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After Sexton, Stafford, Olson

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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. In gray-blue moon, the train would approach that station. No one wanted to linger.

Through the lonely whistle of starlit sojourns no one spoke of Truth. Yet it stayed on the line, a shadow in collective memory.

*

We spent our lives in moving cars. Frozen in snowy North, sunny fields beckoned. We traveled to Disney World.

Here it comes. We close our eyes. Rumors float in mist, swirling around IT. What will be found inside?

Next, the train stopped at the depot of Truth. In darkness, no one wished to get out.

*Mardene Eide, now deceased

Perhaps, a body would be found inside.
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Hill, After Sexton, Stafford, Olson

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—