

Siren

By Alan Nelson

The epiphany hits. A theory strikes you like a bright light on the road to Damascus. The theory starts to ripen and amazing facts fall from random chaos into place. Then you peck the theory open like an overripe peach and create a better theory. If there are medical damages involved, your research starts at cutting edge and works backwards until you've consulted Hippocrates. You find a big kettle of Crazy, and stir it up.

In other words, the matter sucks you in like the black holes at the center of galaxies. Your other cases suffer. You lose all sense of moderation, time, and business sense. You are harsh on yourself and others, your case takes all emotion.

It happens: a siren call that shines in the dark. Its files flash at you from the shelves and in your troubled dreams.

You work on a PowerPoint presentation until it's five hours long. You lay in bed in the middle of the night, surfing the web on your smart phone in search of anything that helps your case. You're born by the ruinous winds of obsession to something akin to madness, though you certainly are working the case.

Fires spontaneously start on files, as they always do. You ignore them. You let them burn merrily away. Things you've told others a hundred times not to do, you do.

Instead, you hammer, stamp and pound on the case that captures you, the Turkish Delight of the legal world. You feel it eat your life, your health, your family, your real interests away and you don't care. Employees do something good and you don't care. Employees do something bad and you don't care. You're a lone shark on a feeding frenzy and any who interrupts you appears to be chum. You know you're slowly going mad, but it's for a cause. No barrier can stop you.

You had a complicated schedule, but now it's simple. The Case is your schedule. All else is interruption. Other items fall or strip away. A few cases walk out the door. Some days you show up unwashed, in jeans and a grubby t-shirt, already working hours when anyone else shows up. You're tired and fussy by 10 in the morning. Time slows to when you were a kid and only held one thing on your mind at a time. You drink coffee and eat massive quantities of one type of food, be it ding dongs or donuts or peanut butter sandwiches.

You spend money on presentation technology. You learn new softwares to experience your file another way. You send an associate or hire a contract worker to research dozens of bizarre legal twists only you anticipate.

You rise early in the mornings, scramble and clamber for some mystery in this case. You feel like it might strangle your life away, but you continue to scuttle forward. Images of other lawyers you've seen die on the job flash through your mind. Your parents, if still alive, say you're driven. You know you're in a delirium without a name that grasps lawyers from time to time, and you hear voices, some from coworkers, some from family members (if you still have family around) to turn practical, to move from this extreme you've become to something more sensible.

The case that snags differs from lawyer to lawyer. For some it's a psychological reenactment of a wrong that happened to them. For others it's the client they want to impress. For yet others it's the opposing attorney sets off levels of competition, or hatred.

Is it choice, instinct or pathological compulsion? You don't ponder that issue a moment. You run on, chasing what you've mistaken for your heart's desire.