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AMY CHUA

THE
GOLDEN
GATE

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writing provides the icing."

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A NOVEL

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AMY CHUA



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*For Mom and Dad
and my sisters Michelle, Katrin, and Cynthia*

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All the dust the wind blew high
Appeared like gold in the sunset sky,
But I was one of the children told
Some of the dust was really gold.

Such was life in the Golden Gate:
Gold dusted all we drank and ate,
And I was one of the children told,
“We all must eat our peck of gold.”

—ROBERT FROST

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PROLOGUE

DEPOSITION OF MRS. GENEVIEVE BAINBRIDGE, HAVING BEEN DULY SWORN AS A WITNESS, TAKEN ON THE FIFTEENTH OF MARCH, 1944, COMMENCING AT 10:00 A.M. BY DISTRICT ATTORNEY DOOGAN:

Q: Good morning, Mrs. Bainbridge. Would you please state your full name and address for the record?

A: Genevieve Hopkins Bainbridge, 2907 Avalon Avenue, Berkeley, California.

Q: And your age?

A: Sixty-two.

Q: Thank you. Do you understand why we've asked you to speak with us today, Mrs. Bainbridge?

A: I wasn't asked, Mr. Doogan. I was subpoenaed.

Q: You were indeed. Because you refused to speak with us when we asked. Mrs. Bainbridge, do you understand why you're here?

A: I do. You want me to help you hang one of my own flesh and blood.

Q: If you could please stick to the facts, Mrs. Bainbridge.

A: I'm doing just that, Mr. Doogan.

Q: Mrs. Bainbridge, I'm giving you a chance to help your family. We know one of your three granddaughters is a murderer. I can convict all three as coconspirators, or you can tell me which one did it, and I'll spare the other two.

[NO RESPONSE FROM THE WITNESS.]

Q: Did you hear me, Mrs. Bainbridge?

A: I heard you, Mr. Doogan.

PART ONE

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Chapter One

1930

Inside an alabaster palace one January afternoon in 1930, a six-year-old girl hiding inside a closed armoire felt truly alone for the first time in her life.

Just seconds earlier, Issy, short for Isabella, had been in that tingly state of anticipation, half-excited, half-fearful, awaiting the moment when the door would be thrown open and she would be found by her sister, Iris.

Issy loved these special Sundays, when she and Iris and Mommy would put on their nicest dresses and go to the White Palace, where Mommy would change into her all-white skirt and stockings and bandeau and play tennis with her best friend, Mrs. von Urban. On those days, Mommy was always beautiful and nervous in a giggly way, and smelled a little different. She would give the girls the whole afternoon off, and while she and Mrs. von Urban had their tennis game, Issy and Iris would have the run of the hotel, which Iris, the older of the two by eighteen months, seemed to know like the back of her hand, yet there was always more to discover—secret stairways, the seven-story spiral slide, hidden turrets, ballrooms that appeared out of nowhere.

Iris with her jet-black curls and Issy with her blond ones did everything together. Issy couldn't remember a day of her life when she hadn't been with her older sister, which is why until this moment she'd never felt alone.

But now, suddenly, she did. She was curled up in a ball, arms around her knees, in the bottom quarter of a decorative armoire in a long hallway. It was a clever hiding place, but not her best. Iris should have found her by now. Issy should have been able to hear her sister's light limping steps, one foot just a little heavier than the other, or her sing-song whisper, "I'm going to

find you! I know where you are!” Instead everything was silent. Issy’s legs were starting to stiffen. She didn’t know it, but she’d been in the armoire for almost thirty minutes.

She pushed open one of the doors and, seeing that the hallway was empty, stepped out. The palace no longer felt right. Even the silence sounded different from other silences she’d known.

She made her way back to the hotel lobby and went to their palm tree—the spot they’d designated in case they lost each other. The lobby was bustling as always with men looking smart in their fedoras, bellboys overloaded with suitcases, women in pearls and fur collars—but Iris wasn’t there.

Issy went next to the tennis courts even though she knew her mother wouldn’t be there either. She checked all the courts, with their soft red clay and balls flying through the air and grown-ups running back and forth. There was no Mommy to be found, and Issy felt even more alone.

The little girl returned to the lobby, checked the palm tree again, then decided to go down to the enormous kitchens in the basement. She knew Iris loved the kitchen, its chaotic order, the steaming vats of soup on the stove, the loaves of bread on metal trays sliding in and out of the ovens, and the frenetic brigade that made it all work—chef, sous-chef, and pastry chef; bread bakers and potato peelers; waiters, porters, and dishwashers. Issy saw all of them that day, as well as the egg man delivering his crates, the milkman delivering his jugs, and the hooded man who delivered honey. She didn’t know why, but suddenly she felt a scream welling up inside her.

That’s when she heard the actual scream—a woman’s scream of terror.

For a moment the kitchen froze. Lips and hands stopped moving; no one took a breath. Then the entire staff ran in the direction of the awful sound, overturning carts and knocking plates to the floor, oblivious to their shattering. Issy followed them, dread rising within her.

A crowd had gathered in a low-ceilinged concrete passage near the laundry bins. The air was heavy here, steamy, oppressive. Issy wove her way numbly, without will or thought, past knees and hands; she was so small no one even noticed her. She finally broke through to the front line, where a circle had formed around a pile of soiled sheets and towels on the floor, the

effluvium ejected from eight floors of laundry chutes. It smelled carnal, of sweat and other human fluids.

The grown-ups, paralyzed, were staring in horror at that pile of laundry, too frightened to step forward. On top of it lay Iris, like a broken doll, face up, dark curls strewn, one eye open, her bare neck twisted at a terribly wrong angle. *My Dy-Dee doll died twice. Once when I snapped her head off ... and once under the sun lamp trying to get warm, she melted.*

Encircling Iris's grotesquely bent neck was a laceration, fresh and thin and red and angry.

1944

FRIDAY, MARCH 10

1

When I was a kid—before they took my dad away, in 1931—we used to play ball on a patchy field next to the municipal dump. Home plate was across the road from the three-mile-long Berkeley Pier, where trucks and autos would line up for the ferry to San Francisco. I always looked out for the cars with New York plates, weather-beaten and mud-crusteD because they'd been on the road for weeks. These were people who had crossed the country on the Lincoln Highway.

The Lincoln Highway was the first coast-to-coast road in America. It started at the corner of Broadway and 42nd Street in Times Square, New York, and from there intrepid motorists in their Fords and Studebakers would set out on the three-thousand-mile journey to San Francisco, guided by rough maps and by red, white, and blue signposts along the way. The highway—really a series of interconnected country byways—traversed the nation in the shortest possible route, avoiding big cities like Chicago or Denver in favor of smaller towns like Fort Wayne and Cedar Rapids, Omaha and Cheyenne. People had to get out of their cars when they came to streams or river crossings, so they could wade in first to make sure the water wasn't too deep. They also had to bring camping gear: in the deserts of Wyoming and Utah and Nevada, they'd likely pass more than a night or two without a roof over their heads. My dad used to say that someday he'd take us all on the Lincoln Highway, in the opposite direction, to see New York City and the Statue of

Liberty. Never happened.

Before there were any bridges crossing the San Francisco Bay, the Lincoln Highway ended in the reclaimed marshland of the lower East Bay, passing by what must have been some of the unsightliest spots of the entire journey, like industrial Richmond or the swampy lowlands of El Cerrito, where I grew up in a tenement house across the street from a tannery and a slaughterhouse. Soaring San Francisco lay just across the water, but it might as well have been a universe away.

I used to watch the overdressed Easterners get out of their cars to stretch their legs, grimacing at the heavy odor of the cracking plant and the stink of fish. Sometimes they'd point at the shoeless, shirtless brown-skinned little boys casting their poor fishing lines into the water. I could tell they felt like they were in a foreign country. English wasn't prominent down by the pier. In fact, few white people lived in the East Bay lowlands. Instead there were Italians and Greeks and Portuguese (on their way to being white), Chinese and Japanese, Mexicans and Blacks, all poor, all living in their own separate enclaves, all dreaming dreams of a better life.

Often the Easterners, on discovering that the next ferry wasn't leaving for a few hours, would get back in their cars, pull out from the ferry line, and tool around a bit. If they headed off toward Oakland, they would probably have seen Miseryville, where, in the wake of the Crash, hundreds of homeless men were living in surplus concrete sewer pipes, one man each to a six-foot section of pipe, subsisting on produce discarded by local vegetable wholesalers boiled into a communal stew, larded with lint or sawdust to make it more filling.

Sometimes I felt like a foreigner too. But not at the pier; it was when I took the Key train that ascended the Berkeley Hills, which I did whenever I could, that I felt like a stranger. The train took people to the white neighborhoods dotted with middle-class homes and small shopping streets, past the university with its famous campanile, climbing up and up until the air smelled of sage and eucalyptus with hints of honey and mint and sweet oleander. High up in the hills, the train came to its terminus at the foot of the splendid, many-winged Claremont Hotel. The Claremont was the largest hotel on the West Coast, and its entire exterior—not only walls and shutters,

but tower and gables and even the roof—was painted dazzling white, so that the structure seemed to float cloud-like in the fresh and fragrant air, an alabaster palace in the sky.

The Crash of 1929 hadn't been an equal opportunity wrecking ball. Like the Spanish flu epidemic only ten years earlier, it hit those on the lower rungs incalculably harder than those at the top. At the bottom, millions went hungry; children scavenged garbage cans for potato peelings, fresh meat trimmings, or other lucky finds to contribute to a family dinner that might otherwise consist of ketchup sandwiches or a single loaf of bread and a can of beans; during rough spells siblings took daily turns eating; countless families were put out on the street, unable to make rent or pay their mortgage; within a few years after the Crash, half of all Black Americans were unemployed. But at the top, it was a different story. While a few gaudy fortunes were lost, for the most part those with a million in the bank before the Crash still had it after.

For them the Depression was a time of lavish spending. Maybe even more lavish than before, if only to distract themselves from the general unpleasantness out on the street—the panhandlers, the homeless, the mass labor protests. In the wake of the worst financial collapse in the nation's history, the California rich spent like there was no tomorrow. They threw ever more extravagant parties. They dined on Russian caviar and Hungarian goose liver. And they packed into luxurious hotels like the shimmering white Claremont, hobnobbing with Barrymore and Garbo, dancing to Count Basie's orchestra and Louis Armstrong's trumpet.

When I was a boy, I wouldn't have dared set foot in the Claremont Hotel. The first time I went inside I was already a cop—not a detective yet, just a patrolman—called in because some rich kid had walked out on a massive bill. After I found the kid and made him pay up, I became something of a regular. I learned a ton at the Claremont Hotel. I learned how the rich drink their cocktails, how they sit—a rich man on a sofa or armchair always crosses his legs—what they say by way of small talk, how they smoke. I guess for me it was like finishing school.

And now, by complete accident, I happened to be at the Claremont again on the night Walter Wilkinson was murdered twice.

The maître d', Julie, with his affected French condescension—the condescension was real enough, it was the French part that was fake—glided over to my table and asked me quietly if I could “assist” with a “matter” in one of the guest rooms. I knew Julie wouldn't interrupt a customer in the middle of a drink if it wasn't important, so I told the young woman I was with I'd be right back and followed him.

Julie handed me off to the Claremont's night manager—a young sallow-faced guy I didn't know—who lacked the maître d's aplomb and instead looked like he was so nervous he was going to throw up.

“It's Walter Wilkinson,” he whispered to me while we were waiting for an elevator. “Do you know who that is?”

“How could I not know who Wilkinson is?” I asked him back. “What about him?”

The elevator door opened, and the manager put his finger to his lips, meaning he didn't want to talk in front of Pounds, the elevator operator. Pounds and I said hello.

Everybody knew Wilkinson was in town. An industrialist who'd made a fortune in Midwestern power and light, Wilkinson had come in second to FDR for president in 1940. Some people said he was going to beat him for sure this time. They were dreaming.

“Shots were fired in his room a half hour ago,” whispered the manager as we hurried down a long corridor on the sixth floor. He was so nervous his mouth kept moving even when he wasn't talking. “He hasn't answered his door since.”

“Who says shots were fired?” I asked.

“Guests. Three different guests. They heard the shots and called down to the front desk.”

We stopped at room 602, and the manager gave a tentative knock at the door. “Mr. Wilkinson? Are you there, Mr. Wilkinson?”

No one answered. The manager turned to me in despair.

“Open the door,” I said to him.

“I can't. Mr. Wilkinson left specific instructions not to disturb him under any circumstances. If something's happened to him, it will be a calamity.”

I took it he wasn't expressing a political opinion. He meant a calamity for the hotel—or maybe for him personally. “I'll tell you what'll be a calamity,” I said. “The man bleeds to death in his room because you're so solicitous of his privacy. Open the goddamn door.”

The manager nodded, swallowed hard, and used a skeleton key to open the door.

Walter Wilkinson was sitting on the edge of his bed, motionless but unhurt. He was dressed for a formal dinner: black three-piece suit, bowtie, shoes polished to a high shine, hair impeccable, but his face was as white as his cuffs. I don't think I've ever seen a man so ashen. He didn't speak; he didn't even look at us. I could smell his expensive cologne—Penhaligon's. The bed he was sitting on was nicely made, and the room showed no signs of disturbance—except for a bullet hole in a wall near a standing lamp.

“Please pardon the intrusion, Mr. Wilkinson,” said the manager abjectly. “The detective ordered me to. Thank heavens you're all right. We thought you'd been murdered.”

“I have been,” said Wilkinson, his voice deep and low, still without moving.

I introduced myself and asked him what happened.

His reply was to stand up, walk into the bathroom, and start running water in the sink. It sounded like he was splashing it on his face. The manager glanced at me, nervous as ever.

After keeping us waiting a couple of minutes, Wilkinson returned, ready for business and toweling off his cheeks as if we'd simply caught him shaving. He wasn't ashen anymore; now he looked more like his pictures. A lot of people said he was the handsomest man ever to run for president. He was fifty-nine, over six feet in height, solidly built, with a broad chest, Brylcreemed salt-and-pepper hair, dark eyebrows, and a commanding demeanor.

“It was a Communist,” he said. “A young man. Shabbily dressed. Foreign accent.” Wilkinson shot a furious look at the manager: “How does a ruffian like that get into one of your guest rooms?”

The manager was in agony: “It's a terrible breach, Mr. Wilkinson. We're so sorry.”

“He was waiting for me. I came in, shut the door, and started toward the lamp. Before I got there, I felt a gun between my shoulder blades. He told me to stand against the wall. Called me a blood-sucking capitalist—an enemy of the working man—the usual rot.”

“What’d he look like?” I asked.

“I didn’t get a good look at him. It was dark, and he had a flashlight pointed into my eyes. He was shaking. He could barely keep the light trained on me. He may have been drunk.”

“Height—weight—hair color—age—facial features—anything you can remember would help, Mr. Wilkinson.”

“I told you, I couldn’t see him. Because of the flashlight.”

“All right. What happened next?”

“I went to the wall, as he’d told me to. He took a few steps backward until he was at the door. He said I deserved to die and fired right at me. Then he fled. That’s the whole of it.”

“You’re a lucky man, Mr. Wilkinson,” I said.

“There’s no such thing,” he replied. “Men make their own luck.”

I nodded to avoid having to disagree with him. “You mentioned a foreign accent. What kind?”

“If I had to say,” said Wilkinson, “I’d say Russian.”

I turned to the manager: “Put Mr. Wilkinson in a different room. Don’t tell anyone where he is. Not anyone, you hear me?”

“Understood,” said the manager.

I told them I’d station a uniform outside Wilkinson’s new room for the night and have some boys come by first thing in the morning to pull the bullet out of the wall and dust for prints. In the meantime, I would interview staff and the other guests on the floor to see if anyone saw anything.

Which I did, but only after first returning to the bar to tell the woman I’d been having a drink with not to wait for me. I didn’t have to; she was already gone. Next I called Chief Greening to give him a heads-up. He told me to come to his house and brief him when I finished, no matter how late.

3

Three hours later, having learned exactly nothing more, I drove to Chief

Greening's house. The only thing still playing on the radio was the news, and the news was bad. The Japanese had invaded India and were supposedly about to make their move on Australia. The Germans were pounding Anzio. Another battered hospital ship had heaved into the Port of San Francisco, carrying home three hundred boys with blown-off limbs. Meanwhile down in the Tenderloin, shore patrol had tried to arrest a couple of drunk and disorderly marines, which ended up sparking a riot between cops and servicemen that left a dozen injured and twice that many in military jail.

It was almost midnight when I got to Greening's house on Shasta Road, but the Chief had on his usual double-breasted suit. He was a short, portly, friendly man with a shiny bald head, glasses, and two ballpoints always sticking out of his jacket pocket. He'd had the misfortune of taking over from the legendary August Vollmer, who'd been chief of the Berkeley PD since before I was born. Vollmer practically invented forensic science; he practically invented the lie detector; his methods were copied all over the country, and folks were already calling him "the father of modern policing." You had to sympathize with Greening; nobody could have filled Vollmer's shoes. He poured me a cup of coffee and offered me a piece of his wife's Lazy Daisy cake, which I accepted even though I didn't feel like eating because I didn't like the way his house smelled—like cat litter and stale candy. We sat down at his kitchen table, and I gave him a full report.

"A Communist with a Russian accent—obviously a Jew," said Greening with distaste. "Tell me how a single race can both control the banks and be behind all the Reds? I despise Hitler and everything he stands for, of course, but sometimes one understands the outrage."

Like a lot of senior officers, both military and police, Greening had been an admirer of German efficiency and had opposed going to war with them. He thought banker Jews were pushing FDR into a war that was none of our business; it was only when Hitler started bombing London that he turned. He didn't know I was a quarter Jewish myself, which was just as well, given the other strikes against me. My dad was from Mexico, and mom was an Okie from the Dust Bowl, the very bottom of it. I ended up taking my mom's last name, but that's a long story.

"I'm not sure I buy the Russian Communist, sir," I said.

“What do you mean?”

“Wilkinson said the man who shot him was shabbily dressed,” I answered. “But then he said he couldn’t see the guy—couldn’t tell me the first thing about him, not even how tall he was. So how does he know he was shabbily dressed?”

“Why invent a detail about the man’s clothing?” asked Greening.

“Maybe the whole story’s wrong.”

“You think he made it up? Why would he do that?”

“Who knows? Maybe he had a girl in his room and something happened and she took a shot at him. Or he took a shot at her. Wilkinson’s married. He’s running for president. Better to say a Red tried to kill him than a hooker.”

Chief Greening shook his head sadly. For all his years on the force, he still genuinely expected the better sort of people to be, well, better sorts of people.

“He said he’d been murdered?” asked the chief. “He used that word?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Why?”

“I’ve been wondering the same thing.”

The phone rang; Greening went to his living room to take it.

“Yes, yes,” I heard Greening say, “I know all about it already. No, Mr. Wilkinson is not dead, and if you spread that rumor to anyone else, I’ll have your badge tomorrow. What’s that? Are you sure?”

He listened a minute longer before coming back to the kitchen.

“Someone tried to kill Wilkinson again,” he told me. “And this time they succeeded.”

“What?”

“Wilkinson’s dead.”

“It’s a mistake,” I said. “Somebody heard wrong.”

“Exactly what I thought. But it’s no mistake. He’s dead—shot in the head.”

“When?” I asked. “Where?”

“Just a few minutes ago, at the Claremont.”

“That can’t be. I had his room under guard.”

“You had his new room under guard. Apparently he was killed in the room where the first attempt took place.”

“Son of a bitch.” I grabbed my coat and hat and was almost out the door when Greening stopped me.

“By the way, Sullivan,” he said, “what were you doing there—at the Claremont?”

“Me? Having a drink.”

“I see. Isn’t that a little beyond your—you know?”

“Beyond my station?” I asked.

“Beyond your means.”

I left for the hotel.

4

I walked into room 602 again and stopped short. Wilkinson was dead all right—but not just dead.

He was spread out on the king-size bed, face up. Statesmanlike just a few hours earlier, now he was exposed from the waist down, genitalia limp and hairy nakedness splayed out. His black trousers were crumpled down to his ankles, and his legs were half on, half off the bed, bent at the knee, his polished black shoes a few inches off the floor. He still had on his white dress shirt, bowtie, and vest, which made the whole thing more disturbing, like accidentally catching someone in black tie on the toilet. I could still smell his lavender and musk cologne. But now it was mixed with the scent of sulfur and metal from the gunshot.

That wasn’t all. His mouth was stretched open in a silent scream, preserved in that position of terror by a profusion of objects crammed into and overflowing from it.

A camera flash exploded behind me, blinding me and fixing on my retina the image of the dead man’s stuffed mouth. The flash came from Johnny, the police department photographer. Next to him was Dicky O’Gar, the officer who was supposed to have been keeping watch over Wilkinson.

“Do me a favor, Johnny,” I said. “Hold off until I have a look around. Go stand in the hall, and make sure nobody else comes in. Dicky, you stay here with me.”

I went up to the body. Wilkinson's lips were bloody and torn at the edges because they were so overstretched. Without removing any of the objects, or touching them with my fingers, I used the blade end of my jackknife to get a better look at what was inside his mouth. It was hotel room detritus: a pen, unsmoked cigarettes, a bar of soap, a paper doily, crumpled stationery, flowers, and apparently a piece of chocolate.

He had been shot only once, in the forehead. Blood and brain matter were splattered all over the pillows and the headboard and the wall above the headboard too. His eyes were wide open, staring at the ceiling.

"What the hell was he doing here?" I asked Dicky, who had been on the force as long as me, but had never made it past patrolman. "I told them to put him in a different room."

"They did," said Dicky, "but then he forgot something in his old room and he had to go back to get it."

"Didn't you go with him?"

"No, sir," said Dicky, proud of himself. "You told me not to budge, not for nothing, not even if I had to go to the john."

I hate to say it of a fellow Berkeley officer, but Dicky O'Gar was so thick he couldn't tell which way an elevator was going if you gave him two guesses. He had fallen out of the stupid tree and hit every branch on the way down.

"For Christ's sake," I said.

Light slowly dawned. "Oh jeez, I should of gone with him, shouldn't I of?"

"Who found the body, Dicky?"

"I did. The manager and me, we were the first ones in."

"Anybody move anything?"

"No, sir. But when I opened the door, that sheet of newspaper blew off him. It was covering his privates."

Next to the bed, on the floor, there was an open double sheet of newspaper—the front and back pages of today's *Chronicle*. The rest of the newspaper was lying on top of a dresser.

"Any sign of forced entry?" I asked.

"No, sir."

“What’s that over there?”

At the foot of the dresser, on the floor, was a small black box lying on its side, its hinged lid open. I went over and had a closer look: it was two by two, black velvet on the outside with a white satin interior. Whatever had been inside it was gone.

“I didn’t touch that, Boss,” said Dicky. “I didn’t take nothing.”

“I know you didn’t, Dicky.”

I stood up and looked at the dead man again. Based on where he lay, he figured to have been shot while standing at the foot of the bed, facing his killer. The bullet blew through the back of his skull, causing the spatter on the pillows and headboard. He would have died instantly, and his body would have fallen backward onto the bed. Maybe his pants were already down when he was shot, or maybe that was done to him afterward.

“So what do you think—you figure it was a robbery?” asked Dicky. “Somebody killed him for whatever was in that box, like a diamond ring or something?”

“Could be. Except robbers don’t normally cram their victim’s mouth so full of crap their lips rip open. You check the bathroom?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Closet?”

“Uh—not yet, Boss.”

I opened the closet door, using my foot in case there were any prints on the knob, and shined my penlight at the rack and hangers. The closet was empty. All of Wilkinson’s belongings had been moved to his new room. My damn light was flickering on and off—I had to shake the thing to get it to work at all—so I almost missed the two glinting pinpricks near the floor. I kneeled down, gave the penlight a good shake, and almost jumped out of my skin.

A dead baby was staring right at me.

I shouted a curse all the way to heaven.

“What is it, boss?” said Dicky, lumbering up behind me.

“Nothing,” I said, exhaling.

It wasn’t a dead baby. It was just a doll, a glass-eyed doll, with tight curly dark hair, a cracked porcelain face, and a tiny red mouth in the shape of

an O. One eyelid was half closed. Her hands were reaching out to me.

“It moved!” cried Dicky.

“It didn’t goddamn move. It’s my light that’s moving.”

“It moved!” Dicky said again.

I banged my penlight into my palm and finally got a steady light and held the beam on the doll for ten seconds. “Well, it’s not moving now,” I said.

The doll stared at me with her one open blue eye. She was wearing a faded old-fashioned dress, and had discolored age spots on her painted face and rubbery arms. What was an old doll doing in Wilkinson’s closet? But then she might not have had anything to do with Wilkinson. Tucked away in a corner, she could have been there for years.

I told Dicky to make sure he tagged and bagged the doll when the room was cleared, and I told Johnny he could start his photography now, reminding both of them not to touch anything until prints were taken. As I was leaving, something caught my eye in the doorjamb, a couple of feet up from the floor. It was a yellow thread, stuck on a splinter, no more than a quarter inch long. I tweezed it out and put it in an envelope.

Down at reception, the front desk clerks told me they hadn’t seen anyone unusual or agitated or even in a hurry leaving the hotel after midnight. Which meant that the killer was either a pretty cool customer—or hadn’t left the hotel.

In an office behind the front desk, I found the night manager, just getting off the phone with the hotel’s owner. If he was nervous before, now he looked like he was going to have a heart attack right there in his office. I reminded him that Wilkinson’s other room—the one I’d shifted him to—was part of the crime scene. Nothing was to be moved, and nobody was to go in except police.

“Can we keep this out of the papers?” he asked me, pleading.

“Not a chance. I’m going to need a list of every guest in the hotel, with their home addresses.”

“Whatever for?”

“Because the killer might be one of them.”

“One of our guests? You heard Mr. Wilkinson—his assailant was a

ruffian, a Communist.”

“I want the names of everyone who ate at the restaurant tonight too. Ask Julie—he’ll know. And if there were any meetings or gatherings yesterday evening, I want a list of the people who attended them.”

“We have two hundred and seventy-six guest rooms, the best restaurant in the East Bay, and several conference rooms. You’re talking about over five hundred people. Possibly a thousand.”

“Just get me the list.” I said good night and looked at my watch. It was three thirty in the morning, and I planned to be back at the hotel by six. “Listen, I don’t want to be trouble, but I could use a room to get a couple of hours of sleep and work out of tomorrow. I’ll need a place to meet with my officers anyway; you don’t want us standing around your lobby.”

“No, I don’t,” he agreed. “But I’m afraid we’re fully booked.”

“All right. I’ll figure something out.”

“There is room 422, I suppose. If you don’t mind.”

“Why would I mind?”

“Well, it—ah—it hasn’t been stayed in for some years.”

I didn’t know what he was talking about, but I didn’t care. “If it has a bed, I’ll take it.”

1944

SATURDAY, MARCH 11

1

“Here’s what you’re going to do,” I said the next morning to a hotel room so thick with police officers it was standing-room only, most of them from the Berkeley PD but some borrowed from Oakland and Richmond—the Bay Area forces knew how to help each other out when we needed it. Dawn was just breaking. “You’re going to interview every single guest in this hotel. Nobody checks out without being talked to.”

The men grumbled. “There must be hundreds of them,” said McRae, who was smart but lazy.

“And there’s a dozen of you boys to interview them,” I said. “Take a maximum of fifteen minutes per interview. Do your jobs and you won’t even miss lunch.”

“But what if they got business, Detective?” McRae persisted. “The people here ain’t bums. They’re big shots. What if they won’t talk to us?”

“I don’t care if they’re Eleanor Roosevelt and they have to attend tea in the White House. This is the biggest crime the Bay Area’s ever seen—maybe ever will see. Which means our jobs are on the line, every one of us. Anybody refuses to talk with you, you take down their name and report that to me pronto.”

I wondered if the Feds were going to swoop in and try to take the case away from us. I didn’t think so. First of all, the FBI didn’t have the manpower out here—back East, sure, but not here. Second, they didn’t really

have any jurisdiction. Homicide was a state crime, not federal. It didn't matter if the victim was a presidential candidate. Hell, you could try to kill the president-elect of the United States, and you weren't committing a federal crime, which we all learned in 1933 when that son-of-a-bitch Zangara fired five shots at FDR but missed him and killed the mayor of Chicago instead. Even killing the actual president wasn't a federal crime, although people said Congress was planning to do something about that. But the point was that Wilkinson's murder was our business, not the FBI's. They'd be breathing down our necks, no doubt about it, but either we solved this murder or no one would.

“Okay, but say they do talk to us,” said Dicky O'Gar.

No more words came out of Dicky's mouth. It was as if he thought he'd asked a question.

“Okay, say they do,” I said.

“What do we ask them?”

I was about to curse but checked myself. It was a good question. “Good question, Dicky,” I said. “You ask them five things: name—where they're from—purpose of their visit—what they were doing at midnight—and did they see anything unusual last night? And you don't answer any questions; you do the asking, got me? Now listen. This story's going to break any minute. When it does, reporters will be on us like flies on an open sewer. Don't talk to them. Don't confirm anything to anybody—that's the Chief's job. Now get going. Not you two, Tankersley and Polk—you're interviewing hotel staff. Make sure you talk to the old elevator man, Pounds—he sees and hears everything. You're looking for anything out of the ordinary. Any new hires in the last week? Anything unusual happen last night?”

2

There's three components to a criminal investigation: interviewing, working the physical evidence—the fancy word for which is forensics—and thinking. That's it. I had the boys doing the interviewing, so the next thing to see to was forensics, beginning with the autopsy.

I drove to the Alameda Coroner's Bureau in Oakland and was told that Coroner Emerson was down in the examination room. In California we have

county coroners, and they're elected, which is not exactly a recipe for competence. But Dr. Emerson was a good one. He was an old fellow—a talker who knew what he was talking about.

Wilkinson was lying on an autopsy table. The coloring is the thing that changes most dramatically in the recently dead. Wilkinson wasn't human-colored anymore. Now he was gray with bluish streaks where blood used to flow. He didn't look peaceful or asleep either—none of those myths. He looked more like frozen, turned meat.

“Your shooter was standing directly in front of the deceased, no more than two feet away, when the fatal shot was fired,” said Emerson. “The nitrite residue on the hair and face tells me that. I can't determine caliber from the entry or exit wounds of course, but I'll bet you a wooden nickel it was a thirty-eight or better.”

“Why's that, Doc?”

“Because his brain was so lovely and largely intact that the bullet couldn't have been smaller. Smaller things do more damage than bigger things. Keep that in mind, son—it's an axiom of all medicine, all life if you ask me—it's the microorganisms that kill us, and we didn't even know they existed when I was a boy. When a smaller projectile, a twenty-two caliber say, enters the forehead and hits the back of man's skull, it ricochets or curves around the cranial interior, turning his brain to soup. In this case, the bullet exited cleanly. Ergo, it was medium to large caliber.”

I liked Emerson—I always learned something from him.

“There's something else you should see,” he said. “Look at this.”

Using a forceps, he picked up a small dark green object cubical in shape. I could see minute carving on it.

“This I extracted from the back of the deceased's mouth, along with the numerous other items you undoubtedly saw. It appears to be stone. Jade by the look of it, but I'm no geologist. Oriental writing is etched into it. Whatever it is, it was found deep in the victim's throat. It may have been the first object the murderer put in.”

“You need to keep that, or can I take it?”

“It's all yours,” said Emerson.

My next stop was our forensics lab at Berkeley Police headquarters. This was another Vollmer creation—back in 1923, he'd set up the first crime lab in the country, along with the first fingerprint filing system. We detectives rotated through the lab in our first year on the force, to be sure we understood the basics.

“A gift from the coroner,” I said to Jim Archimbault, who ran the lab, as I placed on a counter an evidence box containing everything found in the dead man's mouth. I fished out the sealed bag containing the green cube. “Found in Wilkinson's throat—some kind of Oriental writing on it. Can you handle it?”

“Of course,” said Archimbault, who was peering into a microscope. He was the best forensics man west of the Appalachians.

“Tell me you've got something for me already, Archie.”

“I do indeed. To begin with, your doll has a club foot.”

The doll was lying on its back on a stainless steel counter, both its eyes now wide open. Archimbault had stripped it naked. I saw what he meant. While the doll's right foot had ordinary toes, its left was a bulbous ugly mass. “What happened to it?”

“The foot was subjected to intense heat,” said Archimbault. “It melted.”

I was looking right at the doll when its left eye closed lazily, then reopened. “Are you kidding me?” I asked.

“About what?”

“Could there be an internal mechanism in that doll—something that makes it move?”

“That doll is hollow inside apart from a tube connecting mouth to buttocks. An innovation apparently patented by its manufacturer. It's called a Dy-Dee Baby. Turn it over—you'll see.”

I did. On the doll's back it said “EFFAN BEE DY DEE BABY,” along with patent numbers from the US, England, and France. “Any prints on it?”

“Excellent prints. Unidentified as yet, but excellent. There is something odd, though. There's an incision or abrasion on the doll, where the skin—if you can call it that—has been scraped away. On the left arm—see for yourself.”

Just below the doll's left shoulder, a shallow groove had been carved into

the hard rubber skin, about a quarter-inch long. “Any idea how it was made?”

“With something sharp—like a scalpel or the edge of a scissors—but it would have taken effort, repeated strokes, a lot of them.”

“Could it be ... a voodoo doll?”

“No idea. Motives are your department. Come look at my microscope.”

He ceded his spot to me. I had to twist the focal lens before I made them out: three infinitesimal braided filaments, lemon yellow in color.

“This the thread I found?” I asked.

“Correct.”

“Silk?”

“Very good. Silk of the highest quality—which happens to be in very short supply these days. If I had to guess, I’d say it came from a skirt or dress belonging to a wealthy woman.”

“How about the bullets?” I asked. “Same gun?”

“Looks like it. Both are Colt thirty-eight Specials. I’ll know for sure when I’ve run ballistics. If I can, that is. The one that went through the wall hit a steel stud. It’s a mess.”

On a white marble counter I saw the small black velvet box we’d found on the floor of Wilkinson’s hotel room.

“You find any prints on that box?” I asked.

“Unfortunately, no. Fabric’s a poor surface for fingerprinting, and velvet’s worst of all. Feel free to pick it up—I’m done with it. You can tell the purveyor with the naked eye.”

I held the velvet box up to the light. Inside, on the white satin, barely visible lettering said “Shreve & Co.”—San Francisco’s ritziest jewelry store. I’d have to pay them a visit.

DEPOSITION OF MRS. GENEVIEVE BAINBRIDGE, HAVING BEEN DULY SWORN AS A
WITNESS, TAKEN ON THE FIFTEENTH OF MARCH, 1944, COMMENCING AT 10:00 A.M.,
CONTINUED

BY DISTRICT ATTORNEY DOOGAN:

Q: Mrs. Bainbridge, I asked you a simple question. Instead of answering, you've treated us to a history of your family. But we're here today to talk about the present, not the past. So I ask you again—where were your granddaughters on the night of March 10th?

[PAUSE.]

A: Are you aware, Mr. Doogan, that my granddaughters were all born within a week of each other?

Q: No, Mrs. Bainbridge, I was not aware of that.

A: Yes. Cassie and Nicole are twins, and they were born in January of 1924, and by coincidence, their cousin, Isabella, was born six days later.

Q: I'm sorry, Mrs. Bainbridge, but of what possible relevance is that?

A: That depends on your view of relevance. Yours, Mr. Doogan, appears to be quite cramped.

Q: Mrs. Bainbridge, I know you think you're helping your granddaughters by evading my questions. But I assure you you're mistaken. Gravely mistaken. I don't need your evidence to convict your granddaughters. I need your evidence to save them.

A: Save two of them, you mean.

Q: Yes. Save two of them.

A: Mr. Doogan, you've asked me—strong-armed me—to help you understand my granddaughters. But nothing about my granddaughters can be understood unless you start with their childhood.

Q: [INAUDIBLE.] Very well, Mrs. Bainbridge, you may proceed. But please try to keep it succinct.

1930

1

For three months after the tragedy, Issy didn't speak a word to anyone. Other changes, too, came over her, anomalous and troubling.

Her schoolteacher reported that the little girl had begun falling asleep during class—while sitting up, with her eyes open. When approached, Issy would snap out of it, unaware she'd been unconscious. Then came the inexplicable alphabet practice sheet. Issy had been having trouble learning to write, losing her way completely when she came to letters for which the capital differed from the minuscule. But then one day, on Issy's desk, the teacher discovered a perfect alphabet, twenty-six flawless letters in both upper and lower case, all of them gracefully rendered. The handwriting was utterly new. Moreover, Issy denied having written it. The teacher was baffled, as was everyone else. It was the little girl's grandmother, for whom graphology was something of a hobby, who pointed out that the alphabet had clearly been written by someone's left hand. And that while Issy was right-handed, Iris, by contrast, had favored the *manus sinistra*.

All this should have engendered care and concern from the little girl's parents, Roger Stafford and his wife, the famously beautiful Sadie Bainbridge Stafford. But it did no such thing.

Iris's death had plunged Sadie into an impenetrable darkness. Part of this was grief. And part the tormenting wrack of guilt for leaving her little girls unattended in the hotel so long that awful day. But there was something more besides.

Above all else Sadie craved being coveted—she needed desirability as

others need air and water—and having children hadn't advanced that goal. Before the tragedy she would often remark on having lost her figure to childbearing, which wasn't true, and just as often betray annoyance when her captivating little girls, like dolls comes to life, one with dark tresses, the other blond, drew all eyes to themselves, eliciting oohs and aahs, including from men. The truth was that Sadie envied them—Isabella with her fawnlike limbs, Iris with her crooked smile, neither having any need of lipstick, rouge, or girdles, both sparkling naturally as Sadie herself felt she once did. And now Sadie resented Iris for dying, for commanding even more attention and for casting a pall over the family.

Sadie began drinking excessively. And having fits of hysteria. This is what led to her suicide attempt five weeks after Iris's death. Coming home late from work, Roger found Sadie passed out on the bedroom floor, an empty bottle of sleeping pills near her outstretched hand. He rushed her to a hospital, where they pumped her stomach and the doctor grimly reported that the evacuation revealed no pills, suggesting that the drug had already been digested and hence that it was too late. But she lived.

When she came home, her hysteria only intensified. It became violent, especially when she was drinking. A slew of physicians were consulted, and a slew of prescriptions followed. Cold baths were tried, then fever treatments, then sleeping salves. Nothing helped.

Roger began spending more and more nights away from home. He was a junior partner in the firm of the renowned female architect Julia Morgan, who was building Mr. Hearst's spectacular castle in San Simeon. In a desperate frenzy to forget, Roger threw himself into the engineering of that 115-room cathedral of capitalism, dubbed by George Bernard Shaw "the place God would've built if he had the money." Roger took to spending entire weeks at a hotel nearby the construction site. A change was coming over him as well. As with Sadie, his grief was compounded by something more. In his case, it was growing rage at his wife. He had begun suspecting her. Of deception, manipulation, and the worst of all vices.

Sadie's first trip to the sanatorium—right after Iris died—had been voluntary, but the second was not. Roger called the hospital, saying his wife was threatening self-destruction again, and soon men in white coats appeared.

They put Sadie in a straitjacket and took her away, screaming. Roger did not accompany the ambulance. From the living room window, he watched, cold-eyed, as it drove away.

Isabella had heard Sadie's screams as well and taken frightened refuge in her bedroom. But Roger gave no thought to her or to what effect her mother's violent extraction might have on her. Once the apple of her father's eye, she was now, for practical purposes, an orphan.

Turning from the window after Sadie had been taken away, Roger withdrew to his study and did not emerge. One flight above him was a high-ceilinged bedroom wallpapered with miniature red roses that looked like blood clots. In that room, two child's beds with matching canopies and floral quilts stood side by side. In one lay Issy. The other had belonged to her sister Iris, with whom Issy was speaking.

2

Issy?

Stop talking to me, Iris! You're dead.

Don't be scared, Issy. I'm here.

The dead lie there like ice babies.

Frozen. Like popsicles.

Issy?

What?

Remember what I was wearing that day?

Your blue dress with the white flowers.

Yes but what else?

I don't remember.

Try harder. Do you remember what game we were playing?

Hide-and-seek.

Yes that's it.

That was so fun.

You're forgetting something, Issy.

No, I'm not.

Red Riding Hood.

What?

Red Riding Hood. Except the cloak wasn't red.

I don't want to talk to you anymore, Iris. It was so much fun that day.

We were playing hide-and-seek. I was hiding and you were supposed to find me. But you never did.

That's not right, Issy.

It is right. I was hiding.

Yes, Issy, you were hiding. But not from me.

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1944

SATURDAY, MARCH 11

1

After leaving Archimbault in the crime lab, I went up a few flights back to my own office. It was small, but at least it had a window, and I kept a row of potted paperwhites on the sill, because they made the air fresh. There were piles of paper all over my desk and even on the floor, but I knew what each pile contained and exactly where every single thing was. In the center of my desk was a stack of newspaper and magazine stories I'd made Holly—the secretary I shared with six other officers—collect for me on Wilkinson. I had opinions about the man, but when you think about your political opinions, you realize that ninety percent of the time you don't know what the hell you're talking about. The truth is I didn't know a thing about Wilkinson. And if you want to solve a homicide, you better know your victim.

Especially a homicide like this one. It looked to me like whoever killed Wilkinson hated him. So the question was, who hated Walter Wilkinson? You can't trust newspapers, but there's one subject they're good at—hate. First they whip it up, then they report on it.

I put my feet on the desk and began reading. Wilkinson was Indiana-born, and it turned out his dad was a serious Progressive. Wilkinson had been a Democrat himself until the presidential race of 1940, when, depending on who you believed, he either had a change of heart or saw a window of opportunity and jumped through it. He became a pro-war, pro-business Republican, going around the country decrying the New Deal as big-

government socialism, and he ripped FDR for his neutrality on Hitler. “I didn’t leave my party,” he said about quitting the Democrats; “my party left me.” Wilkinson fever swept the country. He made the cover of *Time* magazine and *Fortune*.

Seventy thousand people went to one of his speeches in Los Angeles—seventy thousand. Nobody minded that he was a married man carrying on pretty brazenly with a divorcée from New York City’s literary circles. When he made his play for the Republican nomination in 1940, the GOP muckety-mucks he was shouldering out of the way tried to tank him. One senator said it was all right with him if the town whore joined the church, but she shouldn’t be leading the choir the first week. That would have sunk most candidates, but Wilkinson’s fans didn’t seem to care what the muckety-mucks said. When he won the nomination, a hundred fifty thousand people came out in a hundred-degree heat to hear his acceptance speech in Indiana. Nobody had ever seen anything like it.

But in the campaign, Wilkinson’s advisers told him he needed to tone it down, and he began trying to present himself as a candidate for everybody, on both sides of the aisle. Later he said he was furious he’d listened. In any event, FDR was either too beloved or too crafty and spanked him in the general.

After Wilkinson lost in 1940, he stayed in the public eye, publishing a book that called for America to be a champion of freedom all over the globe—it sold a million copies in its first month. He was especially tough on Japan, arguing way before Pearl Harbor that we should starve the Japanese of oil. But he wasn’t a hater—if anything, the opposite. He blasted Charles Lindbergh’s anti-Semitic rants as un-American. He led a fight to oust the Ku Klux Klan in Ohio, and he called for the armed forces and Washington, DC, to be desegregated. As chairman of Twentieth Century-Fox, Wilkinson had pushed all of Hollywood to give better roles to Black actors. The NAACP loved him. And the KKK didn’t.

Bottom line: Wilkinson was a strange combination, a ladies’ man and a flamethrower, a man of passion and an opportunist, with points of principle thrown in for good measure, all of which meant that a lot of different types might have hated his guts.

Just then came a familiar knock on my office door: *tappety-tap, tap tap*. And Miriam walked in.

“Hi, there,” I said. “Oh *shit!* I forgot to pick you up, didn’t I?”

“No sweat, Al. I hitched a ride here. On the back of a scooter.”

Miriam looked like a girl growing up on the frontier, which made no sense since she’d lived practically her whole life in Albany, a gritty town in the East Bay lowlands where Berkeley’s rich used to dump their garbage. She was scrawny with freckles and an unruly mop of curly dark ringlets. She wore the same pair of overalls every day. She smoked and could cuss up a storm.

She was also eleven.

Miriam was my half-sister Rosemary’s daughter. I was supposed to have lunch with her before dropping her off at the five-and-dime on Shattuck Avenue, where she worked in the back. I didn’t love it that she was paid under the table, literally in nickels and dimes, since I was supposed to be law enforcement. But I’d learned a long time ago that when there’s no leeway, survival comes first, and with Rosemary, there was no leeway. Rosemary always had a man in her house, but they never lasted. A few of them had been decent guys, but lately they’d been getting worse and worse. When the last one bailed a few months ago, she went into a real tailspin. She was drinking again and got herself fired again, this time from the Hotsy Totsy Club down on San Pablo. If she could just pull herself together, there were plenty of other dives looking for barmaids, but for now Miriam was picking up the slack, taking odd jobs when she wasn’t in school. Miriam never complained about it, even though she was probably the breadwinner at this point. She was a good kid, levelheaded, and quick as a whip.

My intercom buzzed. It was Holly, telling me there was a man wanting to see me with information he claimed I needed to hear.

“Give me five minutes,” I said to Miriam. “Go talk to Holly for a while, okay?”

“Sounds great, Al. Don’t mind me.” And she disappeared.

The man who walked through my door introduced himself as Clark Collinson. He was maybe thirty-two or thirty-three—blond, athletic, open-faced, but already losing his hair. He looked like a lot of the fraternity boys I

knew at college.

“I know who killed Walter Wilkinson,” he said.

“Who says he’s dead?”

“It’s in all the papers.”

He handed me a copy of an extra the *Berkeley Gazette* had just put out. Wilkinson’s murder was the headline in sixty-four-point type. They had my name in the story too, as the detective in charge. I handed it back to him.

“Go on,” I said.

“Did you know Wilkinson was in a satanic cult? They call themselves the Temple of the Holy Grail. There was a disappearance there a few years ago—still unsolved. Wilkinson was a member.”

“How do you know?”

“I saw him there.”

“Where is this place? Who’s in charge?”

Collinson leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms. “I’m happy to help, Detective, but I would expect to receive something for my services.”

“Oh yeah? What?”

“Fifty dollars. No one else is going to come forward with this information. They’re very secretive. And they punish anyone who turns against them.”

“When did you see Wilkinson there?”

“Three nights ago.”

“Wednesday? What time?”

“Between eight and ten.”

“You sure about that?”

“One hundred percent.”

Three nights ago, Wilkinson was still en route to California from Wisconsin.

I pressed my intercom. When Holly came in, I told her to wire a flag on Collinson’s name to every stationhouse in Contra Costa, San Francisco, and Alameda counties. Then I turned to Collinson: “If you go to anybody else with this cock-and-bull story, you’ll be arrested for obstruction. Now get out of here.”

Collinson left my office without protest but also without embarrassment;

people doing wrong always feel on the inside like they're somehow in the right. No exceptions. There were going to be a lot of these cranks and fraudsters. The worst thing about them was the amount of your time they wasted.

I put on my coat and hat and collected Miriam so we could grab lunch, but stopped in at the Claremont first to check in on the boys, leaving Miriam in the car.

2

Just like the front desk clerks, none of the guests interviewed so far had seen or heard anything unusual the night before. Which made me think whoever killed Wilkinson knew their way around the Claremont—knew how to get in and out of the place without being seen. Maybe someone who'd scoped out the place beforehand, or maybe an employee.

In the lobby I found Tankersley, whom I'd put in charge of interviewing staff. Tank was one of my best men and just the fourth Black officer to serve on the Berkeley PD. His grandfather had escaped slavery in Alabama, fleeing to the supposedly free state of California. A few years later, he was found hanging from a tree, which they called a suicide, but it was obvious what had happened. Tank's dad was doing time. There hadn't been a lick of education in that family, same as mine, but Tank was a Berkeley grad like me.

"What've you got?" I asked him.

"Nothing that stands out, Detective," he said. "No recent hires. The only thing out of the ordinary last night was an appendicitis in the laundry and two kitchen guys getting in a fistfight over some burnt carrots. Plus a lot of complaints about working double shifts without overtime."

"You talked to everybody working here?"

"Everybody—from the maids on up."

"Okay. Let's try something else."

I asked a front desk clerk to get Chick Uhalt for me. Chick was the weekend day manager. I liked him. He was an ex-ballplayer—pitched for the Cardinals for ten years—and he didn't have the Claremont attitude. It was Chick who'd arranged for me to be served for free at the hotel bar ever since I got that deadbeat rich boy to pay up on his two-hundred-dollar hotel bill back

in '39. Chick came out, and I asked him if any staff didn't show up for work today. He picked up a house phone and started making calls.

A minute later, he cupped his hand over the receiver and said, "There's a Mexican basement girl—Juanita Juárez. She mops floors, irons sheets. She worked late yesterday and called in sick this morning. Lives out in Richmond. You interested?"

"Would she have had business on the sixth floor?"

Chick put a couple of questions to the receiver, then he said to me: "Yeah—she restocked the linen closets. Just before she left."

"When did she leave?"

"A little after midnight."

"I'm interested," I said.

3

"Do you smell something, Miriam?"

"You're always smelling something."

"No seriously, is something rotting?"

"It's your car, Al. And I don't smell anything."

We were in my unmarked detective's car on our way to the address in Richmond that Chick gave me. I drove a '36 gunmetal LaSalle coupe, a beautiful machine that I bought for a song because she'd been banged up in a bad collision and it was hard to get parts—they stopped making LaSalles in 1940. I'd fixed her up and installed a police radio and taken out the inside door handles and window cranks in the back. I'd also juiced her up with a V-8 engine. A hidden talent of mine is that I'm good at teaching myself stuff—like repairing things, whether it's a Colt Police Official or a burnt-out carburetor in a 1936 LaSalle. There's a book you can check out for free on literally any topic. The experts don't want you to know it, but anyone can become an expert at anything, if you're willing to educate yourself.

"It's fun to be around you, Al," Miriam said. "I think you're the tiger's spots."

I glanced over to see if she was teasing me, but she wasn't.

Miriam was a mutt like me, and people were always trying to figure out what she was. Her skin was brown—her dad, whom she'd never met, was a

boxer who'd passed through San Francisco a few times and might have been a heavyweight champion if Blacks had been allowed to fight for that title. She had dark wavy ringlets down to her shoulders, a small slightly upturned nose, and huge wide-set eyes too big for her face. Her eyes were blue, though, the same as mine—we both got that from my mother, who was her grandmother.

Miriam always wore a pocket square with her overalls—right in the middle of the bib—which she fashioned out of cloth scraps she got for free in the remnant bin at the five-and-dime. Every day the pocket square would have a different pattern. Sometimes it was checkered or a splash of daisies or lots of little hammers.

The address Chick gave me led to a collection of old red boxcars off the highway in the Richmond lowlands. There were no streets, no house numbers, just the shacks alongside a stream, each with its own little vegetable garden. On a patch of dusty land, barefoot children were running around kicking an old football, with a pack of bony hounds yapping and chasing after it. In front of one of the boxcars an old woman was sitting, smoking a pipe.

I got out of the car. Miriam did too.

“You got the cards?” I asked.

“Right here,” she said, tapping her back pocket.

“Stay out of trouble,” I said.

“No problemo, Al.”

I went up to the old woman with the pipe and told her I was looking for Juanita Juárez. She pointed with her pipe at the next shack over. I knocked at its door, and an even older woman with a sleeping baby in her arms opened it. When I asked for Juanita, she spoke Spanish to someone inside, and then a younger woman took her place. This one had a blanket clutched around her shoulders; she was maybe five feet tall if that, with alert eyes studiously not making contact with mine.

“Juanita Juárez?” I asked.

She nodded.

“Detective Sullivan, Berkeley Police,” I said, showing her my badge. “I have a few questions for you, ma'am. May I come in?”

She didn't look happy about it, but she let me in. The place was crowded but tidy, and there was a good cooking smell in the air. We sat down at a small wooden table in a room that functioned as kitchen, living room, dining room, nursery—an everything room. I had spent a lot of time in everything rooms.

I took out a pen and notebook and made her confirm that she worked at the Claremont Hotel. She had a heavy accent but no problem understanding me. She also didn't show any signs of being sick, apart from the blanket.

“Last night, you worked the sixth floor at the hotel, is that right?”

She nodded.

“What were your hours yesterday?”

“I—I clean the whole day.”

I had to prod her to be more specific. It turned out she was on a fourteen-hour shift—eleven in the morning till one in the morning—and then they expected her to come in for a morning shift today. The usual, in other words. Work till you drop.

“Do you know what happened at the hotel last night, ma'am?”

“No.”

I showed her a photograph of Walter Wilkinson.

“Have you ever seen this man?”

“I don't know nothing. I didn't see nothing.”

“Did you work on the sixth floor last night?”

“Yes. But I—I don't want no trouble.”

I took out a pack of cigarettes and offered her one. She shook her head; I lit one for myself. Then I told her in Spanish that the arepas smelled good.

For the first time she made eye contact with me, startled.

I asked her, still in Spanish, if the baby in the arms of the abuela was hers. She told me yes and that one of the boys running around outside was hers too. I'd played this card a thousand times. All it took usually was a couple of sentences in Spanish—not white people's Spanish, but good Mexican Spanish—and I became a different person in their eyes. Actually I became a different person in my own eyes too. It's funny what a bond it can be, language, when you live somewhere you don't belong. Juanita, though, was still guarded, and I didn't blame her. Apart from my hair, I don't look

Mexican. Like I said, my eyes are blue, I'm pretty tall, and I'm only tan in the summer.

So I explained that my father was from Guadalajara, that he'd come to the US as a boy and worked twenty years at Standard Oil in Richmond. But they took him away in 1931, pulled him right out of our house and put him on a bus to Mexico. Every Mexican in the United States knows about the so-called repatriations after the Crash to open up jobs for Americans; white people have already forgotten it ever happened. The papers said about 250,000 were sent back, but Mexicans believe it was a million or more. The papers also called it voluntary, but there was nothing voluntary about it. They not only took my dad; they took my two half-brothers too. They would have taken me, but I had a different mother, an American, from Nebraska.

"Listen to me, señora," I said. "I know you saw something last night. There won't be any trouble if you talk to me. There may be trouble if you don't."

She hesitated, but a second later, words started pouring out. I think it was a relief to her. At first I couldn't understand what she was talking about, but eventually I got the picture.

She'd started at the Claremont over ten years ago as a maid. The hours were long, but the Claremont was beautiful, and she liked making beds so crisp you could bounce a coin off them. Then one morning she was called into the manager's office, which she'd never set foot in before. She was terrified. A well-dressed woman in a fancy hat was there. "Is this the girl you saw?" the manager asked the woman. "How on earth should I know?" the woman replied. "Do you think I can tell them apart?" It turned out the woman had claimed that a housekeeper stole her jewelry. Juanita said she had never taken anything from anyone, at which point the woman grew incensed and started yelling, objecting in particular to the fact that Juanita had dared to look her in the eyes. After that, they put Juanita to work ironing, cleaning floors, and setting up tables for afternoon tea, which was a demotion; her pay went down. From that day to this, Juanita had kept her head down and mouth shut.

"Good policy," I said in Spanish. "But you need to tell me the truth, Juanita." I pointed to Wilkinson's photo, which was still on the table, and

switched back to English. “Did you see this man last night?”

“Yes, señor,” she said reluctantly in a low voice, “I saw him.”

“In his room?”

“No.”

“In the hall?”

“Yes. He come from the elevator and go to his room. Room 602.”

“When?”

“Twelve o’clock.”

“Midnight? You sure?”

“Sí, I hear the big clock.”

There was something she wasn’t telling me. “Was he alone?” I asked. She shook her head.

“Who was he with?”

“A young lady. She go into his room with him.”

“What did she look like?”

“Very beautiful, señor. Hair like Miss Jean Harlow.”

“Blond, you mean?”

She nodded.

“What was she wearing?”

“A nice dress. Very nice.”

“What were they doing, she and Mr. Wilkinson?”

“Talking.”

“Just talking? How about laughing, arguing, kissing?”

“No—just talking.”

“About what?”

“I don’t know.”

“What age was the young lady would you say?”

Juanita didn’t answer.

“You can guess,” I said. “It’s okay to guess.”

She looked away from me.

“What is it?” I asked.

She remained silent. I had to repeat myself.

“I know her, Señor Sullivan. I know this young lady.”

“You know her? Who was it?”

She looked down at her feet.

“I promise you, Juanita, you’re not going to get in any trouble. Who was it?”

“I know the young lady from afternoon tea. I know her since she was small. She always come with her grandmother, the old lady—Mrs. B., we call her. The family with the little girl who died—the ghost child.”

I knew exactly who Juanita was talking about. Anyone from Berkeley would have. People had been saying the Claremont was haunted ever since a little girl had died there back in 1930. Over the years, guests had supposedly heard a girl crying faintly inside the walls at night, or seen something white and formless pass through their room like a chill. I always figured the hotel made the whole ghost thing up because it was good for business, even if the folks at the Claremont pretended otherwise.

“You’re talking about Mrs. Bainbridge?” I asked, switching back to Spanish so there would be no mistake.

“Yes—Mrs. Bainbridge—that’s her.”

Mrs. Genevieve Bainbridge lived in Berkeley and was the matriarch of one of the oldest blue-blood families in the Bay Area. She had three granddaughters—four actually, counting the one who died in 1930. Everyone had heard of San Francisco’s “Bainbridge girls,” famous for their supposed good looks.

“You’re sure the young lady you saw last night with Mr. Wilkinson was one of her granddaughters?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

“Which one?”

“I ... I don’t know.”

“You know Mrs. Bainbridge has three granddaughters, right?”

“Yes. Sometimes she bring one, sometimes two, sometimes all three.”

“So which one did you see last night?”

“I don’t know. They—they always look the same to me. They all have yellow hair. I’m sorry.”

“That’s okay. Listen, don’t go anywhere—I’m going to send one of my boys here with some photos of the Bainbridge girls. Maybe if you look closely at them you’ll be able to pick out which one you saw.”

I thanked Juanita and headed out. This was a bombshell—a double. If Walter Wilkinson, presidential candidate and married man, was with one of the Bainbridge girls at midnight last night, that was explosive enough. But if that Bainbridge girl was also his killer—well, even I had a hard time believing that.

Outside, Miriam was sitting on the stoop next to the old woman with the pipe.

“Hey, Miriam—you smoking again?” I called out.

“Nope. I quit.”

“Come on—let’s get going.”

I didn’t know which of Mrs. Bainbridge’s three granddaughters Juanita had seen. Two of them I’d never met, but the third one I had. She was the girl I’d been having a drink with at the Claremont last night.

1930

The wealthy gossip as much as anyone else, but never about their help. This is because they don't care about them as human beings and take no interest in their personal lives. But for the help, the opposite is true. The households they work for are the center of their world, and they have the strongest opinions—almost invariably unfavorable—about every family member, which opinions they share with one another every chance they get.

This imbalance of attention, which is generally unhealthy for all concerned, was on full display one brisk October night in 1930 in the kitchen of the Bainbridge-Stafford house on Nob Hill, where a cook and housekeeper in black dresses with white aprons were complaining and clucking their tongues. In this particular household, several especially lurid tales were circulating: Of the dead daughter, not even in the ground a year, who had worked with the Devil himself to put a hex on this house. Of the surviving six-year-old who, upon being asked her age by a neighbor, put up eight fingers—the age her deceased sister would have been. Of a scullery maid at the Claremont Hotel who claimed she saw the same surviving daughter push her sister to her death. And of the girls' lunatic mother, Sadie, who had opened the silver drawer and started throwing knives and spoons at the cook.

"I'm telling you, I'm quitting!" said the target of those projectiles. "I'm fed up to my ears!"

"There's nowhere to go," replied the housekeeper, Mrs. Biddleston. "There's no jobs out there."

"Job! What good's a job if I'm dead in the grave?"

"Better to work in a loony house than starve in the street. And keep your

voice down, Mabel. Old Mrs. Bainbridge will hear you. She's sitting in the parlor."

The two were silent a moment, the dishes clinking.

"I'm telling you," the cook went on. "There's something not right with Miss Issy. She put her doll in the *refrigerator*. A headless doll. I nearly jumped out of my skin."

"Did you know, Mabel," and here Mrs. Biddleston lowered her voice, "Miss Isabella talks to her dead sister? One time I heard the dead girl's voice come out of her. I swear it—Miss Iris was talking through Miss Issy's mouth."

"Oh Lordy me, Ethel. Devil's spawn, that one. May the good Lord have mercy on us all."

1944

SATURDAY, MARCH 11

1

After leaving Juanita's, I broke at least a dozen traffic laws to get Miriam to work in time. It was 1:58 when I pulled up at her five-and-dime in Berkeley.

"I made you lunch, Al."

That's when I realized I'd forgotten to feed her. To be fair, I'd forgotten to feed myself too. Even though Miriam's my half-sister's kid, I'd never really thought of myself as her uncle. More like her friend. Or maybe an older brother. Being her uncle would have carried way too much responsibility. It was too close to being a father, and given the wreckage I came from I had no business going anywhere near that role. Besides, Miriam didn't need another parent to deal with; she was already taking care of her mother.

"Miriam, I—"

"I figured we might not have time," she said. "Here, have half."

She had unwrapped the wax paper off something that looked like a stack of bread. She handed me a triangle half of it.

"What is it?" I asked.

"It's a six-layer peanut butter and potato chip sandwich," she said, taking a huge bite of her half. "Itsmospeshletaay," she added with her mouth full.

I took a bite. Maybe I was just hungry, but it was awfully good.

"Howzherrlegtodayaal?" she asked, taking another giant bite.

"How's my leg? It's good, thanks."

I'd taken a couple of bullets in my left leg at Guadalcanal in '42, including one in my knee. They shipped me back to the States because it was supposed to take eight months before I would walk again. I was up and running in three, but they still wouldn't let me reenlist.

"Staying over tonight?" I asked her.

"Nah, I'm fine."

"Did your mom come home?"

"Not yet. I think she might today though."

"If she's not back, you stay at my place. You hear me, Miriam?"

"Okay. Maybe tomorrow night."

2

I spent the rest of the afternoon in my commandeered room at the Claremont getting status reports from my men. They were mostly useless, but not quite. A couple of guests said they'd seen a man in a hood—possibly a monk—walking late at night through the flower garden in back of the hotel toward the winding back road that leads up to Grizzly Peak. That was something I'd have to run down. Of more immediate interest, a businessman named Jessup said he saw a young woman coming out of room 602 around seven thirty last night.

I called down to the front desk and learned that Jessup was out but had a dinner reservation at the Claremont's restaurant tonight at six thirty. I was just hanging up when a call came in from the station. It was Dicky O'Gar. He'd been to Juanita Juárez's place with photographs of the three Bainbridge granddaughters.

"No dice, Boss," he said. "I showed Juanita photos of the three girls, just like you said. She couldn't make an ID."

"For Christ's sake—do they really look that similar?"

"Not to me. But Juanita can't tell them apart. She says American girls with yellow hair all look the same to her."

"Then how does she know it was one of the Bainbridge girls at all?"

"I don't know, Boss, but she was sure of it. She kept saying it was definitely one of them."

"But she didn't know which one."

“Nope. I mean no, sir.”

I checked my watch—I still had a half hour before Jessup’s dinner reservation. I figured this would be a good time to tell Chief Greening I was going to have to interview the Bainbridge granddaughters—and put all three of them in front of Juanita to see if she could pick one out in person.

3

“You want to interview the Bainbridge girls?” Greening asked me after I told him my plans.

“Yes, sir.”

“You want to put them in a lineup?”

“If we can, sir.”

“Are you joking?”

“No, sir,” I said.

“Sullivan, my boy, we all have prejudices. Even me. But when you’ve been a police officer as long as I have, you learn to put them aside. You have to. I’m chief of police for all Berkeley, not for one class or segment. Vollmer gets the credit for doing it first, but I’ve hired more Blacks in my twelve years than he did in his first twelve. But this Jovita or Consuela of yours tells us it was a Bainbridge girl, and you take it as a God-given truth and start barking like a trained seal, and you’re ready to launch a whole investigation into an innocent family on the basis of—of what? She admitted she couldn’t tell American girls apart.”

Greening shook his head, but I could tell he wasn’t finished, so I bit my tongue. I had my prejudices for sure; Greening wasn’t wrong about that. If I had to choose who was more likely to commit a crime, a Juanita or a “Bainbridge girl,” I would have picked the Bainbridge girl every time because they could get away with it.

“Which is stunning,” Greening went on. “Appalling really. These people just don’t respect the individual. It’s not their fault. It’s part of their culture, the way they see the world. You know, when I was in college, I heard a lecture by a great man, and he said—I’ll never forget this as long as I live—he said we must be agents of progress for the uncivilized nations. It’s our duty. They are our wards—we must take them under our wing and tutelage.

We can't be complacent, he said. Today they may not like us for it, but tomorrow they'll thank us. I almost shed a tear just thinking about it. That man knew what America stands for—what we're capable of, what we're meant to be. I tell you, Sullivan, if someone just showed some spine, after this war is over we'd send a few troops down to Mexico and take the place over. Everyone would be better off."

"We'd teach them to respect the individual," I said.

"Exactly. Which your chambermaid doesn't. I appreciate your sympathy for her, Sullivan, I do—I have great sympathy for Mexicans myself. Some of them are fine people. But we can't be at their mercy. Now this Consuela—"

"Juanita, sir."

"This Juanita 'knows' she saw one of the Bainbridge girls? Ridiculous. By her own admission it could have been any woman with blond hair, and she wouldn't have known the difference. That's no evidence at all."

Greening had a point. I believed Juanita, but a lot of other people wouldn't.

The chief leaned forward and lowered his voice. "I need to tell you something about the Bainbridges, Sullivan. People are out to get that family—because they're wealthy and the women are beautiful. I remember when every woman in northern California, even my own blessed wife, had her claws out for Sadie Bainbridge. It was all jealousy. I can tell you that in my encounters with Sadie, she was perfectly delightful, very considerate—she always noticed how well-pressed I kept my uniform."

I'd heard about Sadie Bainbridge—the mother of one of the Bainbridge girls. Years ago, she'd lost her other daughter in a tragic accident at the Claremont. Apparently she was a shut-in now; no one had seen her in years.

"Now it's the next generation they have it out for," Greening went on. "Do you know I actually heard someone say they thought Isabella was possessed? Possessed! That beautiful young lady? Jealousy all over again. The Bainbridge girls are charming young women, all three of them. Remember, Sullivan—the presumption of innocence! In those three words you have the heart of our system—the value of the individual—the presumption of innocence!"

I kept mum. I hadn't seen much presumption of innocence when

Greening had us round up the Japanese after Pearl Harbor. I'm not saying we were wrong. The Japs had made war on us, and once they took out our air and naval bases in Hawaii, the entire West Coast was basically defenseless. They could have bombed the mainland or even invaded any time they wanted. Maybe we had to move the Japanese off the West Coast, but let's not pretend we honored the presumption of innocence.

"So, Detective Sullivan," Chief Greening concluded, "the answer is no. There will be absolutely no lineup of the Bainbridge girls. The very idea. And we will not bring them in for questioning. Am I clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"That poor family has been through more than enough already."

4

I got back to the Claremont in time to catch Jessup having dinner in the hotel restaurant. He was alone. And wearing too much Aqua Velva. He offered to pour me a glass of his wine, which I declined, being on duty.

Jessup was a wolfish-looking man of forty or so wearing an oversized suit with enormous shoulders and greased-back hair. He was in town to do some steel plate strength tests for the Kaiser shipyards. Apologizing for making him repeat himself, I asked him to go over with me what he saw last night.

"With pleasure," he said. "But as I told your man, I don't have much to say. The woman was just leaving room 602 as I came around a corner in the hallway. She walked toward me; I walked toward her. We crossed paths. I turned around to get another look at her as she was walking away, but she'd already turned the corner when I did. I'm afraid that's all I have for you."

"What made you turn around to get another look at her?"

"You would have too, believe me."

"Good-looking?"

"Sensational," he said, wiping his wine-rimmed lips with a white cloth napkin. "Nice tight dress too. Form-fitting. With a slit up the side so you could see her leg. And what a leg."

"How old?"

"Hard to say. Young. But sometimes they look younger than they are."

“Short? Tall?”

“Medium. But she was wearing heels. Five foot one without them, I’d guess. Long shiny hair. That enigmatic expression they all have.”

“Enigmatic?”

“Like you’ll never know what they’re thinking, not in a thousand years. You know how they look.”

“I’m not following you, Mr. Jessup. Who’s they?”

“Didn’t your man tell you? The girl was Chinese.”

“Chinese?”

“High-class Chinese. Not one of your Chinatown girls. I’ve had plenty of those, and she was a lot more expensive, this one, believe me.”

I had just been getting ready to show him photographs of the Bainbridge girls; it seemed Walter Wilkinson had been a very busy man last night. “Mr. Jessup,” I said, “you’re saying the woman you saw was a prostitute?”

“What else would she have been?”

I left Jessup to his wine. Talking to the man made me feel like I needed a shower.

5

When I got back to the hotel room I’d commandeered—I got them to let me stay for one more night—a woman was outside my door, smoking a cigarette, leaning back against the wall. She was a slim blonde, in her twenties I’d say, wearing a light blue button-up sweater, a long navy skirt, and a matching low-profile pillbox hat. She was making contact with the wall at four points—the back of her head, her two shoulder blades, and her right heel—while she cupped one elbow in the palm of a hand and smoked with two fingers of the other hand. Apart from a birthmark above one corner of her mouth—or maybe in part because of the birthmark—her face was pretty easy to look at. No wedding ring.

“Detective Sullivan?” she said when I got to the door.

“That’s me. And you are?”

“I’m a reporter with *New York Tribune*.”

“You got here fast.”

“Already in town,” she said. “I’ve been working on a story about one

Walter Wilkinson.”

“Is that right?”

“That’s right.”

I unlocked my door and started stepping through.

“Aren’t you going to invite me in?” she asked.

“No, I’m not. I’m not talking to the press.”

“You’ve got it backwards, Detective. I don’t want anything from you. You want something from me.”

“And what do I want from you, miss?”

“Information.”

I smiled. “The last guy who told me that tried to sell me a bunk story about a cult for fifty bucks. What’s your racket?”

“Invite me into your war room and you can find out.”

I looked her over, and half of me wished I could. “Sorry. No press. No exceptions.”

“Suit yourself,” she said, turning her back on me and sashaying away. “It’s not my problem if you miss the Chinese angle.”

“Hold on,” I said. She stopped and looked at me over a shoulder. “What do you mean Chinese angle?”

“Oh, now you’re interested?”

“Maybe.”

“Well, my price has gone up. You’ll have to buy me a drink to find out.” She set off down the hall again, this time knowing I’d follow her.

6

Down in the cocktail lounge, I found us a table in a dark corner where we wouldn’t be seen or overheard. A waiter was on top of us before we’d settled in our chairs. I asked her what she was drinking and she said whatever I was, so I ordered a couple of Manhattans. She took out another cigarette and waited for me to light it. I did, and lit one of my own as well. In the dark she looked like Hedy Lamarr.

Smelled good too. Like orange blossoms.

“So what’s the Chinese angle?” I asked.

“Too aggressive, Detective. Much too. Go a little more slowly when

you're with a girl the first time." She looked me over. "I heard you're a college boy—with a degree in history?"

"You heard right. You?"

"Creative writing."

"That about sums up the newspaper business."

"Such mistrust for reporters, Detective."

The waiter slipped a couple of cocktail napkins onto the table, followed by our drinks.

"The more you know about a story in the paper," I said, "the more you see how wrong they got it."

"The more you know about cops, the more you wonder which side of the law they're on."

I nodded. "So why the newspaper racket?" I asked her. "You don't need the money, that's for sure."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because of that Tiffany's cigarette case you keep your smokes in."

"Observant, aren't we? I heard you were the youngest ever to make detective in the Berkeley Police Department. Protégé of the famous August Vollmer, the father of American law enforcement."

"Are you doing a story on Wilkinson or me, miss?"

"Maybe both of you."

I stood up and threw some money on the table. "I'm a little busy right now to be taken for a ride. Enjoy your drink."

"Madame Chiang Kai-Shek," she said.

I didn't reply, but I didn't leave either.

"Do you know who that is, Detective? The wife of the president of China, our ally in the war?"

"I know who Madame Chiang is. What about her?"

"Did you know she's moved here, and she's living just down the road?"

"Everyone in Berkeley knows that."

"Doesn't it seem a little strange to you that the First Lady of China, the most powerful woman in the world and probably the most ambitious, would move to Berkeley, California—by herself, without her husband—even as her country is fighting for its life?"

“They say she had medical reasons.”

“I’m not knocking Berkeley, Detective—it’s a pretty little town—but if you were looking for the best doctors in the Western world, would you come here?”

“If you’ve got something to say, ma’am, you better get to it.”

“Madame Chiang is having an affair with Walter Wilkinson. Was, excuse me. That’s why she’s living here.”

I sat down. “Go on.”

“She told a confidant a few months ago that if Wilkinson won the presidency, they would rule the world—those are her actual words. She would rule the Orient, and he would rule the West.”

“Where are you getting this, miss?”

“Do *you* give away your sources, Detective? Wilkinson met Madame Chiang in 1942, when Roosevelt sent him to China as his special envoy. It was billed as a goodwill trip, but I’m told the real purpose was to see whether we should keep backing Chiang Kai-Shek in the fight against Japan or throw our weight behind the commander of the Red Army, Mao Tse-tung. Chiang and Mao are mortal enemies. Only one of them will come out of this war the leader of China. Wilkinson was there to figure out which horse to back, but he lost his head for Madame Chiang. Have you ever met her?”

“Me? No chance.”

“Men find her bewitching. Hypnotic. She speaks perfect English—with a Southern accent, because she went to school in Georgia. She was Wilkinson’s translator and host in Chungking, and soon they were having secret trysts. When they disappeared from a state dinner party held in President Chiang’s mansion, the Generalissimo went on a furious tirade. He stormed into Wilkinson’s hotel with ten men and turned the whole place upside down, but Wilkinson and the Madame were at a secret apartment of hers, so the General didn’t find them. After Wilkinson returned to the States, he wrote Madame Chiang and begged her to come live in America. He said she should move to Berkeley, because the Claremont is his home away from home. And she did. The only question is whether General Chiang decided to have Wilkinson killed—something Chiang likes to do to his enemies, usually by firing squad. Or beheading.”

“What do you want, miss?”

“What do *I* want?”

“What’s in it for you?”

“Why, Detective, can’t a girl do her duty as a citizen without being suspected of ulterior motives?”

“You support Mao—is that it?”

“Chiang is a corrupt, bloodthirsty murderer. But no, I don’t support Mao. I’m a reporter, Detective. I don’t take sides.”

“You’re making Wilkinson out to be pretty reckless, miss. First, he sleeps with the wife of the president of China, who’s famous for having his secret police take out his enemies. Then he invites her to come to America so he can keep carrying on with her?”

“Love makes people reckless—I would have thought a homicide detective would know that. Haven’t you ever been head over heels?”

“No, miss, I haven’t.”

“Then you haven’t lived. I fall head over heels every chance I get.”

With that she finished her Manhattan, stood up, and started to leave.

“I didn’t get your name, miss,” I said.

“You are a detective, aren’t you? I’m sure you’ll find out.”

7

I liked his suits. Custom-made, by the looks of them. All wool, naturally, even though it hadn’t been legal to make a three-piece wool suit since ’42. Of course with a wool suit you couldn’t necessarily tell if it was new or old—the government had also curtailed style changes so that people wouldn’t buy new clothes just to keep up with fashion—but in Wilkinson’s case, I was guessing new. He’d been a good-looking man with a high-end tailor, and nobody expected the rich to follow the rules that applied to everyone else, whether it came to adultery or fabric.

I was in his hotel room—his other room, the one I’d moved him to after the first attempt on him—fishing through the pockets of his clothes. We hadn’t packed up his things yet. I’d had the boys do a search, but they hadn’t turned up a datebook or calendar, which seemed odd. A man as busy as Wilkinson had to have one. So I was double-checking, but I didn’t find one

either.

On a dresser, my men had gathered the valuables—wallet, keys, a Reverso watch, some fancy tiepins and cufflinks. I didn't find anything interesting in the wallet, but the car keys got me thinking. The boys assumed they belonged to some car Wilkinson owned back East, but they were Chevy keys, and Wilkinson struck me as more of a Cadillac man. We knew he hadn't valeted a car, but he might have rented one and parked it himself. I decided to have a look in the hotel parking lot.

It took me over an hour, but I found it. Wilkinson's keys fit a late-model Chevrolet De Luxe. In the glove box was a folder from a Drive-Ur-Self at the airport—and a leather-bound pocket calendar.

It was a gold mine. There were notations showing all the meetings he'd had since arriving in San Francisco. Maybe that's why he went back to room 602 the night he was killed—he could have been looking for his calendar.

On the day of his death Walter Wilkinson had had a very full day. Breakfast at six thirty in the hotel with "BR" and "ST"; something indecipherable at nine; radio interviews ten to twelve; a lunch talk at the Rotary in San Francisco; "tea" with "Mei-Ling" at three; another talk at six with some bankers; an eight-thirty dinner with the Audubon Society he must have canceled after being shot at; and then the last entry, the most important one. Wilkinson had written down "12:00" and "hotel" and nothing else. Unlike all the other entries, he'd circled that one—double circled it—but hadn't indicated even with initials whom he was meeting.

Wilkinson wasn't looking for his calendar. The reason he went back to room 602 was because he had a midnight meeting with someone—someone important enough to risk going back to the room where he'd already been shot at.

8

The phone was ringing in my temporary hotel headquarters as I walked in. It was the front desk, telling me that a Miss Nicole Bainbridge was downstairs, asking to meet with me as soon as possible. I figured Chief Greening's order—not to question the Bainbridge girls—didn't apply if one of them came to me on her own.

“Send her up,” I said.

Given what Juanita had said—that she’d seen a Bainbridge girl with Wilkinson shortly before he was killed—Nicole was technically a suspect. I knew for a fact she’d been at the Claremont the night Wilkinson was killed because she was the girl I’d been having a drink with in the hotel bar when the maître d’ came to get me. On top of which, right when we first sat down, Nicole had gone off to the ladies’, and she was away long enough that she could conceivably have gone up to Wilkinson’s room, taken a shot at him, and missed. Then she could have gone back later to finish the job.

But there were a lot of holes in this theory. To begin with, when she came back to the table Nicole didn’t look like someone who’d just tried to kill someone. Second, what possible motive would Nicole Bainbridge have for murdering Wilkinson? Third, what about Wilkinson’s claim that it was a Communist ruffian who took the first shot at him? I still found that story fishy, but why would he make it up if Nicole had been the shooter? Fourth, she hadn’t been wearing any yellow silk when I met her. And finally, if Nicole had been planning to take a shot at Wilkinson, why would she have asked a policeman—me—to be here in the hotel with her when it was supposed to happen?

There was a knock at the door, and I let Nicole in. Her face was square-shaped with prominent cheekbones—a kind of Eastern European look, apparently from her mother, who, I’d been told, came from some kind of Polish nobility. Or maybe Czech. Her honey-blond hair was shoulder length, and whereas she’d been in a dress last night, now she was wearing gray slacks and blue shirt. She looked like a college girl because she was one—a junior at Berkeley. She didn’t smile when she came in; she hadn’t smiled yesterday either. She also didn’t smell like anything—just kind of dry.

“Okay to talk here, Miss Bainbridge?” I said. For my makeshift office, I’d pushed the single bed into a corner and converted it into an oversized table for all my paperwork. There was a desk, which is where I did my work, and an armchair that came with an ottoman which I’d stuck in the closet. “Would you prefer the lobby? Or one of the conference rooms?”

She looked around warily. “This is fine,” she said, sitting down in the armchair.

“Sorry about disappearing last night, miss,” I said, taking a seat behind my desk.

“Not at all. You obviously had something much more urgent.”

“Well, you can’t tell someone you’ve got something important to say to them and then run out on them before you’ve said it. I should have followed up with you today. I meant to.”

“As a matter of fact, that’s why I’m here,” said Nicole. “You said a friend of mine was in danger. May I ask which friend?”

“Salvatore Ibarra.”

I thought I saw her flush for a second.

“Listen, miss, I’m going to come right to the point. We know you went with Mr. Ibarra to a Young Communist League meeting a few weeks ago. We also know he’s in the marine union, which is a Communist front, and that he was probably responsible for the bombing of a police squad car three years ago.”

“And how do you know all that, Detective Sullivan? Are you spying on us?”

“Not me personally, miss. I’m just trying to help—that’s all. It’s actually you, not Mr. Ibarra, we’re concerned about.”

“We?”

It made sense that she wanted to know who was watching them, and the answer was the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which was tapping the phones of every known Communist in the Bay Area, and a lot of other people besides, but that wasn’t something I could tell her. Anyway, I wasn’t privy to most of it. But Diarmuid Doogan, the District Attorney for Alameda County, was. Doogan was tight with Governor Earl Warren, and Warren was tight with J. Edgar Hoover. Both Warren and Hoover thought Communism was an even bigger threat to America than Nazism. All I knew was that the FBI had picked up Nicole Bainbridge associating with a known Communist, Salvatore Ibarra, and Doogan had asked me to take her out for a drink and have a talk with her. I think Doogan hoped she might fall for me, which sure as hell didn’t happen. Regardless, if she had any solid information about Ibarra, I was supposed to get it; if not, I was supposed to warn her to keep away from him. But Doogan also asked me not to say anything to Chief Greening

because Greening didn't know about the wiretaps. That put me in a tricky spot, but the DA calls the shots, so I did what he asked.

"He's a bad apple, miss, your friend Salvatore. I'm not anti-union. My dad was union. But it was one thing to be a Communist stirring up a strike before the war; it's totally different now."

"We aren't at war with Communism, Detective," she instructed me. It's an invariable rule: the younger you are, the more you know, and the less everyone else knows. "Without Russia, we don't stand a chance against Germany."

"The Russians aren't our friends, miss. Anybody who thinks otherwise isn't looking. If you know anything about what Salvatore's been up to, you should tell me about it. Otherwise you could end up an accessory."

"I see. You're very kind to warn me, Detective. Thank you." She paused. "I wonder, though, if you've ever considered whether you're the one who's an accessory."

"To what?"

"To the exploitation of labor."

It sounded like Nicole Bainbridge was more of a true believer than Doogan thought. I smiled. "I'm definitely an accessory to the exploitation of my own labor. I'll cop to that."

She wasn't amused. On the contrary, a look of scorn came over her. "What about to the maiming and killing of striking dockworkers? Who were unarmed and defenseless? That's what the police do, Mr. Sullivan—at the bidding of their paymasters, the ship companies."

Classic. Perfect. A rich girl who never had to fear for her safety in her life giving me lip about cops.

"They weren't just striking, miss, those workers. They were rioting, they were preventing nonunion men from working. They surrounded a police car and tried to turn it over—with the officers inside."

"Which justified shooting into a crowd of unarmed people?"

I gave her credit for not being a socialite who only thought about dresses and parties, but I knew her sort—I'd met plenty just like her at Berkeley. Kids who felt guilty—no, resentful—about being born with a gold spoon in their mouth. Kids trying to escape who they were. Trying on different

personas like normal folks tried on shoes. Should I be an archaeologist? A singer? A naturalist? Too many choices, that was the problem. They had no constraints, no debts, no need to work—they could be anything they wanted, barring only a total lack of talent, which was actually not uncommon. But the persona most *grata* was communist. Don't get me wrong, I'm a Democrat and a big fan of the New Deal, but communism is crap. You don't want to say to a starving man, "You've got no chance, pal, but don't worry, we're going to bring everyone down to your level." And I especially had no patience for rich kid communism. I'd never seen so many rich people so passionately committed to equality—without giving anything up. They thought they were championing the poor, but it was all just talk and theater and self-indulgence. They had no idea what the poor really wanted, which was just to fucking rise and get some respect and maybe stick it in the face of their former bosses.

"Look, miss," I said, "I'm not defending Bloody Thursday. But the war has changed things. The whole port of San Francisco is a US Navy facility now. You can't try to organize a strike there anymore. That's a federal offense. A violation of the Espionage Act. You can get the death penalty for that."

"Professor Radin doesn't agree with you."

"I'm sorry?"

"Professor Radin teaches at the law school. He says the Espionage Act is unconstitutional. And that we have a right to express our opinions even in wartime."

"Your friend Salvatore isn't just expressing his opinions, miss."

"Why—what's he done?"

"Besides blowing up a police car, which burned the face off a good cop?"

"How do you know he was good?"

Are you effing kidding me, I thought. Now I was getting mad—but I was also beginning to wonder how deep in she might already be. I decided to give her a little rope. "That's a fair question," I said. "There are a lot of bad cops out there. You think that one might have deserved what he got?"

"I have no idea, Detective. You tell me. I don't know anything about it."

She was no fool, this girl. And it was obvious that my warning about Salvatore wasn't going to have the least effect on her—I had the impression that he was more than a friend. “Well, I suggest you tell Mr. Ibarra to watch his step.”

She nodded coldly and stood up to go, but I stopped her.

“Could you spare another minute, miss?”

She sat down again, impassive.

“Did you know Walter Wilkinson, Miss Bainbridge?”

“Just of him. What I read in the papers.”

“So you never met him personally?”

“No—why would I have? Wait, I beg your pardon. I was at a Christmas party a few months ago, and he was there as well.”

“Where was that, miss?”

“At Madame Chiang's.”

“Madame Chiang Kai-Shek?”

“Yes, her house on Avalon Avenue. My grandmother was invited—they're neighbors—and she brought me with her.”

“Did you speak with him there?”

“No. Well, he introduced himself to me.”

“He introduced himself to you, but you didn't speak with him?”

“No.”

“I guess his politics aren't exactly your politics?”

“I despise everything he stands for.”

“Okay. Did you have any contact with him after that party?”

“Certainly not.”

“Look, I'm sorry to pry, but can I ask you what you did after I left our table last night?”

“I waited a bit. Then I left.”

“And you went where?”

“To my room—my dorm room.”

“Then what?”

“What did I do after I went back to my room? Why are you asking?”

“Because a witness believes she may have seen you back here at the Claremont, miss, with Mr. Wilkinson outside his room at around midnight

last night. Is that possible?”

“Absolutely not. I wasn’t even in Berkeley anymore. I went to our country house up in Sonoma.”

“Okay.” I opened up a notebook so I could take notes. “How’d you get to your country house?”

“I drove.”

“What time did you get there?”

“Around ten.”

“Was there anyone with you? Who can confirm what you’re telling me?”

“My sister, Cassie, and my cousin Isabella. They can both confirm it. We stayed the night, went hunting in the morning, and came back this afternoon.”

“Besides the three of you,” I said, “was there anyone else at the house? Did anyone see you there?”

“No. I don’t think so.”

I put down my pen. I didn’t like this convenient triple alibi one bit, and while I couldn’t have proved it to a jury, I was pretty sure she was making the whole thing up. “You didn’t mention that to me last night—that you were heading out of town.”

“I’d forgotten all about it, honestly. I only remembered after you left.”

“Okay. No problem. By the way, why the Claremont?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I was just wondering why you picked the Claremont as the place for our drink.”

“You told me to choose somewhere in Berkeley.”

“But why the Claremont?”

“I don’t know—it was the first place that came to mind.”

“What gun did you use, Miss Bainbridge? Was it a thirty-eight?”

“Excuse me?”

“What kind of gun did you use?”

“I’ve never fired a gun in my life.”

“You just told me you went hunting this morning. Up in Sonoma. I was asking what gun you used hunting.”

“Oh. A rifle.”

“But you didn’t shoot it?”

“No. I didn’t take a shot. It was my first time, actually. Isabella’s too. Cassie’s the hunter.”

“What kind of rifle?”

“I don’t know. A Winchester maybe? You’d have to ask Cassie.”

“Okay. Thanks very much, miss. I won’t take up any more of your time. What were you hunting—deer?”

“Yes—deer.”

“Anyone bag anything?”

“No. The hunt was a total failure. For the hunters, I mean. For the deer it was a great success.”

I said goodbye to Nicole Bainbridge. She was pretty impressive—I hadn’t gotten a lick of information out of her, either about Salvatore Ibarra or Walter Wilkinson. One thing was clear though: she had no problem lying to a police detective in a murder investigation. Nicole said herself she despised Wilkinson. Could she possibly have despised him enough to kill him?

9

I stayed up until four thirty going through my men’s interview notes and was just about to turn in when I heard a woman shriek in the adjoining room. It wasn’t a terrible scream, maybe an I-just-heard-a-mouse scream, but under the circumstances I thought I’d better check it out. Out in the hallway, at the end of the corridor, I saw Miriam—what the hell was she doing here, and so late?—disappearing around the corner.

I ran after her, calling her name, turned the corner, and practically ran smack into a little girl, standing still and staring me right in the face. But it wasn’t Miriam. She was pale with long dark curls, and in one of her hands, she was holding a black velvet box. She spun around and took off down the corridor. I stood there flat-footed for a couple of seconds, not knowing what was going on, then I followed. She turned another corner into the elevator bay. When I got there, she was just stepping into one of the cars. The door was closing as I reached it, but I stuck my arm in, and the door crunched on my wrist—I was going have a nasty bruise for sure—then it started opening again, and a second later the little girl leapt out at me like a wild animal, shrieking, hands reaching for me, and as I fought her off, fought off her

scratching claws and yellow nails, I saw that her crazed face was the face of the doll from the closet with its shiny porcelain cheeks and glassy eyes and red lips frozen into a tiny O.

I came to with my cheek lying directly on my desk. I'd had plenty of nightmares, but nothing like this one. I was glad it was my last night at the Claremont.

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Chapter Eight

1937

The grand opening festivities for the Golden Gate Bridge in May of 1937 were unprecedented in West Coast history. A fleet of United States Navy warships patrolled beneath the bridge, while five hundred aircraft flew the skies above. Fireworks exploded every night for a week. International industrial exhibitions filled every square and park. Parades marched, nineteen beauty queens were crowned, an illuminated nighttime pageant re-created the taming of the West, with world-famous baritones and a cast of three thousand. Instead of a ribbon cutting, a redwood trunk three feet thick was placed across the bridge and log-sawing champions competed to see who could cut through first. On the last day before the bridge opened for vehicular traffic, pedestrians only were invited to cross—at twenty-five cents a head—and two hundred thousand did so. Among these were stilt walkers, horseback riders, and young people on roller skates.

Three of those young people were Cassie and Nicole Bainbridge and their cousin Isabella Stafford. Isabella had been asked to be one of the Fiesta's beauty queens—at thirteen she would have been the youngest—but the idea was vetoed by her grandmother, the family matriarch, who was waiting for them at the end of the bridge, on the San Francisco side.

“Hi, Nana,” Isabella called out. “Sorry to keep you waiting.”

“Not at all,” replied Genevieve Bainbridge. “I wouldn't have missed this for the world. Why don't you girls get your skates off and we'll all go home in my car?”

The three girls, exhilarated and out of breath, plopped down at a curb and unlocked their roller skates.

“I’m starving!” said Isabella. “I can’t wait to get home and have some of Mabel’s pineapple upside-down cake.” Then she lowered her voice. “Although Mrs. Biddleston will probably try to stop me—that old ogress.”

At the mention of the Staffords’ housekeeper, a serious look came over Cassie, the tallest of the three girls and also the most responsible. “Issy, that stunt of yours this morning? You have to stop doing that.”

“It’s just a prank, Cassie. I think it’s funny.”

“No, it’s not,” said Nicole. “You scared Mrs. Biddleston to death! She almost passed out. She needed smelling salts!”

“No, she didn’t. She was just putting it on. She hates me, and she always has. Besides it’s funny to see her get like that, all huffy and red-faced.”

“It is a little funny.” Cassie giggled.

“Where did you get that wig?” asked Nicole.

“My theater class.”

“You’re so dark, Issy.”

“It really is a little scary, Issy.”

“You mean because I look like Iris?”

“Well ... yes, actually,” said Nicole.

“A lot like her,” said Cassie.

“I’m just honoring her. Dr. Chung said that in ancient China people used to dress up and impersonate loved ones who had recently died. It was a way of honoring the dead. And it helped them get over their grief.”

Dr. Margaret Chung was one of the doctors treating Isabella’s mother.

“I don’t know,” said Cassie dubiously. “Dr. Chung sounds strange. Doesn’t she wear men’s clothes? And calls herself Mike?”

“We’re all strange inside. I’m strange. You’re strange too, Cassie, you’re just afraid to admit it.”

“How about me—am I strange?” asked Nicole. Suddenly she looked worried, almost hurt. “Maybe I’m just ordinary. Maybe I’m boring.”

“No one’s boring. Not deep inside. Not if you really get to know them. Mrs. Duncan—you know, the spiritualist they sent me to—told me that all humans have a dark side and light side. I’ve done things that if I told you, you’d never speak to me again.”

Cassie sighed. “Remember when you refused to talk, Issy? For months?”

“I know. And now I can’t stop talking.”

“I’m worried that I’m ordinary,” said Nicole, frowning. “That I’ll never in my whole life ever do anything special or important or shocking. That I just don’t have it in me.”

“Oh you do, Nicole—don’t worry. It’s just that nothing really bad has ever happened to you.”

“I broke my arm last year!”

“That’s not really bad.”

“Oh. Like losing Iris?”

“Who said I lost Iris?”

“Issy!”

“I’m just teasing. I promise you, Nicky, you have strangeness all bottled up inside you. It just needs to be unleashed. Hey, I have an idea—we should be the three witches from *Macbeth*.”

“You have to be careful, Issy. People say there’s something wrong with you.”

“I don’t care what they say. Nana says the best way to triumph over one’s enemies is to not even acknowledge they exist. Anyway, the doctors say it’s just my way of controlling my own thoughts. I don’t want them to do to me what they did to my mother.”

“What did they do to her?”

“They did an operation where they cut into part of her brain.”

Nicole looked worried. “They might do that to you if you keep talking to Iris.”

“I don’t think so. She protects me from evil.”

“What evil, Issy?!”

“Evil is everywhere. Where you least expect it. It can seep out of the radio. Or a lobster salad.”

“Oh, Issy—why do you say that?”

“Because it talks to me.”

“What talks to you?”

“Evil.”

“Iris talks to you, and evil talks to you?”

“Yes.”

“Are they the same?”

“No! Not at all. They’re opposites. Come on—Nana’s waiting.”

DEPOSITION OF MRS. GENEVIEVE BAINBRIDGE, HAVING BEEN DULY SWORN AS A
WITNESS, TAKEN ON THE FIFTEENTH OF MARCH, 1944, COMMENCING AT 10:00 A.M.,
CONTINUED

BY DISTRICT ATTORNEY DOOGAN:

Q: I'm sorry, Mrs. Bainbridge, but I'm going to have to interrupt you again.
We've been here for upwards of three hours now. I have no more time for your
family history, and neither does my staff.

A: I know what you want, Mr. Doogan. You want to reduce my family to a one-page
police report, which will not only dehumanize us but allow you to
mischaracterize my granddaughters in furtherance of your outrageous
allegations. I can't assist you in that.

Q: I just want the facts, Mrs. Bainbridge.

A: Let me make a proposal, then. I will write it down for you. I will tell you
all the facts, but in their proper context.

Q: Excellent idea. You can start at the beginning and take as long as you like in
the comfort of your own home. I'm sure we'll all be most edified. For now,
however, I must insist that you answer my questions about the night of Walter
Wilkinson's murder.

Chapter Nine

MRS. BAINBRIDGE'S TESTIMONIAL
PREPARED FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY DOOGAN
IN CONNECTION WITH HER DEPOSITION
TAKEN ON THE FIFTEENTH OF MARCH, 1944

You advised me, Mr. Doogan, in the most condescending manner, to "start at the beginning," but that presupposes there is such a thing as the beginning, when in fact everything that happens is rooted in something earlier. In my family's case, nothing can be extricated from the terrible day fourteen years ago—January 25, 1930—when we lost poor Iris.

What you are about to read, you may find difficult to believe or even preternatural. But I assure you that by the time you reach the end, you will see the grave injustice you are committing.

★ ★ ★

Among the most obscene things about Iris's death was the lurid delight the press took in it, trampling on our dignity and twisting our suffering into a source of their revenue. The one that took the prize was from the *Chronicle*. I kept the clipping; here it is.

**NECK LITERALLY SNAPPED
IN TWO IN CHILD'S BODY.**

**Grandniece of Mark Hopkins Meets With Tragedy at the Claremont
LITTLE IRIS AND ISSY**

On Tuesday, a CHRONICLE scribe was detailed to Berkeley to report on the death of a little girl seven years of age who had a few days before climbed into a laundry chute at the Claremont Hotel and plunged nine flights to her death. The reporter wended his way to a leafy cul-de-sac in the Berkeley Hills, where stood, at No. 2907 Avalon Avenue, a stately house, the drawn curtains of which testified to the bereavement within. Upon knocking, the door was opened by a maidservant dressed in black, and as a trusted friend of the family, the reporter was invited into the parlor, where he recognized at once many distinguished members of the Hopkins clan, for the deceased child, Iris Bainbridge Stafford, had been a grandniece of Mr. Mark Hopkins, one of the great railway men of the previous century. But the most touching sight was an even littler girl, only six, sitting

prettily with golden locks and bowed head, gazing upon

A LITTLE WHITE FACE, UPTURNED

The eyes of that upturned face were closed, the hands still, and the white serge and wreath told that life had departed. No trace of agony lingered any longer on the countenance, no sign was visible of the torturous severing of the neck which had brought life to an end. Had it not been for the tokens of death surrounding the little one, clad in a tasteful white dress and pink bow, it could hardly have been believed that the child's stillness was more than a quiet slumber.

The dignified whispers of the mourners were all that broke the stillness until the seated six-year-old told the reporter her story, in a quiet but steady little voice with surprising composure.

"My name is Issy—short for Isabella. Iris was my sister. We used to accompany our mother to the Claremont when she played tennis with her friend Mrs. von Urban. Iris and I especially liked to ride down the spiral slide that descends from the top of the Tower to the grass below, which was originally built to let people escape from fires but which everyone rides down now for fun."

SISTERS TOLD OF SLIDES HIDDEN IN HOTEL

"A maid we knew at the hotel once told us that many secret rides like the Tower slide were hidden all over the hotel. That's what Iris was looking for when she came upon the laundry chute. She thought she had found another slide."

★ ★ ★

This report, if such it should be called, was a festival of impropriety. The brazen journalist was not a "trusted friend" of our family. He was an utter stranger who obtained entry into my house by false pretenses, impersonating a relative. Moreover, his conversation with Isabella was a complete fabrication. Isabella hadn't spoken a word to him; she didn't speak at all for months after the tragedy. Nevertheless, apart from the stupidity of making a six-year-old sound sixteen and absurdly calling Iris a "grandniece of Mark Hopkins"—I myself am Mark Hopkins's grandniece; Iris was his great-great-grandniece—the awful facts he reported were true.

★ ★ ★

It was Sadie—my daughter Sadie, poor Iris's mother—who suffered most from the tragedy, but she was unwell long before. We just didn't know it. The illness wasn't in her body; it was in her mind. Outwardly, she was anything but sickly. Until she was seventeen, Sadie was vigorous and headstrong and hungry for life—perhaps too hungry. But perhaps she was ill even then, and I was simply blind to it because, like the rest of the world, I assumed from her ravishing looks that she must be happy and healthy, when I of all people should have known better.

In fairy tales, there are always three daughters, and the youngest is always the fairest. So it was in my own family, where I was the eldest. When visitors called, the same scene would invariably unfold. "My word, what a beauty," they'd marvel upon catching sight of my youngest sister, Helena. Then turning to Blanche, my middle sister, it was always, "Gracious, another beauty! And the

eldest is—?" That's when they'd see me, and the awkward disappointment would be palpable. No one could finish the sentence, but what everyone was thinking was, the plainest.

But I didn't mind that. It was actually a gift of sorts. Seeing my younger sisters—the catches, the desirable ones—turn themselves into delicate flowers for the opposite sex always filled me with pity and disdain. It was so desperate, so demeaning. Have you ever seen a man playing the helpless ingenue? Of course not.

I was the direct one, the one with an iron will who didn't care what others thought. My father always said I should have been a boy, which I took as a compliment. But when it came to suitors—well, they found me too intimidating, or perhaps too smart, and invariably preferred my more charming sisters. By the time I was twenty-two, I was in the embarrassing position of being the only unmarried daughter left, and incredibly, whispers of spinsterhood had already begun. But I ended up with the best husband—there's rare consensus on that.

My glamorous sisters had fixed their sights on, and were ultimately matched with, San Francisco's most dashing bachelors; both their husbands turned out to be scoundrels. By contrast, no one could have been kinder or more decent than my dear, poor Lionel, even if he was never the handsomest of the lot. But fate has a wicked sense of humor—who would have expected me and portly, weak-chinned Lionel to produce a daughter so radiantly beautiful?

Sadie was born in 1904, a year-and-a-half before the great earthquake crumbled buildings like biscuits and the ensuing fire roasted people alive. Lionel and I lived on Nob Hill, just down the street from the Hopkins mansion, built by my great-uncle Mark as a monument of love to his wife, which makes me wonder if he was unfaithful. The day after the earthquake, when we all foolishly supposed that the disaster was over, the hellish fire started climbing up the hills. We first took refuge in my great-uncle's house, but the inferno pursued us even there, and we ran, terrified, Sadie in my arms, to the Floods' fortress-like stone manor across the street. I'll never forget seeing the Hopkins mansion engulfed in flames, and the Stanfords' next to it, and the Huntingtons', and the Crockers'—the greatest houses in the western United States, all built of wood despite the exterior appearance of stonework, all ablaze, all disappearing before our eyes. We didn't know it, but that day marked the end of the era of the great families and their dominance over the city of San Francisco.

It's astonishing how quickly the city recovered—new buildings sprang out of nowhere every day. The tectonic plates of power, wealth, and population shifted beneath our feet, even as those below the city itself had shifted. The class of people elected to office broadened, a good thing in itself, but corruption, widespread before, became endemic. Workingmen, so many of them homeless after the fire, were ruthlessly exploited for their labor—something the Hopkins family always stood against—setting the stage for the strikes and violence we all lived through before the war. My son, John, came a year later, during the financial panic when we thought we'd lost everything but didn't. The post-fire years were booming times for San Francisco, and they were the happiest of my life, when the children were little, before they lost their father in the Great War.

After Lionel's passing, my options were quite limited. There I was, a widow in her late thirties with two teenage children. I had a fortune but no prospects or inspiration, nothing to activate my mind. There were a few suitors, but in end, I concentrated on my children and giving them the best start in life I could.

But Sadie, who was just coming into her womanhood when she lost her father, was too much for me. I tried to control her, but I didn't know how.

I wish now that we hadn't made so much of Sadie's looks when she was growing up. Sadie's tantalizing beauty was forever being celebrated everywhere by everyone, and I was pleased about it, never thinking to highlight other attributes of hers, or other accomplishments, she could take pride in. The

result, I think, was that her features and figure became her source of self-worth. She clung to beauty like a lifeboat but also wielded it like a weapon.

She needed all the boys, every last one, to fall in love with her, to be transfixed by her. And not just the boys. When she was only thirteen, grown men would stop in their tracks to stare at her. I should have been more alive to the danger, but honestly I had no experience of what the combination of beauty and manipulateness could do to a girl. And if I'm being honest, perhaps I took pride in having borne so alluring a daughter.

Of course Sadie was keenly aware of the effect she had on males—girls like her always are, no matter how young—and she became, I think, addicted to it. Soon she needed stronger and stronger proofs of it. She needed to see men commit transgressions for her, such as betraying their betrotheds or gaping at her while on the arm of their apoplectic wives. At home she would periodically fall into depressions or furies or both states at once, throwing plates and vases against the wall; the cause, it would turn out, was that some member of the opposite sex hadn't fallen head over heels for her. She had to conquer every single man.

Even when she had a beau—and she always did—she flirted constantly with other men. It was around this time that she also started to use the threat of self-destruction as an instrument. One winter when she was fifteen, she made a plan to go tobogganing with her then-steady, a college senior who arrived late to their hillside rendezvous. He found her in a snowbank at the bottom of the slope, unconscious and bleeding badly from her head. Terrified, the boy picked her up and carried her all the way to our house, only to discover that her unconsciousness had been feigned, the blood mercurochrome. She told me the story herself, laughing merrily at her prank.

I was so ignorant and heedless then. When the family portraitist discovered that Sadie had drawing talent, I jumped at his offer to give her private lessons in his studio. One evening, a mink stole of mine went missing, and instinct told me where I would find it. I went to the artist's studio and found that Sadie wasn't learning to paint. She was modeling, and on this occasion was clad only in my mink, gracefully slipped down off her pretty shoulders and covering very little of the rest of her. One glance around the artist's quarters—at the savagely unmade bed, at the cocktail glasses with only ice remaining in them—confirmed my worst fears. To this day, I don't know which of them seduced the other.

I believe this is a good place, Mr. Doogan, for me to reiterate our "gentleman's agreement," which I am trusting you to honor. As you can see, the facts I'm recounting to you are of the most private and personal nature; I would not be revealing them but for your promise of confidentiality. I know you will be wondering how these facts relate to the death of Mr. Wilkinson. I can only ask that you be patient.

★ ★ ★

I am not as modern as young people are today, Mr. Doogan, but neither am I a Victorian. To my mind, physical appetite in young women is as healthy as it is in young men. So I didn't judge my daughter for her license; I simply assumed that marriage would be the cure.

Sadie came out when she was seventeen, and what a year 1921 was to debut. There was such prosperity back then, such mirth—the young people thought it would last forever. And golden-haired, tiny-waisted, full-chested Sadie was the Belle of San Francisco—the papers actually called her that. There wasn't a man at her ball who didn't want her, even the happily married ones, I'm sorry to say.

I had my eye on the Getty boy as a prospect, not because of his fortune—we

had no lack in that department—but because he had patience, which I thought Sadie needed. I approved of the Fisher boy too, although he was perhaps a bit full of himself; his parents had just funded the symphony. But Sadie had no interest in any of the local young men—and certainly not Roger Stafford, a not particularly distinguished engineering student, although there was no one more besotted with her. Roger was a nice enough boy, polite, tall, upright, and he would have jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge for Sadie—had there been a Golden Gate Bridge to jump off—but she barely noticed his existence.

Which is why everyone was surprised, including myself, when she chose him, accepting his proposal only a few weeks after her ball. And even more surprised when, not seven days later, they were married. I'd always assumed we'd have a grand affair at the Palace. But instead they opted for nothing at all—just a trip to City Hall.

I soon understood why. I'm afraid this is indelicate, Mr. Doogan, but what is indelicacy given what my family has been through and the plight we're in now. In any event, Iris was born a scant nine months later, rounding up. Nothing has ever been the same since.

The delivery was normal, but Sadie wasn't. She wouldn't get out of bed. She simply wouldn't, for anything. She cried for days on end and wouldn't even look at her baby, much less hold her. She wouldn't eat; she only drank—cocktails, for the most part. We had to bring in a nurse—four of them, actually, two for her, and two for the baby.

The doctors couldn't find anything wrong, and I thought Sadie was simply being melodramatic and self-indulgent. I even reprimanded her for it, quite harshly. I just didn't understand. I didn't understand how a mother could neglect her newborn.

When I think how backward I was in those days, how unsympathetic, it shames me. I'm only glad my Lionel was no longer with us. He loved Sadie more than life itself. It would have broken his heart to see her in such misery and despair.

Whispering began immediately—but not the whispering I feared, about the timing of Iris's conception. Apparently the uncharitable Mrs. Haas said to the chatterbox Mrs. Wilcox that she thought Iris was cursed—it was the widow's peak, barely concealed by all those dark curls—and why would an infant have so much hair? Later, after Iris had her bout of polio, thankfully mild but leaving her with the slightest limp, the same dreadful women whispered knowingly to one another about the poor creature's hex. I will admit that Iris was not born under the same lucky star as her sister; she lacked Isabella's natural sweetness and charm, she could be quite unruly, and at times even I lost patience with her. Still, it angered me that grown women would say such monstrous things about an innocent child.

When Sadie had been bed-ridden for over a month, a good friend of hers named Tillie, who had become almost a sister to Sadie, the sister she never had, made a suggestion. Tillie was quite modern, too modern for my taste. I don't think I ever trusted her, but she and Sadie had formed an instant bond due to the nature of Tillie's wedding—a story she and her husband loved to recount.

Two years earlier, Tillie had met a honey-tongued Viennese physician of aristocratic descent at a party in Los Angeles in the home of a movie star. She was only eighteen at the time; Dr. Rudolf von Urban was in his early forties, with supposedly movie star looks of his own. The next morning, he offered to drive her on some errands she had to run. After she'd climbed into his Studebaker, he told her he had to stop first at City Hall to pick up a marriage license.

"You're getting married?" she asked.

"Yes, but one can't until five days after one has obtained the license. So I'm afraid we'll have to wait until Saturday."

"We? What do you mean we?"

"I mean I want to marry you, Miss Madison."

"Are you out of your mind? I don't even know you."

"You will by Saturday," said Dr. von Urban. "Listen to me. I could not have fallen in love with you last night unless we were made for each other—unless we were bio-electrically and mentally in tune. You're too young to know how unusual that is. But you'll see, I promise."

And they were married two weeks later—a city hall ceremony, just like Sadie's. They settled in San Francisco, and had been happy ever since. Or so they said.

The point of all this is that after Iris was born and Sadie fell into her misery, Tillie suggested that Sadie be treated by her husband. Dr. von Urban was a specialist in all the latest psychiatric techniques; he had studied under the famous Dr. Freud himself, and for years he'd treated the best families in Vienna. Tillie said that curing young women's depression was the new psychiatry's "bread and butter."

Sadie didn't act on this suggestion at first. It was only after Isabella was born, and once again Sadie lapsed into her catatonia, that Sadie agreed to "see" Dr. von Urban—that's the word they use to describe going to a doctor's house five days a week, lying on a couch, and talking—just talking. Incredibly enough, after several months she was cured. Not gradually, but all at once; Dr. von Urban explained that she'd had a "breakthrough." None of us knew what that meant—at least I certainly didn't—but we were all overjoyed. Sadie recovered her former vivacity and voraciousness, and she at last began to be a mother to her little girls. She also took up tennis and began playing with Tillie at the Claremont, which she loved and which I wholeheartedly supported. I had just moved to the bucolic Berkeley Hills myself, to a house only a stone's throw from the Claremont; being out of doors and active is the best cure for most ills, in my opinion. For a few precious years all seemed well with the world.

In retrospect, however, it clearly wasn't. Motherhood was never the fulfillment for Sadie it should have been. It was closer to the opposite. Surely she was not unique in this; many more women than care to admit feel their children to be intolerably needy, requiring too much patience, time, and energy. Sadie had bursts of rage so uncontrolled we worried she might hurt herself. And she took oddly little pleasure in her daughters; sometimes she simply refused to kiss them good night even when they were calling out for her. She would complain bitterly of the hours she had to spend at home and of pains in her stomach for which her doctors could find no source. Sometimes it seemed the only thing she really enjoyed were her tennis outings at the Claremont.

Then came the cursed day, the blackest of all days, the day we lost Iris.

1944

SUNDAY, MARCH 12

1

There's nothing better than driving over the Bay Bridge early on a Sunday morning. You're all by yourself. It's like flying over the water, especially if you're going close to a hundred, which is what I like to do—but then I can get away with it, because no cop gives another cop a speeding ticket. Today, though, Miriam was in the car with me, so I kept it to eighty. Rosemary, Miriam's mom, hadn't made it back home last night and called me this morning at six a.m.—I don't even know where from—with another crisis, something that made no sense and I'm pretty sure was made up. In any event, I had Miriam for the morning.

I loved seeing the metropolis rise up in front of me. It was a skyline of reinvention. No city more ruthlessly ripped away and replaced what came before than San Francisco.

I majored in history at Cal, but I've been a history buff since I was a kid. In fourth grade, when we learned about Cortez and Pizarro and Balboa, a whole new world opened up for me. A world of faraway lands and adventurous explorers. A world of winners. These Spaniards, many of whom were born poor, weren't just *braceros*—farm workers and fruit pickers. They were *conquistadores*—what a great word—who founded cities and built empires.

Later on I learned that most of these heroes of mine were more monstrous than noble, not to mention spindly-legged and inbred. A professor

at Berkeley opened my eyes. They hadn't taught us in fourth grade that Cortez murdered Montezuma—through a piece of nasty duplicity—and slaughtered the Aztecs. And the idea that Balboa “discovered the Pacific”—in retrospect, it was pretty embarrassing that I ever believed that, even as a kid. But when I was a boy, those tales of conquest kept me going. They were my escape route from our overcrowded tenement house in El Cerrito.

You had to hand it to white people—San Francisco was the living, pulsating proof of that. They were outsiders to California, but you wouldn't know it now. They came, they saw, they took, they built—and what they built was like nothing the world had ever seen before. But then all Californians were outsiders. Even the native peoples had come from another land, crossing the Bering Straits far to the north and making their way down through Alaska. Dozens of tribes speaking over a hundred different dialects had lived in California, foraging, fishing, and hunting back in the time when massive herds of wild elk and antelope roamed the savannahs. I used to love learning the names of those tribes and of their languages—names all but lost today—like Paiute and Washo, Mojave, Miwok and Yurok and Yokut. They lived in peace for thousands of years, until the whites came.

The first Europeans in California were Spaniards. Our history books said the Spanish “conquered” California, but that was a stretch. It wasn't until the late 1700s that the Spanish took any serious interest in California, and even then Spanish colonization consisted of a few meager forts, or *presidios*, to defend the coastline and a smattering of Christian missions to convert the heathens. These were located in remote outposts along a six-hundred-mile trail called the Camino Real—the King's Highway. San Francisco was one of those missions, founded in 1776, the same year America was born. And its presidio flew the flag of the king of Spain—but by 1808 California wasn't Spain's anymore, because way across the Atlantic, Napoleon was taking all of Europe, and he'd put the Spanish king in prison. Then Mexico declared independence, and for some twenty-five years California was Mexican.

Whites finally started coming to California in significant numbers when they realized there was money to be made. And when they did, they were like a hurricane, clearing out everything that stood in their way. Before the white incursion, the indigenous population of California numbered some three

hundred thousand. Maybe a third of the natives of the continental United States lived in California. By 1900, only sixteen thousand remained.

The first wave came for fur. Backed by financiers from England and Boston, these sea-toughened hunters and traders couldn't believe the treasure they found in the waters of San Francisco Bay.

Otters. Countless otters, teeming, bobbing, defenseless.

What's so special about otters? I'll tell you what. Their glossy, inch-thick, jet-black pelt is the thickest fur of any animal on earth. You know who wore otter in those days? The emperors of China. And anyone else rich enough to afford it. Otter fur was so valuable it was known as soft gold.

Wading in to shore from their schooner, the hunters would set traps for otter pups in shallow water, near the beach. The unsuspecting pups, with their white-fur panda faces, would swim happily into those baited traps. When those traps closed their jaws, the pups' sudden terrified squeals would bring crowds of adult otters streaming in to save their young. Which is just what the hunters wanted. In short order the whole romp—that's what you call a group of otters, unless they're floating in water, in which case you call them a raft—the whole romp would be dead, their pelts ripped clean from their bones in just a few deft strokes. The luxurious skins would then be shipped all over the world, but especially to China, where aristocrats would pay small fortunes for them.

The English and Bostonian financiers got rich, but after a few reckless years, the innumerable otters were gone. After wiping out the otters, the hunters turned next to seals, then to beaver. And when these too were exterminated, the hunters too disappeared, just like their prey. By 1845, the Fur Rush was over, and San Francisco fell back into a lulling and deceptive repose.

As late as 1846 the city of San Francisco wasn't a city at all. It wasn't even a village. It was a settlement, a ramshackle encampment still under Mexican dominion ruled by wealthy rancheros, with some two hundred inhabitants living among sand dunes around an inauspicious harbor beset by impenetrable fogs and summers as cold as winters.

But then in 1848, two momentous events occurred within a week of each other. One was the signing of a treaty in Guadalupe Hidalgo, bringing

America's war on Mexico to a successful close—for America, that is—and turning California into United States territory. The other was the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill, with San Francisco the nearest port.

Within a year, a thousand people were pouring through that port every week. By 1849, San Francisco's population had grown to twenty-five thousand. By 1853, fifty thousand. By 1869, one hundred fifty thousand. There was nothing on the West Coast remotely like it. San Francisco in 1869 was twenty-five times the size of Los Angeles.

Over the next decade, the West's four greatest railroad tycoons—Stanford, Hopkins, Huntington, and Crocker—began erecting fabulous residences on top of the commanding California Hill, which from then on would be known as Nob Hill, “nob” being slang for a grandee, from the Hindi word *nabob*. Of these residences, the Hopkins mansion was the most famous, staggering in its dimensions; they say its gallery rivaled the greatest cathedrals of France.

Nob Hill's been the pinnacle of San Francisco ever since. Even during the Depression, as thousands of workingmen took to sleeping in flophouses, in pool rooms, and on the sidewalks south of Market Street, Nob Hill embodied the zenith of wealth and power. On the peak of Nob Hill rose the city's grandest hotels—like the Mark Hopkins, built on the site of the Hopkins mansion—open only to whites, its most expensive apartment buildings, open only to whites, its most exclusive private club, open only to white men, and its soaring Episcopal cathedral, open to anyone who could afford to live on top of Nob Hill, meaning basically only whites.

“You make history so interesting, Al,” said Miriam when we arrived at our destination, right on top of Nob Hill. “I told my friend Icehouse it's like watching the movies when you tell it. Not like school where it's so boring.”

I'd given Miriam pretty much the unvarnished version. I thought she could handle it. Besides, why sugarcoat stuff that actually happened? I parked and told Miriam to wait for me in the car. Then I walked downhill a block to a stately four-story Beaux Arts mansion.

It was eight in the morning on Sunday, and I was pushing it. Chief Greening had told me point-blank I couldn't bring the Bainbridge girls down to the station for questioning—but he hadn't said anything about me talking

to them in their own homes, on my own time. I rang the bell.

2

A stout housekeeper with a flustered demeanor opened the door. I showed her my badge.

“Morning, ma’am. Detective Al Sullivan. I’m here to see Miss Isabella Stafford.”

“Police! Goodness gracious.” Her eyes lit up with busybody interest. “What’s that girl got up to now?”

“Is she in, ma’am?”

Looking wounded, she took my hat and invited me to follow her. As she led me over marble floors past a curving staircase, I could hear her muttering, “That’s right—don’t tell Mrs. Biddleston anything. No one ever does. But do you ever hear me complain? Never.”

“How long you been working here, ma’am?”

“Eighteen years, if you can believe it. Nineteen come December.”

“You must have a big staff to keep a grand place like this going.”

“Staff? It’s just me, taking care of the whole house. Used to be five of us, but they all left. No one else could stand it.”

“Well, you sure keep this place spotless. The Staffords are lucky to have you.”

“Here we are, Detective.” Mrs. Biddleston was beaming now. “Make yourself comfortable. I’ll go fetch Miss Stafford.”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

She deposited me in a living room out of Buckingham Palace. It smelled like gin, orchids, and expensive carpets—and something honey-like, probably a beeswax furniture polish. The ceiling was double height, the sofas pearl-gray velvet. There was a grand piano and paintings of horses and landscapes with carved wood frames that must have been four inches thick. Grand as it was, everything was the right size, the right shade, somehow not excessive. All the good taste that money could buy.

“That was quick, Detective,” said a female voice behind me. “I’m impressed.”

I turned around and found myself looking at last night’s reporter—the

one who'd told me about Madame Chiang's supposed affair with Walter Wilkinson. She was wearing a knee-length skirt that hugged her figure pretty well from the waist down, with a white blouse tucked into it that did the same above.

"You're Isabella Stafford?"

"One and the same. You look much too dark and angry for a Sunday morning, Detective Sullivan."

"Not dark or angry, miss. Just surprised." Actually, I was a little rankled, mostly because it apparently showed.

"Oh my goodness," she said. "You didn't know, did you? In that case, I take it back—I'm not impressed. But then what are you doing here?"

"I think you know exactly what I'm doing here, Miss Stafford. Kind of casts a new light on last night, doesn't it? With you being a suspect and pitching me a story about someone else doing the killing."

"I'm a suspect? How thrilling! Tell me everything. How on earth am I a suspect?"

"A witness says she saw one of you Bainbridge girls with Mr. Wilkinson outside his room at midnight on Friday. But I'm guessing you already know that from your cousin Nicole."

"What? No. I haven't spoken to Nicole. And that's absurd."

Even if Juanita Juárez couldn't tell them apart, Isabella didn't look much like Nicole. They had the same shoulder-length blond hair, but Isabella's face was heart-shaped—nothing Eastern European about it—and she had violet eyes you couldn't miss. Unless of course you were trained, like Juanita, not to look into white people's eyes. Isabella also had that birthmark on her left cheek. And while Nicole was good looking, Isabella was drop-dead beautiful.

"I'm going to need to ask you a few questions, miss. Is that all right?"

"It's more than all right. I've always wanted to be questioned by the police. And I get to see you in action. Shall we get started?"

She took a seat on a sofa, crossing her legs. I was supposed to be the one in charge, but that's not how it felt. In fact, it felt like she had the advantage on me in about four or five different ways. I sat down in an armchair and took out my pen and notebook.

"Ah, notes," she said. "I do the same thing. When I'm interviewing

people for a story, I mean. I wonder if I should get my notepad for my story about you.”

“Could you state your full name for me, miss?”

“Isabella Bainbridge Stafford.”

“You live here with your parents?”

“My mother. She’s upstairs—she’s an invalid and doesn’t leave the house anymore. My mother has had a very sad life, Detective. She’s been institutionalized many times. No doubt you’ve heard about our family’s tragedy?”

“Yes—my sympathies, miss. And your father, is he here as well?”

“Oh, let’s not talk about our parents, please. Nothing is less interesting. Come back to the murder, for heaven’s sake. Can I get you some coffee?”

“I’m fine, thanks. So are you actually a reporter, Miss Stafford?”

“Would you like to read my latest story? It’s on the psychological trauma of children in war. See for yourself.”

She was pointing to an issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* on the coffee table. On the cover, next to a Norman Rockwell illustration, Isabella’s name appeared along with two other contributors.

“I don’t think I’ll make a career out of it, journalism,” she continued. “Really I’m an aspiring failed poet. I spend most of my time writing poems that never get published, which is so much fun and so good for the ego. Speaking of ego, it was my therapist’s idea that I start writing poetry— isn’t that interesting?” She uncrossed her legs, then crossed them the other way. “Do you know anything about psychoanalysis, Detective?”

“Regular people don’t have time to lie on couches talking about their head problems, miss.”

“Oh, regular people. Is there such a thing? You don’t strike me as a regular person, Detective. Anyway, you may be a skeptic about psychotherapy, but I highly recommend it. It’s like being stripped of all your defenses. Nothing makes you feel more bare and helpless.” She paused. “May I ask why you became a policeman, Detective? You must deal all the time with the ugliest sides of human nature—murder and rape, deceit and betrayal, greed, lust, envy, hate. I imagine you’re immersed in sin day and night. Why choose such a profession?”

She was flirting with me, pretty brazenly. I figured it meant she had something to hide, but despite myself I didn't find it unpleasant. "You're always the most interesting person in the room, aren't you, Miss Stafford? You must have men eating out of the palm of your hand."

"I'm going to take that as a compliment. But I think you're avoiding the question. Why *did* you become a policeman?"

"To catch criminals, miss."

"So hard-boiled. Of course to catch criminals, but why? An analyst would guess it had something do with your father. Freud believed all men want to kill their fathers. It's not conscious, and it's not something anyone can be blamed for. I've had fantasies of killing my mother. I didn't even know it until I was analyzed. I want to kill her so I can stop living in fear she'll kill herself. Oh my goodness, what am I doing? You're investigating a murder, and I'm telling you I have fantasies about killing people! I have an idea," she said, rising abruptly. "Let's get some air. Shall we go out to the garden?"

"Sit down, miss. I need to know what you were doing Friday night between the hours of eight and midnight."

Sighing, she sat down. "If you're going to interrogate a girl, at least offer her a cigarette."

I held out a pack, and she took one. Then I had to light it for her, and she touched my hand as I did, which might have been the whole point. But I'll say this for her: she was one of those women who look good smoking. Pretty hands, I guess. Pretty a lot of things.

"On Friday night," she said, blowing smoke, "I was in Sonoma, with my cousins at our country house. We had a plan to go to hunting for the weekend."

"So you weren't at the Claremont Hotel that night—or any time that day?"

"No."

"Did you know Walter Wilkinson? Did you ever meet him before?"

"I attended a party once where he was also a guest. It was last Christmas, at Madame Chiang's house on Avalon Avenue in Berkeley. That's where I learned about his trip to China, and his—what's the right word?—liaison

with Madame Chiang. But don't ask me how I found out. I've already told you—I'm not giving away my source."

"Your cousin Nicole was also at that party?"

"Yes."

"Did she speak with Wilkinson?"

"I don't think so. She detested him."

"Did you speak with him?"

"Briefly. I told him I was a reporter for the *Tribune* and asked if I could write a story about him."

"And?"

"He agreed."

"But you never did the interview?"

"No. I never saw him again."

I nodded, taking notes. "How'd you get to Sonoma on Friday, if you don't mind my asking?"

"I drove up with Nicole that evening."

"How was the hunting, miss? Did you land anything?"

"Not a thing. It was the first time for Nicole and me—Cassie's the hunter—and we weren't too impressive. I don't think either of us got off a single shot."

"That was a mistake, miss."

"I'm sorry?"

"When you're trying to coordinate an alibi with somebody, you don't want to tune the details that close."

"I take it that means I'm still a suspect, Detective?"

"At this point everyone's a suspect, Miss Stafford."

"Do you have any more questions?"

"I think that's it for now—actually, I do have one more question. Do you happen to know Madame Chiang Kai-Shek's first name?"

"As a matter of fact I do. It's Mei-Ling. She's one of the three famous Soong sisters. Why?"

So now I knew who Wilkinson had tea with at three o'clock the day he died. I thanked Isabella for her time, and she led me back through Buckingham Palace with its wide corridors and drawing rooms and Oriental

rugs. It felt more like a museum than a house. I was nearly at the front door, about to grab my hat from the stand, when I happened to glance to my left—and stopped dead in my tracks.

Hanging on a wall of a library I hadn't seen on my way in was a large oil painting of two little girls. On the left was clearly a young Isabella, about five years old. Standing next to her and staring straight at me was a girl with long dark curls, just slightly older.

It was the girl from my dream.

Same pale skin. Same eyes. Same dress.

How was that possible?

“Detective? Are you all right?”

“What?”

She touched my arm, looking at me intently. “Is everything okay?”

“I had a strange dream last night is all, and there was a little girl in it who looked, well, a lot like the girl next to you in that painting.”

“That's Iris.”

“I figured. But you know, come to think of it, miss, it's not so strange—I must have seen photos of her at the time of—of—”

“—the accident.”

“They must have stayed with me somehow.”

“Yes, that makes sense. There were photographs of her all over the papers. And if it's any comfort, you're not the only one, Detective. A lot of people have dreams about Iris. Especially if they're staying at the Claremont.”

It wasn't any comfort.

3

Outside the Staffords', I tried to clear my brain. A clanging cable car was climbing up the steep street to the top of Nob Hill.

One thing was clear. I had to pay a call at the Bainbridges' country house and I had to do it fast, if there was any chance of getting to the bottom of the girls' convenient joint alibi before they'd completely coordinated their stories.

“Jiminy Cricket, Al,” Miriam said when I got back to my car. “What

happened?”

I started backing out. “Jiminy Cricket? What kind of Goody Two-shoes talk is that? You used to swear up a storm.”

“That’s when I was kid, Al.”

“You’re still a kid, Miriam.”

“I was just going through a stage. Things change, Al. People grow. No more swearing and smoking for me. Where are we headed, by the way? Don’t forget I have to work today. I gotta be at the five-and-dime by noon.”

“Damn it, I did forget,” I said, hitting the brakes. I was about to ask her why she had to work on a Sunday—the five-and-dime wasn’t even open on Sundays—when the radio crackled my vehicle number.

“B squad six, come in please. B squad six, do you read?”

I picked up the receiver. “This is B squad six. Come back.”

“Detective Sullivan?” said Jackie, our communications officer. I could barely hear her; I was too far away. “I have Officer O’Gar for you. Do you read?”

“Dicky?” I said. “Put him through, Jackie.”

“Hi, Boss,” said Dicky O’Gar.

“What is it, Dicky? I don’t have all day.”

“You know how you told Petrocelli and me to go through the list of all the people who checked out of the Claremont yesterday to see if there was anybody we didn’t talk to? And you know I told you that we got them all?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, we did get them all.”

“Then why are you calling me?”

“Because there was this one lady we didn’t interview because she didn’t check out. Jane Chao. Chinese.”

“So if she hasn’t checked out, go interview her now. What’s the problem?”

“That’s the thing, Boss. She’s gone. She checks in the day Wilkinson was shot, and when a maid goes in her room the next morning, she’s gone—just gone. And get this. The address she gave when she checked in is a Berkeley address. Why would she stay at the Claremont if she lived in Berkeley?”

“Okay—go to that address, and if you find this Jane Chao, bring her to the station and wait for me there.”

“I already went to her address. It was the West Berkeley library. What about that, Boss—her address was a library. So I asked the guy behind the desk if he knows a Jane Chao, and he says let me think—and then he remembers there’s a Chinese woman who comes in here all the time, and he gives me her name and address.”

“Dicky, this is good police work. Better than good.”

“Thanks, Boss.”

“So did you find her?” I asked.

“Who?”

“The Chinese woman who checks out books.”

“No, it wasn’t Jane Chao, Boss,” said Dicky. “It was some other lady. I can’t even pronounce the name. Chow-Shee or something or other. It was a dead end.”

“Wait—you didn’t go talk to her?”

“To Chow-Shee? No. What for? It wasn’t Jane Chao.”

“For Christ’s sake.” I considered telling Dicky to go there now, but I couldn’t trust him. “Give me the address.”

4

“So who were you interviewing in that fancy house?” Miriam asked.

I’d turned the La Salle around and was heading back to the East Bay to take Miriam to work and follow up on Dicky’s lead. Sonoma would have to wait. “A possible murder suspect.”

“Whoa.” Miriam’s eyes opened wide. “What was he like?”

“She. Annoying. She asked me why I became a cop.”

Miriam looked puzzled. “What’s annoying about that? Why *did* you become a cop?”

What was annoying was that, coming from Isabella, it felt like a classic rich girl’s question—as if the world were my cornucopia and I’d had so many options. What else was I going to be, a nuclear physicist? But Miriam was right—it really wasn’t such a bad question. Especially after what the police did to my father.

Up and down California, local police were the muscle who “repatriated” Mexicans after the Crash. Immigration agents didn’t come to our house and take my dad and brothers away. Cops did. So why did I become one?

Because I was hell-bent on escaping my legacy—that’s why. My freshman year roommate at Berkeley, a rich boy from a banking family, once said to me, after I made the mistake, never repeated again, of talking about my family, “Oh man, do you come from a long line of losers!” I almost took a swing at him, but then I realized that would just prove his point. Besides, he wasn’t even trying to be insulting. Plus he’d nailed it.

My mom’s dad shot his own dad in the face and spent the rest of his life in the slammer. My mom’s mom was a drunk who died before forty. Even my dad’s father was a loser. What Jew in the 1880s goes to Mexico instead of America? There couldn’t have been more than a couple hundred in the whole country. And what Jew loses all his money, for Christ’s sake? My dad’s father—Moses Gottlieb was his name—earned enough as a peddler to marry a Mexican girl and open up a pawn shop in Guadalajara. But he did too well. Basically he was a moneylender to the town’s aristocracy, and when they couldn’t pay up, he’d sell their pawned jewelry, which he had every right to do, but eventually the rich turned the town against him and his store was smashed to pieces and they stole all the jewelry and they even took him out on the street and cut off his beard and pissed on him.

After that, Moses moved to a different town and opened a new store using his wife’s—my grandmother’s—last name, Gutiérrez. His sons, including my dad, took that surname too. My dad would probably have been fine there, but in his teens he went north to the land of opportunity, where no matter how hard he worked, everyone saw him as a lazy freeloader stealing jobs from real Americans—which is why he ended up being deported.

That’s my lineage. Generations of suspects. But I didn’t say any of that to Miriam because a lot of it was her legacy too. Instead, I said, “There’s a suspicion line in every society, Miriam, and you’re either above or below it. The people above that line, they never even think about it. They walk the streets like they own them. They take for granted that the law is there to protect them, because it is.

“But if you’re below the line, different story. Below the line, you’re what

the law protects against. Society has its constant eye on you, not just cops but average people and people lower than you—everyone. You start to look and feel like you're doing something wrong even when you're not.

“The reason I became a cop is that I wanted to be above the suspicion line. Cops are the opposite of suspects. They're the ones who do the suspecting. That goes double for detectives. We're the ones who can even suspect the cops.”

“Got it,” said Miriam, nodding. Then a wistful look came over her. “But I'm not sure I can ever be above the suspicion line.”

“What are you talking about? Trust me, if I can, you can.”

“I don't know, Al. I don't look like you.”

I felt a rush of sadness mixed with anger at the world. I didn't know what to say to her. She noticed everything, that kid. And she was growing up way too fast.

5

We pulled up at unit 167 in Codornices Village, a barracks-like public housing complex built by the US government in the Berkeley lowlands, not far from the pier and the sandlot where I used to play ball as a kid. The Berkeley waterfront was nothing when I was growing up—the municipal dump, the ferry dock, and factories like the Heinz plant, filling the air with the smell of boiling tomatoes. Which I liked. But the city—the whole Bay Area—had exploded with the war.

It was a second gold rush. Overnight, San Francisco became the biggest naval port on the West Coast, and the East Bay the biggest shipbuilding center in the history of the world. After Pearl Harbor, when they basically took out America's Pacific fleet, the Japs thought we were done—we'd never be players in the Pacific theater again. FDR thought otherwise. The US Navy started building warships at a clip no one thought humanly possible—over a thousand in all, battleships, cargo ships, transport ships, aircraft carriers the size of small towns—and the East Bay was where it all happened, because warships from back East would have taken forever to get here, and because the San Francisco Bay was the biggest, best protected natural ocean harbor in the world. Colossal shipyards sprang up out of nowhere all over the East Bay,

with the Kaiser yards in Richmond the biggest of all. Henry Kaiser, a high school dropout, figured out how to revolutionize the whole shipbuilding process, modeling his assembly lines on Ford's automotive factories. The Kaiser yards once built a warship from scratch in four days.

And that meant jobs. All told, close to a half million people had come pouring into the East Bay—people who'd been starving for work for ten years—because there were finally jobs, jobs everywhere, too many jobs to fill, jobs paying more than most workingmen had ever seen in their lifetimes.

There was no place to put all the newcomers. Entire families were living in people's garages, without a toilet or water. Landlords were renting out single beds to two different people, a day worker and a night worker, who would each get the room for twelve hours a day. Plenty were living out of their old rust-bucket cars.

Folks came from as far as Kentucky and North Carolina to find jobs in golden California. If they were white, people called them "Okies" or "Arkies" no matter what state they came from, and those terms were not compliments. I remember my mom being called Okie; it basically meant dumb hillbilly. But the Blacks had it worst, as usual.

Before the war, there couldn't have been more than five thousand Blacks in all of San Francisco; in Berkeley, maybe four thousand tops. Now the Bay was home to probably sixty thousand. They had come by the trainload—the Southern Pacific had a direct from New Orleans to San Francisco—full of hope. But instead of a promised land, they found themselves once more at the bottom of the heap, relegated not only to the most menial and low-paying jobs but the most dangerous. The unions wouldn't even let employers hire them. At Port Chicago, just twenty-five miles from Berkeley, the navy made Black sailors load live bombs and torpedoes onto ships without even minimal safety precautions, until one day the whole facility blew up and 320 men were killed, two-thirds of them Black. White officers got thirty-day survivor's leave to recover, while Black enlisted men were forced to clean up the wreckage—including the body parts of their fallen brethren—and then told to get back to work. A month later, when fifty Black sailors refused to keep loading munitions under the same conditions, the navy court-martialed them for mutiny and sentenced every one of them to fifteen years' hard labor.

The reason for Codornices Village was that Berkeley's whites wouldn't rent to Blacks. There was nowhere for them to live. The federal government even offered the city money to build housing for them, but Berkeley refused. So the feds built the Village themselves, with twenty-five percent of the units reserved for Negroes—in a section mostly segregated from everyone else.

I told Miriam to wait in the car and knocked at unit 167. No answer. I tried the knob—the door was unlocked, which didn't seem right, not in a public housing complex. I'd lived in one after they took my dad, leaving Mom and me with no money, and I'm not saying you don't trust your neighbors, but you keep your door locked, especially for a ground-floor unit like this one. I probably shouldn't have, but there was something funny about the whole thing, something too still—anyway, I opened the door and went in.

The first thing I noticed was a faint smell—like a dentist's office and a butcher shop at the same time. I was in a small hallway, dark with a low ceiling. The apartment didn't feel unoccupied, although I couldn't have said why. Then my eyes adjusted and I saw the blood spots on the hallway floor.

When I turned the corner, I saw the body. There was more blood in that room than a slaughterhouse—not just on the linoleum, but spattered on all the furniture and the walls as well.

The victim was a young Chinese woman lying on her side, her arms thrown this way and that. She was a perfect match for the description Jessup had given me of the prostitute he saw coming out Wilkinson's room around seven thirty the night of his murder: late twenties maybe, with long black shining hair, wearing a once-green slim-fitting Oriental evening dress with a slit way up the side—about as blood-soaked as any article of clothing I've ever seen. The coroner would have to say for sure, but she looked like she might have been lying there for more than a day, which meant she could have been killed the night of Wilkinson's murder.

She had been hacked to death. There was deep gash in her throat—it went from end to end, and looked to be a couple of inches deep. There were similar gashes in her stomach and on her side and on her shoulders, thighs, and wrists. One of her hands was almost chopped clean off.

And there was a hatchet buried in the base of her skull.

“Hey Al,” said a voice behind me, “throw me your car keys.”

I spun around. It was Miriam.

“Miriam—go back to the car,” I said, trying to block the view so she wouldn’t see the body.

“That’s the problem, Al. A cop came by and said he was going to have the car towed.”

“He can’t tow my car. It’s a police car.”

“I tried to tell him that, but he didn’t believe me. He’s Albany PD, and he’s never heard of you. He said he was going around the block and if the car was still there when he came back, he was going to tow it. You’re blocking a driveway that trucks are trying to come out of.”

“I can’t move the car now,” I said.

“I’ll move it.”

“Miriam, you’re eleven. You can’t drive.”

“You know I can drive.”

I did know it. She was a pretty good driver actually. I was the one who taught her how, down on San Pablo Avenue.

“I mean you can’t drive legally.”

“These are extenuating circumstances, Al.”

I tossed her my keys and told her to get on my radio and tell Jackie I had a homicide at Codornices unit 167. “And stay in the car after that, you hear me?”

6

A half hour later, I’d managed to get two boys down from the station, Dicky and Petrocelli, to secure the scene and keep out the gathering crowd. Coroner Emerson himself was going to come handle the body, and he was taking care of the ambulance crew; the East Bay hadn’t had a corpse like this one in decades.

Because of all the blood, I hadn’t discovered the most gruesome fact about her body until I’d gotten a closer look. The fingernails on her left hand were gone. It looked like they’d been torn off.

Other than the mess of her own body, the woman’s unit was scrupulously clean. Plants were growing on the lone windowsill under a white lace curtain. There was a chest of drawers with a framed sepia

photograph on it, of a little Chinese boy; the picture didn't look like it had been taken in America. Books were piled up on the floor in a corner of the small room, and a couple of scrolls with Oriental characters hung on a wall. Every last thing was blood-spattered.

I'd been in plenty of hookers' places, and this apartment didn't look like one. There were no cheap perfumes, no fake stoles in the closet, no high heels, no lingerie in the drawers.

I came back outside in the sunlight, where I'd left Dicky and Petrocelli posted by the door.

"Geez," said Dicky, "who kills somebody with a hatchet?"

"Did you notice the handle?" I asked him. Most of the hatchet's long wooden handle had been cut off, leaving only six inches—just enough for a man to get a good grip, while otherwise hiding the weapon in his clothing. "That's what the highbinders used to use."

"The what?"

In the old days, Chinatown gangs had their own executioners, called highbinders because they'd tie their queue up on the top of their heads so whoever they were fighting couldn't grab it. Supposedly the highbinders liked hatchets, and they liked leaving the hatchet sticking out their victim's skull when they were done. But I hadn't heard about any hatchet jobs for a long time.

"Listen," I said to Petrocelli, "I have to drive up to Sonoma. I need you to get on the horn and call the SFPD. Ask for anybody on their Chinatown squad and tell them about this and tell them I want to set up a meet with them. Then do some interviewing here—find out as much about the victim as you can. Dicky, make sure you seal up this room tight."

7

Jackie was calling my unit number on the radio when I got back in my car. Miriam was in the front passenger seat.

"This is Sullivan. Come in, Jackie."

"Detective? Mr. Archimbault from the crime lab wants to talk to you."

"I can't come to the station, Jackie," I said. "No time. See if you can get him to talk to me by radio."

A minute later Archimbault's voice crackled out. "I've got some information for you," he said, "about that Dy-Dee doll you found in Wilkinson's closet—the one with the melted foot?"

"I'm listening, Archie."

"Dy-Dee dolls were first manufactured in 1930. Extremely popular—apparently they were the first dolls to drink and wet. But they've changed materials over the years. The faces on the earliest models used a composite of wood dust and glue, sanded and painted. Their faces cracked, though, so two years later the company changed to all rubber. Your doll's face is composite. That means it was made in 1930 or 1931."

A fourteen-year-old doll—why? If the murderer left it, was it a message of some kind? Could Wilkinson have brought it? But for what purpose? Or could it have been lying there in that closet since 1930?

"How about the fingerprints? You told me you got a good set of prints off that doll. Any matches?"

"Yes—your decedent."

So Wilkinson had at least touched the doll. That didn't prove anything, of course. He might have seen it on the floor of his closet, picked it up, and put it back. "Much obliged, Archie. You're the top."

That's when I realized Miriam hadn't said anything.

"You all right, Miriam?"

"Was ... was that a dead person?"

"Yeah," I said. "That was a crime scene."

"Was it the woman who went to the library all the time?"

I was kicking myself. How stupid was I to bring Miriam everywhere with me on police business? This was bound to happen sooner or later. "Probably."

"What happened to her?"

"I don't know yet. It's my job to find out."

Miriam nodded. We drove in silence for a while.

Then she said, "Did you know you talk different to different people?"

"What?"

"Yeah. Like when you're talking to Archie, you sound totally different than when you're talking to Dicky."

“Oh. Right. I guess I just adjust to my audience.”

“I have a lot to learn from you, Al.”

“You don’t have to learn that from me. You shouldn’t learn that from me. It’s not always a good thing. Just be yourself.”

“No, thanks. I want to be way better than my current self.”

I felt a jab of admiration and pain. And about a hundred other feelings I couldn’t even put a name to. I knew just how she felt. It was so close to home that I couldn’t say anything at all.

I dropped her off at the five-and-dime and headed north for Sonoma.

8

Even with no traffic on a weekend, it took me over an hour to get to the Sonoma Valley—the wooded playgrounds of the rich and powerful. Driving up along the winding Napa River, through mile after mile of forest, you catch glimpses of mansions surrounded by thousand-acre estates, like Jack London’s ranch. People don’t know it, but Sonoma was the first piece of California that Americans wrested from Mexico. Right after the US declared war on Mexico in May of 1846, some thirty armed American lowlife filibusters overran the undefended little town of Sonoma, got drunk, hoisted up a flag with a bear on it, and declared California an independent republic. Soon enough California would be US territory, but Sonoma was where it all began.

When I was little—maybe five or six—my dad once asked me, “If there’s another war between the US and Mexico, which side are you going to fight for?” I just stared at him dumbly—I didn’t know what the right answer was. Then he tousled my hair and said, “Don’t you worry, gringo—you’ll fight for America. But watch out. Because the true question is, which side is going to shoot you?”

In the twenties, every August, my dad would send me and my brothers up to Sonoma to join the other Mexican pickers racing to harvest the ripe grapes. Back then Sonoma was a major wine producer. It was backbreaking work and they paid us pennies, but it was also kind of fun and we thought we were making a fortune. Then Prohibition came, and that was all she wrote for California wines. Even now, more than ten years later, driving up through the

Sonoma Valley, I saw vineyard after vineyard lying fallow. Probably they'd never come back.

I figured that the Bainbridges' "country house" was going to be a castle, and I was right. It was almost noon when I rang at the massive wooden double front door. No one answered, so I walked around the side, following a winding path that led to a vast estate in the rear.

From somewhere in the distance came a whacking or sawing noise. I followed it, passing a pen where hogs of all sizes were mingling with chickens. There were stables back there too, along with smaller sheds, servants' cottages, and a host of other outbuildings. They must have had at least two hundred acres. The sawing was coming from one of those outbuildings, a red barn with an open front door.

I peered inside. The day had already been bloodier than any I'd ever had before as a cop, but it turned out I hadn't seen anything yet. Inside the barn, where shafts of sunlight poured in through roof windows, a large animal of some kind was hanging feet up from a meat hook and Cassie Bainbridge, with her back to me, was going at it with a butcher's saw. She was wearing hunting trousers and fisherman's boots and a full-body canvas apron. Her hair was swept into a ponytail and pinned up in a loose knot on top of her head. She was standing in a pool of blood, but her body was going back and forth, back and forth, furiously, wildly. The animal was already skinned, and Cassie was sawing through its breastbone. When she cracked through, she tossed the saw on the ground, took a big curved knife, and slashed open its neck so wide I could see its windpipe. Then with the same knife she ripped open the carcass from stem to stern, and all the innards of that creature spilled out at her feet, sloshing onto her boots.

I've seen animals skinned before, but I've never seen one opened up so—savagely. I don't think of myself as a weak-stomached man, and probably it was the combined effect of the hatchet job I'd witnessed in Berkeley, but I had to turn away. A twig broke under one of my shoes; Cassie heard it and spun around, curved knife held high.

"Who's there?" she called out, her body erect and alert.

A peculiar image came to me. Even in a butcher's apron, the third Bainbridge girl—with her long neck, chin held high, arm raised with a lethal

weapon—looked like Artemis. All she needed was a golden bow and a quiver of golden arrows.

“Detective Al Sullivan, Berkeley PD. Sorry to barge in on you like this, Miss Bainbridge.”

“What are you doing here?”

That curved blade of hers was poised above her head like she might throw it at me.

“I don’t know what you’re scared of, miss,” I said. “You’re the one holding the big knife.”

“I’m sorry,” she said, lowering the weapon and approaching me, wiping her forehead with the back of a leather glove and accidentally painting a streak of blood over her eyes. “I don’t have any time right now. You’ll have to come back another day.”

“Too busy slaughtering?”

“Things are very hectic at the farm today, and my farmhands don’t know how to do their jobs—it’s that time of year.”

“What time of year is that, miss?”

“Can you find your own way out, Detective?”

She kept glancing at her watch with an urgency that didn’t match the necessities of farm work.

“I just have a few questions, miss. Could you tell me where you were Friday night, between eight and midnight?”

“Friday? I was here with my sister, Nicky, and my cousin Issy. They drove up and spent the night.”

“What time did they get here?”

“I’m sorry, Detective, but I have to get back to work.”

“How about your farmhands—could I talk to them?”

“Why?”

“Just so they can confirm that Nicole and Isabella were here with you that night, and I can rule all of you out. It won’t take me a minute.”

“I’m sorry, but we’re all much too busy.”

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to insist, Miss Bainbridge.”

“And I’m going to have to insist you don’t.”

I stared at her.

“We’re not in Berkeley,” she said. “I don’t think you have any authority here.”

“Then I’ll have local police come take a statement—would you prefer that?”

She looked so infuriated I thought she might take that knife to me after all, but then she seemed to change her mind and said, “All right. I can give you five minutes—that’s it. I’ll meet you in the house. The door’s open. I just have to change out of this gear, and I’ll be right there.”

I thanked her, retraced my path, and let myself in the lodge. The main room was dim, cool, and cavernous. There were dark timber beams high overhead and two enormous stone fireplaces facing each other, one at either end. Wrought-iron chandeliers hung from the high ceiling. On the walls were moose heads, buck heads, elk heads, all with majestic antlers. On the floor, mixed in with Persian rugs, were skins and furs of animals I couldn’t identify, as well as a splayed flattened whole black bear, head and all. Stained-glass windows filtered in sunlight tinted purple and red. The place was like a cathedral where the gods were animal carcasses.

Against one long wall was a set of glass-fronted gun cabinets. There must have been fifty rifles, standing upright, some of them older than I was, and an equal number of handguns hung on hooks. It was the largest home collection of firearms I’d ever seen.

Suddenly I was shoved aside, almost lifted off the floor, by a four-legged animal. Convinced it was a bear, I drew and spun around, gun in hand, only to see a white-tailed deer trotting toward a metal bowl on the floor, filled with corn and leaves and lettuce. The animal ate from its bowl happily, paying no mind to me whatsoever—or to the stuffed trophy heads of its dead compatriots gazing out vacantly from the walls. Apparently the huntress kept a pet deer.

I waited ten minutes with no sign of Cassie before deciding something was wrong. Back outside, there were no more sawing or hacking sounds—just the clucking of chickens and grunting of hogs. I walked to the barn where I’d talked with Cassie and stopped at its open door.

The skinned creature was still hanging from its meat hook, swaying gently and dripping blood. Otherwise the place looked empty.

“Miss Bainbridge?” I called out.

No answer. At the back of the barn, I saw an open door. I went through, then down a stairway that led to a basement storage room with animal feed, crates of root vegetables, and glass jars of all sizes. At the back of that room was another door, half-open.

That door led to another, larger underground room filled like a dormitory with a dozen cots. One of those cots was covered by a bloodstained sheet, and next to it, on the floor, lay an overturned intravenous stand, along with a couple rolls of gauze, a pair of scissors, and more medical equipment. What was I looking at?

At the far end of the room light was pouring in through an open bulkhead door at the top of a short flight of steps. I ran across the room, up the stairs, through the door—and found myself outside in the woods. Not twenty feet away was a river and dock, the calm waters undisturbed by the hot temper rising inside me. Right in front of me was a dirt road, running parallel to the river, where fresh tread marks and pebble scatter showed that a car had been parked there but had recently pulled away.

Cassie had ditched me. I didn’t know whether I was more pissed off or baffled. Why? And now what? I couldn’t get a warrant issued for her, because I had nothing to arrest her for. I couldn’t even take evidence or collect prints from the basement room because I had no jurisdiction. The best I was going to be able to do was radio the Sonoma sheriff’s office and see if they’d investigate, which I doubted because the Bainbridge family probably had local law enforcement in their pockets.

I looked at my watch and cursed. By the time I got back to Berkeley, night would be falling. Another day gone, another day without a crack in the case. I could just picture the look on Greening’s face when I told him I wanted to put out an all-points bulletin on Cassie Bainbridge—whom I’d questioned in direct defiance of his orders—and also to interview Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. It was more likely he’d fire me than say yes to either.

PART TWO

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Chapter Eleven

MRS. BAINBRIDGE'S TESTIMONIAL
PREPARED FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY DOOGAN
IN CONNECTION WITH HER DEPOSITION
TAKEN ON THE FIFTEENTH OF MARCH, 1944

I don't like to admit this, Mr. Doogan—and for years I didn't—but the reason I'm so close with all three of my granddaughters is that my own children weren't good parents. Neither Sadie nor John. Quite deficient, actually.

In Sadie's case, one must have compassion; I don't know who could have borne up under the ghastly misfortunes that befell her. It's true that she kept making the most destructive decisions, over and over, which I initially ascribed to libido and bad luck, a terrible combination, but I now wonder if she might have inherited an illness—a mental illness—from Lionel's side of the family. He had an aunt who was mad as a March hare. She had no empathy whatsoever; she hated cats and dogs—all pets—and would kick them when they didn't behave. I once saw her take a goldfish and rip its head off.

As for my son, John, why was he such a poor father? I think the most honest explanation is that he married a vain, superficial woman—Justyna, a penniless descendant of the last king of Poland, who combined extravagant taste with a total lack of providence. I'm not sure there was ever any love between them. The relationship was more like a business transaction. She brought a title to the family, which John found irresistible, although I can't imagine why—the American obsession with European nobility has always baffled me. On his end, John contributed the fortune Justyna needed to live the way she felt people in her station were entitled, and perhaps required, to live. While never technically estranged, John and Justyna cohabited in form only; from early on, I think he could barely stand being in her presence. I saw him wince every time Justyna recounted the day years ago when she was presented to the Queen of England wearing a sapphire necklace (borrowed) that cost a million dollars.

Her improvidence was genuinely extreme; she would often insist on having Russian caviar for lunch, even when she was dining alone at home. I think John was so overwhelmed by the responsibility of maintaining his exorbitantly expensive wife, he had neither the time nor the energy to pay attention to his twin daughters. He did hunt with Cassie, but mainly as a way of escaping from his wife—I did not detect any kind of special bond developing between father and daughter as a result of it. In fact, I believe he detested hunting. He was too cowardly to be good at it and too squeamish to enjoy it.

By contrast, Cassie was a natural huntress. She's built like a stag herself, with strong limbs, a sturdy neck, and monumental posture. When pursuing her prey, she thinks like a predator, waiting patiently, anticipating her quarry's next move, acting decisively when the time comes. And she is utterly fearless when it comes to sinew, blood, and bone. I don't know where she gets it from;

neither the Hopkinses nor the Bainbridges have ever been hunters.

And yet she loves the animals she hunts. I have never understood that. How can a person kill what he loves? Once, when Cassie was sixteen, she returned from a hunt carrying in her arms a newborn fawn. I happened to be at the country house in Sonoma that weekend. I don't think I'd ever seen Cassie so stubborn and determined.

It turned out she had killed the fawn's mother. Apparently she'd executed a perfect "double-shoulder" shot, severing the spine at once with a single round. Unlike her father, who when he didn't miss his target entirely usually caught the poor creature in its belly or flank, so that it ran off through the woods in horrific pain, Cassie invariably killed her prey instantly, sparing it that torture. But that day something was wrong. The fallen doe's lower stomach was grossly distended. And for one moment, as Cassie would later tell us, the tip of a dark little nose protruded from the doe's nether parts, just below the tail—then disappeared.

Without hesitation—and as her father turned away in revulsion—Cassie drew a jagged hunting knife from her bag, knelt beside the dead deer, and sliced her belly open. The fawn was right there, on its side, ears back, eyes closed. Cassie sawed the umbilical cord and tore away the sac; the soaking, matted creature took its first breaths in her arms.

At the country house, carrying that newborn in both arms, Cassie's first words were spoken to me: "I'm keeping it."

"What?" John objected. "Out of the question. It's a bloody mess, and who's going to look after it? I told her not to bring it home," he said to me. "I told her that nature will dispose. Better than we can. Talk some sense into her, will you?"

"Perhaps Mr. Sasaki can raise it," I suggested. Kaz Sasaki was the caretaker at our country house.

"Sasaki?" said John. "He's barely managing as it is."

Mr. Sasaki, who had joined us in the foyer, did not in fact look well-pleased by my suggestion. A stroke the previous year had left him with a severe limp, and I suppose he had little inclination to add to his duties the raising of a baby deer.

"Then I'll bring her to San Francisco," said Cassie.

"You can't raise a deer in the city," said John. "It's illegal."

Suddenly a voice from behind us said, "What a sweetie! Give her to me. I'll take care of her."

We turned and saw a tall Japanese American young woman in her mid-twenties with short hair and broad shoulders.

"You remember my daughter Yuko," Mr. Sasaki said, unable to keep the pride of out of his voice. "She just graduated from UCLA. Yuko, you met Mr. Bainbridge, Mrs. Bainbridge, and Miss Cassie Bainbridge many years ago."

"Of course!" Yuko said. "Nice to see you again. Now, what do you say we get this poor little thing some warm goat's milk?"

A look came over Cassie that I couldn't quite place. "Thank you," she said, gently placing the baby fawn into Yuko's arms.

1944

MONDAY, MARCH 13

1

“*Adversary.*”

“Opponent. Enemy.”

“*Banish.*”

“Kick out.”

“Exact definition please.”

“To send away.”

“As punishment,” I said. “To send away as punishment.”

“Like your dad?” asked Miriam.

“No, not like him. Well, I don’t know. Maybe. *Circumnavigate.*”

“Oh come on, Al. People don’t really use words like that.”

“You bet they do. People who matter. Who can make or break your life with their little finger.”

“Got it. To go all the way around something. Like the world.”

“That’s right,” I said, impressed. “That’s good, Miriam. Real good.”

We were at my place in West Berkeley. It was early Monday morning, and I was ironing one of my two white work shirts. The other one was hanging on a clothesline behind me, along with some socks and shorts. One shirt I washed, one I wore—that was my daily drill. I also owned two suits, and I pressed one of those every morning too. They were expensive, but I’d learned years ago that people take a man differently depending on the suit he wears and how well it’s pressed. Same with shoes—my work shoes were ten

years old, but I shined them every day.

Miriam was sitting in an old rocker I'd picked up from the side of the road a while back. For four straight days now Rosemary hadn't come home. It infuriated me. I know she had a tough life, but we all had tough lives—and she had a kid for Christ's sake, a good kid, a kid paying the rent for her. Miriam had been putting in too many hours lately at the five-and-dime for my liking.

“You doing okay at school, Miriam?”

“Come see, come saw,” Miriam said. “That's French,” she added.

I was quizzing Miriam with my old dog-eared Vis-Ed vocabulary cards—which Chief Vollmer himself gave me. A get-out-of-prison gift. Or not gift—deal. That was the deal—learn these or stay in. Best deal I ever made.

I picked up the box top and read from the inside cover: “In any career a person's opportunities are limited by the effectiveness of his vocabulary. Vis-Ed English cards can help you increase your vocabulary and your opportunities.”

“You're preaching to the choir, Al. I like words. I just don't like math. How about some spam and eggs?” she said, going to the fridge.

“Out of eggs.”

“Spam sandwich?”

My place was clean and well-organized, but I didn't keep it well-stocked. Honestly, it was a hole-in-the-wall in a lousy part of town. But I wasn't going to be there much longer. I'd put down a deposit on a house up in the Berkeley Hills, which should have been way above my pay grade, but I'd been saving up for almost ten years and, because the bank thought I was white, I'd been able to get a loan.

You can't find a city in America more prejudiced than Berkeley. The loan officer at the bank showed me a map of the city, color-coded. Everything west of Grove and down in the lowlands was red. Those neighborhoods were labelled “Hazardous,” with a “Predominance of Negroes and Orientals” as well as “Mixed Classes of Wage Earners.” That's where I lived. No bank would give you a loan for a house in a red zone. Yellow and blue neighborhoods were a step up from red, but green was best of all. The only green neighborhoods were Claremont and the Berkeley Hills—reserved

for “Pure Caucasians,” with a whites-only covenant in every deed. That made my blood boil, but I sure as hell wasn’t going to let it stop me from living where it was nice.

The house I was going to buy was on Wildcat Peak, almost at the very top, where the air sparkled like crystal in the morning and smelled like wild strawberries and freshwater brooks. It wasn’t actually a house yet. It was an old run-down stable—which is the only reason I could afford it—but I knew I could fix it up, dig a well, put in windows, big windows because it had an unbelievable view of the whole San Francisco Bay, and ever since I was a kid that’s all I wanted—a place with a view, a place to stand on high ground and look down on the world below. I hadn’t told anyone about it, not even Miriam, but the closing was in two weeks, and I had just enough money to make it.

I folded up the cot Miriam slept on and shoved it and her lamp against the wall. She still liked to have a light on next to her at night, probably because she’d spent her first two months in an incubator, with a yellow bulb over it radiating heat to keep her alive and cooking. She’d been the size of a guinea pig, her skin as wrinkled as a bat’s nose. The doctors said she didn’t have a chance. But she was a fighter, that girl, even then. I’m a sucker for that against-all-odds kind of thing. Which is why what she just said bothered me.

“What do you mean you don’t like math?”

“It’s boring. And I’m bad at it.”

“Those two statements are causally connected, Miriam. Nothing is fun until you’re good at it.”

I had a lot more to say, but just then the doorbell rang. Probably the newsboy wanting his nickel, I thought.

I gave the bottom of the door a kick then yanked at it while pulling up on the knob, because that was the only way to get it open.

Standing outside my door was Isabella Stafford. In a green dress, belted at the waist, and a matching button of a hat on her silky blond hair.

I felt like I’d been socked in the stomach.

“Good morning,” she said with a disarming smile.

I stared at her, feeling a hot anger start in my gut and rise up until my face was burning. “What are you doing here?” I asked, trying to knock the

smile off her face.

“I have something to tell you. Something important.”

“How’d you get my address?”

“I looked it up, for heaven’s sake. You seem angry, Detective.”

I wasn’t angry. I was livid. It was just like her kind to come slumming it to my place without any warning. I could just imagine how we looked to her. Me in an old gray undershirt. The clothesline strung up right across the room, with boxers hanging from it. The ironing board. My shoe polish kit. The bathroom door was open, for Christ’s sake, and she could see the john.

“You need to leave,” I said. “This is my house. It’s eight in the morning.”

“You came to *my* house at eight in the morning just yesterday.” She wasn’t the least bit fazed. “And—who is this? Hallo, there. I’m Isabella. I like your handkerchief. I like the frogs.”

I glanced back at Miriam and winced. She was standing there frozen in her raggedy overalls, with her crazy pocket square—this one with a frog pattern—her mouth slightly open. I’d never seen her like that before—speechless, dazzled.

“Are those ... *flashcards*?” Isabella continued, peering over my shoulder when Miriam didn’t respond.

I was getting madder and madder. “Visiting hours start at eight-thirty, Miss Stafford. At the stationhouse. If you have something to tell me, you can tell me there.”

I shut the door in her face.

“Al!” said Miriam, the spell broken.

“What?”

“Why were you so mean to her?”

“Want to know a good word, Miriam? Droll. D-R-O-L-L. It means quaintly amusing. That’s how she thinks of you and me. We’re just a tourist attraction to people like her.”

“Who is she? She’s ... so pretty.”

“She’s bad news. She’s the murder suspect I told you about. And never trust people who look like that, you hear me?”

I pulled my shirt on, even though the cuffs were still damp.

“Get your coat, Miriam. I’m taking you to school.”

2

According to a geology book I read, California’s history began tens of millions of years ago, when the earth’s mantle still pulsed with molten rock, and the great tectonic plates were shifting among the seas like jigsaw pieces, causing the western edge of North America to collide with the Farallon plate below the Pacific Ocean. The continent rode over the sea floor, and the landmass buckled like the hood of a car in a slow-motion head-on crash.

That’s how the Sierra Nevada was born. Same with the Berkeley Hills.

The colossal Sierra Nevada mountain range is California’s eastern border—a geologic barrier that for millennia made California a world unto itself, with its own climate, its own flora and fauna, its own indigenous peoples speaking languages heard nowhere else on the continent. Winds blow down from the mountaintops, hot and fierce, unique to California. In southern California, they call this the Santa Ana wind. In the San Francisco Bay, we call it the Diablo—or Devil—wind.

The Diablo wind flows down from the peaks of the Sierra Nevada, rushes up the Berkeley Hills, and then pours down again, sometimes reaching hurricane speeds in the spring and fall, felling telephone poles, starting fires, then spreading those fires like a bellows. One of those fires burned down almost all of North Berkeley in 1923.

Another Devil’s wind was blowing in the Berkeley Hills in 1942, the one and only other time I’d visited the Benedictine Abbey of St. Andrew. That was a day I didn’t much like remembering.

But now I was back. There was no Devil’s wind today, but still the gusts were so strong I had to hold on to my hat. The smell of burning leaves or maybe a wildfire was in the air.

3

I’d decided to stop by the abbey after dropping Miriam at school because of the two guests at the Claremont who said they’d seen a priest or friar leaving the rear of the hotel grounds around midnight on the night of the murder. In Berkeley, monks weren’t all that unusual—but at midnight, at the Claremont? If a monk had been there, it was a pretty good bet he’d come down from St.

Andrew's, which was located high up in Berkeley Hills, higher even than the Claremont.

Father Johmann, the abbot himself, answered the door. I knew Johmann from back when he was a pastor in Richmond and I was a kid growing up in El Cerrito. He was a little old man now, at least eighty, with not a hair on his head, but with the same lopsided smile I remembered. When he heard my voice, the smile faded. I hadn't even said my name yet, but he put his fingers to my cheekbones, nose, and chin, and he knew who I was. He'd done the same thing two years ago, the only other time I'd been to the abbey. I know it's churlish of me, but honestly I don't like anyone laying hands all over my face.

"It's Detective Sullivan, Father," I said. "Berkeley Police."

"I know who you are. What is it this time? Have you come to seek forgiveness?"

"For what?"

"Everyone needs forgiveness."

"The law doesn't stop at the church door, Father."

"Nor God's law outside it, Detective. What's your business with us?"

"There was a murder a few nights ago at the Claremont Hotel. You've probably heard?"

"The whole world has heard."

"A monk was seen leaving the hotel heading in this direction around midnight that night. I'm just following up."

"At midnight? My brothers are at prayer at midnight. If there was a monk at the Claremont at that hour, you must look elsewhere. St. Andrew's is not the only monastery in Berkeley or Oakland."

"Do you have personal knowledge, Father, that every single one of your monks was here at the abbey that night?"

In the darkness within the abbey behind Father Johmann, I could see a few monks gathered in a semicircle, listening to our exchange. They were all hooded, so I couldn't see their eyes.

"I will ask the brothers this evening and report back to you. Good day."

He tried to shut the door, but I stopped it. "Sorry, Father. Not good enough."

“Do you have a warrant, Detective?”

“I don’t need a warrant to go inside a church.”

“Your disrespect for sanctuary neither surprises me nor intimidates me. But I will answer your question. Brother Gratian was not at services.”

“And where was he?”

“I wouldn’t know, Detective, I’m not my brother’s keeper. Gratian is excused from prayer because of his special duties. He is our master beekeeper. This abbey is self-supporting, Detective, like every Benedictine monastery. Our product is honey, and Brother Gratian makes it for us. The sale of that honey makes everything else possible.”

“Who buys it?”

“The Claremont Hotel.”

“Is that right?”

“They buy our entire output.”

“And how does your honey get from here to the Claremont, Father?”

“Brother Gratian makes the deliveries. He walks down to the hotel himself. He goes regularly, because he can only carry so much each trip. But he would not have been there at midnight, Detective. And if he was, he would have been doing nothing more sinister than delivering honey.”

“I’ll need to have a word with him, Father.”

The abbot laughed sardonically. “I’m afraid no one can have a word with Gratian. He has taken the vow of silence, and he upholds that vow with utmost rigor.”

“What about a nonverbal yes or no?” I asked.

“I don’t think you understand what it means to believe in something, Detective, to really believe. But if you wish to question him, Detective, you’re free to try. He will be at the hives. Come with me.”

He gestured me inside the church. When he shut the heavy wooden door behind me, it was almost pitch black. There was no sunlight to speak of. The windows were just narrow vertical slits high up in the walls. The only lighting came from clusters of flickering amber candles.

Outside, the abbey looked deceptively like a welcoming farm. Inside, it was medieval—stone floor, stone walls, columns, vaults, relics, one spiral staircase going up to a library, which I’d never seen, and another going down

to a crypt, which I had.

The story was that the abbey had originally been founded in China in the nineteenth century. For some reason nobody wanted to talk about, China gave them the boot in 1925, and their parent abbey in France decided to relocate them to California, where they built a replica of the structure they had in China.

Without using a cane or even feeling his way, Father Johmann led me silently through cold, narrow corridors to a back door and out into an open field. A hundred feet away or so, past a wooden fence, was an apiary—about fifty box hives, with bees swarming all around them. A monk was tending the hives, wearing not only the usual brown cloth habit and hood but also thick, black, elbow-length leather gloves and a wicker disk where his face should have been.

Johmann clapped his hands and waved. The hooded beekeeper saw us, put down his tools, and began a slow walk in our direction, with bees straggling after him. When he was about six feet from us, he stopped, the wicker disk still covering his face. A bee was crawling on it, and a couple more were on his habit. Then he took off his gloves, revealing strong, gnarled hands, and he removed the wicker disk as well. In the shadow of his hood, I saw a sharp nose, thin lips, and glowing eyes.

“Gratian,” said Father Johmann, “this is Detective Sullivan of the Berkeley Police. You may remember him from his visit to the abbey two years ago. He’s going to ask you some questions.”

“Brother Gratian,” I said, “I understand you’ve taken the vow of silence, but I’m hoping you might be willing to indicate a yes or no to a few questions, maybe by nodding or shaking your head. How’s that sound?”

The beekeeper stood stock still, staring at me with unblinking eyes from below his hood.

“Right,” I said. “Brother Gratian, were you at the Claremont Hotel last Friday night around midnight?”

The hooded monk made no movement of any kind.

“I hope you’ll give me an answer, Brother Gratian. There could be trouble if you don’t. Trouble for you and your abbey.”

It was a little disconcerting how still he was.

“Has Brother Gratian made any gesture in response, Detective?” Father Johmann asked, although I think he knew the answer perfectly well.

“No, he has not,” I said.

“I warned you. He is not willing to communicate. That is all, Gratian. You may resume your work.”

The beekeeper placed the wicker disk over his face again and walked back toward the hives.

“I suppose you’re going to ransack my abbey now,” said Johmann.

“I’d like to see his room, if you don’t mind.”

“You make it sound as if it matters to you, having my permission.”

I didn’t answer. Legally, I couldn’t insist on going into a dwelling, not without a warrant. But the Father didn’t need to know that.

“This way then,” said Johmann, leading me inside the abbey again, this time to the monks’ quarters, where he opened a door to a small spare lodging—bed, dresser, desk with a chair, a candle on the desk. I hadn’t expected to find anything, and I didn’t. If Brother Gratian had anything to hide, he wasn’t likely to have left it in his room. There were plenty of secret nooks and crannies in the abbey, or secret spots in the woods, that would make much better hiding places. I pictured the monks’ quarters being turned inside out, the church and its grounds being searched, people torn from hiding places.

“You’re troubled, my son,” said Father Johmann.

“Why would I be troubled, Father?”

He shook his head. “We cannot run from our sins,” he said. “They are inside us.”

I thanked him and left St. Andrew’s.

4

As soon as I got into the stationhouse, everyone shook my hand and clapped me on the back like I’d solved a big case, which I definitely hadn’t. Turned out Cal Berkeley basketball had won the Pacific Conference championship last night—and I’d forgotten they were even playing. Tank and I were the only ones in the station who’d actually gone to Berkeley, but everyone in town lived and died with the Golden Bears. It’s funny what elates people, no matter how lousy their lives are otherwise. When Berkeley won a

championship, we all felt like champions.

In my office, I tossed my hat at the rack all the way across the room and caught one of the hooks. I made a one-two punch into the air, spun around, and was about to plunk myself down on my swivel chair when I realized I wasn't alone.

There she was in the same green belted dress she'd been wearing a few hours ago.

"Miss Stafford," I said, trying to sound dignified, wincing internally not just at my idiocy with the hat rack but also at the thought of myself in my stained gray undershirt in my puny apartment with my laundry line behind me. Even my pressed shirt felt less sharp than usual, knowing she'd seen it on my ironing board. "You came to see the beast in its other natural habitat?"

"About my visit this morning, Detective—"

"You want me to apologize for shutting the door on you? All right, I apologize."

"No, I just didn't think—"

"Not interested in what you thought, Miss Stafford. Emphatically not interested. You said you had something to tell me?"

She stared at me for a second. "You're certainly rough on a girl."

For the first time I noticed dark circles under her eyes. Like she hadn't been sleeping. Or might even have been crying. Or then again, might just have put her makeup on that way for effect, like Ingrid Bergman at the end of that movie that just came out, where her husband makes her think she's insane. "I don't have time to play games, miss."

"I see. Well, I believe I've solved your case for you."

"Is that right?"

"I really do, yes. You remember I told you I went to a Christmas party at Madame Chiang's and Walter Wilkinson was there?"

"Sure I remember. You said you had a chat with him—you told him you wanted to do a story on him, and he agreed. Did something else happen between you at that party?"

"Between us?"

"You know what I mean."

"Why, Detective, do I detect a note of jealousy?"

“You think every man you meet is in love with you, don’t you, Miss Stafford?”

“Why, I could say the same about you. Such a handsome, brooding, impenetrable storm of a man—just the type every woman secretly longs to tame. Has anyone ever told you look like Tyrone Power?”

“No, they haven’t.”

“Well, you do. And women must fall for you right and left. What if you and I were made for each other, Detective?”

For a split second, I almost let myself wonder if she meant it. Then I came to my senses. “Get to the point, miss.”

“I must be making a dent in the armor if you’re so angry with me. Anyway, something important happened at that party. My source—who was part of Wilkinson’s inner circle—told me last night that Wilkinson and Madame Chiang had a private meeting that night during the party. Wilkinson dropped an absolute bomb. He said to her that the United States could no longer trust her husband—Chiang Kai-Shek—because he was too corrupt and too brutal and was losing the support of the Chinese people. She said, but surely the US wasn’t going to back a Communist like Mao? Wilkinson said no, but he was going to advise President Roosevelt that Chiang had to go and we had to find a replacement for him.”

Isabella stopped at that point, looking at me expectantly.

“Thank you, miss,” I said. “I’ll make a note of that.”

“A note? Don’t you see? Wilkinson turned on them. Until now, I thought General Chiang killed him out of jealousy, but it was Madame Chiang who had him killed. Or both of them together. They must have used that servant—Jane Chao—to do it. That’s why she had to be killed—to cover their tracks.”

“How do you know about Jane Chao?”

“I’m a reporter, Detective, in case you’d forgotten.”

I nodded. “Is that all?”

“Is that all? Yes, that’s all.”

I thanked her, went to my door, and opened it, waiting for her to leave. She stood up, but stayed where she was.

“About this morning—” she began.

“I told you, miss—forget this morning.”

“Stop it. I just wanted to say I shouldn’t have come to your house like that. I’m sorry. Really. It was thoughtless and presumptuous of me. A spoiled, selfish thing to do. I hope you’ll accept my apology.”

She sounded sincere. I looked for signs of derision or guile but found none. Of course maybe she was even more manipulative than I thought.

She came to the door as if she were leaving but then stopped and turned to me. “Is she your daughter?”

“Who—Miriam? Christ no. Her mom’s my half-sister.”

“But you take care of her?”

“Definitely not. The kid pretty much takes care of herself.”

“Why does she live with you, then?”

“She doesn’t. She just stays over once in a while when her mom goes AWOL.”

“She’s cute, your niece. She has such style.”

Style? I thought to myself. Miriam had a lot of things going for her, but I never thought style was one of them.

“It’s really sweet, your relationship with her,” Isabella continued. “She clearly adores you.”

“Which you know on the basis of what, miss?”

“Am I wrong?” When I didn’t respond, she continued, “I don’t suppose you care, but as a matter of fact, I happen to know very well what it’s like to feel all alone in the world.”

Part of me wanted to shut her up—if there’s one thing I couldn’t stand, it was a rich girl who felt unlucky in life. But another part knew that what she was saying was factually true. Her family was a train wreck, almost as bad as my mine except rich. Meanwhile, a third part of me couldn’t help noticing her long lashes and her lips—she had what they call a rosebud mouth, a perfect version of it. “I may have misjudged you, miss. If I did, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t soften on me,” she said.

“If it was a hundred in the shade, I wouldn’t soften on you, miss.”

“Good. Because I’m bad, Detective. I do terrible things. And if you soften on me, I’ll do them to you.”

With that, she tried to leave, but I held her back by the arm.

“Was it you?” I asked.

“Was it me what?”

“The blonde with Wilkinson outside his room before he died. Was it you?”

She looked at me without any doubt or hesitation. “I told you—I was at our country house in Sonoma that night, with my cousins.”

“I was at your country house yesterday. Your cousin Cassie took off on me. Why?”

“I have no idea.”

“Where is she now?”

“I don’t know.”

I nodded but didn’t believe a word she said. “Good day, Miss Stafford. I’ll be in touch.”

Chapter Thirteen

MRS. BAINBRIDGE'S TESTIMONIAL
PREPARED FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY DOOGAN
IN CONNECTION WITH HER DEPOSITION
TAKEN ON THE FIFTEENTH OF MARCH, 1944

That my granddaughters had neglectful parents came with one silver lining: the three girls developed an intense bond, becoming pillars of support for each other. They also gravitated toward me. They often came to stay with me in Berkeley, in different configurations, sometimes individually, sometimes a pair, sometimes all three, but Isabella the most often because she was the most alone.

Those are some of my most treasured memories—spending time with my granddaughters in the Berkeley Hills. We'd hike the trails in Wildcat Canyon, the girls adorable with their crooked walking sticks that they also pretended were magic wands, or I'd take them to the gorgeous new Rose Garden laid out like a terraced amphitheater with its breathtaking one hundred varieties of roses. On clear nights, I'd let them stay up past their bedtime and we'd go stargazing from the lookout on Grizzly Peak. On one occasion, Cassie said to me wistfully, "Our mother doesn't like to do fun things like this with us," to which Nicole added, "She doesn't like to do *anything* with us," and my heart nearly broke. What is the point of having children if you don't want to spend time with them?

In some ways, I became a surrogate parent for all three. In fact, I believe I came to know my granddaughters better than their own parents did—both their many virtues and their hidden flaws.

Nicole is exceedingly intelligent—the only one of my granddaughters attending university. She's also the most judgmental and political, constantly up in arms over this or that. But her great weakness is that she doesn't know herself—in the least. She thinks she believes passionately in things, feels things, that she actually doesn't. I can imagine her committing a great wrong while telling herself she's acting not just blamelessly but heroically. She's the most likely to make a catastrophic mistake entirely out of self-delusion.

Cassie is the tallest and, physically, the strongest of the three. She's also the most tomboyish. She's matter-of-fact and prefers to wear pants, something young women are just starting to do, and I very much approve. We practically had to drag her to her own debutante cotillion, so uninterested is she in dancing, ball gowns, and all other girlish frivolity. She can be brusque to a fault and is utterly lacking in the feminine arts (a deficiency she may get from me), which pushes all the young men away.

As for Isabella, well, to put it mildly, she is far and away the most complicated of my granddaughters. And always has been, since the tragedy. Part of it was her deep identification—sometimes I think psychological merger—with Iris, from whom she'd been nearly inseparable the first six years of her life. I'm told there are psychological terms for her condition, which apparently is

quite common in children who've lost siblings. But as if Iris's death weren't enough, Issy's mother could be self-absorbed to the point of cruelty.

When Iris died, Sadie was only twenty-five and still beautiful, but already corroded inside. She threw herself into the only thing she felt she excelled at, which was enticing men, but it brought her nothing but more self-loathing. Still, misfortune can't excuse everything. One especially painful memory still haunts me.

It was two summers after the tragedy. Sadie had been hospitalized again—she was constantly in and out—and Issy, just eight at the time, was sent to stay with me in Berkeley. All that summer, twice every week without fail, Issy sent letters for her mother to the hospital. Sadie never replied, but Issy persisted, always believing she was helping her mother recover, and always enclosing little gifts she spent hours making or amusing verses she had written. This was heartbreaking, because in fact Sadie had been discharged from the hospital after only ten days. She hadn't sent for Issy or even let her know that she was back. Instead Sadie spent the summer attending cocktail parties and dinners, going to the beach, sailing in the Bay with this or that new paramour—Roger by then being long gone. I kept this from Issy as long as she was with me in Berkeley, but when she returned to San Francisco that autumn for school, she somehow discovered the truth.

I'll never forget how Issy looked the next time I visited Nob Hill—tiny, wilted, defeated. She wouldn't even make eye contact with me. It was as if she were shrinking, willing herself into nonexistence.

"Issy," I said, alarmed. "What's wrong?"

She didn't even look up at me. Instead, she said, in a flat, dull voice, "No one wants me. No one ever will."

I knelt down and took her hand. "Listen to me, Isabella. You're feeling sorry for yourself. You have every reason to, but you must stop. I could tell you that I want you, that I love you, and it would be true, but that still wouldn't be adequate. You have to depend on yourself."

Isabella turned slowly to me, her eyes forlorn and searching. I could see that she was trying to take in what I was saying.

"Always remember this," I went on. "You're strong. Stronger than all the others. Because you have endured the most. From the youngest age and at the cruelest hands. You're like steel, forged in fire. And every additional cruelty you face will only make you stronger."

I don't want to overclaim, but I believe that these words had a profound effect on her, and that it was after this exchange that Isabella finally began to put the tragedy behind her. Not immediately, of course. But over the course of the next year she grew increasingly confident and self-assertive, surprising everyone by eventually becoming the most extroverted and daring of my three granddaughters.

And while she grew up to almost uncannily resemble a young Sadie, her mind is far sharper and more nimble. This wasn't apparent for some years, but ever since she came into her own, she's always been a step ahead of everyone else. If the girls and I were playing Monopoly on a summer evening and the doorbell rang unexpectedly, causing the rest of us to wonder who it could be, Isabella would instantly put it all together and say, "Oh! It's probably Jane Abbott returning the pie pan she borrowed the day before she went off to Paris—she'd be getting back just about now," or, "I bet it's the actuary coming to get Nana's signature for the sale of Mr. Randolph's estate." She was always right, and my heart would swell, privately thinking that she perhaps took after me.

But putting aside the occasional bouts of darkness to which she is still subject, Issy has another flaw, which is that she lies too often and too easily. I think she tells herself she's acting—a favorite hobby of hers—when in truth she's simply prevaricating. It probably began as a way to conceal her pain, a determination not to be pitied—something else she gets from me. In any event,

she's almost frightfully adept at it. I'd watch with a frown but also in awe as she led Mrs. Biddleston, the housekeeper, down the garden path, embellishing her stories with details so choice and convoluted no one could possibly have made them up.

Chiefly she deployed these arts to save her cousins' skins—there is quite a goodness to Isabella, which many people don't see. There was the time, for example, when she pretended to faint to give Cassie time to round up the naughty brood of ferrets Cassie had been secretly raising in the basement of the barn at the country house—there must have been a dozen of the rascals, and they'd taken to looting and hoarding our dishtowels. Isabella not only fainted, but had to pretend to recover and then faint a second time. It was clear to me of course that it was all an act, but I played along. I was proud of Isabella—all three of them, actually. They were loyal to the bone. Maybe because apart from me they were each other's only real family.

Through it all, Issy never turned on her mother. On the contrary, she defended her, and as she got older tried to protect her. Even today she still lives in that house because her mother has no one else.

1944

MONDAY, MARCH 13

1

After Isabella left I poured myself a coffee, a big one. By late morning, the stationhouse coffee tasted like burnt coal—actually, it always tasted like burnt coal—but coffee wasn't being rationed anymore, so at least there was plenty of it.

Nothing added up. I had a dead presidential candidate in the Claremont stripped half-naked with flowers sticking out of his mouth, and a dead Chinese woman chopped up in a public housing project with a hatchet sticking out of her neck. The first killing felt personal; somebody wanted Wilkinson not just dead, but humiliated. The second killing felt professional—Chinatown professional. I had a Chinese angle on Wilkinson, which suggested a connection between the two killings, and I had a Bainbridge angle, which didn't. On top of which I had three lying Bainbridge girls—one who hated Wilkinson's guts politically, one who'd been doing god knows what in a secret basement room, and one who was trying to sell me the Chinese angle.

People kill for three things: money, power, and love. Give me a murder, and ninety-nine times out of a hundred, one of those three things will be your motive. But so far I couldn't pin any one of them to either of my murders. I had a single witness placing one of the Bainbridge girls with Wilkinson at or near the time he died, but the truth is I didn't have a clue why any of them would have been with him, or what they were doing together, or how long

she'd spent with him. In fact, I didn't even have an exact time of death.

That, at least, I could do something about.

I gathered every officer in the stationhouse who was working the case into the main room and dragged a big chalkboard to where everyone could see it. "We're doing a timeline," I said to them, drawing a horizontal line across the top of the blackboard. "This is the night of Wilkinson's murder. We start with seven thirty p.m.—shots fired. Three different guests call it down to the front desk. Who interviewed those guests?"

"I did," said McRae, grouchy because he'd had to work the whole weekend.

"Names?"

"I'm supposed to remember their names? What we do we care about their names?"

"We care because we're doing this right. We're going to line up the facts we think we know and, underneath each fact, put the witness or evidence we have for it. Go get your interview notes, McRae. In fact, all of you go get your notes."

While they were gathering their notebooks, I asked if anyone had any updates for me.

"Uh, sir, I have something," said Polk, who'd been talking to hotel staff. "I'm not sure it's an update though."

"What is it?"

"Well, I heard from at least a dozen people that, uh, there's some kind of ghost in the hotel. A little girl."

"Where've you been, Polk? Everybody knows that story."

"It's not just a story, sir."

"A girl wailing in the walls? Spooky shadows? Is that what you're talking about?"

"No, not just that, sir. Some hotel guests have died."

"People die at hotels, Polk. Some are old, some are sick, some have heart attacks. Every hotel has stories like that."

"The thing is, sir, they all died on the fourth floor. And not from heart attacks. One slit her wrists in a bathtub, and a few years later somebody hung himself. Both in room 422. Your room, sir."

If I felt a chill, I didn't let on. "Not our problem, Polk. McRae, let me have those names."

I put McRae's witnesses on the board under the entry for seven thirty. "Okay, next up is a couple of minutes after eight p.m.—Wilkinson is seen in his room, number 602, unharmed but with a bullet hole in a wall. Witnesses: me and the night manager. Next, eight thirty p.m.: Wilkinson is taken to room 527 in a different wing. Dicky, you saw Wilkinson go into that room, right?"

"Yes, sir. And I stood outside, just like you told me."

"Good. When did you see him next?"

"When he opened the door for the guy from room service," said Dicky. "With a big steak and a plate of fries."

"What time was that, Dicky?"

"What time? Geez."

"I got that," said Tankersley. "I interviewed the folks in room service. The steak was delivered to room 527 about nine forty."

"Good work, Tank. Okay, did Wilkinson make any calls from his new room?"

Silence.

"Don't tell me no one checked phone logs."

"You didn't ask nobody to do that, Boss," said Dicky.

"For Christ's sake." I shouted for Jackie, our communications officer. "Jackie, call the Claremont and get me all the phone calls Wilkinson made. I want to know when he called, and I want to know who he called. If the hotel doesn't have it, call the phone company. All right—Dicky, what happened next, after Wilkinson got his dinner?"

"Next," said Dicky, "the guy from room service comes back after a couple of hours to pick up the stuff. That's when Wilkinson tells me he left something in his old room and heads back there."

"Tankersley," I said, "what time did room service make that pick-up?"

"Let me see," said Tankersley. "Eleven thirty."

"Okay. Next up, midnight: Juanita Juárez says she sees Wilkinson and one of the Bainbridge girls walking down the hallway and going into room 602 right around twelve midnight. So we know he was still alive then. But where was Wilkinson between eleven thirty and midnight—anybody?"

No one had anything on Wilkinson in that half hour.

“All right,” I said, “who heard the gunshot, and when did they hear it?”

“Two people heard it,” said Petrocelli. “The first was a guy named Miller. I talked to him. Old fella. He was staying a couple of doors down from Wilkinson. He said he heard something that sounded like a shot at eleven forty-five. It woke him up.”

“Well, he must have gotten the time wrong,” I said, “because Juanita saw Wilkinson in the corridor at midnight. Did he call it down to the front desk?”

“No—he said he heard there’d been a false alarm earlier, so he figured it was probably the same thing.”

“Okay. Who’s the second guy?”

“Name of Douvray,” said Petrocelli. “I’m getting this from the front desk clerk I interviewed. Douvray was in 604—right next door to Wilkinson. He calls down to the lobby at about half past twelve reporting a sound like a gunshot. The desk clerk gets on the horn right away and phones us.”

“Jackie,” I called out, “what time did the Claremont call us on Friday night to report the gunshot?”

Jackie checked the log: the hotel had called us at 12:33 in the morning.

“Good,” I said, marking up the blackboard. “So it looks like time of death is twelve thirty a.m. That’s when Douvray hears the shot. He calls it down to the front desk, and the front desk calls us.”

“No—that’s not right, sir,” said Tankersley.

“Why not?”

“Because I did the interview with Douvray. He told me he didn’t call in the gunshot right when he heard it. He called it down later, because he was—ah—indisposed.”

“Indisposed?”

“He was with a woman in his room. They both heard the shot but weren’t sure what it was—they thought it might be a champagne cork. And they were in the middle of their business when they heard it, if you know what I mean.”

“So when did they actually hear the shot?” I asked.

“About forty-five minutes before he called down.”

“So eleven forty-five?”

“Right.”

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“He was sure, sir.”

“Then we’ve got a problem. Juanita says she saw Wilkinson alive at midnight, but if these two guests have it right, he would’ve been dead by then.”

Something was off, and I had a pretty good idea what it was. I grabbed my hat and headed for the Claremont.

2

It took me a while, but I finally found Juanita in a steamy basement area set off for laundry work. Almost all the other laundry workers doing the soaking, scrubbing, and wringing looked to be Chinese. Juanita was by herself in a small, hot room, ironing. There was a bin of clean sheets and pillowcases next to her—there must have been hundreds of them—waiting to be pressed.

“Hola, Juanita,” I said.

“Buenos días, Señor Sullivan.”

“How are you feeling, Juanita? All better?”

“Yes, Señor. All better.”

“Good, good. I’m just double-checking one thing, Juanita. You told me it was midnight when you saw Mr. Wilkinson. Are you sure about that?”

“Yes, Señor Sullivan. I am sure. He was in the hallway walking with the young lady when I heard the clock strike.”

“No, he wasn’t.”

Juanita stopped ironing, mid-stroke.

I shut the door.

“Wilkinson was dead by midnight,” I continued. “When you saw him, he was already dead.”

She didn’t respond.

“Lying to a police officer?” I said, changing to Spanish. “Not smart, Juanita.”

Suddenly a look of defiance—or maybe contempt—came over her. “You think that just because you speak Spanish to me we’re friends and I’m going to trust you? Do you think I’m stupid, Detective? That you can tell me that story about your father—if it’s even true—and then I’ll do whatever you

want? You're all the same. You asked about my children the other day—do you know where their father is? He's dead. Killed—by police, like you. A lady, a rich lady, was being robbed, and he tried to help, and a policeman shot him, the wrong man, and he died. That was it. No apology, nothing. Like he never lived.”

“I'm sorry, Juanita,” I said, switching to English, “but right now you need to tell me what you really saw last Friday night.”

“Why should I tell you anything?” Juanita had switched back to English too. “Last time I talk to you they found out and think I did something bad and now I work here—in the basement—even less pay.”

“You want to know why you should talk to me? Because I can have your children taken away.”

As soon as I said that, I wished I hadn't. But I was frustrated and running out of time.

Fear replaced defiance in her eyes. It wasn't the first time I'd felt the raw power of being a police officer—or used that power, or maybe abused it.

“You didn't see Wilkinson in the hallway, did you, Juanita?”

“I don't want trouble, Señor Sullivan.”

“Trouble is losing your kids, Juanita.”

“Please, Señor—”

“Just tell me what you saw that night.”

“I saw the young lady come out of Mr. Wilkinson's room.”

“Who? One of the Bainbridge girls?”

“Yes.”

“Not going into the room—coming out?”

“Yes.”

“Was she alone?”

“Yes.”

“Go on,” I said.

“She was—upset.”

“Crying?”

“Not crying—upset. Afraid. She run away.”

“Did she see you?”

“No. She go the other way.”

“Then what? You saw Wilkinson, didn’t you? You saw him in his room. That’s why you’re afraid to talk.”

She nodded reluctantly.

“You need to start talking now, Juanita.”

“The door—it was open. Mr. Wilkinson was dead. On the bed.”

“Tell me exactly what you saw.”

“I don’t know. His pants were—down. His mouth was filled with things—I don’t know what. Maybe flowers. And there was blood.” Now Juanita was getting agitated. “A lot of blood, everywhere.”

“What else? Is there anything else you remember?”

“I was scared.”

“How about the girl? What do you remember about her? Try to remember, Juanita.”

“She had blood on her.”

“Where?”

“Her skirt.”

“What color was the skirt?”

“Yellow.”

“Was it silk?”

“Silk?”

“*Seda*?”

“Oh. I don’t know. Maybe. It was very nice.”

“And it was one of the Bainbridge girls? You’re sure about that?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

“But you really don’t know which one?”

“No. I’m telling the truth. I don’t know. Please, Señor Sullivan, my children. I didn’t mean ... I made a mistake ... I should have told you. Please don’t do anything.”

“As long as you’re telling me the truth.”

3

Walking back to my car, I felt pretty lousy. I tried to tell myself I was doing my job. It wasn’t my fault Juanita had lied to me. If that’s what it took to get the truth out of her, that’s what it took.

But the more I thought about it, the lousier I felt. When you're powerless, it's so easy for people you love to just disappear. Like Juanita's husband. One careless shot and Juanita was a widow, her kids fatherless. And no one cared, no one made amends. I wondered if he'd been a good dad—if his kids had idolized him the way I did my dad.

I suspect that by the age of seventeen, a lot of boys have outgrown their adulation of their fathers. You start off seeing your dad as a hero—the strongest, most principled man in the world—but a day comes when you suddenly realize he's only human. You see his weaknesses, his failings, his real place in the world. For a boy at least, that realization probably marks the transition from child to adult, whether it happens at the age of five or fifteen. But it hadn't happened with me. At seventeen, I still saw my dad in the same heroic vein I always had, and that's when they took him. As a result, I kept that idealization intact. In fact, it grew.

As my dad was boarding the bus that would take him and my half-brothers to Mexico, he told me not to worry—he'd find a way home, a way back to us. He told me just to take care of Mom—I had to be the man of the house now. He said if Mom tried to follow him to Mexico, I couldn't let her. She was white, which was gold in America, so she had to take advantage of that, and the same with me since I could pass for white. Besides Mexico wouldn't be safe for her. He didn't know where he'd end up, and there might not be jobs or a house or even food. Most important of all was my going to college. The day I'd gotten into Berkeley, he said, was the proudest in his life, and he made me promise to give it my all.

I followed his instructions as best I could. I did well at Berkeley, and I took care of Mom, but it wasn't easy. Mom was sweet, and she had a big pretty smile that Miriam got too, but she radiated helplessness. And she was unlucky in love. Her helplessness made some men want to protect her, but sometimes I think it also made men subconsciously want to hurt her, which makes no sense, I know.

Mom's first husband—Rosemary's dad—abandoned her. Just didn't come home one night, and that was it. She never saw him again and had to hear through the grapevine about how he fell off a crane and died while working on the new Merchants Exchange in San Francisco. A few years later,

she met my dad. In church of all places, in line for communion. Mom was Irish Catholic, and Dad had been raised Catholic back in Guadalajara by his mom—although he once told me his dad Moses lit candles every Friday night even though he didn't know why. Anyway, Mom and Dad both liked to say theirs was a match made in heaven. She had a daughter with no father, he had two boys with no mother—his first wife had died of tuberculosis—and they were married within three months. They had a big wedding, and nobody minded that he was Mex and she was Okie. Rosemary and the boys got along great, and I came into the picture a year later.

But everything went south after they took Dad away. Mom had no skills. She misused words all the time and couldn't spell to save her life. It was no surprise that she couldn't get any work at all. Skilled men were lucky to get menial jobs back then, in the middle of the Depression; the unskilled didn't have a snowball's chance. In the end, we lost the house in El Cerrito because we couldn't make the mortgage payments. But I managed to piece together part-time jobs at Cal and made enough to rent Mom a small apartment in Albany and have enough left over to cover my tuition.

Mom and I didn't have any news of my dad, not a single word, until 1935, four years later, when a letter came from him. Before that, we didn't know where he or my brothers were; we didn't even know if they were still alive. It turned out that some Mexican official way down south in Chiapas, where my dad had first found work, had been skimming all the international postal delivery money while just throwing out the international mail, outgoing and incoming. The whole time we were thinking Dad might be dead, he was thinking we weren't answering his letters. Now he'd moved to Acapulco; my half-brothers were there with him. I jumped on a bus the next morning. It took me three days to get there.

I have to admit I broke down when I saw him. He's a big guy—shorter than me by a head, but burly and solid as a rock—and when he put his arms around me, and called me gringo, the way he always did, I couldn't help it. At forty-eight, he was still strong and healthy. His hair was just starting to gray, but his eyebrows were still black. He smiled and shook his head at me and asked me how college was and told me I was just in time.

He was working as a driver for rich American tourists at one of the fancy

hotels; his excellent English and gregarious good nature made him a natural. In his hotel limousine, he took me to the foot of some high cliffs, where men were swan-diving into the ocean from a ledge so high it made me dizzy to look at them. It was a tourist attraction, a performance staged by the same hotel my dad worked for. When one of the divers came up out of the water, I saw it was my brother Miguel—the eldest of us, and the one I was always closest to.

I ran down to the beach. My second brother, Diego, was there too, and so were their wives and more than a half dozen little kids. Everyone was smiling and laughing. I met all the little niños and niñas, and Miguel instructed them to call me Tito Al—“simpler that way,” he said—and I joked that they weren’t going to be able to get rid of me. Acapulco was bustling; it looked way more prosperous and inviting than Depression-mired California. I told them I was going to stay in Acapulco and send bus money back to Mom so she could come too. Everyone laughed again, but not so hard this time, and finally the truth sank in.

One of the new wives was my dad’s, and so were two of the little niñas. The old bastard had a new family.

I stayed in Acapulco for another two days, getting drunk with my brothers at night, all the while growing hotter and hotter inside. My dad kept trying to talk to me, but I avoided him. On the third day, I told them I had to get back to school, which was true, and I caught the next bus north.

On the long trip home I weighed what to tell Mom. I decided to lie to her—she didn’t need to know. So I started concocting stories in my head of how Dad was earning good money and saving up and how he and the boys were going to come home just as soon as the border reopened.

But when I got home, and my mom came running out, all anxious and hopeful, I couldn’t do it—I couldn’t even look at her. She kept asking about Dad, and I kept evading her questions, telling her about my brothers and their new families. “But how about your father?” she pressed, starting to get agitated. “Is something wrong? Is he sick?”

“He’s not sick, Ma—he’s fine.” I must have let a little bitterness creep into my voice, because a look of confusion—then shock and hurt—came over her. But I didn’t tell her. I never told her. I let the hate fester in me instead.

That was spring term of my last year at Berkeley, and I nearly didn't graduate. On campus, I started looking for fights to start. I would seize on any excuse to bring up Mexico, just waiting for some frat boys who didn't know I was Mexican to make a disparaging comment, and they invariably obliged me. I got into brawls so bad I ended up in jail a couple of times.

It was Vollmer who saved me. The second time I got jailed, he came to my cell in the middle of the night. He'd been my professor in a criminal justice class, and I guess maybe he saw something in me. He told me that, despite my brawling, there was a job in the Berkeley Police Department waiting for me as long as I straightened out and graduated and kept my grades up. He said I was smart enough to make detective. He also said he knew my type and that I had what it took to clean up nice, whatever that means.

My mom just got more and more helpless and hopeless after I returned from Acapulco. She kind of lost her will to live. She stopped eating properly. And then she got sick.

Her decline wasn't merciful; it was long, slow torture. The trips to the hospital became more frequent, but didn't do any good, and the painkillers didn't work. She couldn't keep anything down and threw up yellow-green bile. By the end she was so thin and frail I couldn't stand it. One night in 1937, my second year in the police department, I went to Albany for a visit and knocked at her door.

A friend of hers opened it—a nice woman about sixty with kindly crinkled eyes, who wore her black gray-streaked hair in a bun and owned a popular flower shop on Shattuck in downtown Berkeley. She'd been spending more time with my mom than I had, because I was doing double shifts on the force. Mom had delivered flowers for her a few times years ago, before my dad was taken, and they became friendly.

"I'm sorry I'm late," I said. "Thank you so much for taking care of Mom."

"She's been asking for you. You should go to her now."

I found Mom on her bed, hardly breathing.

"Ma?"

She turned her head slowly to me, her eyes hollow.

“Is Rosemary coming?”

This worried me. Rosemary hadn’t checked in on Mom for at least two years.

“Soon, I think. How are you feeling, Ma? Can I get you anything? Shall I open the window?”

“Alejo,” she whispered, her voice barely audible.

“I’m here, Ma.”

“I want you to tell me something.”

“Anything.”

“Is ... is she pretty?”

“Who? Mom, what are you talking about?” I knew exactly who she was talking about.

“Your pa. I know. I know he found someone else.”

“No! Ma, don’t be crazy. There wasn’t anyone else. He died, Ma. I didn’t want to tell you, but he died. I found out when I went there. In a car accident.”

“I don’t think that’s true, Alejo. But you’re a good son.”

“It is true! I didn’t want to upset you. It was a head-on collision, and he died instantly. He didn’t suffer.”

“Yes ... that would be like your pa. No suffering. Always lucky.”

I don’t know what it says about me—or my father—that the last thing I said to my mother was a lie. My only regret was that I didn’t do it a lot earlier.

Actually, that’s not true—I had a lot of regrets. I thought about my mom’s friend, the one who was with her that last day, all the way to the end, who held me when I broke down, then helped me with all funeral arrangements and even donated flowers from her shop.

In my mind’s eye, I saw a pair of strong hands pushing someone onto a bus. Someone kind.

I shouldn’t have said what I said to Juanita. Me of all people.

4

Back at the station, I headed for Greening’s office. The fact that Juanita had seen one of the Bainbridge girls coming out of the dead man’s room, with

blood on her, changed everything. If there had been only one Bainbridge granddaughter, it would have been time to arrest her. The problem was there were three of them, meaning I didn't have probable cause on any of them.

Protocol said the next step was to bring all three down to headquarters, put them in separate rooms, and go at them hard with a serious interrogation. But that required Greening's permission.

The Chief's reaction was even worse than I expected.

"I thought we talked about this, Sullivan," he said, sitting behind his desk. "Why are you falling all over yourself because of what this Juanita told you?"

"I'm just taking the evidence as I find it, sir."

"On the contrary, you're taking the word of a Mexican chambermaid over that of three pillars of this community when you don't have a shred of evidence against them. What possible motive would any of the Bainbridge girls have?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You don't have a motive. You don't have a murder weapon."

"The Bainbridges have a large collection of handguns at their country house, sir. Any of the girls could have taken one."

"Bald speculation. Has it occurred to you that this Mexican maid of yours could have killed Wilkinson herself? Or could have stolen whatever was in that Shreve box you found, and has now invented a story to pin the blame on someone else?"

"I believe Juanita is telling the truth, sir."

"She's a liar, Sullivan. A person who lies once will lie again and again. And she can't even tell blond girls apart? Her testimony would be torn to pieces in a courtroom."

He had a point there. An important one. Juanita would be virtually useless as a witness. The district attorney might not even be willing to put her on the stand. And as of now her evidence was the only evidence I had against the Bainbridge girls.

"We have to bring them in for questioning, sir," I said.

"You'll bring them in if and when you have the evidence. I won't tolerate any corner cutting, Sullivan. This is America. We have the rule of

law here. If you haul any of those girls into this station in disregard of due process, it will be your last day as an officer. Do I make myself clear?”

I told him he did and left his office. From the look on my face, the boys knew better than to ask me what had happened.

Regardless of what I did with the Bainbridge girls, I still had a murdered Chinese woman to deal with, and for that I had to go to Chinatown. Since I had at least two other leads to track down in San Francisco, I collared Tank and told him he was coming with me.

“I’m sorry, sir,” he said, “but could I take a pass on that? I got class.”

“What class?”

“At Boalt. One class every semester. I’ll get a degree in six years if I make it. If you need me, though, I’ll come—no problem.”

“You’re going to law school?”

“Yeah. For my dad. I’m going to get him out of prison.”

I stared at Tank for a couple seconds. His dad’s story was an ugly one. In the late ’30s, he’d taken a woman to the Bank Club up in Reno a few years after Tank’s mom died. They were going to do a little gambling, a little dancing—just have some fun. The problem was the woman was white. Somebody in the casino didn’t like the sight of that and called the cops. They charged Tank’s dad under the Mann Act—also called the White Slave Act—which makes it a felony for a man to “transport” a woman across state lines for “immoral purposes.” Some police departments and prosecutors liked to use that statute to go after interracial couples, which is what happened to Tank’s dad. When a cop jumped him in the casino, he pulled himself free, and for that they hit him up with assault, obstruction, resisting arrest, and drunk and disorderly. He was doing fifteen to twenty in the state prison up in Carson City. I doubted Tank would ever get his dad out, but I admired his drive. I told him to go to his class.

“Oh, Detective?” It was Jackie calling out to me. “I’ve got Wilkinson’s phone records from the Claremont.”

“Nice job, Jackie,” I said. “Did he make any calls Friday night—the night he was killed?”

“Yes,” she said, flipping through some papers. “He called a Berkeley number at seven forty-three p.m.”

“So after he was shot at, but before we moved him. Whose number is that?”

“It’s an unlisted number, but I found out—it’s the home of Madame Chiang Kai-Shek.”

“Is that right? Okay. Anything else?”

“Then he called the Audubon Society in San Francisco.”

“That would have been him canceling dinner. Is that it?”

“One more call, around nine p.m. Another San Francisco number.”

“Who was it?”

“A Mr. Stafford—he called a Mr. Roger Stafford.”

Chapter Fifteen

MRS. BAINBRIDGE'S TESTIMONIAL
PREPARED FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY DOOGAN
IN CONNECTION WITH HER DEPOSITION
TAKEN ON THE FIFTEENTH OF MARCH, 1944

Even after Isabella regained her confidence and footing, appearing perfectly normal to the unsuspecting eye, she would still periodically have disturbing episodes revolving around Iris. Sometimes, completely out of the blue, she'd suddenly take on her sister's voice and mannerisms, and it was as if Iris had come back to life—it really could be quite frightening. Other times, she would do things that she would later deny or attribute to Iris.

Once when she was about ten, she shredded an old stuffed toy of hers—I believe it was an elephant—with a pair of scissors but later had no memory of it, and in fact insisted that Iris had done it. No one, including the doctors, knew how conscious or unconscious, voluntary or involuntary, real or feigned, these spells or "fugue states" were, but they would leave us all shaken.

I had another concern as well. Inexplicably, given Sadie's unconscionable neglect, Isabella seemed to want to emulate her mother, often imitating her sashaying gait and coquettish way of speaking. This so concerned me that I would occasionally say to her, "Isabella, you are not your mother. You are not similar to her or responsible for her mistakes or fated to be like her. There are those who disintegrate in the face of adversity and those who find a way to harness it and turn it to their advantage. Your mother is in the former category, but you are in the latter."

You can therefore imagine my distress when we were making pancakes one Sunday morning, and Isabella—now fifteen—suddenly informed me that she wanted to start seeing a psychoanalyst, as her mother had done years before.

I hadn't realized she knew anything about psychoanalysis, and frankly I have an extremely low opinion of its practitioners. "Goodness gracious, Issy, why on earth would you want to do that?"

"They interpret dreams, Nana, and I've been having really strange ones lately."

"Nightmares?"

"No, not exactly. Iris is in them."

"Iris? You poor dear."

"They're not *bad* dreams—in fact, sometimes I don't want to wake up from them. Iris is herself, exactly as she was. She's wearing the same dress as that day—the light blue one with the white embroidery. But there's something else. In my dreams, she's always wearing the necklace."

The necklace she was referring to, Mr. Doogan, was something she and I had discussed before. Many years earlier—I believe she was just seven or eight—Issy and I were up on Chaparral Peak, walking the Strawberry Canyon loop. We'd just

come upon a stunning carpet of wild poppies, when out of the blue, without any sign of distress, Issy began telling me about the day Iris died, including details I'd never heard before, and about her gradual recovery of memories and mis-memories from that day. Then she asked me if anyone had ever found Iris's necklace.

"What necklace?" I asked.

"The one she was wearing at the Claremont that day," said Issy. "The silver one with the cross pendant. It was gone when they found her."

"Isabella, I don't remember hearing anything about a silver necklace. Where did she get it?"

"I think maybe from Mrs. von Urban."

"Issy, did you ever tell anyone about this?"

"No."

At the time, we were all trying so hard to move on from the tragedy I put this out of my mind. But when, almost ten years later, Isabella mentioned that necklace once again, a terrible anxiety came over me. I dispensed with the pancakes, grabbed our coats, led the way down the footpath to College Avenue, then marched us all the way to the Berkeley campus, which we crossed. It took us a good twenty-five minutes, but at last we arrived at 923 Euclid, the home of the illustrious August Vollmer, who was then our police chief. There was no one else I could trust. I made Issy tell him what she'd just told me.

A week later, Chief Vollmer called on me at my house. Over a cup of tea in my living room, Gus told me that Tillie von Urban had confirmed what Issy said—she had indeed given Iris a silver necklace with a cross pendant.

"Why should that nosy parker have given her anything at all?" I said.

"Have you not asked her?"

I explained that I was no longer on speaking terms with the von Urbans, which was true then and remains true today.

"I see," said Gus. Then, as was his wont, he paid me a compliment that was in fact a challenge. "Your logic is as good as mine, Genevieve. As good as any man's on my force. What conclusions would you draw from the fact that when Iris was found, the necklace was gone?"

"I would say that two possibilities are most likely," I replied. "Either the necklace got caught on something when Iris was falling down the laundry chute, and tore off, or it was stolen by one of the hotel staff after her body came out of the chute."

"I agree," said Gus. "Would you like me to open an investigation into the possible theft?"

"But there's a third possibility," I added. "Someone stole the necklace from Iris when she was playing hide-and-seek with Issy and threw Iris down the laundry chute to hide the crime."

He nodded. "In which case we'd be dealing with a homicide, not an accident."

"Exactly."

"I wondered if you were thinking that," he said. "I'm not saying it's impossible, Genevieve. But against that supposition are two facts. First, as you know, we found a chair next to the opening of the laundry chute, with Iris's fingerprints on it, indicating that Iris herself brought the chair there and climbed on it in order to get herself into the chute. Second, the laceration on her neck is consistent with the necklace having caught on something in the chute."

I felt a jab of pain thinking of poor little Iris's last moments. "It's just that I can't bear the thought that she might have been killed and we never even investigated."

"And there is another fact that may be of relevance," he went on. "It seems that Dr. von Urban accompanied Tillie and Sadie to the Claremont on the days when the women played tennis. He would book a room for himself and his wife, and they would stay the night."

"Yes, I'd heard that."

"It also seems that after Tillie and Sadie finished playing, Tillie would participate in a ladies' round robin. Sadie would not. And Genevieve, I'm told that during that interval, Sadie was seen on more than one occasion entering Dr. von Urban's room."

"Good heavens," I said.

In truth I wasn't very surprised. I mentioned before, Mr. Doogan, that poor Sadie had enjoyed a miraculous recovery from deep depression after she began seeing Dr. von Urban. I had long suspected that the cure had been not psychiatric in nature, but rather a love affair—with her doctor.

"All these facts," said Gus, "might become very public should there be another investigation."

That prospect was of course extremely distressing. My family had been through so very much already. I wasn't sure how much more it could bear. "What should I do? What would you do, Gus, putting aside any personal considerations?"

"In my professional opinion, this information isn't enough to open a murder investigation."

So, Mr. Doogan, that's how we resolved it and also how I first learned of the necklace that poor Iris was wearing that wretched day. I hadn't thought of it for years, so you can imagine my surprise when Isabella suddenly brought it up again and on top of that the notion of commencing psychoanalysis. She knew nothing, I assumed, about her mother's true experience with psychoanalysis, and I certainly wasn't going to tell her. But I did try to dissuade her.

"Isabella," I said, "I just don't know about these newfangled mental techniques. To be candid, I think there's a strong smell of quackery about it."

"Analysis is the only treatment, Nana, specifically focused on the interpretation of dreams. That's what I'm looking for. Because of what Iris says to me in the dream. It's always the same thing."

"What does she say?"

"Find my necklace, Issy. You have to find my necklace."

I cannot tell you, Mr. Doogan, the chills that went up my spine. A voice from the dead, speaking to poor Isabella in the dark of night. It occurred to me for a moment that perhaps Isabella had inherited the frightful mental illness Sadie has, perhaps in some latent or attenuated form.

In any event, Isabella was decided, and once she's set her mind to something, there's no turning her back.

Isabella still has a bedroom in my house, back from the days when she would spend months at a time with me, but starting around then, when she turned sixteen, I saw less and less of her. I don't know if it was the psychoanalyst she started seeing—a Viennese woman about my age, as it happened—and I do think these psychoanalysts like to inject themselves like wedges between family members—or just the fact of her growing up. Come to think of it, the same was true of Nicole and Cassie too. After they turned sixteen, they also stopped visiting as often, which makes me think I'm just a nostalgic old grandma and it's all part of the healthy process of children becoming their own independent persons.

But back to Isabella, one heartening development did come out of her psychoanalysis. The episodes where she took on Iris's persona came to an end at last. On the other hand, it was also at this time that she began to grow obsessed with young men, just as her mother had been. She compulsively needed them to fall in love with her—but once they did, she lost interest. This happened over and over—she had a gift for it—for making men feel powerful, and then leaving them high and dry.

I know I'm biased because I'm her grandmother, but I can't say I really fault Isabella. She was simply trying to regain a sense of control over her own life. Besides, she was only doing what men have been doing for eons. Far too often it's the other way around—with men the Casanovas, breaking women's hearts.

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1944

MONDAY, MARCH 13

1

As I rounded a hairpin turn on Lombard Street and the majestic Golden Gate Bridge soared into view, I felt the same exhilaration and thrill I always did.

I love infrastructure, all infrastructure—roads, dams, tunnels, aqueducts, hydroelectric plants—the more colossal, the better. But the Golden Gate Bridge is in a class of own.

For a long time, no one believed that a bridge could ever connect San Francisco to the Marin headlands to the north. A mile of water had to be crossed, and that water was far too deep and turbulent, roiled by dangerous tidal currents, to allow a bridge's foundations to be anchored. But the same unstoppable gale that had swept the fur ships into California and wiped out the native peoples also whipped up a bridge across that mile-long expanse of fearsome water. It was just a matter of money. And a few more lives.

The death-to-dollars ratio for bridge construction was well known in the 1930s. For every million dollars spent, at least one man would be killed. Men had to die to build a bridge; it was a fact of life. After all, twenty-seven men had perished building the Brooklyn Bridge, including its designer, whose foot was crushed—his toes were amputated successfully, but tetanus killed him all the same. Remarkably, the Golden Gate Bridge claimed only eleven lives. Cheap at the price.

How could such a massive project have been undertaken at public expense in the middle of the Depression? Because the Golden Gate Bridge

was a cash cow, churning out enormous profits in toll revenue. A thirty-five-million-dollar bond issue was underwritten by the San Francisco–based Bank of America, and the bridge tolls repaid bond buyers handsomely with interest, the principal recouped in record time.

Scientifically, the bridge was revolutionary. Preexisting principles demanded that bridges be maximally rigid—ideally as rigid as solid rock. Achieving such rigidity would have been virtually impossible in a mile-long suspension bridge. But new engineering breakthroughs held that the ideal was not a rock but a tree—a thing that bent with the wind, rather than trying to resist it. Suddenly slimmer, longer, less rigid structures were not only possible but desirable. That theory was rudely tested—and vindicated—in June 1935, when an earthquake shook the Bay. At that time, the majestic bridge towers had already risen up from the waters, but no cable had been spun yet, no roadway laid. Men were working on top of the south tower when the quake struck. The tower began to tremble; the men had no way down. Soon the tower top was swaying back and forth, sixteen feet toward the ocean, then sixteen feet toward the bay. The men were sure they would fall to their deaths, but after the quake passed, the tower was still there, upright, undamaged, undefeated.

When completed, the Golden Gate Bridge was the longest in the world, its slender and perfectly proportioned art deco towers the tallest, its color instantly iconic. Garish black and yellow stripes were originally planned, to increase visibility in case of fog. But the moment the architects saw their first deliveries of steel beam, protectively coated in thick burnt-orange primer, they knew they'd found their hue.

And now, just seven years later, the Golden Gate had become the crowning symbol of San Francisco and all its aspirations. The very name conjured visions of untold wealth—of streets paved with gold, of cities showered with gold dust, of the never-ending gold rush otherwise known as California. On one side of the country, the Statue of Liberty proclaimed America's dream of freedom. On the other, the Golden Gate Bridge stood for the second half of that dream—prosperity.

In fact, though, the name Golden Gate had nothing to do with the precious metal. The bridge was so called because of the body of water it

crossed—the Golden Gate Strait—and the strait got its name in 1846, two years before gold was discovered at Sutter’s Mill. The strait’s name was a prophecy that San Francisco’s enormous natural harbor, one of the largest in the world, would one day be America’s golden gate to the riches of trade with the Orient. This prophecy had come true—but only for some. It certainly hadn’t worked out so well for the Orientals who came through that gate.

I was on Lombard Street to pay a call on a retired professor who apparently knew more about Chinese art and artifacts than anyone else in California. It said something about America that the leading expert on Chinese art wasn’t Chinese, but someone named Lowell Alford. If the Exclusion Acts hadn’t kept the Chinese out for sixty years, that probably wouldn’t have been true. But this professor was my best shot at assessing the green stone we’d found in Wilkinson’s throat.

He examined the cube-like stone carefully, then pored over its intricate carving with a magnifying glass.

“Where did you get this?” he asked at last.

“It’s connected to a murder investigation, Professor. I’m afraid I can’t say much more at the moment.”

“Understood. Well, here’s what I can tell you. This stone is jade of the highest quality, and the calligraphy is an ancient writing style known as seal script, which nearly no one can read anymore. The characters say it’s an official seal of the Government of the Republic of China.”

“As in the government headed by General Chiang Kai-Shek?”

“That’s the one.”

“Son of a gun,” I muttered to myself.

“But it could be a reproduction,” he continued. “There are some very clever forgers in Chinatown.”

I thanked him and said goodbye. Chinatown happened to be where I was headed next.

2

I met Vern “Headbanger” Callaghan, the beefy gray-haired sergeant of the SFPD’s Chinatown squad, outside the Forbidden City, Charlie Low’s nightclub on Sutter Street. Callaghan had arranged a 5:30 sit-down for me

with Eddie Gong, the head boss of the Hip Sing Tong. The Chinatown “tongs” were essentially criminal gangs dressed up as business associations. At least that’s how we cops thought of them.

There was already a line around the block waiting to get into the joint. About half were navy boys in uniform. San Francisco was a liberty port, meaning the seamen had shore leave and could paint the town red, each one knowing that this night on the town could be their last. They poured into Chinatown and the Tenderloin, North Beach and Market Street, lining up outside every strip club, tattoo parlor, and burlesque hall they could find, their drinking starting at lunch and only stopping at closing time—eleven o’clock by city ordinance—after which they’d flood out into the streets, four sheets and counting, picking fights with marines and army recruits, who’d been doing the same thing. It was a good time for all but mayhem for the cops, who had to load the worst of them into paddy wagons and dump them off at the military jail in the Hall of Justice until they dried out.

The club wasn’t in Chinatown proper. It was located just outside, only a block from Union Square—perfect for Americans who wanted a taste of Chinatown but were too afraid to actually set foot in its supposedly vice-infested alleys. Besides servicemen, a lot of well-heeled San Franciscans frequented the place as well.

Callaghan cut the line, and the Chinese doorman recognized him, letting him and me go straight in. On our way upstairs, Callaghan told me that as soon as he’d found out about the hatchet murder in Berkeley, he had his boys round up a dozen Hip Sing soldiers, busting a few lips and breaking a couple of teeth in the process. That’s how he got the meeting with Eddie Gong so fast. I asked him how he knew the Hip Sing were responsible. He found the question amusing.

“You Berkeley boys—you’re good for a laugh, that much I’ll give you,” he said in his strong Irish brogue. “Who cares a rat’s pecker if it was Hip Sing that did it? I don’t think it was, to give you the unvarnished. Eddie Gong’s too smart for that. But he’ll tell me who did it to get his men back, won’t he? They think they can start up this shite again on Vern Callaghan’s watch? They’ll be sorry they were ever born.”

I saw his point. Callaghan was an old-timer; he knew that in their

heyday, the tong wars had been bloody and out of control. Killings in broad daylight, bodies littering the streets. Women were a big part of the problem—there weren't enough of them in Chinatown. The Chinese had poured into San Francisco like everybody else once news of gold spread around the world, but it was almost all men at first, and just when Chinese women started to immigrate too, we slapped the Exclusion Acts on them, and that was it—only the tiniest handful of Chinese were allowed to enter the country until just last year, when the Exclusion Act was finally repealed. For decades the ratio of men to women in Chinatown was something like nine to one, and girls smuggled in from China for the sex trade were more valuable than opium. It wasn't just Chinese men who wanted the merchandise either; men like Wilkinson were buyers too. The tongs controlled the whole prostitution business. The girls—a lot of them underage, and all of them lied to about life in America—were basically slaves. The tongs decided where they could go, who they could talk to, who they had to cater to. If they refused to work or tried to go it on their own, their tong would hunt them down and make examples of them. Callaghan thought that's what had happened at Codornices Village.

Still, I wasn't crazy about the idea of Callaghan banging people's heads when he had no idea who was guilty, and judging by the expression on Eddie Gong's face, he wasn't crazy about it either.

The club room of the Forbidden City was on the second floor, and it was jumping. Every table was full, the band was blaring, and a crowd four-deep lined the bar, hooting and hollering and calling out marriage proposals as Noel Toy did her ostrich feather strip tease. Toy used to be a Berkeley co-ed; I'd actually met her there. Her parents were among the few Chinese who got in during the exclusion period, and they ran a laundry up in Inverness. Even with just feathers on, she looked like she knew exactly what she was doing, which was rising the fastest way available to her, and I admired that. We all make trade-offs, and only losers judge. Besides, she was awfully good-looking.

At a VIP table set off in a corner sat Eddie Gong, with a porcelain cup of tea in front of him and a brace of bruisers behind. I'd expected an old Chinese boss in his fifties or sixties, but Gong had to be my age. I'm

impressed by anyone who's good at his job, and I had no doubt Gong was good. You don't climb that high that young otherwise. He was lean and confident, ruggedly handsome, wearing a suit of better cloth than anything I'd ever owned. Of course he was probably also a cold-blooded killer.

"Eddie, my boy," said Callaghan in a booming voice, smiling broadly as we took seats at Gong's table. "Did you really think I'd let this go because the hit was in Berkeley? Talk to me, boy."

"So now we're friends?" asked Eddie Gong.

He had a good, deep voice and spoke colloquial English with a Cantonese accent. His hands were folded in front of him, perfectly still. That was something I'd trained myself to do too: not to show any nervous mannerisms, like cracking your knuckles or shaking your leg. It wasn't easy, but you could command a room just by being still.

"We're always friends, Eddie, you and me," said Callaghan. "You're fighting the same enemy we are, aren't you? The Japs."

"Where 'you' means Chinese people, and 'we' means Americans?"

Callaghan leaned back in his chair, shaking his head but smiling. "Sullivan, prepare to be edified by the gangster."

Noel had finished her number, and the audience exploded in applause and whistles. Gong drank his tea, waiting them out. The band took a break, and the decibel level fell from deafening to just loud.

"'Asia, with her numberless millions,'" said Gong, evidently reciting by heart, "'sends to our shores the dregs of her population. There can be no doubt but that the presence of numbers among us of a degraded and distinct people must exercise a deleterious influence upon the superior race.' Do you know who said that, gentlemen? It was Leland Stanford, governor of this state, in his inaugural address. You even blamed us for the Plague. 'The Chinese cancer must be cut out of the heart of our city, root and branch, if we have any regard for its future sanitary welfare.' That's what your Board of Health said."

"Water under the bridge, Eddie," said Vern. "Water under the bridge."

"You know what my eight-year-old daughter said to me the other day, Callaghan?" asked Gong. "She was crying. She said someone called her a Jap. And you know what my first reaction was? How dare they mistake my

daughter for a fucking Jap. Now is that a healthy way to think? But that's what this country does. Not *e pluribus unum*, but divide and conquer. Italians, Greeks, Mexican, Chinese, Japanese, you name it. Turn them all against each other, and everyone against the Blacks. Now it's the Japs' turn, but it will be some other group next—maybe us again.”

“Oh, stop your whining, Eddie boy,” said Vern. “America loves you Chinese now. More than you deserve.”

“Right—we're the good Orientals now. But I still can't buy a house outside Chinatown. That's 'all men are created equal' for you.”

“I know, I know,” said Vern, “but we don't make the rules, Eddie, and if you don't mind my saying so, you've done pretty well for yourself, haven't you? A lot better than you'd do if you had to go back where you came from.”

“This is where I come from,” said Gong.

“I'll tell you where you come from, Eddie—an illustrious line of gangsters. Your father was head of the Hip Sing, just like you. He and I, we were great friends. I always treated your father right, and he did the same by me. Just like us, Eddie. Haven't I always done right by you?”

“As long as you get yours. How's that nice house of yours, Callaghan? Where is it again—Presidio Heights? The mortgage—I guess that would be very hard to pay off on a policeman's salary.”

“Exactly—that's what I'm talking about,” cried Vern happily. “You play ball with me, and I play ball with you. I've seen your house, Eddie—it's a lot nicer than mine, that's for sure. You and me, we know where our bread is buttered. So talk to me, Eddie boy. I know you don't want war. I know it wasn't you. Tell me which of the tongs pulled this hatchet job, and your boys will be home by nightfall.”

“It wasn't a tong killing.”

“Oh yeah? Somebody else just happened to use a sawed-off hatchet to cut a whore to pieces?”

“She wasn't a whore,” said Gong. He turned to me. “You're Berkeley PD?”

“That's right,” I said.

“What do you know about the woman who was killed?” Gong asked me.

“Practically nothing. She went by a lot of names. Her neighbors knew

her as Shirley Wang; at the library, she was Chow-Shee; it looks like she used the name Jane Chao at the Claremont. She'd moved into the Codornices apartment about a month ago. Nobody there knew what she did for a living or where she came from. She had fair English. A son back in China."

"She was a Red," said Gong. "A Communist spy."

"China has Reds?" asked Vern. "Since when?"

Gong looked disgusted. "You're so ignorant, Callaghan. How can you be in charge of anything? China is in the middle of a civil war between the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-Shek and the Communists under Mao. They joined forces to fight the Japs, but when the war's over they'll be right back at it, and they'll fight to the death."

"And what's any of this got to do with our murder?" said Vern.

"Chiang," Gong went on, ignoring Callaghan, "has the money and the weaponry, which he gets from America, but Mao has the people. Normally, that means Chiang should win, because the people are no match for money and guns. But Mao has something else—he's changing the way China thinks. They get people to stand up in public, beg for forgiveness, and denounce themselves."

"For what?" I said.

"For having the wrong views. They call it Rectification. You might laugh, but it works. The people who come out on the other end of Rectification, they'll do anything for Mao. Mothers will go where he tells them, leaving their children behind. They'll become moles in Chiang's government or his army, no matter what the risk. There are Red Chinese spies everywhere. Including here in San Francisco. But for every Red Chinese spy, Chiang has two secret policemen. China has the biggest secret police force in the history of the world. Hundreds of thousands of men. Butchers who torture before they assassinate. But they know what they're doing—there's never been a better trained secret police. Because they learned their trade from the master—your sainted Chief Vollmer, Detective Sullivan."

"What?" I said, not believing what I'd just heard.

"You didn't know that, did you? It's true. Chiang's secret police were trained by V-men—Vollmer men just like you, Detective—who came to Berkeley from China to study under your old chief in the early thirties.

Vollmer taught them all the modern techniques. Don't get me wrong. I'm not condemning Chiang's secret police. China needs them to infiltrate the Communists just as the Communists are infiltrating China. We in Chinatown support General Chiang and his Nationalists. They believe in profit and commerce, just like us—just like America. That's the choice China faces, and soon the whole world will too—between godless capitalism and godless Communism.”

“Wake me up when class is out, for fuck's sake,” said Vern. “Why would a Red Chinese spy be in Berkeley?”

“It's not crazy,” I said. “She could have been keeping an eye on Madame Chiang.”

“Not only keeping an eye on her,” said Gong. “Living with her. Shirley Wang came to this country a year ago with the rest of Madame Chiang's household. She was one of her most trusted servants. But four weeks ago, Madame Chiang received news that Shirley was a spy for Mao. The Madame didn't believe it, but she fired Shirley all the same. That's how Shirley ended up in your public housing village, Detective.”

“And you know all this how?” I asked.

“We're the ones who discovered that Shirley was getting messages from the Communists. I told Madame Chiang myself. But we had nothing else to do with it.”

“Oh yeah?” said Vern. “So who did her, then?”

“Let me ask you a question,” I said. “Would Chiang's secret police torture a woman?”

“That's their specialty,” said Gong. “They're famous for it. They rip their fingernails off. Very useful for interrogations, I'm told.”

He was describing exactly what I'd seen on Shirley Wang's body.

“Come on,” said Callaghan, “a Red Chinese spy was killed in Berkeley by a Chinese secret police assassin? That's your story, Eddie?”

“I'm not accusing anyone of anything. But I can tell you this much. There hasn't been a tong hatchet murder in this country for over twenty years. It was bad for business. Brought too much heat. Why would we start now?”

Gong stood up. One of his henchmen draped a coat over his shoulders.

“That’s all I have for you, gentlemen,” he said. “Sergeant, I expect my men out of jail by morning. Unless you want to reconsider our—financial arrangements.”

3

Back in my car, I decided not to think about the fact that Vern Callaghan, head of San Francisco’s Chinatown squad, was on the take from Eddie Gong, head of Chinatown’s biggest gang—which didn’t really surprise me but didn’t make me too proud of my profession either. I guess that was how they kept the peace, and who knows—maybe it was better that way.

The more important point was that one person had now emerged with a connection to both my murders—and that person just happened to be the First Lady of China, who just happened to be living in Berkeley, California, five minutes from the Claremont Hotel. It was pretty clear I had to talk with Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, no matter what Chief Greening would say about it.

Meanwhile I had just enough time, before getting back to Berkeley, to make one more stop in downtown San Francisco.

4

The Shreve & Co. jewelry store was a high-end emporium at the corner of Post and Grant, with glass showcases and marble columns and mirrors everywhere, and I arrived just as they were closing. On display were rack after rack of silver—silver sculptures, silverware, silver necklaces—and a few million dollars’ worth of gems. The smallest diamond ring there would probably have cost me a year’s pay.

The guy who offered to help me could have been a mortician. He was tall and spare, with thinning hair and a long melancholy face. I showed him my badge and told him I needed to know whether Walter Wilkinson had made any recent purchases there.

“*The* Walter Wilkinson? Who was just killed?”

“That’s right.”

“No. Nothing at all.”

“You would know?”

“I would know,” he said. “I’m the manager.”

I put the black velvet box on the glass counter between us. “This was in Mr. Wilkinson’s hotel room. It’s one of yours.”

His long bony fingers took it from me and turned it over a few times, holding it close to his eyes. I thought he was going to put on one of those jeweler’s monocles, but he didn’t. “That’s curious,” he said. “It is one of ours, but we stopped using those boxes over a decade ago. I believe it was in 1932, when we switched manufacturers to obtain a more youthful, vital look. These are the boxes we use now.”

He pulled out from a drawer a different dark velvet box, which didn’t look any more youthful and vital to me, but he was the expert. “Do you keep sales records from before 1932?” I asked.

“Certainly.”

“Could you find out if Wilkinson bought anything from you back then?”

“On what day of what year?”

“That I don’t know.”

“Our invoices are organized by date, Detective. Without a date, one would have to go through every receipt, day by day, and look at the purchaser’s signature. I’m not prepared to do that. Are you?”

“Not right now,” I said.

“Good, because the owners wouldn’t have let you if you were.”

“One last question, if you don’t mind. What kind of item would have gone into a box like this?”

“Oh, it could have been anything. Not a watch or ring; we have special boxes for those. But nearly anything else. Earrings, a brooch, a bracelet or necklace. Perhaps a charm or a locket.”

5

After leaving Shreve & Co., I headed back to my car, which was parked on a side street around the corner, and I was almost there when I noticed the Packard coming up from behind me—a little too slowly. It was starting to get dark, and the little side street was otherwise empty. The machine drew up to the curb just ahead of me and shut down its lights with the engine still running.

Three men in suits got out. Each of them was carrying; I could see the

bulge of their shoulder holsters. They made a triangle around me.

“Somebody wants to see you, Sullivan,” one of them said.

“Oh, yeah? Who?” I asked.

“Just get in the car.”

“And if I don’t?”

“It’ll be easier if you do.”

I couldn’t see any reason anybody would want me dead, and if on the off chance somebody did, these guys could have done it already. I got in the Packard.

Nobody said anything. I was squeezed into the back seat, with one of the men on either side of me. They drove to California Street and took it up to the top of Nob Hill. Then a few quick turns, a descent down a driveway, and they pulled up at a rear service entrance of the massive Pacific-Union Club.

“I hate to break it you, boys,” I said, “but I’m not a member.”

“Get out,” was the only reply I got.

They led me in through a service door—nobody gave them any trouble about it—and we climbed a few flights of stairs. Then they walked me down a dressy corridor and brought me to a closed door. One of the men knocked, and it took a few minutes, but eventually the door was opened from the inside by yet another man in a dark suit. He gestured us in.

The room was some kind of parlor with leather furniture, dark wood bookcases, antique lamps, that kind of thing. It had the rich smell of old money.

In a stately wingback chair sat Madame Chiang Kai-Shek.

“Detective Sullivan,” she said, standing up with a smile and an extended hand. “Thank you for meeting with me on such short notice. My apologies for the theatrics, but I wanted to keep this very private. Even my husband, the General, doesn’t know I’m speaking with you. Please sit, won’t you?”

I saw what all the fuss was about. A year ago Madame Chiang had addressed the United States Congress—the first woman ever to do that—and apparently when she strode into the chamber a collective gasp went up from the congressmen and the folks in the galleries alike. Standing before me, she was elegant but also more spontaneous and playful than you’d expect. Her dress was black with red trim, her jewelry green—jade, I guessed. I took a

seat opposite her. A couple of bodyguards stood behind her, while two more were guarding the door we had come through, and still two others were guarding a door on the other side of the room.

Somebody must have been tailing me when I left the Forbidden City. Maybe they heard I was meeting with Eddie Gong—maybe Gong himself had told them—and then they followed me from there to the jewelry store.

“I only have a few minutes before the post-speech reception begins,” she said, “and since I’m the one who gave the speech, I really shouldn’t be late. So I’ll be very direct. I understand that you’re investigating the murder of my friend Walter Wilkinson. I am here to tell you that President Chiang and I had nothing to do with it. The very suggestion that we would have *killed* a distinguished statesman like Walter, whom we have had as a dinner guest in our own house, is ludicrous and insulting.” She paused. “The General and I are fighting for Chinese democracy. Walter was an ally in this struggle. We wanted him alive, and I guarantee you we had nothing to do with his death. I wanted you to hear that from me, Detective, in person.”

Part of me was still getting used to the idea that I was in the same room with the First Lady of China. But I did have a question, and I thought I might as well ask.

“Thank you, ma’am. As a matter of fact, there is something you might be able to help me with. A piece of jade was found in Mr. Wilkinson’s mouth—left there by the killer, it seems. And that jade has been identified as a seal of the Government of the Republic of China—your husband’s government. I was wondering if you could shed any light on that.”

“One of our seals? I don’t believe it. It must be counterfeit. If the Republic of China had Walter killed, do you really think we’d have been so foolish as to leave a calling card? It’s absurd. What possible motive would my husband or I have had for killing him?”

“Respectfully, ma’am, I can think of one or two.”

“Ah. You are referring to the rumor that I was having an affair with Mr. Wilkinson. Did you know, Detective Sullivan, that my father was a missionary preacher—a Southern Methodist preacher?”

“No, ma’am, I didn’t.”

“Yes. He came to Christ as a young man in North Carolina, of all places.

When he returned to China, arms full of Bibles, he raised his six children to be devout Christians. People say our childhood was puritanical. It's true, and I'm proud of it. Marital infidelity disgusts me, Detective. My views on marriage are well known all over China. When Mrs. Liang told me her husband was having an affair, I had him fired at once—and he was one of my husband's closest confidants. I am a Christian woman and a devoted wife, loyal to only one man—my husband.”

Even if that were true, the obvious reply was that her husband might have believed the rumor and had Wilkinson killed for it. But I didn't want to put it quite that way to Madame Chiang. “Is it possible a mistake was made, ma'am, by a subordinate? Could an agent of your husband's, hearing these outrageous rumors, have taken action on his own, without you or President Chiang knowing anything about it?”

“Absolutely not. None of the Generalissimo's agents would be so foolhardy. They are extremely disciplined.”

“I've also heard, ma'am, that Mr. Wilkinson had changed his thinking about your husband—about his support for General Chiang as China's leader.”

For the first time, Madame Chiang's eyes flashed with anger. “Who told you that?”

“Is it true?”

The anger disappeared just as quickly as it had come on, and she was composed again. “My husband and I have many enemies, Detective—do you know how many attempts on our lives there have been? They will say anything to destroy us. With my husband, at least they're consistent: he's a ruthless warlord who can't be trusted. With me, they can't even keep their attacks straight. Which is it—am I the Dragon Lady controlling all China from behind the throne or the spoiled brat sleeping on silk sheets while my people starve? Or the docile concubine—an ‘exquisite Chinese doll,’ as that *Life* reporter put it? As to Walter losing faith in us—I don't know who told you that, but it's just another lie. No one was a stauncher supporter. Without my husband at the helm, China will fall to that Communist Mao Tse-tung. Walter knew that—and that it's in America's interest to avoid that result at all costs.”

“Speaking of Mao, ma’am, could he have wanted Wilkinson dead? Could one of his agents have done it?”

“That thought has crossed our minds too, Detective. But Mao wouldn’t dare. Killing an American politician on American soil? Even he wouldn’t think of it.” She stood. “And now, Detective, I really must get to the reception.”

I got up too, and we shook hands again.

“Oh, there is one other thing,” I said. “You didn’t say anything about Shirley Wang.”

There was no change in her expression—I was watching for it. “She was an employee in my household. But she was a thief, and I let her go. I know nothing about her murder.”

“How did you know she was murdered, ma’am?”

“We have eyes and ears everywhere, Detective. I’ve never pretended otherwise. It wouldn’t be safe here for me if we didn’t.”

“I’m told that Shirley worked for Mao.”

“I’ve been told the same thing. But if you want to find her killer, you should be looking in Chinatown. The tongs use hatchets, Detective. We most certainly do not.”

“Could Shirley have killed Wilkinson and placed one of your seals at the scene to frame you for it?”

“Detective Sullivan, nothing would suit my political interests more than to tell you that Mao Tse-tung was behind the killing of Walter Wilkinson.”

“So why aren’t you telling me that, ma’am?”

“Because it’s not true. And because Walter was a very dear friend, and I won’t use his murder for political purposes. Let me tell you something, Detective. Contrary to all the sordid rumors, Walter did not come to Berkeley to see me. He came for someone else. I don’t know who it was, but about three weeks ago, Walter phoned me to let me know he was planning a visit, and he mentioned there was someone very important to him here, whom he had to see. That’s all I know. I just hope you’ll bring his killer to justice.”

“And Shirley Wang’s killer?”

“Shirley Wang is not important.”

With that remark, Madame Chiang took her leave. As I was ushered out

of the room, I thought to myself that Madame Chiang was charming all right—but I wouldn't want to cross her.

6

They wouldn't let me leave the Pacific-Union Club through the front door, so they shoved me politely out the same service entrance I'd come in through.

It was raining now. My car was still parked near Shreve's, and cabs were out of my league, meaning I was in for a walk. Which was all right with me, because there was a place close by I wanted to visit. I put my collar up, pulled my hat brim down, and set off through the drizzle, wondering how much I'd been played in the last seventy-two hours and by how many different women.

You had to admire Nob Hill in the nighttime: the skyscraping Mark Hopkins, the stately Fairmont bigger than a European palace, the soaring towers of Grace Cathedral. I'd been in the Mark Hopkins exactly once in my life and felt like an imposter every minute I was there. A lot of big hotels in San Francisco were billeting servicemen in their ballrooms and dining rooms—because the mayor had ordered them to—but not the Mark. No one expected it of the Mark. I wondered who got paid off for that, and how much it cost.

But even the rich and powerful couldn't get away with murder. At least not always. At least I didn't like to think so.

Madame Chiang knew more about Shirley Wang's murder than she was letting on, but that didn't make her the doer. As to Wilkinson, I had to weigh Madame Chiang's story on the one hand against Isabella's on the other. According to the Madame, Wilkinson was the Chiangs' strongest ally and she and her husband had every reason to want to keep him alive; according to Isabella, Wilkinson had turned on Chiang Kai-Shek, and they would have wanted him dead.

It only took me only a couple of minutes to get where I was going. I climbed the front steps and rang the bell.

Isabella herself answered the door.

"Why, it's my dark and stormy detective," she said, "on a dark and stormy night. Don't just stand there—come in out of the rain."

“I’m fine where I am, miss.”

“I don’t like the sound of that.”

“Why did Walter Wilkinson call you the night he died, Miss Stafford?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“He placed a call to this house, miss, at nine o’clock, soon after someone took a shot at him. The number’s listed in your father’s name, but you told me yourself your father hasn’t lived here in years. Wilkinson wasn’t calling your father. He was calling you.”

“If Mr. Wilkinson called, I—”

“Oh, he made the call, miss. We have the phone records.”

“Well I didn’t get it. I wasn’t here.”

“No? Okay, let’s say I believe you. Still, why would he call you? That’s the question, Miss Stafford.”

“I told you, Detective—I was doing a story on him. He must have been calling to schedule our interview.”

“You’d given him your number?”

“Yes, so that he could get back to me about the interview.”

“When did you do that, miss—give him your number?”

“When? I must have given it to him at the Christmas party.”

“You must have?”

“No, I did. I wrote it down for him.”

“You’re telling me he was calling you at nine o’clock at night to schedule an interview? After someone had nearly killed him?”

“It’s my best guess, Detective. Do you have another theory?”

“Several.”

“All of which, I suppose, involve him making a midnight assignation with me? Why would he?”

“Why would a man ask a girl to meet him in a hotel at midnight? I can’t imagine.”

“I think you *are* imagining. I can see it in your eyes. You’re imagining me alone with a man at night and what I might do.”

“That’s exactly what I’m imagining, Miss Stafford.”

“You don’t have to imagine. You could find out for yourself.”

“But would I live to tell the tale?”

“You can’t really think I killed him. I believe I could kill a man—I do—but I could never have killed Mr. Wilkinson.”

“Why not?”

She smiled. “Because I was in Sonoma, of course.”

“You should try telling the truth some time, miss. It’d be a relief. You’d feel better.”

“I’ve tried telling the truth many times in my life, Detective. It never once felt better. Is that all?”

I said good night and left.

But just as I reached the end of the block—downhill from the Stafford house—a Lincoln came careening around the corner and nearly clipped me. It sped uphill and screeched to a breakneck stop right in front of Isabella’s, its front tire jumping the curb and its fender almost hitting a tree trunk. Cassie Bainbridge leapt out from the driver’s seat, followed immediately by Nicole from the passenger side, with a satchel over her shoulder. They ran up to the house and let themselves in, so helter-skelter they left all the doors open—car doors and house door alike.

A few seconds later, a light went on in a room on the second floor, and Cassie and Nicole flitted back and forth in the window. Then I saw Isabella there too. At that point the light went off, and a moment later the three of them came bursting out of the front door again, making straight for the Lincoln. Nicole no longer had her shoulder bag, but Isabella was carrying a small suitcase.

Isabella spotted me watching from the corner, and she said something to her cousins, and they all turned in my direction. For an instant the three Bainbridge girls—Isabella, Nicole, and Cassie—all stared at me at the same time, like fair-haired sorceresses in the night. Then Cassie jumped behind the wheel and the other two climbed in as well, and the car made a U-turn and came tearing down the street in my direction way too fast. For a second I thought they might be coming at me, but they gave me a wide berth, although they damn near hit someone else, practically spinning out as they rounded the corner. At the end of the next block, the car skidded around another corner and disappeared.

I looked back at the Stafford house. It was entirely dark now, but in the

lamplight of the street I could see the front door was ajar. It was like God tempting me. What was in the satchel Nicole was carrying? Could they have just moved criminal evidence—could it possibly have been the murder weapon? I didn't know what was going on, but I had the distinct impression someone was trying to get rid of something.

If a cop has probable cause to believe evidence of a crime is in a certain house and might not be there by the time he comes back with a warrant, he can go into that house. He can break down the door. To be honest, I'm not sure I passed any part of that test, but on the other hand I wasn't planning any door-breaking. With a little luck, no one would ever know I was there.

The Stafford house was deathly silent inside. There was no sign of the housekeeper. The ceilings were so high the sound of my shoes on the marble floor reverberated a lot louder than I intended. But nothing stirred. I wondered if Sadie, Isabella's mom, might have been hospitalized again. That could explain why the house felt so empty and why no servants seemed to be around either.

I ascended the stairs as quietly as I could and went into the room the girls had been in. With my flashlight, I took a look around. It was a bedroom, but a strange one. The ceiling was high, but the room itself was small, so it felt oppressive. The walls were papered with small rust-red roses that felt the opposite of fresh. There were two child-size canopied beds, perfectly made, and the furniture was child-size too. Cassie and Nicole had been in the house so short a time I expected to see the satchel in plain view, and there it was—lying on top of one of the beds. But it was empty now, completely empty.

I opened the drawers, but all I found were children's clothes, neatly folded, undisturbed. In the closet were little girls' dresses, in an even row, as if they hadn't been touched in years. The whole place felt frozen in time. I poked around some more, but found nothing. Then I thought I heard footsteps above me—as if someone was moving around on the third floor—and I decided to get out of there, given the questionable legality of my being in the house in the first place.

Downstairs was eerily still. It wasn't pitch-black, just shadowy, and the marble busts that seemed so stately in the daytime looked macabre in the night. The house was silent again. Near the front door, I found myself

standing outside the library where I'd seen the oil painting of the two sisters, Isabella and Iris, when they were little. I didn't know why, but I needed to see that painting again. I stepped into the room and trained my light on it.

Iris stared out at me, and the same chill that ran up my spine the first time I saw that painting ran down it now. I shifted my gaze to the young Isabella. Her violet eyes were sad, and she looked small and lost—it was hard to believe she was the same person as the self-assured young woman I'd just exchanged words with. I looked back at Iris. She was wearing the blue dress with white flowers that I'd seen in my dream—how was that possible?—and the folds of her skirt blended into those of Isabella's skirt, which was the reverse of Iris's, white with little blue flowers.

That's when I saw it.

In Iris's left hand, half-hidden against the folds of the little girls' skirts, she was holding a doll. It was barely visible, but it had a porcelain face and tiny round mouth and was a dead ringer for the doll I'd found in the closet at the Claremont.

At that moment, I heard a noise from above, floating down the stairwell—a soft wailing like someone in pain or crying. It sounded like a child. The wailing grew louder, then softer, then louder again. Part of me thought I'd better beat it, but I had to find out what it was.

As I mounted the stairs, the wail changed. Or maybe it didn't change; maybe it just sounded different as I got closer. Now it was more like singing. On the second floor, it was still coming from somewhere above me, so I went up another flight, but it was higher still. A smaller stairwell led up to a fourth floor where the ceiling was so low I had to hunch over to avoid banging my head. The singing had turned back into a wail now, interspersed with word fragments too hushed for me to make out. The voice was female for sure, but it didn't sound like a child any more.

It was coming from a room toward the rear of the house. A dim light was on in that room. I pushed the door open and saw a female figure at a window. The window was open, and she had one leg over the sill. She was about to step right out the window—four flights up from the ground.

“Don't!” I shouted.

The figure turned, and I saw Isabella staring at me with wild eyes and

disheveled hair. Then I saw that her face was older—the skin looser and lined, although still beautiful. It wasn't Isabella—it was her mother, Sadie, who apparently wasn't a bedridden invalid after all.

She fairly pounced out of the window, like a cat. But instead of falling to her death, she stood straight up—then glided off to the right, out of view. I went to the open window. There was a kind of fire escape outside it. I squeezed myself out the window and onto the fire escape, which led to a series of steep metal stairs running down the rear wall of the house. Sadie was halfway down already. Again I followed her. The final flight of stairs ended in a garden in what must have been the back yard. A cast iron gate led out of that garden to an alley. The gate was open. Sadie was gone.

1944

TUESDAY, MARCH 14

1

“These eggs are *really* good, Al! What’d you do to them?”

It was the next morning, just after sunrise, and Miriam and I were sitting at my fold-out Formica dining table eating breakfast. Rosemary still hadn’t shown up. I was distracted—I couldn’t get the image of Sadie gliding along the fourth-floor balcony out of my head—and annoyed at the same time. Where the hell was Rosemary? I’d had a date last night, which I had to cancel because of Miriam. Truth is I didn’t like the woman much though. I’d been with her a few times, but she was too bony in the hips and shoulders, plus I didn’t like the way she smelled. The worst part was how she kept looking at me hopefully, as if she were expecting me to spring some surprise on her, like maybe a ring, when in fact I was trying to ease her out gently. So it was just as well I had to call the date off.

Still, this thing with Miriam had to stop. She couldn’t be living with me. I got a kick out of Miriam. Seeing her was usually the best part of my day, but I couldn’t be in charge. I couldn’t raise a kid. What if I made all the wrong decisions and she ended up a mess and it was my fault? Besides, I had my own life to work on. And how was I supposed to do all the things bachelors do if she was around all the time?

“Just added onions and tomatoes and peppers is all. And some spices. Like my dad used to do.”

“Wow. I never had spices before. Where’d you find the meat?”

Beef had been rationed since last year. You were only allowed to buy two and a half pounds of meat—any meat—a week. Plus it was scarce and expensive, so hamburger was practically a luxury for working people nowadays. Miriam probably hadn't had any for months.

"Petrini's—I got the last half pound," I answered. "How's math going, Miriam? What are you working on?"

"Huh? Oh. Nothing. Same old stuff."

"No, I'm serious. What are you studying right now—multiplication, division?"

"Yeah, all that stuff. But I don't think my teacher likes me too much."

"Why would she not like you? Everyone likes you."

"I don't know. She looks at me funny. Once she asked me where I was from. Couple times, actually. And also what my father did."

"What'd you say?"

"I said I didn't have a father."

"And what'd she say?"

"I can't remember. I think she said she was sorry."

"Okay then, see? She doesn't not like you."

Inwardly I cursed. I didn't know anything about kids, and whether they needed comforting or a talking to. And did Miriam need a haircut and some better clothes? She couldn't wear those same overalls all the time. She looked like a farmer.

"Al?"

"What?"

"I don't want to disappoint you but ... well, I'm not sure school's for me. A lot of kids have stopped going."

I'd heard that. With the war, both teachers and students were dropping out. But I thought that was just high school. Miriam was only in sixth grade.

"I don't care what other people are doing," I said. "School is not optional. It's your only way out."

"I just feel like I learn more hanging around with you. You know way more than my stupid teachers anyway and—"

"Your teachers aren't stupid, and you can't just hang around me, Miriam. I'm not your dad. You need to get that through your head."

As soon as I said that—actually before I was done saying it—I wished I could suck it back. But it was too late. Miriam winced like she'd been knifed, and I thought for a second she was going to burst into tears. Then it passed, and she looked upbeat again, which only made me feel worse and wish she actually had burst into tears.

“I know that, Al, don't worry.” She sounded fine, even chipper—but I could hear a tremor in her voice, which told me I'd hurt her bad. “I'm just saying that I'm not brainy like you.”

I tried to pivot, make it seem like I'd been saying something else. “Following me around won't get you anywhere. You're real smart, Miriam. You could be a teacher—”

“No way, forget that.”

“Or a scientist or a doctor—”

“You're dreaming, Al.”

“You could own a business. You've got street smarts, you're good with people, you have good judgment and people like you.”

I was trying, but it was too late. I'd already said the most devastating thing I could possibly have said to a good kid without even one proper parent, who was pulling more than her weight already. Why was this so goddamned hard? I just didn't have the right instincts when it came to kids. I always thought I could teach myself anything, but there was no manual for this. Why didn't some expert—like maybe a doctor—write a book teaching people the best way to raise a kid? I'd buy that book for Rosemary in a heartbeat. Rosemary was just going to have to pull herself together. Miriam needed her—girls need their mothers, even imperfect ones.

2

When I got to the station it was all bad news waiting for me. The press, not just local but national, was demanding to know why we still didn't have any suspects. On top of which I had three messages from District Attorney Doogan asking the same thing. Meanwhile, Wilkinson's widow back in New York was making a stink that we hadn't released his body and was insisting he be given a state funeral—not seeming to remember that he'd never actually won public office.

I ignored all of it. The question in my head was what Iris Stafford's doll was doing in Walter Wilkinson's closet. Something connected that little girl's death to my murder, and I needed to know what.

I went down to the basement where we kept the old case files—shelves and shelves of assault and theft and death going back forty years. Iris Stafford's file consisted of a single red folder, with no physical evidence at all. That made sense: accidental deaths aren't police matters, so we don't create an extensive file or keep any of the evidence. I checked the file out of storage and took it up to my office.

I had to blow fourteen years of dust off the folder before emptying its contents onto my desk. A couple dozen photographs spilled out first—pictures of the dead girl lying where she'd been found, on a pile of dirty laundry, taken from different angles and distances.

The basic story told by the police report was familiar. I remembered most of it from the newspaper coverage back in 1930. At about five o'clock on January 25, a laundry chute in the Claremont's basement spat out the body of seven-year-old Iris Stafford, headfirst, into a pile of soiled sheets and towels. She was dead on arrival. About a half hour earlier, Iris and her sister, Isabella, had been seen playing hide-and-seek in the hotel's banquet rooms while their mother, Sadie, was out on the tennis courts with a friend. Like a lot of other people, the girls used to have fun coming down the hotel's spiral fire escape slide. The speculation was that Iris thought she'd discovered another slide when in fact she'd come upon a laundry chute.

When the police and an ambulance got there, Sadie Stafford still hadn't been located. About forty minutes later, the father, Roger Stafford, arrived, and he took charge of Isabella. The ambulance crew were wheeling Iris—covered by a sheet—out through the lobby when Sadie finally appeared. She tore the sheet off her daughter's body, began screaming uncontrollably, and had to be sedated with two shots of chloral hydrate before being taken away by medical personnel.

The interview notes were spare. Sadie had never been interviewed at all. She suffered a nervous breakdown and was institutionalized in an insane asylum in Napa, where they kept her on ice for a week. Roger Stafford point-blank refused to speak with the police. In fact, he nearly came to blows with

the officer who went to his house the next day to try to interview him. Isabella, only six years old and in shock, was unable to respond to questions. Apparently she stopped speaking altogether—not to the police, not to family members, not to anyone—for months.

Sadie's tennis friend, Tillie, was the most forthcoming. It turned out she was married to Sadie's psychoanalyst, Dr. Rudolf von Urban, which was a name I knew. Von Urban had been on trial recently for practicing medicine without a license—a trial the papers had pounced all over, especially when it came out that his prescription for his patients, most of them wealthy and female, was invariably directed to improving their sex lives. Sadie and Tillie had occasional Sunday tennis outings, every few months or so, at the Claremont. On the day of the death, they had played from three to four; afterward, Tillie played in a woman's round-robin and didn't come back inside the hotel until the news of an accident was spreading. Dr. von Urban, who had spent the night at the Claremont, was interviewed the next day at his home in Carmel-by-the-Sea, giving a statement long-winded in the extreme. He was expansive about his Viennese academic pedigree and how successful he'd been in treating the women in his care; he knew nothing about the accident; he'd been in his hotel room at the Claremont the entire afternoon working on a book. At a certain point—he wasn't sure when—Sadie knocked on his door, asking if he'd seen the girls; he told her he hadn't; she went off; he knew nothing more until Tillie came back and told him the shocking news.

The thing that bothered me most was Sadie—her whereabouts didn't add up. Hotel staff went looking for her almost immediately after the body was found. They knew she was playing tennis. They should have found her either on the courts or in the locker room, but they didn't. Not for two hours. Where had she been? When exactly did she go up to von Urban's room, why would she have thought he might have seen the girls, and why wasn't von Urban interviewed until the next day? It felt like Sadie and the good doctor might have had more than a purely medical relationship.

Paper-clipped into the file at the end of the interviews was a short, cryptic note written by Chief Vollmer himself in 1932. New information—the source appeared to be Genevieve Bainbridge, the grandmother—indicated that a silver necklace with a small diamond cross pendant worn by Iris may

have gone missing on the day of her death. The facts were deemed insufficient to open up a new investigation.

There was also an autopsy report, which was normal; the law requires a medical examination for every accidental death. All of Iris's injuries, the coroner concluded, were the result of her nine-story headfirst plunge down the laundry chute, especially the brutal snapping of her neck. While the little girl had a nasty laceration encircling her neck—presumably from the necklace she'd been wearing—there had been no strangulation.

Iris had other scrapes and scratches on her body as well, some of them of older vintage, but nothing out of the ordinary for a rambunctious kid. All of her injuries, new and old, were marked on a schematic diagram of a human body, and something about that diagram bothered me, although I didn't know what. The poor kid had also suffered a bout of polio, leaving her with a mildly deformed left foot.

What had happened to Iris's necklace? And where had Sadie Stafford been for the two hours her little girl was lying dead on a cold basement floor while strangers gawked and police photographers flashed their bulbs?

There was one last item in the case file: a large envelope containing newspaper photographs from the time, including pictures of the crowds that had gathered in front of the Claremont. They weren't allowed inside the hotel, but hundreds had lingered long outside its front doors, ostensibly to express grief and sympathy, but in reality to gape at traumatized family members or maybe even catch a glimpse of the child corpse.

Then I noticed something. In one of the crowd photos, which must have been taken from a third-floor window at the hotel, while everyone else was facing the Claremont, a lone figure was walking away, on a path that would take him up higher into the Berkeley Hills.

It was a monk. Wearing a belted habit of the same kind they wore at St. Andrew's Abbey. With a hood over his head.

I swore. What were the odds that a monk would be walking away from the scene of two deaths at the Claremont Hotel fourteen years apart?

I started repacking the case file when my eyes fell again on the autopsy diagram showing the location of Iris's injuries, and that same nagging feeling came over me. For some reason I glanced over at the doll we'd found in

Wilkinson's hotel room, which was lying on top of a cardboard evidence box on my floor.

Suddenly I knew what was bothering me.

When Archimbault first examined the doll, he told me he'd found a strange mark on one of its arms—a deep groove etched just below the left shoulder. I checked that against Iris's autopsy diagram. It was a perfect match.

Iris had deep bruises on her left arm. They predated the accident. The cut on the doll's arm was in the same place. And the doll's melted left foot was a match too, for Iris's deformed polio foot.

It was as if someone had turned that doll into an incarnation of Iris's body. But who—and why?

3

I knocked at 2907 Avalon Avenue, an upscale winding street a few elegant blocks below the Claremont. The house was a grand white stucco in the Mediterranean style with a terracotta tile roof and large bay windows, perched on a steep hillside overlooking the other houses on the street. I could smell oranges, lemons, and maybe apricots from the garden. This was lily-white fragrant Berkeley, high up in the hills. Well, almost lily-white: right across the street from Mrs. Bainbridge's house was Madame Chiang Kai-Shek's.

The front door opened.

"Mrs. Genevieve Bainbridge? Detective Al Sullivan, Berkeley PD. Could I have ten minutes of your time?"

"Of course. Please come in. Al Sullivan—you're Gus Vollmer's protégé, aren't you? And you played baseball for Cal some years ago. An ace pitcher, if I recall?"

This took me aback. "Yes, ma'am. How'd you know that?"

"I know everything. I'm just joking. Gus is an old friend. I just spoke with him the other day; we're on the same conservation board."

I had a dim memory of being a rookie when Chief Vollmer first told me about Mrs. Bainbridge, who at that time was a middle-aged widow. She'd helped the department solve a burglary when everyone else was stumped.

“Right, I remember now. He called you the best sleuth in town.”

“Amateur sleuth.”

“I think he just said sleuth. You were the one who cracked the cat burglary on College Avenue.”

“I did, actually. It was obviously an inside job. But how can I help you, Detective?”

“Well, I’m sorry to have to bring this up, ma’am, but I was hoping to ask you a couple of questions about your granddaughter Iris.”

“Iris? Good heavens.”

“Yes, I was wondering if by any chance you remember her having a doll—a Dy-Dee doll?”

“I do indeed. She and Isabella each had one. They were great favorites.”

“Do you know what became of them?”

“The dolls? Oh goodness, it’s been so long. Perhaps in an attic somewhere? Or long thrown out? I’m afraid I don’t know.”

“All right. Mrs. Bainbridge, I’m sorry to—well, I’m sorry to be so blunt, ma’am, but is it possible that someone in the Stafford household might have been ... hurting Iris?”

“Goodness gracious. What do you mean, Detective?”

“Hitting her. Bruising her.”

“Absolutely not. It’s inconceivable. If such a thing had been happening, I would have known. Iris would have told me. What on earth makes you think that? And what does poor Iris have to do with any of this?”

“I just happened to be looking at the old case file, ma’am, and I’m trying to tie up some loose ends.”

“For heaven’s sake, Detective, I may be old, but I don’t live under a rock. You’re investigating the murder of Walter Wilkinson. What possible connection can there be to Iris and her doll?”

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Bainbridge, I can’t discuss the Wilkinson case.”

We hadn’t released to the public yet any of the strange details of Wilkinson’s murder—not his state of undress, not his stuffed-full mouth, and not the doll found in his closet.

“Yes, of course—I understand, Gus was always the same way.” She paused for a moment, then continued. “I’ve heard that there are vicious

rumors circulating about my family again—we are everyone’s favorite fodder—but I believe I can save you some time. I know you’ve already questioned my three granddaughters, and if you’re actually considering the possibility that any of them might have been involved in Mr. Wilkinson’s murder, you can strike that theory now. I can account for the whereabouts of all three that evening.”

I took out my notebook and pen. “I’m all ears, ma’am.”

“The girls had an overnight planned at our country house in Sonoma that night. Isabella left here around ten in one of my cars, met Nicole at her dorm room, and the two of them drove there together. Just to make sure they arrived safely, I called the country house a few hours later. All three were there, chatting and having hot cocoa by the fire. So you see, none of my granddaughters could have been at the Claremont at midnight. Of course I’m assuming the papers are correct in saying Mr. Wilkinson was killed at midnight, and I above all people should know how wrong the papers are about most things. Was he not killed around midnight?”

“He was, ma’am.”

“There you are, then. My granddaughters were hours away at that time. And surely you must have other suspects. Mr. Wilkinson was a politician and, from what I gather, quite an outspoken and controversial one. I wouldn’t be surprised if many people wanted him dead.”

Genevieve Bainbridge reminded me of a lioness protecting her brood, and I had a feeling she’d do pretty much anything to protect her family, including spinning yarns if she had to, or conveniently confirming alibis. “Were there any connections you know of, ma’am, between the Bainbridges and Walter Wilkinson?”

“What possible connections could there have been?”

“Was he ... close to any of your granddaughters?”

“Certainly not.”

“Were you acquainted with him, ma’am?”

“I was at a party recently where he was also in attendance.”

“That would have been at Madame Chiang’s?”

“Yes, she lives right across the street. We’ve become quite friendly. When she was about to buy her house, half my neighbors tried to stop the

sale on the reprehensible ground that a racial covenant in all our deeds precluded it, which was true. But Mr. Lipman and I—he's the president of the Wells Fargo bank—headed up a countercampaign and thank goodness we prevailed. Last December, Madame Chiang was kind enough to invite me and my granddaughters to her Christmas party. There were many illustrious guests there. Walter Wilkinson was one of them."

"Did Nicole speak with him?"

"I doubt it. Nicole can't stomach capitalists at the moment. And there would hardly have been opportunity. Mr. Wilkinson spent most of the evening at the side of our hostess. It was plain, Detective, that they were ... well acquainted with one another, if I'm making myself clear. It was quite entertaining to watch the two of them actually. The lady-killer and the femme fatale, both of course married to other people. But then at the end of the evening—although perhaps it was part of the game—he began flirting brazenly with another woman, a much younger woman. My granddaughter Isabella."

"Did Isabella ... reciprocate those advances, Mrs. Bainbridge?"

"You can't be serious."

"Just asking, ma'am."

"Absolutely not. He was old enough to be her grandfather."

At this point Mrs. Bainbridge glanced at her watch. I ignored the hint. "Your daughter, Sadie, ma'am, how would you describe her present condition?"

"Unwell, Detective, extremely unwell."

"Is she ambulatory?"

"My daughter has had an indescribably difficult life. Being constantly in the public eye has been part of the problem. I hope you'll respect my family's privacy."

She stood, so I did too and thanked her for her time. I was halfway out the door when I stopped.

"Just one more thing, ma'am, and I apologize if this is out of line, but your son-in-law, Roger Stafford, Sadie's husband—am I right that he wasn't Iris's father?"

I'd waited until I was on her front steps for this one, because I thought if

I'd still been inside she might have thrown me out. But she didn't bat an eye and responded as if the question were as mundane as whether the corner store was open on Sundays. "No, Detective, he wasn't. Excellent deduction. Did you compare Iris's birthdate to Sadie's wedding date?"

"As a matter of fact I did, ma'am. But there was also Mr. Stafford's behavior the day after Iris died."

"You mean his altercation with that policeman?"

"Yes, and his refusing to cooperate with the investigation. He never gave a statement. It seemed like something a little more complicated than grief."

"It certainly was. Will that be all, Detective?"

"Iris's real father, ma'am—was it Sadie's psychiatrist? Dr. von Urban?"

"I'm afraid I can't help you there, Detective. But now I have a question for you—you've jogged a memory. When you were a student at Cal—when you first met Gus—didn't you go by a different name? Alejo? Yes, Gus referred to you as Alejo Gutiérrez. When did you become Al Sullivan? And why? Forgive me if I'm prying, but I have so much admiration for self-made men."

I felt the blood rush to my cheeks. Fortunately, I have a lot of melanin in my skin, so it didn't show. How the hell did she know so much, and had Vollmer actually blabbed to her about me? For some reason, maybe idiotic, I'd always assumed he wouldn't tell anyone. I tried to read her. Her expression was kindly, but was she trying to rattle me, go for my weak spot? How would she even know what my weak spot was? Come to think of it, who said I had a weak spot?

"Gus was terribly fond of you," she continued. "He said you had a photographic memory. But if I'm not mistaken, Gus described you as a Spanish speaker—if memory serves, your father was from Mexico? I don't detect even a hint of a Spanish accent—you must be very good at languages—did you train yourself to get rid of it?"

That's actually exactly what I did. But I wasn't about to give her the pleasure of being right. "Spanish was my second language," I lied. "We spoke mostly English at home because that's all my mom could understand." Which was the opposite of true since my dad was the dominant one in family and ran the show.

“Well, I genuinely admire you,” she said, sounding completely sincere. “I have great respect for people who reinvent themselves—and people who can blend seamlessly into any social setting.”

I was almost positive she was toying with me. “Thank you, ma’am—that’s one of the nicest things anyone’s ever said to me,” I said. “You’ve been a great help—I really appreciate your giving me the time. And I’ll let you know if there are any developments. Good day, Mrs. Bainbridge.”

4

It was probably exactly what the old matriarch wanted—to keep me from focusing on all the holes in her granddaughters’ cock-and-bull country-house alibi—but my whole way back to the station, all I could do was rehearse in my head all the good reasons I’d had for changing my name from Gutiérrez to Sullivan.

At the time, what I told myself was that I was washing my hands of my dad. After what he did to my mom, I didn’t want anything to do with him, including his name. But if I was being totally honest with myself, there was more to it.

When I got to Berkeley, I might have been the only Mexican in my entire freshman class—and I was only half. I was definitely the only Mex on the Cal baseball team. I don’t think the other guys had ever heard the name Gutiérrez. They had a good laugh and started calling me Due to Errors instead, and it stuck. Mostly I let it roll off my back. I made better grades than they did, I could run a faster fifty-yard dash, and I was their best pitcher. But there was always a line I couldn’t cross. I was the only guy on the team not in a fraternity—wrong last name. Same with the girls. Plenty of girls liked me, but there was an upper echelon that wouldn’t even look at me. The society girls, the cotillion set, the debutantes—they were in their own world, and they didn’t have the time of day for a guy named Gutiérrez.

Anyway, the month after I graduated, I became a patrolman in the Berkeley PD, and I signed up as Al Sullivan. Only Chief Vollmer knew about the change, and he had no problem with it. That’s the name he put on my tag and on my locker too. I always told myself the change wasn’t a big deal. After all, taking your mom’s name was kind of a family tradition. But then

why was it so easy for Mrs. Bainbridge to get under my skin?

That's what I was thinking about while I was climbing the stairs at the station up to my office, and I only snapped out of it when Holly collared me and told me that a young woman was in the waiting room, hoping to see me. She'd been there for two hours.

"What's her name?" I asked.

"She wouldn't say," said Holly.

"What's she want to see me about?"

"She wouldn't say that either."

5

The young woman was sitting alone in the waiting room with her arms hugging herself as if it were cold. She looked poor, but decent and clean. Mediterranean, I thought, judging by her dark hair and olive complexion. Maybe twenty-three or twenty-four. Nice looking. But the moment she saw me, she leapt up from her seat like a bomb had gone off and started for the door.

"I'm sorry," she said, sounding pretty upset. "I made a mistake. I—I don't think I should do this."

"Hold on there, miss," I said. "You waited a long time to talk to me."

She stopped at the door.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

She just looked at me, frozen. You get a lot of cranks at police stations, but I didn't think she was one. Someone like her didn't sit in a police waiting room for two hours unless it was serious.

"I tell you what," I said. "Come with me to my office, and just sit down for a second. You don't have to say anything, and you can leave any time you want. How does that sound?"

She nodded and followed me to my office. I shut the door, and we sat down, me behind my desk. I gave her a moment, then said, "Maybe we could start with your name, miss. Would you like to tell me your name?"

"Yes, but I—I don't know if I should."

She looked genuinely afraid—as in afraid for her life. I had her figured for rape or domestic. Although there were no facial bruises, her boyfriend or

husband could still have been beating her up. There was a lot more of that going on—a whole lot more—than anybody wanted to talk about. The problem with these cases was that the woman was usually too terrified to work with the cops, and if she didn't press charges, there was nothing we could do. The worst thing was when we intervened but then the woman got scared and backed out. What happened next usually involved her ending up in the hospital. If not the morgue.

“Listen, miss,” I said, “anything you say in this room will be just between you and me. And I won't act on it without your permission. That's a promise. Is somebody hurting you?”

She looked startled. “No,” she said. “But I—I know something, and if I tell you, they may come for me. Or my family.”

Now I had no idea what was going on. “Who may come for you?”

“Rich people. Powerful people. People who—” She stopped in midsentence. I thought she was going to pick up and leave, but then she gathered herself and said in a quiet, even voice: “My name is Eliana Halikias. I know who killed Walter Wilkinson. Her name is Nicole. Nicole Bainbridge.”

PART THREE

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Chapter Eighteen

MRS. BAINBRIDGE'S TESTIMONIAL
PREPARED FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY DOOGAN
IN CONNECTION WITH HER DEPOSITION
TAKEN ON THE FIFTEENTH OF MARCH, 1944

One April day in 1941, my granddaughter Nicole announced she was now a Communist.

I instantly suspected a boy was involved. This required no genius on my part. It was a straightforward deduction from the fact that at the very same time she began to denounce all her previous beaux.

"What's wrong with me, Nana?" she asked. "How could I have had such mortifying taste? What could I possibly have seen in that ridiculous George Thatcher? Or Chip Abbott—ugh!"

I had to agree with her there. George was Nicole's first boyfriend, and never was there a wider gap between self-perception and reality. He thought of himself as brooding and stoic when in fact he was thin-skinned and giddy with an extremely low pain tolerance. Charles Abbott IV was Nicole's date to the deb ball, and as pretentious as they come. He was an artist at heart—but only at heart.

"I want to make a difference, Nana. I want my life to have meaning. But what have I done? Nothing—nothing except come out and dance with inane boys at cotillions. I haven't contributed a whit to humanity."

For the rest of that year Nicole was seized with class fervor, and in those prewar days, labor strikes were still omnipresent. Nicole joined women warehouse workers striking at the Southern Pacific terminal. She marched outside the Heinz pickle factory in Emeryville. She even picketed the Mark Hopkins; I doubt very much that anyone else in that line was a descendant of the great man.

You will suppose, Mr. Doogan, that I abhor Communism. Far from it. Although I am certainly not a Communist myself, no one with a heart can fail to object to our society's gross inequities, our mistreatment of the workingman, and our scandalous indifference to hunger. I admired Nicole's idealism, and I thought it important for her to learn through her own experiences, including her own mistakes.

But to be candid, I fully expected her new fervor to burn itself out within a few quick months. Nicole's dalliances with causes had always been like Sadie's, or Isabella's for that matter, with men—passionate but fleeting. In this I was mistaken. Nicole's devotion to her new cause intensified, and soon we were all in her crosshairs—our whole family, our entire social strata.

Later that year, I dropped by John's house in Pacific Heights to say hello to the twins and found Nicole in a state. She was so angry she was shaking, and at first she refused to speak with me. When I pressed her, she finally burst out, "Do you know what happened today, Nana? The police beat up some longshoremen.

They punctured the lung of one of the men and left him to die. The men hadn't done a thing—only exercised their right to strike."

I was horrified. "That's terrible," I said. "Reprehensible. Did you know any of them?"

"What difference does that make? You don't understand, Nana. The police are disgusting, and they'll pay for what they did, but they're just pawns. The real villains are the ones hiding behind the scene, pulling the levers, the ones who turned the police into the shipowners' stooges—the financiers, the industrialists, the Board of Supervisors, with their avarice and indifference."

This was a quite pointed remark. As Nicole knew well, the president of the Board of Supervisors was a cousin of ours.

Nicole's matriculation at Berkeley the next year only added fuel to the fire. Now she was surrounded by hundreds of young people with the same views as hers and, what was worse, by professors equally decrying the evils of the ruling class.

But a change came over her at college. Her passion became more cerebral. Instead of attending marches, she read incomprehensible Frenchmen and attended lectures by German Jewish philosophers, now refugees at Berkeley. This intellectual turn didn't surprise me a bit, as it was much more in keeping with her natural temperament.

Nicole has always been physically timid—she's afraid of heights and the ocean. And unlike Cassie, who can skin a whole deer by herself, tossing out entrails like Christmas ribbons, Nicole is squeamish like her father. She actually passes out at the sight of blood. For once I was glad of this timidity, because it kept her from being a true revolutionary. Nicole may be capable of grave mistakes, but she is utterly incapable of violence.

1944

TUESDAY, MARCH 14

1

I took out a notebook and pen. “All right, Miss Halikias—tell me why you think so.”

“Because she told me.”

“Nicole Bainbridge told you she killed Walter Wilkinson?”

“Why—you think people like her wouldn’t do such a thing, and people like me, we have to be lying?”

“I don’t think anything of the sort. Tell you what—let’s start at the beginning. How do you know Miss Bainbridge?”

“I met her four years ago when I was working at a newspaper stand in the Hub on Market Street. With my cousin Sal. Nicky’s father, he used to buy papers from us. One day, Nicky was with him, and she ran back with a tip for us. She didn’t realize it, but it was more money than Sal and me would make in a week. Anyway, she came back the next day, alone. We got to talking. Or rather she got to talking with Sal. A little while after that she started coming over to Sal’s place on Rincon Hill. The three of us, we spent a lot of time together.”

“Doing what?”

“Talking, mostly. Going for walks. Things you do if you don’t have any money. We drank homemade wine sometimes.”

“What would you talk about?”

“The revolution. All she ever wanted to talk about was the revolution.”

“This cousin Sal you mentioned, miss—what’s his last name?”

“Ibarra.”

I figured. Salvatore Ibarra was the known Red whom Nicole was involved with, the one I’d asked her about. He was all over Hoover’s wiretap transcripts. Eliana wasn’t. I’d never seen or heard her name before. “Are you a Communist, Miss Halikias?” I asked.

“I believe in decent wages so that working people don’t starve. I believe in safe working conditions. Does that make me a Communist?”

“Not in my book.”

“My father was a longshoreman. He can’t work anymore because he hurt his back on the job during a speed-up. He doesn’t have a doctor because we can’t afford it. They don’t give him anything—no pension, no compensation, nothing. I don’t believe in violence of any kind—too many people in my family have suffered from it—I just think people who worked hard their whole lives deserve something better.”

“I’m with you there, miss.”

She glanced at me sharply. “Are you just saying what you think I want to hear?”

“No, miss. What I say, I believe. You can take that to the bank.”

She looked like she wanted to trust me, but didn’t. Not much of a surprise, given the way we cops have treated dockworkers for the last, oh, seventy-five years. “Anyway,” she went on, “last week Nicky invited us—Sal and me—to a lecture by one of her professors at Berkeley. The lecture was something about Marx and lost manuscripts from a hundred years ago. To be honest, I couldn’t understand a thing. I guess the students understood it, because they got all hot and bothered and kept raising their hands to talk. I don’t know if I should say this, but I think Sal and me were the only real workers there, and honestly I don’t think the students knew anything about work. To me, they sounded more like people acting in a play.”

“All right. Then what happened?”

“Someone in the audience brought up Walter Wilkinson and mentioned that he was going to be staying at the Claremont Hotel, and the students really got going, because of how Wilkinson was such a rich capitalist and might be the next president. They started chanting, ‘W.W., we say no, W.W.’

has to go.’ Nicky was standing up, shouting with the rest of them. I’d never seen her that way—raising her fist, yelling at the top of her lungs.

“After that, the three of us went outside and sat on the grass, smoking. Sal was saying how much he hated Walter Wilkinson, and how Wilkinson would probably be elected and then everything would go back to the way it was before the war, when the longshoremen weren’t being paid enough to put bread on the table. That’s when Nicky started talking about how she could kill Walter Wilkinson.”

“I’m sorry, miss. Why would Nicole Bainbridge want to kill Mr. Wilkinson?”

“She thought it would make her one of us. And she wanted to impress Sal. She’s in love with Sal. She would do anything for him.”

“Did Sal ask her to kill Wilkinson?”

“No! Sal? He didn’t want her to kill anybody. We thought she was just joking. Or talking big for show, like the other students. But then we started to worry. She was saying she would have the perfect opportunity because she was going to be at the Claremont on Friday having a drink with a policeman. She sounded ... crazy, too excited, like she wasn’t thinking straight. She said no one would ever suspect someone like her, and the policeman would be her alibi. Sal tried to talk her out of it.”

“And after that?”

“I didn’t see her again until last Saturday—the day after Wilkinson was killed. She came to Sal’s place at ten or eleven at night. She told us she did it.”

“Did what, Miss Halikias? I need you to be specific.”

“She said she shot him.”

“Okay. Anything about the body?”

“What do you mean?”

“Did she say she did anything to Wilkinson’s body?”

“Not to me. Why, what did she do?”

“Can anybody back you up on this, Miss Halikias?”

She shook her head. “I knew you wouldn’t believe me.”

“What I believe doesn’t matter, miss. It’s going to be your word against hers. Can anyone corroborate what you’re saying?”

“Sal can. He won’t want to tell you, but he knows.”

2

I didn’t know what to make of Eliana Halikias. She looked and sounded credible. I wondered if she knew that I was the policeman Nicole was having drinks with at the Claremont. If so, she’d been careful not to mention it. But I was still having trouble believing that Nicole could have gotten herself to the sixth floor when she left our table for the ladies’ room, taken a shot at Wilkinson, and rushed back down to the hotel bar without anyone, including me, noticing anything. And nothing Eliana told me explained why Wilkinson would have concocted a story about a shabbily dressed Red with a Russian accent if the shooter had been Nicole Bainbridge. The whole thing didn’t add up. Then again, maybe I just didn’t want to believe it. Because if Nicole had been using me as her alibi, I was the chump in the story.

I found Eliana’s cousin Sal where she said I would—at the Kaiser shipyards in Richmond. I got his foreman to point him out to me.

As soon as he saw me, a look halfway between hostility and panic came over him. But he followed me reluctantly off the line, wiping his armpits and his grease-smearred face with a dirty towel.

He was a good-looking guy—very. Not tall, but well-built. A mass of curly dark hair, deeply tanned skin. His eyes were more sensitive than I expected. I could easily imagine Nicole Bainbridge falling for him.

“Detective Al Sullivan, Berkeley PD,” I said.

“I know who you are. You’re the cop Eliana went to talk to.”

“And I know who you are. You’re Salvatore Ibarra, the guy who popped a Molotov cocktail into a patrol car three years ago and burned the face off a good cop.”

“That wasn’t me.”

“Who then?”

“Go fuck yourself.”

“Easy, pal. You don’t want to make me mad. I’m thinking about arresting you right now as accessory after the fact to murder one. If you know who killed Walter Wilkinson, and you’re not telling, that’s a felony.”

“Eliana told you who did it. What do you need me for?”

“Corroboration.”

“Like you’re going to put me on the stand? With my record? No fucking way.”

He had a point there. Even if he did corroborate, he’d be as useless a witness as Juanita.

“Tell me about Nicole Bainbridge, Sal,” I said.

“What about her?”

“She sweet on you?”

He nodded.

“Bullshit.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“A beautiful girl like that? Blond? Rich? Smart?” I baited him. “She wouldn’t go for a dirtbag grease ball like you if you were the last man standing.”

He stepped forward.

“What,” I said, “are you going to take a swing at me? You don’t have the balls.”

He spat onto the dock.

“You know what I think? I think you killed Wilkinson, and Eliana’s trying to pin it on Nicole to save her cousin’s sorry ass. Nicole Bainbridge a murderer? Give me a break. A girl like that isn’t a criminal. From her family? She believes in the revolution? What a load of crap. I’m taking you in.”

“For what?” He looked alarmed again.

“I told you—for the Molotov cocktail you threw into that patrol car, and accessory after the fact to murdering Walter Wilkinson. Let’s go.”

Sal looked miserable. Like he was pinned—but I wasn’t sure what the trap was exactly.

“Okay, I was there. I was there with Ellie when Nicky spilled what she’d done.”

“What did she say, Sal?”

“You already know.”

“Indulge me.”

I wanted to see if there would be discrepancies between Sal’s account and Eliana’s. There weren’t.

After he'd finished, Sal looked away, out onto the water. He seemed troubled—like he either regretted saying what he already had or wanted to say more.

“What is it, Sal?”

“Nothing.”

“Now's the time, Sal. You got to something to say, you better say it. You don't say it now, no one will believe you later.”

“The car bombing, in forty-one,” he said in a low voice. “That was her too. Nicky.”

“Bullshit.”

“The dock police, they'd beaten the crap out of us that day. They put my uncle in the hospital. Punctured his lung.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I'm telling you what happened that day. A bunch of us walked off the job that morning, and the cops beat us up. I told Nicky and she was mad as hell. At you all. She said police are cowards and murderers. She said we couldn't just let them get away with it. But she said her family was the real enemy.”

“Her family? She loves her family.” I was just making things up at this point to keep him going.

“You don't know squat. She hates her family. Except for her sister and cousin. I never seen anything like the way she hates her family. Our people, we're not like that—family's everything. Anyway, we all went walking to the port that night, me, Ellie, and Nicky. We were down by the piers—this is before the war, so no barricades, no security—and we stopped at a corner a couple of blocks away from a police car. But Nicky kept going, by herself.”

Sal shifted and wiped his face again. I had the impression he really didn't like telling me this story—but also that it was true.

“Then what?” I said.

“That's it. She threw it into the cop car. Right through the window.”

“Threw what?”

“The Molotov cocktail.”

“You're saying Nicole was carrying a gasoline bottle bomb as she walked down that street? Just holding it in her hands, for the whole world to

see?”

“No. In her purse. I could see the bottle sticking out, with a white rag just hanging from it. She passed a couple of cops, and I was sure they’d see it. But they just smiled and greeted her thinking she was just some nice rich girl. When she passed their car, she lit the wick with a lighter, and threw it in. She didn’t mean to hurt nobody. The car was empty when she did it. But the cops, they saw their car on fire and came running back. Just when they got there, it blew. The whole car blew.”

I’d been a detective long enough to know when a lowlife was lying to me. Sal wasn’t.

3

Back in my car, I got on the radio with the San Francisco PD and left instructions to find the cops who were on the scene at the car bombing in ’41 and show them a photo of Nicole Bainbridge, to see if by any chance anyone saw her in the vicinity that night. Just as I finished, a radio call came in from Tankersley. I’d asked him to go back to the Claremont and show Nicole’s photo to the staff who worked in the basement.

“Found something, Boss,” said Tank. “A kitchen guy says he saw her around eleven fifteen the night of the murder.”

“On my way.”

4

The hot, industrial basement kitchens of the Claremont were in turmoil. The workers were up in arms about something.

“What’s going on?” I asked Tankersley.

“Seems the whole Chinese laundry crew went AWOL this morning. Just upped and disappeared. Now management’s trying to get the kitchen hands to do the washing, and they’re raising hell.”

“Your man’s still here, I hope?”

Tank introduced me to a slight, fifty-year-old man with a weather-beaten face and an immense white handlebar moustache, named Adrianakis.

“Thanks for helping us out, Mr. Adrianakis,” I said. “You work here?”

“Dinner cook,” he answered with a strong accent. “Mostly peeling potatoes. Every night, peeling.”

“I did some of that myself, in the army.” I showed him Nicole’s photo again. “You saw this woman the night Walter Wilkinson was murdered?”

“Mm-hmm. I was on break. I went out back and smoke a cigarette.”

“What time?”

“I tell your man already. About quarter past eleven.”

“Where?”

“In back, where the trucks park. The girls were coming from the other —”

“Girls? There was more than one girl?”

“Two. Coming from the big parking lot. They walk straight up to a back door. One of them—not your girl, the other one—she knocks, just tap tap tap—quiet as a mouse—and someone on the inside opens it, and they go in. Both of them.”

“You could see all this at eleven p.m.? Wasn’t it dark?”

“The hotel has big lights outside at night. I could see them like it was day.”

I showed him another photo—this one of Cassie. “Was she the other girl?”

“That’s her—the one who knocked.”

“Let me ask you something, Mr. Adrianakis. My men were supposed to interview everyone at the Claremont after the murder. Did anyone talk to you?”

“A policeman? Sure.”

“But you didn’t mention this to him?”

He shrugged. “I thought they were hotel guests out for a walk. Two fancy girls like that—what are you going to think?”

5

“Book her.”

That order came from the District Attorney, Diarmuid Doogan. The DA and his staff worked out of the new Oakland courthouse on the shore of Lake Merritt, and Doogan had summoned me there—to his corner office, on the top floor with a big water view. I had been there exactly once before, and Nicole Bainbridge was the topic then too. That was when Doogan told me

about the FBI wiretaps on Nicole's Communist friends, and when he asked me to take her out for a drink.

The DA's digs made the Berkeley Police station look like an outhouse. Everything was state of the art: pneumatic mail tubes, Underwood typewriters, and brand-new glossy black Western Electric rotary phones with the bell inside instead of in a separate ringer box. Doogan's underlings—all of them in suit and tie—were constantly running in to get his signature on one document or another. The office was like a Duesenberg Straight-8 pumping on all cylinders. A copy of my report on the Wilkinson case was lying on his desk, open, with sentences underlined and notes in the margins.

There were two ways a cop could lawfully arrest someone. If you personally saw someone commit a crime, you had *carte blanche*—you could slap him in cuffs, throw him in the back of a paddy wagon, whatever you wanted. But otherwise, it was a whole different ballgame. If you didn't witness the guy committing a crime, you needed an arrest warrant, which you couldn't get without probable cause, signed off on by your commanding officer and then by a judge. "I don't think I can arrest Nicole, sir," I said.

"Of course you can," said Doogan, who was about forty-five and tall, with Clark Gable hair and a neatly trimmed mustache. "We've got two friends of hers she confessed to, we've got a witness who places her sneaking back into the hotel through a back door a half hour before the murder, and we've got the fact that she invented an alibi—which is admissible evidence of guilt in itself. On top of that, she's a known associate of radical Communists, and the Communists hate Wilkinson. Wilkinson himself said the first shooter was a Communist. Maybe that was a confederate of hers, but he missed, so she had to go back later. Anyway, we've got more than enough for probable cause."

"The problem's not probable cause," I agreed. "It's Chief Greening."

"Greening," said Doogan dismissively. "If we had the murder weapon with Nicole's fingerprints on it, he wouldn't arrest her—because her last name is Bainbridge. Greening's a nonentity. He's retiring next month, and no one will remember his name by summer. Forget about him. We have our work cut out for us—taking down one of the high-and-mighty Bainbridges."

Even though Doogan had gone to Harvard Law, he was a public school

kid whose dad sold air conditioners. Rumor had it that years ago, as a young man, Doogan had been jilted the week before his wedding by a girl from an upper crust family. I didn't know if the story was true, but one thing was clear: he had a massive chip on his shoulder—from being Irish, Catholic, and middle class, from not getting invited to high society dinner and cocktail parties—which gave him a healthy dose of motivating bitterness. I knew how he felt: he wanted to take down and stick it to everyone who'd ever slighted him. And he had a running list that went on for pages. It was a funny thing. I could relate to Doogan, understood him, even admired him, but I didn't want to be like him.

I also wouldn't have wanted him for an enemy. He was smart, ruthless, dog-eat-dog driven, and at the same time he had a high-wattage smile he could turn on at will—he was known to be a courtroom magician. Above all, he was ferociously ambitious. His predecessor as DA, Earl Warren, had ascended from the Alameda District Attorney's office to the governor's mansion, and Doogan was looking to follow him.

“Nonentity or not,” I said, “Greening's still my boss. He won't sign off on the warrant.”

“You don't report to Greening anymore, Sullivan—not on the Wilkinson case. You report to yourself—and me.”

He handed me two documents bearing the seal of the State of California. The first was signed by Governor Warren himself, creating a multicounty task force for the Wilkinson case under the direct authority of District Attorney Doogan. The second was signed by Doogan, appointing the head of this task force: me. It wasn't unusual for an East Bay cop to be seconded to the District Attorney's staff on a given case, but this arrangement was a way bigger deal. It gave Doogan—and me—statewide authority and put us on top of the local police departments.

“I like how you've handled this case, Sullivan,” said Doogan. “I like every step you've taken. But it's not in the bag yet. You understand that, right? This is a Bainbridge we're talking about—a Bainbridge girl. These people—they think they're better than the rest of the world, and everyone else thinks it right along with them—out of servility or maybe just habit. It's pathetic.”

“Think of the men on the jury,” he went on, “like every one of them’s a little Greening. They’ll want to believe in that pretty girl from a fine family; they’ll want to be her champion. So we need more. Which is why the old lady is the key.”

“Mrs. Bainbridge?”

“I’m going to depose her myself.”

“She won’t give you her granddaughters. She’d take a sword for them.”

“Exactly—that’s her weakness. There’s a way to break every person on this earth, you just have to find it. First we’ll put Nicole behind bars. No Bainbridge has ever been behind bars. Then I’ll tell Mrs. Bainbridge that we have enough evidence to convict all three of her granddaughters as coconspirators. They lied to us about the alibi, all three of them. I’ll tell Mrs. Bainbridge that all three will face capital murder charges unless she gives me the goods on Nicole.”

This was a pressure tactic, not the law. Lying to the police to give somebody else an alibi makes you an accessory after the fact, not a conspirator. Accessory was good for maybe a five-year sentence tops, whereas a coconspirator to murder could get death. I knew Doogan knew all that. He was just playing hardball, jacking up the pressure on Mrs. Bainbridge to get her to talk.

“I’ll tell her she has a choice,” said Doogan. “She can save two of her granddaughters, or she can lose all three.”

He handed me another document: it was an arrest warrant.

“You’ve done all the spade work on this case already,” he said. “Now you and I are going to bring it home. Book her.”

6

Once more I sat across from Nicole Bainbridge—but this time not under the soft crystal chandeliers of the Claremont. We were facing each other in a grim, bare interrogation room with one dim electric bulb hanging on a long wire from the ceiling.

The change in her was almost painful to see. Gone was the defiance. Her eyes looked panicked, and the sinews in her neck stood out. Even though the room was cold, she was sweating. And even though she was sweating, she

was shivering. Her hands and shoulders—no, her whole body was trembling.

She didn't have any inner reserves, I suddenly realized, no deep wells of love or hate or anger or anything to draw on.

"How you holding up, miss?"

We had her in the sheriff's lockup in the Oakland courthouse basement. There was only one cell for all the women. Her fellow jills would have been dragged in off the street in the last twenty-four hours, mostly for street crimes—theft, drunkenness, prostitution.

"I need to talk to my grandmother," she said. "I'm not safe here. The other people here—the criminals—they want to hurt me. You need to move me."

So now that the rich girl actually had to spend time with the riffraff that she so desperately wanted to be part of—wanted to lead a revolution on behalf of—the scales had fallen from her eyes, and she wanted to pull all the strings of family and wealth to get away from them.

"Have you been assaulted, miss?"

This seemed to take her aback. "No," she said. "But I—I can't stay here," she repeated.

"I'm afraid it's not your choice, miss. In case you missed it, you've been arrested for murder. You're in big trouble, miss. And now would be a very good time to tell me what really happened last Friday."

"I didn't do anything—I'm telling you the truth."

"So you were nowhere near the Claremont at midnight? You were at your country house in Sonoma?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Too bad a witness saw you entering the hotel through a back door at eleven fifteen p.m."

Alarm filled her eyes.

"Who? Who saw me? It's a mistake."

"Why'd you lie to me, Nicole?"

"I want to speak with our lawyer—Mr. Burns, he represents our family."

"As soon as he gets here. But I'm giving you a chance to cooperate, miss, which a judge will look favorably on. Let's start with 1941. I talked to your boyfriend Sal Ibarra. He told me you were the one who bombed that

police car at the port.”

The panic on her face changed to incredulity. “What? You—you’re lying.”

“I’m afraid not, miss. Your friends—if you still want to call them that—they’ve given you up. That’s why you’re here.”

“No,” she said, her voice faltering, “that’s not possible.”

“It’s more than possible—it’s a fact. Sal and Eliana Halikias—both of them—told us you killed Walter Wilkinson. They say you confessed to them about it afterwards—bragged about it actually.”

I watched as the betrayal sank in.

Then I turned up the screws. “Eliana says you’re in love with Sal—which he confirmed—and that you’d do anything to impress him. She was right about that—you really care for him, don’t you?”

Her eyes had filled with tears, and she looked bewildered and terrified. She’d lost her posture and was limp as a ragdoll.

“Do you have anything to tell me, miss?”

“I—I need to speak with my grandmother,” she said again, pleading. “Or Cassie or Isabella. Please.”

I decided the best way to keep the pressure on was to send her back to the pen and stood to leave. “That’s not how it works, miss. I’m sorry.”

7

I meant to get home on the early side because I was still feeling crummy about being mean to Miriam at breakfast. I was even thinking I might take her to the pictures—maybe *The Curse of the Cat People* with Simone Simon, which I knew she was dying to see. But in the end I didn’t get back till almost ten, and Miriam wasn’t even there. Her knapsack was gone too. Instead I found a note from her on the kitchen table:

Dear Al,
Mom came home. So I’m staying with her. So don’t worry about me. OK.

Love, Miriam

Well, that was good news at least. Maybe Rosemary had finally grown a

conscience and realized she couldn't just leave Miriam to her own devices. But I knew that was wishful thinking. More likely she'd run out of dough—or whatever new boyfriend she was hanging out with had dumped her.

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1944

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15

1

“Anything?” I asked Tankersley and Dicky O’Gar.

“Nothing,” Tank replied. “We turned the place upside down, sir.”

We were in Nicole Bainbridge’s Berkeley dorm room, the morning after we’d arrested her. I’d chosen Tank to execute the search because he was the best cop on the Berkeley force. I picked Dicky because, with Tank there, he wouldn’t do any harm, and I didn’t want to leave him off the biggest case in Berkeley history. I’d also asked Chief Greening’s permission; as the head of Doogan’s task force, I didn’t have to, but I thought it was important to show the Chief some respect after Doogan had gone over his head to arrest Nicole. I didn’t want Greening smarting. Never underestimate the wrath of little people with a little power.

If we’d found the murder weapon in Nicole’s room, that obviously would have iced the case; it would have been ballgame over, and Nicole would be facing the hangman. But I didn’t expect we’d find it. I still had real doubts that Nicole was Wilkinson’s killer—the motive didn’t square. Why would she have left Wilkinson’s body the way we found it—half stripped with his mouth stuffed full, including with a jade seal of the Government of the Republic of China? What did that have to do with Communism or with Nicole impressing her boyfriend? And then there was the doll in the closet—Iris’s doll. The Wilkinson murder was connected to the Bainbridges in some complicated way, but I still didn’t know how. And besides, if Nicole *had*

pulled the trigger, there were a hundred ways she could have gotten rid of the gun by now. Thrown it in the Bay, for one. Or put it back in the country house.

That's when I remembered the satchel Nicole had been carrying when she and Cassie rushed up in their car to Isabella's house on Nob Hill. Nicole and Cassie had been frantic about something, and when they came out of the house a minute later, Nicole wasn't carrying that bag anymore.

"I have another idea," I said to Tank. "You and I are going to take a little trip to the big city."

2

The same housekeeper I'd met a couple days earlier answered the door. It was my third time at the Stafford house in three days. This time I had Tank with me, in uniform. Normally Berkeley cops couldn't have executed a search in San Francisco, but those restrictions didn't apply to Doogan's statewide task force.

"Afternoon, ma'am. It's Mrs. Biddleston, right? Thanks for being so helpful the other day. I'm afraid we have a warrant to search one of the rooms upstairs."

"A warrant! Goodness gracious. I knew it."

"As a courtesy, I'd prefer to get the consent of one of the owners, if they're here."

"No one's here but Mrs. Sadie."

"May I speak with her?"

"Speak with her? Oh I don't think you'd want to do that." The housekeeper glanced around furtively, then got closer and whispered, "Mrs. Sadie—she thinks it's 1921 and she's seventeen years old, that's what she thinks."

"So she doesn't leave the house anymore?"

The housekeeper's eyes filled with conspiratorial excitement. "My lips are sealed," she said dramatically, making a zipper gesture across her lips. "I don't reveal the secrets of the house I work in."

"I really respect that, Mrs. Biddleston. And also what a help you are to law enforcement."

“You won’t hear from me that she goes out at all hours of the night.”

“No kidding. Where?”

“That’s what I want to know,” she said in a hushed voice. “No one knows where she goes.”

“How about Mr. Stafford? Is he here?”

“Goodness no—and thank heavens for that. You won’t see that man back in this house, not as long as she’s alive. I tell you, you’ve never seen hate like that.”

I exchanged a glance with Tankersley. “In that case, ma’am, we’ll just get to it.”

A moment later, I was back in the little girls’ room with the two canopied beds and flowered wallpaper. In broad daylight, it didn’t feel eerie anymore—the whole house didn’t—but just looked like an ordinary kids’ room. The satchel was still on the bed.

“Empty,” said Tankersley, shaking it out.

Tank and I went at it. We looked under the beds, under the mattresses, and between the sheets. We rifled through all the little drawers, up and down the closet, in every nook and cranny.

I moved the two small chests of drawers away from the wall to see if by chance something was hiding behind them. Nothing. I lifted the oval rug between the beds. Nothing.

I shoved one of the beds aside. Nothing unusual there either. I shoved the other aside, and that’s when I saw it. There was a separation in the floorboards—the crack between two of the boards was larger than it should have been. I knelt down, pried at it, and one of the floorboards came right up, easily. A hidden compartment lay below, small and rectangular.

Inside lay another Dy-Dee doll, from the same skin-cracked vintage as the one back in the evidence box at the station, except this one had blond hair and a different-patterned dress. Next to the doll was a pile of loose papers. I started riffling through them. Some were yellowed with age. Some had handwriting. There were odd sketches too—spirals and crosses and gnarly tree branches that looked like claws, or maybe just were claws—executed in dark, angry pencil strokes. What was I looking at? The writing seemed to be verse fragments, sometimes filling a whole page, sometimes just a stray line,

and they weren't cheerful nursery rhymes. One read:

Many are the dissemblers

Another one:

*It oozes out of petals
like worms in the night*

And a longer one:

*We must be taught evil,
taught what is bestial,
taught how screams explode from our veins*

It might not have been a hundred percent by the book—our search warrant only mentioned that we were looking for a gun—but if you find other potentially relevant evidence, you're allowed to seize it. So I gathered up all the loose sheets and took them with me.

3

I almost drove to the wrong office—I was halfway to the Berkeley stationhouse before I remembered I wasn't working there anymore. I was on loan to DA Doogan at the Alameda County Courthouse in Oakland.

The courthouse is a dignified white concrete building with long vertical windows on the facade that gives it a columned effect. The building takes up a whole city block and overlooks Lake Merritt, which despite being a deceptive picturesque blue, is actually a saltwater slough so polluted with waste runoff that swimming has been banned for fifty years. That doesn't keep poor people from fishing out of it, though, because it's thick with bass. I was just getting out of my car and wondering if that filth-water fish is slow poison when I heard a voice calling out behind me.

"Detective Sullivan!"

I turned and saw Isabella running up to me. I didn't mention that I had a box of personal papers of hers in the back seat of my car.

"You have to help me, Detective," she said, out of breath. "Please."

She was wearing a pale pink sweater top cinched at the waist with a thin black belt, over a straight white skirt. The usual high heels. She looked good and had to know it.

“With what, miss?”

“Nicole didn’t kill anyone. She’s not capable of it. I promise you.”

“That might have been worth more if everything you’ve said to me up to now hadn’t been a crock of lies.”

“I know—you’re right, Detective. We got off on the wrong foot, and it’s entirely my fault. I wasn’t candid with you—and it was ... disrespectful. Can we start over? Please? I can give you proof about Nicole. There are things you don’t know.”

She sounded different—serious and not at all flirtatious. In fact, she’d dropped the whole Hedy Lamarr act. I figured it was all calculated—just a different act—but that didn’t mean it wasn’t impressive.

“How about this, Miss Stafford? I ask you three questions. You answer them. If I don’t like your answers, we’re done. All right?”

She nodded.

“Let’s start with an easy one. Is your mother an invalid—bedridden, as you told me just two days ago? Yes or no?”

“Mostly, yes. But ... not entirely. She almost always stays in her room, that’s the truth. But I did leave something out. Honestly it’s a long and sad story. Do you really want to hear it?”

“I’m listening, miss.”

“Well, when I was thirteen, my father sent my mother to Boston to have an operation performed on her brain. From what I understand, they drove metal picks through her eye sockets into her skull. It sounds barbaric to me, and sometimes I think my father did it out of spite. I’m sure you know by now that Iris wasn’t my father’s child. When he lost her in the accident—and then discovered she wasn’t even his—it broke him. He turned on all of us.

“After my mother came home, she was different. Better in some ways. She was calmer and nicer. But she was also confused. She didn’t know what day or month it was. Or who was alive and who was dead. Most days she spent in her bedroom, never changing out of her dressing gown. There were also times when she’d suddenly come downstairs all dressed for horseback

riding, or a cocktail party, or her debutante cotillion.

“But it’s her nocturnal outings that are really worrisome. Every so often she’ll disappear in the middle of the night, then hours later she’ll turn up in the most unpredictable places—downtown or on the pier, miles away—all dressed up. It doesn’t happen very often, but when it does, then, no, she’s not bedridden—although the doctors believe she may be sleepwalking.” Isabella paused. “So, did I pass, Detective?”

I thought about it. What she said not only rang true—if she’d invented it all, she was a better liar than I’d ever met—it also made sense of how I’d seen Sadie behave a few nights earlier.

“Yeah, you did,” I said. I didn’t really have three questions planned—there were more like a hundred questions I wanted to ask her. But I picked one. “You and your sister, Iris, you each had a doll—Dy-Dee dolls I think they’re called. What became of them?”

“Our dolls?” For the first time, she looked genuinely startled. “Why are you asking about them?”

“I’m the one asking the questions, miss.”

“But ... what do they have to do with anything? I don’t understand.”

Was I imagining it, or did she sound distressed—almost afraid?

When I didn’t reply, she said, “I believe mine—Clarabelle was her name—is in my old bedroom. In a childhood hiding spot. Iris’s doll, Eve ... I think the last time I saw her was the day of the accident. My mother confiscated her when Iris made a fuss about something. Why do you want to know about our dolls?” she repeated.

“Like I said, miss, I’m the one asking questions.”

“Well, I told you where mine is, and I don’t know where hers is. That’s the truth.”

“Okay. Final question. Where were the three of you—you and Nicole and Cassie—the night Walter Wilkinson was killed? And don’t give me that three-way song-and-dance country-house alibi again.”

“We did drive up to the Sonoma house, as I said. But not until about one in the morning.”

“You didn’t answer my question. What were you doing before that?”

“There’s something I can’t tell you. I wish I could—I truly want to tell

you—but I’m sworn to secrecy. But it has nothing to do with Walter Wilkinson, I swear to you.”

“Something you can’t tell me. I’m afraid that’s not acceptable, miss.”

“I can help you in another way. I can give you some valuable information. Something you’ll want to know, Detective.”

I hesitated. It always felt like I was being led down the garden path with her, but I didn’t see any downside in hearing her out.

“Go ahead then.”

“Eliana’s story is a complete fabrication. She’s the one who kept trying to get Nicole to kill Wilkinson at the Claremont. But Nicole couldn’t do it and never intended to. And now Eliana’s framing Nicole. Any woman could see it. The problem is it’s men—the prosecutor, the judge, the jurors—who will make the decision. And Eliana will just manipulate them with her feminine wiles.”

“Imagine that,” I said. She didn’t respond, so I continued. “Why would Eliana want to frame your cousin, miss?”

“Here, talk to this man,” she said, handing me a slip of paper with a name and address on it. “He’s the manager of the Scottish Rite Auditorium in San Francisco, corner of Sutter Street and Van Ness. Ask him what he knows about Sal and Eliana.”

“What’s he going to tell me?”

“Just talk to him. Please. You won’t regret it.”

“No promises. By the way, your housekeeper’s going to tell you I was just at your place—executing a search warrant.”

“A search warrant—whatever for?”

“A murder weapon.”

“Did you find one?”

I didn’t respond. “Good afternoon, Miss Stafford.”

4

When I told Doogan we hadn’t found the murder weapon in the Stafford house, he was unperturbed.

“That’s all right—we don’t need it,” he said. “We got a big break this morning. Owing to you actually. The San Francisco boys you put on this—

they tracked down the cop who had his face burned off in that car bombing back in forty-one. Just before the explosion, he and his partner passed a well-dressed girl in the street. He never gave her a thought. But the minute he saw Nicole Bainbridge's photo, he identified her. When I put him on the stand—a cop injured in the line of duty, his face disfigured, with a family of six to support—and he points to Nicole and says, 'She's the one who did this to me,' we'll have the jury in our pocket. I also started Mrs. Bainbridge's deposition this morning, and I'm working her. She's cagey all right, but I have her number. She definitely knows more than she's letting on."

I nodded. "Can we talk about the Chinese angle, sir?" I asked.

Doogan looked like I had thrown cold water on a birthday cake. But he knew what I meant—all the pieces of evidence in the Wilkinson case that pointed to the Chinese, none of which squared with Eliana's account.

Doogan checked his watch. "I've got three minutes, Sullivan. Lay it out for me. What do we have that says the Chinese were involved in killing Wilkinson?"

"Well, we have Jane Chao, a.k.a. Shirley Wang, murdered by hatchet in Codornices Village. Jane may have been a Chinese Communist spy, and she definitely used to work for Madame Chiang, who may have been having an affair with Wilkinson. We've got a piece of jade found in Wilkinson's throat, engraved with the seal of the Chinese government. And we have a hotel witness, name of Jessup, who says he saw a good-looking young Chinese woman come out of Wilkinson's room at around seven thirty—when the first shot was fired at him—who fits the description of Jane Chao."

Doogan frowned. "Jessup said she was a prostitute, right?"

"Yeah, but he could have been wrong."

"Or he could have been right. Wilkinson was a known philanderer. And Jessup didn't hear any shots fired, right? We have no proof she had any connection whatsoever to the murder."

"And the stuff in Wilkinson's mouth? Why would Nicole have done that?"

"To throw us off the scent, so that cops like you would be asking that very question. Look, here's the real problem with Jane Chao. Either it was a Chinatown tong that had her killed, or else it was Madame Chiang. If it was a

tong, that's San Francisco's problem, not ours. If it was Madame Chiang, we can't touch her—sovereign immunity. Either way, no one gives a damn about some no-name Oriental killed in public housing, and there's nothing in it for us." He started gathering up papers on his desk. "Thanks for filling me in, Sullivan—that'll be all."

I got up to leave. "What about the doll from Wilkinson's closet? How does that fit in?"

"The doll?" Doogan frowned. "What about the doll?"

"We found marks on it corresponding to injuries on Iris Stafford."

"Iris Stafford?" Doogan looked at me like I'd lost my mind. "The little girl who died in the accident fifteen years ago?"

"That's right. Nicole's cousin—Isabella's sister. I think the doll may have belonged to her."

"I don't understand what you're saying, Sullivan. What would a doll belonging to Iris Stafford be doing in Wilkinson's hotel room closet?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Oh, for heaven's sake." Doogan stood up, shaking his head and smiling. "Next you'll be telling me you saw the little girl's ghost. Listen, Sullivan, I've got to get to court—" He clapped me on the back and his tone turned jovial as he ushered me out. "—But like I said, you've done great work on this case—first-rate—and I'll make sure everyone knows it. Now, let's keep our eye on the ball and focus on Nicole. Together, you and me, we'll bring down the house of Bainbridge."

I nodded, but all the same, I decided to run down the tip Isabella had given me.

5

When I got back that night—it had taken me forever to get to the Scottish Rite Auditorium, then an accident on the Bay Bridge hung me up for an hour—there was a wet-dog smell outside my place, mixed with something moldy in the neighborhood. I couldn't wait to get out of there and into my new house. Just counting down the days.

Inside, the place felt empty. I turned on the radio, and Jimmy Dorsey's "Bésame Mucho" came on for the thousandth time. It was actually written by

a Mexican woman, and in Spanish it was perfect. But Dorsey's version was so syrupy I couldn't stand it. I switched it off and went to the icebox. There, on the top shelf, I found a lumpy Miriam concoction along with a note that said *This is for you, Al, Mash potato and hot dog cassaroll*. She must have come in some time during the day and made it. I tasted it—there were pickles in it too (a nice touch, I thought)—then polished off the whole thing. The presentation was lacking, but it tasted a lot better than it had any right to.

This goddamned case, I thought—it felt like I couldn't believe anything anyone had told me, from day one. The Bainbridge girls were about as trustworthy as Delilah, all of them. But why? What were they covering up? Isabella especially. With her it was almost worse when what she said checked out, because it was so obvious—she'd even said so herself—that she was leaving out more than she was revealing. Today had been more of the same.

Maybe I needed to take a break from the Bainbridges. I thought about heading out to a bar. Then I had a better idea. Now that I had my place back to myself, I started calling the girl I'd bailed on the day before; I'd actually dialed half her number before I realized she wasn't the one I wanted to see.

What *was* it with Isabella? Why couldn't I get her out of my head? In a way it was a ridiculous question. She was blond and beautiful—every man's dream girl. In my case there was the extra icing that she was also the kind of establishment girl who'd never given me the time of day, so maybe it was the chase and the challenge. On the other hand, I hadn't liked her cousin Nicole at all, who shared all those same features. But Nicole was self-deluded and self-righteous, which for me is just about the least attractive combination there can be in a girl. Isabella seemed different, although I wasn't clear exactly how. It was something in her eyes. Maybe she was just playing me—probably she was just playing me—but there was a longing and pain that kept pulling me back in.

I poured myself a beer and stared at my work bag, which was sitting on my couch, staring back at me, carrying inside it Isabella's secrets—or at any rate all the papers I'd taken from under the floor of her childhood bedroom.

I started going through them, one page at a time. I tried to arrange them chronologically. I could see now that they were from two different time periods. The drawings were in a childish hand, but violent. Furious scrawls

and gashes. Stick figures with broken necks.

And hooded figures, I noticed for the first time. A lot of them—of all shapes and sizes. Some were tall and sinister and clawed, others hunchbacked, still others looking almost childlike but frightening, with cavernous O's for mouths.

The child who drew these things was definitely troubled. And scared of something.

The verses, in a much more adult hand, were just as disturbing, filled with savagery, like:

*They took a knitting needle
And poked it through my pupils*

That was pretty gruesome. I guessed it was a reference to the lobotomy Isabella told me her mother had had.

*I am split in two
but only one of us can prevail.
I need a scalpel
to cut out the broken pieces of you in me
the broken pieces of evil.*

How was she split in two? Maybe something to do with her sister, Iris. And broken pieces of evil? Had she done something? Why did she write so much about evil?

I had trouble sleeping that night. I'd been having bad dreams for a few days now. Tonight it was creepy hooded figures and dolls with gaping apertures for their mouths.

1944

THURSDAY, MARCH 16

1

The next morning, I headed over to the longshoreman's union hall down on North Point Street in San Francisco, where the men would be getting hired out for the day. I was looking for Sal, but found Eliana with an apron on, behind a long counter, doling out scrambled eggs to dockworkers and their families. I greeted her and asked if she knew where Salvatore was.

"Sal? No. He got work this morning on the navy docks out at Hunters Point. But I thought you talked with him already."

"Just trying to clear up a couple of things, miss. You told me you and Sal are cousins, right?"

"That's right."

"By blood?"

"I guess so."

"Really? That's funny. I heard one of your aunts married one of his uncles. Which would mean not by blood."

"Oh. That's not by blood?"

"No, miss, it's not. That makes you kissing cousins, because it would be fine for you to marry each other."

"I see," she nodded, giving nothing away.

"Miss Halikias, do you happen to remember being at a dance at the Scottish Rite Auditorium back in January 1941?"

"1941? That was three years ago."

“It was a benefit for Greek war relief. You were there. You and Sal both.”

“Oh, sure. Everyone went.”

“Did you dance with Sal?”

“I may have. Everyone was dancing with each other. Why?”

“Is it possible, Eliana, that you danced with Sal all night? And only with him? And that at the end of the night it was just the two of you on the floor, in each other’s arms?”

“Who said that?”

“You two were in love, weren’t you? And then Nicole Bainbridge arrived on the scene, and Sal liked her.”

“We both liked her.”

“Oh, I don’t think so, miss. I think you hate her.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

“I think you’re jealous of her.”

Eliana gave a short laugh. “Who put that idea in your head?” she said scornfully. “The cousin? The glamour girl?”

That was quick: I didn’t know how she guessed that Isabella had talked to me about her.

“Look, miss, you didn’t turn in Nicole because you’re a Girl Scout and it was your civic duty. You’ve got it in for Nicole Bainbridge—she makes your blood boil—anybody can see that. The only question is whether you’ve got it in for her so you’re lying about her or whether you’ve got it in for her so you’re telling the truth about her.”

Eliana looked me straight in the eye, saying nothing for almost thirty seconds. Then in a calm voice, she said, “I’ll be honest with you, Detective, I don’t like Nicole Bainbridge. And not because I’m jealous. I don’t like rich white girls who see themselves as saviors. But I wouldn’t expect you to see that. She’s your people after all.”

“My people,” I repeated. “You make a lot of assumptions about me, miss.”

This got her attention. She looked me over for a second, scrutinizing my features, then said, “So who are your people, then?”

“My mom was from Nebraska—she’s dead. But my father’s from

Mexico. Deported back in thirty-one.” I left out that he’d done swell for himself since then in Acapulco.

“Interesting,” Eliana said, wiping off the counter, then wiping her hands on her apron. “So you want to know my story, Detective? The real story? I’ll tell you if you want, but it’s a long one.”

“I’m all ears, miss.”

Eliana’s stainless steel vat of scrambled eggs was nearly empty. There was one serving left and no more takers. She scooped it up in a ladle and raised it in my direction, asking me with her eyes if I wanted it.

“Sure,” I said.

She fixed me a plate, poured herself a watery cup of black coffee, and walked over to one of the long wooden tables. I followed her, and we sat down. She took a sip of her coffee.

“My mother’s dead too. Her name was Penelope, and she loved people. She was different from me—everyone said she was like a ray of sunshine. She and my father, Dimitri, came over in 1907, along with thousands of other penniless Greeks. My father became a plasterer by day and a longshoreman by night. My mother worked as a housekeeper for Mrs. Phyllis Newmark.”

“The silver baron’s wife?”

“That’s the one.” Eliana paused. “It’s funny how whites in America don’t see Greeks as white. Maybe that’s why my father wants to go back—all he can talk about is Greece, Greece, Greece. But my mother was the opposite. She loved America.”

“My dad was the same,” I said. “He always said America was so much better than where he came from.”

“Right. Anyway, for nine years my mother worked in the Newmark mansion. When I was ten, she got pregnant again. But things went wrong. She was in horrible pain, and we couldn’t afford the surgery the doctors said she needed. The whole time, she kept working, until she just couldn’t take it anymore, and finally asked Mrs. Newmark for help. It would have been so easy for Mrs. Newmark to save her life. All she would have had to do is call one of her fancy friends. But Mrs. Newmark couldn’t be bothered. She just waved my mom away, giving her some time off and telling her to rest at home—I’m sure she thought she was being very generous.

“My father is a proud man, and he’d never asked anyone for a favor in his life. But seeing my mother bleeding and writhing in pain, he went to the Newmark house and rang the bell. He couldn’t even get past the front door. In the end, my mother died senselessly and in agony.”

Eliana looked away, taking another sip of coffee.

“I’m sorry, Miss Halikias. I really am. That shouldn’t happen to anyone.”

“Well—that’s my experience with rich white ladies like Nicole Bainbridge, Detective. They love making a big show of how much they care. But inside you disgust them.”

We sat in silence for a bit. The truth was, Eliana and I had a lot in common. I’d also lost a parent as a kid, and for a while after they took my dad away, I was angry at every white person I met. Which made no sense, because my mom was white and most people thought I was white. But I never felt totally white. Of course I wasn’t really Mexican either. I didn’t fit in anywhere. Those were the years when I was brawling all the time and trying out life from inside a jail cell. Then Vollmer came along, pulled me up, and straightened me out. No one could have been whiter than Vollmer, and there was no one I admired more. He helped me go from Alejo Gutiérrez to Al Sullivan, and life got a lot better. I don’t know what that says about this country. Or about me. Sometimes I feel guilty—sometimes worse than guilty. But then I tell myself it’s not me, it’s America.

Having something in common with Eliana didn’t mean I believed her. “There’s still something I don’t quite get, miss,” I said. “I know you’re not shedding tears over Walter Wilkinson. If anything, you’re happy somebody killed him—it’s better for the unions. So why’d you turn in Nicole? Why turn in someone who just did your movement a big favor?”

“Because I refuse to be anybody’s entertainment, that’s why. You should have seen the look on her face the first time she saw Sal’s place—she found it so *quaint*, she was so *interested*, she wanted so badly to be part of it. And to have some real-life poor friends that she could parade around to ease her conscience. It turns my stomach.”

“I know how that feels, miss.”

Eliana scoffed. “I doubt that very much. I don’t think men are capable. Sal, for example. I still remember the first time Nicole came running over. He

just stood there, like a fool. Dazzled. I don't think I've ever been so furious and humiliated."

I actually did know how she felt. In fact, it was uncanny. As if Eliana was describing the morning when Isabella came to my place. My reaction had been just like Eliana's. And Miriam had been just like Sal, dumbstruck and starry-eyed.

"So why'd you go along with it in the first place, Eliana?" I used her first name by accident. "You told me that the three of you would go for walks and drink wine, late into the night. Why, if you felt that way about her?"

"I was using her, Detective. Sal and I desperately needed money. Not just for ourselves. For our families, the dockworkers, the widows, the families of dead and disabled workmen. Nicole had unlimited money. All we had to do was ask. But then I realized it wasn't free. The price was our dignity. It was *fun* for her. All of it. The protests, Sal and me. The car bombing. I think that's why she killed Wilkinson too. The revolution is amusement for her. And when rich white people amuse themselves, other people pay for it. Well, not this time."

A lot of what Eliana said was obviously true—you don't make painful stuff like that up. And for the first time I felt I understood her. Also for the first time, I felt I could understand why Nicole might really have committed murder. It could have been exciting for her—fun, to use Eliana's words. And she'd have known that no one would ever suspect her.

It was Isabella who'd pushed the idea that Eliana was lying about Nicole out of jealousy. But come to think of it, Isabella liked to be entertained too—playing a reporter, dabbling in international intrigue, seeing me in my natural habitat. It was probably amusing for Isabella to get me to run down leads she'd tipped me off to. I'll bet she thought she had me wrapped around her finger. It would probably be a hell of a laugh for her if she talked me into disbelieving Eliana.

"Sal, he's like a brother to me," said Eliana. "He always has been. You can imagine whatever you want, but it won't change anything. Nicole doesn't have anything I want." She paused, then added with more than a little contempt, "You really think I could be jealous of someone like that?"

I left Eliana and thought about that question. I decided decidedly yes.

Sal was the one I really wanted to talk to. I had evidence pointing to a romantic relationship between him and Eliana—their dancing in each other’s arms all night a couple years ago. I’d hit Eliana with that evidence, and it hadn’t fazed her. But I wanted to hit Sal with it too, because he was—well, not as sharp. Even if Eliana was lying, I didn’t think she’d ever crack. Sal was the weaker link.

But I didn’t find him at Hunters Point, where Eliana said he’d be. He wasn’t on any of the work crews there. He wasn’t in the stevedore quarters either. I was beginning to wonder if Eliana might have deliberately sent me off in the wrong direction when I learned that a lot of men had been trucked over to the Bethlehem shipyard back in Alameda. I made a stop at the Port Hospital and then set off for the East Bay.

I didn’t get to Alameda. A call came on my radio—it was Tank, patched through. I could barely hear him, there was so much yelling and heckling in the background.

“You better get over here, Boss,” he said. “I’m at the Claremont.”

“Why? Is there another dead body?”

“No.”

“Then you can handle it, Tank, whatever it is. I got my hands full. If there’s a problem, call Greening and tell him you need help.”

“I tried that, sir, but Greening said to call you. He said that you’d want to know because it’s a goddamn mess and could destroy all our careers and reputations and that’s a direct quote.”

“Jesus—what’s going on?”

“You know the Chinese laundry workers I told you about? Who all just picked up and disappeared the other day, all eight of ’em? Well, they weren’t Chinese. They were Japanese—Jap spies.”

“*Jap spies?* You can’t be serious.”

“Greening says we—you—need to find them and catch them or the press is going to blame us for the whole thing. And Detective, I mean what if there’s another attack like Pearl Harbor? It’ll be on us.”

I had no idea what he was talking about. “Where are you now?”

“In the basement. Laundry.”

“What’s all that shouting? Are those reporters?”

“Only about fifty.”

“Stay put. I’ll be right there.”

3

Holding out my police badge, I pushed my way through the Claremont’s industrial subterranean kitchens to the muggy low-ceilinged laundry rooms, which were in chaos. A stocky guy with a triumphant smile and a leering paunch that squeezed out from his belt was yelling orders but also holding forth to a throng of reporters armed with cameras and notebooks.

“Two plus two, that’s what I says to them,” he regaled the newsmen. “All you got to do is add. I knew something was fishy—from the get-go I knew. Two plus two. Like rats. Chinese my bum leg.”

A reporter from the *Chronicle* recognized me. “Detective Sullivan,” he called out, “when did you learn there was a Jap spy ring in Berkeley?”

“Just hearing about it now, Joe.”

“So the Berkeley police didn’t know?”

“Detective, where are the Japs now?” another reporter called out. “Do you have any leads? Are they still in Berkeley?”

“Is it true you stayed at the Claremont for two nights last week?”

“So they were right under your nose the whole time and you didn’t suspect?”

“Are they planning an attack?”

“Could the Nips have killed Walter Wilkinson?”

“Give me a break, boys,” I said, shooing them out. “I just got here. We’ll have a statement for you later. Let me do my job, will you?” When the last one was gone, I extended my hand to the guy who’d been doing the talking. “Al Sullivan, Berkeley PD.”

“George Pulaski,” he said, giving me a fleshy handshake, “basement services.”

“What’s this all about, George?”

“You didn’t hear?”

“I want it in your own words.”

“They flew the coop. The whole laundry crew. Toy, Choy, Lo Mein,

Chop Suey—the lot of them. Pretending they were Chinese—I knew they was fishy. First of all, they worked too hard. No honest man works that hard. At least not when the boss’s back is turned. And the bitch girl, she was the worst of ’em.”

“What girl?”

“The rest were old men and women, but this one was younger, and she did all the heavy lifting work when I wasn’t looking so I could never fire anybody. Didn’t show me any sugar at all, the little bitch. Not even a smile, not once. They have no human feeling. Did you hear what they did in the Philippines? My sister’s daughter—the boy she married? Blown to pieces in Guadalcanal. Left her with two kids and no daddy.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, George. It wasn’t pretty at the ’Canal. I was there too.”

“You were? Give me another handshake, buddy. You’re a real American.” With my hand in his, Pulaski put his mouth near my ear and whispered, “It’s us or them. We should go into those camps, line ’em up, and use them for target practice. You know what I’m saying?”

There are times I regret being a police officer.

“Let me ask you something, George. How’d you find out your laundry workers were Japanese?”

“Because of the gent that came down here Monday night. He sees one of my laundrywomen—an old lady—and says, ‘I know her—what’s she doing down here? That’s Mrs. Tanaka. She used to give my boy violin lessons.’ I knew it the whole time. But I’m smart. I don’t let on. ‘Why, you must be mistaken, sir,’ I says. ‘That’s not Mrs. Tanaka—that’s Mrs. Chop Suey, a Chinawoman.’ ‘No,’ he says, ‘that’s Mrs. Tanaka, and she’s a Jap.’ And you should of seen the look on Chop Suey’s face. She saw the gent pointing at her, and she knew she’d been spotted. I could see it in those slanty eyes. Right away she scurries over—you know how they walk, scurrying like rats—to the little bitch. And they start whispering until I broke it up.”

“Did you report this?”

“Did I? I went right upstairs to the front office and I says we got Japs in the basement. We got to call the cops. And the little grub night manager, he says he’ll ‘relay my concerns.’ That’s what he says—‘relay my concerns.’ He

didn't do shinola. But I knew they were going to disappear. Because that bitch disappeared last week. She took sick—that's what they said at least. Appendicitis, they said. Two ladies came and picked her up."

"Appendicitis?" That rang a bell. Someone in the hotel staff had come down with appendicitis the night Wilkinson died. "Was this the same day Walter Wilkinson got killed?"

"Sure was."

"Tell me about these two ladies who picked her up."

"I wasn't here. But one of the night-shift guys said he saw them walk the Jap girl out to a car and drive her away. He says they were blond and upscale. And I haven't even told you the kicker."

"What's that?"

"Guess what we found when I had their lockers cleaned out? Jap books and magazines. And spy maps. I gave them to your colored already."

That was a reference to Tankersley. I told Pulaski we'd get back to him, then collared Tank and asked him to show me what they'd found in the lockers.

"You got to see this map, Detective. It's scary."

"Why?"

"Just look," he said, unfolding a large map of Berkeley. "Up here, someone's drawn a circle in red. See it? Know what they circled?"

The red circle was high up in the Berkeley Hills. I could see instantly what it surrounded—the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory, where, according to a lot of people, top-secret radioactive bombs were being researched.

"How many other people have you shown this to, Tank?"

"Nobody," he said.

"Keep it that way."

"What if they're planning an attack on the Lab?"

"Call Lawrence Lab and tell them what we found. Don't embellish, Tank. Don't make more of it than it is. And help me out here. This is the Claremont, for Christ's sake. Don't they run background checks? How did the Claremont Hotel end up hiring eight Japs?"

"That's what we've been trying to figure out, sir."

"All right. After you call the Lab, get back here so the reporters have

someone to yell at. I'm paying a call on personnel."

4

The Claremont's personnel office was also in the basement but in another wing, far from the low-ceilinged steam and heat of the laundry rooms and kitchen. A kindly woman named Breckenridge was in charge—and aghast that the hotel had been home to a Japanese spy ring. She told me they were mostly elderly. "There was one girl—a tall, athletic girl—in her twenties, but the others were all older, in their sixties and maybe a few in their seventies."

Elderly people in their sixties and seventies didn't sound much like spy material to me. "When were they hired?"

"I'll have to check." She went to a metal filing cabinet and kept talking as she flipped through its drawers. "I didn't hire any of them, I can assure you of that. I've only been working here for eight months. Here they are. Let me see. Two of them—the girl and one of the older men, I believe—were hired on the same day in April of 1942. The others at various times after that, either later in 1942 or last year."

"I'll need their addresses, ma'am."

She frowned, leafing through the files. "That's strange. I don't see a home address for any of them. Normally we always have addresses."

"Would the hotel have done any background screening when it hired them?"

"Absolutely. We only hire on the basis of sound references, no matter what the position. Well, isn't that strange too? The same person seems to have served as the reference for every one of them."

"Who's that, ma'am?"

"A Miss Bainbridge. Miss Cassandra Bainbridge."

5

I ended up having to spend the whole goddamn day at the Claremont, and it was punishing.

The reporters were swimming around the entire hotel like piranha, hungry for any facts hinting at the possibility of an imminent Japanese attack. It sounds crazy, but it was almost like they wanted a few thousand more people to die in a bombing because it would be such a great story. At the

same time, the Claremont workers were suddenly remembering one suspicious incident after another. They'd seen the Japanese plotting with one another in whispers; the Japanese were stealing silver from the kitchen; they were seen sneaking up into the hills at night; they had sabotaged the hotel's laundry machines, which were out of service for two whole days.

"Why would they want to sabotage the washing machines?" I asked.

"I think I saw them planting some kind of device in them. You know—like a secret camera."

"In the washing machines."

I shook my head, but I had to take notes on it all. Besides the Lawrence Radiation Lab, we also had to alert the FBI and the National Guard; I put in a call to the governor's office; I even called Navy command at the Presidio. I had to tell all of them that eight supposed Japanese spies had been hiding in our midst for years, and all of them had just disappeared en masse as if they were about to spring into action. If there was another catastrophic attack on American soil—this time here in the Bay Area—the whole world was going to say that the Berkeley PD missed the boat and let it happen. I had to call local hospitals and fire stations too, and make sure they were prepared for an emergency, just in case.

And how the hell was Cassie Bainbridge involved? With a Japanese spy ring? What was it with the Bainbridges and the Claremont? If there was a crisis at the hotel, a Bainbridge always seemed to be in the middle of it.

6

It was evening when I finally left the Claremont, and drizzling outside. Petrocelli was waiting for me near the hotel's front door under an umbrella.

"She's gone, Boss," he said. "On the lam, I think."

I'd asked Petrocelli to find Cassie Bainbridge and bring her down to the station.

"Where'd you look?" I asked him.

"She wasn't at the Bainbridges' house in San Francisco, so I drove all the way up to their place in Sonoma. The staff there told me she left the house yesterday morning by herself in one of the family cars. Nobody's seen her since. I talked to her parents too. They haven't seen her either. Nobody

knows where she is.”

“All right—put out a statewide lookout on her. I’ll call in tonight for an update. Right now there’s something else I’ve got to do.”

7

I banged on the door of Sal Ibarra’s shed on Rincon Hill, but no one answered. The windows were dark, so I figured he was out. I went to the corner, put up the collars of my coat against the rain, and waited. It was almost nine at night and I was on my fifth cigarette when Sal came sauntering up the steep unpaved alley toward his place. He was by himself; he’d obviously knocked down a few—more than a few—after work. I got up behind him just as he was letting himself in.

“Hello, Sal,” I said.

He jerked around. The same trapped animal face came over him. He was wearing an old red jacket—who wears a red jacket?—fraying at the elbows, too short in the cuffs and sleeves. His white shirt was fraying too, and stained. But his shoes—they were a different story. Newish. Two-toned brown leather oxfords. Nicer than mine, that’s for sure, and I know my shoes.

“What do you want?” he asked. His eyes were large and changeable—shifting from confident to defensive, from angry to sensitive—but on the whole I had to admit it was an honest face. “You taking me in?”

“Depends,” I said, walking inside through the open door. There were dirty dishes on a table, cigarette butts on the floor, and empty fifths of rotgut lying on their sides all over the place. “Let me ask you something, Sal. You’re a good-looking guy. A lot of girls must fall for you.”

He shrugged.

“And I’ve just been thinking about how Eliana’s always there whenever Nicole’s there. I mean, according to what you two told me yourselves. Eliana was at the newsstand when you first met Nicole. Eliana was there when you would drink homemade wine here at your place. Eliana was there when Nicole bombed the police car. She’s always there.”

“What about it?”

“She’s in love with you, isn’t she?”

He shrugged again. “You’d have to ask her.”

“I’m asking you.”

“What if she is?”

“That’s the question, Sal. Let me ask you something else. No, I don’t even need to ask. I know this one. It was your idea, Nicole’s throwing that Molotov cocktail into the patrol car. You asked her to do it.”

“No I didn’t.”

“You made it yourself, didn’t you, the cocktail, and you handed it to her.”

“No! You’re trying to stick that on me again, but it won’t stick because I didn’t do it.”

“So you’re saying Nicole Bainbridge, a girl from Nob Hill, knew how to make a bottle bomb all by herself? You expect anyone to believe that bullshit?”

“I didn’t say she made it,” said Salvatore.

That was a slip. I jumped on it.

“No, you didn’t. But if Nicole didn’t make it, and you didn’t make it, who does that leave? That leaves Eliana, doesn’t it?”

Sal didn’t answer. His deer-in-the-headlights eyes had come back.

“Truth is,” I said, “having Nicole bomb the police car was Eliana’s idea in the first place, wasn’t it? She made the bomb, and she gave it to Nicole, and the two of you walked Nicole down to the port so Nicole could do what Eliana wanted her to do.”

“I don’t remember.”

“You know, Sal, I dropped by the union hall this morning and had a nice chat with Eliana. She told me Nicole has been paying to feed and clothe the children of longshoremen who died or lost their jobs. Did you know that?”

“Sure I knew. Why, is there something wrong with helping people now?”

“Then I went by the port hospital and asked if they’d treated any patients by the name of Ibarra. They said there was one they’d operated on a couple of times in 1941. Seems he fell from a ladder while unloading and then had his ribs broken by the police. He had to have two operations. That your dad?”

“My uncle.”

“Do you know who paid for his operations, Sal?”

He began to shift uneasily. “Nicky,” he said quietly.

“I couldn’t hear that?”

“Nicky did.”

“That’s right. She paid for all his operations. It made me wonder—how did your uncle keep bread on the table for his wife and kids when he couldn’t work? Did you pay for that, Sal?”

“Nicky did.”

“What about their rent? Who took care of that?”

“Nicky.”

“How do you like that? That girl from a fine family who fell in love with you when she was just—how old when she first met you?”

“Fifteen.”

“Fifteen. That fifteen-year-old girl who fell in love with you, Sal, who believed in you and your cause—who would do anything for you, that’s what Eliana told me—she took care of your uncle and his wife and kids when they needed help?”

“I guess.”

“And in return, you’re sending her to the gas chamber.”

“Shut up.”

“You know where she is right now, Sal? In jail. Maybe she’s having her hair pulled out right now. Or being beaten up. The other inmates wouldn’t take to her kind, I don’t think. And you know what’s going to happen to her later? She’s going to be executed. You get that, right?”

He didn’t answer.

“You’re the only one who can save her, you know that.”

“Shut up.”

“Nicole never told you and Eliana she killed Walter Wilkinson, did she?”

Again Sal was silent.

“Where’d you get those shoes, Sal? They don’t really go with the rest of your outfit. Nicole bought them for you, didn’t she?”

He looked down.

“Didn’t she?” I asked again.

A shadow of shame passed over him. “Yeah.”

“She saved your family, Sal. She bought you the shoes on your goddamn

feet. And you're going to send her to the gas chamber for a crime she didn't commit."

"Leave me alone."

"Did Nicole tell you and Eliana that she killed Wilkinson, or was that a lie?"

Sal didn't answer.

"Was it the truth or a lie?"

He replied at last, but inaudibly.

"I can't hear you, Sal. What was that?"

"A lie," he whispered.

"Still didn't hear you," I said, cupping my ear.

"It was a lie!" shouted Salvatore.

1944

FRIDAY, MARCH 17

1

At four in the morning when it was still pitch-black, I woke up in a hot sweat. I'd had another dream. This one didn't have menacing hooded figures, but it was just as disturbing in a different way. It was so disturbing I tried to make myself believe it wasn't what I thought it was. Which was futile because it was exactly what I thought it was.

In this dream I'd been with a woman. The most beautiful woman I'd ever seen—voluptuous golden hair, deep violet eyes. We were in a luxurious bedroom, everything in white, a soft pampered hotel-white. She was smiling and walking toward me, wearing a sheer white slip that showed her perfect shoulders and collar bone, and she smelled like paradise, like oleander and gardenias. She was everything I'd ever wanted, and I pulled her to me, and was about to kiss her when I felt another presence in the room, behind me. I turned, and there was the strange little dark-haired girl from my other dream, watching us, silent, holding her doll. That's when I woke up.

What the hell was that? I didn't know which was more unnerving—that I was dreaming of Isabella or of Iris.

I couldn't get back to sleep so I got up and went for a long run. It's a good thing it was still dark and no one could see me—they'd have thought I was crazy. No one ran around for exercise—most folks did calisthenics if they did anything. But we'd had to run three miles a day in army basic training, and I'd picked up the habit.

I ran up into the hills, toward the more redolent fresher air. Hell is always described as a burning fire, but I bet it stinks. Come to think of it, brimstone, which Hell is also supposed to be full of, is another word for sulfur. So that's settled. Hell stinks.

I did the usual army three miles, then another two. Then I went home and did a hundred push-ups and a hundred sit-ups. Sometimes you have to kill yourself just to keep sane.

2

When I got to the DA's around eight, Doogan was already there. He wasn't a slacker, that's for sure. He was where he was for a reason. And one of those reasons was: he hated to lose.

Which is why I wasn't looking forward to filling him in about Sal Ibarra. But I had no choice. I told him how Sal had admitted that Eliana fabricated the whole story about Nicole.

His face went gray. "You've got to be kidding me. He's got to be lying."

"I don't think so, sir. He has no reason to."

"Damn it. Why'd you go back to him a second time anyway? Listen, Sullivan, let's keep this under wraps for now. I need to think."

For the next few hours, Doogan stewed around. I could tell by the way his jaw twitched that every little distraction—an unanswered phone, a nasal voice in the hall—infuriated him internally.

Then things got worse. At eleven, Archibald Burns, the Bainbridge family's lawyer, marched into the office, accompanied by Genevieve Bainbridge. It turned out Burns, also skeptical of Eliana's story, had sent a private investigator to talk to Sal, who'd spilled the beans to him too. With Burns at her side, Mrs. Bainbridge demanded her granddaughter's immediate release.

Doogan didn't say yes or no, but afterward he was in an even darker temper. This was looking to be a serious reputational hit for him—arresting a Bainbridge only to have the case fall apart within twenty-four hours—and I could see him working it over in his head, searching for a way to regain the upper hand.

"So, do we let Nicole go?" I asked him.

“Not yet,” he said grimly. “I’m thinking about prosecuting her for the car bombing in forty-one. She was seventeen at the time, so I can charge her as an adult. Have some men bring in both Eliana and Sal. I’ll get them to swear out affidavits pinning the car bombing on Nicole—and when they’re done with that, I’ll throw the book at them too.”

Thinking of Eliana, I felt a pang. With her luck she and Sal would end up doing long hard time, and Nicole, with her family’s fancy lawyers behind her, would get off scot-free.

“The problem with prosecuting Nicole for the car bombing,” Doogan went on, worrying about the same thing, “is that our only hard evidence would be testimony from Salvatore and Eliana, who are now proven liars on top of being lowlifes—not to mention that Sal has a criminal record a mile long. Burns will rip them to shreds on the stand. Goddamn it.”

I decided to change the subject.

“Did you see the report I left for you on the Jap business at the Claremont?” I asked.

“Glanced at it,” he said absently, clearly still thinking about Nicole. “Espionage is federal. That’s a case for the FBI.”

“I have a statewide bulletin out on the Japs as well as on Cassie. I don’t think it’s a coincidence that—”

“What did you say?” Doogan interrupted. “Cassie Bainbridge?”

He clearly hadn’t read my report.

“That’s right. I talked to Claremont personnel, and it turns out that Cassie was the one who got all those Japs hired. She was the sole reference for every single one of them. My guess is she’s helping them escape right now. She’s missing too.”

“What’s her connection to these Japs?” Doogan asked. He was paying attention now.

“We don’t know yet. But I think she and Nicole picked up one of them—a young woman who apparently had appendicitis—the night Wilkinson was murdered. I think that’s why they came to the hotel that night.”

I could see the gears turning in Doogan’s head. “Back up, Sullivan. Back way the hell up. Start at the beginning and walk me through this.”

I told him everything we knew. The more I said, the more interested he

got.

“Let me make sure I understand,” he said when I was done. “On the night Walter Wilkinson died, some time after midnight, Cassie and Nicole were seen taking this Japanese girl out through a back door and driving her away?”

“That’s right.”

Doogan had a gleam in his eye now, and I didn’t have a good feeling about it. “And as you keep reminding me, we have a witness who saw an Oriental woman coming out of Wilkinson’s hotel room after the first attack on him. What was his name again?”

“Jessup. Out of Fresno. His description of her matches the body we found at Codornices Village. I think it was Jane Chao he saw.”

“What if it wasn’t? What if the woman he saw was Japanese?”

“Jessup said Chinese, wearing a Chinese dress.”

“Oh come on. How could he tell the difference between Chinese or Japanese? No one can. And in fact, if this woman *had* been Japanese, she would have needed to disguise that fact—for example, by wearing a Chinese dress. Think about it, Sullivan. You just told me there was a Japanese spy ring at the Claremont Hotel.”

“I didn’t say spies, sir. They were seven elderly people and one young woman. My guess is they were hiding to avoid the internment camps. The only evidence we have even suggesting they were spies is that map—the one with a circle around the Radiation Lab.”

“And what about that?” asked Doogan.

“It’s not exactly proof. Maybe it was the opposite—warning them to avoid the Lab, since that place has guards around it twenty-four hours a day.”

“Or maybe it’s exactly what it looks like. I repeat—think about it. Wilkinson was rabidly anti-Japanese. Didn’t he give a speech at the Presidio saying the only good Jap is a dead Jap? And that we should blow Japan to hell?”

I knew just what Doogan was referring to. The day before Wilkinson was killed, the *Chronicle* had a story about him going on an anti-Japanese tirade at the Presidio, insisting that the internment hadn’t gone nearly far enough. Supposedly he had the place roaring with laughter when he said, “We ought

to take those yellowtails right down to the edge of the Pacific and say to 'em, 'Okay boys, over there's Tokyo. Start walkin'.'”

It was a good, meaty story. There was just one problem: it wasn't true. I knew that because Tank had been there. Wilkinson had a lot of Black supporters; he'd been the first presidential candidate ever to address an NAACP convention. Anyway, Tank told me it was a county supervisor who'd said those things, not Wilkinson. In fact, Wilkinson had actually tried to calm the crowd down.

“Actually he didn't,” I said to Doogan. “The *Chronicle* reported that, but they got it wrong.”

“Who cares whether they got it wrong? All that matters is what the Jap spies thought. Everyone was talking about that speech. The Japs hear about it, and that gives us motive.”

“You really think Japanese laundry workers killed Walter Wilkinson?”

“Not laundry workers, Sullivan. Spies. The Japanese woman, dressed to look Chinese, takes her first shot at seven thirty when Jessup saw her, but she missed, so she or they go back up later and finish him off. The facts all fit. An Oriental woman is seen coming out of Wilkinson's room after the first shot; Nicole and Cassie Bainbridge sneak into the hotel at eleven fifteen; one of them—we don't know which one yet—is seen outside Wilkinson's room with blood on her at midnight; and both Bainbridge girls are seen helping the Oriental woman out to their car in the rear of the hotel after the murder. They claim it was appendicitis, but come on—the Jap woman just happened to get appendicitis and has to be rushed out of the hotel the same night Wilkinson's killed? I don't believe it. I say she was the shooter, and she got hurt when she was up in his room. Maybe she took a bullet in the stomach. The appendicitis story was a cover.”

“Why would two Bainbridge girls be helping Japanese spies? And why wouldn't Wilkinson have told us the first shooter was a Japanese woman instead of inventing the whole Commie story? I don't see how we prove any of this beyond a reasonable doubt, sir.”

“If I told a jury that Japs killed Santa Claus, I could prove it beyond a reasonable doubt. Everything changes, Sullivan, once you've got a different color defendant in the box. There isn't a jury in this state that wouldn't send a

Jap to the gas chamber if they had a chance. I'm going to triple the number of patrols out there looking for Cassie and the Japs. And get me this Jessup. He's the key to the whole case. I don't care if he has to drive, fly, or swim here. Now excuse me. I've got phone calls to make. A lot of them."

I stood up to go, shaking my head but holding my tongue. The whole thing stank, and I had half a mind to quit on the spot. But then I thought what good would that do? Besides, getting Jessup was the best move anyway, because his story wasn't going to fit Doogan's. Jessup had been very definite, and he claimed to know what he was talking about—he would tell Doogan the woman he saw was a Chinese call girl.

3

Early that afternoon, we arrested Cassie Bainbridge. A woman who owned a grocery store up in Healdsburg, not far from the Bainbridge country house, called the cops after seeing a "suspicious looking" Oriental woman waiting in a car while Cassie was inside the store buying food and provisions.

Apparently the shop owner recognized Cassie and recalled having seen her with a Japanese woman on several occasions a couple of years ago before the internment. She reported that they'd behaved disgustingly, unnaturally, and that every time she saw them giggling, flirting, looking at each other salaciously—possibly even holding hands once—she felt like throwing up. The deviance was vile enough—but for a young woman from such a distinguished family, and with an Oriental? And not just that—a Jap?

State police responded to the call and pulled the two women over a half hour later. The Oriental woman turned out to be a Japanese woman by the name of Yuko Sasaki. They arrested her too.

4

A few hours later, I had Jessup in my office, in another suit with jumbo shoulders, still smelling of Aqua Velva. I told him to stay put while I went down the hall to see Doogan.

My advice to Doogan was to put together a lineup and see if Jessup could pick out Yuko Sasaki as the woman he saw outside Wilkinson's room. I was pretty confident he wouldn't be able to, since he'd described the woman to me as five one with long shiny hair, whereas Yuko was about five

six with short, cropped hair. We'd have to use Chinese women for the lineup, since all the Japanese were in camps.

"Leave it to me," said Doogan. "Bring Jessup to my office, and I'll handle the rest."

5

At five p.m., on the front steps of the Alameda County Courthouse, District Attorney Doogan gave a prepared statement to a crowd forty or fifty strong, most of them reporters. I was standing a few steps to Doogan's right.

"Following a statewide manhunt," said Doogan, "an individual has been apprehended and charged with the murder of Mr. Walter Wilkinson. That individual is a twenty-five-year-old female of Japanese descent and a member of the circle of saboteurs who, as we recently learned, had successfully infiltrated the Claremont Hotel. As you know, Mr. Wilkinson was one of this nation's most outspoken champions of total war against our enemy in the Pacific, the nation responsible for the cowardly surprise attack at Pearl Harbor. Long before it was fashionable, Walter Wilkinson urged stern measures against the Japanese menace here inside our borders. Unfortunately, for this bravery it seems he paid with his life. Nevertheless, I urge restraint. Revenge is not condoned by our Savior. And no one is judged in this country on the basis of their race. No one is guilty until they have been convicted upon evidence presented in open court. To that end I invite all of you to tomorrow's arraignment—a public proceeding at which you'll be able to hear for the first time details of this tragic, heinous murder and evidence of the role played by the Japanese."

"DA Doogan," called out one of the reporters, "is it true that Cassie Bainbridge is in custody too?"

"Is it true she was in the car with the Jap girl?"

"Miss Bainbridge is in custody, boys, and I'd like to tell you more, but that wouldn't be fair. We'll present the facts at the arraignment tomorrow."

"DA Doogan, what's your response to people who say you're just targeting the Bainbridge family for your own personal advancement? Isn't it true that just twenty-four hours ago, you were saying *Nicole* Bainbridge was the one who killed Walter Wilkinson? And that you arrested her on the basis

of information that's now known to be false and yet kept her in custody for two days? And now you're switching sisters with an entirely new theory?"

I could see Doogan cursing to himself. I'm sure he was thinking that the Bainbridges always had a few reporters in their pocket. I knew Doogan would come back hard, and he did.

"We have reason to believe Miss Nicole Bainbridge perpetrated a car bombing in 1941 that burned the face off a good policeman. Her role in the murder of Walter Wilkinson has not yet been determined. As to Cassie Bainbridge, the evidence will show that she was instrumental in placing the Japs at the Claremont and that she was—how shall I put it—intimately acquainted with the twenty-five-year-old Japanese female who has been charged with the murder."

The reporters clamored for more, but the District Attorney had given them all the information he wanted. I saw a reporter double underlining his proposed headline: JAP SPY RING AT LUXURIOUS CLAREMONT HOTEL CONNECTED TO WILKINSON CASE; MURDERER ARRESTED.

6

As the press crowd thinned out, it was clear that Doogan felt back on top and in control. The bad feeling I'd been having about the direction he was going had only gotten worse.

That's when I spotted Isabella standing at the foot of the steps. Apparently she'd attended the press conference too. She saw me at the same time and came up the stairs toward me. She was wearing an orange and white dotted dress with small buttons down the front and a low square neck. I remembered my dream, and felt my face grow warm. But today she looked drawn and anxious.

"We have to stop this lunacy," she said, distressed. "You can't possibly think Cassie and Yuko killed Walter Wilkinson."

"I feel like we just had this conversation, miss, only about your other cousin."

"People have been coming after my family with false allegations for as long as I can remember, Detective. Do you know that when Iris died some people said *I* killed her—pushed her to her death? I was six. I understand why

they hate us. But what's happening now is truly outrageous. That horrid District Attorney is just race-baiting. Yuko's not a spy! I know her—her father's worked for us for a decade—and she couldn't hurt a fly. She and Cassie have done absolutely nothing wrong.”

I lit a cigarette. “I'm afraid that's not true, miss. Those Japanese were violating the internment law—”

“A terrible, unjust law!” she interrupted.

“Maybe so, but the law's the law. And it looks like Cassie was helping the Japanese break it. My guess is the monks up at St. Andrew's were helping too. We cleared a couple dozen from the abbey back in forty-two. If that's what Cassie was involved with, Miss Stafford, you should tell me. It'll be a lot better for her, trust me.”

Isabella had been staring at me in disbelief for the last few seconds. “You *participated* in rounding up the Japanese? That was a disgrace for this country. Those people are American citizens. How could you have played a part in such a contemptible act?”

“I was doing my job, miss. In case you haven't noticed, we're at war. I was also following the law—Executive Order 9066, which came down directly from President Roosevelt.”

“You should be ashamed of yourself,” she said. “We knew some of those people—they were our friends and neighbors and teachers and colleagues. They were mothers and fathers and children and grandparents.”

Isabella looked at me in disgust, and I started getting hot. I couldn't believe this rich girl was judging me.

“You don't live in the real world, Miss Stafford. From your perch, there are so many choices—an infinite number of choices. You only have to do the right thing, that's all, easy as pie, end of story. Well, I hate to tell you this, but most people don't have infinite options. They have to play the hand that's dealt them, make trade-offs, and smile at scum, if the scum is higher on the pecking order. I happen to know some US citizens who've been taken away too, miss. Like my father and brothers. They were Americans too, but they were Mexican—and this country pulled them right out of our house and rounded them up like cattle. I was seventeen, and my mother and I couldn't do a goddamn thing. That was 1931. Anyone in your family ever get rounded

up and deported, Miss Stafford?”

“You think that makes it *better*—that something equally terrible was done to you? It just makes it worse! How could you have done that after what happened to you?”

“Because it’s completely different, for Christ’s sake. Mexicans didn’t bomb the United States. Mexicans didn’t kill two thousand innocent Americans on our own soil. We weren’t at war with Mexico. And we gave the Japanese a choice—they were free to leave the West Coast—they had weeks to go anywhere else in the country. The only people who were put in camps were the ones who didn’t leave. How were we supposed to know which of those were good and which were bad? And what do you think Japan did to the Americans who were there when war broke out? They took all their money and locked them up in camps. That’s what countries do when they’re at war.”

“Why is your last name Sullivan, Detective?”

“What?”

“If your father’s Mexican, why is your name Sullivan? Did you change it?”

I didn’t answer. But I was kicking myself inside. First the grandmother pounces on me with that, and now I’d walked into the same trap with Isabella.

“You did, didn’t you? You changed your last name. Why? Are you ashamed of it?”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, miss.”

“You know what I think, Detective? I think you’re harboring so much guilt you can barely fend it off. I think deep down you knew it was wrong—what you did to those Japanese taking refuge at the abbey—but you did it anyway, God knows why, and now you have to tell yourself a big story about how that was so different from what was done to your father. I think your whole life is a lie—and you have no idea who you are.”

“And you want to know what I think? I think it was you outside Walter Wilkinson’s room after he was killed. That’s why you’re so sure Nicole and Cassie didn’t do it.”

“You think I killed him?”

“Did you?”

“Why would I?”

“I don’t know, miss. Why was your sister’s doll in his closet?”

This time she didn’t answer, and we just glared at each other for maybe fifteen seconds. I broke the silence in the end.

“All the same,” I said, “I agree with you about Cassie and Yuko. I don’t believe they killed anyone. Assuming you’re not going to confess that you did it, do you have anything else that might clear them?”

Isabella looked like she was debating whether even to keep talking to me. Then she said, “I can prove where Cassie and Yuko were when Mr. Wilkinson was killed. I wanted to ask you to communicate it to Mr. Doogan, so that he would stop this farce.”

“Tell me what you’ve got.”

She did. The story took a few minutes.

“Well, Miss Stafford, if any of that’s true, I advise you not to go to DA Doogan with it. You should go to Burns and have him use it at the arraignment.”

“But then it will be public. That’s just what we don’t want.”

“I get that, but you don’t know the DA. He’s not going to be a friend to your family under any circumstances. Burns is your best shot. You better hurry, though—he’s going to have a lot of work to do between now and tomorrow morning.”

7

I took the stairs up to my office, all eight flights of them, not the elevator. I didn’t know which had me more riled, Doogan’s race-baiting or Isabella’s thinking she knew me better than I knew myself.

You have no idea who you are—that’s what she said. Because I changed my fucking name? What bullshit. Who says who we are? And why does who I am have to depend on who my father was? How about some other measure like whether you wanted to make something of yourself, and how much blood and sweat you’re willing to spill for it?

Worse, I’d just helped my prime suspect. Going behind the back of my boss.

I was breathing hard when I got to the DA's floor, where a San Francisco cop in uniform immediately called out to me. Sal Ibarra, in handcuffs, was by his side, and the cop was pushing Sal in my direction.

"Hey—are you Sullivan?" asked the cop.

"That's me."

"What am I supposed to do with this piece of garbage?"

I took Sal off his hands and led him down the hall to the interrogation room, explaining to him that the DA wanted him to swear out an affidavit saying that Nicole bombed the patrol car in '41.

"So why am I handcuffed?" he asked nervously.

I didn't respond.

The door of the interrogation room was shut, which meant it was already in use, so I looked through the little window on the door, and there sat Eliana Halikias, by herself. She was also cuffed, which was a good thing because she looked ready to kill someone.

The situation gave me an idea. I brought Sal into the interrogation room, sat him down in a corner, and cuffed him to the wall. Then I did the same to Eliana, on the opposite side of the room. She looked daggers at me, but she wouldn't even glance at Sal. The only thing she said was, "Get him out of here. I don't want to be anywhere near him," but I left them both there and went to the room next door—the observation room.

The setup was a Doogan innovation. The interrogation room had a big long mirror on one of its walls—or rather, what looked like a mirror from inside, but which you could see through if you were standing on the other side of it, in the observation room, where you could also hear what people were saying.

I waited, figuring I might learn something if the two of them got into it. Eliana had turned her back on Sal, which wasn't easy, given the way I'd cuffed her. The metal must have been digging into her wrists.

"Please, Ellie," said Sal. "Please look at me."

She only turned farther away from him.

"I'm sorry, Ellie. I made a mistake. I don't know what happened."

Suddenly she spun around, with fire in her eyes. "I'll tell you what happened," she said. "You betrayed me. Because you're weak. You just

couldn't resist the idea of being worshiped. You don't even realize you're nothing to her. Men are such idiots. You'll fall for fucking anything. 'Teach me how to use a saw,'" Eliana mimicked.

"Maybe she really wanted to learn how to use it," Sal said. "No one in her family knows how to do anything like that."

"I can't believe you're defending her."

"I'm not defending her! I just—"

"Oh really? Say you hate her."

"You know I hate her. I told you over and over."

"See? You can't even say it."

"I hate her, all right? I hate her. But they would have sent her to the chair, Ellie. I—I just couldn't do it. I'm sorry."

"She bought you, you idiot," Eliana hissed. "Look at you—still wearing those shoes she gave you. You love the way you look in them, strutting around. Do you how stupid you look? Look at your grubby shirt and grubby pants—you think those shiny shoes fit? You don't think you look ridiculous?"

"Can't we just go back to the way it was? Before we met her?"

"I never want to see you again," she said.

"But Ellie, I love you—"

"Oh you love me! Let's celebrate! Shall we go to the Fairmont? Who cares, Sal? Who cares who you love or how you feel? You're weak."

"You're right, Ellie, I'm not strong like you. I—I just want to die."

"Die then! No one will notice. That's our destiny. People like us. You make me sick."

Hell, could women be cruel, I thought. Men were no match for them.

Then Eliana spat. But not at Sal. She spat toward the one-way mirror, and she looked straight at it—straight in my direction.

"And you—you make me sick too," she said, her voice dripping with disdain. "I know you're there. I pity you. I told you—they're your people."

I decided to let someone else take their statements.

8

Instead I headed to Doogan's office and knocked at his door. I didn't feel too

hopeful, but I thought I'd give it another try.

“Sorry, sir, I know I'm repeating myself—but don't you think we're a little short on proof that Cassie and Yuko killed Wilkinson?”

“All we have to do at the arraignment tomorrow, Sullivan, is show probable cause—and I've got plenty enough for that. Keep this under your hat, but by the time we get to trial, I think we'll have a confession from Miss Sasaki. The army's got men who specialize in questioning enemy aliens, using what they call intensified interrogation techniques. I'm going to have them work on her.”

“With all respect, sir, I don't think we can do that—she's a US citizen.”

“Of course we can do it. If the Japs are about to attack the Radiation Lab, we need to know about it—do you have any idea how lethal that could be? We need to know everything that Jap woman knows. The interrogation techniques just speed up the process, that's all. If she's innocent, she won't confess. But if she does confess, we'll have killed two birds with one stone—solved a murder and stopped another Pearl Harbor. But the interrogation's going to have to wait until after the arraignment. I don't want any marks on her.”

I stared at Doogan's back as he strode unperturbed down the hall, wondering how someone could be constructed that way. He was talking about torture, and he'd said it like he was ordering a hamburger. Sure, we were at war, and the Japs were torturing the hell out of our boys, but this was bullshit. We had nothing on Yuko, and even Doogan had to know that any confession we beat out of her would be a crock. I was on the side of the law, but if this was the law, I didn't want any part of it.

1944

SATURDAY, MARCH 18

1

I'd never seen an arraignment like this one. For one thing, it was a Saturday. Invoking wartime necessity, Doogan had pulled off an emergency hearing, making us the only news worth covering in all of Alameda County that day. The courtroom was packed with reporters—if there had been rafters, they would have been hanging from them. Normally, that would have made no sense. The probable cause determination at an arraignment is usually a nonevent. It's a rubber stamp; there's no jury. I'd seen probable cause determinations done without the defendant even being present. But that's up to the District Attorney, and Doogan clearly intended to put on a show.

As soon as the case was called, Doogan had Yuko Sasaki led into the courtroom in prison garb, her hands manacled, an armed marshal on either side of her. Looking scared out of her wits—to me, at any rate; I saw one of the newspaper artists scrawling a picture of her that made her look like a dangerous rat with fangs—she took a seat at the defendants' table. Cassie was already sitting at that table, also a defendant, but she was in civilian clothes. When she saw Yuko marched in, her eyes flooded with pain.

In the front row, just behind Burns, I spotted Mrs. Genevieve Bainbridge, and next to her someone I guessed was Nicole and Cassie's father. If they had a mom, I didn't see her. I didn't see Isabella either.

Jessup was Doogan's first witness, and goddamn it if he didn't swear on the Bible that Yuko was the woman he saw outside Wilkinson's hotel room. I

didn't know if Jessup was lying through his teeth or if he'd talked himself into it. But anyone could see he was enjoying the limelight. He was the state's star witness; he'd been on at least three radio shows already.

Next Doogan put in evidence my report of a witness having seen one of the three Bainbridge granddaughters coming out of Wilkinson's room around midnight with blood on her skirt. Then came the store owner from Sonoma who'd helped the police capture Cassie and Yuko. She identified Yuko as the daughter of a Japanese man who used to work for the Bainbridges, adding that the two women used to frequent her store before the war, behaving disgustingly. Doogan tried to question her further, but Judge Lewis Moss cut him off. Adrianakis followed, testifying that he'd seen Cassie and Nicole enter the Claremont Hotel through a back door at 11:15 p.m. on the night of the murder. After that came Pulaski, who said that Cassie and Nicole had been seen walking Yuko out of the hotel, through the same back door, a little after midnight, "with the Jap looking like she'd been shot in the stomach." This was hearsay, but that was allowed at an arraignment.

Finally, Doogan called a witness I wasn't expecting, a Colonel Karl Bendetsen of the United States Army. Bendetsen was a Stanford grad. He was in charge of the whole Japanese internment program. In fact, he'd designed it. Doogan began by asking him whether there was anything to fear at the relocation centers where Japanese from the West Coast had been "offered accommodation" for the duration of the war.

"Only if you're afraid of summer camp," said Bendetsen. "How would you like to be housed, fed, and taken care of at taxpayer expense? We give them tennis courts, Ping-Pong tables, baseball, soccer. They can farm if they want—work and make money if they want. There are schools for the kids and classes and lectures for the adults. One camp has a swimming pool. They get to see the latest movies. They have libraries and Boy Scout troops. I took my kids for a visit and by the time we left, darn it if my boys weren't begging me to let them stay there this summer."

The courtroom audience laughed appreciatively.

"So, Colonel," said Doogan, "in your expert opinion, is it plausible that innocent, law-abiding individuals would prefer hard labor as hotel laundry workers over the amenities and freedoms they would enjoy at a relocation

center?”

“That’s nonsense.”

“Thank you, Colonel. But there’s something I still don’t understand. Why were all persons of Japanese ancestry required to be relocated? Surely some Japanese pose no threat.”

“Every one of them has to be regarded as a potential enemy, Mr. Doogan. That’s what our generals and Governor Earl Warren determined. The reason is simple. You can’t penetrate Oriental thinking, so you can never tell which ones are loyal and which ones are not.”

“But surely, Colonel,” asked Doogan, feigning surprise, “older Japanese and women can’t be a serious threat to us?”

I’d seen prosecutors pull this trick before. They pretend to be dubious about something their own witness said, conveying fake shock at the notion that anyone—i.e., the defendant—could be capable of such depravity, and then letting their witness educate them. Great trial lawyers are always great actors. Usually you’d never see this kind of stunt at an arraignment, because there’s no jury and it’s all business, but Doogan was playing for the press.

“I’m afraid they can,” Bendetsen replied. “It’s a key part of the Japanese playbook for clandestine enemy activity. The prototype is a nest of spies between six and twelve in number, hiding who they really are, lying in wait somewhere, maybe even for years, with elderly people often supplying the cover, taking advantage of the average American’s natural guileless kindness. But one younger individual will be planted among them who’s ready to engage in criminal activity when the time comes. That younger individual can easily be female.”

“But not an American citizen surely, Colonel,” Doogan fake protested. “If a Japanese is born in the United States, clothed by our noble laws in the generous mantle of American citizenship, surely he or she would never dream of siding with their ancestral nation over our country?”

“I wish that were true,” said Bendetsen, “but the Japanese child is raised to revere Japan, to consider it an honor to give his life for the emperor. Loyalty to their race runs in Japanese blood, you might say. Just look at the Philippines. There have been Japanese in the Philippines since the sixteen hundreds—that’s over three hundred years. They had a Japantown there just

as we did in San Francisco. The Filipinos naively trusted their twenty thousand Japanese neighbors just as we did. But as soon as Japan invaded, the local Japanese immediately sided with their homeland, helping Japan's army conquer the country, defeat American troops, and perpetrate unspeakable atrocities."

"Atrocities?" replied a deeply shocked Doogan. "What atrocities?"

"Objection, your Honor," said Burns. "Irrelevant, immaterial, and highly prejudicial."

"Mr. Burns," answered Judge Moss, "as you know very well, this is only an arraignment, not a trial, so the usual restrictions on evidence don't apply. Answer the question, Colonel."

"Well, you can begin with the Bataan Death March," said Bendetsen, "where the Japanese beat our men to death, starved them, bayoneted them for sport. These were prisoners of war I'm talking about, Mr. Doogan, entitled to respect and to humane treatment. The Japanese killed thousands of POWs—perhaps tens of thousands—without mercy."

"Yes, the crimes of Bataan are known to us all," said Doogan, his voice suddenly quiet. He knew how to change things up and had dropped the whole fake-protest act. "Now, Colonel Bendetsen, tell us what the Japanese do to civilians."

"They rape girls and murder babies," said Bendetsen.

The entire audience in the courtroom gasped.

"There's a nice hotel in Manila called the Bayview," Bendetsen continued. "The Japanese turned it into a rape center. They seized the most beautiful girls from all over the Philippines and took them to the Bayview. I'm talking about twelve-year-olds, fourteen-year-olds. The soldiers raped them over and over. One girl cried too much so they sliced her breasts off. A Japanese soldier held her breasts up to his own chest and they all laughed. Pregnant Filipino women were killed by having their bellies ripped open. Japanese soldiers would tear babies from the hands of screaming mothers and bayonet them. Then gouge their eyes out and wipe the eyeballs on the walls."

The courtroom's collective gasp had given way to a collective silence. You could hear people trying to breathe.

I knew Bendetsen wasn't making this up, but I also understood what

Doogan was doing. Bendetsen's testimony would be published in every newspaper in the country. Doogan was trying to win his case right here, right now—even though he had only the barest shreds of real evidence. The law wouldn't matter. The facts wouldn't matter. Before they even got to court, jurors would be ready to send Yuko to the gas chamber for the crime of being Japanese. And maybe they'd send Cassie there too, as her accomplice.

Judge Moss finally called a halt to Bendetsen's testimony. "Well, Mr. Burns," said the judge, "I must tell you that in the court's opinion, the state has more than amply satisfied its burden of showing probable cause. To save everyone's time, I'm going to terminate the hearing at this time. Bailiff, please—"

"With all due respect, your Honor," Burns interrupted, "the defense will exercise its right to put on evidence."

Moss frowned. The defense almost never called witnesses at an arraignment. "Mr. Burns," said the judge, "what is the point of your putting on evidence when I've already found probable cause?"

"To change your Honor's mind," said Burns.

"If you mean you believe you can raise reasonable doubt, Mr. Burns, I don't need to tell you that's the standard of proof at trial, not at arraignment. Reasonable doubt does not defeat probable cause."

"I'm well aware of the standard at arraignment, your Honor," said Burns, "but the defense has a right to put on evidence."

"Very well, Counsel. It's a waste of time, but I'll allow it. You have a witness to call?"

"Witnesses, your Honor."

"For heaven's sake," said Moss. "Go ahead, then."

Burns cleared his throat uncomfortably and glanced over his shoulder toward the courtroom door, as if hoping someone might appear there—but no one did. "Thank you, your Honor," he said, "but, ah, due to the rushed nature of these proceedings, and the fact that it's a weekend, the defense is not quite ready at this moment. We ask for a recess."

"A recess? In the middle of an arraignment? For how long?"

"Two hours, your Honor."

Doogan stood up. "The state objects, your Honor. The Court has already

found probable cause. Mr. Burns can put on his witnesses—if he actually has any—at the trial.”

Judge Moss looked extremely irritated. “I’ll give you ten minutes, Mr. Burns. If you’re not ready at that time, this proceeding is over.”

2

I didn’t want to hang around the courtroom during the recess, so I went up to my office. In the stack of messages on my desk was one from the Berkeley stationhouse saying that the principal at Del Mar had called for me yesterday.

Del Mar was Miriam’s school. Why would her school principal be calling, and why call me? I tried the number on the message, but today was Saturday, and no one answered. There was no way to reach Rosemary because she had no phone at her place. I couldn’t think of what else to do, so I headed back to the courtroom.

3

When I got there, Judge Moss was just calling the court to order. Isabella was now sitting beside her grandmother in the front row, wearing a white skirt suit like the one Ingrid Bergman wore in *Casablanca*. The courtroom fell silent.

“Is the defense ready to put on its evidence?” Moss asked Burns.

“We are, your Honor.” Burns made a signal, and someone at the back opened the courtroom door. In strode, one after the other, nine naval officers in full dress white uniforms. The reporters cleared a path for them, and they took seats in the crowded gallery.

“What is this?” asked Doogan.

“The defense calls Lieutenant Toby ‘Dutch’ Vorwald,” declared Burns.

I’d heard of Dutch Vorwald—he was famous from the battle of Guadalcanal. With a pronounced limp, he took the stand.

“Lieutenant Vorwald,” said Burns, “you’re a fighter pilot for the United States Navy, correct?”

“Yes, sir. Except I’ve been fighting the doctors more than the Japs lately.”

“And I understand that you personally brought down twenty-six Japanese enemy aircraft at Guadalcanal?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Twenty-six—that qualifies you as a flying ace, doesn’t it?”

“Five made him an ace,” shouted one of the other officers, from the benches. “Twenty-six made him a legend.”

“Order,” said Judge Moss. “There will be no more interruptions.”

“Lieutenant Vorwald,” Burns continued, “do you know Dr. Margaret Chung of San Francisco?”

“Yes, sir, I know Mom Chung very well. I’m her son. We’re all her sons, every one of the boys here today.”

“Objection, your Honor,” said Prosecutor Doogan. “I have the utmost respect for our servicemen, but what is the relevance of this testimony?”

“Your Honor,” said Burns, “I intend to call Dr. Margaret Chung to provide critical testimony. I am fully entitled to have a character witness testify on her behalf.”

“Continue. But get to the point, Mr. Burns. My patience is wearing thin.”

“Thank you, your Honor. Lieutenant Vorwald, please explain what you meant just now when you said you and the other naval officers in court today are all sons of Dr. Margaret Chung.”

“Well, back in the late thirties, there were a lot of us—naval reservists, out-of-work pilots—living in San Francisco. We didn’t have enough money even to pay for food. Dr. Chung, she took us in. Made us dinner—cooked for us herself. She kind of adopted us, and we kind of adopted her. We all call her Mom Chung now. It was seven of us at the start, now she makes dinner for seventy or eighty at a time. This little jade Buddha I wear around my neck? When I see another fella with one of these out in the field, we know we’re sons of Mom Chung.”

“And how many of Mom Chung’s sons are there at this time, Lieutenant?”

“Hundreds. You would have heard of some of them. Admiral Nimitz is one.”

“And what is Dr. Chung’s reputation for truthfulness, Lieutenant Vorwald, among you servicemen?”

“Any one of us would take incoming for that woman. We’d trust her with our lives. And we’d put our lives behind anything she said.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant. That’s all.”

“Cross-examination, Mr. Doogan?” asked Judge Moss.

“No questions, your Honor,” said Doogan curtly.

“You may step down, Lieutenant,” said the judge. “Call your next witness, Mr. Burns.”

“The defense calls Dr. Margaret Chung.”

The courtroom door opened once again, and a Chinese woman in her mid-fifties walked in. She was five feet tall at most and professionally dressed, with a kindly expression. She walked briskly to the witness stand and was sworn in. Meanwhile, Doogan sent an assistant scurrying out of the courtroom.

“Dr. Chung,” said Burns. “You are a surgeon in San Francisco?”

“I am chief surgeon at the Chinese Hospital, which I helped found.”

“And you were the first Chinese woman to become a physician in this country?”

“Yes, I was.”

“Do you treat only Chinese patients, Dr. Chung?”

“Oh no—we treat anyone in need. Many of my patients are Caucasian.”

“Anyone we might have heard of, Doctor?”

“Well, I’ve treated Tallulah Bankhead—I removed her tonsils, actually—and Helen Hayes. Ronald Reagan told me he had headaches, but all he needed was some aspirin.”

“Thank you, Doctor. Now, I direct your attention to the night of March tenth—the night Walter Wilkinson was murdered. Could you please tell us where you were at approximately eleven twenty that night?”

“I was at home. Listening to the radio.”

“Did something interrupt you?”

“Yes. A phone call, an urgent phone call. From Cassandra Bainbridge. A friend of hers, Yuko Sasaki, was gravely ill, showing all the symptoms of a burst appendix.”

“Were Miss Bainbridge and Miss Sasaki known to you?”

“Yes. We have mutual friends.”

“And why would Miss Bainbridge call you about her friend’s appendicitis?”

“Why? Because I’m a surgeon. And without surgery, a burst appendix can quickly cause death.”

“But why call you, Dr. Chung, rather than take Miss Sasaki to the nearest hospital in Berkeley?”

“Because hospitals are under an obligation to report to the authorities when they treat an Oriental. My clinic is in Chinatown, and no one expects us to report. If I reported every Oriental I treated, I would be on the telephone every minute of the day.”

“What did you say to Cassie?”

“I told her to rush Yuko to my clinic, and when they arrived, I performed the appendectomy myself. I was helped by two of my fine assistants.”

“What time did the operation begin, Dr. Chung?”

“I have it in our log, which I brought with me. May I consult the log?”

“By all means.”

“The patient arrived at eleven fifty-five. The operation commenced twenty minutes later.”

“So at midnight on the night of March tenth, Miss Sasaki was in your clinic in San Francisco with a case of acute appendicitis?”

“That is correct.”

“And the defendant Cassie Bainbridge was there as well?”

“The entire time, yes.”

“And was anyone else there, accompanying Cassie Bainbridge?”

“Yes—Nicole Bainbridge, Cassie’s sister.”

“Thank you, Dr. Chung. Was it successful, by the way, the operation?”

“Largely. But the patient had a bleeding episode two days later and required further attention. After that, however, Yuko recovered nicely.”

“One other thing. Were you aware, Doctor, that Yuko Sasaki is a Japanese American?”

“Of course.”

“And were you aware that by treating her and failing to report her, you have subjected yourself to having your medical license revoked?”

“Yes.”

“Why would you do such a thing?”

“I’m a doctor, Mr. Burns. We doctors take an oath to save lives when we

can and, above all, to do no harm. We don't look at the race of the person we're treating."

"Did you have any reason to believe that Miss Sasaki might be a dangerous spy for Japan?"

"Don't be silly. Yuko's an English literature major. She's as American as you or me or anyone in this courtroom. She was born in America. She doesn't even speak Japanese."

"Thank you, Dr. Chung. Nothing further."

"Your witness, Mr. Doogan," said the judge.

Doogan's assistant had just returned to the prosecution's table. The two of them conferred in hushed tones. "Are you sure?" Doogan whispered. The assistant nodded.

"Dr. Chung," said Doogan, approaching the witness, "you seem to know Cassandra Bainbridge and Yuko Sasaki quite well. How is it you are so intimately acquainted with them?"

"As I mentioned, we have mutual friends."

"Mutual friends. I see. Do you frequent the same establishments as they do?"

"I'm not sure what you mean by 'establishments'?"

"I think the term is well understood, Doctor. Nightclubs, bars, restaurants? Have you ever met the defendants at Mona's 440 Club on Broadway in San Francisco?"

"I may have."

"No need to equivocate, Dr. Chung. You have on at least one occasion met the defendants at Mona's 440 Club, have you not?"

"Yes."

"Are you married, Dr. Chung?"

"Objection, your Honor," said Burns.

"Overruled."

"No, I'm not married."

"Tell us, Dr. Chung, isn't Mona's 440 what is known as a bohemian nightclub?"

"Objection."

"Overruled," said Judge Moss. "Again, this is an arraignment. The rules

of evidence are not in force here. I will not warn you a third time, Mr. Burns. Answer the question, Dr. Chung.”

“I don’t know what bohemian means in this context,” said Dr. Chung.

“Well, isn’t it true, Doctor, that the patrons of Mona’s 440 are almost exclusively women, with most of them wearing men’s clothes?”

“Yes.”

“And isn’t it true, Dr. Chung, that you yourself used to wear male clothing and used to call yourself by a male name—Mike, specifically?”

“Your Honor,” Burns objected.

“Mr. Burns,” said the judge, “sit down. Answer the question, Dr. Chung.”

“I’m happy to,” she said. “When I was a medical student, I was not only the only Oriental in my classes, but the only woman. Because I didn’t want my fellow students or my teachers to see me or treat me any differently from anyone else, I chose for a time to wear a man’s suit and use a man’s name. I have said as much in public lectures.”

“Thank you, Doctor,” said Doogan. “Your Honor, I move to strike all of Dr. Chung’s testimony.”

“On what ground?”

“Sexual deviance, your Honor. A sexual deviant cannot give credible testimony.”

“Your Honor!” cried Burns.

The gallery burst into shouting and hooting. Judge Moss banged his gavel until there was silence.

“Mr. Doogan,” said the judge, “I have allowed you unfettered discretion to question the witness because the ordinary rules of evidence do not apply at an arraignment. But the rules of law do. Your motion to strike is out of order.”

“Your Honor,” protested Doogan, “sexual deviance is a crime and disqualifies her as a witness.”

“Not in my courtroom, Mr. Doogan,” said the judge. “And not in the state of California. While you’re correct of course that homosexuality is a crime, the California Supreme Court held in 1910 that evidence of immorality is not proper on cross-examination for the sole purpose of discrediting a

witness. In re Gird, 108 Pacific Reporter 499.”

“That’s not my understanding of the law, your Honor.”

“You’re free to appeal, Mr. Doogan.” Judge Moss turned to Burns. “Counsel, your witness Dr. Margaret Chung has testified that on the night of March tenth—the same night Walter Wilkinson was murdered in Berkeley—Cassie and Nicole Bainbridge brought Yuko Sasaki to Dr. Chung’s clinic in San Francisco and that along with two assistants she performed an emergency appendectomy on Miss Sasaki just after midnight, which is also approximately the time that Mr. Wilkinson was shot dead across the Bay. Are those assistants available to testify?”

“They are here in court, your Honor,” said Burns, gesturing at two people in the gallery, who rose from their seats. One was wearing a hospital coat; both were Caucasian. “They will confirm Dr. Chung’s testimony in every detail.”

“Mr. Doogan,” said the judge, “do I need to have these witnesses testify?”

Doogan cleared his throat. “No, your Honor. Duplicative.”

“Yes, I’m sure it would be,” said the judge. “The state’s motion to strike Dr. Chung’s testimony is denied. The Court finds that there is no probable cause to believe that Defendant Cassandra Bainbridge or Yuko Sasaki were connected in any way to the murder of Walter Wilkinson. In addition, the Court reverses its prior finding of probable cause to believe that Nicole Bainbridge was connected to the murder. The charges are dismissed, and the Court is adjourned.”

Moss brought his gavel down, and the courtroom exploded into a cacophony.

4

So now I knew what I’d seen in the basement of the barn in Sonoma the day Cassie ditched me. Yuko had obviously been hiding there, recovering from her appendectomy, and the blood I saw was probably from her bleeding episode two days after the surgery. When Cassie took off, she had Yuko with her, not wanting me, a cop, to find her. She may even have had Mom Chung with her too. I also had a guess about why Cassie, Nicole, and Isabella drove

off in a mad rush the night I knocked on the door of the Stafford house just after I'd spoken to Madame Chiang—it was the same night someone in the Claremont had recognized one of the Japanese women working in the laundry, blowing their cover. The Bainbridge girls were probably racing off to help the Japanese flee the hotel.

I was on my way to Doogan's office, and not looking forward to it. But when I nearly banged into him rounding a corner, I was surprised. The spectacular courtroom debacle he'd just suffered hadn't made the slightest dent in his armor. He still looked calm and confident. He had a sheaf of legal documents in his hand, and it turned out he was looking for me.

"Just the man I was coming to see," said Doogan. "I know you're thinking what I'm thinking."

"What's that, sir?"

"Oh come on, Sullivan—think about it. We know who did it now."

"Isabella?"

"It has to be," said Doogan. "Your maid at the Claremont saw one of the three Bainbridge granddaughters coming out of Wilkinson's room right after he was killed, with blood on her. Two of those granddaughters—Cassie and Nicole—are now accounted for; they were at the Chinese clinic. Isabella's the only one left. She has to be the killer."

"Or at least the one Juanita saw come out of Wilkinson's room," I corrected.

"Which means she's the killer," Doogan persisted. "What we don't have is motive. Why would Isabella want Walter Wilkinson dead? There's some connection between Wilkinson and the Bainbridges."

I didn't bother reminding him that I'd been saying so all along.

Doogan was waving a stack of papers. "These are applications for search warrants. We're going to tear up every place Isabella Stafford has ever lived—Nob Hill, Berkeley, Sonoma—I don't care how many goddamn houses they have. They think they just kicked our asses, but they have no idea what's coming. We've already got Nicole for the car bombing and Cassie for aiding the Japs. Now I'm going to put them all away."

I nodded, inwardly marveling at how naturally it came to Doogan to convince himself he'd done everything right. Ninety percent of success is

confidence. That's why it's the people with the least self-doubt who rule the world—which is pretty scary if you think about it. “How long before the warrants come through?” I asked.

“Hopefully by tomorrow.”

I thought it over. “How about I have a go at Roger Stafford? And maybe talk with Sadie, if that's possible. Nobody's questioned either of them.”

“Good,” Doogan said. “Wilkinson ate up good-looking women everywhere he went, and Isabella certainly fits the bill. Maybe after he met her at that Christmas party, they struck up an affair that went south. See if her parents know anything.”

5

I couldn't find a residence or phone listing for Roger Stafford. But I knew he worked for Julia Morgan, so I paid a call at her offices.

Julia Morgan was one of the most famous architects in the country, and like me she'd gone to Berkeley—back in the 1890s, coming to school every day in a horse-drawn carriage. I'd never even heard of her—or thought about architecture, for that matter—until I happened into the Berkeley Women's City Club one day and my jaw dropped. I didn't know the words at the time, but it was Gothic and Romanesque and Moorish all at once. I went back every chance I could, just to stare at the optical-illusion swimming pool, with its immense arches that the water's reflection turned into full circles, so you felt like you were staring down a long ornate tunnel.

Morgan was supposed to be one of the best engineers of any architect alive. Her campanile at Mills was so perfectly designed it survived the quake—and was practically the only building there that did—which turned out to be her big break, because everyone in the rebuild wanted the architect who beat the quake. That's also why Hearst put her in charge of his castle. She was doing something like fifteen buildings a year, when other architects were lucky to do one.

She was also the first licensed woman architect in the history of California. Which reminded me of Mom Chung being the first Chinese woman doctor. Actually, Morgan and Dr. Chung had something else in common. I'd never met her, but people said Julia Morgan dressed like a man

as well, in a shirt and tie. I wondered about that. Maybe they'd both had to, to be taken seriously. Or maybe there was something more to it.

The receptionist at Morgan's offices told me that Roger Stafford was working at something called "the Chapel of the Chimes" in Oakland. I took down the address and went there.

The Chapel of the Chimes turned out to be a fantastical Gothic complex abutting a cemetery. I found Roger Stafford in the columbarium, which was exquisitely carved but also one of the most macabre places I've ever been in. It looked like a library, except that the books on the shelves were actually receptacles containing the ashes of the wealthy dead. Roger was taking measurements of those receptacles and recording the measurements on a clipboard.

I was taken aback by his appearance. He couldn't have been older than forty-five but looked sixty. His eyes were cold and joyless, his cheeks hollow.

I hadn't expected him to be friendly—given his brawl with a policeman trying to interview him back in 1930—but I was still unprepared for the depth of his hostility. He refused to answer most of my questions and would barely look at me.

I tried to ask him about Iris, but he cut me off and told me he had nothing to say about her—he hadn't back in 1930, and he didn't now. Then I asked him about Sadie, but he just laughed caustically and would only shake his head.

"What about Walter Wilkinson?" I asked.

"What about him?"

"Did you know him?"

"Why would I have?"

"That wasn't an answer, Mr. Stafford."

"Yes it was."

"Wilkinson placed a call to your house on Nob Hill the evening he was killed. Do you know of any reason he would be trying to contact you or anyone else in your family? Your daughter Isabella, for example?"

At this, he turned his gaunt cynical gaze on me. "So you've met Isabella," he said, with a short bitter laugh. "That's what you're really here

for, I should have known. You like her, don't you? Despite yourself, your better judgment?"

"I'm sorry, sir?"

"You find her intriguing—more vulnerable than you expected, perhaps?" Roger's voice dripped with mockery. "Challenging and tantalizing? Ravishing, of course. And those long-lashed violet eyes, brimming with— with what, Detective? That's the question you need to ask yourself. With what. It's a cunning, devious bloodline she comes from—a line of sirens. Witches. Maybe you misjudged her, you find yourself saying. She's had such a hard time of it, such a hard life, after all."

I didn't answer. He sounded like he was talking more to himself than to me. He wasn't even looking at me as he spoke. But then he turned his eyes back on me, now strangely pitying.

"Don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about, Detective," he said. "Have you dreamt of her yet? If so, I despair for you. It may be too late."

I didn't get any more out of Roger Stafford. I only knew one thing. I'd never talked to a father who so loathed—and feared—his own child.

6

Isabella answered the door at the Stafford house, and as soon as she saw me, her face lit up. "Detective Sullivan! Thank you so much for your help—and what a relief about Cassie and Yuko—my entire family's so grateful. Wasn't Mom Chung marvelous?"

"I wouldn't thank me yet, miss," I said. "Is your mother here?"

"My mother? Why?"

"I'm here to speak with her. Mind if I come in?" I said, stepping inside the house. Isabella moved aside reluctantly, and I walked past her into the foyer.

"I told you," she said, "my mother isn't well."

"No? Is there some reason you don't want me to talk to her, Miss Stafford?"

"Yes, is there some reason, Isabella?" asked a voice above our heads. "So that you can keep this handsome young man all to yourself?"

Isabella spun around, and we both looked up to the top of the stairs, where Sadie Stafford was descending the curved staircase. She was wearing a low-neck red evening dress and matching high heels even though it was midafternoon. She wore red lipstick too, and rouge. Unlike the last time I saw her, her hair was stylishly coiffed. She was still attractive, but the overall effect was unsettling.

“Morning, ma’am,” I said. “Sorry to bother you on a weekend. I’m Detective Al Sullivan, Berkeley PD.”

“Oh, don’t be silly,” she said. “I know who you are. We’ve met. On the rooftop—don’t you remember? As a matter of fact, you’ve been at this house many times in the last few days, haven’t you?” A sly look came over her. “Sometimes when no one else is here and you think no one can see you.”

“I’m going to need to ask you a few questions, Mrs. Stafford.”

“You don’t have to talk to him, Mother,” said Isabella.

“I’m delighted to talk to him, Isabella.” Turning to me, she said conspiratorially, “She’s always pretending to be concerned about me. Come, Detective—let’s go to the parlor, just the two of us, where we won’t be disturbed.”

Sadie took my arm and led me to the room with the painting of Isabella and Iris, doll dangling from the latter’s hand.

“Voilà, my daughters!” she said, gesturing theatrically at little girls in the painting. “Irresistible, aren’t they?”

This seemed oddly lighthearted, given that one of them was dead.

“Mother,” said Isabella, who had followed us.

“Isabella, this is private conversation,” Sadie said sharply.

She swung closed the parlor doors, shutting Isabella out, and sank into a leather armchair, crossing her legs.

“So—how can I help you?” she said. “Would you care for a cocktail?”

“I’m fine, thanks. Mrs. Stafford, I assume you’ve heard about the murder of Walter Wilkinson at the Claremont last Friday?”

“Well, aren’t you a sharp one?” she said playfully.

“Do you happen to know, ma’am, if your daughter Isabella was acquainted with Mr. Wilkinson?”

“Isabella? Oh, I’m sure of it,” she tossed off.

I paused. A different possibility occurred to me. “Mrs. Stafford, did *you* know Mr. Wilkinson?”

“Of course I knew him. He nearly became president of the United States.”

“Did you ever meet him, ma’am?”

“Oh, thousands and thousands of times. If he’d become president, I might have been his First Lady.”

So Sadie Stafford was at least partly delusional. But maybe only partly. And maybe she was feigning the whole thing. “When was the last time you saw Mr. Wilkinson, ma’am?”

“The last time?” A new expression had come over her—as if she were bemused.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I’m afraid I have no idea,” she said, eyes twinkling. “My memory’s not what it used to be.”

“Just roughly will do. Was it years ago or more recently?”

“I honestly don’t know,” she replied, covering her mouth like someone trying not to show their amusement.

“Is something funny, ma’am?”

“No. Of course not. Forgive me. Please continue. Are you interested in having some lunch?” she added pleasantly, even though it was long past lunchtime.

“Mrs. Stafford, I’m sorry to have to ask you this, but where were you last Friday around midnight? Were you by any chance at the Claremont Hotel?”

At this Sadie looked like she was barely able to contain herself. Then she began to laugh. It was such a pleasing, mirthful laugh, it was hard not to smile along with her. But she just kept laughing. Wouldn’t stop laughing. She was laughing so hard she was rocking back and forth and her eyes were watering.

I wasn’t sure what I was witnessing. She seemed truly in stitches.

“You have everything wrong. Everything,” she finally managed to say between uncontrollable peals of laughter. “You—*are—so—stupid,*” she barely got out, then exploded again in peals, doubling over.

That’s when she fell out of her chair, landing with a crack on the floor

and knocking over a crystal vase, which shattered to pieces. She gave a sharp cry. Shards of glass surrounded her.

“Mrs. Stafford!” I called out, jumping up to help her.

“Mother!” Isabella had come running in at the sound of the crash. “Oh my goodness, let me help you up.”

“No, don’t touch me—get away from me!” Sadie screamed, pushing her daughter away with such force Isabella recoiled. “Please,” Sadie begged me, her fingers digging into my arm, “you have to help me. You don’t know the things she’s done. Don’t let her hurt me!” She seized a piece of glass and before I could stop her hurled it at Isabella—missing her by a good two feet—then immediately howled in pain because she’d cut her own hand.

As Sadie’s wails grew more hysterical, more animal-like, I looked over to Isabella for guidance, but she was standing perfectly still. She seemed to be looking right at me, or through me, but not seeing me. It was as if she were somewhere else. Then I decided I must have imagined it because she said in a normal voice, “We need to get her upstairs. When she gets like this, she doesn’t know what she’s saying. The only thing that helps is sleep—”

“She’s lying, don’t listen to her,” Sadie yelled. She was still sitting on the floor, leaning unsteadily on one arm, knees sidesaddle, surrounded by shards. One of her high heels had fallen off.

“Can you help me lift her up?” Isabella asked me.

I nodded. Isabella and I got on opposite sides of her, and together we lifted her to her feet.

“Why are you ignoring me and doing what she wants?” Sadie protested helplessly. “You think I’m crazy—but she’s the crazy one.”

“I won’t let anything happen to you, ma’am, I promise,” I said. “Let’s just get you out of this broken glass.”

Sadie’s body suddenly relaxed, and she became compliant. We managed to walk her up the stairs to her bedroom, which was huge—more like a private suite. Incongruously, it looked like the bedroom of an active socialite. Dresses and gowns were strewn on the backs of chairs. A large, mirrored vanity crammed with cosmetics and wigs filled up half a wall.

We deposited her on her bed. Isabella found some gauze, and Sadie, curled up on her side, allowed Isabella to bandage the cut on her hand. By the

time Isabella was done, Sadie's eyes were closed; it looked like she'd already fallen asleep. Isabella took off the one shoe her mother still had on and covered her with a blanket.

"Thank you," Isabella said to me quietly. One of her sleeves had slipped down, revealing a bare shoulder. As she hooked a loose strand of hair behind her ear, she looked, as Roger had put it, ravishingly beautiful. I forced myself to look away.

"I'll come back another time, miss."

"I think that's best. I'll show you out."

I was following Isabella out the door when, behind me, Sadie said in an oddly clear voice, "She's bewitched you."

I turned around. Sadie was wide awake again, sitting upright.

"That's why you can't see the obvious," she went on. "That look in your eyes—you have no idea how many other men I've seen with that same look. She's the one you should be questioning about that night, not me. Why don't you ask her, Detective?"

"Ask her what, ma'am?"

"Where she was that night and why she didn't come home until one thirty in the morning."

"She doesn't know what she's saying," Isabella said.

"And why don't you ask her how I got this way, so—damaged?" Sadie continued bitterly. "Look at me—ugly, useless, brainless. They say it was Roger, but it wasn't—*she's* the one who made sure I had the operation, by manipulating her father and all the doctors, by flirting with them and playing the helpless ingénue. She's the one who ruined me. I might as well be dead. I wish I *were* dead. Get out—*get out!*"

We left, Isabella shutting the door behind us.

"It's not true—any of it," she said to me, her eyes brimming with tears. "I—I don't know why she hates me so much."

We walked downstairs to the front door in silence. I didn't mention that her father had just given me basically the same warning about her.

Halfway out the door, I stopped. "I'm giving you one last chance to tell me the truth, miss," I said to Isabella. "Where were you the night Wilkinson was killed?"

She didn't answer my question. Instead she said, "I didn't kill him."

"Did you know him?"

She looked at me for a long time. Then she said, "No."

I shook my head. "Anything else you want to tell me?"

There was another long silence. "No," she said.

7

I didn't know who was more unnerving, Roger or Sadie Stafford. As for their ominous warnings about Isabella, well, I was on notice. But I wasn't sure what to make of either of the Stafford parents. They were both obviously damaged but also self-absorbed and self-pitying in different ways, and in Sadie's case I didn't know what her brain procedure might have done to her.

One thing had come out of my talking to them, though. Neither had given me any real facts, but I'd come away with a definite hunch. It was a long shot, but I thought of one person who might be able to confirm it.

8

I found Pounds, the old elevator man at the Claremont, in his usual car, dressed as always in a spotless baggy blue uniform with polished brass buttons that looked like it had been issued during the Great War.

"Hello, Pounds."

"Where to today, Detective?" he asked as he drew shut the elevator's iron-lattice inner door. "Fourth floor?"

"Actually, I was looking for you. Hoping to ask you a couple of questions."

He threw me a glance, cranked a lever that started us upward, then stopped the car between floors. "Ask away."

Pounds had a memory like a steel trap. He never forgot a name; he never forgot a face. He also knew more about what happened at the Claremont than just about anyone. All the staff talked to him, and he heard a ton taking guests up and down in his elevator. But he never volunteered a thing. With me he'd answer questions, but if I didn't ask for exactly the right information, I'd be out of luck. Once I asked him if three guys had taken a ride with him on a particular night, and I described them, and he said no, and later it turned that two of them had been in his car. I asked him why he hadn't told me, and he

said, "Because you asked if three had taken a ride with me." I'd had Tank and Polk interview him the day after the murder, but they might not have known what to ask.

"How long have you been working here, Pounds?" I asked him.

"As long as there's been a here here. I been operating these elevators since the day the hotel opened in 1915. Twenty-nine years."

"So you were here the day the little Bainbridge girl died, back in 1930?"

"The little girl's name wasn't Bainbridge. It was Miss Iris Stafford, born to the former Miss Sadie Bainbridge after she married Mr. Roger Stafford in 1921."

"You're right—I keep forgetting that. But you were working here the day she died?"

"Yes, sir. Worst day in this hotel's history."

"According to the police report, a doctor by the name of von Urban was also staying in the hotel that day. The register says he was in room 422—the same room I worked out of. Do you know this Dr. von Urban?"

"Yes, I do. He's the husband of the woman Mrs. Sadie used to play tennis with."

"After the little girl's body was found, no one could locate Sadie for hours. But according to the report, she went up to this von Urban's room at some point. There's a suspicion that they were carrying on. Is that right, Pounds—were they carrying on?"

"No, sir."

"No, they weren't carrying on?"

"That's right, they're weren't."

"I didn't think so. And you know that because?"

"Because it was the same drill every time Mrs. Sadie came to play tennis."

"What drill?"

"They would book a room in Dr. von Urban's name, but he wouldn't show up. Somebody else would stay there instead. Same somebody that Mrs. Sadie would meet every time she played tennis."

"Do you mean Mrs. Tillie von Urban?"

"No, sir. Someone else."

“And that someone else was?”

Pounds hesitated.

“I already know, Pounds. I just need confirmation.”

He still didn’t answer.

“This isn’t gossip,” I said. “This is a murder investigation.”

He nodded. “It was Mr. Walter Wilkinson.”

We looked at each other for a few seconds.

“Son of a bitch,” I said.

9

“Son of a bitch,” said Doogan. It was past seven in the evening, but I found him working late in the office. “So Wilkinson was having an affair with Sadie Bainbridge.”

“Not just that,” I said. “He was with her at the Claremont the day her daughter Iris died. And I’ll tell you something else, sir. I think he was Iris’s father. She didn’t look anything like the other Bainbridge girls. She had dark hair and dark eyes—like Wilkinson. And the doll we found in his closet—I don’t know why he had it, but I’m certain it was Iris’s doll.”

I reminded Doogan about how the abrasions on the dead little girl’s body matched up with the incisions someone had made on the doll.

“That’s it, then,” said Doogan, eyes gleaming. “That gives us motive. Isabella must have found out about Wilkinson and her mother and blamed him.”

“Blamed him for...?”

“For her sister’s death? For mistreating her mother? For destroying her family? I don’t know exactly, but the search warrants will come through tomorrow, and something’s going to turn up. This is perfect. Juries eat this kind of thing up—infidelity, betrayal, revenge—it’s red meat. This is going to make your career, Sullivan, mark my words,” he added, and I knew he was thinking of his own. “Speaking of red meat, how about some dinner? On me.”

I couldn’t say no, so we went out for a steak, something I hadn’t had for over a year. There was no small talk with Doogan. He spent the whole dinner strategizing. By the time we left he had the entire trial mapped out, and I

knew he could practically taste the victory, which he couldn't wait to throw back in the face of the Bainbridges.

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1944

SUNDAY, MARCH 19

1

Sunday morning the first thing I did was put in another call to Gladys Mulkerrins, the principal at Del Mar, Miriam's school. I didn't expect her to answer since it was a weekend, but she did.

"Mrs. Mulkerrins?"

"Yes, who's this?"

"Detective Al Sullivan, returning your call."

"Who? Oh yes, sorry, you caught me off guard. We have your number on file as a relation of Miriam Milsap. Is that right?"

"Yes, ma'am. I'm her uncle. Is there a problem?"

"There certainly is. She's been missing classes for months now. She often leaves school before dismissal—in fact, she has attended math only five times all semester and is on the verge of failing. And now she's been completely truant for a week. She hasn't come in at all."

I couldn't believe my ears. "There must be some mistake, ma'am. I dropped her off at school myself last Monday."

"Would you like me to show you her attendance record? It's not a pretty sight. Your niece is delinquent. And evidently deceitful. I'm sorry to have to tell you this, Detective Sullivan, but I have a great deal of experience with her kind. When they are truant at this age, gross immorality is just around the corner. And they are not in the main reformable."

I despised this woman and was about to blow a fuse. I wanted to ask her

what “kind” she’d had so much experience with, but I knew that anything I did for my own satisfaction now would only be taken out on Miriam later. Little people with a little power, as I always say.

“We’ve also been unable to reach Miriam’s mother—Mrs. Milsap, if that’s still her name?” she went on. “It seems her phone has been—disconnected?”

I could hear the disapproval dripping from her voice, but I still held my tongue. “I’ll go over there myself, ma’am, and tell Miriam’s mom what’s going on. We’ll get things straightened out, I promise you.”

“I do hope so,” she answered. “I’d hate to have to call social services.”

Sure she’d hate it. It would be her “painful duty” to take Miriam away from her family. I rang off, grabbed my coat and hat, and drove straight to Rosemary’s.

2

Rosemary lived in the Albany lowlands, in a duplex sandwiched between a bowling alley and a strip club. The street outside was littered and filthy, probably from people living it up last night.

I banged on the door, but no one answered. I tried to think where they might have gone—not to church, that was for sure, although Rosemary had been knocked up once by a minister. I really hoped Rosemary wasn’t back on the bottle.

I walked around to the side of the house and peeked in through a window. And there, sitting by herself at a small rickety wood table on a turned-over crate was Miriam, eating a bowl of dry Cheerios.

I banged on the window. “Hey, open the door. Didn’t you hear me knocking?”

“Oh hi, Al,” she said sheepishly. “I didn’t know it was you.”

“Well, open up.”

When she opened the front door for me, I couldn’t keep my temper. I don’t think I’d ever yelled at her before. “What the hell’s going on, Miriam? You’re cutting school? And lying to me about it? Where’s Rosemary? Oh, shit,” I said, forgetting my usual rule of not cursing in front of her. “That was a lie too. She didn’t really come back, did she?”

“I didn’t mean to make you mad, Al.”

“Well, you failed there. Start talking. Now.”

“I—I just wanted to get out of your hair. You’re right—you’re not my dad. You’re an eljable bachelor. And I can take care of myself.”

“What about school, Miriam? You stopped going?”

Miriam squirmed and frowned. “There’s some—stuff going on. With Mom.”

“Where is she?”

“She’s staying up in Sacramento now. She has a new boyfriend.”

“*Sacramento*? She left you?”

“Al?”

“What?”

“Can you just take a deep breath and listen to me for a sec?”

“I’m listening.”

“You don’t have to worry about me, Al. I have everything under control. I’ve been taking some extra shifts at work is all. To make extra money.”

“You don’t need extra money; you need to be in school. You’re eleven, for heaven’s sake, Miriam.”

“I—I do need the extra money.”

I looked at her and realized there was something else she wasn’t telling me.

“I need the truth, Miriam. All of it.”

“Okay.” Miriam took a deep breath. “Remember Jack?”

“Unfortunately, I do.” Jack O’Brien was one of Rosemary’s guys a few guys ago.

“You know how he liked to bet on greyhounds? And got Mom kinda hooked on it too? Well, they hit a bad streak, and Mom ended up losing some money.”

“How much?”

“A lot, Al.”

“A hundred?”

Miriam shook her head.

“More than that?” A slow sick feeling was coming over me. “You’re talking a lot a lot? How much?”

“She kept borrowing more, to try to win it back. I didn’t know, or I woulda come to you, honest. But yeah, she lost a lot. Five hundred. Don’t be mad at her, okay, Al? Please? Ma’s had it hard.”

I couldn’t believe it. You could buy a house with five hundred dollars. I was furious. I forced myself to calm down. “So what happened?”

“They were going to mess her up if she didn’t pay it back—it was a bad crowd she got mixed up with—real bad. So, well, I borrowed some money and paid it back.”

“*You* borrowed the money. Who would loan an eleven-year-old kid five hundred bucks?”

“Mickey.”

“Oh, shit,” I said, forgetting my rule for the second time.

“Yeah, he’s helping me out, Al. We have an arrangement.”

“Mickey’s a greedy dirtbag, Miriam.”

“It’s nothing, Al. Just a couple more months and I’m done.”

Mickey was the owner of the five-and-dime and a first-class, grade A sleazebag. With the war on, child labor had skyrocketed all over the country; millions of kids were working and missing school because of it. They were paid next to nothing even though a lot of them worked as long and as hard as adults. Mickey was just the type to be doing that to Miriam. Worse, I’d heard rumors that Mickey worked for Tony Lima, San Francisco’s mafia boss who owned Fisherman’s Wharf.

“Come with me,” I said to Miriam, practically dragging her by the ear. “We’re going to pay Mickey a little visit.”

3

I found Mickey behind the counter, eating French fries and wiping ketchup from his mouth. I’d known him since high school and never trusted him. I kicked myself for ever letting Miriam work for him in the first place.

“Want to tell me what’s going on here, Mickey?”

“What do you mean?” he asked innocently.

“Come on, Mickey, you’ve got to be kidding me. You’ve got an eleven-year-old working every day, when she should be in school? And weekends? Plus she just told me she was here last night unloading something?”

Mickey shrugged. “Big shipment of paper goods came in. I’m helping the kid out, that’s all. She needed cash, and I lent it to her. I was doing her a favor, Sullivan—I saved her mom’s life. If not for me, she never would have found anyone to lend her the money. Now she’s got to work it off.”

“Listen, Mickey, I’m going to pay you the five hundred bucks she owes you, okay? I’ll get it to you tomorrow.”

“Five hundred?” Mickey scoffed. “She told you five hundred? What about interest? What about the risk I took? I had three other people I could of lent that money to at twenty percent a month. I only gave her a break because she’s related to you, and you and I go way back.”

“Just tell me how much she owes you, total.”

“It says it right here,” he said, handing me a piece of paper.

“What is this?”

“It’s a contract. She signed it.”

“You can’t enforce a contract against a minor, Mickey, you know that.”

“You can this one.” For the first time, he looked a little guilty. But pleased too. “Sorry, buddy. I need the labor. You can’t get good help anymore—forget good help, any help. Not since the war started.”

I looked at the contract with a sinking feeling. If the rumors were true about Mickey working with Tony Lima, the mafia boss, this was not going to be good. Lima was famous for his lawyered-up loansharking scams. Sure enough, the contract was structured in a way that trapped Miriam. It didn’t say anything about a loan. It said she’d shoplifted goods worth in excess of \$500 and that if she didn’t work for three years on Mickey’s terms, he’d bring charges.

“You lying bastard,” I said to Mickey. “She never stole a penny.”

“It says there she did,” Mickey answered, shrugging.

“Miriam, did you shoplift?”

“No! You know I’d never do that, Al. But I—I made a mistake.” She looked like she was about to burst into tears. “I signed it. I shoulda read it more carefully, but I didn’t. It was the only way to get the money for Mom. I didn’t realize how much I’d have to work.”

I could just imagine what happened. Mickey probably started her with a couple of extra days every now and then. Then he probably jacked it up,

adding nights and weekends, threatening her with the shoplifting business. “How do we solve this, Mickey?” I asked. “How much is it going to cost to make this go away?”

“Read the contract—right at the end.”

The last paragraph of the contract said that Miriam could be free and clear if she paid Mickey three thousand dollars.

“*Three thousand dollars?*” I said. “Are you out of your mind? Off a five-hundred-dollar loan to a kid—that you shouldn’t have made in the first place? How is she ever supposed to get that kind of money?”

“That’s why I’m letting her work it off. I’m telling you, I’m the good guy here. We’re only talking three years.”

“*Three years?*” I asked.

“It really isn’t a long time, Al,” said Miriam. “Maybe this is the best way.”

“You’re gonna be an indentured servant? To this cretin?” I asked her. “How about school—how about getting into college like we talked about?”

“I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that, Al—”

“There’s nothing to talk about,” I cut her off. I was about to explode, but all I did was throw a tenner onto the counter. “That’s for this week, Mickey. You and I will talk later. Let’s get out of here, Miriam.”

4

The Berkeley search warrant came through late that afternoon—surprising to get it on a Sunday, but Doogan had pulled strings—before the others. I brought Miriam with me because I wasn’t going to let her out of my sight.

“Look at these houses,” said Miriam, whistling, as we drove down Avalon Avenue. It was as if she’d already forgotten about Mickey and the five-and-dime and was her usual self again.

“You want to live in a house like this someday? Do your schoolwork.”

“I got two chances of that, Al: Slim and None. And Slim left town.”

She wasn’t wrong about the houses—Avalon had some of the finest in Berkeley, and no finer pair than Madame Chiang’s fortress-like iron-barred mansion near the end of the street, on the low side, and Mrs. Genevieve Bainbridge’s house directly opposite, on the high side. A crew of Chinese

gardeners was pulling weeds from Madame Chiang's steep yard. Mrs. Bainbridge was doing some gardening of her own in her lawn.

I greeted her and handed her my warrant. She stood up stiffly from her spade work, the way older people do, and then she stiffened more when she read it, but she made no objection. She wasn't the kind of person who wasted energy on futile protests.

Instead she asked, looking curiously at Miriam, "Is this your daughter?"

"No, ma'am," I said, trying to sound professional, even though I knew how irregular it was to have a child sidekick with me. "This is my niece, Miriam."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Miriam," she said, leading us into the house. "I have a batch of freshly baked cookies in the kitchen. Would you like to try one and then help me with my gardening while your detective uncle does his work? The apricot trees are in full bloom."

Miriam glanced at me, then shook her head furtively when Mrs. Bainbridge wasn't looking. I could tell she would have much preferred watching me conduct a search, but I said, "That's nice of you, Mrs. Bainbridge, thanks. I shouldn't be too long. The warrant's just for one room—Isabella's bedroom. Would you mind showing me the way?"

I could feel Mrs. Bainbridge's reproach piercing through me, although all she said was, "Left at the top of the stairs and left again at the end of the hall. But you're wasting your time, I assure you."

As I mounted the stairs, I marveled at the difference between searching a rich man's house and a poor man's. In the neighborhood where I grew up, when cops wanted to search a house, they just barged in and shoved to the floor anybody who got in their way, while the rest of the family cowered in the kitchen. If the cops had a warrant, it sure as heck wouldn't have been a single-room warrant. As far as I know, there's never been a single-room search warrant in history in a workingman's part of town. But the cops wouldn't have had a warrant at all. No cop ever got a warrant to search a poor man's house.

The Constitution said if you searched a house in violation of the Fourth Amendment—which requires a warrant—you couldn't use the evidence you found in court. They call that the exclusionary rule. What people don't

understand is that the Fourth Amendment doesn't apply to us state cops; it only applies to the Feds. In other words, if the FBI searches a house illegally, they can't use the evidence; but if a city or state cop does the same thing, no problem. A few justices on the Supreme Court wanted to change that, but so far a majority hadn't gone along. A couple years back, everyone was worried that the California Supreme Court was going to announce the same rule for us under the state constitution. But the Court said no, so no California cops gave a damn about warrants.

Unless it was a rich man's house. You'd better not barge in there without a warrant. You'd better dot your i's and cross your t's, because otherwise the rich man and his lawyers would call your boss and get your ass fired the next day. Or maybe they'd call the governor and get your boss fired. Bottom line—it was like a lot of things: one rule for the poor, another for the rich.

I found Isabella's room where Mrs. Bainbridge said I would. I thought it might be a little girl's bedroom, because I figured Isabella hadn't spent many nights there since she was a kid. I was wrong. The bed was a grown-up's bed, the closet was full of women's clothing, the bookcase full of real books.

It's one kind of search when you know what you're looking for, but it's a whole other kind when you don't—and I didn't. Sure, a murder weapon would be nice, and so would a yellow silk skirt or dress, but if Isabella was the killer, she was way too smart to have kept either of those around. The question was whether something less obvious—something she might have kept—might implicate her. And for that kind of search, you can't leave any stone unturned. With every piece of clothing, you go through pockets, hems, linings. You look inside every item in every drawer, after which you pull the whole drawer out to make sure nothing's taped to the side or bottom. Obviously you look under the mattress and pillows. Then you have to take the pictures off the walls and the backs off their frames. When there's a bookcase, you remove every book and leaf through its pages to see if anything's hidden there.

Which is how I eventually found it. In a book of poetry by somebody I'd never heard of. I was flipping through it like I'd done with dozens of others when a card slipped out and fell to the floor.

It was a substantial card, of heavy stock. Centered at the top the name

“Walter Wilkinson” was embossed in navy block letters. Below that, in a man’s handwriting, was the following message: “Dear Isabella, Meet me on the tenth at midnight. I’m at the Claremont, Room 602. Please come. I beg of you.” It was signed, “W.W.”

5

With the card in my jacket pocket, I found Mrs. Bainbridge outside in the rear garden, picking apricots with Miriam, and asked if I could use her phone. She said of course and told me it was in the pantry off the kitchen. I called Doogan and told him what I’d found.

“Bingo,” he said. “Bingo, bingo, *bingo*. I knew it. Now get over to the Stafford house on Nob Hill right away. I don’t want another Bainbridge girl on the run. See if you can get her to tell you where the murder weapon is. Tell her cooperating is her only chance of avoiding the chair. And whether she gives it up or not, bring her in.”

“Got it, sir.”

“Detective Sullivan?”

This was Mrs. Bainbridge. She was standing at the kitchen door; I didn’t know much she’d overheard.

“Are you arresting Isabella?”

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Bainbridge. I can’t discuss the case with you. Good day, ma’am. Thank you for looking after Miriam.”

“Please—Detective—don’t leave yet. I—I have something for you.”

“Sorry, ma’am. I don’t have time.”

“You do, for this. I promise you. Assuming, that is, you want to know who really killed Walter Wilkinson.”

She walked away. And with that bait dangled in front of me, I had to stick around.

I heard her climb the stairs. A minute later she returned with a thin reddish-brown folder tied up with string.

“This is a document Mr. Doogan asked me to prepare, using quite unscrupulous tactics I must say. Read it, and you’ll understand why I haven’t given it to him. You’ll also know the truth. The unvarnished truth.”

When I got to my car, I put Miriam in the back seat next to a pile of her

schoolbooks that I'd made her bring, and told her to get to work even though I didn't know what I was talking about. In the front seat, I untied Mrs. Bainbridge's folder. Inside was a long testimonial, apparently meant to be an attachment to her deposition. While Miriam did her schoolwork, I read Mrs. Bainbridge's story. From the first page of that testimonial to the last, I don't think I moved. The early installments had plenty of fireworks in their own right. But the last was a six-alarm fire.

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Chapter Twenty-Five

MRS. BAINBRIDGE'S TESTIMONIAL
PREPARED FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY DOOGAN
IN CONNECTION WITH HER DEPOSITION
TAKEN ON THE FIFTEENTH OF MARCH, 1944

I come now at last to the murder of Walter Wilkinson, about which, Mr. Doogan, you told me, with unappealing relish I must say, that if I did not disclose to you which of my granddaughters did the deed, all three would face the hangman. I'm an old lady who hasn't accomplished anything extraordinary in life, but I do have the gift of perceptivity, and I can tell you with absolute conviction that you are not a person of good character. I don't know when it will happen, but mark my words you are in for a fall from grace. Your careerism is too blatant—there's no genius to it. Your total lack of empathy will be your downfall.

In the interest of saving everyone time, I will start with a simple but untoward disclosure. My eldest granddaughter—poor Iris, who died in the tragic accident—was not my son-in-law Roger Stafford's child. She was the product of an affair my daughter, Sadie, had with another man she met before Roger. That man was Walter Wilkinson.

At the time, Mr. Wilkinson was an unknown—a modestly successful businessman from the Midwest who made periodic working trips to San Francisco, where, because of charm and nice looks, he quickly found himself mingling with San Francisco society. He was often invited—almost always by women infatuated with him—to the most exclusive parties and events. That's how Sadie met him—through me, in fact. She accompanied me to the opening of the new Museum of the Legion of Honor, and shortly after that—possibly that very night—she commenced an affair with him, which led to her becoming pregnant at the age of seventeen. Unfortunately, Mr. Wilkinson had just become engaged to another woman back East—a fact that he conveniently omitted, as men of his kind are wont to do, when disclosure would get in the way of something delectable and satisfying. So Sadie had to find someone else to marry her in the shortest possible order, and the person most head-over-heels for her at the time, as well as the most gullible, was Roger Stafford.

But unfortunately for Roger, the affair was not over—far from it. Even as a newlywed, Sadie was still pining away for Wilkinson—she always most craved the things she couldn't have—which persisted right through her pregnancy and then the birth of Iris. With the poor child just a few days old, Sadie fell into a terrible despondency and couldn't nurse. This was diagnosed incorrectly as postpartum melancholy, when in fact it was just a desperate hankering, physical and emotional, for Mr. Wilkinson.

You'll recall that shortly after Isabella was born, Sadie began seeing the psychiatrist Dr. von Urban—a man of no morals at all, whom you, Mr. Doogan, would get along with capitally—and that I once attributed Sadie's miraculous

recovery from her melancholy to a love affair she was having with the despicable doctor himself. In this I was mistaken. It turns out that Dr. von Urban recommended as a *cure*—can you imagine?—that Sadie recommence her affair with Wilkinson, who as it happens still made regular business trips to the Bay Area. She wrote him, or perhaps telegraphed, I don't know the mechanics, and what a surprise, he obliged. Thus began years of secret rendezvous facilitated by the doctor and his equally loathsome wife, who I can only assume thrives on intrigue and duplicity—not to mention the prurient titillation she no doubt took from the whole sordid arrangement.

In any event Sadie and Wilkinson carried on this way for years, meeting every three or six or however many months, always at the Claremont, always under the pretense of Sadie playing tennis with Tillie. I knew nothing of the subterfuge; neither did Roger.

Unexpectedly—and this was the cause of the great catastrophe—Mr. Wilkinson, who never had children of his own, I believe due to health issues with his actual wife, grew increasingly besotted with Iris. Viewing her from afar became part of the reason he came so often to the Claremont—over time, I believe, the main reason. Men like Mr. Wilkinson get tired of women like Sadie—once tasted, once conquered, they are devalued—and Sadie, I suspect, was becoming an albatross to him. Mr. Wilkinson was by now a married man after all, with a political career just taking off. At the same time, Sadie was becoming ever more needy and reckless, apparently on several occasions calling his home in New York. And beauty does fade.

Perhaps this is a good place to add an important caveat. Everything I'm recounting I know only from what Sadie, strapped down and infused with phenobarbital, told me, possibly unwittingly, from her hospital bed in the first days after the tragedy, her words gushing out hysterically, almost incoherently—suggesting veracity, by the way, as she was decidedly not in a state to engage in deception.

In any event, Iris became the apple of Mr. Wilkinson's eye. It was utterly out of character and rather mysterious really. Perhaps it was middle age and a sense of mortality on the horizon, or perhaps the success he had achieved and the thought of no one to pass it on to, or perhaps he was bewitched. But he, the most fickle and roaming and noncommittal of men, simply melted, lost his heart to Iris with her dark eyes and slight limp and unruly night black hair.

He was a smitten father if ever there was one, showering Iris with gifts that ostensibly came from Tillie. It pained him that Iris would never know who her real admirer was, but it also gave him joy to see her face light up.

At the same time, his thirst for Sadie continued to wane, and on the day Iris died, Mr. Wilkinson tried to end their affair, telling Sadie this would be his last trip to the Claremont. He and Sadie had finished their lovemaking and apparently an entire bottle of champagne—of course he would have waited until after he indulged himself—when he delivered the blow and told her it was over.

Sadie tried everything, weeping, remonstrating, threatening. As a last resort, out of sheer desperation, she fell to her knees and begged. Come see our daughter, she pleaded, the beautiful creature we made together. If you don't feel what I think you will, I'll let you go, I give you my word.

It was a clever ploy. Mr. Wilkinson had held Iris on a few occasions as a toddler, and always spent as much time as he could watching her from afar whenever he visited the Claremont. But to keep their secret he hadn't been in her presence since she turned two. So he couldn't resist.

They found Iris in a banquet room on the second floor, looking for a place to hide. I don't know how they ended up in the Tower—perhaps it was for privacy, or perhaps Sadie wanted a romantic setting with a view of the hills, which would be like her. But once they were up there, Sadie announced to Iris that Mr. Wilkinson was her father, her real father, hoping this would change his mind. It

didn't. On the contrary, it provoked anger on his part—I think he felt he was being manipulated.

Precisely what happened next is unclear to me. In her hysterical state in the hospital, Sadie insisted that it was Mr. Wilkinson who in a burst of inebriated, fury-induced carelessness had sent Iris falling to her death, but I must say in all honesty that I am extremely dubious of this claim. On this point I think Sadie was probably just being spiteful, or trying to deflect blame from herself. Mr. Wilkinson was simply too taken with the little girl, and I don't believe he would have been capable of doing such a thing, even inadvertently. Instead I suspect that spirited little girl was playing while her parents argued, and that they, heedless and negligent, let her climb up on the chair, look into the laundry chute, and probably jump into it, thinking she had found another slide.

And now—I can just imagine your impatience, Mr. Doogan, fuming at why the old bat is taking so long—I will finally tell you what happened the night of Walter Wilkinson's murder.

For years after the tragedy, Sadie received all manner of psychiatric treatment—insulin shock therapy, cardiazol shock therapy, electroconvulsive shock therapy, and more besides. I wouldn't be at all surprised if history marks the 1930s as the heyday of the hacks, and it is my opinion that psychiatry in general is 90% charlatanism. Is anyone ever actually cured? Does anyone ever even improve as a result of psychiatric interventions?

In any event, nothing they did to Sadie worked, and she grew increasingly violent. After one particularly frightening incident in which a member of the household staff was seriously injured, Roger decided that Sadie should undergo a procedure called a leucotomy, which was quite new at that time, pioneered by a surgeon from Yale named Freeman and being carried out across the country ostensibly with great success. I was extremely skeptical about this new miracle technique from the beginning. It was always men performing these operations, and almost always on women—housewives, typically—who, conveniently, were unwell both before and after the procedure and thus in no position to have their opinions taken seriously. But Roger insisted that she have the procedure—whether he genuinely wished to help her or was simply sick of her hysterics and wanted to exact a kind of subconscious retribution, I don't know. So ice picks were inserted through Sadie's eye sockets into the frontal lobes of her brain, and parts of her cerebral cortex were transected—a procedure also known as a partial lobotomy. It didn't cure her, but it did change her. Arguably there were beneficial results: her violence and promiscuity largely subsided. But from that point on she was also mentally compromised.

She lost her sense of reality. She'd sometimes think she was seventeen or twenty-one. Lucidity and derangement became strangely mixed in her. For example, although she had no sense of the war raging all over the world, nor even much sense of what year it was, when Walter Wilkinson ran for president in 1940, Sadie was suddenly acutely aware of every detail. His burgeoning prominence and popularity infuriated her. While she was murky and disoriented about almost everything else, when it came to him, her mind was like a trap. A mere mention of his name on the radio would trigger an explosion of vitriol. The worst was when a picture of him and his wife appeared in *Life* magazine, which sent her on a rampage.

And then there were the nighttime disappearances. Every now and again there are nights—sometimes a year goes by without such a night, sometimes they come in batches—when Sadie leaves the house and is nowhere to be found, staying out until daylight. When she returns, she is dressed invariably in glamorous garb and high heels, with lipstick and rouge and mascara. She never says where she's been, but it's clear she sometimes strays far from home. Once she was brought back by policemen, who found her on a seaside boardwalk at Playland and believed her to be a lady of the night.

And now for the finale, Mr. Doogan, the moment you've been waiting for. The night Walter Wilkinson was killed, my doorbell rang. It was a highly unusual hour for a caller—nearly one in the morning.

It's odd how one knows when something is terribly wrong. The moment I heard my doorbell, I knew it just as I had when the phone rang at my house fourteen years ago. I realize it is quite impossible, but I'm telling you—I could hear it in the very ring of the doorbell that Friday night, just as I had been able to hear it in the ring of the phone the awful day poor Iris died.

I was just getting ready for bed, so I came down in a robe and opened the door. It was Sadie.

She had evidently been out on one of her night-walking escapades—how she got to Berkeley from the city I don't know, but she had turned up in places even farther away before. She was wearing a long hooded cloak. Beneath it the paint on her face and red lipstick made her look almost youthful again. But her eyes were mad. There's no other word for it.

She sauntered in as if it were a perfectly normal hour and a perfectly normal occurrence, when in fact Sadie hadn't been to my house even once since the leucotomy. She tossed her cloak and purse right onto the floor of my foyer—as if she thought a maid would come running to take care of her things—and tottered unsteadily into my living room. She had on an utterly inappropriate cocktail dress, and she dropped herself on a sofa, reclining and crossing her long legs, which are still quite fine, flipping off her heels as she did.

"Fix me a drink, mother," she said. "I need a nightcap. Desperately."

"Sadie, my dear, what are you doing here?"

"I just had the *loveliest* dinner with Walter at the Claremont," she said dreamily, like a girl describing her honeymoon. "We had bluepoints and champagne and Lobster Newberg—such a divine meal. And Walter looked so dashing—he had put on his best dinner suit for me. But then he told me over dessert—over chocolate *soufflé*, can you imagine?—that it had to be our last meal together. And so it was. It was our Last Supper."

At this point, her tone abruptly changed. Her body hardened. The damaged lines of her face became suddenly apparent.

In a chillingly calm voice, she said, and I believe these are her exact words, "God spoke to me, Mother. He told me to do it."

"Do what, Sadie?"

"It's finally over. I've taken care of it, and I'm ecstatic. I was so pleased God spoke to me, because my whole life I've very rarely reached out to Him, neglected Him really. And thank goodness—Walter was a danger, Mother. A danger to many, many people. He's heartless; he's a murderer. The world is a far safer place now that he's gone."

You can imagine how worried I was. But my worry was for Sadie's health and her lost sanity, not for Walter Wilkinson. The news of Mr. Wilkinson's murder would only come out the next morning. None of us knew that anything had happened to him, and it never occurred to me that there could be any reality to my daughter's ravings. So I called Sadie a taxi, gave the driver the Nob Hill address, and made sure that he would see her safely inside.

The next morning, when I saw the headlines, I finally understood that a ghastly truth was mixed into Sadie's delusions. I told no one what had happened. And perhaps by keeping silent I committed a crime. I don't know; that's your department, Mr. Doogan. But the murder was done. Nothing could now undo it.

Then you came along, Mr. Doogan, hungry for reasons best known to yourself to convict one of my granddaughters of the crime. You are wrong, as I've told you all along. You are aiming at the wrong target. Or perhaps you knew the true target all along. I wouldn't put it past you. Perhaps you knew that by threatening my granddaughters you could induce me to give away my own daughter, a sin for which I will surely burn for all eternity.

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1944

MONDAY, MARCH 20

1

“Goddamn it,” said Doogan. “That cunning bitch.”

He was in his office chair, a cup of coffee in one hand and Mrs. Bainbridge’s testimonial in the other. As soon as I’d finished reading it yesterday, I’d called Doogan and briefed him. He’d reluctantly agreed to postpone arresting Isabella until he had a chance to read the testimonial himself.

“Sir?” I asked.

“Ever hear of *People v. Schmidt*?” he asked. “It’s a case decided by none other than Justice Benjamin Cardozo. And it specifically says that if a woman has a delusion that God spoke to her and ordered her to kill someone, she’s not guilty by reason of insanity. The old lady’s playing us. Did you notice the exact words she used—that Sadie said ‘God told me to do it’? The old bat knows exactly what she’s doing—she’s giving me the one person in the family I can’t convict. And I’ll tell you why. Because she knows Isabella did it. The whole story’s bullshit. There’s no way Sadie could have done it. She’s out of her mind—you told me so yourself.”

“Not exactly,” I said. “She’s half in, half out. And we know she goes out in the streets at night. I think she might be capable.”

“Oh, please,” said Doogan. “You’re saying a crazy woman got herself from San Francisco to Berkeley, snuck into the Claremont, shot Wilkinson and got out again, all without anyone noticing her?”

“I’m just saying there’s more to Sadie Stafford than people think. She’s no invalid. At least not all the time.”

“It’s a load of crap,” said Doogan. “That note card you found, from Wilkinson to Isabella, that’s the smoking gun. It puts her at his hotel room at the exact time he was killed, for God’s sake. That card got us the search warrant for the Stafford house in Nob Hill—which came through early this morning, by the way. Get over there now, Sullivan. I want you to supervise. See if you can find me a murder weapon—and please tell me it has Isabella Stafford’s fingerprints on it.”

2

At the Stafford house in Nob Hill, Isabella had been put under guard. Five city cops were turning the house upside down while a sixth was standing next to Isabella at the foot of the stairs, holding her by the arm.

“Thank goodness you’re here,” she said when she saw me. “Can you please tell me what’s going on? Am I under arrest? No one will tell me anything.”

I spoke to the cop, not to her, and asked him where Sadie was. He responded that she’d taken a whopping dose of Nembutal and was up in her room completely knocked out. Then I asked whether they were finished with the kitchen yet. He said they were, and I turned to Isabella: “Follow me, Miss Stafford.”

The kitchen was a wreckage. All the cabinets and drawers were open, their contents strewn helter-skelter onto the counters and floor. I posted the cop outside the kitchen door so nobody else would come in, and made Isabella sit down at a long wood table that was piled with pots and pans, boxes and jars, and so on. I sat down opposite her and pushed out of the way everything that was between us.

“You’re in serious trouble, miss.” I tossed Wilkinson’s card on the table in front of her. “Recognize this?”

She glanced down, and I saw her flinch.

“The night Walter Wilkinson was killed,” I continued, “you went to his room at midnight. You had an appointment with him. And it was you the hotel maid saw in the hallway coming out of his room. Isn’t that right?”

There was a silence. Then she said, “Yes—but he was already dead when I got there, I swear to you.”

I didn’t respond. I just looked at her.

“You have to believe me, Detective.”

“No, I don’t, Miss Stafford. I really don’t.”

“I could never have killed him. Never.”

“And why’s that, miss?”

“Because he was my father.”

That statement hung in the air.

“Not just Iris’s,” she said, “but mine too.”

I didn’t say so, but I’d been wondering about the same thing ever since Pounds told me how long Wilkinson and Sadie had been carrying on. Wilkinson being Isabella’s father would also explain Roger’s hostility to her. And I’d never bought the idea that Isabella was having an affair with Wilkinson—although maybe I just didn’t want that to be true.

Aloud, I said, “That doesn’t prove you didn’t kill him. If you’ve got a story you want to tell me, miss, you’d better get to it.”

Isabella looked away for a moment. Then she said, “All right—I’ll tell you everything.”

“I’m listening.”

“I first met Walter Wilkinson about three months ago, at Madame Chiang’s Christmas party, where he kept staring at me. Finally he came up and told me he’d known my mother long ago, and that he couldn’t get over how much I looked like her. I’ve heard that many times, so I didn’t find our conversation especially remarkable. We exchanged a few more words, then I left the party with my grandmother and Nicole, and I forgot all about him.

“About a month later, though, I received a long letter from him. It was ... quite a letter. He told me that he met my mother in 1921 at the opening gala for the Palace of Legion of Honor and that they’d fallen in love and spent the night together. He said he was Iris’s real father and that he and my mother had continued their affair, even after they were both married to other people, always meeting at Claremont. That was the first time I realized the real purpose of the ‘special Sundays’ Iris and I used to spend at the Claremont with our mother. He told me that he was actually at the Claremont with my

mother the day Iris had her accident. And he told me that he was my father too. He said that he'd suffered years of guilt because he'd abandoned me and that he wanted to make amends and get to know me because I was his only living child.

"I wrote back intemperately—I don't know why but his letter terrified and infuriated me, and I didn't want to believe it. In fact, I wrote him that I didn't believe him and that I never wanted to hear from him again. He then wrote me another letter saying that he was coming to the Bay Area in March and that he had something to show me—to give me—as proof. I didn't reply. But after he arrived in town, he sent me a card—the one you found. Right up to the last minute, I wasn't sure whether I was going to meet him or not. But in the end I decided to go.

"I drove there alone. I entered through a side door—I know that hotel inside out—and took the service stairs up to the sixth floor. I went to room 602 and found the door ajar. So I walked in, and that's when I saw him, lying there, dead, his pants pulled down in a humiliating way, his mouth stuffed with strange things—it was horrible. The most horrible thing I've ever seen. I grabbed a sheet of newspaper and covered him—it was indecent the way he was exposed.

"I was about to leave when I saw a small black velvet box on the dresser—even though there didn't seem to be any other belongings of his in the room. I thought it might be the proof he said he had for me. And it was. Inside the box was a child's silver necklace with a cross pendant—it was tarnished—it looked like it had been sitting there for years, untouched. The thing is, Iris had a necklace almost just like it—in fact she was wearing it the day she died, but it went missing. We'd always been told it was a gift from Mrs. von Urban, but I realized now it was from him. He must have bought me a matching one, except mine had tiny emeralds instead of diamonds on it. I think he'd meant to give it to me long ago but never got a chance. I don't know why—you won't understand—I don't understand—but I was overcome. All this time—my whole life—I'd had a father out there—a father who loved me—as his own. And now, the moment I'd found him, he was dead.

"I barely remember leaving the room. I took the necklace—I have it if

you want to see it—and ran out and left the hotel the way I came. I drove away—I didn't even know where I was going—and finally I returned home. That's the truth, Detective—I swear to you."

Neither of us spoke for quite a while.

"If all that's true, miss," I said, "why didn't you tell anyone? Why'd you come to me with that cock-and-bull story about Madame Chiang?"

"Because—because I knew it was my mother. I know you've read my grandmother's testimonial—she told me. So you know the truth as well. The moment I saw him, I knew she'd killed him."

I didn't answer.

"When I came to your room the next day," she went on, "I was just trying to see what you knew and throw you off the track. I thought there would be no harm—no one would ever dare go after Madame Chiang. I was just trying to protect my mother."

"Why would you do that, miss?" I was thinking of how viciously Sadie had treated her the last time I was in the house, even throwing glass at her.

"My mother hates me. But ever since I can remember, I adored her. I can't help it." Isabella's eyes had filled with tears, which she wiped away. "All I ever wanted was for her to love me, even just a little."

I'd been a cop for ten years. I didn't often get a gut feeling of absolute certainty that a suspect was coming clean, but when I did, I'd never been never wrong. I had that feeling now. Even knowing how many times she'd lied to me, I believed her.

There was a knock at the kitchen door, and one of the men came in and told me they'd been through the whole house and hadn't found anything of interest. I told him to keep looking.

I thought about what we knew. Sadie definitely wasn't the helpless convalescent people thought she was. And there were glimmers of acuteness—even canniness—breaking through whatever fog her brain might otherwise be in. I could believe she was capable of violence. She'd seemed oddly gleeful too when I'd mentioned Wilkinson's murder to her.

"Any idea where the murder weapon might be?" I asked Isabella.

Isabella shook her head. "Even if I knew, I wouldn't tell you. Why would I help you convict my mother?"

“You wouldn’t be doing her any harm, miss. Doogan says your mom can’t be held criminally responsible even if she did kill Wilkinson.”

“I don’t understand.”

“If what your grandmother says in her testimonial is true, your mom’s not guilty by reason of insanity. She can’t be convicted.”

“Are you telling me the truth? Nothing will happen to her?”

“I’m telling you what Doogan told me, miss, and he’s the DA. And I can tell you something else—your mother should not have a firearm. It’s dangerous for everyone—including herself. If she has a gun in this house, you should help us find it.”

Isabella thought it over.

“I can think of one place she might have put it,” she said at last. “Can we ... can I take you there?”

She led me up three flights of stairs to a room in the attic—the very room I’d seen Sadie leave the house from. Isabella went to the window and opened it.

“This is how my mother sneaks out when she has one of her night-walking episodes,” said Isabella. “There’s a balcony outside this window and a ladder that goes down to the garden.”

I didn’t mention that I already knew all that. We went outside onto the narrow balcony with its stone parapet. Isabella walked a few paces, then stopped.

“This is her hiding spot,” she said. “I’ve found very strange things here before.”

She reached her hand into a nook hidden from view.

“Don’t touch anything, miss,” I said quickly. But I was too late.

Isabella pulled her hand back out, holding a revolver.

“Give that to me,” I said, drawing a handkerchief out of my pocket.

3

I told the boys who were still searching the house that I was taking Miss Stafford to headquarters back in Alameda County. I also told them to go to the neighbors and find out if anyone happened to see Sadie outside on the night of the tenth.

I put Isabella in the back seat of my car and headed over the Bay Bridge. We didn't do much talking. By rights I should have taken her to the courthouse in Oakland, where Doogan's offices were, but instead I brought her to Berkeley so I could use the crime lab at our station. It was a little after noon, and I was hoping Jim Archimbault would be out for lunch. He was. I took Isabella down to the lab with me and made her sit in a chair while I worked.

First I threw powder—we used aluminum—all over the revolver to see if any latent prints popped up. You wouldn't know it from *True Detective* magazines, but firearms are lousy for pulling fingerprints. Nine times out of ten you don't get a thing. On this gun, though, there was one good set of prints on the grip, so I took out the transparent tape, lifted them off, and fixed them onto a lifting card. Next I checked the revolver to see if it was still loaded. It was, and I fired a bullet into our recovery tank of water, fished it out and put it under the comparison microscope. Then, from Archie's file cabinet, I took the bullet from Wilkinson's hotel room headboard and placed it under the microscope next to the revolver's bullet.

"What are you finding?" Isabella asked.

"This is the gun that killed Walter Wilkinson. It's the murder weapon, no doubt about it. Now I need you to give me a set of your fingerprints, miss."

"Oh, of course," she said.

I took her prints and under a magnifying glass compared them with the ones I'd just lifted from the revolver. I already knew what I was going to find, and I did.

"Your fingerprints are on the gun, miss," I said. "Nobody else's. Just yours."

"It must be from when I handed it to you."

I nodded, wondering whether Isabella could possibly have done the whole thing on purpose. I looked at her looking at me, artlessness in her eyes—and wondered. Could she have led me to that nook on the balcony and picked up the gun deliberately, all to create an explanation of why I would find her fingerprints on it?

No—that made no sense. If she was the killer, and that clever, she would have wiped the gun clean in the first place—or just not led me to it.

The problem was, Doogan wouldn't see it that way. All he was going to see was a murder weapon with Isabella's prints on it, and that was my fault, because I let her stick her hand in that cubby hole and hand me the gun. Of course there would be a simple solution to that problem if I were the kind of cop who tampered with evidence. I could just tear up the lifting card—the one with her prints on it—and wipe down the gun.

Which I would never do. Because destroying evidence was one of those lines you never cross. It separates the good cops from the bad. If you destroy evidence, you're not a cop at all anymore. You're just another criminal.

But manufacturing evidence—that was just as bad, wasn't it? And in a way this evidence had been manufactured—by me. I had created it, out of my own stupidity, when I let Isabella stick her hand in that cubby hole and hand me the gun. If you've manufactured evidence, you have a duty to get rid of it.

Even I didn't buy that.

I was rationalizing, and I knew it. I was thinking about taking a step I could never take back, becoming something I could never unbecome. And there was only one reason why—because it was Isabella whose prints were on that gun. What was it Sadie had said? She's bewitched you. She's from a line of sirens, Roger had said. If it had been anyone other than Isabella, anyone at all, none of this would have crossed my mind.

"Detective?" she asked.

I looked at her. Then, before I could stop myself, I tore up the prints, burned the pieces to ash, and wiped the gun clean.

"Did you just ... destroy evidence?" Isabella asked me. "To help me?"

I didn't answer that question.

Then I drove her to the Alameda courthouse, to have a conversation I wasn't looking forward to with District Attorney Doogan.

4

Doogan and I were standing outside the door of a brightly lit interrogation room on the sixth floor of the courthouse. Through a small glass pane in the middle of the door, we could see Isabella inside, alone, sitting at a table. I'd put her there; it was up to Doogan to decide whether to book her.

I'd filled him in on everything Isabella had told me—about Wilkinson

being her father and about him being already dead when she got to his room. I also told him we'd found the murder weapon in the Stafford house, tucked away in a rooftop nook that Isabella had led me to, a nook where Sadie had hidden things in the past and where I myself had seen her walking at night about a week ago.

"What about prints?" asked Doogan. "Any prints on the gun?"

"Nothing," I answered evenly. "I dusted it myself."

He stared at Isabella through the glass pane, her hands folded on the table in front of her. She couldn't see us. The glass was mirrored on the other side.

"I still don't like it," said Doogan.

"I knew you wouldn't."

"She took you straight to the hidden gun? It sounds to me like she knew it was there."

"Maybe," I answered. "But if she killed him, why take me to the gun? And Sadie Bainbridge, sir, I've had a few encounters with her, and the more I think about it, there's something really troubling about her. She's got a real vicious streak, and she could be psychopathic. If I had to put money on it, sir, I'd say I believe Miss Stafford."

Doogan showed me a rueful smile. "Well, I don't," he said. "But it's not who you believe in this game, Sullivan. It's who you can convict, and I don't think I can convict her."

He fell silent, drumming his fingers against each other. We both kept looking through the glass at Isabella. I wondered if, like Eliana, she knew she was being watched.

"If we prosecute Isabella," Doogan said at last, "the grandmother will take the stand and say Sadie did it—she'll tell the whole elaborate story she spun in that testimonial, and the jury will be riveted. The physical evidence is inconclusive. The gun could point to either one of them. The case has reasonable doubt written all over it. And look at her sitting there—every man on that jury will want to be her knight in shining armor."

At that moment an assistant DA came into the room. "We just got a report from San Francisco, Mr. Doogan," he said. "Police officers spoke to the Staffords' neighbors. One of them saw Sadie Stafford out on the street

walking away from her house at about ten thirty or eleven o'clock on the night of the tenth."

Doogan thanked him, and the assistant left us alone in the dimly lit anteroom.

"Well, that's it then," said Doogan. "They've got us, Sullivan. I thought this case was going to make my career—now I've got to make sure I survive it." He smiled again. "But here's what we're going to do—declare victory. We'll make the story about the debauchery and moral bankruptcy of the upper class. We found the killer, and on top of that we uncovered the true story behind the death of Iris Stafford back in 1930. The newspapers will eat it up. And we'll be the ones who broke the case wide open—you and me, Sullivan."

I nodded. "And the girl?" I asked.

"Let her go," said Doogan. "The murderess is free to leave."

1944

TUESDAY, MARCH 21

1

“*Dapper*,” I said, starting on the D words.

“Elegantly dressed,” Miriam answered. “Like you.”

“No. Not like me. *Debacle*.”

“Total disaster,” Miriam replied. “I’ve been meaning to ask—how’s your case going?”

“Good.”

“Did you solve it?”

“Yeah, I think we did.”

“What happened to the pretty woman? The nice one who came here.”

“Nothing. *Deleterious*.”

“Harmful. So she’s innocent?”

“Yeah. *Deluded*.”

“Deceived by false beliefs.”

“Good. Okay, go get your knapsack—you don’t want to miss the bus. You apologized yesterday to your teacher, right, like I told you? Told her your mom got sick?” Which was not exactly true, but close enough.

“Yeah, I did.” Miriam looked dubious. “But Al, she just doesn’t like me, my teacher. Always looks at me funny.”

“You still have to go to school, Miriam.”

“Al?”

“What?”

“I think we need to talk. Man to man. I wanna pay back the money I borrowed. And I just don’t think school’s for me, Al. I can do vocab cards on my own. I don’t need to be in a stupid classroom. I’m better at the hustle. There are lots of ways I can make money. My friend Icehouse works at Call Me Joe on Shattuck, and he says he can get me a shift. Plus I might be able to get something in the Claremont kitchen.”

“The *Claremont kitchen*? What’s wrong with you, Miriam? You need to be figuring out how to have people serving *you* at the Claremont in ten years. And can I remind you again that you’re only eleven?”

“Twelve next month. And Icehouse is only thirteen. Plus I’m worried about what they’ll do if I don’t get the money.”

“Miriam, you just need to get to school now,” I said in exasperation. “I want you to stop thinking about Mickey and the money—everything’s going to be all right.”

I wasn’t actually sure about that. I’d shown the document Mickey had Miriam sign to a lawyer pal of mine—the same guy doing the closing for my new house—hoping he’d say I could just tear it up. Instead he told me that whoever drew it up knew what he was doing. Apparently in California, contracts with kids were enforceable if the kid’s parents had abandoned them and the other party was providing the kid with “necessities”—which is exactly what Mickey’s contract said. On top of that Miriam “confessed” in the contract to shoplifting, which Mickey would be able to hold over her. The lawyer said she basically had three choices—work off the three years, take the juvie shoplifting charge, or pay the three grand.

I couldn’t believe it. What the hell was wrong with the law if it protected a sleaze like Mickey instead of a good kid like Miriam? And what the hell was wrong with Miriam, not wanting to swing for the fences?

Something had gone wrong with Miriam—how had she gotten so off track? And since when had she gotten so friendly with Icehouse, whom I vaguely recalled as a gangly, shaggy-haired kid from the neighborhood named Harry? Goddamn Rosemary. I’d called Sacramento PD to see if they could help me find her, but they had nothing. I had a bad feeling that Rosemary might not come back this time, at least not any time soon. She probably thought she could outrun her gambling debt by disappearing into

Sacramento. But who frigging does that, ditch their own kid?

And what was supposed to happen to Miriam now? I'd been wracking my brain, and could see exactly zero options.

2

When I heard the knock at my door, I knew exactly who it was.

"I'm sorry," said Isabella with a pretty smile—actually, pretty doesn't come close—"I know you don't like me coming to your house. But I had to thank you—and this was the only place I could, because I don't plan ever to set foot in a police station again if I can help it. Aren't you going to let me in?"

"I don't think I am, Miss Stafford."

"For heaven's sake, I've seen your house before. Please—I have nowhere else to go."

"Nowhere to go? Your family has more houses than I have rooms."

"I brought a present for your niece. Is she home?"

"She's at school, miss."

"I'll leave it with you, then." From her purse, she withdrew a little stack of three or four books, tied up in brown paper and blue and white string. "These are my favorite books from when I was her age. I think she'll love *Anne of Green Gables*." She handed the books to me but didn't let them go. We stood there, joined at the hands by the gift. "If you don't let me in, I'll feel terrible—and so will you."

She was right about that. "You're too much for me, Miss Stafford. Please come in. Coffee?"

"Yes, thank you."

I made her a cup of coffee, creating space at the table by pushing some hanging laundry to the end of the clothesline. Right behind her chair, on a low bookshelf, was the box with her old drawings and poetry in it, but she had no reason to know they were in my house. Instead she looked around the room like it interested her, taking in my poverty for a second time. I imagined her seeing instead the little place I was going to buy at the top of the Berkeley Hills, then realized she'd probably barely be able to tell the difference between my dream house and the dump I was in.

“So Miriam’s still staying here,” she said, smiling at the cot, which I hadn’t folded up yet and which was scattered with scraps of fabric that Miriam had been cutting up for her pocket squares.

“Yeah,” I said grimly. “For now. The kid’s mom is gone.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know. Still thinking.”

“There’s a school near Los Angeles—Sacred Heart. Have you heard of it? It’s a boarding school for girls. My family helped fund it years ago. It’s run by Dominican Sisters and has a beautiful campus. The headmistress is an old friend of mine. I could make some inquiries.”

This sounded like a complete fantasy, and I wasn’t even sure she was sincere. I decided to change the subject. “How are your cousins doing?”

“Nicole is angry. She was scared before, but now she’s just angry. She feels doubly betrayed, by a man she thought she loved and a woman she thought was her best friend. As for Cassie, she’s in agony. Because of Yuko.”

“Did they send her to a camp?”

“No—Yuko’s free. My grandmother found out about something called the Japanese American Student Relocation Council that Eleanor Roosevelt helped start. It turns out Japanese are allowed out of internment if they’ve been accepted by a university not on the West Coast. My grandmother got Yuko into a masters program at Cornell. I don’t know how she did it so fast. It must have cost her a sizable donation. She’s the most extraordinary person I know, my grandmother. But Yuko is refusing to go. Her father is old and failing. He and the others are still in hiding, and Yuko won’t leave him. That’s why Cassie’s so upset. She’s afraid her parents will discover where they are and turn them in.” She paused, stirring her coffee. Then she looked at me intently and asked, “Is that what you would do—turn them in?”

“I’d be breaking three or four laws if I didn’t, miss.”

“You broke the law when you wiped my fingerprints off the gun, didn’t you?”

I looked at Isabella for a moment, then stood up, shaking my head. “You’re always after something, aren’t you, miss? Have you ever done anything without an ulterior motive?”

“They’re just teachers and shopkeepers,” she shot back, standing up as

well, “who’ve never harmed anyone. You know it’s wrong, Detective, in your heart—I know you know it, because of what happened to your father and brothers. And now you have a chance to do the right thing.”

She came so close to me our bodies were almost touching.

“Help me save them,” she continued. “It would be so easy for you. There’s a farm in Paradise Valley, Nevada, owned by a Japanese man named Bill Tomiyasu. The Japanese aren’t under an internment order in Nevada. Yuko’s been in touch with him, and he’s agreed to take in her father and the rest of them as workers. We just have to get them through the roadblocks and across the state line. You could do that, Detective—you could drive them in a police van, and the officers at the roadblocks would wave you straight through because you’re one of them—they wouldn’t even question you. And even if they did, you could say you were transporting prisoners to a camp.”

She’d thought of everything. Plotted the whole thing out, including my role in it, playing me like a fiddle, assuming she could get me to do just what she wanted even though I was a cop and would be risking my neck and exploiting the trust of my fellow officers. She had some nerve. She must have been used to having men lapping out of her hand.

And I was going to be one of those men. I already knew it.

After Berkeley’s internment order came down in late April 1942, the military made us—the Berkeley PD—do the dirty work. We were the ones who had to tell our Japanese neighbors they had a week to pack up all their possessions, but could only take a single suitcase each. We were the ones who ordered them to leave their pets behind; I remember a little girl sobbing uncontrollably as we pulled her away from her collie. We were the ones who gave them numbers like cattle, packing them onto buses headed for the camps. And I was the one, as luck would have it, who, with my own two hands, personally shoved Mrs. Obate onto the bus, the kindly old woman with the flower shop on Shattuck, who’d cared for my mom when she was dying, coming to the house every day when I couldn’t, and comforted me after she passed.

I’d told myself every line I could think of about why I should help lock up the Japanese. I was protecting the country. I was protecting the Japanese themselves from being attacked. The camps were comfortable, they were

temporary, they were voluntary—because all a Jap had to do was leave the West Coast, and if they hadn't, well that was their choice. Besides, it was my job, it was the law. FDR himself signed the executive order. Earl Warren supported it. All the generals said it was necessary because of the threat of sabotage. A Japanese guy named Fred Korematsu whom they caught in San Leandro had taken it to federal court and lost—he'd lost in the lower court, he'd lost in the appeals court, and everyone said he was going to lose in the Supreme Court too. On top of all that, I was just one person, and not an important one. Even if I refused to go along, what difference would that make? I'd have blown my career for nothing.

At least that's what I told myself. But I didn't believe it anymore.

"All right," I said to Isabella.

"All right?"

I nodded.

What appeared to be genuine surprise and delight came over her. "Thank you! I knew I wasn't wrong about you! You're a good man—I knew it."

"Not so good, miss. I'll help you on one condition."

"Anything."

"You have dinner with me when I get back."

3

The great redwoods of northern California are not only the tallest trees in the world. They're the tallest living things in the world. And at over three thousand years in age, among the oldest—already ancient when Plato wrote his dialogues. I first saw them when I was thirteen; it was my first experience of awe.

Before airplanes, no human had seen the crowns of the most gigantic of the sequoias. The trees were simply too tall, the growth too dense. No one knew that the canopy of each of these colossuses was a forest in itself.

A sequoia sheds innumerable needles every year, thousands of which are caught by its thick horizontal branches, there to decompose, turning over the centuries into rich layers of soil, and from this soil, hundreds of feet above the forest floor, grows a host of epiphytic life—not only moss and fern, not only fruit-bearing elderberry and huckleberry bushes, but whole trees,

hemlock, spruce, and Douglas firs. Countless animals, from salamanders to bats, bald eagles to blue herons, crawl or nest in this forest above the forest, many never seeing or touching the world below.

The sheer immensity of the sequoias made news all over the globe when Europeans first “discovered” them. But not everyone regarded the sequoias as wonders of the world. It was also possible to see them as what they were—wood. Sturdy, durable, marketable timber, yielding more board feet per acre than calculators could sum. The companies seizing these acres had no idea how prized, how versatile, their product would prove to be. Whole towns would soon be built of redwood, because it was stronger and more resistant to fire than other wood. Railway cars were made of redwood, and so were the countless ties of the railroad tracks. Redwood doors were shipped to Central America because they were impervious to the white ant. The sawdust of redwood was so fine yet so insulating that the choicest grapes were packed in it.

Two million acres of redwood forest lined the California coastland when gold was discovered at Sutter’s Mill in 1848. Serious logging began two years later. In the blink of an eye, only four percent of those old-growth sequoias were still standing.

I’d barely said a word to Yuko Sasaki for almost three hours. We were driving through giant redwood country on our way to Nevada, and I’d run out of sequoia facts to distract myself with.

I was driving, and she was in the passenger seat. The others, including her father, were in the back of the van. They were all in old worn-out clothing, dressed to look like I was transferring them from one relocation camp to another. It was dark and raining. The windshield wiper kept missing the same spot over and over, so I was flying half-blind.

At first, I was just too nervous to talk—too worried about getting stopped with a vanload of California’s most wanted fugitives, which would have been pretty much the end of my life as I knew it. But even after we’d made it through two roadblocks—the cops saw the police insignia on my van and just waved me through, exactly as Isabella had predicted—there was complete silence. It was awkward but I couldn’t think of anything non-stupid to say. I’d never felt more different from another human being in my life. I

just assumed that any views I had she'd hate, that anything I found funny, she wouldn't, that she'd despise the thoughts in my head if she knew them. I don't know why I assumed all that—I had no basis given that I didn't know her from Adam. Maybe it was guilt.

"I guess you know, miss," I said out of nowhere, "that I led the police raid on the Japanese hiding at St. Andrews? Back in forty-two."

"No," she said, "I didn't know that."

We drove in silence again.

Then, unexpectedly, she said, "I remember when I first saw the internment order. Everything before that had been going so perfectly. Dawn was just breaking, and Cassie and I were at the top of Telegraph Hill where it was all misty, and suddenly the fog rolled away and the Golden Gate Bridge appeared out of nowhere. And even though there was a curfew, and Dad and I had been forced to register, and we'd heard about Japanese fishermen being rounded up in Santa Monica, my spirits soared. Then I saw it—the order—nailed to a telephone pole like Jesus on the cross, saying that everyone of Japanese ancestry was going to be evacuated from San Francisco. I remember thinking, 'Germany and Italy are enemies in the war too. Why aren't German Americans and Italian Americans being rounded up and sent to camps too? Why only Japanese Americans?' And it hit me—it's because we aren't white. And only whites can be true Americans."

I started to say something about it being the same for Mexicans in the US, but checked myself. How would I know?

Another silence passed. Someone coughed in the back, then I heard some quiet murmuring.

"Before the internment," Yuko went on, "there was a headline in the *Chronicle*. It said, 'Japanese a Menace to American Women.' Oh, so I'm a menace to Cassie? Well, maybe she's a menace to *me!*"

To be honest, I still had a little trouble getting used to the idea of a woman being with a woman.

"I know that's not right," she said. "But it's how all this race hate talk makes you think. It's no better in Japan. My mother grew up in Tokyo, and she told me all her teachers believed that the Japanese were a racially superior people destined to rule all of Asia. She'd also get upset with me

whenever I sat out in the sun. Did you know that Japanese women carry umbrellas around even when it's not raining? That's because white skin is prized fanatically there. White is the color of the gods, symbolizing spiritual and physical purity. When Cassie first took me to the Claremont, I thought it was the most beautiful place I'd ever seen. It was all white, magnificent white. But now I think—wait—is white actually beautiful? I can tell you this, the Claremont sure doesn't look like a White Palace down in the basement laundry rooms."

We drove on in the slashing rain.

"How'd you all end up in the Claremont?" I said. "If you don't mind my asking."

"That was my idea. My dad has diabetes, and I was afraid he wouldn't be able to get insulin in a camp. That was before we even knew how bad the camps really were."

Yuko told me what she had heard about the camps. Guards in watchtowers with machine guns. Freezing temperatures and sweltering heat. Open latrines with no barriers and no privacy at all. People being shot when they tried to escape. And how it wasn't just the police searching for them. The FBI and the army were, too, and so were ordinary people, people with cute dogs and toddlers they'd always thought were nice. She told me they thought about fleeing California, but then read about the governor of Wyoming saying, "If you bring Japanese into my state, I promise you they will be hanging from every tree." On the East Coast too, the Japanese were being harassed and spat on—they couldn't book hotel rooms or get served in restaurants, let alone get a job, even in Chicago or Boston or New York City.

"What I was really afraid of," she said, "was that if my dad went to a camp, he wouldn't take his insulin even if they had any. All I could think of was Mr. Murata. After finding out about the internment order, he went to a hotel and shot himself in the head, clutching an award he'd received for his gallant service to America in the Great War. That could easily have been my dad—he served too.

"That's when I thought of the Claremont—of working there. It actually came to me when I saw a horrible cartoon called 'How to Spot a Jap.' It said a Chinese person was 'about the size of the average American,' but 'the Jap

is shorter and looks as if his legs are joined directly to his chest.’ It also said that unlike Chinese people, Japs had buck teeth and shuffled when they walk. I remember being outraged and thinking, I don’t look anything like that! My father doesn’t either. For that matter, I didn’t know *any* Japanese who looked like that. Then it occurred me—why not just pretend we were Chinese? Americans couldn’t tell the difference anyway.”

So Cassie got them jobs under Chinese names at the Claremont—with her grandmother’s help.

After that, Yuko and I talked about lighter things. She told me about a pet deer that she and Cassie had raised—which I’d met—and it turns out she and I both liked doing crossword puzzles.

About a half hour before the Nevada line, she said out of the blue, “‘Hope is the thing with feathers, That perches in the soul, And sings the tune without the words, And never stops at all.’ Do you know that poem? By Emily Dickinson?”

“No, miss. I don’t know much poetry. I’ve never felt I had time for it, to be honest.”

“‘To live is so startling it leaves little time for anything else.’ That’s Emily Dickinson too.”

1944

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22

1

I rolled into the DA's office in the Alameda courthouse the next day without any sleep at all, shaved in the men's room, and started pouring coffee down my throat. Yuko and I had gotten back at six thirty in the morning. I wondered if anyone was going to ask me where I'd been yesterday, but no one did. No one even noticed that I'd borrowed a police van.

A note on my desk said to call Sergeant Vern Callaghan of the SFPD's Chinatown squad. So I did, and Vern told me they'd caught Jane Chao's killer. Apparently the squad had busted some lowlife Chinese bookie who was bilking the cops out of their rightful cut, and by total chance they'd found a bloody axe in his room and bloody clothes to boot. The bookie swore none of it was his, belonging instead to a guy named Ping who'd been staying with him but was now down at the port about to board a ship for Hong Kong. Which turned out to be true. Vern's boys found Ping at the port and arrested him. He had Chinese identity papers and didn't seem to speak a word of English. Vern then put the screws on Eddie Gong, and Eddie gave the guy up, saying that Ping had killed Jane Chao but that he wasn't part of Eddie's tong and wasn't from Chinatown at all. Eddie said if we wanted to know who he was, we'd have to ask Madame Chiang. Vern asked me if I wanted Ping transferred to our custody, and I said yes.

I reported all this to Doogan, then spent the day writing reports and packing up. The Wilkinson case was closing, meaning I was headed back to

the Berkeley PD. Doogan had set up a whole press campaign, in which he'd announce Sadie as Wilkinson's killer while doing his best to tar the rest of the Bainbridge family in the process. Somehow all the coverage of Doogan so far had been favorable, and he was on his way.

2

At around three thirty, my buzzer rang. I was told a young woman was here to see me. "Send her in," I said.

It was Isabella, in a cap-sleeved black dress with a scoop neck. She smelled like lilac and pear.

After closing the door, Isabella said, "I wanted to thank you personally, Detective, for what you did last night. I know what a risk it was for you, and I wanted to let you know how much I—and Cassie and Yuko—appreciate it."

She said this warmly, but she seemed dispirited.

"You don't owe me any thanks, miss. Is everything all right?"

"Yes, fine." She paused. "Actually, since you're kind enough to ask, I just came from trying to visit my mother, and she refused to see me again. I suppose she's punishing me. I'll keep trying though. Anyway, I know you have work to do, and I'll be out of your hair in one minute, but the reason I'm here is that I heard back from Sacred Heart Academy, the school down in Los Angeles I told you about. I spoke to the headmistress—and they have a spot for Miriam. They're willing to take her immediately, if she's accepted. It's a beautiful campus on forty acres near the San Gabriel Mountains. They have a swimming pool."

"Sounds like a country club."

"No—they have an excellent curriculum. And a music conservatory and a first-rate arts program. The Sisters are tough, by the way."

"I appreciate all the trouble you've gone to, miss, I really do," I said, and I meant it. I hadn't expected her to do anything, actually. "But that's a pipedream for us. We can't afford a private school like that."

"Oh, but I haven't told you the best part. They'd offer Miriam a full scholarship, covering tuition and room and board. She'd even have a spending allowance."

"Why would they do all that, Miss Stafford?"

“Well, I may have put in a good word for Miriam, emphasizing her intelligence and deservingness. I told you, my family—my grandmother, really—gave Sacred Heart its founding donation. But Miriam will have to apply. She has to get in on her own merit, like any other girl.”

It was dawning on me for the first time that this was a real possibility.

“So ... what would we have to do?”

“Miriam will have to take a test, but if you want I could help her prepare. Besides, I know she’s a whiz at vocabulary,” she added, smiling. Then her expression changed. “But—are you sure the best solution isn’t for Miriam to stay with you? The two of you seem—”

I broke in: “I’m sure, miss. I can’t be her father. That would be a disaster. For her, and for me.”

Isabella was about to say something else, but I didn’t let her.

“No one in my family has ever been able to raise a kid. We have rotten moms and dads going back generations. We can’t escape our legacy—none of us. And I don’t want a kid in my house. Period. How long do we have—before we have to get back to the school?”

Isabella frowned. Then she said, “Soon. A few days at most. Otherwise, they’ll give the spot to someone else. There’s a waitlist.”

“All right. Let me think about it. And talk to Miriam. I really am grateful, miss.”

“It’s nothing. Especially after everything you’ve done for my family.”

She went to the door, then turned back.

“I’m looking forward to dinner tomorrow night,” she said. “May I ask one last favor though? Can you bring Miriam along? I love girls that age, and I can tell her about Sacred Heart.”

My first reaction was one of panic. I guess I just didn’t see how Miriam could fit in, either at a fancy restaurant or with Isabella. Plus the last thing I wanted was for Miriam to be the object of anyone’s pity. Then I thought about it and decided it wasn’t such a bad idea. There was nothing about Miriam to be ashamed of, and Isabella genuinely seemed to like her. Besides, Isabella was cultivated and literate and believed in education; with the new red flags I was seeing, Miriam could use spending a little time with someone like that.

“I’ll bring her along, miss. And thank you again.”

3

I dropped by the five-and-dime to settle things with Mickey once and for all. I was going to tell him he could work things out with me right now or else there’d be hell to pay. But there was a new guy behind the counter. He was in his thirties, wearing a flashy pinstriped suit.

“Where’s Mickey?” I asked.

“Mickey’s gone.”

“What do you mean, gone?”

“Mickey don’t work here no more.”

“This is Mickey’s store.”

“Not no more, it ain’t. It’s Tony’s now.”

He looked at me cheekily. I knew who Tony had to be—Tony Lima, the San Francisco mobster.

“You must be that dick Mickey told us about before he—” he went on, not finishing his sentence. “You’re Sullivan, right?”

“That’s me.”

“Tony’s got a message for you. Everything Mickey owned is Tony’s now. Including the girl, the brown-faced one. What’s with her—is she colored? Anyway, she needs to get back to work. It’ll be good for her, Tony says. You want her to be safe, don’t you?”

I leaned over the counter and grabbed him by the sharp lapels of his striped jacket. “Is that a threat, punk?”

“What are you going to do, arrest me?” He grinned at me. “Go ahead.”

I let him go.

“Work is the safest thing for her, Tony says,” the goon went on, straightening and smoothing out his jacket. “Tony says anything can happen to a girl out on the street these days. Like the one they found washed up on Ocean Beach? That was a shame. A real shame. The girl needs to get back to work, Tony says. Or pay what she owes.”

4

When I finally got home, the radio was playing Bing Crosby, and Miriam was sitting at the kitchen table doing homework. Well, that was good at least,

I thought. But when I glanced at the math worksheet she was doing, I saw she'd gotten all the problems wrong. She had no idea how to do fractions.

"Miriam, one-fourth plus one-fourth is not one-eighth! How can that make sense?" I said in exasperation. "I give you a quarter of an apple pie and then another quarter of it, how much of the pie do you have?"

"I have half the pie."

"Yes, Miriam, half. Not an eighth, which would be less than you started with, which would make no sense."

"I didn't know one over four meant a quarter."

"What did you think it meant?"

"One over four."

I shut off the radio, then grabbed a chair and sat at the table across from her.

"I have to talk to you, Miriam. I have some good news."

Miriam's face brightened. "You found Mom?"

"No. Better. I managed to get you a spot at a topnotch boarding school —"

"What's a boarding school?"

"It's a school you live at. This one's called Sacred Heart Academy. They'll give you a really good education, nothing like the crap you've been getting. It's got a swimming pool."

"What?" Miriam was shaking her head in disbelief, horror-struck. "What do you mean I'm going to live at school? No! I don't want to!"

"Listen to me, Miriam. This is an opportunity. It's one of the best all-girl schools in the country and—"

"All girls! They'll hate me!"

"Stop being a baby, Miriam. This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance."

"No! I won't go!" Miriam said, stomping her feet. "You can't make me, and I don't want to be at some stupid old school with snooty girls. I won't belong there, Al, and you know it. If you don't want me here, I'll go live with Icehouse—"

"Miriam!" I thundered. "Do you know how much trouble you've caused? What a mess you've made? You're one step away from juvie—or worse. Look at your mom—do you want to end up like that? This is just how

it started with her too. Cutting school, failing at math, lying right and left. You're acting just like Rosemary. Right before she decided to be a fuck-up for life."

I was so angry I was shaking. Miriam was quivering. She looked so skinny, a sack of bones. A big tear rolled down her cheek, which just made me madder.

"I don't have time for you and your antics," I said. "This Sacred Heart school is run by nuns, and that's exactly what you need. Now, there's a test you have to take, and you're going to take it. You're going to study nonstop. And you're not going to screw this up. Do you hear me?"

I could hear her choking down a sob.

"Do you hear me?" I repeated.

"Okay, Al. I hear you. I'll take the test."

1944

THURSDAY, MARCH 23

1

I'd asked Isabella to pick a restaurant, and she'd chosen the Prime Rib Room at the Claremont. The choice puzzled me because the Claremont wasn't exactly a repository of happy memories for her. But my own attitude was never run from anything you fear—run straight at it instead—so I figured maybe it was something like that.

The moment Miriam and I stepped into the Claremont's jaw-dropping lobby with its cathedral ceilings and grand chandeliers, Miriam went moon-eyed. She'd never been anywhere a tenth as fancy.

"So this is what a hotel looks like," she said.

"Not all hotels," I answered.

There was no sign of Isabella, so we decided to wait in the lobby. Once again Miriam had bounced back—her natural inclination was to be happy, which I envied and admired. I'd never met a more resilient kid. Or adult for that matter. The restaurant had a dress code, which at first had seemed to present an insurmountable problem, but Miriam managed to dig up an old spring dress from Rosemary's closet. I told her she looked like a movie star, but it didn't actually fit her at all. It was way too big—and faded too. I just hoped she didn't notice the way people were looking at her.

Isabella showed up almost twenty minutes late, in an off-the-shoulder white satin dress that was dangerously attractive. But she seemed even more disheartened than the day before. Despite myself, I felt a pang of

disappointment. I suppose I wanted her to be more excited. But Isabella brightened when she saw Miriam, and she paid Miriam's dress a big compliment, which I appreciated.

We made our way to the oak-beamed Prime Rib Room, where Julie, the maître d', led us to a white-linen table in a corner. Isabella and I ordered cocktails, and Miriam asked if she could go explore.

"If you're back in twenty minutes," I said.

"Make sure you go to the north wing," Isabella said. "It's a little scary, but it's full of secret hiding places. There's a passageway behind a grandfather clock, and a fake door that leads nowhere, and a cubbyhole under the center staircase that's perfect for hiding."

"Twenty minutes," I repeated.

"Got it," said Miriam, heading off.

Isabella took a sip of her drink—something called a French 75, which had gin and champagne and was apparently what people in New York were drinking. "I finally saw my mother today," she said.

"How'd that go?"

"Smashingly." She smiled wistfully. "I never learn. Somehow I always imagine that if my mother could just get the right treatment, everything would be different. But it's never different." She took another sip of her French 75. "Oh my goodness, what I am doing?! Let's talk about something else."

And we did.

She told me about the sudden wildfire blooms in the Berkeley Hills, which I'd never seen despite all my years there, about a poet named Robert Lowell she liked, and about a painter named Frida Kahlo she loved. We talked about Gibbon, and she was surprised I knew so much about Rome. She had a piece coming out in the *Tribune* about the war shutting down the toy industry, and she was embarrassed at how frivolous it was.

For a while I completely forgot about Walter Wilkinson and Miriam's debt and the fact that people were being blown apart on battlefields. I had a glimpse of what it was like to live in the leisure class.

"I wonder where Miriam is," I said after about twenty minutes.

"Oh I have some guesses," Isabella said. "This place is magical for

children, and Miriam—she has so much imagination and spirit.”

Suddenly an odd expression came over her.

“Would you excuse me, Detective? I need to go to the powder room. I feel a little lightheaded.”

The minute she left, I felt someone approaching me from behind.

“Detective Sullivan,” said a woman’s voice from behind me, which I recognized even before I turned around.

2

“Madame Chiang,” I said, standing up.

She was wearing a black silk Chinese dress with a red chrysanthemum pattern and coral earrings. She had two of her strongmen behind her, one on either side. She made a big display of greeting me as if we were old friends—which we weren’t—by warmly smiling and shaking my hand, declaring how nice it was to see me again, then lowered her voice almost to a whisper, so that no one could overhear.

“I have something to tell you,” she said, “before your dinner companion returns. It concerns her—directly. I’ve read in the papers that Walter Wilkinson was her father. It isn’t true.”

A wave of dread passed over me. “What makes you say that, ma’am?”

“First we need to come to an understanding about a countryman of mine you have in custody. His name is Zhou Yuan-ping, but you may know him as Ping. I’d like him to be released immediately.”

“I’m afraid that’s not going to happen, ma’am. Ping is charged with murder—the murder of Jane Chao. He’s not going to be released on your request, especially given that he may have been sent here by your husband to do the job. Things don’t work that way in this country.”

“They do if one is offering valuable enough information. And the truth about who really killed Walter seems rather valuable to me.”

A tornado was coming; I could feel it. “I’m listening.”

“The day he was murdered, Walter and I met at three at the Fairmont.”

I nodded. “You had tea,” I said, remembering the entry in his calendar.

“Walter was utterly distraught. I’d never seen him like that—I’ve never seen anyone in that much anguish. And it was because he’d received—this.”

Madame Chiang handed me a letter. I recognized the feminine handwriting immediately. The letter was from Isabella, and it was addressed to Wilkinson.

“Read it,” said Madame Chiang, “but I’m afraid my men will insist on your giving it back to me unless we come to an understanding about Mr. Ping.”

So I started reading, and with every word I felt like I was sinking into an abyss, my stomach twisting, even as I was waking from a dream:

Dear Mr. Wilkinson,

I’ve received your card inviting me to your hotel room at midnight. You sicken me. You’re my sister’s father. And you dare—again—to make an advance on me?

Men like you are an infection, a curse on humanity. You take what you want with impunity and sully everything you touch. You’re syphilis in a tuxedo.

You took advantage of my mother and created a monster. Whoever killed Iris, you’re to blame. You destroyed my family, and in your arrogance, you don’t feel a shred of remorse. You should be dragged naked through the streets.

You don’t want to enrage me. Because when I am angry, I am more than one person.

I warn you. Leave this city. Never return. Because if you don’t, I will find you and I will blow your brains out. I swear it.

Isabella Stafford

“I’m not well acquainted with Miss Stafford,” said Madame Chiang when I’d finished the letter, “but Walter told me that a kind of insanity runs in the women in her family. It manifests itself only episodically, so they appear deceptively normal most of the time. I’m sorry, Detective, if this is not what you wanted to hear.”

“It’s just business, ma’am. How do you come to be in possession of this letter, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“Fortuity. Walter was so distraught he left it behind.”

Somehow I doubted it was fortuity. I could imagine Madame Chiang conveniently distracting him or finding some other way to make sure she ended up with the letter.

“And why are you showing it to me only now?”

She smiled. “Because information is power,” she replied, “and timing is everything.”

“I’m going to need to keep this letter, ma’am.”

“I assume I have your word then, about releasing Mr. Ping?”

I nodded.

“Good. The rest is up to you.”

She took her leave, smiling serenely again for the sake of whoever might be watching, and I went to the restaurant’s ladies’ room and knocked at the door, calling out Isabella’s name.

The door opened, and a woman came out, but it wasn’t Isabella, and she said there was no one else inside. I went in, calling out again, but she was right. The bathroom was empty.

Suddenly I thought of Miriam, and my heart began to pound.

I started off for the north wing. After a few steps, I burst into a full-out run, ignoring the strange looks I got from the hotel guests.

I didn’t find them on the ground floor. I don’t know why, but I was suddenly sure they were upstairs in the Tower. No one was on the second or third floor. I started taking the stairs three at a time. On the sixth floor, I began to hear above me in the stairwell the murmuring of a woman’s soft voice, quiet, earnest, caring. I still heard it, a little louder, when I got to the seventh floor. The next flight up was a narrow, spiral stairway, and there, on the eighth-floor landing, I finally found them.

With their backs to me, they were standing side by side in front of the laundry chute, which was open, Isabella speaking in a low soothing voice, her hand making its way down Miriam’s spine.

And Miriam’s head was in the throat of the laundry chute. She was leaning in and peering down inside.

I leapt across the landing, calling out Miriam’s name, and grabbed her, putting her behind me for safety. Isabella turned, staring at me. She didn’t look like herself. Her eyes were open wide and vacant, but there was a cruel curl to her lip and for an irrational split second she looked like both herself and Sadie at the same time. Then the double image passed, and it was just Isabella again, but seemingly confused, disoriented.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

“It’s over, miss,” I said, reaching into a back pocket for my cuffs.

April 1944

1

Two weeks after my dinner with Isabella Stafford at the Claremont, I sat on a grassy slope near the top of Wildcat Peak, high in the Berkeley Hills, surrounded by purple morning glories, buttercups, and wild roses. A stream was burbling somewhere nearby, and next to me was a big brown grasshopper foolish enough to think it was camouflaged. As always, the place was abuzz with hummingbirds hovering and darting from blossom to blossom, their iridescent green and gold feathers shimmering in the sun. They were my favorite birds, hummingbirds. They reminded me of Miriam: they were the smallest birds in the world, but had the biggest brains.

There was one piece of semi-good news. I'd called in a favor from Chick Uhalt, who pulled some strings for me and got Juanita undemoted. She was back upstairs making beds again, which was what she preferred, and which paid a little better. I didn't kid myself—it wouldn't make her life good or anything. But it beat ironing laundry in a hot basement.

Downslope from me stood the old broken-down stable that I'd spent countless hours fixing up in my head. Every room was going to have a view—a spectacular panoramic view, the kind only rich people have. Today was the closing—I had ten years of savings, three thousand dollars, in an envelope in my jacket pocket—and I wanted to look at the place one last time.

I got back in my car and drove down to my lawyer's office on Shattuck Avenue. The seller was there already, and the closing documents were stacked on a conference table, all set to be signed. When I told them it wasn't

going to happen, there was a moment of confusion, then the seller broke out into expletives and said he was keeping the deposit, which I'd assumed he would, since it was his by rights.

After the jilted seller left, I apologized to my lawyer and told him he had to do something else for me instead.

2

"What is this place?" asked Miriam a few hours later.

"What do you think?"

"It's a palace, Al."

That, it was not. We were standing in a small one-story house in the same low-rent West Berkeley neighborhood as my old rat-hole place. It had yellow siding and no character because I couldn't afford it. But it did have a big, bright everything room with lots of windows. "This would be yours," I said, pointing to a bare but good-sized bedroom looking out on a scrappy maple tree and the neighbor's trash cans.

Miriam blinked, uncomprehending. "What are you talking about, Al? I thought you said I had to go to Sacred Heart and live with the nuns."

"Changed my mind." I handed her a document. "I want you to read these, Miriam. Carefully. They're adoption papers. I won't file them unless you say yes. But if I do, you'd, well, you'd be my daughter."

It took her a few seconds to answer.

"But ... what about Mom?"

"I found her in Sacramento and spoke with her. She's still your mom, and always will be, but she's going through a rough—"

I never finished that sentence because I was practically knocked over by Miriam, who came charging at me and jumped up on me piggyback-style, arms around my neck, hooting and hollering.

"But no more cutting school, you hear me?" I said when she calmed down. "Not a single day."

"Okay, Al, but ... but what about what I owe Mickey?"

"You're done with that. My lawyer took care of it. It's all settled."

3

I got a call from Doogan the morning of April 13.

“She wants to see you,” he said. “She wouldn’t say why. The guard damn near fell out of his chair.”

Isabella hadn’t said a word since the day I brought her in from the Claremont three weeks ago—not a single word, not to anyone, not even family. I’d received commendations and a lot of favorable press for cracking the case—although in fact Madame Chiang had handed it to me on a platter—but we’d decided for obvious reasons that I shouldn’t be the one to interrogate Isabella. Everyone who did try to take her statement, however, reported the same thing: she wouldn’t speak. I remembered from her grandmother’s testimonial that something similar had happened when she was a child, back in 1930, after Iris died—she’d gone mute then too, for weeks. I had no idea if it was the same phenomenon now or if the whole thing was just another ruse. Either way, she’d refused to see any visitors, including the family lawyer, Burns.

But today was the day she was being transferred from the Oakland jail to the women’s prison down south in Tehachapi. Apparently the cat un-got her tongue.

Half of me wanted to say no and forget about her. But that wasn’t really an option—forgetting about her, that is. Despite myself, I’d been thinking about her every night, although mostly the thought in my head was what a fool I’d been. Inviting her to dinner. Imagining that she might actually like me. The girl had played me over and over, and I’d made it easy for her every time. Rolled onto my back and stuck my paws in the air. I’d falsified evidence for her, for Christ’s sake.

I honestly didn’t know how crazy she was—or what she was doing up in the Tower with Miriam at the Claremont. I’m no psychiatrist, but who knows—maybe Isabella was reenacting the day Iris died, with herself in the role of Sadie and Miriam as Iris, and Isabella was really going to pitch Miriam down the chute. Or maybe Isabella was going to try to throw herself down the chute.

Or maybe she’d preplanned all of it, including luring Miriam to the Tower, and even telling me the cruel line Sadie had supposedly said to her that day to make me feel sorry for her. Maybe it was all a big lie, making her crazy in a different way.

In the eyes of the law, none of it mattered. All that counted was whether Isabella knew what she was doing when she killed Wilkinson, and the letter she wrote to him—threatening to go to his hotel room and blow his brains out—made it crystal clear that she did.

For the first ten days after the arrest, Genevieve Bainbridge kept coming into the DA’s office, along with Burns, insisting that the letter was a forgery and demanding to see Isabella, claiming that we were keeping her in isolation. But Isabella refused, point-blank, and you can’t force a prisoner to see anyone. I think in my heart I actually harbored a faint hope that the letter *was* a forgery, but Doogan hired an expert graphologist, and the second he looked at the letter and compared it to some samples of Isabella’s known writing, he said there was no doubt the letter was Isabella’s.

And now she wanted to see me.

“You want me to do it?” I asked Doogan.

“I wouldn’t be calling you if I didn’t.”

4

Isabella was wearing beige prison garb. She was obviously going through hell, but somehow she still managed to look good.

I took a seat across the table from her.

“How can I help you, miss?”

There was a silence, then she said without expression, “Mr. Doogan’s going to ask for the death penalty, isn’t he?”

I nodded. “Already has.”

“I wanted you to know,” she went on, “that I’ve asked to speak to Mr. Burns. Not about my case, but to make a will. I’m going to leave a substantial sum to Miriam, as well as all my books.”

My instinctive reaction was rejection. I wasn’t going to saddle Miriam with a murderer’s legacy or let myself be insulted by her offering to help. But then I thought about it and realized I’d be playing the fool as much by saying no as I would by saying yes. Isabella was going to death row anyway, and Miriam’s prospects were more important than any foolish pride on my part. So all I said was that was very kind of her.

Some time passed without either of us speaking.

“Is that all, miss?”

“No,” she said. “It’s not. These last few weeks, in here, by myself, I’ve remembered a lot of things from my childhood—things I’d forgotten—or maybe didn’t want to remember.”

I waited for her to go on, but she didn’t. Another silence passed.

“Let me ask you something,” I said.

Isabella gave a small smile. “Curiosity killed the cat.”

“What happened the day Iris died? What really happened to your sister?”

Isabella looked suddenly tired. “I was so young,” she said.

“Six.”

“Yes, I was six. That morning, Iris had pulled the head off my doll. I was angry at her. Very angry.”

“And?”

“I don’t remember. I get confused.”

“What happened, miss?”

“Someone was watching her. Someone followed her. To the laundry chute.”

“Who?”

Isabella didn’t answer, lost in memory.

“Was it you, miss?” I asked. “Was it you who followed Iris?”

Almost a minute passed. Then she asked, “Did I frighten her?”

“Who?”

“Miriam.”

“Miriam insists that you weren’t going to hurt her. So no, miss, you didn’t frighten her.”

“I’m glad of that. You won’t believe me, but I have no memory of walking to the laundry chute or opening the door. It’s as if someone else did it, not me. I’ve wondered ... I’ve wondered if I could have killed my father in the same state.”

“Mr. Wilkinson wasn’t your father, miss. Your letter makes that very clear.”

“My letter.”

She smiled, looking off so far in the distance I didn’t know where she was.

Suddenly she frowned. “It was someone in a hood. The person following Iris.”

“Was it you, Isabella?” I asked. “Was it you in the hood? Did you kill your sister?”

She buried her face in her hands, shaking her head.

“No no no,” she said in anguish.

And then she finally told me everything.

5

I knocked on the door of 2907 Avalon. I could smell citrus, sage, and eucalyptus—the good clean air of the Berkeley Hills, at its freshest.

Mrs. Genevieve Bainbridge let me in and offered me coffee, which I accepted. When we were seated in the living room, a small plate of shortbread cookies on the table between us, I said, “I’m sorry to be the bearer of bad news, ma’am, but I know you’ve been waiting to hear. The graphologist’s final report came in, confirming that Isabella wrote the letter to Walter Wilkinson.”

“That’s impossible. I know Isabella. She would never have written a note like that. It’s a mistake.”

“I’m afraid not, Mrs. Bainbridge. The report’s conclusive.”

“I will appeal that immediately.”

“You can’t appeal an expert opinion, ma’am,” I said.

There was a short silence. I could see her mind working. She never gave up, that woman—I admired that.

“But it still doesn’t prove she did it,” said Mrs. Bainbridge.

“We also found some folks who saw your daughter Sadie on the night of the murder. She went to Golden Gate Park, it turns out, and made a bit of a spectacle of herself. It was a good try, ma’am, but we know Isabella killed Wilkinson, and she’s going to have to pay for it.”

“Surely Isabella has told you she didn’t write that letter—and that she didn’t kill Mr. Wilkinson.”

“No, ma’am, she hasn’t said either of those things. But it wouldn’t matter if she had.”

A longer silence passed.

“Isabella and I are so much alike. People rarely see that.” She smiled sadly. “I don’t know how everything went so wrong. I’ve tried so hard to keep this family together—it’s the only thing that matters to me. But it’s gone. And I’m responsible.”

“We’re not to blame for what other people do, ma’am.”

She drew herself up and smiled graciously. “No, of course. Would you excuse me a moment?”

She left, and I heard her walking slowly upstairs. I sat by myself, wondering about Mrs. Bainbridge and realizing how alone she was.

Some time passed. At least five minutes. At last I went to the foot of the stairs and called up to her. There was no answer.

I went up. “Mrs. Bainbridge?” I called out again. There was no response, so I walked to the end of the hall, where I found the master bedroom.

She was lying on her bed face up, her face sheet-white, beads of sweat on her brow, struggling for breath, suddenly looking old and frail. In a clenched hand was a clump of leaves.

I rushed to her and started gathering her into my arms. “We need to get you to a hospital, ma’am.”

“Let me go,” she said quietly. “It’s pointless. A single leaf of *Nerium oleander* is enough to kill. I’ve had six. Let me lie down, Detective.”

I did. Her eyes were clear, but her gaze was not on me. She was looking somewhere far away.

“Read what’s on my night table,” she said. “It’s the last chapter.”

Next to her bed, on an end table, lay a stack of papers. On top was draped a little silver necklace with a jeweled cross pendant.

“You’re right,” she whispered to me. “We’re not to blame for what others do.”

MRS. BAINBRIDGE’S TESTIMONIAL
PREPARED FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY DOOGAN
IN CONNECTION WITH HER DEPOSITION
TAKEN ON THE FIFTEENTH OF MARCH, 1944

I married Lionel when I was twenty-two. He was my first: my first beau and my first lover, although applying that term to Lionel is a bit comical. I loved Lionel dearly, but conjugal bliss was not an important part of our marriage. Our union was built on something much deeper, stronger, more dignified.

I’ve never been a very physical person, which is why those von Urbans with all their open talk of eroticism revolted me. But I always performed my marital

duties as a wife, never once refusing even if it meant clenching my teeth, and together we produced two beautiful children, Sadie and John.

When Lionel died in the Great War in 1918—from the influenza, not combat—I was thirty-seven. All the other widows I knew threw themselves with libidinous determination into the task of remarrying. But I never hankered after that kind of satisfaction, the basest kind, so after Lionel passed I resigned myself to widowhood and assumed that aspect of my life, the bedroom aspect, was forever behind me. It was a bit of a relief, actually.

Then one afternoon, three years later, I was at the Cliff House, having lunch with my old friends Susannah and David Lowell, when by chance an old friend of David's came to our table. He was about my age, around forty, and dashing, almost obscenely masculine. He said hello to the Lowells and introduced himself to me. I learned that he was a businessman originally from Indiana but now from Ohio, who was in San Francisco for a few weeks of meetings.

He had an odd half-smiling way of looking at me with his head slightly cocked that I experienced as indecent, almost as if he could see through my clothes. For the first time in my life—truly the first—I experienced carnal longing. I'd never encountered anything like it, and didn't even recognize what I was feeling. How to describe it? I suddenly felt lazy and warm and reckless at the same time, as well as a little cheap.

I assumed I would never see him again—I had learned long ago that men like him don't remember women like me—but I was wrong. The very next day he called to invite me to dinner. This was unexpected and confusing. What did he want from me? Surely he couldn't be interested in me in an amorous way. I decided that he was probably after my money, so I declined his invitation.

But he persisted and tried again. Everyone I asked had said he was doing well—very well—financially, but still I declined. I'd never trusted men in his category, men who knew their effect on women, and I had my guard up. And perhaps I was afraid. But when he asked a third time, I finally said yes. He took me to the Tadich Grill, where we dined by candlelight and drank champagne and I couldn't believe it. It was unmistakable. He was propositioning me—romantically propositioning me. Nothing like this had ever happened to me—no one had ever even flirted with me before. My introduction to Lionel had been long in the planning, carefully calculated, and arranged by our two families. Our courtship had been sweet, proper, and antiseptic.

I ended up in his hotel room. He was only my second lover, or depending on how you define lover, my first. Certainly he was the first and only to bring me to the heights of pleasure—the most undignified heights. I lost control of my mind and body. I gave myself over to him completely. I was putty in his hands. Putty and a harlot and a dog in heat. I was loathsome, a gaping beatific smile on my face as if I'd discovered some immense all-encompassing truth.

The next morning, back in my own house in Pacific Heights, I woke up feeling like a different person. I felt like throwing caution to the winds, and allowed my mind to wander irresponsibly—could I move to the Midwest, give up everything, start anew? A bouquet of roses arrived that morning, with a card from him on which he'd drawn a heart pierced by an arrow, and I said to myself—I could.

As it happened, that night was the opening of the new Museum of the Legion of Honor, a grand, Neoclassical edifice overlooking the Pacific Ocean, built by the sugar magnate and racehorse breeder Adolph Spreckels as a gift to the city. I was still on a cloud, giddy as a teenager, when I arrived, accompanied by Sadie, who in her Grecian-style gown was turning every man's head as always. Sadie and I were marveling at one of the museum's centerpieces—*The Thinker*, by Rodin—when who should come up to us but he, dressed in black tie, even handsomer than the night before. He was attentive and amusing, and he never left our side the entire evening, except to procure us more cocktails.

I was sure that he would pay a visit the next day—I dressed so carefully that morning—or at the very least phone, but he didn't. Nor did I hear from him the

next day, or the next.

A week passed, and still nothing. I couldn't understand why. I grew frantic. There had to be a problem, a misunderstanding, an accident. I was unable to think or eat or sleep.

Finally, when I couldn't stand it any longer, I went to his hotel—it was the Palace Hotel, where just the year before the philandering President Warren Harding had died suddenly and mysteriously in his sleep. I inquired at the front desk, and was told he was out for lunch. I found an unobtrusive spot in a corner of the lobby and lurked there, spider-like, spinster-like. Nearly forty minutes passed.

Then I saw him. He walked in through the double doors, head thrown back, laughing. On his arm was a dazzlingly beautiful young woman, also laughing.

It was Sadie. My seventeen-year-old daughter.

I saw him playfully grab a white rose from a floral arrangement and present it with a mock bow to Sadie, who took it, stuck it coquettishly in her hair, and laughed again, irresistible.

They got in an elevator. After it closed, I made my way to an elevator as well. I knew what room he was in because I'd been there myself a week earlier.

When I got out, I saw them at the end of the hall, standing in front of the same room I'd been in. He was kissing her passionately, hungrily, while his right hand unzipped her dress. He pulled the dress down from her shoulders, and I saw Sadie's lovely bare back, before he spun her into the room and shut the door behind them.

I made myself go to his room and stood outside it. And I listened. For a long time. The louder the sounds of their lovemaking, the more clarity descended on me.

He loved pleasuring himself. He loved women the way some people love filet mignon or Lobster Thermidor or a glass of Château Lafite. He was a sybarite, a man of prodigious sensual appetite, who rapaciously indulged his every selfish sense. It was disgusting.

I remember the way he ate the fine chocolates in his hotel room, the ones left on the pillows. He'd take a discriminating bite, then savor it, allowing the flavors to melt and swirl in his mouth, then he'd writhe a little and make sounds of guttural ecstasy. It was pornographic. After that—and after other pleasures—he'd light the proverbial cigarette, feeling warm and spent, satisfied.

My next interaction with him was direct and professional. It was at the same Palace Hotel, but not up in his room, god forbid; rather I chose the Pied Piper Bar. But now I had the upper hand, and I wielded it. Facing him across a small marble table, I told him that if he didn't leave town immediately, I would have him prosecuted for statutory rape. I'm a great frequenter of the law library, and I knew that in California it was rape to have sexual intercourse with a girl under eighteen. His response was sheer depravity. He feigned ignorance, then tried to flirt with me, daring to touch my arm. He lied amateurishly to my face, tried to soften me with his manliness, and I could tell he found me both pitiful and repellent. He'd had so many women, rich and poor, young and old, thin and fat, perhaps skeletal, pockmarked, decaying, and subhuman—he'd tried it all!—and I was lower than any of them.

I eventually triumphed, as I knew I would—men like him always have weakness at their core. He left, tail between his oh-so-powerful legs, without a word of explanation or even a farewell to Sadie—one of my conditions. And of course I didn't breathe a word of any of this to Sadie either. She was just about to come out, and I wanted her to be fully present at her debutante ball and to focus on appropriate suitors as opposed to a libertine twice her age.

But how cruel is fate? The lecher left Sadie with child.

Poor, star-crossed Iris. Her striking raven-haired resemblance to that malignancy had always provoked an involuntary antipathy in me, and I often found

myself grabbing her arm so roughly I left a bruise—I'd have to remind myself constantly she wasn't to blame. But I never imagined I would be a witness to her death.

It was a Sunday afternoon, nine years after I'd expelled that man from Berkeley, and I happened to be descending the hills after visiting St. Andrew's Abbey. The abbot had presented me with a gift—an honorary cassock—in thanks for all the support I'd given them over the years. The path down from St. Andrew's affords a view of the Claremont—and to my amazement I saw him. Walter Wilkinson. It was unmistakably he. Striding into the hotel, moving well as he always did, wielding his natural grace like a sword.

I was paralyzed. I don't think I moved for a full two minutes. And then, who should follow his footsteps into the hotel but Sadie, in her attractive tennis whites.

The truth flooded over me. All at once I understood. Everything. All those tennis outings with Tillie were just a pretext. It had been going on the whole time without my knowledge. For years.

My paralysis broke, and I made my way home, fighting blinding rage—the utter disrespect and disregard he had for me! I tried to occupy myself for some hours. Then it hit me that I might be rushing to conclusions. The tennis outings might be real. It could have been a coincidence. I called the hotel at once, asking if a Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson had checked in, but was told that no one by that name was staying at the hotel. Then, in a flash of insight, I asked for Dr. von Urban; they told me he was a guest, and I obtained his room number. I had to go there. I couldn't let them see me, but I had to see them. I drove to the hotel and parked in the rear, dressed now in the cassock. With the hood over my head, I entered through the basement service entrance, just as one of the St. Andrew's monks often did.

If I ask myself what on earth I was doing, I'm not sure what answer to give. It was absurd and reckless, but I couldn't bear it. I had to be certain. I took the stairs and made my way, unseen, to Room 422, the room number I'd been given. And there I stood, excruciatingly, for a second time in my life, outside a hotel room where my one-time lover was making love to my own daughter.

But they weren't making love. They were quarreling. Fighting. He was breaking it off. She was insisting that he say goodbye to Iris.

They came out of the room; I was by then around a corner. I followed them. Sadie was so inebriated she could barely walk. They found Iris in one of the banquet rooms and led her to the north wing and up the Tower stairs. From a half-flight down, I watched them through the bannisters as they continued their row on the eighth-floor landing. Just like them, I too paid no attention to Iris as the poor doomed disobedient creature pulled a chair up to the laundry chute and climbed up. I was as guilty as they!

When they heard Iris's frightful scream, it was too late. They ran to the chute—but she was gone. Sadie passed out on the spot, probably as much from alcohol as shock. Walter ran down the stairs—he passed within a foot of me, but never saw me—heading, I assume to the laundry facilities in the basement in hopes of finding his daughter.

I ran to the door of the laundry chute and called out Iris's name. Perhaps, mercifully, she was stuck in the chute—perhaps she could hear me—perhaps we could save her. But there was no answer. Then, a foot or so down the dark chute, I saw a glint. I reached for it, and my hand closed over a thin chain. It was her necklace. It had caught on a nail.

Walter must have fled when he found Iris dead in the basement, the scoundrel. I expect he grieved, but his inner corruption, self-interest, and venality trumped. He had his reputation to consider—his marriage, his leadership in the business world, his growing fortune, his possible political career. So he fled. But I did too, returning to my house, pretending I'd never been there.

★ ★ ★

I didn't see him again until 1943—at Madame Chiang's Christmas party. By now he was a famous man. A presidential candidate. Did he feel no shame, no mortification, at returning to Berkeley, the scene of his crime? It seemed not. He looked as though he felt invulnerable.

The moment I saw him with Madame Chiang, I knew he'd had her. I was sick at the sight of them both. But I have never felt anything like the inner twisting, the wrenching—as if my lungs and innards had been tied into knots—that I experienced when I saw him flirting with Isabella.

I didn't think she took to him—at all. She didn't despise him for his politics the way Nicole did. But she seemed indifferent, and I didn't see her following him with her eyes like so many other women at that party did, drawn to his power.

Two months later, though, the newspapers reported that he was returning to Berkeley yet again. I felt a formless, nameless terror as if I knew what was coming. And it did come. The day he arrived in town, Isabella came to my house in Berkeley. She let me know that she was planning to return to Berkeley tomorrow evening "to see a friend"—and I knew at once there was more to it. While she was in the kitchen, I stole a look in her purse and sure enough found a card—a note card, in Walter's own hand—inviting her to the Claremont the next day at midnight.

The horror that ran through my veins! They had obviously been in contact since Madame Chiang's party. And she had plainly come to Berkeley because she was accepting his invitation—his midnight rendezvous. The old lecher was intent on having Isabella too—what a coup. Three generations seriatim! Why not? A family affair!

Or perhaps he'd already had her.

Unimaginable. Unallowable.

Immediately I put pen to paper. Twenty years ago, when I'd discovered him with Sadie, I'd run the man out of town with well-crafted, knife-like threats, and I would do it again. But to be most effective, the threat had to come not from me, but Isabella herself. So I wrote a letter mimicking Isabella's hand—graphology is a pastime of mine, and I had many letters of Isabella's from which to copy. My Isabella was revolted by his advances—as the real Isabella should have been—and I had her warn him to leave Berkeley immediately, once and for all, in the most hostile possible tone. That evening, I slipped the letter under the door of his room at the Claremont.

But he didn't leave. I called the hotel the next afternoon asking for him, hoping to be told that Mr. Wilkinson had checked out, but on the contrary I learned not only that he was still a guest at the hotel, but that he was planning to be in residence for three more nights.

Which meant, to my horror, that his liaison with Isabella was still on.

And I had to stop it. At any cost.

As I had so many years ago, I slipped in that night through a back door of the Claremont Hotel, in my monk's cassock. It was eleven thirty. The gun was from the family's collection at our country house. I'd planned to knock on his door. I imagined that he'd open it, thinking I was Isabella. I'd pictured the shock on his face—although I wondered if he'd even recognize me.

But to my surprise, the door was already open, the room dark and empty. It looked as if he'd moved out. I was wondering what to do next when I heard his footsteps approaching in the hallway. I knew those steps. I knew his smooth, easy gait.

I sat down in a chair. Calmness under pressure is one of my native strengths.

The room was still dark. He came in and turned on a light, looking at his watch.

"Hello, Walter," I said.

He spun around—he *did* recognize me. I believe he'd even recognized my voice.

I rose and walked toward him, gun pointed straight at his forehead. He was going to say something, but I didn't wish to hear a single word from his mouth—his pleasure-seeking mouth, which had perhaps already been on Isabella—so I shot him. Right between the eyes, as they say. Or a little above.

He fell onto the bed. I'm not sure exactly why, but I pulled his pants down. It just felt right. That he should die exposed. Then I placed on his tongue an official jade seal I'd taken from Madame Chiang's, to suggest that she or one of her people had done the deed.

I would have left at that point, but I happened to see two chocolates lying on the white hotel pillows. It was fate. They too, I knew, had to go in his mouth. And when that was done, and his lips were parted, I felt the urge to fill his mouth with even more. Until it was bursting. Which I did, with everything there was at hand. Including the proverbial cigarette.

There was only one problem—the letter I'd written in Isabella's hand. Walter, I hoped and assumed, would have destroyed it, so that no one else would ever see it. But if he hadn't, I'd intended to find it among his belongings. His belongings, however, weren't there. The room was empty of any luggage, clothing, briefcase. Why? Here was a circumstance I hadn't foreseen, and I had no answer for it.

But I'd run out of time. I had to be gone before Isabella arrived. I left the way I'd come in and returned home. No one had seen me.

At home that night, I lay awake in my bed, evaluating. I'd left a clue for the police implicating Madame Chiang in the murder, but if that gambit failed—and if, worse yet, the police discovered Walter's connection to my family and, worst of all, they found the letter seemingly from Isabella—a contingency plan was imperative. In that event, the only way to save Isabella would be if someone else in the family was implicated instead. At last I saw the way out. If Sadie were thought to be the murderess, she could never be convicted of the crime, not in her mental state. The worst that could happen was another commitment to the asylum.

So, a day later, I drove in the middle of the night to our house on Nob Hill. I let myself in. No one was awake. I crept upstairs and secreted the gun in an old hiding place of Sadie's. It was all just precautionary. I was laying the groundwork in case of need.

And for the first week or so, I believed we were safe. The police clearly hadn't found the letter. Walter, I thought, had indeed destroyed it.

In short, in the end, all had gone according to plan, which didn't surprise me. In moments of singular consequence, when others lose their heads, I never lose mine. Rather I am crystalline. I become a much larger version of myself and I can sing and paint and compose and waltz beautifully and do the trapeze. I'm a matador and a young lass and a terribly old and wise philosopher. I can do things that are not ordinary and not ordinarily acceptable because I'm on a different spatial and moral plane. This is why, in moments of crisis, I've always been able make the most exquisitely perfect decisions.

EPILOGUE

“It’s so sad, all of it,” said Miriam. “Poor Walter Wilkinson. To be dead. Poor Mrs. Bainbridge. And poor Isabella.”

I’d picked Miriam up after school, and we were at Edy’s Ice Cream parlor on Grand Avenue. I’d meant for it to be a celebration because the adoption papers had come through.

Miriam was one sweet kid, no doubt about it. She had more compassion than everyone else I knew put together. I hoped that was a good thing—and not something that would cause her pain down the road.

“What’s Isabella going to do now that she’s out of jail?” she asked.

“I don’t know. But she said she wanted to change her life.”

Miriam was eating a big cone of Rocky Road. I’d ordered a sundae but hadn’t touched it.

“What’s the matter, Al—why aren’t you eating anything?”

I didn’t say so to Miriam, but I was thinking about the lie I told Mrs. Bainbridge—that our graphologist had said the writing in the letter was Isabella’s. The guy had said the opposite. In his final report, he said that his first impression was wrong and that upon closer inspection the letter actually was a forgery, just a really good one. By then I was pretty sure Mrs. Bainbridge was the killer. But we didn’t have any proof. We didn’t have anything on her, including no motive. My only chance was to get her to confess, and I didn’t think she’d let Isabella hang for a crime she’d committed herself. So I told her the graphologist had confirmed that Isabella wrote that letter. Which meant Isabella was done for. I hadn’t planned on her killing herself as a result.

I stuck my spoon into the sundae but just left it there, poking out. “Miriam, what really happened to you and Isabella that night in the Tower?”

Miriam frowned.

“It was so strange, Al. We were having fun—she was telling me secrets about the Claremont and how she and Iris once stole some strawberries off the top of a cake on a fancy cart—and then she just stopped. I asked her what was wrong, but she didn’t answer. It was like she didn’t hear me. Then she walked real slow over to the laundry door and opened it. I thought maybe she wanted to show me something, so I went over too and looked in. But there was nothing to see, and that’s when you came running in. I didn’t understand what was happening. I still don’t.”

I didn’t totally understand it either. Isabella told me that she really did go looking for Miriam just to bring her back down to dinner. Only when she saw the laundry chute did it hit her that they were standing in the very same place where Iris had fallen to her death all those years ago. At that point she apparently fell into one of her sleepwalking states, the kind she used to suffer as a child and would later have no memory of.

I shuddered to imagine what she might have done if I hadn’t shown up. But I did show up, because Madame Chiang had given me that letter, and I was dead certain Isabella was the killer.

When I showed her the letter, she knew instantly her grandmother had written it, but what she couldn’t understand was why. She even started wondering whether she herself might have been the one who killed Wilkinson during a similar sleepwalking episode. She didn’t believe Mrs. Bainbridge would ever do anything to hurt her. But when I sat with her in prison and pressed her about the day Iris died, a memory surfaced: the shape of a hooded figure following Iris up to the Tower. And it was then that she realized, or allowed herself to realize, that the person in the hood was her grandmother.

“That’s what Iris was trying to tell me all those years,” Isabella had said to me that day at the prison. “That’s why she kept coming to me. I think that’s what she’s been trying to tell everyone at the Claremont.”

I’m not a believer myself—not in ghosts, not in anything supernatural. But I couldn’t help remembering my dream of Iris, wearing the same dress

she'd died in, the night I stayed in Room 422.

Isabella also explained the mystery of the old doll—Iris's doll—in Wilkinson's closet. Iris had been odd about that doll. She'd melted its foot to match her own polio-damaged foot, and made bruises on its arms whenever she got a bruise. The morning of Iris's death, the girls got in a fight, and Iris pulled the head off Isabella's doll. As punishment, Sadie confiscated Iris's doll and stuffed it in her tennis bag, which Wilkinson ended up with in his rush to clear out his hotel room after the accident. All these years later, desperate to prove to Isabella that he was the girls' real father, he'd brought that doll back with him, along with the necklace he'd bought as a present for Isabella.

The irony was that Mrs. Bainbridge never knew Wilkinson was Isabella's father. She didn't know that Wilkinson and Sadie had had a second tryst some months after Iris was born; she thought they'd only resumed their affair years later after Isabella was already a toddler. So when Mrs. Bainbridge saw Wilkinson's note begging Isabella to meet him in his hotel room, she could only imagine he was trying to seduce her ... and that was the final straw.

The last piece of the puzzle came from Eddie Gong, who got it from Ping, the Chinese guy we'd arrested down at the port. Ping turned out to be one of Chiang Kai-Shek's secret police, and he'd been sent to kill Jane Chao, who was Mao's agent but had been working for Madame Chiang. Jane was the one who took the first shot at Wilkinson in the Claremont the night he died, and she meant to miss. She was delivering a message: support Mao, not Chiang, or else. But Chiang Kai-Shek's man Ping tracked her down at Codornices Village, tortured a confession out of her, and then murdered her, using an axe to make it look like a tong had done it. I'd told Doogan all this, but he didn't want any part of it.

So in the end Isabella had been right. There was a Chinese angle to the Wilkinson case. Turns out she'd told me the truth about most everything—once she stopped lying to me.

Miriam was done with her ice cream. I tossed my uneaten sundae in the trash. "Come on, Miriam," I said. "We should get home. We've got a lot of work to do."

We were having a guest over for dinner—our first ever.

★ ★ ★

“Geez that smells good, Al! What are you making? Pancakes?”

I was cooking. But making a hash of it.

“Tortillas, Miriam. My dad used to make them. You got to flip ’em with your bare hands. Only weaklings use a spatula, he always said.” I demonstrated and burned half my fingertips off. “And this here’s the salsa, but my dad’s was way better.”

The table was set for three, fancier than it had ever been before. We’d put real plates out, and I’d bought matching real glasses. Full cutlery too, as in a knife, spoon, and fork—I had to teach Miriam which side of the plate they went on. She’d also made cloth napkins out of her fabric scraps, folding and ironing them to look just like she’d seen at the Claremont.

There was a knock. Miriam jumped up in excitement.

“I’ll get it,” I said, going to the door and opening it.

Our guest was holding a small bouquet of daisies.

“Hello, Harry,” I said.

“Oh hullo, Mr. Sullivan,” said Icehouse.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

As the child of strict Chinese immigrant parents who didn't give my sisters and me a lot of social freedom, I always had my nose in a book. I would walk to the public library and come back with my arms overloaded. My favorites were mysteries and historical suspense novels; I read all the Encyclopedia Brown and Nancy Drew books before graduating to Dorothy Eden, Mary Stewart, Victoria Holt, Daphne du Maurier, and of course Agatha Christie, gobbling up every single one of her whodunits, many more than once. I always wanted to write a mystery of my own, but never had a plot, so I ended up writing nonfiction books first. Most of those books explored in some way the disparate impact of capitalism on different ethnic and immigrant groups—a theme that runs through *The Golden Gate* as well.

The plot for *The Golden Gate* came to me all of a sudden—a grandmother who is an unreliable narrator and who is told that one of her three granddaughters is a murderer. As for the inspiration, it started with a coincidence having to do with the house where my parents now live in Berkeley, California.

I didn't grow up in that house. When I was eight, we moved from West Lafayette, Indiana, to a modest East Bay town called El Cerrito (where Sullivan also grew up). My public high school was majority-minority with many if not most of the kids economically disadvantaged and non-college-bound. Meanwhile, in the hills high above us were fancy houses with spectacular views of the whole San Francisco Bay. My parents, like so many immigrants, believed in the American Dream, but I saw close-up the deep-seated effects of poverty and racism.

After I left for college, my parents moved to a much nicer house in the

Claremont neighborhood of the Berkeley Hills—which turned out to be Madame Chiang Kai-Shek’s former house! For reasons no one fully understands to this day, Madame Chiang lived in the house from 1943 to 1944. Why was the First Lady of China living in Berkeley in the middle of the Second World War? A few years ago, I learned that during that period she was rumored to be having an affair with US presidential candidate Wendell Willkie. So I decided to spin a story around those mysterious facts.

Genevieve Bainbridge’s (fictitious) house on Avalon Avenue stands directly across the street from Madame Chiang’s (actual) house, where my eighty-six-year-old parents still live. Just up the way is the dazzling all-white Claremont Hotel, and every time I see it, I’m struck anew by its grandeur. It really is, as Sullivan described it, like an alabaster palace floating in the sky. Meanwhile, then as now, downhill, just a stone’s throw away, are impoverished people, homeless people, struggling to survive. From the affluent peaks of the Berkeley Hills to the gritty flatlands of Richmond, Oakland, and El Cerrito, the East Bay was and is a stark example of America’s shocking wealth disparities.

The Claremont is where the two key deaths in the book take place. While Walter Wilkinson’s murder is completely fictional—Wendell Willkie, the historical figure on whom Wilkinson is loosely based, died in 1944 of a heart attack shortly after his second unsuccessful bid for president—Iris Stafford’s tragic fall draws on a famous ghost story associated with the Claremont, involving a six-year-old girl who went missing at the hotel for two days, only to turn up dead in the laundry chute. Her spirit is still said to roam the halls of the fourth floor, and room 422 in particular.

As I dug deeper into the past, I realized how much of the history of California and the San Francisco Bay Area I didn’t know, despite having grown up there. I now learned that California was once home to one of the largest Native American populations in the United States, who spoke hundreds of dialects over a span of thousands of years. Once whites arrived, practically the whole Native population was wiped out in the blink of an eye. I learned about the Fur Rush that preceded the Gold Rush and virtually extinguished the region’s once-teeming seal, beaver, and otter populations; about how San Francisco rebuilt itself overnight after the Great Earthquake

and Fire of 1906; and about how, after the Japanese obliterated the US Navy at Pearl Harbor, the Bay Area became the largest shipbuilding center in the world with yards like Kaiser and Moore Dry Dock churning out new ships every day.

I also discovered fascinating Bay Area historical figures whom I'd never heard of, like the trailblazing architect Julia Morgan, who designed over seven hundred buildings, including Hearst Castle; August Vollmer, the first chief of the Berkeley Police, who revolutionized police forensics throughout the country—and whose protégés, known as V-men, included two Chinese students who were later connected to General Chiang Kai-Shek's famously vicious secret police; and Margaret "Mom" Chung, the first woman Chinese American doctor in the United States, who treated Hollywood celebrities, held weekly dinners for hungry soldiers (where they mingled with stars like Ronald Reagan and John Wayne), and was revered by United States servicemen in World War Two (Admiral Chester Nimitz was one of her pallbearers).

The more I learned, the more I was struck by the stark parallels between America in our own time and the Bay Area in the era of the Great Depression and World War Two. In 1930s San Francisco, the poor were starving on the street while the rich spent like there was no tomorrow. Bigotry was shameless and rampant, with Mexicans forcibly "repatriated" by the hundreds of thousands, the Chinese Exclusion Act still in place, and hostile derision openly directed at "Okies," a term then referring to poor white migrants from the Dust Bowl. In the 1940s came the Japanese internment, when full-fledged American citizens were literally caged off. For the first time, Blacks came to the Bay Area in significant numbers, pouring in from the American South in search of jobs, only to find themselves subjected to vicious prejudice, excluded by labor unions, denied entry into restaurants, theaters and hotels, and barred from living in white neighborhoods. Throughout this period, numerous other ethnic groups—such as Italians, Greeks, Poles, Slavs, Hungarians, and Jews—occupied a subordinate position too, not yet considered fully white.

I chose to make Detective Sullivan a light-skinned mixed-race man in part because Berkeley's police force in the 1940s included almost no women

or minorities, but also because I wanted to explore the phenomenon of racial “passing.” Sullivan is part Mexican, part Nebraskan, and part Jewish on his Mexican side (as I’ve explored in my nonfiction work, the countries of Latin America saw a small but significant influx of entrepreneurial Jewish immigrants starting in the 1890s). But Sullivan can pass as white and chooses to go by Al Sullivan rather than Alejo Gutiérrez for reasons he has not fully admitted to himself. His niece Miriam is Black-white biracial and conscious even at her young age that she can’t pass as easily as Sullivan and may not have the same opportunities. Other characters too feel pressure to conform or hide their true identities—to “act white” or “act straight” in order to be accepted and have a chance at success in American society. Dr. “Mom” Chung and Julia Morgan were two extremely successful professionals for their time who dressed in masculine attire and never married; both are now thought by many to have been gay.

These issues resonate for me personally, as the daughter of Chinese immigrants (who still remembers being teased as a girl for her accent and “slanty eyes”) and now the mother of two mixed-race daughters. I’ve long been interested in the phenomena of passing, “covering,” and “code-switching”—whereby minorities and other non-mainstream communities adjust their behavior in order to advance or even just survive—and the psychological costs that entails.

Also woven throughout this book are strands of the life and work of the brilliant, troubled American poet Anne Sexton, who lived in the mid-twentieth century and committed suicide at the age of forty-five. The wholly fictional character of Sadie Bainbridge Stafford is in some respects based loosely on Sexton herself, as powerfully depicted in her daughter Linda Gray Sexton’s memoir, *Searching for Mercy Street: My Journey Back to My Mother, Anne Sexton* (2011), and Diane Wood Middlebrook’s *Anne Sexton: A Biography* (1992). For example, Sadie’s tobogganing-mercurochrome story appears in Middlebrook, *Anne Sexton*, p. 19, and Sadie’s breakdowns, maternal frustrations and irresponsibility, and attempted-suicide episodes parallel events in Sexton’s life. See Gray Sexton, *Searching for Mercy Street*, pp. 23–29, 36, 86–88, 128–129, 143, 156, 173; Middlebrook, *Anne Sexton*, pp. 31–40.

Other aspects of Sexton, including her troubled childhood, fugue states, and experience with psychoanalysis, are incorporated in the character of Isabella. See Gray Sexton, *Searching for Mercy Street*, pp. 87–88, 101–102; Middlebrook, *Anne Sexton*, pp. 7–8, 39–47, 238–239. Finally, images from Sexton’s haunting poetry appear frequently in Isabella’s thoughts, words, and writing. The Dy-Dee doll lines in Chapter One are quoted with permission from “The Death Baby,” *Anne Sexton: The Complete Poems* (First Mariner Books, 1999), p. 355. Other Sexton poems from which I draw inspiration (for example on pp. 31, 71, 220, 228, and 339) include *The Evil Seekers*, *Red Riding Hood*, *The Evil Eye*, *The Fury of Hating Eyes*, *The Civil War*, and *The Double Image*.

My descriptions of wartime San Francisco and the explosion of shipbuilding in the Bay Area draw heavily on pp. 244–250 of Ian W. Toll’s magisterial *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1924–1944* (2015); see also Mason Schaefer, “Surge at San Francisco: A Port After Pearl Harbor, 1941–42,” *Army History* (Fall 1996), pp. 10–17. On the Bay Area’s shifting demographics, see Marilynn S. Johnson, “War as Watershed: The East Bay and World War II,” *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 63 (1994), pp. 315–331. On the explosion at Port Chicago, see “The Port Chicago 50 at 76: Time for Exoneration by Thurgood Marshall, Jr. and John A. Lawrence,” The National WWII Museum, New Orleans (July 17, 2020).

On the Mexican deportations of the 1930s, see the powerful seminal work by Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (rev. ed. 2006); see also “250,000 Mexicans Repatriated,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1932, p. 7.

On San Francisco’s Chinatown and Chinese Americans in World War Two, see Judy Yung, *The Chinese Exclusion Act and Angel Island: A Brief History with Documents* (2018); Judy Yung, *San Francisco’s Chinatown* (2016); Richard H. Dillon, *Hatchet Men: The Story of the Tong Wars in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (2012); Gary Kamiya, “Forbidden City ushered in golden age of Chinatown nightclubs,” SFGate (Jan. 9, 2015); Yifan Huang, “Chinese Americans in San Francisco during World War II,” FoundSF (2015); Joan B. Trauner, “The Chinese as medical scapegoats in San Francisco, 1870–1905,” *California History* (1978), vol. 57(1), pp. 74, 76–78

(“The Chinese cancer”); and Leland Stanford, Inaugural Address, Jan. 10, 1862, <https://governors.library.ca.gov/addresses/08-Stanford.html> (“Asia, with her numberless millions”).

The more general sections on California history are based on numerous sources, including Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (2005), p. 13; Charles Wollenberg, *Berkeley: A City in History* (2008), pp. 112–115; Dale L. Walker, *Bear Flag Rising: The Conquest of California, 1846* (1999), pp. 114, 122–131; Brian Butko, *Greetings from the Lincoln Highway* (2013); Sohyun Im, “California Fur Rush,” *FoundSF* (Oct. 2013); Richard Ravalli, “The Near Extinction and Reemergence of the Pacific Sea Otter, 1850–1938,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, vol. 100, no. 4 (Fall 2009), pp. 181–191. Sullivan’s musings on the great redwoods draw heavily from James Clifford Shirley, *The Redwoods of Coast and Sierra* (1940), p. 50; “Coast Redwood,” National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/coast-redwood.htm>; and “The Redwoods of Coast and Sierra: Uses of the Redwoods,” National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/shirley/sec9.htm. On the design, financing, construction, and gala opening of the Golden Gate Bridge, see Kevin Starr, *Golden Gate: The Life and Times of America’s Greatest Bridge* (2010), pp. 5, 73–82, 95–100, 107, 131–136; Harvey Schwartz, *Building the Golden Gate Bridge: A Workers’ Oral History* (2015), p. 13 (source for the death-to-dollars ratio); “Golden Gate Bridge,” PBS American Experience, www.shoppbs.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/goldengate/sfeature/sf_facts_during.html; Library of Congress, “Today in History, May 27, 1937,” www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/may-27; and Official Program: Gold Gate Bridge Fiesta, San Francisco (May 27 to June 2, 1937), www.goldengate.org/assets/1/6/officialprogram.pdf.

Much of the (fictional) life of Walter Wilkinson is based on the real life of Wendell Willkie, as recounted in David Levering Lewis, *The Improbable Wendell Willkie: The Businessman Who Saved the Republican Party and His Country, and Conceived a New World Order* (2018), pp. 1–8; Samuel Zipp, *The Idealist: Wendell Willkie’s Wartime Quest to Build One World* (2020), pp. 2–10; and James H. Madison, *Wendell Willkie, Hoosier Internationalist* (1992), p. 24 (source of the “town whore” quote). However, apart from the

rumored affair with Madame Chiang, the scandalous and disreputable behavior of Walter Wilkinson is wholly concocted, with no connection to Wendell Willkie, a much-admired political figure with an important legacy.

The sections on Madame Chiang Kai-Shek draw significantly from Jung Chang, *Big Sister, Little Sister, Red Sister: Three Women at the Heart of Twentieth-Century China* (2019), pp. 29, 34, 45–46, 222–224; Laura Tyson Li, *Madame Chiang Kai-shek: China's Eternal First Lady* (2006), pp. 8, 20, 195–197, 205, 210, 219, 225, 250; and Jonathan Fenby, *Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the China He Lost* (2003), pp. 388–392, 395–396; and Emily Hahn, *The Soong Sisters* (1941), pp. 7–8, 20–21, 26, 268, 270–271. There appears to be only one source of the rumored affair between Willkie and Madame Chiang: Gardner Cowles, founder of *Look* magazine, who accompanied Willkie to China. According to Cowles, Willkie himself “gave Cowles a play-by-play account of his alleged amorous conquest” of Madame Chiang. Li, *Madame Chiang Kai-Shek*, p. 185; see also Fenby, *Generalissimo*, pp. 388–392. As many have pointed out, however, there is no other evidence of the affair (see, e.g., Chang, *Big Sister, Little Sister, Red Sister*, p. 222), and Willkie’s claims (if he made them at all) could have been wishful or self-serving braggadocio. On the racial covenant in the deeds in the Claremont neighborhood, see Burl Willes, “Mme. Chiang Kai-Shek and her Claremont-Elmwood Neighborhood” (pamphlet on file with author).

On Julia Morgan, Hearst Castle, Chapel of the Chimes, and other iconic Morgan buildings, see Victoria Kastner, *Julia Morgan: An Intimate Biography of the Trailblazing Architect* (2022), pp. 15, 92, 147; Mark Wilson, *Julia Morgan: Architect of Beauty* (2012); David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (2001); Taylor Coffman, *Hearst Castle: The Story of William Randolph Hearst and San Simeon* (1985); Mike McPhate, “A Cathedral of Capitalism on California’s Central Coast,” *California Sun*, May 30, 2018; and “Anything But Humble: Hearst Castle,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, www.smithsonianmag.com/videos/anything-but-humble-hearst-castle (source of George Bernard Shaw quote).

On August Vollmer, “V-men,” and Chiang Kai-Shek’s secret police, see Willard M. Oliver, *August Vollmer: The Father of American Policing* (2017), pp. 304–305, 309–311, 335–354, 379, 497–498; Frederic Wakeman, Jr.,

“American Police Advisers and the Nationalist Chinese Secret Service, 1930–37,” *Modern China* (April 1992), vol. 18, pp. 107–137.

For my descriptions of the Japanese internment, including Col. Karl Bendetsen’s role, I relied heavily on Richard Reeves, *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese American Internment in World War II* (2016), pp. 8, 58–68, 76, 78–79, 82, 111, 115, 118, 120; see also Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973), pp. 28–30. On the rounding up of Japanese Americans in Berkeley, see Gretchen Kell, “Campus, city to mark WWII internment of Japanese Americans, 75 years on,” *Berkeley News* (April 24, 2017), <https://news.berkeley.edu/2017/04/24/campus-city-to-mark-wwii-evacuation-of-japanese-americans-75-years-on>.

On Dr. “Mom” Chung, see Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards: The Life of a Wartime Celebrity* (2005), pp. 1–3, 44, 88, 92, 98–100, 120–121, 153. The fictitious character of Toby ‘Dutch’ Vorwald is a composite of a number of actual ace fighter pilots.

Dr. Rudolf von Urban is an actual historical figure, who did indeed recommend sexual experimentation to his psychiatric patients and who was in fact tried in California in 1943 for practicing without a medical license. The story of his marriage told by Genevieve Bainbridge is taken from Daniel Benveniste’s article, “The Early History of Psychoanalysis in San Francisco,” *Psychoanalysis and History*, vol. 8(2) (July 2006), pp. 16–17. However, the involvement of the von Urbans in the events of this book is entirely fictional.

Finally, I took some liberties with dates and other details of historical events. For example, the opening gala of the Palace of Legion of Honor, where Genevieve and Sadie fatefully encounter Walter Wilkinson, took place on Armistice Day of 1924, not 1921. President Warren Harding did die at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco—but in 1923, not 1921. The Port Chicago disaster that killed so many African American sailors is real, but it took place in July 1944, just after the events of this book. The hot dry wind that occasionally seizes the San Francisco Bay Area is called the Diablo wind, but that name appears to have originated in the 1990s. And Isabella’s statement to Sullivan that Wilkinson was in fact sent to China to help FDR decide whether to back Chiang Kai-Shek or Mao is based loosely on the Dixie

Mission, which in reality had no connection to Wendell Willkie and did not begin until July 1944.

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