

JOHN LESCROART

TREASURE

HUNT

A NOVEL



DUTTON

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JOHN LESCROART
TREASURE
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DUTTON

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To Kathryn Detzer, Andy Jalakas, and again (always) to Lisa M. Sawyer

It is one thing . . . that business between men and women, and there are many other more important things, including food.

—Alexander McCall Smith

The day he found the body, Mickey Dade woke up under a tree on Mount Tamalpais.

Sleeping outside a few nights a week had been going on as a regular thing with him for about four months now. He always kept a sleeping bag in his used Camaro's trunk anyway, and starting around mid-May, when the weather got nice everywhere but in San Francisco proper, he'd finish work and leave town in whatever direction struck his fancy.

Even in the urbanized, overcrowded Bay Area, there were innumerable places a guy could simply pull over, park, and crash on the ground under cover of trees or bushes or in the hollow of a sand dune in one of the city or county or even national parks, at the beaches, off back roads, even in the quiet "neighborhood watch" suburbs.

Monday the past week, while it was still light out he'd driven down to Woodside, an exclusively semirural enclave nestled into the foothills behind Palo Alto, and slept out under an old stone bridge over a dry creek bed. Two days later, he'd parked a couple hundred feet down an unnamed, little-used dirt track cut into the woods behind Burlingame around Crystal Springs Reservoir. Last night, he'd gone north into Marin County, got halfway up Mount Tamalpais, and pulled under an old low-hanging scrub oak in a forgotten and unpaved parking lot.

He always woke up at first light, so this morning he was on the Golden Gate Bridge by the time the sun cleared the hills behind Oakland. He had his iPod coming through his speakers. It was mid-September, and as usual this time of year, the coastal fog was taking a break. The morning clarity under the cloudless sky was startling. Mickey could easily make out the tiny dots of the Farallones, twenty-some miles away over the deceptively still Pacific.

He exited the bridge and soon found himself on Marina, cruising through the streets. The close-set, well-maintained, beautiful low-rise homes stirred some vestigial gene he must have picked up somewhere. Just driving through a neighborhood of real honest-to-God stand-alone homes always filled him with something like contentment, although it wasn't quite that; it was more like hope that contentment and physical security were among life's possibilities.

This was something Mickey didn't have much personal experience with. He couldn't remember ever having lived in anything but an apartment house, although his parents had apparently rented a small bungalow in the Sunset before their divorce. His sister, Tamara, said she vaguely remembered that house. But she was two years older than he was. Mickey had been only two when his mom had taken them from their father and moved out.

But Mickey didn't get time to enjoy the Marina architecture this morning. A crowd was clogging the street up by the Palace of Fine Arts. At this location, he thought somebody was probably shooting a movie—the Palace had been a setting in both *Vertigo* and *The Rock*, among a host of other films. People loved the old domed structure that had been constructed for the Panama-Pacific Exhibition

back in 1915. With its classical columns and its reflecting lagoon, the spot conjured both urban elegance and a hint of mystery. So he pulled into the Yacht Club parking lot, where he knew you could always get a spot at this time of the morning.

When Mickey got out of his car, he was surprised that the noises carrying from down by the Palace seemed distinctly ominous and angry. Someone was giving harsh orders on a bullhorn. He heard a full-throated chorus of discontent—maybe actors and extras emoting, but he didn't think so.

Mostly, it sounded like a fight.

* * *

From the outskirts of the crowd, Mickey could make out at least three distinct groups, not including the vans from two of the local television stations.

The police, at least twenty of them, six of them mounted on horseback, held a line near the shoreline of the lagoon. The nonequestrian cops were turned out in “hats and bats”—full assault gear, helmets with tinted face masks, batons out. A larger, homogeneous, and clearly hostile group of maybe fifty citizens milled around on the sloping banks of the lagoon as if waiting for instructions to charge the police line. In front of them, a tall bearded guy in camo gear was right up in the face of the lead cop with the bullhorn. Finally, down by the water's edge, a smaller group of perhaps twenty people in the uniforms of the city's Parks and Recreation Department huddled fearfully by a small fleet of rowboats laden with what looked like netting of some kind.

The camo guy started a chant, “Hell, no, don't let them go!” and in seconds the crowd was in full-throat behind him, pressing forward toward the police line. The cops brought up their batons as the bullhorn exhorted the crowd to “Back away! Back away!”

“Hell, no, don't let them go!”

A white-haired man in a bathrobe and tennis shoes with his arms crossed and wearing a bemused expression stood on a lawn across the street. Mickey sidled up next to him. “What's going on?” he asked.

The man shook his head. “Idiots.”

“Who?”

“All of 'em.”

“But what's it about?”

The man looked over, askance. “You don't know about the ducks? Where you been?”

“What about the ducks?”

“They're moving 'em, or trying to.” He shook his head again. “Lunatics. Stupid idea, bad planning, insane timing. But what else do you expect nowadays, huh? You really don't know about this? Moving the ducks down to Foster City?”

“Ahh.” So that's what this was. Mickey had read all about it over the past few months, but hadn't realized that it was coming to a head so soon. Now the whole story came back to him.

The city had approved a \$22 million restoration for the Palace and its grounds, and part of the project included buttressing the remainder of the shoreline of the lagoon, most of which was already bounded by a low rock-and-concrete wall. But the rest of the shoreline, closest in toward the Palace itself, had become degraded over time—in the past year alone, a couple of kids had fallen in when the banks had collapsed under them. It wasn't so much dangerous as it opened the city to possible

litigation issues, and so the supervisors had given the plan the green light, and put up \$7.5 million to get the project started. The rest would, somehow, be funded by private benefactors. And lo, it had come to pass.

But to do any of this work, first the lagoon had to be drained.

Enter the ducks. And the San Francisco Palace Duck Coalition. And a former Berkeley tree sitter who, for the present campaign, had adopted the nom de guerre of Eric Canard. Mickey only now came to recognize the man in his camo gear. Usually he did photo ops in a full duck suit.

The Palace ducks, of course, along with its swans, herons, seagulls, and other birds, called the lagoon home. And if the lagoon were drained, Canard had argued to the Board of Supervisors, the ducks would become homeless. Temporarily, but truly. And in a city that prided itself on being a haven for the homeless, this was simply unacceptable.

So the supervisors, caving in—to widespread derision in the media and on the street—had set about finding a solution to the problem. In spite of the fact that San Francisco had several nice and completely serviceable ponds, those ponds had their own populations of ducks whose environment, Canard argued, would be compromised by the wholesale relocation of the Palace ducks to their own home waters. So, eventually, the decision was made to relocate the ducks to Foster City, a residential community with Venice-like canals, and few permanent resident ducks, twenty miles south down the Peninsula.

This would have been a workable, though of course still wildly foolish, idea except for one thing. Six months before, Foster City had encountered its own problem with its indigenous ground squirrel population. These animals were burrowing in the city's levees and destroying them, threatening homes with the very real possibility of imminent flooding. In response to this crisis, Foster City had decided to poison the levee-dwelling critters en masse. This slaughter passed largely unnoticed in Foster City itself, but did not escape the keen eye of Eric Canard. And when San Francisco announced its intention to remove its Palace ducks to Foster City, Canard had gone ballistic.

Surely, if the ducks were sent to Foster City, the heartless bureaucrats there would not treasure and protect them. These people had shown their true colors around the plight of defenseless animals and would obviously treat the ducks as they had treated their own squirrels if given half a chance. And Canard was not going to let that happen.

So he'd sued. And lost.

And had threatened to sue again. Which gave the city a window in which to make its move.

Across the street, the chant was wearing down, but Mickey could still hear a strong voice—undoubtedly Canard—yelling now at the lead cop.

“So how'd this start today?” Mickey asked the old man. “I thought it was still in the courts.”

“No. The brains down at City Hall decided they'd just go ahead and round up the birds. The whole thing is nuts. And it's all moot anyway. They started draining the lake a couple of days ago before they were ready for the ducks—in secret, I might add, and that's never a good idea—so word got out to Canard and his people that something was happening down here, and the whack jobs started gathering before sunrise this morning. Uh-oh.”

Off in the distance, the sound of sirens, police reinforcements on the way. Another news van pulled in, screeching to a stop.

The way this thing was developing, Mickey thought the story had a good chance to go national.

But Mickey had to get home, cleaned up, and to work. So he thanked the older man for his company, said good-bye, and crossed the street about a half block north of the crowd. Turning right, still hugging the shoreline, he followed it around to where it veered away from the view of the crowd.

Here the lower water level of the lagoon was much more obvious than it was up by the demonstration. The clumpy roots of the cattails shone black with the gunky bottom mud in the morning light. The low-hanging tree branches, which normally kissed the water's surface, now looked trimmed off a foot and a half or so above the waterline. An asphalt pathway came down to the water's edge off the parking lot, and Mickey took it as the shortcut back to where he'd parked.

But he hadn't gone more than a couple of steps when one of the tree roots sticking up from the brackish water stopped him in his tracks. It was funny the way these things growing wild in nature could so closely resemble shapes you'd expect to find in other species, in animals, even in people. Those roots, emerging from the water, could easily, he thought, be the hand of a man.

In fact, it seemed so near a resemblance that he forced himself to step off the pathway and look closer. He came right down now to the water's edge, where from this vantage he could dimly make out, six or eight inches under the water, an all-too-recognizable shape.

As Mickey stared in dawning belief, suddenly the water seemed to move and a trail of bubbles rose out from underneath the submerged form, turning it over and raising what was now clearly a body until its head broke the water's surface and the dead man's eyeless face stared up at him, caught and silenced in midscream.

At ten minutes past noon, Mickey walked up the single flight of stairs that led from the Grant Street entrance, in the heart of Chinatown, to the front door of his workplace, a private investigations firm called the Hunt Club.

Although the word *firm* was a bit of a misnomer, especially lately.

Six months before, the business had been successfully humming along in pretty much the same circumstances it had enjoyed for the first six and a half years of its existence. At that time, the owner—Wyatt Hunt—didn't seem to have too much trouble keeping himself and his two-and-a-half-person staff busy most of the time, working primarily for several of the city's well-heeled law firms.

Mickey's sister, Tamara, had held down the front-desk duties and often did light field- and interrogation work, especially when women witnesses or children were involved. A junior associate—Tamara's old boyfriend Craig Chiurco—had done the lion's share of the legwork locating witnesses, serving subpoenas, accompanying clients to depositions, and performing the other standard grunt work that made up the business.

Mickey, in addition to occasional subpoena service to the Hunt Club, had mostly driven a cab for a living, but was pretty much on call full-time to supply transportation to Wyatt or Craig should they need it, as they often did. In a city where parking was always so problematic, access to immediate transportation turned out to be a highly valued and oft-used service.

Wyatt Hunt himself was the computer whiz and the basic brains behind the organization. A natural-born marketer, Hunt also pulled in the actual jobs that kept everyone busy.

Until recently anyway. When bad luck, withering publicity over one huge failed case, a faltering economy, and possibly some questionable judgment had created a perfect storm that was threatening to shipwreck the enterprise.

Tamara had simply walked away from her job and had fallen into a profound funk from which she still had not emerged. And with the exception of piecemeal work with the law firm Freeman, Farrelly, Hardy & Roake, where Hunt had several close friends and one girlfriend—the business had all but evaporated.

Mickey, though, had not only stayed on with Hunt, he'd given up his more lucrative daily work as a chef, the cab business, quit most of his cooking classes, and taken over his sister's position at the front desk. He did this because Wyatt Hunt was not just a good boss. Hunt had literally saved the lives of both Mickey and Tamara when they'd been children.

So Mickey wasn't going to abandon Hunt. He'd stick it out until the job dried up and blew away. Or until it resurrected itself. Either way, Mickey was on board for the duration. He was still young, just twenty-seven. His own plans—to become a chef and open a world-class restaurant—could wait, since, like most American men his age, he was going to live forever.

Mickey the dutiful had, of course, called from the Marina three hours ago at the minute he realized he was going to be late for work, and had told the answering machine some of the story, but he'd of necessity left out a lot of it.

His discovery of the body had stolen the thunder from the demonstration. As soon as he'd run over and contacted one of the policemen on the scene, the television vans and a good portion of the crowd had swarmed to the other end of the lagoon to see the corpse in the water.

Now he let himself in to the Hunt Club's two-room office. A chair scraped in the back, and Wyatt Hunt appeared in the adjoining door on his right, just beyond the receptionist's desk. Tall and casually buffed, Hunt was dressed in slacks, a blue shirt, and darker blue tie. His sport coat, Mickey knew, would be hanging over his chair in his office in the back. "Just in time," Hunt said.

"For what? Tell me we've got some work."

"I'll play your silly game. We've got some work."

Mickey pumped a fist. "All right. You going out?"

"I am."

"Where to?"

"Lunch at Le Central."

Mickey whistled. Le Central was a white-tablecloth French restaurant down around the corner off Bush Street. This potentially meant that Wyatt had scored some deep-pockets client who would be footing the bill. "Who's the client?" Mickey asked.

"Ah, the client. What client?"

"The one we're talking about."

"I'm afraid there is no client."

"So where's the work coming from?"

"What work?"

"The work you just said we had."

Hunt leaned against Mickey's desk and shrugged his shoulders. "Actually, truth be told, we don't have any work."

"But—"

"Hey. You told me to tell you we had some work, so I played along."

In fact, though, I'm afraid we don't have any paying work." He turned a palm up. "At this stage we'd better be able to joke about it, don't you think? And the good news is that I'm really going to have lunch at Le Central and was waiting for you. You eaten yet?"

"Not today. Other days, though, I have."

Hunt broke a grin. "Good for you. So I won't have to teach you how." He looked around the small space with a wistful air, as though he might not see it again. "Let's lock up and get ourselves on the outside of some grub."

Le Central had a notice on its daily-updated blackboard informing its patrons that its famous and delicious cassoulet had been cooking now for 12,345 consecutive days. In spite of that, both Wyatt and Mickey agreed that it was too warm a day for the rib-sticking beans, duck, sausage, and lamb casserole, and instead both ordered the *poulet frites*—half a roasted chicken with fries. As an afterthought, Wyatt also ordered a bottle of white wine, by no means a common occurrence at lunchtime. When Mickey raised his eyebrows in surprise, he said, "Special occasion. You mind?"

“Not if you don’t mind me falling asleep at the desk this afternoon,” Mickey said. “But if you’re okay with that, I’ll force down a glass or two.”

“That’s the spirit.”

“What’s the special occasion?”

“Well, let’s wait for the wine. Meanwhile, tell me about this morning. You actually discovered the body?”

Mickey launched into a truncated version of the day’s events. The dead man, according to the identification in his wallet, was Dominic Como, a prominent civic activist who’d gone missing about four days before. Even more startling, and depressing, from Mickey’s perspective, was the fact that his grandfather, Jim Parr, had worked for Como as his personal driver. The dead man had been one of Jim’s personal heroes. So now, if and when he went home tonight, Mickey would be sharing his one bedroom, nine-hundred-square-foot walkup with a grieving grandfather and a train wreck of a sister.

The waiter appeared with their wine. Hunt tasted it, pronounced it fine, and then waited for the glasses to be filled before he lifted his. “Here’s to new beginnings.”

“New beginnings,” Mickey repeated. He hesitated, his glass poised in front of his mouth. “What does that sound ominous?”

Hunt put down his untouched wine. “I’ve pretty much decided to close up the shop. Let you move on to your chef’s career.”

“What about you?”

“I’ll be all right. Probably just hook up with one of the other outfits in town. Either that, or get a real job someplace. All these computer and marketing skills I’ve gotten good at ought to be worth something to somebody, I figure. Maybe a start-up.”

“But you don’t want to do that.”

“Well, sometimes you don’t get to do what you want. You, for example, don’t really want to be a receptionist and gofer.”

“That’s not the same thing.”

“Why not?”

“I’m a lot younger than you is one reason.”

Hunt almost chuckled. “Forty-five isn’t exactly one foot in the grave, Mick. People have been known to start over at that age. Goethe wrote *Faust* when he was eighty, so maybe there’s still some hope for me.”

“That’s not it. It’s not just the age. You love what you do.”

“I sure as hell don’t love sitting around the office waiting for the phone to ring.”

“But when there’s work . . .”

“Granted. It’s a good gig. I’m not arguing. I like it a lot when it’s working.” He lifted his hands a few inches off the table. “But you know what it’s been like. I don’t see how it’s going to turn around. So I thought I’d give you a few weeks’ notice—I’ll keep you on the exorbitant payroll until I shut the door for good, but I thought you deserved to know as soon as I made up my mind, and I pretty much have.”

“Pretty much, or definitely?”

“Well, pretty definitely, unless something drastic happens. And I also wanted to tell you how much I’ve appreciated what you’ve done for me over these past months. But I can’t ask you to hold on any longer when I don’t really see any future in it.”

Mickey finally noticed his wineglass. He picked it up and drank off a good swallow. “So what’s the timeline?”

“Well, the lease for the office goes another two months from now and I’ve got to give a month’s

notice. So I guess it's formal in about thirty days, give or take."

"Unless something comes up to turn things around."

"I wouldn't hold my breath, Mick. I really don't see what could make a difference at this point."

Something jangled near Mickey's head and he swatted at the offending noise that had jarred him so violently from his afternoon sleep. The phone hit the floor in front of his desk and the receiver bounced across the hardwood.

Mickey jumped up out of his chair, yelling, "Coming. Sorry. Just a second." He came around the desk, grabbed the receiver, and, breathing heavily, managed to say he was sorry again before he realized where he was and said, "Hunt Club. Mickey speaking."

A man's voice. "Everything all right there?"

"Yeah. I just knocked the phone onto the floor. How can I help you?"

"You're Mickey, you said?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, hold on a minute. I've got somebody who wants to talk to you."

Mickey waited, then heard his grandfather's voice. "Hey, Mick, is that you?"

"Jim?"

"Yeah. Me."

"What's up? How you doin'?"

"Well . . . a little fucked up."

"Where are you?"

"The Shamrock."

"Are you okay?"

"Good. I'm good. But I'm going to need a lift home here pretty soon."

Mickey looked at his watch and let out a sigh. "Jim, it's only four o'clock. I'm at work at least another hour."

"I don't think Mose would let me drink for another hour."

"Who's Mose?"

"Bartender here. S'good guy." Slurring.

"How about you just have water or something? Would he serve you water?"

"I don't drink water. The things fish do in water. You don't want to know. Maybe he'd give me one more drink?" Sounding like he was making the suggestion to someone in front of him. "Maybe not though. No." Back to Mickey. "He's shaking his head. Hold on just a second. Here he is again. Tell him I'll drink slow."

But the first man's voice came back on. "This is Moses McGuire. You know where the Shamrock is? Maybe you want to get down here and pick up your old man. I don't know if I want to let him out of here by himself in the condition he's in."

"He's my grandfather," Mickey said.

"Whatever." McGuire lowered his voice. "Look, if he wouldn't have remembered your number just now, I would have had to call a cab, but he said he didn't want to take a cab, so I asked him how'd he feel about the cops, and I sure as hell don't want to do that. Meanwhile, I got a business to run. He's eighty-sixed here and you need to come down and get him right now. How old is he?"

"I don't know exactly. Seventy-four, I think, somewhere in there."

“That’s too old for the drunk tank. You’ve got to come get him.”

Swearing to himself, by now completely awake, Mickey said, “All right. Put him on again, would you?” And then, after a short pause, “Jim. God damn it. I’m going to call Tam first. You just wait. Maybe she’ll beat me there and can walk you home.”

“She’s not home.”

“Where is she?”

“I don’t know. She went out.”

“Well, I’ll try her anyway. Meanwhile, you wait. Just sit there and have a club soda. Fish avoid club soda like the plague. The bubbles make ’em fart.”

Twenty minutes later, after double-parking around the corner, Mickey pushed his way through the door of the Little Shamrock, Jim’s local hangout.

One of the oldest bars in the city, founded in 1893, the Little Shamrock started out very narrow and by the front door. A couple of large picture windows facing Lincoln Boulevard let in some natural light. A bar with a dozen or so stools ran down the left side of the room, and on the right, in front, an eclectic selection of memorabilia, including an antique bicycle, black-and-white photos, old electric posters, and a grandfather clock that had stopped during the Great Earthquake of 1906 hung on the wall. Halfway back, the place opened up slightly to accommodate dart players and a jukebox, and at the very back, under the faux Tiffany lamps, the room took on the look of a dilapidated old living room, with a couple of sagging couches facing a cluster of overstuffed easy chairs.

Jim Parr sat at the far end of the crowded bar with an empty glass in front of him. Maybe the bartender had coaxed him into something nonalcoholic after all. Jim was staring at the television screen. His cheeks were wet. Excusing his way through the press, Mickey got back next to him and put a hand on his grandfather’s shoulder, gathering him in a half hug. He kissed him on the top of his cue-ba head. “Hey.”

Jim leaned into him for a second, then pulled away, grabbed the bar napkin, and wiped at his eyes. “How’d you get here so fast?”

“I ignored the speed limit. And I’m double-parked. You think you can walk?”

“ ’Course. I could walk home if I needed to.”

“Well, luckily you don’t need to. You paid up here?”

“Paid as I went. Only way to live.”

“So I’ve heard. Like a million times. Okay. Let’s go.”

The old man got his feet onto the floor and straightened up, leaning into Mickey. The bartender saw what was happening and gave Mickey an approving nod. He mouthed a silent thank-you.

Parr managed to keep upright as the two of them negotiated their way out of the bar and out onto the sidewalk. It was still a clear, warm day, and the sun was in their eyes as they made their way to the car. After Mickey poured Parr into the front seat, he went around and got in.

“This about Dominic Como?” he asked.

His grandfather, head back against the seat with his eyes closed, turned toward Mickey and another tear broke. “I loved that guy,” he said.

Mickey facilitated his parking around the city by the judicious use of a handicap placard that he kept in his glove compartment and that he could put onto his dashboard whenever he needed it. His grandfather had given him this surprisingly valuable little blue item. In theory, only handicapped individuals had access to them, and there was nothing handicapped about Jim Parr.

And there had been nothing handicapped about Dominic Como, either, for that matter.

But Como nevertheless had always possessed a handicapped card for those special occasions when nothing else would do. When Parr had retired eight years ago, Como gave him one as a present. Como could get things that other people didn't seem to have access to. It had been one of his talents, and access to those things was one of the perks of Parr's old job.

So parking wasn't its usual awful and automatic hassle. Today Mickey pulled up into a spot by the emergency entrance to the UC Medical Center, only a couple of blocks from their apartment. By that time, Jim was snoring.

Fifteen minutes later, the old man was in his bed, still dressed except for his shoes, and with the covers pulled up around him. Mickey closed the bedroom door and, sweating from having basically carried Jim up to the second floor where they lived, he took a dispirited glance around the cluttered living room: Tamara's Murphy bed pulled down from the wall and unmade. Newspapers from several days scattered around. Coffee mugs on just about every flat surface.

He straightened up, and when he'd finished, he opened the door to his own bedroom, essentially a large closet with a window facing the wall of the apartment behind them. Here was his bed, a board-and-cinder-block bookcase, a small dresser/desk combo unit, a few prints on the walls.

But he didn't go into his room. Dead in his tracks, he stopped in its doorway. No wonder he fled from this place as often as he could.

This was no way to live.

The death of Dominic Como, now confirmed as a murder, led off the five o'clock news. The cause, as Mickey had suspected, was not drowning, but rather someone had hit him with a blunt object on the back of the head. Como had already been missing for four days by the time he was found partially submerged in the lagoon at the Palace of Fine Arts by . . .

Mickey, sitting in front of his television, came forward in mild shock as his own image appeared on the screen as part of the big story of the day. He had talked to several reporters that morning at the scene, of course, but never really believed that they'd run with any of the footage of him, since his own role in the larger story was at best only a footnote. But there he was on TV, describing how he'd come upon the body. He thought this was pretty cool in spite of how young he looked, and how disheveled, which he suddenly realized was what sleeping out under trees could do to you.

But when they identified Mickey as "an associate with the Hunt Club, a private investigating firm" it occurred to him that maybe his unshaven mug and slept-in clothing weren't the best advertisement in the world. That realization brought him up short—the idea that he might actually be a liability of some kind for Wyatt's business. Maybe while he was cleaning up his apartment and his physical surroundings, he thought it wouldn't be such a bad idea to work on his own hygiene and appearance.

But then his image left the screen and Channel Four's perky anchorwoman was going on with more about the crime and the victim. Because of his grandfather's longstanding job as Como's driver, Mickey knew a lot about him, but he hadn't ever really focused on the breadth of his charitable work. Now he learned that Como had either founded or sat on the boards of no fewer than six major charities.

in San Francisco—the Sunset Youth Project (of which he was executive director), Braceros Unidos, the Mission Street Coalition, the Rainbow Workshops, the Sanctuary House for Battered Women, and Halfway Home.

The police investigation was continuing, but so far there were no suspects.

Cleanly shaven and showered, in slacks, a button-down dress shirt under a Mountain Hardwear jacket, and tennis shoes, Mickey walked down to Golden Gate Park, then, in another quarter mile so, found himself at the de Young Museum.

Off to his right loomed one of his favorite recent additions to the city's landscape. Adjacent to the museum, a strange-looking tower thrust itself nine stories up into the now-darkening sky. The exterior of the tower looked to be made of metallic panels—copper?—into which the builder had punched various imperfections, from bumps to indentations to holes. More unexpectedly, especially upon the first viewing, the tower twisted as it went up. What started as a rectangle at the base shifted as it rose until at the top it was a gravity-defying parallelogram. From the top—an enclosed viewing platform—Mickey had been pleased to recognize that the bottom of the tower was aligned with the east-west grid of the park, while the top's orientation was turned to match the grid of the city's downtown streets.

Inside now, he stopped a minute to listen to the jazz quintet playing in the lobby—a Friday-night tradition—then took the elevators up to the top. No charge. He'd been up here no fewer than forty times, and every time the place worked its magic on him. The windows were huge, both wide and tall, and through them the entire city revealed itself beneath and all around him. And since, because of the tower's twisting nature, it wasn't really obvious that there actually was a physical building under him, it always felt like he was floating.

The sun had just disappeared into the ocean and the purple western sky was now ablaze with gorgeous orange-red clouds. The Golden Gate Bridge was *right there*, just off to his right. And back behind him, the high-rises of downtown had just started to twinkle with their evening lights.

But tonight he wasn't here for the views. Because of its parallelogram shape, the floor came to a point on both the north and south ends. Mickey looked left and then made his way to the corner where, as he'd suspected and hoped, his sister—in a cowl-necked sweatshirt and camo pants—sat on the floor, apparently mesmerized, hugging her knees.

"They just let you sit here all day?" he asked.

She looked up and shrugged. "I'm not bothering anybody."

Mickey went down on one knee. "Were you planning to come home sometime?"

"Sure."

"When?"

"Eventually."

"Good. Just so I know not to rent out your space." He paused. "Oh, and in case you were wondering, Jim's all right."

Now her head did turn toward him, quickly, in surprise. "Why wouldn't he be?"

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