

Minor Traffic Infraction by David Breitkopf

Friday, December 11, 2009

In my rear-view I see him yapping to the dispatch, taking his sweet time. Fine, take your time. Take my time. I've more than you know. They love keeping that light flashing around. It's their way of showing the world they're working.

Finally, here he comes. Look at his pudgy hand on his gun. That's right officer, I'm a dangerous man. But he probably thinks I'm nobody, another minor traffic infraction notched in his monthly quota. How easy it would be to change his night, his life. Let me roll down the window before he gets here.

He points his giant phallic flashlight in my face, searing my eyes. And for an instant I'm in a rage, but I manage to quell it even before it manifests on the surface of my face. Oh, he has no clue whom he's dealing with.

"Do you know how fast you were going?" he says with a hint of a Southern drawl, which I note only because this is Short Hills, New Jersey.

"No officer, was I speeding? I say politely, so politely only a man of refinement and subtly—which he obviously is not—could detect my sarcasm.

"Yep, you were going 63 in a 40 mile an hour zone. That's 23 miles an hour over the speed limit." His acne-scarred double chin bobs with each word.

"I'm sorry officer, but it's late and the road was nearly deserted."

"Can I see your drivers license, registration and insurance card, please?"

I hand him the documents. As he reads them by flashlight, he says, "I can understand going 10 miles an hour over the speed limit, but I've got to stop you when you're going 23 miles over it. This ain't a highway. There are residences all along this road. And people come home from work about this hour. You've got to be careful."

"Of course Officer...Sanderlin," I read off the pin clipped to his chest. He starts to fill out the ticket right there, doesn't even take it back to the patrol car.

Do you know how fast you were going?!!! Don't give me that supercilious tone. I could tell you the RPMs. That's not the real question you should be asking me Officer Sanderlin, but you're too fatuous to ask the right question, your eyes too-close-set and lackluster, your bulldog underbite too provincial. You're even too lazy to run a computer check on my driver's license, which would reveal, no doubt, an outstanding warrant for my arrest for auto theft, you, you product of a drunken midwife. Ha!

He rips the ticket off his pad and sticks it under my nose.

"Thank you," I say with a studied condescension lost on him. I start to put the car in gear, but stop.

"I'm actually glad you ticketed me Officer Sanderlin. It shows you're doing your job." Look at him preening like a weathercock at sunrise. "You always read in the newspaper stories of policemen stopping a car for some minor infraction—like speeding for instance—only to discover the decomposing body of a prostitute in the trunk of the car. You never know."

"You never know," he parrots.

"By the way, do you have a shovel I can borrow?" He laughs. "Well, I hope the remainder of your night is uneventful Officer Sanderlin, pleasant chatting with you. And from now on you can count on me to remain within the limits of the law...or at least within the speed limit."

As I pull onto the road, I glance into the rear-view and see Sanderlin both illuminated in the red glow of my rear lights and backlit by his patrol car lights. In front of me I notice a car pull off the road into a driveway. He's right, I'll give him that much: some people do return home from work at this hour, but some never return.

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The unfinished screenplay blew around his bloody Brook's Brothers; the custom-made briefcase lay sprung near his hand. He was dead long before his head split like a water balloon on the asphalt. The Valentino tie was a complete loss.