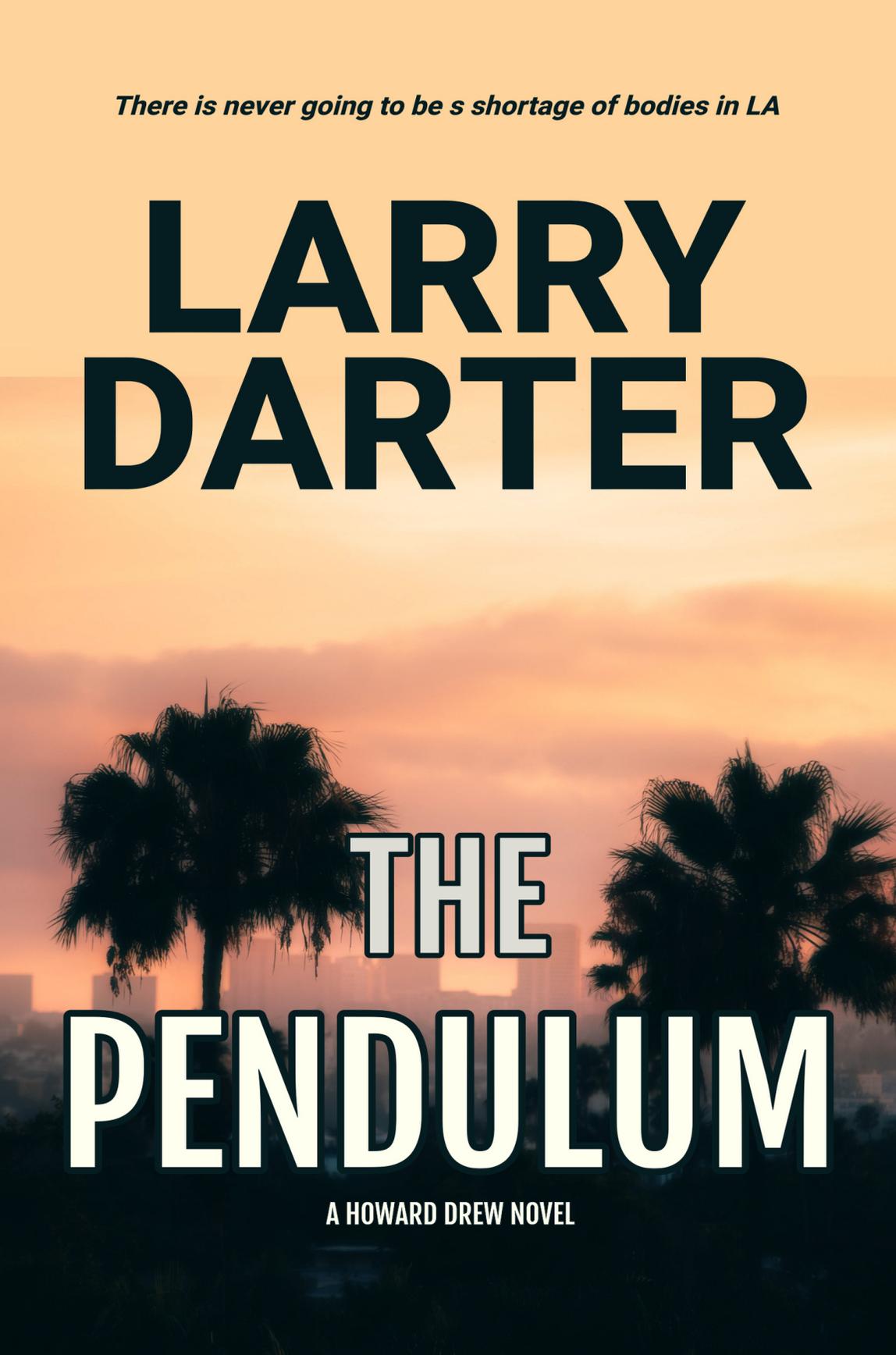


There is never going to be a shortage of bodies in LA

LARRY DARTER



THE PENDULUM

A HOWARD DREW NOVEL

LARRY DARTER

The Pendulum



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Chapter 1

The call came just after 3 A.M., but Howard Drew was awake and sitting in the dining room with the thick sheaf of reports he had removed from the murder book spread out on the table before him. He liked to think he would find the missing piece of the puzzle he'd overlooked that would enable him to get Sienna Mills' killer if he only kept reviewing the reports. But deep down, he knew the truth. He just couldn't let the case go.

The murder book Drew had was his own personal copy, and having it was a violation of departmental policy. But six months before, he had copied all the reports from the official murder book, put them in a blue three-ring binder, and took the binder home before the Mills case got kicked downtown to the Open-Unsolved Unit. Someone had strangled Sienna Mills inside her Venice bungalow. It was the only case that Drew and his former partner, Rudy Ortega, had worked together that they hadn't solved before Rudy's retirement. Now Drew continued working the case off the books on his own time.

The call was from Lieutenant Celia Walsh, Drew's supervisor.

"Howie, you up?"

Drew could tell Walsh had recently awakened. He heard the sleepiness in her voice. It was deeper and raspier than usual.

"I'm up."

"Who's that you got playing?"

"Mel Parsons' *Glass Heart* album. That's "What Would You Change" you hear now."

"One of your new country music discoveries?"

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“She’s more indie-folk, but a lot of her stuff sounds like country.”

“Sounds good. But I have to pull you away from it.”

Drew turned the volume down on the Bose player.

“What’s the call, Lieutenant?”

“Hollywood needs you and Cici to come out and take over a scene. Their late show detectives are tied up on something else. This one looks like a murder-suicide—an adult female and a juvenile female. We would probably get it, anyway.”

LAPD had twenty-one community police stations or divisions grouped geographically into four command areas, known as bureaus. Each division had a detective bureau, but they were the first line and couldn’t get bogged down on long-running cases like homicides. Bureau homicide squads investigated the run-of-the-mill homicides involving ordinary citizens. Whenever a murder city-wide involved any sort of political, celebrity, or media special interest, it was usually assigned to the Homicide Special Section, which was part of the Robbery-Homicide Division (RHD) that operated out of the downtown Police Administration Building (PAB).

Drew picked up a pen and a small notebook.

“Where is it?” Drew asked.

“Up on the overlook off Mulholland, above the Hollywood Bowl. You know where it is?”

“Yeah, the Jerome C. Daniel Overlook. I’ve been up there.”

On the first page of the notebook, Drew wrote the date and location of the scene.

“Anything else I should know?” Drew asked.

“You now know what I know,” Walsh said. “As I said, the Hollywood watch commander described it to me as a possible murder-suicide.”

“Do they know who the victims are?”

“Patrol is working on it. Maybe they’ll have that by the time you get there.”

Walsh asked if Drew would notify his partner of the call out. Drew said he’d take care of it.

“Okay, Howie, get up there and see what’s what, then call me and let me know.”

“You staying up?”

“No, just call and wake me up. Everyone else does.”

Drew found it ironic his supervisor had complained about getting woken up to a person she had routinely woken up throughout their relationship.

“Roger that,” Drew said.

He hung up and called Cecelia Ruiz, his new partner. Ruiz was a D1 who had transferred into the West Bureau homicide squad after five years in patrol at Wilshire Division. They were still getting acquainted, but Drew felt sure the bonding would happen. It always did.

Drew’s call woke Ruiz, but she became alert quickly. Her eagerness to respond to the call out pleased him. They agreed to meet at the scene.

“See you there, Ruiz,” Drew said.

“Howie,” Ruiz said. “You can call me Cici. Everybody does.”

“Okay, see you out there.”

After hanging up, Drew put on jeans, a shirt, and his hiking boots. Since it was a middle of the night call out, the regulations permitted casual clothes. He slipped the leather holster onto his belt and positioned it on his right hip. Then he picked up the Glock G23 off the dresser. After checking the magazine and the action, he put the weapon in the holster and then clipped his LAPD badge on the belt in front of his jeans’ right side pocket. He was ready. After turning off the living room lights, he went out the door.

The crime scene was close to Drew’s apartment. He drove north to Cahuenga and continued north to Lakeridge Place. Drew turned left onto Mulholland Drive and followed it to the overlook. A sign posted with OVERLOOK CLOSED AT DARK greeted him at the entrance. Drew knew people routinely ignored the sign. He pulled in behind a group of official vehicles—a SID van, blue coroner’s van, and several marked LAPD units. Patrol had erected an outer perimeter of yellow crime scene tape around a white Nissan Altima with the front doors open.

Drew parked and got out. A patrol officer assigned to the outer perimeter handed him a clipboard with the scene log. After Drew wrote down his name and badge number, the officer lifted the tape. Drew entered the crime scene and walked toward the vehicle. The SID forensics team had erected portable

lights on either side of the car. Two technicians and a coroner's investigator were working around the front of the Nissan. He didn't see Ruiz and hadn't expected to since he knew she lived farther away.

"Howie, over here."

Drew turned and saw Sergeant Harmony Terry leaning against the front fender of a black and white Ford Explorer. She had a cup of coffee in her hand. She pushed off the supervisor's vehicle as Drew came over.

Drew was acquainted with Terry, having worked with her on other scenes in the past.

"Been waiting on somebody from the bureau," Terry said. "Didn't know it would be you, Howie."

"It's me."

"You working this one solo?"

"No, my partner's on the way?"

"Your new partner, right? I heard Rudy took retirement."

"Yeah. So what do you have here?"

Drew wanted to stay focused on the case, not engage in small talk. He was the least experienced lead homicide investigator at West Bureau. He knew a lot of people were still watching his every move—and some of them expected him to fail.

"An Asian adult female, mid-thirties, and an Asian juvenile female who looks to be around six or seven," Terry said. "Looks like intentional carbon monoxide poisoning. Both were deceased when my guys found them."

"Did you get a call?"

"No," Terry said. "There has been a lot of criminal activity going on up here after dark. People ignore the sign at the entrance. So, I've detailed the beat unit to check the lookout regularly during the shift. They swung by around 2 A.M. and spotted the Nissan. When they approached on foot, they found the victims unconscious and unresponsive."

"You said suspected intentional carbon monoxide poisoning?"

"Yeah, there is a garden hose running from the exhaust pipe to inside a back passenger window," Terry said. "That's what we call a clue in police work." Terry laughed.

Drew nodded impatiently. “Was the engine running when your guys arrived?”

“Yeah.”

“Have you identified the victims?”

“No, there was no purse or ID in the car.” Terry took out a Pelican 7060 LED tactical flashlight and switched it on. By the light, she looked at a small notebook in her other hand. “We ran the license plate and the vehicle registration checks to a Makoto Fukazawa with an address in Laurel Canyon.”

Drew shielded his eyes from the glare of the headlights of another vehicle pulling up outside the crime tape perimeter. When the driver turned off the lights, he looked back at Terry.

“The husband of the adult female, maybe?”

“Dunno. Your guess is as good as mine.”

“Okay,” Drew said. “We’ll figure it out.”

“What did I miss?”

Drew turned to see Cici Ruiz walking up. She was a short, well-proportioned Latina with shoulder-length dark brown hair. Like Drew, Ruiz wore jeans. She had on a dark hoodie over a dark shirt.

“Just got here,” Drew said. “Two victims, both Asian females. One adult and one child, both deceased. Terry here says it looks like intentional carbon monoxide poisoning.”

“I’m Cici Ruiz,” Ruiz said to Terry, offering her hand. The two women shook.

“Harmony Terry,” the patrol sergeant said.

“Let’s take a look,” Drew said to Ruiz, turning away abruptly and walking toward the Nissan. “Thanks, Harmony,” he said over his shoulder as an afterthought.

“Anytime, Howie,” Terry said.

Ruiz fell into step with Drew as they walked over to the car. As they approached, they saw a tech photographing the bodies with a digital camera while another with a video camera was also documenting the scene. A woman wearing a blue windbreaker with LAC CORONER’S INVESTIGATOR on the back with her hair pulled into a ponytail was working on the adult female

victim's body. She turned as the detectives approached and brushed a wisp of blond hair from her face that had escaped from the ponytail with a blue gloved hand. Drew didn't recognize her. He hadn't been around long enough to work a scene with each of the seventy-something coroner's investigators the Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner employed.

"I'm Drew, West Bureau homicide," Drew said. "This is my partner, Detective Ruiz."

The woman nodded. "Lisa McGuire."

Drew surveyed the Nissan and saw a green garden hose that entered the driver's side passenger door at the top of the window someone had left open a crack. Silver duct tape sealed the opening to either side of the hose. Drew walked to the back of the car and saw someone had inserted the other end of the hose into the exhaust pipe. Silver duct tape also sealed the end of the pipe around the hose. He walked back to McGuire.

"Got TOD estimates?"

"Sometime within the past twelve hours is the best I can give you," McGuire said. "It's a cool night, which messes with the liver temperature estimates. We'll narrow it down after the autopsies."

Drew peered into the front seat. The woman wore black pants with a black short-sleeved top. The girl had on a powder blue dress. He winced at the sight of the dead child, something no cop ever got comfortable seeing.

"Mother and daughter?" he said.

"Probably, based on the circumstances and the facial resemblances," McGuire said. "But that's only speculation until we make the identifications."

Drew nodded.

"Definitely looks like the adult victim is a suicide," Ruiz said. "And she took the kid with her."

"That's what it looks like," McGuire said. "There are no external signs of trauma present on either victim. You can see from the lividity the bodies were in the same upright positions when they died."

"When will they make the cuts?"

"It will be a while," McGuire said. "There were more than a hundred bodies awaiting autopsy when I started my shift."

“Anybody look in the car yet?” Drew said.

“The SID people looked through it for identification,” McGuire said. “Nada. The car looks like someone recently detailed the interior. It’s clean as a whistle—no purse or wallet for the adult female. No phone. Nothing in the trunk except the spare tire and jack.”

Drew put on a pair of gloves and grabbed his Pelican flashlight from his hip pocket. He went around to the passenger side with Ruiz in tow, leaned into the car, and looked around. He opened the glove box and found it empty. Then he opened the rear passenger door and repeated the process. He looked under and between the seats. He found nothing inside, verifying the information McGuire had given him. But Drew always checked things for himself, to be sure.

The body movers arrived and transported the victims. A tow truck arrived for the Nissan. After the SID people had finished processing the vehicle for prints, hairs, and fibers, the tow truck driver left with the vehicle for the impound lot.

“What now?” Ruiz said to Drew.

“We can’t make the death notification to the next of kin until we identify the adult female,” Drew said. “McGuire printed her, and they will run the prints through AFIS. Hopefully, we’ll get a hit. We’re clear for now.”

“If the woman wanted to kill herself, fine,” Ruiz said. “But why take the kid with her?”

“That’s something else we’ll have to figure out,” Drew said, opening his car door. “See you at the bureau later.”

“Okay, Howie,” Ruiz said, “see you later.”

The detectives got in their cars and drove away.

Chapter 2

Drew drove home. He called and woke Lieutenant Walsh and filled her in. Then he showered and put on a suit. After filling his Yeti stainless-steel mug with coffee from his Keurig, Drew left his apartment for the bureau.

Drew and Rudy Ortega, his first partner and mentor at West Bureau had taken turns stopping off at Starbucks and bringing coffee in with them each morning. After Ortega retired, Drew had bought the Yeti travel mug and brought his morning Joe to the office from home. It saved a stop and was cheaper. The department provided coffee pods for the Keurig in the break room were beyond awful. Drew avoided drinking the stuff like the plague.

He walked into the squad room at 7:30 A.M., ready for work despite a night with no sleep. That wasn't unusual for Drew, even without a middle of the night call out. Thanks to two tours in Iraq when he was in the army, Drew suffered symptoms of PTSD, which included frequent terrifying nightmares. As a result, Drew considered it a good night when he got five or six hours of uninterrupted sleep.

Setting his mug on the desk beside the keyboard, Drew switched on the computer and checked his emails. He was replying to an email from a deputy district attorney, confirming his availability for an upcoming court date, when Ruiz walked in.

"Hey," Drew said without looking up from the screen.

"Hey, Howie," Ruiz said. "What have we got going today?"

"Getting started on the case," Drew said as he hit send on the email.

"We treat suicides the same as homicides?"

"The suicide is only part of it," Drew said, swiveling his chair to look at

her. We have at least one murder. I'm sure it wasn't the kid's idea to run the garden hose inside the car."

Ruiz had on her usual work attire, the stylish tailored suit favored by most LAPD female detectives. Wearing suits allowed the women to carry their guns on their hips instead of purses. This one was navy, and Ruiz wore it over a light blue blouse.

"Right," Ruiz said.

Drew nodded and thought he might have embarrassed her with the comment.

"We need to ID them as soon as possible," Drew said. "I'm going to get a forensics artist down to the coroner's office to draw composites for dissemination to the media. While I'm doing that, call the missing persons' bureau and check incident reports at Hollywood Division station since the car registration has a Laurel Canyon address."

"On it," Ruiz said.

When Drew reached for the phone to call the Technical Investigation Division to request the composite drawings, his direct line rang before he picked up the receiver. He answered the phone.

"Detective Drew," a female caller said. "This is Risa Kimura. I'm an LA County coroner's investigator."

"Good morning, Ms. Kimura," Drew said. "How can I help you?"

"When I came on duty this morning," Kimura said. "Lisa McGuire mentioned your murder-suicide case from the overlook."

"Yes?"

"I might have some insight on that for you."

"Okay, I'm listening."

"I visited the morgue this morning after I talked with Lisa. I can confirm the woman and the child are Japanese or Japanese-Americans. I'm Japanese-American myself and understand the culture. Are you familiar with the term oyako shinju, Detective?"

"No, I'm not."

"In Japan, oyako shinju is the practice of parent-child suicide," Kimura said. "I think that could be what you're looking at with this case."

“Huh?” Drew said. “Is that a common practice within the culture?”

“Yes, even though oyako shinju is now unlawful in Japan,” Kimura said. “It is still widely practiced. Oyako shinju has even been on the rise in Japan for the last several years. Such deaths frequently occur in Japan for reasons ranging from domestic violence between couples to economic problems.”

“I’m having a tough time getting my head around this,” Drew said. “If a parent decides to die, why don’t they just die by themselves and let the children live?”

“In Japanese culture, to kill one’s children out of despair is not considered a criminal act. Traditionally, most view it as an honorable thing to do. Most traditional Japanese women consider their children extensions of themselves. The mentality is that a parent who decides on suicide doesn’t want to cause a burden to others by leaving their children behind.”

“I won’t pretend to understand that,” Drew said. “But I understand the cultural concept you’ve explained.”

“I would guess that the woman is Japanese-American, that she came to the States from Japan as an adult and still felt close ties with Japanese culture. That’s usually the case when oyako shinju occurs here.”

“So, when we learn who this woman was, we should expect she was having relational or financial problems?” Drew said.

“Probably yes,” Kimura said. “Certainly, she might have faced a situation she felt she had lost face or had become a burden to society if suicide seemed acceptable.”

“For her and her daughter,” Drew said.

“Yes, please understand, Detective,” Kimura said. “Most likely, the woman loved her child passionately, maybe almost obsessively. She probably took her daughter everywhere with her—even to die.”

“Thank you for the information, Ms. Kimura,” Drew said. “Is it okay if I circle back to you if I have any further questions?”

“Sure,” Kimura said. She gave Drew her mobile number. “Call me anytime if you think I can help.”

After hanging up, Drew briefed his partner on the call.

“That’s such a tragedy,” Ruiz said. “It’s bad enough the woman felt she could

only solve her problems with suicide. But the idea of killing your child to save face or to avoid burdening someone else is the saddest thing I've ever heard."

Drew's direct line rang again. This time it was a fingerprint identification technician from the coroner's office calling. After talking with the technician and hanging up, Drew looked over at Ruiz. You can forget the missing persons' reports, and we won't need the composite drawings. They got an AFIS hit on the woman from the national fingerprint database. When she moved here from Japan, INS fingerprinted her. The name is Yoko Fukazawa.

Drew typed the name into the LAPD database and got a DMV record.

"She's got a California license," he said, pulling up the record. "The address is on Stanley Hills Drive."

"Same as the address on the Nissan's registration," Ruiz said.

Drew nodded. "We're building momentum," he said with satisfaction. "A murder case is like a shark. You have to keep it moving, or it will die on you."

"So, are we headed to Laurel Canyon?"

"Yeah, we can make the death knock now."

The detectives grabbed their jackets and left the bureau.

* * *

Drew got on the 405 at Santa Monica Boulevard, drove north to the 101, and then south until exiting at South Laurel Canyon Boulevard, which led them to Stanley Hills Drive. A half-hour after leaving West Bureau, Drew parked the gray unmarked Ford sedan at the curb in front of a modest-looking brick and wood sided one-story with a detached garage at the address on Yoko Fukazawa's DMV record. The wood siding was painted a light yellow, and there was a red-tiled covered front porch. While the house seemed modest by LA standards, under a thousand square feet, Drew expected it was probably worth at least a million given the location and prevailing housing prices.

Laurel Canyon is a mountainous neighborhood in the Hollywood Hills area of the Santa Monica Mountains and part of the West district of Los Angeles.

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It became a nexus of counterculture activity and attitudes in the mid to late 1960s and early 1970s. It was home to many of LA's most celebrated rock musicians of that era, including Cass Elliot, Jim Morrison of The Doors, The Eagles band members, Neil Young, and Brian Wilson of The Beach Boys. Many considered Cass Elliot's home one of Laurel Canyon's biggest party houses with all-night, drug-fueled sleepovers that were well attended by the hippest musicians and movie stars of the times.

Today, Laurel Canyon continues to carry a reputation as a residential center for creatives—people involved in music, film, and the arts. But the rents have gone up, and so have the home prices. Many are valued in the millions. It's an elite area for creative types and an ideal location. It's only a short walk from the famous Sunset Strip, one of the main north-south arteries between the flats and valleys of Los Angeles.

"Looks quiet, like no one is home," Ruiz said.

"Well, after driving up here, I'm not leaving without knocking," Drew said, getting out of the car.

The detectives followed the bricked sidewalk to the front porch and Drew knocked on the brown painted wood front door. After a few moments, someone opened the door only a crack.

"Yes?" said a woman's accented voice.

"LAPD detectives Drew and Ruiz," Drew said. "Can we have a word with you?"

After a brief pause, the woman said, "Yes." She closed the door. Drew and Ruiz heard a security chain rattle inside, and then the woman opened the door. She was a petite Asian woman wearing a yellow sundress who looked to be in her mid-twenties. Two small children, a boy and a girl, stood behind her. They clung to the woman's dress and peered shyly around her waist at Drew.

"We're looking for Makoto Fukazawa," Drew said. "Does he live here?"

The woman nodded and said, "He's at work."

"Do you live here?" Drew said.

The woman nodded again.

"Are you related to Yoko Fukazawa?" Drew said.

The woman shook her head. “Friend,” she said.

“Does Yoko live here?”

“Yes, but not here now.”

“With her daughter?”

Again, the woman nodded. “Juri.”

“Juri,” repeated the little boy who Drew thought looked to be about four and a year older than his sister.

“Are Yoko and Makoto related?”

“Yes, married.”

“So, Makoto is Juri’s father.”

“Yes.”

“And you all live here together?”

“Yes.”

“We need to talk with Makoto,” Drew said. “It’s very important.”

“He’s at work.”

“Yeah, you said that,” Drew said. “Is there a phone number where we could reach him?”

The woman nodded, reached into a dress pocket, and pulled out a phone. She peered at the screen. After tapping the screen a few times, she offered the phone to Drew.

“You talk,” she said.

Drew took the phone and put it to his ear.

“Hi, sweetie,” a man’s voice said.

“Mr. Fukazawa—Makoto Fukazawa?”

“Yes,” the man said, sounding surprised. “Who is this?”

“This is Detective Drew, LAPD,” Drew said. “We’re at your home and need to talk with you about an important matter.”

“What matter?”

“I’d rather not get into it on the phone,” Drew said. “We need to speak with you in person. It’s very important.”

“I’m at work now.”

“Where? We can come to you.”

“I’m at my office in Long Beach,” Fukazawa said. “Can we meet tomorrow?”

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“No, it’s very important that we speak with you today, Mr. Fukazawa,” Drew said. “We can come to you, or you can meet us at West Bureau on West Venice. It can’t wait.”

“Okay,” Fukazawa said. “I will come to the station. Address, please?”

Drew gave him the address.

“I can leave here in about one-half hour,” Fukazawa said.

“Great,” Drew said. “We will expect to see you in about an hour. Thanks.”

Drew handed the phone back to the woman and thanked her. Then the detectives returned to the car for the drive back to West Bureau.

“We can stop off at the tacos truck on South La Brea on the way in for lunch,” Drew said.

Ruiz looked at him with a raised eyebrow. “I was thinking Thai for lunch,” she said. “Don’t I ever get a vote on where we have 10-7?”

“Sure,” Drew said, grinning. “But today is not that day. I want tacos.”

“Whatever,” Ruiz said.

Chapter 3

Drew and Ruiz entered the bureau through the entrance off of the police parking lot. They followed the rear hallway into the detective squad room. Drew saw Lieutenant Walsh was at her desk.

“Let’s update the LT,” he said to Ruiz.

Drew knocked on the door frame, and Walsh looked up from the paperwork on her desk.

“What’s up, Howie?” she said.

“Just letting you know we identified the victims from this morning,” Drew said. “The woman’s husband will be in within the hour. We’ll interview him and make the notification.”

“Great,” Walsh said with a broad smile. “Good work, detectives. Hopefully, you two will wrap this one up quickly.”

Drew nodded, then he and Ruiz headed to their desks.

“You think we’ll close the case and be back on rotation by the end of the week?” Ruiz said.

“Depends on the cuts,” Drew said. “We can’t call the woman’s death a suicide until after we get the autopsy results.”

“It sure doesn’t look like a murder,” Ruiz said.

“Maybe not,” Drew said. “But something bothers me. It seems strange that Makoto Fukazawa is unaware his wife and daughter weren’t at home when he left for work this morning.”

“Yeah, guess we’ll find out why when he gets here.”

“There’s another thing,” Drew said. “When the woman at the house dialed Fukazawa’s number and handed me the phone, he answered with ‘Hi, sweetie,’

thinking it was the woman on the phone.”

“Yeah, that sounds a little weird. You think something is going on between Fukazawa and the friend living at the house?”

“It wouldn’t surprise me,” Drew said. “It’s LA. Nothing surprises me anymore.”

* * *

About an hour later, Drew heard his name called.

“Howie, Mr. Fukazawa, to see you.”

Drew looked up. He saw the watch sergeant with an Asian man wearing jeans, a green polo shirt, and white athletic shoes. Drew and Ruiz stood up.

“Thanks for coming, Mr. Fukazawa,” Drew said, extending his hand. “I’m Detective Drew. We spoke on the phone.”

Fukazawa nodded and shook Drew’s hand.

“This is my partner, Detective Ruiz,” Drew said, gesturing to her.

Fukazawa shook hands with Ruiz.

“What’s this about?” he said, in heavily accented English.

“Let’s talk in an interview room so we can have some privacy,” Drew said.

Drew and Ruiz walked Fukazawa to a vacant interview room. After Drew pointed to the single chair on one side of the desk, Fukazawa sat down. Drew and Ruiz sat down on chairs on the opposite side of the table facing Fukazawa.

Fukazawa looked to be in his early fifties. His most distinguishing feature was a thick black toupee that sat slightly askew atop his head. He sat stiffly with his arms crossed and his fingers tightly gripping his forearms.

Drew took the lead in the interview. He planned to interview Fukazawa first to get some basic biographical information before making the death notification. He knew it was best never to inform a family member that a loved one was dead until after the interview. Once the police made the death notification, family members were often too shaken to provide any useful information.

“Were you born in Los Angeles, Mr. Fukazawa?”

Fukazawa shook his head. "Japan," he said. "I have lived in the United States for the past twenty years since becoming an American citizen."

"Do you have family here?"

"Yes, my wife and daughter."

"What are their names?"

"My wife is Yoko. My daughter is Juri."

"How old is your daughter?"

"Six years old."

"Did you meet your wife in Japan?"

"No. Like me, she was born in Japan and moved here. I met her at a restaurant here in Los Angeles. Later, we married."

"How long have you been married?"

"Almost nine years."

"And Juri is your only child?"

Fukazawa nodded.

Drew found it interesting Fukazawa continued answering his questions without protesting or asking why the police were asking questions about his family. It was almost as if the man knew why the police had summoned him for the interview.

"How is your marriage?"

"What do you mean?"

"Is everything good between you and Mrs. Fukazawa? Are you happy together?"

Fukazawa smiled and laughed briefly. "She wants to live in Japan. I want to live in the United States. We have had some discrepancies or arguments. Whatever you want to call it."

"Is your wife at home now?"

"No, she and my daughter flew to Japan in July," Fukazawa said, "and are staying with Yoko's mother. You see, my wife has enrolled Juri in a Japanese primary school. Yoko wants Juri educated there."

"Did you agree to that?"

Fukazawa shook his head. "Juri attended kindergarten last year here in Los Angeles. I wished for our daughter to continue her studies here."

“When do you expect your wife and daughter to return to LA?”

“January.”

“So your wife wants your daughter to go to school in Japan for a while to see how she likes it?”

“Yes.”

“You mentioned arguments,” Drew said. “Were you guys talking about divorce?”

“It hasn’t gone that far yet,” Fukazawa said. “We are trying to work it out. I talked to her by phone about three weeks ago. She asked me to send money for the airfare for their return to LA in January. Next week is my daughter’s birthday, and I plan to call her. We are trying to work things out. Is anything wrong?”

Drew glanced at Ruiz. That was the question they had been waiting for Fukazawa to ask. They had summoned him to West Bureau, put him in an interview room, and Drew had bombarded him with questions about his wife and daughter. The detectives found it odd it took Fukazawa so long to express concern.

“We’ll explain everything,” Drew said. “It’s important we get as much background information as we can first.”

Fukazawa nodded meekly.

“Some of these questions may seem strange,” Drew said. “But I’ll explain everything in a moment.”

“Okay.”

“So, your wife and daughter aren’t coming back until January, right?”

“Yes.”

“Did you have a lot of arguments about her taking your daughter back to Japan?”

“Yeah, sort of—I mean, I don’t know what her intentions are. But she says she wants to try living in Japan for now.”

“Does your wife have any medical problems at all? Either physical or psychological?”

“Well, yes, mental... like depression, maybe bipolar, I think. But she doesn’t want to do anything about it. Before she left, she wasn’t sleeping.”

“She wasn’t sleeping much? How bad was it?”

“I can’t say. She only said she wasn’t sleeping well. My wife sleeps with my daughter. I sleep alone in the master bedroom.”

“I see,” Drew said. “That happens sometimes.”

“Does your wife have friends here in LA that she spends time with—for shopping or getting together for lunch? Do you know their names?”

“Yoko has no friends here,” Fukazawa said. “She rarely even talks with the neighbors.”

Drew nodded. “When we were at your house, we met a woman with two little kids. She said she was staying there and was a friend of your wife.”

“Well, she is a family friend. They are living with us temporarily so they can learn English.”

“Do you have any previous marriages?” Drew said.

“I was married once before. We divorced. My ex-wife and two daughters now live in Hawaii.”

“Do you still stay in touch with them?”

“Not really. I talked to my daughters by phone about a year ago.”

“Okay,” Drew said. “What’s your relationship like with your daughter, Juri?”

“Very close,” Fukazawa said.

“Is your daughter closer to you or her mother?”

“She is closer to me. When I come home from work, she hangs around me all the time.”

“What would you say was the major problem you and your wife had?”

“Well... from time to time, we had financial problems. But it wasn’t a big issue. We managed.”

“Did your wife ever tell you she was definitely going to leave you for good?”

Fukazawa fiddled with his watch. “No,” he said. “No.”

“So, the most recent problem was she wanted to live in Japan, but you wanted to live here?”

Fukazawa nodded, and then his cell phone rang.

“Go ahead and get that if you want,” Drew said. “Ruiz and I will step out for a moment and get coffee.”

The phone call provided Drew a good excuse to leave the room with Ruiz

so they could confer. After stepping out into the hallway, Drew closed the door behind them.

“What do you think?” Drew said.

“He seems clueless his wife and daughter aren’t in Japan. That’s weird.”

“Or maybe he’s pretending to be clueless about it. I think something is going on with him.”

“Like he had something to do with the deaths of his wife and daughter.”

“I’m not sure yet. It’s only a feeling.”

“If he was as close to his daughter as he claimed, he might have a meltdown when you tell him she’s dead.”

“Unless,” Drew said, “he killed them.”

When the detectives reentered the interview room, they overheard Fukazawa murmur “sweetie” before ending the call.

“Sweetie?” Drew exclaimed. “Who is sweetie?”

“What?” Fukazawa said, looking embarrassed. “Oh... sweetie?”

“Yeah, sweetie. Who is that?”

“What do you call it?” Fukazawa sputtered. “Nickname. It’s only a nickname.”

“For whom?”

“Um... that was Fumiko on the phone, the woman staying with us at the house temporarily.”

“Do you a relationship with her?”

Fukazawa stroked his chin. “In a sense, yes, but not, not... not quite yet.”

“Maybe later, after you and your wife settle things?”

“Well, it depends,” Fukazawa said. “I mean, my wife... I don’t know.”

“So how did Fumiko come to live with you guys?”

“Well, she came to LA from Japan in July to study English and plans to leave next month.”

“Is she younger than your wife?”

Fukazawa nodded. “Fumiko is twenty-five. Yoko is thirty-six.”

“How old are you?”

“Fifty.”

“So, your wife is quite a bit younger.”

“Well, yes, but that’s not uncommon in our culture. Japanese women prefer to marry men who are older, who are financially stable.”

“Let’s see,” Drew said. “Your wife went to Japan in July, and Fumiko came to live at your house in July. That’s a coincidence.”

“Fumiko moved into the house in August, actually,” Fukazawa said.

“After your wife left for Japan?”

“Yes.”

“Does your wife know about that?”

“I mentioned it.”

“What did she say?”

“She said, ‘Well, that’s good for you.’ Stuff like that. So she can stay in Japan longer.”

“Wasn’t she jealous?”

“No, Yoko isn’t jealous.”

“That’s hard to believe,” Drew said. “That your wife is okay with another attractive woman living in the house with you while she is away in Japan.”

Fukazawa looked embarrassed. “Well... you see, she isn’t jealous because we no longer have relations together.”

“You mean you and your wife don’t have sex anymore?”

Fukazawa nodded, looking miserable. “We last had sex in January. She told me to stay away from her, and she started sleeping in the other room with my daughter.”

“Are you having sex with Fumiko?”

“No,” Fukazawa blustered.

Drew didn’t believe him, but he didn’t believe he could force Fukazawa to admit the truth.

“Did your wife have any life insurance?”

Fukazawa shook his head.

Drew decided it was time to tell Fukazawa about the bodies found in the car at the overlook. He inched his chair closer to the table between him and Fukazawa.

“Let me explain something,” Drew said softly. “We’re conducting an investigation that started early this morning. That’s why we asked you to

come down here today.”

“Okay.”

“What I’m going to tell you will be bad news for you. We found two bodies in a car this morning—a woman and a young girl. We have since identified them as your wife and daughter.”

Fukazawa stiffened and clenched his fists. Then, tightly shutting his eyes, he pinched the bridge of his nose and gritted his teeth until the muscles in his jaws clenched. A few moments later, his body went slack suddenly, and he collapsed in his chair.

“My Juri?” he wailed.

“We believe so,” Drew said. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

Fukazawa stifled a quick cry. “No, that’s impossible,” he said. “They’re in Japan.”

“No, they are in LA,” Drew said. “I wouldn’t tell you this unless we were sure. It seems your wife returned early. Maybe that’s why she asked you for the travel money three weeks ago.”

“No,” Fukazawa said, throwing his head on the table sobbing, his body heaving.

“We’ll give you a moment,” Drew said, getting up from his chair. “I’ll get you some water.” He and Ruiz left the room.

Even with the door closed, Fukazawa’s sobs echoed throughout the hallway outside the interview room.

“When they cry like that, does it mean they’re guilty or innocent?” Ruiz said.

“With this guy, who knows?” Drew said grimly.

“There is the chance he didn’t know his wife and daughter came back from Japan,” Ruiz said. “Maybe when she got home, she saw the other woman and her kids living with her husband and lost it. Maybe she committed suicide and took their daughter with her to punish him.”

After mulling things over for a few minutes, Drew got a bottle of water from the break room for Fukazawa, and then he and Ruiz went back in the interview room. Fukazawa was still crying. Ruiz studied him for several moments in a detached manner.

“You honestly believed they were still in Japan?” she said.

Fukazawa lifted his head weakly. “She mentioned she might come back early... because my daughter missed me,” he said. “What happened to them?”

“Do you have any reason to believe your wife may have taken her own life with your daughter?” Drew said.

“Well, she kept saying she was going to kill herself,” Fukazawa said.

“When did she say that?”

“She threatened to kill herself with a knife and cut herself on the hand once before she went to Japan,” Fukazawa said, staring down at the table. “That is part of the depression, threatening suicide. Yoko beat me a few times. She had mental problems.”

“Did you take the suicide threats seriously?”

“She only mentioned it, you know? She said she wanted to kill herself a few times. When she was depressed, she either got violent or closed up. I didn’t know what to think, and she wouldn’t do anything about the depression.”

“She refused to get help?”

“Yeah.”

“What would your wife be doing up at the overlook above Hollywood Bowl off Mulholland?” Drew said. He wanted to find out if Fukazawa was familiar with the place.

“Well, we went there a few times,” Fukazawa said.

“Was it a special place for her?”

“When we were dating, we went there sometimes,” Fukazawa said. “We parked there to chat and to look down at the city lights.”

“It looks like it was suicide with your daughter there,” Drew said. “So, we’re not looking at you, and you’re not under arrest or anything. But in situations like this, we need to look around the deceased person’s home to see if we can find anything that might explain why they wanted to take their own life. Do you understand?”

Fukazawa nodded.

“Will you give us permission to search your house to see if we can find anything your wife may have left behind that might explain all this?”

“Yes, of course,” Fukazawa said without hesitation. “I want you to find out

what happened.”

“Did your wife have a car?”

“Yes, a white Nissan Altima,” Fukazawa said. “I bought it for her.”

“Where was the car while your wife was in Japan?”

“I had important work the day my wife and daughter left for Japan and couldn’t take them to the airport,” Fukazawa explained. “I told her to take the car and leave it in long-term parking at the airport.”

“Okay,” Drew said. “We need you to wait here for a few minutes while we coordinate some things. Then we’ll all go out to your house together.”

Fukazawa nodded in agreement.

After clearing it with Lieutenant Walsh, Drew drafted two detectives from the squad room, Mark Andrus and Adrian Brewer, to go with them to Fukazawa’s house in Laurel Canyon to help with the search.

“We need one more person,” Drew said. “We need to interview Fumiko while we’re there. Fukazawa said she is here to learn English, so we need someone who speaks Japanese.”

“Maybe we can borrow someone from the Gang and Narcotics Division’s Asian Crime Unit,” Ruiz said.

“Good idea,” Drew said. “Call the Gang Support Section and see if they have someone available.”

Ruiz made the call. A few minutes later, she told Drew that a Japanese-American officer from the Asian Gang Unit, Grace Hiroki, would meet them at Fukazawa’s house. Drew had called Hollywood station to get a marked unit dispatched to the house. He wanted the uniformed officers to corral Fukazawa outside while the detectives interviewed Fumiko alone.

Andrus and Brewer had already left for Laurel Canyon. Hiroki and the marked unit were on route there when Drew and Ruiz left West Bureau following Fukazawa. He drove his own car, an older model blue Toyota Corolla.

“This guy is hard to read,” Ruiz said on the drive to Laurel Canyon. “Except for the initial drama, I was more upset when my dog died than him. I was so traumatized I had to take a week off.”

“Yeah, there is definitely something weird going on with him,” Drew said.

“I just can’t figure how he could have killed them and staged it as a parent-suicide at the overlook,” Ruiz said. “I can’t imagine they just sat there in the car meekly while he rigged up the hose and started pumping carbon monoxide into the car. We found no evidence that anyone restrained either of them.”

“I’m sure there could be a way to do it,” Drew said. “But I agree it would have been complicated. He could have drugged them to control them. If something like that happened, we have to figure it out.”

“I know one thing,” Ruiz said. “If my boyfriend moved another woman and her kids into our apartment while I was out of town, I wouldn’t be thinking suicide. I’d be thinking homicide.”

Drew laughed at that one.

