

THE VILLAGE BY THE SEA

It was the summer of 1954 in the town of La Jolla, California and all the town folk thought that life was going swimmingly. Most of the people in the town were avid swimmers, whether it be in the Pacific Ocean, the new pool at the fashionable La Valencia Hotel, the old pool at the self-important La Jolla Beach and Tennis Club, or the countless private pools at the private homes scattered from the sea coast up along the side of the *magnificent* eight hundred foot hill that separated the town from eastern parts of San Diego. Of course, many people partook of all these different venues to enjoy the water as yachtsmen, fishermen, paddle boarders, swimmers, floaters, free divers, body surfers, surfers or just spectators enjoying the water, sea and land creatures.

The town population was not too large, only twenty thousand people according to the statistician of San Diego County, so locals still referred to their seven square miles of living area as the *Village*. Weekend and holiday tourists would swell the town by another ten thousand folks, drawn by the sea. The Village was a destination for sea lovers. Early inhabitants were wealthy older people who, often at the behest of their doctor, had settled into retirement living. There were second homes for wealthy industrialists of the east coast and Europe who wanted to enjoy the easy living climate of Southern California when the weather turned ugly at their main residences. Returning military soldiers, from predominantly the Officer Corps, who had passed through San Diego on their way overseas to the South Pacific War against the Japanese, settled into the La Jolla they had known as a Gunnery Range. They were supplemented by painters, writers, actors, architects and other artists that had settled here since the turn into the twentieth century, inspired by the beauty and power of the sea. There were a few Okies living in the town, a scattering of colored inhabitants and a good portion of Mexican-Americans who could trace their ancestry in San Diego to before the Revolution. Which Revolution, you ask? The Mexican? The Russian? The North-South conflagration? The skirmish with the Americans over California? The American Revolution? The answer is *any one you want to chose*, because aside from the native Indians who everybody pushed out of the way, the Mexicans were the early settlers to this region and always laid claim to it.

The town folk practiced religion at numerous churches, usually with the phrase *the sea* attached to their name: Mary, Star of the Sea, St. James by the Sea, the Wind by the Sea. The Presbyterian church was an exception and there weren't enough Jews in the town to support their own Synagogue. They all praised their God for their health, their idea of wealth and for the opportunity to live in La Jolla.

Long time practitioners of this way of life were not too concerned by the early

events of this summer of '54. They had all been affected by the war, either personally or by a death in their family or close circle of friends or vicariously through the news. They all knew that the German threat had been replaced by the Communist threat. They all knew that the country was in a nascent boom, economically and biologically with children. They were settled in their way of life and complacent about their future. But as strange things began to happen, one softly after the other, until their compounding and stumbling against one another made their aberrance even visible to the flush and jaded inhabitants of La Jolla, locals began to take notice. At first it was the intrigue, *oh the intrigue* that this summer would give them to discourse about at their cocktail parties and sunset gatherings along the shore. The excitement interspersed into their usually languid days, where they would speak of their acquaintance with the protagonists of this story, or that they knew a person that knew a protagonist. But as the summer colored into autumn, as the mysterious sightings and occasional deaths filled the lifted cocktail glasses, some began to fear for their safety.