Fifth Tuesday Writing Challenge: "I'm late, I'm late"

August 31, 2010

Premise: You're late for work because you overslept. Your boss hates oversleepers, but he does love entertaining stories. Create the most outlandish excuse for why you were late . . . and do it in no more than 400 words.

An entry from Seto Kaiba's Journal

Jen Wilcher, first-and-third, second-and-fourth

Wednesday July 14, 2015

I walked into Michael Rockefeller's New York City office late today. I told him I ran into some bullies I needed to teach a lesson to. He seemed pleased enough with that to continue on to more important, but boring, business – discussing the plans for America's first KaibaLand theme park.

The excuse I gave Rockefeller for being late was only partial truth. Telling him about my recently developed hyper-empathy syndrome would have been like telling him how to immobilize me while taking over my company. It just wasn't good business sense.

On my way to Rockefeller's office, while my limo was stuck in lunch-hour traffic, I saw some older boys in a nearby alley kick a young kid in the stomach.

I felt the boy's sharp pain and toppled over in my car's seat. Sight, you see, triggers my involuntary, delusional sharing of another's pain.

Somehow I managed to sit back up and order Isono, my butler, to pull over. I pulled my gun from its hip holster as I got out of the limo. I realize now I shouldn't have done this, but the scene reminded me too much of my little brother, Mokuba, getting bullied when we were younger. God, I hate bullies.

"Hey," I yelled as I walked down the alleyway.

The tallest kid turned around first. He stood in front of the others, blocking my view of their victim while the other two kids continued their pounding.

"Hey," I repeated, louder this time.

The other two turned around.

"I see you're not deaf after all," I said.

All three saw my gun and ran off, forcing me to get a better look at their prey – a young boy not much older than 8.

I withered to the ground with his pain, pain that, delusional or not, hurts like hell.

I tried to close my eyes. I tried to look away, anything, but the faux pain held my body captive.

The boy coughed up blood.

Am I going to die? I wondered.

Then darkness.

I awoke in my limo some moments later a block away from Rockefeller's office, nauseous and 30 minutes late for our meeting. All thanks to my bastard of a stepfather's experiments.

Damn you, Gozaboro! I will find a cure for what you've done to me.

I'm late because . . .

Judith McNeil, first-and-third

You won't believe this, but I got up earlier than usual, speed showered, wolfed granola, stepped out of my apartment, and slammed the door. At the moment of the door slam, my irrational, jealous neighbor appeared in the hallway, scotch glass in one hand and a Ginza sushi knife in the other. One eyebrow raised, she accused me in terms I won't use here, of sleeping with her husband. I tried to maintain my cool while I kept one arm behind me and slid one foot back in inch increments so as to position myself to re-insert my key in the door.

I reassured her that I had not the faintest interest in her husband.

She responded with: "Oh, you think I'm hooked up with a dog, bitch?"

I tried to laugh.

It came out sounding like a bark, further infuriating her.

Possibly alerted by my third eye, I sensed her intent and started down the stairs a second before she came at me with the Ginza knife, intent on making her own brand of sushi out of my behind. My car was parked directly in front of the apartment building, but I knew I wouldn't have time to open the door, get in, and drive away before she got to me. Fortunately for me, I was carrying my heels in my plastic bag with my lunch, so I had on my running shoes. Unfortunately for me, she didn't have enough alcohol in her to slow her down, but she did have enough to fuel her rage. When she started to close in on me, I reached into the bag. I intended to throw one of my shoes at her – they were bargain basement so I didn't care – but I grabbed a sandwich instead.

She got a messy tuna salad in the face.

That gave me just enough time to turn into an alley, and I managed to push a wheeled dumpster sideways to block her, but she appeared at the other end of the alley. Now I was blocked, so I had to climb over the dumpster to get away. I'm sure I looked like a large crab trying to get out of the proverbial barrel.

My third eye abandoned me when I got on a bus headed in the opposite direction from work. She saw me on the bus as it pulled out, so I had to stay on that bus until there was enough distance between us that I could get off and get a cab.

That's it. And, oh, by the way, I need a $200 advance until next payday.

Truth is stranger than fiction

Millie Mader, first-and-third

Yikes, it can't be.

The clock on the nightstand said six a.m. last time I looked. Jeez, I must have gone back to sleep.

Shouldn't have had that second glass of wine.

Shock at seeing the hands pointing to seven propelled me out of bed.

Half hour to get ready – no time to shower.

Roll on some deodorant, fluff up the hair. I dotted makeup on my still moist face. It streaked in a couple of places. Next, I swiped on mascara – no time for curling lashes. Hated what I saw in the mirror.

Lipstick helped some – no time for blotting.

Put on the same clothes as yesterday. Damn, those spike heels pinched my toes.

Jumped in the car, remembered "click it or ticket" and fastened my seat belt.

Going fifty in the thirty-five zone, I slammed on my brakes. And just in time. There was the dad-gum freight train.

It looked miles long.

I had always avoided the train before. What will old John "Crabby" Crabtree say when I get to work?

Cussing up a storm, I pulled up behind a long line of cars at the crossing. Well, no one could hear me, but a grungy-looking man jerked open my door. He grabbed my arm. Said, "Get the hell out, lady. This is gonna be my car."

I reacted on pure gut instinct. I thrust my left leg into his privates, catching him with my spiked heel. Sent him stumbling across the street, clutching himself and cursing.

Horns started blasting, people were yelling, I thought they thought I was a hero, but it was the line moving. I tromped on the gas. No time to reach for my cell phone to call the police. The carjacker would be long gone anyway.

When I pushed open the office door, Mr. "Crabby" looked – well – crabby.

"What's the story this time?" he asked. "I want the truth."

I related my tale of woe.

He seemed to be holding back a chuckle, but still he asked, "How long did it take you to make that one up?"

"Truth is stranger than fiction," I replied.

Cooper's tale

Andrea Kirchman, second-and-fourth

I pulled off my jacket and scooted towards my cubicle.

"Where do you think you're going?"

It was the voice of future unemployment. I turned around.

My boss crossed her arms and scowled. "Late. Again. You better have a hell of a reason, Cooper, or you can just start packing up your crap and find somewhere else to slack off."

"Overslept," I said.

"Overslept? Are you kidding me?"

"Car trouble."

"Well, which one is it, you overslept or you had car trouble?"

"Both."

"How is that possible?"

"Well, the power went out, so my alarm clock didn't go off."

"There weren't any storms last night."

"It went out when the car knocked over the power pole outside my house."

"What car?"

"My car."

"You ran your car into the power pole? Were you drunk?"

"Not me. The dog."

"The dog drove your car?"

"The dog jumped into the car when my daughter left the front door of the house open. It's a convertible. I mean the car, not the door. My daughter was helping my wife and her boyfriend to the hospital."

"Your wife has a boyfriend?"

"No, no, no. Not my wife's boyfriend. *My* wife; my *daughter's* boyfriend, Todd."

"Oh."

"Yeah. The wife freaked out."

"What on earth was going on?"

"Marilyn passed out in the hall on her way to get a drink of water. She took a couple of those Tylenol PMs before she went to bed, but forgot about the wine she had with dinner. Made her pretty woozy."

"And the boyfriend?"

"He was in the living room, proposing to my daughter. He'd just popped the question when they heard a 'thud' in the hall. Mandy – that's my daughter – asked Todd to carry Marilyn to the couch."

"And then?"

"My wife woke up. She knows Krav Maga. The hospital thinks Todd has a couple broken ribs and a broken nose."

"And Marilyn?"

"A slight concussion, but she'll be fine."

"Where were you during all this?"

"Sleeping. They said they didn't want to worry me."

"I see." My boss unfolded her arms. "You need to get a battery-powered alarm clock, Cooper. Now, get back to work."

Checkmate

Jerry Peterson, first-and-third

"Mister Data, you're late."

"Please excuse me, Captain. I was doing the impossible."

"You have my curiosity, Mister Data. What is that?"

"I was sleeping."

"But you never sleep. You're an android, Mister Data."

"That is true, sir. I am an android. But it is also true that I was sleeping."

"Well, we don't have any crisis here, so I have some moments to be amused. Tell me, how could the impossible have happened?"

"Well, sir, I went to the Holodeck. In my previous visit, I had played chess with the grand master, Aragon of the galaxy Winsip. He had defeated me, and you know that, too, is impossible. So I have spent the last week going through all the libraries of the known universe, studying the greatest chess games ever played. I was looking for that one move my memory banks may have overlooked, the move I could have used to put Aragon into a corner from which he could not escape. And I found it, sir."

"So you went back to the Holodeck."

"That I did, sir. I summoned Aragon, and we launched into a new match. He played brilliantly, as did I. After something like three hours, it appeared we were about at a draw, and Aragon excused himself. He said he wished to get a chalice of mead. I think he called it a Spotted Cow, sir. While he was away, a woman – quite beautiful by your standards – entered our gaming area. She said she had been sent by Aragon to entertain me while he was away refreshing himself."

"Entertain you? How?"

"I wondered that myself, sir, so I asked. And she said she was prepared to entertain me with stories greater than those of the greatest writers of all times past, greater even than those of Tomlinson, Freiburger, Schneller, and Ellestad. In truth, sir, her stories were not."

"Really?"

"They were boring, so boring, so banal that, after the third story, my eyelids grew heavy, and I closed them. I don't know for how long, sir, but it was your calls on my communicator that awoke me."

"Was she still there, Mister Data, this woman?"

"No, she was not."

"And the chess game?"

"This is very strange, indeed."

"Why is that, Mister Data?"

"It appears, sir, that Aragon and I must have resumed our game at some time, I do not know how or when. But when I awoke, I saw on the board before me my queen – in checkmate. Aragon had defeated me again."

Introduction to induced oversleep

Clayton Gill, first-and-third

Miker glanced at the clock on the wall outside the principal's office. Eight fifteen. He nudged Geo, who slouched nearby fiddling with his MP3 player.

"Fragmont's late," Miker said.

"Fifteen minutes," Geo said. "Assistant principal by day, football coach day and night. He just blew the whole first quarter."

"Not like him to keep Stromfeller waiting. Maybe he overslept."

"Don't even go there."

Assistant Principal Fragmont burst through the swinging doors.

"Mr. Salee. Mr. Fleming. Follow me."

Fragmont rapped on the door to Stromfeller's office and pushed his way in.

"Good morning, Susan. Sorry I'm running late."

Miker and Geo shuffled in. Fragmont clunked the door shut behind them.

"We're down to fifteen minutes, Ed. I've got the Exec Committee at eight-thirty."

The day before, Fragmont had confiscated Miker's book bag. Now he held it aloft like a trophy bass. He laid it on Stromfeller's desk. The evidence.

"They're to blame for my delay this morning, too." He pointed at the interrogation chairs. "Have a seat, boys."

A soft knock sounded at the door. Mrs. Bunster's round face appeared.

"I'm sorry Dr. Stromfeller, but Mr. Fragmont has an urgent call."

"Go ahead, Ed. Take the call."

"But Susan." Fragmont pointed at the bag. "This is serious."

"It's alright. I'll take matters from here."

Fragmont frowned a warning at the boys and followed Bunster out.

Stromfeller leveled her gaze.

"Yesterday at graduation, you two silenced my speech, disrupted the whole ceremony, with some sort of electronic device. A 'Fenton silencer.' Is that right?"

She poked the bag.

"Show me what you've got."

Miker retrieved the bag and opened it. Geo removed the Fenton. He also took out two small, gray objects which he positioned on the principal's desk, one on either side. They looked like stand-alone speakers for a laptop computer.

"That's the silencer?"

"No," Miker said. He held up the black box. "This is."

"Then what's this on my desk?"

"Something else I've been working on," Geo said. "A binaural brainwave entrainment system."

Stromfeller's jaw tightened.

"As you know," Geo said, "childhood obesity is epidemic. I've got a little body-mass-index challenge myself. What we're shooting for with this device is appetite mitigation and weight loss without exercise or dieting. If we get the settings right, it ought to work."

Stromfeller leaned forward, looked at the tiny speakers and shook her head.

"What does it do?"

Geo slipped on his MP3 headphones and motioned to Miker to cover his ears.

"Well?" Stromfeller demanded.

Geo reached out and flipped a switch on one of the speakers. Through his palms, Miker heard a low hum.

A slow, dreamy smile spread across Stromfeller's face. The deep crease between her eyes relaxed. The wrinkles around her eyes and mouth faded away. She folded her arms and nestled her head on the blotter.

The school bell rang. Eight-thirty.

Miker removed his hand from one ear and toggled the switch. The boys regarded their principal asleep at her desk. Her lips parted. She drooled and snored.

"Still needs some adjustment, Geo."

A trip on LSD

Amber Boudreau, first-and-third

So there I am, on my way to work in Lucy – yes, I named my car – one hand on the wheel, one on the horn, because that's how I drive through rush hour on Lake Shore Drive. Out of nowhere, this three-hundred-pound mountain lion lands on the road right in front of me. I'm stunned stupid, so what do I do?

I hit the horn.

And it sticks.

So this four-hundred-pound cat glares at me. I think the cars around me are revving their engines, but, no, it's coming from this five-hundred-pound cougar. It reaches out a massive paw and swipes Lucy's hood. My whole world spins. The cat bats Lucy again and flips us over the barricade onto the sand between the road and the lake.

Yes, I'm wearing my seat belt, but I'm still flying around the inside of my car like clothes in a washing machine. So then this six-hundred-pound beast pounces on Lucy like she's a mouse. I think it's because the horn is still going off, even though it sounds more like a moan now.

Another blow lands Lucy right side up, tires in the sand. I guess the huge cat's getting bored, because it unsheathes a fistful of daggers. Each one sounds like a switchblade being flicked open in an alley at night. The cat rears up, ready to drive these razor-sharp meat shredders into Lucy and pry her open like she's a can of tuna.

Then I hear this whooshing sound. At first I think it's just the blood rushing to my head because I'm sure I'm gonna die, but this giant wall of water waves at me from behind the cougar. This wall crashes down on my car and the cat. Talk about a hard rain, I'm certain my windshield is gonna shatter and I'm gonna drown on dry land, but I'm surprised.

The windshield holds.

The water washes away, and I peek out my windows.

No sign of the cat.

Incidentally, the waters of Lake Michigan do wonders for stuck horns because Lucy stops her squawking. I drive down the beach to the Addison exit and get back on LSD. I go directly to the mechanic to drop off my car, so that's why I'm late for work.

The good news, though, Lucy's gonna be okay.

Voice mail message for ‘the boss’

Randy Haselow, first-and-third, second-and-fourth

I know I was supposed to be in two hours ago.

I have to blame my friend Igor, visiting from Saint Petersburg. Cultured city, but those Russians love their vodka. Did you know they keep it in the freezer? Apparently zero degrees Fahrenheit deadens the taste and it goes down easier. I normally keep my freezer full of frozen vegetables and whole-grain bread and – I buy them on sale and fill it up. Which fact Igor was so considerate of, that he put his vodka in the fridge instead.

Anyway, I’m not supposed to irritate my inflamed facial nerve by wearing glasses. Comes out of the brain right over the ear. No, it doesn’t hurt, just kind of tingles when I eat something crunchy or – anyway, I turn off the alarm and stumble out of bed. I go to get a glass of water first thing like my yoga teacher says. Yeah, good for you, body and spirit and balance and core strength. Remind me to stand on one foot for you some time with my other leg straight out in front. Great bar trick.

So I go to get my water, and here’s this bottle and I can’t read the label. No, you can’t put contact lenses in until you’ve been awake for half and hour. The eye needs to get back to its normal shape first.

So I think I’m pouring myself a 16-ounce glass of some fancy bottled water, but instead it’s Igor’s goddamn vodka.

You better believe it tasted funny. Well, not the taste so much as the aftertaste. It was chilled. Not exactly the breakfast of champions. I nicked myself about fifty times shaving, and then figured I’d better not drive. But turns out you’re not supposed to walk along the Beltline, so the officer suggested I cut through the Arboretum.

I don’t know where the hell I am. Some dirt path. For the longest time I couldn’t get a signal on my cell. I’m hoping another college student will jog by so I can ask directions, but so far it’s just trees and wildlife. The mosquitoes are terrible. Thank God, I’m wearing a three-piece suit.

I’ll be there as soon as I can. Take care now.

Death and destruction

John Schneller, first-and-third

"Hey, Rip Van Winkle, before you get comfy, into my office!"

"Now, Ma'am? Yes, Ma'am . . . I expect you heard about the terrible morning I've had."

"From what I see on this report, you've had a week of reporting late to work. You know this company has a death or dismemberment policy in regards to tardiness."

"But Ma'am, there was a death. I feel weak in the knees just thinking about it."

"I was referring to your own body bag, but lay it out and your employment could just last another day."

"You are so kind, Ma'am . . . and compassionate, I've always said."

"Right. Let's hear it."

"I'm not one to make excuses, Ma'am, never one to embellish the facts, but it was a tragedy. On Sclepphester Lane, driving defensively, anticipating a rousing day of telemarketing, I – I took a life. It was a monarch, Ma'am."

"Monarch. Is that a make of car?"

"Butterfly, Ma'am."

"You hit a butterfly, and that made you," glancing at the clock, "two hours late?"

"No, ma'am, that was Tuesday. I recovered quickly. Only an hour late on Tuesday. I see by the look of grief on your face, that you understand. But the butterfly was not the real tragedy."

"No? It gets worse?"

"Yes. You won't believe it, but on that same road, for absolutely no reason at all. A raccoon committed suicide."

"And that was what, Wednesday?"

"No ma'am, that was Monday. Gave it a double-thump ironing, right there on Schleppester Lane. I was a basket case all day. Even the next morning. I expect that's why I didn't see that butterfly sitting there sucking up that coon's eyeball juices . . . 'til it was too late. Tragedy, Ma'am, but it got worse."

"No."

"Yes, Ma'am, a possum."

"And was the possum there because of the raccoon or the butterfly?"

"Hard to tell, Ma'am, but he never made it out of the passing lane."

"And that was what, Wednesday?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"And what about Thursday?"

"Vultures. At lest two of 'em. Winged a third one. Tragic."

"Yeah, tragic. But this is Friday, and you're three hours late today."

"Yes, Ma'am. Turns out that with all this death and destruction, they closed off Sclepphester Lane. County trucks, DNR, state police, they were all there. And when they saw all that fur, feathers, and butterfly dust on my hood, they impounded my car."

"And you had to walk to work?"

"No, Ma'am. I hitched a ride with the state trooper."

"Surely a state trooper could have gotten you here on time."

"You know, I think he would have. But there was this butterfly . . ."

Detour

Alicia Connolly-Lohr, first-and-third

Barefoot, I slinked along the legal secretaries' modular walls with my ball cap pulled down. Rounded the last corner.

Metzger.

Arms crossed over his chest.

He threw back his head. "Good morning, sunshine. Oh, Miss, Missy, Melissa – I hunger. I thirst. I'm virtually in crack withdrawal waiting to hear why in God's green acres you're an hour late for defending your neurosurgeon from the gold diggers sitting in our conference room."

"Mr. Metzger, I am so sorry. There were extraordinary circumstances."

I skulked past him.

He bird-dogged me as I hobbled into my office, curling my toes to hide the sparkly, pink fingernail polish from my little niece's birthday party the night before. I changed fast and opened the door. Metzger stood there staring down at me.

"Bad hair day, too?"

My shoulders slumped. "The cap. It flattened. I can put it in pony tail."

"That'll look professional. What happened?"

"A guy on the Washington Street bridge had a bomb! Stopped traffic both ways for forty-five minutes. Horrendous backup. CNN was there. Negotiations dragged on. A police chopper finally dropped a net on the poor guy. Turns out he was despondent over a divorce. Oh, and no bomb. But people went insane, sweltering in their cars. We were like a massive car-lot of refugees. Can you believe some people actually chanted, "Jump, fool, jump." Anyhoo, I did a one-eighty on the shoulder in my VW bug to get off onto a side road. My car's in the ditch now. A guy going the other way tried the same thing. I won't repeat the hurl of insults and obscenities I've endured already this morning. Can't get a tow. It's 7:45, eighty-four degrees; humidity is like four million. Hair's electrified frizz. I'm sweating like a banshee and late for Dr. Franken's deposition. Did you know, they call him Frankenstein behind his back? My cell's dead. I'm in high heels, hauling this suitcase of papers, going I don't know where, looking like a troglodyte freak. I go barefoot on the grass. That's hot and prickly. Shreds my pantyhose to smithereens."

Metzger chuckled. "Priceless image, Miss. How'd you finally get here?"

"Motorcycle. Nicest guy. He strapped on my suitcase, cruised right past everything right to the front door. Not all of those Hell's Angels guys are bad. He gave me the baseball hat." I smiled.

Metzger busted a gut.

"And I recruited a new client," I said, raising a finger. "For the criminal division."

Metzger grabbed his head, started walking away, stifling laugher. "No more," he said between snorts and snickers. "Plaintiffs got delayed, too. Just get in there and defend Dr. Franken's precious platinum patoot."