

IDENTICAL

SCOTT TUROW

PAN BOOKS

Principal Characters

Gianis Family

Paul Gianis – *A lawyer*

Cass Gianis – *Paul's identical twin*

Lidia Gianis – *Paul and Cass's mother*

Kronon Family

Hal Kronon – *Executive with ZP, a real estate concern*

Zeus Kronon – *Hal's father and the founder of ZP*

Dita Kronon – *Hal's sister; the murder victim*

Teri Kronon – *Hal and Dita's aunt, Zeus's sister, and
Lidia Gianis's best friend*

Investigators

Evon Miller – *ZP's Senior Vice President for Security*

Tim Brodie – *Former homicide detective who first
investigated Dita's murder*

1

Paul—September 5, 1982

Many years from now, whenever he thinks back to Dita Kronon's murder, Paul Gianis's memories will always return to the start of the day. It is September 5, 1982, the Sunday of Labor Day weekend, a lush afternoon with high clouds lustrous as pearls. Zeus Kronon, Dita's father, has opened the sloping grounds of his suburban mansion to hundreds of his fellow parishioners from St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church in the city for their annual celebration of the ecclesiastical New Year. Down the hill, in the grassy riverside meadow that serves as a parking lot, Paul arrives with his mother and his identical twin brother, Cass. The next few hours with both of them, Paul knows, will be an ordeal.

On the driver's side, Cass is out of the old Datsun coupe instantly.

"I need to find Dita," he says, referring to his girlfriend, Zeus's daughter.

Their mother climbs from the passenger seat with Paul's assistance, watching her other son sling his suit coat over his shoulder and bound up the hill.

"Theae mou," she mutters in Greek and quickly makes the sign of the cross after invoking God in dismay.

"Mom," Paul says, now that his brother is gone, "what are we doing here really?"

SCOTT TUROW

Lidia, their mother, condenses her thick eyebrows, as if she doesn't understand.

"You refuse to come to this picnic every year," he says, "because of how much Dad hates Zeus."

"No more than I," quietly answers Lidia, who rarely concedes priority in anything. Together, with Lidia hanging on to her son's arm for support, Paul and she start up the gravel path toward Zeus's vast white house with its low-pitched gables and Corinthian columns. "This picnic is for the church, not Zeus. I've missed many of our former neighbors, and I have not been face-to-face with Nouna Teri in months."

"You talk to Teri every day."

"Paulie mou,"—literally 'My Paul,'—"I didn't make you come here."

"I had to, Mom. You're up to something. Cass and I both know it."

"Am I?" asks Lidia. "I didn't realize that when you received your law degree, you also became a mind reader."

"You're going to make some kind of trouble about Dita."

"Trouble?" Lidia snorts. At sixty-three, their mother has grown somewhat stout, but she retains a regal manner, a tall woman with fierce dark eyes and a wide spray of graying hair pushed back from her brow. "Dita makes enough trouble by herself. Even Teri admits that, and the girl is her niece. If Cass marries Dita, your father will never speak to him again."

"Mom, that's just old-country nonsense like believing in the evil eye. Cass and I aren't going to carry on your crazy feud with Zeus. And we're twenty-five years old. You have to let Cass make his own decisions."

"Who says?" answers Lidia, adding a sudden chuckle and a squeeze of Paul's bicep to lighten the mood. That is their

IDENTICAL

mother's idea of wit, laughing when she says something she means.

At the top of the hill, the picnic is a sensory barrage. The gums and spices, still smoking in the censers after a brief religious service, mingle with the aromas of four whole lambs roasting over oak, while the frenetic, high-pitched music of a bouzouki band lances the air to welcome the hundreds of guests crowding onto the lawn.

Teri, Zeus's sister, their mother's best friend since Lidia and Teri were both seven years old, awaits them with her scarecrow mop of dyed yellow hair. She embraces Paul and his mother. Zeus's son, Hal, is beside Teri, greeting the guests. At forty, Hal is fat and awkward and overeager, the kind of person who always approaches you in the pathetic hapless manner of a slobbering dog. Even so, Paul retains a soft spot for Hal, whom Cass and he used to follow around like puppies twenty years ago, in the days before a quarrel about the lease on Paul's father's grocery divided their families. Like Paul, Hal seems willing to ignore all that. He hugs Paul's mother, whom he still calls "Auntie Lidia," and chats idly with Paul before Teri leads Lidia away. A covey of their friends awaits them in the deep shade of one of the many blue-and-white-striped tents pitched across the lawn. Reluctantly, Paul heads into this jumble of people from his childhood whose old-world ways and ponderous expectations he's always longed to escape.

A few paces in, his girlfriend, Georgia Lazopoulos, catches sight of him and starts forward with her adoring grin. In her blue gingham sundress, Georgia is short and curvy and cutely dimpled—people always mention Sally Field. Although they have dated since their senior year in high school, their lips barely brush when they reach each other. Georgia is the daughter of Father Nik, St. D's priest,

and realizes she is under constant observation on occasions like this.

She has already prepared Paul a paper plate of lamb and pastitsio, both favorites, which he accepts with thanks, but he steps away from her for a second to look for Cass. Paul finally spies his twin amid a clutch of people from high school. Even at a hundred feet, Paul knows he can catch Cass's eye, and when he does, he hitches his chin slightly so Cass is aware of their mother's location. They have resolved to keep watch and intervene if Lidia comes near Dita. She is unlikely to approach Dita's parents, to whom she has not spoken in years.

Privately, Paul shares most of his mother's opinions about Dita, but he feels Cass's fierce need for autonomy and has always treated his brother's desires as synonymous with his own. Despite their parents' furious opposition, Dita, with her caustic tongue and daring manner, seems to delight Cass far more than any prior woman.

Other people—normal people—don't really understand what it is to grow up not fully knowing where you start and your brother ends. For Paul, humans fall into two classes: Cass, and everybody else. Even their mother, a titanic force who has always loomed over them with the strength and unbending will of a marble column, does not stand in the same realm of emotional proximity.

Therefore, it has been one of the most surprising challenges of Paul Gianis's life that his brother and he began to become so different in college. Cass partied too much and openly resisted their parents. After graduation, Paul went on to law school, while Cass drifted until successfully applying to the Kindle County Police Academy, where he will start next week.

As Paul turns back to where he left Georgia, his legs

IDENTICAL

tangle with someone behind him, and he is suddenly on the way down, arms helicoptering as he yelps, sending his plate flying. He ends up flat on his back, while the young woman he tripped on bends toward him, pinning his arms against the grass.

“Don’t move,” she says. “Give yourself a second to be sure you’re all right.”

It’s Sofia Michalis.

“Where have you been?” are the first words out of his mouth. He does not know if he means simply that he has not seen her in several years, or that the time has transformed her. Both are true. Sofia was always self-possessed, a smarty-pants, but not the kind of girl you would have thought would end up so attractive. In high school, she was one of many young women the boys, with typical cruelty, referred to as ‘a Greek tragedy,’ meaning her nose is far too large for her face. But she always had that air. And a killer body. Now she knows she’s something special.

Laughing, he sits up to examine himself. There is a grass stain on the sleeve of his tan Brooks Brothers suit, but no pain anywhere. He accepts her hand to return to his feet, while several people who came close to help now turn away.

In answer to his question, Sofia tells Paul that for the last seven years, she has been in a combined college and med school program in Boston. She got her MD in June and began a residency here at U Hospital.

“In?” Paul asks.

“Surgery,” she answers.

“Jesus,” he says. He never would have imagined. “Does that mean I could have gotten free stitches, if I needed them?”

“My mother keeps telling me I should have let her teach me to sew.”

SCOTT TUROW

Sofia asks about him. He will be sworn in to the bar in two months and become a deputy prosecuting attorney in Kindle County in Raymond Horgan's office.

"And what about the rest of it?" Sofia asks. "Still going with Georgia?"

"Still going with Georgia," he answers. Her two small front teeth appear over her skinny lower lip and that fine set of honkers seems to perk up somehow. He recognizes what she's thinking: When are you going to figure it out? "She's here somewhere," he says and gestures widely, as if he did not know that Georgia is bound to have stayed close, almost as if he otherwise might get away.

"I'll have to find her," Sofia says. "And say hello."

"You should," he says, feeling that Georgia has somehow thwarted the momentum of their conversation. Sofia parts with a quick wave and he resists the temptation to let his eye follow her. But the impact of her presence lingers. Sofia, he senses, has become one of those people he has longed to be, able to make herself felt in the world. It is a jarring sight when he finally glances back a second later to see Sofia with Georgia, who holds no similar ambitions. At Father Nik's urging, Georgia skipped college, and is already a senior teller at a local bank. Paul loves Georgia. He will always love Georgia. But he is not sure he wants to marry her, which is what she and her family have long expected. That is his problem. Life with Georgia would be good, but not necessarily interesting.

Caught up with these thoughts, Paul realizes that he has lost track of their mother, and when he finally spots her, he is alarmed to see her engaged with the host. But Lidia is considering Zeus with an unyielding expression. Dark and still improbably handsome at the age of sixty-six, Zeus with his rushing silver hair is turned out in a white suit, doing

IDENTICAL

his best to appear jolly in the face of Lidia's coolness. Paul would have thought that Zeus is too obviously stuck on himself to succeed in politics, but he became the Republican candidate for governor, and is neck and neck in the general election race with barely two months to go. If Zeus wins, he will presumably leave his vast business, which owns shopping centers across the nation, in the hands of Hal, who is virtually certain to run it into the ground.

In the meantime, Paul notices Zeus's beautiful daughter headed toward him. Dita glides up and plants full on Paul's mouth a humid kiss, in which the ether of alcohol lingers. Whenever he sees Dita, she seems to be smashed. It takes Paul an instant to understand that she is pretending she can't tell the twins apart—most people still cannot—and he eases her away.

"Is that you, Paul? Lucky for me you didn't play along. Would Cass be jealous or do you two share everything?" Raven-haired and statuesque, with full, well-shaped features and striking dark eyes, Dita laughs and draws her breasts against his arm, forcing him to take another step back.

Because of antics like this, Paul tries hard to avoid Dita, even though he knows intuitively that is exactly what she wants, to separate him from Cass.

"Dita, I know you think you're funny, but I wouldn't be hanging by the phone waiting for your guest shot on Carson."

"Oh, Paul," she says, "you're totally uptight. If somebody shoved a lump of coal up your ass, it would turn into a diamond." Having plainly triumphed in this impromptu round of the Dozens, Dita pauses for a measuring look. "Why is everybody in your house against me?"

"We're not against you, Dita. We're for Cass."

"That's right. Cass needs a girl like Georgia. Bor-ring."

SCOTT TUROW

The pain of hearing someone speak so callously about Georgia is surprisingly sharp, and he has to suppress the impulse Dita frequently inspires to slap his hand over her mouth. Dita is smart. That is another thing that makes her so dangerous. He turns away, but Dita cannot resist a final shot.

“Really,” she says, “I think I would have dumped Cass a long time ago, if I didn’t know it would give the rest of you such a thrill.”

Over the years, when Paul revisits this day that will change his family’s life forever, Dita’s thrashing unhappiness with herself will grow plain to him across the distance of time. But in the moment, he can feel only the peril to his twin that Dita poses, and his painful inability to save Cass from it. Paul walks off, while the thought comes to him with the force and clarity of a trumpet blast: He despises that woman.

2

Pardon and Parole—January 8, 2008

Evon Miller, fifty, senior vice-president for security at ZP Real Estate Investment Trust, ran with the uncommon speed of a former athlete through the basement of the State Building Annex, not knowing where she was going or why she was here. Short and strongly built, Evon unexpectedly made out the number of the conference room she was seeking, and jerked to a halt. Within a plastic holder beside the door, a misprinted placard read PARDN AND PAROLE BOARD HEARING. Inside the conference room, she found her boss, Hal Kronon, CEO of ZP, whose urgent e-mail had summoned her. He was speaking with his personal lawyer, Mel Tooley, and another man in a suit she didn't know.

Evon had spent twenty years as an FBI special agent before taking this job, and she had learned that the power of the state, frequently spoken about as if it were a dread disease, was often most notable for the utter lack of majesty with which it was exercised. The Pardon and Parole Commission's monthly deliberations about the liberty of several dozen humans were going to be conducted in this low-ceilinged windowless room from metal folding chairs placed at two card tables. Behind the seats, the great seal of the state, thirty inches across and all plastic, hung slightly askew on the streaked wall. A lectern with a microphone was centered between the commissioners and two more card

tables reserved for the participants, the state and whoever would speak for the prisoner. The hearing, which the card at the door said would commence at 2:00, had apparently been delayed.

Evon's boss, dark and burly, with his shirt gathered over the waist of his bespoke suit and his necktie askew, finally saw her and drew her toward a corner of the room. On the way, she asked why he was here. His message had offered no explanation.

"I'm trying to keep Cass Gianis in prison," he said. Evon knew next to nothing about the murder of Hal's sister, Dita, in September 1982. The case was long past being news by the time she'd moved to Kindle County fifteen years ago, and Hal preferred not to discuss it. Her knowledge was limited to what had been in the papers recently, that Cass Gianis, the identical twin of Paul Gianis, a state senator now running for mayor, had pled guilty to killing Dita, his girlfriend at the time. "That's not what I need first."

"What is?"

"It's YourHouse," he whispered. Hal had been in negotiations for months to buy YourHouse, one of the nation's largest builders of planned communities, for several hundred million dollars. With the downtick in prices for single-family homes, he believed he could bargain hard and diversify ZP, as he'd been advised to do for years. "We missed something in our due diligence. In Indianapolis. Sounds like there may be a brownfield on part of the site. We need environmental investigators. ASAP."

Evon was not even sure there was such a thing. Worse, knowing Hal, she was wary of chasing phantoms.

"Where did this come from?" she asked, meaning the information.

Hal kept his voice low, his lips barely moving.

IDENTICAL

“Tim shadowed Dykstra and the rest of the YourHouse crew, after they flew in yesterday.”

“Jesus, Hal.” ZP had kept Tim Brodie, an elderly former homicide detective, on an annual retainer for decades to do occasional work as a private investigator for Hal. Evon had little use for private investigators, most of whom were wannabes and used-to-bes who didn’t know where the lines were and could get the company in trouble. Having Brodie spy on his business adversaries was typical of Hal’s impulsive and risky stunts.

“Get somebody on this,” he directed Evon, “but don’t go far. I may need your help here.”

As a boss, Hal Kronon, who had run ZP on his own since the death of his father, Zeus, twenty years ago, seemed to exist in a state of constant agitation. He could be by turns imperial, outraged or pleading, and always loud and opinionated. In every mood Hal required instant gratification from his employees. Evon was often baffled, therefore, by how fond she had become of him in the three years she’d been at ZP. For one thing, he had been astoundingly generous, making her far richer than a girl from Kaskia, Colorado, ever would have imagined possible. But mostly she liked Hal because he was so abject when he needed her help and so thoroughly appreciative afterward. Hal was one of those men who required plenty of women to take care of him, especially now that his mother, Hermione, was gone. There was Hal’s wife, Mina, funny and bossy, and pudgy like her husband, and ancient Aunt Teri, his father’s sister, who scared everyone a little bit. At work, Evon had become one of Hal’s principal confidants, frequently nodding for hours, and gently attempting to save him from himself.

She went out to the hall to call her assistant VP who covered the Ohio Valley and told him to get up to

Indianapolis and find somebody who could look for environmental contamination. Back inside, Mel Tooley, Hal's lawyer, told her that the hearing had been delayed again, because Cass's lawyer was still en route. Her boss had gone out to return a few calls. Mel was checking his handheld from a seat in one of the three rows of card chairs that had been set out for spectators, and Evon put herself down beside him. As a Bureau agent, Evon had known Mel mostly by reputation, which was as another scumbag defense lawyer, smart but basically deceitful. Through Hal, she'd seen Mel's better side, but she still took him with a grain of salt. He looked ridiculous, for one thing, wearing suits too tight for his wide form and a shaggy toupee, which he must have adopted when Tom Jones was the rage. The mess of black curls fell all over his head, resembling the stuff he might sweep off the floor when he took his poodle to the groomer.

She asked Mel for a better picture of what was supposed to happen this afternoon. Mel wrenched his eyes in passing anguish.

"It's just Hal being Hal," he said. He explained that family members of homicide victims had a statutory right to demand a hearing before a convicted killer was released. There was no basis, however, to hold Cass Gianis any longer. He had done all but six months of good time on the twenty-five-year sentence imposed when he pled guilty, and the only way to keep him inside would be for a serious disciplinary infraction. Instead, Gianis had been a model prisoner.

"Here," said Mel, "take a look at his file. See if I missed something." Mel handed over a heavy redwell folder and left to return a call of his own, while Evon sat there, turning the pages. An essential element of Cass's original plea deal had apparently been incarceration in a minimum-security institu-

IDENTICAL

tion, treatment rarely accorded a murderer, and for which she assumed there had been hard bargaining. As a result, he had been in the Hillcrest Correctional Facility about seventy-five miles from the Tri-Cities for more than two decades, even turning down transfers to newer prisons where he could have had his own room. The forms he'd filled out stated that Hillcrest, despite its barracks, was a better location for his family, especially his twin brother, who visited most Sundays. Tooley had subpoenaed every piece of paper Hillcrest had on Cass, starting with his intake photo and the fingerprints he'd given when he entered prison in July 1983, and concluding with the most recent status report of his counselor. As Mel had said, the overall impression from the heavy file was of someone who had managed the rare trick of being a popular figure with the administration, the correctional officers and fellow prisoners, to whom Cass taught classes on law and GED equivalency every day. Most recently, Gianis had finished distance classes to qualify for a teaching credential. In a milieu in which disciplinary beefs were routine—fistfights over the TV channel, fruit secreted from the mess that could be fermented with a little bread into rotgut liquor, joints that relatives had smuggled in—Cass's record showed only a few "tickets," write-ups for offenses no graver than reading after lights-out.

At the doorway, there was a ruffle of activity. Paul Gianis, looking as good as he did on TV, was on his way in, followed by two scrubbed young underlings, a black woman and a white man, campaign staffers, Evon surmised. Mayoral race or not, Paul was apparently going to resume the role he'd played from the start, as one of his brother's lawyers. He hung his gray wool overcoat over a metal chair and threw down a beaten briefcase on the table designated for the prisoner's representatives.

SCOTT TUROW

There had been a time, fifteen years ago, when Evon would have said she knew Paul Gianis fairly well, although she realized that he might not even remember her now. At that time, she had been transferred here to work on Project Petros, an FBI undercover investigation of corruption in the state courtrooms where personal-injury cases were heard. Paul was that rare Kindle County lawyer who'd first had the guts to refuse a shakedown attempt by a prominent judge, and then exhibited the even greater courage required to say yes when Evon asked him to testify about the incident after the judge was indicted. Afterward, widespread admiration for Paul, especially in the press, had propelled him into a political career that had led him to become majority leader in the state senate. Now running for mayor, he was far ahead in the early polls due to his name recognition and the generous backing of the plaintiff's bar and several unions.

Evon nodded when Paul finally cast an absent glance her way. He seemed to register nothing at first, then looked back and beamed.

"My God, it's Evon." He crossed the room immediately to offer his hand and chatted as he stood over her, jingling the keys and change in his pocket, answering her questions about his family. Paul's wife, Sofia Michalis, was famous in her own right, a reconstructive surgeon who'd made national news twice for leading teams of doctors to Iraq to treat the victims of IEDs. Their two sons, he said, were both at Easton College.

"And what about you?" he asked. "I heard you went to work for Hal. How's that been?" The corners of his mouth peaked. Paul clearly was familiar with Hal's reputation for irascibility.

"He's not a bad guy. Bark is a lot worse."

"Hey," he said. "I've known Hal all my life."

IDENTICAL

Evon straightened up. She'd never heard that.

"The families were always like this." Paul crossed his long fingers. "His Aunt Teri was my mom's best friend and her *koumbara*, the maid of honor at my parents' wedding. In our church, that meant she was also my oldest sister's godmother, the *nouna*, which is a big deal if you're Greek. Teri was at every family celebration—Easter and Christmas and saints' days—and Hal was her favorite, so she brought him along. My Big Fat Greek Family." He smiled at his bland little joke. "Eventually my dad and Hal's got into this insane tussle about the lease on my father's grocery, but before that, Hal even babysat for Cass and me." He showed the same great white grin, engaging because it made him seem briefly unguarded. "Needless to mention, he hates my guts now."

Even leaving aside Dita's murder—a lot to leave aside—Hal hated all liberal politicians, who, as he would tell you, almost always wanted to pay for inept government services by raising property taxes, which would drive out of the city business and employment and, most important, the tenants who rented in ZP's three major shopping centers in Kindle County. Evon tended to see his point. She'd voted Republican her entire life, until 2004, when she felt like they'd closed the door on her with the national effort to equate gay marriage with leprosy.

"How's your campaign?" she asked.

"Everybody says it's going great," he said, again offering that expansive smile. He was a nice-looking man, fit, a tad better than six feet, with a mountain of black hair that gleamed like a crow, save the scattered strands gone to silver. His long face had been weighted by time in that way that somehow looked good only on men, who ended up appearing wiser, nobler and ergo more fit for power. On women, it was just age. "Can I count on your vote?"

She probably would have said yes, even if it hadn't been banter, but Paul was interrupted by the arrival of Cass's main lawyer, Sandy Stern, who, according to the prison file, had represented Cass when he pled guilty. Round and bald, with an enigmatically elegant manner, Stern demonstrated there was an advantage to looking middle-aged when you were younger. He seemed barely changed by the fifteen years that had passed since he'd first cross-examined Evon in one of the Project Petros cases. Stern greeted Paul and also shook hands with Evon with a tiny bow, although she was unsure he actually remembered her.

A skinny female clerk appeared then from the back room to announce the commissioners were ready, and Evon summoned Tooley and Hal from the hall. By the time they returned to the conference room, a deputy sheriff was steering Cass Gianis in from a side door. He moved with mincing steps, since he wore leg irons and manacles, both connected to a metal chain that circled the waist of his blue jumpsuit. Paul asked the deputy's permission before embracing his brother.

Although the Gianises were obviously identical twins, seeing them side by side Evon recognized that, like her friends the Sherrell sisters back in Kaskia, they had not matured as exact photocopies. Cass was a tad taller, and somewhat broader. The most notable difference was that Paul's nose had been broken years ago. There was a funny story about that, retold in every profile of Paul, because, during their honeymoon in 1983, his wife, Sofia, had accidentally hit him with a tennis racket when he was trying to teach her the game. His father had supposedly taken one look at the bandage when they returned and said, 'I thought I told you not to talk back.' Paul had been left with a purplish lump at the bridge that looked a bit like a knuckle.

IDENTICAL

Both brothers wore glasses, Cass's simple clear plastic prison-issue frames, Paul's black and stylishly squared. By some accounts, Paul had given up his contacts to obscure his broken nose, but to Evon it made the contrast in their profiles more noticeable. The resemblance between the twins was strong otherwise, except that Cass parted his thick hair, grown out as a privilege of minimum security, on the left, while Paul combed his hair the other way.

The five members of the commission filed in from a back door, four men and one woman, a diverse racial array like a UN poster. Evon had no idea who any of them were. No doubt they were all friends of the governor, a Republican, and thus, if anything, likely to be inclined toward Hal, who, largely by himself, financed the operations of the Republican Party in Kindle County.

The chairman, a sorrowful-looking fellow named Perfectus Elder, went through a discussion of several cases that received nothing but perfunctory commentary from the assistant attorney general, a lean guy named Logan whom Hal and Tooley had been talking with when Evon arrived. While this was occurring, an elderly lady in a wheelchair was steered into the hearing room by her tiny Filipina caregiver. The woman was engaged in an addled murmur, and the caregiver remonstrated with her quietly, as if speaking to a young child. The old woman's white hair was disordered and thin, like the remains of a milkweed pod, but she was beautifully dressed, and, even reduced by age and disease, retained a look of some determination. Paul turned away from his brother to greet her and she fell upon him with sufficient desperation that Evon realized the old lady was their mother.

"Typical stunt," Hal muttered immediately, loud enough that the commissioners had to hear the remark. Under the

table, Tooley grabbed Hal's hand. Evon had been around enough hearing rooms to share Hal's suspicion. Stern and Paul, an accomplished trial lawyer who'd made a bundle in the national tobacco litigation after he left the PA's office, were using the twins' mother as an exhibit, demonstrating that there was no time to lose in letting Cass out. In the meantime, Paul again awaited the deputy's agreement before nodding to Cass, who turned back to embrace their mom. She became a burbling mess, her wailing briefly filling the hearing room. Evon realized it might have been years since the old lady had last seen her sons together. Chairman Elder grimaced a bit, then called the case everyone here was clearly waiting for.

"Matter of Cassian Gianis, number 54669, objection of Herakles Kronon." Elder made a complete hash of Hal's names, not just the first, which was often mispronounced, but the last as well, which was spoken as if he were an Irishman named Cronin.

Mel on one side, and Stern and Paul on the other, met at the lectern and gave their names for the record, which was a tape recording being made by the slender young woman who was operating the machine at the end of the table. Several reporters had filed in in the last few minutes, taking the seats next to Evon in the first row of chairs, joining Paul's two staffers. Word that Paul Gianis was in the house seemed to have attracted several additional onlookers, who filled the second and third rows.

"Mr. Gianis is scheduled for release on January thirtieth," said Elder, "and Mr. Kronon has objected. Mr. Tooley, how should we proceed?"

"My client would like to address the commission," said Mel, and moved aside to let Hal take his place. Tooley was giving the wild horse its head, but doing his best not to be

IDENTICAL

splattered by the mud as he galloped by. Everyone in the room, except Hal, accepted the inevitability of Paul Gianis's election.

Hal came to his feet, looking awkward, as Evon could have predicted. He had forgotten to re-button his shirt collar and his tie was to the side, and he couldn't figure out where to put his hands, which he finally folded in front of himself. Her boss, even at his best, was not a pleasing physical presence. He had a large sloping belly and an oddly lizard-like face with goggle eyes, heavy jowls, thick horn-rimmed glasses and a flattened nose. His hairline had been reduced to a few flyaway scraps.

He expressed his thanks to the board members and then began a free-form soliloquy about Dita's death. Although Hal generally avoided the unruly emotions summoned by speaking about his sister's murder, she was never far from his mind. In Hal's office, on one wall, was a small shrine to Dita, including her senior sorority picture from the Kappa Kappa Gamma house at State. She had been striking and dark, with huge eyes and a wide wry smile.

By the time Hal was a couple of minutes into his remarks, he was weeping, but he was also largely incoherent. Only one thing was clear in his presentation. Because Hal's pain remained, it seemed wrong that Cass Gianis would be allowed to walk free.

As Hal spoke, occasional loony mumblings came from the twins' mother on the other side of the room, her caregiver making persistent efforts to shush her. At the other table, Paul and Cass remained respectfully stone-faced throughout Hal's presentation.

When Hal finally sat down again, Stern rose, taking care to first close the center button on his suit coat. He still retained the faint accent of his native Argentina.

“No one wishes more than Cass, and his mother and brother here beside him, that the events of that night twenty-five years ago could be undone. It has been a source of terrible grief to their family, and they understand that their own loss has been small next to the Kronons’. But Cass has paid the price fixed by the law, a sentence that was agreed to with the consent of the Kronons at the time. The record—”

Hal could not contain himself. “It was all right with my father and mother. It was never all right with me.”

Chair Elder looked even more sorrowful in the face of this outburst. He searched around for a gavel and, finding none, banged the flat of his hand on the card table as Tooley hauled Hal back to his seat. Several of the observers murmured. If Hal was hoping to agitate public opinion, it wasn’t working. He was making a fool of himself.

Elder nodded to Stern, who continued for only another moment. When he was done, Elder leaned left and right to consult with his colleagues. It was unusual for anyone of stature to appear at these hearings, except when grand-standing prosecutors, usually those running for reelection, came to inveigh against the release of a particularly notorious prisoner. But that was part of the established agenda. To have influential strangers like Paul and Hal embroiled before the commission was uncomfortable, especially when there were reporters here. Elder clearly wanted to get this over with now.

“Release date to stand,” Elder said. The panel then rushed out the back door, like liquid through a funnel.

Evon watched as Paul Gianis hugged his brother. The deputies took hold of Cass’s blue sleeve, but allowed him to embrace his mother briefly before they steered him from the room. The reporters surrounded Paul.

IDENTICAL

Stern shook hands with Tooley and left first. Hal marched out with Evon and Mel in unhappy cortege behind him.

“Talk about wasted breath,” said Hal in the corridor. The conference room door swung open a second later, and the attendant appeared, struggling to back Mrs. Gianis’s chair across the threshold. Hal, who in his own way was quite a gentleman, rushed over to help. Just to prove you never knew what you would get with Hal, he knelt beside the old lady as soon as she was outside, purring to her, as if he had not just been painting her son as the spawn of Satan.

“Auntie Lidia,” he called her. He rested a hand on her forearm, the brown skin mottled with age spots and a skinny white patch, shiny like an old burn. Evon was reminded of the deterioration of her mother’s skin when she was dying. It had seemed as thin as paper, as if you could tear it with your fingers. “Auntie Lidia, it’s Hal Kronon. Zeus and Hermione’s son. It’s so good to see you.” He smiled at her, as the old woman looked about trying to comprehend. Her eyes were watery from age and bald of lashes. In order to help her, Hal switched to Greek. The sole word Evon understood was when Hal repeated his given name. But Mrs. Gianis caught that, too.

“Herakles!” the old lady exclaimed. She nodded several times. “Herakles,” she repeated, and then brought her hand to Hal’s cheek with remarkable tenderness. The door swung outward again and this time Paul emerged, followed by a trio of reporters and his two young staffers. Hal stood up, wet-eyed again, his overused hanky crushed into the center of his face. Paul surveyed all of this for a second, then spoke to the attendant.

“Nelda, I think you should get Mom upstairs. They’re waiting at the home.” Mrs. Gianis was still saying ‘Herakles’ while the attendant wheeled her away. Paul turned back to

Hal with a ripe expression, something between bitterness and bemusement, his lips drawn tight.

“Don’t give me the evil eye, Paul,” Hal responded. “Your mother was always kind to me. *She* didn’t murder anybody. Which I’d never say about you.”

At the last remark, Paul’s mouth actually fell open and he took a step back.

“Jesus, Hal.”

“Don’t ‘Jesus’ me. You got away with it, but I know you had a hand in Dita’s murder. I’ve always known that.”

The three reporters wrote furiously on their spiral pads. Paul’s brow collapsed toward his eyes. His public image was of an eternally measured person and he was not about to let that go, no matter what the provocation. He stared Hal down for only an instant longer.

“That’s nonsense, Hal. You’re upset.” He gestured to the two young people who’d accompanied him and threw on his overcoat as he hustled off down the corridor.

The reporters immediately surrounded Hal. Maria Sonreia, from Channel 4, who was in her heavy camera makeup, her eyebrows so perfectly defined that they could have been pasted on, asked Hal several times, “What exactly do you believe Senator Gianis’s role was in your sister’s murder?”

Tooley, who like Evon had stood by speechless, finally intervened, grabbing Hal by the arm and pulling him away.

“We have nothing else to say at the moment,” said Mel. “We may have a further statement tomorrow.”

Evon called for Hal’s car on the way to the elevator, and the limo, a Bentley, whose caramel leather always made her feel as if she were inside a jewel box, was at the curb when they got there. Delman, the driver, held open the door, smiling amiably as a traffic officer in an optic vest waved her lighted baton at him and told him to move. At Hal’s

IDENTICAL

instruction, Evon jumped in. Delman would drop Hal at the office, then bring Evon back to pick up her car.

“Hal, what the *hell* was that about?” Tooley demanded, as soon as they were under way. Mel was a childhood friend of Hal’s. Among Hal’s many myths about himself was that he was ‘a city boy’ who had been raised in a bungalow in Kewahnee, not the Greenwood County mansion to which his father moved them when Hal finished junior high. He had no taste for the well-heeled suburbanites with whom he’d attended high school and college, and among whom he’d now raised his children, preferring a few grade school friends, like Mel, who truth be told had probably shunned Hal back then like everyone else. Unctuous by nature, Tooley nonetheless was direct when need be with Hal, who in the right mood could tolerate straight talk.

“You know you’re on page one tomorrow,” Mel said.

“Obviously,” said Hal. You could never forget with Hal that despite the emotional magma that frequently forced its way to the surface, he could sometimes be cunning.

“There isn’t any chance, is there, that I can talk you into issuing a public statement this afternoon retracting what you just said? If we get something out fast, then Paul may not sue you for defamation.”

“Defamation?”

“Hal, he’s running for mayor. You just called him a murderer. He’ll sue you for slander. He can’t ignore it.”

Hal was heaped inside his overcoat, arms across his chest, looking a little like a molting bird.

“I’m not retracting anything.” Having a billion dollars had an odd effect on people, Evon had come to learn. In Hal’s case, it often made him a baby. “Let him sue me. Don’t I have the right to express my opinion about somebody running for mayor?”

“Even with a public figure, Hal, the law says you can’t make accusations that show a malicious disregard for the truth.”

“It *is* true. Mark my words. The twins were in this together. I’ve known those two all their lives. There is no way one of them could have done something like this without involving the other one.”

Tooley shook his head.

“Hal, man, I’ve followed this case for you for decades. I’ve never seen a word that implicates Paul. And it’s a ridiculous time to make the charge. After twenty-five years, you suddenly pipe up, blaming him for his brother’s crime, just when Paul is odds-on to become mayor, and you’re the biggest donor to the other party?”

Hal considered all of this with a sour expression, his eyes skittering about behind his thick lenses like cornered mice.

“The guy pisses me off.”

Evon was in no position yet to fully comprehend the web of family resentments at play here. But at least one part of Hal’s fury was understandable. Dita’s murder had ended his father’s political career. Zeus had abandoned his campaign for governor within days of his daughter’s death. And here was Paul, scaling Mount Olympus, with the papers already saying that if he won, the governor’s office was likely to be next.

“I always thought he had something to do with it,” Hal said. “My parents would never hear that, neither one of them. My father kept telling us, ‘This is as big a tragedy for the Gianises as it is for us,’ and my mother, especially after my dad died, she just hated discussing the entire thing. And I kept quiet for their sakes. But they’re gone now and I’m speaking my mind. I think I’m actually going to run ads.” Hal nodded decisively. Evon was beginning to recognize that

IDENTICAL

none of Hal's remarks, here or back in the corridor, were completely spontaneous. He had been considering making a scene, and the potential aftermath, when he'd arrived today.

"That'll only force him into court," Tooley said. "You go that route, big fella, you gotta have some proof."

"Evon will find the evidence."

"Me?" She couldn't contain herself. But she had spent three years now extracting Hal from the holes he blundered into.

"Call Tim," Hal said.

"Tim?" asked Evon. Hal was referring to the PI he'd had tailing Corus Dykstra from YourHouse the day before.

"Tim knows all about this case," said Hal. "He never thought we had the whole story. I bet he already has plenty of dope on Paul."

They had reached the ZP Building, and Hal, who had a conference call on the YourHouse acquisition, hopped out so he could get upstairs to his office on the fortieth floor. But he stuck his head back into the car for one second to hand over a slip of paper.

"That's Tim's cell. Find him. He'll help."