

The Lost Mission

John Frain

John Frain
189 Keswick Drive
New Albany, OH 43054
johnfrain@mac.com
www.greathousestories.com
www.desertscreenwritersgroup.com

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1. The Best Laid Plans

After twenty years with the San Francisco Police Department I was looking forward to retirement from my position as Assistant Chief of Detectives. I had accumulated a good pension and had no more plans than to lead a quiet life of wine making and hiking up in the Sonoma wine country. A real estate agent friend had scouted out some little places for me in the Valley of the Moon and I was ready to put a down payment on one of them.

However, as the old saying goes, the best laid plans of mice and men often go astray. It was only a few weeks before my retirement when the police pension plan was discovered to be close to bankrupt. You probably heard the story in the news. There was an investigation and the bottom line was that the people who managed our pension made some bad investment decisions.

All of a sudden, my "best laid" plan to retire to the wine country had gone "astray" and a lot of us retiring members of the police department scrambled to find other jobs that could bring in some money during our golden

years. There was a sudden surge of my fellow detectives into security and investigation businesses in the Bay Area.

But I needed to get out of San Francisco. It was too expensive to live in without a full-time salary. And besides, much of the romance of the city was gone after all of the homicides and crimes I investigated over the years. I could be in some quiet little coffee house in North Beach and think about the murder at the flat across the street. I could be on the ferry over to Sausalito and see the body of a young murdered girl floating in the bay.

A cousin who lived in Salt Lake City heard I was out of work and needed a job and suggested I try Salt Lake City. I drove to Utah last spring and lived with him a few weeks until I got a little apartment. I found that I really liked the area. It was a lot less expensive than San Francisco and everything was new and fresh as the snow on top of the Wasatch Mountains to the east of the city. I leased a little office space in a mall next to a Chinese take-out place and hung up my shingle: "American Investigation Services." It wasn't the most creative name but I couldn't think of anything else and I wanted to get my cards printed and get a little money coming in. I started running in the mornings again and hiking in the mountains over the weekends, getting myself back in shape.

I got a nice little notice in the papers about my business and my background and before long there was a steady stream of clients. Nothing like the hardcore work of homicide investigations and fraud stuff I had pursued in San Francisco. Mostly softer cases like a cheating spouse or identity theft. It wasn't going to get me that place in the wine country but then again it was bringing in some money.

As my new life in Salt Lake City developed, I stayed in touch with a number of my old friends in the San Francisco Police Department. Things are going high-tech in the police department my friend Sheila told me. With the rise of terrorism, Chief Mulhune had invested in a lot of new technology.

"He has this magic black bus," Sheila said. "It's supposed to be able to sniff out terrorists in large crowds like an electric bloodhound."

News of terrorism was on the television news every night and all over the Internet. America had just invaded the ISIS forces in some town near the Turkish border and there was talk of some retaliation from them.

But I was happy to start a new life among the clean-living Mormons and leave all the serious police work behind in San Francisco.

2. Miranda Is Missing

One day in early September I was at the office finishing up paper work on a domestic case when I got a call from a frantic father whose daughter had just run away from home. He and his wife wanted to see me immediately and gave me an address in one of the best neighborhoods in town. I told him I had some work to finish up but the caller was insistent that I come over immediately. I could hear anxiety and fear in his voice so I left the office and drove to his home.

It was in the south part of Salt Lake City, in the hills of the Wasatch Mountains. Wide streets and large trees and lawns that spread out with colorful gardens that spread out in an explosion of colors like the open plumes of peacocks. A small army of gardeners and service people worked up and down the streets keeping everything beautiful. I had been in Salt Lake City to know that many of the movers and shakers of the city lived here. The

frantic call came from a man named Ben Henderson, the billionaire founder and President of Henderson Industries, the international conglomerate.

The Henderson place was on top of its own private hill. A driveway wound around wide gardens and a large pond with a few swans and ended in front of a huge brick home with ivy running up the sides of it. I had just gotten out of my car when the front door opened and a tall, dignified man with white hair came down the front steps to greet me. I judged him to be in his late 60s or early 70s.

"You must be John Dugan," he said. "I'm Ben Henderson. Thanks for coming on such short notice."

"No problem," I said.

"You've got quite a background," he said as he walked me into his home. "San Francisco detective. We don't get many of these in Salt Lake City."

"Probably a good thing," I said. "They're not the nicest group of people."

I followed him through the big entry way and through the house and then into his office. An attractive woman greeted us. She was maybe in her mid-60s but she had one of those faces age had pretty much left alone. Her eyes were watery and she held a handkerchief in her hand. I could tell that she had been crying. Ben Henderson introduced his

wife Myrna to me and in a few seconds I was sitting across from them in the office and things were all business. Ben Henderson handed me a photograph of a pretty young blond girl who couldn't have been older than twenty.

"Our twenty-year old daughter Miranda," he said. "Our only child. After high school, she got her 'call to serve' and went on her mission to Liberia. There is a strong tradition of missionary service in the Church. The Savior taught in Matthew 28:19 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations'. Church members consider it a privilege to show their love for other people and the Lord by sharing the gospel."

"We got letters from her weekly for the first six months," Ben Henderson said. "And then the letters fell off. As is the custom with Mormons on a mission, she called us last Christmas and we talked for a while. We could detect something different in her voice."

"That's all she called?" I asked.

"Missionaries are only allowed a few calls home each year so we weren't surprised we only got the one call," said Myrna Henderson.

"We did hear from one of her missionary companions that they were concerned about her and felt that she had lost her testimony," said Ben Henderson.

"Lost her testimony?" I asked.

"This happens when a Mormon on a mission loses their faith in the church," Myrna Henderson said. "It doesn't happen often but it does happen."

"We tried contacting her but got no response," Ben Henderson said. "We got a letter from one of her missionary companions that she had left Liberia. They didn't know where she went. We hired an investigator who went over to look for her but he found nothing. Of course we got more and more concerned."

"Then, a week ago, she showed up on our doorstep," Myrna Henderson said. "Just showed up without any warning. She was distant but there was also something new in her. A new passion I had never in her before."

"She's been staying with us this past week coming and going at all hours of the day and night," Ben Henderson said. "We tried to find out what had happened over there but it was impossible to get anything out of her. Some of her old girlfriends came by to visit but she had no interest in them anymore."

"Late this morning, Myrna called me at my office and said Miranda was gone." Ben Henderson said. "She took the Mercedes and just left. Fifteen minutes later I got a call

from our bank that Miranda had withdrawn a hundred thousand dollars from her account."

"Lots of money for a young girl," I said.

"We put it into her account so that she could use it to live on during her missionary work but she never tapped into it until today."

"Any idea where she might be headed?" I asked.

"California comes to mind," Myrna said. "We spent a lot of time out there when she was young. She loved the diversity of the state."

"Any particular place in California?" I asked.

"Not really," Myrna said. "She loved a lot of places in California."

"If she's driving to California, Interstate 80 would be the most logical route," I said.

"Yes, it would," Ben Henderson said.

"I need to look at her room," I said.

We left the office and went up the winding steps to the second floor. I had the feeling of being on a small ocean liner. Her room was large but almost barren. Some clothing hung in the closet but her mother said it had not been touched since she arrived home. Her desk was emptied of everything. It was hard to believe anyone had occupied the room.

"Not much to go on is there," Ben Henderson said.

The three of us stood surveying the room. He was right. There was not much to go on in the room. As we were ready to leave the room I noticed a small scrap of paper on the floor. On it was scribbled "Highway 50." This was all. Just the words Highway 50. I showed the piece of paper to her parents.

"Mean anything?" I asked.

"We used to drive to California and take Highway 50 through Nevada to California," Ben Henderson said. "Off the beaten track but a beautiful road. Miranda loved the road."

"I've made a few trips across it," I said. "Called the loneliest road in America."

"Yes," said Ben Henderson. "You can go for miles without seeing a car."

We went down to the office. Ben Henderson said he wanted to retain my services to find his daughter. He wrote out a check for \$25,000. It was more money than I had seen in a long time and I struggled to maintain my professional composure.

"I'll need some things from you," I told them. "I need the make and license plate of the Mercedes. I need a list of her friends. A sample of her handwriting. Her cell phone

number. Her credit card information. A physical description of Miranda and a recent photo of her."

"She doesn't use a credit card or a cell phone," Myrna Henderson said. "I know this sounds strange in this age but she always carries cash and has those little throw away cell phones you buy at drug stores. I can put together a list of her friends and email them to you later. There are really only a few friends."

She went out of the room and came back in a few minutes with the license and model of the Mercedes, a photo of her and some letters Miranda had written to her parents from her mission and gave them to me. A stunning blond girl was in the photo. It might be a head shot for a model but there was little happiness in the face. It maintained a stone expression with a distracted, distant look.

"What's the next step?" Ben Henderson asked.

"How long has she been gone for?" I asked.

"A few hours," Myrna Henderson said.

"Of course the natural thing to do would be to call the police and issue a missing person report," I offered.

"Have the highway patrol be on the lookout for her.

Ben Henderson shook his head.

"We don't want the police involved right now," he said. "I want to keep it out of the papers as long as

possible. We don't need the publicity. That's why I called you."

I looked at my watch. It was one o'clock in the afternoon.

"I'm going to go back to my place and toss some things into a bag and then drive south and hit Highway 50 in Ely, Nevada. Maybe I can pick up her trail. It's not much but it's all we've got right now."

Outside the big home it was a scorching day even in the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains where the Henderson place was located. It was going to be hot as hell on Highway 50 across the middle of Nevada.

As I drove back to my apartment I went over the things I had so far. A twenty-year-old daughter of a billionaire in a Mercedes with a hundred thousand dollars on her, maybe heading to California, maybe on a two-lane highway through the barren desert of Nevada on a hot summer day. No credit cards or cell phone to trace her by. No electronic trail in our age of digital everything. It wasn't much to go on. A lot less than I usually had. Almost everyone leaves a digital trail these days. But Miranda would probably not leave one. There was the Mercedes she was driving. It would have been easy to call an old friend of mine in the California Highway Patrol and have him issue an APB for the

Mercedes. But this would make front-page news and Henderson didn't want this. It seemed funny that he was more concerned about publicity than using all means to find his daughter. But the super-wealthy are like this but it did make me wonder about his relationship with his daughter.

3. The Loneliest Road in America

The place was one of those spots in the middle of the desert that existed simply to put gas in cars and a little food or liquid in the mouths of passing motorists. The next gas station was a hundred miles away and it made sense to stop and fill your tank up, check the water in your radiator and maybe have a cold Coke and a sandwich before continuing westward in the brutal heat of the Nevada desert over the jagged distant mountains to the west.

I pushed the pump into my dusty blue Buick, opened the hood of the car and checked the water with a rag wrapped around my hand. The radiator hissed like a snake and I put some water in and then went into a place across the little two-lane road that simply said "Café" in faded red lettering. A few cars were parked in front of it with out-of-state license plates on them. Utah. Colorado. Nebraska. People passing through the town from places far away like me.

An old air-conditioner rumbled inside trying its best to put some cool air into circulation but it was losing the battle. A fan overhead pushed the hot air around. There were a few old chrome and yellow Formica tables and a small counter. A young couple sat at one of the tables sipping Cokes and looking like characters in a zombie movie. I guessed they were heading out to California to start a new life. Two people were at the counter. One was a guy nursing a beer who had the tired, lonely look of a traveling salesman. The other was a young kid attacking a greasy hamburger like he hadn't had food in days.

I sat down on a stool at the end of the counter and the heavysset woman behind the counter tossed a piece of paper in front of me that had a few things typed on it and the word "Menu" at the top. She didn't look too happy to see me and wasn't trying to win any popularity contest.

"Don't get too fancy on me," she grumbled. "It's too hot to get the grill going again."

"Just a beer," I said.

She took a bottle of beer from a refrigerator that was rumbling like the air-conditioning, twisted the cap and plopped it down in front of me. I took a long draw on. It wasn't very cold but tasted good going down my dry throat. I hadn't had anything to drink for almost two hundred miles

since leaving Provo this morning. When the beer was finished I ordered another and then opened up my wallet and took out my business card and pushed it across the table at the big woman. She pulled some thick glasses out of her apron and stared at the card for a few seconds, mouthing the words like someone just learning to read.

"American Investigations," she said slowly. "You're a detective?"

"More or less," I said.

"What are you trying to detect?" she asked.

I pulled out the photo of the girl and placed it on the counter next to my card.

"Seen her through here?"

The big woman studied the photo for a few seconds and then shook her head.

"No," she said. "The face is not familiar. And I would remember a face like that. A real looker she is."

I got up and put a few dollars on the table and thanked her and then walked towards the door.

"You might try my husband at the gas station," she said. "They don't always come in here to eat."

"I'll do that," I said.

Outside, the sun was like an overhead heat lamp. An old thermometer in the shade on the side of the gas station

said 120. The two-lane road was empty in both directions without a car in sight. I walked across the road and into the gas station office. An old man sat behind a desk reading something.

I pulled out my card again and then tossed the photo of the girl towards him.

"Your wife told me you might have seen her come through," I said.

He studied the photo.

"I don't always see people who come through," he said. "You know how it is with this new fangled pay at the pump stuff. Some pay at the pump and don't have to give me cash. They just stop at the pumps and then are gone."

He kept looking at the photo.

"But I did see her," he said. "She paid cash for her gasoline."

The words grabbed me. It was the first indication since Salt Lake City I was on her trail.

"Are you sure?"

"You don't forget a face like that," he said.

"How long ago?" I asked

He looked at a dusty clock on the wall.

"Maybe three hours ago," he said.

"She say anything to you?" I asked.

"Asked how far to Reno," he said.

"That's all?" I asked.

"That's all," he said.

I thanked him and went out and jumped in the Buick and pushed the accelerator down and headed west towards the jagged mountains and Reno. I was pretty sure she would spend the night in Reno. But Reno is a big city and the odds of me finding her were much worse than any odds in the casinos. Still, it was something.

In a few minutes I had the Buick up to a hundred. I didn't want to push it anymore in the heat. The road was as straight as an arrow heading for the mountains in the distance.

I pulled out my cellphone and called my old detective friend Max from the San Francisco Police Department. Like me, he was forced to retire and had no pension so he had started a detective business in Reno. I filled him in on the basics of the case.

"She went through a little spot in the road a few hours ago," I said. "Heading towards Reno. Driving a late model dark Mercedes. License plate Utah Z76-9CK. I think it's a good bet she'll spend the night in Reno. Been a long, hot day of driving for her. Pretty sure she'll spend the night there. She'll need some rest."

"You make some big requests," Max said. "A young girl in a Mercedes. Reno is not a big city but it's big when you're looking for one girl and a car."

"Sorry Max but that's all I have to go on right now. I'll call you when I get to Reno."

"You're staying with me tonight," he said. "I've got a good couch."

"I'll take you up on take offer," I said. "Give me a call if they come up with anything. I'll be in Reno in about four hours if my engine doesn't blow up."

In an hour I reached the foothills of the mountains and the road began to curve for the first time in maybe three hours. I wound up the mountain and was in something called Toiyabe National Forest. It wasn't much of a forest. Just a little cooler with a hint of green but no more than a hint.

I tried to get a station on the car radio but just got static. The static on the radio was about as clear as this case was to me.

4. Max's Place In Reno

Reno sits in a valley with the Sierras to the west and the Virginia Range to the east. You wind down from the Virginia Mountains into the city. It was seven when I reached the outskirts the city. The lights of the big casino signs could be seen in the distance throwing neon into the twilight sky.

I drove to Max Miller's place on the west side of town. He had been one of my key detective assistants in the San Francisco Police Department. Someone who had pulled my ass out of the fire more than once. He was the best but like a lot of us in the department he was forced to start a business in his 60s when the pension fund went belly-up. He loved to ski and hike and gamble and Reno seemed the place to start a new career for him. Like me, he had recently retired from the department after receiving almost every commendation possible.

Max was never married. The perpetual bachelor. He had purchased a condo in a young swinging complex and we sat out by the pool on the warm September night and watched young girls with tiny bikinis run around the pool giggling under palm trees with colored lights on them. Max had mixed a pitcher of Margaritas and after a few toasts to our new lives he settled down to watch the women around the pool.

"Don't get much better than this," he said.

"You've gotta good place," I said.

"How do you survive in that moralistic place called Salt Lake City?" he asked. "You're the farthest thing from a Mormon I've ever seen."

"It's not bad," I tell Max. "Keeps me honest."

"After all the wives," he says.

"Yeah," I agree. "After all the wives."

He was right. There had been four marriages that started with some degree of a spark and ended with nothing more than a quick farewell that was not much more than the short note Miranda left her parents. Like Miranda, they had all disappeared without any forwarding address.

"So we have a missing Mormon girl from a wealthy family," Max says.

"That's about it," I tell him. "Something happened to her on her mission. Something that changed her. Her parents want her back. Get back the daughter they once had."

"She's heading for California?" Max asks.

"Maybe," I tell him. "It is a place she has good memories about. But nothing is sure. The only thing that is close to sure, and it isn't that close, is that she might be in Reno tonight."

"What about credit cards and cell phones?" Max asks.

"Doesn't use credit cards and only uses throw away cell phones," I say. "Has a hundred thousand in cash on her."

"Doesn't want to be tracked," Max says.

"Yeah, that's for sure," I say.

"Why?" he asks. "She's just a kid. Why all the elaborate cover-up?" Max asks.

"You always have good questions," I tell him. "The same ones I have."

Max then pulls out a printout of all the hotels and motels in Reno and hands it to me.

"Checked all the places in town and no Miranda Henderson registered at any of them," he says.

"Not surprising. She might be young but she's probably smart enough to give some fictitious name when she checks in."

"Might be staying with friends," Max says. "I think we should check for any friends in Reno."

"Maybe," I say, "but according to her parents she's pretty much rejected all of them. I think it's more likely she simply gave a fictitious name when she checked in."

I pulled out the letters she wrote her parents and handed them to Max.

"We have her handwriting," I tell him. "You can't get away from your handwriting."

Max held the letters in his hand and smiled.

"I'll run it through the new system," he says.

"I was hoping you'd say that," I tell him.

But before he did this we had another couple Margueritas by the pool and Max was invited to a party by one of the young girls at the pool. She called him "Detective Max" and it was obvious he loved being called this name and I wondered what romantic stories about detective life he had filled her brain with.

We went back inside his condo about ten that night and Max threw on steak on his barbeque overlooking the pool. He

talked of going out to the casinos but I somehow talked him out of it.

After dinner, he fed the letters into the scanner in his office at his condo. It went into a new system that the department was just developing when I left San Francisco called "Scribe Scan" that matched handwriting with names in a similar way that fingerprints and eye scans matched things together. It was another tool from Smith Security Systems in San Francisco, the leader in creating technologies to aid police. The chief loved all the latest technology and Smith Scribe Scan was one of his latest toys.

"Everyone has to write something when they check into a motel or hotel," Max said. "As you know, almost everyone is on the system. And I mean everyone whether they've got a criminal record or not."

"A handwriting DNA," I said.

"Yes," Max said. "A good way of putting it."

After the letters were scanned into the system we sat out on Max's patio and ate our steaks and a few more Marguerites and watched the young women around the pool below and talked in nostalgic terms about the old days being detectives in San Francisco. He kept on wanting to head down the road just a "few blocks" to the casino and I

kept telling him it was time to call it a night. It was not an easy thing to keep him away from the casinos but somehow I managed to do it.

We went to bed around midnight. I slept like a baby. It had been a long day. Starting out as just another day of searching for an unfaithful spouse or some act of identify theft and ending in Reno searching for a pretty young girl who had left a family of wealth in Salt Lake City.

5. A Dark Clue

The fifty Margueritas Max and I drank mixed with the stuff of dreams that night and I was back in San Francisco in my younger days, a romantic hero saving young virgins and helping old ladies get back at all the mean people in the world who double crossed them. There was enough of this to easily make it into a 24/7 business.

A little radio was blaring away next to the couch with a helicopter pilot talking about traffic problems in Reno. There was an accident here and stalled car there. It was a wonder the city could get up and running again for a new day.

I got up and put one of the little round things that said Espresso into Max's Keurig coffee maker and waited for it to pay out a strong cup of coffee for me. I could hear Max snoring in his bedroom. I took the cup of mud-like coffee and went out to his porch that overlooked the swimming pool. A pretty girl was taking a few laps and

looked up and waved at me. I waved back wondering what the hell I was doing living in that moralistic place called Salt Lake City. Maybe Max could use a roommate. We could make a good team.

As I sat on the porch watching the sun come up to the east, I could hear the ringing sound of a bell. I went inside Max's condo. It was coming from his telephone. He had a message. What the hell I thought. We're like brothers. I picked up the phone and pushed the message button.

There was a message from a guy with a heavy gruff voice.

"We ran the writing sample you sent," the voice said. "Came up with a place to put the writing to. The Golden Arms Motel. Room 159. Call if you need anything else."

The message made me wake up a lot more than the coffee and I went in and pulled Max out of bed.

"Toss some clothes on," I said. "We've got a place she was at last night. She might still be there."

We were in my Buick ten minutes later heading across town towards the Golden Arms Motel. The morning traffic was heavy but we reached the place in ten minutes. It was one of those motels on what people called motel row. Not any

better or worse than any of them. Just another motel you stopped at when you couldn't go any further.

The manager was a real asshole but lightened up when we flashed our badges at him and when Max grabbed his collar and told him he was going to beat the crap out of him if he didn't give him the key to room 159.

We went down the narrow little hallway and found room 159, opened the door and went inside. Another dumb room in a dumb motel I had seen too many (dumb) times in my life. No one was there. The bed was ruffled up. Someone had slept in it but only barely slept in it. We searched around the room for a few minutes but there was nothing to be found in it.

Max then pulled out his cell phone and made a call.

Half an hour later a short heavy-set woman arrived with a briefcase and began dusting the place for fingerprints. She looked like the little eccentric medium Tangina Barrons in the film *Poltergeist*. It was Sheila King, one of our top CSI people in San Francisco Police Department.

"So you've got a new life in Reno," I say to Sheila.

"Still in San Francisco with the department," she says. "Max has me up here for a few days on a case. You know how convincing Max can be."

She worked on the room for maybe half an hour and then packed up her tools.

"I'll get back to you in a few hours," Sheila said and was gone.

Max suggested we get a Bloody Mary at Harrah's Casino. My head was pounding from the Margueritas the night before but I said it sounded like the best idea of the moment.

We sat in one of the bars of Harrah's having Bloody Mary's waiting for the report from the CSI people. On Saturday morning the place was relatively slow with only a few hundred old ladies out there on the floor pushing coins into the slot machines. Sirens went off now and then with flashing red lights and the excitement seemed to spur on the old ladies to pushing more money into the machines. The whole endeavor of Harrah's seemed much more criminal than anything I had ever been involved with.

We had just finished our second Bloody Mary when Max's cell phone buzzed.

"Sheila's come up with something," Max said. "We'll meet her at my office."

Fifteen minutes later we were sitting in Max's office. It looked like something between a dental office and insurance office at this non-descript mall in a shady part of town. Next door was a pizza place and on the other side

some consignment furniture store. Sheila was already there waiting for us when we arrived. She had an excited look on her face. I noticed this because, knowing Sheila over the years, it took a lot to excite her.

"We dusted all the prints in the room," she said. "Your girl was one of them so this was no surprise. But we found another print in the room."

"So she hooked up with a friend," Max said.

"Yes, a friend," Sheila said. "But not just any old friend."

She took out some documents and some scientific graphs like I had seen her take out so many times over years I knew her. She didn't look like a top CSI investigator but more like an overweight woman who was a member of a book club in some suburb of a sleepy town. But she was one of the best investigators the department ever employed.

Sheila put a photo on Max's desk. It was the photo of a dark, angry bearded man. It was an attractive face. Even handsome but it was covered by a beard and long hair.

"Ashid Kolali," she said. "Ring a bell?"

The name hung in the air for a few seconds. Neither Max nor I were familiar with it.

"Should it?" I asked.

"You've been away from the department too long," she said.

"Fill us in," Max said.

"From Afghanistan," she said. "A known terrorist noted for making a new type of small super bomb. It's the first indication we have that he's in the states."

Max and I looked at the printout that went with the photo of Kolali. It went on for a few pages listing a number of bombings all through the Middle East in the past few years.

"Our little Mormon girl is keeping some rough company," I said.

"Why?" Max asked.

"It's a good question," I said. "There are lots of good questions."

Sheila got up and walked towards the door.

"All I've got so far," she said. "I'll see what else I can find."

"Thanks Sheila," said Max. "You're the best."

"I know," said Sheila and was gone.

* * *

The morning sun came through the slanted blinds in Max's office making it seem like a scene from one of those noir detective films from the 40s. Max and I sat silently for a few moments after Sheila was gone looking at the face of Ashid Kolali. It was a difficult face to look at, full of anger and hatred, capable of anything you could think of.

I pulled my cell phone out of my pocket and pushed a few numbers. Ben Henderson wanted to keep news out of this whole thing but it was no longer an option. When my friend with the California Highway Patrol answered I told him that he needed to issue an APB for the Mercedes Miranda was driving. I sent the photo of Miranda and Kalali to him from the scanner Max had in his office. The whole thing had suddenly become something a lot more serious than the runaway daughter of a billionaire.

After the call there was not much to do but wait. A few calls came into Max's office. The same kind of stuff I usually got in Utah: a jealous woman wanted her husband shadowed to see where he was going at night when he told her he was at the sports bar with his guy friends; an older woman who wanted to find a lost friend; a guy who was the victim of some door-to-door scandal. The usual stuff. I called and checked my messages. There was a voice mail from

Myrna Henderson that she had emailed me a list of Miranda's few closest friends.

Max made some calls, following up the voice mail messages he had. When he was finished he extracted a bottle from his desk and poured us a few drinks. We sat there nursing the drinks with the office striped by the morning sun through the blinds. He turned on the radio to a country and western station. He loved country and western music. I hated it.

"The Kalali connection might explain her disappearance from her mission in Liberia," Max said.

"It seems that way," I said.

"How the hell did she get to Afghanistan," Max wondered.

"Maybe he wasn't in Afghanistan," I offered. "Maybe he came to Liberia."

"A leading terrorist with a billionaire's daughter and a hundred grand in cash," Max said.

"Not the best combination," I said.

6. Miranda's Friend

We went out for lunch at one of the casinos near Max's office. It was Saturday and the place was crowded with people in Reno for the weekend. You would have thought Max owned the place as everyone said hello to him. After lunch we hit one of the black jack tables and Max lost a quick five hundred in the time it took to down two vodka tonics.

Around two in the afternoon my cell phone buzzed and my friend from the California Highway Patrol was on the other end. I left the table because it was too noisy to hear what he was saying and walked outside into the parking lot of the casino.

"Threw up an APB in Nevada and California," he said.
"Found your car."

"Have them in custody?" I asked.

"Nothing in custody except the car," he said. "Sitting in the parking area of a rest stop along 395 south of Reno."

"Your people check the car out?" I asked.

"Went over it with a fine tooth comb," he said. "Clean as a whistle. No prints or anything."

"Get the photos around," I told him.

"Already done," he said.

Let me know if you hear anything," I said.

I went back into the casino. Max was in a better mood after winning back some of the money he had lost.

"Found the car abandoned on 395 south of Reno," I told him.

"They know we're onto them," he said grabbing his chips from the table and heading out for the car.

Maybe," I said. "Maybe not. Maybe just standard operating procedure for a terrorist to always change cars."

"He's a tricky son-of-a-bitch," Max said pulling out a map from his car. "395 simply goes north and south through the Sierras. Means they could be heading anywhere in California. If the car was abandoned off I-80 we could at least guess they were heading west for Sacramento or San Francisco. But 395 doesn't make any commitment. They could be going into the Central Valley or heading for Las Vegas or Los Angeles."

We drove back to Max's condo and he gave me a pair of swim trunks and we laid out by the pool in the hot weather.

Max got a few beers from his refrigerator and we sipped on them running the whole thing through our minds over and over like a record that kept on skipping. A few girls waved at Max but he was not as interested as he was the night before. When he got on a case he was like this.

I began calling the list of close friends of Miranda her mother had emailed me. One of the girls on the list was on the mission with Miranda over in Liberia but had no idea where she had disappeared. She was simply gone one day. Another girl had gone to high school with Miranda. She told me that Miranda was a quiet girl who kept to herself. She was a Mormon but not the best Mormon her old girlfriend said. She always wanted something else. The mission she went on was mostly to satisfy her parents who were avid Mormons.

The last person on the list was a girl named Carly Simmons. Myrna Henderson had put a note by Carly's name and phone number. I noticed that her phone had a Reno area code.

"Really her closest girl friend," Myrna Henderson had written. "Miranda went to a Mormon summer camp with Carly each summer for a few summers and then on a church sponsored trip one spring vacation out to California."

I called Carly Simmons and left a message on her voice mail to call me. But there wasn't time to wait for voice mail calls to get back with you and I had Max find the address in Reno attached to the phone number. It was Saturday and I figured Carly might be home.

* * *

It was one of those new condo projects with pennant flags waiving and bright signs screaming in headlines about incredible sales prices. We went into a courtyard that had a pool and some people splashing about in it and found Carly's condo on the second floor. I rang the bell and a pretty girl with light brown hair poked her head out of a door cracked open a few inches. I took out my private investigator badge and showed it to Carly and introduced Max to her. I told her I had been retained by the Henderson's to find Miranda Henderson. Carly opened the door and told us to come in. We sat around her blue and yellow breakfast table on furniture that looked like it came from Ikea.

"Is she in trouble?" Carly asked.

"That's what we're trying to find out," I told her.

"I just talked to her a few days ago," Carly said.
"She had just gotten home from overseas."

"She left home yesterday morning," I told her. "We found out she stayed at a motel in Reno last night. Did she call you when she was in town?"

"No," said Carly. "I didn't hear anything from her. Funny she didn't call me."

"Yes, it is a little unusual," I said. "Her mother told me you were her best friend."

Carly Simmons smiled and shook her head.

"Miranda really didn't have any best friends," she said. "I guess I was the closest friend she had but I hardly knew her. She was such a secretive person. She always felt trapped in Salt Lake City. It wasn't her city, her place in the world. She never wanted to be a Mormon. Hated the Mormon lifestyle."

"Any idea where she might be headed?" Max asked.

Carly looked off from the table for a few seconds.

"I'm no longer a member of the Mormon Church but there was a church trip to San Francisco in the spring of our junior year in high school when we were both good little Mormon girls. There was a group of us from Salt Lake City and we stayed at the home of some Mormons near Golden Gate Park. Our group mixed with another group of young Mormons

and between worship services there were picnics in the park and some other social events. Miranda was happier than I've ever seen her during this time. She loved the city and Golden Gate Park and was intrigued by the nearby Haight Ashbury District. It seemed like forbidden fruit to Miranda."

"Anything else stand out from that time?" I asked.

"The thing that really stands out is that she met a nice looking Mormon boy named David something who was a senior in high school. They were together all the time. He was from a wealthy Mormon family in San Francisco and I think Miranda found someone she could relate to being from so much wealth herself. She snuck out of the place we were staying one night and met David in the Haight. She told me about her evening in the Haight with David a few weeks after we returned to Salt Lake City. I think it stood for everything she disliked about Mormonism. She told me one day she would live in the Haight. I thought it kind of strange with all the money and places her parents had to want to live in the Haight. She told me and I promised I would never tell anyone."

"Then," Carly continued, "the day before we left, our two groups took a trip to see the Golden Gate Bridge and walked over it. The leader of the group had everyone stop

when we got to the middle of the bridge for a few minutes to look at the view. I remember seeing David and Miranda holding hands and then kissing each other. Not a quick kiss but a long, passionate kiss. Of course this was unusual to see since it is against the Mormon religion."

"What happened to David?" Max asked.

"I heard he went on his mission," Carly said. "Put off going to Stanford until he got back from it. At least that's what Miranda told me but she didn't tell me much."

Carly was silent. The sun came through the kitchen window and made a spot on the Ikea table. Outside there was the sound of splashing in the pool. Far away a siren rushed somewhere through the city. A rap song blared out of someone's radio. An airplane roared overhead. The condos were probably a good deal because they were directly under the flight path of the airport. The sound of the airplane made something turn in my mind.

We thanked Carly Simmons for her time and information and headed out to the car.

"Put some things in a bag," I told Max. "We're flying to San Francisco this afternoon."

7.The San Francisco Police Department

I thought I was over San Francisco but I don't think anyone who has lived in San Francisco ever gets over the city. Andy Williams sings about leaving his heart in San Francisco. I had left a lot of homicides and crimes in the city but somewhere in all of this I had also left my heart in the city.

We rented a car at the airport and headed up to police headquarters. It was late afternoon and the western sun made the windows in the skyscrapers sparkle with silver light. Rising over the skyline was the 70-story Smith Technologies Building, headquarters of Robert Smith's global empire. Beyond the skyscrapers the Golden Gate Bridge got that golden glow it always got at the end of the day. It was a scene that could have been painted by Thomas Kinkade and placed in galleries along Union Street for the tourists to buy.

I knew that young people like Miranda and David were holding hands somewhere and looking out at the bay and thinking of a future in the magic city by the bay. But I also knew that there was another city under the warm colors, the pastoral image. I knew sirens were screaming down the streets, banks were being robbed, people being murdered in all the gold and silver light. And in all of this I was pretty sure that there was another Miranda with an ugly killer hiding somewhere in the city.

We got into the police department when twilight was beginning to spread over the city and lights were twinkling on. I had phoned the chief on our way to the airport in Reno and filled him in on what we knew so far. He was waiting for us in his corner office on the top floor. Our arrival caused quite a stir. We knew a few of the detectives on the floor but most of the old breed like Max and me had left and were working in private businesses around the city. My counterpart introduced himself to me. He was a guy in his early 50s who was a former FBI agent before coming to the department.

Patrick Mulhune was an old Irishman who had been chief for ten years and ruled the department with the iron hand that only an Irishman can muster. He liked having a few Guinness Stouts at the pubs around town and discussing the

fortunes (or misfortunes) of the San Francisco Giants. He always had a new Irish joke and often told the same one over and over when he had a few too many stouts.

The chief sat behind his desk with the lights of the city blinking on behind him and said it was good to see us and asked how we were doing and told us he would never be a team like the two of us in the department again. It was good to hear all of this but it only made me nostalgic for a life that was behind me now. Then his serious Irish look came over his face and you knew that Irish jokes were something very distant in his mind.

"I called Nordstrom at the NSA," he said. "Even they didn't know Kalali was in the country. The bastard is a tricky son-of-a-bitch. Knows everything in the book about making himself invisible. Nordstrom did say they've monitored a lot of recent chatter over the net. Something's going on. Something big. They haven't been able to put a time or place to the information but Kalali has the means and contacts to pull off something big."

"San Francisco might be the target," Max said.

"Maybe," the chief said. "But Kalali isn't the only terrorist in the nation now. Nordstrom says the NSA is monitoring four or five cells around the country."

"September 11th is three days away," I said.

"Don't think I haven't thought about the date," the chief said. "It makes sense they would pull something on the 11th."

"Nordstrom have anything else for us?" I asked.

"No, he'll let me know if he does," the chief said.

"Gotta keep the feds out of this whole thing," I tell the chief.

He shakes his head in agreement.

"The bastards always screw things up," he said. "Come in a take over everything like they own the city. This is my city not theirs. I told Nordstrom to keep all of this between the two of us. He owes me a few favors."

"Hope he keeps his promise but it's hard to trust the feds," Max says. "We've been burned more than once by them."

"We can handle the whole thing in the department," the chief said. "Keep those bastards out of our face. We've got some amazing new technology since you guys left. Time we put it to the test."

The chief got up from his desk.

"Follow me," he said.

We followed him through the large room full of cubicles where most of the department's detectives were located. Max and I knew the area well, had lived here for

many years. A number of guys waived to us as we walked through the room.

The chief went into one of the conference rooms and turned on a projector sitting on the conference table. He motioned us to sit down.

"I want to show you a few of our new toys," he said dimming the lights.

On the screen was the photograph of a large black bus.

"Our new counter-terrorism unit," he said. "The latest unit from Smith Security Systems."

The name Smith Security was a well-known name in the law enforcement community. It was one of the divisions of the global conglomerate Smith Technologies headquartered in San Francisco. The founder of the company Robert Smith was a good friend of Chief Mulhune and the San Francisco Police Department was always the first to get the latest technology from the company.

But the company made far more than large anti-terrorism units like the big black bus on the screen in front of us. It had also developed the Smith Scribe Scan technology Max used to find the motel Miranda was at in Reno. And, it was the technology Sheila used to run global matches on fingerprints. It utilized a new type of database that was far more comprehensive than even the FBI system.

"Heavily armored," the chief said pushing the button on the projector and showing different angles of the great black bus. It looked like one of those custom coaches rock stars spend a million bucks on.

"The best part is inside," he said.

There was a photo of the screen now of a number of people sitting in front of monitors and computer screens.

"We can monitor large crowds in ways we've never been able to do before," the chief said.

A photograph of a huge crowd appeared on the screen.

"The Peace in the Park Festival last month," the chief said. "Thirty thousand people in Golden Gate Park. I put myself in the crowd to test the new Smith Retina Recognition System to see if it could find me."

The chief's photo appeared in a box on the upper right of the screen. A bulls-eye zoomed in on his face and centered on his eyes. A group of numbers spun on the screen for maybe thirty seconds and the photo of the large crowd came back on the screen and began to zoom in on the crowd moving closer and closer to one face. It stopped a foot away from the face of a guy with long hair wearing a San Francisco Giants baseball jacket, sunglasses and Giants baseball cap. The lettering on the jacket and cap were crystal clear like images from a high definition television

set. I was about to remark that the system had failed to locate the chief when the long haired guy in the photo lifted off his baseball cap and wig and we saw the face of the chief on the screen.

"Hard to fool the new Smith Retina Recognition camera," Max said. "Even using a disguise in a huge crowd."

We walked back to his office when the chief's new toy show was over.

"We're gonna' use the bus and the system for the first time in a few days," he said. "On the big 9/11 rally at the Civic Center. Fifty thousand expected."

"Kalali and Miranda Henderson might be in the crowd," I say.

"It makes sense that the 9/11 rally is their target," Max said.

"Yes," chief Mulhune said. "Makes a lot of sense. I'll be in the bus. I want you boys to join me."

"We'll be there," I tell the chief. "Of course it would be better if we locate Kalali before the 11th."

"That's your game right now," the chief said. "Of course the department will give you all the help we can. But I'm not sure how much help we can offer two of the best detectives we've ever had."

It was nice to hear the chief say this but it didn't do much to boost my confidence that a master terrorist could be found in a few days.

* * *

Darkness had fallen over the city when we left police headquarters. I could see the flashing red beacons on top of the seventy-story Smith Technologies Building a mile away in the Financial District. I had a sudden thought that the red beacon symbolized the eyes of some watchful parent, watching over her children, keeping them safe from terrorists like Ashid Kalali. But at the same time it also seemed a type of warning light alerting us that something terrible was about to happen, something that even the brilliant products of Smith technology couldn't prevent.

I drove over to Eddy Street and headed west through the Tenderloin. It was coming home to Max and me as we had spent so much time down here chasing down homicides and missing persons. We headed out towards the Avenues and through the colorful buildings of the Western Addition housing projects just south of Japantown.

"OK," Max said. "I give up. Where the hell are we going?"

"You'll see," I told him. "I've got it all worked out."

We turned left on Divisadero and headed towards the Panhandle. I had called our old friend Bernie Goldberg told him we were going undercover for a few days and needed something that wouldn't make us stand-out in the Haight. His little flat on Hayes was a depository of ten thousand disguises used by undercover police in the city for years. Bernie was happy to see we were back in town.

Half an hour later, two longhaired old hippies emerged from Bernie's place wearing sweat pants and sneakers and Green Bay Packers jackets. Just another two tourists to spend money in the city and to call up memories of the 60s in the Haight district.

We headed south on Divisadero for a few more blocks, across the Panhandle streets of Fell and Oak and turned right onto Page Street and drove maybe ten blocks to a big psychedelic Victorian near the corner of Page and Clayton, a block from Haight Street and the heart of the Haight-Ashbury District. I pulled in the driveway and turned off the car's engine.

"Hank Stern's place," Max said.

"Yeah," I said pulling my bag out of the car. "He's in Europe and gave me his key and told me to come and go when

I wanted. I thought it's a good time to take him up on his offer."

We got settled in and walked the block over to Haight Street and had a few veggie burgers at an organic restaurant with a spaced out waitress.

Max was mad. He hated organic food.

"Why the hell can't we just walk down to the MacDonald's on the corner?" he said.

"I'm thinking about your health," I told Max. Someone needs to think about it because Max didn't do much thinking about it. Since moving up to Reno it looked like he had put on maybe forty or fifty pounds.

Sitting across from me in the dim light of a few Chinese lanterns and the sound of sitar music in the background, he looked ridiculous in his blond wig and long ponytail under his baseball cap. But then I looked pretty ridiculous myself.

Maybe looking ridiculous for a few days in Haight-Ashbury might locate one of the world's deadliest terrorists before the chief's fancy tech tools would locate him. But it was not something I would place a bet on at one of Max's black jack tables in Reno.

I doubted that Miranda would look much like the beautiful young blond girl in the photo her mother had given me. Or that Ashid Kalali would look like the angry, bearded buy in the photo we had. Like us, they would have taken some disguise. So here we all were in the Haight District of San Francisco: two detectives in disguise looking for two radicals in disguise. Everyone in some sort of disguise today. Even the police chief at the festival in the park testing the new Smith cameras.

In all of this, the real people behind the disguises had disappeared so that we were no longer looking for the real person anymore but only the disguise of the real person.

We walked back to my friend's place after dinner.

I talked to Max about my thoughts about these paradoxes of the modern world.

"There you go again," he said. "Getting too poetic and philosophical about things."

He was right. It wasn't the time for philosophy or poetry.

8.Old Hippies

The next morning a few hippies in jogging pants and tennis shoes and Green Bay Packers jackets walked down Haight Street poking in and out of the shops. We looked ridiculous but at the same time we looked pretty authentic. Bernie was the best in the business. Max refused to go to another organic place for breakfast so we walked down to the McDonald's on Stanyan Street where he ordered three Egg McMuffins.

Then we walked into Amoeba Records ("The World's Largest Record Store") and across half a football field to the jazz section. A bunch of old guys went through the records. In the Coltrane section there was a large middle-eastern looking man in the traditional Arabic Thobe looking through the Coltrane albums. We walked up to him.

"Good to see you boys again," undercover agent Eric Jensen said. "How's Reno and Salt Lake City?"

"Where all the action is," Max said.

We followed him as he walked through the big record store and out onto the dirty sidewalks. The homeless were just beginning to stir awake in the shadows between the buildings, scratching their faces and wondering where that next dollar might come from. Jensen smiled quickly at one of the homeless guys and I knew the old bum was one of his undercover boys.

Storeowners were tossing buckets of water on the sidewalk in front of their places but it wasn't doing a lot of good, just pushing the dirt around a little. That's the only thing splashes of water seem to do these days: just push the dirt and filth of the world around a little, rearranging it but not getting rid of it. What was really needed was a great apocalyptic rainstorm on the level of the one back in Noah's time. Forty days and forty nights. A storm that would cover everything and wash the old world away so that the world could start over again fresh and bright like the snow on top of the mountains above Salt Lake City.

Detective Eric Jenson was one of the best undercover people in the whole department. I called him last night and set up our meeting at Amoeba. Both Max and I had known him for years. He was our key go-to guy in the Haight and knew

the place like the back of his hand. I gave him copies of the photos of Miranda and Kalali and told him to get word around with the other under cover boys in the area to watch for them.

"I doubt they're gonna' look a lot like the photos," I said. "They're most likely taken on a disguise but it's all we've got."

"A big play," Eric said. "A lot bigger than the usual stuff over here."

"Max and I are into this big stuff now days since we left the department," I said.

"How long they been in town?" he asked.

"Probably got in yesterday," I said. "Not sure they're in the Haight but there's a good chance they are. The girl is nostalgic about it."

Jenson looked at the photos and put them into a pocket inside his black robe.

"A Mormon billionaire's daughter and one of the world's most notorious terrorists," he said. "To think they might have honored my neck of the woods with their presence."

"Get the word out," I told him. "Make copies of the photos and spread them around. They probably look

different. This Kalali is a real squirmy bastard who changes his looks like an old lava lamp."

We parted over the sleeping bag of a homeless person who was just sitting up in his pile of garbage ready to face another day. He wanted to know if we could spare a dollar. Max pulled out a few bucks and gave it to him.

"The Egg McMuffins are still on for another half an hour at McDonalds," he said.

* * *

We walked back to my car parked in front of my friend's place and drove over to Golden Gate Park. I parked the car on Martin Luther King Jr. Drive near the California Academy of Sciences and we strolled over to Stowe Lake. Two old hippie tourists out for a morning walk in the park. We sat on a bench by Stowe Lake and watched the pedal boats go by. There were kids with their parents. Old couples slowly navigating around the little lake. Some girls on roller blades. More kids with their parents. A couple sharing a joint. A group of Japanese tourists giggling and snapping photos. A group of French tourists from a big tour bus. More kids with their parents. But no one who looked like a terrorist with a pretty blond girl.

We walked up Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and over to the California Academy of Sciences and found a bench in front of the place. The morning passed like mornings used to pass in my younger days: going slow and not anywhere in particular like the peddle boats on Stowe Lake, meandering through the hours like the day was placed on a raft floating down a lazy river in summer. Max told me about a twenty-five year girl in Reno he was in love with. It didn't surprise me. It was like Max to fall in and out of love. He had been this way ever since I knew him.

We showed each other some cool new apps on our iPhones. I had just downloaded an atomic watch that told time to the accuracy of a millionth of a second. Like I would ever need this. We talked about the early days in the department when we were filled with hope and idealism and the belief that we could make a better world. We talked about the single bars and fern bars of the 70s in the city. A place called Henry Africa's near Van Ness we hung out in trying to pick up women. I talked about my wives but didn't talk about them too long. Neither one of us had created any children nor had any brothers or sisters alive. Our parents were dead and we were both ships alone, sailing through the world with few connections or obligations.

The city had changed so much since those early years when we started out in the department in the 70s. Feinstein was mayor then, Harvey Milk was supervisor, Dan White was a murderer, aids were becoming an epidemic. People played dice games at the bars over lunch. Women still dressed up. Out in the Avenues on Clement where I lived there were mostly yuppies driving Subaru's.

Now, the city I once knew was gone and a new city was all around us full of people from every nation on earth and the people of the city from thirty years ago no more than ghosts drifting in and out of San Francisco like the thick fogs of the summer months. Clement was now more Chinese than Chinatown and no one ever thought of having a few vodka tonics for lunch. The old empty warehouses south of Market Street were now full of Internet companies and twenty-year-old millionaires. Maybe there was some consolation in fighting all the crime over the years and making the city a little safer for the new generation. But both of us wondered if it really was safer. You battle all your life to make the city safe and respectable and then terrorists like Kalali barge into town ready to blow the whole place up. Modern life was hard to figure out. Much harder than any case I had ever tried to figure out.

* * *

It was another of those late summer days out on the Avenues that start buried in a thick fog with foghorns moaning in the distance and then turn into a bright blue day without a cloud in the sky.

Tourists came and went in front of the Academy of Sciences. More Japanese and French and Brits and Russians. Kites danced around in the blue sky. Bicycles went by.

A young girl wearing a sweatshirt passed us pushing a little cart that said "Water Station" on it. She stopped across the street from us and pulled bottles of water from her cart and put up a sign that said "Spring Water: \$2." She sold some water to people going by on bikes and a few tourists. In five minutes a mass of runners came down Martin Luther King with numbers pinned to their jerseys. Many stopped and bought water from the girl across the street. In a few minutes the mass of runners was gone.

"Could use a little water," I told Max and got up from the bench and walked across the street to the girl and her cart. She was a beautiful young girl with dark hair and skin that was radiant in the morning sunshine.

"Two bottles I said," pulling out four dollars.

She smiled and handed me the bottles of water. On the wrist of her right hand I noticed a small tattoo that looked like a version of the Golden Gate Bridge. Everyone these days had tattoos. Even old ladies and old men.

"Looks like a good, healthy business," I said to her. "In my days these carts contained a lot of junk food." "They're the new thing with all the runners and races in town," she said.

"Like the one that just went by," I said.

"They're just practicing for the big race next week," she said.

"I imagine you do pretty well with a big race," I said.

She shook her head.

"Maybe," she said. "But buying permits cost an arm and leg. Just got my permit and it cost five thousand dollars."

"That's a lot of water to sell," I said as I walked away. "Good luck to you."

She smiled and I walked back and gave Max his bottle of water.

"The things I do to make you healthy," I said to him.

"I wish it was gin or vodka," he said.

He hated water almost as much as he hated organic food.

In a few minutes the girl was gone, pushing her cart down the street and around a corner.

Max and I finished our bottles of water and got in the car and headed back to my friend's place. We a block over to Haight Street and down to Amoeba Record store and back to the Coltrane records and found the big middle-eastern guy in the black robe.

"Anything turn up yet?" I asked Eric Jensen.

"Nothing yet," he said. "Have everybody over here looking for them but nothing so far. There's a lot of static in the air though about something big coming on the 11th. There's going to be a big rally at the Civic Center at noon and the chief wants to have all of us working the crowd. At least 50,000 expected to remember those who died. The chance of something going down on the 11th is pretty strong. And the chance it'll happen at the Civic Center is even stronger."

"Not much time to find our two friends," I say.

"We're at it night and day," he said. "You'll be the first to hear if we get anything."

Max and I walked up and down Haight Street a few times but didn't see anyone who looked even vaguely like Miranda and Kalali. Even in disguise.

That night we got dressed back up in our adult clothing and drove over to Clement for some good Chinese food and a few bottles of Tsing Tao beer. Then we drove out to the Cliff House and had a few more drinks at the nice bar in the bottom area of the place. A few young girls were at the bar next to us and Max started talking to them telling them he was a detective. He always got good mileage with his detective stories.

My cell phone buzzed and I saw it was Sheila calling and walked outside where it was quiet from the noise of Max's stories and the chattering of the bar. I leaned on the railing on the patio of the Cliff House overlooking the pounding surf below.

"I've got some interesting information," Sheila said.

"I can use some interesting information," I told Sheila.

"The fingerprints of Ashid Kalali match another person," she said. "A twenty-five-year old American. His name is David Smith."

There was a moment of silence. A few waves knocked against the rocks below and a mist of spray shot up over the railing. The horn of a freighter coming into the bay sounded.

"As in Robert Smith of Smith Technologies?" I ask.

"The same one," Sheila says.

"That's unbelievable," I say.

"And more than a little ironic," Sheila adds. "The son of the man who has created the greatest tools for fighting terrorism and crime is one of the world's greatest terrorists."

"Are you sure?" I ask.

"What kind of question is that?" Sheila says.

It was a dumb question. I couldn't think of any time in all the fifteen years I had worked with her that Sheila had not been sure when she presented some piece of evidence.

"You need an address?" Sheila asks.

"I know where he lives," I told her.

It was out in the Seacliff area on the northwest tip of the peninsula and it was one of the most magnificent places in the city.

"Thanks Sheila," I told her. "Let me know if you come up with anything else."

I walked back into the restaurant and pulled Max away from a twenty-something girl he was telling detective stories to over one of those fancy new Martini drinks.

He was not happy.

"Remind me not to go drinking with you again," he said.

"We've got a busy day tomorrow," I told him. "We're going out to meet a billionaire and you need to look your best."

I filled him in on Sheila's call on the drive back to the Haight. He agreed with Sheila's assessment on irony of the whole thing. The world's greatest creator of terrorist fighting technology was father of one of the world's greatest criminals.

"Not to mention that the kids of two Mormon billionaires are terrorists," he added.

It was a little after nine when we got back to our place in the Haight. I called the Smith residence and a snooty sounding guy with a British accent answered the phone. I asked to speak to Robert Smith and was told he was not available. I said I was a detective and it was about Mr. Smith's son David.

"David is no longer with us," the snooty voice said.

"I have information this is not true," I said.

The phone was silent for a few moments and another voice came on the phone.

"What's this about my son David?" said Robert Smith.

"I'll tell you all about it tomorrow," I say. "Nine in the morning?"

"Nine tomorrow," Robert Smith said.

Before I went to bed, I called Chief Mulhune and told him that Kalali was really David Smith.

"Jesus Christ," the chief said. "Robert Smith is one of the largest supporters of the department. Are you sure?"

"Coming straight from Sheila," I said.

"I need to call him," the chief said.

"Wait until after I talk with him tomorrow," I said.

"Jesus Christ," the chief said again.

9. The Mansion In Seacliff

Everyone has a favorite area in San Francisco. Some like the diversity of the Mission District. Others like the beauty of the Presidio. Some like the fancy shops along Union Street. Others the dignified old painted ladies along postcard row. Others, the excitement of the downtown Financial District. San Francisco has something for everyone.

My favorite area was the exclusive little kingdom of Seacliff in the Richmond District near Lands End and Baker Beach. I knew the area well. My old flat was in the Richmond District at the end of Clement not far from Seacliff. I spent many hours hiking the trail where the bay broke into the Pacific Ocean. There was a spot you could pause and look down at the indent into the peninsula called China Beach and up above China Beach, see the big homes of Seacliff. I dreamed of one day getting a place in Seacliff but it was no more than the dream of a police detective.

We took 19th north to Lake and turned left and headed west on Lake out to Seacliff. The morning fog was just beginning to lift and you could see orange pieces of the top of the Golden Gate Bridge a mile to the north rising over the Presidio.

Real estate is a precious commodity in San Francisco but this is not much of a concern to a billionaire. We drove along a faded adobe pink wall for a block and then stopped in front of a big gate where cameras looked down on us from all angles. I pushed the buzzer in the box outside the car window and announced us to the British voice in the box. The gate slowly swung open and we drove up a curving driveway edged by a wide lawn full of Cypress trees. The house sat on top of a hill, a giant Prairie style place built by one of the disciples of Frank Lloyd Wright.

The British voice was attached to a tall, thin man with a dour-looking face pointed upward that didn't look like it had seen many smiles on it. We were no longer old, longhaired hippy tourists but were now respectable again wearing sports jackets, slacks and some decent shoes. We were clean-shaven and looked better than we had in a long time. But this didn't impress the thin man who looked like the butler from the Downton Abbey television show with his

immaculately pressed morning coat, back tie, grey vest, gold cuff links and and grey striped trousers.

We followed him down a long wide hallway of marble, gold-flecked mirrors, priceless statues and paintings from Dutch masters, through tall French doors you could drive a beer truck through and out onto a wide terrace of imported stone overlooking China Beach below and the Golden Gate Bridge half a mile to the right.

The familiar face of Robert Smith motioned us over to a table with a laptop on it and a few cell phones that buzzed on and off like electric crickets. He gathered them all up and handed them to the tall slim man.

"Take care of these," he told the tall slim man. "I don't want to be disturbed."

The tall slim man took the cell buzzing cellphones and disappeared into the house.

When we sat down at the table he lifted a large silver pitcher.

"Coffee?"

"That would be nice," Max said and I nodded my head in agreement. Max's eyes were still bloodshot from all the alcohol he had put in his body last night and I knew he was fighting one hell-of-a-hangover.

Robert Smith poured coffee into our cups and we all sat at the table and sipped the coffee or a few moments and watched a container ship pass under the bridge and out to sea. Smith was a tall, handsome man in his early seventies with rugged features and still the athletic build of the quarterback of the 1963 Stanford football team.

"It's hard to believe David is still alive," he said. "He was kidnapped from his mission in the Ukrainian city of Kiev and then murdered."

Robert Smith picked up a file on the table and passed it to me. Max and I briefly went through a number of official documents from the church the American embassy and some reports from a team of private investigators who Smith hired to find his son.

"He was murdered ten miles outside of Kiev," Robert Smith said. "A brutal cold-blooded murder."

"The body was never found," Max said.

"No," Smith said.

I pulled out the documents Sheila gave us from the room in Reno and handed them to Smith.

"The fingerprints of your son were found in a motel room in Reno, Nevada a few days ago." I said. "Found with the prints of a young girl named Miranda Henderson from Salt Lake City."

"Ben Henderson's daughter?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "I was retained by him to find her."

"They had a thing together a number of years ago when she came out here with a Mormon group," Smith said. "My former wife mentioned it to me."

"Apparently, they're together now," Max said.

Robert Smith watched the container ship out in the bay for a few seconds.

"My son is not dead?" he said.

I pulled the photo of the terrorist from the file and placed it in front of him. He looked at the photo for some time. The dirty black hair and beard of the angry man the Moslem robe.

"In a sense he is dead," I told Smith. "The old David Smith has taken on a new life and is now known as Ashid Kolali."

"One of the most wanted terrorists in the world," Max added.

"We've tracked your son and Miranda Henderson into San Francisco and suspect they are in the Haight district and are planning some terrorist act. Your son has become one of the most deadly bombers in the world."

Robert Smith shook his head.

"This is so impossible to believe," he said.

"We have the prints from Reno and Kolali's prints and they both match," I said. "Made possible by the Smith International Print Matching System. You know how fail-proof this system is."

Smith continued to shake his head.

"Anything that might help us locate him?" I asked.

"Friends? Family members? Any idea on where he might be?"

Smith shook his head.

"He has no brothers and sisters," he said. "We were never very close. He never liked the church. Hated it in fact. It was an effort to get him to go to services."

"At the temple the dust of distraction seems to settle out, the fog and the haze seem to lift, and we can 'see' things that we were not able to see before and find a way through our troubles that we had not previously known," Smith said. "It's a quote from Boyd Packer, one of the leaders of the church. My son could never understand these sentiments."

"What Mormon church did you attend?" I asked.

"The one over at the Civic Center," Robert Smith said.

Max and I looked at each other when he said this. Eric Jensen had told us there was a huge rally scheduled for the Civic Center on 9/11.

"The kid was a genius," Smith said. "Early acceptance to Stanford. His freshman year first in his class. But he quickly was losing his calling in the church. Drinking alcohol. Partying all the time. I pulled him out and forced him to go on his mission. I told him college could wait for later. He hated me for this."

"You are divorced from his mother?" I asked. It had been in the papers but I needed to bring her name into the conversation.

"A jaded member of the church," Smith said. "She pulled farther and farther away from the church. She was born and raised in San Francisco. She was a 60s flower child who never grew up. She loved Haight Ashbury. I worried about her and had security people go with her. David would often go to the Haight with his mother."

"Where is she now?" I asked.

"Lives up in the wine country," Smith said. "With the settlement she got from me she bought herself a winery."

"We're going to need to talk to her," I say.

Smith pushed some keys on his laptop, took out a piece of paper and wrote an address and number down.

"Her cell phone number," he said. "Zelda can probably help you more than I can."

We got up and I gave Robert Smith my card.

"Let me know if you think of anything else that might be helpful to us," I said. "We're up against time and need to find him before he blows up half the city with one of the new bombs he has created."

"I would make sure you add some additional security on the Smith Technologies Building downtown," Max said.

"Yes," Smith said. "You're right."

We left him sitting at the table on his patio, staring out at the bay at nothing in particular. We walked through the big French doors and down the long hallway and out the front door. The tall slim butler came from one of the rooms and went to open the front door for us.

"Thanks," I said. "We'll show ourselves out."

We drove east on Lake Street and I called Zelda Smith. She answered the phone and I told her we were driving up to talk to her about her son David.

"What is there to talk about?" she asked. "He died two years ago in the Ukraine."

"He's still alive," I said. "I have proof."

"You know how to get here?" she said.

"Yes," I said. "We'll be there in an hour or so."

10. Moondance Winery

We headed north over the bridge and up 101 through San Rafael and turned onto Highway 37 south of Novato and then went northeast and took 121 north and 12 into the town of Sonoma. There wasn't a lot of traffic and we made good time.

After the traffic of Sonoma we headed north on 12 and into the southern part of the Valley of the Moon. I had been up here a number of times and thought it was the most beautiful place in the world. It was where I had planned on retiring before the pension scandal that sent me back to work in Salt Lake City.

I turned off 12 and went down a dirt road for half a mile and stopped in front of a little cottage next to some vineyards. It was the place I wanted to buy before my pension disappeared. There was no longer a "For Sale" sign in front of the place. A Volvo station wagon was in the driveway and a few kids were running around outside.

"I would have been here if the pension thing hadn't happened," I told Max. "A gentleman farmer with a few acres of grapes and no homicides to worry about anymore."

I turned around and headed back to Highway 12 and turned right and continued north on it through the Valley of the Moon. The valley is one of the ten or so wine districts in Sonoma County. The appellation is bordered by the Mayacamas Mountains in the east and the Sonoma Mountains in the west.

* * *

The valley is known for its unique terroir with Sonoma Mountain protecting the area from the wet and cool influence of the nearby Pacific Ocean. The Sonoma Mountains to the west help protect the valley from excessive rainfall. The cool air that affects the region comes northward from San Pablo Bay through the Carneros region and southward from the Santa Rosa plain. The valley has played a significant role in the history of California wine.

September is one of the warmer months of the year in the wine country and the beginning of the grape harvest. Today, we could see workers in the vineyards on both sides

of the two-lane highway. We had to slow down a few times when we got behind some of the tractors pulling their loads of grapes down the highway.

You might say there are two harvests, one for sparkling wines and one for still wines. Grapes for sparkling wine require only 19% sugar content rather than 25% for still wines. Unless there is an unusually warm summer that speeds ripening, the full harvest begins in September. For grape harvesting, picking at precisely the right moment is critical.

When the grapes are ready there are, literally, not enough hours in the day. Sometimes picking goes on around the clock. In the autumn evenings you can hear engine noises of mechanical harvesters in the vineyards at night and see the floodlights of hand harvesting. Night harvesting has the benefit of picking cooler grapes that don't ferment on the way to the winery.

While there's a feast of other food available to birds this time of year, a few species love to munch on wine grapes. That's when the shining strips of Mylar will go up. Sometimes, too many birds appear and netting will be stretched over the vines to protect the still ripening grapes. Hovering over all of this is the strong scent of the wine crush.

I gave Max a lecture on all of this. We had been up here in the wine country a few times together. Usually, to celebrate some case that was resolved. Max wasn't all that interested in grapes like I was. To him, a bottle of wine was just a bottle of wine. He liked his bourbon much more and especially when the bourbon came with some attractive young woman.

* * *

Zelda Smith owned the Moondance Winery just south of Kenwood. It was one of the top wineries in all of Sonoma with ratings on its wines consistently in Robert Parker's top categories. I didn't realize that Zelda Smith owned the winery but imagined she had purchased it with the big settlement she received from her divorce a few years ago from Robert Smith.

The main building of the winery was a huge Normandy style French castle with three tall chimneys that rose over a flurry of busy activity in the vineyards. You turned off Highway 12 and went under a fancy sign with the logo of a dancing moon on it and down a road for maybe a quarter of a mile to a parking lot surrounded by the vineyards. Things were busy now at the winery. The parking lot was filled

with cars and a tour bus was just unloading a group of Japanese tourists.

A garden surrounded the big French castle full of neatly trimmed hedges, flowers and twenty types of exotic plants. We walked up the brick pathway that ran through the gardens and into the castle and introduced ourselves to a young man at the front door wearing a blue blazer with the Moondance Winery logo on it and told him that Zelda Smith was expecting us. We followed him through the big home, past the gift shop and tasting rooms, past some young couples who were a little tipsy from wine tasting, past another wine tasting room with the top wines in it and up a wide, circular stairway and then down a hallway to a room at the end of it. The young man knocked on the door and a voice said come in.

It was a strange room inside the big French castle. Its walls were covered with psychedelic posters featuring San Francisco bands like The Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane and Quick Silver Messenger Service. The muted theme colors of burgundy and dark green and the dark woods of what we had seen downstairs gave way to walls of bright florescent yellow and orange. You were in one of the great wineries of California but looking around at the room you might be in some hippy place over in the Haight. In the

background the Jimi Hendrix song "All Along the Watchtower" flowed out of Bose speakers.

Zelda Smith got up from her desk and walked over to greet us. She was much younger than Robert Smith and I judged her to be little more than forty years old. She was dressed in a Paisley top with blue jeans and a red bandana tied around her forehead and wearing boots with little frills on them. There was a congregation of turquoise and silver Indian jewelry around her neck and rings with weird designs on a few of her fingers. She shook our hands as I introduced ourselves but she might have just as well given us a peace sign.

She led us over to a table with a few bottles of wine on it and offered us a glass.

"One of our best Cabernets," she said.

"Thanks," I said taking the glass she offered me.

"Can't pass up a Cabernet from Moondance."

She poured Max a glass and sat down at the table and poured herself a glass of wine.

"It's incredible what you said on the phone this morning about my son David," she said. "Hard to believe. Impossible to believe. We had a number of investigators involved. There were official letters from the government and all. It's hard to believe he is still alive."

Max and I went back-and-forth telling Zelda what we had just told Robert Smith a few hours ago. We told her how we had tracked him using her former husband's technology. She was startled at first that he had become a terrorist but the idea seemed to sink in after a few minutes.

"He hated his father," Zelda said. "Hated being pulled out of Stanford and forced on a mission over to Russia. He had no interest in the Mormon church and its moralistic ways."

"You two got divorced before he went away to Stanford?" I asked.

"I moved out and came up here and bought the winery," she said. "Left the Mormon church. It was never for me."

"Did David visit you up here?"

"All the time," Zelda said. "Would come up a lot of weekends when he was in school. He loved to work in the vineyards. We would drink wine together. He was so happy to get away from his father. He was thinking of leaving his father and coming to live with me right before he went away to college."

"Ever talk about a girl named Miranda?" I asked.

"Yes," Zelda said. "She was the only girlfriend he ever had if you can call meeting someone for a few days in San Francisco a girlfriend. But the days the Mormon group

came out to San Francisco from Salt Lake City were special ones for him. I never saw him so happy as those few days. Then she was gone."

"We have reason to believe your son might be planning some attack in San Francisco on 9/11," Max said. "Is there anything special about the date 9/11 for your son?"

Zelda smiled briefly and shook her head.

"I think it meant something different to him than it meant to other people," she said. "Most saw it as an attack on our nation. David saw it as an attack on the technologies his father had created. An attack on his father really. It was an attack he was happy about."

Zelda poured another glass of wine for Max and me. It was some of the best Cabernet I ever tasted and (not to be conceited) I was somewhat of a minor authority on good Cabs. She looked out the stained glass window behind her desk thinking for a few seconds.

"And of course there is another thing important about September 11th to David," she said.

"What's that?" Max asked.

"It's his birthday," Zelda said.

Max and I looked at each other.

"We think he and Miranda are somewhere in the Haight district," I said. "We heard your son and Miranda spent time together there."

"It makes sense," said Zelda. "We went there together a number of times. It was close to our place in Seacliff. And yet, at the same time, so far away from the life his father was trying to make for him."

"Any idea where he might go in the Haight?" I asked. She pondered this question for a few minutes.

"He liked a lot of places," she said. "The record stores. The cafes. The bookstores. They all represented a life his father did not want him to have."

"Any place in particular?" I asked.

"When I left my husband I lived in the Haight for a few days before coming up here and looking for a place."

"Where did you live?" Max asked.

"A hotel on Stanyan called the Golden Gate," Zelda said. "Had a big room on the second floor in the corner of the hotel with a bay window."

"David know you went there?" I asked.

"Of course," she said. "He stayed with me the first few nights I was there. Helped me move in. He talked about quitting school and going up to the wine country with me

but I talked him out of it. Told him it was important to finish school and go to Stanford."

I got up and thanked Zelda for the wine and information.

"We have some work to do," I said.

"Do you think I'll ever see my son again?" she asked.

"I wish I could tell you," I said.

11. The Golden Gate Hotel

I was on the phone to Eric Jensen before we even reached the parking lot of the Moondance Winery. Another three tourist buses had arrived since we had been meeting with Zelda Smith and people were all over the place.

"Get some undercover people over to the Golden Gate Hotel right now," I said to him. "We have a big lead on things. Don't do anything. Just stake the place out."

Then I called Sheila and told her she needed to be ready to sweep a room over in the Haight and that I'd call her when we got back into town.

The traffic was a little heavy going back into the city on the Sunday afternoon with people coming back from wine tours. At a little after three we were back in the Haight and dressed up like hippies again and talking to a few undercover homeless people in front of the Golden Gate Hotel. Eric Jensen was one of them.

"Been here since you called and haven't noticed

anything out of the ordinary," he said.

Max and I went into the hotel and over to a young kid behind the registration desk. We flashed our badges at him and asked to see the registration book. Of course there was no one named Miranda or Ashid Kolali or David Smith checked in.

"Who is in the room with the bay window on the second floor?" Max asked.

The kid went down the registration list.

"A couple named Dan and Pamela Johnson," he said.

"From Indiana."

"They in now?" Max asked.

"I don't know," he said. "Sometimes I see residents come and go. Sometimes not."

"I need a key to the room," I said.

The kid gave me a key from the cubbyholes behind the desk. I pulled out my cell phone and called Eric Jensen outside.

"Max and I are going up to the room," I said. "Not sure if they're in the room or not. Back us up outside."

We went up a creaky stairway in the old Victorian building with our guns drawn and walked down the hall to the corner bay window room and knocked on the door. There was no answer. I put the key into the door and opened it.

There was one of those tall brass beds in the room and a few pieces furniture. A porcelain bowl type of washbasin. A few old photographs of San Francisco on the wall. The big bay window looked out at the entrance to Golden Gate Park across the street. The bed was neatly made. The door to the closet was open and there was nothing in it. Nothing on the small dresser. Not any items in the room. It was impossible to believe anyone was occupying the room.

We didn't go into the room but stood at the door surveying all of this. I called Sheila and told her to get over to the Golden Gate Hotel in the Haight as fast as she could.

She came down the hallway of the hotel in fifteen minutes carrying her briefcase full of magic tools and went to work going through the room. After ten minutes, she motioned us over to the bedside table and pointed to something. There was the hint of a faded circular red spot on the wooden table like the crescent of a new moon. The kind of spot a glass of wine might make. The spot was barely noticeable but it was something that greatly concerned Sheila who scraped off a sample of the stain from the table and put it into a small plastic bag.

Ten minutes later she pulled a piece of fabric off the floor and placed it in another plastic bag.

"That does it," she said. "They're good, whoever they are. Haven't seen a room as clean as this in a long time."

"You'll have something for us soon?" Max asked.

"Give me some lab time," Sheila said. "I'll call you in a few hours."

I closed the door and locked the room up and we followed Sheila downstairs and gave the key back to the kid behind the desk.

"I think the Johnson's upstairs have checked out," I told the kid.

"Damnit," the kid said. "Happens all the time when we don't have a credit card."

"Think you can identify them?" Max asked.

"She was a pretty girl with long red hair," the kid said. "He was a good-looking guy with a brown crew cut. In their early twenties maybe. All American looks."

I pulled out my card and handed it to the kid.

"You never saw us here," I told him. "Call me if you see them again."

"And one more question," I said to the kid. "Why do they call this place the Golden Gate Hotel?"

The kid walked us outside and pointed at a piece of orange that barely poked over the trees of Golden Gate Park.

"That's the bridge," he said. "You can see the Golden gate Bridge from the hotel."

"Of course," Max said as the kid went back inside the hotel.

We went along the sidewalk in front of the hotel and then I leaned over and told the old homeless person propped up against the outside of the hotel to keep his people around the place.

"I think they got away from us," I told Eric Jensen. "But you never know."

We walked down Stanyan Street and then turned left at the beginning of Haight. We were searching for a nice young couple from Indiana named the Johnsons. A pretty girl with red hair and an attractive guy with a crew cut. Two old hippies in disguise looking for two terrorists in disguise. But the Johnsons were nowhere around.

* * *

We stopped in a dark little bar on Haight Street called The Ship of Fools full of daytime drinkers and a jukebox playing "White Rabbit" from the Jefferson Airplane. We had a few beers. When my eyes adjusted to the dim place I could see that we were sitting with a group of old men at

the bar and there wasn't a woman in the place.

A guy came up and asked me to dance and I declined.

"Don't you just hate it when that happens," Max said.

Yeah, I did I told him but said it wasn't that we didn't look the part of a few old gay guys sitting in a bar in the Haight on a Sunday afternoon.

My cell phone rang a few minutes later. It was Sheila.

"We're at the Ship of Fools," I told her.

"Be there in fifteen minutes," she said.

And then she added, "The Ship of Fools? I didn't think you and Max were ... "

"Damn it Sheila," I said. "Just get over here."

She walked into the bar ten minutes later and took a stool at the bar next to me.

"A vodka straight over ice," she said. "I really didn't think you and Max were ... after all these years."

"Godamnit Sheila," I said. "Quit fooling around with me. We just stopped to have a drink."

"A likely story," she said.

"So what do you have?" I asked.

She pulled out some papers I couldn't see in the dim light of the place and put them on the bar.

"Analyzed the wine stain in the room," she said. "An expensive wine stain."

"Oh?"

"From a winery in Sonoma County," Sheila said. "Not just any old winery. From Moondance Winery."

I let this information sink in. Max also heard what she said and was also silent.

"And the piece of material I found in the room," she said. "A rare material not used in many places at all. Except curtains in Mormon churches."

"Mormon churches?" I asked.

"I can't believe you don't know this stuff," Sheila said. "Working for a Mormon client and all."

"Fill me in," I said to her.

"There's an event in Mormon services called an endowment," Sheila said. "The endowment is a ceremony designed to prepare participants to become kings, queens, priests, and priestesses in the afterlife. As part of the ceremony, participants take part in a scripted reenactment of the Biblical creation and fall of Adam and Eve. The ceremony includes a symbolic washing and anointing and receipt of a 'new name' that is not to be revealed to others except at a certain part in the ceremony. There is then the receipt of the temple garment Mormons are expected to wear under their clothing day and night throughout their life."

Sheila took a long draw on her vodka, ordered another and continued.

"The recipients go to the dressing rooms to change into white clothing, and then to an endowment room, which is like a very small auditorium. There, the story of the creation is recounted and instruction is given to enable those attending to feel God's love and the empowering spirit in their lives. An endowment session takes about 90 minutes. An officiator stands behind the altar, facing the seated patrons. Behind the officiator is a small movie screen for instructional purposes and a curtain, through which one may enter the celestial room of the temple. Entering the celestial room is the culmination of the endowment, and is symbolic of entering the kingdom of God. The celestial room is traditionally the most beautiful room in the temple. There, patrons can sit and pray or meditate. The spirit in the celestial room is the most peaceful, tranquil, and holy of any place on earth."

"Sounds wonderful," I tell Sheila. "Maybe I missed my calling as a Mormon but what does it all mean?"

"The piece of fabric in the hotel room was from the curtain of a celestial room at a Mormon church," she said. "The fabric has to be of a certain type according to Mormon standards."

Another song from Jefferson Airplane came out of the jukebox. One I had heard a number of times but couldn't immediately recognize. In the dim light of the place, I could see a few men dancing together on the little dance floor. Max was sitting next to Sheila and I was glad he was not one of them out there dancing.

"So, let me get this straight," I said to Sheila as I ordered her another vodka over ice. "Someone was in that room who was drinking wine from the Moondance Winery. Someone who had been in a Mormon church."

"That's right," Sheila said as she tossed down the vodka and walked out of the bar into the golden mercury vapor lights of Haight Street that were just beginning to blink on.

I called the chief and told him about my day talking to Robert Smith and Zelda and Sheila.

"We're just a little behind them," I said to the chief.

"Just a little," he said.

"I'm sure he's targeting the Mormon Church at the Civic Center on the 11th," I said to the chief. "Sheila has some convincing evidence."

"Get some sleep," the chief said. "I'll see you guys at the Civic Center tomorrow at eight in the morning."

"I'm sorry we couldn't find the son-of-a-bitch," I said to the chief. "He's a smart, tricky bastard and he's out to prove something against his father."

"Always the toughest types," the chief said.

Max and I left the Ship of Fools after a few more beers and walked back to my friend's place. Max was nostalgic about the old days and said a few things about them on our walk back.

"We make a great team," he said. "We always have made a great team."

"Yes, we have," I agreed.

"I wish we were back in the city again working on cases like this," he said. "Important stuff. Not domestic bullshit things. Wives looking for cheating husbands. Husbands looking for cheating wives. Lost pets. Credit fraud. Identify theft. It's all bullshit."

"It pays the bills," I said to Max.

"There's got to be other ways to pay the bills," he said.

We walked in silence for a few moments. Fog was rolling in over the Haight and foghorns were moaning out in the bay. Sirens screamed in the distance. Maybe he was right I thought but didn't want to say anything to him because I knew it would only get him going more on the

whole topic and I was in no mood for an argument tonight.
But I did miss the excitement of the city and our old days
together.

12. Civic Center Rally

As that saying goes, the next day came in like a lamb and went out like a lion. It was a brilliant blue day without the hint of a cloud in the sky. Max and I headed over to the Civic Center at seven-thirty and found the huge black bus parked in front of City Hall. A small crowd was beginning to develop and the police were already setting up their barricades along the streets.

Chief Mulhune sat in a big chair inside the black bus with twenty tiny television monitor screens in front of him. He looked like the producer of some ESPN football game. Assistants were all around him checking things out on the elaborate electronic system.

Max and I walked around Civic Center as the crowds started to grow. We went over to the big Mormon Church on the south part of the Civic Center and flashed our badges and went inside and looked the place over. I had never been inside a Mormon church before. It was one of the most beautiful places I had ever been.

Behind us were some members of the bomb squad with their sophisticated electronic devices pushing them over every foot of the church.

At ten we went back to the black bus for a meeting with the chief. The top people in the department were gathered around the big black bus as the chief walked out of it and addressed everyone.

"You all know the situation," he said. "We have reason to believe there will a terrorist bombing attempt at the civic center today. Everyone has been given photos of the terrorists but there is little reason to believe they look like this. Everyone needs to be on the lookout for the smallest of things. Ashid Kolali is a master at disguise. He could be the little old lady carrying flowers. The kid on the bike. The girl pushing a crippled mother. I've distributed the photos we have of him and the girl but don't assume they are not in disguise."

After his meeting, the police forces dispersed around the civic center. Eric Jensen was there with his group of undercover officers. The members of the SWAT team were positioned around the perimeters. On the roofs of buildings like the Opera House, police snipers were positioned with their high powered telescopic sights aimed at the ground a hundred yards below. And on a number of the buildings, the

Smith Retina Cameras were set up ready to take photos of the crowd and analyze the fifty thousand faces.

Max and I walked around the growing crowd at the civic center. Looking for the Johnsons from Indiana? The pretty blond Mormon girl from Salt Lake City? The clean, crew cut boy that went to Stanford University?

The mayor showed up around ten and then the various congressmen from the Bay Area and the United States Senators and then Robert Smith. He went into the black bus and stayed there with the police chief. It was an important event for Smith Technologies.

People continued to arrive at the civic center and by eleven in the morning the crowd was estimated to be around 50,000. There were hundreds of American flags waving and signs reminding people to remember all the Americans lost on that fateful day.

The actual program began at noon when the mayor gave a short talk about remembering all the fallen heroes of that day in New York followed by a few brief speeches by the Congressmen and Senators.

Max and I watched the events from inside the big black police bus behind chief Mulhune who was sitting in the large captain's chair in front of all the television monitors. Robert Smith stood next to the chief surveying

the screens. Each few minutes, there was a snapshot taken of the total crowd at the event and then an analysis run matching all the faces using the Smith Retina System. The large photograph of the entire crowd was snapped every few minutes and the numbers ran on the computer screens and the analysis appeared in front of the chief.

The photos of David Smith and Miranda appeared in the upper right on the big computer screen and the system continued to analyze the faces in the crowd to see if there was a match in the crowd.

It was maybe ten minutes after twelve when one of the congressmen was finishing his speech when a red light flashed on the big screen and the system went zooming into a face in the crowd. It was a young man wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses wearing a San Francisco Giants sweatshirt. The young man was standing in front of the Mormon Church.

The chief yanked pushed a button in front of him.

"We've gotta' match," he said. "Bring him down."

A half-minute went by and a voice came over the speakers in the bus.

"Lost him," said the voice.

"Damn," said the chief.

Minutes went by. More photos were taken by the Smith system and more faces appeared on the screens. But the guy in the sweatshirt was gone.

A call came in around twelve-twenty.

"We've found a bomb in the Mormon church," the voice said.

"Send the bomb squad in," yelled chief Mulhune.

He turned to his top people surrounding him in the bus.

"We need to evacuate the civic center immediately," he said.

Things began happening quickly and within half an hour the entire civic center was desolate of people.

A call came into the black bus.

"Bomb is disabled," it said.

The chief shook his head. His shirt was wet with sweat.

"We stopped him," he said.

13. The LA Clue

We drove back to the Haight in the afternoon. The police spent a few hours sweeping the Civic Center but found nothing. The national news media were all over the area with their vans and satellite dishes and reporters sticking microphones in the faces of police officials. Chief Mulhune was a hero and stood in front of his magic black bus and told reporters the world was entering a new era in the war against terrorism.

Max and I went back to the Haight and watched the news reports on television at the Ship of Fools. The day was a victory for the police department but still we wondered what happened to David Smith and Miranda Henderson. Where were they and where would they surface next? What city would be their next target? It was impossible to know but we were reasonably certain it would not be San Francisco. Their plan had been stopped in the Bay Area and it was reasonable to suspect they were on their way out of town to

another city or in another city now or maybe leaving the country.

We had been in the bar for maybe an hour when an old homeless person staggered into the place and sat down at the bar next to Max and me.

"So the chief's a hero," Eric Jensen said watching the news of the event on the television.

"The whole department is a hero," I said.

"With all the anti-police stuff going on these days it's a good thing."

"But they're still out there," I said.

"I've got twenty people in the Haight looking for them," he said.

"The nice Johnson couple from Indiana," Max said. "The red-haired Paula Johnson and her all-American husband with a crew cut."

"Or a longhaired hippy and his flower child girlfriend," I offered.

"Maybe someone inside a Burka," Max added.

"I've talked to all our contacts," Eric Jensen said. "I thought something might turn up in the mosques of the city but nothing. We've tossed out a wide net but nothing."

"Max and I think they left the city," I said.

"It's a good thought," says Jensen. "It's a narrative the department is developing."

* * *

We left the Ship of Fools in late afternoon and went back to our place on Page Street and watched more news of the event today on television. I was at a loss on what to do. I thought of calling the Hendersons and telling them I had done as much as I could to locate their daughter and that I was on my way back to Salt Lake City. But it seemed best to stick around in town for another day or two and see if anything turned up. The chances were good that they had both left San Francisco but there was a slim chance they were still in town.

Chief Mulhune called around six and told me he was contacted the federal boys and getting them involved. It was impossible to keep them out of the whole thing after the events today.

"I've called my counterparts in all the big cities of California," he said. "Told them the two might be coming their way. The FBI's involved now."

* * *

The next day Max and I were back walking the streets of the Haight but it seemed a waste of time. We checked with Eric Jensen a number of times but it was still the same thing, his people had not seen any sign of them.

It was a warm, sunny day and we drove over the Golden Gate Bridge and up into the Marin Headlands and parked and watched some container ships move in and out of the bay. We got out and hiked up to some of the old gunnery locations built into the side of the hills to ward off an attack from the Japanese in World War II. We drove out to the Point Bonita Lighthouse and walked over the little bridge out to it and then leaned against the white pipe railing and looked at the bridge and San Francisco behind it.

Neither one of us said anything. We just thought about all the memories contained in that city. There were memories of a lot of murders we had investigated. Memories of crimes all through the city. Bad memories. Sad memories. Memories of my marriages that had come and gone. But there were also many good memories contained in the city. The little places we loved going. The magic areas you suddenly discovered. The crazy events like the Halloween Parade down Polk Street. The Bay to Breakers run Max and I had done for so many years.

My cell phone rang interrupted my memories. It was Chief Mulhune.

"Got a call from Chief Parker in LA," he said. "They've found evidence the two were in a motel out in West Covina. There was a loud commotion at the motel late at night and someone called the police. When they arrived they found the occupants of the room gone. But they found a receipt from the Golden Gate Hotel in the room and a map of the Mormon Church at the civic center. And they found a half empty bottle of wine from the Moondance Winery with Kolali's fingerprints on it."

"They're planning something in LA," I say.

"The police are alerted," the chief said. "Checking all the big crowd events going on in LA in the next few days."

"I think it's time for us to head back," I tell the chief.

"Yes," he says, "but not before a little event I'm putting together tonight at John's Grill. Eight o'clock. I want you and Max there."

"We'll be there," I say.

14. John's Grill

Everyone who knows a little about the history of San Francisco knows John's Grill is a location in the famous detective story *The Maltese Falcon* of Dashiell Hammett. It was one of the chief's favorite places and we had enjoyed more than a few Guinness Stouts with him at the bar of the place over the years.

All of the top people in the police department were at the place when we arrived. It was somewhat like an old reunion. There were questions about what we were doing these days. How did we like life after the department? I told a few of the new detectives that life in Salt Lake City was clean and beautiful and healthy and I was happy to get small jobs like missing persons and cheating spouses. But it was a lie. I really missed the murder cases of the city. I didn't think I did when I left but I knew I did after just a few days back.

"You sure decide to come back in a big way," one of the detectives said to me. And it was true, something hard to argue with. Max and I had come back to the city on one of the biggest cases in the history of the department.

There was a big dinner set up on the second floor of John's Grill, a long banquet type of table with streamers and a banner on the wall that said "Great Work!" in two foot high letters. Those who know the place know that there is an imitation of the gold Maltese Falcon from the Hammett book in a glass case on the landing up to the second floor. The chief had somehow bribed the manager of the restaurant to let him take the foot high statue out of the case and set it up on the table next to his seat at the head of the long table.

The dinner and celebration commenced. There were toasts all around and speeches about a job well done. At some time during the evening, a member of the bomb squad brought in a foot long black cylinder object and placed it next to the gold statue of the famous Maltese Falcon and the chief clicked his glass and stood up.

"Captain Brennan of the bomb squad has brought in the defused bomb found in the Mormon Church yesterday," he said. "I don't know how many of you know about the story of

the Maltese Falcon in the famous Dashiell Hammett story but let me give you a few facts about it."

The chief held up the gold Maltese Falcon.

"In the story, everyone wants a fabulously valuable gold statuette of a falcon, created as tribute for the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV."

He put the statue down and then held up the foot long black cylinder that was the bomb found in the Mormon Church.

"This bomb," he said, "is somewhat like the Maltese Falcon in that it is something everyone wanted to find. Only it didn't offer great riches but only great death."

The merriment of the evening continued. The chief gave some more toasts and commended the members of his department on a job well done.

Things began to break up around midnight and Max and I started to wonder if we should call a cab to get us back to the Haight area. Before we left, the captain of the bomb squad came up to me holding the black cylinder bomb in his hand.

"I've never seen anything like it before," he said. "We analyzed the explosives in it last night at the lab. It's close to the power of a nuclear weapon in a foot-long device. Whoever created it is brilliant."

"What would have happened if it exploded?" Max asked.

The bomb squad captain shook his head.

"It would have leveled the entire civic center," he said. "I doubt anyone would have survived."

Max and I looked at the ominous looking cylinder for a few moments the bomb squad guy held and thanked him for his work.

We started to head for the stairs and maybe a call to a taxi to take us back to our place.

"The funny thing is," the bomb squad captain said before we headed downstairs, "is that it didn't go off."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"It didn't go off because the wire was never connected," he said. "A major mistake."

We looked at the bomb squad captain.

"Why would a master bomb expert like Kolali make a mistake like this?" he asked. "I keep thinking about this."

"The best laid plans of mice and terrorists often go astray," I said changing around an old saying I was familiar with.

Max and I stumbled to our car and somehow made it back to the Haight. The streets were rolling around like the deck of a ship in a great storm at sea. I thought about what the bomb squad captain said on the drive back to the

Haight. Why wasn't the wire connected? Why did one of the world's leading bomb terrorists make such a stupid mistake? It was almost as if he never wanted the bomb to go off in the first place.

15. Park To Bridge Race

The next morning was September 13th. Max and I were nursing huge hangovers from the chief's party last night at John's Grill. I tossed down a few aspirin and put on my standard issue sweatpants and tried wake up Max and get him to go out and run with me but it was impossible to pull him off the couch in the living room.

I jogged over to the Panhandle and jogged down it. There was a huge crowd walking down it dressed in all sorts of weird attire.

"What's going on?" I asked one woman who went by dressed up like Little Orphan Annie with a small poodle on a leash.

"The Park to Bridge run of course," she said as if everyone should know this.

"Where?" I asked.

"Starts in front of the Academy of Sciences," she said.

I watched all types of costumed runners pass as I ran along the Panhandle Boulevard and then ran back to our place and put some strong coffee on and was able to force some of it down Max and make his eyes come open.

"We've gotta' go over and watch the beginning of the big race," I told Max. "Another Bay to Breakers type of thing. You know how much we used to like running in the Bay to Breakers."

"I'm not about to run in any race today," he said.

"We're just going to watch the beginning of it," I said. "Be lots of pretty women if it's anything like the Bay to Breakers. Some not dressed in much clothing."

Max considered my argument, grunted and put on his sweatpants and running shoes.

The streets were crowded with thousands of people pushing through the Haight towards Golden Gate Park.

We mingled around the starting area for the race looking at all sorts of costumes and characters. This was San Francisco for you.

At ten there was a whistle and the runners were off down Martin Luther King and then over to 19th and up 19th through the Presidio tunnel and then onto the bridge. In half an hour they were all gone and the street was clear.

Max and I went over and found our usual bench we had become accustomed to in the last few days while we were in the Haight. I grabbed a flyer about the event off the ground and looked it over. The Bay to Breakers race had become so popular that another race like it was started. Twenty-five thousand runners were expected for the event today. The race would start in Golden Gate Park in front of the Academy of Sciences and end on the Marin side of the bridge. At noon, there would be a celebration of the event with fireworks shot from boats in the bay and sirens going off all over the city.

We sat there in the park and talked about our plans. Max was ready to fly back to Reno and make eyes again at the girls around his pool. And I was ready to head back to Salt Lake City and resume my important business of spying on cheating husbands and tracking down missing credit cards.

I thought I should call my client the Hendersons and let them know their daughter was still on the loose and probably somewhere in that little place called Los Angeles. I told Myrna Henderson that god only knew where her daughter was and what would happen to her and her boyfriend David Smith. She and her husband had read about the whole

thing in the papers and watched it on all the news networks.

"The two of them have eluded everybody," I told Myrna. "The best technology of the police department in San Francisco. Everybody. They continue to change their appearance and it has been impossible to find them. One day Miranda has red hair. Another day blond hair. One day she is one thing. The next day something else. There is simply no way of identifying her except by her writing and fingerprints."

"There is something that might help identify her," Myrna Henderson said.

"Oh?" I asked.

"After she got back from the trip to San Francisco she got a tattoo on her right wrist," Myrna said. "A tattoo of the Golden Gate Bridge. It was something to remind her of her trip out there. 'A bridge to a new life' Miranda told me."

I listened to the words for a few seconds without saying anything. Things began clicking together. I remembered the girl in the park a few days ago, the one with an orange tattoo of a bridge on her wrist. I recalled her telling me about the vendor's license she just

obtained. Things began clicking together quickly like the inside workings of an old clock.

The thought surfaced that David Smith had played with us all along, throwing us off their trail, leading us to believe that the foiled terrorist attempt at the 9/11 rally in the Civic Center was their target. Everything was planted to point to this event: the wine stain at the Golden Gate Hotel in the Haight; the piece of the curtain from the Mormon Church in the hotel room. David Smith was one step ahead of us all the time, ahead of all the brilliant technologies created by his father. It occurred to me that this is what he wanted to do. It was a game he was playing with his father.

I pulled Max up from the bench and told him my thoughts as we ran the three blocks back to the car parked at our place on Page. I called Chief Mulhune as we ran down Haight Street and told him on my thoughts.

"They're down in LA," he said.

"It's all a decoy," I said. "The bomb that didn't go off in the civic center. The face of David Smith in the crowd that disappeared. The date of 9/11. The stuff we heard from LA. All to throw us off."

"I'll get our people over there immediately," the chief said.

"We need to play things as quiet as we can," I tell him. "I think the two are posing as vendors of one of those water stations and they've wheeled it out around the middle of the bridge. I suspect the bomb is on a timer to go off at noon but they could manually override the timer and set it off if they suspected the police were going to stop them."

"What's your idea?" the chief asked.

"Max and I are on our way to the bridge entrance now. We're in our jogging suits," I tell him. "We'll join the runners on the bridge and blend into them. We'll grab them when we run past. I know what Miranda looks like. Saw her the other day in the park. I want you to have a few of your top counter-terrorism people meet us in the parking lot of the Bridge Pavilion in half an hour. Make sure they're in jogging clothes and look like runners. I'll brief them when we get there."

There are a few ways to get to the entrance of the Golden Gate Bridge. The race was using the major one on 19th Street through the Presidio tunnel but it was packed with thousands of runners and not an option. Another was to head north on Arguello Boulevard and then weave through the Presidio until it until you connected up with the Highway 101 entrance to the bridge. The closest was to drive west

to 25th Street turn right on 25th and head north on it to the Seacliff area and then turn right onto Lincoln Boulevard and follow it north through the western part of the Presidio.

Lincoln Boulevard through the Presidio is one of the more scenic roads in San Francisco. It meanders along the western part of the Presidio above Baker Beach. Tourists slowly drive along it stopping to take pictures.

We sped along it hitting speeds of 60 at times, passing a few large tour buses and the slow moving cars of tourists. Max checked his Glock and we quickly over the plan. It wasn't a complicated plan, not involving any of the chief's magic tools from Robert Smith's technology. It was a simple plan that depended on a lot of luck more than anything else. We would all join the runners as they ran across the bridge. I would be leading our group, searching for the particular water station Miranda and Smith were tending. I would briefly turn my head at the officers behind me when I saw it and run a few steps past it and then spin around and jump the two with the other officers. Maybe they could override the timing device on the bomb but I suspected it was programmed to go off at noon.

Lincoln Boulevard dead ends at Highway 101 a few hundred yards from the entrance to the bridge and right

across 101 from the Golden Gate Bridge Pavilion. I screeched to a stop and we got out and pushed through the runners who filled Highway 101 heading out onto the bridge.

As we approached the pavilion I saw the chief's big black bus and the chief out in front of it in the middle of four or five beefy joggers in running suits checking their weapons. I had not asked him to bring the bus but it was not surprising he did. It symbolized modern technology to the chief, brought to the battle against terrorism and he believed that modern technology could defeat terrorism. So far it had been used to throw us off by the son of the developer of much of this modern technology. It was hard for me to place much trust in the chief's beliefs.

I stood in the middle of group of officers, like the quarterback in some sandlot football game giving out the directions for a play, telling them the plan I had told the chief. I knew some of the guys, had worked with them before on a few cases. I knew they were the best. A few former Seals trained by the best teachers in hand-to-hand combat.

"I've got a drone over the bridge with the Smith camera on it," said the chief.

"That's not gonna' do much for us now chief," I said pushing the clock app on my cellphone. The second hand

moved faster than I had ever seen it move and the minute hand went from eight minutes to seven minutes before noon.

"Let's go," I said to the group.

We jumped into the river of runners and were out of the bridge in a minute. The bridge was around a mile and seven-tenths long and I was pretty sure they were in the middle of it where they had first kissed. That meant the middle of the bridge was about eight-tenths of a mile from us and we had seven minutes and thirty seconds to make it.

Like the popular Bay to Breakers race I had done for a number of times in my younger years, a number of runners were in costumes.

There were all types of runners in costumes. There was a group of guys dressed as soldiers from the Revolutionary War wearing only underwear and carrying an American flag. There was a woman dressed as a bushel of grapes wearing nothing more than a bunch of purple balloons around her. There were a group of belly dancers in pink and gold sequins. There was a group of guys dressed in black suits with dark sunglasses surrounding a guy wearing an Obama mask.

Max begun to fall farther and farther back after a few minutes and I realized he was not going to be able to keep up with us.

I held my cell phone open to the clock app and looked at it every few seconds. Five minutes until noon. Then four minutes. Then three minutes.

We wove through the runners. Past a group of giant transvestites dressed as different versions of Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz*. Past the Cookie Monster and a large purple Barney. Past a Mr. Rogers lookalike. Past someone in a Joe Biden mask. Past Nancy Pelosi. Governor Jerry Brown. Past Kim Jung-un in his grey military uniform next to a guy that looked like Dennis Rodman.

We ran past a number of the water stations on the bridge where people slowed down and grabbed a bottle of water. I carefully looked at the vendors as we ran past but didn't see Miranda at any of them. I wondered if this was another decoy somehow, that the two were again one step ahead of us.

A minute before noon I saw the water station with the woman I had seen at the park the other day. Her hair was not brunette but red, different but it was the same cart the girl in the park had the other day. Next to her stood a guy with a blond crew cut. I was maybe fifty yards away. I briefly turned my head back towards the officers behind me as we approached the cart.

"That's them," I shouted back to them.

It was thirty seconds before noon when we ran past them and then spun around and went to grab them. A few officers grabbed Miranda and wrestled her to the ground and tossed cuffs on. David Smith was more difficult to subdue when I went for him. He was an expert at martial arts and had me on the bridge asphalt in a second and had a gun pointed at me until it was shot out of his hand and quickly subdued and cuffed by a few officers.

Both Miranda and Smith fell to the bridge, facing east in the position of the Muslim prayer position of the Salat.

"You are too late my friend," Smith said.

I tried to open the top of the water cart but it was locked. I tried to pry off the lock with the butt of my gun but it was no use. I pulled at the cart but it was too heavy to lift. I yelled for help and another arm came in from the side to help me lift it. It was Max, huffing and wheezing and ready to fall over but still there, next to me, ready to pull my ass out of the fire like he had done so many times before.

"Help me get this thing over the side of the bridge," I yelled at Max.

We struggled with it for a few seconds and got it up and pushed it up to the railing of the bridge and finally

over the bridge and watched it fall towards the bay as sirens were going off and boat in the bay below firing fireworks. We looked at it slowly sink into the waters of the bay below.

Nothing happened.

I looked at the clock on my cellphone.

It showed a few seconds after twelve.

"That son-of-a-bitch," I yelled to Max. "Another decoy. He's fooled us again. The bomb's in another place."

As I said this a huge blossom of light appeared in the water below and a second later a tower of water rose out of the bay and the bridge shook and swayed back-and-forth like a great earthquake had just struck. It knocked the runners on the bridge down and there was screaming all around. The bridge continued to sway back and forth and a massive spray of water rained over the bridge with the power of a big thunderstorm. It swayed for a few minutes but then stopped. The bridge was going to hold up.

The chief was notified we had the two in custody and in a few minutes I saw the big black special operations bus heading towards us on the bridge followed by a number of police cars. It stopped by us and the chief got out and walked up to Max and me and shook our hands.

"Great work," he said. "That was close."

Then he walked over and looked at David Smith and Miranda Henderson for a few seconds.

"Almost had us fooled," he said looking at David Smith. "But you can't fool your father's modern technology."

David Smith did not say anything and the chief had them placed in one of the police cars and driven off the bridge under tight security.

The chief then came over to Max and me.

"You are not to discuss any details of the operation with the press," he said. "All of this is classified information. Of course you can understand."

"We won't say anything about the operation," I told him.

* * *

As we drove back to the Haight Max and I discussed the chief's desire to keep the details of the operation quiet, something known only between the three of us. It did make sense that he would want to keep the details of the apprehension of two terrorists classified in the same way the feds would want to keep details classified.

But we couldn't help thinking how much he wanted to take credit for the event himself, him and his wondrous new technology, how he didn't want to let the world know that so much of this whole thing had been a fiasco, following clever decoys that led the police around in circles, how much of the whole thing eventually came down to the chance event of me briefly glancing at the tattoo on a girl in the park and a conversation with the girl's mother an hour before the bomb was set to go off. And of course there was the fact that there was an election coming up soon and the chief was running for re-election and trying to justify the millions he had spent on new technology.

Back at our place in the Haight we watched the event on the national news. A special team of structural engineers looked analyzed the bridge and found no damage and traffic was allowed back on the bridge in the late afternoon.

"Golden Gate Bridge and Thousands Saved From Terrorist Explosion," was the constant theme of the headlines. Someone with the department had taken photos when the chief came out on the bridge and there were photos of the chief next to David Smith and Miranda Henderson with his black bus in the background. There was a photo of Max and me and

we were lauded as the heroes who tossed who tossed the bomb off the bridge.

Somehow the press found out where we were staying and there was a crowd of reporters and television news crews outside the place on Page Street when we went out for dinner that evening.

"We're under orders not to make any comments on the operation," was all I said to them as we got in our car and headed to one of our favorite restaurants in the city. We were dressed in our client meeting blazers and slacks. I figured we deserved a good meal.

16. The Lost Mission

The day after the foiled terrorist event Ben Henderson called and said he and Myrna were flying to San Francisco and would be staying at the Fairmont on Nob Hill. I heard over the radio they went down to the federal building to visit Miranda who was now in federal custody. I got a call around one in the afternoon from Ben Henderson. He asked me to come over to their suite.

A little before one, I pushed through a group of reporters and television news people gathered outside the Henderson suite at the Fairmont. Microphones were shoved in my face, television lights pointed at me but all I said was "No comment" as I went into their suite.

We sat in the living room of the large suite next to big windows that looked out over the downtown area of the city. A thick morning fog was lifting over the city and the Smith Technologies Tower appeared like something on a stage once the curtain was lifted. The symbolism of the event came and went in one of those split second instances of

synchronicity as I sat down on the sofa facing the Hendersons.

"How did you find her?" Myrna Henderson wanted to know.

"I'm not at liberty to tell you," I said.

"It was the tattoo," she said.

"That was part of the puzzle," I told Myrna. In effect it was really the entire puzzle but I didn't tell her this.

"We went down and talked to her this morning," Ben Henderson said. "It's hard to believe she was about to kill herself and thousands of others with the bomb."

"It's difficult to understand," I told him.

"Miranda told me this morning that everyone has a mission in life," Myrna Henderson said. "The Mormon mission was not her mission. She lost her Mormon mission but found a new mission when she met David Smith."

"Sometimes love creates the biggest mission of all," I said.

"Yes," said Myrna.

"When will you be back in Salt Lake City?" Ben Henderson asked.

"I'm not sure," I said. "Think I'll stick around the city for a few days and play tourist."

"There's a position waiting for you in my company," Ben Henderson said.

"Thank you," I said. "I'll give you a call when I'm back in town."

Ben Henderson took an envelope off a table and handed it to me.

"What's this?" I asked.

"A small thank you for finding my daughter and saving her life life," he said. "No one knows her fate right now but all her mother and I know is that she is alive."

I opened the envelope. There was a check for a million dollars in it written from Ben Henderson to me.

"I can't accept this," I said to him.

"You deserve all of it," he said. "And probably more. For saving Miranda's life and the lives of thousands of others."

"That was your mission," said Myrna Henderson.

I looked at the check. It represented the amount in my police department pension that had disappeared. It represented the amount I was going to use to buy that little place up in Sonoma County in the Valley of the Moon and grow a few grapes and forget about chasing murderers and crooks.

"Maybe it was my mission," I said.

* * *

On the drive back to the place on Page Street, chief Mulhune called and offered me a new position with the police department.

"I've found some money for a Chief of Special operations," he said. "We could use your experience and skills."

"I appreciate the offer chief," I said. "But I think I'm ready to slow down a little."

"Let me know if you change your mind," he said.

"I certainly will chief," I said.

When I got back to the place Max was all packed and ready for his flight back to Reno.

"You better get packed," he said. "Our flight to Reno leaves in two hours."

"I think I'll stick around town for a few days," I tell Max. "See a few old friends and places. Stir up some memories. Do some thinking about my future."

"We make a great team," Max said. "There's room at my place for you in Reno until you find a place. We could create an agency with two of the best. We'd blow out the

competition in Reno. Get you back into the dating scene again."

"That's good of you to consider of me," I told Max.
"But I need a little time to think about things."

17. Serendipity

I drove back to the place on Page that night after dropping Max off at the airport. I sat in the living room of my friends place and listened to jazz from KCSM stream over his stereo system and opened one of the bottles of wine Zelda Smith gave me from Moondance Winery and just sat in a big leather chair and watched the day's light fade from the big bay window that looked down on Page Street.

Around seven, I got the idea to call Sheila and ask her to meet me for dinner at this Korean place on Clement that had the best Korean food in town. A little over an hour later, Sheila sat across from me in a dim butterscotch light from a few paper lanterns.

"Your work was helpful in the case," I said to her.

"They were always a few steps ahead of us," she said.

"Yes," I agreed. "Always a few steps."

"So, tell me what really happened," Sheila said. "How did you know they were going to strike the bridge? What technology of chief Mulhune led you there?"

"No technology at all," I said. "Just the chance seeing a tattoo on the wrist of a girl in the park a few days before the race. A girl at one of those water stations they have along the route of the race. The chance call to Myrna Henderson an hour before noon on the day of the race to ask her about anything that might identify her daughter from all the disguises she had taken on. She told me her daughter had a tattoo of the bridge on her wrist. I put two and two together."

Sheila laughed and shook her head.

"All of our fancy technology developed by Robert Smith couldn't stop them," she said.

"It actually worked against us," I said. "David Smith used the technology his father developed as a decoy against us. The appearance of David Smith at the civic center rally. The wine stain in the hotel room. The piece of the curtain from the church. The handwriting at the registration desks of the places they stayed. The fingerprint technology. All used to throw us off course."

"No wonder there's been nothing in the press about the details of stopping them," Sheila said.

"The chief has classified everything in the case and told Max and me not to say anything about it," I said.

"It figures with his re-election campaign in full swing," Sheila said.

"Yes," I agreed. "But in a certain way, it makes sense to have future terrorists fear the power of technology against them. It acts as a form of detriment. It's much more of a detriment than the forces of luck and chance. But the forces of luck and chance are more powerful in the end."

Sheila picked up her glass of wine and clicked it against my bottle of beer.

"I'll drink to that," she said.

* * *

The next morning, I called my real estate friend up in Sonoma and told her I was back in the market for a little place in the Valley of the Moon. She said she had a few places she wanted me to look at.

I drove up to Sonoma to look at what she had on the market. I crossed the Golden Gate Bridge right at noontime and thought it was another one of those funny chance moments in life. The traffic was light and I made it up to Sonoma in a little over an hour and a half.

We looked at a few places in the Valley of the Moon and then I found it. A little grey Victorian bungalow in the vineyards off Highway 12. It came with half an acre of grapes. Enough to start a little wine hobby with. Half a mile away I could see Zelda Smith's Moondance Winery rising out of the vineyards like a great ocean liner. I told my agent I wanted the place and wrote out a check for the down payment.

As they say, the best-laid plans often go astray. But perhaps they only go astray for a little while, after a serendipitous detour down the road of life, and then return to the plan.