

Drop the bottle!

Scott ran his hand over his scalp. His skin was warm. He'd left his baseball cap in the car, imagining this task before him would take less than a minute. But based on the thin film of sweat forming on his bare head, he must have been standing in front of his boss's fancy house for closer to ten minutes.

How could ten minutes have passed?

He felt the heat from his head transfer to his palm as he looked down at the pool of liquid at his feet.

"Do not move!" The baritone voice, filtered through a speaker, was forceful and severe.

Scott started to turn.

"FREEZE."

He froze, his left hand in midair above his head. His right hand, holding the bottle of water, remained at his side. He'd heard a siren earlier and wondered what crime had been committed. But he now made the connection—the siren had been headed to where he was.

He waited.

He heard a car door open and slam, followed by another open and slam. Footsteps up the driveway. He didn't want to move his head, partly out of a fear of getting shot, but mostly because he was good at taking direction and had been told to freeze, although his eyes were peripherally scanning his environment.

In front of him was the large hand-carved door. Flanking the door were matching manicured

bushes in cobalt ceramic pots. Further to his right, by the side of the house, he caught sight of two men—gardeners based on their sweaty T-shirts, large-brimmed hats, and a leaf blower—peeking around and watching the action. They dipped back when he made eye contact with them. He scanned left and saw nothing but the white house and a large hydrangea bush that was blossoming blue. He'd read the color of the blossoms was based on the amount of aluminum in the soil. Useless information, as he doubted he was being taken down by a band of demanding horticulturists. He presumed the men behind him were cops, and this would be sorted out with a question or two.

One set of footsteps told him one person was approaching. Unless one cop was carrying the other cop. Scott almost laughed out loud at this image. The footsteps in the sand thing. "When you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you." He felt both comforted and irreverent, imagining one cop carrying the other.

"Drop the bottle!" The voice was still loud but no longer distorted, as the guy was now standing a few feet behind him.

Scott dropped the bottle and stood perfectly still as thoughts of reaching for his ID came and went. He'd let this guy tell him what to do. Better for everyone.

"Turn around slowly.

Scott did. The cop was shorter than Scott, but most people were, and in this instance, Scott tried to appear shorter by dropping his shoulders and softening his knees. The other cop walked up the drive and across the lawn to the side of the house where Scott had seen the gardeners.

"Name?" the cop said.

"Scott Mullan. Can I put my other hand down?"

“Yes. Slowly.”

He did. He needed to get out of the sun. Standing under the big Los Angeles October sky, he felt the heat intensifying and knew he’d have a pink scalp before long.

“I can explain.”

“Everyone thinks so. Do you have ID?”

“Yes.”

“Where is it?”

“In my wallet.” Scott tried to point with his eyes to his back pocket.

“Turn around.”

“I just did.”

“Now.” Stern. Humor, at this point, didn’t seem to be working. The guy was looking at Scott’s torso rather than his face, as if to catch any furtive movements, ready to fire at the largest mass.

Scott turned back around to face the front door. He felt a hand reach into the back pocket of his Dockers. As the wallet was pulled from his pants, he stared at the step to the front door and the pool of liquid that was starting to evaporate at its edges. He should have been on his way home, not derailed by this whole *Adam-12* misunderstanding.

His mind raced forward while his shoes remained rooted to the driveway. This was going to be hard to explain. Cop Two walked across the lawn and, noticing the liquid on the steps, stepped around it and approached the front door. He knocked. Scott knew no one was home, but it still made him nervous. Cop Two knocked again. Waited. And then, as if again trying to leave a pristine crime scene, he stepped around the liquid and headed down the driveway.

“Turn back around,” said Cop One, who was extracting Scott’s license from his wallet. As Cop Two walked past them, he gave a little nod. Cop One nodded back without looking up and handed off the license to Cop Two, who took it, glancing at it as he continued down the driveway. They had this down.

“You can see my card in there,” Scott said. “I work on *The Late Enough Show*. It’s a TV show. This is my boss’s house. Dylan Flynn.” The mention of Dylan Flynn usually got a reaction from kids, housewives, plumbers, bankers. Most people said, “I love him,” “He is so funny,” or “How tall *is* he?”

So far, this policeman did not seem impressed.

“You know—The Leprechaun?” Dylan was short and Irish and had reluctantly embraced the moniker early in his comedy career. Even if people didn’t watch the show, they knew “The Leprechaun.” But the invocation got no obvious sign of recognition from the cop who was questioning him.

“What are you doing here? Big party?”

Scott was encouraged by the sarcasm. He could have an exchange with this guy and be on his way. He exhaled for what felt like the first time since he’d been ordered to freeze.

“I work for him,” Scott said.

“You work here?”

Scott tried hard to see this man. Not just see a cop. Find something special. “Look for the Messiah,” as he’d read earlier. The cop had clear skin. Long eyelashes. Good posture. And a nice voice, despite the stern tone.

“You have a nice voice.”

“Well, that’s a new one.”

“I stopped by to give him something.”

“Right.” The cop sighed. “And what was it you were going to give him?”

Scott heard the truth in his head and how crazy he’d sound if he said it out loud: “I was here to pour water on his doorstep and say a prayer for his family.” Choosing to sound arrogant rather than crazy, he said, “An idea. For the show.” Better to fib, although it made him uncomfortable, than say what he was actually doing, which could, if it got out, imply Dylan was having family troubles. There had been rumors on TMZ about a Down syndrome child, but this was never confirmed.

“You guys don’t have email? On your fancy TV show?”

“Please. Call him. He’ll vouch for me.”

“What’s his number?”

“That’s convenient.”

“No, I don’t have it. Sasha always connects me. His assistant. Call the main number on the card. They can either connect you to him or they can vouch for me.” Scott realized it was Saturday and no one would be in the office. He could always give them Sasha’s cell phone number, if it came to that.

“And what do you do there?” Cop One said, sounding bored. Ready to wrap this up.

“I’m the head writer.” His face reddened as he realized he was not only lying but that this lie might get back to his boss. Maybe it was just wishful lying. “I mean, I’m *up* for head writer. I’m a writer. A comedy writer.”

“Do you have a phone?”

“Don’t you have a phone thing in your car?”

“Sir. Your phone, please.”

Scott moved his hand slowly to his other pocket and pulled out his phone.

“Password?”

“There isn’t one. Try Sasha Kurganov. Or Trudy Polk. Their cell numbers are in there.”

“Stay here.”

Cop One took the phone and wallet and walked halfway down the driveway as Cop Two was walking back up. They spoke in low sibilant tones. Scott was unable to make out the words but imagined something like, “This is nothing, but let’s look like we’re actually doing something. Then we’ll get lunch. What are you in the mood for?” Then he figured the other guy was saying, “Mexican. But first, let’s sweat this guy a little more.” Scott would play along to keep the peace and be on his way.

Cop Two went back down the drive, and Cop One remained where he was, writing things in his little flip book. Maybe things like “cheese burrito, nachos, horchata.”

Cop One came back up and handed Scott his wallet.

“We cool?” Scott said, feeling the flush of embarrassment on his face. He’d never used that phrase before in his life and wondered if, caught up in a police confrontation, he was now channeling some Elmore Leonard character. He felt a preliminary relief that he wasn’t someone who ever got into trouble, and for a moment his heart raced with a strange gratitude for the simple and relatively unencumbered life he had been given. Or had chosen. Or was living. He said a silent thank you to God and imagined himself hugging his teenagers when he got home. Maybe he’d stop for flowers for his wife. But then thought—no. She wasn’t the flowers type,

plus flowers for no reason would just beg the obvious question.

The cop looked at him. "Are we cool? No. We are not cool." Cop One explained he was unable to verify identity and Scott would have to come down to the station until they could reach either Mr. Flynn or his assistant.

"Let me get my water." If nothing else, Scott wanted them to know he did not condone littering.

"Leave the bottle, sir. It is part of the crime scene." And as if on cue, Cop Two walked past them and started with the whole yellow tape routine.

Scott gave one fleeting glance over his shoulder to the gardeners, who were back watching from the side of the house, cell phones in hand.

"Should I follow you? I'll need my license." He laughed, trying to indicate he took the law very seriously. That he would never think of driving without his license. He wanted to reach for his keys but knew this guy was jumpy about any furtive movements.

"Put out your hands, please." Cop One reached around to the back of his belt and pulled off the handcuffs.

"You're arresting me?"

"Until we can confirm what you say."

"You can't arrest me. I have to pick up a honey-baked ham."

"Oh, in that case we'll let you go."

"Really?"

"No."

"It's true, everyone is a comedian."

“Sir. I am not a comedian, and until we are able to verify your employment, neither are you.”

There was something illogical about this supposition that he wanted to pursue, but he figured he should let it go. He was facing a more pressing problem. An actual problem. He had never even seen handcuffs in real life and was having a hard time processing the fact that they were being closed around his own wrists.

“What am I being arrested for?”

“Violation of Penal Code 602. Trespassing and trespassing with intent to damage property.”

“Damage? You’re talking about the step? It’s water.”

“That’s something for CSU to determine.”

Cop One took Scott by the elbow and they walked down the driveway.

“I can’t believe this. I’m getting into the patrol car?”

“That’s how it works.”

“Are you going to do that whole protecting my head thing?”

No response.

“Who did you try calling? I can give you more numbers. Please.”

“We can sort it out at the station.”

Cop One maneuvered Scott into the patrol car, which included putting a hand on his head.

“Ow.”

“Now you’re crying police brutality?”

“No. Sorry. Sunburn.”