

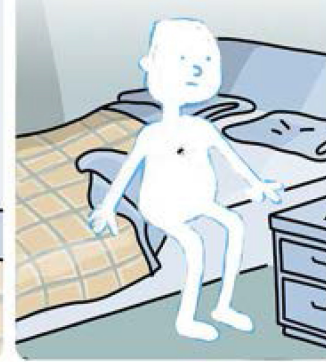
ONE TUESDAY MORNING,  
GERALD PRESTON WOKE UP.



AFTER YET ANOTHER  
RESTLESS NIGHT.



HE COULDN'T REMEMBER  
THE LAST TIME HE HAD  
SLEPT PROPERLY.



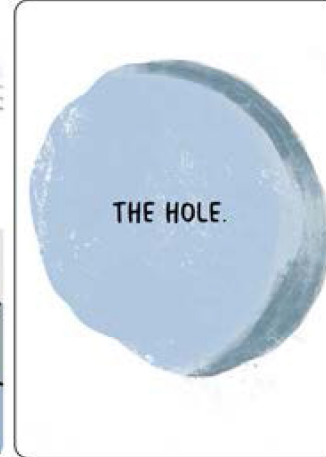
HIS SLEEP WAS OFTEN  
INTERRUPTED BY DREAMS,  
WHICH WOULD LEAVE HIM  
FEELING ANXIOUS.



AS A CONSEQUENCE,  
GERALD FELT LIKE HE  
HADN'T RESTED AT ALL.



RECENTLY THOUGH,  
SOMETHING ELSE WAS  
ON HIS MIND.



IT WAS ABOUT AN INCH  
ACROSS, GOING ALL THE  
WAY THROUGH HIS BODY.



SEEMINGLY AVOIDING ALL  
INTERNAL ORGANS.



GERALD WOULD SOMETIMES  
TOUCH IT. HE NEVER FELT  
ANY SENSATION THOUGH.  
IT WAS, JUST, **THERE.**



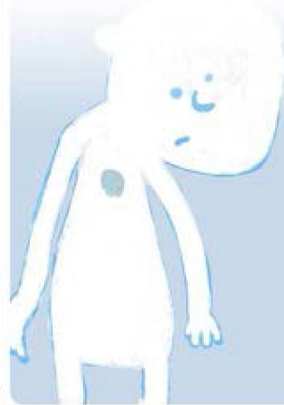
AND HE DIDN'T KNOW  
WHAT TO DO.



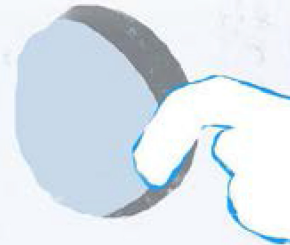
IT WAS ALWAYS CLEAN  
THOUGH, AND IT NEVER  
**LOOKED** LIKE AN  
INJURY.



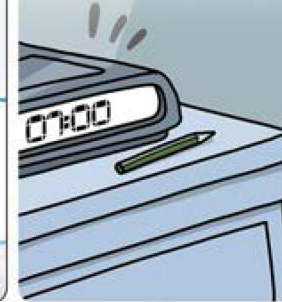
NO BLOOD.



SOFT, SMOOTH.  
PLEASANT, ALMOST.



THE ALARM  
WENT OFF.



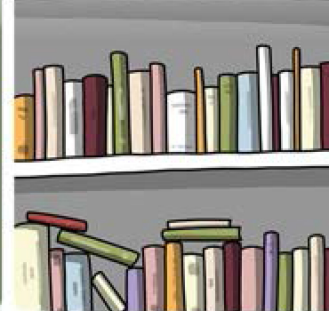
GERALD OFTEN WOKE  
UP BEFORE HIS ALARM.



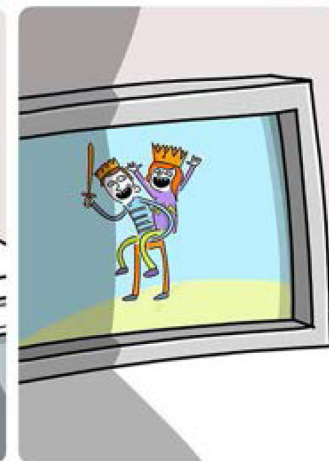
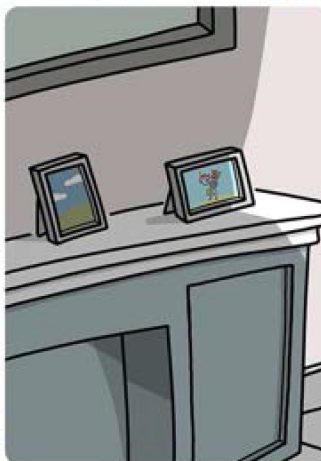
HE TURNED IT OFF  
AND THOUGHT ABOUT  
GETTING READY FOR WORK.



WORK SEEMED SO FUTILE  
NOW, AND HE DIDN'T  
WANT TO GO.



HE DIDN'T WANT TO DO  
**ANYTHING** ANYMORE.





GERALD TOOK HIS PENCIL FROM THE BEDSIDE TABLE.



(WHICH SAT NEXT TO THE UNUSED CROSSWORD BOOK.)



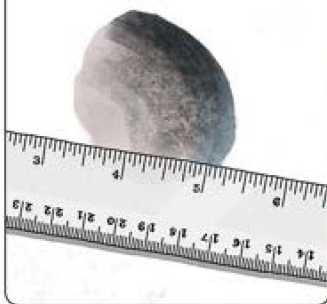
AND UPDATED HIS NOTES.



HE'D BEEN RECORDING THE SIZE OF THE HOLE FOR A LITTLE WHILE.



NOT SINCE THE FIRST DAY, BUT VERY SHORTLY AFTER ITS FIRST APPEARANCE.



ALTHOUGH HE SOMETIMES FORGOT.



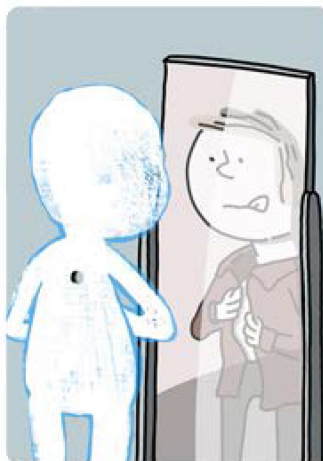
ESPECIALLY ON DAYS WHEN HE FELT REALLY DOWN.



FUNNILY ENOUGH, THESE WERE THE DAYS WHEN THE HOLE WAS BIGGEST.



BUT GERALD DIDN'T NOTICE THE CORRELATION.



NOT YET, ANYWAY.

THE DJ ON THE RADIO READ OUT THE TIME.



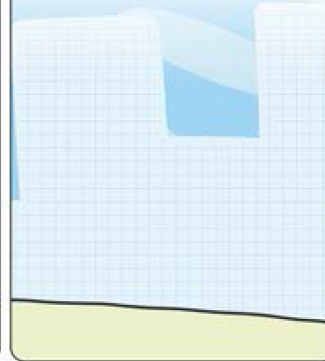
"I KEEP TELLING MYSELF THAT PEOPLE CAN'T SEE IT. THAT THEY CAN'T TELL", THOUGHT GERALD.



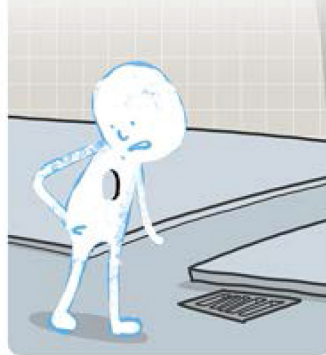
BUT HE WAS STILL CONCEREND. HE FELT **WRONG** SOMEHOW. LIKE PART OF HIM WAS MISSING.

OH, I SHOULDN'T RUN, I'M FULL OF PORRIDGE...

AS HE WALKED TO WORK, HE TRIED TO RECALL **WHEN** THE HOLE HAD FIRST APPEARED.



**CHILDHOOD** WAS HIS FIRST THOUGHT, BUT HE FIGURED THAT HE'D HAVE NOTICED?



IT WAS SORT OF LIKE WHEN YOU NOTICE A MARK ON YOUR BODY, A MOLE, SAY, AND YOU ASK YOURSELF 'HOW LONG HAS THAT BEEN THERE?' AND WHY ARE YOU ONLY JUST NOTICING IT NOW?



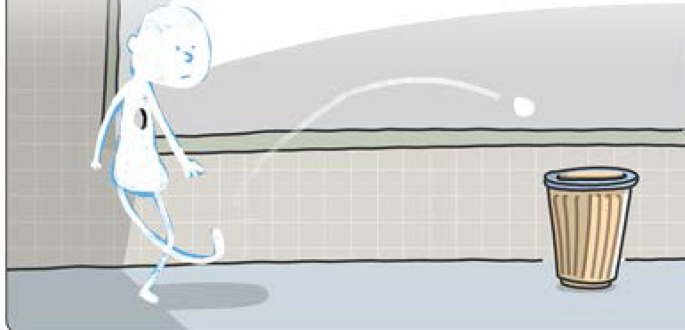
"**JENNY WOULD KNOW**" THOUGHT GERALD, AND HE WISHED THAT HE COULD ASK HER, SOMEHOW.



ONE THING HE WAS SURE OF: IT WAS CERTAINLY THERE AFTER SHE DIED.



HE THEN WONDERED WHAT SHE'D THINK ABOUT ALL THE STUFF IN THE NEWS. SO MUCH HAD HAPPENED: BREXIT, COVID. BOWIE GOING WOULD HAVE UPSET HER, ROBIN WILLIAMS TOO.



STILL, SHE MISSED OUT ON NIGEL FARAGE, SO SWINGS AND ROUNDABOUTS.

