my shoulder which establishes its own encouraging contact with the carpet. It is to this that I turn. Either one will do, the choice of shoulder is only determined by the way I happen to have landed. What I do is swivel it, as though attempting to use it to scratch my nose, and having swivelled to its fullest extent, use friction to pull forwards by that same distance whatever is left behind. In this way I find I can move six to nine inches at a time, the span of a hand (yours, not mine). My progress is more rapid than might be inferred from this description. My body - my frame - takes on a sort of rocking motion (there are many such motions in my life) which, once set in train, slowly gathers its own momentum. I am adept at moving this way and would be confident in a race across any stretch of carpet against a person with unimpaired faculties whose limbs were restricted in line with my own. Still, it would have been easier a few years ago, when more of my own faculties were available. Before that it would have been easier still; notwithstanding that both arms were available to me then, I had use of my legs as well. There was a point in my life when I could have been expected to cross a room in a position that might roughly be characterised as upright; in other words it was possible, after a fashion, for me to walk. (A less forgiving observer might have called it a shuffle.) Even then the curl was sufficiently advanced that my eyes, forced downwards as they were, could provide me no intelligence of any obstacle further ahead than my own truncated body length. However, I did get around without recourse to chariots of any description and with only occasional need of sticks or crutches. What might have been useful,

but was never suggested, was a small camera which could have been attached to the crown of my head (which might as well have been helmeted if only to provide a reliable fixture for it), whose picture could have been conveyed, via some compliant protocol, to a screen-based device I could have held in my hand, to display for me its view of potential obstacles as I advanced. No, nothing like this was ever mentioned. I would have suggested it myself but it did not occur to me until later when it was, of course, too late. Perhaps the appropriate gadgetry had yet to be invented, and by the time it was (for it has been), my requirements had progressed. At that time when I was, if I may put it this way, at my peak, I was even able to negotiate a few stairs. I still can, in a way, but that is only thanks to the elaborate and expensive conveyance with which my brother has enhanced his staircase here. I say enhanced, but any apprehension of the history of this house, and the central role that was planned for the staircase, could only view it as a disfigurement. I prefer to think of it as a symbol of his devotion to me.

Assessed by ordinary criteria, this bedroom is the best in the house. In size it is the largest, and it has its own bathroom (all arranged for my peculiar needs, which I shall describe in due course) and its extravagant window takes in a view across the spacious backyard, with its lawn and pool and the trees that shield it from the prying of neighbours with equivalent lookouts (a shielding that, unusually, is not reciprocated, with the upshot that I am afforded a view of the almost unused pool of the neighbours on one side and even a partial view of the pool of the next house along, well used this one even at night where I have sometimes seen them cavorting under nebulous lighting that does not quite expose their state of undress - which provokes a feeling not so much of prurience, as a sense of wonder at the idea that it could be so unremarkable to exist inside a body that might be worth spying on at all.) There was a time when I craved the water myself. It was where I most nearly narrowed the gap between myself and my peers. While they cavorted according to their own lights, splashing and jumping and thrashing around after balls and suchlike, I could be seen in the shallow end, hanging like a jellyfish, propelling myself short distances with a scooping motion I had developed using my hands alone and, if not exactly gathering the ball and tossing it back into the fray, at least saluting the fact, as it flew by, that we were all suspended in the same medium. Those times are long gone. Although my body, in outline, has more and more approached that of a jellyfish, it is a long way from one in texture, being more like a prawn, stiff and calcified, almost as if glazed with an exoskeleton of its own. To save us all from embarrassment I remain a spectator these days, assuming I am able to arrange myself into a position from which spectating is feasible. Recently this has become more difficult. Considerations of courtesy and taste tend to limit

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its mention, but it must have occurred to those around me, just as it has occurred to me, that I may be facing the final stretch. The real point of interest now is just how far my deterioration will have advanced before my body finally gives up, or put another way, my putative condition when I take my final breath. How much further can the curl progress and what will it be that actually does for me? Will it be a simple inability at a certain point to fill my lungs, in which case a time must be approaching when I start to suffocate, and if this is the case, at what point will it become unbearable (as it surely must) and might it be possible, on the assumption that I retain the urge to carry on, to slow or even somehow temporarily stall the process? Or conversely will it be possible, once the torment of unfulfilled lungs is at its deepest and there is no hope of reprieve, to hasten the process, to embrace the inevitable, to somehow thwart those final minutes, hours or days? Or again, will I succumb to some happy interference? Will some malady, some contamination, broach my weakened defences and carry me off in its own manner by stalling my heart or, in what might be construed as the final irony by those with a taste for such things, by smothering my breathing apparatus in the manner to which my curl was tending me anyway? For when all is said and done, it seems that there are two ways for a body to succumb. It is in the breath or the heartbeat, and if either falters the game is up. Another possibility, which I have to consider, is the hastening of the process through artificial means, administered by myself or some doughty accomplice. This must always be a consideration in speculations of this kind even if it is one which is not, ultimately, to be entertained. I can imagine no other candidate for this role than my brother, especially if there were consequences to be faced, which there might be, the laws being what they are, and it would suit a certain martyred bent of his to face them after I am gone. One thing I can state with confidence is that no physical force would be involved. Violence has always been distasteful to me, notwithstanding that it's something I am no longer capable of inflicting, even if a suitable weapon could be pressed into my hand. My preferred method would be a simple surfeit of one of my medications. There are many of these and several would do the job taken in a quantity it is possible for me to accumulate. But I doubt it would ever come to this. All my life I have observed the rise and fall of my physical self with a sort of fascination and I believe it would be a betrayal of this process, which it seems to me may be my life's main purpose, not to see it all the way through to the end.