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HIDEO ASHIDA

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

9:08 a.m.

There—Whalen's Drugstore, 6th and Spring streets. The site of four recent felonies. 211 PC—Armed Robbery.

The store was jinxed. Four heists in one month predicted a fifth heist. It was probably the same bandit. The man worked solo. He covered his face with a bandanna and carried a long-barreled gat. He always stole narcotics and till cash.

The Robbery Squad was shorthanded. A geek wearing a Hitler mask hit three taverns in Silver Lake. It was 211 plus mayhem. The geek pistol-whipped the bartenders and groped female customers. He was gun-happy. He shot up jukeboxes and shelves full of booze.

Robbery was swamped. Ashida built the trip-wire gizmo and chose this test spot. He'd created the prototype in high school. His first test spot was the Belmont High showers. He used it to photograph Bucky after basketball prac—

A car swerved northbound on Spring. The driver saw Ashida. Of course—he yelled, "Goddamn Jap!"

Ray Pinker responded. Of course—he yelled, "Screw you!"

Ashida stared at the ground. The feeder cord ran across the street and stopped at the curb in front of the drugstore. The geek bandit parked in the same spot all four times. The cord led to a trip-action camera encased in hard rubber. The wheel jolts of cars parking activated gears. A shutter and flashbulb clicked and snapped photos of rear license plates. Rolls of film were stashed in rubber-coated tubes. A single load would cover a full day's worth of cars.

Pinker lit a cigarette. "It's a wild-goose chase. We're civilian

criminologists, not cops. We know the damn thing works, so why are we here? It's not like we've been tipped to another job."

Ashida smiled. "You know the answer to that."

"If the answer is 'We've got nothing better to do,' or 'We're scientists with no personal lives worth a damn,' then you're right."

A bus passed southbound. A Mexican guy blew smoke rings out his window. He saw Ashida. He yelled, "*Puto* Jap!"

Pinker flipped his cigarette. It fell short of the bus.

"Which one of you was born here? Which one of you did *not* swim the Rio Grande illegally?"

Ashida squared off his necktie. "Say it again. You were exasperated the first time you said it, so I know it was a candid response."

Pinker grinned. "You're my protégé, so you're *my* Jap, which gives me a vested interest in you. You're the only Jap employed by the Los Angeles Police Department, which makes you that much more unique and gives me that much more cachet."

Ashida laughed. A '38 DeSoto pulled up in front of the drugstore. The wheels hit the wire, the lens clicked, the flashbulb popped. A tall man got out. He had Bucky Bleichert's dark hair and small brown eyes. Ashida watched him enter the drugstore.

Pinker ducked across the street and futzed with the bulb slot. Ashida window-peeped the drugstore and tracked the man. The glass distorted his features. Ashida *made* him Bucky. He shut his eyes, he blinked, he opened his eyes and transformed him. The man evinced Bucky's grace now. He *glided*. He smiled and displayed big buck teeth.

The man walked out. Pinker ran back across the street and blocked Ashida's view. The car drove off. Ashida blinked. The world lost its one-minute Bucky Bleichert glow.

They settled back in. Pinker leaned on a lamppost and chain-smoked. Ashida stood still and felt the downtown L.A. whir.

The war was coming. The whir was all about it. He was a native-born Nisei and second son. His father was a gandy dancer. Pops guzzled terpin hydrate and worked himself to death laying railroad track. His mother had an apartment in Little Tokyo. She was pro-Emperor and spoke Japanese just to torque him. The family owned a truck farm in the San Fernando Valley. His brother Akira ran it. It was mostly Nisei acreage out there. Mexican illegals picked their crops. It was a common Nisei practice. It was shameful, it was pru-

dent, it was labor at low cost. The practice bordered on indentured servitude. The practice assured solvency for the Nisei farmer class.

The practice entailed collusion. The family paid bribes to a Mexican State Police captain. The payments saved the wetbacks from deportation. Akira accepted the practice and implemented it sans moral probe. It permitted second son Hideo to ignore the family trade and pursue his criminological passion.

He had advanced degrees in chemistry and biology. He was a Stanford Ph.D. at twenty-two. He knew serology, fingerprinting, ballistics. He went on the Los Angeles Police Department a year ago. He wanted to work with its legendary head chemist. He was a protégé looking for a mentor. Ray Pinker was a pedagogue looking for a pupil. The bond was formed in that manner. The assigned roles blurred very fast.

They became colleagues. Pinker was admirably blind per racial matters. He compared Ashida to Charlie Chan's number-one son. Ashida told Pinker that Charlie Chan was Chinese. Pinker said, "It's all Greek to me."

Spring Street was lined with mock-snow Christmas trees. They were coated with bird dung and soot. A kid hawked *Heralds* outside the drugstore. He shouted the headline: "*FDR in Last-Ditch Talks with Japs!*"

Pinker said, "The damn gizmo works."

"I know."

"You're a goddamn genius."

"I know."

"That rape-o's still operating. The Central Vice guys make him for an MP. He dicked another lady two nights ago."

Ashida nodded. "The first victim resisted and tore off a strip of his armband. He wore his uniform shirt under his civilian coat. I've got fiber samples at my lab in my mother's apartment."

Pinker ogled a big blonde draped around a sailor. The sailor fish-eyed Ashida.

"Bucky Bleichert's fighting at the Olympic tomorrow night. The skinny is he'll fight a few more times and come on the Department."

Ashida flushed. "I knew Bucky in high school."

"I know. That's why I said it."

"Who's he fighting?"

"A stumblebum named Junior Wilkins. Elmer Jackson collared

him for flimflam. He was running a back-to-Africa con with some shine preacher.”

A '37 Ford coupe parked upside the drugstore. There—the wheels hit the wire, the lens clicks, the flashbulb pops on cue.

Pinker coughed and turned away from Ashida. A man got out of the car. He wore a fedora and an overcoat with the collar up. Ashida prickled. It was *no-overcoat* warm.

Pinker hacked and coughed. He was almost doubled up. The man pulled a handkerchief over his face.

Ashida tingled.

It was perfect. It was ideal. Pinker didn't see the man. They had the plate number. He could let the crime occur. He could run his forensic study from inception.

The man entered the drugstore.

Ashida checked his watch. It was 9:24 a.m.

Pinker turned around and lit a cigarette. Ashida scanned the drugstore window. The man walked down the toothpaste aisle. Ashida checked his watch on the sly.

The man hunkered out of sight. 9:25, 9:26, 9:27.

Pinker said, “My wife thinks it's dirt in the air, but I say it's just excess phlegm.”

The man ran out of the drugstore. He gripped a paper bag and a half-visible pistol. He knocked over the newsboy. He shagged his car and peeled out.

Pinker said, “Holy shit.” The cigarette dropped from his mouth.

The newsboy ran into the drugstore. Pinker ran toward a call box. Ashida ran up to the gizmo.

He unlocked it and knelt close. He studied the negative in the feeder. There, faint and blurred: Cal KFE-621.

A car idled by. The driver was a Shriner, replete with fez. He saw Ashida and got all contorted. Ashida stood up and made fists. The car pulled away.

“*FDR in Last-Ditch Talks with Japs!*” The newsboy stared at Ashida and shrieked it.

There—a cop siren at 9:31.

Ashida stood poised. A K-car took the corner and skid-stopped just short of the gizmo. Ashida was eyeball close. He recognized the guys: Buzz Meeks and Lee Blanchard.

They got out. Meeks worked Headquarters Robbery. Blanchard

worked Central Patrol. Meeks wore a fresh-pressed suit. Blanchard wore a slept-in uniform.

Meeks said, "What gives, kid? How come you beat us here?"

Blanchard said, "What gives, Hirohito?"

Meeks jerked Blanchard's necktie and snapped his head. Blanchard blushed.

Ashida pointed to the gizmo. "Mr. Pinker and I were testing this device. The store's a patsy, so we chose it for our test site. Car wheels set off a camera under that tubing. We lucked into the robbery. The suspect's plate number is KFE-621."

Meeks winked and squatted by the gizmo. Blanchard got in the car and sent out the squawk. Meeks was a Dust Bowl vet and ex-cowboy film actor. He came on under James Edgar "Two-Gun" Davis. He was a bagman to Mayor Frank Shaw. The county grand jury sacked Shaw and Chief Davis. Meeks dodged fourteen indictments.

Blanchard was an ex-heavyweight contender. He bought a house above the Sunset Strip with his fight stash. He cracked a big bank job in '39 and cinched his cop reputation. He was shackled up with a woman—Kay something. Shack jobs were verboten under Chief C. B. Horrall. The Chief was soft on Lee and turned a blind eye. Meeks and Blanchard were rumor magnets. The most prevalent: Lee was tight with Ben Siegel and the Jewish syndicate.

The drugstore was all hubbub. Voices bounced off the windows. Ashida looked inside. Pinker had the witnesses huddled.

Meeks picked his teeth and admired the gizmo. Blanchard stepped out of the K-car.

"The car was snatched in front of a pool hall on East Slauson. The 77th Street desk logged it at 8:16. It's got to be a spook. White don't survive from Jefferson south."

Meeks checked his watch. "Call Traffic, tell them to issue a bulletin, and tell them to spice it up. One-man crime wave, armed and dangerous. Make it sound like a meat-and-potatoes job."

Blanchard made the Churchill V sign. Meeks primped in the window reflection. Ashida walked into the drugstore.

He imprinted the floor plan. He memorized the witnesses' faces. He gauged distances geometrically. He moved his eyes, details accrued, he smelled body odors imbued with adrenaline.

Two white-coat pharmacists. A suit-and-tie manager. Two old-lady customers. The fat pharmacist had a boil on his neck. The thin

pharmacist had the shakes. One old lady was obese. Her vein pattern indicated arterial sclerosis.

The witnesses were pressed in tight. Meeks walked behind the front counter and stood facing them.

“I’m Sergeant Turner Meeks, and I’m listening.”

The manager said, “He walked in and went straight to the pharmacy. He wore a mask and had a gun, but I don’t think it was the man who robbed us those other times. This man was taller and thinner.”

The pharmacists bobbed their heads—yeah, boss, we agree.

Meeks said, “What happened then?”

The fat pharmacist said, “He lined us up and stole our wallets. He walked us down the first pill aisle, stole a bottle of phenobarbital and fired his gun into the ceiling.”

Ashida pricked. There—the uncommon detail.

“Mr. Pinker and I were across the street. We would have heard the shot.”

The fat pharmacist went nix. “The gun had a silencer. It stuck off the end of the barrel.”

Ashida walked back to the pharmacy. Note the cash register, Hershey bars and Christmas-card display. He rang up a one-dollar sale. The money drawer popped open. The slots were stuffed with ones through twenties.

Instinct.

The bandit wanted dope more than money. The wallet thefts were secondary. They were undertaken to obscure the primary motive.

Anomaly.

Why steal only *one* bottle of phenobarbital? The action rebutted the dope-fiend robber archetype.

Ashida vaulted the counter and walked down the first aisle. There—no ejected shell casing. There—*two* options.

The robber picked it up, or the gun was a revolver.

There—the bullet hole in the ceiling. Metal shards on the floor below—decomposed silencer threads.

He knelt down and studied them. The edges were burned from muzzle heat. The threads dropped off in little swirls.

Ashida walked back to the front counter. Pinker had his evidence kit. Meeks uncorked a bottle of drugstore hooch and passed it

around. Blanchard raided the chewing-gum rack. Meeks stuffed his pockets full of rubbers.

The jug made the rounds. Ashida declined it. The pharmacists took healthy pulls. The old ladies giggled and sipped.

Blanchard said, "We got a kickback from Traffic. The car was dumped three blocks from here. We got glove prints on the dashboard so far."

Meeks lit a cigar. "Did he touch anything inside the store? Can you folks help me with that?"

The fat pharmacist coughed. "He brushed the comic-book rack on his way out. I think he might have snagged his coat."

Pinker went *Now*. Ashida caught it and ducked past the witnesses. The rack was stuffed with *Mickey Mouse* and *Tarzan*. Ashida swiveled it twice. Nothing and nothing. Yes—right *there*.

Bright red threads, attached to one prong.

Wool felt, densely woven, *familiar*.

Ashida pulled out a pen and evidence envelope. He plucked the threads and sealed them. He wrote "211 PC/Whalen's Drug-store/10:09 a.m., 12/6/41" on the envelope flap.

More laughs up front—Blanchard and Meeks made like the Ritz Brothers. Ashida sniffed the envelope. He smelled the fabric through the paper. He made the synaptic catch.

The suspected MP rapist. The fibers off his armband. Pinker said he just raped another lady. The fool wore the armband on his rape prowls.

There was no red in the robber's overcoat. The rack prongs were situated at the man's waist level. The overcoat featured open-topped pockets. The fabric threads might have come from something sticking out. He had comparison fibers at his mother's place. He could confirm or exclude the match.

There's the whistle—Pinker's I need you *now*.

Ashida tracked the sound. Pinker was back in the pharmacy. He had his evidence camera out. He shot three exposures of the bullet hole, three exposures of the silencer shards.

"This job intrigues me. He didn't terrorize the witnesses with the gun, he didn't steal till cash, he squeezed a gunshot off for kicks."

Ashida nodded. "It's as if he was testing the silencer. And why did he only steal *one* bottle of the phenobarbital?"

Pinker nodded. "I like the test-fire theory. It's obviously a home-

made suppressor, because you've got thread burns from a single firing. Eight or ten shots would render the thing useless."

"You're right, and the manager said it's not the same man who robbed the store on the prior occasions. Whatever his primary and secondary motives, he picked out a patsy."

Pinker scooped shards into an envelope. "There's probably a crawl space between the ceiling and the roof."

The ceiling was made from loose gypsum-board panels. Ashida jumped and popped the one beside the bullet hole. Pinker made hand stirrups. Ashida caught the boost and got up.

The crawl space was all mildewed planks and cobwebs. Ashida hoisted himself in. He smelled stale gunpowder. He stood up and snagged himself on a cobweb. He brushed it off and got out his pocket flashlight. The beam caught insect swarms and a scurrying rat. There—six decomposed bullet chunks.

Be careful. You've been in this from inception. There's your official duty—and there's You.

Stanford, '36. Introductory Forensics: "All true clinicians succumb and hoard evidence. The practice creates a symbiosis of *it* and *you*."

He checked his watch. He held the flashlight in his teeth and got out another envelope. He wrote "211 PC/Whalen's Drugstore/10:16 a.m., 12/6/41" on the front. He scooped four bullet chunks into it. He put the other two in his pocket.

The rat squirmed by him. He brushed himself off and dropped out of the hole. He landed deftly. He saw Buzz Meeks eyeballing the narcotics shelves.

"Look at this, kid."

Ashida looked. Bingo—four bottle rows neatly arrayed. The fifth row—*dis*arrayed. Vials of morphine paregoric—rifled, for sure.

"The pharmacist said he only stole phenobarbital."

Meeks said, "Yeah, and I believe him. But the skinny pharmacy guy's got the heebie-jeebies, and his shirt collar's soaked through. My guess is he's got a habit."

"Yes. He took advantage of the robbery to steal a vial of the paregoric. He only took what the robber could have carried on his person, and what he could hide himself."

Meeks winked. "You are *so* right, Charlie Chan."

"I'm Japanese, Sergeant. I know you can't tell the difference, but I'm not a goddamn Chinaman."

Meeks grinned. "You look like an American to me."

Ashida went swoony. Praise always made him flutter like a—

He glanced up front. Pinker dusted the door. Blanchard scrounged razor blades off the manager. The hophead pharmacist was green at the gills. His hands twitched, his Adam's apple bob-bobbed.

Meeks walked up to him and grabbed his necktie. The tie was a leash. Meeks pulled him back to the pharmacy and shoved him into Ashida. The hophead pissed his pants. Ashida shoved him into the counter and checked himself for stains.

The hophead quaked. The piss stain spread. Meeks pulled the sap off his belt.

"You swipe a jug of the paregoric? That a regular practice of yours?"

"One a week, boss. I'm cutting down. If I'm lyin', I'm flyin'."

"You got thirty seconds to convince me that you didn't finger this here robbery. You got twenty-nine seconds as of right now."

The hophead made prayer hands. "Not me, boss. I went to pharmacy school at Saint John Bosco J.C. I was raised by the Dominican Brothers."

Meeks grabbed a bottle of morph off the shelf. The hophead licked his lips.

"Who are you going to call to snitch off pushers in exchange for confiscated hop? Who's your Oklahoma-born-and-bred papa?"

"S-S-S-Sergeant T-T-Turner M-M-Meeks. He's my daddy—if I'm lyin', I'm flyin'."

Meeks tossed the jug at him. The hophead caught it and vamoosed down the aisle. Meeks said, "You're fastidious, Ashida. I don't know why you got such a fascination for this line of work."

The party up front was adjourning. Blanchard hugged the old ladies. The manager whipped out a camera and took snapshots. He got Pinker with his print brush and Big Lee in a boxer's crouch. Meeks walked over and traded mock blows with him. The old ladies squealed.

They all waved bye-bye on the sidewalk. Ashida smoothed out his suit coat and let the crowd disperse. Pinker, Blanchard and Meeks stood over the gizmo. Blanchard and Meeks had that *Holy shit* look.

Ashida walked outside and over. A prowler car swung north and grazed the curb. Pinker, Blanchard and Meeks snapped to.

Pinker said, "Look sharp now."

Meeks said, "Whiskey Bill."

Blanchard said, "Pious cocksucker."

A uniformed captain got out and inspected the gizmo. He wore glasses. He was dark-haired, midsize and trim. Odds on Captain William H. Parker.

Ashida snapped to. Parker examined the feeder cords. Pinker, Blanchard and Meeks stood at parade rest.

Parker toed the cord. "It's innovative, but the wider practical applications are eluding me. Address this point and describe the creative genesis and full mechanical workings in significant detail, and have your report on my desk by 9:00 a.m. tomorrow."

Ashida and Pinker nodded.

Parker looked at Meeks. "You're offensively overweight. Lose thirty pounds within the next thirty days, or I'll have Chief Horrall put you on the 'Fat Husband's Diet' recently extolled in the *Ladies' Home Journal*."

Meeks nodded.

Parker looked at Blanchard. "Roll down your sleeves. Your mermaid tattoo is repugnant."

Blanchard rolled down his sleeves.

Parker tapped his watch. "It's now 10:31. I want a stolen-car report, with a synopsis of the robbery, on my desk in fifty-nine minutes."

Pinker nodded. Ashida nodded. Ditto Blanchard and Meeks. Parker got in his car and took off.

Meeks said, "Whiskey Bill."

Blanchard said, "He lost money on my fight with Jimmy Bivens. He can't let it go."

Pinker said, "The fight was fixed. You should have told him."

10:32 a.m.

Army half-tracks rolled down Spring. Trucks hauling howitzers tailed them. The convoy ran for blocks. It was all over the radio. Fortifications for defense plants and Fort MacArthur.

Soldier-drivers waved to the locals. Pedestrians stopped to applaud. Men doffed their hats, kids cheered, women blew kisses.

The traffic rumble was bad. Ashida cut east on 4th Street and north on Broadway. Passersby kept eyeing him.

He felt disembodied. He broke the law to observe lawlessness from a criminal act's inception. He succumbed to criminal pathology. He initiated an experiment. Would early access and distanced empathy allow him to understand criminals more clearly?

Introductory Forensics. He knew he'd succumb in time. He'd know the case as it grabbed him. That symbiosis—*it* and *you*.

He seized a textbook opportunity. He had to determine the pathology of a prosaic heist and report his findings first. His findings might serve the greater cause of forensic criminology. His findings might serve no cause at all. He was compelled to act. He was quintessentially Japanese. Japanese men were born to embody the concept of *Act*.

Ashida turned east and hit Little Tokyo. His pulse decelerated, his breath relaxed. A black-and-white cruised by. The driver recognized him and waved.

His mother had a walk-up at 2nd and San Pedro. The halls always reeked of broiled eel. He had his own apartment, across from Belmont High.

It was brimful of lab gear. The overflow filled his old bedroom at his mother's place. Mariko welcomed his intrusions. They allowed her to torque him at whim.

Ashida entered the building and unlocked the door. The place was quiet. Mariko was off somewhere, probably boozing and fomenting. He walked to his old bedroom and locked himself in.

Shelves packed with textbooks. Chemical vials and vats. Beakers, Bunsen burners, a hot plate. A spectrograph and three microscopes bolted to a table.

Ashida placed the bullet chunks on the table and grabbed his ammo-ID text. He held a magnifying glass over the chunks and studied the creases and dents.

The bullet pierced gypsum. The book was cross-referenced—ammo types to material fired upon. The photos were clear. Page 68—gypsum board. Two pages on—a bullet fragment with near-identical creases and dents.

The classic German firearm. The 9mm Luger.

The Luger had a floating-toggle ejector. The rounds always arced slowly. A deft shooter could catch an ejected shell in the air.

He ID'd the bullet independently. He withheld two fragments.

He gave Ray Pinker the remaining four. Pinker would or would not ID them.

Pinker was not as skilled at bullet identification. He was cultivating *this* evidential lead all by himself.

The fibers next.

Pinker knew he kept the book-rack fibers. Pinker knew he had the armband fibers here. They were sharing this lead. It was hypothetical, thus far.

Ashida got out both fiber sets. They looked naked-eye similar. He placed them under the slides of his comparison microscope.

He swiveled in close. He scanned for texture and color consistency. *Almost, almost, go in closer still.* Yes—the book-rack fibers were cut from the same type of armband cloth.

He could boil out the fabric dye and blotter-dry it. He could run chemical tests. The tests carried their own systematic flaws. The results would prove inconclusive.

A key-in-lock noise jarred him. He walked into the living room. Mariko had 11:00 a.m. booze breath.

He said, “Hello, Mother.” She spoke slurred Japanese back. He bowed and tried to take her hand. She pulled away and flashed a magazine.

A “picture bride” rag. Choose a photograph and send for a young woman. She’ll be shipped from Japan. Include the five-hundred-dollar steamship fare. All brides guaranteed to be fertile and subservient.

“I’ve told you, Mother. I’m not going to marry a fifteen-year-old girl out of a brothel.”

“You too old to be bachelor. Neighbors get suspicious.”

“The neighbors don’t concern me. Akira’s a bachelor, why don’t you pester him?”

Mariko segued to pidgin talk. She learned it in railroad camps, circa 1905. She spoke it to demean his education.

“Speak straight English, Mother. You’ve been here for thirty-six years.”

Mariko plopped on the couch. “Franklin Double-Cross Rosenfeld back down to Minister Togo. ‘U.S. surrender to China imminent,’ Chiang Kai-shek say.”

Ashida laughed. “You’ve got your geopolitics confused, Mother. I’d ask you where you heard it, but I’m afraid you’ll tell me.”

Mariko giggled. "Father Coughlin. Christian Front. 'No war for Jew bankers,' Gerald L. K. Smith say. Lucky Lindy *ichiban*. He fly Atlantic solo, land at Hirohito's feet."

Enough.

Ashida walked to the kitchen. The Hiram Walker Ten High stood by the dish rack. Ashida poured a double shot and walked it in to Mariko. She knocked it back and tee-heed. She patted the couch.

He sat down. "Tell me something that isn't crazy. Pretend that I'm Akira and we have business to discuss."

"Farm profits up 16% last quarter. Jew accountant find way to deduct bribes to Captain Madrano. He say 'Care and feeding of wetbacks good deduction.'"

Ashida tapped her arm. "Parts of speech, Mother. Don't drop your articles. You always do it when you've been drinking."

Mariko jabbed his arm. "This better? I read about Bucky Bleichert in the *Herald*. It say he got fight coming up, but it don't say my son's friend a cream puff who only fight bums he can beat. It don't say my son think his mama's Fifth Column, but Bucky's papa Fifth Column, 'cause he in German-American Bund."

Sucker punch. She got drunk, she played dumb, she hit low.

"Don't talk that way about Bucky, Mama. You know it isn't true."

"Bucky scaredy-cat. Afraid to fight Mexican boy. Papa in Bund, Bucky cream puff."

Ashida stood up and knocked over a lamp stand. Mariko put two fingers over her lips and went *Sieg Heil!* Ashida swerved to his room and slammed the door.

The room was too hot now. Heat pressurized his chemicals and caused vapor leak. He turned on the fan and called the Robbery squadroom direct.

He got three rings. He heard "It's Meeks, and I'm listening."

"Hideo Ashida, Sergeant."

"Yeah, and you're Johnny-on-the-spot, given what time it is. Did you call to tell me something I don't know?"

"I did, yes."

Meeks coughed. "Then tell me, 'cause I'm listening."

"The book-rack fiber matched the armband fiber. It *is* the same cloth, so it's quite likely that the fiber came from an Army-issue armband. It may or may not be the *exact* armband worn by the same

man, but it *is* the same cloth, and the chronological order of the crimes makes the rapist a suspect for the robbery.”

Meeks whistled. “Well, I think I should tell Dudley Smith about this. He’ll see what Jack Horrall wants to do.”

Ashida said, “What do you mean?”

“Well, you got the rape-to-armed-robbery parlay, and the likelihood of some U.S. armed services fiend on the loose. It sounds like this guy’s good for some mother dog shit, and it might notch us some cachet with the Army if we stop this short of a court-martial.”

Ashida gulped. “Or a civilian trial?”

“You’re getting the picture, son. Mrs. Ashida didn’t raise any dumb kids.”

Ashida dropped the receiver. Squadroom noise bounced up off the floor.

He chose this male world. He’s learning its customs and codes. It’s unbearably thrilling.

2

KAY LAKE’S DIARY

[COMPILED AND CHRONOLOGICALLY INSERTED
BY THE LOS ANGELES POLICE MUSEUM]

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

11:23 a.m.

I’ve begun this diary on impulse. An extraordinary scene unfolded as I sat on my separate bedroom terrace. I was sketching the southern view and heard the rumble of engines below me on the Strip. I immediately got up and wrote down the precise time and date. I sensed what the rumble portended, and I was right.

A line of armored vehicles chugged west on Sunset, to fevered scrutiny and applause. It took a full ten minutes for the armada to pass. The noise was loud, the cheers louder. People stopped their

cars to get out and salute the young soldiers. It played hell with the flow of traffic—but no one seemed to care. The soldiers were delighted by this display of respect and affection. They waved and blew kisses; a half dozen waitresses from Dave's Blue Room ran out and passed them cases of liquor. Somebody shouted, "*America!*" That's when I knew.

The war is coming. I'm going to enlist.

I always do what I say I'm going to do. I formally state my intent and proceed from that point. I am going to write a diary entry every day, until the present world conflict concludes or the world blows up. I will walk away from my easy existence and seek official postings near the front lines. I live a dilettante's life now. My compulsive sketch artistry is a schoolgirl's attempt to capture confounding realities. My piano studies and emerging proficiency with the easier Chopin nocturnes stall my pursuit of a true cause. This lovely home in no way allays my psychic discomfort; Lee Blanchard's indulgence is disconcerting more than anything else. This diary is a broadside against stasis and unrest.

I have always felt superior to my surroundings. This house states the case most tellingly. I picked out every German Expressionist print and every stick of blond-wood furniture. I'm a prairie girl from Sioux Falls, South Dakota—and a gifted arriviste.

I'm moving into my separate bedroom now. My own work is arrogantly displayed on the walls, interspersed with Klee and Kandinsky. There are a dozen drawings of a light heavyweight named Bucky Bleichert. He has a hungry young man's body and large bucked teeth. I have sketched him many times, from ringside seats at the Olympic. Bucky Bleichert is a local celebrity who understands the ephemeral quality of celebrity and does not view boxing as a true cause. His circumspection in the ring delights me. I have never spoken to Bucky Bleichert, but I am certain that I understand him.

Because I was a local celebrity once. It was February '39. I was nineteen. It all pertained to a bank robbery and its alleged solution.

This house. A refuge a few years ago, a trap now.

The robbery got me this house, not Lee's prudently invested fight winnings. Lee Blanchard is not a savvy investor, as is commonly held. Nor is he my lover, in the common sense. He entered my life to facilitate my destiny—whatever that is. I know it now.

Sioux Falls was an insufficient destiny. The winter cold spells and

summer heat waves left people dead. Indians strayed from nearby reservations and stabbed one another in speakeasies. Klansmen broke a Negro man out of the county jail. He was accused of raping a dim-witted white girl. The Klansmen convened a kangaroo court. The girl was slow to condemn or exonerate the man accused. The Klansmen staked him over a red-ant hill in mid-August. The summer sun or the ants killed him. Local lore was divided on this.

Protestants despised the few local Catholics. Nativist groups flourished throughout the Depression. Methodists were at odds with Lutherans and Baptists and vice versa. A range war over prize cattle broke out in '34. Fourteen men were killed near the Iowa state line.

My parents and older brother were sweet-natured and content. Their only sin was lack of imagination. I pretended to be one of them in order to live within myself unobstructed. I lived to read, draw and roam. People talked about me. I dropped racy bons mots in church.

I did not care about my family. The fact mildly horrified me. I wanted to run away to Los Angeles and become someone else there. I got a job at a bookstore and stole a month's worth of cash receipts. I left my parents a perfunctory note of farewell.

It was November '36. I was sixteen. The bus ride west featured dust storms and a flash flood near Albuquerque. Armed goons were stationed at the California border. They were charged to keep indigent Okies out. They were L.A. policemen.

I rented cot space at a career girls' residence in Hollywood and carhopped at Simon's Drive-In on the Miracle Mile. I wore roller skates and twirled flamboyantly to amuse myself and scrounge tips. The other girls hated me and spread the rumor that I was a prostitute. I was fired. I relinquished myself to an aimless bohemianism.

The Depression was winding down; privation and inequity were vividly present still. I roamed L.A. with my sketch pad. I drew polemical pictures of local labor strife. I read Karl Marx, only believed a third of it and went to numerous left-wing soirées. I embraced the Left as a fashion accessory. They lacked the grandeur I had come to see as my birthright.

I loved men and was going mad with suppressed desire. It pushed

me into a series of affairs with dubious jazz musicians. Sex was not what I imagined. It was tension, scent and prosaic misalliance. It was sweet and sad revelation, and all expectation dashed.

I lent money to a string of lovers and went through my carhop stash. I was evicted from the career girls' residence and took it with strident good cheer. I ate in soup kitchens and slept bedroll-swaddled in Griffith Park. I cleaned up daily at the YWCA and never appeared unkempt. I was equal parts innocence and lunatic grit. I was impervious to danger and too addled by men to assess them past my own desire.

Bobby De Witt was a jazz drummer. He personified the appellation "lounge lizard." He wore high-waisted flannels and two-tone loafer jackets; he kept up with his pachuco bunk mates from the Preston Reformatory. He caught me sketching him. I convinced myself that he recognized my talent and Norma Shearer-like aplomb. I was mistaken there. All he recognized was my penchant for the outré.

He had a small house out at Venice Beach. I had my own room. I slept away months of taxing outdoor days and too hot and too cold outdoor nights. I ate myself back from the brink of malnutrition and pondered what to do next.

Bobby seduced me then. I thought I was seducing him. I was mistaken. He saw that I was growing wings and set out to clip them.

Bobby was quite sweet to me at first. It started changing shortly after New Year's. His business picked up. He got me hooked on laudanum and made me stay home to answer the phone and book dates with his girls and their "clients." It got worse. He held a dope kick over me and coerced me into his stable. It got much worse.

Jazz drummer is always a synonym for *dope peddler* and *pimp*. I have the knife scars on the back of my thighs to prove it.

It was winter '39 now. My local celebrity was at hand. The newspapers and radio have their version. The Los Angeles Police Department has theirs. Both versions assert *this*: Kay Lake meets Lee Blanchard at Bobby De Witt's trial.

It wasn't true. I met Lee before the Boulevard-Citizens heist.

We met at the Olympic Auditorium. Bobby let me out of the house-brothel on "furlough." I was a full year into my Bucky Bleichert craze and went to all of his fights.

Bucky knocked out his opponent in the sixth round. I dawdled with the crowd as they left the arena. Lee introduced himself. I recognized him as an ex-boxer. I didn't know that he was a cop.

We talked. I liked Lee. I worked to disguise my acute dissolution. I hurried home to laudanum and white slavery. Lee tailed me back to Venice Beach. I did not know it that night.

Two more fight-night furloughs followed. I ran into Lee both times. He had tailed me from the house to the Olympic. I did not know it then.

Lee drew me out gently. He saw through my lies and euphemisms and got very angry. He told me that he had a business opportunity pending. He hinted that he could "work in my situation."

February 11, 1939, arrived. The papers got the physical facts right. The bank was at Yucca and Ivar in Hollywood. Four men hijacked an armored car headed there. A downed motorcycle served as a diversion. The men overpowered and chloroformed three guards. They substituted six cash bags full of phone-book scraps for six bags full of cash.

They huddled in the back of the armored car. They changed into guard uniforms and drove to the bank. The manager saw the scrap bags and opened the vault. They sapped him and added the vault cash to their take. They locked the tellers in the vault and went back out the front door.

A teller had tripped an alarm switch. Four nearby patrol cars roared up. A shoot-out resulted. Two robbers were killed, two robbers escaped. No policemen were wounded or in any way harmed.

The two dead robbers were identified as "out-of-town muscle." The two escaped robbers were not ID'd.

The papers got all that right. The papers got it *all* right for the next two weeks. The *Herald* ran a headline on February 28: TIP FROM EX-BOXER COP CRACKS BLOODY BANK ROBBERY.

The official version:

Officer Lee Blanchard strung together tips. Informants and "fight-game acquaintances" supplied "the lurid lowdown." They fingered Bobby De Witt as the "brains behind the Boulevard-Citizens job."

Of course, it was a lie. Of course, the "fourth man" remained unidentified. I know who he is. The public and the Los Angeles Police Department do not.

The real version:

Lee Blanchard masterminded the Boulevard-Citizens job. I knew it then; I know it now. Lee and I have never discussed it. We simply share the knowledge in the same way that we do not share a bed.

Bobby went to trial in June. Planted evidence convicted him. Lee Blanchard is far more cunning and intelligent than he plays. Bobby drew ten to life. The *Herald* ran a human-interest piece. The tag-line was quite perverse: GANG GIRL FALLS IN LOVE — WITH COP! GOING STRAIGHT — TO ALTAR?

I attended the trial and testified against Bobby. I tapered off the laudanum to assure a harrowing witness-stand performance. The DA's Office presented a threadbare case. My recounted degradation was the indictment, the closing argument, the sentence writ as my decree of damnation. I complied with the lie that I met Lee in the courtroom.

We did not go straight to the altar. Lee bought us this house. Bobby De Witt was consigned to San Quentin. Lee fumbled at making love to me a few heartbreaking times and broke off that part of our union. I live off of Lee's police salary and his alleged boxing savings. I'm working toward degrees at UCLA; my piano teacher calls my beginner Chopin bravura. I sleep with men at whim—because I want to and because I need to extinguish the power of Bobby De Witt. I bring men here, to the house Lee Blanchard bought for me. Lee expresses no resentment. He sleeps in the Detective Bureau cot room most nights. He wants a Bureau transfer very badly. He's in the thrall of a suavely brutal cop named Dudley Smith, and wants to join his cadre of goons.

I have my dilettante world and my more compelling world of criminals and policemen. I inhabit the two worlds seamlessly and *do* exhibit Norma Shearer-like aplomb. I revel in my insider status. The genesis was Bobby De Witt. He bid me to enter this world. I owe him for that.

Bobby introduced me to a call-service madam named Brenda Allen. Brenda weaned me through my dope kick. We've stayed in touch. We have coffee, talk and smoke ourselves hoarse. Brenda runs girls through a telephone exchange and services an elite clientele. Her lover is a Vice sergeant named Elmer Jackson. Elmer is funny and droll; he blithely facilitates this exclusive brand of police-sanctioned prostitution. Chief Jack Horrall gets a 7% cut.

I love both my worlds. I'm much more engaged by the cop-criminal world. I paid a very dear price to get in.

Another convoy is crossing Sunset and Doheny. I feel the rumble all through my body.

Paul Robeson is appearing at Philharmonic Hall Monday night. I might go. Some of my old leftist chums might be there. I could lord my local celebrity over them and argue that Stalin is just as bad as Hitler. I might even create a scene.

I'm bored. My life is all busywork. Lee reported a rumor floating around City Hall: Bucky Bleichert has applied to the PD.

I hope he gets on. I'll go to his Academy graduation and sketch him in cop blue. Sunday night marks his farewell fight. I'll be there to capture the last punch he throws. The papers have been running cartoons of Emperor Hirohito. The artists always give him Bucky's big teeth.

The convoy has passed out of range. That rumble has left my body.

Nothing before this moment exists. The war is coming. I'm going to enlist.

3

WILLIAM H. PARKER

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

1:02 p.m.

Another fucking convoy. Stalled traffic at Pico and Crenshaw.

A major intersection. All six lanes blocked. Civilian motorists honking their horns—part fervor, part frustration.

Parker checked his watch. He was now two minutes late. He was meeting Carl Hull at Wilshire Station. Carl kept the Department's Fifth Column files. Carl was half intelligence agent, half cop.

A motorcycle punk jumped a half-track hitch and zoomed off,

westbound. The act broke four traffic-code laws. The heist-hot car call cost him an hour. The Ashida kid's gizmo compensated.

Soldiers applauded the jump. The punk flipped them the finger.

Parker stepped out of his car. The convoy stretched to Olympic north and Washington south. Crisscross traffic, lumbering vehicles, Army fools running red lights.

His siren was useless. Street noise would smother it. The fortifications were pledged to defense plants. Two howitzers were pledged to Douglas Aircraft. His old boss ran the plant police. James Edgar "Two-Gun" Davis would get two more guns.

He was stalled in traffic. He was stalled in *Traffic Division*. He was The Man Who Would Be Chief. He was dead-stalled on all flanks.

He hailed from Deadwood, South Dakota. He was a son of the Holy Church and mining-town justice. He *will* be Chief. He will derail the Protestant line of succession. He will enact rigorous reforms. His brusque-tempered reformer's zeal was divinely bestowed. He *will* be Chief. He's been laying the groundwork for years.

He's William H. Parker III. Bill Parker I was a Union army colonel and U.S. attorney. Bill Parker I closed down Deadwood's whorehouses and dope dens. Bill Parker I was elected to Congress in 1906. Cirrhosis killed him at age sixty-one.

Bill Parker I had The Thirst. Line of succession: Bill Parker II and III inherited it.

His police department moniker is "Whiskey Bill." It's colorful, but incomplete. It fails to denote his comportment within the affliction.

He stayed dry throughout Prohibition. Alcohol was *illegal* then. 1933 brought repeal. He's been drinking at odd intervals since then.

Deadwood. He acquired The Thirst there.

Deadwood *formed* him the way L.A. *made* him. He graduated from high school in '20. He was the brightest kid in his class. His mother divorced Bill Parker II in '22. She uprooted to L.A. then. He helped with the move and stayed on.

L.A. was a hundred times bigger than Deadwood and a hundred times more corrupt. He worked as a movie usher and cabbie. L.A.'s sinfulness enraged him. The scale of the place drew him in.

There was a horrible kid marriage. His bride was a trollop. He

did vile things to her. He cannot say the woman's name. He confessed his vile acts to a priest and received absolution.

He got a Church annulment and married again. Helen Schultz was a prudently chosen wife. She was an ex-policewoman. His first wife was a tawdry drunk dream. Helen was probity defined.

He drove taxicabs and attended law school. He joined the Los Angeles Police Department in '27. It was sickeningly corrupt. *Protestant* hoodlums ran the Department. He held his tongue and made rank. He became the hatchet man for Two-Gun Davis. The man was bone-dirty. He acceded to the man's designs. He heard things he shouldn't have heard and did things he shouldn't have done. His brutal ambition was forged from this ghastly descent.

He began his ascent. It started with his law school degree and stunning bar-exam performance. Jim Davis taught him the law from a morally forfeited perspective. He changed the law to vouch his career path.

Jim Davis and Mayor Frank Shaw were ousted. Fletcher Bowron was elected mayor. Bowron was a dimwit and half-assed reformer. Bowron brought in and sacked Chief Art Hohmann. Chief Art squawked when Fletch tapped "Call-Me-Jack" Horrall. Call-Me-Jack was a hear-no-evil/see-no-evil Chief. He maintained a clean façade. He was buffered by hatchet men and bagmen. Captain William H. Parker was frozen in place. The promotion list was an ice floe. He deployed his legal knowledge to thaw himself out.

He crafted legal documents. They fortified civil-service statutes, curtailed political influence and buttressed police autonomy. He had reform-minded jurists introduce the measures. They were straw men and kept his name out of it. The first measures altered the L.A. City Charter and were voted into law. A final measure granted civil service protection to police chiefs. That law now protected Call-Me-Jack Horrall. It would protect him one day.

The Los Angeles Police Department was a snake pit. Rampant factionalism, feudal-warlord cops. City Hall was hot-wired. The Detective Bureau was full of mop-closet listening posts and wire-recording gadgets spackled to ledges and lamps. Cops talked heedlessly, cops kept tabs. Smart cops made their dirty calls from pay phones.

Like Dudley Smith.

They monitored one another. They played at civility. Their

shared Catholicism served them there. They had monthly dinners with Archbishop Cantwell. Call-Me-Jack let Dudley peddle dope to southside Negroes. Call-Me-Jack cosigned Dudley's loathsome theories of racial sedation. Dudley was a Coughlinites and America Firster. He was Irish-born. He hated the English. He smugly relished the Nazi bombing of London.

Parker leaned on his black-and-white. The northbound traffic was stacked down to Adams now. Soldiers whooped at Dorsey High girls. A girl flipped her skirt and displayed her undies. It created an uproar.

Traffic jam. Logjam in Traffic Division.

He ran the Accident Investigation Detail. It was boring work, crucial work, not a career booster. The L.A. boom continued. The automobile boom boomed exponentially. More cars, more car crashes, more injuries and fatalities.

Call-Me-Jack sent him to Northwestern U. last year. He matriculated at a school for ranking traffic cops. His professors predicted an "auto-wreck apocalypse." He kept seeing a young woman on campus. She was tall, red-haired, about twenty-five. He asked a few students about her. They said she was a registered nurse and biology major. Her name was Joan something. She was from the Wisconsin boonies. She liked to drink.

It was 1:14 p.m. The convoy was impregnable. Wait—a northbound half-track stalled out.

Thread the needle. Hit the wiggle spot.

Parker got in the car and tapped his cherry lights and siren. Little kids on the sidewalk squealed. He gunned it and squeaked through the opening. He hit Wilshire Station at 1:16.

He parked and ran upstairs. Young cops gawked at the captain in full sprint.

Carl Hull had an office across from the squadroom. He ran the Red Squad in the '30s and reformed it. The Department hired out cops as strikebreaker thugs. Hull kiboshed the practice and took on his file-keeper job.

Parker stepped into the office. Hull sat at his desk, with his feet up. A war map covered two walls. Blue and red pins denoted troops in Europe. Yellow pins denoted the Japs' Pacific march.

Hull said, "You're seventeen minutes late."

Parker straddled a chair. "An auto theft and a drugstore heist pushed me back."

"I've got scuttlebutt on that."

"Tell me."

Hull packed his pipe. "It's off the Bureau pipeline. That Jap lab kid called Buzz Meeks. He got a fiber match to that rape-o MP."

"Conclusive?"

"No, and the kid told Meeks that."

Parker drummed the chair slats. "Who'd Meeks tell?"

"Dudley Smith."

"And Dudley went to Call-Me-Jack, who said, 'You take care of it, Dud.'"

Hull lit the pipe. "Yes, and in an ideal world, I'd prefer due process."

Parker lit a cigarette. "As much as I despise rapists and heist men, so would I."

A breeze buckled the war map. Parker studied the Russian-front pins. The resisting reds swarmed the advancing blues. It was a near rout.

"We'll be up against Russia after the war, Carl."

"Unless we intercede after Hitler bleeds them dry."

Parker shook his head. "They're our allies now. We need them to win *this* war, which hasn't even started for us yet."

Hull smiled. "Stalin will angle for a property split in eastern Europe. We'll have to forfeit territories and hold on to some strategic possessions."

Parker pointed to the map. "The conflict will be largely ideological then. It's been that way since their goddamn revolution. They hate us, we hate them. We can't let a momentary alliance blunt us to the fact that the world isn't big enough for both of us."

Hull twirled an ashtray. "You're leading me, William."

Parker smiled. "Here's my cross-examination, then. Do you predict a U.S. versus Russia war of territorial chess, the moment that peace is declared?"

Hull said, "Yes, I do."

"Then I'll classify you as a friendly witness and capitalize on that concession. Do you consider our homegrown Fifth Column to be clever and farsighted enough to begin their subversive activities *before* our inevitable engagement in the current world conflict?"

Hull pointed to the map. “Yes. They know that Hitler can’t fight a two-front war and win, just like we do. They’ll play up the fact that Russian blood paved our way to victory, portray us as panfascists and ingrates, and roll out every cliché in the books from that point on.”

Parker pulled out a pocket-size tract. “Here’s some quotes from this. ‘A draconian policy of U.S. aggression against Russia, our current brave ally, after the war is won.’ ‘Escalating war hysteria and the racially inspired mass imprisonment of innocent Japanese citizens, a collusive tangle of the Los Angeles Police Department and the FBI.’”

Hull tamped his pipe. “Devil’s advocate, William. The Feds *do* have a Jap subversive list, and they *will* use us if any type of detentions are required. You can’t fault the bastards’ logic here.”

Parker said, “Their logic is specious, seditious, disingenuous and criminally defamatory. These shitheels allege to be antifascist, yet they give aid and comfort to our shared fascist enemy with the very writing and publication of this tract. And if you require further verification of the pervertedly circuitous logic of it all, the tract was printed by the same outfit that prints Gerald L. K. Smith’s hate tracts.”

Hull stared at the wall maps. Parker tossed the tract in his lap. Hull skimmed it.

“I know who wrote this. I’ve got her prose style and vocabulary memorized.”

“Tell me.”

“It’s a woman. She’s a socialite, for want of less kind descriptions, and she runs a Red cell. She lords it over some screenwriters and actors. They show up at rallies, make speeches and cause a ruckus. The Feds have an informant in the cell. He’s a Beverly Hills psychiatrist that all the Reds spill their woes to. A pal on the Feds passes me the good doctor’s dirt. I’ll show you my file, if you quit leading me and come clean.”

Parker shook his head. “Give me some names first. Come on, Carl. I outrank you.”

Hull laughed. “The doctor’s name is Saul Lesnick. His daughter was riding a vehicular-manslaughter term at Tehachapi. The Feds sprung her on the proviso that he turn snitch.”

“The others?”

“The woman’s name is Claire De Haven. Her chief acolytes are a fairy actor named Reynolds Loftis and his inamorata Chaz Minear.”

No bells rang. The Urge hit out of nowhere. Come on—revoke The Pledge. One drink won’t kill you.

“These Reds are defaming our police department, Carl. We can’t have that.”

“You’ll be Chief one day, William. I look forward to that day, and I’ll serve proudly under you. For now, though, I’d be happy with an explanation.”

Parker stood up. “We’ll plant someone in the cell. Our own informant. Someone we’ve got a wedge on.”

Hull opened a drawer and pulled out four photographs. Parker leaned over the desk.

Hull laid the photos out. “I was checking my surveillance files a few weeks ago. These jumped out at me. I thought they might be useful at some point, so you might call this serendipitous.”

Four sneak snapshots. Group pix. Two indoor meetings, two outdoor rallies. Dates: mid-’37 to fall ’38. A young woman’s face circled, four times.

She had dark hair. She stared intently at *something*. She looked provocative.

“Who is she?”

“Katherine Ann Lake, age twenty-one. Here’s a hint. Her boyfriend was the bluesuit at your heist call a few hours ago.”

Bells rang. Provocative—*sure*.

The Boulevard-Citizens job. That persistent rumor: Lee Blanchard bossed the heist and framed a fall guy. Blanchard was allegedly tight with Ben Siegel. “Bugsy” was now in the Hall of Justice jail. He allegedly snuffed a hood named Greenie Greenberg. It was a Jew gang rubout—November ’39.

Siegel would be out soon. The prosecution’s key witness took a window dive. Last month—Coney Island, New York. Gangland thug Abe Reles falls to his death. NYPD men are guarding him. He fashions a bedsheet rope and attempts to escape. He plummets eight stories.

Katherine Ann Lake. The girl Blanchard met at the robbery trial. The prosecution’s stunning star witness.

Parker stared at the photos. “Blanchard’s a shitheel. You’ve heard the rumors.”

Hull coughed. “Yes, and I credit them. If you’re thinking of the

Boulevard-Citizens caper for a wedge on the girl, you wouldn't be far off."

Parker said, "He wants to link up with Dudley and his boys. You've heard the rumors."

Hull said, "Here's something you haven't heard. The NYPD Intelligence Squad spotted Blanchard in Coney Island, right before that witness in the Siegel trial jumped. The cops recognized him from his fight days."

Parker stared at the photographs. The resolution was sharp. The Lake girl had fierce dark eyes.

4

DUDLEY SMITH

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

2:16 p.m.

Lineup.

Five rape suspects, four rape victims, one-way glass between. A raised stage and height strips marked on the wall.

Chairs for eyeball witnesses. Standing ashtrays. A discomfiting wall poster.

It featured flags and dyspeptic eagles. It was a war-bond pitch. It supported intervention in this Jew-inspired war.

Dudley was America First. He loved Father Coughlin's weekly broadcasts. He enjoyed Gerald L. K. Smith's tirades. He shared a surname and no blood with Pastor Smith. The pastor was vilely antipapist.

Mike Breuning said, "The rape ladies are next door. They all say they could ID the guy, so we're in luck there. The lineup guys are backstage. They're all MPs from the Fort MacArthur battalion, and they all fit the suspect's description."

Dick Carlisle cracked his knuckles. Elmer Jackson flipped through his notebook. He'd worked the rape string from the start.

Dudley watched him read. Yes—the rapes felt consistent with the drugstore heist this a.m. That Jap lab whiz was right—the book-rack fibers do not *assuredly* place the rape-o at the drugstore. The *possible* two-crime parlay was irrelevant. Rape devastated women. The offense equaled murder. He told Call-Me-Jack that. Call-Me-Jack said, “You take care of it, Dud.”

Elmer chewed a cigar. Elmer ran whores with Brenda Allen. The Vice Squad phones were tapped. Everyone knew everyone’s shit. City Hall was one big listening post.

Carlisle lit a cigarette. Breuning stood poised. Elmer wagged his cigar.

“We’ve got four incidents. The victims all described the fucker as blond, medium-size and about twenty-five. Our guys fit that bill, and they were all on overnight leave when the incidents occurred. On top of that, they all had battery beefs involving women before they enlisted. For MO, we’ve got this. All four victims were out walking, alone, in West L.A. The rape-o abducted them, gagged them and drove them to four different vacant lots nearby. Here’s the crazy shit. The rape-o hits them twice, rolls on a rubber and cries out like he’s in pain when he’s giving it to them.”

Dudley smiled. Breuning leaned in close. Dudley put an arm around him.

“Call the infirmary at Fort MacArthur, lad. Get the names of all the soldiers treated for syph and the clap within the past six months, both in the MP battalion and the camp at large. Compile separate lists and report back within half an hour.”

Breuning vamoosed. Elmer said, “What gives, boss?”

“An instinct and a hypothesis, lad. Let’s say the MP’s armband was a ruse to foil identification, because wearing such an identifying item on a rape string is tantamount to suicidal. Let’s say he’s miffed at some long-ago woman for having given him a dose. Let’s say he’s a smart lad with scientific knowledge. He knows that we can determine blood type from pus or seminal discharge. Let’s say that for some fiendishly unfathomable reason, he wants the rapes to cause him pain.”

Elmer went *Hub?* Carlisle went *Oh, yeab—I get it.*

Dot Rothstein walked the women in. Dot was a Sheriff’s matron and a grand bull dyke. She ran six one, 240. Male cops stood tall around her.

The women had that schoolmarm look that rape-o's found fetching. They wore church frocks to a lineup. Carlisle dispensed cigarettes and lights.

The room smoked up. The women eyeballed the stage and made faces. The Dotstress scrambled.

Dudley said, "You're all grand and brave ladies for submitting to this ordeal, so we will do our best to ensure that it will be brief. Five men will walk in and stand on that stage, under the wall numbers one through five. You can see them, but they cannot see you. If you see the man who so heinously assaulted you, please tell me."

The women gulped en masse. Elmer tripped a wall switch. Five soldiers walked onstage and faced the room. They wore olive drabs and red armbands. They ran to the rape man's type.

Two women squinted. One woman leaked tears. One woman put on her glasses. They studied the stage. The moment built and fizzled. They all shook their heads no.

Elmer tapped the wall switch. The soldiers filed offstage. The women clustered around an ashtray and stubbed out their cigarettes.

One said, "They just weren't him."

One rubbed her eyes. "He was more mean-looking."

One nodded.

One said, "He had mean eyes."

Dudley smiled. Dudley touched their arms. It meant *There, there*.

Breuning returned. He was breathing hard. His shirt was wet. He waved a mug-shot strip.

Dudley walked over. Breuning leaned into the doorway.

"One case. The guy's an MP corporal, and he fits the description. He was on overnight leave on the dates of all four incidents, and he got his dose treated *after* the last rape. The provost captain told me he was a suspect in a rape string in Seattle, but the Army took him anyway. He's on leave now. He's a racetrack fiend, and the Oak Tree Meet's at Santa Anita today. I've got a plate number for him."

Dudley grabbed the strip. *Aaaaaah*—Jerome Joseph Pavlik. Young, blond, *mean*.

Two women hovered. Dudley flashed the strip. The women studied it.

One woman cried. One woman screamed.

Dudley pulled out two shamrock charms. They were fourteen-karat gold. He bought them bulk off a Yid jeweler.

He drew the women to him. He placed the charms in their hands. He said, "I'll take care of it."

2:46 p.m.

The last race ran at 3:30. Santa Anita was off the Arroyo Seco Parkway. It was *très* tight.

They ran through the City Hall garage. Breuning owned a souped-up Ford. They piled in and peeled out.

Breuning drove. Dudley sat up front. Carlisle sat in back, with three sawed-off shotguns.

They were 10-gauge and twin-barreled. They were fitted for bear slugs and triple-aught buck.

They pulled onto Main Street and cut through Chinatown. They made the parkway, fast.

Breuning gunned it. The juice needle jumped to eighty. Dudley smoked and looked out his window. He caught a wreck on the southbound side.

Skid marks, road flares, collision. Impact—a Navy flatbed and shine Cadillac. Traffic grief. It brought to mind Whiskey Bill Parker. He had grand dirt on him.

You should not have indulged that youthful marriage. Did you think your misconduct would escape my scrutiny?

Whiskey Bill had remarried. His second union was plainly humdrum. Dudley had his own Irish-born wife and four daughters. He had a rogue fifth daughter in Boston. She was seventeen now. They exchanged frequent letters and phone calls.

Elizabeth Short. His child with a married woman named Phoebe. A scold with her own daughter brood.

The Short girls all looked like Phoebe. It cloaked Beth's paternal blood. Phoebe was older than him. He was a mere nineteen when they coupled. He was a raw Irish conscript.

Joe Kennedy lived in Boston. Joe was filthy rich and donated money to Irish causes. Joe financed his citizenship. The price was strongarm work.

Beth knew that he was her father. She loved him and cleaved to the notion of her rough policeman dad. He just sent her a plane ticket. She wanted to see Los Angeles at Christmas. Her last letter disturbed him. She hinted at a "horrible thing" last year. Beth had

a blind chum named Tommy Gilfoyle. He should call Tommy and inquire about that “horrible thing.”

Family.

Bold men required it. The constraints were minimal. The vows were laughable. The joys were rich. Family was a necessary tether. The hellhound within him would go berserk without it. Whiskey Bill was childless. He ran unchecked in his prim lunacy.

The parkway was near dead. Breuning took hairpin turns fast. The juice needle jumped in the straightaways.

Dudley checked his watch. It was 2:54. The next-to-last race ran at 3:00. Most track fiends left before the closer.

Lincoln Heights whizzed by. A cowboy movie was filming up in the hills. A gunfight blurred by. Dudley recognized a man in a loincloth. Some Apache—a skid row bookie and three-time loser out of Big Q.

Dudley smoked. His thoughts drifted.

He moonlighted for Columbia Pictures. He was Harry Cohn’s morals watchdog. Film stars ran unruly. The studio führers controlled them with rigid conduct codes. Violations construed breach of contract. He’s nailed queer movie stars. He’s nailed dipsos and hopheads galore. He’s got legions of bellboys and whores bribed to report indiscretions. He’s building quite the grand scrapbook of Hollywood at play.

Bette Davis will love his candid photos. She’ll be at the Shrine Friday night. The *Examiner* is throwing its newsboys’ Christmas bash. He’ll be there to provoke a chance meet.

Wetbacks tilled crops above the film site. Carlos Madrano probably supplied them. Carlos. *El Capitán*, Mexican State Police. Close pal of Call-Me-Jack and Two-Gun Davis. Carlos shared his antipathy for the Reds and the Jews. Carlos viewed the Japs as *der Führer*’s pesky kin.

Dudley checked the mug strip. The rape-o looked like a small Lee Blanchard.

Aaaaah, Leland. Are you still troubled by Coney Island, on November 12? You would love to join my cadre, but have you the gumption for the work?

Ben Siegel wanted Abe Reles dead. Lee Blanchard owed Ben, per the Boulevard-Citizens job. Jew syndicate lads bribed two NYPD guards. Hotel-room doors were left open.

They Mickey Finn'd Reles' food. It was a quick two-man job. Blanchard fashioned the escape rope—a euphemism for noose. He did the hoisting himself.

The New York *Daily News* captured the moment. CANARY FALLS TO DEATH! HE CAN SING, BUT HE CAN'T FLY!

The train ride home was vexing. Blanchard waxed weepy and stayed drunk. The lad went back with Ben S. Benny bought out his fight contract and advised Lee to take some prudent dives. Lee refused, Lee owed Benny, Lee behaved rashly with the Boulevard-Citizens job. Benny banked at Boulevard-Citizens and played golf with the prexy. Benny was quite insane and obsessed with respectability. That caper was one large snafu.

Breuning pulled off the parkway. It was 3:01. Carlisle loaded the shotguns. They cut through South Pasadena. They made Arcadia and Santa Anita in two minutes flat.

The San Gabriels loomed behind the racetrack proper. The crest line framed the grandstands and clubhouse. The parking lot was two-thirds empty. Loudspeakers blared. A race ran down the home stretch.

Breuning cruised the parking rows. Dudley and Carlisle scanned plates. Cheers squelched up the speakers. Track fools walked out of the clubhouse and made for their cars.

Carlisle said, "Right there."

Yes—a '36 Olds sedan. Forest green/whip antenna/California ADL-642.

Breuning swung into an empty space and idled. Dudley chained cigarettes. The crowd fanned through the car rows. A man and two women peeled off their way. *Yes*—Jerome Joseph Pavlik and a Chinatown whore duet.

Carlisle said, "Tong chippies."

Breuning said, "Four Families, and protected. The boss Chink plays mah-jongg with Call-Me-Jack."

They looked blotto. The rape-o wore wilted khakis. The chippies wore moth-eaten fur coats.

They piled into the Olds. Dudley said, "Tail them."

They brodied out of the lot. Breuning stuck close. They were stinko. They wouldn't notice. Breuning rode their bumper—hard.

Two-car caravan. Residential streets, Fair Oaks Boulevard. The Parkway, due south.

The Olds fishtailed and weaved. Breuning eased off the gas. A Packard got between them. The whip antenna stayed in sight.

Carlisle blanket-wrapped the shotguns. Breuning said, "Bon voyage, sweetheart."

The Olds pulled off at Alameda, southbound. Chinatown was straight ahead. Kwan's Chinese Pagoda was quite close.

The Olds bumped the curb and stopped. The whores stumbled out. They got their sea legs. They tucked cash rolls into their garter belts and blew the rape-o kisses. They weaved down an alley behind a chop suey pit.

Carlisle passed out the shotguns. Jerome Joseph Pavlik stepped from his car and eyed the world, shit-faced. He gawked a vacant lot, catty-corner. It was full of palm trees and high grass.

He staggered into the lot. He walked up to a palm tree and pulled out his dick. He launched a world's record piss.

Dudley said, "Now, lads."

The street was no-one-out quiet. They beelined to the lot. Soft dirt covered their footsteps. The rape-o swayed and sprayed grass.

They came up behind him. He didn't hear shit.

Dudley said, "Those grand girls won't be the same now. This prevents recurring grief."

He started to turn around. He started to say "Say what?"

Six triggers snapped. The rape-o blew up. Bone shards took down palm fronds. Carlisle's glasses got residual-spritzed.

Big booms overlapped. Note those buckshot-on-wood echoes. 3:30 church bells pealed through all of it.

3:31 p.m.

Bug-eyed dragons flanked the Pagoda. Their tongues lit up and wagged at night. Uncle Ace Kwan ran the Hop Sing tong. His joint catered to white stiffs and Chinks with white taste buds. L.A. cops dined gratis.

Dudley walked through the restaurant. Mayor Bowron and DA McPherson were snout-deep in chow mein. Fletch B. was a peppy civic booster and all-around stupe. McPherson was a narcoleptic rumdum and mud shark. He frequented Minnie Roberts' Casbah and engaged two Congo cuties at a pop.

A recessed door led to the basement. Dudley took the stairs down. He leaned on a wall panel. It slid open. Fumes hit him straight off.

An opium den. Dim lights and twenty-odd pallets. Water bowls, cups and ladles. Scrawny Chinamen in their skivvies, sucking on pipes.

Dudley counted heads. *Aaaaah*, sixteen fiends adrift.

Dudley shut the panel. The basement conjured labyrinths beneath the Wolfsschanze. Cement walls, mildew, scrolled-iron doors. Ace Kwan's office—an SS bunker.

He knocked and walked in. Uncle Ace squatted over the floor safe. He was sixty-six and consumptive thin. He wore a Santa Claus hat. He conjured atrocity and Yule cheer.

"How's tricks, Dudster?"

"Tricky, my yellow brother."

"How so?"

"There's a dead white man in the lot across the street. Your lads should spread some quicklime and post a guard while the earth absorbs him."

Ace sat cross-legged. He was famously nimble. It was a common heathen trait.

"The lad was last seen with two tong whores."

"Hop Sing?"

"Four Families. You might want to remove the green sedan, as well. I don't want such trivial white business to disturb your clientele."

Ace bowed. "Four Families has been rude to my favorite niece. They are unsavory like that."

"Shall I rebuke those involved? I would hate to see another feud."

Ace stood up. "No, but my Irish brother honors me with the offer."

Dudley bowed. Ace pointed to a side doorway and went *Be my guest*. Dudley opened the door. Ace vanished somewhere. Chinks were stealthy and decorous.

It was his secret room. The pallet, the bowl, the ladle. Compressed tar spread on a bread plate. As always—The Pipe.

He hung his suit coat and holster on a wall peg. The pallet was built for a tall man. Dudley packed and lit the pipe.

The tar smoldered, the burn hit, the smoke funneled in. His shoulders dropped. His limbs disappeared.

The wisps now. *You never know what you'll see.*

Yes—there.

Dublin. Grafton Street, '21. Black and Tans with rubber-bullet guns. They aim for the kidneys. It still hurts when he stoops.

A rally. Patrick Pearse in full cry.

“Irishmen and Irishwomen—in the name of God and the dead generations from which she receives her nationhood—Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.”

A church rectory. A gun cache in a priest's bedroom. A rifle stock hits his hands. He's on the street now. He's sighting down the barrel. A British soldier's face explodes.

He's on Sackville Street. The recoil subsides. He's looting a Prottly-owned shop. Patrick Pearse ruffles his hair.

“She now seizes the moment, supported by her exiled children in America.”

Joe Kennedy smiles. He's got satchels full of cash. Irish Citizen's Army men greet him. The Black and Tans murder Patrick Pearse. There's a firing squad. He's got a bull's-eye pinned to his chest.

Joe Kennedy says, “You're a bright boy. You should come to America. Prohibition is a license to steal. You could ferry hooch for me.”

He's in Canada, that's Lake Erie, he's on a moored barge. He's holding a tommy gun. Whiskey crates cover the deck.

Boston. A grand house. A Yankee maid scowls at him. He's toddling six-year-old Jack.

Joe Kennedy says, “Dud, this Jew banker fucked me on a deal. Take care of it, will you?”

His limbs are gone. The tar still burns. He knows when to stir the flame. Time is a nickelodeon. It screens through eyes in the back of his head.

He hit the Jew too hard. He shouldn't have killed him. Joe Kennedy is peeved.

“Your future is in Los Angeles, son. I can get you on the police force. You can fuck movie stars and create mischief.”

He's standing proud in knife-sharp blues. He's hitting a purse snatcher with a phone book. Jack Horrall toasts him at Archbishop Cantwell's table. He's in Harry Cohn's office. Harry pats a bust of Benito Mussolini. He's outside a Bel-Air manse with a camera. He's got a window view. Cary Grant is engaged in all-male *soixante-neuf*.

Photoplay, *Screen World*—magazine pages aswirl. Bette Davis—aglow with something *he* said.

Switcheroo. Instant travelogue. He's on Coney Island at the Half Moon Hotel. He's hoisting the canary. Don't cry, Lee Blanchard—it's unmanly.

Travelogue. Back to Boston. Young Jack Kennedy's a Navy ensign now. He's due here for Christmas. He wants to fuck movie stars.

Jack starts singing, in Spanish. His voice doesn't go with the tune. Cut to the Trocadero. It's festooned with a banner: WELCOME 1938!

He's at a table with Ben Siegel and Sheriff Biscailuz. Glenn Miller's band plays "Perfidia." Bette Davis dances with a fey young man.

Light streaked in. The nickelodeon jerked. A shutter dropped and killed his travelogue.

He felt his limbs. He saw his coat and gun on a peg.

A Chinese woman appeared. She brought an aperitif. Three Benzedrine tablets and green tea.

Dudley stood up. The room retained a glow.

"What time is it, please?"

"It is 6:42."

"Perfidia" ended off-key. Bette Davis blew him a kiss.

5

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

6:43 p.m.

Bucky was late. He always dropped by the lab on weekends. He trained at the Main Street Gym. Central Station was close.

The lab was dead. Most chemists worked Monday to Friday. Ashida worked seven days and nights.

The captain's office was next door. Elmer Jackson's voice came through a vent. He was boozing with Captain Bergdahl. They discussed the rape lineup with Dudley Smith.

The rapees ID'd the rape-o off a mug shot. Elmer said, "The

guy might be good for the drugstore job this morning, but the DA'll probably have to indict him off a slab."

Bergdahl laughed. Ashida prepped a microscope and the drugstore bullet chunks. Ray Pinker ran *his* tests. He left his report on Ashida's desk. His conclusion: Browning 9mm, shell catcher—equipped.

Wrong. Pinker's comparison text was outdated. *Be certain now. Retest yourself.*

He dialed in close. He got the same characteristics as this morning. Call it conclusive. A Luger slug hits gypsum board.

Bergdahl cracked a joke. The vent amplified his voice. Ha, ha—Come-San-Chin, the Chinese cocksucker.

Elmer said, "Cute, but I already heard it."

Bergdahl said, "Can you tell them apart? The Japs and the Chinks, I mean. I've got a pal on the Feds. He says they've got a roundup list for the Japs, if we get into this-here war. From my white man's perspective, I can't see no difference."

Ashida unlocked his tool drawer. He kept his photographs inside.

There's Bucky. He's crouched in boxing trunks. He's tall. He's lean. His muscles meld more than protrude. He's German Lutheran, with a Jewish star on his trunks. It expressed anti-Nazi sentiment.

He moved sideways on his toes and never tangled up his feet. He had left-hand power off feints. Mariko said he had "Tojo teeth." His dad was in the German-American Bund.

His eyes were small and deep-set. His smile lit up rooms.

There. Those clomps—he's taking the steps two at a time.

Ashida locked up the photos. Bucky walked in and dragged a chair over. He wore flannels and his Belmont letter jacket. The green *B* was pinned for basketball and track.

They shook hands. Ashida said, "Is it true?"

Bucky grinned. "Who told you?"

"Ray Pinker said it's common knowledge, which probably means that everyone knows, except me."

"I'm cleared for the May Academy class. I've passed all the exams, and they told me the background check is pro forma."

Ashida smiled. "You were waiting to tell me. You didn't want to jinx it, so you thought you'd wait until you were sure."

Bucky rocked his chair. "Or after the fight tomorrow. I'll be starved, and I'll buy dinner. We weigh in at noon, and I'll be all but-

terflies until it's over. I can't drop weight the way I used to. I'm still up at one seventy-nine."

Ashida said, "Take some steam at the Shotokan Baths."

"Nix that. I've got a pass to the Jonathan Club. The DA left a note at the gym. 'Son, I'm betting on you.'"

Ashida slapped his knees. "I could tell you stories about him."

"I've already heard them. He showed up drunk at a Lee Blanchard fight, with two colored girls."

Ashida said, "Junior Wilkins? It's not a very auspicious farewell fight."

"No, but it's one I can win."

Ashida laced his fingers. "Did you read Braven Dyer's column? He said you're running from Ronnie Cordero."

Bucky flinched. "I'm not quitting off a loss, Hideo."

"You wouldn't lose."

"He'd clean my clock. I could take him like I could take Joe Louis."

"I'm sorry you took it the wrong way. I didn't mean to—"

Bucky waved him off. "I ran into Jack Webb. He's selling suits at Silverwood's. He said the Detective Bureau men buy wholesale there."

"Jack's an awful cop buff. He's always bringing the Bureau men coffee and cigarettes."

Bucky stroked his Belmont *B*. "Sentinels forever. Jack should let us buy wholesale. We got him elected class president."

Ashida blurted it. "You've got an admirer."

"Who is she? And what's wrong with her?"

"I've seen her at your fights. She's always drawing you."

Bucky flashed his teeth. "I'm saving myself for Carole Lombard. You think she'll go for these?"

There's the blush. It always happens. Bucky's so gracious that he never sees.

6

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

7:03 p.m.

The Strip is swarmed with servicemen. Dave's Blue Room, the Bit O' Sweden and the Trocadero are dishing out free liquor on the sidewalk. I just listened to a news broadcast. The men are being deployed to the Chavez Ravine Naval Base, Fort MacArthur in San Pedro, and Camp Roberts, up near San Luis Obispo. Los Angeles is the deployment hub; the artillery passing through has been consigned to coastal-defense installations and the Lockheed, Boeing, Douglas and Hughes aircraft plants. Ex-Chief Jim Davis runs the Douglas police force; he blathered for a good ten minutes about the need to protect civilian production facilities from Fifth Column sabotage and air-balloon attack. Davis is a vivid local lunatic; I watched him shoot a cigarette out of Lee's mouth at the Bureau Christmas party last year.

I began my diary only this morning. It feels like a remedy to stasis already. I'm looking in at my separate bedroom; the first thing I see are my Bucky Bleichert sketches. They identify my need to engage men anonymously and abstractly. Writing about Bucky forces me to see him in a more critical light.

Lee Blanchard despises Bucky, for his "dance master style" and "handpicked powder-puff opponents." I love Bucky for the ways that he is not Lee, because I am beholden to Lee in confounding ways and need Lee in direct proportion to our shared history.

We had a horrible fight a few hours ago. It pertained to Lee's recent behavior. He's been acting hurt for nearly a month now. He's been sleeping in the Detective Bureau cot room more and more, and spending more and more time with the Bureau's "mascot," a very eager-to-please haberdashery salesman named Jack Webb. He disappeared for a week in mid-November, and explained his absence as "decoy work" in a robbery investigation. I believed it—but only briefly. On a whim, I went through Lee's separate bedroom drawers

this afternoon. I found a receipt for a train ticket to New York City and back, November 8 to 15.

I stewed over it. Lee came home and changed out of his civilian clothes. He stated his intention to spend the night at City Hall. I confronted him then.

I demanded an explanation for the receipt and his recent actions. Lee confronted *me* then. He said, "You think you're an independent woman, but you sponge off of *me* and screw guys in *my* house, while *I* foot the bill. You're a dilettante and a parasite, and if you disapprove of my behavior, get the fuck out of *my* house."

With that, Lee stormed out of *his* house, got in *his* car and drove off to live in *his* world—a world that I am subsumed by. A world that I fell into, and want more of.

Brenda Allen, Elmer Jackson and police-sanctioned vice. Lee and his fawning allegiance to Dudley Smith. Bobby De Witt in San Quentin and the scars on my legs. Whatever Lee owed or did *not* owe to Ben Siegel, currently awaiting release from the Hall of Justice jail. The bank heist that Lee planned in large part as a mission to save me. The *deus ex machina*: a little girl vanishes in 1929.

Lee's little sister Laurie, age twelve. Lee, fifteen then. Laurie disappears. She was at play in a public park one moment and gone forever the next. Lee was supposed to be watching her. He was off screwing the neighborhood round heels instead.

Lee carries the guilt. He hasn't fully touched a woman since that time. It's why he provides me with a comfortable home and does not make love to me. It's punishment sustained and punishment inflicted. It enrages me and moves me to sobs. It's why I love Lee so deeply and refuse to leave him. It's why I sleep with men in his own house.

The houses flanking this house are blaring the evening news; I can hear both broadcasts plainly. FDR is scolding Japan for their vile aggressions. Father Coughlin is scolding FDR and the Jew hegemony.

Both men own posterity. War gives men a plain and simple something to do. There's a brawl down on the Strip. The radios are a low hum under the shrieks.

Lee Blanchard had forty-nine pro fights and engineered a daring robbery. He owns posterity in a way that I never will. That fact infuriates me.

All I have is withering perception. Women write diaries in the hope that their words will beckon fate.

7

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

7:49 p.m.

The news signed off. A talking beaver signed on and pitched toothpaste. Parker kicked his door shut.

Traffic Division was dead. Traffic shit roiled citywide. He was the only man on duty. Nobody else cared.

The division had its own building. 1st and Figueroa—six blocks from City Hall. It was his brainchild. Buy an old warehouse and convert it. Create autonomy. Limit Jack Horrall's access.

Parker prayed. He asked God for the courage not to drink tonight. He asked God to guide him through his incursion.

He was frayed. The Thirst plagued him. West L.A. Patrol snared two soldiers for drunk driving. There were three downed half-tracks at Pico and Bundy. Ten Central Division men got diverted. Central was running a night-watch skeleton crew.

Parker tidied up his desk. Parker stared at the files on his blotter.

Lee Blanchard's personnel file. Carl Hull's files: Claire De Haven, Reynolds Loftis, Chaz Minear, Saul Lesnick. Carl's suspected seditionists' summary sheet on Katherine Ann Lake.

White female American. 3/9/20/Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Prairie stock like him.

Carl called Claire De Haven "the Red Queen." There were no files on the other cell members. The "subsidiary membership" fluctuated. The Queen moved her pawns in and out. She did not know that Doc Lesnick was a long-term Fed snitch.

Blanchard first—a thin file, three pages.

Class B fitness reports. No informant spiel on the Boulevard-Citizens job. Nothing on Blanchard's alleged friendship with Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel. Four civilian complaints. The complainants

accused Blanchard of brutal jail-cell beatings. The complaints were dismissed—the complainants were perverts and hopheads.

No surprises. No new insights. His old instinct confirmed. Blanchard was strictly unkosher.

The Queen and her key pawns—more sinister.

Parker skimmed the files. The gist hit him quick. Doc Lesnick's snitch perceptions felt valid. Claire De Haven was an extortionist. Reynolds Loftis and Chaz Minear were homosexuals. The Red Queen held incriminating photos.

They wore drag gowns at a homo ball. Sheriff's roust sheets corroborated the pix. Loftis and Minear were repeatedly detained during fruit raids. The detentions ran up to 1940. Loftis and Minear habituated queer meeting places and congregated with other degenerates.

The Red Queen dominated them. She told Loftis what movies to act in and Minear how to craft his film scripts. Carl included sample dialogue. It was classic Fifth Columnism.

In the war films: Russian soldiers decry the plight of American Negroes. In the gangster films: hoodlums deride authority and extoll the ghastly charms of relinquishment. In the comedies: sophisticates drop leftist bons mots and vilify Adolf Hitler. The murderous Joe Stalin goes unmentioned.

Parker lit a cigarette. The Lake girl's file ran sixteen pages, replete with photographs.

Here's Miss Lake at Red gatherings. Banners abound. Dubious causes, ragamuffin crowds.

JUSTICE FOR THE SCOTTSBORO BOYS! REMEMBER SACCO & VANZETTI!
ROOSEVELT, WALL STREET PAWN! BREAD ON EVERY PLATE NOW!

The crowds were unkempt. Miss Lake was groomed and well-dressed. She *attired* herself.

The photos were crisp black and white. He sensed that she always wore red. She wore a cloche hat to a Ban-the-Klan rally. Men clustered around her. She was not classically lovely. She worked with what she had.

The hat *bad* to be red. She was spoofing her own affect. She was distanced from the causes she embraced.

She got straight A's at UCLA. She studied music, literature and political science. Her professors inked comments on her transcripts. They cited her "luminous" term papers. Two profs singled out her

essay “Beethoven and Luther: Art and God Within.” It was published in a prestigious journal.

Carl Hull secured a list of her library checkouts. It felt emblematic. Left-slanted biography. Romantic-era poetry. Muckraking labor screeds.

Wedges, fulcrums, coercion.

Serendipity.

What was *this* young woman doing with a thug cop like Lee Blanchard? The Boulevard-Citizens job failed to explain it. Carl Hull saw Miss Lake testify at Bobby De Witt’s trial. The prosecution foundered until she took the stand. Miss Lake swore the oath between sobs. She closed the show, right there.

He made two calls from Carl’s office. He got the FBI first. He wanted to talk to Dr. Lesnick’s Fed handler. The man was off fishing in Oregon. He talked to Special Agent Ward Littell instead.

Serendipity.

He knew Ward from church. Ward was an ex-sem boy and a bit of a bleeding heart. Ward knew nothing about Lesnick. Ward leaked a tip.

The Feds were poised to investigate the tapped phones at City Hall. The push would occur in early ’42. Ex-Chief Hohmann had snatched off the Department. Fletch Bowron made Jack Horrall Chief. Dimwit Hohmann wanted his job back. The taps and listening posts were an open secret. Fletch and Call-Me-Jack were fake reformers. Jack was 100% on the grift. Jack had a gentler touch than Crazy Jim Davis.

He called Sid Hudgens next. Sid scribed for the *Mirror-News*. Sid confirmed Ward Littell’s assertions.

Art Hohmann was a Fed fink. The fucker was lawsuit-happy. Wouldn’t *you* be, Bill? Fat Jack is in his chair.

Wedges, fulcrums, coercion.

It was 9:05. Parker grabbed the phone and called the Bureau line. “Homicide, Sergeant Ludlow.”

“It’s Bill Parker at Traffic.”

“Uh, yeah, Captain?”

“Is Lee Blanchard there?”

Ludlow said, “Yes, sir. He’s taking a nap on Dudley Smith’s couch.”

Parker said, “Don’t wake him. And don’t tell him I called.”

Ludlow mumbled something. Parker hung up. The surveillance pix beamed out at him.

Miss Lake's hat was red. It *had* to be.

9:07 p.m.

Parker shagged his car and cut west on 1st Street. He skimmed the radio and caught newscasts. The news was all *JAPS*.

Japs whiz toward Siam, Japs whiz toward the Philippines. FDR remains embroiled with Jap envoys. Boss Jap Hirohito blows raspberries.

Parker doused the radio. 1st Street swept into Beverly Boulevard. Christmas lights blinked on lawns and outlined doorways. A Schenley's billboard reignited The Thirst. A Maytag billboard got him jazzed.

A family oohed and aahed a gas range. The mom looked like that redhead at Northwestern. Joan something. Homewrecker. He hid out from Helen and *gassed* on *her*.

Parker turned north on La Cienega. The Strip hop-hop-hopped. He swerved around a downed flatbed spilling gas masks. Drunken sailors donned the masks and capered. Two Marines duked it out by the Mocambo. They staggered and capsized a faux Christmas tree.

North on Wetherly Drive. The Lake-Blanchard love nest—halfway up the block.

Streamlined and stylish. Aesthetically landscaped. No kind of cop's house. Too costly, too *good*.

A Packard ragtop was parked in the driveway. Parker pulled in behind it. The house was lit up. Cigarette smoke plumed off a high terrace.

He got out and stretched. He straightened his tie and hitched up his holster. He crossed the porch and rang the bell.

Footsteps responded. She swung the door wide.

She stared at him. She wore gabardine slacks and a man's white shirt. She dressed up to stay home.

"Bill Parker, Miss Lake. I was hoping I could have a few moments of your time."

She checked her watch. It was solid gold. She wore saddle shoes. She cinched her hair with a tortoiseshell barrette.

"It's 9:41 p.m., Captain."

“Yes, I know it’s late. If I’m intruding, I could come back tomorrow.”

She stepped toward him. It was a block-the-doorway pose.

“It pertains to Lee, then? That’s a Traffic Division patch on your sleeve. Has there been an accident?”

She had his prairie twang. He noticed her notice his. She could lose it or modify it. She exemplified *Affect*.

“Officer Blanchard is fine, Miss Lake. It’s something else entirely. I’m hoping you’ll be curious enough to hear me out.”

She stepped aside. He stepped inside. The living room was a movie set. Mauve walls, wingback chairs, tubular chaise lounges. Leftist-message art and a chrome liquor sideboard.

“You have a lovely home, Miss Lake.”

She shut the door. “Lee had a successful boxing career. He had good financial counseling, as well.”

“Ben Siegel is shrewd with his money. I’m sure he counseled Officer Blanchard himself.”

She leaned on the door. The pose covered a pout. For a heartbeat—faux sophisticate, reckless child.

“We’ve all heard the rumors, Captain. A few of us know that they’re false.”

Parker pointed to a chair. “Would you mind?”

She nodded and walked to the sideboard. Parker sat down. She spritzed out two club sodas and brought him one. She pulled a matching chair up close.

They touched glasses. She said, “To whatever comes next.”

Parker sipped his drink. “Tell me how you knew.”

“I attended Mayor Bowron’s Easter dinner for Archbishop Cantwell. There was an open bar. You veered between a selection of spirits and the soft-drink tray. In the end, you had a seltzer. You seemed to be both disappointed and relieved.”

Parker said, “Do you always observe minor moments that acutely?”

“Yes. And you sense that I do, which is why you’re here.”

Parker popped a sweat. “You’re from Sioux Falls?”

“Yes, and you’re from Deadwood.”

“How do you know that?”

“Elmer Jackson told me.”

“Are you friends with Sergeant Jackson?”

“Yes.”

“Are you familiar with the rumors about him?”

“Yes, and I know that they’re true, as much as the rumors about Lee are false.”

Sweat pooled at his hairline. The goddamn girl saw it. She walked over and opened a window.

A breeze drifted in. Horns honked down on Doheny. The goddamn girl struck a lounge pose.

Fireworks exploded. He caught a wide window view. Illegal Army hijinks. Red-white-and-blue starbursts.

She said, “The war is coming.”

“Yes. What do you think about that?”

“I see large events as opportunities. It may not be my best quality.”

Parker smiled. “For instance?”

She sat down and crossed her legs. Her bobby sox clashed with her saddle shoes. It was a deliberate *Screw you*.

“The Depression, for instance. It got me out of Sioux Falls.”

“What do you think of the eastern-front campaign?”

“I hate the Germans and feel ambivalent about the Russians, if that’s what you’re getting at.”

Parker patted his pockets for cigarettes. The girl reached in her slacks and tossed him her pack. He took one and tossed the pack back.

They lit up. A two-second breather followed. Illegal fireworks went *whoosh*.

“You haven’t asked me what I’m doing here.”

“You were out clearing traffic jams. You were in the neighborhood, so you thought you’d drop in on a woman you’ve never met.”

“Are you finished?”

“No. You called the Bureau first. You wanted to make sure that Officer Lee Blanchard was asleep on Sergeant Dudley Smith’s couch.”

Parker gripped the chair and looked around for an ashtray. The girl stubbed out her cigarette and passed hers over. Their hands trembled and brushed.

“*Are you finished?*”

“No, but here’s an alternate answer. It’s Saturday night, and you thought I might be at loose ends.”

“And why would I think that?”

“Because *you’re* at loose ends? Because rumors run both ways? Because you read some sort of file on me and extrapolated?”

Fireworks streamed. Sunset Boulevard lit up. Couples jitterbugged on a flatbed truck.

They held a stare. The girl blinked first. She leaned in and plucked the ashtray off his lap.

He flinched. His glasses slid down his nose. The girl pointed to the window.

“What are they celebrating?”

“Opportunity.”

“Yes. I’ll buy that.”

“Will you show me the house?”

She stood up and mock-curtisied. Parker followed her. Such affect—*look*.

Fifth Column art couched in sleekness. Cubism meets oppression. Astonishing—a *cop* lived here.

They walked upstairs. The landing featured deep red walls and floor-mounted lights. Pencil sketches were taped to the red. Breadlines, chain gangs, labor strikes and charging policemen.

She stepped into a room and flipped a wall switch. Light framed a cop still life.

An unmade bed. Discarded blues and desk debris. A .38 Special, handcuffs, spring-loaded sap. Framed wall clips from Big Lee’s fight days.

She flipped off the switch. The room went dark. She stood on the too-bright landing and looked in at him. She *posed*. *He got it*.

She studied movie stars and random photos. She borrowed images to make herself cohere. She was brilliantly good at appearance. She was malleable without it.

The auburn hair, the dark red walls, the klieg lighting. She’ll pivot now, that’s for—

She pivoted. She walked to a doorway across the hall. He followed her.

The door was shut. A key lock was affixed to the knob. The anomaly stunned him.

He stood beside her. She pulled out a key and unlocked the door. It was her private bedroom. She fed him the cue and saved it for last.

Rose-colored walls, eased drawing desk. An upright piano against one wall. Busts of Beethoven and Luther.

Pencil portraits arrayed on a shelf. That slick light heavyweight Bucky Bleichert.

Parker pointed over. "He's applied to the Department."

Kay Lake said, "I know."

"Why him? You've got your own fighter."

"You're being disingenuous, Captain. If you tell me that shacking up is forbidden by Los Angeles Police Charter, I'll explain it more provocatively."

Parker walked out to the terrace. The Sunset Strip hopped. Drunken soldiers hobknobbed outside the Trocadero. They whooped and waved sparklers. Traffic was fucked-up from here to kingdom come.

He leaned on the rail. Kay Lake walked out and joined him. He felt light-headed.

She handed him a cigarette and lit it. She lit up herself.

"I stand out here in the rain sometimes. The colors change gloriously."

Parker looked at her. He smelled sandalwood. She sprayed herself back in the bedroom. Affect, appearance—she caught her own sweat.

"What are your immediate plans, Miss Lake?"

"I'm going to enlist."

"Which branch?"

"The one with the snazziest uniforms."

Parker smiled. "You're dead-set?"

She tossed her hair. "Unless you offer me something more enticing."

He flicked his cigarette over the rail. It hit the hood of his prowler car and smoldered.

"There's phone taps and listening posts all over City Hall. I need you to transcribe the wire recordings on the Detective Bureau taps. You'll need to do it at the location."

Kay Lake beamed. "*You're being disingenuous, Captain.* I would say that there's something on the recordings that you want me to hear, and that it pertains to the threat you're holding back on."

Parker flushed. "You can start Monday morning."

She shook her head. "If you make sure Lee doesn't see me, I'll start tonight."