



Chapter 1: Flayed

Jenny Lind City Hall, Police Department, Detectives Office, Kearny Street, San Francisco. February 12, 1884

“I tell you, Captain, she was flayed like a dressed deer. Clean down to the bone.”

Detective Sergeant Eduard Vanderheiden, or “Dutch” as his peers called him, was a tall, thin, bald, and agitated man with thick, auburn mustaches that curled on the ends like charmed snakes and flaming red chin whiskers. He also had a constant wink in his right eye. This nervous tic would often garner Dutch a drunken swing from a jealous husband’s fist if he were seated within arm’s reach of the Dutchman’s chin. At age forty-nine, Dutch was never afraid to gawk at a pretty lady. That was his problem.

Captain of Detectives, Isaiah Lees, sat, manning the telegraph machine that connected each of the three San Francisco districts. Lees wore a brown frock coat and vest with checkered pants and spit-shined Oxfords. His face had the jowly redness of his fifty-four years, his hazel eyes were deep-set, and his brow was almost always in a contemplative frown. His graying goatee and full head of curly-brown hair were well groomed. His one affectation was to wear a cape whenever he was on a case, and, as a result, many of the beat cops referred to him as “Sherlock.” Captain Lees, after all, was born in England.

“Now that makes sense. Tongs use very sharp hatchets to enforce their will. I would wager she was probably keeping money from her handler, or else it was

retribution for some other financial transaction. If twenty years in Chinatown taught me anything, it's taught me, money is the reason for everything." Lees stood up.

The First District of the San Francisco Police Department, with its station house at First and Mission Streets in Happy Valley, extended from California Street to Rincon Point. There was also a little lock-up or "calaboose" located in the First District station house. The Second District, with its station housed at City Hall at Pacific and Kearny, where Captain Lees and Detective Vanderheiden were now, was inside the former Jenny Lind Hotel, and it embraced the main business district. The Third District, with a station on Ohio Street, covered the area from Pacific Avenue north to North Beach.

Whenever a major crime was committed, the uniformed officer would send a message back to the Detectives' Office on Kearny, the Second District, and a detective would be dispatched to the scene. After the arrest, detectives took offenders to the main jail on Kearny.

"But she weren't no Tong girl. She was working at 814 Sacramento, next-door to the rooming house. A white working girl. You know, most of the Tongs got their Chinawomen working over on Sullivan's Alley or Bartlett's." Vanderheiden pointed to a location on a large map hanging on the wall in back of the telegraph machine.

"Those white girls sometimes work alone. Who's at the crime scene? It might become dangerous." Lees picked up his holstered Colt .45 and buckled it around his waist. He felt for his Bowie knife behind his vest and attached his captain's badge to his cape, which was draped over the back of the swivel chair.

"Cameron was first on scene. Oh, and don't be surprised if Cook shows up. Cameron knows to notify the Chinatown Squad when there's a ruckus. This ain't no ruckus, but we know Tongs can start a war over much

less.” Dutch winked at Lees. He followed the captain out the door, and they rode the elevator from the third-floor office down to the street.

Inside the elevator, Lees scowled up at the taller detective, whom he had known for twenty years on the force. They had both been beat policemen after the Civil War and earned their detective appointments through hard work and many arrests.

“Jesse Brown Cook and his band of holy rollers don’t understand how it is now that they passed the Exclusion Act. These Asiatics had no rights to begin with, and now that they can’t get over here by boat, the competition between these men has escalated. I’m not surprised by this murder, and there will probably be a Chinaman behind it. But kid Cook gets his marching orders from Sheriff Connolly,” Lees said.

“I seen Connolly call out the health team to fumigate every blasted gambling parlor, opium den, and hooker house in Chinatown. The mayor blames the chinks for every outbreak of typhus, malaria, and plague. But Connolly will poison the Chinatown rooms when the white kids in San Francisco so much as get the measles!” Dutch punched into the air with his fist.

Lees smiled. “You know how the excrement rolls downhill? Leland Stanford, the pope of the bluebloods, says the Chinese are inferior humans. He never liked it when the coolies defended themselves against the Irish workers who attacked them while working on Stanford’s railroad. And Stanford testified to Congress to get the Exclusion Act passed. He hand-picked Connolly, the Irishman, and Connolly picked Cook, the holy joe. The three of them think they’re saving Christian America from the Yellow Peril. America’s not supposed to exclude. It’s supposed to include. Everybody!”

“Okay, Captain, I know where you stand. You’re preachin’ to the choir here. Just don’t lose your temper

with the kid the way you did last week when they fumigated the room where the baby was.”

“That baby died, Dutch! All because of Cook and his band of holy rollers. But Cook was just the proximate cause. The underlying cause is men who think they’re better just because they’re rich, white and Christian.” Lees returned the scowl to his brow, and they both stepped out into the chilly night air of San Francisco.

Detectives Lees and Vanderheiden walked the four blocks down Kearny to Chinatown. Once a crime scene was secured, they knew there was no rush. Unless suspects were reported on the scene, the methodical process of criminal detection would be usually slow and arduous. Witnesses, if any, needed to be interviewed. Evidence, if any, needed to be collected and classified. And, of course, the journalists were always there to provide a circus atmosphere.

Captain Lees had always enjoyed working the Chinatown beat. Sailing from his home in Lancashire, England in 1848, he was an eighteen-year-old immigrant looking for adventure. When he landed in San Francisco aboard the *Mary Francis* on December 20, the Gold Rush had just begun. He worked as a laborer and engineer until he was drawn to the profession of law and order by performing a citizen’s arrest when he saw a man stabbed for \$300. He was hired by the newly established police department in 1854 and was promoted to captain four years later.

Now, as Captain of Detectives, Lees understood the social realities of being an immigrant in a strange land. Even though England was not China, he still believed the same fear and insecurities existed inside the men who came here to seek their fortunes.

Captain Lees had advanced in his chosen profession because he read a lot, and he was, like all good detectives, a student of human nature. He understood that humans

joined groups to protect themselves from perceived threats to their livelihood or their person.

In a strange way, Lees himself had joined the police department because he felt threatened by the burgeoning greed of San Francisco during the Gold Rush. He witnessed men behaving like monsters. Raiding gold mining claims, killing the owners or stealing their gold—or both. When the railroad construction began, he saw how the owners, like Stanford, would speak out of both sides of their mouths.

On the one hand, they told the ruling class what they wanted to hear that America should be kept white. On the other hand, if they wanted to maximize their profits, the way Stanford did, they turned around and imported Chinese workers from Guangdong Province in southern China.

Lees knew these rich bastards were sly, however, in that they contracted with the governing Manchu in China, who forced the men in their country to become indentured servants. These immigrants had to wear the Manchu pajamas and distinctive queue pigtails and swear their allegiance to their rulers back home.

Lees wondered if Stanford or any of the other rich men ever thought about what life would be like if they had to forsake their civil rights, give up their families, and travel inside overcrowded steamships to a new world where they were accepted only by the greedy businessmen who would then run their lives and determine their fortunes? These Chinese had no human rights to vote, to organize, to marry, to testify in court or to even socialize with their superiors outside these Chinatowns.

Lees knew history. The first Americans were British subjects fleeing the Crown's persecution of their religion and their strange ideas about independence and freedom. They became indentured to profiteering "companies" in England who sent them to the New World under contract.

Why couldn't men like Stanford see that these Chinese men were the same indentured citizens as their forebears had been? How was Buddhism any stranger than being a Quaker or a Catholic? Money! That's what changed their tune.

According to Lees, who was a pragmatic realist, most of the ills of a society and its persecution of minorities, could be traced to the unholy quest for profit at the expense of others. It had always been this way, and it was continuing in his beautiful San Francisco to this very day.

Chinatown's twelve blocks of crowded wooden and brick houses, businesses, temples, family associations, rooming houses for the bachelor majority, opium dens, and gambling halls were home to more than 22,000 people. Even though the population had fallen after the 1882 Exclusion Law was passed, the atmosphere was still bustling and noisy, with brightly colored lanterns, three-cornered yellow silk pennants denoting restaurants, calligraphy on sign boards, flowing costumes, hair in queues and the sound of Cantonese dialects being spoken in the alleyways and outdoor markets. In this familiar neighborhood, Lees and Vanderheiden knew, the immigrants found the security and solidarity to survive the racial and economic oppression of greater San Francisco.

As they came up to the crime scene at 814 Sacramento, it was exactly 8 PM, and Lees saw that Cameron had roped off the front of the small door leading into the one-room apartment. Next-door, at the two-story rooming house, he could see several white women hanging their heads out of room windows, and they smiled and waved down at him and his partner as they ducked under the rope and shook hands with Officer James Cameron who was standing on the front step.

"Jimmy! You come up and see me after you're done, you hear?" One of the women yelled down, and

Cameron's face reddened.

"Don't mind those wenches, Captain," said Cameron. "They get a toot on with that opium, and you can never tell what they'll come out with."

"I know, Jimmy," said Lees. "Got anything for us?"

"No, when I arrived, there was just the body on the bed inside. One of the girls next-door knew where I was on my beat, and she come running up and told me about hearing a scream inside this little bungalow. You'll see exactly what I saw when I entered. Of course, I didn't touch a thing, but there was no visible weapon anywhere in plain sight. Only her gruesome corpse lying on that threadbare cot. No furniture. Just that bed and a small bedside table with a gas lamp. I tell you, Cap, I got sick to my stomach. I never seen nothing so horrible in me life."

"Do we know the murdered woman's name?" Dutch asked.

"Yes, it's Mary McCarthy. She used to live at the Methodist Mission for Wayward Women, but I guess she decided to ditch the straight and narrow and try to make some money on her own. Don't know if she had a handler, but it don't seem like it. I asked a few of the girls next-door, and they said they never seen no men, besides Johnny boys, escorting her to or from the apartment. As you know, clients come inside. Pimps escort their dollies around town and are usually dressed like peacocks."

Captain Lees opened the red door, and it squealed on its hinges. He stepped through, and the two other men followed him. The single gas lantern was glowing on a small table next to the cot. Lees motioned toward the lamp.

"Hold it over the body, Dutch. I want to inspect her," he said.

The tall detective gently grasped the bronze lantern by its semicircular guards and held it up over the cot. The bright light shone down on what was left of Mary McCarthy, woman of the streets. In the corner of the room,

the sound of what must have been a rat scurrying into a hole made Lees swallow hard.

Lees immediately saw that the face of the victim had not been harmed. In fact, he could still see the rouged cheeks and red lipstick, and Mary's green eyes stared at him accusingly beneath heavy blue eyeshadow and dark brown eyebrows. Her reddish-brown hair was piled high and fastened with ribbons and a silver seahorse comb. However, beginning at the nape, there began a horrific display the likes of which Lees had never seen before on man or beast.

Dutch's description of a deer flaying was hardly an acceptable comparison. The pulling from the outer epidermal layers was just the beginning. After removing the skin, the slayer had then removed all of the muscles, tendons, and intestines from the poor woman's corpse, until all that was left lying on the cot was the skeletal remains of a once lovely, nineteen-year-old orphan by the Christian name of Mary McCarthy.

Lees' eyes roved over the body like two searchlights. He stopped when he saw something exposed in the pelvic region, between the woman's legs. "Bag," he said, and Officer Cameron quickly took out a small paper sack, from a cloth container around his waist, and handed it to his superior. Lees bent down, reached out, and extracted a piece of thin lamb's skin from the orifice, and he gently dropped it into the bag. "Mark it as number 1, Jimmy," the Captain told the young officer.

"Looks like one of them new Sheiks. They sell for twenty-five cents apiece in the *Examiner*. Advertised as married women's friends. Ha! That Comstock Law's making a lot of rich businessmen," said Dutch, chuckling.

"I guess she had a customer before this happened. Something about him made her want to use protection," said Lees. "But there's hardly any splatter on the floor, walls or even on the cot. How did this butcher do it? And,

more importantly, what did he do it with?"

"Maybe he was a butcher—a real one, Captain. We should investigate all the butcher shops in Chinatown. Maybe a Tong hatchet done this, but I think you hit the nail on the head. Only a butcher would know how to keep the blood from running like a river all over the place." Dutch shook his head.

"Yes, I think that's a good proposition. First, we'll run through my Rogues' Gallery of photographs to see if any butchers are there who've committed crimes. Then we'll go to the butchers without a record of criminal behavior." Captain Lees motioned for Dutch to put the gas lantern back on the little bedside table.

Outside, the Chinatown Squad wagon was pulling onto Sacramento with its loudly obnoxious siren and clatter of horses' hooves. Detectives Vanderheiden and Lees looked at each other and raised their eyebrows.

"Kid Cook," Captain Lees said.

"He will be cooking up something for certain," Dutch replied.

The door opened, and a tall, dapper, twenty-four-year-old sergeant entered, followed by three of his men. With a black-brush mustache, wide-set, piercing brown eyes and a commanding demeanor, he immediately took up position in the center of the small room. His blue uniform was ironed and spotless, and there was a yellow insignia of an Asian tiger stitched on his hat's crown.

"Gentlemen! I see you've secured the scene quite well, but now we can enjoy the real suspects. I'll question Little Pete and Big Jim. They have most likely punished this lass for overstepping her bounds. You fellows know how these hi-binders feel about freelancers. Without getting protection money, they can become quite monstrous."

Captain Lees let out an audible sigh. "Jesse, my lad, you know as well as I that Fong Jing Tong and Chin Ten

Sing are old men now. They haven't been active since the 1860s, and I would imagine they would readily confess to an assassination plot on Chester A. Arthur himself at this point in time. They are both senile, my good man."

"I can see you don't understand the ways of these pagan idolaters, Captain Lees. They worship their ancestors, and they always obey their wise elders. Sheriff Connolly has placed me in charge because I've studied their ways, and I've become quite proficient at weeding out the bad ones."

"At the grand old age of twenty-four, you've been able to cast a wide net of noxious fumes. I know. . ." Lees began, but Dutch grabbed his arm.

"Captain, I think we need to get back to the station and look over those photographs."

"All right, Detectives. We'll be keeping you informed. If I get a confession, I'll certainly let you know." Cook stepped over to the bed and looked down at the victim. "Oh, my! Would you look at that. Did you know, Captain, their Buddhist and Taoist religions require that corpse bones be shipped back to China for proper burial? Indeed. They also believe that the skin emits evil spirits, and so they will never handle a dead body until it's been stripped of the evil outer flesh. Our Christian coroners have been given that foul duty."

"I know all about the religious practices of the Chinese, my dear Cook. And those Christian coroners get paid handsomely for their work. If you look closely, however, you'll see that this woman is not a Chinawoman. I'm not saying there might not be a Chinese connection here, but as it stands right now, I'm open to any suspect—Chinese or other races." Lees opened the front door. "Good night, gentlemen," he said, and he stepped out onto the front step. Dutch followed him.

Outside, the local newspapermen were awaiting them. They had the new dry plate cameras, and they were

busy taking photographs of the scene and interviewing possible witnesses on the street. Now Lees and Vanderheiden were part of their picture-taking. One young man Lees knew as Boscombe, from the San Francisco Examiner, wearing a blue suit and matching derby, stepped forward, pen and paper tablet in hand.

“Any suspects, Captain? Find a weapon? How long has she been dead? Can we also get inside to get a photo of the body?”

Lees was surprised by the young reporter’s last question. “Also? We have not allowed any person to come inside this crime scene, Boscombe. You know the rules. Nobody allowed in until we’ve gathered all evidence and questioned all possible witnesses.”

“But there was a reporter inside earlier. I passed him on my way here. His name is Kwong. George Kwong. He’s a reporter for *The Oriental*. He told me he got a picture of the white prostitute who was killed on Sacramento. His smile was wider than a Cheshire Cat’s. When I got here, your man already had the rope up.”

Lees knew that name. Kwong. Yes, that was the name of the leader of the Sam Yup Company, Andrew Kwong. Andrew also owned part interest in *The Oriental*, so that would explain how his son, George, got the job. Kwong was one of the Christian converts who got money from the Methodist Church to publish the only newspaper allowed in Chinatown. As the leader of the businessmen’s company, he was probably the wealthiest Chinaman in San Francisco.

“As to your first three questions, Boscombe, no, no, and we won’t know until the coroner gets here.” Lees stepped past the gathered reporters, who were shouting out questions to him, which he ignored. From experience, Lees knew that no matter how he would answer the questions put to him, they would, most of the time, get transformed into something outrageous, to attract

readership for their papers. Besides, Cook would certainly give them enough nonsense to fill their papers for weeks.

“I can see the headlines already, Dutch. INNOCENT CAUCASIAN DAMSEL MUTILATED BY BARBAROUS CHINESE RELIGIOUS CULT, or some such balderdash.” Lees spat into the gutter. “However, I do want to meet with the Six Companies’ leaders to investigate what they know about this murder—especially Andrew Kwong and his son, George. How did George get wind of this murder before anybody else? Why would that Christian rag want to promote the killing of a white woman?”

All around them, the noise of the Chinatown streets permeated the evening’s glow, as the wispy fog began to creep across the pavement ahead, like the premonition of some curse beginning to cast its spell over the entire City by the Bay.

All of Chinatown and soon, most likely, most of Guangdong Province would be aware of the murder investigation. Kid Cook had taken it upon himself to arrest fourteen of the leaders of the Tongs. He had taken them to Sheriff Connolly’s station, so Captain Lees was not informed until one of his detectives, Danny Carey, was over there because his best informer, Li Wong, had been arrested, and he discovered Wong was locked inside the jail on Kearny Street.

Lees knew the only thing really separating the Tongs and street justice was the sheriff’s department. San Francisco had decades of vigilante law before the department was formed, and blood vengeance was still in the hearts of many citizens, as a holdover from the frontier and Gold Rush days.

Lees had learned to work with both the good and bad members of Chinatown. To the sheriff’s department, however, the Tongs were always the bad men, never to be trusted

Lees knew better. There were Tongs he could work with to keep the overall peace, and they were much more valuable to him outside than they were locked-up. He also believed it was a better use of his time to follow the leads he had already uncovered in this case, especially the one that pointed to George Kwong, the son of Andrew Kwong, head of the Sam Yup Company. However, Captain Lees knew there was no such thing as cornering a man of his reputation. It would cause an immediate response from the entire community.

Therefore, Lees was going to arrange a meeting with all of the Six Companies' leaders at one time so that suspicions would not be raised. If and when he procured enough evidence to make an accusation or arrest, all of the leaders would be informed so that possible violence might be averted. Of course, Kid Cook and his arrests of Tong leaders had already placed all of Chinatown on high alert, and this was not good for Lees and his investigation. Again, it seemed, Lees was fighting his inner foe: the conflict between his police department and that of the freewheeling and unrestrained Sheriff's Department that provided the captain with more obstacles than they provided assistance.

Once back at the Office of Detectives on Kearny, Captain Lees told Detective Vanderheiden to arrange the meeting with the leaders of the Six Companies in the morning. Before retiring to his apartment on Montgomery Street, Lees did a thorough search through his photographic records of arrested and convicted felons.

There were seven who had listed their occupation as "butcher," but none of them had a sexual assault or other such conviction. Two were arrested for larceny, one for assault, and four for drunken vagrancy. Only one was Chinese. Lees decided to delegate the questioning of these seven to one of his detectives, of which there were five, not including him and his partner. Perry O'Brien would

probably be the best candidate, as he was not working on a case presently.

As Isaiah Lees leaned back in his chair with his feet on the desk, he thought about what questions he would ask of these leaders, and he remembered yet another connection to the victim. Mary McCarthy had previously been a member of the Methodist Mission for Wayward Women. He knew the woman, Rachel Benedict, the appointed head of that mission. She would need to be interviewed as well.

Finally, he also realized, Andrew Kwong received the money for his newspaper, *The Oriental*, from the Methodist Church in San Francisco. With those dots connected, the Kwongs became even more suspect. Was there perhaps some rivalry between father and son, which had caused one of them to murder young Mary McCarthy?

Lees knew he needed to find out who had visited McCarthy the evening of her murder. Was it one of the Kwongs or some other member of the Six Companies? Did McCarthy perhaps begin to blackmail one of her clients? She was, after all, a freelance whore.

Of course, at this stage of the investigation, her client might have been anybody, and his hunch that this person was connected to Chinatown might be wrong. One thing was certain. The inscrutable way the Chinese could keep what white men called a “poker face,” would be an added difficulty when he questioned them all at their meeting.