



## CHAPTER NINE

If there was a first for Arden that made even him take notice of his unique ability it was the painting he did in the spring of 1947 of the Golden Gate Bridge. He had always been fascinated by this engineering marvel, even as a youngster. Its sheer size was imposing, and the thought that it had been constructed – with multiple losses of life – across an unruly stretch of water seemed all but miraculous. This manmade taunting of the uncaring forces of nature – wind, water, cold, gravity – testified to such manifest strength and stability that to gaze upon it was to acknowledge that it would in all likelihood survive man himself. To stare at either of the towers from which the highway portion of the structure was suspended, its base embedded deep into the ground below the wind-whipped waters of the Golden Gate, was to salute the ballsy gumption of Chief Engineer Joseph Strauss for having so arrogantly chosen to build “on water.”

Upon first arriving in San Francisco in 1938, Arden placed walking across the bridge at the top of his to-do list, and when the day came it did not disappoint. Early on, a thick fog cloaked everything between the water and all but the upper third of the bridge’s massive twin towers. Each tower rose skyward as if piercing the fog, only a portion of the orange vermillion - “International Orange” as it was called - constructs clearing the mass white that rendered the remainder of the bridge invisible. Arden wondered how it appeared from afar, his mind’s

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eye seeing the towers protruding through the cottony fog, as if the bridge itself suddenly existed in heaven.

As he first set off on the three-and-a-half-mile round-trip, he was unable to see much of anything apart from the road upon which he was walking, the view from the bridge an endless tedium of fog. Traffic had slowed due to weather, with pedestrians sparse as well, many having chosen to forgo a trip across the bridge during minimum visibility. Almost imperceptibly, however, the fog began to burn away, and by the time Arden reached the north end, he was confident that at least a portion of his return trip would be rewarded with the visuals he had been hoping to get.

By the time he was two-thirds across, a faint blue had debuted in the sky, the fog evaporating into a haze that weakened by the minute. Just north of the tower positioned along the San Francisco side, Arden stopped to take in the sights. He could feel himself smiling as he gazed east, when suddenly he was ambushed by the stark realization that the bridge on which he was standing was prime real estate for suicides. He thought of the troubled souls who threw themselves downward, colliding with water at an unforgiving velocity, each having chosen to breach the fence that rose less than four feet before taking that last irreversible step. It would be so easy, he thought before putting aside such dark thoughts, to take in the soothing images before him, namely the choppy waters of the bay and, off to the right, what locals boasted to be “the world’s most beautiful city.”