

# matters familiar



e. g. fabricant

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## **DEDICATION**

For Frank and Betty, for the gifts of life and love—theirs,  
mine, and ours—and  
For M. A.; BeeEss; Tomiss; Jerome; J. L.; Fuffy; and The  
Brat, for helping me fill in the blanks.

## CONTENTS

1	Ashley Alert	1
2	Boys Will Be Men	24
3	Chosen	34
4	Gemini	52
5	Intentional Walk	72
6	The Jewel of Genoa	100
7	Medalists	139
8	Meridian	145
9	Pallbearer	171
10	Pipe Dream	193
11	Robbin' Hood	225
12	Term Limit	260

## 12 Term Limit



Recreational soul mates Zev Brannan and Barney Isleton bobbed and dozed in Zev's 18-foot Alumacraft northwest of the pier at Pinole Point, near where the Sacramento River empties into San Pablo Bay. As the silent November dawn cracked behind them, they shared the unspoken hope that not all the King salmon had found their way upriver, pursuing their evolutionary suicides. Sure, they'd settle for a trout or two; truth be told, they were grateful just to be out of the house—and on a Sunday morning to boot. Barney cradled his rod and fished a beer out of the cooler, opening it with some difficulty. "Durned arthur-itis." He neglected to rotate the EZ-open tab a quarter turn and it tore out a mustache hair at the first draught. "Gol-*DANG* it!"

Zev reeled in his bait, inspected it, and recast. "You rather be in church with the old lady this mornin'?"

"Point made," Barney said. He stood to stretch, and his eye caught a lumpy mass riding the current

about 70 yards to starboard. "Hey! What you suppose that is?"

Zev peered through the mist layering the opaque olive waters. "Looks like deadfall to me."

"Let's check it out." They laid aside their gear and Zev

fired up the Evinrude while Barney hauled in the drift anchor. As they motored alongside, Barney hooked the shape's far edge with a gaff and rolled it over.

Zev flinched. "Mother a God!" A male face, handsome in spite of its pale bloat, surfaced, the well-dressed trunk and appendages below it sinking away from it. "What do you suppose—"

"Hold on a minute," Barney said. "I *know* this guy!"



The Commissioner admired the sapphire blue California sky over Vallejo through the front passenger window. All the clouds, it seemed, were inside his head. He studied the pump-action shotgun bracket-mounted vertically above the transmission hump. At the wheel in plainclothes, California Highway Patrol Sergeant Ernesto Nuñez noticed, and prepared himself for the usual question—but with more steel. *Ernie: Don't laugh this time; it wouldn't be appropriate.*

"So, Ernie," Insurance Commissioner John Quincy "Jack" Quisenberry asked, "when are you going to let me break that bad boy out and squeeze off a few?"

Ernie checked his left outside mirror in case he softened prematurely. "No can do, Sir." He couldn't help himself; he cracked a smile and turned back. "When you going to stop asking me?"

Jack wasn't smiling this time. "Well, Ernie, my man—since the hearings start Monday, that may have

been the last time."

*Shit*, Ernie thought. *Nice going, pendéjo—the only statewide elected official in memory who's treated his details as equals is going down, and you go and stick your foot in it!* He focused on his hands gripping the wheel and the horizon beyond them.

Jack read Sgt. Nuñez's discomfort; by reflex he came to his rescue. "Cheer up, Ernie. Maybe the next guy will drink *real* beer, instead of that Colorado Kool-Aid I like." Satisfied at seeing his driver's jaw and fingers relax, Jack resumed his dark reverie. *How did it come to this?* he wondered. *Military combat pilot. High-concept marriage. Business credentials. Three Assembly terms as a journeyman moderate. Elected and re-elected to a third-rail office, to which I brought management skills and, God forbid, results. Now I'm probably a fortnight away from being run out of Sacramento—and without benefit of electorate, unlike the other guy.* He came out of it when he saw the Maritime Academy exit sign.

"The Carquinez coming up, sir." Sgt. Nuñez eased the Dark Blue Pearl Crown Victoria over and onto the right shoulder, pulling in behind a white CalTrans pickup. A hard-hatted employee in engineer semi-formal and orange safety vest got out and presumed to guide him to a stop.

Jack produced a business card and scribbled on the back. He extended it to Sgt. Nuñez. "Here, Ernie. After you drop me, head into the City and pick up this guy at the *Chronicle*. He's expecting you; his office number is on here. Bring him here and call me when you arrive. You've got my cell number, right?"

The sergeant nodded. Jack stepped out and the sergeant pulled away. Jack had scarcely buttoned his topcoat before the excitable engineer was on him. "Good afternoon, Commissioner," he said. "Supervising Engineer Steve Soblett at your service."

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



### **E. G. Fabricant**

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