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Protective pit bull helps case

WOMAN'S DOG FOUGHT OFF INTRUDER, PROVIDED DNA CLUE THAT LED TO SUSPECT'S ARREST

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Mercury News

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This was a pit bull mauling everyone can cheer.

Except Anthony Easley.

Easley, 37, was arraigned Thursday on charges of an attempted sexual assault and burglary that took place four months ago in San Jose. It was an attack stopped, and ultimately solved, authorities say, by the ferocious protectiveness of Maya, a 4-year-old pit bull who ended up with the suspect's blood on her face.

The sun was just coming up June 17 and the 31-year-old single mom - who asked not to be identified - was coming back to an empty house. Although she had spent the evening celebrating her birthday at the San Pablo Casino, her spirits were low - she had recently lost her job.

As she started to unlock her front door, she saw a shadow out of the corner of her eye. Someone shoved her from behind.

"My boyfriend works for the police department," she screamed at the mysterious intruder, "and he will be

home any minute."

The desperate fib died in her throat as the man began strangling her. "Shut up," he growled as she tried to stab him with her keys.

"Then, I saw my dog's white streak coming from the other room," the victim said. "Maya," she gurgled, "get him!"

Maya attacked. She had always been a gentle dog, ever since the victim adopted the pit bull mix as a puppy from the Humane Society, falling in love with the white dog with brown spots and floppy ears.

Now, Maya was tearing and ripping the stranger's arms.

The man tried to fight off Maya with one hand while keeping his other hand around the woman's throat.

"That's when I grabbed him," said the victim, "where the sun doesn't shine."

At that very painful moment, the attacker let her go.

With Maya snarling and snapping, the attacker gave up. The victim held Maya by her collar as the attacker fled.

When San Jose police officers Iain Fry and Chris Kubasta arrived at the house they didn't find much beyond the signs of a violent struggle. But then, they noticed what looked like a smudge of red above the dog's right eye - possibly the suspect's blood and DNA evidence.

Because Maya was frenzied the victim had to hold her behind a door, while the officer reached around and swabbed a spot just above the dog's snapping teeth - once, twice, three times.

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Even Fry didn't think much would come of the sample.

"We never thought they would even run 'em," Fry said of the swabs. "I mean, there's no way - you are talking about one drop of blood on a dog's head. A million to one."

The victim's descriptions helped create a composite sketch.

After checking all sex registrants and other violent parolees in the area, detective Ryan Kimber ran out of leads within a few days.

"In these stranger cases, where there is no relationship between the attacker and the victim, well, those can be very difficult to solve," said Lt. Mark McIninch, who heads San Jose police's Sexual Assault Investigations Unit.

Maya was now hyper-protective, snarling at anyone who came too close to the house or to the woman and her 11-year-old son. Always proud of her strength and independence, the woman said that after the attack, she was scared, depressed, barely able to get out of the house and crying all the time.

"I thought he would come back all pissed off," she said, "and finish off what he did."

But months later, Fry and Kubasta's diligence paid off.

The Santa Clara County crime lab extracted human DNA from the swab. It was then matched through the state's database of samples taken from anyone convicted of a felony and those arrested or charged with a homicide or sex offense. Ultimately, all information led to Easley, police and prosecutors said.

"It was the saving grace and one of those 'above and beyond' efforts," Kimber said of the police work. "It's what saved this case."

Easley was previously convicted of two sexual felonies in Solano County, according to court documents. He also was convicted of robbery in Contra Costa County. Now, as a third striker, he faces life in prison if convicted, said Santa Clara County prosecutor Michael Fletcher.

When San Jose police called detective J. Melville in Vallejo, he volunteered to find the suspect. Several hours later, he did. Easley lived near the police department.

Kimber told the victim, who had bought a two-pound steak for Maya after the attack.

The woman went home and cried. She hugged Maya.

"What," she said "would I do without you?"

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