I parked the heap around the corner from Keenan's house, sat in the dark for a
moment, then turned off the key and got out. When I slammed the door, I could hear
rust flaking off the rocker panels and dropping onto the street. It wasn't going to
be like that much longer.
The gun was in a bandolier holster and lay against my ribcage like a fist. It was
Barney's .45, and I was glad of that. It lent the whole crazy business a touch of
irony. Maybe even a sense of justice.
Keenan's house was an architectural monstrosity spread over a quarter-acre of land,
all slanting angles and steep-sloped roofs behind an iron fence. He'd left the gate
unlocked, as I'd hoped. Earlier I'd seen him calling someone from the living room,
and a hunch too strong to deny told me it had been either Jagger or the Sarge.
Probably the Sarge. The waiting was over; this was my night.
I walked to the driveway, staying close to the shrubbery and listening for any
strange sound over the cutting whine of the January wind. There wasn't any. It was
Friday night, and Keenan's sleep-in maid would be out having a jolly time at
somebody's Tupperware party. Nobody home but that bastard Keenan. Waiting for the
Sarge. Waiting -- although he didn't know it yet -- for me.
The carport was open and I slipped inside. The ebony shadow of Keenan's Impala
loomed. I tried the back door. The car was also open. Keenan wasn't cut out to be a
villain, I reflected; he was much too trusting. I got in the car, sat down, and
waited.
Now I could hear the faint sound of jazz on the wind, very quiet, very good. Miles
Davis, maybe. Keenan listening to Miles Davis and holding a gin fizz in one
manicured hand. Nice for him.
It was a long wait. The hands on my watch crawled from eight-thirty to nine to ten.
Time for a lot of thinking. I mostly thought about Barney, and that wasn't strictly
a matter of choice. I thought about how he looked in that small boat when I found
him, staring up at me and making meaningless cawing noises. He'd been adrift for two
days and looked like a boiled lobster. There was black blood encrusted across his
midsection where he'd been shot.
He'd steered toward the cottage as best he could, but still it had been mostly luck.
Lucky he'd gotten there, lucky he could still talk for a little while. I'd had a
fistful of sleeping pills ready if he couldn't talk. I didn't want him to suffer.
Not unless there was a reason for it, anyway. As it turned out, there was. He had a
story to tell, a real whopper, and he told me almost all of it.
when he was dead, I went back to the boat and got his .45. It was hidden aft in a
small compartment, wrapped in a waterproof pouch. Then I tossed his boat out into
deep water and sank it. If I could have put an epitaph over his head, it would have
been the one about how there's a sucker born every minute. Most of them are pretty
nice guys, too, I bet -- just like Barney. Instead, I started trying to find the men
who capped him. It had taken six months to find Keenan and to ascertain that Sarge
was, at least, somewhere close by, but I'm a persistent little pup, and here I was.
At ten-twenty, headlights splashed up the curving driveway and I lay on the floor of
the Impala. The newcomer drove into the carport, squeezing up close to Keenan's car.
It sounded like one of the old Volkswagens. The little engine died and I could hear
Sarge grunting softly as he fought his way out of the little car. The porch light
went on, and the sound of the door clicking open came to me.
Keenan: "Sarge! You're late! Come on in and have a drink."
Sarge: "Scotch."
I'd unrolled the window before. Now I stuck Barney's .45 through it, holding the
stock with both hands. "Stand still," I said.
The Sarge was halfway up the porch steps. Keenan, the perfect host, had come out and
was looking down at him, waiting for him to come up so he could after-you him into
the house. They were both perfect silhouettes in the light spilling through from
inside. I doubted if they could see much of me in the dark, but they could see the
gun. It was a big gun.
"Who the hell are you?" Keenan asked.
"Jerry Tarkanian," I said. "Move and I'll put a hole in you big enough to watch
television through."
"You sound like a punk," Sarge said. He didn't move, though.