
UNKNOWN SENDER

by Tim Kissman

a short short-story

LIMELIGHTCREATIONS

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FOREWORD

These short short-stories were written for a weekly Internet mystery contest, where authors are invited to submit a 500 word or less story about a photo the Web site puts on its site. This week's featured photo: a woman sitting at her computer and making a disturbed face.

Amy Ling sat at the computer terminal and cleaned. As part of the Fortune 500 company's elite midnight computer corps, she was in charge of cleaning the crumbs, skin flakes and dust out of keyboards, wiping down monitors and purging hard drives as the company's daytime workers slept.

When she shot a blast of compressed air through a keyboard's cran-
nies, the computer she was working on came to life. Blinking eagerly in
blue and white letters were the words, **E-MAIL RECEIVED.**

Curiosity won over her sense of duty. She pushed return and twelve
e-mails filled the screen. The earliest was fifteen minutes old, the latest,
one minute. She opened the first with a click of the button.

HE'S HERE, BE CAREFUL!

Amy face shot a confused look at the screen. She saw her reflection
and shook off the initial fright. She opened the next two.

PLEASE TURN ON THE COMPUTER.

HE'S LURKING. HE'S GOING TO KILL ME.

One of Amy's helpers knocked over a bucket. Amy shot a look in
the direction of the noise. Her subordinate just shrugged and smiled.
Amy growled, then turned her attention back to the computer.

I THINK HE CAN SEE ME.

The next three e-mails said the same thing.

OH, GOD. I WANT TO SCREAM.

She looked around the room, but other than her cleaning staff, no one was there that didn't belong. She continued to open the e-mails.

PLEASE HELP ME.

HE CAN HEAR ME TYPING.

HE'S CLOSE. I CAN SMELL HIS SWEAT.

I'M UNDER THE DESK, ROW 8, DESK 6.

I'M SO SCARED.

With the last of the e-mails opened Amy could feel her heart beat. It was trying to leap from her chest. She looked around the room, counting rows and cubicles. Row 8, desk 6 was right behind her. Her best employee, Ralph, was there cleaning the hard drive.

"Ralph, is that computer on?" Amy asked.

Ralph sat up and smiled. "Nope, it's off."

"Does anything look wrong with that desk?"

Ralph took a quick inventory. "Nope." He stood and used a rag to wipe the top of the monitor. "I'm going into the next room."

Amy shook her head and let out a nervous chuckle. "All right, I'll be there in a minute." Letting out a long sigh, she turned back to the computer and started cleaning it again. She heard the door shut and looked up. She was the only one left in the room.

She went to flip the power switch when another e-mail icon flashed across the screen, blinking noiselessly. She pushed return and opened it.

IT'S RALPH! RUN!

Amy never had the chance. She turned around in time to see Ralph's arm as he swiped at her in a flurry of slashes. Her body fell across the desk, smashing into the clean computer.

Ralph smiled, wiped his knife and flicked the computer off.

The screen, like Amy, went dead.
