

The squirrel

by Mathilde Fog Nielsen

It is 7.30 am. I know, because that is when the alarm on my phone goes off. I stretch my arm, reach towards my phone and make the noise stop. The silence in my room is sudden. I scratch my eyes. It does not feel like I have slept one minute, but I must have, since my eyes were closed. I roll out of bed, and my body feels exhausted. I definitely did not get the recommended hours of sleep. I barely do these days. I walk out to the kitchen and put the water on boil to make myself a coffee. “We are out of milk,” I tell my dad. A few minutes later, I take a sip from my cup. It is bitter and I do not enjoy the taste of coffee without milk. I grab my cup and go back into my bedroom. I sit down by my desk and log into my first zoom-meeting of the day. I am a bit early, so I sit and wait until the teacher arrives at the virtual meeting. When waiting, I see myself in the reflection of the black computer screen. There are dark circles under my eyes and my hair is in the same bun that I went to bed with last night. I do not really care. It is only a handful of the teachers who want us to turn the webcam on, anyway.

A few minutes go by and my classmates and our math teacher pop up on my screen. A few students have their webcams turned on but most of them are just black screens with their name written across. “Good morning,” says our math teacher. No one answers. I always feel bad for the teacher when they only receive silence. I definitely would not like to teach a whole class of black silent screens. Our teacher begins to talk about the plan for this and the next couple of modules. Our Prime Minister has just announced that our time in quarantine is extended, once again. Now, we are not even sure if we get to take our final exams.

I look out of my window and I feel myself slowly zoning out. There is squirrel running right in front of me, searching for its hidden nuts under the grass. I often see a squirrel doing this at the same time, at the same place, every day. I wonder if it is the same squirrel. The weather outside looks welcoming. Spring is starting to show. Flowers are flowering, the leaves on our bushes are turning green and my left arm is getting warmed up by the rays of the sun through the window. I have tried to go outside but it is still too cold, plus direct sunlight makes focusing quite difficult.

I think of how I have four modules today and how I have two assignments due tonight. I also need to read my history homework for tomorrow's module. Else I will not be able to keep up. "It is going to be a long day," I sigh out loud and immediately look down at the little microphone symbol in the corner of my screen to make sure that the microphone is turned off.

"I am going to split you into groups of five," I hear my teacher say, when a little white square pops up saying: 'join breakout room'. I click the square and right away I am moved into a smaller virtual meeting. I turn my webcam on, thinking it would be impolite to have it turned off when doing a group project. When seeing my face, my classmates decide to do the same thing.

We slowly start working on our project. One of the group members keeps glitching and every once in a while, I can hear my own echo repeat what I just said, ten times louder.

One girl is having a hard time understanding how to solve the math problem that we have been given and I try to explain it to her. She gets frustrated and leaves our meeting. My head hurts and I cannot wait till this meeting is over. Finally, our teacher calls us back into 'the main room' to wish us a nice weekend. I still have at least 10 hours left till my weekend begins. We get a five-minute break before the next module starts. I look outside my window again. I re-consider going outside, but I convince myself that it would not make that much of a difference.

Hours by the desk go by and the time now says 10.22 pm. My back hurts because of my bad posture and my headache has yet to end. I am struggling with my last assignment of the day. It is an assignment about the corona virus. I roll my eyes as if they could fall out the back of my head. I have already written three assignments about the virus, and I am over it.

Time goes by and I have been staring at a blank piece of paper for what feels like an eternity. I am digging for my nuts, but I do not seem to be able to find them. I consider just taking the couple of hours of written absence, but I end up writing as much as I can for the remaining time.