

# The Police Car Sped Past Him

The police car sped past him with lights flashing and he started to follow it. Through the town it went, down the High Street, and into the country lanes beyond. At last he came to where the collision had taken place and his jaw dropped and his eyes shone with cunning as he took in the situation. "Gotcha" he exclaimed under his breath, "I'll get you yet." Quickly finding a side track that nobody seemed to have discovered yet he drove down and parked before returning to the scene of the accident and considering how he could turn this to his advantage. He recognised the driver of the 4x4, oh yes, he recognised him, and the woman with him, and in his mind he re-ran the scenario of their connection.

After work one day he had gone to call on his girlfriend Annie in response to a tearful request from her. It must be bad, he thought, to ask him to come round now, when she should have been on her shift at the restaurant in town but maybe she's got off early and changed her mind about what to do that evening. As soon as she opened the door, though, Joe could see that something was wrong. His usually bright and bubbly friend looked shaken, and it was obvious that she had been crying.

"What's the matter, sweetheart," Joe asked in concern, putting his arm round her and guiding her into the kitchen, where he sat her down before putting the kettle on for a cup of coffee.

"It's that dreadful Rory, the manager," said Annie, her voice wobbling with tears. "I know I'm maybe not the best waitress in the world but I do my best only he's always picking on little things and making me nervous. He was in the Army, you know, and he treats us like his 'men', always shouting at us for the least little thing."

"So why do you stay there?" queried Joe.

"Well, apart from him it's a great bunch of people. There's a great camaraderie between us and the customers are nice people too."

"So, what did you do today that was so dreadful," pursued Joe.

"Oh, I dropped some plates and of course they broke, with food all over the floor, and he just lost it. 'Off you go, then, Annie' he said, 'and don't bother asking for a reference'. That means I won't get

anything else waitressing because all the places are full of people filling the time in these summer hols before they go off to Uni in September.” and Annie broke into fresh tears.

To cheer Annie up they then spent some time discussing ways they could get even with Rory. Some were outlandish, but had the effect of making Annie giggle and cheer up a bit, and eventually Joe came up with a plan. He was a stringer for the local paper in his spare time, while he was studying journalism, and fancied himself as an amateur sleuth, so his plan was to tail him and see if he could find out if he was doing something disreputable.

“You’ll have to let me know something about his movements: what times he leaves the café, if he goes out anywhere particular, where he parks his car – that sort of thing.

“Can we do that,” asked Annie.

“Well, I’ll give it a go,” said Joe firmly. “I shall carry out some stake-outs. You could even come with me some time, if you liked.”

Supplied with the necessary information Joe was following Rory on one of his outings, this time to a country park some way outside the town. Armed with nothing more advanced than his trusty point-and-shoot camera he kept a respectable distance until he saw him approaching a woman sitting alone on a bench. Quickly he moved behind the trunk of a sturdy pine tree and got his camera ready for action. After furtively looking round Rory kissed the woman quickly and they embraced for a little while longer but when it sounded as though other people were approaching they both moved apart to look like casual acquaintances.

Having got what he thought was enough evidence to blackmail him Joe turned to leave but his foot slipped and at the rustle of leaves that this caused Rory was up on his feet.

“Hey,” he shouted. “You there. What’s going on?” and he strode across the path to confront Joe but with his youth and daily gym practice he quickly outran the heavier Rory and was soon on his way into town to get the pictures developed.

Later that afternoon Rory was surprised to learn that a journalist from the local paper was keen to get his response to an article that he was planning to write about him. He thought of himself as rather a

prominent figure in the neighbourhood and was pleased to think that his restaurant would get the recognition it deserved.

Joe walked into the study and seated himself, smiling pleasantly. Rory sat down at his desk and turned to give him his best attention.

“How can I help you, Mr .... Sargeant?” he enquired, looking at the card Joe had had printed specially.

Joe eased himself back in his chair and crossed his legs with his ankle over his knee. He tried to look nonchalant. “Well,” he said “You know the series that the paper runs – ‘What Happens Next?’”

Rory looked mystified, and a bit impatient – he couldn’t see how this related to the picture he’d had in his mind of being hailed as the town’s super chef - and shook his head.

“Ah, well,” Joe began amiably. It is a little puzzle that we run each week – a bit of a reader grabber. We publish part of a picture and the readers have to guess what happens next. It’s a bit like ‘spot the ball’. We give a small prize to anyone who guesses accurately. “Now,” he continued in a sharper tone. “I decided to conduct my own little version of this. Perhaps you will look at these, please,” and he placed an envelope on the desk in front of him before fanning out the photographs that she took from it with a theatrical flourish. “I’m sure the readers will be only too keen to submit ideas for ‘What happens next’”.

Rory was initially bemused, then furious, as he stared at the selection of prints that Joe spread out on the desk. Then he looked up at Joe and sneered “Piffle. Absolute rubbish. The lady was an old friend and absolutely nothing to get excited about. You can send them to my wife: I don’t care” and he tore the pictures up and threw them down in front of Joe. He sat back with his arms crossed and stared him down and Joe was obliged to slink down the stairs and explain to Annie his failure to move Rory. He felt very bad about having let Annie down but he was against someone stronger than he was.

Joe tried to push this to the back of his mind as he now pursued the Police car along the high street and beyond the town into the countryside. Eventually he came to where the road had been cordoned off because of the accident and to his surprise he identified Rory’s car that had been involved in the collision and that Rory and the woman in the photos were standing at the side of the road, with his arm round her. The car looked to be a write-off and the hatchback had been forced up by the collision, with the contents strewn round the road and now blowing across to the pavement.

What a piece of luck! Joe managed to park down a track that ran off the road and hurried back to the scene to take as many photos of the couple as he could. And then, right in front of him the icing on the cake - an itinerary from a travel company for a 'Mr and Mrs' .... Followed by a fictitious name.

A couple of days later the receptionist at the restaurant phoned once more up to Rory's office announcing a visitor would like to see him and Joe was directed upstairs. Rory's face was mocking as Joe came in and sat down uninvited in the chair in front of Rory's desk. But he lost his sneer as he realised the amount of evidence Joe had and his expression was now stonily impassive.

"Perhaps you would like to reconsider your treatment of my friend," said Joe, leaning back in the chair and casually crossing his legs.

Rory leaned to the side and opened the bottom drawer of his desk, before sliding his hand inside. Joe's throat went dry, and his legs turned to jelly, as he thought of the rumours that had gone around about Rory and the damage that he could do with the butt of a pistol but five minutes later he was staggering down the stairs, giddy with relief at having got out of there unscathed.

"Here you are, love," he said to Annie later, passing her an envelope, as he walked into the hall and took off his jacket. "From Rory."

Mystified she opened the envelope then squealed with delight.

"He says he forgot to give you your severance pay," explained Joe. "I think that more than makes up for you not having to work at his poxy restaurant for the rest of the summer, doesn't it?" and Annie threw her arms around his neck and was only too delighted to show him how very pleased she was with the outcome.

In his office Rory looked at the contents of the bottom drawer. He admired Joe's gumption but thought that his girlfriend didn't deserve him. He had had fun having a fling with her while she worked at the restaurant but realised that he should have thrown her over with more delicacy once he had become enmeshed with the glamorous and elegant Magda. The money he had given Joe salved his conscience, and if there were to be any further trouble he had ways of seeing that they would soon be countered so he gazed once more at the assortment of guns, razors and knuckledusters residing in the drawer, closed it firmly and picked up the phone to order more stock for the restaurant.