



CAVEAT

This is a Work of Fiction, sketched against the landscape of the Californias. The locations are mostly real. The events and characters depicted herein flow from the Imagination of the Author. Any resemblance to actual events or people is a coincidence. [c] 2023 jas weaver

Chapter One
1974 SUNDAY 12:15 PM

The old hinges on the new wooden door of the ancient house creak as Emiliano Zapata bursts through the front entrance and onto the wooden porch of the wedding house. He moves past the caterers standing beside the tables set with hors d'oeuvres and plates of exotic fruits and vegetables and dips and Pumpkin pies—it is Thanksgiving Week, and the bride loves those pies! He is a happy hombre as his oldest daughter, Cristina, has just been married. He waltzes to the redwood railing that affords a view of Scripps Pier and the vast Pacific Ocean past the Village of La Jolla. He leans against the railing and hears the groaning sound of weathered wood, and then he straightens up.

“Gringos,” his happy disposition changes and he mutters to himself. “Bastardos incompetentes construyeron este lugar hace cien años antes de que los mexicanos regresaran para mejorar la habilidad en el comercio de la construcción.”

[Incompetent bastards built this place a hundred years ago before the Mexicans came back to ante up the skill in the construction trade.]

A waiter holding a tray of glasses full of Gran Cru white wine moves over to him. Zapata frowns and pushes his hand toward the man.

“Cerveza Pacifico, rapido! Tres.” [Pacifico beer, quickly! Three.]

The man motions to another server who is promptly next to Zapata with a tray containing three amber colored bottles of Pacifico beer and a small dish of cut limes. He sets the tray on an adjacent table, unscrews the top, and gives the bottle to Zapata. Zapata frowns, the server pulls a cut lime from the tray, and Zapata exchanges a crisp one-hundred-dollar bill for the sour fruit.

“Gracias Señor,” nods the man, and Zapata motions him to stand still with the tray. Zapata rubs the lime against the rim of the beer bottle. Some of the juice squirts onto his fingers and he feels the mild acidity move down his skin. He lifts the bottle to his mouth and takes a long, very long drink. The perspiration beads on his face and just as quickly the hot air dries it into salt. He wipes his cool forehead with the back of his hand, then drops the back of that hand to his lips, where he licks the salt. Then he flips

his hand over and creases his lips with the lime. He takes another deep drink and empties the bottle.

Zapata points the waiter to a man standing seven feet away, and the waiter takes the tray over to him. The man takes a Pacifico and lime and waits as the waiter moves back to Zapata, who exchanges for the last beer bottle, and takes another slice of lime. The man is called Alejandro, and minions refer to him as the Shadow of Zapata. Shadow not for appearance, as they are diametric in looks, but for his omnipresence with Zapata, the implementor of Zapata's wishes. Younger by ten years. Taller by six inches. Argentina is his country of origin Light-skinned Latino built like a jaguar. Left-hand man in a right-hand world. A muscular accountant. Packing.

They raise bottles, simultaneously drink, and after a sip, Alejandro drops his bottle to his chin, while Zapata closes his eyes and listens to the quiet breaking of the ocean waves and the muffled sounds of the indoor mariachi players. Zapata stops to gather some more salt from his forehead and lime the bottle mouth. He drinks again, squints his eyes into the high sun standing over the ocean, and watches the distant rainclouds slowly moving east toward the coastline, with an occasional lightning bolt visible in the grey clouds—but too distant to hear any thunder.

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Lou Whitman's legs dangle into the Pacific Ocean while he sits astride his 10' 2" Carl Ekstrom asymmetrical surfboard and watches the dark rain clouds to the northwest. The hot Sonoran desert winds that brought the Indian Summer to San Diego for the Thanksgiving week are getting ready to flee from the cold front.

Lou is part of a funeral circle of sixty+ other surfers sitting in the ocean two-hundred yards west of Windansea Beach, almost to the kelp beds. They celebrate the passing of one of their own, Janie Weber, a renowned woman surfer, surfboard shaper and design innovator. A graduate of the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles, her air-brushed surfboards fetched a good price in California and Hawaii. Her Uncle was a famous surfer in his own right, and he taught her how to ride long boards when she lived in Ocean Beach, a suburb of San Diego. She lived on the North Shore of Hawaii for several years, and spent six months living on the Gold Coast in Australia. She had survived severe wipeouts at some of the larger reef breaks in Hawaii and La Jolla, but

she didn't survive a traffic collision with a drunk driver who swerved into her lane on La Jolla Boulevard after he closed down a bar at 2 AM. Janie was only thirty years old. The funeral is an open affair, attended by her many friends.

There is a lifeguard boat west of the perimeter of the circle, and the guards give a thumbs up to the ceremony and to Lou, who lifts a beer up toward them, and then lifts up a small plastic bag containing some of Janie's cremated ashes.

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Zapata reaches into his pocket for some Prada sunglasses, and turns toward the building to watch the people exit through the doors. He beams at them and they wave back with their mischievous grins. He finishes the cerveza, exchanges the glass bottle for Gran Cru white wine, and the caterer leaves with another C note.

The wedding house is a sixty year old wooden building on the grounds of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography in La Jolla. It comfortably houses eighty people plus staff, and its elevation of about one hundred feet above the Pacific Ocean offers a sweeping view of the sea across seventy miles to San Clemente Island. Several years back, Zapata told his realtor that he wanted to purchase the island for all cash. When the realtor told Zapata the island belonged to the US Government and wasn't for sale, Zapata said, "Todo está a la venta. Solo necesita conocer a las personas adecuadas. Investigarlo." [Everything's for sale. You just need to know the right people. Look into it.]

The realtor said, "this is the United States, not a Banana Republic." The realtor lost his client—he was fortunate that Zapata disregarded the advice of his Shadow, Alejandro—so the realtor didn't lose his life.

Emiliano, EZ to his friends, was born in Guatemala on September 30, 1927. His parents had never heard of the Mexican revolutionary who ran with Pancho Villa in the early 1900s. When they did find out about him, they continued to ask, "why would the Mexican revolutionaries' parents name their son after EZ's grandfather?" No one ever gave them a satisfactory answer, and EZ later referred to himself as a *revolutionary* by the innovative way he operated his business.

EZ dresses well for the wedding: a black sharkskin suit made especially in Milano, with specific padding in the shoulders that diverts attention from his short legs;

a white linen dress shirt which has the stitching, "EZ" over the left breast pocket—which holds a silk burgundy handkerchief, the color matching his gabardine tie—and Italian shoes, *Mercutio Loafers*, crafted by the Berluti fashion house by one of their retired craftsman now living in *Verona*.

EZ drinks lightly from his glass and closes his eyes and feels the compression of his feet in the *Mercutio loafers*.

Mis pies lloran por huaraches. [My feet cry for huaraches.]

At five thousand dollars a bottle, he likes that people are impressed by *Domaine Leflaive Batard Montrachet Grand Cru*. He prefers the Mexican beer, but he has a role to play and he has learned to play it well.

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This Thanksgiving week Lou is on break from his first year as an assistant District Attorney in LA. At twenty-four years of age, he finished back-to-back capital cases that no one else in the office wanted to prosecute. The head DA consented to Lou taking the week off and working as a lifeguard for the City of San Diego, and enjoying the Pacific Ocean. In high school he was the best swimmer on the team, garnering CIF awards and just falling short of making the US Olympic Swim Team. He already knew a lot of the lifeguards from surfing with them on the beaches of San Diego and Baja California. The City of San Diego knew there would be several thousand freed high school and college students thronging the beaches, so the guards asked Lou in August, when he was down from LA, if he wanted to fill in for that week. He consented with a smile, passed the tests, swam around the OB Pier, and jumped the 98 feet off *Deadman's* into the sea just to prove a point—the point being, in an emergency you can't always wait for a helicopter to begin the rescue. Then he went back to LA to prosecute criminals and get consent from his Boss to spend the week in San Diego—without pay of course.

Most of the people in the water have hats and shirts on to protect them from the afternoon sun. They all wear wildly pink leis flown in from Hawaii for the ceremony, a tribute to this courageous water woman. Most hold open beer bottles in one hand and *Janie's* cremated ashes in a plastic bag in their other hand. More than a few dangle burning J's from their hands and lips.

A private boat packed with people and drinks and weed sits along the edge of the crowd, while several young kids wearing sun hats and rash guards float within the ring in small rubber rafts. The circle is forty feet in diameter. Many participants, Lou included, wear green shirts with a silk-screened picture of Janie on the front, executing a high cutback on the face of a ten-foot wave. Joey Brandt, sitting in the center of the circle, finishes the final individual tribute with words, “. . . and rip in peace!” The ensuing screams rise toward the afternoon sun that glares high in the sky. If the floating kelp beds were brittle glass, the high note of a girl would have broken some gourds.

Lou raises his hands in the air with the others and shouts, “a good day to be in the water!” Others echo his words and he empties his bag of ashes into the sea.

“Yeah!” Several voices shout back to him.

“A good day to be in the water!” It’s the girl with the high noted voice.

“Yeah! Janie!” shouts a man.

“Janie!” A second voice joins in.

“Janie!” A third voice joins in and then three score voices join in the chorus and start screaming the name, “Janie!”

On the beach a surf guitar riffs from the live band beginning to play, and on cue, those with ash throw it onto the surface of the water, and those with bottles or cans or flasks, finish their drink and throw the empties to a gremmie in the middle with a plastic trash bag. The ash disperses, the lifeguard boat spews out water from a hose dropped into the ocean, and everybody screams in ecstasy. Several people fire up more homegrown and those so inclined snort up some blow they carry in plastic containers.

“No surf today!” says a voice.

“Kegs are about to open! The band’s starting!”

“I’m paddling into the beach!” The circle breaks as most of the people fiercely paddle toward the shore.

* * *

Michael R, the managing director of the La Jolla Theatre, quarter full wine glass in hand, strolls over to EZ. A roughly handsome 45-year-old man who wears an ocean blue tie over a blue work shirt that lays over faded blue jeans torn at his knees. No socks cover his feet which are comfortably slipped into canvas boating shoes—the color

blue. He has thinning sandy hair and inquisitive blue eyes that are curious about most anything in the world. An artiste educated in the east coast and brought out to La Jolla with a substantial pay raise from his past play station. R appreciates expensive wines. R appreciates good steaks from Nebraska and deep-sea fish from the ocean depths off of San Diego. But most of all, R appreciates that EZ is on the Board of Directors of the Theatre, and that a sliver of his wealth supports most of the Theatre's productions and R's substantial salary.

"Excellent taste my friend," says R, sweeping his hand at the setting. "This is a beautiful location for a beautiful wedding with your beautiful daughter and her beautiful husband. "Hermoso. Excelente!" R is multi-lingual from growing up in Spanish Harlem.

"Gracias. Weatherman called it perfecto," says EZ raising his glass to the sunny blue sky over the ocean and R joins the salute. "Rain should break in after dark, when we're done, after the Dodger game." R nods his assent and drinks deep.

"I really like your threads." He reaches over and strokes Zapata's suit as if it were an expensive Ashera cat.

"Mucho Gracias. Milano. Italy." He sips from his glass and proclaims, "El mejor traje jamás hecho para un hombre de mi estatura." [Finest suit ever made for a man of my stature.]

"I know, I like it," says R, not brusquely, but with a skilled deftness that will shorten a conversation without giving offense. R is well acquainted with the long-winded orations of EZ; and that if EZ understood he was being restrained, matters could get tense. R waves at two beautiful ladies that step out of the house and onto the porch. "As we discussed, we could use this style in one of our next productions. Italian politico style. Mafioso. Fantastic tailoring." He pulls a small camera from his torn jeans and says, "EZ. I really want to take a picture of this and show it to our costume designer. Is it OK?"

EZ nods and sips and smiles as the porch fills with revelers. He is content. For the moment. Now there is only one left to join with a reputable family. Daughter, that is. Not son. For twenty-six-year old Tomas is still living the good life. Well paid for education. Money in the bank—well, money in the bank where his father knows the president of that bank. But lots more, just not as accessible. And single. A single young

man in an illicit world where certain types of women are attracted to the affluence gained in that world.

Muchas mujeres, [Many women.] whether for the moment, the night, the week or a longer period of time where they could bear children with Tomas, and then get the divorce and the house and alimony and child support to ease them into their next man.

R takes several photographs, puts away his camera and goes back to drinking. He loves this wine. It reminds him of the Venice Film Festival twenty years prior, when he was an assistant for the Italian film director, Federico d’Nuzzio and the . . . But that is another tale.

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