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Cop For A Night

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It was the first Friday of the semester, and as the rest of my fellow students got ready to go to the bar, I got ready to go to work. At 11 p.m. sharp, I walked into the Ames Police Station, spent a few minutes figuring out which car went with whom, and then I was off for a night of patrolling. My partner for the night would be Derek Grooters, a regular at patrolling the Campustown neighborhood. Although I probably didn't look very intimidating in my khaki coat and jeans, I was ready to put on my toughest face as we locked up drunk drivers, broke up fights, and busted underage drinkers.

We headed down Lincoln Way, up Welch, left on Chamberlain, right on Stanton. We were getting a feel for where our problem areas may be tonight. People are already stumbling in front of the car on their way across the street - until they realize they have run in front of a cop car, and suddenly they're able to walk a little bit straighter.

11:18 p.m. and we get our first call. A female voice comes over our radio: Two males dressed in army fatigues are on the doorstep of Pi Kappa Phi and are refusing to leave. Caller thinks they are...
drug dealers. Fortunately my partner is a skilled driver and knows the area well. Some quick maneuvering gets us to the scene in less than a minute. One female and three males, two of whom are dressed in fatigues, are still on the sidewalk outside the house. I look around for our backup and get ready to search ‘em, bag ‘em, and book ‘em Cop’s style. But five minutes later, we’re back in the car, no arrests made, not even a ticket issued.

Grooters, being a cop of more experience than I, fills me in on the situation. They were all underage and obviously drinking, but they were willing to leave cooperatively, and all of their records checked out OK. I learn my first lesson of the night: it’s all about how you respond to authority. Everyone on Welch is drinking tonight, many are underage, and there’s no time to take them all in. If they’re nice and cooperative, most likely we will be, too. We don’t shake hands before leaving, however, even though frequently people extend their hands to us. It’s not to be rude: it’s putting safety first. In that situation, you never know what someone might be hiding up their sleeve, literally.

11:29 p.m. and we’re called to Todd Drive for a DPN&Q (Disturbing the Peace). Caller says partying has moved into the hallway of the apartment building, but thinks it started in apartment 102. As we pull up, we see about twenty people walking away already - another car arrived just before us. We’re just going to tell everyone to go home, and if they comply, they’ll probably avoid the $150 ticket. The other officer is upstairs talking with the residents of another apartment, so we stay downstairs and literally follow the garbage to apartment 102. A quick knock on the door is met with no reply. “Open up! Ames Police!” Still nothing. We listen carefully to what’s happening behind the locked door. There’s probably five to ten people left inside, and they can be heard scurrying around cleaning up. The knocking continues, and quickly turns to pounding, then kicking. The whole apartment building is shaking with the force that the door is enduring, but the door still doesn’t open.

Two residents from upstairs curiously follow Ian Lawler, the other cop, downstairs. The two guys yell to their
friends inside, “Open up the door, things are only going to get worse.” Still no reply. So they start to call people that they know are inside, explaining the situation. They hand the phones to Grooters and Lawler, who try to talk the same sense into them. We are going to call your landlord if you don’t open the door, and then you will get evicted, because you are currently in violation of your lease. The tenants don’t believe that they will get evicted. Those of us in the hall are left to look around at each other in bewilderment. Who are these idiots inside who think they can disobey the police and not suffer the consequences? Lawler decides it’s time to issue arrest warrants for the tenants, the first time it would ever be done. He gets back on the phone with a resident, explaining that he will be arrested if he doesn’t open the door in the next twenty seconds. The resident wants to know what he is being arrested for. Lawler tries to explain that there is no arrest warrant yet, but there will be if he doesn’t open the door. The resident still wants to know why he is being arrested. Is this guy really this trashed, or just a complete idiot? Probably both. The door still doesn’t open.

It’s outside the apartment that I finally prove myself useful. While Lawler patrols the door, Grooters checks out the windows, finding that one occupant is in his bedroom and they can talk through the window. After hopeing he may have gotten through, he looks to me where I stand in the doorway. “Are they coming out yet?” “No. But they’re getting louder in the living room.” Thank goodness I was there to fill him in on the important details.

Frustration moves to amusement as we try to figure out how to handle the situation inside. They have seriously wasted our time tonight, time we should have been on the street ready to help more serious problems than a house party. After about 45 minutes, Grooters gets the one tenant to open the door. We file in, surprised to find there are probably 30 people who have been sitting on the living room floor in the dark. The room is hot and smelly, and we are ready to leave. ID’s are collected, names are written down, and the Lawler explains that originally no one was going to be in trouble. Now, however, the tenant who would not cooperate is going to be arrested, in addition to being served a large fine. Everyone was sent home, and our defiant party host was put into the back of Lawler’s car. What a waste of our night, but it sure did feel good to finally arrest someone. I couldn’t believe they didn’t want to arrest more, but I was finally starting to understand what their real
mission was with students— to diffuse the situation. This in mind, we headed back to campus to patrol the area on foot.

While I’m sure I looked impressive, my partner was the one who really got the attention. Straight in the door at the bar, no line, no ID checks. Those waiting were quick to object about why I got to enter with such ease. Who was I to get a police escort? Patience, kids, patience. The doorman at Es Tas got strict about ID’s for the first time in his career when I walked in, because he didn’t believe that I was actually an officer. I’m undercover, okay? My excuses were not sufficient, but my two officer “friends” were quick to put him in his place. We enter Sips, Paddy’s and Mickey’s for a quick run through, are greeted with cheers, hugs, and “amusing” stories. And, no, we don’t pose for photos. Who do you think we are?

In Element, we pause for a minute to observe the dancing from the upper level. “Is that what you call dancing?” Grooters jokes. “Only when you’re at Element,” I’m fast to reply. We were really beginning to bond as partners.

We meet mixed reactions on Welch, some cheer or make jokes, others quickly turn when they realize they’re about to pass the officer who arrested them last week (they’re right to turn, Grooters not only recognizes their face, but he knows their full name. It’s all about knowing people.) And then there’s the group of guys who taunt us from the top of Legacy tower. There’s always a tough guy when he’s seven floors high, right?

12:58 a.m. and we are radioed by a nearby officer to pull the ID of a guy in line for a superdog. He’s wearing a t-shirt, sweats, and slippers. As we check his ID, the other officer arrives and administers a quick field sobriety test. His friends protest to us, wanting to know what’s going on. He’s quickly cuffed and taken away, appropriately dressed in his pajamas for his sleepover in the slammer. His friends catch up to us again as we walk away.

“He called that cop a cocksucker over on Stanton,” Grooters informs them. His friends realize they are defeated, “I guess that’ll do it.” That’s right that’ll do it.

1:30 a.m. and we try to distract ourselves from the cold by watching the drunken antics of those spilling out of the bars. We laugh as one guy takes a fall in the middle of the crosswalk, but two minutes later when we hear a crash across the street, we take off running after the same guy who just fell over a short fence. He’s drunk with no friends to help him home, so he willingly is loaded up to go sleep off a couple too many shots in the drunk tank.

As Campustown began to fade, so did my energy level. While my partner had made a caffeine stop to help him through until our 7 a.m. shift ended, I had been going on adrenaline alone. I convinced myself that Grooters would probably survive the night without my backup for protection, so I headed home early. It had been an exciting night, and although we hadn’t made any donut stops, Grooters still had four hours to go.