

Killer Heels

A Short Story

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I am the cobbler. Want your Zippo engraved? I'm not your man. Need the cracked screen on your iPhone repaired? A spare key? A trophy for your kid's sports day? Nothing doing. That's for the high street.

Me? I make beautiful, hand-crafted shoes. My clients' needs are precise, my creations bespoke.

The studio is discreet. Nothing much to look at from the outside, just a ramshackle fisherman's hut on the dunes.

There's plenty of parking space by the café. And no one gives you a second glance ... even during the winter months, the big skies and sandy beach bring the dog-walkers, twitchers and seal-spotters. So while I'm not quite out of sight, I am out of mind. Plus, Norfolk people have ready smiles but keep to their own business.

Which is how we like it, me and my clients.

Take J, for example. One of my regulars. My creations have girdled her feet for two decades. She's an artisan, too, of a sort. I don't ask much, and she doesn't say much. Still, a good cobbler needs to know the *intention* if a shoe's to do its job.

With J, it's all about sevens. Seven pairs of shoes for seven days a week.

Monday's shoes are dancing shoes. Three-inch heels support her calf muscles, though the sole is flexible and the toe boxed like a traditional pointe.

Classical ballet and modern dance all-in. I fashion the Dori shoes in exquisite berry-red satin, with ribbons to match. Her moves are dirty but divine, she tells me with wink.

Tuesday's shoes are business shoes. Something comfortable and timeless. Something she can stride in. Something androgynous yet achingly feminine. The saddle Oxfords fit her like a glove – tan suede on cream leather.

Two decades back, she was wearing them with baggy socks and shift dresses. These days, they're teamed with wide-leg pinstripes that swish around long legs. The boys in management don't play silly buggers with her, that's for sure.

Wednesday's shoes are climbing shoes. Initially, they were a challenge, I can tell you. Not the mechanics of the build – I'm fine with that – but the sacrificing of comfort. A good cobbler considers the wearing. Good shoes are worn yet not *felt*.

J's climbing is aggressive and technical. She's in her forties and younger athletes are snapping at her heels. The tight leather binds her feet to the point of constriction, but that's what's required to keep ahead of the pups. She's still winning county comps, so I keep my head in the fit.

Thursday's shoes are running shoes. J wouldn't dream of hitting JD Sports. I'm her king of trainers, she says.

She regularly pounds fifteen kilometres of tarmac and we need to look after her knees. Plus, in the past five years she's begun to overpronate just a touch, so I build in a little motion control for stability.

Running is how J does her planning, and my shoes help her focus on what's in her head, not what's on her feet.

Friday's shoes are visiting shoes. She volunteers at a refuge. Doesn't discuss the people she meets there – that would be a breach of trust – but I know those women are running for their lives.

We've worked out what she needs to walk the hallways, check the locks and cameras, vet the security team, clean the rooms, serve the food, nurse the wounds, listen to the fear, build hope from horror.

I almost smell her fury as I construct pumps of the softest black leather and a sturdy rubber sole. They're like a second skin. She forgets she's wearing them.

Saturday's shoes are killing shoes. Back in the day, I experimented with custom insoles and spring-loaded thumb daggers. We talked about coating the blades in ricin or botulinum. All very Rosa Klebb. In practice, the engineering proved temperamental, the execution awkward, even for

an athlete like J. Sometimes simplicity is the name of the game.

I put mechanics and chemistry to one side and turned to geometry. Killer heels. It's all in the angles, a trompe l'oeil, really. The heel appears straight but curves into a razor-sharp vertical edge that J uses to slice through the Achilles tendon with a mere flick of the ankle – a move she's perfected in her dance classes. Her victim's still processing the damage as she slides the heel across his neck.

I have ears all over. Word is, that refuge has an unusually high recovery rate. New lives, fresh starts.

Sunday's shoes are paddling shoes. After a week's work, J's feet are tired. Jaded feet make for a sloppy mind. The jelly flats are green because that's her favourite colour. They hold their shape in the salt and shale. The water cleanses as she wades but the broken pebbles and jagged chalk reef underfoot don't assault her.

I keep this to myself but consider these shoes my crown in her seven-day collection. Sentimental, I know, but everyone needs saving one way or another.