

## Word Lock

### Carol Azzam Year 8 Write Now Entry

I was just getting off the bus when an old guy with a waist-length white beard burst out of the newsagency and ran towards me, shouting, "At last! The saviour of the world, you have arrived!"

I kept walking and pretended I hadn't seen him, even when he lay down on the footpath behind me and started calling out "All hail to the great one!"

A quick backwards glance confirmed that in addition to the long white fake beard, he was also wearing a kind of orange jumpsuit with a zip up the front, yellow gumboots and a New York Yankees baseball cap that was about four sizes too small.

"That's your dad, isn't it?" whispered my best friend Ellen. "In disguise?"

"Nope," I said. "Never seen him before."

I hoped nobody else would recognise him. It wasn't much of a hope, since my equal best friend Roger, known as Rabbit, added, "What's your dad dressed up like that for? Has he gone crazy?"

"No he hasn't gone crazy," I hissed through my clenched teeth. "He's got a good reason."

He did too, but it was incredibly top secret. So amazingly top secret I couldn't even tell my two very best friends in the whole wide world. Not if I wanted them to stay alive.

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I still didn't grasp the concept myself. Dad wasn't like this before; him, mum and me were almost a model family. But when he got his new job at the lab things changed and I began getting much more attention than I ever sought after.

I picked up my pace and my mates followed me in silence. I quickly flicked my eyes to each of them. Their mouths looked as though they could burst any minute – burst and pour out a bath full of questions. I had to get away from them before they started leaking.

"Look guys, I really need to get home."

"Why?" both of them spoke in unison.

"Homework." *Lame excuse*, I criticised myself. It however seemed to work. I bolted down the road.

When I got home my mum was sitting on the couch. Her legs were tightly pressed together and her lips were pursed with anxiety. I looked at my watch. 4:09. *Shoot, nine minutes late*. Mum began to stand up, her muscles relaxing.

"You never fail to worry me, Daniel," she said. I looked down at my Nike's. The laces were undone. As if I cared.

"It's dad again. He's always around. This time the moment I got off the bus. How can you expect me to make my stupid curfew at this rate?"

Mum attempted to run her fingers through her heavily hair-sprayed hair. "Your curfew isn't stupid; it's for your own good. I can't risk you breaking the word lock."

The word lock. The thing that stopped me from chatting properly with my mates. The thing that my own mind couldn't control. The thing that made me a paranoid freak. I started to get angry. This conversation happened almost every day, ending with me giving up. But not today.

Today I had a plan - to break free.

"DANIEL CRAIG!" My mother's voice broke my daydream. "You need to understand that I'm doing all I can to help you. The police have tried to keep him in institutions and you're hopefully doing your bit-"

"MY BIT?" I cracked. "My bit *should* be going to dad's lab!"

Mum straightened her back and looked at me pointedly. "Well you know you can't do that."

"Why?"

"The word lock!"

"I don't care about the word lock!"

Mum sat back down. I blinked a couple of times and licked my lips.

"Try and stop me." I stomped to the door, tied my shoelaces and began running again. My schoolbag was still with me so I dug out the scrunched up paper with dad's lab address on it. Then I ran faster, adrenaline kicking into my system. I could feel myself getting stronger.

I thought about life before dad's 'science'. We were happy. I learnt how to ride a motorcycle – the thrill of breaking the law was satisfying, so I rode often, even on cold, rainy nights. That's when things got creepy, dad got creepy. I was in an accident. Nothing too serious, but enough to be put to sleep. At that time dad was a doctor so naturally he did the operating. Well, the operating and a bit more.

The wind tore at my thighs and my tongue was like a dried apricot. I didn't mind. *Good cross country practise*, I thought. Finally I reached dad's lab, panting like a dog playing fetch. I entered the lobby, the elevator, then went up.

Dad was secretly studying human micro-chipping parallel with his career as a doctor. *Level 2, 3*. He developed a link between speech and the nervous system. *Level 5, 6*. Thus he invented the Word Lock – a microchip that when certain words only he knows are spoken can shut down the nervous

system and those of the people around the subject. *Level 9, 10.* I was his first test. That's right. My friends and I could drop dead any minute. *Level 11. Ping.* But I didn't know what I couldn't say – so I didn't say much at all.

I had planned this for so long. I remembered my way around from the one time I was let in, years ago. *Straight, left, left, sharp right, straight, right.* I came across an opaque glass door with a steel plate nailed near it. It read 'Dr Michael Craig'.

My dad kept on turning up, pretending to be almost anything in a desperate attempt to get me to say the mystery fated words. It hurt me to know that my dad wouldn't mind if I were dead just to prove his technology, but I sucked it up and reached for a large orange button underneath the plaque. I paused, then continued. *No backing out now.*

The door slid away to reveal my bewildered dad sitting behind a heavily varnished wooden desk.

"Hi dad," I meant those simple words to scare him. His paper pale face told me that it worked.

Oh yes.

He had a lot of explaining to do.

And it started now.