

## Exclusive Excerpt from *Intimate Bondage*:

# Chapter Two

As Chapter Two opens, the “Angel of Death” serial killer has just claimed a third victim in the Pacific Heights neighborhood of San Francisco. Frank Miller, a homicide detective with the SFPD who is just a few weeks short of his retirement, and his partner Kate Dawson, a good cop with a troubled past, are following up a lead in the Tenderloin...

FRANK MILLER noted that the heavy San Francisco fog was showing signs of lifting by the time he and his partner Kate Dawson had made their way from the luxurious homes in Pacific Heights to the dilapidated, hourly rentals in the Tenderloin. Miller had driven the unmarked police sedan nearly the length of one of the long, north-south streets that cross the city.

But the distance between the two locations was more psychological than physical, from the super rich to the dirt poor. With some of San Francisco’s most prestigious real estate only a few blocks to the north, the nearby office towers of the Financial District and the upscale retailers and hoteliers of Union Square located immediately to the east, the Tenderloin was fifty square blocks of strip joints, gay bars, liquor shops, peep shows and adult bookstores. The squalid conditions had given the neighborhood a seedy reputation that was well-earned. Here, on Skid Row, prostitutes walked the walk, alcoholics and addicts traded pints of blood for their own particular poisons, homeless men and women made makeshift dwellings out of cardboard, and drug dealers plied their trade.

Miller turned left from Hyde Street onto Post, and parked the car in front of the apartment building at 891 Post Street. Dawson looked out the window, and shrugged. The street looked like any other one in San Francisco. Only for Miller, did the street hold any kind of significance.

From 1926 until 1929, Dashiell Hammett had lived in a modest apartment on the northwest corner of the fourth floor where he wrote one of the greatest detective novels of all time *The Maltese Falcon*. In his day, the Tenderloin had a very rich history of crime and decadence, and its notorious billiard halls, boxing gyms, speakeasies, theaters and restaurants became the backdrop for some of his most famous stories. Even the local residents he encountered, while working as a real-life Sam Spade, formed the prototypes for the mysterious Miss Wonderly, the oily little Joel Cairo, the chillingly genial Gutman and other notable figures depicted in Hammett's hardboiled novels.

For Frank, however, those flamboyant characters existed only in the pages of detective fiction, and had very little to do with reality. In all of his years on the force, he never once stumbled across a sardonic private eye, a hapless grifter, a law-abiding citizen lured into a life of crime, a mastermind with the perfect crime, or a femme fatale. Most criminals tended to be very lazy, and with few exceptions, chose the path of least resistance every time. With such a singularly one-dimensional mindset, Miller was surprised that the record of arrests was not closer to ninety-nine percent. The other one percent is what kept him up nights, for they were truly exceptional.

The two detectives climbed out of the unmarked police sedan, and crossed Polk at the middle of the street. In a matter of minutes, they reached B&J's Adult Book Store.

Back in the 1950s, the building had housed a grocery store, whose glass show windows lured passersby with fresh produce and specials of the week. Now the glass façade was completely covered with light blue paint and white letters that shouted "Adult Books—Magazines, Movies!"

Miller looked up at the sign, and grunted. "If we're lucky," he said to Dawson, "the next earthquake will strike right below our feet, and swallow up this whole festering cesspool with one gulp."

"Didn't you used to walk a beat in this neighborhood?" Kate asked.

"Yeah, that was forty years ago. I was a rookie cop then, just back from my tour of duty in 'Nam. Made my first collar over there, near that bus stop."

He pointed across the street to a sign post, which read "Bus Stop," and to the alley just beyond.

"Aggravated sexual assault," he continued. "Some pimp had decided to teach one of his girls a lesson, and I was dumb enough to think I could help her. Spent an hour filling out the

paperwork, and then she refused to press charges. That was the day I learned ‘justice’ was nothing more than a fancied-up word that didn’t mean shit down here on the streets.”

“But you’ve been a cop your whole life . . .”

“That’s right, but it doesn’t mean that I’ve liked it,” he replied. For an instant, his eyes glazed over, and troubled memories of the past transported him to a different time and place. “Back in the day, a black man had few choices of a career. And yes, we were called ‘black’, not African-American. I suppose it was better than ‘negro’ or ‘colored’—a damn sight better than ‘nigger’—but that’s how it was. We took those jobs that no white man wanted, and were happy to get them despite low wages. We had families to feed. There was no such thing as food stamps or welfare. You worked a job or you went hungry.”

Dawson looked at him with something approaching pity. She shook her head slowly. She just didn’t know.

“I thought when I got back from overseas, you know, from fighting an unseen enemy and watching my friends die all around me, that I was going to have a good job waiting for me,” he went on talking, lost in his reverie. “Society’s idea of a good job was as a cook or a dishwasher or a porter. It didn’t matter that I had bled red like all of them white boys over there. I was still a black man in the eyes of white-bread America, and I didn’t rate anything more than a job in the service industry. Well, I wasn’t having any of that. You see, my parents had worked as domestic servants their entire lives, and the last thing that I wanted to do was shine someone else’s shoes or cook someone else’s meals or carry someone else’s bags.”

Tears pooled in the corners of Dawson’s wide brown eyes.

“I suppose I could have worked in the shipyards or learned how to drive a bus or work a cable car, but I had aspirations for something more. I wanted to live in a mansion like Collins, not serve in one,” he concluded. “In 1970, less than five percent of the SFPD was black, and not one of them was an inspector or chief. They were all beat cops assigned to the ghetto. So I took the exam and went to the Academy and this is where I ended up . . . back in the Tenderloin.”

Kate buried her face in her hands for a moment and trembled as she took stock of her own life. She had spent so much time talking and complaining about her own problems that she never once thought to ask her partner about his. Miller had always seemed like such a paragon—that shining example of what it meant to be a good cop—that she’d never realized he was hurting on the inside. She should have known that the

African-American detective carried forty years' worth of the pain and humiliation of racial injustice.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I'm sorry. I should have spent more time listening and less time talking."

"Forget it. I was just feeling sorry for myself," he said. "It's just that every time I come to a place like this that stinks of day-old urine, I'm reminded how little we've actually advanced beyond the jungle. Let's just get this done, and get the hell out of here."

"No problem, Frank," she said, sobering up. "I've got your back."

They exchanged a brief nod and walked into the Adult bookstore, and made a full sweep of the premises. The stark, white-washed walls with its wire racks and tables of books, magazines and videos and its linoleum floors resembled the interior design of a farmers' market, minus the nutritious fruits and vegetables. A large center table stacked full of slick, four-color magazines in sealed plastic wrappers dominated the main sales floor, while tiered racks, bolted to the wall, offered videos with explicit shots of sexual intercourse between couples and multiple partners on their covers. Films with such outrageous titles as *Hot and Horny Cheerleaders*, *Titillation*, *Cream Pie University*, *2069: A Sex Odyssey*, and *Babysitter Confessions* seemed to literally jump off the wall with their crude and salacious themes. Materials appealing to sadomasochistic devotees were set aside in a section towards the back near a modest selection of dildos, whips, riding crops, handcuffs and butt plugs. A dark maze of tiny booths featuring X-rated films, each about the size of a broom closet, was hidden from view by a faded, moth-eaten set of red velvet drapes. Kate couldn't help but feeling creeped out by the whole thing, and made a mental note to herself about taking a hot shower to wash off all of the filth the minute she hit the door to her apartment.

Near the front door, a popeyed balding man in his forties collected money from a customer for several DVDs and a swingers' magazine. The store clerk wore a bowling shirt with the name CARL embroidered on the right pocket and paisley Bermuda shorts that seemed more appropriately suited for Venice Beach than the front checkout counter at a business. "Carl" looked like he hadn't shaved in over a week. When he smiled, the handful of teeth in his mouth formed a lost graveyard, the pearly whites standing like forgotten tombstones in the blackness.

A delayed recording of the San Francisco Giants playing baseball against the Chicago Cubs ran on a portable TV that sat

behind the counter. A sign above the cash register read: "Sale to minors is forbidden by law."

Several patrons who were perusing materials on the center table quickly scattered when Miller and Kate approached the front counter and pulled out their badges. One of the customers stood his ground.

"I'm Detective Miller. This is Detective Dawson. We'd like to ask you a few questions."

"I don't know nothin'," the clerk replied, hastily reaching under the checkout counter and placing a "closed" sign between him and the two detectives. He then turned his back on them, and walked to the other end of the counter to stare at the television. "How about them Giants?"

"You seem pretty jumpy for someone who doesn't know anything, Carl," Miller observed.

Carl turned back around, nervous, one hand clutching the other. "I don't really work here. I'm just filling in for a few days," he said, stuttering, his speech high-pitched and fast-paced. "You should come back and talk to the owner. He's here on Tuesdays and Wednesdays."

"Today is Wednesday."

"I mean Friday," Carl said, swallowing hard. "Tuesdays and Fridays."

Frank leaned over the counter until his face was close to Carl's. "You need to dial it down a notch, cowboy, or you're going to make me think that something illegal is going down here."

The clerk nodded. "See, I'm on parole. This was the only job I could get," he confessed, trying to get hold of himself. "My parole officer thinks I'm flipping hamburgers down at Burger City."

"Well, then you should be pretty anxious to cooperate with us," Miller said.

"I'll tell you anything you want to hear."

"Good, just make sure it's the truth."

Carl lowered his voice, and looked to the right, then to the left, as if checking to see whether he was being recorded by some kind of surveillance camera. "I just want you to know up front that I don't make any of the decisions about the kinds of videos we sell," he said, with a soft whisper. "If there are any movies with underage actresses, I don't know anything about it."

Kate had no clue what he was talking about. She shot her partner a sideways glance, and he responded by shrugging.

"We don't care about your inventory," Kate said at last.

“We just want to ask you a few questions,” Miller added.

“You’re not Vice?” Carl’s pop-eyes were as big as saucers.

“No, Homicide. We’re here investigating a murder,” the senior detective replied, and Kate wondered just how stupid Carl was. From his jacket pocket, Miller produced a small photograph of Steven Collins, and shoved it in the clerk’s face. “Has this man ever been a customer in your store?”

Carl was now breathing easier. He looked over the photograph, and nodded. “Yeah, I seen him here a couple of times.”

“You sure?” asked Kate.

“Look, detective, we get a certain kind of clientele in here,” he replied. All of a sudden, Carl was poised, cool, and in complete control of himself. He seemed to have more faces than Eve. “Mostly perverts who just want quarters so they can jerk off to the peep shows out back. Couples looking for a third person to join them in a threesome. Lookers who don’t have the balls to put their money down for what they want, and a handful of regulars from the neighborhood.”

Carl looked again at the photograph.

“This guy was different somehow. He smelled of money,” Carl added. “He wore those fancy handmade suits. Silk ties. Thousand-dollar shoes. Carried a wad of money thick enough to choke a horse. He bought mostly that hardcore S&M shit, and paid cash for it.”

“Do you ever recall seeing him with anybody else?” Miller asked.

Carl pondered the question. “Yes, now I seem to remember that he came in once with this other guy,” the store clerk finally answered. “They were in the back, browsing through some of the toys, when all of a sudden they had this blow-up. He shouted something at the other guy, then stormed out of here. A few minutes later, his buddy left. Come to think of it, that may have been the last time I saw him.”

For an instant, Kate turned her gaze away, and noticed that one of the customers had been listening intently to their interrogation. She looked him up and down, and concluded that he seemed somehow out of place. She wasn’t quite certain where he belonged, but he definitely didn’t fit her notion of the kind of pervert who frequented adult bookstores. He was average in build and height, but the intense look in his baby blue eyes was only supplanted by his smile. The man’s smile was the type that she had only come

across four or five times in her life . . . one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it. The fact that he was elegantly attired in a designer Italian suit and sported an expensive Rolex watch on his right wrist made him stand out even more as a “person of interest.”

Kate waited and observed him for another moment to confirm her suspicions, then walked deliberately up to him. “You seem pretty interested in our interrogation, Mr....”

“Monroe. John Monroe,” he replied. “But my friends call me Jay.”

“Well, *Mr.* Monroe, do you often eavesdrop on conversations that don’t have anything to do with you?” she asked.

“No, not especially. I just think you’re wasting your time with him.”

“You do, huh?”

“He’s not a reliable witness, and I really wouldn’t put too much stock into what he’s telling you. He’s a convicted felon and a notorious liar.” He raked the fingers of his well-manicured left hand through his wavy hair. “Why, just last week he was trying to con some tourist into buying this place and the theatre next door. He would have succeeded if I hadn’t set the man straight.”

“What makes you an expert?” Kate asked.

“I know a little bit about human behavior,” he said. “Your new best buddy Carl suffers from malignant narcissism, which means that everything he says or does is larger than life. He needs to feel admired, and has an obsession with unlimited success or omnipotence, even if it means using others to achieve it. He feels a sense of entitlement; he’s a pathological liar, and doesn’t care about anyone or anything.”

“You don’t say . . .”

“Right now, he’s so scared you’ll report him to his probation officer that he’s willing to tell you anything . . . even if it has absolutely no basis in fact.” Monroe gestured toward the store clerk. “But come back in an hour, and he’ll be back to his usual tricks, trying to con somebody else.”

“And why should I believe you?”

He flashed her a smile brighter than the lighthouse at Angel Island. “Because you find me interesting, and because you’re attracted to me.”

“Excuse me?”

As a law enforcement officer, Kate liked to think that she had heard it all, seen it all, that she was unflappable. And

for the most part, she was. She had heard confessions from cold-blooded killers, child abusers, wife beaters, con men, flashers, mental patients and drug dealers. The story was always the same. How society had turned them as law-abiding citizens into hardened criminals. She had gotten so used to all the lies, prevarications, excuses, threats, pleadings and intimidations that she had become almost anesthetized to the spoken word. Of course, the fact that so many of her fellow officers were, mainly, lower middle class rednecks or wetbacks who punctuated everything they said with profanity had further disillusioned her. To hear a rich, well-bred, well-educated man talk, especially in such an affected manner about her and some imaginary attraction between them, gave her pause.

“Come on, admit it, Inspector. From the moment you and your partner first walked in here, you haven’t been able to take your eyes off me. You’ve been asking yourself what this really handsome, well-dressed man was doing here.”

“Is that so?” she asked, with a raised eyebrow. “I don’t think you really want to know that I think.”

“Sure I do.”

“I think you’re a pompous, over-educated asshole.”

“You know that’s not true. You were actually wondering what I think of you,” Monroe added. He gave the strong impression that he selected his words with a great deal of care. “Perhaps searching for that right word or turn of phrase that will reveal your deepest, darkest desires to me.”

For a moment, they held each other’s eyes, then Kate lost her nerve and turned away. “*Disgusting* is the word that comes to mind, Mr. Monroe. I find men like you who get their kicks from pornography disgusting. Don’t you know how degrading pornography is to women?”

“Ahhhhh, but you really don’t know why I’m here,” he said, raising his hand in objection. “You just assume that I’m another customer. Perhaps some loser who feeds quarters into a tiny booth around back because he can’t face real intimacy.”

“I really don’t care,” she replied.

“You know that’s not true. You’re intrigued by me, but you won’t let your guard down long enough to be honest with yourself.”

“Okay, smart guy, I’ll play along,” Kate said. She was getting really pissed off. “Why are you here?”

Monroe removed a book from the center table, and handed it to her. Titled *The Master-Slave Relationship: A Study in*

*Duality*, the book's dust jacket featured a lurid cover of a man dressed from head to toe in black leather whipping a naked, honey-tanned blonde who was tied by her wrists to a bench. The blood-stained welts on the woman's back and buttocks suggested that the whip had cut into her bare skin with a violent force, but the look on her face was pure ecstasy. To some, the image might have proved shocking; to others, exciting, almost titillating; for Kate, the image was simply repugnant.

"The answers to all of your questions are right here," he said, flashing one of his patented smiles.

"What are you?" she demanded, paging through the text. "Some kind of dungeon master trolling for sex slaves?"

"Well, no. A dungeon master is a figure from D&D."

"D&D? S&M? It's all alphabet soup to me, you twisted fuck," Kate exclaimed, shoving the book back into his hands. She turned her back on him and started to walk away, towards her partner.

"No, no, you don't understand," Monroe protested, trailing after her. "D&D stands for Dungeons and Dragons. It's a game that kids play. I'm not a dungeon master. I'm an..."

Kate and Monroe exchanged glances like the crossing of swords.

"You people are really sick, you know that? You get your rocks off by inflicting pain on other people, and then try to blame it all on some kid's game."

"It's not about the pain. In fact, most BDSM doesn't even involve pain," Monroe said, in a matter-of-fact tone. He thumbed to a section in the book, and handed it back to her with the pages open to Chapter Seven. "It's about the exchange of power. One person willingly hands over control to another. It's the most beautiful *and pure* example of trust between two people that I know of."

"I'll bet," she replied, snapping the book shut, still not convinced. "Sick bastards like you just want to keep trying to convince yourselves that's true."

"You're wrong. The submissive person is always the one with the power. He or she always has the option to say 'no'."

Kate glanced down at the cover of the book she was holding, and for a fleeting instant in time, she became stuck between the tick and the tock on a clock as the author's name—John P. Monroe—registered. Monroe was not

just some misguided fan, as she had first surmised, but the actual author of the book.

Kate felt a hand come down on her shoulder, and jumped as if she had been given an electric shock to set her free. The hand belonged to her partner.

“I think we’ve got all we’re going to get out of Carl,” Miller said with a sour look on his face.

“Right.”

As lead detective, Frank had the right to decide when it was time for them to get the show on the road. “We should get moving, Kate. We’ve got fourteen more sewers just like this one . . . and the rats are getting hungry.”

“Sure. Just give me a couple of minutes, and I’ll meet you outside,” she said.

“Okay, just make it fast,” he added, on his way to the door. “I don’t want to be in this toilet any longer than I have to.”

“I know exactly what you mean.”

Kate watched Miller exit the store, then turned back around to finish her conversation with Monroe, but he was no longer there. “Sonuvabitch,” she exclaimed. In a confused and reckless state of mind, she scrambled up and down the aisles, and then crashed the peep shows out back, but there was no sign of him. Monroe had completely vanished from the store without a trace.

“Get hold of yourself, Kate,” she said, breathing hard, her head between her knees. “Can’t afford to let Frank see me like this.” She took a couple of deep breaths, and straightened up.

A noise! Kate swiveled around, gun in hand, and came face to face with the last person in the world that she was expecting—Carl.

“I can get you a signed, first edition for just fifteen bucks more if you like, Inspector,” the clerk said, still eager to please.

“No, that won’t be necessary.”

“It’s a real classic,” he persisted.

“No, thank you,” Kate said, holstering her gun. Angry and annoyed, she slapped the book down on the checkout counter, and pointed to the author’s photo on the back page. “But I would like to know what happened to the author.”

“Can’t say. I haven’t seen him here in weeks.”

Kate gazed up at him, startled. “But I was just talking to him . . .”

“You were?” Carl replied with a dumb look on his face. He sat up in his chair, and pantomimed the action of looking around the store. “They come, and they go. It’s not my job to identify every Tom, Dick, and Harry that walks into the store. I got far more important things to do.”

“You must have seen him,” she insisted.

“Sure, officer, whatever you say,” he said, suddenly changing his story. “He looked just like the dude on this cover. Big as life . . .”

“Forget it, Carl. I don’t think you even know when you’re lying or telling the truth.”

“Listen, lady, are you going to buy the book, or not?”

Dawson shook her head. As she exited the store, Kate had a strange look on her face, as if she had been talking with a madman. She was desperate for answers about Monroe, but she also knew that she would not find them there. Carl was either stoned or totally out of his mind. Probably both...