

Interrogation: Seeds

*A Max Toom Story*

by David Cirillo

Case #1421, September 9<sup>th</sup>

Incident: Public Urination

Prepared By: Detective Max Toom

Reviewed By: Officer Mary Marks, Dispatcher

Attending: Officer Travis McKinney

I was heading home after work, it was around 9:00 p.m, and to be clear, there was no 911 call. I just happened to drive past.

At first I thought she was filling her car tire with air, but I didn't see a compressor. I slowed, thinking maybe she had a flat and needed assistance. When I got closer to the young gal, I saw a few things I shouldn't have. She had her skirt hiked up and a puddle was forming by the car's right, front tire and gathering around her shoes. I understood the situation, and believe me, I wanted to keep driving, but duty called.

I asked her name: It was Tina Brothers. I told her I wasn't too interested in why she chose that spot to pee, but I'd have to give her a ticket. Public urination was against city ordinances, not to mention it was gross. She showed me her middle finger, followed by a few choice words. I asked her to calm herself, and she threatened to aim her next stream in my direction. I had no choice; I brought her in and set her up in Interrogation Room #1. (I chose #1 to keep it thematically accurate—Mary Marks, I hope you appreciate my joke.)

Tina sat at the table while Officer McKinney and myself kept watch behind the one-way glass. She didn't seem to be drunk, nor did she seem dangerous.

"She was just blowin' off some steam I bet," McKinney said.

"She threatened to pee on me."

"In some cultures that's a compliment."

"And what cultures would that be?"

McKinney smiled and shrugged.

I said, "I'll go talk to her."

"You might want to bring a roll of toilet paper with ya, just in case."

She had her hands buried in her face, her chestnut hair falling over her hands. She

wore a black skirt and a black exercise shirt; she seemed determined to blend into the night. Can't say I blame her doing what she was doing.

"I'm Officer Toom, in case you forgot," I said. I stayed near the door; she rubbed her face viciously, like she was sanding wood. When she finally looked over, she might have been the girl from *The Ring*. "Yikes," I said. "You're a mess. I don't know your family, but you might also be a disgrace. Public urination is not a badge of honor."

"My family might agree with you. Today wasn't my best day."

"I'm happy to hear that," I answered. "Can you tell me what was going on out there?"

"It's pretty simple," she said. "I was peeing on my ex-boyfriend's car."

I cracked a smile, but I knew I shouldn't have. Tina noticed, and her posture relaxed a little. She probably assumed a laughing cop was a good one; from experience, I know that's not always true.

"As I said, public urination is against the law, but I was also a little concerned that you threatened me. Threatening a cop is a little more serious. A teensy bit."

She looked about eighteen, but these days, I couldn't tell. If she said fourteen, I'd buy it; if she was twenty-four, I wouldn't gasp.

"I didn't mean to do that," Tina said. "I mean, I meant to lash out, but I didn't mean to threaten you. I wouldn't have peed on you. I'm sorry."

"Apology accepted."

She leaned back in the cold, metal chair. "So now what? You gonna arrest me?"

"Haven't decided. If you can answer one question for me, and do it well, I can see letting you off."

"What question?"

"Why were you doing that, peeing on your ex's car? I get it, he's an ex, he's probably a real dirtbag and broke up with you. But I'm a deeper kind of cop. I want the more complex explanation."

She laughed, "No offense, but you couldn't handle my level of complex. It's downright crazy."

*Older. She's definitely older. She has poise, self-assurance. She knows a little about herself.*

"Regardless, I'd still like to hear what you have to say," I answered.

She pushed aside some of the smeared mascara, though a few tears still worked down her face. It was a pretty face, not hard to see even through smudged make-up. She took a few deep breaths, readying herself.

"It's been a bad run with the boys," she started. "I'm going to keep it simple and refer to all exes as Jim. So Jim #1 broke up with me a few years ago because I'm Catholic. We

hadn't been together that long, but when he ended it, he said, 'I don't like girls who pray.' It was a little jarring to be told such a thing, and even if I'm better off without Jim #1, it was the start of my losing streak."

"I might call that a win, but I understand what you mean. Dumped is dumped, right?"

"Exactly. So then there's Jim #2, the cheater. It seems I don't have to explain anything more about that, but again, ending a relationship in such a way is jarring."

"You've had some bad luck with the guys, I'll admit it."

I smiled to show I empathized; she returned a half-hearted smirk. I'd seen that look from my girlfriend, Quinn, and it often meant we were about to argue. From Tina, I assumed it meant this: I don't need your sympathy or empathy, copper. I understood.

"Then there's Jim #3, the current Jim."

"The Jim of the urinated car."

"Yes."

She paused, adjusted her shirt, sat up straight. I decided to get closer so she would notice I listened and cared. I stepped over, grabbed my chair, and pulled in under me. I kept my distance, but I was sure I appeared more attentive and interested.

"I guess it's not the saddest story ever told, but it was just one of those things. He came into my life shortly before my grandma died, and you can't imagine what he did. Listened, brought me food, even visited Grandma in the hospital. At the funeral, I probably would have melted down a dozen times if Jim #3 wasn't there to hold me up."

I nodded. A good detective knows when to talk and when to pipe down.

"He was good to me for the next seven months, and who knows, maybe we fell in love. Hard to say when love is found, and maybe with Jim #3 what we had was codependency. Or maybe I equated not being alone to being in love. Whatever, I told everyone, it was a good seven months."

"Then it turned," I said.

She nodded.

"I caught him with another woman, but it's not what you think. They weren't in bed or anything like that."

"What did you catch them doing?"

"Talking. I know, it doesn't sound so bad. Boyfriends can talk without the girlfriend listening in, it's legal."

"I can attest to that. No such laws prevent it."

Again I got a wry smirk.

“It was one of those freak things, that’s how I found out. I got off work early and headed to his place—I walked since it was only about a mile and I wanted a little exercise. So when I was a block away, I heard his voice; he was talking to someone. Then I heard a female voice respond. He was in a nook near the community center not far from his house. It seemed an odd place to talk, so I hung back and listened.”

I didn’t know what was to come, but Tina’s face gave it away.

“My name came up. I heard him say phrases like ‘it’s not serious’ and ‘she’s a bit of a drain.’ Of course my heart fell, and I wanted to jump into the open and accuse him but I didn’t. Then the female voice asked how we met, and he started laughing. ‘Basically a funeral, her grandma’s.’ The woman laughed. He said I was having a hard time, and he was there as a friend to support me. He then said, ‘She latched on like some river leech. I mean, I felt trapped, but I felt so sad for her, I gave it a chance. I did. But she’s really messed up. An emotional drain. She has only one mode: cry mode. I mean, I’m a sensitive guy, but a relationship can’t be all tears, you know?’ The woman knew. She told Jimmy #3 how sweet he was, how he went beyond what was expected. He was a regular peach, that’s what he was!”

It had been building, and with this final exclamation, the dam of tears broke. I know I shouldn’t have done what I did, but then again, why not? I’m a cop. I get paid to keep the peace, and sometimes peace has different shapes and sizes. So I sat next to her, pulled her to my shoulder, and let her cry. It lasted a while, and through it all, a few short phrases slipped out. ‘Six months wasted.’ ‘How do I always pick losers?’ It was mostly tears, though, and she soaked my shirt, and when she felt a bit better, she pulled away.

“I suppose you think I’m latching onto you, huh? Using my emotions to trap you. There’s more to relationships than tears, am I right?”

She laughed, but I didn’t.

I said to her, “Some men are cowards. It’s just a fact. I wish I could change that but I can’t.”

She wiped her eyes with her sleeve.

“I shouldn’t have peed on his car,” she said. “But after what he did, it seemed tame.”

“I need to ask you a question. Will you answer it?”

“Probably.”

“Why choose that revenge? Why not take a bat to the windows or knife to the tires? What you did is a rather passive revenge. Mind you, I’m a cop, and I’m not encouraging more aggressive behaviors. But why do what you did?”

Her answer amused me. “Why does a moth fly to a candle? Why does a bee return to the hive? It’s what they do; it’s in their nature.”

I couldn't help myself, I laughed; her laughter followed.

"That's as good an answer as any," I said.

"So what's next?" she asked. She was feeling better. "Are you going to hold me in jail overnight?"

I knew I had a variety of responses here. Let her go. Give her a ticket despite the sad tale. Perhaps pay her boyfriend a visit and give him a little scare. All viable.

But I used to do prison ministry, and I still do it when I can find time. I thought another direction might have more lasting results. Did I know if it would? Nope. But sometimes a farmer plants a seed in a field, not knowing if the seed will bear fruit or not. Sometimes it grows, sometimes it doesn't. The important thing is, the farmer planted the seed.

"No jail," I said. "Something much worse."

Her face got nervous.

"Tina, is it easier for a person to forgive or be forgiven?"

She didn't answer, but I said, "Please answer. It's not a trick question."

"I don't know. I'd say forgive because you don't have control over the person forgiving you."

"Exactly," Toom said. "So will you forgive Jim #3? You don't have to forget, and you don't have to tell him he's pardoned. But in your heart, will you forgive him? If you say yes, I will forgive your act of public desecration, if not, I will give you a \$200 ticket."

"Forgive him? You want me to forgive that piece of garbage?"

"It's not what I want that matters, it matters what you tell me. If you say you'll forgive him, we have a deal."

She smiled and said, "Yes, Detective, I'll forgive him, why the hell not?"

"Then you're free to go."

She thanked me, wiped away the last tears, and went to the door. Before she left, she rushed back and threw her arms around my neck. "Thank you for arresting me, Detective Toom. It's the best arrest a girl could ask for."

She left, and honestly, I don't know if she really forgave Jim #3, but I didn't need to know, after all, I'm just a humble farmer.