

Then Press put up a battle—and instead of explaining the gag Max bludgeoned him.”

Sibyl glanced at the bedroom door. “And nearly did the same to you.”

“By then the whole plan had been switched. Arny was wild with anger at Max. But wanting to save his own skin, he decided to kidnap Grolheim . . . which wasn’t part of the original plan at all. So Press was dumped into the coat box; they forced My to go down to his station wagon with them . . . and Arny had to report to his sister that Max had gone off the deep end, committed murder. There must have been a hurried consultation with Hadley—I haven’t checked with Dimmock on that, but he’ll get the details out of her—and the three of them, Hadley, Gretchen, and Arny, must have decided to make Grolheim the villain of the piece.”

“I never knew anyone less villainish.”

“Nor I. But Hadley was desperate . . . and he had an ace up his sleeve. A whole deck of aces. Ataraxics.”

“Atar—which?”

“Tranquilizers. No-worry tablets. There are a dozen different kinds on the market, but they’re mostly chlorpromazine or meprobamates. He’d been feeding a few to Lily Inez to keep her from running off the rails completely. They’d worked with her, so he figured they might put Grolheim in a frame of mind where he could be induced to make a bunch of phone calls without showing alarm or concern . . . and so would be set up as the patsy who was at the bottom of it all.”

“Tranquilizers . . . to make a man ignore a murder! To make him act as if it never happened. That’s hideous!”

“They overdid it, though. They couldn’t get the same stuff—out at West Cornwall where Hadley owned his motel—that he’d been using to calm Miss I.’s nerves. So Arny bought something called *Careaway—the Pillowtime Pill*: it must have been dynamite. It made him forget all his troubles, all right, but it also made him talk like an entirely different person. The specialist at the hospital said it might take My a month to get over the effects. But a funny thing: they’d been making him take six a day, when the maximum dose is three, yet it still

didn't dull the edge of his character. When I put it to him that they'd killed Press, he came out of his dream world long enough to show how he really felt about it. And that was the last straw for Arny."

"But didn't you offer to make a deal with him?"

"I offered to. What I had in mind was, if, as I thought, neither Arny nor Missus Chadbourne had any part in either of the murders, it might be possible to get the district attorney to waive prosecution on the kidnaping and hijacking scores. The idea was to have Lily I. and Rettjer both agree the theft and abductions were in the nature of a gag, set up with their permission. It would have been hard to make a case out against Arny if everybody said the snatch was all in fun."

"But you never got around to discussing it with Arny?"

"No. He wanted to finish us both off on the spot. He would have, except for Gretchen Chadbourne."

Sibyl said: "Will they convict her . . . as an accessory?"

"Not if I have anything to say about it. She did go along with the impromptu plan to put the blame on My . . . but she was only doing as Hadley told her. She went to My's house to get his clothes as part of that build-up, but she had no part in any violence. And it must have been what she told Hadley about Max that drove the manager to put the mad dog out of the way."

"She saved your life twice," Sibyl said. "If they send her to prison I'll go to see her every visiting day, just for that."

He smiled. "They'll put her on probation, likely. Anyhow, you won't have time to visit anyone. You'll be looking after me. Isn't that the deal?"

"Yes, it is. So stop fretting, or I'll give you one of those Careaways."

"You can give me something else much more soothing, shugie."

And she did.