

Alice Stein's chunky figure was pinning a young girl in the corner beyond the heavy table. The girl's wrists were being held firmly but, between screeches, she was biting at Alice's neck and butting her in the face.

Don reached over his operative's shoulder, got a grip on the girl's hair, held her head back against the wall.

"Watch her nails!" Alice warned. "She's a slasher. She ruined a couple hundred dollars' worth of lingerie before they got wise to her. Broken razor blades under her nails."

She's a handsome little hellion, Don thought. Blond and slim and full of fizz and vinegar. Fourteen, maybe fifteen. *That beaver shortie she's wearing set some proud parent back quite a stack of coupons.*

The girl sneered, "Lingerie! Wait till you find out what I did to those nylons. And if you want a real laugh, take a look at those seventy-five-dollar crocodile handbags!"

Don spoke over his shoulder. "Miss Kahn. Get the nurse down here. Tell her to bring sedatives. If the doctor's in the store, ask him to come along too."

"I don't want any damned doctor," the girl cried. "You can't make me take any medicine. I won't take any!"

"You act," Don said, "as if you've already had something. You been smoking reefers?"

"Sure." She mocked him gleefully. "I'm hopped up till I'm ready to pop. But don't ever think I'm not responsible for my actions. I knew what I was doing and I'll do it again."

Don let go of the blond hair. "Want everybody to notice how bad you are, don't you? What's the matter? You're good-looking enough to get all the attention you want, without acting like a sulky six-year-old. Who you trying to get even with?"

"You." She showed nice even teeth in pure insolence. "You and everybody else in this crummy old store."

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Jane Doe. And I live in a whorehouse on West Forty-sixth. Anything else you want to know?" She began to laugh, rolling her head from side to side with her eyes closed, the laughter coming in crescendo bursts, louder and louder.

Alice said quietly: "Faking. And she's no addict, Don."

"I know she isn't, Al. Doesn't she have a handbag?"

"No. May have a wallet in her coat."

The laughter stopped suddenly. "Try and find it," the girl panted. "I live on what I make as a streetwalker. I have no visible means of support; you'll have to arrest me and take me to court."

The nurse hustled in starchily, regarded the girl amiably.

Don said: "Young lady fancies herself as a malicious bitch. She's been slashing merchandise. Want to be sure she doesn't slash herself in a fit of remorse, nurse."

"*Remorse!*" the girl screeched hysterically. "*Me . . . remorseful? How ridiculous can you be!*"

The nurse scolded her. "Behave, now. Sit down. Over there. Stop putting on an act. We're used to those shenanigans."

Alice followed Don to the outer office. "Something screwy about her, Don. She comes from a good family . . . at least from a family with a good income. You know what I think? She wants to go to jail . . . to hurt someone close to her."

Sibyl peered in at the detainee. "You know, I think I've seen that kid's picture in the papers recently—or maybe in a magazine."

Don said: "See if you can find a cleaner's mark on her clothes, Al. We'll have to get in touch with her folks." He hated slashers as much as any store executive, but Al and the nurse could handle that, time being.

Becky called: "Mister Stoltz on One."

Don took it. "Yes, Bob."

"Couple of headquarters men on their way up to see you, boy," Stoltz sounded grave. "I passed the buck to you because it's about Myron Grolheim."

"What about him?"

"Cop on the beat noticed his house had been broken into. He called a prowler car. The detectives went in and found a dead man on the kitchen floor."

• • • • Chapter 14

DON'S KNUCKLES WHITENED ON THE RECEIVER. "THEY IDENTIFY THE DEAD MAN?"

"DON'T BELIEVE SO." Stolz was worried. "I thought of Jim Preston right away, of course. But I was afraid I might cross you up by asking the wrong questions."

"WHAT DID YOU SAY?"

"ONLY THAT GROLHEIM HADN'T SHOWED UP AT THE STORE THIS MORNING, NO ONE IN THE FUR SALON HAD HEARD FROM HIM, SO YOU WERE TRYING TO LOCATE HIM. NOTHING ABOUT THE . . . COAT. ARE YOU GOING TO TELL 'EM YOU WERE UP THERE?"

"DEPENDS." *If the dead man was Press, I'll have to spill the whole story and to hell with secrecy. If it was My Grolheim, it'll all have to come out, too; the chips can fall where they may.* "I'll call you back, soon as I can." He hung up.

Sibyl breathed: "A dead man, Don?"

"COPS SAW THAT BROKEN BASEMENT DOOR, WENT IN, AND FOUND A BODY. IF THEY MADE ANY IDENTIFICATION, THEY DIDN'T LET ON TO BOB STOLZ. COUPLE OF THE HOMICIDE CREW ARE ON THEIR WAY UP HERE NOW."

She put a hand to her throat as if it hurt her to speak. "SUPPOSE IT WAS . . . PRESS."

"I HAVE TO MAKE SURE BEFORE I TELL THEM ABOUT MAX AND THE GIRL, ABOUT MY HAVING BEEN UP THERE."

"THEY'LL FIND IT OUT, SOONER OR LATER." Sibyl searched his eyes. "OUR FINGERPRINTS WILL BE ALL OVER THE PLACE."

"IF PRESS IS DEAD, THAT WON'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE. WE'LL HAVE TO GET THE MACHINERY GOING TO RUN DOWN MAX AND HIS PALS. NO SENSE HOLDING BACK ANYTHING . . . UNLESS PRESS IS STILL ALIVE."

"But if you stall and later on they learn you were at Grolheim's—it'll put you in a corner, Don."

"Both of us . . . in the same corner. That's right. You want to take that gamble? It might have unpleasant consequences, Sib."

She was indignant. "You know better than to ask."

"Thought I did." He smiled tautly.

Becky Kahn announced a Lieutenant Dimmock, a Sergeant Quinton.

"One minute," Don told the intercom.

Sibyl said: "Want me to stay?"

"No. Want you to get a line on Mister Norman Rettjer."

"The tycoon's tycoon?" She was surprised. "The princely giver?"

"Shot in the dark. He's a friend of Bob Stolz. You said the customer would be."

"Yes. Also, he'd have that kind of money to fling around. And he'd be scared of scandal too."

"See if you can sniff out some. But *sub rosa*, Sib."

"Soul of discretion." She went out.

Through the open office door came a screech of fury from the slasher. "You can't make me take any of your damn medicine! I won't take it!"

Don shook hands with Dimmock, a chesty middle-aged detective whose blue serge seemed to be buttoned around a barrel. He had the suspicious eyes and the hard, expressionless features of a man accustomed to constant contact with deception. The eyes inspected Don's bruised countenance; the lieutenant's face remained impassive.

Quinton, on the other hand, looked like a rangy, young executive in some prosperous advertising agency; he was suave and affable in the best Madison Avenue manner.

Dimmock got right down to business. "Your manager says you're anxious to get in touch with this Mister Grolheim. Expect we're even more concerned than you are. We want to ask him about a dead man found in his house this morning."

Don said: "You sure it wasn't Grolheim you found?"

Quinton answered. "Gentleman we talked to downstairs

says your fur buyer is a small man, middle-aged, dark hair, dark complexion. Right?"

"That's right." Don nodded. "What did the dead man look like?"

"Like he'd been picked on by a pile driver," Dimmock said. "Face beat in. Hell of a mess. Now about this Grolheim, Mister Stoltz said you might have a photograph."

Don spoke to the intercom. "Mister Grolheim's Confidential folder, please, Miss Kahn." He turned to Dimmock. "From what I know of Myron Grolheim, he wouldn't have the strength or the stamina to beat up a schoolboy. How old would you say the victim was?"

Quinton smiled skeptically. "Be surprised what a little man can do if he gets mad enough, Mister Cadee. We had a case, only couple weeks ago. Old boy in his sixties, wouldn't have weighed more'n a hundred-twenty in a diving suit, took a hammer to a moving man come to take back some installment furniture. Fella looked like he'd been kicked in the teeth by a mule."

Becky came in with the folder; a shrill scream from the Interview Room came in with her. The Homicide men exchanged curious glances.

Don handed the folder across the desk to Dimmock. "You'll see by the physical description that Mister Grolheim wouldn't have been able to put up much of a battle with a man who was heavier than he was. Did this dead man have a muscular build?"

"Yeah," Dimmock said offhandedly. "With this descrip, we'll have enough to put out a pickup flyer on Grolheim. You got any dope on his relatives, friends?"

Don spread his hands. "I have the records of more than two thousand employees of Ambletts in those files, Lieutenant. You can see it would be impossible for us to keep tabs on all of them." *Why are you holding out on me? Is it because somebody saw me leaving the West End house with Sib this morning and you want me to commit myself?*

Quinton said: "We don't expect the impossible, Mister

Cadee. But we thought you might be able to suggest some reason for your fur buyer's absence."

Don said carefully: "I saw him for a few minutes yesterday afternoon. As far as I know, he expected to be in this morning. His assistant, Miss Gates, looked for him as usual. His record here has been tops; he's been in responsible positions with leading stores for years. Not the sort to run out on his company."

"Middle-aged men"—Quinton shook his head amiably—"do some peculiar things. Glandular disturbances, you know. We had a case—"

Dimmock broke in sharply. "Think you ought to know that the gentleman has taken all his clothing—suits, shirts, the works—from his house. Sort of thing a man does when he's planning to skip the locality. Makes it hard for us to entertain any suggestion of self-defense. Now if he'd stayed put after the battle he had with this boy, if he'd called the precinct and asked for a couple of officers to come over—there'd been a fight and the kid was dead—why, we'd be able to book him on manslaughter instead of murder."

"Boy?" Don tried to keep the monosyllable from disclosing his feelings.

Quinton answered quickly. "Pretty hard to pin down his age until we get the Medexam's report, you know. Fifteen, possibly sixteen. Did Mister Grolheim have a car?"

"A green and brown Pontiac station wagon, late model." *It was Max, not Press! Max, who nearly beat you to death. The little bastard who would have killed you if it hadn't been for the girl in the turquoise dress.* A sense of relief flooded over him.

Dimmock said: "Then Grolheim wouldn't have been likely to be hiring a chauffeur? This dead kid had on a chauffeur's uniform."

"I wouldn't know, of course," Don said cautiously, "but Mister Grolheim didn't seem to me like the limousine type."

Quinton took the folder from Dimmock, scanned it swiftly. "Was your fur buyer especially interested in young boys?"

Don kept his temper. "Only in his son who is in a military academy, I believe. A very normal guy, Mister Grolheim, in

my opinion. Could this youngster have been a burglar, perhaps?"

"Sure," Dimmock said. "He could have been. It still doesn't explain why a householder who surprised a thief and battered him to death should clear out without notifying the authorities."

Quinton tucked the folder under his arm. "There'll be something more to it than burglary, you can bet on that, Mister Cadee. We'll have the answer within twenty-four hours, you can bet on that, too."

Dimmock said: "Meantime you'll keep in touch with us, Mister Cadee? If you hear from your fur buyer, I mean."

"Sure," Don said. "Excuse me." The red button on the intercom glowed on, off, on, off, on again.

"Yes, Miss Kahn."

"Uh . . . call for you on Two," his secretary murmured. "*I don't know whether you want to talk to him, now.*"

"Put him on." He knew whose voice he would hear when he picked up the phone and he wasn't disappointed.

• • • • Chapter 15

DON LEANED BACK IN HIS CHAIR, JAMMING THE RECEIVER against his ear. "How you doing, fella?"

"All right, so far," Grolheim said calmly. "I just wanted to let you know that the Lily Inez will go back to town this evening."

"That's fine, fine." No mistaking the timbre of the buyer's voice; still, there was something decidedly queer about Grolheim's way of talking, Don thought. It was almost as if the man had dictated to a tape recording device. But of course that

couldn't be, since Grolheim was replying to the remarks made to him. "You'll be coming too?"

"Not right away, Don. Not until tomorrow, probably. Better have Miss Gates get those Fur Festival proofs out of my top drawer and okay them. They have to be in today." The buyer was as matter-of-fact as if the past fourteen hours had been a blank slate.

"I'll take care of that." Don could see Dimmock's head cocked slightly to one side, straining to hear the other half of the phone conversation. The lieutenant was suspicious; it wouldn't be smart to ask direct questions but there was one query which had to be put—guardedly. "How's Jim making out, boy?"

Grolheim's tone became fainter, as if he had moved back from the transmitter. "Oh . . . I nearly forgot to tell you—he's going in with the sables. Might let his wife know."

"I'll do that." Don felt perspiration on his forehead, knew Dimmock had noticed it, was wondering why Don was sweating blood. He couldn't gain much by continuing this restrained double-talk; still he had the feeling that Grolheim was struggling to get through with something more coherent than the casual conversation had provided up to now. "About what time, should I tell her?"

"Well . . . I can't say . . . probably—oh, sometime after the rehearsal is over." The buyer was plainly confused. "Eleven or so. Something like that. Well, see you tomorrow, Don." There was an abrupt click.

Don waited a moment before hanging up. "Take it easy, boy," he said to the dead line. He couldn't let it seem as if he'd been cut off cold. "Sorry for the interruption, gentlemen."

Quinton was speaking almost before he'd racked the receiver. "This Grolheim—is he separated from his wife?"

Don said: "He's a widower; it's there in the file. Why?"

The sergeant smiled. "We have reason to believe there was a woman in the house at the time the crime was committed."

Reason? What kind of reason? What had they found up there on West End? Traces of facepowder? A coppery hair? Had Sibyl left a handkerchief? Maybe the woman wasn't with Mis-

ter Grolheim. Couldn't she have been with this youngster who was killed?"

"Yeah," Lieutenant Dimmock said sourly. "She could have been the one who pounded him to a pulp, all we know." He stared with open hostility. "You wouldn't be giving us any run-around, trying to keep your store out of the papers, Mister Cadee? If you had any news about this Grolheim you wouldn't hold it back now, would you?"

Don put on a prop scowl of resentment. "If you have any doubts about the way Ambletts co-operates with the police, ask your precinct captain; he'll tell you we play ball. However"—he slapped the blotter gently with the flat of his hand—"you can understand that the store wouldn't like to have one of our executives accused of murder until he's at least had a chance to defend himself against the charge. We back up our people until we find there's good reason not to, Lieutenant."

"Back 'em up all you want," Dimmock growled. "Just don't buck us."

"On the contrary," Don said, "I'll help all I can. Go down to the morgue with you right now, see if I can identify this kid . . . ?"

"You couldn't." Quinton waved the offer aside. "Features were mutilated too much; his own father wouldn't recognize him. We'll have to work from fingerprints, dental charts, clothing, see?"

Dimmock stalked toward the door. "Where'll we find this assistant of Grolheim's?"

"Miss Gates may be out of the store." Don went to the outer office with them. "Miss Kahn, see if you can get hold of Baisha Gates. These gentlemen want to talk to her."

Sergeant Quinton shook hands. "We'll have to tell your switchboard girls to hold up any outside calls from Mister Grolheim until they can be traced."

"Good idea," Don said evenly. "I was going to do that, myself."

Miss Kahn reported that Miss Gates was out of the store, wasn't expected back until after lunch.

Dimmock grunted. "Leave word we'll be in to see her." He

"No. Maybe I should have told them, but I didn't. Keeping my fingers crossed for Press."

"Might get yourself in trouble. Want to be damn careful."

"I am being. Some fat's in the fire already. Can't keep that from spattering onto the front pages. But I'll do my best to see it doesn't burn any innocent bystanders."

"Know you will, Don. Keep me in touch. I'm goddamn upset about this."

Who isn't? Don retorted silently as he hung up. Only person who doesn't seem to be bothered is My Grolheim. Have we all misjudged the little man?

He rejected the possibility that the buyer had been responsible for Max's death. Whatever might be concealed beneath Grolheim's gloominess, his nervous apprehensions, his apparent nonchalance on the telephone, the man was not the homicidal type.

From what he had seen of the girl in the turquoise dress, she hadn't appeared to be the sort who would have battered a boy's face so it resembled nothing human.

Unless there were still other members of the hijack gang, that left only the man with the nasty smile Salvatore had described. He'd have been with Grolheim during that phone call just now. Would, even before that, have known all he needed to know from the contents of the wallet Max had taken with Don's clothes.

"Want to be damn careful!" Not much need of that warning! Not with a probable murderer in possession of keys to the store, your office, your hotel room, your car. . . .

Becky drove in on his thoughts. "Miss Stein says she has to see you right away."

"Be right out."

Alice Stein stood by his secretary's desk, a handkerchief pressed to her ear. "We'll have to get that hellcat out of here, Mister Cadee. She's practically clawed the nurse's eyes out. I can't figure what's eating her but she ought to be in a strait jacket."

"Maybe we'll have to put her there, Al." He went in the Interview Room.

• • • • Chapter 16

BY TEN, A PLAIN-CLOTHES MAN AND A MATRON FROM THE precinct had taken the girl to Bellevue; Alice Stein was listening to the explanations of an indignant dowager who had been apprehended while "simply taking the garment out to the street so she could see how it looked in daylight"; Protection was settling down to its daily procession of amateur pilferers and professional boosters. The show did not divert Don's attention from the curious problem of My Grolheim's implausible attitude.

Just now, on the phone, the buyer hadn't seemed at all concerned about his own precarious situation. Yet less than twenty-four hours ago he had acted like a man genuinely alarmed for his own safety. But yesterday he had been in no actual danger, while today he must certainly have realized his peril. Had he been so numbed by the hijacking, the attack on Press, the death of Max that he could no longer think clearly? It seemed improbable.

The intercom announced Miss Forde on One.

"Hello," he said. "You'll be glad to know the guy the cops found up on West End wasn't Press."

"It's a black dog off my back," Sibyl said. "Who was he?"

"Teen-age torpedo who worked me over. Somebody had worked on him, with more permanent results."

"Police know you were up there, Don?"

"Not yet. No. It would have required too much explanation."

"Still will. You're only postponing the evil hour."

"If I can postpone it until tomorrow it may turn the trick.

Now why don't you go home, catch a quick nap? You didn't get any sleep to speak of. . . ."

"Neither did you, unless you count the time you were unconscious. Anyhow I couldn't rest until I knew for sure about Press. I'm going to scout around the exclusive shops to see if I can get a line on that turquoise gown. And if I do get a lead, where will I find you?"

"How about the Red Boar, one o'clock?"

"At the bar," she agreed. "I'll need another pickup by then."

He gave Becky the number he'd seen on the gold receiver at Lily Inez's apartment. The maid answered.

"This is Cadee of Ambletts. Let me speak to Miss Inez."

"She is not here. She is at the rehearsal."

"What studio is that, Frances?"

The maid hesitated. "Twenty Em. But you cannot call her there. She will not be disturbed. You may leave a message with me, if you wish."

"Maybe later, thanks." He put on his topcoat, told Becky where he was going, adjusted his hat so the band didn't press too tightly over the swollen eye.

At the Interview Room he paused only long enough to wig-wag Alice that she was to take over at his desk. He thought of getting her to caution Baisha Gates about Dimmock and Quinton but decided there would be plenty of time for that before the Homicide men returned.

He walked to the telecasting building, found the big studio, ran into a uniformed usher at the door.

"No visitors, mister."

"I have a message for Miss Inez," Don said.

"Leave it with me. I'll see she gets it. But you can't come in."

Don took out a business card, wrote "About Mr. R." on it, held it out. "How much do you want to bet I can't come in, if you get that to her right away?"

The usher glanced around to make sure no one was watching. "You're not one of those lousy process servers, are you?"

"She'll tell you I'm not." Don fingered his wallet. "Bet you five she tells you to bring me in." He pulled the five halfway out of the billfold section.

"You—tracked them down?"

"Not exactly. I'm not the only one in on the tracking down, either. Police are involved now."

"No!" Hadley was clearly shocked; he dropped his arm.
"But you promised—"

"I didn't bring them into it," Don said. "And so far the cops don't know Miss Inez is mixed up in the mess. But they're bound to find out. You can't soft-pedal a murder."

"You . . . uh . . . said *murder*?" The pink washed out of Elton Hadley's face as if a gray shadow had fallen over the high forehead. "Who . . . ?"

"Look," Don said impatiently, "last night I tried to get Miss Inez to tell me what she knew about this crown sable business; she might have prevented a killing if she hadn't dumbed up. Now I'm not going to horse around with her any longer. Either she talks to me here and now, or to the police this afternoon."

Hadley swallowed before he answered. "Friend, you have her all wrong. Lil wasn't dumbing up. She was scared to death. That's the fact. She'll tell you why. Come on. I'll take you to her."

• • • • Chapter 17

THE MANAGER STRODE ALONG THE CORRIDOR, TURNED A CORNER, led the way up a short flight, down a wide hall past a picture-windowed booth with tiered theater seats like a projection room overlooking the confusion of apparatus, the churning activity on the studio floor below. Across the hall from this observation booth was a narrow door with a red-lettered warning:

MAINTENANCE—KEEP OUT.

Hadley rapped on it.

"Had to have her dressing room switched up here," he started to explain. "Last week we had a disagreeable——"

The door opened suddenly. Lily Inez, youthful in white tailored shirt and tight black skirt, gazed in astonishment. "Why, Mister Cadee! You've been in an accident!"

"Nothing accidental, no." Don took in the scanty furnishings of the temporary dressing room—make-up table with mirrors and a clutter of jars, a chaise, a small coffee table with an electric *espresso* machine, some chairs such as undertakers use. "I took a beating, Miss Inez. Trying to find out who stole your sables."

"Oh, God!" She registered instant sympathy. "I'm so frightfully sorry."

"Sorry?" he repeated dourly. "That's hardly enough."

"Our friend is sore, Lil." Hadley closed the door, put one foot up on a folding chair, crossed his arms, and rested them on his knee. "He thinks you held out on him last night, that if you'd spoken up then you might have prevented a killing."

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "Who was killed?"

"Police haven't made an identification yet." Don wondered whether her shocked expression was theatrical or genuine. "Body's down at the morgue. But I had a pretty good look at him. Also, Mister Grolheim described him to me yesterday afternoon."

She fiddled nervously with a cigarette while he gave details of his visit to the fur buyer's home, the encounter with Max. He didn't mention the girl in the turquoise gown. "Bastard had buck teeth and pale green eyes and sideburns; his skin was bad and his talk was tough. Recognize him?"

"No." She glanced up at Hadley as if for confirmation. "Sounds as if he was a perfectly hideous monster. I don't believe I'd ever be able to forget anyone so horrible . . . if I'd ever seen him."

"Thing is"—Hadley wagged plump little fingers—"the cops

have seen him. They're sure to find out he was one of those who hijacked the coat; then they'll want to know why you didn't report the theft last night. You better set Mister Cadee straight, or I wouldn't blame him for thinking you know a lot more about it than you actually do."

"What I think"—Don was impatient—"is that you'd better realize there's a lot more at stake than any fancy fur piece. Two of Amblett's men are still in the hands of a gang that doesn't balk at anything in the book."

Lily Inez put her hand on Hadley's sleeve. "Elton . . . you'll have to tell them I feel too wretched to run through the script this morning. I simply could not make it."

"I fix." Hadley looked unhappy. "It'll mean overtime tonight. But you're in no shape to rehearse." He went to the door. "Don't forget to take your ten-thirty pill."

"All right." She rose to lock the door behind him. "I feel as if I've been rehearsing a nightmare for the last ten days. I'm closer to a crack-up than an egg that just rolled off the table." She shook a small pink tablet from a plastic phial. "A nightmare all day every day and no sleep at night. I wish to Christ I'd never heard of the damn sables." She sat on the bench before the glittering make-up mirrors.

"Does the gentleman who bought the coat know how you feel about it?" Don asked.

"Oh yes." Lily Inez popped the pill into her mouth, poured a chaser from a thermos jug. "But he's not the sort to back down on a promise. And up to last night he thought the rhymes were the work of some former admirer who was jealous of him." She smiled wryly at her reflection, tilting her chin up to examine a throat shadow, reciting meanwhile:

*"The day you wear the sable coat
I promise I will cut your throat."*

"Who sent the comic valentine?"

She twisted around on the bench to frown at him. "I thought at first it was a joke, too, when it came in the mail ten days ago. But then I began to puzzle it out—up to then no one but

my friend and I knew anything about this wonderful present . . . no one at all. He hadn't told a soul, nor had I. Not even Elton . . . though he handles all my personal business, my bank account, my mail, everything. The coat was to be an absolute secret until my birthday—yesterday. But it wasn't a secret; the person who wrote that miserable jingle knew. It worried me; I simply couldn't imagine anyone who'd make an ugly threat like that."

Don said: "The generous gentleman had no idea?"

"He knew he couldn't have let the cat out of the bag so he was sure I must have. I couldn't convince him otherwise. But of course I was absolutely positive I hadn't breathed the slightest suggestion to anyone—so I was certain he must somehow have let the secret slip. We batted that back and forth the whole of a distressing evening . . . and got nowhere. I dreamed of stilettos and butcher knives all night. In the morning I was so exhausted I could laugh at myself. But when I got a call from Elton at the studio I stopped laughing." She massaged her temples with the tips of her fingers. "The second rhyme had been sent to me in care of the television network marked 'Private and Personal.' It had been put in with the batch of fan letters and Elton, who takes the fan mail seriously, had opened it." She chanted the words in a depressed tone of voice:

*"Once wear the sable that he gave
And then get ready for your grave."*

"Hadley have any suggestion who the rhymester might be?"

"No indeed. He thought it was some crackpot because of course he didn't know anything about the coat. But then I had to tell him. It began to get him upset, too . . . and he has the occupational disease of the television business, ulcers. It was almost more of a strain on him than on me, with those nasty couplets coming in every day like clockwork.

*"But don that garment once and I
Will guarantee that you will die."*

"Were these things handwritten?"

She reached for an ostrich leather bag on the chaise, opened it, took out a check wallet, from beneath the pad of checks removed a folded sheet. "This is the last one; day before yesterday."

It was neatly typed in the center of a sheet of coarse white paper, letterhead size:

*Let your conscience be your guide
And be not the coffin's bride.*

He fingered the paper thoughtfully. "You haven't made any attempt to trace this?"

"How could we? There are good reasons why my friend does not want any publicity and just as many why it should hurt me professionally." She gestured at the paper. "It's written on studio paper—it's made especially so it won't make crackling noises when you rustle it near a mike. But almost anyone could get hold of a few sheets like that."

"What about the envelopes?"

"They're at home. I kept them all. Plain, dime-store variety." She held out her hand for the jingle. "I know you're supposed to be able to trace a thing like this from the typewriting. *He* wanted to get a firm of private detectives on it but I wouldn't let him; the whole thing has made me so desperately miserable. All my life I've been fighting for something I never thought I'd have, absolute security. Maybe you don't know it but there aren't too many in show business who do get it. A big salary, yes—but you have to cut it up six ways from Sunday and few of us put enough away to feel safe, no matter if the options aren't picked up. There's always that fear of being old and sick and alone in some cheap rooming house." Her eyes closed. "I really thought I had it made this time. I even thought I might get that jackpot bonus along with it, genuine happiness with someone I honestly care for. But I guess it's not in the cards for me. I told him last night that if it hadn't been for the possibility your store people might have been hurt, I'd be glad the damn coat had been stolen. I meant it."

"It's to be returned tonight, Miss Inez."

She gasped. "To me?"

"I suppose. Mister Grolheim phoned to say it would be brought back sometime late this evening."

"But—then why did they steal it?"

"For money. Only thing that sort of thug steals for."

"Who would pay them?"

"Your Mister Rettjer."

"No!" She came to her feet. "He'd never do a thing like that!"

"Somebody's going to pay, if the crown sables come back. It doesn't seem as if you'd be interested in putting up the money. Who besides Mister Rettjer would you suggest?"

She sat down suddenly as if she was faint. "He doesn't know about the murder. It would almost make him a party to the crime, wouldn't it?"

"Compounding a felony, it's called. Yes. I don't care about that. I'm not a cop. But if Mister Rettjer has made a deal with these hijackers, he'll have made arrangements to get the money to them before the coat is turned over. I want to know what those arrangements are and I want to know in a hurry. You better get hold of your friend and find out."

• • • • Chapter 18

THE STAR OF PAINTING THE TOWN RAN A DIAMOND-STUDDED silver comb through the famous tousled hair. "How did you find out about Norman?"

"There's been talk about his being in Las Vegas while you were there."

She made a comical move. "I told him it was a mistake for him to go out there."

"It'll be your mistake if you don't call him now."

"There's a phone booth up on the next floor."

"Think of all the raised eyebrows if I were to be seen crowding into a public booth with you. And I have to hear what you say to him."

"I'm sure you wouldn't crowd me, Mister Cadee."

"I might have to," he said soberly. "There's a phone in that sponsor's booth across the hall."

"He doesn't like me to call him at the office."

"I won't like it if you don't. Tell him I have to see him right away."

She laid the comb down reluctantly. "I hate to do anything that might get him in trouble, Mister Cadee."

"He's in trouble up to his ears already if he's made a deal with these hijackers. You and I may be able to keep him from getting in deeper."

"Then I'll try to get him to see you."

The phone was on a low table in front of the first row of seats in the steeply tiered booth. The only light in the darkened cubicle came from the great-glass window looking down on the bustling activity of the studio. Electricians trailed coils of cable to and fro, sport-shirted cameramen made mysterious adjustments with their cumbersome apparatus, musicians penciled notations on score sheets, a quartet of dancers in ballet costume burlesqued a number from the *Firebird*.

Lily Inez sat down a yard from the glass partition, dialed. "Mister Norman Rettjer, please. . . . Tell him Miss Smolyanka would like to speak to him." She smiled impishly at Don. "With a name like that you wonder I want to change it? . . . Oh, God!" The smile vanished. "*Look!*" She huddled down in her seat, pointing.

Down by the backdrop of the middle set with its row of Lautrec-like cancan dancers high-kicking at crimson balloons and pink champagne bottles spelling out P-A-I-N-T-I-N-G T-H-E T-O-W-N, he saw Elton Hadley in agitated conversation with a handsome woman in a heather tweed—a woman

in her early thirties with a haughty manner, cold, patrician features, and dark glasses hiding her eyes.

"Helen Rettjer! Norman's wife." Lily Inez held her hand over the mouthpiece. "I've never seen her at the studio before. *She mustn't see me!*"

Don stepped between her and the glass partition. "Go ahead on your call." He thought the imperious lady was telling off Hadley in spades; the manager's huge head was bobbing, his childlike hands were held out in anxious appeal.

"Norman?" The timbre of Lily Inez' voice became noticeably more husky. "That man from Ambletts is here in the studio with me . . . yes, yes, I know—but it's absolutely important I tell you now, right this minute . . ."

Don observed Hadley beckoning to the assistant director in the houndstooth jacket. The latter hurried over, listened to the voluble lady in the dark glasses; then, he, too, began to shrug and shake his head in obvious denial.

"Mister Cadee," Lily Inez said, "tells me your present is to delivered some time tonight. . . . Do you know about that? . . . Yes? . . . Then he has to see you immediately before you complete the arrangements."

On the floor below, Missus Rettjer held up a gloved hand, spoke briefly and bitterly, swung on her heel, and stalked away disdainfully.

"I realize you have other matters which are important, Norman, but this is a matter of life and death, I mean it. . . . Yes—and by the way—Helen is here in the studio, now. Do you know what she wants?"

Hadley exchanged earnest words with the assistant director before he loped after Missus Rettjer, caught up with her, began an expostulation which stopped the lady in her tracks.

"No, I haven't spoken to her . . . I don't intend to, no. What? . . . All right, I'll tell him. . . . Oh, I'm so utterly wretched I'm going straight back to the apartment. . . . Yes, call me there." She hung up. "*Is she still here?*"

Don moved aside. "The coast is clear. Your manager just left with her. Does her husband know what's on her mind?"

"Not at all. He's flabbergasted. He thought she was on her

way to Nassau by plane." She clapped a hand to her forehead. "She must have come here to make a scene. That's all I need, a scene with her. Oh, God!"

"I was right about the coat?" he asked.

"Yes, you were. Though he doesn't believe there's anything to be worried about. He says he talked to one of the men from your store only a little while ago and there isn't going to be any trouble at all about getting the coat back."

All a misunderstanding—wasn't that what Grolheim had told Sib last night? "When will he see me?"

"As soon as you can get down to his office. Do you know where it is? Forty Wall. Intekcom Holding Corporation."

"I'll find it." Don took her arm. "How much does Mister Rettjer's wife know about you?"

"Nothing . . . except what she may have heard in the way of rumors from Las Vegas and so on. She knows he doesn't care for her; they've been all but legally separated for a year. But she won't give him a divorce and he won't try to get one. I suppose she may suspect there's another woman—or more than one, for that matter. But I'm sure she has no idea that Norm would marry me tomorrow if he were free."

"She has ideas about something; she was giving your manager a bad five minutes there."

Lily Inez sighed. "This is the day I've been dreading. Helen wouldn't have come here unless she'd meant to have a showdown." She followed him up the tier of steps. "It makes me think she must have sent me those horrid rhymes. Maybe she arranged to have the coat stolen—though how she could have found out about that . . ." Her voice trailed away.

Don thought she was fighting to keep back a flood of tears. "You're not going to rehearse this afternoon?"

"No."

"I may drop around to the apartment later then." He went down the short flight, out to the studio floor. Neither Hadley nor Helen Rettjer was in sight, nor did he see either of them in the lobby of Telecast Towers as he left the building.

The offices of Intekcom were as quiet and subdued as the

studio had been noisy and confused. The receptionist was an elderly man who looked like a professor.

"Mister Rettjer is expecting you, Mister Cadee. This way, if you please."

The financier's office was homey rather than impressive. No desk—merely a large table spread with charts. Easy chairs, and logs glowing in a cheerful brick fireplace. A small bar, a giant television set . . . and the man himself, a small-boned man with a rock-hard face, smoking a pipe and scrutinizing his visitor through rimless spectacles before offering to shake hands.

"I can understand your store's position in this matter, Mister Cadee."

"Then we won't waste time on that." Don refused a cigar. "I'm here because of my personal interest in two of our men. Not because of the crown sable coat."

Rettjer rubbed the bowl of the briar against the side of his nose. "I'm glad to be able to set your mind at ease on that score. I had a very pleasant conversation with your Mister Grolheim; he anticipates no further difficulties in the transaction."

"What about the other man? Jim Preston?"

"Your fur buyer didn't mention him, Mister Cadee."

"Then you don't know whether he's still alive?"

The financier smiled tolerantly. "Nothing Mister Grolheim said indicated any unpleasantness, so I assume both your men are quite all right and will be back on the job tomorrow."

"I don't assume that," Don said bluntly. "And as for unpleasantness, there's been plenty. I was put through a rock crusher by one of the hijackers last night."

Rettjer showed no emotion. "I knew nothing of that."

"Evidently there are other things you don't know. I have damn good reason to believe Jim Preston was slugged unconscious, probably killed, outside Miss Inez' apartment last night when the sables were stolen."

"She told me you were afraid he had been hurt."

"I'm afraid he's dead. As dead as the member of the gang the police found in Grolheim's house this morning."

Rettjer knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the brick

of the fireplace. "I *didn't* know about that. And it's quite clear Mister Grolheim didn't know it, either."

Don said: "What kind of a blackmail proposition did he put up to you?"

"Ah . . . that's a rather rough term to use, isn't it?"

"What the hell else can you call it?" Don retorted. "You're going to have to pay for the sables a second time, else they wouldn't release the coat . . . or our men. Only reason you'd pay would be to avoid publicity. Well, let me tell you, there's bound to be a mess of publicity anyhow, now there's been a murder. I can't help that; what I may be able to do is help get our men out of the hands of some murderous bastards. And the first thing I need to know is exactly what kind of a deal you made with them."

"Even," Rettjer said softly, "if my telling you should cause your friends to suffer for it? Because that's part of the deal, Mister Cadee. That I tell no one of the terms. Otherwise, your employees may regret it."

"You'll tell me." Don was brusque. "You'll tell me here and now. Because I know just how much cause Jim Preston and Myron Grolheim have had to regret it already."

"Suppose"—Rettjer eyed him speculatively—"I think it wiser to refuse your request?"

"I might," Don said, "be able to make you change your mind."

• • • • Chapter 19

THE FINANCIER ROSE, SAUNTERED TO THE FIREPLACE. "A LOT of people have tried to make me change my mind, Mister Cadee." He picked up a brass poker from the fire set on the brick hearth. "I suppose you would go to the police?"

"To the newspapers," Don said. "No city desk could pass up a story about a prominent industrialist, a celebrated television star, a crown sable coat—and an extortion attempt that involved murder. By the way, if you pay off the blackmailers, you might wind up charged as an accessory."

Rettjer bent to poke at a smoldering log; his face was momentarily hidden. "It seems to me your Mister Grolheim is the accessory, if not the principal. He was one of the very few who knew about the sables, knew when and where they were to be delivered. He practically admitted that he was to share in the ransom if it was paid. Now you tell me one of his partners in crime was found beaten to death in his house. Yet you claim your interest is in getting him out of the hands of the gang."

"I don't believe Grolheim is a thief or an extortionist, much less a murderer."

Rettjer turned around. "How did *you* know the sables were to be returned?"

"Grolheim called me up, too."

"What did he say?"

"That arrangements had been made to have the coat delivered to Miss Inez sometime this evening."

"You know"—Rettjer swung the poker idly—"the newspapers might make something out of the facts that a couple of Ambletts employees left the store with the sables and one of them later called you up, notified you that a proposition had been made to me about the return of the merchandise. Doesn't put your store in a very favorable light."

"Depends how it's put," Don said. "There are witnesses who can prove that one of our men was slugged while attempting to protect the store's property. I can testify that I was given a fairly brutal workover while trying to trace the garment. And from the way Grolheim talked to me on the phone, I'd say he was aware that his own life is in danger."

"That wasn't my impression."

"You don't know the man."

"He seemed absolutely unconcerned about anything except the payment demanded, absolutely cold-blooded."

"That's the point," Don said. "Grolheim is anything but cold-

blooded. He's normally tense and jumpy. They have him buffered in some way . . . with a gun at his back. Or a threat of torture."

"Under the circumstances you think it would be foolish to believe he would keep his word?"

"About the coat? They'll send it back. What else can they do with it? It's not negotiable like your securities. But I'm not worried about the sables. I want Jim Preston and Myron Grolheim back . . . if it isn't too late."

"Your buyer was explicit on that score; he said there'd be no further difficulties of any kind, once the transaction was completed."

"He may have believed that. He might not know about the murder. They may have kept him in the dark about Jim Preston. But there'll be plenty of difficulties for the other members of the gang—and they know it, whether Grolheim does or not."

"Then you suggest I go through with the plan?"

"How can I tell until I know what you agreed to do?"

Rettjer replaced the poker, straightened up. "I'm to have fifty thousand in small bills packed in a brief case. At six o'clock someone will call me at the Buckinghurst apartment to tell me what to do with the money. At seven another call will notify me where to pick up the coat." He went to the bar. "Sounds like a Grade-B movie, doesn't it?"

"Did Grolheim say you were to deliver the brief case yourself?"

"No. Only that I should follow instructions to the letter and, of course, refrain from notifying the authorities. Drink?"

"I can use one."

"Scotch?"

"And water. Thanks. How would it be if you gave me the brief case, let me deliver it?"

Rettjer clattered ice cubes into glasses. "I'm beginning to change my mind about you, Mister Cadee. I will admit that my preconception about a department store detective wasn't too flattering. Evidently I was wrong in your case. You have a hell of a nerve to ask me to hand over fifty thousand dollars to a man I've never seen before in my life. But this seems to be a

circumstance where a hell of a nerve is needed. How will you operate?"

Don took the highball. "Have to play it by ear. I'll be at the Buckinghurst by six and take it from there."

"Even though it may jeopardize your own men?"

"They're already jeopardized . . . up to here. I may be able to convince the contact man for the gang that it will be a break for all concerned if they'll turn Preston and Grolheim loose. Whatever happens, it won't affect your coat deal."

"May affect you."

"Calculated risk. You know about that sort of thing. You're taking a few yourself." Don thought the financier was relieved at the idea of having someone else handle the ransom matter. "Miss Inez suspects your wife of sending those jingles, has an idea Missus Rettjer may have connived at having the sables stolen."

"A natural enough conjecture but without the slightest foundation." Rettjer smiled; the smile transformed his hard features, making him suddenly very likable. "Tell you something, Mister Cadee. A woman has to care a lot about a man to be jealous of him. My wife doesn't care that much about me; she's not jealous, not even interested."

"Then why did she go to the studio this morning?"

"She thought I might be there. She had been trying to reach me here at the office. I was out. Far as I knew she was flying to the Bahamas . . . but she's always changing her mind at the last minute." He waved the pipe stem. "It had nothing to do with the coat, you may be sure. I have told Miss Inez that she might look closer to her own establishment for the author of those creepy couplets."

"As close as . . . ?"

"Her maid. Frances resents me; I once suggested she should be discharged. She's always asking for increases; she gets more right now than either of my secretaries. Fancies she ought to be paid off for keeping quiet about my visits to the apartment, I suppose. Neither Miss Inez nor I believe in starting that; once you begin to hand out hush money, there's no end to it. Besides, there's nothing in particular for us to hide. I'm fond

of Lily; she likes me. We don't broadcast it but we are certainly not ashamed of it."

Don raised his eyebrows. "Not fifty thousand dollars' worth?"

"Oh no. Not at all. The ransom for the coat is another matter. I want her to have those sables; I have gone to considerable trouble and expense to see she does have them. Putting up the additional money may seem like a high premium in order to protect my original investment—perhaps if I had thought I could get a duplicate I might have turned down Mister Grolheim's offer. But there's no such thing as a duplicate. It might be two or three years before I could have another one made up; it takes that long to have the skins matched. By that time I might be dead. Or she might. I want her to have it now. So . . . I will have that brief case ready for you at six tonight."

"You're not telling Miss Inez the details of the arrangement?"

"You are the only one who knows."

"Better that way." Don put his glass on the bar. "You might have another call from Mister Grolheim, before this evening."

"What makes you think so?"

"Afternoon papers will carry the story of that dead man. It may rattle the rest of the gang. They might even want to move up the time for the delivery of the money."

"I'll let you know if that happens."

"At the store. Leave a message with my secretary."

• • • • Chapter 20

PASSING THE NEWSSTAND IN THE LOBBY ON HIS WAY OUT, DON received a mild jolt; Max's pale eyes and wolfish fangs sneered up at him from a photograph occupying the front page of a pinkish tabloid. The scarehead said:

HUNT THRILL KILLER IN TEEN-AGER'S DEATH

Don bought a copy, read the "Story on Page Two" riding uptown in a cab. Evidently Dimmock and Quinton had made quick identification from the youth's fingerprints:

Max "The Burner" Tillson, 16, recently released from Bronx Boys Correctional Institution, was found dead this morning in the West End Avenue residence of a wealthy fur man, Myron Grolheim. Police investigating a broken areaway door discovered the body, brutally mutilated. Except for the murdered teen-ager, there was no one in the three-story house. An intensive search is underway for Grolheim, who was known to be in the city yesterday. Tillson had been released from the reformatory November first after serving five months of a six months' term for the theft of a tobacco distributor's truck.

The rest was a rewrite man's sensationalism, a suggestion—in the form of a query—asking whether the boy might have been a victim of some homicidal sadist, without mentioning Grolheim specifically. The background for this seemed to be that Tillson had once belonged to a teen-age gang, the Mott Avenue Malays, so known because they liked to boast of running amuck among their juvenile enemies.

You hit it on the nose. The kid had been a jumper. When the cops find out about the stolen sables, they'll figure that Max had inside information from My Grolheim and was put out of the way to keep the fact quiet. That'll be your fault, boy: you had a chance to tell Dimmock about Max and his side-kick trailing My for days . . . and you said nothing. The Homicide boys will have good reason to feel you've been covering up an inside job, too.

Getting out of the cab in front of the Berkowsky building, he felt suddenly very weary. *The strain of not knowing whether you're playing it the right way, boy. But you gave your word*

to Ruth Preston . . . and while there's a chance Jim may get out of this all right; you wouldn't want to play it any other way.

The offices of Wolheim Berkowsky & Sons were on the ground floor, facing Seventh Avenue. Gloomy, high-ceilinged, paneled in dark walnut, with old-fashioned lighting fixtures and somber steel engravings such as used to be popular around the turn of the century. But there was nothing out of date about Morris Berkowsky. The junior vice-president was Brooks Brothers and Ivy League and Park Avenue: tall and rangy and briskly businesslike.

He took Don into an office with scores of framed and signed photographs on the walls, a social gallery, ladies of the *haut monde*.

"Miss Gates didn't tell me just what you have in mind, Mister Cadee, but I gathered it had to do with a certain garment we made for your store."

"That's correct. The crown sable coat was hijacked last night before My Grolheim could deliver it to the customer."

Berkowsky didn't seem to be surprised. "You were covered? By insurance in transit?"

"I'm not certain. But Ambletts isn't trying to evade responsibility for payment. We're told the garment will be returned undamaged; anyhow the purchaser isn't going to renege on the deal. But a couple of our men were taken along with the coat. Mister Grolheim and one of my best Protection men, Jim Preston. Ambletts is more concerned about the men than the merchandise, Mister Berkowsky."

"You say Myron is in the hands of these hijackers?" Berkowsky was puzzled. "I spoke to him only an hour ago."

"I talked to him this morning, too," Don said. "He called up to say the coat would be returned and that he would also be free in a day or so. But I think he was acting under duress."

"It didn't seem so to me. The reason I wasn't too surprised to hear about the theft was that Myron wanted to know if we could suggest another customer who might be interested in buying the coat if the sale fell through." Berkowsky frowned. "It struck me as a queer question, though of course we do run

up against instances where the purchaser is unable to take some expensive garment and we do have to look around for another customer. But Myron would be more likely to know of a possible taker for this rather . . . extraordinary garment . . . than I would. So it threw me a bit."

"What did you tell him?"

"Why—that we would make some discreet inquiries, let him know. My first supposition was that the gentleman who ordered the coat had had some disagreement with the lady for whom it had been designed."

"Nothing like that. He still wants to give her the coat even though he's going to have to pay a ransom in addition to your price."

"No kidding!" The frown deepened. "Certainly be the most expensive item of apparel the world has ever seen, then. But I'm more baffled than ever, Mister Cadee. You see, Myron gave no indication that his personal safety was involved. He did sound rather vague, but I laid that to his distress at having such a large transaction screwed up. As near as I can recall, the closest he came to hinting there might be something wrong was to say his plans hadn't worked out quite as he had expected. You're sure there is no mistake about his having been abducted along with the coat?"

"You mean do I believe he might have been in on the steal?" Don asked. "I don't. I think he's in great danger. As soon as the ransom has been paid over, there's a good chance he'll go the way this kid went." He held out the paper.

Berkowsky turned to Page Two, scowling. After a moment he looked up. "This seems to say Myron was the murderer."

"He wasn't. You know him, you know he wouldn't have the heart to kill anyone."

"I would have said that's right. Still——"

"The paper's whooping up a sensation. It didn't have the facts because the police didn't have them. I had been warned by My not to give them any dope, otherwise he and Jim Preston might not be allowed to go free," Don said. "Now I'm damn sure that a crook who would kill one of his own partners in crime wouldn't think twice about finishing off a couple of

witnesses to his misdeeds. These calls from My—he talked to our customer as well as to you and me—add up to just one thing. They're fixing to make him the patsy . . . for the hijack and the murder of this Max as well."

Berkowsky nodded. "If I had to testify in court about that phone call, it would certainly make him seem like one of the gang, that's true."

"It comes down to this," Don said. "I have to locate this bunch of highbinders before they get the ransom."

"If there's any way our firm can help . . ."

"Not unless some of your people can recognize the man who worked with this Max Tillson when Preston was slugged outside Miss Inez' apartment." Don described the fellow as Salvatore had—the broken nose, the bulgy pugdog eyes, the slimy smile, the sapphire ring. He added, "And Grolheim said he might have been an Italian."

"He never worked for us," Berkowsky said. "I'll go further; I doubt if he ever worked in a fur factory. Very few Italians in this business, very few. Of course he may have been a truck driver—but that star sapphire doesn't make it seem likely."

"No," Don agreed. "One more thing. How long have you known My?"

"Ten or twelve years," Berkowsky said. "He's always had a first-class reputation in the trade, not especially in a sociable sense, but as an individual of integrity. I would be unhappy to revise my opinion of him."

"That's all I wanted to know." Don said he'd keep Wolheim Berkowsky & Sons in touch with developments, then said good-by.

As he came out of the building, Baisha Gates rushed across the sidewalk, clutched his arm. "I didn't want to barge in while you were busy with Morrie, but I simply had to catch you before you went back to the store, Mister Cadee."

"Why?" he asked. "Did you latch onto something at Sari Soeurs?"

"Oh, I have the list of their mink minxes"—she giggled foolishly—"but I can't tell whether it'll be any help to you or not." She took a sheet of crested notepaper out of her coat

pocket. "Here . . . and don't blame me for all the Miss Joneses and Miss Whites and Miss Johnsons they gave me. I know they aren't the ladies' real names and *they* know it, too, but what are they to do if some gentleman says a blue pastel is for plain Miss Smith when her name is probably Hortense Hasenpfeffer!"

"You didn't rush over here just to give me this list?"

"Oh no." She whipped off her horn-rims, peered up at him anxiously. "I waylaid you because Miss Kahn said you mustn't come back to the office."

"That so?"

"Not until you've talked to her, anyway. There are two policemen waiting with a warrant for you."

• • • • Chapter 21

DON TOOK BAISHA'S ARM. "LET'S HOP ACROSS TO THAT DRUG-store. Unless you're afraid of being seen with a desperate criminal."

"I'm not a bit afraid." She snuggled against him crossing the street. "I always said you'd be one of the ten most wanted men, Mister Cadee. But I didn't mean it in the police sense. If there's anything I can do to help you . . ."

"There is. Call Miss Kahn from that booth, give her the number of the phone, have her ring back soon as she can get away from my office." He ran interference past the pushing lunch-hour crowd two and three deep at the busy fountain.

In the booth a stout man spoke earnestly to the phone, beating the air with a hairy hand for emphasis.

Baisha said: "What did you do that put the police after you?"

"I went up to My Grolheim's house to see what might have