

## Too Little...Too Late

by Jeanne Gulbranson

“Hey, I don’t have anything against little people...or dwarfs or midgets, or whatever we’re supposed to call them. Yeah, I think it’s ‘little people’...yeah, that’s it. I just never saw one before! You guys know...I’ve been working this county for five years. I mean, where the hell did he come from—maybe he moved down from St. Louis? Shit, I don’t know...but I’m telling you, I never saw one of those around here before—I thought I was hallucinating! I swear to god, that guy didn’t look any taller than this table—I thought it was a kid at first—but not when I saw that full beard! Jesus!”

Dark sweat stains were widening on Trooper Trotter’s shirt as he tried to continue with his report of what had taken place just an hour before. The whole time that Trotter had been talking, one of his fellow Highway Patrolmen was typing furiously, trying to keep up with the words that were spewing out of Trotter like beer from a spigot.

Lieutenant Barton tried to calm Trotter down. “Okay, okay...just take it easy. Just go back to the facts. You’re okay. Just tell us what happened.” Trotter leaned back in his chair, wiped his forehead, and took a long, deep breath. The other three troopers in the interview room hadn’t said a word since they’d all sat down together; they hadn’t even shifted in their seats. Leaning forward on the table, they were anxious to hear how this whole thing had gone down. It was pretty common knowledge that Trotter was a loose cannon sometimes, but still—he was one of their own, and this was really not good.

“So, like I was saying,” Trotter continued, “after I’d clocked that beat-up, ‘73 Pinto doing 67 in the 35 curve right before Shepherd’s Creek, of course, I pulled him over. And this...little person jumped out of the car right away. And I mean, he really had to jump—even in a Pinto it

was long ways down for him! I wasn't even out of my car yet and he's coming at me fast with this funny, side-to-side walk—like a duck, you know?—so right away, I unsnapped my holster and hollered at him to stop. I didn't know what the hell was going on. I got out quick and told him to back away and hold still, and he did—but his mouth was just going off! I never even got a word in the whole time—he wouldn't stop ratchet-jawing!" Trotter stopped talking for a few seconds and looked around the room. "You know—you really need to hear all of this. I think we should play the recorder back, so you don't miss anything," Trotter suggested.

"Damn good thing that little person and me were standing so close to my recorder," Trotter thought to himself. "I'd never be able to remember all that shit!"

The Lieutenant reached across the table to push Play on the recorder they'd removed from Trotter's patrol car, and he turned the volume all the way up. One of the other troopers got up and shut off the noisy, loose fan in the room. They really wanted to hear this. At first, they couldn't understand the little person's words, but in just a few seconds he got in range of the recorder, and his words came through loud and clear.

"...pulled me over, 'cause I know I was goin' a little too fast, but, shit—I have to get to Walmart! You'd better get over there too! Except we're probably both going to miss it now because you stopped me! Walmart's got Fry Daddy's on sale for 15 bucks! I don't mean those worthless little Junior things that you can't even squeeze two pieces of fish in—I mean a big-ass Fry Daddy that you can fry up like a whole chicken at one time! Fifteen bucks! Hell, those things go for 29 dollars, regular—sometimes more, like at Christmas when the goddamn stores raise their prices just to stick it to people! I was even going to get my worthless sister, Irene, one. Just 'cause I live with her, she ain't touchin' mine! Hell, I probably won't get her one, 'cause she's such a worthless bitch. At least I thought about buyin' it for her—that's the kind of

nice guy I am—always have been too nice for my own damn good. Yeah, and what does it get me! Pulled over by a cop just because I'm tryin' to get in on a good deal! By the time I get there, I won't have to worry about getting' her one or not—they're probably going to be out of 'em. You know how they pull those things on people. Yeah, big ads about something, but then you bust your ass to get there and find out they only had like three of them! I don't know—maybe I'll get her one and maybe I won't. Hell, I'll figure that out when I get there—if I ever get there now! I sure as hell don't want her or her three, snot-nosed brats touching my stuff. Hell, who even knows where those kids came from? With all the guys comin' and goin' all the time—you can't figure out who's who around there! Now there's that new one that's just moved right in, actin' like he owns the goddamn place—like we had enough room for somebody else in the trailer! That asshole is the reason I'm late getting to Walmart anyway—damn paper's been out for hours. But, every shittin' day he gets to it first and then throws it on top of the refrigerator and hollers out, 'Come on, Tiny Tim. See if you can get it down.' Damn right I can...I got that bat that I use to reach up and drag the paper right down. Half the damn time, it falls all over me and the asshole starts singing this song he made up—like he's auditioning for *American Idol* or something. 'Tiny Tim got buried. Tiny Tim got buried.' Buried, my ass. One of these days, I'm going to use the bat on him and then we'll see who gets buried! Shit—I've about had it with that Tiny Tim crap out of him. I mean, what the hell kind of parents would name me Tim anyway? They were askin' for everybody to call me Tiny Tim. My ma said they didn't know I was going to be this size when I was born, but she's a damn liar. Always has been. How didn't they know? I had stubby arms and legs and this huge head! My aunt told me they sewed on my ma's twat for about an hour after I came out. So they knew...and they named me Tim anyway! Shit. My ma said that's why my dad left when I was two years old. He didn't

even believe I was his—said no cop could have a little piece of nothing, like I was. Oh, yeah, he was a tough guy all right—just like the rest of you cops—always picking on people smaller than you—always takin’ advantage—figuring I’m not worth shit just because I’m little—kicking me around—picking me up like a sack and throwing me to your other big cop buddies like a baseball—calling me names and thumping me on the head and pulling me over just because I’m driving a little fast to get to Walmart! You think I can’t defend myself?”

There were a few seconds of silence on the recorder before they heard Trotter’s deep voice hollering, “Hey, get up! What are you doing?! Jesus Christ! Get off me! Quit biting my ankles! You little piece of shit! That hurts! Stop it!” Trotter’s painful yells were followed by the unmistakable sound of a gunshot, and then Trotter’s murmur of “Son of a bitch!”

Lieutenant Barton hit the Stop button, and all of them—Barton, Trotter, the other troopers—sat quietly, looking back and forth from one to the other.

“I didn’t have a choice. You can see I had to fire,” Trotter said. “The little son of a bitch was going to eat me alive!”

Lieutenant Barton said, “Well, I think we’re done here. It was obviously self-defense. You had no other option.” The other troopers nodded slowly as they shook hands with Trotter. “Good job, man.” “Glad you made it through.” “Hell of a tough deal for you—make sure you take some time off—you’ve earned it!”