

The F-Bomb Drill

In summer Manny Teague came to work intermittently, between long absences with his family. When he was around to tell them, his stories were a combination of the unexpected and the unwanted. Teague spoke of his young twins with such enthusiasm that we all fell in love again with the idea of marriage and family.

Only Dvorak, who'd never known love, refused to smile at the thought of Henry jumping towards the sky hoping his cereal box jetpack might spark to life. Or William, setting a squirrel trap but not knowing what to do with the creature he caught in it. Teague talked about his sorrow as they pedaled away from him for the first time without training wheels and his relief that their little fingers still clung to him in the pool. He was in the office less frequently, but it felt like we heard more from him than ever with stories about the boys. New photos popped up on his desk each time he returned, bringing summertime and childhood itself into our dreary cube farm.

Then September began and all things started up again as they had been. School re-opened and Teague was back full time, wistful and sad. His face grew paler as he spent less time with his kids in the sun and more time with us beneath fluorescent lights. I got lost during his endless monologues about the boys, only now and then piqued by a key phrase or two. Like *truder drills*.

'*Truder Drills*,' Teague said, 'Haven't I told you about the

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‘*truder drills* they do at school?’

He continued despite our disinterest.

‘I’m boiling water for pasta night, William and Henry starting to squawk behind me. To distract them, I ask what they did at school all day. You know what they said?’

Nobody knew. Nobody cared.

‘Drills.’

‘I asked them, ‘You mean a fire drill?’

‘William said, ‘Well, at first we did the fire drill, where we leave the classroom and go outside. But there were no fire trucks.’ Then he started talking about fire trucks and I was back to focusing on the pasta sauce. Until I heard William talking about drills again.

‘...when the alarm goes off, we all have to be quiet and move to the back of the room. No pushing. No running. Just like the fire drill, but quieter and only in the classroom. We move quietly. But quickly. Miss Belmont puts a shade over the window...’

Teague stopped to see if we were paying attention. Even Dvorak had taken interest. ‘So I asked him what kind of drill that was. I had my suspicions. You know what he said? He said, ‘Truder drill.’

‘Truder?’ I asked. ‘Truder? You mean, as in...’ But I stopped. I got it. I didn’t want William and Henry to get it. Better they think of it innocently, right? The name terrifies me. An intruder at school?’

Karen broke the silence. ‘What did the teacher tell them about *why* they practice it?’

Teague shrugged. ‘If you ask me, they know enough. I’m happy for them to think of it as the *truder drill*. But you know what? It gets worse. You know what they practiced next? Next they practiced what

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happens if, during the intruder drill, there's a fire drill. That alarm sounds like this...'

The idea filled me with admiration, that school authorities had thought it through so thoroughly. The idea also filled me with horror, at the thought that this drill might someday be useful. I didn't need to wonder how Teague felt about it.

Teague said, 'I told my boys, 'They've been doing drills since forever. Different drills for all kinds of emergencies. Emergencies that never happened. Like the A-bomb.'

William asked, 'A-bomb? Is that like the F-bomb? Hayden got in trouble for using the F-bomb. What's an F-bomb? Miss Belmont sent him to the principal's office for using the F-bomb. Are we going to have F-bomb drills?'

Teague shook his head. I wasn't sure if he was laughing to himself or crying.

'I told them not to spend so much time with Hayden. 'And we do not say F-bomb, in this house, or at school, or anywhere.' Maybe I was too harsh. William bent his head to the table.

'Sweet Henry. You know what he did? He came to his brother's defense. 'We don't play with Hayden. We play with Julia and Martina and Joseph.' I've heard those names before, but I have no faces to go with them. All their innocence slipping past. Just six, but grown to the point of having friends I don't know.

'Do yourselves a favor... Don't have kids. It's just one sorrow after another as they grow up, and in the meantime, its 'truder drills.'