

Flash Fiction Collection No. I
By
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Next!

Paralysed with terror I watched as the uniformed border guards at the security checkpoint literally dismantled the battered VW, pulling off mudguards, side panels, even the bumper bars. The driver was next to the car on his knees, his hands on his head. A scowling guard stood watch over him while aiming an AK-47 rifle at his head.

My hands clung to my steering wheel like a bird's talons to a branch in the midst of a wild storm. My face drained of all color, my stomach had a leaden, sinking feeling, and adrenaline spiked every nerve ending throughout my entire body. It felt like a billion tiny needles were piercing my skin. What on earth did I think I was doing? This was sheer folly!

The book binder draped an over familiar arm around my shoulders, "You'll be fine, Pietr. When you pass through the checkpoint be confident, calm and relaxed. Easy, no?"

My arms and chest were shaking uncontrollably. I could have sworn I was naked and in the midst of a snowstorm, although it was a warm summer day.

With a triumphant shout the guards found contraband in a concealed panel in the VW's boot. My heart missed a beat and then crashed back into action like a jackhammer loose in my chest. To say that I was panicking was an understatement. If they found something so well concealed, what chance did I have in smuggling my prohibited books through the checkpoint?

I glanced apprehensively at the suitcase lying next to me on the front passenger seat.

Those guards were going to open the suitcase. It was a forgone conclusion. And then I was going to rot forever in an East German prison. I had to turn my car around and go! I must flee! I began to reach for the gear column; my feet ready to engage the clutch.

I was sitting in the school cafeteria, watching the school's sports captain strutting around as he spun another tale of his sporting prowess. Nine desirable girls surrounded him, hanging off his every word. And at least that many guys lounged around the group too: laughing and clapping, just glad to be part of the captain's entourage.

I was not envious. I was jealous. If I had even an iota of Ben's confidence I could be anything I wanted to be. It was not fair.

Sudden movement broke me from my bitter reverie and I saw Hitomi, a Japanese-American girl sit next to me. "What's up, Pietr?"

"Him," I snapped, "I wish I could be confident like that."

Hitomi searched out my eyes and smiled, "I don't."

"Yeah, right." I replied dryly. Everyone wanted to be like Ben.

"No, really, I don't. For all his confidence, it all revolves around himself. He's not doing anything worthwhile with it. But there is another kind of confidence, and I have that in abundance. I have complete confidence in Jesus and in His ability to be my life-long provider."

Turning my full attention to Hitomi's plain face, I found her calm, peaceful atmosphere fill my heart with an aching sensation I had never felt before. "Tell me more about this Jesus..."

The border guards marched off the balding man at gunpoint while others pushed his half-dismantled car off the road next to the checkpoint.

The closest guard pointed at me and barked, "Next!"

Meeting the guard's gaze but speaking softly so he could not hear me, I said, "I have another kind of confidence." Suddenly a tangible atmosphere of peace and calm descended over me and I stopped shaking. Color returned to my face. My hands relaxed on the steering wheel.

On a sudden impulse I popped the latches on the suitcase full of German Bibles and withdrew two of them, which I then placed in plain sight on top of the suitcase.

I drove into the checkpoint.

The border guard, AK-47 gripped menacingly in his right hand, opened the passenger door. He looked at the suitcase, at the clearly displayed prohibited German Bibles, and then locked eyes with me for what seemed like an eternity.

With a shrug he withdrew and slammed the door shut, pointing past the checkpoint, saying, "Drive on!"

Then the guard turned to the car behind mine and barked, "Next!"

I drove into East Germany. I had a delivery to make.

Grave Robbers

Neferet shrieked and flung herself backward in the semi-darkness.

Teman caught the slim woman and slammed her bodily against the upward sloping passage wall. "Keep it together!" he snapped.

Neferet frantically wiped her hands on her long, dishevelled robe. "It was a scorpion! It could have stung me!"

"What a shame it missed!" Teman snarled as he thrust his face into hers.

Burly Gatam grabbed Teman by the locks of his thick black hair and yanked him roughly away from the woman. "We need her, you idiot, she can read the hieroglyphs."

Teman's right hand wandered to the bronze knife strapped to his knee length kilt, rebellious emotions playing over his scarred face.

Gatam's face, looking eerie in the flickering light from the torches, smiled widely. "You want to take me now, Teman? I've lead our band for fifteen years, and we've robbed two pyramids under my expert leadership. And here we are, finally in the heart of the greatest one of them all, and now you want me? Come on then!"

But as aggressive as he was, Teman was also not stupid. His hand moved away from his knife. But he could not resist smashing a meaty fist into the wall next to the girl's head, causing her to shy away in fear.

"Damn it!" Teman cursed as he sucked on his bruised knuckles. About to push Neferet back up the passage, he suddenly turned to the wall. "Bring that torch here!"

A torchbearer came to stand next to Teman, who was carefully running his fingers along the seams separating the massive stone blocks.

"What are you doing, fool!" Gatam growled.

Puzzled, Teman turned to the group's leader, "Look! This white sediment between these stones is sea salt!"

"That's impossible, we are a good two hundred feet above ground!" refuted the leader.

"Taste it yourself, then." Teman insisted.

Looking daggers at his companion, Gatam scratched some of the white power from between the stone blocks and tasted it. Frustration became bafflement. "You are correct. This is sea salt. But what does this mean?"

Neferet found her voice. "It means that at some time in the past, the ocean flooded this entire area. A flood so big that it at least partially submerged this pyramid."

"Hah! Sounds like rubbish. And it is of no consequence, so let us continue!" Gatam announced after studying the girl's face carefully in the semi-darkness. There was no way the ocean could have flooded this far inland, or so high.

The grave robbers and Egyptian woman they had forced to come with them continued to ascend the gently sloping passage. They had studied this pyramid carefully for a month before finding the secret entrance that allowed them access to its interior.

The greatest thrill had been stumbling across this upward sloping passageway, something they had never heard mentioned before. The other smaller pyramids they had raided certainly did not contain such a passage.

Holding their flicking torches high they continued to ascend until the passage reached a large chamber, about ten cubits wide and twenty long.

"Spread out and hold up your torches." Gatam shouted, visions of riches uncountable consuming his mind.

The torch bearers spread themselves around the stark walled room, and the fire light revealed a large but plain, rectangular red granite sarcophagus filling the centre of the room, its lid sitting firmly in place.

"This one is not like the others," Neferet said quietly as she walked respectfully over to the large stone coffer.

"Explain yourself woman. Why must you always speak in stupid riddles!" Gatam growled as he and Teman also walked over to the coffer. He ran his hands over the smooth red stone.

"This sarcophagus, in fact, this whole room," began Neferet carefully, "contains none of my people's hieroglyphs."

"Humph," snorted Gatam, "I really don't care. Let's just get this lid off the coffer and see what loot the mummy has got with him."

Gatam, Teman, and two of the torch bearers grunted as they carefully lifted the stone lid off the sarcophagus and lay it on the floor.

Gatam swore. Teman just stood there stupefied. The sarcophagus was empty.

No mummy, no gold, no jewels, completely empty except for one stone tablet.

Neferet overcame her fear of the grave robbers, grabbed a burning torch from one of them, and clambered into the coffer to pick up the stone tablet. She ran her hand along the simple hieroglyphs and read it quietly to herself.

The hairs on the back of Gatam's neck stood up and he took a step back, suddenly terrified beyond words as an awesome, strange Presence filled the chamber. A glance at Teman and the porters showed them all to be unnerved as well. They all felt unworthy, unclean, as though their sinful, violent lives were being laid bare before them.

"What does the tablet say, damn you woman!" Gatam snarled at her while glancing over his shoulder, expecting ghosts to appear to strike him down.

Neferet rose her head high and smiled. The grave robbers all took another step back in fear. "Its hieroglyphs are very simple, more so than my peoples. But I can read it. It is all about a man, the man who built this pyramid. I can't read his name symbol, so I'll just call him 'the man'. It reads like this, "The man walked with God, then he was no more, because God took him away."

The Presence of God in the chamber magnified tenfold and all the grave robbers ran screaming from the room, leaving Neferet by herself, kneeling in the sarcophagus and clutching the stone tablet to her breast. She rose her eyes heavenward, "Yahweh, God of Israel, provider of the Israeli Sacred Scrolls, Your Word is true. Enoch is not here..."

Do Not Try to Change the Subject

I could contain myself no longer. "You make me..."

"Yes dear?"

"So so angry!"

My husband sighed. "Whatever I've done, I'm sorry, OK?"

I pulled our little one's hand, "Don't dally James!" And to my husband, "I told you I wanted to get here by ten. You took so long getting ready it's almost eleven thirty!"

"Sorry, I kind of got distracted."

"Always some lame reason. When are you going to change!" I spat.

"Mommy, please don't fight with Daddy," implored our four year old.

My husband answered gently, "Carol, I have always been like this. Why do you make such a big issue of it these days?"

I swerved to avoid another tourist. "Dear, you've got a problem with meeting a deadline. You know you've got this problem. And I asked you to make a special effort."

George held up helpless hands, "I am trying dear. But as we are here now, let's drop this and enjoy ourselves."

"Enjoy ourselves!" I protested, "we've come all the way here to another state, primarily to spend the whole day exploring this vintage heritage settlement. And now we are going to miss a whole hour and a half!"

My husband bent down to touch James's arm. He pointed at the building we were heading for, "See that, son? Used to be a flour mill until they turned it into a prison."

"There's lots of water around it, Daddy."

"You're right, little fella - water full of sharks. No prisoners could ever swim across the lake to escape."

"Don't try to change the subject, George," I threatened.

George breathed out slowly, "I'm not, honey, I'm trying to enjoy our time here. Why don't we talk about this tonight? Now that we're here, let's explore this colonial convict settlement to our hearts' content."

I was a runaway train hurtling downhill. "Uh uh, not good enough. I'm still angry with you for making us two hours late to the gold mining town last February."

"Darling, that was five months ago! I already said I was sorry."

"Well, your apology obviously meant nothing or you would have made a bigger effort today. Not to mention making us late for James' pre-school interview, my mother's on Christmas day – again –and all because you can't get your act together!"

George would not rise to my barbs, "Carol, I told you on our first date that I suffer from a mild form of attention deficit syndrome. I really am doing my best."

We were passing through the tourist attraction's unique radial exercise yards and were approaching the cross-shaped prison itself. I barely noticed.

"I think you're doing it on purpose, George, just to get at me."

"Now you know that's not true."

I rose my eyes. "Why don't you put some passion in your voice, George, you know how much it irritates me when you talk like a lamb!"

"Mommy, please be nice to Daddy," said James, trying again to calm me down.

"You stay out of this, James! This is between your father and me!"

"The little one has a point," said a kindly male voice from behind us.

I span around angrily at this unwelcome intrusion, "Excuse me, but this is absolutely none of your..." The words stuck in my throat and my face turned red with

embarrassment. The elderly man walking behind us with his aged wife was wearing a dog collar.

The minister smiled at me and said softly, "Love is patient, love is kind. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love never fails."

I stood there with my face burning while the minister turned and walked slowly away from us.

I glanced back at my husband expecting to see a look of triumph on his face but saw only concern.

My shoulders slumped and I let the anger melt out of me. "Sorry George, you were right. Let's put this behind us and just enjoy ourselves today."

My husband put our son on his right hip and offered me his left arm. "Shall we?"

I rewarded him with my best smile and took his arm.

Into Captivity!

The exercise yard was enclosed on three sides by dirty cyclone fences tipped with barbed wire. Freezing cold air cut through the yard like hailstones through the paper walls of a Japanese house.

Over one hundred men from a wide variety of backgrounds filled the yard, huddled together in small like-minded groups. As I threaded my way cautiously through this throng I felt waves of hatred and loathing sent my way akin to heat radiating from an overused oven. I kept my eyes doggedly on the ground. Just as my brother's cat saw eye contact as a flagrant attempt at domination, I had found that the same rules applied here.

I finally reached the enclosure's southeast corner. A small crowd had already gathered. I turned around and stood with my back to the fence, the frigid wind cutting straight through my inadequate clothing. I should have been despondent but instead announced; "I am honored and overjoyed because today it is my turn!"

A chorus of replies greeted me.

"Good on you, brother!"

"Let's hear you, brother!"

"Loser!"

As I began to speak I met the eyes of all in my small audience, finding several kindred spirits, a few doubtfals, and those come to enjoy the brewing spectacle. "Delight your heart in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart", the Bible says. And it is with great joy that I can tell you today that Jesus Christ Himself is the desire of my heart. I am content. In fact, even in the midst of this nightmare, I am happy."

A commotion across the yard attracted my attention. Five prison guards wielding riot clubs waded through the irregular throng of malcontents, who parted before them like schools of fish fleeing hungry sharks.

One spectator saw the guards approaching and ridiculed me; "You're a lunatic! And a liar - no-one could be happy here!"

"Sir, your happiness is dictated by your circumstances, something which you cannot control and that changes like Melbourne weather. When everything goes your way, you are happy. Not so with me - I have a deep happiness with unshakeable foundations, not affected by my circumstances..."

The guards broke through my audience and reached me. The leader's club rose and came down on my collarbone. I felt the bone crack but remained standing as pain washed through me like forked lightning stabbing forth from an angry sky.

The guard lifted his club again and pulled me to him by the scruff of my collar, "Traitor to humanity! People like you are the only obstacle to true world peace! Renounce your adherence to your banned religious beliefs and embrace the Maitreya, the true incarnation of the universal Christ Consciousness, and I will walk away right now."

"I acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." I replied unwaveringly.

The club descended and pain blossomed through my head. Several more times the club rose and fell until I collapsed to the ground like a puppet with its strings cut. Bruised, bleeding, and suffering a couple of fractured bones, I tried to regain my feet but found myself pitching headfirst towards the concrete.

Strong arms unexpectedly caught me and helped me to a sitting position. My primary critic sat in front of me. "Why do you do this? Every Sunday one of you Christians steps up and delivers a sermon that results in your receiving a callous beating. What am I missing? In your shoes I would live in dread of this. Yet you welcome it. And I hate to admit it, but you do indeed look...happy."

Breathing was painful but I was able to speak. "My happiness is founded in Jesus Christ and in my relationship with Him. I have learned that He is in complete control of my life, in fact, and of all things. There is nothing I need fear. Everything that happens in my life is part of His plan, something He has allowed to happen. So instead of worrying, I relax and accept His lordship and rejoice in Him."

My critic appraised me. "I am a Jew, and in refusing to accept the Mark and renounce Judaism, was thrown in this diabolical prison. But my faith is not helping me. I feel constricted by rules and regulations. Can you convince me that your Jesus is the Messiah I have been waiting for?"

"Let's start with the Book of Isaiah." I answered.

There Will Be No Crucifixion

I felt so completely out of place, like a trespasser skulking through a top-secret government installation. The full moon was so low in the sky that it cast long, foreboding shadows across the gardens and surrounding grounds. Trees and bushes formed black silhouettes against the night sky.

It was the year AD 30. I am a Time Continuum Cop from the twenty-fifth century, sent back to stop two time travelling terrorists detecting travelling here in an attempt to change the future. What these terrorists do not realise is that unlike in the sci-fi movies, there is only one timeline. If they succeed in their mission they will not change the future; instead, they will destroy the timeline completely. There will be no future.

Our time-continuum equipment detected this unauthorised time displacement. In just a few minutes these terrorists would arrive here in the Garden of Gethsemane. Considering the date and the location, their target could only be the historical figure Jesus Christ.

I actually volunteered for this mission, but perhaps not for the reasons you suspect. You see I am an atheist and therefore have always been curious to see what Jesus Christ was actually like. I wanted to see how he managed to have such an effect on the course of history. Was he just a charismatic leader or history's greatest con man?

I crept stealthily through the Garden of Gethsemane without making a sound. My chameleon device was already activated, so no inhabitants of this time could see me. My weapons were loaded and the safeties were disabled. As soon as the terrorists arrived I would ambush them. Then I would spend the next few days following Jesus Christ to see what happened with his crucifixion and reputed resurrection from the dead. If I could return to the future with proof that the resurrection was just one great con, I would change the nature of my own time.

My cybernetically enhanced eyes could see in several spectrums at once so I quickly located three of Jesus' disciples. They were fast asleep on some stone benches beneath a treeline that edged the garden. Walking closer to them I observed that one was a large, burly man with an unkempt beard. Two younger men slept near him, one bearded, one clean-shaven, and the latter probably just a teenager.

Leaving no trace of my passing I walked past them and continued up the garden path.

I heard a voice cry out in anguish so I quickened my pace, fearing that the terrorists had somehow arrived ahead of schedule. I burst through a hedge line and found a man wearing a flowing white robe with a blue shoulder sash kneeling in front of a large rock, his face lifted heavenwards. He was saying, "Father, please, is there anyway that this cup can be taken from me? But let your will be done, not mine."

I was shocked. Part of my mission-prep included reading the entire New Testament and learning to speak Ancient Hebrew and Greek, but in being an atheist I did not actually expect to find Jesus Christ saying exactly what the Bible recorded him as saying.

While I stood gaping in amazement Jesus suddenly turned around, stood up, and looked directly at me.

I staggered back. With my chameleon device active there was no way he could see me. It was impossible. Yet somehow his eyes were locked firmly upon mine.

My wrist chronometer suddenly buzzed, and the hairs stood up on the back of my neck. A time displacement was in progress. The terrorists were here at last.

With cybernetically enhanced muscles and unnatural speed I unholstered my two blasters, but hesitated when six rather than two beings exited the timestream. And to my astonishment and horror I realised that these terrorists were not human. In

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