

## Cheese Burger, No Salad

The alarm sounded and Jim woke up to the exact same surroundings he had for the last eighteen years. He took a minute to look around the darkly lit room as he had everyday for the last eighteen years.

The brown Oak cupboard stood in the corner. Its left side containing six suits all exactly the same. The right side containing his wife's clothes. The set of drawers containing underwear, every pair the same as the last.

He looked over to the window. Small shards of light escaping from the peach curtains were the only source of light in the room. Jim took a second to remember when they bought the curtains. It was eighteen years ago, around the same time he married Elly.

Jim looked at Elly still sleeping in the bed. She hadn't woken up before him for eighteen years. He looked at the wrinkles that lined her face, he could map those lines with his eyes closed because they hadn't changed in eighteen years.

Jim got out of bed and walked over to bathroom and started to wash his face. He turned on the hot tap and let it run for exactly thirty seconds before holding the soap under the water and the wiping his face with it. He cupped his hands and collected some water and then threw it against his face. He looked in the mirror and smiled slightly to himself the same way he had done for the last eighteen years.

He walked back into the bedroom and opened the drawers. He first put his pants on and then sat lightly on the bed and pull his socks over his feet. As he sat down Elly stirred a little. Jim looked over his shoulder and quietly remembered when they met. Jim was twenty-four, two years later they were married and had been for eighteen years now.

Jim put his shirt on and buttoned it up from bottom to top and then the cuffs. He then pulled one of the many grey ties from the cupboard and fastened it around his neck. Lastly he pulled his trousers up and zipped them and then buttoned them, the same way he had done for eighteen years.

He knelt on the bed lightly, leant down and kissed Elly gently on her forehead. Jim stood up took another look at his eighteen year life and walked downstairs to the kitchen.

Jim took a bowl from one cupboard and poured himself a bowl of cornflakes. He replaced the cornflakes and took a pint of semi-skimmed milk from the fridge. After filling the bowl so the milk could just been seen around the sides of the cornflakes Jim put the milk back in the fridge and closed it.

He ate his cornflakes and then washed and dried both his spoon and his bowl, replaced them and then turned around. He took a short look at his kitchen, it was immaculate, not a

speck of dirt anywhere and all the appliances had a place and hadn't moved for eighteen years.

Jim walked to the front door and took his keys from the hook; he placed them in his pocket and then picked up his briefcase. He walked out of the door and closed it behind him. He slid his keys into the car door and twisted so the car unlocked.

Jim placed his briefcase on the passenger seat and slid into the driver's position. He inserted the keys into the ignition and then turned the keys. The car started after exactly two seconds, as it had for the last eighteen years. Jim took a second to look into the rear view mirror and smiled; 'my life is good' he thought to himself and then set off to work.

He took the same way to work as he had for the last eighteen years. Took the ringroad to the dual carriageway, along the dual carriageway for five minutes and then back into the city. Along North street and then fourth left into the company car park. Jim got out of the car and looked around the city. Immense skyscrapers loomed high growing from the ground. 'London hasn't changed in the eighteen years I've been here' he thought to himself.

Jim walked up to the front door of the company building and bought a doughnut from the cart just outside. A hot, no sugar, jam in the middle doughnut, the same type of doughnut he had been buying for eighteen years.

He walked into the company building and signed in at the reception desk. He said hello to the two receptionists and got into the lift. He pressed the button for the fourth floor and waited. It took exactly one minute to reach the fourth floor; it had taken one minute for the last eighteen years.

Jim walked over to his desk and sat down. He placed his doughnut down on the table with the small serviette just under it. He looked at the clock and it switched from 8:59 am to 9:00 am and he started work, the same way he had for eighteen years.

At 10:00 am the intercom flicked on the manager called Jim into his office. Jim stood up and smiled as he walked into the manager's office. The manager told Jim to sit down. He explained that even though he knew that Jim had worked with the company for a long time, the company was in financial trouble. The manager went on to explain that younger more qualified staff were required, and that Jim had to be made redundant for a twenty-six year with a university degree.

Jim stood up and walked out of the office. The smile had disappeared from his face as he walked over to his desk and proceeded to place a few things inside of his briefcase. Jim switched the computer off and pushed the chair under the desk, and for the first time in eighteen years there was a doughnut left on Jim's table after he had left work.

Jim walked out of the building and for the first time in eighteen years he didn't sign out. He got into his car and turned the ignition key and for the first time in eighteen years the car didn't start.

Jim got out of his car and started to walk through the city of London on his way home. For the first time in eighteen years he didn't look up at the mighty skyscrapers as he passed through the city.

Jim spent half an hour walking home that day. He paused just outside of his house to survey the scene. In his front garden where two suitcases and most of his clothes strewn over the grass. Jim looked up and saw Elly coming out of the house with the last of his clothes. She dumped them with the rest and shouted at Jim that her mother was right, and that Jim was a hopeless nobody with no chance of ever changing.

Jim stood for a couple of minutes after Elly had slammed the door and then turned around. Still holding his briefcase he left his clothes and set off back into town.

He walked around town and realised that for the first time in eighteen years he hadn't come home to a happy smiling Elly. As Jim walked he found himself in a large fast food restaurant. He had seen the restaurant every day for eighteen years and for the first time in eighteen years decided to eat there.

He stood in cue and briefly surveyed the menu above the attendants. He noticed how slowly the cue was moving and after about eighteen minutes finally got to the front of the cue.

Jim looked up at the attendant serving him he looked about eighteen. "Cheese Burger, No Salad."

The attendant stared at Jim for a couple of seconds and then said that if he wanted a cheeseburger he would have to have salad with it because it was on the menu. Jim's eyes suddenly filled with despair. He dropped his briefcase, turned around and barging through a few customers finally managed to get out of the restaurant.

Jim waited at the traffic lights until the green man appeared he then proceeded to cross the road. Just before he got to the other side of the road he heard the screeching of brakes as a car hit him. He landed around eighteen meters from where the car hit him.

He lay there face up looking at the clouds in the sky no longer able to feel his body. Everything started getting very bright and for the first time in eighteen years it occurred to Jim that he had wasted the last eighteen years of his life.

As he lay there while the bright white light engulfed him he realised... eighteen was his unlucky number.