Work

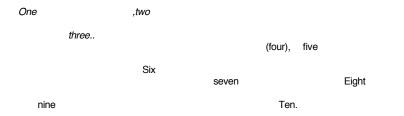
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The room is round and I am its center. Branching out from me, in my bed, are blankets, strewn across the room like hands on a clock. Ticking, reverberating within the curved walls. At my 1 o'clock there is a glass door. It was open the entire night, allowing the fog and the cold to attach themselves to the rafters and floor. Shadows and apparitions float above me in a swirling vortex.

Looking off of the bed, the blurred carpet shines with frost and cracks beneath my bare feet. I am numb except for my eyes, a thin, cutting breeze juts into the room. I grip the metallic chill of the door and close it before the cold seeps into me. Walking back to bed, the walls glisten like jewels, I stop at the window. The sky around me is dark and thick, the sun hasn't risen. It won't for a long time.

Climbing up the side of my bed was difficult with my numb hands, but with my legs hooked around the bedstead, it was just a gradual pull. I draped my blankets on top of me like dead leaves, they did nothing to warm my callous limbs. The center of my mattress had grown raw with my absence. I repeatedly shifted my arms and legs to arouse a spark of heat. A glow started to spread, going up my legs and wrapping itself around my torso. It held onto me with care and unwavering attention. I tucked my head beneath the blankets to see and thank this anonymous caregiver, but all that greeted me were my dirty pajamas and the short interval clacking of my watch. My wristwatch has a long diagonal crack on its face. I like to imagine that it's a compass, pointing everywhere at once. Its small mechanical heartbeat filled the space beneath the pleasant weight of the blankets.

Okay. It's Tuesday, work is today. It was raining yesterday, but hopefully not today. My work clothes are probably soaked from the dew and fog. I need to get them in front of the stove before the sun rises. I need to get up. I need to get out of bed. I'll count to ten.



I balled up my blankets and threw them at the glass door. I hit the floor hard, but kept my balance. In my wake there was misty trail. My leather boots stomped dully across the carpet. And the door handle no longer had a deathly chill on it.

The gray sky was lighter than before, but no light had pierced its walls yet. Maybe it wouldn't be able to today. Wet mud groans and shivers beneath my leather feet, and I gradually move further into the fog.

My Aunt and Uncle's house is a little ways from where I live, and I could easily make the walk in the dark, but the fog confused and muddled my sense of direction. My watch was indecisively pointing the way; 5 o'clock and 9 o'clock. The thick walls of gray created shapes and destroyed them before my unfocused eyes. I see shapes of friends and strangers long forgotten. They timidly walk behind me as I grope through the fluid hallways.

A North star appears to my left, the porch light was left on. Sputtering with moths, its orange light guides me past the cruel and fantastic shapes. The swollen wood porch accepts my feet without a sound. The damp outer walls of the house are green with lichen and moss. A sharp smell fills the air; the stove is still burning.

I close the wooden door silently, and take off my boots in a similar fashion. The small stove sends me its weak, sunny greeting from the corner of the living room. I walk forward, slinking towards the kitchen with my socks sliding on the wooden floor. Cups and plates line the shelves above me. I pick up a mug the color of indifference and set it down on a table that weighs down the room. The day old coffee has separated, thick brown mud sits at the bottom of the pot like a bad dream. I pour out the firm liquid into a ceramic bowl, add milk, and place it on top of the stove.

As I stirred the tan pool, I thought about my work clothes. I laid them out to dry on the clothesline, but with the weather like it is, I doubt they're dry. They are probably frozen stiff to the line. I won't be able to thaw and dry them in time for work. It's going to rain today anyways, I can feel it.

I walked into the kitchen, made a right, and stopped in front of the laundry room. Piles of clean clothes scraped at the ceiling, socks and underwear were scattered on the floor, and the smell of lavender pervaded it all. After carefully picking out a pair of stained jeans from the swaying pile, I stirred the bowl a little more; it steamed in response to my soft strokes. I grabbed my Uncle's maroon sweater off of the coatrack above the stove. My day-old shirt smells fine, I can wear that today too.

The ceramic bowl was now threatening to bubble over, it had grown impatient with my absence. I took off my socks and used them to transport the burning coffee to my mug. Sitting still at the heavy table worried me, so I paced around the room and waited for my coffee to cool. Work is today. Work is today. It's the second day of the work week and the weather is foul. I haven't missed a day yet, but maybe they'll especially need me today. After all, you can't put your faith in the guys I work with.

Looking outside at the porch calmed me. The quiet lull of the fog against the house was mesmerizing. Behind me, on the walls of the living room, were paintings that displayed not only the absurdity of the human figure, but tried to worship it somehow. I can hear my Aunt and Uncle's sleep talk echoing through the hallway next to me. The words "butter" and "done" keep repeating. I try not to listen.

My coffee looks like it has calmed down a bit. But sipping it tells me otherwise. I take my Uncle's aluminum thermos off of the shelf and pour my coffee into it. I'll drink it later. I put my caked boots on, and the sweater as well. With furtive steps and the thermos tucked under my arm, I walked out into the drifting fog.

Once I was on the road, the shapes stopped following me. I could tell without turning around, their silent whispers no longer probed the back of my head. The wet hills on either side of me were like waves ready to spill into the road. I noticed that I was walking towards the bay. I would have to pass through town first.

I was walking steadily up the road, but when I reached the apex, I stopped and looked down. Town was empty, it was too early for

anyone to be out. Good luck for me, people would see me and send me their best wishes for work that day. I would feel badly, because their wishes would be in vain. Looking past town, I could see the bay calling to me in the distance. I imagined its white caps and dark waves. Swerving left to right and layering on top of each other in a calm, menacing dance. I'm not going to work today.