

Gordon woke up to find himself in a pit. Perhaps it was a pit of his own despair. But how did he get there? He didn't recall being arrested. He would certainly remember that. Come to think of it, Gordon came to think, he didn't quite recall anything at all.

Now that wasn't quite true. Gordon did remember some things. And the things he did remember were these: Gordon was forty-two years old. He had three children. He was divorced. Or separated. It wasn't clear to him. He had never been through any legal proceedings; his wife had simply gone out to get the groceries for dinner and never returned.

After his wife's disappearance, Gordon had called the police, who investigated just what had happened to her. They reviewed the security tapes from all the entrances and exits of the grocery store. His wife did not appear in any of the footage. They reviewed the parking lot security tapes, theorizing that she had been carjacked or abducted while leaving her vehicle. His wife, and her silver Mercedes-Benz SUV were not to be found there, either. They ran a story on the local news station every night for two weeks. They even borrowed a helicopter from the nearest city's police department, which they flew over the woodlands that surrounded the city, just in case. Lastly, they borrowed the search dogs from the city. Gordon gave the police officers his wife's hairbrush. The dogs turned up empty as well.

Eventually, they called off the search. The day this happened the police had come to Gordon's door and had said that there was simply no more they could do. They had exhausted all leads, which was a lie, because there were no leads. They told him that this was probably just one of those things. Sometimes people got tired of the lives

they were living and just left. Gordon would just have to accept it and try to move on. There was no more they could do.

For the first month, Gordon could not do anything. He laid in bed. He cried. He tried to eat, but mostly he just ended up vomiting. He lost twenty pounds. He grew a beard, perhaps the only active thing Gordon did do during that period of mourning. His children learned to fend for themselves. He would give them money and they would walk to the grocery store and buy bread, cheese, candy, and Kool-Aid. When he ran out of money, he would give them his credit card, and they would take it to the grocery store. Because Gordon lived in a small town, the staff at the grocery store knew what had happened, and accepted the credit card from the children. When the laundry needed to be done, the children would quietly walk it across the street to their neighbour, who would wash it so they could have clean socks and underwear for school the next day.

After the first month, Gordon finally got out of bed. At first he tried to write, but when he saw the words leaving his pen, he thought of his wife leaving him. So he would lock the sheets of paper in a drawer, never wanting them to leave him too. He tried to paint, but when the paint dried, he thought of how his marriage had dried up. So he would zip the canvasses up in a suitcase and hide it in the closet under the stairs. When his children asked if they could play at a friend's house, he would beat them so violently that they were unable to leave. Eventually, they learned to stop asking. Eventually they stopped going to school, because the consequence would be just the same. Even still, Gordon continued to beat his children because he thought they might leave him. Because he thought they were thinking about leaving him.

These were the things that Gordon remembered when he awoke in a dark pit, exactly three months to the day after his wife disappeared. This was why Gordon's first instinct was to think that he was simply in a pit of his own despair. He had driven his wife away, beaten his children, and abandoned his job without so much as a phone call to his boss. Had Gordon bothered to look beyond the shadows that surrounded him, this is what he would have seen:

He would have seen that he was chained to the wall by his feet. The length of his chain was about twelve feet, which did little to help him, considering the pit itself was only about eight feet in diameter. When something is measured in diameter, this means that it is circular. The pit was also circular. It was lined with bricks, flush against one another, so that climbing out was an impossibility. Even if the bricks were not there, climbing out would remain an impossibility because Gordon's chain was only about twelve feet in length, and the pit was about thirty feet in height. Because it had a height, it was more a cylinder than a circle.

Gordon spent his time in the pit in much the same way as he did his last two months in life. The first month he spent chained to the wall. Some days he cried. Other days he cursed God, Allah, Vishnu, and Zeus for his entrapment. His beard grew longer. His skin grew paler. His stomach grew smaller. Despite the fact that Gordon had not eaten since he awoke in the pit, he did not hunger. Perhaps it was the pit itself, perhaps it was that Gordon's body had simply become used to being starved. Starved for everything: affection, sex, food. Either way, Gordon did not think about food.

In the second month of his sentence in the pit, Gordon became more active. He could never be sure he had spent two months in the pit. The light coming from above neither rose nor set. It was constant. Gordon could not be sure he had been there for two weeks or two years, much less two months. He assumed two months because his memories were of the two months previous, and so two months simply made sense to him. Because the light above never wavered, Gordon often figured he may be in hell. He spent part of his second month in the pit wondering which was worse: hell or a pit of his own despair. In the end, he determined that they were of the same scale. The rest of the time, Gordon spent looking for a way out of the pit. It seemed as though there were none.

Finally, exactly three months to the day of Gordon's exile into the pit, or so Gordon figured, anyway, he found an escape route. On the far wall of the pit, at the very bottom, where the bricks met the wet mud that coated the floor, Gordon found that there was a loose brick. He tugged at it. He worked at it. A piece of it broke off, and he used it to dig out the mortar around it. Once the brick was removed, Gordon removed another, then another, then a third. Gordon removed bricks, painstakingly, one by one, until there was a hole big enough for him to crawl through. After Gordon had made this hole, he was struck with the sudden realization that he remained chained at the feet. Having never had the opportunity to test the limits of his chain, Gordon decided to go as far as he could through the hole. He at least wanted a peek at what was beyond his pit of despair, his personal hell.

Gordon crawled a foot. His chain was now nine feet stretched. Gordon crawled another foot. His chain was now ten feet stretched. Gordon crawled two more feet. His chain was now stretched the full twelve feet of its length. There was a dark voice in Gordon's head which told him that he should not proceed further. He felt instinctively that the chain was through. But Gordon did not listen. He was tired of listening to the dark voices in his head. It was a full six months since his wife had left him and Gordon wanted to be free from the despair. He crawled another foot.

To his surprise, Gordon found that the chain was not attached to the wall of the pit at all. The chain was not attached to anything. He persevered. The tunnel he had discovered was long and dark. When he looked up, Gordon saw portraits of his wife and his children. He saw portraits of himself and his wife on their wedding day. They were lit, as though from underneath, but when Gordon looked down to discover the source of the light, there was nothing there. When Gordon saw these portraits, he felt his heart break. His heart broke so hard that he dropped to the floor and clutched at his chest. He questioned whether or not to carry on. But after a few minutes, the pain subsided to a dull ache. Then it receded into a mere throbbing. And once twenty full minutes had passed, the pain was gone. After a while, Gordon was able to crawl through the tunnel without feeling any pain at all.

Gordon was not sure how long he crawled through the tunnel. He only knew that he did not hunger, he did not tire, and he did not sleep. He just crawled. All the while, Gordon was presented with images of his life with his wife and children above him. An invisible light shone from below him. After a while, Gordon could not be sure how long exactly, the images started to change. After a while, an image came up that Gordon

remembered quite well: It was his wife, kissing him on the cheek for the last time. She was heading to the grocery store, for the last time, to buy the ingredients for dinner, for the last time. This image stopped Gordon dead in his tracks. He stared at it for a long time. He wasn't sure how he felt. On one hand, he hurt the most immense hurt since that very day. But on the other hand, he felt nothing at all. It was a strange experience for George to feel nothing and everything all at once. Finally, after how long he could not be sure, Gordon simply made up his mind to *move on*.

Gordon continued down the dark, moist tunnel. He saw images of himself, lying in bed. He saw images of himself, lying in bed. He saw images of himself, lying in bed. Then he saw images of his children. He saw images of himself beating his children. He saw images of his children crying, in their room, comforting each other. He saw his daughter putting a band-aid on her younger brother. He saw his daughter taking on the role of a mother.

When Gordon saw these images his heart ached even more than it had ached before. When Gordon saw these images, he felt his heart escape from his chest. He saw his heart in a portrait above his head, lit from below. He looked down to find the source of the light, but saw nothing. His gut wrenched with the guilt of what he had done. His mind felt at once dizzy and clear. He knew, finally, what he had done to his children-- his children who had been with him even though his wife had not-- his children who had stroked his hair and made him dinner-- his children, who despite all the pain they were dealing with, had taken it upon themselves to behave as adults. And he had beat them. He had taken his hand, his belt, his belongings to them. He had blamed them for her leaving, and he he accused them of trying to leave as well.

Gordon looked down at the ground. He was full of remorse. He wanted to see the invisible light that was emanating from below. He looked down at the damp, dark, black ground. He looked down and he started to cry. Not tears of loss, but tears of sorrow. He was sorry for what he had done to his children. He was sorry for what he had done to his neighbours. He was sorry for what he had done to everyone. For the first time in nearly seven months, Gordon looked down at himself. He looked at the backs of his hands, pressed into the mud that coated the tunnel. He looked at the wrinkles on his knuckles. He looked at the cracks in his fingernails. He lifted his hands from the soil and looked at his palms. They were covered in mud. He rubbed the mud off on the legs of his ripped jeans.

He looked at his palms and they were glowing. They were glowing with light. Gordon looked down and saw the light that was emanating from his palms. For the first time in nearly seven months, he saw the light. He looked into it. He looked deep into it. Gordon looked deep into the light and he was home.