

# THE DEN 1

## THE LEFT SIDE IS SCRIPT

### ONE

I had to move and move quickly  
I am not allowed to explore my new  
surroundings as I am not allowed to  
leave the house.

I have a new name now,  
I'm a shielder. People, surfaces and  
the air have become dangerous to me.  
I am safe in my new home but I can't  
sleep, so I leave the house before  
dawn to explore the wood.

The wood has been calling me.  
It wanted me to move here and it did  
everything in its power to draw me here.  
Things which shouldn't have slotted into  
place aligned quickly.  
Its branches beckoned me and so  
I pay it attention, I respond to its call.

I visit the wood everyday before dawn.  
Day after day I see no one.  
I move hastily but carefully, suspiciously,  
danger seeping through my veins,  
on edge, spikey, sensitive.  
I step onto it as a current and ride it.  
It lifts me up and drives me on.

Soon I abandon the tarmacked paths  
for the spidergram of earthy trails  
cutting up the inside of the wood,  
leading me deeper and deeper  
towards solitude.

## THE RIGHT SIDE IS SOUND

*quick footsteps on a gravelly road  
birdsong in background*

*footsteps walking on the road  
multiply*

*a second voice speaks over the  
first, cracking of twigs underfoot,  
the ground has changed,  
it is not road, they are in the wood*

*footsteps slow down on leaves,  
twigs and dirt*

*crunch and scrape of feet on dry  
earth*

I become familiar with sections.  
I prefer the dense deep ones.  
Over time the bramble is unable to  
contain itself, threading over and  
under, always reaching up.

I retrace paths.  
I notice oddments left by visitors:  
a dog lead, a drinks can,  
used toilet roll covered in shit,  
a condom packet.

I listen for twigs being broken underfoot.  
I learn the secrets. My face breaking spiders  
webs means I am the first in the day  
to pass through.  
When I startle birds, I know that it is  
me to startle them, not another.

Ears uncovered eyes uncovering all,  
they have never been so powerful.  
My senses are sharpened,  
carved to a point. It is not relaxing,  
but I am so alive, moved by threat,  
fear and adrenaline I move through,  
through and on,  
always in the direction of the rising sun.

Sometimes someone is there.  
When I catch a glimpse of them I freeze.  
But they are not looking out for me  
as I am for them. They walk past me,  
less than a meter sometimes,  
but they never see me.  
Act as if you are not man owning the space  
but act as a branch, as a bird, as a leaf  
and you can disappear in plain sight.

I have assimilated.

*footsteps become erratic and pause*

*flapping of bird's wings*

*birdsong*

*cracking of twigs underfoot  
slow footsteps slow down on  
twigs and dry leaves*

I am the wood and the wood is me.

The bushes and trees have messages for you,  
they observe you as they have observed  
us for centuries.

We come and go, the trees remain.  
They offer comfort and guidance to  
those seeking reassurance.

The trunks of the trees are the same size,  
give or take, as a person.

I wrap my arms around them and lay my  
cheek on their bark.

I am the wood and the wood is me.  
They shield the shielder and I imagine  
their wooden arms wrapping back around me.

After a while it comes back to me, the  
instinct to hide, to burrow, to find a hollow,  
a dip, a bush, a cavity.

I have used dens before to hide and avoid,  
to step outside of society and create a  
space to check out.

To catch your breath, to be encased.  
To try to erase human interaction for a time  
and talk to nature instead.

A blank space, a niche offered:

Come inside

Refresh

Revive

Hide

Pause

I'll keep you a secret

I am the wood and the wood is me.

*a second voice echoes the first  
birdsong becomes louder  
rustling in undergrowth becomes  
louder*

*woodpecker song*

*sound of train in distance  
footsteps on dry ground become  
hesitant, pausing*

*second voice drops out  
birdsong becomes stronger  
tentative footsteps continue*

*second voice repeats 'I am the wood  
and the wood is me', slowly getting  
louder*

*the second voice multiplies, falling  
over itself*

*feet scrape on crunchy sounding  
ground, breaking twigs*

*second voice ends*

## T W O

I have made dens behind garages, on flat roofs,  
in the depths of ferns, in the hollow of a school  
field, in hedges surrounding everywhere I have  
lived.

But I will tell you about my best den,  
my favourite den, the one that I never  
showed anyone and I that never shared.

As far as I know it is still waiting for me.  
Perhaps overgrown, but inside,  
deep at its core it is still there in some  
form perhaps thinking about me decades later.

I did not enjoy school. I did not enjoy  
being in places that I did not choose to be in,  
sat for hours in chairs that I did not want to sit in.

So I decided to make a space for myself  
within the school, somewhere to go and  
miss the double lessons of classes  
which I found the most uncomfortable.

Opposite one of the school buildings  
was the perimeter chain link fence of the school,  
and next to it inside the boundary  
was a swathe of bramble and bushes.  
On a lunchtime one day I snuck off to explore,  
I looked around and then slipped in,  
squeezing up against the fence.

I travelled about six meters, maybe more,  
itching and scratching between fence and  
undergrowth until a natural cavity presented itself.  
It was low but I could get my body inside.  
I tore and pushed back twigs,  
leaves and bramble to make space.

*feet walk on dry leaves  
louder birdsong  
slow heavy footsteps on dry  
and crunchy ground*

*creaking sound in background*

*footsteps heavy and slow on gravel*

*distorted dog bark in distance  
or is it a bird?*

*strong birdsong  
footsteps stop*

*cloth scraping on bramble  
rustling, sweeping and crackling*

*loud scraping sounds of fabric on  
bramble  
birdsong becomes clearer and  
stronger  
loud scraping and popping sounds*

I spent a lot of time in there in that summer term,  
smoking cigarettes and listening to my walkman.  
Happiness and peace knowing that I was  
fully obscured.

*rustling and scraping stops*

*small rubber squeak*

Out of all my memories from school  
this is the one most imprinted in my mind.  
I can travel there now, can you?  
I am happy to share.

*aeroplane and birdsong*

*aeroplane and birdsong gets  
louder*

### T H R E E

How to make a den.

*twinkling stretched static sounding  
background noise  
slow echoes of birdsong*

It will help if you have an idea of the  
purpose of the den.  
Firstly you need to decide from what or  
whom you are hiding from. This may,  
but not always, help you choose the  
purpose and location of your den.

*sound of fabric being scraped,  
catching and pulling on brambles.  
metallic cooing continues to twang  
in the background*

Dens made in the open are for play,  
a few branches clustered together,  
a quick sketch of a den,  
your imagination filling in the rest.

*rustling, catching and pulling sound  
of fabric on brambles*

But here we are seeking time away,  
a place to retreat into hidden and obscured.  
Most dens by their nature are transient,  
temporary, a stopping place for a particular  
time, for breath, for contemplation, for quiet.

*metallic twang, second voice  
doubles, cooing background noise  
pulled out metallic twang*

To hide from someone may mean they  
are located quite near. That is okay,  
it need not be very far away.  
The most useful dens are close enough

*rustling in a bush, cracking twigs*

to reach quickly, to dive into,  
just under people's noses.

*underfoot, fabric caught on brambles*

Dens can also exist inside of course,  
in places unused or places that someone  
would not consider climbing into:  
a wardrobe, a cupboard, under the bed,  
behind furniture, a corner, a construction  
of blankets, even just underneath your duvet.  
The same principle applies, visually hidden,  
sonically subdued, unexpected and out of sight.

*metallic sounding heavy rain*

*fabric scraping  
second voice doubles*

You need not even have a physical place,  
just close your eyes now and imagine  
where you would like to go, pull the covers  
up over your head, sink deep into the bath,  
you can travel anywhere, no one will find you.  
Faith and belief in your den is of primary  
importance in the dens of your mind.

*crackling, crunching, scraping*

*metallic sounding rustling*

*second voice doubles  
rain sound has ceased*

But I will tell you how to make a den  
outside in public, in a garden,  
a field, a verge, woods or a park.

*birdsong becomes clearer, sound  
of dry leaves and twigs underfoot,  
slow steps*

You start with the eye.

*second voice echoes the first,  
repeating*

As you walk, stop and scan the area,  
or slow your walk down and speed  
up your eyes so as to not attract attention.

Look for areas which go unnoticed.  
The unused, bypassed or forgotten.  
Bushes next to roads, the undergrowth,  
dead spaces, forgotten areas, just to the side,  
no through tracks, the corners, edges,  
forgotten, without purpose.

*rustling becomes louder  
snapping twigs, popping*

The eye is trained, as landscape is  
moulded by man, to look for the view,

the path, the space ahead of you,  
to advance with purpose, to get to the  
destination as quickly and efficiently as possible.  
Consider then, what catches the  
human eye and discard it.

*second voice doubles*

You will look to the periphery at the uncultivated,  
unattractive, spaces in-between,  
spaces of no use, looked over,  
perhaps next to the place where  
some production takes place,  
some task, taking the attention,  
leaving the outskirts unkept and unkempt.

*footsteps through dry leaves*  
*footsteps pause*

*footsteps resume*

Spaces just close enough to the path,  
to the building, to the road, but they  
have had no purpose until now.  
Soon they will protect you, offer you shelter,  
you and you alone. These are now your places.

*second voice doubles*

Reject spaces that someone has used before,  
avoid pre trodden paths, any break in brambles.  
If fresh litter is found in the perfect spot,  
then move on. It is better to make a new den,  
it will be more unexpected and safer.

*footsteps on very dry leaves*  
*rustling*

Once you have found your location test out  
the area by walking past it a few times  
looking at it directly, and casually scanning.  
You are testing the eyes of the ones  
you are hiding from. They are unlikely to  
look directly at this forgotten place.  
Try to unfocus your eyes and sweep  
them back and forth, nothing should  
attract them to the chosen spot.

*breaking of twigs*  
*second voice doubles*

You can make adjustments,  
but the base needs to accommodate you,  
sitting or lying down. At its core it needs

*rustles in leaves become louder*

*twigs breaking underfoot*

to be comfortable. Ideally it will have the bare bones of some sort of structure to build upon. If you can see it at a distance with a cursory glance then you will need to camouflage.

That's okay, most dens need a bit of work and modification. Look around for material that matches your den - twigs, leaves, branches. If it is part of a building then maybe a sheet of plastic or wood, something that looks like it lives there already, what looks like rubbish to others. Consider what catches the human eye and what the onlooker would pass over.

Branches and twigs with leaves mirroring the ones already there are best, build up the coverage in a haphazard way, no straight lines - you are not building a fence. We are taught to try and recognise patterns, order in nature, let your den be wild, criss cross and crazy.

At each stage retreat to the pedestrian viewer, pass the eye over to see what needs amending. You do not need full coverage, in fact it is useful to be able to see out of the den a little to watch for anyone approaching. Remember that people are not expecting to see you there. Only other den hunters will find you, or those wishing to relieve themselves.

You may have to visit the den a few times, each time on approach try to look at it with fresh eyes and build as necessary. Once established, don't get lazy. Consider wearing clothes to blend into your surroundings and upon exit

*rustles become louder*  
*birdsong becomes clearer*

*breaking twigs*

*second voice doubles*

*loud footsteps on broken wood and bark*

*footsteps on leaves become erratic*

*rustle in bushes*

*second voice stops*

and entry always stop and use your eyes  
and ears, and if able move quickly.

#### F O U R

Thirty years later and I am making a new den.  
I am sightseeing in a new city, a new country  
- the wood

I am both old and young, I am in Devon,  
in Kent and I'm here in London.  
The micro is macro, time has proven to be a  
construct and now so is geography.  
My body transcends and is ageless,  
it is just me and the wood, the leaves,  
the mud, the trees and the birds.

I sneak through the wood and through  
the railings into the cemetery.  
I place myself on the logs overlooking the city,  
the smoke and the gravestones.  
The graves on the extreme of the hill  
where I sit are without stones,  
just churned and turned earth,  
they are new and still settling.

I silently greet my new companions,  
knowing that they are not bone and dust yet,  
they are very much still here.  
But they are safe and I am safe from them.

I see the rising sun.  
It is peeking through the trees on the right.  
It is bright orange and the edge of the light  
blurs around the gap it is appearing through.  
A tiny burning orange fire surrounded by  
branches and leaves which have turned

*loud layers of birdsong and  
flapping wings of birds in bushes,  
birdsong and wind in trees*

*motorbike in the distance*

*microphone brushing against railings*

*clear birdsong*

*distorted metallic machine rolling  
sound fades in, and then fades out*

black against the light.  
I do not need to see the entire sphere,  
the small spot is enough for me and it excites  
me to see its power through the trees.  
Light and sun burns on, it is not over yet.

'everything in the world has changed  
apart from you'

*second voice doubles*

I try to relax but keep opening my eyes to  
scan the hill for visitors.

*birdsong clear and loud*

I want to lie down, to be safe.

The ground is dry with no dew or frost  
and to the right of me where the sun hits  
is a dip under a tree with the ground  
covered in ivy and old dry oak leaves.

*footsteps on dry leaves  
rustling in bushes  
clothes scrape on bramble*

I move inside and sit myself down  
at the bottom of an old bare tree.  
It is comfortable and I am surrounded by holly leaves.

I am finally able to relax.  
I listen to the birds.  
Amongst ones I do not recognise  
I hear a crow and a woodpecker.  
I have heard the woodpecker for a few days  
but I wasn't sure. It sounded like an old tree  
trunk creaking, but yes it is, it's a woodpecker!

*woodpecker song  
rustling ceases  
motorbike in distance*

I sit for a while, quietly. This place feels safe,  
safer than the woods where I need to keep moving.  
I am camouflaged. I close my eyes and breathe.  
I like it here with the holly leaves and my quiet  
companions.

*bee buzzing*

I absorb all the sounds around me.  
In the distance I can hear a car stereo.  
But traffic has mostly ceased, it is lockdown.

*birdsong becomes stronger*

The bird song has taken the place of the cars.  
I can only hear the sound of bins being collected.

I meditate, sinking deep into the tree and the earth.  
The wood tells me to slow down, I acquiesce.  
I know this is right for me, there is no rush,  
I can take my time, observe, rest, think and  
listen to the lessons the wood has for me.

*bee buzzing*  
*clear birdsong becomes louder*

*bee buzzing*

Trust in the wood.

Become nature.

There is a fluttering in the holly bushes above me,  
it is two sparrows. I am so still that the birds  
can come close. They notice me and  
make more noise but they do not move away.

*bee buzzing, fluttering birds*

*clear, loud birdsong continues with  
the occasional buzz of a bee*

*[there is hope]*