

DOGAN

A JEREMY BARNES SHORT STORY



ROBERT GERMAUX



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*by Robert Germaux*

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Laura Fleming and moi. At a fancy art thing on Saturday night. The weekend was shaping up nicely. But that was two days away. First things first. On Thursday morning, after running and lifting a little, I called Peterson Toyota and talked to Brian in the service department. He said they had an opening at 11:00 for an oil and lube on the 4Runner, and I told him I'd take it. I can change the oil myself, of course. Really. I did it once, over at Angie and Simon's. Well, Simon helped a little, but it was yours truly who actually popped the hood, which is the first and most important step in the whole process. Think about it.

Okay, so I know beans about cars, which is why I have always taken my vehicles in for their regularly scheduled maintenance. I'm a whiz at whipping off thousand-word essays, not to mention arm-wrestling, but I pretty much suck at anything more involved than topping off the windshield washer fluid. Yeah, I know, how can I be a private detective, which is supposed to be such a manly profession, and not be able to navigate my way around cars? I just never had any interest in learning about the care and feeding of automobiles. A long time ago, I tried my hand at some of the simpler procedures, like that oil-changing thing, in case of emergencies, but that phase of my life came to an abrupt halt when I became aware of the existence of Triple A. I mean, c'mon.

\* \* \*

Peterson Toyota is owned by Phil Peterson, who's got me by about ten years. I bought my very first car from Phil, when I was still in college and working part-time for Uncle Leo. The car was an old Tercel, and I think Phil realized right away that my financial situation didn't allow for anything beyond basic transportation. He gave me a good deal on the Tercel and didn't try to talk me into any nonsense like rustproofing, so I've continued to buy my cars from his dealership. About four years ago, our relationship took a different turn. Somebody snatched his six-month-old daughter, grabbed the girl out of her stroller at a playground while the babysitter sat two feet away. Within twenty-four hours, two things about the case stood out to the cops and anyone else who'd ever been involved with the abduction of a child. First, the kidnapper was a teenage boy. Second, there was no ransom demand. Every cop in the city was working overtime trying to find the girl. Two days after she was taken, Phil called to ask if I'd help look for his daughter. I told him I would, and then I called Dennis, my cop contact and best friend, to see what the police had learned.

The babysitter hadn't been able to provide a very good description of the boy who'd taken the baby, just that he was white and skinny and wore a blue cap. The cops had canvassed the area around the playground, to no avail. There were lots of teenage boys who fit the description, but they all had solid alibis for the time of the kidnapping. Denny told me that the police had also checked with the local hospitals, asking about girls who'd recently had miscarriages or even abortions, thinking maybe one of them and her boyfriend had decided to grab someone else's baby. You never know with kids. But that turned out to be a dead end, too.

I spent a day looking into other possibilities, with no success at all, and then, mostly because I didn't know what else to do, I checked with a source in the adoption field, not to see about babies who'd suddenly become available, the cops had done that early on. Instead, I tried the backdoor approach and asked about females, teenagers to early twenties, who'd put kids up for adoption during the previous few months. My friend gave me a sheet with over fifty names on it, which I arbitrarily narrowed to twelve by excluding anyone living more than a few miles from the playground. I was pretty sure that I wasn't supposed to have such a list in my possession, and I was equally sure that I didn't care. As I scanned the list, one name, Roberta Johnson, caught my eye, something about the paper just a few days earlier. I got on the Post-Gazette's website and

within thirty seconds found the five-line bit on the back page of the Local News section. Fifteen-year-old Roberta Johnson had been reported missing. The other four lines described the clothes she'd been wearing the day she disappeared and mentioned that Roberta was "easily confused."

A contact at the paper got me Roberta's home address, and less than half an hour later, I was talking to her parents. Her father told me that Roberta was "always runnin' off," and the only reason they'd reported her disappearance this time was his wife was worried "on accounta she thinks Bobbie might do somethin' stupid, feelin' bad about gettin' rida that kid and all." He had no idea where his daughter was, and he didn't seem to care. I didn't find out what his wife thought or felt about anything, since she sat in a straight-backed chair in the corner of their living room the whole time I was there and never uttered a word.

Before I left, I asked about the father of Roberta's baby, and Mr. Johnson said, "Melvin Baines. Eighteen years old and stickin' it to my daughter. Prick lives over at the corner of Negley and Winchester, big yellow brick place. They don't have a brain between'em, why we made Bobbie give up that kid."

I drove over to Melvin's house and found no one home, so I parked out front and waited. An hour later, a skinny white kid walked past my car and up the walk to the house. He was wearing a Yankees hat.

The rest was easy. I caught up with him on his front porch and told him I was looking for Bobbie. Within thirty seconds, I could tell that Melvin, too, was easily confused. And his eyes kept moving past me to an abandoned apartment building just down the street.

Two minutes later I was standing in one of the first floor apartments, cradling Phil's daughter in one arm while I called him to come get his baby. Bobbie and Melvin had wanted a replacement baby, and they hadn't thought it through any further than Melvin procuring one for them.

Phil had wanted to give me a blank check, but I told him there was no charge. Early on, Uncle Leo had impressed upon me that you didn't take money for looking for children. "Find'em or not," he'd said, "if there're little ones involved, there's no bill."

Then Phil tried to give me a new car, and when I turned that down, too, and he saw that I was serious, he just looked at me and nodded and shook my hand.

\* \* \*

While the boys in the shop had their way with the 4Runner, I wandered around the showroom. No reason not to at least glance at the new cars. Simple courtesy, really. I was checking out a grayish Camry XLE when a slender young black man wearing a three-piece suit approached me and put out his hand.

"Hi," he said. "I'm Randall. Beautiful vehicle, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is," I agreed. "And I'm just looking, Randall. Killing time while my car's being serviced."

"Hey, no problem," he said. "My boss says we should greet the customer, and then if the customer wants to be left alone, we're supposed to leave them alone."

Actually, I knew that that was Phil's policy. He didn't believe in high pressure salesmanship. Randall gave me his card and turned to leave.

"Say, Randall," I said, "If I was interested in this gray number here, what kind of numbers would we be talking?"

"It's antique sage pearl, sir, and why don't we go into my office?"

Two hours later, I was signing the sales agreement. Randall said I could pick up the car the following Monday, once all the paperwork had been processed. I asked if there was any chance of my getting it by Saturday, and he left to talk to the general manager. When the two of them came back a couple of minutes later, Phil was with them.

"JB," he said, shaking my hand, "I didn't know you were here. Randall tells me you're buying that XLE we got on the floor. Good choice. He also tells me you'd like it by Saturday. I believe we can expedite matters a little."

"Phil, I'm not asking for any special—"

"And you aren't getting any," he said. "Nothing that we wouldn't do for any other customer who's been loyal to the dealership over the years." He looked at me for a minute. "You gonna give me grief over this?"

"Nah," I said, "I'm not. Thanks, Phil."

He turned to walk out of the office, then paused and looked back at me.

"Logan's starting kindergarten next year, JB."

I nodded.

\* \* \*

An hour later, as I drove home in my Camry XLE, I took a deep breath.

New car smell.

Ya gotta love it.

**- The End -**



### **About the Author:**

Robert Germaux is a retired high school English teacher turned author. He and his wife, Cynthia, live outside of Pittsburgh, where they enjoy spending time with family and friends, taking long walks, attending live theater productions and just relaxing together in front of their fireplace.

They also have been lucky enough to travel a good bit, sharing romantic times together everywhere from Paris to Tahiti.

The idea for "Logan" came from a chapter in one of Mr. Germaux's books about private detective Jeremy Barnes (JB to his friends). Jeremy Barnes makes his literary debut in Robert Germaux's new detective novel, "Hard Court", now available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Bob welcomes any comments, questions or suggestions about this story, the character of JB or any of his books. You can also visit him on his [website](#) to request author interviews and guest posts.

*\*document prepared by Susan Barton, [My Book Tour](#)*