

5:12 A.M. My alarm went off 3 minutes early, *yet again*.

I stretch my extremities as I make a colossal effort to get up from the comfort of my linen sheets. I know there's a consensus that Mondays are the worst, that there's nothing more painful, nothing more excruciating than a Monday, but I beg to differ. Nothing fills my heart with dread more than a Saturday morning.

The steam fogs up the mirror as the water begins to fall from the shower head. I begin to make a mental note of the day's tasks: craniotomy at 6:55, neuroendoscopy at 9:30, and a cranial biopsy checkup at 3 in the afternoon for a patient I had operated on a month prior for a brain abscess located near the cerebellum. Today was going to be a bit different—I was called in yesterday for a temporary replacement at a hospital on the other side of the city as their only resident neurosurgeon had fallen ill.

I forgo the dark-wash jeans I had worn yesterday in favor of some sleek, almost-black chinos. I thought them to be more appropriate. Staring at myself in the mirror, I notice a single strand of grey hair peeking out from a sea of red. Did I always have grey hairs?

The price one pays for stress, I suppose.

I take a quick glance at Fido on the bed, still sleeping. He had fallen asleep with his paws around his favorite toy, a teddy bear that was already a few years old; frayed at the edges and bursting at the seams. I give him a kiss on his furry forehead and rub his back.

"Goodbye boy," I whisper. "Be good while I'm gone, okay? There's food and water in your bowl."

He lets out a soft growl in approval.

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The drive to work was particularly uneventful. The rain was pattering on the windshield as I looked behind me to make sure that my white coat and scrubs were in the back seat where I usually left them.

I pull into the hospital driveway, park the car, and take a deep breath. Today was going to be tough, but I knew that I would pull through.

After a brief walk through the bare, fluorescent-lit white hallways, I arrive at the reception in the surgical ward. A young receptionist looks up at me and signals me to wait for just a moment as she finishes a call. She's sleep deprived—probably worked the graveyard shift.

She takes one look at me in my white coat and perks up.

"You must be our neurosurgeon transfer," she says as she taps away on the keyboard. "Doctor Anderson?"

"Yes, that's me," I say as I pull out my ID. "Dr. Sheila Anderson, M.D."

She stands up and gestures for me to follow her.

"Nice to meet you, Doctor Sheila. Your patient is waiting for you in operating room number 405. Please follow me."