

Children's feet are softer and more sensitive than ours. So are their ears. Like snakes, children sense even the most minute seismic vibrations—their feet and ears are two prongs of a tuning fork. Every day, far, far away, thick smoke issues from crumbling buildings, and inside the smoke, there is a sound—a deep drrrrrrrrrrrrrrrone pulling the children like a merciless magnet.

The sound obeys only the laws of physics. The soil carries it all the way to this room. We absorb it. But the children alone perceive it. They are softer, more sensitive. They listen to the underside of the concrete, to the water pipes, the fiber-optic cables, the electrical conduits, the canalization, the metals and minerals, the underground rivers, the holes and tunnels, the roots, the plants, and the trees—all the way to the source of the sound, all the way to the place inside the smoke.

The children are there now. A thick cloud of oozing debris submerges them into a smooth, gray, solid smoke. There are many chambers in the smoke, new dimensions forming as the architecture shifts—the drone, the sound, guiding it all. The pulse of it is nearly internal. Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr... rrrrrrrrrr... rrrrrrrrrr. The children feel it under their nails, in their nostrils, vibrating inside their tummies. It's not disorienting. The smoke wriggles differently here. Something like a tunnel—and at the end of it, a door. This is where the sound is found. The children enter.

Ooooooooooof! It's fast! This place ingests—a rip current—it takes everything as material. It sucks them in! The children do not resist; they play. It warps them, dissolves them, melts them, rolls them, makes them liquid, pliant and palpable. Their humors conjoin—phlegm, blood, bile—no hierarchy.

“Hello!” the children exclaim. “A room made up of our entire body! More! Will time? More! Will lair? Puncture? Stretch?”

A large window appears on one side. Then, a glass door. Both keep the smoke out. The children yawn, and a hallway appears across the glass wall. More yawns. The journey was long, and the shape-shifting is so tiring. The children need rest. But then—a woman opens the glass door and enters, followed by the smoke she lets in. She leaves the door wide open. More visitors trickle in—stumbling, ashy, coughing, leaking. Friends, mothers, coworkers, lovers, first responders, strangers, enemies—each from their own world.

This place is common to all smoke. Only some find it, wandering through wildfires, explosions—places that burn, crush, and take apart. Each dusts off their shoulders and splutters puffs of smoke from their lungs. The debris from their bodies falls to the floor and disappears, swallowed by the children. The visitors greet each other and look around the room. Opposite things hold each other at the wall: copper conductors and black rubber blocks. Some visitors find their reflections in the varnish of the thin steel near the windows. Others move through the hallway to see if there is more. This exercise repeats for a while. A steady stream trickles in.

The children are very tired now—but so proud of the room they made. As the last visitor vanishes down the hallway, the children let their form go. Sleep engulfs them quickly, and they dream, letting out a long, drrrrrrrrrrrrrone snore:

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