

The ADVENTURES of CAPTAIN APOSTROPHE

Episode XXXVII: Incident in Barnstable

Scene: a weekday, early morning.

In the squad room of the Barnstable Police Station, two cops - obviously veterans of the force - are discussing an incident. For the purposes of this narrative, their names will be "Ed" and "Diego de Bettancourt y Salazar" (or, as he is known to his fellow officers, "DBS").

Ed:

I've been a cop for twenty-two years, DBS. You could say I'm a grizzled veteran, although I'm not 100 percent sure what "grizzled" means. I have the usual warm heart beneath a gruff exterior. I rescued three kittens when I was a rookie. I took a bullet in the gluteus maximus in that 7-11 robbery on North Street ten years back, got a commendation from the selectmen and a write-up in the paper. I've made more DUI arrests than any other cop on the force ...

DBS:

I hear you, Ed. No more experienced cop than you anywhere on the Cape.

Ed:

Thanks, DBS. Appreciated. But this situation last night ... well, I guess there's a first time for everything.

DBS:

For sure. That guy downstairs in the tank is one weird dude. Is the town sending over a psychiatrist to interview him or what?

Ed:

I think they told the Chief that somebody would be by this afternoon. What is it that this guy's calling himself ... "Captain Apostrophe", something like that? And what the hell's with that mask and cape? He looks like somebody dressing up as Batman for the Senior Center Halloween party.

DBS:

Yeah, pretty strange. He still won't give us his real name and he refuses to remove his super-hero gloves so we can fingerprint him. Where did you pick him up?

Ed:

We got a 911 from a house in Cotuit around midnight. Guy tells us there's some character in a costume messing around with the big rock at the entrance to his driveway. There's a lot of noise like somebody's working with a chisel. Guy's got a wife and two little kids so he's afraid to go out but he calls us. Charlie and I get there five minutes later and here's this dude still chopping away at this rock. Paid no attention to us at all and he's muttering something to himself. I could make out "morons" and

The ADVENTURES of CAPTAIN APOSTROPHE

Episode XXXVII: Incident in Barnstable

“buffoons” and I think “ignoramus” but the rest of it is pretty much gibberish. Finally he finishes bashing the rock and a big smile crosses his face. “Another victory for Captain Apostrophe!” he says to me and Charlie as he starts putting his tools in a bag, nice and calm and not trying to run away or anything. We look at one another and then at the rock. The homeowner’s name is carved on it but it’s pretty badly bunged up between the last two letters. By this time the owner is out on the driveway with us, and then it gets ugly.

DBS:

Is that when this Captain character attacked? Charlie was telling me about it at the shift change this morning. Guess he went right for the homeowner’s throat, huh?

Ed:

Exactly. Captain what’s-his-name was in good shape until the homeowner started to yell and scream about the damage to his rock. “I want him arrested for ... for defacement,” the guy tell us. The Captain hears this and totally loses it. He starts yelling even louder than the guy, stuff about “it doesn’t belong there” and “respect for the language” and “creeping punctuational mediocrity” and all kinds of other crap. It got so bad that every door on the street was opening, people in pajamas and robes looking out to see what the hell was going on.

DBS:

Wow!

Ed:

Up to that point the confrontation was only verbal. But when the complainant says to us “I expect you to quickly and securely arrest this person” - that’s when the perp goes for the guy’s throat. I swear to heaven he was actually foaming at the mouth. Of course we had no choice at that point but to cuff him and bring him in. He was OK in the back of the patrol car except for the muttering. “I alone ... defender ... English language ... chains will not stop me ... purification ... ”, stuff like that, we couldn’t make out most of it.

DBS:

Jimmy at the desk was telling me there was more hooah when you booked him.

Ed:

Yeah, sure was. He had calmed down quite a bit on the ride in. He asked to use the toilet, so Charlie took him downstairs. Everything was hunky-dory until our friend spots the Mens’ and Womens’ signs on the toilet doors. He yells something and next thing Charlie knows, he yanks a small can of white spray paint from under his cape somewhere - and I would have sworn we did a pat-down on him - and then goes after the signs. Before Charlie could put a hammerlock on him, he had painted over the

The ADVENTURES of CAPTAIN APOSTROPHE

Episode XXXVII: Incident in Barnstable

apostrophes and seemed to be calming down. “Even here...no place safe ...” Charlie heard him say. He hasn’t said much more since we booked him.

DBS:

He’s sure strange, all right. What do you figure his angle is? Except for this thing he has for punctuation, he seems pretty peaceful. Oh yeah, and except for the mask and the cape and the rest of the rig he wears ...

Ed:

I’m a grizzled veteran cop. I’m pretty sure I know what this guy’s problem is. But I want to see if the psychiatrist confirms what I’m thinking.

[Fade to black; theme music]

Scene Two: squad room as before, later same day.

Ed, DBS, and the Chief are being briefed by the psychiatrist, Doctor Z (oddly enough, his real name).

Dr. Z:

... so that’s the story on your prisoner: delusional, schizo, paranoid, bipolar, and several other things you wouldn’t understand.

Ed:

In other words, a complete looney, right, Doc?

Dr. Z:

That may be a little strong, but it’s certainly one way to put it.

Ed:

Doc, I had a theory about this guy and his hangups on bad punctuation, split infinitives, dangling participles, run-on sentences ... he was once an English teacher, am I right?

Dr. Z:

Amazing but true. Let me see ... BA in English from Fordham 1965, MA from Brown 1967. Scored 760 on the English part of the Graduate Record Exam. Taught freshman English at several high schools but got fired from his last job for ... what did they call it? ... Here it is: “tendencies to excess in discipline”. The story was that he had forced the leading scorer on the football team to stand outside the school building in his underwear - in late November, mind you - chanting “The apostrophe is our friend” for two hours instead of being at practice. Then there was the “If the pronoun’s possessive, the apostrophe’s excessive” chant he came up with after watching

The ADVENTURES of CAPTAIN APOSTROPHE

Episode XXXVII: Incident in Barnstable

Johnnie Cochran at the OJ trial. Kids were afraid to open their mouths or write anything in his classes. He got canned and the real mental problems seem to have started shortly thereafter.

Ed [shivering slightly]:

I had a teacher like that once ... Sister Mary Agnes, seventh grade back at Saint Patrick's up in Taunton. Kept a bar of Lifebuoy in her desk in case she heard any of us say ain't. We'd have to bite off a piece and chew it until we blew bubbles ... yuck! But the funny thing is, I've never said ain't in my life ...

DBS:

Doctor, did this guy say what he was doing over in Cotuit when we arrested him?

Dr. Z:

Apparently he cruises neighborhoods looking for evidence of apostrophe abuse, like house signs that identify the owners as The Smith's. That was the problem with the rock in Cotuit. When he finds something that offends him, he removes it - or, as he prefers to say, "corrects" it. He keeps a bag of tools in his car to make these "corrections" on various misspellings, misplaced punctuation, and other "egregious public offenses" as he terms them. Messing with other folks' property isn't a crime to him - it's an act of purification. He's really sincere about it too.

DBS:

When I lived over in Falmouth a few years back, there was a sign directing drivers to "Falmouth Hights" - no "e". It was up for quite a while and even I thought it looked stupid. Then one day the sign was gone ...

Dr. Z:

Yes, our friend explained to me that the removal of that sign was his first official act as "Captain Apostrophe, quasi-super-hero, Defender of What's Left of the English Language, Implacable Enemy of Linguistic Inaccuracies". The Falmouth cops caught him in the act of taking the sign down. They didn't do anything to him because they figured he was a little nuts but otherwise harmless. The sign was on a state highway, but the state cops just laughed when the Falmouth PD called to tell them about it.

The Chief:

Doc, is this guy dangerous in any way? We can't keep him locked up forever.

Dr. Z:

I'll put it to you this way: he's narrowly-focused but not a threat. Although ...

The Chief:

I don't need "although". Give it to me straight, Doc.

The ADVENTURES of CAPTAIN APOSTROPHE

Episode XXXVII: Incident in Barnstable

Dr. Z:

Well, he did say something about painting over the windows of any real estate agents who insisted in their ads that houses on the Upper Cape had “ocean views”. “You can’t see the ocean from anywhere west of Chatham,” he told me, “unless you have erected a 124-foot tower near your house for that express purpose. You can see bays and sounds and ponds and lakes and rivers, but YOU CAN’T SEE THE OCEAN!” He was pretty riled up about it and I believe he means to carry out his threat. He won’t hurt anybody but it will be a hell of a mess to clean up. But he doesn’t care as long as he makes his point.

DBS:

He’s weird but he makes sense sometimes.

The Chief:

Anything else, Doc?

Dr. Z:

He did mention his burning desire to smack with a brick the next wait-person who responded to his “thank you” with “no problem”...

Ed:

Hey, I wouldn’t mind helping him with that one!

The Chief:

You guys are a big help. Hey, Doc - maybe you should examine these two bozos next!

[Sitcom applause/laugh-track, fade, theme music]

The End ... ?