

The Eight Days

David Walker

Monday

What is it, what's the matter with you, whispered the man in the gray overcoat.

Nothing. Dizzy for a moment. I'm okay. Again he raised the barrel, felt the cold metal of the sight pressing into his cheek. He trained the crosshairs on Karl's door. The night air was chill and heavy, and a few cars hissed on the wet street below. Suddenly a figure in white turned the corner. He tried to make out the face.

The man behind him spoke for the third time. There seems to be a bit of lint in the shape of a potato on the lens, Dietrich, or is that a flaw in the screen.

Tuesday

His eyes ached, and his hands were sticky with the thick green liquid. Curiously, the odor of radishes filled the room. It had been a long day. Maria held the last jar, the smallest one, up to the light.

Wait a minute, she said, the faintest hint of excitement in her voice. This one's turned white.

Wednesday

At dawn the sky over the deserted airfield was the color of slate. He lit a cigarette, pulled his glove back on, and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. Johann had been due at six, but there had been no sign of him yet.

A low drone caught his ear. He focused the field glasses on the thin line of trees at the horizon, and spotted the twin-engine plane. That's him, he said to the blond man.

They watched the tiny figure jump from the hatch, and almost immediately the white chute bloomed and caught.

What if he doesn't have the papers with him.

He will.

Suddenly, in what seemed a single instant, Johann slipped from his harness,

plummeted straight to the ground, bounced once on the asphalt, and landed in a twisted heap in the cornfield at the end of the farthest runway.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to look into the incredibly deep blue eyes. We're all alone now, the blond man said. Just us two left.

He smiled and ran his tongue over his lips. What can I say, Hans, he said. I mean.

Thursday

Jesus, she said, what happened to the flashlight.

I dropped it. Erich swore. Help me find it.

Silently, she took the turnip from her purse, dropped it over the edge, and counted ten before she heard the splash.

Look, let's not get separated. I wouldn't want to get lost up here. Everybody hold hands.

He fumbled for the hand of the person next to him, and nearly cried out when he touched cold steel, before he realized what had happened.

Friday

There she was, standing beside the bins of tomatoes. Everything checked out, the long blond hair, the blue coat, the tan satchel. But to be sure, he drew out the photograph once again. Finally, adjusting his shoulders, he strolled up to her. Ingrid, he said.

What, she replied slowly, focusing on a point just above his head.

Aunt Elisabeth won't be coming today. He put his hand lightly on her shoulder. I'm your uncle, Ingrid. Friedrich. You're to come with me.

Saturday

He was beginning to get cramped from lying so long on the sacks of onions. There was a burst of static over the intercom, and then a woman's voice began to speak excitedly in a foreign language. People were running overhead, and out the window he could see the beams of flashlights sweeping the lawn.

Good God, Gerald whimpered, can't you stop the bleeding. Someone's sure to look here.

What day is your birthday, he said, trying to take his mind off the pain.

The fourth of December.

I'll be damned. Same as mine.

Sunday

Here, she murmured, let me help you. She squeezed a ribbon of the cool cream onto his shoulderblades and began to work it in with firm circular strokes. He felt himself begin to relax.

Have you been in this country long, she asked.

Just a week. Why.

We don't see many Americans. Only during the cucumber festival.

She added more cream and began to knead the muscles of his lower back

and buttocks, her practiced thumbs probing the firm flesh. Do you like that, she asked, tickling the hairs on his upper thighs.

Yes, he said.

Good. Now turn over.

Monday

He was putting the last book back in the bookcase when he heard her suck in breath sharply. What's the matter, he said.

That picture. I never noticed it before. Tell me what you see.

He stared at the photograph on the calendar. The view out a window, a street, a few cars. A market. Piles of cabbages.

But the man coming around the corner, the one with the flashlight, look at his face. She put her hand on his shoulder. Suddenly his head swam.