

WHAT PRICE?

by

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(A woman, BETH, sits alone in a stark room, that looks very much like a police interrogation room. Another chair and metal table are also here.

Beth waits. She looks at her watch. Waits. She looks at the door, then nervously around the room. She waits.

A MAN enters, carrying a file folder and a recording device. He pays no attention to the woman, who sits up quickly. He crosses to the table and sits in the other chair. He opens the folder and reviews the first couple of pages, still not acknowledging the woman.

The woman looks on anxiously. She opens her mouth to speak and the man suddenly lifts a single finger in the air, signaling her to stay quiet. He continues to read. Then man takes out a pen and turns on the tape recorder. He continues to read the file.)

MAN

(abruptly)

Name?

BETH

My . . . ? Don't you have that?

MAN

What is your name?

BETH

It's Freeman. Beth Freeman.

(The man writes something, and continues to review his file.)

BETH

It's just I wrote it on the top of the forms, so I thought

BETH (CONT.)

you'd have that. You had me worried I was in the wrong room, or that –

MAN

This'll go better if you just answer the questions.

BETH

(pause)

All right.

MAN

Age?

BETH

Didn't I write that . . .

(She trails off on his look.)

I'm [age].

MAN

(turning off the recorder)

Are you going to keep doing that?

BETH

No, I'm sorry.

MAN

Are you sure?

BETH

Yes.

MAN

(He turns the recorder on and goes back to his notes.)

You're married.

BETH

Yes.

MAN

Your husband's name?

BETH

Michael Williams.

MAN

(stops writing, looks at her.)

BETH

I kept my name.

MAN

(looks at her a moment longer)

You have children?

BETH

Yes. Danielle and Sarah.

MAN

And their last names?

BETH

(slight pause)

Williams.

(slight pause)

What does all this have to do with –

MAN

Just answer the questions, please.

BETH

But they don't have anything to do with –

MAN

They're entirely relevant to what we need to know.

BETH

But why do you need names of my children?

MAN

Are you going to cooperate here?

BETH

No. I mean, I am. I will. Yes.

MAN

Then all you have to do is answer the questions as succinctly as possible. All right?

BETH

Yes, all right.

MAN

Have you ever been convicted of a crime?

BETH

A – ? No.

MAN

Ever been arrested?

BETH

No.

MAN

Investigated for any reason?

BETH

No.

MAN

(just stares at her)

BETH

Oh. Well, we were audited a couple years ago. We made a . . . subtracted wrong. But we took care of it. Paid a small penalty.

MAN

Occupation?

BETH

I do graphic design work for a firm near Boston.

MAN

That's a long commute.

BETH

Yeah, it . . . when I started it was only a couple days a week and Michael was working in Bath, so it wasn't so bad, but Michael got laid off recently, so I've had to go to full time.

MAN

You could move.

BETH

The girls are in a good school here, and we've got family in the area.

MAN

Mmm. Religion?

BETH

Excuse me?

MAN

What's your religious background.

BETH

Is it legal for you to ask me that?

MAN

(He looks at her, then writes something.)

BETH

What are you writing?

MAN

Were you born an American citizen?

BETH

Yes. I was born here in Portland.

MAN

And you've traveled outside the US?

BETH

Of course.

MAN
Of course?

BETH
Yeah. Why not?

MAN
You've made trips to England, France . . . Morocco.

BETH
Yeah.

MAN
And phone records indicate quite a few international calls to Morocco. Two or three a month.

BETH
How do you know about my phone calls?

MAN
Who are you calling?

BETH
You can't ask me questions like that. I want a lawyer.

MAN
You don't get one here. Who are you calling?

BETH
What, are we at war with them now?

MAN
I don't think you want to be glib with me.

BETH
I'm calling my sister, okay? She lives there. She married a Moroccan. Is it all right if I call her?

MAN
Do you frequently consort with foreign nationals?

BETH

I don't believe this.

MAN

Are you a loyal American citizen?

BETH

Going to Casablanca doesn't make me disloyal.

MAN

What about sedition?

BETH

Sedition?

MAN

The organized incitement of rebellion or civil disorder against the state.

BETH

Civil disorder? Are you . . . I don't understand. What about it?

MAN

Have you ever participated in seditious acts?

BETH

Me? No.

MAN

No?

(refers to his files.)

January 2003. Attended a protest march in New York against the war. July –

BETH

A march isn't How'd you know about that?

MAN

We know a great deal.

BETH

Wait are . . . are you investigating me?

MAN
(turning off the recorder)
We're not after you.

BETH
What is this?

MAN
We need a name. One name. That's all.

BETH
A name?

MAN
Someone who's threatened the fabric of the nation.

BETH
I don't know anyone like that.

MAN
Of course you do. We all do.

BETH
No, really. I don't. I'm not very political. I went to a couple marches, but

MAN
So you've never heard anyone, say, call the war "immoral?"

BETH
No.

MAN
...call the President a "liar?"

BETH
No.

MAN
(reading from his notes)
... or say the war was "a gift of new oil fields to the companies that helped buy the presidency?"

BETH

(starting to answer, then
recognizing the phrase)

N – No, I'm sorry.

(The Man looks at her for a moment.
Then he flips through his file until he
finds the information he wants.)

MAN

Your children attend the Wainfleet School. Sarah is in pre-kindergarten. Danielle in first grade, and gets good marks in math. She was nervous about starting school and clung to your pant leg when you took her there for the first day. It is now 11:30 which means Danielle's about to start gym class. She's learning to swim.

(slight pause)

That's a good thing. The water can be dangerous if you don't know how.

[The play continues. If you would like to read the rest, please contact the author at: Craig@CraigPospisil.com.]