

### Obsession

I experienced something new on Monday: a flaw in my daily life. My alarm went off at 6:30 a.m. that morning - as it does every morning - waking me up. I stood and paced ten steps to the bathroom door, as usual, and showered, being sure to turn the water on, off, then back on again. My broad array of pills displayed itself on the countertop in front of me, but I ignored them and got dressed in my usual pattern of neutral colors. I am a very plain-looking man; I don't like color or light. I dress quite blandly to present myself as normal.

I walked down the stairs, skipping the second to last step. I've never stepped on that step- I just can't. I fixed my bowl of cereal, Raisin Bran since it was Monday, and watched the news. Except, this time, something seemed... *off*. I didn't know what it was; I had done everything as normal. I resumed my habitual morning in hopes that everything would begin to feel right once again.

I left for work at 8:00 a.m. Upon reaching the intersection on 24th Street, the feeling recurred; I felt as though I was missing something, and it made me uneasy. *What was this feeling?* As I sat at that stop sign, I felt around my car, being sure to touch everything in hopes that something would trigger whatever was causing this immense *feeling*. I touched the dashboard, the clutch, the papers in my passenger seat, even the roof- but nothing. I returned my hands to the steering wheel, gripping it very tightly, and began screaming as my knuckles turned white. In my rearview mirror headlights approached, so I shifted into drive and continued on my way to work.

I reached my place of business and drove up to my parking space to see a red Chevy parked between *my* white lines. Someone had taken *my* spot. I couldn't park anywhere else- I

just couldn't. That's *my* spot. I stopped my car and sprang out, breathing heavily as I stomped toward the Chevy. Approaching the driver's window, I noticed the keys were still in the ignition, so I opened the car door and sat down inside. While starting the car, a rush of contentment sparked my adrenaline. I then drove this vehicle to a different parking space so I could park in mine. That felt a lot better; that car wasn't supposed to be there.

After returning to my car, I pulled into my space and just sat, thinking about what I had just done. A smile crept across my face as relief swept over me. I felt as though what I had done wasn't wrong, however. Whoever had parked here was in the wrong because *their* car was in *my* spot. I then proceeded to turn my car off, turn it back on, and turn it off again in order to exit and go into work.

Work flowed as usual. The phone rang exactly three times before I picked it up. I always let the phone ring three times before answering. If it happened to ring a fourth time, I wouldn't pick up. I clicked, unclicked, then clicked my pen again and wrote down the notes my caller had given me, then proceeded to hang up. My co-worker, Andrew, approached me and began discussing the weather. I felt some discomfort, as Andrew usually discussed the news with me. Although weather was also a rather usual topic for a co-worker to converse with his peer about, for some reason, his doing so caused that *feeling* to return. Andrew then asked me if everything was all right, as I had begun to perspire profusely. My hands quickly clenched into fists, but I took a deep breath and relaxed my hands. I told Andrew it was a small anxiety attack, and that I would be all right. He nodded and walked away. I didn't like Andrew, and frankly, I don't think he was too fond of me either.

I sat there and the *feeling* didn't go away. I was almost in tears due to the amount of stress it had been causing me. *What was I missing?* There is no way for me to express this *feeling* in words; it's a feeling of absence, of anger, and of discomfort. I just need to fix this. I wanted to punch something- to pull out my hair- anything to quench this sensation. After a moment of relaxation techniques, which I have memorized due to how often I feel stressed, I was able to put that feeling behind me for a while in order to finish my day at work.

My shift, as usual, ended at 5:45 p.m. I gathered my belongings, as I never leave personal items at work, shut my computer off, then the monitor, and stood. I always ended my work day in that order- no exceptions. I looked behind me once again to be absolutely sure I had everything, walked to about five feet from the exit, then turned around. I had to go check my workspace again to make absolutely sure I didn't leave anything behind.. As usual, I did, so I left once again.

As soon as I reached my car, the *feeling* returned. Something was missing and I couldn't figure it out. Something was missing from my routine. I sat down inside my vehicle, turned my car on, off, then back on again, and left for home.

Upon reaching the intersection at 24th Street, that *feeling* increased. *What...am...I...missing...?* I sat at the stop sign for a while, my car still running. A car came up behind me and I motioned for them to go around. I had never experienced this before. How could I have a flaw in my own routine? I looked forward as the sky became a dim, grey color. I had to go home. Gripping the steering wheel until my knuckles turned white, I drove.

A sharp ringing struck my eardrum as I turned into my driveway. I flinched and swerved into my fence. Screaming in anger, I fixed my car into my parking place, shut the car off, back

on, then back off again. I adjusted the steering wheel so it would be straight- it had to be straight- and got out of my car, being sure to lock, unlock, and lock my car. As usual, I washed my car. However, I didn't wash the sides. I never washed the sides; no matter how dirty they got, I never washed the sides of my car.

Afterwards, I walked to my backyard only to once again experience that immense *feeling*. *I can't stand this!* I yelled out to the lake. The lake always seemed to calm me...but this time, it only made the sensation increase. I couldn't handle that day anymore, I needed to sleep. I walked inside my house and locked, unlocked, and locked the door behind me. Performing my usual routine, I walked upstairs, skipping the second to last step, and walked to the bathroom. I brushed my hair, then my teeth, and washed my face. Always in that order. I was undressing when I felt that *feeling* return. I grabbed at my hair, but instead of screaming this time, I wept. Why was I like this? Why can't I be normal? I looked at the numerous orange bottles on the counter and thought about my ignorance toward modern medicine, which only caused more tears.

I lay in bed. The *feeling* was still there, but I somehow slept. Monday needed to end.

I woke up yesterday at 6:30 a.m, walked ten paces to the bathroom, showered: on, off, on, and dressed myself. I purposefully looked away when the orange, filled pill bottles caught my eye, then headed downstairs, being sure to skip the second to last step. I made my cereal - Tuesday meant Corn Flakes - and turned on the news. The *feeling*, it came back. I tried to put it behind me, I really did.

8:00 a.m. I headed to work, parked in my space, turned the car off, on, and back off again and headed inside. Again, the *feeling* returned when Andrew didn't mention the news. He

*always* talked about the news with me. After Andrew left, I looked around my desk. What had I been missing from my routine? My temples swelled as the *feeling* struck itself through my ribs and out of my mouth. Andrew rushed over as I stood and pushed him to the floor. I had to get out of here. I grabbed my belongings, stepped over Andrew, and raced out of the building.

I reached my car: ignition on, off, on. The next thing I knew, I was driving over eighty miles-per-hour down the road toward the intersection at 24th Street. I noticed a short, meaty man walking across the road. He dodged to the left, as any person would, and I swerved in his direction. I heard a loud *thunk* under my car. A wave of horror swept over me as I stopped my vehicle. After popping my trunk, I slowly exited my car and approached the body. The man was a bloody pulp. Blood leaked through every hole in his torn clothing. One leg was bent backwards and blood spilled out from his knee. I quickly picked the man up and threw him into my trunk. He was a large man, but my adrenaline was too high for me to be distracted by his weight. Panic-stricken, I started, stopped, and started my car. I felt a sense of absence; I was there physically, but my mind was a blank abyss.

I didn't remember driving home.

Upon reaching my house, I immediately stepped out of my car after straightening the steering wheel, and locked, unlocked, and locked it. I first began to wash the blood off of my car- avoiding the sides; the sides weren't necessary. I heaved the man from my trunk and dragged him into my backyard. His weight was a lot more challenging this time. I obtained a garbage bag and shears from my toolshed, posthaste.

The man's dismembered body fit perfectly with a brick inside the garbage bag. I wiped my forehead and headed toward the lake. The aroma from the bag filled my nostrils, burned

my nose hairs, and made my eyes water. I threw the bag into the lake then quickly headed inside, being sure to lock, unlock, and lock the door.

I sprinted upstairs - skipping the second to last step - brushed my hair, then my teeth, and washed my face. My clothes were drenched in blood. I took them off and threw them into the clothes bin. I noticed the other day that my clothes bin had begun to emit a sour, metallic aroma. I chose to ignore it, again, and go to sleep. I slept better that night.

I awoke this morning at 6:30 a.m. Ten steps to the bathroom, turned the water on, off, then back on again, and showered. My pills made me more irate than ever this morning when I noticed them, to which I responded by flushing every one down the toilet. I then headed downstairs, skipping the second to last step. Today was Wednesday, so I prepared my Cheerios. I turned on the news to see the headline: *"24th Street Killer Strikes again."*

I smiled. Back to normal.