

A WOMEN'S MURDER CLUB THRILLER



JAMES PATTERSON

& MAXINE PAETRO



TH

OF NEVER

12TH OF NEVER

James Patterson is one of the best-known and biggest-selling writers of all time. His books have sold in excess of 400 million copies worldwide. He is the author of some of the most popular series of the past two decades – the Alex Cross, Women’s Murder Club, Detective Michael Bennett and Private novels – and he has written many other number one bestsellers including non-fiction and stand-alone thrillers.

James is passionate about encouraging children to read. Inspired by his own son who was a reluctant reader, he also writes a range of books for young readers including the Middle School, Dog Diaries, Treasure Hunters and Max Einstein series. James has donated millions in grants to independent bookshops and has been the most borrowed adult author in UK libraries for the past fourteen years. He lives in Florida with his family.

Maxine Paetro is a novelist who has collaborated with James Patterson on the bestselling Women’s Murder Club, Private and Confessions series, *Woman of God*, and other stand-alone novels. She lives with her husband, John, in New York.

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Meet The Women's Murder Club

EXCLUSIVE PROFILES by Our Crime Desk

LINDSAY BOXER

A homicide detective in the San Francisco Police Department, juggling the worst murder cases with the challenges of being a first-time mother. Her loving husband Joe, daughter Julie and loyal border-collie Martha give her a reason to protect the city. She didn't have the easiest start to life, with an absent father and an ill mother, but she didn't shy away from a difficult and

demanding career. With the help of her friends, Lindsay makes it her mission to solve the toughest cases.

CLAIRE WASHBURN

Chief Medical Examiner for San Francisco and one of Lindsay's oldest friends. Wise, confident and viciously funny, she can be relied on to help whatever the problem. She virtually runs the Office of the Coroner for her overbearing, credit-stealing

boss, but rarely complains. Happily married with children, her personal life is relatively calm in comparison to her professional life.

CINDY THOMAS

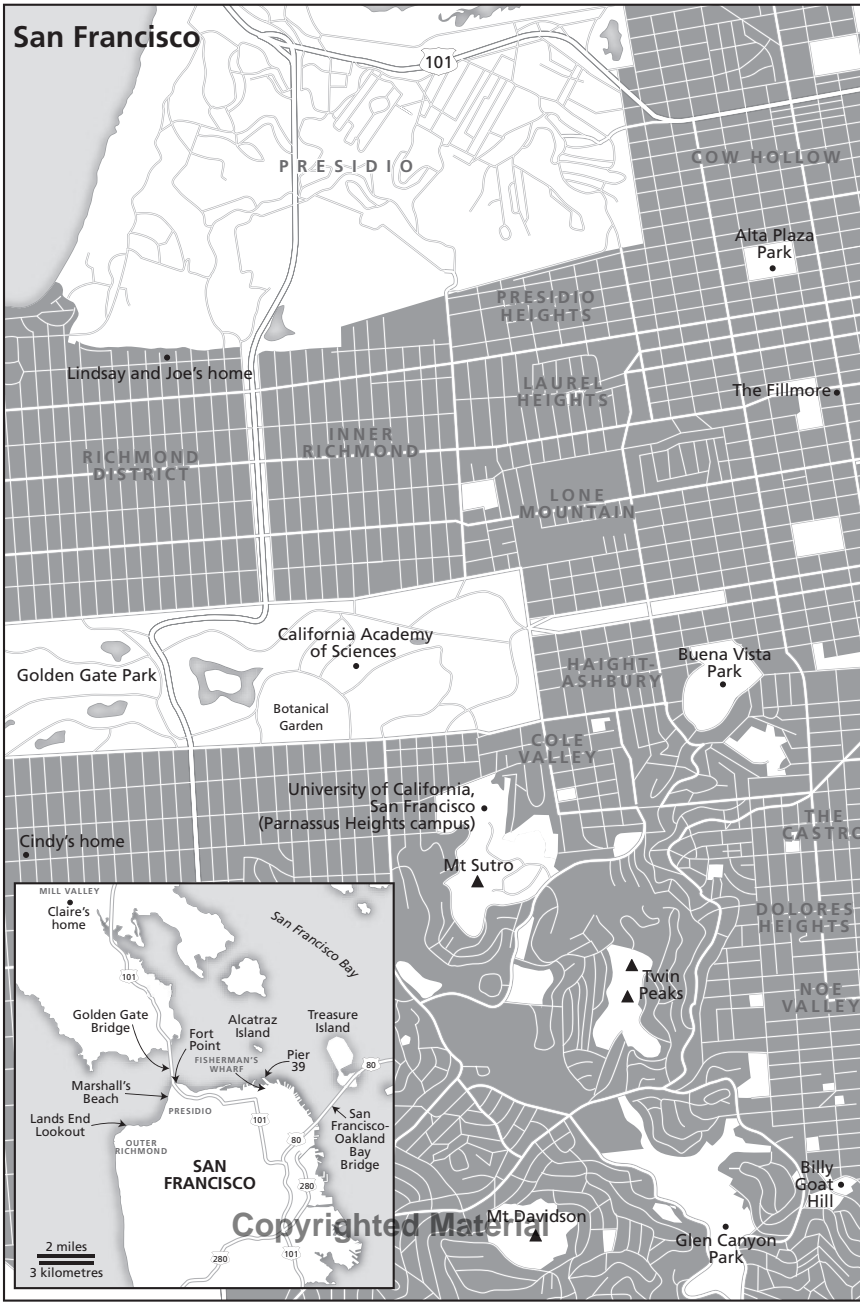
An up-and-coming journalist who's always looking for the next big story. She'll go the extra mile, risking life and limb to get her scoop. Sometimes she prefers to grill her friends over cocktails for a juicy secret, but, luckily for them, she's totally trustworthy (most of the time...). She somehow found the time to publish a book between solving cases, writing articles for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and keeping together her relationship with Lindsay's partner, Rich Conklin.

“When your job is murder, you need friends you can count on”

YUKI CASTELLANO

One of the best lawyers in the city, she's desperate to make her mark. Ambitious, intelligent and passionate, she'll fight for what's right, always defending the underdog even if it means standing in the way of those she loves. Often this includes her husband - who is also Lindsay's boss - Lt. Jackson Brady.

San Francisco



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Penguin
Random House
UK

First published in the UK by Century in 2013
Published in paperback by Arrow Books in 2013
Published in Penguin Books 2023
001

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-099-57425-5

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



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Suzie and John, Brendan and Jack

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PROLOGUE

A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT

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One

I WOKE UP to a sharp report, as if a gun had gone off next to my ear. My eyes flew open and I sat straight up in bed.

I yelled “*Joe,*” but my husband wasn’t lying next to me. He was in an airplane, thirty-five thousand feet above the heartland, and wouldn’t be home until the morning.

There was another ferocious crack and my bedroom brightened with lightning that snapped and wrapped around the windows. A boomer shook the window frames and sheets of rain lashed the glass. I was so distracted by the vicious storm that it took me a second or two to register the wave of pain that came from my belly and washed right through me.

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Oh, man, it hurt really bad.

Yes, it was my own fault for gorging on refried beans for dinner, then chasing down the Mexican leftovers with rigatoni marinara at ten.

I looked at the clock—2:12 a.m.—then jumped at the next seismic thunderclap. Martha whined from under the bed. I called to her. “Martha. Boo, honey, whatchoo doin’? It’s just a storm. It can’t hurt you. Come to Mama.”

She flapped her tail against the carpet, but she didn’t come out. I swung my legs over the bed and flipped the switch on the bedside lamp—and nothing happened. I tried a couple more times, but damn it—the light wouldn’t go on.

The power couldn’t be out. But it was.

I reached for my Maglite, accidentally knocked it with the back of my hand, and it flew off the night table, rolled under the bed, and went I don’t know where.

Lightning branched down and reached across the black sky, as if to emphasize the point that the lights were out as far as the eye could see.

I grabbed the cordless phone and listened to dead air. The phones were out, too, and now I was

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feeling that weird wave of stomach pain again.
Yowee.

I want to be clear. I was feeling a wave, not a contraction.

My age classifies me as an “elderly primi-gravida,” meaning over forty, pregnant with my first child. I had seen my doctor yesterday morning and I’d checked out fine. The baby had checked out fine, and wasn’t due for another week.

I had booked a bed on the birthing floor at California Women’s Hospital, and although I’m not the organic granola type, I wanted to have the whole natural childbirth experience. The truth was, this baby might be the only one Joe and I would ever have.

Another wave of pain hit me.

To repeat, it was *not* a contraction.

I staggered out to the living room, found my handbag—an item I hadn’t needed in several weeks—and dug around until I found my iPhone. The battery bar was showing that I had only 10 percent of a full charge. Too damned little.

I leaned against a wall and went online to see what kind of storm was beating up San Francisco.

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The squall was even worse than I thought. Twenty thousand families were in the dark. People were stuck in elevators between floors. Signs and other detritus had been flung through windows. Cars had skidded across roads, crashed, and flipped. All emergency vehicles had been deployed. Emergency rooms were flooded with patients and downed power lines were sparking on the streets.

This was shaping up to be one of the worst storms in SF history. Headlines quoted the mayor: STAY IN YOUR HOMES. THE STREETS ARE UNSAFE.

Martha slunk over and collapsed on top of my feet.

“We’re going to be okay,” I cooed.

And then that pain came over me. And it flipped me out.

“Go away,” I yelled at Martha. “Go away.”

She ran.

“I’m sorry, Boo,” I said to my whimpering dog. “These are false contractions. If they were real, I would know it.”

I grabbed my knees—and that’s when my water broke.

No way!

I could not comprehend what was happening

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—it could not be happening. I wasn't ready to have the baby. It wasn't due for another week. But ready or not, this baby was coming.

God help me.

My little one and I were really in for it now.

Two

I WANTED TO abandon my body.

Yes, that sounds insane, but that's how I felt—and it was all that I felt. I clicked the light switch up and down, picked up the landline.

Still no power and no phones; neither would be restored until the sun threw some light on the situation. I had five minutes of battery left on my iPhone, maybe less.

I speed-dialed my doctor, left a message with her service, then called the hospital. A nice woman named Shelby asked me, “How often are your contractions coming?”

“I don't know. I didn't time them. I didn't even know I was having them.”

“Lindy?” **Copyrighted Material**

“Lindsay.”

“Lindsay, your water breaking means you’ll be in labor for a while yet. You could deliver in three hours or three days, but don’t worry. Let me explain about three-one-one.”

I knew about 311. But still I listened as Shelby explained that 311 was the rule for what to do when your contractions come every three minutes, last for one minute, and that pattern repeats for at least one hour: you go to the hospital.

“Are you kidding me?” I screeched into the phone. “Because, listen! I’m alone and I’ve never done this before.”

“Do *not* come in until you’re in active labor,” Shelby said. “Stay home, where you’re comfortable.”

I yelled, “Thanks!,” snapped off my phone, and walked my enormous baby bump to the window. I was breathing hard as I looked up Lake Street in the direction of my chosen hospital. There was no traffic, no traffic lights. The street was closed.

A tremendous burst of lightning cracked the sky open and sent Martha skittering under the couch. It was crazy, but I was starting to like

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the storm, even though it had sucked all the air out of the room.

It was hot. Damned hot. I kicked off my XXL pj's and another painful wave took my breath away. It was as if a boa constrictor had wrapped itself around my torso and was squeezing me into the shape of a meal.

I was scared, and it wasn't all about the pain.

Babies got strangled by umbilical cords. Women died in childbirth. Elderly primigravidas were more at risk than younger women, and old babes like me weren't supposed to do childbirth by themselves. What if there were complications?

Claire Washburn is my best friend. She is San Francisco's chief medical examiner—a forensic pathologist, not an obstetrician, but hell. She'd had three babies. I knew she could talk me through this. At least she could try.

I dialed and Claire answered with a groggy “Dr. Wazjjbrn.”

“Claire. It's too soon to go to the hospital, I know, but yow. I think I can feel the baby's head down there. What should I do?”

“Don't push!” my best friend shouted at me. “I'm calling nine-one-one right now.”

I shouted back at her, “Call a private ambulance service so I can go to the Women’s Hospital! Claire, do you read me?”

Claire didn’t answer.

My phone was dead.

Three

MY RAGING RIVER of hormones was sending a single, unambiguous message.

Push.

Claire had said, “Don’t push,” and that sounded both insane and impossible, but I got her drift. The baby was safe inside me until help arrived.

It must have taken me ten minutes to ease my throbbing, hurting self into bed.

I knew that Claire wouldn’t let me down, that she had probably thrown the weight of her office behind the 911 call. I put my birthing instincts in park and thought with my entire being, *I’m in God’s hands now. All I can do is make the best of this and hope that the baby is safe. That’s all I can do.*

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Martha got up on the bed and curled up next to me. I put my hand on her head and I resisted my contractions. I heard noises, someone calling “Helloooo”—sounds that were far outside my tunnel of pain. I put my hands up against blinding flashlight beams and then, like a force of nature, all the lights went on.

The power was back.

My bedroom was filled with strapping men standing shoulder to shoulder in a line that stretched from the door to the bed and ran along both sides of it. There had to be at least twelve of them, all with stricken, smoke-smudged faces, all in full turnout gear. I remember staring at the reflective tape on their jackets, wondering why a dozen firefighters were crowding in on me.

I shouted, “Where’s the fire?”

A large young man came toward me. He was at least six four, with a buzz cut, a still-bleeding gash on his cheek, and a look of deep concern in his eyes.

He said, “I’m Deputy Chief Robert Wilson. I’m called Robbie. Take it easy. Everything is going to be okay.”

Really? Then, I realized that a fire rig had been

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closer to the apartment than an ambulance and so firefighters had answered the 911 call.

I said, “This is embarrassing. My place is a mess.”

I was thinking about my clothes strewn all over the place, dog hair on the bed, somehow forgetting that I was completely naked with my legs spread apart.

Robbie Wilson said, “How are you doing, Sergeant?”

“I’m having a baby,” I said.

“I know. You take it easy now.”

He fitted an oxygen mask to my face, but I pushed it away.

“I don’t need that.”

“It’s for the baby,” he said. He turned to the gang of firemen and shouted, “I need boiling water. I need towels. A lot of them.”

Did I have any clean towels? I didn’t even know. I pushed the mask away again and grunted at Robbie, “Have you ever delivered a baby?”

He paused for a long moment. “A couple of times,” he lied.

I liked him. I trusted him. But I didn’t believe him.

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He said, “You can push now, Sergeant. Go ahead and try.”

I did it. I pushed and grunted and I lost track of the time. Had an hour passed?

It felt as though the baby were grabbing my rib cage from the inside and holding on with both fists. The pain was agonizing and it seemed that I would never get Baby Molinari out of my body and into the world. Just when I thought I had spent my last breath, my baby slid out of my body into Robbie’s baseball-glove-size hands.

I heard a little cry. It was a sweet sound that had the special effect of putting the pain behind me, hugging me around the heart.

“Oh, wow. She’s *perfect*,” said Big Robbie.

I peered into the light and said, “Give her to me.”

I wiggled my fingers in the air as someone cut the cord and cleaned up her little face. And then my baby was in my arms.

“Hello, sweet girl.”

She opened her eyes to little slits and she looked right at me. Tears fell out of my eyes as I smiled into my daughter’s face. A bond was formed that could never be broken; it was a moment I would never, ever forget.

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My little girl *was* perfect and as beautiful as a sunrise over the ocean, as awesome as a double rainbow over swans in flight.

It's too bad the word *miracle* has been overused, because I swear it's the only word that fit the feeling of holding my daughter in my arms. My heart swelled to the size of the world. I only wished Joe had been here.

I counted my baby's fingers and toes, talking nonsense to her the whole time.

"I'm your mommy. You know that, baby girl? Look what we've *done*."

But was she really okay? Was her little heart beating at the right pace? Were her lungs filling with enough air?

The big dude said, "You should both have a thorough checkup. Ready to go to the hospital, Sergeant?"

"We're going in the fire rig?"

"I'll make room in the front seat."

"Oh, *good*," I said. "And please, amp up the sirens."

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BOOK I

THREE WEEKS LATER

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Chapter 1

YUKI CASTELLANO PARKED her car on Brannan Street, a block or so away from the Hall of Justice. She was lucky to have gotten this parking spot, and she took it as a good sign. Today she was glad for any good sign.

She got out of her car, then reached into the backseat for her briefcase and jacket. Then she set off toward the gray granite building on Bryant Street, where she worked as an assistant district attorney and where, in about an hour, she would prosecute a piece-of-crap wife and child killer named Keith Herman.

Keith Herman was a disbarred attorney who had made his living by defending the most heinous of slime-bucket clients and had often won his cases

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by letting prosecution witnesses know that if they testified, they would be killed.

Accordingly, witnesses sometimes fled California rather than appear against Herman's clients.

He'd been charged with witness tampering, but never convicted. That's how scary he was. He was also a registered sex offender, so that made two juicy bits of information Yuki couldn't tell the jury because the law said that she couldn't prejudice the jury by citing his prior misdeeds.

So Yuki had been building the case against Herman based on evidence that he'd killed his wife, dismembered her body, and somehow made his young daughter disappear, arguably a harder charge to prove because the girl's body had not been found.

Yuki had been doing nothing but work on the Herman case for the last five months and now, as the first day of the trial arrived, she was stoked and nervous at the same time. Her case was solid, but she'd been surprised by verdicts that had gone against her in cases as airtight as this one.

As she turned the corner onto Bryant, Yuki located the cause of her worry. It was Keith Herman's defense attorney, John Kinsela, who,

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right after Keith Herman, was probably the sleaziest lawyer in the country. He had defended legendary high-profile killers and had rarely lost a case.

And he usually destroyed the reputations of opposing counsel with innuendo and rumors, which he leaked as truth to the press.

Yuki had never gone up against Kinsela before, but Kinsela had shredded her boss, Leonard “Red Dog” Parisi, in a murder trial about two years ago. Parisi still hadn’t gotten over it. He was pulling for Yuki, giving her his full support, but it wasn’t lost on Yuki that he wasn’t trying the case himself.

Red Dog had a bad heart.

Yuki was young, fit, and up for the challenge of her life.

Yuki walked quickly toward the Hall, head bent as she mentally rehearsed her opener. She was startled out of her thoughts by someone calling her name. She looked up, saw the good-looking young guy with the blond cowlick and the start of a mustache.

Nicky Gaines was her associate and second chair in this trial. He was carrying a paper bag.

“Damn, you look good, Yuki.”

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Gaines was five years younger than she was, and Yuki didn't care whether he really did have a crush on her or if he was just flattering her. She was in love. And not with Nicky Gaines.

"You have coffee in there?" Yuki asked.

"Hot, with cream, one sugar. And then I've got the double espresso for you."

"Let's go straight to the courtroom," Yuki said.

"How are you feeling about this?" Gaines said, walking up the steps along with her.

"Like if I don't get a double-barreled conviction, I may kill Keith Herman myself."

Chapter 2

WHEN JENNIFER HERMAN'S dismembered body turned up in eight separate garbage bags, and when seven-year-old Lily Herman hadn't been found despite the exhaustive police search conducted over a six-month period, Keith Herman was tried in the press and found guilty of murdering them both.

The intense media attention had whipped up a lot of hatred toward Keith Herman. It made it nearly impossible to find a jury who hadn't watched the network specials, hadn't seen the rewards offered for information about the missing child, and hadn't formed an opinion as to the guilt of the accused.

And so jury selection had taken almost three weeks.

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Now the press filled half the gallery in courtroom 202, Superior Court of California, County of San Francisco. The other half of the room was filled with citizens who had lined up early enough that morning to have scored one of the precious seats.

At 8:23 a.m. Yuki was at the prosecution table in the blond-wood-paneled courtroom. Her laptop was open and as she went through a long e-mail from Red Dog, she hoped all her witnesses would show up to testify—that they hadn't been silenced or intimidated (or worse) by the opposition.

Across the aisle, at the defense table, sat two ordinary-looking men who were actually two of the scariest people Yuki had ever met. Keith Herman was paunchy, bald, and had black eyes that looked like bullet holes in his unlined, babyish face. Not all psychopaths look homicidal, but Keith Herman did. Herman had never shown any remorse, not while identifying the sections of meat that had once been his wife, not while discussing his missing daughter.

Herman's attorney, John Kinsela, was tall with thinning gray hair and a bloodless complexion that made him look as though he climbed out of a coffin

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at night. Unlike his client, Kinsela was smooth. He expressed sadness and regret. He listened thoughtfully and spoke well and persuasively on camera. He passed as a reasonable facsimile of a person. A little digging into his past had turned up five divorces and the ownership of a Glock semiautomatic, which he carried at all times.

Yuki had been with these ghouls through countless hours of depositions and felt that she knew them too well.

She had dressed this morning in a bright red suit because she had a slight build, could look younger than her years, and because of the fact that red made her look and feel more powerful.

You couldn't hang back in red. You couldn't hesitate. You really had to live up to red.

She also wore a gold star on a chain around her neck, a graduation-from-law-school gift from her mother, who had been murdered several years earlier.

Wearing the star kept Keiko Castellano present in Yuki's mind and might even help her to win.

She had to win.

This was a tremendous opportunity to get justice for the victims, to become a hero to female

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victims everywhere. It was also an opportunity to be humiliated by a savage attorney and his perverted, murdering client.

It was her job to make sure that Keith Herman didn't get out of jail—ever.

The buzz in the gallery intensified, then cut off suddenly as the door leading from the judge's chambers opened behind the bench and Judge Arthur R. Nussbaum entered the courtroom.

Chapter 3

YUKI HALF LISTENED as Judge Nussbaum instructed the handpicked jury of six men, six women, and four alternates, who were as diverse a group as could be imagined: black, white, brown, white-collar, and blue-collar.

Nussbaum had been a clever trial lawyer, but the judge was new at his job and Yuki was sure he would play this one by the book.

When he asked her if she was ready to begin, she said she was. Gaines whispered, “Go get ’em,” and Yuki stood, greeted the jury, and walked confidently to the lectern in the well of the courtroom. Then, without warning, she blanked. She couldn’t remember the first sentence in her opener, the key that would unlock her carefully wrought statement.

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Yuki looked over at Gaines. He smiled, nodded, and her mind unfroze.

She said, “The defendant, Keith Herman, is a killer, and the evidence in this case will show you that the people who depended on Mr. Herman, the ones who looked to him for protection and love, are the people who should have feared him the most.”

Yuki paused to let her words sink in, looked at every member of the jury, and began to lay out her case.

“On March first, a day like any other, Keith Herman tucked his daughter’s lifeless body into the backseat of his Lexus, and she was never seen again. Jennifer Herman, Keith Herman’s wife, never reported her daughter missing, because as her husband was driving off with their daughter, Jennifer Herman was already dead by her husband’s hand.

“You will hear testimony that before she disappeared, Jennifer Herman told a friend on several occasions that she was afraid of her husband and that if anything ever happened to her, the friend should go to the police. Which this friend did. Had Lesley Rohan not called the police, they wouldn’t have looked for Jennifer Herman, and her body

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would have been buried under several tons of garbage in a landfill.

“You will hear testimony from another witness, an undercover police officer, who will tell you that he was offered one hundred thousand dollars by the defendant to kill Jennifer Herman.”

Yuki’s mind unclenched. She knew that she had gotten into the rhythm and the beat of her perfectly choreographed and well-rehearsed presentation. She was in a great groove.

She told the jury about the witnesses she would introduce—the sanitation worker who found the body of Jennifer Herman in eight separate garbage bags and the forensic pathologist who would talk about Jennifer Herman’s cause of death.

She walked to the counsel table and picked up an 8 x 10-inch color photo of a young child with dark wavy hair and a captivating smile. Carrying the picture in both hands, Yuki showed it to the jury as she walked along the length of the railing.

“This beautiful child is the defendant’s daughter, Lily, who has been missing for over a year. You will hear from a neighbor’s housekeeper, Maria Ortega, that a month before Lily disappeared, she became moody and withdrawn and that there

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were bruises on her arms and legs. Ms. Ortega will testify that she reported her suspicions to the police.

“The state,” Yuki said, keeping eye contact with the jury, “does not have to prove motive, but if I were sitting in the jury box, I’d be asking, ‘Why would the defendant, a man with wealth and means, decide to put his entire life in the toilet? Why would he kill the beautiful woman who was his wife, and the wonderful little girl who was his daughter?’

“Did Mr. Herman abuse his little girl, and did his wife catch him at it and try to protect their daughter?”

Kinsela shot to his feet. “Your Honor, this is argument.”

“Overruled.”

Yuki didn’t hesitate.

She stepped on the gas.

She said to the jury, “Did Mr. Herman physically abuse his little girl? Did Mr. Herman kill his wife when she tried to protect their daughter? What was his motive for murdering his loved ones?

“That question is going to haunt me for the rest of my life.”

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Chapter 4

WHEN SHE STOOD behind the lectern, Yuki felt like a little kid peering up over the edge of a table. So she stayed close to the jury box and spoke loudly enough for everyone in the courtroom to hear.

“We can’t know what was in the defendant’s mind when he took the lives of his wife and daughter, and the victims can’t tell us,” she said.

“We don’t have to know or prove motive, but we do have a witness, Ms. Lynnette Lagrande, who will testify that the defendant wanted to ditch his family. She will testify that she was in love with Keith Herman, that Mr. Herman said that he loved her and wanted to marry her. And so Ms. Lynnette Lagrande, a model citizen, patiently waited for

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Mr. Herman to make good on that promise for the last three years.”

There had been no coughing in the gallery, no shuffling in the jury box, and even when the defense team attempted to distract the jurors and the audience, Yuki had kept all the attention on herself.

But when she said that Lynnette Lagrande would give evidence proving that the defendant wanted to leave his family, John Kinsela snorted—what passed for laughter in his corner of the underworld. Yuki’s cheeks burned, but she didn’t even flick her eyes in opposing counsel’s direction. She had to bring her opening home.

She moved her glossy black hair away from her face, hooked it around her ears, and said to the jury, “The defense will tell you that there is no evidence connecting the death of Jennifer Herman to Keith Herman. They will say that Keith Herman’s fingerprints and DNA were not on the garbage bags—that in fact, Mr. Herman never saw his wife or daughter the day our witness saw him leave his house and put his daughter into his car.

“The defense will impugn the character and the veracity of Mr. Herman’s lover.

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“They will tell you that the defendant was misidentified by his neighbor and will maintain that since the body of Lily Herman has never been recovered, there is no evidence that she is even dead.

“So I ask you and I ask them,” Yuki said, pivoting so that she was staring the defendant and his counsel down. “Where is Lily Herman? Where is that little girl?”

“The defense will tell you that the people’s case is all based on circumstantial evidence. We have nothing to hide. We cannot put a gun in Mr. Herman’s hand. But circumstantial evidence is real evidence.

“If you go to bed one night and in the morning you see snow in your front yard and there are footprints in that snow, that is circumstantial evidence that snow fell during the night and that someone walked across your yard. You don’t have to actually see the snow falling to conclude that there was snowfall.

“So why are we all here today, ladies and gentlemen?”

“We submit to you that Keith Herman did brutally kill Jennifer and Lily Herman so that he

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could, for once and for all, be free to pursue his life as a wealthy widower and come to the party with no baggage and no financial overhead.

“We cannot let him get away with it. At the conclusion of this trial, you will have evidentiary proof that the defendant did callously commit two premeditated murders.”

The words were just out of Yuki’s mouth when John Kinsela laughed noisily again and once more drew the eyes of the jury to himself.

Yuki sharply objected.

Judge Nussbaum sustained her objection and Kinsela apologized for the interruption. But he had stolen her moment, broken the mood. And he had the jury’s rapt attention as he stood to make his opening statement.

Chapter 5

JOHN KINSELA BUTTONED his jacket and ran his hand across the lower half of his face. He achieved a look of contrition, as though he was sorry for the interruption.

It was all theatrics.

Yuki hoped the jury could read him as the drama whore he was.

“Folks, again, I’m sorry to have made light of the state’s opening statement. It was rude, but unintentional. The prosecutor is doing her job, a very difficult one, I assure you, because there is no evidence linking my client to any crime.”

Kinsela put his hands into his pockets, sauntered out into the well, and continued his conversation with the jury.

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“As the prosecutor said, there is no blood, no DNA, no gun in Mr. Herman’s hand. There is no direct evidence against Mr. Herman, because my client didn’t kill anyone, and the circumstantial evidence, such as it is, does not tie him to the death of his wife.

“Mr. Herman is one of the victims here. He loved his family and is devastated by their loss. And yet, as Ms. Castellano told you, he was having an affair with Ms. Lagrande.

“For a married man to have an affair may be bad behavior, but it’s not a crime. If it were a crime, about sixty-five percent of married men in the United States would be in the slammer.”

There was a ruffle of laughter in the courtroom, which Judge Nussbaum banged into silence with his gavel. He admonished the audience, and told them that he could have individuals removed or the entire courtroom emptied.

“You are here at my discretion,” Nussbaum warned. “Go on, Mr. Kinsela.”

And Kinsela did.

“Ms. Lagrande has a little cottage in the woods a few hours up the coast. She and Mr. Herman drove up there in her car on the afternoon of February

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twenty-eighth. My client was spending the night with Ms. Lagrande when the crimes presumably took place. They didn't see anyone and no one saw them. That is often the nature of a clandestine affair.

"Now, Ms. Lagrande is going to tell you that she was not with Mr. Herman the day that Jennifer Herman's body was found, the day Lily Herman tragically disappeared. She'll say Mr. Herman is making that up to give himself an alibi.

"Why is she going to betray Mr. Herman? Because they fought that weekend and Mr. Herman ended the affair.

"Ms. Lagrande is a woman scorned, and she's not just my client's alibi, she is the prosecution's entire case.

"The neighbor misidentified Mr. Herman and a car that is the same model as the one Mr. Herman owns. Lily Herman did have bruises, but she had them because she had a temper tantrum. Her father wouldn't buy her a dress she wanted and she flailed and kicked at Mr. Herman and he tried to restrain her. There was no beating, no call to the police, nothing like that.

"If he could, he would buy her a million dresses now.

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“Mr. Herman did not report that his wife and daughter were missing on March first because he didn’t know it. He was occupied with Ms. Lagrande at the time of this tragedy, which has unquestionably destroyed his life.

“That’s it, folks. That is our case. Mr. Herman didn’t kill anyone. This trial is about whether or not you believe Ms. Lagrande beyond a reasonable doubt.”

John Kinsela thanked the jury and sat down. For a second, Yuki couldn’t quite believe that Kinsela had singled out her star witness, shot a cannonball at her, then took a bow.

Yuki had hoped he would do exactly that. It was now in Kinsela’s best interest to strip Lynnette Lagrande’s testimony bare, break her, and throw her bones under the bus. He could only do that if she testified.

Her witness would appear.

Lynnette Lagrande, a woman with an exotic dancer’s name, was in fact a grade-school teacher, twenty years younger than the defendant, and possessed of a spotless reputation. She’d never gotten so much as a parking ticket in her life.

Gaines showed Yuki the cartoon he had

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