

Walls End



SFL 48 Hour Flash Fiction 2016 Entry



Title cue: "Walls End"

Dialogue Cue: "No it's okay, leave it, I'll save this for later."

Total word count: 1,468

“What’s his name?”

“Weaver,” Vince replied, handing Kelsey the victim’s ident-card. “Richard Weaver, MD.”

“A doctor, huh?” Kelsey waved away the ident-card and knelt by the corpse, careful not to step in the blood. “You’d think he would’ve been smart enough to find a less painful way to do this.”

She gesturing at the archaic kinetic weapon on the floor near the body. “I’m curious where he found ammo for that thing.”

“Yeah, not easy to come by.” Vince walked around the perimeter of the room, looking around. “Doesn’t really look like a history buff. Family heirloom?”

Kelsey didn’t reply. She stared at the gaping exit wound in the back of the victim’s head and thought about the bottle of pills on the table back in her apartment. The whiskey would be watered down and warm by the time she got back. It seemed like such a waste to buy a new bottle that she’d never finish, even assuming she could even find an open shop at this hour. She didn’t want to wait another year but she wanted good whiskey to be the last thing she tasted.

“Hello? Kels?”

She shook her head, tried to focus on the scene before her. “Sorry, didn’t hear you.”

“Whatever. We done? Self-inflicted, right? We ready for the meds to come fetch him?”

Kelsey stood up, her mind back on the here and now. “Anybody talk to his familiar yet?”

Vince picked up a wristpiece from the ornate desk and tossed it to her. “I tried to link into it but looks like Weaver scrubbed it before he died.”

She gave it back to him. “Show me.”

“Where’s Matthias?”

“I rushed out the door,” she lied. “I took him off to shower and forgot to put him back on when I got the call.”

If Vince noticed that her hair was still gelled in the same style that it had been when they’d left the station earlier, he didn’t comment on it. Instead, he sighed and held the doctor’s wristpiece near his own and said, “Ripley, wake it up, please.”

His AI chirped twice, lighting up as it followed his directive.

The victim’s tech cycled on and chirped twice, an echo of the other. A few seconds later, a tiny holographic woman in a business suit appeared, hovering over the portable artificial intelligence unit.

“Hello.” She looked up at Vince. “Are you my new owner? Until you name me, my designation is Sierra. May I have yours, please?”

It was definitely a high-end model – the voice had no trace of distortion or artifice to it, and there was no lag. Matthias was always a hair off; it was as bad as watching a badly dubbed vid.

“See?” Vince handed the device back to Kelsey. “Factory settings.”

The six-inch woman looked up at her. “Hello. Are you my new owner? Until --”

“Be quiet, Sierra.”

The familiar’s immaterial mouth closed and she smiled patiently.

The hologram blinked out of existence as the inspector accessed the physical device, the screen lighting up at Kelsey’s touch. She began tapping in commands, rapidly moving through a series of screens.

“You’re a techhead now?” Vince looked over her shoulder. “What’re you doing?”

She didn’t immediately reply, not sure how to explain that she’d cleared Matthias’s

history herself an hour or so earlier. Before she had to make up another lie, they both heard a noise, the faint sound of laughter from across the room.

Putting the device into her coat pocket, she unclipped her NLSD from her belt and primed it. Vince fell into step behind her as she crossed the room. It was muffled but they could definitely hear voices, which should’ve been impossible – all there was at the end of the room was a desk, chair, and bookshelf; the entire apartment had been cleared; the only people inside were Kelsey and Vince.

She glanced back at Vince and then his NLSD, still on his belt.

“Sorry.” He winced as he drew the subdual device.

Slipping around the desk, Kelsey realized she hadn’t been close to this much paper since she’d visited the North American History Museum as a kid and the smell was unnerving.

The desk was impeccably laid out; the tip of the stylus flush against the corner of the tablet, the digital frame sitting at a precise forty-five-degree angle to the corner of the desk, mirroring the commscreen on the other side.

She pushed the chair – real leather, a year’s salary for her, at least – under the desk and examined the bookshelf. The voices were still indistinct but louder.

“Kelsey?”

She continued to ignore her partner. Most of the books on the shelf were medical texts or journals, but one wasn’t.

“Kelsey!”

The Stephen King novel slid forward effortlessly. There was only a faint click as the bookshelf slid up, the whole section disappeared into the ceiling to reveal a small, well-lit panic room. A young girl, eleven, maybe twelve, sat in a plush chair, watching a vid on a wall-sized

screen.

She turned and, at the sight of an armed woman, squealed, jumping out of the chair and ducking behind it.

“It’s okay,” Kelsey said, holstering the NLSD. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

The kid peeked over the arm of the chair and Kelsey gasped.

She’d seen the girl’s eyes before.

“Damn it, Kelsey.” The ominous click that accompanied her name sent a chill up her spine.

She hit the red button on the panic room wall and backed out as the bookshelf descended. Slowly, she turned to face her partner.

“I really wish you hadn’t done that, Kels.” The gun had looked awful on the floor but it looked twice as ugly pointed at her. “Put your subber on the desk.”

As she unhooked her NLSD and tossed it on the desk, there was a double-chirp from her pocket. Deliberately, she reached in and took out the doctor’s wristpiece. She ran her finger across the screen and the hologram appeared.

“Why, hello there.” Now wearing a lab coat instead of a business suit, she regarded Kelsey. “I’m sorry, I don’t believe we’ve met. You may call me Amanda. Where is Richard?”

Vince glared at his partner. “How’d you do that?”

Kelsey tossed the wristpiece to Vince; he caught it without thinking but Kelsey didn’t try to take advantage of the distraction.

The AI looked up at him. “Oh, hello, Vincent. I must have fallen asleep. How was dinner?”

“Amanda, play last thirty seconds recorded prior to sleep mode. Audio only. Security

override, nine-nineteen, authorization Walls, Kelsey.”

“Confirming.” Amanda disappeared.

“To fully scrub an AI, you have to do it from the hard drive, not the portable.” Kelsey tapped the viewer on the desk and it flashed on, rendering a photograph of the little girl and her dads standing on the steps in front of the North American History Museum.

She had Richard’s chin but Vince’s eyes.

Kelsey sighed and looked at her partner.

“Three years and you never told me?”

The wristpiece screen flicked back on.

“Override confirmed,” Amanda said. “Playback beginning.”

Vince’s voice came out of the tiny machine. “...bring this with?”

Another man’s voice replied, “No it’s okay, leave it, I’ll save this for later. Let’s finish this. I have things to do.”

“Where’s Stevie?” Vince’s recorded voice was tight. “She’s in there, isn’t she?”

The other man sounded bored. “Just stop, okay? You know -- ”

The sound of the gun going off was tinny, too much for the wristpiece’s system to handle, and then the screen went dark.

The gun shook in Vince’s hand.

“I’ve fired one of those before. They have a lot of kick. Can hurt your wrist if you’re not careful.” Kelsey turned the viewer so Vince could see it. “Why’d you do it?”

“He was going to take her. He had the money, the lawyers. I’d never see her again.” He lowered the gun, wiped at his eyes with the other hand. “You of all people should know how it feels!”

“I do,” she agreed. “But you’ll still never see her again. You know that, right? Even if you shoot me, Sato’s outside. It’s over.”

“I know,” he said, raising the gun and pulling the trigger.

The noise was louder than Kelsey expected. Kelsey closed her eyes for a moment before turning and pressing the King book. As the bookshelf ascended, she fought to control her breathing.

The girl – Stevie – Stevie was still huddling behind the chair as Kelsey stepped into the room. As she saw her partner’s eyes looking back at her from the girl’s face, she knew that she’d have to find a shop open on the way home. She didn’t have anything for breakfast at her apartment.

“Hi, Stevie,” she said. “I’m a friend of your dad’s.”