

A Woman Named Guernica

By Guillermo Reyes

Don't judge Gwenn Andauer for her one and only murder---at least that's what her defense might sound like once she comes to trial later this year. Since her arrest, she hasn't denied the killing and police have reportedly found a confession that she penned in long hand years before her arrest. The forty year old police woman, who was celebrating seventeen years of service in the San Diego Police Department before she was arrested, stored her confession in a plain folder and left it in a drawer in her desk at the downtown Imperial office, and was dated two years before her arrest. Through nearly two decades of service, Gwenn---the daughter of an American CIA officer and a Chilean mother ---had risen in the ranks of San Diego police to head the sex crimes unit. She won several community service awards and an assortment of trophies and medals for running San Diego marathons that used to adorn her office.

Gwenn was born in the American section of the Panama Canal.

"In case you ever want to become president," her father told her early in life, "Remind people you were born on American territory."

She was barely ten years old and was thankful that she had a father who actually thought of his daughter as a future president.

Variations of "a woman's gotta dream big" were her late father's favorite sayings. She was an only child. All the energy that might have gone to a son instead were placed on her and, as a child, she imagined herself as a combat fighter in a Seals unit, liberating some island like Grenada from Soviet and Cuban invaders. She gravitated instead towards police work. Her father encouraged her throughout her youth to start by dreaming big but also concretely and specifically to plan ahead, and then one day, he'd been found dead one morning at his desk at home, a burst ventricle within him. She'd been nineteen then. Gwenn was left alone to care for her mother, a Chilean national of German descent who was homebound for various personal eccentricities later labeled "depressive." Her mother had originally named her daughter "Guernica," after the Spanish town invaded and pummeled to death by the Nazis during the Spanish Civil War. Guernica grew up to hate the name. An occasional Picasso fan might have asked if she was named after the painting, but the painting was also inspired by an infamous aerial bombardment---and who wants to be named after that? At ten years old, Guernica chose to be called Gwenn, but kept her legal name and did her best to avoid introducing her friends to her mother who often kept calling her by the deadliest female name since Medea. (Mrs. Andauer has become something of a local celebrity in San Diego herself during this entire ordeal, giving interviews to the press in which she claims her daughter's been the victim of a conspiracy involving the CIA and the Communists in some unholy alliance---we the people in the media have obliged her with attention, and one must admit Mrs. Andauer's theories have been great for the ratings of local shows which rarely compete with national broadcasts.) In college, Gwenn called herself a "modern chick" but not a feminist. She believed in a woman's right to choose, and urged her gay friends to get married already even in the 90s when the issue wasn't particularly on the political

radar, and she empathized with racial minorities as well. She often counted as one, too, depending on how she filled out her forms. Her mother hailed from the southern edge of Chile where the Antarctica blew winds to challenge international ships trying to cross the Strait of Magellan (nowadays more for tourism than commerce), so technically Gwenn could pass for “Latina” even though her mother’s ancestry were traced to Germanic/Aryan roots. But the SDPD wouldn’t have gotten away with not hiring her regardless of her background because she wanted it that badly and nobody was going to stop her. Still, she never explained to her mother that she’d gotten her job as part of a minority and female set-aside program. Her mother wouldn’t have stood for it, no more than her father might have had he been alive.

“That minority stuff gives me the creeps,” her mother told the press after the arrest. “If they want to be judged by the content of their character, I don’t understand the need for special legislation favoring them....”

Her father had been an American adventurer who had worked for the CIA in Latin America in the early 70s. The nature of his work remains classified, but Gwenn admitted to this interviewer that it was connected to the CIA’s support of the military against the various socialist or progressive movements in that region, including the freely elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile. Decades would pass before the official “Pinochet Files” would be released to the public to reveal an extensive American presence in the military coup that overthrew Allende.

“Your father was a hero,” her Mother told her, repeatedly while growing up. “But he wasn’t even allowed to get credit for it, and you can bet he would have taken it. He saved an entire continent from Communist oppression. Kissinger was a wimp! He gave in to the liberal vice of hiding the achievements of brave men and women who fought for liberty!”

Mother’s family had fled Germany as the allies had moved in on Berlin. A couple of ships later had them landing in Buenos Aires, Argentina. A flight later to Santiago, and they joined a family of German immigrants in southern Chile, in the city of Valdivia which was nearly destroyed by the strongest earthquake ever recorded in human history in 1960. “The earth was trying to shake me off,” she told a local TV interviewer because mother made it clear that tectonic plates were all about her, a punishment for her sins. Mother felt she had plenty of them to shake off, but rarely spoke up about them. Gwenn’s father, Roger Andauer, had never even proposed properly to her mother, Margarita Schweikert. She tagged along and fled with him to the U.S. once the Chilean coup was wrapped up in a bow like a gift to the Nixon Administration and soon they were married in the Canal Zone where he was stationed for five years. Mrs. Andauer doesn’t even remember a ceremony or a party. It just happened, she told me years later when I interviewed her for an article.

But the coup didn’t exactly correlate with the very different type of murder Gwenn herself would eventually be accused of. The killing of Emily Smythe in San Diego wasn’t exactly an act of *realpolitik* as approved by Henry Kissinger and the CIA. Emily Smythe was the young wife of Arnulfo Lopez-Ellenstein, the Mexican-American young man who had split up with Gwenn at a time when she had entertained illusions of eternity with him. Eternity was a crucial word, a belief system really, one that gives heavy emphasis on the ideal. *You are mine forever*. That’s the key to this belief. Either you’re mine or no one else may have you. A young

woman without any experience with men such as Guernica seemed to believe it. “I practiced it,” she says today. “I was a blind follower to such a doctrine.”

Mrs. Andauer told reporters she first noticed her daughter had a problem with men when the matriarch woke up one morning in her San Diego home and found Gwenn sleeping on the couch in the living room. She had moved to the dorms only a few days earlier.

“What are you doing here?” The mother asked. She noticed the young woman had slept with her average Southern California wear, shorts and tank top, and had only let go of messy, dusty sandals that lay on the edge of the couch looking wet and torn. “What happened to you?”

“I walked from campus to the bus stop, and then took the bus downtown and connected to one in North Park, and just threw myself on the couch. I was too tired to even brush my teeth.”

“You are supposed to be living on campus. Don’t tell me you ‘miss mommy because I won’t have that. It’s pathetic for the daughter of a CIA officer.”

“Don’t worry, mother, I didn’t miss you one bit at the dorms,” said her daughter, truthfully.

“Fine. Tell me what happened, and then get the hell out.”

“I lost all track of time, mother.”

Mother understood too well. “It’s a man, isn’t it? One of your professors.”

“No, not one of my professors, just a boy. It’s silly actually.”

“I’m sure it is. But I’m curious. Tell me—and then go. Don’t forget deodorant.”

On her first week on campus, Gwenn spotted Arnie walking along toward one of his classes in those long passage ways with verdant landscapes that makes a campus look like a pleasant afterlife. The young man was a sight to behold, this rather tall, if lanky, presence. She noticed his legs exposed and the color of what appeared at first to be perfect, evenly tanned skin but it was actually natural olive skin that matched that special hook nose of his, clunky and awkward but somehow loveable, and (to get back to those legs,) yes, what a sight they were due to the revealing clothes of an average fall semester in San Diego---those ever present shorts and tank tops with logos that everyone on campus seemed to wear as if the youth of America were walking advertisements for corporate America. On most people, the look simply revealed that Americans were overweight, marked with bulges and pimples and unflattering tattoos, even on the women, but on a boy like Arnulfo Lopez-Ellenstein, it was the closest thing to sex the eye could spot in the daylight, a form of walking flesh revealing itself to the senses of anyone who looked. His legs, well-exercised, revealing biker’s calves, and his arms, defined and cut, without exaggerated hulks, were enough to stir something in her, to make Gwenn feel disoriented.

Arnie was something to behold. And someone to follow. Gwenn left behind her book, her car keys, her purse and her wallet. She wanted to see for herself if all roads led to him. It led her to find an off-campus apartment building where the boy walked in, looking carefree, as if freed from all outside obligations. He lived on the first floor and the windows generously opened to let

in the sunshine and the cool marine layer of a breeze. As the sun set, it was easy enough for her to hide behind a set of bushes landscaped to look like little bird cages.

“You actually stood outside all night watching him from a hide out?” asked her mother, looking amused. She hadn’t forgotten that in high school, Gwenn had followed one of her male teachers home and was discovered sleeping on a shed in the backyard of the home, scaring the teacher’s wife to death. “And, don’t tell me, you left behind your purse?”

“That’s right. I fell asleep in the bushes and an old lady walking her dog found me when the dog almost peed on me.”

Gwenn ran back to campus only to find her purse gone with all her credit cards and her car keys. The only thing left were a couple of text books from a Forensics class that nobody cared enough about to steal. Mother helped her call the credit card companies to put a stop to the old credit line and solicit new cards and then she drove her daughter to the DMV to get a new license.

While they waited at the DMV, the mother asked, “What’s so special about this boy anyway?”

“He just stirred me up,” she said, and didn’t know how else to explain it. “I had to see him at home.”

“So what does he do there?”

“Oh, stuff.”

Stuff? Her daughter had stood outside the window just to watch “stuff.” The boy had poured himself some sugary cereal for dinner. A cereal for champions. He also dined on a single protein bar wrapped into a thin plastic layering. His two roommates, also students, came home and dined on take-out pizza with beer on the side, which Arnie had responsibly kept away from. They all watched together an episode of *The Simpsons*, and from the window, so did Gwenn.

“And you still felt stirred up after that?” The mother asked with wonder. “He sounds like an average twerp.”

“I knew you wouldn’t understand.”

“Oh, I understand all right,” she said. “I just don’t want to keep calling the credit card company after you leave your stuff unattended.”

“Mother, it won’t happen again.”

She kept her word. There were no more misplaced credit cards or missing purses. But Gwenn wasn’t through with Arnie. It turned out that, on her first social event, a freshman orientation hour, the main student representative was a young senior assigned to greet the new class. That was Arnie Lopez-Ellenstein. That’s where she learned his name and learned that her first impressions were justified.

Average, ever so average did he seem in retrospect, but that's not how his smile struck her at that function. It wasn't simply the solid construction of the hook-nosed Aztec face. It was also the way he carried himself, the way he confidently greeted her. It took care of her. It reassured her. It seemed to imply this is it, whatever it was, that inscrutable "it" that fomented confidence and stirrings of forever. He was one of those socially active young men who understood the importance of gestures---a welcoming, kind word made her feel at home on campus. He was the perfect Mexican boy---Mexican-American really, and the family was well-bred, local business owners of some tire chain store. She didn't care about tires one bit, but she understood success and the discipline needed to stay afloat in a competitive world of tires. But his parents could have sold scented candles just as well. She just wanted him adjoined to her like a plug. Up until then she had been a stable, if ambitious young woman with the drive to succeed in college, to establish her own voice as the daughter of an intrepid warrior like her father, but now she also felt connected to something even more primal. To her womanhood perhaps? How adorable and yet vibrant and manly he looked in his suit, a dark woolen thing most likely bought for him by his mother. This much good taste couldn't have been anything other than a feminine instinct---his mother had successfully trained him to please women. He didn't even realize how effective his gestures proved to be on her. She was so overjoyed that she immediately spun into fatalism---she would never impress him. She was shapeless at the time, a book worm, a dork. Other young women were clearly more attractive in their warm weather skirts, fashionable and airy. Her shorts were average and more infantile than youthful, and she had failed to dress up for this function. But then she brightened up and understood her challenge. Gwenn was immediately elated by the goal and the singular aim of pursuing him. She would woo. She would conquer. She would triumph over the other weaker girls. Gwenn believed she would make the right impression with consistent perseverance. She would create an aura of invincibility about her, and he must not be allowed to think he could ever turn her down.

How painful it all seemed now, sweet, and melancholy, seventeen years later. To think she had been in love that blindly, and it was a genuine feeling, a dizzying pain that kept her up at night, that made her imagine things and entertain grand illusions of endless time.

They had gone out for four whole months, an eternity. He knew the right well-lit restaurants overlooking the ocean, places his own mother must have recommended, too. Gwenn even imagined this future mother-in-law --a woman she never met but imagined as part of her future--as being practical, civilized, a classy woman who'd reared her son in the specifics of politeness, and knew where women wanted to be taken. And he was all that, suave, and smooth-talking, and welcoming, a trilingual kid who had learned his parents' Spanish along with his native English and taken a couple of years of Arabic. She didn't know why Arabic, but it sounded right after he explained he yearned to become a diplomat and travel beyond the confines of San Diego. He was interested in hearing about how her father had joined the CIA, but she couldn't reveal parts of family history because they were still classified information. He still found it riveting that she had been raised in this type of family, connected to diplomacy, even if an "underground" one. She was convinced she had made an impression.

"Look at this crap!" Mother threw the social section of the Sunday *San Diego Union* at her daughter that ill-fated morning. The folded paper hit the cup of coffee, shaking it, almost turning it over.

“Calm down, mother. What are you talking about now?”

Gwenn had gone to visit mother on one of her days off from the university. Mother lived in North Park at the time, in a house that had to be rebuilt after a Cessna collided with a commercial airliner over the neighborhood in 1978 and debris and body parts fell from the sky on a perfect sunny day. The original owner would not rebuild in a place that reminded her of the deadliest day in San Diego history. Mother relished the challenge and said that it was the safest place on earth. Imagine the odds, she told her daughter, of another lethal accident event taking place there on the precise same spot, so the odds made it the safest place on earth. Mother had not only bought the ruined house with father’s life insurance, but fixed it, and the two of them had moved in together. Gwenn never felt at home. She moved closer to campus as soon as she was accepted to the university and she still had bad dreams of airliners tearing apart in the sky over her home. Mother slept soundly from day one. The Chilean Germans were a confident people, mother reminded her, a people who stared into the darkness and challenged it to a duel.

“That Mexican wheeler-dealer!” Mother told her in regards to Arnie’s announcement of his engagement to another woman. “You sure know how to pick ‘em.”

Gwenn thought she and Arnie were still seeing each other. Arnie had mentioned a need to finish a senior thesis project for a political science class. He was applying to grad schools in international relations and thought his thesis would be his main sample writing, his calling card. She left him alone and respected his need for “distance.” That was clearly enough distance for him to announce his engagement to Emily Smythe.

Now mother had caught it: a wedding ceremony was being announced in the *San Diego Union* for early June and Gwenn read about it like anybody else in the city. She went over the details repeatedly: the woman’s name was Emily, the daughter of a Phoenix shoe retailer; the girl was studying English Lit at UC San Diego, and they were now marrying at some La Jolla resort in a month. Gwenn thought she could have forgiven the news if only Arnie had managed to tell her up front, but now she realized she had been a thing on the side, a sexual outlet at best. Emily’s picture revealed a certain feebleness of mind, a weakness, and virgins like her seemed silly and pliable to Gwenn, and easily removed, too. Removal was the right word. She had played with that word in her mouth until her lips could utter it with a certain flair and practicality. A nuisance needed to be removed like a pest.

What a distraction to her own ambitions. She was already studying for the exam to enter rookie training at the San Diego police department. She was serious about law enforcement. She could not be thinking about something as atrocious as...as...she couldn’t even say it. Removal?

“Since then, my daughter outgrew any signs of girlhood,” Mrs. Andauer revealed to an interviewer years later in one of those morning shows that pops up at 6am at a local channel. “She might have struck you as a weakling then. But the woman you’d meet in a few years developed her looks, her frame, her muscles even. She took up surfing, for godssake! She learned to bust down doors and chase pimps around until they were out of breath when she threw them in the slammer.”

Gwenn became the San Diego police woman she felt qualified to become with her qualities of strength and competence. She dated men, some on the force, others not. She felt she would eventually find one to marry, but she wasn't in a rush. How

wholesome she seemed, in and out of uniform, an active woman who surfed in her spare time, who went dancing with her friends to some of the surfer hangouts by the beach, and also to some of the sexually ambivalent clubs in Oceanside frequented by some of the marines. She experienced a cheap thrill inhabiting that awesome world of the daring, the closeted, the passionate---young men who understood their mission in life, to serve the military, and yet to hide their sexuality. She had a special weakness for that type of double life---found it touching in fact. It was the life of the sun, the beach, and youthful energy and secrets. She felt right at home.

A couple of years later, when she was still out on patrol, she parked her cruiser outside the condo building where the young couple lived. Arnie was out. She had made sure of it. She had informed herself about his schedule, knew about the internship with the San Diego Institute of International Studies where he often attended diplomatic functions and where he worked as an intern. During that week, he was showing around visitors from allied European countries, people who visited military facilities in the U.S. and then liked to be escorted around the dynamic night life of Southern California with a quick trip to Hollywood on the side. Diplomats used San Diego as their excuse to party on behalf of their countries, and the affable intern Arnie seemed happy to comply. The Cold War had fizzled out, crumbled like the Berlin Wall itself, and the world of the main players seemed permanently suspended in peace. It was the end of history, Professor Fukuyama said, and people in San Diego in particular wanted to believe it. Without the Communist Party to kick around any longer, it was party time.

Emily preferred to stay at home working on her dissertation on all three of the Brontë sisters, which was taking years because she clearly didn't have the discipline to follow a consistent program of study, or at least that's how Gwenn thought of Emily, the woman who couldn't hack it, not marriage, not work, not study. In contrast, look at Gwenn. She had become a proud member of the SDPD while the sap, Emily, remained a struggling student. How long, Emily? How long, before he realizes you are going nowhere, that you can't live up to your potential, let alone fulfill a simple ambition such as completing your degree?

Emily opened the front door to her charming little Spanish-style bungalow. Daddy put the down payment, and Emily had chosen it for location, expensive, but clearly not exclusive. The place didn't even have a security gate. Any stranger could park his car on the street, and invite himself in. Herself, in Gwenn's case.

"May I help you, officer?" Emily asked. She stood, wet, wearing a robe with a towel on her head looking like a turban.

Emily watched helplessly as the officer forced her way in.

"Officer, is there something wrong?" Asked Emily. "Has something happened to my husband, Mr. Lopez? Please!"

At the sound of the man's name, referred to him with a strange formality she found absurd, Gwenn reacted the way one does to an insult. It tore into her. It brought back an ugly

feeling that she once had felt when mother first threw a copy of the social section of the *San Diego Union* at her face announcing the engagement. “Arnie’s just fine,” she said bitterly. “Never been better apparently!”

Then she couldn’t go on. She threw herself down on the couch and she couldn’t look up. She was suddenly weeping, out loud, with that type of sobbing that she had seen in movies, Greek old ladies in heavy veils over their faces crying at a funeral like in, say, *Zorba the Greek*. That was absurd, too, she realized, and hated to succumb to tears.

“What is wrong, officer?” Emily asked trying to seem sympathetic. No, of course, she couldn’t understand, thought Gwenn. The asshole hadn’t told Emily at all about her. Her name hadn’t even crossed his lips. Arnulfo had chosen to erase her from history altogether.

“Officer, do you need....water?”

“Fuck water!” She shouted. “And fuck you, Emily!”

Emily was stunned into silence. “You obviously aren’t here on an official capacity, officer. Perhaps it’s best you leave because you wouldn’t want me to call the police. How would this look to your fellow officers, or to your boss, the chief of police?”

“Are you threatening me?”

“No, no, I wouldn’t do that,” said Emily, now royally backing down. “I just want to make sure you’ll be OK. He did mention you once, ah, Gwenn,” she added, but stopped. She decided it was best to be quiet now.

It was an honest voice, an earnest and polite face, a pretty young woman with a petite figure, who looked even better in person and vulnerable in her bath robe and wet hair. Gwenn wasn’t about to confide in her though. Who knew what Emily might do? Gwenn drove home thinking this was it for her, for her tenure as a cop, for all those years she had dreamed of dying as a member of the force. She had her department-issued gun with her. It was as useful as any to put an end to it, to her life altogether. She had sunk this low, losing her composure in front of the enemy. But instead, she slept, a deep bitter sleep that took her back in time to childhood, to memories of travel, to foreign lands where her father kept landing in a jumbo jet, leaving her alone in a hotel with her mother, and then when the job was done, they would fly out together. It was a life of quick results. The deed was done, and father left behind a military junta firmly in place. She dreamt of bodies piled up like so much debris, mounted onto trucks, then dumped in the ocean from helicopters, a favorite practice of the military juntas of South America. The image would haunt her dreams like the ones of bodies, living, breathing, human beings that fell from the sky over San Diego on that day in 1978 when the planes collided. And then there was the memory of that history teacher, Mr. Miller, loveable Mr. Miller, the chemistry teacher who had once left her mesmerized with his blue eyes and a muscular body that looked so perfect for a man in his 30s, rigorous, experienced, like a body that thrives under the pressure of weights. It was true that she’d fallen asleep on the shed in the backyard of his home. She had meant to spy on his wife and children, but then something overcame her, a fatigue that had made her lower her head as if curling up into a fetal position and pass out. Mr. Miller had been her first crush and her

first case of stalking but her body had betrayed her. She wasn't able to follow through at the time. She'd grown stronger and more insistent since.

When she woke up that morning, she got herself into her uniform, and felt ready to walk into the office, to ask to speak to the chief, then offer her resignation.

When she signed in at work, the boss greeted her like at any other day. There were no phone calls from Arnulfo Lopez-Ellenstein, nor from his young wife, Emily. She had to wonder why the young woman had chosen to keep her secret. Surely she must have asked her husband questions. That woman is in the past, he must have reassured her. She must have been easy to convince, the sap. Or Arnulfo himself was the type of naïve young man who thought Gwenn, his alleged pursuer, would just go away. She went about her duties as normal. She was interviewing for a promotion to work on an investigative unit to weed out sexual traffickers.

She woke up a few weeks later with a certain feeling she had never felt before. No, I won't go away, she told herself. I won't be invisible. He must know I exist. Finding out about his engagement to the shoe seller's daughter in a social section of the *San Diego Union* had been the ultimate blow—and she had lived with it all these years. If he hasn't called, then one day he will, she figured, when he finally pays attention.

Little Emily was dead within two weeks, strangled to death. Gwenn went home that night thinking that in no time, the San Diego police, the ATF, the FBI, even the CIA, someone, anyone would surround her apartment complex, demand her surrender in some dramatic spectacle televised via satellite. It was exhilarating to think of it, but couldn't contain that emotion. Her exhaustion shone through instead. She slept and dreamt of bodies falling from the sky once again.

The next day she pulled herself out of bed, feeling fatigued, as if a cold were coming on, and she wondered what her story would be. It wasn't as if she had been so entirely careful. She had worn gloves but forensic advances in DNA testing were slowly being instituted at the time. The SPDP hadn't yet adopted the technique of testing everything for DNA evidence. Still, she was aware of the advances in the science and knew the risks.

She returned to work to find the homicide unit hopping as usual. One of her detective colleagues volunteered information about a gang of Mexican boys, "illegals," hitting a couple of neighborhoods that previous night, robbing residents, and they had left one woman dead, a young woman who must have surprised them by being home alone. Detective Wynard asked her to come into his office. She felt a rush of anticipation, a little thrill in the air.

"A certain Mr. Smythe says you paid a visit to his daughter a couple of weeks ago and that you were once the lover of her husband, Arnulfo Lopez-Ellenstein."

"What exactly is he saying about me?" She asked. "I don't understand."

"His daughter was found dead last night in their apartment."

"Oh. I don't know what to say---my God."

“We think she might have been the victim of the Sepulveda gang---those illegal kids running around breaking into people’s homes, but then the old man decided that you are her husband’s ex-lover and, you know, we need to follow every lead, you understand. So...Why did you pay her a visit a few weeks ago?”

“Look, I didn’t visit. It’s true that I dated Arnie back in college---”

“Is that his nickname?”

“Yes, it is. Our relationship was over two years ago. I haven’t been in touch since. And I’ve never met her.”

“So where did the old man get this idea then, that you paid a visit?”

Emily had talked after all. Gwenn imagined her reaching for the phone after she left that first time, calling daddy back in Cowtown, Arizona, letting him know that her husband’s ex had knocked on the door and she was a police woman. She imagined that tone of surprise in the old man’s voice. A police woman? That doesn’t sound right, honey. Did you call the cops? She hadn’t called the cops, but he, the old man, did.

“Like I said, I never met Arnie’s wife,” she said, firmly, and held her eye contact steady.

She also realized that her discipline would pay off at a moment like this. She had never sent letters desperately pleading with Arnulfo. She had left no paper trail to identify her as the jilted woman. Her only appearance had been recently, two years after her break up, and she had gone after the wife, not the husband. Arnulfo had no evidence of the threat Gwenn represented to his wife, and she could hear Arnulfo himself reassuring Emily that she wasn’t a peril to her, that Officer Andauer was a cop for godssake. A cop.

The detective looked satisfied. “Alright, well, yes....Lopez said as much, thinks his father-in-law has a tendency to panic. I’m sure our lead with the Sepulveda brothers is solid, but the old man insists that you came in and scared his daughter half to death.”

“I do not go around San Diego scaring house wives half to death.”

“I had to ask, you understand.”

“I understand.”

The Sepulveda brothers were charged with murder. Their robbing spree had resulted, in fact, in the accidental killing of an older woman just six months previously when according to their confession she’d come at them with a knife and they had shot her, leaving them to claim self-defense against an 80 year old woman. At first, they denied any responsibility for the Emily Smythe murder. Still, the defense lawyer made the brothers confess to that crime and to the old woman’s murder in exchange for a reduced sentence. *Illegals kill two local house wives*, went the headlines. It reassured people that the killers were behind bars.

Seventeen years went by. Gwenn had just come from a luncheon in which prominent female contributors to the community were handed out awards for service. The winners included

a couple of school teachers, a community activist, the editor of a local magazine about the “San Diego lifestyle,” and the owner of a women’s apparel company. Gwenn was also the winner for nearly two decades of service, especially for her work pursuing sex traffickers. She gave the inspirational speech that brought the luncheon audience to its feet, and she went back to work carrying a plaque with her name on it, and some extra piece of cake on a Styrofoam plate to help assuage a feeding frenzy during the sixth month of her pregnancy. She had married a gay man, a refugee from Bosnia. He lived in Hillcrest with his American male lover, and in exchange, she was due to be a mother.

She left the cake in the office refrigerator when she walked out and she saw those faces, the ones she knew would one day be staring at her. It was that new detective McIntyre from the cold case unit who asked her to step into his office.

“We really need your help with a case,” he said.

She knew the day had arrived and read it in the subtext of his words. She had helped through the years in various homicide cases involving traffickers and her expertise in the area had helped put away ruthless men and a few women who were involved in the exploitation of other women from all over the world who were flown into Tijuana then transported into the U.S. through the desert. Gwenn had worked with the various agencies needed to free the young women, find them homes, jobs, and provide basic human sympathy needed for them to get on with their lives. The traffickers were persistent, a survivor species, a special subset of evil that continued to recur and return for more.

“We reopened the case of Emily Smythe, or Emily Lopez-Ellenstein, if you will.”

“OK, so how can I help you with that, detective?”

She had always wondered about the ease with which the investigation had dropped her as a suspect, had re-routed all suspicion at the Sepulveda gang, and then even Arnie himself had never pointed the police towards her. That had left Emily’s senile father to insist for nearly twenty years that the case should be reopened and that San Diego’s most accomplished female cop should be investigated. She had stayed away from Arnie as well. She figured it would have been in bad taste to even approach him after his wife’s death, especially after finding out that Emily’s old man had it in for her. But she did hear about the conference of international scholars scheduled for Mexico City in the summer of 2001. The internet had given her a guilt-free mode of keeping up with all the whereabouts and activities of Arnulfo Lopez-Ellenstein. A quick entry on the google and she was up to date on his various lectures and speakerships as a young professor of international studies at UC San Diego. One of his books, *The Rise of Al-Qaeda*, had been published without fanfare in 1999, but would travel up the charts of bestsellers in the aftermath of 9/11 and was especially praised for its simple, yet precise observation that Al-Qaeda would strike the homeland. Some critics in 1999 had criticized the young author for his “paranoid style,” but he was now called “prescient.” During the summer of 2001, before world events caught up with Lopez-Ellenstein’s prophecies, a conference of scholars became the right place for a reunion.

She noticed the look of surprise on his face when he walked into the bar of the hotel near the Zócalo where the scholars were staying. This was a historic neighborhood with its ancient Cathedral leaning like the Tower of Pisa, and the presidential palace across the street greeting a new presidency, and a massive square often used for protests but also for music festivals and gatherings of Aztec dancers. She reached over from her booth and hugged him lightly and asexually like greeting a work acquaintance, and then bid him to sit down and have a drink with her to catch up.

How lovely he must have found her, wearing the most feminine outfit he had ever seen on her, a black little dress of Oscar runway-style that suited her well in a sinewy, leaner figure than she'd ever shown when he once knew her. One single earring hung on her left ear lobe as if she had lost its twin on the right, and in that dim light, she could have doubled for Barbra Streisand in "Funny Girl" ready to sing "My Man." He would not have recognized the reference. He was clearly too straight for that. But she knew the look that she was after, and she had achieved it as usual without him catching on entirely.

"I've always wanted to visit Mexico City as an adult," she told him. "My father traveled all over Latin America and we must have come here when I was a child, but I don't remember it well. It's like a recovered memory actually," she said.

The befuddled young professor enjoyed a shot of bourbon which went well with that red-white-and blue bowtie he'd worn with a clashing striped white and purple shirt and suspenders with black pants. Who wears suspenders these days? Gwenn wondered, but that was one of the things about Arnie, which made him lovable after all these years. He warned her from the start that he'd need to return to the conference.

"I never told you how sorry I was about Emily," she finally said, eager to break the ice on that subject. "I never called you. I thought it wouldn't be in good taste, but I really felt for you then. I hope you realize that."

He stared at her in disbelief as if this was the last thing he had ever wanted to talk about. The man was delivering a speech about how Al-Qaeda was poised to attack the United States to a bunch of skeptical scholars, but the subject of his dead wife seemed surprising to him.

"Can I just ask you a question?" He asked.

She smiled in anticipation. She thought he would ask the question, that one question, the one that no one, not even the police, had dared to ask her.

"Were you really in love with me all that time?" He asked instead.

"Why, Arnie....I was crazy about you, but you know those days are gone," she said. She didn't explain to him that she had booked her flight to Mexico to coincide with this conference.

"I thought so," he said, "it's just that Emily....I mean, she said you came over that night and cried in front of her."

"Well, I don't know what she meant," she said. "I never met her."

“Why would she make that up?”

“I don’t know, Arnie. Jealousy sometimes drives people to say things.”

“Wait, you think Emily was jealous of you?”

This hurt her feelings just enough to give her pause, but she wasn’t about to show it.

“It’s perfectly possible she imagined I was still in the picture,” she answered. “After all, you got engaged to her when we were still seeing each other, didn’t you?”

“You both coincided,” he admitted, “but, no, actually, by the time we announced our engagement, I had already broken up with you,” he insisted.

“She must have felt threatened,” she said. “I was already an accomplished police woman, after all.”

“You’re not saying she imagined it? Or worse, that she lied!”

“Arnie, let’s not. Let bygones be bygones, you know. We had a great time, I loved you then. Things are different now.”

“Gwenn....I....ah....”

Oh, here it came. Gwenn had waited years for this. Was this the question?

“I...I loved you, too,” he said. But no, she somehow didn’t want to hear that. She really was itching to hear the question. She was dying to answer it for him and him alone. She was dying to say it, too, because a feeling of anticipation, exhilaration even, made her think that she would get to confess her crime to him, if only he would ask the question and she would give the truth to him like a parting gift. The sweetest punishment would come from him, and only him. Hearing his confession of love now, well, it was somehow non-climactic, even absurd. This was no longer about love, but about hate, and more importantly, it was about lethal passions that were closer, really, to terrorism. Didn’t he know that, he the expert? “But Emily wasshe was just a normal girl,” he added.

“And I wasn’t normal, Arnie?”

“There was just something intense about you,” he said. “And I don’t blame you. Any woman who wants to join the police and hunt criminals must have that extra zing—or whatever you call it, that extra drive that makes her so special. But I couldn’t compete with that.”

“To you, I was competition then?”

“I just wanted a normal wife, Gwenn, that’s all. I regret what happened. I feel terrible that I couldn’t tell you to your face and that you had to read about our engagement in the paper.”

“How do you know that I read it in the paper?”

“Your mother called to chew me out.”

“My mother?!?”

“She even called again to say good riddance when Emily was found dead.”

“My mother said that? It figures.”

Gwenn was beside herself. Her mother---this was a genuine surprise. She was glad she had put away that woman in the La Jolla Assisted Living Facility years before.

“I even thought maybe your mother had come over and you know, done it herself---but the police said that the intruders were two strong, male criminals running around the neighborhood. Illegals, too. It couldn't have been an old lady like your mother. I wasn't thinking rationally, but she was my first thought, isn't that ridiculous?”

And you never suspected me? She wanted to ask but refrained.

“When Emily's father made those charges about you, I had a fight with the old man. I told him you were a police woman for chrissake! I didn't believe you were capable of harming anybody. I still feel that way. I've kept up with your career. I'm very proud of you, Gwenn, I'm just sorry we're both alone now. I'm sorry I brought us both to this type of life where we're left wondering what might have been if only I'd been stronger, or strong enough to accept a woman as dynamic as you....”

She felt the duty to walk away. It was she who took the last sip of her red wine and then left him in the hotel bar to fester in his solitude. Gwenn had her moment of gliding away wearing the delicate designer dress and he hadn't even recognized it. It was something she had stolen out of Emily's closet as a treasure. She had to lose twenty pounds to fit into it. The man had not paid attention to Emily's fashion choices all these years and he wasn't paying attention to hers now. The deadliest lover must be the one who is oblivious to you, who doesn't see the truth when he sees it staring him to his face. She was even wearing the evidence. She walked out into the Zócalo alone, breathing in the night air, allowing Mexican men to stare at this woman in an elegant black dress showing off Amazonian calves. She was an asset to the night with its exploding fireworks in the air celebrating a national holiday.

Detective McIntyre was another type of man altogether. That day in 2013, he was ready to face this pregnant woman with what he knew, from the tips provided to him by Emily's father who had made an inventory of Emily's belongings and found a dress missing. McIntyre pulled out the picture of Emily and Arnie in the *San Diego Union* when their wedding had been announced years previously. In that picture, Emily dons the same dress that Gwenn was wearing in another picture of hers that he pulled out from the archives. He showed both pictures to her then. Guernica “Gwenn” Andauer was accepting an award for community service wearing Emily's black dress.

“You had the nerve to wear it in public,” McIntyre said. “What a risk, Gwenn!”

“Arnie didn't even notice,” she said. “Never even missed the dress.”