

Chapter 1: The Voice



The Supreme Grand Lodge of the Rosicrucians, 212 Clay Street, San Francisco, May 2, 1886.

"We grow daily beyond our yesterdays and are ever reaching forth for the morrow. The world has had a long night, as it has had bright days; and now another morn is breaking, and we stand in the Door of the Dawn."—Dr. Paschal Beverly Randolph, *Magia Sexualis*

The young woman sat on the bench in the front row. The spiritualist gathering place was inside an old Victorian house owned by one of the members, a Mrs. Virginia Partridge. The girl was crying in the fading San Francisco window light that was illuminating her. Her body was folded over, her head in her hands, as she sobbed, her pale-blue bonnet hanging around her white neck by its frail ribbon.

Clara Shortridge Foltz, Esq., who had been part of the earlier meeting of spiritualists and suffragists, wanted to see if there was something she could do to aid the young woman in her discomfort. With her reddish-brown hair, the girl reminded Clara of her oldest daughter, Trella Evelyn, who was now twenty. Her swirled bun and curly hair was bobbing up and down as Clara walked over and placed a hand on her shoulder. The young woman wore a modest blue dress with bustle, and a satin sash encircled her thin waist.

"My dear, what's wrong?" Clara whispered, not wanting to startle her.

The girl was far from startled. She slowly raised her head, and stared into space, her rouged cheeks slick with tears. Her face was pretty, yet Clara noticed she wore dark eyeshadow, and her eyebrows were red smudges above her glistening gray eyes. Clara had seen this type of shaved eyebrows in photographs of Japanese women, who wanted to affect a kind of mystical quality to their demeanor. The girl finally turned toward Clara, folded her porcelain-like hands into her lap, and cleared her throat.

"I don't know how it happened. I heard the other witnesses, but I still don't believe what they said." Clara noticed the young woman's pupils were constricted, and her words were slurred. The confusing words were perhaps due to a drug-induced condition.

“Witnesses? I don’t understand. I am an attorney. Perhaps I can help you.” Clara reached down to take the girl’s hand, but she pulled back and squealed.

“There were attorneys in that courtroom. All they did was argue about the different witnesses and what they saw. *He* never got called to the stand! He’s still out there!” The girl stood up and began humming and shaking her head back-and-forth, as if she were being seduced by a strange, inner demon.

“I can understand why you would want to come to our meeting. We support women’s rights under the guise of spiritual communication. What happened to you? Are you drugged? Were you raped? What’s your name?”

The young woman’s humming began to transform into a chanting of words. Clara thought this might be a method of protecting her body. When she spoke, she clutched her arms across her breasts and looked up into the air at some invisible entity, perhaps a protecting angel or a demigod of some kind.

“Perhaps you can come with me. I don’t live too far from here, and I have a friend who knows about the problems of young women such as yourself.” Clara took a few steps toward the door, hoping the girl would follow. When she failed to do so, the attorney went back and grasped her arm at the elbow. She guided the young woman toward the door. The girl walked as if she were in another world, looking all about, squinting at the descending sun outside, and continuing to mumble her prayer, if that’s what it was.

They took the cable car up California Street to the mansion. The girl seemed in a trance, staring out at the passing pedestrians, horses and merchant carts as if they were phantasms in her personal dream world. Clara realized this when she observed the young woman reach out and attempt to touch one of the passing horses, even though it was at least ten yards from her open window inside the trolley.

After getting clearance from the guard at the gate, Hannigan, the butler, answered the tall gray door of the Hopkins Victorian mansion at One Nob Hill. Clara heard her younger teenage children roughhousing on the stairs. The Irish butler raised his auburn eyebrows and smiled. “Been that way since you left, mum. Banshees, they are, to be sure!”

“Could you please tell Ah Toy I want to see her? We’ll be in the living room.”

“It’s nice to get instructions all civilized like. Miss Ah Toy and her shouts. It’s my opinion, mum, she gets the wee ones all riled up.” Hannigan looked over the girl briefly before he turned to leave, the tails of his black coat bobbing against his backside as he climbed the stairway to the second floor.

Clara, now thirty-seven, had been living at the Hopkins residence since she solved the mystery of the eight murdered prostitutes two years before. Her best friend, Ah Toy, the former Chinatown Madame and now an independently wealthy artist and art dealer, was invited by Mrs. Hopkins to stay with her, and now it was the entire Shortridge family who lived with the widow. These were hard times, as

the strikes were on at the railroads, and high unemployment was the result. The big investors and owners of the machines of progress were not being very kind to the working folks.

Mrs. Hopkins, at sixty-eight, was becoming senile, and as such, she was probably more receptive to having all these new, live-in guests to watch out for her. Her confusion was humorous to all of the Shortridge family, and Ah Toy, a shrewd businesswoman in her own right, was making an effort to see that the old woman was not being tricked by sly businessmen or local politicians. The late Mark Hopkins, her husband, was one of the four owners of the railroads in the United States, so he had left his wife with a vast fortune.

Clara was thankful to be able to have this gigantic mansion for her family to live in. One of the main reasons she had taken the murder case in Chinatown was because they paid her enough so that she could finally bring her family from San Jose to live with her. Now that she was back to plying her daily trade of divorce cases and family law, the money was not as forthcoming as the one hundred dollars per hour she received from the Chinatown Six Companies during the murder case. One more reason she was grateful to have this abode.

“Carrie, who have you brought home to us?” Ah Toy was mincing her way over the thick Persian carpeting toward them. As a child back in China, Ah Toy’s feet had been bound, which now caused her to walk in tiny steps. Clara was still standing with her charge, whose name, she then realized, she did not know.

The young woman was staring, fixated would be a better word, at one of the oil paintings hanging on the redwood wall in the living room. Its subject was a female medium in front of the Tin How Temple. The woman in the painting had a crazed, inward stare, and her mouth was open. The Chinese men standing all around her were listening intently to what she was saying. The medium’s words, according to the belief, were channeling responses from the Goddess Mazu, who was being carried behind the medium on a colorfully decorated cart.

“She seems to be hypnotized by your art, Ah Toy. I found her in this state of somnambulism at my meeting. I think she’s been abused by some trauma, and I want your help.”

Ah Toy, at age fifty-eight, was still a beautiful woman. She wore a long black silk dress called a *cheongsam* that extended down to cover her bound feet, and her hair was still mostly black, although waves of gray were present, and her temples were completely white. She minced over to stand beside the young woman.

The living room in this Victorian mansion resembled an art gallery rather than a place to entertain guests. Long mahogany benches faced the walls, which were filled with hundreds of oils, watercolors and sculpted designs on wooden platforms. Mrs. Hopkins was one of the biggest art collectors in the United States.

“Why are you fascinated by this piece, my dear?” Ah Toy whispered to the

girl. The older woman knew immediately not to burst out in her usually flamboyant voice. The former Chinatown Madame had worked with thousands of fragile young women, and she knew how to handle a damaged psyche. She had been successful in the sex trade because she was gentle, and she had used a woman's beauty and her more mysterious qualities to please men rather than overt and animalistic sexual intercourse.

"I can do this," the girl said, matter-of-factly.

"Do what? What's your name? I am Ah Toy."

Clara listened intently to the conversation. Her detective abilities were on alert, as she sensed there would be an interesting exchange.

"Adeline Quantrill. I can speak in the voices from beyond." Adeline touched her red lips with the tips of the fingers of her right hand. Her face was pretty, oval and Asian-looking, although her eyes were not slanted. It was her jet-black hair and dark eyes beneath the brushes of eyebrows that made her appear Oriental. Her breathing was now regular, and she seemed to be responding well to Ah Toy's questions.

"Beyond. Do you mean voices from our departed souls? Our relatives and friends who've passed on?"

"No. I mean voices from those who are not willing to share what they're thinking to others. Some are dead, but others are alive. They exist in prisons made by men and in prisons created by the mind."

"I see. That's quite a magnificent gift you have! I want to learn more." Ah Toy encircled the girl's shoulders with her arm.

"I found her crying. She told me she was at some kind of trial. The attorneys would not listen to her. She said they kept arguing about what the witnesses had testified. Also, she said that somebody was still out there—a man." Clara stepped over to stand next to her friend.

Adeline pulled away, and her snub nose wrinkled, her mouth turned down, her head began to slowly shake, from side-to-side, and she began to flash her teeth like a caged wildcat. The voice that came out of her was not that of a teenage young woman, however, it was the deep baritone of a tortured male.

"They come to me like lost sheep. I attract them with my recipes for sexual fulfillment, you see. The energies of the body can be harvested for a power much greater than the power men have over them! I can teach them the joys of producing passion as it's linked to the dead. Intercourse with their husbands only leads to death. But intercourse with me leads to the release of the soul into a new realm of power on Earth!"

Ah Toy spoke gently to the possessed woman. "Who are you? Why do you have such power?"

Adeline did not look at Ah Toy. She continued to stare, flaring her nostrils and

flashing her teeth. “I am a follower of Dr. Paschal Beverly Randolph. He taught me the gift of animal magnetism before he killed himself in Ohio. Now I have perfected his teachings, and women can at last learn the only way to free themselves from the slavery over their minds and bodies.”

Clara was intrigued. Most of her abolitionist and suffragist work had been “allowed” because the Spiritualist Movement, of which Dr. Randolph was a member, gave women a voice that they would not have had otherwise. The male patriarchy forbade most women from speaking in public, and women themselves were fighting the equal rights suffragists because they believed gaining more political power would lead to the same corruption that men had created.

However, Clara and her sisters still spoke out for the rights of women because they knew it was the only truly political path toward ultimate equality under the law. If they had to speak as if they were “possessed” by some otherworldly spirit, so be it. They would speak wherever they could to get their message out to others. But this young woman seemed to be speaking about something more sinister afoot. Dr. Randolph had been a controversial practitioner, and some said his combination of sex and power led to lascivious cravings and ungodly rituals inside the bedroom. Could Adeline be a victim of such practices?

“But how can these women free themselves?” Clara asked the inevitable question.

For the first time, the girl turned toward the voice and stared at Clara. Her masculine voice became a harsh whisper, and what she then said chilled Clara’s mind as if this man were in the room and had addressed her personally. She knew after it was said that it was leading her into a morass of dark sexual practices, and the visitation of urges that she thought were only present in men who were engaging in bloody and horrendous warfare.

“They release the souls of their husbands, of course!” The voice said.