THE

INHERITANCE OF SHADOWS

A FAMILY'S RECKONING

Chapter One

The Day the Truth Stirred

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CHAPTERONE

The Day the Truth Stirred

The truth does not negotiate.

In every family there comes a day when silence ends—when memories, long buried, insist on being heard.

For me, that day arrived on June 12, 2022, with the loss of my cousin Fred Giambona—a man whose quiet strength carried the last echoes of a story long unspoken. His death did not close the book; it opened it. In that hour I grasped—not in anger, but in clarity—that legacy is not what we inherit; it is what we uncover, restore, and set free.

What began in sorrow became a vow: to finish the work he asked of me—to bring the buried truth of our family into the light.

This is not merely genealogy.

This is the story of how a battered shoebox, a hillside address, and a century of records overturned the life we thought we inherited—and revealed what the powerful may have meant to erase.

It is a record of power and concealment—of disappearance, institutional betrayal, and eugenics; of illicit privilege; and of the Sicilian Mafia as it moved through neighborhoods and ledgers, not myths. It is a ledger of secrets kept so long they warped three generations of lives.

In these pages you will meet people with secrets they took to their graves—and others whose secrets put them in theirs.

First, a promise to the reader, offered plainly:

What follows is grounded in documentation—official records, state correspondence, personal testimony, and the letters that survived. Where the record speaks, I follow it. Where memory enters, I say so. And where the evidence leaves room only for inference, I will tell you that, too. To protect the privacy of those involved, some names have been changed, some people are composites, and certain events have been condensed, rearranged, or dramatized. The letters, court files, and documents at the heart of this story are real and are quoted as I found them.

You will learn how a childhood friend became, by proof and providence, something far closer than either of us ever understood. You will see why I believe my Aunt Angelina did not simply “vanish,” but disappeared under circumstances the record refuses to clarify. And you will see how the state’s guardianship—stamped and sealed—became a door through which girls were not protected so much as contained.

The files seldom say it outright. The conditions speak.

Sunday, June 12, 2022 — 1:34 p.m.

Over Paso Nogal Park the light had that unwavering stillness peculiar to early summer in California. From my desk the hills rolled eastward in muted gold, grasses dry as parchment, old oaks writing their crooked script against an untroubled sky.

It was the hour I often used on a quiet Sunday to ready myself for the week ahead—updating my notes, organizing Monday's list, attending to the small rituals that kept life in order. The world outside had not changed in years: quiet, steadfast, seemingly eternal.

Then the familiar chime of my iPhone—so ordinary—broke the room.

It carried warning. I felt it before I looked.

This is bad news.

Doug Adams wrote:

Chuck, I don't know if u have been notified yet, but Fred passed away about an hour ago.

I read the words twice before they made sense.

Fred Giambona—my cousin, my friend, my brother in spirit—was gone.

Though I had known he was gravely ill, the finality of it landed with the force of a hammer. Some truths, I would learn again, do not become real until they arrive.

I sat for a long while without moving. Outside, sunlight washed the hills; inside, a shadow lengthened.

Tears came—spontaneous, welcome. I had come to see them not as weakness, but as a measure of love. Yet grief has a way of reaching further than we expect. The quiet tears thickened, deepened, and soon I was overtaken—my breath breaking, my hands shaking as sobs rose from a place far older than the moment itself.

It was not simply Fred I was crying for, but every loss that had ever sat, patient and unsaid, in the corners of my life.

And yet even in that first hour, grief held within it a summons.

Years earlier, Fred had placed in my hands a small, ordinary shoebox—letters and official papers written decades before—that overturned the stories we had been told about who we were. Those pages had already taught me the grammar of harm: men whose names appeared in society columns and court minutes; a household where respectability and power wore the same face; and the state's neat, lethal handwriting—sterilization recommended—inscribing consequences on the bodies of the powerless.

Second, the promise repeated: the trail those papers opened touches what the newspapers called “organized crime” and what families called “don’t ask.” It reaches the West Coast’s Sicilian network, yes—but in this story the most ruinous blows often came from polished rooms: judges, benefactors, and men who smiled for the photograph and then turned the key.

And it leads, unavoidably, to my mother, a ward of the state—where the files are too careful to accuse, and yet the corridors make their own record: girls like her were not shielded; they were supervised.

The shoebox had been hidden away for decades. It was small, scuffed at the corners, the lid held on with a thick blue rubber band. The paper smelled faintly of dust and starch; the seals were raised under my thumb, the ink faded to a tired brown.

Inside was paper—only paper: letters in careful script, notices with stamped seals, a birth certificate, and the clipped language of offices that prefer rulings to explanations.

But once read, they did not lie down again.

They led where they wished, and I followed.

The letters bore Frances’s name—typed, mistyped, corrected. There were notices about Frances at Stockton State Hospital, and the bureaucratic phrase that outlives its authors: sterilization recommended.

There were dates and hospital wards and case numbers, the outlines of rooms whose doors were meant to stay shut.

The papers named men and their wives whose photographs appeared in society pages—people received as benefactors and pillars. Respectability, I learned, can be a mask worn in daylight.

In this story, harm did not always come from the underworld’s shadows. Often it was administered from polished rooms—by men with titles, signatures, and the authority to make their decisions look like order.

The trail led to a young woman in our bloodline who knew too much and then was gone—my Aunt Angelina.

Not misplaced.

Not “run off.”

Removed and erased.

But even that terror is only a spoke on the larger wheel.

The hub is Frances—what was done to her, and what that made of her four children.

And the papers did what such papers sometimes do: they opened a path beyond ink.

In time, what began as a file became a test tube and a lab report, and a boy I had played ball with years ago stood revealed as more than memory—kin in a way neither of us could have

imagined.

That revelation, too, bends back toward Frances—the family she was denied the right to keep.

And the documents pointed, like a compass that would not spin, toward the astonishing truth that could not remain lost or silent.

None of it would have come to me without Fred.

He was the last keeper of the gate—and the keeper who opened it.

Fred's illness advanced with merciless speed—stomach cancer, swift and unrelenting. For three months he bore the knowledge alone before he could summon the strength to tell me.

It was not avoidance. It was protection—the old instinct of a family that learned to wrap pain in silence.

Weeks before his death I drove to Stockton, to the modest house on East Essex Street that had belonged to his grandfather, Victor Giambona.

The rooms were quiet; the air carried that faint sterility that attends the end of things.

Fred lay in bed, half-paralyzed, his great engine running now on memory more than muscle.

His son Dominic and Dominic's mother, Paula White, tended him with the uncomplaining devotion that is love's hardest work.

Sensing what we needed, Dominic left us.

We spoke in the plain, careful way of those who know time has come to a narrow point.

We talked of small things and large things, and at last of the book—Frances's book, really, and the record it demands.

He lifted his hands, drew me near, and held my eyes.

"You need to finish the book," he said.

His voice was steady. His meaning required no escort.

Fred knew what we were stepping into.

He knew this story would challenge everything—loyalty, memory, even sanity.

But he also knew it had to be told.

We kissed each other's faces—the old, awkward grace of men who know what comes next and stand to meet it.

When I stepped into the hall, I understood that a charge had been given, and that grief would now share the room with duty: to bring Frances out of the file and back into a voice.

Let me say plainly what this book is—and what it is not.

It is not a memoir.

These pages keep a record others meant to bury.

At their center stands Frances Junta, a young mother handed to the state, written over by other hands, nearly erased.

Around her gather the forces that shaped a century: law and medicine, money and reputation; the West Coast's Sicilian network; and the respectable rooms where decisions were dressed as order.

Reader's promise:

I will show you what I can prove—and where I must infer.

You will see why the record convinced me.

You will be asked to notice the small things—dates, docket numbers, a line in a ledger—because in this history the minor thread returns later as the main design.

First, a promise of what you will find—kept brief and clear:

• Frances Junta at Stockton State Hospital, where California's eugenics machinery wrote its cool instruction—sterilization recommended—and lives turned on a clerk's stroke.

• A single address on the hillside of Berkeley, California, 10 Mosswood Road—and a courtroom known simply as Department 1, where the same names recur when erasure is required.

• Respectable families in society columns whose influence traveled further than their photographs, and whose signatures carried the weight of verdicts.

Second, three things I will not hedge:

• My Aunt Angelina Junta was an innocent young woman who "went missing," never to be seen or heard from again.

• Bette Mae Junta, Frances's daughter—my mother—was sexually assaulted as a child while a ward of the State of California.

• Richard Doppie, a childhood friend, stands nearer to this history than anyone knew—proved to be entangled in this lineage in ways the record would not let us ignore.

Third—and one last time, so there is no mistaking what lies ahead:

• The real Sicilian Mafia as it was lived on this coast—less myth than ledger and neighborhood—set against the more ruinous blows delivered from polished rooms.

• Sealed adoptions outside ordinary channels; letters signed under an alias that points back to a judge.

• The old shoebox of letters that began it—and the chain of evidence that followed: papers to archives, archives to DNA, until Frances's story stood up and spoke.

This is not a tale for spectacle or speed.

It is the keeping of a record across eighteen years and three generations.

The men who engineered the silence are gone.

The silence is not.

What follows is the story they did not account for: that someone would keep reading and refuse to look away—until Frances Junta could be called by her name and answered.

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*The story continues in **The Inheritance of Shadows: A Family's Reckoning**.*
*For the full book and to write to the author, visit **theinheritanceofshadows.com***