Masters of Noir

Volume Four

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A Mystery Anthology
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Lust Song by Stuart Friedman first appeared in Manhunt, December 1956.
THE PICKPOCKET by MICKEY SPILLANE

Willie came into the bar smiling. He couldn't understand why he did it, but he did it anyway. Ever since the day he had married Sally and had stopped in for a bottle of beer to bring home for his wedding supper, he had come in smiling. Sally, he thought, three years with Sally, and now there was little Bill and a brother or maybe a sister on the way.

The bartender waved, and Willie said, “Hello, Barney.” A beer came up and he pushed a quarter out, looking at himself in the big mirror behind the wall. He wasn't very big, and he was far from good-looking. Just an ordinary guy, a little on the small side. He was respectable now. A real law-abiding citizen. Meeting Sally had done that.

He remembered the day three winters ago when he'd tried to lift a wallet from a guy's pocket. Hunger and cold had made his hand shake and the guy had collared him. He was almost glad to be run into the station house where it was warm. But the guy must have known that, too, and refused to press any charges. So he got kicked out in the cold again. That was where Sally had found him.

He remembered the taxi, and Sally and the driver half-carrying him into her tiny apartment. The smell of the hot soup did more to revive him than anything else. She didn't ask any questions, but he told her nevertheless. He was a pickpocket. A skinny little mug who had lived by his hands ever since he was a kid. She'd told him, right away, that it didn't matter.

He had eaten her food and slept on her couch for a week before he got smart. Then he did something he had never done before in his life. He got a job. It wasn't much at first, just sweeping up in a loft where they made radio parts. Slowly he found out he had hands that could do better things than push a broom. The boss found it out, too, when he discovered Willie assembling sections in half the time that it took a skilled mechanic to do it. They gave the broom to someone else.

Only then did he ask Sally to marry him. She gave up her job at the department store and they settled down to a regular married life. The funny part was that he liked it.

The cops never gave up, though. As regularly as clockwork they came around. A real friendly visit, understand? But they came around. The first of the month Detective Coggins would walk in right after supper, talk a while, looking at him with those cynical, cold blue eyes, then leave. That part worried Willie—not for himself, but for little Bill. It wouldn't be long now before he'd be in school, and the other kids ... they'd take it out on him. Your old man was a crook ... a pickpocket ... yeah, then why do the coppers come around all the time? Willie drained his beer quickly. Sally was waiting supper for him.

He had almost reached the door when he heard the shots. The black sedan shot past as he stepped outside and for one awful instant he saw a face. Black eyebrows ... the sneer ... the scar on the cheek. The face of a guy he had known three years ago. And the guy had seen him, too. In his mind, Willie ran. He ran faster than he had ever run in his life—but his legs didn't run. They carried him homeward as the self-respecting should walk: but his mind ran.

Three years wasn't so long after all.

As soon as he came in Sally knew something was wrong. She said, “What happened?” Willie couldn't answer. “Your job ... “ she said hesitantly. Willie shook his head.

It was the hurt look that made his lips move. “Somebody got shot up the street,” he told her. “I don't know who it was, but I know who did it.”

“Did anyone else ... “

“No, just me. I think I was the only one.”

He could tell Sally was almost afraid to ask the next question. Finally, she said: “Did they see you?”
"Yes. He knows me."

"Oh, Willie! " Her voice was muffled with despair. They stood in silence, not knowing what to say, not daring to say anything. But both had the same thoughts. Run. Get out of town. Somebody was dead and it wouldn't hurt to kill a couple more to cover the first.

Sally said: “ ... The cops. Should we ... “

"I don't dare. They wouldn't believe me. My word wouldn't be any good anyway."

It came then, the sharp rap on the door. Willie leaped to his feet and ran, reaching for the key in the lock. He was a second too late. The door was tried and pushed open. The guy that came in was big. He filled the door from jamb to jamb with the bulk of his body. He grabbed Willie by the shirt and held him tight in his huge hands.

"Hello, shrimp," he said.

Willie punched him. It was as hard as he could hit, but it didn't do a bit of good. The guy snarled: “Cut it out before I break your skinny neck!” Behind him he closed the door softly. Sally stood with the back of her hand to her mouth, tense, motionless.

With a rough shove the big guy sent Willie staggering into the table, his thick lips curling into a tight sneer. “Didn't expect somebody so soon, did you, Willie? Too bad you're not smart. Marty doesn't waste any time. Not with dopes that see too much. You know, Marty's a lucky guy. The only one that spots the shooting turns out to be a punk he can put the finger on right away. Anybody else would be down at headquarters picking out his picture right now.”

His hand went inside his coat and came out with a .45 automatic. “I always said Marty was lucky.”

The big guy didn't level the gun. He just swung it until it covered Willie's stomach. Sally drew in her breath to scream quickly, just once, before she died.

But before the scream came Willie gave a little laugh and said: “You won't shoot me with that gun, Buster.”

Time stood still. Willie laughed again. “I slipped out the magazine when you grabbed me.” The big guy cursed. His finger curled under the butt and felt the empty space there. Willie was very calm now. “And I don't think you've got a shell in the chamber, either.”

The big guy took one step, reaching for Willie, a vicious curse on his lips; then the sugar bowl left Sally's hand and took him on the forehead. He went down.

Willie didn't hesitate this time. He picked up the phone and called the station house. He asked for Detective Coggins. In three minutes the cop with the cold blue eyes was there, listening to Willie's story. The big guy went out with cuffs on. Willie said: “Coggins ... “

"Yes?"

"When the trial comes up ... you can count on me to testify. They won't scare me off."

The detective smiled, and for the first time the ice left those cold blue eyes. “I know you will, Willie.” He paused. “And Willie ... about those visits of mine ... I'd like to come up and see you. I think we could be good friends. But I'd like to have you ask me first.”

A grin covered Willie's face. “Sure! Come up ... anytime at all! Let's say next Saturday night. Bring the missus!”

The detective waved and left. As he closed the door Willie could imagine the chant of young voices. They were saying:

"Yeah ... and you better not get funny with Bill because his pop is friends with that cop. Sure, they're all the time playing cards and ... “
Willie laughed. “Sometimes,” he said, “I'm almost glad that I had some experience. Finally came in handy!”

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I DON'T FOOL AROUND by LAWRENCE BLOCK

Fischer pulled up at a curb and we got out of the car in a hurry, heading for the black Chevy with the people standing around it. The precinct cop made room for us and we went on through. As far as I was concerned, this was just a formality. I knew who was dead and I knew who had killed him. Taking a good long look at the corpse wasn't going to change that.

The punk slumped over the wheel with holes in his head had lived longer than we had expected. He was a hood named Johnny Blue, a strongarm-weakbrain who crossed some of the wrong people. He'd been due for a hit for weeks, according to the rumbles that filtered through to Manhattan West. Now he'd been hit, and hard.

One slug in the side of the face. Another in the neck. Three more in the back of the head.

"Who is he?" Fischer asked. I told him.

"A messy way to do it," the kid went on. "Any of those shots would have killed him. Why shoot him up like that?"

My college cop. My new partner, my cross to bear ever since some genius switched Danny Taggert to Vice. My Little Boy Lost, who wanted murder to be a nice clean affair, with one bullet lodged in the heart and, if you please, as little blood as possible.

I said, "The killer didn't want to take chances."

"Chances? But—"

I was very tired. "This wasn't a tavern brawl," I told him. "This wasn't one guy hitting another guy over the head with a bar stool. This was a pro killing."

"It doesn't look so professional to me. A mess."

"That's because you don't know what to look for." I turned away, sick of the corpse and the killer, sick of Fischer, sick of West 46th Street at three in the morning. Sick of murder.

"It's a pro killing," I said again. "In a car, on a quiet street, in the middle of the night. Five bullets, any one of which would have caused death. That's a trademark."

"Why?"

"Because hired killers don't fool around," I said. "Let's get out of here."

The coffee was bitter but it was black and it was hot. I sipped it as I read through the file again. I knew everything in the file by heart. I read it automatically, then shoved it over to Fischer.

"Name," I said, "Frank Calder. First arrest at age 14, 1948, grand theft auto. Suspended. Arrested three months later, GTA again, six months in Elmira. Three years later he was picked up for assault with a deadly weapon. A knife. The victim refused to press charges and we dropped them."

I sipped some more of the coffee. "That was eight years ago. Since then he's been picked up fifteen times. Same charge each time. Suspicion of homicide."

"Innocent?"

"Guilty, of course. Fifteen times that we know about. Probably a dozen more that we don't know about. Fourteen times we let him go. Once we thought we had a case."

"What happened?"
"Grand jury disagreed with us. Indictment quashed."

Fischer nodded. “And you think he may have killed Blue?”

"No."

"Then why are we—"

"I don't think he might have killed Blue,” I said. “I know damn well he killed Blue. Calder does most of his work in the Kitchen. A Hell's Kitchen boy from the start, grew up on 39th Street west of Ninth. Gun used was a .38. Calder always uses a .38. Likes to shoot people in cars."

"Still, you can't be sure that—"

"I can be sure," I cut in. I wished that Vice would send Danny back to me. Fischer was impossible. “Calder works for Nino Popo a lot of the time. Popo had a thing against Blue. Quit sounding like a public defender, will you? This was one of Calder's. Period."

"We pick him up now?"

"No."

"But you just said—"

"I know what I said. I know damn well what I said and I don't need a parrot to toss it back at me."

"But—"

"Shut up.” I finished the coffee. “I told you Calder was a pro. You know what that means? You understand what that record says? He's a hired killer. You pay him and he shoots people. That's how he makes his living. A good living. He dresses in three-hundred-dollar suits. He wears gold cuff links. He lives in a penthouse overlooking Central Park. The west side of the park—he's not a millionaire. But he does well in his job."

I paused for breath. I just wanted to get home and go to bed. I was tired. “I told you about pros,” I said. “They don't fool around. They don't leave loopholes. It's their business and they know it. They don't crack under pressure. If we pick up Calder he'll be out in no time at all. No witnesses. A cast-iron alibi. No holes at all."

"So what do we do?"

"We go home,” I said. “We go home and take hot showers and go to bed. Tomorrow we pick him up.”

I left him there to wonder what I was talking about. I went home and took a hot shower and fell asleep the minute I hit the bed.

Homicide is rugged. There are good things about it—we don't take bribes, we stay clean. There are also bad things.

Because there are only three types of murder, and of the three there is only one that we solve. There is the amateur killing with a motive, the husband who strangles his wife, the tavern brawl, the grudge murder. There you have your suspect at the start and you look around for the proof. And find it, no matter how clever a job they do of burying it. That is the kind that gets solved.

There is also the silly killing. The bum beaten to death on the Bowery. The hustler with a knife in her belly. The fag killed in his own apartment by a casual conquest. The mugging victim with a crushed skull. These we don't solve. Not without a break.

And there is the professional murder. And those we never solve.

I met Fischer at five in the afternoon. He was carrying a folded copy of an afternoon tabloid. The headline ran GANGLAND SLAYING IN HELL'S KITCHEN. I could have guessed it word for word. I took the paper from him
and gave the story a quick run-through. It was about the same as the morning papers had it.

It didn't say we had nothing to work with. It didn't say we had anything to work with. It said that Johnny Blue had
been found in a parked car with holes in him, and that he was dead. Then there were a few paragraphs trying to turn
the career of a fourth-rater into something notorious, and then there was some nonsense to the effect that the cops
were keeping mum.

Mum?

"We're on Calder," I told him. "No other assignment until we nail him. Got that?"

"Sure."

"I wanted it that way. I want to get Calder. I want to get him good."

"I thought you said it was impossible."

"It is."

"Then—"

"You talk too much," I said. I waited for him to get mad but he didn't. He was hurt—it showed in his face, in the
way he wouldn't look at me. But he wouldn't get mad. And this made me like him that much less. He never got mad
at anything. He didn't know how to hate.

I don't like college cops. I don't like people who are up to their ears in understanding and sympathy and sweetness
and sunshine. I don't like people who don't know how to hate.

Maybe it's just the way a person is. If I were Calder I would hate cops. I'm a cop. I hate Calder. I hate him because
he breaks laws and shoots people. I hate him because he gets away with it. I hated Johnny Blue. He used to get away
with things too. Now he was dead and Calder had killed him and I hated Calder.

I was going to get him.

"Look it over again," I said, sliding Calder's file over to Fischer again. "Skip the record. Look at the picture."

Dark black hair. A flat face, not too bad-looking. Hard eyes, a long nose, a little scar on the chin. I don't know how
he got the scar. Maybe he cut himself shaving.

"You said we pick him up today. Were you kidding?"

"I don't kid. I was serious."

"They found evidence?"

"No."

He looked at me. He was afraid to open his mouth. Gutless.

"We worry him a little. Don't bother your head about it. Go get the car and meet me out front. And wear a gun."

He didn't say anything, just went off for the car. I checked my gun, then stuck it back in the holster. I picked up
Calder's file, and took a good long look at it. I let the face burn into my brain. I stood there for a minute or two and
hated.

Then I went out to the car where Fischer was waiting.

The building was fancy. A uniformed doorman stood at attention out in front. I had to show him my shield before he
let us inside. He was there to keep out undesirables. Unless they lived in the penthouse.
The carpet was deep in the lobby. The elevator rose in silence. I stood there and hated Calder.

He had the whole top floor. I got out of the elevator and took my gun out of its holster, wondering whether or not the doorman had called Calder yet. Probably.

I rang the bell.

"Yeah?"

A penthouse overlooking the park didn't get Hell's Kitchen out of his speech. Nothing would.

"Police."

"Whataya want?"

"Open the door and shut up."

A few seconds later the door opened. He was short, five-six or five-seven. He was wearing a silk bathrobe and slippers that looked expensive. The apartment was well-furnished but for what he had paid he could have used an interior decorator. There was a shoddiness about the place. Maybe the shoddiness was Calder.

"Come on in," he said. "You use a drink?"


"What for?"

"Murder."

"Yeah?" A wide smile. "Somebody got killed?"

"Johnny Blue."

"I'm covered," he said. No I'm innocent but I'm covered. "I was playing cards with some fellows."

"Uh-huh."

He shrugged heroically. "You want, we can go down to the station. My lawyer'll have me out right away. I'm clean."

"You're never clean," I said. "You were born filthy."

The smile widened. But there was uncertainty behind it. I was getting to him.

"You're cheap and rotten," I said. "You're a punk. You spend a fortune on cologne and it still doesn't cover the smell."

Now the smile was gone.

"Your sister sleeps with bums," I said. "Your mother was the cheapest whore on the West Side. She died of syphilis."

That did it. He was a few feet away—then he lowered his head and charged. I could have clubbed him with the gun. I didn't.

I shot him.

He gave a yell like a wounded steer and fell to his knees. The bullet had taken him in the right shoulder. I guess it hurt. I hoped so.
"You shot him." It was Fischer talking.

"Good thinking," I told him. "You're on the ball."

"Now what?"

I shrugged. "We can take him in," I suggested. "We can book him for resisting arrest and a few other things."

"Not murder?"

"You heard him," I said. "He's clean."

I looked at Fischer. That was the answer to my college cop, my buddy. Here was a murderer, a murderer with a shoulder wound. Now we would be nice to him. Get him to a hospital quick before he lost too much blood. Maybe drop the resisting arrest charge because, after all, he was a sick man.

I had my gun in my hand. I stepped back a few feet and aimed. I watched the play of expressions on Calder's face. He didn't know whether or not to believe it.

I shot him in the face.

I talked to Fischer while I found a gun in a drawer, picked it up in a towel, and wrapped Calder's fingers around it. It made it look good—he had drawn on me, I shot him in the shoulder, he went on and held onto the gun, and I shot him dead. It would look good enough—there wasn't going to be any investigation.

"Maybe thirty killings," I said. "That's what this animal had to his credit. He made beating the law a business. He didn't fool around. And there was no way to get him."

No answer from my partner.

"So this time he lost. He doesn't fool around. Well, neither do I."

I knew Fischer wasn't satisfied. He wouldn't blab, but it would worry him. He would feel uncomfortable with me. I don't fit into his moral scheme of things. Maybe he'll put in for a transfer.

I hope so.
They came through the prison gate, sixteen of them, handcuffed two by two, with four city policemen to deliver them to the prison. They saw their first convict in the shower room, a trusty who took their civilian clothes and thumbed them to the showers. Afterwards, they went along one at a time, and Macalay found himself in a barber chair. Clippers ran over his hair, and he was out again.

He looked down at his chest. His number was 116911. No. His name was that; he was 116911. And would be for quite a while.

He'd been here before, on business, to question prisoners. But it was different now. He was not a visitor with a badge in his pocket and a gun checked at the main gate, with a name and a job, a salary and a whistle to blow if the guards were slow letting him out. He was 116911, in a blue denim suit that was too tight across the shoulders and too long in the legs. But he was still big and he still looked like a cop was supposed to look. A cop for a mural or a Police Athletic League poster. He had the requirements, size and an ugly sort of handsomeness.

From his new viewpoint, he saw, somewhat to his surprise, that the guards did very little more than stand around. The actual bossing was done by trusties. Trusties had issued them their clothes; trusties formed them into lines. Now a trusty marched them to an isolation barracks. “You'll be here three weeks,” he said. “Till the doc's sure you ain't gonna break out with something an' infect us tenderer guys. I'm your barracks leader; the guys call me Nosy.”

One of the new fish said: “This is like the Marine Corps all over again.”

"If you was in the Marines, I don't know how we won any wars,” Nosy said calmly. “Okay. There's a bed for each of you. A shelf at the top, box at the bottom. There's a john through that door. You can't go no place but in here, but if you want library books, write 'em out, any they'll bring 'em to ya. Any questions you got ask me now."

Macalay said: “Can we have pencil and paper?”

Nosy didn't answer.

One of the other cons said: “How about radios?”

"There's headsets under your shelves, hooked into the prison system ... No more questions? I'll write a duty after each guy's name, put it on the bulletin board here. That door leads to my room."

"How about you picking up an infection from us?" the former Marine asked.

Nosy said: “Let's see, you're Rodel, aren't you? Why, Rodel, the warden figgers anything I haven't had'd be plain interesting. Keep the doc on his toes."

Nosy stood up and tacked the sheet on the bulletin board and went into his room.

Macalay said: “Seems like a nice kind of guy."

Nobody said anything. One by one the men got up and looked at their assignments. Rodel got to take care of the washbasins; he told a con named Beales: “You gotta call me mister. You're the wiper of the johns; you gotta look up to me."

After awhile Macalay went and looked, too. He turned from the list. “Hey, my name isn't here."

Nobody answered him. He went and knocked on Nosy's door. Nosy yelled a “come in,” and when the door was opened could be seen stretched out on a cot with two mattresses, holding a magazine.

Macalay said: “You forgot to give me any work."
Nosy stared at him silently and then went back to reading. After awhile, Macalay shut the door and went back to his cot. Somebody laughed, but when he looked around, there wasn’t a smile in the barracks room.

So now he knew how it was going to be; how it was for a policeman who went to prison. You became a ghost, something that nobody could see or hear.

It wasn't good. But when he'd made the deal, he knew it wasn't going to be any bed of roses.

It had started in the rain. There were two of them, as per regulations, two patrolmen in a car, making the rounds. That Macalay wasn't physically fit, his right arm dislocated, was not according to regulations. They were listening to the traffic squad get all the calls while they—Gresham was driving, Macalay on the radio—tooled their weary way through the deserted commercial streets, the rain doing nothing for their spirits, the lack of calls letting them slowly down into a bog of indifference.

It was Macalay who saw the light, just a flicker of it, in the window of a second story salesroom. His hand on Gresham's arm stopped the car, and they both watched, and then they were sure of it. There was a flashlight up there.

So they had gone up, Gresham first, and found the bars in the jewelry place cut away, the electric warning system carefully extracted, as Macalay had dissected angleworm nerves in high school biology. They saw the three men at the safe with the burning-torch, but they never saw the other two.

After that it was all noise and guns; Gresham dead and one of the safecrackers dying; Macalay in a corner with his right shoulder, the bum shoulder, shot and all the rest of him bruised as a .45 bruises a man; the other four getting away, and later the sergeant's car and the lieutenant's car, the headquarters car and the loft-squad truck all screaming down below.

And the ambulance and the trip to the hospital and the brass standing around his bed arguing and questioning.

And finally the hospital orderly—how honest can a skid-row white-coat get?—coming in and turning over the little paper to the inspector. The little paper with two diamonds folded in it that they had found in Macalay's shoe, just where he had put them before blacking out trying to help Gresham, who was already beyond help.

After that, it got slower. He talked with Inspector Strane and they'd come to an understanding. He'd had a choice to make—which of two eight balls he'd get behind. And then there was the trial, and the district attorney who had asked the chair for Macalay: “If a man is committing a felony, such as grand larceny, and anyone gets killed as a result of said felony, he is guilty of murder under the law.”

But the jury had only given him ten to twenty. Ten years to twenty years in the pen. A reporter in the courtroom had said: “It doesn't matter. Send a cop to prison, and the cons'll knock him off anyway.” And this reporter, of course, didn't know about the deal between Macalay and Strane which made a special target out of Macalay for the cons....

So here he was. In Isolation Barracks No. 7, bed No. 11. With a con on either side of him, and cons across the room; but nobody to speak to. He talked to them but he never got an answer, and even when the prison doctor came around once a day, he grunted at Macalay, though he made jokes with the other fresh fish.

All things pass. The three weeks went by without a contagious disease showing up and Macalay—116911—was put in a regular cell-block, No. 9, on the second tier, and given a regular job, running a stitching machine in the shoe shop.

The clerks who assigned the jobs were almost all trusties, and they would have given him hard labor, but his shoulder hadn't completely recovered from the bullet wound and the old injury that kept throwing the collar bone out of place. It had been weak and strained the night he'd seen the light in the jewelry-loft; that was why poor Gresham had gone up the stairs first.

If it hadn't been for the shoulder, it would have been Macalay dead and Gresham wounded, and sometimes 116911 thought it might have been better that way.

The needles used on a power leather sewing machine are strong, sharp. Set in the end of a piece of broom handle,
one of them makes a lovely shiv. Coming to his machine one morning, Macalay found his needle missing. He went to the foreman, his lie prepared.

"I forgot to tell you last night. My needle broke just as I finished work."

The foreman looked him over. "Okay. Bring me the broken parts and I'll sign a new one out to you."

"I threw the broken pieces in the scrap bin. Last night."

The foreman was a civilian. He raised his hand, and a guard came over. "Take him to the P.K. Keep an eye on him; he stole a needle."

As the guard marched Macalay out of the shoe shop, all the cons were, for once, bent hard over their work. But he thought he caught a couple of smiles.

The Principal Keeper was no gentleman; he left all that to the warden. When the guard lined Macalay up in front of him and said: "116911. Stole a needle from the shoe shop," the P.K. hardly looked up. He just said: "Search him," picked up a phone and said: "Search 32a, cell block 9," and went on with his paper work.

Before the block guards could call back, Macalay was stripped and searched standing at attention, naked in front of the P.K.'s desk. When the call came back that there was no contraband in the cell, the P.K. sighed and got up from behind his desk. He walked slowly around to face Macalay.

"Where's the needle?"

Macalay said: "It broke. I threw it in the trash bin last night." The P.K. brought the heel of his shoe down on Macalay's naked toes. "Where is it?" He twisted the heel a little. It was not made of rubber.

Macalay said: "I don't know."

The P.K. hit him in the belly. "Stand at attention," he said, when Macalay bent over involuntarily. "And call me sir. Where is it?"

Macalay found a little wind left in him and said: "I don't know, sir."

The P.K. bawled "Parade rest." Spray from his mouth landed on Macalay's face.

Macalay advanced one foot, and started to clasp his hands in front of him. As soon as he separated his legs, the P.K. brought his knee up between them, hard. Macalay passed out.

He came to in the Hole, in solitary. He was still naked, but there was a suit of coveralls and a pair of felt slippers in his cell. He put them on, and had to walk bent over, because the coveralls were too short. The slippers were too big. Nobody tapped on his water pipes, nobody put a message in his oatmeal for two weeks. That was what he ate—a big bowl of oatmeal once a day, put in a Judas-gate in the door every morning, together with a half-gallon jug of water. The Judas-gate only opened one way at a time, so he didn't know if his food was brought by a trusty or a guard.

That went on for two weeks. Towards the end of that time, Macalay began to have an illusion; he imagined Gresham's dead body was in the cell with him. When he moved from one side of the Hole to the other, the body slowly moved after him. It took a lot of effort not to think about contacting Inspector Strane and begging him to call the whole thing off.

When he got back to cell block No. 9, he had a new bunky. It didn't matter to Macalay; none of the cons talked to him anyway. He sat down on his bunk, and the thin mattress and chain-link spring felt wonderful after the floor of the Hole. He pulled his feet up, stretched, and slowly, tentatively closed his eyes; the light hurt them.

The body of Gresham came back and lay on the floor of the cell. But in a few minutes it faded, and Macalay let out a long sigh.
The man on the other bunk put down his magazine. “What did you see?” he asked.

"A body,” Macalay said. “He was my sidekick."

"I saw my mother,” the other man said. “The time I was in the Hole. Everybody sees something, if he stays in the Hole more than three days.”

Macalay said: “Does anybody—” and then stopped. He suddenly realized he was being talked to. He finished the sentence. “Does anybody ever get less than three days in the Hole?”

"Not under this P.K.,” the cellmate said. “If he don’t end up with a shiv in his ribs, the class of prisoners has fallen off in this can ... My name’s Mason. Jock Mason."

"Macalay."

"Yeah, I know. You were a cop, Mac. We're willing to forget it. My gang. Jock's Jockeys. If you'd said somebody lifted your needle, all the guys in the shoe shop woulda gotten hacked. We like a guy who keeps his teeth covered."

Macalay slowly grinned. It never occurred to him to say he might not like to be one of Jock's Jockeys. He said: “Hey. What are we doin’ in our cells?"

Jock laughed. "It's Sunday morning. Church parade's just gone, an' lunch'll be coming up in an hour ... A guy loses track of time in the Hole, an' don't I know it. There's a ball game this afternoon, the Stripes against the Stars. Who do you like?" Jock slowly rolled himself a cigarette and tossed the makings over to Macalay.

Macalay built a cigarette carefully. He hadn't smoked in four years, but he thought he knew how to roll one from when he was a kid. It looked a little like a tamale, but it held together while he lighted it. He said: ‘I'll take either side you don't want, for a pack of tailormades—when I earn them.’ The cons got a quarter a day when they worked.

Jock said: “You got the Stars. It's a sucker bet.”

"Yeah? They'll lick the numbers off the Stripes."

Both men laughed.

2.

Life changed after that. A prison is a peculiar place; almost everything happens in one that happens in the outside, free world; but it happens fast, in odd corners, just before a guard walks by, just after one has passed.

So Macalay, as one of Jock's Jockeys, found he could get drunk if he really wanted to; could get as many uncensored letters out as he wanted to; could even have a love affair—if he cared for it, and with a boy who should have been in a women’s prison—or an asylum—anyway.

He passed up the latter two amusements, but once in a while he took on a skinful. Ten to twenty's a hard sentence to pass, and he'd done less than six months of it.

So he was in on the drunk in Boiler No. 4, which made prison history.

No. 4 was a power boiler, not a heating one, and it was out of commission while a bunch of cons scaled it. Fitz Llewellen, a lifer, was in on the scaling gang, and he designed a still out of some of the boiler tubes they were cleaning. Since no guard in his right mind would possibly go inside a boiler, the still ran all the time they were chipping No. 4; but Fitz and Jock wouldn't let anybody touch, the white mule till the day before the boiler was cleaned.

There were six of them in there: Fitz, Jock, Macalay, the Nosy who had been a trusty when Mac was a fresh fish, and two safecrackers named Hanning and Russ, friends Macalay had cultivated with a great show of casualness, and persuaded Jock to take into their gang.
They passed the popsckull around gently at first, with a lot of “will-you-please” and “your turn.” It was pretty good jungle juice; made out of oranges and prunes lifted from the mess hall. Jock’s habitual easy gloom lifted, and he began singing, the tenor notes bouncing back off the boiler plate. “Singin’ in the rain, oh singin’ in the rain ...”

"Shut up," Russ said. “A screw’ll hear you.”

Jock said: “A guy can’t shut up forever. I feel good.” He went on singing.

Russ said: “You may want a month in the Hole. I don’t. Shutup.”

"Hole ain’t so bad,” Jock said. “Ask Mac. He was there last.”

Macalay said: “Not so bad. But I don’t want any more of it.”

"You used to be a cop, didn’t you?” Russ asked.

Macalay nodded. It was the first time it had been mentioned.

"I don’t like cops,” Russ said. He drained a big swallow of popsckull, and breathed out. “I don’t like cops’ brothers. I don’t like ex-cops, an’ any woman who’d give birth to a cop would sleep with monkeys.” And he took another drink.

"Okay,” Macalay said, telling himself to take it slow and easy, to feel his way along. “Now I’m a con, just like anybody else.” It was hot in the boiler, and the liquor didn’t help any. That stuff must have been a hundred and thirty proof at least, and they were drinking it straight.

"I don’t like drinking with cops,” Russ said monotonously. “I don’t like drinking with cops’ cellmates. I don’t have to listen to cops’ cellmates sing.”

"You’re just beggin’ for a throat full of teeth,” Jock said, still humming.

"Oh, tough guy,” Russ said. His hand flicked, and there was a little round of wood in it; a piece of broomstick, but carved carefully to give it looks. It opened, and one piece had a leather-needle sticking out of it. The other had been the sheath.

"Put it away Russ,” Hanning said. He was a very quiet guy, who had only drifted into buddying with Russ because they’d been in the same trade in the free world, loft-men.

"You turnin’ cop-lover, too?” Russ asked. His speech was getting a little blurred. He turned the bradawl shiv, and it shone in the dim light.

Jock suddenly shot out his foot, trying to kick the shiv out of Russ’ hand. Russ slid away, and stood up, his back against the polished boiler plate. “Now we know,” he said. “Now we know.” He started going for Jock.

Macalay got his feet under him. Why couldn’t it be some con other than Russ? Lousy luck. There was no other way to make the play now. Maybe, with Jock, he could get the shiv away and later, when sober, Russ would appreciate it.

The floor of the boiler was slick from the chipping they had given it. It was going to be a nasty fight; but Macalay needed Russ alive. He must try to keep him alive.

Fitz was gone; Nosy was halfway up the ladder. Before he could disappear through the manhole, Hanning was after him. The light was blocked a second time, and then Jock and Macalay were alone with the safecracker.

Jock said: “Got a shiv, Mac?”

Macalay said: “No. But there’s only one of him. I’ll keep him looking at me, and you get up behind him and mug him.”

Jock said: “Fair enough.”
Russ was bent over, shuffling around the boiler floor, the shiv held out, threateningly and guarding his belly at the same time. He moved into the center of the boiler, and that was a mistake. Jock started to get behind him, he half-turned, and Macalay was on him.

Macalay had had judo training as a rookie cop. He lunged at the knife with his right hand, and as it came up, shifted and came in fast with his left. The knife edge of his palm caught Russ on the side of the neck, and the safecracker went half off his feet.

Then everything turned into slow motion. Russ caromed off the side of the boiler, slid and staggered, and fell. He landed square on the leather needle in his hand. He made a little, quiet noise—almost like a tired man snuggling into bed—and was still.

Jock and Macalay stared at each other across his body. After a moment Jock bent down and felt his pulse. “Okay,” he said. “Okay. He's had it.”

Macalay said: “I guess we have, too.” He shook his head. “No way of getting out of this. No way.” And by the emphasis, he included his chance of beating the rap per Strane's agreement.

Jock said: “We can try. It's hot out there. Maybe the screw's gone off to hunt himself some shade ... If we can get to the kitchen, and be bumming chow, the boys there'll give us an alibi.”

Macalay said: “We have a chance. Those damn guards don't work too hard.”

Jock went up the ladder first. Macalay was so close behind him that he almost got his fingers stepped on. They clambered through the manhole, and out onto the boiler top, and dropped down on the brick floor of the boiler room.

Nobody was around. The heating furnaces were off for the summer; the con in charge of the power boilers was around on the other side, where the gauges were. It was almost as hot on the boiler room floor as it had been inside the boiler, or at least it seemed that way.

They made it to the door, and out, and walked along the side of the powerhouse towards the kitchen, the next building. The yard was deserted in the heat. Jock said: “The P.K. done us a favor, when he thought he was piling it on us, making us chip that boiler. We're gonna get away with it.”

Macalay said: “We haven't yet.”

Jock said: “No. We ain't. I got an ace in the hole. I've been saving it. If we can make the kitchen I think I'll play it.”

"This is the big hand," Macalay said. “Play your ace. This is murder.” The goose that could lay the hundred-grand egg for him had been murdered.

"Self defense," Jock said quickly. “Ain't no fingerprints on that shiv except his.”

Macalay laughed. “By the time the P.K. gets through, there'll be fingerprints. Yours, mine. That P.K. lives to see us all fixed, but good.”

A hundred feet from the kitchen, ninety feet. Their shoes seemed to have lead soles, like they'd dressed for diving. The sweat poured steadily down Macalay's back. Abruptly, he wanted to stand in the scorched yard and scream: “I'm not a criminal. I'm not a con! I don't belong with these men, this isn't me!”

You're shook, he told himself. Take it easy. Remember, this is the eight-ball you picked.

Fifty feet, forty feet. The whole traverse wasn't taking more than two minutes. But hours went by inside Macalay's brain, years of aging were being piled on his body. He told himself, trying to make a joke of it, that his arteries would be hardened before he got to the kitchen.

He found the joke didn't amuse him.
Now the loathsome smell of greasy stew bubbling was strong in their noses. There should have been a guard outside the kitchen door; there wasn't. The P.K. was so bad that the guards doped off half the time, smoking and lounging in a shady area behind the infirmary. The P.K. himself stayed out of the yard as much as possible.

The Warden was writing a book on the reform of criminals. The Deputy Warden toured around the United States making speeches about the Warden's pet theories.

It was a hell of penitentiary, but it had a kitchen and they were almost there.

And then they were inside. Macalay followed Jock around the edge of the big room, past cons peeling vegetables, washing pots, past baker-cons and cook-cons and salad-maker-cons. There were supposed to be civilian chefs, but the jobs were never filled, and the budget came out nicely at the end of the year, if the food didn't.

Somewhere Jock snatched two white caps, and they put them on. They bellied in to a sink where a punk named Snifter was scrubbing grills with a red brick. Each of them snatched up a brick and went to work. Macalay noticed that Jock was very careless with the dirty water that came off the grease-caked grill; he splashed it on his clothes, it ran down on his shoes. After a moment Macalay got the idea too; and in a couple of minutes he looked as though he'd been working in the kitchen all morning.

His stomach began to unknot, his arteries to soften.

A trusty-messenger went by; carrying invoices from the kitchen to the front office. Jock stepped back and blocked his way. Jock's lips hardly moved, and his voice was faint even as close as Macalay was.

"Bud, take a message for me. To a screw named Sinclair. You know him, don't you?"

"Yeah," the trusty said. "Big potbellied guy with a brown moustache."


"S'posin' he don't want to see you?"

"Tell him I just got a letter from a friend of his in ElkoNevada."

"Okay," said the trusty. "You owe me a favor." You got nothing for nothing in the can.

Jock nodded, and stepped in to the sink again, started scrubbing. A con pushed a load of grills up and dumped them in the sink, and more greasy water splashed over them. Macalay said: "Watch what you're doin', stir-bum."

"Who's a stir-bum, you stir-bum?"

The grease from the grills was a solid coating on Macalay's arms now, and its taste, and the taste of the blue air of the kitchen, was all down his throat. He said: "Isn't this enough grills?"

Jock said: "I'm waiting for Sinclair."

All this time the punk named Snifter scrubbed grills between them, not saying anything, apparently not hearing anything. Macalay realized that the punk was scared to death at being between Jock and one of his Jockeys, a tough yard gang. Macalay wondered what Snifter would do if he knew why Macalay and Jock were scrubbing grills, and remembering why they were there, made the filthy work a lot easier to take.

And here came Sinclair, a paunchy guy, with a moustache that probably would have been gray if he hadn't chewed tobacco. There were grease spots on his gray shirt and blue pants, and tarnish on his badge. "You Jock?" he said.

Jock nodded. "One time of Elko Nevada," he said. "With lots of friends there."

Sinclair chewed the moustache, and looked at Macalay and Snifter. "Blow."

Jock said: "Snifter can blow. Macalay's a friend of mine. From ElkoNevada."
Snifter sidled away, happily.

"What's all this about Elko, Nevada?" Sinclair said. Unlike Jock he did not say it as though it was all one word.

"Mac and I have been here all morning. When we reported to the job we were supposed to do, it was all done, and you went through the yard and told us to report to the kitchen."

Sinclair spat brown juice on the kitchen floor. "Yeah?"

"Yeah," Jock said. "And you never held up Horse Caner's gambling joint in Elko Nevada and you never shot his brother and one of the faro-dealers. Never."

Macalay watched Sinclair. The pig eyes of the guard never showed anything, not fear, not anger. "When did all this happen?"

"Five minutes after the first shift started this morning," Jock said.

Sinclair said: "Okay. What job was it that was finished?"

"Chipping boilers."

Sinclair started away. From five feet he turned back. "And stay away from Nevada."

"Never even heard of the place," Jock said.

"It's a no-good state," Sinclair said, and kept on going.

Macalay let out his breath as far as it would go. Then he hated to breathe in again because of the blue grease-smoke in the kitchen. "That was quite an ace."

Jock nodded, sadly. He had given up on the grills, was trying to get the grease off his hands. "Yeah," he said. "A pal got the word to me when he heard I was coming here. I hated to play that hole ace. I really hated to."

3.

This time there were five naked men lined up in front of the P.K.'s desk. The P.K. looked very happy; he had the look of a man who'd hit oil digging a sewer. There was old Fitz, there was Hanning, Nosy, Jock and Macalay.

The P.K. said: "Okay. I'm paid by the year; I don't mind waiting. You were the guys on the chipping gang with Russ. This morning we go to put the boiler back in service, and he's in there stinking dead. And we've had the state cops looking for him for three days. So what happened?" He glared at them.

Nobody said anything. It was still hot weather, and their bodies glistened. Macalay wondered vaguely what the J stood for, but he didn't ask.

"I don't take it kindly that for three days the papers have been full of I let a con escape," the P.K. said. "I don't take it kindly on account of the people don't remember it wasn't so. They think they remember I got a leaky jug. It ain't good."

None of the cons said anything. The P.K. leaned back in his desk. A triangular stand of wood on it said his name was J. Odell, and he was Principal Keeper. Macalay wondered vaguely what the J stood for, but he didn't ask.

"I don't take it kindly that for three days the papers have been full of I let a con escape," the P.K. said. "I don't take it kindly on account of the people don't remember it wasn't so. They think they remember I got a leaky jug. It ain't good."

None of the cons said anything. It was still hot weather, and their bodies glistened. Macalay wondered if the P.K. was a little queer, the way he liked to question naked cons. It could very well be. A homo and a sadist would be two nice things to say about the P.K.

You're thinking like a con, Macalay told himself. The P.K.'s just a sour guy who does all the work the Warden and the Deputy Warden should do. You find guys like that in police stations all over the country. Supposing they take it out in socking a prisoner now and then, it's understandable.

And a voice inside answered: "It depends on which side you stand. What a cop or a guard can understand doesn't make sense to a con or a suspect."
The P.K. said: “You guys were on the crew with Russ. One of you killed him.”

Hanning said: “How did he die?”

A guard standing behind the five prisoners reached out with his swagger stick and whacked Hanning across the back. “Shut up.”

"One of you knows how he croaked,” the P.K. said. “It don’t matter to the rest of you. I can throw the five of you into the Hole. But it’s nice an’ cool in the Hole now. So—” He turned to the guards. “I want five pairs of cuffs,” He thought. “An’ a piece of chain.”

He was positively chuckling when the things were brought. “You guys like the boiler room so well, you’re gonna see it. There was jungle juice in that boiler, there was a still. Having a good time, wasn’t you?”

He had them handcuffed one to the other. The man at each end had one open cuff; the guard slipped a chain link over one of them, and then led the line of five, still naked, out of the office, down the stairs, across the exercise yard to the boiler room. The P.K. strolled along with them, his uniform coat open. He was whistling softly under his breath.

There was a guard on duty outside the boiler room this time. The word had gone out; the P.K. is in the yard. It wasn’t a thing that happened very often; the screws were all on duty and at their posts. Some of them had even straightened their uniforms and tried to polish their badges.

The guard saluted, and the procession marched into the boiler room. There were cops, plain clothes and uniformed, from the State Police Force working around No. 4. The P.K. led his little show there and stopped.

He said: “You guys about through?”

A detective turned and grunted. “Nothing to find out here.”

"Then scram.”

The detective probably had a good deal of rank; he didn't seem to be used to that kind of talk. He said: “Huh?”

"Regulations say if there's a homicide in the prison, I gotta let you guys look it over. So you looked. Now I'm taking it over my way. I'll call you tonight, let you know who croaked Russ.’

The detective turned a blue-eyed gaze on the five naked men. “What the hell?”

"They're gonna talk. Probably only one or two of 'em did the killing. The others'll be glad to squeal before I get through with them.”

"Stuff you get that way don't stand up in court.”

"This is my pen. It'll stand up here.”

The P.K. reached out, grabbed the loose end of the chain, pulled it. The con to whose cuff it went gave a little yelp as the cuff bit into his wrist. The P.K. said: “You guys make a circle around the boiler. No. 5 here. Face the boiler and stand a foot away from it.” He turned to the detective. “You think I'm cruel, cap? A cruel guy wouldn't give 'em that foot. But me, I got all the time in the world.”

Macalay found it was hard to force himself to step that close to the boiler side. A faint cherry glow came out of it. But the bite on his wrist was more immediate and he stepped in. The P.K. fastened the chain so they were pinned there, in a circle whose radius was just a foot more than that of the boiler rim.

The detective-captain said angrily: “I don't want to see this.”

"Then don't look,” the P.K. said. “Get back in your dolly-cart an’ go tour the pretty scenery. You state cops give me
a pain. Inside here, we know what these guys are. Rats, all of ‘em. Punks. Mebbe they act nice an’ pretty for you, but once that gate closes on ‘em, they show up for what they are.”

The captain was not visible to Macalay any more. He said: “All right, boys, the Warden doesn't seem to need us anymore.”

There was the shuffle of men moving together. There was the snarl of the P.K.’s voice. “I'm not the Warden. I'm just the lousy Principal Keeper.”

But the heat had started now. Sweat streamed down his front, into his eyes, into his mouth when he gasped. He shut his eyes tight, and red flames flickered against the eyelids.

His wrists hurt, and he had to brace himself. The men on the other side of the circle were pulling back, trying to get away from the cherry-glow of the boiler wall, and that meant they were pulling him in. He braced his naked, aching feet, and pulled back, and across the boiler one of the men shrieked. He didn't know which one.

Old Fitz was next to him. Macalay heard him mutter: “We gotta hold our own.”

The boiler room floor was greasy, the puddle of sweat didn't help. But he braced himself, and leaned backwards.

Jock's voice on the other side of the boiler yelped: “Give us a little slack here. Hanning's touching the metal!”

Macalay realized then that the scream he'd heard had never stopped. He let up on the pull a little, and the screaming stopped, broke off into a mumbled wail.

The sweat had stopped, he suddenly realized. Guess there's just so much in a man, and his was gone.

Now his head began to go around, and his eyeballs began to swell. It was as though all the liquid left in his body had gone to his eyes. He was sure they would burst in a moment, and that seemed worse to him than dying. The picture of his eyes bursting, and their liquid spattering on the boiler wall and drying there became so real that he jerked back, and the scream came from the other side again.

He shook his head and came back to a sort of half-sanity, a limbo-land on the edge of reason. The P.K.’s gravelly voice came through to him: “All right, you lice. Anybody want to confess an’ save four other guys’ lives?”

He got no answer; perhaps he hadn't expected any. The voice deepened to a snarl: “All right. If you think I mind seeing the whole bunch of you shrivel up an’ blow away, just keep your mouths shut. It don't matter to me.”

The snarl went on. But Macalay had a new worry. Old Fitz on his left wrist had fainted. He fell forward, almost breaking Macalay's arm, and Macalay and Nosy, on either side of him, flipped him back, automatically, and held him there. The cuff bit through the skin and Macalay began to bleed. The blood running down his hand felt cool and nice.

Maybe I'll bleed to death and get out of this. Easy dough, Strane's kind, you can't take it along. Wouldn't it be nice to die, just to die?

A new noise cut over the P.K.’s growl. It was Nosy. “Got a guy passed out, sir. He's breaking my arm.”

"Fine,” the P.K. said, “fine. So talk, and get outta the daisy chain.”

"How can I talk ?” Nosy asked. “My arm's breaking.”

"Let it break,” the P.K. said. “Talk with your mouth.”

"Go to hell,” said Nosy.

Through the fog of his pain, he heard the P.K.’s feet tramping towards him. Grit on the boiler room floor ground under those big feet, and they did it on a note high enough to cut piercingly through Macalay's head and add one more pain to a system that was nearly all pain now.
The P.K. had kicked Nosy up against the boiler.

Nosy screamed, and jerked back, and Hanning on the other side screamed, and then Hanning's scream turned into words. "Macalay," he yelled. "Macalay an' Jock was the last two in the boiler with him. They did it, Jock and Macalay."

"All right," the Principal Keeper said. "Open the chain, boys. Take Hanning and Fitz and Nosy to the hospital. Lay the other two out on the floor here and throw a bucket of water on 'em."

Macalay felt hands on him, but he couldn't be sure what they were doing. But he did feel cooler, and there was some sensation left in his back, because he could feel the filth of the floor biting into his skin.

"G'wan," the P.K. said. "Throw some water on 'em."

Another voice said: "Sir, those burns'll blister if you hit them with cold water."

"So? Let 'em blister."

"I thought the Principal Keeper wanted them for trial. Any jury'd let them off if they get blistered."

"Who's going to try them?" The Principal Keeper was laughing now. "There wasn't any fingerprints on that shiv except Russ'; we'd never get a conviction. But if these crumbs had told me about Russ when it happened, the papers never would have printed that I'd let a guy escape. I want to teach these bums that they better keep clean with me. Throw some water on 'em and put 'em in the Hole. They gotta learn."

Macalay, for all his pain, laughed inside when he heard he was going to the Hole again. It was cool in the Hole, and this was summer. He could take it; he'd taken it before....

And once he'd been sorry for himself, just because he was in a detention cell in the city. Sorry for himself because he was lonely. That was why he had been so glad when Inspector Strane showed up.

Inspector Strane, William Martin Strane, was something in the Department; a man four years beyond the retirement age, the city council had had to pass a special law exempting him from retirement. Theoretically, Inspector Strane couldn't live forever; but the city, and the city's police, had no idea of what they would do when and if he died.

He didn't look like dying as he sat down on Macalay's bunk and stared at him from ice-colored eyes. He didn't seem to have much time to waste on words. "Macalay, you had no business being on duty that night."

Macalay knew the Inspector, from hearsay and personal knowledge. You didn't kid around with him. He said: "No, sir."

Strane said: "I want to brief you on your physical condition. Seems you're not aware of it. Your right arm's gone out four times in the last two months. You dislocated it wrestling at the Y, and the civilian doctor you went to hasn't been able to fix it."

"No, sir. No, he hasn't."

"You got a physical exam coming up next month. You wouldn't be able to pass it, even if you had the chance to take it." The Inspector reached his leg out and squashed a cockroach under the sole of his high-laced kangaroo shoe.

Macalay said nothing.

"Hmph." Even the Inspector's grunt had an old-fashioned quality about it. "Some day you'll have to learn a trade. Clerk in an office or something."

Macalay shifted from one foot to the other. He didn't dare sit down until the Inspector asked him to.

"Listen, Macalay," the Inspector said. "Those jewels in your shoe weren't worth a million, but they were still worth a
hell of a lot. Even if they were glass, you'd still be on a spot. You know that."

All Macalay said was: “Yes, sir.”

"The Jewelers Association has posted a hundred thousand dollars reward for that gang, arrest and conviction. It's their sixth job."

He stopped, and Macalay waited. The Inspector pulled a narrow cigar out of his pocket and lit it. He half-closed his ice-cube eyes against the smoke. For a man with a reputation for bluntness, he was being surprisingly circuitous.

"That's a lot of money," Macalay said, to break the silence, wondering when Strane would get to the point.

"Yeah. Jewelers pay a lot of insurance. A gang like this raises the premium—y'know? These bums have heisted several million bucks' worth."

"You'd think they'd retire," Macalay said.

Inspector Strane stared at him, as though trying to figure out if this cop in a cell was trying to be funny. Finally, he concluded Macalay wasn't. He said: “Bums never got enough money. Their friends blackmail ‘em; their dames cost money; the fences rook them. I never knew one to die rich.”

Macalay had no observations to make on bums and their money problems.

Inspector Strane let the silence build; then he nodded, as though pleased with the young man. “Okay,” he said. “You got the picture. Signify anything to you?”

Macalay shook his head slightly.

"You've not got too much to choose from,” Inspector Strane said. “So. Why not take on this case? The Jewelers' Association's been talking to me. They want a man."

"Me?” Macalay laughed a non-funny laugh. “I'm sure as hell not going to be around.

Inspector Strane crossed his legs and the bunk creaked. He took the thin cigar from his mouth. “Why'd you take those diamonds? No crap now, Macalay.”

"Like you said, Inspector: the doc told me I'd never pass another physical. They were right there for me to take. I'd just come to after being slugged and there they were. If I hadn't passed out trying to get to Gresham, I'd have got away with those stones.”

Strane came as close to smiling as he ever got. “We want the bums who have been getting away with too damn much.”

Macalay said: “And don't forget Gresham."

"You'd like to square things for him, wouldn't you?"

A silence hung between them. Strane wasn't getting to his point. Macalay figured he'd help him.

"You said something about a hundred thousand reward. That dough interests me."

"All right,” Strane said, and then laid it on the line. He had given it to him like an itemized account. His offer and the alternatives, numbering them one to three, for definiteness as well as clarity: In return for information, Macalay would be sprung, his sentence whatever it might be, nullified. That plus the reward. If he failed, tough—Strane had no bargaining tools; he served his time. In either case, he ran the risk of a shiv in his gut by a con. There was only one thing worse, to a con's way of thinking, than a cop ... and that was a double-crossing cop.

"Why go into the pen to crack this case?” Macalay wanted to know.
"We got no leads on the outside, that's why." Strane sounded annoyed. "Well?"

"A guy can live forever on a hundred grand. Live real well. His shoulder'll never bother him."

"You sound like I'm giving you a guarantee." Inspector Strane shook his head dolefully. "Bums don't talk, remember that." It was his standard word for crooks. "Especially to cops."

"They talk to other bums," Macalay said.

"Hmph." The Inspector's grunt belittled Macalay's confidence. "And there's another thing to remember. We go on working on this case on the outside. We crack it before you, the deal's over. You understand?"

"I still like the sound of that big lump of dough."

Inspector Strane nodded. "I just hope you're tough enough. Once you start on this, you know, there's no out?" He spotted another cockroach; his foot went for it and got it. "Write when you've got something to tell me. My first two names, William Martin. On second thought, make it Miss Billie Martin. Tell her you miss her. The box number is 1151, here at the Central Post Office. The bum you're to get close to is a loft-man by the name of Russell. He's the brother of that safecracker who died right alongside of Gresham. That's about it."

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Macalay was four weeks in the Hole this time. But even in there, he could sense that his position in the prison had changed. The first time he'd gone to the Hole for not squealing, he hadn't known whether a prisoner or a screw brought his food; this time when he was in for not squealing under the toughest circumstances, he was sure it was a con.

Because in his very first tray there was a salve of burn ointment. And on the second tray there was a candle and a dozen matches.

After that there was a little something on nearly every tray; a few slices of bacon, a buttered roll, an orange even. Sometimes there was nothing, and that undoubtedly meant that a guard was looking over the trays. But that didn't happen very often, so probably the P.K. had gone back to sitting in his office, and the Warden was still working on his book and the Deputy Warden was still making speeches, and the screws were still doping off in the shade.

It was funny, now. Even in the Hole Macalay felt in touch with the whole prison, perhaps as a man giving a transfusion to a patient on the operating table feels in touch with the operation; it is passing through his veins and arteries. He never heard a word from Jock or anyone else, but he could feel himself in touch with Jock, in some other Hole.

Macalay was really part of the prison now, and the Hole wasn't so bad. And best of all there was Hanning, Russ' sidekick. Hanning who probably knew what Russ knew.

His burns healed, and the broken skin on his wrist healed, though his wrist bones ached for quite a while, and there were permanent scars there and on his knees and on one shoulder that must have gone against the boiler when he didn't know it.

Instead of fighting the Hole this time, he looked on it as a rest from chipping boilers or scrubbing greasy pans in the kitchen. Maybe it would have been better in the infirmary, but it was all right.

And so he got a little better all the time. He began exercising, doing knee-bends and push-ups. He told himself he was doing this to keep his health; then, when that self-lie stopped fooling him, he said he was doing it because you didn't dare go out in the yard weak.

And then he stripped away all self-pretense. He faced himself: Hanning squealed on Jock and me; Jock and me have to get him. And we will. So I got to be strong.

The next meal he kept his spoon out, hoping it wouldn't get the trusty who'd been feeding him into trouble. He hid
the spoon by putting it behind some loose mortar in the wall, and waited two full meals. When there was a cold
chunk of stew meat—good lamb shank with marrow in it—on his tray, he knew the same trusty was still on duty,
and had covered up about the spoon, some way.

So he took the spoon out of hiding and began sharpening it on the rough concrete floor.

You can kill a man with a spoon. The way you do it is, you sharpen the bowl down to an arrowhead; then you bend
the handle like a finger ring, only you leave an inch and a half at the back to lie flat along your palm.

Slip that on, and one punch will do the job.

Now his time was pretty full. He had his exercise; he had his sharpening; he had his thoughts. He thought of the
hundred thousand. He thought he would get the dope for Strane from Hanning and then kill Hanning.

After awhile he got out. His cellmate this time was a fresh fish, just out of the quarantine block, guy named Leon
something or other. Just a punk. Looked like he didn't even have to shave every day. A punk with light fuzz on his
chin.

As soon as Macalay was shoved into his cell, this Leon volunteered his name and said: “I'm doing two to ten for
grand larceny, automobile. How about you?”

"I'm a chicken thief,” Macalay said. “I took three hundred to five hundred for habitual chicken theft.”

Leon looked at him. “Aw,” he said. “I'm sorry. I'm always doin' something wrong. Isn't it right to ask the guys what
they're in for?”

"No, fish. It ain't right. You can accumulate a mouthful of floating teeth asking questions. It isn't ethical."

"I didn't know,” Leon said, gloomily. “I never do anything right. Like the car I took. It was already hot, and on the
police radio, was why the guy had left it there with the keys in it ... I thought the law was it wasn't stealing if the
keys were in it, but that ain't the law.”

"Thanks for the advice,” Macalay said. “I knew the P.K. had it in for me, but I didn't know he'd go this far, putting
you in my cell.”

"Who's the P.K.?” The kid had thick black hair and pink cheeks, and his eyes shone. He'd last about two hours in the
yard.

"The P.K. is a kind of chewing gum they give us,” Macalay said. He stripped off his shirt and went over to the
washstand. He knew the kid's eyes must be coming out on his cheekbones when he saw the still-fresh scars, but he
didn't hear any questions.

Fresh water played across his face, he rubbed it in well, rubbing the Hole out, getting clean again. He started to
shave, and then, not suddenly, but rolling hard at him, as a steam-roller goes at a pile of rubble, some sort of sanity
returned.

I was going to kill Hanning, he thought. Kill Hanning, take a chance on the big rap, on throwing away everything
that maybe can get me out of here.

He shaved slower, pausing every now and then. To live like a con, and yet not to become one. That, he told himself,
was what he had to fight against—that was the big danger. To keep my eye on the outside, on the free world, on a
hundred thousand bucks, to remember that stir is only a small part of the world. To think of it as prison, not stir, the
men prisoners, not cons, the officers guards and not screws; to live penned up, but think free.

He turned, reached for his shirt, and said: “Leon, the P.K. is the Principal Keeper. He runs this place. He's the man to
fear.”

A smile broke across Leon's face. His eyes got shiny. He said: “Thanks, mister.”
"The name's Macalay. Just Mac." Macalay returned the smile, wondering fleetingly if he could in some way use this young squirt to get to Hanning. "There goes the supper bell. We line up here, I'll show you how, and do a snake dance to the mess hall ... Keep your lip buttoned up, there are swagger-stick screws all along the way."

It was still hot weather, but there was just the smell of fall coming in the air. It was good to be walking along to the mess hall, out in the sun and the cool air.

Good just to drift along with the other cons, but it was time for Macalay to think. He had accomplished only one thing so far: he had established himself as a real con. Hardly anybody would remember now that he'd once been a cop; two sessions of the Hole had taken care of that.

And now—suddenly, not like the steam-roller, but like a bulldozer hitting something hard, and pushing it, all at once into something new, he understood why there had been no outside trial, no investigation of Russ' murder.

The P.K. That snake brain, sitting in his twin offices, one blood-proof, and one carpeted, planning. It would be easy for the P.K. to see to it that the state cops would find no evidence to take into court, and an officer won't push a case that he's going to lose.

Macalay knew that. Every cop knows that. It's bad for your record.

And why? So the P.K. could keep his own record clear. So he could have a real reason to use the torture that was as necessary to him as grass to a cow, water to a fish.

Macalay, back from the Hole, back from the depths of his convict-thinking, summed it up. I'm in stir, but good, not a con holds my police background against me. I've got that, and it's one thing I figured right from the start I had to get.

And I've got one other thing: I know how to handle the P.K., and the P.K. is the prison. The whole prison. But my neck is still in a noose. I got to act like I'm expected to act. The cons will expect me to get Hanning for squealing. I've got to make that play, and cross the next bridge when and if.

Macalay laughed inside, thinking of Strane smashing cockroaches, Strane, who should be retired, sitting on his old ass telling him he'd have to be tough. But Macalay's face never moved a muscle. The screws didn't like it if you laughed in the march-along.

He marched into the mess hall, eyes in front of him, hands at his sides as per regulations; but he had learned to see a lot without looking. He saw Hanning two files over, and Hanning saw him. Hanning's look said, "Come on, you sonofabitch, I'm ready." He saw Jock one file on the other side of him, and Jock didn't look like he'd ever get his strength back. The P.K. had broken Jock; the P.K. could break anyone in time. Including Macalay.

Leon was on one side of him, and that was no good to him at all. But the man on the other side of him was an old stir-bum, Lefty something-or-other. As they bowed their heads and stood behind the benches, he gathered his breath; and as the chaplain started the grace, he told Lefty: "Hanning's my meat and nobody else's. Pass it."

The Chaplain finished and they sat down and the bowls were placed on their tables: hot dogs, vinegar sauerkraut, boiled potatoes and watery spinach. Macalay speared hot dogs and potatoes and took his bread and Leon's to make sandwiches; it takes twenty years to learn to eat prison sauerkraut. As the new head of Jock's Jockies, he probably should have taken Leon's sausages, too, but he couldn't do it.

He knew the word was passing down the long tables. It was a thing that the rifle-screws on the balcony, and the swagger-stick screws walking up and down between the benches couldn't stop; it happened at every meal that somebody passed the word. But never a lip moved, and not a wave of sound went anywhere but where it was aimed.

We've suspended the laws of physics, Macalay thought. We can make a tunnel out of air, and shoot sound through it! We ought to be studied by some of the eggheads at the colleges.

He reached out and scooped up Leon's margarine, buttered a sandwich with it.

Leon looked at him sadly.
There was a commotion behind them, aways. The rifle-guards on the balcony stiffened at the rail, raking the place with their guns. Leon said: “What happened?”

A screw yelled: “Shut up, you! No talking in the mess hall,” and poked Leon in his back with his swagger-stick.

Macalay said: “Somebody passed out. The stinkin’ food they give you, you never know if it’s to be eaten or if it’s already been eaten. It’s a mystery somebody doesn’t pass out every meal."

Nobody but Leon heard him say it.

The doors to the yard opened and two white-shirted trusties with a stretcher came in, trotting. The chug-chug of the infirmary’s old ambulance could be heard outside the door.

A gentle wind ran across the mess hall. Lefty let a breath of it go at Macalay. “Jock lost his lunch. He passed out.”

Macalay said: “A lunch like this ain’t much loss.” And he thought that with Jock laid up, Hanning became unquestionably his meat. It was up to him now.

The mess hall trusties served rice pudding.

5.

The P.K. assigned Macalay to the concrete block plant. It was rough work; pick up a shovel of cement, heave it in the hopper, follow it with a few shovels of sand, a few of gravel, one of stones and turn and do the same thing to the mixer on the other side.

It was work that left your arms trembling long after you were on your cot in the cell with the lights out and the radio earphones turned off. Macalay was the only man in the yard who had to tend two mixers at one time. His bad shoulder nearly killed him at night.

He heard Jock was in the clay-brick yard, unloading kilns. That wasn't bad work, if the screws let the kilns cool before you had to unload them. He heard they didn't with Jock. The P.K. was still riding both him and Jock.

Then he heard that Hanning had been given a job in the office, filing papers for the P.K.

That night he wrote a letter to Miss Billie Martin, Box 1151. He had to make an effort to remember the number.

Two days later he was hauled out of his cell right after lunch and told the P.K. wanted him.

Even though he knew what it was about, he felt the old thrill of fear go through his stomach and the small of his back. He didn't even like to hear about the P.K. anymore; the P.K. was the cons’ favorite conversation piece.

But this time there weren't screws in the office; it wasn't even the same office. It was the one where the P.K. did his front work, a pleasant place with a trusty typing away at a desk, and the P.K. behind a bigger one, with a bookcase behind him, full of books on criminology and penology and institute management which he had never read.

Opposite him was Inspector Strane. He looked around as Macalay came to attention, his heels clicking.

The P.K. said: “All right, Macalay. At ease. The Inspector here has some questions to ask you."

Inspector Strane said: “No use taking up your time, Mr. Odell."

Odell, that was the P.K.’s name. He had another of those triangle things on this desk, like he had in the other room, the room that was plain and slick, so blood wouldn't stain anything.

The P.K. said: “I like to cooperate."

"And I appreciate it. But I would like to talk to Macalay alone now. If we could just have a little room to talk in, a cell, anything."
"I ain't likely to put a city police inspector in a cell. You g'wan an' use my other office. You want somebody to take notes?"

"No." Inspector Strane had not looked at Macalay. "You can't get anything out of a convict if notes are being taken, Mr. Odell."

"You can't get anything out of Macalay anyway," the P.K. said. "He's one of the worst troublemakers in this can. I wisht you'da framed a more docile guy to send here."

The Inspector was as stiff-backed as ever. "I don't frame people, Mr. Odell."

"That was a joke," the P.K. said. "Just a joke. Okay, Strauss, take Inspector Strane over to my other office, take Macalay with him. You don't have to stay with them, jus' make sure Macalay don't have a shiv on him. I don't want any cops getting killed in my stir."

The screw, Strauss, saluted. He snapped his fingers at Macalay to rightabout-face; Macalay did. The Inspector followed them out. The P.K. said: "You guys on the cops don't have any idea what we gotta put up with. You see the best side of them, when they still think they maybe are gonna beat the rap."

When they were alone, Macalay stood at attention in front of the P.K.'s desk.

The Inspector, behind the desk, said: "All right, Mac, all right. Break it off."

Macalay said: "Yes, sir."

Strane's eyes widened. Then he nodded, slowly, and began sliding the desk drawers open, slowly, smoothly, as though he'd once been trained as a second-story man. He found the mike in the middle drawer, left-hand side. He sat staring down at it for a moment, and then slowly grinned. He took his hat—his good felt hat—and jammed it down over the mike. Then he shut the drawer again. "There," he said. "Sit down, Mac."

Macalay sat down. Inspector Strane pulled two thin cigars out of his pocket, handed one of them to Macalay, took a flask off his hip and a box of breath-killers, and put those on Macalay's side of the desk. "Okay," he said, "let's have it. You getting anywhere?"

"Sure. I'm making concrete bricks now. It's better than chipping boilers or washing pots. It's not as good as being in the shoeshop, where I was."

Strane's lips thinned. "Knock it off, Macalay. Quit clowning."

Macalay reached out and took a drink from the flask. The taste of free-world liquor brought him all kinds of memories; and for a minute he was afraid he was going to cry. He bit his lip and said: "I've been in The Hole, in solitary, twice. It pretty near got me."

"So now you want out. You know I can't—"

"No. No. I don't want to get out."

The Inspector sat up a little straighter. He looked almost angry. "What did you want to see me about?"

"I want to be transferred to the laundry."

"You got me down here for that? Why, I can't—"

"There's somebody I got to get next to."

"Why?" The old voice cracked like a whip.

"This guy was Russ' buddy. He's on the office force and he got there by squealing on me. He goes through the laundry every day for a check."
"You've gone stir-crazy! You think I'd help you kill a man, even a con? You think Principal Keeper Odell wouldn't know he had to keep you apart?"

"He's a sadist," Macalay said. He finished his liquor and reached for the breath-killers. "He'd like to see this Hanning hurt. He'd like to see me hurt, too. He'd like to see every con hurt. This Hanning was Russ' buddy. You know Russ is dead? I take it, you know that."

Strane nodded, watched Macalay chew the breath-killers.

"I was getting somewhere before I got into The Hole," Macalay said, "and to go on, I'll have to work in the laundry. I tell you I'm onto something good."

"You got guts," Inspector Strane said. "I'll be damned if I don't want to see this work out for you."

"Thanks," Macalay said bitterly.

"Stop and think, will you? What am I going to tell Odell? I got no reason to ask him to transfer you."

"You're not much help."

Strane swore. "And you keep your hands off that Hanning."

"I'll get to him," Macalay said. "I have to."

The P.K. laughed. "He's a real dyed-in-the-wool lowdown con," he said. "They never talk. Supposed to be a first offender, but I've sent out tracers. I'll bet you he's served time in a half a dozen other places."

Macalay stood at attention.

"He's not your favorite prisoner, eh?" Inspector Strane took out a cigar, handed it to the P.K.

"I got no favorite among the cons," the P.K. said, heavily. "A nestful of snakes, the whole bunch. I'd like to pump poison through the cells."

Strane said: "Well, if there weren't any criminals, we'd both be out of jobs."

The P.K. chuckled his heavy, belching chuckle. "A thought. Need this boy any more, Inspector?"

"No," Inspector Strane said. "But think it over, Macalay."

"Hold that boy outside, Strauss," the P.K. said. "I want to talk to him.... "

Strauss snapped his fingers at Macalay, who about-faced and marched out with the guard. Outside, Strauss sat down on a bench, staring at the convict-clerks; Macalay started to sit down next to him. Strauss snapped his fingers. "Attention!"

After awhile Inspector Strane came out, putting on his hat. He never glanced at Macalay, standing stiffly at attention.

One of the clerks, a little nance Macalay couldn't remember seeing before, was giggling at him, for no apparent reason. By the time the P.K. sounded his buzzer, Macalay was considering violence.

Strauss snapped his fingers again—he was really a natural to turn out just like the P.K.—and Macalay marched back into the office, stood at attention in front of the desk.

After awhile the P.K. looked up. "All right, Strauss." He waited till the screw had left. Then his sour gaze went up and down Macalay. "So you didn't tell that city dick anything."

"No, sir."
"Pretty anxious for you to talk. Wanted me to bribe you."

"Sir?"

"Give you a laundry job so you'd talk. Yah! Why should I? What did these cops ever do for me, except send more renegades in here to make me trouble? I wouldn't do a city inspector a favor if he paid me!"

Macalay waited. So Strane had tried and it hadn't worked. So—

"Yeah!" the P.K. snarled again. "I never liked you, Macalay. I don't like cons, and you're the worst kind. Aren't you?"

"I don't know, sir."

"But I got you trained," the P.K. said. He ran a finger over the desk, inspected it for dust. "You don't talk to cops, and that's because I trained you. You're a real con, now. You know what that inspector gets a year?"

Macalay felt very tired. He said: "No, sir."

"Twenty-three hundred bucks more than I do. And he gets to go home at night, not live in a lousy stir. And he gets to go to dinners with all the big shots in town, and get up an' make speeches about how we're putting down crime, an' all."

Apparently the P.K. hated cops as well as cons. Macalay wondered how he felt about civilians. Probably hated them, too, because they didn't have to take state jobs. Probably hated himself for that matter.

"Yeah," the P.K. said, "that inspector sure went off with a bee in his high hat. You, Macalay. I'll transfer you, but where I want to transfer you. You think you got brains enough to hold down an office job?"

"I could try, sir," Macalay said, and held his breath.

"Yeah. I'll have you transferred. You start tomorrow. Can you type?"

"Yes, sir." This was too damn good to be true.

"Good, boy, good. A big boy like you in with the fags. Be nice."

Macalay nodded imperceptibly. The sadistic sonofabitch wanted to see him and Hanning tangle. He wanted to see two cons knife one another. His own perverted pleasure was all the sonofabitch ever thought about.

6.

The office job was okay. Only the P.K.'s office—the fancy one where he did not interrogate prisoners—was air conditioned, but there were fans in all the clerical rooms, and, as winter came on, heaters. There were washbasins where the convict-clerks could wash their hands if they soiled them on the carbon paper; there were pots of coffee sent up from the kitchen whenever they wanted them, because the office staff could do a lot for the other convicts, could transfer their cells or their work-assignments.

Several of the clerks were punks, pansies, girl-boys; these were the various phrases the prison world used to describe them. They flirted with the normal men on the convict-staff, and two or three couples of clerks were “married.” Of course it was a cinch for a clerk to see that he shared the same cell with his beloved. But in addition to all this, they were cons. Especially vicious ones. The limp wrists and the wiggling behinds didn't make you forget that.

The arrival of Macalay, a new man in the office, had given the pansies a great big old thrill, as Macalay put it to himself. One of them had presented him with a personal coffee cup with his name painted on it in the fluid they used to correct mimeograph stencils; another had put flowers on his desk, and a third had given him a chair pad, hand-knitted.
But when he didn't respond to their attentions, the girl-boys relaxed back into routine, and left him alone. Quizzically, he noticed that inside himself he rather missed the fuss they'd made over him, and, shuddering, he told himself he had to finish this up quick, make his play before he slid down the easy chute of convict thinking.

So he concentrated on Hanning.

It was a thing he could do well—hate Hanning. The convict part of him and the copper part of him could hate Hanning equally.

Hanning didn't bat an eye when he found Macalay in the office. He didn't allow himself to be stared down. What Hanning might be cooking up for him, he had no way of knowing. But he was wary, even as he knew Hanning to be wary of him.

He found out something right away: Hanning was “married” to one of the file clerks. Somehow or other this surprised Macalay; it changed his opinion of Hanning from sheer hatred to something pretty close to contempt. Still, he worked on how he could put this information that he'd uncovered about Hanning to use.

For two weeks he didn't speak to the squealer. Then the time for the annual report to the Governor came up, and the office staff were put on overtime. It meant they had to eat dinner, at least, in the office, while the rest of the population got supper in the mess halls. The P.K.'s whole career depended on those reports; if anything went wrong with them, the Warden might stop writing his book, the Deputy Warden might stay home for a while, and the P.K.'s life would be wrecked. So nothing was too good for the clerks who made out the report.

Macalay searched and searched, and finally found an opening. There was a nice little thing in the annual mess report he could use. But, instead of going right to the P.K. with it, he waited. That night he took his supper plate over to Hanning's desk. “Hi, boy.”

Hanning looked up, startled, his face an angry white.

"I don't want these mashed potatoes,” Macalay said. “I'll swap them for your string beans.” Macalay made the swap quickly with his fork. Then he pulled up a chair and sat opposite Hanning. He said: “Brother, I was sure out to get you.” He forked overdone beef into his mouth. “When a guy first gets out of that Hole, he's like an animal. Hell, man, if you hadn't yelled, I was gonna do it myself. You probably saved my life, yellin’ when you did.”

Hanning was getting back to normal. “Well, yeah, that furnace. We'd've all croaked in a little while, and the P.K.—he woulda found some way of covering up.”

"That's right,” Macalay said, and went on eating. “You holding that against me? You know—about Russ?”

Hanning shook his head, his eyes glistening with relief. “That bastard?” he said shrilly, in his eagerness to square things with Macalay.

Macalay dropped it then, but he kept on talking to Hanning once in awhile—just casually for a couple of days. At the end of that time he gave Hanning's sweetie—they called him Piney—a knitted muffler Leon's mother had sent him.

Then Macalay went to the P.K. He was very careful to stand at attention while he talked. “Sir, about the mess hall report.”

The P.K. growled, but it wasn't the growl he'd used at previous interviews. This one took place in the polite office, too. “What about it?”

"I notice the Principal Keeper says that food costs went up three percent in the last year.”

"Yeah?”

"I went over to the library and looked it up. Overall food costs in the country went up eight percent. Instead of apologizing, the prison can claim an actual reduction in costs of five percent.”
The P.K. looked pleased. But he hated to be nice to anyone. “Yeah?” he said. “I can claim it, but can I make it stick?”

“I want to make a chart on it. A graph.”

“Hey, that’s all right. Yeah, you do that.”

“I’ll need some help. I’ll have to go talk to the steward, and the chief cook. Get the real dope. Make it look professional. I could do it myself, but it’d take me a week. Two guys could get it all done in half a day.”

“Okay. Take any of the clerks you want.”

So the next morning found Macalay and Hanning in the kitchen. Macalay had worked it smoothly; Hanning’s last suspicion was gone. He should have known all along that a squealer would also be yellow. Hanning behaved like any other greedy weakling let loose in the kitchen; went around nibbling stuff, bumming coffee, flirting with one of the fry-cooks till he got a steak broiled in butter.

The kitchen activity was rising to the noontime peak. Lunch had to be gotten out; three thousand cons had to eat. Nobody paid any attention to anybody else.

Macalay got a piece of rag out of his pocket; it was used to dust typewriters, but this one was fresh. He slipped a boning knife from a butcher block, wrapped the rag around the handle, moved it up and down a couple of times to remove prints, and palmed it under the clipboard he was taking notes on.

He said: “Hanning, you got to help me a couple of minutes.”

Hanning was talking to his friend, the fry-cook. “Aw, Mac ... “

“You’ve goofed off all morning. I’ll have to bring one of the other clerks back with me after lunch if—”

“All right, all right.”

Macalay led the way to a meat box. If Hanning had any suspicions left, they must have disappeared when he saw how casually Macalay let him take the rear. They walked into the box, and Macalay gestured with his pencil hand; the other held the clipboard and the knife. “We gotta make a count of those carcasses,” he said. “You go along and call out to me, lamb, beef, pork, whatever they are. Only take us a minute.”

Hanning stepped forward towards the chilled meat. Macalay kicked the heavy vault door shut, and put the pencil in his pocket.

He said: “Turn, Hanning. Turn and take it.”

Hanning turned, his mouth open to say something. Then he saw the knife, and his mouth stayed open. But the color ran out of his face. He was standing by a big side of mutton, and his face, which had been the color of the red meat, ran down the scale until it just matched the suet.

“You think you were going to squeal and get away with it?” Macalay asked. “You got soft in the head, just because I talked easy to you.”

Hanning’s Adam’s apple was jerking up and down like there was a fish hook in and somebody was playing it with a reel.

“Go on and yell,” Macalay said. “These boxes are soundproof.”

“You—you—“

“Let me do the talking,” Macalay said. “You’re trying to say I can’t get away with it. You’re wrong. Nobody saw us come in here. And in this cold, your body’ll stiffen so fast, the docs’ll never be able to say what time you got it. And
I got alibis for every minute of my time—from when I checked with the steward out there, and him with one eye on the clock that tells him when to serve lunch, till ten minutes ago, when your friend Piney's gonna swear I was in the office with him."

"Piney?" Hanning asked. Blood—maybe the blood that had drained out of his cheeks—was flooding the whites of his eyes, tracing red veins across them. "Piney's gonna—"

"Piney don't love you any more," Macalay said. "Nobody loves a squealer. Anyway, Piney wants a guy who can look after him. Dead men don't."

He raised the knife, holding it in front of his chest, fist around the wooden handle, hand turned over. He walked towards Hanning.

And it was hard for him not to hurry, not to step forward fast and let the knife do the work. The dirty squealer! It wasn't right that a snitch should live in the world of decent cons!

The knife would do it. It was sharp and thin, worn down to a sliver of the finest steel. It would go in the soft space between the breast bones and slide up, easy as taking a drink, up to the left and into the heart, and there'd be one squealer less to stink up the world.

Macalay fought it back, made himself go slow, slow for effect, slow for the big one, the play that he'd suffered for; in the fish tank, in cells, in The Hole, in the concrete block plant....

Slow, he told himself, slow to scare him, not fast to kill him. He's a squealer and a yellow belly and he'll break right down the middle. Take it slow, slow ...

Then the mutton-fat face split, and Hanning was screaming: "Don't kill me! Lemme go, I can give you some dope you can use. You were a cop." He was playing his hole ace; every con had one, fondled and held onto, for just such a time. "It could do you good. Yeah—yeah, it could."

Macalay hesitated. This had to be right, this had to be acting like no guy on the screen had ever done. His voice had to be hard and contemptuous. "What you got? You got something on the P.K.? You going to tell me he's a swish?"

"It could maybe spring you," Hanning screeched again. "I know the guys who—" he stopped.

Macalay's heart began to pound, hard. But he had to keep that sneer on his face, in his voice. "Still squealing, huh?"

"Russ knew the ones pulled that loft job," Hanning said. "His brother got it on that job. Ya—ya, just like that buddy-cop of yours. I'm levelling with ya. Russ told me when we first saw ya. Told me who—" He broke off.

"What good'll that do me?" Macalay asked. He moved the knife forward; it touched Hanning's shirt, just below and to the right of the number sewed on the pocket. "What good, squealer?"

"I can give you names and dates and where to pick 'em up," Hanning said. "I got it all. You wanta get them, don't you? They killed that cop pal of yours. You wanta get 'em don't yuh?"

"Yeah," Macalay said. "Yeah, I want to get them. Start talking. An' it better be right, because if it ain't, I'll still be in here, and so will you."

He shifted the knife to his left hand, under the clipboard, and started writing as Hanning babbled.

He could sneak a letter out with the noon mail that went from the office. Inspector Strane would get it tomorrow, and come get him.

He'd be out soon—a free man, a rich man ... But, hell, it would be a pleasure to kill Hanning when the squealer got through squealing. It sure would. And maybe necessary now, to keep Hanning from squealing on him. In any case, he'd have to travel fast and far to get beyond the clutch of the grapevine.
Suddenly, Macalay threw the knife away, hard, into the far black depths of the icebox. It landed in the sawdust, barely made a noise. Looking at Hanning, crouched, panting, the refrigerator light glinting off his cold sweat, Macalay wondered if it was going to be as hard living what the hundred grand as it had been getting it.
She was a small girl, and she looked even smaller, lying there at the river end of the vast, empty pier. A tugboat captain had sighted her body off Pier 90, radioed the Harbor Precinct, and a police launch had taken her from the water and brought her ashore. There was a chill wind blowing in from the Hudson and the pale October sun glinted dully on the girl's face and arms and bare shoulders. The skirt of her topless dress was imprinted with miniature four-leaf clovers and horseshoes and number 7's, and on her right wrist there was a charm bracelet with more four-leaf clovers and horseshoes.

A sergeant and three patrolmen from the Uniform Force had arrived in an RMP car a few minutes before my partner, Paul Brader, and I. They had just finished their preliminary examination of the body.

The sergeant glanced at me and then back down at the girl. "They'd didn't do her a hell of a lot of good, did they? The lucky symbols, I mean."

"Not much," I said.

"How old do you figure her for, Jim?" Paul Brader asked.

"Eighteen, maybe," I said. "No more than that."

"Well, we've got a homicide all right," Paul said. "She sure wasn't alive when she hit the water. You notice the skin?"

I'd noticed. It wasn't pale, the way it would have been had she drowned. The river water was cold, and cold water contracts the blood vessels and forces the blood to the inner part of the body.

"And there's no postmortem lividity in the head and neck," Paul went on. "Floaters always hang the same way in the water, with the head down. If she had been alive when she went in, she'd be a damned sight less pretty than she is now." He stepped close and knelt beside the girl. "How long would you say she was in the water, Jim?"

"That's always tough to figure," I said. "Taking the weather into consideration, and the fact that she's a little thin, I'd say anywhere from three to five days." I looked at the sergeant. "Any label in that dress, Ted?"

"No, sir."

"How about the underclothes?"

"Just brand names. No shop names at all."

Paul gently rolled the girl over on her left side. "Take a look at these lacerations on the back of her head," he said.

I knelt down beside him. There were two lacerations, apparently quite deep, and about three inches long. But lacerations and other mutilations of bodies found in the water are often misleading. Marine life takes its toll, and bodies frequently bob for hours against pilings and wharves and the sides of boats before they are discovered.

"We'll have to wait and see what the M.E.'s shop says about those," I said. I looked at both the girl's palms. There were no fingernail marks, such as are usually found in drownings. It's true that drowning people clutch at anything; and when there's nothing to grasp, they clench their hands anyhow, driving the nails into the flesh.

The girl had pierced ears, and the small gold rings in them appeared expensive. So did the charm bracelet, and the dress was obviously no bargain-counter item. There were four dollar bills tucked into the top of one of her stockings.

The uniformed sergeant removed the jewelry and the bills and listed them on his report sheet. "Four bucks," he murmured. "Mad money, probably."
Paul and I straightened up. “You want to wait for the doc?” he asked.

"Not much point,” I said. “He won't be able to tell us anything until after he autopsies her. We don't need him to tell us we got a homicide.”

"No I guess not," Paul said. He stared down at the girl a moment. “Tough, Jim. There's something about pulling a pretty girl out of cold water that gets me. Every time."

I nodded, and we turned back toward our prowl car. I knew what he meant. We handle about four hundred floaters a year in New York, most of them in the spring and summer. The majority of them are accidental drownings. A number are suicides, though there are fewer than is generally supposed. An even smaller number are homicides. And of the homicides, only about one in ten are women.

I got behind the wheel and we drove along the pier and turned downtown toward Centre Street, where the Missing Persons Bureau is located.

"You going to hit the station house first?” Paul asked.

"No. We can call in from the Bureau. I’ve got a hunch we'll save time if we go through the MP reports ourselves.”

The first thing a detective does when he has an unidentified body—provided it's a homicide and the body has been dead more than a day or so—is check the reports of missing persons. In the event of a routine drowning, the investigating officer's report is sent to the Bureau and the description matched against MP reports by MP personnel.

We found the matching MP report almost at once.

POLICE DEPARTMENT
City of New York
REPORT OF MISSING PERSON
Surname: TAYLOR, First Name: LUCILLE, Initials: M, Sex: F, Age: 19
Address; Date and Time Seen:
751 W. 72nd, 10/11/54, 8 P.M.
Last seen at:
LEAVING HOME ADDRESS
Probable Destination: UNKNOWN, Cause of Absence: UNKNOWN

I scanned the rest of the MP form. It was all there—a close physical description of the girl, the skirt with the lucky symbols, the pierced ears and gold earrings, the charm bracelet. There, was, however, one item of jewelry listed on the report which had not been on the girl when she'd been taken from the river. A diamond engagement ring, assumed to be about half a carat.

"You were off a year on the age, Jim,” Paul said, grinning.

"All right, so fire me,” I said.

"I'll take it up with the commissioner,” he said. “You want me to handle the ID confirmation?"

"Might as well,” I said. “No use both of us killing time with it.” I glanced down at the bottom of the form. The report had been phoned in by a Mrs. Edward Carpenter, with the same address as the girl's. Mrs. Carpenter, it seemed, was the girl's aunt. I wrote down the name and address on a piece of scratch paper and handed it to Paul. “I'll make a deal with you,” I said. “You get Mrs. Carpenter and take her over to Bellevue for the ID, and I'll handle the paper work on this."

"All the way through?"

"Sure. What'd you think?"
"You've got yourself a deal. You want me to take her home, after the ID?"

"Nope. Take her to the precinct ... That's if she isn't too upset. If she takes it too hard, drive her home and call me from there."

"Anything else?"

"Well, you might get her to fill you in on the girl, if you can. Don't push too hard, unless you think she can take it."

He nodded. "You going back to the station house now?"

"Uh-huh. I'll ride that far with you, and then you can go on up to Seventy-second Street and get Mrs. Carpenter."

Back in the squad room, I finished typing up some 61's in connection with other cases Paul and I were working on, completed several Wanted cards on a gang of Philadelphia hoods a stool had told me were now in New York, and then rolled a fresh 61 form into the Underwood and began the suspected homicide report on Lucille M. Taylor. I kept remembering how small she had looked there on the end of the big pier, and how angry the river had sounded as Paul and I stood there in the chill wind.

Paul came in an hour later. There were two people with him, a tall heavy-set blonde woman of about fifty and a small, wispy little guy with an almost completely bald head and eyes the color of faded blue denim. It took me a few moments to realize he was probably not much older than the woman. Of the two, the man seemed much the more upset.

"This is Mr. and Mrs. Carpenter, Jim," Paul said. "Folks, this is Detective Coren."

We all nodded to one another and I pushed two chairs close to my desk and asked them to sit down. Mrs. Carpenter frowned at the chair, took a large, flowered handkerchief from her purse and dusted it thoroughly, and finally sat down. Mr. Carpenter watched her closely, biting his lip. He didn't sit down until she had settled herself. Paul Brader leaned a hip against my desk and lit a cigarette. He extended the package to the Carpenters, but both shook their heads.

I could sense that there was no point in condolences, and I was relieved. I knew Paul hadn't got anything on the trip to Bellevue or he would have taken me aside and briefed me. Mrs. Carpenter was obviously the dominant member of the family, and I addressed my remarks to her.

"We'll make this just as short as we can," I said. "The first question, of course, is whether you know anyone who might have killed your niece."

She sat very straight, almost rigid, staring at me unblinkingly. "I'm sure I couldn't say."

"You reported her missing as of eight P.M. last Monday, and the time of your report was ten A.M. Tuesday. Was it unusual for Lucille to stay out all night?"

"It was the first time she'd ever done that. She would never have had the opportunity for a second time, I assure you."

"We'll want to notify her parents." I picked up a pencil. "What's their address?"

"They're dead. Lucille has been living with Mr. Carpenter and me ever since then. Almost a year now."

"Did she go on a date Monday night, Mrs. Carpenter?"

"I'm sure I don't know. We'd had very little to say to one another the last few weeks."

"You have no idea at all where she was going? No idea whom she might have planned to meet?"
"None at all."

"Was she wearing a coat or jacket when she left?"

"I told them what she was wearing when I called to report her missing. If she'd been wearing a coat, I would have said so."

"It's been very chilly the last week or so. I thought you might have forgotten—"

"I forgot nothing."

I looked at Mr. Carpenter. "How about you, sir? Do you have any idea of whom Lucille planned to see that night?"

"He knows nothing about it," Mrs. Carpenter said crisply.

Mr. Carpenter glanced furtively at her, then dropped his eyes and shook his head. "She didn't mention," he said.

I turned back to Mrs. Carpenter. "You said she was wearing a diamond engagement ring when she left. There was no such ring on her hand when we found her."

"She was wearing it when she left the house. I'm quite certain of it."

"Whose was it?"

"Why, her own, of course."

"I mean, who gave it to her? Who was the man?"

Mrs. Carpenter had very thin lips, and when she pursed them, as she did now, she gave the impression of having no lips at all. "I'm afraid I don't know," she said finally.

Paul Brader leaned forward. "Mrs. Carpenter, do you mean to tell us that your niece was engaged to a guy, wearing his ring, and you don't know who he was?"

Mrs. Carpenter took a deep breath, staring at Paul fixedly. "I don't like your tone, young man," she said. "I—"

"I'm sorry," Paul said. "It's just a little hard to understand, that's all."

"She began wearing the ring about a month ago. It was shortly after the time Lucille and I—well, you might say we stopped confiding in one another."

"And why was that?" Paul asked.

"Because I discovered certain things about her. At first I was of a mind to ask her to leave my house." She turned her head slightly to glare at her husband.

"You mind telling us a bit more about it?" I asked.

"Not at all. Why should I pretend to protect the reputation of a girl like Lucille? She was an extremely pretty girl ... she liked to flaunt herself. Especially around Mr. Carpenter."

"Now, Cora ... " Mr. Carpenter began.

"Please be still, Mr. Carpenter," she said coldly. "You've defended that disgraceful person often enough already."

"It just don't seem right somehow," he said. "Her being dead and all, and—"

"That'll do," Mrs. Carpenter said. She looked at me. "As I said, she flaunted herself. She thought nothing of going through the house in her slip, or parading from the bathroom with just a towel wrapped around her. Why, once she
"We're interested only in finding the one who killed her, Mrs. Carpenter," I said. "Now, can you tell us anything else that might help? For instance, do you know whether she was in fear of anyone? Had she ever said anything at all that might give us a lead?"

"No, she never did. It seems quite plain to me that she was robbed."

"Why so?"

"Because she wore the ring when she left the house, and yet it was not on her finger when her body was found."

"A lot of things could have happened," I said. "Robbery's a possibility, of course."

A knowing look came into her eyes, and when she spoke there was a subtle suggestiveness to her voice. "Unless something else happened, that is. Unless, let us say, one of the people who found her took a fancy to the ring. It would be quite simple for him to appropriate it." She smiled faintly. "Such things have been known to happen, have they not?"

"Just a minute," Paul said sharply. "If you're trying to say that we—"

"Hold it, Paul," I said. "Mrs. Carpenter is just upset, that's all."

"I'm not in the least upset. I never permit myself to become upset."

"About this man she was engaged to," I said. "We'll want to talk to him. Can you tell us anyone who might know who he is? Any girl friends Lucille had who might know?"

"She had few friends. Naturally, the way she twisted herself around, showing off all the time, she'd be lucky if decent girls even spoke to her."

"Did she have a job?"

"Yes. She worked for a photographer."

I lifted the pencil again. "Where?"

"His name is Schuyler. The studio is somewhere on Fifty-seventh Street."

"You know the address?"

"No, I don't. You'll have to look it up."

I studied her a moment. "Can you think of anything else that might help us, Mrs. Carpenter? Surely she mentioned friends or acquaintances. A young girl would have some social life. How about church groups, or clubs, or night courses at one of the colleges?"

"I've told you all I can," she said. "It was only during the last two or three months that she began going out much. Before that, she went out only now and then. And if she ever told me the names of any of her men friends, I've long since forgotten them."

"One more thing," I said. "She was nineteen, and she had a job. If things were strained between you two, why did she continue to stay with you?"

Again Mrs. Carpenter glared at her husband. "She didn't realize the full extent of my dislike, I'm quite sure. Mr. Carpenter prevailed on me not to ask her to leave. Then, too, we charged her considerably less for her board and room than she would have paid elsewhere. Even so, things were coming to a head. I had almost determined to give her notice."
I stood up. “I guess that'll be all, Mrs. Carpenter,” I said. “Mr. Carpenter, will you come with me a moment?”

He glanced at his wife, as if for permission, and then he got slowly to his feet and followed me back through the squad commander's office to one of the interrogation rooms.

"We'll be only a moment," I said. “I wondered if you had anything to add.” I grinned. “I thought maybe we could talk a bit more freely back here.”

The expression on his face told me he was genuinely surprised to find that anyone was willing to show him any consideration.

"Cora's just plain wrong about Lucille," he said in a voice that sounded as if it were accustomed to making apologies. “Just plain wrong. Lucille was a pretty girl, and I reckon she knew it well enough, but she sure never did anything wrong around the house. She—well, I guess she just figured I was her uncle, and that it wasn't a heck of a lot different than if it was her father. Maybe she did run around the house half naked sometimes, but she sure never done it for my benefit. She just never thought anything about it, that's all.”

"I can understand why she might have kept things from your wife, Mr. Carpenter,” I said, “but I thought she might have said something to you. About the man she was engaged to, I mean.”

"Nope. She never did."

I nodded. “Can you think of anything that might help?”

"No, sir, I can't. Not a thing."

We went back to the squad room. I arranged for an unmarked car to take Mr. and Mrs. Carpenter home, and then I typed up the results of the interview and added them to the file on Lucille Taylor.

"That guy Carpenter bugs me a little,” Paul said. “Being in the same house all the time with a girl like Lucille could give a man a lot of ideas. Maybe he got charged up, and she nixed him, and he got mad about it.” He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Or maybe she didn't nix him, and his wife found out about it, and she got mad.”

"Could be,” I said. “You feel like some coffee?"

"Always."

"Let's grab a cup, and then go see her boss.” I found the address in the directory, and then Paul and I signed out and left the squad room.

4.

The Schuyler Studios, Inc. was on the fourth floor, with windows opening on Fifty-seventh Street. It was apparently a good-sized outfit, judging from the number of lettered doorways we passed on our way to the reception room. The reception room itself, however, was quite small. We told the male receptionist who we were, and after he'd talked a moment on an intercom, he led us back to Schuyler's private office.

"That'll be all, Mr. Stacy,” he said, rising. “Won't you gentlemen sit down?”

We sat, and I told him our business. He was a big man, about forty, with hair grown gray at the temples and a face that would have been rugged except for the eyes. The eyes were strangely soft, with that moist sheen that women's eyes sometimes have. When I had finished, he picked up a letter opener from his desk and turned it over and over in his fingers, shaking his head slowly.

"It's hard to believe,” he said. “She was such a young girl, and a very pretty one—and to die like that ... “

"We're trying to get a line on her friends,” I told him. “Can you help us?"
He thought a moment. “You know, that's very strange. She was a very quiet, unassuming girl, but quite personable. And yet, now that you ask, I can't remember her ever mentioning anyone.”

"How about other employees here? She must at least have gone to lunch with someone."

"She was the only girl. All the rest are men. And I'm almost certain she never went to lunch with any of them. She wasn't exactly a cold person, but she did tend to keep aloof from the men here. I've heard them talking about her, now and then—as men will. I gathered that none of them had ever dated her, or in fact even talked to her very much, except as pertaining to business."

"How did you get along with her, Mr. Schuyler?"

"Quite well. I was very fond of her. She did her job, and my clients seemed to like her. Especially the women. And in this business, that's important. We deal with a great number of account executives and art directors, and many of them are women. Lucille was quite a favorite with them."

"You ever see her outside the office?"

His mouth tightened a little, but his eyes retained that almost feminine softness. “Just what do you mean?"

"I mean, did you ever see her socially? Did you ever take her out?"

"That's a rather unusual question."

"There's nothing personal,” I said. “We have to follow a certain routine, Mr. Schuyler."

He nodded slowly. “Yes. Yes, I suppose you do. The answer to your question is no. I have had a number of young women working for me, during the fifteen years I have owned this studio. I have made it a strict personal rule never to become involved, in even the most innocent way. Sometimes girls—especially ones as young as Miss Taylor—misinterpret a friendly interest. And even so, I am quite happily married. I have a daughter fifteen and another seventeen.” He smiled, and the friendliness came back into his voice. “Does that answer your question?"

I nodded. “How long had she worked here, Mr. Schuyler?"

"Let's see ... Oh, about three months. I can check and be exact, if you wish."

"That's close enough,” I said.

"Wait!” He leaned forward. “Maybe I can help you after all. You asked about her friends. Well, up until about six weeks or two months ago Lucille used to receive calls from some man. Someone named Vince. He called quite often. I'd hear her mention his name when she said hello, of course."

"But he hadn't called her recently?"

"Not that I know of."

"Were their conversations friendly, would you say?"

"Yes. Judging from Lucille's tone of voice, I'd say they were a bit more than friendly—if you know what I mean."

"You ever hear her mention his last name?"

"No, I'm afraid not. I couldn't help but overhear, of course, but I didn't make a point of tuning in. I'd just hear her say ‘Hello, Vince,' or ‘Good-by, Vince,'—you know."

"Uh-huh. Can you think of anything else that might help us, Mr. Schuyler? You remember anything else from these telephone conversations—anything to indicate that she and this Vince might be planning to get married?"

"Married? Why, no. I'm sure she would have mentioned such plans to me, though. That is, if she planned to take
some time off, rather than just quit outright. She'd almost have to, you know."

"Yeah. Well, is there anything you can tell us, Mr. Schuyler?"

"I only wish I could. As I said, I was very fond of Lucille. I'd be only too anxious to help, if I could."

On our way down in the elevator, Paul turned to me and grimaced. "A real cold fish," he said. "As long as something doesn't scratch him or his own family, he doesn't give a goddamn. But I'll bet if one of his daughters got looked at cross-eyed by some guy, he'd be after us to put the guy in the electric chair."

5.

We drove back to the station house, checked the message spike for calls, read the flimsies in the alarm book to see if there had been any new arrests or detentions that concerned us, and then I called the morgue at Bellevue to see how Lucille Taylor's autopsy was coming along.

The assistant M.E. to whom I talked said it had just been completed. The cause of death had been a severed spinal cord, resulting from a blow or blows to the back of the neck and head. The lacerations appeared to have been made with a blunt instrument, such as a length of two-by-four. One or more of the blows had dislocated the vertebrae enough to sever the cord, after which the vertebrae had slipped back into place. The assistant M.E. seemed quite pleased that he had discovered this so quickly.

I told Paul the result of the autopsy, changed the official designation of Lucille Taylor's file from "Suspected Homicide" to just plain "Homicide," and added the autopsy finding to the original Complaint Report form.

Then Paul and I got down to routine. We collected all the arrest records for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, divided them equally, and began going through them for pickups made near the Hudson River. It was our hope that Lucille's killer might have been pulled in on some other charge after he had put Lucille in the water. There had been several pickups, but most of them had been too far downriver to look right for us.

Next, we checked the list of men pulled in for morning lineups, starting with the one held Tuesday morning. There was nothing for us there, either.

The phone on my desk rang and Paul, who was closer, answered it. He nodded to me, and I picked up an extension. It was Schuyler, the photographer for whom Lucille Taylor had worked.

"I'm afraid the shock of Lucille's death affected my memory," he said. "I've just recalled that I did hear her mention that man's name. That 'Vince' I told you about. I remember now that she called him once, while I happened to be passing near her desk. She asked someone to call him to the phone, and she used his full name. I don't know why, but for some odd reason the name seems to have stayed with me."

"Fine," Paul said. "What is it?"

"Donnelly. Vince Donnelly. I remember distinctly."

"Thanks very much, Mr. Schuyler," Paul said. "That's a real help."

"Well, I certainly hope so. It was unforgivable of me not to have thought of it sooner."

"It's only natural, sir," Paul said. "We appreciate your calling us." He spoke a moment longer, and then hung up.

"We've got a package on a guy by that name, Paul," I said.

"Yeah. I know. Want me to pull it?"

"Uh-huh. Seems to me he lives on Seventy-second Street, just the way Lucille did."

Paul went to the next room, brought back the package on Vince Donnelly, and put it down on my desk. "You're off
again, Jim,” he said. “He lives on Seventy-third Street.”

“All right,” I said. “So fire me again.”

Vince Donnelly was twenty-three years old, had drawn a suspended sentence in 1950 on a grand larceny charge in
connection with a stolen car, and had been convicted on a similar charge in 1951. He had done eighteen months.
Since then he had been pulled in twice for questioning, but had not been booked. He lived less than two blocks from
the address where Lucille Taylor had lived with her aunt and uncle.

“Maybe we've got ourselves a boy, Jim,” Paul said.

“Maybe. Let's see what he's got to say.”

6.

We spent the better part of two hours looking for Vince Donnelly, and then gave up and went back to the station
house. Donnelly had moved from the Seventy-third Street address some two weeks before, and we were unable to
turn up anyone who knew his present whereabouts.

I called Headquarters, gave them Donnelly's description, and asked that an alarm for him be sent out. In a few
minutes the teletype machine in the squad room began to clack, and Paul and I walked over to it and watched the
words form across the paper, just as they were doing in all the other squad rooms in New York.

* * * *

ALARM 4191 CODE SIG L-1 AUTH HBR SQD. 4:31 P.M. HOLD FOR INTERROGATION—VINCENT C.
DONNELLY—M-W-23-5-9-165—LIGHT BROWN HAIR—BROWN EYES—MUSCULAR BUILD—
BIRTHMARK OVER RIGHT EAR—SLIGHT LIMP—UNKNOWN BUT HAS REPUTATION AS FLASHY
DRESSER.

"I haven't eaten yet,” Paul said. “How about some chow?"

I nodded. “Good idea.”

"How about the Automat? I like those pecan rolls."

"Okay. Sign us out, will you, while I put Donnelly's package back in file?"

"Check."

When we got back to the squad room there were two messages for us. One was from Lieutenant Mason, at the
Twentieth Precinct, saying they'd picked up Vince Donnelly and were holding him for us. The other was a note to
call a Miss Peggy Webb, who had phoned to say she had important information in connection with Lucille Taylor's
murder.

I called Miss Webb at the number she had given. She impressed me as intelligent and sincere, and very tense. She
assured me she knew who had killed Lucille Taylor, but she said that she didn't want to talk about it over the phone.
When I asked her to come down to the station house, she refused. I arranged to meet her at the entrance of the
Jacoby Camera Supply, on Sixth Avenue between Forty-seventh and Forty-eighth.

I told Paul about the call. “I guess we'll have to split up,” I said. “You'd better get over to the Twentieth and start in
on Donnelly. If this Webb girl has anything, I'll call you there.”

"Sure,” Paul said darkly. “Naturally. Of course. I go tangle with a damned punk, and you go off to see the girl. I sit
over there in a hot squad room with a thief, and you sit in a nice cool bar, making time with ... “ He broke off,
sighing. “I think I'll take it up with the commissioner.”

I grinned. “You've got the commissioner on the brain.”
"What brain? If I had a brain, I'd never have been a cop in the first place." He reached for his jacket. "Well, I'll get over there and see what gives with our friend Donnelly. Don't get lost with that girl, Jim."

"I'll try not to," I said.

7.

Peggy Webb turned out to be a very thin, very plain girl of about thirty. She kept twisting her handbag in her hands and, except for the moment it took me to introduce and identify myself, she never met my eyes once.

"I read the story in the paper," she said, staring out at the traffic on Sixth. "Right away I knew who did it." She glanced at the doorway of the camera shop and then back at the traffic again. "I work here now. But I used to work for the Schuyler Studios. I worked there for four years—until Lucille came there."

I leaned back against the plate glass front of the shop, studying her. "Who do you think killed her?"

"Schuyler killed her."

"That's a pretty serious accusation, Miss Webb."

"I realize that."

"How do you know he killed her?"

"It had to be him. I know it, just as well as I know I'm standing here. It caught up with him, that's all."

"You mind explaining?"

"That's why I called you, isn't it? Schuyler and Lucille were having an affair. I was his right hand around that place for four years, and then one day Lucille shows up. Right off he starts breaking her in on my job. And that's not all. He started her in at more money than I made, after I'd been there four years. Oh, it made me sick to watch the two of them. They thought nobody knew what was up. But they were wrong. Here he was, more than twice her age, and she sitting there smiling so prissy and nice—it made me want to throw up." There was a hard set to her features now.

"Still," I said, "that's hardly—"

"Have you talked to Schuyler?"

"Yes."

"Did he tell you he was married?"

"Yes."

"Did he also tell you that he was just a photographer's assistant, till he met his wife? Did he tell you that she was a very wealthy woman, and that he married her for her money? ... No? No, of course he didn't." Her voice grew tighter. "He isn't dumb. Not that one. He wouldn't have let go of his wife any sooner'n he would let go a gold mine."

"I don't quite follow you," I said.

"Well, you'll soon begin to." She was staring at the knot in my tie now. "Why would a man buy a girl an engagement ring—if he was married to a gold mine, and meant to stay that way?"

"You mean he bought one for Lucille Taylor?"

"That's right. He bought it at Lormer's, on Fifth Avenue. They made a mistake somehow, and sent the bill to the office. I opened it, right along with all the other mail, and put it on his desk. About ten minutes later I overheard him giving Mr. Lormer hell. He said he'd specifically told the clerk there not to send a bill, either to his office or his home. He was so mad that he was almost shouting. And then, about two or three days later, Lucille shows up with a
big diamond on her finger. When I asked her who the lucky man was, she just simpered like the silly fool she was, and acted coy. I thought I'd have to go to the window and be sick."

"That's interesting," I said, "but it could have been a—"

"A coincidence? Oh, no—it was no coincidence. Schuyler bought that ring for Lucille, and she wore it. And if you were a woman, you'd know from the way she acted around there that she thought she and Schuyler were going to get married."

I thought it over.

"That's the whole thing, can't you see?" she asked. "Schuyler was after something, but he couldn't get it without promising to marry her. He wanted to have his cake and eat it too. I mean he didn't have any intention of giving up his wife's money, but he wanted Lucille. So he told her he was going to divorce his wife and marry her. He was just sharp enough, and she was just dumb enough, and he pulled it." Her eyes came up as far as my mouth, but no higher. "And that couldn't go on forever, could it? When it came to a showdown, and Schuyler had to admit that he'd been playing her for all he could get—" she shrugged—"well?"

"You didn't care much for Lucille, did you?"

"I loathed her."

"And Schuyler?"

She took a deep breath. "I—I guess I was in love with him once. But no more. After Lucille had been there a couple of months, he called me in and fired me. Just like that. He didn't even give me a reason—because there was no reason. He didn't need two girls, and so he just kicked me out on the street. Why, it was all I could do to get him to write a few references for me. And that after I'd been there all those years ... "

I nodded. "A tough break, Miss Webb."

"When will you arrest him?"

"We'll talk to him again."

"But isn't it plain enough? What more could you possibly want?"

"We'll talk to him," I said again. I got out my notebook and took down Miss Webb's address and phone number.

"I see I've wasted my time," she said.

"Not at all," I said, making it friendly. "I'm very grateful to you. As I said, we'll—" But she had turned quickly and was walking off down Sixth Avenue. Once she hesitated a moment, as if she might turn back, but then she went on again, walking even more rapidly than before.

I went into a drug store and called the Twentieth Precinct. Paul Brader told me that Vince Donnelly hadn't opened his mouth, except to demand a lawyer. Paul had been able, through other sources, to establish that he was the same Vince Donnelly who had gone around with Lucille Taylor, but that was all. We had nothing at all on Donnelly, and unless we came up with something within the next few hours we'd have to let him go.

"I got a feeling about this guy," Paul said. "I think we're on our way."

"Yeah? Why so?"

"I just sort of hunch it, that's all."

"Well, keep at him. I'm going to check out a couple things with Schuyler, and then I'll be over to help you."

He laughed. "Schuyler—or the girl?"
"Schuyler."

"Okay. See you later."

I hung up, located the after-business-hours number of the Lormer Jewelry Shop in the directory, and finally got through to Mr. Lormer himself. He lived in a hotel on Lexington Avenue, and asked me to come up. From him I learned that the diamond engagement ring, while large, had been of the lowest quality he carried. I asked if Schuyler had brought a young woman to the shop for a fitting, and Mr. Lormer said no. Schuyler had asked that the engagement ring be made up in the same size as a small intaglio he wore on the little finger of his left hand. And then—very reluctantly—Mr. Lormer told me that Schuyler had returned the ring yesterday morning. He had not wanted a cash refund, but had applied the refund value of the ring against two jewelled wrist watches, to be delivered to his two daughters.

I took Mr. Lormer to his shop, impounded the ring, signed a receipt for it, and took him back home. Then I drove to Seventy-second Street and got a positive identification of the ring from Lucille, Taylor's aunt and uncle.

I located Schuyler's home address in the directory, picked up Paul Brader at the Twentieth, and we drove downtown toward Schuyler's apartment house.

8.

In his office, Schuyler had been as cool as they come. Standing in the doorway of his apartment, with his wife and daughters just behind him, he was something else again. We had counted on surprise and the presence of his family to unnerve him, and we weren't disappointed. He had divided his life into two parts, and we had suddenly brought the parts together. He stared first at Paul and then at me, moistening his lips.

I had the engagement ring in the palm of my hand, and now I opened my fingers slowly and let him see it.

"What is it, dear?" his wife asked, and one of the girls moved a little closer, her eyes questioning me.

"I—I can't talk here," Schuyler said, in what he probably thought was a whisper. "My God, I—"

"Get your coat," I said.

He nodded rapidly. "Yes, yes—of course."

We rode down in the self-service elevator, phoned in a release for Vince Donnelly, and crossed the street to the RMP car. Paul got behind the wheel and I got into the back seat with Schuyler. Paul eased the car out into the heavy Lexington Avenue traffic.

"We have the ring, Mr. Schuyler," I said. "We got a positive identification of it. You returned it after Lucille Taylor had been murdered. We'll have no trouble taking it from there. Not a bit. We'll put a dozen men on it. We'll work around the clock. We'll get a little here, and a little there—and pretty soon we'll have you in a box. The smartest thing you can do—the only thing you can do—is make it a little easier on yourself." I paused. "And make it a little easier on your family."

"My girls!" Schuyler said. "My God, my girls!"

"Tell us about the other girl," I said softly. "Tell us about Lucille."

It was a long moment before he could keep his voice steady. "She threatened me," he said at last. "She said she was going to my wife and daughters and tell them about—about us. I knew I could have patched it up with my wife, but—my daughters ... God, I—"

"You admitted to Lucille that you'd never intended to divorce your wife and marry her?"

He nodded almost imperceptibly. "I had grown a little tired of her. She was pretty, but so—so immature. I told her, and she became enraged. I was surprised. I hadn't thought she was capable of so much fury. We had walked down
Seventy-second Street to the river. We were sitting on one of those benches down there, watching the tugboats. When I told her, she began to curse me. She was almost screaming. I couldn't see anyone else nearby, but I was afraid someone would hear her. I tried to calm her, but she got almost hysterical. Then she slapped me, and I grabbed her. I—I don't know just what happened then, but somehow I made her head hit the back of the bench. And then I kept doing it—kept beating her head against the back of the bench.” Suddenly he covered his face with his hands and his body slumped. “And then—and then I carried her to the railing across from the bench and threw her into the water.”

I watched the neon streaming by. “But not before you stripped that ring off her finger, Schuyler,” I said. “You sure as hell didn't forget the ring, did you?”

He didn't say anything.

As we neared the Harbor Precinct, I could hear a tugboat whistle, somewhere out there on the cold Hudson, a deep, remote blast that was somehow like a mockery.

"God," Schuyler murmured. “My poor girls, my poor little girls ... “

And don't forget poor little Lucille Taylor, I thought, while you're feeling sorry for your victims.
I noticed the blue-gray Caddy on my road, but had no time to watch it twist and bounce the twenty miles through Everglades sawgrass, palmetto and slash pine from the Tamiami trail to my place.

I'd been out all morning in the helicopter hunting for strays and just as I glimpsed the Caddy, I saw one of my Santa Gertrudis heifers caught in a bog. Lose a cow in that ooze, you never see her again. I needed every cow I had, every penny I could earn on my farm. I was in hock, even paying for the ‘copter on installments.

I engaged the pedals, the wings rotated slowly and I hovered over the bawling cow. The pinch-rig I'd made was an ice-tong affair of steel and leather I let down on my cable.

"Take it easy, baby," I told the cow. "You're too valuable to lose in that goo."

The cable winched down, I closed the pincher about her belly and started upward. The sucking noise of the ooze and bawling of the cow rose above the revving of my motor.

I let the heifer swing a moment to impress her, then set her down in high grass, cussed her once for luck, reeled in my line and peeled off toward the house where the Caddy was parked in the yard.

She was sitting in the Caddy looking around when I walked toward her. What she saw was bare sand yard without even a slash pine growing in it, brown frame house of four rooms and porch, coal-oil lamps and outhouse. Rugged, but beautiful to me. It had belonged to my folks. They'd died while I was in a Chinese prison camp. It got so this lonely place was what I'd dreamed of coming back to.

"How'd you get this far off the trail?" I said. "My road is hard to find."

She got out of the car, smiled. Except for her shape she wasn't terrific; wavy brown hair, deep-set brown eyes and squared chin. "Not as hard to find as your house. I had a ball getting here—the car scraped between the ruts."

"It's been dry or you'd never have made it."

"I'd have made it." Something about her voice made me look at her again, closer.

Her gaze touched my helicopter, and didn't move on. She smiled again. "You Jim Norton?"

I nodded and she said, still watching the ‘copter, "I'm Celia Carmic ... Mrs. Curt Carmic."

Carmic. I stared. The whole state had been alerted in a search for Curt Carmic. He had crashed in his private plane on an Everglades hunting trip. After a week of intensive searching, the Coast Guard had abandoned him as dead.

I invited her up on the porch. "I'm sorry about your husband, Mrs. Carmic."

"Yes." She shook her head as though still unable to believe it. She made a wad of her handkerchief. "Curt and I were—very happy, Mr. Norton. He was—well, several years older than I, but he was a vital man, had the world in his hand." Her head tilted. "I don't say Curt didn't have enemies. Every strong man does."

Her eyes were moist, her voice sounded full of tears. She told me about Carmic. She glossed over the way he got a discharge from the Marines in 1943, but said that from 1945 he'd had great success, headed two companies making parts for the Korean police action, Carmic Defrosters.

"Curt was due in Washington on the Monday following his trip. They were investigating his war profits. Curt was ill at this injustice, his doctor told him to rest. His idea of rest was a weekend hunting trip in the Everglades. But more than anything, Mr. Norton, he wanted to come back and clear his name." Her chin quivered. "I can't believe Curt is dead."
I didn't know what to say. All I wanted down here was peace, and a chance to make a living my way. I'd been in the world she talked about. I'd had it.

"They searched for Curt for a week. I know they were thorough and didn't find a trace. I can't give up. Can you understand that, Mr. Norton? I've got to find him. That's why I came to you."

I waited, not knowing why I didn't want to get mixed up in this thing. She said, "I'll give you a thousand dollars—and pay all expenses if you'll help me search for him."

I had plenty of use for a thousand dollars. I couldn't buy the picture she painted of Curt Carmic. Him I never knew, but I knew his Defrosters and there was a good reason for that Senate inquiry. Still, no man would take to the Everglades even to escape a government investigation.

"How long would you want to search?"

"Until we find him." She paced my porch. "I'll pay the thousand dollars for anything up to ten days. After that—" she spread her hands, left that unfinished. Tensely she watched me until I nodded. She cried then. She stood rigid and tears ran down her cheeks.

The rest of the day we studied flight plans and maps. She had all the information she could get on the Everglades and the weather.

I tried to shrug off the feeling of wrong that persisted. Any profiteer who'd sell Carmic Defrosters to his country should have been investigated and any woman who'd lived ten years with him should know that. Yet she spoke of him as though he were saintly. I reminded myself it didn't matter, it was a thousand dollars to me, but the nagging sense of emptiness stayed.

We set up the first flight pattern, figured mileage, weather and gas capacity and set for seven the next morning. When the time was set, Celia Carmic became a different woman.

First she'd been the bereaved wife, then the cold general over map briefing and weather data. At supper she chatted about her life in Washington. She ate delicately—like a she-wolf with a Vassar education. I'd never met anyone like her; I had to smile.

"Why are you laughing at me?"

I fumbled my fork. "I'm not laughing."

She stopped eating, touched her lips with a paper napkin. "How old are you, Jim?"

I remembered the war years, the prison. "I'll be a hundred next April."

"I'd say twenty-three."

"Say whatever you like."

She looked around. "No girl to share all this?"

I shook my head. "The kind that would share this I wouldn't want. And the other kind—" I stopped. I suddenly knew the only kind of woman I'd ever wanted. We just looked at each other ... "I can't afford what I want," I said.

"What would you do to be able to afford her?"

"Anything."

"Sure?"

"Anything at all."
"You might be held to that," she said. "And soon."

About five A.M. I heard something stir in the house and jumped out of bed. Sleep-drugged, I staggered across the room. I reached the guest room door before I remembered Celia was there.

I stopped in the doorway, fully awake, realizing I was in my undershorts; it was too hot to sleep in anything more.

She was fully dressed, white shirt, jodhpurs, gleaming boots. She had a handful of maps and weather data. "Sorry I wakened you, Jim. I couldn't sleep any more. I'm too anxious to get started."

I mumbled something and backed off. She let her eyes prowl over me and then walked out into the front room leaving me gaping after her. Where was the bereaved wife? Where were those unshed tears?

From that moment there was a sick emptiness in my stomach. But the second the flight started, she was all business.

She sat with the flight pattern mapped on her lap. After I filled all gas tanks at the Lewiston Airport, she watched compass and mileage indicator until we reached the lines marking our first pattern. Coldly serious, she read that country minutely with field glasses.

She never took five, never relaxed. This land was huge bolts of scorched brown, ribboned by black strings of water. Heron took flight, I pointed out a wildcat. Nothing down there but silence and heat waves.

We made our circle, reached the end of the flight pattern. She sat back, dropped the binoculars. Red circles encased her eyes. "We know they're not in there."

"We'll take the second pattern tomorrow."

She seemed to have lost interest. She was watching me again from the corner of her eyes. I set the ‘copter down in the yard.

"Think I could learn to handle a windmill, Jim?"

"It's not easy. But I could teach you."

She looked thoughtful.

After supper she wanted a drink to celebrate the end of our first flight. All I had was a few cans of warm beer. We drank that. She laughed and talked, teasing me about being a farmer stuck away from the world. Suddenly for no reason we stopped laughing and we stopped talking.

Crickets and frogs screeched outside the windows. It was so quiet I heard mosquitoes frantic against the screens.

I tried not to stare at her, but I couldn't keep my gaze off her. I asked if she were sleepy. She said no. We sat for a long time and listened to the crickets. That night I didn't sleep much....

Next morning I was out of bed and dressed hours ahead of Celia. I fixed breakfast but not even the odors of coffee and eggs wakened her. I let her sleep. I didn't trust myself in that room. I remembered why she was here—a husband lost in the swamp. I had to keep remembering that.

At a quarter of seven she came out, voice angry. "Why didn't you wake me up?"

I stared at her, knowing how I'd fought to keep out of that room. "Why didn't you bring an alarm clock?"

We stood tense across the table. Then she smiled and looked very pleased about something....

We'd been flying about three hours and suddenly Celia grabbed my arm. An electric charge went through me at her touch. Maybe you don't know what it is to want like that. I was sick, wanting just two things: never to find her husband and to have money so I could afford Celia Carmic.
She pointed to something glittering. I engaged the pedals, idled off the engine and we settled in a cleared space six inches above water.

She scrambled out of the plane, ran through muck and saw-grass. I plodded after her. When I reached her, she was swearing, words she shouldn't even have known.

Somebody had cut open a five gallon oil can, tossed it beside the creek. She followed me back to the ‘copter.

We retraced and she was silent, did not even mention learning to handle the ‘copter. We set down in the yard about four and she walked silently into the house.

After supper she discovered the old wind-up phonograph in the front room. She played an ancient record. "Sweet—Stay As Sweet As You Are." She wound it, played it again.

"Reminds me of you," she said. "Sweet and innocent."

I remembered her disappointment this afternoon when she thought we'd found a sign of her husband. This was a different woman.

"Come on, Jim, dance with me."

"I don't dance."

"I'll teach you." She came over, took my hands. Hers were like ice. I stood up. She came into my arms, moved closer. Her hands slid up my back....

I wanted to sleep through next morning. It was good burying my face in the warm fragrance of her hair. But when I thought about the flight, I thought about her husband. I didn't like that.

I pulled her closer. She went taut. "No, Jim. We're going to search." She pulled away, eyes hard. "We're going to search all day. Everyday."

In the plane, I felt her nearness, I could smell her. All day she kept binoculars fixed on that changeless land.

"We're not staying out long enough," she said.

My voice was hard. "We'll look as long as you like. That doesn't keep me from hoping we—don't find him."

Her fingers closed on my arm. "Don't say that, Jim. Pray we do find him."

How could she do that, turn her emotions off and on? I could not forget last night; for her it had never happened. She loved her husband. She came to me. It didn't make my kind of sense. I clammed up.

We reached the end of the pattern. She dropped the glasses, rings deep about her eyes. But when she dropped the binoculars, she dropped the search. Now her brown eyes sought something else. "How long, Jim, before we get home?"

Her voice was breathless. I went empty. Her hand gripped me. "It's too far. Hurry."

I tried to hurry but they never built enough speed in a flying windmill for us. I set the ‘copter down in the yard, killed the engine. We ran across the yard. That was when I saw the car tire tracks.

I stopped. The tracks came in from the road. "Somebody's been here." I sounded like Papa Bear.

Celia frowned, but pulled me toward the house. "Probably some salesman."

Footprints in the sand led around the house, paused at every window. "Persistent." I said.

For no reason I could explain, I felt that old sense of wrong mixed with unexplained fear. "I'll take the ‘copter.
Maybe I can catch him before he gets back to the Trail."

"Don't be a fool." She pressed against me. "I've waited all day. You're not chasing down some salesman. You're not going to leave me tonight."

I didn't, either....

Next morning I woke up thinking about those tire tracks and footprints. Too many things were unexplained, wrong. I fixed breakfast but didn't eat anything. Celia ate like a plowman.

I followed the flight pattern but my mind wasn't on it. Celia never relaxed. We'd not found one encouraging sign, yet she never mentioned quitting. One thing was now certain. She was compelled by something stronger than that love she'd talked about the first day. Did she love Carmic at all? She never discussed him outside the 'copter. She never worried about the hell he endured if he were alive in that swamp country. All she did was glue her gaze to that ground.

When we returned, I searched first for new tire tracks. There was none. I couldn't say why, but I felt no better.

Celia pretended disinterest, but she looked for them, too.

After supper, she started the phonograph. It blared but only intensified the silence. She toppled into my lap. "It's too quiet, doll. I'm a big city girl. The Embassy—F Street. Got to have excitement. Where you going to take me?"

I smelled the warm fragrance at the nape of her neck. "I know where I want to take you."

"There's a juke joint about a mile down the Tamiami Trail from your road."

"Twenty miles. Nickel juke. Ten cent beer and mud farmers."

"That's where I want to go."

I looked at her squared chin, didn't even bother to argue.

She drove recklessly on the twisting roadway, parked beside the Seminole Inn. An anaemic neon glowed fitfully. There were gas pumps out front, motel cottages in the rear. Inside was boot-scarred bar, small dance space, unpainted tables, candles in beer cans, booths. There were half a dozen customers. We sat at a table, ordered beer. She seemed to have forgotten her husband, so I tried to.

A man sat alone at the end of the bar near the juke. I didn't pay any attention to him at first. I noticed he was pretty-boy handsome, with a golden, sculptured profile, thin mouth.

We'd been there about ten minutes before I realized he was watching every move we made. Every time I looked up, his eyes would go flat and he'd stare beyond me.

"You know that character?" I said to Celia.

"Who?" She said it too carelessly. There weren't that many people in there. I got that old empty feeling.

"Handsome," I said. "The blond god over there. He must know you, he's staring at you."

Celia looked dutifully. Her eyes met Handsome's for an instant. I saw something flicker in his flat eyes—something green like jealousy, red like hatred. It flashed and was gone. He looked at his beer.

"I'm sure I never saw him before," Celia said. "Want to dance?"

What I wanted was to hit somebody or something. If she knew the guy, why didn't she say so? I had to be sure. I excused myself, went through the door marked "His'n."

From inside I watched Celia. She got up after a moment, walked over to the juke. Handsome swung around at the
bar as I'd known he would.

For a moment I was ill. I pressed my ear against the pine paneling, trying to hear what they said. Celia punched coins into the juke. “Stay away.” Her voice was a sharp whisper.

"I've got to see you!"

"You can't. I told you you couldn't."

"You're crossing me—” The blaring music drowned his words. I washed my face, rinsed out my mouth, staring at my reflection in the dirty window.

I was silent driving home. Celia laughed, teased, called me a baby. She slid over close, laid her head on my shoulder. It was a gray night, strung with stars and full of wrong.

"I wish you'd teach me to run the 'copter, Jim."

I felt pebbles in my throat. I wanted her to tell me the truth, but by now I knew better. I wouldn't waste my breath. “You couldn't take your eyes away from those binoculars long enough to learn.”

She sighed. “That's right. That's most important, isn't it?"

I didn't say anything. It didn't seem important at all.

When we got back next afternoon from the fifth flight pattern, I saw the new tracks. “Well, he was back again,” I said.

She took it big. “Somebody is trying to sell you something."

"That's God's truth."

"—and just can't believe you're gone so much!” She met my gaze evenly when she said that and didn't even blush.

We ate supper silently. Afterwards she marked out the next flight pattern. I didn't even bother to look at it. I told myself I was going to bed alone. I didn't. She had me all clobbered, but I wanted her worse than ever.

The next morning we took off as usual. I asked her to explain the prowler.

She said it must be a neighbor of mine, or a salesman.

I shook my head. “Don't give me that. I have no neighbors. A salesman would travel that road once, maybe; never twice."

She shrugged. “It's your country."

"It's your boyfriend,” I told her.

"My boyfriend!” She laughed. I let her laugh. She got tired and stopped, cold.

"I heard you two at the juke.” My voice was as tired and empty as I felt.

Her eyes flickered.

"Why not level with me, Celia? What are you looking for? What do you want?"

She stared out at the horizon. She bit her lip and closed her eyes tight, but didn't speak. My heart hurt against my ribs. I wanted her to be something she wasn't and never would be.

I wanted her and hated her, and wondered what she was really here for.
We reached the beginning of the flight pattern, the same parched pepper grass, same tufted pines and endless silence. This was the next to the last day. I heard her sigh; she placed the binoculars against her eyes. After a moment, she removed them, wiped her tears. “I love you, Jim.”

"Sure you do."

"I didn't mean to, I didn't even consider it. But—you don't know what it means to me to find Curt.” She sank her fingers into my arm. “You won't be sorry, Jim.”

"I'm already sorry. I went nuts when you walked on my place. All I've thought about was having you—and I couldn't afford you, even if I could overlook the rest of it."

"We've got to find him.” She turned back, put glasses to her eyes. “And we will.”

Time slipped away. And miles. I was about to make the circle, but she told me to go on a bit further. Then I heard her catch her breath, but I'd already seen it. You don't need field glasses to see smoke in that flat wasteland. She dropped the binoculars, looked at me, face rigid.

She touched my arm, then her fingers were clinging to me. “We've found him, we've found Curt."

"Sure,” I said. “Didn't you know we would?”

I set the plane down near the black river. We saw the man standing beside the smudge fire. He was alone. Celia and I got out of the ‘copter and went toward him.

He wasn't dirty, ragged or bearded—his face wasn't swollen with mosquito poisoning—the way it should be with a man lost in the Everglades. He'd built himself a hut of a parachute, sheltered by rude ribs made of pine limbs. I looked around. There was no sign of the plane.

I congratulated him under my breath. He was a smart guy, all right. He had survived. He had been ready. He'd had a parachute. What had happened to the plane—or what had been made to happen to it—I'd never know. Neither would anyone else. Sixty feet under, in the Gulf, no doubt.

"Well, baby,” he was saying to Celia, “I see you finally made it.” His voice was angry.

She snarled back at him. “I came as soon as I—could.”

"Well thanks.” His gaze raked me and his mouth twisted. “Not bad,” he said. “Not bad at all.”

She said, “I had to wait for the air forces to call off the search. I had to get a pilot.”

His brow tilted. “Yes, I see you got a nice young one. Another in your long list? Is this what delayed you until the last day, Celia?”

"We did the best we could, Curt.” Her breath was sharp. “Did you have sense enough to save the money along with yourself?”

Carmic laughed. “Well, your grief hasn't changed you, pet. You've still got to have money, haven't you?” He glanced at me. “My wife has some kind of complex—maybe it's an allergy—she can't stand poverty. She was born in it and she scratched her way out. God help anybody who stands in her way. My dear little wife. Never wanted anything but old money and new men.”

Celia said, “Your exile didn't improve your disposition.”

"Nothing will improve my disposition except a long rest in Rio.”

She shrugged. “Where is the money? I'm ready to get out of here.”

Carmic laughed, reached up inside his parachute hut. He pulled down a bulging brief case. I didn't have to see
inside. I knew what was there—what Celia had been looking for—all the cash and negotiable securities he'd managed to get his hands on—his profits from Carmic Detectives.

"Well, baby, it's finally working. Just the way we planned. I wish you hadn't brought a 'copter. I'm not sure I can handle it."

I went cold. The nightmare was complete, I saw all they'd planned. Carmic disappeared, destroyed his plane. Celia searched for him and was lost in the search. That must be Handsome's part in this—to make sure the authorities wrote her off as well as her husband. Then much later two very rich people would turn up in Rio—and live happily ever after. I wasn't sure where that left Handsome, how much he was getting out of this.

But I saw where that left me. The river looked cold and black. I wouldn't be lonely—the alligators would keep me company. What was murder when Carmic faced prison and his wife faced poverty? It had been a well-planned if desperate gamble—but the odds hadn't been as long as they seemed.

Carmic pawed in the brief case. I saw the gleam of green bills, the black of an automatic. He said, "We'll take care of your boyfriend and then we'll get out of here."

"Curt." Celia's voice was deadly.

We both faced her, moving in slow motion.

"Curt," she said again. "You're not going anywhere. You were lost in a plane crash. Remember? We couldn't find you. I'm sorry, Curt. But I'm not sure I'd like Rio. Why should I run? I can go back to Washington—the rich widow of a martyred hero."

We both stared at the .25 automatic she'd taken from her shirt. A woman's weapon. She'd had it all the time. She'd saved it for this.

Curt's mouth dropped. His eyes widened, hurt and sick. Maybe no man can ever believe the woman he trusts will cross him. It was like that with Carmic. He stared at the gun in her hand and still didn't believe it. He looked in her eyes and saw it all there, and still doubted it. It was clear enough. She wasn't going to run the rest of her life. She didn't have to run. She could have his money and a life even better than she'd ever had. In her eyes he saw that had been her secret plan all along, no matter what lies she'd told him.

"You think you'll have her?" he said to me. "You think you'll be different than the hotel clerks and the band leader and football heroes on Saturday night—" he was almost crying, the poor dope. "But you won't be different—they've got to be new. They've—"

The little gun in Celia's hand made a popping sound in the silence. It popped again. She didn't miss. He was too big a target and she was too close.

Curt stopped talking and he stopped breathing as he crumpled to the ground where he would stop living. I heeled around suddenly and grabbed Celia's wrist. I twisted hard. She didn't fight and she didn't cry out. She folded a little at the knees, bit her lip. She dropped the gun. I picked it up, thrust it in my pocket.

She stared at me. "I had to kill him, Jim. Don't you see? He was in the way. I love you and he was in the way. It's all right. Everybody thought he was dead—and now he really is. There's a quarter of a million dollars there, Jim. A quarter of a million! It's all ours. He didn't steal it—not all at once—nobody can ever claim it. He accumulated it, as steadily and as quickly as he could. There was some suspicion, but nothing they can prove. It's ours, Jim! Didn't you say you wanted money enough so you could afford me? We've got it now. We'll be rich. Richer than any dream you ever had."

"You killed him. Murdered him."

"You don't know. How he has beaten me, insulted me, hurt and degraded me. He was a beast, Jim. He deserved to die." She shook, her shoulders sagging and she looked as if she might fall. I steadied her.
Her arms went around me, her trembling mouth found mine. She was sobbing then and I felt her warmth, her animal-like warmth against me. “Let’s get home, Jim,” she cried softly. “Let’s get home.”

I couldn’t forget her husband’s body, but there was nothing I could do for him. Not now, not here.

Celia didn’t speak all the way back. She sat with the satchel of money between her feet.

I didn’t say anything. There wasn’t anything more to say. That little .25 had said it all back there on the black and bottomless river in the unchartered glades, into which the ‘gators would have pulled Curt Carmic by now.

I thought about the way I had wanted money enough so I could afford Celia, and there it was—the money and Celia. But would I have come back, would she have let me come back if she could have handled a ‘copter? If I had taught her, would I be doing the dead man’s float beside her husband?

I set the plane down in the front yard. Handsome’s car was baking in the sun beside Celia’s Caddy.

I helped her out of the ‘copter. I managed to hide what I felt. I tried to remember back to when she’d come here that first day. I couldn’t make it. I was cold. In the blazing sun, it was ten below.

We reached the steps. We went in. The door slammed behind us, hard. Handsome had a gun in his hand. I stared at him. Then at her. I got it. They had what they wanted now.

"Stay right where you are,” he said to me.

"Do I have a choice?” I asked him. “Now take it easy with that thing ... “

Celia would be happy with him, him and Curt's money. They could buy the world. I was all that stood between them and freedom with that quarter million.

Handsome nodded at the satchel in Celia's hand. His mouth broke into a smile. “You found Curt.” It was a statement. He dampened his lips. “You got the money.”

Celia must have nodded. I wasn’t looking at her. I was watching him, and that gun.

He jerked his head toward the Caddy. “Get Norton's gun, Ce. Take it and get into the car. I'll follow in mine, as soon as I've taken care of Hayseed here.”

She didn't look at me. She went around behind me. She held the satchel in one hand—that previous, bloody satchel. With her hand he felt my pockets for the guns, mine and the one she’d used on Curt.

I felt lighter without the guns, and helpless. I sweated, wishing I could sucker Handsome near enough to jump him. I'd give him odds, I'd let him have the first shot. Celia had not moved from behind me.

"All right, Celia,” he said. “Get away from him—get out to the car.”

"No. I'm sorry. We can't get away with killing him. We'd have to run. Hide. Always. If you'd had the guts or brains to learn how to handle a ‘copter, like I wanted, it might have been different. But no. I'm sorry, but I'm not going to run and have to hide forever.”

She stepped away from me. It sounded like a cannon. I swear I felt the burn of it, my ear drum felt as though it were bursting.

The surprise and horror in Handsome's face were deeper even than Curt's had been. All the hours he must have spent planning the way it would be ... and now he, too, was in her way. She’d knocked him out of her life, because I’d stepped into it.

He looked as though somebody had hit him in the chest and left a dirty brown stain on his shirt. He rocked backward under the impact of the bullet but his knees buckled first and he toppled forward and fell slowly down to the floor.
I didn't move. I stared at him, knowing he was dead. I didn't have to touch him. His gun lay on the ground at my feet. I didn't touch it either.

Celia's voice seemed to be coming at me from across the widest everglades. I could hardly hear her.

"You'll say you shot him, Jim. It'll look better that way. He was prowling and you shot him. He really was prowling, wasn't he? They won't even hold you. Then we'll meet, in Rio—anywhere. But we won't have to stay, Jim. We can come back, live on the west coast or in the northwest. Anywhere, in fact. Jim, it'll be like you wanted!"

Like I wanted. I'd told her I'd do anything to have her and she'd dealt me in. Her hand was double-murder and she was making me her partner. I heard her that first night saying You might be held to that. And soon.

I was hearing Curt Carmic asking if I thought I'd have her, if I thought I'd be different than all the other men she'd had. Old men and new money....

I was Number One on her hit parade now. I'd won the jackpot—the quarter million dollars and Celia—because I'd owned a 'copter, and was six-two and rugged and had fallen in love with her. But six months from now, a year? I felt Handsome looking up at me, sightlessly, and was sorry for him.

Who will be next, Celia? What man will you want tomorrow, next week, next year? How will I get it, Celia, when I'm the one who stands in your way?

She was staring at me, lips parted, breathing hard, reading my thoughts, the questions in my eyes. “You don't love me,” she whispered softly. “You're like the rest of them. Just talk. I killed for you—and you're afraid of me. You'll turn me in, won't you? You'll tell them. All this money—and you'd tell them.” Her voice rose, was almost a shriek.

I lunged as the gun came up in her hand. I grabbed her right wrist; the satchel flew out of her left hand. I twisted hard.

She fought at the trigger, and never fought me at all. Her arm went limp and I heard the gun blast between us, rocking the very earth. For a moment she quivered as though in a spasm and then she relaxed all over. I held her to keep her from falling. But it could do no good. She was falling away from me.

I let her down gently. She was no good, a killer. Mad, maybe, for all I knew. But all the same, my eyes blurred as I got into my car to go for the sheriff.

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FACE OF EVIL by DAVID ALEXANDER

It was noon and the stocky detective with the swarthy face waited in the corridor of the City Hospital. He was a middle-aged man with heavily defined features. His coarse dark hair was salted with gray and a little string of sweat beads glistened on his forehead. His heavy shoulders drooped from fatigue. His eyes were large and dark and there was weary compassion in them as if they had looked upon the thousand faces of human life, neither with despair nor hope, but only with a patient acceptance. The whites of the eyes were filamented with bloody threads. He had not slept the night before. He had stayed on duty because the psychopathic killer the papers called The Butcher was loose again.

The detective's name was Romano. He was a lieutenant of Homicide, Manhattan West.

A doctor in a white coat came out of a nearby hospital room and closed the door after him. He was accompanied by a nurse. The nurse was dark and young and pretty and Romano thought of his own daughter who was a student at Marymount College. Romano rose slowly from the hard chair in the corridor, sighing with exhaustion. His feet had begun to throb and ache. That was always the first sign that his body was rebelling against the demands he made of it. Soon his nervous stomach would start acting up and he'd feel the painful little twinges of rising blood pressure. He was getting old. He would have to take his pension soon. Years ago he would have been driven and sustained by excitement, when a big squeal was this close to the break. He felt nothing like that now. He was just dead-tired.

The man in the hospital room was the only living person who could identify The Butcher, who had murdered five women and dismembered their bodies in a manner horrible enough to justify the name the papers had awarded him.

Romano lumbered slowly toward the doctor, his big feet slapping heavily on the rubber linoleum of the floor.

"Has he come out of it, Doc?" Romano asked.

The doctor was a thin man with high cheekbones and a small mustache. His slim, white fingers toyed with the stethoscope that dangled around his neck.

"He's out of coma, if that's what you mean," the doctor answered. "But he's hardly rational. I would say he's still suffering from shock. He has a heart condition, we've determined that. The experience he went through last night—well, it's a wonder he's alive under the circumstances. It might be better to wait awhile, Lieutenant."

Romano said, "It's pretty urgent, Doc. It's about as urgent as it can get. Time may mean a lot."

The doctor hesitated. The pretty nurse looked disapprovingly at Romano. She does look kind of like my daughter Ellie, Romano thought. She doesn't like me. Maybe she hates me, even, because she thinks I'm callous, that I want to torture a poor, sick man.

The doctor said, "I suppose you can go in for a little while, if you insist. But try to be considerate. Don't press him too much. You have to realize what he's been through."

Romano nodded. "I know," he said.

It sounded false, perhaps. But he did know. That was the tough part about being a cop. You saw all the violence and sadness and suffering there was and unless you were made of rock it became a part of you and you understood it and shared it. You understood afresh each time you saw the wild anguish in a woman's face, each time you looked into a man's dazed eyes and saw his quivering lips.

The doctor drew aside, said, "Just a few minutes, then. A very few minutes, please."

Romano opened the door and walked into the hospital room. He closed the door behind him.

The man on the bed stared wide-eyed at the ceiling. His name was Lester Ferguson. The Butcher had murdered his wife the night before. Ferguson had found her body on the floor of their bedroom when he returned from choir
practice.

Romano stood quietly by the bed for moment. The man did not even look at him.

Romano said, "Do you remember me, Mr. Ferguson?"

With an obvious physical effort, Ferguson turned his head toward the detective. He said, "I—I'm not quite sure."

"I'm a police officer, Mr. Ferguson. Lieutenant Romano, Homicide. I talked to you a moment last night at your house before you collapsed. You told me you saw his face. You said you could identify the man."

Ferguson's voice was a whisper. "The face," he said.

Romano waited. Ferguson said nothing else. He was off in a world of his own again.

"You told me you saw the murderer's face, Mr. Ferguson," Romano persisted. "When I asked you if you could identify it, you answered, 'Yes, yes, I will remember it forever.' It was right after that you became ill. Can you describe the face to me, Mr. Ferguson? I hate to do this. I know what you've been through. But this man is an insane killer. Your wife was the fifth woman he has killed. The same sadist, the same psychopath committed all the murders, because his method was always the same. He'll kill again, Mr. Ferguson, unless we find him first. And you're the only person on earth who can identify him."

Ferguson had drifted off again. Finally, he said, "The face."

"Yes, sir," said Romano eagerly. "The face you saw last night. The face at the window. Can you describe the face, Mr. Ferguson?"

Ferguson's voice was husky. "It—it was the Face of Evil," he said.

Romano sighed heavily and seated himself on the edge of a straight chair beside the bed.

"It was an evil face," he prompted. "Can you tell me a little more, Mr. Ferguson? Was it a young face or an old one? Was it broad or thin? Were there any scars or other distinguishing marks, perhaps?"

Ferguson said, "You cannot describe the Face of Evil in such terms."

Romano wiped the sweat beads from his face with the edge of his hand. Why were hospitals always such stuffy places? Sick people should have fresh air.

"Please try to help me, Mr. Ferguson," he pleaded patiently. "We'll have to have a little more than that to go on."

"What did you say your name was?" Ferguson asked.

"Romano. Lieutenant Romano. I'm a detective assigned to investigate the murder of your wife."

"Are you a religious man, Lieutenant?" Ferguson asked.

Romano winced. His wife Rosa and Father Riordan were always needling him about missing Mass. A cop's hours were so unpredictable. A cop got so damned tired.

"I believe in God, Mr. Ferguson," he said. "I'm a member of the church."

"All religious men have looked upon the face of God," Ferguson declared, his voice suddenly clear, animation coming into his dead-white face. "But how can you describe the face of God? You cannot describe the face of God as old or young or broad or thin or scarred or smooth."

The effort seemed to have exhausted the man on the bed. He fell back on the pillow, breathing heavily. Romano waited. Finally he said, "It was a human face you saw last night, Mr. Ferguson. You said you saw it staring at you through the window. It was the face of the man who murdered your wife."
Ferguson seemed exasperated at the detective's obtuseness. “Who can say if the Face of Evil is a human face?” he asked. “I mean no blasphemy, but it is like the face of God, because it is so many things. It is the face of a wanton woman who waits in shadows. It is the face of a soldier who is killing his enemy. It is the face of a maniac who runs amok with a flaming torch. It is the broad, red face of a lecherous sot who mouths obscenities. And it is the pinched, white face of a narcotics addict. Does that answer you? The Face of Evil is all these things."

Romano said, “Then it wasn't the face of a person you saw last night. It wasn't a real face, after all.”

Ferguson lurched upright in the bed. His voice rose to shrill hysteria and Romano glanced apprehensively toward the closed door. “Of course it was real! It was a murderer's face. It was the face of the man who killed my wife!”

Romano sighed. He decided to try another tack. The doctor or the nurse would be in any second to tell him that his time was up.

"About the window, Mr. Ferguson,” he said, consulting scribbled notes. “Your apartment is on the first floor. There is a bedroom window that opens on the little garden. It is quite probable the murderer entered and left through the window. It was not locked. But you told us you stood in the bedroom doorway and saw the face in the window directly opposite you. You were mistaken there, weren't you, Mr. Ferguson? There is no window directly opposite the doorway. The window is some fourteen feet to the right of the door. You would have to walk into the room, past your wife's body, and turn to the right to see the window. You were a little confused on this point. Under the circumstances, that is understandable.”

"No! No!” Ferguson exclaimed. “I came home from the church. I was feeling ill. I have been having these little spells. It is my heart, they say. I sank down into a chair, exhausted. I tried to call my wife. I wanted the medicine in the bathroom cabinet. She did not answer. I must have dozed off, lost consciousness. When I came to, I called my wife again. She did not answer. I opened my bedroom door. Her body was there at my feet, with the knife beside it. I looked up and there was a window directly above my wife's body, directly opposite the door, and the naked Face of Evil was staring at me through the window."

Romano said, “I see.” The door was opening quietly. The nurse had come to summon him. He said, “Thank you, Mr. Ferguson. I hope I haven't tired you. We'll talk again when you are feeling better.”

Romano nodded politely to the nurse and left the room. He had learned never to hope too much when a break was in the making. Now he was not too disappointed. He had to work on the theory that Ferguson had actually seen a face, because that was the only possible lead to the madman who had butchered five women. When Ferguson's mind cleared he might be able to describe the face in recognizable terms. He might be able to go over the mug shots of the hundreds of psychopaths in the I. D. room and pick out one and say, “That is the face.” Romano had to hold to that. The Butcher had killed five times in seven months. He would kill again if they failed to find him.

Romano returned to Manhattan West, the old precinct house on the edge of Hell's Kitchen that was the clearing house for all the crimes of violence committed west of Fifth Avenue. He mounted a flight of worn stairs and entered the cubbyhole that served him as an office. A green-shaded bulb burned above the desk night and day, for no light came through the small window on an air-shaft. A large, young detective named Grierson, Romano's assistant, lay sleeping on the cracked leather couch. Grierson was a detective first-grade, which meant he drew lieutenant's pay, even though he did not have the permanent rank on the Department rolls. And he's only been a cop for seven years, Romano thought. Grierson was the new type of cop. He had been graduated from City College and on his nights off he studied law at N. Y. U. Romano sank down in the creaking swivel chair and sighed heavily. He reached down and loosened the laces of his shoes. As he had expected, his nervous stomach was acting up. He took a small bottle of soda tablets from a drawer, shook out two. He poured water from a thermos jug on the desk and swallowed the tablets.

Grierson awakened and sat up on the couch, smoothing down his black hair with a big hand. He hadn't been to bed either, since The Butcher's latest kill had broken. Grierson yawned and said, “How is it?”

"My feet hurt," Romano answered.

Grierson said, “Did Ferguson come to? Did he identify The Butcher?”
Romano covered his mouth with his hand and belched. He said, “Ferguson came to. I talked to him a few minutes. He says he saw a face that wasn't human staring at him through a window that isn't there.”

"One of those," said Grierson.

"We've got to believe it," Romano replied. He was trying to convince himself, not Grierson. “We've got to believe he saw The Butcher's face. Later on he may remember and tell us something we can work on. He's got a heart condition. He had a slight stroke when he got home last night, the medics say. When he came out of it and saw the body, his mind was fogged. He thinks the window was directly opposite the door. It isn't. But he could have stepped around the body, turned right and seen the face there in the only window. We've got to keep on thinking he did."

"The lab finished with the knife," said Grierson. “It adds up to nothing. The fingerprints were only smudges."

Romano nodded glumly. “Like usual," he said. “I've been on the force since you were playing hopscotch. In all that time I've seen just one murder solved by fingerprints. The murderer was considerate. He left his prints in a pot of jewelers' wax."

Grierson said, “The poop on Ferguson is on your desk. Top folder. I looked it over. He's a solid citizen. Nobody had a word to say against him. Manages a book store on lower Fifth Avenue that sells Bibles and religious stuff. He's a pillar of the church. All his neighbors and his clergyman and the shopkeepers he deals with had a good word to say for him. He met his wife at his church. They've been married six years. No children."

"That's all?" Romano asked.

"Not quite," said Grierson. “He was a student at a Divinity College when the war broke out. He wanted to be a minister. He could have been deferred from the draft, but he enlisted in a combat unit. He was an infantryman. He was with Clark's Fifth Army all the way up The Boot. His record was good. Bronze Star decoration. Made staff sergeant. Was wounded slightly and got a Purple Heart. He was hospitalized a long time. It wasn't the wound. He also suffered battle shock or combat fatigue or whatever it was they called it."

"That means he's a nut?" Romano asked. “It means he might see faces in windows that aren't there?"

Grierson shrugged and yawned again. “Not unless a couple of million other guys who are walking the streets are nuts," he answered. “There were at least that many cases of combat fatigue during the war, I understand. It's a temporary breakdown of the nervous system, that's all.""Thanks, Grierson,” Romano said. Sometimes he resented these new cops, the eager-beaver kind who had college degrees and studied law in night school. But they were useful. Romano hated to wade through long reports and Grierson knew it. Grierson could type with all ten fingers. He did most of the clerical poop that was part of a cop's job. Romano hated to peck at the typewriter with two thick fingers. He always made mistakes. After doing it for more than twenty years, he made mistakes.

The lieutenant began to skim through the report on Ferguson. He didn't read it carefully. He could depend on Grierson. Suddenly he paused and his thick eyebrows knit together.

"He was in that vet's place right over on Staten Island," he said.

Grierson said, “That's right. Bay Heaven. It's one of the biggest Army general hospitals in the country.""Get your hat,” Romano said. Romano was tying his shoe laces. “Why?" asked Grierson.

"We're going over to Staten Island," Romano answered. “There just might be some medic still around who remembers Ferguson."

Grierson rose and stretched. “Oh, well," he said, “it's a nice day for a ferry ride."

They left the police car parked on the lower deck of the ferry and climbed up to the top. They stood by the rail, letting the wind whip their faces, watching the skyline of Manhattan recede into the distance. More than eight
million people lived and worked and had their being in this immediate area, Romano thought. One of them was called The Butcher.

"I wish I had some easy job," the lieutenant said aloud. "Like finding a needle in a haystack."

It took nearly two hours of questioning and waiting and checking the files at the hospital before they found a doctor named Bowers. He was an elderly man with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. After he had glanced over the files he remembered Lester Ferguson among the thousands of patients who had been under his care during the last dozen years. He remembered him quite clearly.

"A most interesting case," Bowers said. "His wound was comparatively trivial, a fragment of shell in the leg that required surgery, but did no permanent damage. He didn't even limp as a result. But he was in shock for an incredible length of time. Weeks, months, even. Sometimes he would lapse into a catatonic state. He would lie there on his cot, his body rigid, staring wide-eyed at the ceiling. And he would murmur something in a kind of awed and frightened whisper. 'The face,' he'd say, 'the face.' He'd murmur that over and over again.

"It was trauma, of course, some shocking experience that had been repressed and had made a lasting impression on him. We couldn't bring out what it was or when it had occurred. It might have been in his childhood. It might have been anything and it might have happened at any time. I always say a thing like that is a splinter under the skin of the mind. You have to extract it somehow. We tried various techniques. None of them seemed to work. Finally, we hit on sodium pentothal, the stuff the newspapers call truth serum. I doubt we'd use it now we have the new relaxing drugs, but it did the trick. When he was under the influence of the drug we questioned him, and we finally brought it out, removed the splinter, you might say.

"He'd seen a face, or thought he'd seen one, staring at him through a broken window during street fighting while they were mopping up some little town in Italy. He thought it was the Face of Evil, as he called it. It must have been a pretty horrible experience for him. He was wounded right afterward, but the face stayed in his mind. Once we got him to tell us about it, we purged the thing and he was on his way to recovery."

"You think he saw a real face in the window?" Romano asked. "Or was it just some sort of delusion?"

The doctor shrugged. "It's hard to say," he answered. "It could have been a real face. It could have been the face of some enemy sniper trapped there in a ruined building. The street was piled with dead and dying men, probably. Such faces aren't very pretty. Whatever it was he saw, he thought it was the Face of Evil. He called it that. You have to understand that Ferguson was a very religious man. He'd been studying for the ministry when he went into the Army. Killing is a terrible experience for any man. That was especially true for a man like Ferguson. Most soldiers go through a war never knowing for sure that the shots they fire have killed an enemy. Ferguson knew for sure. Just a few days before he was wounded, a few days before he saw the face, he'd been decorated for wiping out an enemy strongpoint with a grenade. Five machine-gunners were killed by the grenade."

"And when you brought it out, when you made him tell you about the face—this Face of Evil—he was cured?" Romano asked.

"From the clinical view, he was," Bowers answered. "He came out of shock. The catatonic periods did not recur. We kept him around awhile for observation. He was perfectly normal when he was discharged."

"Ferguson saw the face again last night," Romano said flatly.

Bowers said, "I'm sorry. That is bad, of course, but it happens sometimes, years later. Usually it's some shattering experience that brings it on."

"It was a shattering experience," Romano told the doctor. "Ferguson's wife was killed by a murderer they call The Butcher."

The Lieutenant rose and nodded to Grierson. He was ready to leave.

As the police car rolled off the ferry onto Manhattan Island, Grierson said, "It's nearly five. Do we knock off now and catch some shuteye, or are we starting another tour of duty?"
"Drive to City Hospital," Romano answered. "I want to try and talk to Ferguson again."

Inside the hospital, Romano saw the same doctor he had spoken to that morning, the thin man with the high cheekbones and the small mustache.

"I'd like to talk to Ferguson again," he said. "I won't be but a little while."

The doctor said, "Didn't you get our message, Lieutenant?"

"What message?" Romano asked.

"We called your office and left word. Lester Ferguson died of a cerebral hemorrhage about an hour ago."

Romano merely nodded, accepting it.

Grierson shook his head angrily. "So the only person who could tell us what The Butcher looked like died without identifying him," the young detective said.

"Oh, he identified him," Romano answered softly. "Come on, Grierson. I want to look in on Ferguson's flat."

The Fergusons had occupied the ground floor of a house of mellowed brick on a pleasant, tree-lined street in Greenwich Village. Romano got the key of Ferguson's apartment from the superintendent. Daylight still showed through the windows, but the apartment was shadowy and Romano switched on lights.

He said, "Ferguson must have been sitting in that chair right there when he came back to consciousness after his stroke." He crossed the room and sat down in a chintz-covered easy chair.

"He came to," Romano continued. "He was confused. He probably wasn't too sure where he was, even. He called to his wife, and she didn't answer."

Romano got to his feet. "The bedroom door was closed. Ferguson walked toward it." Romano walked toward the bedroom door and opened it. He switched on another light, stood in the doorway.

"He looked down and saw his wife's body on the floor, right inside the doorway. Then he looked up and saw the murderer's face staring at him through a window."

Romano drew aside, "Come over here, Grierson," he said. "Stand here in the doorway."

Grierson obeyed.

"Look straight ahead of you," Romano said. "You see, Ferguson was right. There is a window."

Grierson was a good cop and a conscientious one, but sometimes his mind did not work too fast. He turned to Romano, his face blank.

Romano said, "You want me to draw you a picture? Ferguson saw the face of the man who killed his wife in what he called a window, the thing that's right in front of you. He called it The Face of Evil, but it was The Butcher's face, the face of the psycho who killed five women in this neighborhood."

Grierson didn't see a window.

All he saw was his own face reflected in the mirror on the wall.

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I finally caught up to her around eleven o'clock in a bar just off Windward Avenue. Windward Avenue is in Venice and Venice is not what you would call the high-rent district in the Los Angeles area.

A juke box was doling out the nasal complaints of a hillbilly songstress and most of the men at the bar looked like they worked with their hands. At the far end of the bar from the doorway, Angela Ladugo was sitting in front of what appeared to be a double martini.

The Ladugo name is a big one in this county, going way back to the Spanish land grants. Angela seemed to have inherited her looks from mama's side of the family, which was mostly English.

I paused for a moment in the doorway and she looked up and her gaze met mine and I thought for a moment she smiled. But I could have been wrong; her face was stiff and her eyes were glazed.

The bartender, a big and ugly man, looked at me appraisingly and then his gaze shifted to Miss Ladugo and he frowned. A couple of the workingmen looked over at me and back at their glasses of beer.

There was an empty stool next to Angela; I headed toward it. The bartender watched me every step of the way and when I finally parked, he was standing at our end, studying me carefully.

I met his gaze blandly. “Bourbon and water.”

"Sure thing,” he said.

"New around here, are you?"

"Where's here—Venice?"

"Right."

Before I could answer, Angela said, “Don't hit him yet, Bugsy. Maybe he's a customer.”

I looked over at her, but she was looking straight ahead. I looked back at the bartender. “I'm not following the plot. Is this a private bar?”

He shook his head. “Are you a private cop?”

I nodded.

He nodded, too, toward the door. “Beat it.”

"Easy now,” I said. “I'm not just any private cop. You could phone Sergeant Nystrom over at the Venice Station. Do you know him?”

"I know him.”

"Ask him about me, about Joe Puma. He'll give you a good word on me.”

"Beat it,” he said again.

Angela Ladugo sighed heavily. “Relax, Bugsy. Papa would only send another one. At least this one looks—washed.”

The big man looked between us and went over to get my whiskey. I brought out a package of cigarettes and offered her one.
"No, thank you," she said in the deliberate, carefully enunciated speech of the civilized drunk on the brink of the pit.

"Do you come here for color, Miss Ladugo?" I asked quietly, casually.

She frowned and said distinctly, "No. For sanctuary."

The bartender brought my bourbon and water. "That'll be two bucks."

He was beginning to annoy me. I said, "Kind of steep here, aren't you?"

"I guess. Two bucks, cash."

"Drink it yourself," I told him. "Ready to go, Miss Ladugo?"

"No," she said. "Bugsy, you're being difficult. The man's only doing his job."

"What kind of men do that kind of job?" he asked contemptuously.

A silence. Briefly, I considered my professional decorum. And then I gave Bugsy my blankest stare and said evenly, "Maybe you've got some kind of local reputation as a tough guy, mister, but frankly I never heard of you. And I don't like your insolence."

The men along the bar were giving us their attention now. A bleached blonde in one of the booths started to giggle nervously. The juke box gave us Sixteen Tons.

Angela sighed again and said quietly, "I'm ready to go. I'll see you later, Bugsy. I'll be back."

"Don't go if you don't want to," he said.

She put a hand carefully on the bar and even more carefully slid off the stool. "Let's go, Mr.—"

"Puma," I supplied. "My arm, Miss Ladugo?"

"Thank you, no. I can manage."

She was close enough for me to smell her perfume, for me to see that her transparently fair skin and fine hair were flawless. She couldn't have been on the booze for long.

Outside, the night air was chilly and damp.

"Now, I'll take your arm," she said. "Where's your car?"

"This way. About a block. Are you all right?"

A wino came lurching across the street, narrowly missed being hit by a passing car. From the bar behind us, came the shrill lament of another ridge-running canary.

"I'm all right," Miss Ladugo said. "I'm—navigable."

"You're not going to be sick, are you?"

"Not if you don't talk about it, I'm not. Where did Papa find you?"

"I was recommended by a mutual acquaintance. Would you like some coffee?"

"If we can go to a place that isn't too clattery. Isn't Bugsy wonderful? He's so loyal."

"Most merchants are loyal to good accounts, Miss Ladugo. Just another half block, now."

She stopped walking. “Don't patronize me. I'm not an alcoholic, Mr.—Panther, or whatever it is.”

"Puma,” I said. “I didn't mean to sound condescending, but you must admit you're very drunk."

"Puma,” she said. “That's a strange name. What kind of name is that?”

"Italian,” I told her. “Just a little bit, now, just a few steps.”

"You're simpering, Mr. Puma. Don't simper."

I opened the door of my car on the curb side and helped her in. The flivver started with a cough and I swung in a U turn, heading for Santa Monica.

Nothing from her. In a few minutes I smelled tobacco and looked over to see her smoking. I asked, “Zuky's joint all right?”

"I suppose.” A pause. “No. Take me home. I'll send someone for my car.”

"Your car—" I said. “I didn't think about that. I should have left mine and driven yours. I guess I live closer to Venice than you do.”

"In that case, why don't we go to your house for a cup of coffee?"

"It isn't a house; it's an apartment, Miss Ladugo. And my landlord frowns on my bringing beautiful women there."

"Am I beautiful?"

I thought she moved closer. “You know you are,” I said. “All beautiful women know it.”

Now, I felt her move closer. I said, “And you're drunk and you don't want to hate yourself in the morning. So why don't you open that window on your side and get some cold, fresh air?”

A chuckle and her voice was husky. “You mustn't give me a rejection complex.” Another pause. “You—"

"Quit it,” I shot back at her.

Her breathing was suddenly harsh. “You bastard. I'm Spanish, understand. Spanish and English. And the Spanish goes back to before this was even a state.”

"I know,” I said. “I just don't like to be sworn at. Are you sure you don't want to go to Zuky's?”

Her voice was soft again. “I'll go to Zuky's. I—I didn't mean what I said. I—in bars like Bugsy's, a lady can pick up some—some unladylike attitudes.”

"Sure,” I said. “What's the attraction there? Bugsy?”

"It's a friendly place,” she said slowly. “It's warm and plain and nobody tries to be anything they aren't.” She opened the window on her side and threw her cigarette out.

I said, “You try to be something you aren't when you go there. Those aren't your kind of people.”

"How do you know? What do you know about me?"

"I know you're rich and those people weren't. I can guess you're educated and I'm sure they aren't. Have any of them invited you to their homes?”

"Just the single ones,” she said. “Are you lecturing me, Mr. Puma?”

"I'll quit it. It's only that I hate to see—oh, I'm sorry.” I stopped for the light at Olympic, and looked over at her.
She was facing my way. “Go on. You hate to see what?”

"I hate to see quality degenerate."

The chuckle again. “How naive. Are you confusing quality with wealth, Mr. Puma?”

"Maybe.” The light changed and I drove on toward Wilshire.

Two block this side of it, she asked, “Who recommended you to Dad?”

"Anthony Ellers, the attorney. I've done some work for him.”

She was silent until I pulled the car into the lot behind Zuky's. Then she asked, “Don't you ever drink, Mr. Puma?”

"Frequently. But I don't have to."

She sighed. “Oh God, a moralist! Tony Ellers certainly picks them.”

I smiled at her. “My credit rating's good, too. How about a sandwich with your coffee? It all goes on the expense account.”

She studied me in the dimness of the car and then she smiled, too. “All right, all right. Get around here now and open the door for me like a gentleman.”

Zuky's was filled with the wonderful smells of fine kosher food. From a booth on the mezzanine, Jean Hartley waved and made a circle with his thumb and forefinger. I ignored him.

We took a booth near the counter. Almost all the seats at the counter were taken, as were most of the booths. I said, “This is a warm and plain and friendly place and the food is good. Why not here instead of Bugsy's?”

Her gaze was candid. “You tell me.”

I shook my head. “Unless you have some compulsion to degrade yourself. Cheap bars are for people who can't afford good bars. And all bars are for people who haven't any really interesting places to go. With your kind of money, there must be a million places more fun than Bugsy's.”

Her smile was cool. “Like?”

"Oh, Switzerland or Sun Valley or Bermuda or the Los Angeles Country Club.”

"I've been to all those places,” she said. “They're no better.”

The waitress came and we ordered corned beef sandwiches and coffee.

Jean Hartley materialized and said, “Joe, Joe old boy, gee it's great to see you.”

"It's been nice seeing you, Jean,” I said. “So long.”

My welcome didn't dim his smile. “Joe boy, you're being difficult.”

"Go, Jean,” I said. “This isn't the Palladium.”

He looked from me to Miss Ladugo and back to me. He shook his head. “I don't blame you,” he said, and went away.

"Handsome man,” Angela said.

I shrugged.
"Tell me," she asked, "are you really as square as you sound?"

I shrugged again.

"That man wanted to meet me, didn't he? And he didn't know I'm rich, either, did he?"

"He probably does," I said. "He's worked his way into better fields since he milked the lonely hearts club racket dry."

"Oh? Is he what's called a confidence man?"

"No. They work on different principles. Jean trades on people's loneliness, on widows and spinsters, all the drab and gullible people who want to be told they're interesting."

Angela Ladugo smiled. "He seemed very charming. I suppose that's one of his weapons."

"I suppose. I never found him very charming."

"You're stuffy," she said. "You're—"

The waitress came with our orders and Angela stopped. The waitress went away, and I said, "I'm a private investigator. Decorum is part of what I sell."

She looked around and back at me. "Are you sexless, too?"

"I've never been accused of it before. I've never taken advantage of a drunken woman, if that's what you mean."

"I'm not drunk. I was, but I'm not now."

"Eat," I said. "Drink your coffee."

There was no further dialogue of any importance. She ate all of her sandwich and drank two cups of coffee. And then I drove her back to Beverly Hills and up the long, winding driveway that kept the Ladugo mansion out of view from the lower class drivers on Sunset Boulevard.

A day's work at my usual rates and it never occurred to me to be suspicious of the Buick four-door hardtop that seemed to have followed us from Santa Monica.

I billed Mr. Ladugo for mileage and the sandwiches and coffee and fifty dollars for my labor and got a check almost immediately. I had done what I was trained to do; the girl needed a psychiatrist more than a bodyguard.

I worked half a week on some hotel skips and a day on a character check on a rich girl's suitor. Friday afternoon, Mr. Ladugo called me.

What kind of man, he wanted to know, was Jean Hartley?

"He's never been convicted," I said. "Is it facts you want, sir, or my opinion of the man?"

"Your opinion might be interesting, considering that you introduced him to my daughter."

"I didn't introduce him to your daughter, Mr. Ladugo. Whoever told you that, lied."

"My daughter told me that. Could I have your version of how they happened to meet?"

I told him about Zuky's and the short conversation I'd had with Jean Hartley. And I asked, "Do you happen to know what kind of car Mr. Hartley drives?"

"It's red, I know that. Fairly big car. Why?"
I told him about the Buick that had followed us from Santa Monica. That had been a red car.

"I see," he said, and there was a long silence. Finally, "Are you busy now?"

"I'll be through with my present assignment at four o'clock. I'll be free after that." I was through right then, but I didn't want the carriage trade to think I might possibly be hungry.

"I'd like you to keep an eye on her," he said. "Have you enough help to do that around the clock?"

"I can arrange for it. Why don't I just go to this Jean Hartley and lean on him a little?"

"Are you—qualified to do that?"

"Not legally," I answered. "But physically, I am."

"No," he said, "nothing like that. I can't—afford anything like that. Angela's shopping now, but she should be home by five."

I phoned Barney Allison and he wasn't busy. I told him it would be the sleep watch for him; I could probably handle the rest of the day.

"It's your client," he said. "I figured to get the dirty end of the stick."

"If you don't need the business, Barney—"

"I do, I do," he said. "Command me."

Then I looked for Jean Hartley in the phone book, but he wasn't in it. He undoubtedly had an unlisted number. I phoned Sam Heller of the bunko squad, but Sam had no recent address of Jean's.

At four-thirty, I was parked on Sunset, about a block from the Ladugo driveway. At four-fifty, a Lincoln Continental turned in and it looked like Angela was behind the wheel.

I'd brought a couple sandwiches and a vacuum bottle of coffee; at six, I ate. At six-thirty, I was enjoying a cigarette and a disk jockey when a Beverly Hills prow! car pulled up behind my rollabout.

The one who came around to my side of the car was young and healthy and looked pugnacious. He asked cheerfully if I was having car trouble.

I told him I wasn't.

"Noticed you first almost two hours ago," he went on. "You live in the neighborhood, do you?"

"About seven miles from here." I pulled out the photostat of my license to show him.

He frowned and looked at the other cop, who was standing on the curb. "Private man."

The other man said nothing nor did his expression change. It was a bored expression.

"Waiting for someone?" the younger one asked me.

I nodded. "If you're worried about me, boys, you could go up to the house and talk to Mr. Ladugo. But don't let his daughter see you. She's the one I'm waiting for and Mr. Ladugo is paying me to wait."

"Ladugo," the young man said. "Oh, yes. Ladugo. Well, good luck, Mr. Puma."

They went away.

Even in Beverly Hills, that name meant something. Puma, now, there was a name you had to look up, but not
Ladugo. Why was that? I gave it some thought while I waited and decided it was because he was older, and therefore richer. But he wasn't as old as my dad, and my dad had just finished paying the mortgage on a seven thousand dollar home. He'd been paying on it for twenty years. I must learn to save my money, cut down on cigarettes, or something. Or get into another line of work, like Jean Hartley.

At seven-thirty, the Continental came gliding out of the Ladugo driveway, making all the Cadillacs on Sunset look like 1927 Flints. I gave her a couple of blocks and followed in the Continental's little sister.

There was a guilty knowledge gnawing at me. If we hadn't gone to Zuky's, she wouldn't have met Jean Hartley. And I wouldn't have been hired to follow her.

At a road leading off to the right, just beyond the UCLA campus, the Continental turned and began climbing into the hills. It was a private road, serving a quartette of estates, and I didn't follow immediately. If it dead-ended up above, Angela and I would eventually come nose to nose.

I waited on Sunset for five minutes and then turned in the road. The houses were above the road and four mailboxes were set into a field-stone pillar at the first driveway. Atop the pillar were four names cut out of wrought iron and one of the names was Ladugo. Her trip seemed innocent enough; I drove out again to wait on Sunset.

It was dark, now, and the headlights of the heavy traffic heading toward town came barreling around the curve in a steady stream of light. My radio gave me the day's news and some comments on the news and then a succession of platters.

A little before ten o'clock, the Continental came out on Sunset again and headed west. I gave it a three block lead.

It went through Santa Monica at a speed that invited arrest, but she was lucky, tonight. On Lincoln Avenue, she swung toward Venice.

Not back to Bugsy's, I thought. Not back to that rendezvous of the literate and the witty, that charming salon of the sophisticated.

A block from Windward, she parked. I was parking a half block behind that when she went through the doorway.

I got out and walked across the street before going down that way. When I came abreast of the bar, I could see her sitting next to a man whose back was to me. I walked down another half block and saw the red Buick four-door Riviera. The registration slip on the steering column informed me that this was the car of Jean Hartley. His address was there, too, and I copied it.

Then I went back to wait.

I didn't have long. In about ten minutes, both of them came out of Bugsy's. For a few moments, they talked and then separated and headed for their cars.

I followed Angela's, though the Buick seemed to be going to the same place. Both of them turned right on Wilshire and headed back toward Westwood.

Westwood was the address on Jean Hartley's steering column. And that's where they finally stopped, in front of a sixteen unit apartment building of fieldstone and cerise stucco, built around a sixty foot swimming pool.

I waited until they had walked out of sight and then came back to the flood-lighted patio next to the pool. A list of the tenants was on a board here and one of the tenants was Hartley Associates.

Some associates he'd have. With numbers under their pictures. But who could guess that by looking at him? I went sniffing around until I found his door.

There was an el in the hallway at this point, undoubtedly formed by the fireplace in the apartment. It afforded me enough cover.

Hartley Associates. What could that mean? Phoney stock? I heard music and I heard laughter. The music was
Chopin's and the laughter was Angela's. Even in the better California apartment houses, the walls are thin.

Some boys certainly do make out.

I heard a thud that sounded like a refrigerator door closing.

I wanted to smoke, but smoke would reveal me to others who might pass along the hall. Chopin changed to Debussy and I thought I heard the tinkle of ice in glasses. Light music, cool drinks and a dark night—while I stood in the hall, hating them both.

Time dragged along on its belly.

And then, right after eleven o'clock, I though I heard a whimper. There had been silence for minutes and this whimper was of the complaining type. I was moving toward the door, where I could hear better, when I heard the scream.

I tried the knob and the door was locked. I stepped back and put a foot into the panel next to the knob and the door came open on the second kick.

Light from the hall poured into the dark apartment and I could see Angela Ladugo, up against a wall, the palms of her hands pressed against the wall, her staring eyes frightened.

She was wearing nothing but that almost translucent skin and her fair hair. I took one step into the room and found a light switch next to the door.

When the lights went on, I could see Hartley sitting on a davenport near the fireplace and I headed his way. I never got there.

As unconsciousness poured into my reverberating skull, I remembered that the sign downstairs had warned me he had associates.

I came to on the floor. Hartley sat on the davenport, smoking. There was no sign of Angela Ladugo or anyone else.

I asked, “Where is she?”

"Miss Ladugo? She's gone home. Why?"

"Why? She screamed, didn't she? What the hell were you doing to her?"

He frowned. “I didn't hear any scream. Are you sure it was in this apartment?"

"You know it was. Who hit me?"

Hartley pointed at an ottoman. “Nobody hit you. You stumbled over that.”

I put a hand on the floor and got slowly to my feet. The pain in my skull seemed to pulse with my heartbeat.

Hartley said, “I haven't called the police—yet. I thought perhaps you had a reason for breaking into my apartment.”

"Call 'em,” I said. “Or I will.”

He pointed toward a hallway. “There's the phone. You're free to use it."

I came over to stand in front of him. “Maybe I ought to work you over first. They might be easier on you than I'd be.”

He looked at me without fear. “Suit yourself. That would add assault to the rap."

I had nothing and he knew it. I wasn't about to throw the important name of Angela Ladugo to a scandal-hungry
press. I was being paid to protect her, not publicize her. I studied him for seconds, while reason fought the rage in me.

Finally, I asked, “What's the racket this time, Jean?”

He smiled. “Don't be that way, Joe. So the girl likes me. That's a crime? She was a little high and noisy, but you can bet she's been that way before. Did she hang around? If she'd been in trouble, wouldn't she have stayed around to see that you were all right?”

"How do I know what happened to her?” I asked.

He looked at his watch. “She should be phoning any minute, from home. I'll let you talk to her if you want.”

I sat down on the davenport. “I'll wait.”

He leaned back and studied the end of his cigarette. “What were you doing out there, Joe? Are you working for her father?”

"No. I felt responsible for her meeting you. I'm working for myself.”

He smiled. “I'll bet. I can just see Joe Puma making this big noble gesture. Don't kid me.”

I said slowly, “This isn't the right town to buck anyone named Ladugo, Jean. He could really railroad you.”

"Maybe. I can't help it if the girl likes me.”

"That girl's sick,” I said. “She has some compulsion to debase herself. Is that the soft spot you're working?”

"She likes me,” he said for the third time. “Does there have to be a dollar in it? She's a beautiful girl.”

"For you,” I said, “there has to be a dollar in it. And I intend to see you don't ever latch onto it. I've got friends in the Department, Jean.”

He sighed. “And all I've got is the love of this poor woman.”

The phone rang, and he went over to it. I came right along.

He said, “Hello,” and handed me the phone.

I heard Angela say, “Jean? Is everything all right? There won't be any trouble, will there?”

"None,” I said. “Are you home?”

"I'm home. Jean—is that you—?”

I gave him the phone and went into the kitchen to get a drink of water. The lump on the back of my head was sore, but the rattles were diminishing in my brain.

If she was home, she was now under the eye of Barney Allison. I could use some rest.

I went out without saying any more to Jean, but I didn't go right home. I drove back to Venice.

The big man behind the bar greeted me with a frown when I came in. I said, “I'd like to talk to you.”

"It's not mutual.”

"I'd like to talk about Angela Ladugo. I'm being paid to see that she doesn't get into trouble.”

He looked down at the bar to where a man was nursing a beer. He looked back at me. “Keep your voice low. I don't
want any of these slobs to know her name."

I nodded. “The man who met her here tonight can do her more harm than any of your customers are likely to. His name is Jean Hartley. Have you ever heard of him?”

"I've heard of him.” His eyes were bleak.

I said, “I'll have a beer if it's less than two dollars.”

He drew one from the tap. “On the house. What's Hartley's pitch?”

"I don't know. What's your attraction, Bugsy?”

He looked at me suspiciously. “I knew her mother. Way, way back, when we were both punks. I was just a preliminary boy and her mother danced at the Blue Garter. I guess you're too young to remember the Blue Garter.”

"Burlesque?"

"Something like that. A cafe. But Angela Walker was no tramp—don't get that idea. Her folks back in England were solid middle-class people."

"I see. And that's where Ladugo met her, at the Blue Garter?"

"I don't know. She was dancing there when she met him."

"And you kept up the acquaintanceship through the years?"

He colored slightly. “No. Not that she was a snob. But Venice is a hell of a long ways from Beverly Hills.”

"She's dead now?"

"Almost three years."

"And Angela has renewed the friendship. Her mother must have talked about you."

"I guess she did. What's it to you, Mac?"

"Nothing, I guess. I'm just looking for a pattern."

"We don't sell 'em, here. I thought you were watching the girl."

"She's home,” I said. “Another man will watch her until I go back to work in the morning. This is pretty good beer."

"For twenty cents, you can have another one."

I put two dimes on the counter, and said, “Hartley scares me. He's tricky and handsome and completely unscrupulous.”

He put a fresh glass of beer in front of me. “I wouldn't call him handsome.”

"Angela did. She went up to his apartment tonight. I broke in and somebody clobbered me. When I came to, she was gone. But she phoned him from home while I was still there.”

Bugsy looked at me evenly. “Maybe the old man should have hired somebody who knew his business.”

"You might have a point there. I'll go when I finish the beer."

He went down to serve the man at the other end of the bar. He came back to say, “I always mixed Angela's drinks real, real weak. She's got no tolerance for alcohol.”
I said nothing, nursing the beer.

Bugsy said, “Can’t you muscle this Hartley a little? He didn’t look like much to me.”

"He’s a citizen,” I said, “just like you. And the Department is full of boys who hate private operatives, just like you do.”

"Maybe I resented the old man sending you down here to drag her home. Some of the joints she’s been in, this could be a church.”

"He didn’t send me down here. I wound up here because she did. I don’t think he knows where she goes.”

Bugsy drew himself a small beer. He looked at it as he said, “And maybe he doesn’t care. Maybe he just hired you to keep the Ladugo name out of the papers.”

"That could be,” I said, and finished my beer. “Good night, Bugsy.”

He nodded.

At home, I took a warm shower and set the alarm for seven o’clock. I wanted to write my reports of the two days before going over to relieve Barney.

I’d finished them by eight, and a little before nine, I drove up in front of the Ladugo driveway. There was no sign of Barney Allison.

He wouldn’t desert a post; I figured Angela must have already left the house. I drove to the office. If Barney had a chance to leave a message, he would have left it with my phone-answering service.

Barney’s Chev was parked about four doors from the entrance to my office. Angela wasn’t in sight; I went over to the Chev.

Barney said, “She went through that doorway about fifteen minutes ago. Maybe she’s waiting for you.”

"Maybe. Okay, Barney, I’ll take it from here.”

He yawned and nodded and drove away.

Angela Ladugo was waiting in the first floor lobby, sitting on a rattan love seat. Her gaze didn’t quite meet mine as I walked over.

When I was standing in front of her, she looked at the floor. Her voice was very low, “What—happened last night?”

"You tell me. Do you want to go up to the office?”

She shook her head. “It’s quiet enough here.” She looked up. “I—can’t drink very well. You might think that’s absurd, but it’s—I mean, I really don’t know what happened last night. I wasn’t really—conscious.”

"Didn’t you drive home?”

She shook her head. “I’m almost sure I didn’t. I think someone drove me home in my car. Was it Jean?”

"You don’t need to lie to me, Miss Ladugo,” I said gently. “I’m on your side.”

"I’m not lying.”

I said, “You phoned Hartley when you got home. You didn’t sound drunk to me then. You just sounded scared.”

Her eyes were blank. “You were there?”
"That's right. You're not going to see Hartley again, are you?"

She shook her head. “Of course not. Are you—still going to follow me?”

"Shouldn't I?"

She took a deep breath that sounded like relief. “I don't know. Are you going to tell my dad about—last night?"

"Most of it is in the report I wrote. Most of it. I'm not sure where the line of ethics would be. It isn't my intention to shock your father or—hurt you."

She looked at the floor again. “Thank you."

The downcast eyes bit was right out of the Brontes; I hoped she didn't think I was falling for her delicate lady routine.

She looked up with a smile. “As long as you're going to be following me, why don't we go together?” Charm she had, even though I knew it was premeditated.

"Fine,” I said. “It'll save gas."

We went to some shops I had never seen before—on the inside, that is. Like her poorer sisters, she shopped without buying. We went to Roland's for lunch.

There, under the impulse of a martini, I asked her, “Were you and your mother closer than you are with your father?"

She nodded, her eyes searching my face.

"You don't—resent your father?"

"I love him. Can't we talk about something else?"

We tried. We discussed some movies we'd both seen and one book we'd both read. Her thoughts were banal; her opinions adolescent. We ran out of words, with the arrival of the coffee.

Then, as we finished, she said, “Why don't we go home and talk to my father? I'm sure I don't need to be watched anymore."

"Might look bad for me,” I said. “So far as he knows, you're not aware I'm following you."

Some of her geniality was gone. “I'll phone him."

Which she did, right there at the table. And after a few moments of sweet talk, she handed the phone to me.

Her father said, “Pretend I'm taking you off the job. But keep an eye on her."

"All right, sir,” I said, and handed the phone back to her.

When she'd finished talking, she smiled at me. “You can put the check on the expense account, I'm sure. Good luck, Mr. Puma."

"Thank you,” I said.

We both rose and then she paused, to suddenly stare at me. “I haven't annoyed you, have I? I mean, that report about last night—this doesn't mean you'll—make it more complete?"

I shook my head. “And I hope you won't betray your father's trust.”
The smile came back. “Of course I won't.”

I asked, “How do I get back to my car?”

“You can get a cab, I'm sure,” she said. “I'd drop you, but I have so much more shopping to do.”

She had me. I couldn't follow her in a cab and I couldn't admit I was going to follow her. I nodded good-bye to her and signaled for the check.

I got a cab in five minutes and was back to my car in ten more. And, on a hunch, I drove right over to Westwood.

I came up Hartley's street just as the Continental disappeared around the corner. A truck came backing out of a driveway, and, by the time I got started again, she must have made another turn. Because the big black car was nowhere in sight.

I drove back to Hartley's apartment building. There was an off chance he was home and she had arranged to meet him somewhere. I parked in front.

Ten minutes of waiting, and I went up to his door. I could hear a record player giving out with Brahms. I rang the bell. No answer. I knocked. No answer.

The music stopped and in a few seconds started over again. Hartley could be asleep or out, or maybe he liked the record. I tried the door; it was locked.

Was there another door? Not in the hallway, but perhaps there was one opening on the balconies overlooking the pool.

I found that there was a small sun-deck right off Hartley's door. The door was locked but I could see into his living room through a window opening onto the sun-deck. I could see Hartley.

He was on the floor, his face and forehead covered with dark blood. I didn't know if he was dead, but he wasn't moving.

I went along the balcony to the first neighbor's door and rang the bell. A Negro woman in a maid's uniform opened it and I told her, “The tenant in Apartment 22 has been seriously hurt. Would you phone the police and tell them to bring a doctor along? It's Mr. Hartley and he's on the floor in his living room. They'll have to break in, unless the manager's around.”

"I'll phone the manager, too,” she said.

I went to the nearest pay phone and called Mr. Ladugo. He wasn't home. I phoned Barney Allison and told him what had happened.

"And you didn't wait for the police to arrive? You're in trouble, Joe."

"Maybe. What I want you to do is keep phoning Mr. Ladugo. When you get him, tell him what happened. And tell him his daughter was just leaving the place as I drove up."

"Man, we could both lose our licenses."

"You couldn't. Do as I say now."

"All right. But I'm not identifying myself. And when the law nabs you, you'd better not tell them you told me about this."

"I won't. Get going, man!"

From there, I drove to Santa Monica, to one of the modest sections of that snug, smug suburb where one of my older lady friends lived. She was well past seventy, and retired. But for forty years, she had handled the society page for
Los Angeles' biggest newspaper.

She was out in front, pruning her roses. She smiled at me. “Hello, stranger. If it's money you want, I'm broke. If it's a drink, you know where the liquor is.”

"Just information, Frances,” I said. “I want to know all you know about the Ladugos.”

"A fascinating story,” she said. “Come on in; I'll have a drink with you.”

She told me what she knew plus the gossip.

Then I said, “Because Ladugo's wife was messing around with this other man, it doesn't necessarily follow that Ladugo wasn't the child's father. She and the other man could have been enjoying a perfectly platonic friendship.”

"They might have been. But I don't think so. And neither did any of their friends at that time. I mean her good friends, not the catty ones. They were frankly scandalized by her behavior.”

"All right,” I said. “Your gossip has usually proven more accurate than some supposedly factual stories. May I use your phone?”

She nodded.

I phoned Barney Allison and he told me I could reach Mr. Ladugo at home. I phoned Mr. Ladugo.

He said, “My daughter's here now, Mr. Puma. She tells me that she never went into Mr. Hartley's apartment. She stayed there quite awhile, ringing his bell, because she could hear music inside and she thought he must be home.”

"She told me this morning,” I said, “that she was never going to see him again. She could be lying now, too.”

A pause. “I—don't think she is. She's very frightened.” Another pause. “How about Hartley? Is he dead?”

"I don't know. Did Hartley try to blackmail you, Mr. Ladugo?”

"Blackmail me? Why? How?”

"Let me talk to Miss Ladugo, please,” I said.

His voice was harsh. “Is something going on I don't know about?”

"Could be. But I don't know about it either. Could I speak with Miss Ladugo?”

Another pause and then, “Just a moment.”

The soft and humble voice of Angela Ladugo, “What is it you want, Mr. Puma?”

"The truth, if it's in you. Was Hartley blackmailing you? What was it, pictures?”

"I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Puma.”

"Okay,” I said. “I'm supposed to be working for your father. But I'm not going to lose my license over a job. I'm going to the police now.”

Silence for a few seconds, and then, “That would be stupid. That would be extremely poor business. Wait, here's Father.”

After an interval Mr. Ladugo got on the wire. His voice was almost a whisper. “Will you come over here, first, Mr. Puma? And would you bring your reports along?”

"I'll be there in less than an hour,” I said.
As I hung up, Frances said, “Scandal, eh? And do I get let in on it? No, no. I tell you all and you tell me nothing.”

"Honey," I said, “you're a reporter. Telling all is your business. But privacy is what I sell.”

"I'm not a reporter any more, Wop. I'm a lonely old woman looking for gossip to warm my heart over. Don't hurry back, you slob."

"I love you, Frances," I said. “I love you all the ways there are. And I'll be back with the gossip."

I didn't stop for the reports. I went over to the office for that purpose, but I saw the Department car in front and kept going. Sergeant Sam Heller would remember that I was asking about Jean Hartley the other day and that's why the law was waiting in front of my office. This would indicate that Hartley was either dead or unconscious, or the law would be parked somewhere else.

In the Ladugo home, Papa was waiting for me with Angela in his library. He sat in a leather chair behind his desk; Angela stood near the sliding glass doors that led to the pool and patio.

I said, “I couldn't get the reports. The police were waiting for me at my office, so I keep moving.”

He nodded. “Somebody must have recognized you.”

"I guess."

He looked at his daughter's back and again at me. “Why did you mention blackmail?”

"You tell me,” I said. “Has it happened before?”

He colored. Angela turned. Her voice was ice. “What kind of remark was that, Mr. Puma?”

I looked at her coolly. “Blackmail could be a good way to milk your dad. Especially, if you worked with Hartley.”

"And why should I cheat my own father? I'm his only child, Mr. Puma.”

"Maybe,” I suggested, “you get everything you want—except money. I don't know, of course, but that's one thought.”

Ladugo said, “Aren't you being insolent, Mr. Puma?”

"I guess I am,” I said. “Your daughter brings out the worst in me, sir.” I took a deep breath and looked at him quietly.

He was rolling a pencil on this desk with the flat of his hand. “When you finally talk to the police, it wouldn't be necessary to tell them why you were at Hartley's apartment, would it.”

"I'm afraid it would. If he's dead, I'm sure it would.”

He continued to roll the pencil and now he was looking at it, absorbed in the wonder of his moving hand. “You'd have to tell them the truth? I mean, there could be other reasons why you were over there, couldn't there?”

I smiled. “For how much?”

He looked up hopefully. “For—a thousand dollars?”

I shook my head. “Not even for a million.”

He was beet red and there was hate in his eyes. “Then why did you mention money?”

"Because I wanted you to come right out with a bribe offer. I don't like pussy-footing.”
I looked over at his daughter and thought I saw a smile on that sly face. I looked back at Mr. Ladugo and was ashamed of myself. He was thoroughly humiliated. His hands were on top of the desk now and he was staring at them.

I said, “I’m sorry. Now that the damage is done, I’m sorry. But there has been such a mess of deception in this business, I was getting sick. Believe me, Mr. Ladugo, if I’m not forced to mention your name, I won’t. Tell me honestly, though, have you been blackmailed before?”

He looked at his daughter and back at the desk. He nodded.
Rudy Ferris didn't have any trouble smashing my door open because he's a real big guy. He stood facing me, his black automatic pointed straight at my throat.

It didn't take me long to figure out what had happened. Ella had told him—everything. That little fool!

I spread my hands helplessly. “Now, look, Rudy. Let me—"

"Shut up, Chuck!” The guy's massive chest was heaving like a ground swell. “I don't want no talk. That's all we got since you blew in."

I shut up. Nothing I could say would wipe his brain clean. He was too far gone. Mad. Killing mad. So I shut up and watched his small eyes as they snapped to both sides of my room and then back to me. “You alone here?"

I nodded, wishing I wasn't. Rudy closed the door, its lock dangling, as if a closed door would muffle the blast of that cannon he held. That door was the only way out, unless I chose to leap out the window, which was two stories up, and kill myself that way.

Maybe I had it coming. In Rudy's eyes I guess I was a heel. But the big, overgrown jerk was stone blind and had been ever since Ella had decided he was her boyfriend, long before I had shown up in Leadsville. Otherwise he'd have known she was the type who got a charge out of anybody who could put some kicks into her miserable life.

Ella Barnes was fresh out of a haystack, like all the dames in Leadsville. But with her there was a difference. There was a restlessness in her that kept her on edge every minute, a restlessness that kept her dissatisfied with herself even though she'd snared the biggest, best-looking hayseed in town.

And there was something else about Ella. I found this out during the night I spent with her in her old man's barn.

We were in the loft. Her eyes lit up as she said, “Chuck, I'd like to stir up this town before I leave. I mean really stir it up. I'm so sick and tired and bored with everything in it that I'd like to give them a jolt they'd never get over."

Those were approximately her words. I'd only half listened. I'd already had what I'd come for so I wasn't much interested in her babbling. But now her words were coming back to me, or at least the gist of what she had been trying to say.

But I couldn't dwell on it. Rudy Ferris was coming forward, the .45 steady in his hand. “I'm gonna blast your brains out,” he was saying. “You got it comin’ to you."

He was so close I could smell the stench of his sweating body and the cheap whiskey on his breath.

I swallowed hard. “Ella tell you about it?” It was a stupid question, but I had to say something for a stall.

"I saw you an' her sneakin' outa the barn. After you left, I grabbed Ella an' made her tell me what you did."

He raised his gun to my head.

"Hold it, Rudy!” My voice was scratchy and cracked, because I was scared. My only defense was to keep talking. “Let me have my say, Rudy. What harm can it do? I can't get out of here, can I? Just let me tell you ... “

He brought the gun up close to my temple and clicked off the safety.

"All right, Rudy. Go ahead and shoot!” I was practically screaming at him. “I wasn't Ella's first. She's already pregnant by somebody else."

The words had flowed smoothly out of my mouth. It was all a big lie. But I had to shock him with something. For the time being, it appeared to have done the trick.
I'd stunned him. His gun hand relaxed a little. I kept talking so he wouldn't have a chance to think about me. “Ella played you for a fool, Rudy. Can't you see that? All she wants is kicks. She told me so. She told me she was bored stiff with everybody in this dead town, including you.”

All the things Ella had told me up in the hay loft were coming out now. I kept talking because I didn't want to stop and give him a chance to do his own thinking. He was listening all right. And that was what I wanted. His mouth hung open goonishly now and his gun hand was down at his side.

"I didn't force Ella to do anything she didn't want to do. Lord knows how many others she's had. She's sick, Rudy. Sick for the want of thrills. She'd do anything to stir up a rumpus."

A real out was hitting me now. It made me a little sick to think of it, but it was all I had. After all, it was my life that depended on it.

"That's why she told you about what happened in the barn. She knew you'd come here to kill me. And after you're finished with me she'll tell you about the other guy, the one who made her pregnant."

Sweat rolled down my face and some of it went into my mouth. Rudy's head was swaying with disbelief, but my words were reaching him, digging into him cruelly.

"Want to know something else, Rudy? I'll bet you anything that Ella is outside right now waiting to see what happens."

I backed toward the window. “Bet she's out there, Rudy. Take a look! She's waiting for you to kill me, then the other guy. You know why? So all the dames in this burg will look at her as the gal Rudy Ferris knocked off two guys for. She'll have what she wants. Recognition. Excitement. Plenty of it. And the other hayseeders around here will think she really has something because two men died for her. So they'll make love to her, Rudy, while you're sweating your brains out waiting for your turn in the electric chair.”

"No! It ain't like that! You're just trying to lie your way out of a bullet."

"I am not. All you have to do is look outside. Go ahead, Rudy. Put the lights out and take a look."

He motioned to me with his gun. “Get over by the window. Stand there so I can see you."

I did as I was told, feeling sick to my stomach because of what I was doing. Rudy snapped off the wall switch and moved toward the window. He pushed the curtain aside just a crack. I took a look myself, and let out a sigh of relief.

In the lighted doorway of a store across the street, a bare leg swung back and forth. It was a woman's leg. Ella's. She was sitting on a stool just inside the door.

"What'd I tell you, Rudy?” I whispered. “She's waiting to hear your gun go off. She sent you on the errand and now she wants to see that you carry it out.”

He was quiet for a long moment. Then he said, “Pack your bag and get outa here!”

"Yeah, sure, Rudy.” It took me no more'n three minutes to shut my suitcase on a full load.

"So long, Rudy."

He didn't answer, nor turn his head away from the window. I squeezed hurriedly out of the door and then took the back stairs on the double down to the alley that circled the hotel. I wanted to get away from there, fast.

I was in the alley when I heard the shots. I counted six. I felt like throwing up. All the way to the bus station I kept trying to rid my brain of the promise I'd made Ella up in the loft. I'd promised to take her away from Leadsville that very night.

I told her to wait for me across the street from the hotel.
CRIME OF PASSION by RICHARD S. PRATHER

There must have been twenty cars in the drive when I got to the address in Malibu. I parked my Cad behind a new Lincoln convertible and walked to the front door of a two-story, hundred-thousand-dollar house as modern as now. A small fortune in rubber plants, ferns, bananas, hibiscus fronted the house and bordered the drive. From the sea's edge fifty yards or so away I could hear the boom of surf, and the tangy bracing scent of the ocean was exhilarating in my nostrils.

This was a warm Sunday afternoon; Sheldon Scott, Investigations—my downtown L.A. office—was closed, and I was invited to a party. A Hawaiian party at that: luau, roast pig, the works. From behind the house somewhere I heard a happy squeal. A happy feminine squeal. Sounded like a good wild party. There was a lot of hellish yelling and whooping. At the top of six cement steps I found a buzzer on the right of the massive door, poked it as chimes went off to the tune of How Dry I Am.

I could hear somebody running toward the door. Sounded like somebody barefooted. “Oh, Johnny!” a gal yelled, “Here I come, Johnny!” There was the slap-slap of bare feet and then the door swung wide and a beautiful blonde babe holding a highball glass in her hand stood there framed in the doorway beaming at me.

She cried, “Where you been, Johnny?” and then she began staring at me curiously.

Well, that was nothing to what I was doing to her. Very softly, so softly that I am amazed she heard me, I said, “I'm not Johnny, I'm only Shell Scott, but don't let that—”

Wham, the door slammed in my face. Feet went slap-slap back the way they'd come. What the hell, I leaned on the buzzer some more. Christ knew what I'd get next time. I was even thinking maybe I should yell, “Hey, Johnny's here!” and stand back.

There weren't any footsteps this time. The door opened and a guy about five feet, eight inches tall came outside and glared up at me. The guy was about thirty-five, wearing vivid swim trunks and carrying a highball glass. He was six inches shorter than I, but only about ten pounds under my 205. He was built like a .45 automatic, and he was loaded. “Johnny, huh?” he said thickly, then he dropped his highball glass onto the cement with a crash, and socked me on the chin with his right hand.

I was caught completely by surprise—to tell the truth, I'd been trying to peek around him and get another glimpse of that blonde—so I didn't even have time to jerk my chin. He got me solidly and knocked me clear down those six steps onto the driveway. “The hell with you, Johnny,” he said.

The door slammed again. Behind him.

I started to get up, then changed my mind. Maybe it was time for a few cool thoughts. Everything was going around and around. That short guy packed a powerful punch, and though he hadn't knocked me out, he'd made the afternoon a couple shades darker. I fumbled in my coat for cigarettes and my lighter, got a weed lit, and propped an elbow under me while I dragged smoke into my lungs.

The numbers above the massive door danced a little as I stared at them, but they were the right numbers. This was the right house. I shook my head and the ringing went away, everything stopped going around, settled down. It had been less than an hour ago that Dolly had phoned me from here and told me to fly out and bring my trunks, that there was one hell of a party going on. She had said, “Come on, Scotty boy, you come on out here ri’ now. Bes’ li'l ol’ party you ever did see. You got my pers’nal invitation.” And so on. Naturally I had dropped everything and headed for Malibu. She'd convinced me that I'd be welcome. Dolly had said she'd save me a drink and a kiss if I wanted them, and I wanted them. But maybe, I thought, Dolly had been out of her mind. Some welcome.

A girl's voice near me said, “Boy! I thought I was drunk. Whoo. You better go home.”

"I just got here.” I glanced up and was surprised to find that the gal had walked clear up to within a foot of me. She was wearing a brief bathing suit and from this angle she didn't look half bad. I decided that from any angle she
wouldn't look half bad. I couldn't tell how tall she was, but she looked wonderful, and had long red hair and blue eyes.

"What are you doing down there on the ground?" she asked me.

"I'm resting, stupid." I felt ugly.

She squatted on her heels and looked bleary-eyed at me. "Hi," she said. "I'm Betty."

"Hi, Betty. Your bikini has slipped."

"Has not. That's the way I wear it."

She was a gorgeous babe, but obviously no great shakes for brains. I had another drag of my cigarette, then got to my feet, went up the steps and rang the bell. Nothing happened. I banged on the door and the babe standing down there in the driveway said, "Why'n't you turn the doorknob?"

"Yeah, sure," I said. Talk about stupid babes. I turned the doorknob. The door opened. I laughed sourly and went inside.

There was a hall, rooms opening off it, a couple of which I examined without getting a glimpse of that daredevil who had clipped me. A long hall led toward the rear of the house and out in back there I could hear the whooping and yelling.

I headed that way. Mainly I wanted to find the guy who had socked me, but I would be less than honest if I didn't admit there was hope that I'd see the blonde babe again. And after the way she'd trotted to the front door, maybe there'd be a whole flock of wonderful and beautiful people gadding about out there in back. I quickened my pace, found a door and went through it.

There weren't any beautiful people, but there were about a dozen guys and gals standing around drinking and yakking. Most of them had highballs and one had a bottle. This seemed to be only a fragment of the crowd apparently here, because I could hear a lot of noise and music coming from somewhere closer to the ocean. A path led through the trees and shrubbery toward the sounds, but I couldn't see very far because the grounds were so lushly planted and overgrown.

In this small group here, however, one of the guys was the short, bad-tempered egg who had made the mistake of clobbering me. His back was to me. I walked up close to him, tapped him on the shoulder with my index finger, and when he turned I tapped him on the chin with my right fist. He got all loose and his eyes rolled a bit and he fell down.

Everybody stared at me. Several of the people seemed shocked, a few merely interested, but the only rise out of anybody was one guy's remark, to nobody in particular: "Some party, huh?" They were all horribly drunk. Another guy, a tall, gangling fellow with sandy hair and a wire-stiff mustache stepped toward me. "Oh, I say," he said mushily. "That was a rotten thing to do!"

He was British, and sounded as if he were gargling Schweppes Quinine Water. "That's not quite the way to treat our host, what?" he said cheerfully.

"What?"

"Yes, what. What indeed."

"Oh, shut up. I mean, what? He's the host?"

"Yes, host, old man. Well, toodleoo." He wandered off, down the shrub-lined pathway toward all the noise and commotion.

I looked at the guy on the ground. This might ruin the party for me, but I wasn't sorry I'd clobbered him. A big ruby
ring on his finger had left a lump on my chin larger than the ruby. Somebody behind me said, “Well, well.”

I turned. A gal had just stepped out of the same door I’d come through a few seconds ago. I recognized her. It was the blonde who’d been looking for Johnny. Saying she wore clothes would be, perhaps, an overstatement, since she was bare-foot and wore a red and black and green sarong that hugged her waist and hips the way I’d have liked to. The blonde hair was shoulder-length, her eyes were huge and brown, and she looked very good to me. Again.

She walked toward me smiling. She took hold of my arm, nodded at the guy on the ground and said, “Did you do that?”

"Yeah."

"He had it coming to him."

"You don't know the half of it."

"You don't know the half of it."

This had gone far enough. I turned her around, held both her arms gently and marched her back into the house. “Lady,” I said, “since I rang the bell here things have occurred with revolting rapidity. What's going on here?”

It took her only about a minute to bring sanity into what had seemed madness. This was just one of the rather wild parties that L. Franklin Brevoort—now unconscious—held every weekend here at his Malibu home. He'd been tossing the parties for about a year, and this was a big one—authentic Hawaiian luau, complete with whole roast pig, poi, dancing girls, Hawaiian music.

She interrupted me, “I can't stand him, though. Who can? Oh, you can't blame L. Franklin—everybody calls him L. Franklin—considering that old mace he's got for a wife.”

"That old what?"

"Mace. A kind of battle-ax. That's what everybody calls her. She's pretty gruesome. Anyway, L. Franklin's about the loneliest man in Malibu—"

"Ha. You forget, I am in Malibu. And you forget, too, that I saw you in that doorway—"

"Anyway, when the bell rang I figured that was a good excuse to get away from L. Franklin. And I did think it was Johnny. My, I was surprised. Wonder where Johnny is?"

She went on to tell me that you had to be very careful not to let L. Franklin get you alone, because he was a regular old rip. “I'm surprised somebody hasn't shot him,” she said, “the way he's always going around reaching for everybody's women. He's sure a rip. Boy, was he mad when the bell rang and I took off.”

"I know. He came outside and knocked me down."

She laughed. “Well, I'm going back to the party. You coming?”

I thought about it while she walked to the door. This seemed like a dandy party, and I hadn't even seen Dolly yet, but I wasn't sure I'd be welcome here after what had happened. Then Elaine turned and said, “You're kind of nice, you know? I like you a lot already. Guess I surprised you when I opened the door.”

"Frankly, you hit me harder than L. Franklin did."

She laughed. “I looked pretty good, huh?"

"Well ... why, yes."

Elaine grinned. “I'll save you a dance,” she said, turned and left the house.
Well, if everybody here was crazy, this was no time for me to be sane. I was staying at this here party. If L. Franklin didn't like it, I'd sock him again. I started after Elaine. Outside, somebody was pouring water on L. Franklin. Among other things Elaine had told me that the crux of the party was closer to the beach, about twenty or thirty yards back of the house. She was out of sight, so I headed toward the ocean, following the path. All you had to do was follow the noise. Mixed in with the whooping was music, Hawaiian music. In a minute I came out into a big clearing filled with plenty of movement.

About fifty people were flitting in and out among the trees and shrubs, many of them dancing. Four brown-skinned guys in sarongs were playing on stringed things and drums, and the place was a mass of color. A fifth brown-skinned guy was swinging a wicked-looking sword around and jumping over it while the other men played pulsating Hawaiian music that sounded as if it had a little mambo in it.

This place of Brevoort's was practically a jungle, with all kinds of trees, including palms and eucalyptus, a dozen different kinds of shrubs and tropical plants surrounding the clearing. There were bananas, philodendron, elephant ears, more hibiscus and lilies and orchids, and plenty of ferns. There were a lot of potted plants standing around, and practically all of the guests were potted, too. Almost everybody here was wearing trunks or swimsuits, most of the gals in bikinis or similarly abbreviated jobs, and a man simply couldn't have asked for a more interesting get-together.

On my right was a zoo-pound block of ice, its middle hollowed out and filled with a red punch, two white gardenias and a purple orchid floated on the liquor's surface. Several halves of coconut shells rested on the ice and as I watched a redhead tomato filled one of the coconut cups, drank the punch, and then let out a yip, shaking her head. It was Betty, the redhead tomato I'd met in front of the house.

I walked up beside her, had a cup of the punch and almost let out a yip myself. It was so strong they probably had to change the flowers every fifteen minutes. Then I said, "Hi."

She didn't say anything, just smiled and wrapped her arms around me and we started dancing. Then she stopped. "You scratch," she said, looking up at me. "Haven't you got a suit?"

"Sure. In the car."

"Get it. And hurry. We'll have a dance, and a swim. I'm Betty."

I went flying off down the path, changed in the car, and was back in two minutes. Betty, I was pleased to see, was waiting for me. We had a couple dances, and it was really much better without scratching. Then she said, "Come on," and ran toward the beach. I followed her down the path and caught up with her at the sand's edge.

On our right flames leaped from a pit dug in the sand. "What's the bonfire for?" I asked Betty.

"That's where they'll cook the pig pretty quick," she said. "Big luau. Really doing it right, huh? The pig's for the big dinner later—along with poi and raw fish and I don't know what all. Come on." She raced into the water.

When we got back to the clearing, the music and dancing was getting even wilder. It was almost dark, and somebody grabbed Betty and whirled her away. I didn't try to stop her; there were dozens more around, including the blonde Elaine, who was dancing at the moment. This was marvelous. Nothing was going to get me to leave this party. I went over to the punch bowl and had another drink as a woman older than most here, a gal about forty, came up beside me and dipped half a coconut into the punch, gulped the drink down, and then had another immediately after it. I shuddered. She weighed about a hundred and fifty pounds, was maybe five-eight, and had a flat, rather unpleasant face.

She looked at me and said, "Dance with me. I'm Mrs. Brevoort. I'm the hostess, so you have to dance with me."

She was soused to the eardrums. I said, "Sure," and latched onto her. We took about four steps and she stopped. "I don't want to dance," she said. "Go wiggle with those naked women."

I swung around eagerly, looking for the naked women, then realized she'd referred to the gals in bikinis. Mrs. Brevoort was dressed in skirt and blouse, and I guessed she'd been trying to have a good time, but not succeeding. It
suddenly occurred to me, as I looked at all those lovely, startlingly shaped dolls gyrating near us, that this might well be the first dance Mrs. Brevoort had—and she'd asked me for it.

I started to make small talk, so small it was almost invisible, but she waved her hand at me and said, “Go away. Go wiggle wi' make' w'mn.” Her eyes were getting glassy. Those two fast punches must have been suddenly catching up with her. I left her at the hollowed-out cake of ice.

It was dark now, and the glow from the fire down on the beach was warm and red; a few Japanese lanterns had been lighted here in the clearing, and a half dozen Hawaiian torches were lighted. I wondered where L. Franklin, the host, was. But then I forgot about him; I was having too much fun to wonder about the host or hostess—it was a typical party. I never did see Dolly.

A couple hours, maybe more, passed in a kind of delightfully Hawaiian delirium. And it seemed that the music got more sensual, the dances wilder, the women lovelier. From somewhere came three gals in hula skirts and the music took on a header beat and the three gals started shaking like maracas. Right in front of me I saw a beautiful blonde gal doing a hula, especially for me it appeared, and it was my blonde; it was Elaine.

"Well, hello," I said.

She kept doing her unique hula, unique because it must have been the kind popular before the missionaries came, and she said, “Like?”

"Lovely, lovely." The three gals in hula skirts were stirring up a storm, and somebody yelled that we were all to join in when the spirit moved us. One guy grabbed a little doll and they leaped into the middle of the clearing with the other three gals and started improvising. The music got wilder, more frantic and pulse-stirring. Another guy and gal started jumping around, and soon this seemed less like Malibu than a strip of Hawaiian beach of a hundred years ago.

More guys and gals got up and leaped around, and it seemed there were more bouncing, quivering, jiggling and jangling bodies than I’d ever before seen quivering practically in unison. There were squeals and yips and howls among the hulas, and with half the people here already gyrating—the spirit moved me.

I let out a whoop with a lot of vowels in it so it would sound Hawaiian, and I jumped into the middle of the people letting out oofs and uuffs and huuhs and similar Hawaiian-like sounds, while shaking all over like a plucked banjo string. Elaine came toward me at what seemed a hundred miles an hour, but making little forward progress. The drums kept thudding, throbbing, and suddenly there was nobody at all standing on the sidelines. The last guy, a tall Texan I’d met earlier, let out a “Yahoo” and came twirling around the edge of the crowd holding onto the hand of a black-haired tomato who was throwing everything at him but the palm trees, while he continued to let out yips like he was calling all the little dogies in Texas. Elaine sort of rammed herself up against me so close that she might have grown there, and in a few moments we were on the edge of the crowd, next to the path leading to the beach.

She spun around and raced down the path away from me. I ran after her.

At the sand’s edge she stumbled and I almost caught her, but she regained her balance and ran toward the booming breakers. I followed her past the pit where huge hot coals now glowed, and I saw something from the corner of my eyes that jarred me oddly, but I kept on running. I ran clear past the pit where the pig was now being roasted for the luau dinner later, then I slowed and stopped.

I went back and looked down into the pit dug in the sand, heat bouncing against my face. It did look like a pig at first, not much like a man. It was a man, though. I heard Elaine laughing.

I got down on my hands and knees, moved as close as I could. The guy was face down, but even face up he’d have been unrecognizable, so horribly was he burned. Still sticking out of his throat was the sharp metal spit that would have been used for holding the pig. One arm was outflung, the hand in a somewhat more protected spot than the rest of him, and I could see the big ruby ring on his finger. Mine host.

"Come on! What’s the matter with you?” It was Elaine calling me. I could barely see the dim white blur of her body outlined against the darkness of the sea. Behind her a comber broke and frothed in toward us. I stood up and walked
toward Elaine.

Five minutes later we were both in the house; I hadn't told Elaine a thing and she was a little angry with me. She pointed out the phone and I told her to wait in the next room, then phoned local Homicide. After that I found Elaine. “Where's the kitchen?” I asked her.

"The what? Don't tell me you brought me here because you're hungry!"

I shuddered. “No, but I've got to sober up. I'll explain all of this later.” She led me to the kitchen where I drank half a quart of milk while water boiled for some instant coffee. Elaine stared at me as if I were crazy while I found meat in the icebox, some roast beef, and made a thick, sloppy sandwich with an inch of meat between two slices of french bread. I gulped coffee, grabbed a frying pan and big spoon, then took Elaine's arm and led her back to the clearing where people were still squealing and dancing. “Are you crazy?” Elaine asked me in exasperation.

"Maybe. Hold the frying pan for me, will you?” She shook her head, grabbed the pan. I hit it vigorously with the spoon and yelled, “Chow time, everybody. Chow's on.” Not many people paid attention to me; I hadn't expected many to. I walked around the clearing, munching on my sloppy sandwich and saying “Chow, anybody?” to everybody. It didn't happen till I was almost at the punch bowl. Mrs. Brevoort's unpleasant face loomed beside me.

I said, “Hi. Wanna dance?” I blinked drunkenly at her, and nibbled at the beef. She eyed the sandwich, fascinated.

I said, “I'm sorry, but I got so starved I couldn't wait for everybody else. Hope you don't mind, but I carved a little meat off that pig down there in the pit.”

"You ... what?” she said, and her face was already starting to get green.

I said, “I was hungry. There's plenty more, though. You hungry, Mrs. Brevoort?”

Her mouth dropped open, her lips twitched, and her eyes rolled up in her head. Then she fainted. People around us kept dancing and going, “Uuh!” and making Hawaiian chants.

Half an hour later the police had come and gone. I'd told them on the phone to arrive without sirens, and in the meantime to check on me with the Los Angeles and Hollywood police. As a result, they handled everything quietly and took Mrs. Brevoort away with almost no commotion at all—and let me stay. She spilled everything in the first five minutes: that she knew her husband had just married her for her money and that it was her money he used for these weekly parties at which he ignored her, and everybody else ignored her, and she'd caught him on the beach tonight with a babe, waited until the girl went back alone to the clearing, then swatted L. Franklin over the head with the spit and stuck it through his throat. She'd dragged him ten feet through the sand and rolled him in onto the coals.

Elaine said to me, “I still don't know why she fainted when you stuck that ghastly sandwich in her face.”

"She thought I was eating her hubby. She'd tossed him into the pig pit."

"I don't get it. Why into the pit?"

"She was all excited. People get excited when they kill people. She thought she could hide him there until she figured out what to do. And she wasn't acting very logically anyway, it was a crime of passion. She hated parties."

We were standing beside the melting punch bowl. Both of us had a small drink. A lot of people were still dancing—not around the pit, though. Right after Mrs. Brevoort had fainted I'd sent Elaine scooting down to the beach to make sure nobody did reach the pit; nobody had. I said, “I didn't have the faintest idea who, of these fifty people, might have run the buzzard through. Only the person who'd killed him, though, would have known what was cooking. Well, at least it was better than having the cops haul everybody down to the station—I was damned if anybody was going to break up this fine party.”

Elaine said, “I still don't get it all. You mean both the host and hostess are gone?"

"Yeah. They took L. Franklin away, too. So there's nobody to call off the party. You know, this thing may last for
weeks."

"How long will you last?"

I grinned at her. She laughed softly, whirled and ran toward the beach. I waited about one second, and then turned.

I ran after her.

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LUST SONG by STUART FRIEDMAN

Cha cha cha-tiyata ... cha-ta-cha,” her chirpy voice sang. The melodious sound penetrated the closed windows. “Cha cha cha-tiyata ... cha-ta-cha.”

In the dim old bedroom, Barton stood listening behind lowered blinds. Tall and gray in workshirt and overalls, his sinewy old body was bent forward and motionless like a taut bow and his mouth was open slightly like a crater in the dry crust of the seamy skin of his face. His big, knuckly hands were clenched and still as weights. “Cha cha cha-tiyata ... cha-ta-cha.” He straightened up, moistened his lips, drew a long breath and shook his head. His hands opened. He turned and started for the door, but some counter-will in him made him veer to the bureau. He opened a drawer and took out the binoculars.

He went to the window, inched it up and raised the blind two inches from the sill, squinting briefly against the glare stripe of sunlight. He went to the chair at the end of the room, where light wouldn't catch on the lenses, and put the binoculars to his eyes, his heart beginning to thump against his ribs. Cha cha cha-tiyata ... cha-ta-cha, he whispered as the sound of her came again, louder, richer through the opening. His thick fingers became tremulous on the delicate adjustment wheel as he found her and brought her into focus, her red hair in the wind glowing like embers in a forge.

Deena May, his hired hand's wife ... the “child bride” as Barton thought of her ... was hanging clothes in her yard and dancing to her own foolish, delicious music. She wore a loose, carelessly buttoned, pink house dress ... and probably nothing else ... and she came toward him from the clothes basket to the line, lifting her knees in quick, prancy steps. She was a pretty little thing, as lively and mindless as a bird, with a tiny waist and dainty legs. She wasn't fully fleshed out yet and her lines were clean as stems and from the front or back or side views, the roundings of her femaleness showed clearly when the wind pressed the thin dress to her flesh.

She moved back to the clothes basket, not in a straight line, but in a prancing, dancing half circle to the beat of the "Cha cha cha-tiyata ... cha-ta-cha ... “ On the “tiyata” part her thin voice rose high as a cat's, then swiftly dipped with an oddly stroking sound that was nakedly voluptuous in quality. She accompanied the sound with a tantalizing motion: a fluid roll, tilt and swish of her hips. She came back to the line with another garment ... a pair of her husband's underwear shorts ... and as she pinned them up her knees flashed higher than ever, showing the smooth pale nakedness of her inner thighs. Pain stabbed at Barton's eyeballs and he shut his eyes, resting the binoculars on his knees. Warm, warm her young body would be, warm as new milk ... or cool in the fresh breeze, cool as silk. Warm, cool, whichever, whatever, it didn't matter.

He pulled her to him again with the binoculars. She had a saucy round face with round blue eyes and a round dimple in her chin. Down in the mule country, where she came from, the dimple meant the devil was in her, Deena May said. Ignorant superstition. But Barton supposed it had been drilled into her child mind till she believed it. With her showing her flesh and singing and stepping high to the devil's beat, anyone could believe it.

He saw she kept turning her head to her shoulder and he was so enrapt with the brilliant image of her red hair, like a wanton brand of flame on her cheek, that he didn't realize she was looking back at the house. Then the screen door flew open and her husband Hugh charged out. Barton realized then that Hugh had been watching from inside and Deena May had been putting on the show to thump against his ribs. She whooped and shrieked and took off across the yard. He caught her by the hair in a dozen long-legged strides and dumped her. She kicked her bare legs in the air and rolled onto her knees and tackled his lanky legs and in a moment he was on the ground with her, scowling and mussing her up. She got away and he chased her out of sight around the front of the house. In awhile he came marching her in front of him, twisting her arm. She stopped every few steps and bumped her bottom back against him, a look of high glee on her excited face. She boasted how she could get him excited any time, morning, noon and night, and could wear him down to a frazzle even if she was only fourteen and he thought he was a man because he was twenty-one. Hugh pushed her inside the house with a loud spank and the screen door whacked shut. Barton lowered the binoculars, his mouth clamped in a straight line.

Barton thought of Hugh with a bitter scorn. For all his big talk about being man enough to handle her, all she had to do was swish her tail to bring him down on all fours and use him up. He went to the bureau, dropped the binoculars
in the bureau drawer and kneed it shut with an air of finality. That's all there was these days, animals yielding to their pleasures, no discipline, no pride in strength, only in weakness. Barton caught sight of himself in the bureau mirror, which was flaking and yellowed, decaying like everything else in this dying house. Light from the peephole opening of the window shone on one side of his face, leaving the other in shadow, and an uneven line ran down the center as if a jagged axe blade had tried to split his head—and struck granite, he told himself. He had lived his life on his hind legs, and nothing, nothing short of God could bring him low at the end ... no, not even the devil.

He left the bedroom and went along the hall, past the shut doors of the long-empty bedrooms, where the rugs and curtains and chairs and made-beds remained, unused, and giving off the silent musty breath of slow decay. He went down the gloomy central stairs and looked in at the big, glassed-in porch that had served as a play room and sewing room and second parlor, where the girls could entertain their beaux, and in the final years Melly, his wife, had made it her afternoon headquarters, for reading or sewing or just contenting herself looking out at the side lawn and her flowers and their fields. Often she would have her nap there after the midday meal and he'd come down from his own nap and they'd have coffee together before he went out to work. Sometimes he thought a belief in ghosts would be a help, so he could imagine her there smiling and asking if he'd had a good nap ... though he was inclined to wake grumpy and had usually been aggravated by the question. On an impulse he went over and started to raise the blinds; a little clean light in this room of Melly's might give the whole dreary house a better feel.

He glanced around to look at the furnishings when the first blind was up. Slowly, he lowered the blind again. The furnishings were shabby and graceless and heavy, nothing anybody would want today. It had been mighty pretty once. He shrugged. Better to leave it with the dead past.

He went to the kitchen and set coffee warming while he tidied up the mess from his dinner, his mouth down at the corners, a sourness in his stomach and at the base of his tongue. He took some baking soda and belched, looking with distaste at the leftovers in pans and skillet. He still ate the same old greasy food, and too much of it, just as if he still worked from “sun to sun.” He drank his coffee standing up; then marched out like a man going to work, but he wasn't going to do anything but putter ... maybe fix up that board in the corn crib, or maybe mend harness. He shook his head; damnfoolishness mending harness for a team of horses that never did anything but pasture and once in awhile some light hauling. The tractor did their work better and cheaper, and there wasn't really enough land left to require a tractor. He had sold off all but the sixty acres he and Melly had started out with. He'd saved his three boys and two girls the trouble of waiting for him to die by giving them their patrimony shortly after Melly passed on. He had a few thousand and this place and he wouldn't have to crowd any of his grandchildren out of their rooms, which was probably luckier than an old man had right to be.

He dawdled around in the barn, feeling that there wasn't any point in doing anything in particular. He went and stood in the barn door and looked out over the green expanse of growing corn and beyond it in the south field to the vast great yellow square of young wheat. It would grow and ripen and then be cut down and there'd be another winter and maybe another spring....

He spat! God damn a self-pitying man. Whining at his age, worse than a whelp. He heard the tractor start up and located it out in the field with Hugh on the seat, riding young and high and mighty. Then his gaze slid toward the little house, the one he and Melly had started out in. Deena May would be up and chippying around at her chores ... or maybe sprawled in the bed, sleeping and renewing that radiant, lustrous, sweet vital young body. The mere sight of that little house roused his belly to life.

He walked up the lane, toward the houses, toward the old barn, thinking of his Bible and the times of greatness when the old men were kings and Solomon lay cold on his bed and they brought to his bed the choicest virgins and ... The land swirled in the bright heat and Barton stopped and lighted a cigarette ... and there had been King David who had looked upon the flesh of Bathsheba ... the smoke dry-tickled his throat and he coughed violently ... and the great king had sent the young husband off to his death in the Bible, yes, in the good Book, and it had been recorded, the living truth ... wicked though it might be, it was the nature and the Fate of Man ... and when a man grew cold with age he could not help himself if he went to the life-saving fire ... it was his own life he saved, even if it came to King David's way ... Scraped down to the raw an animal had to choose to save his own life....

An animal, yes, an animal killed or was killed ... but not a man, not a human standing on his hind legs. NO! He didn't wipe out the pride of all his achievements at his life's end....
Barton turned into the old barn, got into his car and drove to town. Maybe there would be a few cronies around the grain elevator or the feed store. He parked on Main Street. He sat, debating. He didn't have many cronies left. And all they could do together would be to carp about the way things were and down in all their bellies was nothing but the cold fear of death and the fear of life and the aching, hopeless wish to be men again. He didn't want the smell of them. He went over to the bank and cashed a check and drove on into the city. He parked and roamed the bright, busy streets, looking sharply in at the women's shops, tempted and afraid to go in and buy some pretties for her. Panties and stockings and shoes and perfumes and dresses. He felt flushed and excited and he stopped at a travel agency window with its pictures of gay, carefree foreign places and girls in bathing suits and without exactly knowing what he was doing he got the car again and drove to the airport. He watched the great, shiny planes, landing and taking off; he mingled with the moving, lively crowds waiting to go or going and he longed to have Deena May there to see it and feel it and catch the fire and enthusiasm. He could take her and give her the sparkling brightness and the go go go that she craved. What did it come to, all his hard work and sober virtue? It came to dullness and death.

Hugh was at the milking when Barton got back and Barton, remembering all the hostile thoughts he had had toward the boy, took pains to praise him.

"Sorry to leave you with all the work. Had some business in town. But I'll grant that you're handling things fine, just fine."

Hugh took it with clear pleasure. And after some easy talk about farm matters he said: "I hope she never bothered you, woke you up from your nap. Did she?"

Barton laughed. "Why no. Why? Was she cutting up?"

Hugh shook his head, looking comically earnest. "She was singing around in the yard and carrying on. The thing with Deena May, Mr. Barton, is she is a good-hearted little thing, only she's childish. She was the young'un of a big family and they catered to her something awful. But I've got real confidence that right down in her heart she ain't really spoiled, but will turn out a first-class woman." He sighed. "I do have a time with her, she's that childish. She's enough to wear out your patience sometimes. But I won't leave her get on your nerves."

"Don't you let it worry you. You just keep up your good work ... and keep on reading those Agricultural pamphlets and the papers and learning, the way you have been, and improving yourself. I like the both of you. Fine, just fine."

"Would you like to come down to supper?"

"Not tonight. Young folks should be alone, and I take Sunday dinners with you ... that's plenty ... not that she's not a grand little cook. She is."

"Thanks. She'll be tickled to hear you said that."

"Didn't I ever tell her?"

"Well ... " Hugh began uncomfortably. "No. And ... well, I always was a little scared you don't like her much ... " He waited and Barton assured him. "I sure am relieved. I kind of thought you sometimes look at her ... well, stern-like."

"That's mainly how old men do look, you know."

Hugh chuckled. "Funny thing, but Deena May says she ain't fooled the way you look stern because you like her."

Barton felt a quick uneasiness. "I do, indeed I do."

"And she sure likes you. Wants to come up and live in the big house. Says it's a pure shame you got to cook yourself and stay around that big old empty place alone. I said to her: 'Deena May, it would just aggravate him out of his wits to have to put up with your childishness right in the same house.' "

"But not at all ... why, that's a splendid idea ... I mean, Hugh ... if you'd want to ... the pair of you would give the old place life, and the stove's a good one and there's that fine refrigerator and a nearly new bathroom ... "
"Begging your pardon, Mr. Barton, it's only her idea." He shook his head. "You see, even if you could stand her childishness ... well, you understand, I got my hands full already to make a woman out of her ... and if you both like each other why you'd cater to her like she had it back home with old ... older people ... No offense, but, well, that little house is just nice. Sure you wouldn't take supper with us, though?"

Barton hesitated; he dreaded cooking his own meal and eating alone in that oversized coffin of a house. Talking with Hugh, face to face, Barton liked him and shared with him, from Hugh's viewpoint, his problems with the "child bride." But Deena May in the flesh was something else. In his presence, they both became kids and meals with them were full of bickerings, and each would turn to Barton for support. He had always found it amusing, but inevitably he had had to side with Hugh. Still he didn't want to go over there and be forced to sit like a gray sage passing down moral pronouncements. He didn't want to say a word against her, nor uphold a set of principles that smelled of must and decay.

"No, thank you just the same," he said. "See you tomorrow, Hugh."

Barton sat in the parlor with the evening paper, rereading grain market quotes without absorbing them. He didn't give a damn. There was something else, like a small, pleasant glow in his belly, holding his mind. Hugh had said she wasn't fooled by the look of sternness; she knew with the sure female animal instinct that the sight of her stirred the still-living male in him. And she wanted to take over the big house, where he'd cater to her.

He turned off the parlor light and went up to the bedroom and turned the bedroom light on for a few minutes, as though he had come up to bed. He didn't undress. Presently, he turned off the light and waited, listening near the open window. It would be awhile. She'd peer over to make sure the big house was dark and that he slept.

She was looking out her window. She vanished, and her front screen clapped shut and the hound, put out, whimpered for his mistress like an exiled lover till she shrieked at him. Then the lights went out. Barton tensed and rubbed his thick, calloused fingers against his dry palms. The beat of his heart quickened in anticipation and he could feel the juice of life rising in him, even his mouth salivated and his lips were warm and wet.

He began to fear that Hugh had, in a sense, won, that he was lying there cold beside her fire, sober and resolved to hoard his strength, and sleep like the goddamned fool he was ... Then it came. A squall and a moan. Barton blinked, brightening. Hugh handled her roughly, but with no genuine air of mastery. Instead, his roughness seemed against the grain, something he did because she willed it. But one Saturday night they had gone to a dance, and, from the gossip Barton heard, Deena May had slipped out to the parking lot and serviced a squad of young bucks before Hugh caught her. He'd bloodied some noses and got a whaling himself and the sounds coming from the little house that night had been pure hell. But tonight, as usual, Barton heard her song of lust, a primitive sound of combat and terror and wild joy that set a serpent crawling in his belly.

In the long wake of silence, Barton found himself shivering and disgusted with himself. What had he come to? Turning his eyes and ears and mind into sneaking, slimy things that degraded everything he had ever been. The most shameful, the most intolerable part of it was that he was reduced to this cowardly caricature of manhood, as if he was a eunuch. He slept fitfully, waking repeatedly till almost dawn, when he dropped into a deep sleep.

He woke to the sound of her "Cha cha cha-tyata ... "

Light flooded the room and he knew from the slant of the sun that it was very late. Past ten. My God, he hadn't overslept this way in years. He sat up and got heavily out of bed. He heard the tractor in the field. Everything was going on without him.

"Cha cha cha-tyata ... cha to cha ... "

He shut the window and the blind, but her chirpy, teasy little voice penetrated the dim bedroom with an insistent, irresistible rhythm. It stroked his waking senses and thrummed through his tired body like another pulse. He had to see her, he had to see her. He got the binoculars. His trembling thick fingers fumbled at the blind. It got away with a startling zip and hiss and flapped around the roller at the top. He found himself standing flatfooted and exposed at the window in his old nightshirt. He jumped aside, and had to stand gripping the bedpost for balance until his heart quit slamming and the dizziness passed. He edged back into the room and in the mirror caught sight of his scarecrow
old body, in the old fashioned nightshirt, and turned his face.

He couldn't eat. He went out to the car in his best suit. He drove into the city and made some purchases.

He was back at two, the funereal old Sunday suit behind him, splashed out now in brown and white shoes, light tan suit, coconut weave straw hat with a band matching his turquoise sport shirt. He carried packages of vivid socks, underpants, pajamas, and straw shoes in two pieces of airplane luggage.

He put the binoculars, which he'd used at the State Fair races, into their case. He hung them by the strap across his shoulder and gave himself a sporty grin. For awhile he just walked around acquainting himself with his new clothes and personality.

He stopped in the middle of the kitchen, frowning. He should have saved the old suit. He'd have to go to the bank and tell them to put the place up for sale, because the new life would be impossible in this community where he had a set meaning and where, if he changed the meaning, they'd think he was crazy. They'd snicker and wag their heads if they saw him in these clothes, and figure him insane because he didn't just sit and wait to die.

He shuddered. Most of the acres were gone, most of the rooms closed ... the dimensions were narrowing, narrowing ... the old dark house had the feel of a coffin.

He wanted to hear the sunlight sound of her “Cha cha cha ... “ He kept listening vaguely, wondering where she was. The tractor was out in the field; he could hear it. Hugh was accounted for, but where was Deena May? In the little house ... alone ... on the bed ...

"Andrew ... “

He turned without thinking and went toward the sound of the voice and opened the door to the glassed-in porch. He was about to say: “What is it, Melly ?” before he caught himself.

You're crazy! he thought, frightened. Hearing voices. He stood, silent, wondering. Maybe there was some something, some communication somehow ... not voices, but a feel, a presence. There was no feel of her here; she was dead.

He had to get out of this coffin house. He walked out into the front yard and let the sunlight soak into him and the warm air fill his lungs. From miles away he heard the bark of a dog, then a second nearer barking, and the sounds came down the line of farms like a string of firecrackers till Deena May's hound took it up. The hair stiffened on the back of his neck as he heard her sharp little voice silence the dog. She was in the back yard of the big house ... near the grape arbor, he judged.

Barton went around the side of the house, his step cautious on the grass, his whole body caught up in a helpless, trembling anticipation.

The arbor enclosed a rectangle of space and through the wall of vines he saw her lying on the grass within. She was propped on one elbow, her other arm lifted in a slim bare curve as her little fist crushed slowly into a succulent bunch of grapes above her upturned face. The juice streamed into her wide-open red mouth and he could see the rolling sliding motion of her arched throat as she swallowed greedily. Some of the juice ran over her chin and down her throat and ran in purple rivulets across the smooth white skin between her breasts. He could see the soft-rising slope of the side of one breast, in the blue shadow, where an upper button of her cotton dress was open. She was barefoot and barelegged. One knee was raised a few inches and a tantalizing bit of her thigh showed. She dropped the grape husks and reached her hand to the hound who licked her fingers, then licked the juice from her throat and from between her breasts. She pushed the dog away and slid her vivid blue eyes to their corners. She saw Barton and grinned slowly at him.

"Y'all dressed up sharp, Mr. Barton." She wagged her knee lazily from side to side and watched him from the corners of her eyes.

He had scarcely been aware that he'd moved, but here he was within the enclosure. It was airless behind the thick vines and the sweet tart smell of the crushed grapes hung over her in the motionless heat and his throat was
trembling so much he couldn't speak.

She sat up, pivoted around on one hip to face him, both knees up and apart for an instant so he could see she wore nothing under the thin dress. She folded her feet under her and covered her legs with her skirt, her expression exaggeratedly demure. "Y' scowling fierce. I do something to make you mad at me, Mr. Barton?" she said, her tone mocking and knowing. She indicated two heaped baskets. "You said I could just come and take all of the grapes I wanted to take. Can't I?" She gave him a pouty look. "Or must I go on away. Y' want me to go on away, Mr. Barton? H'm?"

"Deena May. Never go away ... " He began hoarsely. His face was hot and he needed to sweat and he couldn't. He was feverish. He blurted. "I want you. I want you to come away with me ... "

She shook her mass of fiery hair back and opened those round blue eyes wide at him. "Where to? C'mon down where I can hear you sweet talk." He got awkwardly down on his knees. "C'mon, clear down," she urged. "Where y' gonna take me, big old Daddy Lover?"

He sat almost touching her, his eyes fixed trance-like on her, his mouth twitchy at the corners. "New York. California. Mexico, foreign places, races, nightclubs, beaches ... Deena May, come with me. Fly. You ever fly in an airplane?"

"No, I never. When? Buy me purties?" She thrust her leg out from under the skirt, fit the curve of her arched foot warmly against the bony round of his knee, stroking him. She wriggled her toes. "Purty high-heel shoes ... stockings," she touched her leg, then her hip and giggled, lowering her eyes, "and all? I'd leave you put them on me, even ... " In a sudden burst of enthusiasm she came upright, standing on her knees before him. She hunched her shoulders and ran her hands slinkily across her chest. "Naked looking green dresses and blue and skin color ones and my hair piled zoop, up like this ... " She pushed the flaming mass of her hair in a high wad and turned to show her ears and the lovely line of her neck. "And loop earrings and pearls wound in my hair. Whoo-eee ... " She shook her shoulders and hips, standing there on her spread knees, and sang, grinning straight and dazzlingly close into his face. "Cha cha cha-tyata ... cha-ta-cha."

She pitched forward, winding her strong wiry little arms around his neck. She pushed her wet red mouth against his, hot and open and tasting like sugar. He toppled over onto his side on the grass, panting, his hands starting over her maddening body.

She rolled away out of reach. He pawed for her, scrambling, his eyes glazed and senseless. "Naughty big old Daddy Lover ... " She got to her feet, kicked his hand from her ankle and danced away. She came within reach, teased him with her toe, jumped clear again. "Want it bad?"

"Please ... "

She touched the dimple in her chin. "Devil's in me. I set out for you, old man. My maw always said if an old man scowl at a purty young girl it ain't natural; he's fightin' off young-man ideas and bound to lose and watch out. I been watchin' the fierce way you look at me. Promise you'd cater to me, old man?"

"Anything. I—I promise. Come here."

"Anything. I—I promise. Come here."

"No, no. You cool off and chicken on me, that's what you'd end up. You chicken?"

Her eyes were blinking and dancing. He got himself to a sitting position and stared at her, sensing her meaning.

"What d'ya mean."

"Hugh. He'd prevent us. And he's got it comin' to him, the way he won't cater to me. I got it all set, but if you chicken out, y'can't never get no closer'n them spy glasses you look at me through. I seen you once, don't think I never ... " She giggled, strutted and sang tauntingly, shaking her behind at him. "Cha cha cha-tyata ... cha-ta-cha ... Well ... ?"

It was dark. Heat pricked at his scalp as he sat in the crotch of the tree by the turn in the creek, a shotgun on his knees. He knew he was there to ambush and kill a young man in cold blood, and yet he wasn't. It wasn't really him, Andrew Barton, but something else in him compelled to do it, to do what he had to do to hold onto the brightness of
life against ... He couldn't think it through; he needn't try ... the past was dead, only the future was living ...

"You can drop your shotgun now, Mr. Barton."

Barton froze. That cold, strange voice wasn't real; it was just fear and guilt working at his ears and mind ...

"Drop it!" Hugh's voice chopped at him. "I got a rifle at your back."

Barton threw the shotgun down. "Shoot me," he said. "Go ahead and shoot me."

"I just want my pay so I can head out. Now, climb down. I found her hiding up in your house, hound led me straight to her. I scared the truth out of her. I never thought you could lie to me, Mr. Barton. Tell me she was hustling down to meet a feller so's I could come and you could shoot me.” His voice cracked. “I never would of believed it, except I seen it's so. Now, march!"

Barton moved along ahead of him, looking down. “Hugh, boy,” he mumbled. “I wouldn't have gone through with it. Believe me."

"Mr. Barton, you don't know if you would of or not."

Deena May stood scowling in a corner of the kitchen. Hugh ignored her. “I want my pay plus pay for the use of my wife."

"I swear nothing's happened."

"If you're the one who ain't had her, no charge. Otherwise, kindly add twenty-five.” He spun, red-faced and furious and shouted at her, “Cents!” He turned, wiped at the sudden tears in his eyes. “Now will you please pay me my money so I can get the hell away from here?"

Deena May and Barton stood in the same room, not looking at each other. They listened after Hugh had gone and finally the old car coughed and started and went sputtering down the lane. They watched its lights turn onto the road. Then it was out of sight.

"Good riddance of bad rubbish,” Deena May sniffed. She slid a glance at him and frowned. “What're you moping around about?"

He turned up his hands.

"You ain't going to try kissing me off, too, are you?"

"I—I—“ He couldn't look at her.

"Lookit, big old Daddy Lover ... Cha cha cha-tyyata ... cha ta cha ... “ She sang and danced, shaking herself, and Barton couldn't keep himself from watching. “That's better,” she cried. “C'mon. There's nothing to bother us none now. C'mon!"

She went up the stairs. After a moment, he lowered his head and followed.

It was past midnight. Light from the setting moon lay like winter frost over his old body as he looked out the bedroom window at Deena May and her hound coming back across the field. She'd sneaked down there again to slut with those hoodlums she ran with. Maybe when all the negotiations on the sale of the farm were completed in a few more days and they could get away from this old coffin of a house, she would be different. He shook his head wearily. No, wherever she went she would attract the scum of creation to her.

She reached the yard, moved out of sight at the arbor. She would be coming in shortly, he realized with a vague dread, and he wanted to get to bed and feign sleep. But he was dull and slow with fatigue and she was already in the house and coming noisily up the stairs before he could break his inertia and crawl under the covers. In two weeks she had lived up ninety percent of his remaining life, he thought hopelessly. He kept his eyes shut as she flung open
the door and snapped on the light.

"I been taking that ole hound dog for a run," she lied stupidly. She sounded half-drunk. He didn't bother to answer. She flaunted off to the bedroom she had taken over, calling back: “Quick's I take me a bath I'll be back, and don't you go try and beg off like last night and this morning, you big old Daddy Lover, you—"

She was burning him out like dry old tinder, and he knew what hell was like. It was fire, fire; it burned unquenchable and insatiable in her. He couldn't stand it ... he couldn't ... He moaned softly, a bone-deep ache of tiredness in him. If she would just let him alone, let him rest in peace ...

Then she was back in a filmy nylon shorty nightgown that left her luscious, dancing legs naked to the hips; her eyes teased and her lips taunted: “Get up, big old Daddy Lover ... Lookit!” She began to prance, tilting her hips and shaking her breasts and rolling her bottom as she sang: “Cha cha cha-tyata—cha ta cha ... “

He crammed the pillow over his head, and writhed. “Please let me sleep!” His voice rose to a bellow of anguish.

She laughed. “C'mon,” she taunted, and pulled the pillow away, and moved her body tantalizingly, and his cold hands reached toward her. “Cha cha cha ... “ she teased, backstepping daintily. “C'mon, you get up and dance that cute way you do, big old Daddy Lover.”

He sat up and got up and began to lift his knees and wag his rump and he heard his voice croaking, “Cha cha cha-tyata—cha ta cha—” And then he caught sight of himself in the old bureau mirror, like a grotesque, mindless performing animal. He stopped and stared at that beautiful fire burning him to death and he knew he had to put out that fire to save himself.

At last he lay quietly, an old man in his bed. But his bony fingers still ached from the unaccustomed tension and violence they had just endured. His heartbeat had finally calmed. His hand moved over and rested on her briefly. It were as though she were sleeping beside him. Already, her flesh was beginning to lose its heat, just as her throat had forever lost its song of lust. He sighed and shut his eyes, his body yielding to the deepest craving in it, the craving for an old man's rest.

THE END

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