

Jason cried; a sweet internal moan, softly rhythmic and pitched precisely to lull and comfort. On the inner surface of his eyelids played a halo of remembered light like an abstract snapshot from a pinhole camera, changing from white to yellow and red and back again as he tensed and relaxed the small muscles across his brow.

In his left hand was the little white van; its familiar wheels and the tiny smooth windows decipherable against his fingertips. The other hand rested on the carpet where his fingernails, well overdue a trim, were dragging and catching lazily against the synthetic fibres woven in tight ridges. In the meantime Jason's tears had begun to dry on his unwiped cheeks. His young skin felt tautened and a little raw from the saline residue.

It had been very quick. The "clonk" of the battery casing had been quite audible as it struck the edge of her eye socket. This was despite the usually all pervasive percussive drone of the music workshop. The reaction of the adults had been fast too; perhaps consciously, because the lady beside him was a visitor. His removal from class had been clinically and swiftly exacted with little fuss and Jason had offered no resistance other than a last grasp for the torch.

It had engaged him as soon as he saw it. It looked heavy and smooth and the light it emitted was intense and enchanting. The purpose of the torch was for use as a pointer to alert each child that it was their turn to participate and to direct their gaze towards the big screen which was streaming colours and live pictures of everyone in the group. When it was your turn you were supposed to play your instrument for a few seconds until the torch moved on. Jason had elected not to participate for the time being. The only instrument of interest to him was the lollipop drum and *it* had been missing from the box this week. Carla had hummed the usual counting song to him anyway as was customary when the session began - a well rehearsed ritual they both understood as a means of reassurance and 1:1

focus. This week, without the drum, the significance was somehow lost. Jason had decided to slide from his chair onto the carpet instead.

Visitors were not unusual in school. In fact, unavoidable interruptions and observations were quite commonplace. From his new perspective on the ground Jason noted that today's visitor had on shiny shoes with a point at the front and a flat matte sole, very finely ridged underneath. They looked new.

Jason liked shoe shops because of the smell of tanned leather and new rubber and because he was invited to touch and explore all of the tactile qualities offered by buckles, the treads of soles and raised waxed stitching. He actually preferred not to wear shoes if possible because of the stifling constraint they enforced and the lack of sensation they afforded in informing him about the environment under his feet. He would look away and disengage, screwing his face up when it came to a new fitting. Mum knew just to get on with it after the agreed time allowed for isle roaming and touching. She would reassure the assistant that he was OK.

Jason took his gaze from the visitor's shoes and looked back at his own feet; bare and pale and maybe two thirds the size they would be once he was big like his brother Alex. As the session had already begun and the introductions were over, the torch was temporarily out of commission nearby. He picked it up with some effort at full stretch and was pleased to confirm that its matte black body had all the weight he'd expected. The session continued around him with some audio and visual accompaniment by Kyle, the workshop leader.

Jason inspected the rubber switch and the thin red trim around the torch's lens. He switched it on and off a few times, and watched as the refracted beams cut through the gaps between his fingers with a similar but more luminous red intensity like the red of the trim. He liked the decisive sound the switch made despite it's covering of rubber. He was soon compelled to press the light to his eye to experience it more acutely. As soon as he did so,

the sound of the room receded and he was enveloped and overwhelmed by the visual stimulus. The temporary deafness was benign and wholly agreeable. He felt serenely weightless and unencumbered by any of the other peripheral senses that usually penetrated his consciousness. Time was suspended for a moment...

All of a sudden he'd been wrenched from the brilliant fluorescence of his ephemeral inner asylum. The discordance of the room made him giddy and his synthesised deafness was superseded by a temporary blindness as he flailed to compose himself, still clutching the heavy torch which had been rudely disengaged from his face.

Clarity returned the moment the accidental missile made contact with the Lady's face. Her grasp released immediately and the torch fell to the ground with a sickening sound that revealed its real fragility, only disguised by the layer of rubber and the substantial weight of the batteries within.

Now the sounds associated with home time were beginning to penetrate his little corner on the carpet by the radiator. Jason could picture in his mind its cream paint, the two small chips where it was missing and the grey metal below was visible, and the red oblong stickle brick wedged between the pipe and the skirting board beneath. The radiator offered comforting extremes of sensation throughout the school year as well as a favourite surface on which to drive the white van. The seventeen cream ridges were spaced perfectly to accommodate the wheels along a predictable course up and down.

Hearing a familiar footfall, Jason opened his eyes. The radiant light was no longer etched on his retina but in his memory instead.

Carla came across the room towards him. She held out her hand. Jason could see that the skin between her thumb and forefinger was inflamed and scratched. He knew he'd done it. 'Jason, the bus is outside; Lee is here. I have your shoes and socks. Shall we take your little van for a drive home?'

There were seventeen “Give Way” signs to look for between school and home.
Tomorrow there would be seventeen again.