

Spies?

I'm not a writer, not in any stretch of the word. But I've got some time to kill, and an interesting story to tell. So here goes nothing.

I was walking home from work, through the park, at 18:35. I remember the time because it's always 18:35 when I walk through the park. Leaves were rustling as the branches creaked. I pulled my jacket closer around me. The bushes rustled again, but there was no breeze. That's when he appeared. I didn't get a good look at him. Only saw his rugged hair and tanned skin, or maybe it wasn't tanned, it was hard to tell with the glow of the streetlamp above us. He turned and looked at me, sweat dripping down his forehead, panting like a dog. Then nothing. It's a cliché that I hate but it's true, it all happened in slow motion. His body went limp and he hit the floor. Red began to surround him, staining the pavement and edging closer towards me. I just watched as it soaked into my shoes pulling me into his life, his death.

More rustling, I closed my eyes not wanting to know what else could appear. Nothing good, surely. But I was wrong. One foot, then another, slowly and completely unbothered by the events that had just occurred a tall thin man stepped out of that bush. He looked down at the body then turned to me. His face was chiseled, classically handsome, I guess. I didn't notice many details, except one. A small scar on the left corner of his mouth. It was upturned and gave the illusion that he was smirking. But how could anyone smirk in this situation.

"I guess you'd better come with then." He said. He didn't mumble, or shout, or groan. He just, said it. I didn't respond. What would I even say? I just followed him.

Eventually my hands stopped shaking, my mouth wasn't dry and I was breathing normally again. Just a few more deep breathes, then I turned to him. An expressionless face, wearing all black. He looked like he was trying to blend in with the night.

"What the hell is going on?" I finally said. Well, I squealed. It came out at a much higher pitch than I intended.

"It's complicated," He replied, with a slight chuckle, "and confidential." His tone turned more serious, as did his face.

We continued to walk in silence. My briefcase bumping against my leg made me think. Think about the boring life I'm supposed to be living, and how this has changed all of that. But do I really want to be entangled in this mess? I don't even know what this is. Following a stranger through town in the dark, not even a stranger, a murderer. With all these thoughts racing through my mind I didn't even notice when my feet started to pick up speed. I felt the cold air rush past my face and realised I was running. I was running away from a man with a gun. How stupid am I? But it was too late to turn back, I had to just keep running. I turned into an alleyway to try and loose him. Then I tripped. Of

course I tripped. Everyone trips when they're running for their life. I rolled onto my back, no point in getting up, I'm too exhausted to keep running. I just lay there as his tall thin figure loomed over me.

"Not a bad attempt, I'd give it maybe a seven out of ten." He was smiling now, and that wasn't just his scar.

"Tell me what this is all about, otherwise I'm not walking another step with you." I sounded much more assertive this time.

"Fine." He turned over an empty bin and lowered himself onto it. "My name is Agent Booth, I work for a classified branch of the government that discreetly deals with threats we don't want the public to know about. The man you saw was one of those threats. I'm a good guy, I promise you."

There was a moment of silence as I began to process what he had just told me. Am I really getting caught up in all this spy stuff? Does that really happen to people? I realised it had been silent for way too long, I had to say something. Something smart, something witty, something that showed him I could handle this.

"Cool beans"

"Cool beans?"

"Yep, that's what I said... Apparently." Why? I couldn't tell you, I've never said it before, and yet I decided that in this moment it was the perfect time to use a quote from a 2007 comedy film.

"Right. Well, then I guess we had better keep moving then." He stood up and dusted himself off.

I still didn't know where we were going. But at least we talked. Or he threatened. I'm not entirely sure. The way he spoke sounded like it was procedure for him. Like he had memorised a script and was just giving me the usual spiel about how I'm perfectly safe with him, and more will be explained later. One thing was for sure though, he wasn't going to let me go home anytime soon. I wasn't even sure I wanted to go home. It was like the beginning of a spy novel. I never knew what was going to happen next. As it turns out, neither did Booth.

It felt like we had been walking for hours, maybe we had, I didn't bother to check. Time seemed trivial in these circumstances. But clearly, we had been walking long enough for Booth as he stopped dead in his tracks. We were at a crossroad.

"Left, or right?" he asked me.

"Left." I said, with certainty.

God knows where that confidence came from, I didn't even know where we were never mind which way we should go. But Booth seemed satisfied with my answer. So left we went. I don't know why, or how, but in the short time I had known Booth I began to like him, trust him even. Maybe I was crazy or maybe it was a mild case of Stockholm syndrome, either way it seemed that sticking with him was the only option I had.

The air was getting colder and the stars getting brighter. We had definitely been walking for hours now. And honestly, it didn't seem like we were going to stop. We would just keep going like this, one foot in front of the other, my briefcase still swinging by my side, until eventually one of us would have to die of exhaustion. I began thinking about chairs. All kinds of chairs, or stools. Anything I could sit on, anything where my feet would not be holding my weight. The bliss that overwhelmed me thinking about this was immense. The beautiful, simple design of a chair. The wonderful feeling of sitt..

"We're here."

Daydream ruined. We were stood next to a large brick structure that arched over the road in front of us. Bridge. It was bridge. I can't think of a more effective way of describing a bridge than 'It was a bridge'. Like I said, I'm not a writer. Anyway, we were standing next to this bridge and I noticed just how quiet it was. No one around, no traffic, nothing. The perfect place to dispose of a witness I thought. My eyes shifted over to Booth as he examined the wall next to us. Stalling? Preparing? His right hand reached into his jacket. For what, a gun, a knife? A small piece of paper?

"What's that for?" I stepped forward. Assuring myself he couldn't kill me with this scrap of paper.

"It's my pin. I've got an awful memory."

That's when I saw that part of the wall had moved to reveal a pin pad. I couldn't help but smile to myself. This is the sort of spy stuff kids dream about. He entered his pin, 6385. My memory's not quite so bad. Another chunk of the wall began to shift as it revealed a thin folder marked "CONFIDENTIAL".

"This," Booth began, "is my next mission."

He took out a small picture and held it in front of me, a man with dark curly hair and a scruffy beard. Bright blue eyes, or green. Or they may have been brown, I didn't look at the picture for that long.

"This man is planning to blow up various seemingly unimportant locations around the country. Tonight. Schools, churches, gyms. No one will be hurt but a large amount of vital government information will be lost. He has to flick the activation switch at exactly 1am for the bombs to detonate. If he misses that time, they will neutralise themselves, a stupid design error he made. But, it helps us a lot. All we have to do is delay him long enough that he misses the detonation time."

"I'm sorry, we?" I stammered.

"Yes, we. No one else is close enough to his location to do get there in time and I can't let you leave my side. We're the only ones that can stop this." He was confident, assured that I wasn't going to argue with this. I'd just accept and go with him. As if I didn't have a life to go back to.

I began to open my mouth, ready to protest. Then the slow motion started again. He was staring at me, eyes wide open, as he fell to the ground. I didn't see where the shot came from. I didn't know if they were going to fire at me next. But I wasn't taking any chances. I grabbed the folder and ran. Looking

back to once again see a blood-stained pavement.

I stopped running. I stopped walking. I stopped. So many thoughts running through my head. Ditch the file and go home, pretend nothing ever happened. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to go home. But Booth's words echoed around my head; "We're the only ones that can stop this." Slowly the words started to morph. Booth was in my head, telling me again and again "You're the only one that can stop this." He was right. I started thumbing through the file, looking for an address or location where I could find the scruffy bearded man. Part of me praying I wouldn't find it. But I did. Along with directions. As if they knew the person completing this mission wouldn't know where they were.

More walking. It was 12:25 when I started and based on the directions it would take twenty minutes to get there. So I didn't walk fast. I was already panicking about what I could do to delay this guy, I didn't want to have to delay him for fifteen minutes. But for now, I had to just keep walking.

I made it. The villain's lair. I was hoping for a big white mansion or something but honestly, it was more like a shed. A nice shed. But still a shed. I pushed on the door and it creaked open. There he was. The man with the scruffy beard. "Can I help you?" He smiled. They're not supposed to smile, they're supposed to do an evil laugh. This guy really wasn't living up to my supervillain expectations.

I had two minutes. Two minutes of delaying to do. Easy right? Just had to make something up. Something that would get him away from the control panel thing. There was a light switch to my left. Perfect. He won't be able to see the button, I'm a genius! I reached up and flicked the switch. It wasn't a light switch, I heard the bang in front of me, cue the slow motion.

Now I'm sat in a prison cell. I saved the day, stopped the bombings. Just accidentally murdered someone and simultaneously called the police on myself. An interesting feature to add to your shed if you ask me. My cell door clunked open as a guard entered.

"What would you do? To pass the time I mean." I asked the guard.

"Write a book, some great books were written in prison, Nelson Mandela's Conversations with myself was. But then again, so was Mein Kampf. And I wouldn't worry too much. You won't be here long. We'll get you out." He said with a smirk. Or maybe it just looked like a smirk, it was hard to tell with that scar on the left corner of his mouth.