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## What goes around comes around

*I moved forward, out of the blackest sleep, to find myself surrounded by doctors...American doctors:*

I sensed their vigor, scarcely held in check, like the profusion of their body hair; and the forbidding touch of their forbidding hands—doctor's hands, so strong, so clean, so aromatic. Although my paralysis was pretty well complete, I did find that I could move my eyes. At any rate, my eyes moved. The doctors seemed to be availing themselves of my immobility. They were, I sensed, discussing my case, but also other matters having to do with their copious free time: hobbies, and so on. And the thought came to me, surprising in its fluency and confidence, fully formed, fully settled: How I hate doctors. Any doctors. All doctors. Consider the Jewish joke, with the old lady running distractedly along the seashore: *Help! My son the doctor is drowning*. Amusing, I suppose. Her pride, I suppose, is amusing: it is greater than her love. But why the pride in these *doctor* children (why not shame, why not incredulous dread?): intimates of bacilli and trichinae, of trauma and mortification, with their disgusting vocabulary and their disgusting furniture (the bloodstained rubber bib, hanging on its hook). They are life's gatekeepers. And why would anyone want to be that?

The doctors around my bed were, of course, in leisurewear; they sent off a fuzz of suntanned self-possession, together with the unanimity that comes from safety in numbers. Given my circumstances, I might have found their manner insultingly casual. Yet I was reassured by the very vapidness of these doctors or joggers or bodybuilders, these vigor-experts—something to do with their unsmiling pursuit of the good life. The good life, at least, is better than the bad life. It features windsurfing, for example, and sweet deals in futures, and archery, and hang gliding, and fine dining. In my sleep I had dreamed of a ... No, it wasn't like that. Let me put it this way: presiding over the darkness out of which I had loomed there was a figure, a male shape, with an entirely unmanageable aura, containing such things as beauty, terror, love, filth, and above all power. This male shape or essence seemed to be wearing a white coat (a medic's stark white smock). And black boots. And a certain kind of smile. I think the image might have been a ghost-negative of doctor number one—his black tracksuit and power-pack plimsolls, and the satisfied wince he gave as he pointed at my chest with a shake of his head.