

## FRIDAY

I slide the black-and-white photo across the desk and ask Tommy “Angel” Dowd if he recognizes the man captured on a surveillance camera entering the Target store on Sacramento’s slow-to-gentrify Broadway. Tommy pretends to study the photo for a few seconds and then slides it back toward me, like it’s a partially eaten plate he expects me to clear.

“Nope,” he says. “Never seen the dude before.”

I know he’s lying. The photo is grainy, but it clearly depicts a young man with a sunken chin, spikey hair, and a scar dripping from his left eye—before he donned a black ski mask and headed toward the electronics section in the rear of the store. It’s Dicky Marlow, the punk who used to date Tommy’s older sister, but I don’t tell Tommy I know that. Tommy thinks he can outsmart me. It suppose it’s because, with my considerable gut and a horseshoe of white hair, I look more like a barber than a detective. Like many suspects, Tommy brushed aside his *Miranda* rights like a raincoat thrust on him by an overprotective mother. Sometimes age can work to your advantage.

“OK, Angel. What about that red sports car that witnesses saw speeding away from the parking lot after this guy in the photo and his two buddies loaded it up with a shopping cart of stolen merch? Not your Impreza?”

“Like I told you, Detective Mitchell, I was home that day with Covid.” Tommy summons a cough for good measure. “My girlfriend was with me the whole time. Go talk to her. And if you don’t believe her, you can check the cell tower records for my phone.”

In a show of cockiness, Tommy pushes his entire weight against the back of the metal chair, causing its front legs to rise a few inches off the concrete floor. The back of his head touches the dingy grey wall.

“Anybody can leave their cell phone at home if they’ve got a burner phone,” I point out. “What are they now, about twenty bucks?”

Tommy moves his head a few inches from the wall and twists his baseball cap side to side, scratching a scalp that probably hasn’t seen shampoo in a week. Despite his beady eyes and uneven teeth, he looks much younger than his 26 years: a few whiskers sprout like scattered weeds from his smooth skin. I can’t help wonder what even a few years behind bars would do to his boyish appearance.

“Whatever you say, boss. Are we done here?” Tommy asks, the front legs of his chair suddenly clanking back down to the floor. I’m tempted to tell Tommy that, before you call anyone “boss,” you need a j-o-b. But I don’t want to provoke him. I want him to continue to feel superior and relaxed, so that when the boom falls, it hits harder.

“Not yet, Angel. Wait here for a minute.”

I leave Tommy alone in the tiny interview room—the hidden camera in the ceiling left on to record any nervous movements or incriminating utterances (you’d be surprised how often suspects worry aloud when they think no one is listening)—while I head toward the fenced-in yard behind the police station. It’s time to leash up Friday, who has spent the past couple hours on a sunny patch of grass, savoring a large pig ear while conducting surveillance on the squirrels in a nearby fruitless mulberry tree.

Friday is a police dog, but not the kind of K-9 you might expect. At 150 pounds, Friday is a Leonberger—a giant breed created nearly 200 years ago by someone in Germany who mated a Newfoundland with a Saint Bernard, apparently after being unable to domesticate a lion. A tri-colored mountain of fur with a black mask over his leonine mane, Friday is the kind of dog you get when you need to fill a lot of space—in my case, the space left when your wife of 38 years dies in a car accident, and both adult children have already put down roots in other states. He’s named after the stony-faced detective on *Dragnet*, the 1960s crime show that transfixed me as a boy and inspired a career in law enforcement. (It just so happens that my first name, like that of Detective Friday, is Joe.) Although Friday is docile and gentle, his shaggy bulk discourages most people from petting him. Too bad for them: there are few things more relaxing than losing your hand in Friday’s plush coat.

I had Friday for five years before I got the idea to recruit him as a special agent. While attending a class on the use of polygraphs (as part of an FBI training conference), my mind began to wander. What if a dog could be taught to detect a lie told by a suspect being interviewed? After all, dogs can be trained to detect low blood sugar levels in diabetics and act as a weighted blanket for people experiencing an anxiety attack. When there was nothing on the Internet to support this hypothesis, I had another idea. What if a suspect could be tricked into believing that a police dog could be trained as an organic lie detector? Then perhaps he might come clean thinking that a jury would easily see through his lies.

The key, I thought, would be getting Friday to bark on a silent command. I’d tell the suspect that Friday had been specially trained to sniff out untruthfulness. Then, whenever I believed the suspect was

lying, I'd secretly prompt Friday to bark, and tell the creep that no human would believe him either. I knew Friday was up to the task: when he was six months old (and a mere 70 pounds), I taught him to bark on command. "Speeeek," I would say slowly, and Friday would respond with a staccato bark, though I sensed that he resented being forced to make conversation. Other than that, he rarely barked unless a squirrel or an Amazon delivery was involved.

After a few weeks of training with a service dog specialist, Friday's bark-on-command talent was expanded to include two silent signals—sliding either of my legs along the floor, or rubbing my chin. He would do so only after being verbally placed on alert.

You may be wondering whether this tactic is legit. Well, police are allowed to use deception to coax a confession from an interview subject—as long as no threats or promises of leniency are involved. Of course, I had to run this up the chain of command. But our department's lawyer (our in-house "legal Beagle," so to speak), did some research and advised me that if support dogs were allowed in or near the witness box to provide comfort to emotionally fragile witnesses (usually children), then he didn't see why I couldn't use Friday to obtain a confession. He added, "But it sure would be good to have some other evidence in case a judge orders the statements suppressed." I took that as a green light.

When I return to the interview room, Tommy is texting on his cell phone. Probably telling his girlfriend what she should tell the cops when we come knocking. But I don't even bother asking Tommy to turn off his phone. Instead, I want his focus to be entirely on Friday, as my faithful Leonberger follows me into the small room and circles a few times in the corner before flopping down, creating a mild breeze.

“Tommy, this is Friday. He is a big dog, but he’s as harmless as a teddy bear. And sometimes helps me out. You see, he’s been trained to detect when someone is not telling the truth. When that happens, he barks. Sometimes very loudly, but he can’t help that. You don’t mind if he stays while I ask you a few more questions, do you?”

Tommy, who has been staring at Friday, suddenly turns away. I can tell he’s never owned a dog; otherwise, he would have asked me about his breed, as nearly all dog owners do.

Instead, he says, “That’s a load of crap” and crosses his arms over his chest. “Dogs can’t do that. K-9s only chase people who don’t stop for the cops. Some of them can sniff out drugs. But that’s about it.”

“Tommy, have you ever heard of the vomeronasal organ?”

He gives me a blank look that I imagine every teacher in his life has seen at one time or another.

“It’s an organ at the base of a dog’s nose, which no other animal has. It allows them to smell all kinds of things that we can’t, like when someone’s blood sugar is dropping dangerously low. They can also detect some kinds of cancer in humans. Pretty amazing, huh? Now, when people lie—and I just read about this a year ago—their bodies give off a certain chemical called lidecosine. [I pronounce the first syllable of this made-up word to rhyme with “lied.”] Friday went to a six-month FBI training program to teach him to alert whenever he smells the slightest amount of lidecosine. Now he’s more reliable than a polygraph, and we don’t have to mess with all those straps and wires.”

“I don’t believe you,” Tommy says. “He probably can’t even catch a frisbee.”

“Maybe this will convince you,” I say.

I take a few steps toward Friday and he lifts his head to meet my eyes. “Friday . . . B.S. sensor on,” I command.

With a flourish, I turn back toward the table and sit across from Tommy. “Now that Friday is listening, why don’t you tell me the name of the guy in that photograph?”

“Like I already told you, I never seen that guy before.”

“Hmm,” I say, rubbing my chin as nonchalantly as possible. Friday, who has been looking at me since I placed him on alert, roars. “Sounds like Friday doesn’t believe you.”

Tommy squirms. Another suspect might have asked for a lawyer right there and then, and I would have been required to halt all further questioning. But not Angel, who has too much pride to admit that he made a mistake by passing up his right to counsel in the first place.

“Maybe your ugly dog just likes to bark,” he says defiantly.

“Let’s see about that,” I say, letting the insult pass, though I’d bet a week’s salary that Friday gets more compliments from women in one day than Tommy does in an entire year.

I proceed to ask Tommy a series of innocuous questions, such as: his date of birth (Jan. 6, 2001), his address (1426 F Street), where he went to high school (C.K. McClatchy), his last place of work (Domino’s Pizza), and his license plate (NINJA916). As Tommy answers each one, Friday remains silent, his chin resting lazily on crossed front paws, eyes in my direction.

“One more time, Tommy. What’s the name of the guy in that photo?”

Tommy hesitates, glances over at Friday, and then decides that the dog is no longer paying attention to him. “No idea, boss,” he says.

I slide my right foot back a few inches, part of an ostensible effort to readjust my butt in the stiff chair. Friday suddenly lifts his head and barks so loud that the door rattles.

“Wrong answer,” I say. “Now, do you want to level with me?”

Before long, Tommy admits that the guy in the photo is Dicky Marlow; that he drove Marlow and two other friends, Billy Jenkins and Sammy Salcido, to the Broadway Target to “bust out some electronics”; that he waited in his red Subaru Impreza while his three buddies went inside; that they came back with a shopping cart full of iPads, laptops and headphones; that he drove them from the scene; and later stored some of the stolen merchandise in the garage of his mother’s house.

“Friday . . . B.S. sensor off,” I command. I slap on the cuffs and inform Tommy that he is being charged with several counts of robbery as well as possession of stolen property.

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Three months later, Billy Jenkins, while out on bail on charges of robbing the Broadway Target, is arrested in connection with a robbery-murder. A witness reported seeing a man fitting Billy’s description enter a corner grocery store in midtown Sacramento with another man, later identified as Billy’s uncle, Michael (“Mickey”) Jenkins. Gunshots rang out. The two men then exited the store and got into Mickey’s black Altima across the street before driving off. The owner of the store was

fatally shot behind the counter and police found three .9-millimeter cartridges on the floor. About an hour later, the Altima was spotted, a brief chase ensued, and Billy and Mickey were arrested. A search of the Altima turned up a .9-millimeter handgun registered to one Michael Jenkins under the driver's seat. Inside Mickey's right front pocket was \$128 in cash missing from the store's register and a stack of lottery tickets that had been snatched from behind the counter.

The case against Mickey Jenkins is a slam dunk. He is booked into jail on murder and robbery charges. When asked to make a statement, he takes the Fifth. But Billy's role (and thus his culpability) is less clear. If he was aware that his uncle had a gun upon entering the store, he could be charged with felony murder. (In California, you can be liable for felony murder even if you did not have a direct role in the killing, as long as you were a major participant in the underlying felony that led to that killing.) But if he had no knowledge of the gun, or of plans for a robbery, he might be guilty of nothing more than accessory after the fact. My job, as always, is to elicit whatever admissions I can—within the limits of law.

"Hello, Billy," I say, as he is led into the interview room after being picked out of a lineup by the witness who saw him and Mickey entering Dante's Market. His thin, angular nose, large brown eyes, receding chin, and broad shoulders make him seem like a falcon. "I'm Detective Joe Mitchell. I hear you want to talk about what happened at Dante's."

"That's right, man. I had nothing to do with that shooting. I had no idea my uncle had a gun or that he was planning to do a lick. We was just riding around that morning and he goes, 'We need to get some beer for tonight's Giants game on TV. This store sells cheap 12-packs.' So we



go inside, and the next thing I know, he pulls gun from his waist, which was the first time I seen it, and he walks up to the counter, and says—

“Hold on, Billy,” I say, cutting him off with an upturned palm. “If you want to talk to me, I have to first read you your *Miranda* rights.”

Which I do, and which he foolishly waives. Billy starts over from the top, filling in the part I had initially blocked.

“He walks up to the counter and says, ‘Open up the drawer and give me all the cash, and no one will get hurt.’ I say, ‘Uncle Mickey, what the fuck are you doing?’ He goes, ‘Stay out of this, Billy. You’re already in enough trouble with the law.’ I say, ‘What if someone sees us?’ He goes, ‘Just look out the window and let me know if anyone’s coming. Otherwise, keep your mouth shut.’ So I just stayed out of his way.”

Billy has just admitted to being an aider and abettor to the robbery. But I know he’s good for more than that. You don’t plan a smash-and-grab at Target with three other guys, only to be clueless when you are with an uncle who is planning an armed robbery.

“OK, Billy. Your uncle was carrying a Glock 17. Those guns are not easy to conceal. You expect me to believe you didn’t know he was packing before you entered the store?”

“He was wearing a big sweatshirt that morning,” Billy says, suggesting that Mickey, who is built like The Rock, was chilly on a warm June morning. “I swear I never seen that gun before. It freaked me out.”

“And what about the Cheetos that were found on the floor of the store, and the fact that you had red powder on your fingers when you were arrested? Looks like you grabbed a little snack while your uncle

was cleaning out the register and deciding to play the lottery. That doesn't sound like someone who was freaking out."

Billy doesn't skip a beat. "I brought those Cheetos from home and was still eating them when we went into the store. When I saw Uncle Mickey pull out his big gun, I was so surprised that I dropped the bag."

"There was no bag on the floor of the grocery store," I point out. "But there was an empty bag of Flamin' Hot Cheetos on the passenger side floorboard of your uncle's car when you guys were arrested. I guess the sight of a dead guy didn't cause you to lose your appetite."

"I was hungry, man," Billy says with umbrage, as if I'm accusing him of going for seconds on Thanksgiving.

I look up from my notepad, on which I've been summarizing Billy's ludicrous excuses. In the corner, I've also written the word "Trifexis" as a reminder that Friday is overdue for his monthly heartworm and flea prevention pill. Then I lay my pen down softly, about to play good cop.

"What you say is possible, Billy. But I'm not sure I can believe you just yet. Would you mind if I brought a partner in here while I ask you some additional questions? If he thinks you're telling the truth, I might be able to let you go."

Billy looks at his watch as if he's got another appointment. "Sure, whatever," he agrees.

"Great. I'll be right back."

I round up Friday from a shady spot under the mulberry tree and bring him into the interview room. When I open the door, Billy's eyes light up—not with fear or worry, but with delight.

“Wow, that’s a beautiful dog you got there,” Billy says. “You mind if I pet him? It’s a he, isn’t it?”

Before I can respond, Billy is crouching down, rubbing Friday first along his back, then around his neck, and finally playing with his long, velvety ears. Friday, tongue hanging out, appears to be in heaven. He doesn’t often get this spa treatment from strangers.

“He seems to like you,” I say, unable to hide my irritation. “Why don’t you sit back down, Billy, and let me tell you about him.”

Billy retreats to his chair. Friday does a couple 360s before settling down while I give my usual spiel about his ability to detect lies. Billy doesn’t seem to react. Either he thinks he can outsmart both of us, or he’s waiting for me to deliver the punchline. Or maybe (though the odds of this are 1 in 10,000) he’s actually telling the truth.

I instruct Friday to turn on his non-existent B.S. sensor and hold up the police report I’ve brought in from the patrol desk.

“Now Billy, you said you didn’t see your uncle’s Glock until he pulled it out from under his sweatshirt inside the store. But this report says that when you guys were arrested he was wearing a black T-shirt. Which makes sense because it was already 80 degrees that morning. What happened to the sweatshirt?”

“Right after we left the grocery store, we went to Mickey’s house and he took off his sweatshirt because it was starting to get hot. That’s why he wasn’t wearing it when the black-and-white started chasing us.”

This is obviously a lie. If Mickey had gone to his house, he certainly would have left the gun there, and probably the cash and lottery tickets. So I rub my chin to signal Friday. But he remains silent.

I call his name to make sure he's looking at me before I rub it again. The only sound in the room is the rattle of the air conditioning system. Weird. Maybe he's not feeling well today. Could he have heartworm? I try again.

"You and your Uncle Mickey are pretty close, right?"

Billy nods.

"And he knows you are out on bail awaiting trial on a bunch of charges from the Target robbery. In fact, he's the guy who posted bail for you, correct."

Another nod.

"So you want me to believe that he's willing to expose you to more robbery charges, and maybe even murder charges, by having you tag along while he pulls a gun on a store owner in broad daylight?"

"You gotta know my uncle, detective. He's . . . what's that word . . . impulsive? Yeah, impulsive. He gets an idea in his head and he doesn't think it through. Probably thought no one would be in the store first thing in the morning. I took a peek down the aisles and saw we were the only ones inside. I don't remember seeing any cameras either. Then Uncle Mickey pulls out the gun and tells the guy to open the register. The guy pops open the drawer. But there's not much inside, only a few \$20s and some smaller bills.

"So Mickey says, 'Give me all the lottery tickets.' And the guy tells Mickey he's all sold out, and Mickey needs to leave. Mickey says, 'I know they're under the counter. So hand them over, or I'll put a hole in you.' The guy tells Mickey to get lost. Mickey raises up the gun and the guy reaches for it. Tries to be a fucking hero. I hear three gunshots and the

guy does down. Mickey then goes behind the counter and a few seconds later holds up a bunch of lottery tickets. I tell him we need to get out of there, and so we leave.”

“That’s quite a story, Billy,” I say. “Why were you looking around for surveillance cameras?”

“I wasn’t looking for them,” Billy says. “I just noticed there weren’t any.”

“I see,” I say, hiding my scorn. I readjust my position so that my leg brushes along the floor under the table. But Friday doesn’t appear to share my incredulity. I call his name again to make sure he’s looking in my direction before I move my other leg more conspicuously. Silence.

With Friday apparently taking the day off, I decide to resort to a more traditional form of deceit. (As previously mentioned, trickery is allowed during interviews, as long as it is not coercive and/or likely to result in a false confession. Thank you, Supreme Court.)

“O.K. Billy. Here’s another thing I neglected to mention earlier. The witness who identified you and your uncle outside the store also told the police that they saw him with a gun in his hand right when he went inside. How could you not have seen it also?”

Before Billy can respond, Friday rises to his feet and howls.

“Sounds like your dog thinks you are the one who’s lying,” Billy smiles. He then turns to the dog. “Don’t you trust your master, Friday?”

“There must be a squirrel right outside the room,” I stumble. “When that happens, it can take Friday a minute or two to settle down.”

Billy looks at his watch again. His grin widens. I try another approach.

“One more thing, Billy. The crime scene techs found red powder all over the counter, right near where the lottery tickets were stolen. Looks like Red Hot Cheetos dust. Which means you were right there when the victim was shot. Why don’t you tell me--”

Before I can finish, Friday calls my bluff with another bark.

“You must be putting out a lot of that Listerine stuff today,” Billy says. I’m surprised he came even close to remembering the bogus word. “Your dog, Friday, really does have a good nose. Don’t you, boy?”

I glare at Friday and end the interview. I’ve got enough to charge Billy Jenkins with aiding and abetting a robbery, but not nearly enough to charge him with felony murder. Virtually nothing to show that Billy knew his uncle was carrying the Glock when he entered the store, that Billy played a key role in the robbery, or that he was indifferent to the store owner’s loss of life, despite the fact that he continued munching on Cheetos as the victim bled to death.

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The next week, there are some new developments. It turns out there was another person in the store at the time of the murder; she had dashed out shortly after Billy and Mickey Jenkins did, but was afraid to come forward because she is an undocumented immigrant. But when she heard on the news that only the older of the two men (Mickey Jenkins) had been charged with murder, she stepped out of the shadows.

The new witness’s name is Maria. When I interview her, she describes what she saw from the rear of the store. She had just grabbed

a carton of milk and was headed to the counter to pay for it when she saw two men, one older than the other, enter the store. The older man was carrying a large handgun, which frightened her, so she hid behind a sunglass carousel, through which she was able to see what was going on in the front of the store. The older man (who was wearing a black T-shirt) went up to the counter and demanded that the gentleman at the register give him “all the money.” Meanwhile, the younger man grabbed a bag of Cheetos from a rack near the register and began eating them. The gentleman behind the counter opened the register but then abruptly shut it. He and the older man began yelling at each other. At that point, the younger man stuffed the Cheetos bag in his pocket, went up to the older man and grabbed the gun from him. He pointed the gun at the gentleman behind the counter and said, “This is what you get being disrespectful.” He fired three shots into the man’s chest, sending him reeling backwards before collapsing to the floor. It was all Maria could do to keep from screaming. The older of the two robbers jumped over the counter, banged open the register, and removed a bunch of bills. He then bent down below the counter and, a few seconds later, triumphantly held up a stack of lottery tickets. He got up and took the gun back from the younger man. They then both left the store.

I thank Maria for her coming forward, and vow to do everything I can to protect her from being deported.

The following day, a ballistics expert determines that the three cartridges found at the scene were fired from the Glock 17 seized from under the driver’s seat of Mickey Jenkins’s car. Although the gun yields no fingerprints, a few grains of red powder are detected on the grip.

Neither gas chromatography nor mass spectrometry is needed to confirm what the tongue easily detects: Cheetos dust.

As soon as my report and the lab report land at the Sacramento DA's office, a new criminal complaint is filed, charging both Billy Jenkins and Mickey Jenkins with first-degree murder and armed robbery. They are booked without bail.

As for Friday, he is no longer a member of the detective division. Nor am I. When the recording of my interview with Billy Jenkins is reviewed by my superiors, they reassign me to an administrative job in the records section. Not long afterwards, our department's lawyer is hunting for work on LinkedIn. It's not the end of the world: I'm just two years away from retirement and I can stick it out until then.

But my relationship with Friday will never be the same. In fact, I now call him Brutus. Did he resent me for training him to fool criminal suspects instead of allowing him to pursue his natural talents of watching over farms and rescuing endangered swimmers? Did he suddenly switch loyalties to Billy Jenkins because Billy found his sweet spots faster than I ever did? Do dogs have a sadistic sense of humor?

I know I'll never be able to answer those questions. But every time I hear Friday bark, I turn my own B.S. sensor on.

(August 2025)