

I was giving the parked cars the once-over. The Oldsmobile with the license number ~JYJ 114 was in stall number five. "Okay", I said to the attendant, "I'll let you know if I close the deal on the office in this building". I walked with him back to the entrance. He gave me a ticket on the agency car and parked it. I was back in ten minutes. "Forgot to get something out of the car", I told him, showing him my ticket. He started to say something as I walked in and then suddenly grinned and said, "Oh, yes. You're the one I was talking to about a monthly rental. "That's right", I told him. He consulted the parking ticket, then looked at a notation and said, "You're in the third row back toward the rear. Can you find it all right"?

"Sure", I told him. I went back to the agency car and got out an electric bug, one of the newest devices for electronic shadowing. I always keep a set in the car. I put in new batteries so as to be certain I'd have plenty of power and on my way out walked over to the regular parking stalls and stood looking at them thoughtfully. I waited until the parking attendant was busy with a customer, then slipped around the back of the car with license number ~JYM 114, attached the electronic bug to the rear bumper and walked out. The attendant waved me on. One of the hardest chores a detective has is hanging around on a city street, trying to make himself inconspicuous, keeping an eye on the entrance of an office building and waiting. For the first fifteen or twenty minutes it's possible to be more or less interested in window displays, then in people passing by. After a while, however, a person's mind gets fed up and that magnifies all of the disagreeable physical symptoms which go with that sort of an assignment. You want to sit down. Your leg muscles and back muscles feel weary. You're conscious of the fact that your feet hurt, that the city pavements are hard.

I waited a solid two hours before my man came out of the office building. He came out alone. I wasn't far behind him when he entered the parking lot and hurried over to his car. The attendant recognized me once more and said, "What did you do about that office"? "I haven't made up my mind yet", I said.

"It's a sublease. I have a couple of them I'm figuring on; one here and one that's out quite a ways where there's usually curbside parking". "That curbside parking is undependable and annoying, particularly when it rains", he said. I kept trying to get him to take my money. "Okay", I told him. "I'm in a rush right now. I know where the car is. Want me to drive it out"?

"I'll have one of the boys get it", he said. "It's one of the rules on transients. Regulars drive out their own cars".

"Make it as snappy as you can, will you"? I asked. "Oh, that's all right", he said. "You're going to be a regular. You'll get in the office building here. You don't want to

lease a place way out in the sticks. You get business where the business is, not where it isn't". I grinned at him, handed him a couple of dollars and said, "By the time you get the parking charge figured up, there should be a cigar in it for you". I hurried over to the agency heap, jumped in, started the motor and was just in time to see the car I wanted to shadow turn to the left. I was held up a bit trying to make a left turn. By the time I'd made it he was gone. Traffic was pretty heavy. I turned on the electric bug, and the signal came in loud and clear. I made time and picked him up within ten blocks. I stayed half a block behind him, letting lots of cars keep in between us, listening to the steady beep **h beep **h beep. After fifteen minutes of traffic driving he turned to the left. I couldn't see him, but the electric bugging device gave steady beeps when it was straight ahead, short half beeps when the car I was following was to the left, and long drawn-out beeps when it turned to the right. If it ever got behind me, the beep turned to a buzz. I turned left too soon and got a signal showing that I was still behind him but he was to the right. After a while the signal became a buzz and I knew he was behind me. That meant he'd parked someplace. I made a big circle until I located the car parked at the curb in front of an apartment house. I found a parking place half a block away, sat in the car and waited. My quarry was in the apartment house for two hours. Then he came out and started driving toward the beach. By this time it was dark. I could get up close to him where there was traffic but had to drop far behind when there wasn't traffic. My lights would have been a giveaway if I'd tried to shadow him in the conventional manner. Moreover, I'd have lost him if it hadn't been for the electronic shadowing device **h. His signal was coming loud and clear and then all of a sudden it turned to a buzz. I circled the block and found he was in the parking lot of a high-class restaurant. I sat where I could watch the exit and realized I was hungry. I sat there with the faint odor of charcoal-broiled steaks tantalizing my nostrils and occasionally catching the aroma of coffee. My man came out an hour later, drove to the beach, turned right and after half a mile went to the Swim and Tan Motel. It was a fairly modern motel with quite a bit of electrical display in front. I remembered it was the Peeping Tom place. I waited until my man was coming out of the office with the key to a cabin before I went in to register.

The card the man I was shadowing had filled out was still on the counter. I noticed that he was in Unit 12 and that he had registered under the name of Oscar L& Palmer and wife, giving a San Francisco address. He had written out the license number of his car but had transposed the last two figures, an old dodge which is still good. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the motel manager doesn't check the license number on the plates against the license number the tenant writes out. If he does, it's still better than an even chance he won't notice the transposition of the numbers, and if he should notice it, the thing can be passed off as an honest mistake. I used the alias of Robert C& Richards, gave the first three letters

and the first and last figure of the license number on the agency heap, but a couple of phony numbers in between. I could have written anything. The manager of the motel was a woman who apparently didn't care. She was complying with the law in regard to registrations but she certainly wasn't checking license numbers or bothering the tenants. "You mean you're all alone, Mr& Richards"?

"That's right". "Your wife isn't going to join you- later"? "I don't think so". "If you expect her to show up", she said, "you'd better put 'and wife' on there. It's a formality, you know". "Any difference in the rate"? I asked. "Not to you", she said smiling. "It's ten dollars either way. There are ice cubes in a container at the far end and in another by the office. There are three soft-drink vending machines, and if you should be joined by- anybody- try to keep things quiet, if you will. We like to run a nice quiet place". "Thank you", I told her. I took another sidelong glance at the other registration card, then took the key to Unit 13 that she had given me and went down long enough to park the car. The construction was reasonably solid; not like the cracker-box construction of so many of the motel units that have stucco all over the outside but walls that are thin enough so you can hear every movement of the people in the adjoining apartment. I put a small electric amplifier against the wall on the side I wanted to case. With the aid of that I could hear my man moving around, heard him cough a couple of times, heard the toilet flush, heard the sound of water running. Whoever his companion was going to be, she was going to join him later. She knew where to come. He didn't have to telephone. I was so hungry my stomach felt all lines of communication had been severed. It's one thing to go without food when you're occupied with some work or when you're simply postponing a meal, but when you're dependent on someone else and know that you <can't> eat until he's bedded down for the night, hunger can be a gnawing torture. I had noticed a drive-in down the road a quarter of a mile. The batteries on the bugging device I had put on the car were still fresh enough to send out good strong signals. The powerful microphone I could press against the wall between my motel unit and that occupied by the man would bring in the sound of any conversation, and I was positively nauseated I was so hungry. I got in the car, drove down to the drive-in and ordered a couple of hamburgers with everything included, a cup of coffee and the fastest service possible. The place wasn't particularly busy at that time of night, and the girl who was waiting on me, who was clothed in the tightest-fitting pair of slacks I had ever seen on a woman and a sweater that showed everything there was- and there was lots of it- wanted to be sociable. "You really in a hurry, Handsome"? she asked. "I'm in a hurry, Beautiful". "It's early in the evening to be in a hurry. There's lots of time left". "There may not be any women left", I said. She gave a little pout and said, "<I> don't get off work until eleven o'clock. That's when my evening commences". "I'll

be here at ten-fifty-five", I said. "Oh, <you!>" she announced. "That's what they all say. What's that thing going buzz-buzz-buzz in your car"? I said "Darn it, that's the automatic signal that shows when the ignition key is on. I didn't turn it off". I reached over and switched off the electronic bugging device. She went in to get the hamburgers, and I switched on the device again and kept the signal from Dowling's car coming in steady and clear until I saw her starting back with the hamburgers. Then I shut off the device again. She wanted to hang around while I was eating. "Don't you think it's selfish to have dinner <before> you go to pick her up"? "No", I said. "It's a kindness to her. You see, she's on a diet. She'll eat just a pineapple and cottage cheese salad and I'm to have one with her so she won't feel out of place". "diets can be terrible", the girl said. "How much overweight is she"?

"Not a bit", I said, "but she's keeping her figure in hand".

She looked at me provocatively. "Good figures <should> be kept in hand", she said, and walked away with an exaggerated wiggle. I turned on the device again, half fearful that I might find silence, but the buzzes came in loud and clear. When I switched on the lights for her to come and get the check, I had the exact change plus a dollar tip.

The fat man said, "All we gotta do is go around the corner".

The gun moved. The thin man said, "That-a-way".

"- second building on the right". "- it says police right on the door". "- so even if we was as dumb as you take us for, we could still find it". Roberta and Dave began to back toward the door. The thin man waved the gun again. He said, "Right around the corner". "It says water works, but there is a policeman on duty, too". "A night policeman just like in the States. You know"? "Canada doesn't have much of this here juvenile delinquency problem, but we keep a night policeman all the same on account of the crazy tourists". At the door, Dave paused to feel for the latch. Roberta glanced up at her husband. He was going to be sensible and not try to do anything rash with that gun pointed at him. She measured the distance from where they stood to the men and the gun, measured the distance from the men to the back room. She decided to risk it. There was something phony about all this gun waving- something not quite what it seemed in the detailed directions for finding the police. Dave had the latch under his thumb now and he removed his arm from his wife in order to pull the door open. In a flash she was away to the back, paying no attention to three angry shouts from the male throats. She tore open the back door. It was dark inside the room but enough light spilled from the restaurant behind her to enable her to make out a round table with a green cloth top. There was a small sideboard with some empty

beer bottles on it and perhaps fifteen wooden chairs. Slowly she turned to face the men again. Rat-face at the counter was on his feet. The distance between where she stood and where Dave waited at the outside door was a hundred miles. Keeping her frightened gaze on the men at the counter, she began to feel her way to the door. She sidled along the booths one step at a time. The gun followed her.

As she reached Dave and felt his arm go around her, felt him pull her to the safety of his person, she knew with the certainty of despair that something bad had happened to Lauren. The two men watched as Dave closed the door behind them, watched them cross the sidewalk to their car. It was getting light. The fat man removed his apron, put on a greasy and wrinkled jacket, and zipped it over his paunch. The thin man moved swiftly to the phone and dialed a number. When he was answered, he said, "Albert? Vince. I'm sending you a couple of customers- yeah- just get them out of my hair and keep them out- I don't give a damn what you tell them- only don't believe a word they say- they're out to make trouble for me and it is up to you to stop them- I don't care how- and one more thing- Cate's Cafe closed at eleven like always last night and Rose and Clarence Corsi left for Quebec yesterday- some shrine or other- I think it was called Saint Simon's- yeah, yesterday. Got it"? He turned from the phone and strode to the front of the restaurant. The white Buick hadn't moved away yet. Good. A line of worry formed, a twitch pulled his mouth over to one side. He said, "Grosse? You ain't kidding me- the kid don't know the name of this town"? "I ain't kidding you, Vince. How could she? She musta been walking in her sleep- you seen her yourself in here". "Howda I know"?

"Remember how she looked when Barney held the door for her? Kinda like a zombie? She was just waking up when we found her at the garage". Vince swore. "Stupid fools- ain't got enough brains between the two of you"- Grosse muttered, his head down, one hand playing with the zipper on his jacket. "- had enough brains to call ya up so as ya could do sompin about it when the parents- I coulda let her go go"- His eyes were lowered, so he couldn't have seen the narrow, pointed face of his companion suddenly writhe with fury; but he was aware of it just the same. He knew Vince Steiner was one of those men who had to work up a fury once in a while just to prove how dangerous he could be. With a curse, Vince seized the thing nearest, a glass sugar container with a spouted metal top, and threw it against the wall opposite. The heavy glass didn't break, but the top flew off; sugar sprayed with a hiss that was loud in the silence. Not really startled, but careful to appear so, Grosse sucked noisily on his pipe. Vince cursed steadily. "Why does everything have to happen to me"? Grosse quietly got a broom and started to sweep up the sugar. Vince watched him. His mouth worked over the profanity, the obscenities in his vocabulary. Once he said, "Why'n hell didn't you look in the back seat of the car before you drove off? Don't you and Barney ever

use your brains"? The fat man didn't answer. He got one of the menus and brushed the spilled sugar onto it and carried it to a box on the floor behind the counter. He returned the menu to its place between catchup bottle and paper napkin dispenser. He spoke soothingly. "She don't know nothing about them cars. She thinks she's in a ordinary garage". "How do you know, stupid? And put Cate's gun back". "I know". Grosse tucked the gun under the counter. "- one word of this gets to Guardino"- "Who's telling Guardino"? Vince swore again. "You get that kid over to Rose's house".

The fat man winced. He ran a finger down his cheek, tracing the scratch there. "Why can't I leave her locked up in the tool crib"?

The thin man stopped his pacing long enough to glance at the clock. "You and Barney get her over to Rose's before it gets too light. After Guardino's left, we'll dump the kid somewhere near the border where she kin get home. God help you if she knows where she's been". Grosse spread his hands. "What am I going to do with her all day? In the tool crib she can't get away".

"What the hell do I care what you do with her all day? Just get her where Guardino won't see her and start asking questions".

Grosse swore now. "Dammit all, Vince. I ain't no baby sitter". Vince shouted finally, "Get her over to Rose's and I'll come by and see that she stays put". Grosse rubbed the bridge of his nose where it was swollen. He spoke sullenly. "You don't hafta get nasty. I wish you luck when you try scaring that kid". Suddenly he grinned. His voice lost its sullen tones and he chuckled. "I got one question". "What is it"? Impatiently. "Are you a poor dumb Canadian or a smart aleck from the States"? Vince lifted his hand as if to strike, but his thin lips spread in a smile. Grosse ducked and sniggered. "Where'd you say you was born"? "In a Chicago slum just like you. And I ain't going back there on account of one lousy kid". ##

Lauren Landis rubbed her face against the blanket. She had cried a little because she was frightened. She could easily understand why the two men had been startled to find a strange girl in the back seat of their car (she had figured <that> out), but she couldn't understand their subsequent actions. Was it because she had shown panic? Who could blame her for that? It was one thing to awaken outside a restaurant where your parents were eating and quite another to awaken in a strange garage and know your parents had gone on home without you. She was glad the fat man had left. Barney was not really frightening. She jumped as the little man now appeared at the window and, reaching through the opening, offered her a bottle of coke. She smiled at him wetly. Although she found she was thirsty, she was about to refuse (never, never take candy from a strange

man) when she saw the bottle was unopened. He placed a bottle opener on the counter. So, <he> understood her panic. She blew her nose on a tissue and opened the coke bottle. It was icy cold and tasted delicious. She felt a lift in spirit. When she was finished she pushed it back. The man was busy doing something to the inside of the door-frame on the driver's side of a car. She called softly, "Barney".

He looked in her direction but he didn't answer.

She said, "Barney, why is he keeping me here"?

Still no answer. He seemed to be looking at a point above the little window. Lauren said, "Why can't I call my home? Or borrow some money from someone and go home by bus? I could send the money right back". Barney finished the cigarette he had been smoking. He dropped it and carefully ground it to nothing with the sole of his heavy shoe. Now he looked at her. He said, "I only work here". Lauren said, "Please"? But he was back at work on a car. She dropped her head on her arms on the counter. How could he be kind one moment and cruel the next? Did he know something that made him feel sad and sorry for her? And was he afraid to do anything as definite as releasing her? Her heart was thumping painfully; the unknown was so much worse than- what dangers lay ahead for her? What awful thing had she to face in the next few hours? Something wet and hot was trickling on her wrists. Tears?

With a sturdy act of will she turned her mind away from herself; as long as she could do nothing constructive about the situation she was in, she would think about something else. Her mother and father, for instance. Where were they now? In her mind she followed the white Buick along the road somewhere between here and the Niagara River. Her father's attention would be on the road ahead and it wouldn't deviate an inch until he crossed the bridge at the Falls and took the River Road to LaSalle and, finally, turned in at their own driveway at 387 Heather Heights. Then he would yawn and stretch and shout, "All out. This is the end of the line". And what would her mother be doing right now? Her mother would be fast asleep curled up against that wonderful, big, safe, solid shoulder next to her on the front seat. Lauren Landis was in trouble and she was alone. ##

Roberta Landis put her hand on her husband's arm as he slid in the driver's seat beside her. Somewhere birds were sweetly calling, were answered. Her teeth chattered so that she made three attempts at speech before she became intelligible. "Dave. I saw that woman's apron behind the door. There was a wet spot- she couldn't have been gone long". Dave made some sound meant to convey agreement. He inserted the car key in the lock. Roberta was violently trembling. She stammered, "You heard what he said about police? Why don't we drive around the corner"?

The car door crashed shut. The engine throbbed into life. Dave said, "I got the message. We're going".

Roberta said, "No. You go. Walk. Suppose Lauren comes looking for us? I can sit here in the car while you walk around the corner". The big car sprang away from the curb like something alive. He said, "I'm not going to leave my wife and my car out here in sight of those"- Roberta glanced at him and stopped trembling.

His jowls were spiked by barbs of graying beard. His small, mean eyes regarded Marty steadily, unblinkingly. His eyes were threaded by little filaments of red as if tiny veins had burst and flooded blood into them. As he chewed his gum and exuded wheezing breath, Marty smelt the reek of bad whiskey. Marty recognized the man. He had driven the car that passed them on the road outside Admassy's place.

This was Acey Squire, proprietor of the juke joint. Marty smiled at Squire pleasantly and said, "There was a cab waiting for me here. Do you know where it might have gone"? Squire chewed his gum, his jaw moving in a steady rhythm. He looked straight at Marty. He did not answer. Marty scanned the faces of the others nearest him, looked into their staring eyes. "Did anyone see my cab"? he asked, keeping his voice casual. He avoided showing any surprise or annoyance when no one answered him. "I have to get back to Jarrodsville", he went on. "I see there are some cars here. I wonder if one of you gentlemen could drive me back to town? I'd be happy to pay for the favor, of course".

The seventeen men stood and stared at him for a moment longer. And then a startling thing occurred. It was so utterly unexpected that Marty stood for several moments with his mouth hanging open foolishly after it had happened. There was no word spoken, no apparent signal given. Yet the men all moved at the same instant.

They piled into the waiting cars, motors roared, the cars sped off.

The station wagon and the old Plymouth headed east toward Jarrodsville. The Ford and the pickup truck sped west toward Sanford's Run. In seconds all four cars were out of sight. Marty Land stood alone on a red-clay road as storm clouds gathered ominously in the sky again. From a great distance thunder growled and broke the silence. Land looked back toward the dilapidated house. He thought he saw a pale face at a window. Perhaps it was Dora May. Perhaps she would be glad that they hadn't hurt him. There were other farmhouses nearby. Across the road there was one no more than a hundred yards away. There was another on this side, a little further down. There were many more between here and Jarrodsville. Telephone poles lined the road. They reared tall and mocking. Their wires stretched out into infinity. Not a single strand of wire reached into the silent houses beside the red-clay road. There was nothing he could do but walk. And Jarrodsville was more than three miles away, down an old dirt road that the rain had turned into a quagmire.

Marty faced east and started walking down the left side of the road. After he had proceeded a few feet, he paused and turned up the cuffs of his trousers, which were already damp and mud-caked. The viscous mud was ankle-deep, and in places great puddles spread across the road and reflected the murky light. As he approached the first farmhouse, thunder sounded behind him again, closer now and louder, like a steadily advancing drum corps. There were several people on the porch of the farmhouse. There was a very old man and a young woman and a brood of children ranging from toddlers to teen-agers. For just an instant he thought of appealing to them for help. Perhaps they had a car or truck and would drive him into town. Then he realized the utter futility of the idea. They were staring at him in the same blank and menacing way that the men outside the gate had stared. Even the eyes of the smallest children seemed malicious. On his side of the road there were two farm hands, well back in a field, leaning against a plow. They, too, stared at him. The drums of thunder were right behind him now. A foolish thought came into his head. He remembered a story he had read as a youth. It was probably one of Kipling's tales of the British Army. It concerned an officer who had been disgraced and drummed out. The steady roll of the drums had sounded behind him as he walked between the endless ranks of the men he had commanded, and each man about-faced and turned his back as the officer approached. Marty wished these poor farm people would turn their backs. The fencing by the roadside ended. Now the dirt highway was bordered on either side by a fairly deep drainage ditch, too broad to leap over unless you were an Olympic star. The day's rain had been added to the stagnant water. He was trapped on the road when he heard the sound of an approaching car. It was coming toward him. The car was now in sight. Marty's heart skipped a beat when he recognized it. It was the station wagon that had passed his cab on the road, the station wagon that had been parked at the Burch farm. Acey Squire's station wagon. It had headed back toward Jarrodsville. That had only been a ruse to lure him out on the deserted road. Now Acey and his friends were returning to seek him out. The station wagon came to a stop a couple of hundred feet in front of him, beside a fenced field. Then there was another sound. A second car was coming from the west, from the direction of Sanford's Run. It was the Ford that had been outside Burch's farm. Marty looked helplessly in both directions. It was a narrow road, barely wide enough for two cars to pass. He could not leave the road because of the water-filled drainage ditch. When the two cars were equidistant from him, the station wagon started up again and the Ford gathered speed. They bore down on him. There was nothing he could do except jump into the ditch. He jumped, and sank to his knees in muddy water. As the two cars roared by, there was a high-pitched eerie, nerve-shattering sound. Marty knew how the Union soldiers must have felt at Chancellorsville and Antietam and Gettysburg when the ragged gray ranks charged at them, screaming the wild banshee howl they called the Rebel yell. For moments he stood in water, shivering and gasping for breath. He had turned his ankle slightly, and it

pained him. The cars, with their load of howling men, had disappeared in the distance. There had been two more cars parked at the farm, a Plymouth and a pickup truck. They would be coming for him next, bearing down on him from both directions. And then the station wagon and the Ford would seek him out again. He would be harassed repeatedly and would escape death by inches time after time, all the way to Jarrodsville. He still had three miles to go. Back East the more affluent juvenile delinquents, who could afford hyped-up autos instead of switch blades as lethal weapons, played this same game and called it "Chicken". He could not go through the fields. That way was barred on both sides of the road by a high barbed-wire fence. He had to make for the section of road just ahead that was bordered by the rail fence, the section by the farmhouse. At least he could climb up on the fence when his tormenters roared by again. The Admassy place could not be far now. He would go in there, climb through the window, and at least be safe for a little while and able to rest. There was even a bare chance that the phone had not been disconnected.

He did not dare climb back up to the road. He was deep in water, but at least they could not reach him there. He splashed on, mud sucking at his feet with each step, until he reached the end of the drainage ditch and the beginning of the fence that enclosed the farm. He climbed back to the road, and he felt utterly exhausted. He stood, panting, for a moment. And then he saw something that he had not seen before, and panic gripped him again. The fence, his only refuge when the metal death came roaring at him, was made of rails, all right, but the rails were protected by a thick screening of barbed wire that would rip his flesh if he pressed against it. He lurched on down the road despairingly, because there was no place else to go. He lost all sense of dignity. You could not stand on dignity when you were soaked and muddied and your life was at stake. Probably people were watching him from the porch or from behind the windows of this farmhouse, too, but he did not bother to look. He broke into a dogtrot, breathing heavily, streaming with sweat. He had to reach Admassy's place. It was his only sanctuary. The fences on both sides of the road bristled with the barbed wire. The fences stretched on endlessly.

And then he heard them. And now he saw them. The Plymouth was coming at him from the east, the pickup truck from the west. They had timed it better this time. They would reach him at almost exactly the same instant. He stopped stone-still. If he backed against the fence, one of the cars would brush him as it passed, and he would be cruelly lacerated by the wire. He stumbled to the middle of the road and simply stood there, waiting for them, a perfect target. The cars must have had their gas pedals pushed down to the floor boards. They were coming on at reckless speed for such old vehicles. They thundered at him. He held his arms close to his sides and made himself as small as possible. When the Plymouth neared, it veered toward him and seemed about to run him down. He forced himself to stay frozen there. If he moved, he would be in the path of the other car. He thought the fender of the Plymouth brushed his jacket

as it went by. In a fraction of a second the pickup truck hurtled by on the other side. The weird, insane sound of the Rebel yell reverberated again and echoed from the distant hills. He did not leave the middle of the road. He did not try to run. He trudged on, his aching eyes focused straight ahead. He was nearing the Admassy house. He was going to make it, he told himself. And then he heard a car coming from the east, and he felt as if he would break down and weep. "Oh, no, not again", he said aloud. "Not again so soon". There was a new sound, a sound as piercing as the Rebel yell, yet different. It was the sound of a siren. Now he saw that the approaching car was painted white, and he began to wave his arms frantically. It was the prowler car from the sheriff's office.

The car drew up alongside him and stopped. "Get in", Charley Estes said brusquely. He staggered into the back seat and lay back, fighting for breath. There was someone in front with the sheriff. It was Pete Holmes, the cabdriver. Pete turned around and said to Marty, "I guess you think I'm a yellow-bellied hound. But there wasn't no use in me staying there. I couldn't fight a dozen or so of 'em. If I'd stayed, all that I'd have got was four punctured tires and one busted head. Why didn't you wait at the Burch house? You must've known I'd gone to get the sheriff. I was lucky they let me go, I guess". The sheriff was occupied with maneuvering the car around in a very narrow space. When it was finally pointed east, he said, "You should never have come out here alone. This is redneck country. Every man in every one of these houses is a Night Rider.

Then he turned the telephone over to Rourke, and went into the bedroom to change his slippers for dry socks and shoes. Rourke was talking on the phone when he came back. "About an hour, eh? Are you positive"? He listened a moment and then said, "Hold it". He turned his head and said, "Alvarez will definitely be in a back room at the Jai Alai Club on South Beach within an hour. Want to try and meet him there"? Shayne looked at his watch. That wasn't too far from Fifth Street, and should allow him to make Scotty's Bar by midnight. He said with satisfaction, "That's fine, Tim. I'll be there". Rourke confirmed the appointment over the phone and hung up. "I don't know what you're getting into, Mike", he said unhappily. "I hope to Christ **h".

Shayne said briskly, "Grab another drink if you want it. We've got one other call to make before I meet Alvarez". "Where"? "It's out in the Northeast section. Have you got my car here"? "It's parked in front". Rourke hastily slopped whiskey into his glass on top of half-melted ice-cubes.

"I'd better keep on driving yours", Shayne decided, "because I'll be going on over to the Beach. I can drop you back here to pick mine up". He went to a closet to get a light jacket, and took his hat from beside the door. Timothy Rourke gulped down

the whiskey hastily and joined him, asking, "Who are we going to call on in the Northeast section"? "A lady. That is, maybe not too much of a lady. At least, I want to find out whether she's home yet or not". He opened the door and followed Rourke out.

In Rourke's car, Shayne drove east to Biscayne Boulevard and north toward Felice Perrin's address which had been given to him by the Peralta governess. As he drove, he filled in Timothy Rourke briefly on the events of the evening after leaving the reporter to go to the Peralta house, and on his own surmises. "I want to be in Scotty's Bar at midnight when Marsha makes her phone call there", he ended grimly. "I don't know whether that threatening letter of hers has anything to do with this situation or not, but I want to see who takes the call". "This deal at <Las Putas Buenas> where the two knife-men jumped you", said Rourke with interest, "that sounds like it was set up with malice aforethought by the luscious Mrs& Peralta, doesn't it"? "It does", Shayne grunted sourly, still able to taste her mouth on his in the Green Jungle parking lot. "That story of hers about an unsigned note directing her to be there tonight sounds completely phony. If it was designed to put me on the spot, it would have to have been written before Peralta ever called me in on the case". "Do you think Laura did have the counterfeit bracelet made without her husband's knowledge"? "I haven't the faintest idea. I think her husband strongly suspects so, and that's why he called me in on the thing in direct defiance of his confederates **h and almost certainly without telling them why he was doing so. Isn't this Felice's street"? Shayne asked, peering ahead at the partially obscured street sign. Rourke could see it better out the right-hand side, and he said, "Yes. Turn to the left, I think, for that number you gave me. Not more than a block or so". Shayne got in the left-hand lane and cut across the Boulevard divider. There was a small, neon-lighted restaurant and cocktail lounge on the southeast corner of the intersection as he turned into the quiet, palm-lined street where most of the houses on both sides were older two-story mansions, now cut up into furnished rooms and housekeeping apartments.

Shayne drove westward from the Boulevard slowly, letting Rourke crane his head out the window and watch for street numbers. A single automobile was parked half-way up the block on the left-hand side. Shayne noted idly that it carried Miami Beach license plates as he approached, and then saw the flare of a match in the front seat as they passed, indicating that it was occupied. He turned to see the briefly-illumed faces of two men in the parked car just as Rourke said, "It's the next house, Mike. On the right". Instead of pulling into the curb, Shayne increased his speed slightly to the corner where he swung left. He went around the corner and parked, turning off his lights and motor. "I told you, Mike", said Rourke in an aggrieved voice. "It was back there **h".

Shayne said, "I know it was, Tim". His voice was chilling and cold. "Did you see the car parked across the street"? "I didn't notice it. I was watching for numbers **h". "It has a Beach license, Tim. Two men in the front seat. I got a quick look at their faces as we went past. Unless I'm crazy as hell, they're two of Painter's dicks. A couple named Harris and Geely. Those names mean anything to you"? "Wait a minute, Mike. In Painter's office this evening **h". Shayne nodded grimly. "The pair whom Petey is officially commending for slapping me around and pulling me in". "What are they doing here"? "A stake-out, I suppose. On Felice Perrin. Maybe with specific orders to see that I don't make contact with her. I'm not positive, Tim. I may be wrong. I'll slide out and walk around the block back to the cocktail lounge on Biscayne. You drive on and circle back and pull up beside them parked there. You're a reporter, and you're looking for Miss Perrin to interview her. Make them show their hands. If they are Beach cops on a stake-out, they'll admit it to a reporter. They've got no official standing on this side of the Bay. As soon as you find out if they are Geely and Harris, come on around to the lounge where I'll be waiting".

Shayne opened the door on his side and stepped out. Timothy Rourke groaned dismally as he slid under the wheel. "The things you talk me into, Mike **h". Shayne chuckled. "How often do they add up to headlines? You should complain". He crossed the street and walked swiftly southward to circle back to the Boulevard and north a block to the open restaurant. He was standing at the end of the bar enjoying a slug of cognac when Rourke came in six or eight minutes later. The reporter nodded as he moved up beside him at the bar. Shayne told the bartender, "Bourbon and water", and Rourke told him, "It's those two, all right. Harris and Geely. I made them show me their identification before I could be persuaded not to call on Felice Perrin". Shayne said happily, "I've got it all worked out, Tim. Take your time with your drink. I'll beat it. In exactly three minutes, go in that phone booth behind you and call Police Headquarters. Be excited and don't identify yourself. Just say that a couple of drunks are having a hell of a fight down the street, and they better send a patrol car. Then hang up fast and come walking on down to the Perrin address. I'll be waiting for you there". The bartender brought Rourke's drink and Shayne laid a twenty-dollar bill on the bar. He said in a low voice, "I've got a date with a lady, Mister. Will that pay for a pint I can take with me. You know how it is", he added with a conspiratorial wink. "Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker **h and you don't have any candy for sale here anyhow". "We sure don't". The bartender winked back at him and palmed the bill. He turned away and returned in a moment with a pint of brandy in a small paper sack which he slid over the counter to Shayne. As the detective slid it into his pocket, Rourke asked sadly, "What in hell are you going to do, Mike"? "Make a couple of punk detectives named Geely and Harris wish to God they'd stayed

out of my way this afternoon. Three minutes, Tim". Shayne strode out blithely, and Rourke checked his watch and sipped his drink, getting a dime ready to make the telephone call to the police. Outside, Shayne hesitated when he saw that Rourke had parked his coupe directly in front of the bar headed south. He walked over to the right-hand door, opened it and got the reloaded automatic out of the glove compartment and put it in his hip pocket. He hoped he wouldn't be forced to use it in taking care of the Beach detectives, but its weight was comforting at his hip. On this side of the Bay, Miami Beach cops had no more legal rights than any ordinary citizen, and Shayne's pistol permit was just as good as theirs. He went swiftly up the sidewalk toward the parked car with the two Beach detectives in the front seat. He tugged the brim of his hat low as he approached, stepped out into the street just behind the car and strode around to the right-hand side. The big, paunchy man named Geely was on that side, half-turned in the seat toward his hatchet-faced companion so that his back partially rested against the closed door.

Shayne turned the handle and jerked the door open before either of the men were quite aware of his presence in the night. Geely grunted and slid partly out, and Shayne's left arm snaked in around his neck to help him, while he set himself solidly on the roadway and swung his right fist to the big, gum-chewing jaw before Geely could straighten up. Shayne stepped back to let him slump to the ground, and then dived over him through the open door into Harris who was cursing loudly and trying to drag a gun from a shoulder holster, somewhat impeded by the steering wheel. Shayne locked his big hands around Harris' thin neck and dragged him out over the seat into the roadway. He hit him once on the sharp point of his chin and felt the body go limp. He dropped him into the street a couple of feet away from Geely's recumbent figure and stared down at both of them for a moment before kicking the big man lightly in the side. He didn't stir. They were both breathing heavily, out cold, and Shayne didn't think either of them had recognized him or could describe him.

He got the pint of liquor out of his pocket and unscrewed the top, sprinkled the pungent stuff liberally over both men, and then tossed the open bottle in on the front seat. He turned, then, to look toward the lighted Boulevard, and saw Rourke's tall, emaciated figure come out of the lounge and hurriedly start to angle across the street toward the opposite side. Shayne strolled across to intercept the reporter in front of the two-story house where Felice Perrin lived, and asked casually, "Get the police okay?" "Sure. Said they'd have a patrol car here fast. Let's get inside. What happened with you"? "Why the two damned fools got all excited when they saw the bottle, and knocked each other out cold", Shayne said good-humoredly. "They'll have fun explaining that to the Miami cops. Got no business over here on a stake-out anyway".

They went up onto a front porch and into a small hallway where a dim bulb burned high in the ceiling. A row of mailboxes

along the wall had numbers and names on them. Shayne found one marked PERRIN ~2-A. The stairway on the right was dark, but there was a wall-switch at the bottom which lighted another dim bulb at the top, and they went up. There were two front rooms, both dark behind their transoms, and there was no sound or light in the entire house to indicate that any of the occupants were awake.

Eight, nine steps above him, Roberts had paused. Mickey paused with him, waiting, no longer impatient, trying now to think it out, do a little planning. He looked down over the banister at the hotel desk, with the telephone and pen set. If I could call in, they could check the story while we were on our way. I wouldn't have to tell them I had Roberts- Then he heard it, like a muffled thud, felt a subtle change in air pressure. He glanced up in time to see Roberts hurtling down on him from above, literally flying through the air, his bloody face twisted. Mickey tried to flatten against the banister, gripped it with one hand, but Roberts' full weight struck him at that moment in the groin. He gasped for air and the impact tore his hand from the rail. He tumbled with Roberts, helpless and in agony, over and over, down the steps. By a wrenching effort, he managed to hunch and draw in, to take the final fall on his back and shoulders rather than his head. He was fuzzy in his mind and, for a moment, helpless on the lobby floor, but he was conscious, and free of the weight of Roberts' body. When his vision cleared he saw the taller one scrambling upward, reaching. Mickey was on his knees when Roberts turned on the stairs and the razor flashed in his hand. He felt his empty pocket and knew that Roberts had retrieved the only weapon at hand. Mickey's eyes fixed on the other's feet, which would first betray the moment and direction of an attack. He rose stiffly, forcing his knees to lock. The knifelike pain in his groin nearly brought him down again. He made himself back off slowly, his eyes wary on Roberts, who now had no more to lose than he. The pain dulled as he moved, and he steadied inside. After a moment he extended one hand, the fingers curled. "Come on", he said. "You want to be that big a fool- I was hoping for this". Roberts brushed at his eyes with his free hand and started down the steps. He held the razor well out to one side. He was invulnerable to attack, but he could be handled, Mickey knew, if he could be brought to make the first move. They were eight feet apart when Roberts cleared the last step. Mickey waited with slack arms. "Any time, Roberts", he said. "Or would it be easier if I put my hands in my pockets"? The taunt was lost on Roberts. He advanced slowly, directly, giving no hint of a feint to either side. He was just short of arm's reach when he stopped. Mickey backed off two steps, forcing him to come on again. There was a fixed grin on Roberts' face, made hideous by the swollen nose and the smeared blood.

Mickey backed off again and Roberts hesitated, then came along. They moved in a series of rhythmic fits and starts, a macabre dance- two steps back, two steps forward, two steps back. Mickey felt his shoulders

come up against the wall beside the heavy slab front door. This was going to be it now, any second, and what he had to remember was to keep his eye on the razor, no matter what, even if Roberts should feint with a kick to the groin, the deadly hand was his exclusive concern.

The kick came, sudden and vicious but short. Mickey's guts twisted with the effort, but he kept his eye on the weapon. It moved in a silver arc toward his throat, then veered downward. He hunched his left shoulder into it and slashed at Roberts' forearm with his own, felt the blade slide off his sleeve. Before Roberts could move inside to cut upward toward his face, he slammed his right fist into Roberts' belly. Roberts sagged and slashed at him wildly. Ducking, Mickey tripped and fell to one side, landing heavily on the wood floor. Then Roberts was on him, gasping for breath and for a couple of seconds Mickey lost sight of the blade. He felt it rip at the side of his jacket and a momentary sting under his left ribs. He got a knee up into Roberts' belly, used both hands and heaved him clear, then scrambled to his feet. They were in the center of the lobby now. Still clutching the razor, Roberts came up into a crouch, shaking his head. When he charged Mickey was ready. He hit Roberts with his left fist in the ribs and the razor cut toward him feebly, then wobbled in mid-air. With his right fist, and nearly all his weight behind it, he smashed at the bloodstained face. Roberts careened backward, his back arched, fought for balance and, failing, stumbled against the newel post at the foot of the stairs. The sound of his head striking the solid wood was an ultimate, sudden-end sound. He fell on his side across the lowest step, rolled over once, then lay still.

Mickey found himself leaning against the desk, with stiff hands, panting for breath. After a minute he went to Roberts, looked at one of his eyes and felt for a pulse. He couldn't feel any. Roberts appeared to be dead; if not yet, then soon, very soon. Suddenly it was cold in the lobby. #@ 12#

It seemed to him that a long time had passed before he decided what to do. Actually it was no more than eight or ten minutes, and the sum of his reasoning came to this:

There's no way to take him in now and keep those other two- Wister and the one who hired the two of them- from finding out about Roberts and lamming out. The local law here would hold me till they check clear back home, and maybe more than that. They would have to. By then they could never catch up with the others. There's no other way; I'll have to do it myself. He looked at where Roberts lay sprawled on the step. Mickey was sure now he was dead.

One thing, he thought, nobody knows about it yet. Only me.

He climbed the stairs, went into Roberts' room, found a suitcase and packed as much into it as he could. He left a few things. It didn't

have to be perfect. Roberts was a wastrel. Walking away on impulse, he might logically leave behind what it was inconvenient to carry.

When he had closed the suitcase he found a rag and moved about the room, wiping carefully everything he might have touched. It took him nearly an hour. He went to the room he had rented and got into his overcoat. He left the rest of his things and returned to the lobby. He set Roberts' suitcase near the front door, went outside and walked back to the garage. He was mildly surprised to find it was snowing. It snowed softly, silently, an undulating interruption of his vision against the night sky. He could feel it on his face and in his hair. He found the key to the Jeep, got it started and warmed it up for five minutes. Then he backed out and swung around to the front drive. He went into the hotel and searched till he found the razor. He put it in his own pocket for safekeeping. He took the suitcase out to the Jeep and put it in the front seat. Then he went back for Roberts. The body was heavier than he had anticipated. He got it onto his shoulder after some work and carried it outside and down to the Jeep. He dumped it into the back and made sure it wouldn't roll out, then returned to the porch and closed the front door, making sure it was unlocked. He drove carefully in the direction of the brief tour they had taken earlier. It snowed continuously, but quietly, evenly. When he reached the dip in the woods, he saw that already the earlier ruts were barely discernible. The Jeep fought its way through the low spot and got onto higher ground. He drove in low gear to the fork in the road and swung as close as possible to the entrance to the abandoned mine. He parked facing it and left the headlights on, but when he started into the tunnel with the suitcase, he found the illumination extended no farther than half a dozen feet into the passage. He went back and got the flashlight, returned to the tunnel and carried the suitcase to the edge of the pit he had found earlier. He tossed the bag into the pit and watched dry dust spray up around it. When the dust settled, he went back to the Jeep and carefully worked Roberts' body onto his shoulder. It wasn't like carrying the suitcase. The soft snow was deceitful underfoot. Twice he nearly fell. Inside the passage, he had to work his way over the fallen timber and nearly collapsed under his clumsy burden. By the time he reached the edge of the pit he was panting and his shoulder and back ached under the drag of the dead weight. He stood looking down for a few seconds, then backed up two or three paces from the edge. There was too much weight casually to toss it away. He could feel himself falling in with it and being unable to get out. It would be a bad place to die. It was a bad place for Roberts to wind up, but Roberts had asked for it. It was too late to worry about that.

He knelt slowly and dumped the corpse onto the floor of the tunnel. It was a relief to get rid of the weight. He was shaking with tension and it took him a couple of minutes to get his breath and settle down. Then he got on his knees and rolled Roberts' body toward the edge. It hung momentarily on the point of dropping off. He gave it a strong push, heard it slide, then tumble dryly into the hole. He got

to his feet and threw the flashlight beam into the pit. The body lay in an awkward sprawl twelve or fifteen feet below the level of the tunnel floor. Deep enough, he decided. There was little chance anyone would enter this shaft during the winter. The external signs of his approach to it would be covered by the snow, probably by the next day. It wasn't cold enough in the tunnel to preserve the body intact. By spring it would be a skeleton. He made his way back to the Jeep. He had started to back into the turn when he remembered the razor in his pocket. He climbed down, went back into the tunnel and tossed the razor into the pit. It landed on Roberts' sprawled right thigh, poised precariously, then slid off to the ground. He went back once more to the Jeep and started the short drive to the hotel.

In the garage he checked the Jeep for signs of the use he had made of it. There were stains here and there and he cleaned them off, using an oiled rag he found on a nail. He wiped the steering wheel and all the places he might have touched the Jeep. He replaced the flashlight where it had been stowed, got into his own car and backed it out of the garage. There were tire marks where it had been, but they were overlapped by others and on the dusty floor would not be noticeable except under close scrutiny. Liz Peabody, he thought, might spend some time grieving for her lost lover, but he doubted that she would launch an investigation. He judged her to be a woman of some pride, though not much sense. Still she would probably have sense enough not to call in the local sheriff to find her boy friend who, apparently, had run away.

He put in a call to Cunningham from his hotel room. The maid answered and he decided Nancy must be at work. Jeb cautioned him not to be too hopeful and then, ignoring his own advice, said excitedly, "But it does sound good. A woman named Lisa who tells nobody anything about herself. That courtyard picture with the same initials".

"I'm not exactly jumping up and down with enthusiasm. I'll call you in a day or so". On the highway he relaxed and enjoyed the drive over Lake Pontchartrain and along the coast.

Gulf Springs was ten miles inland- more of a quaint old coast town than those along the beach made garish by tourist attractions.

He checked into a motel and drove downtown. The courthouse was a white-stucco building minus the customary dome. Instead of the usual straggling privet hedges and patches of bare dirt in most small-town squares, the building was hemmed in by a semitropical growth of camellias and azaleas and a smooth lawn the improbably bright-green shade of florist's grass. He figured his best bet was a call on the sheriff. A clerk in the outer office took him in to Sheriff Carruthers, a big, paunchy man with thick, white hair and a voice with a senatorial resonance which suggested he should be running for higher office. Seated in front of the desk, Hank said, "I'm looking for some information with very little to go on, Sheriff".

He explained the background of the case, ending with the tenuous clue which had brought him to Gulf Springs. The sheriff's swivel chair tilted back. "So you're looking for a woman who married a man who might have lived here a year ago and might have been poisoned. If there was such a person, I'm afraid she got away with it. Pity we don't know more about him. I think the best bet is to go through the society columns of last year and see if any of the grooms match with the obituaries a little later. It'll be a tedious job, but if you want to try it, the old newspaper files are in the basement here in the county supervisor's office". "Maybe the society editor would remember a good-looking out-of-town bride".

"That's an idea. Mrs& Calhoun has been society editor here for twenty-five years. The editor says that marriages may be made in heaven, but weddings are made in Mrs& Calhoun's columns. She's the one who decides which wedding is to get the lead space in the Sunday paper and all that". He smiled. "Once, when the editor was just out of the hospital from a gallstone operation, Mrs& Calhoun and the mother of the bride went out to his house and fought it out beside his bed. She'd be sure to remember any bride who was vague about background. She'd have made a great scientist dedicated to tracking down heredity and environment. She'd also remember if the groom died later". He stood up. "I wish you good luck, but please don't dig up too tough a case for me this close to election. If you find out anything, come on back here and we'll get started on it".

Tracking down Mrs& Calhoun was like trying to catch up with Paul Revere between Lexington and Concord. It turned out that she also sold real estate, cosmetics, and hospital insurance. The wearying trek stretched into the afternoon- from newspaper plant to insurance office to her house and back to the newspaper, where he found her at five o'clock. She was a large woman with a frizzled gray poodle cut and a pencil clamped like a bit between her teeth while she hunted and pecked on an old typewriter. It took a couple of minutes to run through her various businesses and get down to the one he wanted.

"Last year? Well, I do remember one. From Baton Rouge. Married a man named Vincent Black. I remember her because she didn't want her picture in the paper. First bride like that I've seen in twenty-five years". "What reason did she give"?

"Said she had a breaking-out on her face- some sort of allergy- and none of her old pictures was good enough. I didn't see her till several days later at the wedding, and her face looked like it had never had a blemish on it. But, of course, you couldn't see too well through the veil". "Was her name Lisa Carmody"?

"Now how in hell would I remember that"?

"Never mind. I can look it up. Do they still live here"?

"I think they moved away shortly after they were married. He was a salesman for something or other and must have been transferred. I'm sure it'll be in the files. We usually run a social note when somebody moves away". He stood up and thanked her. "Have they inherited some money or something"? she asked with a reportorial gleam in her eye. He said vaguely, "Well, it is a little legal matter, but nothing like that". He hurried across to the courthouse and caught the sheriff just as he was leaving.

"Sounds like what you're after", he said when Hank had finished. "Come on, let's hurry down before they lock up for the day". In the basement the sheriff took him to a small, dingy office occupied by a tall, thin man informal in rolled-up shirt sleeves.

"Mr& Ferrell *h Hirey Lindsay, chairman of the board of supervisors. Mr& Ferrell is a private detective, Hirey. Wants to look up something in the newspaper files, so don't lock him in here". "Sure", said Hirey. "I'll just leave the door open. It latches when you close it, so stay as long as you like".

Carruthers crossed the room to a metal door with an open grillework in the top half. He pulled it open. "Now don't shut this door. It won't open from inside. Before we built the new jail, we used to keep prisoners in here overnight sometimes when the old jail got too crowded. Hirey treats himself a lot better than we do prisoners. They were a sight more comfortable than the ones in the jail with the cold air from Hirey's air conditioner coming through the grille".

He walked past the sheriff into a windowless room with shelves full of big, leather-bound volumes from floor to ceiling all around the walls. A metal table and four chairs stood in the center.

"They're all here, back to 1865", Carruthers told him. "It's all right to smoke, but make sure your cigarettes are out before you leave. And, of course, you know not to take clippings".

"I'll leave the air conditioner on for you, Mr& Ferrell", said Hirey. "Don't forget to turn it off and close the door good so it'll latch". Hank thanked them and promised to observe the rules. When they had gone, he stood for a minute breathing in the mustiness of old paper and leather which the busily thrumming air conditioner couldn't quite dispel.

#CHAPTER FOURTEEN#

In
a tour around the stacks, he found that the earliest volumes began on the left and progressed clockwise around the room. An old weakness for

burrowing in records rose up to tempt him. It was, indeed, all here- almost a century. From reconstruction to moon rockets. But he pulled away from the irrelevant old volumes and walked around to the newer ones. Last year's volume was at the top a couple of inches below the ceiling. Near it was a metal ladder on casters attached to the top shelf. He pulled it over, climbed up, and lifted out the big volume, almost losing his balance from the weight of it. He staggered over and dropped it on the table. Since Mrs& Calhoun remembered only that the marriage had been in the spring, he started to plod through several months. He tried to turn right to the society page in each one, but interesting stories kept cropping up to distract him. At last he found it in the paper of April 2. It told him little more than Mrs& Calhoun had remembered, stating that it had been a small, modest wedding compared to some of the others.

There was a marked contrast in the amount of information on bride and groom. Mr& Black's life was an open book, so to speak, from his birth in Jackson, Mississippi, through his basketball-playing days at L&S&U& and his attainment of a B&A& degree, which had presumably prepared him for his career as district sales manager for Peerless Business Machines. The one line on the bride said she was Miss Lisa Carmody from Baton Rouge. No mention of New Orleans. Hank was beginning to feel sharp concern for Mr& Black. If Mrs& Black was who he thought she was, Mr& Black's Peerless selling days might well be over. Now for their exodus from Gulf Springs. This time the search took twice as long, cutting down on his extra reading, for he had to pick through several columns of one- and two-line social notes in each issue. He found it in the edition of May 15. The item said Mr& and Mrs& Black had moved to Jackson, his home town- so the lovely Lisa had been with him a year ago. Next on his program was a call to the Jackson office of Peerless Business Machines to find out if Vincent Black was still with them- or, more specifically, still with <us>.

He glanced at his watch, saw it was only seven, and decided to indulge his weakness now. For the next hour he scrambled happily up and down the ladder, sharing the excitement of reporters who had seen McKinley's assassination, the Iroquois Theater fire in Chicago, and the Hall-Mills trial. In the middle of the stock market crash, he heard a slight noise in the outer office. He turned around, saw nothing, and decided it must be a mouse. Something else distracted him, yet there was no sound, only tomblike silence. Then he knew it was not sound, but lack of it. The air conditioner was no longer running. He jumped up and turned around to see the metal door closing. It clanged shut as he sprang toward it. He pressed his face against the grille. "Who's there"? The light shining through the grille dimly illuminated the office beyond- enough for him to see there was no one there. Then he heard the outer door closing. "Hey, come back", he shouted. He thought it must be some damn janitor or cleaning woman pattering around, figuring that Hirey had gone off and forgotten to turn off everything and lock

up. _hen the faint beginnings of fear stirred in his mind. Unless he was stone-blind, the person who'd just left couldn't have missed seeing Hank through the open door of the brightly lighted room. And even if he'd somehow missed seeing him, he wouldn't have gone off and left the light on and door open in the file room. Whoever it was had meant to shut him up in here, had followed him and waited till the courthouse and square were deserted. But why? To search his room at the motel? To come back later and kill him after the stores had closed around the square and everybody had left? No, they could

kill him just as easy right now. Nobody could hear what was going on in this underground vault. Then he heard it and smelled it- the steady hissing, the dread, familiar pungency of gas escaping. It must be coming from an upright heater against the far wall in the supervisors' office. Until now, Lilac Gaylor and Lila Kingsley had been like an anagram which he could unscramble at his own pace and choosing. Except for those minutes in her room, he had lost touch with her as a reality. Gaylor's obsession and Cunningham's chimera-chasing reminiscences had mesmerized him into thinking of Lila and Lilac, separately or together, as a legend. They kept drifting apart and merging again in his mind like some minute form of life on a microscope slide.

"Well"- said Mr& Skyros. "I take a little time to think it over". It was awkward: very awkward. There would be all the nuisance of contacting someone else to take over. Someone reasonably trustworthy. And Angie would hear about it. And Angie knew-

"Time", said Angie, and he smiled very sweet and slow at Mr& Skyros. "Not too much time, because I'll be needing some more myself pretty much right away. And I done favors for you, big favor not so long back, didn't I, and I'm right here to take on where Pretty left off. No trouble. I don't want no trouble, you don't want no trouble, nobody wants trouble, Mr& Skyros".

Dear heaven, no, thought Mr& Skyros, turning away as another man came in. He straightened his tie at the mirror with a shaking hand; the genial smile seemed painted on his face. Angie knew- Speak of dangerous information! Angie knew too much entirely already. Really he had Mr& Skyros at bay **h "Big favor I done you. Acourse there's this deal o' Denny's- and Jackie's- kinda hangin' fire, ain't it, maybe you've been kinda worryin' over that. And can't say I blame you", said Angie thoughtfully. "This deal with the ace o' spades. Anything to do with an ace o' spades, bad luck". Ace of spades- a widow, that was what they called a widow, these low-class crooks remembered Mr& Skyros distractedly. All about that Angie knew, too. When things got a little out of hand, they very rapidly got a lot out of hand- it seemed to be a general rule. All just by chance, and in a way tracing back to poor Frank, all of it, because naturally- brothers, living together- and Angie- Mr& Skyros did not at all like the

look on Angelo's regular-featured, almost girlishly good-looking face-

or indeed anything about Angelo. Mr& Skyros was not a man who thought very much about moral principles; he found money much more interesting; but all the same he thought now, uneasily, of the way in which Angelo earned his living- and paid for his own stuff- and eyed the soft smile, and the spaniel-like dark eyes, and he felt a little ill. "Look, my friend", he said, "in my life I learn, how is it the proverb says, better an ounce of prevention to a pound of cure. I stay in business so long because I'm careful. Two weeks, a month, we talk it over again, and maybe if nothing happens meanwhile to say the cops know this and that, then we make a little deal, isn't it"? "That's a long while", said Angie.

"I tell you, you want to leave it that way, I don't fool around with it. I go over to Castro and get fixed up there. I can't wait no two weeks". And Mr& Skyros didn't like Angie, but what with Prettyman and three of his boys inside, and not likely to come out- And Angie such a valuable salesman, Prettyman said- All the nuisance and danger of getting in touch with practically a whole new bunch of boys- Why did everything have to happen at once?

Denny said stupidly, "Why, you ain't turning Angie down, are you, Mr& Skyros? I mean, we all figured- I guess anybody'd figure- Angie"- Angelo gave him an affectionate smile. "Mr& Skyros too smart a fellow want to get rid of me", he said. "It's O&K&, Denny, everything's O&K& Ain't it, Mr& Skyros"? Oh, God, the name repeated over and over, anybody to hear- Not being a fool, Mr& Skyros knew why. But aside from everything else, it would scarcely be pleasant to have dealings with one who was nominally an underling and actually held- you could say- the whip hand. And all because of Domokous! If Mr& Skyros had dreamed of all the trouble that young man would eventually cause- Of course, there was another factor. Angie worth his weight in gold right now, but these users, they sometimes went down fast. Who knew, Angie might not last long **h. The sweat broke out on Mr& Skyros' forehead as he realized he had been actually thinking- hoping- planning- perhaps- Good God above, had not Domokous been enough? He patted Angelo's thin shoulder paternally. "Now you don't want to go talking that way", he said. "Sure, sure, you're the one take over for Pretty, soon as I get the supply, get started up again, isn't it? You don't need worry, Angelo. I tell you, I know how it is with you, my friend, I sympathize, and I'll make it a special point- a special favor- get in touch, and get some stuff just for you. I don't know if I can manage it tonight or tomorrow, but I'll try my best, my friend. You see, you got to remember, we all got schedules, like any business! My man, he won't be around a little while, he just fixed me up with this stuff they took out of the Elite. It's awkward, you see that, isn't it"? "Well, that's your business, Mr& Skyros", said Angie, and his dreamy eyes moved past Mr& Skyros' shoulder to gaze vaguely out the ground-glass

window. "I appreciate it, you do that. Sure. We don't none of us want no trouble **h. I'm in a room over the Golden Club on San Pedro, you just ask for me there, you want see me. Or maybe I call you- tonight? About nine o'clock, I call and see if you got any. A couple decks for me, Mr& Skyros- and ten-twelve to sell, see, I like to have a little ready cash". "Oh, now, I don't know about that much", said Mr& Skyros. "And you know, Angelo, Pretty, he always keeps it a strict cash basis, like they say"- "Sure", said Angie. "Sure, Mr& Skyros. Fifty a throw, that the deal? Sure. I bring you the cash, say five hundred for ten decks. Never mind how much I cut it, how much I get", and he smiled his sleepy smile again. "Standard deal, Mr& Skyros. You go 'n' have a look round for it". "I do my best", said Mr& Skyros earnestly, "just for you, my friend. This is awkward for everybody, isn't it, we all got to put up with inconvenience sometimes. But I do my best for you". He got out of there in a hurry, brushing past another man in the door, mopping his brow. The expedient thing- yes, very true, one must make do as one could, in some situations. It could all be straightened out later. Not very much later, but when things had settled down a little. After this deal with the Bouvardier woman went through. An ace of spades **h. He was not a superstitious man, but he felt perhaps there was a little something in that, indeed. He rather wished he had never got into the business, and still- scarcely to be resisted, a nice little profit with not much work involved, easy money **h ##

Katya Roslev, who would be Katharine Ross so very soon now, rang up her first sale of the day and counted back the change. She did not notice that the customer seized her purchase and turned away without a smile or a word of thanks. Usually she marked the few who did thank you, you didn't get that kind much in a place like this: and she played a little game with herself, seeing how downright rude she could act to the others, before they'd take offense, threaten to call the manager. Funny how seldom they did: used to it, probably. The kind who came into a cheap store like this! Grab, snatch, I saw that first! and, Here, I'll take this, I was before <her>, you wait on me now or I don't bother with it, see! This kind of place **h She'd be through here, just no time at all- leave this kind of thing 'way behind. Off at noon, and she'd never come back. Never have to. Money- a lot of money, <enough>. She'd be smart about it, get him to give it to her in little bills so's nobody would suspect- maybe couldn't get it until Monday account of that, the banks- But that wasn't really long to wait. Not when she'd waited so long already. No need say anything at all to the old woman. She had it all planned out, how she'd do. She'd say she didn't feel good on Sunday, couldn't go to church- there'd be a little argument, but she could be stubborn- and when the old woman had gone, quick pack the things she'd need to take, all but the dress she'd wear Monday, and take the bag down to that place in the station where you could put things in a locker overnight, for

a dime. Then on Monday morning- or it might have to be Tuesday- get up and leave just the usual time, and last thing, put the money in an envelope under the old woman's purse there in the drawer. She wouldn't be going to get that for an hour or so after Katya had left, go do the daily shopping. No need leave a note with it, either- or maybe just something like, Don't worry about me, I'm going away to make a better life. A better life. Escape. It wasn't as if she wanted <much>. She didn't mind working hard, not as if she figured to do anything <wrong> to live easy and soft- all she wanted was a <chance>, where she wasn't marked as what she was.

To

be Katharine Ross, and work in a nicer shop somewhere, at a little more money so she could have prettier clothes, and learn ladies' manners and all like that, and get to know different people than up to now, not just the ones like her here, with foreign-sounding names, the ones went to the same church and- Different place, different job, different people, she'd be all different too. Prettier, she'd do her hair another way; smarter, and wear different kinds of clothes- she'd be Katharine Ross, just what that <sounded> like.

"You've give me the wrong change", said the customer sharply. "Think I can't count"? Katya made up the amount in indifferent silence. She was listening to other voices, out of the future.

Some of those vaguely-imagined new, different people. <Oh, Katharine's awfully nice, and pretty too, I like Katharine- Let's ask Katharine to go with us, she's always lots of fun- Katharine>-

Soon, very soon now **h #@ SIXTEEN @#

Mendoza

didn't

wake until nearly nine-thirty. It was going to be another hot day; already the thermometer stood close to ninety. Alison was still sound asleep; he made fresh coffee and searched through all the desk drawers for more cigarettes before thinking of her handbag, and found a crumpled stray cigarette at its bottom, which tasted peculiarly of face powder. He left a note propped on the desk asking her to call him sometime today, and drove home. After he'd got out fresh liver for Bast, he paused to look at her crouched daintily over her dish. Surely she <was> just a trifle fatter around the middle? He seemed to remember reading somewhere that Abyssinians had large litters, and suffered a dismaying vision of the apartment overrun with a dozen kittens. "<@Y que sigue despues?>- what then"? he asked her severely. "A lot of people are so peculiar that they don't like cats, it's not the easiest thing in the world to find good homes for kittens- and, damn it, you know very well if I have them around long, impossible to give them away! And I suppose now that you've finally grown up, if a little late, you'd go on producing kittens every six months or so. Yes, well, it's a pity to spoil your girlish figure- which all those kittens would do anyway- but I think when you've raised these we'll just have the vet fix it so there won't be any more **h. I wonder if the Carters would take one

**h. And it's no good looking at me like that", as she wound affectionately around his ankles.

Maude's long nose unexpectedly wrinkled up. "Happened to be in the hall! Happened to hear you quarrel about her! Oh, well, you can't really blame Lolotte. She lost her beau to you". But she was talking of Emile when she saw the black line of the open door; Sarah remembered it clearly. Maude went on. "I've got to get busy. Miss Celie's taken to her bed, with the door locked. She opened it an inch and poked out the keys for me to give you. Here"- She thrust a bundle of keys strung on a thick red cord into Sarah's hand. "Not that there's much use in locking up the smokehouse and the storehouse now. Drink your coffee"- Coffee. "It's- cold". Maude suddenly looked quite capable of pouring it down her throat. "I don't want it", Sarah said, firmly.

"Oh. Well- I'll take it down with me as I go".

Maude swooped up the cup and hiked up her top hoop as if about to take off with a racing start. At the door she turned back, her Roman nose looking very long now and satiric. "I forgot. Ben and Lucien have gone after them. It's just like that book your Northern friend wrote- except there aren't any ice floes to cross and no bloodhounds".

"I don't know Mrs& Stowe **h. What can they do if they find them"? "They can't do anything. It's silly, childish, running after them like that. I told Ben so. But of course the paterollers won't be of any help, not with everything so upset and that Yankee cavalry outfit they say is running around, God knows where". She had swished away, she had been gone for a long time probably when Sarah suddenly realized that she ought to stop her, pour out the coffee, so no one would drink it. But then the so-called coffee was bad enough at best, cold it was all but undrinkable- especially that cup! She was deeply, horribly sure that Lucien had filled it with opium. She had quarreled with Lucien, she had resisted his demands for money- and if she died, by the provisions of her marriage contract, Lucien would inherit legally not only the immediate sum of gold under the floorboards in the office, but later, when the war was over, her father's entire estate. She felt cold and hot, sticky and chilly at the same time. Now wait a minute, she told herself, think about it; Lucien is not the only person in this house who could have put opium in that coffee. She had lost a bottle of opium- but that was on the trip from New Orleans. Or someone had taken it during her first day at Honotassa. Yes, she had missed it after her talk with Emile, after dinner, just before Emile was shot. Rilly or Glendora had entered her room while she slept, bringing back her washed clothes. So somebody else could have come in, too- then or later while she was out of the room. It would have been easy to identify as opium by its odor. It was not very reasonable to believe that Lucien had procured unprocurable opium and come back to Honotassa with a formed plan to murder her. He didn't even know that she was there. And he certainly couldn't have guessed that she would resist his demand for the gold or that she

was not the yielding- yes, and credible fool he had every right to expect. No, he had been surprised, unpleasantly surprised, but surprised.

Then somebody else? Don't question, Rev had said, don't invite danger. Her skin crawled: Lolotte had told Maude that she was in the hall and the door was open. Sarah had begun to tell Lucien of Emile, she had begun to question and a little draft had crept across the room from the bedroom door, open barely enough to show a rim of blackness in the hall. So Lolotte- or anybody- could have listened, and that somebody could have already been supplied with the missing bottle of opium. That was not reasonable either. The opium had disappeared before Emile's death and whoever shot him could not by any stretch of the imagination have foreseen Sarah's own doubts and suspicions- and questions. She began to doubt whether there had been in fact a lethal dose of opium in the cup. So suppose somebody only wished to frighten her, so she would leave Honotassa!

That made a certain amount of logic. Added to the argument was the fact that while she might have tasted the coffee if it had been still hot, she might even have drunk some of it, she wouldn't have taken enough to kill her, for she would have been warned by its taste. No. It was merely an attempt to frighten her.

She wouldn't go back to New York as Maude suggested; she wouldn't run like a scared cat. But- well, she'd be very careful.

She dressed and the accustomed routine restored to her a sense of normal everyday life. But before she left her room she dug into her big moire bag, took out the envelope holding her marriage contract and the wax seal had been broken. So somebody else knew what would happen to her father's money if she died. Rev had known all along. Rev didn't need to break the wax seal, read the contract and find out. He could conceivably have wished to make sure; Rev loved Honotassa, it was like a part of his breath and body; Rev had stressed the need for money. Rev would never have tried to give her poison! She thrust the envelope back in the bag; there was no point in locking it up in the armoire now, it was like locking the barn after the horse was stolen. And in all likelihood, by now, there was more than one person in the house who knew the terms of her marriage contract. There was no point either in telling herself again what a fool she'd been. She went downstairs and received another curious shock, for when Glendora flapped into the dining room in her homemade moccasins, Sarah asked her when she had brought coffee to her room and Glendora said she hadn't. "Too much work this morning, Miss Sarah- everybody gone like that"- Sarah swallowed past another kind of constriction in her throat. "Well, then who brought it"? "Miss Maude. She come to the kitchen and say she take it up to you". Glendora put down a dish of lukewarm rice. "Not much breakfast this morning. I don't know what we're going to do, Miss Sarah". "We've got to eat", Sarah said, curtly, because a chill crawled over her again. Maude?

Glendora flapped away. The rice wasn't dosed with opium, indeed it had no taste at all, not a grain of salt. She ate what she could and went out along the covered passageway, with the rain dripping from the vines. In the kitchen Glendora was despairingly picking chickens. "Get a basket", Sarah told her. "We'll go to the storehouse". Glendora dropped a chicken and a flurry of feathers, and went with her through the drizzle, to the storehouse. Sarah found the right key and unlocked the door. It was a long, low room, like a root cellar, for it was banked up with soil, and vines had run rampant over that, too. It was dark but dry and cool. She doled out what Glendora vaguely guessed were the right amounts of dried peas, eggs, cornmeal, a little salt. The shelves looked emptier than when Miss Celie had shown her the storeroom, and since the men from the Commissary had called; there were certainly now fewer mouths to feed but there was less to feed them with. She took Glendora to the smokehouse, unlocked it and saw with satisfaction there was still a quantity of hams and sides of bacon, hanging from the smoke-stained rafters. They wouldn't go hungry, not yet. And the fields were green and growing. "Can't you possibly imagine what life is going to be like, here"? Maude had said. Maude.

She

sent Glendora back to the house, her basket and her apron laden. She stood for a moment, rain dripping from the trees over her head, thinking of Maude. Maude had the opportunity to take the bottle of opium from Sarah's room. Maude had the cool ruthlessness to do

whatever she made up her mind to do. She couldn't see how her death could affect Maude. She couldn't see any reason why Maude would attempt to frighten her. Besides, there was something hysterical and silly, something almost childish about an attempt to frighten her. Maude was neither hysterical nor silly and Sarah rather doubted if she had ever

been childish. Yet Maude had suggested that Sarah return to New York. Maude could have shot Emile- if she'd had a reason to kill him. There was no use in standing there in the drizzle, trying to find a link between Emile's murder and opium in a cup of coffee. She started back for the house, saw a light in the office, opened the door and surprised a domestic little scene which was far outside the dark realm of murder or attempted murder. Rev, George and Lolotte were mending shoes. a lighted lamp stood on the table that dusky, drizzling day. They were all three bent over a shabby riding boot; George had a tack hammer. Lolotte held a patch of leather, Rev steadied something, a tiny brad, waiting for George's poised hammer. George said, "First thing I do when I get to Vicksburg again, is get me a Yankee"- "With boots on", Lolotte laughed softly. Rev looked up and saw her. Lolotte looked up and stiffened. George didn't look up at all. There was no way to know, no way to guess whether any one of them was surprised at Sarah's appearance, believing her to be drugged and senseless- and just possibly dead. Rev said, "Come in, Sarah. Reckon

you know the news". And what news, Sarah thought as satirically as Maude might have said it. Rev's face was suddenly a little fixed and questioning. He turned to George and Lolotte. "Take your cobbler's shop somewhere else. I want to talk to Sarah".

Everything in the office, the spreading circle of lamplight, the patch of leather in Lolotte's hands. George poised with the tack hammer, the homely, everyday atmosphere, all denied an attempt at murder. A rush of panic caught Sarah. "No. Not now. I mean I've got to- to see to the kitchen. Glendora"- Her words jumbled together and she all but ran from the office and from the question in Rev's face. Now why did I do that? she thought as warm, drizzling rain touched her face. She was no schoolgirl, refusing to bear tales. As she reached the kitchen door the answer presented itself; if she told anyone of the opium it must be Lucien, her husband. It might be, indeed it had already proved to be a marriage without love, but it was marriage. So she couldn't choose Rev as a confidant; it must be Lucien. Always provided that Lucien himself had not dosed her coffee with opium, she thought, as coldly and sharply, again, as Maude might have said it.

She paused at the kitchen door, caught her breath, told herself firmly that the opium was only an attempt to frighten her and went into the kitchen, where Glendora was eyeing the chickens dismally and Maude was cleaning lamp chimneys. Glendora gave a gulp. "Miss Sarah, I can't cut up no chicken. Miss Maude say she won't". Again the homely, everyday details of daily living refuted a vicious attempt to frighten her- or to murder her. The homely everyday details of living and domestic requirements also pressed upon her with their immediate urgency. No matter what had happened or hadn't happened, somebody had to see about dinner. She eyed the chickens with, if she had known it, something of Glendora's dismal look and thought with a certain fury of the time she had spent on Latin verbs.

"Not since last night. I didn't think there was any reason to". "Maybe there isn't. Speak to him again anyway. Try talking to some of the fellows he works with, friends, anyone. Try to find out how happy he is with his wife, whether he plays around with women. You might try looking into his wife too. She might have been talking to some of her friends about her husband if they've been having any trouble". "You think Black's the one we're looking for"? "Yeah. I think he might be", Conrad said grimly. "Then again he might not". "What a stinking world", Rourke said. "Black is Gilborn's best friend".

"I know". "Will you be coming back soon"?

"I think so. I'm on my way to see the Jacobs woman".

"Gilborn's secretary? What for? You don't think Gilborn

is the-"? "I don't think anything. I just don't want to go off half-cocked before picking up Black, that's all". Conrad interrupted. "Gilborn says he was in his office all day with her yesterday. I'd like to make sure. Also, it's just possible she might know something about Mrs& Gilborn". "Right. I'll see you later". "Aren't you ever going to go home"?

"It sure as hell doesn't look like it, does it? I'm telling you, if these corpses ever knew the trouble they put us to, they'd think twice before letting themselves get knocked off".

"Remember to tell that to the next corpse you meet".

Conrad hung up and sat on the small telephone-booth bench, massaging his right leg. He looked at his watch. It was ten minutes before eleven. He wondered how long it would be before they had a signed confession from Lionel Black. Thirty years' experience let him know, even at this early stage, that Black was his man. But he still wanted to know why. ##

It was a cold, windy day, the day after Kittie's death, but Stanley Gilborn paid no attention to the blustery October wind. After leaving Conrad, Gilborn had no destination. He simply walked, not noticing where he was, not caring. He stopped automatically at the street corners, waiting for the traffic lights to change, unheeding of other people, his coat open and flapping. As he walked, he tried to think.

Of Kittie. Of himself. Mainly of what Conrad had tried to make him believe. There was nothing coherent about his thinking. It was a succession of picture-images passing through his mind: the same ones, different ones, in no apparent sequence, in no logical succession.

The enormity of what Conrad had told him made it impossible for Gilborn to accept, with any degree of realism, the actuality of it. Conrad's words had intellectual meaning for him only. Emotionally, they penetrated him not at all. <Whoever he was and your wife were intimate>. Gilborn remembered Conrad's exact words. They made sense and yet they didn't. He knew Conrad had told him the truth. It was so. Yet it wasn't so. It wasn't so because it couldn't be so. When Kittie was alive- and he remembered the pressure of her hand resting lightly on his arm- she had been the center of his life. She was the sun, he the closest planet orbiting around her, the rest of the world existing and visible yet removed. For fifty-five years he had lived, progressing towards a no-goal, eating, working, breathing without plan, without reason. Kittie had come along to justify everything. She was his goal, she was his reason. He had lived all his life waiting for her. Not once, in the time that he had known her, had he ever considered the possibility, not once, not for one one-thousandth of a second, of her infidelity. He could not consider it now.

Not really. And so he walked, aimless again. The walk ended, inevitably, right in front of his hotel building. The doorman began to nod his head automatically, then remembered who Gilborn was, what had happened to him the night before. He looked at Gilborn with undisguised curiosity. Gilborn passed by him without seeing him.

He crossed the lobby and rode up in the elevator lost in his own thoughts. In the apartment itself, all was still. The police were no longer there. There was no evidence that anything was different than it had been. Except that Kitti wasn't there.

Without taking off his coat, he sat in the blue chair which still faced the closed bedroom door. At last, sitting there, in the familiar surroundings, the truth began to sink in. <Who?>

He felt no anger towards Kitti, no sense that she had betrayed him. <Who?> She was all he had, everything he had, everything he wanted. Someone had taken her away from him. <Who?> Where there is a left-hand entry in the ledger, there is a right-hand one, he remembered from his school days. Where there is a victim, there is a killer. <Who?> <Whoever he was and your wife were intimate>. He rose from the chair, took off his coat. Quickly, he went into the bedroom.

The bed still showed signs of where Kitti had lain. Gilborn stood there for a long time. He looked at the bed unblinkingly. The bed was empty now. Kitti would lie in it no more. He would lie in it no more. Gilborn wondered whether Kitti had lain in that same bed with **h <Who?> For thirty minutes, Stanley Gilborn stood there. At the end of the half-hour, racking his brains, thinking over and over again of Kitti, her friends, her past, he left the bedroom. <Who?> He could think of no answer.

Gilborn put on his coat again. Before leaving, he took one last, lingering look at the apartment. He knew he would never see it again. In the street, walking as quickly as he could, Stanley Gilborn was a lone figure. ##

On Blanche Jacobs, Kitti

Gilborn's death had a quite different effect. For Blanche, Kitti's death was a source of guilty, but nonetheless soaring, happy hope.

In Blanche's defense, it must be said she was unaware of the newborn hope. If anyone had asked her, she would have described herself only as nervous and worried. The figures on the worksheet paper in front of her were jumping and waving around so badly it was all she could do to make them out clearly enough to copy them with the typewriter. She wondered whether Stanley would call. She wanted to be with him, to give him the comfort and companionship she knew he needed. She had skipped her lunch hour in the fear that

he might call while she was out. He hadn't. And now she was feeling sick, both from concern about Stanley and hunger. Why hadn't he called? Men, she reflected, even men like Stanley, are unpredictable. She tried to think of his unpredictable actions in the eleven years she had known him and discovered they weren't so many after all. Stanley really was quite predictable. That was one of the things she liked about Stanley. He wasn't like so many other men. The dentist last night, for instance. Dinner and the movies had been fine. He had taken her upstairs to say good night. She had invited him in for coffee. It was in the kitchen, as she was watching the kettle, waiting for the water to boil, that he had grabbed for her. Without warning, without giving her a chance to prepare for it. From behind, he had put his arms on her shoulders, turned her around, and pressed her to him, so close she couldn't breathe.

Later, she apologized for the long scratch across his face, tried to explain she couldn't help herself, that the panic arose in her unwanted. But he hadn't understood. When he left, she knew she would never see him again. Stanley wasn't like that. She could always predict what Stanley was going to do, ever since she first met him. Except for that one morning. The morning he walked in to announce to her, blushing, that he was married. She thought she was going to die. She had assumed before then that one day he would ask her to marry him. Blanche couldn't remember when she had first arrived at this conclusion. She thought it was sometime during the second week she worked for Stanley. It was nothing that he said or did, but it seemed so <natural> to her that she should be working for him, looking forward to his eventual proposal.

She was thirty-one years old then. Her mother was already considerably concerned over her daughter's future. But Blanche had been able to maintain a serene and assured composure in the face of her widowed mother's continued carping, had been able to resist her urgings to date anyone who offered the slightest possibility of matrimony.

For Blanche, it was only a matter of time before Stanley would propose. It was to be expected that Stanley would be shy, slow in taking such a momentous step. Stanley went along in life, she knew, convinced that he deserved the love and faith of no woman. As a result, he never looked for it. But one day, she expected, he would somehow discover, without her having to tell him, that there was such a woman in the world; a woman who was willing to give him love, faith, and anything else a woman could give a husband. Indeed, there was a woman who, unasked, had already given him love. Unquestionably, Blanche loved Stanley. And then, unexpectedly, Stanley made his announcement. On that first day, Blanche literally thought she was going to die, or, at the very least, go out of her mind.

It might have been easier for her if Kitti Walker hadn't been everything that Blanche was not. Kitti was thirty years younger than Stanley, taller than Stanley, prettier than Stanley had any

right to hope for, much less expect. Kitty could have married a score of men. There was no reason for her to marry someone like Stanley Gilborn, there was no <need> for her to marry Stanley. Kitty had come into the office, on somebody's recommendation, because she needed help in preparing her income tax return. Stanley had filled out the return and because, when he was finished, it was close to the lunch hour, he had politely asked Kitty to join him, never expecting her to accept. Blanche knew all this because the door to Stanley's office was open and, without straining too hard, she could hear everything that was said. Stanley had gone out, saying he would be back in an hour. He hadn't come back for over two.

After that day, Blanche still didn't know exactly what had happened. There were mornings when Stanley came in late, afternoons when he left early, days when he didn't come in at all. Blanche knew something must be causing Stanley's new, strange behavior but she never once connected it with Kitty Walker. It was too unprecedented. Then, six weeks after the day Kitty first came into the office, Stanley announced he and Kitty were married. Somehow, Blanche managed to cover the stunned surprise and offer her congratulations.

That night the two of them left for a week's honeymoon in Acapulco. While they were away Blanche came into the office every morning, running things as she had always run them for Stanley, going through the week in a dazed stupor, getting things done automatically, out of habit. For exactly one week, she was able to continue in this manner. On the morning of Stanley's return, however, her strength left her. Two hours of watching his serenely happy face, listening to his soft humming as he bent over his penciled figures, and Blanche had to leave. She stayed away for ten days. Those ten days were like no others that Blanche had known.

Mostly, she stayed in bed. She didn't tell anyone, even her mother, what was wrong. She refused to have a doctor, insisting there was nothing a doctor could do for her.

"Right", said the fingerprint man. "Also, if you're going to believe those prints, you'll have to look for a killer who's a top-grade piano player". He demonstrated by playing an imaginary piano, doing a staccato passage with a broadly exaggerated attack. To make it clearer he shifted to acting out, but with no change of manner, the killing of Rose Mallory. His hands snatched at an imaginary bucket, swooping down hard to grab it and coming away with equal snap like a ball that's been bounced hard. In the same way he pantomimed grasping a mantel and bouncing cleanly off that, pressing his hands against the floor and bouncing cleanly off that. He was moving like a ballet dancer, playing for laughs. If Rose Mallory's killer acted this way, catching up with him was going to be a cinch. We'd know him by his stretch pants and the flowers he'd wear twined in his hair. Perhaps if Felix had first come upon us when this boy was not cavorting so gaily up and down the hall outside the murdered

woman's apartment, we might have had less trouble convincing Felix of our seriousness. This, you will remember, was still New Year's Day. By the time Felix turned up it was early afternoon, which, one would think, would be late enough so that by then, except for small children and a few hardy souls who had not yet sobered up, it could have been expected that people would no longer be having any sort of active interest in the previous night's noisemakers and paper hats.

Felix was the exception. He had retained his hat and his horn, and, whatever fun might still be going, he was ready to join it. That, incidentally, might give you some idea of what Felix was like. After all, he hadn't happened upon us in that second-floor hall without warning.

The ~ME's boys had finished their on-the-spot examination and the body had been removed for autopsy. The meat wagon, therefore, was not out in front of the house any more, but the cluster of squad cars was still there and there was a cop on the door downstairs to screen any comings and goings. There was, furthermore, the crowd of curious onlookers gathered in the street and a couple more cops to hold them at a decent distance. Just put yourself in Felix's place for a moment. You're a taxpayer, householder, landlord. You've been away from home for the New Year festivities, but now the party is over and you come home. Defining sobriety in the limited sense of being free from the clinical symptoms of the effects of alcohol ingested and not yet eliminated from the system, you are sober.

You still have your paper hat and you're wearing it, but then, it is an extraordinary paper hat and, in addition to anything else you may be, you are also the sculptor who created that most peculiar dame out in the back yard. It's not too much to assume that you will have a more lasting interest in paper hats than will Mr& Average Citizen. You have your paper horn clutched in your big, craggy fist, and for your entrance you have planned a noisy, colorful and exuberant greeting to your friends and tenants. You find your house a focus of public and police attention. Can you imagine yourself forgetting under the circumstances that you are approaching this startling and unexpected situation so unsuitably hatted and armed with a paper horn?

Maybe one could be startled into forgetfulness. You shoulder your way through the cluster of the curious and you barge up to the cop on the door. You identify yourself and ask him what's going on. Instead of answering you, he sticks his head in the door and shouts up the stairs. "Got the upstairs guy", he bellows. "The owner. Do I send him up"? Then he turns back to you. "Go on in", he says. "They'll tell you what's cooking". Even then, as you go into the house oppressed by the knowledge that something is cooking and that your house has passed under this unaccountable, official control, could you go on forgetting that you still had that ridiculous hat on your head and you were still carrying that childish

horn in your hand? What I'm getting at is that we were fully prepared for Felix's being an odd one. We'd seen his handiwork out in the back yard, and the little his tenants had told us of him did make him sound a little special. We were not, however, prepared for anything like the apparition that confronted us as Felix came up the stairs. He, of course, must have been equally unprepared for what confronted him, but, nonetheless, I did find his reaction startling.

If Felix was still wearing the hat and carrying the horn because he'd forgotten about them, he now remembered. He came bounding up the stairs and joined the dance. He adjusted the hat, lifted the horn to his lips as though it were a flute, and fell in alongside our fingerprint expert to cavort with him. Our man stopped dead and glowered at Felix. Felix threw his head back and laughed a laugh that shook the timbers of even that solidly built old house. This was a bull of a man. He was big-chested, big-shouldered and heavy-armed. His face was ruddy and heavy and unlined, and when he laughed he showed his teeth, which were big and white and strong and unquestionably home-grown. I don't remember ever seeing teeth that were quite so white and at the same time quite so emphatically not dentures. His hair had receded most of the way to the back of his neck. He had only a fringe of hair and he wore it cropped short. It was almost as white as his teeth. For a man of his mass he was curiously short. He wasn't a dwarf but he was a bit of a comic figure. A man with so big and so staggeringly developed a torso and such long and powerful arms is expected to stand taller than five feet five. For Felix it was a bit of a stretch to make even that measurement. The man was just this side of being a freak. We waited till he had finished laughing, and that gave us a few moments for taking stock of him. He was dressed in a manner <Esquire> might suggest for the outdoor man's country weekend. Dark gray sports jacket, lighter gray slacks, pink flannel shirt, black silk necktie. His eyes were clear. He was freshly shaved, and if there had been any alcohol in him we could never have missed detecting some scent of it on the massive gusts of his laughter. Not even a whiff. Eventually he subsided. "Felix"? Gibby said. "Me", he said merrily. "Me, the happy one".

"That much Latin we remember", Gibby said dryly. "You always live up to your name, always like this, always making happy"?

"I try", Felix said blithely. "The world is full of blokes who put their hearts into making the tragic scene. I've never noticed that it improves things any". "Bully for you", Gibby said. "What's the rest of your name"? "No rest of it. Felix is all there is". "All there ever was"? "The past I leave to historians", Felix intoned, demonstrating that he could be pompous as well as happy. "You live in the present"? "In the present", Felix proclaimed. "For the future. Is there any other time in which a man can live"? "We", Gibby announced, "are not philosophers. We are Assistant District Attorneys. This gentleman is a police

officer. He is a fingerprint specialist. Could your future, your immediate future, be made to include taking us upstairs, giving us a bit of space in which our friend can work, and making available to him your finger tips"? The happy one could never have looked happier. This was more than joy. It was ecstasy. "Those lovely whorls", he chortled. "So intricate, so beautiful. Come right along. I love fingerprints". He was prancing along the hall, heading for the next flight of stairs. Gibby called him back. "We're here because of what happened last night", he said. "Past, yes, but important. Since it is important, for the record let's have the full name". "That important"? Felix asked. "That important". "Grubb", Felix whispered.

"Felix Grubb"? Gibby asked, not bothering to whisper.

"Shh", Felix implored. "I can't see what would make it necessary for you to know. Nothing could make it necessary to proclaim it to the whole world". Obliging Gibby lowered his voice. "Felix Grubb"? he repeated. "No. Edmund, but not for years. For years it's been just Felix. First thing I did after my twenty-first birthday was go into court and have it officially changed, and this is something I don't tell everybody. That was almost forty years ago". Having volunteered that he was a man of about sixty, he bounded up the stairs and with each leap rendered the number less credible. This was a broth of a boy, our Felix, and nothing was more obvious than the joy he took in demonstrating how agile he was and how full of juice and spirit. We followed him up the stairs. The cops would gather up Connor and the foursome on the third floor and bring us those of them who would voluntarily submit to fingerprinting.

You may think we didn't need Nancy and Jean, but you always get what you can when you can, and we had no guarantee that a fingerprint record on them couldn't be useful before we were through with this case. Also, if we had excluded the ladies we would have to that extent let the whole world know at least that much of where we stood. The killer, if in our present group, would certainly be interested in knowing that much, and even though with the fingerprint evidence what it was I could see no way he could use this bit of information to improve on his situation, there might always be some way. If you can possibly avoid it, you don't hand out any extra chances.

Felix took us into his studio. It was that oddly shaped space at the very top of the house, where ceiling heights had to accommodate themselves to the varying angles of roof slope. At each angle of its pitch a big skylight had been fitted into the roof and all these skylights were fitted with systems of multiple screens and shades. When Felix first opened the door on it, all these shades were tightly drawn and the whole studio was as dark as night. He quickly fixed that, rolling back the shades on some of the skylights and adjusting screens on the others. He flew about the place making these adjustments and it was obvious that what he was doing was the fruit of long experience.

None of his movements was tentative. There was no process of trial and error. Starting with the room completely blacked out, as it was when we came in, he unerringly fixed things so that the whole place was bathed in the maximum of light without at any point admitting even so much as a crack of glare. Expecting something more-than-average wacky, I was surprised by what we found. There was no display of either works in progress or of finished work. Here and there on work table or pedestal stood a shape with a sheet or a tarpaulin draped over it. These shapes might have been mad, but there was no telling. They were all completely shrouded. The equipment was solid and heavy and in good condition. Everything was orderly and it seemed to be arranged for the workman's comfort, convenience and efficiency. There were tools about but they were neatly kept. There was no confusion and no litter. Supplies of sheet metal were neatly stacked in bins. ANDY DID NOT SEE the newspapers the next day. Someone on his staff- he suspected it was Ed Thornburg- intercepted them and for this Andy was grateful. He finally fell asleep around six in the morning with the aid of a sleeping capsule, a crutch he rarely used, and didn't awaken until early afternoon. Memory flooded him the instant he opened his eyes and the sick feeling knotted his stomach.

Outside his window bloomed a beautiful summer day. Presumably the same sun was shining upon little Drew also, and those who had kidnapped him. But where? It was still a very big world, despite all the modern cant to the contrary. Hub was sitting in a chair that blocked the hall door. He was dozing, perhaps the only sleep he'd gotten. He snapped to alertness at Andy's entrance. "Sorry, Mr& Paxton. Nothing new. Lot of people waiting to see you, though".

"Reporters"? "Our own people. Questions about the show tonight". Hub picked up the telephone. "Shall I let them know you're awake"? "I suppose. How's Lissa, do you know"? Hub considered. "Some better. She's got plenty of guts, Mr& Paxton. You want me to call her"?

"She expecting me to"? Hub shook his head so Andy told him not to bother. The only reason for contacting Lissa was to comfort or to be comforted. He could not manage the former or expect the latter; they had nothing to give to each other. The omission might look peculiar to outsiders, but Andy could not bring himself to go through the motions simply for the sake of appearances. He had little time to himself, anyway. As the afternoon sped toward evening, the suite saw a steady procession of Paxton aides pass in and out, each with his own special problem. Thornburg arrived with the writers. They had spent the morning revising the act, eliminating all the gay songs, patter and dancing with a view of the best public relations. What remained lacked the original verve but it was at least dignified, as befitting the tragic circumstances. Raymond Fox reported that the orchestra had hastily rehearsed "Cradle Song" in case it was needed. Charlie Marble was back and forth on several occasions, first to confer with Andy on the advisability of cancelling the Las Vegas

engagement- they decided it was wise- and later to announce that a prominent comedian, also an agency client, had agreed to fill the casino's open date. And once Bake slipped in, pale and drawn, last night's liquor still on his breath with some of today's added to it. He asked if there was anything he could do. Andy invented a job to keep him busy, sending him ahead to El Dorado to supervise last minute arrangements. But from Rocco Vecchio, they heard nothing.

At last it was time to depart. Hub, nosing about, spotted reporters in the lobby, so Andy was hustled away quietly through the hotel's service entrance in a strange car which Hub had procured somewhere.

They succeeded in eluding the curious at the hotel, but there was no chance of avoiding them at the nightclub. El Dorado was surrounded by a mob. They overflowed the parking lot, making progress by automobile difficult. Long before he reached the protection of the stage door, Andy was recognized. Word of his arrival spread through the crowd like a brushfire. They surged around him, fingers pointing, eyes prying. It was not a hostile gathering but Andy sensed the difference from last night's hero-worshippers. They had come not to admire but to observe. "It's worse inside", Thornburg informed Andy. "Skolman's jammed in every table he could find. Under the heading of it's an ill wind, et cetera". Backstage was tomblike by contrast. Andy's co-workers kept their distance, awed by the tragedy. But in his dressing room was a large bouquet and a card that read, "We're with you all the way". It was signed by everyone in the troupe. Andy couldn't help but be touched. He instructed Shirl Winter to compose a note of thanks to be posted on the call board. Bake was waiting to report that Lou DuVol had been sobered up to the point where he could function efficiently. Andy gathered that this had been no small accomplishment. Bake himself looked better; any kind of job was better than brooding.

Andy told him, "Bake, I wish you'd talk to Skolman, see if some kind of p& a& system can be rigged up outside. It's just barely possible with this crowd that the kidnapper wasn't able to get a table. I wouldn't want him to miss the message". "I'll try. Skolman isn't going to like it much, though, giving away what he should be selling". Skolman wasn't the only one who didn't care for Andy's scheme. A short time later, Lieutenant Bonner stomped into the dressing room. "I got a bone to pick with you, Mr& Paxton. It's those damn loudspeakers". Andy rolled up the revised script he had been studying. "What about them"?

"They're going to louse me up good. My men have been here all afternoon, setting up for this thing". Bonner explained that, with the nightclub's cooperation, the police had occupied El Dorado like a battlefield. Motion picture cameras had been installed to film the audience, the reservation list was being checked out name by name, and a special detail was already at work in the parking lot scrutinizing automobiles for a possible lead. However, it was virtually

impossible to screen the mob outside, even if Bonner had manpower available for the purpose. "I want you to have the speakers taken out". Andy sighed. "Seems like we're never going to see eye to eye, Lieutenant. Didn't they tell you what I wanted the p&a system for"? "Sure, I know. But it's such a long shot"- "No longer than yours. What do you expect to get tonight, anyway? You think somebody is going to stand up in the audience and make guilty faces? Or have a sign on his car that says, 'Here Comes the Paxton Kidnapper'"? Andy crumbled the script in his fist. "I can't stop you from doing what you think is right. But don't try to stop me, either". "Someday", Bonner said, "you're going to ask us for help. I can hardly wait". "What you don't understand is that I'm asking for it now". But Bonner departed, still full of ill will. He had gotten stuck with a job too big for his imagination; he had to cling to routine, tested procedures. To act otherwise would be to admit his helplessness. But, admit or not, Bonner was helpless. The crime showed too much planning, the kidnappers appeared too proficient to be caught by a checklist. Andy's performance was scheduled for eleven o'clock. He stalled for a half-hour longer, hoping to hear something from Vecchio about the ransom money. Bake and Shirl Winter, on separate telephones, could not reach him at any conceivable location in Los Angeles, nor could they secure any clear-cut information regarding his efforts. Bake cursed. "The sweaty bastard's probably halfway to Peru with our money by now". When no one smiled, he felt constrained to add, "Just kidding, natch".

Thornburg popped in to advise, "Andy, Skolman's sending up smoke signals. You about ready"? "What's he complaining about"? Bake asked. "They're drinking, aren't they"?

"No. We got a bunch of sippers out there tonight. I guess nobody wants to pass out and miss anything". Thornburg added in a lower voice but Andy overheard, "They act more like a jury than an audience". Andy said, "Well, I guess we can't wait any longer. Hub, you stick by the stage door. If Rock shows up during the number- or you hear anything- give me the signal". Shirl Winter said, "I'll stay on the phone, Mr& Paxton. There's a couple of call-backs I can work on". "You're a sweetheart- but leave one line open. He may try to phone us". Andy passed into the corridor, their "good lucks"! following him. It was what they said before every performance but tonight it sounded different, as if he really needed it. They were right. The act, cut to shreds and hastily patched together during the afternoon, had not been rehearsed sufficiently by anyone. The result had nothing of the polish, pace or cohesion of the previous night. Here's where luck would normally step in. But this was no ordinary show and Andy knew it. Whether he sang well or badly had nothing to do with it. The audience had come not to be entertained but to judge. Twenty-four hours had changed him from a performer to a freak. Within this

framework, what followed was strained, even macabre. Eliminating the patter and the upbeat numbers left little but blues and other songs of equal melancholy. The effect was as depressing as a gravestone, the applause irresolute and short-lived. Yet Andy plowed ahead, mouthing the inconsequential words as if they possessed real meaning, and gradually his listeners warmed to him. Their clapping grew more fervent; the evening was still not beyond salvaging, not as a show but for him as a person. The worst was yet to come. As Andy reached the finale of his act, a subdued commotion backstage drew his attention to the wings. Rocco Vecchio- a perspiring, haggard Vecchio- was standing there, flanked by two men in the uniforms of armored transport guards. Vecchio was nodding and pointing at the large suitcase he held. Andy felt his heart thud heavily with relief. He waved at Fox to cut off the finale introduction. The music died away discordantly. He drew a deep breath. "Ladies and gentlemen, in place of my regular closing number tonight, I'd like to sing something of a different nature for you. Ray, if you please- the 'Cradle Song'". He sensed rather than heard the gasp that swept across the audience. Nor could he blame them. This particular song at this particular time could only be interpreted as the ultimate in bad taste, callous exploitation beyond the bounds of decency. Having no choice, he plunged into it, anyway, holding onto the microphone for support. "Lullaby and goodnight **h" His voice shook. For the first time in his life he forgot the lyrics midway through and had to cover up by humming the rest. He wondered if the audience would let him finish. They did; though contemptuous, they were still polite. But when he was finally through, their scorn was made apparent. Someone clapped tentatively then quickly stopped. Otherwise, the silence was complete. As the lights came up, Andy could see that a number of patrons were already on their way toward the exit. He stumbled off-stage. "My God", he muttered. "My God". Hub was there to support him. "It's okay, Mr& Paxton. The money's here, all of it". At this moment, all he could think of was what he'd been forced to undergo. "Did you hear them? Do you know what they think of me"?

"Bunch of damn jerks", Hub growled. "Who needs them"?

Thornburg patted his arm. "Sure, Andy, it'll be all right. Nothing broken that can't be mended". The words were hollow. Thornburg knew, better than any of them, that a public image was as fragile as Humpty Dumpty. All the king's horses and all the king's men **h Vecchio shouldered in. "I got it, Andy. God knows how, but I got it. You'll never believe the places I've been today. I practically had to sign your life away, you'll probably fire me for some of the deals I had to go for, but"- Andy nodded dully. "It doesn't matter, Rock. We've done our part".

He clutched that knowledge to him as he returned to his dressing room. The usual congratulatory crowd was conspicuously absent; the place had the air of a morgue. Andy had no desire to linger himself

but Hub reported that the mob outside was still large despite the efforts of the police to disperse them.

His son watched until he got as far as the hall, almost out of sight, then hurried after. "Dad. Dad, wait". He caught up with the old man in the living room. Old man Arthur had put down the suitcase to open the front door. "Just this one favor, Dad. Just don't tell Ferguson that crazy opinion of yours".

"Why not"? The old man gave the room a stare in leaving; under the scraggly brows the pale old eyes burned with a bitter memory. "It's the truth". "The Bartlett girl was killed by Mr& Dronk's son. Rossi and Ferguson have been across the street, talking to the kid. They've found some sort of new evidence, a bundle of clothes or something, and it must link the kid even stronger to the crime. Why won't you accept facts? The two kids were together a lot, they were having some kind of teen-age affair- God knows how far that had gone- and the kid's crippled. He limps, and the man who hit you and took the cane, <he> limped. My God, how much more do you want"? His father looked him over closely. "You sound like an old woman. You should have gone to work today, 'stead of sneaking around spying on the Dronk house". "Now, see here"- "The trouble with you", old man Arthur began, and then checked himself. Young Mrs& Arthur had opened the oven and there was a drifting odor of hot biscuits. The old man opened the door and stepped out into the sunlight. "Isn't enough time to go into it", he finished, and slammed the door in his son's face.

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Mrs& Holden turned from the window draperies. "They found something else up there", she said half-aloud to the empty room. "They took it away, overalls or something". She walked restlessly across the room, then back to the windows. "Now they've gone, they didn't come back, and they didn't arrest that Dronk boy". She stood frowning and chewing her lip. She was wearing a brown cotton dress, cut across the hips in a way that was supposed to make her look slimmer, a yoke set into the skirt and flaring pleats below. She smoothed the skirt, sat down, then stood up and went back to the windows. "Why on earth did I send him off to work? There was excuse enough to keep him home **h that young Mr& Arthur's still over there". With sudden energy, she went to the phone and rang Holden's office and asked for him. "I think you had better come home". "Mae, we're so busy. Mr& Crosson's been on everybody's neck, an order he expected didn't come through and he's"- "I don't care. I want you here. I'm all alone and certain things are going on that look very ominous. I need someone to go out and find out what's happening". "But I couldn't do that, even if I were home"! His voice grew high and trembling. "I can't be underfoot every time those cops turn around! They'll **h they'll think <l> did something".

He couldn't see the grin that split her mouth; the teeth that shone into the phone were like a shark's. "You'll just have to risk it. You can't wander along in the dark, can you? I'd think that you **h even more than I **h would be wondering what they're up to. They found some clothes", she tossed in. "What"?

Deliberately, she ignored the yelp. "Also, that Mr& Ferguson was here. I guess he wants to ask you some questions. I stalled him off. He doesn't expect you until five". "Then I'd better wait until five". "No **h o **h o. Come home right away". She slapped the receiver into its holder and stepped away. Her eyes were bright with anticipation. In his office, Mr& Holden replaced the phone slowly. He rose from his chair. He had to cough then; he went to the window and choked there with the fresh breeze on his face. He got his hat out of the closet. For a moment he thought of going into Crosson's office to explain that he had to leave, but there was now such a pain in his chest, such a pounding in his head, that he decided to let it go. He passed the receptionist in the outer office, muttering, "I've got to go out for a little while". Let her call Crosson if she wanted to, let Crosson raise the roof or even can him, he didn't care. He got into the car. Putting the key into the switch, pressing the accelerator with his foot, putting the car into reverse, seemed vast endeavors almost beyond the ability of his shaking body. Once out in the street, the traffic was a gadfly maze in which he wandered stricken. When he turned into the highway that led to the outskirts of the city and then rose toward home, he had to pull over to the curb and wait for a few minutes, sucking in air and squinting and blinking his eyes to clear them of tears. What on earth was in Mae's mind, that she wanted him up there spying on what the cops were doing? What did she think he could do? He tried to ignore what his own common sense told him, but it wasn't possible; her motives were too blatant. She wanted him to get into trouble. She wanted the police to notice him, suspect him. She was going to keep on scheming, poking, prodding, suggesting, and dictating until the cops got up enough interest in him to go back to their old neighborhood and ask questions. And he knew in that moment, with a cold sinking of despair, a dying of old hopes, that Mae had spread some kind of word there among the neighbors. Nothing bald, open; but enough. They'd have some suspicions to repeat to the police. Though his inner thoughts cringed at it, he forced himself to think back, recreating the scene in which Mae claimed to have caught him molesting the child. It hadn't amounted to anything. There had been nothing evil or dirty in his intentions.

A second scene flashed before his mind, the interior of the garage at the new house and the young Bartlett girl turning startled to meet him, the dim dark and the sudden confusion and fear and then the brightness as Mae had clicked on the light. Suppose the cops somehow got hold of <that?> Well, it hadn't been what it seemed, he'd had no idea the girl was in there. He hadn't touched her. And when he came to examine the scene, there was

a certain staginess to it, it had the smell of planning, and a swift suspicion darted into his mind. Too monstrous, of course. Mae wouldn't have plotted a thing like that. It was just that little accidents played into her hands. Like this murder. He leaned on the wheel, clutching it, staring into the sunlight, and tried to bring order into his thoughts. He felt light-headed and sick. There was no use wandering off into a territory of utter nightmare. Mae was his wife. She was married to him for better or for worse. She wouldn't be wilfully planning his destruction. But she was. She was.

Even as the conviction of truth roared through him, shattering his last hope of safety, he was reaching to release the hand brake, to head up the road for home, doing her bidding. He drove, and the road wobbled, familiar scenes crept past on either side. He came to a stretch of old orange groves, the trees dead, some of them uprooted, and then there was an outlying shopping area, and tract houses. He had the feeling that he should abandon the car and run off somewhere to hide. But he couldn't imagine where. There was really no place to go, finally, except home to Mae. At the gate he slowed, looking around. Cooper was beside his car, on the curb at the right, just standing there morosely; he didn't even look up. Behind him on the steps of the little office sat old man Arthur; he was straight, something angry in his attitude, as if he might be waiting to report something. Holden stepped on the gas. A new idea drifted in from nowhere. He could go to the police. He could tell them his fears of being involved, he could explain what had happened in the old neighborhood and how Mae had misunderstood and how she had held it over him—the scene was complete in his mind at the moment, even to his own jerkings and snivelings, and Ferguson's silent patience. He could throw himself on the mercy of the Police Department. It wasn't what Mae would want him to do, though. He was sure of this. Once he had abandoned himself to the very worst, once he had quieted all the dragons of worry and suspense, there wouldn't be very much for Mae to do. At that moment, Holden almost slammed on the brakes to go back to Cooper and ask if Ferguson was about. It would be such a relief. What was that old sign, supposed to be painted over a door somewhere, <Abandon hope, all ye who enter here?>

Why, Holden said to himself, surprised at his own sudden insight, I'll bet some of those people who enter are just as happy as can be. They've worried, they've lain awake nights, they've shook at the slightest footstep, they've pictured their own destruction, and now it's all over and they can give up. Sure, they're giving up hope. Hand in hand with hope went things like terror and apprehension. <Good-bye>. Holden waved a hand at the empty street. <Glad to see you go>. He drove into the paved space before the garage and got out, slamming the car door. He looked up and down the street. If Ferguson's car had been in sight, Holden would have walked directly to it. He went to the front door and opened it and looked in. Mae entered the room from the hallway to the kitchen.

She had a cup of something steaming, coffee perhaps, in one hand, a fresh piece of toast in the other. She stood there, watching Holden come in, and she put the piece of toast in her mouth and bit off one corner with a huge chomp of her white teeth. "Mae"-

"I've been thinking", she said, swallowing the toast. "Didn't you have an old pair of painting overalls in the garage? You used them that time you painted the porch at our other house. And then you wiped up some grease". She had caught him off guard, no preparation, nothing certain but that ahead lay some kind of disaster. "No. Wait a minute. What do you"- "I've been looking for them, and they're gone. I'm sure they were in the garage up until a couple of days ago. Or even yesterday. You used to paint in them, and then you just took them for rags. The police have them now". "I don't remember any overalls at all".

"They were all faded. Worn through at the knees". She stood sipping and chewing and watching. "Green paint, wasn't it? Well, I'm not sure of the color. But you had them". "Mae, sit down. Put down the cup of coffee. Tell me what this is all about".

She shook her head. She took another bite of toast. Holden noticed almost absently how she chewed, how the whole side of her cheek moved, a slab of fat that extended down into her neck. "My goodness, you ought to remember if I do. You're going to have to go to the police and explain what happened. Tell them the truth **h or something **h before they come here". A seeping coldness entered Holden's being; his nerves seemed frost-bitten down to the tips of his tingling fingers and his spine felt stiff and glass-like, liable to break like an icicle at any moment. "I've never owned any painting overalls.

A man with a sketch pad in hand sat with a large pink woman in a small office at the end of a long, dim corridor and made pencil lines on paper and said, "Is this more like it, Mrs& MacReady? Or are the eyebrows more like this"? When he had finished with that, he would go to another part of the hotel and say much the same things to someone else, most probably a busboy. "Begin to look like him now, would you say? Different about the mouth, huh? More like this, maybe"? Men blew dust on objects in a room on the seventeenth floor of the Hotel Dumont and blew it off again, and did the same in a tiny, almost airless room in a tenement in the West Forties. And men also used vacuum cleaners in both rooms, sucking dust up once more. Men from the Third Detective District, Eighteenth Precinct, had the longest, the most tedious, job. At the Hotel Dumont there had, at the time in issue, been twenty-three overnights, counting couples as singular. These included, as one, Mr& and Mrs& Anthony Payne, who had checked in a little after noon the day before, and had not checked out together. But Gardner Willings was not included; he had been at the Dumont for almost a week. There was, of course, no special reason to believe that the man or woman they sought had stayed only overnight at the hotel. The twenty-three (or twenty-two

with the Paynes themselves omitted) provided merely a place to start, and their identification was the barest of starts. With names and addresses listed, verification came next. It would take time; it would, almost inevitably, trouble some water. ("I certainly was not at the Dumont last night and my husband couldn't have been. He's in Boston. Of <course> he's in"-) The Hotel King Arthur across the street provided almost twice as many problems. The King Arthur offered respectable and convenient lodgings to people from the suburbs who wanted to see a show and didn't want- heaven knew didn't want!- to lunge anxiously through crowded streets to railroad stations and, at odd hours of night, drive from smaller stations to distant homes, probably through rain or, in November, something worse. The King Arthur was less expensive than the Dumont. The King Arthur had fifty-four overnights, again counting rooms rather than people. Check the overnights out. Failing to find what was wanted, as was most likely, check out other guests, with special- but not exclusive- attention to those with rooms on the street. (Anyone active enough can reach a roof, wherever his room may be.) And know, while all this went on, that there was no real reason to suppose that the murderer had been a guest in either hotel. It was not even certain the shot had been fired from either hotel. There were other roofs, less convenient but not impossible. It is dull business, detecting, and hard on feet. There was also the one salient question to ask, and ask widely: Did you notice anything out of the way? Like, for example, a man carrying a twenty-two rifle, probably with a telescopic sight attached? There was, of course, no hope it really would be that simple. The sniper, whether psychopathic marksman or murderer by intent, would hardly have walked to his vantage point with rifle over shoulder, whistling a marching tune. Anybody carrying anything that might hide a rifle? Long thin suitcase? Or long fat suitcase, for that matter? Shrugs met that, from room clerks, from bellhops. Who measures? But nothing, it appeared, long enough to attract attention. Cases, say, for musical instruments? None noted at the Dumont. Several at the King Arthur. A combo was staying there. And had been for a week. Anything else? Anything at all? Shrugs met that. (Detective Pearson, Eighteenth Precinct, thought for a time he might be on to something. A refuse bin at the Dumont turned up a florist's box- a very long box for very long-stemmed flowers. Traces of oil on green tissue? The lab to check. The lab: Sorry. No oil.) Anything at all strange?

Well, a man had tried, at the King Arthur, to register with an ocelot. At the Dumont, a guest had come in a collapsible wheel chair. At the King Arthur one guest had had his head heavily bandaged, and another had a bandaged foot and had walked with crutches. There had also been a man who must have had St& Vitus or something, because he kept jerking his head. As reports dribbled in, William Weigand tossed them into the centrifuge which had become his head. Mullins came in. There was no sign of Mrs& Lauren Payne at her house on Nod Road, Ridgefield, Connecticut. The house was modern, large, on five acres. Must have cost plenty. The State cops would

check from time to time; pass word when there was word to pass. Weigand tossed this news into the centrifuge. Sort things out, damn it. Sort out the next move. Try to forget motive for the moment. Consider opportunity. Only those actually with Payne when he was shot, or who had left the party within not more than five minutes (make five arbitrary) positively had none. The Norths; Hathaway, Jerry's publicity director; Livingston Birdwood, producer of <Uprising>. They had been with Payne when he was shot, could not therefore have shot him from above. Take Gardner Willings. He had left after the scuffle; had been seen to leave. He would have had ample time to go into a blind somewhere and wait his prey. Consider him seriously, therefore? Intangibles entered, then- hunches which felt like facts. Willings would ambush, certainly; Willings undoubtedly had. Willings was, presumably, a better than average shot. But- hunch, now- Willings would not ambush anything which went on two legs instead of four. Because, if for no other reason, Willings would never for a moment suppose he was not bigger, tougher, than anything else that went on two legs. Ambushes are laid by those who doubt themselves, as any man may against a tiger. Faith Constable had had to "go on" from the party and had, presumably, gone on. To be checked out further. Forget motive? No, motive is a part of fact. Nobody in his right mind punishes a quarter-century-old dereliction. Grudges simply do not keep that well in a sane mind. Faith Constable had accomplished much in a quarter of a century. Jeopardize it now to correct so old a wrong? Bill shook his head. Also, he thought, I doubt if she could hit the side of a barn with a shotgun. Lauren herself? She had left the party early, pleading a headache. No lack of opportunity, presuming she had a gun. She might, conceivably, have brought one in in a large-enough suitcase. (Check on the Payne luggage.) She might now have taken it away again. Motive- her husband wandering? Bitter, unreasoning jealousy? Heaven knew it happened and hell knew it too. But- it happened, almost always, among the primitive and, usually, among the very young. (Call it mentally young; call it retarded.) There was nothing to indicate that Lauren Payne was primitive. She did not move in primitive circles. She was young, but not that young. It occurred to Bill Weigand that he was, on a hunch basis, eliminating a good many. He reminded himself that all eliminations were tentative. He also reminded himself that he had an unusual number of possibilities. The Masons, mother or son, or mother <and> son? Opportunity was obvious. Motive. Here, too, the cause to hate lay well back in the years. But bitterness had more cause to remain, even increasingly to corrode. With the boy, particularly. The boy had, apparently- if Mrs& MacReady was right in what she had told Mullins- only in recent months been forced to give up college, to work as a busboy. Seeing the man he blamed for this made much of- youth and bitterness and-

Bill picked up the telephone; got Mullins. "Send out a pickup on Mrs& Mason and the boy when you've got enough to go on", Bill said. "Right"? Mullins would do. A man named Lars Simon, playwright-director, had expressed a wish that

Anthony Payne drop dead. He would say, of course, that he had not really had any such wish; that what he had said was no more than one of those things one does say, lightly, meaning nothing. Which probably would turn out to be true; which he obviously had to be given the opportunity to say. A man named Blaine Smythe, with "y" and "e" but pronounced without them, had been fired at Payne's insistence. He was also, if Pam North was right, a closer acquaintance of Lauren Payne's than she, now, was inclined to admit. He might deny the latter; would certainly deny any connection between the two things, or any connection of either with murder. He would have to be given the opportunity. Mullins? It was evident that Mullins was the man to go. It was evident that a captain should remain at his desk, directing with a firm hand and keeping a firm seat. Bill Weigand was good and tired of the wall opposite, and the crack in the plaster. Let Mullins keep the firm seat; let Stein. #@#

When Siamese cats are intertwined it is difficult to tell where one leaves off and another begins. Stilts and Shadow, on Pam's bed, appeared to be one cat- rather large, as Siamese cats go, and, to be sure, having two heads and two tails. On the other hand, they, or it, seemed to have no legs whatever. Pamela North said, "Hi", to her cats, and added that proper cats met their humans at the door. Of four dark brown ears, one twitched slightly at this. "All right", Pam said. "I know it isn't dinnertime". But at this the one too-large cat suddenly became two cats, stretching. Shadow, the more talkative, began at once to talk, her voice piteous. Stilts, a more direct cat, leaped from the bed and trotted briskly toward the kitchen. Shadow looked surprised, wailed, and trotted after her. The hell it isn't dinnertime, two waving tails told Pam North.

It was not, whatever tale was told by tails. Martha presumably would cope. She might be firm. It was most unlikely that she would be firm. They want to be fat cats, Pam thought, and lighted a cigarette and leaned back on a chaise and considered pulling her thoughts together. After a time, it occurred to her that her thoughts were not worth the trouble. A vague feeling that Anthony Payne had had it coming was hardly a thought and was, in any event, reprehensible. Had Faith Constable's explanation of her confidence, so uninvited, been a little thin? That was more like a thought, but not a great deal more. Had that tall dark boy, carrying trays too heavy for him, found what he might have considered adulation of a man he probably hated more than he could bear? And possessed himself- how?- of a rifle and killed? Pam found she had no answers; had only a hope. The poor kid- the poor, frail kid. Some people have luck and some have no luck and that, whatever people who prefer order say, is the size of it. The poor, unlucky- The telephone rang. Pam realized, to her surprise, that she had been almost dozing. At four o'clock in the afternoon. Two martinis for lunch- that was the trouble. I ought to remember. Don't pretend. You do remember. You just- "Hello? Yes, this is she? What"? The voice had music in it. Even with words coming too fast, they came on the music of the

voice. "I said I would", Pam said. "They won't talk about who gave the information. Not unless they have to. They don't, Mrs& Constable. Not unless they have"- She was interrupted. "Call this a cry for help", Faith Constable said.

"Through a door conveniently unlocked", Madden supplemented.

"That damn door", said the police chief. "A gift horse to be viewed with suspicion". Madden's dark face wore a meditative look. "If there was collusion between an outside murderer and a member of the household it would be an elementary precaution to check on the door later. And it makes a very poor red herring for an inside job. Much better to break a cellar window". "Don't forget, there was the hope it would pass for a natural death", Pauling reminded him. "Well, with a house as big as that there must be at least one cellar window that wouldn't be noticed right away unless there was a police investigation". "Yeah. And a pane of glass isn't hard to"- The telephone interrupted him. He scooped up the receiver and said, "Police chief", into the mouthpiece, and then, "Oh yes, Mr& Benson. I was hoping I'd hear from you today". With his free hand he pulled a pad and pencil toward him and began to make notes as he listened, saying, "Uh-huh" and "I see" at intervals. At last he said, "Well, thank you for calling, Mr& Benson. Although there was no doubt in my mind and we've been handling it as one I'm glad to have it made official". He hung up. "Coroner", he said to Madden. "He's just heard from the pathologist who says Mrs& Meeker apparently died from suffocation". Pauling looked at his notes. "Many minute hemorrhages in the lungs; particles of lint and thread in the mouth and nostrils. Scrapings from the bed linen identical with the lint and thread found in the nasal and oral cavities. No other cause of death apparent. Trachea clear of mucus and foreign objects. Brain examined for thrombosis, clot or hemorrhage. No signs of these, no gross hemorrhage of lungs, heart, brain or stomach". He paused. "That's about it. Oh, the time of death. The duration of the digestive process varies, the pathologist says, but the empty stomach and the findings in the upper gastrointestinal tract indicate that Mrs& Meeker died several hours after her seven-o'clock dinner. Probably around midnight, give or take an hour either way".

Pauling paused again. "So there it is", he said. "Not your problem, of course, unless Johnston and the murderer are one and the same". They discussed this possibility. However likely it was, Pauling said, he couldn't limit himself to it. He had to look for other prospects, other motives until more conclusive evidence pointing to Johnston came to light. Madden, with his investigation centered on the fraud, said that tomorrow he would go to the Bronx bank through which Mrs& Meeker's checks to Johnston had cleared.

Arthur Williams had to be located, they agreed. He might have been in collusion with Johnston on the fraud; he might be Mrs&

Meeker's murderer or have played some part in her death. This was Madden's suggestion; the police chief shook his head over it. If Arthur Williams was involved in the fraud or the murder, then he too had another identity. No one the Medfield police had questioned professed to know any more about him than about Johnston. Scholarship applicant? Pauling looked doubtful. Madden explained that he was thinking of an application sent directly to Mrs& Meeker. Then he asked to use the phone and called Brian Thayer, who said that he was just leaving to keep a lunch date but would be home by two o'clock. Madden said that he would see him at two and made another call, this one to Mrs& Meeker's lawyers. Mr& Hohlbein was out for the day, but Mr& Garth would be free at one-thirty. The secretary's tone indicated that an appointment at such short notice was a concession for which Madden should be duly grateful. He inferred that Hohlbein and Garth were high-priced lawyers.

He had lunch with Pauling. Promptly at one-thirty he entered Hohlbein and Garth's elegant suite of offices in Medfield's newest professional building. He disliked Garth on sight, conservative clothes and haircut, smile a shade too earnestly boyish for a man who must be well into his thirties, handclasp too consciously quick and firm. Youngish man on the make, Madden labeled him, and was ready to guess that in a correct, not too pushing fashion, the junior partner of the firm had political ambitions; that Mrs& Garth would be impeccably suitable as the wife of a rising young lawyer; that there were three children, two boys and a girl; that she was active in the Woman's Club and he in Lions, Rotary, and Jaycee; and finally, that neither of them had harbored an unorthodox opinion since their wedding day. Madden knew that he could be completely wrong about all this, but also knew that he would go right on disliking Garth.

Garth was prepared to be helpful in what he referred to with fastidious distaste as this unfortunate Johnston affair, which would not, he said more than once, have ever come about if Mrs& Meeker had only seen fit to consult Mr& Hohlbein or him about it. Madden regretted not being able to find fault with so true a statement. He asked to see a copy of Mrs& Meeker's will. Garth brought one out. The date, October 8, 1957, immediately caught the inspector's eye. "Fairly recent", he remarked. "Was she in the habit of making new wills"? "Oh no. She had reason to change the one she made right after Mr& Meeker's death. Her estate had grown considerably. She wanted to make a more equitable distribution of it among the groups that would benefit the most; particularly the scholarship fund. At the time the will was drawn Mr& Hohlbein mentioned to me how mentally alert she seemed for her age, knowing just what changes she wanted made and so forth". Garth hesitated. "Mr& Hohlbein and I have noticed some lapses since, though. Most of them this past year, I'd say. Even two or three years ago I doubt that she'd have become involved in this unfortunate Johnston affair. She'd have consulted us, you see. She always did before, and showed the utmost confidence in whatever we advised".

The inspector nodded, doubting this. Mrs& Meeker hadn't struck him as ready to seek anyone's advise, least of all Garth's. With her sharp tongue she'd have cut his pompousness to ribbons. It would have been Hohlbein who handled her affairs. Madden settled back to read the will. He skimmed over the millions that went to Meeker Park, Medfield Hospital, the civic center, the Public Health Nursing Association, the library, and so on, pausing when he came to the scholarship fund. Two millions were added to what had been set aside for it in Mrs& Meeker's lifetime, and the proviso made that as long as Brian Thayer continued to discharge his duties as administrator of the fund to the satisfaction of the board of trustees (hereinafter appointed by the bank administering the estate) he was to be retained in his present capacity at a salary commensurate with the increased responsibilities enlargement of the fund would entail. A splendid vote of confidence in Thayer, Madden reflected. Tenure, too. Very nice for him. He went on to personal bequests, a list of names largely unknown to him. Twenty-five thousand to each of the great-nieces in Oregon (not much to blood relatives out of millions) ten thousand to this friend and that, five thousand to another; to Brian Thayer, the sum of ten thousand dollars; to the Pecks, ten thousand each; to Joan Sheldon the conditional bequest of ten thousand to be paid to her in the event that she was still in Mrs& Meeker's employ at the time of the latter's death. (No additional five thousand for each year after Joan's twenty-first birthday; Mrs& Meeker hadn't got around to taking care of that.) Too bad, Madden thought. Joan Sheldon had earned the larger bequest. Mr& Hohlbein was left twenty thousand, Garth ten. There were no other names Madden recognized. Arthur Williams's might well have been included, he felt. Mrs& Meeker had spent a small fortune on a search for him but had made no provision for him in her will if he should be found after her death, and had never mentioned his name to her lawyers. Madden took up this point with Garth, who shrugged it off. "Old people have their idiosyncrasies".

"This one came a bit high at thirty thousand or more".

"Well, she had a number of them where money was concerned", Garth said. "Sometimes we'd have trouble persuading her to make tax-exempt charitable contributions, and I've known her to quarrel with a plumber over a bill for fixing a faucet; the next moment she'd put another half million into the scholarship fund or thirty thousand into something as impractical as this unfortunate Johnston affair. There was no telling how she'd react to spending money".

Madden inquired next about the audit of the scholarship fund.

There was an annual audit, Garth informed him. No discrepancies or shortages had ever been found. Brian Thayer was a thoroughly honest and competent administrator. His salary had reached the ten thousand mark. His expenses ran another four or five thousand. The lawyer

didn't know him very well although he saw him occasionally at some dinner party- Thayer, like himself, Madden reflected, was the extra man so prized by hostesses- and found him easy enough to talk to. But he didn't play golf, didn't seem to belong to any local clubs- his work took him away a lot, of course- which probably accounted for his tendency to keep to himself. Garth's glance began to flicker to his watch. He said that he had already told the police chief that he didn't know what insurance man had recommended Johnston to Mrs& Meeker. He would offer no theory to account for her murder. The whole thing, his manner conveyed, was so far outside the normal routine of Hohlbein and Garth that it practically demanded being swept under the rug. No doubt Mrs& Meeker had snubbed him many a time and he felt no grief over her passing. Even so, Madden's dislike of the suave, correct lawyer deepened. It would be all right with him, he decided, if his investigation of the fraud, with its probable by-product of murder, led to Garth's door. Motive? Ten-thousand-dollar bequest. At first glance, not much of a motive for a man of his standing; but for all his air of affluence, who could tell what his private financial picture was? The inspector knew as he left that this was wishful thinking. Nevertheless, he made a mental note to look into Garth's financial background.

Brian Thayer had a downtown address. He lived in an apartment house not over three or four years old, a reclaimed island of landscaped brick and glass on the fringe of the business district. He occupied a two-bedroom apartment on the fourth floor, using the second bedroom as his office. Airy and bright, the apartment was furnished with good modern furniture, rugs, and draperies. Done by a professional decorator, Madden thought, and somehow as impersonal, as unremarkable as its occupant. In Dunston the rent would run close to two hundred a month; in Medfield, perhaps twenty-five less, not all of it paid by Thayer, who could charge off one room on his expense account.

He took Madden into the room he used as an office. It contained a desk, files, a typewriter on a stand, and two big leather armchairs. A newspaper open at stock-market reports lay on one of them. Thayer folded it up and offered a drink. The inspector declined. To begin the interview, he asked if Thayer, with more time to think it over, could add to what he had said the other day about Johnston.

Thayer shook his head. "It's all I think about, too. That and her death. It's still unbelievable that it was murder. For all her domineering ways, I can't conceive of her having had a deadly enemy".

"Dammit, Phil, are you trying to wreck my career? Because that's what you're doing- wrecking it, wrecking it, wrecking it"! Griffith had confronted Hoag on the building's front steps- Hoag had been permitted no further- and backed him against a wrought-iron railing. His rage had built up as he made his way here from the second floor, helped by the quantity of champagne he had consumed.

Hoag said, "I didn't send for you, Leigh. I want the captain in charge. Where is he"? "Phil, for God's sake, go away. The undersecretary's in there. I told you there's nothing between Midge and me, nothing. It's all in your mind". A couple of sobs escaped him, followed by a sentiment that revealed his emotional state. "Why, I'm not fit to touch the hem of her garment".

"Leigh, get a grip on yourself. It's not about you or Midge. I have some security information about the prime minister".

Griffith looked at him suspiciously through red-rimmed eyes. "Not about me? You mean it, Phil? You wouldn't pull my leg, old man? I <did> get you on the platform this morning".

"I'm not pulling your leg. Will you call that captain"?

"No use, he won't come". He peered closely at Hoag in the gathering darkness. "What happened to your head"?

"I was hit- knocked out. Now will you get him"? "He says I'm to take the message". He stared at Hoag drunkenly. "Who'd hit you in the head"? "It doesn't matter. You get back to the captain and tell him this: Somebody's going to take a shot at the prime minister, and Mahzeer is in on the plot. Tell him under no circumstances to trust the prime minister with Mahzeer".

Griffith said, "That's impossible. Mahzeer's the ambassador". "Nevertheless it's true". "Impossible". Griffith was trying to clear his head of the champagne fuzz that encased it. "I'll show you how wrong you are. Mahzeer and the prime minister are alone right now". He nodded triumphantly. "So that proves it"! Hoag looked terrified. "Where are they"? "Where'd you expect, the john? Mahzeer's office". "Where is that"? "Facing us, two flights up. Look, old man, you can't go up. They won't even let you in the front door. So why don't you be a good boy and"-

Hoag grabbed him by the shoulders. "Listen to me, Leigh. If you want to spend another day in the State Department- <another day>- you get in there and tell that captain what I told you". He bit out the words. "And you know I can do it". Griffith raised placating hands. "Easy does it, Phil. I was just going. I'm on my way". He turned and fled into the house and made his way up the marble stairs without once looking back. On the second landing he paused to look for Docherty, didn't see him, and accepted a glass of champagne. He took several large swallows, recollected that Docherty had gone up another flight, and decided he would be wise to cover himself by finding him. The way Hoag was, no telling what he might say or do. He finished his champagne and climbed uncertainly to the next landing. At the top a uniformed officer blocked further

progress. "Yes, what is it"? he asked. "I want Captain Docherty". He spotted Docherty coming out of a room at the far end of the corridor and called to him. Docherty said, "It's okay, Bonfiglio, let him by". They walked toward each other. "Well"? Griffith said, "Hoag told me to tell you"- he waited until they were close; it was hideously embarrassing- "not to let the prime minister be alone with Mahzeer". Griffith looked half-crooked to the captain; it would be just like him. "Why not"? "He claims Mahzeer's in a plot to kill the P&M&". Docherty went taut: was it possible? Could the ambassador himself be the man on this side the prime minister feared? Not possible, he thought; the prime minister knew who his enemy was here; he wasn't going to allow himself to be led meekly to the slaughter. And if by some wild chance Mahzeer was the man, he wouldn't dare try anything now- not after Docherty had looked in on the two of them to see that all was well. Docherty was damned if he would make a fool of himself again the way he had earlier over the laundry truck. One more muddleheaded play like that one and they'd be leading him away. Still, this had to be checked out. "Where'd your friend Hoag get his information"? he asked.

"Haven't the faintest, Captain". "Would you mind sending him up here? I'd like to talk to him". Troubled, he continued along the corridor, poking his head into the next office for a careful look around.

#3#

But Hoag had not stayed on the front steps when Griffith disappeared into the building. He was unwilling to rely on Griffith's carrying his message, and he had no confidence the police would act on it. If Mahzeer was alone with the prime minister he could be arranging his execution while Hoag stood out here shivering in the darkening street. He would have to do something on his own. But what? The door opened and three men and a woman in a sari swept past him and down the stairs. In the lighted interior he saw other men and women struggling into their wraps. These were the early departures; in half an hour the reception would be over. If Mahzeer was planning to set up the prime minister for Muller he would have to do it in the next few minutes. Hoag descended the stone steps to the street and looked up at the building. Wide windows with many small leaded panes swept across the upper stories. On the second floor he saw the animated faces of the party guests; the scene looked like a Christmas card. On the third floor one of the two windows was lighted; it was framed in maroon drapes, and no faces were visible. This would be Mahzeer's office. He and the prime minister would be back from the window, seated at Mahzeer's desk; they would be going over papers Mahzeer had saved as excuse for just such a meeting. In a minute, or five minutes, the business would be done; Mahzeer would stand up, the prime minister would follow. Mahzeer would direct the prime minister's attention to something out the window and

would guide him forward and then step to one side. The single shot would come; Hoag would carry its sound to his grave. Mahzeer, of course, would be desolate. How was he to suspect that an assassin had been lurking somewhere across the street waiting for just such a chance?

Hoag turned. Where across the street? Where was Muller waiting with the rifle? Narrow four-story buildings ran the length of the block like books tightly packed on a shelf. Most of them could be eliminated; Muller's would have to be one of the half dozen almost directly opposite. The legation was generously set back from the building line; if the angle of fire were too great the jutting buildings on either side would interfere. Would the shot come from a roof? He ran his eye along the roof copings; almost at once a figure bulked up. But dully glinting on the dark form were the buttons and badge of a policeman. With a cop patrolling the road Muller would have to be inside a building- if he was here at all, and not waiting for the prime minister somewhere between this street and the terminal building at La Guardia Airport. Hoag crossed the narrow street, squeezing between parked cars to reach the sidewalk. From this side he could see farther into the legation's third-story window, but he saw no faces; the room's occupants were still seated or they had been called into the hallway by an alarmed police captain. If only the latter were true **h. He walked rapidly along the buildings scanning their facades: one was a club- that was out; two others he ruled out because all their windows were lighted. That left three, possibly four, one looking much like the next. He climbed the steps of the first and opened the door to the vestibule. He quickly closed it again. He had assumed that all these buildings had been divided into apartments, but this one, from a glance at the hall furnishings, was obviously still a functioning town house, and its owners were in residence; that made it doubtful as the hiding place of a man whose plans had to be made in advance. He went on to the next building and found what he expected- the mingled cooking aromas of a public vestibule. On one wall was the brass front of a row of mailboxes; there were six apartments. Now what? The names on the mailboxes meant nothing to him. This was senseless- he had no idea what to look for. He peered in the boxes themselves; all were empty except one, and that one was jammed with letters and magazines. The occupants of Apartment Number 3 were probably away for a few days, and not likely to return on a Friday. Had Muller made the same deduction? Muller was attracted to the lore of mailboxes. He opened the inner door; the cooking odors were stronger- all over the city, at this hour, housewives would be fussing over stoves. He climbed, as quickly as he could urge his body, up the two unbroken flights to the third floor, pulling himself along on a delicate balustrade, all that remained of the building's beauty. He paused on the landing to steady his breathing and then bent to examine the single door by the light of the weak bulb overhead. Now he was certain: the lock had not yielded to Muller's collection of keys; fresh scars showed that the door had been prized open. It had been shut again, but the lock was broken; he noted

with a thrill of fear that the door moved under his touch. What was he to do now? He had thought no further than finding Muller. He realized now he had more than half hoped he wouldn't find him- that Muller would not be here, that the attempt would be scheduled for somewhere beyond Hoag's control. He could not break in on an armed man. He would have to climb back down to the street and signal a cop. Was there time? His thoughts were scattered by the sharp report of a rifle from the other side of the door. Hoag pushed open the door: at the far end of the long dark room Muller was faintly silhouetted against the window, the rifle still raised; he stood with his feet apart on a kitchen table he had dragged to the sill. He turned his head to the source of the disturbance and instantly back to the window and his rifle sight, dismissing Hoag for the moment with the same contempt he had shown in their encounter at Hoag's apartment.

Hoag stretched his left hand to the wall and fumbled for the switch: evil flourishes in the dark. The room was bathed in light at the instant Muller's second shot came. Muller, nakedly exposed at the bright window like a deer pinned in a car's headlights, threw down the rifle and turned to jump from the table; his face wore a look of outrage. A shot caught him and straightened him up in screaming pain; a following volley of shots shattered glass, ripped the ceiling, and sent him lurching heavily from the table. He was dead before his body made contact with the floor. Hoag stumbled back into the hall, leaned against the wall, and started to retch.

#4#

After

Captain Docherty sent Arleigh Griffith for Hoag he was able to complete his detailed inspection of the third floor and to receive a report from his man covering the floors above before Griffith returned, buoyed up by a brief stop for another glass of champagne.

The safe at Ingleside District Station stands next to the gum machine in a narrow passageway that leads to Captain Harris's office (to the left), the lieutenant's office (farther along and to the left) and the janitor's supply closet (straight ahead). The safe is a repository for three dead flashlight batteries, a hundred and fifty unused left-hand fingerprint cards, a stack of unsold Policemen's Ball tickets from last year, and thirty-seven cents in coins and stamps. Gun set the captain's fifth of Hiram Walker inside the safe before he reported to Lt& Killpath, though he knew that Killpath's ulcer prevented him from making any untoward incursion on Herman Wolff's gift. It was more a matter of tact, and also it was none of Killpath's goddam business. He walked up to the lieutenant's office, leaned wearily against the gun rack that housed four rifles and a gas gun nobody remembered having used and a submachine gun that was occasionally tried out on the Academy Range. He stared at the clerk who sat at a scarred and ancient fumed-oak desk stuffing

envelopes. "Where's the Lieut"? The clerk wagged his head toward the captain's office. Gun went to the connecting door, which was open, and stood at attention while Orville Torrence Killpath, in full uniform, finished combing his hair. The lieutenant's sparse brown hair was heavily pomaded, and as Killpath raked the comb through it, it stuck together in thatches so that it looked like umbrella ribs clinging to his pink skull. The lieutenant eyed Gun's reflection in the mirror over the washbowl and then glanced back at his own face, moving the comb methodically around his head. Leave me alone, Gun thought. Fight with Sam Schaeffer, fight with the whole damned Bureau. But leave me alone. Because I'm looking for the son of a bitch that killed that old man, and I'm going to get him. If you just leave me to hell alone, Lieutenant.

Killpath peered through half-closed lids at his reflection, thrust up his chin in a gesture of satisfaction and about-faced.

Gun waited for Killpath to sit down behind the desk near the window. He sat stiff-backed in a chair that did not swivel, though it was obvious to Gun that Killpath felt his position as acting captain plainly merited a swivel chair. The desk before him was in no better repair than the rest of the furniture crowded into the room, including wooden file cabinets with some of their pulls yanked off and a wardrobe stained with the roof seepage of countless seasons. Killpath pulled one thin leg up, clamping his arms around the shinbone to press his knee into an incredibly scrawny gut. It was the posture which the men had come to recognize as that of Killpath defying his ulcer. He put his chin on his kneecap, stretching his neck like that of a turkey on a chopping block, and stared wordlessly at his sergeant. Gun waited. The 7:45 bell rang and he could hear the outside doors bang shut, closing in the assembled day watch. Finally, Orville intoned through his hawk nose, "We can't have people running in any time they please, Sergeant". "No, sir". "Running in, running out. Can't have it. Makes for confusion and congestion". He rocked back in the chair, knee locked against stomach, his beady eyes fixed on Matson. He was silent again, possibly listening to the sounds in the squadroom. Roll was being called. Gun cleared his throat. Killpath said, "You were expected to report to my office twenty minutes ago, Sergeant. That's not getting all the juice out of the orange, now is it"? "No, sir".

Then Killpath smiled. Gun knew that nothing but aces back to back would give the lieutenant an ulcer and a smile at the same time.

The day-watch platoon commander, Lt & Rinker, was calling out the beat assignments, but Matson couldn't make the names mean anything. "I called the station at three this morning", Killpath's nasal voice pronounced. "Do you have any idea who might have been in charge at the time"? "Sergeant Vaughn, sir". "Now, now, you're just guessing, Sergeant". He

smiled thinly, savoring his joke. "What if I said nobody was here but a couple of patrolmen"? "Sir, Vaughn knows better than to leave the station without a relief. He must have"-

"He let a patrolman take over the duties of the station keeper. Now that's not regulation, is it"? "No, sir".

"But you didn't know a thing about it, did you"? Killpath leaned forward; his foot slipped off the chair and he put it back again, frowning now. "That's not taking one's command with a responsible attitude, Matson". Gun told himself that the old bastard was a fool. But stupidity was no consolation when it had rank.

"I was out in the district, sir". "Oh, yes. So I have heard". He stretched a pale hand out to the scattered papers on his desk. "I might point out that your inability to report to my office this morning when you were instructed to do so has not **h ah **h limited my knowledge of your activities as you may have hoped". He took up a white sheet of paper, dark with single-spaced data.

A car pulled into the driveway outside the window. Gun knew it was Car 12, the wagon, returned from delivering Ingleside's drunk-and-disorderlies to the City Jail. But for some fool reason he couldn't remember which men he'd put on the transfer detail. He stared at the report in Killpath's hand, sure it was written by Accacia- just as sure as if he'd submitted it in his scrawled longhand. He sucked in his breath and kept quiet while Killpath laid down the sheet again, wound the gold-wire stems of his glasses around his ears and then, eying the report as it lay before him on the desk, intoned, "Acting Lieutenant Gunnar Matson one failed to see that the station keeper was properly relieved two absented himself throughout the entire watch without checking on the station's activities or the whereabouts of his section sergeants three permitted members of the Homicide Detail of the Inspector's Bureau to arrogate for their own convenience a patrolman who was thereby prevented from carrying on his proper assignment four failed to notify the station commander Acting Captain O& T& Killpath of a homicide occurring in the district five frequented extralegal establishments known as after-hours spots for purposes of an unofficial and purportedly social nature and six"- he leaned back and peeled off his glasses "- failed to co-operate with the Acting Captain by returning promptly when so ordered. What have you to say to that, Sergeant"? Killpath sailed the paper across the desk, but Matson didn't pick it up or even glance at it.

"Well"? "I didn't think Accacia knew so many big words, Lieutenant". Killpath licked his lips. "Patrolman Accacia is an alert and conscientious law-enforcement officer. I don't think his diligence mitigates your negligence, Matson".

"Negligence, hell"! Gun held his breath a moment, pushing

the volume and pitch of his voice down under the trapdoor in his throat. "Sir. I would have been negligent and a goddam lousy cop to boot, if I'd sat around this station all night when somebody got away with murder in my district. It's too bad I didn't call you, and it's too bad I let Schaeffer use Accacia when he could have had a boy who'd be glad to learn something of Homicide procedure. But I'm not one damned bit sorry I went out to question the people I know in the places they hang around, and"- "Let's not push our patience beyond the danger line, Sergeant", Killpath nasaed. "I shouldn't like to have to write you up for insubordination as well as dereliction of duty". Gun stiffened, his hands balling into fists at his sides. He clamped his jaws to keep the fury from spilling out. An argument with Orville Torrence Killpath was as frustrating and as futile as a cap pistol on a firing range.

Killpath leaned forward again, rocked comfortably with his arms still wrapped around one knee. "Let's just remember, Sergeant, that we must all carry our own umbrella. A district station can't run smoothly, unless"- He interrupted himself, looking around Gun at the doorway. "Morning, Lieutenant Rinker". "Sorry, Orville. I thought you hadn't come in yet". "I've been here for some time". He stood up, cocked his head and eyed Gun coldly. "The sergeant is just leaving". ##

It had come as no great surprise to Matson that the hot water in the showers didn't work, that Loren Severe had thrown up all over the stairs, or that some thieving bastard of a cop had walked off with his cigarettes. It was the best he could hope for on a watch that had ended with a session in Killpath's office. Now, as he passed the open counter that divided the assembly room from the business office, he nodded and said good night to the station keeper and his clerks, not stopping to hear the day-watch playback of his chewing out. Not that he gave a damn what the grapevine sent out about Killpath's little speech on the comportment of platoon commanders. He just didn't want to talk about it. If the acting captain wanted his acting lieutenant to sit on his ass around the station all night, Killpath would just have to go out and drag Gun back by the heels once an hour; because he'd be damned if he was going to be a mid-watch pencil-pusher just to please his ulcerated pro-tem captain. At the doorway he squinted up at the gray morning overcast and patted his jacket pockets for the cigarettes, remembering then that he'd left them at the Doughnuttery. He could pick up another pack on his way home, if he were going home. But even before he started across the oiled road to his Plymouth, parked in the lot under the cypress trees across from the station, he knew that he wasn't going home. Not yet. It was nine o'clock in the morning: the hour which, like a spade turning clods of earth, exposed to the day a myriad of busy creatures that had lain dormant in the quiet night. Mission Street at this hour was populated by a whole community that Gun could not have seen on his tour of duty- the neighborhood that had known Urbano Quintana by

day.

#TEN#

Sol Phillips had purchased the Alliance Furniture Mart seventeen years ago. It was professedly worth three thousand dollars in stock and good will, and the name was written in gold in foot-high letters across each of the two display windows. On the right window, at eye level, in smaller print but also in gold, was <Gonzalez, Prop&,> and under that, <Se Habla Espanol>. Mr& Phillips took a razor to <Gonzalez, Prop&,> but left the promise that Spanish would be understood because he thought it meant that Spanish clientele would be welcome. Language was no problem anyway; Mr& Phillips had only to signal from his doorway to summon aid from the ubiquitous bilingual children who played on the sidewalks of Mission Street. Aside from the fact that business was slow this time of year and his one salesgirl was not the most enterprising, Mr& Phillips had no worries at all, and he said as much to Gun Matson, who sat across from him in civilian clothes, on a Jiffy-Couch-a-Bed, mauve velour, \$79.89 nothing-down special! "She's honest as the day", Mr& Phillips said, and added, "Mr& Gunnar, I can say this to you: Beebe is a little too honest. You can't tell a customer how much it's going to cost him to refinance his payments before he even signs for a loan on the money down! A time plan is a mere convenience, you understand, and when"- He interrupted himself, smiling. "I put her in lamps. That way I don't lose so much". "Why don't you just hire somebody else"?

"She says she has to finish a story". He shrugged. "I asked her why she couldn't do it tomorrow, but it seems the muse is working good tonight and she's afraid to let it go". Casey made some comment, but his mind was busy as he considered the man. His name was George Needham and he, too, had come from a good family. He was perhaps thirty-two, nicely set up, with light brown hair that had a pronounced wave. He was always well groomed and well tailored, and he had that rich man's look which was authentic enough and came from two good prep schools and a proper university. An only child, he had done all the things that young men do who have been born to money and social position until his father double-crossed him by dying broke. Since then he had worked at this and that, though some said his main interest was gambling. All this went through Casey's mind in the first instant, but what held his interest was the fact that these two should be together at all. For he had understood that Betty had been engaged to a boy named Barry Jenkins. She had grown up with young Jenkins, and he had heard that they had been at the point of getting married at least twice. He wanted to ask her about Jenkins now, but he knew he couldn't do so in Needham's presence. And so, still wondering and a little perplexed, he grinned at the girl and spoke lightly to make sure that she would know he was kidding. "Where did you pick him up"? "Oh, I've known him quite

a while". She glanced at her companion fondly. "Haven't I, George"? "I've been after her for years", Needham said, "but I've never been able to get anywhere until the last few days". The girl's eyes were softly shining as she reached out and touched Casey's hand. "Can I tell you a secret? We're going to get married. Do you approve"? Casey kept his smile fixed, but some small inner disturbance was working on him as he thought again about Needham, who was eight or ten years older than the girl. He wondered whether Needham was going to swear off gambling and get a steady job or whether he was counting on the income from Betty's estate to subsidize him. None of this showed in his face, and he tried to keep his skepticism in hand. He made a point of frowning, of acting out the part of the fond father-confessor. "I'll have to give it some thought", he said. "You wouldn't want me to say yes without making sure his intentions are honorable, would you"? She made a face at him and then she laughed. "Of course not". "I'll get my references in order", Needham said, and though he spoke with a smile, Casey somehow got the idea that he was not particularly amused. "Stop by any time, Casey". He stood up and touched the girl's arm. "Come on, darling. If you're really serious about working on that story, I'd better take you home". Casey watched them go, still frowning absently and then dismissing the matter as he called for his check. As he went out he told Freddie the dinner was perfect, and when he got his hat and coat from Nancy Parks and put a fifty-piece piece in the slot, he told her to be sure that it went toward her dowry. A taxi took him back to the bar and grill where he had left his car, and a few minutes later he found a parking place across the street from his apartment. Because his mind had been otherwise occupied for the past couple of hours, he did not think to look and see if Jerry Burton's car was still there. In fact, he did not think about Jerry Burton at all until he entered his living room and closed the door behind him. Only then, when his glance focused on the divan and saw that it was empty, did he remember his earlier problem. Even from where he stood he could see the neatly folded blanket that he had spread over Burton, the pillow, the sheet of paper on top of it. Then he was striding across the room, his thoughts confused but the worry building swiftly inside him as he snatched up the note. ##

<Jack:
Look in
the wastebasket. I knew the only way I could beat you was to play possum,
but it was a good try, kid, and I appreciate it. J>&
##

The wastebasket stood near the wall next to the divan, and the instant Casey picked it up he knew what had happened. The discarded papers inside were sodden, there was a glint of liquid at the bottom, and the smell of whisky was strong and distinct. He put the basket down distastefully, muttering softly and thoroughly disgusted with himself

and his plan that had seemed so foolproof. For he remembered too well how he had brought back the loaded drinks to Burton and then returned to the kitchen to get weaker drinks for himself. For another second or two he gave in to the annoyance that was directed at himself; then his mind moved on to be confronted by something far more serious, and as the thought expanded, the implications jarred him. It no longer mattered that Burton had outsmarted him. The important thing was that Burton had gone somewhere to meet a blackmailer with a gun in his pocket. And that gun was empty. Even before his mind had rounded out the idea, he thrust one hand into his trousers pocket and pulled out the six slugs he had taken from the revolver. He considered them with brooding eyes, brows bunched as his brain grappled with the problem and tried to find some solution. He said: "The crazy fool", half aloud. He put the shells on the table, as though he could no longer bear to hold them. He thought: <Where the hell could he have gone? How can I find him?> There was no answer to this and he began to pace back and forth across the room, his imagination out of control. He tried to tell himself that maybe Burton had sobered up enough to get some sense. Maybe he only intended to scare the blackmailer, whoever he was, in which case an unloaded gun would be good enough. He thought of other possibilities, none of them satisfactory, and finally he began to think, to wonder if there was some way he could reach Burton. Then, as he turned toward the telephone, it rang shrilly to shatter the stillness in the room and he reached for it eagerly. "Yeah", he said. "Casey"?

"Yeah". "Tony Calenda". Casey heard the voice distinctly and he knew who it was, but it took him a while to make the mental readjustment and control the disturbance inside his head. When he heard Calenda say: "What about that picture you took this afternoon"? it still took him another few seconds to remember the job he had done for Frank Ackerly. "What picture"? he demanded. "You took a picture of me at the corner of Washington and Blake about three thirty this afternoon". "Who says so"? "One of my boys". Casey believed that much. Calenda was not the sort who walked around without one of his "boys" close at hand. "So"? "With my trial coming up in Federal Court next week I wouldn't want that picture published". "Who says it's going to be published"?

"I wouldn't even want it to get around".

Under normal circumstances Casey was a little fussy when people told him what to do with pictures he had taken. Even so, he generally listened and was usually reasonable to those who voiced their objections properly. Right now, however, he was still too worried about Jerry Burton, and the gun that had no bullets, and the story Burton had told him, to care too much about Tony Calenda. His nerves were getting a little ragged and his impatience put an edge in his voice. "Look", he said. "I was hired to take a picture. I took it. That's all I know about it and that's all I care". "Maybe

you'd better tell the guy who hired you what I said".

"You tell him". "All right", Calenda said, his voice still quiet. "But I meant what I said, Casey. If that picture gets around and I find out you had anything to do with it, I'm going to send a couple of my boys around to see you". "You do that", Casey said. "Just be sure to send your two best boys, Tony". He hung up with a bang, annoyed at himself for running off at the mouth like that but still terribly concerned with the situation he had helped to create. As soon as he could think logically again he reached for the telephone directory and found Jerry Burton's home number. He dialed it and listened to it ring ten times before he hung up. He called the bar and grill where he had picked Burton up that afternoon. When he was told that no one had seen Burton since then, he thought of three other places that were possibilities. Each time he got the same answer and in the end he gave up. By the time he had smoked three cigarettes he had calmed down. He had done all he could and that was that. And anyway Burton was not the kind of guy who would be likely to get in trouble even when he was drunk. He, Casey, had been scared for a while, but that had come mostly from the fact that he felt responsible. He should have stayed here and watched Burton. He didn't. So he made a mistake. So what?

He kept telling himself this as he went out to the kitchen to make a drink. Only then did he decide he didn't want one. He considered opening a can of beer but vetoed that idea too. Finally he went into the bedroom and sat down to take off his shoes. He had just finished unlacing the right one when the telephone rang again. When he snatched it up the voice that came to him was quick and urgent. "Casey? You don't know me but I know you. If you want a picture get to the corner of Adams and Clark just as fast as you can. If you hurry you might beat the headquarters boys". Casey heard the click of the distant receiver before he could open his mouth, and it took him no more than three seconds to make his decision. For over the years he had received many such calls. Some of them came from people who identified themselves. Some telephoned because he had done them a favor in the past. Others because they expected some sort of reward for the information. A few passed along a tip for the simple reason that they liked him and wanted to give him a break. Only an occasional tip turned out to be a phony, and, like the police, Casey had made a point of running down all such suggestions and he did not hesitate this time. He was in his car with his camera and equipment bag in less than two minutes, and it took him only three more to reach the corner, a block from Columbus Avenue. It was a district of small factories and loft buildings and occasional tenements, and he could see the police radio car as he rounded the corner and slammed on the brakes. He did not bother with his radio- there would be time for that later- but as he scrambled out on the pavement he saw the filling station and the public telephone booth and knew instantly how he had been summoned. The police car had pulled up behind a small sedan, its headlights still on.

slowly he pulled out the hand throttle until the boat was moving at little more than a crawl, and watched Elaine rapidly spin from one station to another, tune in the null, then draw in a line on the chart. "We're out just a little too far. Make a 90 degree straight for shore". Poet came in, raising his eyebrows appreciatively as he saw Elaine. "Now"? he asked. "Pretty quick", she replied. "Will you drop the anchor"? Poet nodded, swung below and a moment later emerged from the forward hatch where he picked up the anchor. The rock and roll music coming from the radio station suddenly faded as the boat coasted into the null on the ~RDF.

"Reverse", Elaine said, then peered through the loop of the ~RDF and waved to Poet. A second later she came behind the wheel and backed off the anchor line until it was set in the ocean floor. She cut the engines and slowly the cruiser swung around on the end of its lines until its bow was pointing into the wind and the cockpit faced toward the shore. Nick watched her somewhat enviously as she efficiently cut the engines, and started the auxiliary motor.

Poet came up from below, wearing new bathing trunks. The price tag hung from the belt and he pulled it off as he entered the chartroom and looked at it curiously. Nick wondered if Elaine had bought them, but he said nothing. Nobody, he suddenly realized, was saying anything. It seemed as if they were all under a spell. There should be an excited conversation, for somewhere, directly below them, was a treasure lost for more than four hundred years. But instead of chatter there was a null, like on the radio direction finder. Once, in New York, he had gone flying with some friends in a small private airplane with a single engine. They had all been laughing, joking, when suddenly the engine had failed. No one had screamed. No one had prayed. All had fallen into a complete silence, listening to the wind whistle over the wings. The pilot had been good. He'd landed the plane on a small airstrip in Connecticut and as soon as the aircraft had coasted to a stop, everyone had burst into chatter at the same moment.

There had been tension in the plane during the silent descent; a tension similar to the one now. But in the plane there was a concrete reason for it. Now, at this moment, there should be none **h unless skin diving was much more dangerous than he had been led to believe. Yet tension existed. The same taut-nerved relationship as there had been between the passengers on the plane now strained at the three of them here on the boat. It hung over them like a cloud, its arrival as sudden as a cloud skidding over the sun. Silently, Elaine picked up her keys from the table and went out into the cockpit, Poet behind her, Nick trailing behind him. She threw back a cushion over one of the seats, unlocked a padlock on the chest beneath it, then presently straightened, holding a long knife and a wicked looking spear gun in her hand. Poet whistled softly as he looked at the gun. "Hydraulic"? he asked. Elaine nodded. "They are the

best". She kicked the locker lid shut and replaced the cushion. "They are the most efficient". "And the deadliest", Poet commented as he buckled on his tank harness. "Why do you need an arsenal"? Nick asked, apprehensively, staring at the weapon.

"It's quite possible there's more than codfish down there, man", Poet replied with a short, nervous laugh as he held the harness for Elaine. A moment later, moving awkwardly because of the swimming fins, she picked up the gun, handed the knife to Poet, then rolled off the transom of the boat, back first. Poet nodded to Nick and entered the water in a similar fashion. Another moment and they were out of sight, leaving behind only a string of bubbles as a clue to their whereabouts. For a while Nick followed the twisting course of the bubbles, wondering which set came from Elaine. They remained close together, their air trail wiggling like serpents traveling side by side. Eventually the bubbles became lost in the sparkle of the ocean surface, and he rolled over on his back. Clasp his hands behind his head, he stared at the blue sky. There was nothing quite like being alone on a boat on the ocean. Alfredo certainly must have enjoyed being alone. Next to the ocean, probably the loneliest spot was the desert. If Elaine's uncle had stuck to this desire for aloneness, he probably would still be alive. Yet Alfredo wanted money **h wanted money to roam through the deserts. And Graham wanted money probably to roam among the dice tables in Las Vegas. It was an odd combination **h a strange pair to stumble upon the wreck of the <Trinidad>. But Graham hadn't stumbled on it. Two to three weeks prior to the charter of the <Virginia>, Graham had been snooping around the San Luis Rey Mission. The small helicopter with its two steel skids churned offshore and Nick raised up to watch it heading south. That was a hell of a note, he thought. A couple couldn't even find a secluded spot anywhere on a beach to neck nowadays without someone swooping down upon them. If the character flying that thing had gone over San Clemente Island yesterday he would have had an eyeful. Off to the west a beautiful schooner slowly beat its way into the wind, headed on a tack toward San Clemente. Behind it a cabin cruiser drifted crossways in the small ground-swell, a lone fisherman in the chair aft. The fisherman was right in the middle of the Deep. Nick recalled stories that the two best fishing spots in Southern California were over the La Jolla Deep and the Redondo Deep, two spots where the ocean dropped off to fantastic depths almost from the shoreline. Someday, geologists had warned, the land on both sides of these deeps would fall into the ocean and no more La Jolla or Redondo Beach. Meanwhile, fishermen took advantage of them to pull up whoppers. Sometimes the fish exploded as they neared the surface because of the difference in pressure.

Why, he wondered, had Elaine wanted him along on this trip? He couldn't skindive, he couldn't run a boat, except on the open sea. He stood up, stretched, looked around for the bubbles, but could see none. Strolling down to the galley, he lit the butane under the coffee pot and when the brew was heated, poured himself a cup and went

up to the chartroom. Turning on the hi-fi, he went back to the cockpit, stretched out on the cushions and listened to the music. Elaine and Poet returned together, popping up over the transom almost like dolphins breaking water. He sat up and watched as they pulled themselves over the stern. "Any luck"? he asked. Poet shook his head, sliding his face mask up on his forehead. "We're right on the edge of the Deep", Elaine said. Pulling off her face mask, she carefully placed the spear gun across the stern, then lifted her wet hair from her back and squeezed out the water. "Which is a break as the area to search is less than a square mile", she added as she swung her legs over the transom. "Any news"?

"Not a thing". He tossed her a towel, then repeated the service for Poet. "Cigarette"? Elaine shook her head as she slipped out of her harness, but Poet nodded. His feet still hung over the stern of the transom, but as he reached for the smoke he raised them to swing them in. The fin on his foot caught on the moulding, throwing him off balance. His forearm smashed painfully into the narrow washboard and he grimaced as he grabbed his bruised limb with his other hand and rolled into the boat. "Kee-reist"! The word hissed distinctly from Poet's lips as he struggled to his feet.

Nick's body became rigid. Turning slowly he saw Poet in a brilliant glare of horror. Poet! His face was still creased in pain as he studied the underside of his arm. Poet a murderer? Turning quickly toward Elaine, Nick saw that she, too, stood in shocked surprise. The sudden silence was too silent. Instinctively aware of the charged atmosphere, Poet raised his head slowly, looking first at Elaine. She had caught the implication of the oath. Her face was frozen into the mask of a mannequin, her body absolutely motionless. And then Nick knew that all of them knew **h Elaine, himself **h and Poet. Elaine recovered first, so quickly that Nick thought he might have imagined her sudden reaction. "Do you need a bandage"? she asked steadily. Poet rubbed his arm. "It's like banging a shin", he said, his eyes lingered on Nick's face, then moved back to Elaine. "Hurts like hell for a second, then it disappears". "I'll get some ointment". Elaine turned and started toward the companionway. But her walk was too steady, too slow, telegraphing her fear. Nick sensed it. So did Poet. Springing like a cat, he leaped back, swooped up the spring gun and, whirling, pointed it toward the cabin. At the same instant, Nick hit the barrel and threw himself upon the smaller man. The gun fired next to his ear with a vicious whoosh like the first stroke of an old steam engine. At the same instant, Elaine screamed wildly, the sound ending abruptly as Nick went off the boat and into the water on top of the frantic, struggling Poet. The moment the sea closed over Nick, some atavistic sense warned him that he would survive in this alien element only if he did not panic. But the murderer to whom he clung had a tremendous advantage. The wide flippers on Poet's feet gave his legs incredible power, driving the two of them down into the water as they rolled over and over. Poet was the captured,

arms pinioned to his side, and he twisted convulsively trying to escape. Poet would escape, Nick thought grimly, because he wore the apparatus which would keep him alive under water. But Nick would not let go. The rubber and glass face mask slipped from Poet's forehead, bounced painlessly off Nick's chin, then disappeared. Poet twisted again and Nick's knuckles scraped on the air tank, ripping off the skin. For a split second, Nick relaxed his grip and Poet's slippery body spun completely around before Nick could stop him, holding him now from the rear. Something flailed at the side of Nick's head as they rolled around and around. Suddenly Poet stopped struggling and the two of them hung suspended in the water, not rising, not sinking. A sharp pain lanced across Nick's chest and a bubble of air escaped from his tortured lungs, joining dozens of others that sailed lazily toward the surface like helium balloons rising into the sky. A black, snake-like object swayed eerily in front of him, spewing bubbles from its flat cobra head. The air hose was free! The discovery struck Nick like a blow. Desperately, Nick flashed one hand up, catching Poet's neck in the bend of his elbow. At the same instant, he grabbed the loose, writhing hose with his other hand and bit down on the hard rubber mouthpiece. Instinctively he exhaled through his nose then sucked in the air from the hose. At once the excruciating pain in his chest stopped and he was seized with a sudden, wild exultation. As if this was a signal, Poet abruptly began to thrash the water and the quick movement slowly made them sink through the water. Relentlessly, Nick held on, sucking on the hose, inhaling the air that belonged to Poet. Poet was not fighting Nick now.

HARBOR POINT sticks out into the ocean like the fat neck of a steamer clam. It's a rich village but not much for action- too many solid residents, not enough tourists or working stiffs. It's at the far end of the county and the last time I came here was for a hit and run manslaughter- about seven months ago. Chief Bob Moore looked his same hick-self; a man mountain running to lard in his middle-age. Seeing me he said with real surprise, "Well, well, ain't we honored! Hardly expected the <head> of County Homicide up for this murder. You sure climbed fast, Jed. Rookie investigator last summer and now it's <Inspector Jed>. Took me 19 years to become Chief of our three man police force. Proves a college education pays off". His sarcasm was followed by a stupid grin of his thick mouth and bad teeth. "I guess it helps", I said, paying no attention to his ribbing. "Never could figure out why you ever wanted to be a cop, Jed. You're not only young but **h well, you don't <even look> like a police officer. A runt with narrow shoulders and that brush haircut **h hell, you'd pass for a juvenile delinquent of the hotrod set. In my day the first requirement for a cop was to look like the law, big and tough. Man, when my 275 pounds and six-four comes along, why it's the same as another badge. When I say move, a guy moves"! "Don't worry about my being tough, Moore. Also, it's far too early in the day for corny lines like the bigger they come **h You've had your gassy lecture,

let's get to work. Who was the murdered woman **h Mrs& Buck"?

"Widow, nice sort of woman. Comfortably fixed. Ran a fair-sized farm. Came to the Harbor as a bride and **h Don't worry Jed, this one is in the bag. I know the killer, have the only road off the peninsula covered". "Yeah, passed your road block as I drove in", I said, sitting on his polished desk. Although Bob dressed like a slob, he kept a neat office. "Okay, what happened"?

"About nine this morning Mrs& Buck phones me she's having trouble with one of her farm hands- money trouble. Colored fellow named Tim Williams- only hand she has working for her now. Tim come with the migratory workers that follow the crops up from the South last year, but Tim and his wife settled here. Never had no trouble with him before, thought he was a hard worker, hustling around to get a full week's work. Anyway, Julia asks me to **h".

"Julia"? "Come on, <Inspector>, look alive. Julia Buck, the deceased", Moore said, slipping me his smug, idiot-grin again. "Julia asks me to come out at once. But she didn't sound real alarmed **h you know, like there was any immediate danger. I got there at 9:47 A&M&, found her strangled. I would have come sooner if I'd known **h. No doubt about Tim being the killer- I have a witness. Don't know why the County had to send anybody up here. Told them I can handle this". "Yeah, seems you have a nice package, with all the strings tied. Who's **h"?

"I'll collar Tim before night". "Who's your witness"? "Julia had- has- an old Indian woman cooking for her- Nellie Harris. Probably the last of the original Island Indians. Nellie was in the kitchen, had just come to work, when she heard Tim arguing with Julia in the living room. Swears she recognized his voice, that Tim yelled, 'It's my money and I want it!' and then rushed out of the house. Then she heard Julia phone me. Nellie went on with her house work- until I found Julia dead. And before you say it, Nellie ain't near strong enough to have strangled Julia. There's no doubt this Tim sneaked back and killed Mrs& Buck. Another fact: Tim's disappeared- on the run. But there's no way off the Point except through my road block. Guess you want to see the body- have her up the street in Doc Abel's office". "Let's see it". We walked up Main Street to this big white house, then around to the back. Being the Harbors sole doctor, Abel was also its Medical Examiner. The corpse was on a table, covered by a sheet. Doc Abel was busy up front with some of his live patients. Pulling back the sheet, I examined the bruises around Julia Buck's once slender throat. Powerful hands had killed her. "Find any prints"? Chief Moore shook his big head, seemed lost in thought as he stared at the nude body. Then he said, "Never noticed it before **h I mean, when she was dressed **h but for a woman her age, Julia had a real fine figure". I dropped the sheet, glanced at my watch. It was almost one and I hadn't

had lunch. Still, I wanted to get this over with, had a lot of paper work waiting in my own office. I told him, "I want to go see the Buck house". "Sure". Walking back down Main Street, I said, "I saw the Harbor's one squad car at the road block, we'll ride out in my car". "Naw, we'll use mine", Moore said, opening the door of a sleek white Jaguar roadster. As I slid in beside him he said, "Some heap, hey? Got a heck of a buy on this, dirt cheap". "Yeah, it's a real load", I told him, looking up the street at my battered Ford. Five racing minutes later we pulled into the driveway of this typical two-story house, and when the Jaguar stopped I managed to swallow. There was a garage and a modern barn in the rear, all of it standing between two large flat fields planted in early potatoes. Everything shouted gentleman farming, the kind of grandfather-father-to son folding money the Point is known for. The fins of a Caddy were sticking out of the garage, while the inside of the house was a comfortable mixture of old and expensive contemporary furniture. Nellie Harris wasn't old, she was ancient- a tiny shriveled woman with a face like a tan prune. She was also stone deaf in her right ear. She calmly repeated what Moore had told me. When I asked, "Why didn't you go into the living room to see how Mrs& Buck was"? the old gal stared at me with her hard eyes, said, "She didn't call. I do the living room last. I went up stairs and did the bath and her bedroom- way I always do in the morning". "Have you any idea what this Tim and Mrs& Buck were arguing about"? "Probably wages. Miss Julia was a hard woman with a dollar. Years ago when I asked her to put me in Social Security, so's I wouldn't have to be working now, Miss Julia threatened to fire me- all because it would mean a few more dollars a year to her". "Did you hear Tim return"? "No sir. Nobody came until Chief Moore". I drummed on the kitchen table with my pencil. "Mrs& Buck have any men friends"? "Her"? The wrinkled mouth laughed, revealing astonishingly strong, white, teeth. "I never see none. But then I wasn't her social secretary".

"Was she on friendly terms with other members of her family"?

"Didn't have no family- around here. They had a son- killed in the war". I walked into the living room. There didn't seem to be any signs of a struggle. I told Moore, "Where does Tim's wife live"? "I'll take you there. Look Jed, this is an open and shut case and I have to relieve my men at the road block soon. Okay, come on". We did 80 miles an hour across a hard dirt road to a cluster of shacks. In late summer migratory workers lived five and six to a room in these. Now they were empty, except for a cottage across the road. Mrs& Tim Williams was about 21, with skin the color of bitter chocolate, and if you discounted the plain dress and worn slippers, she was startlingly pretty. The inside of their place was full of new furniture, five bucks down and a buck a week stuff, but all of it clean and full of the warmth of a home. Mrs& Williams was both sullen and frightened.

She said she didn't know a thing- Tim had left the house at six in the morning, as usual. She hadn't seen him since.

"Did Mrs& Buck owe him any wages"? I asked. "Well, for this week, but they wasn't due 'till Saturday. Listen, Mr& Inspector, no matter what anybody say, my Tim didn't kill that woman!

Tim is a good man, hard working. He strong as a bull but gentle as a baby. Even if he angry, Tim wouldn't hurt a woman. He never in his life took a hand to a woman or **h" "We'll get him soon, see what he says", Chief Moore cut in. "Does your husband have a car"? I asked. "Got us an old station wagon. Need it for the job". I asked a silly question: "You've no idea where your husband could be, now"?

She shook her head. I knew she was lying. I stood there, staring at her for a moment- thinking mostly of her beauty and her poverty.

Moore said, "Come on, Jed, I have to get to my men".

On my way out I told her, "If you should **h eh **h just happen to see your husband, get him to give himself up. He'll get a fair trial. Hiding out like this won't get him anything, except more trouble, or a bullet". "Yes. I'll tell him- <if> I see him". We made it back to the Harbor in less than four minutes. I tried not to act scared. That Jaguar could really barrel along. I told Moore I was going to eat, get some forms filled out by Doc Abel. Chief Moore said, "If I don't see you when I return, see you for certain at my road block, Inspector".

I had a bowl of decent chowder, phoned the Doc and he said he'd leave the death statements with his girl- in a half hour. Lighting my pipe, I took a walk. The Harbor is a big yachting basin in the summer. Even now, there were several slick cruisers tied to the dock, an ocean-going yawl anchored inside the breakwater. There was a 34 foot Wheeler with CHIEF BOB'S in big gold letters on its stern also tied up at the dock. It wasn't a new boat, about five years old, but fitted with fishing outriggers and chairs. I asked an old guy running a fishing station if the boat was Moore's. He said, "You bet. Bob Moore is plumb crazy about blue fishing". I dropped into the doctor's office, picked up my forms. As I was walking back to the Police Station, which was in the same building with the City Hall and Post Office, I saw Mrs& Tim Williams sneaking into the back of my car. If she moved gracefully, she was clumsy at it. I got into the front seat. She was 'hiding' on the floor of the back seat, the soft curves of her back and hips- rousing lines. I drove out of the Harbor, turned off into a dirt road among the scrub pine trees and stopped. I waited a few minutes and she sat up. For another moment we didn't talk, then she began to weep. She mumbled, "I just know that Chief Moore is out to kill my Tim"!

"Maybe. I never saw him so anxious before", I said, lighting my pipe and offering her a cigarette. "Of course, it could be because this is his first murder case. You know where Tim is, don't you, Mrs Williams"? She puffed on the cigarette slowly, sitting slumped against the back seat; didn't answer. But the police have dropped the case. I want you to go to Pearson City and find out why- first-hand stuff for your modern crime series. Take the same train Diana Beauclerk took and get there at the same time. Go to the same hotel and occupy the same suite- 1105".

"Will the hotel rent it so soon after the crime"? "Why not? The police have finished with it. Besides, the number of the suite hasn't been published in any newspaper. To the hotel people, you'll just be an innocent tourist who happens to ask for that particular suite". "Still, they may not want to rent it".

"That's your headache. Once inside, keep your eyes open"!

"For what"! Alec was growing more and more skeptical. "The police will have gone over every square inch of the place with a fine-tooth comb. The hotel people will have scoured and vacuumed it. Ten to one, it's even been redecorated"! "There's always a chance they may have overlooked something", returned the chief. "I'm betting on that chance. Interview the bellboy and chambermaid who waited on Beauclerk. Study the topography of the suite. Soak up local color. Reenact everything Beauclerk did.

Try to imagine you're going to be murdered yourself- between eleven p&m& and one a&m& the night you arrive". Alec smirked. "Cheerful way to spend an evening"! A sudden thought wiped the smirk from his face. "Suppose the murderer should return to the scene of the crime"! The chief's eyes gleamed. He spoke softly. "That is exactly what I'm hoping for. After all, the murderer is still at large. And the key to the suite is still missing". ##

On the train Alec refreshed his memory of the Beauclerk case by reading teletype flimsies- spot-news stories about the crime sent out by the <Pearson City Star,> a member of the Syndicate Press. Diana Beauclerk was a second-rate actress living in New York. Two weeks ago she had gone west to Pearson City. Daniel Forbes, her divorced husband, lived there. So did the firm of lawyers who had got her the divorce, Kimball and Stacy. She reached Pearson City at nine p&m& and went straight to the Hotel Westmore. She telephoned the junior partner of her law firm, Martin Stacy, and asked him to call at her hotel that evening.

At the time of her divorce Forbes had promised to pay her a lump sum in lieu of further alimony if she remarried. According to Stacy, she told him she was planning to remarry and she wanted him to ask Forbes for the lump sum. Stacy replied that it would bankrupt Forbes,

who had just sunk all his money in a real estate venture. Stacy said he left her suite at nine forty-five p&m. She was in good health and spirits, but still determined to get the money from Forbes. No one saw Stacy leave. No other visitor inquired for her that evening. Next morning she was found dead in her suite with a bullet from a .22-caliber Colt revolver in her brain. According to the medical examiner, she was shot between eleven p&m and one a&m. Her door was locked and the key was missing. So was the gun.

When Alec finished reading he was sure that either Forbes or Stacy had killed Diana Beauclerk. Forbes had motive and Stacy had opportunity.

Find a motive for Stacy or an opportunity for Forbes and the case would be solved. ##

The Hotel Westmore proved to be one of the older hotels in Pearson City, and definitely second-rate. Alec's first impression of the lobby was gloomy, Victorian dignity- black walnut and red plush, a black and white tiled floor, and Persian rugs.

He studied the night clerk as a man measures an adversary. "I'd like the room I had the last time". "Certainly, sir". The clerk was young and limp, with a tired smile. "Do you recall the number"? "It was 1105". The clerk's smile congealed. "That suite is taken". Alec's glance went to a chart of guest names and room numbers hanging on the wall behind the clerk. Opposite the number 1105 stood one word: <Unoccupied>.

The clerk's glance followed Alec's. "We have better rooms vacant now", he babbled. "Larger and more comfortable. At the same rate".

Alec's face was dark, blunt, and sulky. He always looked impertinent and he could look dangerous. He was looking dangerous now. He raised his voice. "Anything wrong with the plumbing in 1105"? There was a sudden stillness in the lobby. Two women, who had been chattering like parrots, were struck dumb. A man, lighting a match for his cigar, paused until the flame burned his fingers. Even the bellboys on their bench were listening.

The clerk's eyes flickered. "Of course not"! "Anybody with a contagious disease been in there"? "No"! The clerk was almost hysterical. "It's just that- well, 1105 is being redecorated". "I don't believe it". Alec leaned on the desk, holding the clerk's eyes with his. "Suppose you tell me the real reason", he drawled. "There might be a story in it". "St-story"? "I'm with the Syndicated Press, Feature Service. Either I get the story- or I get the suite". It was blackmail and the clerk knew it. "There is no story", he piped tremulously. "Front! Show this gentleman to 1105"! The stillness persisted as Alec followed

a bellboy across the lobby to the elevator. He could feel eyes on his back. He wished it had not been necessary to announce the number of his suite quite so publicly. The corridor on the eleventh floor was dimly lighted by electric globes at intervals of thirty feet. A thick, crimson carpet muffled every footfall. At the end of the corridor Alec noticed a door marked: <Fire Stairs>. It was a neat setup for murder. The bellboy unlocked a white door numbered 1105. The room was dark but a neon sign flashed and faded beyond the window. A few snowflakes sifted down through that theatrical red glow, languid as falling feathers. Hastily the boy switched on a ceiling light. The room looked normal and even commonplace. There was no hint of a violent struggle now. Deal furniture with a mahogany finish was neatly arranged as if it stood in the window of a department store. The blue rug was suspiciously bright and new. It had never been stained with blood. Table covers and towels were clean, ashtrays empty and supplied with fresh matches. The mirror over the bureau was a blank eye, round and innocent. Alec played the part of an innocent tourist. "Is there anything wrong with this room"?

"N-no". The boy dropped his eyes. "Afraid you'll lose your job if you don't keep your mouth shut"? The boy raised his eyes. "Listen, mister. If you want my advice, pack up and take the next train back to New York". "Were you on duty here two weeks ago"? The boy hesitated. Then, "I'm not talking. But I wouldn't spend a night in here for a million bucks"! He was in a hurry to get out of the room. Alec gave him a tip and let him go. Alone, Alec examined the doors. There were three- one leading to a bathroom, one to the hall, and one to the room next door which was immovable- locked or bolted on the other side. Alec locked the hall door and put the key with his watch on the bedside table. It was just quarter of nine. As he ranged his belongings on the bureau he noticed a film of white dust on the dark surface of the wood beyond the linen cover. Not gray like the dust that collects in an unused room, but white. Women didn't use white face powder nowadays, he recalled. They used pink, tan, or cream powder. Alec glanced into the bathroom. <Blood in the bathtub where the murderer appears to have washed his hands>.

It seemed clean now, but Alec decided against a bath. He crawled into bed and switched off the light. In the darkness he could see the rosy reflection of the neon sign on the wall opposite the window. It winked as steadily as a metronome- on, off- on, off. In less than five minutes

Alec was asleep. He never knew just what woke him. Yet suddenly he was wide-awake. There was no sound and apparently no movement in the room except the noiseless pulsation of the red light on the wall. He lay still, listening to the silence, watching the light. Somewhere in the city a big clock sounded twelve solemn notes- midnight. <According to the medical examiner she was shot between eleven p&m& and one a&m&> **h.

Alec heard a faint sound.
His heart seemed to swell and knock against the wall of his chest.
For the sound was inside the room. he let his eyelids droop
and breathed heavily, feigning sleep. The sound was coming nearer. A
monstrous shadow fell across the illuminated wall, distorted and indefinable.

When the neon sign faded out, the shadow disappeared.
When the neon sign flashed on, the shadow was still there. It stretched
to an impossible height, climbing the wall to the ceiling. That
meant that something between the light and its reflection on the wall
was moving closer to the source of the light- in this case, the window.

Cautiously Alec tensed his muscles, ready to jump. The bedsprings
betrayed him with a creak. The shadow vanished. Someone
had moved beyond the range of the light from the window. Abandoning
caution, Alec leaped out of bed and groped for the light switch.
Before he could snap it on, a stinging blow caught him in the ribs.
He lashed out blindly with his right. There was a thick, squashy crack
of fist on flesh. Something hard grazed his knuckles. He
put everything he had into the next and aimed down where the stomach ought
to be. Rough cloth rasped his fist. There was a grunt, curiously
inarticulate, like that of an animal in pain. Something heavy shook
the floor as it dropped. Alec waited a moment, on guard. Nothing
happened. Again he groped for the light switch. The blue
rug had been rolled up and stacked in one corner of the room. On the
bare floorboards a man lay face down. He had a short, heavy, powerful
body. Alec turned him over and discovered a round, lumpy face
with narrow, slanting eyes- a primitive Tartar face from Russia
or the Balkans. The man's shoes were too pointed, his overcoat too
broad at the shoulders and too narrow at the waist. There was
a slight bulge under the left armpit- a shoulder holster. Alec promptly
removed the gun. He was familiar with this type. He had seen it
in the lineup at Police Headquarters in New York, in Broadway night
clubs and Seventh Avenue pool rooms, in the criminal courts. But
he was surprised to meet it here. Diana Beauclerk had no connection
with the underworld. A professional gunman would not have killed
her with a weapon of such small caliber as a .22. Nor would he
choose a respectable hotel as the scene for a killing when it would be
so much safer to take his victim for a one-way ride on a lonely country
road. The man's eyelids fluttered. He opened his eyes.

"What are you doing here"? demanded Alec. The man
made no reply. His eyes were dazed. His lips were bruised and swollen
where Alec had hit him. "Did you kill Diana Beauclerk"?

Alec expected an indignant denial, but there was no response
at all. "Oh, come on, snap out of it! Or I'll turn
you over to the police"! The silence was getting on Alec's
nerves. The man opened his mouth, but no words came. Only that
curious, animal grunting Alec had heard during their fight.
"Don't you speak English"? The man opened his mouth

wider. A forefinger pointed toward his gullet. Alec leaned forward to look. There were hideous scars inside the throat and the palate was mutilated.

In good time I shall get to the distressing actuality, to Red McIver and Handley Walker, to murder and sudden death. But you realize, I am sure, how much old deeds incite to new ones, and you must forgive me if I tell you first of the old ones. It was in 1814 that Abraham Wharf and his sister sat by a meager fire in their house on Dogtown Common, a desolate place even then. He was sharpening his razor. "Sister", said he "do you think people who commit suicide go to heaven"? and she answered, "I don't know, but I hope you'll never do such a thing". Without a tremor, "God forbid"! he said, and went out and cut his throat in the cave near Granny Day's swamp. What has this to do with the present? Much, I assure you. You must know what gets into people, even such as Red and Handley, before you can tell what comes out of them. They had learned, both of them, about Abraham Wharf. That's why I beg

you not to forget him. His ghost is not laid. Red and Handley, God help them, knew the old Dogtown lore; and I knew they knew it, for I'd told them a lot of it. And isn't it true that you get a deeper perception about a man and his motives when you know what it is he knows? Yes, gentlemen, I am getting to the point, to my point. You know the facts; they are set forth in your own newspapers. You want from me the story, but a story is about 'why' and then, perhaps, about 'how'. The 'when' you know; yesterday morning. So what I am trying to tell you is the 'why'- that is <my> point- and that concerns the spirit of the matter. There is an inwardness and a luster to old furniture (look at that mahogany highboy behind you) which has a provocative emanation, if I may say so. Places, too, have their haunting qualities. Even people. And my point in this sad story is the spirit of the matter. When you hold the spirit of a thing, then somehow you know the truth- you know a fake antique from the real thing. And the truth is what you've come for, is it not? Now, Dogtown is one of those places that creeps into the marrow as worms get into old wood, under the veneer. In fact, all the folk who lived on the back of Cape Ann, they are not just like others. There's a different hall-mark on them. There were no witch burnings here because everyone had a witch in the family. Just think of old Granther Stannard who pulled the teeth of Dark Younger (her real name was Dorcas), and because he bungled the job and left two protruding tusks she put such a hex on him that he thought his legs were made of glass. After that he was never known to run or even walk fast. Today Dogtown is the only deserted village in all New England that I know of. There it sits, a small highland, with towns like Gloucester near by; but now it's the most lost and tortured place in the world. Those who lived in that desolation of rocky deformity took on some of the moraine's stony character. Scientists say it is the last spewings of a great glacier, but one rather feels that only a malevolent giant could have piled up those crouching monsters of granite which still seem to preserve a sort of suspended, ominous life

in them. We'll walk up there later. It's perhaps a mile from here where we sit. And not one single dwelling left there, though once, in the early eighteenth century, there were close to a hundred houses. (I myself have identified about sixty sites, from the old maps and registers. A fascinating pursuit, I assure you.) Even I can remember nothing but ruined cellars and tumbled pillars, and nobody has lived there in the memory of any living man. It is now a sweep of boulders and ledges, with oak, walnut and sumac creeping across the common, and everywhere the ruins and the long, long shadows. That's your setting, and a sinister one. Please get that in your reports. It accounts for so many things. Both Red McIver and Handley Walker lived nearby, almost as near as I do. Red lived at Lanesville, and from his house he could be up on the Common in a half hour's brisk walk; Handley lived further on, at Pigeon Cove. I'd often find one or other of them up around Dogtown sketching. They were both

painters, (They were? They are? What should one say?) Well, anyhow, Dogtown Common is so much off the beaten track nowadays that only Sunday picnickers still stray up there, from time to time. Sea-road, railroad, lack of water, killed Dogtown. Dead, dead as a brass door nail, and I sometimes feel like the Sexton, for I'm about the last to be even interested. I knew Red and Handley well. As I said, they were both painters. They'd come, separately, to Gloucester some twenty years ago- there's always been an artists' colony somewhere on Cape Ann- and each married here. They married cousins, Anta and Freya Norberg. There are a lot of Scandinavians in this neck of the woods, and many still make painted furniture and take steam-baths. Pretty girls among them, with blonde hair and pert faces. Handley married Freya and Red, of the red beard, married Anta. And it was because of an old Norberg inheritance that I got to understand them all so well. The quarrel ended in a ridiculous draw, but I must tell you about it. Oh, yes, I'm quite sure it's important, because of the Beech Pasture. What's that?

Why, that's what gave me the feeling, gave me as-it-were the spirit, the demoniac, evil spirit of this whole affair. You see, besides being custodian of antiquities, I am also registrar. No, I don't hold with those who live entirely among dead things. I know as well as the next man that a ship is called from the rigging she carries, where the live wind blows, and not from the hull. But you've got to know both. What's below the water-line interests me also. As I was saying, I've known all about the old records, including the old Norberg deed. Some ten years ago that page was torn out, I don't know by whom. About five years ago, Handley came to ask me if he could see the tattered register. He was courteous and casual about it, as though it were of no consequence. He's always like that, in spite of being a big man. (When you see him, you'll notice his habit of fingering, I might almost say, stroking a large mole with black hairs on it, by his right temple.) A sensual man, but very courteous, some would say slick. Like his glossy black hair. Too many outside manners, to my taste. He is the sort who, with an appraising eye, would cross the street to help a strange woman on to a bus and then pinch her.

A real gentleman, I feel, would do neither. He's always worn a broad-brimmed hat, and I've noticed, in my small study at the Society, that he rather smells of cosmetics. The next week, cousin Red wandered in as casually, but curt and untidy. Red was small and fine-boned, like ivory-inlay. He too asked to see the same page. When I told him someone had torn it out, he shouted. "By God, it's that damn Handley, the sneak"! And later in the same week they both came together to examine the register. Fortunately we were alone in the building- so few people nowadays are interested even in their own past or in the lovely craft of other days- for they began to abuse each other in the foulest language. Red thrusting out his tawny beard, Handley glowering under his suddenly rumpled black hair. They actually bristled. <Le rouge et le noir>. Violent men both. Red always was morose, yet that day the dapper Handley was the louder of the two. But for my presence, they would have been at each others' throats.

During the quarrel I learned what the trouble was, from the accusations each hurled at the other. The Beech Pasture had suddenly become valuable. There's a fine granite quarry there, and granite's coming back for public buildings. Both men knew it was in the Norberg family holdings, but to which of the cousins did it belong, Anta or Freya? Fortunately, I knew almost exactly what the will had said. It began with a preamble, of course. This explained that the judge of probate of Essex County, 1785 or 1786, appointed three free-holders of Gloucester to divide and establish the Norberg estate. After the usual Honorable Sirs, it went on to say that there had been set off to the widow one full third part of the real estate of the deceased Salu Norberg, one lower room, on the Western side, privileges to the well and bake-oven and to one third of the cellar (I can show you the cellar when we go up), also one Cow Right, and lastly they set off to the widow her own land that she brought with her as dower, namely the Beech Pasture. And I remember that the whole of the privileges, not counting the Beech Pasture, was valued at twenty pounds. I wish you could have seen the crests fall on these two sparring coxcombs when I told them that obviously the pasture belonged to their wives jointly. That battle scene, ridiculous at it was, remained in my mind. A disturbing picture of bad blood, to be further heightened with illicit if bucolic colors, for on a subsequent day I saw Handley escorting Anta, Red's wife, up on Dogtown Common. I felt it would be inopportune to disclose my presence. Not that I intentionally go unperceived, but the boulders up there are very high and I am a small woman.

One other cause of jealousy between them I must tell you. Paint! Gloomy and unkempt as Red McIver was, he was much the better painter. I suppose Handley knew it. If Red had a show at Gloucester, Handley would hurry to hang his pictures in Rockport. You may say this has little pertinence, but, gentlemen, remember that all this prepared my mind, alerted my intelligence. By such touches the pattern takes shape. You would call these the motives

of crime. I would call them the patterns of life, perhaps even the designs of destiny. Yet with all this knowledge I had nothing of substance to unravel our case, as you would call it, till yesterday.

One month ago, on the 20th of October, was the opening of the gunning season in Massachusetts. Not much to shoot, but there are a few pheasant. Rabbits, too, if you care for them, which most of the folk around here haven't the sense to appreciate. Any more than they have the sense to eat mussels. That was the day Red was said to have gone away. Oh yes, he'd talked about doing so. In fact, he often disappeared, from time to time,- off to paint the sea, aboard a dragger out from Gloucester. Anta, his wife, never seemed to mind. I suppose these absences gave her more clearance for her embraces with Cousin Handley. Anyhow, I wasn't surprised, early that morning, to see Handley himself crossing from Dogtown Common Road to the Back Road. No, he didn't have his gun, which he should have. It would have been a good excuse for his being there at all. I myself had been up there by seven o'clock, after mushrooms, since there'd been a week of rain which had stopped early that morning and the day was as clear as Sandwich glass.

That's what the man had said. Haney peered doubtfully at his drinking companion through bleary, tear-filled eyes. He had no ready answer, as much from surprise as from the fit of coughing. Was the man drunk or crazy or both? But his new-found buddy had matched him drink for drink until he lost count, and the man's eyes were still clear. <The guy is off his rocker,> Haney thought to himself, and looked away from those eyes. Eyes that were clear, but also bright with a strange intensity, a sort of cold fire burning behind them. Why hadn't he noticed it before? No, the man was not drunk **h

He wondered how he got tied up with this stranger. But, of course, he remembered now. It was blurred, after two hours of steady drinking, but the occasion of it came back to him. The stranger, his head seemingly sunk in thought, started to cross the street against the light just as a huge moving van roared through the intersection.

Brakes howled and a horn blared furiously, but the man would have been hit if Phil hadn't called out to him a second before. His shout had been involuntary, something anybody might have done without thinking, on the spur of the moment. As a matter of fact, he wouldn't have cared at all if the guy had been hit. Actually, he regretted having opened his mouth when the truck came to a stop and the angry driver jumped down from the cab and walked back toward them. By then, the stranger was thanking Haney profusely and had one arm around his shoulders as if he were an old friend. So the driver started to curse at both of them as if they had been in a plot together to ruin his safe-driving record. Then the man he saved turned and looked squarely into the truck driver's face, without saying a word. Very suddenly, the driver stopped swearing at them, turned on his heel and went back to his truck. Haney hadn't given it much thought at

the time. Now he recalled it very clearly, and wondered what the truck driver had seen in those eyes to make him back off. It must have been the sort of look that can call a bluff without saying a word.

When the light went their way, they went on across the street. And when the stranger found out that Phil was on the way to one of his favorite bars, he insisted on offering to buy drinks for both of them.

Phil usually went alone and kept to himself, sitting in a corner and passing the time by nursing his favorite grudges. But he decided he wouldn't mind company in return for free drinks, even though he made good money at his job. Phil was like that. ##

NOW

he wondered

if it was worth it, having a screwball for company. He really didn't take the offer seriously, but he began to feel uneasy. When he finally got the coughing under control, he realized that Pete (all he gave was his first name) was still waiting for an answer- he didn't even seem to wink as he continued to stare. Haney managed a weak laugh. "Guess I can't think of anyone, Pete. Thanks anyhow".

A faint crease appeared between the man's eyebrows.

"I think you aren't taking me seriously, Phil. I meant it. And everybody has some kind of grudge. I might have got hit by that truck if it wasn't for you. I believe in returning favors. I'll do anything for somebody I like. It won't cost you a cent, Phil. Go ahead and try me"! Phil rubbed his forehead wearily. He was beginning to feel woolly. Maybe it would be better to humor the guy and then make an exit. He really didn't expect anything to come of it, and there <were> a few people **h "All right", he

conceded finally, "if you must know, I don't get along with the landlord. He keeps riding me because I like to listen to the radio and sing while I'm taking a bath. He says the neighbors complain, but I don't believe it. Why don't they tell me themselves if it bothers them"? The man closed his eyes and nodded. When he looked up again, he seemed almost contented. "Fine. Give me your address. It will take a little time. I want to study your landlord's habits and movements first. You see, I always make it look like an accident. Maybe suicide, if it looks reasonable. In that way there's no trouble for the customer". Haney's eyebrows flew up. <"Customer"?> Pete smiled modestly. "It's my line of work", he said **h Five minutes later, before Haney could make his break, the stranger stood up and nodded farewell. Haney watched the small but wiry man slip out the door quickly and silently, and felt relieved to see that nobody else seemed to notice his departure.

Phil decided to stay a little longer, and as time passed it seemed as if the strange little man had never been there, but for the other glass on the table. Some time before midnight he returned

to his apartment and hit the sack, putting the whole incident out of mind before he fell asleep. The next day, Sunday, the hangover reminded Haney where he had been the night before. The hangover in turn reminded him of his conversation with the weirdy, and he groaned. He went for more aspirin later in the day, and passed the surly landlord on the way- he was still alive and scowling as usual, as if tenants were a burden in his life. Phil shrugged and ignored him.

He went back to work Monday. By Wednesday the landlord was still alive. Of course **h On Thursday, Haney mailed the monthly check for separate maintenance to his wife Lolly, and wished the stranger could do something about her **h Coming home from work, he was startled to see a police car parked in front of the apartment building. Inside the lobby, people were standing around, talking excitedly. His spine crawled with a foreboding premonition as he asked one of his fellow tenants what had happened. The landlord had died. Late that afternoon, it seemed, he had fallen off the roof while on some obscure errand or inspection. He had apparently been alone. Nobody witnessed the fall- just the sickening impact when his body smashed on the pavement just outside the basement delivery entrance.

Haney hoped that nobody noticed his sudden pallor, as he felt the blood drain from his cheeks. He muttered something about how terrible it was, and walked with deliberate slowness to the elevator. Once inside his apartment, he poured a drink with trembling hands and flopped limply in a chair. After a while he began to feel better about it, especially when no one bothered to ask any questions. But after all, why should they? Still later, he finally convinced himself that it <was> an accident- just a coincidence. The stranger really had nothing to do with it, of course **h Haney went to bed, happy that at least he was rid of that lousy landlord. After all, the man had no family, so no one suffered, and everybody was better off for it. Really, he said to himself, nobody kills a man just as a favor!

<So you thought I didn't mean what I said>. The stranger's eyes were large and sad, as if Phil Haney had hurt his feelings. It was like a recurrent, annoying dream, but now the dream was beginning to take on overtones of a nightmare. However, Haney knew it was not a dream. He might be very tight, but he knew where he was. It was the same bar, and it was two weeks later- Saturday night, when he had an excuse to drink heavier than usual. ##

HE had been sitting in the usual corner at the little table, as far as possible from any talkative, friendly luses. He was enjoying the weekly ritual of washing down his pet grievance with bourbon slightly moistened with water. This favorite grievance was not the landlord. He had already quite forgotten about him. In fact, he had only mentioned him on the spur of the moment. His real grievance was Lolly. Toward the end of his fourth hairy highball, while he was moodily making wet rings on the table-top with the bottom of the glass, he became

aware that he was not alone. He looked up with bloodshot eyes and beheld the stranger sitting across the table, smiling a secret smile at him, as if they were fellow conspirators. He hadn't even noticed- what was his name? Pete?- he hadn't seen him sit down. The man was uncanny, like a shadow, and made as much noise as a shadow.

Haney felt like shrinking out of sight, but he was already trapped in the corner with the wiry, dark little man. He began to wish that he hadn't shouted that other evening when the truck bore down through the crossing. Was he going to be saddled from now on with a creep for a bar-buddy? He'd have to start going to some of the other places again. In a low voice, almost whispering, the man had asked Phil if he was happy with the way the landlord had been taken off his back. He made the mistake of answering in an offhand way, and instantly realized that his skepticism must have showed in his face or voice.

Pete frowned slightly, then became sad and moody. Haney didn't want to encourage his company, but felt he ought to buy him a drink anyhow, to prevent possible trouble. But there was no trouble. The guy sulked over his drink, obviously upset by Haney's lack of appreciation. To break the uncomfortable silence, Haney began to talk. In time, and two drinks later, he was complaining bitterly about his wife. He was on the subject for ten minutes or so when he noticed the renewed interest in his listener- it showed in the alert face and the suddenly bright eyes. When he paused to moisten his throat, the stranger broke in. "But why pay her bills? If she runs around with other men, and if you hate her as you say, why not just divorce her"? Haney scowled. "That bitch would love a divorce", he growled. "Then she'd get half of everything I have. Community property deal- you know. I'd have to sell out my business to pay her off with her share. She can drop dead"!

Pete nodded understandingly. "Oh yes. Now I see. You must understand, I haven't been in this state too long. I came out here to retire. That's why I- why I do a free job now and then. You should have told me about her before". Haney felt a twinge of annoyance when he heard the now familiar line again. Then a wild thought ran circles through his clouded brain. Suppose- just suppose this guy was really what he said he was! A retired professional killer **h If he was just a nut, no harm was done. But if he was the real thing, he could do something about Lolly. He felt very cunning, very proud of himself as he played on the other man's soft spot.

"No offense intended", he said gently. "But it's just that- well, you know. The cops didn't suspect a thing, and I thought it was a coincidence. After all, I didn't know you, Pete. It <could> have been an accident". He shrugged casually. "But if you say you managed it **h" The stranger was hooked. His eyes burned feverishly. "Yes, yes", he muttered impatiently. "Of course it looked like an accident. I always work it that way- and always at a time when the customer has an alibi. Let me prove it, Phil. I

think I can manage one more favor for you". He waited eagerly.

Haney swished the liquor in the bottom of his glass. About halfway back Pops groped against a wall and stopped, pulled away two loosely nailed wide boards at one end, and went through. "C'mon", he whispered; "floor level's about three feet down, so don't fall". I went through and down, into pitch darkness. He said, "Jist stay still. I'll pull the boards back and then get us a light. Jist stay where you are". I jist stayed where I was while he fumbled around and then walked away. A moment later he struck a match and lighted a candle, and I could see. It was a big room, empty except for a few things of Pop's at the far end- a wooden crate on which stood the candle, a spread out blanket, and an unrolled bindle. I looked back over my shoulder while I went to join him; he'd hung another half of a blanket over the boarded window so no light would show through. I took the pint bottle from my pocket and handed it over as I sat down beside him on the spread blanket. "You first", I said. He drank and handed it back. "Nice place", I told him. "Listen, I got a buddy I travel with, real nice guy named Larry. I know where he is, right near here. Could he join the party and sleep here tonight too? We'll both be blowing town tomorrow so we won't be moving in on you". He hesitated a second, looking at the bottle, before he said "Sure-sure", and I reassured him. "He'll bring a bottle too, and I'll get another one or maybe two while I'm out. You can work on this one while I'm gone, kill it if you want". I took a short swallow from it myself and handed it to him. His "sure-sure" was enthusiastic this time. He put the bottle down. "Git over by the window while there's light, an' I'll put th' candle out. When yuh come back I'll put it out agin till you're both inside".

Charlie was waiting, leaning against a building front. "Perfect set-up", I told him. "But we got to go back to Fifth and get another bottle or two. On the way I'll give you the scoop".

On the way I gave him the scoop. I bought another pint of sherry and when we got back Pops let us in in the dark, put back the blanket and then lighted the candle again. I introduced my friend Larry to Pops and we made ourselves comfortable. There was still a little, not much, left in the first bottle and we passed it around once and killed it, and Charlie opened his. I was reminded, amusedly, by a poem of Kenneth Patchen's called <The Murder of Two Men by a Young Kid Wearing Lemon Colored Gloves>, which Patchen himself read on a record against jazz background. The poem consisted of only two words, the word "Wait", repeated over and over at irregular intervals and with different inflections, and then the word "Now"! and a blaring final chord from the jazz group. This was the same, except that it was the murder of one man by two men and neither of us was wearing gloves. But we could wait all right; there was no hurry. I said, "Wait **h wait" to Charlie and he grinned, digging the reference. We'd heard the record together once.

The second bottle passed a few times. Pop was taking long ones, but not showing the effect yet. He seemed as drunk as when I'd first talked to him, but no drunker. He had a capacity; if we'd really been trying to get him dead drunk we'd have had to go out for more wine. About halfway through the second bottle, Charlie looked at me across Pops, who was sitting between us and asked "Now"? I said, "Wait", and handed the bottle to Pops for his final drink. When he handed it back and I had hold of it safely, Pops was looking toward me and I said "Now", to Charlie and he swung the short length of lead pipe he'd meanwhile taken from his pocket, once. It was a lead pipe cinch. There was a sound like the one you produce by flicking a watermelon with your finger, only louder, and Pops fell forward from the waist and then over sidewise. Out cold, if not dead; and he'd never known what hit him- he'd never known that <anything> had hit him. I reached my hand toward him to put it inside his shirt to feel for a heartbeat, but Charlie said "Wait"!!- and said it sharply, not as in the Patchen bit, but as an order- so I stopped my hand and looked at him. He was holding the piece of lead pipe out to me. "We don't want to know whether he's dead, yet. I gauged that blow to be borderline. To kyo him and maybe or maybe not kill. You hit again about twice that hard before we know whether he's dead or not. That way we'll never know which of us really killed him and which was just the accomplice. Dig"? I dug him, I saw his point; it made sense. I took the piece of pipe from Charlie's hand and used it, harder than he had. The <thunk> was louder, anyway, and I thought I heard bone crack. Charlie said, "Good boy. That did it, if mine didn't. And we'll never know which. All right, now I'll give you a hand". We straightened Pops up and I made sure there was no trace of a heartbeat. I nodded to Charlie. "Let's put him down again the way he was. It's a more natural position". We did that. "How do you feel"? Charlie asked me.

"Cool", I told him. "What do you feel"? "Nothing. Well **h maybe I'm exaggerating. It was a kick, but not a big enough one for me to want to take the chance again, except for stakes. But let's not talk about it abstractly until we're out of here. Now, first question: the bottles. Shall we take them all with us, or leave one"? "Take them", I said. "If we left one we'd have to wipe it for fingerprints. Here's the picture we want to leave for the fuzz- whenever the body gets found. This happened in the middle of a drinking bout with another bum. If they'd been working on a bottle or a jug he'd have taken it with him".

"Right. And he'd have taken the weapon with him too, so we take that. Now"- He looked around. "I've been careful about fingerprints. How about you"? "Same. There are the boards over the window, of course, but they're not painted and too rough to take prints. Same goes for the rough cement of the ledge. Besides, I doubt if the cops will even try dusting. They find dead

winos every day, maybe they won't even autopsy him for the cause of death". "We can't take a chance on that. We've got to assume they'll decide he was murdered and we've got to keep the picture consistent. Our hypothetical other bum who killed him would have turned out his pockets. Let's do that". We did that and found a dirty handkerchief, some matches and fourteen cents in change. We took the matches- they were book matches and once they'd been touched might retain fingerprints- and the change. We discussed the candle and decided the hypothetical other bum would have left it burning to light his way to the window and because he'd have no reason to blow it out. The candle had been stuck on a tin lid so it wouldn't set fire to the crate when it guttered out. A fire wouldn't have mattered except that it would cause Pops to be found sooner. He might not be found for days, even weeks, otherwise. We went once more over every point, then triple-checked. Being picked up for questioning by a cop on the way out seemed to be the only possible remaining danger, and we weren't picked up by a cop. In fact, nobody saw us, cop or citizen. Winsett is a quiet street with no taverns and was completely deserted at that hour. Which, if it matters, was one A&M&. Less than three hours ago we'd decided, in Maxine Wells's pad on Cosmo, to commit a trial murder. It had gone like clockwork. Almost <too> smoothly, I found myself thinking, and then told myself that was ridiculous. How safe is too safe? Thinking like that can get you into a padded pad. An hour later we were back in my unpadded pad, killing what had been left of the second pint. We decided to leave the third one intact for tomorrow. Also our plans for me to commit Charlie's murder and for him to commit mine. But we were really going to do it. We shook hands on it. We planned ahead only one step, a rendezvous for tomorrow when we could swap notes. I'd tell him everything I'd learned about Seaton's habits and habitat, and he'd tell me the score on Radic. We made the date for two o'clock in the afternoon at Maxine Wells's pad. Charlie would get there early because he had the key. From here on in, the less Charlie and I were seen together in public, or visited one another's rooms, the better. I was dead tired and slept soundly, as far as I know dreamlessly. We met at Maxine's and decided we were set to stay as long as it took, into or even through the evening, to talk things out. Charlie had brought food and we'd decided on no drinks. I'd brought along the virgin pint from last night, but we were going to kill that only when we were through talking.

I talked first, telling him everything I knew about Seaton and his house and domestic arrangements. I drew diagrams and floor plans; he memorized them thoroughly and then we tore them into tiny pieces and flushed them down. He gave me equivalent and even more detailed dope on Radic, including diagrams- one of the apartment building Radic lived in and one of the apartment itself. He'd been there several times, back when, while he and Radic had been friends, or at least not enemies. It didn't take us as long as we'd thought it might; it was not quite six o'clock when we finished and Charlie said, "Well, I guess that's it. Shall we flip a coin to see

which of us goes first? Or would you rather deal a hand of show-down poker or play a game of gin rummy, or what"? "Wait a minute, Charlie", I said. "One thing we haven't discussed, expense money. We'll need <some> at least, if only bus fare to the scene of the crime. And if you're as flat broke as I am, I think we'll have to take the added risk of knocking over a filling station or something before we split for one of us to set up an alibi while the other does his dirty work". He sighed. "All right, I'll come clean. I've got a little stashed for a rainy day, and I guess this is rainy enough. A couple of hundred. If you draw the short straw I'll lend you some bread, like fifty bucks, before I take off to visit my sister in Frisco. Then, after I'm back, another fifty so you can put some mileage on yourself and have a solid alibi somewhere while I take care of your seat cover boy". "Solid", I said. I took a deep breath, and the plunge. "In that case, let's not draw. I'll go to bat first. You'd have to wait till Seaton's back from Mexico City and also while I set it up with Doris to have <her> have an alibi for D-night. So it wouldn't be for days or even a week before you could do anything. But your friend Manny can go any time". He grinned and clapped me on the shoulder. "I was hoping you'd say that, Willy. But I wouldn't have suggested it. Well- in that case, I take off tomorrow morning for Frisco. And, in case, I brought the money with me".

Now that he knew himself to be self he was free to grok ever closer to his brothers, merge without let. Self's integrity was and is and ever had been. Mike stopped to cherish all his brother selves, the many threes-fulfilled on Mars, corporate and discorporate, the precious few on Earth- the unknown powers of three on Earth that would be his to merge with and cherish now that at last long waiting he grokked and cherished himself. Mike remained in trance; there was much to grok, loose ends to puzzle over and fit into his growing- all that he had seen and heard and been at the Archangel Foster Tabernacle (not just cusp when he and Digby had come face to face alone) **h why Bishop Senator Boone made him warily uneasy, how Miss Dawn Ardent tasted like a water brother when she was not, the smell of goodness he had incompletely grokked in the jumping up and down and wailing- Jubal's conversations coming and going- Jubal's words troubled him most; he studied them, compared them with what he had been taught as a nestling, struggling to bridge between languages, the one he thought with and the one he was learning to think in. The word "church" which turned up over and over again among Jubal's words gave him knotty difficulty; there was no Martian concept to match it- unless one took "church" and "worship" and "God" and "congregation" and many other words and equated them to the totality of the only world he had known during growing-waiting **h then forced the concept back into English in that phrase which had been rejected (by each differently) by Jubal, by Mahmoud, by Digby.

<"Thou art God">. He was closer to understanding

it in English now, although it could never have the inevitability of the Martian concept it stood for. In his mind he spoke simultaneously the English sentence and the Martian word and felt closer grokking. Repeating it like a student telling himself that the jewel is in the lotus he sank into nirvana. Before midnight he speeded his heart, resumed normal breathing, ran down his check list, uncurled and sat up. He had been weary; now he felt light and gay and clear-headed, ready for the many actions he saw spreading out before him.

He felt a puppyish need for company as strong as his earlier necessity for quiet. He stepped out into the hall, was delighted to encounter a water brother. <"Hi"!> "Oh. Hello, Mike.

My,
you look chipper". "I feel fine! Where is everybody"?

"Asleep. Ben and Stinky went home an hour ago and people started going to bed". "Oh". Mike felt disappointed that Mahmoud had left; he wanted to explain his new grokking.

"I ought to be asleep, too, but I felt like a snack. Are you hungry"?

"Sure, I'm hungry"! "Come on, there's some cold chicken and we'll see what else". They went downstairs, loaded a tray lavishly. "Let's take it outside. It's plenty warm". "A fine idea", Mike agreed. "Warm enough to swim- real Indian summer. I'll switch on the floods".

"Don't bother", Mike answered. "I'll carry the tray". He could see in almost total darkness. Jubal said that his night-sight probably came from the conditions in which he had grown up, and Mike grokked this was true but grokked that there was more to it; his foster parents had taught him to see. As for the night being warm, he would have been comfortable naked on Mount Everest but his water brothers had little tolerance for changes in temperature and pressure; he was considerate of their weakness, once he learned of it. But he was looking forward to snow- seeing for himself that each tiny crystal of the water of life was a unique individual, as he had read- walking barefoot, rolling in it. In the meantime he was pleased with the warm night and the still more pleasing company of his water brother. "Okay, take the tray. I'll switch on the underwater lights. That'll be plenty to eat by". "Fine". Mike liked having light up through the ripples; it was a goodness, beauty. They picnicked by the pool, then lay back on the grass and looked at stars. "Mike, there's Mars. It is Mars, isn't it? Or Antares"? "It is Mars". "Mike? What are they doing on Mars"? He hesitated; the question was too wide for the sparse English language. "On the side toward the horizon- the southern hemisphere- it is spring; plants are being taught to grow". "'Taught to grow'"?

He hesitated. "Larry teaches plants to grow. I have

helped him. But my people- Martians, I mean; I now grok <you> are my people- teach plants another way. In the other hemisphere it is growing colder and nymphs, those who stayed alive through the summer, are being brought into nests for quickening and more growing". He thought. "Of the humans we left at the equator, one has disincorporated and the others are sad". Yes, I heard it in the news".

Mike had not heard it; he had not known it until asked.
"They should not be sad. Mr& Booker T& W& Jones Food Technician First Class is not sad; the Old Ones have cherished him".

"You knew him"? "Yes. He had his own face, dark and beautiful. But he was homesick". "Oh, dear! Mike **h do you ever get homesick? For Mars"? "At first I was homesick", he answered. "I was lonely always". He rolled toward her and took her in his arms. "But now I am not lonely. I grok I shall never be lonely again". "Mike darling"- They kissed, and went on kissing. Presently his water brother said breathlessly. "Oh, my! That was almost worse than the first time". "You are all right, my brother"?

"Yes. Yes indeed. Kiss me again". A long time later, by cosmic clock, she said, "Mike? Is that- I mean, 'Do you know'" - "I know. It is for growing closer. Now we grow closer". "Well **h I've been ready a long time- goodness, we <all> have, but **h never mind, dear; turn just a little. I'll help". As they merged, grokking together, Mike said softly and triumphantly: "Thou art God". Her answer was not in words. Then, as their grokking made them ever closer and Mike felt himself almost ready to disincorporate her voice called him back: "Oh! **h <Oh! Thou> art God"! "We grok God". #/25,.#

On Mars humans were building pressure domes for the male and female party that would arrive by next ship. This went faster than scheduled as the Martians were helpful. Part of the time saved was spent on a preliminary estimate for a long-distance plan to free bound oxygen in the sands of Mars to make the planet more friendly to future human generations. The Old Ones neither helped nor hindered this plan; time was not yet. Their meditations were approaching a violent cusp that would shape Martian art for many millennia. On Earth elections continued and a very advanced poet published a limited edition of verse consisting entirely of punctuation marks and spaces; <Time> magazine reviewed it and suggested that the Federation Assembly Daily Record should be translated into the medium. A colossal campaign opened to sell more sexual organs of plants and Mrs& Joseph ("Shadow of Greatness") Douglas was quoted as saying: "I would no more sit down without flowers on my table than without serviettes". A Tibetan swami from Palermo, Sicily, announced in Beverly Hills a newly discovered, ancient

yoga discipline for ripple breathing which increased both pranha and cosmic attraction between sexes. His chelas were required to assume the matsyendra posture dressed in hand-woven diapers while he read aloud from Rig-Veda and an assistant guru examined their purses in another room- nothing was stolen; the purpose was less immediate.

The President of the United States proclaimed the first Sunday in November as "National Grandmothers' Day" and urged America to say it with flowers. A funeral parlor chain was indicted for price-cutting. Fosterite bishops, after secret conclave, announced the Church's second Major Miracle: Supreme Bishop Digby had been translated bodily to Heaven and spot-promoted to Archangel, ranking with-but-after Archangel Foster. The glorious news had been held up pending Heavenly confirmation of the elevation of a new Supreme Bishop, Huey Short- a candidate accepted by the Boone faction after lots had been cast repeatedly. <L'Unita> and <Hoy> published identical denunciations of Short's elevation, <L'Osservatore Romano> and the <Christian Science Monitor> ignored it, <Times of India> snickered at it, and the Manchester <Guardian> simply reported it- the Fosterites in England were few but extremely militant. Digby was not pleased with his promotion. The Man from Mars had interrupted him with his work half finished- and that stupid jackass Short was certain to louse it up. Foster listened with angelic patience until Digby ran down, then said, "Listen, junior, you're an angel now- so forget it. Eternity is no time for recriminations. You too were a stupid jackass until you poisoned me. Afterwards you did well enough. Now that Short is Supreme Bishop he'll do all right, he can't help it. Same as with the Popes. Some of them were warts until they got promoted. Check with one of them, go ahead- there's no professional jealousy here". Digby calmed down, but made one request. Foster shook his halo. "You can't touch him. You shouldn't have tried to. Oh, you can submit a requisition for a miracle if you want to make a fool of yourself. But, I'm telling you, it'll be turned down- you don't understand the System yet. The Martians have their own setup, different from ours, and as long as they need him, we can't touch him. They run their show their way- the Universe has variety, something for everybody- a fact you field workers often miss". "You mean this punk can brush me aside and I've got to hold still for it"? "I held still for the same thing, didn't I? I'm helping you now, am I not? Now look, there's work to be done and lots of it. The Boss wants performance, not gripes. If you need a Day off to calm down, duck over to the Muslim Paradise and take it. Otherwise, straighten your halo, square your wings, and dig in. The sooner you act like an angel the quicker you'll feel angelic. Get Happy, junior"! Digby heaved a deep ethereal sigh. "Okay, I'm Happy. Where do I start"? Jubal did not hear of Digby's disappearance when it was announced, and, when he did, while he had a fleeting suspicion, he dismissed it; if Mike had had a finger in it, he had gotten away with it- and what happened

to supreme bishops worried Jubal not at all as long as he wasn't bothered. His household had gone through an upset. Jubal deduced what had happened but did not know with whom- and didn't want to inquire. Mike was of legal age and presumed able to defend himself in the clinches. Anyhow, it was high time the boy was salted.

Jubal couldn't reconstruct the crime from the way the girls behaved because patterns kept shifting- ~ABC ~<vs> ~D, then ~BCD

~<vs> ~A **h or ~AB ~<vs> ~CD, or ~AD

~<vs>

~CB, through all ways that four women can gang up on each other. This continued most of the week following that ill-starred trip to church, during which period Mike stayed in his room and usually in a trance so deep that Jubal would have pronounced him dead had he not seen it before. Jubal would not have minded it if service had not gone to pieces. The girls seemed to spend half their time tiptoeing in "to see if Mike was all right" and they were too preoccupied to cook, much less be secretaries. Even rock-steady Anne- Hell, Anne was the worst! Absent-minded, subject to unexplained tears **h Jubal would have bet his life that if Anne were to witness the Second Coming, she would memorize date, time, personae, events, and barometric pressure without batting her calm blue eyes.