

1985 . . .

Tommy Mason sat in his beat-up, but much-loved, Bronco on the side of the road. His hands rested on the steering wheel as his eyes focused on the rearview mirror. Behind him, an unmarked police car with a red bubble light on its roof pulled up and parked. This certainly wasn't how Tommy was expecting to start the day, being pulled over on his way to work. What he'd been pulled over for, he had no idea. He drove this stretch of road every day. He knew the speed limit. There were no stop signs or red lights to run. The Bronco was just in the shop, so he knew there were no lights out or any sort of violations that a cop would think it necessary to pull him over for. And his license plate tags were up-to-date. He was going to have some questions for whoever this patrol officer was.

Keeping his eyes on the rearview mirror, he watched as the door to the police car swung open and a square, rather unkept looking officer stepped out. Tommy raised an eyebrow as he watched him approach the Bronco. The officer was wearing a pair of dark Aviator sunglasses and a blue windbreaker with a badge pinned to his chest. He looked as though he hadn't shaved in a couple of days and could use a comb to run through his hair. As he sauntered up to Tommy's window, he placed a traditional eight-point police hat on his head to complete the official appearance.

"Huh..." Tommy grunted, watching the cop giving the Bronco a thorough, yet overly exaggerated examination. "This is going to be fun."

When he reached the driver's side of the truck, Tommy rolled down the window and gave the officer his trademark thousand-watt smile. The same smile that had gotten him out of so

many jams in the past. Incidentally, it had also been the cause of a few problems as well. But he preferred to think of the good his smile had done. And might do for him again.

“Good morning, officer. What seems to be the problem?” He tried to sound as cheery as possible.

Tommy expected some sort of response, but instead found himself staring silently at his own reflection in the officer’s sunglasses while the man chewed on an enormous wad of gum.

When he finally spoke, he said, “I’m Officer Smith with the Parker City Police Department. Do you know why I pulled you over this morning?”

“Officer Smith? I can’t say that I do. I don’t think I was speeding. But I guess I could have been. You see, I’m just traveling through Parker, so I don’t know the area all that well,” Tommy lied.

“Well, you were speeding back there, sir. Sorry to say. It happens sometimes. But unfortunately, I had to pull you over. It’s all about safety. You understand.”

“Dang, Officer! I really didn’t mean to be speedin.” Tommy had suddenly taken on an accentuated southern drawl. “I guess it’s just such a nice mornin’ I wasn’t paying much attention. Look how beautiful that sky is. So bright blue. I just love the spring. Don’t you?”

“Spring is very nice but—”

“And I was just thinkin’ about all the flowers. It’s been a bang-up season for the flowers this year. Have you noticed how vibrant the flowers have been? I think that’s the best word for them. *Vibrant.*”

“I really haven’t—”

“I mean, I’m not much of a flower guy, to be honest with you. But something about them this year just got to me. My girlfriend’s always bringing home fresh flowers. I guess I’ve started paying attention to them.”

Trying to take control of the conversation, the officer raised his voice slightly. Tommy could hear a hint of irritation, but Smith was trying to keep himself in check. Tommy admired that. “Sir. If I could please see your license and registration card.”

“Officer...Smith? Was it? I really am sorry about this. Was I really goin’ that fast that you need to give me a ticket? I didn’t feel like I was goin’ too fast. Not that this old bucket of bolts can even get its giddy-up on to start with. I mean, maybe you could just give me a warning. And I promise the next time I come through Parker City I’ll drive real slow.”

“I need to see your license and registration, sir.”

Tommy leaned over and opened the glove box, rifled around looking for the Bronco’s registration for a moment, then popped back up and said, “Really, I’m very sorry. I must have been daydreamin.’ You see, I’m plannin’ on askin’ my girlfriend to marry me. I’m on my way home. I was in Baltimore for a job last night. And tonight I’m taking Suzanne out...Suzanne’s my girlfriend...I’m taking Suzanne out to dinner to pop the question. She’s gonna be so surprised. She didn’t think I was ever gonna ask her. But I am. I asked her father’s blessing and everything. It’s gonna be perfect.”

“Uh huh. Well, it sounds like you’re a man in love.” The officer’s stone-cold demeanor began to melt. A smile slowly spread across his lips. “Maybe there is something we could do.”

“That would be so great. I would really appreciate it. Because I really have to be going. But not too fast!” Tommy forced a laugh. He knew he must sound completely ridiculous.

“Let me think here. If I write you up and turn in the speeding ticket as is, it could be a few hundred dollars in fines. Plus, you’ll have to show up in traffic court. Nobody likes that. The judge might even say you have to go back to driving school.”

“You’re kiddin’?” Tommy’s eyes went wide, dutifully playing his part.

“Let’s see. What can I do?” Smith made a show of scratching his head while he looked off at some point in the distance. “What say you just give me fifty dollars to take care of the warning notice fee right here and we’ll be square. I’ll be able to let you get on your way and I’ll fill out all the paperwork later.”

“A warning notice fee,” Tommy repeated. “Well, fifty sounds better than three hundred any day.”

“Hey, not all policemen are hardasses. And you’re right. It’s a nice day. You caught me in a good mood,” Smith said, a smirk curling the side of his lip. “So, fifty dollars and it’s all taken care of.”

“Okay. I just want to make sure I got this. I just have to pay you fifty dollars for the warning notice fee and we’ll be all good? No ticket? No traffic court?”

“That’s right.”

“But you still need my license and registration so you can get my name for the paperwork. Right?” Tommy asked, reaching into his back pocket.

“Um. Yeah. Right. I need your name and address for the warning.”

Tommy handed over a black leather wallet and smiled. He watched intently as Officer Smith opened it. He could only imagine what Smith’s eyes looked like behind the sunglasses.

“Wha...what’s this?” Smith asked.

“You see, *that* is a *real* Parker City Police Department badge,” Tommy said leveling his gaze. “And you can see by my ID card that my name is *Detective* Thomas Mason. I know everyone in the PCPD. Who the hell are you?”

Before Smith could answer, Tommy raised his service revolver from beneath the edge of the window. The color drained from the imposter’s face. Tommy knew exactly what was about to happen, so he was fully prepared. As the fake cop dropped the badge wallet, Tommy flung open the driver’s side door, hitting Smith square in the hip. Losing his balance, Smith stumbled and fell to his knees. Tommy swung the door again, this time hitting him full-on in his side, sending him sprawling across the pavement. Before he could even think about getting up, still dazed from the unexpected blows, Tommy was standing over him with his foot firmly in the middle of his back.

“You, *dipshit*, are under arrest for impersonating a police officer and ruining my good mood.”