

Characters

- Detective Sofia Innes (**F**) - a tough but fair police detective
- Detective Paul Danielson (**M**) - a police detective of many years
- Tobias Hasse “Toby” (**M**) - a homeless man

Scene 1 – Police interview room

(Tabs open. Toby is seated in a chair facing the audience, behind a desk. He looks sad, dejected, and nervous. After a few moments, Detectives Paul and Sofia enter from stage left. Paul is carrying some papers in a file folder. Paul reaches the table and throws the file so it lands on the table in front of Toby. Sofia goes to the other side of the table stage right.)

Paul: (to Toby) Mister Hasse, you have been arrested for arson. You have been read your rights and you have declined to have a lawyer present here for your questioning. Is that correct?

Toby: Yes, sir.

Sofia: You do realise, Mister Hasse, that a lawyer can be provided for you, free of charge?

Toby: Yes, ma'am.

Sofia: And yet you still refuse to have one?

Toby: Don't need one.

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Paul: And why is that?

Toby: I done it.

Paul: You *done* what?

Toby: I burned it. I lit the fire.

Paul: Where?

Toby: In the back where I stay.

Sofia: You started the fire in the field behind the homeless shelter?

Toby: Yeah, me. I done it. I burned it. **(looks down)**

Sofia: Mister Hasse, do you understand that you have been charged with a very serious crime?

You could go to jail.

Toby: Don't wanna go to jail.

Sofia: Then you should have a lawyer here helping you.

Toby: No lawyer. I done it.

Paul: Would you be willing to put that in writing?

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Toby: Not very good at writin'.

Paul: We could put you on tape. How about that?

Toby: Don't care. Just wanna go back.

Sofia: Back to prison?

Toby: Back to the shelter.

Sofia: Prison's where you're going if you say you're guilty and don't have any legal help.

(Toby lowers his head and remains silent.)

Paul: **(grabs up the papers)** That's good enough for me. Open and shut case. Nice and easy. Let's go. **(heads for the exit stage left)**

Sofia: Wait, Danielsen. I have a couple more questions.

Paul: What?

Sofia: Just hang on a minute. There are some loose ends to tie up.

(Paul crosses behind Toby to stage right and takes Sofia by the arm)

Paul: **(stage whisper)** What are you doing? There are no loose ends. He did it. He said so. I believe him. End of story.

Sofia: Look! I know you have a meeting with Heather or Mandy or whatever her name is but I grew up on the North Shore of Boston and I know what a bad catch smells like.

Paul: Yes, I have an important meeting with an informant who –

Sofia: Oh, please. The whole department knows about your *informant*.

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Paul: **(pauses)** OK. You want to play Joe Friday then go ahead, knock yourself out. But don't take all day.

(Paul returns to his place on the stage left side of the table but stands behind Toby. Sofia takes the chair facing Toby and moves it to the stage right side of the table and sits down)

Sofia: **(to Toby)** Mister Hasse, uh – **(looks at the file on the table)** Toby. May I call you Toby?

(Toby remains silent)

Sofia: Toby, tell me about the fire. You say that you started it. How?

Toby: You already know that.

Sofia: I want to hear it from you. Tell me how you started the fire.

Toby: I just took a match and threw it and, boom – it all went up.

Sofia: Tell me exactly how you started the fire, in detail.

Toby: **(stares at Sofia for a moment)** Well, I, uh, put some wood, some loose wood that was lyin' around and piled it all up and then I got some other stuff, you know, leaves and papers and stuff and threw it all on top; and then I lit it all.

(Sofia looks at Toby for a moment then glares at Paul who moves forward a few steps)

Paul: You were never a Boy Scout were you, Mister Hasse? **(waits for a response but none comes)** You see, in the Boy Scouts, they teach you how to make a proper fire. The leaves and the papers, what you would call the kindling, is put *under* the wood. If you put it on

top it just burns off and there's no fire.

Toby: Yeah, well, that's what I did – leaves, paper, wood – fire!

Sofia: And that's it? That's all you did?

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Toby: Look, lady. What do you want? Why you askin' me all these questions? I piled up some *kindlin'* then I threw some wood down, then I lit a match, and *poof* – fire! What more do you need to know?

Sofia: Well, for starters, you could tell me when you threw the gasoline on the wood.

Toby: What?

Paul: **(lets out a deep sigh then sits on the edge of the table)** Gasoline, Toby! The fire was started with gas. You neglected to mention that very important part of the story.

Toby: Yeah? Well, I just forgot is all.

Sofia: Toby, you didn't start that fire, did you? Someone else started it. Isn't that so?

Toby: I started the fire. I burned the garden.

Sofia: Wait! What did you say? Garden?

(Sofia looks at Paul with a questioning look. Paul responds with a shrug.)

Sofia: **(to Toby)** Whose garden was it?

(Toby looks away)

Sofia: Was that your garden, Toby?

Toby: **(softly)** Yeah.

Paul: A garden in the middle of a deserted lot?

Sofia: **(slides her chair closer)** Toby, tell me about your garden.

Toby: It was beautiful. There were tomatoes and cucumbers and all kinds of things.

Sofia: How did it start?

Toby: Well, it's a funny thing, really. I was walking one day. Not sure where I was. Guess I had a little too much to drink and I got lost. Found myself in a neighbourhood I'd never been before. Then I see this garden on the side of one of the houses. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. There were so many colours and things were lined up so perfectly. I just stared at it until someone saw me and sent me away. **(pauses)** Came back to the shelter and said I wanted to have a garden. I told Mister Russ and he said he would help me out

Paul: Mister Russ? Who's Mister Russ?

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Toby: He's my buddy. He works at the shelter.

Sofia: Mister Russ got you the seeds so you could start a garden?

Toby: Yeah. He helped clear a small plot. We even went for walks and stuffed our pockets with good soil to put in the garden. **(pauses)** It started small. Actually, it didn't start at all. At least, not right away. First couple of years nothing happened. Nothing. I was going to give up but Mister Russ said it just takes time. Then one day I saw a sprout, and then another and another. Soon I had me a small garden. **(pauses and smiles)** It was like I had seen that one day: bright colours and straight rows. **(looks at Sofia)** You know, it was the one thing I was ever good at and it mostly kept me away from the booze.

Sofia: So, what happened?

Toby: My garden kept growing. At first, I ate the vegetables myself. I didn't have to beg for food so much. I kept making the garden bigger and I added more plants. When people saw what I was doing they donated seeds and tools and supplies. Soon I was giving food away not just to my buddies but to anyone who showed up at the shelter.

Paul: And when did you decide to just burn it all away?

Toby: Mister Russ got mad at me. Said I shouldn't have let the garden get so big. Said I was, how did he put it, upsetting the apple cart. Kind of funny huh? My garden was upsetting

his apples.

Sofia: Why would your garden make him mad? You were focused on something important. You were even providing food to other people.

Toby: He said that because of me they wouldn't get any more Christmas presents.

Sofia: What?

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Paul: **(Pause)** No good deed goes unpunished.

(Sofia looks to Paul for an explanation but Paul responds only with a laugh)

Paul: You're not seeing it are you, detective?

Sofia: Enlighten me.

Paul: The homeless shelter depends on donations from people who think it needs their money. It relies on a perception of need – **(looks to Sofia to continue)**

Sofia: And if that perception changes, so goes the flow of aid; no more Christmas presents.

Paul: **(to Toby)** You've done good, Mister Hasse. Too good. You started handing out free food to hungry people from your garden and made your shelter look self-sufficient.

Toby: That's bad?

Paul: It is to a shelter that depends on a free flow of donated cash to support itself, its clients, and its staff.

Toby: Is that why Mister Russ got mad at me?

Paul: Yeah. I imagine he got plenty mad.

Sofia: Toby, did Mister Russ tell you to start the fire?

Toby: **(lowers his head)** He was my friend and he got so upset. I didn't know what to do.

(There is a moment of silence)

Sofia: Toby; did he tell you to burn your garden?

(Toby remains silent for a moment and then sobs softly)

Toby: You couldn't do it, could you? You couldn't burn down all that work you did; all those plants you loved.

(Toby remains silent and emotional. After a few moments, he shakes his head to indicate a no. After another moment, he speaks.)

Toby: He told me to take a long walk. When I came back it was all gone.

Sofia: Who, Toby? Who told you to take a walk?

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Toby: Mister Russ.

Sofia: He told you to take a walk and when you got back your garden was gone?

(Toby hesitates)

Sofia: Toby, if Mister Russ set fire to your garden; if he killed all those beautiful plants you worked so hard to raise, he's not your friend. **(pauses)** You fed people who were hungry. That was a good thing. It was the right thing no matter what Mister Russ may have told you. Do the right thing now, Toby. **(pauses)** Did you see Mister Russ start that fire?

(Toby hesitates again then nods his head)

Paul: **(Lets out a deep sigh)** Great! There goes my very informative lunch.

Sofia: **(Ignoring Paul)** Toby, you're free to go, for now.

Toby: **(Lifts his head)** Can I go back to the shelter?

Sofia: **(Pats Toby's arm)** Sure. And I'm going to see to it that you get a chance to start another garden.

Toby: Yeah? And can I go see Mister Russ?

Sofia: Oh, well. Detective Danielson and I are going to have a little chat with him and I suspect he may have to go away for a little while.

Toby: Oh?

Sofia: There are others, Toby, who want to be your friend. Good friends who won't lie to you.

Toby: **(Stares at Sofia for a moment)** Thank you, ma'am.

Paul: C'mon. Toby. I'll walk you out and get one of the officers to give you a ride.

(Paul escorts Toby out. Sofia sits for a moment where she is, then stands and pushes Toby's chair back under the table. She exits. Tabs close.)

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