

CHAPTER 1

Stinson Beach

November 22, 1958

A noise that sounded like glass shattering and a door being kicked open startled Amelia Slater awake. She jolted out of bed and peered out the window but saw nothing. The worst storm of the season blasted sand and water against the windows of their beach house obscuring her view.

She wrapped her arms around herself and rubbed them to ward off the freezing cold. In the pitch black, she couldn't see. Was her husband Sam awake? Was he even in the room? Her blood pounded through her veins. "Sam! Wake up. I heard a noise."

"I'm awake. I've been awake for a while. I didn't want to bother you in case you were able to get to sleep." The mattress squeaked as he sat up in bed.

"How could anyone sleep in this storm?" Amelia peered through the window, still trying to see outside. "Besides, it's freezing." She took a deep breath, but inhaled a lungful of briny air, which made her queasy.

Sam tried to click on the bedside light. "Damn, no power." He switched on a flashlight, and shone it at the clock by his bed. "It's 1:15. Why don't you light some candles?"

In the dim glow of Sam's flashlight, Amelia fumbled until she found the candles and matches they'd laid out the night before. Once she lit them, their glow cast long shadows in the room making it even eerier than it had been before.

Sam and Amelia were staying at a two-story beach house which was right in the bull's eye of an unusually fierce early winter storm that zeroed in on the northern California coast. When storm warnings were issued for Stinson Beach, they'd taken all the precautions possible, but it appeared they weren't enough. The rains had not yet arrived but the wind whistled through the rain gutters and pounded against the house. The sliding glass door of their bedroom that opened onto a deck threatened to shatter as flying branches battered it.

Sam headed for the bedroom door, his flashlight making a dim circle against the wall.

"Where are you going?" She tried to control her voice so it wouldn't shake. She didn't like the thought of being left alone in the bedroom.

"I'm going to go check on things, see if the house is okay. Maybe I can get a fire going in the fireplace." Sam hesitated. "Shhh. Did you hear that?"

"What?" He didn't answer her. She watched the shafts of light from Sam's flashlight vanish from sight as he walked through the upstairs hallway. Shivering,

she picked up the candle and made her way to a chair to retrieve her coat and put it on over her nightgown.

She listened intently and heard some thumping noises. She wasn't sure if the source of the banging was Sam or the storm...or something else. Someone might have climbed the wooden staircase that could be accessed from the beach. Still, that would have been difficult because the surf was so high it was probably crashing up against the bottom of the stairs.

"Sam! Sam!" Amelia called. "Where are you? Sam, is that you?"

There was no response.

Something big slammed against the large floor-to-ceiling glass doors. Amelia raced to the other side of the room and cowered in case they might break. She heard noises outside on the deck and cautiously looked outside. A shadowy figure threw a large object which made a metallic sound when it clanked onto the deck. The man then turned and ran. She strained her eyes against the dense darkness. This heightened Amelia's anxiety. She was very alone and vulnerable to the intruder who was just outside the glass door on the deck. Fear began to overwhelm her. She was afraid that something had happened to Sam. She knew he would never leave her defenseless.

She reached for the flashlight on the table, clicked it on, and shone it out the glass door, but she could see nothing except her own reflection. As she walked closer the beam of her flashlight fell on a red gas can lying on its side on the deck.

Amelia inched closer to get a better look and then instinctively recoiled as she saw flames racing across the deck outside the doors. Amelia was simultaneously confused and numbed with fear as she watched the deck become a wall of fire being buffeted by the high winds from the storm.

She had to get out of there. Amelia turned and ran toward the bedroom door with the flashlight illuminating her path. She began shouting Sam's name as loudly as she could. As she opened the bedroom door two shots rang out and ricocheted off the wall and doorframe above her head.

Amelia squealed and retreated into the bedroom, slamming the door. She looked for a way to lock the door to protect herself from the assailant but it was an old-fashioned lock that required a skeleton key.

There was so much noise from the fire roaring outside on the deck and the storm, that Amelia couldn't tell if the shooter was pursuing her further or attempting to break down the bedroom door. She leaned against the door but knew she would be defenseless if the gunman wanted to force his way into the bedroom.

Where was Sam? Was he okay? Who fired the shots at her? Who set the deck on fire?

Amelia was now trapped between an unknown assailant outside her bedroom door and the fire raging on the deck on the other side of the glass doors. She had just

moments to make a decision about how to escape.

She decided to take her chances on the deck since the shadowy figure who fired the shots at her was undoubtedly just outside her bedroom.

Amelia tried to grasp the door handle to the sliding glass door but it burned her hand, and she jumped back. She couldn't figure out how to unlock it and didn't have time in the darkness to deal with it. Amelia decided to take more direct action—she picked up a wooden chair and threw it at the large glass doors onto the deck.

The chair cracked the glass but mostly bounced off of the door and fell onto the floor. She quickly scanned the room for something heavier that she could throw through the glass door.

Amelia spotted a large metal paperweight on a writing desk in the bedroom. It looked like some kind of navigation tool from a boat. She cocked her arm and threw it as hard as she could at the cracked glass door.

That did the trick, but the glass shards from the door went flying all over the bedroom floor and the deck. The breaking of the door only made her situation worse as the high winds now pushed the flames into the bedroom and closer to Amelia.

The curtains around the large glass door ignited as the fire slowly snaked its way toward Amelia. It was going to be impossible for Amelia to escape onto the deck because of the intensity of the flames. Panic now overtook her and in desperation Amelia screamed, “Sam! Sam! Help! Sam, help me!”

The storm and the crackling of the fire, which exploded into the bedroom onto new sources of fuel, drowned out Amelia's cries for help. Amelia began to tremble with fear at her dire circumstances. She had to not give up and make another attempt to escape. She eyed the bedroom door. She had no choice but to open it and confront whatever was on the other side.

Sam had taken his gun when he left moments ago leaving her unarmed. The helpless Amelia stood in front of the closed bedroom door, and glanced over her shoulder at the advancing flames being whipped by the windstorm into a swirling inferno.

Amelia didn't know what awaited her on the other side of the door but she was going to have to make a break for it.

She took a deep breath and then rushed for the door. When she grabbed the knob and turned, it was locked. Someone had used a skeleton key to lock her in the burning bedroom.

She was trapped.

FIVE WEEKS EARLIER....

CHAPTER 2

San Francisco

October 21, 1958

The petite Nancy Roskelly, age 22, a San Francisco secretary, just over five feet tall, had twinkling green eyes and shoulder length blonde hair, which was often pinned up on her head to give her a more formal appearance in the gray flannel suit, button-down world of San Francisco's financial district.

Nancy had lived alone for almost two months. Her previous roommate, Sarah Bradshaw, had moved out after her marriage in September. Nancy was hoping to find the right young woman for a roommate very soon. She not only wanted the companionship but she also missed having someone else to pay half of her rent. "I hate to admit it," Nancy said in a low conspiratorial tone as she entered her apartment with her boyfriend, Tony Lee, "but I've been pretty jumpy lately. Every creak of the floorboards in this house gives me the chills. When I'm in my bed and I hear sounds, I'm just sure someone's breaking in. Sometimes I'm certain that I hear footsteps." She rubbed her arms to calm down the prickly sensation she felt from even talking about it.

Nancy's two bedroom apartment was cramped but cozy. The small living room had an overstuffed chair, a large flowered couch and a small television with a rabbit ear

antennae on a wheeled cart which was pushed off into the corner.

The living room space ran into the small kitchen at the back of the apartment.

“Do you have time for some coffee?” Nancy asked.

“Sure that sounds good,” Tony said as he took seat on the couch. She gave Tony a quick kiss as she took off her coat and walked into the kitchen. He picked up the San Francisco Chronicle off of the coffee table and started to peruse the front page. Nancy, wearing a black pullover sweater and gray skirt, emerged from the kitchen carrying a tray to serve coffee to her boyfriend. Tony, an athletic looking young man with wavy black hair, was a stockbroker at the firm where Nancy worked. He was wearing a tweed sport coat and slacks, a white shirt but no tie. They had been steadily dating since the end of the summer.

As she moved towards the couch she saw a troubled look on Tony’s face as he concentrated on the front page of the morning paper.

Nancy began pouring the coffee. “What is it?”

“A letter from the strangler. Did you see this?”

“I didn’t have a chance before I left this morning.”

“This guy is taunting the cops—actually everyone in San Francisco. Listen to this.”

To the people of San Francisco,

The women of the city and those who care about them should live in fear. I’ve already selected my next victim. I’m watching her now, waiting for the right moment to attack. There are so many pretty, blonde girls in San Francisco to choose from. The cops have no clues and no idea how to stop me.

I’m the shadow on the street on a foggy night.

I’m the stranger lurking near your apartment.

I’m the man who keeps looking at you on the city bus. By the time you realize that it’s me—it will already be too late for you. I cannot be stopped.

The Fog City Strangler

“Why do they publish his letters? It gives him the attention he’s after,” Nancy lamented as she took a seat next to Tony. As Tony read the words of the latest letter from the strangler it shook Nancy to her core. She buried her face in Tony’s shoulder where she felt secure.

“Better to know than not to know I guess. He sends these letters to all the newspapers in town.”

“Oh Tony...that makes me so afraid. I feel helpless, like no matter what I do, he can attack me.”

Tony put his arm around Nancy. “That’s how he wants you to feel. This guy thrives on scaring everyone. The strangler can’t hurt you because I won’t let him. He’ll have to go through me to get to you.”

Tony pulled back and took a sip of coffee and Nancy could tell he was deep in thought. He then looked into her green eyes, saying “Hey, I’ve got it! I could bunk

right here on your couch each night. I wouldn't mind. I could bring my gun and stand guard over you all night."

"That's very sweet but I'll be okay. I just panic sometimes. I hate living alone."

"I know. I hope you get a roommate soon, honey," Tony said as he tenderly took her hand. "I hate the thought that you are by yourself right now—especially since you are a beautiful young blonde. Maybe you could borrow my gun. I could show you how to shoot it. You could keep it on your nightstand..."

"No! Guns scare me...I just couldn't have one," Nancy said with a frown. The couple had just returned from a night at the movies watching the Halloween bill at the Balboa Theatre on the northern rim of Golden Gate Park on the western edge of the city. The featured movie was Horror of Dracula starring Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing.

It was a foggy, chilly night in San Francisco—the perfect atmospheric for the approach of Halloween. The theatre was within walking distance of Nancy's apartment and the couple had walked in dense fog as they left the movie.

"That movie wasn't the right one for me to see tonight." Nancy's stomach churned.

"That's all I needed...seeing vampires coming into a blonde woman's bedroom while she sleeps in a filmy pink negligee."

"You know that woman the vampire was after did look like you. Blonde hair, very pretty."

"Is that a compliment, or are you trying to scare me?"

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to joke about this thing." Tony leaned over and hugged her. "I guess I have to joke about it because it's so creepy. Now you've got me curious...do you have a filmy pink negligee like the woman in the movie?"

She pulled away from him. "Actually I do. That jumped right out at me while I watched the movie."

"Well, I could hang some garlic or a crucifix around your neck before I leave."

Tony gave a half-hearted laugh.

"Very funny. We should have gone to a comedy not a movie about women being attacked, even if I don't believe in vampires."

"I'm sorry, Nancy," Looking sheepish, Tony took another sip of coffee, then he perked up like he had a different idea. "You know I have a serious offer on the table. I'd love to become your next roommate. I was completely serious when I asked you to be my wife."

"I know." Nancy rose and took the coffee tray and her cup into the kitchen.

"What? You don't want to marry me? I thought we were getting along great. If you need more time..."

She cut him off. "It's not that. I just don't know if I'm ready yet. It's a big decision. Let me think about it okay?"

Tony finished off his coffee and looked at Nancy. "Hmm. 'You'll think about

it'...that sounds pretty cold. I promised the other night that I wouldn't pressure you; I'd give you time to think about it. But I'm going to break my promise—when will I get an answer?"

She was nervous about all these killings going on, and seeing how insensitive he was to her fears, making stupid jokes...didn't help his case. "Be patient with me, okay? You kind of surprised me the other night. You'll have my answer soon. I promise. But I hope you know..." She wasn't sure, but what the hell, she'd say it anyway. "I do love you, Tony." She sat back down on the couch and they embraced uneasily. He tried to kiss her, but she stiffened up.

"I'd better go, baby. Tomorrow's a working day. Just keep your doors locked and you'll be fine," Tony said softly. "Don't be afraid, lay in bed and think about me instead of things that go bump in the night."

"I will," Nancy said with a smile as she kissed him good night. "Uh, Tony, I feel silly asking...but before you go home...would you mind..."

"It's not silly," Tony said sympathetically.

He then went into Nancy's bedroom and looked under the bed and in her closets. He then pulled back the shower curtain in the bathroom to make sure no one was hiding in the bathtub. "All clear," he announced, "You know I'm just five minutes away. Call me if you need me or if something scares you, okay?"

Maybe he was a good guy after all. "Okay. Thanks Tony."

Nancy clicked the dead bolt on her door and fastened the security chain. She was exhausted and it would be a short night.

As Nancy prepared for bed she thought about Tony but she also thought about someone else who had a place in her heart. Gene Crawford was a sailor who was at sea now. She thought about their whirlwind nights of dancing and late night walks, how they'd laughed, and talked until dawn...and kissed. Then Gene shipped out. He promised that after his stint at sea he'd return to Nancy.

He'd written her passionate letters since he had been gone. Nancy had promised him that she would wait for him while he was away. Gene wanted to have a serious talk with her about their future once he returned to San Francisco.

Shortly, after Gene shipped out, Nancy had met Tony. Now, even though she knew it wasn't right and she'd have to make a decision eventually, she loved them both. She felt either one would be a great husband, but things were getting complicated. Gene was due back by mid-November and Nancy wanted a chance to see him. She wanted to see if her feelings had changed since she met Tony.

Nancy had thought there was plenty of time to make a decision, really weigh the pros and cons. But now that Tony was pressuring her she wasn't sure how long she could continue to put him off.

She was exhausted. It was all getting to be too much for her. Nancy was originally planning to shower and wash her hair tonight but now she was so tired, she had all

she could do to drag herself into the bedroom. She'd set her alarm extra early and planned to take care of her hair in the morning.

Nancy clicked off her light and laid awake staring at the ceiling for what seemed like a long time. She desperately wanted a good night's sleep but her mind was whirling about the big decisions that loomed in her life. Tonight it seemed very quiet in her apartment. Almost too quiet. The next thing she knew was when she suddenly woke and noticed it was almost 7 a.m. She bounded out of bed once she realized that she had shut off her alarm and fallen back asleep.

Nancy had set her alarm for 6:30. Now she'd have to take a very quick shower and see if there was any way that she could make herself presentable without washing her hair.

When her bare feet touched the cold tile floor of her bathroom, it sent a chill through her body. Nancy looked in the mirror and rolled her eyes. There was no way she could get away with not washing her hair before she went to work. She quickly peeled off her nightgown and got into the shower.

Tending to her hair would have to take the place of breakfast in her morning routine. She'd try to catch some coffee and a pastry at mid-morning at one of the cafes near her company's office on Market Street.

Nancy was a receptionist for a stock brokerage firm in the heart of the financial district of downtown San Francisco. As she rushed to get ready, Nancy nervously glanced at the clock in her bedroom.

Finally her hair was done and she'd have to hurry to be ready in time to catch the last bus, which would get her to the door of her office before 8:30. She needed to be at her post at 8:45 to get early calls before the office officially opened at 9 a.m. Nancy put on a crisp white blouse and a powder-blue full skirt. She then sat on the edge of her bed to put on her nylons and black heels. The diminutive blonde pulled the first nylon over her shapely leg and attached it to her garter belt. As she went to pull on the second nylon, she noticed a run in it.

"Oh rats," Nancy said to herself. She shot a glance at the clock. The flawed nylon stocking would have to do. There was no time. Most people at work never saw Nancy's legs anyway as she sat at her post behind a desk at the entrance to the brokerage firm, handling visitors and phone calls.

Nancy decided to go out on her lunch hour and buy some new nylons at one of the many stores in the bustling center of San Francisco commerce.

Nancy grabbed her purse and moved into the living room, opening the closet near the front door. She quickly grabbed a coat and scarf as she prepared to head out on this foggy day. She hoped the San Francisco fog didn't undo all of the meticulous work on her hair.

Just as Nancy retrieved her coat, there was a sharp and persistent knock at her front door. She wondered who could be knocking on her door so early.

Nancy impatiently opened the door and found a repairman standing in front of her with his tool box. He said there was a plumbing problem in the building and he needed to check the pipes under her sink.

She sighed and checked her watch. "Okay, but it'll have to be quick."

"I'm checking all the units in the building. We may have a leak in the wall somewhere," the man said as he moved inside the apartment within inches of Nancy and sat his tool box on the floor.

She turned away for just a split second and felt a strong rough hand clamped over her mouth. With his other hand the man flashed a large hunting knife in front of her face. Nancy was being pulled towards the couch. She tried to squirm away but the man put the tip of the knife against her throat.

By 9 a.m., Nancy's boss and co-workers began wondering where the diligent young woman was. There was no one at the receptionist's desk and the phone was ringing off the hook.

Tony was alarmed when he noticed Nancy missing from her desk. He dialed her apartment and got no answer.

Tony knew that Nancy was never late. He went bounding out the door of the office. The elevator seemed to be in slow motion as it descended to the street level. He couldn't shake his feeling of dread as he frantically ran down to his car and raced toward Nancy's apartment.

As he got to the San Francisco-style townhouse building, he ran up the steps and hammered on the door with his fist but there was no response.

He turned the doorknob and to his chagrin found that it wasn't locked. He knew Nancy would never leave her door unlocked.

Tony ran into the apartment. Nancy's coat was tossed haphazardly half on and half off the couch and in the middle of the living room floor was her purse and scarf.

Tony hurried into the bedroom.

She was lying on her side on the bedroom floor. Her green eyes were slightly hooded and staring into space. Nancy was dead.

Her hands were tied behind her back with a short strand of white rope. Nancy's skirt was hiked up to mid-thigh. Her nylons had been removed. One nylon had been used to strangle her and was knotted tightly around her neck.

The second nylon was tied around Nancy's right ankle with the other end looped through the nylon around her delicate neck. It was pulled so firmly that Nancy's leg was bent up awkwardly behind her.

Her crisp white blouse was ripped open and a chunk of cloth had been cut out of it. Tony slumped on the edge of the bed looking down at Nancy. He buried his head in his hands and began to cry.

Tony was too late. His worse fears...and Nancy's—had become a reality. His beautiful Nancy was the fourth victim of the Fog City Strangler.