

Chapter 1

On a beautiful Sunday afternoon in September 1970, Judge Christina Jensen and her husband Nick returned home from their honeymoon in British Columbia, Canada.

Christina parked their new Cadillac sedan in the garage, and Nick retrieved two large suitcases from the trunk. An athletic and attractive fifty-year old, the Judge scampered ahead of Nick and opened the front door. As the newlyweds entered the hallway of their elegant home in the City of San Marino, Christina noticed that a court file had been placed on a small round table that bore the imprint of the Southern California Mission Judicial District on which she served as a Judge.

She stopped at the table and said, “Honey, this is strange. What’s a court file doing out here?”

Nick Pawlowski set down the heavy suitcases by the hall staircase. He shrugged and gave his wife a questioning look. “Well, what’s in the file?” he asked.

Christina suddenly remembered that her bailiff, Kathy Powell, had a key to the house in the event that court work might require the Judge’s immediate attention. Christina picked up the file and opened it. Inside was a memo from Presiding Judge Tyler Scott along with two newspaper clippings. She quickly read all the items. Christina’s lovely face, framed by short blond hair, turned slightly pale.

She looked up at Nick. “Damn. I just wish we were back in Canada and making love in that cozy cabin overlooking the lake,” said the former Army nurse.

Nick put a hand lightly on her shoulder. “Crissy, what’s the matter?”

The Judge sighed. “Nick, I took your advice. I prayed for guidance about whether I should remain a Municipal Judge instead of accepting the Governor’s appointment to the Superior Court. There were a lot of pros and cons affecting my decision. I chose to remain a Muni Judge because I didn’t want to disclose to the Governor’s Office that I was an ... alcoholic.” She paused. “Okay. I’ve been sober nearly two years now, and I’ve gone to AA religiously. Maybe I should apply to be elevated, and just let the chips fall where they may.”

Nick frowned. “Crissy, you’re not making much sense.”

“Honey, when I heard the Hampton case, and there were all those repercussions in the media, I thought I had enough grief to last me a lifetime.”

Christina handed her husband the file. “Just read this,” she said. “I’ll be using the phone in the study. I’ve got to call Ty Scott.”

Nick sat down on a living room couch and opened the file. He was not a lawyer, so he read the two newspaper articles first, and then Judge Scott’s memo.

A small headline from the front page of the *Alhambra-Post Advocate* read, “Teen Runaway Brutally Raped; Ralph Twins Arrested.” The brief article stated that Alhambra Police had arrested Tom and Todd Ralph, thirty-year old identical twins, for beating and raping a fifteen-year old runaway girl.

A larger headline in the *San Marino Clarion* asked, “Did Cops Frame Twins?” The accompanying article asserted that Alhambra Police had been harassing “the Ralph boys” for years, falsely claiming they were dope dealers. Each twin had been jailed and released nearly a dozen times. There had never been any convictions on any counts. The article ended with a question: “Why is the Alhambra PD refusing to arrest the real rapists—the Ramirez twins?”

After Nick read Judge Scott’s memo, he looked across at the closed door of the study. He could faintly hear Christina’s strained voice as she spoke on the phone. He decided to go upstairs and start unpacking their bags.

In the study, Judge Jensen tightly gripped the phone. Both her elbows were on her desk, and her free hand pressed hard against her forehead. “Ty, why are you dumping the Ralph case on me? The D.A. and defense are brawling over it, and it’s already become a media circus.”

“Hold on, Crissy,” Scott replied with a chuckle. “First, you have to tell me all about your Canadian honeymoon. How was the trip?”

“I wish I’d never left. Maybe I should apply for Superior Court. Do you think I could still get elevated—even though I recently turned them down?”

Scott was silent a moment. Then he spoke in a firm and even tone. “Let me give you some background on the Ralph case. The twins are the sons of San Marino Councilman Wardell Ralph. Wardell is tight with Elbert Morrison, the publisher and editor of the *Clarion*. I issued the search warrant for the twins’ apartment, so there’s no legal way I could be disqualified. I can’t assign it to Judge Bain because the *Clarion* attacked Bain editorially when he didn’t disqualify himself in the case of Adam Henry Morrison, our former State legislator and accused dope dealer. It’s one thing to write extreme editorials, but Elbert’s so-called reporting in the *Clarion* is also unfair. Elbert claims the Alhambra PD won’t return his calls, but an Alhambra police official told the *Post-Advocate* that Elbert never called the police station to get their side of the story.”

When Scott paused, Jensen said, “I still don’t understand why you can’t hear the case.”

“Until about a week ago, I would have. But here’s what happened. You won’t believe this. My dad, J.T., wrote a letter to the *Clarion* defending Judge Bain’s decision to hold Henry Morrison to answer, and not disqualify himself. Dad wrote that Bain’s decision was correct, and that Dad favored an honest liberal over a crook—Bain over Morrison. Dad closed by saying he felt confident in his opinion because his son, Tyler Scott, was a colleague of Bain’s on the Mission Court.”

Scott gave a short, self-conscious laugh. “Crissy, I had no idea Dad would write this letter. But here’s the payoff—Elbert Morrison

wrote an editorial in the *Clarion* accusing both J.T. and me of being woolly-headed liberals. He also said J.T. had to retire at an early age because he was a lousy dentist.”

Again, Jensen tried to break in. “But—”

“Crissy, there’s another reason that I have to bail out. This case is so high profile that the District Attorney assigned Jan Thornton, my old girlfriend, to prosecute the Ralph twins.”

Jensen said nothing.

Scott concluded, “Don’t worry, Crissy. There’ll be thunder and lightning for a week or two, when you hear the case, but after that, it will be someone else’s problem. See you at the courthouse tomorrow. Bye.”

“Goodbye, Ty.”

Christina hung up the phone and took several deep breaths. When she opened the study door, she could hear Nick whistling upstairs while he unpacked. She climbed the stairs and stood in the bedroom doorway.

Nick looked at her with concern. “So, what did Judge Scott say?”

Christina came in and sat on the bed. She tersely recounted Scott’s reasons for disqualifying himself from the Ralph case. “Nick, the accusations against the Ralph twins are beyond awful. Rape isn’t a death penalty case, but if half the allegations are true, and if it were a capital case, I’d like to be the person that drops the pill on those bastards.”

“Drops the pill?” Nick repeated.

The Judge reluctantly smiled. “Honey, that’s legal slang for execution in the gas chamber.”

She stood up and began unpacking her suitcase.