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# SEASON OF THE WITCH

“An enthralling — and harrowing — account of how the  
1967 Summer of Love gave way to 20 or so winters of discontent.”

— *The Washington Post*



“A sprawling, ambitious history . . . Talbot’s energetic, highly entertaining  
storytelling conveys the exhilaration of ’60s counterculture as well as the  
gathering ugliness that would mark the city in the ’70s.” — *The Boston Globe*

DAVID TALBOT

*New York Times* bestselling author of *Brothers*

*In a kaleidoscopic narrative, bestselling author David Talbot recounts the gripping story of San Francisco in the turbulent years between 1967 and 1982—and of the extra-ordinary men and women who led to the city's ultimate rebirth and triumph.*

*Season of the Witch* is the first book to fully capture the dark magic of San Francisco in this breathtaking period, when the city radically changed itself—and then revolutionized the world. The cool gray city of love was the epicenter of the 1960s cultural revolution. But by the early 1970s, San Francisco's ecstatic experiment came crashing down from its starmountain heights. The city was rocked by savage murder sprees, mysterious terror campaigns, political assassinations, street riots, and finally a terrifying sexual epidemic. No other city endured so many calamities in such a short time span.

David Talbot takes us deep into the riveting story of his city's ascent, decline, and heroic recovery. He draws intimate portraits of San Francisco's legendary demons and saviors: Charles Manson, Patty Hearst and the Symbionese Liberation Army, Jerry Garcia, Janis Joplin, Bill Graham, Herb Caen, the Cockettes, Harvey Milk, Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple, Joe Montana and the Super Bowl 49ers. He reveals how the city emerged from the trials of this period with a new brand of "San Francisco values," including gay marriage, medical marijuana, immigration sanctuary, universal health care, recycling, renewable energy, consumer safety, and a living wage mandate. Considered radical when they were first introduced, these ideas have become the bedrock of decent society in many parts of the country, and exemplify the ways that the city now inspires us toward a live-and-let-live tolerance, a shared sense of humanity, and an openness to change.

As a new generation of activists and dreamers seeks its own path to a more enlightened future, *Season of the Witch*—with its epic tale of the wild and bloody birth of San Francisco values—offers both inspiration and cautionary wisdom.

PRAISE FOR  
*SEASON OF THE WITCH*

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—**OLIVER STONE**

“As a phenomenally intuitive journalist, editor, and culture critic, David Talbot has not only channeled the Zeitgeist but helped make it.”

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—**PUBLISHERS WEEKLY (STARRED REVIEW)**



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**DAVID TALBOT**, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy Years*, is the founder of *Salon*. He lives in San Francisco.

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*Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy Years*  
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# SEASON OF THE WITCH

Enchantment, Terror, and Deliverance  
in the City of Love

DAVID TALBOT

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To Camille, who helped me finally and fully love San Francisco, while I was falling in love with her. And to the entire Peri family, the Italian-Irish-Greek clan that brought the city's history to life for me. And to my sons, Joseph and Nathaniel, who are making their own San Francisco history.

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The most vital way of touching this past, of course, is by speaking with the men and women who lived it. I am grateful to the more than 120 people who shared their stories with me, reliving the traumas and triumphs and the jaw-dropping wildness that was San Francisco.

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*“It’s the freedom of the city that keeps it alive.”*

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—Geoffrey West, physicist

# AUTHOR'S NOTE

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I WAS BORN AND RAISED in Los Angeles, but even when I was growing up, I knew that I belonged in San Francisco. My father, Lyle Talbot, was a Hollywood actor, but he too loved San Francisco. In the early 1930s, while working for Warner Bros., he costarred with Bette Davis in *Fog over Frisco*, a snappy thriller about high-society types who fall into the violent grip of the underworld. The film brought my father on location to San Francisco, and he returned often to the city for business and pleasure. Years later, he regaled me and my brother and sisters with colorful stories about lavish parties at the Sheraton Palace Hotel; intimate soirees at a North Hill apartment where a female Chinese-American doctor raised money for the flying aces who were resisting Japan's invasion of China; and drinking escapades with Marion Davies, the fun-loving mistress of William Randolph Hearst. His tales conjured a city that was far more atmospheric and cosmopolitan than the sun-bleached Los Angeles suburb where I grew up.

During the 1960s, my father brought us to San Francisco when he performed in long runs at the Geary Theater, the city's grand old lady of pleasure. Setting out from the St. Francis Hotel in the middle of downtown, my siblings and I would trek the wind-whipped hills, wander through Chinatown and North Beach, and take the ferryboat to Sausalito. I knew—listening to some older, long-haired teenagers dressed like Moroccan tribesmen, as they played guitars and flutes in a Sausalito square—that I would make San Francisco my home one day. By then, San Francisco had come to stand for something far different than it had for my father; it was my generation's wild shore of freedom. The city held layers of allure for me that descended deep through time.

By the time I moved to San Francisco in the 1970s, the city was at war with itself, beset by grisly crime and political violence. My city of peace and love and music, and my father's city of evening dress elegance, was being obliterated by a daily barrage of gruesome headlines. In the end, San Francisco not only survived this bloody turmoil, it emerged as a beacon of enlightenment and experimentation for the entire world.

As the years went by, San Francisco became not only my city but also my way of life. From the time I was a boy, I wanted to live in a place like my father's theater world, a magic box filled with lavishly made-up women, extravagant gay men, and other larger-than-life characters. I wanted a world that could encompass all worlds. I found something close to it in this soft-lit city in the ocean mists. I found myself here, got married here, raised my two sons here, started my own version of a theater company here—an eccentric web magazine called *Salon* that could have been born only in San Francisco, city of outcasts.

And now it's time to repay the debt. This is my love letter to San Francisco. But if it's a valentine, it's a bloody valentine, filled with the raw truth as well as the glory about the city that has been my home for more than three decades now. The story I'm about to tell is an epic one, filled with personalities and events. But in the end, this is what it is all about. It's the story of a city that changed itself, and then changed the world.

# INTRODUCTION

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SAN FRANCISCO WAS BUILT on a dare. The city was tossed up overnight on the shimmying, heaving, mischievous crust of the Pacific rim. A gold rush city of fortune seekers, gamblers, desperadoes and the flesh-peddling circus that caters to such men, San Francisco defied the laws of nature. It was a wide-open town, its thighs splayed wantonly for every vice damned in the Bible and more than a few that were left out. San Francisco was the Last Chance Saloon for outcasts from every corner of the globe. If the earth didn't swallow them first, hell soon enough would.

Great cities have usually been founded by wealthy burghers and craftsmen—their spires and monuments a testament to the holiness of the work ethic. But San Francisco high society was a devil's dinner party, a rogue's crew of robber barons, saloon keepers, and shrewd harlots. When the town's painted ladies went to the theater, gentlemen would rise until they were seated. By 1866, there were thirty-one saloons for every place of worship.

After the great earthquake struck in 1906, a wandering Pentecostal preacher who found himself among San Francisco's smoking ruins inevitably declared the disaster God's vengeance on Sodom. In the emotional aftershocks of the catastrophe, the Holy Roller's hellfire preaching attracted a flock of dazed souls. But the size of his congregation was dwarfed by the crowd that thronged the last theater left standing in the city, where San Franciscans lustily cheered their beloved burlesques.

San Francisco's Barbary Coast district—with its black-stockings bars, live sex shows, and opium dens—rose again from the earthquake's ashes. And well into the new century—long before Las Vegas assured tourists that it knew how to keep their secrets—San Francisco aggressively marketed its libertine image. During the Prohibition era, the local board of supervisors passed legislation forbidding San Francisco police from enforcing the dry law. Drinking queen shows were written up in the tourist guides alongside the ferryboat rides and Fisherman's Wharf dining spots.

By the 1930s, however, another San Francisco emerged: Catholic, working class, family-oriented. The Church's influence could be felt throughout the town, particularly in city hall and the police department, where an old-boy's network of Irish Catholic—and later Italian Catholic—officials held sway.

Catholic San Francisco had its own wild heart: tough stevedores and cable car operators who fought bloody battles for labor rights; and immigrant kids who learned to love Puccini and Dante, and collected nickels for the Irish Volunteers back home. These working-class heroes eventually turned San Francisco into a pro-labor, arts-loving stronghold of the Democratic Party.

But as the Catholic hierarchy solidified its control of the city during and after World War I, it imposed a traditional social order on San Francisco, driving the city's Barbary outlaw underground. For years, the two San Franciscos waged a clandestine civil war. Gays and lesbians would be swept up in midnight police raids on bars. (Dykes had to wear at least one article of women's clothing—usually lacy panties—to avoid arrest.) Mixed-race couples were quietly blocked by real estate covenants from renting apartments in the city. Only occasional



did the city's culture war erupt onto the front pages of the metro newspapers—as it did in 1957 when poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, owner of City Lights Books, was put on trial for publishing “Howl,” Allen Ginsberg’s declaration of war on the American Moloch, and the opening salvo in the 1960s’ epic struggle for cultural freedom.

A decade later, San Francisco’s culture war was in full fury, as the city absorbed a wave of runaway children—refugees from America’s broken family—and transformed itself overnight into the capital of the 1960s counterculture. In the 1970s, San Francisco was overrun by another army of American runaways, as it became the Emerald City of gay liberation.

No other American city has undergone such an earth-shaking cultural shift in such a short span. Today San Francisco is seen as the “Left Coast City”—the wild, frontier outpost of the American Dream. Conservatives have declared war on “San Francisco values” and are bitterly fighting to stop the spread of those values. But long before the culture war went nationwide, San Francisco was torn apart by its own uncivil war. San Francisco values did not come in with flowers in their hair; they were born howling, in blood and strife. It took years of frantic and often violent conflict—including political assassinations, riots, bombings, kidnappings, serial race murders, antigay street mayhem, the biggest mass suicide in history, and a panic-inducing epidemic—before San Francisco finally made peace with itself and its new identity.

In the end, San Francisco healed itself by learning how to take care of its sick and dying. And it came together to celebrate itself with the help of an unlikely football dynasty and a team that mirrored the city’s eccentric personality.

San Francisco’s battles are no longer with itself but with the outside world, as it exports the European-style social ideas that drive Republican leaders and Fox News commentators into a frenzy: gay marriage, medical marijuana, universal health care, immigrant sanctuary, “living wage,” minimum wage, bicycle-friendly streets, stricter environmental and consumer regulations. Conservatives see these San Francisco values as examples of social engineering gone mad. But in San Francisco, they’re seen as the bedrock of a decent society, one that is based on a live-and-let-live tolerance, shared sense of humanity, and openness to change.

One of San Francisco’s more flowery laureates anointed it “the cool gray city of love.” But the people who cling to its hills and hollows and know its mercurial temperament—the sudden juggernaut of sea fog and wind that can shroud the sun and chill the soul—recognize San Francisco as a rougher beast. The people who radically changed San Francisco in the 1960s and 1970s—and thus, the world—have been ridiculed and trivialized for so long that we’ve forgotten who they really were. But it took a frontier breed of men and women to conquer a town like San Francisco—a town that was still more Dashiell Hammett than Oz. Ginsberg called them “seekers,” which gives them their due. This is the story of their quest, and how they triumphed over the machinery of night.

# SEASON OF THE WITCH

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# PROLOGUE

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## Wild Irish Rogues

San Francisco, June 1932

THE CITY WAS in a frenzy. Frank Egan—the once popular public defender, a man widely considered to be a future mayor—was on the run, accused of hiring two ex-cons to murder a fifty-nine-year-old widow named Jessie Hughes.

Before he disappeared, Egan emotionally insisted on his innocence. “Mrs. Hughes has been like a mother to me,” he tearfully told reporters. But it did not look good for the public defender. He was the widow’s executor, as well as the beneficiary of both her will and several insurance policies—and before her murder, she had been shrilly accusing him of looting her finances. When one of the ex-cons confessed his role in the brutal murder, naming the public defender as the mastermind, Egan decided to pull a vanishing act.

By the time he made himself scarce, Egan was San Francisco’s most notorious criminal, even though he had yet to be formally charged with a crime. The newspapers were filled with grisly details about the widow’s murder. The two ex-cons, one of whom bore a striking resemblance to George Raft and the other to Humphrey Bogart, had talked their way into the unfortunate Mrs. Hughes’s Lakewood Drive home, knocked her out with several blows to the jaw, lugged her into her basement garage, put her under the wheel of a blue Lincoln sedan once owned by a gangster, and crushed the life out of her by running the heavy car back and forth over her body. Then they drove a couple blocks away and dumped the lifeless woman in the gutter, hoping she’d be mistaken for a hit-and-run victim.

The local papers also indicated that Mrs. Hughes was not Egan’s only victim, that he had made a racket of bilking lonely and aging women out of their nest eggs. One of these sad victims—referred to as “a little hunchback” in the press—had fallen into Egan’s clutches through the unsavory auspices of a female spiritualist, who recognized an easy mark when she saw one. Another victim was lured away from her loving husband by the George Raft look-alike accomplice, who was masquerading at the time as a debonair dancing instructor. While the woman’s husband was away on business, the distraught man later recounted, his wife went “dance mad” and fell into a life of dissolution. She ended up in a gloomy Tenderloin flat where she was kept in a permanent state of inebriation while Egan raided her savings and otherwise exploited her fallen condition. Finally, her husband charged, she was dispatched altogether with a poison powder by yet another sordid partner of Egan’s—a thoroughly corrupt surgeon named Dr. Nathan S. Housman who made a living by patching up bullet-riddled hoodlums when not running criminal errands for Egan.

Hammett would have blushed to create villains as florid as Egan and his henchmen. Fortunately for Egan, he was represented by a lawyer who was well on his way to becoming a San Francisco legend: Vincent Hallinan, a brawling young Irishman with thick, wavy hair and the battered good looks of a prizefighter. Hallinan was a rising thirty-four-year-old defense

attorney when he took the Egan case. He was also a confirmed bachelor and notorious ladies man, having sloughed off his Jesuit schooling and, in his words, “the daffy theology of the Roman Catholic Church” and “embraced a pagan hedonism.”

But young Vince Hallinan seemed to have finally met his match with his current romantic partner: a twenty-year-old, green-eyed, half-Irish, half-Genovese beauty named Vivian Moore. They were a true-life Nick and Nora—a young, stylish, dazzling couple who consorted with mugs and crooks and were always one step ahead of the cops.

If Hallinan drew a bad hand with Egan, those were the breaks of the game. He never bothered to ask Egan if he was guilty. A criminal lawyer can't concern himself “with the guilt or innocence of a client,” he would say years later, looking back on the notorious case. “He can't. The whole thing is a racket. The prosecution puts on its case not for justice but for conviction, and you put on yours only to acquit. If you are unwilling to do all that is possible to obtain your client's acquittal, you are allowing a vicious system to grind him up, and you have no business on the defense side of the court. And you won't be there very long, either.”

Later in his life, Hallinan would put his formidable courtroom skills at the service of labor leaders, Cold War dissidents, civil rights activists, and antiwar protesters. The legal victories that he and his colleagues won helped create a new San Francisco, and a new America. But there were few heroes in his life in those days. Hallinan learned his rough trade in the slimy trenches of the San Francisco courts—where the defendants were often morally depraved, and the cops and prosecutors were something worse.

Now Hallinan's biggest challenge was to bring Frank Egan safely to jail before he could commit suicide—an outcome that the newspapers were loudly suggesting the cops preferred. That the public defender couldn't make good on his threat to “blow the lid off the police department.” What did Egan have on the notoriously crooked San Francisco Police Department? Hallinan didn't know. But he knew he had to find a way to safely convey Egan to the authorities—with a crowd of reporters to witness his surrender.

Each day that Egan remained at large, the city grew more frantic. The wanted man was last seen in a car with Hallinan and the lawyer's “more than attractive girlfriend,” as the *San Francisco Chronicle* called Viv, while the trio drove away from Hallinan's summer cottage on Emerald Lake, south of the city. So now cops and sheriffs were combing the hills in San Mateo, and even dragging the lake. One wild rumor had Egan taking off from the lake in an amphibian plane to the open sea, where a speedboat whooshed him to a rum ship outside the twelve-mile limit.

HOW COULD THE SFPD have let Egan slip through its fingers? The press smelled a rat. “What the matter with the city's police department?” the *Chronicle* demanded to know in a front-page editorial. “Here is a man indicted for one of the most appalling murders in the city's history . . . and the police did not even have their eye on him.”

Mayor Angelo Rossi, who had ascended to his city hall suite courtesy of the all-powerful Irish political machine, knew he had to tread lightly with Police Chief William Quinn and his boys if he wanted to keep his job. But at long last, even Rossi's patience wore thin. When reporters listened outside his door, the mayor bellowed over the phone at Quinn that he wanted Egan in custody, and he wanted him now. Later, an agitated Rossi threatened to “clean house” at the police department if there was any more bungling.

With the flame turned high under his ass, the police chief knew he could no longer wait for

Egan to turn up stiff—he had to go find him. And Quinn knew exactly where to look first: Vince Hallinan’s various habitats. After secreting his client away in a safe place while he figured out a strategy, Hallinan drove to his house, where he was immediately greeted by four burly plainclothes cops. The top dog flashed his badge.

“We have orders to take you down to headquarters.”

Hallinan was unfazed. He knew the dance. “Do you have a warrant?”

“No.”

“Then you’re not taking me anywhere.”

The detective looked stymied. “Do you mind if we go in and call the chief on your phone?”

Hallinan normally got along with Quinn, who was an easygoing sort of man for a cop. But when Vince got on the phone with him, the chief sounded hysterical. “Listen, Hallinan, the town’s in an uproar!” Quinn shouted. “You get Egan here right now, or I’m going to charge you with complicity in the murder of Jessie Hughes!”

Vince Hallinan was not the type who was easily intimidated. He grew up in a miserably poor family. Back in the old country, his father Patrick belonged to the Irish Invincibles, the terrorist fringe of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. After assassinating the agent of a renegade gouging landlord, Patrick was forced to flee to America—and to a lifetime of regrets and raw deals. Young Vince had been attracted to the law not only by the money but also as a way to fight bullies without using your fists—though he never forswore that more direct method of dealing with thugs, even if they wore three-piece suits. Hallinan took on poor Irish clients who were being evicted from their homes or had been maimed in streetcar accidents, whether or not a big payday seemed likely. And along the way, he stood up to brutal cops, corrupt court officials, ruthless corporate executives—even the powerful Catholic Church, which he always resented for robbing him and other Irish-Americans of their childhood with mysticism and fear.

So Quinn didn’t scare him. Speaking firmly into the phone, Hallinan informed the chief that Frank Egan would appear only if he were indicted. Until then, if the police interfered with Hallinan in any way, he would sue them for false arrest. “You’d better simmer down and realize that you’re an officer of the law, and stop letting your office be run by the newspapers,” the young lawyer lectured the spluttering chief. Then he handed the phone back to the detective.

After a few minutes of “Yeahs” and “Uh-huhs,” the detective hung up and turned to Hallinan.

“The chief says that you don’t have to come down to headquarters . . . but we’re going to stay right here with you, and we’re not supposed to let you out of our sight until Egan comes and surrenders.”

“Make yourselves at home,” Hallinan replied graciously. “I’ll cook us up a pot of coffee.”

Then Hallinan walked into the kitchen—and promptly went out the back door. He climbed over the fence into the alley, hurried to the home of a friend, and borrowed his car.

Hallinan was free, but he was in a jam. He wanted to arrange for Egan’s well-publicized surrender—which he knew would not only be safer for his client but also look better in court. To do that, he needed to communicate with Egan. But with half the city’s police force now looking for Hallinan, whose face had been splashed across the front pages for weeks, that wouldn’t be easy. He had to find a messenger—and the first person who came to mind was his free-spirited girlfriend.

During their brief romance, Vivian Moore had already made a strong impression on Hallinan with her adventurous—some might call it reckless—exploits. The product of a broken marriage

and shuttled as a girl from one unpredictable home to another in her mother's sprawling family, Viv learned early on to take care of herself. One day she terrified Vince by plunging into the icy surf in Monterey Bay and swimming halfway to the Orient. "When she made back to shore, I didn't know whether to slap her or kiss her."

Hallinan hated to bring his young lover into the Egan mess. But when he laid out the proposition to her, she immediately agreed to act as the go-between with his notorious client. "Of course, I was delighted," Viv recalled later. "Such excitement, and everything about the case all over the front pages!"

Soon after Vivian returned to her apartment on Fourteenth Avenue, however, the doorbell rang, and when she opened the door, two flatfoots barged inside.

"We're here to see Vincent Hallinan," growled one, a gruff old gray bear named Sergeant Mike Desmond.

"He isn't here," she shot back.

"Well, he will be," retorted Desmond. "You're his girl. He'll turn up."

Vivian sat down and began reading a book. She knew she had to think fast. Suddenly she stood up and walked across the room.

The bulky Desmond jumped up and got in her way.

She played the one card she had—the only one that would work on a tough Mick like Desmond. "I suppose that a person might be permitted to go to the bathroom," she said archly, looking the cop dead in the eye.

Desmond blushed as crimson as a cardinal's robe. "All right," he stammered, "but I'll have to stand right outside that bedroom door. I'm not supposed to let you out of my sight."

Shutting the bathroom door behind her, Vivian opened the window and shimmied through it feetfirst. Her apartment was on the second floor, and she needed to grope for the water pipe on the side of the building, but she finally grabbed on to it and slid down like a fireman to the landing below. After descending the stairs to the backyard, she took off her shoes, tipped over three large flowerpots, and stood on top of the rocky platform so that she could climb over the fence. Now she was on a sidewalk to the rear of her building, and the wild and sheltering canopy of Golden Gate Park beckoned to her, just blocks away. She sprinted for it, taking a secret path into its thick foliage that she had known from childhood.

Viv was supposed to rendezvous with Vince at the Great Highway, on the ocean end of the park, about two miles away. She had no money for a cab, so she took off on foot for her destination as the first cold gusts of afternoon began blowing in from the Pacific. Ten or fifteen minutes later, she heard the wails of police sirens, and she dropped to the ground and crawled inside the prickly shrubbery along the path, waiting there until they faded. Then she got up, brushed herself off, and headed west again.

By the time she reached Vince's car, parked near the beach, Viv was as flushed and wild-eyed as an animal that had outrun a hunting party. Vince was flabbergasted. "I'm sorry I put you in this position," he told her.

She waved off his concern. "Listen," she said, still a little breathless, "I love it! Where's the message and where do I take it?"

After Viv delivered Vince's message to the strange, sallow-faced Egan at his hideout, the young couple lay low. They drove out to the country for the rest of the afternoon, and in the early evening they returned to the city and ducked inside a movie palace. The whole city was looking for them, but they were snuggled together in the theater's dark cocoon, watching

movie. At intermission, the orchestra leader turned around and cracked, "Is Frank Egan ~~Vincent Hallinan in the house?~~" The audience broke into laughter, and Vince and Viv laughed too.

IT WAS AROUND THIS time that Vincent Hallinan, bachelor for life, realized that he was going to spend the rest of his life with this woman. It had taken him awhile to arrive at this conclusion. But Viv had known all along that "the Mastodon," as she liked to call him, would finally be brought down. She knew from the moment she met him, with his blue, blue eyes and crooked smile, that this was the man who would fulfill her girlhood dream—the man who would be the father of her six children, all boys.

But before they could begin work on their brood, Vince and Viv had to navigate the much more treacherous shoals of the Egan case. When they returned to their respective homes that night after the movies, their living rooms were occupied by armies of shotgun-wielding men in blue, who served each of them with a grand jury subpoena. When she showed up for her court appearance, Vivian, already a press sweetheart, was greeted with a fireworks of flashbulbs by the newshounds. Sweeping into the grand jury room in a jaunty flapper's cap, silky striped blouse, hip-hugging skirt, fur-lined jacket, and tight black leather gloves, Viv quickly seduced the dour-faced grand jurors. "Miss Moore told her version of [Egan's escape] fully to the jurors who succumbed as one man to her charms and kept her in the grand jury room three-quarters of an hour—not that they thought she could give them any more information of value, but because she is such a delightful girl to talk to," the *Chronicle* reported the next day.

As for Vince, his "charms did not prove so effective," the newspaper dryly recounted, as one by one, the tough lawyer batted away the grand jury's questions and was quickly dismissed.

Soon after, the wild saga of Egan's flight finally came to an end, when Hallinan staged the public defender's surrender. Accompanied by a swarm of reporters, Egan strolled into the Golden Gate Park station and breezily greeted the cops behind the desk, a number of whom he had pounded the beat with back in his youth. "Good morning, boys."

"Good morning, Frank. How do you like our new jail?"

"I'd like to take a look at it," Egan replied—and he was given an extended opportunity to do just that.

The Egan trial enthralled San Francisco for several weeks more. Crowds jostled in the predawn damp and chill before the hall of justice opened to grab seats in the courtroom, where they marveled at Hallinan's unique blend of flowery and combative oratory. The details of the crime that emerged during the trial only darkened Egan's already villainous portrait. One of the ex-cons testified that all he got from Egan for carrying out his vile murder plan was a new hat—the public defender had threatened him with a return trip to San Quentin State Prison if he didn't comply. What sort of man offers a hat for a woman's life, the excon's teary mother asked? And all of San Francisco wondered the same. Only an attorney with the pugilistic artistry of Vincent Hallinan could have kept Egan from the gas chamber.

In the end, Frank Egan got life. By the time he slithered off to the penitentiary, Egan was such a reviled character that the press also turned its fury on his skillful young attorney for mounting such an aggressive defense. But the city's outrage soon found a new target: the SFPD. No sooner had Egan been convicted than a top police official confessed to the press that the cops knew in advance about Egan's murder plan but had done nothing to stop it. For months, the police department had been monitoring the phone calls between Egan and his

accomplice, the nefarious Dr. Housman—which explained why the police seemed so certain of Egan’s guilt from the very beginning.

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Why didn’t the cops rescue poor Jessie Hughes from a violent end? Their explanation seemed weak and slippery, and quickly raised new suspicions about the city’s murky police bureaucracy. Was the brass somehow involved in Egan’s criminal enterprise? Or were they sitting on evidence of his dark plots so they could blackmail him and secretly control the public defender’s office?

The police bombshell confirmed what Hallinan knew all along: San Francisco justice was a contradiction in terms. The municipal corridors were awash in graft and vice. And the cops were some of the biggest offenders of all. The SFPD liked to boast that gangsters could never get a foothold in San Francisco, unlike mob-ridden cities such as New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. “Good reason: the cops do their own ‘protecting’ in San Francisco and keep the payoffs in the family,” Hallinan was quick to explain.

These unvarnished opinions didn’t win Vince friends on the force. Nor did his combative courtroom style make him a beloved figure in the judges’ chambers. If a defendant was to enjoy any rights at all in a judicial system as deeply putrid as San Francisco’s, his lawyer had to be willing to wade in with both fists. But this style of rough justice had its costs.

Judges were in the habit of jailing Hallinan for disrespect. When one jurist asked the pugnacious lawyer if he meant to show contempt for his court, Vince replied, “No, Your Honor. I’m trying to conceal it.”

Hallinan was particularly contemptuous of the judge who presided over the Egan trial, an aging courtroom despot with an obvious bias for the prosecution. The judge made sure that Hallinan would pay for his defiance.

Shortly after the Egan trial concluded, Vince finally embraced the inevitable and proposed to Viv. But as the young couple prepared to drive off on their honeymoon, a meaty paw suddenly reached into Hallinan’s car and turned off the ignition. The paw, and the gruff voice that belonged to the old bear, Sergeant Desmond.

“Sorry, Vince, we have a warrant for your arrest, and we’re taking you in.”

“Listen, Mike,” pleaded the bridegroom, “we’re going on our honeymoon. Can’t you hold me up for a week?”

“We held it up for a week already,” growled Desmond. “We have positive orders to bring you up today.”

“All right,” Hallinan sighed. “Viv, this is Detective Sergeant Desmond.”

The old bear looked at the young woman who some weeks earlier had slipped his grasp and bowed deeply. “I have had the pleasure.”

Now Vivian Hallinan stood on the sidewalk in front of her mother’s apartment as her freshly minted husband was hustled into a squad car. She was twenty years old and full of self-confidence. She had thrown herself into her new life with this “wild Irish rogue” with the same reckless abandon that she had plunged into the choppy surf of Monterey Bay. “Yet, as I stood there and watched the dark blue patrol car vanish down the street, a feeling of panic gripped me. Maybe I had bargained for more than I could handle.”

In the years to come, all San Francisco would be seized by the same feeling, as the city leaped into the thrashing unknown.

DESPITE HIS PRINCIPLED OPPOSITION to married life, Vince turned out to be an enthusiast



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