



Tuesday's Tie - Rick Chambers
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A lively purple necktie didn't fit the solemn day, but Jelle Van Dijk had no choice. This was his Friday tie, and Friday was Sophie Bakker's funeral.

He snugged the half Windsor knot into the cleft of his shirt collar. Slipping into his black suit jacket and gray overcoat, Jelle checked his appearance in the hallway mirror before heading out.

Leaden clouds drooped over Amsterdam, but they would hold onto the rain for another six hours and 17 minutes. Jelle knew this with absolute certainty. That left plenty of time to walk from his Amstelveen townhouse to Buitenveldert, the not-as-posh-as-it-wished neighborhood where Sophie's parents lived. He drew a cap down to his eyebrows and pulled up his coat collar, shrouding his features from passersby.

An hour's brisk stroll brought him to the Bakkers' home. Like its neighbors, it looked comfortable without being immodest. Briefly, Jelle pictured a young Sophie playing on the strip of grass along the nearby canal. But the image proved too painful, and he pushed it away.

White sheets draped every window in the home, an old tradition signifying mourning. Jelle would see little of the funeral gathering; Dutch funerals were invite-only, so he must grieve outdoors, apart and alone. He found a bench a short way up the street and planted himself there.

Hours passed as he watched friends and family approach the front door, exchange hugs and tears, then disappear inside. Jelle wept, too. In sorrow, of course. Also in guilt.

For even now, three days after her death, Jelle knew how to save Sophie. He just couldn't bring himself to do it.

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The previous Tuesday began as usual, with a gentle alarm, a leisurely shower, and partial dress in white shirt and blue slacks, followed by

breakfast of coffee, a bran muffin and a hard-boiled egg. Jelle's well-grooved routine had 45 years' momentum behind it.

Still, he wasn't one to fret about the passing of time. At 68, Jelle was a full year past the late-retirement mark. Even so, taking his pension soon wasn't in the cards. Single and without extended family, his focus remained on his career at SleurQX N.V., one of the biggest food exporters in The Netherlands. He was extraordinary as a global account manager. That's why his superiors hadn't pressured him to retire—yet.

Jelle checked the kitchen clock and realized he was running late. He wiggled into a blue suit jacket, snagged one of his seven neckties and rushed out the door. Sun and warmth greeted him, a far cry from Monday's dreary weather. He hurried to the nearest Metro station, boarded his regular train and grabbed his regular seat.

Once settled, he turned toward the window, using it as a makeshift mirror as he donned his necktie. He froze at the first step of knot tying, glanced down and sighed.

He'd brought the wrong necktie.

It was, admittedly, a silly tradition: Jelle reserved certain ties for certain days. In his Tuesday morning haste, he'd snatched his Monday tie—a subtle, gold-checked pattern overlaid on indigo. The error wasn't a big deal, but it felt like one. Grumbling quietly, he finished the knot, smoothed his collar and sat back in his seat.

Ten minutes later, the train stopped. As Jelle stepped onto the platform, he noticed that the weather had changed. Rain clouds, a light mist and a cold breeze, much like the previous day, had replaced the springtime warmth. Rapid weather changes weren't unusual in his tiny homeland, but rarely so fickle. Jelle hastened his pace until he reached the spacious glass lobby of SleurQX N.V.

Seeing Sophie at her desk brightened his day immensely. "*Goedemorgen,*" he said shyly.

Sophie returned his greeting with a knee-wobbling smile. "Wow, look at you! Ready to take on the world!"

“Only with you at my side, Sophie.”

She was in her forties, blonde with laser-blue eyes, a recent hire with professional skills so impressive that she managed projects beyond her lobby assignment. Jelle harbored an unconfessed, entirely inappropriate crush on her.

What enamored him was neither Sophie’s beauty nor her business acumen; it was her selfless compassion. Every day she offered him an encouraging word or kind act to let him know she appreciated him—not merely his expertise, but Jelle as a person. That was rare in his life. Knowing he mattered to Sophie meant the world to him.

“Busy today?” she asked.

“That’s true every day. It’s starting to wear me down.”

“It doesn’t help that you haven’t taken a vacation in two years.”

Jelle blushed—and hoped. Did she care after all? “How do you know that?” She tapped her computer screen. “Keeper of the calendars, remember?”

“Oh. Of course,” he replied, disappointed. “I, uh, better get to work. Lots to do before the account managers’ conference today.”

“The global video call, you mean?” Sophie frowned. “That’s tomorrow, isn’t it?”

“Sorry, no. It’s this afternoon.”

Puzzled, she called up a calendar on her computer. ““Global Account Managers Quarterly, Tuesday, 1530,”” she read aloud.

“That’s the one.”

“But today is Monday.”

He chuckled at her apparent joke. Sophie didn’t join him. She simply stared, clearly confused.

“No, today’s Tuesday,” said Jelle. “Luuk and I finalized the agenda yesterday.”

“Impossible,” Sophie insisted. “He went cycling in Zuid Kennemerland over the weekend. He told me about it this morning.”

Despite his secret infatuation, the gag fell flat for Jelle. He started to say so when he saw Luuk, his supervisor, crossing the lobby. Jelle waved him over.

“Luuk, I’m glad you’re here. Can you—”

Luuk interrupted him. “Sorry, terribly late for an appointment. Jelle, you and I need to complete the agenda for tomorrow’s quarterly call. Can you meet over lunch?”

Jelle felt his throat tighten. “Tomorrow’s call?”

“The global account managers call,” Luuk said impatiently. “Lunch okay?” Jelle’s voice grew small. “I ... yes.”

Luuk nodded and hurried off.

Trembling, Jelle pulled out his smartphone and tapped the screen. The display gave the date, time and, most importantly, the day.

Monday.

“Don’t worry,” Sophie said soothingly. “Everyone gets their days mixed up now and then.” That didn’t help him feel better.

Jelle’s anxiety grew as his second consecutive Monday wore on. Every appointment was one he’d kept the previous day. Each conversation was a reprise, every client call a repeat performance. His meeting with Luuk covered the same topics and questions they’d resolved 24 hours earlier. By the time Jelle got home that evening, he was both exhausted and terrified.

He made himself a stiff drink while puzzling over his bizarre experience. *Déjà vu*, the sense of having lived the present moment once before, was hardly novel. But this was *déjà vu* on steroids. Was it something more? Was he ill? Jelle once knew a man whose epilepsy caused frequent bouts of *déjà*

vu. But never had his friend said the disease prompted entire days to rewind.

As Jelle lifted the glass to his lips, a small drop of condensation fell onto his necktie. His Monday necktie. The tie he'd worn by accident on Tuesday.

A Tuesday that never happened.

“Ridiculous!” he shouted at his empty townhouse. “It’s a necktie. A necktie doesn’t decide what day it is. There must be a rational explanation.”

Hours later, when he stumbled into bed, he still hadn’t come up with one.

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Jelle stood at his closet the next morning and stared at his neckties, too frightened to choose one.

What if they really did determine the day he would live?

Extraordinary notions demanded extraordinary proof, so he decided to experiment. He would wear a tie for a day far removed from what the present day should—or might—be.

Jelle chose his Thursday tie, a black and teal stripe. He tied it, then checked his phone, heart racing.

Incredibly, the screen declared it was Thursday.

Still in disbelief, Jelle opened the browser and scrolled through the morning headlines. Thoughts of magic neckties quickly evaporated as his eyes landed on a breaking news story:

**SUSPECT HELD IN SLEURQX SHOOTING;
HEROIC EMPLOYEE STOPS MASS DEATHS**

Officials at SleurQX N.V. hailed as “an uncommon hero” an employee who was shot and killed on Tuesday at the company’s headquarters.

Police have not released the name of the shooter who walked into the main lobby of SleurQX and threatened dozens of people. The

attack was thwarted when one employee attempted to stop the gunman, an effort authorities say likely saved multiple lives.

The victim, Jelle Van Dijk, 68, was pronounced dead at the scene.

Screaming, Jelle flung the phone away.

He wailed in sorrow and fear for over an hour. Only a check in the mirror to confirm that he wasn't actually dead finally quieted him. A morning drink—a pricey *oued jenever* Jelle rarely touched—further calmed his ragged nerves.

Jelle struggled to understand what was happening. The world believed he'd been killed on Tuesday morning, moments after encountering the SleurQX shooter. News reports claimed Jelle quickly, almost presciently, realized the threat, grabbed the gun barrel and pulled it to his chest, away from other would-be victims. He died instantly. But his sacrifice gave Security time to capture the gunman until police arrived.

The news photos horrified Jelle. He saw his own shrouded body sprawled on the marbled floor of the lobby, surrounded by blood splatters and splintered glass.

Only a single thought kept full-blown panic at bay: Death had taken a different Jelle Van Dijk, on a day the currently living and breathing Jelle hadn't experienced.

But the living Jelle wasn't unaffected, for the time-twisting neckties left him trapped in a paradox. He couldn't return to his daily existence. The world would never believe his bizarre story of time jumping. People would think Jelle faked his death or that he had something to do with the shooting. He considered running away to start a new life, but he'd need money to do that. None of his accounts would be accessible to a "dead" man.

Then again, he still had his neckties. How far in time could he travel?

The answer proved disappointing. Trying each tie moved him to a different day, but all within a single week. That left him all but imprisoned in his home, living a handful of days over and over again. To keep his survival a secret, he must limit his time outside to Sunday, Monday and a sliver of Tuesday morning.

Unless, he thought desperately, I choose a different path.

What if he put on his Tuesday necktie but didn't show up to work? What if he didn't go to the lobby at the fateful moment? Might that rewrite his destiny?

With a glimmer of hope, Jelle returned to his closet. Tuesday's necktie, a fiery red favored by his American friends, hung from the tie rack. He took it, flipped up his shirt collar and wrapped the tie around his neck.

As he tightened the knot and put the collar back in place, Jelle noticed the light in the room brightening. Beyond his bedroom window, the sky turned clear and blue. He nervously checked his phone.

It was Tuesday.

Choking back a cry of relief, he made the most important call of his time.

"Hello, Luuk? This is Jelle. I ... I'm very ill today. ... No, I don't think I should come to the office.

... Yes, I know, I was supposed to help with the quarterly meeting, but I'm far too sick. Been in the lavatory since—oh. Sorry. I'll spare you the details. ... Thank you, I will."

Hours later, a TV news crew reported from the shooting scene. It had been a massacre. Police named the suspect, a former employee nursing a grudge. The man was on the loose; no one had stopped his attack. With the nation's borders closed, authorities were confident they'd find him soon. And they did—by morning, as Jelle learned when he put on his Wednesday tie.

Yet the man's arrest couldn't undo the deaths of 11 innocent people. Jelle watched the somber coverage from inside his townhouse, very much alive. He knew so because his heart was shattered.

It hadn't occurred to him that one of the victims would be Sophie Bakker.

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Jelle sat on the bench for hours, his head in his hands. He knew he should go home, but his anguish anchored him there. Choosing to save his own life

had been easy; enduring the deluge of shame at the loss of others, especially Sophie, was agonizing.

“Excuse me.”

Startled, Jelle looked up. A woman in a black sweater stood there—ash blonde, middle age and slightly pudgy, with sapphire eyes and a worried look.

“I’ve been watching you,” she said, cocking her head toward the Bakker house. “We tend to notice strangers around here. Especially distraught ones.” She paused. Jelle noticed that her eyes were raw, her cheeks crimson. She’d been wrestling with her own emotional pain.

“Did you know my Sophie?”

Jelle nodded. Words wouldn’t come. He wasn’t sure they should.

She sat next to him, drawing her sweater tight as the breeze tousled her hair.

“Sophie had a powerful effect on people. Always an encourager, never a critic. She used to drive me crazy, sticking up for the underdogs. ‘Every person is a child of God,’ she would say. ‘Every person is worth saving.’”

Her words soothed him. Jelle regained his voice.

“I loved her. Her smile. The hope she brought me every day. Her kind spirit, that’s what I miss the most. That warmth doesn’t exist anywhere else in my life. There’s only my work. My loneliness.”

“I suspect Sophie saw more in you than that. She cared about you for a reason.”

He shook his head. “I don’t know what,” he whispered. Jelle wiped a sleeve across his damp eyes, then looked at her again.

“You’re very kind,” he said. “I see where she got it from.”

With a deep, shuddering breath, the woman rose from the bench.

“Sophie taught me the difference between being nice and being kind. It’s putting other people first. Valuing them. That’s who she was, what she did. That’s what she dared us all to do. Just be kind.”

She turned her back to him. Jelle noticed her trembling. “Are you afraid of what comes next?” she asked.

His pause stretched an eternity. “Yes. Terrified.”

She left without another word.

The walk home took Jelle much longer this time. He arrived just as the darkening sky began to weep. Jelle Van Dijk joined in.

The tears cleansed him, lifted him. In his journey of mourning, he found the kindness and selflessness of Sophie Bakker.

Then, with resolve, he went to his closet and put on Tuesday’s tie.

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