

The Bad Day

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Nick lay in traction, bandaged from head to toe and itching in places he didn't even know he had. Unable to move his neck, he strained his eyes to the right to catch a glimpse of his wife. She was still unconscious, poor thing.

He remembered starting the day to the interminable squawking of an alarm. He slapped at the snooze button blindly as if chasing a drunken moth. As he stared at the ceiling listening to Meg's light snore, he thought about the tasks ahead. Meeting with that bitch of a boss, Susan, at ten. Two proposals, then a client lunch at one. Run through the Stanfield presentation with Rudy, then back at the desk by three to return phone calls and set up the Ludwig account.

Normally dark at this hour, a flicker of sunlight broke his trance. He grabbed his watch off the dresser. 8:00? The alarm said 6:30. Which one was wrong?

He staggered into the kitchen and looked at the wall clock. 8:04, and the carpool would be out front any minute. Saul's driving today— damn timely Norwegians, he'd be out front honking at exactly 8:15. With no time for coffee or a shower, he had to throw on a suit, snatch a muffin, and call it good.

He took the steps two at a time. Quickly, he reset the clock and checked that the second alarm would wake Meg at 9:30, as usual. Leaning over his still sleeping wife he whispered, "Honeybunch, I'm running late. Got to deal with Susan." He shuddered at the thought, "...eh, I'll figure it out, Hon—bye," then kissed her cheek. She replied by mumbling and rolling over.

He got to the front door just as Saul pulled up and dropped his muffin while fumbling for his keys in the doorway. A white streak swooped in and the muffin disappeared. So much for breakfast. Saul maneuvered his station wagon onto the driveway and motioned Nick to the backseat. Before Nick had the car door closed, Saul lurched into reverse. WHUMP! CHINK! "Dammit, I think I hit your stupid curb again— you guys really oughta fix that." Nick rolled his eyes. How does one idiot-proof their driveway?

Once at work, Nick fished through his pockets but found no change for the machine. His stomach groaned its displeasure. He only had about ten minutes to collect himself before meeting with Susan, and he hadn't even tied his tie yet.

He endured the meeting and was rewarded with a message that the last client had cancelled. Realizing he had an hour and a half to himself, he sweet-talked Saul into borrowing the wagon so he could surprise Meg with lunch. Meg usually came home around 1:00, so he figured he'd have time to cook up a little something special.

When he pulled into the driveway, his heart stopped. The front door was wide open and Shotzie was yapping his fool head off from the back yard. He rushed in to find the house in shambles. Bits of paper were strewn all over the kitchen, the hallway lamp was in pieces, and the side garage door was open, but Meg's car was still there. In a panic, he ran up to the bedroom, where the alarm clock was jerked out of the wall, the bed was messed up— Meg usually made it—and clothes were everywhere. It looked like there had been a struggle. He called to his wife as he ran back downstairs.

Something small and round sent his foot flying out from under him, and he tumbled ass over teakettle down the stairs. Shotzie yapped and clawed at the screen door. He cried out for Meg, trying to get up, only to realize that he had broken his leg, and quite possibly his arm. He hollered for a good ten minutes until a neighbor rescued him. EMTs strapped him to a stretcher and hauled him onto an ambulance.

The ambulance wailed down the city streets on the way to the hospital. He drifted in and out and called for Meg until one of the EMTs leaned in close to him and told him that they would take very good care of him. Just as he said that, the ambulance violently jerked sideways, which dislodged an oxygen tank that dropped on Nick's head and knocked him unconscious. When he awoke, he was in the hospital, and they wheeled his wife in next to him.

His morphine monitor beeped, and he felt the blissful release of pain as he slipped into Happyland once again. He still didn't know why Meg was in the bed next to him.

Meg gave up on the alarm and turned it off. The house was quiet, and the sun streamed persistently through the gauze curtains. She threw off the covers and smiled at the words her husband had said earlier, “How ‘bout lunch, the Inn on Eighth? Put those cute red shoes on, and I’ll see you about one, bye.” Then he kissed her. She was groggy after staying up past 11:00 to finish her paper, but she remembered the whole thing.

How did he know about her new shoes? Well, it would be nice to dress up a bit, and she even had the perfect lipstick to go with the outfit she’d bought the shoes for.

She mumbled to herself as she made coffee, she hated it when Nick didn’t leave her some. As she got out the puppy food for Shotzie, she suddenly realized that she hadn’t seen the little monster yet this morning.

She called his name and Shotzie ran from the hall into the bathroom with his tail between his legs. She searched the hallway, but found no cause for his guilty retreat. Back in the bedroom, she discovered that the damned dog had barfed what looked like a poppy seed muffin all over her new red shoes!

After wrestling with her hair and re-thinking her entire outfit several times, she glanced at her watch. 11:15. She was late for class already! She must have looked at the clock wrong. She hopped on one foot with a shoe in one hand, and her purse on her elbow. She grabbed about \$3 in change off the nightstand, where Nick cleaned out his pockets every night. She finally got her shoe on and headed for the door, only to trip on the alarm clock’s cord, ripping it out of the wall. As she fell face-first, her purse flew out into the hallway and spilled halfway down the stairs. Tripping over that blasted cord was becoming a habit— she had done the same thing last night and had to reset the stupid thing to her watch. Well, it would just have to wait; she didn’t have the time to deal with it now.

She gathered everything back into her purse, threw the puppy in the back yard, and dashed out the garage door. In her haste to flee the house, the door swung back open and knocked over the telephone table, breaking the lamp, and sending the Rolodex careening into the kitchen.

To her absolute horror, the car wouldn’t start. Frustrated beyond all logic, she stomped out the front door. At the edge of the driveway she saw that the

ceramic bunny that she had made in pottery class was smashed to smithereens. Overwrought, she trudged across the street to Leslie's house and banged on the screen door.

Leslie, quite comely in her curlers, green facemask, and cigarette dangling out the side of her mouth, answered the door with a knowing look and the keys to her Studebaker.

Amazingly, Meg was early to class. She drummed her fingers through out the lecture, itchy to get out of there and meet up with Nick. She dug through her purse for her lipstick, but couldn't find it. She sighed, glanced out the window, then at her watch. 11:15. She shook her wrist, and then listened for a tick. Nothing.

When class ended, she tossed her \$4 watch in the garbage and practically ran to get to the car. Halfway across the street, an ambulance came careening out of nowhere and almost hit her. It swerved sharply to avoid her, and she jumped backwards in terror. A speeding taxi rounded the opposite corner, and smashed into her. The last thing she remembered was asking an EMT to tell her husband that she'd be late for lunch.