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Warnings We Do Not Heed

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The Last Flight to Omaha

When she noticed the red and blue lights flashing in her rear view, she quickly pulled over to the side of the road, reached into her purse and lifted out the Glock 43 firearm Jack had purchased for her years ago. Not for this kind of situation granted, but still. Holding it low next to her leg, she prayed, *Not now, not now, not so soon.*

“Are we there, Mommy?” Little Charlie asked sleepily from the back seat, “Are we at the airport now?”

She calculated in her head. If this is a routine stop, then take the ticket and keep moving. But if it’s his people, we’re definitely in trouble. All I can hope for is to protect Charlie, along with the information he’s carrying.

“Mommy?”

Oh Lord help me, she thought. My heart’s about to explode. Why doesn’t Pilates teach you breathe control when you’re trying to run away from your megalomaniacal husband?

The ambulance sped past a second later causing Candice to laugh out loud in relief.

Way to go, Bond. Nice nerves.

“Mommy, are we there?”

“Not yet, Sweetie. Mommy had to pull over to let an ambulance go by. We’ll be at the airport soon. Are you looking forward to your first airplane flight? Do you still have Mr. Wubbie?”

“Yes Mommy. Mr. Wubbie says, ‘*Yaaaaayy, we’re going on a plane ride!*’” Charlie giggled holding his stuffed animal up and shaking him so she could see the bear in the rearview mirror.

“Good boy. Keep a good hold on Mr. Wubbie now. Don’t let him go. He’s your buddy bear and will keep you safe.” *Not to mention, he’s holding a terabyte of company secrets sewn up his ass, she thought. That’ll teach you to abuse me, Jack!*

The remaining drive down highway 237 to Mineta airport took another fifteen minutes before Candice could park the rental curbside, ditch the Glock in the glove box, and get Charlie out of his car seat. Another ten walking to Alaska Airlines to buy tickets before moving forward to the security clearance area. Thankfully, the airport was fairly empty since the only people flying to Omaha tonight were a girls’ soccer team and their coach, a couple of middle-aged men in cheap suits, and her and Charlie. And Charlie was still in his pajamas, so no one paid him any mind as she’d intended. For her part, she was wearing an Adidas track suit with Sketchers slip on shoes, her hair pulled back in a ponytail, and no makeup to give the impression she and Charlie were some mid-western Mom and child heading home from their visit to the grandparents. But despite her dressed down demeanor, she could tell the nighttime TWA security employee was clocking her approach and giving her the once over. He was looking at her figure, more specifically her breasts, as most men did, with an almost audible thought, *Body pat down, yes please!*

Taking a deep breath, she willed a message back to him telepathically, *I’m just your average housewife. Nothing to see here. No breasts worth fondling. Nor curves to run your*

hands over. Just a middle-aged woman, her child, and her child's teddy bear catching the last domestic flight to Omaha. Please be cool. Please don't be a creep. Please don't suspect us of anything.

“Step over here, ma'am,” the security guard directed, smiling. She took Charlie's hand and walked toward the guard. He didn't seem to mind Charlie tagging along or that Mr. Wubbie hadn't been placed on the conveyor belt along with their shoes and carry-on bag. Because he was looking squarely at her breasts. Though, to be fair, he was shorter than her with his eyes in a direct line, so maybe he couldn't necessarily help himself.

Here we go, she thought, the moment of truth.

In her head, she began computing her chances. A habit she'd formed long ago during her early days writing tech code for her company when it was just a start up. Before Bellion bought it, made her rich, and changed the face of data sharing across the globe forever. And destroyed every dream she'd ever had including making the world a better place. *There are, she recited her researched facts in her head, on average, 27, 435 passengers flying in and out of Mineta every day. Of those, 53% were men, 32% women, and 15% children. TSA statistics indicate women were twice as likely to be searched when the screener was male. And women with children four times as likely thanks to the smuggling habits of Columbian drug dealers. Unless that woman had a small child between the ages of four and seven when both were screened in tandem together. Then, statistically, security often left the child unchallenged eight out of ten times as long as two factors were in place: one, that child was dressed in single layer pajamas. And two, that child held no more than one small stuffed animal not big enough to conceal anything of significant value, size, or amount.*

Let's just hope, she thought, this guy follows the same statistical blueprint and leaves Charlie and Mr. Wubbie alone. Mr. Wubbie is beanie baby sized. And Charlie is wearing his dinosaur onesie with the Velcro flap in the back.

The TWA security employee, she was happy to discover, cooperated. He never glanced Charlie or Mr. Wubbie's way in the least. And despite the initial ogling, didn't seem all that much more interested in her. He just ran his security wand up her front and down her back fairly quickly before saying, "Thank you, ma'am. You're free to gather your things and go ahead." He even managed to sound bored.

Thank God, she thought taking Charlie's hand again, grabbing their shoes and walking into the terminal hallway. Everything was closed for the night, or she definitely would've stopped for a Starbuck's Mochaccino, along with a hot chocolate for Charlie, to calm her nerves before heading over to the boarding gate. But she couldn't and so remained anxious. Checking over her shoulder as she walked, wanting to make sure it was safe for her and Charlie and Mr. Wubbie, Candice felt incredibly uncomfortable. Like everyone was watching her. But no one seemed to be.

Nerves, she thought. You're definitely no James Bond. But it still had to be done. You couldn't let the lying bastard get away with it.

One more statistical calculation ran through her head. There was a 90% guarantee her husband, Jack Bellion, was still in his office sitting at his computer unaware she was not at home. If she'd timed it right, he'd be consumed right now with reports rolling in about "minor server glitches" growing exponentially along Bellion's mainframe. His I.T. people around the globe would assure him they were on it, but she knew Jack didn't delegate when he believed he was the better man for the job. Which was always. So, he'd be looking into it directly himself. And in the process, maybe even forget their scheduled face time call each evening to say goodnight, as he often insisted on. And if

she happened not to answer, though she wasn't allowed not to, she hoped he'd be too distracted to raise any alarms for another ten or fifteen minutes. Which meant he'd be late sending someone to the house to check on her, which could buy her and Charlie an additional thirty minutes before Jack realized they were actually gone.

He may check on me, but I doubt he'll even think about Charlie. Which still broke her heart and was another reason she'd soured on their marriage. *He never cared about you, Charlie. Not from the first. Nor did he show even the smallest interest in being a father. Not to a human child at least. But he'd never ignore his company or deny it.* She'd always known Jack was an obsessive intellect who lived for his work. It'd been apparent from the first time he visited her at Stanford, when he wanted to buy her newly formed startup company. Fawning over her, courting her for weeks after, and expansively complimenting her on her financial equilibrium and distribution algorithm – the one she was close to perfecting – the one Jack was all charm and attention about. He was fascinated by her construction design and how, if she wrote it correctly, she could ensure every person in the world received a distribution of sufficient funds gathered from vacated bank account residuals worldwide, left over sub-penny charges from digital transactions, and bitcoin mining cast off derivatives. Enough so no one ever had to be poor, hungry, or homeless again. And still allow the global free market to function within its system of checks and balances.

"In point of fact, Jack raved, your algorithm is possibly the most brilliant conceptual code I've ever seen written. Better than even what I could write. And, who knows what its potential could be to the world. The information sharing and equilibrium adjustment assessment section alone is revolutionary. Saving the world will just be icing on the cake."

"This may sound naïve, she'd admitted, "But I honestly WANT to save the world in a practical and tangible way. If I let you buy my company, you'll have to promise to keep my work going. I

want to finish what I started. I'll let you use my base algorithms as you see fit, but you have to promise me I'll be able to finish my work no matter how long it takes."

"Oh, I wouldn't have it any other way," Jack promised. And she believed him. How could she not. She'd already fallen in love with him.

But despite her love, she still made Jack wait another full year -- till she was positive he loved her too -- before she'd sign off on the acquisition and merger of her company into his. And to his credit, he never wavered the entire year. Or for the next eight, when she and Jack became THE power couple in Silicon Valley's world of internet companies -- him the charismatic CEO of Bellion and her the genius programmer. But she never anticipated, not after so many years of living and working together, that Jack's love would turn on a dime once he learned she was pregnant. Then, to add insult, he shut her out, her and the child, all during her pregnancy and up to and after the birth of Charlie -- as though she'd violated some unwritten rule of his he couldn't forgive.

"That's your deal!" he'd had the balls to tell her during a particularly bitter fight after Charlie was born. She wanted to name the child after him, but he'd adamantly refused. *"The Bellion Corporation IS my name. MY company. THAT is my child and the thing that will carry my name down through the ages into eternity."*

It wasn't like Candice hadn't known Jack's ego was outsized from the start. You couldn't be within ten feet of him, or talk to him for more than five minutes, without realizing that. But she never imagined his loyalty was not with her. Until she became pregnant, and he locked her out.

"You've turned our home into a prison for Charlie and me, she'd complained. And our company into your justification for being a sub-human shit."

"It's not your company! It never was. You're crazy if you ever thought so."

Jack, she thought standing in front of her flight's boarding gate, you should've been a better father to Charlie. And you should never have betrayed me! Then I wouldn't have done what I did. Or have to show you where the real power lies.

Candice never felt deceitful about the backdoor code worm she'd woven into her algorithm from the first line she'd ever written. Nor guilty for never telling Jack she'd kept secret access to the entire company's internet database, based on the use of her algorithm's back door. It was an old trick her zoologist mother taught her that gave Candice the idea – if you mixed medication right into a baby animal's food from the very start, they'd never know it didn't belong or wasn't supposed to be part of their food chain. In fact, they would never realize the truth of it, unless you took it away.

Well Jack, she thought, you and all your cronies will be feeling that absence tonight when you realize you can't fix what's happening to your precious company's operational databases. I've taken the code away which, over the next eight hours, will cripple Bellion's entire server structure including every remote program out there. I've shut you down and locked you out. Sure, your teams will think they've been cyber-attacked. But not you. You don't think in such conventional terms, do you? You'll suspect it's me. Especially when you discover Charlie and I are gone. And hell, your ego might try to protect you, but you won't be able to ignore the reason why -- because you stole my work for "your" company and betrayed me, then had the temerity to deny Charlie not only your name, but his right to be your named son. You gave me no choice! Charlie is your child, you son of a bitch! Not that damn company. And now you understand what a mother will do to protect her child and ensure their future.

Candice didn't know if she was being entirely honest with herself. Or even altruistic. But she knew she was bitter over Jack taking his love away from her. And denying Charlie his birthright.

“The most dangerous animal in all nature,” Candice remembered her mother once telling her, “is a mother protecting her young.” And Candice believed her. She felt it the minute Charlie was born inside her. And Omaha, Nebraska, and the FBI, would be her and Charlie’s point of safe harbor. Candice’s research had shown it to be so.

In Omaha, Nebraska, the brochure read, Herbert Hoover selected these twelve acres to establish itself as an independent source away from all other government agencies. Today, that includes keeping all interim functions analog, without any digital footprint or online access of any kind, separate from national and international structures. Should an unknown cyber-attack cripple the US government,” continued the company website byline, Omaha, Nebraska will be Camelot stabilizing a world threatened by chaos through its adherence to grounded, brick and mortar techniques. AS Herbert Hoover had originally foreseen.

I knew Jack would eventually find us, Candice recalled, and I don’t need statistical analysis to know how deep his online access extends. My algorithm would ensure he could find anyone anywhere. And then he’d send Morris, his head of security, after us. 100%. That man is far too dangerous and connected. Thinking this still made Candice shiver violently. But I doubt they’ll be able to penetrate the FBI at Omaha.

“You okay, Mommy? You’re shaking. Are you cold?” Charlie asked bringing Candice back to the present. “Here, hold Mr. Wubbie. He’ll warm you up.”

“Oh, thank you Charlie, but you keep Mr. Wubbie. Hold him tight no matter what. He’s your buddy and will keep you safe.”

“Ma’am,” the airline stewardess at the plane entrance spoke, looking concerned, “the flight is boarding now. Are you ready?”

She took Charlie’s hand and replied, “Of course. Thank you. We’re coming.”

The stewardess gave her an odd look before quickly switching to an obviously practiced smile in return. "Very good, ma'am. Your ticket then, please."

Candice handed over the tickets noticing the stewardess didn't even glance toward Charlie. *Just like the TWA security screener, she realized. Either they don't have children of their own or it's late and they're too tired to care. That will certainly be to our advantage.*

For some reason, the feeling she was being watched as she boarded the plane wouldn't leave Candice. *Bad nerves, she thought. Or the thought of Morris showing up. Which would definitely be bad news.* She knew Morris would do just about anything and everything for Jack. But kill for him? That was too frightening a question to pose while Charlie was with her. She'd never let that happen though. She was his mother!

This spy stuff is messing with your head, she thought. Morris is devoted to Jack, sure. And creepy as hell. But that doesn't mean he's evil incarnate. Don't let yourself overreact. Stick to your plan.

Candice guided Charlie to his seat in first class. But almost immediately, she had to insist on a box of juicy juice and crackers be brought to him three times before the flight attendant would comply.

"The plane hasn't left the gates ma'am. We don't provide extra drink service for another hour till we're in the air."

"Sure," Candice replied, "but you just set a glass of champagne down in front of me. Surely you can put a box of juice down in front of my son here."

"Of course, ma'am," the stewardess replied looking over at the window seat and giving Candice a similar quizzical look as the gate attendant. But still she complied and returned less than a minute later with juice and crackers. "Here you are, ma'am."

The nerve! Candice thought, *I wanted to blend and not be noticeable, but not be ignored. This whole airport must be full of childless employees because none of them seem to know what to do with us. With me or Charlie.*

With Charlie and Mr. Wubbie comfortably sitting in the window seat, Candice tried to settle in the middle. Which left the aisle seat next to her empty. And which was why, when Morris walked up, he could take the seat right next to her.

Oh fuck! She thought trying not to audibly yelp in surprise. She didn't want to panic. She wanted to be steady and appear calm and confident. If not for her sake, then at least for Charlie.

"Hello, Candice," Morris Jacobi smiled, "How are you feeling this evening?"

"Let's cut the bullshit, okay? Are you going to threaten me or try to bribe me?"

"Whatever do you mean?"

"You obviously know I have something. Something important. Otherwise you wouldn't be here talking to me. But I'm in public so you're not going to just grab me and try to drag me away. So either you're going to threaten my life or bribe me into returning. But since I'm already rich, then I assume it will be threats. Which won't do you any good, because you can't scare me. You can't do anything."

"Oh, it's nothing like that at all. Please, Candice, I'm only here because Jack is worried. He asked that I find you and see to your safety. You disappeared this evening and he was concerned something had happened. Or that you were in trouble. It took a little work, I admit, to get things up and running in such a short time. But when your credit card reported additional charges added to your rental car -- apparently the agent was trying to overcharge you -- the credit card company tried to call you. And when they couldn't reach you, they contacted Bellion's fraud department since Bellion still holds

primary ownership over your card. And from that, I piggy backed your account and received an alert when you purchased your plane tickets.”

“Aren’t you the clever one? But I’m not going back. You can’t make me.”

“Really, Candice, it’s nothing like that. Jack just wants to make sure you’re well. He loves you and has been very worried about you of late.”

“I’m fine, thank you. As you can plainly see.”

“Well, not to be insensitive, but you look exhausted. And it’s not any of my business why but, you seem to be having a difficult time of late. Not eating or sleeping. And making some very strange accusations toward Jack and the company. Then you up and run off tonight? Why, if you don’t mind me asking? And why are you flying to Nebraska?”

“The anti-IT technology unit with the FBI are in Omaha. I’ve already spoken with them and have reported Jack for anti-trust violations. You should know they’re expecting me so don’t think you can try anything. They’ll know. They’re expecting me. They are.”

“I see. But why two tickets? Why did you buy two one-way tickets? Will someone be joining you on this flight? Is someone helping you?”

“How do you mean?”

“Why did you buy two plane tickets tonight? Are you expecting someone to fly with you? Is someone else coming along?”

“Not that it’s any of your business, but I would never leave Charlie. Not with anyone, let alone with you or Jack or anyone he employs!”

“Charlie?”

"My son," Candice said looking over at Charlie in the window seat. Adorable Charlie who just smiled back at her. *Why am I even admitting this to him?* She wondered. *If he doesn't know, I shouldn't be telling him. I guess I'm not James Bond after all.*

"Your son? Charlie?"

"Of course. He's right here in the seat next to us. Don't be dense. But, still, he's no concern of yours," Candice replied. She turned to Charlie wanting to reassure him, worried he might be frightened. "Don't worry Charlie, you're safe. Just keep a hold of Mr. Wubbie."

Candice then turned back to Morris with a mother's deadly glare. "Don't think you can do anything," she spat, "to me or Charlie! Not here. Not now! I won't allow it! You and Jack will just have to deal with the consequences of all you've done with Bellion. It's no longer my concern."

"I see."

"You see? What do you see? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Ms. Bellion, Candice, I don't mean to be indifferent, but as far as I'm aware, there is no Charlie. You seem to be having a break from reality. You are, well, confused."

"What does THAT mean!? Are you trying to threaten me and my child?"

"No, Candice. Nothing like that. I'm here at Jack's request. He's worried about you. I'm a little worried myself. You haven't been yourself of late. I would never threaten you, let alone....err...anyone's child."

"Good. Then you can just get up and leave this plane this very instant. Charlie and I will be on our way.

“Candice, please understand. There is no Charlie. Not anymore. You had a miscarriage a year ago. Jack is just trying to look out for you.”

“That’s not true. You can plainly see Charlie sitting right here next to me. But he’s not your concern. This game you’re playing has gone on long enough. I know what you and Jack have been doing with my work. And I won’t stand for it any longer. Now, if you’ll please excuse me, I’d like you to leave now.”

Morris smiled sadly. *Well, you can’t always fix what’s broke*, he thought.

Candice continued, “I’ll be going direct to the FBI offices in Nebraska to meet Agent Thompson. He’s expecting me and will sound the alarms if I don’t arrive on time. Then I’m going to turn over all the evidence I’ve collected against you and my husband and all the people who helped you so you won’t be able to harm anyone else. You’ll just have to answer to the FBI now. And a congressional hearing at some point, I suppose.”

“I think I understand now,” Morris replied, “I want to assure you you’re perfectly safe, Candice. I’m here to make sure of it. You understand?”

“Charlie and I are perfectly safe despite your threats. Aren’t we Charlie,” Candice smiled turning to the window seat, “Are you enjoying your first airplane ride? We should be taking off any moment now. The bad old man will be gone soon.”

“Yes, I see,” Morris spoke, signaling the psychiatric nurse he’d hired to prepare the injection. Then nodding to the Air Marshals in the parallel rows watching them. It was going to be plan B -- Candice would be placed under an involuntary civil commitment and the psychiatric nurse would administer an IM back up of Ativan, Haldol, and Benadryl to sedate her. Then, with the assistance of the Air Marshals, Morris and his private security team would escort Candice off the flight to a private car. Where Morris and the nurse would ride with her all the way to El Camino’s Psychiatric Acute Care Unit in Mountain View for a 5150W&I admission.

“Charlie, are you enjoying the flight?” Candice asked clutching Mr. Wubbie to her chest.

“Candice, this is for the best,” Morris said taking her left arm and pinning it to the arm rest while the Air Marshals and the psychiatric nurse moved in.

The End.