

UNLEASHED

By Carl L. Williams

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CHARACTERS (2 M, 1 F)

CHESTER WHITAKER	Irascible, argumentative
ETHAN DEAVERS	Small town judge
MOLLY STARK	Deputy, frustrated

SETTING: Municipal court in the town of Springdale.

TIME: Present.

AT RISE: Judge **ETHAN DEAVERS** sits behind a table in an informal hearing room. Deputy **MOLLY STARK** and **CHESTER WHITAKER** stand facing each other in front of the table.

CHESTER: (*angry, emphatic*) Not guilty! Not guilty, not guilty, not guilty!

ETHAN: Calm down, Chester. It's a Class C misdemeanor, not a murder charge.

CHESTER: I don't care. I'm not guilty, Ethan.

ETHAN: As long as we're in municipal court, Chester, I'm Judge Deavers or Your Honor.

CHESTER: (*sarcastic*) Oh, pardon me, "Your Honor."

MOLLY: It's just that kind of attitude I've had to deal with for longer than I can remember, Your Honor. You know how he is.

ETHAN: Everybody in Springdale knows how he is, Molly...I mean, Deputy Stark. But I'm assuming that's not why you wrote him a ticket.

MOLLY: He broke the law.

CHESTER: I did no such thing.

MOLLY: I saw you!

CHESTER: You didn't see nothin'.

ETHAN: Tell me what you saw.

MOLLY: I saw the accused, Chester Whitaker, walking his dog without a leash. There's a municipal ordinance that says you got to have your dog on a leash. And if you don't, you get a ticket and you get fined!

CHESTER: I guess catching a citizen walking his dog is a heck of a lot easier than catching a real criminal or chasing down somebody speeding through town at fifty miles an hour!

MOLLY: I'm deputized to write tickets to anybody I see breaking the law, and you broke it!

ETHAN: (*looks at paperwork*) My copy of the citation says that last Saturday at 4:35 p.m. you were seen walking your dog without a leash in the 1200 block of Myrtle Street. Is that right?

CHESTER: The Saturday part is right. 4:35 is right. Walking is right. The dog is right. But the leash part is wrong! Kenny Rogers had on a leash.

MOLLY: (*derisive*) "Kenny Rogers."

ETHAN: How come you named that dog of yours Kenny Rogers anyhow?

CHESTER: (*as if it's obvious*) He *looks* like Kenny Rogers.

MOLLY: The dog was twenty feet ahead of the accused, Your Honor. No leash.

CHESTER: You're telling me you didn't see a leash attached to Kenny Rogers' collar?

MOLLY: He was trailing a six-foot leash, but so what? You didn't have ahold of it!

CHESTER: The law doesn't say I have to have ahold of it. Just says the dog has to be on a leash, and he was!

ETHAN: Chester, that's a bit of a stretch, isn't it? What good's a leash if you don't keep ahold of it?

CHESTER: Don't ask me. Ask whoever wrote the fool law.

MOLLY: Have you ever heard anything as stupid as that?

ETHAN: Nearly every term of the Supreme Court. It's called the letter of the law. Sometimes it gets misspelled. So let's take a look at this particular ordinance. (*opens a book of local statutes*)

MOLLY: Oh, this is ridiculous. He just doesn't want to pay the fine.

CHESTER: No way I'm gonna pay any thirty or forty dollars to the town of Springdale for something as nitpicky as this.

ETHAN: Actually, Chester, the fine for this particular misdemeanor, set by statute, is a hundred and twenty dollars.

CHESTER: A hundred and twenty dollars! For walking a dog?

ETHAN: Here's what the statute says. "Dogs that are not on a leash will be subject to a fine of one hundred and twenty dollars." The town council passed that ordinance just last year.

MOLLY: And my step-daddy's on the town council, so don't tell me I don't know the laws around here.

CHESTER: Your step-daddy's the reason they let you be a deputy. But what did that ordinance say again, Ethan, Your Honor?

ETHAN: "Dogs that are not on a leash will be subject to a fine of one hundred and twenty dollars."

CHESTER: Then why'd you give *me* that ticket, Molly? You should've given it to Kenny Rogers!

MOLLY: Give the ticket to a dog?!

ETHAN: It does say the dog will be subject to a fine. Doesn't say anything about the owner.

MOLLY: But Judge Deavers! You know what they meant.

CHESTER: Don't matter what they meant. That's not the way they wrote it out.

ETHAN: One of those misspelled letters of the law, Molly.

MOLLY: (*thinking fast*) Okay, then. Okay. But a dog can't pay a fine, can he? So who's responsible for the dog and what the dog does? If the dog goes and digs up somebody's petunias, who's liable for that? The dog's owner!

ETHAN: She's got a point there, Chester.

CHESTER: She's got no point at all. Besides, who says I own Kenny Rogers?

MOLLY: Everybody in town knows he's your dog!

CHESTER: I feed him and walk him, but that don't mean I own him. Matter of fact, I never paid a dime for him. Don't have no bill of sale. He's free to come and go as he pleases.

ETHAN: What do you say to that, Molly?

MOLLY: You don't own him?

CHESTER: No.

MOLLY: Didn't buy him?

CHESTER: No.

MOLLY: Then you musta stole him! You're a low-down dognapper!

ETHAN: You got any proof he stole him?

MOLLY: Well... How'd you get him, then?

CHESTER: Adopted him. He came by when he was little and I took him in.

MOLLY: You mean he was a stray?

CHESTER: An orphan dog.

MOLLY: Then he's not yours at all. He ought to be turned over to the dog pound.

CHESTER: And you oughta be turned over to the loony bin.

ETHAN: Being what passes for a judge around here, I'm not sending Kenny Rogers or Deputy Stark to either one of those places.

CHESTER: (*to MOLLY*) At least Kenny Rogers' got somebody willing to take him in, which is more than I can say for you.

MOLLY: Chester Whitaker, you been a nuisance around this town all your born days. You deserve a ticket just for being you!

CHESTER: That's how you been treating me ever since high school. I wish you'd up and get married one of these days and stop pestering me. It's harassment, is what it is, Your Honor.

ETHAN: How do you figure?

CHESTER: Like when she was workin' at the Blue Cup Cafe. Did she ever refill my coffee without me havin' to ask her twice or three times?

I swear she did it just so's I'd keep talking to her, even if it was only "More coffee over here." And now here she is again, tracking me down to write me tickets.

MOLLY: You half-crazy clump of shoe-mud. I'd scrape you right off, but you're always underfoot. Who kept coming into the cafe? I never went out and dragged you in. And Saturday, there I was parked in my cruiser, just waiting for Bobby Ray Scroggins to run the stop sign again, when you came walking by with that mangy Kenny Rogers dragging his leash behind him.

CHESTER: He's not mangy... no more'n you are, though I done checked him over better.

MOLLY: You won't be doing any checking-over on me.

ETHAN: I'm not sure what any of this has got to do with the case at hand.

CHESTER: The case at hand is that I need some kind of restraining order against Deputy Molly Stark before she drives me stark raving mad, which is where the Stark part always comes in.

MOLLY: If anybody needs restraining, it's you. I'd like to get one of those orders myself, Judge.

CHESTER: Like you'd need it. You could be stark naked, Molly Stark, and I wouldn't look your way except to whistle for my dog.

MOLLY: You take that back!

CHESTER: Will not.

MOLLY: If you ever did see me in the altogether, it'd be from peeking in my window.

CHESTER: I never been near your window. But I will say I never seen such fancy drapes on a double wide.

MOLLY: (*pleasantly surprised*) You think they're fancy?

CHESTER: All patterned up the way they are.

MOLLY: (*flattered now*) I made those drapes myself.

CHESTER: Go on. You can't sew that good.

MOLLY: Can, too.

CHESTER: I'll be.

ETHAN: About those restraining orders... Nobody's getting restrained, not unless the two of you restrain yourselves, which I wouldn't bet on happening any time soon.

CHESTER: So what about my ticket?

ETHAN: Considering how sloppy the ordinance was written, I'd call it unenforceable. Molly, you might tell your step-daddy that he's gonna have to rewrite that ordinance if you plan on apprehending any more dog-related miscreants.

MOLLY: And nobody's more dog-related than Chester.

CHESTER: Does this mean I won't have to pay a fine?

ETHAN: That's what it means. I'm dismissing your case.

MOLLY: One more lawbreaker set free 'cause of a technicality.

CHESTER: I guess you'd like to see me locked up in the jailhouse
where you could come and see me every day and bring me coffee.

MOLLY: I'd rather see you try to escape so I could shoot you down and
make Kenny Rogers an orphan again.

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