

Tail and Trouble

Victor Catano



Tail and Trouble

A Red Adept Publishing Book

Red Adept Publishing, LLC

104 Bugenfield Court

Garner, NC 27529

<http://RedAdeptPublishing.com/>

Copyright © 2016 by Victor Catano. All rights reserved.

Cover Design: [Streetlight Graphics](#)

To Kim, for all the love, encouragement and inspiration.

And to Ollie. Thank you for letting me into the pack. You are always missed.

ONE

I inched my red Ford Galaxie forward. Orson lay in the passenger seat, splayed out, with his tongue lolling out of his mouth. He had dozed off as if he hadn't a care in the world. The barely there AC wheezed and whimpered, harmonizing with Orson's snoring.

The road to Charleston was clogged with midday commuters and early weekend traffic. Ahead were flashing emergency lights. We weren't going anywhere, and we had places to be. Annoyed, I started to drum my fingers on the wheel. That didn't last long, as the vinyl was so hot I was afraid my hand would get stuck to it.

The fan blew hot air in my face. I checked the temperature gauge. The arrow was creeping up to the red. I sighed. The last thing I needed was to overheat on the highway.

I tapped Orson on his furry brown leg. He opened his eyes and favored me with a disdainful stare.

I motioned to the traffic jam. "Little help?"

Orson yawned, scratched behind one ear with a back paw, then gave his privates a lick just to make sure they were still there. Finally, he glanced up at the road. He barked once, a spark flaring in his eyes.

The police lights went off as the accident got cleared over to the shoulder. The traffic began to move. As our speed got back above thirty, the engine cooled a bit.

Happy? Too hot. Let me sleep.

I felt the thought in my head, gruff and growling. It was like an itch I couldn't scratch. I patted him on the head. "Thanks, Orson."

He grunted and was back asleep in under a minute. The way the bulldog's hindquarters were

twitching, he was probably dreaming about violating an uptight poodle. I smiled. Orson had a way with the ladies, human and canine.

The thermometer was still too close to the red for my liking, so I decided to pull off the freeway to give the car a rest. The next exit was for Myrtle Beach. Sheila had always been a beach person. She loved to sit on the hot sand and watch the waves; I loved to see her in a swimsuit. When I flipped on my turn signal, Orson's eyes popped open, and he sat up in the seat. He whined pitifully. He liked beaches, too. And he missed his mama. We had been on the road for over eight hours, trying to find her trail.

We had to circle around for a minute, but we finally got a spot in an ideal location, close to both a hot dog stand and the beach. After Orson and I had walked along the shore line and splashed our feet in the bathtub-warm surf, I bought us lunch: a plain hot dog for Orson, chili cheese for me. Orson wanted chili, but I said no. Maybe if he didn't sleep with his butt in my face, I would reconsider. Orson wolfed his down in a minute. I leaned against the car and ate mine, the thirteen-year-old part of my brain snickering at a gift shop called the Gay Dolphin. I was sure there was an innocent reason for the name, but I couldn't help imagining a dolphin on rollerblades.

The groups of college kids gave us a wide berth. Even though there were plenty of No Dogs Allowed signs, no one bothered us. People didn't really notice Orson unless he wanted to be noticed.

And he definitely wanted those two blond sorority girls in bikinis to notice him. I mentally dubbed them Muffy and Buffy.

"Oooh, he's adorable!" Muffy squealed. "I love bulldogs!"

"Can I pet him?" Buffy cooed.

Orson was already rubbing his head against her leg, the gold flecks in his brown eyes flashing. Muffy and Buffy didn't wait for an answer. Both bikini-clad girls bent over and petted his back. Orson bobbed his head up, pressing it against their breasts.

"He's so funny!" Muffy said. "He thinks he's people!"

If you only knew.

Orson rolled onto his back, and the girls cooed as they rubbed his belly.

You dirty dog.

Orson grinned. *Don't hate the player.*

Two frat boys jogged up. Their build and their attitude told me they were probably football players. Since they were both under six feet and a little thick around the waist, I guessed they were small college, big enough to be irritating but small enough that they had to prove how tough they were every chance they got.

"Hey, what's going on?" one asked.

"What you doing with our ladies, brah?" the other one added.

Sigh. "I'm not doing anything, *brah*. Your ladies asked to pet my dog."

Orson twitched ecstatically as the two girls continued to scratch his belly.

The first one took a step closer. "Well, they can stop."

I gestured at the petting-fest. "No one's forcing them." That was mostly true. Orson couldn't force people to do anything completely against their will. But everybody wanted to pet Orson.

The second one waved at the girls. "Yo, Kylee, come on."

"Yeah, let's go, Buffy," the first one added.

Huh. Her name really was Buffy. The two girls ignored the guys and continued to coo over Orson, getting dangerously close to breaking whatever animal husbandry laws South Carolina

might have had.

Chad and Biff moved closer to me and puffed out their chests, glaring.

“What the fuck, man?” Biff said.

“Yeah, what the fuck?” Chad echoed.

“Like I said, no one is forcing your ladies to pet my dog. If they would rather pet him than talk to you, can you blame them? Orson is a lot more charming than the two of you.”

They furrowed their unibrows. After a second, their eyes popped wide. I thought I even heard them growl. I knew I shouldn't goad them. Sheila was always telling me I would insult the wrong person one day. Not that I was worried about a fight. The day I couldn't handle two stupid frat boys was the day they could put me in a home to eat lime Jell-O and watch *Law & Order* reruns. I wasn't huge and my army training hadn't given me bulging muscles, so a lot of idiots who were bigger than I was thought they could push me around. They didn't try that more than once.

Biff glared at me. “What did you say, brah?”

Oh well. In for a penny. I spread out against the hood of the car, my left hand resting near the antenna. I shifted my weight, so I'd be ready to move. “What, are you deaf *and* stupid?”

Chad's nostrils flared, and he lunged at me. I snapped off the antenna and whipped it at him. *Whap!* A cut opened up under his eye. He clapped a hand over the wound and fell back. Before Biff could react—*whap!*—he screamed and grabbed his face. Chad swung blindly at me. I sidestepped then gave him a straight palm to his nose. Blood flowed from his face, and he crumpled into a heap.

The two girls were still purring at Orson. Someone else would probably notice the bloodied frat boys, though. I picked up Orson and dumped him in the passenger seat. I slid in beside him

and drove off.

Hey! We were having a moment! Go play with your friends some more.

I checked the rear view mirror. The girls were still bent over where Orson had been. They kind of shook themselves awake, then they noticed their boyfriends rolling around on the sidewalk. I could hear them scream from two blocks away.