

walked slowly, stepping carefully as if his feet were sinking into deep muck. "Well, of all people," he said cheerfully. "I certainly am glad to see you, Don."

He didn't mention the blood on your face, your hand. Maybe he thinks it all came from that beating Max gave you. "They treat you okay, My?"

"No complaints." Grolheim sat down on the other end of the bed from Army. "I'm a little tired of hamburg sandwiches, though." He closed his eyes as if exhausted.

Army said: "We got the dough. It's over there on the desk. I'll give you your share in a minute."

"No hurry." Grolheim flapped a hand up negligently. "No rush. I'm not worried about the money. Everything's all right, now Don's here."

Missus Chadbourne beamed: "You see, Mister Cadee?"

Don said: "Everything's not all right with Jim Preston, is it, My?"

The fur buyer roused himself as if from a daydream. He shook his head like a dog coming out of the water. "No," he said more loudly. "Of course it isn't, Don." His shoulders straightened. "*They killed Preston, you know that?* They murdered him in cold blood. They'll have to pay for that, won't they, Don?"

Army spoke savagely. "You'll pay, you weasly son of a bitch. Take him back, Gretchen. They'll both pay now. This one goes first!"

She cried: "No, no more, Army! Don't! You'll . . . you'll have to kill me, too, if you do it. I won't stand for it—I won't—I won't——"

Strong light filtered in through the venetians.

"Shut up," Army whispered. "Car outside. Stopping here." He crept to the window, lifted a slat, peered out.

Don slid his feet over the side of the bed.

Sib, he thought. She followed us somehow!

• • • Chapter 33

ARMY MOVED AWAY FROM THE WINDOW. "It's HER!" HE snatched the brief case. "Here." He tossed the .45 to Missus Chadbourne.

She caught it. "What'll I do?"

"Use it, if you have to." Army took four quick steps to the door of the bathroom. "Keep these babies in line." He included Don and Myron in his disdainful gesture. "Keep her outa my hair." He stepped into the bathroom. "I'll be in the john. You can handle it. Get rid of her, but fast. We got work to do." He shut the door.

Knuckles rapped at the door.

Gretchen Chadbourne shoved the gun down in the pocket of her suede coat. "Just a sec . . ." she called.

Don came to his feet, saw a figure covered with a sheet on the carpet beyond the bed Army had been sitting on. Shoes showed at the bottom of the sheet. Square-toed men's shoes. The kind Press always wore.

Missus Chadbourne opened the door.

Lily Inez filled the doorway. She still wore the Gay Nineties costume beneath the shimmering splendor of the crown sable coat. "Gretchen! Are we in time?"

Behind her loomed the tall figure of her manager, in a shaggy ulster. He was white with fear, or—Don thought—possibly anger. His eyes searched the room. "Where's Arnold?"

Grolheim stood as if hypnotized, gazing enraptured at the quivering beauty of the blue-brown fur. Don seized his arm, drew him back, stepped in front of him.

Gretchen backed against the writing table where she could