

When I am out wandering, I never *mean* to walk by the pit. I leave my home and start in whatever direction I fancy and once I lose count of how many twists and turns that my feet have taken, I usually first notice the smell.

One day, as I burrow deep into the aortal streetways of my neighbourhood where the grass is ever pristinely snipped and automobiles all freshly waxed, I stumble upon the pit for the first time. As I chirp a Hello to a smartly dressed man dragging a leashed animal behind him, I am unnerved by the presence of a black maw - approximately a meter in diameter - that opens up in the space between two brightly coloured residences on my left. My thoughts are of yellow warning tape and sprained ankles as I resolve to hurry past the strange hole.

*Surely something must soon be done about such an immediate safety hazard, I think to myself. It's only a matter of time before something of importance is lost down there.*

After obsessing about the logistical pitfalls of excavating such a deep hole for what seems to be several minutes, I shake the daydreams out of my eyes and am suddenly aware that I've stopped walking. Looking down, I realize that I'm standing at the very edge of the chasm which I'd thought to have passed minutes ago.

*How silly of me, I chide my absent-mindedness. I won't start meeting deadlines by standing around looking into sinkholes all day. I really must get going, I'm almost certainly late for-*

My mind is blank.

I am aware that I am behind schedule for some pressing rendezvous (*Perhaps a meeting with my publisher? A parent-teacher interview?*), but I cannot avert my mind's eye from thoughts of this pit. No matter how I strain my memory, my meticulously scheduled plans for the day completely elude me. As sweat pools beneath my arms and my feet sink into the pavement, a single thought screeches through my mind like a fork against porcelain blankness.

*Family.*

*Of course. I must return home to my family. They may have a rational explanation for this bizarre pit, or why it so forcefully tugs on one's thoughts.*

I tear myself from the mental pull and start towards my home. Several steps down the sidewalk, my mind relaxes from its rigid coil. A block away, I no longer feel a compulsion to scream. By the time I

reach my own street, the ringing in my ears has ebbed away to silence. Still, a primal element of self-preservation lurks behind my eyelids, insisting that I must warn my Perdita. My little Ido and Andata. They must know not to wander near the pit, lest they be pulled in as I nearly was.

I burst through my front door and my voice cracks as I call for my beloved.

I feel a deepening well of dread in my stomach as I search each room for signs of life.

I careen into my kitchen and see a small note on the dinner table.

*Dear;*

*Mother is sick. Taking children for a visit. Hope you understand. Will see you soon.*

*-P.*

The room is silent for several minutes save for the deep thrum of my heart. I am relieved beyond words. By the time they are back, someone will have taken care of the pit problem, surely.

That night, I dream that I am standing in my living room. I am holding Perdita's farewell note. The full stop that punctuates the memo slowly grows, blackening the entire slip of paper before engulfing my hand, arm, and soon my entire body. The ink soaks through the note and drips down onto the floor in tarry globules. Once it has fully seeped into the carpet, I begin to sink into the ground, straining to free my legs and gasping for breath. As the walls cave in and I feel my world ending, I try and fail to remember my own name. Now engulfed in darkness, my lungs shriek in crackling agony; my teeth clench and become spongy; sensation recedes from my fingertips; nothingness bites at my periphery. I hear a low buzzing sound through the blank space as if through several layers of aluminum foil. It resembles a voice.

It asks if I would like to breathe again.

It asks if I truly love my family.

It asks if I'm proud of the pretty little suburban life that I've built for myself.

It asks all of these things in a single word.

*Feed.*

Beginning as a breathless whisper and rising to a tantrumatic scream, the word stretches on for hours. My eardrums split open, and I feel the groan of an ancient cornerstone deep within me as it is rattled loose by the din.

I wake with a start, frantically reaching for the journal on my bedside, in which I keep a record of my nightmares as fuel for my creative endeavours. Opening the book to the current date and grabbing at

the retreating threads of the dream, I uncap a ballpoint pen and attempt to outline the dread that gripped me in that cacophonous void. When I am done, I scan my work and see nothing but childlike scribbles and blots of blue ink. I realize with horror that I have forgotten how to write.

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It is a few days before I happen upon the pit again. My inability to write in complete sentences presents a unique challenge to my regular assortment of deadlines and quotas, but fortunately I have already been avoiding all contact with my publisher for weeks through a clever chain of deferrals, excuses, and forwarded phone numbers. When it is absolutely necessary to send messages to a business acquaintances, I have found that a series of pictographic doodles serves to both inform and amuse any who I must come in contact with. I occupy most of my time sitting in Ido and Andata's rooms, glazing over photo albums and examining their toys for defects. Ido's train collection (a gift from Perdita's mother) is especially fascinating to me, but one morning upon close inspection I find my eyes transfixed on a dark discolouration on the side of a yellow model engine. I tuck it away in my coat pocket, and in my notebook (marked "REMINDERS") I draw a simple rendering of myself remodelling the toy with fresh paint.

One afternoon, after feeling a distinct pang of boredom I decide to call up Ed Schwärze, an old classmate of mine, to chat. He is thrilled to hear from me, and wishes to have me over for dinner at the soonest possible convenience, promising me a hearty meal in return for the latest gossip relating to my life. I hang up the phone and set to preparations for the outing.

First, I enter my study. Affixed to the wall is a detailed map of my city, every street and pathway branching and converging like cracks in a grand mirror. Near the centre there is a bright red dot; my own residence. A few blocks away there is a dark black marker spot; the place where I encountered the pit. To avoid nightmares and further memory loss, I plan my daily routes to stray as far as possible from that street. Quickly memorizing the directions to my host's home, I then move to the preparation of conversation.

An explanation: dating back to my childhood, speaking with peers has been an area of particular weakness for me. To remedy this, my dear mother would sit with me for hours on end, meticulously mapping out conversations and accounting for the the most probable responses to each topic of interest

that I intended to bring up. In planning for this particular meeting, I draw seventy five diagrams in the REMINDERS notebook, including a sunny picture of myself and Perdita's wedding, the signing of my first publishing deal, and many illustrations of recent elections, wars, and public executions. Satisfied with my notes, I dress myself in fine clothing and leave the house.

The route to my host's home is fairly simple, following the main thoroughfares of my neighbourhood save for a small detour which I must take through a newly erected suburb in order to avoid the pit. By my estimation, it should not take more than an hour to complete the journey.

*A beautiful day, I muse, staring skyward at the approximate approximate halfway point of my trek. That's a worryingly large formation of dark cumulonimbi on the horizon, but it shall surely be dissipated by the time I return home from dinner. I do hope this turns out to be a pleasant evening, it has been so long since I spoke with Ed, and I feel that I am such a different person he may not even recognize me. Perhaps when I see him I will do our primary school salute, for old times sa-*

I step on my lace and come crashing down onto the sidewalk, skidding onto a house's front lawn.. A searing pain alerts me that the knees of my trousers have ripped against the concrete, the skin no doubt following suit. I attempt to lift myself from the ground, but the grass gives way under my left hand and my balance is thrown into disarray. I begin to roll sideways into a growing sinkhole, catching hold of the sidewalk with bloodied hands as my legs hang above the gaping chasm.

*No.*

I could not have miscalculated in my directions.

*Please, no.*

A deep tremor rumbles miles below my feet.

*This cannot be happening. A nightmare.*

With herculean effort and manic adrenaline I strain to hoist myself. Gravity is more forceful than usual. The sinews in my shoulders scream in pain and I feel muscles tearing as I finally make it over the ledge. Panting, I look back into the pit. The tremor continues, the familiar aluminum buzz growing in intensity.

*Feed.*

Not a nightmare. This cannot be happening but this is no nightmare. The rumbling causes my teeth to rattle in my skull

*Feed.*

My hand instinctually moves to my coat pocket and finds a hard metal shape.

*Feed.*

With tears in my eyes, I lift Ido's train, holding it above the pit. It is the colour of rotten fruit. I hope he will forgive me.

*Feed.*

The model engine falls from my hand and disappears into darkness. I do not hear it reach the bottom for what feels like minutes. The aluminum buzzing reaches a climax and ceases. The stench of burning plastic fills the air. Deep inside the pit, where there was once nothing I can now make out shapes. More of my son's toys. Hundreds of them. A stuffed bear lost many years ago, a mechanical boat destroyed during a tantrum, a portable electronic taken away from him for overuse.

As the layer of toys rises closer to the surface, the topmost objects begin to rot, turning to mud, then dirt before being overgrown with grass. As quickly as the pit appeared, it has been filled in. No trace of it remains on the lawn.

Composing myself, I dust off my clothing. Though my knees still bleed and my shirt sticks with sweat to my back from the ordeal, my mind feels remarkably cleansed and I am happy to put the encounter behind me. I look up to the sky. The dark clouds are still far away.

*A beautiful day.*

I realize how late I am, and hurry onwards to Ed's house.



When I arrive, I am greeted at the door by a sickly looking fellow much older than myself, who after just a few words begins coughing in a heaving fit for a somewhat uncomfortable amount of time.

"Ed?" I ask. "Ed Schwärze?" I tentatively raise my right fist to my chest with my index finger extended upwards.

“You old fool!” the man says, hacking one last cough before returning the gesture with his middle and index finger extended. “Can’t even remember the salute, can you? Has it been that long since we’ve seen each other?”

I smile sheepishly and my face grows hot. The Ed I knew in primary school was a strong and handsome young lad, full of vigour and reckless energy. The man standing in front of me appears to be on the brink of death, with grey hair and a crooked spine. The silence is broken when I realize he is staring, puzzled at my tattered clothing.

“Had a bit of a spill on the way over here, Ed. Nothing to worry about.” I force a laugh.

After removing my shoes, I follow Ed into the dining room, where a meal of pale meat and potatoes is laid out on a table for two. We sit down and begin to eat. Every few seconds, I glance down at my REMINDERS notebook, which is open on my lap under the table.

“...the family?” I realize Ed has been speaking for several minutes.

“Ah of course, yes. They are well. Perdita’s mother is sick at the moment and so they are visiting her out of state.”

“And you have *two* children now? I never would have pinned you for the type.”

“Yes, there’s Andata, she is almost six, and then...”

*Ian?*

“And then there’s little...”

*Ignatius?*

“You alright there, old friend? You seem a tad pale.”

“Isaac. Little Isaac. Yes. He just turned four. Yes, I’m fine, Ed. Don’t know what came over me.”

“Good man! I can get you some water if you like.”

“Three...”

“Beg your pardon?”

“Three. Little Isaac just turned three. And yes, sorry Ed, I’d love a glass of water.”

Ed smiles, nods and leaves the room. I thumb through my notes to ready a suitable conversation topic for when he returns. I hear coughing coming from the kitchen.

*The economy is a safe bet. Not something I can speak much about, but Ed seems to be the type to know a fair amount about business affairs.*

I procure a pencil and circle the diagram of a crying banker. Ed continues to cough.

*Perhaps after that I will ask him about his own family. A charismatic fellow like him must have a partner somewhere.*

I draw a question mark next to a crude family tree helmed by Ed. From the other room I hear a dull thump.

“Ed?”

There is no response. The coughing has ceased.

“Ed, are you alright in there?”

I get up to investigate and hesitantly move to the kitchen.

Ed is lying on the floor. Blood pools around his mouth. My heart pounds as I turn and attempt to locate his home phone in order to call an ambulance. Rifling through the rooms of his house, I eventually find a black rotary on a table next to a narrow bed. I pick up the receiver and freeze.

*The phone number for emergencies.*

A bead of sweat drips off of my brow. My index finger hovers above the dial.

*The emergency phone number. The simple three digit combination that may save Ed's life.*

A weak whimpering noise escapes my mouth. As much as I wring my brain, the numbers do not come to me.

The receiver hits the carpet floor with a thud. I pull on my shoes and without tying them I bolt out into the evening. Rain is falling in heavy droplets. I run until my legs are sore and my breath comes in ragged gasps. My clothes are thoroughly soaked I finally reach my house. I enter my study, and in black marker I draw another, larger spot on the map where I saw the pit earlier this evening. Another area to which I must not venture. My life cannot withstand any further memory loss. I pack my drenched clothing away in a rubbish container, and sit under a running shower until I fall asleep.

In my dreams, I am standing in my living room with a black piece of paper in my hand. I hear a young boy's voice calling out from afar.

“Father?”

Panic slices through me. My son and daughter. They are in trouble and I must find them.

“Father!”

As I scramble through the house looking for the source of the voices, their volumes grow and shrink in random bursts.

*His room. They must be in his room. My son’s room.*

I am certain that the room exists. I oversaw the construction of the house myself and I can even now hear Perdita insisting that we should prepare for two children. However, I cannot find the doorway through which my children’s voices emanate.

“Father, please!” There is pain in their voices now.

Finally, on my sixteenth time down the house’s main hallway, the doorway appears to me. A name written on it in bright paint is blotted out by a dark mold. Smoke is leaking from under the frame. When I reach out to turn the handle, the skin on my hand is singed.

“F-Fath...” The voices become deeper and weaker. I steel myself and clutch the doorknob. As it turns, my palm begins to melt and the hot metal cuts through to the bone.

The door swings open and inky black smoke billows out. It is the smell of scorched plastic. The voices sound as one now, screaming out at me from the void.

“Feed.”

The smoke pricks at my eyeballs. What was once my hand has been burnt down to a stump. I fall into the room and do not feel the ground rise up to meet me.



I wake naked in my shower with cold water falling down onto me. At some point while I was unconscious I must have rolled over onto my right side, as my hand has fallen asleep under the pressure. I hear a phone ringing.

*Who could be calling me at such an hour?*



I rouse myself and walk out into my living room. I pick up the receiver and raise it to my ear. A woman's voice, angry and impatient, is on the other end.

"...weeks late."

"I'm sorry, I don't understand."

"Oh of course you don't understand, you worthless..."

*Who is this? A friend of my wife's?*

"...luck finding another publishing house willing to put up with you."

"Are you a friend of P-"

"...don't know why this is so difficult for you to understand..."

"Could you ask Patricia when she will be home?"

"...had it with your games. Good day."

The dial tone buzzes for several minutes. The only other sound is that of water dripping off of me onto the hardwood floor. Eventually I walk back to my washroom in order to dry off. Next I walk to my bedroom and put on a bathrobe. On top of my dresser is a photo album. I pick it up and flip through the pages. Most of the pictures are of myself and my wife. In several of the photos we are smiling with two infants, most likely the children of her siblings. Patricia always wanted to have children of our own.

*Perhaps when she returns I will bring up the subject.* In my REMINDERS notebook I draw the two of us smiling. Cherubic babies float in speech bubbles above our heads.

*I must remember to do this. Such important conversation cannot be put off for long.*

I tear the page out, fold it into quarters, and tuck it into my wallet.

A knock on the door sounds from my living room. I open the door to see who it is. It is a policeman. His face is stern and clean shaven. Dark glasses shield his eyes. He seems angry with me.

"...vestigating the death of a Mr. Edward Schwärze, do you mind answering a few..."

In the reflection of his sunglasses I see another face, unkempt and hairy.

"...were you last night between the hours of seven and..."

*Is that me? How did I allow myself to fall into such disrepair?*

"Sir?"

A sterner face now.

“...ask you to please step back and answer the question.”

My eyes remain fixed on the darkness of the policeman’s eyes. My heart stutters in recognition.

*The pit. It has found me. No policeman. The pit.*

“...identification?”

Eluding this infernal pit-man will require a clever ruse. I reach for my wallet in a facade of compliance.

“...we go. Was that so hard, sir?”

I swing my fist and catch the pit-man’s jaw. While he is momentarily stunned I make a break for the street. I hear his voice call after me. I have angered the pit. This may have been a mistake.

Nevertheless, I continue to run. I must lure the pit-man away from my home. Away from my wife. Away from the place where we shall raise our children.

Fortunately, my obsessive mapkeeping has bestowed me with knowledge of my neighbourhood down to minutiae. A few backtracks, several sidestreets, and a dash through a backyard later, I no longer hear the pit-man’s cries. Knowing it will most likely linger at my house for several hours, I decide to wander the neighbourhood and enjoy the weather. I take a deep breath and savour the smell of the morning.

Burning plastic.

I turn down a street I do not recognize.

Smoke in the air.

My legs become heavy.

Road caving in.

*I refuse to believe this.*

Eyes spongy teeth singed lungs watering.

Aluminum in the ears and smoke in the eyes and food in my pocket.

Feed, the road says.

Feed, the sky says.

Feed, the amnesiac says.

My wallet drops. Doodle of lovely couple flutters out. Takes its time on the way down.

*A road repaved. A beautiful work of infrastructure.*

*Time to go home.*

Night has fallen when I reach my house. Voices pulse from within. I am guarded.

I enter through the back door and spy a group of marauders. Three of them. Two females and a male. They are eating my food.

*Feed.*

The taller female looks up and her eyes light up. Panic. This is their leader. The three of them scream. It sounds like terror. They know they are discovered. I bellow and wave my arms like a beast. They attempt to overpower me with numbers but I shake them off and strike at them with full force. The battle goes on for several minutes but I emerge victorious. The three marauders flee the scene. I go to my study and add another black mark to the map.



He wakes and does not remember his dreams. He wakes and finds himself in a house. He is hungry but all of the shelves are bare. He wishes to explore but the rooms have all been boarded up except one. He enters. A desk. On the desk is a notebook. Capital letters on the cover, this must be important. Flips the notebook open, gets ink on his hands. The pages are soaked with blackness.

*A dirty trick, leaving this lying around, he thinks.*

He turns around. A large piece of paper hangs on the wall. So many dots. Hardly any blank space left at all. Thinks he can make out a red spot somewhere in the centre. An optical illusion, surely.

He looks out the window. Is there a world out there? He is hopeful.

*World out there is too dark. Stay inside.*

A voice in his head.

*Feed.*

How can he feed? There is nothing left. Still, the metal voice sounds.

*Feed.*

He looks down at his right hand. Covered in ink from the trick notebook. Can't even feel it.

Stares for hours. All the while the voice drones.

*Feed.*

He goes to the kitchen to find a knife.

