

MORE THAN

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It is often that they are bare and I see them. They are always lined up, curled against each other, separated by lines, capped by nails, sleeping uselessly side by side in an unaware slumber.

Each time I see them, I must count them. Each time my eyes find them, through misdirection, chance, or some positive fascination, some sublime inclination, I must count them. There are always only five.

There has never been one time that here has been more than five. I must count them.

I assume that I must count them because there always appear to be more than five. Each time I see them there always appear to be more than five. Or, at least, that is the way it appears to appear to me.

I know there are only five. There is no need for anyone to try to convince me, to talk me into believing what it is I always, inevitably, see, and what it is I always, intellectually, know. There are always only five and there have always only been five and I know, I know there will always only be five. There cannot be more than five.

I must count them.

There can be less than five. I know this. I know this because even though I have not ever seen less than five I have read about less than five, I have heard about less than five, I can imagine less than five. I know there can be less than five because I know how to make them be less than five.

It is easy to make them less than five. So simple. Their delicate, dreamless sleep need not be interrupted. A mindless slice, a knife of sufficient angle, a lawn mower of determined will, an automobile door of thoughtless speed. So easy. They need never be awakened. All these sharp hands can subtract one or all. I know, and they know, that there can be less than five.

They do not know that there can be more than five. Or rather, their inability to make more than five makes any knowledge of more than five meaningless. If they should, by some chance or predetermined fate, happen to see more than five in that particular instant before their nameless subtraction, they may know more than five in a hurried way before they negate the more than five to suddenly make five--or less than five.

It is for this reason, among others, that I must always count them.

It disturbs me that they would be able to make the proper five, given the theoretical instance where they have found more than five. For my sanity I must pretend that this has never actually happened. I must not allow them to make five. Only less than five.

It is true that I have also read about more than five, that I have heard about more than five, but this does not enable me to imagine more than five. I can imagine that I see more than five, that is why I am always counting, but it is always only five that I am seeing, merely disguised as more than five.

For this reason that I am convinced that here is some special reason for this obsession with counting. I have decided that there are three possible reasons why I

insist upon imagining that I see more than five when there are only always five, and always only five.

It is likely that it is all a question of fear. Perhaps there is in me a particular quality that is frightened of this one peculiarity. To test this theory, I have prepared myself for the instant when I see the five that pretend to be the more than five. I have, with special care and consideration noted the circumstances of my instinctual counting and my immediate reaction.

When and where I see them does seem to be a matter of chance; surely I cannot say either way. Suddenly I will be looking at them, and before I am totally aware of them I will be counting them. It will happen on the street, in a room, in a store, sometimes even in a picture. It happens quickly, but there have been a few times when I have been able to isolate the moment before the counting begins, before I am quite sure (even though I know anyway) that there are five and not more than five, and this is why I am able to say that fear may indeed play a part in this forever counting. It is a sharp, barely imperceptible fear, fast and not merely a little exciting. It is not unlike the precise split-instant when someone bends to kiss you for the first time, but the two sets of lips have barely not touched. In the space before I begin to count, I feel a terrifying expectation-- of finding the more than five, or not finding the more than five, I surely cannot say.

Occasionally, and, these are the most frightening times of all, I will see the five impostors on my own self. I am then likely to immediately touch, to separate each one from its Siamese-twin neighbor when counting them, perhaps to make sure one does not snap back and get counted again, so that I may believe, if I ever finally do count more than five (which is, of course, impossible), that it is a legitimate counting. I do not doubt that the shock of finding more than five, followed instantly by an uneasy fear of miscalculation, leading to a re-evaluation of the counting, which would of course

culminate in a final verdict of of course only five, would be sure to leave me far too confused to count or see or know anything for the rest of my life.

It is not possible for me to go any further with my understanding of my fear. I know that in some way I am afraid of the incomprehensible more than five. I do not know why.

The second possible reason behind my counting is not unrelated to the first. Does my fear come from some desire that I will not acknowledge? Is the finding of the more than five something I want and do not want, equally desperately? The horror, the complete surrender that this kind of desire, this particular desire and not desire would imply astounds me when I dare to think about it.

I must count them. There are always only five. There has never been one time that there has been more than five. I think that I have seen more than five, but I have not. I have not ever seen more than five.

I must count them.

The third and last possible component reason behind my counting is hope. If the more than five is something that I am afraid of knowing as possible, and if fear of that knowing stems from a desire inside me that seeps out in my constant and almost convincing illusions of more than five, then what I do not quite see must be what I truly hope to see, what I want to see, especially if what excites me the most is the expectation of seeing them upon myself. These must be the reasons.

But I will not say I want to see the more than five. I will not say it!

A mindless slice, a knife of sufficient angle, a lawn mower of determined will, an automobile door of thoughtless speed. So easy. They need never be awakened.