

CHAPTER ONE

August 14, 1951.

“They stole him from me,” cried the hysterical voice. “They stole him from me.”

Jake Weaver recognized the voice on the phone. Marion Davies. One-time actress and longtime mistress of William Randolph Hearst, the owner of Weaver’s newspaper, the *Los Angeles Herald-Express*.

“Stole whom, Miss Davies?” Jake knew the answer. There’d been a death watch for a week now at the Hearst mansion on Beverly Drive.

“My Willie. He died today.” Sobbing, having trouble getting the words out.

“I’m so sorry, Miss Davies.”

“I was asleep upstairs, Mr. Weaver. I’d been sitting up with Willie for so long, for so many days, the doctor insisted I take a sedative. When I woke up the place was quiet. I asked the nurse where he was. She said he was dead. His body was gone, whoosh, just like that. They took him. He belonged to me and I to him. And now he was gone.”

Jake knew that Hearst’s son, William Junior, had been staying in the guest house along with Richard Berlin, president of the Hearst Corporation, part of the death watch.

“The nurse said they told her not to bother me, not to even wake me up when the hearse came to take him off to the mortuary.” That’s really cruel, Jake thought bitterly.

Jake liked Miss Davies. He felt her pain like a nail to the chest. He himself had visited Hearst three days ago. Unable to get out of bed, wasted away to about 120 pounds, the old man had feebly placed a hand on Jake’s head as if bestowing a papal blessing.

“You . . . were always . . .” The words coming slowly, so softly Jake had to strain to hear them. “. . . my favorite bloodhound.”

Hearing that, Jake couldn’t help the tear that began to trickle onto his cheek. He’d worked for this American journalism giant for fourteen years. He’d covered a war for him, risked his life in Nazi Europe for him, led a crusade against the underworld for him.

“You didn’t even get to say goodbye, Miss Davies? I’m sorrier that I can say.”

“What can I do, Mr. Weaver?” Pitiful desperation in her voice. “What can I possibly do?”

Jake knew that Bill Hearst, Richard Berlin, and Millicent Hearst, who’d refused all these years to grant her husband a divorce, would fight Davies for control of the Hearst fortune. His will had been vague on that, or so he’d heard from newspaper gossips. He also was aware of California’s community property laws.

Marion Davies had been the old man’s faithful common-law wife for three decades. There’d never been any doubt that her love for him was real. She was no gold-digger. Miss Davies had made a lot of money in Hollywood and had invested it well. She’d even lent Hearst a million dollars during the Depression before his news empire’s remarkable recovery during World War II.

Jake knew that now she could get royally stiffed on this.

He had been the *Herald-Express* military writer for nine years but recently was bumped up to assistant managing editor. He still kept his hand in, though, writing the occasional news story.

Jake felt humbled that the spunky one-time actress had turned to him in her desperation. Over the years they’d developed a rapport and she’d sometimes asked his advice on small things such as what to give W.R. for his birthday.

He knew that the Hearst sons and their mother Millicent had been circling for days waiting for the old man to breathe his last. Now the birds of prey had pounced.

“I’ll see what I can do, Miss Davies,” Jake said. “I’ll see what I can do.”