

**ACE**  
DOUBLE NOVEL  
BOOKS

**TWO COMPLETE NOVELS 35c**

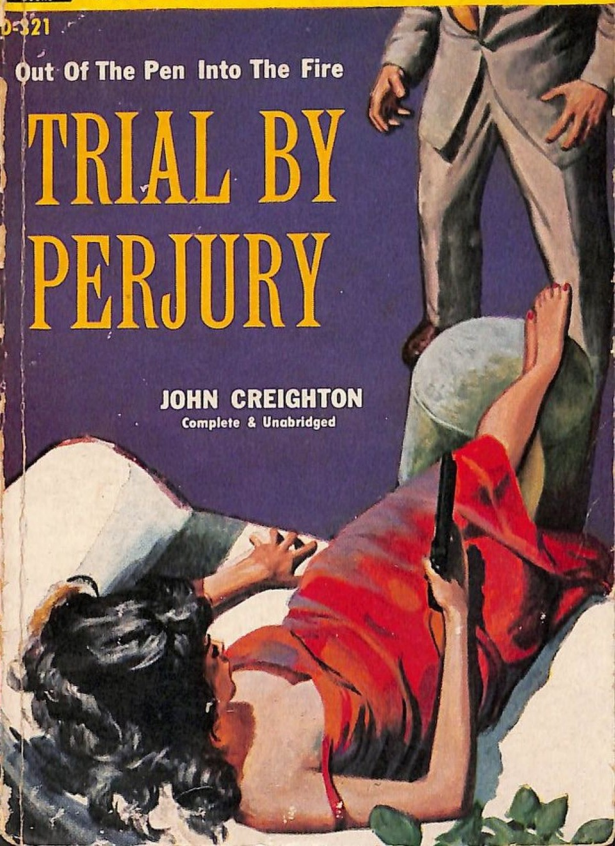
D-321

Out Of The Pen Into The Fire

# TRIAL BY PERJURY

**JOHN CREIGHTON**

Complete & Unabridged



## YOU CAN'T HANG TWICE

Being fall guy for a hit-and-run driver, Dan Kirby learned, was not the best way to make ten grand. For after completing his seven months behind bars, he found himself without either the money or his wife . . . and with a new frame being fixed, this time for murder.

It was a vicious trap. If he went to the cops, they'd send him up for perjury; if he went to the big shot he'd fronted for before, he'd be slapped down for blackmail.

John Creighton's new novel of TRIAL BY PERJURY is a gripping thriller all the way!

---

Turn this book over for  
second complete novel

---



## CAST OF CHARACTERS

### Dan Kirby

He had a choice of executioners—an underworld gunman or the operator of the state gas chamber.

### Mark Leland

Integrity was his slogan, but bribery was his method.

### Donna Armand

Her tastes were too rich for her salary.

### Pete Dolan

He knew a good thing when he saw one.

### Fred Jarrett

For once this sly lawyer didn't spot all the angles.

### Anne Sorenson

A nightclub singer who sang for the cops.

# ***Trial by Perjury***

by

JOHN CREIGHTON

ACE BOOKS, INC.

23 West 47th Street, New York 36, N. Y.

TRIAL BY PERJURY

Copyright ©, 1958, by Ace Books, Inc.

All Rights Reserved

---

THE SMELL OF TROUBLE

Copyright ©, 1958, by Ace Books, Inc.

---

Printed in U. S. A.

## Chapter One

EXCEPT FOR those six weeks on the jail farm, which didn't really count, this was his first day outside in seven and a half months. He was a free man again, as free as any of the people about him in the bus, for he had, as the saying went, paid his debt to society.

But he felt bewildered, a little lost. Everything seemed alien to him, even this trip home through familiar countryside. Tell himself as he would that it was over and done with, that he could now go where he wished and do as he pleased, he still could not quite accept his new status.

Seven and a half months was not a long time. But behind bars it could and did seem half a lifetime, and adjustment did not come easily or quickly. Maybe he had a hunch, a premonition, that it was not entirely over and done with, that his home coming simply meant more grief. He was beyond a doubt subject to a feeling that nothing was to go right for him.

He felt that he must look like a jailbird, like an ex-con. It was all in his mind, of course. In appearance, he was no different from the people about him. Others looked as tense and seemed as burdened with trouble. Most were not so tanned as he; thanks to his weeks on the farm, he had no prison pallor. Only in his imagination was the mark of confinement upon him. No one stared at him as though he were a freak. If anyone noticed him at all, it was not to suspect. He was just another traveler; an average sort of one, at that. He was a sandy-haired man of thirty-four, not tall and yet not short, not handsome but not bad-looking either. . . . Nobody noticed him, really.



The trip had not been long, something less than an hour, and now the bus rolled into the city and pulled up to its terminal. He rose with the other passengers, retrieved his small bag, and trailed the others from the bus. His legs were weak and he was trembling. There was no reason for it, unless he knew, in his subconscious, that they would be waiting for him.

There were two of them, one a blonde in a sandstone-white convertible and the other a cop.

The one, the blonde, called, "Dan! Dan Kirby!"

She was parked only fifty feet away. She smiled and motioned and opened the door of the convertible, all in warm invitation. He stared, at first not knowing her from Eve and then finding her vaguely familiar. She waved again, smiled some more. After a moment of hesitation, he started toward her and then was tapped on the shoulder.

A voice said, "Hold on, Kirby."

He turned quickly, as if still on the inside and a screw had spoken. He saw a man bigger than himself and in the campaign hat and dark-gray uniform of the State Police. The clamp let loose of his memory; he remembered this man, even knew his name—Larsen. It was Larsen who had picked him up that night and made the arrest.

"Forget the dame," Larsen said. "You're taking a ride with me."

"A ride where?"

"To the Barracks."

"Now, listen—"

"Come along, Kirby."

He stood his ground, turned rebellious. "Look, I've been out less than three hours. I spent most of that time sitting in the bus station and the rest on the bus. I haven't pulled anything."

"Nobody's saying you have," Larsen told him. "But I've orders to bring you in. Now come along."

Kirby swore, and said, "Suppose I say 'no?'"

Larsen stared at him, hard-eyed. "Don't make things tough for yourself," he said, making it a warning and a threat. "One way or another, you're coming along."

The rebellion died in Kirby. There was no beating the system, once a man ran afoul of it. Inside, you jumped when a guard barked at you. Outside, it was a cop who did the shoving. He sighed resignedly. "All right, let's go."

Larsen said, "This way," and walked him to the parking lot at the side of the bus terminal.

They passed the blonde in the convertible. She was parked in a no parking area. She stared at them, her smile gone. Kirby stared back, trying without success to remember her.

Like the car, she looked expensive. She looked too rich for his blood. He'd never been able to afford dames with a high price tag. He hadn't been able to afford even Lila, and she'd come cheap. Low cost, high upkeep; that had been Lila. Lila. . . . This one reminded him of Lila, though she was darkly blonde instead of a flame-touched redhead. She had the same ripe figure, what he could see of it. And sleek. Sleek like out of high-fashion ad.

"Who's the dame, Kirby?"

"I don't know."

"She came to meet you."

"I still don't know."

"All right," Larsen said. "So you don't know."

His marked cruising car was on the lot. He put Kirby into it, then went around and got behind the wheel. Before starting the motor, he took out a notebook and wrote down the license number of the blonde's convertible. He never missed a trick, State Trooper Larsen.

They drove east on Market Street. At Market and Grant they passed the Globe Service Service which Kirby had operated under lease before his arrest. He looked at it, and looked away. They turned out Lennox, passed the sprawling buildings of Leland Industries, Incorporated. A billboard which once had enumerated the company's various indus-

tries now bore a picture of the firm's head and the legend.

FOR GOVERNOR—MARK LELAND.

Gazing at the billboard, Kirby swore under his breath. Larsen said, "What's that?"

Kirby shook his head. "Nothing."

Larsen gave him a sour look.

They'd put up a new barracks while Kirby was inside. It was colonial in style, of red brick, and stood on ten acres of landscaped grounds. It was surprisingly handsome for a police station. They parked and went inside.

In the squad room an irate citizen was threatening the desk sergeant and a trooper with his influence in high places. The sergeant looked bored, the trooper sore. Larsen led Kirby into a corridor where they passed Communications Room and then turned into one of a half-dozen offices. A man in civilian clothes sat at a desk. He had salt-and-pepper hair but his face was young. His name was Hanlon. Kirby remembered him. Hanlon was always in plainclothes, a detective.

He said, to Larsen, "I'll call you, Mike," dismissing him. And to Kirby, "Sit down, Dan. Cigarette?"

"I'll smoke my own."

"Suit yourself. But that's a big chip you're carrying."

"Why shouldn't it be? I've done my stretch and I'm clean, but still you have me hauled in here." He hadn't accepted Hanlon's invitation to sit down. He moved to the desk, scowled down at the man behind it. "Why?" he demanded. "What do you think you've got on me?"

"Not a thing," Hanlon said, leaning back comfortably and lighting a cigarette. "I just wanted to have a friendly talk with you. A friendly talk, Dan. By the way, how was it on the farm?"

Kirby was thrown off stride by the question, and it was a long moment before he replied. "It was better than a cell. What do you want me to say? That it was a wish-you-were-here vacation? I was still doing time, remember."



"Like you say, it was better than a cell," Hanlon said easily. "Not that I want any credit, but I pulled the strings that got you assigned to the farm."

"You! Why?"

"Why don't you sit down and take it easy, Dan?"

"Why, Hanlon? Why should you do me favors?"

Hanlon gazed at the burning end of his cigarette. He continued to gaze at it, policeman-patient; he seemed to have no nerves. He didn't look up until Kirby, grunting with disgust, seated himself in the chair to one side of the desk.

"I did you a favor because I've taken a big interest in you. I've been interested in you for seven and a half long months, off and on. You fascinate me. In twenty-two years as a cop, I never before ran into a man who handed himself a bum rap. Which is exactly what you did, chump!"

He waited for a reply, but Kirby, looking as though he'd been slugged, sat there tongue-tied.

Hanlon went on, "Maybe I sound sore. Well, I am sore, and for good reason. But mostly I feel sorry for you. You took the rap and did time, and what did it get you? Not a damn thing. Your wife grabbed the loot and took a plane for Reno. You got nothing to say?"

Kirby shook his head.

"Still being a chump, eh?"

"Look, Hanlon, lay off me!"

"Not yet," Hanlon told him. "Not until I've talked myself out. I didn't investigate you all the way back to the cradle just to have you tell me to jump through a hoop. I'm going to talk and you're going to listen."

"You've got no right to—"

Hanlon hit the top of his desk with his fist. "Don't hand me any such crap!" he exploded. "After giving this force and the courts a screwing, don't you hand me anything but the truth!"

Kirby was pale through his tan. He sat there looking trapped, but stubborn too.



"I'll lay it out for you," Hanlon said flatly. "An elderly man—a retired minister named Burton—was run down and killed by a motorist last December twenty-first. The scene of the accident was on Route 32, at a crossroads place called Maple Grove. It happened at seven-twenty at night, a rainy night. The driver of the death car was exceeding the speed limit. According to witnesses, he was doing at least 50 in a 25 mile-an-hour zone.

"There were three witnesses, two men and a young woman. The young woman was the victim's granddaughter. All told the investigating officers that the driver braked his car momentarily after hitting the old man, then speeded up and got away before they could get his license number. You with me, Dan?"

"I've heard all this before."

"Sure, you did," Hanlon told him. "But you're going to hear it again and more.

"The two male witnesses said that it was a big, new car—gray or tan in color. The girl—the granddaughter—did even better. She said it was a '57 tan Cadillac!

"Now, the driver wasn't entirely to blame. There was a traffic light a hundred yards from the scene of the accident, and the victim should have crossed the highway at the point. Instead, he crossed where he did and became another traffic fatality.

"But if the driver had stayed within the speed limit, he might have seen the old man in time to avoid running him down. So he was at fault. But the reason we really wanted him was for his failure to stop at the scene of an accident."

Hanlon paused to light another cigarette. "It was the biggest search for a hit-and-run driver in my experience. We didn't need a fire built under us, but the press and the public built one, anyway. There was a big fuss. Everybody was up in arms. So we did our best and came up with nothing. But the man we were looking for was worried, scared. Right, Dan?"

Kirby said tightly, "You're telling it, Hanlon."

"He got so scared that he decided to buy his way out of the jam," Hanlon went on. "And he managed to do just that. We get a tip from a bartender. He tells us that a guy was in his joint the night before, drinking himself blind. The guy's got troubles. He confides in the bartender. He's killed a man in a hit-and-run accident.

"He knows the guy by his first name and that he works at a service station. So we start checking and find that there's only one local station with somebody named Dan. The Globe Service Station at Market and Grant is operated by a Dan Kirby. We take the bartender around, and he says it's the guy who confided in him. We check Kirby's car. He's not driving it that day, says its fuel pump is shot. It's in his garage behind his apartment house. He's nervous, looks guilty as hell. So we check the car and it shows damage, a broken headlight and some dents in the fender. Just the amount of damage that would result from hitting a pedestrian at 50 miles-an-hour. So—"

"I admitted I was the man you were looking for," Kirby cut in. Beads of sweat dotted his forehead. He was breathing hard. "Can't you lay off now?"

"Sure, you admitted you were our man," Hanlon said. "You even signed a statement that you were the hit-and-run driver who killed the old gentleman. And we fell for it, even though your car was not a new Caddy, but a four-year-old Ford!"

## Chapter Two

DAN KIRBY was sweating, but he felt cold within himself. Scared-cold. The impossible had happened, and he was being

trapped with it. He was no great brain, but he was bright enough to know that he could take another fall—if only for perjury. He watched Hanlon rise and come from behind the desk to tower over him. He didn't want to go back to prison. Once in a lifetime was once too often. But he felt a trap being closed about him, and there was nothing he could do about it.

Hanlon was smiling mockingly. "What are you sweating about, Kirby?" Not 'Dan' now, but 'Kirby'. "Something worrying you?"

Kirby kept silent. There was nothing to say. If he opened his mouth, he would put his foot in it.

Hanlon said, "So we decided that the witnesses were mistaken in thinking it had been a Cadillac or another big car. We had your statement and your damaged Ford. We turned you over to the district attorney. When you appeared in court, you pleaded guilty. What else could we ask for? We closed the case. The public and the press cooled off. Everybody was happy—including you and the man you'd taken the rap for."

He was silent a moment, gazing at Kirby in a hard-eyed way. "Maybe you think that cops are satisfied to close a case just so long as *somebody* takes the rap. Not so. Not the cops belonging to this outfit, anyway. One of the boys—it was Trooper Larsen—couldn't get this case out of his mind. He couldn't understand how three seemingly trustworthy witnesses could mistake an old Ford for a brand new big car."

Kirby blurted out, "Witnesses have been mistaken before!"

Hanlon ignored that. "Larsen went around for another look at your car. More than that, he took along an expert body mechanic. Kirby, the damage to that Ford was done with a sledge hammer."

"So I must be nuts, eh?" Kirby said thickly. "Damaging my own car and then confessing to being a hit-and-run killer. I must really be nuts."

"Not nuts, but cute," Hanlon replied. "Ten thousand



dollars cute. After Larsen told me what he'd found, I took over. Unofficially, since the case was closed. I began digging into your affairs. Except for your war record, there wasn't much. Up until this hit-and-run mess, you were always a nothing guy. Between World War Two and the Korea fiasco, you were just a floater. . . . One year in college, then driving a truck and working at service stations and having a go at door-to-door selling. A couple different jobs every year. After Korea you tried to do better. You leased the Globe Service Station at Market and Grant.

"You did all right for a couple of years. So all right that you married and settled down. Then a cut-rate outfit put up a big station on the opposite corner. The competition hurt like hell. The last few months before the hit-and-run accident, you weren't making expenses. Then just as you were getting desperate you got what you thought was a break. Maybe the guy was a customer, eh, Kirby?"

"I don't know what guy you're talking about."

"The guy in a jam. The guy who propositioned you to take the heat off him for ten grand in cold cash. A scared guy with plenty of dough."

"You're talking nonsense, Hanlon."

"Sure, cops always talk nonsense. Anyway, you were desperate and ten thousand dollars looked like good pay for maybe a year in jail. So you agreed to take the rap for that hit-and-run fatality, figuring that the money would give you a fresh start in another business after you served your sentence. But you made a mistake, didn't you?"

"Yeah. I made the mistake of coming back here and setting myself up to be hounded by you."

"You made the mistake of trusting your wife."

Kirby's face tightened, as though with pain. "That's right," he said. "Now twist that knife you've got in me."

"I've got no knife in you," Hanlon said. "Like I told you at the start, I feel sorry for you—as I would for any chump."



You banked the ten grand in your and Mrs. Kirby's joint checking account. And you were no sooner sent up than she drew the money out and took off for Reno to obtain a divorce. Now you're out and haven't a dime to show for the seven and a half months you spent inside. You were suckered all around."

"You soon done talking, Hanlon?"

"Who paid you that ten grand, Kirby?"

"I'm not answering questions. And you won't be able to bounce any answers out of me, either."

"I want that character," Hanlon said flatly. "There's nothing I hate like the guy who buys his way out of jams. I'm going to reopen that case, and I'm going to have your help."

Kirby shook his head. "Not a chance. You can keep me here from now on until doomsday and it won't buy you a thing."

Hanlon stared at him hard-eyed. "Sure. You'll go on playing the chump. You'll go to the character who bought you and try to hit him up for some more dough. The way he'll look at it, you're blackmailing him. And he'll get tough. You know what he's likely to do, a character who buys his way out of jams?"

"You're dying to tell me," Kirby said. "So go ahead."

"He'll pay somebody to take you off his neck."

"You're scaring me, Hanlon. You really are."

"That's all you've got to say?"

"I've got a question."

"All right. Let's have it."

"Can I go now?"

Hanlon looked sore enough to slug him. As though not trusting himself, he took a quick turn about the room. Once he had himself under control, he said, "I'd give odds of ten-to-one that the next time I hear of you, it'll be that you've been found dead or half-dead in some dark alley." He turned abruptly to the door, opened it, called to Trooper Larsen,

"All right, Mike. . . . Take the poor sucker back into town."

It was odd, Kirby thought as he walked out, but along with being sore Hanlon did look sorry for him.

### Chapter Three

KIRBY reached into the police car for his bag, then said, "Thanks, anyway, cop," and turned away. Larsen caught him by the arm, held him.

"Don't be like that, Kirby. It's a long hike to town."

"Sure, but I'll make it."

Larsen scowled at him for a moment, then said, "Well, suit yourself. I've more to do than haul you around," and turned him loose.

Kirby didn't reply. He went to the highway, waited for a break in the flow of traffic, then started across. Larsen had missed a trick. There was a diner on the opposite side, and among the cars parked before it was a sandstone-white Dodge convertible with its top down. A blonde sat behind the wheel.

Kirby tossed his bag onto the back seat, got in beside the blonde. She still looked expensive and vaguely familiar. He caught a whiff of her perfume; she smelled good, so good his long dormant maleness was tantalized. About her too, he imagined, was the smell of trouble.

He gave her a grin that he really didn't feel, and said, "Sorry I kept you waiting."

She smiled. It was a somewhat forced smile accompanied by an uneasy glance divided between him and the Barracks across the highway. Larsen was standing by his car, watching with what must have been a lively interest.

The blonde said, "Why did they take you there, Dan?"

"They're fond of me. They wanted to say 'welcome home'."

"No." She was frowning, worriedly. "What did they really want?"

"They wanted to tell me not to be a naughty boy again," he said, and decided that she looked good even when frowning. "Now, what do you want, Miss . . ."

Her purse, a white-bead affair, lay between them on the seat. He picked it up, jerked open the slide fastener, took out her wallet. Her driver's license said that her name was Donna Armand. He put the wallet back, zipped the purse, returned it to the seat.

". . . Miss Armand?" he finished.

She was still frowning, with annoyance now. "That wasn't necessary," she said. "I would have told you my name, if only you'd said that you didn't remember me."

"All right. I'll say it now. I don't remember you."

"I'm Fred Jarrett's secretary."

"Oh?"

"We were introduced in his law office one night about eight months ago." She quit frowning, brought back her smile. "Your not remembering isn't very flattering. Didn't you notice me that night, Dan?"

He shrugged. He'd been too keyed up that night to have noticed her even if she'd been posing as Lady Godiva. That had been the night he agreed to take the rap, to make a fall guy of himself.

Her boss, Fred Jarrett, was the man who'd set the thing up. She'd been present but taken no part in the deal. But even if that hadn't been the night it was settled, he probably wouldn't have paid any attention to her. He'd still been in love with his wife at the time. He hadn't guessed that Lila would double-cross him after he was sent up—play him for a sucker, as Hanlon put it. He shrugged Lila out of his thoughts, looked again at the blonde.

She was a honey blonde, her hair soft and thick and rich-



ly gleaming. He wondered what it would be like to run his fingers through it. Her eyes were wide and rather heavy lidded, gray in color with a trace of green, and her mouth was large and sensuous. She was wearing a pale green sheath dress that hugged her lush body as though in love with it. She had firm, high breasts, and her legs were long and elegant. The parts of her not covered by the dress were tanned a smooth golden brown. He wondered if she were like that all over.

He said, "I'm noticing you now, Miss Armand."

"Donna, Dan."

"All right . . . Donna. Now what is it *you* want?"

"My boss sent me to meet you."

"That's nice of your boss, but—"

"When I saw that state trooper, I didn't know what to do. I phoned the office but Mr. Jarrett was out. So, the decision left to me, I drove out here and hoped they wouldn't keep you long. Please, Dan . . . what did they take you in for?"

"They're bright boys. They've caught on."

She stared at him in consternation. "Oh, no! They can't know everything?"

He shook his head. "Not everything. Only that I was paid to take the rap for somebody." He saw that Larsen had at last gone inside the Barracks. "Let's get out of here. If we don't, we'll have a cop named Hanlon dropping in on us."

She cast a frightened glance across the highway, then quickly started the motor and pulled away from the diner. He looked back once they were on the highway and saw Larsen and Hanlon come from the Barracks. He kept watching, but the two merely stood there staring after the convertible. Evidently, they weren't going to make a chase of it.

When he could no longer see them, he asked, "Why should Jarrett bother about me?"

"Mr. Leland wants to see you, Dan."

He gave a start. "Leland? Isn't that a mistake?"

"It is," she replied, a chill in her voice. "But your friend,



Mr. Leland, is in the habit of making mistakes. As you must realize by now."

They were passing the vast plant of Leland Industries, Incorporated. Kirby stared at the billboard bearing the likeness of Mark Leland and the plug for his candidacy for the office of governor. It also bore a slogan:

*Vote for Integrity in Government!*

"He's got the habit, all right," Kirby said. "And he's one man who can't afford to make mistakes."

"That's a matter of conjecture," Donna Armand said, "since he can afford to pay to have his mistakes covered up. I'm to take you out to his country place, Dan, but right now I could do with a drink. How about you?"

"I have a seven and a half months' long thirst."

"Shall we go to my place or just stop at a bar?"

He eyed her with astonishment. "Your place might be cozy, but I'd better remind you that a drink isn't the only thing I've done without for seven and a half months."

She laughed, low in her throat. "Thanks for warning me," she said. "A bar it will be, though I do think I'd be safe with you. Wouldn't I?"

"It depends on what you consider safe."

"Yes, I suppose it does," she said, slanting a smiling look at him. "My place another time, maybe. When we know each other better. There's a bar up ahead."

He watched her narrowly, more than a little puzzled and somehow suspicious of her. It was too easy. It was never this easy, certainly not for him, with her sort. Her sort? What did he know about her? She might be a tramp despite her elegant props, a high-class tramp. Or maybe she wanted something of him, something other than his capacity to perform as a male. For the life of him, he couldn't see her giving him that bedroom smile for himself alone.

She was Fred Jarrett's secretary and something more, he was certain. Even an efficient legal secretary couldn't afford such a car and such an expensively sleek look as she pos-

sessed. On the other hand, the convertible might not be hers.

"Your car?" he asked, as she turned in at the bar.

"Yes, of course. Why do you ask?"

"No reason. I just thought it might belong to your boss."

"Oh, really, Dan," she said, letting him have that throaty laughter again. "Can you, by any stretching of the imagination, see Fred Jarrett in a convertible?"

He remembered the lawyer as a pompous little man who was always in a sweat about something and he could not imagine him driving anything so flamboyant as Donna's convertible. Chuckling, he told her that he couldn't. He was beginning to feel himself again.

They parked, went into the bar and took stools. Except for one other customer, they had the place to themselves. He ordered bourbon on the rocks, and Donna said she'd have the same. When he looked at her wonderingly, she said, "Taking my liquor straight comes of my working for J. Frederick Jarrett. It's a nerve-racking job. Excuse me, Dan. I'll try to call him again. I want him to know about your having been taken in by the police."

She got from her stool, walked toward the phone booth at the rear of the long, narrow room. He looked after her. So did the barman and the other customer. Her rear view was as good as the front.

The barman brought their drinks. Kirby downed his at once, and said, "Hit me again." He didn't feel so care-free now that she was away from him. The edgy feeling of being an ex-con took hold of him again. He thought of how Hanlon had leaned on him and wondered what sort of rap would be pinned on him when and if the detective found out the whole truth and got enough evidence to reopen the case. They could nail him for perjury, he supposed. And for obstructing justice. He could see himself drawing another jail sentence, and it scared him.

He felt bitter about it. All he'd done was try to get

himself out of a financial hole. He'd been living on his small savings, those last few months, and he'd known that he would have to let the station go. He'd merely tried to get back on his feet, to pay his way, and to do a big wheel a favor. Fred Jarrett had made it seem that he would be doing a fine thing.

"Mr. Leland made a grave mistake," the lawyer had said. "But he'd been drinking quite a bit, at a cocktail party, and therefore what he did is understandable if not, in the eyes of the law, excusable. Mr. Leland, my boy, is this city's leading citizen—an upstanding citizen. He heads its largest industry and is active in civic affairs. He's running for governor this fall, not because he is politically ambitious but because many responsible people see the need of a change in the governor's mansion and know that he is the only man for that office. . . ."

Jarrett had wanted Kirby to go into it blind. At first he'd refused to tell for whom Kirby would be taking the rap. Jarrett had been a customer at the service station and known that Kirby was up against hard times. But Kirby had insisted upon meeting the man who needed a fall guy. He hadn't wanted to take the rap for some worthless character—not even for ten thousand dollars. So finally Jarrett had arranged for him to meet the big man, Mark Leland.

Jarrett had told him, "A thing like this could kill him politically. He's up against a political machine that has controlled this state for twenty years, and the machine would clobber him with this unfortunate hit-and-run affair. Even if he went to the police and made a clean breast of it, he would be ruined. His political enemies would crucify him, Dan."

Jarrett had talked on and on, telling him what a fine person Mark Leland was. Kirby hadn't doubted any of it. His old man had been a machinist at Leland Industries and always considered it the best place in the world at which to be employed. Kirby had never heard a word of disparagement



against Mark Leland. So he had fallen for the bait Jarrett dangled before him. A favor for a great man and ten grand for himself. Only he hadn't a red cent of that ten grand now. That double-crossing bitch who had been his wife. . . .

Donna returned from the phone, took her stool. "Mr. Jarrett is still out. Dan, why the angry scowl?"

He wiped off the scowl, and said; "Just thinking."

"About your wife—your ex-wife?"

He eyed her curiously. "You know about her?"

She nodded. "Mr. Jarrett kept tabs on her, through me. He knew that you'd had to tell her, but he was leery of her—afraid she'd talk out of turn. He was sorry about what she did to you, but yet relieved that she left town."

"I never told her who I was taking the rap for."

"I know, but she still could have fouled things up by telling what she knew." She lay a hand on his arm. "Does it still hurt, Dan?"

"Sure, it still hurts."

"I can't understand how she could do such a thing."

He couldn't understand it, either. They'd been married more than two years, and he had thought her as much in love with him as he was with her. He'd believed that they were good for each other. They'd hit it off fine up until business got bad at the station. They'd had spats then, but he'd been as much to blame as Lila. He'd been upset, worried about paying the bills. Every time she complained, he'd flown off the handle. He'd taken the rap for Mark Leland as much for Lila as for himself. It was to have been a stake in the future for both. He'd planned to use the money to set himself up in another business. Lila was to have used only what she needed to cover her living expenses while he was away. He'd trusted her. . . . What a chump!

Donna said, "If a man can't trust his own wife . . ."

"Drop it," he told her. "I don't want to talk about it."

"All right, Danny."



Danny. . . . Nobody had ever called him that. It sounded good, coming from her. He wondered why she was being so damn nice to him. He asked her.

He asked too, "What's in it for you?"

She took a sip of her drink before answering. "Like you, Dan, I've just lost someone I was fond of and still feel the hurt. I want badly to get over it, to forget. And you can't forget all by yourself." She smiled, lifted her glass. "To a short memory—for both of us."

He drank with her, inordinately pleased to know that she had no more angle than that.

Donna said, "By the way, Mr. Jarrett also kept tabs on your affairs while you were away. On Mr. Leland's suggestion. You've still got a place to live. There was still ten months to go on the lease for your apartment. It's paid up, with Mr. Leland's money. Also, your car was repaired and serviced last week. Mr. Leland was very much upset and sorry for you when he heard that your wife walked out on you."

"He's a real bighearted guy."

"Oh, he is generous," Donna said. "But it's so easy to be when you have half the money in the world."

He smiled at her. "I have the feeling you don't like him."

She was silent a moment, and seemed to withdraw herself from him. "I can take him or leave him alone," she said finally. "Well, let's get out to his place."

She hadn't taken even a third of her drink.

Leland's country place was one of the more imposing estates in the exclusive Wilshire Hills. It was of gray stone with here and there a bit of gleaming white clapboard to guard against monotony. The slightly peaked roof was a rarity these days, it being of good old-fashioned slate. It was a split-level house, but too big to have the boxy effect of most of that type. It looked long, squat and rambling. The garage was at the right side, and at a right angle to

the house. It was a four-car garage. Donna drove around to that side, parked. Three cars were inside and, since the doors were open, Kirby saw that one was a light tan Cadillac. He supposed that was the hit-and-run car, and was surprised that Leland hadn't traded it in for a new one.

It was a big place, a place for gracious living. Kirby knew that Leland was a widower and so wondered what the man wanted with such an enormous house.

"Quite a domicile," he said to Donna.

She nodded, and said, in an oddly flat tone, "Yes. Some people have all the luck."

They got from the convertible, walked around the corner of the garage and saw a man and a woman seated in the shade of a gaily colored beach umbrella. The man was Fred Jarrett, the woman a stranger to Kirby. Another man was just climbing from the big kidney-shaped pool. Snatching up a towel, he strode across the pool's blue concrete apron to greet Kirby and his companion. He was Mark Leland.

He was fifty-two, but only the touch of gray at his temples hinted at his age. He had the physique of a man twenty years younger. He was above medium height, broad of shoulder, flat of stomach. For all his being an active industrialist and a political aspirant, he had a deep leisure class tan. He was undeniably handsome, and distinguished looking too. Dan Kirby could not help but think that Donna Armand was right; some people had all the luck. Here was a man who had everything, even to a definite youthfulness after a half century of living.

He shook Kirby's hand, patted him on the shoulder. "It's good to have you back, my boy!" he exclaimed. He was always hearty, ever enthusiastic. "Come join the others. You too, Donna. Yes, it's good to have you back with us, my boy!"

Kirby felt rubbed the wrong way. He wanted to ask where Leland got that 'my boy' stuff. After all, he was an

adult—if not too bright a one. He resented being talked down to.

They walked to the pool where Leland donned straw sandals and a terry cloth robe, then said, "Dan, you remember Fred Jarrett, of course. My lawyer and friend. And this lovely lady is my fiancée, Myra Forbes. Myra, a very good friend of mine, Dan Kirby. He's been away, out West, for quite a while." He looked toward the house. A colored man in a white jacket was busy at a portable bar on the terrace. "All right, George, we'll have our drinks now," he called.

Jarrett had risen, offered his hand, said that it was good to see Kirby again. He was a stocky, florid man who took himself too seriously and possessed a habitual air of worryment. He looked somewhat upset at the moment, and immediately after shaking hands he mopped his perspiring face with a handkerchief.

Donna said, "I didn't expect to find you here, Mr. Jarrett."

He replied, in a slightly agitated way, "I decided that I'd better be present, considering the circumstances."

By that time Kirby was acknowledging the introduction to the host's fiancée. Myra Forbes appeared to be in her early forties; she was tall and willowy, with small features that made for a delicate beauty. She struck him as a person with a genuine liking for people.

"Where out West, Mr. Kirby?" she asked.

"Well, Arizona mostly."

"Tucson, perhaps? I have quite a few friends in Tucson."

She was not to know about him, he realized. He had to avoid giving her reason to wonder about him. He said, "I've been through Tucson a time or two, Miss Forbes, but . . ." He tried to think of another Arizona town, coming up with Globe. "But I spent most of my time in Globe."

"Globe. . . . That's the mining town, isn't it? I do think that the Ashleys are in Globe—"



Jarrett broke in, "Dan, I'm rather rushed. Could I talk with you for just a moment?"

Kirby nodded, asked the Forbes woman to excuse him, and let Jarrett hurry him off to the house. The room they entered was Leland's study; it was a vast room with a huge stone fireplace, one wall all books from floor to ceiling, teakwood paneling, mahogany and leather furniture. Jarrett looked hot and bothered.

"I had to get you away from Mrs. Forbes—"

"Mrs. Forbes?" Kirby cut in. "I thought she is Leland's fiancée."

"She's a widow," Jarrett said. "The widow of old Jim Forbes, the banker. I couldn't let you go on like that about Arizona, Dan. You couldn't have fooled her for long. She's been everywhere and knows everybody. She—"

"Not everywhere," Kirby said. "She hasn't been where I've been."

Jarrett flinched. "Now, that's uncalled for, Dan. I know it must have been rough, but after all you were well paid. It's unfortunate that your wife went off with the money, but . . . well, you should have been more careful. My God, Dan, whatever prompted you to trust her with all that money?"

"I had the naive notion that a man could trust his wife."

"Well, that's neither here nor there," Jarrett said. "But please keep away from Mrs. Forbes. She's not to know the nature of your association with Mr. Leland."

The butler entered the room, drinks on a tray. He served them and withdrew. Kirby sampled his drink, found it to be a scotch-and-soda.

Jarrett said, "I don't know why Mr. Leland wanted you out here. I don't approve of his having you here, and I did advise him against it. But he's not a man to take advice even from his attorney. You understand, of course, that—"

He broke off abruptly, for Leland came striding into the room.

Leland was no longer the pleasant host. He was unsmiling, his face stern and his manner brusque. He dominated the other two with his forceful personality.

Seating himself at the desk, Leland set his drink on the blotter and took a cigar from the humidor. After lighting up, he said, "Dan, having you here was solely my idea. Fred was opposed to it. He feared that someone—the police, of course—might find out and wonder about it. But the police have closed the case. They won't concern themselves with you now, so long as you don't give them reason to."

Kirby could not help but say, "You're sure of it?"

Leland stared at him. "You have a reason for asking that, I take it."

Kirby nodded. "A trooper picked me up when I got off the bus. He took me to the Barracks where I was questioned by a detective. They know now that I let myself take a bum rap."

Jarrett turned pale. "I was afraid of that!" he exclaimed. "We've made a grave mistake in underestimating the police!"

Leland ignored him. "How much more do they know, Kirby?"

"No more."

"You're sure?"

"Well, I couldn't read Hanlon's mind," Kirby said. "He may know more than he let on, but he didn't seem to know who paid me the ten grand. That was the question he wanted answered."

Leland nodded thoughtfully, and said, "This convinces me that I've arrived at the proper procedure. Knowing that you were soon to be released, Kirby, I've given you a lot of thought lately. Even before learning that you'd been questioned, I'd decided that we'd all be happier if you left town for a time. I imagine that you agree?"

Kirby didn't know what to say, so merely shrugged.

Leland went on, "Earlier, I was rather upset about how things worked out for you. It seemed unfortunate that your

wife should run off with the money. I decided to help you. Through Mr. Jarrett's secretary, I had the rent on your apartment paid up, the bills for the utilities paid, and your car repaired. It seemed only fair. But recently I decided that your remaining in town, even within the state, would be risky for both of us."

He opened a desk drawer, took out a sheaf of brand new bills, tossed it onto the desk.

"There is a thousand dollars," he went on. "I suggest that you—" He broke off abruptly as Donna came into the room. He stared at her for a moment, frowning with annoyance. Then, as if accepting the fact that she already knew the entire setup, he continued, "I suggest that you leave town immediately. Maybe you'd like to spend some time on the West Coast. I understand that your wife is out there. Possibly, you'd like to see her and try to patch things up between you. I'm sure that she would be inclined to reconsider now that you are out of prison."

Kirby said tightly, "How would you know my wife's whereabouts?"

"I learned of it from Miss Armand?"

Kirby looked at Donna. "How did you know?"

She shrugged. "It's no big secret, Danny. When Mr. Leland told me to take care of your apartment and car, he also suggested that I try to learn where Mrs. Kirby had gone. He thought that you would be interested in trying to recover your money—if not in winning her back. So, with Mr. Leland footing the bill, I employed a private detective."

Fred Jarrett exploded, "My God, how stupid can people be! So many people are getting involved in this mess that we may as well broadcast it. I didn't know anything about a private detective." He stared at his secretary. "You should know that you can't trust private detectives. You must have heard me say so a hundred times!"

"You trust this one," Donna told him. "It's Pete Dolan."

"Dolan! I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him!"



"You employ him often enough."

"Not on anything he might be able to use, himself!" Jarrett said wildly. Then, to Leland, "Why do you retain me if you don't confide in me? Just so you can make use of my secretary?"

Leland said shortly, "I'll remind you, Fred, that I retain you only on certain unorthodox matters. You do not handle all my affairs. Now calm down. I want to get this settled with Kirby." He looked at Kirby. "You would like to see your wife and attempt to salvage your marriage, wouldn't you?"

"I don't know if I would or I wouldn't," Kirby said. It was the truth. He wasn't sure that he even wanted to see Lila again. When the divorce papers were served on him, he'd angrily decided that he was done with her—convinced himself that he hated her. He added, more to himself than to the man behind the desk, "I just don't know."

Leland said, "But you must want to recover some of that ten thousand dollars!"

"Maybe I should want to. But I don't know about that, either."

"Dan needs time to get adjusted," Donna said. "To work things out for himself."

"Yes, of course," Leland said, rising. He smiled, turning on his charm and assuming that friendly attitude again. "Take some time to think about your wife and the money," he said. "Donna, can tell you where she is and—"

Donna shook her head. "I don't know her exact whereabouts. Dolan didn't know, either, the last report I had from him. That was ten days ago. Maybe by now . . . well, I'll get in touch with him this afternoon."

"You might encourage Dan to go to some place on a vacation while he's deciding whether or not to go to the West Coast."

Kirby felt as though he were being leaned on, pushed. He said, "That's a part of what I've got to think about. I'm not sure I want to leave town at all."

Leland lost his friendly manner. His face hardened. "Let me impress on you that you have no choice. I want you out of town—out of the state."

Kirby's temper slipped. "Mr. Leland, I don't like being threatened. I don't even like being shoved around!"

Jarrett said, in a distressed voice, "Gentlemen, please . . . let's not quarrel." Then, to Leland, "You're fouling this up. You'd better let me handle it from here on." He came to Kirby, lay a friendly hand on his shoulder. "Nobody is shoving you around, Dan. We're merely trying to work our way out of a dangerous situation, one that threatens you as well as Mr. Leland. You know as well as I do that the cops won't let up on you. I'm acquainted with that detective, Ed Hanlon. He's a bulldog when he gets his teeth into something. He'll keep after you, make life miserable for you. As much for your own sake as for Mr. Leland's, I suggest that you do leave town—if only for, say, six months. Now, will you do that?"

"I'll think about it," Kirby said. "That's all I'll promise."

Jarrett patted his shoulder. "That's all we're asking you to do," he said. "Now take your money and Miss Armand will drive you back to town."

Kirby shook his head. "I made a bargain, and I'll stick to it. You paid me ten thousand. I don't want another thousand."

"Don't be foolish, Dan!"

"Foolish or not, I don't want more of Leland's money."

Both Jarrett and Leland would have argued, but Donna came forward and picked up the money. "I'll see if I can't change Dan's mind," she said, stuffing the money into her purse. Then, smiling at Kirby, "Come along, Danny. If you stay longer, there'll be hard feelings all around."

She took his arm, and he let her lead him from the house.

## Chapter Four

KIRBY had lived with his wife at 712 E. Mason Avenue. It was there that Donna took him. She found a parking space close to the building, an old brownstone residence that had been converted into small apartments, but he made no effort to get from the car. She regarded him sympathetically.

"You'd rather not go inside, Danny?" she asked. "Too many memories?"

"I suppose so."

"I know how you feel. I really do."

He was touched by her concern, and found himself wishing that Lila had been more like her. He said, "Hanlon called me a chump, but I'm not half so big a one as the guy who ditched you. If that's what happened, of course."

"That's what happened," Donna said, and there was a look of pain in her eyes. "Three years and then . . . nothing."

"You were married to him?"

"No, I didn't have even that much," she said bitterly. "When I met him, fell in love with him, I was a starry-eyed young innocent. I believed that he would marry me in time. But why should he? I was a pushover, available whenever he wanted me. And when he no longer wanted me, I was easily dropped." She smiled bleakly. "But I'll get over it. Darn it, I'm going to get over it!"

"Sure, you are."

"Dan . . ."

"Yes, Donna?"

"I'm in the phone book, if you ever feel like calling me."

He looked at her with surprise. "Aren't you supposed to work on me so I leave town?"



"Yes, but I'm not going to do it."

"Any reason why you aren't?"

"Two good ones. One, I think you should decide for yourself whether or not you want to go away. Two, I think I might like it if you don't go."

"If I don't go, how long should I wait before I feel like calling you?"

"Not very long."

"Suppose it's tonight?"

Her only answer to that was a smile. She opened her purse and took out the thousand dollars. The bills were new, crisp, held together with a bank's paper band. Fifty, twenty dollar bills. She put them in Kirby's hand.

"Take it," she said firmly. "Mark Leland won't miss it. Besides, he owes you that and more, considering what you did for him. I'll call Pete Dolan and find out if he's learned the exact whereabouts of your ex-wife. He should have, in the ten days since his last report. And for the twenty-two hundred dollars it's already cost Mark Leland."

Kirby shook his head, marveling. "I can't get used to the idea of a man—even a rich man—throwing money around like Leland does. Why, Donna? What's his motive?"

"He's looking out for his own interests, believe me. He never does anything but think of Mark Leland. He won't feel comfortable until you're a long way from here. To him, Dan, you're a boogyman."

"I guess that's it," he said. Then, slipping the money into his pocket, "If I don't leave town, I'll let you help me blow this. All right?"

"We'll have a ball, Danny," Donna said. "Going up to your apartment?"

He nodded. "Might as well. Why be scared of memories?" He got from the car, took his bag from the back seat. "Thanks for everything."

"You're more than welcome," she said, then started the motor and drove off.

He stood looking after her until she was out of sight, then reluctantly entered the apartment house.

## Chapter Five

HIS APARTMENT was 2A, on the second floor. Climbing the stairs, he had no feeling that he was coming home. Rather, he felt let down and depressed. He had an impulse to clear out and go to a hotel. Then the thought came that if he shrank from facing those empty rooms above he would never know whether or not he was really over Lila. The answer was up there, and he needed to know it. He went on.

He heard the busy hum of a sweeper, and saw that the door to 2B, directly across the hallway, was open. That apartment had been vacant the last couple months Lila and he were here. So it had been rented again. The thought slipped in and out of his mind. He was aware that the woman of that apartment was vacuuming just inside her door as he fitted his key into the lock of his door, but he avoided looking at her.

"Hi, there! Are you my neighbor?"

He turned, nodded, said, "I live here."

She was young. Not much more than twenty, he guessed. She switched off the sweeper, smiled. "I knew that apartment belonged to someone," she said, "but in my six months here this is the first I saw anyone in or out of it."

"I've been away."

"I'm glad you're back. It won't be so lonely on this floor now. Are you the whole of the family?"

"Yes."

"So am I the whole of mine. I'm Anne Sorensen."

"Dan Kirby."

"Glad to know you, Dan."

He made with a smile and said that he was glad to know her.

She wore blue jeans and a blouse with the bottom of it hanging loose. She had her hair done up in a scarf. She still smiled at him, in an expectant way now; she was real cute, and friendly as could be. First Donna and now this chick. He was getting the idea that dames were friendlier these days than before he went inside. Either that, or prison had brought out a manly charm that he'd never before possessed. But this one, he warned himself, was just a kid.

He said, "Well, I'd better get inside and do some house-cleaning, too. After all this time, my place will be a mess. I'll probably have to shovel the dust out."

"Probably," she said. "Well, see you, Dan."

He said, "Sure," and went inside.

He closed the door, stood just inside it, looked about the living room. It appeared smaller and less attractive than he remembered. The modern furniture which Lila and he had had so much fun buying—on time, from a discount house—once seemed pretty fine. Now it struck him as too much blonde wood and too tawdry of upholstery. The big screen TV set seemed to fill too much of the room. The cotton rug was worn; it had been a bad buy, but at the time it was the best they could afford.

The room was warm, oppressive with an odd, cloying odor. It needed airing, he told himself, but didn't go to open the windows. He just stood there, remembering, and wishing he could call out, "Hey, honey; I'm home!" and hear Lila answer.

After a long time, too long a time, he did run up the venetian blinds half way and throw up the window sashes. He went to the bedroom and opened the one window there. The furniture here was also blonde. Here, in this room, his sense of loss got the better of him, and he had the



thought that it would be good if the male animal too were permitted to shed tears and thus find a release from hurt.

He removed his jacket and hung it in the closet which held only his few clothes now and so appeared almost empty. He loosened his tie and then stretched out on the Hollywood bed. He folded his arms beneath his head and stared at the ceiling and thought achingly of Lila.

He found it increasingly hard to accept the ugly truth, to believe that she had done such a thing to him. He remembered how shocked and frightened she'd been when he told her that he was going to take the rap for a hit-and-run killing. She'd argued against it until he convinced her that it was the only way out of their financial difficulties. Even then she had cried a little, and said, "I don't know how I'll stand it without you, Dan!"

She hadn't tried to stand it. He'd heard from a friend who'd come to visit him while he was inside that Lila had cleared out within a week of his being sent up. The friend was Al Boland who had worked for him at the station. He'd asked Al to look in on Lila once in a while, to see that she was getting along all right. No, she hadn't tried to stand being without him.

He knew now, had known since she ran out on him, that she'd not been in love with him—not really in love. Fond of him, maybe; but no more than that. She'd simply fooled him into believing she felt something deep and lasting. And perhaps fooled herself too. Certainly, she had gone through the motions of being in love; he'd found her to be a passionate woman. Even toward the end, when they'd quarreled because of their money troubles, she had never denied him affection. But her having given herself freely hadn't meant that she was in love. She couldn't have loved him and then run out on him.

Leland wanted him out of town, had suggested that he go see Lila and attempt to win her back or at least try to recover some of the money from her. But did he want her

back, if he could have her, knowing she wasn't in love with him? He didn't know. As for the money . . . to hell with it!

He was still lost in his gloomy thoughts when, a half an hour later, the doorbell rang. He ignored it for a while, hoping that whoever it was would go away. The ringing persisted, so he rose, went to the living-room, pressed the button that unlocked the inner vestibule door downstairs. He went out into the hallway and looked down the stairs.

A tall, husky, blond man had come in from the vestibule and was now climbing the stairs. Seeing Kirby, he said, "I'm Pete Dolan, Mr. Kirby."

Kirby nodded. He waited until the detective reached the second floor, then said, "Come on in." He led Dolan into the living room and gestured toward a chair. "Have a seat. Make yourself comfortable." He seated himself on the sofa, waited, wondering what had brought the man. News of Lila? Kirby wasn't sure he wanted to hear it.

Dolan was in no hurry to tell why he was there. He took out a pack of cigarettes, held it out to Kirby who shook his head. While lighting one for himself, Dolan gazed at Kirby with open curiosity.

He was a rugged looking, coarsely handsome man in his middle thirties. He had an open, clean-cut appearance. His manner was casual, and he gave the impression that with him everything was aboveboard and on the level. But Kirby recalled Fred Jarrett saying that he did not trust Pete Dolan. Too, Kirby had known while inside several con-men who radiated trustworthiness just as Dolan did now.

"Miss Armand called me," Dolan said. "She said that from now on I should make my reports to you. I was in the neighborhood and so decided to stop and see you."

Kirby nodded, waited.

Dolan went on, "I flew out to the Coast the early part of last week. The agency that was doing my leg work out there located your ex-wife. She was living in Hollywood un-

der her maiden name, Lila Hammond. By the time I got out there she'd skipped again. I stayed on and worked with the West Coast agency, then flew back day before yesterday. We didn't get a line on her, but the boys out there are still working on it. They should locate her again within a few days. We're sure she didn't go far and think she may still be in Hollywood or some place in L. A."

"Why are you sure of that?"

"The agency had one of its woman operatives get next to her. Miss Hammond told the operative that she liked it out there and intended to stay on. She also talked about getting an apartment. She had been staying at a hotel, you understand."

"What made her skip?"

Dolan shrugged. "The operative probably scared her by asking too many questions."

"Why did you go out there, Dolan?"

"That's a good question," Dolan said, grinning. "For one thing, I had an unlimited expense account—but you know that, of course. For another, I wanted to be sure those people out there had the right woman. You see, Mr. Kirby, this Lila Hammond was cagy. She never did admit to the woman operative that she'd ever been married. Also, she denied having lived in the East—claimed to have come to California from Arizona. The agency tried to get a picture of her, to send back here. But she had none in her possession. And when they tried to snap one of her, she caught on and ducked. So I hoped to make sure that there weren't two Lila Hammonds. I was convinced we had the right woman, but . . . well, Miss Armand insisted that there should be no margin for error."

"How did *you* expect to identify her as my ex-wife?"

"By an odd coincidence, I happen to know the lady."

"Oh?"

"Before she married you she was hostess at a midtown restaurant," Dolan said. "Beauchamp's. It's close to my office,



and I eat lunch there most every day. I remember her, all right. In fact, I was on the make for her a little while back then. Tried to take her out. But it was no dice. Maybe she was already going with you, thinking of marrying you." Dolan rose, crossed to the coffee table, crushed out his cigarette in an ashtray. "So that brings you up to date, Mr. Kirby. And, like I said, we'll probably have her spotted again within a few days. I'll keep you posted."

Kirby stood up, saying, "Don't bother. Drop it."

Dolan stared at him. "Drop it?"

Kirby nodded. "Close the case, send Miss Armand your final bill."

Dolan frowned. He was evidently puzzled that it was no longer important to find the missing woman and also annoyed that he must close an extremely profitably case. "Just like that?" he said. "With no explanation?"

"Do I owe you one?"

"If you're dissatisfied with the way I've handled the case, I'd like to know it."

"It's just that too much time, effort and money have been spent trying to locate my ex-wife," Kirby told him. "Besides, I'm not sure now that I want her located."

Dolan shrugged, said, "Well, you're the boss," but was still frowning as he went to the door. After opening it, he looked at Kirby again. "One last thing. If I get a line on her in the West Coast agency's final report, would you want it passed on to you?"

"You can pass it along," Kirby said, smiling faintly, "if you care to."

Dolan nodded, "I'll do that," he said, and went out.

Kirby was still smiling as the door closed behind the detective, amused over Dolan's having tipped his hand. Dolan would pass on Lila's whereabouts in a day or two, claiming he'd learned it from the West Coast agency's final report. Actually, he already knew it—and had known it for some time. He'd kept it to himself so as to continue collecting

his agency fees and cashing in on that unlimited expense account. He'd had a good thing, and made the most of it. A nice guy, Pete Dolan. Ethical. . . . A man of principles.

There was one thing that Kirby couldn't figure, though. Why Dolan had come to see him when it would have been so much easier to have phoned. But there was a bigger question that Kirby needed to answer. Would he go to Lila when Dolan gave him her whereabouts? He was still pondering that when a knock sounded. He shook himself mentally, crossed to the door, opened it to the girl from across the hall.

"Hi again," she said. "I was making some coffee, and it occurred to me that you might like a cup. If you would, come on over."

The invitation took him by surprise, and he could think of no way to turn it down without offending her. He accepted with a smile, saying, "I could do with one." He wondered, as he went along to her apartment, whether she just believed strongly in the Good Neighbor Policy or, like Donna Armand, saw something in him that he didn't know he possessed.

## Chapter Six

HER FRONT ROOM was more studio than living room; artist's paraphernalia crowded it. A half-completed painting stood upon an easel and nearby was a low table littered with palette, brushes, tubes and bottles, while along one wall were propped, one against the other, a couple dozen canvases. The room smelled of oil paint and turpentine.

She led him through it, back to the kitchen which was as tidy as the front room was littered. Two cups were already set out on the formica-topped table. She motioned for him

to sit down, then brought the percolator from the gas stove and filled the cups.

"Cream and sugar?"

"No, thanks. I take mine black. You're a painter?"

"Of sorts," she replied, seating herself opposite him. "I play around at painting. As a hobby. For a living, I sing. If you ever have a free evening, stop in at the Blue Room and bend an ear. That's the supper club over on Arlington Street, you know. Anne Sorensen, song stylist—that's me."

He stared at her. "You a night spot entertainer?"

"And why not, may I ask?"

"Well, to look at you . . ."

"Oh, these old clothes . . . I guess I do look a mess, and sort of immature. But I look a lot different when I'm working. I'm a real doll then, believe me."

He grinned. "I still have to see it to be convinced. Anyway, you're full of surprises. From blue jeans to blues singer to artist."

"Why should my being a painter surprise you?" she demanded. "After all, many people in show business have cultural interests. For instance, Gypsy Rose Lee." She thought about that for a moment. "Of course, I can't compare myself with her. I've never done any stripping."

"There's time. You're still young."

"That's a thought," she said, grinning back at him. Then, studying him with narrowed eyes, "You'd make a good subject for a portrait. That's an interesting face you have there."

"Only because it's the face of the average guy."

"No, no. There's strength in it, and a sort of sadness."

"Don't tell me that you'd like me to pose for you."

"I hadn't thought of it, but it's an idea," she said. "A male model for a female artist, instead of vice versa. Maybe that's why I putter around at painting—because of a secret desire to have a handsome male pose for me. I'll have to talk to my psychologist about that."



She pulled a crumpled package of cigarettes from the pocket of her blouse, held it out to him. He took a cigarette, one so wilted it required straightening before being lighted.

They were silent for a time, sipping the coffee and smoking and more or less openly sizing each other up. She had good features, and despite her sloppy attire there were traces of an adequate figure. He now would have guessed her age at twenty-two, and he was sure that she could, with little effort, glamorize herself into something pretty special. And she was good company. Too trusting company, he reflected.

He said, "It strikes me that this could be a little risky. I mean, your inviting a man you don't really know into your apartment."

"Risky for me?" Anne asked, "or for the man?"

"For you," he said. "For all you know, I could be a Jack the Ripper or something."

"But you come pretty well recommended, Dan."

"Oh? By whom?"

"By our landlord, Mr. Bentley. I asked him about the neighbors before taking the apartment. He thinks highly of you. Says you're a fine young man—despite your one misstep."

He took another swallow of coffee. Somehow, it suddenly tasted as bitter as gall. He'd been enjoying himself until now. He said, "So you know."

She nodded. "I know. You were involved in a hit-and-run accident and went to jail."

"That's it. So that doesn't make me a fine young man."

"You have a guilt complex?"

"Wouldn't you?"

"I don't know," she said, frowning in thought. "It might happen to anyone. Running someone down, then getting panicky. If you'd been able to think calmly, you wouldn't have run. It wasn't a premeditated act like . . . like murder.

Besides, the old man who was killed was at least partly at fault, wasn't he?"

He nodded glumly, said, "I suppose he was. You do know all about it, don't you?"

"I remember reading about it," she replied. "It was a big thing in the papers. Since it's still bothering you, why not talk about it? I'm a good listener."

"What's there to talk about?"

"The whole thing," she said. "Don't hold anything back. To rid yourself of this guilt complex, you've got to unburden yourself completely."

He laughed. "So you practice psychiatry too, do you?"

She made a face at him. "Seriously, I don't see why you're touchy about what happened. It was more an unthinking mistake than a criminal act. "You—" She broke off abruptly, gazed at him wide-eyed. "Dan, maybe you weren't the hit-and-run driver! Maybe the police arrested an innocent man! Is that it?"

He stared at her in silence for a time, taken aback. "What makes you think such a thing? If you read the newspapers at the time, you know that I admitted I was the hit-and-run driver."

"Maybe the police beat a confession out of you," she said, still wide-eyed, "with rubber hoses!"

"You don't believe that."

"No, I guess I don't. I don't know what made me think that you might have been wrongly accused. Of course, it was in the newspapers that the car involved was a Cadillac and then, when you were arrested, that you drove a Ford."

Kirby eyed her with sudden suspicion. "You've got a good memory," he said. "Almost too good a memory, considering that at the time you didn't know me and it couldn't have meant more to you than any other highway accident."

She looked at him with surprise. "I do have a good memory, Dan," she said, sounding offended. "Are you ac-

cusing me of knowing more about what happened than I should?"

That had been in his mind, and it was still there. But he was probably being unduly suspicious. "Sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to sound suspicious."

"Well, you did sound that way, for heaven's sake," Anne said, pouting. Then, glancing at the wall clock, "Twenty past five! Where did the afternoon get to?"

He pushed back his chair, stood up. "I can take a hint."

She was contrite. "I'm awfully sorry, but I have an appointment. I still have to bathe the body beautiful and do my nails and everything. . . . Well, anyway, it's been fun."

"Sure. Thanks for the coffee and the cigarette."

"We'll have to do it again, Dan."

She went to the door with him, opened it for him.

Just before going out, he said, "Maybe you'll show me your paintings sometime."

"Of course," she said, and eased him out by slowly and firmly closing the door.

Crossing to his own apartment, he had the feeling that he'd been given the bum's rush. Unless he was imagining things, she had been in a hurry to be rid of him only after he had, as she'd put it, accused her of knowing more about what had happened eight months ago than she reasonably should. Looking at it critically, it seemed that she'd been a bit too neighborly. It occurred to him that she might have had him over in the hope of learning more than she already knew. And not because of idle curiosity. If that were the case, then Miss Anne Sorensen must have been planted in Apartment 2B. And if she had been planted there, he could guess who had done the planting; that State Police detective, Ed Hanlon.

He decided that he'd better find out more about her before their next meeting. It was possible that she was not a night spot singer but a lady cop.



## Chapter Seven

HE WANDERED aimlessly through his apartment. In the kitchen, he discovered a couple of cans of beer in the refrigerator. He took one out, punctured it, had a long swallow. After seven and a half months, a beer should have really hit the spot. Instead, it tasted flat and oddly bitter. The fault lay with him, of course, not with this product of the brewers' ancient art.

Carrying the can with him, he went to the living room and switched on the television set. A western came on. He switched channels, and an announcer was saying, "... a paid political announcement. And now, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. John Grierson, chairman of the local Leland for Governor Committee. . . ."

Mr. John Grierson filled the picture tube. Behind him was a large banner bearing a picture of Mark Leland and the slogan:

*Vote for Integrity in Government!*

Mr. Grierson should have let a professional pitchman make the paid political announcement, for he had neither camera presence nor a good speaking voice. He was a beefy character who hemmed and hawed far too much. But finally he overcame his self-consciousness and did fairly well with the pitch.

He extolled Mark Leland's virtues, and they were many indeed. It seemed that Leland had inherited control of Leland Industries in 1939, just prior to the outbreak of World War II. With great foresight, he had anticipated the eventual entry of the United States into the conflict and had immediately begun planning to switch from the production of consumer goods to military needs. When the time came,

Leland Industries was tooled and ready to work for the armed forces. Not content to be merely a supplier of the sinews of war, Leland had in '43 turned his corporation over to a planning board—five men trained by himself—and enlisted in the Army. He had served his country brilliantly—according to the speaker—as a major-general.

Further, Mark Leland's record—still according to the political pitchman—as a civic leader was an enviable one. He was a member of the various business organizations and took a leading part in their activities. He had headed the drive for the new wing to the Mid-City Hospital; he himself had subscribed one hundred thousand dollars to the fund. He had donated forty acres of land for a park on the southside. It was he who had founded Camp Hiawatha, a fine resort for underprivileged boys.

In the field of labor relations, no other industrialist could boast of such amiable association between employer and employees. Mr. Leland was also engaged in farming. Last year cattle raised on his Fairmount Farm had won prizes at both the county and state fairs. Mr. Leland was also a sportsman and . . .

The speaker rambled on and on, his rasping voice insidious in its painting a word picture of Mark Leland as the only man worthy of being 'Governor of this great State'.

It was, Kirby supposed, a fairly accurate portrait of the man, and it seemed reasonable to assume that he would make a good governor.

But there was another side to the man, one not so attractive. There was Mark Leland drunk or at least tipsy, driving at an excessive speed and running down a pedestrian, then breaking the law by fleeing the scene of an accident and, finally, fearing arrest and adverse publicity, seeking a chump to take the rap for him. . . .

Two pictures of Mark Leland, one seen by the public and one by only Dan Kirby and a couple of other people.

Ordinarily, Kirby was like Ed Hanlon in that he hated

people who bought their way out of jams. But in this case he felt that perhaps it was justifiable. Leland was a great man, and society would have gained nothing if he had taken the rap. In fact, as Kirby saw it, a whole state would be the loser if Leland's political enemies had been given a hit-and-run charge to use as ammunition against the man. Kirby couldn't damn him for one mistake.

But was he going to continue being Leland's chump? He could still hear Leland saying: *I want you out of town—out of the state.* The man had given him a thousand dollars for traveling expenses, and suggested that he try to find his wife and patch things up with her. But he wasn't sure that he wanted to look for Lila, and he could think of no place he really wanted to go.

Nothing any longer seemed worthwhile, because he'd lost Lila. He was just content to sit there in front of the television set with a can of flat-tasting beer in his hand, his mind a blank.

How stupid could a person be? To go all to pieces because his wife had run out on him; a dame who'd never been in love with him, anyway. There were other dames. Donna Armand, for one.

He got up, switched off the TV, went to the kitchen to dispose of the beer can. He went to the bedroom, got his jacket from the closet, then left the apartment.

Leaving the building, he turned east along Mason Avenue and walked the two blocks to a small restaurant where he and Lila had sometimes eaten. He found an empty booth and ordered, when the waitress came, a steak, a baked potato, a salad, and a cup of coffee.

This was one of the things he'd looked forward to while inside, a meal of his own choosing. But when it was served, he found that he had no appetite. He had to force himself to eat. Even the juicy steak seemed no better than prison fare. He managed to do away with it, however, and took a second cup of coffee.



It was nearly dark when he left the restaurant. He lit a cigarette and started back to his apartment, wishing he could rid himself of his feeling of depression. He'd been in cheerful spirits during the time he was with Donna. He'd made up his mind to call her by the time he entered his apartment, but the phone began to ring as he reached for it.

Thinking it was she calling him, he said, "Hello, Donna?" There was no reply, so he said, "Hello, hello?"

Then a hesitant voice said, "Dan . . . Dan, listen. . . ."

A woman's voice, but not Donna Armand's. There was only one voice that could cause his heart to leap as it did now. Lila's. He said her name, then burst out, "Lila, where are you? Here in town?"

"Dan, don't talk," Lila said. "Don't ask questions. Just listen. I'm going to say this once and then—"

"Lila, I want to see you!"

"Dan, if you won't listen, I'll have to hang up."

"All right, but—"

"You're in trouble, Dan," Lila said. "You don't realize it, but you're going to be in a real jam. You're going to be used as a fall guy again, just as you were before for Mark Leland. Only this time you won't be doing it willingly, and there won't be any pay-off for you. Dan, are you listening?"

"I'm listening, Lila. But I don't get it. What's going on? Can't you tell me? Look, how did you know that it was Mark Leland who—"

"Well, it was Leland, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but how did you know? I never told you."

"Never mind how I found out," she said, her voice somehow different from what it once had been. "Just don't wait around and take another rap. I'm warning you, Dan, to make up for what I did to you. Get out of town, Dan. Go away . . . far away, please!"

"Lila—"

But she was no longer on the line.

He held the telephone for a moment, staring at it as

though expecting it to tell him where she was. Then he put it down and picked up the directory, thinking: *Dolan knows!* He found the private detective listed as *P. J. Dolan, Investigations*. He noted the address instead of the phone number, then dropped the book and strode from the apartment.

Reaching the lower floor, he went back the hallway and let himself out the rear door. He crossed the yard to the four-car garage, switched on the lights as he entered. As Donna had told him, his '54 Ford sedan had been repaired. A new headlight had been installed and the dents removed from the damaged fender and the fender repainted. He opened the door to the alley, then got in behind the wheel. The battery was fully charged; it kicked the motor over in a hurry. He backed from the garage, got out to close its door, then got behind the wheel again and headed for midtown.

Dolan's address was 230 E. Market Street, a dingy old office building with a florist's shop on the ground floor. Kirby found a parking space directly in front of the building. He entered the lobby and saw by the directory that P. J. Dolan, Investigations was on the third floor, Room 312. There was an elevator but its gate was closed and locked and no operator in sight. Kirby took the stairs. Except for a colored man working with a mop on the second floor, the building seemed deserted, and when Kirby located the door to 312, no light showed through its frosted glass panel. He knocked and rattled the doorknob. No one came to the door.

He descended the stairs, left the building, walked to a drug store on the corner. He went inside to the phone booth and again looked up Dolan in the directory. There was no residence listed for the detective, but beneath his office address and number there was an if-no-answer number. He entered the booth, deposited a dime, dialed the alternate number. It was that of an answering service.

He said, "I'm trying to reach P. J. Dolan."

"Sorry, sir, but Mr. Dolan didn't inform us where he could

be reached tonight," a feminine voice replied. "However, he may check in later. If you would like him to call you back, give me your name and number."

He gave his name and the number of his telephone at home, then asked, "Could you let me have Mr. Dolan's home address?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but we don't have that information."

"Well, thanks, anyway. . . ."

He looked in the directory again, this time for Donna Armand's number. He deposited another dime, dialed again. Donna's "hello?" did something for him, lifted his spirits.

"Dan Kirby, Donna. Could you give me Pete Dolan's home address? It's important that I get in touch with him."

"Is something wrong, Danny?"

It was good to talk to someone. And with Donna, he could talk without having to weigh every word. "Lila called me," he told her. "She's here in town. . . . It was a local call, not long distance. She wouldn't answer any questions, just warned me that I'm in trouble and had better get out of town. I want to see her, Donna. I've got to see her. Dolan knows where she is and . . . well, that's why I want to get in touch with him."

"Your ex-wife is here in town, Dan? But why?"

"I don't know why. But I've a hunch that Dolan had something to do with her coming back."

"A hunch, Dan? That's not much to go on."

"Well, he was around to see me this afternoon, after you phoned him. Something he said convinced me that he knows her whereabouts."

"He came to see you?"

"Yes."

"Why, Dan?"

"He gave me no good reason," Kirby said. "Just that he happened to be in the neighborhood. I don't know what he wanted. Maybe nothing except to look me over. Anyway, I'd give odds that he knows where Lila is. And I—"



"You say she warned you that you are in trouble? What sort of trouble, Dan?"

"She was pretty mysterious. She merely said that I was to be used as a fall guy again, but that this time I wouldn't be a willing one and wouldn't be paid. And listen, Donna, She knows about the other time. About who paid me to take the rap. I never told her, but she's found out. Do you think Dolan knew and told her?"

There was no immediate reply from Donna. He could hear only her breathing. It was heavy, fluttery. She was silent so long that he prompted, "Donna?"

"It's possible, Dan," she said. "But I don't know how he found out. Oh, this is awful! What shall we do?"

"I know what I'm going to do," he told her. "Find Lila. Through Dolan. So you know where he lives?"

"At the Claremont Hotel. But he also has a place outside town. His hideout, he calls it."

"Do you know where his hideout is located?"

"No . . . no, I don't. But I know a girl he sometimes takes out, and I'm pretty sure she's been to the place with him. I'll try to find out from her, if you want me to."

"I want you to, just in case he's not at the Claremont."

"All right. I'll call you back."

"I'm talking from a public booth, Donna. Let me give you the number. . . ."

She called back in less than five minutes. "I couldn't reach my friend, Dan. She's not home, but I'll keep trying. Listen, it's seven-twenty now, call me at nine. If I don't answer then, try at nine-thirty. I have some typing to do for Mr. Jarrett. When it's finished, I'll have to take it to his home. So I'll be pretty busy for more than an hour."

"All right," he said. "Nine o'clock. Meanwhile, I'll try his hotel. If he isn't there, maybe the desk clerk will have the address of his country place. See you, Donna."

"Yes, Dan. 'Bye now."

He said good-bye and hung up.

He walked to the Claremont Hotel, which was only three blocks away. It was a small, somewhat down-at-heels hotel that had seen its best days a half-century ago. The desk clerk was a frail, white-haired character who looked as old and as seedy as the building. He and a half-dozen lobby-squatters had their eyes glued to a TV set. The fights were on, and the clerk pulled his gaze away from the picture with obvious reluctance.

"Yes, sir? A room?"

"No room. Is P. J. Dolan in?"

"Nope."

"You're sure?"

The old man gestured toward the key-rack behind the desk. "Room 316. There's the key. Even if it wasn't there, I'd know if Dolan was in or not. I know all the regulars."

"I want to see him on business," Kirby said. "He's not in his office and he's not here. Maybe he's at his place outside town. How about letting me have the address?"

"Don't have it," the clerk said, his gaze shifting back to the television set.

Kirby looked at his watch as he left the hotel. The time was seven thirty-eight, which meant that he had an hour and twenty-two minutes to kill. He walked back toward where he'd left his car, but midway along the second block he turned into a bar. He took a stool, ordered a beer, lit a cigarette.

He felt tense, on edge. He kept looking at his watch. Time dragged. His eagerness to find Lila was pretty close to being anxiety. That was odd, he reflected, before she'd called him, he hadn't known if he ever wanted to see her again.

Well, now he had reason to see her. He wanted to get the answers to some questions. He wanted to know about this jam he would be in if he didn't go away. He wanted to know how she'd learned that it was Mark Leland for whom he'd taken the rap; why she'd returned from the West

Coast, and how she'd become involved in this thing against which she'd warned him.

But most of all, he had to admit, he wanted to see Lila to find out if he was still carrying the torch for her. He had to see her to know that he no longer wanted her.

He stretched out his beer as long as possible, then ordered another to pay the rent on the stool he occupied. At eight-thirty, he left the bar and walked to where his car was parked.

It was eight fifty-two when he entered his apartment. He saw at once that someone had been there during his absence. There was a small desk in one corner of the living room and a paper now lay on the floor beneath the desk chair. He crossed the room picked up the paper, found it to be nothing more than a year-old receipted light bill. The intruder had searched the desk and dropped the receipt, and either not noticed it or not bothered to pick it up.

Kirby opened the desk drawers, saw that they contained only receipted bills, a checkbook, some cancelled checks, a copy of the lease for the apartment, the title to his car, and some worthless odds and ends. There had never been anything of much value in the desk, he knew. Nothing that would interest anyone.

He went into the bedroom. The prowler had been in that room too, and been careless again in one small way. His traveling-bag no longer stood exactly where he'd placed it upon arriving home. He'd dropped the bag at the end of the Hollywood bed. Now it stood a little out from the bed. He stooped, opened the bag. It contained some underwear and socks, his shaving gear, a toothbrush, a tube of toothpaste, a pair of hair brushes in a leather case, three packs of cigarettes, a couple of paperback novels. He'd had everything neatly packed; now the contents of the bag were untidy. He rose, looked about the room. Nothing else appeared out of place. But he didn't doubt that the prowler had gone



through the drawers of the bureau, the dressing table and through the closet.

Looking for what? For evidence that he'd been paid to take the rap for that hit-and-run fatality? For the name of the person who'd paid him to take it? It couldn't have been anything else. There was no other reason for anybody to be interested in him.

And who was interested in him for that reason? Ed Hanlon, the State Police detective, of course. But Hanlon wouldn't have entered his apartment in such a fashion, burglarized it; he'd have come with a search warrant. Then, who? The too cute trick across the hall—Anne Sorensen?

He decided that it must have been she, and, suddenly angry, he left the apartment and crossed the hall to knock on her door. She didn't answer his knock, and he realized that she would now be at that night spot—if she really was a night spot singer.

He turned from her door, but promising himself that he'd catch her when she came home. Damn right, he would!

## Chapter Eight

HE DIALED Donna's number promptly at nine, but got no answer. He tried again at nine-thirty, and this time heard her say, "Danny?" immediately after the second ring. She sounded out of breath. "I just got home, just this minute. Did you get to talk to Pete Dolan?"

"No. He wasn't at the Claremont."

"Well, I've got the location of his hideout. He may be there. It's down on the bay, Danny. The third cottage south of Rigby's Landing. Have you ever been down that way?"

"A long time ago. When I was pretty young."

"Are you going there, Danny?"

"Yes, tonight."

"I see. . . . You know, I'd like to go with you but, darn it, J. Frederick discovered a couple of mistakes in the typing I did tonight. I've got three legal-size pages to retype. But, Danny . . . why don't you stop by my place when you get back? You can tell me if Dolan does know where your ex-wife is, and if you get to see her."

"Stop by only to satisfy your curiosity?"

"Well, and to have a nightcap with me."

"All right. I'll stop by, if it's not too late."

"But, Danny. . . . Is it ever too late?" her voice purred. Then she hung up before he could reply to that.

Rigby's Landing, on the east shore of the bay, was only a dozen miles from town. Ordinarily, it was a drive of but a quarter of an hour. But it began to rain as Kirby started, and due to the downpour, and to a string of four big trucks tailgating each other and keeping him from passing, he was nearly half an hour reaching Four Corners which was the turn-off from the highway onto the road to the Landing.

Rigby's Landing was strictly a summer place. There was a dingy hotel with a bar and a restaurant, an old-fashioned general store which called itself a super market, a gas station, and, at the water's edge, a small-boat agency. Farther along the shore, in each direction, were numerous cottages and several camps. One of the latter was Camp Hiawatha, the boys' resort sponsored by Mark Leland.

Labor Day was the end of the season, with the camps and many of the cottages closing for the winter months. Now, late in September and on a rainy night, the Landing itself had a gloomy, deserted look. Kirby saw only a half dozen cars parked at the cluster of grubby buildings. He took the shore road southward, driving slowly so as not to miss Dolan's

cottage. Donna had told him that it was the third south of the Landing.

The first cottage stood in a clearing about a hundred yards from the Landing. It was lighted, and a car stood in its driveway. The second was fifty yards farther along. It was dark. After that one Kirby followed the narrow road through a dense growth of brush and scrub trees for a quarter of a mile before he saw the third cottage—or rather, a glimmer of light through the rainy darkness.

This third place—Dolan's, if his information was correct—was isolated. It had no neighbors on either side, and it was partially screened from the road by trees. Turning in its driveway, Kirby had the thought that it was indeed a hideout.

The cottage was one-storied with a screened porch across the front. It stood about a hundred feet from the water. Below it was a small pier with a boat tied alongside. The water looked black and forbidding. The cottage was lighted, with drawn window blinds, but no car was in sight.

Kirby parked, switched off windshield wipers, lights and motor. He got from the car, hurried across the wet sandy ground to the porch steps. The screen-door was unlocked. He crossed the porch and knocked on the house door. The door was not tightly latched and so moved slightly under his knuckles.

No one came to the door, so he knocked again and then called, "Hello, Dolan!" He got no answer. After waiting in indecision a little longer, he hesitantly pushed the door open and stepped inside.

The room he entered was the living room, furnished cheaply and haphazardly. At the end of the room was a fireplace, and the dying embers of a log fire glowed dull red in it. On the floor before the hearth lay a woman. She was sprawled in an odd, twisted position, in a little pool of blood. He knew without going to her that she was dead. He also knew instantly who she was, even though her face was turned from him.



He knew her by that flame-touched red hair.  
*Lila!*

## Chapter Nine

HE WENT to her, to make sure. But his first impression had not been wrong. Lila was dead; no spark of life remained. She'd been shot twice, and both shots had been aimed at her heart. She was a crumpled thing in jade-green lounging pajamas. He found himself thinking bleakly that green had always been her favorite color, her best color. Beyond that, he couldn't think at all.

He remained kneeling by her, numbed by shock. Later, grief would come—and anger too. He'd loved this woman. She had been a part of his life, a part of himself. For the time of their marriage, their living together, their flesh had been as one and they had delighted in the union. And now Lila, who had always been so vibrant with life, was so still in death.

He rose abruptly, shot through with panic and seized by a wild urge to run from this place of murder. It seemed suddenly a trap for him as it had been for her. But he stood for a moment, looking through a doorway into an adjoining room. A bedroom.

There were twin beds, and the covers of each were neatly turned down as though two people were about to retire. On one bed lay a filmy black nightgown, on the other a folded suit of men's pajamas. Two people. . . . Lila and Dolan?

He didn't need that question answered. He knew the answer. Lila had been living here with Pete Dolan, of course.

He turned in flight now, running from he knew not what.

But though he was beyond reasoning at the moment, he instinctively wiped from the front door and the porch screen-door any fingerprints he may have left there upon entering the cottage. He ran through the sluicing rain to his car, started the motor and turned on lights and windshield wipers. He turned the car and raced away from there.

He drove much too fast, considering the rain and the traffic on the highway, and got back to town in much less time than it had taken him to drive out to the cottage. Why he was hurrying, he did not know. Nor did he know where he was headed. He simply had an uncontrollable urge to run, to run far and fast.

Then he recalled that Donna Armand had told him to stop by, and he decided that he wanted to see her. He needed to talk to someone, and Donna was the only person he dared trust. He stopped at a drug store and went inside to the phone booth.

He looked up Donna's address, which was 117 Merrill Avenue, then looked in the front of the directory for the page on which emergency numbers were listed. He took the phone off the hook, deposited a dime, dialed, and got an immediate answer.

"State Police, Sergeant Kulaski speaking."

"Sergeant, take down this address. . . ." His voice was shaky, off key. "The Bay Shore Road, Rigby's Landing, the third cottage south. Got that, Sergeant?"

"I've got it. Now, what about it?"

"You'll find a murdered woman there."

"What!"

Kirby hung up on Sergeant Kulaski's startled yell.

Ten minutes later he parked in front of 117 Merrill Avenue, which was a part of an apartment development called Colonial Manor. The buildings were of a pseudo-colonial architecture, all of a size, two storied and divided into four apartments each. The grounds were attractively landscaped, and the over-all effect was pleasantly semi-suburban. The

thought crossed Kirby's mind that this was a rather expensive address for a secretary.

Donna's apartment was on the second floor of 117 and had its own private entrance. He pressed the bell button and almost at once the door clicked open. He stepped inside, looked up the stairs. The door above opened, and Donna smiled down at him.

"Come on up, Danny."

He went up, on legs that were suddenly so weak they seemed about to give way. He was no longer numb. Feeling had returned, and he felt lousy. He was shaking violently.

Donna said, "My, Danny, it must be raining cats and dogs." Her tone was light, jarringly gay. She was wearing a gold house coat and had her hair fixed atop her head. "You look half-drowned, Danny!"

He reached the landing outside her door and stood swaying. Her eyes widened on him, taking in his pallor and the stricken look in his eyes. Her gaiety dissolved.

"Dan, what is it? What's happened to you?"

"Lila. . . . She's dead."

"Dead? You mean, Dolan told you she is?"

He shook his head. "I found her at his place. She was lying on the floor, in front of the fireplace. She'd been shot."

"Shot, Dan? You mean . . . murdered?"

He nodded heavily.

She gazed at him with disbelief for a moment, then took his arm and led him inside. She closed the door, and said, "Better get out of that wet jacket, Dan." She helped him out of it, placed it in the closet there in the small foyer. "Come in and sit down. I'll get you a drink. You certainly need one."

He accompanied her into the living room, sank into an armchair as she went off to the kitchen. He sat staring blankly until she returned and put a glass into his hand.

"Drink up, Dan. It'll help."

He took a pull at the drink. It was Scotch-on-the-rocks. She



seated herself opposite him, on the beige sofa, and took a cigarette from a pink-and-gold ceramic box on the coffee table. She watched him worriedly as she lighted the cigarette. "Do you want to talk about it, Dan?"

More to himself than to her, he said, "If I get my hands on that damn Dolan—I"

Her eyes grew round. "You think *he* killed her?"

He looked at her with surprise. "Who else could have killed her. He brought her back from the West Coast and they were living together at the cottage. They were living together and planning to pull something crooked. Or he was doing the planning, and Lila found out about it. It had something to do with me, because of my taking the rap for Mark Leland, and Lila didn't like it. So she phoned me that warning. When Dolan found out, he flew into a rage and shot her."

Donna still watched him worriedly. "I don't know, Dan. . . . Pete Dolan isn't exactly stupid. Being a private detective, he'd realize that he couldn't get away with such a thing. Murdering a woman in his own cottage. . . . I don't know, Dan."

"If he was sore, lost his temper—"

"He might have roughed her up, in that case. But I just can't see him shooting her."

"Then who . . . ?"

"If it was Dolan who killed her," Donna said, frowning with thought, "we can be sure that he's taken steps to keep himself in the clear."

"How could he do that?"

"Well, by framing someone else."

Kirby sat frozen, his drink forgotten. He suddenly realized that Donna must be right. Dolan knew all the angles, he had to, to make out as a private detective. If he had murdered Lila, and Kirby was still convinced that he had, he would rig it so that somebody else took the rap. He would have an alibi for the time of the murder, and he would almost cer-

tainly find a way to give the police an even likelier suspect than himself.

"Me," Kirby said thickly. "He'll frame me. I'm a sitting duck for him. I'm just out of jail, and Lila was my ex-wife. She divorced me while I was inside. The police will figure that I found out that she was living out there with Dolan and killed her because of jealousy. My God, Donna, he'll frame me!"

"If only you hadn't gone out there. . . ."

"Yeah. If only I hadn't." He finished his drink, rose, set the glass on the coffee table. He began a nervous pacing, the way a prisoner paces a jail cell. I can see how he'll work it," he said, thinking aloud rather than talking to Donna. "He'll claim that there was nothing between him and Lila, that he was simply hired to find her and bring her back at the time of my release from jail. He'll say that he let her use his cottage and that I was to join her there. He'll tell the police that he sent me out there to her. He won't need to say more. The police will figure that I was sore at her for divorcing me and shot her."

"There's one thing, Dan," Donna said, rising and gripping his arm so that he quit his pacing. "Nobody knows you went out there."

"They'll find out that I did go."

"But how?"

"Well, there's the clerk at Dolan's hotel. I asked him for the address of Dolan's country place. He didn't give it to me, but the police will know—if they talk to the clerk—that I was trying to get out there. Besides, Dolan will swear he told me how to find my way to it."

She turned, crushed out her cigarette on an ashtray that matched the pink-and-gold cigarette box. "As you say, Dolan will have arranged an alibi—if he is the murderer. Suppose you arrange one for yourself, Dan."

"How can I?"

"Through me."

He eyed her uncertainly for a moment. "You mean that you'd let me say that I was with you all evening?"

"If you want me to, Dan."

"Why? Why would you do that?"

She gave him a woman's enigmatic smile. "Can't you guess, Dan?" She moved toward him, lay her hands on his shoulders. "As the saying has it, I'm fancy free. And also a little lonely. As for you . . . well, you're an extremely attractive male. Need I say more?"

Things were happening too fast for him. He was frightened and confused. He didn't need her to say more, of course. He recognized a dame on the make when face to face with one. But he had a disturbing feeling that his luck was a bit too good. Why, he wondered, was a girl like Donna Armand fancy free? It seemed that there should be at least one man in her life, and that she would have no need to be on the make for someone like himself; for an ex-con; for a man who had nothing to offer her except his maleness.

"What's the matter, Dan? Aren't I your type?"

He didn't know why he hesitated. He was starved for a woman. All the while he'd been inside, he had dreamed of the day when this would happen to him.

"Is it because of Lila, Dan?"

That was it, he supposed. That explained his reluctance to take her. It had been Lila he'd wanted during the past seven months. Even after she'd divorced him, it had been Lila he'd wanted when he got out—even when his hurt was greatest.

Donna slipped her arms about his neck. "Lila's dead, Dan," she whispered. "You can't ever have her again. You've got to forget her. Let me make you forget her. Let me, Dan . . . please!"

Her body pressed against his, her lips found his.

Then long dammed passion burst loose, and he wrapped his arms about her lush, seeking body.



## Chapter Ten

LATER, LYING beside her in the dark bedroom, drained of passion, he became frightened and confused again. Donna lay apart from him, emotionally becalmed and evidently lost in disturbing thoughts of her own.

"Donna?"

"Yes, Dan."

"What do you think this is all about?"

"I don't know. I've been wondering."

"On the phone, Lila said that I was going to be used for a fall guy. She begged me not to wait around and take another rap. She found out that Dolan is planning to play me for a sucker, somehow. What could he be up to?"

"Blackmail, maybe."

"Blackmail . . . me?"

"Not you, Dan. Mark Leland. I'm just guessing, of course, but it's the only thing that figures. Look, Dan, Dolan got curious about Lila. When he found her out on the West Coast, he questioned her. He wanted to know why so much money was being spent to find her. He was sure that you hadn't that kind of money. So he got it out of Lila, about your going to jail for Mark Leland."

"Lila didn't know about Mark Leland."

"She knew. She must have. Maybe you told her, and have forgotten you did. Anyway, she knew. And she told Dolan. So he decided that he could shake Mr. Leland down."

"Well, maybe. But where did I fit into his scheme?"

"Isn't it possible that he intended—perhaps still intends—to make it appear that you're doing the blackmailing?"

"How could he swing that?"

Donna sat up, reached out to the nightstand for cigarettes. She lit one for him, another for himself. In the glow of the lighter's flame, her magnificent body took on golden tints. Deep gold where she was tanned, pale gold where she was not. Her body was statuesque. She was beautiful. He considered himself no great bargain, and marvelled that she had gone for him in such a big way.

"He could do it anonymously," Donna said. "Unsigned letters. Phone calls, without saying who was speaking. He'd simply make his demands and threats, and let Mr. Leland draw his own conclusion; which would be that you are the one making the blackmail attempt."

Dan swore under his breath. "I should have done what Leland told me to do—gotten out of town."

"That's the one thing you mustn't do now," she said quickly. "If you leave now, it'll look as though you're running—as though you're guilty. You've got to stay and see it through—brazen it out. Have you enough nerve, Dan?"

"You'll really give me an alibi?"

"You were here all evening, darling—from seven o'clock."

"I don't know why you want to do it for me, Donna."

She laughed softly, throatily. She took his cigarette, put it and her own in the ashtray on the nightstand. Then she came in against him, kissed him hard and lingeringly.

"Now do you know why?" she asked, whispering it. "Darling, I don't want this to be just a one-night stand. I hope you don't, either."

He tightened his arms about her, kissed her. "I don't," he said. "I don't. Believe me."

"And you won't do anything foolish, like getting scared and running away?"

"Not now, Donna."

"I'm glad. And maybe tomorrow night . . ."

"You want me to go now?"

"I don't want you to, but you'd better," she said. "I've got to get some sleep. I'm a working girl, remember. Kiss me once

more, then go, darling. . . . Kiss me, but make it quick."

He did as she told him, then got from bed and pulled on his clothes.

It was ten after two when he entered his apartment. He went from room to room, switching on lights in an attempt to dispel its oppressive loneliness. He wasn't ready for bed; he again had Lila on his mind, along with the fear that he would have to take the rap for her murder. He put his still wet jacket away in the bedroom closet and changed his damp slacks for a fresh pair, then went to the kitchen for a beer.

Drinking from the can, he wondered uneasily how soon it would be before the police came to question him. He wondered too if he would be able to deceive them into believing that he had been with Donna Armand at the time Lila was murdered. He would have to be smarter and tougher than they were, which would take some doing.

A knock at his door caused him to start violently.

He put down the beer, went to the living room. He hesitated at the door, reluctant to open it. The person outside knocked again, persistently but not, he decided, as urgently and demandingly as a policeman would have done. He opened the door and saw, with no great surprise, that it was the Sorensen girl.

"Hello, Dan," she said brightly. "I saw that your place was lighted, when I got from my car, and so knew you were still up." She was wearing a raincoat and had a scarf about her head. She looked cute. She smiled, dazzlingly. "I thought maybe you'd want to offer me a nightcap to pay me back for the coffee."

"All I've got is beer," he told her. "But come in. I've been wanting to see you."

She said, "You have?" her smile fading. She'd caught the sourness of his tone, and suddenly she wasn't quite so eager to come into his apartment. Still standing in the hall-



way, she asked, "What did you want to see me about?"

He caught her by the arm, pulled her inside. "You should know," he said, closing the door.

She turned quickly to face him, startled and just a little frightened. She carried a large leather purse, gripped it now with her right hand as though she intended to use it as a weapon if he took hold of her again.

"What ails you, Dan? You're acting—"

"You know what ails me," he cut in. "Your searching my apartment."

She gasped involuntarily. Then, realized that she'd given herself away. "How did you know I was here?"

"You were a little careless, sweetheart."

"I . . . I suppose I should explain myself."

"I'd say you should."

"Well, it's just that—"

She was interrupted by the door buzzer. Somebody downstairs pressed the button and held it down. The buzzer kept sounding without let up. Somebody wanted urgently to be admitted, and he felt sure that somebody was a policeman. He turned, pressed the button that would release the inner downstairs door, then opened his apartment door and looked down the stairs. A man wearing a gray hat and a trench coat came in from the vestibule, closed the door, started up the stairs. It was Hanlon, the State Police detective.

"Up late, aren't you, Kirby?" he asked, when halfway up the stairs. "Glad you are. Wouldn't have wanted to rouse you out of a sound sleep."

"That's very considerate of you, I'm sure."

"Just get in?"

"A few minutes ago."

Hanlon came along the hallway. He'd been out before the rain stopped; his hat and raincoat were wet. "You don't seem surprised to see me, Dan."

"After this afternoon, should I be?"

"Well, maybe not." Hanlon was looking past Kirby, into

the living room, seeing Anne Sorensen. "Got company, eh? Sorry if I'm interrupting something."

Kirby said, "You bet you are. But now that you're here, come on in. The more, the merrier." When Hanlon had followed him inside, he said, "Miss Sorensen, Mr. Hanlon. Miss Sorensen is my neighbor from across the hall." He watched them closely, trying to see some signs that they knew each other. He still thought it possible that the girl might be a lady cop. For all he could tell, however, they were strangers. He went on, "Mr. Hanlon is a policeman. He never stops working at it."

Hanlon took off his hat, smiled. "How do you do, Miss Sorensen. Every man should have a neighbor like you."

Her smile was somewhat forced. "Why, thank you, Mr. Hanlon," she said. "A policeman? I suppose you want to talk to Dan alone. I was just leaving, anyway."

She began edging toward the door, but Hanlon stopped her by asking, "Been with Dan all evening, Miss Sorensen?"

"Oh, no. I just dropped in a moment ago, when I got home from work."

"From work? You work late hours, Miss Sorensen."

Kirby said, "Miss Sorensen is a singer at a night spot. At the Blue Room. You and I will have to catch her act some time, Hanlon." He opened the door for Anne. "See you tomorrow, honey—for sure."

"Yes . . . yes, of course."

She left hurriedly, obviously glad to get away.

He shut the door, turned to face Hanlon, said wearily, "Look, do we have to go around and around again like we did this afternoon? It's pretty late for playing games."

Hanlon said, "A cute trick, that. You work fast, Dan." He ran the fingers of his left hand through his gray-dusted hair, then put on his hat. "This is a new game, Kirby," he went on, his voice hardening. "I've got some questions to ask you—new ones. And this time I want answers."

"All right. But make it snappy. I want to hit the sack."

Hanlon took out and lit a cigarette, eying him sourly the while. He was in no hurry. He dragged hard on the cigarette, and said, "I'm missing my beauty sleep, too. Where did you spend tonight?"

"No place very interesting to you. I was with a friend."

"What friend?"

"A lady."

"Another one?"

So far, Kirby had managed to play it cool. He decided that he'd better play it cagy, as well, and let Hanlon dig it out of him. "Look, Hanlon, I've done my time. I'm free to move about as I please and to see whom I please. There's nothing between Miss Sorensen and me. How could there be, when I just met her this afternoon? As for the other girl, I can't see any reason for telling you who she is."

"Before I'm through, you'll be glad to tell me who she is."

"Why will I?"

Hanlon puffed on his cigarette, eying him with no great affection. "Was the other one your wife—your ex-wife?"

Kirby thought: *Here it comes!* He said, "No, it wasn't my ex-wife. So far as I know, she never came back here from Reno."

"You haven't heard from her since she divorced you?"

"No."

"You didn't see her tonight?"

"Tonight? You mean that she's here in town?"

"I mean," Hanlon said flatly, "that she was murdered tonight. Now, who were you with tonight, if it wasn't your ex-wife?"

Kirby was relieved that Hanlon had at last sprung it on him, for he was shaking and had broken out in a nervous sweat. Now he could look upset without having to explain the reason for it. "Lila?" he said, and even to his own ears he sounded genuinely shocked. "Lila . . . murdered?"

Hanlon watched him intently for a long moment, then turned to the end table by the sofa and crushed out his cig-



arette in an ashtray. Facing about, he said, "You're out of jail less than twenty-four hours and your ex-wife turns up a homicide case. The way I see it, you'd better be able to account for every minute of your time tonight—or you're in trouble." He came and stood directly in front of Kirby, his face tight with an angry impatience. "But you can't account for it, can you?"

"Hanlon, listen—"

"Sergeant Hanlon to you, Kirby. I don't feel friendly toward you anymore."

"All right . . . Sergeant. But listen . . . I didn't murder her. My God, why should I?"

"Because she divorced you and was shackled up with somebody else."

"Lila was living with another man?"

"You know Pete Dolan, Kirby?"

"The private detective? Yes, I know him. You mean that Lila and he?"

"You catch on fast—maybe too fast."

Kirby took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his forehead. "I don't know, Sergeant," he said thickly. "I swear it. I did know that Lila had known Dolan before she married me, that he'd tried to date her then. But I didn't know that she'd come back here . . . to him. Look, maybe he killed her."

"Why? What was his motive?"

"How should I know? Why don't you ask him?"

"I will, when I locate him," Hanlon said. "But for my money, it wasn't Dolan who killed her. He's too cute to kill a dame in his own house and hope to beat the rap. He'd have disposed of the body. And he wouldn't have tipped off the cops, as the murderer did. But he'll have some explaining to do when we pick him up. That's for sure. Right now you're the one who'd better do some explaining. I'm giving you a break, Kirby. You'd better take it. Can you account for your movements tonight?"

"I can. Easily enough."

"All right, go ahead."

"I was with a girl, like I told you."

"Her name?"

"Donna Armand."

"The woman who picked you up when you left the Barracks this afternoon?"

"As you probably know," Kirby said. "You must have run a check on the license number of her car."

Hanlon nodded. "That I did," he said. "But the only information that got me was her name and address. Just who is she, Kirby?"

"You don't need to drag her into this, Sergeant."

"For your sake, I do. Who is she?"

"She works for Fred Jarrett, and he's an attorney. He was my legal counsel when I was up on that hit-and-run charge."

"And he sent her to meet you today?"

Kirby shrugged. "You'll have to ask her that," he said. "Anyway, I had a date with her tonight." He hoped the lie didn't show on his face. "I was with her from seven o'clock until half an hour ago. She'll tell you that."

"If she does," Hanlon said, "you may or may not be in the clear. It depends on whether or not she's telling the truth. I'll check with her, for sure. Now get your coat and come along."

Kirby stared at him. "Come along where?"

"To identify a corpse," Hanlon said sourly.

## Chapter Eleven

KIRBY was taken to a mortuary on the south side of town, one handy to Rigby's Landing. His identification of Lila

was merely a required formality, for there was no question about the identity of the murder victim. Seeing Lila there, so pale and cold in death, he was hit hard and came unashamedly to the verge of weeping. He was grateful that Hanlon did not prolong their stay. They were in and out of the mortuary within a matter of minutes.

Before they entered Hanlon's car, he said, "Kirby, for a second there I thought you were going to bawl."

"If I was alone, I'd probably do just that," Kirby told him. Then, harshly: "Get him, Sergeant. Get the bastard who did it!"

"I'm damn sure going to try to get him," Hanlon said. "And with a two thousand man organization behind me, it'll be a good try—believe me."

"He shouldn't be so hard to find."

"You're talking about Dolan?"

"Who else?"

"The right man," Hanlon said. "Don't think you're in the clear just because the sight of her made you want to bawl. Let's go, Kirby."

They got into the unmarked police car, pulled out of the mortuary's parking lot. The streets were all but deserted. It had begun to rain again, a light drizzle. It was a bleak, black night.

Hanlon said, "One-seventeen Merrill Avenue. Right?"

"What?"

"The Armand woman."

"Oh. Yes, that's her address. But you're not going to bother her now—at this time of night?"

Hanlon gave him a sour look. "Want me to wait until sometime during the day so you can see her first and coach her?"

It was nearly three-thirty when they arrived at 117 Merrill Avenue. Hanlon kept ringing the doorbell until the door clicked open. They entered and saw Donna gazing sleepily down at them from her apartment door. She had on yellow



pajamas and a short green robe. Her blonde hair was tousled.

Hanlon said, "State Police, Miss Armand. I'd like to ask you some questions." He took out a leather folder, flipped it open to show his badge. "May we come up?"

"Yes . . . yes, I suppose so."

They went up, after Hanlon motioned for Kirby to precede him. Donna turned back inside and was going around lighting all the lamps in her living room when they entered. She faced them with a smile for Kirby and a frown for Hanlon.

"What is it?" she asked. "Dan, are you in trouble?"

Giving Kirby no chance to speak, Hanlon said, "A routine investigation, Miss Armand. I'm Sergeant Michael Hanlon. Do you mind telling me where you were tonight?"

Donna's eyes widened with surprise. "Where I was?" she said. "Why, I was right here in my apartment. Didn't Dan tell you that?"

"He mentioned it. He said he was here with you for a while."

Kirby said, "Quit trying to be cute, Sergeant. I said—"

Hanlon turned toward Kirby, scowling. "Keep out of it," he ordered. "Wait until I've finished with the lady." Then, to Donna, "How long was Kirby with you, Miss Armand?"

Donna no longer looked sleepy. She looked annoyed. Kirby caught himself holding his breath. He was fearful that she might have changed her mind about lying for him. If she had, he knew where Hanlon would take him next. To the Barracks.

After a long moment, Donna said, "I don't know what time it was when Dan left. But it was late. One-thirty, at least. I know it was after the rain stopped. Say, one-thirty or a few minutes later."

"All right. What time did he get here?"

"Promptly at seven, as he said he would."

"And he was here the whole time?"

"Yes, of course. It was raining too hard for us to go out."

Hanlon gazed at her as though trying to make up his mind whether or not to believe her. "Miss Armand, I hope you're very sure about this. It's very important. There's been a murder and—"

"A murder!" Donna appeared genuinely startled. She looked at Kirby, then back at Hanlon. "You mean somebody . . . well, somebody we know?"

"Kirby's ex-wife. Did you know her, Miss Armand?"

"No, I don't believe I ever met her. Where and when did this happen? I understand that Mrs. Kirby left town to divorce Dan and hadn't returned."

"She returned," Hanlon told her. "How long have you known Kirby?"

"Since before he was sentenced to jail," Donna said. "My boss, Mr. Jarrett, acted as his attorney and that's how I happened to meet Dan."

"I see," Hanlon said, but his tone suggested that something was bothering him. "Well, thank you, Miss Armand. Sorry to have gotten you from bed. Good night." He turned toward the door. "Let's go, Kirby."

Donna said, in a puzzled way, "But aren't you going to tell me more? Dan, do they suspect you of killing her?"

Hanlon looked at her over his shoulder. "There's no more to tell you, Miss Armand," he said. "We don't know anything except that we received an anonymous phone call at ten-thirty-eight about a murdered woman in a cottage near Rigby's Landing. The cottage turned out to be owned by a man named Dolan and the murdered woman was a Lila Hammond Kirby, formerly Mrs. Daniel Kirby. As for suspecting your friend of killing her . . . well, so far I'm letting him alibi himself for the time of the murder. What you've just told me seems to back up his alibi. Good night, Miss Armand."

They sat in Hanlon's car, watched the windows of Donna's

apartment go dark. Hanlon was lost in thought, seemed in a bad humor. Kirby breathed easier, knowing that he was in the clear at least for the time being. He had Donna to thank for that. Only one thing bothered him now; he hated dragging her into it. It would be too bad if Hanlon found out she'd lied.

Hanlon finally started the motor, switched on lights and windshield wipers. But he still didn't put the car into motion. "I've a feeling that something's been put over on me. Damn it, Kirby, I keep getting these lousy feelings about everything you're mixed up in!"

"I'm not mixed up in Lila's murder. I've just proved that."

"All you've really proved is that you've got something women like. And brother, what women. Glamour dolls, all of them. That redheaded ex-wife of yours, your brunette neighbor, and your blonde date tonight. What is it you've got, Kirby?"

"I wouldn't know."

"It's not dough, and I've seen better looking guys."

"Look, Sergeant, how about driving me home?"

"Sure, sure," Hanlon said, and pulled away from the curb. They hadn't driven a block, however, when he said, "I've got a hunch this ties in somehow with your taking the rap on that hit-and-run charge. You know, Kirby, I've a notion to take you to the Barracks instead of back to your apartment."

"And forget all about Dolan?" Kirby said bitterly. "Well, you're the cop and I can't stop you." He was silent for a little while, then added, "But you won't get a thing out of me because I don't know anything. You'll have to let me go sooner or later, and when you do, damn you, I'll go after Dolan on my own!"

Hanlon didn't reply to that.

He didn't speak until he halted the car in front of Kirby's apartment house, then he said, "A word of warning, wise guy. Don't try to leave town. If you do, I'll have you brought



back so fast you'll think you're jet propelled. Another thing . . . you leave Dolan to us. If I catch you playing cop, I'll drag you in and throw the book at you. Understand?"

Kirby said tightly, "I hear you talking, Sergeant," and got from the car.

He slept finally, when his bedroom was already beginning to grow light with dawn. He slept soundly, however, waking only once, shortly after eight o'clock, when the door buzzer sounded. It kept buzzing persistently for several minutes, but he refused to get from bed and answer it. He covered his head with the pillow, muffling the sound. He awoke again at ten o'clock, with the feeling that something was very wrong and then remembering about Lila. He lay for a few minutes, thinking of their life together . . . and then of how she had looked when he found her in Dolan's cottage and later at the mortuary. He groaned with a feeling that was so intense as to be almost physical pain, and the next moment cursed Pete Dolan. And got from bed.

He showered and shaved and dressed, and wondered what he was to do with himself today. It occurred to him almost immediately that he had plenty to do. He would have to see the people at the mortuary and arrange for Lila's funeral, for when her remains were released for burial by the authorities. And after that he would try to find Pete Dolan if the police still hadn't picked him up. Also, he had promised to call Donna. He wanted to see her. She had become important to him. She was the only person he could trust.

The phone began to ring as he was about to leave the apartment. He hesitated, then answered it on the chance that Donna was calling. A man was on the line.

"Mr. Kirby? This is Blakely of the *Evening Courier*. Maybe you remember me from when you were picked on that hit-and-run charge. I interviewed you then. Anyway, I was around to see you earlier but you didn't answer your bell. I'm on the Lila Kirby story, Mr. Kirby, and my editor thought

I should interview you since you were once married to her. Would you answer some questions?"

"Blakely, I have a question I'd like answered," Kirby said. "Have the police found Pete Dolan?"

"They hadn't when I was out at the Barracks fifteen minutes ago. Do you think that he—"

"What I think is that the police should pick him up."

"Because you're convinced that he murdered Lila Kirby?"

"Aren't you convinced of that, Blakely?"

"I'm never convinced of anything, Mr. Kirby. The police say only that he's wanted for questioning. Have they questioned you?"

"They have."

"Did you satisfy them that you had nothing to do with the murder?"

"I have an airtight alibi. But Dolan—"

"You sound like an angry man, Mr. Kirby."

"I'm that," Kirby said. "A woman has been murdered, and the man who must have murdered her is still at large. I'm angry, all right." And slammed down the phone.

He left the apartment, and he was an angry man. If the police didn't find Dolan, he would—somehow.

## Chapter Twelve

HE KNOCKED on the door across the hall, still wanting to learn why Anne Sorensen had searched his apartment. And to find out exactly what she was. But she didn't answer his knock. Either she was out or didn't want to face him. He went down the stairs and out to his car. The rain was over, the day bright and warm. But the balmy weather did nothing to lift his sagging spirits.

He drove to mid-town, stopped at a cafeteria for a breakfast that consisted only of coffee and a sweet roll. Afterward, he bought a morning newspaper, *The Herald*, and sat in his car while reading what Blakely had called "the Lila Kirby story." It wasn't a story he liked. It made him more depressed, and angrier.

The headline was: **DIVORCEE SLAIN IN LOVE NEST.**

The story called Lila "a glamorous red-haired divorcee." It described how she'd been found shot to death in "an isolated" Bay Shore Road cottage by State troopers who had gone there on an anonymous tip. It told of Lila being clad in "exotic" lounging pajamas, and of the opened twin beds. There was mention of P. J. Dolan as owner of the cottage; he was described as a private detective, and the police were quoted as, "trying to locate him for questioning."

What angered Kirby was that the story did not bear down more heavily on Dolan. Though it was brought out that Lila had apparently been keeping a tryst with a man at the cottage, there was not even the suggestion, unless one read between the lines, that Dolan was her lover and murderer. There was mention of Kirby himself, as the murdered woman's ex-husband and as having been involved in a hit-and-run accident eight months before. On an inside page, there was a picture of the "murder room" at the cottage and one of Lila. The latter was Lila in a glamor pose, a picture he hadn't seen before. He assumed that Lila had had it made after obtaining the divorce.

He lay the newspaper aside and drove out to the mortuary on the south side. Lila's parents were dead, and the only living relative was a sister whose whereabouts Kirby didn't know; Lila herself had been out of touch with the sister for years. Therefore, he felt that it was up to him to make the funeral arrangements. He explained that to the man at the mortuary. They made tentative arrangements. Nothing could be definitely settled, for the coroner had not yet released the body for burial.



Leaving the mortuary, Kirby went to a nearby drug store and dialed Donna's number. There was no answer, so he looked up the number of Fred Jarrett's law office.

Donna answered, and he felt better upon hearing her voice.

"Dan, Donna," he said. "You told me to call you today and . . . well, I wanted to talk to you."

"Is everything all right, Dan?" She'd lowered her voice; it was barely above a whisper now. "Nothing's gone wrong, has it?"

"Things are like they were last night."

"That policeman was here this morning, Dan."

"Hanlon? What did he want?"

"He asked the same questions over again." She sounded upset, worried. "I think he suspects that we didn't tell the truth last night, Dan."

It was stuffy in the phone booth, but he felt a sudden chill. "How did you make out with him?"

"I told him exactly the same thing as last night."

"He's likely to keep after you, Donna, until he trips you up."

"Yes, I'm afraid of that."

"I'm sorry now that I dragged you into this."

"I wish we were both out of it, Dan," she said. "I'll have to hang up now. I'm pretty busy."

"Will I see you tonight?"

She didn't answer at once. When she finally spoke, it was with a definite restraint. It was as though she were shying away from him. "I have a headache, Dan," she said. "I got so little sleep. I think by the time I get home I'll have to take a couple of aspirin and go to bed."

"Well, maybe tomorrow night . . ."

"Yes," she said. "'Bye now."

She broke the connection.

He hung up, gripped by disappointment and by uneasiness too. There'd been a change in Donna's manner toward him,

a decided coolness. He left the booth convinced that she was sorry she'd given him an alibi. He didn't blame her, since lying to the police was no small thing. But he was vaguely disturbed, fearful that she might now believe that he'd killed Lila. If she did, she would certainly, sooner or later, tell Hanlon that she had lied. And that would lower the boom on him.

Somebody had to find Dolan and get a confession out of him, and the way he saw it that was for him to do.

He didn't know how to go about it, but decided to start at Dolan's office. He drove to the dingy old building, found a parking space nearby, put his car into it, deposited a nickel. The ancient elevator was in use today, and he had the elderly Negro who operated it take him up to the third floor. The door to Room 312 was still locked.

The elevator man had remained there on the third floor, and now called to him, "He ain't in, mister. And I doubt that he'll be in."

Kirby walked back to him. "What's wrong? Did he go out of business?"

"He's got trouble, that Dolan. With the cops. The State cops, at that. You seen the morning paper?"

"I saw it."

"Read about the murder out at the bay?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"The woman was murdered in a cottage Dolan owns. That's why the cops are looking for him. That's how I figure it, anyway." He chuckled. "That Dolan . . . he's like one of them private eyes in the movies and on television. A sort of Mike Hammer. Beautiful dames found dead in his cottage. A lot of fun until he got on the wrong side of the cops. You want to hire him for a job?"

"Something like that."

"You'll have to find yourself another private eye, mister. Going down?"

Kirby nodded, stepped into the elevator. "Were the police inside his office?"

"Yep. Two big troopers. They got the super to let them in. But if you're wondering if they found Mr. Dolan inside, the answer is *no*. He's made himself scarce, for sure. First floor, mister. . . ."

From the office building, Kirby walked to the Claremont Hotel. The clerk now on duty was not so old as the one he'd talked to the night before, but he was no less frail looking. He was a bundle of nerves. His hands trembled constantly and there was a noticeable twitch at the left corner of his mouth.

Kirby felt sure that it was useless to ask, but he did so, anyway. "Mr. Dolan in his room?"

"No, sir."

"Do you have any idea where I can find him?"

The clerk's mouth kept twitching. "You a cop? Or a reporter?"

Kirby shook his head. "I have some business with Dolan, and I have to get in touch with him before the police take him out of circulation. Have they been around here looking for him?"

"They've been here, but they didn't find him in."

Kirby lay a ten dollar bill on the counter. "Would that buy me the names of some of his friends?"

The clerk eyed the bill hopefully, his fingers quivering as he straightened his bow tie. "I don't know much about Mr. Dolan," he said. "I see him go in and out of here, but that's about all. Except that a character named Bert Pearson sometimes stops in to see him. You'll find Pearson behind the cigar counter at Accardi's poolroom around the corner on Fenton Street."

"One name for ten bucks? That's no bargain."

"Like I said, I don't know much about Mr. Dolan."

"Did you tell the police about Bert Pearson?"

"No, sir. I didn't happen to think of him then. Mostly,



they asked if Mr. Dolan ever had any women visit him here."

"Did he?"

"No, sir," the clerk said, a bit haughtily. "It's against the rules for guests to have visitors of the opposite sex in their rooms."

Kirby smiled faintly, wondering how often each night that rule was broken at the Claremont. He said, "Well, there's your ten spot," and walked from the hotel.

He went around the corner, and found Accardi's poolroom next to the Fenton Street Fire Station.

The front part of the storeroom was given over to a tobacco counter, a soft drink dispensing machine, and a display of magazines and paperback books. At the rear were three pool tables, only one in use at the moment, and a couple pinball machines. A couple of teen-agers with duck-tail haircuts were browsing through the girlie magazines, and the man behind the cigar counter was studying a racing form. It was a dimly lighted place, but he was wearing sunglasses. He was bald and had a broad, fleshy face. He looked like a man of brawn grown flabby.

He nodded when Kirby asked if he was Bert Pearson. "That's me," he said. "What can I do for you?"

Kirby brought out another ten dollar bill. "I'm not a cop and I'm not a reporter," he said. "I want to see a certain man before the cops and reporters get to him—on business. All right?"

"Who's the guy?"

"Pete Dolan."

Pearson's expression didn't change and the dark glasses hid his eyes so that Kirby couldn't see what was in them. But somehow the fat man seemed to change, to withdraw into himself. "Pete Dolan," he said. "I saw in the paper about him. The chump. I always figured he'd end up in a jam because of one or another of his broads."

"You know how I can get in touch with him?"

"Nope."

Kirby dropped the ten-dollar bill on the counter, then added a second and a third. "Now?"

Pearson shook his head. "I could use the money, pal, but I'm leveling with you. I couldn't even tell you how to get in touch with Pete for a cool grand. I do a job for him now and then, but I'm not buddy-buddy with him."

"What kind of a job do you do for him now and then?"

"Tailing, skip-tracing, stake-outs. I used to be with the Pinkerton Agency. Haven't got a license now, but I take a chance and do a little leg work for Dolan when he needs somebody."

"You know any of his friends—anybody close to him?"

"Nobody gets close to Pete Dolan, pal. Except maybe some broad now and then. Like the one who got her picture in the paper this morning. Dolan must have flipped, if he's the guy who chilled her. Why he should though, I wouldn't know. He has a whole harem of them."

"You know any of them?"

"Not me. The kind Dolan goes for come too high for me."

"How do you know about them then, Bert?"

"Kiss and tell. That's Pete Dolan. He likes to brag about his dames. Not names, though. He never mentions names. He just tags the dolls."

"Tags them how?"

Thinking about that, Pearson rubbed his bald head. "Well, there was one he called his social register dame. Another he talked about as his blues singer. He was real gone on that one for a while—the singer, I mean. She worked in some supper club. Then there was one he called his doll with the convertible."

"He ever mention the redhead to you?"

"Not that I remember."

Kirby picked up his money, then, on second thought, pushed one of the tens across the counter. "For that much,"

he said, "tell me how you'd go about finding him if you wanted to see him before the cops got him."

Pearson rubbed his head some more, then said slowly, "Mac, I just wouldn't know, and I've done a lot of skip-tracing in my time. If Dolan's in hiding, it's with somebody who won't dare sell him out—somebody he's got something on. And he's got plenty on a lot of people in this town. I'd give odds, Mac, that nobody finds Dolan—you or the cops."

Kirby said, "I've got to find him," but he felt that he'd reached a dead end in his search for Dolan. Along with being discouraged, he was more than a little scared. He again was gripped by the fear that Dolan was planning for him to take the rap for Lila's murder.

He returned to his car, sat in it for a few minutes trying to figure out what his next move should be. Finally, having reached no decision, he drove the car to a parking lot and got a ticket for it. He went to a restaurant for lunch, then, after eating, walked aimlessly about the mid-town streets. Being just out of jail, he should have enjoyed his freedom. But he wasn't able to, with the threat of a murder rap hanging over him, he didn't feel like a free man.

He went into a movie house finally, to kill some time. Sitting in the darkness with a Western on the wide screen, his mind wouldn't stay with the movement on the screen.

The Western ran its gun-blazing course, and the second feature was a murder mystery. The picture's hero was framed for a murder and was forced to flee from the dull-witted but brutal sheriff and his deputies. It looked hopeless for both hero and heroine, halfway through the film. . . . And halfway through the film, Kirby was sledged-hammered by something that Bert Pearson had told him.

The fat man had said that one of the women about whom Pete Dolan boasted was a blues singer in a supper club. And Anne Sorensen claimed to be a song stylist at a supper club called the Blue Room. . . .

He immediately left his seat and walked from the theater



without waiting to see how the hero of the picture saved himself from *his* murder rap.

It was five-thirty when he left the movie house and nearly six o'clock when he entered his apartment building. Reaching the second floor, he knocked on the door of Apartment 2B. When the girl failed to come to the door, he went into his own apartment and walked back to the kitchen.

The kitchen door opened onto the landing of an outside stairway which led from the back yard to connect with each of the second and third floor apartments. The lock of the door was of the simplest sort, and could be opened with a skeleton key obtainable at any five-and-dime store. There was such a key now in the lock of Kirby's kitchen door, for the original key had been lost soon after he and Lila moved into the apartment. He unlocked the door, took the key from the lock, stepped out onto the landing.

The landing served the other second floor apartment as well as his own, and he went to its door. Inserting his key into the lock there, he found that it would go only part way. Anne's key was on the inside of the lock. He tried to force it out but failed. Returning to his kitchen, he got a short piece of slender wire. He went back to Anne's door, used the wire to probe at the key on the inside of the lock. Shortly he managed to turn the key and push it from the lock. He inserted his skeleton key again; this time it went all the way in, and he was able to unlock the door. He stepped into her kitchen and closed the door behind him.

He moved along the hallway, looked into the bathroom and the bedroom to make sure she was not there. Both those rooms were, like the kitchen, empty, and he went on to the living room. She was not there, either; he had the place to himself, to search at will for something to link her with Pete Dolan.

As he'd noted when she'd invited him into the apartment, her living room was mostly a studio. He looked again at her artist's easel with the half-completed painting, a still life. He

looked at the low table with its litter of paints and brushes and at the finished paintings and sketches about the room; landscapes, still lifes, a couple of portraits. He didn't know a thing about art, but he decided that she was, for a Sunday painter, pretty good. Her drafting was adequate, and he admired her use of vivid colors. If her work created a mood, it was a cheerful one. There was nothing gloomy about any of her pictures.

The room was furnished in a most casual way. There was a sofa, two armchairs, a piano, a phonograph, a table piled high with records and sheet music. There was no desk where her papers would be kept. He went back the hallway, entered her bedroom. The furniture here was blonde modern, the room was more attractively done than the living room. There was a small desk in one corner. He went directly to it.

There was a telephone, a portable typewriter, a pen in a holder with an onyx base. On the desk blotter was a large manila envelope, and atop the envelope lay a batch of newspaper clippings. He was going to ignore the clippings, taking it for granted that they were, since Anne was an entertainer, her press notices. Then, about to open the desk drawers, he noticed the headline of the uppermost clipping. It read:

#### LONG-SOUGHT HIT-AND-RUN DRIVER CAUGHT.

He picked up the clippings. The one was the story of his arrest eight months ago. He glanced at the others. They dealt with that fatal hit-and-run accident, the search for the driver of the death car, and his being sentenced to jail. Two of the clippings also carried his picture.

He stared at the handful of carefully clipped papers in utter bewilderment, wondering why they had been clipped and saved by the girl who occupied this apartment. Apparently she had been reading them only recently. He was still puzzling over them when he heard her enter the apartment.

He gave no thought to trying to avoid her, even though

he might have ducked out the back way without being seen. Instead, he went to face her.

She had closed the door, crossed the living room, was placing some packages from a shopping trip on the sofa. She whirled as he entered the room, gasping, "You! What are you doing here?"

She appeared much more mature than on the other occasions he had seen her. She was wearing a dark green sheath dress and looked sleekly smart from the top of her dark head to the soles of her spike-heeled pumps. Marveling at the change, Kirby had the thought that there were actually two Anne Sorensens.

He said, "I'm repaying the call you made to my apartment when I wasn't home. And I'm here to hear you do some explaining."

"Don't be angry, Dan . . . please."

"Just give me some answers, and I won't be."

"All right. What do you want to know?"

"Mostly, I want to know where Pete Dolan is hiding."

"Dolan?"

"Don't play dumb," he said flatly. "I know about you and him. Now, where is he?"

She looked bewildered. "I'm willing to answer, but I don't know where he is. I do know Pete Dolan, but not so well that you can say that you know about him and me. I've never had anything to do with him. Sure, he used to come to the Blue Room and try to date me. But I never went out with him even once. I don't like him. He's conceited and overbearing. He thinks a girl should be flattered by his attentions. For a couple months, he was an awful nuisance and—"

"Quit it," he broke in. "He's been bragging about how cozy you and he are. He got you to move into this apartment. He planted you here to get next to me."

"Dan, now I'm getting mad!"

"Go ahead, get mad. But you're still going to tell me where Dolan is, and why he put you onto me!"



Anne said furiously, "I'm going to do no such thing, because I don't know where he is and he didn't put me onto you. If you're not going to believe me, why keep on forcing me to deny such ridiculous things? Pete Dolan has nothing to do with me, and for the life of me I can't see what he has to do with you!"

"Listen, after murdering my wife—my ex-wife—and trying to pin the murder on me, he has plenty to do with me!"

Her angry expression fell apart and she stared at him blankly. "What did you say?"

"Don't pretend you didn't know, damn it!"

Anne sat down on the sofa suddenly, still staring at him. "Murdered? Your ex-wife? Dan, I didn't know . . . honest!"

"It's in the papers."

"I didn't see a newspaper today," she said. "Dan, you've got to believe me. I don't know what you're accusing me of, but I swear it—I have nothing to do with Pete Dolan."

"You didn't move into this building just because you liked the apartment," he said. "You moved in because I was across the hall. You wanted to get next to me, and you wanted to search my place. Lord knows what for." He crossed the room, stood over her. "Here's proof that you're up to something that has to do with me."

He tossed the clippings onto her lap.

"I won't deny that," Anne said. "But I do deny that I'm involved with Pete Dolan. If you'll let me explain. . . ."

"I'm listening."

She picked up the sheaf of clippings. "Did you read through these, Dan?" she asked.

"No."

"My name's in one or two of them," she said. "Anne Sorensen. I'm the granddaughter of Reverend Burton. I was with him at Maple Grove the night he was run down and killed. Since you pleaded guilty in court, there was no trial and I didn't have to appear as a witness. So you never saw me. I didn't keep these clippings because I enjoy reading

about what happened to my grandfather—or even about what happened to you. I admit that.”

“Why, then?”

“Because, Dan, I know it wasn’t your car that killed him. I saw the car, remember. It wasn’t a Ford several years old. It was a shiny new Cadillac. I was sure of that then, and I’m sure of it now.”

Anne went on, “Even after your arrest and your admission of guilt, I didn’t believe that you were the right man. Because the car wasn’t right. I worried about it. After you were sentenced to jail, I went to the State Police Barracks and told Trooper Larsen that I was sure that they had the wrong man. He took me to Sergeant Hanlon and—”

“So you and Hanlon do know each other.”

She nodded. “I’ll explain in a moment why we pretended not to know each other last night. . . . But first, I told him, as I had Trooper Larsen, that you were not the right man. Or rather, that it was not your car that ran down my grandfather. I didn’t convince him, of course. But there was another investigation. They checked your car and found reason to believe that it had been deliberately damaged—not damaged in an accident. Well, to make a long story short, Dan . . . Sergeant Hanlon called on me several weeks ago. He’d learned that you had deposited ten thousand dollars in your bank account shortly before you were arrested. He’d also learned that your wife had taken the ten thousand dollars and gone to Reno to obtain a divorce.

“He told me that you were soon to be released and he suggested that I try to strike up an acquaintance with you in the hope that sooner or later you’d confide in me or let something slip. He knew, somehow, that this apartment was vacant and suggested that I rent it. You see, Dan, Sergeant Hanlon believes that the real hit-and-run driver paid you ten thousand dollars to take the blame.” She paused, gazed at him wide-eyed. “He’s right, isn’t he?”

Kirby ignored her question, asked one of his own. “What

did you expect to find when you searched my apartment?"

"I don't know, really. I suppose I thought you might have some incriminating papers around, maybe letters from the man you went to jail for. It was a silly idea, and I realize that now. But at the time I felt that I was being very clever."

"How'd you get into my apartment?"

"It was easy," she said. "Mr. Bentley, our landlord, lives just down the street. I went to his house and told him I was locked out of my apartment. I knew that he had a master key to all the apartments, and hoped he would loan it to me. He did. I used it to enter your apartment." She looked suddenly startled. "How did *you* get into *my* apartment?"

"I used a skeleton key on your kitchen door."

Anne threw the clippings aside, jumped to her feet. "I don't know why I should be on the defensive," she said angrily. "You're the one who should feel guilty. After all, you've done a terrible thing. All I've tried to do is learn who really ran down my grandfather and then fled like a despicable coward!"

He stared at her frowningly for a moment longer, then turned toward the door.

"You've got to tell me who he is!" she cried. "You've got to, so he can be punished!"

He left without replying to that.

In his own apartment, he stretched out on the bed and stared dully at the ceiling. So she was the granddaughter and had been a witness. He felt suddenly sick of the whole sorry mess.

He lay there thinking about the Sorensen girl and discovered that he wasn't really sore at her. She was an oddball; that was for sure. But she was a nice kid, for all her whackiness. She might seem a flighty female, but she did possess a sound sense of values. She made him wish that he'd never taken the rap for Leland. If he hadn't gone to jail, Lila wouldn't have been tempted by that ten thousand dollars. She



wouldn't have divorced him and become involved with Pete Dolan, and ended up a corpse in Dolan's cottage.

He saw the wrong of it now, too late.

He dozed off after a time, and it was growing dark in his bedroom when the door buzzer woke him. He got off the bed, put on his jacket, went to the living room. He pressed the button to unlock the downstairs door, then opened his apartment door and stepped out into the hall. He expected it to be Hanlon.

The two men who came in from the vestibule and climbed the stairs were strangers. One was red faced and burly, the other small of stature and swarthy. If they were cops, they were city cops. They hadn't the sharp look of well-trained troopers.

The burly one said, "Your name Kirby—Dan Kirby?"

"It is."

"All right. Come along."

"Come along where?"

The burly one halted directly in front of him. "Never mind where," he said. "Just come along." The swarthy one moved around behind Kirby.

"Not yet," Kirby said. "Not until I see your identification."

"You going to give us a hard time, Kirby?"

"If you're cops, no. But if you're not cops, I'm not going anywhere with you."

The burly one's red face hardened. "He's going to give us a hard time, Tony."

"The hell he is," the swarthy one said. "Let's take him, Jake."

They closed in on Kirby, slugging at him.

## Chapter Thirteen

KIRBY ducked Jake's first punch, rolled with his second. Then Tony caught him with a clubbing blow on the back of the neck. There was a burst of pain, and he felt himself falling. He went to his hands and knees, dazed and helpless. One of the pair—he didn't know which—laughed and said, "Not so tough. . . . Not tough at all!"

Each of them took an arm, hauled him to his feet. They kept hold of him, forcing his arms up behind his back until the strain on his muscles caused more pain.

They forced him to walk with them, to the stairs and down the stairs and through the vestibule. They hustled him down the outside steps, across the sidewalk, to a parked car. A third man sat behind the wheel. They put him into the rear, between the two of them.

And the third man said, "It didn't take long."

"It didn't," Jake said. "He was a pushover. Let's go, Charlie."

The car was put into motion, and there was no more talk.

They weren't cops, city or any other kind. That Kirby knew now. Who and what they were, he didn't know—couldn't even guess.

They were in no hurry. Charlie drove slowly, taking care not to go over the speed limit or run through a red light. It was apparent that they didn't want to tangle with the police even on a traffic violation. Finally they came to the exclusive Wilshire Hills section and turned in the driveway to Mark Leland's handsome country estate.

Charlie stopped the car in front of the big split-level house, and Jake said, "All right, Kirby . . . out." Jake and Tony got out with Kirby, walked him to the entrance of the house. They were expected. Leland's colored manservant

opened the door before they reached it, and said, "Come in, gentlemen. Mr. Leland is in his study."

Leland was at his desk. He rose when they entered the study. He wore a white dinner jacket and a stiff look of anger. Kirby stopped just inside the door, but Jake and Tony took him by the arms and hustled him over to the desk. Leland stared at him with open dislike, none of his cultivated charm in evidence tonight. Kirby knew that he was looking upon a Mark Leland that the public was never permitted to see.

Kirby was no longer dazed. Except for a dull aching at the back of his neck, his pain was gone. He was now just plain sore.

"Leland, a phone call would have brought me out here," he said flatly. "You didn't need to send these hoodlums after me."

"These men are not hoodlums," Leland said stiffly. "They're security guards at Leland Industries. I sent them to make sure you'd come. I doubt that a phone call would have brought you." He looked at the factory guards. "Jake, you and Tony wait in the hall while I talk to this punk."

They left the room, closing the door behind them.

And Leland said, "All right, Kirby, just what made you think that I'd stand for blackmail?"

"Blackmail? You think that I—"

"Don't play dumb," Leland cut in. "You're not fooling me with a phony air of injured innocence. I'm telling you to your face, punk. You're not getting one cent more out of me. Not one damn cent more. I paid you ten thousand dollars for your services eight months ago. Yesterday I gave you another thousand because you'd lost the ten and I felt sorry for you. But no more. Not a cent more!"

Kirby's face was stiff with an anger as great as Leland's. He said tightly, "Leland, you're a big, important wheel, and maybe from your exalted position I do look like a punk. I'll take that. But I'll be damned if I'll take being called a



blackmailer. I don't know what's eating at you. But I do know that I didn't ask for that grand yesterday. And I know that I haven't asked you for any money since. If anybody has told you I've asked for more, that person is lying!"

Leland didn't reply to that. He abruptly moved from behind his desk, strode to a library table at the side of the room. A tape recorder stood upon the table, and he switched it on. Kirby had turned to watch him, now he moved forward to listen to what was coming from the recorder. And what he heard jolted him.

Coming off the tape were three voices: his own, Leland's, and Fred Jarrett's. His own rather subdued and uncertain, and rather respectful because he had been at the time the recording was made out of his element and unused to sharp lawyers and important industrialists. Jarrett's was smooth, almost oily. And Leland's was incisive, commanding—even a bit domineering. The words being reproduced were those that the three of them had spoken that night the deal had been made in Fred Jarrett's office.

Leland switched off the recorder before the tape ran its course. His ordinarily handsome face was almost ugly with his vile temper. "I received that tape in the mail this morning," he said flatly. "This afternoon I received an anonymous call from a man who took pains to disguise his voice."

"But you recognized it as my voice?" Kirby said. "If you think you did, you think wrong."

"Maybe it wasn't yours but—"

"It wasn't mine, disguised or otherwise."

Leland swore. "Quit this act of innocence, Kirby," he said. "You're not putting anything over on me. You mailed that tape and you talked to me on the phone. It had to be you . . . or maybe someone acting for you."

"Listen, Leland, when I walked into Jarrett's office that night, it was the first time I'd ever been there. You and Jarrett were already there when I arrived. The two of you

were in Jarrett's private office when Donna—Miss Armand showed me in. Did you see me lugging a tape recorder along? Or do you think I planted one there ahead of time?"

"It was a pocket model, one that uses a wire instead of a tape." Leland gestured toward the recorder. "Then this tape was made from the wire recording. You recorded that conversation, Kirby. You sent this tape to me, and you talked to me on the phone this afternoon, demanding fifty thousand dollars for the original recording!"

"Fifty thousand dollars!"

"As if that's news to you," Leland said disgustedly. "That was your price. But I'm not paying it, Kirby. I'll see you in hell first!"

"Jarrett. . . . He's your blackmailer, Leland."

"Oh, no. I'm not buying that. Fred Jarrett's not such a fool that he'd pull something like that one. He knows that I'm in a position to ruin him, financially and professionally."

"It's got to be Jarrett," Kirby said stubbornly. "He was the only other person in the office that night, except for Miss Armand."

"And Miss Armand is in the clear, like Jarrett," Leland said. "I happen to know that she wouldn't do anything to hurt me. Besides, she wasn't in the private office during the conversation. As I remember it, she left the office, to go home, after showing you in."

"I'm not saying that she's the one. I'm saying that Jarrett is your blackmailer. He's got to be, damn it."

Leland brushed that aside with an impatient wave of his hand. "You might as well face up to it, Kirby. You've bitten off more than you can chew. My God, man, did you really think I'd be stupid enough not to guess that it was you!"

"At the moment, I think you're damn stupid."

"We'll see about that in a minute," Leland said. He returned to his desk, picked up the phone, dialed a number. "Mrs. Forbes, please . . . Myra, this is Mark. . . . I'm afraid I'll be a little late. A small matter has come up, and

I've got to take care of it immediately. It will take longer than I expected. . . . What's that, my dear? I sound strange? Well, I am a bit angry. In fact, I'm very angry. . . . Yes, I'll try to be there in an hour. 'Bye, darling."

He put down the phone, scowled at Kirby.

"I'd hoped to reason with you," he said, "but now I see that there's only one way to deal with your sort. I want that original recording, and I'm going to have it. As you mentioned on the phone this afternoon—"

"Damn you, Leland, I wasn't on your phone this afternoon or any afternoon!"

Leland ignored that, went on as though Kirby hadn't spoken. "You mentioned that this recording would be dynamite in the hands of my political enemies. On that, I agree with you. If the political machine opposing my candidacy for governor should get hold of it, I would be forced to withdraw from the race for that office. More than that, I would suffer socially and even in business. It's not something I could ever live down. But my enemies are not getting hold of that recording, Kirby. You are going to give me the original and any other tapes you may have made."

"I can't give you what I don't have, Leland."

"You're very stupid, holding to this pretense of innocence," Leland said, studying him sourly for a moment. "You really don't understand the danger you're in, do you, Kirby?"

"All I understand," Kirby told him, "is that you've got the wrong man."

"We'll see," Leland said, then crossed to the door. Opening it, he called to the two men waiting in the hall. "Jake . . . Tony, come in here, please." He pointed at Kirby when the pair entered the study. "This man has something of mine that I want returned to me," he said curtly. "He probably doesn't have it on his person, but I'm sure that with a little persuasion he'll take us to where he's keeping it."

The two guards looked at Kirby, Jake saying after a moment, "No holds barred, Mr. Leland?"



"No holds barred," Leland said. "Get it over with as quickly as possible. I have a date with my fiancée."

The two of them moved toward Kirby, Jake donning a set of brass knuckles and Tony taking a blackjack from his hip-pocket.

Kirby looked about wildly, seeking a means of escape or a weapon. The huge stone fireplace at the end of the room caught his eye. There was at one side of the hearth a brass wood carrier and at the other side a stand holding the usual fireplace tools. As Jake and Tony closed in on him, he moved toward the end of the room. Tony rushed him, the blackjack lifted for a blow. Kirby reached the fireplace, grabbed at the tool stand. His hand closed on the handle of the tongs.

He leapt forward to meet Tony, swinging the tongs like a club. Tony's blackjack was no match for such a weapon, makeshift though it was. He let out a startled yelp, tried to duck. He saved himself from a solid head blow, but he wasn't agile enough to dodge the tongs completely. They caught him alongside the face, glancingly. Tony screamed. He dropped the sap, clapped a hand to his face. A great gash had been opened, blood seeped from it and through his fingers. Tony's knees buckled, dropped him to the floor where he lay writhing.

Jake had grown suddenly cautious, halting ten feet away. Kirby now knew exactly what he was doing; he hurled the tongs at Jake. They missed the burly man, since he quickly ducked. But in ducking, he gave Kirby a chance to get at Tony. Kirby bent over the downed man, reached inside his jacket, snatched the gun from his shoulder holster. It was a snub-nosed .38 revolver. Kirby came erect, slipping the gun's safety, leveling the revolver at the now frightened and confused Jake. And also covering the man behind the desk. He was just in time, for Leland was reaching into a drawer—almost certainly for a gun.

"All right, Leland," Kirby ordered. "Come away from there!"

Leland jerked his hand from the drawer, came away from the desk. Both he and Jake stared at Kirby with helpless rage. Tony rose to a sitting position, held a handkerchief to the gash on his cheek. Kirby moved slightly, so that he could cover Tony as well as the other two.

He said, "Leland, I'm telling you once more. I'm not trying to blackmail you. I don't want any money from you. I didn't want that thousand dollars you gave me yesterday. I'd give it back to you now, except that it looks like I'm going to need it to get away from you and your strong-arm boys."

Leland sneered, said, "You still haven't convinced me, Kirby."

Kirby eyed him disgustedly. "For a man who is head of an industrial empire and aspires to be governor of a great state, you strike me as a stupid jerk, Leland. If I was blackmailing you, I'd tell you that you've got no choice but to pay up, now that I've got a gun on you. Can't you see that?"

"I can see that you're trying hard to cover for yourself."

"I'm trying hard to make you see that it's Jarrett who is blackmailing you."

"I told you that Fred Jarrett—"

"I know what you told me," Kirby cut in. "But I'm telling you that Jarrett and only Jarrett could have made that tape recording. I'm not saying that he mailed you the tape and phoned you the demand for fifty thousand dollars. I don't think he did. I think he's in cahoots with Pete Dolan, and that Dolan mailed it and phoned you. I've reason to think that. You read about my ex-wife being found murdered in Dolan's cottage, didn't you?"

Shrugging as though that was of no consequence, Leland said, "I read about it."

"She phoned me a few hours before she was murdered,"

Kirby went on, "to warn me that I was to be set up as a fall guy. She didn't tell me why or how. But this is the answer. Dolan was rigging it so you'd think I was doing the black-mailing. They wanted you to think that so you wouldn't suspect that Jarrett had made the recording and was trying to cash in on it."

"You've got it all figured, haven't you, Kirby?" Leland said. "But you can't make me buy it because I know Jarrett wouldn't dare pull anything like that on me. So I'm warning you. You turn that original recording over to me or you're in trouble. You were lucky here tonight, but next time it'll be different. And if you give that recording to anyone who'll use it against me, you're not likely to be around to enjoy your revenge."

Kirby stared at him. "Are you threatening my life, Leland?"

"I won't be responsible for what Jake and Tony do the next time I have to send them after you, Kirby!"

Kirby stared at him a moment longer, then, still covering the three with the gun, he crossed the room to the door. He paused there, and said, "I'm getting a good look at you for the first time, Leland. And I don't like what I see. Maybe the voters of this state should see you the way I see you."

"What does that mean?"

"That I'm considering going to the police and telling them that I did take the rap for somebody."

Leland flinched, visibly and replied savagely, "You'd better reconsider, my friend." He glanced at Jake and Tony. "Do you two think you could handle him better another time?"

Tony's reply was to gaze at Kirby with a wicked hatred and curse him, while Jake said, "Just say the word, Mr. Leland, and from now on this punk will be living on borrowed time."

Leland nodded with satisfaction. "Now you know, Kirby," he said coldly. "If you want to stay alive and healthy, stay



away from the police and get that recording into my hands within twenty-four hours."

Kirby looked at each of the three in turn and had no doubts that it would be as Leland said. "Yes, now I know," he said bitterly.

He opened the door, left the room and the house. He was trembling violently, partly with anger but mostly because he was frightened.

## Chapter Fourteen

CHARLIE was still parked in front of the house, dozing at the wheel of the car. Kirby opened the door, got in beside him, showed him the gun, and said, "You're driving me back to town without any argument."

Charlie said, "I guess so," and made haste to start the motor and switch on the lights. Nobody came from the house as they pulled away and headed toward the highway. Midway down the curving driveway, Charlie asked, "What happened in there, anyway?"

"Tony had a little accident and Jake had a scare thrown into him," Kirby said. "So you keep your hands on the wheel. If you've got a gun, forget about it."

"Whatever you say, chum."

When they reached the highway, Kirby saw a car parked a short distance from the driveway. The lights of Charlie's car showed him the driver sitting in the parked car. It was a woman—Anne Sorensen.

On impulse, he said, "Pull up. I'm getting out."

Charlie had just started onto the highway. He hit the brakes, then backed into the driveway. Kirby got out, said,

"Drive on the way you're headed." He backed up the order by gesturing with the gun. Charlie drove on, heading along the highway toward town.

Kirby slipped the gun into his jacket pocket and went to Anne's car. It was a newish Chevy hardtop. He opened the door and got in beside her.

"All right," he said. "Let's go. This is a good place to get away from." When she had the hardtop headed toward the city, at a speed greater than the law allowed, he said, "You saw them take me, eh?"

Without taking her eyes from the road, she nodded and said, "I heard a commotion in the hall and opened my door just as they started taking you down the stairs. At first I thought of calling the police. Then I realized that would do no good, that they would be gone with you before the police came."

"So you followed us?"

"Yes. It was easy. They didn't drive fast and—"

"Why'd you bother?"

"Well, for heaven's sake; you were being taken away by force. Wouldn't you have done something if it had happened to me? Oh, I know . . . you think I wasn't any help. But if you hadn't come out of there when you did, I would have gone to call the police." She overtook and swerved around Charlie's car, left it far behind. "I did want to be of help, Dan. After all, we are friends."

"Friends? You want to be friends with me, suspecting me like you do?"

"You're a very likeable guy, Dan, even if you did something foolish . . . well, you've probably learned your lesson and won't do anything like that again. That was Mark Leland's place back there, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"And he's the man who paid you all that money to go to jail in his place?"

"You're jumping at conclusions, friend."

"But the right conclusions," she said. Then, sounding put-out with him, "How can you still shield him after the way those two men treated you?"

He was silent for a long moment: "Friend, I'll tell you something. When a person makes a deal with Mark Leland's sort, he's making a bum deal. A bum deal all around. I lost my wife because I went to jail, and she lost her life because she went her own way. Tonight I was threatened with the same thing. If I don't watch myself from now on, I too may end up dead. I'm poison to Mark Leland right now, through no fault of my own. I tried to play square with him but . . . well, it's all part of a bum deal that I should never have gone for."

"So you admit it," Anne said. "You admit that he's the man you went to jail for."

"Only to you," he said. "Not to anyone else. Especially not to the police."

"But, Dan . . . you have a wrong to right!"

"And go back to jail for perjury and obstructing justice and Heaven knows what else? Or worse, having those two strong-arm boys back there knocking me off? Nothing doing!"

Anne was silent for perhaps as long as it took her to drive a mile, then she said bitterly, "I'm disappointed in you, Dan. I was beginning to think that when you saw the right thing to do you'd do it. Yes, I'm very disappointed in you . . . and just when I'd begun to like you a lot!"

They didn't speak after that. The chill silence lasted until Anne parked in front of their apartment house.

Then she said, "You realize that I'm going to call Sergeant Hanlon about this, don't you?"

He nodded. "I realize it."

"Aren't you going to ask me not to?"

"No."

"No? Why not?"



"I told you it's a bum deal all around," he said, opening the door. "I won't drag you into it."

He started to get from the car but she caught hold of his arm. When he turned to look at her, she leaned toward him and quickly kissed him. He stared at her in bewilderment for a moment, then, still not understanding why she'd done that, he got out and started walking away. He halted, then returned to the car and bent down to look at her. She was still sitting as he'd left her, looking grave and perhaps a bit unhappy.

"Thanks for following us out there," he said, "and for the ride back. See you *friend*."

"*Friend*," Anne said bitterly. "I'm beginning to hate that word."

He didn't reply to that, but went on to his own car. He climbed in behind the wheel, took Tony's revolver from his pocket and put it into the glove compartment. He started the motor and switched on the lights. As he drove away, he saw in the rear-view mirror that Anne was still sitting in her car. She was gazing after him, and he wondered what was in her thoughts. A crazy dame. . . . He didn't understand her at all. He had the feeling that if he'd ask it, she would have agreed not to phone Hanlon.

But he hadn't asked that, because he didn't want her to soil herself by becoming involved in this dirty mess in even a small way. She should do what was for her the right thing. Nothing would come of her phoning Hanlon, anyway. Hanlon couldn't move in on Leland on her word alone. Which was, Kirby reflected, too bad.

Driving aimlessly, still angry and frightened, feeling trapped between the police on one hand and Leland and his goons on the other, he listened to a voice in his mind ask; *Well, what are you going to do about it?*

He hadn't any answer to the question. There wasn't anything he could do. If he went to the police and made a clean breast of it, they would book him on all sorts of charges.

Perjury, obstructing justice, and he couldn't even guess what else.

The police would hold him and he would be temporarily safe from those goons of Leland's. But he wouldn't be in jail forever. When he'd done his time, Jake and Tony would be waiting for him. He had an idea that those two possessed long memories. And certainly Mark Leland would never forget.

Besides, he wanted nothing to do with the police. Nor did he want to do another stretch behind bars. So making a clean breast of it wasn't his out. He had no out, unless he could do the impossible; convince Leland, within twenty-four hours, that not he but Fred Jarrett had made that recording and was behind that blackmailing attempt. But that would clear him only with Leland. He would still have the police breathing down his neck, suspecting him of being the man who murdered Lila.

He pulled in at a drive-in restaurant finally, told the carhop that he'd have a hamburger and a malted milk. While eating his skimpy dinner, he decided that he must try to do the impossible. And to make his try through Fred Jarrett.

A pressure of excitement built up in him. He could force Jarrett to admit being behind the blackmail attempt. He might even be able to get the lawyer to tell where Dolan was hiding. Certainly Jarrett knew that, since he and Dolan were working together. If he were tough enough, he could get the truth out of Jarrett.

There was a public phone at the side of the drive-in restaurant. He went to it after paying the carhop and having her take the tray away. He looked up Jarrett's residence, then deposited a dime and dialed the number.

A servant answered. "The Jarrett residence."

"It Mr. Jarrett there?"

"No, sir."

"Can you tell me where I can reach him?"

"Perhaps at his office, sir. He called earlier to say that he would not be home for dinner, that he was working late."

Kirby said, "Thanks," and hung up.

It was eight-forty-seven by his watch when he left the booth. For an attorney, Jarrett was working late. And maybe not alone. Donna too might be at the office, and possibly a client. But he could wait until the client left, and Donna wouldn't interfere between him and her employer, unless she had undergone a change of heart where he was concerned.

He drove to mid-town. He knew that Jarrett's office was located on Grove Street, on the third floor of a small building which had a dress shop on the street level. He found a parking space around the corner, on Market Street. Before getting from the car, he took Tony's revolver from the glove compartment and slipped it into his jacket pocket.

When he entered the building, a colored man was mopping the tile floor of the foyer. The man looked and said, "Evening, sir," as Kirby passed him and started up the stairs.

Kirby saw no one else. The hallways on the second and third floors were lighted, but the glass panels in the office doors were, with the exception of Jarrett's, all dark. He entered the reception room of the lawyer's small suite. Donna was not at her desk, and the door to the private office was closed. No sound of voices came from the inner room.

Kirby knocked on the door. No one answered his knock. He opened the door, found the private office dark. But in the light from the reception room he saw Fred Jarrett at his desk.

The lawyer looked as though he'd grown tired and put out the lights so he could rest. He was leaning forward in his chair and had his arms and head upon the desk. Kirby pushed the door farther open, stepped into the room. He spoke the man's name before it occurred to him that Jarrett was not resting, that something was very wrong.



He moved toward the desk, seeing now that Jarrett was in a sprawled, awkward position. He felt a knife-sharp alarm, jolted by the realization that Jarrett was dead. Then he heard a slight movement behind him as someone who had hidden behind the door as it opened now lunged at him. He started to turn, but too late. He was struck a heavy blow to the back of the head, just behind his left ear. There was a burst of intense pain that blinded him and buckled his knees. He was driven forward off balance. He collided with the desk, then fell to his hands and knees. He was vaguely aware that the person who'd hit him was coming after him, to hit him again.

He was too dazed, too helpless, to do anything about it. The second blow crashed against his unprotected head, and this time the exploding pain ended in merciful unconsciousness.

He heard someone groaning, and realized that it was himself. He struggled to rise, got as far as his hands and knees. He remained like that for a long moment, the victim of giddiness and throbbing pain. Finally he made it to his feet. He stood swaying, alone now, except for the dead man. After a long moment, when he felt steadier, he switched on the desk lamp. In its white glare, the blood from the wound at Jarrett's left temple was startlingly red.

A bullet wound. . . . Jarrett had been shot only minutes before he entered the building. Or perhaps even after he'd entered it, when he had started to climb the first flight of stairs. Shot by whom? He didn't know. He hadn't gotten so much as a glimpse of the person who'd been lurking there, who'd slugged him. He put a hand to the back of his head. There was no blood, but there was a huge, sore lump. Having been hit hard twice, he found it surprising that there wasn't at least one gash in his scalp. Maybe he hadn't been hit so hard as he thought. Still, he had been unconscious.

He stood staring at the dead man for a long moment, then panic seized him again as it had when he'd found Lila murdered. And instantly he wanted out of there.

As he turned to the door, his foot kicked some heavy object on the floor. He stopped, saw that it was a revolver. The murder gun, he knew. He knew too, that he must get away from there. This murder the police could pin on him without any trouble—if he were found in Jarrett's office or even in the building.

He left immediately, doing as he'd done at Dolan's cottage, using his handkerchief to wipe away any fingerprints he may have left on the doorknobs. He was still a little dazed and suffering a bad headache when he descended the stairs. The janitor was still working in the foyer, now polishing the brass on the front door. He moved aside so that Kirby could leave the building. Kirby pushed the door open, then looked around. It was possible, he thought, that the man could give him a description of the murderer. He also thought it possible that the description would fit Pete Dolan.

"Look, Mac, did you see the man who came down a couple minutes ago?"

The man looked at him blankly. "Didn't see no man but you, mister."

"You're sure?"

"Sure, I'm sure. I've been working right here the past half-hour."

"And you didn't see another man?"

"Said so, didn't I?"

Kirby started to ask about a back way out of the building, but the sudden, not-far-off wail of a siren startled him. The wailing swelled. The emergency vehicle—a police car, Kirby somehow knew—seemed only a block away. It was coming fast, and he felt sure that it was coming to this building. He hurried from the building, strode toward the corner. The siren went into a low snarling and abruptly was silent. Reaching the corner, Kirby looked back and saw that the police

car had come to a stop in front of the building he had just left. Two officers leapt from the car, strode into the building.

Kirby went on to his car, climbed in behind the wheel, and sat frozen by fright. *How had they known so soon?* The janitor obviously hadn't called them; he'd shown no signs that he knew that a murder had been committed in the building. The answer struck Kirby like the blow of a fist; *The murderer had tipped them off!* And the reason for his doing so was obvious. He'd hoped that the police would arrive in time to catch Kirby there and pin the murder on him!

## Chapter Fifteen

FORTUNATELY for him, they hadn't arrived in time to catch him at the scene of the murder. But he wasn't out of danger. The murderer may have told the police whom they could expect to find in Jarrett's office. Or if he hadn't as yet, he could make another anonymous phone call to identify him for them. And the janitor would cinch it for them by identifying him as having been in the building.

It had been fast thinking on the murderer's part. Kirby was sure that this time too, Pete Dolan was the murderer. Having knocked him out, Dolan must have instantly realized that he could frame him for the murder. He'd fled from the building—by the back way, since the janitor hadn't seen him and hurried to a nearby telephone. The police had arrived within a matter of minutes, though not quickly enough to make Dolan's frame work.

Another siren wailed. A second police car raced past the intersection, its red light flashing. Its arrival roused Kirby,



and he quickly started his Ford's motor, switched on the lights, and drove away from the neighborhood. He drove without any thought of where he was going. He did know that no place was safe for him now. He couldn't ask Donna Armand to alibi him again. This time it was her boss who had been murdered, and it wasn't likely that she would want to help him rig an alibi. She might not believe his claim of innocence. Besides, she had been cool and had told him that she didn't want to see him tonight.

Having nowhere else to go, he drove home. When he got there, he saw Anne Sorensen's Chevy parked in front of the apartment house and the lights on in her living room. Her being home at this time, when she should have been at the Blue Room, surprised him. Reaching the second floor, he knocked on her door. He was a little concerned about her.

When she opened the door Anne greeted him with a noticeable coolness. "Well, hello."

"Are you all right, Anne?"

"Of course, I'm all right. Whatever made you think I wasn't?"

"Your not being at work. I thought you might be sick or something."

"Or something," she said. "I had things to think over. Will you come in?"

"Thanks. I'd like to."

He walked into her cluttered living room. He knew one of the things that she'd had to think over, and he said, "Did you call Sergeant Hanlon?"

She shook her head. "I couldn't," she told him; "because of you. I guess I'm just a softie, but I couldn't bring myself to make more trouble for you."

"The trouble you could make for me wouldn't matter much," he said, sitting on the sofa and holding his head in his hands. "I'm in bigger trouble now, Anne."

She came and sat beside him. "Is there anything I can do, Dan?"

"No. Why should you want to do anything for me, anyway?"

"Because I've fallen for you, I suppose," she said, with surprising honesty. "I can't think of any other reason."

He dropped his hands and stared at her. "You've what?"

She met his gaze steadily. "I'm not sure, mind you. But around you I get the queerest feeling. I suspect that I'm in love with you." She sighed. "Why it has to be you, I don't know. You're not exactly a bargain."

"That's for sure," he said bitterly. "I'm just a chump. The world's prize chump. I keep getting deeper into trouble. . . ."

He told her then, the whole story from the day that Fred Jarrett first approached him about taking the rap for the hit-and-run accident. He ended up with what had happened at Jarrett's office less than an hour ago. It took him quite a while, but Anne listened intently and without comment.

When he had finished, she said, "Dan, you've got to go to the police and tell them all this. They may believe you. Certainly they'll investigate and find that you're telling the truth."

"Nobody would believe such a crazy story."

"Somebody already believes it, Dan."

He smiled thinly. "That somebody has already proved herself not very bright by falling for a chump like me." Then, half angrily, "Why should I bother to go to the police? They'll be after me soon enough."

"If you could only convince them that Dolan killed Jarrett. . . . Why do you suppose he did kill him, Dan? What was his motive?"

"Maybe he didn't want to share the fifty thousand dollars he hoped to extort from Mark Leland."

"But he wouldn't have had to murder Jarrett," she protested. "He could have simply refused to share the money. And what could Jarrett have done—sue him?"

He had to admit that she might be right. She was sharp, this pert, dark-haired girl.

She went on, "Listen, Dan, you said that Mark Leland wouldn't believe that Jarrett would double-cross him. Maybe he has a good reason for believing that. Maybe he had some hold on Jarrett, and Jarrett wouldn't have dared double-cross him."

"Maybe, but only Jarrett could have made that tape recording."

"No, he wasn't the only one. There was his secretary."

"Donna?" He shook his head. "She couldn't have made it. She wasn't in the office the whole time. She wasn't in Jarrett's private office when the deal was made."

"Would she have had to be there to make the recording?"

"Well, she could have had the private office bugged somehow."

"Maybe she did, Dan. And maybe she had Dolan kill Jarrett because he found out that she'd made the recording and with Dolan was attempting to blackmail Mark Leland."

Kirby frowned, and didn't reply.

Anne said, "Dan, is it because you're in love with her that you refuse to suspect her?"

He had told her that he'd spent several hours at Donna's apartment and that she had given him an alibi for the time of Lila's murder, but he had not even hinted at the intimacy between them. Even so, Anne seemed to sense that he and Donna had been romantically involved. Her tone was rather brittle when she spoke of the other girl, and she seemed almost eager to throw suspicion on her. He had been jolted by her blunt asking if he was in love with Donna. He wondered if he were.

He took out and mechanically lighted a cigarette, and all but forgot the girl beside him as he thought about Donna. Suspicion came now. He found it strange that Donna had been so eager to become involved with him, to have him make love to her and to give him an alibi. He



considered it odd that there was no other man, as she'd claimed, in her life. Too, he wondered if the way she lived didn't require some explaining; he couldn't believe that she could afford such an apartment and a convertible on her salary as a secretary. She must have another income. From blackmail? Had she been blackmailing other of Fred Jarrett's clients with Pete Dolan's help?

He had phoned her last night, told her about the warning Lila had given him. She had stalled him for more than an hour before telling him the location of Dolan's cottage, saying that she would have to get its location from a friend. Maybe she had known it all the time, and had put him off because she had wanted to contact Dolan and tell him that Lila had tipped him off.

She had seemed sincere about wanting to help him. But it was possible that her kindness had been merely a means of influencing him. She had urged him not to run, not to leave town. Maybe because she wanted him handy to take the rap for the blackmailing attempt and the two murders.

He became aware that Anne had spoken, and looked at her questioningly.

"Are you, Dan?" she said. "Are you in love with her?"

He shook his head. "I don't think so," he told her. You may be right about her. She could have made that tape recording. She and Dolan may be working together."

"What are you going to do to clear yourself?"

"I don't know," he said dully. "I can clear myself only by proving that Dolan murdered Jarrett and Lila. Maybe if I saw Donna and tricked her into admitting that she's in on the blackmail scheme, I'd have something—"

He broke off abruptly, jumped to his feet. He'd heard the ominous wail of a siren. It was growing louder. Anne too rose. She ran to a window, gazed down into the street. The siren's wailing stopped abruptly. Anne whirled, came to Kirby. There was a stricken look on her face.

"It's the police, Dan! They're coming into the building!"

"I'm leaving, Anne, by the back way."

"They may not come into my apartment, Dan. I won't let them!"

"I'm leaving, anyway," he said. "I'm going to see Donna and try to get the truth out of her."

"They'll catch you when you take your car!"

"I'll walk."

"You can't show yourself on the streets, Dan!" she said frantically. "Listen, I'll drive you to her place. Wait for me just inside the entrance to Memorial Park. I'll meet you there after the police have gone!"

The buzzer across the hall sounded again, insistently.

He said, "I won't drag you into it. I'll go it alone."

Anne shook her head. "Wait for me, darling," she pleaded. Then she quickly kissed him, and added, "Don't take any chances now, when you're so close to clearing yourself. Please, Dan!"

He didn't reply to that, but went through her apartment to the back door.

## Chapter Sixteen

KIRBY had meant it when saying that he wouldn't drag Anne into his trouble. But after walking a half-dozen blocks through a residential section where he seemed to be the only pedestrian, he changed his mind about refusing her help. Rather, a prowling car changed it for him.

The cops drove more slowly upon spotting him, looked him over with such a sharp interest that he had a wild urge to start running. But he realized that flight would be disastrous. Instead of fleeing, he tried to brazen it out by

gazing curiously back at the two officers and then stopping to light a cigarette. It was risky, letting the glare of the match show them his face, and for a nerve-shattering moment he felt sure that they would stop to question him. But his actions evidently convinced them that he had nothing to fear from the police. The prowler car speeded up, disappeared, and he could breathe normally again.

It was a long way to Donna's apartment, and he doubted that he would be so lucky if another prowler car came along. In his harassed frame of mind, he imagined that every policeman in the city was doing nothing tonight but searching for him. So he went to the main entrance of Memorial Park to wait for Anne.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Anne came. As he got into her car, she said, "I was afraid you wouldn't wait, Dan."

He told her about his close call with the prowler car. "I figured it's the wrong time for me to be taking a stroll. Donna lives at the Colonial Manor on Merrill Avenue."

Anne turned the car and said, "The police were still at your apartment when I left. The first two were uniformed officers. Two detectives came later. They got the landlord to let them into your apartment. They questioned me, but of course," she gave Kirby a sudden, dazzling smile, "I couldn't tell them a thing. Have you decided how you'll deal with your girl-friend?"

"No. I'll have to play it by ear. And I'm about convinced that she's no friend of mine."

"Well, don't feel so sad about it. You still have me."

"It's always tough finding out that somebody's played you for a sucker."

"You'll never have to feel badly on that score because of me. I'll never, but never, try to put anything over on you—honest."

"You talk as though you and I have a future."

"I'm just talking like this to keep my spirits up, Dan,"



she said. "But, darn it, we've got to get the truth out of her, even if we have to beat it out of her!"

"Not *we*," he said. "You're keeping out of it. You'll drop me off, then go home. Understand?"

"Well, if you don't want me . . ."

Twenty minutes later they turned off Eastern Boulevard into the section where the Colonial Manor was located. He had Anne drop him off a short distance from Donna's apartment, but in sight of it. He saw Donna's convertible standing in front of the building. He also saw that her apartment was lighted.

"You go on home," he told Anne, and opened the door to climb out. "And if anybody asks, you'd better say that you didn't see me tonight. I don't want you in trouble."

"Don't worry about me, Dan."

He smiled, touched her cheek, said, "You're a pal," then got from the car. He watched her make a U-turn and drive back toward the Boulevard, then he went on to Donna's apartment.

The door clicked open almost immediately after he pressed her bell button. He went in and saw her looking down curiously and then with surprise from her apartment door. He went up the stairs two at a time, saying on the way, "I've got to talk with you, Donna."

She frowned with annoyance, but said, "All right, Dan." There was no warmth in her voice, no friendliness. It was as though they'd never been in each other's arms in the ultimate of intimacy. "Is something wrong?"

"Don't you know?" he said, facing her. "Haven't you heard from Dolan?"

Her eyes widened, and her voice sharpened with surprise. "From Pete Dolan? Why should I hear from him?"

"Because he's your partner in crime, Donna."

"What? Are you mad, saying such a thing?"

"Come off it, honey. I know all about it."

"You must be crazy or drunk," she said furiously. "I'm not going to listen to such talk!"

She stepped back, started to close the door. He moved quickly inside, caught her by the arm. He kept hold of her even though she tried to break away. He shut the door, then pulled her close.

"You'll listen," he told her flatly, "and then you'll talk. I'm in one hell of a jam, but I'm going to save myself through you. You're going to tell me a few things, either willingly or because I rough you up. Now make up your mind how it's to be!"

"You're hurting me!"

He realized that he was twisting her arm. He released her, said, "Go in and sit down. Don't give yourself a hard time."

She turned and went into the living room from the small foyer, rubbing her arm. She was wearing a beige sweater and a brown skirt. Following her, he was sharply aware of her fine, long legs and the slight sway of her full hips. He could not help but remember what it had been like to possess her, and knew that he would have to be careful not to let the memory soften him.

Donna seated herself on the sofa, and seemed to have control of herself now. She reached out to the cigarette box on the coffee table, selected a cigarette and picked up the lighter. The lighter failed to work and she looked at him expectantly. He felt in his jacket pockets for matches, and his right hand came in contact with the revolver he'd put in his pocket when he'd gone to Jarrett's office. He brought out a book of matches, struck one, held it so she could light up. His hand wasn't too steady; in fact, it trembled visibly. Donna steadied it with her hand, and the contact sharpened his memory of what had been between them. He jerked his hand away the instant her cigarette was alight, dropped the now dead match into the ashtray on the table, and stood scowling down at her.

Donna looked up at him uneasily. "Don't stand over me like that, Dan. Come sit beside me."

He shook his head. "That worked once, but it won't again. Now quit stalling."

"All right. Just what are you accusing me of, Dan?"

"Of working with Pete Dolan to blackmail Mark Leland of fifty thousand dollars with a tape recording you made the night I was chump enough to go for that deal," he said tightly. "And for getting two people murdered by Dolan: my ex-wife because she warned me that I was to be your fall guy and Fred Jarrett because he figured out that you made that recording."

She stared at him. "Fred Jarrett . . . murdered? Dan, that can't be true!"

"It's true. And you know it. Dolan must have been in touch with you."

"Yes, he's been in touch with me," she said, dropping the cigarette into the ashtray and rising. "I did tell him on the phone early this evening that Mr. Jarrett accused me of making the recording. He said that he would see Mr. Jarrett and scare him out of the notion of doing anything about the recording. But I haven't heard from him since. I swear it, Dan!"

"He scared Jarrett, all right. With a bullet in the head."

"Oh, no!"

"And you did tell him that Lila had phoned me, didn't you?"

"Yes. . . . Yes, I did. But I didn't think he'd harm her."

"Harm her! Hell, he murdered her!"

"Dan, I'm not to blame. You've got to understand . . . please!"

"I understand, all right," he said. "At first I was to take the rap only for the blackmailing. But then it was a matter of murder too, and now I'm to take the rap for that as well. The police are already looking for me, but when



they find me they're going to find you and Dolan with me. You're taking me to him."

She seemed to be going to pieces before his eyes. Her face was growing haggard. Her eyes were haunted. "All right, Dan," she said tonelessly. "I'll take you to him, but only after you've listened to me. I won't . . . I just won't go until you know the truth."

"I'm listening."

"Don't be so hard, Dan . . . so cold," she pleaded. "Don't you remember how it was with us?"

"I remember," he said. "Now talk, if you've got to."

She looked at him with despair, then said, "I did make the tape recording, but not to blackmail Mark Leland for money. I—"

"Don't hand me that," he cut in angrily. "My hunch is that you've been working this blackmail kick for a long time. You sure don't have a standard of living like this on a secretary's pay."

"No, not on a secretary's pay. And I'll soon have to give up this apartment. I no longer have another income."

He kept silent now, letting her tell it.

She went on, bitterness as well as despair in her voice now, "Mark Leland paid for this apartment until a few months ago. He also paid for my car. And for a lot of other things. I was his . . . his mistress for nearly five years. I continued to be, off and on, even after he became involved with the woman he now plans to marry."

"Myra Forbes?"

"Yes, Myra Forbes," she said, and for an instant her face was ugly with a jealous hatred. "He became interested in her about a year ago, when he decided that he'd like to be governor. She has wealth of her own, and social position. He thinks she'll be an asset to him in politics. Three months ago he announced their engagement. I foresaw from the start that he planned to marry her, and it was because of that that I made the recording."

"You see, Dan . . ." She lifted her hands in a pleading gesture, beseeching him to understand. "You see, I'm in love with him. I don't want to give him up. I think I'll die if I lose him."

"But you've already lost him."

"Yes. But I hoped to hold him to me. When I learned that Mr. Jarrett had found someone to take the blame for that hit-and-run accident and that the person insisted upon meeting the man for whom he would take the blame, I decided to make a recording of what was said at the meeting—in the hope it would give me a hold over Mark."

"How'd you work it?" Kirby asked. "Did you bug Jarrett's private office?"

She nodded. "I knew Pete Dolan. He'd done several investigations for Mr. Jarrett. I hired him to rig up a tape recording. The machine was in my desk, in the reception room, and the microphone in the private office. All I wanted was to force Mark into breaking with that Forbes woman and marrying me. I thought that a threat to give the recording to the opposing political party would make him come to his senses."

"Come to his senses?"

"It's me he really loves, not her."

"All right. When did you change your mind and decide to blackmail him for money instead of for his love?"

"I never did, Dan," she said huskily, as though on the verge of tears. "I found that I couldn't make use of the recording. Even after he announced his engagement to her, I couldn't bring myself to use it. I couldn't do anything to hurt him. I was . . . I am too much in love with him."

"But Dolan was using it."

She nodded bleakly. "On Mark's request, Mr. Jarrett hired Dolan to find your ex-wife. He feared that you might make trouble for him when you were released and had neither your wife nor the ten thousand dollars he'd paid you. He thought if we told you where your wife was you'd go to her

and he'd no longer need to worry that you'd ever give it away that you'd taken the blame for him. Dolan found her. She'd run through the ten thousand dollars. She'd gambled away some of it in Reno and a man she was involved with in Los Angeles got most of the rest. She was about broke when Dolan located her. He made a play for her, and she was willing to play. He learned from her how you'd come by the ten thousand dollars, and he knows a good thing when he sees one.

"He brought Lila back here two weeks ago, making a big sex thing of it and promising her some easy money. He kept her out of sight, at his cottage. Then he came to see me. He was here in my apartment one evening when I got home from work. He'd searched it, found the tape recording. He'd taken it away, played it, then returned to ask me what use I'd made of it and to find out who else knew about it. He slapped me around when I threatened to tell Mark about the tape and that he had taken it." She shuddered. "He really hurt me, Dan."

"I'm crying for you," Kirby said. "Keep talking."

"He said that he would cash in on the recording and cut me in on the money," she went on. "He said that I was in whether or not I liked it. If I talked to Mark or anyone else, he would say that I was in it from the beginning—that I'd planned it. He also said that he'd scramble my looks if I talked, so that no man would ever want me. What could I do but go along with him, Dan?"

"Nothing, I guess," Kirby said, not so curtly now. "You're lucky he didn't kill you, like he did Lila and Jarrett."

"I'm living in fear of my life this very moment, Dan. That's why I tried to win your friendship. I thought that if I could get you to fall in love with me you'd help me handle Dolan." She moved toward him. "You still could, darling."

He regarded her uncertainly for a moment, wanting to believe her story but not quite sure that he did. During the past few minutes, the strain she'd been under for so long



had begun to tell. It ravished her beauty. She looked tortured, looked as though she were going to pieces.

"I'll help you as much as I can," he said. "At least, I'll back up your word against Dolan's. But I'm in a worse jam than you are, and I've got to look out for myself. I've got to get at Dolan to clear myself. Where is he?"

"Down at the bay," she said. "Not at his cottage, of course. At Mark's boys' camp, Camp Hiawatha. He's been hiding there ever since he killed Lila. It's only a few miles from his cottage, and it's closed for the winter."

"He trusts you enough to have told you where he's hiding?"

"He's got this hold on me, Dan. He'll tell the police that I had a part in the blackmail attempt and the murders if he's caught. He knows that I can't afford to give him away. Besides, he has to trust somebody. He called me this afternoon, ordered me to bring some food and whiskey out to him. And I had to do it. I drove out there after work, with the stuff he wanted. Then he was impossible. He wanted me to let him make love to me. He's a beast, Dan. He uses and abuses everybody. He knows I have to do what he wants, because I daren't cross him."

"But you just have. You've told me where he's hiding."

"You're not the police, Dan. You're on my side. You'll help me against him."

He studied her for a long moment, trying to convince himself that she was leveling with him. Her story had the ring of truth, but he had a lingering doubt. Finally he said, "I've no car. You'll have to drive me out there."

"All right. But he's armed, Dan. Have you a gun?"

"I've a gun. Let's go."

She said that she had to get her car keys, and went into the bedroom. When she returned, carrying a handbag, the telephone began to ring. She stared at the instrument, startled, then crossed the room to the desk on which it stood. From her end of the conversation, Kirby knew that it was the police. She exclaimed with simulated surprise and hor-

ror, and he guessed that the person calling had told her of Jarrett's murder. Several times she said both "yes" and "no," then finally, "all right, I'll be waiting."

She put down the phone, turned to Kirby with a look of genuine shock. "It was a policeman. They found out that I was Mr. Jarrett's secretary, and they're coming out here right away to ask me questions. The man who called wanted to know if I knew you, Dan!"

"Sure. Dolan gave my name to them when he made his anonymous phone call to them after killing Jarrett. I'm their murderer—they think. Let's go."

"I'd better wait for them, Dan."

"No, you don't," he said, crossing to her and taking her by the arm. "I don't trust you that far. I'm not taking any chances on what you might tell them about me. Come on. We're getting out of here."

## Chapter Seventeen

THEY HAD nothing to say to each other now. They were as strangers. The girl drove. He watched her handle the wheel of the four thousand dollar car and, despite his distrust, he felt sorry for her. She no longer had her well-heeled lover. Nor her job, now that Fred Jarrett was dead. And she was in trouble. She would have a tough time of it explaining her part in all that had happened, and it was possible that the police wouldn't believe that she'd done nothing more wrong than make that tape recording. It was possible that they would believe Dolan's story rather than hers.

But the police still didn't have Dolan; didn't even suspect him of Jarrett's murder and merely wanted to question him

about Lila's. He, Dan Kirby, was the man they wanted. And he, to clear himself, must deliver Dolan to them. He had some misgivings now about his ability to handle the man. At any rate, he was so deep in trouble that he had better be concerned for himself rather than for Donna Armand.

There was a stop sign at the Boulevard. Donna stopped for it, let a string of city-bound cars pass, then pulled out and headed in the same direction. Half a block from the intersection was a service station, closed for the night but with a car parked in the area before its pumps. The car was a Chevy hardtop, and its driver, a woman, sat behind the wheel. Anne? He wasn't sure. He hadn't gotten a good look at her.

He turned in the seat, looked back. The Chevy's lights came on and it nosed out into the Boulevard. It was Anne, he was now sure. And she intended to follow him and Donna. He swore under his breath.

"Step on it," he told Donna. "Somebody's following us."

She gave him a frightened look. "Who is it? The police?"

"No, not the police. . . . Just step on it."

Donna did step on it. She passed everything but a hot-rod with three teen-agers in the front seat. She held seventy until they were through the railroad underpass, then, slowing to forty, she turned onto Front Street. Kirby looked back. Several other cars also turned in the same direction, which led into a factory and warehouse district, but they were so far behind that he could not tell if one of them was Anne's Chevy. He hoped they had lost her.

They followed Front Street all the way across town, then swung over to the State highway running south from the city. Looking back, Kirby saw that there a half dozen cars strung out behind them. He saw each only as a pair of glaring headlights, and so was unable to determine if Anne's Chevy was among them. However, when Donna turned onto the county road leading to Rigby's Landing, a few minutes later, he saw no other car follow in that direction. He breathed easier then,



relieved that Anne was safely out of it.

"Have we lost them?" Donna asked.

"Yes."

Rigby's Landing was dark except for a light over the entrance of the dingy old hotel and a blue neon sign at the adjoining bar. Donna turned south along the shore road, passed Dolan's cottage where Lila had met her violent death, headed toward the boys' camp three miles from the Landing.

The camp area consisted of wooded, hilly country, and was entered through an imposing arch of brown fieldstone. Beyond was a narrow, unpaved road that ran straight and level for perhaps a quarter of a mile, then took them up a high slope in a steep, curving climb. Donna took the difficult grade at a cautious fifteen miles an hour, slowing even more at one extremely sharp bend. That portion of the road was tricky, dangerous. Kirby could understand why Donna sighed with relief when she came onto the summit of the hill.

The camp's main buildings—handsome log-and-stone structures—stood a hundred yards back from the crest of the slope. Beyond, at the edge of a dense woods, was a row of about two dozen small cabins. Donna pulled up in front of the largest building, evidently the Headquarters Building. The entire camp was dark.

Kirby found himself suddenly tense. His breathing had quickened, and so had the beating of his heart. He took the revolver from his pocket, and asked, in a whisper, "Do you have to go in to him or can you get him out here?"

"He'll come out, after I signal." She too whispered. "I've got to let him know it's I because other people sometimes come up here at night."

"Well, get him out," he told her. "Signal him."

He opened the door, slipped from the car, closed the door without slamming it. He crouched down beside the convertible, on the side away from the building. Donna sounded her horn in three short, light blasts. After a pause, she

sounded it three times more. She got from the car, stood by it.

After perhaps half a minute, Kirby heard Dolan's voice from the building. "Why'd you come back?" the man demanded. "Did something go wrong?"

"Nothing went wrong," Donna replied. "I just got to thinking about what you wanted this afternoon and decided that I could have been a little more accommodating."

"Yeah? That's a switch."

"A gal can change her mind, can't she?"

"Why didn't you phone that you were coming?" Dolan was closer now, and still moving toward the car. There was a crunch of gravel beneath his feet. "You're not trying to con me, are you, baby?"

"About what?" Donna said, laughing. "I was just trying to give you a pleasant surprise, Pete."

Dolan didn't reply to that. He was at the car now; Kirby felt his presence, and he guessed that Dolan was looking into the convertible to make sure that Donna had no one hiding in it.

"All right, baby. I'll have to buy it, I guess. Come to papa, eh?"

There was a long silence, then Donna gasped audibly and said, "That was good, but don't be quite so rough. Try it again—more tenderly, lover."

They were in each other's arms, and Kirby, knowing that Donna was giving him an opportunity to make his move, went fast around the rear of the car. Dolan was holding Donna to him, his hands on her hips and his mouth against hers. He must have sensed the presence of a third person, for he abruptly released her and whirled. There was a revolver in the waistband of his pants, and his right hand closed on its butt.

Kirby yelled, "Don't! Don't try it, Dolan!"

For the space of a few heartbeats he was sure that Dolan would try it, and that he would have to shoot the man. Then

Dolan took his hand away from the gun. The instant he did so, Donna reached out and took the revolver. She moved to Kirby, stood beside him.

Dolan now stared at her, his face ugly with rage. "You bitch!" he said hoarsely. "You double-crossing bitch!"

Donna moved closer to Kirby. She looked at him, her eyes oddly bright in the pallor of her face. She looked at the gun in his hand, then quickly and viciously swung her gun in a clubbing blow to his wrist. The pain was knife-sharp for Kirby. It numbed his whole arm, and his gun dropped from his hand.

Donna said, quite calmly, "Now take him, Dolan. Take him!"

Dolan lunged at Kirby, slugged him hard to the face. Kirby went reeling backwards and slumped against the car. Then he was hit again, and he crumpled to the ground dazed and helpless.

He started to rise, got to one foot and one knee. He stayed like that, his arms resting on the raised knee and his head bowed. He saw no reason to get up. He was as good as dead. They would murder him, as they had Lila and Fred Jarrett. When a slug slammed the life out of him, it would make no difference whether he was like this or on his feet. He didn't even look up.

But he sensed their nearness, Dolan closer and towering over him. He knew that there was a gun in Dolan's hand now, its muzzle staring at him malignantly.

Then, as he braced himself for the blast of a shot and the tearing impact of a bullet, he heard Dolan say, in perplexity, "Baby, I don't get it. You've got some explaining to do."

And Donna, her voice still unbelievably calm, "He got wise and came after me. I couldn't turn him over to the police, so I did the next best thing—brought him to you."

"For a second there, you had me worried."

"It was the only way, Pete."



"I guess," Dolan said, as though not quite certain of it. "What do I do with him now that I've got him?"

"That's for you to decide," she told him. "After all, you've got to do some of the figuring."

There was a moment of silence as Dolan no doubt did some figuring. Then, his voice sharper, "Cut those lights, and your motor too. There's a car down on the road, and I don't like the way it's crawling along."

Kirby blocked the driver's side of the convertible, so Donna went around to the other side, climbed in, switched off lights and motor. For a little while she and Dolan were silent again, watching the car on the shore road.

*Don't let it be Anne*, Kirby thought frantically. *If it is Anne, don't let her come up here!*

Donna said, "It's turning in the camp road, Petel!" Then, in a relieved tone, "No, it's going back. It just turned around there."

"Yeah," said Dolan. "But I don't like it. Maybe you were tailed."

Donna's tone was contemptuous now. "Quit being so jumpy," she told him. "It was just a couple of lovebirds." She laughed, and added with a coarseness Kirby hadn't thought her capable of, "A couple looking for a place to park and get tailed." She got from the car, came around it to stand by Dolan. "Have you decided yet what to do about our kneeling friend?"

Dolan didn't reply. He prodded Kirby with his foot, ordered him to get up. And added, "Come on, you. We're going inside."

Kirby got to his feet. He was still groggy from being slugged. He stared at the two, trying to gauge his chances of saving himself. They seemed slim indeed. Dolan had retrieved his gun from Donna, and she held the one Kirby had brought with him. She held it casually, expertly; obviously she hadn't the average woman's fear of firearms. His hope became a wobbly thing. Even if he got an opportunity to take

Dolan, she would get him. Kirby had no doubts about that.

Dolan said, "Move," and gave him a shove.

They went to the doorway of the building, Kirby in the lead, Dolan close behind him and Donna following.

At the door, which was closed, Dolan snapped, "Hold it, Kirby!" Then, almost as curtly to Donna, "You go in and turn on the light. You know which room."

She went to the door, opened it wide, disappeared into the thick darkness of the building. After several minutes a light came on inside, and again Dolan started Kirby walking with a shove. He shut the door after them, and they crossed an enormous room that so far as Kirby could tell was bare of furnishings. They entered the lighted room, a small one furnished as an office and also with a leather couch and a couple of armchairs. A blanket shrouded the one window, apparently as a blackout precaution. Dolan kicked the door shut, gestured toward the couch with his gun.

"Over there, you."

Kirby crossed the room and seated himself on the edge of the couch. Donna took a cigarette from a pack on the desk, lighted it, went and perched on the arm of a chair. She lay her revolver on the back of the chair. Dolan stood by the desk, which was littered with canned food, a loaf of bread, bottles of liquor. Dolan looked beat. His haggard face had a stubble of beard. His blonde hair was uncombed. His shirt was soiled, his slacks badly mussed. To Kirby, he looked as though he'd been hiding out for a month instead of only since last night.

After staring broodingly at Kirby for a long moment, he turned to the desk and, using his left hand while keeping his gun leveled with his right, he picked up one of the bottles and splashed a couple ounces of whiskey into a glass. He downed the whiskey at a gulp, shuddered, then put down the glass. He stared at Kirby again, this time with less uncertainty and indecision.

"Kirby, you're so stupid I feel sorry for you," he said

finally. "You'll be about the dumbest bastard they ever strapped into the hot seat."

"Don't underrate him, Pete," Donna said. "He's smarter than you think. He came to me with a proposition. A real bright idea."

"Yeah? What was it?"

"That I help him frame you for two murders. Lila's and Fred Jarrett's."

Dolan gasped at her. "Jarrett's?"

Puffing on her cigarette, Donna nodded. "Jarrett and I were working late at the office tonight," she said. "As I was leaving, Kirby showed up and said he wanted to talk to Jarrett. I didn't stay, but when I got outside the building I went straight to a phone and called the police. I suspected that he was going to jump Jarrett about the tape recording and accuse him of blackmailing Mark Leland. I felt sure that he would get rough with the boss, so I—"

Kirby jumped up, said, yelling it, "Why, you lying bitch. It was you!"

She quickly picked up her revolver, and Dolan leveled his and shouted, "Sit down, you, or I'll plug you! Sit down and keep your mouth shut!"

"Listen, Dolan; she's lying and—"

Dolan moved toward him, raising his gun threateningly. "Sit down and shut up before I slug you!"

Kirby sat down. He held his tongue, with an effort. The three of them were silent for several minutes, then Dolan told Donna to tell the rest of it.

She was willing. She seemed to relish the web of lies she was spinning to entangle Kirby. "Not long after I got home, he showed up. He said that he's quarreled with Jarrett and there'd been a scuffle. In the scuffle, his gun went off and Jarrett was killed. He said that afterward, after thinking over what Jarrett had told him, he'd become convinced that I'd made the recording and was blackmailing Mark Leland with your help. He'd left the office before the police arrived.



And he wanted me to help him frame you for the killing."

"How could he swing that when you'd told the cops about him being with Jarrett?"

"He didn't know I'd phoned them," Donna said. "Besides, he left the gun in Jarrett's office—your gun, Pete. The gun he found in your cottage and used on Lila."

Dolan stared at Kirby, cursed him.

Kirby stared at the girl, his mind still reeling with shock. He thought, *You, not he. . . . You killed Lila and Jarrett!* It was true, but he had difficulty believing it.

She went on, "So you can see that he's not stupid, Pete. And because he's not, you've got only one choice with him."

He eyed her uncertainly. "What choice?"

"To make sure he's dead before you turn him in."

"Dead?"

"What else?" she said, dropping her cigarette to the floor and flattening it with the toe of her shoe. She stood by the chair now, holding the snub-nosed revolver in front of her. "Alive, he'll do his best to pin the murders on you. Even if he fails at that, he'll wreck our plans for putting the bite on Mark Leland." She gave Kirby a half amused, half taunting smile. "I don't try to hold a man once he's lost interest in me, but I do make him pay for services performed. I'm sure that, Governor-to-be, Leland will be happy to pay and to go on paying to keep that tape recording out of the news."

Dolan was frowning at her. "Look, you're saying that I should kill Kirby?"

"Do you see anything else?" she said. "Of course, you don't. Listen, Pete, there are two ways to do it. One, you kill him in self-defense—which will make you a hero. Two, you can make it appear a suicide—which may be the smart thing."

Shaking his head, Dolan said, "Murder? No!"

She looked at him with annoyance, and with contempt. "Must I do all the planning and all the work too? What ails

you, anyway? You were a big man when you found out about my setup and then grabbed the tape from me. Fifty-fifty, you said. But you want half the take without half the responsibility!" She'd lost her calm; her voice rose, off key. "But you'll take half the responsibility, even though I'm the one who kills him. I'll see to that. If anything goes wrong and we're found out, I'll finger you for the killing!"

"You'd kill him?" Dolan said, staring at her as though such a thing was beyond belief. "You'd shoot a helpless man?"

Kirby said, "She'll do it, Dolan. After having killed two people already, why should she hesitate to kill a third? She'll kill me and end up letting you take the rap. She's got you fooled like she had me. Until I came here, I was sure that you'd killed Lila and Jarrett." He saw Dolan glaring at him, but this time he wasn't warned to silence. "And she did her best to keep me believing it. She murdered Lila, because Lila warned me that I was to be played for a patsy. She feared that Lila might get in touch with me again and tell me everything."

He paused, trying to see what effect his words had on Dolan. He couldn't tell. "Tonight Jarrett was dead when I got to his office," he went on. "His private office was dark, and somebody slugged me when I entered it. I took it for granted that a man—you, Dolan—had done the slugging. It didn't occur to me that a woman could hit so hard. But now, seeing how she handles a gun, I know that she's capable of it. She'll kill me, all right, just as she killed Lila and Jarrett!"

"You see?" Donna said. "You see how full of bright ideas he is? He'll fix it so that the police give us a hard time. Alive, he'll spoil everything for us. Dead, he'll not be able to hurt us."

"How long will you stay alive, Dolan, once Leland pays off?" Kirby said. "You don't think she'll share the take with you, do you?"

Donna spat an obscenity at him, swung her revolver up to line on him. "I've listened to enough from you!" she screamed, and squeezed the trigger.

## Chapter Eighteen

KIRBY saved himself, not by conscious thought, however, but through reflex action. As Donna's finger began to squeeze the trigger, he ducked low and hurled himself at her. Though the range was pointblank, the slug missed him by a scant inch or two. The blast of the shot still had his ears ringing when he slammed into the girl.

He heard her cry out as his arms encircled her legs, heard her scream again as he lifted her. Her arms flailed and the gun flew from her hand. He dumped her across the back of the armchair, then heaved at her so that both she and the chair toppled. She cried out again, in pain this time, as she landed.

He whirled toward Dolan, caught him gripped by indecision. But as Kirby lunged at him, Dolan swung his revolver like a club. Kirby jerked his head away from the blow, took the impact on his left shoulder. There was a burst of pain, but he absorbed it and grappled with Dolan.

They reeled one way and another in a savage straining against each other, Dolan trying to use his gun and Kirby trying to thwart him. They collided with the desk, and Kirby was bent back over it.

He jabbed Dolan twice to the face, hard, and Dolan, hurt, broke away. Kirby hurled himself after the man, this time getting a grip on the barrel of the gun in Dolan's right hand. From the corner of his eye, Kirby saw Donna pick herself



up from the floor. He had a moment of fright, expecting her to go after her gun.

Instead, she did something that puzzled him. She ran behind the desk and grabbed up Dolan's jacket which had been draped over the chair there. Then she ran toward the door.

That much Kirby saw. He failed to see her flee the room, for now Dolan kned him in the groin and he was lost in a wave of agony. But through his pain, he kept his grip on the gun. And with his right hand he caught Dolan by the throat. He dug his fingers into Dolan's throat, using what strength remained as pain sapped him. Half-blind because of the pain, he was barely able to see that Dolan too was now in agony. The man's face was contorted with it. And in his eyes, bulging now and turning glassy, was something beyond pain—fear.

In panic, Dolan let loose of the gun and used both his hands to wrench the throttling hand from his throat. The instant he was free, he went reeling away, gasping, choking, retching. He slumped against the wall, bent over, his own hands at his throat.

Kirby too reeled backwards, his pain only slowly diminishing. He leaned against the desk, took the gun from his left hand into his right and aimed it at the man against the wall. He waited, for his pain to go away and for Dolan to recover.

Dolan finally came erect and stared at him dully, no fight left. He saw the gun, and his eyes mirrored fear again.

Kirby said, "I told you once. I'll tell you again. She killed Lila and she killed Jarrett."

"All right."

"And I'm getting the police out here."

Dolan did not comment on that. He said, "Where is she?"

"She ran out. With your coat. What was in it—the tape?"

Dolan nodded. "The tape. What else?"

Kirby gestured with the gun. "We're going after her," he said, "You first. Move!"

They hurried from the office, crossed the wide main room to the front door which Donna had left open. Just as they reached the doorway, her convertible took off as though jet-propelled. Donna sped across the parking area, swung onto the steep, narrow road.

"Where's your car?" Kirby demanded of Dolan.

"Around back of the building."

"Come on. We're going after her. That tape recording is evidence."

They started around the side of the building, then were halted by a great, explosive crash from the slope. Both men guessed what had happened. Driving like a woman bereft of her senses, Donna had taken a curve at too great a speed, failed to make it, piled up the convertible. They ran to the road and down it, coming to the wreckage of the convertible midway along the slope. The car had failed to navigate the sharpest of the road's curves. It had hurtled off the road, plunged down the slope for a distance of perhaps fifty feet, into a clump of trees. It was wrapped around the trunk of one of the larger trees, smashed beyond repair. And the girl in it was a twisted, broken thing.

They lifted her from the wreckage, lay her upon the ground. They thought her dead, but Dolan discovered a faint heartbeat. He said something about phoning for an ambulance.

"Go call one," Kirby told him, but wondered if it wouldn't be better for Donna, if no attempt were made to save her life.

A State Police car arrived in a matter of minutes. It had been on the way even before Dolan made his phone call. Kirby learned, later, that Anne Sorensen had managed to follow the white convertible out from town. He had failed to see her car on the road to Rigby's Landing because she'd taken the precaution of turning off the Chevy's lights. After spotting the convertible up at the boys' camp, Anne had

turned back to the Landing to phone Sergeant Hanlon. She had feared that Kirby wouldn't be able to cope with both Donna and Dolan. Hanlon had done as she'd asked, dispatched a cruiser to the camp.

But it was much later that Kirby got an explanation from Anne. Before he saw her, an ambulance rushed Donna to a hospital, and the troopers took him and Dolan and the tape recording to the Barracks.

Kirby was questioned alone. He was questioned over and over, by Sergeant Hanlon and by other officers. He answered every question put to him. He made a complete statement, and signed it willingly. He made no attempt to cover for Mark Leland, despite the threats the man had made.

He was cleared of the murders. Donna regained consciousness during the hour before her death at five after six that morning. Aware that she was dying, she confessed to killing both Lila and Jarrett. Dolan confessed to the black-mail plot after being confronted with Donna's statement and with the tape recording which the troopers had found in his jacket when removing it from the wrecked convertible.

A harassed young man from the District Attorney's office was present. His name was Courtney, and it was the tape recording and Kirby's statement about taking the rap for Mark Leland that had him upset.

Courtney was of the same political party as Mark Leland and one of his active supporters. Being a lawyer, he was accustomed to making deals. In an attempt to cover for Leland, he suggested a deal to Sergeant Hanlon: mention of Kirby's taking the rap for Leland should be omitted from his statement and the tape recording should be "misaid." In return, the District Attorney's office would not take action against Kirby and no adverse publicity would be given the State Police for having arrested the wrong man for the hit-and-run fatality. Courtney lost his temper when Hanlon refused to go for such a deal, accusing the sergeant of playing politics.



That was the wrong thing to say to Sergeant Hanlon. He gave Courtney a verbal blasting, telling him that in the fifty-three years, since the founding of the State Police, no governor had tried to use the force politically. He'd be damned if he would let the State Police be accused of playing politics by the supporters of a man not yet—and now not likely to be—elected governor. He ended up by ordering Courtney from his office.

With the D. A.'s man gone, Hanlon turned a sour look on Dan Kirby. "I had it in mind to lecture you, Dan," he said, his tone acid, "but small good that would do. Nothing I could say would keep you out of trouble. That's for sure."

Kirby flushed, stung because Hanlon was treating him like a teen-aged punk. He said, "Look, Sergeant, don't you think it's possible that I'm bright enough not to make the same mistake twice? I know that I'm to blame for this whole mess. If I hadn't taken the rap for Leland, three people wouldn't have met violent death. I see that. I've learned my lesson."

Hanlon studied him for a long moment, then some of the angry hardness went out of his broad face. "I'm hoping you've learned your lesson, Dan. I don't want to be on your neck again for any reason. As for your being to blame . . . no, I wouldn't say you're to blame for anything except letting yourself be played for a sucker. You know who's really to blame, to my mind?" He paused, then answered his own question, "Mark Leland."

"I needed the money, Sergeant," Kirby said. "But I thought *then*, that he was a great man who shouldn't have to take the rap for what seemed more like a mistake than a real crime."

"And now?"

"Now I think . . . I know he's a phony."

Hanlon smiled thinly. "This is the age of phoniness, Dan. Few if any of our public figures are what their publicity build-ups claim. A couple troopers are on their way to pick Leland up. He'll no sooner be brought in than a whole bat-

tery of legal-eagles will swoop down on the place. We'll be threatened, intimidated, offered deals. The pressure will be terrific."

"And what will happen?"

"We'll give Leland a bad time, but whether or not action is taken against him is up to the District Attorney's office. My idea is that the whole thing will be forgotten. But there's one way to hit back. The story will break in the newspapers today. I'll see to that. And the publicity should bring Leland's political career to an abrupt halt." Hanlon was silent again for a time. Then he smiled, suddenly friendly, and said, "By the way, Dan, you can leave any time you want."

Kirby stood up, turned toward the door, then faced around. "There's just one thing more, Sergeant. Leland made threats against me. Now that I've talked, he's likely to carry out those threats."

Hanlon smiled again, somewhat wryly. "One of the reasons I'm having him brought in is to discuss you with him," he said. "Where you're concerned, I'm going to brainwash the phony. By the time he leaves here, he won't have a single thought of revenge. He'll have forgotten you exist. Okay?"

"Okay. And thanks, Sergeant."

"See you around, Dan."

Kirby grinned, for the first time in he didn't know how long. "I'd rather not see you, Sergeant," he said, and left the office.

He felt safe now. If no action was taken against Mark Leland, none would be taken against him, either, for having perjured himself and obstructed justice. He was luckier than he deserved, he supposed. He was even luckier than he knew. This he discovered when coming from the Barracks. A now very familiar Chevy hardtop was parked outside the building, its driver behind the wheel. She was dozing. It was 8:15 A.M., and Anne, like himself, had missed a night's sleep. She awoke as he opened the door and got in beside her. She gave him a drowsy smile.

"Ready to go home, Dan?"

"Free to go home," he told her. "But you didn't have to wait."

Anne started the motor, saying, "I *did* have to. I had something to tell you. It's this. . . . I've decided that I am in love with you. Also, that you need me to keep you out of trouble."

He grinned at her. "Something tells me that I'm bound to get in trouble *with* you," he said. "But I've a hunch it'll be fun. Take me home, honey. . . . I'm ready and willing."