

CHAPTER 3
THE KEY
February 17, 1958

On a drizzly Monday, Margaret Bolender came blowing into Sam's life like a tempest.

Sam had just returned from his routine Monday morning trip to the airport to drop off Amelia and was beginning his day at the office. He called Jimmy Jankow's widow, Rita, to check on her. Sam was sure that Valentine's Day had been a difficult day for her after losing her husband five months ago.

Sam was just concluding his conversation with Rita when he noticed an attractive statuesque woman enter the office and talk to his secretary, Janet Simmons. Sam's eyes met Janet's as they exchanged a glance through the open inner office door. Sam quickly hung up and signaled Janet to let the woman enter.

Margaret Bolender was a woman who physically demanded attention when she walked into a room. There was an aura about her that said "look at me." Sam immediately detected that Maggie knew this and relished it.

She was a glamorous, audacious woman, about five foot nine, shoulder-length reddish brown hair and cat-like bright green eyes. Her eyelids seemed to always be half-closed, like window shades, on her luminescent eyes. This added to the mysterious feline look she directed at Sam. When Maggie smiled, two distinct dimples appeared on her cheeks.

"Hello," Sam said extending his hand, "I'm Sam Slater."

"I've finally gotten to meet Sam Slater. I've heard all about you. I'm Margaret Bolender. I prefer you call me Maggie. Can I call you Sam?"

"Sure," Sam said offering her a chair in front of his desk.

“May I take your coat?” Sam said as he maneuvered into position to help her. The removal of her coat unveiled her curvaceous, long body. She was full-bosomed but otherwise her body was thin. Maggie wore a tight-fitting maroon-colored dress and a large black hat.

“It’s absolutely horrible out there this morning?” Maggie said as she smoothed her dress.

“Do we know each other?” a puzzled Sam asked.

“Not yet,” Maggie said in a surprisingly flirty way. Sam was bowled over at this woman’s direct approach. Sam was always put off by people who were so socially aggressive. He felt like Maggie was really looking him over with an sly smile on her face.

“Sam, I would like to hire you to do an investigation for me. You come highly recommended.”

“Let’s back up a bit. You say you know about me and that I come highly recommended. Fill in some blanks for me.”

Maggie settled into her chair and seemed to be purposely displaying a lot of shapely leg in Sam’s view.

“I’m sorry, Sam,” she began, “I don’t mean to be so obtuse. I’m good friends with someone you know--Mary Anne Steele. The Steeles were close to me and my late husband. Mary Anne just goes on and on about you. She and Ted so appreciate what you did to solve the murder of their daughter. Poor Bette. That beastly banker was just taking advantage of her innocence and then to dump her out in the ocean. It’s too horrible. But you were stellar in solving that nasty business.”

“I just wish I could have done something to save Bette’s life. I feel great sympathy for what Ted and Mary Anne must be coping with.”

“I heard that you’ve had your own share of tragedy,’ Maggie said. “The death of your partner was a hideous thing for you.”

Not wishing to go down that road with Maggie, Sam tried to curtail that line of conversation by saying, “Thank you Maggie. How can I help you?”

Maggie reached into her purse and pulled out a cigarette. Then without saying a word, she put the cigarette into her mouth and leaned towards Sam. This was sending the unsubtle message that Maggie intended to be serviced upon demand. Sam grabbed the cigarette lighter off of his desk and lit Maggie’s cigarette.

“Thank you, Sam,” she purred as if it were an unexpected courtesy. She then leaned forward and picked up the framed picture of Amelia which was sitting on the corner of Sam’s desk.

“Aaah, this must be your lovely girlfriend. I’ve heard about her too. She’s such a pretty little girl. What’s her name?”

“Uh...Amelia and she’s hardly a girl.”

“Sorry, Sam. I didn’t mean anything by it. She’s just not our age, I would guess. How old are you, Sam? Probably about mid-thirties or so. Am I right?”

Sam was starting to lose patience with her femme fatale act but responded, “That’s about right.”

“I’m just a few years older than you. How old is Amelia?”

“Well, Amelia is part of my private life. ‘Private’ being the operative word. I don’t mean to be rude to a potential client, Maggie, but I really don’t have time for a lot of idle chatter this morning. I keep asking you a direct question and not getting a direct answer. How can I help you?”

“I’m sorry, Sam, I didn’t mean to get off on the wrong foot with you. I can see Amelia is a sensitive topic with you,” she said with a coquettish smile. “I guess I take some getting used to, Sam. I’ve been told that I was born without the ‘discretion gene.’ I think you’ll find me easy to work with because I’m so direct.”

“Well, then please be direct now. What is it you want to hire me to do for you?”

It was as if Maggie flipped a switch on her emotions. Her seductive, smoky looks at Sam now turned into the sadness of a grieving widow. She took a long drag on her cigarette and said, “Sam, I lost my husband just over two weeks ago. I’ve been in such a state about it and there are a lot of unanswered questions.”

“Lost your husband, meaning he’s deceased?” Sam asked. He wasn’t buying the grieving widow bit for even a second. This lady is a real piece of work.

“Yes, Sam,” she lamented. “The police say he jumped off of the Golden Gate Bridge. His body was found in the bay early on a Tuesday morning at the end of January. His car, which was brand new, was sitting parked right in the middle of the bridge in a traffic lane. It was still running but my Arthur was gone.”

“Obviously, you don’t believe he jumped off of the bridge?”

“No I don’t, Sam. Arthur was the last person in the world who would have reason to kill himself. There’s a lot of things which just don’t make sense. I want you to find out what really happened to my poor husband.”

Sam’s head was spinning trying to keep up with this story. “So, let me get this straight Maggie, your husband’s car was found sitting in the middle of the Golden Gate Bridge and he was no where to be seen. His body was found in the bay, right?”

“It was,” Maggie said with her most sincere, sad face. “The Coast Guard found him floating in the water. The police say it’s a suicide. But I know it’s not.”

“The police don’t always do everything right, but the cops and the Coast Guard have retrieved a lot of jumpers over the years. What makes you think they’re wrong this time?” Sam asked.

“A wife just knows these things about her husband. Arthur was a highly successful attorney and he’s also deeply involved in politics. I’ll just say it...he...we...are quite wealthy. Arthur’s life was the very picture of a successful, powerful man. People like my Arthur don’t suddenly jump off of the Golden Gate Bridge.”

“I don’t mean to be insensitive to your loss, Maggie, but I would imagine that it’s very hard for family members to accept the suicide of their loved one. It’s a terrible shock for a family...or a wife to deal with.”

“No, I understand how this sounds, Sam. That’s how the police reacted to my story. I was expressing my frustration with all of this to Mary Anne and she recommended that I talk to you. Mary Anne and I have been spending some time together to help one another through the grieving process.”

Sam had always been underwhelmed by the Mary Anne Steele’s display of grief for her daughter. Now, Maggie Bolender hardly seemed like a woman who suddenly lost her dearly beloved husband just two weeks ago.

Maggie continued, “Sam, anyone who knew my husband thinks there’s something very strange going on here. No one--and I mean no one-- really believes that Arthur jumped off of the bridge.”

“Well, I’m not sure where to begin to attack this problem. I’ll gather some information and try to see what I can find out. But you’re not giving me much to go on,” Sam said.

Maggie then leaned forward and slid back into her temptress act. Flashing her green eyes at Sam, she mysteriously whispered, “Sam, there’s something else.”

“What’s that?”

Maggie reached into her purse and retrieved a key and held it in front of her face. Still whispering conspiratorially for dramatic impact, Maggie explained, “This key may unlock some secrets about what was occurring in my husband’s life just before his death.”

“I’m sorry, I’m not following you,” Sam said.

“I was given this key as part of my husband’s personal effects after his body was found. I could find a use for all of the keys on his key ring but not this one. There were keys to our Pacific Heights house, the keys to the law office, car keys and keys to our cabin by Lake Tahoe. However, this key stumped me. That was until I got with our attorney--my husband’s law partner--to begin the process of settling my Arthur’s affairs.”

“And?” Sam asked.

“My attorney went through the list of the assets we own and there was a surprise. A house on Eddy Street.”

“A surprise?”

“I didn’t know we owned a house on Eddy Street. Arthur had never mentioned it to me. I can’t imagine what this secret house would be used for by my husband.”

“Did you go take a look?”

“No, I haven’t, Sam. I can’t bring myself to do that. I’m frankly a little afraid to do that. That’s one of the things I would like for you to do for me. I want you to take this key and check on that house.”

“I don’t mean to be crass, Maggie, but is it possible that he was keeping a woman there? Another woman?”

“I’m hardly a babe in the woods, Sam, but I don’t think Arthur had a mistress and kept her in that house.”

“Aren’t most women surprised to discover that their husband is having an affair?”

“My husband was almost twenty years older than me. I hardly think I’m the kind of woman that a husband would cheat on. Don’t you think that I could keep a man satisfied, Sam? Don’t you think that I’m pretty enough, that my husband wouldn’t have to go elsewhere? What do *you* think, Sam?”

Sam didn’t wish to get into a discussion of the well documented fact that even very pretty, sexy women can have a cheating husband. Sam knew the questions were a trap but he tried to gracefully escape by saying simply, “You’re a very attractive woman, Maggie.”

“Why, thank you, Sam,” Maggie said softly. “I’m just at a loss about what to do. This house thing is very unsettling. Can you help me through this? I’ll pay you very well. I feel so, so helpless.”

Sam was sure that Maggie Bolender may be a great many things but helpless was not one of them.

“I should caution you that an open-ended investigation like this could take weeks and consequently might start rolling up a sizable bill,” Sam said.

“Sam, money doesn’t matter to me, but I appreciate your honesty. I’m sure that you and I will work very well together.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

“I’ll have my attorney send you a retainer check. All I ask is that you come and see me at my house in Pacific Heights to give me regular updates. Here is an envelope with my dear Arthur’s picture and our contact information. There’s also my private phone number which rings in my bedroom. Please call me on that number.”

Sam slid the picture out of the envelope. Arthur Bolender looked the part as a mature man who was well-connected politically and in San Francisco social circles. He was a handsome man with wavy, thick hair which was mostly silver. It gave him a very distinguished look .

Maggie exited with the same flourish as she had made when she entered the office.

As Sam watched her walk out of office, he had a sinking feeling. Just before Maggie disappeared out the doorway, she turned and peered out from under the brim of her hat, giving Sam what could only be interpreted as a seductive look and a sly smile.

There was something very strange happening here, but now Sam was on board for the ride. It was at this point that a stewardess like Amelia should have warned Sam--“fasten your seat belt, we’re expecting turbulence.”

After Maggie left, Janet shot Sam a concerned look and commented, “Who was that?”

CHAPTER 6

THE LOCKED ROOM

February 21, 1958

It had become Sam's routine to drop Amelia off and pick her up at the airport each week. It was not that Amelia wasn't capable of making the trip herself. In the years before Sam came into her life, Amelia always rode taxis between the airport and her Mission District apartment.

Their relationship had developed an unusual rhythm. Amelia would be in San Francisco for three days and she would spend almost every spare moment with Sam. Then she would leave for four or five days, during which they very rarely communicated.

Sometimes she would come home on Thursday night, sometimes Friday afternoon. The separation seemed to make their time together more intense and passionate.

When Amelia left town a week ago, she and Sam were basking in the afterglow of their decision to become secretly engaged. Sam wore an overcoat and his fedora to the airport on this chilly, windy day in the city-by-the-bay.

Amelia emerged from her plane which had pulled up to the gate. She sparkled in her blue TWA uniform and white gloves. She had an overcoat over her arm as she carried her shoulder bag and suitcase into the terminal.

Amelia broke into her beautiful smile upon sighting Sam and greeted him with a big kiss.

"How's my secret fiancé?" she whispered after kissing him.

"I'm fine now," Sam said with a smile. "I assume from your comment that you haven't changed your mind."

"Definitely not," she said flirtatiously.

Sam helped her on with her overcoat and took her luggage. "It's a cold day," Sam warned.

“Try Chicago. I’m so glad to be back in San Francisco. I’ve been freezing all week. It’s pretty hard for a California girl to deal with all of that snow back East. Any time I’m cold it makes me miss you more.”

“Really? Glad I perform a useful function. This has been quite a week. I have a lot to tell you.”

“Ooooh,” Amelia purred as she slid into the front seat of Sam’s car. “That got my attention. What’s been going on?”

Sam knew the visit of Maggie Bolender, Arthur’s plunge off of the Golden Gate Bridge and the mysterious house on Eddy Street would be catnip to Amelia. She would immediately pounce at the thrill of a new case. However, Sam was sure that Amelia was not going to take to Maggie once they met.

As Sam drove toward Amelia’s apartment, he gave her an edited version of Maggie Bolender’s visit. He did tell Amelia that he found Maggie’s supposed mourning of Arthur unconvincing. Sam skipped the part about Maggie being a shameless flirt.

Sam recounted his visit to the Eddy Street house and the odd mixture of the rooms. When Sam told Amelia about the upper fourth floor room it got predictable results.

“Sam!” Amelia said breathlessly, “We have to find a way to get into that room. We have to go back there tomorrow. I’ve got to see it.”

Sam smiled to himself as he pulled to the curb in front of Amelia’s apartment. He knew this was going to happen.

Amelia tentatively opened the door to see if her roommates, Jenny and Marilyn, were home or if they were fully dressed. Sam and Amelia had burst in on the two roommates at times in the past while they ran shrieking through the apartment in their underwear.

Amelia was much more concerned about avoiding scantily-clad stewardesses than Sam was. He secretly thought both of Amelia's roommates were drop dead gorgeous women.

It was dark and quiet in Amelia's apartment as they entered. Amelia hauled her luggage into her bedroom and began changing clothes to prepare for a night on the town including dinner at one of their favorite Chinese restaurants.

After springing his Valentine's Day proposal of marriage on Amelia, Sam found his thoughts increasingly focusing on the day when she would really be his. He told Amelia that he would be patient but it wasn't going to be easy.

Amelia emerged wearing a gray skirt and powder blue sweater, which was a spectacular combination with her sparkling blue eyes.

Sam greeted her by saying, "Amelia what are we going to do?"

"I thought we were going to the Four Seas in Chinatown tonight?"

"No, I mean about us?"

"About us?" Amelia said with a puzzled look on her face. "Last I heard, we're getting married."

"Of course we are," he said embracing her. "I haven't regretted that for one minute since Valentine's Day. But I mean...I've just been thinking about you this week."

"Oh, this sounds serious. What's on your mind?" she asked.

"I mean, uh, I've been thinking this week a lot about the day you'll really be mine. I guess I'm getting tired of telling you goodbye. I don't like being alone anymore. I told you I'm willing to wait, but that's going to be harder than I thought."

“I know Sam. We have a lot to work out, but you should never doubt that I’m *am* yours. We’re going to work this out. I’m going to start talking to the airline people in New York about the possibilities. Okay?”

“Okay.”

They kissed and Sam grabbed her hand as they bounded down the front steps. Over dinner Sam and Amelia discussed their plan to go to the Eddy Street house on Friday.

On Saturday, Sam was finally taking Amelia to the suburbs to meet his family before she had to fly out Sunday night. She would be introduced as Sam’s girlfriend, not his fiancée.

When Sam picked up Amelia Friday morning, she was chattering about the Bolenders and the mysterious house. Amelia’s mind was in hyper drive after a good night’s sleep.

She was distracted temporarily when Elvis Presley’s song, one of Amelia’s favorites, “Loving You” began playing on the radio. Amelia began swaying to the music and caressing Sam. Her bright blues eyes burned with desire as she stared at Sam and softly sang,

“I will spend my whole life through,

Loving you, loving you.

Winter, summer, springtime, too,

Loving you, loving you.”

Sam loved the effect Elvis’ love songs always had on Amelia. It turned up her thermostat and she immediately turned her passion on Sam. Just as the song ended, Sam found a parking spot on Eddy Street.

As they began walking towards the townhouse she asked Sam, “How can someone have a secret house that his wife doesn’t even know about?”

“The same way, he can have a mistress. But that isn’t what this house is for, you’ll see when we get inside.”

“What do you think of Maggie Bolender?” Amelia asked as they walked.

“I’m not sure what to make of her. You’ll get a chance to meet her I’m sure. I’ll be interested to see what you think of her,” Sam said. “One thing for sure, she didn’t seem like a woman who’s husband took a dive off of the Golden Gate Bridge two weeks ago.”

Once at the front door, Sam put the key in the lock as Amelia scanned the front facade of the light green townhouse. Sam cautiously opened the door but it seemed dark and quiet inside the house.

“There are obviously other people coming to this house--not just Arthur Bolender. I keep wondering if I’m going to run into one of them.”

Amelia began walking around the large round table and exploring the second floor living room space.

“Let’s head upstairs,” Sam suggested.

As they descended the stairs, Amelia stopped and remarked, “these are really creaky, noisy stairs. It’d be hard to sneak up on someone on these stairs.”

Amelia’s reaction to the third story bedroom was the same as Sam’s. It seemed incongruous to have such an elegant Victorian-style bedroom in a house that looked and felt like a gentleman’s poker club.

Amelia immediately honed in on the picture of Maggie on the nightstand. “Wow, that’s Maggie? She’s very pretty. I didn’t expect her to look like that.”

“She is pretty and she’s very, uh, very overwhelming in person.”

“Overwhelming? Is she *that* pretty, Sam?” Amelia said with an edge creeping into her voice.

“Not her looks, it’s her personality. She’s very aggressive and manipulative. Maggie makes quite a first impression.”

“Sounds charming,” Amelia snarled sarcastically as she picked up Maggie’s picture to examine it more closely.

“Amelia, she’s not as pretty as you.”

“Oh really? She’s pretty glamorous.”

“Let’s go on up,” Sam said pointing with his index finger.

Amelia seemed troubled as she perused Maggie’s photo. It was as if she sensed Maggie was going to be a source of trouble for her and Sam.

Meanwhile, Sam explored the stairwell for a light switch. He had been unsuccessful in his earlier attempt but this time he discovered a cord hanging down from an overhead light fixture.

Sam pulled the string illuminating the stairs to the fourth floor. Amelia was soon behind him on the stairs.

“I could probably bust it down,” Sam said as he pushed on the locked door.

“I don’t think that would be a good idea. It would be best if no one knows that we’re snooping around in here. We need some time to find out what’s going on.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

“Pick the lock. It’s the old kind that uses a skeleton key. It ought to be easy enough to pick.”

“I don’t know how to pick a lock,” Sam said indignantly to Amelia.

“You’re a private eye. All of the private eyes in movies know how to pick locks.”

“I must have skipped class that day in private investigator school, Amelia,” Sam said.

“I’m a baseball player. I don’t know how to pick the lock.”

Amelia stood on her tiptoes and ran her hand along the top of the door frame. She stopped when she discovered a skeleton key on the dusty ledge above their heads.”

“Here we go,” Amelia proudly announced.

“How did you know that was there?”

“They always keep skeleton keys on top of the door ledge in movies.”

“Amelia, you watch too many movies,” Sam said as he shook his head.

Amelia ignored him and popped the key in the lock and the door came open.

They both walked into a large attic room with no walls. It looked like a meeting room of some kind with a large chalkboard, two large bulletin boards with items pinned on them and several large tables littered with papers.”

Amelia and Sam were stunned by what they saw.

“What is this place? What’s going on here?” Amelia said quietly.

CHAPTER 15

FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIRS

March 1, 1958

It was mid-morning on Saturday when Amelia using her own key and came bursting into Sam’s apartment to make him breakfast. Sam marveled at Amelia’s boundless energy on the weekend after a grueling week of travel.

For Sam, this Saturday morning was ideal. He had spent last night on the couch in the living room smooching with Amelia while listening to what she called “their make-out music” consisting of Elvis, The Platters and Johnny Mathis LPs.

Amelia then drove a few blocks to her apartment in Sam’s car and returned in the morning to make him breakfast. Sam could get used to this. The only way this Saturday morning could have improved was if Amelia had spent the night in his bed.

Sam was still asleep when Amelia tip-toed into his bedroom. She was wearing a light green dress which Sam always seemed to like. She removed her high heels and quietly crept into Sam’s bed. She put her arms around his neck and began kissing him.

He immediately responded by continuing to kiss her.

“Good morning, Sam,” she whispered. “Are you tired of kissing me after last night?”

“I really doubt it, Amelia,” Sam said softly. “By the way, we’re going to have to have kind of an unconventional engagement and wedding. Wanna just have the honeymoon this morning?”

“Nice try,” Amelia said chuckling. “I’ll go make you a nice breakfast while you take a cold shower.”

As Amelia pulled back and got off the bed, Sam said, “giving you a key to my apartment was the best decision I ever made.”

After their late breakfast they headed for the Eddy Street house. Amelia continued to chatter about her theories about what was going on in this house. Sam had filled her in on the discussions with Vince and others to try to get a better handle on the private lives of Arthur and Maggie Bolender.

Sam recounted to Amelia that he had spent much of Thursday staking out the house on Eddy Street to see if there were any comings and goings. There were none.

Amelia and Sam were going to target the top floor. They wanted to look through the myriad of documents scattered on the work tables. Sam had also thought a lot about the reel-to-reel tape machine.

What was on those tapes? They apparently were using the recorder to document phone calls. What phone calls were so important that they needed to be taped? Sam had to find out.

The pair approached the front door carrying one of Amelia's TWA flight bags to collect items from the house. Sam reached under the front seat to retrieve his revolver and shoulder holster.

Amelia shot him a concerned look as he retrieved the gun but she said nothing. Sam knew that the gun made Amelia nervous. However, by the time this day was over, Amelia would be very grateful that Sam was armed while they were in the mysterious house.

Upon entering, they paused to listen for any sounds in the house. It was as silent as a crypt. Apparently they were alone in the house. The creaky floors and staircase would have the same effect as ringing an alarm bell if anyone else entered the house.

Sam and Amelia began ascending the stairs. They briefly stopped outside the bedroom door on the third floor and peeked inside. There was no one there and the Victorian bedroom looked just as it had on their earlier visit.

"Let's go up to the top floor and come back here afterwards," Sam suggested.

"I agree," Amelia responded. "I'd like to take a look at what's inside that roll top desk."

Sam motioned with a nod of his head and they climbed the stairs to the top floor. They used the skeleton key which was still hidden on the upper frame of the door. Sam and Amelia proceeded cautiously through the door and again found the room intact and dark.

Amelia clicked on the overhead light and they began exploring the room. Sam started by looking over the tape recorder which was used to tap the phone.

Meanwhile, Amelia began flipping through various folders full of papers scattered on the large working table in the big open room. Sam noticed another phone in the corner across the room on a small end table.

Sam jotted down the number of the phone hooked to the tape recorder. It was UNDERhill 5-8947. He walked to the corner phone and saw that the dial was labeled with a different phone number--UNderhill 5-6709. Two different lines.

“Amelia,” Sam said quietly, “Go stand by the phone hooked to the tape recorder. Answer the phone but don’t say anything.”

“Okay,” she responded, moving towards the large table with the phone and recorder. Sam looked at his notepad and dialed UN5-8947. The phone by Amelia began to ring. Sam nodded at her. As soon as she picked up the receiver, the tape machine came to life to record the phone call.

Sam looked quizzically at Amelia. “Anything on that phone gets automatically recorded. This other phone can be more private.”

“What does that mean?” Amelia asked.

“I don’t know but suddenly I’m dying to know what’s on that tape reel,” Sam responded. There was a new, unused tape still in a box near the tape machine. Sam carefully removed the tape on the machine and replaced it with the new tape. He then put the tape with a record of the phone calls in the flight bag.

Amelia resumed shuffling the papers on the desk while Sam walked to the large rolling board and began studying the documents pinned up under the large title “Operation Valkyrie.”

“Sam,” Amelia said in a barely audible voice, “take a look at these.”

Amelia began to walk him through the papers she had discovered. “These are the diplomatic memos. These papers were sent from Moscow to the Russian Consulate here in San Francisco. These have got to be secret documents and they ended up in this house,” Amelia said in a puzzled tone.

“Let’s throw those in the bag. We need to take a closer look at them. I’m a little spooked looking around up here. I feel like someone is going to come in or pop out of the closet at any minute.”

“I do too,” Amelia confided. “This will give us plenty to digest. Let’s go down to take a look at that desk and then get out of here.”

“I agree,” Sam said. They moved towards the door and clicked off the light.

“This gets stranger all of the time,” Amelia said as they descended the stairs towards the bedroom. “I still think it’s best that no one knows you and I are snooping around in here yet. Once, they know we’re watching them, they’ll start hiding things. Then we’ll never find out what’s going on here.”

“You’re right. We need to make sure we don’t tip our hand yet. I wonder when they come here...and who ‘they’ are?” Sam said.

Amelia raised the cover on the roll-top desk and began to look over the contents. Sam walked slowly towards the hallway. There was a closet in the hall and Sam wanted to see what was in there.

“Look, Sam, another tape,” Amelia said holding it aloft. “It looks like another one from the tape machine upstairs. It’s labeled ‘November, 1957 to January, 1958.’”

“Good work. Put it in the bag,” Sam said with a smile. He then turned to head for the hall closet. Sam slowly pulled open the closet door. Inside were a few office supplies. It was mostly empty.

Just as Sam began to open a box in the closet he heard a sound down below. He froze. There were footsteps below and voices. The stairs began to creak. Someone was coming.

Sam quickly stuck his head in the bedroom door. “Amelia, someone’s coming! Hide!” he whispered. “Quick!”

Amelia looked panicked. She jitter-bugged in place for a moment, then quickly removed her high heels, grabbed the flight bag and slid under the big Victorian bed. Sam rushed to the closet and closed the door as the creaking on the staircase grew louder.

Sam and Amelia held their breath. It sounded like two men were now on the landing on the third floor, chatting as they entered the bedroom.

It was filthy and Amelia stirred up an accumulation of dust bunnies as she slid under the bed which swirled all around her. To her side was the flight bag and she clutched her shoes to her chest. She tried to not breath for two reasons.

She didn’t want to make a sound but she was also fighting off a sneeze generated by the flying lint and dust under the bed. Amelia pinched her nose and tried holding her breath.

“What do we need to do in here?” one of the men asked.

“We need to print some posters for the rally tonight. You and I are supposed to hand them out at the Cow Palace as the union people go into their conference.”

“Says who?”

“Lt. Colonel Stephen McKinnon, that’s who,” the one man said mockingly.

“McKinnon thinks we’re all in the Marines and he’s our commander. Who put him in charge?”

“No one, but since Arthur’s plunge off of the bridge, McKinnon’s the boss,” the man said.

The second man walked towards the nightstand and picked up Maggie’s picture. “How did an old geezer like Arthur get a beautiful dame like this?” he said admiring the picture.

“Rich boys can afford nice toys,” his partner said sarcastically.

Amelia could no longer hold her breathe and tried to gently take in some air. It only made the sneeze she was fighting off grow more urgent.

“What do you think really happened to Arthur? Do you think he really killed himself?”

Just then there was a noise under the bed. Amelia could no longer stop it. She did the best she could to suppress the sneeze. The two men stopped talking and looked at one another.

Amelia was really frightened now. The men were completely silent and listening intently. Amelia again tried holding her breath and closed her eyes. Suddenly she felt a hand around each of her ankles and with a whoosh, she was pulled out from under the bed across the hardwood floor.

To Amelia’s horror she was on her back in the middle of the floor staring up at the two men.

“Well, look what we found. You look like you’d be a lot more fun on top of the bed instead of under it,” one of the men said. He then grabbed Amelia and threw her roughly onto the bed as she let out a yelp.

“Hold her down,” the man instructed as he moved towards the bed and the struggling
Amelia.