

TLC Showcase

Daniel Pembrey



Introduction to the novel	2
Extract from <i>The Woman Who Stopped Traffic</i>	3
About the writer	8

Introduction to *The Woman Who Stopped Traffic*

I first approached The Literary Consultancy while writing a personal travelogue following the footsteps of D.H. Lawrence through the Americas. (I grew up in Nottinghamshire and my great-grandfather, like Lawrence's dad, was a coal miner.) I was immediately struck by the integrity and professionalism of Rebecca Swift and team. The editorial assessment that followed set me on my path to professional writing.

Some years later, I joined a TLC Literary Adventures retreat in Andalucia, where I wrote the following extract from my debut commercial novel, *The Woman Who Stopped Traffic*.

In essence, the story is a classic murder-mystery brought into the modern age. At its centre is a suspicious death, which the heroine – Natalie Chevalier – helps solve. This occurs against the backdrop of a social networking company (not unlike Facebook) primed to have its stock market debut, whose website is being invaded by adverts offering trafficked girls for sale. Natalie, former head of security at a large Seattle software company, is brought in to consult. The company's head of security dies, events spin out of control, the stock offering is a fiasco and Natalie, nearly killed herself, takes on the mystery man behind it all in a role-playing game with a dramatic conclusion.

After ten years working for Amazon on the US West Coast, I'd come to know the technology industry, financial background, and story locations. In this scene, Natalie and banker Ben Silverman (handling the Facebook-like company's stock market debut) drive down from San Francisco to Monterey to visit Jon Vogel, a maverick investor. Jon Vogel was loosely modelled on Steve Jobs and those contradictory elements of sixties counter-culture and extreme corporate wealth seen in many Silicon Valley success stories over the years. It was one of the phenomena peculiar to the US West Coast that fascinated me while working there ... working at the heart of the Internet economy's growth, and the infancy of social media.

Be careful who your
friends are...

THE WOMAN WHO STOPPED TRAFFIC

DANIEL PEMBREY

The Woman Who Stopped Traffic

Extract from Chapter 10

The glade was peculiarly dense around Vogel’s ungated entranceway. Pine, maple, and scrub oak fought for sky. The canopy of the driveway almost totally shut out the light. Only after a hundred yards or so did it open out, into bright meadowland. The sun was beginning to burn through the marine layer above, gently illuminating the yellow-white asters and mauve lupins dotted about. At the far end, trees pincered in around a group of wooden buildings. Beyond winked ocean.

“Well, this is where it happens. The annual tech barons’ Woodstock-by-the-sea,” Silverman marveled. “He must have a hundred acres. *Unbelievable.*”

“What’s that?” Natalie said, looking to the left.

Set back from the driveway was a complicated metal structure glinting unevenly. It looked like a Jean Tinguely sculpture – only, the size of a small house. Metal wheels whirred on different axes. Hammer levers rose and fell uncertainly. It creaked and groaned and moaned at its task. They pulled over and got out. A plaque read:

The Clock of the Eternal

NOW!

July 29th, 1967

“Interesting,” Ben said.

Turning back to the meadow, Natalie saw something move in the trees opposite. “And what’s *that?*” she said.

“What?” he said, shielding his eyes from the brightening sun with a hand.

“*Shh*,” Natalie said. For a moment, there was only insect drone. Then she whispered: “Look. Over in that oak, the large one: the lowest branch, extending horizontally,” and she guided his vision down her outstretched arm to a pale golden shape straddling the limb in question.

“Must be another sculpture,” he murmured.

But she knew. She could sense its watchful, feline presence. Suddenly its eyes blinked frostily.

“Holy shit! That’s a *lion* over there!” Ben raised his forearm protectively.

She eased his wrist aside. “It’s OK. There’s a fence.”

There was a set of horizontal silvery strands just visible in the strengthening light.

“And that fence is supposed to stop a three hundred pound lion?” he said.

“It’s likely electrified. And it’s a lioness, look: no mane. The lion is over there.”

“Fuck!” Ben sucked in air. Not fifty yards from them, a five hundred pound male had broken cover and was standing equally still, its eyes quietly and intently upon them, its enormous mane flattened here and there by the ocean breeze.

Natalie: “I read an article in last Sunday’s *Times* about the growing trend for these exotic pets. You know, rap musicians and basketball stars looking to bring a bit of the Serengeti to their back yards.”

“Yeah well,” Ben swallowed hard. “The only guy I heard of who kept zoo animals on his property was Michael Jackson. And we all know what happened to him.”

A purring rumble came their way – the kind the reptilian brain is designed to focus its fullest attention on. Ben hurried her round to the passenger side of the Porsche: “Get in,” he urged.

“I’m sure glad this ain’t an open top now,” she laughed uneasily.

“No kidding.”

Still wary of triggering a predatory response in the lion – even encased in the Porsche, they moved slowly over to the huddle of low buildings. They leaned in to the raked windshield to take in the roof structure of the crescent-shaped central building. Beams thrust out of the ground like some giant, hand-held fan. Or perhaps the display of a male peacock, Natalie decided: the copper flashings had turned an appropriate shade of green. The view of the ocean from inside had to be stunning. Around it were other, smaller structures fashioned from natural materials and separated by mature trees.

Warily, they got out of the car once more. They could hear the boom and hiss of surf. The air was balsam fresh. There was another smell that Natalie couldn't put her finger on.

A young woman with frizzy blond hair appeared out of nowhere in khaki shorts and a tight halter-top. She had a tiny frame and enormous, surgically enhanced breasts. Her eyes were like saucers.

"Hi!" she squeaked. "I'm Mysty – with two 'y's!"

"I'm Ben Silverman, two 'n's. We spoke on the phone earlier."

"I'm Mister Vogel's personal assistant," Mysty clarified for Natalie's benefit. On cue, a bear-like figure rounded the corner of the house. Jon Vogel was wearing only a lime-green Speedo. Natalie didn't know whether it was a good thing or not that his belly hung down to almost cover the front, giving him the appearance of going naked.

"Jon, this is Natalie Chevalier –"

"Oh yeay! Oh yeay!" he rang out like a town crier. "All hail the visiting princess!" and he gave a wildly exaggerated bow, fingers twirling.

"I think they're stoned," Ben said in a low voice.

"You don't say."

“Well, welcome to New Earth, Natalie,” Vogel said with disarming sincerity.

“Thank you.”

“We were admiring your big game,” Ben said. “The lions –”

“Life *is* a big game!” Vogel exploded with kinetic energy, “the *divine* game!” He seemed to inhabit some other place where color, contrast and volume were turned up to MAX.

“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players’!” he cried out.

Ben: “Shakespeare.”

“*As You Like It.*” Vogel laughed heartily. He led them up a path away from the house, into a canyon-like area previously hidden from view. The subject of Malovich’s demise soon came up, briefly tranquilizing him: “I can’t believe Yuri’s a goner,” he said. “He was a good kid: someone who’d always do the right thing. Shit, it feels like only yesterday Wiz and I recruited him from Stanford.” He gripped the sides of a ladder that rose vertically into a tree house twenty feet above. “Come up to my office.”

About the Writer

Daniel hails from Nottinghamshire and first worked with The Literacy Consultancy while developing a literary travelogue following in the footsteps of D.H. Lawrence. He worked for Amazon for 10 years, mostly at its Seattle head office, finishing up as Head of Kindle Direct Publishing Europe. Under his pen name Daniel Pembrey, he writes psychological suspense stories. Susan Hill remarked: "Daniel Pembrey tells a cracking tale with verve and style." His debut novel *The Woman*



Who Stopped Traffic became the bestselling Techno Thriller on Amazon.co.uk, and his Kindle Single, *The Candidate: A Luxembourg Thriller* became the bestselling Thriller Short Story on Amazon.co.uk. *The Harbour Master*, his new Kindle Single, will be published in April. You can find him at his website danielpembrey.com, on Facebook/DPembrey and on Twitter @DPemb