

PROTECT & SERVE
Pilot "Damned If You Do"

Written by

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In the '60s, Santa Cruz, California was dubbed "Surf City, USA," but in the early 1970s Santa Cruz was dubbed "The Murder Capitol of the World." Under what looks like a sleepy beach town near the epicenter of a cultural revolution lies a vein of swampy darkness.

Cristina Gabriela Acosta, the daughter of an NYPD legend, like so many of her generation, fled west. Her desire was simple: she just wanted to be a good cop. The Bay Area promised fresh ideas and acceptance. But what she found was the same old shit: an Afro-Cuban woman isn't afforded any more respect there than she was in NYC.

When Señora Reyes' daughter, Daisy, goes missing the SCPD dismisses her and her worry. No one cares about one more missing girl, especially a Chicana. When Daisy's body is found her death is ruled a suicide and filed away. But Cris can't let it go. Neither can the Local who found Daisy, surfer girl and UCSC co-ed Sunny (Sunshine) Fermi.

Polar opposites at first blush, the structured and guarded New Yorker and the creative and inquisitive Flower Child compliment each other perfectly to solve problems in ways unorthodox to the stodgy, old school detective work of yesterday's department.

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FADE IN:

TO WHITE

The white reveals itself to be thick wall of fog. It thins incrementally. Finally, we emerge to:

EXT. SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA (1972) - SUNSET

Zoom over the feral, near-impenetrable Northern California Pacific ocean. Surfers dot the break along the cliffs like fishing bobbers. Behind them, deeper, moving slowly, the hint of a large form. Hard to say if it's a dolphin, elephant seal, or a great white shark prowling.

An enormous wooden roller coaster incongruously comes into focus. Sounds of GROANING WOOD, CLICKS, BELLS, and THRILLED SCREAMS drift by.

Push up, over, and past a city (more of a big town, really) mottled with trees that ebbs into an enormous, lush redwood forest spanning as far as the eye can see.

EXT. FOREST - SUNSET

It's nearly dark in the redwoods. We float along through the trees. Looking for something. Stop. CRASHING through the trees. Whip around.

DAISY REYES (Chicana, 16), terrified, high af, bursts through the trees. She's running for her life. The branches whip her arms and legs, grab her long, straight hair. The roots trip up her bare and bloody feet.

We shoot after her.

OVER BLACK:

GUNSHOT.

Daisy YELPS.

INT. CRIS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The place is a small, sparse, neat but comfortable beach bungalow. Pretty normal - pictures of a Afro-Cuban teenage girl with her NYPD dad, pictures of her receiving her black belt in Jiu Jitsu, her award for marksmanship, etc.

Also an entire wall is littered with fairly gruesome crime scene photos, newspaper clippings, hastily written notes, photos of various people marked "MISSING."

CRISTINA ACOSTA (early 30s, Afro-Cuban, New York transplant) is in her police uniform. She stops at a mirror and finishes dressing for The Job with deep respect and commitment: badge, name tag, gun, note pad, cover.

She tucks up an errant curl and makes sure she's completely squared away. Then she does a kind of ritual not unlike crossing herself, of touching her badge, her pistol, her handcuffs, her cover, before she grabs her keys and leaves.

The lock CLICKS behind her.

EXT. SANTA CRUZ STREETS - DAY

1972 Santa Cruz is a microcosm of the nation of the time. The era of conservatism is cracking and the Age of Aquarius is comin' in hot. Tightly coiffed ladies and flat-topped fellows hustle past dallying, scruffy, long-haired Flower Children.

But there's something underneath the dissonant thrill of revolution -- the underlying, nerve-searing, furtive anxiety of Chaos straining against its worn tethers, an itchy high-pitched whistle on the far edge of earshot.

It's a town so beautiful yet with a biting wind and oppressive fog. Nothing is only beautiful. Many things thrive on chaos.

An island in a busy intersection, Cris directs traffic with sharp, clear hand signals and a GENEROUS USE OF HER WHISTLE.

EXT. PACIFIC GARDEN MALL - DAY

Santa Cruz oozes with sensuality, not just in respect to sex -- although there is plenty of that -- but in every aspect of its culture: music, food, dance, poetry, film, politics, and conversation. Even the air and light seem seductive.

The center of *this* universe, the Pacific Garden Mall, teems with life. LIVE MUSIC bounces down the street and off the ornate old buildings.

POETS AND BUSKING MUSICIANS FILL THE AIR. On the corner, any corner, is some DEMONSTRATOR on their soapbox LECTURING, PITCHING, PERFORMING. That's TIMOTHY LEARY holding court at the table over there.

On the flip side are THOSE ON THE HUNT. They're the ones watching from the periphery, assessing, probing for weaknesses, for an edge, for the ones to use, to take from, to turn out.

Cris writes tickets for SKATEBOARDERS and PEOPLE SMOKING DOOBIES on the outdoor mall, converses with PASSERSBY.

These are hardly the tasks worthy of the honor she pays the uniform. But she's a good cop and does her job diligently if not with a bit of frustration. She memorizes the Land Sharks and they note her noting them.

INT. UCSC STUDENT HOUSING - SUNNY'S ROOM - DAY

SUNSHINE "SUNNY" FERMI (20, white, surfer type, whip-smart) pops a real crime book in a day pack with camera, canteen of water, and snacks. Littering her (very messy) RA room are puzzles, newspapers. She grabs her skateboard and exits.

INT. UCSC STUDENT HOUSING - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Sunny sees MEREDITH (19) in the hallway and they shake hands in a very hip way.

SUNNY

Hey, Meredith! Watch "Policewoman" tonight? New episode!

MEREDITH

No way, you always ruin the ending.

SUNNY

It's always so obvious!

MEREDITH

Maybe for you!

SUNNY

C'mon, don't be square. I promise not to guess.

A look.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

I promise not to tell you.

MEREDITH

Groovy. Count me in then.

Sunny continues out of the building.

EXT. SANTA CRUZ STREETS - DAY

Sunny skateboards down the tree-lined streets until a car passes. She grabs the bumper and hitches a ride. Her hair billows out behind her, a huge grin plastered on her face.

She gets to an intersection and in one smooth motion lets go of the car, scoops up her board, and sticks out her thumb.

It doesn't take long for someone to stop and pick her up.

EXT. PACIFIC GARDEN MALL - DAY

Sunny is right at home with the surging art movement. She skateboards down the open mall fielding HELLOS and giving low fives. Everyone knows her, she knows everyone.

Sunny flows right past Cris scratching out parking tickets.

Cris checks her watch. Quitting time. She takes a breath, packs up her ticket book and heads out. A couple of the land sharks move forward from the edges.

INT. SANTA CRUZ POLICE PRECINCT - BULLPEN - DAY

It's a fairly small complement. The phone doesn't ring a whole lot, there's not a sense of urgency, it's a sleepy beach town. Or used to be.

Along one wall is a collage of Missing notices and Unsolved Cases. We recognize some of the images from Cris' own wall, the same gruesome crime scene photos. There's no pattern to how things are placed, they just seem to be slapped up.

A FEW DETECTIVES, including DETECTIVE FRANK CARTER (30s, prematurely bald, twitchy), DETECTIVE RALPH LEVY (late 40s, veteran detective, ambivalent) go over the board like they do whenever there's nothing happening.

DET. LEVY

Grim, Frank, I'm tellin' ya. Ever since Frazier slaughtered that Ochs family this town's become a shit pile of looney tunes. Nothin', nothin', nothin' then bingo! We're busier than hell. I don't wanna be busy, Frank.

The detectives fidget uncomfortably at the name Frazier. The move pictures around like Scrabble tiles, looking for connections

DET. CARTER

What pisses me off is half these missing persons are probably just goddamn hippies wandering off after some crappy band or another. But here they are, clogging our wall!

DET. LEVY

You think they're just gone?

DET. CARTER

Put it this way, I hope so. The numbers flowing in and out of this town? There's a lotta margin for error.

DET. LEVY

That your woman's intuition?

DET. CARTER

I mean, look at all of it.

DET. LEVY

(shrug)

We got it.

Carter shakes his head. They don't got it.

In the background, Cris tries to eavesdrop. They notice and lean away from her. Cris tries to play it cool. She holds out a box of donuts.

CRIS

Hey, guys. Uh, donut?

DET. LEVY

What can we do for you, Acosta? We're trying to work here.

CRIS

Right. I thought I might be of some help. I've been thinking--

DET. CARTER

You'd type up my report?

Here it comes.

DET. CARTER (CONT'D)

You type right?

CRIS

Not very w--

DET. CARTER

Then get back on the street where
you belong.

Damn.

CAPT. SAYERS (O.S.)

ACOSTA!

Cris flinches imperceptibly as everyone in the nearly all
white, all male room turns to look at her, boring holes into
her.

DET. CARTER

Get the fuck out of here, Acosta.

Cris heads to the Captain's office. As she crosses the room
she repeats her ritual of subtly touching her badge, her
pistol, her handcuffs, her cover.

INT. SANTA CRUZ POLICE PRECINCT - CAPT. SAYERS'S OFFICE -
CONTINUOUS

It's a basic cop office except the section he calls "The Cult
Board." In this "free-love age" the Bay Area in general is a
magnet to the lost and looking, and the chaos that follows.

The wall has images of missing children, maps of compounds,
images of leaders and potential leaders, and hunting grounds -
- college campuses, bus stations, the Pacific Garden Mall.

CAPT. JIMMY SAYERS (60s, dry, former high school star
quarterback) is chain smoking. He's a fair dude but not very
pleasant.

He lights a new cigarette with the old one then aggressively
jabs the old cigarette out in a shitty, reeking, overflowing
ashtray made for him by one of his talentless kids.

CAPT. SAYERS

Right, yeah, so, sit, Acosta.

Cris stands at attention.

CRIS

I'd rather stand, sir, if it's all
the same to you.

Capt. Sayers winces. Why does she have to make everything so
difficult?

CAPT. SAYERS
 Whatever. Look, your promotion
 application was denied and, uh--

CRIS
 Why, sir?

CAPT. SAYERS
 What?

CRIS
 Why? Sir.

Damned if he'll admit the real reason.

CAPT. SAYERS
 Oh. Some paperwork thing... Look
 anyway, it's fine. You're too
 valuable where you are. This is a
 team, right? And you're part of it
 and I, uh, need you where you are,
 hun.

CRIS
 (collects herself)
 May, may I reapply?

CAPT. SAYERS
 What do you wanna do that for?
 C'mon. You're only gonna quit once
 you get married and start poppin'--
 start having kids.

There's no way in hell either of these things is going to
 happen. Not that she'd admit that. The only thing worse in
 1972 than a woman quitting work after she gets married, is a
 woman who doesn't want to get married. Or pop out any kids.

CRIS
 Sir--

CAPT. SAYERS
 It's for the best. Dismissed,
 Officer.

They exchange an exasperated look. Cris will swallow the
 sting and save the battle for another day. She's patient.
 She'll get what she wants eventually. Deep down Capt. Sayers
 knows this too.

INT. SANTA CRUZ POLICE PRECINCT - BULLPEN - DAY

Cris enters, frustrated, while a bit of a hubbub is starting. A wall of WHITE, MALE OFFICERS AND DETECTIVES, including DETECTIVE AARON WHITEHALL (40s, says things like, "Beaner") surround SENORA REYES, (late 30s, Mexican, panicked). Her English is broken, worsened by her stress.

SRA REYES

No, you no understand.

DET. WHITEHALL

No, ma'am, we understand you fine, unfortunately you can't report her missing for 72 hours.

SRA REYES

Pero, no! She does not...

(in Spanish)

She's a good girl, she was upset and went for a walk and never came back. She is always home for dinner. And school today, she wasn't there.

Sra Reyes is on the brink of tears. The male detectives look at her as though she's on fire.

DET. WHITEHALL

Melendez! Get over here!

OFFICER SEAN MELENDEZ, (20s, Latino, but only technically, white boy in every other respect) hovering on the outside of the circle hesitates. Does he have to? This woman is "hysterical."

Cris CLUCKS and crosses to them.

CRIS

¿Con permiso, señora, puedo ayudarte?

Sra Reyes blinks.

SRA REYES

(in Spanish)

I'm sorry, your Spanish...

CRIS

(in Spanish)

Yes, I'm Cuban.

SRA REYES

Cuban? You are so far from home.

CRIS
How can I help you, señora?

SRA REYES
My daughter, she's missing. She's gone. They think she ran away, she never would do that! They won't let me report it.

CRIS
Calm yourself, I will help you.

The detectives just frown at her.

DET. WHITEHALL
 You're wasting your time, Acosta. It's just some stupid wetback run off.

CRIS
 (snapping)
 Shut up, Whitehall.

DET. WHITEHALL
 (seething)
Officer Acosta, you will mind your tongue or I will mind it for you.

SRA REYES
 Por favor, señora.

Capt. Sayers comes into the bullpen.

CAPT. SAYERS
 What's going on?

DET. WHITEHALL
 Her kid ran away. We told her she needs to wait 72 hours as protocol dictates but Acosta here--

CRIS
 Sir, she's very upset, please just let me calm her down. I'll even punch out.

Everyone rolls their eyes. Kiss ass.

CAPT. SAYERS
 Jesus, Acosta. Fine. Make it quick and get her out of here.
 (he points at her)
 We can't help her for 72 hours.

Cris leads Sra Reyes to a desk in the corner and clears paperwork off some chairs.

CRIS
(in Spanish)
Now, tell me about your daughter.

Cris conceals her note-taking from prying eyes.

SRA REYES
(in Spanish)
We had a fight, like mothers and daughters do, and she ran out. She was mad! And then she never came back. Something bad has happened.
(she puts her hands to her heart)
I feel it. My daughter.

CRIS
I'm so sorry. What were you fighting about?

SRA REYES
It is so stupid now. She wanted to spend time with her friends. There was work to do first.

CRIS
Do you have a picture of her?

SRA REYES
No. Oh, no, I should have brought one. I didn't think-- Oh! Yes, yes I have one.

Sra. Reyes pulls out a dog-eared picture of a grinning Daisy. It's definitely the girl who was running for her life.

CRIS
What are her friends' names?

SRA REYES
Oh, I don't know, white girls, Nancy something and Cindy... Cullen.

Cris makes notes. Sra Reyes studies her.

SRA REYES (CONT'D)
So, you are Cuban. But American. Where is your family? Your mother?
(Cris frowns)
(MORE)

SRA REYES (CONT'D)
*She is with God, no? Are you alone
here?*

Is it that obvious? Sra Reyes reaches to touch Cris's arm.

DET. CARTER
Acosta!

Cris jerks away.

CRIS
*That's fine, señora. I will follow
up. Go home and wait for her.*

SRA REYES
*Thank you, señorita. Thank you for
listening to me. Please help me.
Please.*

Det. Carter HUFFS in the distance.

CRIS
I promise. I will do what I can.

Cris walks Sra. Reyes out.

ANGLE ON:

At the door, Cris turns. Capt. Sayers is right behind her.

CAPT. SAYERS
No.

CRIS
What's that, sir?

CAPT. SAYERS
Do not pursue.

CRIS
I wasn't--

CAPT. SAYERS
It's a no. She can come back after
72 hours.

CRIS
Yes, sir.

Cris tucks her note pad in her pocket.