



THE MARGARET ATWOODS

Margaret Atwood had been arrested before. But he had never been arrested by a police officer named Margaret Atwood.

Desk Sergeant stopped by Margaret's cube. "Atwood," he said. "You fucked up your arrest report. You typed your name on the perp's line."

"No, Sarge," Margaret said. "Perp's name's the same as mine. Margaret Atwood."

Margaret Atwood had always wanted to be a cop, ever since he was a little boy. He even liked doing the paperwork.

The crime Margaret Atwood allegedly committed is not important. If he wasn't completely innocent, he was, at least, not indictable. What he allegedly did in an Italian restaurant in Providence, Rhode Island, is irrelevant, not worth mentioning.

Margaret Atwood, the arresting officer, was six years old in 1986 when *Police Academy 3* came out. He wanted to go see it, but his parents wouldn't take him because it was rated PG. Also, his mother got nauseous in movie theatres. "All I smell is dirty hair," she'd say.

Margaret's father promised to buy *Police Academy 3* for the boy as soon as it came out on video. Margaret's father—also named Margaret Atwood—had just graduated from the Rhode Island Police Academy, third in his class, and he had just begun a promising career in law enforcement with the Providence Police Department. But his career was cut short when two fellow police officers discovered Margaret marching in a gay pride parade. He was disguised as a mime, but he was still recognizable in his big black cop shoes. His colleagues beat the hell out of Margaret along the parade route. Margaret took his licks like a mime:

silent, miming his reactions to the real punches. When they were done, he was a mime with a black eye and split lip?

So Margaret Atwood's father began working as a security guard. The police force didn't want him. He already wasn't Italian, couldn't grow a mustache, and had a girl's name. Now he was gay.

Margaret Atwood, the perp, got into lots of fistfights as a young man. He wanted to like people, but people were not nice to him. One hundred percent of Margaret Atwood's fights were about his name. Margaret was his mother's name, and when she died giving birth to her one and only son, Margaret's father decided to name his one and only son after his dead wife. At the time, in profound grief, he could not be talked out of it.

Margaret discovered that he could win nearly every fight if he were to throw the first punch. One punch is all it takes with most guys, Margaret understood, especially if the other guy isn't expecting to be punched. The ones who needed two or three punches to be defeated by Margaret Atwood—he didn't win those fights. Margaret threw quick overhanded punches—jabs really—aimed right at the nose and top teeth. If he wasn't in position to throw an over-hand punch, he threw a roundhouse right to the temple or eyesocket.

There had been some confusion after Margaret was cuffed. When asked to state his name, Margaret always paused, readying himself for a reaction, readying himself to punch. He looked down at his feet and said, “Margaret Atwood.”

Margaret Atwood slapped the perp hard across the back of his head. He figured the perp had read the nametag above his badge. “Comedian.”

MESSAGE LEFT

Hello. You have reached the production offices of *Diagnosis: Murder*, starring Dick Van Dyke as Doctor Mark Sloan. At the sound of the tone, you're invited to leave a message for the cast and characters of *Diagnosis: Murder*. Friday nights, eight o'clock, CBS. But if this is the lady who keeps calling to say that Dick Van Dyke should shave off his mustache, we don't want to hear from you again. Dick will not be losing the mustache any time soon.

The days of a clean-shaven Dick Van Dyke are long gone. History. He is no longer Rob Petrie. He is Doctor Mark Sloan, full-time physician and part-time sleuth. *Diagnosis: Murder*, CBS, Friday nights, eight o'clock. Dick's mustache is his baby. Dick is into his mustache. When it comes to his mustache, Dick's like a man who has switched religions. He prays to the mustache god now, and he doesn't want to even think about his old no-mustache god.

Dick's mustache is the defining symbol of his blooming second career, lady. There were some tough years before Dick grew the mustache, and he doesn't want to even think about his life before the mustache. He's drawn mustaches on all his old pictures. He took a magicmarker and drew a mustache on every single picture. He did the family photos first, vacations, holidays, every picture in the Van Dyke family photo album. Then Dick drew mustaches on his old headshots. Dick drew mustaches on his *TV Guide* covers from 1962 and 1965. Dick even drew mustaches on his commemorative posters for *Chitty-Chitty Bang-Bang*, *Mary Poppins*, and *Bye Bye, Birdie*. He called the Museum of Television History and asked if they would add a mustache to the Dick Van Dyke in their *Dick Van Dyke Show* exhibit. They said no go, but Dick says he's going to call again in six months, and if the answer's still no, then he's going to keep on calling. "People yield to repetition," Dick says.

Dick's mustache represents a sort of second puberty for him. The only thing Dick regrets about his mustache is that he didn't grow it sooner. I want to close the door on this issue, lady. I want to put it to bed. Historically, I can think of no other actor who grew facial hair late in his career. There's only Raymond Burr and Orson Welles, but the real story with them is that they were actors who simply grew obese and then grew facial hair to direct attention away from how fat they had gotten. Dick's mustache was a great career move. In fact, it was my idea that Dick grow the mustache. I thought a mustache would look good on Dick, and I was right. I wish I could grow a mustache like Dick. But my facial hair looks like it belongs on another part of my body. Really. Forget it. I grow a mustache, and it looks like I left my zipper open.

Diagnosis: Murder has a lot invested in Dick's mustache. Dick's mustache is insured against any "unforeseen natural occurrence or intentional act of sabotage that might damage or render professionally unusable the cultivated hair between the nose and mouth of Richard 'Dick' Van Dyke." So in case some nutjob like you, lady, douses Dick with a depilatory, we'll be able to settle with our insurers and pay Dick and all other salaried employees of this production company until such time as Dick's mustache has grown back and he can begin per-

forming again as Doctor Mark Sloan, *Diagnosis: Murder*, CBS, Friday nights, eight o'clock.

We all attribute the phenomenal success of *Diagnosis: Murder* to Dick's mustache. Dick's mustache has become a talisman around here. On days when we're shooting, all the actors touch Dick's mustache for good luck, and Dick's mustache always delivers. The only time an actor flubs a line is when they forget to touch Dick's mustache before a scene.

If only you could touch Dick's mustache. You wouldn't want Dick to shave his mustache off after you touched it. It's silken. It's warm. It breathes. It transmits energy to your fingertips when you touch it. Dick's mustache is like a smile of its own. I can't imagine why you're not on board with Dick's mustache, lady. Obviously you're a fan. You love Dick Van Dyke. You should love Dick's mustache. I understand that it might have been hard at first to get used to seeing Dick Van Dyke with a mustache, but you should have accepted it by now. Come to terms with Dick Van Dyke's mustache for your own good. Dick's not shaving. End of story.