

DIEGO KILLER

Unleashed Power

A Jake Smith Mystery: Book Three

by

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CHAPTER ONE

“Kill him.”

“Jesús, he’s been with us since the start and brought in a lot of business. Let me talk to him. I’m sure I can bring him back into the fold.”

“How many times can I wait?”

“This is the last time, I promise. If he doesn’t come around, I’ll do him.” The pair discuss the problem associate without mentioning a name, though there was never a question of whom they spoke.

The long, excruciating summer heat wave of nineteen-seventy-three just started, but tempers had long boiled beyond acceptable levels. The rusty swap cooler, hanging in the only window, rattles and blasts warm, humid air. The assassin pulls a clean handkerchief from his front pants pocket and wipes his face while his employer uses a dirty, damp sleeve.

“Kill him tonight!” the man pounds the table with clenched fists and screams with frustration. This round began an hour earlier when his number one enforcer plopped into a chair across the desk.

The visitor stands. “All right, Jesús, tonight.” Joy swelled inside the assassin, as he had been looking forward to this one for a long time. “What about his partner?” Hoping for a twosome.

“What partner?”

“The private investigator.”

“I might need him. His time will come soon enough.”

After a gentle nod, the two men raise their tequila shots and down them.

The enforcer spins and walks confidently out of the rundown warehouse office. While he steps into the extreme afternoon sun, he

slips on a tortoise-shell framed pair of dark, almost black, lensed sunglasses and walks across the dirt lot to his vehicle. As he opens the door, a gust blankets him in a cloud of dust. "Shit!"

The unscrupulous middle-aged man steers his Cadillac onto Tijuana's alligatored asphalt. Then, he dodges potholes back to his current hotel room.

After phoning San Diego and arraigning a late-night meeting, he throws a black-leather satchel on the unmade bed. Next, he gathers his tools of the trade, and in they go. Finally, the enforcer walks to the closet and searches for the appropriate outfit for the evening activities.

The killer chooses black dress shoes, a black turtleneck pullover, and black dress slacks. Next, he takes the ensemble to the washroom, where he showers and shaves. After dressing, he grabs a dark-blue, almost black sports coat from the closet and heads downstairs to his De Ville.

A ragtag teenager guards his vehicle. He hands him an American fin, though the car never needs looking after. The underbelly of Tijuana knows well of the midnight black Cadillac and gives it a wide berth.

The hitman drives to the border and crosses into the States. Checking the time, it is still early, so he heads to a familiar bar in Chula Vista.

At Artio's Baja Sur Cantina, the man in black sits at the counter and orders a neat double whiskey and a cheeseburger. Mexican burgers do not hold a candle to the American version, and he stops here at every chance. He sits alone for two hours before finally driving the waterfront route to downtown San Diego.

Pulling into an empty spot in front of the Star of India tall ship, the killer stays in the Cadillac. Slowly, he draws on a Cuban Habanos cigar, watching boat lights pass across the bay. After finishing his smoke, the Mexican man wastes more time strolling the waterfront park for another hour, pleased he wore his blazer. Despite the day's heat, San Diego's harbor is chilly, with the ocean breeze dragging in an on-shore flow. The full moon, invisible, through the glowing cloud cover.

Well after ten o'clock, he returns to his vehicle. He stands beside the trunk for many minutes, watching a few late-night tourists meander around. Eventually, he retrieves his gun, knife, and other possibly needed items from the satchel: tape, cable ties, flashlight, lock picking kit, and a handful of extra shells, all stuffed into familiar pockets. After double-checking that the small caliber pistol loaded, he screws on a silencer before it goes into the left-hand pocket of his sports coat.

The fifteen-block march down Broadway takes him a mere nineteen minutes.

At the back entrance, the killer checks for gawking eyes in the alley. Then, with none visible, he flicks on his flashlight, quickly picks the lock, and steps inside. But before letting the door self-close, he examines the mechanism; Schlage's self-locking hardware requires a key to enable opening from either side. He keeps the door slightly propped open with his foot and pulls the small roll of duct tape from his pants. Then, tearing a strip, he covers the backset hole to prevent the tubular passage latch from engaging.

The assassin sneaks up the stairs to the top sixth floor. All is dark through the hallway, with no seeping light from under the door of suite six-o-four, and he assumes his target a no-show. He places a hand on the knob and gently tries it. To his surprise, it turns. He enters and shines a beam around the reception room—the inner office door open, and his beam stops on the man sleeping in his chair. *This is too easy*, he thinks as he stealthily approaches.

Eyes pop open, and a desk lamp snaps bright. "Oh, it's you." He glances at the wall clock. "I thought you were coming earlier?" He reaches for his top desk drawer. "Let me get your payment."

In one smooth action, the visitor pulls a stiletto from his pants, clicks it open, and charges, stabbing deep into the man's heart. Involuntary jerks and spurting blood turn to twitches before nothing.

The assassin pulls the drawer open to retrieve the envelope, but it's empty except for a 44 Magnum. *James. James, what were you thinking?*

He takes a Polaroid instant photo of the knife protruding from the chest for proof of death. The flash momentarily brightens the room.

After his pupil dilation readjusts to normal, he spends excessive time completely wiping down the office for any old fingerprints that he might have left previously. If nothing else, the man is thorough.

One last body inspection. While approaching, the intruder's foot slips on a sticky patch of liquid. He catches himself with a hand on the desk and shines a beam down. The amount of pooling blood creates an added chore. He smears the footprint in a wide oval through the patch before he wipes the new print off the desk and the blood from his patent-leather sole with his cleaning cloth. Then he carefully folds it with the wet spot in the middle surrounded by the dry and shoves it into a pocket. He will dispose of it once he is back at the wharf. He had planned to throw the gun into the bay but now decides to keep the unused weapon. There is no reason not to do so.

It is time to leave. Back downstairs, the assassin removes the tape and lets the door lock behind him.

Wearing an extra wide satisfaction grin, the murderer strides, with purpose, through the crisp city air to his car and drives south into Mexico.

CHAPTER TWO

Sirens scream down the wide four-lane avenue. The call went out over the radio four minutes earlier, “10-46 male. 500 Broadway, corner of Columbia. Room Six-o-four. Repeat, 500 Broadway, room six-hundred-four!” The closest patrol unit responds to the dead-body code.

Just after six o'clock Monday morning, August sixth, two San Diego police officers sprint up the tenebrous staircase to the top floor. The hallway was darker than a moonless night, except for a beacon of fluorescent light projecting through the open door halfway down.

They bust into the room to encounter a late teen, early twenties, disheveled man huddling in a corner as white as vanilla ice cream and shaking uncontrollably.

A suited, wide-eyed man reclines in a high-back leather chair behind an oversized mahogany desk, staring blankly at the ceiling, with a large pearl-handled stiletto impaled in his chest. Dried blood-infused foam residue surrounds the bloated body's mouth and nose—additament lines of blood stain streaked down the front of the man's suit coat. Before drying, it had dripped onto the floor around the chair. A smeared shoe print streaked through.

The room reeks worse than a rented porta-potty. But, other than the grotesque body, the room is neat, nothing tossed, nothing out of place.

One officer calls their findings into headquarters while the other escorts the young man into the hall, hoping for an easy confession.

Soon the room crams with firefighters and official personnel. It rapidly becomes busier than a school of tuna evading hungry sharks.

Scene investigators place one yellow numbered placard by the floor blood spot and one on the desk next to the tumblers and empty bottle while flashbulbs go off like a dry summer lightning storm.

The building, normally filled with employees, is empty three hours later. Officers corral them and hordes of spectators along the sidewalk behind yellow crime scene tape. One tall, slender woman pushes to the front of the crowd. She flashes credentials to a sentinel and ducks under the tape. Behind her, another woman tries to follow, but the reporter does not secure entrance. Her credentials are not as important as the Senior District Attorneys are. Last to arrive is the coroner, who completes the manic party.

Detective Donald Terrance ruffles through a stack of papers on the desk in front of the victim as his partner, lead-detective Stephen Lyle, interviews their suspect in the bustling hallway.

“What’s your name, Son?” Lyle questions.

“Gary Baird.”

“What have you done here?”

“Nothing. I... I’m the janitor, and I found the guy when I got to this office.” Baird mumbles, “I... I didn’t know what to do, so I called nine-one-one.”

Lyle writes his pertinent information on a notepad. Gary, also a Point Loma Nazarene University student, works early mornings as a janitor to pay for his schooling. Detective Lyle suspects the unmemorable young man and tells him to stick around so they can talk later before he calls an officer over to monitor Baird.

Lyle goes back inside the office to ascertain what his partner discovered. Detective Terrance has found little on the desk, but he needs to call a locksmith to crack the sizable floor safe against the south wall. They split up to question the first responders and crime scene investigators.

First up, Edward Martin, the county coroner. The lead detective steps over. “Hey Doc, find anything other than the obvious?” Lyle’s meager attempt at humor.

“Good morning, Stephen. Nope, only the knife, which appears Mexican-made, and a slight smell of alcohol coming from the

mouth. No other obvious wounds or abrasions. I'll know more after the autopsy."

"As soon as possible, please?" He pats the man on the shoulder.

His partner approaches and reads aloud a business card. "Diego A. Ortiz, Esquire, Specializing in Immigration."

"Every lawyer in San Diego seems to specialize in immigration these days," Lyle comments.

"Immigration or murder," a smiling reply.

"And ambulance chasers."

"And..."

Lyle walks away before Don can finish his thought. Unfortunately, this nonsensical conversation could last the rest of the day.

Detective Terrance moves on to the lead scene investigator. "Any fingerprints, Marv?"

"Not one. They wiped the place clean."

"Not even Ortiz's?"

"Not even his, but I found a twenty-two slug in the wall behind the desk. There again, no weapon found."

"That's odd. Why would someone fire one shot, not a second, but rather stab him?"

"We don't know how long the bullet was there. Probably two unrelated incidents."

"What about the footprints in the blood?" Donald points towards the goeey patch.

"Nothing usable. Only smears. Probably smooth-soled dress shoes," Marvin rationalizes.

His partner approaches. "Don, let's get Baird downtown."

CHAPTER THREE

The man sat at his desk, working late the previous Tuesday night after returning to his office. He finished up just after ten and put on his suit coat before locking up some paperwork in his safe. When he turned to leave, the door opened.

“We need to talk, Juan, acting like old friends.

“We have nothing to discuss, Jesús. I’m going home.”

“Not before we work this out.”

He gave in for the sake of a final compromise. “Would you like a nightcap?”

“Sure, what do you have?”

“We’re drinking bourbon,” as he pulled out a bottle of Pappy Van Winkle’s Family Reserve.

The twenty-year-old bourbon carried a five-hundred-dollar a-bottle price tag, and the only place in town to buy it was the Orange Street Liquor and Deli on Coronado Island. Coronado connected to the community of Imperial Beach via a tombolo named the Silver Strand or over the newly constructed Coronado Bridge from San Diego. Routinely, the businessman picked up a couple of bottles in Tijuana, where a friend’s store kept them in stock just for him. But if he were not going south of the border, which he frequently did, he would drive over the bridge and pick up a holdover bottle. He hated paying the bridge toll, and though he owned the liquor store and purchased wholesale, it was still cheaper in Mexico.

“Bourbon’s good.” Between sips, the visitor comments.

Both men sat drinking from two crystal glasses and chatted.

The time came to get to business. “So, Juan, you know why I’m here?”

“Can’t say as I do,” Juan answers. “I thought we were through with this.”

“You don’t have a choice. This gets resolved tonight.”

“Don’t threaten me. I don’t bend over for anyone.”

The caller rubbed his eyes and forehead like massaging lotion onto an arm before looking back up. “Juan, how long have we been friends?”

“I wouldn’t say we were ever friends, just a convenient relationship.”

Juan reached over and poured two more glasses of the smooth amber liquid. Neither one said a word for the longest time.

After each took another swig, Juan came to a resolution. “How about this? You stay on your side of the border, and I’ll buy, say, fifty kilos a month. Plus, I’ll add another hundred to the monthly.”

The older Mexican chuckled. “A fifty of what?”

“Anything you have.”

“Juan, I taught you everything you know. Remember, you were a starving street urchin, and I owned Tijuana? And now you challenge me? You don’t want a war!”

“You’re a desperate old man.” The immigration attorney ignores the threat.

“I do very well, my friend, as you, but we own the world together! You’ll make more than you ever imagined.”

“You’ve been at this too long. Business has changed, but you haven’t. You need to retire and live out your years peacefully.”

“Yeah? Me retire?” The guest utilizes an animated rolling-hand gesture. “And you keep all this? This that you won’t have, but for me. My friend, you have it backward.”

“My business has far outgrown your petty street sales. The back-alley days are long past,” the attorney not conceding one iota.

They perpetuate arguing their differences until the bottle empties. Finally, Juan stands, “You have my proposal. We’ll meet next week and work out the details.

“You’re calling for a sit-down! You think I’m beneath you?” angrily slurring words from more liquor than he can handle. “This

ends when I say it ends and I the way I want it to end! Your days are numbered!”

“Relax, Jesús. We’ve worked out things before, and this is no different. So sleep on it, and we’ll get together Friday morning.” He ups the time frame to get out of the room.

“I gave you every opportunity. Now it is too late!” The drunk man pats his jacket, feeling for his gun.

Juan rapidly scours his desk for anything that would work as a weapon. Finally, he grasped a gold-plated Cross Pen and lunged, stabbing deep into the caller’s left forearm. Melendez does not flinch as blood gushes. Instead, he struggles to his feet. “You just made a big mistake, my friend.” He pulls the gold pen from his arm, tosses it on the desk, and staggers from the room.

Juan pushes the glasses and empty bottle to the corner of the desk, leans back in his office chair, puts his feet up, and closes his eyes. Soon he’s fast asleep.

CHAPTER FOUR

Detectives Lyle and Terrance escort the young janitor out of the building on their way to the station for an in-depth interview. As they step through the front door, cameras whir, and reporters inundate the detectives, firing nonstop questions, endeavoring to stop the trio.

Jake Smith shoves his way to the front of the crowd, yelling, “Lyle, what’s going on here?” above the reporter’s monotone roar. Not one camera leaves their prey, but one reporter glances in Smith’s direction.

Lyle walks to the edge of the tape barrier. “Well, well, if it’s not old Jack-off Smith. What are you doing here?” he asks, shocked to see Smith. It has been three years since Chief Baker fired Jake, and he moved to Arkansas.

Ignoring Lyle’s uncouth remark, Smith questions, “What’s happening here?”

“What’s your interest?”

“Simple human curiosity. Who died?”

“Nothing you’d be interested in, just some lawyer with enemies.” Grinning with a cat-ate-the-mouse expression.

Smith ducks under the yellow tape. An officer grabs his arm. “You’re not going anywhere, buddy!”

Smith looks back at the detective. “If it’s Diego Ortiz, I work for him.” He dangles a carrot. “I can let you know if anything is missing.”

Terrance approaches, dragging Baird. “You work for him? What are you, a PI or something?” he pipes up.

“Exactamundo.”

“In town?”

“Where else?”

His partner’s intrusion gives Lyle a moment to think. “Let him pass!” he commands, “Smith, when you finish, come by the station. We need to talk.”

Smith overlooks thanking the detective but promises to see him later, with no intention of complying.

The Channel 8 reporter runs after Smith as soon as the detectives free him. As he strides past the officers, “Jake, wait up,” Virginia Small shouts.

Before hitting the front door, he turns to see his old semi-friend. “Virginia, how are you doing?”

“Fine, Jake. I thought you were in Oklahoma or some God-forsaken state?”

“You got that right.” Referring to the description, not the location. “What did you do to your arm?” Smith notices gauze sticking out under an Ace bandage wrapped tightly around Small’s forearm.

“Oh, this? I slipped on the wet floor getting out of the shower this morning. Too big a hurry to get over here.” She questions, “So you know the murdered guy?”

Jake fails to answer and continues through the door.

During the same time, Terrance questions his partner. “Why would you let him up there?”

“To see what he’s after. I don’t believe in coincidences, and Smith being here and knowing the deceased is more than curiosity.”

Detective Lyle keys his walkie-talkie. “Jake Smith is on his way up. Can you watch him and call me as soon as he leaves? I need to know what interests him.”

Smith takes the stairs two at a time, hoping to lose his tailing annoyance. Then, on the sixth floor, he spies assistant district attorney Jillian Ross talking with an officer in the hallway.

Jake has not seen Jellybean since she cheated on him on New Year’s Eve three years prior. *Crap*, he thinks to himself, *I’m outed now*.

Since returning to San Diego, Smith has kept a low profile and hasn't talked with any former acquaintances. However, he encountered three people in the last five minutes he specifically avoided.

Jake approaches unnoticed. "Good morning, Ms. Ross." *That's four.*

She spins at the familiar voice. "Jake! It's good to see you. When did you get back?" Shock and gladness encompass her at the same time.

"A while back," he answers casually. "How are you doing, Jill?"

She gives him a hug of familiarity and whispers in his ear, "A hell of a lot better now. I missed you, Jake." And she quickly separates.

"I can't say the same." Still not over her misconduct.

Virginia makes it to the floor, completely out of breath, but in time to witness the hug. She trots to the old acquaintances. "Hello, Jill. Jake, we need to talk," all in one breath.

Ross snubs her. It does not surprise the reporter. They never got along, and the ADA never had a comment for her newscast.

"Did you confirm the deceased?" Small tries to engage Smith.

"Haven't had a chance, dear," Jake adds the friendly term of endearment to get under his ex's skin.

"It's Diego Ortiz." Directed at Smith, Ross tries to one-up the reporter.

San Diego Police Lieutenant Stephen Holden steps out the open office door. "I'll be, Jake Smith; you're back?" Already alerted to Smith's arrival, but acting astonished at his presence.

"It kind of appears that way." *Five out of seven.*

"What are you doing here?" Holden refers to the crime scene.

"I'm doing some work for James." Smith uses the English translation of Diego. "I'm hoping to get into the room?"

"Who's James?"

"The dead guy."

"How long?" the lieutenant asks. His interest piques at Smith, referring to Diego Ortiz as James.

"A few months, now."

“How long do you need in the room?” Holden clarifies.

“Five minutes.”

“What are you looking for?” Holden bluntly rephrases his previous question.

“Just here to help. I’ll let you know if anything is missing. Was the room tossed?”

“What kind of work? I mean, what are you doing now?” But, of course, Holden isn’t going to give Smith anything from the room and only observe his search.

“A little investigative work.” Smith underplays his answer.

“Good for you!” he patronizes and continues the charade, “Did you run into Lyle and Terrance?”

“Unfortunately!”

Holden cannot contain a small chuckle. “After you finish here, you’ll need to come in and chat about your deceased client.” Holden sticks out his hand. “It’s good to see you, Jake.”

Smith reflects silently; *it’s not good to see anyone this morning*; however, he shakes the man’s hand. “Thanks, Steve. I’ll stop by in a few.” He knows Stephen hates his name shortened and does it, anyway. *Why do all Stephens fixate over their name?*

The door guard steps aside for the entourage. Holden stays on Jake’s heels like a fly on potato salad.

Small pulls a tiny camera from her bag and follows Jill, following Holden into the room.

“Jeez, that’s not good.” Smith comments on the body with the large knife left untouched and protruding from the chest.

At the sound of the familiar voice, Ed Martin looks up. “Jake, it is nice to see you. Just get back?” The coroner states, truly happy to see his friend.

“Hey, Doc, likewise. I wish it were better circumstances.”

“This one’s messy.” Ed’s unneeded comment. “Stop by the office sometime, and we’ll catch up.”

“Will do, thanks, Doc.”

Smith strolls around the room, looking carefully but not touching. He stares into the trash can for a long time.

Holden's suspicions about his former employee are growing. "What exactly are you looking for, Jake?"

Smith refuses to mention that he got what he wanted as soon as he walked in and saw the Mexican stiletto. He turns to Holden and states, "Everything looks normal here... well, everything but Jim. I guess I better get out of your hair." He starts for the door.

"Jake, we'll see you at the station." Holden reminds him.

Unnoticed, Small snaps a quick photograph of the body. It will be the lead story on the five o'clock broadcast.

CHAPTER FIVE

Friday, February 2, nineteen-seventy-three, six months before the Ortiz murder, Detective Jake Smith walked into the Fayetteville Police headquarters after lunch. He opened the unusually closed detective's squad room door.

"SURPRISE!" everyone yells in unison. Jake turned in his resignation two weeks prior; this was his last day on the job.

Someone handed him a scotch and water. His girlfriend, Alexis Dench, the Northwest Times reporter, ran up to him and hugged him hard while she whispered in his ear, "I'm so proud of you. I love you, Jake." The room burst into applause. Alex realized she was too loud, and everyone overheard her. She turned three shades of scarlet and backed up, giving Jake plenty of room.

"Speech! Speech!" The call goes out from various attendees. Smith, normally not one to be abashed, slowly raised his glass. "I don't know what to say."

The room laughs, and someone yells, "Lie. We'll try to believe it!" The room erupted.

"Well, all I can say is thank you for accepting me as one of you." He looked over the crowd, adding, "I don't know if that's a good thing." The group jeered and laughed more. They had probably been drinking the hour he was at lunch.

He continued more seriously. "I'll truly miss all of you. If anyone visits San Diego, you'll always have a place to stay."

"Get settled fast, buddy; our bus leaves next weekend!" his soon-to-be ex-partner shouted.

Smith raised his glass and thanked the group again.

The exuberant fun continued the rest of the afternoon and into the evening at a local bar.

Jake and Alexis left Arkansas the following morning in his red sports car. The soft-top up and packed compartment barely left enough room for them. Smith was leaving for good, but Alex had a return flight home two weeks later. She took vacation time off from work to help him move and settle.

They loved each other, and Jake had asked Alexis to marry him and move to San Diego. She did not say yes or no, but tried to convince him to stay in Fayetteville, where they could build a life together.

Jake explained he could not stay there and did not like the place. Moreover, Alex explained she had lived there her whole life and did not think she could ever leave. To solve the quandary, Alexis agreed to try San Diego for two weeks before making a final decision.

Six days later, the pair pulled into Southern California after sightseeing along the way at Carlsbad Caverns, the Grand Canyon, and other tourist attractions. They checked into a hotel on the La Jolla-Pacific Beach border, overlooking the Pacific Ocean for the remainder of the week.

In Southern California, Smith showed his girlfriend a grand time, with two days in Los Angeles, one at Disneyland and the other in Hollywood. In addition, they visited SeaWorld, the San Diego Zoo, and Balboa Park in San Diego. Every hometown evening featured a different restaurant and many romantic moonlit walks on various beaches.

Dench, never having traveled outside of Arkansas, thought Southern California had to be the vacation spot in the world; the weather was mild, and the sun shone every day. On the flip side, traffic was a nightmare. It scared her to death every time Jake hit freeway speeds over seventy miles per hour, weaving in and out of slower vehicles. Crowds of people clogged every artery in the city, and they had to wait in lines everywhere they went. Alex told Jake she would visit often but refused to partake permanently in the nightmare.

The final week ended too quickly for both, and Jake dropped her off at Lindbergh Field, San Diego's International Airport, for her flight home.

He returned to their hotel and checked out. Smith re-registered at the Padre Inn in Old Town and started looking for permanent accommodations.

The following Thursday, he found a second-floor loft on the corner of Fifth and Island, a block south of Market Street downtown, and signed a year lease beginning the first of the following month.

Throughout March, Jake remodeled his space. He partitioned off a front office, leaving the immense single backroom and bathroom as living quarters. He bought cheap used furniture for both areas and worked on setting up his business.

Having been a police detective, obtaining his private investigator license was more a matter of filling out forms and paying the fee.

Jake did not want to use his name to avoid old friends for as long as possible. He called his small enterprise Hamilton-Adams Investigations, HAI for short, figuring two dead president's names sounded traditional and a two-name masthead projected a larger firm perception—image is critical. Smith did not realize his self-designed tyronic logo featuring a magnifying glass enlarging HAI projected the antithesis effect. Still, he had a small wooden plaque made and screwed it to the front of the building beside the street entrance.

By April, Hamilton-Adams Investigations had opened for business. It was a rough neighborhood, and he did not expect walk-in traffic. Daily, Smith visited different sections of the downtown area, introducing his incipient company to business owners and handing out cards. Unsurprisingly, nobody was in the market for his services and did not know anyone who was.

A week later, he got his first job. A man descried Smith's business card lying on an associate's desk, phoned, and wanted to meet with him.

The man told Jake that his wife, a shy and mostly a stay-at-home person, had ostensibly needed to give herself some sense of personal

value—she took up selling Tupperware. The suspected problem arose the previous month with her business' suppositious boom, and she presented three to four home shows a week but did not bring home any money.

HAI hired for five days to tail the woman. Smith got a photograph and the address of their residence.

The first evening on the job, Smith sat in his 'Vette down the block from the home. She left shortly after the man arrived from work, carrying a briefcase and a small cardboard box. The PI followed her to a house in La Mesa. He watched as she knocked on the door. An older woman answered, and the two talked for a few minutes. Jake snapped a couple of photographs of the pair. Eventually, the suspect handed over the small box, and they said their goodbyes.

Jake again followed her to another home in Clairemont. This time, the woman made numerous trips into the house, carrying many large boxes. Minutes after she unpacked, four more women showed up and went inside. Jake sat in his car and guzzled coffee from his thermos for three hours. Finally, the last woman that arrived left. Another half hour later, the Tupperware Lady walked out and drove home, and so did Smith.

The following evening, Smith again sat outside his client's home. Furthermore, both adults and their three children never left the house.

The next evening, while he sat in position, the woman of the house drove off with a preteen boy. Smith followed the dyad to a local Methodist church. She dropped the boy off and went back home.

Just before nine o'clock, the woman returned to the church and picked up her son.

Two more evenings of bloodhound work, and the woman conducted two more home shows.

Smith decided to see what she did during the day and sat outside the suspect's home Friday morning. Finally, just before ten o'clock, she left. Jake followed her to a local Bank of America branch. When she went inside, Smith followed.

The woman walked to the self-service desk and filled out a deposit slip as Smith did the same while noting that the woman's deposit went into a savings account in her name only. He struck up a little small talk. She asked if he was married. When he told her no, she asked about a girlfriend or neighbor that might be interested in a Tupperware demonstration. Smith did not know anyone. They part ways. She made her deposit, and Smith left the bank. He sat in his car, waiting for her to come out.

When the week of observation finished, Jake headed to the husband's office, showed the man his few pictures, and told him that his wife did nothing but conduct Tupperware business. He also explained that she had a personal savings account at B of A.

They discussed whether to keep up the surveillance for an additional week. The man decided not to and terminated Smith. It will be up to the husband to ascertain if his wife was secretly stashing money to benefit their family or needed it to leave him.

The PI sat at his desk, worried about his next move. He had enough savings to keep HAI going for another three months, but he will be broke and on the street if he could not engender an income.

CHAPTER SIX

Desperate at the commencement of the third month, Jake Smith sat at the counter in Emily's Café, sipping his morning mug of java and endeavoring to deduce a plan of action. The first couple of struggling months, with only one case, Smith had virtually depleted his savings account. He was on the verge of bankruptcy. Jake charged considerably less than his completion, though raising his hourly rate would not help when he had no clients. His week of surveillance work only extended the ineluctable foreordained by a few days.

While he waited for his runny eggs, the owner approached him. Jake went there often and had become casual friends with her. They conducted small talk, and he mentioned he had trouble securing new clients. Emily responded she was friends with an attorney. She would call him to see if he had anything available. When his breakfast arrived, she moved along to converse with other customers.

This statement made him cogitate about lawyers. He returned to his office and called his attorney son in San Francisco for help.

Smith only had one child. Cheryl got pregnant and gave birth to their son when she was twenty. She and Jake did not get married until two years later, when he was a patrol officer for SDPD.

Adam advised his father to contact insurance companies. He relayed that many indemnification businesses use outside investigators for suspected fraud cases.

Jake refused an offered loan, thanked his son, and signed off the long-distance call.

Smith immediately started phoning insurance companies for appointments. His endeavor was unsuccessful, and he did not secure a single interview.

Later that same evening, his phone rang. "Hello, HAI."

"When did *you* get back?"

"Happy to hear from you, too. Who told you?" Jake asked his ex-wife Cheryl, who remarried a year after he moved to Arkansas. *Six of seven*. Jake's count of avoidables rose.

"Adam called and told me."

"Now you know. What do you want?"

"Calm down, Jake. I am only trying to help you. He said you needed some advice on your business and that he suggested insurance companies." Cheryl tried a little congeniality.

"I'm doing ok on my own. I only phoned Adam to see how *he* was doing." Jake's indignant response.

"Well, anyway, I talked to Roy over dinner. You know he's a successful businessman?" After a pause of smugness. "He has a job for you."

"What kind of job?"

"I'm not sure, but you can stop by his business in the morning." Cheryl gave Jake the address.

Smith eschewed writing it down; he refused to take charity from his ex.

"Did you get that, Jake?"

"Yeah, but I'm pretty busy on a case. I don't think I can help him right now."

The line went quiet for a long time. "Jake, I will have Roy call his insurance man and see if he can learn who you can talk to."

Moments later, Jake concedes minor defeat. "That's nice. I appreciate it."

Two days after Cheryl's call, Jake's phone rang while he sat, lost in woe, at his office desk.

"Good morning, HAI Investigations."

“Jake, Roy here.”

“Roy who?” Not relating this Roy to his ex-wife’s new husband, whom he had never met.

“Roy Pickert, Roy, *and* Cheryl.”

“Oh, that Roy!” Smith’s noggin light flickers.

“Yes, *that* Roy.” When Jake did not respond, he continued, “Jake, I have a name for you at John Hancock Insurance who might get you some work.”

Roy related the name and phone number. Jake wrote this one down.

After thanking the man and promising to go over to a barbeque, Jake gets off the line.

He spent another fruitless day canvassing independent insurance underwriters, trying to gather any names of people for the companies they represent, specifically, who were in charge of running investigations.

The first thing the following morning, Jake called Roy’s given number and spoke to Lynette Shaheen. They made a lunch appointment for Tuesday.

When the lunch date arrived, Smith walked into the Grant Grill inside the historic U.S. Grant Hotel on Broadway in the heart of downtown. He came, fashionably ten minutes late, and asked the host if Ms. Shaheen was present. She directs Jake to a white-clothed table in the center of the room.

“Ms. Shaheen?” Jake approached the table.

She glanced at her watch. “You’re late!”

“Sorry, I had a little trouble parking.”

“Then you should have left earlier. I don’t waste my time waiting for anyone wanting a favor,” the woman bluntly responded.

Looking at the shamelessly corpulent woman, Smith thinks, *no doubt, this woman would wait eight hours for a meal.* Nevertheless, he took a seat, politely remarking, “I’ll make sure it never happens again, Ms. Shaheen.”

He erroneously expected her to respond with; please call me Lyn or Lynette. Instead, she states, “If there is a next time!”

“Let’s order so you can get back to work. Then, I’ll fill you in on my background,” Jake offered.

“I’m the office manager and don’t have to account for my time. You’re a little too presumptuous to be a detective, Smith.”

Not sure if he should genuflect or kiss her ring, he overlooked her observation. “Would you like a drink?” He was sure she could use one.

At that instant, the waiter approached and sat a Baileys, on ice, in front of her, then he asked Jake what he wanted to drink. Before Smith could answer, Shaheen piped up, “I’ll have the crab salad and bring some extra rolls and another Baileys.”

“I’ll have a tuna on rye and a glass of water, please.” He realized if he did not get his order in expeditiously, he would not be eating.

“Alright, Smith, so you think you’re a detective?”

“Yes, I am. I worked as a detective for the San Diego PD for seven years. Then I transferred to Arkansas and was a detective in the Fayetteville Police Department before returning to San Diego to start my own firm, Hamilton-Adams Investigations.” But, he goes on, “I was only in Arkansas for three years and maintained all my contacts here.”

The waiter interrupted, delivering their food. “Enjoy! If I can get you anything else?”

“Another Baileys!” snapped the woman.

Shaheen did not waste a second shoveling in crab and spinach. “What contacts?” She asked through her weed-stuffed mouth.

Smith let his food sit. “I’m in tight with all the detectives and Chief Baker, which gives me access to their resources,” Jake lied.

“Who else?” While stuffing in a mouthful of lettuce followed by half a French Roll.

He sarcastically asked the hippo, “Would you like me to get you a few more rolls?” Then, before the woman could spit more food particles across the table, he continued, “I’m also tight with

the district attorney's office and all the local reporters, TV, and newspaper."

"That's it?" Lynette's lack of diplomacy was unbelievable.

"Of course not. I know many politicians and business owners. And regular folks, such as yourself." Smith, more than fed up, was ready to walk. He was craving a bite, and Emily's Café fit the bill nicely.

"Well, you know I'll have to check your references!"

"Would you like me to do the investigation for you?" with abhorrence. He refused to concede to the uncouth woman.

"Unnecessary. I use Newman Investigations. Ralph is ex-FBI and superb," Shaheen jabbed back. "Are you going to eat your sandwich?"

"Help yourself." Smith pushed his plate across the table. "I really need to get going. I am working on another, uh, a large case at the moment. Should I stop by your office in a day or two to pick up any paperwork? You know, release forms, insurance rider forms, or whatever your organization uses?"

"You're ending our meeting!"

Maybe you have never encountered a real man he abstains from voicing but stands and grins. "Unfortunately, I do have other commitments, and I don't want to be tardy."

Lynette waved the waiter over and demanded he give the lunch bill to Smith.

"Don't worry about paperwork at this point. After I check you out, I'll bring the necessary forms to our next meeting."

"Sounds good, Ms. Shaheen. When do you think that'll be?"

"We'll meet here next Tuesday at noon."

Smith immediately realized this was going to be a weekly commitment. *She better give me more damn business than she eats.*