Having hyperventilated, I abandoned myself to the keys, hardly knowing where I was heading except that I would not pause until the end -- my only rule being that the entire sentence would be composed in a single breath, so that the end of oxygen would designate not just the incapacity for further thought but the completion of that thought, signified by a full stop.

Upon completing the sentence, I caught my breath and reflected on what it had disclosed to me. The ideal, I thought, is to synchronize the meaning of our existence with its duration: neither to die before meaning is complete nor to outlive that completion. Most would be satisfied with only a vague correspondence between meaning and duration; they lack the discipline to strive for better coordination. The rare genuine martyrs of history can manage to synchronize them down to a particular day. But has anyone attained the harmony within a minute or a second?

I hypothesized that the intensity of fulfillment was inversely proportional to the duration of the gap between termination of meaning and termination of being. Thus, a separation of one second would result in a fulfillment 60 times greater than that resulting from a separation of one minute.

It should be noted that, not believing in any afterlife, I did not envision any retrospective savoring of the fulfillment after death; no, the fulfillment would have to suffice unto itself and could not be contemplated or measured thereafter. This seemed only fitting.

Furthermore, measurement would be impossible if I managed to attain the ideal: perfect coordination between being and meaning, such that the gap would equal zero and the fulfillment would be infinite. Even in the absence of immortality, this procedure would hold out the promise of divinity.

I have now worked out all the ramifications of my hypothesis to my satisfaction. The final communication of the idea is almost complete, and the preparations for extinction have been made. All that remains
There's only one passenger cabin on this freighter, a curiosity or some kind of emergency facility. Through a friend of a friend, you managed to book the room. Now you're a week into the trip across the Pacific, and memories of the life you used to lead are fading.

The crew of this enormous ship is small, and they keep to themselves. They'll give you a nod or a brusque "How's it goin'?" at the canteen, but that's about it. That's fine with you; you're not here to socialize on a pleasure cruise.

There are narrow walkways on deck. You can circumambulate the mountain of containers that loom over you, flat, rusty, painted with the insignia of unknown corporations. On a sunny day, the difference between the north and south sides of the ship is almost like the bright and dark sides of the Moon: on one side, the unfiltered rays bake the containers and exacerbate the light and warmth.

When a storm gathers and rushes over the ship, you venture out -- the only one there -- and hold a railing while sheets of water baptize the great ship, and you sense a slow, slow roll.

There is always the deep vibration of the turbines.

There is always the ocean, tolerating your passage, showing you only the thinnest layer of its dark reserves.

Your cabin has no windows and just enough room for a bunk, a table, and a washroom. You brought no phone, no music, no reading material -- only a small dictionary and the little Underwood that sits on the table.

Write the last paragraph of the last page that you will type just before the ship pulls into Shanghai.
25. Writing prompt #2

It was going to be so cool, riding the rails like a Depression hobo. You had your kit bag, your little stash of food and drink, a sleeping bag. Not much money -- you didn't want to be worrying about getting it stolen. Better to busk (you can sing) and wash dishes and spare-change it across the country.

In the Oakland rail yards you snuck around until you saw the empty freight car with its door cracked open. There were slats in the sides -- it was some kind of cattle car -- so you could even watch the scenery go by. The breeze wouldn't bother you, it was July and it would be warm even when you rolled through the Rockies.

You figured you'd be fine for three, four days if necessary. Denver would be a great place to get off.

Before the train left Oakland, they came by and shut the door. It crashed closed with an all-too-solid sound. Yeah, sure enough, you were locked in. You tried not to panic. This just meant that you'd have to deal with a surprise destination. Denver, Reno, jail, whatever -- you'd deal with it, that was the whole idea of this adventure.

The creaking, rocking, accelerating rumble of the train helped you relax and just enjoy the scenery glimpsed through the slats. The Central Valley gave off rich scents of manure and soil and concrete in the sun. The hills of the Gold Country were tawny and dotted with what might be olive trees.

The train was chugging up into the Sierra Nevada. It let out a whistle that was like a whale song, mournful and reverberating, as it passed into a tunnel.

This was a long tunnel, very long, black as blindness. You must have been in it for an hour and there was still no light from the other side.

Then you noticed that the sounds were diminishing, slowing, grinding down. The train was decelerating, not using its brakes but letting the momentum roll itself out on the tunnel tracks. It seemed to take forever, but finally there was no sound and no motion.

You've been pacing, palpating the surfaces of the car, yanking at the door, shouting, but all you hear is the echoes of your hoarse voice. Your food and drink are gone. It's getting hard to breathe. You stumble across your kit bag and you feel a sheet of paper -- it's that poster for your friend's gig in the city -- and a ballpoint pen.

What do you write?
... travelers ... finding themselves lost in some forest, should not wander about turning this way and that, nor, worse still, stop in one place, but should always walk in as straight a line as they can in one direction and never change it for feeble reasons, even if at the outset it had perhaps been only chance that made them choose it ... -- Descartes

The opening of the National Forest Highway was greeted with delight by sportsmen, vacationers, loggers, and nearly everyone except a few fanatics who had preferred the old, winding, two-lane road and the backpacking trails. Now there were eight lanes of smooth convenience, with as few dips and turns as possible, accommodating even the most deluxe RV.

The most modern hotels, motels, restaurants, and attractions followed the highway and sprang up at every exit.

The attractions of the National Forest became so plentiful that the Highway had to be extended to 12 lanes, and the less important hills, valleys, and streams had to be leveled. The result of the work were excellent: more travelers than ever visited the park, and thriving communities of year-round inhabitants, service staff, and the infrastructure to meet their needs sprang up at every interchange.

But the residents of the National Forest needed their own vacations. New highways and facilities were built to accommodate their trips to the National Scenic Valley, the National River Gorge, the National Wetlands, and other recreational resources.

I've spent the last five years on the Grand Tour in my Potawatomi All-Terrain Mobile Mansion. I've seen it all: the National River Gorge Highway, the rest stops of the National Wetlands Highway, the fueling islands on the National Continental Divide Highway, the acres of RV City. It's almost hypnotic, spending your hours letting the road slip past your windshield, unsure whether you're climbing or descending, letting the GPS keep you up to date on your location.

Maybe it's hypnosis that led me to pull over here. I'm not sure why, but I had to do it, even though the vehicle practically overlaps into the traffic lanes from the shoulder, and the 16-wheelers are honking as they blow by. I'm climbing over the barrier, through the drainage ditch, and into a scrubby, patchy grove of evergreens that hasn't yet been paved over. The sound of the highway follows me but quiets down a little as I head straight away from it, perpendicular to the road. The scent of exhaust mixes with an unfamiliar smell of sap. I splash through a feeble stream. Before long, I hear the highway sound getting louder again, ahead of me. I slow down, then sit on a boulder.

What's next?