

## Chapter 2

It is late December, six days after Christmas, nineteen-sixty-nine, and somewhere close to three-thirty early Wednesday, New Year's Eve morning.

The solid-black dressed man strides up the dark deserted Reed Street sidewalk. He pulls on the top of his long wool mask stretching it off and rolls the bottom edges up before replacing on his head; now it looks like a regular toque anyone could be seen wearing on a chilly morning. The near freezing ocean wind whipping all around him. He suddenly jumps back into reality and grasps how cold he is. He wraps his light nylon windbreaker as tight as he can around his lanky body. The man needs to concentrate and finish his night's work.

The strange shadow scans the street in both directions, before turning left on Mission Boulevard, he still has fifteen blocks north back to his vehicle, parked discreetly in the Law Street neighborhood. It is a long irksome walk but he has chores to do along the way. He hurries up the boulevard in the cold early morning air. The assassin is acutely aware of appropriate spots to dispose of his lethal, one-use weapon.

He stops and stands at an alley entrance two blocks up the wide street. Squinting, the figure eyes a familiar group of dented steel trashcans down the nearly indiscernible alleyway. The murderer again glances up and down the boulevard ensuring nobody's wandering around. Not a soul in sight! The current northern cold wave must have everyone warm and cozy, snuggling in bed.

Plan "A" still in effect. He starts down the alley, pulling the straight plastic tube-gun from his sleeve and proceeds to dismantle the alien-looking object as he walks. By the time he arrives at the cans both his encased hands juggling the seven parts. His gloved right-hand fumbles its contents and drops them. The steel barrel-powder chamber combination tinkles to the concrete and rolls to the middle of the alley.

"Shit," he quietly mumbles as he glances around. The man becomes a part-of-the-darkness statue and waits to see if any faces appear in one of the numerous overlooking windows. After minutes of nothing, he picks up the plastic guide handle and slide trigger, jamming them into a jacket pocket, and walks over to retrieve the offending steel part.

Quickly he throws the split metal retaining ring, and large spring into different cans and rushes back to the Boulevard.

Stepping around the corner, a pimply faced teenage boy runs him over while speeding down the sidewalk. His rear bike rack holding a heavy canvas Union Newspaper bag stuffed with the morning edition.

The shocked man jumps to his feet, yelling, “What the hell are you doing?”

“I’m... m... m, sorry. I never seen anyone walking this early.” The boy, still on his knees, grabs his old red Schwinn bicycle and pulls it close. The dark figure scares the young teenager and he starts stuffing the scattered papers back into his bag as fast as he can.

“You should be more damn careful!” lowering his voice to almost whispering level.

Realizing it is too late to hide his face; the black figure hurriedly turns and continues his walk. He stops a half-block away, thinking, “Should I go back, and fix this problem? He concludes, “That stupid kid is probably too afraid to take much notice of me.” Before totally making up his mind, he frantically starts checking pockets to make sure nothing dropped out. The figure looks back at the kid, who is already speeding away down the sidewalk. Unsure what to do, he continues north.

Another four blocks the murderer comes upon the old Safeway Grocery Store, his next and most import dumping ground. He is hopeful no homeless will be sleeping amongst the bailed cardboard bundles or in the trash-littered lane behind the store. He previously scouted this alley on numerous occasions at varying times at night. A few occasions the spot besieged with bums and others times, not a soul found. So far it has been, more or less, a lucky night. Fortunately, the latter holds true, the area is free of the unkempt vagrants, the cold snap forcing them into homeless shelters. It is a relieving break.

He walks to one of the countless charred fire-warming metal garbage drums and throws his three plastic parts into one of the half-full containers. The man retrieves discarded packing paper from the store’s large commercial dumpster and throws it on top of his parts. He struggles ripping off larger cardboard chunks sticking out from one of the many bailed cubes and throws them into the can. He continues to the wooden pallet storage area, rips a few boards from a destroyed pallet, and adds them. Finally, the man pulls a can of lighter fluid and a disposable lighter from a front pants pocket. He squirts a steady stream of clear liquid all over and around the mound of flammable debris he constructed, and throws in the empty fluid container. He ignites the jumble.

The soaked pile sparks to life and the dark figure throws in his Bic. As soon as flames shoot high out of the can, the killer walks down the alley toward the beach and away from the boulevard. He plans to miss any called fire trucks or cops coming down Mission and take the safer path up the beachside boardwalk. The disposal took him less than five minutes. He knows the full rage fire will dissolve his parts into a lump of melted plastic before anyone can put out the inferno. The heat scarcely has to reach a hundred-five degree. He confidently thinks, “Besides nobody would know what the tubes are anyway.”

The man peeks around the final alley building, under a dim yellow exposed lightbulb; he looks up and down the boardwalk, and back at his burning can. The walk’s clear, but he believes he sees a black mass somewhere down the alley, behind the fire. Narrow eyed he cannot detect any movement and concludes he only imaging. He steps onto the planked walkway and continues north.

Close to the end of his ocean front walk, he again takes a hard look around. Still no one; he enters the sand. The man kneels down just past the entryway through the concrete barrier and hand-scoops a small hole at the base of the low wall. He pulls a pocketknife from his pants and pries the primer from the firing end of the barrel. After inserting the used primer and small steel firing pin, he fills the hole in and smooths the top sand. It is time to move on to Law Street and the final beach-area dumping site.

Back on Mission Boulevard, he looks south. Two sets of flashing red lights are just approaching his alley. “Only another four blocks to freedom,” he softly mutters to himself as he turns and continues the final leg of his journey.

The killer reaches Law Street and turns towards the Pacific. Rapidly he moves past his outdated Ford Galaxie to the white boarded barrier at the ocean-end of the street. The man proceeds down the solid thick wooden-planked stairs to the cliff hidden beach. Excitement permeates his body and he has long forgotten the cold wind. Under the stairs, he digs the second hole. The man pulls the handkerchief and stainless steel slug from his pocket. After wiping the blood and chunks of brain matter off, he pushes the four-inch rod straight down through the bottom of his hole as deep as he can into the sand. He covers over the part and returns the bloody handkerchief to his pocket.

The night’s last beach task; he pulls a hacksaw blade from his shirt pocket and saws the steel barrel in half. The man walks through the soft sand to the ocean’s edge and throws the first half

of the narrow tube towards the south, as far as he can, into the waves. Turning north, he throws the powder chamber end just as far into the pounding surf. If either or both of these parts ever found they will be well cleansed by the raw salt water of any gunpowder residue, and hopefully partially rusted, if not into oblivion.

At his car, he removes a glove and reaches into a pocket for his key. Fumbling around his pocketknife, he feels a foreign object at the bottom. His hand pulls out two keys. He had overlooked discarding his victim's apartment key in the burning can.

Across Law Street, he spots a sewer vent below the edge of the cement sidewalk. The man walks over and chuck's in the extra key. He cannot help but whistle a soft tune as returns to his vehicle while removing his other glove.

The executioner has one more stop on his way home. Before driving away, he pulls a large-sized paper grocery sack from under the seat. He puts the gloves and light jacket along with his wool hat into the bag and drives away.

After hiding through a maze of side streets to the Morena business district, the man turns down Sherman Street, and pulls into an industrial complex, stopping in front of an outside large green commercial dumpster in front of the unit where he works.

Exiting his car, he entombs the brown sack of clothes deep within the trash filling the container; satisfied it will go unnoticed until Friday's early morning pickup, with all the small industrial workshops closed for New Year's Day and most of them through the four-day weekend.

He bends the hacksaw blade in half and tosses it in. Lastly, he just throws the bloody handkerchief on top. It will go overlooked no matter what; the container always holds an assortment of bloody accident rags. Even the local dumpster-divers avoid this grotesque can.

He jumps back in the car and drives home.

Once in his driveway, he sneaks along the fence, dividing his property from the neighbors. He tramples through overgrown weeds, to the side door of the paint-faded garage and enters.

Inside he removes shoes, setting them on top of the dryer before undressing and placing his jeans, shirt, and socks and underwear into the large plastic laundry sink attached to the wall beside his washing machine. He pushes in the rubber sink stopper and fills water just above the clothes. Grabbing two gallons of bleach, he has ready and pours them over the clothes.

The man walks naked through the empty house to his bathroom and showers after which he sits at the kitchen table and has a beer before he pulls the Galaxie back into its garage home.