

Richard Gilzean

Officers Fall

Centennial Avenue. Parking violation. Car blocking driveway. Citation issued. North Shore Towing notified

Norton Street. Public disturbance. Noisy juveniles on 440 inbound bus. Suspects flee before officers arrive.

Sixth Street. Barking dog complaint. Attempts to shush dog unsuccessful. Citation left in owner's mailbox. Dog pound notified.

Harvest Avenue. Suspicious odour. Homeowner returning from extended trip reports a bad odour – a gas leak or 'the smell of death'. Officers investigate. Odour ascertained to be emanating from a neighbour's frangipani tree in unseasonal bloom. 'The smell of life,' Officer [Badge #64720] ponders aloud. Officers nod. Homeowner rolls eyes, nods politely.

Fairview Avenue. Shady Glen Retirement Apartments. Loud noise complaint. 'What kind of noise?' officers ask. Complainant simply says it was 'a loud report'. 'A gunshot?' officers query. 'A scream? Explosion? What?' Complainant becomes adamant, shakes walnut cane in fisted hand: 'It was a loud report!' Officers mutter, reach for batons, then relent. Officers report report.

89 Allen Street. Public disturbance. Clean-Azza-Whistle Cleaners. Two women in fist fight over snakeskin vest. Each declares ownership of claim ticket found on the floor by officers. In an inspired Solomonic moment. Officer [Badge #64720] waves a pair of tailor's shears and proposes cutting the vest in half. Approaching the contested garment, he slips its coveted skins between the forged blades. And thus is the true mother revealed!

Jersey Road. Vandalism. Side of the Willoughby 1<sup>st</sup> Scouts Hall defaced. Spray paint depicts congress between a male and a female, a panoramic mural of heterosexual coupling that spans the entire length of the wall, its every detail rendered with a high degree of clinical accuracy. Officers gape. Minutes pass in slack-jawed silence, until officer [Badge #64720] ascertains incipient hard-on. Officer horrified, desperately reroutes train of thought, briskly repositions baton. Second officer (Badge #34633) takes down the report, feigns unawareness of her partner's tumescent plight, ponders the small blessings of womanhood. Vandalism reported to Parks and Recreation Maintenance.

33 Day Street. Canine-litter violation. Homeowner complains of faeces on the front lawn. Officers investigate, reconnoitre on foot. They walk abreast, eyes askint and arms akimbo, their hands at rest among the ordinance of their utility belts: radio receiver, Taser, ammo pouch, handcuffs, keys and whistles. Officers jingle like Santas. Their shoulders and hips move with the easy dip and roll of Classic Cop Swagger. 'That business back there,' she says, 'with the snakeskin vest?' He grunts in acknowledgement, scanning the scene for untoward canine activity. 'I-I liked that.' Her voice is hoarse, throaty, tentative, as he's never heard before. He nods, purses lips, nods some more. She nervously fingers the butt of her service revolver. He deftly repositions his baton. A high colour passes from steely countenance to the other. Officers blush. Mid-swagger, elbows graze. And within that scant touch, the zap of a thousand Tasers. Up ahead, another steaming pile, whereupon the turd trail turns cold. Officers terminate search, notify dog pound.

Robin Head Road. Tall Ships Estate. Criminal trespass. One-armed solicitor selling magazine subscriptions in gated community. Forty six year old suspect is embarrassed, despondent, angry, blames his bad luck on television, on fast food, on 'the fucking internet'. Officers suggest cutting fast food some slack, then issue warning, escort suspect to the main gate, and buy subscription to *Men's Health* and *Better Homes and Gardens*.

2 Clearvale Street. Possible illegal entry. Complainant 'senses a presence' upon returning home from yoga class. Officers investigate; ascertain opportunity to practice Cop Swagger, to shake things up a bit. Officer [Badge #34633] pulls shoulders back, adds two centimetres to height. Officer [Badge #64720] sucks gut in, pulls oblique muscle. Search of premises yields nothing. 'That's okay,' complainant says. 'It's gone now.' Officers mutter, blame yoga.

Robin Head Road. Tall Ships Estate. Criminal trespass and public disturbance. One-armed magazine salesman kicking doors and threatening residents. Scuffle ensues. Officers sit on suspect, call for backup, ponder cop koan: how do you cuff a one-armed man?

Victoria Park. Illegal assembly. Demonstrators blocking access to university, refuse order to disperse. All available officers dispatched for crowd control. Officers gathered at staging area, briefed on use-of-force policy, on arrest and intake procedures, then sicked on the long hairs. Officers pumped, fired up, ready to rumble. Hand to hand manoeuvres seemingly long forgotten – arm locks and choke holds, the supple choreography of baton work – all return facilely to muscle memory. Officer [Badge 34633] musses hair laying into bulky demonstrator. A scrawny hank slips loose, nestles against her right cheek, framing the side of her face like an open parenthesis. A semaphore of possibilities, officer [Badge #64720] muses, spotting her while bashing his demonstrator. Amid the tussle and the heat of arrest and intake, she looks up, seeks him out, and finds him. She smiles, waves shyly. From across the tactical field, he smiles, waves back, sticks out his tongue. She is suddenly overcome, startled at how the sight of him affects her. It is not just love, nor desire, but something profoundly less complex, as unadorned and simple as the Motor Traffic Act. Officer laughs, cries. Tearful and giddy, she restrains her demonstrator with joy in her heart. Demonstrators cuffed, booked, loaded into paddy wagons. Assembly dispersed. Scene secured. Officers spent, pink and damp in the afterglow of crowd control. Cop camaraderie ensues. Shirt tails tucked, batons wiped down, cigarettes shared. Backs and butts slapped all around.

Pacific Street. Officers go to reserve, park at the water's edge. Officers dead-tired, reposed. They do not speak. They sip their double shot lattes, ponder view. A gash in the bruise-coloured sky bleeds yellow. Sunshine leeks into the ocean, stains the surface with shimmering light. He looks over at her, notices a discolouration, a swelling on her left cheek bone. His hand reaches out, touch her. 'You're hurt,' he says. She smiles, whispers, 'You should see the other guy.' They screw their eyes against the jagged harshness of an unpolarised world, slips glasses back on. His hands reach for hers; their fingers clasp and enmesh. He reaches for her. She leans towards him; it is like falling. Officers fall. Afterward, they linger over their coffee. Officers watch a ball of sunlight flare up at earth's edge like a direct hit. Officers assess scene, ascertain world to be beautiful.