

When a Stranger Calls

Sherilyn Connelly

2002

Burnout had come by to sell me some grass, and we were hanging out, smoking. As usual, Burnout's capacity for the stuff astounded me. For as much as I've seen him smoke at one time, I've never gotten the sense that it affected his behavior or abilities in the slightest. Probably because he's a drug veteran. When you have a history of IV usage and sport a methadone patch on your arm, pot has about as much affect on you as Zima would on Charles Bukowski.

I, on the other hand, was thoroughly baked. What the hell, I figured, I was home and I had no other plans for the evening. Besides, it doesn't take much. I'm big, and was a hundred pounds bigger then, but my tolerance is low.

The phone rang. It was late early evening, and I thought it might be my girlfriend calling to say she was running late. Nothing the machine couldn't handle, and she'd certainly understand if I didn't answer, but evidently my judgment was impaired. I answered the phone.

Who do you not want on the other end of the phone at a time like this?

That's right. The police.

Well, it wasn't exactly the police. It was some program the they were running called PAL, having to do with kids. More than that, having to do with keeping kids off drugs. And, of course, they were calling because they wanted money. "You want to help keep kids off drugs, don't you?"

So. I'm stoned, with my dealer in my home, and the cops call me asking for money. It was a set-up. It had to be. Burnout was an ex-hippie with a criminal record

including possession, so surely they'd been tracking him for years, waiting for the right moment to pounce. That moment was now. It made perfect sense. It would be a great trophy bust, and my involvement would prove that they don't just target minorities: "look! a twenty-five year old caucasian with a college education! we don't discriminate!" Truly another glorious victory in the War on Drugs.

I've seldom been more freaked out than I was at that moment, made worse by the fact that panicking was simply not an option. I had to play it cool, even though I have a hard time ordering a pizza when I'm stoned, let alone not alerting the cop on the phone that I'm aware of his SWAT team ready to break down the door at any moment.

I politely said I wasn't interested, and he countered it with a well-scripted response about why I should be interested, why I couldn't possibly take another breath in good conscience without doing everything possible to help keep kids off drugs. I was afraid to hang up, because then they'd know I was on to them. Besides, it was the cops. Yeah, it was their telemarketing arm, but still, you don't hang up on these people. Pisses 'em off.

When he got to the "How much do you think you can afford to donate today?" part, I said that I really couldn't afford anything at all since I was unemployed and my girlfriend was in charge of the finances. Reasonable enough, right? Nope! Borrowing from the classic xtian tradition, poverty shouldn't stand in the way of tithing. He kept lowering the amount: "\$30? No? How about \$20? Can you afford \$20? \$15? Can you afford \$15 to help keep kids off drugs?"

Turns out \$10 was what I could afford to keep kids off drugs. I had to acquiesce eventually, since I couldn't hang up and he wasn't going to take no for an answer. The next part was even scarier: giving him my name and address. I was convinced that it was just a formality, that he already knew who I was and where I lived. But I had to play along. I did try to get clever and give a zip code from out of town, in

hopes that the bill would get lost in the mail. He saw right through it, and I said I'd accidentally given him my old work zip code. But I knew I blew it, and I braced myself for the ninja-suited cops which were about to crash through the windows.

No busts happened that day, at least not in my home. But I learned my lesson about answering the phone.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 2nd Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.