

Precocious

Flash Fiction for Guests of the WordFeeder
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“My name is John Stansfield. I’m an agricultural microbiologist for a consulting firm. The name of the company isn’t important. They had nothing to do with what I’m about to describe. Besides, by now whatever personal records I kept at the office have removed or altered to fool any investigation. These people don’t erase any evidence of your existence. That’s way too hard, too suspicious. Better to leave you out there, stripped of your credibility. By now, my life has been tweaked, altered with finesse just enough to make anything I say here seem plausibly unbelievable, at most the ramblings of an over-active imagination. They have taken from me the fraction of my life that made me special. It was hardly anything, but everything that made me unique. It is the proverbial telltale partial fingerprint proving their involvement, that I have become extraordinarily ordinary, of no particular interest to anyone. The records I have, but they don’t know about, are quite probably the last surviving evidence that what I am about to tell you is true. I fear for my life. Even more, I fear that what I have done, however innocent and well meaning, will be left to prove in horrible retrospect that my story was authentic, and the danger all too real.”

“It’s late. If you care, I’m working in the dark, except for the glow of my screen, in the upstairs bedroom of one the kids of an acquaintance who’s on vacation. I overheard him leaving his house key with his secretary to take care of his plants, and made a copy while she went out for lunch. He doesn’t know I’m here, and I borrowed a friend’s car in case they were tracking mine. No one followed me. I should be okay for the next few hours – time enough to write this, get some sleep, and be up and out of here early, before any of the neighbors notice. I’m afraid to use my cell phone, and these people don’t have a land line. It sounds corny, I know, but I’ll give you instructions later for how you can reach me by running a personals add on-line. ...I’m talking too much. I’m so tired, but I’ve got to get this out.”

“My particular specialty is protecting agricultural products from exposure to environmental and biological elements which, when those agricultural products are consumed, would cause harm to the public.”

“I’m not much of a writer, but I’ll do my best to explain what’s happened, and then I’m going to go. This will be an e-mail addressed to the Editors-in-Chief of the major television news networks and most prominent newspapers. Hopefully, one of you will take me seriously, investigate on the odd chance that I’m not a crackpot, and do something about it. I can’t, and don’t think I’ll live long enough even if I could. At best, you’ll staff it out, if it even makes it to your desk. At most, you might do your duty and forward it to the local office of the FBI who will give it casual study until it’s too late. At worst, these notes will be one more inconspicuous item for the nice Hispanic lady who empties your trash after you’ve gone home for the day.

With luck, you'll never realize how many lives you could have saved had you only paid attention.”

“Some months ago, I was approached by someone who identified herself – verbally and with written credentials which I verified with her agency – as Rebecca Kloonz, a senior analyst with Homeland Security, an almost too attractive blonde, as stunning as she was friendly, the consummate professional you couldn't get out of your head no matter how hard you tried. What I did, to be honest, I did for my country, but pleasing her was certainly part of it.”

“When I first met her, she was accompanied by a suit claiming to be a lawyer with the same agency. I'll attach copies of the business cards they gave me. Although I now know they are imposters, both of them checked out when we first met. I called Homeland Security, and there used to be a handful of citations on Google, and a My Space page, but they're gone now. Kloontz, the analyst, was to be my contact. The lawyer – the suit that came with her after I agreed to cooperate – was supposedly there to explain a handful of forms and agreements I had to sign related to federal secrecy statutes.”

“The gist of what they wanted was to hire me, outside of our company, to participate in what amounted to a game in the war against terrorism. My job was to devise and precisely document three to five means by which terrorists could infect the food supply so as to produce the most widespread, most frightening harm to our people, with devastating effects on the economy. One simple example that she gave me, far less sophisticated and effective than what she knew I could propose, was to introduce Mad Cow's Disease in multiple herds around the country, destroying the American beef industry and all the various related companies whose products derive from that core ingredient. But MCD was too obvious. What they wanted from me were techniques that would kill as many people as possible, quickly, before the root cause could be determined, and for which there would be no obvious or convenient solution.”

“Other experts, as unknown to me as I would be to them, would then be tasked to devise means of protecting against these threats that I had devised, and recovering from such an attack. In later games, our roles would be reversed. It was the patriotic thing for me to do. It's unbelievable, but I even met with Ms. Kloonz at her offices in the Homeland Security building in Washington. Why wouldn't I believe her? While I was there, some senior gentlemen stopped by to thank me for agreeing to work with them on behalf of the American people would never appreciate the value of my efforts and that of other scientists like me. Who knows what he thought I was there to do? Was he in on it, or not? God forgive me, but who wouldn't have thought this was real?”

“Attached to this e-mail are copies of the three suggestions I made, including detailed formulas, instructions for manufacturing, and plans for distribution. Their insidious effectiveness never disgusted me. Their cleverness made me proud of what I could do for my country, but then they counted on that, didn't they, that I would be so highly motivated to do the right thing.”

Of the three proposals I made to Kloonz, the one in which she seemed to be most interested wa... Hold on. I think there's a car pulling up in the driveway. Jesus, it's after 1 AM and Jack isn't due home until next week. Hold on... It's just one man. F**k, he's working the front

door. He's coming in. I'm going to e-mail this now and send you the attachments later, as soon as I..."

"Hi, honey." His mother gave her smiling husband a quick kiss on the lips, and turned to shout upstairs to her favorite (and only) son. "Nelson! Com'on. Daddy's home. I've got dinner ready to go. Get your sister and come on down. We've still got to pack so we can get an early start tomorrow morning."

"Nuts," Nelson thought to himself, interrupting his typing to press on the center of his frames, pushing his glasses up this nose which, sadly, would eventually be large enough to no longer need his assistance.

"He's not packed yet?" his father asked, putting down his briefcase on top of their cat he hadn't noticed was sitting in his favorite family room chair." You'd have thought Jack, the cat, would have screamed, but then he was used to it, and looked forward to their leaving him home for a week of peace and quiet. "What's he been doing all day?"

"Writing. I don't know. I haven't packed either." And then she laughed, not wanting to make fun of their son, but unable to help herself. "He's been grumbling that he has less than three weeks to come up with a really cool nickname."

"It's summertime. Why isn't he busy with his dorky friends inventing something?"

"Hey, they're not that dorky," his older sister, Samantha, always protective of her younger brother, had just come around the corner into the kitchen. "He's just a kid – a really, really smart kid with an overly active imagination. He'll be okay as soon as he starts Middle School after we get back."

"Nelson!!!" His mother couldn't stand not serving dinner when it was ready.

The cringe was a reflex he couldn't suppress. Still upstairs, standing up from his desk, Nelson moved the arrow "Send/Receive" and pressed the left key below his synapse pad. "Maybe it'll make the news," he said out loud. "That would be cool."

"NELSON." This time it was his father calling him. "Sam, please go get your brother."

"Nelson Metcalf Rogerson. Jesus, what were they thinking?" he muttered under his breath, closing the lid of his laptop on his way to the door. "I'm never going to get a girl to go out with me. Never, ever."

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