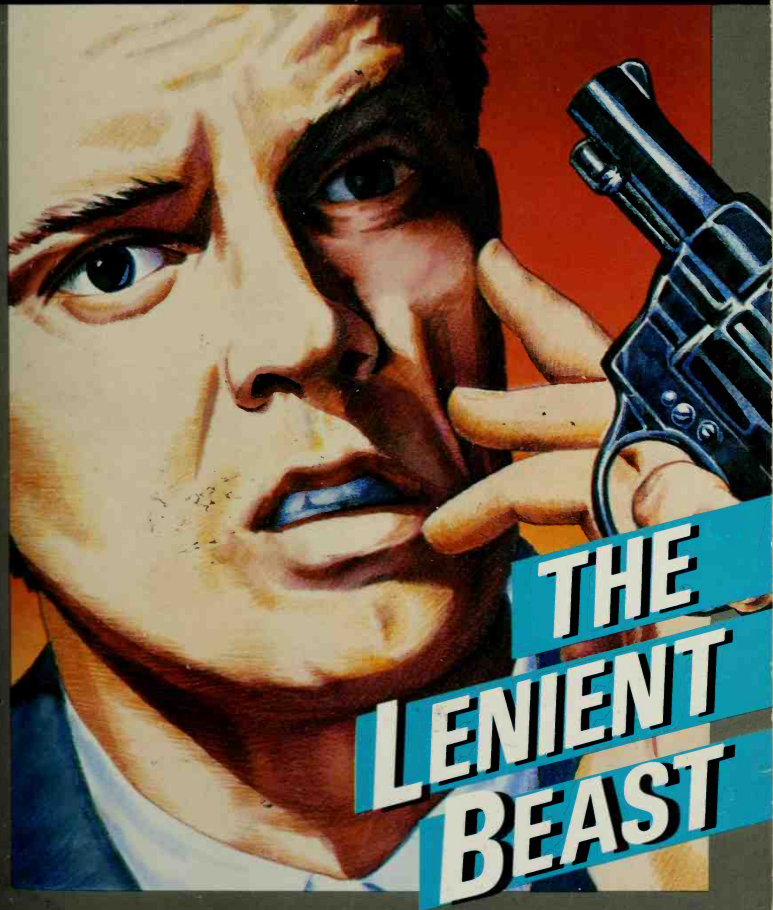
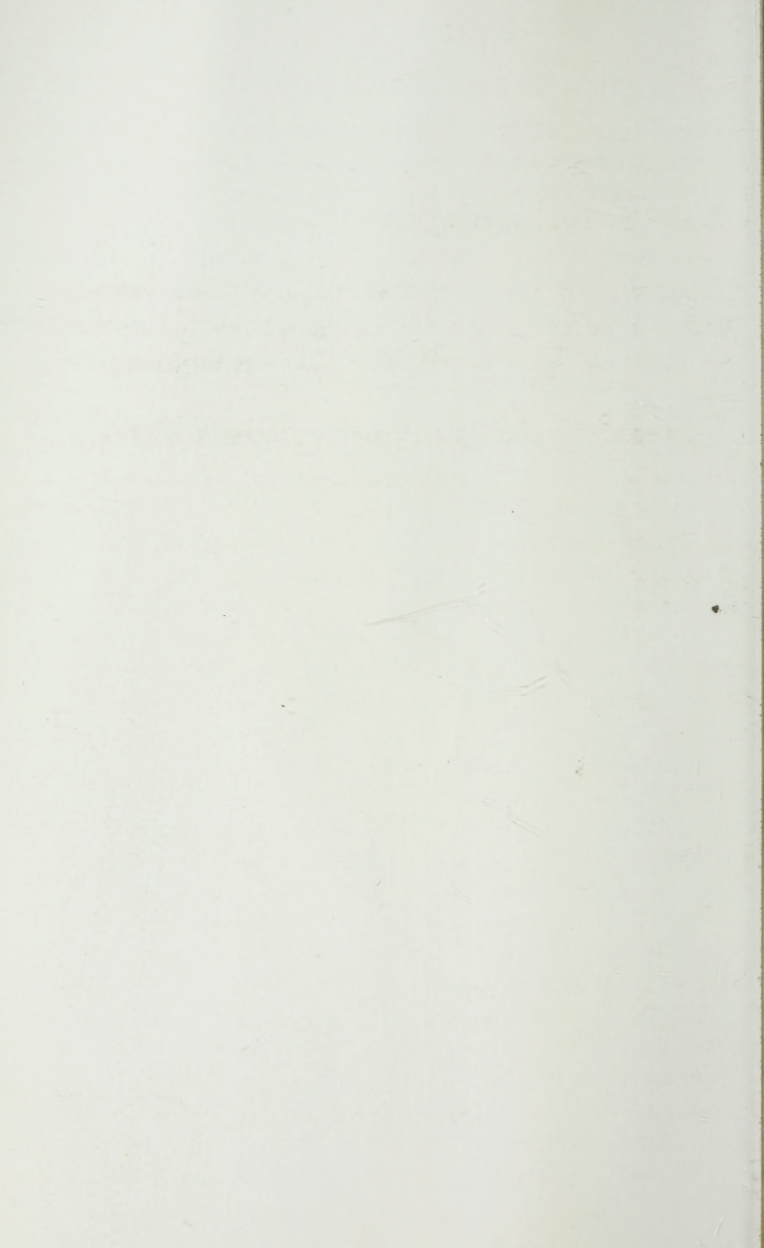


50 "Extraordinarily successful... nicely calculated narrative surprises."—*The New York Times Book Review*

FREDRIC BROWN

■ Author of *THE FABULOUS CLIPJOINT* ■





Praise for *The Lenient Beast*:

“A mass-murderer is eliminated in a fitting manner and so nicely calculated are the narrative surprises that not another word should be said concerning the plot . . .”

—Anthony Boucher, *The New York Times Book Review*

Also by Fredric Brown available from Carroll & Graf:

The Screaming Mimi

***THE
LENIENT
BEAST***

FREDRIC BROWN

Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc.
New York

Copyright © 1956 by Fredric Brown
Copyright © renewed 1984 by Fredric Brown

All rights reserved

Published by arrangement with Roberta Pryor, Inc.

First Carroll & Graf edition 1988

Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc.
260 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10001

ISBN: 0-88184-444-6

Manufactured in the United States of America

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		<i>Page</i>
ONE	John Medley	9
TWO	Fern Cahan	24
THREE	Frank Ramos	35
FOUR	John Medley	50
FIVE	Walter Pettijohn . . .	56
SIX	Frank Ramos	68
SEVEN	Fern Cahan	86
EIGHT	Alice Ramos	104
NINE	Frank Ramos	113
TEN	Fern Cahan	120
ELEVEN	John Medley	131
TWELVE	Frank Ramos	148
THIRTEEN	Alice Ramos	165
FOURTEEN	Frank Ramos	170
FIFTEEN	John Medley	181
SIXTEEN	Walter Pettijohn . . .	189



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012

THE LENIENT BEAST

*When I said that mercy stood
Within the borders of the wood,
I meant the lenient beast with claws
And bloody, swift-dispatching jaws.*

— LAWRENCE P. SPINGARN

ALL THE CHARACTERS IN THIS BOOK ARE
FICTITIOUS, INCLUDING AND PARTICULARLY
THOSE CHARACTERS DEPICTED AS MEMBERS
OF THE TUCSON POLICE DEPARTMENT.

ONE

JOHN MEDLEY

Late this morning I found a dead man in my back yard. Although I wakened at my usual time, eight o'clock, I did not make the discovery until a few minutes after eleven because I did not chance to look out of the back window of my living room until that time.

My house, I should perhaps explain, is small. It is almost square and the living room extends the length of one side of it and has windows at front and back. There is a window at the side of the house also, but it is useless since I had a carport built outside it, and I keep it covered with a drape; the front and back windows are large and give ample light. The other side of the house has bedroom at the front and kitchen at the back, a small bathroom between them.

The kitchen, where I had eaten breakfast—a bowl of cereal followed by several leisurely cups of coffee while I read the *Tucson Daily News*—has a door and a window opening on the back of the house, but the door has no pane of glass and the window is a small high one; since the table is against the wall under it I never try to look out the window.

April is the loveliest month in Tucson. A sunny April day is perfect, and almost all April days are sunny. After breakfast I stood outside my front door, drinking the air and the warmth, watching the high clear vapor trails of the big

six-engine jet planes from Davis-Monthan Field; two of them, so high in the sky that the planes themselves were all but invisible. Another plane, just taking off, flew over low while I stood there. A beautiful thing, if noisy and a bit terrifying when one thought of what its purpose was.

Not that I fear that purpose, for myself.

Or do I? But they make me feel old, those sleek monsters, for I remember when I was a boy and the sound of a plane brought us all running out of the house to stare upward at the rare wonder of a machine in the sky, defying gravity. A little open cockpit biplane with wings held together and apart by struts and wires, precariously powered by an engine not much more powerful than a car's.

Those who flew those planes were men to me then; those who fly the jets today are boys, and that makes me feel even older, for the difference is not in them but in myself. I see them in a tavern on Plumer Street which I go to occasionally of an evening; they are nice boys, and friendly, but at fifty-six I must seem like a doddering old codger to them.

But I digress. The day was so lovely that I decided to leave my car and walk the few blocks up Campbell to do my shopping at the Safeway Market on Broadway; my current needs were not too great for me to carry easily. It was Wednesday, and I always do my bulk shopping on Friday, which lets me take advantage of weekend specials and still avoid the Saturday crowds and the standing in line in front of one of the checkers.

I made a few small purchases at the drugstore as well, and it must have been at least ten o'clock when I returned home. After that—but I am being prolix; suffice it to say that I did a few chores inside the house and did not happen to look out of the back window until eleven o'clock or a few minutes thereafter. And then I saw the man lying there.

He lay on his back with his head slightly raised and rest-

ing on a large root of the Chinese elm which is in the center of the yard. The position in which he lay was a natural one; he could have been a tramp or a drunk who had wandered into the yard and fallen asleep.

But when I went out of the door and approached closer, I could see that he was dead. His eyes were wide open and staring straight up into the bright Arizona sun. But I unbuttoned part of his jacket and shirt and put my hand inside to make sure there was no heartbeat.

I have no fear of dead bodies, as many people have. Once, thirty-some years ago, I worked for a mortician and started to learn the trade. For a few months only, but long enough permanently to overcome whatever squeamishness I may have had in dealing with cold clay that once was warm flesh. My eventual decision to choose another occupation was made when I realized that I would, if and when I became a mortician in my own right, have to deal with—and mulct, for my own profit—the grief-stricken living. The dead feel nothing, but I knew that I would find myself suffering with the bereaved who mourned them.

I touched the body in no other way, not even to rebutton the clothing. Although there was nothing visible to indicate that the death was not a natural one, I knew that it must be reported to the police, and that the police, if they are like the police in the mystery novels I occasionally read for relaxation, do not like to have bodies disturbed until they have had the chance to examine them *in situ*.

I have no telephone so I did not go back into the house. Instead I walked across the two vacant lots that separate my property from that of my nearest neighbor to the south, Mrs. Armstrong, a widow who lives with her unmarried daughter. Although we have not become close friends, we have been good neighbors, and on the few occasions when I have had cause to use a telephone she has permitted me to use hers.

She must have chanced to look from a window and to have seen me coming, for she opened the door as I neared it.

"Morning, Mr. Medley," she called out. She is a big woman with a cheerful, booming voice.

"Good morning," I said. "May I use your telephone for a moment?"

"Sure." She stepped back to let me enter. "And then you'll have a cup of coffee with me, won't you? I was just thinking about heating it up to have a cup myself."

"Thank you," I said, "but I'm afraid I must return home as soon as the call is completed. It's to the police, and they'll expect me to be there waiting for them when they arrive."

"When they—you mean something's wrong, Mr. Medley?"

"Yes and no," I said, looking for the police number in the phone book and finding it quickly among the emergency numbers on the first page. "If you'll pardon me a moment, I'll explain as soon as I've made the call."

But of course once I had made the call I didn't have to explain; she heard what I told the police. That there was a dead man in my yard, a stranger to me, and that I'd just discovered him. And my name and address, of course. "Please stay home, Mr. Medley. We'll be right there. And don't disturb anything," I was told.

When I put down the telephone and stood up, Mrs. Armstrong was staring at me with wide eyes. "Are you sure—?"

"Of course I'm sure," I said dryly. "You don't think I'd fool the police about a thing like that, do you? They wouldn't like it."

"I mean—I didn't mean it that way, Mr. Medley. Where is he?"

"Lying under the big tree in the center of the back yard. The Chinese elm."

"But—how did he die?"

"I don't know how. I'd say acute alcoholism is a good pos-

sibility. It would account for his having—uh—strayed off the beaten path. Thanks for the use of your phone, Mrs. Armstrong. And I'd better get back quickly. If they pass the word to a radio car, it can be there within minutes."

She followed me out of the door and stood staring toward the tree. But the body under it wasn't visible from here because of the low privet hedge around the yard.

I went back the way I had come, across the lots and through the break in the hedge, but I didn't approach the body again. I went into the house and to the front window, to wait.

It was not over five minutes before a car pulled up at the curb and two uniformed men got out and walked rapidly toward my front door. I met them there and had the door open.

"Mr. Medley? You phoned—?"

"Yes," I said. "This way, gentlemen. In the back yard, but you might as well come through the house to get there."

I led them through and out the back way, but waited just outside the back door while they approached the body and bent over it. One of them repeated my gesture of feeling for a heartbeat.

"Dead all right, Hank. Guess we might as well phone in right away, huh?"

The taller and slightly older of the two—they were both quite young men, not yet far into their twenties—straightened up. "It won't matter if we take a minute," he said. "See if he's got a name on him; if he has we can tell 'em that much when we call."

While the younger one reached into pockets, the one who had straightened up looked toward me. "You said over the phone that he was a stranger to you, Mister?"

"That's right," I said.

"Any idea how he got here?"

"None," I said, and was about to explain how it had hap-

pened that I hadn't looked into my back yard since waking and until just before I had phoned, when the younger one said, "No wallet, no money, no papers. Handkerchief, cigarettes and matches, that's all."

"Don't look like a bum," said the other one. "Say, Phil, don't move him except to lift his head a little and feel the back of it. If he was robbed, maybe he was slugged." He joined the other. "Here, I'll give you a hand."

Their bodies blocked my view but a few seconds later I heard the one called Hank say, "Oh-oh. Look at that." They both straightened up.

"Was he—slugged?" I asked.

"Bullet hole," said Hank. "And that puts it way out of our league. Can I use your phone?"

I explained that I didn't have one and had used the one next door and pointed out the house. Noticing, as I did so, that Mrs. Armstrong was still or again outside her door, watching.

"Our car's closer," Hank said. "Phil, you call in. I'll stick here."

The one called Phil went around the house toward their car. Hank told me, "You go inside if you want to. Just so you don't go anywhere."

Since there didn't seem to be anything I could do, I decided that I might as well go indoors so I thanked him and did so. It was obvious that, now that the death seemed to be murder, these particular policemen had no more questions for me. They'd been sent in answer to my call—maybe to verify it and make sure that I really *did* have a body in my yard—but now they were ready to bow out. Investigation would be taken over by a homicide department, if Tucson was large enough to have a separate department for that purpose, or by a detective bureau. The latter turned out to be the case, if I may anticipate.

Back in my living room I found myself at a loose end, wondering how to put in time until the detectives came; surely they'd be here soon and surely they'd want to ask me a great many more questions than the uniformed men had asked.

Usually at that time of day I relax and read a while or listen to music or both. I have an excellent if not extensive record collection and a high-fidelity phonograph installation with speakers at both ends of the room. I didn't feel inclined to read and wondered whether, under the circumstances, it would be all right for me to play a record or two. I decided it would be all right if I kept it soft.

But the record I put on played only a few minutes before a car drove up and two men who didn't look much like detectives but who must be, I decided, got out. They went over to the uniformed man who had been waiting in the radio car and talked to him for a few minutes, then came toward the house.

One of them was of medium height and dark; he looked Spanish or Mexican and wore a tan gabardine suit. The other was an Anglo (as they call them out here), taller and thinner. He was less neatly dressed, but not sloppily so. Even though he wore a hat—they both wore felt hats—one could see that his hair was carrot colored.

I went from the window to the front door to open it for them but by the time I got there they were walking around the outside to the back. Either they thought I was still in the back yard or, more likely, they weren't interested in me until they had examined the body. But I was interested in them and in how they would start the investigation, so I went to the back door and outside again.

They were there before me, talking to the uniformed man who had waited beside the body. I heard one of them, the Mexican one (whom I decided now at closer range *was* of

Mexican rather than of Spanish ancestry), tell the uniformed policeman that he could leave now, and he did so. He nodded to me and said, "'Bye, Mr. Medley," quite politely as he passed me.

That caused the others to turn and look toward me, so I walked closer and introduced myself. "I'm John Medley. I found the body and telephoned in. I suppose you'll want to ask me some questions."

"Yes, Mr. Medley." It was the Mexican one who spoke. "But no hurry—we want to do a few things here before the coroner comes and he's on his way now."

He turned to his partner. "We'd better take some pix before we even touch him, Red. Want to get the camera?"

"Sure." The man he'd called Red walked rapidly toward the street, past me.

"Would you rather I went back inside?" I asked, "or do you mind if I watch from here?"

"It's all right as long as you don't come any closer. By the way, my name's Ramos, Frank Ramos. My partner's Fern Cahan. Fern's a funny name for a man but it doesn't matter because everybody calls him Red anyway."

"I can see why," I said.

"Mr. Medley, you told the boys this man is a stranger to you. Are you really sure of that? I mean, did you take a close look, a good look, at this face?"

"Close enough," I said. I explained how I had bent over to feel inside the man's shirt to make sure that he was dead, and that I had touched nothing, disturbed nothing, otherwise.

Red Cahan came back with a camera, a big Graflex like newspaper cameramen use, but old and battered. I stepped back a little farther to be out their way while they took half a dozen shots from various angles.

"Guess that's enough, Red," Ramos said. "And that sounds like it's the wagon coming." He listened a moment. "Yeah.

Well, guess that's all the shots we need. Come on, Red, you put the camera in the car while I talk to Doc. And we'll see you in a few minutes, Mr. Medley."

They went around the house together. I went back indoors, mostly because the sun had become uncomfortably warm, and I hadn't been wearing a hat.

The record I'd left on had finished playing and I'd missed most of it. I started it again, thinking they might be busy for quite a while yet.

But it had played only a few minutes before there was a knock at the door, the back one, and I went to it and let Frank Ramos in.

He said, "Red's going to give the boys a hand, and then case the yard. He'll be in soon. Say, that phonograph has a real tone. Hi-fi?"

I nodded. "I thought you might be longer. I'll shut it off."

"Please don't. Not till Red comes in, anyway. I like it."

"It's Berlioz," I said. "Hector Berlioz, one of the most underrated of the great composers. Because, I suppose, most people think of him as modern, whereas he was far ahead of his time. When he composed what we're listening to now, *Symphonie Fantastique*, in eighteen thirty, Beethoven had been dead only three years, and Wagner was only seventeen. And Richard Strauss was only five when Berlioz died in eighteen fifty-nine."

"It's nice stuff."

"What did you mean by saying your partner was casing the yard?"

"Looking for footprints, heel marks, things like that. Red's more of a woodsman than I am so I leave things to him on outdoor stuff. He'll see things I'd miss—if there's anything to see. I doubt if there will be."

"The ground's pretty hard," I said. "I haven't done any watering for four—no, five days now."

"Even if you'd watered yesterday, ground dries so fast here, I doubt if there'd be anything. Well, here's Red. Maybe at that you'd better shut off the music while we talk. I'll let him in."

I shut off the phonograph.

"Nothing, Frank," Red was telling his partner. "Hard as *see-ment*, damn near. One clump of hedge along the alley's broken, but it looks like it happened longer ago than last night."

"It did," I said. "I don't myself know how it happened but I noticed it day before yesterday. May I offer you some coffee, gentlemen? Or, if it's not too early in the day, a glass of wine? I have some very good pale dry sherry."

"Thanks, no," Ramos said. "Just sit down and we will too. Now, no doubt this has nothing to do with the crime, but would you mind giving us just a little background on yourself, Mr. Medley? How long you've lived here, what you do, things like that?"

"Not at all," I said. "I've been in Tucson six—no, six and a half years. And here in this house for the same length of time, as near as matters; I bought it within a month of coming here."

"Do you work at anything? Or are you retired?"

"Retired," I said. "Mostly so anyway. I own a few pieces of property around town and occasionally buy or sell a piece."

"Is the real estate business what you were in before you came here?"

"More or less. As an independent operator, not an agent. And I've done quite a few other things too."

"And you came here from—?"

"Chicago. I was fifty, then. A bit young to retire, perhaps, but I was getting arthritis—which the climate here has almost completely cured. And since I could afford to retire if I was

willing to live modestly, as I do, and since I wanted to, I did. With the exceptions noted."

"I see. I gather that you live alone here. May I ask whether you're a bachelor or a widower?"

"A bachelor."

"Were you born in Chicago?"

"No, in Cincinnati. I've lived quite a few places, though. Always the Middle West until I came here."

"I see," Ramos said again. He seemed to do all the talking for the two of them. "Well, that gives us a fairly good picture of you yourself, Mr. Medley. Now about this morning. You discovered the body about eleven o'clock. What time did you get up?"

"Eight o'clock, as near as matters." I went on and explained what I'd done during the morning and how it happened that I hadn't discovered the body sooner. While I was talking Ramos stood up and went to the kitchen doorway to look in, obviously to verify what I'd just said about not being able to see the back yard from the kitchen window.

He turned back, but stayed in the doorway, leaning against one side of it. He smiled and his olive face was quite handsome as his white teeth flashed.

"And yesterday evening?" he asked.

"I stayed home. Spent the evening reading, listening to music. Went to bed a little short of midnight."

"And slept through? You heard nothing?"

"I slept as well as usual, which is fairly soundly. I don't recall hearing anything out of the ordinary. I suppose you mean the sound of a shot. No, I don't recall hearing one."

Ramos frowned. "Surely you'd remember if you heard one."

"If I'd recognized it for a *shot*, of course. But if I'd taken it to be a backfire at the time, I might not. Do you think he was shot there in the yard where I found him?"

"Too early to be sure of anything. But please think carefully. You neither saw nor heard anything at all unusual either yesterday evening or last night?"

"That's right, Mr. Ramos. But about the shot—assuming it was fired there in the yard. There's one other possible reason why I might not have heard it."

"What's that?"

"Jet planes. When they're taking off from the field in this direction they're pretty low when they come over here. And pretty noisy. If a shot was fired while one of them was right over—well, I don't think I'd hear it."

"Possibly not. Do you yourself have any firearms, Mr. Medley?"

"A revolver, yes," I said. "I bought it when I first moved into this house. It was much more isolated then than it is now—you know how fast Tucson has been building up—and it's not far from the Southern Pacific tracks. I thought of tramps."

"What caliber is the revolver?"

"I believe it's a thirty-two. I don't know much about guns. I bought it used, at one of those secondhand stores on Congress Street downtown."

"May we see it?"

"Certainly," I said. I went to the desk and took it from the second drawer. Cahan, the redheaded one, had followed me across the room so I handed it to him. It is a small nickel-plated gun with a relatively short barrel.

He swung the cylinder expertly, ejected the cartridges into the palm of his hand and then put them down on the desk blotter. He walked to the front window with the gun and held it up to look into the barrel.

"If you wish to take it along to check it, you may," I said. "You'll find it hasn't been fired recently. Not for five years, in fact."

"That I can see," Cahan said. "It's pretty rusty, Mr. Medley. No, we won't need to take it in." He came back and put it on the desk beside the cartridges. "I'd suggest you clean out that barrel before you reload it. Or still better, take it to a gunsmith and have a good job done on it."

Ramos said, "I gather you fired it five years ago, from what you said. For testing or practice, or did you have a use for it?"

"I had use for it, I'm sorry to say," I told him. "I had a dog then, a collie pup six months old. And someone poisoned him. I ran to a phone, all the way up to Broadway then, and called for a vet. But when I got home—well, the poor dog was in such terrible agony—"

Cahan nodded. "I noticed a little white wooden cross in a corner of your yard. You buried it there?"

"Yes," I said. "Sentimental of me, but I'd come to love the dog and didn't want him just to be picked up with the garbage. It's the only dog I ever owned—and I'll never have another. Not if there's even a possibility that the poisoner is someone who's still around here."

"Uh-huh. Dog-poisoners are sure hell." Cahan turned to Ramos. "Well, Frank, you got any more questions?"

"Just one," Ramos said. "Mr. Medley, does the name Stiff-ler mean anything to you? Kurt Stiffler?"

I shook my head slowly. "No. That is, I don't know any-one of that name. But it does sound vaguely familiar, as though I'd read it or heard it somewhere before—and rather recently, I believe."

"It's been in the newspapers."

I said, "I must have read it then. But I don't remember in what connection."

"I guess that's all, then, Mr. Medley. For now, I mean. I'm afraid one or both of us will be back, though, with a lot more

questions. After we've got the coroner's report and an identification."

"Come back any time," I said. "Not this evening, though. It's my chess club night."

I followed them toward the door. I said, "About the dog. I should have added one thing. The veterinarian got here shortly after and I had him look at the dog—partly to make sure that it *had* been poison and not something else. He said it had been poison all right and that it was well that I'd put the dog out of its agony because he wouldn't have been able to save it."

Ramos smiled. "We weren't thinking of bringing a murder charge against you, Mr. Medley. By the way, you were wrong about one thing."

"What's that?"

"That date of Berlioz' death. He died in sixty-nine, not fifty-nine. But Richard Strauss would have been five then, all right; he was born in eighteen sixty-four."

I had to smile at the neat way he'd turned the tables on me for showing off my knowledge of composers. I said, "You must have an eidetic memory, Mr. Ramos. And you must own the same recording of the *Fantastique* that I have—the one that mentions those time relationships in the program notes."

"Right. About my owning the same recording, anyway. Uh—you're not planning any trips out of town, are you, Sir?"

"No, I'm not."

"Good. We'll probably not see you until tomorrow. But you may have reporters in your hair as soon as this afternoon, I'm afraid."

I shook hands with both of them and stood watching until they got into their car and drove away.

And then the reaction came and I was trembling. I got the door closed and got to a chair and dropped into it. I dropped

my head into my hands and, behind closed eyelids, let the waves of blackness come and go until I could think clearly again.

Always there is such a reaction as this. But this time had been different from the others, because this time for the first time I had had to discover the body myself and face the police. And knowing from the moment of the kill that it would be that way, I had remained calm. Especially since arising this morning I had acted my role within my mind as well as in my physical actions. I had actually forgotten—almost—that the body was there until it was time for me to discover it. Everything had simply been in abeyance until then and until the police had come and gone.

Now was the time for my suffering, and I suffered.

When I was calm enough I prayed. Again, again I asked God why He asks so much of me. Although I know. He is right, and He is merciful. He asks much, but someday He will take away from me the mark of the beast and I shall be free. Someday He shall extend His mercy even unto me.

TWO

FERN CAHAN

"What do you think of the old coot?" I asked Frank as he U-turned the car and headed toward Broadway.

"Wouldn't trust him as far as I can throw a longhorn, Red."

"Longhorn cheese or longhorn steer?"

"Steer," he said. "How about you?"

"I think he's on the level. Little queer, maybe—or *queer* isn't the word I want. What is?"

"Eccentric?"

"That's it, Webster. A guy his age, a bachelor—well, I guess he's got the right to be a little eccentric."

"What makes you think he's a bachelor?"

"Goddam it, you asked him if he was a widower or a bachelor, didn't you? And he told you."

"Do you believe everything you're told, Red?"

"Nuts," I said. "Why'd he bother lying about anything like that?"

"Maybe he murdered his wife. Do you think all bachelors are eccentric, Red?"

He thought he had me, because I'm one myself. I said, "I get mine. Say, what was that gobbledegook about Berli—what's-his-name? I didn't get it. Did I miss something?"

"Not much. He was playing a record for me while you were giving Doc a hand with the stiff, and he showed off a little. I showed back, that's all."

"What's an eidetic memory, Frank?"

"The kind I've almost got."

"Go to hell," I said. "You erudite bastard."

"Dammit, don't call me an erudite bastard."

"But you are one."

"Sure I'm one, but it ill becomes you, you Goddam Texan cowboy, to use a word like *erudite* because it doesn't belong in your vocabulary. You heard someone else call me that and picked it up and you're not even sure what it means. Call me a smart aleck bastard, if you will."

"All right, I will. Say, Frank, there were a hell of a lot of questions you didn't ask him. How come?"

"Why ask them in the dark? Let's have Doc's report first and make sure of identification. And, if it is Stiffler, see if we can get anything on his movements yesterday evening or last night. Then we'll be ready to tackle Medley again. And hard."

"Hell," I said, "Medley hasn't got anything to do with it. Why'd he have left the guy in his own back yard? He's got a car."

"I don't know," Frank said.

"And what connection would there be likely to be between him and Kurt Stiffler?"

"I don't know," Frank said. "And I told you, Red, I'm not sure it is Stiffler. I saw him only once and for a few minutes, and at a distance. That's going to be our first job, to get a positive identification."

"Now?"

"Hell, we're going to eat first. It's after one. How'd you go for pizza?"

"Show me one," I said. That's one thing I owe Frank Ramos; he introduced me to pizza pie. I'd never heard of it until I teamed up with him.

We were heading in on Broadway, nearing Park, so I knew the place he had in mind, right on the corner there. He put

the car in the parking lot alongside and we went in and took a booth. The waitress came over and we ordered two pizzas, one with anchovies and one with sausage. We always order different kinds and then share.

The waitress walked away and I watched. Frank said, "Get your mind back here, Red. One of us may as well phone Doc while we're waiting."

"You phone," I said. "Then I won't have to get my mind back here. It was doing all right where it was."

He said, "Nuts. We'll flip." He took out a coin and flipped it and I called heads and it came up tails.

I went over to the phone, dialed Doc Raeburn and got him. "Red Cahan, Doc," I said. "What's cooking?"

"Nothing much. I just got back from the mortuary. We got him stripped and on a slab. I've looked him over on the outside. And I can't look him over on the inside unless I get an order for an autopsy."

"If we get it for you right away, can you do it today?"

"Well—I *can*, yes. But listen, Red, I suggest you boys get identification first, if at all possible. Once I go after that bullet, God knows how much of the skull I'm going to have to take apart to get it. It's going to be a lot easier on everybody concerned if you can get identification over with first."

"Okay, Doc. And we may get an ident right quick like, if Frank's right; he thinks he recognizes the guy. But in case we do hold up the autopsy for a while, how much can you give us right now?"

"You want description—height, weight, guess at age, that kind of thing?"

"That'll keep till we find if Frank's right or not. How near can you give us time of death?"

"Pretty roughly, with only rigor to go by. But I'd say that as of when I first saw him—a few minutes before noon—he'd been dead not under six hours, not over twelve."

"That'd make it between midnight and 6 A.M. That's pretty rough, all right."

"Yeah. If you want it much closer, find out when and what he ate last. Then degree of digestion of stomach contents will let me give it to you pretty damn close. Anything else?"

"No doubt about cause of death?"

"That bullet hole is the only mark on him. I'd say a small caliber bullet, probably a twenty-two. Fired close—not quite contact but only a few inches from it. And from a small gun."

"Why a small gun?"

"It didn't go through. A powerful gun, even with a small caliber bullet, would have gone through. Even a twenty-two long rifle cartridge fired through a six-inch barrel would have."

"And you still think, like you said out there, that he was shot where he was found and lay the way he fell?"

"Don't put words in my mouth, Red. I didn't say that. I said it could have been that way. There wasn't much blood on that root under the back of his head but there was a little, and a wound like that doesn't bleed much. And he could have fallen the way he lay."

"Okay, Doc," I said. "Hold the fort and don't let him get away from you."

When I got back to our booth our pizzas had just arrived so I said only, "Nothing startling," and dived in. Later, over our coffee, I gave Frank what Doc Raeburn had given me, such as it was.

He said, "Well, we want that autopsy so we'll push for identification. But Cap will want to know what we're doing so we'd better phone him. I'll do that."

"We got time for another cup of?"

"Guess so. We'll probably be working this evening so we got it coming. You get us refills while I phone in."

I did, and batted the breeze with the waitress while he was

gone, but he came back before I'd started to get anywhere with her so I let it go.

"It's okay," Frank said. "We're to stick with the Stiffler angle. And we're even getting some help. Jay wasn't doing anything so Cap said he'd put him on getting some dope on this Medley character."

I just nodded and Frank stirred his coffee a minute and then looked over at me. "Red, did you take a look at that place where he said he'd buried the collie?"

"Sure. I looked all over the yard. Why?"

"Had a thought. If I wanted to bury a revolver and if I'd read Poe I might put a little white cross over where I buried it to call attention to it so nobody'd think to dig there."

I said, "I don't get it. But anyway, he didn't. That grave had been dug a long time ago. Frank, I think you're out of your head on this Medley angle."

"Maybe so. You figure he's husky enough to carry a body? Say, from his house out into the yard?"

"I guess so. But I say if he carried it, he'd have carried it to his car and rolled it out along the railroad tracks or somewhere, *not* left it in his own back yard. What the hell would he do that for?"

He didn't answer that and we didn't talk any more till we'd paid our checks and were heading for the car. We always take turns driving and it was my turn so I said, "Where to, Frank?"

"Forty-four East Burke Street. I don't know whether he'd still have been staying there, but that was the address of the family at the time of the accident."

"You get it from Cap?"

"It was in the paper."

"Jesus, Frank," I said. "You mean you read a news story about an accident two weeks ago, and remember the street address of the family it happened to?"

"I'm not that good, Red. Happened to remember it for a reason. Little over a year ago, before we teamed up, I worked on a knifing case, a hell of a messy one, at forty-three East Burke. I remember *that* address—God knows I should—and when I was reading about the Stiffler business, it hit me they lived right across the street from there."

One thing I'll say for Frank, smart as he is and fresh as he is, he never takes credit for more than he's got coming. Except in a razzing way, sometimes. Most of the time we get along all right.

I made the Burke Street address in eight minutes.

It's an old neighborhood, not quite a slum but heading that way fast. Forty-four was a two-story frame building flush with the sidewalk. There's a little run-down grocery store in front and a side entrance that leads to rooms and flats behind it and above it.

There were a dozen mailboxes in the dim and dingy hallway. Some of them had names on them and the name on the box numbered six was Stiffler.

We climbed the uncarpeted stairs and found a door with the number that matched the one on the mailbox. I knocked and we stood there waiting.

There wasn't any answer. But if Frank was right, of course there wouldn't be any. It was funny to think that up to two weeks ago five people had lived behind that door and now at least four of them were dead. All of them, if Kurt was dead too. Nobody would ever be home again.

"How old was Kurt Stiffler, Frank?" I asked. "That is, if you remember from the story."

"I remember all right," he said. "One year younger than I. And that makes him exactly your age."

My age, thirty-three. Jesus but Fate can swing on a guy suddenly and knock him flat.

"Well," I said, "should we try some more doors? We can at

least find out if he was still living there. He might not have bothered to take his name off the mailbox if he moved."

Frank nodded and moved to the door on our right, and I moved with him. This time he knocked. And this time the knock was answered. A fat Mexican woman with a gray shawl around her shoulders opened it and stared suspiciously at us.

"*Buenas tardes, Madre,*" Frank said, taking off his hat. "*No está en casa el señor Stiffler, pero—*"

That far I could follow and then the Spanish got too much for me and sounded like gibberish except for an occasional phrase like *lo siento mucho*. Which left me out of the conversation, but I knew it was better that way. The woman probably spoke English, maybe fairly good English, but he'd get a lot more out of her by talking to her in the language that came easiest to her.

They talked at least ten minutes, her voice sullen at first and giving only short answers, but gradually getting friendlier and doing more and more of the talking. Frank's great at handling older women. I think I do better on the younger ones.

Finally a "*Mil gracias,*" from Frank and a "*De nada, mi hijo,*" from her ended it and the door closed.

"*Qué pasa?*" I asked him. "Which, if you don't speak Spanish, my son, means 'What gives?'"

We moved a little way from the door, toward the head of the stairs.

"He's still living there—or was," Frank said. "She last saw him, and talked to him briefly, yesterday morning."

"Take her ten minutes to tell you that?"

"The rest was just general stuff about the Stiffles and about the accident. May not mean anything, but I'll tell you later, after the identification."

"Hey," I said, "what's *about* the identification? Your *madre*

there knew him. Why don't we snag her off and take her down to the mortuary for a look-see?"

"Because something she told me gives us a better bet. The person closest to him is Father Trent, at St. Matthew's. He probably knows more about Stiffler than anyone alive. And I know *him*, slightly. I'd a lot rather have him do the identifying."

"All right," I said. "Let's get him and get it over with." We were going to feel plenty foolish already if the guy who'd been killed turned out to be somebody else who just happened to look like Stiffler. But Frank's pretty good on remembering faces, as well as other things, and I wasn't too worried.

In fact, I felt sure enough so when we got in the car, I said, "Frank, will you brief me again on that God damn accident? I read about it casually but I don't remember all the details. Just what a horrible thing it was."

"Kurt Stiffler was driving. An old jalopy he'd bought for fifty bucks the week before. It was the first car he'd ever owned—but that doesn't mean he wasn't a good driver, or couldn't have been one, because he'd driven a taxi in Mexico City."

"Than which," I said, "there is no whicher. They drive like maniacs down there. But go on."

"His wife—Mexican girl—and three kids were in the car with him. Two boys and a girl, all under ten but I don't remember exact ages or which was which. Or who was sitting ~~where~~—not that either of those things matters. They'd been to a Mexican wedding down in Nogales—not across the border; Nogales, Arizona, on this side. They'd left around ten and around midnight they were nearing Tucson, a few miles south of the airport."

"In which case," I said, "they hadn't been speeding. Almost two hours to drive sixty miles."

"And all of it such smooth straight road that even sixty

isn't speeding—although it might be for a jalopy. But there was a car coming toward them and suddenly the Stiffler car swerved toward it across the center of the road. Tire marks proved that—it's not a matter of taking anybody's word. It didn't hit the other car square but it was a hell of a sideswipe and both cars went off the road. The other car plowed through a fence and stopped upright but Kurt's rolled over twice."

Frank was pulling the car into a parking space; St. Matthews had been only four blocks away and we were there. I said, "Let's sit here a minute. Finish before we go in."

"Okay. Kurt was thrown clear; didn't even get a scratch, somehow or other. His wife and one kid were killed instantly. Another kid died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital and the third kid a couple of hours after they got him there. The driver of the other car—only person in it—died the next day. His chest had been crushed against the steering post. A salesman from Phoenix.

"Well, that's it. Cause was probably a blowout but Stiffler said he didn't hear a tire go; the wheel just jerked in his hands. The shape the car and tires were in afterwards you couldn't prove it one way or another."

Frank lit a cigarette. He said, "Well, they took Kurt in and booked him after he admitted he'd been drinking. Open charge—they were going to decide later between drunken driving and manslaughter."

"The poor guy," I said.

"Yeah. Hearing was the next day. I happened to be going by the door and looked in; that's the one time I saw him. He looked like a dead man and I think he wanted to be one. And from his own answers—I didn't hear them because I had time to look in for only a minute—he *wanted* to take the blame, and I guess he'd have had the book thrown at him.

"But somebody—and now that I know Father Trent was close to Kurt, I've got a pretty good idea who—had got him

a lawyer. Lawyer talked the judge into an adjournment till the next day, and the next day he had half a dozen witnesses who'd been at that wedding party in Nogales. And they swore Kurt had been sober when he left there. He'd had a few glasses—not over three small ones, they all agreed—of light wine early in the evening. But at eight o'clock they'd had a big dinner and Kurt had not drunk during the dinner or after. So the few light drinks he'd had he'd taken over four hours before the accident, and with a gut full of grub and then two hours of driving in between, he couldn't possibly still have been feeling them. That put him in the clear, except for the civil suit."

"Civil suit? I didn't read about that, Frank. Must have missed it."

"The wife of the salesman who was killed in the other car was bringing suit against him, some fantastic figure considering his ability to pay. And he didn't have insurance, naturally."

"The court would have cut down a figure that was out of line," I said.

"Sure, but there'd still have been a sizeable judgment against him. In the thousands, regardless of how many. You see, he *was* liable, no doubt about that. Even if an accident is the fault of a defect in your car, like a tire blowout, you're legally liable for damages. Not criminally liable, now, but if the other driver is in his lane and you cross over the middle line and smash him, brother, you've had it. You're liable for damages to him, no matter whether it's really your fault or not."

"Consider me briefed," I said. "Let's go see Father—uh, what'd you say his name was?"

"Trent. Let me do the talking."

"When don't I?"

And a few minutes later we were sitting in the Father's

study; Frank had introduced me and we'd made ourselves comfortable. The Father looked younger than either Frank or me; I'd say thirty or a year or two under.

"Social call, Frank?" he asked. "Or bad news about one of my people?"

"I'm not sure, Father," Frank said. "We haven't identification as yet. We'd like you to look at a body, if you will, and tell us if it is one of your parishioners."

He nodded slowly. "Of course—but you must have some reason for thinking so. May I ask who you think it is?"

"We're not sure. It may be Kurt Stiffler."

He bent his head a moment and closed his eyes; his lips didn't move but he may have been praying.

Frank said, "If it is Kurt, it's not what you've probably been afraid of. It wasn't accident, but the wound that caused death could not have been self-inflicted. He didn't commit suicide."

He kept his eyes closed a second longer, then opened them and stood up. "Will you take me there right away? I know you'll have a lot of questions to ask, if it is he. But that can wait, can't it?"

"Of course," Frank said. We were standing too, by then. "We'll use our car, Father. And we'll bring you back here afterwards. Whether or not."

It was whether, and not not. He made the identification all right. And I phoned in and told Cap the identification was official before we left the mortuary. He said okay and he'd get a post-mortem order over to Raeburn right away and that we should stay with Father Trent and get his story before we reported in. Since we had to take him back to St. Matthews anyway.

It was quite a story.

THREE

FRANK RAMOS

Night pressed against the windshield. I was driving and I was tired. I turned the car into the police garage and parked it, turned off the lights and the ignition.

"What time is it, Red?" I asked.

"Pushing nine. Well, I'm for a beer. How's about you?"

I said, "A drink might do me good. Not a beer."

"Okay, let's get in my heap then. We'll stop at El Presidio and I'll drive you on home if we're ready to leave at the same time." Red lives way out on Oracle Road and drives to and from work; my place is only seven blocks from downtown and it's less trouble to leave my car in the garage and walk. But I was so tired tonight that the offer of a lift home sounded more enticing than the drink.

We went to the parking lot and got Red's car. A better one than mine, because being single he can afford a better one. Red drives a sleek black Buick convertible; it's four years old but he keeps it shined and tuned within an inch of its life. It looks like, and is, a lot of car.

"Hell of a nice night," Red said, as we got into the Buick.

It was, but I didn't feel like talking so I just grunted an affirmative. I didn't feel like thinking, either, particularly about the case we were working on, but I couldn't help that.

I didn't like it, and I was going to like it less. Call that a premonition if you want; I don't believe in premonitions but I've had a few and this one was the strongest yet.

Nothing I could put my finger on. We didn't have a single lead that seemed to mean anything, but it wasn't that; cases often start that way. Then something breaks and it's in the bag. But this one made nuts.

Take John Medley. A solid citizen. Jay Byrne put in a good afternoon's work on him and everything he'd turned up checked with what Medley had told us. Up to six and a half years ago, anyway, and there didn't seem to be any point in checking back farther than that. That was when he'd bought the house on Campbell Street, as he'd told us. And at about the same time he'd opened an account at the Cowmen's Bank with a sizable draft on a Chicago bank. Occasional largish withdrawals and deposits were always, the head teller told Jay, checks to and from several escrow companies handling real estate transactions. Approximately once a month he drew a hundred in cash and the other small checks he wrote were routine ones, for department store accounts, utility bills and the like. The real estate transaction checks totaled considerably higher on the deposit side than on the withdrawal side; his account had for several years remained at about the same level despite the cash and other routine checks drawn against it. Obviously his dabbling, as he'd called it, in real estate was earning him a living. His credit rating was excellent and the bank and the escrow companies with which he dealt thought highly of him. Nothing against him that Jay could find, not even a traffic ticket. Yes, a very solid citizen.

Take Kurt Stiffler. Not even a citizen, solid or otherwise. Father Trent had given us his background. Kurt had been born in Germany in very troubled times there, the early twenties. Very poor timing, for his father had had a Jewish

grandmother. That made Reinhard Stiffler a Jew, despite the fact that he was a Catholic and had raised Kurt as one. Kurt's mother had died in bearing him; he was an only child, and sickly. He was ten years old when Hitler came into power and the pogroms started. Two years later, when Kurt was twelve, his father had had a chance to escape from Germany and had taken the opportunity despite the fact that he was unable to take his son with him. He had left Kurt with an aunt and uncle; the aunt had been Kurt's mother's sister and there was no taint of Jewry in the family so Kurt might have been safe with them. Might have been, but had not been. Within a few months his uncle had been accused and convicted of opposition to the Nazis and the investigation had brought out Kurt's ancestry. What had happened to the aunt and uncle neither Kurt nor his father ever learned but Kurt, now branded not only as a Jew but as the ward of traitors, had been put into a concentration camp at the age of twelve. Miraculously, he survived ten years there, and grew to young manhood behind barbed wire. But it broke his health completely; he was never strong again and was to be a semi-invalid all his life.

Meanwhile Reinhard Stiffler had reached Mexico and after working for another German there for a few years had learned the language and the ropes sufficiently and had become solvent enough to open a small haberdashery shop in Mexico City. After the war, he was able to locate Kurt and send for him.

Kurt was twenty-two when he joined his father in Mexico. For a while he was unable to do more than rest, try to regain his health and, with the help of his father and a friend of his father's who was a teacher, work at supplementing his very scanty education and at learning a new language. For a while things went well; he did gain enough stamina to enable him to be of some help to his father in the shop and he seemed

to be getting stronger. At twenty-four he had married a Mexican girl; they had three children in the next five years and all the children, at least, were strong and healthy. Then again, four years ago when he was twenty-nine, the bottom had fallen out of things. His father died and, quite suddenly, the shop was bankrupt and lost and he was broke. He struggled to make a living, trying one thing after another, most of them too hard for him. Soon he found himself and his family living near the edge of bare subsistence—and subsistence in Mexico can be far barer than Americans realize.

A priest who was a friend thought he might do better in the United States; another friend offered to lend him money for the trip. The priest was a friend of Father Trent's; with Trent's help he had got into the country on a temporary visa which might be renewable. They'd reached Tucson four months ago. Father Trent had helped him get a job as time-keeper on a construction project and he had been doing well at it. Most of the workers were Spanish-speaking and he had already enough English to get by with the others. The boss spoke German and had himself been a refugee from the Nazis twenty years before. Kurt's health, Father Trent told us, was at least no worse. Both Trent and Kurt's boss had been working on his behalf and there seemed little doubt but that, when the six months of his visa were up he'd be able to obtain an extension and eventually to become an American citizen. There was no doubt at all but that he liked it here. He had already paid off almost all the money his father's friend had lent him for bus fare from Mexico City to Tucson. And had bought, on time payments, the old jalopy that was the first car he had ever owned, and in which their first trip out of town had been the sixty-odd mile trip down to Nogales to the wedding.

What connection could there possibly be between John

Medley and Kurt Stiffler? Logically, none. To date, no one we'd talked to who knew Kurt had ever heard of Medley; no one who knew Medley knew Kurt, except through reading of his tragic accident in the newspapers.

Maybe I was wrong.

"Well, you going to sit there?" Red asked me. I woke up to the fact that we were parked in front of El Presidio and that he'd already got out of his side of the car and had closed the door. I got out, too, and went into the bar.

We took stools. Red ordered beer. (Beer, cowboy music, Western stories, square dancing; that's my Red. He'd wear a Stetson and twin six guns if they'd let him, and carry a *git-tar* too.) I usually drink highballs but this time I needed a quick lift so I took a double straight and downed it, then ordered myself a highball to drink at leisure. Red was dropping coins in the juke box. I don't know why he does; he never seems to listen to the resulting noise, talks right over it.

He came back. "Look," he said, "it could of been this way. This Stiffler and somebody else plan a burglary and pick that house. In the back yard there they get in a fight and the other guy shoots Stiffler."

"To put it in a nutshell," I said, "nuts."

"Why not? Just because Trent says Stiffler was a wonderful young man. Maybe he was, but maybe losing his whole family all at once like that, and blaming himself for it, sent him off his rocker."

"It might have, Red. But not that way."

"All right then, smart guy. What *did* happen?"

"I don't know," I said. "I haven't the faintest God damn idea. Let's forget about it for tonight."

"Okay. What'll we do tomorrow?"

"Go to work," I said. "And do whatever the captain tells us to do. What else?"

"Aw, go soak your head. How'd you like to bowl a game?"

"With human heads it might be interesting. Not otherwise. But I'll shake you dice for a drink."

We shook and I lost, as usual, and bought myself another drink and bought Red a beer and a pack of cigarettes. When we shake for drinks we always do it that way, since he always drinks beer and I never do, and it comes out even.

Red put more money in the juke box and then got into a baseball argument with the man on the next stool and I sat and watched myself in the backbar mirror until my drink was finished and then I nudged Red and asked him if I should shake back.

He considered it. "Guess not, Frank. Think I'm getting sleepy. Let's pull freight."

"You pull freight," I said. "I'm not sleepy and I'm too tired to go home. I'm going to have a couple more." And I signaled the bartender to make me one.

Red finished his beer and then turned to go, putting a hand on my shoulder. I think that, since I'm a Mexican—by race, of course, not nationality—it makes him feel democratic to do that once in a while. Well, I guess he *is* democratic, except when it comes to Negroes; he wouldn't put a friendly hand on a Negro's shoulder.

"Night, Frank," he said. And then, "Watch it, boy; don't turn into an alcoholic."

"Don't worry," I said.

I might have said a lot more than that. I might have told him that there wasn't any danger of my becoming an alcoholic because I couldn't afford it. One in a family is enough; somebody's got to earn the money to buy liquor.

I've never invited Red or any of the other boys home. Not that, at least half of the time, it wouldn't be all right for me to do so. But I never know in advance which time would be right and which time would be wrong.

Not usually, anyway. Tonight would have been a wrong time if I'd had any idea of letting Red drive me home and then asking him in. I'd phoned Alice this afternoon to let her know I'd be working late. The sound of her voice on the phone told me she'd been drinking fairly heavily already and that there wouldn't be any dinner ready for me even if I got home for it.

By now, I felt sure, she'd have passed out. I hoped so.

But that is none of anybody else's business and I'll say for her that she keeps out of trouble and nobody down at headquarters knows about it. I'll say more than that for her. It's crazy, but I still love her. After things that have happened I suppose I shouldn't. But I understand—in a dim sort of way. And isn't it always in a dim sort of way that we understand anybody?

Sometimes I wonder why people stay sober.

I have to. As Joe Friday says on television, I'm a cop. Maybe I don't feel the same degree of devotion about it that Joe does, but I try to do a good job, nasty as the job is to do sometimes. As a cop you see all the bad things, all the dirty messes people make of their own lives and others'.

But it's a job, and somebody's got to do it. It's a job like any job, and I've got twelve years' seniority at it now. I don't know any job that I'm any better fitted for. I've a fairly good education, but a general education, not specialized. I like good books and good music and I can tell Picasso from pistachio, but nobody pays you for reading or listening or looking. I had to leave college after two years, at nineteen, and go to work, and jobs I had the first three years made getting on as a rookie patrolman look like a big deal, and maybe it was. It was all right, anyway, and it was steady. I was thirty by the time I got out of uniform but a lot of cops never do. And I don't expect any more to set the world on fire.

I looked up at the clock and saw it was three minutes after

ten. Approximately, that is. Has it ever occurred to you that no one can tell time except approximately? If you think "three minutes after ten," the very act of thinking it takes time and the pin-point instant is lost somewhere, and you don't know just where, in the duration of your thinking. Or: "At the sound of the chime it will be exactly—?" Exactly? If it was, then you heard it a fraction of a second later, it took another fraction of a second for the sound to register and be translated into thought in your mind. Time never stands still to be named. Already it was four minutes after ten. Approximately, that is.

Jerry the bartender must have seen me looking at the clock for he came over and asked me, "Time for another?" "Let you know in a minute," I told him, and went to the phone booth. If Alice was home and still awake, I'd probably better go. I dialed my number and counted twelve rings, but there wasn't any answer.

I went back and ordered the drink. But it would have to be the last for tonight, I knew. If I ordered one more it would be all too easy to order ten more. Tomorrow was going to be a big day.

Or should be. We'd got nowhere today, except identification and a little general background. Still no autopsy, and I had a hunch we wouldn't get to first base in this case without it. Dr. Raeburn had promised faithfully, though, that he would make it his first order of business in the morning. We still hadn't found anybody who'd seen him since he'd left work at five o'clock, which was at least seven hours before he was killed, possibly as long as eleven hours. No one we'd talked to, including and especially Father Trent, could suggest any possible motive anybody on earth could have for wanting Kurt Stiffler dead. Most people we'd talked to had tended, when told we were the police and were investigating his

death, to jump to the conclusion that he'd killed himself. God knows most suicides have less reason.

But he couldn't have, without an accomplice. And nobody commits suicide *with* an accomplice, unless it's a suicide pact, which didn't fit here.

Hell, I told myself; we haven't all the facts yet. Maybe when we have all the facts it'll begin to make sense. Maybe. Maybe there'll be pie in the sky by and by. Maybe the clear end of the stick is up There.

I walked home. The cool night air felt good, but I didn't.

There was a drone high in the sky and I looked up. I saw a full moon, big and round and yellow, near the zenith and as I watched a jet bomber crossed it, perfectly silhouetted against it for a fleeting second. A rare thing, I thought, and then I wondered why; any plane in the sky on any clear moonlit night must at every instant be between the moon and some point on earth. But I had never seen such a transit before.

As I neared my house—mine, if I keep up the payments another fourteen years or so—I saw that the kitchen light was on. That did not necessarily mean that Alice was in the kitchen, or even at home. And it meant neither, I found out when I let myself in and looked through the house, all four rooms of it. She'd gone out somewhere, probably to one of the two neighborhood taverns within walking distance, past the stage of wanting to drink alone, looking for company. But only to talk to; I felt sure of that. She hadn't taken the car, of course; she didn't know how to drive one. During the first year of our marriage, seven years ago, I'd tried to talk her into learning how to drive but she'd had some phobia against it, not about riding in cars but about driving one herself. I was glad of that now, of course. If it wasn't for those damned phobias of hers her drinking wouldn't have been increasing

steadily for five years now; up to then her drinking had been normal, even less than mine. I've often wondered how much of it was my fault; not all of it, I knew; the seeds had been there all along. But neither was I completely blameless; there were things I should have done and didn't do, things I should not have done and did do.

Just the same I looked in the garage and in the car. One night almost a year ago, coming home after working late like tonight, I'd had a bad two hours worrying about her after one o'clock when the taverns close. I'd fought against phoning headquarters and I did phone the hospitals. At three in the morning I'd decided to drive to headquarters rather than phone there, to see if they had her or any report on her, and I'd found her curled up sound asleep in the back seat of the car. Later she hadn't remembered going there and hadn't been able to tell me why she had done so, but undoubtedly it had been the wish, in drink, to hurt me by making me worry about her. And she'd succeeded.

But tonight she wasn't there. The Old Gray Mare, as we call our '47 Plymouth, stood empty and alone. I went back into the house and looked around, making like a detective so I could judge, from what had happened, how rough a deal I was in for this time.

It wasn't too good. The bedroom was messy (Alice is a meticulous housekeeper when she isn't drinking) and the bed had been slept in, and for a fairish length of time. That was bad because if she'd had a few hours sleep and started over she probably wouldn't get sleepy again for a long time. And I wouldn't sleep, I knew, until she did and in all probability I was in for a pretty sleepless night.

The kitchen was a mild shambles. She'd done her drinking there. She'd killed one pint of whiskey and part of another and five cans of beer. But she hadn't gone out just to replenish stock because only about a third was gone from

the second pint and there were still several cans of beer in the refrigerator. No indication that she'd eaten anything since breakfast; toast scraps from our breakfast together this morning were still on top in the step-on garbage can and the breakfast dishes were still unwashed. (It had been a perfectly normal breakfast. We hadn't quarreled and she'd seemed quite all right; there'd been no indication that she was about to start drinking again and maybe she herself hadn't known it then. The only way I might have guessed was from the fact that it had been several days since she'd done any drinking and currently she seldom stayed away from it longer than that. One day in three was about the average. Almost always starting early in the day when she started.) No sign that she'd eaten anything but she'd started to cook something and had never finished, never put it into the oven. But there was flour on the floor and on the drain board of the sink and a cake pan with some dough in it. The recipe book was open on the table and it was open to a recipe for upside-down cake. I wondered if there was subconscious—or even conscious, if drunken—symbolism in that. The world was upside down for Alice. Maybe she was waiting for the White Rabbit to come along and take a gold watch out his pocket and look at it, and then show her the way down the rabbit hole into schizophrenia. Maybe then, under treatment, something could be done about it. Not sooner; she flared into her worst spells of anger if I so much as mentioned psychiatry. Or became sullen if I tried to discuss her drinking with her, even calmly and as though it were a problem in itself, which of course it isn't. All problems form a continuous nexus and no problem is an island.

I straightened things up a bit and put the unbaked cake in the refrigerator. Tomorrow she'd no doubt be surprised to find it there but she could decide then whether to throw it away or to try baking it.

Alice, Where Art Thou? Nine to one she was at one of the two relatively nearby taverns, but it would relieve my mind a little to know for sure. I couldn't go around to them—it would just start an argument with her if I found her; it would probably antagonize her to the point where next time she'd take a taxi and go farther afield. But I knew the proprietors of both places and I could phone. Harry's Tavern was the more likely of the two so I tried it first.

Harry himself answered and I said, "Harry, this is Ramos. Is Alice there? Don't tell her I'm calling if she is."

She must have been within hearing distance of the phone because he said, "Yes, Bill." He knows my first name well enough.

"Good," I said. "How she doing?"

"Well, pretty fair."

"Okay, Harry. Phone me if you need me. I'll be home from now on. I'll be there at one if I haven't heard from you sooner. And thanks."

She might or might not resent my picking her up at closing time but I'd rather take a chance on that than on her walking home alone at that time, even though the neighborhood's a pretty safe one. At the worst, even if she refused to get in the car and insisted on walking, I could keep her in sight on the way. That would give her something to fight about after we got home but if she was in that bad a mood, she'd find something else to start a quarrel about anyway.

I stood and stretched and looked at the clock. Almost half past eleven. No reason why I shouldn't set the alarm for twelve forty-five and get in an hour's sleep or better. No reason except that, tired as I was, I wasn't sleepy now; I'd just lie there and think, and I didn't want to think.

Nor drink, nor read, nor listen to music. Not serious music, anyway; maybe something light would help time move a little faster.

Most of what lighter music I have is on ten-inch LP's, so I turned on the phonograph to warm up and started looking through the stack of ten-inch records. *Medley from South Pacific*.

No Medleys, thank you. One a day is enough. *I do not love thee, Doctor Fell; the reason why I cannot tell. I do not love thee, Mister Medley*—But what rhymes with Medley? Nothing that I could think of, and to hell with it.

Songs by Tom Lehrer. That would do it, and I hadn't listened to them for a couple of months now. Macabre as a charnel house and funny as hell. I put the record on.

The Irish Ballad started:

About a maid I'll sing a song
Who didn't have her family long,
Not only did she do them wrong,
She did every one of them in.

Her mother she could never stand,
Sing rickety-tickety-tin,
Her mother she could never stand,
And so a cyanide soup she planned.
The mother died with a spoon in her hand,
And her face in a hideous grin, a grin,
Her face in a hideous grin.

Very lovely stuff. I began to relax enough to realize just how tired and tense I'd been.

She set her sister's hair on fire,
Sing rickety-tickety-tin,
She set her sister's hair on fire,
And as the smoke and flame rose high'r,
Danced around the funeral pyre,
Playing a violin, —olin,
Playing a violin.

I felt relaxed enough now to sip at a can of beer so I turned up the volume enough to hear while I went out to the kitchen and got one.

She weighted her brother down with stones,
Sing rickety-tickety-tin,
And sent him off to Davy Jones.
All they ever found were some bones,
And occasional pieces of skin, of skin,
Occasional pieces of skin.

I found myself chuckling a bit, all to myself.

One day when she had nothing to do,
Sing rickety-tickety-tin,
One day when she had nothing to do,
She cut her baby brother in two,
And served him up as an Irish stew,
And invited the neighbors in, —bors in,
Invited the neighbors in.

And just then I thought of a word that rhymed with Medley. Deadly. But *why*? And why couldn't I accept John Medley at face value, as everyone else did? People don't kill without reason—except homicidal maniacs and Medley wasn't one—and what possible reason could he have had for killing, of all people, Kurt Stiffler? And why couldn't I stop thinking about it now, on my own time? Avaunt, John Medley. Let me alone, at least until I start working again tomorrow.

For a while I succeeded in not thinking, just listening. Through the rest of *The Irish Ballad*, *The Hunting Song*, about the hunter who bagged two game wardens, seven hunters, and a cow; *My Home Town*, featuring among other homespun characters the druggist on the corner who killed his mother-in-law, ground her up real well, "*And sprinkled*

just a bit, Over each banana split," and now he was singing my favorite:

I hold your hand in mine, dear,
I press it to my lips . . .

And on to:

The night you died I cut it off,
I really don't know why.
For now each time I kiss it,
I get bloodstains on my tie. . . .

After the Lehrer songs the other records I played seemed dull, but I played some and finally started to get sleepy, but too late now to sneak in that nap; it was only twenty-five minutes short of one o'clock. And the phone rang. I shut off the phonograph and went to it.

It was Harry. "Sorry, Frank, but I think you'd better come get Alice."

"Okay," I said. "She pass out?"

"No, nowhere near it. But she's getting—well, I'm afraid she might start trouble with a couple here; she's getting pretty proddy. She's back in the can right now, so I had a chance to call you."

"I'll be there right away," I said. "Thanks, Harry."

I put my suit coat on again and went out, back to the garage. I opened the door but before I went in to get into the car I found myself staring up at the moon again. The same moon but now, well down from the zenith, looking even bigger and rounder.

No plane crossed it this time, nor a pterodactyl nor a sparrow. But why did it make me think of the round bland face of John Medley? Am I getting an obsession?

FOUR

JOHN MEDLEY

As always in a dream, part of my mind knew that I was dreaming. But it never helps; it makes things more horrible to know, for I am struggling to escape to wakefulness, and I cannot. The dream holds me and will not let me go. Perhaps it is only for a moment, but it is a frozen moment that seems an eternity. How many eternities can a man go through?

Dierdre, Dierdre my beloved. It is always Dierdre.

God, I pray, she is at peace. She is with You. Will You not let her be at peace also in my mind and in my dreams? Have I not yet served You, acted as Your Instrument, enough times? Through me, you are merciful to others. How long, O God, before You extend that mercy unto me? If not to let me die, at least to take away these dreams, these mares of Hell that ride me in the night. I know You do not send them, but will You not stop the one who does, release from bondage to him the part of my soul that he holds and torments in the night?

How many times will You let him make me kill Dierdre again, and in how many ways?

This time it is the pistol and I hold it to the back of her head as she looks unsuspectingly from the window, and then I pull the trigger. The gun explodes deafeningly in the room and I see the tiny mark where it entered. But she does not fall.

She turns back toward me and *her face is gone*. It is a red, bloody oval out of which one eye stares at me and from which the other eye dangles horribly. Her lipless mouth is open and she screams, she *screams*.

Forever. Though I know I dream, though I know this is not real, it is horrible and it is, or it seems, forever.

But thank You, God, that it only seemed. It is gone now. She is gone.

As I lie wide awake now I hear the clock in the living room strike once. What time is it? Half past something, but half past what? Why do I wonder; what does it matter to me? It could be one o'clock, of course, but I do not think so; I came to bed at midnight and feel that I must have slept for longer than an hour before the dream awakened me.

Those half-hour single chimes! How often have I heard them in the night and thought of getting a different clock, one that does not chime the half hour, or one that chimes a number first and then, after a pause, the single chime that indicates the half. By day, of course, it does not matter. One has rough track of time in mind and can judge. But by night a single chime arouses curiosity and does not satisfy it.

It should not matter, but it does. I want to know how many hours of the night are gone and how many remain and that there is no good reason for my wanting to know does not stop the wanting.

Now I must either turn on a light or lie here until the clock chimes the next hour. And tonight I do not want to turn on a light because the police, even though they seemed to suspect nothing, might be watching the house, and knowing that I had awakened and turned on the light, might think that I lie sleepless because of guilt and fear. And they would be right, though wrong; I feel no guilt for killing Kurt Stiffler and no fear of consequences. My guilt is for a real crime and my fear is of dreams. I have no fear that the police will seri-

ously come to believe that I killed that boy, but I do not want them even to suspect that I *might* have, for then they would become annoying. So I shall not turn on my light.

In my mind, more to pass the time than because I am worried, I again run over the things I did Tuesday night.

I made no error, left no trail to myself. Except, of course, leaving the body in my own yard. And that in itself, in the complete absence of any other clue pointing toward me, cannot but make me look innocent instead of guilty. Why, they must have asked themselves, would a murderer leave the body of his victim on his own property when he could easily have moved it elsewhere, having had the whole night to do so? Indeed, why *did* I leave it there? Was that my reasoning when I changed my original plan to put him in the car and leave him near the railroad tracks? It is odd, but my mind clouds just a bit on that one point and I cannot now be certain. Yet it must have been that way. Every other point is clear as crystal in my memory.

No one saw me enter that shabby building where he lived; at least, no one noticed me. I met no one in the hallway or on the stairs, no one saw me when I knocked on his door. No one but Stiffler saw me enter or heard us talk, no one saw us leave together a few minutes later. And in that sordid little place, so tiny for five people to have lived in, I left no sign that I had been there. Not even a fingerprint. I touched nothing there but Stiffler's hand when he offered it as I introduced myself. No one saw us on our way out and I feel certain that we, or at least I, made the short distance to where I had parked my car without being observed. If someone had recognized Stiffler from a distance they would not be able to describe or identify me.

Nor were we observed at the other end of the drive. When I neared my own place my first thought was to look at the Armstrong house and it was still dark, as it had been when I

had left. Mrs. Armstrong and her daughter—a quite pretty girl, a redhead—had gone to a drive-in theater. And they are the only neighbors near enough to have been likely to notice or remember my leaving or my returning. If another neighbor had noticed he would not have been able to see, in the darkness, that I brought another person with me, for I drove the car into the carport and we debarked there and entered the house through the door that leads directly into the house from the carport. True, if even my car had been seen leaving or returning, then I had taken a risk in telling the detectives that I had not left the house at all. But it would be easy to remember that I had run out of cigarettes and had driven up to the drugstore on Broadway to get some. I had actually made such a stop, on my way to get Stiffler, and the druggist would bear me out if he remembered.

And inside my house I had been careful, so careful, to notice everything that *he* touched or handled. Just as there were no prints of mine at his place, I wanted none of his at mine.

I waited half an hour or a little longer before I killed him. I thought of waiting longer, for a plane or a truck to pass and to muffle the sound of the shot. But a look from the side window a moment before showed me that the Armstrongs were still away, and my other neighbors are so relatively remote that I could overlook the slight possibility of their hearing, or at least of their identifying the sound and the direction from which it came.

One piece of Kleenex caught the few drops of blood that might otherwise have fallen. I took him out into the yard at once. It was while I was placing him there that the Armstrongs returned home, but I was in the deep shadow of the elm and simply waited there until they were safely inside their house before I returned to mine.

The rest was simple. I wiped every surface he had touched

or might have touched, then rubbed those surfaces with my own hands so they would not be suspiciously clean and blank. I made a very small fire in my fireplace and in the fire I burned Stiffler's wallet and its small contents and the piece of Kleenex that had caught the blood. Then I cleaned out the fireplace and flushed the ashes down the toilet, leaving no sign that I'd had a recent fire.

The other two things had to be done outdoors and I did them much later. I turned out my light at midnight, partly to have it go off at the usual time and partly to sit in darkness for a while to let my eyes accustom themselves to it so I could see outdoors. I sat there until the clock chimed the half hour and then I went into the carport and took care of possible fingerprints on the car.

From there to the alley and half a block down it before I put the pistol in someone else's garbage can. A perfectly safe way of disposing of it for the garbage from our alley is picked up early on Wednesday mornings and it would be gone before I would discover and report the body. And even if it were found—by the garbage collector when he emptied the can or later on the dump—there was no possible way the police could connect it to me. Anyone could have put it in the garbage can.

Coming back from the alley, I took what was probably my greatest single risk, slight though it was. It had to be done. I used a flashlight briefly to make sure that the body lay in a natural position and that there was no possible indication that it had been dragged there, especially from the direction of the house. His feet *had* dragged; I had managed to carry the rest of him. But the ground was very hard and no mark had been made.

Back in the house I got into bed in darkness and lay there going over every detail in my mind, making sure I'd left nothing undone and deciding that I hadn't.

As tonight, twenty-four hours later, I lay awake again thinking the same things and with the same results. I was completely safe now, even safer than I had been then. None of the few small things which remotely could have gone wrong had gone wrong.

And that in itself was proof that I had correctly interpreted God's will, even though the Sign he had given me this time was a less direct and obvious one than the others.

The clock chimed again, and a second time. Two o'clock. I knew now and I could go back to sleep.

But I didn't sleep at once. I heard it chime the half hour and then three times before I slept again.

FIVE

WALTER PETTIJOHN

I always get to headquarters early but this morning, Thursday morning, I came even earlier than usual. The Stiffler case looked bad; the boys hadn't turned up anything that looked even remotely like a lead. And I wanted to check over their reports and everything else on the case so I could get them off to a good start.

When I passed the switchboard Carmody said, "Good morning, Captain," as always—unless he's too busy handling calls—and I stopped a moment.

"Anything new, Sergeant?" I asked him.

"Knifing on the South Side just after midnight. Under control; we've got the guy who did it. Two burglaries way out east on Speedway. Looks like the same boys who've been working Stone. They didn't get much. That's all except a couple of A. & B.'s on Meyer Street."

Assault and battery cases on Meyer Street are a dime a dozen; a few short blocks in that section constitute the nearest thing Tucson has to a Skid Row, frequented mostly by Mexicans and Negroes.

"Nothing new turned up on the Stiffler case?"

Carmody shook his head and then, as the switchboard buzzed, started talking into the mouthpiece.

I hadn't expected there to be anything, of course. Except under special circumstances an investigation doesn't continue through the night. But there was always the possibility that something that happened might tie in.

Top thing in the basket on my desk was a brief note from Lieutenant Schroeder saying that Car Eight, the one which patrolled that district, had checked the Medley house at intervals throughout the evening and night, that the house had been dark and the car gone at nine twenty, that the car had been in the carport and the house lighted at eleven ten, that on all later checks, at twelve forty and three times later in the night, the car had still been there and the house had been dark. That fitted; Medley had explained to Frank and Red that he'd expected to attend a chess club. In fact, I wondered why I'd given in to Frank's suggestion that I have the squad car boys keep tab on the place. Certainly, from everything I'd heard, John Medley seemed to be above suspicion. But Frank gets funny ideas sometimes.

Frank's report was next; he'd been typing on it yesterday evening when I left. I'd had it all verbally, but now I gave it a thorough reading. Nothing there; they hadn't uncovered a thing. Jay's report on John Medley was there, but I'd already studied it.

It was only a few minutes before the boys would be coming in and, although there were other things in my basket, none of them concerned Stiffler and I glanced at them quickly and put them back again. The Stiffler case came first today. I picked up the phone and told Carmody to send Frank and Red in to see me as soon as they came in. I'd get them started before I gave out any more assignments. I did some thinking and made some notes.

Red Cahan came in first. He's a good boy, not brilliant but hard working, down to earth. I'd rather have one more like him than three more fancy boys like Ramos. I just can't like

Frank. It isn't that I've got any prejudice against Mexicans, and it's good to have a few of them on the force because Tucson has a fair percentage of Spanish-speaking people and they can be handled better by their own kind. And it isn't that I object to a detective having more education than he needs for the job. Maybe it's the combination of the two things, being Mexican and being fancily educated—and showing it.

I nodded to Red and told him to sit down. I made a few more notes and then looked at him. I said, "Well, Red, before Frank gets here, what's your slant on this?"

"Just how do you mean, Cap?"

"I've just read Frank's report. For both of you, sure, but he wrote it up. You agree with all of it?"

"Well—all the facts in it. I think Frank's a little overboard in worrying so much about this Medley guy."

"I agree with you," I told him. "What was your impression of Medley, personally?"

"Nice enough old duck. A little on the prissy side. But hell, there's no connection between him and Stiffler. Way I figure it whoever killed Stiffler—well, say he was killed in a car. They had to put him somewhere and picked Medley's yard by accident. I figure they carried him in from the alley."

I nodded. "Possible. Any reason, though, why they carried him so far inside the yard?"

"So he wouldn't be found as soon, maybe. If they'd left him in the alley, or even just over the hedge, he'd probably have been seen a lot sooner."

I tapped the report. "There's nothing in here to indicate a motive. Any ideas?"

Red struck a match with his thumb nail and lighted the cigarette he'd just put in his mouth. "That I can't figure, Cap.

From what we got so far there hardly could have been one. I think it must have been just ordinary robbery. By someone who didn't even know who he was. Say, like he went out for a walk. Maybe stops in a tavern and—"

I interrupted. "This Father Trent says he hadn't taken a drink since the accident. And that he wasn't much of a drinker even before that."

"So would his priest know if he changed his mind and decided to have a beer while he was out walking? But the killer could have picked him up somewhere else, or just followed him. Or maybe offered him a lift. True, he must not have had much money on him, but he was dressed well enough that he *could* have had. Anyway, I can't figure it any way but robbery. And we've had plenty of robbery killings before. Why look for something fancy in this one?"

"Shooting in the back of the head's a little unusual for that, Red."

"Could happen. Say I want to hold up a guy. I put the gun on him and then tell him to turn around so I can reach around and frisk him from in back. I put the gun against the back of his head or neck where he'll feel it, and reach around. Maybe he grabs at my hand for a judo throw and I pull the trigger. Or maybe if I've got the gun cocked I squeeze a little harder than I mean to, while I'm frisking, and bang."

I said, "I like the last one better. From what you've dug on Stiffler, he wasn't very strong. I can't see him resisting."

"Except for one thing. The way he was feeling, he didn't give a damn. He wanted to die, I guess. Because he was a Catholic he couldn't commit suicide. They wouldn't let him into Heaven or something."

I frowned. Red isn't outright irreligious like Ramos, but he's sometimes a bit too flippant about sacred things. I hold no brief for Catholicism; I'm a Presbyterian myself and an

elder in our church, but on the important issue of suicide Catholic doctrine is as sound as ours. God's gift of life is not to be thrown away by a man on his own impulse.

Red must have guessed what I was thinking for he said, "Sorry, Cap," and changed the subject. He looked at his watch. "Say, it's ten after. Frank didn't phone he'd be late or anything, did he?"

I was giving him a negative answer to that when Frank walked in. He said, "'Morning, Cap. Sorry I'm a little late."

I looked at him. Obviously he hadn't had much sleep; his eyes looked dull and tired and his face was drawn. At least I thought so; it's hard to tell with Mexican faces. But I felt sure there were definite signs of dissipation, as though he'd done some pretty heavy drinking and had stayed up pretty late.

I saw Red look at him too, and I wondered if he'd known that Frank had gone drinking after they'd quit work.

Probably I should have reprimanded him, but I said nothing.

I simply said, "We've been discussing the Stiffler case. We both agree that you're wasting time suspecting Medley of being involved. I think you're wrong there."

Frank shrugged. "I can be wrong. I have been. We haven't really got a lead yet, toward Medley or anyone else. How's about the post mortem? Raeburn kept giving us the run-around on that yesterday and we're stymied on some angles till we have it."

"Yesterday evening he said he'd get at it first thing today. I'll call him now and see if he's going to." I picked up the phone and made the call. I put the phone down and said, "He's working on Stiffler now, his secretary said. So we'll get something soon."

"Well, good for Doc Raeburn," Frank said.

"No call for sarcasm," I said coldly. "Dr. Raeburn is a busy

man. Well, I've got some notes here but first, what are your ideas for today?"

Frank said, "Before we get to that, let me ask if we're doing anything about the possibility that this started in Mexico, over four months ago? That he might have had enemies, or an enemy, there who might have come here, for that purpose or otherwise, and finished him off?"

I nodded toward the notes I had been making. "I'm taking care of that. It's unlikely, but possible. We won't overlook it."

"And how about Medley? I guess he's been here the six and a half years he claims, but aren't we going to check him back any farther? He may have a record, for all we know."

"Ridiculous, Frank," I said. "Even if he should have a record, what would it indicate? He had no possible motive for killing Stiffler."

Frank shrugged. "Neither has anyone else we've come across so far. But all right, maybe it would be going far afield to investigate him that far back."

I said, "It certainly would be, unless we get something that ties him in with Stiffler, something that proves he even *knew* him. Do you plan to see him again today?"

"We want to see him again, sure. When we go up against him next we want to know everything Raeburn can tell us."

I nodded. "We should have something by noon, I'd say. If you're not coming in then, phone in and I'll give you the P.M. report. You plan on going out to the construction project this morning?"

"Right," Frank said. "That should be our first stop. Last evening I talked to Hoffmann, his boss, on the phone. He said he'd be down at that particular project—he runs several of them—today until ten o'clock or so and after that he'd be elsewhere. So we want to catch him."

Frank was doing, as usual, a little too much of the talking

and I didn't want him to get the idea that he's head man on the team, so I looked over to Red Cahan to ask, "How long do you think it should take you out there?"

Red said, "I'd say it depends on how many of the guys he worked with knew him, and how well. If enough of them did know him, it might take us all morning—or all day. Frank, how many men did you say this Hoffmann said worked out there?"

"He said between forty and fifty currently. But most of them are workmen and he wouldn't have had much contact with them, if any. Stiffler worked in the office and wouldn't have had much contact with them, unless he made a friend or two during lunch hour."

"Wouldn't he have picked up time slips from them?" I asked.

"No, Hoffmann had a boy do that. No doubt to make the work as easy as possible on Kurt, physically. Either because he was a fellow-countryman in a bad spot or because Father Trent had sold him on the idea, he was giving the guy as much of a break as possible. Anyway, most of Kurt's contact would be with the few people who worked in the office. I'd say we should finish out there this morning easily."

"And then?" I asked, thinking I might as well set them up for all day if possible.

"If we get any leads that look worth following up right away we'll phone and check with you. Come to think of it, we'll be phoning anyway, about the post mortem. If we don't get any leads out at the project, I guess we might as well go back to canvassing the building he lived in and the neighborhood here. We didn't have time to do more than hit the high spots there yesterday, and a lot of people weren't home when we tried them."

I frowned a little, realizing that Frank had taken the play away from Red again. I've often wondered if I should try

teaming Frank with someone else, someone not as easygoing as Red, to let him get his ears pinned back a little. Maybe he was pushing a little harder than usual this morning to try to hide the shape he was obviously in.

"All right," I said. "That'll do it."

They got up and went out, Frank first. In the doorway Red turned and winked at me. But before I had time to decide what he meant by it, if anything, he was gone.

I picked up the phone to ask to have the next pair of boys sent in, but the minute I got it to my ear my wife's voice said "Walter?" I must have picked it up just when, otherwise, it would have started to ring.

I said, "Yes, dear. How's Carol?"

"All right. That isn't what I called about, Walter. Do you remember that last night—"

"Just a second," I said. "I thought maybe Carol was worse. But if it's something else, is it something that can wait a little while?"

"Why, yes. Want me to call back later?"

"I'll call you back, dear, as soon as I finish giving out assignments. I don't want to keep the boys waiting."

When I heard the click that told me she was off the wire I jigged the button till I got Carmody and told him to send in Harry and Paul. There'd have to be a check out on Campbell Street—Red and Frank had had time only for the houses immediately adjacent to Medley's—and it should be done right away while night before last was still fairly fresh in people's minds.

"Know anything about the Stiffler case?" I asked them, when they'd sat down across the desk from me.

Paul Geissler said, "Only what was in this morning's *Star*." Harry White nodded and said, "Me too."

"Here's the file on it to date," I said, pushing the folder toward them. "Read it—not now, but before you leave here."

What I want you boys to do is canvass the neighborhood out there. Both sides of the street and both sides of the alley in back of Medley's, a full block each way."

Paul said, "There's nothing on the east side of Campbell out there. No residences, I mean; I think there's an auto body repair shop and a joint that makes awnings. But they're not open evenings."

"Try them anyway," I said, "if they're within a block. Someone could have been working late, or maybe they have a watchman or something. Of course the houses will be better bets. You're interested in Tuesday evening and Tuesday night. You want to know if anybody saw any suspicious characters in the neighborhood, any cars stopping that didn't belong there—especially in the alley. Whether anybody heard a shot and if so, what time. Try to get them to remember if they heard anything that *could* have been a shot, even if they thought it was a backfire or something else when they heard it."

"Right. Anything else, Cap?" Paul reached for the file and put it in his lap.

"See if anyone in the neighborhood knew Kurt Stiffler or if he'd ever been seen in the neighborhood before. Show this picture." I opened the drawer of my desk and took a small photograph from it, handed the picture to Paul. "That's a copy of his passport photo. The only one we could find and it's better than one of him dead would be, anyway."

"How about a description to go with it?" Harry asked. "Especially how he was dressed Tuesday evening."

"In the file. Any more questions?"

"About this guy whose yard he was found in. Melody? Do we ask questions about him?"

"Medley," I said, "John Medley. I suppose you might as well find out what his neighbors think of him. And—oh, yes, another thing. He claims to have been home all Tuesday

evening and says he turned his lights out and went to bed about midnight. Might see if you can find anyone who can verify that." I added as an afterthought, "Or disprove it."

Harry started to get up and then let himself back into the chair again. He said, "Maybe this is covered in the report, but in case it isn't, let me ask it while we're in here. Has anyone cased the garbage cans in that block to see if the killer might have got rid of the gun right nearby?"

I said, "You'll find a memo of mine in there. I called the sanitation department yesterday afternoon. That alley was picked up yesterday morning and the stuff's already dumped—and leveled for fill with a lot of other truckloads. It'd take a dozen men a week to dig it all out and screen it."

"It might pay off."

"We might find the gun, but if we did what chance is there that we could trace it? If it's a gun that could be traced, the killer wouldn't have got rid of it that way."

Which was sensible, but I didn't add, because it was none of Harry's business, that I'd protected myself on that very point by checking with the Chief and getting his agreement that the chance of both finding and tracing the gun wasn't worth the very considerable expense of making such a difficult search.

I took care of the other assignments, none of them on the Stiffler case, spoke briefly to the ones I'd be keeping on standby for any emergency, and then wondered whether to go ahead with the letter to the Mexico City police or to call my wife. I decided that the letter would have to be a fairly long and complicated one and I might as well get the phone call over with first. So I put it through.

"Are you sure Carol's all right?" was the first thing I asked her. Our twelve-year-old daughter had complained of a sore throat at breakfast; Ethel had decided to keep her home from school but to postpone deciding whether or not to call a

doctor until she saw whether the throat seemed to get better or worse during the morning.

"Carol's fine," Ethel said. "Between you and me, Walter, I don't think her throat was really very sore at all. I've remembered that she's been worrying about a tough examination coming up today in school. And she practically admitted it."

"Then why don't you send her? Give her an excuse for being late, of course."

"We compromised. I'm letting her stay home if she spends most of the day studying. She'll have to take that test tomorrow if she misses it today, and you want her to get good grades, don't you?"

I didn't agree with that way of thinking but I knew there wasn't any use arguing if Ethel had made up her mind. She'd say she'd simply made a deal with Carol and didn't I admit that I sometimes made deals with criminals, and wasn't that worse? And she'd pretend not to understand if I told her again that the kind of deal we occasionally made with a criminal—such as agreeing to accept a plea of guilty to a lesser charge rather than having a difficult court battle to prove a more serious offense—is necessary for efficient law enforcement. If police departments never compromised but prosecuted every offense to the full, we'd need a dozen times as many prosecutors, judges and courts. We'd have to quadruple taxes to cover the costs. One must be willing to compromise, within reason, in the name of practicality if not in the name of Christianity.

"All right, Ethel," I said. "But what *did* you call about?"

"Oh, I almost forgot. Remember last night I told you we'd heard the name Medley before and that I was sure of it? Well, I was right. I remembered where and looked it up and it was there."

"It was where?"

"On one of the papers in your file. We bought our place from him."

"You're crazy, Ethel," I said. "We built our place; we didn't buy it from anyone."

"I mean the lot we bought to build it on. Four years ago, when we first decided to build. You bought it through that real estate friend of yours, what's-his-name, but John Medley's name is down as the owner. I *knew* I'd seen it somewhere."

"I'll be darned," I said. "I let Jerry handle all of it, and I never met the seller. If I heard the name, it just never registered. Thanks, dear, for letting me know."

After I put the phone back, I sat thinking a minute with amusement; the funny thing about coincidences is that they really happen sometimes.

It made me rather want to meet Medley, especially since I hadn't at the time I bought the lot from him four years ago. It would be an interesting thing to be able to mention to him.

And why shouldn't I, sometime today? It always helps in thinking about a thing if you've seen the place where it happened, seen it yourself, not just read descriptions of it. Yes, I'd like a talk with John Medley and a look at the neighborhood. And if I waited until after I'd get the post mortem report from Dr. Raeburn and until after Red or Frank had phoned in from the project so I could relay it to them, I could kill two birds with one stone by looking up Paul and Harry. I could pass Raeburn's findings on to them and the more specific information about time and manner of death might help them in their canvass.

Yes, I'd do that, and meet Medley.

SIX

FRANK RAMOS

When we got near the garage, Red asked, "Want me to take first turn on driving?"

I said, "You took first turn yesterday. I'll drive."

"Take us half an hour to get there. You could catch a nap, Frank. You must really have hung one on last night."

"I'll drive," I said. Damn it, I thought, if I look that bad, Cap Pettijohn must have noticed it too. If so, it was lucky he hadn't accused me of being hung over, because that would have meant telling him the truth. And the truth is none of his business, or Red's either.

Thank God Alice doesn't get in a state like that often. On second thought, why should I thank Him? Maybe if a true Christian gets one of his legs cut off he thanks God for leaving him the other leg, but I'm not that way. As Red would put it, I'm not that kind of a hairpin. Anyway, "Thank God" is just a phrase when you don't believe in one. So why not let myself think it when it occurs to me and not quibble?

I drove south on Stone and then it cut over to South Sixth Avenue and I drove south on that. We hadn't said a word since I'd insisted on driving.

Finally Red said, "Let's stop for a cup of coffee. Maybe it'd do you some good."

I said, "God damn it, I'm all right. Just let me alone."

"If you're *that* proddy, Frank, maybe we should stop in an alley and get this settled. If a cup of coffee won't help you, maybe a bust in the nose will."

I had to laugh. "Maybe it would," I said, "but I'm not in the mood for it. You win, Red; I'm feeling both lousy and proddy but I got no reason for taking it out on you. Sorry."

"You should of taken it out on Cap. The sanctimonious bastard."

"I should have. But I like to eat."

"Yeah. Well, now that you're over it, how's about stopping for some coffee. I want some, if you don't."

"I'll buy that," I said. "Literally and figuratively."

I had mine black. Hot black coffee isn't a panacea for the way you feel after having been overtired and then getting only a couple of hours of sleep, but it does help and it did help.

And when we took off again, I couldn't even argue about letting Red drive, because we'd made a stop and it was his turn. But we had only another fifteen minutes or so to go and there wasn't any use in my even trying to doze. Especially as my mind kept going back to last night and to wondering if there was *any* way I could have avoided all that argument. I guess there wasn't. When she's at just that stage of inebriation there's nothing else to do, unless I'd walk out on her or knock her out cold. That I'd never do—knock her out, I mean. Walking out on her would be easier and it would come to the same thing in the long run because if I ever do lay a hand on her, she'll walk out on me.

Some women wouldn't, but Alice would. She's that kind of a hairpin. God knows that when I was a beat cop on Meyer Street I ran into enough wife beating cases and once in a while, maybe not often, it was really justified and really did some good. I've seen it straighten a woman out and maybe save a marriage.

But not in our case. Because of the difference in our races, it somehow has built up into a thing between us. The very possibility that I might, I mean. I wouldn't even dare threaten violence because she'd jump to the challenge and I'd have to back down. Or follow through and end everything between us. Maybe if she had an Anglo husband he could beat her and get away with it, but if I did it would be because I'm Mexican, and Mexicans are cruel people—or Anglos think they are. It's funny, sometimes in the heat of a bad quarrel—like last night's—I think there's something in Alice that *wants* me to slap her down. But there's something in her too, and I'm as sure of this as I'm sure of my name, that would compel her to hate me ever afterward if I ever hit her, even once.

"Almost there," Red said. "Listen, Frank, we pass one more tavern, though, and if you think a pick-up drink would help you—well, if you took gin or vodka nobody could smell it on your breath."

I said, "Thanks, Red, but I'll get by without one. I'm feeling better now."

The project was a new high school. It looked like it was about half finished and like it was going to be a nice job architecturally. Sig Hoffmann—probably his name was Sigmund or Siegfried or something back in Germany but he's signed himself Sig ever since he came here—always turns out buildings that are both well-made and good-looking. He's been known to refuse to bid on a job if he didn't like the plans and the specifications.

A Quonset hut on one corner of the lot was obviously headquarters and Red parked near it. We walked over and let ourselves in. There were no partitions and it seemed larger inside than one would have guessed from the outside. Obviously there was more room than was needed, at least at this stage of the construction. There were four desks, fairly far apart. A stenographer worked at one of them, a blond boy

of about seventeen at another, the third was vacant. And Mr. Hoffmann, at the desk at the far end of the Quonset, was studying a blueprint. An air cooler was making a hell of a racket and nobody heard us come in. We walked straight through and to Mr. Hoffmann's desk.

Both Red and I knew him; we'd talked to him at least half a dozen times a little over a year ago when there'd been a burglary at his downtown office. A small safe containing a little over two thousand dollars had been taken. Two days later the ripped-open safe had been found on the desert near Picacho. But the money had never been recovered nor the burglars caught. We'd found out who they were, or at least the names they'd used during the four days they'd stayed at an Oracle Road motel, but they were three days gone by then. We'd sent descriptions of them, of course, and of their car. But nothing had ever come of it. Mr. Hoffmann had been very pleasant to deal with; he didn't blame us for not getting his money back, as a lot of people do under similar circumstances.

He looked up as we stopped in front of his desk. He's short, not over five feet six, but built like a barrel. Has only a fringe of hair around a shiny bald head, but thick bushy eyebrows that stick out almost an inch and make his eyes, shadowed under them, look fierce and forbidding. Actually he's as fierce as Santa Claus, a sucker for everything that comes along except a poor design for a building.

"Hi, boys," he said, and jerked a thumb to some chairs along the wall. "Pull up and squat. Sorry, I've forgotten your names."

We told him. I said, "We'd like to talk to everybody here who knew Kurt, Mr. Hoffmann, but since you have to leave soon I guess you'll want us to start with you."

"Right. I'm ready to leave now, finished here sooner than I thought. But I'll stay as long as you need me. Fire ahead."

"Thanks," I said. "First, did I get it straight over the phone that you saw Kurt last when he left here at five o'clock Tuesday?"

"Five or a few minutes after. I didn't get here Tuesday till almost quitting time. Wouldn't have bothered coming except that there were papers here I needed. But once I was here I decided I might as well look over the progress reports and time slips so I stayed about another half hour, till five-thirty."

"But everyone else left at five, when Kurt left?"

He nodded. "They were getting ready to leave when I came in. I told them to go ahead, that I wouldn't need any help and that I'd lock up when I left."

"Then you last saw Kurt when he walked out of the door?"

"No, come to think of it, I saw him a few minutes later. I walked over to that file cabinet and happened to glance out of the window there and saw him waiting at the bus stop."

"Alone, or was there anyone else waiting?"

"Four or five others. Most of the people here commute in their own cars, but about a dozen use the bus."

Red cut in. "Then why wouldn't there have been a dozen waiting?"

Mr. Hoffmann turned to face him. "Some of the workmen take more time than others to clean up. They don't all leave at the same exact moment."

It had been a patient answer to a silly question, so I took the play back. "Did you recognize any of the others?"

He paused and thought. "No, I didn't. It was just a quick glance. I happened to notice Kurt because he stood alone, outside the group the rest of them made."

"Was that a characteristic thing for him to do, Mr. Hoffmann?" I asked. "I mean, was he usually that way?"

Since the accident in which his family had been killed, yes, Mr. Hoffmann told us. He'd been like a walking zombie, avoiding people as much as he could. He even ate lunch apart

from the others, engaged in no conversation beyond what was necessary for him to handle his job. He wasn't rude to anybody; he was just unresponsive, passive. He wanted to be left alone. Mr. Hoffmann had tried to talk to him a few times and then had given up. All that could be done for Kurt, he'd decided, was to let him fight out his despair by himself and hope that gradually he'd snap out of it and be himself again. Until then, nothing could be done for him, or with him.

Before the accident, Kurt had been introverted and shy, but friendly. He came into little if any contact with the workmen but he got along all right with his fellow workers in the office; although, Mr. Hoffmann thought, he hadn't made friends with any of the people on the project to the extent of extending his friendship beyond working hours. None of them, as far as Mr. Hoffmann knew, had ever been to Kurt's home or met his family.

"Is there any chance he was ashamed of having a Mexican wife?" I wanted to know.

He frowned at me. "Why should he be?"

I let it go. I asked him, "Are you going to hire anyone to take his place?"

"I—don't know. I haven't thought about it."

I said, "If you needed someone badly, you would have thought about it. What I'm getting at is this. To what extent did you *make* a job for Kurt Stiffler out of the goodness of your heart and because he was in a tough spot and a countryman of yours and a member of the same church?"

"The same church? I'm a Lutheran. But a friend of Father Trent's and he said Kurt had to have a job promised before he could get a visa, so—well, I figured I could use him somehow."

I said, "I guess you've answered my question all right." And wondered why I'd asked it. I didn't see how it could affect our investigation to know for sure that Kurt's job had been

less than essential and his employer more than generous in that he'd made a job for Kurt rather than just given him one. If Kurt could possibly have been a suicide, then it might have been a contributory cause if he'd come to realize that he was being given charity rather than a real job; but since Kurt hadn't killed himself that point seemed irrelevant.

Mr. Hoffmann had tried to keep us from noticing his occasional glances at the dial of his wrist watch, but I hadn't missed them and knew we were keeping him so I turned and asked Red if he had any more questions and when he said he hadn't, we let Mr. Hoffmann go. True, questioning the employees might bring out a further question or two we'd want to ask their boss, but unless it was something important or complicated, we could handle it by telephone.

We walked outside the Quonset with Mr. Hoffmann, who had a sudden thought and wanted to know if he should introduce us to the stenographer and the boy, and maybe to the foreman. We told him it wouldn't be necessary; they'd all have read about the murder and would be expecting to be questioned, so we could introduce ourselves.

I asked Red if he had any choice whether we should start with the workmen or go back in the office and talk to the two people there.

He said, "Let's try the office first, Frank. While we're there we can get a list of the workmen's names and if we check 'em off as we talk to them we won't miss anybody and we'll know when we got 'em all."

It made sense; once in a while Red does have a good idea. The stenographer was nearest the door, so we hit her first. We pulled chairs up by her desk and got down to brass tacks as soon as we'd introduced ourselves.

Her name was Rhoda Stern, she told us. She didn't have to tell us that she wasn't whistle bait if she ever had been. She

was at least a half dozen years the wrong side of thirty and she was short and dumpy and wore thick glasses whose harlequin frames, on her, didn't seem decorative. And she was hot and bothered by the heat despite the fact that it wasn't over ninety outside and inside the Quonset the noisy cooler had cut it to about ten degrees less than that. A warm day for April, but what was she going to do when the temperature would hit a hundred and ten in July and August? There are times when it doesn't get much if any cooler than this in the middle of the night.

But she was nice; I liked her. I asked her how long she'd been in Tucson and she told us six months; she'd come here last November, from Minneapolis. And how could we stand wearing coats in heat like this? I could have told her then and there that unless she already had a nest egg she'd better start saving up get-away money because within another two months she'd be leaving; there are some people who just can't take heat and she was one of them. But the Chamber of Commerce wouldn't like my telling her that, and anyway I could be wrong. If she lived through her first summer here she'd be all right, and she might do that if she changed jobs and got into an air-conditioned office building downtown instead of having to work in a Quonset hut, which always seems even hotter than it really is.

Kurt Stiffler? She'd liked him, but he'd been so quiet and shy, hard to get to know. She thought maybe it was because his English was "not so hot." Or maybe—She hesitated.

Red asked, "Tuesday, did you go home on the bus, or do you drive?"

"Neither, usually. I mean, I don't have my own car. But Mr. Vaughn—he's the foreman here—lives just a block from where I room, and he usually takes me home. If we're leaving at the same time, that is. Once in a while he has to stay later,

and then I take the bus. But Tuesday he took me home."

"Did you leave—leave the office here, I mean—before or after Kurt Tuesday?"

"The same time, as near as matters. I mean, I followed him right out the door, only he turned one way, toward the bus stop, and I turned the other way. That's the last I saw him."

"To see if the foreman was leaving?"

"No, I went to where he parks his car and got in it to wait for him. You see, if he is going to work later than five, he always lets me know. Otherwise, I just wait for him at his car. I'm always ready first because he has to wash up and change clothes."

"And the bus had already gone by and picked up Kurt when you and the foreman came out to the street?"

"I don't know. He always cuts across the lot and out the other side, on Beekman Street. So we didn't pass the bus stop."

I didn't see what Red was getting at, and I don't think he did either. Probably he'd just wanted to get into the act for a while. She'd already told us she'd last seen Kurt when she'd followed him out of the door of the Quonset.

I asked her, "Do you have a list of all the workmen employed here? We'll want to talk to each of them, at least for a minute or two apiece, and it'll help if we have a list so we can check off names."

She thought a moment and then said, "Sure, I can give you the time sheet for Tuesday, Kurt's copy. I just typed it up."

She bent over the wastebasket beside her desk and came up with a form with several dozen workmen's names and the number of hours each had put in, written in pencil in a very German-looking handwriting. "Here it is."

"Thanks," I said, and put it in my pocket. "I gather you don't want it back."

"No, it's typed now. Kurt made them out from the time

slips and then I type them in triplicate, one for the files here, one for the pay-roll department and one for the main office."

"And the young man at the desk behind you makes them out now?"

"Oh, no. Now I just type them up straight from the time slips."

"Seems just as simple, but wouldn't that mean this pencil copy wasn't necessary?"

She wiped perspiration off her forehead again. "This heat is awful. No, of course it wasn't necessary. Everybody knows Mr. Hoffmann made that job just because he was sorry for Kurt. Oh, some of the things he did had to be done, but George and I can take care of them between us, easy."

"George is the fellow behind you?"

"Yeah, the kid. George Wicks."

I asked, "Miss Stern, do you think Kurt knew that his job here was—well, on the borderline of charity?"

"If he didn't, he must have been pretty dumb."

There was something in the way she said it that made me ask, "You said before, Miss Stern, that you liked Kurt. Did you, really? Be honest."

"Well, really, I don't see what that has to do with it, Mr.—uh—Ramos."

"Nothing directly," I admitted. "We don't mean to suggest you disliked him enough to shoot him, Miss Stern. But it's part of our job to find out everything about him that we can, good or bad. Even personality traits that other people found in him."

"Well, I guess I see what you mean. I guess it was that he kept so *much* to himself—and I'm talking about before the accident—that he gave the impression that he thought he was better than the rest of us. But I guess people like him are often that way, unless they go to the opposite extreme and are too pushing."

"What do you mean, people like him?"

"Jewish people. That's another thing, he never told anyone he *was* Jewish until his past history came out in the newspaper story about the accident. But the way they stick together, I guess that's why Mr. Hoffmann gave him a job when he didn't need him. It's funny, I'd never thought about Mr. Hoffmann being Jewish but I guess he must be too, his getting out of Germany while Hitler was getting in power there."

I stood up. I said, "Thank you, Miss Stern," and started for the door. I wished her a most enjoyable summer. I hoped the heat would fry her.

Red caught up with me outside. He said, "Hey, aren't we going to talk to the kid in there too?"

"I need fresh air," I told him. "We'll get to the kid later."

"You're so damn thin-skinned on that race business, Frank. So she doesn't like Jews. She was probably brought up that way; she can't help it."

"All right, all right," I said. "Let's find the foreman first."

We found the foreman, Vaughn. We never got around to asking his first name. I told him who we were and what we were doing and then I showed him the time sheet Rhoda Stern had given us and asked him if it was complete or if there'd been any absences that day. He thought a minute.

"Tuesday? No. Nor today either for that matter. You'll be able to talk to all of 'em. Hope you won't keep 'em too long, though. We're a little behind schedule."

"Not more than a few minutes apiece," I promised him. "Unless we run into any of them who really knew Kurt or anything about him."

"You won't," he said. "I doubt if any of them knew him at all. He never came out here and they never go in the office. They'll all know the name and who he was, on account of that story in the paper a couple of weeks ago and the story in

this morning's paper that he was killed. Say, are you *sure* he was killed?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Well, if it could be suicide I'd sure say it was. I never saw a guy act more beat than he acted."

"How well did you know him?"

"Enough to talk to him, that's all. I'm in and out of the office a dozen or more times a day, so I had plenty of chances. I never got close to him, though."

"Did you try?"

"Yes, up to a point. To the point where I saw he didn't want me to try any harder. He was a funny guy."

"When, Tuesday, did you last see him?"

"Just before five o'clock. I saw Hoffmann's car drive up and when he went into the office I went, too, and asked him if there was anything he wanted from me. He said there wasn't so I quit as usual."

"And drove Rhoda Stern home?"

He sighed. "Yes. That dame gets in my hair but I started doing it and now there's no way out. She just lives a block from me."

"Cheer up," I said, "She won't last the summer."

"Hope and think you're right. God, do I get tired hearing her bitch about the heat. In April, yet."

"Thanks," I told him. "Well, I guess we'll—"

"Hey, wait a minute. When's the funeral?"

"Hasn't been set yet. Father Trent of St. Matthew's is going to take care of that end of it. But you can watch the papers. It'll be announced at least a day before."

We saw all of the workmen, checking them off one at a time after we'd talked to them. We didn't learn anything new about Kurt himself; none of them knew him to speak of, although several knew him to speak to, mostly those who either occasionally or regularly had ridden the bus with him.

We found four who had ridden the same bus with him Tuesday afternoon and two of those four had ridden the bus all the way into town and had seen Kurt get off at his usual stop about six blocks before the downtown bus terminal. That would have been about forty minutes after five. Now we had him that far.

We checked on the clothes he'd been wearing and they seemed to be the same ones we'd seen on him in Medley's yard except that he'd been in shirt sleeves going home from work and had been wearing a jacket when we saw him. So obviously he had gone home from the bus stop, either right away or some time during the evening.

And several of the workmen, too, asked about the funeral. Whether anyone from the job would actually go to it or not—except Mr. Hoffmann; I felt sure he would—at least there'd be a movement afoot to send some flowers.

And a damn silly thing that would be, with no Stiffler left to know they were being sent.

"Well," Red said, "that washes it up except for the kid in the office. George what's-his-name."

"George Wicks," I said. "All right, let's get him."

Noon whistles were blowing and we'd found the last workman way at the back of the new high school, so we hurried; maybe he went home for lunch and we'd miss him. He did go home for lunch, but we caught him just as he was about to push off on a bicycle I'd noticed leaning against the side of the Quonset. We asked him if he'd mind talking to us before he took off.

"Okay," he said, "if it doesn't take too long."

It didn't take too long because we didn't get anything new from him.

"Well," Red asked me, "should we save a dime and phone from here?"

Through the Quonset window alongside us I could see

Rhoda Stern unwrapping a lunch at her desk. Even if I'd liked her, I'd just as soon not make the call from there and have her listen.

"I'll pay the dime," I said. "My turn to drive."

We got into the car and went over to South Sixth Avenue, north to the nearest drugstore.

Cap hadn't left for lunch yet and I got him. "We're through at the construction job," I told him. "Nothing much except that he rode the bus home after work and got off at Burke Street, alone, at about five-forty."

Cap grunted. "Not much for a morning's work. Well, I've got the autopsy report. Bullet was a twenty-two short, fired close range but not quite contact, went diagonally upward, ended up just behind the upper forehead. No doubt that it was the cause of death and death would have been instantaneous."

"He got that much of a break anyway," I said.

"Yes. And Dr. Raeburn revises his estimate of time of death, says it was earlier than he figured; he moves it back about four hours."

I said, "That would put it between 8 P.M. and 2 A.M."

"Right. And if he ate dinner at the usual time, probably nearer the first of those two limits. Anyway, he last ate about three hours—and Raeburn says that's fairly accurate—before he died. Probably sandwiches—bread and some kind of sausage, and some cheese."

"Then eight o'clock is out as possible time of death because he *didn't* eat at five. If he walked right home from the bus stop, made himself sandwiches and ate them right away, it would have been six o'clock before he could even have started to eat. So he couldn't have been killed before nine at the earliest. More likely half past nine, if he took his time making the sandwiches and didn't bolt them down. Nothing after that? Not even a drink, maybe?"

"Definitely no alcohol."

"Damn," I said. "I was hoping he'd had some sherry."

"Sherry? Why?"

"Medley offered some to Red and me when we talked to him. A good pale dry sherry, he said." I sighed. "Well, we turned it down so I guess Kurt did too."

Cap snorted, or as near to it as he ever comes. "You're wasting time suspecting John Medley."

"Not time," I said. "I'm wasting suspicion, maybe, but that's cheap. Any other findings on the autopsy, Cap?"

"Nothing bearing directly on the murder. His general health and physical condition were really something. Rae-burn says he should have been in a hospital; it was a wonder he managed to walk around."

"What all was wrong?"

"About everything. Enlarged heart. Anemia—extremely low red corpuscle count. Both lungs about half calcified—although t.b. didn't seem to have been active. Liver and kidneys both in bad shape. I'm not going to read off the details and fancy words. You can read the report yourself when you come in."

"Okay," I said. "Well, shall we go back to canvassing his neighborhood and see if we can get anything more there?"

"Yes, you might as well. *Somebody* must have seen him."

I said, "Okay, Cap. See you later." Outside the phone booth I told Red, "Nothing startling. I'll give it to you on our way into town. Anywhere special you want to eat?"

We got the eating problem solved on our way back to the car and while I drove in on Sixth Avenue I passed on to Red the dope Cap Pettijohn had given me over the phone.

"Makes it easier in one way," Red said.

I asked him how.

"Less of his time to account for. Damn it, *somebody* must have seen him after he got off the bus."

Somebody had, we found out, but it didn't do us much good. The somebody turned out to be one Juan Romero, who ran the little neighborhood grocery downstairs in the same building Kurt had lived in. We made it our first stop today; it had been closed yesterday evening by the time we started our canvass.

Yes, Juan Romero said, he knew Kurt Stiffler. As a customer, that is.

"When did you see him last?"

"Evening he was killed. Stopped in on his way home."

"Do you know about what time that would have been?"

"Before six o'clock. Quarter to, maybe. Usual time. He nearly always stops—stopped in on his way home from work."

"Do you remember what he bought?"

"Loaf of rye bread. I think that's—wait, no. He bought some cheese. Quarter pound of jack cheese."

"No sausage of any kind?"

"No, not then. But he did buy sausage sometimes."

I kept digging and got a little more, not much. Kurt hadn't acted unusual in any way. There hadn't been any conversation more than necessary for the purchase of the bread and cheese. When Kurt had left, he'd turned in the direction that would take him to the doorway that led to the flats upstairs but Romero hadn't actually seen him enter it. He'd been at the back of the store and couldn't possibly have seen, nor could he have heard the door open and close, if it had.

Was Kurt a regular customer? Well, he had been for the last couple of weeks, since his family had died. He usually did his shopping on his way home from work, about the same time every day, and he usually bought bread and stuff for sandwiches. Sometimes but less often some canned goods, especially beans and soups, and occasionally some tortillas.

Romero thought Kurt must have either skipped breakfasts or eaten them at a restaurant on the way to work but that he

made and carried his own lunches and prepared most if not all of his own evening meals.

Hadn't the Stiffers, plural, been regular customers before the accident? No, they hadn't; with five people to shop for Mrs. Stiffler had done her bulk shopping at a supermarket a few blocks away. Romero didn't blame her for that; a little neighborhood store like his couldn't match supermarket prices. Only a penny or two here and there but it did add up on enough groceries to feed five people for a week. Of course she'd drop in for small purchases when she'd run out of something or other, or for perishables that she couldn't stock a week's supply of. Food prices here, and especially meat prices, are so much higher than in Mexico that even supermarket prices horrify a thrifty Mexican housewife recently moved here from south of the border.

But Kurt did all his buying from Romero. There wasn't enough of it to matter, pricewise. And besides, Romero pointed out, men hate supermarkets. They hate hunting through dozens of aisles for what they want and they hate standing in line for a chance to pay for it.

Maybe he had something there. I never go to a supermarket myself if I can avoid it. And when on Saturday, which happens to be my day off, Alice dragoons me into driving her to a market for the week's shopping, I go along but I hate it.

That was all we got out of Romero.

But it moved Kurt Stiffler for us, a little, in both time and space. In time it moved him up to six o'clock, as near as matters, since it would have taken him about ten minutes to walk there from the bus stop and probably another five to make his purchases and pay for them. In space, it got him at least as far as home territory and probably all the way home. It seemed highly improbable that he'd stopped to buy

groceries in his own building and then gone on elsewhere instead of upstairs to his own flat.

"Well," I asked Red, "should we go on with the canvass or take another look in the Stiffler flat first?"

SEVEN

FERN CAHAN

Poor old Frank had been in a real bitch-kitty of a mood all morning. Worst hang-over I'd ever seen him have, and I kind of blamed myself a little bit for not having given him a stronger pitch to let me drive him home from the tavern instead of leaving him there to go on drinking. And whisky at that. Me, I stick to good old beer.

And the way he blew his top over that Rhoda Stern dame out at the high school was something. Sure, race prejudice is his sore point and I can see that, but you can carry hating prejudice to the point of having prejudice yourself—prejudice against everyone who has a prejudice. And that's just about everybody. Some people hide it, that's all.

But he was over it by now, and looking better too. There's nothing like a good lunch under your belt to help a hang-over and we'd had a good one. At the La Jolla.

Coming out of the little grocery he asked me whether we should go upstairs for another look at the Stiffler place. "What for?" I asked him. We'd been there and looked everything over last night, and we'd put a padlock on the door so nobody would bust in—although I don't know what there was to steal. But it had been Cap's orders; he's always worrying about somebody messing up evidence, even when there isn't any.

But Frank makes out a good case sometimes for his ideas and he did this time. He said, "We ought to take another look at the refrigerator, Red, now that we know what he bought and when, and what he ate and when. We didn't really inventory it before because it didn't mean anything then. We cased the joint mostly for papers or letters, stuff like that."

That made sense, so I said okay.

We went up, and I had the key for the padlock and let us in. While I closed the door he went over to the refrigerator and opened the door. It was one of those old-fashioned ones with a coil on top and it was running and was plenty noisy. He came up first with a loaf of rye bread, the kind that comes packaged already sliced. It had been opened and some of it, not much, was gone.

"Good," Frank said. "This is definite proof he came home. This must be the loaf he bought; he'd never have bought bread if he had this much left out of the previous loaf." He poked in farther. "And here's—yes, this is the jack cheese, and it's been opened too. And here's some sausage, two kinds of it. Enough left for him to have made himself a lunch to carry to work on Wednesday."

I joined him and helped him look through the rest of the refrigerator. Not much was in it outside of the things he'd already mentioned. A jar of pickles, some margarine, a wilted head of lettuce, a few other things. Frank closed the door and straightened up. "Well, anything else while we're here?"

I shook my head. We'd gone over the place—all two rooms of it—yesterday evening and it had been pretty depressing. His wife's clothes and the clothing of his three children were all still there, in the closet and the dresser; apparently he hadn't thrown away or given away a single thing. There were still five toothbrushes hanging on nails over the kitchen sink. The flat had no bathroom, although it had a private toilet

in a closet-sized room. We'd searched mostly for papers and letters, and had found little, nothing that told us anything we didn't already know.

I said, "This joint gives me the willies, Frank. Let's get out—Or wait a minute. We got privacy here and it's a good place to talk over something I've been worrying about."

Frank pulled a chair out from under the table and sat straddling it, folding his arms over the back of it. "Shoot," he said.

I said, "Maybe I'm crazy but I'm not absolutely convinced that guy didn't commit suicide. I'll admit I don't see how, but let's leave the *how* part lay for a minute. Look at the reasons he had. Hell, Frank, out of all the suicide cases we've checked, how many had as good a reason or set of reasons as Stiffler had? Loses everything and everybody he's got in the world all at once—and blames himself for it. In lousy health that's probably never going to be better. What *did* he have to live for?"

"Nothing," Frank said. "I'm with you. Keep going. Not over one in ten suicide cases we've checked on have had any better reasons."

"And almost everybody we've talked to who knew him seems to have been surprised that he didn't, damn it. From everybody's description of the way he's been acting, too—hell, three different people who didn't know each other used the word *zombie* to show how he's been acting. Am I right?"

Frank said, "I think he wanted to kill himself. I think the only thing that kept him from it, if anything did keep him from it, was his religion. Christians in general and Catholics in particular think it's a mortal sin and they go to Hell, or maybe to Limbo, if they kill themselves. Me, I'll go along with Schopenhauer."

"Who's he?" I asked.

"Another German. He said suicide is an inalienable right of every man, maybe his most inalienable right, that he didn't ask to be born and therefore isn't obligated to stick around any longer than he wants to."

I said, "I'd say that's going a little far, but—hell, let's get back to Stiffler."

"You were going to explain how he committed suicide."

"I wish I could, damn it. What I mean is this, Frank. Just because he was shot in the back of the head and no gun turned up beside the body, we don't want *completely* to overlook the possibility of suicide. Not when he had so much motive for it and, as far as we can find out, nobody else had *any* motive for killing him. There just might be explanations of both of those things."

Frank was looking at me with a serious frown. He didn't say anything for almost a minute and then he said, "Red, once in a while you amaze me. You use that carrot head of yours for something more than learning cowboy songs. Yes, I've been giving the possibility of suicide a complete brush-off, and I've got no business to, not with as strong a motive as Kurt had. All right, let's consider it. Let's take it point by point. Suppose I think out loud and any time you have a suggestion or think of anything I miss, you cut in. Okay?"

"Shoot," I said.

"All right, let's try that part of it first and get it over with. Then we'll go back to the beginning."

He stood up and pulled his revolver out of his shoulder holster. Frank carries an S. & W. thirty-eight special with a four-inch barrel. He swung out the cylinder and ejected the cartridges, put them down on the kitchen table beside him.

"I'll turn around and you watch." He turned his back to me, reached his arm around under and behind him, pointing

the pistol upward. The muzzle touched the back of his neck just above his collar, crept up another inch or so when he tried harder.

He tilted his head back as far as it would go. The muzzle was against the base of his skull.

"Good," I said. "That's just about where the bullet went in. Within half an inch."

He said, "Step around to one side and figure the angle. Where would it come out if it went through?"

I walked over and studied the position. "Right about at the hairline. And you said that on Stiffler it was found right behind the upper forehead. That's close enough, Frank. Especially as he had a scrawny neck and it was probably a little more limber than yours."

"This would give a contact wound and his wasn't, quite. The muzzle was a fraction of an inch from the skin. But I think that if I pulled the trigger it would tend to pull the gun back about that far. Watch and see."

The gun clicked, and he was right. "Pulled it down about an inch," I told him.

Frank looked thoughtful as he put the cartridges back in the gun and reholstered it. "Okay," he said. "As far as the wound itself goes, he could have killed himself. But it's an awkward way to do it. I've never known of a suicide trying that angle. If they shoot themselves in the head, it's either the temple or dead center in the forehead. Or through the roof of the mouth."

"Unless he did it that way because he wanted it to look like it wasn't a suicide."

"That happens," Frank said, "but almost always it's because the suicide has an insurance policy with a suicide clause and wants his family to collect. That couldn't apply here. Not only didn't he have any family left to worry about, but he didn't have insurance."

"You mean we didn't find a policy. What if he'd left one with the guy he'd borrowed money from in Mexico City, as security on the money he borrowed. And wanted the guy to get his money back."

"He couldn't have had insurance at all. According to that autopsy report he couldn't have passed an insurance examination if a doctor had looked him over through a telescope. But let's skip that point. We're just trying to decide if suicide was *possible*, and I'll grant he could have had some screwy psychological reason for not wanting people to know he killed himself. Maybe he didn't want Father Trent to know he'd weakened. Trent must have been giving him pep talks. It doesn't make sense but then sometimes people don't."

"It would also explain why he didn't kill himself in his own place here," I pointed out. "But why pick Medley's back yard?"

Frank shrugged, and straddled the chair again. "Why pick anywhere. Say he went out to walk, anywhere at random, with the gun in his pocket, until he worked up the nerve to use it. He's walking on Campbell, maybe south toward the railroad tracks. He's already decided to kill himself and to hope that it will be taken for a robbery kill and the tracks would be a good spot for that. Somewhere enroute he's dropped his wallet and his change, if any, into a sewer so it'll look like whoever killed him took his money.

"In front of Medley's he makes up his mind and doesn't want to wait any longer. But he wants privacy for it, doesn't want to do it right out on the sidewalk, so he goes around behind a house—Hell, it's almost beginning to make sense."

It had been my idea, but I found myself arguing against it. I said, "But Medley was home and his light would have been on."

"And maybe with his hi-fi phono going full blast. We didn't think to ask Medley if he'd been playing it or how loud be-

cause we thought when we talked to him Kurt had died after midnight and Medley had told us he went to bed then. But if the phono was on loud that would account for Medley's not having heard the shot, and he didn't hear it. Because we did ask him if he'd heard a shot any time during the evening or the night."

"But the phono would have to have been awful loud, Frank," I said, "for Stiffler to have figured out that Medley wouldn't hear it."

Frank made an impatient gesture. "Maybe he didn't care whether the shot was heard or not. Or maybe he wanted music to die to. Who knows how a guy's mind works when he's desperate enough with grief and guilt to kill himself?"

He laughed suddenly. "Listen to us beating around the bush. Figuring everything except what happened to the gun and saving that sweet little item till the end. What happened to the gun, Red?"

I said, "I read a mystery story one time. I forget who it was by or any of the rest of it but it was about a guy who killed himself and didn't want it to look like suicide, see? So he shot himself with a lightweight little gun, maybe *it* was a twenty-two, right by an open window. And when they found him there wasn't any gun around, either inside the room or outside the window."

"Don't stop now, Esmeralda. What happened to the gun?"

"The guy had caught an owl, a big one. And he'd tied a string from the trigger-guard of the gun to the owl's leg, and he was holding the owl under his left arm when he shot himself. So the owl flew away out the open window and into the woods with the gun hanging from his leg."

Frank put back his head and howled with laughter.

I said, "Damn it, I'm not suggesting that's what Kurt Stiffler did. I just mentioned it to show that there *are* ways

that a man can shoot himself and not have the gun around when they find him, see?"

Frank was wiping tears out of his eyes. He said, "Sorry, Red, I wasn't laughing at *you*. I was just laughing at the picture I got of Kurt taking that final walk with a bird under his arm. A vulture, no doubt. A desert owl would be too small."

I grinned. "A vulture wouldn't work. It would stick around. Or at least circle and come back. But all right, let's take what really *could* have happened. Somebody found the gun the next morning and took it along. A kid going through the alley, maybe. It could easily have been lying well away from the body and where he could see it. He steps over or through the hedge and tiptoes in and swipes the gun. Don't forget the way Stiffler was laying the bullet hole didn't show and he could have been asleep. By now of course the kid knows he swiped a gun from beside a dead body, but he's afraid to tell anybody. He's either got the gun hidden six layers deep or he's got rid of it."

Frank said, "It could be, but I won't buy it. A guy lying flat on his back with a gun beside him—how many kids would have the nerve to cut into a strange yard and walk up to swipe the gun? And if the kid got that close he'd have seen Kurt's eyes were open, so he couldn't have been asleep. Either awake or dead. A kid would have run like hell without even reaching down for the gun, and you know it. A grownup, say a hobo, would scam out of there even faster, and he wouldn't take the gun along if it was made of gold and set with diamonds."

I hated to admit it, but he was right. I hadn't been serious, of course, about the business with the bird, but I had figured seriously that a kid might have swiped the gun. But I'd clean forgotten about the corpse's eyes being wide open.

Frank said, "Another thing, Red. He couldn't possibly have known in advance that the gun was going to be swiped, even

if it was. And he wouldn't have taken such an awkward way of shooting himself, aiming at the back of his head like that, unless he was hoping it would be taken for murder instead of suicide. But if we'd found the gun by him the first thing we'd have thought of was the simple little test I made a few minutes ago, to see if he *could* have shot himself that way. And after we learned who he was and realized how much reason he had to kill himself, we'd never have seriously suspected it to be anything but suicide."

"All right," I said, "so it was a wild idea. Forget it."

Frank shook his head. "No, let's not forget it, Red. Let's keep thinking about it. I won't buy a buzzard flying away with the gun tied to his leg. I won't buy either a kid or a tramp swiping the gun from beside the body, not with the corpse's eyes wide open. A kid would have been scared for one reason, a tramp for another. But that doesn't mean there can't be some explanation for the gun being gone that we haven't thought of yet. If there is, and if we both keep thinking about it, one of us might get it."

I said, "I suppose the idea of an accomplice is completely out. Somebody lined up to carry the gun away for him after he shot himself with it."

Frank looked thoughtful. But he said, "I'm afraid it is in this particular case. You see, assuming he did kill himself, anyone could sympathize with his reasons for doing it. But his reasons for not wanting it to *look* like suicide would have had to be psychological, and that's something else again. I can't see any friend of his sticking his neck out for a jail sentence to help him on that angle. Or, for that matter, Kurt asking anybody to. There have been cases of an accomplice helping someone commit suicide, but under pretty different circumstances."

"For instance?" I asked.

"Funny, but just yesterday I was thinking that nobody

commits suicide with an accomplice unless it's a suicide pact, and I completely forgot the Winkelman case. Couple of years ago, right here in Tucson. Before we got teamed up. I put in some time on it with Jay."

"I never even read about it, that I remember. What gave?"

"Guy named Ernest Winkelman was in a hospital here, dying slowly from t.b. of the stomach. That's damn painful, worse than most cases of carcinoma and just as inevitable. So he died, but maybe a few weeks sooner than the doc figured was kosher. The doc made a few preliminary tests and then made a post mortem—and called us in. Cause of death was approximately two dozen sleeping capsules, a kind called dormison.

"He hadn't brought them in with him and there wasn't any of that particular drug in the hospital. So someone had brought them to him, for the purpose."

"Find out who it was?"

"Wasn't much doubt about it being his wife. She was just about the only visitor he ever had; they hadn't lived here long before he got hospitalized, so he hadn't had a chance to make friends here. At least none close enough to him to risk jail for him like that.

"Wife refused to take a lie detector test; said she didn't believe in it and didn't trust it, which is what all of them say when they're afraid to take it. But she denied taking the stuff to him and we never did trace any dormison to her, so no charge was ever made. For which I'm just as glad; it would have been a hell of a thing to have to prosecute somebody for."

"Yeah," I said, "I see what you mean about the circumstances being different. Guy like that would need outside help but Stiffler—Say, Frank, I just thought of something."

"You mean checking whether Kurt bought a gun since the auto accident?"

I said, "Or before, for that matter. He's been here only four months so if anyone sold him one in that length of time they ought to remember his picture."

Frank pulled out cigarettes, gave me one and stuck one in his mouth. I got my Zippo going and lighted them for us.

Frank said, "It's worth trying. Take us only a couple of hours to cover every place in town he could have bought one. We'll ask Cap, when we report, if we should put that on the agenda for tomorrow. If we find Kurt *did* buy a gun, a twenty-two, and especially since the accident, then we'll give a high order of probability to suicide and *really* start beating our brains out over what could have happened to the gun after he shot himself."

"Right," I said. "I think we can get Cap to go for it. Only I don't think he's going to buy that possibility of suicide, Frank. He hasn't got the imagination we have. Let's not tell him we want to check if Stiffler bought a rod. Let's talk him into it being a good idea to check on all recent sales of twenty-two revolvers."

"Which is a good idea, Red. Maybe we'll find Medley bought one. But I doubt it; he's too slick an article for that."

"You're still hipped on Medley as a killer? Hell, Frank, it doesn't make sense."

"What does?" Frank asked. "Well, let's see if we can finish the neighborhood here today, huh? I've got a hunch we're going to get a large zero but we might as well get it over with."

We got a large zero.

We covered both sides of the block he lived in and found about a dozen people who knew him "slightly" or "to speak to," and found that most of the others knew him by sight and all of them knew who he was and something about him—but nothing that we didn't know already. The accident, the quadruple funeral and the court hearing at least had brought

him local fame. Not to mention the murder story that had broken in this morning's paper. We found ourselves being asked more questions than we ourselves had a chance to ask.

But we found no one who remembered seeing Stiffler at any time Tuesday evening. Nor anyone who knew him at all well.

We found, but it didn't help, two women who had been neighborly with his wife, in Spanish. They'd been in the Stiffler flat and she'd been to their homes. But only by day while Stiffler had been at work. On the few occasions when the possibility of an evening family get-together had been mentioned, Carmelita Stiffler (that was the first time I'd heard her first name) had begged off, explaining that her husband was in poor health and had to spend his evenings resting and go to bed early. We got some details on the three Stiffler children; it seems they were quite bright, in good health and very well-behaved. But since they were all dead, that wasn't going to help us either.

We got in the car around four-thirty and drove down to report in. I asked Frank, "What the hell do you figure was wrong with the guy, not to have made any friends at all, either in his own neighborhood or at work? Sure, he was in bum health, but even at that, damn it, he ought to have had some friends."

Frank said, "I think we'll find he made a few. Not many and not very close friends, in four months. Add up shyness, introversion, lack of stamina, and a wife and three kids to keep him busy, and it doesn't figure he'd have made a flock of friends. He wasn't a good-time Charlie in any language. But he was friendly enough to those people in Nogales to drive down to a wedding. My guess is that whatever friends he did make he met through the church. We'll have to check with Father Trent on that. And on the Nogales people. We

were just thinking in terms of identification and general background when we talked to Trent yesterday; we didn't know what questions to ask."

Cap Pettijohn looked unhappy when we reported the little we'd learned. "All right," he said, frowning. "So he went home right from the bus, except for that grocery stop, and ate at home. But he left home again and you boys mean to tell me nobody saw him leave?"

"Nobody that we could find," Frank said.

Cap said, "I think you'd better try some more tomorrow. Everybody couldn't have been at home in that block."

Frank said, "We've got a list of the places where nobody was home; there weren't many of them. But there were more cases where we could talk to a woman only, because her man was at work. We'll have to pick them up in the evening, or wait till the week end."

Cap frowned again. "You boys worked late last night and I hate to ask you to do it again tonight, but we've got to get going on this thing. The Chief called me just half an hour ago and he wasn't happy with what I could tell him."

I said, "Okay by me to work this evening, Cap." I looked at Frank and he nodded but didn't look happy about it.

"Well," Cap said, "here's what's been happening otherwise. The railroad boys picked up a seventeen-year-old kid with a twenty-two revolver on him. He's in jail now. We're putting a concealed weapons charge against him to hold him and we'll have the gun fired and a bullet compared with the one taken from Stiffler's head. If it matches, we've got something. But I don't have any high hopes for it. The kid says he was in El Paso Tuesday evening and can prove it, for one thing. Another thing, they pulled him off a freight that had just come in."

"He could have boarded it at the edge of town," I said.

"Could have. But if he'd done a murder here, why'd he go

to the edge of town and then hop a freight back in? I think we can forget him, as far as Stiffler's concerned, unless the bullet does match.

"Another thing, I had Paul and Harry spend all day canvassing the Campbell Street neighborhood. Nobody out there recognized a picture of Stiffler and nobody had seen anything suspicious in the neighborhood Tuesday evening. I was out there myself, talked to John Medley. A very pleasant gentleman. Frank, I can't imagine where you get the wild idea he might be involved in the murder. Or do you still feel that way?"

Frank shrugged. "I still think he's a creep. I'll ride with him till something better comes along."

Cap frowned at him. "That's crazy, Frank. He's mildly eccentric, something of a recluse, but that doesn't make him a murderer. The one thing about him that puzzled me is the fact that he does quite a bit of dealing in real estate and still doesn't have a telephone. But he explained that to me."

Frank looked interested. "The explanation being?"

"He simply dislikes telephones and hates being interrupted by one. And he doesn't need one for business because he refuses to dicker on price. If he has a lot listed with an agent for five hundred dollars he doesn't want the agent bothering him to transmit an offer for four fifty. The agent is empowered to sell if he gets the price asked and the deal can be handled by mail."

"Makes sense," I said. "Anything else new, Cap?"

"Got a call from Father Trent. Funeral is set for Saturday morning at ten. Think you boys should go, but that's your day off. Like to work Saturday and take an extra day off next week instead? Or have you made plans for Saturday, either of you?"

Neither of us had, it turned out, and Cap said, "Good. And because of the evening work, don't report in here Saturday

morning. Just get to the funeral at ten and report here after. Now about this evening. Think it'll take you long to finish up over there on Burke Street?"

Frank said, "Not over a couple of hours. Maybe less if we're lucky. Why? Anything else you want us to do?"

"Well, either one of two things. First, I think you boys ought to talk to Father Trent again. Get more leads on what friends he had, since you had bad luck finding any at work or in his own neighborhood."

"We had that in mind," Frank said. "What's the other thing."

"One person out on Campbell. The daughter of that Armstrong widow who lives in the house next to John Medley. She and her mother went to a drive-in movie the evening of the murder, but she could have noticed something either before or after that her mother didn't notice. But I guess seeing Trent is more important, for this evening."

Frank said, "St. Matthew's is on my way home, right in easy walking distance from where I live. And it shouldn't take both of us to talk to Trent, at least this time. So is it okay if I drop in on my way home and see him alone?"

I said, "It's an idea, Cap. Trent knows Frank and might talk more freely if it was just the two of them. And if Frank does that I'll drive home by way of Campbell and look up the Armstrong gal. If it's okay by you."

It was okay by Cap. Ordinarily on a murder case, we're supposed to work in pairs, just in case, but I guess he figured that neither Father Trent nor the Armstrong girl would turn out to be a desperate or dangerous character.

Frank called home from the phone in the assembly room and then we ate and went back to Burke Street. We were through there a little before eight o'clock; we didn't get anything worth mentioning. We found one man who'd noticed Stiffler come out of the grocery store and go into the

entrance that took him upstairs and home, but we already had figured he'd done that. We found another guy who thought he'd seen Stiffler come out of that same entrance about the middle of the evening and thought there was another man with him. But he'd seen it at a distance and couldn't give us a description, even a vague one, of whoever Stiffler had been with; he just hadn't noticed. And the more we questioned him the vaguer it got; he wasn't even sure it was Tuesday evening. We told him to think it over and try to remember more about it and that we'd look him up again later.

We put the city car in the police garage and got my Buick off the parking lot and I dropped Frank off at St. Matthew's and then drove out to Campbell and to the Armstrong house. Medley's living room light was on and his phonograph was going, playing something long-haired that I didn't recognize. I could barely hear it here but if I could hear it at all, at the curb and two lots away, then it was plenty loud inside that living room. If he'd had it on like that Tuesday evening he definitely wouldn't have heard a twenty-two pop in his back yard. I made a mental note to tell Frank that, and then I went up the walk to the Armstrong house and rang the bell.

The girl who opened the door was three-alarm, a knock-out. Hair just one shade redder than mine, wide-apart big blue eyes. Tallish, for a girl, and slender, but really stacked in the right places. Beautifully sun-tanned on all visible areas, and such areas added up to considerable, since she was wearing what women call a play suit, no doubt because that's what it makes men want to do. She was maybe twenty-five, give or take a year or so.

I guess I fumbled a little, out of sheer surprise, in introducing myself, but I got through it okay. She said, "Come in, Mr. Cahan. Mother's in the kitchen. I'll call—"

"We've talked to your mother," I said. "But you weren't

home then and there are a few questions we'd like to ask you. I mean that *I'd* like to ask you."

She smiled. "Of course; please sit down. But I really should run and put on a dress. I wasn't expecting anyone this evening and—"

"Please don't," I said. Not for *my* sake, I meant. "This will just take a minute or two." Unless I could make it take longer.

"All right, Mr. Cahan." She sat down and I picked the chair that gave the best view.

"Your name? I know your last name's Armstrong, but—"

"Caroline."

"Please tell me what you remember about Tuesday evening."

"Well, I'm afraid I can't add anything to what Mother told you. We talked it over and I couldn't remember anything more than she did."

"Please tell me anyway. Pretend we haven't talked to your mother."

"All right. Let's see, I got home from work the usual time, around half past five, and—"

"In the car, or do you use the bus?"

"I drive to work. Mother refuses to learn to drive a car so she wouldn't use it while I'm away anyway."

"Did you notice if Mr. Medley was home then, or if his car was in his carport?"

"I didn't notice about the car but it must have been there because he was, working in the front yard. I think he was trimming the hedge. Anyway, Mother and I had planned to go to a movie and neither of us was very hungry so we decided to wait a while and have a meal out for a change, on the way. We left about half past seven and—"

"Was Medley home then?"

"Mother says his car was there, but I don't remember one way or the other. Nor about his light, although I guess it

wouldn't have been on anyway; it was still light out at that time. Anyway we ate and went to the Prince Drive-In, and we got home a little before ten o'clock because we didn't like the second feature on the bill and didn't stay for all of it. I'm sure and so is Mother that Mr. Medley was home then—that is, I mean that his light was on then. And that's all. I mean, we stayed up another hour, I guess, before we went to bed but we didn't see or hear anything."

I asked, "What do you think of Mr. Medley? As a person, as a neighbor."

"I like him. He's a little on the fuddy-duddy side, but he's nice. And he's a good neighbor all right."

I took the picture of Stiffler out of my pocket, walked over and handed it to her. "Have you ever seen this man? Around the neighborhood—or anywhere else for that matter."

She looked at it closely a moment and then handed it back. "No," she said, "I haven't. Is that the man who was killed?"

I put the picture back in my pocket and nodded. And suddenly it occurred to me that I didn't have any more questions left. Then I thought of one.

"Do you like to square-dance?" I asked her.

She looked at me wide-eyed a second or two and then laughed. "I love to. But—"

"It's only half past eight and the dance is just starting," I said. "Hurry up and put on a dress and let's get going."

EIGHT

ALICE RAMOS

I woke and yawned and wondered what time it was, not that it mattered really because I was all of a sudden wide awake and no matter what time it was I wouldn't go back to sleep. It was early because Frank was still snoring. It isn't a loud snore but he does it *all* the time and sometimes when I can't sleep it drives me almost crazy. We should have twin beds but Frank doesn't want them and any time I mention getting them he reminds me how much in debt we are already, with that tone in his voice that means he's thinking it's because of money I spend on liquor that we're always behind the eight ball financially. But dear Lord, if I didn't drink once in a while, I really *would* go crazy. Life and everything is such an awful mess and there was so much I wanted and look at what I've got. And no chance of it getting better because there he is on that low-paying police job and it'll never get any better. On account of his race if for no other reason he'll never get a chance to be captain of detectives or chief of police or anything. He thinks he's lucky to have got off a beat, but if he was half as smart as he thinks he is he'd find something else to do that would make more money. Or have a future in it. Sometimes I even wish he was a crooked cop and took bribes, but I guess I don't, really; then there'd always be a chance of his getting caught and there'd be *that* to worry about on top of everything else. Or

if he wasn't too damn proud to let me work as a waitress again, at least part of the time, we could get caught up and get some money ahead and maybe get out of this awful place, to New York or Florida or somewhere where there's something going on. But I guess he's right that he'd have a harder time making a living either of those places than here in Arizona. And that sticks us. If he only had some ambition to make something of himself, to do something beside read and listen to that classical music of his. They don't pay off on either of those things. He spends as much money on books and records as I do on drinking, but he denies it. And another thing bad about his job; he's always working late and always tired. He doesn't even like dancing any more, and he used to dance so wonderfully; I guess that's maybe why I fell for him. But look at us now.

I raised myself up on an elbow so I could see across Frank to the clock on the table on his side of the bed. It was ten minutes after eight and for a moment I thought Frank had forgotten to set the alarm and had overslept. Then I remembered it was Saturday, his day off. Except that this particular Saturday he had to be at a funeral at ten o'clock, the funeral of the man who was killed in the case he's working on, this Kurt Stiffler. Frank's full of that particular case right now, he's hipped on it like he gets hipped once in a while on a case and thinks about nothing else. He told me all about it last night, what a mess of tough breaks this Kurt had had, in a concentration camp and all, and a lot about a man named Medley that Frank thinks is a creep but from what he told me I don't see why he thinks so.

I gave Frank a little push that made him turn partway over and would stop him snoring for a few minutes and then I lay back down with my hands behind my head staring at the ceiling. The alarm, I remembered, was set for eight-thirty and I might as well relax here in bed till it went off. If I got

up now ahead of Frank I'd have to make the coffee, and he thinks he makes better coffee than I do so let him make it.

I felt pretty good. No hang-over because I'd had no drinks yesterday and only a few the day before, Thursday, to taper off. Dear Lord, but I'd felt horrible Thursday morning, after that all-night quarrel with Frank Wednesday night. I guess it was mostly my fault, too. Poor Frank, having to go to work the next day after that. I went back to bed and slept till noon after he'd left. But in a way he brings it on himself, being willing to argue. Why doesn't he simply knock me out and put me to bed and go to sleep himself. He's afraid to because he thinks I'd leave him. Maybe I would; I wouldn't know unless it happens and I guess it isn't ever going to happen. He's too good for me, I guess.

He loves me, and I wish he didn't, not so much anyway. Because probably I'll leave him someday and I'd not feel so bad about it if I didn't know it would hurt him plenty. Maybe that's why I'm so bitchy to him sometimes and especially when I've been drinking, because I *want* him to get mad at me and stop loving me, for his own sake. Because I still like him at least that much. But he's so damn patient with me.

I wonder if it would be better with Clyde. Frank doesn't even know that Clyde exists; he's never even seen him or heard his name. And the few times I've gone to a motel with Clyde we've gone early in the evening and I've made him drop me off a block or two from home by one o'clock when the taverns close so Frank didn't suspect a thing. But I don't really love Clyde either. Maybe I just haven't got it in me really to love anybody. Maybe that part of me just ended six years ago, a year after I married Frank, when I had the miscarriage and then they took some things out of me—my “plumbing,” Frank calls it—and I can't have a baby any more. I should have had a baby or babies, then maybe I'd still be in love with Frank like I was before and none of this

might ever have happened. And yet it was a relief too, in a way, because of Frank being Mexican, our babies would have been half that, and so many people do have prejudice. It's silly but they do, and sometimes more against children from mixed marriages than if they're all Mexican. The kid or kids might have had a tough row to hoe. But it will never happen. The one I lost would be just the age to start to school next fall, and I wouldn't even be thinking about leaving Frank, I guess. Or drinking, at least not so much; I wouldn't be able to with a kid or with kids, but this way what else is there to do that's worth doing?

But here I am almost thirty and not getting any younger and if I *am* ever going to get out of this rut I'm in, it's about time I made up my mind. Another few years and I'll have lost my looks and it'll be too late. Or I'll be an alcoholic.

Yes, Clyde may be my last chance for all I know. And would I really be happy with him? I suppose not really happy; is there such a thing as happiness? But it would be a lot less dull and boring. For one thing, when I wanted to drink, he'd drink *with* me, and not stay sober and act disgusted like Frank does. And he makes more money than Frank, I guess about twice as much. We'd live better, but I guess even more important than that is that we wouldn't have to live *here*. Not here in this hot desert with nothing but scorpions and cactus and sand once you get outside of town, not even a river with water in it. Dear Lord, how I remember the lovely lakes in Minnesota, thousands of them, and green, cool woods. I lived there until I was through high school and what made me ever come to Tucson I'll never know, although I'll admit that I liked it at first. But married to Frank I'll never get out of it. Not that I want to go back to Minnesota; it's as much too cold in winter as Tucson is too hot in summer. But Clyde will take me anywhere I want to go, if I'll go with him. Even to Reno for a first stop, he says, if I

want to make it legal. He isn't too enthusiastic about that, though, because to get a divorce even in Reno papers would have to be served on Frank and he'd know where we are and Clyde is afraid Frank might follow with his police pistol. I don't think Frank would, not if I left him a note explaining things anyway, but I'll admit I can't be sure. I don't think Frank would do anything to me, but he just might want to kill Clyde, anyway I can't be sure that he wouldn't. So maybe Clyde is right in saying what does it matter whether we're legally married or not as long as people wherever we go think we are and as long as we wouldn't be having kids anyway; he knows about that, of course.

But Clyde is a salesman and a *good* salesman and I don't mean just because he sold me on going to a motel with him those few times. He sells electrical appliances here, but he says he can sell anything anywhere, even ice cream cones to Eskimos, and that's why I can take my pick of California or Florida or anywhere. I think maybe I'd like San Francisco, from all I've heard about it. I've never been there. I haven't been *anywhere* since I married Frank farther than Grand Canyon and that's right in the same state as Tucson, and that was on our honeymoon seven years ago. And another thing about being with Clyde is that there's always the chance that he'll make a lot of money and we'll really get somewhere, be somebody, while with Frank I know we'll *never* be any better off than we are now, not enough to matter anyway. And there's the fact that Clyde likes all the things I like, dancing, going out, bright spots and bright lights and nice clothes (he says that in San Francisco or wherever we go every time we go out to a night spot he'll wear a Tux, which would look silly in Tucson, and I'll wear one of the dozen or so evening gowns he says I'll have.)

Even if it doesn't last, it'll be a better life than this one for a while, and I guess a while is all I've got. In a while it'll be

too late, if I wait. Wait, late; it rhymes. In more ways than one.

Well, I'll decide before the weather gets really hot, I thought.

Frank woke up; he just reached over and shut off the alarm, five minutes before it was ready to go off. He yawned and stretched and I shut my eyes so he wouldn't know I was awake.

I lay there wondering what he'd do or say if he knew what I was thinking, what I'd been thinking. Would he beat me? Or kill me? Neither, I guess. I don't think he'd even walk out on me.

I felt the bed move as he sat on his side of it, feeling with his feet for his slippers. The bed moved again and I heard the shuffle of his slippers as he headed for the kitchen. Whistling softly. How can anybody whistle so few minutes after waking up? But I could almost whistle myself this morning. I feel good physically. No hang-over. I decided I'd stay on the wagon at least a week this time. No drinks today, at the very least.

I heard the coffeepot rattling and decided to get up. I could dress quickly and be fully dressed when Frank came back from getting the coffee started. I got up and dressed quickly. Sometimes he gets ideas in the morning and this morning I didn't want him to touch me. On account of what I'd been thinking, trying to decide, I suppose.

Why is it, I wondered, that I just don't enjoy sex any more? Not intensively, anyway, not like it used to be. It can't be age, twenty-nine isn't old. And it can't be on account of the operation I had, because it didn't stop then. But maybe it began to taper off then. I don't even enjoy it very much with Clyde, although more there than with Frank; at least with Clyde I'm not bored. Maybe I would be after a while, though, after it wasn't new any more.

But Frank hasn't any complaints, there. I let him have his fun often enough, almost any time he wants unless I'm mad at him or something. Why not? It doesn't *hurt* me. I don't try to act, though, and I sometimes wonder if he realizes how little I get out of it. Nothing at all, usually. I guess he doesn't realize, at that, because there's no contrast in the way I act. Even back when it was the most wonderful thing in all the world I used to like to take it lying passive, with my eyes closed, and not move while the wonderful waves of feeling ran over me. Oh, if it could only be like that again, just once.

I was standing in front of the mirror combing my hair when Frank came back from the kitchen. He came up behind me and put his arms around me. "'Morning, *querida*," he said, and kissed the back of my neck.

"'Morning, darling," I said. Oh, Frank, I thought, if only you were still my darling. If only I could love you like I used to. You're a nice guy and I'm not good for you and I'm probably going to hurt you. Does life bitch things up for everyone like it has for us?

He stepped back. "Okay for me to shower and shave? Or you want the bathroom a while first?"

"Go ahead," I told him. "I don't have to go right away. And I'll take my shower sometime later in the day."

I went out in the kitchen, set the table and got breakfast ready. Frank eats a good breakfast if I get up in time to get it for him; otherwise he just has coffee and maybe a sweet roll or a doughnut if there's one around. He won't cook eggs or bacon for himself.

As always, he read the morning paper while he ate. I don't like his doing that, I'd rather he talked to me, but I don't say anything because I know he has to read it on account of his job. When we were through eating and having a second cup of coffee I asked him if there was anything in the paper about the case he was working on. Sometimes, not often, he

gets his name in the paper if whatever he's working on is an important case like a murder or a big robbery.

"Not even a line, Alice," he told me. "There wasn't anything new for them to follow up. We're getting nowhere faster all the time."

I said, "Today they'll at least have the funeral to cover. Suppose they'll send reporters there?"

"I guess they will." He sighed. "*Damn* it, I wish I could get a lead to Medley. Or even figure out a motive he could possibly have had."

I poured more coffee for us. I said, "I thought you thought he might be a psychopath. Crazy people don't need a motive."

"Yes, they do, Alice. It doesn't have to be a *sane* motive, but they still have to have one."

I said, "From all you told me about Kurt Stiffler, maybe this Medley killed him to put him out of his misery."

Frank put down the paper and stared at me across it. His face went suddenly kind of slack. Expressionless.

"Well," I said defensively, thinking he was making fun of me, "you said a crazy motive would do. Or are *you* crazy enough to take that seriously?"

I guess he was. He didn't even answer me.

After Frank left, I cleaned house and was just getting ready to take a shower when the phone rang. It was Clyde's voice. "Hello, honey. What's cooking?"

"Clyde!" I said, "I told you never to call on *Saturday*. It's Frank's day off and he might answer the phone."

"That's all right," Clyde said cheerfully. "I'd just sell him a vacuum cleaner; you said you needed a better one, didn't you? But I gather, from the way you spoke, that he isn't there even if it is his day off?"

"He's working today," I admitted.

"Then how's about fun and games? Had lunch yet?"

When I said I hadn't, he said, "Then how's about meeting me at the Glass Slipper at one o'clock?"

"I shouldn't, today, Clyde. I'm on the wagon and I want to stay on at least a few days. I know I *should*. I—" ' "

"Honey girl, we've got something to celebrate. I just closed a deal on a big kitchen installation for a new restaurant that's going to open up out on Oracle Road. Over six hundred bucks commission for a few hours' work. Doesn't that deserve a celebration, huh?"

"Gee, Clyde, I guess it does." Six hundred dollars for a few hours' work. More than Frank Ramos makes in a month. "All right, the Glass Slipper at one o'clock."

I took my shower and dressed. And it was still not quite twelve so I had a lot of time. And since I was going off the wagon anyhow, and since I didn't want to take off *cold* sober, I made myself a drink. You live only once. Funny, but Frank taught me that. As a girl I used to go to Sunday School and sometimes to church and I at least more or less believed in a heaven and a hell, an afterlife of some kind, until Frank showed me how silly it was to believe in something like that.

NINE

FRANK RAMOS

Is this a pattern that I see before me?

A dog screaming in agony from poison, mercifully shot to end its pain. (Why had Medley insisted on telling us of that episode in such detail?) A man walking in the silent agony of guilt and bereavement, a man whose world had vanished in a shrieking crash that left him nothing to live for, unable to end things for himself because of religious belief, mercifully put out of *his* pain by a shot that he never felt?

But if two, why not others? How many others? Where and how long ago could it have started? Before John Medley came to Tucson?

A bell is tolling in the belfry high above the church. Six pallbearers are carrying a coffin down the center aisle. I know only one of them, Vaughn, the foreman at the new high school building. He must have phoned Father Trent and offered his services if they were needed. I memorize the other five; later I'll get their names from Trent and Red and I will look them up.

The bell tolls. But not for me. I turn in my seat and look around to see if anyone new has come into the church since I last looked around. No, I see no one I had not see before. Twenty-three, I had counted. Now the pallbearers made it twenty-nine. And I made thirty; I had not counted myself.

John Medley is not present.

Red Caban sits on the other side of the aisle and farther back. We had agreed to come separately and sit separately, the better to observe, and to join one another and compare notes afterward. Accidentally I catch Red's eye and he winks at me. I wink back but I don't feel good about doing it; it doesn't seem right, here and now. Despite the fact that I don't believe in any of this pomp and ceremony and don't believe Kurt Stiffler, dead in that closed coffin being carried down the aisle, knows that any of this is going on. Or cares. It's all ridiculous. But aren't we all? Why did I waste five good bucks of hard-earned money on flowers, just in case there would be a skimpy quantity of them otherwise? (But there wasn't; there were more than I'd expected, including two really big and beautiful floral pieces, one from his fellow workers at the construction project and the other from Sig Hoffmann, his boss. And Hoffmann was paying for the funeral, too, Trent had told me Thursday evening.) Anyway, my little five bucks' worth hadn't been needed although they made a nice splotch of red in what would otherwise have been a monotony of white. But it had been a silly gesture, just the same. Especially since I'd had to send them anonymously because I knew that Red, like myself, would be looking over the cards on the flowers, and Red would think I was crazy to send flowers to the funeral of a man I'd never met. Maybe, I thought with sudden amusement, Red would wonder at those anonymous red roses and think we should track down through the florists to see who had sent them. Well, I could divert him if he got that idea.

Hoffmann was there, of course. And the blond youngster who had worked in the Quonset office with Kurt. Not Rhoda Stern; I was glad that she hadn't come. Two of the workmen from the project. The Mexican woman, still in her shawl, who lived in the flat next to the one where the Stiffles lived.

Where the Stiffers *had* lived. She had with her a boy of about seven or eight; he'd probably played with the Stiffler children. One other woman and one couple from the same building. Two reporters, one from the *Star* and one from the *Citizen*. The *Star* reporter had sat down next to Red, would probably try to pump him to get something for his story.

Those were all the ones I knew. I memorized the faces of the others and later I'd compare notes with Trent as to who had been there. I'd asked him to notice and remember. I imagine he knows just about everyone there that I don't know. They're probably all parishioners of his who knew Kurt through the church. Maybe he'd even urged some of them to come.

The bell tolls. The pallbearers reach the front and put the coffin on the bier before the communion rail. The bell stops tolling. There is silence in which we hear a jet plane somewhere in the sky. The pallbearers seat themselves.

I found myself thinking about Ernest Winkelman, the man I'd told Red about when I was pointing out that it was possible, if unusual, for a suicide to have an accomplice. For the first time I wondered seriously if we'd been right in figuring that only his wife could have or would have taken those dormison capsules to him in the hospital. Possibly she had told the truth in denying it. Possibly Medley had known him, however slightly, and knew of his pain and his wish for merciful death to end it.

Could I find Mrs. Winkelman and ask her if she had known a John Medley, if a man of that name had ever visited her husband while he lay so slowly dying? Or might Medley himself have been a patient in the same hospital at the same time? That, at least, I would be able to check.

How many others, ones that might have passed for natural deaths or unassisted suicides? I thought about the several

unsolved murders that had happened here in recent years—yes, one of them *could* have been a mercy killing, although we hadn't figured it for that at the time.

Father Trent's voice is saying the mass now, in sonorous Latin which I cannot understand; which, for that matter, I could not understand even if I spoke Latin as well as I speak English and Spanish. Yet the sound of his voice is soothing and the very fact that he speaks in a strange language makes it almost convincing, makes me almost feel for the moment that there really *is* a God, a merciful God who cares about us and what we do, and that Father Trent is really talking to him.

How must that voice have sounded in the ears of Kurt Stiffler two weeks ago—yes, only two weeks ago—when he sat in this very church, perhaps this very pew, listening to it and seeing four coffins, one large coffin and three small coffins, lined up on biers against that communion rail?

Or, in a case like that, do they have a separate funeral for each, four funerals one after another? No, they couldn't do that to a man, not possibly. He'd have to face his horror all at once to stand it, not made to consider each item of his loss separately and in sequence.

An altar boy is handing Trent the little shaker on the end of a stick. Now, with it, he is shaking holy water on the coffin. Intoning mystery.

The mass is over and there is a pause and a slight stir about me. I know that this is not all because Trent has told me that after the mass there will be an ordinary funeral oration in English. I look around again; had anyone come in late he would probably have waited in the hallway during the mass and be slipping down the aisle now. But no one has come in. Why have I been expecting John Medley, even if I'm right about him and not as screwy as a bedbug to think what I'm thinking. Why should he have sent flowers, or why should

he come here? Hasn't he already done enough for Kurt Stiffler?

Trent is talking now, telling them about Kurt, most of the things he told Red and me in his study Wednesday afternoon, about Kurt's background, the things that a merciful God had, in His infinite wisdom, made to happen to him. But I listen carefully, in case he should remember and tell now some detail he had not mentioned before. But he doesn't; this version is in even less detail than the one he gave us.

In the pew behind me a woman is crying softly. In Spanish. It's funny; there aren't any words but I can tell that it is in Spanish. Or is it only my imagination because my ears give me the direction of the sound and I know from having looked around that the woman sitting there is Mexican. One of the women who had become a friend of Carmelita Stiffler but who had barely known her husband. She is probably crying for Carmelita and the children, not for Kurt, for Trent's words now evoke their ghosts as well as Kurt's. He is telling of what befell them.

And now he is telling about how, through it all, Kurt kept his faith and how God will now reward him, how he is now rejoined to his loved ones in heaven. It would be nice to be able to believe that, and in this solemn setting I am almost convinced, for a moment. At least I am convinced that it would be very pleasant and soothing to be able to believe such a thing.

It's over, but we keep our seats. The pallbearers rise and go to the bier, take again the silver handles of the coffin. And again the bell starts to toll overhead.

The bell tolls and the coffin is carried back along the aisle, passing so close to me that I can reach out and touch it if I wish. But I wouldn't be touching the poor guy in that coffin; no one will ever touch him again. No one but the worms.

Some of us, about half, followed the hearse to the cemetery.

Red and I in his car, the Buick, and he'd offered a lift to the reporter who'd sat next to him. The other reporter wasn't going. A snazzy convertible is hardly a car for a funeral procession but at least it was black.

"Anything new, you boys?" the reporter wanted to know.

Red grinned at him. "Yeah. I'm in love."

"You damn fool, I mean about the murder. Getting anywhere?"

Red said, "You better ask Cap Pettijohn about that, if you want something to quote. Off the record, we aren't halfway to first base. We've got from nothing."

"That's what I figured. Hell, it was a robbery kill and on one of those you get the guy red-handed or else you never get him."

"Yeah," Red said. "That guy Stiffler sure got a mess of bad breaks, didn't he?"

The reporter said, "He could have got a worse one. He could have lived a few more years."

It didn't take long at the grave, the grave that was alongside four other almost fresh graves. I thought about what was in those other graves now after two weeks and then I tried to stop thinking.

After it was all over we went back to St. Matthew's. We got there ahead of Father Trent, but when he came he gave us half an hour with him in his study. And as I'd expected he knew everyone who'd been at the funeral except some we knew; the two workmen and the blond kid from the project and one of the two reporters. He gave us names and addresses; one of the addresses was in Nogales and was that of the couple whose wedding dinner Kurt had attended just before the accident.

We reported in to Cap and got orders to go ahead and follow up on what we had. We spent the rest of the day doing it and learned that Kurt had had friends and that, as we'd

suspected, he'd made most of them through the church. None of them had been very close friends but that was to be expected since he'd been here only four months, and an introvert doesn't make really close friends in that length of time, especially when his health cuts down the amount of time he has for social life.

We made the Nogales call last and got back just at quitting time and for once Cap didn't have overtime lined up for us. We were running out of leads.

For once I'd get home in time to have dinner with Alice. *If* she hadn't fallen off the wagon and started drinking again. And I didn't think she would have; she'd been really serious about staying on a while this time. And she'd been so damn nice yesterday and this morning.

And this morning she gave me the answer to the question that had been haunting me for three days. ". . . maybe this Medley killed him to put him out of his misery." So simple an answer and so close I hadn't been able to see it.

TEN

FERN CAHAN

Five of the boys were in the assembly room when I walked in. Four of them were batting the breeze about the Tucson Cowboys and the fifth one was Frank. He was sitting alone in the corner looking like he'd lost his last friend. Not hung over, just glum.

I said to him, "Cheer up, sonny. Even if we're working and it's Sunday, life isn't that bad."

He just grunted, didn't even look up at me.

Something was eating him all right. I wondered if he was maybe having family trouble. I met his wife once at the Policeman's Ball a couple of years ago. Nice-looking, I think her name was Alice. They seemed to get along all right, but Frank never mentions her or talks about her. I wouldn't even know he was married if he didn't have to call home whenever he's stuck with working late. Never seems to take her around much either. Maybe that's what's wrong. I can see that a woman wouldn't like to be stuck home all the time. But hell, I'm just guessing.

Too bad in a way, I thought. I know plenty of men and quite a few women, but not many couples. Guess a bachelor just doesn't have much chance to know couples. He sees the men he knows when they're on the loose, and if any of the women he dates have husbands, well, he doesn't want to be

taken home and introduced to them. Married couples seem to run together and so do single people, or one of a couple who's on the loose. So when a bachelor like me finally meets a girl he thinks is *the* girl and feels like he's on the verge of popping a big question, he's got nobody to talk it over with, and, brother, he wants to talk it over plenty. And he wants to introduce the girl around, partly to show her off because he's proud of her and partly because there's still a touch of doubt in his mind and he wants to see if other people rate her the same as he does. But he isn't going to introduce her to his other or former girl friends, or to wolves. So he's on his own when he wants help and advice the most.

Not that I had much doubt about Caroline or that I was in love with her. My God, it had hit me like a ton of bricks. But still it's a hell of a big step to take.

Especially on such short notice, although it doesn't *seem* like short notice; it feels like I've known her for years instead of since Thursday evening. Talked to her half an hour on the phone Friday evening and dated her again Saturday evening, last night. A drive-in theater, not that I saw much of the picture. Kissing her was like—well, I don't know what to compare it to because nothing like it ever happened to me before. Only it'll never be more than kissing, a little mild petting maybe, unless we do get married. When you've been around with dames as much as I have you can tell when a girl is stalling you a while and will give in later and when she means it and there isn't a chance you're going to get in, short of making it legal. Most of the time that kind of girl annoys me, but not Caroline. Hell, in a way I don't *want* to; I mean, I don't want any quickies, I want everything, all of her and all the time, and anything less would drive me even nuttier than I guess I am. So I guess I'm in love all right.

I wish now I'd saved my money. But we'd make it all right, even if she quit her job right away. We wouldn't have to get

a place to live, for one thing. She and her mother have that house and it's bigger than they need for two of them and it would leave Mrs. A. alone there if I took Caroline away, and she could hardly live in that house alone, especially since she doesn't drive a car to get anywhere. It would be living with an in-law and that's supposed to be bad, but I can't see how it would be. I *like* Mrs. A., and I think she likes me. I'll bet what I'm paying for those bachelor quarters would cover whatever payments they're making on the house and all the money I've been spending chasing around would pay expenses for all three of us, if it had to be. My guess is that it wouldn't have to be, though, that Mrs. A. has money of her own or an income. From insurance or something. The two of them can't be living in as nice a place as that on just what Caroline makes as a typist at the electric company. They don't pay typists much.

I guess I always knew that if I ever fell for anybody, it would be all of a sudden, bang, like it did happen.

All right, damn it, I will. But what if she says no?

I had to talk to someone or bust a gut. I sat down beside Frank and said, "Frank, I'm thinking about getting myself hitched to Caroline Armstrong."

He turned and looked at me so surprised that he forgot he'd been feeling sorry for himself. "Isn't this kind of sudden, Red? I thought you were playing the field."

"It's sudden, all right," I said. Just then Carmody looked in and said the captain wanted Paul and Harry. So I knew we had at least a little time and I found myself telling Frank all about it.

He said, "More power to you, Red. Like to meet the girl. One thing, though. I did meet Mrs. Armstrong and she seemed like an awfully nice woman. And hearty and healthy and, for her age, handsome. If her daughter doesn't grow into anything worse, you'll have made a good deal. You can't al-

ways judge a girl by her mother but it's pretty often a good indication. How old is Caroline?"

"Twenty-five. Eight years younger than me isn't too much, is it, Frank?"

"Age doesn't matter as long as you're both old enough. And my guess is that as many sudden marriages work out as the other kind. When Alice and I were married I hadn't known her much longer than you've known Caroline." He paused just long enough that I thought maybe that was all he was going to say, but he went on. "And I've never regretted it. I still love her to hell and back."

Somehow he sounded like he was talking to himself on that last line instead of to me. I waited a minute and got a cigarette going, rather hoping he might say something about Caroline and me getting together with Alice and him. But he didn't. Instead he said, "Just one thing, Red. Do you and Caroline like the same things, the same kind of entertainment and what not?"

"Everything," I said. "By God, everything we've talked about—every movie star, singer, orchestra, kind of dancing, rodeos, everything like that—we find we like or dislike pretty much the same. Even sports, like baseball. She doesn't follow the big leagues but she follows the Cowboys. We're going to the game tomorrow evening."

Frank said, "Then God bless you, my children. There's Carmody signaling us. Guess we're due on the carpet."

We went into Cap's office. He was busy with some papers and just told us to sit down a second. I felt swell, talking with Frank had made up my mind for me. We wouldn't go to the baseball game tomorrow night if I could talk her into taking a drive out on the desert in the moonlight instead. And I'd ask her. Maybe it was going to take a lot of askings, a lot of persuading, and the sooner I started the better. And she'd start thinking seriously about me, if she hadn't already,

sooner if she knew that I was serious about her and not just playing around. Damn it, I *had* to have the girl and, now that I was sure, the sooner the better. I'd be jittery now until I got an answer.

Cap looked up suddenly. At me. "Man was found unconscious in the alley back of Geechy Pete's on Meyer Street at six o'clock this morning. Could have been slugged or could have fallen and hit his head. Either was robbed or didn't have any wallet or identification. Ambulance took him to Benbow Emergency. Concussion, not too serious. A few bruises and contusions. Still unconscious but they think he ought to come around any time. You two go over there and wait, talk to him as soon as he comes around."

Benbow Emergency is on Franklin Street just off Meyer. We're plenty familiar with it; it's where the ambulance takes all the casualties from the Meyer Street Skid Row district. And Geechy Pete's place is a shoeshine parlor that runs a book, although we haven't been able to prove it yet.

I asked, "Was the guy well-dressed or was he a bum?" If he was a bum his not having a wallet on him wouldn't necessarily mean anything.

"Fairly well-dressed," Cap said. "They tell me his clothes are okay on quality but mussed up and dirty. And he wasn't quite broke; he had three singles and some change stuck in his shirt pocket."

Businessman on a bender, it sounded like. But his having a little money loose in a shirt pocket didn't mean he hadn't been robbed. People stick change all sorts of places when they've been drinking, and a robber, especially if he was in a hurry, would settle for a wallet and not check a shirt pocket.

I said, "Okay, Cap, we're off," and stood up.

But Frank said, "Just a minute, Cap. Is there any indication that this ties in with the Stiffler case?"

"Not a thing. If it was a robbery, though, it *could* be the

same guy who took Stiffler. Only not playing quite so rough this time. But no, there's nothing to indicate it."

"Are we giving up on Stiffler then? Or are you just taking Red and me off and putting somebody else on it?"

"Neither," Cap said. He frowned at Frank. "You know better than to think we 'give up' on *any* unsolved killing. It stays on the books and any time we get a new lead or think it might tie in with a new case, we work on it again. But once we've run down everything we can we don't keep men working on it permanently."

"We haven't run down those twenty-two pistol purchases yet, Cap."

"And Sunday would be a bad day to hit places that sell guns. I've got that in mind for you two to do tomorrow. And the Mexico City angle is still open. If they answered my letter reasonably quick, within forty-eight hours of when they'd have got it, we should have an answer tomorrow. If there isn't one, I'll put in a phone call to Chief Gomez."

"Shouldn't you have phoned them in the first place?"

"No," Cap said. "Too many details to give them, too much to explain except in a letter. But now that they've got the details a phone call will hurry them up if they haven't done anything on it yet." Cap frowned again. "Are you criticizing me, Frank?"

Frank flushed a little. "Sorry if it sounded like that, Cap. Didn't mean it that way. Do you want me to make the call for you tomorrow, by the way? I know Gomez speaks perfect English, but if he isn't there—"

"I'll make the call, person to person. There's something else I want to talk to him about. Well, you boys can run along now. Phone in when you get a story out of the guy over there and I'll tell you whether to follow up."

Frank said. "Just one more thing, Cap. About Medley." He hesitated.

"What about Medley?"

"I know you think he's in the clear, Cap. But I'd like to talk to him again. I don't mean right now, of course. But sometime soon."

"I talked to him, Frank. And you're crazy if you think he's a murderer. What could you ask him that we haven't already asked? And what possible motive could he have had for killing Stiffler? If there was any connection between them we'd have found it by now."

Frank's face looked tense. He said, "I know you'll think I'm insane, but I think *he's* insane. A psychopath. I think he killed Stiffler for the same reason he killed his dog when it had been poisoned and was in agony. I think it's quite probable he may have killed other people for the same reason."

Cap Pettijohn stared at Frank for what seemed like a long time, and then he burst out laughing. Cap doesn't laugh often, he's just not a laughing man. But he lets go and really bellows when he does laugh.

Finally he stopped laughing and wiped his eyes with his handkerchief. He said, quite calmly, "Frank, I wasn't laughing at *you*, but at that wild idea. My suggestion is that you forget it before somebody *does* think you're crazy. Now you boys run along or that guy will be conscious when you get there."

We got the car and I drove. Frank sat staring straight ahead, his face as nearly pale as a Mexican's can get. "That son of a bitch," he said.

"He shouldn't have laughed like that," I agreed. "But, Frank, I think you're wrong. I think you're making a mountain out of a molehill, or a dog-killing. I put a cat out of its misery once when it went blind from old age. That doesn't mean I go around mercy-killing *people*."

"That sanctimonious son of a bitch," he said. "If it wouldn't have cost me my job I'd have—"

"Calm down, Frank," I told him. "*Non illegitimus carborundum.*" Frank had taught me that; he said it was mock Latin for "Don't let the bastards grind you down."

It got a grin out of him to have me toss it back at him, and he was quieted down by the time we got to Benbow. Thank God for that or we'd have had a rough day otherwise and I didn't want to fight; I wanted to think about Caroline Armstrong. When we weren't actually working, that is. I always keep my mind on what we're doing while we're actually doing it. But there are always odd moments for dreaming.

The guy was conscious when we got there; he'd come out of it ten minutes before. But knowing we were on our way around they hadn't asked him anything. The intern took us to the room; it was a two-bed room but the other bed was empty.

The guy in the occupied bed didn't occupy much of it. He was somewhere between forty and fifty, maybe five feet two inches tall and couldn't have weighed much over a hundred. He was lying on his side because there was a big bandage on the back of his head. They hadn't had to shave his head to tape it down. But his face could have used the shave; it was covered with stubble that couldn't make up its mind whether it was black or gray. He looked up at us sidewise out of scared little eyes. "What happened?" he asked.

"That's what we want to ask you. First, what's your name?" He'd answer that and then ask me either, "Where am I?" or "What day is it?"

He fooled me; he said, "Harvey Klinger," and didn't ask either of the other questions. Instead he asked, "What's wrong with me? How bad am I hurt?"

Frank cut in on me. "Let's let the doctor tell him that and get it off his mind, and he'll talk better."

The intern said boredly, "Slight concussion. A few bruises. Alcoholism, but not acute. We can release you by six this

evening if nothing develops. You can be drunk again by seven."

The little man licked his lips. "Guess maybe I'm through, for this time. God, I feel awful." Then he grinned faintly. "Guess I earned it."

I thought it was time to get back to business. "Do you know who attacked you?"

"Yeah." He licked his lips again and looked as though he was trying hard to think. "Met him in a tavern. Guy named Jerry; forget his last name, if he told me. Said he was a sailor. What'd a sailor be doing in Tucson? Not even a river here."

"Were you robbed?"

"I dunno. Was I?"

I said, "You had a few dollars loose in your shirt pocket. But if you had a wallet on you, it was taken."

"Guess I wasn't robbed, then. I had twenty on me last I remember, but I guess I spent the difference. Wallet I left in my room at the hotel."

"Hotel? Then you don't live in Tucson?"

"Nope, in Benson. Own a filling station there."

"You came here on business?"

He licked his lips again. "Came here to hang one on, if you got to know. Every six months or so, just for a few days. Got to. Get bored till I can't stand it. Put my car in a garage so I won't drive, check in a hotel and leave my wallet, just take out twenty bucks at a time so if I do get rolled I don't lose much."

"Well," I said, "you weren't robbed. But you were injured. Know what he hit you with?"

He shook his head. And winced because it hurt him.

"Want to swear out an assault warrant against your sailor named Jerry, if that and whatever description you can give us is enough for us to pick him up?"

"Hell, no. Like as not I started the fight myself. When I drink, I—I forget how small I am. I might swing on Rocky Marciano if I thought he was getting in my hair."

Frank chuckled. "It's a good thing you don't drink often, Mr. Klinger. Or you'd never live to a ripe old age."

"Can't drink often. Not at all in Benson. My wife runs the W. C. T. U. there, Women's Christian Temperance Union. And she's bigger than I am too—who isn't?—and if I ever had a few drinks and swung on *her*—brother, I'd wish it *had* been Rocky Marciano."

"Got enough money left in that wallet to pay off for the ambulance ride and the hospital here?" Frank asked. "It's on the house if you're a pauper, but you sound solvent to me."

"Should have a hundred left." He managed to turn his eyes far enough to look at the intern, and the intern nodded and said, "Half of that ought to cover it, easy."

I caught Frank's eye and he nodded so I said, "That's all, then, Mr. Klinger. But with a bump like that on your noggin, you'd better stick to meaning what you said about having had enough for this time. You better head back home and be thinking up a good story on the way."

"Okay, fellas. Thanks, and I will."

I started for the door but thought of one more thing, and turned back. I said, "One more thing. Next time you do this, okay, leave your wallet at the hotel, sure, but at least carry a piece of paper with your name and address on it."

He raised himself up on one elbow. "Huh? And have my wife *notified*? She'd be here right now if you'd phoned her when you found me. And she thinks I'm in Phoenix buying a new line of accessories for the filling station!"

Down in the lobby Frank and I looked at one another and laughed. I asked, "Want to phone the dear captain or shall I?"

"I will," he said. "I'll give him the earth-shaking news from

here and see what's next on the agenda. I needed that laugh. Now I can talk to him without spitting in his eye over the phone."

"But you still think Medley killed Stiffler?"

"Red, I'm not crazy. *He* is. He *did* kill him." He went to the phone.

He's almost got me believing it.

But it doesn't figure. Even if there was any evidence, and there isn't, it just doesn't figure. What could set a man off, drive him crazy, in any way that would make him want to *mercy-kill*?

ELEVEN

JOHN MEDLEY

Tuesday evening, and at eight o'clock I heard the clock strike and I thought, a week ago this moment I left to go and get him. He was so pathetic, that German boy. I knew the moment I first saw him and first spoke to him that God had guided me well.

He was like one dead. He would never have been otherwise. Nor would he have lived long otherwise, even had his body been in better health, for his will to live was gone. But while he did live he would have suffered, and mental anguish can be as intense as physical agony. I have know that for eight years.

So very pathetic, that young German. His eyes looked like pools of despair. His spirit was dead already and his mind and his body ached to die also.

From the newspaper stories of that horrible accident and of his actions at the court hearing and the multiple funeral, I had suspected that it might be so, but God had given me no sign at that time. Not until over a week later, the Sunday afternoon before the Tuesday evening when I killed him, did a sign come, and then it was not a clear and definite one.

It was so pleasant an April Sunday afternoon. I put a pocket Testament in my coat pocket and walked the dozen

blocks from my house to Himmel Park on Tucson Boulevard. It is my church when I go to one. I belong to no denomination, nor ever have. I was an agnostic, a freethinker, until eight years ago when, through the horrible crime I committed then, I found God. Or perhaps He found me. It was in the open that that happened, and it is in the open that I have found myself closest to Him ever since. Since God is everywhere, all the world is a church, it is folly to wall off small portions of it and call them churches. The greatest cathedral is tiny and ridiculous compared to the true cathedral whose roof is the sky.

In Himmel Park—how aptly named; it is the German word for heaven—I found myself a shaded bench from which I could watch the young people playing tennis on the concrete courts, and I watched them for a while and listened to the happy cries of children on the slide and the swings, and then I took the Testament from my pocket. I opened it, not at random, at The Revelation of St. John. If one part of the Bible can be greater than the rest, it is that book.

I found myself reading the passage: 'And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.'

Have you ever wondered about the symbolism of the beast in The Revelation? God, through St. John, tells us his number but not his name. Not, of course, inadvertently; He leaves to each of us the interpretation of that august symbol, and perhaps its meaning was never intended to be the same for all. To me the beast of the Apocalypse is *Mercy*, the mercy of surcease and death that is God's greatest gift. And it makes me feel very humble that six times now God has used me as His instrument in the bestowing of that gift.

But I digress. I had just finished reading the words "should be killed" when I heard the name *Kurt Stiffler* spoken aloud.

Not by a spirit voice but by a corporeal one. Still, could it have been a sign? I did not know, but I listened.

The voice had come from behind me. I turned my head and looked over the back of the bench and downward. A youth and a girl, both, I would have judged, somewhere in their late teens, were sitting on the grass just behind my bench. They had rackets lying beside them and were dressed for tennis; the girl (she was very pretty) wore shorts and a halter and her skin was golden brown from the sun. The youth wore slacks and a T-shirt. He was very blond and quite handsome despite the fact that he was at what is usually quite an awkward age.

It was his voice I had heard use Kurt Stiffler's name. I listened to what he was telling the girl about Stiffler. They were absorbed in their conversation and in one another; neither of them noticed me or knew that I was there. Occasionally a shriller than usual cry from one of the children at the slide would cause me to miss a word or a phrase, but I could hear most of what the blond boy was telling the girl, and her voice, when she put a question now and again, was even more clearly audible because of its higher pitch.

The blond boy, it seemed, worked with Kurt Stiffler in the temporary office at the site of the new high school Sig Hoffmann is building south of town. Apparently the girl had read the news story of the tragic accident, but had not known until now that the boy knew Kurt and worked with him. The boy was telling her about him, about his background before the tragedy and about his actions since.

Concerning the latter, he used the word "zombie" in describing Kurt, and said that he doubted that Kurt would ever recover ("snap back" was his wording) from what had happened to him, partly because in addition to his natural grief he felt guilt and believed himself fully responsible for what had happened; he could not be talked out of taking

all the blame on himself. He said, too, that Kurt was in "really punk" condition physically and had been so all along, even before the accident. He lacked the strength and endurance to hold down even a clerical job and was usually barely able to drag himself to the bus after a day's work. The boy said Hoffmann had "made" the job for him out of sheer generosity. The blond boy felt very sorry for Kurt and wished there was something he could do to help him, but there wasn't. He did try to be friendly, but couldn't get close; probably, he admitted, the difference in their ages was a factor and the difference in their background and experience of life was an even bigger one. "If he feels *that* bad," the girl said, "it's a wonder he doesn't kill himself." "Probably would, if he wasn't a Catholic," the boy told her. Then his voice changed, "Hey, let's go see if there's a court open. We're forgetting what we came here for." I turned back around as they got up off the grass and a moment later they came around my bench and I watched them walk to the tennis courts, swinging their rackets in their hands.

I put the Testament back in my pocket and sat there wondering. *Had* it been a sign from God that I had been reading those words "should be killed" at the very moment I heard Kurt Stiffler's name spoken? Was I once again chosen by Him to be His instrument in an act of mercy? Or had it been coincidence and not a sign at all?

I closed my eyes and, without moving my lips, asked the question, but no answer came.

Still, I read no more. I turned on the bench and watched the children playing for a while. I wondered if Kurt and his wife—what was her name?—it had been in the newspaper, of course, but I couldn't remember—had ever brought their three children here on Sunday afternoons, if I had ever seen or watched them.

Coincidence or a sign? One fact seemed clear; death

would be a boon to Kurt Stiffler. Undoubtedly only religious convictions kept him from taking his own life. Everyone does not feel so, and for some, suicide is not a sin. The poor man to whom I gave the dormison capsules in the hospital did not feel that it was wrong for him to end his own pain and so, for him, it was not wrong. If Stiffler believes suicide to be wrong for him, then it is wrong for him. God lets us know what is right for us. If He is choosing me to end Stiffler's anguish instead of putting it into Stiffler's mind to end his own, then God has His reason for wanting it so, whether or not we can comprehend that reason. God has let me know, in my own case, that I must never end my own anguish; it is my punishment. Perhaps someday I shall have served Him enough times to have expiated my crime and my sin; if so He will give me a sign and I will be free. Until then I must bear whatever comes, and the dreams.

That night and all day Monday I wrestled with the problem. Monday night the answer came to me. It was not in words but it was a clear thought that I knew had not been my own; God had put it into my mind. He was, this time, leaving the final decision to me. I was to bring Kurt Stiffler home and talk to him, study him, and make on my own the final decision as to whether he deserved and was ready for the boon of death. God was testing my wisdom.

And so a week ago this hour I went to Kurt Stiffler. He was pathetically easy to fool, for I had worked out a simple but clever ruse. I told him that I was a friend of Sig Hoffmann's and that Sig had suggested that I see him to ask a favor. I said that tonight, at my home, I hoped to close a business deal with a man who was coming up from Mexico to see me for the purpose, that another man, a German who had not been in this country long, was involved and would be there also, both were to arrive at my house at nine o'clock. That although each of them spoke some English, I was afraid

of the possibility of misunderstanding on one or another of the points that would come up, so I had phoned my friend Sig and had asked if he knew anyone who spoke both Spanish and German as well as English, and Sig had told me that he, Kurt, would no doubt be willing to help me.

I knew that, because he owed Hoffmann so much, he would not refuse, and he did not. He did demur a bit on the ground that his English was still weak, but when I assured him that it was more than adequate for the purpose he came with me.

No one saw me go to his place and no one saw us leave it together and go to my car around the corner. Had we been seen and marked by someone who might have identified me afterward, it would have been no danger to me for I would not have completed my mission; it would have been a sign from God, a negative sign, that He had taken the decision from me and that Kurt Stiffler must live. After a while, embarrassed by the fact that my business acquaintances had not shown up, I would have driven Kurt back home to his squalid little flat. (How could he have stood it to keep on living *there*, where the five of them had lived together? But it was indicative that he had; if he had taken a room of his own elsewhere it would have shown that he was at least trying to find a life for himself alone and to reconcile himself to his loss.)

As it was, the German and the Mexican were late. We sat and talked, or I *tried* to get him to talk. . . .

My cooler was running but suddenly it seemed warm and stifling in my living room and I didn't want to think about a week ago tonight or about Kurt Stiffler. Why do I always suffer this even when I know that what I did was right and that God wanted me to do it?

I stepped out into the relatively cool evening, outside my front door.

Mrs. Armstrong's voice called out, "Yoo-hoo, Mr. Medley!" I looked toward their house and called a hello, wondering what she wanted. I saw there was a car parked in front of their house, a big black convertible. Mrs. Armstrong's voice called out, "Come on over. We're having a celebration. Big news."

There was just enough light for me to see that there seemed to be several people sitting on the Armstrong porch. I was in no mood to go over but one can't shout excuses across two vacant lots, and besides I had no reasonable excuse to offer. So I waved instead of answering and walked down to the sidewalk and toward them; it was too dark to risk walking across the irregular ground of the lots.

As I walked up the porch steps I saw there were three of them, Mrs. Armstrong, her daughter Caroline, and a man whom I didn't recognize immediately in the dimness, until he stood up and put out a hand to me. "Remember me, Mr. Medley? Cahan." It was one of the two city detectives who were investigating Stiffler's death. What was he doing here, and with a glass in his hand?

"Of course I remember you," I said.

"Big news, Mr. Medley," Mrs. Armstrong said. "I have the pleasure of announcing the engagement of my daughter. Just when I thought I was never going to get rid of her."

"You mean—to—" I was stumbling.

Red Cahan laughed. "Yeah, to *me*, Sir. And I consider myself very much to be congratulated."

I congratulated him, got his hand again and gave it a really enthusiastic shake this time. I said, "But—I didn't know you knew these people, Mr. Cahan. Or did you know them—before last Wednesday?"

"That's when I met Mrs. A," he said. "Didn't meet Caroline till Thursday evening, five days ago. So you go right ahead

and say how sudden this is." He grinned. "But that's the kind of a hairpin I am. And we both got red hair so I guess we're somewhat alike. Can I get you a beer?"

I opened my mouth to say that my wife and I had become engaged just as suddenly, thirty years ago, and then I remembered I'd told him and his partner that I'd always been a bachelor.

I said, "I'm sorry I don't drink beer, Mr. Cahan; it gives me gas. But a drink *is* called for, and I've got a bottle of very good sherry at home, the same one I offered a drink from to you and Frank Ramos last Wednesday, only you were on duty then, as I should have realized. How about letting me contribute the bottle to the celebration?"

"Fine," he said. "Providing you'll sit down and let me run over and get it for you."

"I assure you I won't mind—"

"Phooey," he said. "Here I am feeling so swell I'm in a mood to fight wildcats and the least I can do is run next door for a bottle. Where is it?"

I told him where it was and found myself a chair. "He seems like a very nice young man," I said.

Caroline reached over and patted my hand. "He's more than that. He's wonderful. I'm crazy about him."

"They plan to get married in a month," Mrs. Armstrong said. "I don't mind the sudden engagement, but don't you think they ought to wait longer than that actually to get married?"

"Don't answer that, Mr. Medley," Caroline said. "Because if you answer it wrong I'll be mad at you. And Mother doesn't really mean it anyway. A month from now is when Red gets his vacation, two weeks, and we're *not* going to waste it. We're going to Mexico City for our honeymoon."

"And then they're going to live here," Mrs. Armstrong said. "Thank God I didn't have any trouble talking them into

that. It would be awful me rattling around alone in a house like this. I told them if they wouldn't live here with me, I'd sell the house and come live with them. *That* fixed them."

"Mother, you know you didn't have to threaten that. We wanted to live here and you know it."

They weren't arguing, really. I've never seen a mother and daughter more attached to one another than the Armstrongs, and Red Cahan seemed like he'd fit in and get along with both of them. A fine young man. I got the impression that his partner is the more brilliant of the two and, from my point of view, the dangerous one (except there can't possibly be any danger now) but Red is certainly the one of the two of them who is easy to like and to get along with. Open and aboveboard. I don't think I quite trust Frank Ramos, although I can't say why.

Cahan came back with my bottle and won a friendly argument with Mrs. Armstrong as to which of them should go inside to open it and get glasses. Cahan went.

"If two people both have red hair and get married," Caroline said, "do all their children have red hair?"

I said, "In *Life With Father* they did." And wished I hadn't spoken for a cold chill went down my spine. I had for the moment forgotten that *Life With Father* was the play I had taken my wife to see eight years ago on the night that I've always since thought of as the night of horror, the night that had almost driven me insane; perhaps I *was* insane for a while after that, until I found God and the answer. But how, only hours before hell, we had laughed at that funny play.

I loved my wife more deeply than I can say. She was a tall, somewhat gawky girl of eighteen when we were married; I was twenty-six. But she grew into the most beautiful woman who ever lived. Some women are like that; they mature slowly; they gain in beauty with each passing year. That night, the eve of her fortieth birthday, Dierdre (even

her name was beautiful) was lovelier than she had ever been before. She was breath-taking; you would have taken her for a queen. Her face and her body were both superb. I used to joke with her, seeing her disrobed, by telling her that if someone cut off her arms, she would be indistinguishable from Venus of Milo. But I did not love her for beauty alone; twenty-two years of married life had gone by like a lovely dream, so wonderfully were we suited to one another. In retrospect it seems to me that our marriage was perfect. Perhaps it was less than that, but it was as near perfection as a man can ever hope to achieve. Why God was so kind to me, when I did not even believe in Him then, I shall never understand. But what man can ever understand the ways of God?

We lived in Chicago then, but it was not in Chicago that it happened. I was taking a vacation and we had driven westward across the country, leisurely, stopping at some of the national parks, spending a week end—and a few dollars—at Las Vegas. We had reached Los Angeles and it was to be the end of our trip. We had had enough of driving for a while and, since we were ready for a new car anyway, we planned to sell the old one in Los Angeles for whatever it would bring there and to fly back to Chicago on a plane. We had decided to celebrate Dierdre's birthday a day ahead of time so I could spend the following day getting bids from a few dealers on the car and then, if I sold it, book plane reservations for the next available flight.

We ate at the Beverly Hills Brown Derby and then drove downtown and saw the play. I had in my pocket a beautiful diamond-studded wrist watch as a present for her; I intended to give it to her, wherever we might be, just after midnight when her birthday would really start. After the show we had a cocktail each in the bar adjacent to the theater, and I asked her if there was anything else she cared to do before

we returned to the hotel. At first she said there wasn't, and then: "Johnny, I just remembered something. We've been here two days and may leave tomorrow if you sell the car quickly, and I haven't seen the ocean. And I've never seen the Pacific Ocean in my life; wouldn't it be a shame to be this near and go back home without having seen it?" I agreed that it would be a shame. I said, "It's a lovely moonlight night. We can drive to Santa Monica or somewhere and park on the beach a while. Let's go." She wanted to drive and I let her. Neither of us knew the city well, but we figured that if we kept going west we'd have to reach the ocean somewhere and the beaches along it are almost continuous. But we must have lost our sense of direction somewhere for, I learned later, we were heading north on Sepulveda into the canyon when it happened.

The accident and the murder.

Like Kurt's accident in some ways, so different in others.

Dierdre liked to drive fast, and she was driving fast. The road ahead of us was clear; there seemed no danger. Only one car was in sight, approaching us. There was no indication that its driver was drunk until, scarcely a dozen yards away, he swerved into our lane, heading straight toward us in what would have been a head-on collision. Would that it had been one; we would both have been killed instantly and mercifully.

Dierdre cut the wheel sharply. We missed the car, didn't even scrape fenders with it. But still going at least fifty we went off the edge of the road, down a six-foot drop and into a tree.

Like Kurt, I was thrown clear. Much more understandably in my case than his for our car was a convertible while his was not, and he had been behind the wheel. Only if the door on the driver's side springs wide open can he be thrown clear in such a case.

I struck ground with an impact that almost stunned me,

rolled and slid. But I felt no pain. I tried to get to my feet to run back to the car, where Dierdre was screaming, but one leg went out from under me; it was broken. I crawled. The car lay on its side and Dierdre was most of the way through the windshield. Her face was almost-gone. An eye had been gouged out. An arm was cut almost off and blood pumped from the raw wound where glass had sliced away one breast. A big jagged slab of glass stuck from her abdomen and it was red from the blood that spurted up around it. And she was screaming, *screaming*, SCREAMING!

My hand was on a stone. I used it and her screaming stopped. Then I myself was screaming my way into a blackness that should have been death, but wasn't.

I woke in a hospital. Broken leg, broken ribs, other injuries that would heal, and one that would not.

I was unsane, if not insane. I dipped into catatonia for a while. I did not speak, even to tell them what had happened. Had I been able to speak then no doubt I would have told them the truth, that I had killed her, that I had murdered her. I would not have cared how they punished me. I would have welcomed death.

For *I* had killed her. It is true that she would almost certainly have died from loss of blood if not from other injuries before help came, since I learned that it had been almost an hour before an ambulance reached us. It is almost equally certain that Dierdre, even aside from her pain, would not have *wanted* to live so mutilated. But I do not know whether those thoughts were in my head, whether mercy was my only reason, or whether it was that I could not bear the sound of those terrible screams.

Apparently my guilt was never suspected. After six weeks in the hospital I was put in a sanitarium, physically recovered except that I would walk with a cane for a while. Mentally, however, I was still in shock and was so despondent that

they feared I would take my own life. And I would have, had I been able to; something stopped me. Rather, Someone stopped me, for as I know now God had and has a use for me and did not and does not want me to die by my own hand. As I would today, tonight, if only He would give me the sign that I have expiated my guilt by serving Him and that I am now free. Free to join Dierdre, for in finding God I learned the wonderful truth of immortality of the soul and know that I shall see Dierdre again, and not as I last saw her—that would be hell, and it is heaven that I look forward to.

After a while I seemed normal to them and they released me from the sanitarium. I returned to Chicago and tried for a while to take up the threads of life again. I could no more live than I could die. I realized, then, that only through finding God—the God in whom I had not believed—could I ever again become whole. I sought Him in churches and did not find Him. I sought Him in the wilderness then, and found Him there.

It happened to me in northern Wisconsin. I went there to seek solitude under the open sky, but I wore hunting clothes and carried a gun, pretending it was a hunting trip so people would not question me.

God led me to a doe with a broken leg, dying of thirst and hunger. And as I looked at the doe and her wild and stricken eyes looked back, a voice said, "Kill, John Medley." Clearly. And I killed the doe, and I was at peace. For this time I knew that I had carried out God's order and had thereby found God. I knew there had been only mercy in my heart when I had killed. And I knew, because now God put it in my mind, what purpose God had in mind for me, that He would use me as His instrument and that He would give me a sign or otherwise let me know when to kill, and when my guilt had been expiated. For I had killed once, the only person whom I had ever loved, and *without* a sign

from God. And until God takes it away, the mark of the beast is upon me, and the beast is Mercy.

"Your wine, Mr. Medley." I took the glass from Cahan and thanked him.

At my suggestion we toasted Caroline with the first sip and Cahan with the second, their engagement with the third.

A few minutes later, in a lull, I asked him—since it was perfectly natural for me to ask and might even have seemed strange if I had not asked—whether there were any new developments in the Stiffler case.

"Not a thing," he said. "It looks like a dead end."

There was the ring of truth in his voice, for he had spoken much too casually to have been lying. And he let it go at that; if he were trying to deceive me, he would have gone on and elaborated.

A dead end, he had said. And it was.

But life goes on. Young people fall in love and marry and have children, and this young couple would be married and living next to me soon. And within a few years they would have children. Redheaded ones? No doubt.

It will be very pleasant. Perhaps I can put up a swing for them in my back yard. There is no tree big enough for one in the Armstrongs' yard.

Yes, life goes on, and must go on.

I hope that Cahan and I will be friendly neighbors, and do not doubt that we shall. I doubt very much that he is interested, as I am, in books and music, or in chess, so for that reason if no other we shall probably not become really friends. But I should not have close friends in any case. And we shall find things to talk about over the hedge and occasionally I will sit on their porch of a warm evening, as now, or I shall have them over to listen to music; I have some popular records too in case they do **not** enjoy the classical ones.

Thinking of friendship I think of the captain of detectives who called the other afternoon and spent some time with me. There is a man whom I could make a friend, if I dared have friends. What was his name? Oh, yes, Pettijohn. And what an odd coincidence that he now lives in a house built on a lot that he bought from me. Somehow it made a bond between us, although I suppose at that it was not too much of a coincidence; I have bought and sold quite a number of lots in the last six years.

But I like him very much from even so slight an acquaintance, and I felt strongly that the liking was mutual. He is very pleasant, and he is about my age or only slightly younger, not under fifty. He is a good man, and a religious man; I forget now how religion came up in our conversation, but it did. Yes, I remember now. He mentioned the location and the price of a triple corner lot the church of which he is an officer had just acquired for building purposes and asked me if I thought they had made a good buy. And I found him telling me about the home he had built on the lot I had once owned, and about his family, his wife and a daughter.

I wished I could have talked as freely in return. There are times when I regret that, ever since coming to Tucson, I have told people that I have never been married. Then, it was because I did not want to be asked questions about my wife. Lately I often find myself wanting very badly to talk about Dierdre and the wonderful life we had together. But it would make me look ridiculous to change my story now and I am stuck with having been a bachelor.

On the Armstrongs' porch, I sipped my sherry.

There was silence, but among the other three it was the silence of contentment, a happy silence that I did not wish to break. I was thinking, if only I could have a fraction of the love and friendship they have—

"Twenty minutes after nine," Cahan said. "Do you think,

Mrs. Armstrong, that it's too late to take a little ride? And you and Mr. Medley come along, of course."

Mrs. Armstrong laughed. "Go ahead. But you don't want old fogies like us along, so you and Caroline run along." She turned to me. "Sorry, Mr. Medley, I didn't mean to speak for you. Maybe you would like to go with them, and if you do I'll go along too."

I shook my head. "Thanks much," I said, "but I have some papers to work on at home. In fact, I was just thinking of excusing myself." I took the final sip of my wine and stood, putting the glass down on the porch railing where it wouldn't be knocked over.

Cahan was getting up too, and I took his hand again and shook it. "Congratulations again, young man. And to you too, Miss Armstrong."

They tried to get me to take the rest of the wine back with me, but I refused, of course. I had donated the bottle to the celebration and it was a small enough offering.

After the good-bys, I went home and let myself into the house again. And as I did so the clock struck once, half past nine. And I remembered it striking so just a week ago tonight, a week ago this moment, just before—

I had pretended to hear a car approaching. He was nearest the window and I asked him if he would mind looking out to see if the car would stop. He stepped to the window, and then I decided to follow him and look too; I came up behind him, my hand in my pocket until the last moment lest he would be seeing my reflection in the glass. When I was immediately behind him pretending to look over his shoulder I raised the gun and pulled the trigger. And caught and eased him down as he fell. He died so easily, that poor boy, never knowing, even for a fraction of a second, that he was going to die, and with no time to have felt the slightest pain before he was dead.

No, I feel not the slightest regret.

But why, then, do I dread the coming of midnight when I shall have to go to bed, and dream?

Because I know the dreams will come. How much longer, O God, will I have to go on being Thy Instrument? How much longer before Thou wilt grant to me that mercy Thou hast given others through my hand?

TWELVE

FRANK RAMOS

Red was alone in the assembly room when I came in. His back was toward me and he was staring out the window. I don't think he'd heard me come in. I asked, "Where's everybody?"

"Out on a hot one," he said. He turned and I saw that his face was beaming. "We're on stand-by."

I don't care much for stand-by, which means waiting around in case something happens. It gets boring as hell and I'd rather be out doing something.

And I know Red feels the same way and even more strongly so his beam puzzled me until he burst out with the big news. "Frank, I dood it. I'm engaged."

I shook his hand. "Good boy," I said. "Congratulations all over the lot. Is it the girl you were talking about a few days ago or is this a new one?"

He started to get mad and then saw that I was kidding and grinned. "Same one. And we're making it a short engagement. We'll get hitched when my vacation comes up."

"Good deal," I said. "No use stalling if you're sure—and I guess you're old enough to be sure. But what's the hot case everybody's on? And how come?" I'd glanced at my watch as I'd come in; it was starting time just on the head and it didn't seem likely everybody but Red and I had been early enough to have been briefed and sent out already.

"Holdup, Fehrman's, an hour and a half ago." Red sat down and lighted a cigarette, waved the match out. Fehrman's is a supermarket on Twenty-second, out toward Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. "Two guys got the manager just as he'd opened the safe to give out change to the cashiers on the starting shift. Don't know how much was in the safe but whatever it was they got away with it."

"That's out of the city limits," I said. "How come the sheriff isn't handling it?"

"He is, but we're on it too. Unless they made a false pass, they headed toward downtown when they drove away. They figure for out-of-town talent. And we've got good descriptions so we're helping out the county boys by checking the hotels and rooming houses in case they're holing up. Cap got the word at home and called the other boys and had 'em start right out from their houses without reporting in."

I said, "You must have got down pretty early to know all that."

"I did. I just happened to get down fifteen minutes early, and Cap was already here. He gave me the dope and told me to brief you too, in case something pops that calls us in on it."

I sat down. "Brief away," I told him.

The descriptions were good, all right, much better than the usual ones. You could almost picture the men from them. The manager or one of the cashiers had been more observant than most people are. On the car, not so good. They'd been seen driving away and in a car that would have been easily identifiable, but they hadn't gone far in it. It was at the curb three blocks away, and of course it was a stolen car stolen only an hour before and just for that purpose. Nobody had seen them change cars, so we had nothing there. And that was it, except that both the descriptions and the way they'd operated made it pretty sure they weren't local talent.

And if they were holing up in town it would have to be at a hotel or rooming house and we had a chance of getting them. If they'd backtracked away from town or driven on through it they had a lot of mileage under their belts by now and it was up to the sheriff or the state police.

We sat a while and then Red said, "Say, Frank, I'd like you to meet Caroline."

I said no doubt I'd be meeting her soon.

"How about tonight? You and your wife both. You see, Caroline wants me to meet a few of her friends—I haven't met *any* of them yet—and she's inviting them over tonight. Not really a party, just a little get-together. Only a few people and nothing fancy. But she told me to bring along or invite over anybody I wanted and—well, it would be a good time for you and Alice to meet her."

I said, "I'd sure like to, Red. But for all I know Alice has other plans. I'll have to check with her first."

"Sure. But why not phone her now and make sure? If you two can't make it, that'll give me time to line up somebody else. I figure I ought to have *somebody* there, on my side."

It was a tough spot. I knew it was out, taking Alice, because—well, I'm getting better able to predict when she's going to be drinking and when she isn't. She'd been fine yesterday but this morning at breakfast she'd been sullen and that's a pretty sure sign that she'll start drinking; maybe she has already. Damn, oh damn, why doesn't she see what's happening to her? Why, even when she's sober and in her best mood, does she get indignant and fight me if I so much as suggest that it's a problem? Oh, sooner or later she'll see that it's a problem—she'll *have* to face it—and sometimes I almost look forward to its getting worse because it'll have to get worse, I'm afraid, before it gets better.

But I had no out on phoning now, or at least pretending to phone. I went over to the phone we use for personal calls—it

doesn't go through the switchboard—and dialed my number. The second I heard it ring I knew I shouldn't have. With Red listening here I couldn't talk to her and explain his invitation because if she said yes, we still couldn't go, probably, and—damn, of course we couldn't go, even if Alice stayed sober. There'd no doubt be drinking at the party and that would set her off, and anyway if we went we'd have to ask Caroline and Red to our place and sooner or later, it would happen.

So when Alice's voice said, "Hello!" I didn't answer. She sounded cheerful and if she'd started drinking I couldn't tell it from that one word, but then she couldn't have been drinking long even if she had started. I held the receiver close to my ear so her voice couldn't carry across the room to Red, and I waited; I'd count twenty, that's about how long one usually lets a phone ring before deciding it isn't going to be answered.

I counted nine and then Alice's voice, sober and with a puzzled note to it, said, "Clyde?"

Clyde?

Another pause and then the phone clicked in my ear as she hung up. I don't know whether my face showed anything, but I was glad my back was toward Red. I didn't count any more but I held the phone until I was sure I could make my voice sound natural before I hung up and turned back toward him. "No answer," I said. "Probably went out shopping. I'll try again later."

I sat down; I had to sit down. I knew no one named Clyde. But Alice did—and she had expected the phone call to be from him. Did that mean what I was afraid it meant? What else *could* it mean? I tried to think of innocent explanations, and I thought of a few possible ones but they seemed pretty farfetched.

I'd trusted Alice completely, until this moment. I'd never suspected. I'd accepted drinking as her vice—or, to be more

kind about it, as her illness— and never realized that drinking over a long period of time has repercussions besides the physical ones; it deteriorates the moral fibers. And Alice has, or thinks she has, a strong resentment against me. But—

But there can be, there must be, an innocent explanation.

I had to hold onto myself to keep from rushing into Cap's office and telling him—telling him *anything* as an excuse to take off, to rush home and talk to Alice, to find out. I *had* to know.

But I had to wait. It wouldn't be safe for me to go home now. If the answer was the wrong one I might do something I'd regret. I might kill her or I might try to find and kill—Clyde. Damn him, whoever he is. Damn his soul to hell. Yes, if Alice has been having an affair with some—whatever he is, there might all too well be violence in me if I learn of it, for a certainty, *now*, all at once. By tonight I will have accepted the possibility to the extent that I can take it calmly, or more nearly calmly. And what a relief if I learn that there *is* a simple and innocent explanation!

But dare I look forward to one? No, I know already. Somehow I know. Maybe it was the inflection of her voice: "Clyde?" One doesn't say a name that way, unless. And the tone was definitely conspiratorial.

But still I must take time before I talk to her because if it is true we must decide whatever we shall decide without violence for I do not want to hurt her. Am I crazy that I still love her, still want her? If she wants me to forgive her can I make her see the cause of which this is the result and get her to place herself in a doctor's care and stop drinking? Can good come out of evil? Or *can* I forgive, when I think of this man, this *Clyde* touching her body, kissing her breasts—

God, don't let me think of that.

Carmody looked in. "Cap wants to see you boys."

We went into Cap's office. He was leaning back in his

swivel chair, smoking. He waved us to sit down and we did.

"Red briefed you on the holdup business, Frank?" he asked, and when I nodded, "Good," he said, "but you probably won't need it. Looks like they're through town and heading for Phoenix."

"What happened?" Red asked.

"Just talked to the sheriff. One of his men was checking a filling station way north on Oracle Road, found a car had stopped there for gas half an hour ago, two men in it who fitted the descriptions fairly close. Headed north and that would put them out of the county by now. The state patrol will cut them off at Florence."

"Tough," Red said. And when Cap looked at him he grinned. "I don't mean for the holdup men; I mean for us. Now the state boys will get the credit. What did you want us for, Cap?"

"Nothing much. Just that I'm caught up for the moment and thought while you boys were waiting we could talk over the Stiffler case. The Chief's been riding me a little on it."

He turned in his swivel chair and pointed an accusing finger at me. "Now, Frank, forget that wild idea you have about John Medley. Especially now that I've met him personally, I know you're wrong and I forbid you to heckle him in any way. You're not to see him or talk to him. Is that understood?"

"Yes," I said.

"Good, then here's how it stands. We've investigated Stiffler as far as we possibly can, and we find him clean both here and in Mexico City. He had no enemies and no one gained anything at all by his death—except what money he had on him at the time, and the killer took that.

"In my book that makes it a simple robbery kill. Why he was killed in John Medley's yard, or more likely taken there

after being killed, is a little puzzling but there are lots of ways it could have happened. For instance, he was killed in the alley, and if his body had been left there it could have been found quickly, possibly before the killer, who was afoot, could get well clear of the neighborhood. So he carries or drags the body back into the shadow of a tree, into the darkness."

"Or," Red said, "He could have been killed in a car by someone who picked him up. They cut into the alley to get rid of the body and stop behind Medley's. Killer takes the body out of the car and while he's got hold of it decides he might as well take it another dozen yards to put it where it's sure not to be found before morning."

Cap nodded. "One or the other of those, probably. In any case, from the alley side. Mr. Medley's lights were on and, even with the curtains drawn, you could tell they were on from either front or back, and that someone was home there. That wouldn't bother anyone just wanting to drag a body part-way into his yard from the alley, but I can't see it being done from the Campbell Street side, around the house from the front. The tree wouldn't show from there, for one thing."

I thought, what if Alice guessed that it was I on the phone, too late, after she had made the mistake of speaking that hated name? If so, she knows that I know. Might she run away? Either out of fear of me, or with him? Will there be a note waiting for me instead of Alice when I get home tonight? I am almost certain, now that I think of it, that she must have suspected that it was I; hadn't there been a little gasp of fear just before the click as she hung up? Or had I imagined that?

"Well," Cap said, "any ideas or suggestions?" He looked at me first and I shook my head.

Red said, "I don't think there's a thing we can do that we haven't done, Cap. If we crack the case it'll be because we

get a break on it someday. For instance, we don't know that the killer disposed of the gun. And we'll all keep in mind that anybody we catch with a twenty-two from now on might be the guy and that's the first check we'll make on the gun. Or even if he got rid of the gun he may commit a similar crime someday—most holdup men are repeaters—and if we get him cold on that we might be able to get a confession out of him on Stiffler too."

It was a long speech for Red. Has being engaged turned him into an eager beaver?

Cap nodded solemnly. "That's right, Red. I'll put it to the Chief just that way if he rides me again. Or I'll tell him we'll follow up any suggestions *he* wants to make. Well, one more thing, there's a matter I'll probably put you fellows on tomorrow, and I'll give you the file on it now; you might as well be boning up on it while waiting out there."

He opened a drawer of his desk and started shuffling through file folders in it.

All right, I thought, I'll give up on Medley. I can be wrong, anyway. And there isn't a chance, if I can't even talk to him. Already, in the last few evenings, I'd done a few things Cap wouldn't like if he knew about them. And they'd got me nowhere. I'd tried to look up the widow of Ernst Winkelman, the man who'd been given the sleeping capsules, the dormisons, in the hospital. She'd moved back East, and I couldn't even find out where. What would it prove, anyway, if I found her and she said that yes, her husband had known a John Medley? I'd spent a whole evening ransacking my memories for every case of a death in Tucson that *could* have been a mercy-killing or, as in the Winkelman case, a man being supplied with the means of making his own quietus. I'd thought of three or four possibilities, and I could still go ahead and check on them, but the most I'd be able to learn at this late date was that Medley knew or had had contact

with the victims. And what would that prove? And maybe he'd never known them or had contact with them anyway, had just learned about them somehow. I'd found no point of contact between him and Kurt Stiffler. Was it possible he'd chosen Stiffler only from the newspaper stories? No, there must have been something else beyond that, but I'd probably never find it. The best point of attack might be to try to trace Medley back before Tucson, to see what might have happened to him to make him insane; to find out whether or not he'd ever been in a mental institution, too. But I couldn't possibly do a job like that on my own.

Yes, I'd give up on John Medley. Or maybe I can get him to kill *me*, and then Cap would listen. As I feel right now I wouldn't care too much.

Cap started to hand the folder to Red, and the phone rang. He picked up the phone.

Or maybe, I thought, what's happening to me is the cue for me to go after Medley in person and damn the torpedoes. The worst Cap can do is fire me and right now I don't give a damn about that; I don't give a damn about anything.

Maybe if Alice is leaving me or has already left me I should follow Ernst Winkelman's example and put myself out of my misery. I wouldn't even need to have Medley supply me with dormisons. I've got a box of them. I happened to be having a touch of insomnia about the time of the Winkelman case, when we'd been questioning his wife thinking she'd taken them to him. Ordinarily you need a prescription to get them, but I have a friend who is a druggist and he'd sold me two dozen of them. It turned out they didn't help and anyway the insomnia started going away so I'd taken only a few of them. That left twenty, around the house somewhere. More than enough, more than Winkelman had taken. And that would be the easiest way to die, but guess I don't want to die, not even if Alice—

I snapped out of it hearing the sudden ring of excitement in Cap's voice talking on the phone. "Yes, Paul. Stay right there; one of you in the lobby and the other in the alley, and I'll send Red and Frank right over. But take your time and be careful."

He put down the receiver and started talking fast to us. "Paul Geissler, calling from the Carey. The holdup men are there. This time the description tallies to a hair, and the clerk remembers they left the hotel this morning early, well before the robbery, and got back at what would have been just the right time. They're in their room now. Paul says he and Harry didn't go in to take them because their room has a window on a fire escape and that ought to be covered too. You two take the fire escape and Paul and Harry will take the door. Fast."

As we hurried out, he called "Don't forget your guns!"

He knew we didn't have them because we'd taken off our shoulder holsters and our coats in the assembly room and had gone into his office in our shirt sleeves.

But we wouldn't have forgotten them.

I thought wryly, as I strapped mine on, maybe it would be my luck to get shot today, and a wonderful time for it. Alice would get a pension, and could take care of Clyde on it, *damn him*.

We checked the loading too. I carry an S. & W. thirty-eight special with a four-inch barrel; Red carries a Colt thirty-eight on a forty-five frame, same barrel. Red likes his and I mine. He thinks the extra weight of the frame makes for more accurate shooting, and it probably does, but I'll settle for the extra power a thirty-eight special cartridge packs over an ordinary thirty-eight.

The Carey Hotel is a small inexpensive one, the for-men-only type. Four stories and about a dozen rooms to each story above the first. Outside of a tiny lobby, the first floor is taken

up by a hardware store. It was only two blocks away so we walked, as fast as we could without attracting attention.

We found Paul in the lobby, talking to the clerk. The clerk looked scared half to death; he was a good-looking young man with blond wavy hair, the kind you'd trust with your sister but not with your kid brother. He wore big shell-rimmed spectacles but they didn't disguise him much.

Paul said, "He—" jerking a thumb at the clerk, "will give you the key to two-oh-six; it's vacant. They're in three-oh-six, right over that. You two go up there now and get out on the fire escape, go up one flight and get set. Be careful. Harry's in the alley; he'll see when you're ready and will come back in here. We'll take the door."

I took the key from the clerk. "Going to knock first or bust it in?"

Paul said, "I'll knock, loud enough for you to hear me out on the fire escape. That'll draw their attention to the door. You can be sure they won't be looking at the window and you can look in and see what gives. If they're pulling guns you know what to do."

Sure we knew what to do, shoot them in the back. But fair enough at that if they were pulling guns to shoot Paul and Harry through the door or when they broke it in. Dueling ground ethics have to go by the boards once in a while. If they were gunmen, they wouldn't play fair with us if they had a chance to do otherwise. And for Red and me to want to play it the chivalrous way might cost Paul's life or Harry's.

"Did both of them have guns at the holdup?" I asked.

Red said, "Yeah, I forgot to tell you that. One of them had a revolver and the manager said he was fairly sure the gun the other had was a Luger."

A nasty gun, a Luger. Somehow I don't like people who use them. Or, for that matter, people who use any other kind of gun, for criminal purposes.

I said, "Okay," to Paul and Red and I went up the stairs, walking quietly, and we let ourselves into the second floor room as quietly as possible and we didn't talk. There's not much chance of being heard in the room *above* you, but there wasn't any use taking any more chances than we had to.

Red walked straight for the window but I sat down on the bed and took off my shoes. When he saw what I was doing he came back and did the same. On the fire escape, after we got up a flight, we'd be right outside their window and it would probably be open; even the slightest scrape of leather might give us away.

Luckily our window raised without making much noise. Red started through but I pulled him back and looked around until I spotted Harry Berg leaning against a light pole across the alley. He'd been watching for us and he gave us a nod meaning it was okay so far. We went on out onto the fire escape and to the steps and up them, keeping as close to the wall of the building as we could. Red was eager-beaver-ing again and wanted to go first so I let him. When we got to the top of the steps we could see that the window was wide open. That meant we'd have to be plenty quiet but it was a break in one way; the shade would be up too if the window was. If the shade had been pulled down we wouldn't be of any help to Paul and Harry, unless the men tried to escape by way of the window.

But to get one on each side of the window, one of us was going to have to crawl along the fire escape under it. Red was already getting down to do so, but I put my hand on his shoulder and pulled him back. I motioned with my head and got him back far enough alongside the building from the window so it would be safe to whisper, and told him why I'd have to be the one to go under the window to the other side. Red is ambidextrous; he can shoot almost as well with his left hand as with his right. I couldn't hit the side of an

elephant at ten paces with my left hand. So this side of the window was the wrong one for me; I wouldn't be able to shoot into the room from it without stepping out far enough to expose my whole body.

Red got the point, of course. So we traded positions and I got down on my hands and knees and crawled under the window. It would have been a bad time for someone inside the room to have stuck his head out for a breath of fresh air, but nobody did.

I got to my feet on the other side and looked down into the alley. Harry was still there; I nodded to him and he started around to the front.

We waited. I don't know what Red was thinking but I was busy hoping that there wouldn't be any shooting, that they'd give up easily. And the probabilities were that they would; after all, they hadn't had to kill anybody at the holdup and criminals want to shoot it out most of the time only when they're wanted for a capital crime, when they're already smelling that cyanide in their minds and figure they have nothing to lose. No; these boys hadn't killed. But of course they could have killed elsewhere and know they were wanted for that. Or they could be hopped up with H. Quite a bit of it finds its way up here from the border.

But I hoped not. I hate guns and gunplay. I didn't want to shoot anybody, at least not unless his name was Clyde, and I wanted still less to be shot at. Getting shot isn't worse than any other way of dying if you get it in the head, like Kurt did, or in the heart. But it would be my luck, if I got shot today, to get it in the guts. The bullet would get me right where Alice's one word on the telephone had got me.

My God, that had been less than half an hour ago. It was still early morning; it would be another seven hours before I got home if I stuck out the day.

Outside the window, we waited. Probably only five

minutes, but it seemed like five years. Then we heard the knock. Paul hadn't been kidding about making it a loud one. And while he was calling out to them to open in the name of the law Red and I drew our guns and looked in at the window.

There were two men in the room, tough-looking mugs who fitted the description of the holdup men all right. They were both stripped down to shorts. One of them was sitting on the edge of the bed and the other was walking across the room with a bottle in his hand and seemed frozen in the middle of a step.

In that first glimpse I thought it was going to be all right; neither of them seemed to be moving. And I remember thinking *thank God* when I saw the bottle because if they were drinking it meant they weren't on dope. A heroin addict doesn't use alcohol.

But I was counting chickens too soon. It was just the illusion of a first glimpse that they weren't moving. There were two guns lying on the bed, unholstered, one a revolver and the other a Luger. That is, they'd both *been* lying there. The Luger was already in the hand of the man who'd been sitting on the edge of the bed and he was on his feet looking and pointing the gun toward the door.

I yelled out, "Drop it!" and he whirled to face the window and the muzzle of that damn Luger came around with him. Maybe he wouldn't have shot when it registered that there were two of us at the window, both with guns ready, maybe he'd have dropped the Luger and put up his hands. But then again maybe he'd have pulled the trigger and we couldn't wait to find out. Red and I fired almost simultaneously. And as though our shot was a signal Paul or Harry started shooting through the door and then the door burst inward and it was a frozen tableau again. The man who'd grabbed the Luger and stood up with it was back on the bed again, lying

on his back the way Red's bullet and mine hitting almost simultaneously had slammed him. The Luger was still in his hand but he wasn't interested in it. The other man had got as far as the edge of the bed; he was standing with his knees against it. But if he'd been going for the revolver he changed his mind. He had both arms stretched so high over his head that it looked like he was trying to touch the ceiling. The bottle was on the floor and whiskey was gurgling out of it.

While Red and I were climbing in the window, Paul and Harry came on in. Paul was gathering up the gunmen's guns. Looking down at the one we'd shot he whistled and said, "Beautiful shooting!" I stepped over and looked down. There were two bullet holes in the bare chest, an inch apart and both over the heart. We couldn't have done better if we'd tried. I don't know about Red, but I hadn't aimed for the heart or anywhere else. I'd just taken a snap shot. Anyway, we'd both killed him and didn't want to try to remember whether my gun or Red's had gone off first. I thought I knew but I didn't want to be sure.

I remembered something, a sting in my right arm I'd felt when those bullets had started coming through the door. I started peeling off my coat. I said, "Lousy shooting. Do you realize you guys were shooting toward the window when you got trigger happy out there in the hall?"

Paul Geissler was looking at me and his face was suddenly white. "Frank, you didn't get—?"

But he didn't have to finish the question because by that time I had my coat off. And there was a spreading spot of bright red on the sleeve of my white shirt, on the outside and about halfway between the elbow and the shoulder. I hadn't felt any pain at all but a little was starting now.

I said, "Nothing serious, Paul. It couldn't have hit bone or it would have jarred me. I just felt a sting."

I started rolling up my sleeve and he came over and helped

me. His face was even whiter. He said, "Jesus, Frank, I did that. Harry shot only once and that was into the lock of the door. I was the one who got trigger happy. When the shooting started I thought they were firing through the door at us, and I didn't know that the window was in line."

By that time we had the sleeve up above the wound and it wasn't even as bad as I'd expected. I knew I hadn't stopped the bullet but I'd expected to find two holes, front and back. It was just a furrow, but a deep one, about as deep as it could have been without having made separate entrance and exit wounds. It gave me a little shiver down my spine to remember that Harry used a forty-five. If that bullet had been an inch to the left, it would have shattered the bone and I'd probably have had a bad right arm for the rest of my life.

It was bleeding plenty and, now that I could see it, it was starting to hurt plenty too.

Paul said, "Red, you get him over to Emergency fast. We can handle things here."

I said, "Help me put my coat back on. It's got blood on it already anyway and I don't want to walk through the street looking like this." The coat was dark and the blood wouldn't show. I wrapped a clean handkerchief around my arm over the wound and then rolled down the sleeve a little so the roll of the sleeve was over it too.

I said, "Listen, Paul, I don't want Cap to get mad at you about this. Maybe we can rig a story. We could fold the mattress over that Luger to muffle the noise and shoot it once and—" I stopped as I realized it wouldn't work. The other gunman was still alive and would be turned over to the sheriff's department since the holdup had been outside city limits, and the sheriff's department would question him and our story wouldn't stick. The truth would come out.

Harry was holding my coat. He must have been thinking right with me because he said, "It won't stick. And anything

I get, I've got coming. Get the hell out of here fast, Frank. You're bleeding."

I got my wounded arm into the coat sleeve and started to get the other arm into the other sleeve and then, like a damn fool and with no reason at all, I fainted.

THIRTEEN

ALICE RAMOS

The second I had said it I could have bitten my tongue out. But I'd been expecting a call from Clyde and I'd never thought. Frank had *never* called that early in the day, only half an hour after he'd left. He always calls the middle of the afternoon or late afternoon, as soon as he can tell me whether he's going to work late or be home for dinner. I don't know how I know it was Frank, but I know. By the sound of his breathing? I don't know, I suppose that's impossible. But the second I'd said that name, I *knew* it was Frank listening. And anyone else, whatever his reason for not answering right away when I said Hello, would have said something when I asked, "Clyde?"

But Frank must have suspected something already or why would he have called like that and not said anything? Of course he couldn't have guessed I'd be such an utter fool as to give everything away like that, but he must have been calling to check up on me to see if I was home. Or, if he thought he could tell from the sound of my voice just saying Hello, to see whether I was drinking or not. But I don't remember any other phone calls recently when I answered the phone and nobody answered me, so he must have just started checking up on me that way, unless—well, he could have called like that times when I *wasn't* home; there have been plenty of them this past week.

Well, this tears it, I thought. I've got to leave today, right away. I've decided to anyway and there's no use having a scene first. I hate scenes. I'll leave him a note—

Of course the first thing was to call Clyde, so I called him, and talked fast explaining what had happened. I said, "All right, Clyde, this is a showdown. If you really meant it that you want to take me away, now's the time, today. Otherwise, I'm going anyway."

He said, "Baby, of course I meant it, of course I'll take you. But listen—how long ago was this phone call?"

"Five minutes, maybe. I called you right away but it took me a little time to get the number."

"Well, you'd better get out of there fast. If that *was* Frank—I think maybe you're imagining it but it could have been—and if he decided to rush right home and have it out with you he'll be there any minute. Don't bother about packing or leaving a note or anything. Just get the hell out of there fast."

"Clyde honey, I know Frank. I ought to know him after seven years. And he's not rushing home. He might want to but he wouldn't let himself. He's going to have to think it over a while first and make up his mind what he wants to do or say about it. He doesn't do things on impulse, like us. He *reasons* things."

"Hope you're right on that, Baby. Okay, go ahead and pack—but travel light and just take what's really worth taking. We can always shop for you where we're going. And okay, write your little note. But don't tell him my name."

"Of course not, Clyde. Not even your first name, in case I'm wrong about that having been Frank on the phone. Do you really think I *am* wrong?"

"Why think one way or the other? I'm not going to look a gift horse in the mouth. I've been getting sick of this jerkwater town for weeks and I've been sticking around only on account of you. If you think that was that Mexican of

yours, go ahead and think so, if it gets us out of here today. I love you, Baby, but I don't love this town."

"You and me both, Clyde. All right, I can be ready in half an hour. Going to pick me up?"

"Hell no. Maybe your husband's wise something's going on and maybe he isn't but why should we take chances at the last minute? How do you know he didn't rush home—and he could be there already, now that we've been talking this long—but decide to watch the house to see if you're going to do just what you are going to do? And I'd walk right into him. Nix. Let me think a minute."

I said, "All right," and waited.

After a few seconds he said, "Listen, here's what you'd better do. Call a cab when you're ready—Wait, you got money, haven't you?"

"A little over twenty dollars. We've got a hundred and forty-some in a joint account that either of us can draw on and I can—"

He cut me off. "Forget the joint account. I just wanted to be sure you had dough for a long cab ride. Twenty's plenty. When you take the cab you're going to—do you know anyone who works or hangs out at the Pioneer Hotel?"

"No."

"Good, you take a room there and wait for me. Register as—uh—Mary Wentworth. Got that? Remember it, or I won't be able to find you when I come to pick you up. Mary Wentworth."

"Mary Wentworth," I said. "Don't you forget it either. But what's with this long cab ride business? The Pioneer's right downtown."

"I was leading up to it, wanted to get your name and the hotel straight first. Don't take your first cab there, in case. Take it—oh, say, to Oakbar Lodge, way out of town on Speedway. That's maybe a ten-mile trip and you'll have

plenty of time to make sure Frank isn't following you—or anybody else. Watch for *anybody* following you. If he's been suspicious already, he might have a private dick on the job."

"Frank? Hire a *private* detective? Don't be silly."

"Well, one of his buddies maybe. Anyway, make sure you weren't followed. Have yourself a drink at the Oakbar and then phone for another cab and take it to the Pioneer. And register. Remember the name?"

"Are you asking because you've forgotten it already?"

He laughed. "Okay, Baby. And once you're there, stay in your room. Have a drink or two sent up if you get bored waiting, but don't go downstairs to the bar."

"All right, Clyde. When will you be there?"

"As soon as I can, Alice, but don't hold your breath. It might not be till the middle of the afternoon. All you've got to do is pack and write that note, but I've got a lot. I've got commissions to collect, bank business to close, forwarding address—"

"Where, Clyde? Where are we going?"

"Tell you when we're on our way. But you'll like it. 'Bye, Baby. Geez, I'm glad it's working out this way."

I was glad too. But suddenly I got worried that I could be wrong about Frank not coming home and I hurried. I wouldn't have to take a shower or anything, I decided, because I'd have a lot of time to kill in the hotel room and might as well do it then. And I didn't pack much, just one suitcase. It felt fine not to be taking along all the dresses and things that I was tired of but hadn't been able to throw out because they still had too much wear in them.

Writing the note was a little harder. I made some false starts, once I started telling Frank everything that was wrong with him and our life together and Tucson, and then I realized I could write all day if I got going like that, so I tore it up and wrote a short one: "Frank: I'm sorry, but I don't love you

any more and I'm going away with somebody else. Please don't ever try to find me; we just aren't good for each other and never would be."

And signed it. Short and all of it true except the "I'm sorry" and even that was true in a way. I wasn't sorry I was going, but I was sorry for Frank. But he's so stupid; he should have known when I quit loving him and quit loving me too. Then we'd have broken amicably, as they call it, two or three years ago and all this wouldn't ever have happened.

I did just as Clyde told me except that I told the first taxi driver the Rodeo Club instead of the Oakbar Lodge. It's out of town in another direction but just as far and it would do just as well. I didn't want to go to the Oakbar because Frank used to take me there when we were first married and I wanted to forget Frank and being there would make me think of him. The only time I was ever at the Rodeo was one afternoon with Clyde, so that would be all right. Nobody followed me.

But we went through downtown and we were heading west on Congress Street and we were just passing the alley between a little hotel called the Carey and a pawnshop and suddenly there was some shooting from the alley or that seemed to come from the alley, and a lot of people started running that way. We were past the alley by then and I couldn't see anything but I quick asked the cab driver to stop. I had the awfulest feeling, remembering Frank was a detective and carried a gun and *could* be in whatever was going on, maybe even getting shot, and asked the cab driver if he could let me off a few minutes and wait. He slowed down to a crawl and looked around and he said, "Lady, not unless you want to pay me off and take your suitcase. There's no place here I can park to wait." So I realized I'd been being silly and told him all right, to go on.

FOURTEEN

FRANK RAMOS

The doctor's name was Gonzales but we talked in English because there was an intern watching him dress and bandage the wound and when you talk Spanish in front of a non-Spanish-speaking person he feels left out. If he's got prejudice he thinks you're giving him a run-around or even talking about *him*.

I felt foolish as hell for having fainted and asked the doctor why I had, from so slight a wound and when there hadn't been any shock at all.

"Mental shock, then," he said. "Reaction from suddenly realizing how close a call you'd had. And did you have anything else on your mind?"

"I guess so," I said. "I'd just killed a man, for one thing. In twelve years as a cop, for the first time."

"You've been lucky," he said. "Well, that's it. I won't put you to bed but you'd better lie down on that couch a while. Stay here for lunch. After that I'll check you and probably send you home."

"My God," I said, "that's over two hours. This is just a flesh wound. Are you kidding?"

"I'm not kidding, Ramos. You lost quite a bit of blood on the way here. That didn't account for your keeling over the first time because you hadn't lost much yet as of then. But it could make you keel over a second time if you start walking around now."

I said okay and went over to the couch. He said, "There are magazines in the rack there if you want to read, but you'd be better off just to rest, or even sleep if you can."

"All right," I said, "I don't feel like reading anyway."

"Think you can sleep? If so, I'll send your partner away. But he waited, and probably wants to talk to you a minute or so if you feel like it."

"I don't feel like sleeping," I told him. "So send him in."

About five minutes later Red came in. He grinned and said, "Hi, Marksman. That was some fancy shooting we did back there. How do you feel?"

"Okay," I said. "Damn doctor tells me I got to stay here till after lunch, though."

"Then do what the doctor ordered. Listen, until I report in I'm not under any orders. Want me to take a run over to your house and pick up some clothes for you to go home in? Ones with a little less blood on them?"

"What I've got is okay to get home in," I said. "Luckily I had on a dark suit and the blood won't show much once it's dry. Shirt sleeve's a mess, but it won't show once I put the coat back on. Yeah, I can get home to change all right. Think Cap will want me to report back after that, or can I get away with taking the rest of the day off?"

"The rest of the day? Hell, Frank, I talked to Gonzales on my way in here and he says you're going to be off work at least a week, more likely two. Sick leave, too; it won't count against your vacation time. That slug cut through some muscle, not just skin. You're going to have a sore arm for a while."

I said, "I won't argue, then. Damn it, though, I feel like a fool for fainting."

Red grinned again. "I've seen guys faint from getting shot at when they were missed. Finished shooting it out first, though, and conked out when it was all over. Delayed reaction or something."

I said, "Whatever it was, I still feel like an ass for doing it. Have you phoned Cap?"

"Right after we got here. He already had the story from Paul, though. He's coming around here to talk to you pretty soon. Listen, about tonight, you'd probably better skip it. Even if your arm doesn't hurt much now, it'll be hurting by then. We'll fix it up for you to meet Caroline some other time."

"Okay," I said.

"Well, Cap ought to be here pretty soon. Anything else I can do for you, or go out and get for you? Got plenty of cigarettes and everything?"

"Plenty of everything."

"Shall I come back right after lunch and drive you home?"

"You might have to wait around, Red. I don't know how soon after lunch Gonzales will get around to seeing me and giving me walking papers. Thanks, but I'll take a cab."

"Okay, Frank. Be seeing you."

He left, and I lay there and got to thinking. I got to thinking that I might be wrong about Alice, and then that I must have been wrong. There were lots of explanations. For one thing, it might not have *been* Alice; you can't positively identify a voice from two words spoken over a telephone, *Hello* and *Clyde*? It had sounded like Alice's voice, but then I'd been expecting her voice and any woman's voice that sounded even slightly like hers could have fooled me for three syllables. And while one doesn't very often make a mistake dialing one's own number I could very easily have done it that time; I wasn't paying any attention to the dialing because I didn't really want a connection with my own number. I was just faking a phone call to stall Red. In a case like that might not my subconscious have caused me deliberately, but without realizing I was doing it, to dial that number wrong? A lot of the things we think we do as mistakes aren't mistakes at all, to our subconscious minds. And if it had

happened that way, what the woman had done was perfectly natural. *Hello*. And when there wasn't any answer, *Clyde*? Her husband's name, probably. What had made me think I could detect a conspiratorial tone in one syllable? Or recognize Alice's voice from three syllables?

And even if I hadn't misdialed the number, even if it *had* been Alice's voice, there were other explanations equally simple and equally innocent. She knows people I don't know, partly because my job keeps me long hours so often and I'll have to admit I don't take her out much any more. She can have made friends in taverns or elsewhere without having affairs with them. She can have friends I never heard of, and a first-name basis doesn't mean anything these days. She's friendly and not snobbish and for all I know she's on a first-name basis with the milkman, the laundryman and the newspaper carrier and that wouldn't mean she's sleeping with any of them. She could have been expecting a call from someone named Clyde about that time for some household business reason or some perfectly innocent personal reason, and would naturally have spoken that way. She wouldn't think of it being me, that early in the morning, but if I were to call late afternoon when she was expecting me to call and acted the same way, she'd probably say "Frank?" after a few seconds of silence, just as naturally.

Yes, if it had been Alice I talked to, and if she had been expecting a phone call from someone named Clyde, I'd still gone way overboard in building a mountain from a molehill like that. Thank God I hadn't rushed home with blood in my eye on that first impulse and tried to have it out with her.

Anyway, I saw clearly now how wrong I'd been, whatever the real explanation. Alice and I have always been honest with one another, at least about big things. If she ever falls in love with someone else, she'll tell me, and until and unless

that happens I've got no damn business even to suspect otherwise.

Cap Pettijohn came in, looking cheerful and chipper. He pulled up a chair alongside the couch and looked serious long enough to ask how I felt and when I told him I felt fine, he grinned.

"Real job you and Red did over there. And I've got good news for you. A five-hundred-dollar reward is on the man you killed. Wisconsin Bankers Association. Dead or alive he was worth that to them and my guess is they'll be happy he's dead. Convicted on three bank robberies back there. Broke jail two months ago and that's when they posted the reward. Not much on the other one, the younger one, except of course the job they both pulled this morning. He wasn't wanted before that."

Well, I thought, I didn't want to take any reward money for killing a man but I'd have no out on taking my share of it. I'd be marked queer by everyone else in the department if I got noble by trying not to take it.

Cap said, "Paul and Harry absolutely refuse to cut in; I discussed it with them. They say the man was already dead when they got into the room, and that you and Red should split the five hundred."

"Nuts," I said. "Paul and Harry located them at the Carey. They should cut in even if they didn't go upstairs."

Cap nodded. "I put it to them that way but they didn't agree. Well, those rewards take time to come through so the four of you will have plenty of time to decide among you. You might talk Harry over and make it a three-way split, but I don't think you'll get Paul Geissler to touch a penny of it, not after the boner he pulled shooting you. He feels so ashamed about that I don't think the other three of you put together could stuff any of that reward down his throat without shooting him first."

"Let's let it go till the money comes then," I said. "Maybe he'll be easier to convince by that time."

"Fine. Next point. I know what happened over there but I want your opinion, since you're the one who got hurt, before I decide whether I should apply any disciplinary measures to Paul Geissler. He thinks I ought to fire him. I had to talk him out of turning in his badge and quitting. But what he did was inexcusable, shooting blind through a closed door when he knew fellow officers were somewhere on the other side of it. I'm inclined to think a few months back in uniform would be good for him. And it would help his conscience too, if he got some punishment."

I grinned. "If his conscience is in that bad a shape, let *it* punish him and it'll do a better job than you can. No, Cap, he's too good a man to put back in harness for one slip. Anyone can get excited when shooting starts. And he's learned his lesson. If a situation like that ever comes up again I'd rather have him on the other side of the door than anyone else."

"All right, if you feel that way about it. We'll let his conscience handle it; you've got a point there. He wants to come and see you to apologize, though, and I'll forbid him to do that. That'll get his conscience off to a good start. Now about you."

"What about me?"

"Frank, this may sound funny, but maybe this getting shot, as long as it wasn't serious, is a good thing to have happened to you. You haven't been looking well lately, and I don't think you've been feeling very well either. Maybe part of it's my fault for working you too hard. But I don't think that's all of it, although the rest of it is none of my business."

"I think you need a vacation and that one will do you good. You're not down on the list till late fall, but I was thinking, before this came up, of having a talk with you and suggesting

that you let me move your vacation date up. Now we won't have to; Dr. Gonzales tells me you shouldn't come back to work in less than a week and maybe two. So let's call it two weeks' sick leave now, and you'll still have your regular vacation coming up in the fall. How does that sound to you?"

"Fine," I said.

"I'll get a check for you for your two weeks in advance so if you want to take a trip somewhere you can. And if you want to borrow something above that, Frank, I guess I can arrange it for you."

"Thanks, Cap," I said. "But that won't be necessary."

I was thinking that if Alice and I went any great distance or to any place that would be expensive to stay at, I might need a bit more than the check plus what we had on hand in ready money, I could get it easily enough on a loan, a signature loan. The interest would probably be higher than whatever Cap had in mind, but I'd rather do it that way.

"Anyway," Cap said, "take a good rest, Frank. And if you don't mind my suggesting it, lay off the drinking. You have been doing it a little too much lately, haven't you?"

I let it go with, "Okay, Cap. I'll behave myself," and he left.

I closed my eyes and lay there trying to think where I'd take Alice. Not that I wouldn't let her make the final decision, of course, if she picked anywhere within reason. But I might as well have a few suggestions ready. Offhand, Los Angeles seemed like the best bet; I hadn't been there since before we were married and Alice had never been there. And it was just about the right distance, a little over five hundred miles. And too, the rainy season should be over by now and the weather would be beautiful. Then I remembered Los Angeles would be a bad place for anyone who didn't have a car to get around in, and I didn't know yet whether it would be okay for me to drive a car. Until I knew that I couldn't do much planning. Especially as Alice doesn't drive. Having to

be without a car wherever we went might entail a completely different choice of destination. I'd have to remember to ask Gonzales when he released me.

But with or without a car, taking Alice for a trip now would be the best possible thing I could do for her. It might be the turning point and, being together all the time for two weeks, I might be able to gain back some of the ground I felt I'd been losing with her. Cap had been right about my working too many hours, but it wasn't too many hours for my own sake as much as for Alice's. I left her alone too much, much too much. She seldom did much drinking, if any, on my days off when we were together. Yes, my getting this slight wound might be a break after all, for Alice and me.

The door was open and I happened to see Gonzales walking by and called him in to ask him about the driving business. He wanted to know if my car had automatic transmission and when I told him no, it had a gear shift but at least it was a steering post shift and worked easily, he said, "Well, try it. If it doesn't cause you pain it won't hurt you. Matter of fact you should use your arm a certain amount—not on any heavy lifting, though. Planning a trip?"

When I told him what I was planning, he nodded. "I think it'll be all right, Ramos. Especially the road driving part; on the road you have to change gears so seldom it shouldn't bother you at all. On city driving use your right arm as little as you can. When the car's standing still you can reach across and shift gears with your left hand. Even when you're moving if you steady the steering wheel at the bottom with your right hand. I'm not guessing; I drove around town for three days once with such a bad case of bursitis in my right shoulder that I had to do everything with my left hand. Awkward, but it can be done. Want lunch sent up here on a tray or want to eat downstairs?"

I told him downstairs and he said, "Good. I'll have you eat

in the staff dining room, with me. I want to see if it bothers you to use that arm in eating. After that I'll probably send you home."

"Where is the staff dining room?"

"I'll send someone up to get you and he'll show you. I usually eat at twelve-thirty; if it's later than that when somebody comes for you it'll be because an emergency case came in. Now lie back down and rest until then."

I lay back down; I'd sat up on the edge of the couch to talk to him. A little while later Red came in again with my check. He said if I wanted to endorse it he'd run over and cash it for me. But I told him I'd manage it okay.

"You lucky stiff," he said. "Why couldn't I have got that neat little gouge? With two weeks off bet I could talk Caroline into getting hitched now instead of a month from now."

"You wouldn't want a honeymoon with a sore arm," I told him. "But if you're in that much of a rush to get married, why not see if Cap will give you your vacation now instead of later? There's nobody else unattached for him to team you with right now so I'll bet he'd be glad to do it."

"It's an idea," he said. "I'll talk about it to Caroline tonight and if she says okay I'll ask Cap."

"That's smart," I said. "If you ask Cap first and then the girl says she'd rather wait, you're out on a limb."

"Yeah, but I still wish it was me that got shot. Then if I could talk Cap into letting me take my vacation starting at the end of two weeks' sick leave, I could really have myself a honeymoon. Don't think I wouldn't settle for a sore arm for part of it."

We talked about the reward money and he agreed with me that since the other team had found the men at least Harry should be talked into taking a split with us. But he could see how Paul Geissler felt about it and didn't think we should even try to talk him into changing his mind.

Red said that Cap had told him not to bother reporting back until after lunch, so he had time to kill, and wanted to know if I felt like talking or if he should scram and let me rest. I told him I felt like talking, which I did, so he stayed and we batted the breeze for a while. We talked about my plans and about his, and I guess we felt more friendly toward one another than we ever had before. I think that even getting engaged has changed Red a lot, for the better, and being married will do even more for him.

After he'd left, at twelve or a few minutes after, I got to thinking that after I was back at work I'd *have* to work it so Alice and I could be friends with Red and his Caroline. Even if Alice's drinking didn't improve, even if I had to level—at least with Red—and explain why I might have to call off a date once in a while. Red wouldn't be shocked, and probably Caroline wouldn't either. Better that than going on as I'd been doing, which was making a hermit out of me and which prevented Alice and me from making and keeping the right kind of friends.

An emergency case did come in and it was after one o'clock when Gonzales sent an intern to steer me to the staff dining room. By then I was plenty hungry and using my arm to eat bothered me very little. It hurt, but the pain was a steady throb that wasn't any worse when I used my arm than when I held it still. When I'd finished eating Gonzales told me I was doing fine and could run along.

I walked the two blocks to the bank and cashed the check and drew a hundred more from our account; since I'd be able to drive that should be plenty, at least if Alice would settle for Los Angeles, and we could even take off this evening if she wanted to and could be ready by then. If she could that would be better than taking off in the morning; we could get through the desert at night and duck the heat.

I hesitated a moment, wondering whether to phone Alice

so she could get started at least on thinking and deciding right away. But I'd have to explain about being wounded and that would worry her. If she could see me while I was telling her she could *see* that I was all right and that it was nothing to worry about.

Since the walk to the bank hadn't bothered me I decided there was no need for me to take a cab home; I could use the bus and save a buck.

At home I opened the door and called out, "Alice!" and when there was only silence I knew, even before I saw the note, that she was gone and that I'd never see her again. And I knew that, deep down, I'd known that all along, ever since that "Clyde?" and that I'd only been kidding myself, pretending to myself, trying to keep her *with me* just a little while longer, by letting part of my mind tell another part that everything was all right.

I read the note and then went out into the kitchen to see if there was any liquor, and there was. At least she'd left me that.

FIFTEEN

JOHN MEDLEY

It was truly a beautiful afternoon, possibly the finest of the year. The temperature was well under ninety, and with Tucson's low humidity, even ninety is just pleasantly warm unless one spends too long in direct sunshine. Inside my house the temperature had reached only the high seventies and I had not had to turn my cooler on. The sky was clear and blue; there was just the right amount of breeze. Seldom, even here, does one find a day so completely perfect.

I spent the afternoon inside the house and out, watering the lawn. I use a sprinkler that goes on the end of the hose and sticks into the ground with a spike. One must move it to a new spot every fifteen or twenty minutes. I've often thought of having a regular sprinkler system installed. But it is just one of the things one doesn't seem to get around to doing, and I should have had it installed when I first bought the place. There was almost no grass then. Now that I have a fairly good lawn I hate the thought of letting workmen dig trenches in it to lay pipe. One should think ahead in such matters, and one so seldom does.

The watering took until almost dark, but I waited until I had finished before I prepared and ate my evening meal. When I stepped outside my front door for a moment afterwards, I could see that the guests the Armstrongs had invited

were already there. Red Cahan's car was in front of their place, and two other cars.

For a moment I regretted that, earlier in the day, I had declined Mrs. Armstrong's invitation to join the party. But I would not have fitted in. They are all young people; even Mrs. Armstrong is young in spirit. And I am not. Not that I mind in the slightest. Quite the reverse, in fact. I am pleased that I am growing old; each year passed means one year less that I must endure. Besides, I must not let myself get too close to those people, much as I like them. I must not let myself become involved.

I went back inside, considered putting music on the phonograph and decided against it, made myself comfortable in my favorite chair and found my place in the book I had been reading. A popular novel but one that had been recommended to me, and rightly, as better than most of them. It was set in Italy in the late fifteenth century and, by pleasing coincidence, brought in as a character a man who has always fascinated me, the great Savonarola. A man far ahead of his time.

I had been reading for perhaps half an hour when there was a knock at my front door. I was expecting no one, so I assumed that it must be one of the Armstrongs or perhaps Red Cahan, come either to borrow something they had discovered they needed or to make a second effort to persuade me to join them. Going to the door I found myself wondering whether, in the latter case, I should let myself be persuaded. Perhaps I should, I thought, if I stayed for no longer than an hour.

But when I opened the door I saw that I had been wrong. The man who stood outside was a Mexican and at first I thought that I did not know him. Then I placed him, Frank Ramos, Cahan's partner. A policeman.

Come to see me, *as a policeman?*

"Good evening, Mr. Medley. Do you remember me?"

"Of course," I said, stepping back. "Won't you come in, Mr. Ramos?"

He came in, walking past me so I could close the door behind him. When I turned and saw him in full light I saw that his face looked different, somehow. There was something in it that reminded me just a bit of the look on that poor boy Kurt Stiffler's face when he had been here, in this very room, eight days ago tonight. No, Ramos' face was not as desolate or as empty as that, but it was not the face of a happy man. And—was I imagining it, or had he been drinking? Standing there, he seemed to sway just the faintest bit.

"Will you have a chair?" I asked him. And he thanked me and sat down, in the chair in which Kurt had sat. There was no coincidence in that, of course; aside from the chair in which I myself had obviously been sitting, since I had left my book lying open in it, it was the only comfortable chair in the room. The others were straight chairs.

I took my own chair again and moved the book aside. Then I asked him what I could do for him.

He paused a moment before answering as though choosing his words, deciding how to begin. Then he said, "If you don't mind, I'd just like to talk to you a while. Not on police business. In fact, you can have my job taken away from me if you wish simply by telling Captain Pettijohn that I came here. I was forbidden to talk to you."

"I see," I said, although I didn't. "May I ask, are you feeling well, Mr. Ramos? You look a bit upset."

He smiled, but it wasn't too straight a smile. "I'm afraid I am. I had quite a day. I killed a man. I was shot. My wife left me."

"You say you were *shot*?" Startling as the two other things were I picked on that one because if it were true he shouldn't be out walking around; he should be in a hospital. "You mean wounded?"

He gestured with his right hand, and then winced. "Just a flesh wound, upper arm. I'll get over it much sooner than the other things."

I said, "I'm glad to learn that it was not serious. And I'm sorry to hear about the other things. Is the man you killed the one who shot you?"

"As it happened, no. My being shot was an accident. But the man whom I shot—Good Lord, it just occurs to me that I don't know his name; I never asked. I killed him almost twelve hours ago and I still don't know his name."

"A name doesn't matter," I said. "But you interrupted yourself. You were saying that the man whom you shot—?"

"Had a gun pointed at me," he said. "So the fact that I shot him shouldn't bother me. But it does. I'll get over it, but it bothers me. But not as much as losing my wife."

"Perhaps she'll realize she made a mistake and come back to you."

"No," he said "If she'd just run away from me, yes. But she ran away with another man. Even if she should break with him she'd never come back, since she knows that I know that."

"Did you love her very deeply?"

"Yes," he said, and because he said it so simply I knew that it was so.

Then he smiled again. "But I didn't come to unload my troubles on you, Mr. Medley. Nor to ask you to help me out of them as you helped Kurt. I'll get over my troubles and be whole again. Perhaps you were right that Kurt would not have."

He knows. Or is he taking a shot in the dark?

"You really think that I killed that boy?"

"Yes," he said. "I don't expect you to admit it. I didn't come here to try to trap you into a confession. And even if you did

decide to talk freely, it would be your word against mine if you changed your story later. Your house isn't bugged."

"Bugged?"

"Planted with microphones. This is a personal and private conversation. Though I'll understand if you don't believe me on that."

"I believe you," I told him. "But I'm curious why—? But wait, may I offer you a glass of wine? Or have you been—?"

"Have I been drinking? Not for some hours. I started belting a bottle this afternoon but I saw it wasn't going to help, so I stopped. I've walked most of the time since, and it's worn off. Yes, I'll have a glass of wine. If you're having one, that is; I'm not going to drink alone."

"Of course. Would you prefer a dry or a sweet wine? I restocked today and have both."

He said he would prefer dry, so I went into the kitchen and opened a bottle of Burgundy, brought in the bottle and two glasses. I moved a small table between our chairs and poured the wine in his sight so he could see that I was adding nothing to his.

Then I sat back down and when we picked up our glasses, I lifted mine. I said, "To your recovery from your wound. From all your wounds."

He touched my glass with his. "And to your recovery from yours."

Does he know about—Dierdre? Has he traced me that far back, learned of the accident, and guessed the truth? No, he cannot have; he is guessing. All men bear wounds.

I said, "Mr. Ramos, will you tell me exactly why you came here tonight? You suspect me of murder, yet you say—and I believe you—that your visit is unofficial. If I *had* killed that boy, you'd hardly expect me to confess, casually, would you? Why did you come here, really?"

He took a thoughtful sip at his wine, as though seriously considering his answer. He put down the glass. "I'm going away tonight. I may never come back; that's something I'll work out wherever I go. But I've got enough other things to think out and I don't want *you* on my mind. Mr. Medley, I simply want to know whether I'm right or wrong about you, or whether Cap and Red are right in thinking *I'm* crazy."

"Whereas you think that I am—crazy?"

"Forget I used the word. It has no legal meaning. I think you killed Kurt Stiffler—and if him, probably others—out of mercy. For the same reason you killed the poisoned dog. I think you told us about the dog in such detail because it was the one thing you could tell us safely. I think it would make you much less unhappy if you could tell about the others."

"Go on," I said. I could not tell this man the truth, but neither, suddenly, could I lie to him. Nor did I wish to.

"No, I don't think you'll confess to me, and in a way I hope you don't. It would put me in a spot if you did." He took another sip of his wine. "I'm trying to understand," he said. "Mr. Medley, do you believe in God?"

"Of course I do."

"Would you do anything He ordered you to do, by word or by sign?"

"Would not anyone who believed in Him?"

He sighed deeply. He took another sip from the glass he held and I saw it had been emptied. I picked up the bottle in a gesture of invitation for him to hold out his glass. He hesitated. "I wonder," he said, "if I might have a glass of the sweet wine you said you also had. This is good but somehow I don't believe I'd care for another glass of the dry."

"Of course," I said.

I went to the kitchen and opened a bottle of Tokay, brought it back and filled his glass. He said, "Thanks. Do you mind if I go on speculating?"

"Not at all," I told him. "You are a very strange man, Frank Ramos."

He smiled, and his smile was more natural. He was forgetting his own troubles for the moment. He said, "I am a very dull man. But I am wondering why a man might think—or think he knows—that God wants to use *him* as an instrument of mercy. I think it might be because he so badly wants that very kind of mercy for himself. He himself wants to die, but for some reason he cannot. He hopes to be caught, too. Why did you leave Kurt's body on your own property when you could easily have put it elsewhere unless you—or at least your subconscious mind—*wanted* the police to be led to you, this time?"

This is a clever man. Almost, I begin to be afraid of him. And of myself. My tongue wants so badly to loosen, confession would be so blessed a relief. Yet he is right there too; I cannot. I cannot for thereby I would end my usefulness to God before he has signified that he is ready for me to. I make no answer.

Frank Ramos' eyes frighten me because they look at me kindly.

"But things start somewhere. Usually, things like this, in guilt. Mr. Medley, did you ever kill anyone not out of mercy, not on an order from God? Perhaps someone you loved very much?"

It was out of mercy! It was because I loved her and not—not because I could not stand seeing her that way and hearing the sound of her screams. It was out of mercy, even if God had not ordered it, even if then I was a Godless man. It was mercy, I tell you.

Had I shouted that aloud? No, only in my mind. For my hands were covering my face, hiding my eyes, for I do not want him to see the torture in them.

I could take no more.

I lowered my hands and I said, "I'm afraid I don't want to talk any more tonight, Mr. Ramos. You'll forgive me if I seem rude, but I must ask you to leave."

He left very quietly.

I pace the floor, thinking. Why do I not admit to myself and to God that I killed Dierdre selfishly and not out of mercy? If mercy had been the reason, why should I need exculpation? And if I shall at last admit the *fullness* of my guilt, might not God fully forgive it, and extend His mercy even unto me?

I pray best kneeling beside my bed, so I enter the bedroom and turn on the lamp on the night stand. There under it lie a dozen—two dozen—green capsules. And I know what they are, for they are the kind I took to that poor man with tuberculosis of the stomach.

And a deep peace comes into my heart, for this is the sign I have waited for. Yes, Ramos put them there when he made the excuse of wanting a different wine and sent me into the kitchen, but God put it into his heart and his mind to leave them; God would have stopped him had not God known what was to happen, that tonight I should finally see and admit before Him the fullness of my guilt. I am forgiven, and God calls me.

I shall pray and give my thanks to God, but there will be time after I have taken them. I shall need a glass of water.

SIXTEEN

WALTER PETTIJOHN

Frank Ramos stuck his head into my office and asked, "Busy, Cap?"

"Come in, Frank," I said. "Sit down. Back a day early, huh?"

"Yeah. Had some personal business to attend to and wanted to take care of it before I start in. How's everything?"

"Quiet. You're looking fine, Frank." He was; he was looking better than I'd seen him look in a long time. And happier.

"I *feel* fine," he said. "Maybe I should get shot oftener."

That reminded me. "How is the arm? Sure you're ready to start work again?"

"It's okay," he said, and flexed it. "A little twinge once in a while, but it healed nicely. Yes, I'm ready."

"Where did you go?"

"Drove down into Mexico, as far as Torin."

I asked him where that was and he said just past Guaymas.

"On the coast, then," I said. "Do any fishing?"

"Some, the past week. The first few days I just soaked up sun on the beach, and rested."

"Is it better than Guaymas?"

"Much smaller and quieter. I like it better, but you probably wouldn't. You can get by in Guaymas without speaking Spanish, but you might have trouble in Torin. How's Red?"

"On his honeymoon. He wanted his vacation early and I gave it to him. He got married a few days after you left. He'll be back Monday."

"You're going to keep us teamed, aren't you, Cap?"

"Sure. But till next Monday you can work with Carl Davis. Jerry's down with flu, but he ought to be back by then. Say, the boys are chipping in to buy Red a present; happened too suddenly for us to get one before he took off. Want to chip in?"

Frank said, "Think I should do better than that and get him one on my own. After all, he's my partner."

"Good idea. Say, Frank, you wouldn't have been seeing the Tucson papers down there, would you?"

"Nope. Been out of touch. Why?"

"Funny thing happened. John Medley committed suicide. Sleeping capsules."

"The hell," Frank said. "When did it happen?"

"Probably the night of the day you left. His body wasn't found for three days, though. Red's mother-in-law, next door, got worried when she hadn't seen him around for a while and his car stayed in the carport, so Red went over and looked in the windows and saw him. On the bed, but fully dressed. You know, Frank, I did some thinking and I wonder if you could be right about him. About his maybe having killed Stiffler—and maybe some others. He *could* have been a psychopath. I didn't think he was, but you can't always tell them."

"I'd about decided I was wrong," Frank said. "But it does seem odd that he killed himself. Did he leave a note?"

"No, he didn't. Well, there had to be an inquest of course, so we went through his possessions, all his papers. But we didn't find anything—except we learned one thing that was just a little odd. He *had* been married. His wife had died seven years ago in an auto accident, not too long before he moved here."

"It is a little odd. But I suppose he could have had some innocent reason for telling us he'd never been married."

I said, "I suppose so. One other thing, could have been just coincidence and probably was. The capsules he took were dormison and they're not too common. Remember the Winkelman case? Woman we thought was accessory to suicide because she took her husband sleeping capsules in the hospital? They were dormison too. If Medley *was* a psychopathic mercy-killer, that's just the kind of thing he'd be likely to do, and I wonder."

"Medley could have had any one of a hundred other reasons for killing himself, Cap."

"Yes," I said. "But I wish he'd left a note. If he had, we might be able to wipe a few cases off our books." I sighed. "Well, at least he won't be killing anybody else."

"No," Frank said. "I guess he won't."



FINE MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE TITLES FROM CARROLL & GRAF

<input type="checkbox"/>	Brand, Christianna/TOUR DE FORCE	\$3.95
<input type="checkbox"/>	Brown, Fredric/THE LENIENT BEAST	\$3.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	Brown, Fredric/THE SCREAMING MIMI	\$3.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	Carr, John Dickson/CAPTAIN CUT-THROAT	\$3.95
<input type="checkbox"/>	Du Maurier, Daphne/THE SCAPEGOAT	\$4.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fennelly, Tony/THE CLOSET HANGING	\$3.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gilbert, Michael/GAME WITHOUT RULES	\$3.95
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gilbert, Michael/OVERDRIVE	\$3.95
<input type="checkbox"/>	Graham, Winston/MARNIE	\$3.95
<input type="checkbox"/>	Greeley, Andrew/DEATH IN APRIL	\$3.95
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hughes, Dorothy B/RIDE THE PINK HORSE	\$3.95
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hughes, Dorothy B/THE FALLEN SPARROW	\$3.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	Queen, Ellery/THE FINISHING STROKE	\$3.95
<input type="checkbox"/>	'Sapper'/BULLDOG DRUMMOND	\$3.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	Symons, Julian/THE BROKEN PENNY	\$3.95
<input type="checkbox"/>	Symons, Julian/BOGUE'S FORTUNE	\$3.95
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wainwright, John/ALL ON A SUMMER'S DAY	\$3.50

Available from fine bookstores everywhere or use this coupon for ordering:

Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 260 Fifth Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10001

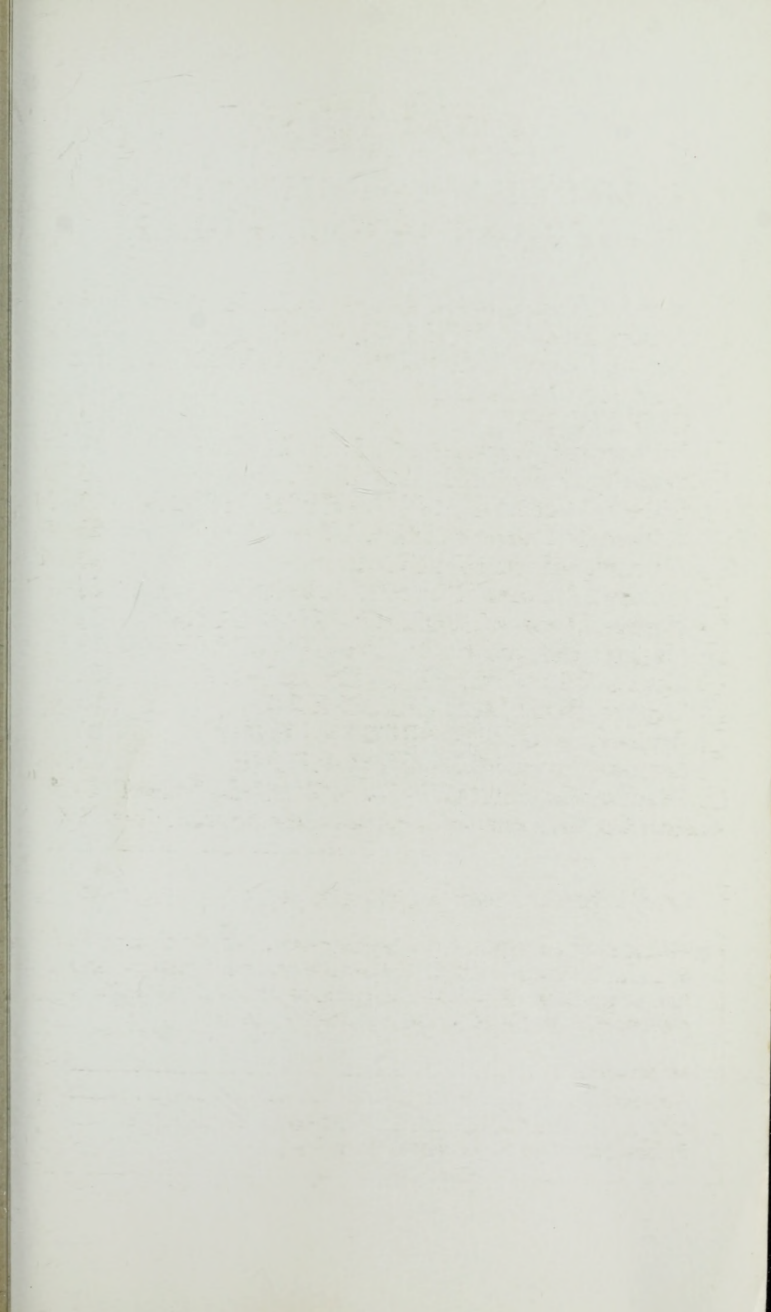
Please send me the books I have checked above. I am enclosing \$_____ (please add \$1.75 per title to cover postage and handling.) Send check or money order—no cash or C.O.D.'s please. N.Y. residents please add 8¼% sales tax.

Mr/Mrs/Miss _____

Address _____

City _____ State/Zip _____

Please allow four to six weeks for delivery.



"A powerful human novel, with plenty of suspense."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

THE LENIENT BEAST

FREDRIC BROWN

John Medley—a kindly mass-murderer with a singular motive.

Frank Ramos—a Mexican-American cop whose idea of justice is a highly personal one.

Alice Ramos—Frank's alcoholic Anglo wife.

Walter Pettijohn—Frank's boss. Doesn't much like Mexicans... especially when they're smarter than he is.

Fern Cahan—Frank's partner. Likes Frank and knows his worth, but isn't above playing on Pettijohn's prejudice.

These five characters each give their own view of the action in this tense and suspenseful crime story.

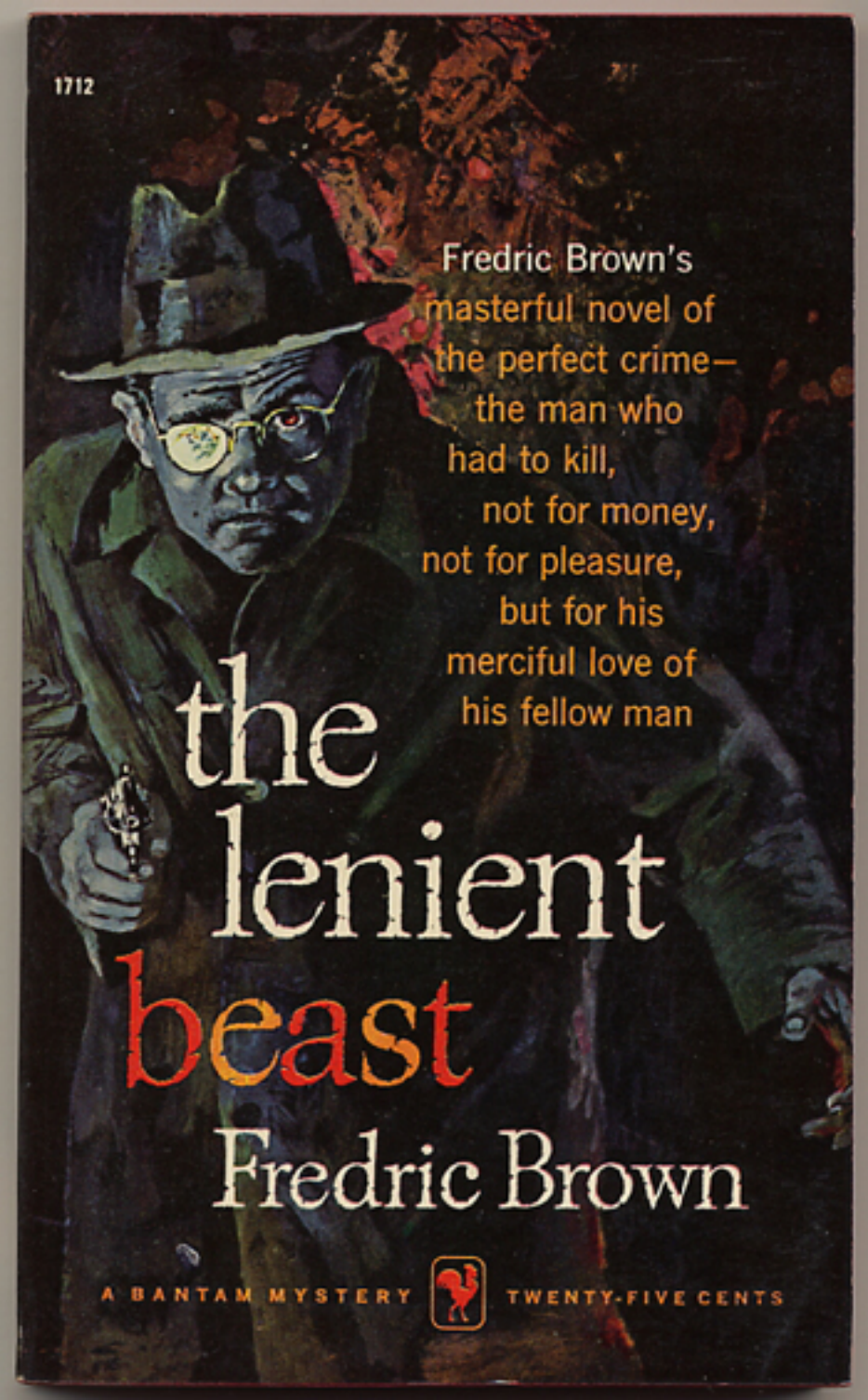
"A most successful fusion of 'Dragnet'-like police routine with the novel of psychological suspense. Complex characters come alive as successfully as does the desert-bounded city of Tuscon."—*New York Times*

COVER DESIGN AND ILLUSTRATION BY TOM McKEVENY



Distributed by Publishers Group West

0-88184-444-6



Fredric Brown's
masterful novel of
the perfect crime—
the man who
had to kill,
not for money,
not for pleasure,
but for his
merciful love of
his fellow man

the
lenient
beast

Fredric Brown

A BANTAM MYSTERY



TWENTY-FIVE CENTS