

What Happened

That first night I kept wondering how it happened. I knew was early morning, but even now I can't remember what the weather was like that day. Hot? Wet? Cloudy? Yes, it must have been warm; we were swimming in the river the day before. The rooms were stuffy and I think I opened the windows for the night. I definitely know I closed the windows later. And I remember wearing a stripy sleeveless top when sleeping and putting on shorts in haste as I was awoken by banging on the door (the shorts did not match the top but they were there on the bedroom floor). So it was warm and in summer the sun rises early. I imagined you laying down looking upwards at the sky, seeing how the morning light changed from grey to pink to blue, this quiet, faint, indecisive blue. The church bells have not rung yet. They always ring at seven. And then I imagined you closing your eyes, turning to the side and rolling down.

This was not what happened. I forgot about the snow guards. Those would have to be broken or removed first. I do not know what happened, how it happened.

For Deleuze and Guattari the secret belongs uniquely to the structure to the novella.¹ If the novel is almost entirely contained in the present, where what happened remains to be discovered by the protagonists, and in the tale the present is continually drawn into the future with the question of what will happen next, then in the novella, the present is concerned only with the relation to a past event. Something happened and this changed everything. But what happened exactly? This we do not know, and as Deleuze and Guattari argue, it doesn't really matter what the actual event consisted of.² It doesn't have to be profound - it can be a mere "nothing," a nothing that happened.³ Crucially however it must remain undiscoverable and not through lack of effort on the protagonist's part. It is not that there was some event that we failed to remember, that we could not recognise or determine; the event is undiscoverable because it is unknowable, the strange secret of the novella. And it has to remain this way.

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 192-207.

² *Ibid.*, 193.

³ *Ibid.*

Deleuze and Guattari present three cases to support their argument, one of which is the “In the Cage” by Henry James, a novella telling the story of a young female telegraphist’s encounter with a wealthy couple.⁴ When while interpreting their messages she begins to suspect that a secret placed her in danger, this changes her and her relation with her fiancée. But we as the reader never find out what happened - we do not know the nature of the secret and neither does she. Here's the thing: in order for the secret to have the power it does, it must remain secret. The effect would change if we knew—or rather, if the protagonist discovered—what had actually occurred. Presumably she would not experience this complete sense of self-disintegration, of casting aside those previous longstanding certainties that defined her.

He asked me, you know, more than once: do you know what happened? And I always had to reply that I do not, that I was asleep at the time.

⁴ Ibid., 195-8.