

# Terrorists Are Closer Than You Think

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Hi, my name is Mr. Terrance Waters. I live here in Stockwell, London with me missus and our four foster kids. The youngest two are developmentally retarded and keeping them's a full-time job for the missus; I help out when I can, and I bring in the paycheck, and between that I don't really do much else.

I work at Choc Full O' Nuts, a fine chocolatiers and sweetseller's a short jaunt from the Elephant and Castle tube station in Walworth, London. I've been there a long time, but I don't want the headache of managing so I stay just a stocker and retailer; no climbing the ladder for me.

The place was having a bit of trouble half a time ago so it was bought out by some big corporation; things have been a bit more stable since, with a steady income and no fear of a bounced paycheck anymore, but they've also become less stable inside; we're always having new rules about how to do this or that and that keeps me busy. I spend a lot of time now in the back room, doing inventories and planning how to move this display over there without moving that display over that way, and so on. Not too bad; we only have a few busy times and usually it's just me and the boss, Mr. Myers.

Well, the other day I went into work like usual and we were just entering the afternoon lull when Mr. Myers said he was going away for a few hours, and could I watch the shop? Well, it's not something I'm supposed to do, but he's my boss so what could I do? I let him go, and expected a long and tiresome evening.

It wasn't an hour later, though, that Mr. Myers came in again. He was dressed different than he was earlier and seemed all agitated, but he sent me to the storeroom. He said he expected a regional overseer any time and he wanted the back to be clean and tidy.

Well, I was working away back there for a while before my tasks took me to consolidate the *Σοκολατα* brand, which is stored in shelves built along the wall to the office. When I got there I heard voices inside.

"...has a bomb?" said voice A.

"I am nearly positive of it. I saw it as he was asking the price of the Dutch *Chocolade*," said voice B.

"Alright, I'll look into it," said voice A again.

Voice A sounded more bemused than worried, and I have a huge curiosity for these sorts of things anyway so I

waited until I heard them leave the office and then came around to the front. When I got there I saw four people. A little ahead of me was a stiff in a suit, who I assume was voice B; a few feet to one side a police officer, presumably voice A; and a harmless looking customer talking to my manager, Mr. Myers. This customer, though, was not asking about the advised delicacies for a three-course meal, the last course consisting of roast duck with three vegetables, to be followed by chocolates and port; rather he was, as I came out, saying:

"So, what you are saying is that if someone started a conflagration right now the whole place would go up in flames before you could find and use the fire extinguisher?"

I glanced at the cop and the suit, but found the former no longer in sight and the later apparently not even paying attention. I couldn't let this go on, so I grabbed Mr. Myers and hurried him into the office.

"What was that about?" asked Mr. Myers as I closed the door behind us.

I was too flustered to answer right away, and in my moment of hesitation the door opened behind me and I walked the police officer.

"I'll tell him about it," said the police officer without any leadup. "You go tell the other policeman I just saw walk in."

Well, I didn't relish that at all, but at least there were two of them now. Besides, what could I say to a police officer when he told me to do something? I left the office again. I didn't see anyone immediately but I heard voices over by the front so I walked up there and blow me smithers if I don't see this other cop being talked to by the bomb man!

Well, I wasn't about to pull two of the bomber's conversation targets away in a row; you never know how touchy these guys get. But I didn't know what else to do. As I walked back toward the counter I noticed the suit and decided, since he's an overseer, I'd ask him. He should know what to do; besides, since he's the one who saw the bomb, shouldn't he be the one to report it?

I was walking toward the overseer guy when I see cut in front of me the cop, who said a word to the suit and the two of them walk into the office. At the same time

as they're walking in Mr. Myers and the other cop walk out, cool as a whistle. There was no meaningful glances, furtive gestures, or hurried conference between the cops; they passed like nothing was going on at all. Some nerve, these police have. I could never do that.

Or so I thought. But as I was going to tell the policeman that I had not had a chance to tell the other policeman, the policeman who did know about the bomb walked directly to the entrance of the store and out into the street. I turned to Mr. Myers in surprise, but what did I see but the office door closing behind him.

Then came the real shock of the day. Yes, I know it sounds silly to say I hadn't already received the real shock of the day, but compared to the next one all the others were nothing. I saw the bomber walking toward the telephone we keep behind the desk. What was I to do? I couldn't let him just call up anyone he wanted, but I didn't dare tell him he couldn't use it.

Then a miracle happened. I noticed that not two feet from where I was standing was the phone line. And in my pocket was the box razor I had been using in the back room and forgot to put away in my hasty exit. Some of you might say that's not a miracle, just a convenient set of circumstances; either way, I took what was given me and with a quick motion cut the line. Then I hastened back to the office to let the crowd there know.

The policeman opened the door, and I didn't waste any time about it. Once the bomber found out the phone was dead, there was no telling what he'd do.

"The terrorist tried to use the telephone, but I cut the line." That's what I said, and I think it put it well. Much better than the suit put his next line:

"This doesn't seem like a small job; we'd need reinforcements."

I mean, honestly. What kind of a statement is that for a regional overseer to make when told a maniac is trying to blow up one of his stores?

The cop just grunted and walked out into the store. Mr. Myers suggested I go into the storeroom until things "blew over." "Blew up" might have been a better statement, but whatever. I didn't hesitate; I was into that storeroom and as far away from the main part of the store as I could get.

I had been there for about twenty minutes when Mr. Myers walked in.

"It's alright; the police have taken the terrorist away; everything is fine again." That's what I expected to hear him say. What he actually said was (no joke) "Could you watch the counter for a bit? I'm going to go buy a new phone line; the old one's past repair."

"What about the bomber?" I asked.

"What? Oh, he left some time ago. There's a customer in there trying to decide between the Belgian fudge and the Russian toffee; I've already given him more samples than I ought, don't give him any more, OK? Be back soon."

That was it. The exciting afternoon of a lifetime and Mr. Myers brushed it off like it didn't matter at all. But that wasn't all. I worked the rest of the evening, which was quiet and unexceptional, and when I got home I told the missus and children about the experience.

"He probably said 'mom' not 'bomb'; your hearing's a bore, pops," said Stafford, the eldest.

"He's right, dear" said the wife, "you really should get your hearing checked."

"I can hear fine!" I protested. And the conversation turned to other topics. The problem with people... Well, anyway, I've told you what really happened. Take it or leave it, there it is. Terrorists are closer than you think.