

SEVEN DAYS A WEEK

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Monday

On Monday, he has an easy one. He loves starting his week with an easy one. Not that his job is particularly difficult, or time-consuming, but it can certainly be distasteful. He does not dwell on this fact. Some of his peers have cracked under the strain, just couldn't keep going on—they let it get to them. But not him. The job is too important, and the benefits are too good. One more year, and he's out—mandatory retirement at 40, with a full pension and medical for the rest of his life.

And today he has an easy one. A drowning.

He does not know her name. He never knows their names. There is no need. He is here to perform a task, to do that which is necessary.

She is elderly. She let her grandson drown in the pool, while she was supposed to be watching him. Instead, she was inside the house, making another vodka tonic. There was some debate as to whether the parents should be held accountable, as well. Surely they knew of her drinking problem.

In the end, the court decided No, there had been enough loss for this family. But someone must pay, and the guilty were no longer coddled.

He holds her head in the tank for four minutes. She does not resist, barely struggles. She seems to welcome it, in fact. He removes his wet gear when he finishes, and signals to the technicians to remove the body. Even though they wear surgical masks, he can tell the younger one is slightly green under the harsh light of the fluorescents.

"You're new?" he asks, not unkindly.

"Y-yes, sir." Though he is gloved, he is hesitant to touch the body of the dead woman.

"It gets easier. Trust me." He snaps off his gloves and tosses them in the trash as he exits the room, and heads upstairs to his other job, as a tax accountant for Linden and Associates. He has some quarterly reports to get done before he goes home. He finds it amusing that, even though the front company is completely government funded, they still care about profit and loss statements.

He stops in a small room devoid of surveillance gear, and removes his mask and tosses it in the laundry bin in the corner. He exits out a door on the other side, his true face revealed for the first time today, and heads to his office.

Tuesday

He has a baton, and is systematically beating a young man with it.

This particular youth, who is handcuffed hand and foot, is the leader of a gang responsible for the savage beating and near-death of a local student. The gang members used fists and feet. He will use a heavy steel baton, and he will break thirty-two bones in the gang leader's body, at random—the same number of fractures the victim suffered.

He strikes the youth hard several times. He ignores the young man, who has begun to cry and plea for forgiveness.

"How many?" he asks.

A slight hum emanates from the wall, but he is not concerned. Everything he wears today is lined with lead to protect him from the x-rays flooding the room.

"Six," comes the terse reply over a speaker. The tech is in an adjacent room, visible through Plexiglas but shielded from the radiation. "Can you hurry up? I've got a lunch reservation."

"Oh? Where?" he asks, as he resumes swinging the baton, over and over, each impact punctuated by the sound of breaking bones.

"L'Maison."

He pauses. "Really? That's my wife's favorite place to eat. I didn't know they were serving lunch now."

"Yep, they just started, maybe a month ago. The place is absolutely swamped," she says, as she glances at her watch, "and they will only hold your table for ten minutes." She gestures at him through the window. "Less talking, more breaking."

"How many now?" he asks.

The humming returns.

"Fourteen."

Wednesday

He is not happy. Not happy at all. He always gets the burnings, and he hates it, loathes it with every fiber of his being. Their identities are secret; no one is supposed to know who performs that which is necessary. Everything is supposed to be random.

But he seems to get most of the burnings. He wonders for a brief moment if someone is pissed off at him. Someone important.

The CEO of a small, successful company is tied to a chair in the center of the room. An abandoned warehouse his company owned burned to the ground, and two homeless men who lived there were caught inside and burned to death. An investigation revealed the CEO hired an ex-con to burn it down for the insurance money. It turns out his wife had very expensive tastes.

"I'll give you anything you want," the CEO pleads.

The words dissipate as he empties a can of gasoline over the CEO's balding head. He sets the can down, and pats his pockets. Where did he put those matches?

Thursday

He is behind the wheel of a car. It is delicate work, and requires his fullest concentration. He must travel at just the precise speed and strike the woman at just the correct angle in order to cripple her, to put her in a wheelchair. The man she struck and crippled will never walk again. She is held in place by a series of straps tied to a bendable pole, all designed to give way when she is struck by the vehicle.

He can see the fear in her face just before the car impacts her and catapults her thirty feet. If he did it properly, her hip is shattered, the vertebrae in her lower spine severed. She will never walk again. She will certainly never drive while inebriated again.

Unless he missed, of course. Then he'll have to strap her up and start all over again.

Friday

He is strangling a man to death; a man who choked the life from his girlfriend after she told him she was pregnant. He is wearing gloves; they are the really soft kind advertisers have convinced us we need in order to drive expensive cars.

He has been trained how to do this—how much pressure to apply, in which direction, and how important his thumbs are. At some point he will feel the trachea collapse in on itself, and his task will be complete.

He times himself. He takes pride in how strong his hands have become over the years and because it's Friday, and he is a little bored, he endeavors to beat his best time. He squeezes with all his strength, feels the windpipe collapsing beneath his thumbs, and knows the man is dead even as he gasps for a breath that will never come.

He glances at his watch. Seventy-two seconds. Not bad.
Not bad at all.

Saturday

It is late in the day, and his daughter is at a friend's house for a sleepover. He makes love to his wife on a leather couch in the living room. Rays of sunlight stream through the curtains, dappling their bodies in psychedelic shapes his grandfather's generation would have found familiar. She sits astride him, unmoving, her eyes closed as she seeks to prolong the sensations of a lazy afternoon.

His hands caress her body, before moving to her face. He pauses at her throat and strokes the skin above her carotid artery, lets his fingertips linger there, can feel her pulse. He thinks briefly of the man he strangled the day before, and wonders if she will ever know what he really does when he goes to work. He wonders if she would be able to understand.

She responds to his touch, and begins moving. She reaches down, knowing it adds something extra for him. The day before, while wielding a very sharp knife, she transformed a serial rapist into a eunuch. It was unpleasant, but necessary, and she does not think about it now. She wonders if her husband will ever know what she really does for a living. He thinks she is an accountant, just like him.

Sunday

He naps in the golden twilight of late afternoon, a tabby cat stretched across his chest. His daughter wakes him, solemnly, her four-year-old face earnest and concerned, and informs him they must go to the store to get milk for dinner.

He is still groggy and ruffled when they get to the store, but his daughter holds his hand firmly as she leads him around the automated cashier to the dairy aisle. A virtual herd of bovine faces watch in silence as he picks up a gallon of milk and checks the date.

A quick movement in his peripheral vision catches his attention. There is a young woman in the aisle with them. He glances over and watches her surreptitiously stuff the interior pockets of her scruffy overcoat with various and sundry items. She has spiky blue hair and is missing the little finger on her left hand. She might be fifteen, and is already a repeat shop-lifter. If she gets caught again, she will lose the entire hand.

She stops when she feels his eyes on her, and straightens up and meets his gaze. It becomes obvious to him that she has not eaten in some time. For half a moment he considers offering to pay for her items, but before he can speak, she whirls on her heel and stalks down the aisle and around the corner.

He looks down at his daughter. He is still holding her left hand. For an instant he can't feel her little finger in his grasp, and he has to squeeze her hand tighter to make sure it is still there.

He turns, and his little girl follows him, hand in hand, as they walk to the front of the store to pay for their milk.

He hopes he has an easy one tomorrow. He likes starting his week with an easy one.