

**A LOMAX AND BIGGS MYSTERY**

*#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR*

# MARSHALL KARP



# BLOOD THIRSTY

*It's a bloodthirsty town, Hollywood is.  
No matter how popular you are, there's always  
someone who'd be happier if you were dead.  
And in some cases, you can be so despised,  
that **everyone** would be happier if you were dead.*

# CHAPTER 1

**ROGER AND AGGIE** held hands as they watched the kid bleed out. He was on his back, head flopped to the left. The gurgling in his windpipe had stopped, and now there was just a silent stream, as if Roger had left the tap open.

“Practice makes perfect,” Aggie said.

Roger accepted the compliment by giving her hand a gentle squeeze. He was definitely not the type to slit somebody’s throat without doing some serious prep work. So he had practiced. On pigs. He tracked down a copy of *Comparative Anatomy and Physiology of the Pig* at the Texas A&M library. After that it was just a matter of working on his technique.

“Did you know that swine have the same basic characteristics as people?” he had said to Aggie. “That’s why they use ’em in biomedical research. You could live for years with a pig heart in you.”

“I think Ermaline Hofstader’s already got one in her,” Aggie said. “You see how that girl eats?”

Roger slaughtered four hogs in all. By the third one he got the hang of it, but he did one more for insurance.

“You sure you can’t switch over to cows or chickens?” Aggie said one night at dinner. “I’m getting pretty damn sick of pork.”

*Four pigs, one Mexican*, Roger thought, looking down at the kid. The only difference was that the kid’s blood wasn’t bright

red like the pigs'. In the murky light under the freeway it looked more like Hershey's syrup.

The pool of chocolate soup got wider, caught a crack in the concrete, and one satellite stream oozed its way toward Roger's left foot.

"Careful it don't get on your boots," Aggie said.

Roger backed up a few steps. "The boots are fine," he said. "More'n I can say for my..." His lips started to form the F-word, but he caught himself. He had given up profanity for Lent. The results had been spotty at best, so on Easter Sunday he made a silent vow to try and hold off cursing another fifty days till Pentecost. "More'n I can say for my dang shirt."

He looked down at his right sleeve, sopping with the kid's juices. "Darn kid spurted. Got blood all over my good Roper."

"Told you ten times not to wear that shirt," she said.

"I must not have heard you," he said. "And it was more like a hundred and ten times."

"Don't worry. I can get it out. I'll take it to a laundromat tonight."

"Good idea," he said. "And make sure you buy a big box of that new Tide with DNA Remover."

"I can get out the blood."

"Blood's not DNA. Trust me, this muchacho's genetic code is in this shirt till I burn it. Besides, a lot of these laundromats in Los Angeles have security cameras, and I don't want to star in no movie about you and me washing blood out of no shirt."

"It wouldn't be you and me in the movie," she said, "because when in the past twenty-seven years did you ever help one time with the washing?"

"Same amount of times you ever split one stick of firewood."

Aggie looked down at the body. Eighty feet over her head she could hear the hum of tires rolling along concrete. She inhaled a noseful of freeway fumes and caught a whiff of garlic. The kid's last meal, probably.

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Roger knelt down beside the body and tightened his grip on the knife. It was a seven-inch Ka-bar, the same Marine Corps fighting knife he had carried with him since Nam. "Let me get this over with," he said.

"Don't," Aggie said, grabbing his arm. The shirt was wet and sticky, but she didn't let go. "Leave him be."

"Ag," he said, "we decided."

It had made sense when they were planning it. Make the murder look like a rival gang did it. Mutilate the kid's face beyond cosmetic repair, so that even his own mother couldn't look at him. Street revenge.

"It ain't necessary," she said. "The cops won't investigate a dead gangbanger. How old is he? Fourteen? Fifteen? You gave some poor woman a dead son. At least give her one she can bury in an open coffin."

"I don't know why I bother planning, if you're gonna change everything last minute." Roger felt the F-word welling up in his throat. "Fine," it came out.

She released the grip on his arm and rubbed her hands together to dry off the blood. "Thank you. You saying he got his DNA in your shirt?"

Roger stood up and slipped the Ka-bar back into its leather sheath. "Yep. Never get it out."

"Then fair is fair. We should leave him a little DNA of our own."

She puckered her lips and sucked them in and out, gathering up a generous gob. She let it fly. The frothy mix of saliva and bile hit the kid's vacant left eye and trickled down his brown cheek toward an ear.

A few minutes later, they were in the Chevy pickup creeping along the freeway with the rest of the rush-hour traffic. He could feel her eyes on him. Reading him. "You upset?" she finally said.

"About what?"

"About the high cost of chintz in China. You just cut a boy's

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throat. You upset about killing someone?"

Roger forced a little laugh. "No big deal. I've killed people before."

"But that was always in the line of duty."

Roger wiped one watery eye with a wrinkled blue bandana. "Yeah. Well, that's what this was, Aggie. Killing this little fucker was the line of duty."

## CHAPTER 2

**IF YOU'RE LOOKING** to get rich, being a cop is not the way to go. Especially the honest variety.

Last year I made ninety-three grand working homicide for LAPD. My partner, Terry Biggs, who is one pay grade lower, managed to make eighty-eight with overtime. Not bad money. Except that my plumber cleared one-fifty. And he didn't get shot at. Of course, I don't have to snake toilets. Life is full of trade-offs.

Then one day the phone rings and some guy offers me and Terry fifty thousand dollars to option our last big homicide case for a movie. I hang up. It's a con job. Ever since we cracked the Familyland murders and got our minute and a half of fame, every cop we know has been busting our balls.

The guy calls back. He swears he's Halsey Bates, the director. "Sure, you are," I say, as I Google him. "Where'd you go to college?"

"Penn," he says.

"Wrong," I say and hang up.

Next day Halsey Bates shows up at the station house, in the flesh. "You might have solved a big murder case, Detective Lomax," he says, "but you don't have a clue where I went to school." He holds up his college diploma. "*Universitas Pennsylvaniaensis*. Penn."

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“Hollywood Online says Penn State,” I tell him.

“They also say Clay Aiken’s dating a supermodel. Let’s talk.”

Two weeks later, Halsey hands us each a check for twenty-five big ones. “And that’s just your first taste,” he says. “This movie catches fire, and you boys will be building yourselves swimming pools.”

“I already have a swimming pool,” Terry told him.

“This one would be for your money.”

“What if I just drained the pool I have?” Terry said. “How long would it take you to refill it with cash?”

“Depends on how long it takes me to find someone with sixty million bucks to bankroll us.”

“I got three daughters. The twins are starting college in September.”

“It took ten years to find the money to make *Forrest Gump*,” Halsey said. “How were you planning on paying for college if I didn’t option your story?”

“Mike and I were going to stick up the Wal-Mart over on Crenshaw. My other choice was to sell a kidney, but Mike refuses to part with one.”

“Well, if you’re in a hurry, we could sell our souls to the devil,” Halsey said. “I have his home number.”

The devil, in this case, was Barry Gerber, a legendary industry prick. Over the years he made dozens of films, zillions of dollars, and zero friends.

“I hear he’s a real Hollywood asshole,” Terry said.

“That’s redundant,” Halsey said. He gave us both a big toothy smile and ran his hand through his thick, straight, dirty-blond hair. The hair is the only thing straight about him.

I’ve met a lot of schmucks in the movie business. Halsey Bates isn’t one of them. He’s a decent guy, with an ugly past.

Seven years ago he was directing a movie and met Kirk Jacoby, a struggling young actor who had the three basic ingredients guaranteed to make him a star. He was talented, great looking,



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and bisexual. Kirk would sleep with anyone if he thought it could help him get ahead in the business.

They spent the day shooting at an LA country club, first on the tennis court, then the locker room, and finally the showers. Halsey was so hot for Kirk he wrapped early, and they drove to Halsey's house, which was well stocked with booze, dope, and condoms.

Jacoby had one agenda. He wanted a bigger part. Halsey offered him a few more scenes, but Kirk wasn't stupid. He knew they'd wind up on the cutting room floor, so he said goodnight and staggered toward his car. He was not only too drunk to drive; he was too drunk to walk. He cut across the lawn and fell into the koi pond. Halsey offered to put him up for the night, but Jacoby insisted on leaving. *Absolut* logic prevailed, and they decided that Halsey should be the designated driver. Jacoby flopped into the director's Saab convertible and immediately fell asleep in the passenger seat.

He never woke up. They weren't the only drunks on the road that night. Heading east on Beverly Boulevard they were T-boned by a young couple in a pickup running a light at Highland. Jacoby, unbelted, was thrown 120 feet and killed instantly. The driver of the pickup had his chest crushed and his girlfriend's head was severed when she went through the windshield.

Even with the best lawyers money could buy, Halsey spent the next four and a half years in prison. But it was time well spent. From his jail cell he used his clout, his talent, and his ingenuity to raise enough money to open a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center in downtown LA.

By the time he got out he had added a rescue mission and a battered-women's shelter, and his charity, One Brick At A Time, had become as popular among the rich and famous as Japanese hybrids. Hollywood is nothing if not forgiving.

The day he got out was a media gangbang of O.J. proportions. TV crews from around the world were camped outside the gates.

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The first one to welcome him back was Barry Gerber. He announced that he was hiring Halsey to direct his first post-prison film. He then whipped out a contract and a pen, offered up his back, and the cameras rolled while Halsey signed on the dotted line. It was a great stunt, and the media gobbled it up.

“What’s the movie about?” half the reporters yelled at once.

Gerber just smiled. “I can’t say.”

It was an old Hollywood ruse. Tell them what you’re trying to pimp, and you’re lucky if they print a word of it. Don’t tell them, and they’ll invoke the First Amendment.

“Come on, Barry,” a woman from *People* demanded. “Give us something.”

Gerber held his hands up and shook his head. The man was a master at getting millions of dollars’ worth of publicity without spending a dime.

The press refused to take no for an answer.

Finally, Gerber acquiesced. “Alright, just a taste. It’s about a good-looking, charming, successful man who makes a terrible mistake,” he said, putting his arm around the good-looking, charming, successful man, who had spent four and half years paying for his own terrible mistake.

“What kind of mistake?” came the inevitable response.

Gerber grinned. “He kills his boyfriend.”

## CHAPTER 3

**IT TOOK THE** better part of a month for Halsey to set up a meeting between us and Barry Gerber. Living legends have busy schedules, so I figured we'd be lucky to get five minutes with him in his office. But that wasn't Barry's style.

"He wants you at the premiere of our new movie," Halsey said. "Sunday night. The Pantages Theatre. Red carpet, black tie."

"Do you really think we should pitch him the Familyland idea when he's surrounded by a theater full of people?" Terry said. "Why doesn't he just meet us in St. Peter's Square and bless us from the balcony?"

"It's the perfect time," Halsey said. "He loves making deals when he's feeling triumphant and expansive. I once saw him green-light a feature at a Lakers game. They had just won in double overtime."

"Can I bring my wife?" Terry said. "She hates when I go to these Hollywood premieres on my own."

"Bring your entire posse," Halsey said. "We'll make a night of it."

Our posse consisted of Terry's wife Marilyn, my girlfriend Diana, my father Big Jim Lomax, and his wife Angel. Jim has a fleet of cars, trucks, and production vehicles that he rents out to film crews. He decided that the best way for us to show up at the premiere was in a thirty-foot stretch Hummer.

Jim is about the size of a Hummer himself, loud as a Harley, and prone to bear hugs. He was sitting across from me in the limo, Angel's tiny brown hand resting on his picnic ham of a thigh. She's twenty years younger, two hundred pounds lighter, and at least three times as stubborn. When my mother died six years ago, Angel did what anti-depressants, shrinks, and weekly visits from our parish priest couldn't. She made him smile. I grinned at the happy couple and gave Jim the official Lomax Wink of Approval.

He caught it, directed his gaze toward the lovely Diana Trantarella sitting at my side, creased one eyelid, and tossed back a paternal wink of his own.

"So, what's this movie about?" Marilyn asked Halsey. Marilyn is Terry's fourth and, I'll bet every nickel of my movie-option money, final wife. She's one of those plus-sized women, so it's ironic that she wound up changing her last name to Biggs. But she's Biggs and Beautiful, with delicate pale skin, fiery red hair, and a quick wit that lets her go wisecrack for wisecrack with her wannabe-comedian husband.

"It's called *I.C.U.*," Halsey said. "It's a thriller, so all I'm going to tell you is that Damian Hedge plays a neurosurgeon who murders someone he's having an affair with."

"I love Damian Hedge," Marilyn said. "Do you think you can direct him to have an affair with me?"

"Marilyn, my pet, you are far too good for Damian Hedge."

"I'm far too good for Terry, but I still sleep with him."

"Excuse me, folks." It was Dennis, our driver. "I don't think Damian will be at the premiere. We have the contract with his studio, and I've been driving him around for the past three or four weeks, but he canceled the limo."

"Maybe he heard Marilyn was stalking him," Terry said.

"It's more likely that he hates Barry Gerber's guts, and he's standing him up just to screw him over," Halsey said.

"Oh God, Halsey," Marilyn said. "Do you know why Gerber

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fired him? I would kill to find out.”

The Barry Gerber–Damian Hedge feud had been one of the hotter topics in La-La Land. It started out as gossip, but the threats of lawsuits and countersuits got it kicked up to the business pages. Frankly, I didn’t give a damn.

Halsey had filled six glasses with champagne, and his own with Perrier. “I have no desire to discuss why the most obnoxious man in this town isn’t talking to the rudest one,” he said, passing out the glasses. “But I do have a toast to a much more promising business relationship.”

Big Jim tapped on the divider. “Dennis, slow down. You got designated drinkers back here, and I don’t want them spilling this stuff on the upholstery.”

The stretch eased to a smooth glide, and Halsey raised his glass. “To Mike and Terry, my new partners in crime. If the gods are smiling tonight, you’ll meet the man who will put up the money to make the movie that will make you rich.”

Terry raised his glass. “Halsey,” he said, “if you’re right, and this movie sells, you will have single-handedly destroyed the very principle on which I have based my entire adult life.”

Halsey turned on the Big Toothy Grin. “And what would that be, Detective Biggs?”

“I’ve been working under the ridiculous assumption that crime doesn’t pay.”

## CHAPTER 4

**WE WERE IN** a caravan of limos on Hollywood Boulevard inching our way to the Pantages Theatre.

“Explain something to me,” Terry said. “They can orchestrate a twelve-minute car chase through the streets of LA, but they can’t figure out how to drop people off at a movie theater without creating a major traffic jam.”

“It’s all part of the game,” Halsey said. “People drag their asses getting out of their limos so they get more camera time. They know everybody else is behind them, and they’re thinking, let those losers wait.”

“But you’re the director,” Angel said. “You shouldn’t have to wait.”

“Everybody sits in traffic,” Halsey said. “Streisand, Scorsese, everybody. Just play the game. They won’t start without us.”

It took us ten minutes to go three blocks. When we got to the front of the line, two hunks of beef in tuxedos opened the doors and helped unload the precious cargo onto the red carpet. A third gave Dennis instructions on where to park and how to pick up his passengers at the end of the night.

Big Jim exited the Hummer first, then helped Angel out.

The mob behind the velvet rope sized them up. One woman actually said, “Who are they?” Half a dozen fans quickly fielded the totally uncool question. “Nobody. They’re nobody.”

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Of course, celebrity stalkers know that Nobodies never arrive alone, so the crowd strained to see which Somebody would finally emerge from the limo. Terry, Marilyn, Diana, and I followed, and I could see that the crowd was getting impatient. I stepped away from the car door, so Halsey could have his moment.

But Big Jim stepped in front of it, threw his arms up in the air, and yelled, “You are the greatest fans in the world.”

The man is a six-foot-four, 300-pound people magnet. People started cheering. A few of us Nobodies waved, and the cameras started snapping.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the Trucker Ringmaster bellowed, “the man you’ve all been waiting for, the director of *I.C.U.*, Mr. Halsey Bates.”

Halsey stepped out and the crowd let out a roar. *So you got drunk and killed someone. You make great movies. All is forgiven.*

I could see Terry lapping it all up. I slammed the car door, and Dennis started to drive off when we heard the siren. One of the beefy parkers slapped the side of the Hummer and yelled, “Hold it up; let him pass.” He pulled out a walkie-talkie and said, “I thought LAPD was redirecting all traffic to Sunset.”

I couldn’t hear the comeback, because the siren got louder and the flashing lights of an ambulance came into view. Then a reporter on the red carpet started yelling at her cameraman, “Freddie, shoot it, shoot it.”

She shoved me and Diana out of the way so Freddie could get a better shot of the ambulance as it passed.

But it didn’t pass.

It came to a screeching stop right in front of the Pantages. The front doors opened and two big-titted blondes in skimpy nurses’ outfits jumped out, ran around to the back, and flung open the rear doors.

Out stepped Damian Hedge. The fans started yowling, reporters started shoving, and the LA cops who thought they could

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coast through the evening began shoving back.

Damian was wearing a white tux and had a stethoscope around his neck. One of the blonde nurses bent forward so he could listen to her colossal chest. Apparently the stethoscope didn't work. He tapped it, hit it against his palm, and finally shrugged and tossed it into the crowd. Then he buried his ear into her cleavage and pronounced her extremely healthy. The crowd ate it up.

Halsey shook his head. "Big stupid douchebag ham."

"And he didn't have to wait in traffic," Terry added.

By now the crowd was chanting, "Day-mi-an, Day-mi-an," and the big stupid douchebag ham walked past us into a sea of cameras and microphones.

"Let's not wait for sloppy seconds," Halsey said. We headed inside.



## CHAPTER 5

**THE PANTAGES THEATRE** is a piece of Hollywood history. Even without a movie, it's worth the price of admission. It's art deco heaven, with ornate ceilings, massive chandeliers, and thousands of thick, plush, red velvet seats.

The ushers were all wearing green hospital scrubs with a red *I.C.U.* logo on the back. One escorted Big Jim and the women to the mezzanine level. Halsey, Terry and I were walked down the aisle to a section marked Reserved.

We barely sat down when a man with a Bluetooth headset in his ear appeared and knelt down beside Halsey's aisle seat. He was about thirty-five, but it was a weary thirty-five, and the lines around his eyes told me he had either spent too much time in the sun or in the line of fire.

I could make out the Waspy good looks that must have served him well at Yale or Dartmouth, but his cheeks were doughy, his jaw was sagging, and his sweat glands were working overtime. The theater was cool, but his face was glistening and his tuxedo shirt had wilted. He looked like a *GQ* cover boy gone to seed.

"Hey, Tyler," Halsey said. "Fellas, this is Tyler Baker-Broome, the man who runs Barry's life. T.B., I'd like you to meet—"

T.B. didn't want to meet anybody. "We have a problem," he said.

"I know. I saw Damian make his grand entrance. I'll bet Barry

is livid. Where is he? I want him to meet Mike and Terry.”

“He’s not here,” Baker-Broome said. “That’s the problem.”

“Where is he?”

“I don’t know where he is,” Baker-Broome said, lowering his voice into a nasty whisper. “I only know where he isn’t.”

“Did he walk out because of Damian?”

“He didn’t walk out because of anything. He never showed up. I spoke to him this morning. He was fine. I called him again at noon. No answer, so I left a message. I called him again at one. Since then I’ve been calling every ten minutes. I tried the office, the house, his cell, everything. He was supposed to be in the theater an hour ago. He’s never missed an opening in his life.”

“Did you call the cops?”

“Are you out of your mind? You know Barry. He’s probably got his nose in some blow, and his dick in some underage coke whore. You want me to call the cops?”

“Excuse me,” Terry said. “None of my business, but he hasn’t been missing long enough for the cops to get involved.”

Baker-Broome had ignored us so far. Now he gave Terry a condescending sneer. “You’re right. It’s none of your business, Mister...”

“Biggs,” Terry said, getting up from his seat. “Detective Terry Biggs. Los Angeles Police Department.”

Terry Biggs is not a pretty man. In fact, he’d be the first to agree that he’s ugly as a mud fence. His face is pitted and has an unfortunate bone structure that makes him look like a cross between Mick Jagger and a weasel. At six-foot-three, he doesn’t have to work hard to look menacing. He loomed over Baker-Broome, who was still squatting, all of two-foot-nothing.

Baker-Broome clenched his face like he had just missed the final Jeopardy question. He stood up and nodded toward me. “You a cop too?”

“Detective Mike Lomax,” I said. “You have the right to remain silent.”

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“A little late for that,” he said, holding out his hands to be cuffed.

“Relax, Tyler,” Halsey said. “They’re cool. I’m sure they don’t give a shit that Barry is out somewhere getting his brains fried or his knob polished.”

“Actually, we do,” Terry said. “I only rented this tuxedo so I could meet him and pitch him a movie.”

“I make most of Barry’s appointments and all of his apologies,” Baker-Broome said. “Sorry he stood you up. As soon as I talk to him, I’ll get you on his calendar.” He handed each of us a business card.

“Tyler’s been with Barry for years,” Halsey said.

“Sixteen and a half,” Tyler said.

“His job description says he’s supposed to be making deals or movies, but he spends most of his time cleaning up after Barry. We call him Tyler Baker-Broome-and-Shovel.”

“So this is not the first time he’s gone missing,” I said.

Tyler laughed. “Hardly. He’s pulled his disappearing act before. He’s got a few perverse habits that get in the way of his judgment. But he never did anything like this. I can’t believe he hasn’t showed up for your opening, Halsey. Once again, I apologize. And speaking of deals and movies, I hope we’re still on for lunch Thursday.”

“Chiseled in stone,” Halsey said.

The audience burst into applause. The four of us turned and looked up to see what triggered it. It wasn’t Barry. It was Damian Hedge.

“Elvis has entered the building,” Halsey said.

“Let’s give Barry five more minutes,” Baker-Broome said. “If he doesn’t show, could you get up there and welcome people?”

Halsey agreed and T.B. went off to make more frantic phone calls.

“Sorry you had to hear all the deviant details about the man I picked to fund our movie,” Halsey said. “I hope it won’t keep

you from taking his sixty mil.”

“You said we’d be doing business with the devil,” I said.

“Underage coke whore?” Terry said. “One would think Barry Gerber’s taste would run to high-class hookers and movie starlets.”

“He’s done them too,” Halsey said, “but his first choice is always street trash. Usually young, so that even when they consent, it’s statutory rape. Barry’s biggest problem is that he hates himself.”

Halsey waited ten minutes, then stepped to the front of the theater and took the microphone. “I just got a call from Barry,” he lied. “He’s running late.”

“You know Barry,” a voice yelled out. It was Damian Hedge. “He’s always getting *a little behind*.”

The crowd laughed. Apparently Barry’s love of young ass was legend.

“Now, Damian,” Halsey said. “Everyone is late from time to time. When we were working on this film, there were a number of mornings that you missed your call time. Rumor has it you were *all tied up*.”

Advantage, Halsey. One of the tabloids had just done a cover story on Damian’s penchant for an erotic form of Japanese rope bondage called Shibari. This time the crowd responded with hoots and yells.

Halsey held the mic close to his face so his voice filled the hall, drowning out any possibility of a retort from Hedge. “Ladies and gentlemen, forgive me for being prejudiced, but I think *I.C.U.* is a terrific film. I know you’re going to embrace it, and I’m sure Barry will join us at the party later this evening.”

With that, the house lights went down. Halsey Bates got the last laugh. And he was right about the movie. It was damn good.

But he was wrong about Barry. The bastard never showed up. There’s no people like show people.

## CHAPTER 6

**WHEN MY WIFE** Joanie died a year and a half ago, I never thought I'd feel joy or love or anything but pain again. And then I met Diana Trantanella.

“Met” is a poor choice of terms. I was sandbagged by my meddling father. Big Jim invited me to dinner one night and there she was. I was totally pissed. What kind of an overbearing, interfering, fat jerk of a father blindsides his forty-two-year-old widowed son with a surprise dinner date? And only six months after Joanie died.

I was as uncooperative, unfriendly, and unsocial as I could be. Actually, I acted like a complete asshole. Jim wanted to kill me. Diana was more forgiving. At the end of the evening I walked her to her car and apologized. She smiled and gave me a gentle peck on the cheek. Apology accepted. Pain understood. Diana's husband had died two years before. She knew we had both just been manipulated by a Machiavellian teamster, and she forgave my bad behavior.

You don't let a woman like that go. Especially when she looks like Diana.

Ever since my hormones were old enough to form opinions of their own, when I hear the Beach Boys sing “California Girls,” I picture a sun-streaked blonde with blue eyes, golden skin, and a knockout smile, running in slo-mo through the surf. Diana is

the early-forties version of my fantasy girl, and if they ever met her, I bet Brian Wilson and Mike Love would update their lyrics in a heartbeat.

Diana and I are now living together. Sort of.

I still rent the little house in West Hollywood where I lived with Joanie. A month after Diana and I started dating, she moved some of her things in. But not all of her things. She keeps the rest in an apartment on Wilshire, where she had lived with her late husband.

When I realized she wasn't going to move in with me full time, I brought some of my stuff over to her apartment. So for the better part of a year it's been your place or mine. There is no ours.

Big Jim, who is never short on solutions, especially when they're for somebody else's problems, offered up his unwanted fatherly wisdom on our living arrangements. "Stop holding on to the past, and buy a house together."

When I informed him that we were happy the way we were, he informed me that we were not. He may be right, but I'll be damned if I let him know.

Halsey's movie ended at 9:30. Diana and I left the party at 11, blew off the limo, and took a cab to her place.

The sun came up about 6:20. Little Mike was up shortly after that. Diana loves to make love in the morning. Personally, I'm not fussy about the time. Just the woman. We were in that half-asleep, totally naked, post-coital spoon position, her belly pressed to my back, her fingers stroking my chest.

"I think we got this backwards," I said. "Roll over."

We twisted a hundred and eighty degrees, until I had arranged myself comfortably behind her and could cup a breast in each hand.

Diana has fantastic breasts. Tits that tit men fantasize about. Full, firm, and oh, so real. The kind that God provides, not the ones approved by the FDA.

We lay there in silence, breathing in perfect sync.

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“What are you thinking about?” she said.

“Nothing.” I shifted my body ever so slightly because Little Mike had actually started thinking about an encore.

“You’re thinking about Paul McCartney, aren’t you?”

“No,” I said, “and if you bring it up again, you’re going to give me a serious case of erectile dysfunction.”

“Paul McCartney” is code for the state of our relationship. He was married almost thirty years when his wife died. Four years later he remarried and had a child. Four years after that, his second marriage ended in an ugly divorce.

The sociologists pounced all over it. Their bottom line is that men are quick to remarry, but that the new wife has a tough time measuring up to the memory of the sainted dead original.

Sir Paul’s divorce made all the papers. The first mistake I made was to read about it. The second mistake was to share it with Diana.

“They call it the Rebecca syndrome,” she said. “Widowers who were happily married have expectations that the replacement wives can’t live up to. But we’re fine. I’m not a replacement wife.”

True. But I had thought about it. According to what I had read, the average widower waits two and a half years before remarrying. My brain started heading in that direction by the third date.

“So marry her” was Terry’s solution. “If it works, it works. It took me three miserable marriages before I found Marilyn.”

“It’s not the same thing,” I told him. “Marilyn didn’t have a gold standard to live up to. All she had to do was not shoot you with your own gun, and you’d have called it a roaring success.”

“You know what your problem is? You overthink everything.”

He’s right. Thinking is bad for me. Getting laid is good. I stopped thinking, kissed Diana’s shoulder and pulled my body as tight to hers as I could. Penis trumps Brain every time. Both Mikes were ready for Round Two when my cell phone rang.

“Somebody needs a cop,” Diana said.

MARSHALL KARP

“It’s Terry. Let it ring.”

Whatever happened to Protect and Serve?” she said, unspooning. She reached over to the night table and handed me the phone.

I flipped it open. “Have I told you lately that your timing sucks?”

“And good morning to you too, Detective Lomax. I’m sorry to interrupt your coitus, but there’s a body in a trash can up in the Hollywood Hills, and you’re invited to the opening. If you tell us where you are, we’ll send a limo.”

“I’m at Diana’s and I don’t have my car, so yeah, come and get me.”

“My pleasure. But first, ask me what this guy died of.”

With Terry anytime is comedy time. “I give up, Terry. What killed the poor fellow?”

“He got a Viagra stuck in his throat. Died of a stiff neck.”

“I’m hitting the shower. Pick me up in twenty minutes.”

Diana grabbed the phone. “Make it thirty minutes. I’m hitting the shower with him.”



## CHAPTER 7

**DIANA'S APARTMENT BUILDING** has a semi-circular driveway, and Terry's five-year-old silver Lexus ES 250 was already parked at the far end when I got downstairs.

"Morning," I said, getting in. "How late did you party last night?"

"Some time around midnight Marilyn realized she wasn't going to live out her fantasies with Damian Hedge, so she decided to settle for me."

"At least you got laid," I said.

"One would think." He turned left out of the driveway onto Wilshire. "But on the ride home she brought up a sore subject."

"Your lackluster past performance in the sack?"

"My dick is fine. It's my bank account that's all shriveled up. Rebecca and Sarah will be in college any minute now, and Emily is only two years behind them. I think Marilyn was expecting Barry Gerber to show up last night and start writing tuition checks. So after four glasses of champagne, Marilyn decides to rehash the shortcomings of the Biggs family budget."

"Definitely not conducive to romance."

"Thank you, Dr. Ruth. You want to solve the world's overpopulation problem? Mandatory husband and wife financial discussions. It's the ultimate form of sex prevention."

"Fortunately, Diana and I file separate returns, so we had fan-

tastic sex.”

“Swell. I’ll make a note of it on the official Lomax and Biggs scorecard.”

“Oh, well, if you’re keeping score, as of 7 a.m., it’s Lomax 2, Biggs, nothing.”

Terry looked at his watch. “And as of 7:35, we’re both getting fucked. Do you believe this crapola?”

“I’m not sure which particular crapola you’re complaining about this morning.”

“A body in a trash can? That’s the case we catch? And before that, we get a junkie in an alley, a Jane Doe under a pier, a night clerk at a flophouse, a pimp. Do you see a pattern here?”

“Dead people.”

“Boring dead people. Ever since we signed the movie deal with Halsey, Division is sending us out on the lowest of the low profile cases.”

“Obviously, somebody is determined to teach you some humility,” I said. “And as your partner, I’m forced to suffer the consequences. But look on the bright side. We work out of Hollywood. We’re bound to catch a superstar sooner or later.”

The good news is, it was sooner. The bad news is, it was the guy who was supposed to write Terry’s tuition checks. The body in the trash can turned out to be Barry Gerber.

Don't stop now.  
The best is yet to come.  
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Thank you for supporting my life of crime.

— Marshall Karp