

EMS

THE JOB OF YOUR LIFE

DEVIN KERINS



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THE SHIFT BEGINS

It's 4:30 in the morning. The alarm clock wakes me out of an incredible dream. One moment, I'm relaxing on a sun-filled beach, ten yards from the breaking waves, sipping on fruity alcohol-filled drinks when suddenly a horrible buzzing snaps me back into reality.

My back cracks as I sit up in bed. I do a little twist to get all the kinks out. I breathe a sigh of relief as I feel my spine pop back into place. Years of lifting heavy patients have wreaked havoc on my faithful backbone. I fumble for the glass of water I left next to the bed and try to swish out the taste of morning breath. Sleep crust gets removed from my eyes and it's time to hit the shower. The cloudiness in my head reminds me that I didn't get nearly enough sleep last night. *What else is new?*

The cold water wakes me up. Unfortunately, I didn't want it to be cold, and I take the lack of warm water as a harbinger of things to come. I bury my face in my hands. That's a position not at all uncommon to the EMS worker. *Please let it be a good day!*

After the shower, I search desperately for a pair of match-

ing socks. *Where do they all go anyway? Is there a mysterious singles' club for socks? I know all the missing socks are getting together somewhere in my house and laughing at me.* Looking at the time, I grab the first two socks that look remotely alike.

One final glance in the mirror. *Got your watch?* Check. *Your stethoscope?* There it is. *Hair looks good?* Not too shabby. *Uniform neatly ironed?* Hell no, but close enough. *Boots polished?* Absolutely not. I spend so much time in those things that they won't stay polished more than an hour anyway. Why bother?

I pull into the station to find my ambulance where I left it. As usual, the night guys have plundered my truck. *Dirty pirates.* I curse and yell as if they were there. Then I throw a box of latex gloves across the back. That makes me feel a little better; wanton destruction usually does. Now it's time to make a list of what they did leave me.

Lucky for me, they left the not-so-important equipment, such as sterile water, tape, and hydrogen peroxide. All the really important stuff, like the oxygen masks and bandages, have been removed from my vehicle. I also make a note to get more emesis basins in case any of my patients decide to blow chunks.

I make up the stretcher. Next I check my defibrillator. The self-test mode on the machine tells me everything is working fine. *That's nice, hope I don't have to find out.*

Inside is taken care of; now it's time for the outside. First I check to make sure the lifting devices are there. Both are fine. Next I check the backboards. Not surprisingly, there are no backboards. *Got to have those.* I see another ambulance that no one is using and decide to grab the boards off of that. *Hey, what goes around comes around!*

My partner shows up. We dispense with the usual pleasantries of "Hey, how was your evening? That's great, mine sucked," and it's off to tackle another day of making a difference.

I call on the radio to my dispatcher and tell him I'm in service. My stomach grumbles. *Wish I had time to eat breakfast this morning.* He cheerily greets me with a friendly hello and my first assignment of the day. On the outside of 123 Main Street, there's a man lying in the bushes, possibly not moving.

I just got in, and already I'm working. This is not a good sign!

At 6:30 in the morning, there aren't too many cars on the road. However, I know that the number of cars on the road means absolutely nothing in terms of how bad my response will be.

I pull out of the station and turn left. No one on the road yet. *That's good.* I hang a right at the first stoplight. A driver up ahead sees me coming and gently guides his car over to the right side of the road. I glide effortlessly past him down the hill. I swing a left onto a side street. What I see enrages me.

Someone has double-parked his car in the street. The driver is still in it, with the seat reclined. Next to him, on his left, is a space wide enough to find his car and mine easily. *Would it have been too much trouble for you to have parallel parked?* I wail on the siren. He wakes up, groggily starts the car, and drives up the street. He pulls over into a very small spot, yet he is still blocking the road. I hit the siren again, and he moves. I manage to pass him, and he flips me the middle finger. *Gee sir, I'm sorry I inconvenienced you.*

I make it onto Main Street without any further problems. I take the spotlight out of its holder and try to shine it along the ground to look for my patient. Not surprisingly, the spotlight doesn't work. *Nothing works when you really want it to.*

I see my patient lying in a bunch of thick bushes. I get out and approach cautiously. The torn leather jacket, faded jeans, and stench of sweat and stale whiskey tip me off right

away. It's Mikey Jones, one of my regulars. I know he's a mean drunk, so I give him a little tap with my foot. Not a kick, just a nudge to wake him up. He stirs, and I step back a little. He gets up and stands in front of me dazed for a moment. As he opens his mouth to speak, a couple of leaves fall out of his mouth and catch on his red beard. He starts to stagger towards me. He stumbles and I reach out to catch him. He falls into my arms and, without making a sound, throws up all over me.

All this fun and it's only 6:40. Eleven hours and twenty minutes left. Maybe I should have stayed in bed. I shrug that thought off.

This is my job. Welcome to it.