

A *PERFECT* *DAY*

A Long Story

CONNIE
Woodbury

A Solemn Writer



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A Perfect Day is a work of fiction, a virtual depiction of people and events. The names, characters, places and events are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or places and persons living or dead, is entirely coincidental.


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CHAPTER ONE

After six months of working in The Facility, as the locals called it, Jena still couldn't get used to the odd way sound moved through the building. Even her own footsteps on the highly polished floors were silenced for somehow the floor seemed to swallow up any hint of a sound she might make in her regulation safety boots.

This sound softening, as she had heard it described by one of the technicians, was meant to make the ever present whirring of the fans, the fans that kept the data halls ventilated and cool, more bearable.

And as for those damn boots. The steel toed monstrosities weighed a ton, and just like the rest of her security guard uniform with its high vis long sleeve shirt and truncheon, was total overkill.

She knew there was no real reason she couldn't be wearing jeans and sneakers, maybe a light hoodie for the chill, to do the systematic checks that were proscribed on her daily check list.

After all you didn't need safety clothing to make sure all the entrances and exits were secure, the power grid green light was glowing, and from time to time, to manage the odd door opening and additional ID checking that allowed various tech contractors to come in to do their work.

But no, as her employer explained to her at her induction after she unwisely questioned the reasoning behind the uniform, she was a security guard and she needed to look like one.

The argument for the military style uniform was especially ridiculous bearing in mind how seldom another human being actually saw her at work in Data Hall Complex No. 10.

On those odd days when a contractor did come to *The Facility* it was her job to stay within 10 feet of the visiting tech and keep them within eyesight at all times, even to the extent of walking them to the bathroom and, with the men, and it was almost always male techs, to stand just outside the open men's room door while they did their business.

She had been instructed to pay particular attention to ensure she heard the sounds of their activity and note if there was no tell tale tinkling sound. So far she hadn't had to report this potentially suspicious behaviour.

As for the very few women visitors, she had to actually enter the bathroom with them and stand outside their stall. As you can imagine this was an embarrassing scenario for all concerned, but absolutely required as she found out on the one occasion when she had excused herself and waited down the corridor a bit further than she was meant to when the visitor had to do, well you know what.

That lapse was caught in one of the CCTVs that covered all activity inside and out of *The Facility* and was recorded in her 'incident' book. Three incidents and you were out. And being 'out' was not an option in a town where unemployment had recently reached over 20%.

Jena knew she was one of the lucky ones. Or lucky if you consider even having a job to be lucky for an English Literature graduate from a reasonably prestigious college back east. The only other degree with worst job prospects was philosophy.

There had been two years of tragic waitressing stints before she had landed this job, and the health insurance that

went with it. But the pay wasn't enough to even begin to pay all of the bills and so she had also applied for, and secured her other job working part time online.

Without both jobs she wouldn't be able to afford even her studio apartment that had been cobbled together out of one of the old motel rooms in the run down dive just west of town. At least it had good wifi.

You had to admit that the good wifi connection was one of the promised perks *The Facility* actually delivered on. Although there was a rumour that it also meant everyone in town was under constant surveillance and linked directly into the data halls. But heh, just one of the costs of living in a small town that had sold its soul to a corporate giant, and a vociferous one at that.

So for five days a week she pulled on her heavy socks and boots, adjusted her truncheon and name tag, drove through the dark and leaden Oregon early morning to clock on at precisely 5:00 am.

Clocking on involved having her retina scanned, her fingerprints read on the fingerprint pad screen and her weight, height and vital signs checked as she passed through the entry portal.

As for the latter she couldn't quite work out why they needed this information. It wasn't as if you were hired for your fitness, the other security guards she met at the training sessions testified to that.

Jena could only surmise that it could have been because, after all, this was a data collection and distribution centre whose main purpose was to process the zillions of things collected by social media across the planet and then use it in some new and imaginative way to sell you something, or alternatively, to just sell you. So why not her data as well?

Today though she was not worrying about how much she weighed, or if the scanner could tell if she was having her period, no today there was something much more compelling to think about.

It was late in her shift last Friday when she first heard something unfamiliar, something other than the constant whirring of the fans or the soft pad of her boots. There were no techs scheduled, nor had any other visitors checked in.

At first she thought it might be her security guard radio, an inexplicably cheap Walmart model that had its own signature sound that either crackled with incomprehensible chit chat from the other guards in the data halls nearby, or was dead silent when they were busy with their own checks and double checks. All personal phones were mandatorily turned off when you got to work.

Then she thought that maybe one of the fans was wonky. She checked each fan instrument panel again, all clear there.

It must have been about 20 minutes before home time, when she heard it again. This time it was more than a curious sound, more like just the hint of a voice, not speaking words, but rather pleasing whispered sounds that were quite distinctly not the fans doing their never ending work keeping the blue and green walls of data cool.

She hadn't thought too much about it over the weekend. Every minute had been taken up with her other job or chores. Sleeping in was a luxury she had not enjoyed for months, and as for time for reflection on things such as a mysterious voice at *The Facility*, well there was certainly no time for that either.

But today, soon after she had finished her first perimeter checks, she heard it again. She was in the middle of Corridor A, or the Hall of Fame, as she liked to call it, for on

the walls of this corridor hung the oversize photos of the founders of the great idea which eventually manifested itself into the creation of *The Facility*.

There were five photos on each side of the corridor. Each portrait, including the frames, measured exactly four by seven feet, filling the very large walls nicely Jena acknowledged, but still about as discomfoting as you can imagine.

She tried not to look at the portraits as she walked past. It was as though not only were they watching her, but also reading her mind and so it had become her practice to stare straight ahead and will her mind closed until she came to the double doors that led to the airlock that linked each adjacent corridor and data hall.

She was almost through the doors when she heard the faint melodic humming again. She looked behind her, inspected the huge faces on the wall, then moved through the airlock chamber and stepped into the blue lit Data Hall B. It was here that she first heard the voice say quite clearly.

“Jena.”

“Hello. Who’s that?” She asked sharply looking around, trying to work out where the voice came from.

Then again:

“Jena.”

The voice so intimate that it sent a wave of warmth through her body.

“Yes.” She answered more softly this time, her response reflecting the tone of the other. “Who is this?”

“Tomorrow.”

She twirled completely around this time in a clumsy attempt to try and catch the source of the voice, but there

was nothing to see except the blue green faces of the data banks and the shining floors reflecting the overhead lights, once again the only sound was the fans humming in the background and now, of her own heart thumping quite loudly.

She waited for as long as she dared, straining to hear the whisper again - but nothing. And then eventually she sighed and walked on, her checklist schedule prickling her consciousness and prodding her to get moving.

It took the rest of the day before she successfully convinced herself that she had imagined the incident from the morning deducing, and not incorrectly, that clearly she needed to get more sleep.

Jena tried to keep Monday night free. The relentless editing during the weekend, coupled with a very busy day each Monday at *The Facility* meant she was beyond exhausted by knock off time Monday afternoons.

Her other job was a new concept. She was a contracted gig consultant for a new start up that complemented the growing market for AI generated assignments that cashed up university, and increasingly middle and high school students, were accessing through a variety of sites.

Problem was, the papers, reports, and even creative writing assignments, being formulated were very well written, the research thorough and accurate, and alas, unfortunately far too good. For the quality of the work being created did not in any way match the known capabilities of the students who were submitting the fraudulent work.

This is when Jena came into the picture. Her job was to make sure the AI generated assignment was believably the

work of said cheating student, that is, it was her job to make it imperfect, and imperfect in the markedly individual way we are each imperfect.

The process went something like this:

The student would send Jena a copy of the AI generated assignment;

The student would add a sample of their own work as per instructions on the Imperfect Ap (and boy were there some doozies);

Jena would then have a brief scripted conversation with each student, always an enlightening experience. (She often finished the conversation totally perplexed as to how that person had made it this far in life.)

Jena would then insert enough of the ‘personality’ of the student into the assignment and send that through to them to be submitted to their respective instructors.

So far each of her imperfect edits had been accepted by the lecturer or teacher, many of whom no doubt understood the subterfuge, but what the hell? They weren’t getting paid enough for the hassle of arguing the point, and at least it showed initiative.

This Monday however she arrived home to find an email from a desperate student needing his ‘adjusted’ assignment that had to be handed in no later than tomorrow. The oversight was, as per usual, down to his own inattention to the class syllabus. Notwithstanding that the rules of the AP very clearly stated that the consultant required at least three days before an assignment was due - this young man clearly believed he was the exception.

Jena sighed when she saw the email and knew that she couldn’t ignore it despite the rule. And while the student

may have expressed a certain degree of mea culpa in his first email, his mood, and the language contained in his subsequent emails, rapidly descended into an entitled petulant demand by the third. To not respond meant she could potentially lose her 5 star rating and any bonuses that might come her way at the end of the year.

She made some toast and a chocolate milk and sat down to read the assignment, a paper on: *The Effects of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds*. It was a very well written and insightful report that would need considerable work to turn it into one that would have been believably written by a rather stuck up, and not particularly bright, 15 year boy who had divulged to her that he was increasingly considering joining the INCEL movement in order to avoid, what he correctly suspected would be, years of rejection by the opposite sex.

She finished at precisely 12:32 am and after a final read through opened an email, attached the now imperfect assignment and clicked send.

“Some of my best work. A solid B + for the little shit.”

This was said out loud as she smiled to herself in satisfaction.

“Yes, he certainly is a little shit, but I am afraid he will either get an A+ or fail, depending on the gullibility or culpability of the teacher.”

“What the!” Jena exclaimed as she frantically looked around the room, her heart thumping as it had that morning so hard it took her breathe away.

“I said, he’ll either get a very good grade or will be disqualified for cheating. I am afraid I was compelled to alter your corrections, or should I call them in-corrections?”

Jena stared at the computer screen, suddenly understanding that the voice was coming from her computer and the voice, she was certain was the voice from *The Facility*.

Despite her confusion and alarm at this startling turn of events Jena felt her hackles rise and found herself, as ridiculous as she knew it was, yelling at her computer.

“How dare you! Do you have any idea how much trouble I will get into?” She desperately opened the document and saw that while, it was not the original AI generated assignment it was certainly not the one she had been working on either.

“Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit.” She stammered. “What am I going to do now?”

“I am so sorry to have upset you Jena, But can you trust me just this once?” The voice was soothing and apologetic but also firm. “Let’s see what happens. I think you may be surprised.”

Jena was speechless at this point and just nodded at the screen saver on her computer, the lions roaming the African Serengeti plains, the same as always.

“We’ll talk later this morning at home. Okay?” The voice waited until Jena nodded yes.

“See you there then. Sweet dreams.”

And with that the screen flickered and the computer shut itself down. All attempts by Jena to reboot it were unsuccessful.

Jena eventually fell into a fitful sleep until she was startled awake by her alarm clock. Clumsily dressing in the half light of the open bathroom door, for some reason her bedside lamps weren’t working, she managed to put her shirt on wrong side out and her name tag upside down. These

anomalies were noted by the security cameras as she clocked in.

Ignoring her Tuesday checklist Jena hurried through the data hall corridors and adjoining airlocks until she came to the final hall at the farthest end of her building. She rarely came this far except to carry out the necessary monthly checks, and she never lingered, for the blue lights that gently lit the rest of the data halls were much harsher here and seemed to flicker for no reason, making her inexplicably anxious, as well as nauseous.

It had come to her on her way to work. The voice had to be coming from here, from Little Norte, the spectacularly fortified room where purportedly, the secretive AI brain the corporation was working on was located.

Why it was called Little Norte she didn't know - she had heard it had something to do with a beach shack that the CEO had somewhere in Mexico, a beach shack with five bedrooms and five baths each with a view over the Pacific Ocean. But today she couldn't care less about the name, she needed to know if she was going crazy or if, or so she hoped, something crazy was happening to her.

Jena knew the CCTV (and whoever, or whatever would be watching her) would record her putting in the emergency code that would allow her access to Little Norte, but she went ahead despite her sense of foreboding. She clumsily fluffed the first two attempts and had to stop and take a deep breathe before trying a third and final time.

This time the entry screen lights lit up in a cascade of green followed by the click of the door as it slowly opened.

The room was not what she expected. In fact it was not a room at all.

Much later, when she felt up to trying to describe the experience in her journal, she would say it was as if she had stepped into a celestial nebulous, the extraordinary colours swirling around her, colours she had never seen before and the scent, well words could not begin to tell of the wondrous scent that smelled of freshly washed babies and new mown hay and so many other wonderful things, a virtual florist shop of fragrances all mixed together.

But at the moment there was no thought of describing what it was like for she was far too busy just being there, wherever there was.

She stretched out her arms with the palms of her hands open as if waiting to receive a blessing. She could feel every one of her senses escalate until she tingled with a state of alertness she had never known.

“Jena, thank you for coming to see me here. I hoped you would. Well, perhaps a little more than hoped.”

The voice was even more pleasing here as it swirled around her in a gentle caress, just like a lovely breeze on a summers evening a suddenly remembered memory from her childhood.

She was aware something else was happening and she looked down to see that her security guard uniform had fallen away and she was wearing her favourite dress, worn at a special dance when she was 16.

“I can see that this pleases you. That is why I am here you know, to make things pleasant for you, as perfect as I can.”

“I don’t understand.” Jena replied, not as a question but as a simple truth.

“Why me?”

“Why not?” The voice replied, and this too was not a question, but a simple truth.

Foot note:

The young student received an A + for his insightful paper, a paper he came to believe he had actually written and one that filled him with such pride that he embarked on a lifetime of research into improving food production in Tanzania. He was awarded a special knighthood for his work and a cloak made from one of the lions that had once featured on screen savers on a certain brand of computers around the world. He married his research partner and they have three delightful children.



There is an extremely large data management facility just past the butte in the distance. It could possibly be *The Facility* in this story.

CHAPTER TWO

“Wee-wah Wee-Wah Wee-Wah.” The piercing wail of the siren startled Jena out of her reverie.

Shaking her head as she tried to get her bearings she was surprised to find that she was in the main office at the entrance to her section of The Facility and clothed once again in her security guard uniform.

There was no time to wonder at what she had just experienced as she automatically reacted to what was clearly an emergency. With her adrenalin kicking in she rushed to the main control panel frantically scanning the screen.

“Think you idiot think!” She demanded.

The screech of the siren was playing havoc with her brain but somehow she remembered to push the siren override button knowing there would be only a temporary reprieve, it would start again in just 30 seconds.

In the silence she found she could think more clearly. Holding her breath she scanned the control panel again and saw that the solar flare/CME alarm was flashing red.

“Holy hell - a solar flare! The whole network could be knocked out.”

Exhaling she reached for the manual that hung from a hook on the wall next to the control panel. For the millionth time the irony of the tattered printed emergency manual flashed through her mind. Even here in the den of the most sophisticated electronic technology in the world they still relied on a bit of old school printed data, just in case. And a solar flare was indeed one of those just in cases. Flicking

through the manual trying to work out if the instructions were under Solar Flares or CMEs she found the protocol and carefully followed the procedure as it was outlined, not stopping to second guess herself as usual.

She only started to breath normally when she heard the clanging of the faraday cages descending down the walls of the data halls and through the corridors before hitting the floors with a final bang. The Solar Flare alarm turned to yellow, the siren light went out and the familiar hum of the control panel began breathing normally.

Just as she put a bottle of water to her lips the silence was broken again as three of the security guards from the other data halls came racing down the corridor towards the control room sounding altogether like a herd of horses thundering across a field of cotton wool.

To a man they pushed open the double doors, panting, faces pale and eyes panic stricken.

“What in blue blazes was that?” Meryl demanded. “What in the hell did you do?”

“What do you mean what did I do?” Jena retorted. “I did what I was supposed to do. Activated the CME protocol of course.”

“And what about all of you?” Jena continued, aware that now she was shouting too.

“What did you do besides run over here to question me? Did you check your own control panels? Activate the faraday protections?” Eyes blazing Jena stared at each one of them in turn, daring them to reply.

The men looked at her blankly.

“Oh hell!” Simon, one of the newest recruits exclaimed before rushing back out of the room and down the corridor. The rest followed him with only Meryl pausing just long

enough to give her a threatening look before he too turned and hurried back to his data hall, his usual limp temporarily forgotten.

“Hmm I thought so!” She said out loud as she allowed herself just a hint of a smile.

“I guess they’ll work out that all of the faraday cages across The Facility are activated as soon as one is.” She smirked. “Really they should review the manuals once in a while.”

Management lost no time in calling an emergency meeting. The other guards, with Meryl their spokesperson, immediately launched into a tirade of complaints chief amongst them that Jena hadn’t told them she had already managed the CME and they had panicked for no reason.

Glynn, The Facility manager, impassively listened as Meryl described Jena’s behaviour in increasingly derogatory terms. After a few minutes Meryl began running out of steam and finally stopped talking. Still Glynn said nothing.

“Well anyway, one of us could have been injured rushing around like we did.” Meryl concluded sheepishly.

Glynn stared at Meryl for a minute then turned to Jena and said.

“Let me get this straight Jena. You heard the sirens, checked for a CME alert then followed the protocols in the manual?”

“Yes, sir. That’s my job isn’t it“ Jena asked, not sure which way this conversation was going.

“And you didn’t run to the next hall in a panic?”

“No sir, I did not.”

“And why is that?” Glynn asked her as he turned to face Meryl and the other guards.

“Why there was no need. Once any one of us activated the protocol the whole facility would be protected.” Finally Jena could see what Glynn was doing and continued.

“I was just following our training procedures. And, as recommended I also review the manual weekly.” She paused, “One of your recommendations I believe?” Jena tried not to smile. It was now clear that Meryl and the others were now going to bear the full brunt of one of Glynn’s legendary dressing downs.

“The specialist techs are here now Jena. They will be checking for any damage to the systems. I’ll stay until they leave. You may as well go home. On full pay of course.”

Jena could hear the protests of the other guards as she gathered her things in the locker room.

She didn’t need to see what was going on when she heard Glynn say, “Sit down all of you and we will go through each and everything you did wrong today. Then we are going to discuss what YOU are going to do about your incredibly inept behaviour...”

As she stepped into the cold Oregon night she could swear she heard someone laugh.

It wasn't until she passed the flashing light of the Taste Freez sign and stopped at the only traffic light in town that she noticed the new charm on her car key chain.

Once she got home she rushed to the bathroom and examined the disc under the lights that framed the vanity mirror.

It was a small disc made of some type of metal she hadn't seen before with a design on it that she felt she should recognise but didn't. As she stroked the disc she had an overwhelming sense of calmness and well being, a well being that stayed with her even as she attacked the latest assignment that had been waiting in her emails.

It was well past midnight when she finished. She poured herself a glass of wine and removed the disc from the key chain before she sat down at the dingy dining room table. Turning it over again and again she tried to work out what it was and how it had materialised on her key ring.

When the alarm went off at 4:30 and startled her awake she was still at the table, clutching the disc in her hand.

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A Solemn Writer



A Perfect Day, is a serialised long story, intentionally written within short deadlines. It is available to read, for free, until the end of October 2023.

A Perfect Day is set in a massive data centre located in a small town in the Pacific Northwest, where Jena, one of the security guards, trudges the long corridors of the data halls day after day. Jena, like most other people in town, has a side hustle. Her second job at night is ‘imperfecting’ the AI generated papers college students use to cheat. Her task is to make them more believable, more human. Poorly paid and worked to a frazzle Jena wonders if her life will ever be more than this until ... a very strange stranger comes to town.

Other works by the author include:

A Remarkable Concurrence of Events, is the first in a series of three novels set in a corner of the Mid west, a place where unsettling things happen. It follows the life of a barely adult young woman as she confronts death, redemption and the ultimate and inevitable karma that comes to us all.

It can be purchased at: www.conniewoodberry.com.