Securing Garcia's Commendation

Dan Dillingham

Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus/vol1986/iss1/21

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Amaranthus by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.
pruning and clipping will richly pay in another season when leaves and petals unfurl and flower. Then I will think only of the growing things rooted in the ground.

But now it’s time to bury the tulip bulbs deep. I also scatter, far below the light, the bulbs of daffodils. The bulbs are fat and firm in my hand, their juicy life protected by the brown, strong skin, tight around them. I feed each one with powdered bone, knowing that they’ll need to fatten more as snow piles silently above them for many months.

Some bulbs have tiny bulblets curving out from them. They are weak and will never grow to stately brightness, but only wrinkled, mangled paleness — if they live at all. My gloved hands pluck these younglings from their dam and throw them far from where I plant.

She was with child and cried out in her pangs . . .

Revelations 12:2

Wiping away the dirt and dampness from my tools, I look again a loving look about my garden. I can smell the freshly dug earth, hear it sighing, settling at this finished season.

We have a covenant, this small plot and I. I bend and dig, clip and carry, feed and water, stake and prune. And my garden blooms grandly for all and God to look upon and smile.

Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. Luke 1:42

Turning from the peaceful garden, I move heavily the end of his day. Tired, I turn from the nurturing, from the things I have decided to plant and the things I’ve refused. Another day awaits me tomorrow, another busy time.

I mustn’t think anymore of the choosing, of the planting and casting aside — for I’ve an appointment in the morning. A cool sterile room, white-masked physician, shining, sharp tools at the ready, and me, shivering in a colorless wrap.

There’ll be no smudge of soil nor curling leaf nor broken twig. God help me, there’ll be no growing thing tomorrow.

Securing Garcia’s Commendation

by Dan Dillingham

I was driving shop 23 south down I-45 on my way to ten-eighty two’s district. I was going there to deliver a written commendation to Chester Garcia, which was one of the pleasant duties sergeants got to perform. He’d been on duty at ten-fifty-two the Saturday before when two buildings burnt to the ground. We had our hands full, what with the fire, plus answering all the alarm calls which plagued that apartment complex. Anyway, the office gave written commendations to everyone on duty there that night — me too. We deserved them, I thought, especially Garcia.

Garcia’s a good officer.

I looked in my rear-view mirror and saw an H.P.D. shop coming up behind me in the outside lawn. They were going about five miles an hour faster than I was, which was five miles an hour over the limit, and they passed me in a few seconds. I waved as they went by, and they ignored it, which didn’t surprise me. Houston cops felt a lot of animosity towards security guards — who knows why. Maybe they thought we were getting too successful. Maybe they just thought we got in the way.

The truth was, we just did the grunt work for them.

I was still a few miles north of ten-eighty-two when the dispatcher’s voice broke over the radio. I listened carefully in case it involved one of my officers.

“W.I.B. three-three-eight to ten-eighty-two.”

Seeing as the call involved Garcia, I eavesdropped. Almost immediately Garcia responded, “Ten-eighty-two, go ahead.”

“Clear, ten-eighty-two, you have an unwanted guest in project eighty-five, number fourteen thirty-five.”

“That’s clear. Unwanted guest, eighty-five, number fourteen thirty-five. Ten-eighty-two clear.”

“I picked up the radio microphone lying next to me and took my turn at it.
“K.B. fifty-ninety-one, ten-ninety-five to ten­eighty-two.”
“Ten-eighty-two, go ahead, Sarge.”
“Clear. I’m just a few minutes from that location. Meet me by the manager’s office and we’ll go in together.”
“That’s clear, sir. Ten-eighty-two clear.”
“Clear. Ten-ninty-five clear.”
I replaced the microphone on its hook this time and accelerated. I didn’t want to make Garcia wait, and I didn’t. By the time I pulled into the main entrance of project eighty-five (The Meadow Lane Apartments), Garcia was just crossing the street from project eighty-three (Spring Brook Apartments). I sat in the shop, with the engine still running, and watched him in the rear-view mirror.
Garcia was a fine young man. He was only twenty-two, but strong and good looking. He had dark hair and dark skin, because he was Mexican. Of course, he was All-American. I’m pretty sure he didn’t even know any Spanish. Anyway I always liked working with him.
“Where’s this apartment?” I asked out of the window as he came up on the driver’s side of my shop.
“It’s just behind the pool, in the interior court­yard,” he said pointing the way.
“Well let’s go.” I switched off the shop, got out, and we made our way down the winding sidewalk that took us through the carefully manicured lawn.
Project eighty-five was one of the nicest properties we patrolled. It was far enough out of Houston proper to automatically lower the crime rate, and also its location on the edge of a nice residential area made it a pretty quiet piece of property. About all we ever got out there were auto­burglaries and security checks. Garcia was probably as surprised to get an unwanted guest callout there as I was.
In a few seconds we were climbing the concrete and steel stairs serving apartments fourteen-thirty­three and fourteen-thirty-five. I decided to let Garcia handle the whole thing. After all, it was his district, and I was just supervising. He stood in front of the door numbered fourteen-thirty-five and knocked soundly.
We both heard footsteps inside, but nothing else. The actor was probably already gone, I thought, or drunk and passed out inside. The door opened and a slender, young lady of about twenty, wearing a long, blue bathrobe emerged from the semidarkness of the apartment. She looked pretty calm, and I thought that maybe this was going to be nothing after all. Garcia proceeded.
“You called us, ma’am?” he asked.
“Yes. He’s in here,” she answered moving back into the apartment, motioning for us to do the same.
The apartment was a mess. It didn’t have the look of a fight or scuffle, it just hadn’t been picked-up or cleaned in a long time. The only light came from a forty-watt bulb in the stove hood. The light fared pretty well against the kitchen’s darkness, but faded to murky shadows in the rest of the place.
The apartment, as we saw it, consisted of the kitchen, a dining area, a large living room and three doors; one of which led to the bedroom, another that went to the bathroom, and the third, next to the door we’d come through, which I assumed was a closet. The three of us were the only people I could see in the whole place. I stood just inside and watched to see what Garcia would do.
I didn’t have to wait long. Garcia gave a quick look around and I presumed he was appraising the situation as I had. “We understood there was an uninvited guest in this apartment. Is that right, ma’am?” Garcia asked in his regular calm, even tone as his eyes continued searching.
For the first time since she opened the door, the woman looked up from the floor. “Yes that’s right.”
“Where is he, ma’am?”
“Jesus Christ, I’m right here,” came a drunken man’s voice from the living room. I saw Garcia’s left hand reach up and come to rest on the grom­met of his nightstick. I tried to keep an eye on Garcia as he moved carefully toward the living room, and at the same time, I scanned the walls for a light switch. I found the switch just as Garcia came up behind the sofa which was sitting crosswise in the room. As soon as I clicked the switch on the actor bolted upright in the sofa.
“Shit. What the hell did ye do that for? Damn, give a guy some warning.”
“All right, calm down,” Garcia said, “Who are you?”
“Name’s Ted Johnson, and I wouldn’t say I was an uninvited guest. Unwanted, unneeded even, but not uninvited. Just ask her,” he said, thrusting his finger towards the complainant.
“This the guy?” Garcia asked turning sideways so he could see the complainant and the actor at the same time.
The lady just nodded, without looking up from the floor.
“What’s your name, ma’am?” Garcia asked pulling a small spiral notebook and a pen from his breast pocket.
“Nancy Dwire.”
Eric Skoglund
"Are you the only one named on the lease for this apartment?"
She nodded again.
Garcia scribbled the two names down in his notebook and put it back in his pocket. "Mr. Johnson, you're going to have to leave now," he said.
"Shit, she don't want me to leave," the man slobbered. "It's just a fucking game. You guys know how these women are," he said, trying to get to his feet. I could tell right then that this guy was trouble.
"Obviously, she does want you to leave. Grab your coat and I'll walk out with you."
"I ain't leavin' till she looks right at me and tells me that's really what she wants."
The lady never looked up from the floor.
"Listen," Garcia said turning and facing the actor directly, "I don't know what's going on with you two, but I do know you have to leave — now."
"I ain't leavin' till she says it," he wailed.
Thinking back on it I probably should have let Garcia continue, but I was getting tired of the whole situation. I didn't know what was going on between them either. Maybe they were breaking off an old relationship. Maybe he was just a friend who'd overstayed his welcome. Maybe she was overreacting. I didn't know. I didn't care. All I knew was this guy had to leave the property before we could clear the call and get on with other things. I was anxious to give that commendation to Garcia, so I stepped in.
"Look Mr. Johnson," I said moving closer to him, "do you know anything about trespass laws in the state of Texas?"
"I know enough to . . ."
"Well," I broke him off, "then you probably know that, as of right now, you're breaking the law."
That was bullshit. Actually he had to be warned once before his offense was actionable, but I was pretty sure only me and Garcia knew that.
"What you probably don't know is that officer Garcia and I are pretty reasonable guys. And the truth is, we don't want to mess with all that. So if you leave right now, I don't see why we couldn't forget the whole thing."
"You ain't foolin' me with that shit," he said backing away from me into the middle of the room. "You ain't real cops; you can't take me to jail."
I took two steps closer to him and put my hand on the grommet of my nightstick. I imagined I looked pretty impressive to this drunk, who seemed bent on making a fool of himself. "You're partially right, Mr. Johnson," I said, "Except there is nothing stopping us from hanging on to you until we can get a "real" cop out here. Is that what you want us to do Mr. Johnson?"
He fell for it. Drunks usually do. Although we were just lowly security guards, our uniforms, nightsticks, and guns certainly gave the perception of authority, especially if your perception is altered as was Mr. Johnson's.
"All right, all right," he half shouted, "I'm going. Shit."
I relaxed and moved towards the door. Garcia helped the man get into his coat and followed him to the door. I stepped outside and turned back to make sure he was still following. He was. We were all just about out to the landing and it looked like we were about finished when, suddenly, Mr. Johnson had a change of heart.
We had only taken one or two steps out the door when he spun around and ran into Garcia who was still coming out through the doorway. He started screaming and trying to push his way past Garcia to get back inside.
"I'm not going to put up with this shit Nancy," he screamed in a voice that seemed instantly sober. "Goddammit, Nance, tell these assholes whaes going on. Damn, I don't want it like this. Goddammit let me back in."
Miss Dwire said nothing I could hear, and Garcia had his hands full holding the guy back.
Quickly I stepped back to the door and grabbed the actor's right arm with my right hand and pulled out my nightstick with my left. I intended to hit him on the back of the knees in order to get him off his feet, but just then he pushed Garcia back into the apartment and with unlikely force for a man his size he swung around and pushed me with the weight of his whole body. The sudden move surprised me. I lost my balance and stumbled backwards against the wall at the end of the landing. My nightstick fell harmlessly to the ground. I straightened up quickly, but the actor was already standing in front of me holding a knife!
I heard Garcia scrambling to his feet inside, but I knew he couldn't get outside in time to do me much good. I saw the actor recoiling his hand ready to plunge the small, lock-blade knife into me. I had to do something, and right now.
I had no plan. There's never time for planning. Nor did I have any experience in being attacked by drunken men with knives. All I had were reflexes, and thankfully sometimes that's enough. As his hand snapped, I leaned back against the wall and raised my left leg. I kicked and my foot hit him squarely in the belt. He reeled backwards toward the open stairs, but before he fell he finished his
stroke and the knife slipped into my thigh. Mr. Johnson and his knife joined my nightstick on the ground below.

I wouldn't say that I fell down. It was more like I sat down — hard. My head was swimming. It was obviously going to take a few seconds for all this to sink in. I wasn't in pain, not yet at least.

At almost the same instant I got stuck, I saw Garcia come bounding out of the apartment. With two steps he traversed the landing, and me, and was racing down towards the actor, only touching every third step on the way. He was down the steps and cuffing Mr. Johnson to the metal railing before I could utter a single sound.

Garcia's a good officer.

Quickly Garcia picked up the knife and nightstick, checked to make sure the actor was secure, and bound back up the stairs. About three steps from the top he froze. "You're hurt," he said. Apparently he didn't know I'd been stabbed.

Actually I didn't know it myself. That is, I felt the knife go in, but so much had happened in so little time I hadn't been able to think about it yet. Garcia stared at my leg, and I followed his gaze. I'd seen some pretty gruesome things in the Texas night, but I wasn't prepared for this. Blood looks different when it's your own.

Suddenly my senses started taking over and I felt sharp pain in my thigh. My navy blue, polyester pant leg was black, soaked with blood, which was now beginning to collect on the cement landing. I hate to admit it, but my head was getting light and I started losing consciousness. "Better get some help," I mumbled, but Garcia was already taking the radio from his belt.


"Where's your keys?" Garcia asked. "I'll get the first aid kit." Even I could see he was shaken. "It's nothing," I said. "Go down and make sure that son of a bitch doesn't get away. I'm fine." "You're not fine and he's not going anywhere." "Hey, I'm still the sergeant here, you know." "Be quiet and let me look at your leg." I was about to protest further when the radio interrupted me.

"Clear, W.I.B. three-three-eight to ten-eighty-two." "Ten-eighty-two," Garcia answered quickly. "Clear sir, Harris County Sheriffs and an ambulance have been dispatched, and are en route." It certainly looked like everything was being taken care of. Good thing too, because I was definitely getting close to passing out. I heard ten-ten come back on the radio and talk to Garcia, but I couldn't make out the words. The pain was getting worse. I heard sirens, and I felt sleepy.

I did pass out, and when I woke up I was lying in the hospital. I felt pretty bad about it. I knew it was just my body's way of coping with the loss of blood, but still I felt lousy about worrying Garcia, and everyone else for that matter.

It wasn't until then that I remembered I hadn't given Garcia his commendation. It didn't matter though, I just gave him two the next time I saw him.

Garcia's a good officer.