

# Robert B. Parker's Angel Eyes

## 1

"Whoever said it never rained in Southern California lied," I said.

"Albert Hammond," Zebulon Sixkill said.

"Albert Hammond wrote it?" I asked.

"Albert Hammond and Mike Hazlewood," Z said. "Albert Hammond sang it. 1972. I can't recall the label."

"I can recall record labels and ball players," I said. "It's one of my many gifts."

"What are your other gifts?"

I shrugged, trying to look modest. "I don't like to brag. But there's a reason Susan stays with me. Beyond my obvious good looks and stellar charm."

"Must be your fashion sense."

"I color-coordinated my ball cap with the T-shirt," I said. "Didn't you notice?"

"I did," he said. "You'll look right at home on Rodeo Drive. They'll think you're a wealthy eccentric."

"And they'd be half right."

We sat parked outside a mid-century modern apartment building in West Hollywood, not far from the Runyon Canyon Park. I'd brought breakfast burritos and two hot coffees from my hotel and graciously shared with Z. Every few seconds, the windshield wipers on his highland-green Mustang would tick tock across the glass. Downslope, the L.A. Basin spread far and wide from the hills. Tall palms moved as if blown by a gentle breath. "What do you know about 1972?" I said. "You weren't born yet."

"You live long enough in Los Angeles and you pick up things," Z said.

"Ray-Bans," I said. "Sports car. An office in Hollywood. You've become the cliché of a private eye."

"Might I remind you I am a full Cree Indian?" he said. "That gives me character."

"Character only gets you so far," I said. "Right now, I'd settle for a clue."

"Have you spoken with Samuelson yet?"

"I put in a call," I said. "He'll be thrilled to hear from me."

"You think the cops know more than us?"

"Wouldn't take much," I said and opened the paper around the burrito and started to eat. I hadn't eaten since asking for an extra pack of pretzels on flight from Boston. No one came from the building, which was guarded with a steel gate and punch-key entry. The rain continued to ping the car. It was overcast and cloudy at nine in the morning. But who was I to complain? It was like summertime compared to the Back Bay at the moment.

"Tell me again about Gabby," Z said. He was tall and thick-muscled, with a

wide, flat face and long black hair. For three years he'd been my sleuthing apprentice, now on his own. His claim to fame was being the only mortal man who could out-bench-press me and Hawk. And he never let us forget.

"Gabrielle Leggett," I said. "Twenty-three. From Cambridge. Her mother takes yoga with Susan. The girl came out here two years ago. She rented this apartment, joined an acting class, and got a job as a dog walker and personal assistant for a publicist in West Hollywood. She did some modeling, shot a few commercials, and expanded her career as a social media influencer."

"Influencer," Z said. "Good work if you can find it. These people don't have to pay for a damn thing. They get comped clothes, meals, hotels."

"Maybe we should try it."

"What would you influence?"

"Beer and donut consumption," I said.

"And what does Gabby use to influence people?"

"Gabby," I said. "I scrolled through her Instagram before I flew out."

"Ugly?" he said.

"Hideous." I pulled out my phone and showed Z a picture. Blonde, tan, long-limbed and lithe, Gabby Leggett posed in a microscopic black bikini and a ridiculously large hat. Another photo had her in cut-off shorts and a crop top, a flower wreath in her hair, at some big music festival I'd never heard of. Z stared at the screen for a while and then let out a very long breath.

"Impressed?"

"Sure," he said. "My left leg won't stop shaking."

"Young enough to be my daughter," I said. "Or so Susan claims."

I handed him my phone and he scrolled through her account. He raised his eyebrows. "When did you get Instagram?"

"Yesterday."

"And your handle is Pearl the Wonder Dog?"

"She already has twenty followers," I said. "Don't tell her. She'll get cocky."

We both looked up as a white BMW wheeled into a space across the road and a thin young man crawled out and walked toward the apartment. He appeared to be the man we'd been waiting for all morning.

"What do you think?" I said.

"Could be," Z said. "Hard to tell. All you white people look the same."

I opened the passenger door and walked toward the young guy as he punched numbers on the keypad. He had a neatly trimmed beard and a Hitler youth haircut and wore a three-piece navy suit with a skinny blood red tie. He stood a little under six feet in tall lace-up boots favored by Victorian-era jockeys.

"Mr. Collinson?"

He nodded, a leather satchel hanging over his shoulder. The metal door sprung open.

"My name's Spenser," I said. "I work for the Leggett family."

"I know who you are," he said. "Sorry I didn't return your calls. To be honest, I don't feel comfortable with this."

"You agreed to let us into Gabby's apartment," I said.

"That was before I spoke to the police," he said, trying to let the door close. "I'd rather you handle your business with the family and leave me out of it."

I wedged my foot in the door frame. I wore Red Wing boots with steel toes and didn't feel a thing. Z had gotten out of the Mustang and hung back, oblivious to the rain. Indians were like that. One with nature.

"Hey," Collinson said.

I gripped his upper arm and walked with him into the apartment building. "The Leggett family greatly appreciates your cooperation. I'm sure you realize they're quite concerned. They haven't heard from her in ten days."

The boy stopped, grunting, trying unsuccessfully to shake my grip. He had the general upper body build of Mr. Salty. "Twelve."

"Excuse me?" I said.

"Twelve days," he said. "Gabby's been gone for twelve days. I've been looking for her since then. I've told the police all I know. I don't know what else to do."

"When did you see her last?"

"Would you please let go of my arm?"

"Is that your arm?" I said. "I thought it was a chicken leg. How about you let me into Gabby's apartment and we can talk?"

"Ouch," he said. "You're hurting me."

I let go and Collinson looked back through a large plate glass window. He seemed transfixed by the sight of the extra-large Native American standing next to the Mustang. Z leaned against the hood with his sizable arms folded over his chest. Collinson pointed his chin in Z's general direction. "Who the hell's that?"

"My associate," I said.

"What's he do?"

"Runs the West Coast office."

"And you?"

"Boston talent scout."

"You guys look like thugs," he said.

"Thanks," I said. "We do our very best."

"I told Gabby's mother I didn't feel comfortable with letting you in," he said. "I just need to pick up some scripts and contracts. Materials confidential to the agency."

"You used to date," I said. "And now you're her agent?"

"That's right," he said. "Is that a problem?"

"And you kept her key?"

"It's complicated," he said.

"Uh-huh," I said. "Any ideas of where she might have gone?"

"Why don't you ask her new boyfriend," he said. "Or her so-called friends."

"And who's her new boyfriend?"

"That's her business," he said. "And I have mine. Now please."

"Did I mention I took the red-eye from Boston last night and had to sit next to a fat guy with halitosis and sleep apnea?" I said. "I'm tired, need a change of clothes, and wish to get into Gabby's building."

"You don't stop, do you?" he said.

"It's never suited me."

Collinson sighed and shook his head. "Maybe you should come work with me at the agency," he said. "You seem to have the temperament."

I looked over at Z and waved, following Collinson deeper into the apartment lobby. He punched up the elevator and waited with a cellphone in hand, staring down at the screen, scrolling with his thumb. There was a bulletin board by an empty reception desk with flyers for lost dogs, sofas for sale, roommates wanted, and a killer metal band seeking intense drummer. Collinson hooked a thumb into the leather satchel's strap as we waited.

"You mind me asking what happened with you and Gabby?"

He looked up and said, "We weren't suited for each other."

"How's that?"

"She's six years younger," he said. "She said I was stifling her personal growth."

"I can see that," I said.

"Our relationship isn't any of your concern."

"That's where you're wrong, Eric," I said. "All this is my concern now."

The elevator opened and we zipped up to the third floor, Collinson already ahead of me down an unremarkable hall and slipping the key into an unremarkable door. The carpet was an industrial gray with black metal sconces placed about every eight feet. The air in the hallway was hot and stuffy, smelling as stale and musty as an old attic. As we walked inside, my eyes had to adjust to the darkness until Collinson found the switch.

The apartment was an absolute mess. Broken glass, stuffing from cushions, and upturned drawers. It didn't take a detective to see someone had been looking for something and wanted to find it very badly.

"Holy shit," he said. "What the hell?"

I walked over and picked up an overturned poster of Boston. A picture taken at twilight across the harbor with a wonderful view of the Custom House Tower and the city skyline. The kind of print you might find at the Quincy Market. It was enough to make me feel slightly homesick.

"God," he said. "What a fucking mess. These people."

"What people, Eric?"

"Whoever did this," he said. "I don't know who. I guess who took her."

I ran my hand over the back of my neck as I stretched my hands high overhead. My back and legs ached from the flight. I watched as he disappeared into a bedroom and returned a few moments later. I stooped down, looking through some scattered papers.

"I'd really rather you not do that."

"Do what?"

"Snoop."

"I'm a detective," I said. "Not a psychic. Snooping is my business."

"I don't know if the cops have been here yet."

"They have."

"Was the apartment like this?" he said.

"I don't know."

"Well if it wasn't, they damn well need to know about it," he said. "I don't want to be responsible for anything you might mess up."

"I may look like a bull in a china shop," I said. "But I'm stealthier than a Sumatran tiger."

Eric Collinson rolled his eyes and shifted his weight in his stylish lace-up boots. He looked both bored and annoyed. I'd only just met him, but I wasn't a fan.

"If you know anything . . ."

"I don't," he said.

"But if you find out something."

"I will," he said. "Can I please go? I need to go."

"For her personal agent, you don't seem to be of much use."

He shook his head and tried to pass me through the narrow hallway. I took up a lot of space and kept my boots firmly planted.

"Why don't you just talk to KiKi?" he said. "She knows more than me. She knows all about Gabby's new beautiful life and new beautiful friends. I warned her. I warned her something like this would happen."

"And how do I find KiKi?"

"I don't know."

"Phone number or address works."

"All I know is she used to hostess at the Mirabeau," he said. "She provides bottle service for rich douchebags."

"Fantastic."

"Do you even know what the Mirabeau is?"

"I told you I'm a pro," I said. "I just mastered Google."

"They have a guest list," he said. "They have a huge wait to get in. It's pretty much the kind of place that you have to know someone."

"I know many people," I said. "And I just purchased a blazer that promises to be wrinkle-free."

Eric Collinson looked as if he doubted me. "It's a hangout for industry people. Beautiful people."

"I'm the definition of beautiful," I said. "Inside and out."

He handed me the key, and said he was done with the whole thing.

"If you had to guess where Gabby went..."

"I can't."

"But if you did, where might she go?"

"It's Mr. Spenser?"

"Just Spenser," I said. "With an S, like the English poet."

"I know how to spell it," he said. "I went to Princeton."

"Of course you did."

He kept looking at me, as if appraising my trustworthiness, and then finally nodded. "If I had to guess what got her?"

I nodded.

"Ambition."

"Ambition?"

"Welcome to L.A., Mr. Spenser," he said, turning away. "What else is there? Gabby was a wonderful girl. I wish I knew what the hell changed her."

"Will you answer next time when I call?"

"Gabby's mother knows where to find me," Collinson said. "I hope you find her. But I'm done with all of this mess."

## 2

I spent the next hour going through Gabby Leggett's apartment with Z. It was hard, as most of her belongings had been tossed on the floor, but we made slow, deliberate work. She didn't have a lot of personal items other than clothes. And there were a lot of clothes, more than most boutiques on Newbury Street, and enough shoes to outfit an army of Kardashians. The interior seemed to have been recently renovated to a new manufactured bamboo floor and sleek gray cabinets in a Scandinavian style. Her furniture was basic and utilitarian, classic Ikea. In the drawers, there were no letters or personal photos. No suicide notices, hidden diaries, or maps to One-Eyed Willy's secret treasure. The only sense that Gabby Leggett had lived here was a MacBook computer slid halfway under her bed.

I pulled it out and showed it to Z. "Almost as if someone wanted us to find it."

"What did Collinson say?"

"Nothing," I said. "I think we made him feel a tad uncomfortable."

"Or inadequate," Z said as he upturned a massive framed black-and-white poster of Gabby Leggett from a modeling shoot. The glass had spider-webbed across the image but the print was otherwise undamaged. "This girl would break that boy like a toothpick."

Gabby was posed in the corner of a shuttered business. The rolling metal grate covering the entrance had been painted with the faces of Tupac and Charlie Chaplin. She had on black jeans and a T-shirt generously cut out from the arm holes. Her lean flank and side of her breasts were on prominent display. She looked right into the camera with her sleepy eyes, full lips parted as she touched the upper part of her chest as if holding back a terrific secret. *Shh.*

"I hate to say it," Z said. "But she's pretty average for this town."

"Tough critic."

"She could've gone anywhere," he said. "For all we know she could've skipped out on her rent and gone down to Baja for a few weeks."

"Then we go to Baja."

"With my luck," Z said, hands on hips, looking over the mess. "We'll end up watching Motel 6 in Van Nuys."

On the way out, I tried to find the super without any luck. I spotted two

security cameras in the lobby and one out by the gated entry. I made a mental note of their placement as Z and I got back into his Mustang and drove back toward his office. I set her laptop in the backseat.

"Can you hack it?" I said.

"Hack it?" Z said. He zipped down Hollywood Boulevard, slowing at a red light. "You mean unlock the laptop without the password?"

"Hacking sounds more tricky and professional," I said. "Good for billing."

"I know just the girl," he said. "Works in K-town."

"Good to have friends."

"Also know a guy in Canada who can track Gabby's movements from her cell phone."

"I used to pull phonebooks at the Boston public library for addresses," I said. "That almost feels like cheating."

"Almost," Z said.

The office of Zebulon Sixkill, licensed California investigator, was at the corner of Highland and Hollywood. Z had the corner space on the second floor of a double decker strip mall. The other tenants included a Thai massage parlor, a vape shop, a movie star tour bus service, twenty-four-hour liquor store, and a nail salon. His office was twice as large as mine with half the furniture and a secretary, a pleasant Latino woman named Delores. Delores was a little older than me but lacked my stellar charisma. She barely glanced up from her *National Enquirer* as we passed her desk. *Rob Lowe Reveals His Sex Tape Regrets!*

"I'd offer you coffee," Z said, "but I haven't bought a coffeemaker yet."

"I started out with just a jar of Sanka and a chipped coffee mug."

"Do you think someone tossed her apartment after the cops?"

"Probably."

"Why don't you think the cops took the laptop?"

"It was there," I said. "Someone left it later."

"Collinson?"

I nodded. It felt odd sitting on the opposite side of the desk. I wasn't used to being the one in the client's chair and missed my accessibility to a bottle of Bushmills and a .357. Although I suspected Z's gun was handy. The Bushmills, not so much. Z had quit drinking almost five years ago.

"I have a list of friends from Gabby's mother," I said. "And the name and address of her current employer and acting school."

"What about her Instagram?" he said. "Friends in the photos?"

"I made a list," I said. "But most of her pics only feature herself. Gabby seemed mainly into promoting Gabby.""

"You want me to hit up the friends and you stick with the acting coach and her boss?"

"Do I detect a subtle hint of ageism?"

Z grinned. He stood up and hung his leather biker jacket on a hook on the back of a bathroom door and sat back down. Some pictures of him from his playing days at Cal Wesleyan lined the walls, along with a photo of him and Henry Cimoli when he worked at the Harbor Health Club. A few scars remained on Z's face from a nasty incident a while back at an old dog track in Revere.

"I am closer to their peer group."

"Maybe the woman she worked for is older than Maureen O'Hara and will take a shine to me."

The office had a lone window that looked into a narrow alley where some homeless had made a small tarp city. An all-night diner pumped smoke and grease into the wide-open space over a dumpster. Rain tapped against the small window and pinged the puddles along the alley.

"Where's the glitz and glamor?" I said.

"Use your imagination," Z said. "It's all around us."

"I was thinking maybe I'd get a martini at the Cocoanut Grove," I said.

"I'd take you there," Z said. "But it burned down about thirty years ago."

"Maybe have dinner at the Brown Derby?"

"Closed."

"Chasen's?"

"Gone."

"Clark Gable?"

"Dead."

"Damn," I said. I made a few notes on a pocket-sized spiral notebook I kept in my jacket.

"What's the girl's mother say?" Z said. He had on gray T-shirt that said Rocky Boy North Stars. The short sleeves looked as if they might burst at any moment.

"I met her at Harvest with Susan the other night," I said. "Didn't know much about her life in L.A. Sounded like they were estranged. On the positive front, she hated Eric Collinson. Said he'd made a mess of her career."

"Maybe Collinson was jealous of Gabby's new friends?"

"Yep."

"Maybe we should've appealed to his better nature."

"You mean shaken the ever-living truth from him?" I said.

"Sure," Z said. "That."

"Sometimes I forget you've learned as much from Hawk as from me."

"What can I say?" Z said. "Boston was one hell of an education. Without you guys, I could never have come back to California as a professional."

"Professor Spenser?"

"Hawk called his class the school of hard knocks."

"At Harvard it would've been called 'A History of Violence through the African-American Prism.'"

Z laid his hand on the small silver MacBook. "I'll take this to K-town and see what I can find. Then I'll try and round up some of Gabby's friends, see what I can find out about where she's been and what she's been up to."

"Try and use some of that Native American charm."

"I'll do my best," he said. "Girls love stoicism."

"And I'll try that acting coach," I said. "Maybe he'll see some untapped potential in me. Maybe I could be the next Nat Pendleton or Ward Bond?"

"Maybe," Z said. "And who the hell are they?"



"So young," I said. "So much to learn."  
"I learned from the best."