

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

SUE
GRAFTON

U

U is for Undertow

"Intriguing . . . Both loyal Kinsey fans and those new to the canon will find much to like." —*Publishers Weekly*

I filled the kettle and set it on the stove, turned on the burner under it, and sliced the lemon. I got out cups and saucers, placing a tea bag and a paper napkin neatly beside each cup. When Bettina emerged we sat down and had tea together before returning to the subject at hand. By then I was reconciled to handing over the album, which was sitting on my desk. I had no real claim to it and from what she'd said, my returning it was as good as saving her life. That issue out of the way, I thought I might as well pump her for information.

I said, "What happens when you put the album back? Won't Grand smell a rat?"

"I have that all worked out. I can tuck it under the bed or in the little trunk she keeps in the closet. I might even leave it someplace obvious and let everyone assume it was right there under her nose. There's a short story about that."

"'The Purloined Letter,' Edgar Allan Poe," I said.

"That's right."

"I'm still stumped about why she sent it in the first place."

Bettina made a gesture, waving the question aside. "She got a bug in her ear. When she comes up with one of her notions, you'd better do as you're told. She hates to be thwarted and she refuses to explain. Once she issues an order, you'd better hop to it if you know what's good for you. Not meaning to give offense, but she's a hellion."

"So I've heard. Why do you put up with her?"

She waved *that* question down as well. "I've known her so long, I wouldn't have the nerve to stand up to her now. For one thing, I live on the property and I'd never hear the end of it."

"You're her assistant?"

Bettina laughed. "Oh no. You couldn't pay me to do a job like that. I help her out of gratitude."

"For what?"

"Cornelia may be difficult, but she can be kindhearted and generous. She did me a great service many years ago."

"Which was what?"

"I was abandoned as a child. I grew up in an orphanage. She and your grandfather took me in and raised me as their own. She fostered other children, too, but I was the first."

"Good news for you. I'm an orphan myself and she didn't take me in."

Bettina's smile faded and she looked at me with concern. "I hope you'll forgive my saying so, dear, but you seem bitter."

"No, no. I'm bitter by nature. I always sound like this."

"Well, I hope I haven't offended you."

"Not at all. Why don't you tell me the story? I'd be fascinated."

"There's not much to it. From the ages of five to ten I lived in an institution, the Children's Haven of Saint Jerome Emiliana. He was the patron saint of orphaned and abandoned little ones. My parents both died in the influenza epidemic of 1918. Any orphanage creates a close association of pseudo-brothers and -sisters, so I suppose I had a family of sorts. We were fed and we had shelter, but there was little love or affection and no real bond with others. As harsh as this sounds, the puns were mild. They entered the convent, leaving their families behind, for who knows what reasons. The devout ones didn't always make it. They became novitiates out of a passion for the church, but the life wasn't as they imag-