



License Renewal

Looking over his shoulder, he could see that the red LCD display was reading seven o'clock. The sunlight through the window was much too bright for a spring morning in April, and it was clear that he would have no way of returning to sleep. Deciding that this was better anyway, he reached out his right foot and placed it on the light-brown carpet.

"No." He thought and pulled his leg back onto the bed and placed it down again.

"No." He thought again and retracted his leg and placed it back on the floor.

After a third and successful try, he stood with both feet off the bed and headed towards the bathroom.¹

It had been three weeks since his driver's license had expired and he had not gotten notice of renewal in the mail whatsoever. He figured that today would be the best day of the week to go to the division of motor vehicles and manually get his license renewed. Wednesday, was in fact a good day to do so as it was the middle of the week and most people would be at work. He asked his supervisor at the accounting firm if he could take off for just this date and he would go in this Saturday to finish his work on payroll.

Twisting the lid off of the tube, he squeezed a reasonable amount of the green-striped toothpaste onto the toothbrush. Holding the toothbrush in his right hand, he proceeded to wet the bristle but stopped when he felt a strong sudden urge to not turn the tap. He experienced this feeling numerous times since his youth so he knew what would follow thereafter – he needed to start over. Though he truly believed that this was totally irrational and not necessary, he washed

¹ The main character is afflicted with a psychological condition known as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). According to the National Institute of Mental Health, (NIMH) one quality a sufferer would endure is to habitually repeat tasks in order to alleviate their anxiety. This is known as a compulsion. Obsessions are usually accompanied by a compulsion. Most OCD patients will refuse go forth to any other activity until they have repeated necessary times to feel enough. The information was put together from the National Institute of Mental Health <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/healthinformation/ocdmenu.cfm>

away the paste from the tip, squeezed another amount, wetted the bristle and brushed his teeth. After which he took a shower washing his head three times.²

When he had finished and stepped out, he arranged the bathroom mat such that it was in parallel to the tub.³ He then checked three times in assurance that the towels drying over the rack had no overlapping folds and then finally headed back to the room to change out of his sleeping clothes. Changing his clothes proved to be difficult that morning as he forgot to wear the shirt before wearing his pants. In response, he began to take off what he had put on and re-dressed accordingly, shirt first. Entering the kitchen in a white collared shirt tucked into his light brown pants, he could see Linda had already prepared a meal and was eating herself. He'd been living with his older widowed sister for a little over ten years and she had been taking care of him since their parents passing.

"I won't be home until late tonight. There have been a lot of patients in the hospital recently so the doctors will need as much help from the nurses as they can get. I've left some food for dinner in the fridge and you can take care of lunch yourself right?" She said clearing her plates.

"I'll be fine." He replied when she handed him his share.

Linda proceeded to her room to dress for work and he sat in the dining room eating in a state of uneasiness.

"Stop." he thought, *"please stop."*

Picking up the fork, he placed it back on the plate then picked it back up.

"Please stop thinking." he thought, *"I don't want to think that. I don't want to think about that."*

² Most OCD symptoms begin commonly during the teen years however it is possible for children younger to exhibit symptoms. The psychiatrists at Doctor NDTV have stated that the earliest recorded age is three. Information taken from <http://www.doctorndtv.com/doctorNDTV%20show/detailtopics.asp?id=83> Likewise, if symptoms start an early age, the person would not get help. The average onset before getting any professional help was 17 years according to the website, OCD Action, at <http://www.ocdaction.org.uk/ocdaction/index.asp?id=511>. Note that OCD people are aware they are doing pointless and senseless behaviors. This is one of the reasons whys it impacts distress upon the person's life002E

³The National Anxiety Foundation at, <http://www.lexington-on-line.com/naf.oed.2.html>, have found that neatness, order, and symmetry are key traits to compulsive behavior. The scene with the bathroom mat was a similar situation that was taken from <http://www.ocdaction.org.uk/ocdaction/index.asp?id=511>.

He felt a great deal of guilt and shame that he had been generating thoughts about his sister again and was utmost fearful that if he didn't re-pick up the fork – yes – redo his actions, he would make a mistake and bring harm on his older sister. This was because he had been worrying about germs and bacteria⁴. He then thought about the potential that germs and bacteria could be transmitted to his older sister because she worked in a hospital. In re-picking up the fork each time, he'd hope to have driven away his bad thoughts and start fresh with a clean slate.⁵ This overall did not seem to relieve the situation, as his uneasiness grew larger. If he could not free himself of this guilt then he would instead place the bad thought on to himself.⁶

"I'm the one infected." He thought, *"The germs are on me and not anybody else."*

He had wished with all his heart that he could think of anything but those bad thoughts; to think only about good things. In doing so, this would ultimately ensure him the safety of a family member and at the same, release him from his state of anxiety.

The time was now seven fifty-nine and the DMV would open in another half hour. This would give him more than enough time to be the first in line since the drive would only take fifteen minutes from where he lived. To such an open opportunity, he decided to leave early to really be the first person in line. He grabbed his keys, went into his car and was about to turn the ignition when he remembered that he did not check the stove to see if it was off.

"I didn't cook anything...so the stove is already off." He thought and attempted to start the ignition again.⁷

"But what if?" He thought feeling a strong desire to go back into the house and check the stove, *"What if it was on? Then the house could be burned down...because I did not check the stove."*

⁴Being afraid of dirt and germs is another obsessive behavior. Information taken from <http://www.lexington-on-line.com/naf.ocd.2.html>

⁵ On a further note from NIMH, performing repetitive behaviors only provides temporary relief. Reluctance to do so, only results in more anxiety. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/anxiety.cfm>

⁶ It is not uncommon that OCD patients worry they will cause friends and family harm because of a "bad" thought or mistake they've assumed they've made. If that is the case, a compulsive behavior is resorted to in order to alleviate the anxiety that was built up. The NIMH website provided a sample patient who described a familiar experience except that it was his parents and the worry was they would leave from him forever. The NIMH website is <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/anxiety.cfm>

⁷ Though there are many types of behaviors that can be repeated, touching things, counting items, cleaning, and checking the stove and door locks are some of the most notable patterns of behavior as the National Anxiety Foundation has stated. <http://www.lexington-on-line.com/naf.ocd.2.html>

He shifted around in the seat of car because he did not want to go back in the house. It was agonizing to battle himself and he was certain that he did not use the stove. He struggled over and over with the thought that his sister was not one to be so irresponsible and forced himself to try and start the ignition. It was unfortunate that he couldn't achieve victory over his battle and the stove was checked once more.

Upon reaching a stop sign on Forest Street a short ways from home, he then realized that he did not check to see if he had locked the front door. This of course, was a very important matter and he did not hesitate to return only to find that he had indeed, locked both top and the bottom parts. Feeling relieved, he got back in his car and backed out. He reached the stop sign that he previously left off and began to question himself. Another feeling was building and compelling him to return.

*"Wait. Did I really check it?" He thought, "Or maybe I only remembered that I should go back, but I really didn't. I-I can't remember if I went back."*⁸

He held his breath at that moment searching through his mind desperately to find any evidence that would allow him to continue. The car stood motionless as time passed behind the large red sign as he searched and searched. At that particular moment, he would not have driven forth had he not seen another vehicle approaching behind.

Being on the road was frustrating most of the time simply because it was a traditional combination of fear and panic. Every bump he drove over on the road was a signal to check the mirror and assert that he had not run anybody over. There was one time when he encountered a pair of young joggers, on his way to work, out for their morning exercise. The joggers were keeping at a mild pace so that they could maintain a conversation. His driving record was clean and he had no purpose of running over anything. Panicking, he slowed down anyway as the car neared them.⁹

⁸ Self Doubt is very common for a person with OCD. It is because of this that they feel the need to check stoves and locks or perform some other silly ritual(s) until 'it feels right.' Information from <http://www.doctormdtv.com/doctorNDTV%20show/detailtopics.asp?id=83> (Doctor NDTV)

⁹ A patient's story on the National Anxiety Foundation described his experience as he would stop the car to search the ditch and weeds to make sure he hadn't hit anybody that flew off the road. This is where the scene was influenced from. <http://www.lexington-on-line.com/naf.ocd.2.html>

It was eight thirty-three when he turned into the parking lot of a large building with a sign in white bolded letters reading Department of Motor Vehicles. He opened the door and took a step in but stopped because he could not go any further. Stepping back out, he held the door open and pretended to look around as if searching for something dropped. Taking a step back in, he stopped again because he couldn't go in. He had to get out to redo this task, but how? He had already searched for a dropped item, so the excuse could not be used again. He carefully tossed his keys outside being careful of not letting anyone see him then stepped out to pick them back up. Fearing that his awkwardness would soon attract attention, he forced himself to think about another thought and stepped inside.¹⁰

The interior of the building was bright and cool and he heard the sound of the air conditioner humming away as if there were no tomorrow. To his disappointment he did not become the first person waiting in a line of three. Apparently, the first gentleman had been waiting outside since seven thirty and the second young lady had arrived shortly just before he did.

"Can I help whose next?" He heard as the waiting gentleman walked to the service window.

Two employees were present at the morning shift. One employee was a man who looked in his mid-thirties and the other was a female who looked in her late twenties. Her tanned skin contrasted with the dark shade of the male and she was wearing a small pink t-shirt that had a fashionable logo embroidered on the chest. This suggested that she was probably much younger.

"I can help the next person." She called to the young woman.

Standing in line, he watched the interaction among the four.

He could see the bare flesh of the DMV workers standing atop the counters and showing him their naked bodies. They were also performing sexual acts.¹¹

"Nooo!" He thought.

¹⁰ Dr. Gayle Ziemann, PhD of the Fairview website has stated that along with main symptoms, OCD suffers may have "rituals for walking through doors or getting up from chairs that often involve repetitive actions or an unusual posture".

"Behavioral Health Advisor 2006.4: Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in Children and Teens." *Fairview*. 24 Jun 2007. <http://www.fairview.org/healthlibrary/content/bha_ocdpeds_bhp.htm>

¹¹ Having repugnant sexual thoughts is another characteristic of OCD. The psychiatrists at Doctor NDTV have stated that some of the patients had pictured themselves sexually involved with a brother/sister. The information was taken from <http://www.doctorndtv.com/doctorNDTV%20show/detailtopics.asp?id=83>

Their genitals were especially dark – probably due to the amount of hair.

He closed his eyes in extreme discomfort and sought very hard to ignore what he knew was completely against his will.

Now he saw the young lady in front of him. She was close to him and was even touching his body.

"Please go away." He thought, "Please go away."

He held his breath and took a step backward hoping for some other thought to swiftly arrive and replace the vulgar images. Not person in the room could have possibly known the crippling helplessness and strain that ran through him. He became tired because it was draining and placed his hand on his head. Slowing doing so, he released his breath.

"Sir, I can help you." He heard the female worker and walked to the window.

"What can I do for you today?" She asked.

"I need my license renewed." He replied.

"Okay, just give me a sec here." She said, "Let me see your old license."

He handed it to her and waited patiently while she completed he her job. After a few seconds, she came back.

"Okay your name is Mark, eyes green, hair brown, age twenty seven and still five-feet ten inches in height?" She asked.

"Yes."

"Okay now, if you'll just look into the lens to your left and read me the third line." She said.

He did as he was told and looked into the lens. The third row consisted of a medium sized font and he could clearly see the letters and numbers were: 4 A D 6 Z o.

"Whenever you're ready." He heard.

"Four, the capital A, uh..." He said, "D".

"Huh? I'm sorry. I couldn't hear the last word. Say it again."

"Uh...The capital D, and s-six" He said.

"Okay I hear a 4, capital A and capital D then what?"

"S-six, capital Z and lower case o" He said.¹²

"Give me a sec." She said, "Okay, you passed so I'll just go ahead and re-issue your license. Would you like to re-take your photo?"

"No. The old one is fine." He replied.

He waited patiently while she printed up the new ID. In his mind, he wanted her to come back quickly because he feared that it would give him a chance to think bad thoughts again. With both elbows on the counter, he closed his eyes and placed his right hand over his face.

"Okay, here's your new ID and here's your old one voided." She said and handed them over, "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No." He replied.

"Are you okay? You don't very well. I saw you earlier in the line and it looked like you had a headache. Do you have a headache?" She asked.

"Not really. I'm just not a morning person." He replied.

"Me too." She said, "Luckily there won't be that any customers coming in for the next few minutes. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No."

"Okay, you have a good day then." ¹³

It was eight forty-nine when he exited the building. Looking into the sky, he could see that the sun was shining too brightly for a spring morning in April.

¹² One patient shared his story with the obsession for numbers or letters that represented "bad things". When he set his alarm for the night, he had to make sure that the numbers didn't add up to a "bad number". In the story, the main character was unable to say the letter "D" and the number "6", where in this case the 'd' could have stood for death and the number six is regarded as a bad number (devil's number in religion). The information was taken from the NIMH website at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/healthinformation/ocdmenu.cfm>

¹³ The main significance for the end of the conversation was to point out that OCD sufferers do not tell anyone about their problems because they think it is absurd and not a real disease. Earlier in the story the reader was also supposed to notice that his older sister didn't notice either, despite her being a medical profession. I had read information regarding an afflicted teenager and her similar situation off an article titled "The ABS's of OCD: teens who have obsessive-compulsive disorder need not suffer in silence". I also found similar information on <http://www.brainphysics.com/ocdfa.php> but the credibility was questionable.

"The ABS's of OCD: teens who have obsessive-compulsive disorder need not suffer in silence" Mark Rowh, a *Weekly Reader* publication 33.8, April-May 2007