

DING

By Glenn Crum

An old man in a red wheelchair slowly, cautiously rolled towards the inexplicable hole in his front lawn. Not a sight, nor a sound, had alerted him of its existence. It was just... there. It just, suddenly, happened.

Sometimes things just happen, he thought to himself as he stopped on the edge and looked down. *But not like this*.

The hole, a perfect circle about 8 meters wide in the center of his yard, seemed like an abyss. Nothing was coming out, nothing was going in. It was as if something had fallen from the sky, and hadn't realized it was meant to stop.

The old man frowned. He'd seen sinkholes before. They had shown up often in his backyard, randomly, for no reason. His neighbors thought he was mad to continue to live in this house after all of the ruckus, but he didn't listen. This was his home. He knew that they just wanted him gone. Either way, he could tell one thing. This was no sinkhole.

He stared at the hole intently. Yet, still, there was nothing. The night sky shone on his lawn, and with a slow, painful movement, he looked up and watched the crescent moon soar east of him. He remembered the moon. Something told him he was wrong about it; or maybe it was someone. He believed the moon was where he was meant to be. He believed he would go there someday. Someday, somehow, he would leave.

The old man's attention was called back to the hole when he heard a soft, long *DING* coming from inside of it.

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A boy, bored out of this world, sat in his well-lit bedroom reading a book. He didn't know what book it was. He didn't even *want* to know. He flipped through the book, skimming each page with little care or interest. He knew it was some classic that his parents insisted that he read during the winter break. He didn't bother to look. Reading was a bore.

He was constantly aware of the time passing. *10:31pm. 10:32.* He knew it wouldn't help to know it, and he knew he had so many better things to do. Like reading, or sleeping like any normal human being.

Yet he wouldn't do either. He didn't have any reason to. He knew something was going to happen. He didn't know why, when, or how. Something was going to happen. Probably.

And if nothing happened, he would make it happen.

10:34pm... Could the minutes tick by any slower? When would it end? He looked at the walls of his room. Red. His favorite color, of course. His parents weren't *always* monsters.

10:35pm... When could he be free of this outlandish nightmare? Why did he have to be stuck in a room with air conditioning, something to do, and a cozy bed to sleep in if he wanted to? He even had a window...

He looked up. He toyed with his red wristwatch, taking it off and putting it back on. Then he realized something strange. He looked at his watch again. *10:36pm.* He looked behind him. The light switch was off. He looked back at his window, and it occurred to him that there was a blinding white light shining into his room.

The boy ran downstairs, leaving his watch behind, and, as he did so, looked at the clocks on the wall. 10:36, all of them. He ran through the living room, threw open the door, and ran outside.

He was astounded to see a slab of white light hanging loosely next to his window. From it came a slow, ominous *DING*. He didn't understand. His jaw dropped open and a gasp escaped him.

He drew it in quickly, but he knew it was too late. He saw the light, though it was without features, seemingly turn towards him. It... noticed him. He almost wanted to turn away, but the light, and the *DING*, grew closer and closer. It fascinated him. What could it be?

He moved towards the light. The light moved towards him.

Soon the light, the *DING*, and the boy were gone. A book, some thrown sheets, and a red wristwatch were the only things that remained to prove the existence of the boy.

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The *DING* was getting louder and louder. The old man and the moon waited in anticipation to see what would happen. As he listened he was blinded by a bright flash of light from inside the hole. He took a moment to breathe. The *DING* was getting closer and closer. What would he do when it reached him?

He started to roll back, suddenly realizing the mistake he had made. His sight returned as his trembling hands pushed the wheels of his wheelchair, watching the hole, listening to that relentless *DING*, until suddenly he couldn't budge. He quickly looked down to see what had happened. Seemingly without explanation, the wheels had fallen into two perfectly shaped crevices, in which it was impossible for them to move anywhere but toward the hole.

It's a conspiracy, he thought. *It's a prank*.

The *DING* became more and more imminent.

Those funny neighbors, he continued. *They think I'll fall for this?*

"You think I'll fall for this?!" the old man cried. "You don't know me! Now would *somebody* get my wheelchair out of this ditch?!"

A thousand years passed in one silent second, and it was soon apparent that nobody was there to listen. The old man shook, trying to get his wheelchair out of the ditch. The *DING* was getting closer and closer. He could see the light emanating from the hole. He kept shaking, harder, faster, until finally his wheelchair fell to the side, breaking the soft, wet earth, and the old man fell with it, rolling away from it.

The *DING* grew louder and louder, enveloping him in itself as he tumbled towards the miniature abyss in his front lawn, with no way of stopping.

Soon the *DING*, and the old man, were gone. A bottomless hole, a house, and a red wheelchair were the only things that remained to prove the existence of the old man.

When he could see again, and the ringing in his ears had stopped, he couldn't believe what he saw.

And neither could the boy.

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They saw the Earth from the rough, gray ground of the Moon, surrounded by dots of light, vividly sparkling in the darkness, some dim, some bright. They saw each other,

unprepared, and saw the whole world in the same predicament. The blinding sun shone past the Earth in an almost picturesque manner, showing them its true power, showing them on what they stood.

I can't believe it, thought the boy. I knew something would happen.

I truly made it, thought the old man. I suppose I must have been right.

Sometimes things just happen, they thought.

Then they truly saw the scale of the world, and the old man turned to the boy. The boy did the same. The old man said five words to the boy. Those five words were: "Don't you ever forget this."

A *DING* emanated from the ground on which they stood, and the light shone even brighter than before. Then, suddenly, everything went dark, and the old man and the moon stood alone.

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The boy awoke, sitting on his bed in a dark room with a book in his hands. He picked up his red wristwatch, looked at it, and smiled to himself. *10:36pm...* Apparently the minutes *could* tick by slower.

He looked out of the window into the night to the moon in the East, and he knew that this was what was meant to happen. He could almost see the faint dot where he and the old man used to be. He smiled at it. The old man would still be there. Always waiting for him. Always watching over him.

He wondered what might have happened to him. He could've dreamt it all, but he didn't think so. There was something so... real about it. Something he could never forget.

Someday he would go back. He knew he would. He had to.

It was where he was meant to be.

The boy looked down, opened his book, and began to read, oblivious to the red wheelchair lying in a ditch next to an inexplicable hole in his neighbor's front lawn.