

Chapter 1

A Ship Docks at San Pedro

“Ok, Rookie, put the toys away. Cap wants to see us in his office.” I looked up at Sam Gallagher, my long-time friend and new partner. What I saw was a tall young man, twenty-three years old, brown and brown, as we cops say. His hair was a bit long, to my way of thinking but then, maybe it was jealousy. My red mop had to be kept short in order to keep it tame. I glanced down at the “toys” laying on the scarred wooden surface; a pair of fourteen-year-old, nickel finished Colt 45 six-shooters. I sighed and got to my feet. I knew most of the others thought my guns to be old-fashioned since most of them now carried the 1890 Remington revolvers, but my father gave the Colts to me when I joined the force this year and they worked just fine. I wrapped them in the cloth I’d been using to oil them, put them away in the drawer and went, with Sammy, to see what the Captain wanted. I’d strap them on when it was time to head out. I glanced at the big calendar page hanging on the wall outside Cap’s office. It was Monday, 19 November 1900. The month, the year and the century were almost over.

The muster room was crowded. Cap had called in everyone he could reach. There were seventy of us on the force; I counted fifty seven heads-perched everywhere: sitting in the chairs, ranged around the walls, even on the sill of the windows that looked out on the City of Los Angeles. I wondered if I had missed something important.

“Boys, we got us a mess.” Cap was trying to look at all of us at once. “A ship, the *Adelaide*, docked at the port two nights ago, unloaded its cargo and crew, same as always. Except this time a couple of bodies came off the boat, too. They are at the Doc’s office right now. He said he thinks it may have been typhoid fever.”

The room went still. The kind of still that falls over a room when they hear something really awful. Murder wasn’t unheard of in our teeming city but this is the first time, since I became a cop that I’d heard of typhoid fever. Of course, I’d only been a cop for nine months, so what did I know?

“Most of you know what we have to do.” The old-timers nodded, most of the younger ones just looked as blank as I felt. “Why don’t you get going and I’ll fill the rookies in.” This should have been funny, but no one was laughing as they filed out of the room.

The captain turned his chair so he could look out the window and then sat down, heavily. At six feet even and about 180 pounds with his guns on, sitting down heavily was not something Cap usually did. Somehow he managed it this time. The six of us “rookies” waited as quietly as we knew how.

In truth I was the only raw rookie having just gotten my star. The others had been on the force for up to two years. I figured it was our lack of knowledge of what we were dealing with that lumped us together. I looked at Sammy, who’s been on the force over a year already. Even though we were separated in age by almost two years he and I have been friends forever and we could read each other; though he’s a lot better at it than I am. He seemed to understand what Cap was talking about, although he waited as quietly as the rest of us to see what we were going to do about it; whatever “it” was.

When I became one of the first to pass the new entrance requirements just being implemented it was expected that they would make us partners so, naturally, they weren’t going to, until Sammy talked them into it. I don’t know what he told the captain but it worked. Now Sammy looked worried. It must have been something he’d heard about that he’d never discussed

with me, which was unusual. He saw me looking, shrugged and started to say something but Cap turned from the window at that moment.

“Listen up, you guys.” The captain hadn’t found whatever he was looking for outside. “What we have to do is locate everyone who was on that ship, legally or illegally, and get them checked out. And we’ve got to do it fast. We’re talking about a crew of from fifty to sixty men. And I understand that there were a few passengers aboard, also.”

Several of the guys groaned. I wasn’t feeling too happy myself. Los Angeles had blossomed to one hundred and two thousand souls—with eight to ten fancy hotels that were almost always full. Those sailors had a three day start and had probably visited every brothel and bar between here and the docks. They could be anywhere by now, spread over the twenty miles that separated the pueblo of Los Angeles from the port at San Pedro. And what about those passengers that all the ships coming to California these days seemed to carry; men with no money, coming out here to find gold or silver or a new life, with or without their families. Now I understood why the old-timers had looked so hopeless as they left to organize the search. The hours that ticked off the days and nights of November in this year of Our Lord 1900 were not as troublesome as in the past, but they were still pretty rowdy and a man could disappear for days, if he wanted to. I returned my attention to what Cap was saying.

“I have copies of the ships crew manifest. Some of the sailors are local boys so they ought to be easy to find. Sammy, you and Mike get some help and go looking for them. The rest of you will join the hunt for the other crewmembers. You’ll start at the flophouses and work out from there and you’ll have to backtrack all the way down to the docks at San Pedro. Let’s just hope most of ‘em were too tired or too moral to go looking for company, just got drunk and turned in their first few days on dry land.” Cap didn’t sound too hopeful but he tried a smile. It didn’t work. “Those of you who get all the way to San Pedro may have to bed down along the trail on the way back; if there’s someplace to stash the sailors overnight, fine. Otherwise you may have to chain them together; keep them from running off. Ok, beat it. Report in when you get back. I’ll round up the rest of the force and get them working on this as soon as I can.”

Sammy stopped at my desk, adjusting his hat, and watched me reload my weapons. One of the things that I thought would help make me a good cop was the speed with which I could breakdown, clean, reassemble, and reload my guns. In Los Angeles, a town that was only a hard two-day ride to the coast and which was growing up around a river, it was a good skill to have. There had been floods every winter from 1888 to 1891 so I had practiced, a lot. No one ever had to worry about my being out of the action just because the Colts got wet. I glanced at Sam as I strapped on my gun belt. Among the things that made us friends was that he never made fun of me, not seriously anyway, especially about those Colts. I had no idea that I’d ever come face to face with a problem my guns couldn’t help me solve. That just shows how green I really was.

John M Glass, who had been Chief of Police since 1889, had moved the force from City Hall to its current location at West 7th Street and Grand Avenue. The Department came of age under Chief Glass. He had originated the first entry-level standards for recruit applicants, standards that Sammy and I had met easily; and he had conceived of, given birth to, and nursed a new level of police professionalism. People used to call the new location The Temporary Police Department—I could never tell if they were saying the police were temporary or our new quarters were—after 11 years very few called it that anymore. Now it was Central Station Headquarters. We had more space, for ourselves and our horses, but I wondered if it was supposed to be a joke of some sort. Earlier that year the Automobile Club of Southern California was established. Central Station was located across the street from the Pioneer Auto Exchange. I

hated the thought that we'd have to start using those devil machines in place of our horses. I'd heard talk; but I tried not to listen.

As Sammy and I left Headquarters, headed for the stables out back where we all kept our mounts, Sam told me what he knew about this typhoid fever thing. Sammy was always a good storyteller; fitting himself to the cheerfulness or seriousness of the story he was telling. In this case, he was as serious as I'd even seen him. "This is exactly what we joined up for." He said. "To protect the people from themselves and from each other."

"We'll have to be real careful around these guys, won't we?" I didn't try to hide the fact that I was scared; Sammy knew me well so he knew it already.

"More than you realize, Rookie." He smiled ruefully. "Cap told me that in a bunch of telegrams he got from New York was sort of a warning. There's an outbreak of typhoid fever going on back there. We'll have to be careful, make sure none of these guys are carrying the sickness. Keep our gloves on and don't eat or drink anything any of these men touch."

Sammy swung his saddle across his horse's back. "We may have to burn our gloves at the end of each day, depending on what we find out there."

"What?" I nearly dropped my saddle. "You mean we're going to have to buy new gloves? Every day?" I looked at him closely, maybe he was just teasing me. Maybe.

Sammy smiled, and this time it reached his eyes. He knew I was trying to save up so I could have something to offer Jennifer beside myself, when I finally got up the nerve to ask her to marry me. "Don't you have any extra pairs?" he made it a question.

I shook my head. "I haven't gotten around to it."

"Well, then, I guess the wedding will just have to wait a little longer, that's all." Sammy gave me that look.

"No, I am not going to ask Dad for money. You know I want to do this on my own."

"Ok, it's your life." Sammy bent to check the cinch. I could tell he was still smiling. We'd had this conversation often enough. We Sullivan's weren't all that rich, but my dad had done pretty well for himself as a gunsmith and I'd grown up comfortable. Sammy and I both knew that Dad was just waiting for me to ask and I could get married tomorrow **and** move into a brand new house, but what I'd said was true; I wanted to do this on my own.

"At least Ethel will have Jennie to keep her company while we're out looking for those men." My face must have broadcasted how shocked I felt. "Well you don't think I'm going home, do you?" Sam went on. "Until we get this mess cleaned up and know for certain that none of us is sick, I'm bunking at the jail and you'd better resign yourself to it." He shook his head. "I am not going to take the chance of her getting sick with her time so near. I want to be there, beside her." His expression was grim as he looked at me. "I want to be there, but I'm not going to take any chances, with her or with the baby."

We mounted up, turned our horses toward the gates and headed out for the homes of the sailors that lived in Los Angeles. I heard some ominous sounds from the Auto Exchange as we rode by. I did my best to tune them out.

About half of the names on our list would take us into the Spanish section to the homes of those men who were married or who lived with their families. We'd both been there before; sailors are always a rowdy bunch when on land. Sammy reviewed the list of names that Cap had given us, working out, in his head, the best route to follow. While we rode I thought over what Sam had said about not going home until this was over.

"I wish I had asked her to be my wife before all this got started," I mumbled. Of course Sammy heard me. Somehow Sammy seems to hear everything I say. He didn't say anything this

time, though, just nodded his head. We headed east on 7th Street, heading for Alameda. We would work our way back westward from there.

Central Station was a three-story brick building with a kind of dormitory on the third floor. Rooms for talking with suspects shared space with the Captain's office and general meeting room on the second and lockup cells lined the walls on the first. Usually the new cops without families or wives would stay there until they'd made enough to get a place of their own. Occasionally a fella like me would come along, who just wanted to start out on his own, prove to himself and his family that he could stand on his own two feet. Half the department was made up of guys who'd come to the Pueblo from some place else. Since I'd made the force I'd been staying up there most nights with just one other rookie, a guy from somewhere in Tennessee. Now it looked like we were going to have company. They would probably house the ship's captain and his officers elsewhere, but that only eliminated fifteen to twenty men. Things might be a bit crowded for a while.

In 1882, the Los Angeles Telephone Company received permission to erect telephone poles in the city, and the service had grown from those seven subscribers and three operators. But not everyone had a receiver, yet. The station had one but Jennie's family hadn't gotten around to having one put in their new house. Not only wouldn't I be able to see her, I wouldn't be able to talk with her; unless I stood outside and talked with her through the window and I wasn't sure her family would appreciate that. I didn't like the way this situation was shaping up. I didn't like it at all.