

A Week in the Life of Allan Johannes
A SEVEN PART SERIAL BY JEFF SOLOMON

MONDAY

Allan Johannes had had a typically long day, which began earnestly at 5:15 AM and did not stop moving forward rapidly until 11:18 PM, when he unlocked the door to his Brooklyn apartment and let his backpack slide from his shoulders and fall to the floor.

THWUMP.

Allan stood in the doorway and stared into the kitchen, sizing up the moment. Consider this:

A twenty-seven year old man stands in the entryway to his kitchen, his face a messy contortion, part tired, part weary, a touch wary, a bit pissed. Confused. And not sure what to do next. He evaluates the moment and realizes that, while there are so many things that need to be done, he has no desire to do any of them. No motivation to move forward. The refrigerator hums... a fruit fly drifts past his nose (Allan doesn't even swat at it)... water in the apartment's heater TICK TICK TICKS...

Allan took two steps forward and let the door slide shut behind him. PUFF-CLICK. He was now inside. Alone.

Allan analyzed the lay of his backpack, half-propped against the wall, and decided that it was well-enough where it was. It was, in fact, perfect, placed within easy reach of what would surely be his confused, sleep-deprived hands the following morning at 5:15, when he would emerge from his room in a hustle and make his daily egress.

He gently laid his coat on one of the two kitchen chairs. Coat and backpack locked and loaded for the following morning. Ready to go.

And that's all it's been, and all it's going to be, for quite some time, he thought to himself. *Destined to repeat myself until I go either mad or enter into a redefining epiphany.*

And then he said aloud, "Do I make myself clear? Walls? You bear witness to the life that is slowly driving me mad. You see the genuine torrent of madness that drives my life forward uncontrollably, allowing me nary a moment to tarry."

The walls, of course, failed to respond with words. But they agreed with Allan just the same. Just the same.

Just the same, Allan turned left and wandered toward the pantry, determined to absorb himself into the nightly popcorn ritual to which he had subscribed for the past twelve years. A bag of microwave popcorn, a can of Shasta, and then to the pillow went his head, so the dictate mandated.

Allan opened the pantry door and pulled a box of Pop Secret from within its depths. It was an unhappy bachelor's pantry... popcorn, iodized salt, a sealed glass jar housing a bit of angel hair pasta.

He pulled a cellophane-encased bag of popcorn from the box. Replaced the box. Hefted the bag gently in his hands. A wan smile crept across his lips... an acknowledgment dedicated to the horror of routine.

Allan slipped the bag of popcorn gently from its wrapping, nudged open the sub-sink cabinet with his leg, and let the plastic fall into the trash. Where it nestled to a rest aside many other slips of cellophane. So many other nights. Allan let the door slide shut gently. WHOOMP.

CLICK. The microwave door popped open, the light went on. Allan laid the bag of popcorn gently in the middle of the treated glass platter and closed the door. His fingers drifted over to the slick plastic pad of buttons and settings on the right side of the microwave.

Twelve years ago, his microwave had had a knob. Ten years ago, a set of metal push buttons. The model purchased five years previous displayed numbers on smooth plastic. This model- scarcely eighteen months old- was similar in the smooth plastic finish over the buttons, but contained in addition several pre-calibrated settings for concoctions such as Beverage, Snacks, Meat, Poultry, Fish, Paella, and Popcorn.

Allan's right index finger hovered instinctively over the Popcorn button, but for the first time in eighteen months, it did not move toward its target. It simply froze.

Allan's heart missed a beat. A small bead of sweat accumulated at the top of his back and then darted down, stopping midway as it touched his shirt and was absorbed, instantly. His breathing increased. What was this?

Allan focused on the word Popcorn and tilted his head slightly, bewildered. He saw an infinite pattern of Popcorns repeat behind it, much like the magic worked by the arrangement of mirrors in fitting rooms that presented the illusion of repetition forever. He saw all of the Popcorns that had been pressed in the past eighteen months... so many of them...

He leaned closer and studied the plastic coating on which the word Popcorn was printed. Perhaps it was his sweat-stained eyes, but it appeared as though a slight erosion had occurred over the center of the word...

So many days... so much popcorn... pressing the button... popcorn, then Shasta, then bed... 5:15 AM... the horror that would follow... and then Popcorn... Popcorn... Popcorn... Pop-

Poultry.

Allan jabbed his finger forward and pressed the Poultry button. He nodded his head firmly and decisively; a few driplets of sweat arced across the void between his brow and the microwave's smooth plastic finish.

DUM HUMMMMMM.....

The microwave jumped to life. No differently than in the past. Allan watched in defiant expectation. The coated glass platter pirouetted, the bag of popcorn held aloft, beginning to stand at its edges.

Just like every other night.

Allan rubbed the front of his teeth with his tongue and watched. He reached behind him and grasped the door to the refrigerator. A mild exertion toward his body...POOF...the refrigerator door opened.

Allan felt the cool of its interior wash over his hand, then up his arm, toward his neck. POP. The first kernel. The bag bulged slightly. POP. Another. POP. Another. POP POP. And another, and another. POP POP POP... routine... routine... routine...

...pop ...pop ...ROUTINE ...pop pop... ROUTINE... ROUTINE... ROUTINE ROUTINE ROUTINE... POP...

Allan turned toward the refrigerator, studied the four cans of Shasta, and reached forward.

BOOM! BOOM!

Allan turned around and screamed.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

He was blown backward against the refrigerator.

BOOM! His head cracked into the bumpy surface of the freezer door. BOOM!

WHACK! He fell downward, his ear smashing the refrigerator handle. BOOM! BOOM BOOM BOOM!

A terrible gust of wind burst forth from the microwave, and the room was bathed in dazzling golden light. Allan felt the stinging blasts of red-hot popcorn kernels careening into his forehead and cheeks.

BOOM!

Smoke everywhere. BOOM! EEE EEE EEE EEE! The smoke detector, detecting.

Plastic, glass, popcorn... hurtling... some insulating wire mesh from the inside door of the microwave whizzed past Allan's head and stuck to the refrigerator... melted into place...

Heat everywhere.

BOOM!

Kernels... hot air... glass... the wind!

EEE EEE EEE EEE!

Goodbye, routine. Sweet routine, be gone.