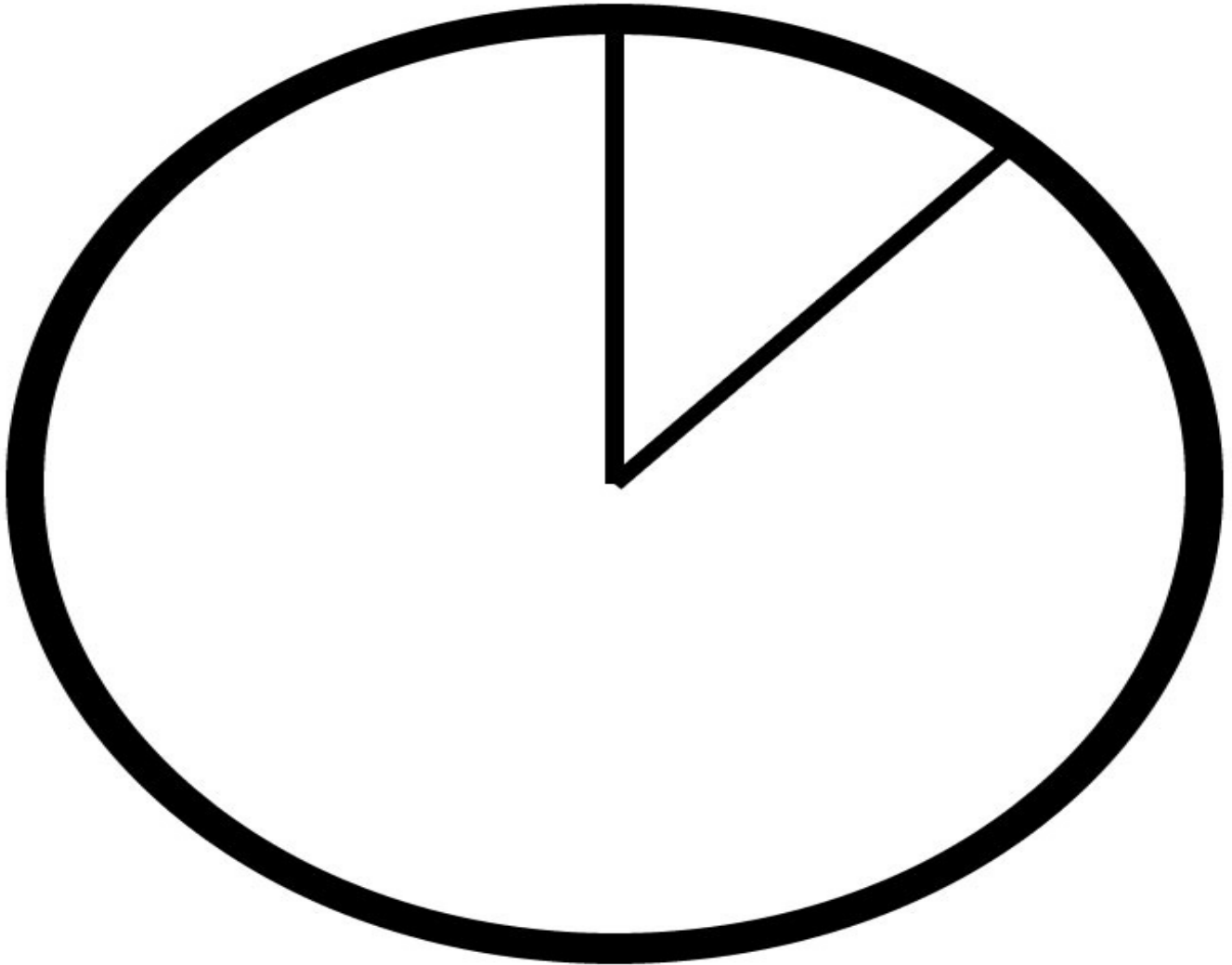


TEN BY TEN

First Round



**Ten Short Stories in Ten Minute
Sessions**

Yardell Perkins

TEN BY TEN: FIRST ROUND

Ten short stories conceived in ten minutes sessions

YARDELL PERKINS



Published by Yardell Perkins

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DEDICATIONS

To Annette,

For helping to separate “Me” from “Myself”

(LONG Story)

To Tricia

For assisting with the inspiration for these “Sessions”

INTRODUCTION

In December 2015, I was able to attend my first ever “Con”: WordCamp 2015; held at the Philadelphia Convention Center right in town. It felt like one of those milestone moments where I was actually stepping into my future life as a freelance web developer. I had registered for the entire three-day event, but the first one turned out to be plenty.

I arrived about fifteen minutes prior to the 8am open of registration and spent the next ten hours leap frogging between the various rooms to hit all of the lightning talks I wanted to get to. I learned a great deal from every one, but there was one in particular that unexpectedly managed to stand out: “Publish in 10 Minutes Per Day” by one Andrea Badgley ([@andreabadgley](#)).

During her lightning talk, she mentioned her early struggles with starting and maintaining her own blogging schedule – a problem I was beginning to deal with myself – and among other things, suggested a simple routine of picking a specific time every day, sitting down at a table or computer screen, and just writing for about ten minutes. The purpose behind this was to first build up the habit of just sitting down to write and second allowing one’s thoughts to flow without getting to wrapped up in the need for a specific subject or idea. Regarding the latter issue; she further suggested coming up with a pre-made batch of words and randomly picking one prior to each session

I had first intended to strictly apply her ideal to my business blog, but managed to get into the groove of finding stuff to write about for that on my own. Still, the idea intrigued me enough that I still wanted to try it out in some capacity. Being an avid lover of my eReader - A Sony PRS-T2 as of this writing - and thinking that I’d like to try publishing an eBook of my own at some point, I decided that I would tweak her suggestion for the purposes of creating the material for a simple eBook.

Initially, the hardest part of this task was creating the wordlist itself I had intended to make it on my own, but I concluded that the resultant stories might be a bit more original, if I was forced to start them from a point somewhere “outside” of myself. To that end, I asked a friend of mine to create the list for me, and I promised myself that I would do my best to work from that.

I struggled with consistently maintaining a day-to-day process of writing, but after an odd couple of months, I managed to create a very rough pool of thirty short stories. I’m fairly confident that none of the stories are plagiarisms or unabashed knock-offs; if only due to the fact that its been so long since I’ve read anything other than a tech manual or programming book that I wouldn’t have had any idea of what to steal from whom in the first place..

My original intent had been to dump all thirty of those stories together into one massive volume. However, even as an eBook that didn’t need to be parsed from start-to-finish, that seemed to be a bit much to put on any potential reader. Therefore, I opted to cherry-pick ten of the stories that I felt particularly comfortable with, and place them here.

Except where noted, there is no explicit order or overarching theme to any of the stories.

Thanks, in advance, for reading.

Yardell

-Yardell

THE BEGGAR

The conversation, to the extent that it could be called a conversation for as much as he talked, went along in largely the same manner it always did:

"Is it really 'now'?"

"It can't end like this!"

"Just one more day?"

"Just five more minutes?"

"Just a little more time?!?! PLEASE!!!"

Death stood before the individual going through their usual motions; same as all of the others. As always, he rarely if ever spoke. It wasn't that he was so cold or aloof to their pleas, but there was little for him to say that could make things any better. For all of the stories, legends, and lore that he had heard about his alleged persona and powers, people would be surprised to learn of just how minimal his position truly was in the grand scheme of it all.

Simply put, he was essentially A "Secretary": He greeted people when they first "arrived" and made sure that they were sent in the right direction. He had no say in who came or when. The individuals themselves were more responsible for that than he.

"What about my wife?"

"What of my children?"

"My squad mates need me! I have to finish the mission!!!"

For as much as people claim to understand that nobody lives forever, and that everyone goes at some point, that actual "point" is rarely a convenient one. By way of their professions, associations, actions - or in some cases, *inaction* - people largely made their own appointments with him...

...The taxi driver who smoked a pack of cigarettes and drank three beers every evening after his shift without fail (Lung disease, age 41)...

...The fitness guru who exercised six times a week, had never know the taste of alcohol, and commanded a diet that would put the most fevering vegans to shame (heart failure, age 89)...

Though, there was more than a fair share of exceptions

...The software engineer who just happened to step into a cab, unbeknownst to him, that had been stolen by a serial killer who recently escaped from a prison...(multiple heart lacerations, age 24)

...The daughter of a mother who contracted HIV from one of her past "clients", the same individual being her father whom she would never know (complication from aids, age 9)

When Death was first assigned to the job - Yes, it is a "position", in the sense that it had been held by another before him and would be issued to someone after him - it was suggested that he familiarize himself with the details of everyone who came to him as it

may help with managing them. For a time, a few thousand years, he had done just that...

"Associate Professor of Engineering"

"Naval Petty Officer"

"Non-Profit Executive Director"

"Janitor"..."Mayor"..."Homemaker"....

...but after a while, he realized that, despite their past path, prior to coming to him, when they finally reached him, they all, at least initially, took on the shape, form, and mannerisms of one type of person in one type of profession.

These days, he labels them all as one in the same:

"The Beggar"

UTOPIA

Albert Camus once said: "The only way to deal with an unfree world is to live a life so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion."

Henry David Thoreau pined: "The man who goes alone may begin today, but he who is with another must wait till that other is ready."

When people think of the word "Utopia", what usually comes to mind are images of some magical metropolis, the likes of "Atlantis" or "Shangri-La", where there is no scarcity or want, and therefore no struggle or conflict. Maybe there is such a physical city, somewhere in the world that exists. If there is, its a place whose existence is of mere novelty to me. It would be nice to find it, but I don't necessarily need to.

I like to think that "Utopia" can also exist as a state of reality where people can "do what they dream". In that respect, I consider myself rather wealthy in that I've been able to cultivate for myself a reality where ive brought two such designs of my own from design to reality, with a third in the works. This task has gotten increasingly simplistic (Not "Easy", there is a difference), over the years as I've been able to reduce my attachments to earthly needs. That's not to say that I outright lack of want for things or company, but that I feel confident in my ability to do with far less in either area than what many other would prefer to have be possess or strive for.

This is the "Utopia" that all people should seek and strive for as its one that can be "found" wherever an individual finds themselves. A reality that exists beyond structures, beyond companies, beyond entitlements and the entitled. A reality to work, research and experiment, and to do so with such like minded people, when and if desired, without the entanglements of the "Real World"

As humble and basic as many may find it, for me, "Atlantis" is my apartment.

THE INHERITANCE

"SIR! With respect, you have to take him!!!", the lady said with a sense of exasperation in her voice

"MA'AM! with respect, I 'Have to' pay my taxes and die!", the man responded from the other side of the door, just barely opened by the security chain. "The last time I spoke Roddy was nine years ago and he had made it *very* clear at the time that he wanted nothing else to do with me. *Ever. Again.* Prior to you having just shown up here at my apartment, unannounced and uninvited, he could have been dead for all I knew."

"Well, sir, he is dead...", the social worker replied. "...and in his will he left very explicit instructions that his son be brought to you.", she carried on in something of a pleading voice. "It is my understanding that, apart from you, this child has no next-of-kin. If you don't accept him, his only recourse would be placement into the state foster care system."

"The 'system' that you are a part of, as a social worker, correct?", the man probingly inquired

"Yes, that's correct", the woman replied, unsure of where he was going with the question.

"Then by all means put him into the damned system!", the man cheerfully replied. "With your intimate knowledge of it, I'm sure that you can make sure that he is placed somewhere 'nice'", he concluded matter-of-factly.

"Are you truly going to deny your cousin his last request? *Really?!?!'*", she said in a rather chagringly tone.

"First off: A 'Last Request', is still a 'Request'. As in, I have no outright obligation to honor it. Secondly: I would argue that he had his *last request* of me when he pointed me out of his life, and told me to STAY out of it; a *request* that I have dutifully honored for the past nine years. I won't stand here and be lectured to about some extra duty you think I have deal with one of his affairs now that he is no longer with us!"

"This is not an 'Affair'! IT'S A LITTLE CHILD!!!"

"IT'S NOT MY CHILD!!!"

"WHAT KIND OF A 'MAN' ARE YOU?!?!'"

"THE KIND THAT'S MAN ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT I DON'T NEED TO PROVE SHIT ABOUT MY 'MANHOOD' TO A 'LADY' IVE ONLY KNOW FOR LESS THAN TEN MINUTES!!!"

At this point, the child in the woman's arms started to cry. The woman, herself, felt on the edge of tears. Shocked, angered, and bewildered all at once at the man's apparent contempt towards the situations.

The man smiled: "The child appears to be upset. You should probably take him somewhere, FAR away from here, and calm him down"

Before the woman could voice another argument, the door was slammed shut. Steps

we're heard walking away from it on the other side. Now with tears in her own eyes, the woman looked down at the baby, itself still crying.

She gently kissed his head: "I'm sorry", she said through some sniffles, "I'm so, so sorry."

THE LOTTERY

The shock of the moment was still sinking in. She had "Won".

The other four members of her group were slouched back in their chairs, or lying on the table continuing to bleed out. The fifth, her sergeant, was sitting directly to her left, shuddering at what had just happened; knowing fully well what was coming next.

Their captors had made the rules of the game simple. It was essentially "Russian Roulette", in reverse: The six of them were sat at the table and handcuffed to their seats. A six-chamber revolver was loaded with five bullets. One of their captors would put the gun to each of their heads and pull the trigger. The one who got the empty chamber would be set free, under the explicit condition that if said person was not the last one to draw, they would have to shoot the others themselves.

When the lieutenant's "Turn" came, she sat up as straight as she could and looked the gun straight in the barrel. Had it been her time, she couldn't have gone more bravely.

The man pressed the barrel between her eyes and pulled the trigger. The loud deafening click of the hammer slamming into the chamber was heard...but nothing else. That particular chamber was the empty one.

The room briefly erupted with equal parts cheers and boos as the men standing around the table started to settle the bets they had made with one another over whether the lieutenant would be killed or not.

"ENOUGH ALREADY, YOU DAMNED APES!!", their leader snapped as he began to uncuff the lieutenant. "Well, Well, my lady!", he said with jubilation, "It looks as if you have won the day! All you have to do now is 'claim' your prize", he said as he glanced to the last man at the table still cuffed.

"You worthless bitch!", the man exclaimed with a clear shudder in his voice. "You got us into this mess and now YOU get to walk away from it?"

"Watch your tone, Sergeant!" The woman exclaimed.

"FUCK YOU, LIEU-TEN-ANT! FUCK!!! YOU!!!", the man snapped back. "What are you going to do? Report me to command?!?! What's your story going to be? That I spoke 'out-of-turn' before you murdered me? And for what? To save your own ass from some shit you got us into because you 'knew you were right' about your course? We both know you're not going to tell them THAT part, DON'T WE?!?!"

The woman grabbed the sergeant's collar with one hand and started to wind up a punch with the other. She was well aware that she had made a terrible mistake, and it has resulted in lives being lost. Such was the burden of command. Still, the military part of her expected the chain of command to be respected and honored, especially before the enemy. Their captor's leader, however, grabbed her hand and forced her back down into her seat as everyone else in the room immediately trained their various guns on her.

"ALRIGHT! ALRIGHT, CHILDREN!", the man chided. "We're all agreed that this is a shit situation you two are both in. Let's not drag it out!" The man took the revolver from his cohort and placed it in the woman's hands while standing behind her. "You know the

deal: You can leave and head back to your other friends, *after* you finish him off. Lest, we shoot you both and nobody will be left to tell anyone anything."

Loathe as she was to admit it, he was right. She could take the gun and *maybe* shoot one of them, but the others would immediately gun them both down, having served nothing but her pride which admittedly created this mess. If all of them died there, they would, at best, be listed as "Missing in Action", with nobody ever knowing what had happened. If she could at least get back, she could tell command 'something'. At least let them know where the bodies of her team *might* be.

She looked at the gun, and then looked the man towering above her right in his eyes: "I have your word? as a gentleman?", she pleaded, "I will have safe, unfettered, passage back to my own side?"

"Save and unfettered", the man said in a reassuring voice while nodding. "We're not the unjust, uncivilized savages you and your others like to make us out to be"

She firmly grasped the gun in her hands, finger on the trigger and pointed it at her last squad mates head. She took some deep breaths to steady herself.

The sergeant began to defiantly chide her: "Just do it, you fucking bi-"

BANG

SIX FINGERS

"WHAT THE ARSE?!?!", The editor roared across the desk at the author who seemed surprisingly relaxed in the face of his bewilderment. "What do you mean he has 'six' fingers?"

"I mean he has six fingers." The author said not only calmly, but with a bit of a smile, as if having completed some masterstroke move.

"Well, why does the character have to have six fingers?", the editor asked, having calmed down a bit.

"I don't know." The author replied, still maintaining a proud calm.

"You don-...you DON'T KNOW?!?! How do YOU...NOT...KNOW?!?!? HE'S YOUR CHARACTER! THIS. IS. YOUR. BOOK!!! For fucks sake, you basically BIRTHED the man. Your his...um...I don't know, his 'man mother' or some shit!!"

The author took a sip of the drink in his hand, leaned slightly back in his chair and sighed.

"...and do you know of any 'Mother' who knows exactly how their child will come to them at the end of their pregnancy? All of the children you've ever heard of with Autism, genetic defects and the like. What mother can you name that has ever seen any of that coming?"

"Well...I...Um....", the editor stumbled for words. It was an admittedly valid point but one that still didn't seem to quite apply to the author, in his mind.

"Okay then, Fine.", The editor said rallying his defense. "You're not a 'man mother'...you're FUCKING GOD! THERE!" The man proclaimed in a burst of excitement. "You decide how this book is supposed to be and the people in it! You have to know then where this 'sixth finger' shit came from. You just make something up and that's that!"

"Is that not how 'god' himself started out"? replied the author. "He set this world and all of us into motion with his own idea of how we we're 'supposed' to be. Look at what came of that?"

Exhausted, the editor fell back into his chair and scanned over the pages again. "What makes you think that this out-of-the-blue change is going to work?"

"Like you said..." the author said, before taking another sip of his drink: "I'm god".

THE TOUR BUS

Had it not been for the slight emerald green tint that everything seemed to be covered in - the very sky above included - had none of them on the bus not known any better, they would have sworn that they were still home.

"IF YOU WOULD DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION TO THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE BUS...", the female sounding guide voice requested through the speaker at the front, "...YOU WILL SEE THAT WE ARE BEGINNING TO PASS THROUGH ONE OF THE SEVERAL RECREATION AREAS IN THIS SECTION OF THE COMPOUND WHERE YOU WILL BE ABLE TO RELAX DURING YOUR FREE TIME AND BRING FUTURE CHILDREN, SHOULD SOME OF YOU CHOOSE TO PROCREATE."

"Hey Lady! If you even ARE a 'Lady'...", Richard bellowed from his seat. "...if you want us to 'relax', the least you could do is stop calling this place a damned 'Compound'! Not like we don't know what's happening 'ere!"

"WHAT NOMENCLATURE WOULD SEAT 2-R-A PREFER?", the voice politely asked.

"Okay, one: We're not 'Seats'! We're HUMANS! PEOPLE! IN-DI-VID-DU-ALS!!!", Richard chided. "We have names, damnit! I'm 'Richard', the man next to me is 'Gent'! The lady across from us, 2-L-A, as you've been bellowing, is 'Maria'! A single mother of three who still shaken up from that vicious little trick you pulled on us a few days ago. Two: this place you done went and built? It's not a "Compound", it's a "City"!!! This specific part here?"

Richard stopped for a second to more closely examine the surroundings,

"Well, okay, fine! Technically is IS a recreation area of sorts, but we call them 'Parks'." Get it all straight, would ya?!?!"

A steady string of low beeps, hums, and crackles started to purr from the speaker, as if the lady – whomever or whatever she was on the other end - was contemplating everything Richard has just said.

"NOMENCLATURE CHANGES PROCESSED AND ACCEPTED", the voice finally responded. "'SEAT 2R-A' IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE 'RICHARD', 'SEAT 2R-B' IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE 'GENT', 'SEAT 2L-A' IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE 'MARIA', 'COMPOUND' IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE 'CITY', 'RECREATION AREA' IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE 'PARK'"

Richard took a deep breath. "Well, that's a LITTLE better, I suppose."

Maria, pulled her head up from her hands, her eyes still read with tears trickling down. She turned slightly to Richard and choked out a slight "Thank you" between some sniffles before burying her head back into her hands.

"Good show, you drunk bastard!", Gent exclaimed while patting Richard on the shoulder.

"Yeah, well, we all already know that we're prisoners. They don't need to be throwing it in our face at every damned turn", Richard remarked.

"You gotta hand it to them, though..", Gent said while looking about at the neighborhood

they we're passing through, "...If they really do see us as 'prisoners', they're not particularly acting like it."

"...and why should they?", Richard snapped back. "How hard do they really have to try now? They know we've got nowhere to run to even if we could run! This place might as well be fuckin' Alcatraz!"

"Alca-what?" Gent asked with a perplexed look on his face.

"An old prison that was built in the middle of some water somewhere back home. It was before your time. Hell, it was before MY time actually. I only know as much as I do of it through a half-broken reference vid."

"Never pegged you for a history buff", Gent remarked.

"Before the invasion..." Richard started.

"Don't you mean 'occupation'?", Gent started to correct

"Cut the politically correct crap. We're not even on Earth anymore. We we're fuckin invaded. Let's call a spade a spade"

"Fair enough" Gent relented while holding his hands up.

"Anyway, before the INVASION, the present was shit and the future looked even shitter. Seemed like the only proper escape was into the past".

"ATTENTION ALL PEOPLE-HUMANS-IN-DI-VID-DU-ALS...", the tour voice called.

"OH, FOR FUCKS SAKE!" Richard exclaimed.

"Well...." Gent said with a bit of a laugh, "You're the one who corrected her."

"...WE HAVE ARRIVED AT YOUR DESIGNATED RESIDENTIAL AREA. PLEASE DISEMBARK AND REPORT TO YOUR HOUSE"

The three of them stepped off the bus and onto the street. Richard was helping Maria along as she was still too distraught to truly wrap her head around the situation.

They had arrived at the mouth of what appeared to be a long suburban street ending with a cul-de-sac. Most of the houses on the street were empty with a small bright light in front of them on the lawn. A handful however, looked occupied and had no such light

"Exactly which house goes to each of us?" Gent asked.

"EXPLICIT RESIDENCE ASSIGNMENTS ARE MADE AT THE DISCRETION OF EACH PEOPLE-HUMANS-IN-DI-VID-DU-ALS FROM THE DOMICILES VISIBLY MARKED" the voice replied; now coming from a speaker outside of the bus.

"So we get to choose our own individual 'cells'. Nice.", Gent replied

Richard looked around at the street and shook his head. He then looked up to the sky to see other buses similar to theirs floating down from a hole in the sky to the section of the city they started in. No doubt more arrivals being queue up for the grand tour.

"Home-Sweet-Fucking-Home", Richard grumbled to himself as he held Maria a little tighter.

THE LAST DAY

You could be forgiven for believing Gerard to be somewhat oblivious to the reality of his situation.

He had arrived to the building, in the same manner as he always had....

He settled into his desk in his office and drank his coffee while reviewing the paper he had bought on the way in...

He had gone through his daily preparation ritual of reviewing his work from the day before and planning out what he intended to do for that day...

As his very first task of the day, he called Mark, a representative from one of his part suppliers to place a parts order for a task to be done within the next couple of weeks.

If you didn't know better, and just about everyone else in the building did, you wouldn't think that Gerard was, at all, acting as someone who was going through their last day of employment.

"Mr. Gerard?", his secretary, Tammy, said while peeking into the open door of his office, "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Sure thing." Gerard said with a smile on his face. "Come on in, and I keep telling you: Call me 'Greg'. If ever there was a day that we didn't need to be formal, its today. It's not like you work for me anymore. ".

Tammy stepped in and closed the door behind her. She briskly took a seat on the other side of his desk.

"Mr. Ger - Um, Greg, - ...", she carefully probed, "Are you...um...okay?"

"As okay as ever", He beamed. "Why do you ask?"

"Well...I mean....", Tammy struggled, "You know....what's happening, right?"

"You mean with my 'Termination'? Yes, the executives have made the details of it all very clear".

"And?!?!", Tammy asked with a slight degree of urgency in her voice.

"And....what?", Gerard replied, as if keeping up the very same air of obliviousness by design.

"You're being TERMINATED!!!!", Tammy exclaimed, as if to be losing patience with the act, if it was an act." You say you 'understand what's happening to you' but you're certainly not acting like it".

"First off...", Gerard said in a correcting tone, "I never said that I 'understood' what's happening to me. only that the executives made the details of it clear. To simplify: I know that I've been 'selected'. I know nothing of the exact thought process that went into said 'selection'"

"..and you're not bothered by any of this?!" Tammy exclaimed.

"It's a bit disappointing, but not entirely surprising.", Gerard shrugged. "For all of their talk about there being some 'fair and equitable' system that drives the selection process,

everyone knows that, behind the scenes, it's just a grown-ups version of the ol high school popularity contests. People needing to get in good with the right other people, sit at the 'right' table during lunch..."

"Why didn't you do any of that?" Tammy asked somewhat hysterically, "You could have saved yourself!"

Gerard broke out into a bit of a laugh. "Saved myself? Goodness woman, the way you're acting, you'd think I was being led off to the gallows or something. I really didn't care for the 'game' when I was in high school, I saw little interest in getting into it now."

"People who are 'Terminated' are led off and never seen again! For all you know, they ARE taking you to the gallows!!!"

"For all I know, they could be taking me to some retirement home to live it up in the lap of luxury for the rest of my days. Besides, if memory serves, You came back, did you not? Made history in the process"

Tammy hung her head a bit low and crossed her arms, "Yeah...well, considering the 'negotiations' process I had to go through with the executives, sometimes I wonder if I shouldn't have just quietly went along with it all"

Gerard started to crack a joke: "Well, perhaps I co--"

KNOCK *KNOCK* *KNOCK*

Gerard and Tammy directed their attention to the office door. "Come in", Gerard exclaimed.

The door opened, and three men that seemed to be a set of triplets, dressed in extremely dark colored, but surprisingly bright business suits entered the room.

"Mr. Gerard?" one of them spoke "It's time to complete your 'Termination'. Please come with us."

Without missing a beat, or dropping his smile, Gerard stood up, grabbed his suit jacket and had, and started to make his way around the desk. As he started to pass Tammy, he looked down at her and smiled:

"Be a gem and make sure Mark gets the order I placed right. Just in case." He winked and made his way with the triplets.

MONDAY MORNING (1 OF 3)

"No more dicking around", he thought to himself as he sat at the edge of his bed, shaking off the sleep. "It happens on Saturday. Sink or Swim"

He'd had a rough idea of how it would all play out, but this was where he'd actually *plan* it.

"Those who fail to plan, plan to fail", he quoted to himself.

As he had made a regular habit of doing anyway, he went to his home-office desk, and set to work on his "To-Do" list for the day. After about 20 minutes of scribbling, erasing, and a full rewrite, he looked over what was in front of him:

TO-DO LIST, MONDAY

- 0900 - Purchase *Item* at store on way to work. Have *Expedited Processing* fee ready to reduce 10-day wait to 5-days

- 1030 - Confirm Friday and Saturday days off with boss

- 1100 - Purchase bus ticket to 'leave town' on Friday

- 1130 - Confirm hotel room at destination

- 1200 - Lunch Date w/ Lara (LAST CHANCE!)

- 1300 - Review list of items in package:

- o Sneakers, jeans, shirt, underwear, jacket, sweat suit top and pants

- o \$500 cash, wallet w/ ID and cash card (\$500)

- o Cellphone

- o Laptop and messenger bag

- o Two pairs of gloves

- 1400 - Have package mailed to motel room at destination. Request tracking services on package.

- 1430 - Contact 'Destination' motel to notify of package delivery. Request call for confirmation of receipt.

- 1530 - Staff Meeting (AGAIN!?!?)

- 1630 - Confirm appointment with "Transporter"

He held the list in front of him and leaned slightly back, as if reviewing a work of art. He took a deep breath and nodded in acceptance of it. "I'll get all of this done", he said to himself. "I won't have to think about any of it as it's planned. Ill 'just do it'", he quietly said as if giving himself marching orders.

The next hour was spent with the rest of his usual morning ritual: 30-minutes perusing his favorite skin sites while 'unwinding' himself, 15-minutes in the shower, and a final fifteen getting his clothes on and packing his bag before heading out the door.

As he stepped outside of his apartment, he glanced down at his watch to read a time of

815am. He once again repeated to himself the first item of his to-do list:

- "Purchase the item on my way to work. Have the expedited processing fee ready"

He wasn't due in until ten and he was currently ahead enough of schedule that he could easily be at the store fifteen minutes ahead of its opening...

The morning weather was nice enough. He decided to walk, as opposed to his usual manner of taking the bus.

"So far, so good..." he said to himself with a smile as he headed down the street.

END PART ONE

SATURDAY MORNING (2 OF 3)

The alarm clock read 4:07am..

He was sitting on the floor in front of his bed, legs crossed in silent thought. To say that he was "up early" would imply that he had actually went to sleep at some point the previous night.

"Today is the day..." he silent whispered to himself.

With the exception of one ultimately minor hang up, Monday, the entire week in general actually had gone off without a hitch. The "minor hitch", being the last-minute cancellation of his lunch date with Lara, BY Lara. It hadn't been a surprise, per se, but it still stung on a certain level. As much as he was still infatuated with the woman, at least physically, he had started to resent the leading treatment he had been receiving from her.

Had any of his multiple advances simply been "Rejected", that would have been one thing. He could have lived with a simple "Sorry, not interested". Lara, clearly seeing how pent up and sexually frustrated he was, had opted for a repeated process of drawing him in, shooting him down, sometimes in a rather public fashion, and then belting out some story about her treatment of him being some kind of twisted "Defense Mechanism" born of the bad treatment she had received from men over the years.

Maybe that was the case. He had seen it a few times before while at college. Still, he'd had nothing to do with any of that and did not particularly appreciate being made to pay for other men's sins.

To Lara's credit: This time around, this LAST time, she had simply called and said that she'd have to leave work early and wouldn't be able to make it. She asked if they could reschedule for next week as she really wanted to sit down with him and just chat. No games or BS.

"Sure thing...", he had cheerfully replied. "Next Monday good?"

"That would be great!", she beamed in kind. "Thanks. Really."

He had hung up the phone with a smirk on his face. "Next Monday..." he chuckled under his breath. For the first time, he felt as though he was on the "Delivery" end of what seemed to be a running joke between them.

The rest of the week had been him just going through his usual work motions: Reports, orders, MORE meetings. There had been nothing to do but wait until Friday morning. When he had arrived at the bus terminal, he had made certain to raise just enough of a fuss with the TSA agents there about wanting to play "Secret Police" so that people would notice that he had been there and through. It wasn't the hardest act to put up. It was bad enough when they we're just in the airports. Now, you almost couldn't catch a cab without being patted down by one of them or put through their scanners.

When he had arrived at his hotel at the destination, he struck up a conversation with the attendant at the front desk. After 15 minutes, he asked to speak with the manager. He has started to go through some preplanned queries about the establishment that he has already knew, but it gave him an excuse to be face-to-face with the manager for a bit.

After a while, he thanked him for his time, and checked into his room. He relaxed for a bit to get himself ready for his next "scene".

He carefully put on a nearby table a charcoal black box, one of two he had picked up from the store on Friday morning. Inside were two small vials containing clear liquids: One marked "Before", the other marked "After". Resting on top of them was a handwritten card with a stern warning:

DO. NOT. MIX. THESE. UP!!!

He had pocketed the vial marked "Before" under his shirt wrist, and went to the restaurant across from his hotel room. He had proceeded to greet the host, his waitress, and a chatted up a few random strangers. Once again, just enough to make his presence somewhat known without going overboard. He requested a glass of orange juice for starters and then ordered a 3-egg-and-ham omelet with some hash browns. When the waitress left and nobody was looking, he had poured the vial into his orange juice and then casually drank the glass down. He was told that the concoction would take about 30 minutes to go in effect. For him, it had felt to be pretty much working its "magic" on him just before his food arrived. As turbulent as his stomach had felt, he knew that he would need to get through at least some of the food on his plate for the charade to work.

About 15-minutes into his breakfast, his stomach had become too turbulent to hold down any food. The resultant scene of him regurgitating all over his lone table suggested that he actually had. Some of the people he had chatted up had been kind enough to help him back to his hotel room. He thanked them for their assistance and asked if someone could notify the manager of his condition and that he should be left alone until further notice. Once everyone had left eyesight. He struggled to close his window blinds and then quickly produced the "After" vial from the black box. He had been instructed to dilute the concoction with some glass of liquid, same with the first, but it was all he could do to get the strength to put the vial to his lips and drink it down straight.

An hour later: He had felt like a million bucks. He had been surging with energy and felt as if he could have ran all the way home and back. Ironically, this made the rest of Friday hard to ride out as he had needed to shelter in his motel room playing 'sick'. After about 3 straight hours of pacing about, he had contacted the manager to request some sleeping pills, making sure to let loose some hacking coughs into his phone. The manager said he would send an attendant to leave a bag at the door but not come in. "So much the better", he had thought. The pills worked enough to settle him down to a relaxed state, but he still couldn't quite sleep. The rest of the afternoon and evening had been spent in his bed just staring up at the ceiling. Around 3am he felt fully back to normal, and decided to just quietly contemplate the next part of his master plan...

"Master Plan...", he chuckled to himself. Had he really thought that?

As far as the mechanics of it, it was fairly simplistic. Still, there was a lot that could have gone wrong with it thus far, and yet, it was all actually on schedule, if not a bit ahead. The worst of it was over. As far as anyone at home knew: He was out of town. As far as anyone in the motel complex knew: He was bedridden and unable to even leave his room.

All that was left was for him to get BACK to town, without anyone noticing and get to the final leg of the plan. With that, he turned his attention to the second box he had gotten from the store along with the first. It was a bit smaller but slightly heavier with a clamp lock on it.

"It's all ready to go", he recalled the man at the store saying when he had picked it up. Just "Set it and forget it, like they use to say in those old Ronco oven commercials. You won't need to be anyone near when the 'magic' starts. In all honesty, I'd advise you NOT to be."

It was definitely sound advice, the man had thought. Still, for his plan to be truly 'complete' he would need to be at the 'scene of the crime' just long enough to give the illusion of being caught as unawares as anyone else.

It was now about 4:30am. He sat at a desk in the room and prepared the list for the day's events

TO-DO LIST, SATURDAY

- 0600 - Get dressed in package items
- 0645 - Prepare to be *picked up* by transporter
- 0830 - Make way to location
- 0900 - Begin *Job*
- 1000 - Return to location to be *picked up* by transporter again
- 1115 - Hang out outside hotel room. Make small talk with manager and staff
- 1500 - Visit restaurant again. Check news feeds for any *initial reports*
- 1600 - Dispose of package clothing
- 1530 - (Perhaps) Ask front desk attendant out

He had his day set out in front of him, as usual. He started to get to work.

* * *

He hadn't expected his 'trip' to be comfortable, given the circumstances, but it was still rougher than he had planned. Still, he couldn't complain much. It's not as if he had bother to explain to the transporter he had hired that the 'lone package' they we're instructed to pick up in one middle-of-nowhere and leave in a seemingly distant second 'middle-of-nowhere' was a live person, let alone him.

He heard the vehicle, whatever kind it had been, drive off. He waited inside of the box for about five minutes before emerging. He stretched out a bit to get his bearings and then looked around to see where he was. After a few moments of checking the map and clock on his temporary cellphone, his heart started to beat a little faster with excitement and anticipation...

He was right where he had wanted to be! The plan was continuing to go off without a hitch!

He quickly dragged the box into some bush off of the dirt road, broke it down, and threw some dirt over it. Then he checked the map again to make certain of his direction and

started to walk through what seemed to be light forest. after about 30 minutes, he came to a hill. Off in the distance, he could hear electricity crackling and machinery, as if he was near some kind of building or civilization...

Not really "some kind", though. He knew EXACTLY what kind.

He went around the hill to find, on the other side. a large tunnel with a locked gate in front. A large sign on the front gave a weathered, but none-the-less clear message:

"CITY SUB-STATION. AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY"

"This was it", he thought to himself. All of his planning and plotting and scheming was now down to an old lock on a slightly rusted, but still capable gate. If there we're still second thoughts, this was the last chance to act on them. The last chance to turn back.

He dug into his pocket and pulled out the black metal box. He looked down at it for a moment, then at the gate, then up into the sky.

"This has been stalled for way too long", He thought with conviction. "Its going to happen sooner or later anyway. At least this way, it will just be finally happening."

He took one more deep breath...

"Let's do this!"

END PART TWO

SUNDAY MORNING (3 OF 3)

11:30am

Sitting up in his bed to look at his clock and the 'action' going on outside his window, the man was surprised at how deeply he slept through last night and apparently the morning. Then again, it wasn't as if he didn't have a little 'help'.

Tonya, the motel service attendant, had apparently had her eye on him since he arrived. When he has gotten back from having completed his work at the city substation, he hadn't intended on making his move on her during the 1115 "Small Talk" session. However, she had been throwing out 'signals' too broad and heavy for even him to miss or ignore. He took a chance and invited her to the restaurant with him.

"Go right ahead", Tonya had mentioned the manager saying. "He said something about the TSA putting the bus station on lockdown. They're saying its just another routine drill, but there's something about the way they're moving and fidgeting about this time. Something has them spooked."

"I'll bet it does", the man thought to himself. It had all started up and got going a lot quicker than he had anticipated, but given the grand scale of what he had set into motion, he figured there would be a point where his 'plan' would be pretty much out of his hands. He had essentially poked enough holes into a proverbial dam or a dyke and now the 'water' was beginning to crash through. He just had to make sure that he was far enough downstream and on just high enough ground, but not too high as to suggest that he had some advance knowledge that only the perpetrator could have had.

While he and Tonya were waiting on their food, the initial reports from his hometown had started to come in. There was already a tense unrest in the central area. There was no outright rioting 'yet', but that was only a matter of time off. Everyone had figured out what was starting to happen. Everyone was trying to get ahead of it all at once. Crowds had formed around stores, shopping centers and banks.

"That's your home, isn't it?", Tonya asked with concern.

"It is..." the man replied in a tone of believably fake concern. "I'm glad to not be there, but I'm worried about my friends and family."

"Can't you call any of them? See if they're ok?", Tonya replied.

The man was blindsided by the question. It was a good one, and he had no real answer for it. Before he even had a chance to start stuttering, the reported on the news announced that the national guard had been activated and had begun to setup a quarantine of the central city areas. All travel and communications in and out would be restricted and monitored until further notice.

"Looks like I'm not calling anyone", the man replied with a mental sigh of relief. It almost felt at if fate, the universe, or whatever you will, had wanted all of this to happen and was somehow protecting him. Felt a bit odd, given what he had done, but he wasn't about to look a gift horse too deep in the mouth.

"Look, I know we just met, and there's probably nothing I really CAN do, but is there anything you think I could TRY to do for you?" Tonya asked?

"Well..." the man said with a devilish grin while leaning forward a bit. "...it looks as if the proverbial 'end of the world' might actually be starting..."

'It really was, though', he thought to himself. His hometown would be 'ground zero', but other would be affected soon enough

"...I don't suppose you'd want to 'go out with a bang' as it were?"

It was the best line he could come up with, on the spot. He hadn't expected anything to come of it but an hour later they were in his room going at it. During a break between 'sessions' he had asked Tonya if she needed to get back to work.

"For what?" she had replied. "You said it yourself: Its the end of the world!". With that they had spent the rest of the afternoon and evening talking about their soon-to-be-over lives and lamenting not having ran into each other sooner. Ironically, thought, they both recognized that there was likely no other circumstances under which their meeting probably COULD have happened.

He looked over to Tonya and gently stroked her back. As if by reflex, she rolled over and rested her head in his lap while draping her arms around his waist and legs. He stroked her head while looking at all of the police, law enforcement, and military action slightly off in the distance at the bus station. There we're people trying to get in. People trying to get out. The law was clearly having trouble maintaining its "Law and Order".

The man reached over for the remote and turned on the TV...

...ARE STILL COMING IN. SIX CITIES ARE NOW CONFIRMED TO BE UNDER MARTIAL LAW WITH THE NATIONAL GUARD ACTIVATED. ANOTHER NINE ARE EXPECTED TO MAKE DECISIONS WITHING THE NEXT 12 HOURS. THE PRESIDENT WAS SCHEDULED TO GIVE A LIVE BRIEFING ON THE MATTER BUT WE JUST HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT HE AND THE REST OF THE FIRST FAMILY HAS BEEN TAKEN TO A SECURED LOCATION AS A PRECAUTION TO MAINTAIN CONTINUITY OF GOVERNMENT IF NECESSARY. NO WORD YET ON WHERE GROUND ZERO MAY HAVE BEEN EXACTLY, BUT INITIAL REPORTS SUGGES-

CLICK

Tonya had picked up the remote and turned off the tv.

"Stop watching that stuff, babe". She said from a half-woken state. "It doesn't matter who or where anymore. Its started.

The end is here. Just let it all end. Its about time, really."

The man looked down at her, kissed her on the head and smiled.

"My thought exactly", he whispered.

END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yardell is currently the owner and lead developer at his private web studio, Perkitech (perkitech.com). In his first career life, he spent ten years as the manager and sole technician of a boutique computer repair shop in his hometown of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. From there, he moved onto a position as a Network Administrator for a network of libraries in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

He is also the current organizer of The Philly Social Anxiety Support group or PhillySAS. An organization that works to assist people with social anxiety in better managing and getting past the inner demons and roadblocks that prevent them from truly living their lives. You can find out more about them at the link below:

meetup.com/phillysas

When he is not trying to build something on the web, or help people feel less awkward around other people, he enjoys some light PC gaming, keeping fit, and delving into esoteric spiritual matters such as [Sacred Geometry](#).

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