

He turned and crawled farther into the undergrowth. The space grew lower and Blake found himself on his hands and knees, scrambling to keep up with the lamp's glow. Forty feet further in, the man paused over a large, flat stone. With a grunt, he shoved it aside to reveal a metal trap door underneath. Yanking a large key from his coveralls, he unlocked the door and swung it open, then slid through feet first.

*Go ask Alice, when she's ten feet tall...*

Blake stood over the hole, looking into its inky depths. He was a lot bigger than his guide, and it looked like a tight fit.

"Come on!" the man hissed from the darkness.

Sucking in his stomach, Blake lowered himself through the opening, feeling the steel edges scrape against his ribs. He could see from the man's headlamp that the tunnel they were in was about five and a half feet high.

"Shut the door!" the man yelled. Ducking his head, Blake reached up and pulled the trap door downward. As he did, he heard a latch click home.

"Now, stay close!"

Hunching over to avoid bumping his head on the ceiling, Blake followed the man along a curving passageway. Every twenty yards or so, an opening branched off to the right or left. The man ignored most of them, but on three occasions he turned onto one of the side routes. After several minutes, the man stopped abruptly. "Here we are!" he crowed.

In the light of the man's helmet, Blake saw a large cinderblock on the tunnel floor. The man shifted his gaze up to the ceiling, revealing a trap door identical to the one they'd just passed through.

"Listen," said Blake. "If you meet me back here in exactly three hours, I'll pay you another fifty for the return trip. I'll have more money by then."

"You've got it." Jumping onto the cinderblock, the man unlatched the door and pushed it open. "Up you go!"

Blake poked his head and shoulders through the hole. As promised,

he was in the middle of a large stand of trees. Feeling a jab to his leg, Blake quickly pulled himself all the way out. Through the opening, the small man's face grinned up at him. "Thanks for the weed!" he cackled. Then he slammed the door shut, leaving a green mossy patch where the opening had been.

Blake peered out through the tree trunks. All around the mini-forest, Golden Gate Park was bustling with activity. He removed his hat and vest and carefully peeled the wig off his head. Remembering his orange hair, he reflected for a moment, then untied his bandana and wrapped it around his head, knotting it in the back. Tucking the wig and vest into the hat, he slid the bundle under some ferns, then walked casually out of the trees. Several yards later he broke into a trot. *Hang on, Ann, he thought. I'm coming.*



"What exactly are you saying?"

"I'm saying that Hawkes appears to have left Los Angeles," Smyth repeated. "At least, our operatives can no longer find any evidence of him there."

"How could this have happened?" Martin Bibbitt demanded. He could feel the blood rising in his face, but he didn't care. "What kind of show are you running?"

"We're working around the clock to locate him," said Smyth flatly. As always, his goal was to keep his meeting with Bibbitt as brief as humanly possible, and he was prepared to say whatever was necessary to accomplish this.

"This has something to do with that New York broadcast—I'm sure of it!" Bibbitt studied Smyth's face. "I don't suppose you've found out anything more on that front?"

"Nothing substantive."

"No—I wouldn't have thought so." Bibbitt began tapping his desk with his fingernails. "They're out to destroy what I've built," he muttered. "Don't think I don't know it!"

*It's like he's forgotten I'm here,* thought Smyth. He quietly rose to his feet. "I'll see you tomorrow, Mr. Secretary," he said. He couldn't be

sure if Bibbitt heard him or not.



“So, our friend has jumped the fence. They’re better than we thought, Tony.”

Marconi made a face. “They’re good at identity switches, I’ll give them that.”

“This poses a problem. Our whole enterprise depends on keeping track of Hawkes’ whereabouts.”

“It’s not like we lost him completely. He just got a little ahead of us, that’s all. We’ve had a firm fix on him from Tuesday morning onward, thanks to that favor from my friend in the California State Police. After they staged their little car accident on Wednesday we tailed them to UCLA, where our people got names and photos of everyone Hawkes met with. The Munis don’t know this, of course—they think the meeting went undetected.”

“Then what happened?”

“We pushed some misinformation that we were going to snatch Hawkes last night, so they didn’t think we were slacking off. They had an escape plan set up, and we were ready to tail them on the other side. But they went another direction.”

“So, where’s our elusive scientist now?”

“A couple of uniforms ran a check on the overnight bus to San Francisco before it pulled out and got photos of all the passengers. They were forwarded straight here, for my eyes only. Turns out one of them was Hawkes in a wig. His minders were on board, too.”

“And?”

“I had an operative meet the bus this morning in Frisco, strictly on the QT. I’ll let Smyth hear about it in a day or so, once we have a better idea what the Munis’ next move will be. Better to let him stew in the dark a little—it’ll give us more running room. Besides, we know where the kid’s heading. Based on the info we’re getting, all roads still point to King Midas.”

“Agreed. You’ve been monitoring his movements?”

“We have—and he’s been moving plenty. He coptered down to his