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Dick
Lochte



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This is a work of fiction. The author acknowledges that there is a not-quite-mythical state known as California, but any similarity to existing people, places, and situations is 100 percent coincidental and unintended.

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*For Nick, who liked the idea,
and for my mother, who likes
all of my ideas.*

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Preface

It is no longer a rare occurrence in contemporary publishing for several books to cover the same subject matter – the scandalous behavior of a deceased film star, perhaps, or a voguish diet plan, or a method for combatting some well-publicized health scare. In this instance we are dealing with the events surrounding a series of brutal murders committed in California during the summer of 1982.

Two involved parties penned separate first-person accounts of the mass murders. Ordinarily these manuscripts would have resulted in two competing volumes. Publishing, however, can be as surprising and deadly as the business of murder. Because of a sudden, if not totally unanticipated, merger, both *Dog Days* by Serendipity Renn Dahlquist and *Die Like a Dog* by Leo G. Bloodworth became the joint properties of the same publishing house.

Obviously, they could not be released individually. The decision was made to combine them into one volume, with excessive repetition deleted. The authors were not pleased by this decision. They viewed the result as ‘excessive and repressive editorial meddling’ (Dahlquist) and ‘a first-class hatchet job’ (Bloodworth).

Regardless, both were eager to see their maiden efforts in print, and finally they came to understand that first novelists should never expect to find things going entirely their way.

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I

(Beginning: **DOG DAYS: A Personal Account of the Kaspar-Helmdale Slayings**. By Serendipity Renn Dahlquist)

The following appeared in somewhat different form in the pages of the Bay High Guardian, considered by many to be the leading high-school newspaper in the Greater Los Angeles area. And yet, regardless of the Guardian's heralded integrity, its faculty advisers went soft as grapes when it came to the story's more ghoulish aspects – descriptions of the corpses and the like – as well as the admittedly gross little detours the case took. The dogfight atrocities, for example, and the brush with the Mexican Mafia and the really depraved stuff that the noble and gallant Mr Leo Bloodworth, master detective, endured on my behalf.

On one hand, I am most proud to be the only sophomore woman – no, make that the only sophomore, period – to have had anything printed in the Guardian this past year. On the other, having been hugely influenced by Mrs Ida Sperling's lecture, 'Journalism: The Truth Shall Make Us Free,' and then having witnessed that same Mrs Sperling edit significant passages from my original manuscript, every word as true as gospel, all I can say is that this writing business must be filled with continuous heartbreak. In any case, I dedicate this, my first book, to my beloved grandmother, known to her many fans as Aunt Lil Fairchild.

S.R.D.

Bay Heights, California

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1. My last day as a hopeless junior-high-school worm was marked with *merde*. Veritably mottled with *merde*. Someone stole my slam book. (Even now, nearly a year and a half later, I remain unconvinced that I simply misplaced it!) Then, Sylvia Leonidas, my supposedly best friend, with whom and with whose parents I had planned on motoring through the great Northwest, dropped the bomb that she had managed to get herself with child, thanks to some George person. Not a Bay Heights boy, more's the pity, for I have it on good authority that their narcotic consumption has rendered them 99 44/100 percent impotent. In any case, it's difficult to imagine a woman in her mid-teens, even one as admittedly backward as Sylvia, failing to take steps to avoid the possibility of conception. And George was almost college age, for heaven's sake. Because of their sexual ignorance and lack of self-control, the trip through the great Northwest was off.

Piling grief upon grief, Mr Madill, whom I cannot abide as either a teacher or a representative of the human race, gave me a C+ in 'Functions and Limits' and would not budge on it, though I humbled myself before his table in the faculty lounge, begging for a B-. And then – would it never end? – Greg Stillman, a Pacifica High senior with serious blue eyes who'd asked me to a junior-senior thing at Carbon Beach, got so stoned after his physics final that he fell into the Pacifica swimming pool while it was drained and broke his leg in two places.

Accepting the fact that this was destined to be my *dies irae*, I skated home as quickly and carefully as possible to discover that the door to the apartment had been left open and that my beloved little bullterrier, Groucho, was missing. Not only was he my lifelong companion, he had been a gift from my father, the only link to a man who had gone away thirteen years before to meet his fate in a seemingly senseless war. Frantically, I rushed through the apartment – my bedroom; grandmother's;

the guest room, where mother stayed when she was in town without male companionship (which was seldom); the bathrooms; the living room, where Groucho often hid under the tufted couch; the dining area and the kitchen.

It took the usual ten or fifteen minutes to get through the UBC switchboard to grandmother. She was and always will be an actress. If you don't immediately respond to her name, Edith Van Dine, you would surely recognize her as Aunt Lil Fairchild, the voice of reason and morality on the top-rated soap, 'Look to Tomorrow'. Grandmother hates me to phone her at work, but this was an emergency.

'Groucho was in his box when I left this morning,' she told me rather peevishly. 'And I certainly shut the front door when I left.'

'It was wide open.'

'Well, I don't understand that at all, dear,' she said, and I could tell her mind was occupied with other things – lies, adultery, deceit, abortion, murder, the junk her television life is so full of.

'Sehr, we'll have to get into this Groucho business a bit later. Gene's waving at me and there's blood in his eyes. Look around the apartment. I'm sure he's just being playful.'

Grandmother is sweet but not what you'd call dependable. Groucho, who was much too old to be playful any longer, was gone. And I knew that I had to take matters into my own hands.

2. According to the post office on the corner, the Bay City Police Department was responsible for crimes perpetrated in Bay Heights, where we lived. It was located at the rear of the white art-deco City Hall Building on Main Street that you've probably seen on all those TV crime shows that so often lack authenticity. The interior was quite different from the TV versions, however, dark and dank and depressing and painted a sickly green. It was filled with different activity, too. As I roller-skated

in, two clean-cut policemen were supporting a badly mauled black fellow whose right eye was hanging out of its socket. The poor man glared at me with his one good eye and asked, 'Are you a Baptist?'

I shook my head and one of the officers informed him, 'You're shit out of luck, Willy, looking for a Baptist in this neighborhood.' And they dragged him away, past a wire cage door and on to God knows where. I was staring after him when a very stern uniformed policeman with a sand-colored crew cut and moustache asked me if I was looking for the Motor Vehicle Division.

'I am not,' I told him. 'I'm here to report a stolen dog.'

He sighed. 'Well, take those skates off, then. No skating in here.'

That *extremely* important task having been disposed of to his satisfaction, he sighed again and dug through papers beneath a long counter. He handed me one and said, 'Fill it out, please.'

It was labeled 'Petty Theft Report'.

'There's nothing petty about the theft, officer,' I told him. 'Groucho is descended from the white bullterriers of England and has the papers to prove it. He was a gift from my late father. So excuse me if I do not consider him petty.'

'It's just a classification, miss. Fill out the form, or don't fill it out. Your call.'

It was a foolish document, designed for a thing and not a living creature. I was doing what I could with it when an aging Chicano in a coffee-pastel suit (the lightweight, three-piece kind with tacky subdued piping on the lapels) entered the waiting area from what was apparently the squad room. He stared at me, frowning as if he were trying to remember something. Then he strolled over and picked up my half-completed report. He glanced at it and asked with a cocky grin, 'So you got a missing mutt?' **Copyrighted Material**

‘My dog is missing, yes.’

‘Well, honey,’ he said, ‘we got eighty-seven murders on the books, sixty-eight muggings and rapes, upwards of one hundred and thirty b-and-e’s. So I wanna be straight with you. Unless your dog happens to bite some traffic cop in the butt, he’s gonna stay missing.’

‘My Groucho has better manners than to bite some cop on the butt, or even to respond to that kind of impolite language,’ I told him, wadding the sheet into a ball and tossing it into a wire basket. ‘Sorry to have taken up so much of your valuable time, which, of course, our taxes pay for.’

‘You a big taxpayer, honey?’

‘My grandmother is.’

‘What about mom and pop?’

‘My pop, as you call him, is deceased. My mother . . . well, I don’t see much of her. Now, if you’ve no other questions about my family, may I go?’

‘Hey, don’t be so tough,’ he said, grinning. ‘Maybe I got an idea for you. There’s this friend of mine, one no-nonsense son of a bitch – excuse my French. He’s got the reputation for finding anything – men, women, runaway kids on dope. That’s how he got his nickname, the Bloodhound. Maybe he could find your mu– dog.’

I stared at him, trying to ascertain how much confidence I should place in a smirking Latin dandy.

‘Where is this Bloodhound?’

‘Downtown L.A.,’ he said, slipping a card from his smooth leather wallet and scribbling a name and address on its blank side with an imitation gold Cartier pen. ‘Here you go, honey.’

I looked at the name he had written: Leo Bloodworth. The other side of the card read: Lt. Rudy Cugat, BCPD, in embossed letters.

‘No relation to the bandleader,’ he said.

‘Who?’

‘Xavier Cugat? Little guy with a moustache and a restaurant on La Cienega. No? Before your time, I guess, honey. Never mind. You give the Hound my card and tell him his friend Cugie recommended him highly.’ Lt. Cugat was almost giggling now.

‘Is this going to cost me a bundle?’ I asked.

‘Oh,’ he replied airily, ‘a few bucks. But it’ll be worth it, I guarantee, to experience the Bloodhound in action.’

3. I do very little traveling beyond the West Side area. In all of my fourteen and three-quarter years, I had been to downtown Los Angeles only twice. The first time was when my mother was staying at the Bonaventure with her lover of the moment, a really rancid personality who was singing dreary old Frank Sinatra stuff in a cocktail lounge there. The other time, Gran took me to the Music Center to see one of her cronies, a nice woman named Beverly Smythe, in a new play imported from England in which the F-word was used repeatedly, much to Gran’s chagrin. (The way the world is headed, she says, they’ll be asking her to use those kinds of words on her soap, and that’s when she fully expects to pack it in. ‘Just pack it in,’ she promises.)

Anyway, though I was as careful as possible that afternoon, I caught the wrong bus and wound up several miles north of the address on Lieutenant Cugat’s card. Luckily, I’d brought my Rollerballs.

It was nearing 4: 30 P.M. when I skated up to find – in the midst of a bunch of discount stores, pawnshops, and a porno movie house that looked like one giant rats’ nest – a dark, brooding building. A directory informed me that Mr Leo Bloodworth and his associate, Mr Roy Kaspar, were officed in suite 403.

Since there were no signs prohibiting it, I skated into the gloomy building.

It was not a busy place. Lots of wood and some of it polished. A rather unsound cage elevator in the center of an open skywell lobby was readying for takeoff. Two nuns were boarding it and I skated on behind them. They were discussing a bargain in plain white underwear they expected to find on the third floor, chattering away like chirping penguins.

The elevator operator, another birdlike creature, a molting chicken, seemed very relieved when the nuns left us. So much so that he slipped a pint bottle of whisky from the inside pocket of his shiny orange jacket with yellow piping, and drank freely from it. He turned to me, wiped his lips on his sleeve, and, grinning most obscenely and toothlessly, offered me the bottle. I declined politely, wondering what sort of mess that smiling Latin had gotten me into.

Naturally, Bloodworth the Bloodhound's office was as dark as Lucifer's soul, to use one of Gran's similes. I sat down on the cold and dusty tile floor, exchanged my Rollerballs for low-rider sneaks, and prepared to wait till the Ice Age, if necessary.

That's when I noticed the strange chap across the hall, sort of hiding in a recess in the wall in front of an unoccupied office. He was a real mouth-breather, this lurker – gargantuan, beet-faced, with semi-punk shaved head. He was wearing a lemon-colored Lacoste shirt (the collar had points, so it was one of the synthetics, rather than the pure cotton) and cranberry slacks, with the obligatory white belt. He was staring at the door to 403.

'Waiting for Mr Bloodworth?' I asked.

No reply. He took a wooden pencil out of his pants pocket and began chewing it. Just crunching it up as if it were a Baby Ruth or something. Then spitting it out on the floor.

You aren't Mr Bloodworth by any horrible chance?' I wondered out loud.

He shot me an evil look and said, 'Get the hell out of here, you little bint.' Flecks of yellow pencil coated his lips.

‘Intimidation does not work on me,’ I told him. ‘I have every right to be here and I resent being called whatever it was you called me.’

He snorted and ate another pencil, and took our conversation no further. Nor did he leave his niche. We stayed like that for what seemed to be hours. Then the elevator doors groaned open and this big, sort of middle-aged, sort of fat – well, not so much fat as thick-chested – fellow exited.

He was dressed in a neatly pressed tan poplin suit and walked as if his feet hurt. As he drew closer, I noticed that his eyes were totally amazing. Yellow-brown and sleepy, except when they flickered, like the eyes of a hawk I saw on a class trip to the San Diego Zoo. They shifted from me to the spiked-head bozo who that moment stepped forward from his shadowy spot.

‘Mr Bloodworth?’ I asked.

The big man with yellow eyes turned to face me and that’s when the bozo caught him in the side of the head with a fist like a travel iron.

Mr Bloodworth – for it was he – bounced into the wall, and the bozo smashed him again. As he slid to the floor, the bozo loomed over him, spitting pencil flecks, veins bulging out like worms on his arms and neck.

‘Listen to me, Bloodworth,’ he shouted, ‘I want you to tell that slimeball of a partner of yours that Gottlieb’s got more of the same for him.’

The bozo, Gottlieb, drew back his foot, apparently intent on kicking the fallen man. I rushed forward and swung my skates into that part of the bozo’s anatomy where Gran suggested I hit any man who gave me a moment’s trouble. Gottlieb was both surprised and pained. He doubled up, howled, and lurched forward, his hand with gnawed fingernails reaching for me.

But Mr Bloodworth was just about on his feet again. He

shouted at the bozo and that craven thug scuttled off down the hall, holding his wounded privates.

Mr Bloodworth coughed a few times and checked his teeth for possible damage. Then he pressed his left temple and winced. He tried, unsuccessfully, to brush the dust and grime from his clothes. 'Just had the damn suit cleaned,' he mumbled in a rumbling baritone.

For some reason, he smelled of chlorine.

He unlocked the door to his office and I followed him into a tiny anteroom. The mail had been deposited on the floor and Mr Bloodworth moved it around with the toe of his shoe. 'There's a good one,' he said, indicating an envelope that he obviously expected me to pick up for him.

I handed it to him and he ripped it open with his little finger.

'Who was that brute?' I asked.

'Gottlieb?' Mr Bloodworth replied in a most unconcerned manner. 'Just another satisfied customer.'

(Beginning: **DIE LIKE A DOG: A novel based on fact** by Leo J. Bloodworth)

This book is dedicated to my three ex-wives: Mrs Louise Lentz (née Gregory), Miss Rita Yarbo, and Mrs Irene Gallup (née O'Brien). While they may have made my life a living hell, at least they had the decency to deny me the dubious joys of fatherhood.

My sincerest thanks go also to Jerry Flaherty of the Los Angeles Post, who was of tremendous assistance in getting this whole thing on paper.

*The Breakers
La Jolla, California*

1. The Pentecostal Church of Marine Rebirth in the San Fernando Valley was a former electronics-parts warehouse that had been gutted, then partitioned into cubicles, each of which was filled with a wooden hot tub. Each tub was in turn filled with a weary businessman type, neck-deep in steamy, soothing water, being guided through a submerged Born Again experience by a healthy young woman with a solemn expression, a strong set of mitts, and unfettered bosoms. There were about twenty-five couples in the tubs, all as naked as apples. And it wasn't even noon.

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The Most Reverend Buddy Fedderson and I were looking down on them from a catwalk in front of his green-velvet-draped sanctum one flight up. Reverend Buddy adjusted his wraparound terry-cloth vestment and smiled benignly at the giant egg crate of wet round humans below.

‘Our philosophy is a simple one, Mr Bloodworth. Relieve the mind and body of all want and the soul will take care of itself.’

‘Amen,’ I added, since my mouth was hanging open anyway. ‘Reverend, I wonder if you’d mind pointing out the bald head that belongs to Mr Milton DeRitter.’

Fedderson dropped a few levels of beatification closer to the earth and asked, ‘Huh?’

‘I’m not really here for a marine rebirth,’ I confessed. ‘Maybe when I have more time.’

‘But what –’

‘I want DeRitter. I’ve been on his case for nearly a month.’

Reverend Buddy’s sky-blue peepers turned frosty. ‘You can go fu–’

I held up my hand. ‘Not in front of the holy hot tubs. Look, pal, I’m not here to cause you any grief. I just want DeRitter.’

He glared at me while his mind clicked away. Finally he said, ‘I can’t allow this. Mr DeRitter is –’

‘Mr DeRitter is an embezzler. He isn’t even Mr DeRitter.’

‘You local or federal?’

‘Local,’ I said, not bothering to tell him local what.

‘Compartment fourteen,’ he said, looking past me to his office. ‘Try to be as non-disruptive as you can. Now, if you’ll excuse me.’

He drifted back into his air-cooled chamber and I hopped down the metal steps and wandered through the cubicles until I found a wooden door decorated with a haloed fish and the number 14. Past it, only a few steps separated me from a chest-high tub. A guy with wispy red hair and a freckled scalp was hunkering at its bottom, communicating via air hose with a hefty blonde,

who seemed to be doing something below with her educated hands. Holding her head above water, she shifted her attention to me and frowned.

‘Reel him in,’ I whispered. ‘Reverend Buddy’s orders.’

She glanced up at the catwalk, then back at me. ‘Gimme a few seconds. He’s just about to see the light.’

A little more fondling and she submerged completely, resurfacing again a few seconds later with DeRitter. She was formidable enough to drape his chin and arms over the side of the tub without any help from him. She then carefully withdrew the air hose from his slack mouth.

His eyes were shut. He was one spent mackerel. But he did have a grin on his face.

‘Wake up,’ I said in his ear. ‘Time to pay for your sins.’

DeRitter’s pale eyes popped open. The girl, standing behind him, pressed against him, rubbing his neck.

‘Easy,’ she cooed. ‘Relax now. You don’t want to spasm or anything, honey.’

‘Who the hell . . . ?’ he asked me.

‘Your family hired me to find you, pal. Madge. Marcus, Junior. You must remember them.’

‘I don’t know any –’

‘Sure you do. Your name is Marcus Weill and, up until three years ago, you were the trusted senior partner of Weill and Weill, Investments, of New York, Chicago, and Paris. The Paris is a nice touch.’

The muscles in his hairy shoulders were bunching up. The wet girl gave me a nasty look, but I’d seen them before. DeRitter/Weill wasn’t any slender reed. He wiped water out of his eyes and said, ‘I don’t know what the hell you’re blabbing about.’

‘Save your breath, Mr Weill. It seems to be in short supply right now.’

He moaned and, without preamble, vaulted out of the tub,

kicking the girl in the head – an accident, I assumed – and splashing me with a wave of chlorinated water. He tried to bull past me in the small cubicle. I grabbed for him, but he was too slick, so I kicked the door shut and pushed him into it, wrestling him to the ground.

He was built like a steel drum and I was glad he'd spent the last half-hour relieving his body and mind or else he might have had me for lunch.

'C'mon, Weill,' I grumbled, straddling his slippery chest with my knees pinning his biceps. 'We're both too old for this kind of crap.'

The girl slipped over the side of the tub, wetting us even more. She stood there for a moment, rubbing her head and giving us a nice long look at her. Then she flounced past us, opening the door as far as she could with Weill's head in the way. As an afterthought, she whacked the door against his nearly exposed scalp before shutting it behind her.

Weill looked foggy. He was breathing like a porpoise with a head cold.

'Your son wants the whole mess cleared up quickly and painlessly,' I said. 'You hand over whatever's left of the five hundred and fifty thousand. Then you fly back to New York and sign a few papers – including a divorce document for your wife – and you'll be free to do whatever you want, short of dipping into some other till.'

'No police?'

'How much of the loot is left?'

'I can pay it back. Fact is, I've done well out here. I manufacture vitamin packs – Vita-Val.'

'Yeah, I know. Well, if the bonding company is satisfied, there probably won't be any legal action taken. Your son doesn't want any publicity. He figures the family has been through enough the past three years.'

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‘The kid’s a weasel and his mother is worse,’ Weill said. ‘Suppose I offer you twenty thousand . . .’

I shook my head sadly. ‘First, I’m collecting ten percent of whatever I recover. Second, your son didn’t get my last good suit all wet. And third, he’d just hire somebody else to find you, and you’re not that hard to find.’

Three hours later I’d accompanied DeRitter/Weill to his bank, wired an impressive cashier’s check to my client, put his errant old man on a flight east, and was standing in a barrel at Lee’s on Hope Street, waiting for my suit to be cleaned and pressed.

From there my day went downhill on rollers, culminating with my being slugged just outside my office by a newt-brain named Gottlieb for whom my associate, Roy Kaspar, had done some work – evidently not to Gottlieb’s liking.

Still, he would not have been able to nail me if it hadn’t been for a weird little girl in the hallway who called my name at the exact moment Gottlieb made his move. Once I hit the concrete, the bastard tried to drop-kick me over my own transom. But I was a little too agile for him, so he skipped. By the time I dragged myself into the office and turned on a torch under yesterday’s drip roast, I was still too woozy to notice I wasn’t alone.

The kid had followed me in. I was inspecting the bruise on my chin and an inch-long slice in my upper gum when she pulled the blinds and let in the smoggy-filtered evening glare. ‘Oh, Jesus,’ I groaned, as a needle of light pierced my skull and lodged right behind my eyes.

‘This place is fit for goats,’ the kid informed me.

I squinted at her. About five feet tall, skinny as a colt, blond hair straight to her shoulders. Wearing Levi’s and a T-shirt that read: NOTHING TO SAY. Like hell. She was turning up her pointy nose at my office. My cluttered desk – the mark of a successful man, my father always said, my pea-green filing cabinet with its

side kicked in; and my smart, plum-colored velvet couch with lion-paw legs.

‘We don’t open the blinds in here,’ I told her. ‘The blinds are never to be opened.’

‘Germs, like evil thoughts, are scattered by sunlight,’ she said.

I groaned again and heard the coffee bubbling in its porcelain pot. As I poured a cup, the girl informed me, ‘That puts pure bile in your system.’

‘Do tell. You selling cookies or something, sister?’

She arched one pale eyebrow. ‘You’re the sleuth, Mr Bloodworth. Do you see any cookies?’

‘No, but I’ve been fooled before.’

‘In point of fact, my name is Serendipity Dahlquist, and I am here to secure your services, such as they are. I would not be here at all if the police – a Lieutenant Rudy Cugat – had not recommended you highly. Bloodworth the Bloodhound, he called you.’

I studied the kid over my coffee cup, wondering if Cugat had been putting her on. Or me. Or the both of us. I decided that Cugat had a downright Oriental sense of humor.

‘Who do you want found?’ I asked her.

She answered straight out, ‘Groucho.’

‘Then you’ve got a problem, lady. Groucho and his brothers are playing to a whole new audience these days.’

‘Not that Groucho,’ she shot back impatiently. ‘My terrier. My sweet little terrier.’

‘A dog?’

‘A very special dog.’

I moved around the desk and started inching toward the door. ‘Well, Miss Dahlquist, I sort of specialize in missing humans. Bail jumpers. Skip artists. The odd runaway. I can put myself into their skins, try to figure out where they’re headed.

Dogs, I just don’t know.

I gathered from her crestfallen expression that she believed me.

‘Lieutenant Cugat was having a joke at my expense,’ she said flatly.

I nodded and stood beside the open door, shifting impatiently. She started out. And then Roy Kaspar arrived, his timing as impeccable as always.

He wore the kind of sincere moustache and razor-cut hair that were all the rage at singles pickup bars that year. He was easygoing and boyish and I wouldn’t have trusted him farther than the length of the cord on his blow dryer. He smiled, flashing his perfect white teeth, and looked from the girl to me. ‘Christ sakes, Leo. Congratulations. You found the Lindbergh kid.’

‘The Lindbergh kid was a male and he’d be older than me, Roy. But it’s nice you dropped by. Your client Gottlieb left a message.’

‘Was he here?’ Kaspar asked casually, making sure that his open shirt collar was tucked smoothly under the lapel of his silk sport coat. ‘The guy’s a real Gomer. He give you any trouble?’

‘None to speak of.’

‘He threw himself on Mr Bloodworth in a cowardly attack,’ the kid piped up, ‘but Mr Bloodworth chased him away. It was awesome to see.’

I gave her a suspicious eye.

‘The jerk doesn’t know what the hell he wants,’ Kaspar said. ‘He hires me, Leo, to get the goods on his wife. Who’s spectacular, by the way. So I get the job done, and when he sees it’s me in the snapshots with her, he shorts out. Totally unspools. Gets downright abusive and says he won’t pay. So’ – he gave me a wink – ‘I withheld the negatives until he came up with the green.’

I rested an inch or two of rump on my desk edge, wondering how much longer I could put up with a bum like Roy in the next

office. I'd earned fifty grand or so that afternoon. Another pay-day like that and I'd be able to make the nut without him.

The girl gave out an impatient 'A-hem.'

'Oh, right,' I told her. 'I'm sorry I can't help you, young lady, so if that's all . . .'

'It certainly is not all,' she said, sticking out her little chin. 'I have traveled seventeen miles by bus and three by roller skate over curbs that have no dips to hire a detective, and I will not be shown the door until I ask for it.' She tugged a bright cloth wallet from her jeans and removed a folded \$50 bill.

She had Roy's attention.

'Perhaps if you told me the problem . . .' he began.

'No way! It's the Bloodhound who is supposed to be the best. It's the Bloodhound I came to hire.'

'Cugat sent her,' I told Kaspar. 'Her dog is missing.'

'Dog?' He managed to control his giggle. 'But, Leo, I'm the firm's dog expert. Remember how I tracked down Fritz the Wonder Spaniel for NBC?'

I sighed. The guy was lower than an earthworm's chin.

'Does this fellow really specialize in animals?' the girl asked me. I shrugged. I wasn't about to encourage her to hire Kaspar. 'Some say he was raised by wolves,' I told her.

'Right,' Kaspar added. 'Me and Remus. Uncle Remus.'

'Romulus and Remus,' the girl corrected him. 'Uncle Remus was an old guy who made up patronizing fables for children.' She glared at both of us accusingly.

Either Kaspar didn't get her message or he was fearless. 'Tell you what, Miss – ah, Miss . . .'

'Miss Dahlquist,' she said. 'Serendipity Dahlquist.'

'Serendipity? That's a real Sixties name, isn't it, Leo?'

I didn't bother to answer. What the hell did I know or care about Sixties names?

'Serendipity,' he said to her, 'suppose I drive you home and

you can fill me in on your missing dog. Just maybe, I might make a suggestion or two about getting it back.'

She looked him over from stem to stern. 'I'll accept your offer of a ride, assuming it in no way commits me to hire you.' She tucked her money away.

Kaspar blinked at her. 'Not at all, Serendipity. No commitment nohow. O-kay, then, soon as I pick up my mail, we'll do it.'

'Miss Dahlquist,' I said, 'I'd appreciate a moment alone with Mr Kaspar.'

She nodded, her hand on the doorknob. 'I place a great deal of faith in my instincts, Mr Bloodworth,' she said thoughtfully, 'and I am convinced that if you were to apply yourself, you would be equally as adept with animals as you are with humans.'

On that exit line she closed the door carefully behind her.

Kaspar looked sheepish. 'I'm just driving her home, Leo.'

'She's a little kid, Roy.'

'A real cute little kid, or didn't you notice?'

I pushed off of the desk and took a step toward him.

'Hey, take it easy, big fella. I'm just yanking your chain. You know I like a lot of meat on the bones. I'm going her way, is all.'

'And don't take her money.'

'What about her share of the gas?'

'Not a sou.'

'Gimme some credit,' he said, grinning his boyish grin. 'I wouldn't take the kid's bread. You know me.'

'That I do, Roy. But I keep hoping that one of these times you're going to prove me wrong.'

2. Call me a cockeyed optimist, but I figured that closed the book on Miss Serendipity Dahlquist and her missing mutt. Four nights later it flipped open again.

I was in the Irish Mist, a no-frills saloon on South Figueroa within staggering distance of my office. It boasted a clientele of

big, noisy, red-faced micks with bad haircuts, mean drunks in the main, and hennaed women of indeterminate age who, when pressed, could be even meaner. The owner was a grizzled ex-stunt gaffer named Mickey O'Hanrahan who was as tough as a hard-boiled owl until he started to reminisce about his youthful days at Twentieth, working for the late director John Ford. A large photo of Ford, his mottled face wearing an eye patch and a sour-stomach scowl, occupied a place of honor on the wall behind the bar, right next to the Bushmill's.

When I'm not on a job, I begin my evenings at the Mist and try to be gone before the fights break out. On that particular night I lingered a bit too long over my fifth Harp. The Clancy Brothers were wailing about Donegal in hi-fi and I was engaged in polite but pointed conversation with a big brunette named Tamarra when a certain Mr Nolan decided to shatter a pint bottle of ale on the skull of a certain Mr Feighan, and they fell to the floor, flailing and biting each other in earnest. What with my attention divided between Nolan's attempts to gouge out Feighan's eyes and Tamarra's invigorating way of measuring the breadth of my left thigh with her ice-pick fingernails, it took me a moment or two to realize that someone was tugging on the tail of my coat.

'Mr Bloodworth, you really must pull yourself together,' said an annoyingly familiar, peevish, little-girl voice.

Tamarra took a long look at the kid and asked quite reasonably, 'Who's the squirt, Hound?'

'My name is Serendipity Dahlquist.'

'Well, don't worry, baby, you can get that fixed. Is she yours, Hound?'

'In no sense,' I replied. To the girl I added, 'This is no place for you, Miss Dahlquist.'

She surveyed the room with her critical blue eyes. Nolan and Feighan, both dripping red, were being shown the door by

O'Hanrahan. A couple of the regulars were kicking sawdust over the blood on the floor and picking up the broken glass.

'Nor is it any place for you, Mr Bloodworth,' the girl said. 'This is a place for hooligans and hookers.'

'Now wait a minute, kid . . .' Tamarra began, slipping from her stool.

The girl ignored her. 'The manager of your building, Mr Diez, told me you'd likely be there, Mr Bloodworth. I thought you'd want to know that your office has been vandalized.'

'Huh?' was the best I could do.

'Three men in suits and ties. They looked quite respectable. Once they were inside your office, I left my hiding place and told the night watchman. But he wasn't very interested. He said he didn't even have bullets in his gun. He let me phone Mr Diez at home and Mr Diez suggested I come here to tell you, rather than disturb the police, whom he felt would be more trouble than help.'

'Are the robbers still there?'

'I doubt it. Are you leaving this loathsome dive or not?'

Tamarra's eyes were tiny slits as she glared at the girl. 'He'll leave when I'm goddamned ready, kid. Why don't you run along and peddle it in some punk club?'

'Ah, Tamarra, honey, I'd better go see about the office.'

'You into kiddy porn these days, Hound?' one of the barfly humorists shouted.

Tamarra answered for me. 'Hound's nearing fifty. You know how it is – they can't get 'em young enough.'

'Just relax,' I said to no one in particular as I got to my feet carefully.

'She got a kid sister for me, Hound? She don't have to be ten years old, long as she looks like a ten-year-old.'

As the kid and I headed out, O'Hanrahan returned from depositing the battlers on the sidewalk. By then the whole room

was whistling and stomping and laughing. The pub owner glowered at his customers and asked me, 'What the bejesus is goin' on?'

I shrugged. 'Tamarra called John Ford a one-eyed son of a bitch and the rest of 'em sort of went on from there.'

O'Hanrahan rushed to his bar and brought down one steel fist on it. 'All right, damn ya', he growled at the laughing drunks, 'let's see how funny you think this is: The pub is closed for the night! Out, you bums. Let your families put up with you for a change.'

I pulled the girl through the swinging doors. There was the sound of broken glass behind us. Then shouts. I heard my name mentioned, not kindly. A couple of wobbly specimens stumbled out of the Mist and waved their fists at us.

The girl and I ran the four blocks to my office as if the both of us were kids.

1. The night watchman, a young adult Mexican, was standing in the rubble of Mr Bloodworth's reception area with a sheepish look on his almond-colored face. He drew his pistol.

'Señor Diez gives me this, but no ammunition,' he told Mr Bloodworth, who, after our little jog, was sweating and puffing and wheezing like a candidate for the emphysema ward. 'I am like the bull without the testicles,' the watchman added, noticing me a bit late.

'It's OK, Diego,' Mr Bloodworth told him. 'There's nothing in here worth anybody getting shot over. How's about giving me a hand straightening the place up?'

Diego puffed out his chest and shook his head. 'I must return to my duty, señor. My duty is to protect this building, not be its janitor.' With that, he left us.

Mr Bloodworth watched him go, a little smile on his lips, then weaved into his office where the contents of his filing cabinets had been emptied onto the carpet along with the contents of his desk drawers. The purple sofa had not been bothered much, however, and Mr Bloodworth flopped onto it, patting it as if it were an animal that had won a ribbon. He was still wheezing.

'You're in bad shape, even for a man your age,' I told him.

'How'd you like to get tossed out of a window, kid?'

'Barroom talk,' I replied. 'Aren't you interested in the descriptions of the men who did this?'

He leaned his head back against the couch, closed the lids on his yellow eyes, and sighed. 'Oh, God, I suppose so. But do you think you could do a little light housecleaning while you talk?'

'I guess,' I said. 'If you're too ancient and worn out to do it yourself.'

I bent over to start collecting the files. 'They were not much older than college boys, only better dressed. Suits and ties. One was blond, one dark-haired, and one had red hair. He was the best-looking.'

'How'd they get in?' Breathing heavily through his nose, he pushed himself off the couch, his eyes open but sleepy-looking, and waded through the debris to where a bottle of Jim Beam lay on its side under the desk. He started to drink from it.

'That could be poisoned,' I suggested.

He hesitated a second, looked from the bottle to me, and then, rather defiantly, poured a goodly amount down his gullet. He grabbed a handful of papers and tossed them every which way into one of the open file drawers. 'I'll sort 'em out later,' he mumbled, mainly to himself

'Well,' he turned to me, 'do I get to hear all about these second-story men or not?'

'Could you please put that away first?' I asked, pointing to the Jim Beam. 'The smell of whiskey makes me barf.'

He raised an eyebrow at me, then picked up the bottle and took another swallow. Sometimes men can be so childish. He drank every last drop, capped the bottle, and carefully placed the empty into a metal wastebasket. 'All put away,' he said.

'It's your mind and body that you're destroying,' I said.

'You know the one thing I like the most about you, Miss Dahlquist?' he asked. He had my attention. 'You remind me of my mother.'

Then he chuckled. Rather nastily, I thought.

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2. It took us the better part of an hour to clean up the mess. During that time I further described the three men who broke into the office. They'd reminded me of the sort of East Coast junior advertising executives who take Gran to lunch every so often. They try to get her to appear in their commercials for dishwasher or cheese dip or whatever. She always goes to lunch with them, but she never agrees to do their ads. She says that she will only promote products she herself uses. She lives with the hope that someday someone will ask her to be spokeswoman for Peal's Lady Soap or Royal Family Preserves, but I doubt they ever will.

The vandals resembled ad execs, very clean and dapper and well groomed. Definitely not your usual sneak thieves. Mr Bloodworth was not too impressed by my observations until I mentioned that the blond-haired man opened the door with a set of keys.

'Describe the keys.'

'Four or five on a ring. The blond-haired man fumbled with them until he found just the right one and he opened the door with it.'

Mr Bloodworth frowned. 'What the hell were you doing in the hallway anyhow, sis?'

'Would it be possible for you to call me Serendipity?'

'Too much effort. Let's split the difference and call you Sarah.'

It was better than 'sis'.

'I was waiting for your partner, Mr Kaspar.'

'He's not my partner, exactly.'

'He's not much of anything. He promised me I'd hear from him within three days. He's one day late.'

Mr Bloodworth's frown deepened. 'You hired him?'

'Didn't he tell you?'

'I haven't seen him in a while myself. How much did you pay him?'

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‘Pay him? Do I look like I was B.Y.?’

‘Born yesterday?’

I smiled. ‘Precisely. I gave him nothing but the promise of a reward if he should help me to recover Groucho.’

‘And Roy agreed to that? To work on the come?’

I nodded. ‘Gran and I put up with him for several hours while he questioned us and snooped around the apartment, looking through my things. He felt quite confident he could find Groucho. Only I haven’t heard from him. I tried calling here, but I kept getting that silly phone-machine message, the one with the bad Humphrey Bogart imitation.’

‘I’m a little embarrassed by that, myself,’ Mr Bloodworth admitted. ‘So you came here tonight –’

‘This afternoon,’ I corrected. ‘I spent several hours in front of your locked door. I assumed one of you would arrive eventually. I had no idea anyone could keep such irregular business hours.’

‘It’s that kind of business.’

‘Well, I’d like to talk with Mr Kaspar. If he’s not sincere about finding Groucho, I will have to make other arrangements.’

‘That might be a good idea, si–uh – Sarah.’

‘I want to fire him myself. Where might I find him?’

He shrugged.

‘Don’t you know? Has the Bloodhound lost his own partner?’

‘I haven’t lost him. And he isn’t really my partner. We share the rent is all.’

‘Then where is he?’

‘How the hell should I know? He has his own cases. I don’t keep tabs on him, for Christ’s sake. I’ve got my own problems, which is what you’re becoming, now that I think of it.’

‘Tell me where I may find Mr Kaspar and you’ll be rid of me.’

He sighed again and led me from his office to the anteroom. Then he opened the door to Mr Kaspar’s office, turned on the light, and grunted, ‘Holy shit – uh, excuse me, kid.’

I would have told him that I'd heard the word before, but I was too amazed at what had been done to the room. It had been totally, awesomely devastated. The wall-to-wall carpet had been ripped free. Desk drawers had been emptied and smashed. A leatherette couch had been torn and gutted. Parts of a stereo radio lay scattered beside an end table, the top of which had been pried off.

Mr Bloodworth's face had turned a strange gray color. His eyes were almost open as they studied the destruction. 'They were just going through the motions out there. This is the big casino. What the Christ were they looking for?'

He picked up the empty plastic casing for a radio. 'Something fairly small.'

He did an about-face on the mess and loped back into the reception area. The desk there had scarcely been touched, possibly because it was bare of anything but a telephone and a black intercom sort of gadget. Mr Bloodworth picked up the phone and pressed a few numbers. Then he cursed and replaced the phone.

The horrible Humphrey Bogart imitation blared out of the black gadget box. 'I'm sorry but Bloodworth and Kaspar are out on a case,' it rattled on. It was Mr Kaspar doing such a lousy job of it. Gran was in a Bogart movie, *In a Lonely Place*, which I have seen any number of times on TV. She portrayed an actress, which must not have been too big a stretch for her.

'Leave your name and number at the beep,' continued Kaspar/Bogart, 'and they'll be looking for you, kid.' This was followed by the promised beep, which was in turn followed by Mr Bloodworth clicking off the machine. He pressed a set of buttons again, then waited for several unanswered rings before replacing the receiver. He looked concerned.

'No answer?'

He shook his head.

'I guess he must be out of something,' I said.