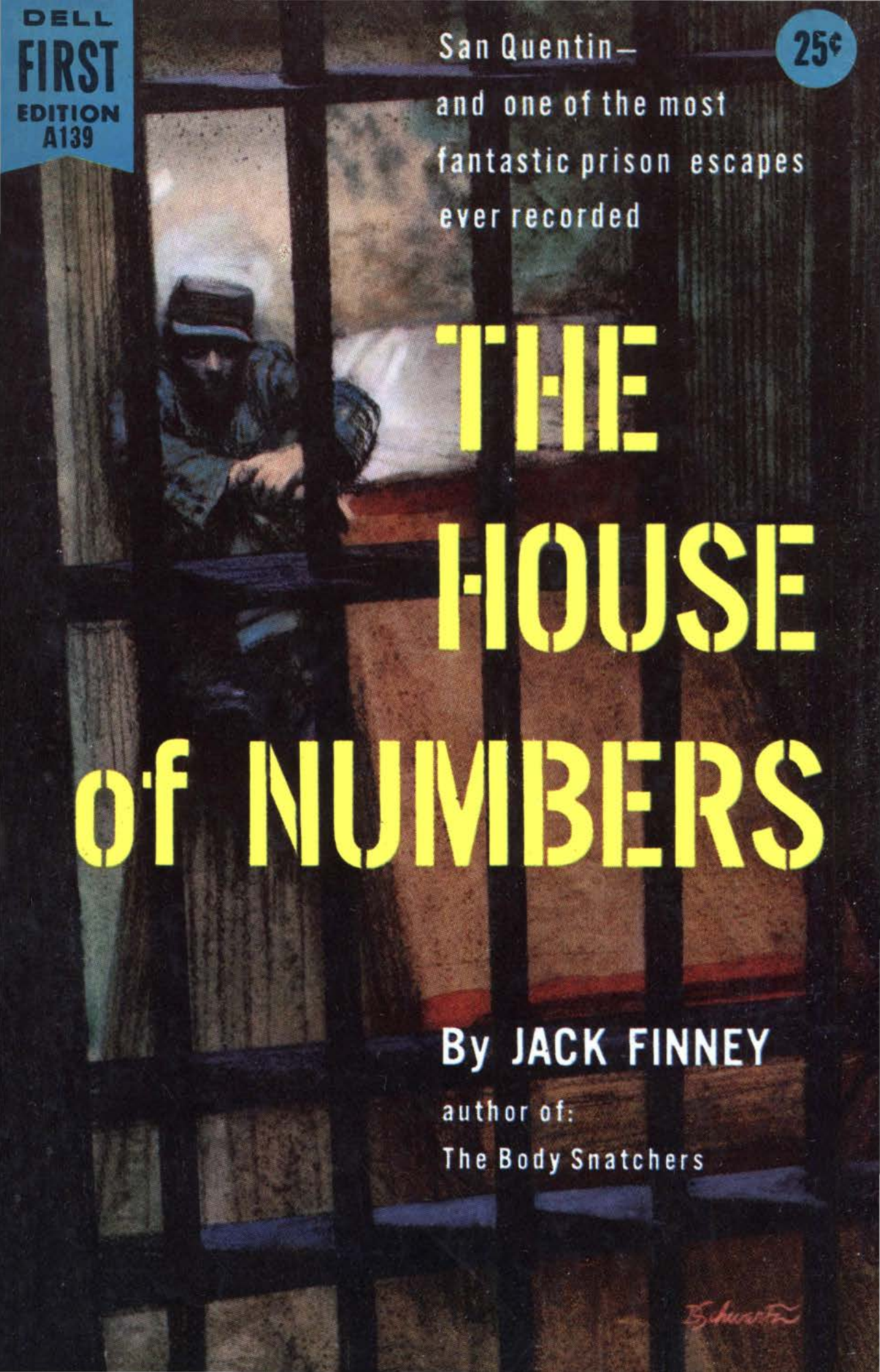
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THE
HOUSE
of NUMBERS
By JACK FINNEY
author of:
The Body Snatchers

SAN QUENTIN

I've got to make my older brother understand: He *has* to get me out of here. It's not the walls, not the monotony, not the guards, not the cell the size of a closet.

It is, very simply, a matter of life and death. It's a guard who's been assaulted . . . and according to California law, it's death for a lifer to strike a guard.

That's me they're talking about. I'm the lifer.

And as I sit here looking at him, I know he'll do it—for his kid brother. He always was a sucker.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Body Snatchers

Five Against the House

THE HOUSE OF NUMBERS

Jack Finney

A Dell First Edition • an original novel

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This is a work of fiction, and, except for the authorized use of the name of Warden Teets, all names and characters in the story are fictional, and any resemblance to real persons is purely coincidental.

Dedication: To my friend, HARLEY O. TEETS, Warden of the California State Prison, San Quentin

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1

I MOVED THE OUTBOARD RUDDER HANDLE slowly to the right, and the little round-bottomed rowboat swung out of Raccoon Strait in a wide slow curve—then suddenly we saw it. Rounding the easternmost point of the Tiburon peninsula, we saw the glow of pale orange light far ahead in the night, near the western edge of San Francisco Bay. As I straightened the tiller again, holding the nose of the little boat on that faint orange glow, I felt the girl on the narrow seat beside me go rigid.

Glancing at her profile in the faint starlight, I saw that her face muscles were set and her eyes were closed; she was scared; but I said nothing, offering not a word or gesture of comfort. Far behind us and to our left, across the calm black Bay—I turned on the seat to look—hung the strung-out orange jewels of the Golden Gate Bridge lights; then one by one they disappeared as the peninsula beside us cut them from view. Directly behind us, miles to the rear, lay the longer span of the orange-lighted Bay bridge, and rising up behind it, the patterned lighting of the streets of Berkeley. Over the

minutes the orange glow far ahead grew steadily in size; and with the motor growling away behind us, we sat in utter silence, watching it. Here and there on the black surface of the water ahead, and far off at the right toward Richmond, lay the green and red lights of buoys, and we could hear their bells now and then. So far as I could see, we were the only moving craft on the enormous black surface of the Bay.

Then presently the orange glow ahead began taking on form and definition, and after a little longer, less than a mile from it now, we could see what it was. It was a line of great floodlights mounted on standards higher than telephone poles, and shining down on an immense peach-colored strange-looking building which rose up out of the spade-shaped point of land we were approaching. Before it sat a smaller structure of the same material and color. The motor at low speed now, we moved closer still for five or six minutes. Now the great peach-colored building seemed very close; a long long building with immensely tall windows; a strange sort of structure unlike any, I was certain, either of us had ever seen anywhere else.

"Well," I said quietly, angrily, "there it is," and I shut off the motor, and we sat in a sudden silence still moving through the black water with the dying momentum of the boat, staring at the silent buildings ahead. High in the air before them at the water's edge, stood a glass-windowed hut raised on immensely tall stiltlike legs; and off to the left, fading into the darkness beyond the reach of the floodlights, were more buildings, and these were tinted a delicate shade of green.

Staring at them and at the great peach-colored building, the girl on the seat beside me tried to speak casually. "It's colored," she murmured, "I can never get over that; it's not gray but colored, and in pastels."

"Yeah," I said coldly, "San Quentin, the pastel prison; it's almost pretty from here. Take a good look at it," I said brutally. "Fill your eyes with it; you can actually see the bars on the windows now; notice?" She nodded, and I saw her eyes close. "And off to the left"—I stopped, waiting, forcing her to open her eyes again, then I pointed—"you can see part of the walls. There are men up there, and they're carrying guns. It's all *real!*" I said suddenly, almost shouting it, "And you're looking at it now, San Quentin prison; there's nothing more real in the world. *Look* at it; we're actually talking about taking a man out of there! Actually helping Arnie escape from San Quentin! Take a *good* look, because you're looking at the kind of place you'll end up in instead—*you*, yourself, Ruth Gehlmann, in the women's prison at Corona!—if anything at all goes wrong." I didn't let up on her. "See that green light?" I said softly, my arm pointing in the faint light of the stars; and she lifted her face to stare at the globe of vivid green light mounted high on a standard over the prison. "It's green now because all's quiet at San Quentin; every last man accounted for. But once that light turns red, if you helped do it, you're in the worst trouble of your life; and you may never be free of the consequences as long as you live."

I stopped then, letting up on her, and on myself, and turned away to stare off across the stern of the boat, giving her a little time alone with herself to think. Stretching for miles behind me lay the widest portion of San Francisco Bay, ink black and silent, and the city far beyond it—the tiny lights of its homes where human beings lived and moved—seemed infinitely removed from me now. Overhead in the clear night sky the needle-pricked blue lights of the stars seemed cold and remote, older than time, unconcerned with me or the whole human race. And I suddenly saw us, two people

in a tiny boat on the vast black surface of the Bay, utterly alone out here, no one knowing we were here or why, and I finally understood completely and at last that what we had thought we could do was impossible. Rescue my brother from San Quentin prison—the very thought now, as I sat lost in the immensity of the great black Bay, was chilling. There was a beginning mist on the water now, cold and chill, and far off across the Bay a foghorn began to sound, mournful and menacing. Glancing up at the remote immensity of the stars then, I felt angry and alone and helpless; and I was afraid. The deep, double-noted, warning growl sounded again, and it frightened me to think of how far I had come in only two days without ever really thinking, until this moment as I sat here in the gathering mist staring at San Quentin prison.

My name is Benjamin Harrison Jarvis. I'm twenty-six years old, a stocky man several inches under six feet, weighing a hundred and seventy pounds; with black hair, blue eyes, and an ordinary, average American face—and I'm no faster thinking than the next guy, I know. But still, it was hard to believe now that less than an hour before, lying in the darkness in a strange bed and room, I had thought I was ready to help a man escape from San Quentin; hadn't even questioned that it was possible to do.

Lying there, then, trying to sleep, I'd heard the snap of a light switch and the click of high heels in the hall just outside the thin wood of my door; in my mind I could see the sleek nylon legs that were making this sound, and the delicate fine-boned ankles that—gradually at first, then suddenly—swelled upward into rounded perfection. An instant later, as a switch clicked on in the front bedroom we'd decided would be hers, I tried to remember her face as it looked when we'd introduced ourselves this morning. First, I re-

membered her hair: very heavy and long, nearly touching her shoulders, and the kind of yellow mixed with darker strands that only genuinely blond hair ever has; then in my mind I saw her prominent cheek bones, her pale magnificent complexion, and gray intelligent eyes.

Her heels clicked down the hall toward me again and stepped onto the tile of the bathroom floor near my door. I heard the medicine cabinet open, then the door close; and suddenly I realized how intensely aware I was of these sounds and of the girl living under this roof with me now who made them. I tried to ignore them and remind myself of the only reason we were here together. But the door opened again; the steps sounded once more on the wooden hall floor, then stopped. There was a moment's complete silence, then I heard them approaching. A very light tapping sounded on my door; it opened quietly; and the girl's handsome figure stood sharply silhouetted against the hall light. "Asleep?" she whispered.

"No."

She hesitated a moment, then said, "Ben? Do you ever—? Are you at all—frightened?"

"Oh," I said slowly, "I don't know. Yeah, a little, I guess. Why? You frightened?"

She nodded, standing there in the doorway against the hall light. "Yes, some," she said quietly. Then suddenly she said, "Oh, Ben, yes, I am! I'm scared! Terribly! Tonight after you left the living-room, I sat there. The house was so quiet and strange, it was as though I had my first chance all day to really think, and— Ben, *talk* to me!" She moved suddenly to my bed and sat down on its edge facing me—"Tell me it'll be all right!" Her voice dropped. "Oh, Ben, I *am* scared."

In the faint light from the hall I could see her face straining for control. I sat up, my mind searching for words. She leaned forward suddenly, hands rising to

her face, and dropped her forehead on my shoulder. Automatically my arms rose and went around her as she huddled against me for comfort, and I patted her back gently and began to murmur. "Take it easy," I said soothingly, "relax. You've got a right to be scared, you've got a right to let down now and shed a few tears." My voice was a monotone, the sound of it more important than the words—"All in one day you move out of your apartment, move in here with a stranger, and the worst is still to come; why shouldn't it get to you? But you'll be okay in the morning; things will look better; you'll be all right, you'll see." I went on like that; and presently she wriggled her shoulders under my arms with a little shuddering sigh and lay there against me, breathing quietly.

For a moment longer I held her, sitting up there in bed, then arched my chest to push her gently erect. She looked up, face puzzled, as I put my hands on her shoulders and, leaning back, held her at arms' length. "Go to bed now," I said, and though I smiled to soften the effect, I hadn't quite kept the gruffness out of my voice. "Go ahead now," I said as she continued to stare at me. There was an edge of irritation in my voice I couldn't help, and I knew I had to explain it. "Look," I said gently, "I know how you feel, and I want to help you, but—damn it, Ruth," I burst out, "you're a beautiful woman! Not just pretty and sort of attractive, but beautiful! And we're *alone* here, absolutely alone, living and sleeping under the same roof, and now here you are sitting on my bed—" I stopped suddenly. "I'm sorry," I said then. "I'm very sorry, but—"

She was nodding, the light from the hall yellow in her hair. "Of course," she said quietly. "I just didn't think. It didn't enter my mind at the moment; I was scared; I wanted comfort; but— Well, of course." She stood up quickly from the bed, nervously smoothing

her skirt. "I'm sorry, Ben. And I'm all right now." She managed to smile down at me then turned away toward the doorway.

She reached it and walked through it, while I stood staring after her; but now, for the first time in the strange and hectic past two days, things seemed to be falling into place or coming into focus in my mind, or something; I wasn't quite sure what I was thinking. "Wait," I said, and she stopped to stare back at me. "You're not all right," I said quietly. "And neither am I. Get your coat." I tossed back the light blankets suddenly. "We're going to take a little ride."

The boat and outboard belonged to the man whose furnished house I'd rented the day before, an Army man transferred to Germany. Since half the people in Marin County own boats, the boat and motor went with the house. It took us less than ten minutes, after I'd dressed, to reach them. We drove south on 101 from Mill Valley to Sausalito—the first town past the Golden Gate Bridge on the Marin County side—and I parked at the north end of the town's single business street, shut down now for the night. Then I led Ruth across the narrow strip of weed-grown land which separates the street from the Sausalito dock area. Nothing, I noticed, had really changed through the years here so far as I could see; way off to the right, against the night sky, I could see the black silhouette of the old ferry-slip, still there though it's been unused ever since Golden Gate Bridge opened. This area—dozens of floating docks projecting out into the Bay, each lined on both sides with pleasure boats of every size and kind—was a gay festive place on summer weekends. I'd been here often; my brother and I went to school in San Francisco. But now the whole area was dark, deserted, and almost utterly silent. The bare masts of the sailboats, moving in shallow arcs on the never-still tide-

water, were just visible against the dark sky.

On the wide wooden walkway alongside the docks, I found in a long row of them, the little wooden storage locker with the number painted on its door, which the key the real-estate agent had given me would unlock. Then I brought out oars, motor, and a half-filled gas can, led Ruth out onto the nearest dock, and found the little rowboat. It had *Albatross* painted on its prow.

For the first ten minutes I rowed, dipping the oars very quietly, heading out into the bay to the southeast, Ruth in the back seat facing me. A quarter-mile out, I attached the outboard. It started on the fourth try, and I sat down beside Ruth, my hand on the tiller. Sausalito lay well behind us now, diminishing in size, the tiny lights of its homes scattered on the hillsides that enclosed it. Far ahead, extending out from the edge of the crisscrossed lights that were the streets of San Francisco toward the Oakland side of the Bay, were the lights of the Bay Bridge; and I could see the buildings, floodlighted like billboards, of Alcatraz Island. It took half an hour to reach and pass through Raccoon Strait —the black silhouette of lightless Angel Island now close at hand to the right; the scattered lights of the villages of Belvedere and Tiburon on the mainland of Marin at the left. I'd known this whole area well as a boy, and for a short time it was almost good to be back. Then we rounded the far point of the Tiburon peninsula; the pale orange glow of San Quentin revealed itself; and I knew I wanted to be anywhere but where I was.

Now, our boat motionless on the water before the great prison, Ruth turned to look at me, and I said softly, "This morning when I told you what Arnie wanted you said yes, you'd help. But that doesn't count, Ruth; it came at you too fast. But now you've had time to think. What about it, Ruth?"

For a moment she turned to look at the floodlighted prison again, then she was shaking her head. "I can't," she whispered. "Ben, you're right. I can't do it!" and she covered her face with her hands. Presently she lowered them and looked at me, eyes bitter. "Maybe I ought to," she said quietly. "I think I should. I think I ought to. But"—her shoulders moved helplessly—"I can't, that's all. It's absurd; but I don't want to be in prison any more than Arnie does!"

" 'Ought to'?" I said. "Why 'ought to'? Why should you help Arnie?"

She didn't answer for several moments; just sat, shoulders slumped, staring over the misting water at the prison. Then she said, "You know why Arnie's in San Quentin, of course, but I doubt if he ever told you why he did what he did." She turned to me again. "Ben, the first time I met Arnie I liked him, but after I'd seen him a few times I almost decided to stop. I liked him more than ever, but I'd begun to wonder if he wasn't attracted to me because"—she shrugged a little—"I had some sort of social standing or whatever you might call it. My family's been in San Francisco a long time; people familiar with such things recognize my name as one of the old ones here, and my people have money. They're not wealthy, none of them, but their homes are pleasant, expensive, and I think Arnie was impressed with all that."

I nodded. "I expect he was."

She nodded, too, and said, "Well, when the time came to pick out an engagement ring, I told Arnie I didn't want a big one; I knew he didn't make much money, or have much. I said I wanted just a small one-carat diamond. Ben," she said pleadingly, "what would you say a one-carat diamond engagement ring would cost?"

I shrugged. "I never priced them; several hundred dollars, I suppose."

She nodded. "That's what I thought; two hundred and fifty dollars, maybe, and I didn't really want him to spend that much. Well, we went to Shreve's in San Francisco and looked at rings, a trayful of them. And as a matter of fact, I rather liked one of the smallest they had, but Arnie just grinned and shook his head, glancing at the clerk. That ring was too small for a member of one of California's oldest families, he said, and I could have slapped him. He was impressing the clerk, a man he'd never even seen before. We finally picked a ring; I admired it, holding my hand off to look at it; the clerk admired it—it *was* beautiful—and Arnie said we'd take it; what did it cost? Well, the clerk wrote down figures on a little pad—I thought he'd never stop—added them all up, then smiled and said thirteen hundred and eighty-five dollars. I had my hand up to pull off the ring, starting to speak, but Arnie had hold of my arm so tight it hurt, and when I saw his eyes I knew I didn't dare speak.

"Ben! He just smiled at the clerk, nodding his head, and asked if they'd take his check. 'Of course!' the clerk said, as though the whole world knew Arnie's check was good for any amount he chose to make it. But since Arnie had no account there, we'd have to wait a few moments till the store manager okayed the check. Well, now I know what Arnie knew then. They'd have phoned the bank from the store office and found out immediately whether his check was good or not. But Arnie just smiled and said not to bother; he had to stop at his bank anyway today, and he'd simply cash a check himself and come back with the cash.

"Ben, I argued with Arnie outside the store—we almost fought. I felt certain that thirteen hundred dollars must be nearly all the money he had; it never

occurred to me that he didn't have it at all. But he insisted he was going to buy me that ring, and no other, and—to tell the truth, I was pleased, and flattered, and touched that he wanted to buy me a ring he couldn't afford. And he bought it; that afternoon, just before they closed, and from the very same clerk; he made sure of that. Ben, he cashed checks at I don't know how many bars, small grocery stores, liquor stores, anywhere and everywhere he could, and paid for that ring with cash." There were tears in her eyes. "Why in the world did he *do* it, Ben? What was *wrong* with him? He moved right afterward, from one furnished apartment to another. But of course they found him, arrested and tried him, and—"

"And sent him to Quentin for fraud," I said. "In California cashing bad checks is considered slightly worse than murder."

She was crying. "I feel responsible, Ben; if it hadn't been for me—"

I cut her off. "No, you're not, and you know it. You may feel you are; I don't doubt that you do. But Arnie did this himself. Why, all his life," I began, then stopped, and said, "Well, maybe I'll tell you about that some time. But I'm not surprised, Ruth. I was surprised the day I first heard he'd passed bad checks; Arnie's no fool. But I'm not surprised now at the reason; Ruth, he *couldn't* say no to buying that ring, not Arnie. But you're not responsible. Anyway," I said angrily, "he ought to be almost due for parole now; and instead he's got himself another two or three years on top of his first sentence. Attempted escape," I said bitterly. "Did you make him do that; was that your fault, too? Why, damn it, he didn't even begin to know what he was doing. He had no chance, they found him hiding out in the prison in less than an hour! And now it's costing him a good two or three years, and we're

supposed to rescue him from that! Well, like hell we will. Arnie's my brother, I'm damn sorry for him, and I'd do a lot for him. But he has no more chance of escaping now than he did the first time. Less, in fact; now he's a maximum-security man. Anyway, I didn't put him in there, neither did you, and we're not going to end up in there with him. Escape," I said angrily. "Help Arnie escape. It's fantastic, it's ridiculous, and why I didn't know it the moment he asked me is more than I can tell you.

"Why, damn it, Ruth, do you know what he did?" I said. "I drove up here Saturday; I come up from L. A. every month to visit him. I saw him Sunday, and we talked in the visitor's room for nearly the full hour; just chitchat, as always; nothing important. And he waited till the last few minutes to spring this on me! He had to escape he was suddenly telling me; he *had* to, and I was to get hold of you, and we had to help him. There was no time for questions. He told me how to reach you; that we both had to get our time free somehow, move into Marin County close to the prison, and be ready to help. I'm to come back tomorrow to hear the rest." I shook my head. "Then the guard was tapping me on the shoulder, I had to stand up and leave, and I left with this terrible feeling of urgency—you know how Arnie can communicate that to you, you know how excited he gets; I didn't have time to think! I phoned my boss in L. A. from a phone booth outside the prison, and just quit my job; I didn't know what else to do. I phoned my landlady and arranged to have her express my things up here. I visited real-estate agents and rushed around looking at furnished places for rent all afternoon, and took the house in Mill Valley. And in between, at every available phone booth I came to, I phoned you all afternoon and evening, and couldn't reach you. Then today—well, you

know what today's been like."

"I know"—she nodded slowly. "When you woke me, ringing my doorbell— Ben, you started talking while I was still half asleep. And then all I could think of was what I had to do, get to the office, and arrange to start my vacation—*that* took some talking! I told them my mother was very ill. Then packing, and moving into a house with an absolute stranger—" She shook her head again.

"Well, there's time to think now," I said tiredly, "and it's about time we started to. Damn it," I said helplessly, "other men serve out their time in prison! Arnie can do it, too, without dragging us in there with him. This is just a sudden idea of his; he said so! And he doesn't know how he'd escape or even go about trying. Escape from San Quentin," I said contemptuously. "Look at it! It's impossible to get a man out of there; at least for us, it is. But it'd be damn easy to get into it trying. Come on," I said, winding the starter rope, "let's get the hell out of here. I'll drive you home in the morning, then go talk to Arnie, and tell him to grow up and behave." I yanked the rope hard. The motor caught, and I swung the rudder to head full throttle back the way we'd come, wondering what I could say to Arnie in the morning.

I looked back once, and there it stood in the night—San Quentin—looking like a fortress, and I knew it *was* a fortress, high-walled and prowled by men with guns. Once more I glanced at the remote stars, and then at the vast reaches of silent water all around me, and I've never felt so small and alone. It was cold now, the mist gathering and drifting on the Bay, and I shivered. And as I did, I felt a sudden unanswerable stab of almost certain knowledge that we weren't finished at all—not as simply as this—and that somehow the frightened

tired girl beside me and I were going to have to attack the great fortress behind us alone. And with my hand on the tiller, steering out into the blackness, I felt sick and afraid.

2

They had to help me escape. They had to, they had *to, they HAD to!* The phrase formed itself in my brain over and again till I was sick of the sound of it, and it lost its meaning.

I had said it for the first time ten seconds after I woke up, the morning after I talked to Ben. It was six-thirty, and I lay listening to the big hollow rumble of the cell block waking, my eyes still closed trying to hold onto sleep, but I couldn't; I never can. Then a guard just outside on the walkway, called, "Jarvis?" and though I told myself he could be calling my name for any of a lot of reasons, I couldn't fool myself. I knew—I absolutely knew—and it was then the words first uttered themselves in my mind: *They've got to help me escape.*

I turned my head on the pillow to look at the front of the cell just behind me. Al was standing at the barred door already dressed; just outside, the guard was looking down at the hectographed list in his hand, then glancing up at the cell numbers over the doors. I knew what he was doing: passing out the morning ducats, hurrying to get through before unlock; but I was in no

hurry to get the one he had for me, and Al had no interest in helping him.

It was the little Swede, and now, finger moving across his list, he had to find the cell number opposite my name, then look up to find the door with 1042 stenciled above it. "Jarvis?" he repeated, stepping to the door and peering in. "One of you guys Jarvis?"

Al didn't answer; just looked at him. I said, "Yeah."

"Ducat for you." He passed it between the bars, and I reached up from my bunk and took it; a little printed cardboard stub headed *Inmate Pass,* the blanks filled in with my name, number, and the time and place I had to report. Deliberately, I didn't look at it for a moment, trying to think of something to hope for, of some other reason why I might be getting a ducat: a new work assignment, a cell change, anything. But when I lowered my eyes, it said what I knew it would say. It was for nine-fifteen this morning, on the Porch—today the Disciplinary Committee was meeting.

"Beef ducat?" Al said.

"Yeah." I looked up at him. He's a tall thin man with a deep tan and white hair, neither old nor young-looking; it would be hard to guess his age. I'm twenty-eight, just under six feet, and fairly husky; black hair and blue eyes, like my brother. "Yeah," I said to Al, "but they got no beef on me."

He just looked at me, knowing what this ducat must be about as well as I did. "Look," he said softly, "they had anything on that, you'd be in isolation right now." That was true, I realized. "They're just trying to pressure you," he said, "don't worry too much about it." I nodded and began to dress.

Unlock at seven, then we had breakfast; ground meat on toast, only that isn't what we call it. I reported for work in the furniture factory, and at nine o'clock showed my ducat to the screw in charge of my work

crew. He's a young guy, conscientious as hell, and I had to wait while he got "The Sheet" from the office—the hectographed list of all special inmate movements that day—and found my name on it. Ducats are forged sometimes, but not to go to the Porch, but he didn't know that yet. I was on the list. He nodded; and I walked out of the factory and down to the gate, showed my ducat to to gate bull and walked over to the Captain's garden, and the Porch just outside his office. A dozen or so inmates were already there in blue jeans and work shirts like me, lounging around, waiting—it was a nice sunny morning. Several were from my block but I didn't know them.

I showed my ducat to the guard in charge, then glanced into the Captain's office through the big plate-glass window. He was there, standing behind his desk shuffling through some papers, wearing as always a very neat, well-pressed tan uniform and his cap with the gold insignia. He's a thin-faced, quiet-spoken, smart-as-hell man, maybe forty-five years old. Allingham and Fengle sat one at each side of his desk. The Captain looked up, saw me, and deliberately leaned forward a little, squinting, as though to make sure it was me. For a moment we stood staring at each other through the big sheet of glass; and I couldn't help it: my stomach contracted into a tight hard knot.

At nine-thirty the buzzer sounded; the guard stuck his head into the office; the Captain spoke; then the guard turned and called, "Cahill." A heavy-set guy maybe thirty-five years old, with deep permanent circles under his eyes, pushed himself erect from the porch railing and walked into the bare little office to stand before the Captain's desk. It was another hot as hell August day so the door was ajar and I could hear what went on; it was like a hundred other weekly Disciplinary Committee hearings.

"Cahill," said Allingham, reading from the pink sheet on the desk before him, "you're down for 'foul and abusive language to an officer. Refusal to obey orders.' " Allingham's a busy, cheerful, little man with a red face and stiff iron gray hair; Associate Warden of Custody and Treatment. He usually wears slacks and a sport jacket. "What about it?" he said.

The man didn't answer, just shrugged. I was leaning with one shoulder against the brick wall of the building so that I could see into the office. The hearing continued; it was a typical case.

This Cahill had refused to pick up a pair of shoes. A guard looked into his cell, saw the shoes in the middle of the floor, and told Cahill—he was lying on the lower bunk—to put them under the bunk. They weren't his shoes, and he refused.

"Look, Cahill," the Captain said quietly, "I don't know of a cell in this prison you can't reach across wall to wall without straining yourself. Why didn't you just reach out without even moving from your bunk, pick up the damned shoes and put them under the bunk? Something wrong with picking up your cellmate's shoes? He got athlete's foot or something?"

Cahill grinned a little and shrugged. "No."

"All right. Time you got around to letting the officer in on whose shoes they were, he was mad. Three times he tells you to put them away, and you refuse. The third time you tell him they aren't your shoes, and by then he don't care; he tells you to put them away anyway. And you won't do it, and you curse him out. That right?"

"I'm just lying in my bunk bothering nobody, and my shoes are where they belong, and—"

"And if an officer tells you to put away some shoes, you put them away, no matter whose they are! An officer tells you to stuff some shoes down the toilet, you

stuff 'em down the toilet. That's how easy it is to get along in prison, Cahill. When the officers tell you to do something, *do* it."

Fengle spoke up. He's a psychiatrist; a young, blondish, plump-faced man in heavy black-rimmed glasses, wearing a gray suit. I'd never talked to him. "You get mad, Cahill," he said, "and get stubborn over trifles like a child. That's what got you in here, that's what's keeping you here, and that's what's back of all your troubles in here."

I murmured to a guy standing next to me, "He needs a degree to figure that out?" and the man smiled.

Cahill shrugged, and after a moment said, "Sometimes it's all right, and you just do what they say, like the Captain says. And sometimes you wouldn't do it if they killed you. Easy for you to talk; you're out. But I'm in."

"That's right," the Captain cut in. "I'm out, and I can nail my shoes to my ceiling if I want. You better get out, too, Cahill. And the way to get out is get yourself up before the parole board when your next date comes up. And the way to get up to the board is to have a clean bill for six months before. And the way to keep your sheet clean is pick up the shoes as long as you're in; and anything else you're told." He glanced at Allingham, then Fengle, and when neither of them spoke, he nodded shortly at Cahill. "All right," he said; and Cahill turned and walked to the door, the guard following. Outside, Cahill walked off toward the Yard, pulling his ducat out of his shirt pocket. They gave him seven days' isolation, and maybe it was worth it.

"Manfred," the guard called, and one of the men standing near the office stepped inside and stopped in front of the Captain's desk—a thin, tense-faced man maybe twenty-three years old.

The Captain picked up his record: a big white sheet

of printed cardboard with the man's photograph stapled to it. " 'Seven days' isolation, December, fighting,' " he said, reading from the card. "Suspended."

"Suspended?" said Fengle.

"Yeah." The Captain nodded. "It was just before Christmas."

Allingham smiled. "Imbued with the Christmas spirit at the time, Nate?"

"No." The Captain shook his head. "Around Christmas you get a run of more serious cases; you got to leave room for them." He looked down at the card again. "January, February, March, May, June, and July; more fighting. You missed April; must have been sick. Quite a hard-nose, aren't you, Manfred?"

The man shrugged.

"Don't take nothin' from nobody, that right?"

"That's right," Manfred said. He drew fourteen days' isolation.

They had a young colored kid in, nineteen years old. He'd rigged up a framework of wire coat hangers and suspended in it a can of shellac with a little hole in the cork. The shellac dripped on the cut end of a loaf of bread underneath. From the bottom of the loaf, the clear filtered fluid dripped into a funnel stuck into the neck of a narrow-mouthed bottle. He had this rig hidden in a paint locker in the paint shop where he worked. "One thing I hate to do," said Allingham. "I hate to phone a man's relatives and tell them he's dying in the hospital because he drank shellac or paint thinner or something."

"Yes, sir," said the man. "You won't have to phone my relatives."

"Why not?" says Allingham.

"I haven't got any," the man said and smiled a little. He lost his job and got twenty-nine days, the maximum.

They had a little fat guy in. The block bulls had

found a complete dismantled phonograph in his cell in a surprise shakedown. They had a couple of homosexuals in; then a guy who'd torn a corset ad from a prison-library magazine, and a man who'd shouted at a woman visitor on one of the tours of the prison that they're always running through the place. They had a fight case and a man who had threatened another inmate with an ax he stole from the supply room. They had a guy in who'd been found with a homemade knife in his sock in a shakedown at the industrial-area gate; a guy who'd scratched his name on the painted wall of his cell; and so on. I got tired of listening, and just stood leaning on the rail of the Porch looking out at the garden. It's a beautiful garden, all right, maybe a quarter acre of plants, shrubs, and crisscrossing paths set in the northeast corner of the prison, and probably the best-tended garden in the world. Across the garden, on the second tier of the old Spanish cell block, one of the old men who live there was leaning on the rail smoking a pipe.

The last case before they called me in was a young Mexican in for fighting, and I listened to that. He wanted a job, he said; if he only had a job, he'd keep out of trouble.

"You had a job," the Captain said. "How come you lost it?"

The man shrugged, smiling; the Captain knew why he'd lost his job.

"What kind of job you been asking for?"

"Mess hall, Captain," and when the Captain grinned, he quickly added, "or quarry. Quarry's all right; I can work, Captain."

"Mess hall or quarry; pretty easily satisfied, aren't you, Jiminez?" The Captain smiled, and so did Jiminez. "All right; I'll give you a job." The Captain pretended to think, then said, "Navy cleaning plant."

Jiminez rolled his eyes and pretended to whistle soundlessly in mock astonishment.

"What's the matter?" the Captain said innocently and turned to Allingham. "One of the preferred jobs; a waiting list long as your arm. And with maximum pay. And he doesn't want it. Look at him"—he nodded at Jiminez, who was grinning—"you'd think I'd insulted him. You want a job," he said to Jiminez, "but not Navy cleaning; how come?'

"You know how come, Captain."

"Tell me."

"Well"—Jiminez shrugged—"I'd be all right for a month, maybe two months. Then I'd be wheelin' and dealin' again."

All three of them burst into laughter, the young Mexican joining them; we smiled a little, too, out on the Porch. "You know yourself, don't you?" said Allingham.

"I ought to."

"Well"—Allingham glanced at the pink charge sheet —"you're here for fighting, and you'll get something for that, but you can do it; you've done it before. Hell, you could do twenty-nine days on your ear, so it doesn't matter." He shrugged. "Doesn't matter if you keep right on getting into trouble. The most we can keep you here is three more years, unless you kill somebody. And what's three years?"

Jiminez shook his head. "Three years is a long time."

"Then *do* something about it! Trim it down! Get out of here in eighteen months!" Allingham stared at him, then went on quietly, "Cut out this crap, Jiminez. Cut out this fighting, and settle down and do your time; get yourself a parole and get out of here. You're an intelligent man; get smart, get yourself a clean bill for a while, go up before the board, and get out." He shrugged. "Or keep on coming in here and stay three

years; we'll feed you, long as you want to stay."

When Jiminez left, Allingham said, "Well?" looking at the others.

"No isolation," the Captain said. "Seven days is the most we ought to give him for this, and that wouldn't bother him; he's tough. Thirty days' loss of privileges; he won't like that."

"What about this job request?" said Fengle.

"You can't give him a job! We got five hundred men in the Yard *never* had a job assignment, and not a mark against them. Pretty soon the word'll get around the only way you get a job here is get yourself in trouble first. Anyway"—he shook his head, smiling a little—"he's conning us. He doesn't want a job in the mess hall, or the quarry either. *Or* Navy cleaning. This sanctimonious wheelin' and dealin' talk—" He snorted disgustedly, but still smiling. "He hasn't reformed; that's just what he *would* do. Only he thinks he's conning us into a job as a runner or laundry distribution, something like that. And in two weeks he'd be running some damn kind of racket again, wheelin' and dealin', just like he says; that's what happened his last job. Let him build up a clean bill, and then talk job; and we'll put him somewhere where there's no wheelin' and dealin' to be done." He grinned. "He's a pretty good boy." Then he looked down at the paper on his desk, and the smile faded. "Jarvis," he said to the guard in the doorway, and the guard turned and called my name.

I walked in and stood before the desk. "Jarvis," said the Captain, looking down at his papers, "we got some news for you, you and a couple dozen other guys from your block. It's about the officer who was hit on the head up on your tier Thursday." He sat back in his chair suddenly, watching my face.

"Yes, sir." I nodded.

"It didn't kill him, didn't fracture his skull, though

it might have. Didn't give him anything but a concussion and a few stitches. Knocked cold, is all; he's all right now." He sat there looking up at me, and I didn't say anything. I knew the guard was all right, this was old news; this wasn't why I was here and I knew it. "Just thought you'd like to have the official word he's okay," the Captain said. "You were up on that tier at the time."

"Yes, sir. I'm glad he's all right."

"Hope we'll get the guy who did it, I suppose."

"Yes, sir."

"Then I got more good news for you—we will." He picked up a sheaf of papers from his desk then sat looking at me. "Didn't look as though we would for a while," he said pleasantly. "Most of the men were out of the block at the time. But there were a couple dozen loafing around there, including you. Could have been any of you hit the guard up on the tier; we don't know who. And I thought maybe we never would find out; nobody'd say he saw it. But things are looking up now—Here." He held out the papers in his hand and I took them.

There were three pieces of paper stapled together, the top one an envelope stamped airmail, special-delivery, and addressed in pencil to *The Warden, San Quentin Pententury, Calif.* It was canceled *Green River, Wyoming,* Saturday. Under the envelope lay a small piece of rough-textured, blue-lined paper covered with penciled handwriting, with a green-ink time-received stamp on it, 9:31 a.m. yesterday, Sunday. I glanced up at the Captain.

"Go ahead," he said, "read it."

I read it. It was short and to the point, and was signed: *Yrs, Ralph Hafek.* It said he'd been lying on his bunk up on the third tier, East block, Thursday, when the guard was hit. It said he'd seen the man who

did it and could identify him. He'd said nothing at the time because he was due out on parole Friday morning and was afraid he'd be held on as a witness if he admitted seeing the assault. Then, home in Wyoming, he'd told his parole officer who advised him to testify. He didn't know the man by name but could pick him out if he saw him. If they, the prison, would pay his round-trip fare—he had no money himself—he'd come up and point out the man.

I looked at the third sheet; a white, flimsy carbon copy of a letter. It was written yesterday, addressed to the Department of Corrections, and signed by the Warden. It quoted the letter I'd just read, requested that the state authorize and issue a check in payment of the man's railroad fare, and ended by emphasizing the importance of finding the man who struck the guard.

I looked up at the Captain. "Yes, sir?" I said and I laid the papers on his desk.

He grinned suddenly. "This Hafek's on parole. If he picks out our man it could help him a lot and he knows it. But the stroke of a pen could send him back here to finish out his term, and he knows that, too. So he's not fooling around; he'll pick out our man. Glad, Jarvis?"

"Yes, sir."

"So are we. We had a phone call from Sacramento this morning; payment's authorized, and the check will be in the mail tomorrow. We'll airmail it soon as it gets here, and we've already phoned Hafek's parole officer; Hafek will leave after work Friday, and be here Saturday morning. Still glad?"

"Yes, sir."

"How come?" He leaned forward, staring up at me intently. "You didn't like that guard; you had trouble with him."

I shrugged. "We each had our beefs. Doesn't mean I

hit him, though, if that's what you mean."

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "I don't know as a man could exactly blame you if you did. I been asking around," he said, and his eyes and voice seemed genuinely sympathetic, "and that guard was riding you, wasn't he?"

I shrugged.

"I hear that he was," the Captain said gently. "That he started calling you the 'Big Shot.' Then he changed it a little; began pronouncing it with an i." Allingham and Fengle smiled faintly "They tell me you were bragging a little bit, Jarvis. About your education and all." He nodded approvingly. "A lot more education than that guard has. And about your job prospects outside and the girl you're going to marry." He nodded. "It's understandable. And that guard had no call to ride you like that. No fun to be laughed at, is it, Jarvis?"

I shrugged. "Didn't bother me any."

"Not enough to get mad and maybe slug that guard when you caught him alone?"

"Hell, no," I said. "I'm not crazy."

"And yet you look worried." His voice was very soft and quiet. "You're pale, Jarvis, really quite pale—did you know that? You look worried; and maybe you should be. Because you know what the punishment would be in your case, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let me remind you just the same. So you'll know how lucky you are—if you didn't hit that guard." He picked up a little brown loose-leafed book from his desk and opened it. "Section 4500 of the California Penal Code," he said, leafing through the pages. "You know about Section 4500, Jarvis?"

"Yes, sir; you don't have to read it."

"Don't like the sound of it, that it? Okay." he tossed the little book to his desk. "But you *are* pale, Jarvis;

I'm not fooling you. All right. See you Saturday morning, when Hafek arrives. Unless you got something you want to tell me right now?"

"No, sir."

"Then that's all; we got no charge sheet on you today. For a change. Just thought you and the other guys in the block when the guard was hit ought to hear the good news. And think about it. You assigned?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"Furniture factory."

"Then get back to it," he said bleakly. I turned and walked out.

I was shriveled up inside; I could hardly see, walking back to the furniture factory. I thought I might actually faint; and when I got there I didn't know what I was doing. I knew I had to escape from San Quentin prison —in the next four days. I *had* to; and I didn't know how. I'd seen this coming, and now the thought of Ben and Ruth outside right now getting ready to help kept me going.

3

AT NOON I went to the Yard as close to running as we're allowed. I waited inside near the gate till I spotted my cellmate coming along, then I walked up to him and said, "Al, skip lunch, I've got to talk to you"—an inmate at Quentin doesn't have to show up for a meal if he doesn't want it. Al took a look at my face and nodded, his mouth quirking; he didn't like missing a meal but he knew I was serious. We found a place in the sun and sat down on the asphalt paving in the big Yard enclosed by the mess halls and three of the cell blocks, our backs against the peach-colored East block wall.

"Al," I said fast, wasting no time, "What do you know about escape?"

He glanced at me, then grinned a little. "Just about what you do; only you learned the hard way, didn't you? Five, six months ago."

"That's right," I said shortly.

"Hid out in—where? Navy Cleaning Depot, wasn't it? Found you in about an hour?"

"Yeah."

"Well, then, you know what I know about escape; nothin'."

"Yeah, yeah," I said, "you don't know anything; I know. But you must have seen a fair number of tries around here. And some must have worked." I pulled out cigarettes, gave one to Al, took one myself and lighted them.

"Oh, yeah," Al said then and dragged on his cigarette. "I seen more guys than you try to make it out in my time here. Hidin' out like you done, just hopin' they won't be found till the hunt dies down, and they can maybe make it over a wall at night. And nailed up in boxes, lyin' on top of a truck motor; one guy tried it wearin' a priest's outfit."

His voice a gentle murmur, carrying no more than a few feet, he continued, "Years ago, four or five guys got into the Warden's house, and they had guns; nobody ever did find out how. It was the old house, not the new one now, and the parole board was meeting; they used to meet there. The cons took them out, all of them, and into their own cars parked outside the house, then out the main gate; the guards had to let them through. But they were chased, of course, and the cons killed the Warden and shot some of the others. They got all the cons back that same day; killed some, and hung the others later; used to hang them here, then. Crazy," he murmured. "Crazy men, killing the Warden. Crazy ever takin' hostages; I never heard of anybody makin' it that way, not permanently." He fell silent, thinking about it. In some ways Al was like an old man.

"Crazy," I agreed softly. Then gently prompting him, I said, "But some guys must use more sense."

"Sure, some." Al inhaled on his cigarette, nodding his head. "Used to be a sort of wall down on the waterfront, ran out into the Bay a few yards; all that was left of an old pier. Most stuff come into the prison on barges once and they had a lot of piers; nowadays it's all trucks. This con—he was on the waterfront detail—

looked at this wall and sees that if a guy got down behind it on the west side, hunched down in the water, eleven tower couldn't see him. And between him and twelve tower there was just a little rise of ground; they couldn't see him from there either. He'd found a little blind spot. Wall's gone now; they pulled it down right after. So this con waits, watching, and pretty soon he sees that every day a tug comes by the prison towing a string of barges. One day he gets down by his wall, and when the tug gets close, he swims out. They might have seen him in the water, but they didn't; he swims quiet and gets onto the barge, figuring to swim ashore the other side of the Bay; had it all planned out. Only the barges jackknifed that day, swung around alongside the tug; and time they got straightened out, it took a couple hours. The con was missing at count and one of the first things they did, they take the launch out to the barges and pull him off."

"Too bad," I murmured. "He deserved to make it."

"Yeah. Yeah, I guess he did. Most of them don't, though." Al laughed quietly. "Five, six years ago when the jute mill burned down, they had scrap-metal dealers in, buying the old steel, hauling it out in trucks. This con, he was helping load a truck, gets a sudden idea; doesn't stop to think, he just does it; gets into the truck down underneath some of this old burned-out steel. They finish loading the truck, and out it goes. The guard counts his crew, a man's gone, and they phone the bridge, Golden Gate Bridge; the truck's going back to the city. They stop the truck at the bridge; the Quentin screws arrive in a car; and it takes half a dozen men an hour and a half to get that con out of there. How he ever would have got out himself, tons of steel on top of him, he never stopped to figure.

Probably been killed, squashed flat, when they unloaded the truck.

"It's hard, Arnie; out of here it is." Al was well into it now. "Even with a lucky break that you got no right to hope for; like this con I was telling you about. Priest comes in; long black robe, buttons at the neck; one of those round black hats with the big brim. He hangs them up somewhere, this con sees them, puts them on, walks out through the east gate, nodding, smiling at everyone, practically blessing them, and he's halfway down the walk by the water to the main gate. Lucky so far, the break of a lifetime, but somebody looks out a window in the administration building, sees a priest with blue-denim pant legs hanging out of his robe, phones the main gate, and that's that." He chuckled derisively. "You see what I mean? You see a chance, take it, and maybe you're wrong, and it was no chance at all, like the guy in the trunk underneath the scrap steel. And a real chance, like the guy on the barges or the guy in the priest's robe—not one guy in ten thousand ever gets a break like that; you could spend your life here and never see one. And even when you do, just like those guys, bad luck can still get you. Man's got no right to count on luck; might as well try climbin' right over the wall and hope the guard drops dead just before he shoots."

"Al, listen," I said. "How do you *make it out of Quentin?*"

For several moments he didn't answer then he said, "I don't know, Arnie, and I've thought about it. So has every con here, and every screw, too, for that matter." Then he said quietly, "Once in a while it's been done; it's been figured. A con got out last year. One day he's just gone, missing at count, and that's all anybody knows to this day. But get it through your head, it's

just short of impossible. Some of these kids"—he shook his head—"the tough, hot kids. You can saw out a bar, you know, in the front of the cell any time you want. Get some emery paper from the machine shops or valve-grinding compound from auto repair. Then unravel a sock, get a supply of thread. Smear vaseline or soap or toothpaste on a thread, scrape the emery off the paper, and run the thread through it. Then saw through the bar with the threads; it's easy; you can do it in less than a night. Everybody knows it, cons and screws both; and so what? Cost a mint to equip Quentin with chilled-steel bars. But so what? These tough, hot kids—just fish, a lot of them, been here a few months—and they cut out of their cells every now and then; and then where are they? They just get the bulls edgy; the bulls got to hunt them out, and how do they know what the kids are carrying? Damn fool kids can get killed and some do. Or they find them half an hour after the short count, hiding out in the cell block, or the Yard or somewhere. You want to get out, out means the other side of the wall."

"*How,* damn it, *how!*" I threw my cigarette on the asphalt and stamped it out under my heel. "How do you make it to the other side of the wall?"

Al laughed softly, just a snort of air through the nostrils. "You don't," he said. "I been tryin' to tell you. I'm tryin' to tell you what you're up against; you ain't figured it out yet. This place is a hundred years old, more than that. You're in a place where men have been working and thinking over a hundred years how to keep you in it. Long before you was born there been guys, and damn smart ones, figuring how to keep you right where you are. Ways there used to be to get out, they been corrected. And they got it worked out now awful damn tight; so tight I don't know how to beat it. Sys-

tem's simple. Places you could walk out, they got a wall. Just a wall's all that's between you and outside. But you can't dig under it in Quentin; you hit water right away. You can't go over it; there's men on top with guns who won't let you. And inside, there's a place you got to be every minute right around the clock from your first day to your last and they got it worked out to see that you are. I don't need to tell you: you're missing, they know it, and hunt you right down. It ain't like the movies, Arnie. Oh, hell"—he shrugged—"I ain't talking about walking off the farm or out of the camps. I mean in here where they really aim to keep you."

He put a hand on my arm to shut me up before I could speak and leaned toward me, bringing his face close to mine. "So here's what I been gettin' at, Arnie. You want to know what you got to do to beat that?" His voice just a murmur, he said, "You got to do what ain't possible. Short of crazy, blind luck like I said. All the ways you see, just looking around, they ain't ways at all; they got you stopped long ago, they got it all figured long before you did. What you got to do—only thing you *can* do—is figure how to do the impossible; that's one thing they ain't guarded against." He leaned closer, whispering, "What I mean, there's walls all around you. But there's nothin' across the top outside, nothin' between you and blue sky. Because it's impossible for a man to fly, impossible to go straight up, so they don't guard against that. What you got to do's figure out how to fly, how to go straight up. Or like this; there's guards on the wall; try throwing up a rope, they see you. If you was invisible, though, they couldn't. But that's impossible so they ain't guarded against it. So you got to figure how to be invisible. Or anything else that just can't be. How do you walk through a wall? How can you be in two places at the very same time? How do

you disappear right under their eyes? How do you hide where there just ain't a place a man can hide in? I ain't talking foolish. They *know* what's possible, long before you ever heard of San Quentin. You got to figure how to do the impossible."

He was quiet for a moment then he said softly, "Most cons in Quentin are in for a couple years more or less; they don't need to worry about escape. And the rest, the long-term cons, most of them are like me. We just do our time, we don't knock our heads against the walls, we don't know how to do what ain't possible. But you got to get out, I know that; you *got* to. But kill somebody, hurt somebody, or take hostages along, and they'll get you for sure even if you make it outside. Wait for the lucky break, and you can wait forever; you ain't got time to wait. Try it foolish, only try what's possible, and the place is ready for that and you get caught or killed trying. No, you got to figure how to do the impossible; that's all you *can* do, Arnie."

We were silent for a long time then, just sitting there in the sun staring out at the Yard. Then Al said softly, "Once in a long while, some guy—a guy who knows what I been tryin' to tell you—he makes it. And they never hear of him again. Whether you're that guy, I don't know. I ain't; I don't know how to do what ain't possible. So I just serve out my time."

"You've done a lot, haven't you, Al?"

"That's right."

"*How?* How in hell do you do it? How do you *do* long time year after year?"

"A day at a time," he said. "And I sleep a lot." Guys were coming out into the Yard from the mess halls now, and Al got to his feet. "Good luck," he said quietly, nodding his head once, then walked away.

In the factory, I said I had stomach cramps, got a pass

back to the block, and I lay down on my bunk there. I had the afternoon, that evening, and tonight, before Ben came to visit me tomorrow—to figure out how to do the impossible.

4

RUTH'S BAGS were packed and on the floor by the front door when I got back from the prison Tuesday morning. She was sitting in the big living-room easy chair smoking, waiting for me to drive her back to her San Francisco apartment and to hear how Arnie had taken our decision. I didn't say anything right away. Closing the front door behind me, I just looked at her, then walked over to the davenport and sat down across the room from her, tossing my hat to the cushions beside me.

"Well?" she said angrily, impatiently—I knew how she was feeling. She was wearing a light-green summer dress and cloth shoes to match and looking very pretty.

I nodded. "I saw him. And told him."

Then she wanted to put off hearing about it. "Maybe you could tell me about it driving over," she said and started to stand.

"I think you better hear this before you leave," I said. She stared at my face for a moment then sat back in her chair. "I told you escaping was a sudden idea of Arnie's," I said quietly. "And it is. Last Thursday Arnie struck a guard. From behind, up on a tier of his cell

block, with a glass insulator he'd stolen. He didn't think anyone was around to see him; the block was nearly empty at the time."

"Struck a guard?" She was frowning, trying to understand that. "Ben, why?"

I shook my head, slumping back on the davenport feeling very tired. "I don't really know, Ruth. He tried to tell me, but about all he really said was that the guard was a punk, a wise young punk, he said." I shook my head again. "And Arnie says he hit him because he hit him, that's all. You get charged-up in prison, he says; those were his words. Men have ripped wash basins off the walls of their cells with their hands, he says. Or clogged up the plumbing and flooded their cells, or torn up mattresses, or anything they can lay their hands on. Other men fight." I shrugged. "And Arnie hit a guard. I think the guard had been ribbing him, taunting him about something or other, and that's something Arnie never could take. Maybe you've noticed it; strike at Arnie's ego, and he just can't take it. Anyway, they don't know who did it; there were a couple dozen men in the block at the time and any of them might have hit the guard; he didn't see who struck him. But an inmate saw it; he was due out on parole in the morning so he kept his mouth shut until he was out. But now they're bringing him to the prison. He'll arrive Saturday morning—*this Saturday*, Ruth—to point out the man who struck that guard."

She was nodding slowly, though without understanding. "But—is the guard all right?"

"Sure. He was knocked out. They had to take a couple stitches but he's all right now."

"And Arnie wants to escape to avoid punishment?"

I nodded. "Yeah."

"Well"—she was frowning puzzledly—"what's the punishment?"

I could feel my face go pale as I spoke. "Ruth, they'll execute him."

"Execute him?" She simply didn't understand. "How do you mean?"

"I mean in the *gas* chamber, damn it!" I shouted, getting to my feet and glaring down at her. "They'll take him to San Rafael, and try him in a courtroom for assault, find him guilty, and the penalty is death! They'll send him to Condemned Row, and *execute* him—that's what I mean!"

She was shaking her head, actually smiling a little without realizing it, her voice almost patient as she explained to me how this was impossible. "No, Ben. They couldn't. Not for striking a man who wasn't even hurt and who's all right now. They *couldn't.*"

"They *can!* They *will!*" The cords of my neck were standing out. Then I stopped shouting and sat down again, leaning forward, staring across the room at her. "Listen, Ruth," I said softly and urgently, "it was hard for me to believe and accept, too. I couldn't get it through my head, and it's still hard to believe. But it's true. It's the law in the great state of California. And it's enforced! Section 4500 of the California Penal Code. Arnie quoted it to me; he knows it word for word —listen! 'Every person undergoing a life sentence who commits an assault upon the person of another with a deadly weapon or by any means likely to produce great bodily injury is punishable with death'! That's what it says or close to it."

"But—Arnie hasn't a life sentence!"

"Yes, he has! Five to life is how his sentence reads: the penalty for attempted escape. He wouldn't even serve the five years, of course; two, maybe, or three; it doesn't really mean life imprisonment. But that's how the sentence reads. Ruth, he's technically a lifer."

She was staring at me across the room. "And—they'd

execute him? For striking a guard?"

I nodded. "They would. They do. And they will. There are two men on Condemned Row in San Quentin now for just that reason. Ruth! Arnie's *got to escape!* And before next Saturday morning!" I actually clapped my hands down onto my head in desperation.

After a moment she said, "And you're going to help him?"

I shrugged angrily, got up, and began pacing the room. "What else?" I said "What else can I possibly do?" and she nodded.

"Ben," she said quietly, "how? How are you going to do it?"

I sat down then and told her. I explained in detail what Arnie had worked out the night before, lying on his bunk till daylight. And when finally I finished, Ruth was shaking her head.

"No," she whispered. *"No,* Ben"—she was still shaking her head, staring at me, eyes wide—"you don't have to do that, not even for Arnie. And no matter what it means. Ben, *nobody* has to do *that!"* Then, watching my face, she said slowly, "But you're going to," and when I nodded, she was silent for several long moments. Then she glanced at her bags by the door. "All right," she said. "I'll have to help, too; you can't do that alone."

"No," I said, "I can't. Ruth, I hate to ask you, but—"

"But we can't let Arnie die. All right, Ben"—she stood up—"we've got a lot to do by two o'clock in the morning."

5

WE BEGAN RIGHT AWAY, hardly able to believe what we were doing, but knowing we had to do it. Ruth sat in the big easy chair with a pad and pen while I lay stretched out on the davenport staring up at the ceiling, and we began listing everything we'd need. We went over every least thing we were going to do, step by careful step, trying to think of every possible thing we'd need to do it. We covered that ground three times; a mistake or an error of omission simply could not be allowed. Finally we had to decide that our list was finished. Ruth made us some lunch with some supplies we'd laid in yesterday, and we ate outdoors in the back yard, sitting on the grass.

We talked a little, Ruth asking some questions about what we were going to do, and I tried to answer them. Then, sitting there cross-legged on the lawn, half a sandwich in her hand, staring across the yard, Ruth turned to look at me. I was lying on my side now, head propped on one arm, eating an apple. "You're a lot different from Arnie, aren't you, Ben?" she said; it was more a statement than a question.

"Yeah, I guess so." I nodded. "Arnie's a lot more up

and down than I am. He could always get more fun out of something than I could; he's more impulsive and carefree; lets himself go more. But he'd get more depressed and blue and discouraged than I ever did, too."

Nodding her head, Ruth said, "I wonder why. Two brothers both growing up in the same way."

"Just a difference between people." I shrugged.

"You'd never have done what he did; about the ring, I mean."

"No, but I don't know that that's because of any special virtue in me; we're just made differently, that's all; we react differently to things. Arnie *had* to do that, Ruth. It's always been terribly important to Arnie what people thought of him. It is to everyone to some extent, but with Arnie if the people around him thought he was great, then he knew he was. And if they thought he was no good, then that's how he felt. I think most people feel they pretty well know what they are, both good and bad, even though they may be mistaken. And if someone else thinks differently it's *they* who've made the mistake. You know what I mean; someone compliments you for some quality you really haven't got, you may be pleased, but you know better. But I always thought that ability was left out of Arnie, he has no conviction inside himself about what he really is; it has to be supplied to him all the time—you can flatter Arnie, if you're even halfway plausible. Arnie's a lot of good things, plenty of them, but he can't believe it himself; it has to be confirmed outside himself before he can accept it. So what people think of Arnie is what he *is* at the moment as far as he's concerned. It was absolutely vital for Arnie to buy back the opinion of himself that he'd have lost if that clerk were allowed to think that Arnie wasn't what he'd tried to make the clerk think he was." I smiled. "If that makes any sense."

"It does," Ruth said. "Arnie loves me, I'm certain;

but I also think that my going out with him, and becoming engaged to him, fits in with some sort of notion of his of what he'd like to be, or ought to be." She shook her head. "And now being a San Quentin inmate, a convict; it must be terrible for him."

I nodded, twisting the stem off my apple, staring down at it. "This may have been an accident of timing," I said. "I've always thought it might be." Ruth was watching me questioningly, and I continued, "When my father lost his job, I was in eighth grade, but Arnie was a sophomore in high school. My dad was an official of a building-and-loan association, a small company but a fairly important job. He made a nice salary for those days anyway, and we lived in a nice home in a nice part of San Francisco. And I guess, to kids, their place in the world seems sort of preordained and natural; they don't question it or anticipate any change. Well, my dad's firm went broke. There was some sort of scandal about it, and the three top officials, including him, were indicted. But it soon turned out that my father knew nothing about the semi-crooked business that had been going on; which was almost worse than if he had known. He'd been absolutely naïve; the other two had fooled him completely; he was almost a sort of innocent front man, used by his partners. And he never again had another good job. I remember how at first he was certain he would; he'd have appointments and lunch dates with friends, men he'd known in business; and he was calm and cheerful, certain he'd very soon be given a position, as he called it, that his former position qualified him for. But after a while it dawned on him that he never would. Pleasant as his old associates were to him—first-name stuff and all, treating him like an equal who still belonged with them—nobody was putting into a job of any importance a man who could be so completely innocent of what was really

going on in the company he was supposed to be helping to run. And when his money began running out, he did what he had to: sold the house, and rented a cheaper one; and took what he could get, a job, not a position. It didn't seem to break him up. He worried and all that, but he seemed happy enough afterward. He got a job in a small cabinet shop; he was always good with tools. And after a while, the place grew a little, and he became a sort of foreman and made not bad money. I think maybe he was even happier in a job he was actually more fitted for; and my mother took it all well enough. She'd belonged to a few clubs of one sort or another, not really social, but sort of. And she'd had to quit those for lack of money and never did rejoin, though maybe she could have after a while.

"And the whole business didn't affect me at all. All that mattered to me, I remember, was that we were still in the same school district after we moved and I didn't have to change schools and give up any friends. I don't think a single kid I knew ever even mentioned to me what was happening about my father; it just didn't mean anything to them. But I've wondered if it wasn't awfully different for Arnie, a sophomore in high school. You know how it is in high school; the kids are beginning to grow up, and sort themselves out, more or less according to the standing of their families. We'd had a car that Arnie could drive, a nice car. And he had an allowance and all that. Well, my dad sold the car. We got another after a while, but it was second-hand, and pretty beat-up. And I know Arnie had to start carrying his lunch to school instead of eating in the school cafeteria; he had to join the lunch-carriers and drop out of the group that bought theirs. And I suppose what was happening to my father was talked about in high school.

"Anyway, thinking about it much later, I always

wondered if that wasn't when Arnie changed. The place he'd had in the world with a sort of guarantee from God wasn't guaranteed at all, and he was dumped right out of it at just the time, maybe, when he was finding out who and what he was in the world. When I got to high school, I remember he sort of sneered at the set who had money in their pockets, cars to drive, and who could go somewhere fairly expensive after school dances; that sort of stuff. He was a pretty good track man and got on the school track team, and that pepped him up for a while. But then he just quit all of a sudden, I don't know why. And once he had a fight with a kid, one of the school hot-shots, one of the 'leaders,' so called. I never did know why either.

"In college, we had to work, both of us; in restaurants, cleaning the gym, that sort of stuff. And we had to work all summer, every year. It seemed natural enough to me; I'd never expected anything different. But maybe Arnie remembered a time when he was beginning to think about college, and had every reason to believe it was going to be different from the way it turned out. I know that for a few years after we finished college, Arnie used to wear a fraternity pin, one of the fraternities at the school. But we'd neither of us belonged to it or any other; we didn't begin to have the money. And again"—I shrugged—"that never bothered me particularly. I had a lot of friends in all the fraternities; I spent a lot of time in various fraternity houses and went to a lot of their dances by invitation. They knew why I didn't belong to one of them; I didn't have the money. And I knew I could have belonged to one—only money prevented it. And so could Arnie, but I don't think he was sure of it any more.

"I don't know"—I shrugged again—"maybe it's too simple an explanation, or maybe that isn't all of it. But I've known for most of my life that nothing, *noth-*

ing, is more important to Arnie than his status. Wherever he's worked, at whatever job, he's always described his job and given it a name—not lying, exactly, but giving an impression that it was more important than it was. We were both in the Army, and after we were out I met Arnie for lunch once in a bar. There was a friend standing there with him when I came in. Arnie introduced us, and this guy said, "We were just talking about the Army, Captain," and then went on to say something or other about that. I was a staff sergeant, Ruth, and Arnie made master sergeant; but he'd told his friend that I'd been a captain, and Arnie, I suppose, was a major. That made him happy, Ruth. The fact that this casual friend he'd run into in a bar believed his brother had been a captain and that he'd been a major, maybe, was good enough for Arnie at the moment. It was as good as true at the time. Once he got out of school where people knew what he was, he was free to make up for all that and free to enjoy having people believe he was what he wanted to be.

"And that, damn it, got him into prison; and that was still worse for him and he tried to escape; that got him in deeper, and then it was still worse; and now he may get himself killed, *executed*—Arnie, my brother!" I threw my apple core away, hard, against the fence. Then I smiled and got up. "Better get started," I said, "we've got a lot to do," and Ruth reached out her hand, and I helped her to her feet.

We drove over the bridge to the city, and at just after one o'clock we were walking out of a parking lot near Mission Street, heading for Market Street. On Market, we separated; we'd divided the list and were to meet at the car at two-thirty. We were to shop only in the biggest and busiest stores we could find.

We were home by three-fifteen, unloading our packages in the attached garage, the big garage door pulled

down and closed. Ruth had bought blue jeans and a work shirt with snap fasteners at the big J. C. Penney's on Market. She bought half a dozen pints of cream and three one-pound tins of coffee at the Emporium, and another half-dozen pints of cream and three more tins of coffee at the Crystal Palace. In a big supermarket she bought sandwich meat, cheese, bread, fruit, cookies, and eight more pints of cream. She withdrew money from her bank, and she bought four big packages of absorbent cotton at a drugstore. I bought an army trenching tool and a square of dark-green canvas—it was half a pup tent—at an Army surplus store. At a hardware store I bought a two-foot length of pipe, a square of fine screening, a small can of brown enamel, a cheap paint brush, and a dozen rolls of black friction tape. At a second hardware store I bought a dozen large bolts and nuts, a good flashlight, two spare bulbs, half a dozen spare dry cells, a large coil of copper wire, and a hundred-foot coil of new quarter-inch rope. On the way home, I stopped at a lumber yard in the Sunset district and bought half a sheet of three-quarter-inch plywood which I put into the car trunk. While I was doing that, Ruth walked across the street to a supermarket and bought half a dozen more pints of cream.

Now, in the garage with our packages unloaded, Ruth put the blue jeans and work shirt into the automatic washer there and poured in some bleach. There were hand tools and a makeshift workbench in the garage, and I marked off my plywood sheet into eight equal squares, and began sawing them out. The washing machine on, Ruth went into the kitchen, poured the cream from the more than two dozen containers down the sink, then began washing them out. When she finished, she emptied the six pounds of coffee into a paper bag, and dropped it into the garbage can beside the door of the garage. I had my eight squares of wood

clamped together by then and a big *J* sketched on the surface of the outer one. I began sawing this J-shape out of the plywood.

We worked all afternoon and into the evening without stopping. We moved from one thing to the next, seldom saying much more than was necessary to the work we were doing. At eight-thirty, still far from finished with all we had to do, we knocked off, got into the car, and drove to a drive-in a few miles north on highway 101 for supper. We ordered, then sat there in the darkened car, waiting. The restaurant juke box was on with a loudspeaker outside so you couldn't escape it, and we sat listening to a shouting rock-and-roll song.

Ruth said, "Ben, will it work? Will it really work?"

I thought for a moment, but could not answer either yes or no so I just shrugged. I was suddenly discouraged and tired, and—because of what we were doing and were going to do—already separate and different from all the people in the other cars around us. I felt alone and uncertain.

"There are so many ways," Ruth murmured then, staring out through the windshield, "that it can all go wrong."

"I know; but we don't have all summer. It's about the best we can do on short notice."

"And what happens if it does go wrong?" she demanded. "What happens to you if they find—"

"Don't talk about it," I said. "Right now, the only way I can get through this is not to think very much beyond what I'm doing at the moment. If I start thinking about what might happen, I won't be able to do this."

Ruth brought her fist down on the dashboard like a hammer. "It isn't *fair!*" she said. "This is impossible! Arnie's got no *right*—" She stopped suddenly and didn't finish.

"You're right," I said quietly. "We're beginning a crime, and an important one; one that can get me killed or both of us in prison for years. And it's through none of our doing. There's no fairness or justice about it. Arnie has no right to ask this. But he's *got* to. And we've got to do it. I do, anyway. They want to *kill* Arnie. He cashed some bad checks, and parlayed it to Death Row under the rules of the game in California. It leaves me no choice. I've got to help him if I can."

The girl car-hop appeared at the side of the car, I rolled down my window, and she fitted a tray with our sandwiches and coffee onto the steering wheel. I thanked her, rolled up the window, and handed Ruth her sandwich.

She took a bite, then said, "Ben, I'm not going to marry Arnie. When he's out, I'm through with him."

I nodded. "I didn't think you would. I'm not surprised. I don't blame you; I wouldn't blame anyone."

Then we ate our food and drove on home.

6

WHEN I PULLED UP AT THE HOUSE, parking at the curb so I'd have room to work in the garage, it was about nine-thirty, and dark. We started crossing the front lawn toward the house, and a man's voice called, "Evenin'." I turned, glancing around, then saw him in the adjoining yard, a vague dark bulk in the faint light from the street lamp down the block.

"Evening," I answered, my voice instinctively cautious, and I was aware that my heart was suddenly beating faster. As we walked toward our front door, the indistinct silhouette grew; the man was walking silently toward us across the lawns. Then he stopped before us, a tall, heavy man, a middle-aged, fat man, hatless and bald, his face very large and round.

"Mr. Nova," he said, ducking his head abruptly in a nod of greeting, "your neighbor from next door." Then he added—his voice tones sly, as though deliberately intending not to be believed—"Just out catchin' a breath and saw you drive up. Thought I'd say howdy to the new neighbors."

I nodded. "Glad to see you." We shook hands, and while my hands aren't small, this man's huge hand,

soft of palm but very strong, swallowed mine. "This is my wife," I said, "and we're the Jarvises."

"Evenin'," he said directly to Ruth, and she responded.

I stood waiting then, door key in my hand, hoping he'd say something that would let us say good night and get on into the house.

But instead he glanced up at the night sky, hands shoved into his back pockets as though he had all the time in the world, and said, "Nice out tonight. Been for a drive?"

"Yeah, little drive," I said. It was awkward, just standing there, not asking him in, but I couldn't; we had too much to do. He just stood there, then, in the dim light from the living-room window—we'd left a lamp on inside—nodding his head, eyes narrowed, smiling at me shrewdly; I didn't know why. He was dressed in what looked like Army suntans: tan wash trousers and shirt, open at the collar. He couldn't be in the Army though, I realized; he was fifty-five years old, maybe, with a great paunch beginning high on his chest and curving down through his belly. He was broad everywhere, from shoulders to hips; a slow-moving, powerful man overlaid with evenly distributed fat.

"Seen you before," he said suddenly, watching me carefully, and one little eye narrowed in almost a wink as though we were sharing some lewd joke.

"Oh?"

"Yep." The exasperating nodding started again. Then he leaned toward me, hands still in his back pockets, and added softly, "Out to the prison."

I could feel my face muscles go slack, a sick tension grabbing at my stomach, and I knew, staring at this man, that he'd meant to startle me, and that he knew he'd succeeded.

"Oh"—he was wagging a great meaty hand in reassurance, standing comfortably back on his heels now—"don't worry." He grinned, somehow in complete command of the situation, whatever it was, then he winked, glancing at Ruth. "I'm a guard out at Quentin," he continued, then immediately added, "correctional officer, I mean," and his paunch shook in amusement while he glanced from one to the other of us. "I *used* to be a guard"—he narrowed his eyes in a malicious smile—"years ago. In the old Quentin I was a guard, a bull, a screw." Deliberately he straightened his face into a mocking approval of the new terminology. "But now I'm an officer." Again his paunch shook. "Good thing, too," he said with deliberate hypocrisy, not bothering to remove the smile from his face. "Much better this way. Treat 'em decent. Like human beings. Movies, classes—television, even! Much better, naturally," he said perfunctorily, no longer smiling, as though the subject had suddenly lost interest for him. "Seen you goin' into the visitor's room, month or so ago maybe. Think it was you, anyway."

"Yes"—I nodded shortly—"I'm sure it was."

"Well"—again he wagged a hand—"don't worry. I see a lot of people from around here out to the prison; people got relatives there. Used to it; never give it a thought. Who is it, your brother?"

I wanted to drive a fist straight out from the waist into that big fat belly. "I'm not *worried,* Mr. Nova," I said angrily. "Yes, it's my brother. And while it's not exactly something I've told everyone I know or meet, it's no big secret as far as I'm concerned." *Oh, the bastard,* I was shouting silently, *the fat, stupid, bastard; why did he have to live next door?*

"Course not!" He nodded comfortably, smiling imperturbably. Then he winked confidentially. "Moved

here, I expect, close to the prison, so's you could visit him regular."

None of your business, you fat prying slob! "Well," I said aloud, "that's partly the case."

"Be glad to look him up." Eyes narrowed, he watched me intently. "I can do that easy, you know; might help him out, maybe. Guard can be a help to a con. Inmate, I mean."

"Oh"—I paused as though considering a friendly gesture; my mind was frantically hunting a plausible excuse—"I think not; thanks just the same. But I'm afraid he'd feel he was a source of embarrassment to us if he knew a San Quentin official was a neighbor of ours. He's doing all right, anyway; he's settled down to do his time. He's accepted prison, and he's doing okay." *Am I protesting too much? Does he know all about Arnie?*

Nova was nodding again. "I'll check up on him anyway; let you know how he's makin' out. Do it on the q.t." He winked again. "Won't tell him I know you." He watched me, waiting for an answer, and reluctantly I had to nod. "Well," he said then, glancing at the closed front door, "I'll be gettin' home. Just wanted to say howdy." We answered something or other and went on into the house as he walked across the front lawns toward his own.

"Of all the unbelievable bad luck," Ruth murmured, dropping on the davenport, when the door was closed again. "Of all the places we could have moved into, we had to move next door to a San Quentin guard."

I shrugged and sat down in the big chair. "Well, it's a big prison," I said, as though I weren't worried. "This county must be full of San Quentin people; probably most of them live here in Marin. Hardly a town you could go to, I'm certain, without guards and

every other kind of San Quentin official living in it. Bad luck to move right next door to one but not so strange."

She was watching me closely. "You think it *is* bad luck, then?"

"Oh—hard to say. I don't like it, of course. But that's a natural feeling. So he lives next door; so what?"

She shook her head. "Don't try to comfort me, Ben. What do you honestly feel?"

I stared down at the floor for a minute, fingers playing with my hat brim. Then I looked up. "He's a son-of-a-bitch," I said quietly. "A snooping, prying, sadistic-minded, trouble-making, dangerous son-of-a-*bitch*."

She was nodding before I had finished. "I think so, too; you can tell sometimes. There's something, I don't know what—*nasty* about him."

I shrugged and said, "Yeah." There was nothing more to say. There are times when you somehow know you've met a natural-born enemy, someone you could never possibly like and who could never like you, someone you know in your bones you're going to have trouble with. I knew that now. "Well," I said and got to my feet, "Still a lot to do." Ruth nodded and stood up, and we went out to the garage again.

We finished, finally, at one o'clock, everything done and ready; but by then it was too late to go to bed. Ruth made coffee, and we sat in the living-room, the drapes pulled tight shut, just talking—about anything and everything except what was about to happen.

Ruth said, "Aren't there people in Los Angeles, Ben, who'll wonder about you?"

"Yeah. I have friends there who'll wonder. But I'll write them in a day or so; tell them something or other. Maybe I'll go back when this is all over; I don't know."

"What about your job?"

"They'll sure as hell wonder. They know it isn't like me to just quit over the phone. But"—I shrugged—"they'll forget it."

"What did you do?" she said. "Where did you work?"

"At an advertising agency; I was production manager." I shook my head. "Of all people to just up and quit without notice, a production manager is worst. But I had an assistant, a girl, who was awfully smart; she'll keep things from getting too snarled up. Might even get my job. I hope so. She could do it."

"Did you know many girls there?"

"Oh—some. Nothing important, nothing serious. But I had a good time in L. A.; knew a lot of nice people."

"Well, I'm interested," she said. "This thing we're in together"—she shook her head incredulously—"It's still hard to believe. And naturally I'm curious about you."

I nodded; I understood. In what we were about to begin, we were completely dependent on each other; yet we knew very little about each other, and I wanted to know more about her, as she did about me. I asked her questions about herself; she'd gone to a girls' school, then to Stanford; for the past two years she'd lived alone in an apartment in San Francisco, though she saw her parents often; they lived in Palo Alto where Ruth had been born. She had a married brother living in Denver. I had the feeling that Ruth—though she had a lot of friends—had been a lonely person, and I could see how Arnie had made a big change in her life.

We were actually sort of clinging to each other, in a way, during that last hour or so. Except in the living room and kitchen, we'd been keeping out of each other's way in that house, getting through the odd situation we were in as well as we could. But now, at two o'clock, I shaved—so closely it hurt—and Ruth stood in the hall, leaning against the bathroom door jamb

watching me, talking, asking if I were sure I had everything I'd need. She got comfort from being close to me. She was afraid of being alone and was postponing it as long as she could. I knew how she felt; I was glad she was there; I was terribly frightened at what I was about to do.

In my room I changed into the blue denims and work shirt Ruth had bought, while Ruth got her dark blue trench coat and blue beret out of the front closet. She drove the car into the garage. I came out by the kitchen door and lifted the now full green canvas sack formed from the tent-square I'd bought into the front seat. Then Ruth backed the car out again with only the parking lights on. I closed the garage door, got into the front seat beside Ruth, and we headed west toward highway 101.

We didn't talk; fear was uppermost in our minds now, and we had nothing to say about that. Four or five miles north on 101, at two twenty-five Wednesday morning, we turned off onto the narrow county road which leads to the San Rafael ferry but first winds through hills past the steel storm fence which marks the outermost boundaries of the San Quentin prison reservation. That fence parallels the road for several miles, and between it and the beginning of the actual prison area lies a wide belt—a sort of no-man's land—of hills covered with trees, woods, and brush. Ruth drove very slowly now, her eyes on the rear-view mirror watching for the headlights of any car which might be on this road, too, tonight. There were none. Presently we passed the west gate of the prison area near the prison farm, where the road turned left for fifty yards then curved to the right. "We're nearly there," I said, "get set." Ruth nodded, and I said, "Now don't worry." Smiling, I added, "I know you will, but just get

through the time somehow; try to think of other things. There's nothing you can do, and it'll be all right. I'm certain of it; it'll be all right."

She nodded, knowing I wasn't and couldn't be sure of any such thing. "I won't worry a bit," she said. "Why should I? This sort of thing is done all the time," and I laughed.

We drove on, the road curving regularly, left, right, left, right; then we entered a comparatively straight stretch of road, where the right road bank rose steeply. "Anywhere along here," I said quietly. Ruth pulled off the road, stopped, and turned off the lights.

It suddenly occurred to me that I might never see her again; that it was possible, or even very likely, that I was going to spend the coming years in a prison, never seeing Ruth or any other girl close enough to touch. I might even be killed in the next few minutes. And if either of those things was going to happen to me then I had to have this much at least: I had to hold this girl to me and kiss her for a moment, for a minute, Arnie or no Arnie. That much was owed to me by someone or something. That much I had to have, because of what I was about to go into.

I turned to Ruth, and began trying to explain that to her. But she just touched a hand to my mouth to shut me off, and then she was moving toward me across the seat and the canvas sack, her arms raising, and I grabbed her to me, hard. I kissed her then, and she responded, and everything I was about to do was gone and forgotten and didn't exist. Then I drew back and said quickly, "I've got to go," and she released me, staring after me as I opened the door beside me, and stepped out onto the dirt shoulder of the deserted road, pulling the sack along with me.

On the road beside the car, I quietly pushed my

door tight closed. Then Ruth came to life and slid under the wheel. "Get going, Ruthie!" I said.

She nodded, put the car into gear, and as it began to move she said, "Be careful. Oh, Ben, be careful!"

7

THEN THE CAR was picking up speed and sliding past me. I climbed a few feet up the bank and when I turned, the car's red taillights flicked out of sight at the bend of the road just ahead. I stood perfectly still, listening, ready to drop flat in the high weeds. The sound of the car motor faded and there was no other sound. I stood in semidarkness—there was a faint half moon and a great many stars—at just before three in the morning —low ebb time for the human body and spirit—yearning after Ruth, and knowing that what I had to do now was impossible. I was about to walk into the greatest danger of my life and I had no stomach for it. I stood there terribly frightened. It wasn't even an exhilarating fear, it occurred to me, but a sickening depression of spirit that left me with hardly the will to move.

But I did. I stepped to the six-foot storm fence of linked wire, topped with barbed-wire strands set at an angle to the fence, and heaved my canvas bundle over it, letting it drop into the weeds on the other side. Once more I paused, listening for an approaching car. Then, setting a toe at an awkward angle into the mesh of the fence, I grabbed the fence top with both hands

and slowly climbed over it, carefully avoiding the steel barbs. On the ground at the other side, I listened again through several moments, then picked up my canvas bundle, and began to climb the hill ahead, pushing slowly through the summer weeds and underbrush, guiding myself to the hilltop by the scattered silhouettes of trees on its crest. This area, I knew, was nothing more than a belt of wasteland isolating the actual prison area from the rest of the county. It was not guarded in any way; there was nothing to stop anyone from doing what I was doing now and for the moment I was safe enough..

In the darkness it took me fifteen minutes to reach the hill's peak where I stood looking down from its height at the long gradual slope of its other side. Ahead and below me, spread out like a great map, lay the prison in black shadow and yellow electric light. I'd been through the prison twice after Arnie began his term here; anyone can go through it—they have scheduled tours for the public every Thursday afternoon. So I knew what I was looking at now. Far ahead lay the enclosed area of the prison itself, eight or ten acres of ground maybe, completely enclosed by either concrete walls or cell blocks and other prison buildings joined together end to end. Inside the enclosed area lay the dark athletic fields, and far beyond them to the west, outside the walls, the prison farm was lost in darkness. Some of the prison below me was dark, some of it well lighted; I could see the great prison Yard, empty now, its shape defined by the strong wall lights around its edges; the tall narrow windows of the enormous cell blocks were dimly lit. Directly below me at the base of the hill lay the prison industrial area, a concrete-walled rectangle directly adjoining the prison area, its south wall being the north wall of the prison. I began walking toward it down the dark hill.

In each of its four factorylike buildings, I saw dim lights burning as I moved quietly down the hill through the summer weeds, my pack in my hand. There were more lights suspended from the twenty-foot concrete walls, shining down into the area. But work was long since over for the day so most of the area below me was dark, except for the wall lights around its edges; and Arnie had told me the buildings would be empty except for an inmate fire guard in each. At the four corners of the walls, and at intervals between them, I saw the black silhouettes of the guard towers. With the area now cleared except for the four honor men in the buildings, the wall gate leading into the prison area locked, and all men accounted for, the industrial-area towers were unmanned. *But what if they're manned tonight?*—the words spoke themselves in my mind. *What if there's a man with a gun in one of those wall posts?* But I knew there wasn't, I told myself; high above the prison on its standard hung the green light; all was quiet, the prison in normal condition, the industrial area empty and silent. Picking my way down the hill, I thought, *The light'll be red before long,* and I tried to smile but I couldn't.

At the bottom of the hill, only a narrow strip of road and a half dozen yards of sloping bare ground lay between me and the black rising bulk of the industrial-area wall. I heard nothing; no sound of an approaching car or person, nothing from the wall or the other side of it. I untied the four knotted corners of the canvas bundle in the weeds beside me. On the very top of the things in the bundle lay a thick coil of the new quarter-inch rope I had bought. I took this coil in my left hand and in my other hand I took the large four-pronged hook I'd fastened to the rope's end by a plait. In shape this hook resembled a four-pronged anchor, but it was made of wood. These were the J-shaped hooks I'd sawed

out of plywood. I'd bolted four of them together, carefully wrapped the shaft with copper wire to strengthen it, then padded every inch of the grapple's surface with absorbent cotton, and wrapped it tight with black friction tape. I'd made two such grappling hooks, and the other, with its identical coil of rope, still lay in my canvas bundle.

There was nothing to do now but use the rope and hook in my hand. But once again, I listened. Then, hearing nothing, I knotted the corners of my bundle together again. Once more I listened, and now there was no longer an acceptable reason for postponing what I had to do.

I walked across the narrow road, clambered down the embankment beyond it, then stood three or four yards from the base of the wall, the coiled rope hanging loose in my left hand, the grappling hook with the last few inches of rope in my right hand. I swung the hook back and forth twice, then drew my arm far back and heaved the hook underhanded and with all my strength up toward the top of the wall. There were three full seconds of utter silence as the rope coils flashed off the palm of my hand, then I heard the padded hook strike and fall. It made a dull clatter, a sound neither great nor small, and I stood for maybe eight or ten seconds, listening. Then I began pulling in the slack of the rope.

The top of this wall, I knew—I'd seen it in daylight—was flat concrete. On both sides of this flat walk, and running the lengths of all the walls, were waist-high metal hand rails, mounted on metal posts set into the concrete. Paralleling the top rail, and midway between it and the top of the wall, ran another supporting rail; it would be almost impossible to toss a four-pronged grappling hook up onto this wall without having one or more of its prongs engage some part of these guide rails. The rope tightened in my hands and

I pulled harder. The rope held. I slid my hands high on the rope; and standing directly beside the wall, I slowly lifted my feet and hung suspended a yard above the ground. The rope strained and creaked but held fast. I let go, climbed the embankment, and crossed the road again to the weeds where my bundle lay. Kneeling beside it, I pulled my belt out of a few loops and slipped it under the big knot of the bundle. Then I threaded the belt through the loops again, cinched it tight, and stood up, the big bundle hanging awkwardly behind me, bumping the backs of my knees with each step.

At the wall again, I climbed the rope hand over hand —the first fifteen feet easily and rapidly, the last five or six in a desperate scrambling agony of rapidly draining strength. A yard from the top I hung for several long moments, afraid I might have to drop or slide back down, the rope burning through the palms of my hands. Then I managed to heave once more, sweat pouring, caught the top edge with one hand and then the other, and in the instant before my arms could collapse, I heaved my upper body up onto the top of the wall. I lay momentarily exhausted for a dozen seconds, the bulky bundle in the small of my back wedged between my body and the rail just above me.

I knew that if anyone had been in the guard towers here, they would have shot or shouted or been on me by now. But nothing happened. From far out on San Francisco Bay—I could see the Bay as I raised my head—a boat whistle sounded, low and mournful. There was no other sound so I dragged my bundle and body up onto the flat walk.

My hook had caught the top guide rail, and I removed it, and dragged up the rope. For the moment at least, I felt temporarily safe. Lying flat on my stomach on the wall top, looking down on the roofs and northern sides of the industrial-area buildings, I knew that I

could not be seen from the road outside, nor from the area below me. I lay there a long time, twenty minutes or more, I suppose, regaining the strength of my arms, my eyes moving over all of the area below that I could see, and alert for any sound.

No one was down there; I knew that presently; so with the rope coiled in my hand and the big hook slung over my back, I began to crawl along the wall to the east on hands and knees, my chest and belly no more than two feet from the concrete surface, the canvas bundle lolling against the backs of my legs. When I was opposite the furniture factory, at the east end of the area, I lay flat on my stomach and carefully lowered the big hook to the ground, holding it out from the side of the wall, making no sound.

I felt the rope slacken as the hook touched the earth, then I passed the free end of the rope around the base of the nearest guide-rail post and let it drop to the ground, too. Then I looked everywhere I could see in the whole industrial area; a lieutenant or sergeant of one of the two night watches, Arnie had told me, was likely to come through this area at least once during the night, and at no set time. But no one, he said, moved through the prison at night without a lighted flashlight in his hand, or he might be shot. So I knew I'd see anyone moving through the area. The fire guards in the buildings of this area never came out of the buildings, Arnie told me; it was a violation of rules, in fact. They were there to spot fires that might somehow start, and they spent the nights reading and dozing. I wasn't worried about them, and there was no flashlight beam bobbing along the grounds of the area, so I climbed over the guard rail, and lowered myself hand over hand on both lengths of rope to the ground. Then I pulled the free length of rope down after me.

I gathered the rope up and crossed the uneven ten-

foot strip of dirt separating the northern wall of the furniture factory from the prison wall. This place, empty and silent, was well lighted and I walked rapidly to the western corner of the building and cautiously looked around it. There, against the side of the building—an uneven silhouette in the darkness beyond the range of the wall lights—lay the great stack of wooden crates Arnie had described. Empty now, they would be used as needed to crate prison-made office desks for shipment to various bureaus and departments of the State of California. I saw nothing else, heard or saw no movement, and after another moment or two, I stepped around the building's corner, and walked toward the crates, a moving shadow in the darkness.

As Arnie had promised, the big crates weren't carefully stacked. The ends and edges of some of them projected beyond others, and between them were gaps of from one or two inches to as much as a foot. Near the center of the great stack of crates, I found—by sight and by feel—a foot-wide gap, and turning sideways, pushed myself into it, dragging and forcing my bundle after me. A yard or more within this narrow aisle, I began feeling for the upper open edges of the stacked crates, and presently found one projecting some inches beyond the bottom of the crate on top of it. Finding a foothold, I climbed—rapping my head sharply against a corner of a crate above me—into this crate, pulling my bundle, rope, and hook in after me. Made to hold an office desk, the crate was roomy enough. Sitting down, my head just brushed the bottom of the crate above my head. After a moment I found I could lie almost flat, my knees bent slightly.

I jammed the hook and rope into a corner of the crate, took off my shoes, and then, head pillowed on my bundle and hands clasped under my neck, settled down to wait. I felt tired, but did not expect to sleep. I could

feel my heart beating, not rapidly, but more rapidly than normal, and I expected this to continue for a long time to come. I was more afraid than I remembered ever having been in my life before, and I was certain that never had I felt fear so steadily and without cessation as I did tonight; and from this, too, I knew I could not expect relief for a long, long, time. I lay there and hated the quality of this persistent fright, for it was the depressing fear of helplessness. I could take no action against it. Lying silently in the center of a stack of empty crates in the walled industrial area of San Quentin prison, I knew that only chance and luck, good or bad, could affect what happened to me. It was out of my hands.

I neither slept nor remained awake for the rest of the night. At times I dreamed—vague, jumbled, indescribable dreams—I was cold and always close to waking, but I always knew I was dreaming and where I was. I shifted position often, always careful to make no sound, and lay there waiting for morning.

8

I WAS AWAKE when the first light diluted the darkness, then I lay semiconscious until the whitening light was complete and all darkness gone. After a while, though it didn't penetrate to where I lay, I knew the first sun was out. After another time, I heard voices, close and overhead. "Hi, Mac," said the nearest voice, and the other—farther away—answered, "Vince; how's the new car?" Then the first man replied, the voice fading as he walked away, and I knew that the guards were manning the industrial-area walls for the day.

Moving very carefully, I took one of the waxed-paper-wrapped packages Ruth had made out of my canvas bundle, and opened it. It was a cheese sandwich and a banana, and though I felt no appetite, I ate them both. When I'd finished, I drank from a cardboard cream container which Ruth had washed out, filled with water, and taped shut. I very much wanted to get out of this crate and stretch—I knew I should have done it earlier—but I was afraid to now. As well as I could, I stretched my back, neck, shoulder and arm muscles; then, sitting pressed back in a corner of the crate, I

stretched out my legs, revolving my feet at the ankles, and felt a little better. I poured water into my palm, and rubbed the water on my closed eyes.

Men began going past the crates; at first two of them, talking quietly, then almost immediately a great many more were streaming by, a few feet from my head. I heard only isolated words and fragments of sentences; none of them lingered near the crates. I smiled a little; the talk I heard reminded me of the Army, nearly every adjective an obscenity. I was surprised at the amount of laughter.

Within a comparatively few minutes—I didn't notice how long—the stream of passing men thinned. Only an occasional man, or pair of men, passed the crates now. Then a low voice, only a yard or two from my ear, said quietly and rapidly, "Are you in there? Ben, are you there? Just say 'yes' if you are; don't keep talking."

"Yes," I answered.

Arnie was silent for a moment, and I heard footsteps pass. Then Arnie spoke again. "How you doing? You okay? Talk till I cough, then shut up right away."

"I'm okay, Arnie," I said quietly. "I'm fine; don't worry about me." I couldn't think of anything else to say, and after a moment Arnie replied.

"Swell," he said. "Just hold out till four. You bring anything to read?" He coughed twice, rather loudly, and I didn't answer.

Again steps passed by and a voice said, "Hi, Arnie."

"Charley," Arnie answered. "How's it?"

"Okay." The voice was well past the crates now.

"Okay, Ben; talk till I cough."

"No," I said, "I didn't bring anything to read"—the notion astounded me.

"Too bad," Arnie said. "Look, I've got to go now. You wearing a watch?" I replied that I was, and Arnie said, "Well, watch the time; be sure you get yourself out

of there before four, or you'll fall down when you try walking. See you later, and—thanks, Benny," he added softly.

"Okay, Arnie. See you later." I heard Arnie's departing steps.

All morning I dozed and awakened, dozed and awakened over again, and after a time I was very hot, and I knew the sun was overhead now, beating down on the crates.

Then again men streamed past me, and I brought out a paper-wrapped package of food—a ham sandwich and some cookies—and ate. I was still not hungry, but the discomfort of lying in this box had become more than discomfort; it was close to pain, and eating helped take my mind off that. The boards on which I lay and sat had become intolerably hard, and no matter what I tried I could not stretch what was becoming a cramped agony out of my muscles. The sun was beating silently on every exposed surface of the stack of crates I lay in, and I was intensely conscious of the oppressive quality of each breath I drew. I didn't—I couldn't—think of anything but my physical discomfort; Arnie, Ruth, home, and what was to happen after four o'clock, had no power to interest me. I was wet with sweat, and every surface of my body which had come into contact with the boards of my crate was actually painful. When once again the stream of prisoners, returning from lunch, flowed past me, I waited in agony until the last of them had gone. Then, very slowly, my muscles cramped, I got to my knees, bent at the waist, and moved to the end of the box. With infinite care, I got my head and shoulders out of the crate at the open end, and over a period of perhaps five full minutes—afraid my cramped muscles might fail me and I would fall with a crash—I got out of the box and stood upright, finally, in the narrow foot-wide aisle. Anyone passing, I knew, who

took the trouble to stop and peer in would see me standing here; and then I'd spend the next few years in San Quentin prison. Still I stood there, methodically exercising each part of my body, concentrating on a leg, then an arm, then the other leg, moving in absolute silence, feeling the prickling return of circulation until I was again in control of my body, and I knew that when I had to, I could walk.

Though I had a long wait until four o'clock, I didn't try to get back in the box; the air was cooler out here; there was some circulation, and occasionally a warm breeze would move through the stacked crates. From time to time an inmate would pass my hiding place; I'd see a flash of blue denim, and if the man weren't too tall, the lower part of his face. Twice the tan-uniformed figures of guards walked past me, and each time anyone passed, I held my breath and stood utterly motionless.

Once more the stream of blue-denimed men was flowing past, moving south now, toward the wall gate and main prison area. Almost immediately, one of these figures approached the narrow space in which I stood, and for a moment of wild panic I felt a nearly irresistible urge to try to hide in my crate. Then the blue figure leaned against the stacked crates, his back to me, completely blocking the narrow space in which I stood, and I knew who it was. The prisoners streamed on past and sometimes one or more of them would speak to Arnie, and he'd answer, his voice calm, pleasant, and unconcerned; I could see that he was holding a lighted cigarette.

Arnie changed his position, leaning negligently with a shoulder against the side of a crate, still blocking my aisle. Then very quietly, his arm bringing the cigarette to his mouth as he spoke, he said, "You okay? Just answer yes or no."

"Yes."

"You out of the crate?"

"Yes."

"All right; we move any second now. This is the bad moment; the guard on the wall could see us now. I'm watching him; he's paying no attention to me. Far as he knows, I'm just waiting for a friend from the factory. Move—" Arnie coughed. Several men, talking, approached and passed the pile of crates. Then Arnie resumed. "Move out, now, Ben. Come forward till you're standing right behind me." Again Arnie changed position, standing now as he had before, his back squarely against the little space in which I stood, blocking it off completely.

I stepped forward until I stood directly behind him, and I put both hands on his back for a moment to let him know I was there.

Arnie said, "Take my ID card out of my back pocket." I reached into his back pocket, and my fingers touched the little plastic-sealed card, and I took it out. "Put it in your shirt pocket," Arnie said. "Be sure you don't lose it."

We waited. Then Arnie turned his head, bringing his cigarette to his mouth, and said, "When I say *now*, just step out, and stand here talking to me."

Again a group passed, talking, and the moment they passed, Arnie said, "Now," and I stepped out into the open.

I couldn't help it; I had to glance up at the wall post, and I saw the guard inside, his back to us, doing something, I couldn't tell what. Then the man turned, partially facing us, but looking off to the west. Arnie was smiling at me, ignoring the guard, but standing so that he could see him.

"I'll step in," Arnie was saying, "the moment a bunch of men have passed. Soon as I do, you walk along after

them. Don't catch up, but try to look as though maybe you're with them. Now, you know what to do? Any questions? You got it all, Ben?" He smiled pleasantly. "*Smile,* Ben; we're just a couple of cons talking."

I managed to smile. "I've got it all, Arnie. Little late for questions, isn't it?" I smiled genuinely, now; I was terribly excited and that feeling, for the moment, overrode my fear.

"Guess it is." Arnie grinned at me, as excited as I was.

Four inmates were approaching from around the corner of the auto shop just west of the furniture factory, and I saw that they would pass close by. They approached, and one of them said, "Hi, Hot Shot," to Arnie, glancing at me without interest.

Arnie didn't answer; just stared steadily at the man, who grinned. Then Arnie looked without seeming to at the wall tower.

The guard—I had to look, too—was leaning on his forearms, the upper part of his body outside the open window of the watch post. He was looking to the west, away from us, but nevertheless I knew we were within range of his vision. I turned to speak to Arnie, but he was gone, and before I could speak, he whispered at me harshly.

"*Move,* Ben!" he said. I saw his strained face in the shadows between the crates, and I turned and walked after the four inmates just ahead.

It was a walk of no more than twenty-five yards to the south corner of the furniture factory, and I took each step in the absolute certainty of hearing a shout from behind me.

But no one shouted; I reached the corner, turned east, and in the moment of disappearing from the sight of the wall guard, I glanced back at him. The man was leaning just as before, staring out over the prison, his

posture conveying his mingled boredom and relief that one more tour of duty was nearly over.

I walked on, joining the thin straggle of men from other parts of the area, all of them moving toward the wall gate that opened into the walled prison area to the south. Then I stopped dead in my tracks at what I saw ahead, my heart began to pound, and I had to fight the impulse to turn and run. There was a shakedown going on at the wall gate; Arnie had told me there would be, but I'd forgotten. Then again I walked slowly forward —there was nothing else to do—trying to calm myself and study the scene before me.

The prisoners, as they reached the open gate, joined one or the other of two loose lines of men. At the head of each line stood a tan-uniformed guard; one a thin blond man of perhaps forty-five, the other dark and younger, and apparently of Spanish or Mexican descent. As an inmate reached the head of his line he would raise both arms, extending them straight out at his sides. Then he would step forward one pace, and the guard at the head of his line would stoop, run his hands from the prisoner's hips down the outside of his trousers, up the inside of the trousers, up the man's ribs, then out along the lengths of both arms. Each prisoner, I saw, stared straight ahead, face expressionless. Then, as the guard said, "Okay," or simply nodded, the man would drop his arms, still not glancing at the guard, walk out through the gate, and the next man would take a pace forward, arms already extended.

The shakedowns were being conducted with astonishing speed—four or five seconds to a man—and the two guards, carrying on a conversation as they worked, never looked at the faces of the men they searched. The routine humiliation of being searched, I understood then, was matched by the bored unconscious embarrassment of the men who did the searching.

I moved ahead in the line, a step at a time; other men joined the line behind me, and presently there were only two men ahead of me. The first of these stepped forward, arms raised and was searched. Then he dropped his arms, and walked toward the gate as the next man stepped forward. The guard began his search, then stopped, stood upright, and called after the man who was just passing through the gate— "Hey, you!" The man turned his head to look back, frowning in puzzlement, still walking forward. *"You!* Yes, you!" the guard called again and gestured sharply with his arm. "Come back here."

The prisoner turned and walked slowly back, frowning, shaking his head from side to side in bewildered protest. He was a small black-haired man, perhaps twenty-five years old; a five-pointed star was tattooed in blue ink on the back of one hand.

He stopped in front of the thin blond guard, who squatted suddenly, grasped one of the man's ankles in each hand, then reached into the top of the prisoner's left sock and brought out a strip of heavy metal about six inches long, maybe an inch wide, and a quarter inch thick, blunt at both ends. The guard stood up. "Let's see your ID card," he said. The prisoner took his plastic-sealed identity card from a shirt pocket and handed it to the guard, who glanced at it, then put it into his own shirt pocket. The prisoners and the other guard stood watching. "All right," said the first guard, nodding at the prisoner, "stand over there," and he gestured with his head at a little gray-painted wood hut beside the wall gate, the guards' office. The prisoner, sullen and contemptuous, strolled over to the hut and stood there, facing the two lines. The guard thrust the metal bar into his pocket, turned to the waiting line, and nodded at the man who stood at the head of it. The man raised his arms, and the shakedown was resumed.

I knew the guard's hand would feel the powerful thump of my heart, knew he would peer at me closely, stand for a moment staring at me wonderingly, then order me to stand aside and wait; I felt absolutely certain I was trapped and caught. The man in front of me dropped his arms and turned to the gate. I stepped forward, arms extended, and I knew my face was chalk white.

I felt the hands flash down the sides of my legs, move up again on the inside, felt them brush my ribs, then the hands shot out along the lengths of my arms, and—staring straight ahead—I saw the guard's perfunctory nod from the corner of my eye, and I stepped forward, dropping my arms, and strolled toward the gate. *Hey, you!*—I waited for the sound, like a shot in the back, putting one foot ahead of the other; then I passed through the gate, walked on, and knew I had made it. I began to tremble. I did not believe I could possibly get through what lay ahead of me now.

For some moments I was lost, and I walked blindly on, simply following the blue-shirted backs of the men ahead of me. I recognized nothing around me as anything I had ever seen before, every sight was alien and strange. Following the men just ahead, I was passing a tall flat-roofed building of ancient discolored brick, three or four stories tall. I glanced at it, eyes moving up along its side; the windows of the top story were boarded over; so far as I knew, I had never seen it before, and I did not know where I was. A part of a straggle of blue-dressed men, I moved along with them. We turned left around a corner of the big old building, then up a flight of concrete stairs, and just ahead stood a wide open steel gate in a steel fence. I walked through it, other blue-denimed men just ahead and just behind me. Three guards, one with the collar ornaments of a lieutenant, stood beside the gate talking among them-

selves. They stared absently at the prisoners streaming through the gate beside them; and then I was past them, and I stepped suddenly into the vast San Quentin Yard.

The sound and sight of it struck at my senses and utterly bewildered me; I walked on for a few steps, then stopped, glancing around me. The sound was a vast murmuring roar; thousands of human voices moving through the air to strike and reflect from the concrete walls that surrounded them. The sight was a great stretch of asphalt pavement on which stood or moved thousands of identically dressed men; the whole area was completely cut off from the rest of the world by the towering concrete walls of the cell blocks and mess halls, pastel-green and peach-colored, and studded with enormous narrow barred windows and heavy riveted steel doors.

It was like no other place I had ever been—this great crowded asphalt-paved square—yet somehow it was oddly familiar. It was neither outdoors nor in. Above was the sharp blue of the California sky, but its horizons were roof tops high overhead with no other glimpse of the lost world outside. Trees, flowers, and earth—women, automobiles, and neon signs—were out of existence here, and the very quality of the light was distorted. It came only from above, clear, even, and luminous.

Then suddenly I remembered where I'd seen this before; in a dozen or more movies at least. A great paved yard, inmates lounging against narrow-windowed walls, the window openings striped with bars—I'd seen it many a time, for this was California, and no matter what prison the movie was supposed to be showing, chances were, I realized, that it had been filmed right here. Only now it was real, and I was in it. The roar of mingled voices was steady and constant;

the mass of blue-clad bodies a shock to my senses. I knew that confusion could take over my mind and in the next moments I could make a terrible and irretrievable mistake.

I saw men streaming slowly into the cell blocks—these weren't walls surrounding the area, but great high cell blocks. The men entered them through each of a number of big riveted doors around the Yard, and I knew there wasn't much time. Within minutes I had to find and be inside a cell—one certain cell and only that cell out of thousands of identical cells—in one of these vast buildings. I stood where I was, a dozen yards past the gate I had entered by, and made my mind slow down; a mistake now could not be corrected.

I'd come from the north, I reminded myself, and I turned a little on my feet, till I faced squarely south. The great cell block ahead, then, at the end of the Yard, must be the South block; my block, therefore, the East block, lay at my left. But men were apparently entering the East block through each of two doors, one far ahead to the south, the other immediately at my left across the Yard. I thought carefully. The men at my left must be entering the North block; I could see no other entrance to it; the door far ahead, therefore, must lead to the East block. I began walking toward it, aware that in the moments I had stood in the Yard, the great crowd had thinned appreciably. I began to hurry.

In the midst of a score of other men who filed in with me, I walked through the open steel doors beside which stood an inmate, a great brass key in his hand. Then again I stopped dead in my tracks, and a man behind me bumped into me, then walked around me, cursing. I'd expected to step directly into the interior of the cell block but instead I stood in a fairly small hexagonal room with plastered walls; at my right and at my left, stood an open steel door, and some of the men passing

around me walked in through one door, some through the other. Again, my eyes actually closed in desperate concentration, I stopped to think; I had come to the far south end of the East block; therefore the entrance to the East block lay at my left. I turned and walked in.

This—the sight that struck at my eyes—was familiar to me from newspaper and magazine photographs I'd noticed since Arnie entered Quentin. I was in a great concrete shell—high, very long, and comparatively narrow, like an old-time dirigible hangar; this was the inside of the tall-windowed peach-tinted cell block. But within this great shell stood another distinctly separate structure, touching the hollow building which enclosed it only at the concrete floor on which it stood. It was a high, very long, spidery structure for it seemed from where I stood to be made entirely of vertical steel bars. It stretched off far ahead into apparently infinite distance and I understood what I was looking at. These were steel-barred cages—cells—side by side on the concrete floor and receding off before me toward the far end of the cell block in dwindling perspective. Directly on top of this long row of cells was another identical row extending off into the same distance. And on top of that was a third row, and then a fourth, and high above my head, just under the girdered ceiling of the cell block but not touching it, was the fifth tier—all alike, door after door after door after door, the entire front of this great block of cells and their doors apparently nothing but vertical bars.

Before each of the upper four tiers hung steel-railed, concrete-paved walkways extending the entire length of the tiers. These were connected by iron stairways, I saw; men swarmed over the entire five-tier-high front of the cell block, on the stairways, the walkways, and entering their cells. The entire block was an echoing cavern of clanging iron and voices.

I followed the thinning stream of men to the nearest stairway and climbed it with the others to the third tier, Arnie's tier. I repeated the number of Arnie's cell to myself, over and over, *1042, 1042,* and now, on the third tier, I looked for the cell numbers stenciled over the steel-bar doors. The first I saw read 1291 and I walked past it; 1290 was the next, then 1289, 1288—the cells stretched far ahead of me and I began to hurry along the walkway, aware that most of the cells I was passing were now occupied; there were very few men left on the walkways now.

I was almost running—1233, 1232—1196,1195—1148, 1147, 1146. I reached the last cell, far down at the other end of the block. It was occupied by two men, the door already closed. The number stenciled above it was 1100, and there were no more cells. There was no 1042.

I stood blankly, my mouth actually hanging open a little, shoulders slumped, and I did not know what to do. I'd entered the wrong cell block, I thought first. Then suddenly I remembered and, actually running now, I turned the corner, ran twenty-five feet, rounded the next corner of the walkway, and was on the other side of the cell block—a second great bank of cells, back to back with the first, stretching ahead before me. 1001, 1002—there were only three other men on the entire length of the walkway ahead, and now two of them turned into a cell, pulling its door closed behind them, and I ran at top speed—1034, 1035, 1036. Then here was 1040, 1041, and with the walkway deserted now and every other man in his cell, I stopped at the half-open door of cell 1042, stepped in with the other occupant who stood staring at me, and pulled the door closed. An instant later, just outside the door, there was the chunking sound of heavy metal dropping a few inches onto metal, and I knew what it was. An immensely long steel bar, half the length of the tier, had been

dropped into place by a guard-operated lever, to slide over the top edges of the row of cell doors into heavy L-brackets riveted to each door. I was locked in cell 1042 of San Quentin Prison.

9

"JUST MADE IT," the man in the cell with me said expressionlessly.

I nodded. "Yeah," I said, and he turned away toward the tiny wash basin fastened to the painted plaster end of the cell. Turning on the single tap, he began splashing water on his face from his cupped palms. He was a tall man, his once-black hair nearly white, the back of his neck tanned, wrinkled, and strong. His face, I had seen, was lined and neither young nor old.

I sat down on the lower bunk—there were two brown-blanketed bunks fastened to the wall, one above the other, and the lower, I knew, was Arnie's—and I began reassuring myself with what Arnie had told me would happen now.

This morning, I knew, Arnie had told his cellmate, this man at the wash basin, that tonight he was going to switch cells; that he intended to visit an unnamed friend in another cell. This, Arnie explained to me, was absolutely forbidden, severely punished when detected; and yet it happened regularly for a variety of reasons, because it was almost impossible, or at least extremely impractical to detect, as long as the men

switching cells drew no special attention to themselves. There were over four thousand men confined in four cell blocks, and just counting them—four times every twenty-four hours—was time-consuming enough. To check the actual identity of each man in each of several thousand cells was a near impossibility, practically speaking, and on those rare occasions when it had to be done for some extraordinary reason, it took hours. Right now, as on day after routine day, for this cell to contain two blue-denimed men of the same race was enough for the guard who would soon glance in, lips moving as he counted the tier.

Al—I remembered his name, now—was drying his face on his towel; then he took a newspaper from the upper bunk, and half sitting on, half leaning against the wash basin, he opened it and began to read. This man, Arnie had said, would not betray the fact that Arnie was, so far as Al knew, in the wrong cell tonight. This was not out of loyalty to Arnie but from simple lack of motive for doing so. For even if the switch were somehow detected, Arnie's cellmate need only say, if he were even asked, that he thought it was a legitimate cell-change ordered by a prison official; there were thousands of such cell-changes here every month. Whether this was believed or not was unimportant; San Quentin inmates were not expected to be their own police.

So it was nothing to this man, I reminded myself, it was none of his business that Arnie had apparently switched cells tonight with the prisoner who now sat on Arnie's bunk. I told myself this, but just the same, I made no further move or remark that might conceivably reveal that I was actually not a San Quentin prisoner. The thought would never enter the man's head; that I did know. I sat on the edge of the bunk in faded, shapeless blue denims, blue work shirt with snap fasteners, and black shoes—and even more important

and fundamental, was the simple fact that I was here. It was inconceivable that I was anything but another San Quentin prisoner, and the fact that Arnie's cellmate had never seen me before meant nothing. However long this man had been at San Quentin, he no more knew every face in it than the resident of a town of four thousand knew every last soul who lived there; and particularly with the population changing every day.

"Hot today, wasn't it?" the bored voice said, and I looked up to see Al looking down at me over the top of his lowered newspaper.

I nodded. "Yeah," I said.

"You workin'?"

I decided to say no; any place I claimed to be working in the prison might turn out to be where this man actually worked; Arnie had forgotten to brief me on this. "No; unassigned; I'm in the Yard." I felt foolishly pleased with the way these terms came to mind.

Al nodded. "You a fish?"

"Yeah," I said; I knew a fish was a comparatively new prisoner or guard. I turned to glance boredly out through the cell door; I wanted this conversation to end, and after a moment, I heard the sound of Arnie's cellmate raising his paper again.

There began now the very worst moments so far, and I sat there on the bunk to endure them in helplessness. For now the count was about to begin, and if today there were a hideout—if some unknown prisoner chose this day to hide out—it would be disaster, final and complete, and there was no way Arnie or I could protect ourselves against this possibility.

I sat wondering what the chances of it were. Hideouts in San Quentin, I knew from Arnie, were neither frequent nor infrequent; they happened not every day or even every week, and a month or more might pass without one. But in a year's time there could be a fair

number, and on any one day the danger of a hideout for some reason—or no reason—was real.

Please, God, I found myself murmuring silently, *don't let it happen today,* and I sat there on the bunk unable to think of anything except what would happen if it did. Not searching for Arnie at all—for there was a blue-denimed man, me, sitting where Arnie ought to be—they would immediately begin a search for the other man, missing from his cell. And among the first and obvious places to be searched in the industrial area—still guarded by the wall guards who stayed there for just this reason until the four-thirty count came all-clear—would be the big pile of crates in which Arnie now lay hidden. It was no place to hide, Arnie had said, unless you expected no search to be made. And the moment they discovered Arnie crouched in his crate, with me locked behind these bars in his place, that would be the end for us both.

I heard the footsteps coming down the tier walkway —the guard counting each and every occupant of this tier—and the danger of another hideout dropped from my mind, for I suddenly knew with simple terror what was about to happen. Al walked to the front of the cell and stood at the bars, and I remembered Arnie's instructions and stood up beside him. The guard had to see us, close up, face to face, and standing on our feet; false counts have been made, Arnie had said, a dummy lying in a bunk where a man should have been, so they took no chances on that. And now, in the next moments, I knew, the guard just outside would stop here at the cell door, stand staring at my face, then frown and say, *Who are you? What are you doing here? You're not a San Quentin man at all!*

On panicky impulse I almost turned away—the guard was far closer than I'd thought; his steps on the walkway were nearly here, only a cell or two away. But

before I could move, the guard was at the cell door, as I stood rigid and frozen beside Al, and then he was past me and gone. In absolute astonishment, I realized that he hadn't even stopped; that he was counting with fantastic speed, walking rapidly and without pause or breaking his step, glancing into each cell, counting the occupants of the entire tier in only the brief time it took to walk its length.

Al was back at the wash basin with his paper, and I stood, eyes closed in relief; then they flashed wide open again—the count had to be clear before I could possibly relax.

I waited, staring out the door; presently, on a narrow wooden walkway suspended from the cell-block wall opposite my door, a tan-uniformed man sauntered past, a rifle tucked under one arm. I turned away, then, and lay down on the bunk, trapped and helpless; and to occupy my mind with something else, I glanced around the cell I was confined in. In actual fact, it was my first real look at it, and I was suddenly astonished at what I saw.

This cell was unbelievably small; it was actually smaller, I saw in amazement, than the bathroom at home, and I sat up on the bunk unable to believe it. The bunk I was sitting on covered half the floor space. One end of the bunk actually touched the bars at the front of the cell, yet beyond its foot at the other end there was barely room for a man to stand. While at the bunk's side, there was no more, I was certain, than two or three feet of space; if I lay on the front edge of the bunk, I knew I could easily reach out and touch the plaster of the opposite wall. At the end of the cell was the tiny wash basin against which Al stood leaning, and beside it a lidless seatless toilet. Above the basin were two narrow wooden shelves, one for each inmate, the shelves crowded with Arnie's and his cellmate's razors,

shaving cream, photographs, and other small possessions. That was all; the tiny space was so crowded that a man could hardly walk in it, couldn't move in it, unless his cellmate lay on a bunk out of the way.

I caught myself actually shaking my head in astonishment; this wasn't enough space for one man to live in and still feel himself human. Yet *two* men occupied it, and, Arnie had once told me, nearly every other almost identical cell in the prison.

And then the fear rushed back to the pit of my stomach. I could not stand this place, and I knew it. I believed I would kill myself if I had to live this way. And I knew that if I had understood this earlier I would never have done what I had; I would not be here, whatever that might mean to Arnie. I knew I could not possibly have brought myself to even risk confinement in a space like this; and for a moment I wondered about the great and lavish State of California. How could its people permit men to be confined in this tiny few feet of space? And then I was swept by the renewed realization that I was confined here now, that I still had to get out, and the sudden thought of freedom, of being out of this cell, and the walls around me, brought the smart of beginning tears to my eyes. One or two minutes had passed since the guard had gone by the cell; I didn't know how long a count took, and I supposed it took a considerable time. I lay down again, face to the wall, trying to keep control of my feelings and emotions, trying to find something to turn my mind to.

Arnie's first job at San Quentin had been as a clerk; he was a college graduate, a fair typist, and he could spell accurately, so he worked as an inmate clerk in the set of offices of which the Captain's office and the prison control room were a part. He'd lost his job in a little over a month; he'd gotten into a fight, and been de-

prived of his job, and it was a long time till he got another. But I'd visited him once while he still had this job, and he told me something of what went on in the control room during a count. So I had some idea of what was happening now, and I thought about it, trying to estimate how long the count would take.

The guard who counted this tier, I knew, would report his total to the cell-block office—the little hut-like wooden structure I'd seen down on the main floor, roofed so that objects thrown from the cells high in the tiers, as frequently happened, would not strike the guards. The guards who were counting the other four tiers would report their counts, then the total for the whole East cell block would be phoned to the control room.

Arnie had been fascinated with the atmosphere of the control room during count time; he watched the room and the men in it every chance he got. There'd be a sergeant at the desk, he said, waiting at the phone for the counts to come in. Maybe half a dozen uniformed men would be standing around talking in an easy casual way about the World Series, the fight on television last night, a vacation one of them had just come back from—anything. What interested Arnie was that it seemed to the eye to be a relaxed kind of scene, but in actual fact it was not. The guards in the cell blocks were never told what the correct count for their blocks should be; and they never knew, for new men arrived, others left, and others were transferred every single day. Each time the sergeant answered the control-room phone during count time, Arnie said, the men around him would lower their voices or actually stop talking—while the sergeant checked the count he'd just received against a master sheet listing the correct totals. When it was correct, Arnie said, you could actually feel the concealed tension in the room relax mo-

mentarily—till the phone rang again. What was happening was routine, repeated time after time, day after day, uneventfully, but you knew, Arnie said, that in the consciousness of these man was a knowledge made up of certain inescapable facts. They were part of a handful of men who kept over four thousand convicted criminals in prison. Most of these inmates were normal in intelligence and psychology, and most were serving comparatively short terms. But scattered among them were murderers, both convicted and potential, dangerous psychopaths, both known and undetected, and every other variety of dangerous personality. There were two men, Arnie said, up on Condemned Row then, and I knew they were there still, awaiting execution; they'd beaten two guards to death with hatchets, and severely wounded two more. Some of the men who stood in that office every day at count time had known the dead guards, and one of the wounded guards was still at the prison.

So at each count, Arnie said, there'd be an unacknowledged, almost unrecognized tension in the control room; for if a count came in short, with no error of counting or arithmetic discovered to correct it, a hunt had to begin immediately, ranging through the entire prison, for the missing man or men. No one in the prison would go home, the green light above San Quentin would turn red, and men off-duty would report to the prison and join the hunt. And so, for each of the waiting guards, it meant immediately prowling through buildings, hunting through stacks of clothing, laundry baskets, food crates, air ducts—everywhere and anywhere a man might conceivably be hiding. And for the guard who came on him—this had happened, and would happen again—there might be a knife or gun waiting in the hiding man's hand.

Every time that phone rang, it might mean somebody

standing beside it would die or be badly hurt in the minutes that followed. And I knew, lying here, why Arnie actually enjoyed that scene; scared as I was, and anxious as no one else could be that the counts be correct today, I took a prisoner's pleasure at the fear of his captors.

They joked, Arnie said, to obscure their tension. Half a mile outside the prison gates was a tiny green-painted building; the pumping plant which drew salt water from the Bay, used in the prison plumbing system. It was manned by a single inmate, trusted and unguarded; there was nothing to stop him from simply walking away. Just the same, a prison guard drove out to this post to make certain the inmate was there at the all-important count time. And the joke was this. "Control room," the sergeant would answer each time his phone rang. And once each count, a voice would answer at some point, "Count ready from the pump station." Then the sergeant, accepting his part in the old, formularized prison joke would reply, "Okay; what's your count?" The man at the other end of the line would say, "One." The sergeant would say, "One? Go back, and recount," and the men standing around him would smile.

I tried to picture that room now; the counts coming in regularly from the four main blocks, the old Spanish cell block, the hospital, the kitchen and mess halls, now preparing to feed four thousand men, the farm at the western end of the prison reservation, each office, residence, and every other part of the prison in which there were inmates to be accounted for.

It would take a long time, I thought, waiting it out, lying there on the bunk; and then Al, lowering his newspaper, said, "Slow count tonight; damn it, I'm hungry."

I couldn't help it; I lifted my head to stare at him. "Slow count?" I said.

"Yeah; should have had the all-clear by now."

I couldn't help it. "A hideout?" I said.

He shrugged. "Maybe. Could be. Hope not, though, or they'll have to make a paddle count of the cells; find out who's missing. And no telling when we'll eat then. Probably some dumb screw can't count straight, or add; it usually is." He lifted his paper, and resumed his reading.

I just sank back on the cot; there was nothing I could do but lie and wait, my muscles like jelly from fear. Somewhere, right now, a second count was being made; the men in the control room waiting to know whether they'd go home now, their watch over; or move through the prison in the manhunt they hated. Two minutes, three— I had my watch up before me—then four minutes passed. The second count must be almost ready, and at any second I'd know whether I'd be a prisoner here for the next few years to come or still have a chance to get out.

Then an electric gong sounded in the block, the merest tap of sound; and I didn't know what it meant. Al tossed his paper onto his bunk. "Chow," he said casually. "You notice what we're having?"

I knew I couldn't trust my voice, and shook my head, wondering how I could be supposed to know what the prison was serving for supper. Then I remembered; the week's menu was posted at various places throughout the prison.

From far below I heard a crash of heavy metal, then an immediate and continuing iron clatter, and I knew what had happened. A tier bar had been lifted, the men of the first tier were pushing their cell doors open, and now I could hear the rising murmur of their voices as

they came out of their cells. Again there came the crash of heavy metal, closer this time, and the sound of many voices intensified. Then, in only the time it takes a guard to run up a flight of stairs, the heavy crash sounded just outside my door as the great bar rose from its slots; and Al immediately pushed open the cell door, stepped out, and was gone. The runway before the cell was suddenly crowded with blue-clad men moving toward the stairways, and I lay on the bunk for a moment longer, then made a sudden decision.

I'd intended to skip supper; to simply remain in the cell; you didn't have to show up for a meal, Arnie had explained to me, unless you wanted to, and for one reason or another men occasionally omitted a meal. Arnie and I had agreed that obviously my wisest action would be to stay here, lying on the bunk, either asleep or apparently so. But now I had to get out of this tiny cell. I couldn't possibly stay in it a moment longer without relief from it. Knowing how potentially dangerous it was to needlessly take the risk of some disastrously revealing blunder, I nevertheless stood up and stepped out onto the runway, closing the cell door behind me.

10

THERE WAS NO DECISION TO MAKE about where to walk; I immediately became part of a moving crowd of men flowing toward the stairway I'd come up on. Then I reached it and moved down with the others around me. The voices—hundreds of conversations—were a great drone: the sound of voices in a crowded auditorium or any other vast enclosed space. Down on the floor of the cell block, I continued to move with the crowd, fighting confusion of mind, trying to fix in my memory the route I was following. We moved out through the doorway I'd come in, its metal door held open by a tan-uniformed guard, and then we were in the Yard again. I crossed it, a part of the crowd, toward a smaller brick building, walked around a corner of it and then into it through an open doorway. I knew that my mind was registering only chaotic impressions, and I felt no assurance that even from here I could retrace my steps. And I wished with all the strength of my heart that I'd stayed, temporarily safe, in the cell, and knew I'd done an utterly foolhardy thing in leaving it.

I passed on through the doorway, turned right with the others, joining a stream of men from somewhere

else, then stepped onto red tile and into sudden brightness, and the quality of the roaring drone of countless voices suddenly changed with the shape and size of the vast room I'd entered. I had a confused impression of hundreds of identical tables, enormous silvery coffee urns, white-coated men urgently busy, and then by an effort of will I took rigid control of my mind, and made myself see and try to understand what was going on around me.

For the moment, at least, it was simple enough; I was in the largest cafeteria I'd ever seen. Just ahead of me, the crowd had stopped moving and turned into a waiting line of men; and within half a dozen steps, I stood still and became a part of it. I knew I could never eat. My throat was locked against food, to chew and to swallow a simple impossibility, and my heart pounded relentlessly as I stood looking around me in a rigid observant panic.

Each of the men upon reaching the head of the line took a compartmented metal tray from a great stack of them, then walked slowly past the row of white-coated men on the other side of the long food counter. There were no choices to make, I saw, no words to speak. With deft haste, each white-coated man an inmate passed ladled up, or forked over, or passed out a portion of food of some kind or other. Then, his tray full, and still part of a line, supervised by standing guards, each man carried his tray down a wide main aisle and sat down at a table.

Even in the table where a man sat, there was no choice or decision to be made. The room was filled with rows of square tables made of clear varnished wood tops each supported by a single metal standard sunk into the red-tile floor. From the metal supporting standard, four metal arms protruded, a round wooden disk at the end of each arm: stoollike seats. There were

no table or chair legs, only that single metal column supporting the whole rigid structure; and I saw that none of this furniture could be picked up, thrown, or used as a weapon. The rows of tables were filled evenly, one at a time; the back half of the great room was filled with eating men; in the front half of the room, every table stood empty.

I took up a tray, and immediately a bundle of silverware wrapped in a paper napkin was slapped onto it by a white-sleeved arm, and an instant later, as I walked slowly on, four slices of bread. The men behind the counter never once even glanced at me, their arms and bodies endlessly repeating their individual rhythms. Two slices of meat loaf appeared on my tray, were immediately covered by a ladleful of brown gravy, and an instant later, a compartment of my tray was filled with creamed boiled potatoes. Green beans, a dish of rice pudding, a mugful of coffee; with each step I took, the tray grew heavier in my hands. Then, always following the man ahead of me, I turned from the table into the main aisle, and my eyes on my coffee, as though to avoid spilling it, I kept my face turned from the guard who stood at one side of the aisle, arms folded, weight on one leg, wordlessly supervising the filling of the table rows. In the steps of the man ahead of me, I turned into an aisle, and when the man sat down at a table already occupied by one man, I sat down, too, and an instant later, the fourth seat was taken by the man behind me.

Did you speak? I wondered. Did you say, *Hello,* or *Good evening*? What was dinner etiquette at San Quentin Prison? I raised my eyes from my tray to the faces of the other three men. One man, eyes on his tray, was forking a piece of meat loaf to his mouth; a second man sat chewing, eyes staring into space. The third man, directly opposite me, was unrolling his silver-

ware from his napkin and his eyes caught mine. He lifted his chin and a corner of his mouth in a brief nod and faint smile of greeting, and I responded in the same way. Then we each turned to our trays.

I was conscious now of the aroma of the food; it smelled delicious. It had the appearance and aroma of very cleanly prepared, simply cooked food; and seated at the table, lost in this great mass of hundreds of identically and anonymously dressed men, I realized that I was in a temporary oasis of safety. I'd wondered how I could possibly choke down even a mouthful of food; but now, like the others, I methodically and rapidly, enjoying it ravenously, ate everything on my tray, including the four slices of bread. Presently I began sipping my coffee, and for the first time I sat back and really looked at the room around me. Two of the men at my table, their suppers finished, began to talk quietly, but I ignored them.

Glancing around, I was suddenly aware—it astonished me—that an entire wall of this enormous high-ceilinged room was a vast mural painting. It was crowded with giant figures, faces, and objects painted on the pastel-green wall in a warm shade of brown; burnt umber, I recognized. There was the sad intelligence of Albert Einstein's face under the great shock of white hair, and just below and to one side of this, a painted billboard which said, *Restricted Area, Atomic Power*. Beside this stood a man in a smock at a complex electrical switchboard of some kind; and there was an outdoor movie, cars lined up before the giant screen. There was a football stadium seen from the air; an elevated superhighway—the entire panel was a crowded representation of countless scenes, objects, and people of this present day and age, excellently done. It was a kind of shock to realize that a good artist was a prisoner here, and I wondered what he had done.

I turned on my stool toward the opposite wall, and there lay another great mural in burnt umber, a huge panoramic suggestion of California's history—gold miners, covered wagons, sailing ships. In an end wall, I noticed, there were tall windows; and skylights in the painted ceiling high overhead; the room was filled with daylight. It was a cheerful room, it occurred to me, the floor a rich red, tables of light wood, beautifully made and varnished, the walls a soft green and painted with murals. And it was immaculately clean. *Not bad,* I thought, and leaned back a little on my stool, comfortably; and my stomach full, I actually relaxed, wondering suddenly when the time would come—years from now, probably—when I could tell people of the incredible thing I had done.

I felt a definite sense of well being—and that betrayed me. With a volition of their own, my thumb and forefinger dipped from old habit into my shirt pocket as they had after every meal for years. They found the end of a cigarette in the open package there, withdrew it, and fitted it into the corner of my mouth. While I sat staring at the mural to my left, my two hands opened a match pack, tore out and struck a match, and lighted the end of the cigarette. I inhaled, then luxuriously and contentedly exhaled a jet of gray smoke. A hand smacked down on my shoulder, and I swung my head to stare up at the angry face of a guard.

"What the hell's the matter with *you?*" said the guard, glaring down at me, impatient for an answer, and for an instant my mind was frantic and astounded, then I understood. The air above the heads of these hundreds of men would have been thick with smoke if smoking were allowed; and instead, it was clear. I was the only man in this vast room with a lighted cigarette in my hand, and I hastily ducked the cigarette end in the dregs of my coffee and heard the slight hiss as it

extinguished. From the other side of the great room, I was vaguely aware of raised voices. *"Boo!"* they yelled, *"Boo!"* and I saw the guard's jaw muscles tighten.

"Sorry," I managed to say, staring up at him, my face anguished as I felt my neck and ears redden.

"Boo!" The cry grew, and other guards walking fast, were coming down the side aisles.

"What's your name?"

"Jarvis," I said automatically, and my lips actually came together to say, *Ben, Ben Jarvis,* but I remembered in time, and said, "Arnie. Arnold Jarvis."

"Let's see your ID card."

I had no idea what the man meant, what he could possibly be talking about. *"Boo!"* the voices were shouting at him.

Then again my mind worked and cast up the information, and I reached into my shirt pocket and brought out the small plastic-encased card I'd taken from Arnie, and the guard took it.

The little inch-and-a-half high photograph with the number under the chin at which the guard was now staring was not my photograph. That was Arnie's face, sullenly and apathetically staring out at the camera which had snapped it over a year before. My eyes closed; I felt physically sick and withdrawn from the strange world around me. *"Boo! Boo!"* I wanted to sleep, I realized in astonishment; to close my eyes and leave a world that was beyond my capabilities.

The photograph on the card formed itself clearly behind my closed eyes; the dark crisp hair and the forehead hairline could have been mine, I knew; but the face was Arnie's, resembling mine only in the general resemblance of brothers. But when I opened my eyes after a moment to stare up at the guard in hopeless withdrawn apathy, he only glanced at me as he handed the card back, and I didn't know whether it had even

occurred to him to compare the tiny photographed face with the living face before him.

"You're not a fish; you've been here long enough to know better," he said, and I understood that the date of Arnie's admission must be on the card. "What's wrong with you?"

"Boo!" came the shouts from other parts of the room, and I heard the other guards' voices. I simply shook my head; I couldn't speak for a moment, and I moved one shoulder in a shrug. "Just forgot," I croaked, then cleared my throat. "Just dreaming, I guess; I forgot."

For a moment longer the guard stared down at me—from the corner of my eye I could see another guard standing just beside and behind me, listening—then the guard who had spoken to me turned away. "All right, quiet down," he called out to the room, not loudly, keeping his voice calm and relaxed. But I could detect the tenseness in his voice, and I understood that a handful of guards among hundreds of prisoners were men in a powder keg, and I had struck a spark—I expected punishment.

Slipping my card back into my shirt pocket, I glanced up at the other three faces at my table and managed a rueful smile and shrug. The man opposite lifted a brow and one corner of his mouth in a faint shrug and smile of jeering sympathy, and continued to stare at me for a moment in thoughtful wonder. Then he looked away.

When would the punishment come, and what form would it take? I didn't know. If it came tonight, if I were taken from my cell to an isolation cell—I didn't know what the procedure was—then I was lost. If it came tomorrow, if Arnold Jarvis, the man who had smoked in the mess hall, were picked up and sent to isolation, I was equally lost. I looked down at the now soggy length of cigarette in my coffee cup; it wasn't

easy to understand that a single puff on a cigarette might send me to prison for many years, but I knew it was true.

The men at my table were getting to their feet, apparently at some signal that I hadn't seen or heard, and I stood up with them. Each of them, I saw, was taking his silverware with him, and I picked up mine, too. Then, as I turned toward the main aisle, I saw that the guard I'd noticed from the corner of my eye was still standing just beside and behind the stool I'd been sitting on. And as I lifted my eyes to his face, I saw it was Nova, the San Quentin guard who lived next door to me in Mill Valley.

I gave up. I'd taken a risk, an impossible one; I'd lost; and it was almost a relief to simply give up and let whatever happened now just go ahead and happen. He was smiling, of course; the same nasty, mean-eyed little smile, and he stood looking at me, nodding his head slowly in quiet, pleased, and utterly malicious satisfaction. "Hello, Jarvis," he said softly, and I didn't even bother trying to answer; I just stood, waiting, lost in a kind of unreal apathy.

Nova jerked his head, gesturing at the main aisle. "Get moving," he said, and I walked toward the door I'd come in, Nova right behind me. At the door stood a big metal bucket, and as the inmates ahead of me passed it, they dropped their silverware into it, and I did the same.

I returned the way I'd come, Nova right behind me. Back in the cell block, I turned to look at him, and again, with a jerk of his head, he indicated that I was to walk on; I turned onto the stairway and began to climb it, Nova still behind me. I didn't know what he meant to do, but it didn't matter; I knew it would be disastrous for me, and at some moment, climbing those stairs, I realized what I was going to do. There was a

part of my brain able to stand off and consider in absolute horror and astonishment what the rest of my mind had decided to do, but I knew I would do it. I was simply not going to be confined for years in San Quentin Prison; I couldn't take it; and whatever the consequences, I was going to do what I had to to prevent it. Maybe any man can kill if circumstances demand it; certainly millions come to it in every war. But to know you're going to—to cross the line you've never crossed before, and know you are about to kill a man—must always be an unbelievable moment.

There was no alternative; Nova dead was the only possible hope for me now; and with a terrible clarity of mind I saw how I was going to do it. There were very few men in the cell block now. After supper, I knew, most of them were off to classes, the athletic fields, movies, band practice; the guards were lounging around their hut on the cell-block floor. Climbing the stairs to the third tier now, and leaning over the stair rail looking up, I saw only three or four men on the walkway, strolling toward their cells.

When I reached the third tier, I'd walk along toward my cell; and once the walkway was clear, the cells directly behind me empty, I'd stop, lean on the railing on my forearms, hands clasped, staring down at the cell-block floor three stories below. It was the kind of posture that invites duplication; whatever Nova had in mind, he could hardly talk to me without leaning on the railing beside me. I'd listen, watching the runway from the corners of my eyes, making certain it remained clear of witnesses. Then I'd pull out my handkerchief, drop it, stoop to pick it up, and instead, crouched there on the walkway, I'd grab Nova tight around the legs like a tackling football player and instantly lift him right over the railing. He'd be leaning half over the rail to begin with; I'd lift him all the way over, and he couldn't

hang on—not upside down—and a fall of three stories onto the concrete floor far below would kill him. The instant he dropped, I'd turn into the empty cell behind me with its door ajar, and when he hit, I'd come rushing out with the others on the tier to see what happened. Then I'd return to my own cell. In the two or three seconds it took me to heave Nova over the railing, I could be seen by anyone rounding a corner of this walkway, or stepping out of a cell anywhere down the line, but even so I was not going to be an inmate here.

On the third tier, two men far ahead strolled along the walkway as I did, Nova just behind me. Then they turned into a cell, and I stopped, leaned on the railing, and when Nova stopped beside me, I looked up and said, "Well?"

He answered something or other; I didn't even listen. Moving only my eyes, I glanced to the other side of me; a man was walking toward the other end of the walkway—he was nearly there—and I watched him disappear around the corner. As though shifting my position slightly, I glanced over Nova's shoulder. A man was just stepping into a cell; in a second the walkway would be empty, and I reached toward my hip pocket and the handkerchief in it, my heart throbbing full strength.

The mind is always being baffled by itself and its incredible abilities. Even in the instant my muscles were tensing with movement, I was able to stand off and watch myself in a part of my mind, and realize that incredibly I, Ben Jarvis, was about to kill a man. But another part of my mind seemed to accept the very same thing almost calmly, telling me that this was a primitive matter of me or him, and that there was no choice of decisions. And in that same instant of simultaneous thought—my hand actually touching my handkerchief, bringing it out and letting it fall, and then bending my

knees to stoop down toward it—I understood that I could not do it. I was willing; I could justify it; I knew I had to do it, and, in that moment, I hated Nova. But I could not kill him, could not reach out, grip this man's knees, and throw him over a railing onto a concrete floor.

In only the fractional moment it took to know absolutely that I was incapable of the act of murder, I paused—then picked up my handkerchief, all hope gone, and stood up again. And now I wanted it over with, wanted this man beside me to quit talking and do what he meant to do; and I actually opened my mouth to say so.

The mind *is* incredible, capable of a dozen intertwined threads of simultaneous but separate thought. My mouth actually opening to speak, my brain was repeating as though it were a recording the first words Nova had spoken just a moment or two before.

"I know your brother." I realized now that he had said this while I nodded unhearingly, and now the words sounded again in my mind. What did he mean? He didn't know Arnie; he had said so only last night. Had he looked up Arnie since then, or— And then, in the split second before I could speak, I understood; and stood there open-mouthed staring at Nova. He thought I was Arnie! He hadn't recognized *me;* he thought he was talking to my San Quentin brother! I couldn't believe it, leaning there on the railing again, Nova's voice rumbling on. He'd seen my face only night before last; how could he possibly fail to recognize me now? Then I understood. I had sat in the San Quentin mess hall eating supper; I'd sat there in the standard prison dress of blue denims and work shirt like the hundreds of others all around me. And of course to this man I could only be Arnold Jarvis, the man he knew was an inmate here; naturally Arnold Jarvis would

resemble his brother. But resemble him *exactly?* I thought doubtfully. Then I remembered that Nova had seen me, after all, only at night, standing in the shadows outside my front door. It was true—a man who looked like the man he'd seen momentarily in semidarkness the night before, who was wearing prison clothes, and who was here at San Quentin as an inmate, could only be the brother he already knew was confined here. Any other thought was fantastic, and would not cross his mind.

"—snooty sort of bastard, thinks he's above people," Nova was saying, still smiling at me in a pleased malicious way. "Wouldn't ask me in; kept me standin' there at his door. But maybe you're different," he said, enjoying our positions; me, the convict, having to stand and listen to whatever he chose to say to me. "Maybe you're not so high and mighty. And maybe you are. I didn't ask your permission to speak; kind of ordered you around, in fact." He grinned at me contemptuously. "Maybe I shoulda asked for an introduction."

I shook my head, and managed to smile. "My brother's a funny guy," I said, and tried to talk through my nose just a little and slur my words a bit, altering my voice. "He's not so bad, though, once you get to know him." I shrugged. "Lots of people get the idea, he's standoffish; don't mean a thing, though. And hell, no, I'm not that way." I nodded at him pleasantly, the two of us leaning there on the rail. "Glad to know you, myself." I'd almost added, "Mr. Nova," but stopped in time.

"Well, that's just fine," he said sarcastically. "Glad to know I made the grade with one branch of the family anyway. Even if it's the San Quentin branch." He shook his head wonderingly. "Snooty," he repeated "And with a brother in Quentin."

I shrugged, as though I didn't understand it either.

"Well"—Nova stood erect and stared at me thoughtfully for another moment or so—"see you around. And keep your nose clean; you got fouled up tonight, and I'll have an eye on you from now on. Wouldn't want to to bring back any bad news to your brother, would I? Or that hot-lookin' sister-in-law of yours."

I shrugged again, smiling. "Hope not."

"You better hope." He stared at me hard-eyed for another moment, then turned, and walked back toward the stairway.

When he'd gone, I walked around to the other side of the tier, found cell 1042, walked in, dropped on the bunk, and closed my eyes, glad that Al wasn't there yet.

And then I let it all flood over me. I'd come as close as I possibly could to actually killing a man; I'd wanted to, I'd tried to. And already I knew that I hadn't even begun to think out the consequences. Turmoil would have broken loose in the whole East block if a guard had come hurtling down from a tier to die on the floor; I'd never have come through all that would have followed, still unsuspected and safe. I'd have lost my freedom and quite likely my life, out of panic started by a single absent-minded puff on a cigarette. And now I knew I was walking a tightrope through the most dangerous moments of my life, and that it still stretched out before me.

I moved a little on the bunk, restlessly, wanting to quit thinking, to just shut off my mind and thoughts and find a way to merely endure. I moved, and a hard object was pressing my elbow, and I felt for it with my hand and discovered a set of black earphones on the blanket. Then, remembering what Arnie had often told me about this, I picked up the earphones and fitted them over my ears. The tiny sound of music—Kaye Starr singing "Learning the Blues"—sounded in my ears, and I lay back, hands clasped under my head, to

listen. And after a time, listening to one record after another of good popular music, the dull depression of long-sustained fear began to lift. I felt almost pleasantly tired now, relaxing both in body and mind, and the pendulum swung as I felt an almost lighthearted defiance of further worry and fear.

I sat up, removing the earphones, wondered for a moment whether Arnie wore pajamas, then smiled at the thought. Arnie had explained what I was to do now, and sitting on the edge of my bunk, I took off my pants and shirt and stood up to hang them on a hook at the back of the cell. Sitting on my bunk, then, I took off my shoes and socks, stuffing the socks into the shoes, and set them under the bunk. Then I crawled under the blankets, put on the earphones again, and once more lay there listening to the music—Louis Armstrong, now. A gong rang in the cell block, and I opened my eyes. A moment later, from the tier above, I heard the sound of a guitar being tuned, and from somewhere else in the block, a horn began to tootle; a trumpeter warming up. Another stringed instrument began to plink from somewhere below me, and I heard a mouth organ. This, I remembered now—Arnie had talked about it—was the music hour; anyone owning a musical instrument was free to play it, or try, during the next hour.

A string of men passed the cell door, some naked except for shoes, some wearing shorts, each carrying a towel. This was also the bath hour for a part of the cell block; once a week, I knew, each man in the block had five minutes under one of the open showers in one corner of the main floor; and once a week, clean clothes.

Hours later I awakened suddenly, the cell dark. Only at the front by the bars was there a weak illumination from the ceiling lights of the cell block far overhead. A sound, close at hand and startling, had awakened me; I lay confused, unable to recall what it had been.

Then I heard it again and sat up, astounded, pulling the now silent earphones off. A cat had meowed, and now it meowed again. I turned to stare at the cell door, and there it was, incredibly, a big tortoise-shell cat, in the dim light of the walkway, sitting on its haunches staring in at the cell.

"Psst!" The sibilant sound came from the bunk overhead, then Al's bare legs swung into view, sliding down off his bunk. "Here, kitty!" Al said, dropping to the floor, and then stooping at the waist, he stepped slowly forward to the door, one hand extended. The cat's neck stretched forward, nose working as it sniffed, then its hind legs rose, and it jumped through the bars into the cell, teeth opening daintily to accept the fragment of food from Al's hand. Watching, I saw Al's wooden face break into a genuine and gentle smile of pleasure; and I watched him reach up to his bunk for another scrap of whatever food he had carried in from the mess hall. Again he fed the cat, then he squatted beside it, stroking the cat's fur, scratching its skull behind the ears. For a moment the cat accepted this, moving its head pleasurably, then it stepped forward out from under Al's caressing, and its pink mouth opened in a meow for more food. Again Al stroked the cat, but the animal apparently knowing that there was no more to eat here, turned, hopped out between the bars, and trotted down the walkway; then I heard it again, several cells away, meowing at another barred door. Al put his palms on the upper bunk, heaved with his arms, and his legs disappeared from before my face, and I heard him sigh as he settled down above me.

I put the earphones on the side of the bunk against the wall, then lay for a few minutes, feeling sleep come over me again. Turning my head, I glanced at the front of the cell and its silhouetted bars and settled down in my bunk, warm and comfortable.

Then, almost asleep, I felt a surge of astonishment move through my mind. Here I was, it suddenly occurred to me—Ben Jarvis, of 175 Loming Court, Mill Valley, California, lying in a bunk of cell 1042, East cell block, San Quentin Prison—and no questions asked. I was provided with a bed, had been given my supper, and would be fed again at breakfast. I might even—the knowledge astonished me—stay here for the entire remaining years of Arnie's sentence; and unless someone decided to check my fingerprints which was unlikely, no one here need ever know the difference. And then, for the first time since Arnie's conviction, I truly understood how utterly anonymous and depersonalized a man became when he entered this place. No one even needed to know him. I was nothing now, I understood, but a pair of blue-denim pants and blue shirt among four thousand others, with a card in one pocket bearing a number and name to distinguish me on the occasions when that was necessary. It actually didn't matter who I was; an Arnold Jarvis, it was recorded somewhere, had been brought here to be held until the prison was told to release him. And as long as a man regularly occupied the places Arnold Jarvis was supposed to be in—San Quentin would be satisfied. Around me now, if I listened for it, I could hear the breathing and occasional murmurs of hundreds of other men sleeping or lying here, like me, in identical white jerseys and shorts, in identical beds in hundreds of identical cells. And joined to this cell block and to each other, end to end, to form an almost complete square, were three more virtually identical cell blocks filled with thousands more almost anonymous men.

It wasn't quite true; I knew that from Arnie. The handful of men who ran this great prison earnestly tried to be more than simple custodians. This was a prison of classrooms; grown men had learned to read

and write here: men completed grammar and high-school educations; others learned trades, and even professions. They played music, they saw movies, read books, they worked, and they played; they were given help in the task of trying to retain their humanity from one side of their imprisonment to the other. The warden of this prison and the men around him at this particular moment in the prison's history, Arnie claimed, did their imaginative and resourceful best for the men California required them to confine. But among four thousand men that best was spread thin. However many hours of each day the Warden, the psychiatrists, the chaplains, might work in this incredibly crowded prison, there was very little they could do for men as individuals. The walls and bars of the cell in which I lay were painted in rather pleasantly contrasting shades of tan and brown; it was as pleasant as the Warden of San Quentin could make it; it was the best he could do for the men who lived in it. But nevertheless it was a cell measuring five-five by seven feet, and seven feet high; and two men had to live in it; two men confined together, their only home, in a space no larger than many closets. These were four thousand half anonymous men, almost stripped of identity, almost indistinguishable to the men and the state and the people who had confined them; and the proof of that, I knew, was the simple fact that I was here.

The thought flared up in my mind like a rocket, and burst; there was nothing to stop Arnie from escaping tonight—leaving me here where I was! The industrial-area walls unguarded, he could climb over as I had, with the hook and rope I had brought him, and— I squeezed my eyes shut and clenched my fists, driving the obscene thought from my mind. I had no *right,* even in imagination, to accuse Arnie like this, no reason to even think it—it was indecent! But it was night; I was locked in a

cell of an enormous prison among hundreds of sleeping inmates; and my mind couldn't stop its own treachery. Arnie would never have a better chance; and he'd be escaping not prison but the gas chamber; a man might justify himself that way! I, at least, would be left only to prison, not death. Suppose, at this moment, Arnie were long since over the wall and on a bus, a train, a plane—I'd brought a hundred and fifty dollars in with me for Arnie, in my pack; he'd asked me to. Why did he want it? Maybe all along his real plan had been—By an act of will I made myself stop. He was doing no such thing; the thought would never even enter his mind; I said this to myself and believed it.

But I lay there, understanding how utterly dependent I was on Arnie now, and almost hating him for it. He had my life in his hands through no fault of my own, through *his* fault instead; and I didn't care for the feeling. I hated the situation I was in—raising an arm over my head, I could feel the bars that locked me in here—and I almost hated the brother who could bring about a situation that could cause me to think the thoughts I had about him. I was no longer worried; I didn't believe the momentary nightmare I'd had; but I didn't like myself for what I'd thought, and I told myself that Arnie deserved better than this from me. I told myself that; then I said silently, *Damn him, damn him to hell,* lying there on the cot, in San Quentin Prison.

11

STANDING IN THE LITTLE AISLE inside the pile of stacked crates next to the furniture factory, I stood waiting, a cigarette cupped in my palm, wondering how Ben was getting along. He'd be doing okay, I thought; no reason he shouldn't. Then I smiled a little; I didn't think he'd get much sleep. A great cell block at night—dark, strange, and quiet, but never silent, with hundreds of men breathing, muttering, and occasionally crying out —is a wierd place, unlike any other. On his first night, no one sleeps much, and more than one grown man has cried into his pillow. This would be an experience for Ben, probably the greatest experience and adventure of his life. He wouldn't be liking it, I thought. But hell, he'd have one night of it; I'd had hundreds.

I raised my watch and looked at it in the glow from my cigarette end. It was just before midnight, but I waited a little longer; I wanted the place fully quieted down before I moved. I could picture San Quentin right now; the great Yard, lighted by electric bulbs, silent and empty; the classrooms, offices, most of the other buildings, and the athletic fields all deserted. The Yard office, just outside the Yard gates, would be lighted, two

or three screws sitting around doing nothing much: the best thing they do. The control room would be lighted, the inmate clerk the only guy working; maybe the lieutenant of this watch was shooting the bull with his sergeant. The third watch was nearly over, and they'd be hoping, as always, that nothing would happen beyond ordinary routine during the rest of their watch to prevent their going home. For once I hoped so, too.

In the blocks, the screws would be lounging around in their huts, talking, reading, killing time; for the next few hours this was the quiet time at Quentin; all classes, band practice, movies, and everything else over now, the men all in, locked up and accounted for, with the next count more than two hours off. Up on the walls in their towers, the wall bulls would be sitting looking out over the prison, smoking sometimes, walking out occasionally, rifles under their arms, to patrol the walls.

But not here. All around me the industrial area was silent, the south wall gate long since locked, the factories and shops emptied of men, and all accounted for in their blocks except for the single fire guard in each building here, dozing, reading a magazine, or listening to some disc jockey. So now the walls were unmanned. They were not only supposed to be, but they were; standing just inside the stacked crates, I'd watched the north wall for a steady half hour, and no one was up there. Twenty minutes ago, the big third-watch sergeant had been through here with his flashlight. I didn't think anyone would be back again tonight.

It was after twelve now, the first watch should be on duty, and it was time to move. I stepped out from the crates. In my hand as I walked along beside the west side of the furniture factory past the crates, was a yard-long miniature spade—a surplus Army trenching tool Ben had carried in in his canvas pack, which was still in the crate.

I began digging in the narrow rectangle of bare ground between the north end of the furniture factory and the great wall which paralleled it a dozen feet farther north, the wall Ben had climbed over. I worked in the corner formed by the north and east walls of the industrial area, directly below the underside of the floor of the corner wall tower. The tower was wider by some feet than the narrow wall it sat on and projected out over me by a yard or more.

I worked quietly, taking care never to strike the concrete wall beside me with the metal edge of my spade; but I didn't worry about the soft crunch of the shovel as it bit into the dry sandy soil; I could see anyone who could possibly approach me before they could hear me. I stood with my back in the corner formed by the north and east walls, and I could see down the entire length of the narrow space between the north wall and the backs of the four factory buildings, a distance of maybe a quarter mile and well lighted by the wall lights. And I could see, as I dug, the entire length of the other narrow space between the east wall and the side of the furniture factory. I couldn't be approached from any other way. Anyone approaching would see me, too, but I didn't believe anyone would come prowling around back here; there was no reason to; there was nothing to check back here. But if anyone did, there was nothing I could do about it; meanwhile I had a lot to do, and I got on with it.

The digging itself was easy enough, and I worked steadily and methodically; but the long narrow hole grew slowly. For, though the spade was new and sharp and the soil easy to push into, I had to carry each spadeful away from the trench, at ever-increasing distances, and scatter it wide.

I worked for well over two hours, never stopping, at a steady even rate; my hands, calloused from the heavy

wood and the tools I handled each day in the furniture factory, accepted the work easily. Just before two in the morning I glanced at my wrist watch and stopped; I had dug a neat rectangle more than six feet long, slightly over a yard wide, and about two feet deep. Quietly, then, keeping to the walls of the factory, I returned to my crates, taking my spade along. For fifteen minutes or so now, the prison would stir into life a little, and this was a good time to rest. Crouched among the crates, I lighted a cigarette, and sat smoking it. For the next little while, till I knew the two-o'clock count was finished and all clear, I was staying where I was. If tonight of all nights, a man were found missing at count, I'd know it soon. The prison would rouse into sudden life, the industrial and every other area alive with prowling guards, and I didn't want to be found standing in it, a shovel in my hands. The other man might be found first, and I'd still have a chance.

I waited fifteen more minutes, and then, the prison still quiet, the green light still on, I walked back to my trench. Stepping up the pace of the work a little, I was finished by three o'clock and the trench was over three feet deep. Most of this final foot-deep layer of earth I didn't scatter, but left piled along the back edge of the trench. Now I put down my spade and walked around the factory to a side window I'd left unlocked myself late this afternoon. It was a steel-framed window with hinges on the sides which I'd oiled yesterday. I pushed it open a foot, waited, then pushed it open a little more, and stood listening. There wasn't a sound, and I heaved myself up, hands on the window ledge, and looked in. There were a few overhead lights burning, but mostly the place was dark. Way up in front, the office lights were on, and now I heaved up a little more and sat on the window ledge.

Some three or four minutes later, the inmate on fire

watch moved his head in the chair he was sitting in, and I spotted him. I took off my shoes and dropped them to the ground; then I climbed into the factory. I was careful not to actually bump into anything, but outside of that I didn't worry about his hearing me in my stocking feet; it's a big factory, and he was a long way off.

I walked a dozen yards through the silent building to a stack of eight-foot plywood sheets, upended and leaning against a wall. Now I was very careful about noise; I lifted aside the topmost sheet of wood, and set it down against the wall, very slowly, till I felt the end touch the floor. Under that top sheet I'd left a smaller sheet of plywood. Yesterday, working quite openly, I'd sawed it to size with a hand saw—several inches over four feet long, a few inches more than a yard wide. Then I'd sawed another two-foot board the same width, and bored a half-dollar sized hole in its center. Now I carried these to a side door, then went back and replaced the top sheet of plywood. Back at the door, I opened it with absolute silence, lifted my two boards outside, then carefully closed the door behind me. I got my shoes, put them on again, then carried the boards to my trench.

There, the two boards butted together end to end, I forced them into the slightly smaller dimensions of the trench, walking around their edges, jouncing my weight on them. When they covered the trench, forced below ground level for a few inches, I walked back to the crates, pulled out the canvas pack, and carried it to the trench. From the pack I took a length of pipe Ben had brought in and looked at it. He'd done a good job; fastened over one end of the pipe, and held on with tightly-wrapped wire, was a circle of fine screening painted a dull brown. I forced the other end of the pipe into the half-dollar sized hole I'd bored in the short length of plywood, and left it there. Then I pulled the

dirt stacked along the back edge of the trench onto the boards with my shovel, heaping it up a little. I trampled the dirt flat, level with and matching the ground around it—also packed hard by the feet that trampled it every day. Now I forced the rest of the pipe length down into its hole till the circlet of screening seemed to lie on the ground. Crumbling a little clot of earth with my fingers, I let it sift down onto the screening until it was covered; and now there was absolutely no visible hint of the six feet by three, yard-deep space I'd made under the ground before me.

Kneeling at one end of it, I forced my fingers down into the earth, found the board edge, and lifted. It was heavy under its layer of earth, but I lifted the front edge some inches, watching the dirt on its top. A few loose nuggets of earth rolled off but most of it, tramped solid, stayed; and when I dropped the board it fell into place again, and the earth over my trench seemed undisturbed. I lifted it once more then, wedged it open with the little spade, and shoved the canvas bundle far into the trench and to one side. Then, holding the board open, I kicked the shovel in after it and let the board drop into place once again. Dusting my hands, I stood staring down at the barren ground before me; it looked just about as it had before I'd begun digging. I glanced at my watch. It was three forty-six in the morning; I was finished now and didn't hang around. I walked back to the stack of crates, crawled into mine, and lay down, very tired, and quite certain I could sleep.

12

I WOKE UP IN ARNIE'S BUNK at dawn the next morning, Thursday, stiff and tired from dreaming, but knowing I was beyond further sleep; a sound had awakened me. It began, pulling me out of sleep, as a few isolated squeaks. Then immediately the sound increased in volume to a great rusty squeal, the sound filling the cell block. It was an enormous iron wheel, I thought puzzledly, turning without grease on an axle. Then, outside the cell door in the air beyond the walkway, I heard the momentary whir of wings, and my astonished mind labeled the great sound. It was the unceasing chirping of hundreds of sparrows; so many that the sounds blended into one vast rusty squeal—and even as I listened, the darkness of the cell block had diluted, and I lay watching the silhouettes of the cell bars strengthening, their definition sharpening. They rounded and took form, and I could see the walkway outside again, and now the cell block was filled with the first colorless white light of day. The vast chirping continued, and across the block I could see one of the great tall windows, opened at the top for ventilation, and the brown bodies of the birds flashing through

the bars into the white daylight beyond.

Another hour passed before the cell block stirred into further life. Then I heard first a cough, then from somewhere close by the quiet murmur of conversation. Water ran in a basin presently, more men coughed, and the murmur of voices grew in volume. I heard a toilet flush, heard a curse, heard an unidentifiable sound. The volume of quiet morning conversation swelled steadily now; far off down the block someone began singing. More water ran, men coughed and hawked and spat; some shouted, calling to other men. A shaft of sunlight slanted down into the block from a window somewhere, and presently Al's legs appeared over the edge of the bunk and he slid to the floor. He glanced at my bunk, his eyes met mine, and he nodded, and I nodded back.

Waiting till Al finished dressing, I sat in my bunk, putting on my shoes and socks. When Al had dressed, then washed his face and hands and brushed his teeth—quickly—he moved to the front of the cell. I got up, put on my shirt and pants, then washed at the basin, brushing my teeth with a finger, using Arnie's toothpaste. I sat down on the bunk then, and presently—somewhere around seven o'clock—the locking bar rose, and Al immediately pushed open the cell door and was gone.

I waited a moment or two, then went out, and following yesterday's route—the path familiar now—walked with the hundreds of other men in the block toward the mess hall again. I knew, I felt in my bones, that I was safe, that I'd made it; that I had done this incredible thing. I ate breakfast—hot cereal, toast, bacon, and coffee—at a table with three blue-denimed, blue-shirted strangers, and ate it with good appetite. I left with the others, remembering to carry my silverware and drop it into the bucket at the doorway. And then I walked the route, clear in my mind now, that I had taken the night before: through the great Yard, down the stair-

way, and past the old brick building to the industrial area. Only once—as I walked in through the gateway with a half dozen other inmates—did the fear spring up again. Two guards stood there, conversing casually, idly watching the incoming men, and the fear of challenge tightened my stomach. Then I was past them, walking toward the western wall of the furniture factory, exactly as Arnie had said would happen. There was no check now on whether a man should or should not be entering this area. When the work began—the wall gateway locked, each worker in his assigned place—anyone not belonging there would be instantly obvious to the supervising guards inside the buildings. Right now a check of identity cards wasn't needed.

At the narrow aisle leading back into the pile of stacked crates, I stopped and idly leaned against it, my back covering the space. Immediately I felt a tap on my shoulder blade. "Benny," Arnie whispered, his mouth almost touching my neck, "everything okay? Things go all right?"

I looked at the wall tower before speaking; two guards stood facing each other at the open window of the tower talking, ignoring the incoming stream of men below them. I turned my head as though glancing to one side, my cheek nearly touching the wall of stacked crates behind me. "Yes."

"The guards okay?"

Again I glanced at the wall. "Yeah."

"All right. Keep an eye on them; and when there's a break in the guys coming along here, just step to one side and face south."

I glanced to the left; five men, four of them together and talking, one alone a step or so behind them, were approaching from the corner of the factory. They drew abreast, passed me, then two more men appeared from around the corner. They approached, walked past; I

glanced at the tower guard, saw the guard still talking to the other; then I looked at the factory corner once again, then stepped to one side, unblocking the space between the crates.

Arnie stepped out, leaning immediately against the crates, his posture relaxed and casual; he grinned at me. Almost instantly another little knot of men appeared from around the building's corner, walking toward us. "Anything happen at all?" Arnie said, still grinning.

The men passed us, one said, "Hi," and Arnie responded by lifting his chin slightly.

"Yeah," I said, "a couple things," and then I told him what had happened in the mess hall last night; and I told him, keeping it short, all about Nova.

Arnie shrugged when I finished. "I don't know this Nova personally," he said, "but I've heard of him; an old-timer left over from the old prison when it was maybe the worst in the country. And he hasn't changed with the times like the rest of them though he goes through the motions. Been here too long to fire, but they'll retire him the first day they can." Arnie shrugged, staring thoughtfully at nothing. "I'll say this for the guards here; they're all right, most of them. Practically all of them. Only one I had trouble with was the punk I hit, and he's just a fish, a new man; he'll straighten around if he wants to stay here." He grinned at me. "Of all the guards in the place, you had to pick Nova to move next door to. Forget about him, Ben." He put a hand on my shoulder momentarily. "If the other guard turned in a report about the cigarette, I'll hear about it this morning at the Captain's Court. And I'll get a little something for it, week's loss of privileges, maybe." He grinned again. "Which will be tough to take; I'll worry about it—all next week. Just forget it; it's nothing; you did good. How'd Al act?" I told him, then Arnie said, "I've got to go now. You all set?" I

nodded. "Thanks, Benny," Arnie said then, looking into my eyes, his head nodding slowly. "It means something to have a brother; some day soon I'll have more to say about that. Tell Ruth I'll be seeing her." He didn't wait for my answer; his eyes lifted toward the tower, then he looked back at the building corner. "Now," he said quietly. "Step in." And I stepped into the narrow space and began walking, sideways, back into the pile, Arnie's back now covering the opening. "Okay?" he said quietly.

"Okay," I said, and then the opening was clear again, Arnie gone.

For half an hour I stood quietly, waiting till no more men passed the little opening. Then, moving carefully and very slowly, I untied my shoes, removed them, and placed them carefully in the crate where I'd lain before. Then, with absolute care, silently testing each handhold and foothold before shifting my weight, I climbed into the big box. There, sitting upright, I took off my shirt, made a pillow out of it, and lay down on my back, hands clasped over my stomach, knees raised. Almost immediately I fell asleep.

I dozed, off and on, all morning. At noon, when the men left for lunch, I unwrapped one of the little waxpaper packages Arnie had left in the crate for me. The sandwich was dry and stale now, but the apple with it was good. I sipped from one of two little cardboard cream containers filled with water Arnie had left, then lay back once more. Again, during most of the afternoon, I dozed, enduring the heat of the afternoon sun. I knew it would be cooler outside the crate, but it would be foolish at this point to take even the least risk of being seen; so I just lay there.

At four o'clock I heard the men streaming past again, and after a few minutes Arnie's voice. "You okay, Ben?"

Lifting my head to the edge of the crate, I whispered

harshly, "Yeah; fine. Good luck, Arnie." I heard no answer, and lay down again.

The area quieted down quickly; I heard the last of the voices passing the crates and then the guards, talking on the wall. Once again there was the danger now that the count would be off, and then this area along with all others would be immediately searched. And if that happened, I knew I would be immediately found, that this stack of crates would be one of the first and most obvious places to look for a hiding man. But now I was past worrying and did not believe it would happen. And presently the all-clear sounded, I heard the voices of the departing guards, and then the area lay silent. For supper, I ate the second sandwich and drank the rest of my water. Just before full dark, around nine-thirty, I gathered up the waxed paper, crushed the empty cream containers flat, and jammed them into my pockets. When it was full dark, I slept again, and a long time later, awakened, knowing from the chill and the quality of the air, that it was well past midnight.

I stumbled getting out of the crate; my muscles were cramped and a leg gave way under me. One shoulder and the side of my shoe struck a crate, and the blow of the shoe made a sharp sound, loud and distinct in the silent night air. I waited then, standing between the crates, but nothing happened, and I could feel the prickling circulation returning to my legs. Presently I lifted my rope and hook from a corner of the box—there was nothing at all left in the crate now—and walked to the front of the edge of the stack and peered out.

Nothing moved, no one was in sight, and I stepped out and turned right, walking toward the wall. At the back corner of the furniture factory I turned right into the narrow space between the rear of the factory and the

wall towering over me. In the illumination from the wall lights, I looked at the earth around me; it seemed no different now than it had two nights before, and I grinned.

There was no flashlight, no one approaching, and for the second time I swung the big padded hook back and forth, then heaved it up onto the wall underhanded. It struck, rattled, and I stood motionless, listening. Then again I tested the rope, hanging onto it, and lifting my feet from the ground. It held firm, and I lowered my feet, rested for a moment, then gripped the rope high, lifted my feet, and squirmed my way up, hand over hand, rapidly. This time, no weight at my back, I climbed more easily; and the strength was just beginning to drain from my arms when my hand touched the wall top, and I heaved myself up onto the wall and, lying flat on my belly, I quickly pulled the rope up after me.

Again I rested, lying there listening; then presently I looped the rope around the base of a metal wall post and slid to the ground, yanking the rope after me. After glancing in each direction, I darted up the embankment, crossed the road, and began climbing the hill on the other side.

Within a dozen steps I was in among the underbrush and out of all sight; then, walking slowly, I reached the hill's crest, then found my way down to the steel-mesh fence. I climbed it as before, then lay down in the waist-high weeds a few yards from the edge of the road to wait. Perhaps half an hour later, a car passed, but rapidly, not blinking its lights, and I didn't move. Another half hour, and now a car rounded the bend, and I knew it was Ruth and almost stood up. But I waited an instant, then saw the car lights blinking dim to bright, dim to bright, and Ruth drove slowly along, and I stood up and whistled. The car stopped,

I ran out, yanked open the door, tossed my rope and hook to the floor, and slid onto the seat beside Ruth, closing but not slamming the door. The car started up immediately.

After a moment, her eyes on the road, Ruth said, "You're all right, aren't you, Ben?"

"Sure," I said. "I'm fine. Everything's okay, and I'm fine. So's Arnie." She didn't answer, and I turned to look at her, and in the light from the dashboard I saw she was crying. She glanced at me then, and smiled, her face happy, the tears running down, and I reached out and patted her shoulder.

Within three minutes or less we reached highway 101, waited for the light to change, then Ruth turned north toward the U. S. 40 junction far ahead at Sacramento. After I'd told her all that had happened and answered all her questions, I climbed into the back seat and lay down under the car blanket. Ruth turned the radio on low, and pretty soon I went to sleep, the car moving steadily on through the night toward Sacramento, then the Sierra Nevadas, Donner Pass at the summit seven thousand feet up, and Reno on the other side.

13

FRIDAY MORNING, dressing in my cell, I knew Ben had made it out of the industrial area last night; if he hadn't, they'd have come for me during the night. At unlock I walked out of the cell thinking, *Last time,* and I thought it all day at the factory and at noon leaving the mess hall.

By four o'clock, quitting time, my hands were shaking, I was so scared and excited. This was the time, the next three or four minutes—and if they caught me now trying to escape they'd know why and throw me into an isolation cell under direct guard till Hafek arrived in the morning to point me out. Then it was the Row for certain.

Outside the factory, I walked back along the east wall of the building, so scared it was hard to breathe; but I made myself saunter, looking casual and unhurried, toward the big wall at the rear of the area. I was directly under the eye of the wall guard in the corner tower under which I'd stood digging last night; but he wouldn't be giving me any special attention yet. I could be walking this way to meet a friend before we left the area for the cell blocks and the four-

thirty count, or for any of a lot of other harmless reasons. For the moment I was simply one of several hundred men filling the industrial area at quitting time.

I walked slowly, conserving the steps between me and the wall ahead, and I was getting nervous and worried, when suddenly I heard it—a shout, loud and prolonged from behind me, around the corner at the front of the factory out of my sight. It was repeated right away—*"Yaay! Yuh-hoo!"*—and I knew what was happening. Two twenty-year-olds were horsing around in front of the factory in a direct line of sight over the factory rooftop for the guard in the tower a few steps in front of me. Ben had brought a hundred and fifty dollars in fives and tens into the prison with him in his canvas sack; all he could get together. I'd offered it to the two kids this morning in the block; I had Al with me, and I gave him the money to hold, to pay over when they delivered. They knew him, and knew he would pay. They'd squawked about the price at first; they wanted a hundred each, and I didn't blame them. They knew they were creating a diversion for something; and that whatever I was up to, they'd be in for some tough questioning and punishment. But seventy-five for each of them was all I had, and they knew it, and finally took it. If they'd known what they were covering for—that they'd be in for a questioning about an attempted escape—they'd have told me to go to hell. But I didn't tell them, and they didn't waste time asking.

Now they were earning their money. One of them shouted again and one of the two, I knew, was now standing on the other's shoulders, balanced precariously, stooped over holding the other's hair, grinning wildly and shouting at the top of his voice—apparently horsing around the way the young kids here do in spite of everything. The shout came again now—

"Yaaay! Yuh-hoo!"—and I flicked my eyes upward.

The guard in the wall tower, almost directly above me now, was staring off in the direction of the shout, and I took one more step, and now I was directly underneath the projecting bottom of the wall tower and out of the guard's sight. By the time he turned his attention from the skylarking prisoners, I was certain there would be no reason for him to wonder where I might have walked to in the meantime. I might have gone back into the factory for some reason or turned the corner ahead to the west. I glanced down the length of the wall toward the next tower now; I couldn't see the guard in that tower, but I felt pretty sure that he, too, would be staring at the prisoners and the gate bulls, who by this time would be ordering the two men to cut out the horseplay. There was no one else in sight of me; nearly all the prisoners in the area were moving toward the wall-gate, and the area back of the shops here was completely empty.

This was the moment, and I took it. I stooped and shoved both hands, fingers working, into the dirt I'd dug last night, found the board edge where I'd expected, and lifted. Instantly sitting down hard, I shoved both legs into the opening. Then, holding the board open above me, I wriggled into the cavity, then let the board drop hard, and lay panting in the velvet-black darkness. It had taken me three or four seconds, no more, to literally disappear from the face of the earth, and I could only wonder what my hiding place looked like from outside. I could only hope that no sliver or edge of board showed above ground. But I felt that it must look all right; I hadn't opened the board any more than the few inches necessary to slip in, and it had dropped neatly back into place; I'd felt or heard no earth slide from its surface. In any case—I tried to smile—I'd soon know.

I'm in a grave, I thought suddenly, and a panicky feeling that I was smothering swept through me. But I'd anticipated that, and I moved slowly, sliding my hands carefully through the air just above my chest, and after a moment my thumb bumped the end of the pipe just over my forehead. I moved myself up an inch or two, altering the position of my head until my mouth touched the end of the pipe. I had to lift my head half an inch to reach it and, moving a hand slowly to the back of my neck, I bunched up the canvas sack there to form a sort of pillow, and now I lay comfortably, the pipe end in my mouth. I took a deep breath and blew hard; then did it again. Bending my knees, I moved down in the trench a little, put one eye to the end of the pipe, and through the tiny mesh eight inches above, I saw blue sky—the dust had blown clear, and I knew I could breath, and the panic subsided.

In the sack under my head, my hand found the hard shape of the flashlight inside it, and I got it out, flicked it on, and as best I could looked at the shallow depression I was lying in. I could see the curve of blue shirt and its buttons down my chest, and beyond that the black tips of my shoes. Just above me, and extending on past my feet, I saw the pine undersurface of the plywood, very white in the beam of my light. I saw one hand lying on my chest, and just beside my mouth the blurred end of the pipe. Fitting my mouth over the pipe end again, I snapped off the flashlight and lay back in the darkness to wait.

When I turned the light on again to glance at my watch, it was four thirty-eight, and I smiled. Just about now, give or take a few minutes, the control-room sergeant, phone at his ear, finger underlining a figure on the master sheet lying on his desk, would be saying "Recount!" into the phone. Then he'd hang up, glancing at the waiting men around him. "East block," he'd

say shortly, "one man short," and probably someone would laugh to show he wasn't nervous, and say, "Who can't add straight this time?" And nobody'd answer or laugh. Except me— I grinned, lying there in the dark, breathing through my pipe.

Four minutes had passed when I glanced at my watch again, then flicked off my light. The recount should be in now, the sergeant replacing his phone, to glance up at the waiting men. "East block recount," he'd say, "still a man short. In the third tier. They're making a paddle count now; Cap's phoning the Warden. Let's go." And the men would look at each other and start to move out.

I wasn't more than a matter of seconds off in my guess about what must be happening. Because a moment or so later I heard a voice far above me, faint and muffled, begin to curse—the wall guard overhead learning that he wasn't going off duty just yet—and I couldn't help it, I shivered a little. Now I was a hunted man.

The paddle count—not a simple count of the men on the tier, but an actual cell-by-cell check to find which of the cells supposed to contain two men actually held only one—was probably finished. Cell ten-forty-two, they knew by now, had only one man in it, and it was supposed to have two. Al would have told them the name of his missing cellmate—there was no reason not to—and the control records would confirm that his name was Arnold Jarvis. In the seconds it took to phone that information to the photograph room in the same building, an inmate clerk would be pulling my prison photograph from a file, and beginning to prepare to duplicate it in quantity. In the seconds just past or just ahead, a light would wink on, high above the prison on its standard, as it did every night. But it would flash on tonight a good two hours early, and it would glow not green but red. Off-duty guards, driving

along highway 101, or anywhere else in sight of the prison for miles around, would see that red glow, begin to curse, and report for duty,

Someone at the Yard Captain's desk, the phone at his ear, his finger on a typed list of phone numbers under the desk-top glass, would be phoning the State Highway Patrol, the County Sheriff's Office, the San Francisco, Richmond, and Oakland police, and all the rest of the list.

I'd thought I'd be scared but I was excited, lying there motionless, knowing what was going on all around me. In the main prison area guards in pairs or larger groups would be on the prowl, peering into each of the great trash cans in the Yard, climbing the tier stairways in each block and then up onto the roofs of the fifth tiers just under the ceilings, climbing to the outer roofs of the smaller buildings, moving through every empty classroom, through the Protestant and Catholic chapels, and the dental offices. They'd be searching the unused upper floors of the old brick building just outside the industrial-area gate which once housed the prison gallows; they'd be poking under the bleachers out in the athletic fields; they'd be searching every place in which a man had ever hidden and every place that any of them could imagine a man might hide.

Right around me, in the industrial area, men were searching through the stack of crates Ben and I had hidden in—and finding no one. And they'd search every building here, looking under and into every piece of machinery big enough to contain a man, looking through every stack of finished products and raw materials, climbing up to tap along the lengths of the air ducts and waiting for the hollow sound to thicken and show them where a man was crouching. In the Navy Cleaning Depot, guards would be dumping over great clothes hampers, spilling them out on the concrete

floor. "Work, you bastards," I muttered. "Earn your two hundred and fifty a month!"

It was a thrill, it was a kick—I was scared, and yet not scared, I was so excited, knowing what they were doing to find me while I lay right under their eyes. At the San Rafael ferry station just across the Bay, a Richmond police car would be parked at the toll gate, while the cops studied every car that came off the boat from the prison side of the Bay, looking for anything that might strike them as suspicious. On each road leading from San Quentin, black and white state police cars would be arriving to park beside each of the nearest road intersections; other cars would be slowly cruising along the roads from the prison looking for a man in a blue shirt and blue denims. And finally, when the first fast preliminary search failed to find me—and they hadn't so far—I imagined the Warden, sitting in his big office, phone at his ear, nodding his head slowly, and saying something like, "All right; now we really start hunting." And now I knew why some men have hidden out just for the hell of it. You're nobody in prison—*nothing*—just a pair of blue pants and a shirt. But once you're *missing* from Quentin, damn them all—you're somebody then!

14

RUTH AND I HAD BREAKFAST at the Riverside Hotel in Reno Friday morning, the day Arnie was to begin his hideout; we ate in the coffee-shop just off the gambling casino on the street floor. Ruth had packed a bag with a change of clothes for me, including a tan sport shirt, slacks, and shoes—my clothes and things had arrived from L. A.—and I'd changed clothes in the back of the car on the floor, coming down out of the mountains.

Ruth wore a sleeveless cotton dress, white with a little pattern of the Eiffel Tower and the Arc d'Triomphe, one of those dresses with a kind of flaring-out skirt. She had a faint golden tan and looked very summery and nice. We finished breakfast and walked out of the hotel; the streets were already fairly crowded with summer tourists, and we joined them, walking up Virginia toward Second Street.

The first pawnshop we came to had a couple of customers in it, and we passed it by. But the next one, half a block on, was empty except for the proprietor, a middle-aged man leaning on the counter reading a newspaper. Ruth walked on, to saunter along looking in windows, waiting for me, and I went into the pawn-

shop and bought a .32 Colt revolver with a blued barrel and a scored grip. It cost thirty-five dollars and took less than two minutes with no questions asked. As I walked out, the gun shoved into my pants pocket, the proprietor was reading his paper again, and less than three minutes later we were on our way out of Reno, heading for the mountains and California again.

I drove this time, feeling rested now, feeling good, and during the six-hour drive back we talked a lot. Ruth's an intelligent girl, an interesting person, and we talked about everything and anything except the prison, and it was a relief to quit thinking about it, or at least try to. In Sacramento we left the car near the big park around the State buildings and walked to the business district for lunch. Then we found a big toy store and hobby shop and bought a wood-carving set—a big elaborate one with a lot of razor-sharp little knives and chisels—and an assortment of soft pine blocks. It was a nice day, pretty warm, but summery and pleasant, and for the first time in a long while, it seemed, I was enjoying myself; I felt happy, and it was good to be alive again. Crossing the park toward the car, along a wide graveled path, Ruth pointed to a big oval-shaped bed of some sort of red flowers and said, "What kind of flowers are those?"

"Those?" I said. "They're hemophilias."

"Really?" She nodded; it must have sounded vaguely familiar to her.

"Yeah. You don't know much about plants, do you?"

"Not much." She smiled at me, sauntering along the path in her summer dress, her arm under mine.

"Well, the ones next to them," I said, "are tularemias; fairly rare. And the ones by the iron fence are hepplewhites. Next to the night-blooming hollyhocks."

"All right," she said, in amused rebuke, and I

laughed and squeezed her arm under mine, feeling good.

But at four o'clock—we'd just gotten home—the whole mood, the good time we'd had driving home over the mountains, was suddenly gone. I looked at my watch as we walked into the house and said, "Well, it's started. He's hiding out right now; the hunt will begin any minute."

Ruth nodded, standing there in the living-room, looking at me. Then, her voice very low and quiet, she said, "Ben. Will he make it?"

I was silent for a moment, staring down at the floor, then I looked up again. "He's in midstream right now," I said, "neither out nor in, and I feel almost superstitious about even mentioning it." Then, seeing the anguish in her eyes, I added softly, "But yes, I think he'll make it. Certainly he will."

She nodded and turned toward the bedrooms. "I'll go change," she said.

I had a shower and shampoo, then—thorough, but not so long and luxurious as I'd have liked. But, dressing in clean fresh clothes, I felt at last that I'd left the prison behind me.

In the living-room again, I walked over to the big front window, pulled the drapes closed, then turned on the living-room lamps, and got out a card table I'd seen in the closet. I moved it next to the lamp on the davenport end-table, brought in a straight-backed kitchen chair, then opened up the wood-carving set I'd bought, and spread it out on the table. I found a ruler and a soft-lead pencil in the kitchen and brought them in, then got the revolver I'd bought, laid it on the table, and sat down.

Ruth came in, in a white blouse and summer flowered skirt, and sat down on the davenport at my elbow glancing at her watch. "Little too early to start supper,"

she said, and I nodded, picked up one of the large pine blocks, and begun slowly sketching on its smooth white surface the outline of the revolver lying on the table before me.

I'm pretty skillful with my hands; this was a kind of thing I do well. I worked quickly but carefully, stopping often to use a ruler, measuring a dimension of the gun, then the corresponding portion of my sketch.

"How's it going?" Ruth said presently, and I held up my block of wood; the pencil outline was nearly complete, and Ruth nodded. "That's special wood, isn't it?"

"Yeah, carving pine," I answered. "Very soft and straight-grained; they select it specially."

"They ought to; it was expensive enough."

I finished my sketch, then began cutting away the wood from around it, starting with the biggest of the razor-sharp knives. Carving is easy with soft wood and the right tools. I'd never done it before, but it went well.

After an hour I quit to flex the muscles of my hand, then I picked up the revolver, the real one, and looked at it. I like guns, I enjoy the feel of them in my hand, and I hefted this, playing with it, then glanced at Ruth who was on the davenport looking through a magazine.

I got up then and jammed the revolver into my belt, my feet slightly apart, arms held out from my sides but hanging loosely. Staring straight ahead, my face stern, I said, "I have just stepped out of the Silver Dollar Hotel onto the dusty street under the hot yellow sun. Two men lounging against a pillar of the Deux Magots Saloon shove themselves erect and dart inside, the shuttered doors swinging behind them. A long-skirted woman grabs a child by one arm and, almost dragging him, runs behind a building. A storekeeper swings the iron shutters closed over his display window, then

rushes inside. Within ten seconds the street is emptied of people, and now, there under the midday sun, it stands deserted except for me—and one other man.

"He stands half a block away facing me in the yellow dust, his gun slung from his hip. He is unshaven for he never shaves. But somehow he has no beard either; there is always one-eighth of an inch of black stubble on his face, never more, never less. He stares at me, eyes narrowed, lips contemptuous."

Glancing at Ruth, I said, "And now, slowly, our hands hanging loose at our sides, we begin walking toward each other." I began walking across the room in a slow measured stride. "A dog trots from behind the saloon, stops to stare, then his tail ducks between his legs, and he darts from sight, whining softly..Step by step, eyes never wavering, we approach." I reached the center of the room. "Suddenly our hands move in two blurs of speed!" My hand shot up and swept the pistol from my belt. "*Bang, bang!* Two shots roar out as one!" I turned to face Ruth again, shoving the revolver back in my belt. "What happened?"

"The honest sheriff was killed. For once."

"Right. And his own bullet went wild, striking an old lady asleep in a rocking chair up on a balcony, in the kneecap. They amputated the old lady, saving the leg, but Wilkes, the hired killer from Dallas, is triumphant, and the poor sheep-herders are driven from the range. And I for one am glad to see it, danged varmints." I whipped the pistol from my belt again. "Reach, lady!"

"Ben, for heaven sakes, put that away. Honestly"—Ruth shook her head—"let a man get his hands on a gun and he's like a child."

"Lucky I don't make you dance in the road, pumping bullets at your heels." I shoved the gun in my belt

again and walked toward her, legs slightly bowed. "You the new school mar'm?"

"Yes, for heaven sakes. Now sit down; you make me nervous."

"Reckon I will." I sat down at the card table again. "Hear you're one of Ravenhill's new gals; gonna work over to th' new saloon."

"That's right, in long black stockings and short red skirt."

I nodded, picking up my carving knife. "You'd look pretty good, too. Ma'am," I added.

Ruth glanced up at me, smiling. "Think so?"

I shrugged, eyes on the carving block in my hand. "I think so," I said, then I looked up and my eyes met hers.

After a moment Ruth said, "Funny, isn't it, you and I here like this." I nodded, and she dropped her head to the back of the davenport. "You know," she added, "a lot of it I like. I'm a domestic type, I guess, and find I like keeping house. I enjoy cooking meals when there's someone to cook for. And while you were gone, I worked in the garden, watered the lawn, shopped for groceries, and I actually enjoyed it. And yesterday, vacuuming the living-room, getting the house all clean before you came home, I felt almost happy; it almost seemed real." She smiled. "In a way, I could feel sorry it's ending, though it's good that it is. It's been hard on you, I know. Hard on me, too."

I smiled, and said, "Propinquity getting in its licks. I hope Arnie realizes what he's putting me through."

Soberly, Ruth answered, "I imagine he's thought about it," and I glanced at her, then resumed my carving.

I worked well into the evening, carving and slicing away the soft wood in thin curling slivers, and I worked with absolute meticulousness, stopping over and over to

check every least dimension of the carving with those of the real gun. Ruth fixed us some supper—veal chops, mashed potatoes, and peas—and brought it in, and I ate at the card table, Ruth on the davenport. We talked while I worked, and while we ate; talking for some reason tonight about things we liked: books, music, plays, sports, all sorts of things. Every hour Ruth would turn on the radio to a local news broadcast, and at nine o'clock, a little after we'd finished supper, we heard the first announcement of Arnie's hideout. The Warden at San Quentin, the announcer said, had reported that an inmate named Arnold Jarvis was missing at the four-thirty count this afternoon. The Warden was certain the inmate had not escaped from the prison; there was no indication that he had. He was believed to be hiding within the prison; a search was going on and would continue till the man was found. Up to this hour, the announcer concluded, the missing man had not been found. "And he won't be," I said, feeling a sudden rush of optimism about Arnie, and I grinned at Ruth, then resumed my carving.

At eleven-twenty that night, the revolver I had bought in Reno was duplicated in pine, down to the grooves and screws on the grip. With scraps of sandpaper wrapped around a forefinger, I smoothed every surface of the wooden gun, wiped it clean, then got up and went out to the garage. I brought in a can of wood filler Ruth had bought and a rag, then sat down at the cardtable and wiped the waxy paste over every surface of the wooden gun, filling and sealing the tiny pores of the wood.

I applied dark-blue liquid shoe polish to all the simulated metal parts, burnishing them with a soft rag when the polish had dried; and now, gleaming softly when I turned the gun in my hands, they looked like blued gun metal. I darkened the inside of the wooden

gun barrel which I'd carved out to a depth of over an inch. The revolver grip, darkened to a deep tan by the wood filler, I left as it was. Finally, I rubbed over the wooden bullet ends with soft-lead pencil and, when I finished, they looked genuine.

We got in the car then, and near the highway I stopped under a street light. "All right," I said to Ruth, reaching down to the seat beside me, "Which twin has the Toni?" I brought up a gun, barrel aimed at the windshield, and slowly twisted my wrist while the dull light from the street lamp wavered along the barrel. After a moment I laid this gun down, brought up the other, and did the same thing.

Ruth said, "There's no difference, Ben; I simply can't tell. No one could, especially in this light. I could see that one had bullets, so I knew it was the wooden one, but that was the only way."

I nodded. "It'll do," I said. "It'll do, all right," and I smiled, put the revolver down on the seat beside me, and drove on toward the highway.

On Golden Gate Bridge, in the middle of the span, no cars visible behind us, Ruth picked up the gun I'd bought in Reno. She held her arm outside the car for a moment, then her arm moved outward in a sudden arc, and for an instant we saw the revolver turning in the air, glinting in the yellow lighting of the bridge. Then curving over the rail, it was gone, to fall into the deepest, most turbulent part of the Bay, over two hundred feet below. On the way home we heard a late news broadcast; the missing San Quentin inmate had not yet been found.

15

HALF A DOZEN TIMES LAST NIGHT, and now as it began again this morning, I heard footsteps and voices close by. I knew it was morning—I could see blue sky high above my little circle of screening—and the day Hafek would come to San Quentin. I knew for certain that if any least portion of the board under which I lay had been visible above ground, I'd have been dragged out long since. I'd taken the canvas sheet Ben had brought my supplies in and rolled up in it like a blanket, but still I was stiff, cold, and tired; I'd slept many times last night but only for a few minutes each time. The ground under and around me was chilly, the dirt under me hard and lumpy, and it was difficult changing positions. Again and again I'd awakened, hearing voices. Once I'd heard my name, and thought, *They know who I am now.* Several times, awakening in the blackness, I had the feeling of being buried alive, and had to fight down an overwhelming urge to sit up, pushing open the lid, whatever the consequences. But each time, I reached for my flashlight beside me and quickly snapped it on, remembering always to cover the

pipe opening with my palm; and each time, the ability to see again quenched my panic.

I lay there now and grew warmer, and knew the morning sun must be touching the ground above me. Presently, very slowly and carefully, I turned my body and lay on my stomach, spreading the canvas out around me, my chest and face raised from the ground, supported by my elbows. Soundlessly, taking my time, I took one of the waxed-paper packages and a carton of water from the little heap of things beside me. Then I reached for one of the empty tight-lidded coffee cans. *No plumbing in here,* I thought to myself, *but this is the next best thing.*"

I ate a sandwich, the bread hard and dry, and an apple; then I drank half a carton of water, half turning on my back to let it run down my throat. And now, the ground warming, the air around me comfortable, I lay, head pillowed on my arms, feeling drowsy. I had not been certain this would be true, but now I had learned that I need not lie breathing through my overhead pipe. Small though the pipe opening was, so was the space I lay in, and with my bodily movements and oxygen consumption at a minimum, I got enough air. At times I felt stifled, the quality of the air bad, but a few minutes of breathing with my mouth over the pipe end would overcome that, I'd found. Drifting to sleep, I had a feeling of certainty that it would not occur to the prowling guards to look for me in the bare ground under their feet; that even if the possibility should occur to them, and I doubted that it would, there was no possible opportunity, in their minds, for a San Quentin inmate to ever dig such a shelter as I lay in now. Feeling competent and assured, ready for a long wait, I drifted into comfortable sleep.

At some time during the morning I woke up warm and sweating, and the air enclosing my body had the

hot motionless quality of air in an attic under a summer sun. I turned quietly onto my back and, my mouth at the pipe, breathed deeply of the outside air for several minutes. Then I sipped some water and felt better, and lay on my back, hands clasped under my head, staring up into the blackness.

At noon, I listened to the faint remote voices of the factory men leaving for lunch, and once again heard my name mentioned. When the last voice had gone, I took off all my clothes—that took twenty-five minutes of slow, awkward, infinitely careful movement. Nevertheless, in the rigid, inescapable heat of the noon sun pouring down on the earth just above me, it was hard to keep myself from audibly gasping for each breath of air. I lay most of the time now with my mouth at the pipe, but the sweat ran steadily from my body—I could feel it trickle—soaking into the canvas I lay on.

The Warden must be grateful for the sun, I thought; he knew that in whatever unlikely cramped space I was hiding, the heat might be at me. And on every wall, both in the prison and industrial area, extra guards would be waiting and watching in alert relentlessness for the betraying movement or sound or actual emergence—this had happened before, and more than once, at San Quentin—of the man who was hiding out. For now the quality of the search would have changed; men would still be prowling the prison, poking under and into and through every place they could think of to look. But they'd be covering old ground now, sometimes for the third, fourth, or fifth times, and there'd be a perfunctory quality in their searching, their hope of actually coming onto me virtually gone. For new and unique hiding places impossible to detect short of tearing down the prison have been discovered or worked out by San Quentin inmates before me. Once a man, a skilled carpenter, built a trapdoor into an upper floor of a

condemned and unused building; no cabinet maker could have disguised it more beautifully. He lay four days between the floor and the ceiling of the room below him, and might have hidden there indefinitely if he'd been able to stand it. But the Warden had waited and watched, extra men on each wall staring down into the prison, and finally hunger drove the man out. He was seen on the fourth night, a moving shadow in the darkness, creeping along the wall of a building; and he was actually relieved to be caught and fed and to again have a bed to lie on.

Now, while he would not have ordered the actual search to end, the Warden, working in his office and going on with the routine of the prison, would no longer be hoping that searching would find me. He'd be counting now—or tomorrow, or the next day, or the day after that, or if not then, next week—on my being obliged to reveal myself. And so the battle was on; I knew that San Quentin Prison—with a quiet tension and terrible alertness—was waiting for me to give up and come staggering out from wherever I was hiding.

At two-thirty I was no longer entirely sane; I lay in a blind and suffering stupor, and thoughts beyond my volition moved sluggishly through my mind in a kind of delirium. Once, years ago, I'd worked at a desk for two hours in a room where the recorded temperature was a hundred and nineteen degrees. I knew vaguely that the motionless air surrounding me now was much hotter than that; and I lay in simple agony, mouth at the pipe, chest heaving, my heart laboring to stay alive. The deadly ovenlike oppressiveness of the awful hotness was an actual physical pressure I could feel on every fractional inch of my skin, clogging and blocking my pores. I drifted often into unconsciousness, and drifted out of it sluggishly—semidelirious, not wanting to awaken, only a tiny portion of my mind and spirit

willing to fight any longer. But that little core of resistance and will to live understood that my weak and dehydrated body would die in the carbon dioxide of its own making if I lay here as I wanted to, in motionless suffering. And it made me rise each time into some kind of consciousness and renewed agony, and put my mouth to the pipe and the life-giving air outside. And, past ever fully satisfying my thirst, I swallowed, and swallowed, and swallowed again, mouthfuls of water from the little cardboard cartons. The darkness—to suffer this incredible heat in velvet-black darkness—was a hell-like thing; and each time I awoke to breathe new oxygen into my fighting lungs and renew the fluid which poured from my tissues, I flicked on my flashlight to fight back the fear of it.

I was buried alive and could not stand it. I knew I had to come out; and the thought of crawling out, back into life again, became all important. No consequences mattered, I knew I had to do it—and yet I waited, postponing it second after second. I thought—the words of it stumbling in stupid slowness through my mind—that men in prison had once suffered in hot boxes. Men had been chained in steel boxes under the sun all day long, and some had died of it; but some had not. And yet even in a metal box, there had been some ventilation. No one, I believed, had ever endured this. I tried leaving where I was with my mind, deliberately thinking of Ben and Ruth, imagining what they might be doing now. But all I could picture was the two of them sitting in a room, an electric fan going, each sipping a tall iced drink. Endlessly they sat, sipping cold drinks, the ice clinking, moisture beaded on the sides of the glasses; and they were cool and comfortable and smiling; and I hated them, I couldn't help it. Squeezing my eyes tight shut, I forced the picture to change, trying to imagine them doing anything but sipping those cold,

cold drinks. And suddenly—as clear as a picture projected on a screen—I saw them in bed; Ruth in a thin white nightgown, Ben in pajamas, both lying back smiling, her head resting on his arm. And then I cursed myself, and told myself that this was impossible, that it couldn't happen, that I was a foul and ungrateful bastard to even think it; and I deliberately opened my senses again to the heat I lay in.

Again I fought that unbelievable heat, and knew I could not last it out, and felt a terrible helpless rage at the men around and just above me who were waiting for me to come staggering out of somewhere. With all my soul I wished I had a gun. If I could have heaved up out of that hole in the ground, a gun in my hand, and killed some of the bastards who'd come at me then before they killed me, I'd have done it. And if the guard I'd hit had been with them, I'd have done it with pleasure. But I had no gun, and so once again I postponed for just a little longer the simple act that would end my torture.

I got through the afternoon that way; by minutes and seconds at a time, enduring on the endless promises I made to myself—and endlessly broke—of relief after only a little bit longer. And in time, only barely conscious, my mouth muscles slack and without strength at the pipe, I became aware of a minute decrease in the terrible temperature. A little more time passed, and now there was a definite slackening off in the heat; then steadily and perceptibly, minute by minute, the heat drained out of the air around me. My mouth at the pipe end pulled air into my lungs from outside that was actually cool, wonderfully refreshing; and I drifted into full consciousness again, limp, terribly weak, but exultant and filled with pride.

A long time later, using my handkerchief and water from a carton, I forced myself to take a kind of bath;

sponging the drying sweat from every surface of my body. Then I ate—forcing myself at first, then suddenly ravenous. I ate two dry sandwiches of salty roast beef and an apple, swallowing the beginning bad spots and eating the core; I did not want to foul my cave with decaying food, for now I knew I was going to stay in it. Then I chewed down a mouthful of salt, shaking it into my mouth from the little cardboard shaker I had. I drank two cartons of tepid water and part of a third; and then it was cool enough to work myself quietly into my clothes.

I lay there quietly then, comfortable, very tired, ready to sleep. Without warning or preliminary thought, I understood suddenly that the picture that had formed in my mind—Ben and Ruth—was true. He was living in a house somewhere alone with good-looking, long-legged, exciting Ruth, and she was alone with him; they were living together, undressing under the same roof, and *sleeping together, damn them!* And an instant later, I laughed. Ben's a good boy, I reminded myself; quiet, modest, damn near an honor student in school; and he never really did know how to have much fun. I tried not to feel it, but I couldn't help it; I felt an almost contemptuous certainty that Ben wouldn't ever—wouldn't even know how to even—look sideways at Ruth.

But still I lay there actually disliking my brother, resenting him; and it was hard to figure out why. All my life he's been the one people really liked; without effort he's made friends; he's never known what it's like to work for them. And over and again it's worked out that I ended up depending on Ben; even as a kid, and in school, I was often asked places only because I was Ben's brother. And to lie here now in a hole in the ground, with absolutely everything depending on Ben

—my safety, my life, Ruth— I didn't like it. And it didn't help to tell myself how grateful I ought to be; and I felt ashamed and lay there like an animal in its hole till I fell asleep.

16

RUTH AND I rented a small furnished apartment in the city on Sutter Street the morning—Saturday—after Arnie hid out. Or rather Ruth did while I waited in the car; I still hadn't shaved. She told the landlady it was for her brother who was moving up from Los Angeles, paid a deposit, got the key, and came down and gave it to me. It was a nice apartment, she said, and it was in a nice location.

We had lunch in a drive-in, then went to a movie on Market Street. We saw half the picture, maybe, and then I couldn't stand it and neither could Ruth. All we could think of was Arnie lying in that hole out at San Quentin—maybe being dragged out right now—and we couldn't watch the picture, and got up and left. I headed back for Marin then; and we went to Muir Woods, and walked along by the little stream that runs through it under the giant redwoods; and that was a little better. It was hot today, for the Bay area, but here in Muir Woods it was cool and peaceful, and we stayed for a couple hours, just wandering around. But a large part of the time we walked holding each other's hand,

clinging to each other for comfort against what we felt and what lay ahead.

We heard a local news broadcast in the car coming home from Muir Woods; there was nothing in it about Arnie, and I felt certain he'd made it through the day and was still safe. At home, we had some supper, just sandwiches; neither of us felt hungry. I don't know how we got through the evening. We talked, but I don't really know about what. We watched some television, or at least stared at the screen. But apprehension lay in the air around us, and once when I said something or other—some inconsequential remark—Ruth burst into tears. I walked over to the davenport where she was sitting, sat down beside her, and took her hand between mine. "Don't worry," I said. "I really mean it; don't worry. It's almost over; it will be in a few hours," and I could feel her relax a little. "Just take it easy," I said then. "Arnie's going to be all right." And she burst into tears all over again.

We got through the first part of the evening, finally, by just talking about Arnie, and what he and I had to do tonight; it was a lot easier than trying not to. Once Ruth said—and it startled me, I actually hadn't thought too much about this—"What's he going to do after he's out, Ben? Where can he go? And what can he do?"

"I don't know," I said slowly. "And I don't think he does; there hasn't been time to worry about that. But hell, you read in the papers every once in a while about some guy who escaped from a prison years before. And he's been living for twenty-five years under an assumed name, a peaceful law-abiding citizen and all that. So there must be others—even more of them—that you never hear about, who are never detected."

She was shaking her head. "It's hard to imagine, though," she said, "about Arnie; all alone, without the help of all the reassurances and props he's always

needed from the people around him."

I nodded. "Unless you were with him," I said, "helping him through it."

She was shaking her head. "I'd have to love him for that. There's a limit to what you can do for other people, no matter what their troubles. The time's past when I could be married to Arnie."

"I know, I know." I was nodding my head, shutting her off. "He's got to make it himself, now. And if he gets through this, I think he will. But he isn't through it yet." I glanced at my watch, then said, "I guess it's time now, Ruth," and she bit her lip and nodded.

In the back bedroom, I changed into my blue denims and work shirt. Then, from a dresser drawer, I took the wooden gun I'd carved, glancing into the mirror at the black stubble on my face. In the garage, Ruth was waiting at the wheel of the car, wearing her navy-blue trench coat and dark beret. Standing by the car, I smeared some car oil from the floor on my pants and shirt, then rubbed floor dust into the stains. I got into the car then, sat on the floor of the front seat beside Ruth, and she started the motor.

She got out and opened the garage door, letting it slide quietly up to the roof, holding it with one hand, not allowing it to bang. She got back into the car, pulling her door closed so that the latch caught. She drove out into the driveway, stopped, got out, and closed the garage door quietly. Then she got in again, pulling her door closed tight with her hands, not slamming it. She drove down into the street and turned left toward the highway, switching on the parking lights. At the highway, a quarter of a mile west, she switched the car lights on full, and turned north. Whether anyone in the neighborhood had noticed our leaving, neither of us knew, but we'd done nothing to direct attention to

ourselves. At home, we'd left lights on in several of the rooms.

Again we drove four or five miles north on 101, toward the county road we'd turned onto several nights before. But this time, swinging into the left-turn lane, we turned west away from the prison, and onto the Greenbrae Road. A quarter mile down it, Ruth pulled off onto the wide dirt and gravel shoulder and stopped. "Soon be over," I said quietly.

"Yes," she answered, but her head was shaking no. "Oh, Ben, this is the worst part. This is where you could be—" She didn't finish. Glancing at me, her face set and angry, she said shortly, "You look terrible."

I smiled and said, "No, I don't," rubbing the bristles on my face. "I'm the Schweppes man; I look distinguished."

But she wouldn't smile back. "And now I can start waiting and worrying about you again," she said. I started to say something, smiling again, but she burst out at me. "I hate it!" she said. "I *hate* sitting alone wondering what's happening to you!"

I put a hand on her arm. "Nothing's going to happen. There's really not much to worry abou—"

"Of course not!" she said angrily. "Before you might have ended up in prison; tonight you may only get shot."

I tried to think of something to say to minimize what now lay ahead of me, but couldn't. "It'll be okay," I said. "Don't worry." It was the best I could do, and I reached out and patted her thigh comfortingly. Then I stood as well as I could in the car to look through the rear window. "Nothing coming," I said. "Turn around; I'll say good-by now; see you soon," and Ruth released the clutch, made a U-turn to the other side of the road, then slowed.

I opened the door, stepped out immediately, and as the car slid past me, pushed the door closed. I stepped down into the summer-dry drainage ditch beside the road and lay down on my belly, my chin in my cupped hands, the upper half of my body supported on my elbows. I saw the twin ruby taillights of the car curve into the little highway approach ahead, and then brighten as Ruth touched the brakes to stop. I watched the motionless car stand for some seconds till the traffic light changed, then saw it start up, pull onto the highway, and head south.

For perhaps five minutes I waited, then I stood and began to walk toward the highway ahead. The road I was on was deserted of traffic at the moment and I walked perhaps two hundred yards. Then headlights approached from far behind me, and I stepped into the weeds and lay down until they passed. Twice more I walked on, and twice more waited in the weeds till a car passed me.

Then, twenty yards from highway 101 just ahead, I lay down in the ditch once again. From a side pocket of my pants, I brought out a sealed envelope and tore it open. From it I shook a dozen fragments out onto the surface of the dry ditch; they were scraps of torn paper, each coated with clear plastic. I put the envelope back into my pocket, and then, in the next forty minutes, I counted nineteen cars which passed me, slowing for the highway ahead, and there was something wrong with each of them for my purpose.

Some were driven by or contained women. Half a dozen contained more than one person. Half a dozen others contained men driving alone; but four of them, I could see as they stopped to wait had their right-hand windows rolled up, either to the top or part way. Two cars were driven by men alone, and their right-hand windows were rolled down, but both of these drivers

were lucky; as they approached and slowed for the highway, the light was red for highway traffic, and they were able to swing onto 101 without stopping.

Over half an hour had passed, and now I waited a good five or six minutes more, and not a single car of any kind passed heading east. Then another set of headlights approached from behind me, and as it passed, I saw the man behind the wheel, no one else in the car, and his right-hand window was rolled clear down. I could see the traffic signal, the amber light on, and as the car slowed for the highway, the waiting highway traffic started up, and the car, a 1953, two-door Buick sedan, stopped to wait, five or six feet from the highway's edge.

I got up and walked toward it, keeping the rear corner of the car between me and the driver. Passing the back end of the car, I saw the driver's face turned away from me, staring to the north watching the traffic signal. I pulled the wooden pistol from my pocket, walked silently up to the right-hand car door, and did two things simultaneously. With my right hand, still hold the gun, I turned the door handle, while my left hand grasped the little plastic-capped door-locking device, and pulled up. As the door opened, the man turning to stare, I had the gun pointing directly at his face and was sliding into the right-hand seat. "Don't act crazy, and you won't get shot," I said quietly. "Just keep your head, and you'll be all right, and won't get hurt." Reaching behind me with my left hand, never taking my eyes or the gun from the man's astonished face, I closed the door beside me. "Now, do you understand what I say?" I said pleasantly. "I don't particularly want to shoot you; just don't go panicky on me."

The man hadn't moved; the rims of his eyes had opened wide in astonishment and fear. Now he narrowed them, in control of himself. He was a man of

perhaps fifty, stout but not fat; he wore a dark brown suit, and a brown felt hat; I could see him clearly in the reflected light from the busy highway just ahead of us. Then he nodded his head several times, slowly. "I understand you," he said. "I'm not trying anything; I got a family. You're welcome to anything I got on me; just tell me what to do." He sat motionless, staring at me, his face tense, worried over what was happening, but not terror-stricken, not panicky.

"Nothing," I said. "When the light changes, swing right onto the highway just like you were going to do before you got company. I'll tell you what's next after that."

The man nodded. "Okay." He kept staring at me, fascinated, and after a moment I smiled.

"Go ahead," I said, "take a good look. You like my clothes? Maybe you want to trade?"

He didn't answer; the traffic light changed, and highway traffic slowed and stopped, fifty feet to our left. Still staring at me, the man didn't see this. "Light's changed," I said. "Let's go. But take it easy; don't stall that motor; we got plenty of time."

Again he nodded, turned to look at the highway before him, and started up very slowly and carefully. On the highway, heading south, he continued to drive very slowly in the right-hand lane beside the dirt shoulder.

"Pick it up a little," I said. "And hold it at forty." I sat pushed into the corner of the seat, back partly against the door behind me, facing the driver. My forearm in my lap, the gun pointed steadily at the driver's side. As cars passed us, lights sliding through our car, the barrel of the gun in my hand glinted and gleamed; it looked entirely real.

We drove two miles, neither of us speaking most of the time. Once I said, "You're busy thinking now, but

don't let it get you into trouble. I can pull this trigger faster than anything you can do. Behave yourself, and you'll be home in an hour, safe and snug."

Just ahead now the road passed between two high embankments, slicing through a hill as it ascended a shallow curve. From a section of the embankment just ahead to the right, I knew bulldozers had removed truckloads of earth fill, and the road shoulder there for a length of twenty-five yards was wide and flat, extending far off the road. "Pull off just ahead," I said, "and stop. Get all four wheels off the road."

The man slowed, then pulled off, stopped, and turned to look at me, waiting. "Turn off your lights, put the gear in neutral, and set the hand brake," I said. "Don't turn the motor off." He did as he was told then again turned to me. "Now, listen," I said. "What I want is your car. You'll even get it back, undamaged, by tomorrow. All you're going to lose is a little gas. I don't want you, your money, or anything else. So all I need now is to get you out of the car. You'll have a little walk, then, but that's all. Understand me? There's nothing to get excited about; you'd be crazy to make me shoot. Okay?"

The man nodded, eyes wide again, and he swallowed before he spoke. "Okay," he said. "Sure, fine. Take the car; it's insured. Look, mister, I did my part; don't *you* get excited. Don't pull that trigger now; just tell me what to do, and I'll do it."

"All right." Reaching behind me with my left hand, I opened the door beside me an inch. "As I move out real slow, you move with me. Don't try starting up the car to shake me loose, or you'll have a bullet in your side before your foot ever touches the gas pedal. Move with me, but keep your distance. Don't get any closer, and don't try to lunge at me. Okay"—eyes and gun never wavering from the man, I slid out of the seat, feet

feeling for the ground—"move across with me."

A hand on the steering wheel for leverage, his other hand on the seat, the man slid himself across the seat after me. When he was well clear of the steering wheel, I stepped backward a pace, holding the car door open with my right shoulder. "Come closer," I said. "Get both feet on the ground now but stay sitting on the seat."

The man did this, and I stepped back another pace, the car door remaining open of its own weight. "Now, stand," I said, "and walk toward me slow, always slow. Just keep your hands at your sides." Clear of the car now, I was standing where passing traffic might conceivably see what I was doing, so I lowered my gun hand to my side, keeping well clear of the man facing me. "Now keep facing me," I said, "but circle around in back of me."

The man, always facing me, moved sideways, shuffling his feet, circling around me toward the embankment. As he did this, I turned to keep facing him; then I backed to the car door again. After a moment or so, left hand behind me, I found the car seat and sat down on its edge, feet on the ground, facing the man, the gun in my lap. "Back up some more," I said, "clear to the embankment."

He did this, shuffling backward, then suddenly, his back touching the dirt embankment, he knew I was going to shoot him. "My God, mister, *don't,*" he said. "*Please* don't. You got the car; I never did anything to—"

"I'm not going to shoot," I said quietly and quickly. "Get that through your head. I just want you clear of the car when I start." As though speaking to a deaf man, I said very slowly and clearly, raising my voice a little, "I'm not going to shoot; you're okay. Just let me get out of here, and you're in the clear." I slid back

across the seat, always facing the man, who stood staring at me, his suit and hat almost invisible against the dark dirt embankment rising high in the darkness behind him, his face and hands pale blurs.

Now, my gun hand still pointing at the man, my eyes always on him, I felt for the clutch with my feet, depressed it, released the brake, and put the car into gear with my left hand. The car door remained open. I pressed the gas pedal slightly, the motor revved up smoothly, and I said, "All right; you're okay now, mister." I leaned to the right as though about to pull the right-hand door closed, then I stopped, leaning across the seat, and I grinned suddenly as though an amusing idea had just occurred to me. The gun was on the seat now under my hands, and I rubbed it briskly over the upholstery, flipped it over with a fingernail, and repeated the action till I was certain any trace of fingerprints was gone. Then I picked it up by the barrel between two knuckles of my right hand. I switched on the car lights, then said, "Here. Here, mister, here's a souvenir for you," and I tossed the gun out of the car toward the man's feet and saw and heard it strike the dirt and slide a few inches, stopping a yard before the man. The man glanced down at it then up at me. "Go ahead," I said, allowing my laughter to fill my voice. "Pick it up; I'll trade you—the gun for the car." Deliberately laughing aloud now, I glanced into the rear-view mirror, then released the clutch, gunning the car, and as it shot onto the pavement, gravel spouting under the wheels, the right-hand car door slammed shut. Immediately I decreased the sudden pressure on the gas pedal, accelerating more slowly. I brought the car smoothly up to forty-five miles an hour, the legal speed limit, and drove on toward the south, toward Waldo Grade, and the Golden Gate Bridge four or five miles ahead.

The man I had left behind, I knew, was just two and two-tenths miles from the nearest gas station and telephone; I'd picked this spot on the way home from Muir Woods today and clocked the distance on my speedometer. I knew it wasn't completely impossible that the man would somehow get an immediate lift and telephone the police, with so perfectly coherent and brief an explanation of what had happened to him that the police would be waiting for me at the toll gate ahead, all within ten minutes' time. But it was far from likely; people are wary of hitchhikers, at night especially, and the chances were very high that he'd have to walk every foot of the way.

Just the same, as the road curved into the bridge approach, nine minutes later, I turned on the car radio; it seemed to me that the sound of dance music would seem inappropriate to anyone's conception of a man doing wrong. I had my twenty-five cents ready as I approached the toll gate, my window open. I slipped the coins into the man's hands without quite having to bring the car to a stop; then I was moving on toward the cutoff just ahead that led to the old San Francisco Exposition building whose domed roof I could see to the right. Far behind me, I was sure, the man whose car I was driving had probably walked half a mile, turning as the headlights of each passing car touched him to thumb vigorously for a ride.

17

DRIVING into the little tree-sheltered street which curves around the dark empty old Exposition building, I saw just one car there and recognized it. I parked directly in back of it and turned off the motor and lights. I wiped all of the steering wheel hard with a handkerchief, the brake handle, light switch, ignition key, and radio panel. Then I opened the right-hand door, sliding across the seat to it. I wiped the door handle and lock, then got out of the car. I closed the door quietly, and wiped the outside door handle. Then I walked five steps ahead to my own car, and got in on the right-hand side. The motor was running quietly, and I said to Ruth, "Everything's fine; let's go home." She started up, and I said gently, "Don't forget your lights."

Ruth said, "Oh!" and turned on the car lights.

"Want me to drive?" I said. "This has been a hell of a strain on you."

Ruth shook her head and turned to look at me. "I'm all right," she said. "You're all right, and I am, too, now. But I've got to hear exactly what happened, right away. Where can we go?"

"The Marina, I guess. It's just a couple blocks from

here," and Ruth nodded and put the car into gear.

The Marina is a sort of common; a wide belt of green public lawn between the street and the edge of the Bay here. Along its water edge are docks for pleasure boats, and there's an asphalt parking area at the very edge of the water with a miraculous view of the Golden Gate Bridge, and this, naturally, is a favorite local lover's lane. We parked there, a little distance from the nearest of the other darkened cars. Ruth turned off the motor and set the brake, and I said, "It went exactly as we planned, no trouble." And then I told her about it.

Ruth nodded, staring off to her left at the string of golden-yellow bridge lights strung across the Bay. "You don't have to reply to this, Ben," she said then. "You don't have to say a thing about it, but I love you."

I didn't answer for a moment, and I guess Ruth thought I wasn't going to, because she turned to me suddenly, her face anxious. "Well, if I may," I said, "I'd *like* to answer it. I love you. So damned much there's no way to say it."

In the dim reflected light from the water her eyes looked suddenly excited and happy, but she was biting her lip and shaking her head. "Ben, what are we going to do?"

"Well," I said, "if it's all right with you, I think one thing we might do is get married. And another thing is this—" I reached out, took her in my arms, and did what I'd been wanting to do for longer, I knew, than I'd realized. I kissed her, holding her very close and tight, and for a long time that was enough.

Then Ruth said it, drawing back to look up at me. "What about Arnie?"

I just shook my head. "I don't know," I said. "Far as I know there's nothing to do about that and nothing to say. I'm sorry, if you know what I mean. But what can be done about it? What can we do? Arnie could

have been married to you long since, but he isn't; he's in San Quentin instead and we didn't put him there. And Arnie brought us together, *threw* us together—living together under the same roof, day and night—in order to get himself out of his own jam. And what's happened now is just something Arnie's going to have to accept, damn it. I didn't bring this about, and neither did you; Arnie did. And he'll have to accept the consequences." I shook my head again. "Though I'll admit I'm going to hate the job of telling him."

"Ben," she said, "let's be glad about this. You're right; when I have to face Arnie I'm not going to like myself. But nothing else could have happened but this. It's not something we could control, and I won't have it spoiled! Ben, smile at me, tell me you're glad."

So I told her; and it was true. All my life seemed to have led up to the way I felt now, and I held Ruth and kissed her and was happy.

We might have stayed there at the Marina, talking, making plans, watching the harbor, for an hour; I don't know. Then we drove back, Ruth at the wheel, I sitting on the floor beside her as we passed through the toll gate. I sat on the floor again as we approached our street, and stayed there till the car was in the garage, and the big metal door closed. Then I got out of the car and followed Ruth into the house.

Entering the lighted living-room, Ruth stopped so suddenly I bumped into her; then I, too, saw Nova in the big easy chair near the window.

18

"EVENIN'." He nodded his big bald head, utterly calm and sure of himself. "Been waitin' for you." We just stood there, motionless. "All alike these houses," he said. "All got one more door'n you can ever remember to lock." He nodded toward the backyard door. "So I come in and made myself comfortable. Got a little news for you."

I nodded, dead furious at this malicious fat man who'd walked into my house; but I knew this was no time for indignation. "What is it? Have they found Arnie? Is he all right?" I walked to the davenport, and Ruth and I sat down facing Nova.

He smiled as though I'd made a little joke not meant to be taken seriously. "No," he drawled as though humoring me, "they haven't found him. Expect he's all right, though." His voice mocking me, he said softly, "The word is he escaped."

"Oh?" I stared at him for a moment. "How?"

Nova threw back his head and laughed silently. "How," he said, grinning at me. "You don't know how. Well, now, I'll tell you somethin'; they don't either—out to the prison. I was s'posed to be on tonight, extra

man on the first watch. So I phoned the prison just before time to leave; figured it was about time for somethin' like this; most hideouts don't last long. 'We don't need you,' the sergeant says. 'Green light's on again; he made it out tonight.' " Nova sat forward, glancing from one to the other of us, grinning. "Seems some guy got his car clouted tonight. At the Greenbrae intersection, mile or so from the prison, just where you'd expect a con might come out at the highway. So when this guy tells the state cops how—guy took it with a wooden pistol, young guy in blue denims, all dirtied up, needs a shave—they take him over to the prison. And he picks out your brother's picture from a batch of them. 'That's him,' the guy says; 'I can tell from the eyes and the hair. Put a two, three day black beard on him, and that's the man.' "

Nova shook his head several times. "Warden's a slow man to give up a search, though; anybody can clout a car wearin' blue denims and needin' a shave." He stared at my clothes and face, then winked. "And the guy coulda made a mistake about the picture; though the wood pistol looks suspicious, like maybe a con carved it out. But the Warden kept the red light on just the same. Only now they had a state cop, radio-car man, pokin' around where this car was clouted; the guy took it must have been waitin', they figure, hidin' in the weeds or the ditch. This cop brings in your brother's ID card, all tore up and throwed away there. They fit it together like a jig-saw puzzle, and that's it—it's your brother's ID card and it didn't fly over the wall itself. Looks like your brother made it out, all right. They don't know how, but he sure as hell must have." Nova sat back in the chair, regarding us, his eyes amused. "Been for a drive?" he said.

"Yeah, little drive."

"Well"—Nova dropped his palms on his knees as

though ready to rise and leave—"just wanted you to hear the news."

"Thanks," I said. "Very nice of you."

"No trouble. I had plenty of sleep tonight, figurin' I'd be on duty, so I didn't mind waitin' for you—out for a little drive. Little curious anyway, I don't mind admittin', to see how you'd take the news. When you finally come home." Deliberately he let his eyes move over me, from head to foot, then he said casually, "I tell you I run into your brother out to the prison? Yep"—he nodded his big bald head, not waiting for an answer—"just before he hid out." Nova sat back in his chair and said, "I was on in the mess hall, there was a little trouble, and I come walkin' over. Thought I heard your brother's name, so I took a good look at the guy." He shook his head as though in amazement. "No doubt in my mind who it was when I saw him good. Looked exactly like you do. Yes, sir, now I see you in the light, the con I talked to—your brother, that is—looked exactly like you do now; specially in them clothes." He slapped his thigh as though at an amusing idea. "Lucky the guy lost his car didn't run into you tonight! Just drivin' around like you say. He coulda thought *you* was the guy clouted his car! Specially in that getup you're wearin'—just like prison clothes; Same kind they wear, you know. But course you know; you been out there.

"Say!" He slapped his knee again as though at a sudden hilarious idea. "If you was to've clouted a guy's car tonight—'stead of your brother, I mean—wouldn't *that've* been funny! They'd figure it was your brother, figure he was out—and all the time he'd still be in! Be a good one, all right," he said shaking his head in amusement. "They figure he's out, and all the time he'd be—" He paused. "Well, now," he said thoughtfully, "Where would he be?" He shrugged.

"Only one place *I'd* want to be. Green light goes on, they come down off the walls in the industrial area—*that's* where I'd want to be. Wait'll the place quiets down good, 'bout an hour from now maybe, and over the wall you go, nothin' to stop you. Almost enough to make a man wish it *did* happen that way. Go out there and grab him when he comes over—chance for a promotion, maybe.

"Promotion," he repeated in amused disgust. "What's that amount to? Few extra dollars every month. Still"—he shrugged one heavy shoulder—"man gets to be my age and ain't saved much, what else you got to hope for? Ain't like somebody was gonna give me a big chunk of money all at once, little nest egg before I retire on half pay. Be nice, though; lot better than any promotion. 'Stead of sittin' here thinkin' up crazy ideas, and maybe gettin' all excited, and rushin' off somewhere to sit in the brush with a gun in his lap, man could just go home and go to bed if he had a little nest egg stashed away."

"Like a couple thousand dollars, Mr. Nova?" I said quietly.

"Yeah." He nodded. "That's what I mean: four, five thousand dollars. Little bundle like that, man could just go home and relax; the man's out; he escaped; that's official; let other people worry about him."

"I own a car," I said quietly. "I paid twelve-fifty for it; it ought to bring me a thousand. And I've got just over three thousand dollars in government bonds. That adds up to four thousand, nearly every cent I've got in the world."

He seemed to have lost interest. "Lucky," he murmured, staring absently out the window. "Nicely fixed for a young fellow. Course it takes time, money tied up like that, to turn it into cash. Three, four days, maybe longer. But"—he shrugged—"money ain't everything. Well"—he put his hands on his thighs and heaved him-

self up from the chair—"time I was gettin' home. *I* ain't tired, but expect you folks are. So I'll get home; figure out what to do with myself the next few hours." He stepped to the front door, a big meaty hand on the knob as though about to open it. Then he nodded a few times, and added casually, "Like I say, money ain't everything; old sayin' but true." He nodded thoughtfully. "No, sir, money ain't everything."

"No?" I said. "What is?"

"Friendship." He nodded at me wisely. "You know"—he smiled—"I had the idea maybe you folks was superior, sort of settin' yourself above people. Had to force myself in here"—he smiled as though he'd made a joke—"before I even got to sit down in your livin'-room. Guess I was wrong about you, though; hope so, because I'm a neighborly man. Nothin' better I like than people droppin' in on me, any time, any hour. Even now, for example, the old lady's asleep, and a house fallin' wouldn't wake her. I had company drop in on me tonight, I wouldn't even think of goin' out."

I was staring at him, trying to fathom what he could be talking about; he opened the door.

"Nothin'll happen out at Quentin for an hour," Nova said. "Least I'm willin' to gamble on that. So I'm goin' home now, for thirty minutes. Company drops in on me, I'll *stay* home. *Her,* I'm talkin' about. *You.*" His finger pointed at Ruth. "Just a half hour's company"—his eyes were shiny, and his tongue touched his lips—"while we get better acquainted. And I stay home tonight, and glad to."

I was at him, right arm swinging as hard as I could throw it—and it stopped in midair, my fist smacking on his meaty palm like a .22 pistol shot. And then he held me gripped; his immense arms were wrapped around me, holding mine tight to my sides; and without effort he lifted me, squeezing me harder and harder, eyes

grinning into mine; while Ruth flailed at him. The pressure tightened, the pain flashed, till I knew another fractional increase of pressure would crack my ribs. Then he arched his great chest and belly, stepping forward, as he let go of me. I'm not a small man, and I'm strong, but I landed hard on the floor and rolled twice from the force of the shove of that incredibly powerful beer barrel of a body. Nova looked at me contemptuously, then turned and walked out into the night.

Some several minutes later I was still shaking my head stubbornly at Ruth. Now, seated beside me on the davenport, her hands on my forearms, she said it again, and this time I listened. "Ben, you can't. He won't let you get near him with a poker, an iron bar, or anything else; you think he doesn't know you'd want to try? Even if you did you might kill him. And one thing you're not going to do for Arnie is murder."

"All right. Then I've got to warn Arnie. Go over that wall again, and—"

"Ben, Ben, you're not thinking! You're just wild!" She made me look at her. "Right now Nova's sitting at his window; you know he is. You couldn't even open the garage door before he'd know it, and he'd be out there as fast as you would. Or just phone San Quentin instead."

I was on my feet, glaring down at her. "Are you trying to tell me there's *nothing* to do! That we just *sit* here and let him go take Arnie!" I brought both hands down on my head. "Lord, it's incredible! There's Arnie, out there now, getting ready. And we can't get *to* him, can't even tell him! And can't think of anything *else* to do! Ruth, we can't just *sit* here and let Arnie go over that wall right into Nova's—"

"Ben, shut up," she said. "And listen. I'll phone Nova. With my voice lowered, my face close to the

phone, sounding all upset and tearful. I'll tell him Arnie's my husband, and that I'm coming over. That you were against it, we had a fight about it, but that I've finally brought you around. You've had to say yes because I've *got* to do it for Arnie. I'll tell him—well, anything; anything like that. I'll just talk, for sixty seconds at least, by my watch." Her eyes were flashing. "I'll make it real, Ben! By believing it myself! I'll sound scared to death!"

I was nodding, feeling the excitement pounding in me; then I grabbed Ruth by both arms. "When you hang up," I said, "lock all the doors, you hear me? In fact, I'll do it now. And when you hang up just sit here and wait, you hear?"

She smiled. "I hear," she said. "Sit here and wait; I've done a lot of it, and I'll do it again, but this is the last."

"It's the last," I said and grinned at her.

In the garage, I stood at the left front fender of the car, hands on the garage door, staring over my shoulder at the open kitchen door. The car motor was running. I saw Ruth in the kitchen at the telephone, dialing; saw her finish dialing and extend one arm to the side.

Then her arm dropped in a swift motion, and I soundlessly raised the garage doors as Ruth said, "Hello, Mr. Nova?"

I got into the car, drove it out in first gear, stopped, and leaped out to close the garage door. Then I was in the car again, coasting down the driveway, foot on the clutch, and as the front wheels touched the street, I shifted directly into high and, the car lights out, I drove past Nova's big darkened front window toward the highway ahead.

19

ONCE AGAIN I climbed that dark hill, and once again entered the prison as I had before, this time directly beside the furniture factory, leaving my rope suspended from the wall beside me; I had no seconds to waste. The area looked the same; silent, empty, the four buildings dimly lighted, the wall lights on, the light showing green high over the prison; and the bare brown dirt under my feet seemed undisturbed. I actually had to kneel, my eyes only inches from the ground as I hunted for the tiny circlet of screening I had made, so long ago it seemed now. I couldn't find it. Minutes passed as I stumbled on my knees, my nose actually brushing the dirt, over that patch of earth between the high concrete wall, and the furniture factory.

Then something caught my eye, and I turned. There behind me, far to the west by the cotton mill, but approaching rapidly along the narrow aisle between the big wall and the buildings, was the bobbing beam of a flashlight. Jerking along the uneven ground with the steps of the patrolling guard who held it, the light was swelling in size—and now all I could do was call, "Arnie!" in as harsh and loud a whisper as I dared.

"Arnie!" I said it louder. "It's Ben! It's *Ben,* Arnie; open up!" I said, my face almost touching the ground, moving over it frantically. "Arnie!" My voice strained and broke with the volume of my whisper; then the ground under me moved, I rolled to one side, and I saw Arnie on his back, holding the weight of the board-supported earth on his straining arms. I scrambled in beside him, and he dropped the lid. Then I remembered: hanging down the wall just beside us, and perfectly visible in the light to anyone passing it, was my rope.

There was nothing we could do. We didn't move; we didn't breathe. We lay waiting, motionless; then suddenly I had to suck in a lungful of air, and I was aware that time had passed. Arnie slowly raised the lid. There was no one; the guard—he must have done this—had turned off ahead between two of the other buildings to the west. Whispering, I told Arnie, then—stripping it to the very minimum he needed to understand—why we had to leave now, not waiting till prison activity reached its early morning ebb, and hoping that Nova had not yet arrived.

I went first, scrambling up my rope, as Arnie tossed his, underhanded, to strike and catch the guard rail overhead. I reached the top, was on my feet yanking my rope up after me to loop it around a support and toss it down on the other side, when the voice in the dimness below me spoke. "All right," it said quietly, "come down easy; I've got a gun on you." And then I saw Nova on the other side of the wall, his bulky silhouette barely darker than the ground on which he stood; and I knew it had been foolish to hope Ruth could stall him to sit stupidly waiting in his house, giving us the time we had needed. I came down—there was nothing else to do; I knew he would shoot if I didn't

—sliding down my rope, face to the wall. As my feet touched the ground, the gun muzzle pressed into my back, and Nova said, "Hands on your head and climb up to the road, slow."

I raised my arms, clasping my hands on my head, still facing the wall; and then I moaned. "My ankle," I mumbled. "I can't walk. I think it's twis—"

"Come on, you bastard, move!" Nova stepped beside me, pulling at my shoulder, prying me from the wall. And then Arnie, legs doubled up, hugging his knees, dropped from that twenty-foot wall onto Nova's back, smashing him to the ground with such a terrible force that I knew if he'd landed squarely on Nova's head, I'd have heard his neck crack. Arnie rolled, hugging his legs, then scrambled to his feet, running back. He snatched up Nova's gun which had spun from his hand; and I stood unable to move yet, and saw him, feet astride Nova's body, lean down and aim the gun barrel directly at Nova's head. From the jerk of Arnie's hand, I understood suddenly that he was tugging at the trigger, and I reached out and pulled the gun from his hand.

"Oh," Arnie said, in a little sound of surprise and understanding, "the safety's on; gimme that gun."

I said, "No," astonished that I should still remember to whisper. "I'll keep it. Let's get *out* of here." Arnie blinked and then nodded, turned to pull down my rope and then pick up his from where he'd thrown it as he leaped.

We couldn't leave Nova here, and we each got him under one arm and dragged him to his feet, staggering with him toward the underbrush and the hill just ahead, his legs dragging limply. And then astoundingly, this massive man began to walk, stumbling, shaking his head, and beginning to mutter. And within half a dozen

steps, he was wrenching his arms from ours. I shoved his gun into his back, and the three of us climbed the hill, then down the other side.

We came out on the road not a dozen yards from Nova's car, pulled off on the shoulder. Mine was parked two hundred yards further on around a bend of the road; I'd driven it well past any point at which Nova was likely to see it. Arnie took Nova's ignition key, then we all walked to my car. With Nova at the wheel and me in the back seat, the gun in my lap, Arnie stood at the driver's window telling Nova where he could find his car parked in San Francisco later tonight or tomorrow, whenever he cared to go get it. I'd intended originally to pick up Arnie just before dawn at a point along this road we'd agreed on; but now another car, Nova's, was at hand for Arnie.

We drove to Mill Valley, Nova at the wheel of my car, Arnie following closely behind in the other. I had Nova drive directly into my garage, and Arnie parked Nova's car in front of his own house, then came across the lawn to my garage. He pulled the big metal door down, then nodded at Nova who was standing, his face absolutely expressionless, looking at neither of us. "What about fat boy here?" Arnie said. "He's got himself quite a story to tell."

"Don't worry about it, Arnie," I said. "You just get going; I'll take care of him."

After a moment Arnie nodded. "All right," he said. "I guess you will at that; you've done pretty good so far." Then the door from the kitchen to the garage opened, and Ruth stood there, staring at the three of us.

Too much had happened; I'd actually forgotten for the moment, it had just dropped from my mind, what Ruth still was to Arnie. And I was blankly astonished for an instant to see Arnie hurry across the garage then,

step into the kitchen, and grab Ruth to him. There he stood, his back to me, holding her, squeezing her tight, his cheek against hers, and murmuring something I couldn't hear—while Ruth stared at me over his shoulder, her eyes stricken and pleading for help. Herding Nova before me, I moved toward them, my mind fumbling for words.

It's easy to imagine in anticipation a scene in which you speak clearly and intelligently and at length, the words coming just right, while the person you're talking to nods, listens, and makes all the proper responses. I'd somehow pictured myself alone with Arnie, explaining in detail, and from the very beginning, just what had happened between Ruth and me, telling him how it had happened in spite of ourselves; and then Arnie nodding slowly, not happy about it, but telling me, finally, that he understood.

But now, a man at gun point before me, Ruth in Arnie's arms as I walked toward them, all I could think of to say was, "Arnie!" He didn't even seem to hear, and I called again, "Arnie!" and he lifted his head to turn and look at me questioningly. Standing before them now, Nova's impassive face staring past them, all I could do was nod stupidly at Ruth and say, "Arnie, Ruth and I are—" Then I nodded again several times hoping he'd understand without my saying it. But he just stared at me, and I had to say, "Arnie, we're going to be married."

Still he just stood there looking at me, his face not even changing expression. Then he began slowly shaking his head no. I had to get out of the garage, and I motioned Nova forward; as we approached the door, Arnie turned suddenly into the living-room, the rest of us following after him. I motioned Nova to a chair, and Ruth and Arnie stood looking at me. Standing where I could see Nova, I faced Arnie and said, "There

hasn't been a chance to tell you, Arnie, no chance at all. We've only found out ourselves. But, Arnie, what happened—you'll have to try to understand—" I stopped because he was no longer listening.

His head had swung to Ruth, eyes intent, demanding an answer, and Ruth looked at him and nodded. "Yes, Arnie," she said softly. "If there'd been any way to tell you before now, but—it's true."

After a moment he actually smiled, glancing pleasantly from Ruth to me. "Well, I can understand it," he said. He walked between us, taking a step or two toward the big window at the front of the room, its drapes pulled closed; then he turned to face us, still smiling. "You've been here—together—and— Well, I can understand it. Sure I can! And I won't hold it against you! Either of you!" His head was nodding rapidly, eagerly, and I suddenly understood what he was doing; he was talking this away, brushing it aside with words, trying to talk it out of existence, as he'd always tried to do with all the unpleasant facts of his life. "But now I'm out," he was saying rapidly, "and I'll stay out, and—" The smile was suddenly gone, his voice desperate. "Ruth, we'll forget it! Forget it happened! And I'll never mention it, and neither will you! You'll come along with me—"

"Arnie!" she said, staring at him. "You're not letting yourself understand, you're not facing it! Arnie, I love —"

"Don't say it!" He spat it out like a single word. "I don't want to hear it." His hands had actually risen toward his ears as though to cover them. "It's not true," he said. "You've been living together, and you only think—"

Desperately, pleading with him, I said, "You've got to *listen*, Arnie. It *is* true; we couldn't help it, we never meant to, but—"

He was holding his hand up, shaking his head, cutting me off, staring at Ruth and walking toward her, stooping a little to look into her eyes. "All right, you say it," he said softly. "Go ahead; I want to hear it from you. *You* tell me you've ditched me. *You* tell me I'm not good enough for you and never was! *You* tell me I'm a con, and that you didn't have the simple guts and loyalty to stick with me. Go ahead!" he shouted, the cords of his neck thrusting out. "Tell me!"

Her eyes suffering, she said, "I can only tell you, Arnie, that I'm in love with Ben. And if it'll help you, and I hope it will, I can tell you I always liked you and still do, but I was never in love with you, and I know it now, and Ben had nothing to do with that. I'd have known it anyway, and we could never have been married. Even if I'd never met Ben, you and I could never—"

He swung away from her. "Well, I'm glad," he said to no one in particular. "I'm damn glad we'd never have been married. Because you're a tramp," he said quietly, turning to look at her again. "A high-class tramp who's not good enough for *me.* And I'm lucky to find it out. Whoever happens to be handy suits you, as it turns out. I'm away, out of circulation, so whoever comes along next is good enough for you." I could have said something, could have moved across the room to shut him up, and I wanted to; I was sick of him, I wanted to smash him in the mouth—and at the same time I didn't have the heart to do it to him, and I knew Ruth would understand. "I wish you luck with her, brother," he said to me, and then repeated the last word as though it were bitterly funny. "Brother! That's a hot one! Well, *brother,* I wish you luck with this—" Suddenly he began to cry. "Ruth, for God's sake come with me," he murmured, his eyes squeezed tight shut, the tears running down. "Ruth, I've counted on it.

Ruth, you've *got* to. Oh, God"—he swung away toward the window, hiding his face—"I'm alone."

I walked to him, put a hand on his shoulder, my mouth opening to say something, I didn't know what; but he jerked his shoulder out from under my hand, turned, and strode across the room to Ruth. "Come here, bitch," he said and grabbed her to him, his hands moving down her body cruelly, clutching her to him, squeezing her flesh. "Every night I was in prison I thought about this, and I'm going—"

Even then I remembered—I knew I had to—to move beside them to a position where I could still see Nova. Then, gun still in one hand, I grabbed Arnie's shoulder and yanked him loose, his feet stumbling backward, Ruth pulling away from him. Then I shoved him hard, aiming for his chest but actually striking his neck with the heel of my hand. He staggered back; but I saw in his eyes that he was coming for me, and I was glad of it.

I shoved the gun at Ruth, my thumb sliding the safety off; she took it, and I said rapidly, "Watch Nova, nothing else, no matter what happens. And *shoot* if he starts up out of that chair." Then Arnie, his balance recovered, was moving toward me, and I wanted nothing more than to feel my fist crack against his face. I felt sorry for him, I truly did, and I was sick of feeling sorry for him, too. In that moment all the fear and awful risk he'd put us both through was in my mind, all we'd done and felt for him; and now what I was going through was too much, and I knew that Arnie should have taken this in any way but the way he had.

He swung at my face and missed, his arm shooting over my right shoulder and the thumb of his fist scratching my neck; our chests touched, and for an instant our eyes were only inches apart and we stared at each other with utter coolness and fury. I couldn't swing my arm, I could only thrust him away; and he tottered backward

trying to swing at me, but off balance and without leverage. I stepped forward and slipped on the waxed wood floor, swinging at him and striking him awkwardly on one shoulder so that he twisted around a little and struck a corner of the television cabinet with his ribs. It was a ridiculous clumsy fight—I don't think I'd swung a fist at anyone since I was a boy in grade school. Arnie turned quickly back to me, and we stood there, swinging awkward blows at each other, neither of us striking where we intended: clumsily struck blows, awkwardly fended off, our feet slipping and sliding on the floor, the sounds of our breathing loud and harsh. I was dead tired almost immediately, and so was he; and then a blow of mine aimed at his jaw struck him on the cheek, grazing past it, but still a fairly hard blow; it knocked him down, or he slipped on the floor, and he lay partly on his back, partly on his side, and I stood over him. For a moment we stared at each other, and then I saw that the fight was over; neither of us, we both knew, wanted to continue; it meant nothing now.

I stepped back, and Arnie got to his feet. "All right, Benny," he said quietly. "You helped me escape; took plenty of chances for me, you really did; you did a good job. So you take my girl in exchange. It's a fair exchange, I suppose, maybe I shouldn't complain; we're all square now. You don't leave me anything, though, no dignity at all; I'm still a beggar, still dependent on you, still asking favors. I've got to shave, Benny, I need some clothes, and I need the key you've got for me." I nodded, and told him where he could find what he needed. Ruth had dropped to the davenport, and I sat down beside her then, to sit watching Nova till Arnie was ready to leave.

I'd never in my life felt worse than I did then, sitting there on that davenport waiting. I knew that nothing

worse could have happened to Arnie. I've often read that you can do no greater harm to a man than to strike at his ego—at the secret conception he has of himself—in a way he's got to acknowledge and cannot deny. Some men are invulnerable to that; they have an inward feeling and conviction of worth that cannot be changed. But Arnie was the very reverse. An inward feeling of worth and of being somebody in his own right was something he'd never had, and something therefore that he had always craved. And he felt it only when others supplied it; when they assured him by their words and actions that he *was* somebody. Ruth was the best thing that had ever happened to Arnie, and now it turned out that it had never happened at all; now he knew not only that he'd lost her, but that he'd never even had her. He was nothing now, I knew he was feeling; he was nobody, not even a man; an outcast.

And I was guilty, I couldn't help feeling; I'd done this to him. I knew I couldn't have prevented it, could never have made things turn out any differently. There is never any justice in who loves whom, no fairness at all. Arnie needed Ruth so much that it was impossible that he could ever keep her. And so today the brothers had fought; Arnie fighting for what he'd already lost, himself; and I fighting my resentment at what I'd had to do to my brother.

He walked into the room, shaved, and wearing a shirt, tie, and suit of mine, his face blank of expression. All he said was, "I won't be in touch," then I handed him the key to the apartment we'd rented for him and the address on a slip of paper. I could see by his face when he took them that he was feeling how dependent he was on us for everything. But he took them, not looking at me, opened the front door, and walked out into the night; my heart cried out for him, but there was

nothing to say. A moment or so later we heard Nova's car start up.

Ruth and I sat in silence then, there in the dead of night, worn out and drained of emotion. Nova sat impassive, his face averted, waiting. I gave Arnie half an hour's start, plenty of time, then got up and motioned Nova to the door. He walked out and, as he crossed the lawn toward his own house, I broke open his revolver, unloaded it, then called to him. When he looked back, I tossed his gun across the lawn to land at his feet. He glanced at me, then stooped, picked up his gun, and walked on toward his door; and I closed mine.

20

I DROPPED INTO A CHAIR, and we were silent for several moments. Then, when we did speak, it wasn't about Arnie; we weren't up to that yet. "What about Nova, Ben?" Ruth said quietly.

"I don't know." I shook my head tiredly. "I just don't know what he'll do, Ruth, or what I can do about it. I'm hoping he'll do nothing. He messed this up, and Arnie got away; Nova wouldn't look good explaining that. The big single-handed capture is fine if it works, but you're a blundering fool if it doesn't— Nova should have phoned Quentin, and they'd have walked out into the prison and picked up Arnie with as many men as they needed. Instead, Nova lost him. The kind of guy he is, I think he'll keep his trap shut, but you never know; he hates us now, that's for sure. And he could be on the phone this very second telling everything he knows, whatever they think of him." I sighed. "But I'm tired now, Ruth; and I'm sick of planning, sick of thinking, sick of the whole damn thing, and I couldn't hold Nova here forever. If I could do something—anything at all—to get you in the clear, I'd be doing it. But I don't know how or what I could do. I'm just tired as

hell, Ruth. I feel pretty bad, and all I want to do is to go to sleep."

The phone didn't ring; and no one pounded at our door. I slept the rest of the night through, worn out. But twice, I learned later, Ruth awakened to lie there listening for—something. It seemed impossible that nothing was going to happen, that no one was coming after us.

I woke up in the morning, I bathed and dressed; Ruth was already in the kitchen when I came out; and nothing happened. The day was bright and clear, the sun streaming into the kitchen where Ruth stood at the stove frying bacon. I sat down at the kitchen table and began reading the paper; I was wearing slacks and a white shirt, with no tie. There was nothing in this early edition about Arnie; and when eight o'clock came, and Ruth switched on the kitchen radio, there was only a brief announcement that the San Quentin inmate had escaped last night, stealing a car at gun point on the highway, and that the car had been found abandoned in San Francisco early this morning. We began to hope then, both for Arnie and for us; but still we almost superstitiously avoided talking about Arnie or all we'd gone through, as though not to tempt fate. I realized presently that we were even lowering our voices, as though not to disturb or even ripple the surface of this apparent calm.

But when the doorbell chimed at eight-twenty, both of us at the breakfast table, our heads swung to stare at each other; then I got up to answer it, knowing our hopes had been foolish.

It was a California State Sheriff, standing there in his tan uniform on the concrete walk at the front door, another at the wheel of the police car with the gold star on the door parked at the curb. He was polite and pleasant enough, though he didn't smile, and he didn't

actually arrest us. He didn't put it that way, at least; would we come out to San Quentin, please? he wanted to know; they wanted to talk to us out there. So I nodded, asked him in, then put on a tie and coat while Ruth changed her dress.

They drove us out Quentin, no one speaking, drove in through the gates, then along the water-front on up to the vine-covered Administration Building. They escorted us into the reception room of the Warden's Office, and a girl led us right into his office.

It's a big, very long room, green-carpeted, with white Venetian blinds at the windows; and as we walked silently across the rug toward the big desk at the far end of the office, the Warden stood up from his desk—a man in his forties, of average height and weight, straight brown thinning hair, and a patient intelligent face.

"I'm the Warden," he said quietly, and we murmured something in reply. He indicated two chairs beside the big desk then, and sat down as we did.

He got right to it. "Early this morning." he said, "I received a phone call from a man who said he lived somewhere in your general neighborhood—an anonymous call. He's been watching you for some time, he told me, has become suspicious, and says he has good reason to believe you helped your brother escape from San Quentin."

With a sort of rueful admiration for Nova, I admitted to myself that it simply hadn't occurred to me how easily he could involve us without involving himself—by merely picking up his phone. Yet I couldn't even mention his name short of confessing everything we'd done. I felt Ruth's hand slip under my arm.

"Now, I have no great respect," the Warden was saying, "for anonymous phone calls or letters." He sat back in his swivel chair, idly picking up a brass letter opener then he glanced up at me again. "But I have to pay

attention to this one. For one thing, he does know something about you; more than we did. He knew you lived here, at least; very close to the prison; you moved up from Los Angeles, he said, about a week ago. But in our records, on your brother's list of accredited visitors, we still have your old address; you didn't notify us of the change."

I shrugged. "I just didn't think of it, Warden."

"Well, it's a coincidence that interests us, your brother escaping just after you arrive up here. But that's not all your neighbor told me. He suspects it was you and not your brother, he says, who stole a car last night at the point of a wooden gun. He saw you leave your house not long before the car was stolen, dressed in what seemed to be prison clothes. And you returned some time afterward. Maybe *you* stole that car, he suggested, to make us believe your brother was out; thus giving him his actual opportunity later on last night." The Warden shrugged. "It's not impossible."

"I wear blue denims around the house, Warden," I said. "So do a lot of people. And we did go out last night in our car. But what can I say except that I did not steal someone else's car?"

"Nothing." He nodded, agreeing with me. "So I'm not even going to ask you if you helped your brother in some way; I'm not a law-enforcement officer anyway." He leaned forward, his eyes on mine. "But I am going to ask you—this is why you're here—to tell me where your brother is, if you know."

I smiled, and so did he a little sadly. Then he held up two fingers, leaning toward me over the desk top. "Two things you've got to think about, Mr. Jarvis. You've come under suspicion, so, if you helped your brother escape, we will probably find it out. I can't possibly make you any sort of promise about what the district attorney of this county will or won't do then, but I can

tell you this. Like any other prosecuting attorney anywhere, he can, for good reason, decide not to prosecute a case. Which makes sense." The Warden sat back. "A man embezzles money, for example, and through remorse, conscience, or fear, changes his mind, returns it, and is often not prosecuted. It isn't good sense or good public policy to treat those men who, in effect, undo their crimes in the same way you treat the men who don't. It wouldn't offer much incentive in future cases."

Again the Warden sat forward, his eyes intent on mine. "You've committed a crime, and a deadly serious one, if you helped your brother escape. Wait till we catch him, and you'll probably end up here as an inmate. But if, instead, you now tell us where he is, you will, in effect, have undone your crime and have some chance to escape prosecution. That's all I can say to you about that."

I was shaking my head, starting to speak, but he held up a hand, shutting me off. "I know, I know," he said. "If you helped your brother, it wasn't in order to turn him in. But I'm not finished. Two things you've got to think about, and this is the second, and infinitely more important one." His voice dropped. "Your brother has *got* to come back here, Mr. Jarvis, he's *got* to. And fast. Right away. Because what do you think he'll do, faced with recapture, if he's given time enough to get hold of a gun? I'm certain he didn't have one when he left the prison, and unless you've given him one since—?"

I shook my head.

"Then we've got to get him back quick while he's still unarmed. Otherwise he'll shoot to kill before he'll let them take him. Innocent men will *die,* Mr. Jarvis, unless you prevent it, right now."

I was shaking my head. "Who says so?" I said. "He's

a convicted criminal, I suppose. And he's escaped from San Quentin. But who says he's a murderer besides? Not everyone will kill, Warden."

"I know," he said quietly. "But your brother will. Listen to me. I didn't begin this job yesterday, and I'm not a political appointee. California brought me here from out of state. This is my career; I've been in the federal prison system for many years, at nearly every job, beginning years ago as a custodial officer—guards, most people say, though I wish they wouldn't. Before that I was a police officer. So maybe you can believe me when I tell you I've developed almost an instinct for what the men here are like, and I am certain your brother will use a gun before he lets anyone bring him back here. There's something *wrong* with your brother, Mr. Jarvis; he's bragged and boasted here, he can't seem to resist it; and he's been taunted for it, and he's fought about it, often. And when he does, there's been a recklessness about it I don't like. He simply doesn't care at the moment what the consequences are; taunt him, rib him, as some of the men have done, and nothing seems to matter to him but to try somehow to erase it. I know that kind of man, Mr. Jarvis; a good many of them end up in prison.

"Listen"—he leaned toward me, holding my eyes with his own—"A short time ago an officer here was struck on the head with a heavy weapon—in your brother's cell block, and when your brother was there. It was a glancing blow, knocking him unconscious, and cutting his scalp; that's all. But it might equally as well have smashed the man's skull in; the man who did it, Mr. Jarvis, didn't care which at the moment. In the sense of proof, we don't know that your brother did it. But we are morally certain he did; we run a *prison,* Mr. Jarvis, and we *know*. And we have a witness who can identify the man who struck the guard. If it turns out to be

your brother, as I'm sure it will, it means Death Row for him.

"*This* time, what's going to stop him from killing, if we give him time to get a gun since he's on his way to the Row anyway? Nothing, I tell you. Unless you help us *now,* men are going to die when your brother faces recapture. Or do you think that time won't come? That he won't be caught?" He shook his head a little. "If you think that you're wrong. The man who escapes and is never heard of again—because he's leading a quiet exemplary life—is so rare he hardly exists in reality. The kind of iron strength and terrible self-discipline that takes—to break all ties, and become a new man—that kind of strength almost always keeps the man in prison to serve out his time; he can take it. But your brother hasn't that kind of strength, he doesn't begin to. He *can't* break every old association; he's dependent on them and will come sneaking back to them; it's an old and familiar pattern to us. And when he does we'll take him. Or he'll get into trouble once again, as he did before, and we'll get him then. *Think* about that moment of recapture, Mr. Jarvis, picture it in your mind; can you see him coming quietly and without resisting?" He shook his head. "No, Mr. Jarvis, he'll shoot. If he has time to get a gun. Men will be killed, and their blood will be on your hands. Are you willing to support their widows?" He slammed his fist down on the desk. "You've *got* to tell me *now* where he is!"

It wasn't reaching me, and he knew it, and he sat slowly and helplessly back in his chair. I believed him; I believed, at least, that he might be speaking the truth about Arnie; I could feel it in my bones. And yet to turn Arnie in—to say, *Yes, you're right, Warden,* and turn Arnie in—was asking too much. It was absurd, and he knew it.

"I suppose it's impossible," the Warden murmured,

almost to himself, "to make you believe your brother is actually capable of pointing a gun at a man's head and pulling the trigger. You won't believe it till he's done it." But *I'd seen him try to do just that* only hours before. *My God,* I was thinking to myself, staring at the man across the desk from me, *it's true; this is how Arnie is going to end up.*

It was hard to talk. "But—he wasn't that way," I said. "He wasn't like that!"

"No. But he is now."

"Why?" I was leaning toward him over the desk. "What—what *happened* to Arnie!"

He just shrugged, his face sad and resigned. "Prison," he said. "That's what happened to him; he couldn't take it. It takes strength to come through prison whole, the way prisons are today."

"And that's what you're telling me to send him *back* to!" I was shouting it, feeling the veins on my temples thrust out. "Back to your rotten prison?"

He smiled a little, that same sad little smile. "Where else?" he said softly. "Have you got a better place? Have you got a *good* prison to send him to? Why, damn you," he shouted back, standing up to lean toward me across the desk, our faces only inches apart, "now you stand there! You never gave a thought in your *life* to the prisons you send men into every hour of every day, and now you stand here and complain to me! Listen, Mr. Jarvis, we spend our lives and careers here, scrounging second-hand ball bats and discarded television sets, begging free movie films, fighting for an extra five-cent-a-day food allowance per man, trying to drag this prison a single step closer to what it ought to be! We put in hours we're never paid for—we put in our lives—doing our damnedest with what we're given and what we can scrounge, trying to get these men through prison, and still keep some spark of humanity alive in

them. And, yes!—sometimes we fail. Why, damn you, we have to wheedle and cajole the very paint we use to keep this place a little less like a prison with buildings a century old because we can't replace them. Don't ask me where to send your brother, mister! I've spent my *life* for your brother. And I'll keep right on."

For several moments he stood staring at me; then he turned wearily away. "We'll do our best for him," he said quietly, and sat down again. "That's all I can promise you. And it may not be enough; I can't say. Not enough; that's the story of San Quentin, Mr. Jarvis. Not enough room—two men in cells not big enough for one! Not enough money, doctors, psychiatrists, equipment, or even *time* to do much more than lock these men up. Mr. Jarvis, San Quentin is one of the best prisons in the country; I think it's *the* best. And it's a bad prison; there are no good ones. But I didn't send nearly five thousand men into a prison built for two thousand; *you* tell me where to put the overflow you and the rest of California send me! My job is to obey your orders."

He sat down in his chair again and looked up at me. "We'll do the best we can for your brother," he repeated. "And I'll offer you this much hope; men sometimes change in prison. I've seen it happen very often."

"Why?" I said, as nastily as I could say it. "Because San Quentin's burned the life and juice out of them?"

"Maybe. Sometimes. But not entirely. Men change of themselves, very often, in spite of all that prison can do to them. In time, they even acquire a strength they never had before. Maybe your brother will, too. But meanwhile he belongs here, for better or worse; there's no other place for him."

Very softly I said, "No other place but the gas chamber, Warden?"

He smiled a little. "No," he said, "that's not what

I've been talking about. You don't ask a man to send his brother to the gas chamber. Mr. Jarvis, we don't *know* who hit the officer; and the witness is back in Wyoming again on parole. Tell me where your brother is—*now,* before it's too late and men are killed, including your brother—and I give you my personal word that the matter will be dropped. You'll have gained that much, and certainly I have to offer you that much. Listen, Mr. Jarvis—this is the only way you *can* save your brother from the gas chamber! Don't you realize that?"

It almost succeeded; this man was speaking the truth, and I almost knew it. But not quite. Maybe, I told myself, though somewhere inside me I knew better, maybe Arnie will get away, to another country, or— I gave up thinking, because it didn't matter. I had to believe this because I simply could not turn in my brother.

The warden knew it; he saw it in my face, and he shook his head in genuine sadness. "All right," he said. "It's your brother, I know. And yet," he said sadly, "he is what he is." Not really hoping to affect me any more, he murmured, "He's a man capable of anything right now, Mr. Jarvis, anything at all."

And as he spoke, something rose up in my mind past all belief, released by those words, and I sat stock still as something clicked into place in my mind with a terrible finality. *Right now he's capable of anything*—it was true, and knowing what I'd done to Arnie; knowing that now he hated me, I was suddenly remembering the words the Warden had spoken when I'd entered this room. "He told me," the Warden had said, "that you moved up here from Los Angeles." It was such a little thing, utterly trivial, yet there was no possible escape from it. Nova didn't know where I'd come from. It was Arnie—an Arnie I knew at last was past all hope who'd do *anything,* and would continue to do anything

including murdering men who tried to recapture him. Arnie had phoned San Quentin about me early this morning, knowing I'd be certain to think it was Nova.

I am certain I thought honestly in the silent moments that followed; I wasn't revenging myself. I'd turned loose a sick and dangerous man, and finally I understood it, and there was no longer a choice about what I could do. I was actually shaking my head as though to clear it as I got to my feet, and Ruth's arm slipped under mine as she stood up beside me. I felt the warm tears begin to slide down my face as I looked up at the patient waiting man before me. "All right, Warden," I whispered, "here's the address you'll find him at, if you hurry." And I was crying for my lost brother as he reached out for his phone.

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