

The Feeling is PariMutuel

by Al Brooks

It was another hard-luck night, smeared by the greasy drizzling rain and muddied by the flat haze of the cold streetlights.

The click of her heels started out soft and distant. The tempo of the click was fast and sure. The sound gradually got louder, but the cadence never slowed. This dame walked with a purpose, and anyone with half a brain would know to stay out of her way.

Without warning, the click stopped. The dame cut a sharp silhouette at the far end of the alley. The hazy streetlight slogged its way through the dark to show her hard gaze turn to the back door of The Dogg House. Whatever her purpose was, it lay behind that door.

Like water, she glided to the door, but this time, her heels put a blanket on it. She parked herself under the dim bulb above the door, her facial expression unchanged. Fixated, she reached into her coat pocket and pulled out a small clear bottle filled with a red liquid. Her shoulders rose, and her delicate pink nose lifted as she took a deep breath. She popped the top of the bottle and threw back its crimson contents. And she waited.

The dame's gorgeous green peepers rolled back into her head, and her weight shifted from one long gam to the other. The little bottle of red liquid fell from her hand and, for a moment, she looked like she was about to topple onto her keister. Quickly, she righted herself. Her eyes fluttered

open, and she leaped back into a fighting stance. Her delicate shoulder muscles gave a panther-like ripple as she focused her attention ahead. Quicker than light, she leaped up and gave the door a strong kick. It folded like an old bill, and she rushed in, ready for bear.

Mere moments after she busted in, Mugsy, Boss Dogg's personal stooge, came flying out the doorway and flat-smacked right into the slimy brick wall opposite the splintered doorway. The oversized thug slowly slid down the wall, stars dancing around his head, and his busted nose at the end of his hairy snout started swelling to the size of a baseball.

The dame calmly sauntered out the doorway and picked up Mugsy by the scruff of the neck, as if he were a baby kitten. She effortlessly lifted him up to her blazing jade eyes and stared him down.

"Where is he? Where's Boss Dogg?" The dame's voice was smooth as silk, but she still looked none too happy that Mugsy was getting in the way of her purpose.

Mugsy pitifully wuffed. "I dunno! I told ya, he ain't been here in two weeks! I dunno where he went!" His last utterance sounded like the whine of a teen princess stripped of her driving privileges by her daddy.

The dame gave a sigh. She purred at him like a razor being sharpened on a whetstone. "Then give him a message, would you please? He knows what I'm looking for. And I'm really getting tired of waiting for him." She pulled him in closer. "Do you understand, Mugsy?"

Before Mugsy could whimper a reply, she tossed him back into the joint. The sound of crashing furniture and broken bottles shot out the doorway, followed by a weak groan. She stood at the doorway, watching Mugsy's flight with an unconcerned look. She looked at the sleeve of her overcoat and dusted off a piece of lint, seemingly annoyed at the miniscule mess.

She turned on her heel and clicked out of the alley back onto the oily sidewalk to wherever her purpose took her next.

And as he watched the whole scene unfold, Mickey remained frozen in place behind the trashcans that littered the back alley of The Dogg House.

He always froze stock still, just staring ahead, whenever he was nervous. His beady black eyes would glaze over, and his lips would draw back over his pointed snoot into a creepy smile. If he stayed this way long enough, a stink would float from him that was noxious enough to choke a hobo. Any goon that was idiot enough to roll him would only get a beezer full of stench instead of a fistful of dollars.

Mickey had been sniffing and rummaging through the trash cans out behind Boss Dogg's place when the dame made her appearance. The Dogg House went through a lot of booze, so the trash cans were almost always filled with empty bottles. Mickey would gather them and take them to the store down the street. The store would take the empties and give him a nickel, sometimes a dime, for the return deposit. He found it was an easy way to boost his earnings.

Especially if his earnings at the racetrack that day were less than he expected.

Either way, he'd take the change and go to the drugstore to get another bottle of Dr. Muler's Famous Old-Tyme Cough Syrup. Good for catarrh, paroxysms, asthma, tuberculosis, black lung, teething babies, and female indelicacies.

Feeling a little indelicate himself, Mickey reached for his bottle inside his coat and swigged the last little bit. He didn't mind the harsh, acrid taste; he did like the warmth of it in his throat and the easy feeling it gave him. He unfroze, and felt a little less anxious about...jeez, what was it he just saw? Some gorgeous gal who...who could punch like a freight train! Right after she took a drink of...something. Something from a little bottle.

Instinctively, he looked around the alley for the little bottle she dropped. Maybe he could get some change for that bottle. He shuffled around the refuse on the ground, and found the bottle and its cork near the trash cans. He picked them both up, and plugged the little bottle with the cork.

Mickey held the bottle up to the light above the back door, hoping to find a mark on it that would indicate its return value. It had no markings at all, but it still had a good tablespoon or so of the red liquid in it.