

PROLOGUE
THE UNIVERSITY, DECEMBER 1958

"WE LOCATED PREVATT."

"Outstanding. Have you primed him?"

"He's primed and ready. Told him his dismissal was all a mistake."

"And the student?"

"Primed and ready. What about Warren?"

"He's ready. He'll cooperate. We just need his deposition."

"And the Jew? What about the Jew?"

"Cohen's next. Let's move it."



ELLIS COHEN KNEW the tactic. The late night call. The anonymous voice summoning the victim. He had readied himself. "Do you have a subpoena?" Cohen asked.

"Will we need one?" the voice asked.

"You will if you want to interrogate me."

"It's to your..."

Cohen broke in to finish the statement, "...advantage to cooperate?"

Silence on the other end.

"Tell you what. I'll spare you the subpoena. Yes, I'll be delighted to cooperate."

"Fine," said the voice. "Be here in thirty minutes."

"No. Tomorrow. I'll let you know when. And don't call me again like this," Cohen said, gently placing the phone on the cradle and turning off the light.

COHEN SAT IN the lobby of the Rosemont Hotel. They had kept him waiting for an hour. Another tactic. Keep him waiting. Build up anxiety, then pounce. Except he was ready to pounce.

As usual, the room was empty except for the table in the center, the straight chairs on either side and the lone light overhead. Cohen recognized Senator Billy Sloat seated at the far end. Mayes, the committee's legal counsel, and Henson, its chief investigator, held positions at the center. Except for file folders and note pads, the only object on the table was the recorder.

Mayes glanced at Senator Sloat, cleared his throat and began. "Would you state your name, occupation and residence please?"

"Ellis Cohen, Professor of English, State University, United States citizen."

Mayes stiffened, paused, glanced again at Sloat and continued. "Do you swear that the deposition you are about to give..."

Cohen interrupted. "I don't swear, Mr. Mayes, except on rare occasions, and I will take an oath only in a legitimate procedure."

Mayes sneered. "You are suggesting that this investigation is illegitimate?"

"Your procedure is questionable. You wanted my cooperation in your inquiry. I'm prepared to offer my cooperation. What do you want to know?"

Caught off guard, Mayes hesitated, looked again in Sloat's direction, then plunged ahead. "Are you now or have you ever been a communist or have had associations with known communists, Dr. Cohen?"

Cohen laughed. "My God, man, you sound just like Joe McCarthy, a bit rough around the edge, but not a bad imitation."

"Will you answer for the record?" he demanded.

"No."

"No, you have not been, or no you will not answer for the record?"

"No, I will not answer for the record."

"Are you homosexual?" Mayes asked.

"That is really of no concern to you."

"Oh, but it is. Homosexuality is a felony in this state, punishable with prison."

THE SIN WARRIORS

"No, Mr. Mayes, a homosexual tendency is not a felony, only the act itself is a felony, and that is unfortunate."

Suddenly Mayes was energized. "Oh, so you condone homosexual acts. And your students? Do you encourage their engagement in such acts?"

"I encourage them to be who they are, not to hide behind pretense."

"As a teacher, Dr. Cohen, you have an obligation to set an example. Your association with known homosexuals and communists is well established. Moral turpitude and subversion are grounds for dismissal," he threatened.

Cohen looked directly at Sloat, then at Mayes. "Since my associations are so well established, it appears that further cooperation is unnecessary."

Mayes glanced again at Sloat, sensing his impatience. He cleared his throat.

"I will ask you once more. Are you a homosexual?" he demanded.

Cohen's response was direct. "No."

"But you know others who are."

"Well, of course, even some who are closeted. For all I know, you could be. Are you, Mr. Mayes? Have you ever in your life had such tendencies?"

Mayes's eyes widened. His face flushed. Blood rushed to his cheeks. He waited a moment for his rage to subside. Sloat shifted in his chair at the question.

"There are serious allegations about you and your association with certain individuals," Mayes said. "You can make this easy or difficult."

"For whom? For me or for you?"

"For all of us, Dr. Cohen. Just give us the facts," he insisted.

"What facts would you prefer? The truth or what you construe as truth?"

"The truth truth," he shouted.

"Oh, that truth. Not the half-truth, the partial truth, but the truth truth. Well, Mr. Mayes, the truth is your so-called investigation is a pathetic abuse of power. If it weren't for the lives you have ruined, I would pity you for your arrogance, your ignorance, your bigotry,

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your cowardice." He stopped abruptly, then leaned forward, speaking directly into the recorder. "But put this in the record. My great disappointment is Dwight Thurgis. He is pitiable. Politics is rife with scum like you, but the president of this university has made himself your academic whore. And that *is* the truth! Now if you want anything else from me, get a subpoena," he said. He rose from his chair. He looked directly at Billy Sloat, turned, and left the room.

OUTSIDE, THE OCTOBER air was brisk. Cohen walked along the commons and, reaching the pond, plopped on the bench next to the path. Back there he had maintained an air of defiance. But the truth was there seemed no recourse other than to resist. The university was supposed to be a refuge against ignorance. Now it was the instrument of ignorance itself. How incredible, he thought, that this could happen in this country, in this time, in this place and that there was no protection under the law, no recourse except to resist.