

INTRODUCTION



*The kingdom of Kali is within us deep.
The built-in destroyer, the savage goddess,
Wakes in the dark and takes away our sleep.
She moves through the blood to poison gentleness.*

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The image on the wall was enough to give a man nightmares. It showed a woman of sorts, but a woman who would have made a playboy shrivel, given pause to the most ardent feminist, and had Freud scrambling to retract his plaintive query concerning what women wanted.

What this lady wanted was blood.

Her skin was dark, so deep a blue it seemed black against the crisp, bright, bloodred waves that splashed against her muscular calves. Around her hips she wore a belt strung with human hands that had been hacked off at the wrist; her neck was looped with a necklace of skulls. Her wild black hair made a matted tangle from which serpents peeped, and from her right ear hung a cluster of dry bones. Four arms emerged from her strong shoulders, in the manner of Hindu deities and the half-joking fantasy of busy mothers the world around, and all twenty of her dagger-long fingernails were red, the same bloodred as the sea around her. In her lower right hand she held a cast-iron skillet, wielding it like a weapon; her upper left grasped the freshly severed head of a man.

The expression on the lady's face was at once beautiful and terrible, the Mona Lisa's evil sister. Her stance

and the set of her shoulders shouted out her triumph and exultation as she showed her tongue and bared her sharp white teeth in pleasure, glorying at the clear blue sky above her, at the pensive vulture in a nearby tree, at the curling smoke from the pyres of the cremation grounds on the hill nearby, at the drained, bearded, staring object swinging from the end of her arm.

She looked drunk on the pleasure of killing, burning with ecstasy at the deep hot lake of shed blood she was wading through.

And she looked far from finished with the slaughter.

She was Kali, whose name means black, the Indian goddess of destruction and creation. Kali, who kills in joy and in rage, Kali the undefeatable, Kali the mother who turns on her faithless children, Kali the destroyer, Kali the creator, whose slaughter brings life, whose energies stimulate Shiva to perform his final dance, a dance that will bring about the end of all creation, all time, all life.

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*It is a place of skulls, a deathly place
Where we confront our violence and feel,
Before that broken and self-ravaged face,
The murderers we are, brought here to kneel.*

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Kate Martinelli sat in her uncomfortable metal folding chair and watched the world come to an end.

It ended quite nicely, in fact, considering the resources at hand and the skill of the participants, with an eye-searing flash and a startling crack, a swirl of colors, then abrupt darkness.

And giggles.

The lights went up again, parents and friends rose to applaud wildly, and twenty-three brightly costumed and painted children gathered on the stage to receive their praise.

The reason for Kate's presence stood third from the end, a mop-headed child with skin the color of milky coffee, a smile that lacked a pair of front teeth, and black eyes that glittered with excitement and pride.

Kate leaned over to speak into the ear of the woman at her side. "Your goddaughter makes a fine monkey."

Lee Cooper laughed. "Mina's been driving Roz and Maj nuts practicing her part—she wore one tail out completely and broke a leg off the sofa jumping onto it. Last week she decided she wasn't going to eat anything but bananas, until Roz got a book that listed what monkeys actually eat."

“I hope she didn’t then go around picking bugs out of tree trunks.”

“I think Roz read selectively.”

“Never trust a minister. Do you know—” Kate stopped, her face changing. She reached into her pocket and pulled out a vibrating pager, looked up at Lee, and shrugged in apology before digging the cell phone out of her pocket and beginning to push her way toward the exit and relative quiet. She was back in a couple of minutes, slipping the phone away as she walked up to the man who had been sitting on her other side during the performance and who was now standing at Lee’s elbow, watchful and ready to offer a supporting hand in the crowd. Lee’s caregiver spoke before Kate could open her mouth.

“What a pity, you’re going to miss the fruit punch and cookies.”

She rolled her eyes and said low into Jon’s ear, “Why it couldn’t have come an hour ago . . .”

“Poor dear,” he said, sounding not in the least sympathetic. “‘A policeman’s lot is not a happy one.’”

“If I find you a ride, would you take her home?”

“Happy to. I’ll be going out later, though.”

“She’ll be fine.” Now for the difficult part. “Lee,” Kate began. “Sweetheart?” but groveling did not prove necessary.

“You’re off, then?”

“I’m sorry.”

“Liar,” said Lee cheerfully. “But you’ve been a very brave honorary godmother, so now you can go and play with your friends. That was Al, I assume?”

Kate and her partner, Al Hawkin, were on call tonight, and in a city the size of San Francisco, a homicide was no rare thing. She nodded, hesitated, and kissed Lee briefly on the cheek. Lee looked more pleased than surprised, which Kate took as a sign that she was doing something right, and Kate in turn felt gratified beyond the scope of her lover’s reaction—their relationship had been more than a little touchy in recent months, and small signs loomed large. She stepped away carefully,

looking down to be sure she didn't knock into Lee's cuffed crutches, and walked around the arranged folding chairs to congratulate Mina's adoptive parents. They were surrounded by others bent on the same purpose—or rather, Roz was surrounded by a circle of admirers, this tall, brown-haired, slightly freckled woman who was glowing and laughing and giving off warmth like (as one article in the Sunday *Chronicle* had put it) a fireplace of the soul.

When she had read that phrase, Kate had wondered to herself if the reporter really meant that Roz was hot. She was, in fact, one of the most unconsciously sexy women Kate knew.

Kate hadn't seen Roz in a couple of weeks, but she knew just looking at her, the way she gestured and leaned toward her audience, the way her laugh came and her eyes flashed, that Roz was involved in some passionate quest or other: She seemed to have grown a couple of inches and lost ten years, a look Kate had seen her wear often enough. Or it could have been from the fulsome praise being heaped on her by the other parents—all of whom, it seemed, had seen a television program Roz had been on the night before and were eager to tell her how great it had been, how great she had been. Roz threw one arm around the school principal and laughed with honest self-deprecation, and while Kate waited to get a word in, she studied the side of that animated face with the slightly uncomfortable affection a person invariably feels toward someone in whose debt she is and always will be, an ever-so-slightly servile discomfort that in Kate's case was magnified by the knowledge that her own lover had once slept with this woman. She liked Roz (how could she not?) and respected her enormously, but she could never be completely comfortable with her.

Roz's partner, Maj Freiling, stood slightly to one side, taking all this in while she spoke with a woman Kate vaguely remembered having met at one of their parties. Maj was short, black-haired, and—incongruously—Swedish; her name therefore was pronounced

“my,” forming the source of endless puns from Roz. Most people who knew Roz assumed that her quiet partner was a nonentity whose job was to keep house, to produce brilliant meals at the drop of Roz’s hat, and to laugh politely at Roz’s jokes. Most people were wrong. Just because Maj spoke little did not mean she had nothing to say. She was the holder of several degrees in an area of brain research so arcane only half a dozen people in San Francisco had ever heard of it, and they in turn were not of the sort to be found in Roz’s company of politicians and reformers. It seemed to Kate a case of complete incompatibility leading to a rock-solid marriage, just one more thing she didn’t understand about Roz Hall.

Kate looked from one woman to the other, and gave up on the attempt to reach Roz. Maj smiled at Kate in complicity as Kate approached. Kate found herself grinning in return as she reached out to squeeze Maj’s arm.

“Thanks for inviting me,” she said. “I was going to come to the party afterward, but I got a call, and have to go. Sorry. Be sure to tell Mina she was the best monkey I’ve ever seen.”

“I will tell her. And don’t worry, your avoidance of our potluck desserts is in good company.” Maj glanced over Kate’s shoulder toward the door. Kate turned and saw a distinctively tailored and hatted figure sweeping out of the school cafeteria. The moment the door swung shut behind him, someone’s voice rose above the babble with a remark about the Ladies of Perpetual Disgruntlement, the group of feminist vigilantes who had in recent weeks set the city on its ear with a series of creative and, Kate had to admit privately, funny acts of revenge. Just that morning the mayor had issued a statement to the press saying, in effect, “We are not amused.”

Kate smiled absently at the overheard remark and turned back to Maj. “That was the mayor, wasn’t it?”

Maj shrugged and gave her a crooked smile as if to apologize for a flashy display.

“I wondered whose car that was. Very impressive,”

Kate told her. “Look, Maj, could you find someone who might be able to take Lee and Jon home? We only brought the one car.”

“We, on the other hand, always bring two, because Roz invariably finds someone she just has to talk to. I’d be happy to give them a ride, if they don’t mind waiting for Mina to stuff herself with cookies first.”

“I’m sure they won’t mind. Jon secretly adores Oreo cookies and—what are those Jell-O things called?”

“Jigglers,” Maj pronounced with fastidious disapproval, giving the word three syllables. Kate laughed and reached out again to pat Maj’s shoulder in thanks, waved to Lee, and hurried out of the school hall in the footsteps of Hizzoner to her own, lesser vehicle.

The western sky was still faintly light ahead of her as Kate drove down Lombard Street in the recently acquired and thoroughly broken-in Honda, which on the first warm day she owned it had declared itself to be the former property of a pizza delivery boy. She rolled down the window to let in the air of this April evening, clear and sweet after the drizzle earlier in the day, and wished she hadn’t let Lee bully her into giving up the motorcycle.

Kate loved San Francisco best at night. During the day it was an interesting city, decorative and lively and every bit as anonymous as a villain, or a cop, could ask for. But at night the city closed in and became intimate, a cluster of hills and valleys with the sea curled up against three sides of it. Sometimes, beneath the stars and the hum of traffic and the collective breathing of three-quarters of a million people, Kate imagined she could hear the city’s song.

The imagined song was a flight of fancy unlike Kate—or rather, unlike the image Kate had of herself—and a thing she had never mentioned to anyone, even to Lee. (Perhaps especially not Lee, an analytical therapist who tended to read far too much into small imaginings.) Like an old tune that had been recorded in a hundred ways, the song of the City could be smooth and sexy from the throat of a torch singer or ornate in a

cappella, coolly instrumental or raunchy in rock. The city's complex melody was never the same on two nights or in two places: Here it had a salsa beat, there the drive of rap held it, elsewhere it was transformed by the plink and slither of Chinese instruments and harmonies, in another part of town it had the raga complexity of Indian music. During those "only in San Francisco" times when the latest outrageous excess of the City by the Bay made the final, tongue-in-cheek segment on the national news—since the Ladies of Perpetual Disgruntlement had come on the scene, for example—the song occasionally took on comic overtones, like a movie score preparing the audience for a pratfall. No matter the setting, though, it was the same song, the night song of the City of St. Francis, and it kept Kate Martinelli company as she crossed its streets to the scene of a crime.

Lombard Street's garish blast of motel and cocktail lounge lights cut off abruptly at the wide gate that marked the entrance to the Presidio, and the clutter of buildings and phone lines gave way to trees and dignified officers' housing. The Army was in the process of withdrawing from the base it had built here, the most gorgeous piece of open land left in San Francisco, but so far the untidy life of civilian San Francisco had been kept at bay, and Kate's headlights picked out neatly trimmed lawn and ranks of dark barracks. Following the directions she had been given, she kept to the right. The road passed along the edge of a parking lot so huge it might have been a parade grounds, with three cars in it, before narrowing further to become a single lane between a wooden building and the madly busy but oddly removed freeway that led to the Golden Gate Bridge, and then Kate saw the gates to the military cemetery and a police car across the adjoining road, turning cars back. She showed the uniform her identification and drove on, headlights playing now across rows of gleaming white gravestones that stretched up the hill to her left, and then the City's song took on a discordant note, like the warning of a minor chord in a suspense

movie, with the appearance of a brilliant blue-white light thrown against the undersides of the trees around the next turn.

The stark glare rising before her in the night made Kate slow to a crawl before rounding the corner. What looked like two hundred people were scattered up the road before her, although she knew it could not be more than thirty at the most, and that included the reporters, who had come here on foot, dragging their equipment with them, from where they had been forced to leave their vans on the other side of the cemetery. She pulled to one side and parked among a wild assortment of official vehicles—park police and SFPD cruisers, ambulance and coroner's van, half a dozen unmarked police cars—and a few small cars from personnel who had been called from home. Further along the curve of the road, kept at a distance by uniforms but making full use of their long-range lenses, television vans were already in attendance, hoping for a lead story for the eleven o'clock news. A uniformed patrolman was still in the process of wrapping yellow tape around the perimeter of the crime scene, using trees, a fence post, and a convenient street sign. Kate nodded at familiar faces among the cops, ignored the questions of the reporters on this side of the scene, and ducked under the restraining tape.

Al Hawkin was standing with his hands in his pockets watching the medical examiner at work, homicide bag on the ground at his feet. He turned when he felt his partner at his side.

"So much for an evening off," he said by way of greeting.

"If you'd called an hour earlier you'd have saved me from the whole play."

"Which one was that?"

"A school play, if you can believe it. You know Roz Hall?" He nodded; half the people in the City knew Roz Hall, to their pleasure or their fury, and occasionally both at once. "Well, she and her partner, Maj, adopted Maj's niece last year, and asked Lee to be the godmother. The kid—her name's Mina—goes to a pri-

vate school that's big on ethnic celebrations, and this was some complicated Indian story about gods and wars. Mina played a monkey. The mayor himself was there." Hawkin's eyebrows went up. "So, what do we have here?"

"The ME beat me here, so I haven't had a chance to look. Called in by a jogger just after six-thirty—there's a uniformed at the guy's house. Seems to be a white male, no obvious signs of violence that the jogger could see, but then he only looked close enough to pass on the CPR before heading home for a phone. I'd say the vic looks to be about twenty-four hours old."

"Funny place to have a heart attack," Kate remarked. "And he wasn't exactly dressed for jogging." What they could see of the body, half hidden by the bushes at the side of the paving, was clothed in heavy, stained work boots and some sort of khaki pants. "And why on earth didn't anyone spot it during the day? This is a pretty heavily used road."

"Not as many people on foot as usual, because of the rain. It was getting dark, so the guy who found him figured it was safe to stop and have a pee, happened to stop here."

There was a certain humor in the picture, which Kate turned over in her mind as they waited to be allowed access to the body. Al broke into her thoughts with a question.

"Why do you suppose he was dropped here? Other than it's dark and you can see cars coming?"

Kate looked around, and she had to admit that it was not the first place she would have chosen for easy disposal of an inconvenient corpse. "If it'd been me, I'd have gone on down there," she told her partner, nodding toward a cluster of dark buildings in the hollow of the hill. "There's no gate across the access road, is there?"

"Nope. And the park guys say there wasn't anything going on there last night, shouldn't have been any traffic down there at all."

Kate turned and looked in the other direction, up the

hill. On the other side of the road, some brambles and trees rose up, then the fence that surrounded the cemetery. “You suppose they were aiming for the cemetery but missed? Maybe there were people in there, scared the perps off.” She herself had run through the Presidio when she was feeling ambitious, and knew the cemetery for a closed-in area with limited access and regular visitors; too likely to get trapped in there, and hard to explain a dead body missing its casket and mortuary van.

Eventually, the ME stood away and she and Hawkin moved into the glare of the portable floodlights to get a closer look at their dead white male.

Dead he clearly was, and Kate agreed that trying CPR on that darkened face with that swollen, froth-covered tongue protruding was not a cheering prospect.

“Strangled,” she said, pointing out the obvious.

“With something other than hands,” Al added as he lifted back the collar of the man’s plaid shirt. Something had torn into the soft skin of the throat, chafing it raw as it did its work.

The man had blunt features, cropped hair, and the coarse bloom of long-term alcohol use in his nose. His belly was big and soft although his chest and upper arms appeared muscular where his shirt had been pulled away by the paramedics. He wore a jeans jacket but cotton-polyester uniform trousers, and a belt with a buckle declaring the man’s loyalty to Coors beer.

“Are his hands tied?”

Al tugged at the inert shoulder, which showed signs that rigor mortis was passing off, to reveal the man’s thick wrists. They wore a pair of regulation police handcuffs identical to those in Kate’s bag. Neither of them commented on the cuffs, but Al held the man’s torso off the ground until Kate had removed a fat wallet from the hip pocket of the pants, then eased the body back down until it was lying as it had been when Kate arrived on the scene.

“Not robbery.” It was Al’s turn to point out the obvious. A gold band dug deep into the flesh of the man’s

meaty ring finger, and in his wallet were eighty-two dollars, a stack of membership cards to video rental parlors, a credit card, and a California driver's license that identified the corpse as one James Larsen, with an address in the bedroom community of South San Francisco. A working man's address to match his clothes and his hands, and somewhat out of the ordinary for a San Francisco homicide victim.

They patted down James Larsen's pockets with care, since the rubber gloves both detectives wore gave no protection against the myriad of sharp and potentially lethal objects people carried around. Kate found a ticket stub to an action movie dated three days before, six coins, a used handkerchief, and the wrapper from a stick of beef jerky. No keys. Al slid a hand into Larsen's left-side jacket pocket and pulled out three cellophane-wrapped pieces of candy: a lump of hard butterscotch, a flattened square of striped coconut chew, and a squashed wad of something red and soft. Mr. James Larsen, it would appear, had had a sweet tooth.

Hawkin dropped the candies into an evidence bag and stood up to let the rest of the team move in. The photographer took a few close-ups to go with his earlier shots of the crime scene as it had appeared before anyone went near the body, and the Crime Scene officers bent to their labors. Kate and Hawkin walked over to where the techs were leaning against their van, the smoke from their cigarettes mingling with the tang of eucalyptus in the cool night air. All four city employees ignored the calls of the gathered news media as if it had been the noise of so many plaintive seagulls.

"Any idea when the autopsy'll be?" Al asked them.

"Might be tomorrow, more likely the next day. The morgue's pretty crowded."

"Let me know."

"But I can tell you now what they'll find," the man continued.

"Clogged arteries, a bad liver, and strangulation," Hawkin offered.

"A taser."

“What?”

“A stun gun, taser, whatever you call it. One of those things women carry. It wouldn’t have killed him, but whoever did this used one to put him down.” The tech threw his cigarette on the pavement and ground it under his heel, blithely contaminating the periphery of a crime scene, then led the two detectives over to the body. He squatted and pulled the plaid shirt back again from Larsen’s strong chest. “That’s a taser burn,” he asserted, pointing to a small red area, and looked up to catch their reaction.

There was none. Both detectives kept their faces empty, and Al merely said, “I suggest you keep that theory to yourself,” casting a quick glance over his shoulder at the waiting reporters, and allowed the process of removing the body to go on.

Still, Kate made a note of what the tech had said before she followed Al over to where they had parked their cars.

“It looked more like a bruise to me,” she said firmly, as if saying so would make a bit of difference. Her partner grunted. “And really, even if it is a taser—”

“We’ll know soon enough,” Al remarked, and walked over to give the reporters what little he could. Or would.

The taser, if the mark on James Larsen’s chest was not bruise, birthmark, pimple, or the growth of some exotic contagion, would create a problem, because that was how the Ladies of Perpetual Disgruntlement, that source of sly jokes at school parties and embarrassment to mayors and cops, began life: with a taser.

The reign of the Ladies (quickly shortened by an admiring public to the LOPD, although they referred to themselves as merely the Ladies) had begun back in late January, when a lowlife named Barry Doyle was acquitted of statutory rape. Belinda Matheson, aged fifteen years and ten months, had gone cruising with some friends with a borrowed ID that looked very like her (hardly unusual, since it belonged to her older sister) and declared her to be twenty-one. Doyle was twice her

age, although his boyish features had a vague resemblance to Leonardo DiCaprio, and the combination of his cute face, his clever flattery, and his illicit booze had landed the teenager in Doyle's bed. Her parents, apoplectic with worry by the time Belinda dragged herself home the next afternoon, furiously pressed charges, but Doyle had a good lawyer and drew an inexperienced prosecutor who allowed a jury that was predominantly male and exclusively unmarried or divorced. The combination of testimony—that Doyle had been seen to check Belinda's ID, reassuring himself that she was no minor; that she had looked to be the person on the license (this bolstered by a blowup photo of Belinda in adult makeup and upswept hair); and most damaging of all, that she was by no means an innocent (this last from an ex-boyfriend who showed great promise for stepping into Barry Doyle's sleaze-covered shoes)—conspired to produce a verdict that had Doyle, owner of six adult video parlors and a topless bar that the jury knew nothing about, crowing his victory over the forces of "disgruntled feminists and other human rights fascists" right there on the courthouse steps—and announcing that he was in turn suing the Matheson family for the "emotional, financial, and professional damage" he had suffered through their "cold-blooded deception." He ended his impromptu press conference by looking straight into the nearest television camera and declaring, "Fair's fair, Belinda."

Shortly before midnight that same day, following a wild celebratory dinner, Doyle vanished somewhere between his car and his front door. He was discovered eight hours later by morning commuters, quite alive if spitting with rage, stark naked and spread-eagled across the window of a building under renovation. His genitals had been dyed purple (as could be seen from the cars that were soon at a complete halt on the freeway) and the duct tape that suspended him from the window frame ripped most of the hair off his wrists, ankles, and face, but most shocking (and delicious) of all was the revelation that underneath the purple dye, he had been

tattooed. The phrase I SCREW CHILDREN was now an indelible part of Barry Doyle's equipment, until such time as he was driven to submit to the pain of eradication, and the note duct-taped to his backside put the cap on the episode:

FAIR'S FAIR, DICK.

—*The Ladies of Perpetual Disgruntlement*

Oh joy, oh ecstasy, on the part of all the world that had never flirted with the idea of bedding an underage girl. And oh the discomfort, oh the uneasy shriveling felt by all society's members (so to speak) who had. A thousand duct-tape jokes bloomed on late-night television, the color purple took on a whole new significance, tattoo artists became the heroes (and the suspects) of the hour. The Ladies instantly overtook their predecessors in the Only-in-San Francisco category, the gay/lesbian/bi/and-a-few-strights protest group called the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. In three days the Ladies had half a dozen fan Web sites, twenty designs of T-shirts for sale around the city's tourist sites (all of them purple), and a hundred jokes about how many Ladies it took to tattoo a man. (A representative answer: None at all, if he's a true Dick.) Even Doyle's friends began to forget that his name was Barry.

Since then, the Ladies had struck twice more. Their most visible action was when a billboard went up, again overlooking the freeway and this time only five hundred yards from police headquarters, showing the face of a prominent local politician superimposed on a male with a naked child in his lap (the politician took an immediate extended vacation, considered by all a sure admission of guilt). Taped to the billboard's access ladder was a note saying:

NAUGHTY BOY.

—*the Ladies*

Their third strike was against a chronic flasher out in the Sunset, overcome by a taser-wielding duo and duct-taped, naked and face-forward, to embrace a metal lamppost on a very cold night. The note taped to his anatomy read:

BIT DRAFTY?
—*the Ladies*

The official Departmental line, of course, was that vigilante actions of this sort were wrong, dangerous, and not to be tolerated. But there were as many cracks about frostbite within the walls of the Justice building as there were outside, and a cop only had to murmur the words “duct tape” to have the room convulsed.

Other actions had been attributed to the Ladies of Perpetual Disgruntlement, both in the Bay Area and across the state, but none were certain, since they lacked the hallmark humor. The police had no more idea who the Ladies were (or even if they were actually women) than they had in January. The obvious suggestion, that some of the “nuns” of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence had decided to grow teeth, was investigated, but no links were found beyond the middle words in the two names and their clear common regard for irreverence. No fingerprints had been found on the duct tape, no identifiable evidence recovered from the crime scenes, the three notes were on paper sold by the ream in chain stores and generated by software and a computer and printer that half of the state could own. Even the billboard, as public an act as could be imagined, had been a fast strike involving prepainted sheets and wallpaper glue. All the police knew was that the Ladies struck at night, and that two of their actions had involved tasers.

And now a man with a possible taser burn on his chest lay dead.

Crime Scene agreed that, particularly as the rain seemed to have stopped for the night, it would be far better to leave the site until morning. Al arranged for

the road to remain closed off and for the scene to be guarded from the depredations of the cameras, before the two detectives went to interview their only witness.

The jogger who had come across the body seemed to be just that, not the murderer returned to the scene to “discover” his victim. He even produced the stub from an airline boarding pass to prove that he had only returned that morning from a business trip. They thanked him and left, and then set off to the Larsen home, to make the announcement and see what they could see.

The Larsen address was in South San Francisco, half an hour down the peninsula from the city and a different world. The big white letters on the hillside declared South San Francisco to be THE INDUSTRIAL CITY, a place dominated by San Francisco International and all the freight, crated and human, that the airport moved.

The Larsen house proved to be one of a thousand cramped stucco boxes thrown up after the war. Even in the inadequate illumination from their flashlights and one dim street lamp, the house showed every year of its half century. Weeds grew in the cracks of the walkway, the cover of the porch light had broken and been removed, and the paint was dull and beginning to peel. Al put his thumb on the bell, and after a minute of no response pounded on the door, but the house remained dark. A trip around the building with flashlights at the windows showed them merely the untidy interior of a tract house, so they split up, heading in opposite directions along the street to stop in at every house where lights still showed. When they met up again to compare notes, the information each had gleaned from the neighbors amounted to the same thing.

The Larsen family had lived here for at least ten years. James worked as a baggage handler at the airport, his wife, Emily, kept house. Their two kids were grown and moved away. His wife had recently left him, and the across-the-street neighbor he went bowling with, the only one who might possibly know where

Larsen's wife or kids were, was away on vacation, due back in three or four days. The one piece of information Kate could add concerned the Larsen car, a six-year-old Chevrolet sedan. DMV gave her the license number, and as they sat in the front seat of Kate's car to write up their field notes, she put out a bulletin for the car. Then, since there was not a great deal more they could do at that time of night, and since there seemed to be no immediate reason to roust a judge out of bed to sign a search warrant, they went their separate ways through the dark and drowsing peninsula, and were both in their beds not so much after midnight.

A deceptively ordinary beginning to a far from ordinary case.

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*There are times when
I think only of killing
The voracious animal
Who is my perpetual shame.*

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One of the medical techs had talked. Either that, or the *Chronicle* reporter had a contact within SFPD who had heard the rumor, because the front page of the paper that Kate fetched from the flower bed the following morning had the story of the body found in the Presidio, an indistinct picture of Al Hawkin walking away from it, and the clear speculation that the death was linked with the Ladies of Perpetual Disgruntlement. Kate cursed, told Lee that she wouldn't be having breakfast, and while Hawkin was out checking on the progress of the crime scene search, Kate set off to hunt down the history of a victim.

James Larsen had a lengthy arrest record, though only two convictions: one for drunk-and-disorderly at the age of nineteen, and one five years before his death, for assaulting his wife. In the twenty-five years between those two convictions, Emily Larsen had been a regular visitor to the hospital emergency room, but had consistently refused to press charges. Only in recent years, when the law was changed to make spousal cooperation unnecessary for domestic violence prosecution, had Larsen been vulnerable.

Since then he had been careful. The police still came to his house every six or eight months, but they had not

arrested him again until the end of February, when the beer binge that he had begun the day before fed into resentments real and imagined and was topped off by his anger over his favorite team's defeat, leaving Emily bleeding onto the floor of the emergency room. He had been arrested and charged with attempted murder, and bail was placed too high for him to reach. Three weeks later the charges were reduced, to battery and assault, and a tired judge had sentenced him to time served, a year of probation, a hundred hours of community service, and marriage counseling. He then turned Larsen loose. Two weeks after that, a pair of SFPD homicide detectives were standing over his corpse.

Just before his release from jail, according to the neighbors, Emily had packed her bags and been driven off by a woman in a Mercedes; she had not been seen since. Or heard from: Emily's few acquaintances did not know where she was, her sister in Fresno hadn't spoken with her since early March, and their father, in a rest home near Fresno, neither knew nor was he interested.

When Emily Larsen had not shown up at her house the following morning, Kate had asked the phone company to preserve the records of the incoming calls for a few days, and then made out a request for a search warrant on the records for the Larsen phone. It was the previous month's phone bill that gave the missing woman away. Four days before her husband was released from jail, Emily had made a telephone call to a lawyer's office in San Francisco. Kate, working her way through the calls, heard the greeting "Law offices" and knew she'd found the wife. She identified herself, asked to speak with the partner who was representing one Emily Larsen, declined to be called back, and settled in with her heels on the desk to wait. She listened to the piano music of call-holding coming through the receiver, understanding that legal dignity required that a cop be made to wait. She'd done the same herself to lawyers. With the phone tucked under her chin, she sat tight and glanced through a stack of memos and Daily

Incident Recaps that had been accumulating on her desk. The recaps, in addition to the usual list of attempted robberies, hit-and-runs, and sexual assaults, included the laconic description of assault by a chronic urinator who was proving a nuisance to passersby—particularly those on bicycles. The memos included one decree (what Kate reckoned was the thirtieth such issued) that department personnel were not, under any circumstances, to make jokes about the Ladies of Perpetual Disgruntlement, or duct tape, or the color purple. Another memo was the announcement that an unknown group had been plastering up flyers seeming to advocate the extermination of all male children, which caused Kate to read it more closely and shake her head. She was looking at a third memo bearing a stern reminder concerning the cost to local supermarkets of the oversized plastic shopping carts favored by the homeless, when the music in her ear cut off abruptly and a woman's voice spoke in her ear.

"Inspector Kate Martinelli?"

"That's right."

"Carla Lomax here. I believe we've met, at a fundraiser for the teen shelter. I certainly know your name."

And reputation, Kate thought. In fact, she'd counted on it. "Good, then you'll know I'm not the bad guy here. I'm trying to reach one of your clients, Emily Larsen."

"What makes you think—"

"She called this number on March sixteenth, a few days before her abusive husband was freed from jail. A day or two later, some woman came to the house and drove Emily Larsen away. Her husband has died. I need to talk with her."

"What happy news?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"That the bastard is dead. It makes my job a lot easier, and Emily's life. Not that she will see it that way, poor thing, but truth to tell she would have gone back to him eventually, and eventually he would have killed her. Much better this way."

“Um.” In Kate’s experience, lawyers did not speak so frankly, certainly not to a cop. “Right. You are representing her, then? May I have her address, please?”

“I am representing her, yes, and I think it would be better if I continued to do so by asking you to come here to interview her in my presence. She’s living in a shelter, and it’s better if the residents don’t feel invaded. I could bring her to you, if you’d prefer, Inspector.”

Kate reflected for a moment before deciding that if the much-abused Emily Larsen had nothing to do with her husband’s death, it would not help matters to drag her downtown, whereas if she did, keeping the first interview away from police territory would give the woman a false sense of security that might come in useful later.

“I’ll come there,” she said. “What time?”

They agreed to two o’clock at Lomax’s law offices south of Market Street. Kate took her heels off her desk, brought the paperwork for that report and a couple of others up to date, and went home for lunch, a rare occurrence.

At two o’clock, while Al Hawkin was bracing himself for the first cut of the pathologist’s knife into the body of James Larsen, Kate rang the bell at the entrance of the anonymous building. As Kate thoughtfully eyed the dents and bashes in the surface of the stout metal door, the speaker set over the bell crackled to life, and the same secretarial voice she had heard before declared, “Law offices.”

“Inspector Kate Martinelli to see Ms. Lomax.” She lifted her face to the camera lens concealed in the reaches of the entranceway, and was buzzed in.

Half a mile north of this address, law offices meant marble, polished oak, smoked mirrors, abstract art, and a size-five receptionist with a daily manicure. Here it meant industrial-quality carpeting, white walls in need of a touch-up, museum posters in drugstore frames, and a size-sixteen secretary with short, unpainted nails on her skilled hands. She also had a waist-length braid keeping her graying brown hair in order, no makeup to

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speak of, skin too pale to have spent time out of doors, and a large basket of toys next to her desk. The woman fixed Kate with a gaze that had seen it all.

“Have a seat,” she offered, though it sounded more like an order. “Carla will be here in a minute.”

“That’s a good security setup,” Kate commented, remaining on her feet. “Do you have a lot of problems here?” SoMa was not the most crime-free part of town by any means, and that door had been the victim of at least one determined assault.

“It’s because we have security that we haven’t had problems.”

“Angry husbands?”

“And boyfriends and fathers. They pound away until the cops get here, making fools of themselves for the camera.” She glanced at the monitors with amused but slightly bitter satisfaction, and Kate, reflecting that the odds were high the woman had once needed the services of a women’s advocate lawyer herself, moved around the desk as if the glance had been an invitation. Peering over the secretary’s shoulder, she saw the displays of four security cameras. Two showed a small parking area; as Kate watched, a light-colored, boxy Mercedes sedan at least ten years old pulled through an opening gate on one screen and parked on one of a half-dozen spaces shown on the next. From the car stepped two women, the driver sorting through her keys as she approached the building until the all-seeing secretary pressed a button and freed the door.

Kate walked up and down for a few minutes, trying to get an impression of the law offices. Casual seemed to be the unifying decorative theme, beginning with the untidy forest of objects on the receptionist’s desk (two spindly plants; a flowered frame with the picture of a young girl; a delicate terra-cotta Virgin and Child; a figurine of an Indian goddess with a black face and golden crown; a three-inch-tall carved box representing a heap of cheerfully intertwined cats; a sprig of redwood cones; and a chipped coffee mug, stuffed with a handful of pens and pencils, that proclaimed “When

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God created man, She was only joking”). The works of art on the walls were similarly eclectic, with museum posters (Monet and Van Gogh) adjoining framed crayon studies (stick figures and box houses) and one competent and very original tempera study of a woman and two children, done with a deft hand in pleasing tones of green and blue. In the corner were the initials P W, and Kate was just thinking that Lee would like this when Carla Lomax came into the room to shake Kate’s hand and lead her back into the building. As Kate followed, she glanced into the other rooms. There looked to be a couple of other partners in the firm, neither of them at their desks. Between two unoccupied offices was a meeting room with a large round wooden table that took up so much of the floor space, it must have been assembled in the room. On the wall a striking black and white poster caught Kate’s eye, the blown-up photograph of a woman with a swollen mouth and two black eyes, a bandage on her scalp, and a cast on one hand, gazing tiredly at the camera. Underneath her image were printed the words, *But he loves me*. Kate wasn’t sure if it was meant to be a joke; if so, it was a bleak one.

Carla Lomax stepped into the next office, sat behind her desk, and waved Kate at a chair across from her. Again Kate remained on her feet. Two could play games in the world of legal give-and-take.

“I thought we might have a word before I bring Emily in,” Lomax told her. “Just so we’re in agreement here.”

“What is there to agree about?” Kate asked, half turned away from Lomax to study an attractive arrangement of framed photographs of the City at night, gaudy North Beach, Chinatown shimmering in the rain.

“Emily Larsen has just lost her husband. She does not need to be harassed.”

Kate took a step over to the next display of photos, an assortment of scenes from foreign countries: a woman in a market, brilliant colors in her shawl and a bowler hat on her head; three thin but laughing chil-

dren playing in a street with a bicycle rickshaw behind them; a woman seated at a backstrap loom, a weaving of vibrant oranges, pinks, and greens emerging from the threads.

“These are nice,” Kate commented. “Where are they from?”

“Bolivia, India, and Guatemala.”

“Did you take them?”

“Yes,” the lawyer said. “Inspector Martinelli—”

“Ms. Lomax, how much criminal law have you done since you passed your exams?”

“Not a lot.”

“Mostly family law, right?”

“I know my law,” Lomax said, offended.

“I’m sure you do. But please, rest assured that so do I, and I don’t go around screwing with family members; it jeopardizes both my job and my cases. Let’s just bring Mrs. Larsen in and let me talk with her, and then I’ll let you both be.”

As Kate had suspected, Carla Lomax was more at home with the intricacies of divorce, child custody, and restraining orders than she was with Miranda rights and criminal investigations. The lawyer hesitated, but in the end she stood up and went to fetch Emily Larsen.

Kate continued to wander around the room, moving from the photos to a display of ethnic dolls and trucks on a low shelf (the better to distract the children of clients?), an impressive bookshelf of legal and psychological tomes, and finally a glass case containing female figures from all over—a grimacing Aztec goddess giving birth to the sun, a multiple-breasted female who looked vaguely Mediterranean next to a woman in wide skirts holding a pair of snakes, the Polish Black Virgin, and the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe. Prominently displayed in front was a crude dark-skinned figure six inches tall, with many arms, bare breasts, and a protruding tongue: wild-eyed and wild-haired, the figure wore a necklace of grinning skulls and held a decapitated head in one of her hands. Kate, nonplussed, could

only wonder what Carla Lomax's troubled clients made of their lawyer's art collection.

The door opened and Carla came in with Emily Larsen, and Kate shook her hand and introduced herself, sitting down with the two women in a group of chairs and making remarks about the weather and traffic to put Emily at ease.

In fact, though, Kate was always uncomfortable around victims of chronic spousal abuse, those walking reminders of the vulnerability of women—particularly those weighed down with children. Intellectually, professionally, she fully understood that a person's willingness to put up with abuse had its roots deep in childhood, when a groundwork of self-contempt and a deep sense of worthlessness was laid down, feelings that made it nearly impossible to stand up to bullying. As a person, however, as a woman, Kate felt primarily frustration and impatience, and even a tinge of completely unfounded revulsion, at their weakness, their willingness to crawl back like beaten dogs to lick the hand of their tormentor. When confronted by a woman who persisted in an abusive relationship, Kate inevitably found herself stifling the question, Why hadn't the woman just hauled off and brained her husband with a skillet?

But then again, maybe this one had.

Everything about the recent widow in front of Kate was apologetic and unassuming, from her limp handshake to her slumped shoulders. The heavy frames of her cheap glasses nearly hid the washed-out brown of her eyes, her face was a pale contrast to the flat black of hair that showed gray at the roots, and the drab cotton dress that hung over her dumpy figure had been washed to the point of colorlessness. Kate began by expressing her sympathies over the loss of her husband; Emily Larsen responded by wincing, her eyes filling. Kate sighed quietly to herself.

"Ms. Larsen . . . Emily. I believe that Ms. Lomax has told you that your husband was killed, on Monday night or Tuesday morning? That he was murdered?"

Kate waited for a response from the woman before she went on, expecting either a meek nod or silent tears. What she saw instead made her sit back sharply, the usual string of questions cut short. A small grimace had puckered up Emily Larsen's mouth—brief, but clear. Why on earth would the woman react to Kate's words with *disapproval*? But what else looked like that? Could it have been an objection to the tasteless word "murder"? Kate wondered. She wished Al were here. With all her instincts set to quivering by that involuntary moue across the woman's face, she would have to proceed very carefully.

"Were you and James separated, Mrs. Larsen?"

"A trial separation," Emily admitted in a small voice.

"Your husband had a history of abusing you. Was that the main reason?"

"I was . . . yes."

"You were afraid of him, I do understand. He hit you, didn't he?"

Emily glanced at Carla, mouth open as if to protest, but she subsided and only nodded.

"Did he hit your kids as well?"

The woman looked up quickly. "Never. He wouldn't. Jimmy's—Jimmy was a good man. He loved us, he really did. He just . . . lost control sometimes."

"When he was drinking."

Another nod.

"Did you ever get the feeling that your husband was involved with someone outside the home?"

"Involved? You mean, like with another woman?"

The very idea was enough to shake Emily Larsen in a way nothing else had.

Kate hastened to reassure her that her loving husband hadn't been taking it elsewhere, so far as she knew.

"Not necessarily a woman. Gambling, maybe, going to the races, perhaps something mildly illegal that he wouldn't have wanted you to find out about?"

"I really don't know. There's nothing I can think of,

and Jimmy never went away much except to work and bowling and stuff. And someone having . . . you know, an affair, they always say they're working overtime, don't they?"

"Did your husband ever have money that wasn't explained by his salary?"

"No," Emily replied, reassured that Kate wasn't about to spring a rival on her, but obviously bewildered by the questions. Kate let it go. A baggage handler behind the scenes at a busy airport might have opportunity for crime, but if Larsen had indulged in smuggling or rifling bags, he had kept it from his wife. Kate would try another tack.

"Mrs. Larsen, did your husband come up to San Francisco a lot?"

"No. He never did."

"Never?"

"Except for the airport, of course, and to Candlestick or whatever they're calling it now. He mostly liked football, but he'd go to baseball games if he could get cheap tickets. And if he was going to Oakland, he'd go through the City even if he came back around the Bay. To save on the bridge fare, you know? Jimmy hated to pay the fare." Toll on the Bay's various bridges was collected only one way, although as far as Kate knew, it was cheaper to pay it than to drive clear around the Bay. James Larsen may have been one who resented the fare enough to spend the gas money, and an hour longer on the road, to avoid paying it.

"So you have no idea what he was doing in the Presidio on Monday night?"

Emily shook her head, as much in wonder as to indicate a negative. "It seems a strange place for Jimmy to go."

"Was he a golfer?" Kate asked desperately, thinking of the Presidio golf course—although Larsen had not been dressed for golf any more than he had been for jogging. Emily looked as if Kate had suggested nude sunbathing or jai alai, and told her no.

No drugs on the body, no unexplained cash, no ex-

tramarital entertainment on the side. Larsen's death was proving more and more enigmatic. "Mrs. Larsen," Kate said finally, "do you have any idea why someone would have wanted to kill your husband?" she asked, and for the second time Emily Larsen's answer gave Kate a jolt. This time the woman looked directly into Kate's face, her eyes theatrically wide.

"No. Of course not," she said. "Who would want to kill Jimmy?"

She had all the guile of a child, her lie so blatant Kate couldn't help glancing at the lawyer. Carla Lomax was sitting motionless in her chair, working hard at not reacting to her client's words, but Kate had the distinct impression that the lawyer was as dismayed by Emily's response as Kate was.

At that juncture Kate had two choices. She could press Emily Larsen until the woman came clean or broke down—or, more likely, until Lomax put a halt to it. If Kate knew what was going on, if she even had a clear suspicion of what lay behind Emily's odd evasiveness, she would not hesitate to push, but there were times when it was better to pull away and go do some research, and all Kate's instincts were telling her this was one of them. Find out who Emily Larsen was and what pushed her levers, and with that weapon in hand, come back and pin her to the wall.

Kate arranged an expression of openness on her face, and nodded as if in acceptance of the answer. "When was the last time you talked to Jimmy?"

"About, oh, a week ago?" She looked at Carla Lomax, who knew better than to give her an answer. "It was—oh right, it was last Tuesday. I called to let him know I was okay, and not to forget that the gas man was coming the next day to check a leak I'd smelled. We didn't talk much. I asked him how he was and told him I was okay, and he said when was I coming home and I said I wasn't, and then he started getting mad and so I just hung up on him," she said proudly, and then spoiled the effect by letting out a sad, deflating little sigh halfway to being a whimper, and adding paren-

thetically, "I don't even know if he stayed home to let the gas man in."

"So you didn't call your husband on Monday?"

"Oh no, I sure didn't."

"And you didn't talk to anyone else who might have told him where you were? A neighbor, maybe? Or a friend you saw in the street?"

"I didn't see anyone, no."

"Where were you on Monday night, Mrs. Larsen?"

Kate slipped the question in as if it had no more weight than the others, and Emily answered it before her lawyer could stir in her chair.

"I was staying at a shelter that Carla set up for me. I'm still there."

"And did you leave at all, any time after, say, six on Monday night?"

"No, I don't think so. No, I'm sure I didn't—there was a meeting and then I stayed up talking to some people until, golly, near midnight."

Kate slapped her notebook shut before Carla Lomax could voice an objection.

"We'd like to borrow the keys to your house, Mrs. Larsen. We need to do a search, to see if your husband may have had visitors or something. We won't disturb anything, and we'll be out of the way before you get back."

Carla Lomax automatically began to protest Kate's need for a warrant, but Emily, in a rare gesture of assertiveness, overrode her. "I really don't mind, Carla. I think I'd rather they were in and out before I got there. Instead of standing there watching them go through his stuff, you know."

Another indicator that Emily was more than she appeared, this ready grasp of the intrusiveness of a police search. Kate studied her thoughtfully as Emily took a set of keys out of her purse and handed the whole ring over to Kate. Kate wrote out a receipt for them and stood up to go.

"I'll phone you later this afternoon," Kate told the woman, "to make arrangements to get these back to

you and let you know how things are going. Will you be at the shelter?"

"Oh. Well, I suppose I could meet you at the house, when you're finished, if I can get a ride. There's no reason not to go home now, is there?"

Looking at Emily Larsen's bleak attempt at a smile, despite the woman's deceptions Kate could have sworn that she was only now coming to realize that her husband was out of her life. "We have no objection to your returning there, if that's what you're asking, and I would be happy to arrange a ride if it would help. Thank you, Mrs. Larsen. Here's my card, let me know if I can do anything for you. Ms. Lomax, could I have a word, please?"

Carla Lomax followed Kate out to the hallway, shutting the office door behind them.

"I'd rather not tell you the location of the shelter," she began immediately, but Kate put up a hand to stop her.

"I wasn't going to ask you, although I probably know already. What I wanted to say, Carla," she said mildly, letting her gaze stray to a child's drawing of a purple cat on the opposite wall, "is that your client seems to know more about her husband's death than she was willing to say, and it might be a good idea for you to have a little discussion with her on the difference between not answering a question and obstructing justice. Before we get into the realm of actual perjury, that is."

Kate gave her a smile as insincere as Emily Larsen's declaration of ignorance, and left.

Back at the Hall of Justice, Kate handed the Larsen keys over to Crime Scene, booted up her computer, and got to work. Hawkin came in an hour later sucking at a peppermint, his thinning hair giving off the aura of the lemon shampoo he habitually used after witnessing an autopsy. She asked him what the pathologist had found.

“Rigor might have been delayed by fat, might have been speeded by a struggle, but the internal temp confirmed time of death between nine-thirty and eleven-thirty Monday night. Cause of death strangulation. No obvious sign of drug use. So far absolutely zilch at the crime scene. Not even a tire track. Oh, and the tech was right, that was a taser burn on Larsen’s chest. Person or persons zapped him, cuffed him, tied a red cotton scarf around his neck, and pulled it tight. Exit one wife-beater.”

The lab work—blood, organs, fibers, and fingernail scrapings—would take days; there was no need for him to tell her that.

“Speaking of the wife,” Kate told him, “I think there’s something hinky about her.”

“Hinky?” Hawkin had gone to the coffeepot and paused in the act of holding the carafe up to the light to judge its drinkability. “What’s ‘hinky’ mean, anyway?”

“Odd. Strange. Out of whack. You know.”

“I don’t know. You’ve been watching that TV cop show again, haven’t you? You’re worse than Jules.”

“What’s wrong with the way Jules talks?” Hawkin’s brilliant teenaged stepdaughter was undeniably a handful, but Kate was very fond of her.

“Nothing, unless you want English. So, Ms. Larsen’s hinky. Would you care to elaborate?”

“I was about to, until you started going hinky on me. She looks like a typical Betsy Homemaker whose husband liked to slap her around on Friday nights, but she’s hiding something about the murder itself. I mean, I’d say she’s honestly sorry about his death, God knows why, but she’s more annoyed by the actual murder than horrified or in denial or any of the usual reactions. Plus that, when I asked if she knew who did it, she suddenly went all big-eyed and innocent. Even her lawyer thought it was weird.”

“Big-eyed and innocent like she did it, or like she knows who did?”

“I think she knows, or suspects anyway. She herself has an alibi—there was a meeting Monday night at the

shelter, and after it broke up she sat around until nearly midnight talking. I've been trying to find out about her, but there's not much there. She's never been arrested, never even had a traffic violation."

"People close to her?"

"I was just getting started on tracking down her family, but she doesn't seem to have had any real friends. Not among the neighbors we talked to, anyway."

"Doesn't sound like the kind to know a couple of guys who'd be willing to bash the hubby for three hundred bucks. Still, you never know. See what you can find, and then tomorrow we can go back down and talk to the neighbors again. Those people across the street should be back by then."

"So should Emily Larsen."

"We can talk to her, too."

They settled in for a session of keyboards and telephones. Hawkin was on the phone to James Larsen's supervisor at the airport when he heard a sharp exclamation from Kate's desk, and looked up to see a triumphant expression on her face. He finished the call and hung up.

"Was that a 'bingo' I heard?" he asked, scribbling a note to himself.

"My Catholic upbringing showing. Emily Larsen's brother is one of your basic bad boys. Name's Cash Strickland. In and out of trouble since juvy, just got out of prison in January for aggravated assault. The original charge was murder one, but he got off with a hung jury, and the DA took a plea instead of working through a retrial on the murder rap. Strickland's on parole in San Jose."

"Nice and close. Want to go talk with him tonight?"

Kate glanced at her watch. "The traffic will be hell, and I wanted to be home for an early dinner. Roz Hall and her partner, Maj, are coming over."

"The minister and the monkey's mother."

"Right. In fact, I'd bet Roz knows about women's shelters. Maybe I'll pick her brains over dinner, see

what she knows about one Carla Lomax, attorney-at-law.”

“Now, that ought to make Lee happy,” Al said dryly.

“Some casual, general conversation, that’s all.”

“Sure. Tomorrow, then. We can do Larsen’s neighbors on the way back. Want me to call Strickland’s parole officer?”

“I’ll do it—he’s a guy I knew when I worked down there. What do you think—make an appointment with Strickland, or sneak up on him?”

“I’d say talk to the PO, find out what he thinks. Of course, if you make a date with Strickland and he bolts, that tells us something, too.”

“True. What did the airport supervisor say?”

“He gave Larsen back his job when he got out, and Larsen lasted exactly one week before showing up drunk. The supervisor fired him.”

“All in all, not a great month for Jimmy Larsen,” Kate commented, and picked up the phone to call the parole officer assigned to Emily Larsen’s brother with the violent past, the brother whose life went far to explain his sister’s easy familiarity with arrest proceedings and the terminology of alibi and search.