

A Dog and Its Bone

by Natalie McNabb

Their coffee was cold and the room hot, but they hunkered over their cups nevertheless. Mickey scanned the bodies, tables, and chairs that were pressed together by the four brick walls. A brunette in the corner placed her cup on a saucer, looked up from her paper. She lifted her chin at Mickey, trapped his gaze. Mickey looked away and whispered to Christophe, “The details?”

“He was late leaving his jewelry store,” said Christophe. “Overheard his wife on the phone telling him to skip the bank because they had to leave for some show she couldn’t shut up about. He walked in with a moneybag—shoved it in his coat when he saw me. No telling what’s in that bag. Remember the gem appraiser’s bag we got?”

Mickey nodded.

“There’re alarms on the windows and front and side doors, but there’s a doggy door around back. Just push the panel. No motion sensors inside. Not with a dog that size.”

“You’re kidding,” said Mickey and looked back at the brunette. She had a ring, which would be a challenge, but they were feistier with rings on their fingers and never followed you around afterwards.

“Am I kidding about what?”

Mickey looked back at Christophe and rolled his eyes. “I’m crawling through doggy doors now?”

“It’s more of a dog door—a big one. They have a huge white shaggy thing.”

“English sheepdog?” asked Mickey. The brunette in the corner grinned at him.

“Yeah. One of those.” Christophe continued, lower, “No knives though, alright? Dog’s a pussy cat, and no one’ll be home anyway.”

“Except the dog.”

“Take peanut butter.”

“A bone’s less messy,” Mickey said. “And, it’ll keep the dog chewing on something other than my ass.”

“Lower or someone’ll hear you, Mic.”

Mickey smiled at the brunette, and she looked away. He drew his knife, butterflied it open under the table and pressed it to Christophe’s kneecap. “My little friend goes wherever I do. Like it or not.”

“Geez-us, Mic. Put that thing away,” Christophe said. “You get cocky when you pack that.”

“Cocky?” Mickey glanced at the brunette, who was reading her paper again. Maybe he’d join her and cover her second coffee or dinner, hopefully more.

“No weapons was our deal, which means,” Christophe’s fist came down on the table more to make his point than to get anyone’s attention, “no knives. That almost did you in last time.”

Mickey whispered, “But it didn’t.” The brunette pushed her coffee cup away.

“Someone’s going to get hurt.”

“The guy was fine. You saw the paper. Besides, it’s not like it was ten years ago. People are crazy now, some vigilante movement or something. I don’t know what it is.”

“We want cash, not to hurt anyone. I’ve got a bad feeling about your little friend.”

Mickey put his knife back in his pocket. “I take the risk. All you do is tell me what to do and then collect half.”

“Trust me, Mic.”

“Oh, just—”

“Promise.” Christophe stared for a moment, waiting. He sighed. “This new attitude isn’t what kept cash in our pockets and us out of jail for ten years. Don’t start doing your own thing now. Unless you want to do just that—your own thing, on your own.”

“Oh, come on. You know me.” Mickey was grinning at the brunette who, finished with her coffee and paper, was buttoning her coat.

“Yeah, I know you. That’s the trouble. No knives. Okay?”

The brunette stood, turned from Mickey and walked toward the door. A ring was too much trouble today. Yes. Much too much trouble.

“Mic, hey—pay attention.” Christophe held up three fingers and said, “There are three places to look first—the chest in the bedroom, the living room armoire and the cupboard under the fish tank. Has to be in one of those spots.”

“You spent all afternoon installing their cable and couldn’t even figure out where he stashed the bag for me?”

“I saw him rummaging in those spots, but couldn’t tell if the bag was still on him or not. He’s a portly guy. And, he kept looking over his shoulder. I couldn’t stare too hard.”

“That’s even worse! What’d you do? Follow him around his house? I’d be looking over my shoulder too.”

“I had installations in each room he was in. Was checking the television pictures. Had the guy’s son helping and everything, but the kid kept asking about every wire stripper, crimper and staple gun in my tool belt—in-between his god-awful coughing. If I get his cold, I get seventy-five percent instead of half.”

Mickey shook his head. “Funny. So, through the doggy door to the fish tank cupboard, the living room armoire and bedroom chest.”

“Just find the bag and get out.”

“Do I ever not?”

Christophe shrugged and said, “I’ve got no idea how, but you manage,” and smiles spread across both of their faces.

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One year, one month and two days later....

“Hey, C. Your cousin’s front page again.”

“Don’t they have anything better to write about?” Christophe asked. “Yesterday, the guy on crutches who got away from cops. Today the idiot who got me tossed in here. I hate Massachusetts. And, idiot cousins who get caught because they feel bad for hurting a kid with a knife I told him not to take in the first place and who, then, make up the dumbest story anyone’s ever heard.”

“Want to read the thing or nark?”

Christophe froze. “What?”

“I said want to read the thing or not?”

“Oh,” said Christophe. “Not really.” He sat up on his bunk, scratched his cheek. “Oh, give me the damn thing.”

“Don’t take it out on me. I’ve got nothing to do with your cousin, Massachusetts, or these rags,” said Christophe’s cell mate, and then he threw the paper onto the cement floor from the upper bunk. “And, I’ll have nothing to do with narks.”

Christophe reddened and got up from his bunk to retrieve the paper.

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MASSACHUSETTS TRIBUNE

Friday, January 7, 2011

“A Stranger with an Even Stranger Fiction”

By Joanie Betz

Massachusetts Tribune staff reporter

A JURY convicted a man today of breaking and entering, assaulting a minor with an illegal weapon and vandalism as a result of the events that occurred in a Bridal Trails residence last December.

The offender, Mickey Vander Slough, testified that a combination of cold medicine and alcohol caused him to believe that he was a dog and that James O’Reilly, the owner of the residence, had hidden a bone from him somewhere inside the home. “I thought,” said Vander Slough, “that it was another game. He’d done it several times—or at least I believed he had.”

Consequently, Vander Slough claimed he entered the residence through a dog door to locate the alleged bone. Said Vander Slough, “It’s all a bit cloudy, but I remember looking in

two places he'd hidden it before: the chest in the master bedroom and the armoire in the living room. Then, I remembered him hiding it one time under the fish tank. When I got there it seemed to be locked, so I tried prying it open with my knife." Vander Slough was in possession of a Balisong, or butterfly knife, an illegal 'gravity knife' in the state of Massachusetts.

The eldest child of the household, a thirteen-year-old boy, had remained at home due to an illness while his parents and two sisters attended *The Nutcracker*. The child heard Vander Slough in the home and hid inside the fish tank cupboard with a baseball bat. When the child heard Vander Slough attempting to open the cupboard, the boy kicked the doors open and Vander Slough's knife penetrated the child's shin. The child jumped from the cupboard and swung the bat at Vander Slough. Vander Slough wrestled the bat from the boy and swung it at the child. The bat missed, but hit the fish tank. Explained Vander Slough, "I'd thought the kid was another dog that'd found my bone. I just wanted it back."

The jury rejected the claim that Vander Slough was hallucinating since tests did not confirm the presence of cold medicine or alcohol in Vander Slough's system.

However, it does appear that alcohol played a role that evening. After Lilly O'Reilley returned from St. Vincent's Emergency with her thirteen-year-old son, the family realized they had not seen Nana, their English sheepdog, all evening. During the family's search for the dog, Mr. O'Reilley discovered that twelve ounces were missing from his newly opened bottle of Crown Royal. Only one ounce was found—in the dog's water dish. The bottle was fingerprinted and Vander Slough's fingerprints were discovered to be on it.

Said Mrs. O'Reilley, "We finally found Nana sleeping under our dining table on top of a huge bone none of us had given her." Mr. O'Reilley added, "And, she wouldn't have slept

through all that commotion unless she'd drunk my Crown. That chap got my dog drunk so he could loot my house."

It is uncertain whether or not the only genuine dog in this story had alcohol in its system, since the dog was not tested, but it does seem likely. It also seems it was the dog, not Mr. O'Reilly, that was actually hiding Vander Slough's bone.

Mickey Vander Slough received a seven-year sentence "due largely to Christophe Vander Slough's testimony," a juror who wishes to remain anonymous stated. Christophe Vander Slough, Mickey's cousin and a local cable installer, was given only a one-year sentence in exchange for his guilty plea and testimony regarding his cousin's role in this home invasion debacle. Christophe Vander Slough is currently serving his sentence at McClellan Penitentiary, where Mickey Vander Slough will be transferred tomorrow.

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Christophe tossed the paper to the cement floor.

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