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HEALTH

BODY: TIGHT & BATTERED



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TORO POSTED BY: Editors
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how bad could that be? It's not like Tyson is still champ. And a punch is a punch, right? I can take a hit or two. Besides, Bray says it's like 10 rounds with Tyson, meaning I've lasted through nine which makes me a pretty good contender myself.

I'm hip enough to professional boxing to know who Mike Tyson is. But when Dr. Bray tells me the first few weeks after surgery will feel like I've gone 10 rounds with Tyson, I figured

And it's not like I've just had surgery on my ear which I understand to be the most vulnerable body part in a Tyson fight.

Therefore: cosmetic surgery is a cake-walk.

It's Sunday...

I muster up enough ambition to take a shower. Even now, the idea of anything touching my body let alone a spray of hot water, makes me cringe. I peel off the lycra-like body suit someone squeezed me into while I lay in an anesthetic stupor. The suit is the kind of one-piece skin-tight surfer outfit you hope never to see on anyone older than 20 — black, stretching from mid-thigh to mid-bicep. Between the

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nylon and my bruised body are sponges cut out into over-sized puzzle pieces, contoured and shaped to fit. It's the sponges, not me, that look pudgy.

Four days earlier in the recovery room...

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TORO WOMAN

JESSICA PHILLIPS: AGELESS BEAUTY

Sharon is there, smiling down at me. "It went very well," she says being careful to use my name. There is something about hearing your name called when waking from an anesthetic sleep that makes one think of whispered poetry, divinity, a choir of soft voices. "Your abs, your chest, everything perfect."

Her face tells me that it's true — that even by Dr. Bray standards, a miracle has been performed.

I spend the next while recovering. I speak non-stop regaling everyone in hearing distance, about the article I'm writing, about my wife, my daughter and I pray that I stopped somewhere within those parameters, but I can't be sure. But Sharon doesn't seem to mind, listening as if her sole purpose is to be entertained by me. I realize that some of my happiest moments in life happen while coming out of an anesthetic high ... followed by a pain-killer high.

Paulette comes up and the percocets have kicked in. I practically lunge for her. She is my contact, my life-line, my partner through the whole ordeal. I see the sudden look of apprehension in her face, she backs away ever so slightly, then leans in to give me a hug.

"It's the percocets," I explain.

"Yes," Paulette agrees. "You seem very happy."

Back home, I begin to understand the full weight of Dr. Bray's warning: I decide that Tyson must be a helluvah fighter. While on painkillers, all is bearable, although whatever liquid they pumped into me to prevent fat from shifting into unwanted places, seeps from me like water from a pin-prick in a balloon. I wake up several times at night in drenched sheets reminiscent of that guy in *The Godfather* who finds a horse's head under his covers.

TORO editor William Morrassutti emails me wishing me the best. I wonder, briefly, if he might feel some guilt for setting me up on this assignment. I consider, briefly, that he should.

There are messages for me left on my mobile from both Dr. Bray and Paulette. They want to know how I'm doing. Have there been any complications? Am I managing the pain?



Managing the pain...

Saturday night. My family is in Ottawa. I am certain I can look after myself. I take two percocets and two Tylenol 3s. Watching television strikes me as a reasonable diversion. Did I also have a beer? I shouldn't have.

The television starts projecting in 3D. I am watching the Leafs battle the Sens. No one's winning. My basement den rises to the ground level. The floor folds in around me so that all dimension is lost except for the images on television which

remain in 3D. I know it's the drugs. I try to enjoy it. Instead I fall asleep. Or maybe I passed out.

I wake up with the need to shower.

I peel off the lycra suit. The sponges, now four days old, stick to me like Post-it notes on a cork board. I peel them off and see my new body for the first time.

Even with the swelling and the bruises I can tell that I'm slender again. My chest is in the right proportion. It frightens me a bit to see me like this. But I like it. There is still evidence of Dr. Bray's art work on my body, segmented and numbered like a carpenter's work plan.

Beneath the shower I can only sense the light touch of water hitting me. There is no other feeling. I am numb and wonder if this is permanent. If I'll ever get back to the sensations and the comfortableness that was once me — flab and all.

A week later...

Showering has become easier. The bruising and swelling is less. I still am confined to the lycra body suit, but the sponges are, for the most part, removed.

I meet Dr. Bray to take out the stitches. He's impressed with the healing, and so am I.

"It will take a few months to achieve the full effect, but we are aligned with the muscle line," he tells me. Muscle lines. When was the last time I had muscle lines? All is good.



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A few months seems like a long time. I'm anxious to be free of the body suit and the painkillers (I have weaned to a couple of Advil, extra strength). But I can already see the results and I'm happy of where I'm heading.

Still, I wonder have I done this entirely out of conceit and ego? Are those the reasons people who undergo cosmetic surgery prefer to remain anonymous? No one wants to parade their vanity.

My friend Catherine who picks me up from the clinic tells me she was careful putting on her makeup for fear that if she arrived unkept Paulette, Sharon and Dr. Bray would strap her down and force-apply a facelift.

I laugh, but can't help think how self-image toys with us. Catherine of course is kidding. And she of all people has no need to pine for any alterations — she likely would say the same of me. But there it is anyway: one can't help but consider the possibilities when the possibilities are there.

One sleepless night when the pain seemed excessive and I was not ready to induce another 3D television experience, my wife said, out of sympathy, "I hope this was worth it."

"Me too." I replied.

Several weeks later and I can say that it was.

Because I know of no journey, emotional, intellectual, spiritual or physical that doesn't require commitment, action and at least some trepidation and pain.

Now, If I can only keep my pants from slipping off my waist.

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POSTED BY: Valerie Freund
April 7, 2011

Thom: I really enjoyed your article. Certainly glad to know that it had the results you were hoping for. Hmmm, I should send the man I'm married to!!Great work!

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