Lovereading.co.uk

True Detectives

Jonathan Kellerman

Published by Headline

Extract

All text is copyright © of the author

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

JONATHAN KELLERMAN

TRUE DETECTIVES

headline

Copyright © 2009 Jonathan Kellerman

The right of Jonathan Kellerman to be identified as the Author of
the Work has been asserted by him in accordance with
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in the United States in 2009 by Ballantine Books,
an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group,
a division of Random House Inc., New York

First published in Great Britain in 2009
by HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP

First published in paperback in Great Britain in 2009
by HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Apart from any use permitted under UK copyright law, this publication may
only be reproduced, stored, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means,
with prior permission in writing of the publishers or, in the case of reprographic production,
in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

All characters in this publication are fictitious
and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead,
is purely coincidental.

Cataloguing in Publication Data is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7553 5973 8 (B-format)
ISBN 978 0 7553 4531 1 (A-format)

Typeset in Fournier MT by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,
Grangemouth, Stirlingshire

Printed in the UK by CPI Mackays, Chatham ME5 8TD

Headline's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and
made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected
to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP
An Hachette UK Company
338 Euston Road
London NW1 3BH

www.headline.co.uk
www.hachette.co.uk

1

August 9, 1979

'*Alleged* AIR-conditioning,' said Darius Fox. 'What's your take, John Jasper? Motor pool morons set us on bake or broil?'

Jack Reed laughed and used a meaty, freckled forearm to clear sweat from his face. Scanning the night-darkened dumpsters and butt-sides of shuttered, low-rent businesses that lined the alley, he sucked on his Parliament and blew smoke out the cruiser's window as Darius kept the car moving forward at ten mph.

Ten years ago, to the day, the Manson Family had butchered Sharon Tate and a whole bunch of other people. If either Fox or Reed was aware of the anniversary, neither thought it worth mentioning.

Crazy Charlie's crimes might as well have been on another planet; big-ticket outrage on high-end real estate. Fox and Reed's Southwest Division shifts were filled with nonstop penny-ante crap that sometimes blossomed into stomach-churning violence.

Reality that never made the papers because, as far as they could see, the papers were works of fiction.

Fox said, 'Man, it's a steam bath.'

Reed said, 'Alleged, as in this is a motor vehicle. More like a shopping cart with a cherry on top.'

Fox had prepped for driving the way he usually did, hand-vacuuming the driver's portion of the bench seat, then wiping the steering wheel down with his private stash of baby wipes. Now it was his own sweat coating the plastic. 'Hand me a tissue, JJ.'

Reed complied and his partner rubbed the wheel till it squeaked.

Both men continued to study the alley as they crawled. Nothing. Good. One half of the shift had passed.

Jack Reed said, 'Alleged, as in Jimmy Carter's a commander in chief.'

'Now you're getting unpleasantly political.'

'That's a problem?'

'Night like this it is.'

'Truth is truth, Darius. It was Peanut Boy helped that loony towel-head back into Eye-Ran and look at all the crap that brought down.'

'No debate on Farmer Bucktooth being a nitwit, John Jasper. I just don't want to pollute our precious time together with small things like international affairs.'

Reed thought about that. 'Fair enough.'

'I'm known for my fairness.'

Slow shift; the usual drunk and disorderlies at Mexican

dance halls on Vermont, a couple of false-alarm burglary calls, an assortment of miscreants warned and released because none of them was worth the paperwork.

The last call they'd fielded before embarking on alley-duty was yet another noise complaint at a USC fraternity, already taken care of by the campus rent-a-cops by the time Fox and Reed arrived. Rich, confident college boys saying yessir and nossir, scooping up beer bottles from the lawn, hurrying inside to continue the merriment. Wink wink wink.

Reed smoked his Parliament down to a shred, pinched it cold between his fingers, flicked the remnant out the window. He was a ruddy, blond fireplug, five nine on a good day, two hundred muscled pounds, thirty but looking older, with skin leathered by the sun and a nose flattened by high school football. A hay-colored crewcut topped his bullet skull. A naturally grainy voice was coarsened further by two packs a day.

Three years out of the service, all his time spent running an armory in Germany.

He said, 'Tell you what *alleged* is, Darius: LA nights cooling off. Night like this, might as well have stayed in Bull Shoals.'

'And missed the opportunity to ride with me?'

Reed grinned. 'Perish the thought.'

'Damn heat,' said Fox, dabbing sweat from his straight-edge mustache. He was a tall, rangy black man, thirty-one years old, a former air force mechanic who'd been told by many people that he was handsome enough to act.

Jack Reed, a small-town Arkansas boy, was comfortable with

black people in a way northerners could never be. He found LA scary. Everyone pretending to love everyone else but the streets hummed with anger.

Working with a black man – sitting side by side, eating, talking, trusting your life to a black man – was a whole different level of comfort for a transplanted southerner, and he was surprised how fast he'd gotten used to riding with Darius.

Knowing what Darius was thinking without Darius having to put it into words.

He could only imagine what his cousins would say if he bothered to talk to them anymore, which he didn't. All that ignorance and stupidity was history.

He contemplated another cigarette as Darius exited the alley, drove a block, entered a neighboring back lane. More garbage and accordion-grated rear doors.

Same old same old; both patrolmen were bored and crazy-hot.

Darius used his forearm to wipe sweat off his chin. Shiny nails flashed. Jack resisted the urge to kid his partner about the weekly manicures. Night like this, no sense being tiresome.

Jack had been to Darius's neat little bungalow in Crenshaw for barbecues and the like, played with Darius's little boy, made chitchat with the woman Darius was supposed to be committed to till death do us.

Madeleine Fox was a small-waisted, curvy, strong-featured white girl who thought she was an artist but had no talent anyone else could perceive. Great teeth and hair, even better

body. Those big soft . . . Jack imagined Darius getting close to her. Sliding down the bed and putting his manicured hands on . . . Jack's own face and body and hands transferred to the scene.

Feeling like a shit, he shut down the movie, lit up another Parliament.

'You OK?' said Darius.

'Yeah.'

'You got fidgety. Pumping those knees, like you do.'

'I'm fine.'

'OK.'

'OK, what?'

'You fidget when something's bugging you.'

'Nothing's bugging me.'

'OK.'

Jack said, 'All that intuition, apply for detective.'

'Big fun,' said Darius. 'Sitting on my ass all day typing, no more stimulating conversation with you? Not to mention fringe benefits?'

Jack had been riding with Darius for thirteen months, knew the perks his partner was talking about.

Comped meals, 'donations' of merchandise by grateful civilians.

Last week, both he and Darius had gotten brand-new pocket calculators from an Arab with a store on Hoover after they'd busted two kids trying to shoplift cassette tapes.

Darius's favorite perk had nothing to do with tangible goods.

Police groupies. Hit the right cop bar at the right time and they swarmed like ants on molasses.

Sad girls, for the most part, not Jack's thing. But he didn't judge.

Sometimes he wondered, though. Darius married to a good-looking, downright sexy girl like Maddy, nice backyard, cute little Aaron.

Jack ever got married, he was pretty sure he'd never step out.

Sometimes he thought about Maddy, those teeth. The rest of the package. Sometimes that brought on headaches and long, itchy thoughts. Mostly when his crappy little single in Inglewood got real quiet and *Penthouse* wasn't gonna cut it.

Darius said, 'Wind blows the heat in, then the heat just sits down and stays until another wind finally decides to kick its ass out of town.'

Jack said, 'Tonight's weather report is brought to you by Cal Worthington Dodge. Now for the latest on them Dodgers.'

Darius laughed. 'Nasty night like this, almost a full moon on top of the heat, you'd think we'd be having more fun.'

'People carving each other up,' said Jack.

'People shooting each other full of holes,' said Darius.

'People stomping each other till the brains ooze out of their cracked skulls.'

'People strangling each other till the tongues are sticking out like limp . . . salamis.'

'For a moment I thought you were gonna say something else – hey, look at the land-yacht.'

Pointing up the alley to a big white car idling, maybe ten yards up, pulled to the left. Lights off but the security bulb of a neighboring building cast an oblique band of yellow across the vehicle's rear end.

Darius said, 'Caddy, looks pretty new. How come it's smoking worse than you?'

He rolled closer and each of them made out the model.

Big white Fleetwood, matching vinyl top, fake wire wheels. Tinted windows shut tight.

Someone's AC wasn't alleged.

Darius rolled close enough to read the tags. Jack called in the numbers.

One-year-old Caddy, registered to Arpad Avakian, address on Edgemont Street, no wants or warrants.

Darius said, 'East Hollywood Armenian. Bit of a drive to Southwest.'

Jack said, 'Maybe something worth driving for.'

'*Real* worth driving for.'

Both of them thinking the same thing without having to say it: No logical reason for Arpad Armenian or whoever was using his wheels to be in this crap-dump neighborhood in a newish luxury boat unless someone had a serious *jones*.

Dope or sex.

Or both.

Guy with a fresh Caddy had the potential to be a fun bust, bit of diversion from the brain-dead locals they usually dealt with.

If Arpad was polite, they might even let him go with a

warning. Some of those Hollywood Armenians owned stereo stores and the like. Nothing wrong with chalking up another grateful civilian.

Darius got closer, put the cruiser in Park. Got out of the car before Jack could place his hand on the door handle.

Jack watched his partner hitch up his trousers, approach the Caddy with the cop swagger that originated when you learned to walk with all that heavy gear on your belt. Like making your way on the rolling deck of a boat; eventually, you came to like it.

Darius walked right up next to the Caddy, shined his flashlight at the driver's window, holding it high, the way they were trained, to prevent it being grabbed. His free hand hovered near his holstered .38, and Jack felt his own paw settling on his weapon. Nowadays everything had to be logged, so he called in the stop, caught a bad connection on the radio, tried twice more before reaching Dispatch.

Meanwhile, Darius was rapping on the window.

Tinted almost black. It stayed closed.

'Police, open up.'

The Caddy sat there, smoking away.

Maybe suicide? Or a carbon mono accident? Normally, you had to be in an indoor situation to asphyxiate yourself with exhaust, but Jack had heard about venting gone bad.

'Open up *now*.' Darius put that menacing edge in his voice. You'd never know this was a guy who loved his weekly salon manicure.

The Caddy's window remained shut.

As Darius repeated the command, he reached to unsnap his holster and Jack moved for his own gun and opened the cruiser's passenger door.

Just as he got to his feet, the window slid down silently.

Whatever Darius saw relaxed him. He dropped his gun arm. Smiled.

Jack relaxed, too.

'License and reg—'

The night cracked.

Three shots in rapid succession. Each hit Darius square in the chest. Each caused him to buck.

He didn't fall back the way they did in the movies. He sank down into a sitting position, hands flat on the asphalt, as the Caddy lurched into gear and shot forward.

At first glance, just a guy resting.

Crazily, Jack thought: He's OK.

Then Darius pivoted, half faced Jack. What looked like motor oil leaked through Darius's tailored navy shirt. His face was that of a stranger.

Jack screamed and fired at the fleeing car. Emptying his revolver as he ran to Darius.

'Oh man, oh Jesus, oh man, Lord Jesus . . .'

Later, he'd learn that one of his bullets had pierced the Caddy's rear window, but that hadn't slowed the big car down.

Darius continued to sit there. Three wet holes in his chest.

Jack cradled him, put pressure on the wounds. 'Hold on, Dar, you're gonna be fine, just hold on hold on hold on.'

Darius stared at the sky with dull, sightless eyes.

His mouth gaped.

Jack felt for a pulse. Gimme something, c'mon, c'mon, gimme . . .

Darius's skin turned to ice.

Jack began CPR, covering Darius's cold mouth with his own.

Like breathing into an empty cave.

Darius lay there.

Still as the heat that had blown in from the desert and decided to stay.

2

By now, Aaron Fox understood Mr Dmitri.

Once a level of trust had developed, he'd stay out of your face.

Aaron's favorite type of client.

Real deep pockets made Mr Dmitri the *perfect* client.

Before his first meeting with the guy, Aaron had done his usual research. Googling *Leonid Davidovitch Dmitri* and coming up with two dozen hits, the most informative a rags-to-riches tale in a business journal: Moscow born, trained as an electrical engineer, Dmitri had been stuck for fifteen years in a dead-end Communist job measuring noise levels at restaurants and filing reports that never got read. At the age of thirty-seven, he'd emigrated to Israel, then the US, taught night school math and physics to other Russians, tinkered in his kitchen, inventing numerous objects of dubious value.

Ten years ago, he'd patented a tiny, wafer-thin stereo speaker that produced outsized sound and was perfect for

cars – especially high-end sports models with their limited cabin space.

Aaron's Porsche had been outfitted with Dmitri's gizmo when he'd had it customized and the fidelity was kick-ass.

The article estimated Mr Dmitri's net worth at a couple hundred million, and Aaron was expecting to meet some tycoon sitting behind an acre of desk in an over-the-top inner sanctum crammed with imitation Fabergé and God knew what else.

What he encountered was a short, bald, stubby-limbed, bullnecked man in his late fifties with a pie-tin face blued by stubble, sitting behind a plywood desk in a no-window hole at a factory in a Sylmar industrial park.

Dmitri was maybe five five, at least two hundred, lots of that muscle, but also some fat. Dark brown laser-sharp eyes never stopped moving.

Two hundred biggies, but the guy wasn't spending it on wardrobe. Short-sleeved pale blue shirt, baggy gray pleated pants, gray New Balances. Aaron came to learn that it was Dmitri's uniform.

Cheap digital watch.

Fake-o tongue-and-groove covered all four walls of the office. Same for the door, giving the place a claustrophobic feel.

That first meeting, he'd played it safe clothes-wise, not knowing what kind of rapport he'd have to develop with the client.

That kind of individual attention was one of the many keys to Aaron's success.

Variety was what he liked about the job. One day you might be meeting at Koi with a pathetically tucked, youth-chasing record producer still thinking he could pull off hip-hop. Chopsticking miso black cod and waiting as the client struggled for nonchalance, inside he's rotting from insecurity as he fumbles to explain his reason for hiring a detective.

Finally the confession: He needs to know, is his twenty-seven-year-old fourth wife blowing the good-looking guy someone saw her with at Fred Segal, or is Darrett really a gay hairdresser she took along as a shopping buddy?

Situation like that, you don't dress down to the client's level but you don't wear a suit. Aaron met the poor fool wearing indigo Diesel jeans, a slate-colored, retro Egyptian cotton T-shirt from VagueLine, unstructured black linen jacket, perforated black Santoni driving shoes.

The following day, he was at a downtown law firm, corporate client talking through a six-hundred-dollar-an-hour mouthpiece, needing someone to check out the goings-on at a Temple Street construction site where tools and building materials were disappearing at an alarming rate. For that one, Aaron chose a navy pin-striped Paul Smith made-to-measure, pearl-gray Ferré shirt, maroon Sego tie, blue pocket square, brown kidskin Magli loafers.

Enjoying the feeling of good threads because tomorrow, he'd be made up like a skuzzy, psycho homeless bum, wheeling a shopping cart past the excavation.

For Aaron's first meeting with Mr Dmitri, he selected an olive Zegna Soft three-button he'd found at the outlet in

Cabazon, maize button-collar shirt and brown linen tie from Barneys, bittersweet chocolate Allen-Edmonds wingtips.

For all Mr Dmitri noticed, Aaron could've pranced in wearing leotards and a codpiece.

Guy was ready to offer him the job, knew Aaron's rates, including the premium expense allowance, had a big fat retainer check faceup on the desk.

Big fat retainer.

'May I ask who referred you, sir?'

Dmitri picked up something that resembled a Rubik's Cube but had about twenty surfaces to it and squares embossed with Greek letters. Without glancing at the numbers, he whirled rapidly, checked out the result, put it back down.

'Certainly, you may ask.' Foghorn voice. Dmitri's accent turned it into *Syertenly you mayyesk*.

Smiling.

'Who referred you, sir?'

Dmitri said, 'Serinus Canaria.'

Another foreign guy? Didn't ring a bell. 'I'm sorry, sir, but that doesn't—'

Dmitri said, 'Common canary.'

Aaron stared.

'Little bird,' said Dmitri. No more smile. 'You want the job or no?'

Aaron glanced around the office for signs of some special interest in ornithology. Nothing on the hideous paneling except curling posters of Mr Dmitri's patented SoundMyte speaker in 'new-age designer colors.'

Aaron said, 'Tell me about the job.'

'Good answer, Mr Fox.'

The first assignment had been shockingly simple – pilfering from Dmitri's shipping bay. The culprit had to be one of six clerks, and within thirty-six hours Aaron had the idiot on hidden cam slipping speakers into four backpacks, stashing one after the other into the trunk of his Camry.

Slam-dunk, three-thousand-dollar tab. Aaron wondered why a man of Mr Dmitri's technical abilities had bothered to hire out.

Testing Aaron?

If so, he'd passed, because the second gig arrived two months later and it was anything but simple.

One of Dmitri's secretaries was concerned that her seventeen-year-old honor-student daughter was 'fooling around' with a gangbanger named Hector George Morales.

'Find out, Mr Fox. I'll take it from there.'

'Nice of you to do that for an employee, sir.'

'Here's the check.'

Morales turned out to be a serious badass, third-generation Mexican Mafia, with a five-page juvey sheet Aaron cadged out of an LAPD records clerk using a hundred-dollar bribe. Ten additional pages recounted a pattern of adult felonies. Morales was suspected of several murders but had only been convicted of a single ADW, serving half of a ten-year sentence at Chino. Thirty-three years old, the fool hung out with extremely bad guys in clear violation of his parole.

Aaron caught him and honor-student-but-not-so-smart Valerie Santenegro on video emerging from an East LA motel near the county coroner's office, reported to Mr Dmitri, and offered to use his LAPD contacts to get Hector busted.

'Good idea, Mr Fox.'

Hector got sent back up for another ten and Valerie was shipped to Dallas to live with her married sister's family.

Mr Dmitri said, 'Good,' and peeled off a wad of bills.

Ten extra hundreds. 'What's this, sir?'

'Appreciation, Mr Fox. Go buy more fancy shirts.'

Over the past six months, Aaron had handled two additional assignments for the Russian: Industrial espionage involving a competitor that took him to Eugene, Oregon, for three weeks of serious high-tech observation, and another in-house theft at the Sylmar factory, this one involving truck drivers.

Every suspect turned up guilty, which was no big surprise. Guy like Dmitri didn't hire you unless he had a pretty good idea what was going on. Aaron's business, in general, posed few whodunits, lots of prove-its.

The fifth case was different.

Dmitri played with his mega-Rubik's. 'You are well, Mr Fox?'

'Great.'

'I'm thinking, perhaps I should call you Aaron.'

'That would be fine, sir.'

'You may call me Mr Dmitri.'

Aaron laughed.

'Yes, it was a joke.' An edge to the Russian's voice said, Don't even think about getting familiar.

'Aaron,' said Dmitri, as if testing out the sound. 'From the Bible. Your parents are religious?'

'Not really, sir.'

'Moses's brother.'

'Yes, sir.' *If you only knew.*

'This new one,' said Dmitri, 'maybe we won't learn the truth. One of my bookkeepers is Maitland Frostig. Master's degree in mathematics but he prefers to work with addition and subtraction. Mr Frostig always looks sad. More recently, he is apparently sadder. I say apparently because I don't get involved with emotions. This year, the Christmas party, my wife said, "That man is extremely depressed. Like we used to be in Moscow." I looked at Maitland Frostig with . . . new eyes and agreed. But I forgot about him.'

Dmitri ran a hand over his shiny dome. 'My wife did not forget. She is a psychiatrist. In Soviet Union they tried to make her inject dissidents with drugs. She refused and was sent to gulag. We never had children.'

'I'm sorry, sir.'

'Regina talks, I listen. I called in Maitland Frostig for a meeting, he says everything is OK. I tell him no it isn't.' Small smile. 'I say it with confidence because my wife is never wrong.'

'In general, sir, that's a good philosophy of life.'

'You are not married.' Statement, not a question. Aaron was certain Dmitri had hired someone to check him out

before writing that first check. Maybe one day he'd find out who.

'Haven't found the right woman.'

'Maybe,' said Dmitri said. 'Anyway, I tell Maitland Frostig something is wrong and he tells me the story. He lives alone, a widower since his daughter is four. Now the daughter is twenty and she is missing. Caitlin Frostig. For fifteen months she is missing, the police do nothing.'

'Someone that age,' said Aaron, 'no sign of foul play, they'll file it as a missing person and put it aside.'

'I made some calls, got the file sent to Homicide detectives. Nothing.'

'Which division?'

'I don't know.'

'Where was the girl last seen?'

'Maitland's house is in Venice.'

'Twenty and still living at home.'

'Yes.'

'Venice is Pacific Division.'

Shrug. *Don't bother me with details.* 'Police do nothing. My call was before I know you. Now I know you.'