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Roll for Initiative

Bianca Tellez
College of DuPage

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Divine Delusion, Color Photograph

_Elise Matlock



Farewell to Anticipation, Jewelry

_Matt Hanson

Roll For Initiative _Bianca Tellez

You're standing in a room that feels both familiar and foreign to you. There are sounds all around you, the chatter of people talking over each other and some kind of music playing in the background. When you listen carefully, too closely, you can even hear the sounds outside.

But then you look and see that there's no one around you. The room you're in is completely bare and it doesn't have a single door or window or any kind of escape. You could swear you were just in a different room. It hits you then that you don't know where all that noise is coming from.

That's when you feel it.

A pit, deep and dark, starts forming in the bottom of your stomach and it feels like there's something there trying to claw itself out. You suddenly find that breathing itself is harder in this room. Every breath you take is shorter and more staggered, and you start getting lightheaded very quickly. Your eyesight goes next. The room starts turning hazy and you're certain then that something is wrong.

Give me a wisdom saving throw.

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Nothing seems out of the ordinary. In fact, you know this feeling. It's familiar. You feel it all the time. It must be a completely normal feeling.

You feel the terrible, familiar feeling start to take over and you let it. The pit in your stomach is crawling its way up. It reaches your chest and clenches around your heart, squeezes until it's all you can feel. Your breaths get even shorter, your lungs start expanding and it feels like they could just pop like a balloon any second now. The room starts moving around you but you remain still.

Your body betrays your brain. It knows you need to get out of there despite the pain and the haze and the noises seeming familiar. But your body isn't in control. Your brain is.

It stops you and weighs down every inch of your body it can reach. You stumble. Once and then twice before you feel your body collapse and fall to the ground.

What do you do?

Five. My pink and yellow bracelet. The mismatched socks I have on. A book, I haven't finished it. My blanket on the floor. The poster falling off my wall.

Four. Cold, it's the floor underneath me. My phone in my—

Four. The floor. It's cold. The bracelet I'm wearing. My sleeves, I'm pulling on them. My phone in my pocket.

Three. The vent, it's too loud. My breathing, it's also too loud. And everyone's voices coming through the vent.

Two. A candle I had on last night and the detergent lingering on my clothes.

One. The coffee I drank this morning.

I take a deep breath but it doesn't work the first time. So I count. And then I try again. In for four. Hold. Out for four. Hold again. I do that over and over until it's the only thing I can think about.

Very good. Now give me an intelligence check.

The room changes around you once more. It was never empty or bare to begin with. You were just thinking a little too much is all. Everything overwhelmed you and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that.

As you breathe in you feel that sinking feeling start to fade. The air you take in fills the pit until it disappears almost completely. It's still there but you can manage it a little better now. Your brain catches up with your body on every exhale. Your hands move to feel the way you breathe and, with each rise and fall, the rest of your muscles relax themselves.

Time passes and you keep counting in fours. When your vision clears and you can perceive everything again, you find the space around you empty. It's a comfortable kind of empty this time, though, with no cacophony of sounds or the haze clouding your surroundings.

You know this place and know that it's safe. All those monsters fighting you inside your head are gone for now. You're safe.

We exit combat.

The Station _Mardelle Fortier

for my Sister*

My family often departed from Truth. Through the lonely whistle of starlit sojourns
In gray-blue moon, the train would approach no one spoke of Truth. Yet it stayed
that station. No one wanted to linger. on the line, a shadow in collective memory.

*

We spent our lives in moving cars. Here it comes. We close our eyes.
Frozen in snowy North, sunny fields beckoned. Rumors float in mist, swirling around IT.
We traveled to Disney World. What will be found inside?

Next, the train stopped at the depot of Truth. *Mardene Eide, now deceased

In darkness, no one wished to get out.

Perhaps, a body would be found inside.
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Dhaka Bangladesh - Nail factory,
Photograph _ Keith Yearman



After Sexton, Stafford, Olson _Tom Hill

Whatever it meant—

"A kiss to bring the evening home."

We pulled apart.

All along the block

Trees tossed new buds

Skyward—

Sun-sliced/wind-mussed/burnt out/gone.

And take also those lilies of the parkway,

Sharp white/petal-peeled/stem-bent/slick.

After the rain,

we set our bluestem boat to swirl,

that shabby vessel of intention,

tied and flattened and gutter-bound

and I said: "I know well

the grass blades that you mention."

Plus this:

the day's heat, pulled taut, broke.

Plus this:

dim rattle of thunder, moving off,
saying:

You're next. You.

Plus this:

the sky, a dirty canvas
the sky, cracking a little
the sky, well—