

The background of the book cover is a dark, textured illustration. It features a large, dark, possibly black or dark brown, collar with a silver-toned buckle and several small, round, blue or grey studs. The collar is set against a dark, mottled background. In the lower right corner, there is a large, curved, metallic object that looks like a wheel or a part of a machine, rendered in shades of brown and gold. The entire cover is framed by a thick, dark red border.

The Dog Collar Murders

Barbara Wilson

A small, rectangular sticker with a red and white geometric design is located on the left edge of the book cover, partially overlapping the red border.

THE DOG COLLAR MURDERS

Barbara Wilson



The Seal Press

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THE DOG COLLAR MURDERS

"But more important was the multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail."

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*

1

WHEN PENNY AND I were eight years old she went through a wedding phase. She used to like to get dressed up in some old lace curtains and to pretend she was getting married. Not to anyone in particular, just married.

I was supposed to hold up the train and catch the flowers afterwards.

Twenty-two years later Penny was doing it in earnest. If this had been one of those novels we used to read or one of the stories Penny used to tell me, then I should have been the happiest girl on earth now—my twin sister was getting married to the man she loved and I was the bridesmaid.

Of course, some things weren't quite the way we might have imagined them. Instead of a white lace dress and gossamer veil Penny was wearing an embroidered blouse and a handwoven skirt from Guatemala, and instead of tossing me a bouquet after the ceremony she handed me her baby, so she could kiss the groom.

I kissed the groom too—after all, he'd been my lover once for nearly two years—and Penny kissed my partner ("On the mouth!" Hadley said later), then I kissed Penny and handed baby Antonia back to her, and we all trooped

out of the house into the garden for the reception.

It was late September. The leaves of the horse chestnut trees were the color of marigolds. The vegetable garden hadn't been turned over yet, and there were still squash vines and tomato plants warming themselves in the afternoon light. Around the borders were dahlias, my mother's dahlias, and roses in full bloom. The sky was a faint but very fresh blue and the air had that wonderful fall clarity, that is partly a fragrance of something ending.

Hadley came up behind me and put her arms around my waist. Her hair smelled good, of fall and herb shampoo, and she was wearing a new light wool jacket that rubbed pleasantly on my bare arms.

"Always a bridesmaid, never a groom," she said.

"It's all so reactionary," I muttered, while smiling at the arriving guests, and directing them to the happy pair. "If I were the one getting married—to you, for instance—do you think all these people, all these relatives and friends of the family, would be turning up? No way."

"Some of them don't seem too pleased to see that Penny has an eight-week-old baby at her breast," Hadley noted. "I think the baby's supposed to be a gentle swelling under the bride's dress, so people can gossip and speculate."

It probably *was* the first time many of the guests had congratulated a bride who was breastfeeding even as she shook their hands. Ray hovered around her, ethnic in an embroidered white shirt and with his black hair brilliantined, the image of the proud husband and father. Who would have suspected this side of him even three years ago, when we'd both been experts on shared birth control? Who would have suspected, as we quarreled about the merits of diaphragm vs. condom, that today we'd be standing here, related, me the lesbian sister of his wife, him the father of my niece? We exchanged a shy glance from time to time—our anger at each other had been transmuted into an ironic and bemused sort of tenderness. Penny was the one I was mad at—for reasons I hesitated to examine too

deeply.

The afternoon passed quickly. My lesbian friends came and were respectfully sarcastic, but I hardly had time to joke with them and hear their commiserations. I was too busy helping be the hostess at this house where Penny and I had grown up, where Penny and Ray and baby Antonia lived now. There were so many people to talk to: the Mortensens from down the street, Aunt Hilda who had come from Everett with her docile husband George, Uncle Walt from Minnesota with his wife Ingrid and their son the fourteen-year-old computer genius. There were Ray's illustrious parents, Doctors Hiyamoto and Contrerez, who had flown in from the UNICEF station in Bangladesh. June Jasper, our long time co-worker at the print shop and Penny's best friend, was here with her boyfriend Eddy (*she* didn't think she had to get married, did she?) and her two girls Ade and Amina. There were friends from different stages of our lives—from grade school, high school, the university, from various political groups that had once taken up hours of our time—the Tenants' Union, Crab-shell Anti-Nuclear Alliance, Seattle Abortion Rights. . . .

There were new friends too. Zee, a Filipina who was studying filmmaking at USC and had flown up for the day. Beth and Janis, friends of mine from last winter; they'd brought Trish, who was now a junior at an alternative school and doing well. There were also new political comrades of Penny and Ray's, people who'd gone to pick coffee beans with them in Nicaragua last January, as well as our newest worker at the printshop, Moe, and his lover, Allen.

The garden was filled with people. "Penny looks so lovely," said Mrs. Mortensen. "Your mother would have been so pleased."

I could only nod and smile and move away with the excuse of getting another tray of hors d'oeuvres from the kitchen. I was stopped halfway to the house by Beth.

"Look over there, isn't that Loie Marsh?" Beth gestured to a small but growing group near the porch.

"What's she doing back in town, I wonder?"

I looked. It was definitely Chloe—or Loie, as she was usually called—Marsh. Ten years ago she'd been the (putative) head of the women against violence against women contingent here in Seattle. I remembered going to a slide show she gave right before a Women Take Back the Night march—it was the famous presentation, with the slide from *Hustler* of the woman going into the meatgrinder and coming out as hamburger. Loie had roused us all to fury.

Soon after, it had been eight or nine years ago now, she'd left Seattle for Boston, where she wrote a famous book against pornography, *The Silenced Heart*, and organized a number of conferences, panels and speak-outs. Since then she'd been a featured speaker on TV talk shows and the college circuit, an anti-porn celebrity.

"She apparently came back to Seattle to write another book," Miranda, an old friend, said, overhearing us. "She's been telling people she's broke and exhausted. She's staying with her cousin Hanna Sandbakker, the actress."

Hanna Sandbakker had been with Penny and Ray in Nicaragua—that must be why they'd invited her and Loie. I didn't really know Hanna myself, though I'd seen her a number of times on Seattle stages. She was a willowy woman with a mane of ash-blond hair, known for her tragic roles in Ibsen and Strindberg. Her trademark was a velvety voice with a slight catch that could make even the most banal words sound remarkable. I especially remembered her as Hedda Gabler, with her pistols.

"Loie's not just sitting around though," Miranda went on. "She's one of the main speakers at the porn conference next week. I already know what she's going to say—she's telling everyone around her now. She thinks the women's movement has been invaded and betrayed by a bunch of sexual liberals, 'so-called feminists' and sadomasochists."

"Surely she makes some distinction?" Hadley asked ironically. She had come up and was holding a tray of champagne and Calistoga.

"There isn't one to people like Loie," Miranda said.

"Saying you're against censorship is practically like saying you like to tie people up and whip them until they bleed."

Everyone laughed nervously, and I looked over at Loie. She was a tall woman, five ten or eleven, with large bones, big hands and feet. Her face was interesting, but not particularly attractive; there was something smooth and slightly convex about it, like the lid of an enamel saucepan. Her short curly blond hair was brushed back tightly over her shiny forehead. Like her cousin she had a particularly distinctive voice; I couldn't catch the words from here, but I heard the cadence, rhetorical and seductive.

She had gathered around her a small eager group of our guests. Hanna was off holding baby Antonia and chatting with Penny, but there were six or seven others listening to Loie speak. With some discomfort I noticed that Elizabeth Ketteridge had turned up at the reception and was standing next to Loie Marsh, apparently drinking in her words. A small woman with big eyes, very little hair and enormous hoop earrings, she was a counselor who dealt with survivors of rape and sexual abuse. I had gotten to know her earlier this year.

"Well, if that's the case, let's hope that Miko and Loie don't run into each other then," someone laughed.

Kimiko Lewis was a local video artist who had recently taken up the cause of lesbian sexual explicitness. She was forever attempting to show her videos at local film festivals and bookstores.

"Is Miko here?"

"No," I said. "I hope not anyway. That woman really gets on my nerves."

"That's 'cause she asked me to be in one of her sex movies," said Hadley, preening.

"You said no, I hope, Hadley," Beth smiled.

"Of course," Hadley sighed. "She didn't offer me near enough money."

"Well, we'll all have a chance to see Miko and Loie square off soon. They're both on one of the panels at the porn conference," Miranda said.

"Is that really what it's called?" someone passing by asked. "I've seen posters around, but I thought the conference was the 'Seattle Conference on Sexuality.'"

Miranda laughed. "Right. So for some people it's the sex conference. For others it's the porn conference. Watch the fireworks!"

It wasn't exactly that I was having a *bad* time. If it had just been a social reunion I would have enjoyed myself immensely. But it was a wedding reception, one of the important markers society uses to separate the socially acceptable from the socially unacceptable. Penny and I had been arguing about it for weeks.

"What's wrong with just living together the way you've been doing?" I'd said. "You can make legal and financial arrangements just the same—better even, because then you can be conscious of what you're doing."

"I'm through living with people. I want this to be different, to show I'm really committed to the relationship."

"Great. How do you think that makes me feel? I'm in a relationship too. If marriage is the only way to show commitment where does that leave us?"

"Well, you could get married if you wanted—I mean, they have ceremonies, don't they?... You, I mean."

"You know goddamn well a ritual for lesbians or gay men isn't the same thing as a wedding. If Hadley and I got married, I wouldn't automatically become Mrs. Pam Nilsen-Harper, respectable supporter of the status quo."

She got defensive. "We're only doing it because of the baby..."

"The baby's got nothing to do with it. You're only doing it because you want to and because you want to be like everyone else. You're just like the rest of those feminists who go to Nicaragua and come back idealizing marriage and the family."

"Everybody's not a lesbian, you know," Penny snarled, falling into the kind of jargon she would have es-

chewed a year ago. "How could a population like Nicaragua replace itself if everyone were? Sexual preference is the product of an advanced capitalist consumer society."

"Oh give me a break, you Sandinista robot," I'd said and stormed out of the house. And then I'd sat in my car and sobbed like a fool. Ever since Antonia had been born, on the second of August, I'd been an emotional wreck. Up to then it had all been interesting. I'd gone with Penny to the doctor and the birth clinic. I'd learned to do the breathing exercises with her so I could be the back-up coach during the birth. I'd sat around with Penny and Ray, tossing names back and forth. I'd finally moved all my stuff out of my old room into the basement and helped paint it yellow and white. And when Penny had called me at three in the morning I'd told her how much I loved her and had raced over to Group Health to be there with her. My twin sister was having a baby!

Ray and I were with her the whole time; we laughed and wept and breathed and struggled with her. And after it was over I held Antonia in my arms and thought she was the most beautiful creature I'd ever seen.

I don't know what happened after that. It was as if I had post-partum blues instead of Penny. While she learned to change diapers and bathe the baby, while she and Ray discussed the color and consistency of Antonia's stools and what position it was best to burp her from, I felt increasingly miserable and left out. And when they started talking about marriage I began to freak out.

"I don't understand why you're so upset," Hadley tried to reason with me.

"She wants to get married, Hadley! She's going to do the whole thing—a husband and a baby!"

"Think of it as having more relatives," she offered, but that just made me cry. For some reason I had begun to miss my parents very badly again this year, even though they had been gone for almost five years.

Hadley tried again, "You're just different people, Pam.

You want different things."

"It's the principle, Hadley," I said. "Society's going to reward her now. I'll never be rewarded. I'm going to be punished my whole life. She should have stuck with me—out of solidarity."

Hadley sighed. "If you'd been a lesbian as long as I had, Pam honey, you would have given up wanting to be acceptable a long time ago. You need to work on accepting yourself."

But Hadley didn't have a twin sister.

Late in the evening, after helping Penny and Ray clear up, Hadley and I returned to the houseboat on Portage Bay that we'd been subletting for the past two months. We put on our sweaters and down vests, for it was quite cool, and sat out on the floating dock, drinking jasmine scented tea and watching the lights of the bridge and the university opposite us on the dark water.

It was a way we'd had of being together for weeks now; a day didn't feel complete until we'd gone out and surveyed the evening colors and discussed the weather and the temperature. We sat there now, companionably, not talking, just drinking tea and looking.

Hadley and I had now been a couple for almost eight months; the first six we'd lived apart but spent increasing amounts of time together. We'd been happy and hadn't ever talked about living together. But when Peggy and Denise asked if we'd be interested in subletting the houseboat while they took advantage of Peggy's grant for traveling in South America, both Hadley and I eagerly said yes.

It was living together without really living together. It's just for three months, we said. Still, we'd each given up our apartments and so far hadn't made any plans for what to do when Peggy and Denise came back at the end of October. The problem was that living together had raised more questions than it had answered for us: how close did

we want to be; were we strictly monogamous; was this a relationship made in heaven that would last forever or just your usual two year lesbian romance?

The houseboat was small and very shipshape, a rectangle divided ingeniously into different spaces for eating and sleeping and entertaining. Hadley's problem was her height; she kept knocking into the bedroom ceiling the first week. I had trouble with the rocking of the boat in the beginning; my legs felt wobbly on land and I had also been awakened on more than one occasion in the first two weeks by waves that made the center beam of the houseboat crack like a whip. I didn't like strange noises at night, and would often wake up with my heart in my mouth, hearing the creaking of the dock alongside the boat and imagining that someone was coming to get me.

It was a comfort to have Hadley; yet even she had to put up with a lot. All summer I'd been taking self-defense classes; I took them so seriously that they entered into my dreams. I felt constantly prepared for attack. Once when we first moved into the houseboat and I'd gone to bed early, Hadley got quietly into bed, casually threw an arm over my shoulder, and nestled close to me. Almost without waking I threw her off on to the floor.

Now we sat cuddling on the deck, watching how the lights reddened the water so festively. I loved the Portage Bay side of Lake Union—it was more relaxed and informal. Lake Union was a working lake, full of tugs and barges, views obscured by masts and sails. Portage Bay seemed quieter, a place where kayakers, canoeists and windsurfers could play. And sometimes, surprisingly, it was utterly calm, like tonight. Not a boat in sight; it was as if we sat by the side of a lake in the mountains.

"It was funny to see Loie," Hadley said eventually. "So much of that porn debate seems to happen on the east coast. You tend to feel that out here people don't get so involved, so caught up in it all."

"That's true," I said, taking off my glasses and resting my head on her shoulder. "I hardly even know what I

think about the whole thing. Do you?"

"No," she said. "Not really. It's been years since I've been certain. I mean, I've read on both sides of the issue, but it's as if the passion of each position negates the other—so when I'm reading someone like Dworkin I sometimes think, yes, she's absolutely right: pornography is about male power, it's a strategy of subordination. But when I read someone else on the other side I think, no, pornographic imagery and sexism aren't always the same thing. We need to keep them distinct, and as women, especially as women, we need to keep our options open to explore our sexuality."

She sighed and looked out across the water. "Maybe after the conference next week I'll have a better grasp of the current thinking. Maybe there's some way to hold both views—some way to understand the contradictions. . . ."

"Yeah," I said and stared at the black waves outlined in silver that came towards us steadily. "You know, though, Hadley, I really *wish* she hadn't gotten married."

2

I WOKE UP EARLY THE next morning and went out on the floating dock. The bay was like a mirror trying to come awake. There were hardly any individual ripples or waves; instead the whole body of water seemed to be in movement, a shivery, massive kind of movement, as if it were stirring from the bottom. It was a gray morning, but it didn't matter by the water, where everything was so luminescent. This morning the sky was like torn bits of very absorbent watercolor paper, with dark gray seeping or branching onto the silver-white color.

It was Sunday and it was bound to get busier on the lake. Now there were only a few solitary scullers from the university speeding along the surface of the water like dragonflies. Later the pleasure boats would come out, the big cruisers full of festive rich people who would steer dangerously close to the docks and would look in the windows. If caught, they'd remark sheepishly, "Nice weather we're having!"

But Hadley and I had learned to ignore them, and to go about our business openly—or to close the curtains when we couldn't. Houseboat life was different than other sorts of life. In part you felt far from Seattle with no traffic, no