

this little piggy

I was still drunk in the morning. And my head. And a workday. I tried to get out of bed but I wasn't in bed. I pulled myself upright and staggered to the shower. Under the lukewarm water I took off my clothes and began to get the world into focus. By the time I was dry and half dressed again most things had something like definite boundaries. Except for my toes. There seemed to be too many of them. There were five on each foot, as I could see at a glance, but the whole set just looked like more than ten. There was only thing to do. I whipped my socks on before I could notice anything more bizarre. Shoes, tie, and off to work.

We were discussing the Scamron account. My manager, Bertha, had noticed my silence. I supposed she had noticed my hangover. We were supposed to come up with a 30 second spot that would rally the deserting customers of this discredited investment fund. I felt fear, nausea, and panic. I began to wonder about my toes. I reached under the table and took off my shoes. Through my socks I felt for the little piggies and began to count. I started with the little toe of the left foot, which has always been my favourite. In fact when I was a little child I used to think that toe was me: I would talk to it when I wanted to give myself important instructions. I had just made sure that both little toes were there, first left then right, when I noticed Bertha scowling at me. I sat up straight, by hooking my right big toe into the carpet. I realised that Bertha and my right big toe had much the same shape. Come to think of it, Rufus, sitting beside Bertha with a smirk on his

face and a wart on his nose, resembled the second toe on my left foot. And Helena, beside Rufus, had a positively uncanny resemblance to my left big toe.

And so on round the table. Each person was one of my toes. I went round the table in my mind pressing the corresponding toe against the carpet. Over and over again: five toe exercises. But wait. There are thirteen of us, and just five toes on each foot. Unless I've grown some extra toes, like a cat we once had. So I check each foot in turn, one two three four five. Then I go round the table and check each person off while folding the corresponding toe backwards to make sure I'm not counting any toe twice. Painful. One two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven twelve thirteen. I did it again, and again.

They were all staring at me. It was awkward. But I could feel something touch my mind. Something big. I grinned, as if it was all part of some premeditated play. "I can do it" I said. "Just trust me. Let me design the spot and I guarantee you Scamron will be delighted."

Five little piggy banks appear on the screen, your monthly payments to Scamron in the past half year, minus the 16% commission. Then five more little piggy banks, your payments in the next half year if you don't foolishly withdraw your investment before the magic has had time to work. Then each piggy pours out its hoard of little golden coins into a transparent chest. In a particular order: far left, far right, leftmost of the second set, second from the left of the first set, and so on. The chest is then poured out into another set of piggy banks, the

same size as the original five and five. It fills them all: all thirteen of them. Or fourteen, depending on the time of day and the colour of the piggies.

Scamron prospered. And then the eggheads got interested. The Scamron-Rove permutation: take two sets of n elements and map them into the positive integers with a permutation satisfying the Walton-Gendler constraint, and the cardinality of the domain of the permutations is $f(n)$. If n is 5 then $f(n)$ is 13.6. If I hadn't got so drunk that night we wouldn't know this.