

The Glass Alibi

Chapter One

RUPTURE

It was a little past midnight in the high-end district of San Francisco's Old Barbary Coast. At any hour of the day, it would have been startling to see a woman as beautiful, as elegant and as terrified as Elizabeth Burnett storm out from the office building across the street from the Transamerica Pyramid.

With her face flushed in fury and indignation, Elizabeth rushed away on her delicate high heels, down the dimly lit sidewalk and past a sign that read, "Farnsworth Real Estate."

Betty Bloomfield ran out from the same office building. The athletically built, forty-something hoodlum was dressed in black skinny jeans, high heel boots and a fitted black leather jacket. She wore her jet-black hair combed straight back into a short ponytail. She grabbed Elizabeth's shoulder, spun her around and growled, "Hold on, Lady Burnett! We're not done with you yet."

"Take your hands off me, you creep!" Elizabeth yelled and shook herself loose.

"I told you to hold on, sister." Betty slammed Elizabeth back against the brick building.

"Make me!" Elizabeth yelled again.

"I've got a .32 in my pocket that could make this permanent." Betty grinned balefully through her clenched teeth.

"Just ask Sharon if she wants anything to happen to her piggy bank, you bloated idiot," Elizabeth scoffed as she started to walk away.

Betty gasped so hard it looked like she'd explode from rage. She pulled a small handgun from her jacket pocket, pointing it at Elizabeth with every intention of shooting her.

Sharon Farnsworth sauntered out from her office building as calm as a summer breeze dressed in a black silk business suit and sensible heels. She swung her black crocodile briefcase casually and spoke authority with years of practice, "Put that hideous thing away, Betty."

Betty still poised to shoot Elizabeth, clenched her teeth and screamed, "ARGH!"

"I mean now, Betty dear!" Sharon said more decisively.

Betty fumed but shoved the pistol back in her pocket.

Casually walking over and standing beside Betty, Sharon spoke calmly. "I will not plead with you, Elizabeth. My investment will take at least a year to mature. There's no way for you to pull out of it. Your money is safe. It's all very simple and quite legal."

"There's nothing legal about this deal and this was not as we planned it, Ms. Farnsworth."

Elizabeth spat rage. "So, if you think I'm intimidated by you—"

"Think again!" Betty growled as she slammed Elizabeth back against the brick wall.

Elizabeth stumbled on her heels again, barely keeping her balance. She began to walk away.

Betty started after her.

Sharon tapped Betty's shoulder and reined her in with her sophisticated manner.

"That's enough for now, Betty." Sharon continued calmly, "This isn't about plans or the law, Elizabeth. You bought into this and I'm telling you, you'll lose if you trifle with me."

"You have the audacity to think that I'll let my timetable be set back because of an investment you made without my permission and with my money?" Elizabeth glared venom-laced daggers at Sharon. "You have the impudence to think that I will not retaliate?"

"I've already done it," said Sharon. "So, what choice do you have but to trust me?" Sharon tilted her head back and laughed through her perfect white teeth.

Elizabeth stood her ground while straightening her loden green skirt and watch-plaid jacket. "Ms. Farnsworth, you know that my father will take whatever action he finds necessary to protect our resources."

Sharon laughed again. "Your father might be a prince in Europe, Elizabeth...but he's nothing over here."

Pointing at Elizabeth, Betty looked at Sharon and fumed, "Why doesn't she ever talk to me?"

Elizabeth scoffed but spoke only to Sharon. "How dare she interrupt me while I'm speaking?"

"Perhaps she thinks she's better than you, Betty. Isn't that right, Elizabeth?"

"You deceived me, Sharon." Elizabeth stared Sharon down then glared at Betty. "And she is nothing but a common thief... a low life trollop."

Betty's eyes smoldered with loathing.

Elizabeth walked up to Betty and sneered, "Listen, you unhinged psycho, I'm not afraid of you. Just ask your boss what would happen to both of you if you carried out any of your simpleminded threats against me."

Elizabeth watched Betty's eyes flash a brief and sinister glint of malevolence. It was unnerving, but she ignored it, and the chill that went up her spine as she turned and walked away.

Still somewhat alarmed by the look in Betty's eyes, Elizabeth glanced back, quickening her pace, past the cast iron streetlamps and Japanese maple trees that lined the sidewalk. She went on to a dimly lit parking lot next to Sharon's office building.

Sharon called out, "You're in over your head, Elizabeth."

Elizabeth turned around and said with confidence, "Seeing is believing, Sharon. I'll get my money back and I will ruin you. Count on it."

Elizabeth turned away and hurried into the parking lot. Sharon ran her hand along Betty's shoulders and smiled.

"Go now, Betty," she hushed. "Hurry, or you'll miss the fireworks."

Grinning a sadistic slasher's smile, Betty ran silently to the edge of the parking lot and hid behind a tree. She was just in time to watch Elizabeth walk up to her black Mercedes Benz, beep the car alarm and reach for the door.

Betty watched a tall, muscular man, dressed in the brown canvas-like clothing of a construction worker, bolt out of the bushes and yank Elizabeth away from the car.

Betty's eyes widened with joy. Her lips parted into another demented smile then, as if savoring ecstasy, she watched Elizabeth's fruitless struggle against the man who punched Elizabeth's face and let her fall to the ground.

Elizabeth slipped away into a dark, semi unconscious world. But she would remember the coarse beard against her face, the overwhelming smell of alcohol/cigarette breath and a familiar, gravelly voice that grunted, "That was a gift from Sharon and Betty. They want you to know that this can happen any time... any place." He knelt down beside her and whispered, "But don't you go away because I have another gift for you... a little surprise that's just from me."

Elizabeth recognized the voice. She knew in an instant, her assailant was Jamie Reynolds.

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Peeking out from behind the tree at the edge of the parking lot, Betty watched Jamie stand up. He nodded, bowed with a drunkard's flourish, then sent Betty a thumbs-up and staggered away.

Betty snickered again then hurried back to where Sharon stood refreshing her lipstick and admiring herself in her compact mirror. Looking up, she watched Betty make a slam-dunk gesture like an athlete who just scored the victory point.

“Happy now?” Sharon said as she continued to admire herself in her compact mirror.

“That was more satisfying than making a hundred thousand bucks in one night,” said Betty.

“It would be wonderful if you could stay with me in the city tonight, but my husband is still in town, and I have a million little details to attend to with him.” Sharon studied the chiseled features of Betty’s face then ran her hand along her waist.

“That’s cool. I’ve gotta stop by my apartment and pick up some things before I head down to Santa Cruz.” Betty looked disappointed.

“Here’s the money to pay off Jamie. He’s really strung out, so be careful around him.” Sharon reached in her purse and handed Betty an envelope. Betty put the envelope in her purse as they sashayed over to a Ford Mustang parked under a streetlight.

“Jamie’s nothing to worry about,” said Betty.

“I’m not worried, Betty. You’re the one who has to deal with Jamie and you never can tell with him.”

“Jamie can be Jekyll or Hyde and it won’t matter to me.”

“And why is that?”

Betty took a tiny bottle of perfume from her purse, dabbed some on her wrists and neck then tossed the bottle back in her purse. “Because,” she smirked confidence. “I’ll have Ian McGovern with me.”

“Well...” Sharon tossed her head back and laughed, “...there’s nothing like having your very own police force. When will you be back in San Francisco?”

Betty ran a finger along the wide white racing stripe that ran down the center of her dark blue Mustang. She said as she got in the car, “Probably on Monday. I’ll be in Santa Cruz for the rest of the week.”

“I have some business down there too. I expect to be in town before noon tomorrow.”

“Then I’ll stop by your office. Okay?”

Sharon smiled again. “Call before you come over... you know what a gossip my secretary is.”

Betty sighed hot breath. “I can hardly wait.”

Sharon blew Betty a kiss then sashayed over toward her ivory colored, 550 SL Mercedes Roadster.

Betty smiled victoriously and slowly drove off into the night, her rumbling exhaust reverberating throughout the concrete and glass canyons of San Francisco’s financial district.

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Back in the parking lot, Jamie Reynolds rose from the ground, pulled up his pants and buckled his belt. His haunted eyes darted around the parking lot like those of a psychopath already caught red handed. He ran his fingers through his greasy hair before lighting a cigarette and coughing out a plume of smoke. He checked the street and the parking lot again. There was no one watching. He hurried away, escaping anyone’s eye who might have seen him. He ran quietly down a narrow unlit red brick alley.

Enraged, shocked and bewildered, Elizabeth Burnett painfully pushed herself over and leaned against her car pulling her skirt down past her knees. Retching and wiping the blood that dripped from her swollen lip, she glared at Jamie Reynolds as he swaggered off into the cityscape and camouflage of night.

The otherwise quiet darkness reeked of invasion, Elizabeth’s labored breathing and exhausted groans. Grunting, she pushed herself up from the asphalt. Sweat covered her ashen skin. She shook off the pain, stood up and leaned heavily against her car. Straightening her skirt again, she

looked back towards Sharon's office and hissed into the night air, "I will see you in hell for this, Betty Bloomfield!"