

Stop Watch

Annie lay in her bed dreaming about how cool it would be to have a stop watch – not just any stop watch, but, one that would stop everything and everybody once she pushed the button. She would be the only one that could move around while everything else would be motionless. “Just think of all the things I could find out and do”, she mused. “Man, I could walk right into a bank and walk out with millions of dollars and no one would know.” In the middle of her delightful daydream came the disturbing harsh sound of her dad’s voice, “Annie, get off your bed and get moving. We have three buildings to clean tonight.”

Annie rolled off the bed and onto her feet. Oh how she hated her guts to go clean buildings. If only her dad could get a real job she could stay home and dream and dream and dream...”Annie, did you hear me. Get a move on. I don’t won’t to be gone all night”. Annie grabbed her thongs and came downstairs. With the biggest smile she could produce she said, “Super. I’m ready. Let’s get going. We’re burning daylight”.

Cleaning was hard work for the fragile and frail Anne Marie Stevenson. The trash can was as big as she was. If she was not careful the vacuum cleaner would pull her down the hallways. To empty the trash can in the dumpster took every bit of strength she had. There were times when Annie could not move a mop because when it was wet it weighed more than she did. Even though Annie put on a good front so as not to hurt the tender feelings of her janitorial-minded parents, the truth was that she detested custodial work.

Young man after young man would take great interest in Annie; that is until they discovered she was a janitor. Word spread quickly through out the school. She did not have a chance. Who would date a janitor? Her hands were rough. She dug through trash all the time. She would walk down the corridors of the high school and out of habit bend down and pick up liter from the ground. Her only shoes smelled like Spic ‘n Span. No one seemed to see past the janitor exterior and to the soul of a beautiful and delightful young lady.

This only increased her wanderings into fantasy. Dreaming was her way to escape reality. At times she would dream of the perfect prom date – a man brave enough to wear a kilt. For getting married someday she made her list for “Mr. Perfect” – he must be a return missionary, he must have a testimony, he must love children and want to have a family, he must be handsome and have a nice body like her dad, he had to be sensitive, he had to do everything she wanted him to do, etc. etc. She loved to dream.

Having finished two buildings there was now only one more left to clean. At least the mortuary was fairly easy. Most of the building was carpeting and there usually was not a lot of trash. Dad turned off the alarm upon entering the building. This was a bad part of town. The police were always on patrol and burglaries were very common.

It was an especially long night of cleaning. Mom was always so demanding. Annie tried hard, but was starting to wear down. How could she keep up? Custodial chores were not for her. Why was she so unfortunate? Why had life dealt her such a bad hand of cards? Annie obediently began her assigned jobs. As she cleaned around the desk in the office of the funeral home her eye caught something that was barely exposed in the partially opened top drawer. What was it she thought. Looking around and seeing that no one was watching, she opened the drawer wider. To her surprise, it was a stop watch. It looked just like the stop watch she had dreamed of earlier that evening. She immediately reached for the time piece and then froze in her tracks. "This is not right. This does not belong to me", she thought.

Annie is one of the most perfect people on the face of the earth. She loves obeying the commandments and being a good example of the gospel. However, this temptation was just a little too much for her. She stood there like a kid in a candy store. It wouldn't hurt to just pick it up and look at, she rationalize. Looking down the hallway she could see that her dad was taking the trash out to the dumpster. Mom was in the restroom cleaning. Now was the perfect time.

She reached into the drawer and cradled the curious object in both hands. Wow! It was beautiful. Annie could not resist. She pushed several buttons protruding from the stop watch and looked around to see if everything came to a sudden halt. No such luck. Cars were still moving down the street outside and people were walking at the super market across the street. Sure, it was not what she thought it was, but it was nice to dream. It was a relaxing break from her tedious work behind a vacuum cleaner.

While Annie was pushing buttons and her dad was outside at the dumpster, the Thornton Police Department was receiving an emergency silent alarm. Someone was sending a distress call from the nearby mortuary. This type of alarm meant people were in danger. It is considered by the police department the same as a silent alarm from a bank being robbed by armed bandits. It was code red and serious business for the cops. Within two minutes a squad car pulled up just outside the mortuary and near the dumpster.

Scrambling from their cruiser, two policemen with pistols drawn, began yelling at the quiet janitor who was simply trying to do his job. "Hands up, hands up. This is the police, now get your #@**## hands up". I was caught completely off guard. Were they talking to me? Certainly they meant someone else. I looked around the dumpster to see if they were talking to someone else. This seemed to agitate them only more. When I came around the other side of the dumpster I met one of the officers coming at me full speed. He knocked me to the ground and struck me in the head with his service revolver. "When we say get you hands up mister, that means you and that means right now".

I was dazed and confused. As I was asking what the problem was they had me handcuffed and sitting on the curb. "How many of you are there", came one question? Before I could answer, "Are you holding any hostages"? All I could think about was how my dad was a policeman for twenty years and he never treated me this way.

To make matters worse, all this time Annie was in the office pushing the silent alarm buttons over and over. I could hear the radio in the squad car, "Get in there quick. Someone is really in trouble. The alarm is going off like firecrackers on the Fourth of July. Someone's in big trouble." Annie had forgot about everything. She was in her own little fantasy land. To her way of thinking, the more she pushed the buttons then sooner or later things in the real world would come to a halt. To the police it meant someone was in great danger and bad people were in the building.

Hoisting me up to my feet, the two policemen marched me as if I was a human shield toward the mortuary. They were more nervous than two cats walking through a rocking chair showroom floor. "Any funny business and you're a gonner mister", came the threat from one officer. "Look, my family is in there cleaning the building. I don't know what this is all about, but I think you have the wrong people." Nothing I could say could change their attitude. As far as they were concerned, I was the "lookout" and the dirty work was being done inside by the rest of the gang.

As we got to the back door Annie could see the policemen holding me by each arm. She threw the "stop watch" back in the drawer and quickly resumed her vacuuming. Mom came out of the restroom and saw the pistol-waving policemen. She was not too alarmed since she had seen me in police custody several times. She opened the door and said, "Come on in. What seems to be the problem"?

It did not take long for the officers to see the real story. This was simply a family cleaning a building to make few extra bucks on the side. Nevertheless, they had to scope out the rest of the building. It was their job and "Silent Alarm Protocol". Upon reaching the office of the mortuary they spied Annie busily at work. Perspiration poured down her forehead. She smiled and said, "Hi, can I help you gentlemen"? "Yeah lady, someone in this building set off a silent alarm. Was it you?" Annie turned off the vacuum cleaner and told them the truth, "Absolutely not. I have never seen a silent alarm and certainly would never set one off if I did. I might be blonde but I'm not a bloomin idiot. Now, please, just leave me and my family alone".

The officers left without any further questions or harassment. Dad looked at mom and Annie and said, "You know we still have a job to do. Let's get to work". Annie replied, "Super, just super! I know where a stop watch is. Let's see how fast we can get it done!"