

Every day's different, and every day's the same. It's been like this for as long as I can remember. The sun rises and the band plays and everything is just beautifully perfect and perfectly beautiful. Who else gets to wake up to their favourite music played live outside their window? Not everyone. I'm one of the lucky ones.

I didn't start out here, of course. I had to earn it, same as everyone else in this place. When I first got here it wasn't very nice at all. I got here on a train that made the Japanese subways look roomy, wedged in like cordwood against who knows how many people. We disgorged and went our mostly-separate ways and I wound up in the most dismal neighbourhood I've ever seen in my life, and the damndest thing is that I can't remember the name of the place now.

It was a big old converted warehouse building, emphasis on big and old. The windows were loose where they weren't boarded up, and the wind whistled through at night, dragging you out of sleep even as it chilled your bones into miserable dead twigs. The elevator looked like it had a serial number of three and smelled of dried-on shit, and by a stunning coincidence so did the smackhead slumped in the corner, quietly losing himself in his stupor. I wouldn't mind, but the needles were all over the stairs as well and besides, one time he quite ruined my shoes.

Well, that simply wouldn't do, would it? So after I'd got a job as a fry cook in the horrible restaurant across town — more tessellated train journeys away, the pay was always behind — I tried to find the building manager. The smackhead kept asking if anyone else wanted to join him, and, if you could credit it, people did! The nerve of them! Some people just have no civic pride. Well, I'll have you know that I don't take no for an answer. I found out where he was getting this, this *filth* from and took it up with the BM and his dealer arse got thrown out into the street where it belonged. His supplier too, though the woman was in a different building, and apparently it went a bit further up the totem pole than I'd thought.

So I still worked and slaved in the restaurant — I can still hear the sizzle and spit of the fryers, you know — but the BM and I got to talking, and we talked a lot. Now, he and I were and to an extent still are very different people. I know, you wouldn't think it to look at us. Just my little joke there, ha ha. He's quite distinctive! Oh, look, there he is! Spot him in a crowd a mile away. I think it's the hair. So unusual, isn't it? Not the colour one normally finds worn by men, but to each their own, I suppose.

But yes. That chap there got me talking to people and I was put in touch with other people higher up the proverbial food chain. Turned out, that business with the junkie had given me a bit of a reputation as a problem solver around these parts. With the right people. Quite soon I was hunting down all sorts of people - drug dealers, smugglers, distilleries, even illegal restaurants. Now that came as a bit of a surprise considering my previous employment! But it all made sense in the end. And slowly, ever so slowly, I crawled out of the muck and emerged blinking into a new world. I moved from complex to complex, rising up the ziggurat, and soon I didn't have to work at the horrible restaurant making horrible food for the great unwashed, I was a somebody, a name! And that's how I wound up where I am today.

Sometimes I wonder what becomes of those who cross my path. There was a woman, some time ago. In a flat not unlike this one, in fact. She pleaded with me for leniency, offered me, oh, all sorts of things. But rules are rules, and she was dealing in the nastiest contraband. Such a simple thing, a flower. A crocus, I believe it was. Or something of that foul ilk. She promised that we could hide it, give respite to people who had lost everything, even that foulest thing with feathers, and grant them peace. I really do wonder what happened to her, when they took her away, because she offered to run away with me. Nobody does that. Not for someone as... unique as myself.

Respite cannot be tolerated, you see, and it's that attitude, that sticking to the *rules*, that got me where I am today! Every morning hearing the marching band play military tunes outside my bedroom window thirty seconds before my alarm goes off! Every day different! Every day the same! Nice suits and ties and keeping the image I had before! No hiding and skulking and trying to avoid my duly appointed punishments in drugged-out stupors or fine foods or the smell of a rose! No, I did what any sane man would do and I *made the best of it!* And now look at me! A self-made man!

Oh dear, I'm so sorry. I've quite monopolized this conversation. It really is an awful habit of mine. So let's talk about you for a moment. Start with the basics, since I'll be your caseworker while you're here.

What exactly did you do, to be sent to Hell?