

The usher made a movement as if to push away the bribe. "I guess you can go in." He slid his closed fist into his pocket. "Just don't say I let you through."

Don strolled into the noisy confusion of reflectors, cameras, lights, microphone booms—picked his way over snaking cables, through a crowd of shirt-sleeved technicians, toward a trio of sets at the far end of the studio. A dozen people clustered around a long table where a young man in horn rims and a houndstooth jacket was dealing out pages off a pile of papers.

"New pages eleven, twelve, kiddies. Turn in your old pages, get your revisions. Going to run through it in a minute."

Don spoke to the assistant director at the table. "Where can I find Miss Inez?"

"You can't." The other continued to hand out script pages. "Couldn't find her myself. Just tried."

Don put his hand on the assistant director's shoulder. "Is Mister Hadley here?"

The horn rims looked up at him owlishly. "Who're you?"

"Name is Cadee. Mister Hadley knows me."

"Past that set. Through the little door. Turn left. Office there."

Don followed directions, filed past a queue of musicians returning from a break. There were three men in the office. One hammered at a typewriter. Another leaned over his shoulder. The third was Hadley; he sat hunched low in a swivel chair, cradling a phone on his chest, fluttering one of the childish hands as he talked. His eyes turned mechanically toward Don; it was a moment before recognition was complete. Then Hadley set the phone on its rack.

"For godsake, what happened to you, my friend?"

"Ran into a bit of trouble about that birthday present." As far as Don could tell, neither of the others noticed the interruption. "Want to make sure Miss Inez doesn't run into the same kind. Have to talk to her right away."

Hadley put an arm around Don's shoulders, drew him out of the office. "Mean to say you were actually *attacked*?" He looked as if he was on the verge of a sneeze.

"By one of the team that hijacked those crown sables, yes."