

*“Scream and I’ll kill you.  
This is a knife.”*

*. . . Then the hand was crushing her mouth  
and as the lightning came, a great fork stabbing  
the sky, she saw the hand that had her head  
thrust back and the white face glaring up at  
the sky before the dark came again. Somewhere  
in her mind, swift as lightning, flashed the  
knowledge that Nat had gone and her father  
wouldn’t hear her. Then there was nothing  
but the white terror of the hand . . .*

*“A GOOD PUZZLE . . .”—Washington Star*

*“EXCELLENT”—Cleveland Plain Dealer*

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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**LESLIE FORD** has been an important and highly successful author of mystery novels since 1928. Her books have been translated into nine languages, winning a world-wide audience for her colorful characters and effective story backgrounds.

She now lives in Annapolis, Maryland, where her husband is on the faculty of St. John's College.

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# **Trial By Ambush**

**By Leslie Ford**

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**DEDICATION:**

*For Erd Brandt,*  
on his retirement as a Senior Editor of  
the Saturday Evening Post, with many  
thanks for the help, kindness and en-  
couragement he has given me for years.

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# CHAPTER 1

Nathaniel James Ryan, free, white, twenty-six, unattached and with no intention of altering that state in the foreseeable future, put Wigmore on Evidence back on his desk in the study he shared with Archibald Prettyman Chalmers the third in Martyr's Tower at Law School, and repeated firmly what he had been saying for some little time.

"I am not taking the lady to breakfast."

"She isn't a lady." Archibald Chalmers, with the Lazarus-glow of a very bad night heightened by contact of his right brow with a stone step his foot had missed coming home up the Tower stairs, held his aching head. "You've got to help me, Nat. She's at the Inn. She's got to be fed."

"These hardy annuals you drag on weekends can feed themselves easy," Nat Ryan said without pity.

"Not this one, she's different." Chalmers put the ice pack back on his head. "She's a tender perennial. I'm going to marry her when she leafs out."

"I'll bet."

"On my honor. I swear it." Archie raised his right hand, and brought it down on the bottle of dog hair. "I don't want her damped off."

Ryan went finally. He had to shave and get dressed. He also had to work, not being like Chalmers, who was not only brilliant but so rich it didn't matter if he never worked. In their second year at Law School, the two had nothing visible in common except their occupancy of the same study, with separate cubicles for bedrooms adjoining it. Archibald Prettyman Chalmers the third was from Baltimore, where Sir Somebody Chalm-

ers had arrived on the first boat, the Ark or the Dove, circa 1634. Ryan was from the West, South Prairie, Washington, where his Scotch-Irish parents had arrived at the ages of ten and eleven and met while his father was at Medical School on even less of a shoestring than Nat Ryan had to go on now. Chalmers was six feet and handsome with crisp curly black hair and brilliant blue eyes, Ryan more Scottish than Irish with North Sea-gray eyes bleaker than usual this morning and sandyish hair in an Ivy League cut that being fresh looked slightly penal as he set out for the Inn, to feed the not-hardy annual who'd come up from Baltimore to the winter carnival weekend on a big date with Chalmers.

As he got his car out his ice skates in the back reminded him he'd planned to go to the lake for an hour. That made him sorer. He walked into the Inn and up to the desk looking as stony as the granite slabs on the sidewalk outside.

"Miss Seaton's checked out," the room clerk informed him. Nat Ryan should have got a hint from the tone of respect in his voice as he lowered it and went on. "—That's her over there in the corner. She's taking the next train."

Nat looked around at a girl smiling brightly but not at him, and when the two girls with her moved on the smile vanished abruptly as her eyes, black as hot pitch, looked at the clock. Her suitcase was by her chair with her gray possum coat on it, her blue bag on her lap, her feet in blue shoes crossed primly at the ankles, her rose-colored mouth and round little jaw set tight to keep the tremor from showing.

*She's just a sprout.* She was a far cry from the lacquered sophisticates that Archie's weekends normally included, true hardy annuals in the respect that their blooming was brief. He went over to her.

"Miss Seaton, I'm Archie's roommate, Nat Ryan. He's got the virus. He's a very sick fellow. May I take you to breakfast?"

"I've already had it." She picked her coat up. "Tell Archie I'm sorry. Could you get me a taxi?"

He picked her bag up and saw her skates. That made it easier. It turned out her eyes weren't black at all, when she got over being mad. They were silver-gray like her coat, only shining when she laughed, her sooty lashes not done with mascara, her brows thick and as glossy as her wind-tousled short hair. Who was fooling who he still didn't know when he put her on a late train. She shook hands and said gravely, "Thank you . . .

it's been fun. Tell Archie to watch it. You can't filter a virus. Isn't that the process for other distillates?"

She wasn't eighteen, and on the lake, a beautiful skater, she'd seemed a lot less. At lunch she's seemed more, and once she'd broken into a peal of April-light laughter.

"You don't have to keep talking to entertain me."

As he waited for the train to pull out he said, "I'll see you next time you come up, I hope."

"I'm sorry I impressed you as being that stupid, but maybe you'll be in Baltimore some day."

She had a fern-in-a-wood pool sort of stillness, among the screaming and giggling maenads on the train with her, that moved him without telling him how gently she had touched a place in his heart that had never been touched in the not-serious romances that had come in the normal course of twenty-six years.

He missed her when he went to the lake the next time and then one weekend Archie went home and apparently persuaded her to try it again. This time he was sober, but it was almost the last. She must have decided he was worth it at that, because she kept coming. As the weekends went past it became a pattern, Archie meeting her train Friday afternoon, lasting through Saturday late or early, depending on when he began on the distillates, Ryan taking over. In time he developed his own pattern, getting his work done so he'd be free to set off with Mary Melissa Seaton, never disturbing the fiction that it was his duty for his friend.

When he went home that summer to a job in a lumber camp he didn't notice how often she came to his mind. She seemed a part of the deep peace of the forest, the moss banks and wild flowers, the coverts of laurel and rhododendron and the giant evergreens with the blue grouse flushing out of them. That some day a mass of laurel and rhododendron in a state on another shore would be a prelude to horror never whispered in the blue misty towers of spruce or in the chill of mountain streams where the silver trout flashing in the sun made him think of her silver eyes. When he went back for his last year at Law School and they picked up the same pattern when Mary Melissa came up, it wasn't till the Easter pre-vacation weekend that he realized what had been happening under the layers of self-deception he'd built up like a shell for his heart to live in. He was in his bathroom whistling as he shaved Sunday morning to take over, standard procedure, getting ready to take her to the lake where

a patch of white trillium was ready to burst open. Instead his cubicle door burst open.

"Mirabile dictu! Brother, I made it! Back to bed, Ryan, the child's play is over. The girl has said yes! Take a look at this . . . a beauty, what?"

Archie, all shaved and dressed, glowing with health, stuck out a velvet box with an emerald-cut diamond the size of a washbowl or nearly. "We've set on June 22nd. You can't be best man, I'm stuck with a cousin. Or maybe the Navy'll send him to China."

After he'd gone the first thing Nat was aware of was the maid around noon.

"You want the washbowl water still running?" she asked, looking oddly at him where he sat at his desk out in the study. "—You all right, Mr. Ryan?" she added, troubled.

Nat Ryan put his hand to his face. Dry flakes of lather on the side of his face he didn't know he hadn't shaved fell on the pages of the book he didn't know he was reading.

He had the rest of April and all of May still to go before graduation. Pride made him stay weekends instead of getting away, pride mixed with Archie's complete unawareness and fine new sobriety when Mary Melissa was there. The night before they got their degrees—no ceremonies and no families present—Chalmers gave a party at the Inn. They were both plastered but Nat Ryan the less so, and when they got back to the Tower and found telegrams waiting for them in the mail slot, he was able to read his while Archie waited to see first if he could make it safely up the stone steps.

His head swirling with Scotch, Nat was still sober enough to warn himself that he had to watch it. He went in his bathroom and held his head under the cold water faucet. When he came back to the study Archie had already poured a handsome slug and was downing it while he tried to focus on the telegram. He finally put the empty glass down on the table and held the blurring words in front of his eyes with both hands.

"Eureka!" he said. He corrected himself with ponderous sobriety. "Objection sustained . . . is not the right word. But in form misleading, the substance is the same. Now comes the Lieutenant-commander, that estimable sea-farer, my honored cousin. The Navy, God bless it, is sending him, not to China, but in the wake of Ulysses, to the wine-dark Aegean.—Nat you're our best man."

"Not me I'm not."

"You ungracious bastard." Chalmers drew himself up, six

generations of Old Baltimore in solid phalanx behind him. "Friendship, my dear fellow, has its obligations as well as its joys."

"You mean its trials. Anyway, I've got to get home."

"Sustained. Its trials." Chalmers swayed, caught himself and sat down carefully. "But I'm not asking you to marry the girl. Merely to officiate in a noble capacity. Merely to pinch-hit for a great sailor and gentleman—"

"Go to hell, will you?"

Nat Ryan already knew he was licked. The telegram in his pocket had told him this would be it. "Archie's going to ask you to be our best man. Please, if you possibly can, Nat. For me. And to ward off the virus attacks. Love, Mary Melissa."

"I just can't do it," he said harshly, doing his best. "I'm sorry, but—"

"—I know. I don't blame you."

Archie Chalmers said it so quietly that Nat stared at him, his face flushing. Then Archie's blue eyes fixed on the glass in front of him clouded with tears.

"—Moment of truth, Nat," he said slowly. "Through a glass darkly." He held the glass up, staring through his tears at the remnant in the bottom. "It's you she belongs to. It isn't me. You ought to shoot me, then you could have her."

The moment of truth ended abruptly, Chalmers quietly passing out, sunk like a rock in oblivion's black waters as he slid to the floor.

In the churning black waters of his own private pit, his face burning with the mortification that the secret of his writhing torment had been no secret, a warning voice told Nat Ryan to get out before Archie came to. His car was at the foot of the steps. The rain was coming down in squalls but he didn't notice it or stop to put the top up. It was lucky . . . or was it? Both then and a month later down in Baltimore, he wasn't sure. In either case, it was what saved him when five miles from town, not knowing where or how fast he was going, he went into a vicious skid and landed on the top of a thick hedge of clipped yew at approximately the moment his car wrapped itself round a utility pole. When he came to he was in the Infirmary at the Medical School and somebody was saying, "Okay, it's the death-wish. You're the head shrinker, I'm just a bone-setter. Let's get him to X-ray."

Except for some bruises and abrasions, two cracked ribs and a broken bone in his right foot were all he had to show for the brush-off death gave him. They painted and patched him and

put him to bed with tape on his ribs and a walking cast on his foot and let him sleep till noon. A nurse brought his breakfast.

"Archie Chalmers is waiting."

*Oh no. I can't take it. Not after last night.*

He needn't have worried. Archie was sober, brisk and unremembering. "You're not pretty but they tell me you're not busted," he said. "—Look, Nat, there's a problem. Think you could help us?"

He took a telegram out of his pocket. "I must have got this last night, it's from my cousin. You know, the one in the Navy? They've changed his orders. He's going to sea. So we need a best man. You know we love you. It's what was wanted all along. Think you could manage?"

Nat had known he was licked. "Why, sure," he said. "Glad to. Nice of you to ask me."

Archie pumped his hand, killing his ribs. "Gee, that's swell! I'll go phone Mary Melissa. She'll be delighted. You want to get dressed? I'll take care of the bill."

Ryan got dressed. The nurse held his coat while he managed to get into it, never having felt worse in soul, mind and body. Until he felt in his pocket.

"Where's all my stuff?"

"I gave it to Mr. Chalmers, when he paid your bill."

*Oh, no.* Nat sat down on the bed. The telegram from Mary Melissa wasn't even in the envelope. It could stare Archie in the face.

"Except this," the nurse said. "In case it was private."

She took it out of her pocket. It took Nat a moment to get up and say "Thanks."

"You had a close shave," the nurse said. "You ought to watch it."

"Hereafter, I will," Nat Ryan said, and he meant it.

"Homicide Bureau," it said on the frosted glass panel of the door into the southwest corner room on the third floor of Baltimore Police Headquarters . . . no mention of Arson nor any of Rape, murder's twin brothers, evil wards of the same bureau.

It was Thursday, June 20th, the third day of the heat wave. Detective Sergeant Dave Trumper, on the four to twelve shift, was alone in the room. Across Fallsway the white turquoise-capped tower of St. Vincent's Church shone, a beacon of grace in an area that could use it. The wide street, once a river, was almost empty, at the fag end of the day, with the city like a barque becalmed on a dead sea . . . or like a tiger in the jungle

awaiting the dark. People were inside now, eating their suppers. Soon they'd be outside, hunting some coolness, swarming on the endless rows of white steps, the women half-naked, men not much better, kids howling and screaming, yahoos on the prowl. Switch-blades and razors, beer and the jukes, heat and humidity . . . love, lust and liquor the three-headed tiger in the jungle of the night.

Summer was the worst. In summer you just waited, hoping to God . . .

It was only in summer, and only when he was alone on duty inside, that Dave Trumper, hard-mouthed, bleak-eyed, face mean-looking and as sere and brown-dry as an old hand of tobacco, thought the city was a jungle. When he was out on the street the city was people, good ones and bad ones, most of them striped, a fair share of each. But tonight he was nervous.

*Must be the heat.* He went over to the door and looked down the narrow deserted hallway, past the dark windows of pawnshops to the closed door of the Detective Division at the far end. Across the hall were two enclosed iron staircases, one down by Detectives, the other just left from the Homicide door. In between them were the public elevators, across from them an open space with an oak bench and the Inquiries window where in the daytime a detective was on duty. Toward Trumper a door led through an inner room to the locked iron grill going into the Bureau of Identification. The few lights that were on made it all seem darker, more empty and deserted.

He went back to the windows overlooking Fallsway. The traffic had died down. A few home-hurrying cabs and an occasional truck had the street to themselves. It was almost as silent as St. Vincent's. Even The Block, a stone's throw away. Air-conditioners had cut off the rip-roar from Baltimore's old locus of sin and dried up the sweat of the bars and strip joints.

*The heat and the quiet. Kind of hypnotic.* Trumper thought it with a dour gleam in his fish-colored eyes. It made him think of a big shot psychiatrist in Washington who'd sold a neighboring police force on some foreigner who could find a mass murderer by something that sounded like "polygamy" but wasn't. Thought waves with a fancy name. Take the foreigner to the situs and he'd hand you the murderer, easy as pie. Except when he did, he'd picked the wrong fellow. Trumper grinned bleakly, his face sobering then as he looked around the green walls of Homicide. Plenty of thought waves had beat against them. Plenty of times you got them all right, talking to somebody maybe you'd not even suspected, the needle of your mind like

the ink needle on the polygraph up the iron stairs in the penthouse.

His eyes moved to the steel files under the side window between him and the coffee pot in the corner. If thought waves hung on, those files were a cesspool. They were the grim catalogue of the City's known scum, including the psychos. *Murder, Arson and Rape*. But it wasn't them that scared you in summer. It was the new ones and the old ones you hadn't caught yet.

He got himself a mug of the cold coffee left by the day shift and sat down at the battered desk in the corner, trying glumly to figure why he hadn't got to his own kid today, the oldest of the three, pushing fifteen. He wouldn't let her go out in a halter and bra top like the rest of her friends. There wasn't a row, she'd just looked at him with pity. *You need a brain wash, Daddy . . . you're ghoully*. Even his doll had been on the kid's side. *You're too hard on her, dear*. That from Mrs. Trumper.

He sat glumly while the evening sun changed the church tower to rose and then to purple. Then abruptly he got up and went to the window again. He wasn't conscious of doing it, no reason. Down below, a lank cat on St. Vincent's wall and a bus stopping were the only things in the street. The bus let a man off just under the window. He was dressed up, for this area in this kind of heat, with a wash suit, even a coat and a bow tie.

*Must think he's seeing the Commissioner, or something*. It went through Trumper's mind, standing there in his sweaty shirtsleeves, as the man took off his coco-straw hat with a yellow band and wiped it inside. Straight down from the third floor Trumper could see the wide light center part of his dark beatnik-thick hair. *He needs a dye job. Funny how many men are scared to go gray*. He saw another man come into sight then, on Headquarters steps. He was tall, lanky and weedy. Trumper's mouth tasted wry. That was a reporter assigned to Headquarters, known to Trumper as Judas Iscariot, a great boy for police brutality, stupidity, incompetence, name it and the cops had it according to Judas.

The neat man was stopping him then, asking directions and getting a loose-jointed wave in the direction of Central district police station, housed in the south corner of Headquarters.

Seeing Judas Iscariot going on, Trumper turned away. If the neat man had had a problem, Judas would have gone with him. He had a nose like an ant-eater's when it came to news.

City Hall clock was booming a slow eight as Trumper left the window. Four hours left. He turned on the TV and watched the Orioles start lousy and come through in the eighth. Every-

thing else was equally as usual. Nothing else happened. At midnight he went home. The kids were asleep, his doll too, but she always got up and fixed him a snack, the way she had when he was a rookie.

"Tonight was real quiet," he told her from the shower, with a dour grin at himself. *It's heat waves, not thought waves.*

The rape was reported at 3.26.

## CHAPTER 2

A gray sedan reported stolen by its owner at Central district in Headquarters building at four minutes past eight had had its description and tag numbers broadcast to the other districts. At one minute past midnight, a rookie in cruise car No. 6 Northern district, headed out Charlotte street, saw a gray car ahead, nudged his sergeant driving and pointed to it. Sergeant Garvey speeded up and brushed their spotlight over its license plates.

"Right color, right make. Wrong number's all."

"We could 'a stopped him." It was the rookie's first week in a cruise car.

"You got to have a reason," Sergeant Garvey said patiently. "Especially out here. Here it's Blue Ribbon."

Garvey was an old-timer out there, in precincts he loved, and when the gray sedan blinked its signal light for a right turn he said, "See? He's going to the Paddock Club. Stop one of them babies and you could be back on the pavement. Here it's exclusive."

He sniffed at the honeysuckle in bloom on the chain fence along the golf course. Across the silver moonlit stretch of the fairways the lilt of a polka was sparkling out of an aerial saucer of light, its rim the dark trees and shrubs that hid the pavilion.

"The Seaton-Chalmers wedding's day after tomorrow. Saturday at four, at the church on up a piece. This is a dance for 'em."

"You read the Society?" The rookie was sarcastic.

"Damn right I do, son," Garvey said. "You better too. These people go away, they tell the papers, like they think burglars can't read. Then they howl to the Commissioner. I don't mean most of 'em aren't nice. Like this young Chalmers, many's the

time I've taken him home so drunk he don't know it, and his mother's a fine lady. Though there's some don't like her."

"That him in that heap?" The rookie nodded at the gray sedan.

"It ain't, but it could be. People have got it, don't have to ride fancy for people to know it."

The rookie was stubborn. "That heap don't look exclusive to me. We could follow him in."

Sergeant Garvey was close to retirement and "Encourage Initiative" was what they told you now. "You're the one learning," he said kindly. "You want to look-see, it won't hurt to go in as far as the bushes. If there's any malarkey, that's where he'd stop."

He was turning back to follow the gray sedan across the golf course when their signal came out of the babble from the short wave.

"Calling Northern Car 6. Car 6 to 430 Orchard Hill Lane. Neighbors see lights, owners away. Orchard Hill Lane, number 430."

Garvey shot the car past the Paddock Club gates. "See? Like I told you. In the paper last week. Those people've gone to Cape May."

At the end of the chain fence he whipped the car into a rat's nest of lanes, winding and wooded.

"Geez, how do you learn 'em?" The rookie was respectful, so impressed he forgot about the exclusive club called The Paddock and the gray sedan. If there was any malarkey it would stop at the bushes.

The bushes were a bank of laurel and rhododendron, black masses growing on each side of the road where it curved in from the fairway to round the pavilion and pass the service area to the parking lot in back. They were part of the rim of the dark saucer holding the light, with the lilt of the polka sparkling above it.

Sitting at a white iron table out on the Paddock Club lawn, watching the dancers, Nat Ryan did not see the gray sedan when it came through the massed rhododendron at the curve in the road. He might have seen it and its lights before they went off and the car crept to a stop on the grass, a few yards from a dark shining magnolia, its blossoms like ghost faces in the lights filtering through the trees surrounding the pavilion. But if he had, he wouldn't have known there was any malarkey. He was a stranger, just a guy from the West sweating it out now in

Baltimore in his job as best man for Archibald Prettyman Chalmers the third, a job that thank God would be over in thirty-nine hours. He'd counted every one of them, each more leaden than the one that had gone.

*I should have told him Sorry, old fellow, and gone the hell home to South Prairie, Washington.*

He'd been telling himself that when the lights of the gray sedan shone for an instant across the top of the laurels, but he had his elbows on the table, his head in his hands, and he hadn't noticed them. Thirty-nine and one-half hours till the wedding, Saturday at four o'clock.

He wasn't dancing on account of the taped bone in the arch of his right foot. He wasn't drinking on account of not stopping if he started. And that would have been fine except that they had enough of a problem in that area now, the bridegroom polluted already or heading that way.

*The bastard, I could kill him.* He said that to himself just in passing, having said it so many times, for the same reason, in the three days he'd been in Baltimore, three days and nine parties, that it had become automatic, like taking the next breath. He kneaded his skull roughly through the short sandy thatch of his Ivy League cut and straightened up, not hearing the sudden crackle of the dead leaves on the ground around the big magnolia on the other side of the laurel hedge as the driver of the gray sedan crept into his dark shelter.

*I love her . . . I love her.* It wasn't Nat Ryan saying it, it was his blood beat, constant, unstopping. He knew it was crazy. Love was a moonbeam, not a chunk of hellfire, a briny flow from the ache in his throat, the knife-blade in his belly that gave a fresh twist now as he caught a glimpse of her dancing up there. He tried to think. The sane thing to do was ease out across the golf course, catch a bus to some place where he could get a taxi and go back to the Chalmers'. Why sit and suffer? Nobody'd miss him, a few slugs of Scotch and maybe he could sleep out some of the hours. He looked at his watch. It was 12.35. Thirty-nine and a half hours till Saturday at four.

He was just testing his foot before he put his weight on it when he saw her again. She was at the opening in the white iron verandah with iron grapes like those on his bench. He couldn't move then, not for a second, and in it he saw her swirl laughing away from some white-coated lad. He thought for a moment it was part of a dream, then, her dress a silver froth like summer sea foam, her feet in silver slippers small pointed stars twinkling down the steps on the Milky Way of the music, and

then coming across the grass toward him, happiness the star-dust aglow all around her.

*It's what they call love-light. It really exists.*

Its shine was so palpable that it seemed he could touch it, and for a moment of humility the ache in his heart was curiously still.

"I didn't know you were out here alone." She was at the table then, her small elfin face shining, her silver-gray eyes all shining, black, away from the light, her thick shining brows black as the shining tendrils of her hair, laughter and love suffusing its own light. She put her hand on his arm for an instant. "I'd have come sooner but somebody said you were laid out at the pool. Why do all drunks think everybody else is?"

She pulled up a chair and sank down in the silver foam of her dress, kicking off her silver slippers and propping her feet in thin gossamer stockings on the bench.

"This is divine." She let out a long, happily relaxed breath and reached over for his glass, took a mouthful before he could stop her and leaned over quickly to spit it out on the grass.

"Young ladies don't spit."

"They do if they aren't crazy." She poured the rest of the lukewarm quinine water out. "You haven't been drinking this stuff without gin all the time, have you?"

"Just tonight." He lied as pleasantly as he could, but the star dusty glow had faded out slowly.

"You needn't to, really," she said gravely. "I think Archie's . . . all right. I didn't smell liquor."

*That's why he's drinking vodka.* He didn't say it, and she was silent for a long moment.

"You didn't want to come here anyway," she said then. "You wanted to go home. Is there . . . a girl, Nat?"

He said, "Haven't you been taught it's bad manners to pry?", surprised at how lightly he could say it.

"I'm sorry. It's just that I've been thinking how horribly selfish we've been . . . or I have anyway."

The knife twisted in his lower midsection again, and for a moment his desire to reach out and touch her feet there beside him took a real effort for him to resist. He had a catch in his throat as he looked at her, her face luminously still in the soft filtering light.

"Don't be silly, Mary Melissa."

"I'm not being. It's so odd, when you think of it. I wouldn't ever have gone back, if you hadn't been there. I mean up to

school, after that first time, when Archie got so stinking drunk at the dance."

"Language, young lady." He took a cigarette out of his pocket, the ache in his throat making his mouth briny.

"Well, it's the truth. I'm not being . . . disloyal. You know I love him." She looked down then, plucking at a creamy fold of her dress. "Nat . . . you don't think he's . . . really an alcoholic, do you?"

*I just don't know . . .* How could he answer, knowing he loved her? At Law School he hadn't thought so. Three days here in Baltimore had been a jolt. The vodka was new, and so were the hidden bottles, two behind a law book he'd picked up out of Archie's bookcase. Tonight when they'd gone after Mary Melissa he'd thought he saw a glint of glass under the back seat.

"You'd have told me," she said, not waiting for his answer, her face a little wry as she added, "And I'd probably have been furious.—I keep saying it's his mother. She's just a stinker."

"She's been charming to me. She couldn't be nicer."

"I know, that's the trouble." She said it with a small, not amused laugh. "But I shouldn't have said that. Maybe it's just . . . me. I know Archie's no monk. But about me he's got standards. I must be a . . . strain."

Nat shifted against the unyielding white iron grapes in his back.

"Let sex rear its head and he streaks for the bar. I'm so . . . pristine, or whatever you call it."

"That's what it is. Don't sell it short, Mary Melissa."

"Well, if liquor's the substitute, it seems sort of crazy. I'll end so pristine I won't have any children."

"Your sometimes sophistication is indecent, Miss Seaton."

The thin iron leaves of the grapes dented his spine. *Shut up for God's sake. I too, young madam, I too am flesh.* He was so raddled with longing and the scalding inferno of all his interior that he wasn't conscious of his hand moving out to her feet. Before he could touch them he felt the shudder that passed through her to them, or through them to her. She drew them quickly down, glancing around her.

"—I have such a . . . strange feeling," she said, shivering. She put her hand up to her breast. "—I keep feeling I . . . I don't know, it's like . . . I was naked. I think I'll go in."

She slipped her feet into the silver slippers. "I'll go find Archie."

She was gone before Nat could have got up. His hand that

had not touched her was clenched on the cold iron of the bench, her instinctive revulsion vivid on his retina, shocking to him too.

*I've got to get out of here for a while. I'll foul the whole deal first thing I know.*

As he got to his feet a swift stab of pain as he put his weight down brought back a flicker of sanity. She probably didn't know what had triggered her reaction. Just the same he'd better do something. *What I need is a drink.* That thought brought him back to Archie. *He's probably in the gents' room and I'd better go see.* It wouldn't be the first time Archie had retired to a sanctuary not open to his date.

He hadn't noticed till then that the music had stopped and the tables on the lawn were beginning to fill up with the young bringing plates of crab ravigote away from the buffet—the best time for a safari. When he got to the steps of the pavilion Mary Melissa was coming gaily back down, fooling him until he felt her fingers on his hand, splinters of ice.

"He's not any place." She whispered it urgently, still smiling. "I don't dare ask anybody. If he's . . . very bad they just *mustn't* know. Couldn't we walk around? I mean, if your foot—"

"My foot's fine. Madam, will you walk?"

She took his arm, her chin up, her fingers gripping hard.

"It'll be simply ghastly . . ."

"Take it easy, girl."

"I mean, all the horsing. Old Archie, big joke. Drag the pool for the body. Somebody'll dive in with all his clothes on . . ."

It seemed strange she'd be so upset. They were among friends and there were several others who hadn't been drinking cokes.

"Where are the showers?"

She shook her head. "Marcellus looked. He's the major domo, he's been here so long it doesn't matter about him. He wouldn't tell."

*Tell who?* Nat wondered again before his mind went back to Archie. The car was the obvious place, but he remembered the brilliant floodlights in the parking place.

"Let's try the golf course," he said. A sand trap was a natural, away from the crowd.

They'd gone through the laurel hedge near the porch, where the orchestra was relaxing with a drink on the front steps. They turned right to avoid them, along the ribbon of asphalt toward the massed rhododendrons at the curve in the road. They saw the sedan, a gray ghost on the grass there, the big magnolia shining in a patch of clear moonlight in a break in the clouds.

"It's against the rules to park there," Mary Melissa said quickly. "It must be a non-member."

"I'll have a look."

"You'd better be careful. You might be . . . surprised."

"I'm blind except for Archie. You stay back."

He went to the car and looked in the open window, on the back seat and on the floor. Archie was a snake for coiling in dark places. But he wasn't there. Nobody was, now. Whoever had left a slipper had left only one. It was small and pointed, white satin, innocent-looking on the front seat beside the pair of binoculars, or case for the same, Nat thought, not opening it to see, binoculars being standard equipment in horse-racing country.

He brushed off his hands and went back to Mary Melissa. "Not there. I guess Cinderella'll be back for her shoe."

They heard a sharp crackle of the dry leaves beneath the magnolia. Ryan smiled until he saw Mary Melissa in a straying moonbeam. Her face was as white as the ghost faces of the magnolia blossoms.

"Look, sweetie," he said gently. "Go back. Don't worry, I'll—"

"No. I'll go with you." She said it quickly, catching her bare shoulders, covering her breast as she'd done before. "I feel . . . sort of cold. Let's hurry, shall we? We'll find him and get him home. You can drop me on the way. I guess I'm just nervy."

She couldn't tell him she was afraid, that she had the same feeling she'd had at the table, he'd looked at her then as if he thought she'd gone crazy.

He took her arm, cold and covered with gooseflesh. When they got out in front of the black massed rhododendrons she seemed to relax.

"It's just . . . such a mess," she said suddenly. "—I wasn't going to tell you. But Daddy's . . . just wild."

"Your father?"

Talbot Seaton was the last person he'd met in Baltimore that he'd have thought of as wild. He was quiet and kindly, a little dry, more like a doctor than a big city banker. And certainly patient, witness the trench yawning across the sloping front yard, including the cobblestoned drive from the iron gates in the brick wall that hid the Seaton place from the street. It was torn up too, the gaps in it bridged over with planks, and you had to walk in through piles of dirt. "My wife's dig for the day lilies has fouled up the gas mains, I'm afraid," he told Nat

mildly, before dinner Tuesday. "Also the plumbing. Some last minute gardening for the reception on Saturday. She decided the lilies clashed with the hydrangeas." Then later when Nat and Archie were coming out on the front porch he said, "Don't break your neck. We can't have any light, some cardinals are nesting in the fixtures. My wife's a bird lover too . . . delightfully unsane in these matters."

To imagine him wild was fantastic.

"I might as well tell you," Mary Melissa said reluctantly. "There was a scene at the Seatons' . . . yesterday when you and Archie left after the photographers got through with my pictures. Daddy . . . raised hell. Archie shouldn't have come to the house when he'd been drinking at lunch."

*At breakfast.* Nat Ryan amended that silently too, his heart twisting as he looked at her, her dress in the silver light making her insubstantial as a shadow, very young and very vulnerable.

"You don't know Daddy. He almost never puts his foot down, but if he does you can't budge him, not even Mother. And she's so . . . so lovely, I wouldn't do anything . . . I mean, I was stupid getting mad when Daddy said Archie's an . . . alcoholic."

Nat said nothing.

"That's why I don't want people to see him. They might tell Daddy.—Would he take the car?"

"I've got the keys." He'd taken them in spite of the sign on the fence. Driving while drunk hadn't been one of Archie's habits. But neither had the vodka and the hidden bottles.

As they went on Nat looked up at the trees, their leaves whispering, stirring fitfully, as a prelude to the storm that seemed to be coming . . . standard procedure in Baltimore weather. Heat lightning was already playing out of the thunderheads piling up on the horizon. But he didn't see any floodlights.

"Where's the car park?"

"Through there. They turn the light off on account of the bugs."

"That makes it simple."

He was less worried then until she said, "I've never seen him . . . I mean, really drunk."

He didn't tell her it wasn't a pretty sight, trying to figure some way to cushion it as they skirted the laurel hedge and went across the green of the last hole and he saw the post and rail fence enclosing the cars.

"We'd better crawl through," Mary Melissa said quickly. She pointed to a group clustered under an oak tree, plates on the ground, cigarettes like fireflies glowing and dying. "I don't want them to see us."

They didn't see them, not till they'd found Archie. She spotted the car first. It was too late for Nat to stop her from seeing him, out cold on the back seat, the car top down. He was face up to the moon, cold and white as a halibut's belly, sweat glistening on his forehead, his mouth hanging flaccid, the empty vodka bottle glinting on its side in the cave of his stomach.

In the black rage that hit him Nat didn't see Mary Melissa take a shocked step backwards, till her heel hit a mole run and threw her off-balance. She was half-way down when he swung around and caught her. He lifted her up bodily, dumping her in the front seat, as a shout came from the oak tree.

"—Hey, leave her alone! What's the idea?"

His foot gave him hell as he got around the car and under the wheel.

"Hurry, Nat, hurry . . ."

If they hadn't been drunk the three white-coated crew-cut youths could have got there easily, and if Ryan hadn't been a stranger he could have gone out the back way. As it was he took the road around the pavilion in full view of the service area and the orchestra on the front steps. It seemed unimportant, as unimportant as Mary Melissa's sitting there huddled in the seat by him, her bowed head in her hands. If they hadn't jolted over a drain cover behind the kitchens, Chalmers would have been seen. As it was, he was face over, the bottle on the floor, his dark Madras jacket a reasonable facsimile of an auto rug.

When they got to the curve by the rhododendrons the gray car was gone.

"They must have heard what I said about rules," Mary Melissa said. Neither of them remembered she had also said he could drop her at home.

A low rumble of thunder rolled on the horizon. Mary Melissa shivered and rubbed her bare shoulders. "It's started, it'll come quick." She looked up. "Hurry, Nat. But be careful . . . the police can stop cars here if they want to, and it might be somebody knows Daddy."

Ryan glanced back. "They'd think he's a blanket." He thought again: *Damn him to hell, I could kill him.*

At the end of the chain fence Mary Melissa pointed to the

right, the way Sergeant Garvey and the rookie from Northern had gone. "This takes us by Archie's, you can find your way back."

"We'll dump him first."

"No." She said quickly. "His mother'll be watching. She'll think we're—. I'm sorry, I forget, she's charming to you." She put her hand out, touching his arm. "Don't be so mad. It's not so . . . world-shaking. I was just startled. I didn't want them to . . . see him."

She didn't speak again except to direct him until they came to the Seatons' street.

"—I hope Daddy's in bed." She half whispered it. "And . . . I made Daddy sound like an ogre, then, and he isn't. I love him. But I love Archie too."

Catherton Road was winding and narrow, not much more than the carriage track it had been before it was paved. In the two-hundred block there were only three houses on the north side and one with the Seatons' on the south, the grounds of all of them two or three acres, all hidden behind brick walls like the Seatons' or high walls of shrubs. If it was a headache to the fire and police departments it was exclusive, as Sergeant Garvey had said.

"No . . . he's still up." She shook her head. There were no lights on the front porch because of the cardinals, but they were on in the library, hall and front parlor.

The moonlight was gone with the black-clouded sky and the street light half lost in the leaves of a plane tree. Inside the gate a pink glow from the fugees marked the trenches, lingering on their retinas with an illusion of permanence. The yellow car lights were bright in the dark street. The house was on a knoll of ground rising to the masses of lilies like a snow border, an illusion of light too. Down by the wall along the street, massed against it and curving up the cobblestoned drive, were shining leaves of the camellias, high and lush-growing, glistening like the magnolia where the lights caught them.

"At least Mother's dig's a blessing. It's been a damned nuisance. But Daddy can't see us."

Nat put his hand down to open his door.

"—No, Nat . . . you mustn't!" she said quickly.

"Don't be an idiot, you'll break your neck. I'm not going to let you go in alone."

She pulled her own door shut and sat still a moment.

"I didn't want to tell you. But . . . Daddy said if Archie got drunk again he'd stop the wedding . . . even if it was five

minutes off. He says he's not going to let me marry a . . . drunkard. And he means it. Nat . . . I couldn't bear it. I mean, for Archie . . . everybody'd know why, and it'd be so . . . humiliating. Archie's not nearly as . . . arrogant as he seems to most people. It wouldn't help him to . . . blow it all up now. You . . . you do like him, don't you?"

"I love him, God damn him, or I wouldn't be here. But I'm not—"

"Listen, please!" She put her hand on his arm and turned her face to him, the first tears he'd seen her have brimming in her eyes. "If Daddy sees you come in, he'll know right away what's the matter. I've been in here alone hundreds of times when Mother's garden stuff's all over the drive. You stay and I'll call when I get to the porch. *Please*, Nat. Not . . . for me. I just couldn't bear to have it all wrecked. You don't want that to happen, Nat, do you?"

"—All right. You call."

What could he do else? He felt her relief and saw the smile light her face as she shook back the tears.

"Oh, Nat, you're an angel! Thanks, Nat! Get him home quick, pneumonia'd tie it."

She leaned over to him quickly, her face shining. "Next to Archie I love you most in the world. What would I ever do . . ." Her lips were soft and warm on the lobe of his right ear where he'd twisted his face sharply away from her kiss. *I too, young madam, I too am flesh.*

"I'll call you, Nat."

He only half-heard her door shut softly and the quick whisper of her feet as she ran across the sidewalk and through the gate. Her kiss was racing like wildfire through every nerve of his body, the blood pounding in his ears. Helping her find Archie, he'd forgotten himself, until the touch of her lips had torn the hell loose all over again.

*I've got to get out, just for one day. I'll go nuts if I don't.*

He heard her call then. "'Night, Archie dear . . . see you tomorrow."

The pounding blood in his ears demolished his time sense, making the time seem far longer than it was. In his right mind he might have realized that she was only a few yards from the gate, this side of the plants with the familiar dark masses of camellias behind her, their leaves shining in the glow of the car lights, standing there smiling, confident in her universe, amused at her mother's dig with its dirt piles pink from the fugees, seeing her father's shadow crossing the library windows and real-

izing she needn't have worried, with the windows closed for the air-conditioning unit he wouldn't hear her.

"'Night, Archie dear!"

Mary Melissa called louder a second time. A few drops of rain had already fallen. Nat started the car, memory prodding him to be careful, remembering the death wish that would now include Archie. Mary Melissa heard him and turned laughing to run on. But without the car lights she was in a sudden pitch-black, the shine gone from the camellias, solid dark masses with no shining leaves. The pink glow near the ground from the fugees made it seem darker, and the instant she waited for her eyes to adjust she knew there was someone . . .

She froze into stone, the naked feeling she'd had at the table with Nat, that had been sharper when she waited for him on the asphalt while he looked in the gray sedan, with her again, a paralysis for a horrible fraction of an instant before she heard the movement in the mulch of dead leaves under the camellias, like the crackle from behind the magnolia at the club.

She tried to run then, opening her mouth, her throat tearing with an agony of fear as she screamed soundlessly. "*Nat! Nat! Daddy . . . oh Daddy!*" Then the hand was crushing her mouth and as the lightning came, a great fork stabbing the sky, she saw the hand that had her head thrust back and the white face glaring up at the sky before the dark came again. Somewhere in her mind thought swift as the lightning flashed the knowledge that Nat had gone and her father wouldn't hear her. Then there was nothing but the white terror of the hand, the salt taste of the blood of her lips and the voice out of the wet mouth horrible against her ear.

*"Scream and I'll kill you. This is a knife."*

*I've got to get out . . . just for one day.* Nat Ryan didn't notice the time when he left Baltimore. It was nearly 4.30 Friday morning when he registered at a down town hotel in Washington. He gave the bell boy his dinner clothes, sodden with rain. "Get them back for me by five this afternoon." Archie's bachelor dinner was at eight. He'd left a note that he'd be back for it, beside Archie still prone in his car in the garage out of the rain.

It was broad daylight before he got to sleep, with the Do Not Disturb sign on the door. The dinner tonight, the wedding Saturday at four. Then home to South Prairie. Home to forget.

He woke in the late afternoon and ordered some food and the evening paper. He might as well dress here when the valet

brought his clothes and go direct to the dinner, at a down town men's club, not go to the Chalmers'. Eating with the paper propped against the coffee pot he glanced at the heading "Police Admit Search for Missing Best Man," his eyes moving on till the Baltimore dateline caught them and jerked them back. A bride-to-be had been attacked on her return from a late party. The Homicide Bureau of the Baltimore Police in charge of the investigation, tight-lipped when questioned about the missing man, admitted they were making inquiries. "We want to talk to several people," Captain Will Justice of the Homicide Squad had told reporters. From a reliable source the reporter had learned that the prospective groom had been found in a dazed condition early in the morning wandering on an exclusive golf course in the northern part of the city, drenched to the skin in the worst storm of the season.

It was not till then that what it was saying got through to Nat Ryan.

*Archie . . .* It was a dry soundless whisper in the slow dawn of recognition. *That's Archie . . .* The rest of it seeped slowly into his paralyzed mind. *Mary Melissa . . . it's Mary Melissa.*

## CHAPTER 3

The Ritter Meades had overslept Friday morning in their row house in a once substantial section of Baltimore City.

"I was supposed to be early." Ritter Meade was forty-three, a dog-faced man with alive brown eyes, happy except when he was at home. He took the dead rat out of the trap under the sink, put it in the garbage pail, reset the trap and went for the paper on the white marble front steps.

"There are only three eggs." Clara Meade put his plate on the kitchen table. She was a small dark intense woman with a touch of extra thyroid to make her eyes brilliant, dressed ready to go to work with her husband. "Brother likes two, so one's all right, isn't it?"

It wasn't a question and Ritter Meade didn't answer as he opened the paper. But something special in his silence made her turn to look at him.

"My God," he said softly. He pointed to the late bulletin

boxed on the front page. "Bride-to-be raped . . . and it says two-hundred block Catherton Road.—Clara, it must be Miss Seaton . . . the job I did out there Wednesday. She's the only one out there. My God Almighty . . ."

"Oh . . . how awful!" Clara Meade picked the paper up. "Oh, what a shame! She was so nice to Brother. She—"

"Oh for Crissake . . ." He jerked back the paper, flushing angrily. "How can you . . . Miss Seaton doesn't even know he's alive. You swallow this stuff of his like it's the Bible. You—"

He dropped his head in his hands. *Oh God, here we go again, why did I start it?* He had a headache, his mouth tasted foul, he was already late and here he had to go and turn her into a fury defending that jerk. He closed his eyes and his ears. He knew it by heart, the tape recording that began with the Year One.—Mother died when he was born because Father didn't believe in doctors for uremia, I nursed him, it was me that dropped him, I was just ten, that's why he's lame, Father was a beast to him, nobody loved him, nobody but me, you're jealous because all the customers like him, you hate him because he's gifted . . .

She'd got through that now, standing over him at the table. In a minute she'd start crying and come up to date. It was always the same.

"You begrudge him his eggs. You want him to starve. And now when his car's stolen you won't even wait and drive him downtown."

She was sobbing now and he couldn't stand that. He pushed his chair back.

"I'll wait if he'll hurry," he said quietly. "And I don't hate him except for the way he treats you. Taking your money . . . You work like a dog while he's lying in bed all day in that stinking bed. I tell you he's a nut, you ought to do something. So what if you did break his leg for him? You didn't do it on purpose and he only limps to make you feel bad. Outside he don't notice it. And he's not going places with me any more, I tell you, and that's flat. Go tell him to hurry if he wants to ride with me."

It didn't matter what he said now she'd got her way. She was out in the hall calling upstairs.

"Brother, we're waiting. Hurry down, dear."

Her voice was warm honey, her eyes velvet lighted.

"He went to bed at nine-thirty, you'd think he'd be able—"

He broke off abruptly, afraid he'd start her off all over again. "I'm sorry. My head's splitting. Was anything wrong with that beer he brought home? Where's the pitcher?"

"Brother took it upstairs." Clara Meade poured some black coffee. "I feel dopey myself, but it's not Brother's fault. We overslept the same as he's doing. Cobby's to blame, he was the one sold it. I'll tell Brother to ask him when he takes the jug back. Here he comes now, you make his toast, dear."

She broke the eggs in the pan. "But don't make a fuss, Rit. He's upset already, them stealing his car."

The paper was on the table. They'd forgotten Miss Seaton.

Detective Sergeant Dave Trumper got out of the elevator on the third floor at Headquarters, his face browner, his eyes hot, his mouth a mean line.

From the hoots and the gabble he could hear down the hall he knew it was the press. The bride angle and Society had brought them like bluebottles. *Damn them to hell.*

He was too sore to notice the man at the window of Detective Inquiries until he heard the officer on duty say "Mister, you can wait here. All day if you want to, that's a free bench. But it ain't going to get you your car any quicker. They'll let you know, soon as they find it."

Trumper glanced back at him as he started along the narrow green hall. The man he was talking to was the neat man he'd seen from the window last night when he was having his brain storm about the thought waves. *And by God I was right.* What had happened was what he'd been scared of, a psycho broke loose. He'd just come from the hospital, waiting since seven to see if the girl could give them some help. He was sick at his stomach, an ache like a screwdriver stuck in his heart.

"Hi, Trump, where's the Captain?"

Big deal from the reporters. Except Judas Iscariot. He was alone by the window looking outside. You had to give that to Judas too, he didn't like rape.

"Where is he, Trump? You taking this one?"

"I don't know. You find out, lemme know."

He made his way through them and shut the door of the captain's office behind him, too hard. The little room was about the size of a closet, room for a desk, a couple of chairs, a hat tree in the corner and a fern on the ledge of a window breast-high.

"You know the one about the girl in the Bronx told the judge—" He could hear Loud Mouth out there telling the big joke and at the burst of guffaws when Loud Mouth got through he jerked the captain's chair angrily out from the desk. His cop's sense of humor stopped short of rape and he could still

hear the Seaton girl moaning in a drugged sleep, moaning "Daddy, Daddy." If Loud Mouth had a kid . . .

"—Hey, here he comes. Hey, Captain! Wait a sec, Captain, picture!"

Trumper heard the scuffle and saw the flash bulbs through the frosted glass panel. They were all yelling at once then. "What about Ryan?" "He still missing?" "You got a search out?" "Book's eight to five the best man's your boy, Captain!" "You want Ryan to talk to?"

Captain Justice's shadow, head and shoulders, showed on the door panel. A nice fella, real quiet and decent. He opened the door then a few inches and held it.

"—want to talk to several of her friends, I expect," he was saying. "We don't say anybody's missing. It's ten o'clock now . . . don't you fellows sleep in after a party?"

"Who with, you suppose, Captain?"

Ha, ha. That was Loud Mouth again.

"How about Chalmers, Captain? What was he doing drunk on the golf course?"

"My, look who's talking." In the laughter Justice added, "You're wasting your time, boys. Go talk to the Chief."

He stepped inside and closed the door. "What's this about Chalmers? Where'd they get that?"

Trumper shook his head. He'd sat down in the chair by the windows with the sheaf of reports, the first fruits that would pile up into a harvest including everything from Lab pictures to messages from the spirit world before they were through. "I don't know, I just got here. Where's Lieutenant Hulan?"

He knew Hulan was the lieutenant on duty at Northern district who had gone to the Seatons' in response to a call at 2.46 that morning. As the first uniformed officer on the scene of the crime he had been brought in to Headquarters and assigned to the Homicide Squad for the duration.

Captain Justice opened the door. "As soon as that bunch clears out of the hall, get Hulan in here," he said to the secretary. He turned back to Trumper. "How's the girl doing?"

"Better than her relatives out there. The uncle tried to get me kicked out of the hospital. Going to report me to the Commissioner, he knows him socially. The chowderhead was bellowing all over the place. Shame and outrage. Not that the girl was raped but that his imbecile sister let the police get in. That's the girl's mother. I didn't see her. The aunt was pouring it on about the disgrace and mortification till the doctor came along and put us all out. But I'll tell you one thing."

He picked the paper up from the waste basket. "A prowler, it says here. That's how the call came to Northern. And that's correct. If she'd said right away what happened, we'd never have heard hide nor hair of it. And by God I don't blame 'em. Look at it here." He held the paper out. "They don't give names, that wouldn't be decent. No. All they say is, the two hundred-block Catherton Road. Bride-to-be coming home from a dance. And so what? There's five houses there, only one of 'em with a daughter. Privacy they got like the Shot Tower."

He waved his hand back toward the famous Baltimore landmark east on Fayette Street.

"By God if it was my girl I wouldn't call us. I'd find the man that did it and kill him. I'd—"

"That's enough, you simmer down." The captain took the reports. "Where in hell is Hulan?"

That was a near bellow, and Hulan was just outside the door, a burly six feet four, hard-bitten in uniform in his own bailiwick, awkward and embarrassed in plain clothes at Headquarters.

"Oh, come in, Lieutenant. You needn't have waited. It's just the Sergeant, his blood pressure's high. Take the other chair. I've read your report but I'd like you to tell us what happened out there."

Hulan took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead, still sweating cold. His district was blue ribbon, the people the touchiest and quickest complainers. Maybe he shouldn't have pressured the girl, he should have kept quiet . . .

"First about Chalmers. You people find him?"

"I was dictating it in there." Hulan pointed to the next room. "It was old Garvey found him, Sergeant Garvey and this rookie. They had Car Six. They saw him on the golf course around near to 4.30. He was sitting under a tree, soaked to his marrow and soused to the gills. He didn't want to go home, kept telling Garvey he was hunting his girl and the Ryan fella. He had something to tell 'em, real vital, he told Garvey. Well, Garvey's been taking him home, six, seven years, so he did it again. Didn't put it on his report. It ain't smart, in Northern. But this rookie sees the paper when he gets home and gets nervous. He calls me up."

Lieutenant Hulan wiped his moist palms on his pants legs. "It was sure lucky. About Chalmers, I mean—"

"All right, Lieutenant. Suppose you start at 2.46. That was the time of the call?"

"And any ideas you got," Trumper put in. It was his beef

about reports, hand-written and labored, nothing but bones with all the meat off.

"Well, I was at the station. Mr. Seaton asked for me. I know him, he's helped us with folks in a jam but that don't like no welfare. He says there's a prowler, his daughter ran into him coming from the dance. He thought it was a thief on account of the presents. Didn't sound worried, just cold mad. I said I'd be out right away and I'd sent the K-9s, they got so much woods.

"Well, I and Ned Olson got out there first, maybe six minutes. The whole front's tore up, mud to your ankles, and there's no porch light, with this pair of redbirds flying out at you and Miz' Seaton running out, saying please don't disturb 'em. Then another car comes with the K-9s with two dogs and I sent 'em around and had 'em check the balconies. They got vines like stepladders. I'd talked to Mr. Seaton on the porch. His wife sounded real dizzy, her birds and this shoe she was talking about, she couldn't find it, been hunting it all over and did I think the K-9s could come in and help her or would the dogs slobber over it if she gave 'em the mate, because it's white satin. So I says to Mr. Seaton, 'Could I speak to your daughter?'

"Well, he's mad as hell, I don't know why till she says, 'But darling, of course they were drunk, it was a party.' I thought he'd choke her, and I figured maybe the girl was drunk and we was on a wild goose chase, so I said could I see her. He says she's upset, but Miz' Seaton says, 'Silly, it's him that upset her, scolding, and it don't hurt her to get wet and she's no muddier now than if her horse threw her, and why don't we be sensible and go talk to her?' So she goes outside and tells Olson to take his spotlight off on account of he'll scare the young baby birds on the front porch and Mr. Seaton and me go in the library."

Lieutenant Hulan took his handkerchief out and mopped his forehead.

"I tell you, she's standing there, all a mess, all over mud, this dress a dishrag sticking to her skin, and she's whiter than those magnolias stinking the place up on the desk behind her. She's just like she's marble, except she's shaking, just shaking to pieces. I take one look and I says, 'My God.' I mean, I was knocked. I seen 'em before, when I was at Pine Street in the Women's division I seen 'em brought in. I knew right away. Jeez, it knocked me."

He shook his head, blinking.

"And I said it right out. 'Good God, you were . . . attacked.' And she just stood, shaking like it's a wind, nodding her head, moving her mouth, but she can't get the words out, and finally she does, she says, 'Yes,' and keels over like she's dead, and her father's struck dumb, standing there holding on to the door knob, it's that quick it happened, he hadn't let go of it.

"And I don't know, I wished I hadn't said it. You should 'a heard the sound that came out of him. I never heard a human sound like it and I never want to."

Dave Trumper took out a cigarette and handed it to him, lighting it for him.

"His wife didn't hear him, she's out on the porch. I got the girl hanging over the side of the couch, bringing her to, and he shuts the door and comes to the phone and calls up their doctor, just as quiet, and tells him to be at the hospital, we're coming. What a man, I thinks, and then he comes over and kisses her and says to me, 'I'll get her mother.' I think, Oh my God, but she's a real soldier, she comes in and she's whiter than her daughter, and she says, 'Baby, it's over, it can't hurt you, baby, not any more.'"

Lieutenant Hulan took a deep drag at his cigarette and then took it out of his mouth and looked at it, surprised, as if not knowing he had it.

"Well, the girl's just half conscious, and her father says to me, 'Send her in a car, my wife will go with her.' He goes and gets a raincoat and gives it to her, and wraps the girl in another, and carries her out through the mud and says, 'Which is your car, Hulan?' I tell him and he puts her in Jelliff's car and says to him 'Drive carefully, but please hurry.' Then he says to me, 'Wait just a moment, I want you to come with me.'"

He looked from the captain to Trumper. "Well, I didn't know. He was just as quiet. He comes back and he says, 'Would you drive me to the Chalmers'. I figured it was natural. Mrs. Chalmers comes down in a wrapper and opens the door, and he asks her is Archie home. She says he's in bed and he says to me, 'Come along, please,' and he walks past Mrs. Chalmers, straight up the stairs, and opens a door and turns on the light, and that's when I see the gun in his hand.—If Chalmers had been there, he'd been dead before I seen it. He'd been dead."

The phone broke the silence in the tiny room. Captain Justice picked it up. "Homicide," he said. In a few seconds he said "Thanks" and put it down.

"She's coming down . . . Chalmers' mother. She's been with the Commissioner. Open the door there, Hulan."

Hulan opened it and looked out. "It's her already."

His tone could have warned them, but they were thinking of her as a woman whose son had brushed death, and they had not heard her graciously thanking the patrolman who escorted her from the Commissioner's office.

As she came in she did not see Trumper or Hulan wedged against the fern in the window.

"I'm Florence Chalmers. Captain Justice, I believe?"

Mrs. Chalmers was large in form and in presence, with blue hair smartly coiffed and eyes that matched the stones of the sapphire and diamond ear clips and the large stone at the throat of her blue linen dress. Her bare brown arms above her white cotton gloves were freckled, the flesh solid as the heavy gold chain with medals and sapphires that clanked on her wrists. If dismay or distress had visited her that morning it was not visible to the policemen there. But they were not patrician. They were what Mrs. Chalmers would have called "little people."

"I went to the Commissioner, naturally. He and his wife have dined with me frequently. Most charming people."

"Will you sit down, ma'am." In the constricted space behind his desk Captain Justice could only half get up. He did that, and Mrs. Chalmers arranged her statuesque proportions in the chair Hulan had vacated. In mentioning the Commissioner she had intended to be gracious, following her own ritual of finding a common friend to establish rapport, having no faintest conception of the vastness of the gulf, in the rigid hierarchy of the police, between the Commissioner's office and the room she was in.

"He said you were in charge, Captain, and he has every confidence I'll be happy with you. It's this unfortunate matter of my son's fiancée."

Trumper's eyes met Hulan's.

"Your son didn't come with you, ma'am?"

"No, Captain. He is happily still asleep. He'll be appalled—"

"You mean he still don't know—"

Sergeant Trumper was stopped by a casual glance as Mrs. Chalmers was aware of him at last.

"I felt it was best. There's nothing he can do. It's all very sordid, as of course you must know."

Trumper wondered, still more when it became clear she did not know why Talbot Seaton had come to her home.

"My son wasn't there when Mr. Seaton came to see him, fortunately, I think, as of course there was nothing he could have told him. And don't please, gentlemen, think I'm being unfeeling. My heart bleeds for her parents. And to have it in the papers—"

Mrs. Chalmers's shudder of distaste was purely reflexive.

"I can only explain that by the fact that . . . or perhaps I should say I can only presume that the child was . . . too distressed to be frank."

"I don't understand you, ma'am."

Mrs. Chalmers was still pleasant, but underneath the surface of her face the three policemen could see a sheath of duranium, hard as the sapphire glint in her eyes.

"I will try to be clearer. No doubt young Ryan's people are estimable, I've never met them. But it was a mistake for my son to have had him in his wedding. I even felt that at Law School my son should have had a more . . . suitable roommate, one of his own group. A wedding is a purely social affair and bringing Ryan in was certainly a . . . mistake. You haven't seen him, of course."

"No, ma'am, we haven't."

"He's a Westerner, twenty-seven years old, and not unattractive. In fact that's the trouble. He's unusually . . . masculine. Not blatantly, I don't mean, but something a woman can feel keenly. And there's no doubt whatever he was strongly attracted to Mary Melissa."

As she smiled pleasantly then Dave Trumper felt his spine cringe as if somebody had drawn an icicle down it.

"And as it won't go any farther, I can tell you Mary Melissa was attracted to him. I don't say physically, that's unthinkable. But we mustn't be naive."

Trumper's hand reaching in his pocket for a cigarette stayed motionless.

"I am a woman of the world, Captain." Mrs. Chalmers smiled slightly for them to see she was aware it was a cliché. "I am not blind. It's ridiculous to think she wasn't aware of the magnetism directed exclusively toward her. She wasn't 'leading him on,' as my mother would have said, but there's no doubt she was—innocently, I'm sure—much warmer than was proper. I don't imagine she ever thought he would misunderstand . . . but she certainly 'asked for it,' though I've no doubt she was distressed when she got more than she expected.—And I must say for my son, I feel strongly that that whole situation was responsible for his drinking. Not that he drinks to excess, but young Ryan

hasn't helped. He drinks vodka and hides the bottles. My son has his faults, that is not one of them. A gentleman drinks openly."

Mrs. Chalmers rose. "I believe that's all it's necessary to say, gentlemen. My son was quite blind, even when I felt I should point it out to him—laughingly, of course."

Dave Trumper brought out the cigarette and lighted it. *I'll bet, you old hellion. Laughing like a cougar.*

"So thank you, Capt—"

"Sit down, will you, ma'am?" Justice asked.

Mrs. Chalmers was not as shock-proof as she had seemed. She recovered in an instant. "Oh, certainly. I thought I had said all that was needed." She sat down again. Looking at her impassively, Trumper saw for the first time a real bitterness, perhaps hatred, like a corrosive, eating inside her. Her hands on her bag were trembling a little.

"As I understand it, you're accusing this Ryan of—"

"You're putting it that way. More harshly than I should."

"You're saying it's Ryan who raped this girl your son was to marry?"

"Is, Captain, not was. My son is a gentleman if Ryan was not. That's why I'm here. To put a stop to this nonsense. The newspapers—"

"We don't like 'em either sometimes. But they got their job—"

"Don't be a fool, Captain. There isn't any 'job.'" It seemed to Trumper that the blue glint in her eyes for an instant had a reddish tinge. "I can assure you I'm not 'making charges,' as I expect you would call it, without grounds. I went to great pains for my information."

"That's what we'd like to hear, ma'am."

"It is from eye-witnesses. Ryan was seen to pick that girl up, throw her bodily into my son's car and drive out of the Paddock. That was about 1.30. They left my son. Sergeant Garvey had to give him a lift home when he was hunting for them at the end of the dance. Fortunately he'd been drinking or he'd have died of pneumonia, he was soaked to the skin. Ryan then came to my house, much later, changed and tore off in the pouring-down rain. I saw him."

"What time was that, Mrs. Chalmers?"

She was gracious again as she sensed the difference in the room's atmosphere.

"I don't know exactly. I was awake and saw my son's car. Ryan was driving, I could see his white jacket. I assumed natu-

rally they were together, Ryan's stuck to my son like a burr the three days he's been here, never leaving him alone with the girl for a minute. His broken foot's been the excuse for not squiring a bridesmaid. He still limps and he can't dance but he can drive when he wants to. I saw him put the car in the garage. The storm was just beginning. I heard the front door then, and in a few minutes I heard it, or something, again, and looked out. Ryan was coming out, in street clothes, and he had a suitcase. He streaked away in his own car."

She raised her dark brows lightly. "I'm afraid, Captain, I was quite pleased. I'd wanted my son to kick him out from the minute he limped in, looking at my son's fiancée like a starving dog. I'm not surprised he turned savage . . . not in the least."

There was a short silence. "Well, that makes it different, ma'am," Justice said slowly.

Mrs. Chalmers rose again. "Different from what, Captain? The facts are simple. He drags the girl off. How unwilling she was I don't, of course, know. She didn't call out. They were together how long? Well over an hour, as I understand it. When she had to explain what had happened to her, she said there was a prowler. It was a policeman, I believe, who suggested rape. There is Ryan's hurried departure, and his absence now."

She went to the door. As she turned back there was an ironic smile on her lips. "Be your age, gentlemen," she said pleasantly. "Nothing is different. It's happened before . . . right here among us, I assure you. It will happen again. Humans are human. Just relax, won't you?"

The silence behind Mrs. Chalmers needed a room that was bigger, broader and deeper.

## CHAPTER 4

It was Lieutenant Hulan who broke the silence. "I don't believe it," he said doggedly, and flushed, acutely embarrassed. Captain Justice looked at him silently for an instant, and at Trumper. "Well?"

Trumper nodded slowly. "Could be. Like the lady says. We could 'a quoted her chapters and verses. And the girl didn't say it was the prowler. Or did she?"

Hulan shook his head.

"See what you can get on this Ryan." Captain Justice got up. "Not hearing from him doesn't look any good. You better talk to her parents. Maybe they'd be glad if it was him at that. What time is it?"

City Hall clock answered with its slow deep-throated bong, the noon whistles from the Harbor taking it up.

Out in the hall the man in the wash suit and coco-straw hat with the yellow band moved his feet under the bench out of the way of the detectives crowding in front of the elevator. Their shop talk included the attack on Mary Melissa Seaton. He listened. When they'd gone on he got up.

"I think I'll go get me a sandwich," he said to the officer in the Inquiries window.

The detective looked around. "Sure, go ahead, mister."

At the hospital the nurse said "She's gone home, Sergeant Trumper." When he and Hulan looked blank she said, "Youngsters have courage. More than we had. They're stoics these days, the mess the world's in."

Down in the street Trumper handed Hulan the car keys. "Your bailiwick. Jigsaw puzzles gone crazy, those fancy streets out there."

"You want to go to the Seaton place?"

"Go by this Paddock Club and let's see it. How long would it take 'em to get from there to her place?"

"Ten minutes maybe. I still don't believe—"

"Yeah. You said it. But she was in a hell of a hurry to get out of the hospital."

At the Club gate Hulan slowed down. "The pavilion's in the middle there, in those trees and bushes." He pointed across the fairway. "Garvey found Chalmers down at the far end, under that big elm tree.—If that girl had been drinking, I'd have smelled it on her breath."

"Not if it was out of Ryan's vodka bottle," Trumper said. "Mrs. Chalmers wasn't lying. She's a pain in the hind end but she believed what she was saying. You got to keep an open mind."

The dour gleam in his eyes was for himself. *Open mind, hell.* In rape you go loaded—loaded against it. The girl's got to prove it and nine times out of ten it's a phoney. He could count off the reasons they were always suspicious. A girl had got herself pregnant, or scared she might have—scared of her parents, or scared

she might have been seen. Or she was plain ornery, charging some guy that had had it and ditched her. Or she'd make up some character—a bushy-haired man, they always said—to protect the real one. *Maybe like Ryan and her saying it was a prowler.*

He looked over at Hulan and managed a sour smile. "I'm a good one to talk. But you got to admit the Chalmers dame checked up, she wasn't shooting her mouth off without evidence to back her. And the fella's cleared out."

They had gone through a maze of narrow winding streets. Ahead Trumper saw a car standing at the curb and knew they were there before Hulan drew up across the street from the Seatons' gate. A panel truck from the Crime Laboratory was just inside, the whole place below the cross trench halfway up to the house a sea of mud. The Lab. technician came over to them.

"You got Ben Hur on, out at Northern?" he asked Hulan. "Looks like a chariot race with elephants. I got one clear print that ain't a cop's though." He pointed to a plaster of paris mould at the end of a plank on the cobblestones. "Right foot. I'd say offhand a lame guy was running."

"Could be, we got one in the picture."

"That's where he took the girl, down there." He pointed toward the shining dark-leaved camellias by the wall. Trumper and Lieutenant Hulan went on up the drive curving around in front of the porch and were starting up to the door when they heard a gentle voice behind them and swung around.

"Be careful of the birds. A young one fell out, but I don't think it was hurt. It upset his parents—"

A slender woman in a white dress was straightening up from the border of trumpet lilies along the house front. She was dark-haired like her daughter, her silver-gray eyes darkening with pain when she heard what she was saying, so poignant with meaning in her own circumstances.

"I don't mean it didn't hurt him, poor naked little thing, but . . . Nature takes care."

She put her trowel down on the steps as she got to them. "I just felt I had to dig in the clean decent earth." She put out her hand to Hulan. "Thank you, Lieutenant, for being . . . kind to my husband. Killing Archie wouldn't have helped us."

She looked blindly on through or past them, as if she'd forgotten they were there.

"Archie's a sweet person. But it was really Nat Ryan . . ."

*Nat Ryan's the one she went to see when she went up to Law School. I was so blind not to see it a long time ago. It had just come to her.*

She remembered them then. "—I'm sorry, my mind doesn't seem to be working. Are you the police too?"

"From Headquarters, ma'am. Sergeant Trumper. What was that about Ryan?"

"Oh, nothing, I didn't mean to . . . except that it seems odd—"

"Mother! Please, Mother!"

Trumper kept himself from looking at the upstairs window. He could hear the girl clearly, her voice sharp or close to it.

"If it's the police bring them up, I can see them."

Mrs. Seaton looked bewildered. "—She says she can see you, will you come with me?"

"If you think she's able—"

"There's only one prayer I've ever said for my children, Sergeant Trumper, and it's pagan, I'm afraid. An old Roman said not to bother the gods about material things, just pray for a sound mind in a sound body. Mary Melissa has both, I believe. I'm sure she can see you."

She led them into the house and up a curving stairway. "People think it's so horrible we should want you to be here." She looked around at them. "I think it would be criminal, cowardly, pusillanimous, if we didn't do all we can to . . . stop him from hurting some other poor child. It would be easier, but it's *wrong*."

At the top she turned toward the back of the house and stopped abruptly. "I'm being stupid, she's moved out of her own room. I must get her wedding stuff put away. It seems so absurd I can't find her slipper."

Trumper saw Hulan shaking his head. *I told you she was dizzy.*

"If Archie and Nat—"

"Mother . . . in here!"

It was the girl's voice from the room to the left, and there was no doubting the urgency in it.

"I forgot, darling."

She led them across to the half-open door. Trumper's face was expressionless. It was clear the girl didn't want her talking to them. Not about Ryan anyway. Or more likely about anything, he thought as he saw the girl sitting there, a dark arrow erect against the back of the chaise longue, her pointed face pale but the small jaw set firmly, her eyes propped wide open,

blackier than silver above the violet of the deep circles under them, and nakedly defensive.

"Will you sit down? Mother, you go, please."

"I'm sorry we have to bother you."

"It's all right, I understand.—Please, Mother."

"We'd rather she stayed, Miss Seaton, if you don't mind."

"I do, I'm afraid."

"Talking to strangers is simpler, I think," Mrs. Seaton said gently. She went to the door. The girl watched her till she closed it and looked back at Trumper. "I'm not going to have her go through it again. She pretends nothing matters, inside she just dies.—If there'd only been some way to keep them from knowing . . . Mother's so . . . so lovely . . . I can't bear to have her hurt."

Hearing the sudden poignancy in her voice Trumper wondered, Mrs. Chalmers's imposing presence and steely conviction wavering a little in his mind.

"Suppose you just tell us what happened, Miss Seaton," he said gently. "We don't want to hurt anyone. The truth's all we're after."

"I've told everybody the truth. It was my fault. I told Daddy it's not fair to blame anybody else. It wasn't Archie's fault, or Nat Ryan's, it was mine. They both tried to get out of the car, to take me up to the house. I wouldn't let them. I wouldn't, truly."

Watching her intently, his face impassive, Dave Trumper felt a quick tug at one of his heart strings, the one he reserved for his own kids when they lied for each other. *Not truly, young lady*. Maybe he wasn't the best detective in the world but he did have a radar response to some things. He knew when a kid was lying. Like the lady had said. "Nothing has happened that hasn't happened before. Humans are human, you'd be surprised."—Not Trumper he wouldn't. Particularly now he was seeing Mary Melissa Seaton there in the daylight. Her dusky hair and silver-gray eyes and face that wasn't pretty maybe but translucently lovely were just the kind that could make a masculine guy look like a starving dog . . . and turn savage.

*It looks like Ryan all right. And she's doing her damndest, the poor little devil.*

He took out his notebook to give her a chance to let down a little, noting as a matter of routine everything the room could tell him. They'd moved the chaise longue, he'd spotted the fresh tracks on the waxed floor as he came in. It seemed strange

she'd move from her own room into this one when the attack had been directly down by the wall in front of it. The chaise was pulled around so she couldn't see out the front windows. The telephone outlet was under them, its cord pulled full length to the low table beside her. He saw the phone was blue when everything else in the room was pale yellow, the twin beds between the windows, the skirts on the dressing table. In the mirror above it he saw a picture that gave him pause. The bulging figure of a sweating big brute he knew was Hulan, the brown mean-looking bastard he knew was himself, the white-faced girl backed against the cushions. Judas Iscariot ought to see that one, he'd have a real deal on Gestapo tactics.

"All right, Miss Seaton," he said. "Suppose you just tell us—"

"I'm trying my best to, but everybody keeps on blaming Archie and Nat, and it wasn't their fault, honestly it wasn't."

*Why do you keep at it then?* Her eyes were defensive, naked, again, her mouth trembling.

"Suppose you just tell us," he said patiently.

"I made them go on home. I've come in by myself hundreds of times, really I have."

"Have I said you haven't?"

She bent her head down. "No. It's just . . . I'm trying to explain why the boys let me come in by myself."

It was then he noticed the darkening yellow spot that looked like a thumb mark on her jaw bone by her left ear.

"You say the boys, Miss Seaton. Chalmers was with you?"

"Of course he was with us."

The emerald-cut diamond she'd had on her finger was gone. He remembered seeing it at the hospital and thinking it was queer a rapist wouldn't have taken it. It was another point for Mrs. Chalmers. He wondered again. There was something screwy. But not her bruised lips or that brutal mark on her jaw.

"All right, let's go on. Just take it easy."

"They didn't want to let me go in by myself. I told them I'd call when I got to the porch. But I didn't, not from there. I wanted them to hurry and . . . get home before the storm."

"It wasn't raining yet, when you got home?"

She shook her head. "It was awfully black but it wasn't raining. And I called to them from just a little ways in the drive."

"They didn't notice?"

"No. I waited a minute, so they wouldn't. Then they went, and I hadn't realized how dark it would be . . . how horribly

dark. The porch light was off and the red flares on the piles of dirt didn't help."

She seemed to have shrunk, huddling herself into a shivering knot, her hands gripping her upper arms.

Trumper had leaned forward a little. This was the truth.

"Then, all of a sudden, I knew there was somebody there, and I tried to run. I thought I was screaming but I guess I wasn't. I could feel my mouth open when this . . . hand grabbed hold of it, I mean closed right over my mouth. It was just . . . horrible."

She bent her head down, squeezing her eyes shut. "Just . . . white, and horrible," she whispered. "And this . . . mouth on my ear, wet and just awful. I could smell some horrible soap, or shave lotion. Then he said, 'Scream and I'll kill you, this is a knife.' I could see it . . . shining, and reddish. I thought it was blood but it must have been the flares on the dirt piles. It felt like it was burning." She moved her left hand, massaging the fleshy part of her arm below the shoulder. "Then he started to . . . curse me. If I wasn't quiet he'd cut my throat. He said he'd love to if I'd give him a chance. He kept saying he hated me, he'd been watching me, watching me for a long time, and he said . . . horrible things, words I'd never heard but I knew they were . . . awful. He said I had to go to the carriage house. But then the lightning came, not the heat flashes but a great fork of it, and I saw his face, glaring and . . . horrible. Then the thunder seemed to scare him and he let go of me. I tried to run and he tripped me and dragged me in the camelias. That's where he . . . attacked me.—I don't have to tell that, do I? I just couldn't do it."

"No," Trumper said gruffly. "You don't have to tell us." He didn't tell her he'd seen the hospital report. Under the slow burning rage that this thing, like an acid, ate him up with, he was thinking: *But you'll have to in court . . . if you've got the guts to go into court and your father and mother let you.* She'd be up there on the stand, the lawyers for the defence forcing her through it, in all the details, step by step, over and over, stripping her naked body and soul, with the press and the public like filthy flies swarming avid-eyed, feeding on her like maggots, an agony far worse than anything she'd been through. *Maybe I was just hoping to God it was Ryan.* These were the times he hated his job. But at least they'd be honest with her even if they couldn't get a conviction without her testimony. They'd tell her and they'd tell her family what it would be like

. . . insofar as they could tell them, nobody could know what it was like till they'd been through it. He thought again: *By God I wouldn't let a girl of mine do it.*

There was another thing eating him, a contempt for Mrs. Chalmers and a contempt for himself. Know-it-all Trumper. The girl was telling the truth unless she was the greatest actress that had yet come along.

"You don't have to tell us." He repeated it harshly.

". . . There was just . . . nothing I could do."

He tried to keep the blind rage out of his voice.

"You're lucky you didn't try, he could have killed you."

"That's what I was . . . afraid of. He had the knife jammed down in the ground, right by my face. I guess if the rain hadn't started to pour down, it might have been . . . a lot worse. It was God he was cursing then, more than me. And he said . . . other girls' names. Then the wind and the rain scared him and he started talking about his car and maybe it wouldn't start. He was so furious I thought then he was going to kill me, but all of a sudden he grabbed up the knife and I heard him running. I think he was lame, the way the planks sounded, the ones over the trench. And that's all.—I didn't tell Daddy or Mother about the knife, and I'd rather they didn't know. And you see what I mean, it was my fault, not the two boys'. They couldn't help it."

Trumper bit off a word he didn't much use. *Who in hell's fault was it but theirs, or Ryan's if he was the one left you alone in the dark?* There was no use saying it. What was done was done.

"All right," he said. He tried to keep his voice matter-of-fact. "Let's get the time fixed. When was it you left the Club?"

"After one some time. I don't really—"

"One-thirty, say?"

"I guess about."

"You'd get here about one-forty then. But the call to the police wasn't put in till 2.46?"

He felt suddenly like the picture he'd seen of himself in the mirror with Hulan, a mean-looking brown bastard, trapping her. When the storm broke in Northern district it was ten minutes to two. It was a few minutes to three when Hulan and his partner got to the house.

She sat there looking as if she hadn't heard him ask her the question. Then she began shaking her head, shaking it slowly what seemed a long time there in the silence, no sound except Hulan's breathing. Finally she stopped.

"I didn't go right in. I stayed there, under the camellias. The rain felt so clean, and I felt so . . . unclean, I guess. I suppose I was like Mother. I thought I was thinking, very clearly, about things. I was trying to figure out what I could do so she . . . and Daddy wouldn't have to be worried. That's all I was thinking. How I could save them from having to know."

The silver-gray eyes focussed gravely on Trumper.

"I didn't have my watch on, so I didn't know what time it was. I didn't want them ever to know, and I thought I'd stayed out a very long time, so they'd be in bed. There weren't any lights on excepting downstairs. I was going to go in and call Nat and Archie, to get them to take me to a doctor."

He caught the tiny pause before she added Chalmers's name. There was still something screwy.

"But they were still up. I just didn't think how I must look. I'd slipped in the mud and fallen too. But I told you I was like Mother, I thought I was being . . . very rational. But they . . . they stared at me so, I said 'There's a prowler outside, he scared me and I fell,' and I went right past them into the library. Or I think I did, I must have been like somebody who was terribly drunk—"

She came to a dead stop. "—Somebody in shock. Don't they act sometimes perfectly normal without knowing it?"

Trumper nodded. Somebody was drunk. That was one of the things being covered up.

"That must have been it then. That's all I remember, till I woke up at the hospital this morning." Her eyes darkened suddenly. "No wonder my Mother lives in a . . . a fog, with that man for a brother. My uncle. You were there, weren't you, and you must have heard him, and when I got back here he was downstairs jabbering to Mother about me associating with people he wouldn't spit on. He makes me sick!"

"—You tell 'em, girlie!"

She swung around, staring at Lieutenant Hulan, and burst into a peal of laughter, breaking off quickly as she saw Trumper's face. Hulan's face was a deep red.

"I'm sorry," she said. "But I can't . . . I can't go on being a . . . a big tragedy, can I?"

Trumper didn't answer for an instant. As she'd turned he'd seen the four bruises on her right cheek, matching the dark print on her jaw. But it wasn't that that had brought back the slow burning red fury inside him. It was the laughter that made him think again, for the second time that day, of another girl

in a rape case he'd been in. That girl hadn't laughed. You could call her a big tragedy.

He managed a dour half-ashamed grin. "You laugh all you want to. You're okay, sugar."

He reached in his pocket and got out a pink form with "General Appearance" printed at the top. He checked off 'Rapist' under "Type of Offender" and followed with the next two. 'Sex, male; color, white.' He handed it to her with his pen.

"Run through this, will you? The way you remember him. How old, for instance?"

"I guess around thirty. I saw him twice, in the lightning flashes. He was just . . . glaring, and he had real bushy black hair."

"And the height?"

She put her hand up to the back of her head. "I'm five feet six when I've got high heels on, and he came . . . I mean I could feel his chin bone here, when he grabbed hold of my mouth." She stopped for a moment and went on. "And I could feel his head bend when he was talking . . . in my ear."

Trumper looked at the slender column of her neck. "Five eleven, about. You check Number Four, it says 'Five eight to six zero.' Go ahead now. You can check more than one if you've got any doubt."

He watched her as she settled intently to the job, a small skeptical frond uncurling in his mind again in spite of himself. The bushy black hair . . . All the phoney characters seemed to have it.

Twice she was confused.

"I don't know what color to say his eyes were. They just looked sort of pink, and glaring."

"Leave it then."

"And it says 'crippled,' but he didn't sound what you'd really call crippled. Just sort of uneven, like when you've twisted your ankle or knee."

He saw her check "Neat" under the heading "Dress".

"There's no place to say what his clothes were like."

"What were they?"

"Green, darkish, like green olives when they're old. He had a sport shirt, not belted in. Not cotton like this." She picked up a fold of her soft summer dress. "Slippery. You know, like wash and wear stuff. It smelled of detergent."

She looked back over the sheet and handed it to him. "That's the best I can do."

He glanced over it. It added up to a white male, five feet

eleven, build slender but strong, dress neat, teeth white and regular, hair dark and bushy. There were thousands of them. But the lameness was a help, if she was right about it. He thought of the print the Lab. technician had found.

"Had you ever seen him before?"

"Not that I know of."

"What about the men working out front?"

She shook her head. "They're mostly colored, and ever so nice, trying to help out with the deliveries and stuff. All kinds of new people have been in and out. I've not been paying attention much, it's been such a rat race, getting ready for the . . . wedding."

"What's happened about that?"

It sounded brutal, in spite of him, and she looked down a moment.

"Daddy's at the office, sending telegrams." She shook her head. "I don't know what he's saying, whether it's postponed or . . . called off. I . . . can't really say what's going to happen."

"All right. We'll have a drawing made from this. You can tell us if it looks like him." He folded the paper up and put it in his pocket. "When do you think you could come and look at some pictures we've got in the files?"

He saw her starting to shrink, her lips trembling. "I don't know if it's any use. It's what he said . . . nobody's ever dared—"

"It's the braggarts we catch, if somebody helps us," Trumper said quietly. "Your father and mother—"

"Mother, you mean." She said it evenly. "I'm not sure about Daddy. Or . . . about me. When you think what some people—"

She bent her head, the tentacles of shame touching her, her cheeks flushing. "I'm not so sure I've got the . . . courage."

*Something's happened. Somebody she's thought of.* She'd been all right till they got to the wedding.

"You do what you want," he said gruffly. "Don't you let 'em pressure you, one way or the other. And anything you want to tell us, Lieutenant Hulan here and me and the captain are on tap. You let us know whenever you want us. The captain'll check with your father about you coming down. Okay? Take it easy now."

As he got up he saw her eyes moving to the telephone, as they'd done a couple of times before.

"Chalmers hadn't heard about it when we left the office," he said. "He was still sleeping."

"I know. I tried to call. His mother had left . . . orders."

He said casually, "Would you know where Mr. Ryan's gone? He seems to have left town."

Her shocked face stared up at him as if he'd struck her.

"Oh no . . . He wouldn't go leave me." She whispered the words and suddenly put her head down in her hands. "Can you go now? Please. I'm very tired."

"Sure."

They went out. Trumper was silent, trying to think. In rape cases you come loaded . . . loaded against. *It's happened before, it'll happen again.* Mrs. Chalmers's words kept hammering in his mind. In spite of everything . . . *Say it really was Ryan. She knows there'd be footprints, in all that mud, so she makes this bushy-haired guy lame and the same height as Ryan and throws the bushy hair in to make him different.*

At the curve in the stairway across a palladian window he looked over the fern-and-flower filled planter out onto a terrace in the back. The panel truck from the Crime Lab. was standing between the old carriage house and a big locust tree, Joe Scala the technician talking with a young fellow who looked like a telephone company lineman from the coiled rope at his belt.

—She wouldn't know she'd picked an old favorite, spavined with age, in the bushy black hair. The emerald-cut ring was gone. She was covering something up. She'd done her damndest insisting Chalmers was in the car with them. As they got down to the hall a clock in a room off it brought still another point to his mind by striking three silvery notes. *If it wasn't Ryan we'd have heard from him.*

They crossed the front porch carefully not to disturb the nesting cardinals and bring Mrs. Seaton in from her lilies.

"—I shouldn't have pressured the girl," Hulan said suddenly.

As they rounded the bushes they saw the lad with the rope going through the woods. Scala was under the big tree, beckoning to them as they came into sight.

"Got something for you, Trump—maybe you can forget about your missing best man. Come on over here.—That was the Davey tree fella, just making a regular storm check on the trees they take care of. Have a look at this one. I'll give you a boost up. Just stand in front of the cement in that cavity and hang on to the cable up there."

It was an old tree that children of long past generations had played in, easy to climb, with places to sit and read story books, the limbs cabled together.

"Keep off that big branch till I see if we can find anything on it. One more step up. That's right. Now turn and look toward the house."

Holding on to the cable Trumper turned. He was looking through a neatly clipped green tunnel of leaves straight into the windows of a room on the second floor. Its walls were painted blue. He could see a white wedding dress on a hanger hooked over an open closet door. To the right the headboard of a four-poster bed faced him directly. It was the room Mrs. Seaton had started to go in at the head of the stairs.

"Now lean over a couple feet this way."

Trumper leaned to his left. He was looking through a second tunnel into a blue-painted bathroom, its floor-length double windows opening onto an iron balcony. He could see sun glasses and a bottle of sun oil on a soggy bath towel that had been left out in the storm.

*He'd been watching her. She said he told her he'd been watching her.*

"Don't muck it up, he may have left traces. There's some places where he's rubbed a cigarette out."

Trumper came down, his face impassive. "The tree man say how long those have been cut?"

"About six weeks, the way the wood's healed. A few new shoots weren't broken more'n three, four days ago." Scala motioned over to the carriage house. "He didn't have to bring any tools, the tack room there's full of 'em. A long pruner you work with a cord. All made to order. And they don't have a dog. The old one died, the maid told me."

"You told any of 'em about this?"

Scala shook his head.

"Don't, then. Leave it look natural. I'll get 'em to leave some lights on tonight and we'll stake the K-9s out."

Sergeant Trumper smiled faintly at the look on Hulan's face. "Your friend Miss Seaton's all right. It's the old she-cat's the liar, not the little lady."

## CHAPTER 5

Sergeant Trumper and Lieutenant Hulan were driving back through the wooded streets, past children and dogs playing in flower-filled yards.

"It gets me," Trumper said bitterly. "I keep telling my own kid, you never know when some bastard's watching you. But why the six weeks? It's like you said, the vines on that house are like step-ladders. He could have got up on that balcony easy. He had a knife, she wouldn't 'a dared to scream."

"You think he was waiting till right on her wedding? You think he's that rotten, slimy low?"

It stirred a chill memory. "You mean like that other one I was telling you about on the way to the hospital?" Trumper asked slowly. That was the heartbreaker, the girl he'd thought of when Mary Melissa Seaton laughed, back there. The girl who hadn't laughed. He was silent for a few blocks, and shook his head then. "That fella was smart. Never left us a trace."

"Neither would this one," Hulan said. "Except for the storm coming and the loose dirt he stepped in. And the tree fella coming to show us his perch up there."

Hulan, driving, didn't see Trumper's eyes open wider. *My God, he's right. There were trees at that place too. We never looked up 'em.*

He moved against the back of the seat to rub out the goose-flesh. Then he settled down. *You get your hopes up in this business you land on the seat of your breeches.*

"You get a heartbreaker, you try to connect every new one up with it. Then the papers say we're trying to unload crimes we can't solve on the first likely fella. I'll tell you one thing. We get that other fella, I'm going to kill him with my own hands. The Seaton girl was lucky compared to that kid. It isn't the same fella."

But he was silent the rest of the way to Headquarters and when he got out in the basement garage he said, "Prayers don't get answered that easy, these days."

They got off the elevator on the third floor. The detective in front of the Inquiries window winked, tapping his forehead, slanting his eyes down at the neat man on the bench reading his newspaper. Trumper was in no mood for shenanigans, but as he was turning to follow Hulan down the hall a faint smell hit his nose and he looked sideways at the man. He'd taken time out from the bench for the barber, his neck sandy neat under his crisp straw hat. Trumper remembered the last words of his daughter when he left home in the morning. *Daddy, you're ghoully, you going beat on us?*

It also reminded him that hair is the easiest characteristic to change. When he stopped at the Bureau of Identification to give them the pink form to run through the machines he said,

"The bushy black hair could be gone by this time. Get us a couple of drawings, one with it and one without. She saw him in the lightning, he'll probably look glaring. Don't let any description get out yet and speed it up, will you? Time's a-wasting on account of the best man."

"He in the clear?" the Bureau of Identification asked.

"Looks like it."

It sounded so too, a little past five o'clock. Trumper was putting some photographs from the files on the captain's desk when the phone rang. It was a person-to-person long distance, from Washington, for the captain of Homicide. Trumper answered it.

"He's out of the office, be back in ten minutes."

He heard a man's voice telling the operator she could connect him, and stiffened abruptly. It sounded like another voice he'd heard, the voice of a man who'd called to tell them he was blowing his brains out and did it right then, the blast of the shotgun coming while they were still on the line. He hadn't sounded crazy or wild-eyed. He sounded like this one, a voice coming out of the last pit of hell.

"Will you give the captain a message? I'm Nathaniel J. Ryan. I've just seen the paper. Tell him I'm not missing. I'm in Washington, at the Gresham Hotel, and I'm driving back to Baltimore now.—Have you got it? The name's Ryan."

"I've got it, Mr. Ryan," Trumper said quietly. He started to add, "You take it easy if you're driving, you could be dead on arrival." But the connection was broken.

Nat Ryan made his turn at the foot of the golf course along the chain fence, the only route he knew that would get him to Catherton Road. It was close to seven o'clock. He'd come a long distance since he'd barged out of the Gresham, meeting the valet with his dinner suit in the hall, saying "You can have it" and striding on past him.

It was a longer trip than registered on his speedometer, the mileage itself taking him longer than it normally would. Remembering the wet road and the utility pole and the other death wish, he made himself stay sharply inside the limits posted on the Parkway. Or he was doing it until his numbed paralysis broke in a sudden fulmination of rage to kill Chalmers. He was shaking all over, the green of the Parkway glowing as foggy red as the warning light on his dashboard. Then somebody yelled at him and he came to, stopping there at a sign that said "No Stopping on the Parkway." He sat there till the grass turned

back to green, his sanity returning, bringing with it the clear knowledge that it wasn't Archie Chalmers who was to blame. It was himself. That wasn't new knowledge, it had been in his brain, over and over, circling its numb channel. *I was the one sober, I was responsible.* Archie couldn't even be said to have been there.

*The poor bloody bastard.* He put his head on his hands gripped to the wheel. They seemed strangely wet. *The poor bloody guy. Who am I to sound off?* The catharsis of his rage left him beaten for a while and when he started the car he had to stop again and vomit by the roadside. He stopped a third time, near Baltimore. Waiting for a light, he saw the woman alongside glance at him and start, nudging the man driving so that he looked across at him, as startled as she was. When the light turned their car speeded ahead to get away, the woman turning to stare back. He shifted to look at himself in the mirror and stopped then at the next gas station to see if he could wash death's face from his own.

He straightened his collar and tie and went over to the diner for a glass of milk and some coffee, seeing the people there laughing and eating, life going on. He bent his head down. *Thank God she's alive. She could be dead.*

The road past the chain fence of the Paddock Club went past Archie's home. His car wasn't there, but Nat wouldn't have gone in. He had to see Talbot Seaton. At one point it seemed he knew what he would say, but as he made the last turn and went down the hill it dissolved as a dream does. There was nothing to say. When he came to the gate there was still nothing, nothing but her face pleading as it had been when he was there, her lips touching his ear when she'd relighted the fire that swept through his veins. How could he say *I wasn't listening or thinking because I'm in love with Mary Melissa . . . it's my fault it happened, I was criminally blind and deaf?*

He stopped at the place where he'd pulled up to let her out, but moved on then to get away from it, stopping at the second gate. He was still blind and did not see the man come over from a car parked across the road.

"You want something, buddy?" He flipped out a wallet with a silver badge on it. "—Klingan, detective."

"I want to see Mr. Seaton. My name's Ryan."

The detective stared. "You the guy that was with her?"

Nat Ryan nodded.

"Okay." Klingan's face seemed to swell, darker, as he looked at him for an instant before he turned back, stopping to let a

gray sedan pass him, motioning it to keep moving. He went on to his car and picked up the sender of the radio on the dash.

As Ryan went through the gate he saw the car standing just inside. *The poor bloody devil.* It hit him again as he saw it was Archie's. He went on past, saw the back was piled up with stuff and looked again. It was his gear in there, his golf bag, briefcase, the rest of the stuff he'd left at the Chalmers'. It was a jolt for a second. *But why the hell should it be? Who'd want him back?* He went on slowly up to where the drive levelled to cross in front of the steps, the uneven stones hard on his foot. As he started up, a sense of being watched made him stop and turn. Across the road the detective was half out of his car, one foot on the pavement. He looked for an instant as if he was frozen there, then pushed himself up, his hand going toward his belt.

*Looks like he's going to shoot.* It was a sardonic flicker that shot through his mind. *Go ahead, Mac, you'd do me a favor.* He went on to the door and pushed the bell, turned to look back again and saw the detective still half in and half out of his car, propped against the back of the seat, his sender pulled around so he could talk into it and still keep his eyes over the wall.

Detective Klingan was reporting to Communications on the top floor of Headquarters.

"Looks like the guy all right. He fits the description. I didn't see him walk because of the wall till he got up by the house. He saw me spot him. I thought maybe he was going to beat it round the house to the woods but he didn't. He's at the door. Now they're letting him in. He's Ryan, all right, and he's the baby we're after. You get me instructions. I don't want no trouble with that outfit again. Yeah, I mean Homicide, who d'ya think? You lemme know."

Detective Klingan put back his mouthpiece and fished in his pocket for the description again. It was him to a T. He sat waiting, beefy and brooding, eaten up with grievances, bitter at the way he'd been treated, Trumper's fault he'd been kicked back to Detectives and he hadn't made sergeant with them. If there'd been a tavern around he could have slipped in for a quick one.

Looking back at Klingan, Nat Ryan hadn't realized for an instant it was Mrs. Seaton who'd opened the door. As he saw her there, an older, more fragile Mary Melissa, he stood mute, unable to speak. She put her hand out and drew him inside.

"Don't try . . . I know. No use to say anything. Just go and help Archie."

She nodded toward the library door. "Go right in, Nat. He's having a bad time. Poor love . . . I can't bear it."

She gave him a gentle push toward the door and faded along the hall. At the next door he saw her stop and heard her voice, apparently speaking to no one.

"Oh, well, of course I forgot the back stairs. I cannot understand what's happened to that slipper."

She moved on toward the kitchen and Nat took a deep breath, straightening his shoulders, and knocked on the library door. He knocked again then and waited for another instant before he opened the door and went in.

They hadn't heard him, nor did they see him for a moment. Talbot Seaton, no longer kindly and casual, seemed to have grown larger, a figure now carved in concrete, as he stood looking at Chalmers sitting on the sofa, his head in his hands, his face gray as he looked up then and saw Nat. Seaton turned a face made of stone ribbed with old iron.

"Nat Ryan, sir. Mrs. Seaton told me to come in. I want to say it was all my fault."

"—But you're not going to say it. You're not going to be silly."

They hadn't heard the door open from the dining room, or perhaps it had been open when Mrs. Seaton had looked in and seen Mary Melissa. She was partly hidden by the chimney breast till she came on in, the sunlight slanting in through the side windows behind her making a nimbus of radiance around her. Nat's heart stood still a moment. Archie half rose, a sob tearing his throat as he slumped down again, his head in his hands.

"Oh, Archie, don't, dear." She went swiftly to him, taking his head, holding it to her as she would a hurt child's, until he stiffened and pushed her away.

"I promised your father . . . not to touch you again." He got up and went jerkily to the windows. "I'm sorry . . . so sorry! My God, what is there I can say . . . If it would help any I'd die. I wish I could."

He was crying then, sobs racking him as Mary Melissa stood by the sofa, her face tender, her own eyes filling with tears for a moment.

"Don't, Archie dear. There isn't any use."

She turned slowly to Nat. "Hi. It . . . it's a mess, isn't it. But you mustn't say it's your fault. It isn't. Why don't we try to make us some sense, Daddy?"

She went to a chair nearer her father and sat down, slipping

her bare feet from her red leather shells, raising her face then, the pale violet circles under her eyes unbearably moving. She had covered the bruises with make-up so Nat did not see them. At that moment she looked simpler and lovelier than he'd ever seen her.

"It's all right, Daddy, to give Archie hell about drinking if you want to, but it's not going to help any . . . and you can't clobber Nat. It isn't fair."

"—I shouldn't have let you—"

"You just shut up, I'm doing the talking." She smiled at him. "And Daddy, you quit looking like a . . . a banker. Please, Daddy."

She got up and went over to him. "If we're going to start placing the blame, we've got to start with the day lilies. Or with the gas pipes. And—" She hesitated and went on. "If you hadn't been so . . . angry with Archie, I wouldn't have insisted Nat drive away and not come up to the house with me. I didn't tell you, Daddy . . . you felt so awful I didn't want to. But . . . it's your fault, as much as . . . anybody else's. I just couldn't bear to . . . postpone the wedding.—Oh, Daddy, don't! It's nobody's fault, is all I'm saying. I wouldn't have told you ever if it wasn't for Nat. It's just not right to blame him."

Nat Ryan looked away. Seeing her father was seeing a stone image turn slowing to dust, his shoulders suddenly sagging, his face drained of color.

"Oh, Daddy, I'm sorry. . . ." She put her arms out and he caught her, straining her to him, his face pressed against her dark head. "Please Daddy." She led him to a chair and sat on the arm of it. He was like Archie then, his head in his hands, his mouth working, words without sound.

"I just want you all not to be . . . silly," she said simply. "And you see, I don't think it would have made any difference . . . what any of us did." She turned to Nat. "You remember, when I told you I thought somebody was watching me? When I said I felt naked? Last night, at the Paddock? Well, it wasn't the first time. Daddy, you remember I asked you for a dog, but we thought it was too soon, after old Gyp died. Well, I've had a feeling that somebody was around here. Don't the police think so? Isn't that the reason they told me to leave my lights on and they'd have the police dogs here? That's why I moved out of my room, I would have days before but I didn't want to make a fuss. I . . . decided I was just tired, worried, or something. Like Nat thought, last night."

Ryan stood motionless. The guilt he'd been wearing dis-

solved into guilt deeper and more unforgiveable. *I should have looked. My God, he could have been there. The people in that gray car might have seen somebody.*

"And I'm . . . not the first one. That's what he told me. He told me other names. I knew two of them. But he could have been lying, I just don't believe even those girls . . . or anybody . . . would just . . . pay no attention. I mean, would shut up and not try to help the police to catch him, so he couldn't . . . hurt somebody else.—Or if they did that, it's just horrible. It's what Mother says, it's just *pusillanimous*."

She reached down for her shoes and got one of them. The other lay there, a small scallop of red leather. It brought back the one he'd seen in the gray sedan, about the same size, the same narrow last. That touched the edge of his mind at first as curious, and then became a fact they might use. It oughtn't to be hard to find out who was the Cinderella and who her friend was. There couldn't have been many non-members at the party and they could be questioned.

Mary Melissa reached down for it. "I'm sort of bushed, I'll go to bed." She went to Archie and raised on her toes, kissing his cheek. "Don't feel so bad, Archie. I'm . . . not so pristine but I'm really not . . . ruined."

"Oh for God's sake, Mary Melissa."

She smiled at him. "Don't be like my uncle, he wants me to go crawl in a cellar and hide."

As she passed Nat on her way to the door she raised up again and kissed his cheek too. "Thanks . . ." she said softly. "I thought you'd be sort of . . . well, just like Archie. My 'some-time sophistication' is sort of tattered, I guess."

The ache in the throat, the knife in the belly. . . . But her lips on his cheek were cool and lovely. He didn't have to jerk his face away, A new kind of love seemed to be born in his heart, or a new depth for the old, tender, not urgent.

"Put on your shoes, girl." He smiled at her.

She put the other one on. At the door she turned back. "Night, dears," she said softly. "You're all sort of . . . wonderful. Thank you a lot."

The silence lay there, no longer angry, no longer bitter. At last Talbot Seaton got to his feet.

"She's alive, that's what matters. Thank God, she's got courage.—If I was hard on you, Archie . . ."

"I can't take that, sir. I could all the rest."

"All right then, we'll skip it. But I take back what I said about

your not coming. I think she needs you. You too, Nat, as long as you're here."

Across the road Detective Klingan saw them come out onto the porch and saw Talbot Seaton put his hands briefly on the shoulders of the two younger men. Detective Klingan had got his signal and got his orders from Sergeant Trumper. *Leave Ryan alone, he isn't the rapist.* Klingan's heavy face was still darkly swollen. Trumper hadn't even seen Ryan but he knew all about it. *Know-it-all Trumper. He'd cut your throat to hog all the credit.*

Detective Klingan knew that and he knew this old business of a man's girl and his best friend playing games on him. The girl was in on it, that was for sure, pulling the wool over their eyes. But not Klingan's. *Look at him limp on that right foot. Coincidence hell.*

As they got to the plank across the trench Nat said "I'll get my stuff out of your car."

"Leave it, it's okay," Chalmers said. "Mine's in the trunk."

Nat stopped, looking at him.

"We're moving into town.—The area of agreement between my mother and myself has often been small, it's now non-existent. Our disagreement this evening was . . . crucial and canonical. I had two choices, one of them impossible. I decided we'd leave. Anyway, I have a duty that requires me to be closer to the scene of action. I'm going to find that . . . subhuman obscenity, and I'm going to kill him. Are you with me or against me?"

"With you," Nat Ryan said. "I think I ought to go to the police station first."

"That's where we're both going. Gifted as we are, I doubt if we can compete with the professionals.—Let me restate our program. They're going to find him, I'm going to kill him. You're going to rig an alibi they can't beat. I don't mind shooting myself when it's over, if necessary, but I'm damned if I care to be led to the gas chamber."

He went on to his car. "I'll go ahead, you follow. We'll get rid of our gear first." He reached down inside. "And take this for me, will you?"

"Sure."

Nat took the vodka bottle, noting as he put it in his pocket that it was full but had been opened. When Archie talked like a book it was usually a sign. When he got in his own car he unscrewed the cap and held the bottle to his nose. They said it

was breathless but it still smelled in the bottle. To be sure it wasn't three-quarters brand water he tasted it. It was all vodka.

"Sorry, old friend." He screwed the top back on and stowed the bottle in his glove compartment.

It was dusky out there, with trees all around, but there had still been plenty of light for Detective Klingan to see him take a few shots of a colorless liquid, presumably not water.—Presumably gin, in terms of Detective Klingan's experience, until the day he would be asked if he'd ever inquired into the color of vodka.

## CHAPTER 6

At 8.30 P.M. John Isham, tall and sad sack, ambled bonelessly into the corner room on the third floor of Police Headquarters and came to rest against the door frame of Captain Justice's small office.

"Anything new, Captain? Printable or un?"

Justice looked up at him. "The best man isn't missing, I guess you got that. Nothing else I can think of."

"I hear you got a detailed description?"

"Where'd you get that?"

"Osmosis, Captain."

"That Greek again.—We aren't saying anything about it, we don't know she got a good look at him. Don't want you to tell him."

Isham nodded, flowed upright, started to go and turned back. "In these deals, you get 'em right quick or you don't?"

"If you'd get out we'd like to get back to work anyway. I thought you were a day man, you ain't on a crusade, are you?"

"May be so," Isham said. "Be seeing you boys."

He ambled back into the hall and down the enclosed staircase, his feet echoing, hollow, up from its iron bowels.

Dave Trumper turned from the files. "I wouldn't swear to it but I guess you can trust that fella, this once. You got the message the Crime Lab. sent down? The tree man came back to tell Joe Scala he forgot to say this character was up there in the tree could be a gymnast of sorts. He found a cracked branch,

says our man probably had to be agile not to land on his head. The B of I's got a few gymnasts, most of 'em burglars."

He tapped the pile of cards he'd pulled from the files. "There's one in here, the fella we caught coming down a drain pipe. But he's at the Cut."

"He's at the Cut unless they've paroled him and didn't bother to tell us," Justice said dryly.

They heard the edgy teeth of the elevator then and the door grunting open.

"I guess that's the best man." Trumper put his cards in the desk drawer. "Or both of 'em." They heard the double tread of feet in the hall, and then they were in the door. Trumper couldn't have said what he expected them to look like, but in terms of the spectacular Mrs. Chalmers had put on it was not what he saw now. He saw two steady-eyed, good-looking young men in rumpled seersuckers, white shirts, bow ties, beat-up shoes, both of them sold a round trip to hell but now on the return end, neither of them looking like a society lush or a dog on the suicide brink. *Something must have happened out at the Seatons' to brace them some.*

The tiny office was crowded again, Trumper backed against the fern, Hulan propped in the open door.

"Can you tell us what happened?" Nat Ryan asked evenly. "All we know is it did. The Seatons didn't tell us anything and we couldn't ask."

Captain Justice nodded. "I don't see why you shouldn't read the first couple of the reports. I expect it'd be quicker than us trying to tell you. Here's Lieutenant Hulan's when he answered the call early this morning. Here's his report of what Miss Seaton told him and Sergeant Trumper when they saw her at home this afternoon."

He unclipped the last sheets from the second report so that it ended where Trumper had told Mary Melissa that Ryan had presumably left town, and handed them each a copy. They read with the eyes of the three policemen steady on them. It was not till they were in Hulan's second report, of what Mary Melissa had told the two officers, that Chalmers looked up.

"You say she insisted I was along with them." He looked at Hulan, then at Trumper. "Why 'insisted,' I mean? Did you think I wasn't?"

Trumper had wondered if his mother hadn't told him she'd been to Headquarters, not wanting to ask. He waited for the captain to answer, but Archie turned to Ryan.

"I was with you, wasn't I? If I wasn't, where was I?"

"You were with us. Right where we found you, on the back seat, dead drunk and out cold. We were trying to get you away from your friends before any of them saw you. Mary Melissa stepped in a mole run and I grabbed her when she was falling. There were a lot of them around. Some of them started charging over toward the car. God knows what they thought. We got away quick. We thought they'd see you, out front, but I hit a drain cover and you jolted over on your face. That's where you were when we got to the Seatons'. She wanted you home before the storm broke. I got you there and that's where I left you, in your garage. Where the hell is my note? I stuck it in your bottle, you louse, where you couldn't miss it. I told you I was going to Washington, I'd be back for your dinner."

Captain Justice glanced at Trumper as Mrs. Chalmers's eyewitness account of Mary Melissa's abduction came out in a new light, again when Ryan's bitter voice changed her whole picture of the car coming to the Chalmers house, Ryan in his white dinner jacket all she could see, not her son in a dark jacket on his face in the back seat. It was an old story about eye-witnesses.

"I must have got it," Archie said quietly. "I can't remember, the first I remember is old Sergeant Garvey opening the front door for me. My mother said he found me on the golf course. Why would I go there? It's two miles away."

"What difference does it make?" Ryan asked. "You act like you think you're a rational—"

Trumper saw him break off, shaking his head as if to get an angry fog out and away.

"Sorry," he said curtly. He turned to Justice. "But that's the whole point. What happened is my fault. It was me that drove off and left her alone. Chalmers had no idea what—"

"Why don't you two just go on and read that," Captain Justice said mildly. "You can tell us then."

They went on, Trumper following by their faces which page they were on, sick first, then sicker or sickened with shock, as they came to the hand, the wet mouth, the knife. He saw them white-lipped, faces gray as their clothes. They finished at last, silent, sick with nausea. The strange thing to Trumper was that neither of them had made any sign of surprise or interest when they came to the man's limping. It had no connection with any awareness, no meaning connected with Ryan's limping too. *Never entered their minds.*

"All right," Justice said. He took back the reports. "Now then.

It doesn't look like Mr. Chalmers can be much help. Mr. Ryan?"

Nat Ryan came up out of the fog of her night of horror.

"What can you tell us?"

"One thing isn't there. Didn't she tell you about her . . . about what she felt on the terrace at the Club, when she thought somebody was watching her? She said she felt like she was naked."

"—What's that, Mr. Ryan?" Trumper leaned forward.

"Give him a chance," Justice said quietly. "Suppose you start over, Mr. Ryan. Start from the beginning. We won't interrupt you."

But Trumper interrupted when Ryan was telling them the reason Mary Melissa wouldn't let him take her up to the house. "She was afraid her father would know Chalmers was drunk and postpone the wedding."

"So you postponed it the hard way."

"Keep quiet, Trump.—Mr. Ryan, you told us you left Mr. Chalmers a note saying you were going to Washington. You have any reason to go there?"

"He was fed up with me," Archie said.

There was the first flicker of light in Ryan's eyes that Trumper had seen. "That's as good as any."

Trumper's eyes lighted a little. *You were getting away because you're in love with the girl. That's one truth the Chalmers dame told us.*

"All right, then. Let's go back." Justice looked down at the notes he'd been making. "This gray sedan. Did Miss Seaton look in it?"

"No, sir. I did."

"You said the people might have seen somebody. What people?"

"The people in that car. Miss Seaton said they must be non-members, it was against the rules to park there. We didn't see them. We heard them, over behind a big magnolia behind the hedge. The girl's slipper was in the car. We just assumed they had a reason for getting out."

"And left a slipper? What kind?"

"A party slipper. White satin with one of these high needle heels. They were gone when we came back around."

Nat had heard footsteps out in the hall without realizing Hulan had left until he saw him then coming back into the doorway. The captain turned his chair to give himself room to get up in.

"Well, I guess that's all, for tonight," he said. "Miss Seaton's coming down at ten in the morning, to look at some photographs. If you want to come too, you might think of something you haven't told us."

He eased them out into the hall. "The steps are quicker, this time of night." He pushed the door open across the narrow hall into the stairwell. "Thanks for coming."

He stood there while they started down and went quickly back across the hall to the office. Trumper was putting the phone down.

"Seaton doesn't know when they first missed the white satin slipper. His wife and the girl are asleep. He'll let us know in the morning."

Justice nodded. "—You had an idea, Hulan?"

"Yes, sir. That car. This rookie I told you about? He had a gray sedan in the report I got from him. So I just now got a hold of him. He said it looked like a stolen one they had to look for, but the tags weren't right. They were going to follow it into the Club anyway but then they got a call. There was a man driving it, alone, dark hair and a sports shirt."

"He get the numbers?"

"He got the letters and the first two digits."

He handed the captain a slip of paper.

"Good work. See what Vehicles can turn up on this, Trump. —Wait just a minute."

He went into his office, unlocked his desk and took out a thick black-jacketed book, the file of a case that had not been closed. It was a file Trumper knew well, the case called the heart-breaker, the one he'd told Hulan about on the way to the hospital and when they were coming back.

"Hulan said this morning Mrs. Seaton couldn't find one of the girl's shoes. I got this out. Remember in this there was a shoe we never found? Or you forgotten it by now?"

Trumper shook his head. He hadn't forgotten. "Sorry. I was too busy figuring Mrs. Seaton's whacky."

*That's why he's captain. He can sit here, never set foot on the situs and see more than I can falling all over it.*

He stood there an instant without moving, as if afraid to draw a deep breath that might shatter a hope.

"I told Hulan coming back here your prayers don't get answered that easy, these days."

"I don't say it's connected. But that shoe just got me to thinking. One other thing too. Were you around here when we had a shoe clerk? Back yonder before we were a separate de-

partment, still in Detectives. I was lieutenant. Seven, eight years."

Trumper's face lighted. "I remember him. Edward something or other. Or was that his last name?" He reached for the phone to call Detectives and brought his hand back. "They wouldn't have him. He—"

"That's right. He wasn't charged. I remember the store manager telling the captain the publicity'd murder them. They sent the woman on a cruise to forget it."

"Yeah," Trumper nodded. "What I remember is his sister, crying her head off, promising he'd get treatment. I remember telling her there wouldn't be any record against him."

Justice went over to the coffee pot in the corner. "Well, the same thing could happen now. I mean if we get this fella, he'll get off too, no prosecution. Miss Seaton and her father are seeing the Inspector in the morning. When he gets through telling 'em what she'll be in for . . ."

"I don't blame him . . . do you?"

The captain turned slowly, not mild any longer. "I hear another word like that out of you, you'll be out there with Klengan, you hear?"

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "One other thing. Those two young fellas. They didn't come here for the fun of it. You watch yourself, Trump, and quit shooting your mouth off. 'If it was your girl you'd kill him.' They've thought of that already. That's why I got rid of 'em. Ryan didn't notice you leaving, Hulan, soon as he mentioned that gray sedan, but they're plenty bright and don't you forget it. Who wants some coffee?"

The iron stairway came out on a catwalk above the first floor and between the Traffic Court and the Chief Magistrate's. Off it was the press room, a low-ceilinged vault with high recessed windows, the reporter alone in it flopped out on the couch, listening. When he heard the hollow iron sound of footsteps he got up, moving to the door, leaning bonelessly on the jamb. John Isham was mildly gratified that he'd guessed right again. Chalmers and Ryan hadn't waited for the elevator to crawl up for them. If he'd guessed right it was them, from the janitor's information that two young men had asked for Homicide and no other customers of interest at present were likely to own the foreign sports car parked outside in front at a No Parking sign.

He moved out as they came onto the catwalk. "Chalmers?"

The taller one with dark hair and bluer eyes said "Yes. Who are you? Press?"

"Right. John Isham by name. Short for Judas Iscariot. if you hear Dave Trumper. You Ryan?"

"That's right."

"I heard 'em calling Northern district Car Six." He waved back at the set that blocked one window, crackling with police talk. "That's your friend Garvey. Except it wasn't him they told to go to a call box and contact old Hulan. I figured you must have sparked 'em. Not that it matters. Even if they catch the fellow the Seatons won't let it get into court. Or will they?—Just asking."

"Would you?" Archie Chalmers asked.

"Me, Mr. Chalmers? I guess I'd be torn, isn't that what they call it? Though I guess if I had the guts I'd go after him and kill him."

"Anti-social, isn't it?"

"Is it? I had a friend, sort of like you, going to marry a girl, got out a twelve-gauge, called Sergeant Trumper on the phone and blasted himself to pieces. Two days before he was going to get married. To a girl like your girl. The same thing happened. She never gave 'em any description. All she did was sit there and scream. Now she's sitting in a corner out at Mount Vale Sanatorium, staring at a blank wall. Any man comes in sight—her father, the doctor, me their old buddy—she starts screaming all over. Believe me, I've tried to find that fellow."

There was a little silence. "What did the police do?" Nat Ryan asked.

Isham shrugged. "All they could. The girl couldn't tell 'em anything. Her sister had seen her and the boy out in front in his car, saying good night. She heard the car leave. The kid didn't come in, so she figured they'd gone for a drive. Later she heard the car come again. She didn't hear her sister come in the house, but she was half-asleep. Didn't know anything had happened till the boy managed to call the police. Then she went out and found her sister sitting on the steps. That's when she started screaming."

Isham had a cigarette in his hand, not lighted. He dropped it on the floor, carefully wiping it out with his foot.

"I was down here, heard the call." He nodded at the radio again. "I followed Trump out. We found the boy. He'd been tied up, his ankles and wrists cut to the bone where he'd fought to get loose, trying to help the girl. They guessed he'd been gagged, he didn't have much of any mouth left. I'll give the cops one thing. She'd lost a shoe. They damn near raked the whole county, trying to find it, find out where he'd taken them. My

friend was right hefty, as big as you, Chalmers. There wasn't a trace. They got the mate to that red sandal upstairs, still waiting."

He took another cigarette out and lighted it. "I guess what I'm saying is, your girl was lucky. So were you. But, like you say, what would I do? I'd say 'Sorry,' I guess, 'leave it to the next one, some real martyr type, don't mind being stripped naked and burned to the stake in a courtroom, big story, front page.' You want to vomit there's a mop in the closet. You going home, in case I should call you?"

"Farthingale Alley, Number 19," Archie said quietly. "Come and have a drink. We're holing in, to cram for the State Bar."

Isham looked at Nat. "You too? Thought you were from out West."

"Just a dry run. Sort of practice."

Isham's sleepy green eyes opened for an instant, reglazed again. "A fair wind I wish you," he said. "If I can help, let me know." He started to amble back into the press room and turned. "Don't make a mistake, kids. Don't figure 'em dumb, upstairs. They're very smart fellas. Quote me and I'll sue."

They went on down and got in the car, Chalmers gripped the wheel, his head pressed to his hands, and sat there for a moment as Nat Ryan had sat on the Parkway.

*A bride-to-be, a lost shoe, a boy bringing his girl home, the boy blowing himself to pieces, the girl at Mount Vale staring at a wall, screaming when any man came near her, no trace of the shoe . . .*

Archie started the car then and they drove through the night-silent streets of the city to Farthingale Alley, a Joseph's coat of tiny houses in the heart of the old town.

"Did you notice the quick brush-off we got when Hulan came back? You were talking about the car and the white slipper in it."

"I noticed," Ryan said.

They went on in the house. The stairs opened from the one living room. There was a small kitchen in what had been a back porch. Their gear was in a heap in the middle of the floor. Archie picked up a bag and stood holding it, staring into the fireplace.

"Mrs. Seaton was hunting a slipper," he said.

"Yes. I heard her say so."

Archie still stood there.

"You read what she said. He wanted to take her to the carriage—"

"Shut up, for God's sake. I read it."

Ryan picked up his stuff and went up the crooked steps, into the tiny front room and shut the door, leaning against it, his eyes shut, his jaw and hands clenched till they ached, the nausea all back, the red fog of rage.

*"We'll get him and we'll kill him. By God we will."*

How long he stood there, how long it took for the red fog to clear and sanity seep back, he couldn't have told. Or how long it was before he heard the echo of a dry voice, that of a well-known lecturer, thrilling a class room.

*The one basic, inviolable concept of the Common Law, our most priceless heritage, is that however guilty, of however awful a crime, the accused has a right to a public trial by a jury of his neighbors in the vicinity, unless he himself chooses to be tried before a judge. That, gentlemen, remember, in this world of yours with its onswEEPing tides of the new barbarism that knows neither human decency nor Justice . . . brute against brute, anarchy against Law, the forked tree of the lyncher wearing a hood. You are the guardians, you are the keepers.*

He looked at the twisted face in the mirror, dimly his own. *And your first contribution to it is to enter into a conspiracy to bespoil and defile it.*

When he went down stairs a few minutes later Archie had poured them drinks. Bourbon, not vodka. They sat there silently for a long time, the stillness of the night broken by the rumble of an occasional truck, a church bell in the distance striking the hours. It struck two as Archie got up.

"I'm turning in."

He took the glass that had been sweating untouched beside him and went out in the kitchen. Nat heard him empty it into the sink and rinse it out. He came back and went over to the crooked steps.

"Forget what I said about you and the alibi, Nat. I may be a bastard but I pay the price tag. In this instance it includes taking the Bar—I won't have the clean hands I hope they require. So you're to keep yours. You just stay out of this. I'll do the finding and I'll do the killing. It'll be deliberate, wilful and with malice aforethought and I won't let anybody hire Enoch Chew, our local Darrow, to pull all the stops to get me off. Good night, Nat . . . and thanks."

## CHAPTER 7

*Something's happened to those two.* Trumper saw it at once when they walked into Homicide at ten the next morning. *Like a rookie grows up just over-night when he runs into his first real one.*

They looked through the photographs he took from the files. Both shook their heads.

"I suppose you've gone through the delivery people, the trench crew, all the rest of them that have been around there."

"That's routine, Mr. Ryan." He was going to add that the man they had out there was half-crazy trying to pin Mrs. Seaton down to simple facts, when Archie tore the thing open.

"Sergeant Trumper, I talked to Mrs. Seaton this morning. She says the slipper she's missing is white satin with a high needle heel. I checked with the Club. The only non-members who were there had their cars parked by the boy. All of them are accounted for."

"We checked that too."—As the captain had said. *They're plenty bright and don't you forget it.* But he wasn't prepared for the next question.

"We understand there was a shoe missing in another case like this. The case of the girl at Mount Vale. Is there a connection?"

Trumper sat still and impassive. *Judas Iscariot's in on this.* He leaned forward.

"And if there is one," he said deliberately, "you want Miss Seaton to go out there too?" His eyes moved from one to the other of them, hot like hot marbles. "Look, you two. I don't know what you're planning, but I want you to listen to me. The attack on Miss Seaton was no hit-and-run deal. That fella's been watching her for weeks."

He told them about the locust tree, stopping again to let them absorb it.

"You wise guys come in here to tell us about our business when you couldn't protect the girl one night. Let me tell you, you keep up whatever you're planning and you put that girl in real danger. Let's say it could be the same fella, he's vicious, I'm telling you, and God only knows what could have happened

to her if the storm hadn't broken loose, or what could have happened if one of you'd walked up to the house with her. What if he'd jumped you, or held the knife on you and taken both of you up to the carriage house? You let him think you're trying to outsmart him, he'll do anything to get even . . . and he could come back to finish the job. That's what scares me, and it ought to scare you. You people are lucky . . . so far, and we want you to stay lucky."

Ryan had got up and gone to the window, sicker than he'd known it was possible to be, and thankful . . . *oh God, thankful* . . . for the storm, crawling cold with the fear it could be true, the man could come back. He stood staring down blindly into the Saturday emptiness of the street, seeing without knowing he was doing it a car pull in behind Archie's and a man getting out, stopping, as most did, to look at the black foreign sports car with its oyster-white leather gleaming in the sun, its glittering pride sharp in contrast with the gray-faced lost pride of its owner behind him there listening to Trumper.

"What you ought to be doing is watching that girl, not watching us. I wouldn't leave her alone for five minutes. He could follow her out and get her some place nobody's looking. You ought to see she don't go sky-larking off by herself in a car. She's helpless if he gets in with a knife. And the same if you're with her. Don't park with her except there's people around and don't sit in a car talking, like those other two kids. Let me tell you this, it's not just the slipper making us think it could be the same man, it's him waiting at the gate for you people. That's what happened to them. Her sister had gone in their place alone. Why didn't he attack her? Was he waiting for the one going to be married? We're thinking, was that part of the modus here?—Makes you sick, don't it."

He stopped again for an instant.

"We don't know it's so. But he told Miss Seaton he'd watched her and he hated her kind of people. That's people like those other poor kids too. I tell you again, if I was you I'd be so scared I'd use every ounce of the brains God gave me seeing she don't get anywhere near him.—Okay, I'm just giving you a personal opinion. Now you, Mr. Ryan—"

Nat turned back from the window.

"You can help us. This car, the gray sedan you looked in. There's a chance we can find it. Anything about it special? Did you open the door?"

Ryan shook his head. "I looked in the open front window."

"Did you touch it at all?"

"Yes. I did touch it." He could see himself there on the asphalt, leaning over the narrow grass edge, his hands on the car. He held them out now, palms flat. "I braced myself against it."

"Good. Let's get your palm prints." Trumper shoved his chair back. "The rain could have washed them off, but we'll take a chance. We'll get your right foot print too, we've got one there in the mud at the Seaton's."

He didn't say it was the shoe print of a man who limped the way Ryan limped.

"Let's go over to the Bureau of Identification. You stay here, Mr. Chalmers. Miss Seaton and her father are upstairs with the Inspector. We'll be back in a minute."

Chalmers moved over to the window where Ryan had stood, the turquoise-capped tower of St. Vincent's gleaming white there in the sun. It was more than a minute before they came back. He was still there, Mary Melissa with him. She turned abruptly when they came in, eyes defensive, naked as they had been when Trumper first saw her out at her house, until she saw Nat with him.

Her relief then drained some of the taut strain from her body, but as she looked at Trumper her face was pale and there was a white line around her rose-colored lipstick. Trumper knew why. They never pulled punches, telling a girl and telling her parents, what a rape trial meant when they got to court.

He came on in, business-like. "Will you look at these pictures for us, Miss Seaton?"

Chalmers turned from the window. "Nat, will you stay?" he asked abruptly. "I've got to go. I'll be out at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Sergeant Trumper, if you want me. I'll leave word at the desk." He strode out without looking at Mary Melissa.

She turned to Nat. "Daddy's got to go to the bank, but I've got the car. You needn't stay if you're busy, or—"

"I'll stay."

She went to the desk where Trumper had the photographs and the artist's drawing. "I'll look at these, if you want me to. —But I think I ought to tell you. My father and I . . . just don't think I could really go through with it. I . . . didn't know till the Inspector told us. He says it's just . . . awful. Nat . . . you don't know—"

"I've read some trials. I know all right."

*We'll never let you do it, baby . . . not when it's all our fault.*

"I'm sorry, Sergeant Trumper."

"That's all right, Miss Seaton." *I wouldn't let a girl of mine do it, by God I wouldn't.* "But we want to know who it is, so we can keep an eye on him."

He opened the desk drawer and took the police artist's drawing out. "This was done from the pink form you checked yesterday."

She stood there, reluctant, for an instant.

"Sit down. Just take it easy." He pushed the drawing over where she could see it. It was the head and face of a man with bushy black hair and glaring eyes. She drew in her breath as she looked at it, but her face was blank.

"If you'll give me a pencil . . . I'm not good at it, but I've had some drawing. Maybe I can show you."

He watched her tear the sheet off the block and with half a dozen strokes bring into life a face that for the fraction of a moment he thought he had seen somewhere. Her next few strokes, making the hair different and adding a dark open-neck shirt, took away the flash of remembrance he seemed to have had.

"But he wouldn't be glaring, or his teeth showing, would he, when you find him."

A few more strokes changed the eyes and took the animal snarl from the mouth.

Trumper took the drawing. "You're pretty sure of this?"

"Yes. I really saw him, in the lightning." She closed her eyes as if to blot that image out, wipe out the revulsion it brought.

"Could you look through these for me?"

He turned over the pile of glossy prints that Chalmers and Ryan had looked at, watching intently as she turned them face over off the pile. Half-way through she drew back a little and moved her hands to her lap, holding them tightly.

"Is that him?"

She had to swallow before she could answer. "I . . . don't know. There's something . . . the eyes and mouth. And the sort of . . . clean look. And he's cocksure, I'd forgotten about that."

Trumper picked it up. It was the man he'd told the captain was nearest to the gymnast that they had in the files. The man was in the House of Correction . . . unless, as the captain said, he'd been paroled and they hadn't been notified. He held it over by the artist's drawing. There was a resemblance. It was probably what had made him think he'd seen the face her first few strokes brought out. Then he turned the print over to read the description again. Bad teeth, grayish hair . . .

When she'd gone through the pile she came back to it.

"There's something about him. Maybe it's just the . . . clean look. I can't explain it, I guess."

"I think I know." Barber shop clean. The neat man on the bench flicked through his mind. "We'll see." He didn't want to tell her he doubted her. He'd done that before and been so wrong it had scared him. "We might get him in a line-up. You'd know him if you saw him."

"Oh yes. But I—" She got to her feet, back where she'd been when she came from the Inspector's office. "I *told* you! I just . . . can't! I know I'm a coward . . . but I couldn't! I'd die!"

Nat Ryan was beside her then, his arm around her shoulders, his face set and angry. "You're not going to."

"Take it easy, Mr. Ryan." Trumper's voice was quiet. "Frankly, we never expected her to. We know there's nothing dirtier to go through. None of us blame her. You just relax, Miss Seaton—and you remember what I told you, Mr. Ryan. I wasn't fooling you two."

As they started out he said, "One other thing. When was it you wore your white satin slippers last, Miss Seaton?"

"I never wore them. They were for my wedding, to go with my dress. But don't believe Mother, she's probably got the ice cream in some closet drawer and that slipper in the deep freeze. Or she's put it in the incinerator with a batch of wrappings. You don't know her, at Christmas she's lethal."

She'd stopped at the door, but she came quickly back to him.

"You . . . understand, don't you? I mean, why I couldn't go into court as a witness? I just couldn't stand it."

"Sure." He said it as gently as he could. *I understand, nobody better.* "Don't worry, sugar. We'll get him some other way."

He wished he believed it.

## CHAPTER 8

The man whose car was standing behind Archie's outside Police Headquarters had been just passing by for fun, his kind of fun, and had not intended to stop until he recognized the black foreign sports car there. *What's he doing down here?* In

the game of Russian roulette he was playing it was as if somebody had slipped in a second shell. For a moment he was afraid, afraid with the fear that withers when it touches. His throat dry, he drove on around the block, and getting hold of himself pulled in to the curb right there in front of Headquarters. A minute of calm had explained it as clearly as if he was inside the building seeing Chalmers as he'd seen the drunken fool's high-horsing mother sail smiling in and smiling back out on the third floor yesterday morning.

He didn't have to be told she was down there to hush up what he knew would never have got in the paper if the girl hadn't made up her story of the prowler. He knew the kind of people they were. It was part of the game, they were the empty chambers in his Russian roulette, the chance of one acting different from the rest what made it exciting. Only he knew that chance too was a blank. It might get him a few powder burns but nothing to hurt him. They were the ones who'd get burned . . . if they were such fools as to tangle with him. He felt fine now as he parked right behind Chalmers.

He strolled over to the entrance, sat down on the granite steps, took out a cigarette and lighted it, right there under their noses. With his white shirt and bow tie, like Chalmers's, a summer suit, not cotton like his so it looked like he'd slept in it but nice wrinkle-proof fabric, he wasn't a bum they could tell to move on. He shifted his straw hat to a jaunty angle and sat there, waiting for the bridegroom whose wedding he'd turned into garbage.

His malice and glee were so great that he didn't notice Chalmers, not until he was down the granite steps, striding long-legged across the sidewalk. The pleasure turned to anger. It meant he had to hurry to get to his car if he wanted to follow him, and it was only when he had to hurry that his martyred hip showed, then or when he limped purposely in front of his sister to let her never forget what she'd done to him. Nobody else dared to think he was a cripple. He had muscles of iron . . . *just like a panther*. He told himself that as he moved his trained body, holding his spine straight crossing the pavement, hating Chalmers for his long easy stride and his height, angry at himself for not having worn the specially built shoes that gave him an added two inches.

For a moment he thought he had to give up, Chalmers was in his car, but he didn't start up, he sat there staring at nothing at all. He didn't even turn his royal fat head to see who was so close to him he could have spit in his face. For an instant the

impulse to do just that was so strong that his leg began to shake. If he did it Chalmers would have to get out and hit him and then they'd see who was the weakling and who knew the Judo, who was strong as a panther. If he'd been anywhere else he'd have done it. Then he checked himself. *Don't get excited. Be cool. The panther can wait.*

Chalmers started up then, slowly, not moving the way he should have, with a car as packed with fabulous class and power. *He drives it like it was any old crate. If it was me I'd show 'em. I'd have some style.* He stayed behind, cool, until Chalmers turned north into Calvert Street. *Home's where he's going. He won't go to his clubs, not this day, when his wedding's all garbage. I'll show him some style.*

He pulled the cream-and-tan car alongside Chalmers at the next stop light and when it turned green shot ahead and again at the next stop light and the next. Chalmers's brain was too soaked with liquor to notice how he was being beaten to a standstill. Just once he glanced over, deliberately waiting for the cream-and-tan car to get in ahead. *The arrogant bastard.*

The two-toned car was ahead when Chalmers turned in his home block. It went on, swung around and came back past the house. *Come in to hole up like a rat, drink himself blind, to forget it's the day he was going to get married.* It went on, made a turn past the church, closed tight, no florists swarming there with flowers and white ribbons to mark off the pews, no white carpet ready to roll down the aisle, and kept on down Cather-ton Road. The gas company crew was there, filling the trenches, but the fat-fannied detective who'd sat in a car across the street yesterday was gone. Maybe tonight it'd be safe to go back to the tree. *If they don't have dogs.* He didn't know they would but they might, and dogs he was afraid of. Until he was sure the girl's family had got out of the mistake they'd made getting in the police he wasn't taking a chance. *I'd better call her and tell her a few things.*

His eyes were bright then, his mouth watering at the taste. *I'll call her now. From over York Road.* He smiled as he swung the car around and headed that way. *Two birds with one stone.* There was another reason for going there. That was where what he thought of as his insurance was, his ace in the hole in case anything went wrong. He'd kept it up, in a manner of speaking, for years and he liked to check on it, once in a while, to see if it was still valid. No panther was foolhardy, neither was he. Once, when he'd gone over there, he'd thought his insurance was cancelled, but it didn't take long to find out he was mistaken,

just long enough for him to quiet himself, quit trembling, and ask a friendly question, with just the right amount of mildly solicitous interest. *The stage lost a great actor. . . .*

He liked to think that when his phantasmagorical world was in orbit. It had many stages, its apogee still to come, and sometimes he trembled when he held the knife in his hand. The apogee was murder and some day, some time, he knew it would come. It was his sister he really wanted to kill, but he couldn't do it, his father had stopped that, with the will that left her the money, to go to his Lodge's old people's home when she died. His face twisted with rage as he thought of it, his hatred of her and of his father's fissionable materials.

He parked in the lot beside a tea store on the York Road and stopped as he went by it to look in the window. Just doing that was a part of his insurance, reminding him he had to put up with his sister, keep her alive and at heel, a fawning she-dog, or he'd have to work like the lousy store clerk he was looking at now, picking out potatoes now for a fat-faced old woman. He stared in at the man for an instant . . . the real insurance, the ace in the hole.

He smiled with contempt then and went into the drugstore on the next corner. There was a phone booth under some stairs. He sat still a moment, deciding who he'd be when he dialled the Seatons' number. The name he'd like best in the Society pages was Randolph G. Perryman, a cousin of the Chalmers'. He dialled and when a colored maid's voice answered he said, "This is Mr. Randy, can I speak to Mary Melissa?"

The woman's voice was sharp over the line. "Randy don't 'Mister' me and if you was him you'd be calling her own number . . . you ain't Randy and I'm going to call the police—"

He cut off the angry blast with a shaking finger and got out of the booth so fast his foot caught a display rack, knocking it over. A girl clerk smiled at him.

"Don't look so frightened, it's always in the way. It doesn't matter."

He went quickly on out, cursing the girl under his breath, she was small and dark like his sister, like the Seaton girl. There was a stitch in his side and when he got back to his car he sat for a moment, breathing deeply as they'd trained him. The hoarfrost of his fear turned into a red blaze of fury.—People like them couldn't call in the police. Her father a big banker . . . how could they dare? Then the sight of a cruise car turning the corner made him catch his breath. Two cars were going out of the parking lot just then, one like his own, and he got

behind it. He didn't stop till he got to the North Avenue market and found another parking place by another drugstore.

He sat longer in the booth this time before he dialled the number of one of the bridesmaids. Then he put on the English accent he'd practised.

"Oh, I say, I am sorry. This is Reggie Montgomery. Could you help me? I've come for the wedding. I say, isn't it ghastly? But I do want to give the girl a ring and I've forgot her private number. So stupid, when she wrote it down for me in Venice. She may have told you about the Mater's Palazzo. She lunched with us there."

"Just a second, I'll see."

His heart chilled again as he waited, and he was about to put the phone down and get out when she came back, giving him the number.

"Why don't you come out and have a drink around five? There are other people in the same boat and Mother's trying to do something normal about it."

"Oh, you *are* kind. But I'm at Friendship just taking off, I told Sir Anthony I'd be back in New York this evening. Do look us up next time you're in London."

He put the phone down, holding his arms tight across his breast to keep from laughing aloud. His face gradually changed then, as he remembered this girl's picture as he'd seen it in the papers. She was dark and small. Some day she'd be a bride instead of a bridesmaid and then she'd meet Reggie Montgomery. His eyes glittered as he reached in his inside coat pocket and took out his most precious possession . . . of those he carried with him. It was a single sheet of paper, pale gray, real stylish, a firm name and address printed, very high class, across the top. Below it was a hand-written list of names, several crossed out, with dates written beside them. The last one was Mary Melissa Seaton, the date June 20th. There were others below hers, not crossed out yet. At the bottom he wrote this girl's name.

He dialled the number she'd given him, listening to the phone ring, breathing more quickly each time, counting the rings then, seeing her creep across her blue bedroom to where he knew the phone was on the table beside the four-poster bed. He let it ring on. She could have been out of the room. Then his face began contorting again with fury, and he was cursing under his breath until he saw a policeman stroll into the store and put the phone down quickly. For a half second there he almost destroyed the paper in his hand, and when he saw the

officer at the counter getting a sandwich he cursed himself. *That was just panic.* He was even forgetting how clever he'd been with that paper too, how it too could turn into a part of the insurance he carried. He put it back in his wallet, but he took out the clippings he'd cut from the paper with the names of the wedding party and the notice of the dance at the Paddock Club Thursday. He rubbed them together into a small wad and tossed it under the feet of the policeman as he went past the fountain.

*I'll call her tonight. I'll tell her.* He could see her in the bed in the blue room where he'd watched her with his binoculars, practically there beside her, see her turn on the light when the blue phone rang, see her reach for it, sitting up, laughing. *You won't laugh this time, you sly little rat.*

He got the cream-and-tan car and drove to a block of row houses in a neighborhood once prosperous, now overrun with poor whites from the Carolina mountains. The alley that ran through it was littered with trash, rusty old garbage cans spilling out rotten musk-melons and mouldy bread. There was a row of corrugated iron garages each side of the alley, and he ran the car into one of them. He was padlocking the door when he saw the policeman coming out of the broken gate up the alley. A sharp spasm of alarm shot through him again, until he saw the woman and dirty kids hanging behind him. *Her husband's got drunk and beat her again.*

He tested the padlock and turned down the alley. Across the street a hillbilly band was playing, a man passing a pie tin, a girl swinging the gospel words so they weren't gospel, the way they got around a license, religion being free in the Free State. At the end of the alley, across at the corner, was a tavern with a sign "Cobby's" over the front in red and blue neon. It was empty except for the proprietor wiping off the bar.

"Hiya, Alvin."

Alvin handed him the keys of the car and the padlock. "Thanks a lot, Cobby. Sure you didn't need it?"

"You kiddin'? When do I get a chance in this racket? Sundays to Ma's farm and back's all I use it, if you didn't the battery'd be dead. The cops ain't found yours yet?"

Alvin shook his head. "Since Thursday, and they got the nerve to brag on their record. They give me a pain. Let's have a beer."

Cobby opened two bottles and pushed Alvin a glass. "What's that dog-faced brother of yours doin', complainin' about my

beer for?" He put his hand on the spigot of the barrel of draft. "He brought back the jug—"

"My *brother-in-law*," Alvin said coldly. He poured his beer into the glass. He didn't drink out of bottles like Cobby. "I see a gendarme in the alley. Cop to you, Cobby. What's he—"

"Rats to you, Alvin." Cobby grinned at him. He tilted his bottle, and brought it down on the bar. "No foolin', though, that's what he's after. Big complaint from the Greek bought the Mecca, rats eatin' the customers next, and a baby got bit bad. They got an inspection on, Sanitarian fella scourin' the block. Your sister home? They—"

The last words were said to an empty stool and the customer that Alvin had pushed aside in the door. Cobby strolled over to look out the window, not at Alvin but at the cop watching the hillbilly band.

"Have a smoke?" He held out a pack of cigarettes to the new customer, who took one and with it a rolled bill that was the payoff on the number he'd hit yesterday.

"Let's have a beer," he said.

"You can have Alvin's, he just poured it."

"He trainin' for the Preakness, the way he was goin'?"

Cobby shook his head. "Cops huntin' rats. Must 'a got a pet one.—Fade away, fella, here comes one of the bastards."

The policeman coming in as the customer disappeared in back was not concerned with either numbers or rats.

"—Hi, Officer," Cobby said cheerfully. "I help you?"

"I'm checking some car tags. This one here yours?" The officer showed a number that Motor Vehicles had pulled out along with all the rest that had the letters and two digits the rookie at Northern had remembered from the gray sedan at the Paddock Club.

Cobby looked at it. "That's mine. You want to see it?" He motioned to the keys to the car and garage lying on top of the cash register. "Right up the alley, Garage No. Six."

"You keep the keys here?"

"Where else would I keep 'em?"

"Anyone else drive it?"

"I'm a philanthropist?" Cobby asked grinning. He hoped Alvin hadn't got into an accident and not told him. But he was not telling anything about Alvin. Not with what Alvin could tell about him.

"I keep her locked up except Sundays I spend with my mother down in the country, gettin' old now. Don't even look

at it any other time. One thing you can give these people around here . . . ignorant sure, but they ain't thieves or vandals. You're welcome to look, Officer."

The officer looked. The car was not a gray '57 sedan. It was cream-and-tan, modern and no sign of a paint job. He did not bother to see if there were any signs of the tags being removed.

He was taking the key out of the padlock when he looked up the alley and saw a friend of his come out of another of the garages with a short neat-looking man.

"Hi there, Mike, how's the old rat-catcher?" He waved to Mike Kulac and took the keys back to Cobby at the tavern.

Officer Kulac helped Alvin close the garage on the gray sedan without tags.

"I took 'em off," Alvin said. "They were last year's, but these hillbillies can't read and they'll steal you blind. I didn't have the dough for new ones this year. I'd have sold it but they kill you on a straight sale and next year maybe I can trade it in."

"You sure don't get much, sellin' outright," Kulac agreed. What interested him was the garage was real clean, no sign of rats or litter to bring them. The guy was nervous, but that was the way. The clean ones always were, it was the dirty ones didn't care.

"How many families you got living here?" He took out his notebook.

"Only ourselves, me and my sister and her husband. She and I own this house. And two across the street."

"And you can't dig up fifteen bucks for some tags?"

He stopped himself from grinning when he saw the man's face.

"We've had a . . . good deal of sickness," Alvin said stiffly.

"Me and my big mouth." Officer Kulac was sorry. Just when the guy was calming down, trying to cooperate, showing him the kitchen, clean as a pin, with all the food covered, he had to make a crack and upset him.

Then he saw the big rat in the trap under the sink.

"You got 'em too, though. Can I look in the cellar?"

"You can look if you like."

Alvin went to the door and switched on the cellar light, holding himself stiffly in control till Kulac got down there. Then he sagged against the door frame, his body starting to tremble, his side an agony. Why had he lied about owning the houses when he'd just said he didn't have money for the tags . . . when anybody could see they weren't poor, not poor like poor

people? *I shouldn't have let him in at all. I should have made him get a warrant. What if it's a blind and he's not a Sanitarian but a detective? What was the other one doing at Cobby's, looking at his car? Oh my God, what'll I do?—Sister! Oh, Sister!*

He heard himself actually calling her then and brought his hand up over his mouth, his eyes going desperately around the room, to the polished case in the open cupboard. His father had been a butcher and his sister had kept his favorite knives from the old country . . . one of them, the one he'd told her he'd broken, now upstairs hidden inside his mattress. He started across the room and stopped short. *Not the knife . . . there'd be blood.* Then a sudden stitch in his side almost doubled him up in an agony of fear as he remembered the license plates for his car right in plain sight upstairs on his desk. He shut his eyes and straightened up, breathing deeply and slowly to reduce tension, the way he'd been taught in his Judo lessons. He took a sudden fierce hold of himself then and when he heard Kulac coming he'd got out into the hall, standing by the front door ready to open it.

"That dark room's a honey, you a photographer?"

Alvin held on to the door knob, afraid he would faint. He'd forgotten the dark room. His voice sounded all right when he managed to speak.

"My brother-in-law. A hobby is all." He turned the lock to pull the door open. "You can see we're clean people, Officer."

"You are that," Mike Kulac said. "But you've got runs. A little kid was bit bad. I'll go upstairs while I'm here, if you don't mind."

Alvin's mind was suddenly clear, his hand on the door knob steady as iron.

*If you do you'll never come down alive.*

"I assure you we've never had any trouble upstairs."

"It's the fireplace flues that make the trouble, and I'd like to look at the roofs. But you can make me get a warrant, I got to act according to law. I'm not forcing you, mister."

Alvin kept his voice steady. "Why, Officer, you're welcome to go up." He managed his gait as he went on ahead. "What I meant was, the dark room downstairs is a hobby. My brother-in-law's a professional, but he does that work in his studio down-town."

"Look, mister." Mike Kulac grinned. "It's none of my business. Rats and rat runs, that's all I'm concerned with.—The name's Tibble?"

"That's right." At the landing Alvin said "These are my sister and brother-in-law's rooms. They're both at work. I'll be upstairs."

On the third floor he unlocked the door to the front room and took down the gray silk thread he kept stretched across to make sure neither his sister nor Ritter Meade snooped while he was away. In the bathroom he picked up the bottle of laurel leaf hair dye that made his hair black when he needed it that way and put it in the back of the medicine closet. He went on into his bedroom, quickly—*swift as a panther*—took the license tags off his desk and slipped them between the mattress and box springs. His hand moved for an instant over the gilded post of his bed, his magnificent bed, its brocaded canopy concealing from the outside the heavy mirror glass, its frame supported up there by the four carved golden posts. He'd bought it at an auction of the set of a costume movie laid in a Venetian palace—the Mater's palazzo—and in the orbit of the fantastic world his dreams had created he could lie in it and imagine himself the gaudiest of all the gaudy old dogs.

He turned then to the wall facing the bed, only a few feet from it. There was a solid wood double door there with curving bronze handles. His leg was shaking a little, his mouth dryer, as he heard Kulac on the floor below, opening and closing the closet doors. Then as he looked wildly around he saw the iron dumbbells on top of the bookcase full of strange titles. He slipped quickly across to it, picked one of them up, brought it back to the bed and slipped it under the brocade cushion at the foot.

So far he had never killed, with his own hands, but lately the taste had got stronger and stronger, the image of himself an imperative pushing him closer. He drew himself taut. There was no pleasure in killing this policeman and he was angry that it was being forced on him, but he'd do it if he opened the door with the bronze handles. It would be quite easy. The cop would know Judo too, he was big and he had a gun, but when he opened that closet door his back would be turned.

He heard Kulac in the hall below.

"All right to come up?"

"Sure, come ahead."

Alvin sat quietly at the foot of the bed, his hand near the cushion. He could look through the bathroom, full of lotions and washes, into the back room and hear Kulac as he started into it from the top of the stairs. Hear him come to a dead stop.

"Hey, you a gymnast or something? You got a deal here."

"I keep in shape," Alvin said easily. Then through the bathroom he saw Kulac at the window, bracing himself, leaning out, far out, to look up at the flat roof where nights you could hear the rats like armies, racing from one house to another. Alvin's eyes glittered, as bright as theirs. One swift blow and the body out the front window onto the pavement. Nobody could say the fall hadn't killed him. There needn't be any blood . . . inside the house.

Kulac came through the bathroom into the bedroom where Alvin was and stopped short, staring at the gold bed.

Alvin's face paled, his lips twisting with contempt. The low-grade Polish son of a bitch. He waited for another crack about the car plates. But Kulac said nothing. He went to the fireplace, not noticing the picture above it or the shape of the andirons when he bent down to look up the chimney. He went through his routine of wall-tapping and the pipes and flashed his light along the baseboard behind the books and on the bottom shelf. He straightened up then, looking around, and spotted the curved handles, in the wall at the foot of the bed. A few feet from Alvin.

"Is that a closet?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," Alvin said. "It isn't locked." His hand tightened on the iron weight under the cushion.

"Open it, please."

"Why don't you?"

Kulac stayed where he was, by the bookcase. "Because I don't get my kicks—" He changed whatever it was he was going to say. "—Out of prying into other people's stuff. Open it, please."

He waited, his flat Polish face impassive except for the white ridges along his jaws.

"It's just my collection," Alvin said, getting up. "I'm an artist. As you must see . . . if you can see. I'm a designer."

He went to the wall, drew the bronze handles apart with a showman's gesture and stepped aside.

"No rats can get in."

They couldn't. The closet was mirror-lined, including the doors, the shelves mirror glass bottom and top, each lighted, the lights going on as the doors swung apart.

"A designer of shoes. Custom made, for a few clients. Bespoke, as we say in England."

Mike Kulac saw shoes, one of a kind, each propped on a crystal bar, slippers and sandals, brocade and satin, red leather, gold and silver, some worn, some new. How many there were

he had no idea, the way the mirrors multiplied them so it seemed there were dozens, and the same with the brides smiling from the photographs propped up by some of them, handwritten cards in a silver clip by each one. That much he saw before Alvin swung the doors to, the lights going off as they closed.

Alvin turned from the doors. "My clients give them back, so I can use them as patterns. Anything else I can show you? The house is yours, sir. *La casa es sua*, as we say in Old Spain."

He bowed with a courtly gesture, his lips twitching as he went back to the bed, sitting again, his hand by the cushion.

"No," Kulac said. "That's enough. You'll get a report from the Department in a few days." He stayed by the bookcase, motioning him to the door. "Go ahead, will you?"

Alvin's eyes glittered. "Why should I?"

Kulac looked at him for an instant. "Because I think you're crazy. That make it clear?"

Alvin was trembling. "I'm going to report you! I know the law! If you saw a knife—" He caught himself quickly and smiled. Reggie Montgomery insolently smiling. "You're a Sanitarian, not a policeman. You'd have to see a felony being committed—"

"What's on your mind, buddy?" Officer Kulac said softly. "Just take it easy. It's like you say. My job's rats. Your taste in art, that bed and your books, they're none of my business. Just the same I'm going to tell you something. If I was you, Mac, I'd go to the head doctor before they came and got me.— Move it now, mister."

Outside in the street he looked back up the white marble row steps at the face pressed on the ruby and purple stained glass panel in the door.

*Mother of God . . .* He touched the medal he wore under his white shirt.

## CHAPTER 9

Driving Mary Melissa home from Headquarters Nat Ryan turned into the maze of winding wooded streets past the Paddock Club. She hadn't spoken since they'd left Trumper on the

third floor and he had taken the only route he knew without asking her, bringing her back from a far remote distance. As he came to the last traffic light she came back herself.

"I feel like a dog, but I just couldn't do it. I didn't know how awful it would be. I just don't blame people keeping their mouths shut."

*We could have told you, Archie and I.* He didn't say it.

"Besides Mother and Daddy, it'd be horrible for Archie too." Her jaw was set firmly. "A thousand times worse than just . . . postponing the wedding. Now people know it, some, anyway, but they can pretend they don't. If there was a trial—"

"Don't, sweetie. I know. It's bad for them, but you're the one matters. Just forget it."

He put his hand out on hers in its white glove, and kept it there motionless for an instant. The emerald-cut diamond she had worn was gone.

". . . I gave it back to him." She said it without looking up. "That's why he left us."

"I'm sorry," he said gently, and strangely he meant it.

"It wasn't my father. I did it myself."

"Not that old—"

"The 'pristine' business?" She finished it when he didn't. "No. I don't think so."

They were moving again, ahead of them the turn that would take them past the Chalmers' house.

"I love him. It isn't that. And I think he loves me. But he's got to decide. There must be some reason he's drunk all the time."

"He wasn't drinking last night."

She made a small wry sound. "A pretty tough price though." Then she said quickly, "I didn't mean that, it wasn't his fault. Anyway, that's that. We can begin over. He's a really sweet person."

"It'll work out," Nat said, strangely also hoping it would.

He saw her eyes slide sideways without her head moving then. They were coming to the Chalmers'.

"I ought to go and tell her, I suppose. But my liver's too white. The way she looks at me you'd think I was something Archie got at the dog pound. You can't blame him for drinking. So did his father. She'd drive a—"

"As I've said before—"

"I know, she was charming to you, you've told me. But at least she'll be decent to Mother again, now I've decided I can't . . . disgrace us. She and my uncle. But I'm just too . . .

beaten to try and face her now. I'd bust out and cry . . . and I'm not going to, or anyway she isn't going to see me. She's just *wicked*, really.—But charming, I know. You're just a sucker, even Archie's revolted."

They went down the Catherton Road hill. When they turned in there was a handsome new car in front of the porch.

"Go on up in back," Mary Melissa said quickly. "It's not the police and even if it was I don't want to see them. I've had enough. I'm going up the back stairs and rest for a while . . . before I see Mother.—A queer wedding day."

It was the only mention she'd made of what day it was or of the dream that had died.

But she saw her mother. When Nat stopped at the carriage house Mrs. Seaton in faded blue denim slacks that made her look younger than her daughter did at the moment got up from her knees where she was clipping the lemon thyme between the flagstones and came over to them.

"You have a visitor. In the library."

There must have been some form of communication not visible to Nat. Mary Melissa said, "—Oh no. I just can't."

"It's like nettles, sweet."

Mary Melissa closed her eyes, her hands dropping wearily at her sides. "Yes. I suppose so." She took a long deep breath and opened her eyes. "Show Nat the woods, or something, please, will you?"

"That tree I'd like down," Mrs. Seaton said. She looked at the two of them for an instant as if she hadn't seen them clearly before. "I don't see how I can help.—It ought to be simple. Come along, Nat."

She led him down the lane toward the woods.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Just Florence Chalmers."

"Oh my God, no . . ."

"Don't be profane, love. Putting things off just makes them harder."

She smiled at him. "Of course, I could have told Florence. Talbot called up to tell me they'd decided Mary Melissa couldn't be a witness. But I didn't know till I saw her that she'd decided it too. Men are such cowards when it comes to their women. You're glad too, aren't you. And Archie will be."

"Very," Nat said.

"But I probably would *not* have told her anyway. That's the trouble with women like Florence, they breed and foster malice. I enjoyed the idea of her stewing in there while I was out

here. Lemon thyme's fragrant. If I'd felt it was my duty to stay with her, I'd have told her, just to get rid of her. She's a damnable nuisance."

"Don't be profane." Nat grinned at her.

"Forty-four years is a long time to have known Florence." She wandered on under the dogwoods, a frail lovely woman. "You know the Old Man of the Sea? He must have had a mate . . . or how would you explain the genes surviving in her? There's the tree, love. Of course she has a way of defeating her own ends. Perhaps you and Archie could cut it down for me. Maybe the two of you could take it down tomorrow."

Across town Officer Kulac was in the kitchen at the Mecca. The Greek kept on talking, but Kulac wasn't listening. He was still in the shadow of the valley of death, not knowing it, only knowing there was something evil in that house.

*I ought to do something.* His conscience kept on telling him that. But he wasn't a censor of art or morals. There was nothing illegal about the golden bed or the books, the pictures and the andirons. More to the point, he was a Sanitarian in Baltimore City where the courts had cracked down in what had come to be known as the "rat cases," the Sanitarians told to mind their own business and leave number slips and the like to policemen with properly drawn warrants to search and to seize. He could hear his captain if he tried to tell him the guy was real sinister. That was the word he'd been hunting. Sinister.

*I must 'a' thought he was going to murder me or something.* He was under the Greek's sink when he said that half-aloud, and he stopped still for a moment. *No kidding, it's the truth.* But the captain would still think he had gone raving crazy. It occurred to him then that he could go off the record to see a friend in Homicide.

It wasn't till he got home and saw his shrimp net and minnow basket on the front fender, the rest of the car all packed, that he remembered coming up tomorrow were the four days' leave he'd accumulated and they were setting off right now to visit Rosie's sister over on the Eastern Shore. *We'll have to wait till morning.* Then the front door burst open and the four little Kulacs shot out like rockets, all shining clean, all yelling for him to hurry, even the baby trying to say "Hurry up Daddy," and there was Rosie too, all flushed, as excited as the rest, and the heart wasn't in him.

He did go and make a couple of calls as soon as he got out of the tub, but Dave Trumper wasn't home and he wasn't at the office. The oddball could wait, four days wouldn't hurt. Cross-

ing the Bay Bridge, the kids counting the sailboats like flocks of white swans on the blue waters of the Chesapeake, the row house near the Mecca got further away, remote and fantastic. Especially the oddball's trying to kill him. Officer Kulac grinned to himself. *I guess it's me needs the head doctor.* Before they got there the kids in the back seat and his conscience with them were all fast asleep.

Mary Melissa went through the kitchen and dining room quickly, not stopping till she got to the door she'd come through into the library—was it only last night?—to stop her father from giving Nat the same hell he'd been giving Archie. She stood there an instant to gather up her courage. Mrs. Chalmers always managed to make her feel awkward, unkempt and raw, a foible of her son's she put up with because of her family . . . even with her mother, its only odd skeleton; Mary Melissa always on the defensive, trying to pull the rags of her pride around her to cover herself from the blue X-ray gaze, the brows slightly arched, always amused. She held her breath, letting it go as she opened the door, the chilled air in the library chillier when she saw Mrs. Chalmers in the bow window, her lips tight, eyes fixed on the hall doorway. Mrs. Chalmers was not smiling.

"—Oh!" She turned sharply. "I didn't expect you so—" She had started to say "quickly when I saw you and Ryan drive in together." She caught herself, a surface smile forming, thin tissue of ice before it hardens to a crust.

Mary Melissa heard it as another of the back-handed rebukes, she hadn't stopped to comb her hair and wash off the grime from the police station . . . Mrs. Chalmers always immaculate, perfectly groomed, her electric blue linen dress without a crease, gloves white as snow.

"I'm sorry. I thought you were waiting—"

"I am, dear. May I sit down?"

It was the first time Mrs. Chalmers had ever had to be invited to sit at the Seatons'. Mary Melissa flushed. "I'm sorry . . . please."

"Thank you, dear." She sat down, elegant and charming, impermeable as the star sapphire on her finger.

"Mrs. Chalmers, I—"

"Let me, if you will, dear." Mrs. Chalmers's smile then was the last smile she would ever give Mary Melissa. "I want to tell you a wonderful idea. I was at a meeting this morning, the Garden Council, and I learned there's a new freighter. It island-hops through the Mediterranean and the Aegean to Istanbul.

There's a suite with two bedrooms and a sort of lanai on the sun deck. Now wait, dear, till I tell you. It sounds simply lovely. The suite's taken, but we can arrange it, for you and Archie. You can be married with just us here Wednesday afternoon. It'll give you time to . . . readjust, two weeks on the ocean and—"

"Mrs. Chalmers!" Mary Melissa took a step toward her. "I'm sorry, but I'm . . . not marrying Archie. We've—"

"Don't be absurd, dear." The smile was still there. "Archie's no prude, dear. Nor is he . . . inexperienced, I'm happy to say. You'll find him—"

"Oh, stop it! Oh, *please!*" Mary Melissa clenched her hands tight, her eyes closed for an instant.

"My dear child! Granted you've had an . . . unlovely experience . . . it isn't unique. You can't let it affect you—"

"—I'm sorry, Mrs. Chalmers." She steadied herself against the arm of the sofa. "I'm not marrying Archie. I've told him. He knows it. He understands—"

Mrs. Chalmers's smile had frozen slowly and vanished. "I doubt it. Archie's a fool. He's deceived still, at the moment, but I've told him plainly, at last. He's offended at me, of course, but he'll come to his senses."

Mary Melissa was looking at her blankly, bewildered and unwary.

"Mary Melissa—" Mrs. Chalmers paused. "I assure you, my child, Archie and your parents are the only people in town—except possibly the police, and they're known to be fools—who are deceived. Nobody else in this town is . . . and your own friends at the Paddock especially, my dear. They know what happened and who is responsible."

The girl standing there, not understanding, her eyes wide open, pale discs of flat silver, was frightened for an instant. There was something terrible in the impervious calm and ruthless perfection of the woman who had always pretended to accept her. *She's like the Medusa . . . or what Lot's wife saw when she turned back . . .* She knew Mrs. Chalmers had seen her shrink. She did not know she was taking it as a confession, a confirmation of what she already believed.

"My dear child," she said evenly, "I tried to believe you said it was a prowler to save Archie's feelings, knowing how fond he is of . . . the man. And at least the man had the decency—or was it the good sense—to get out of town. Was it you who brought him back?"

Staring at her, uncomprehending, Mary Melissa started to speak. But Mrs. Chalmers did not wait for an answer.

"I could have understood the whole thing more clearly." Her voice was deadly quiet. "If you wanted to marry him, as I take it you must still do in spite of what he's done to you—if that's it, you could have done it decently, child . . . but I'm not going to let you throw Archie over. Not at this date. You're not going to make comics out of *us*. And why in God's name you're going to the police, going on with this farce, this incredible pretence, I cannot conceive. Unless your . . . par-amour has another design, possibly financial, in sticking to Archie . . . ?"

Mary Melissa squeezed her eyes shut, shaking her head. "I . . . don't understand you, Mrs. Chalmers. What . . . are you saying? Who do you mean? I don't understand—"

Mrs. Chalmers did not answer for an instant, the curve of her lips not a smile. She said lightly, "Your mother can act stupid, it's becoming to her. It isn't to you, dear. It's a technique that requires a great deal of intelligence. Your mother's polished it for years. I haven't a doubt she's only pretending you've deceived her so your father won't open his eyes and kick Ryan—"

"Oh . . ." Mary Melissa let herself slowly down on the sofa. "You mean Nat Ryan—"

"Yes, my dear, I do indeed.—Who . . ."

"Then you're right, Mrs. Chalmers. I am stupid, very stupid."

"Very, my child. I shall go now."

She was at the hall door when Mary Melissa got to her feet again.

"Mrs. Chalmers!" It seemed to her now she was very cool, very rational, as she had seemed to herself the night by the wall with the rain pouring down on her. "Would you mind listening to me?"

Mrs. Chalmers stopped. It was a long moment before she turned. "I am listening."

"You're quite mistaken, Mrs. Chalmers. Archie understands why we are not getting married. I'd rather he'd tell you. And about Nat . . . Mrs. Chalmers, that's contemptible . . . horrible. Nobody could believe it."

"On the contrary." Mrs. Chalmers was in full control of herself, her voice even and deadly. "I told you I was at a Garden Council. There were thirty-two women there. They all believe it. It was being discussed when I arrived. I did not tell them. It was the reason for the offer of the suite on the freighter

. . . to quiet things down. Those women and their husbands are the social and business leaders of this town. As one of them said, 'How very fortunate he lives in the West . . . in job terms, I mean.' "

Their eyes held steadily a long instant. Mary Melissa said quietly, "That settles it, then, doesn't it?"

"Quite obviously, dear."

"Perhaps you still don't understand, Mrs. Chalmers. What I've been trying to tell you is that I told the police I wasn't going any further, I couldn't make charges and appear as a witness."

"I'm delighted to hear it—"

"—But now that's not true. Can't you see, when what you've just said to me is spread over town, that horrible lie . . . I have to go on? It'd be just filthy, if I didn't?"

Mrs. Chalmers seemed to grow larger, filling the doorway with sapphire ice, her voice when it came like the knife that had burned on Mary Melissa's bare arm. She raised her hand to rub it off again, not seeing Mrs. Chalmers any longer, just hearing her voice, deadly cold.

"I promise you, my dear, it'll be . . . filthier if you do. I give you fair warning. You drag my son's name in this kind of gutter, you'll regret it the rest of your life. You and this Ryan too. I'd advise you to consult him. He may be a scoundrel. He's not a fool."

Mary Melissa heard the door shut, a succession of doors, the library, the screen, the car . . . each sharper and more decisive, dissolving into the explosive sound of the car engine starting and the tires moving down the cobblestones.

She slipped off her shoes and sat there a long time. At last she got up and went to the telephone. She dialled Mulberry 5-1600.

"May I speak to Sergeant Trumper, in Homicide, please."

The dour grating voice sounded strange in her ears.

"Sergeant Trumper? This is Mary Melissa Seaton.—No, I'm all right. I've just changed my mind . . . about being a witness. I'm going to go through with it.—No, nothing's happened. No . . . he hasn't telephoned me. I'm perfectly all right. I just find there's . . . no choice. I have to go through with it. Yes, I'm sure. I'm very sure."

She was very sure as she sat down on the sofa to rest for a moment. When she woke her mother had put a wool coverlet over her and she'd slept through the shattered radiance of her lost bridal hours. She didn't tell her mother or father, least of

all Nat, why she had changed her mind. If Archie guessed it when he walked in the library, sniffed a little and said "My mother's been here?" he said nothing about it.

She was still sure when Trumper called her at six o'clock. Could she come to a line-up Monday morning at 10.00? The man whose photograph she'd tentatively picked out had been on parole for a month.

Archie and Nat spent the night there and Sunday they cut the tree down and sawed it up. It was as if the clock for the three of them had suddenly turned back to the old lighthearted days, Archie's not drinking adding a new carefree dimension. Trumper came out Sunday morning, worried about her, and found them working hard, four sweating beavers, including Talbot Seaton. Mary Melissa came over to him, laughing.

"I think it's Mother's therapy, it's a perfectly good tree. But it's working." She mopped her face off, grave then as she said, "I just changed my mind, Sergeant. There wasn't any reason. I'll be at the line-up, I'm perfectly sure."

Nat and Archie left at ten o'clock Sunday evening and she went to bed still sure, until half-past two that morning when the phone rang. She woke up and reached for it, thinking it was a friend calling her.

## CHAPTER 10

Dave Trumper was not sold on the gymnast-parolee whose photograph Mary Melissa had hesitated over, even though information had come in that he had had his teeth capped and was using hair dye. But he'd doubted her before and been wrong and just the fact that the man wasn't in prison on June 20th was enough, you couldn't take a chance. Then before the line-up set for Monday at 10.00 they had what looked like a real breakthrough.

The artist's drawing Mary Melissa had corrected had been printed and circulated to the stations Saturday afternoon. The call from Northeastern Sunday morning, an hour after Trumper left the Seatons' place, was one of those things you pray for.

"There's a post officer here, his name's Sykes, says he knows this guy, he's dead sure it's the same fellow. The man's name is

Bertram D. Smith and he's a clerk in a tea store out the York Road. He's not home now but the store manager's at the place working on his books. He's a good citizen, an old Iwo marine. Name's Gogan."

His name was Gogan and he had lived out Iwo Jima, but he was half-crying at the end of Trumper's interview with him. He handed the artist's drawing back. "Sure it looks like Bert, it's a dead ringer for him. Maybe the girl's been here and seen him. But he's not your man, Sergeant. That night he was right here for six hours, all through the storm. Eight-thirty to three-thirty A.M."

He took Trumper out to the stock room.

"The fire inspector made a complaint. Six of us worked here. Bert did the checking on every damn carton as we called 'em off. The inspector was here helping us and the night cops were in and out. There ain't a chance. We were yelling to him to hurry when he went to the can even. You can check me, I'll give you the names. Bert ain't home now, he had to go to the hospital."

Trumper listened philosophically as the breakthrough faded.

"All right," he said. "Let him off tomorrow for a couple of hours. We'll get him in the line-up so the girl can check this drawing."

"Look, for Crissake." That was when the Iwo Jima marine came close to crying. "The poor bastard's got troubles. He's got a sick wife, trying to pull through the baby born last week, and a kid in the hospital. A store's a sieve, you line him up because he looks like what some scared girl says was a raper and these dames are my customers'll swear he is one. I'll have to let him go and then what's he to do? You got any decency by God you use it. He's buying his house, you want him to lose it? You want all of 'em to starve?"

"We've got decency," Trumper said patiently. "We'll have to check it. You give me a list of the people here Thursday night. We won't let 'em know what we're inquiring for."

To make sure he did the inquiry himself, not thinking to tell Northeastern to warn Officer Sykes not to mention it to his wife. It being a Sunday, the town dwellers weren't home and those who lived in the country were home but the homes were the devil to find. But Gogan was right. When Trumper got back to his family all he had left was the parolee.

None of it would have mattered, probably, if he'd spent the day at home and his daughter had told him Mike Kulac had called. Monday at breakfast she had a breakthrough from the

day-dreaming she had swathed herself in for the cross-over to age fifteen, slowly driving Trumper and his doll crazy.

"Daddy, I forgot. Mike Kulac called, Saturday, I think."

"What did he want?" Her father grunted it with his mouth full.

"Daddy, your manners, they're ghoully. He didn't say, he had to take Rosie and the kids to her sister's. He sounded just ghoully. Daddy, can't we ever go any place? Here it's just *ghoully*."

Her father counted ten slowly and said, "Pretty soon, sugar."

As he kissed his doll good-bye at the door he said, "Probably Rosie's nagging hell out of Mike again. No future in the rats and toilet squad. Can't you get a new word for your daughter? I've had it. Rosie's gripes too."

"Don't be ghoully, dear."

He got on the bus grinning, no cloud in the sky, no ghouls to warn him that that Monday was going to be a day to remember, even the cat striped alley, not black, that streaked across in front of him by the wall of St. Vincent's when he got out on Fallsway.

He was running the line-up. By 9.30 they'd got him six men, as like the parolee as they could find in the lobby or off the street, doing obligatory citizens' duty for a small fee. He'd checked the line-up room, with an entrance to the platform from the Bureau of Identification and one for the witnesses through the Detective Division. Coming out of Detective along the hall to Homicide at 9.50 he passed the space in front of the elevators. It reminded him of the clean man and what Mary Melissa had said about a special kind of cleanliness her attacker had had.

"Where's the boy friend?"

"It's right sad." The detective in the Inquiries window grinned at him. "Today I got news, and today he don't come. We got his car, smashed up some in the front end. Want him for something?"

Trumper shook his head. "Just a brain wave. Thought I might use him in the line-up. Isn't important."

That was ten minutes to ten. Mary Melissa Seaton ought to be in the office by now. Ryan and Chalmers had got there early and he'd already seen them. If the tree had been Mrs. Seaton's therapy, it had certainly done something for them. He wasn't conscious of thinking it must have done the same for the girl until he got the cold jolt that stopped him dead center in the door to Homicide as he saw her.

*Good God, what's happened?* He stood staring. It was like seeing a corpse in the first stages of rigor that you'd seen laughing gaily a little before. She was rigid, stony cold white, her pale rose lipstick almost scarlet against the bloodless line drawn sharply around her mouth. Under the frames of her dark glasses he could see the deep violet shadows seeping down into her cheeks. He followed her glance, slow motion, over to her father. Talbot Seaton had had time to get used to it, but his face was like an old shoe pulled out of a mudhole. Ryan and Chalmers were standing there, motionless, stunned, as if they'd been hit over the head.

He went on into the room. "What's happened, Miss Seaton?" "Nothing."

Her mouth hardly moved but the word was distinct, as wooden as she was. He glanced at her father again. Seaton shook his head helplessly.

Captain Justice came briskly in, across from the iron stairs. "Sorry I'm late." He paused briefly to nod to all of them and went on to his door. "Excuse me a minute. Trump, can I see you?"

Inside he closed the door. "What in hell's happened? She looks like a zombie."

"She says nothing. I just got in. You better talk to her."

"Get her father in here."

Talbot Seaton didn't know. "She woke up this way. I haven't dared push her. Last night she was fine."

"The K-9s were out there. They said everything was quiet. Did she talk on the phone?"

Seaton shook his head. "It's right by my bed, I'd have waked it if it had rung. Her own phone's unlisted."

*Oh God, I slipped up.* Trumper looked over at the captain. "I'll get a check on it."

"Talk to her, Captain." Seaton's voice sounded as if his skull was a hollow. "We're desperate. I tried to get her not to come, but she insisted."

He might as well have talked to a zombie, or a mechanical doll. Nothing had happened, nothing was wrong, nobody had called her. She sat woodenly, not moving except for her eyes behind the dark glasses, shifting warily from side to side. *Like there's a snake here*, Trumper thought, and Justice put it in words.

"Is there something we've done, Miss Seaton?"

"—No, of course not." She said it quickly, but not quickly enough to cover the small pause.

"Well, you've never been to a line-up, I guess," Justice said casually. "Let me tell you how it works."

She seemed to relax. It didn't make any sense that Trumper could see.

"—You go ahead, Trump. It's getting late, let's get through with it. You got the list? How many on it?"

"Seven."

Trumper handed it to him, seeing the girl relaxed even more. The captain was taking his time, giving her a chance, reading through the list slowly.

"All right, go ahead." He handed it back and Trumper went out, fast so he wouldn't have to talk to Ryan and Chalmers. It was 10.27 then.

Outside the door in the hall the detective from Inquiries was waiting for him. "The boy friend's arrived. Want him, he's yours."

"Forget it. It's too late."

"He's mighty pretty this morning."

"Go to hell, will you?" Trumper managed a sour half-grin. He was sourer when he saw Judas Iscariot coming out of Detectives. They met in front of the elevator across from the vacant Inquiries window.

"Can I see you a minute, Trump? You're running the line-up, aren't you? Can I come to it?"

"They changed the rules on me?"

"I mean as a witness, not a reporter. You might have somebody I saw with those friends of mine."

Trumper hesitated. It could be. "Go ask the captain, he's the boss. I haven't got time."

On the bench five feet from them, his open newspaper up in front of him, Alvin felt his mouth dry as the dirt in a rat run. Thursday night, when he'd stopped the tall lank man outside Headquarters, to be sure he had a witness, he hadn't recognized him until after he'd got inside the building. He remembered him then, a friend of those other two, the boy who'd killed himself and the girl out at Mount Vale. He'd seen him around with them. For an instant, fear clutched at Alvin's heart, the fear that is an agony. *What if he saw me then? What if he remembers me now?* He felt the heavy sweat breaking out over his body. *Damn her . . . oh, damn her . . .* He was cursing the girl who'd told him the line-up would be at ten o'clock, when he'd called her at half-past two to tell her what he'd do if she kept on going to the police. His triumph at knowing what the stupid bastards were up to, the sense of power and gratified

malice he'd had sitting there right under their noses, had been so great he'd told her to go ahead, go on with the farce, he'd know what she did, he had an in, right there in the heart of Police Headquarters.

*What if she told them . . . ? Damn her, I'll fix her, by God. I'll do what I told her I'd do.*

A paroxysm of fury caught him from near-panic as the reporter moved down the hall with his ambling gait and the mean brown-faced bastard of a detective started on. He got to his feet, controlling his hip and his breathing. *She wouldn't dare tell them. She knows what I'll do if she opens her mouth. I told her and she knows I mean it.* But he'd have to give up the pleasure of seeing her now. *The panther's smart, he can wait.* All he'd planned to do was see her come out of the line-up room so he could tell her that night when he called her again.

He went over to the elevator. The brass pointer showed him it had stopped at the fourth floor on its way down. In just a few seconds . . .

At 10.38 Captain Justice came into the line-up room and sat down by Trumper in the front tier of seats, leaving a vacant place between them.

"They're here, you ready?" He leaned over, holding his hand in front of his mouth. "I don't get it, any of it," he said under his breath. "That girl's scared to death. She says she made a mistake when she called you Saturday. She'll do this and that's all, she's through. But I've got a feeling she'll just be going through motions, somehow she *knows* the fellow won't be up there.—Let's get on with it."

He looked up at the platform where the lights shone down on the row of men there behind the copper mesh screen. "I thought you had seven."

"I put one more on. Number Eight. She kept talking about the man being clean and I thought of this fella been waiting at Inquiries. He don't look so clean now, I scared the hell out of him picking him up just when he was getting in the elevator. He's still sweating."

"All right. Get them started."

Trumper signalled to the officer at the door. The first witnesses were Talbot Seaton and Chalmers, Seaton wholly negative. Archie Chalmers remembered he'd seen the photograph of Number Three, the parolee, in Homicide, and recognized no one else. He followed Seaton to the rear corner of the darkened room. The third witness was John Isham, who crossed the room to where Justice and Trumper were sitting and stood there, his

eyes moving slowly from man to man, resting intently on each face.

Looking up at the line in the glare of the lights, Dave Trumper shifted uneasily in his chair. Was it the dead silence that was making them nervous up there? He knew fear is implicit wherever the police are, secret guilt of some kind a burden to every man. But there was something queer, abnormal, in the room, a sharp rising of tension. He could feel it stiffening the hairs at the back of his neck and looking at Justice he saw him alerted, feeling it too. It was in each of the men on the platform, standing there stiff and taut. Even the parolee, an old hand at line-ups, had quit grinning and glanced nervously at the men to his right and left, his face twitching.

*Somebody's scared.* It was as if Trumper could smell it, like an animal effluence, see it in the perspiration that was only partly from the lights beating down on them and the summer heat of the room.

Isham's eyes moved back to the left and went again from man to man, slowly scanning every face. He turned to Trumper then, shaking his head.

"Sorry. I've seen Number Three in police court." That was the parolee. "Number Five I know. He's a tout for a bail bondsman I used in a story last month and he's probably in the numbers. He hates my guts. And Number Eight, that little creep on the end. I seem to have seen him some place." He shook his head. "But I never saw any of 'em back there."

Trumper did a thing then that any police bible would have told him was a deadly sin or that he could have written for a police bible himself.

"You talked to Number Eight out front, Thursday night. Around eight o'clock."

Isham thought an instant and nodded. "That's right. Somebody stole his car."

"He's been hanging around ever since."

"I guess that's it then. Sorry. Very sorry." He went on to join the others.

Something flickered for an instant in Trumper's mind, something about his seeing the two meet there, that night he had the inside duty. But he heard Nat Ryan coming in, the slight limp identifying him before he looked around, as easily as the slouching lope did Isham, and whatever it was he'd noticed, looking down from the third floor, flickered away. For an instant something else stirred in its place. Did the tension slacken when Isham went on to the rear corner? Was he the cause of it?

Anyone on the platform could have identified him by his gait as easily as Trumper did. But Ryan was coming in then and he turned to look at him in the glow from the screened platform. The hairs prickled again on his neck. He'd seen murder on faces in that room before, and he saw it now, the cold quiet kind that scared him.

Nat Ryan's eyes raked across the eight figures up on the platform, scalded with a hatred he hadn't known he could feel. Whatever had happened to Mary Melissa had happened at her home, after he and Archie had left last night, some time before morning when her father had first seen her. It meant Trumper was right, there was no safety for her as long as the man was free . . . not even when she was guarded as she had been then, with the K-9 team on the grounds.

When he had looked at each face he went back over them again, as Isham had done. None of them meant anything. Number Three was grinning again, an old hand hamming it up. That didn't make him the man they wanted. He shook his head at Trumper. But as he started back toward the others an after-image of the brightly-lighted line bloomed on his retina, one face up there standing out sharp and distinct. It was as if a film had unrolled, showing him a picture so simple and normal he'd forgotten it entirely. He went on without stopping. *Maybe that's the whole point. Maybe that's what they're doing. They've got him there to see if we know him . . .*

He sat down next to Archie and turned to look up at the face of the man at the right-hand end. What his mind had seen was the short neatly dressed man as he'd seen him out at the Seatons'. He seemed to remember him as taller, but there wasn't any doubt. It was the same man. He'd been there on Wednesday, the day Archie had started drinking at breakfast, not at lunch.

His eyes bored through the darkness. What was it Isham had said? *Don't figure 'em dumb, kids, they're smarter'n hell.* He wondered for an instant if he ought to go back and tell Trumper. But Trumper must know who the man was or he wouldn't have him up there. And all Nat Ryan could do was tell him he'd seen him. He didn't know there was anything wrong with him. Mary Melissa would know that, and Captain Justice was at the door then, the officer opening it, to let her in.

He felt a touch on his arm then. Archie was leaning toward him, his mouth at his ear.

"Watch Number Eight," he said under his breath. "That bow tie, and that chin . . . he's the guy kept racing the lights on me all the way home, Saturday noon."

Ryan nodded. That probably settled it. "He was at the Sea-tons' Wednesday." He felt a slow, colder anger as his memory flashed more of the events of the day into focus. "My God, I even helped him get his stuff out of his car."

*Yesterday if we'd known it . . .* Today was too late. He heard the door shut. She was in there.

Hearing the door shut and the tap of Mary Melissa's heels as Captain Justice led her over to the chair between them, Trumper felt again the electric tightening of tension, not only in the corner behind him but on the platform, the eight men there frozen like statues. It was more than the quickened pulse of a line-up that always happened when the sound of high heels told men that a woman was in the room. This was a return of the fear nearing panic he'd sensed when Isham was there, and for an instant he felt a tenseness himself, a chill along his spine.

*Maybe we've still got something. Maybe by God we have.*

Then the quality of her steps underlined what Justice had said. They were taut but alive, not the steps of a zombie, and when she sat down between the two of them he didn't have to look at her to know that the paralyzing fear she'd had in the office was gone. It was more than Justice had said, that she'd just be going through motions, she knew the man wouldn't be in the line-up. She knew, somehow, there was no danger to her in this room. *Like here it's a haven, she's perfectly safe.* She'd taken off her dark glasses and as Trumper looked at her then her eyes seemed black, not gray, her face taut but not frozen white as it had been, her hands holding her bag normally. Whatever had turned her into a zombie wasn't in the room and wasn't on the platform and she knew it wouldn't be.

As her eyes met his he saw she knew she'd given it away, had let him see clearly that she knew that. He saw her throat move, her hands tightening on her bag, before she could make herself raise her face and look up at the yellow glare of the narrow stage with eight motionless figures staring straight ahead. Unconsciously his own eyes moved up to the platform. If they had not, he might have seen where hers were focussed, what spot they froze on. He looked back at her almost instantly but too late. In that instant she had frozen again, motionless, her face white, eyes staring blindly ahead of her, a pillar of salt in the form of a girl. Her bag slipped from her hands, in the intense silence its thud on the floor like the crash of a cannon.

For an instant as galvanic as that room with its history of

triumph and heartbreak had ever known, Trumper's heart beat faster. *My God, he is up there. My God, we've got him . . .*

"Which one is it?" He saw her sway then and put his hand out quickly, catching her arm. She jerked it away as if his hand had burned her. "Don't touch me!" It was a whisper of revulsion that only he heard. Then her voice, high-pitched, wet taffeta tearing, ripped through the room humming like a high tension wire.

"Not any of them! He isn't there!—Daddy, where are you . . . I want to go home!"

It was like a sonic shock, her voice breaking through the barrier. In the long instant of stunned silence, as Trumper felt suddenly there was nothing where his stomach had been, he heard John Isham.

"Oh my God, what's she done!"

Talbot Seaton coming quickly from the corner put his arms around the girl as she ran wildly to him. Captain Justice bent down and picked up her bag.

"Get those men off there. Hold them till I come."

The officer on the platform was herding the eight men through into the Bureau of Identification. Trumper waited till the door to the platform was unlocked. Up there he looked back, saw Justice going out with Mary Melissa and her father ahead of him, started on and stopped, looking back again, his face darkening. But Ryan and Chalmers were sitting in the corner, alone, talking in low tones. He hesitated an instant and went on. His concern was with the eight men. One of them was the rapist. Which one . . . and what could he do about it? That was his problem, and the officer at the B of I, waiting to lock the door behind him, stated it sardonically.

"You expecting a confession out of that bunch? You can't beat it out of 'em and how long do you think you can hold 'em?"

Trumper didn't answer. They couldn't beat it out of them and they probably couldn't hold them longer than it took to make sure the addresses they'd given weren't phoney.

All eight would be gone quick, the mad dog with the rest. They'd still get him . . . if they were lucky. What he could do to the Seaton girl in the meantime . . . Trumper thought of the girl at Mount Vale, feeling the cold prickle along his spine, sick for a moment. *And what good'll it do to get him now she's quit cold on us?* Without Mary Melissa as witness they couldn't prosecute.

And even if she changed her mind again, Judas Iscariot's low

cry "My God, what's she done?" rang in his ears. He knew too well what that meant. Inside, in the Bureau of Identification, the parolee, an old-time do-it-yourself, guardhouse lawyer, was telling it to the others. "None of you guys has to worry, she said it ain't any of us."

## CHAPTER 11

Chalmers and Ryan stopped at the door. To their left along the hall Captain Justice was taking Mary Melissa and Talbot Seaton through the platform door and the back elevator down to the basement garage.

"How long can you hold them?" Ryan asked the officer at the door. He nodded at the line-up men going into the B of I.

The officer shrugged. "One of 'em's in the numbers. Their lawyer's here already, right out there waiting."

"Thanks."

They stopped at the Bad Checks desk in the hall. "May I see your phone book?" he asked the girl there. "Yellow, if you've got one?"

"Sure, here it is."

They took it to the window. Nat turned to the "P's." Archie Chalmers put his finger on an advertisement. They gave the book back to the girl and took the iron steps down.

"Let's catch a cab," Nat said. "Your car's too easy to follow down here."

"The damned dirty little . . . fiend," Archie said tightly.

"It's got to be him.—Let's keep walking till we can get a cab. I don't trust Trumper."

They turned the corner of the building and set out to the right on Fayette Street.

Archie looked over at him suddenly. "Blake vs. State, 157 Maryland 1929. Wigmore on Evidence. You remember it?"

"Not by name."

"Right here in Headquarters, 1928. A rape, and this girl was in there looking at photos. She didn't pick the man out. Then she and two detectives walked down that hall and she saw the man who'd attacked her right there. Right in their laps. Like this little swine. You remember it."

"Yes." Ryan's face twisted. "And you remember why Wigmore has it? The detectives were ruled out of court at the trial. Their evidence was hearsay."

"That's not our problem. Here's a cab."

They gave the driver an address on Cathedral Street and got out on the corner. Archie pointed to a brownstone house three doors ahead. "That's it. Second floor."

"Take it easy," Nat said. They went up the stairs. There was a door with a card that said "Ring, please, and enter."

They went into a small elegant salon with French gray panelled walls, an antique mirror over a carved mantel, two chairs, a pair of Directoire sofas in pearly-pink satin. There was a Directoire table used for a desk with a crystal vase of wilted pink roses on it. In silver frames on the mantel and tables were a half-dozen portraits of brides.

"One second please." A man's voice called from inside. In a moment he came in, a dog-faced man with lively brown eyes that caught the dead roses.

He shook his head. "Sixes and sevens around here today," he said, smiling at them. "My wife's the receptionist and she's gone to Washington. I just got in from New York this morning."

"You're Mr. Meade, aren't you?"

"Ritter Meade. What can I do?"

He looked smilingly from one to the other.

"I'm Archibald Chalmers."

The dog-face fell, the happy eyes clouded.

"Oh, my God, I'm sorry!" he said softly. "I just can't tell you, Mr. Chalmers.—I've kept the proofs, I didn't think—"

"It isn't the proofs, Mr. Meade," Nat Ryan said. "When you were taking the pictures at Miss Seaton's on Wednesday you had a man with you. Short, wearing a red cap—"

"That's Alvin. Alvin Tibble. He's my wife's brother. Sometimes she makes me take—"

Ritter Meade came to a slow stop, his Gothic dog-face beginning to change.

"—What do you . . . what do you want with him?" His voice sounded strangely hollow.

"We'd just like his address. We'd like to see him." Archie said it quietly.

It was very strange then. It seemed to Nat it was like watching a house being demolished. One moment the façade hangs intact, and gives then, slowly at first, and collapses into a pile of still moving rubble.

"Oh my God, no . . ." Ritter Meade breathed the words

hardly voiced. He put his hand to the table like a man drunk or crippled or relearning to walk, supported himself by the back of a chair until he got to the sofa and let himself slowly down. "Oh my God, no."

That was strange too. He did not look as if he was sitting there crying but as if he was sitting there alone with the rain pouring down his face.

". . . I knew it. I must have, I've been so afraid."

His big gentle hands were slack on the pink satin.

"—I've told her he's a psycho.—His bed . . . the girls' shoes . . . They were my customers, they weren't the kind to give him those . . . I told her he was stealing them. I knew it would lead to . . . something horrible. She wouldn't believe me."

He looked up at them, eyes unseeing. "I knew the beer was doped, Thursday night. He'd brought it before and I thought the same thing then. And his clothes in the washer . . . Oh my God help us."

He sat staring blindly as they waited. After a long moment he reached slowly into his back pocket and brought out a key ring. He took one key off.

"I'll put this here." He laid it down on the salver on the coffee table. There were some cards on it. "Take one of them, the address is on it. I . . . couldn't ever do anything about him because of my wife. It would be like killing her. You can't understand. But I . . . I won't try to stop you."

The dark eyes were full of pain, searching their faces. "You're going to kill him, aren't you. If I had my camera that's what it would say."

He pushed the salver toward them and got slowly to his feet.

"I'll go away. I've been away since Friday. We had another big row, about him. I wanted to find out if the beer had been doped. I took the pitcher back to the tavern. But my wife—. It doesn't matter. I'll just keep going. I've got connections in Caracas. I won't be here to testify against . . . him, or you. I can't hurt my wife, I love her."

His eyes moved around the room and back to them.

"My God, I see . . . so many things now. He's a . . . a monster, a monster. But I always knew she was safe, I didn't have to worry about her, even if he did hate her. She had the money. If she died he'd lose it, she was safe.—I'll let her know, maybe some day she'll want me back. Please go now."

He took a step to the table and picked up the crystal bowl

full of dead roses. They were just outside the door when they heard it crash into the mirror over the mantel.

They stopped for an instant. "That's crazy, isn't it?" Nat asked quietly.

Chalmers shook his head. "No. 'I loved this business, I loved you people, you've always been good to me. Now it's all . . . fouled with his filth. I don't want any of this, don't want anything left of it. Please go now.'"

On the stairs they heard another crash. "Let's let him alone, he'll feel better."

Nat stopped at the front door. "You've got the gun."

"That's right. I got it at home yesterday noon. That's what I was going out for when he raced me."

Nat held out his hand. "I'll take it."

"Why?"

Their eyes held steadily.

"Because it was you he was looking at when he said what his camera would say. I don't want you to go berserk. He might not be the right . . . monster. I want to hear from him first. If he is, you can have it!"

"All right." Archie handed the gun to him. "But I'm doing the shooting, don't forget that. I've already told you I'd rather do it alone."

"You've told me." Ryan checked the safety and slipped the gun into his pocket. "I want to see this bed and those girls' shoes first."

"All right. Let's get there." Archie looked at the card with the address and slipped it into his pocket with the key. "We haven't got much time. They can't hold them long."

*Each man is an island.* Dave Trumper was thinking he'd heard that somewhere as the Bureau of Identification detective unlocked the grilled door to let Captain Justice in. He went on out, turning to cast a grim look at the eight islands waiting inside there, each keeping to himself, frightened and suspicious, the clean man near the door more of an island than any. He heard the door being locked then as he went along and Justice's quiet voice: "I'm sorry, you men, but we'll have to ask you to cooperate here—"

By the elevators Trumper saw the gifted mouthpiece nobody had ever legally proved was a henchman of the big time gambling rackets, turned abruptly to avoid a run-in with him and saw the man at the other end of the hall, waiting there outside the Homicide door.

*Oh no. Not now, for God's sake.*

He groaned inwardly as he saw the green slacks and the pink shirt spotted with yellow canoes, the poor guy inside them as unhappy as he'd ever seen anybody, real ghoully. Ordinarily it might have meant something. Even if he'd wanted to Trumper didn't have time now to stop and listen to Mike Kulac's problems. He went on, not intending even to say Hello. But the poor guy looked so embarrassed he did say "Hi, fella, how's it with you?" as he put his hand on the door.

Mike Kulac's embarrassment was real. He was a patrolman, low man in a rigid caste system. He'd stuck his neck out, bypassing his own sergeant and captain. Headquarters was high ground where sat the mighty. He would have been deeply embarrassed even in uniform and he was conscious of the clothes he'd come in, not stopping to change. He flushed painfully.

"My conscience hurts, I guess," he said. "You got half a minute to help me out, Dave?"

*He breaks my damn heart, Dave Trumper thought. What's a friend for, in the name of the Lord.* He put his hand on Kulac's shoulder.

"Sure, Mike. Make it three-quarters, that I can spare."

They went in the Homicide room. "Lieutenant Hulan, this is Officer Kulac. He's toilet brigade. We'll just be a second." He opened the door of the captain's office. "Come on in, Mike. What's on your mind?"

He was around the captain's desk, his hand on the phone, just going to say "Wait a minute first" and put in a call to start a check on Chalmers's sports car.

"Have you got a psycho in your files, Dave, that's crazy about shoes? Ladies' slippers, I mean? This fella I ran across collects 'em, one of a kind. He—"

Trumper's hand had frozen on the phone. He started to speak and stopped and his voice when it came sounded as if from far off.

"—What's that you say?"

Mike Kulac flushed a darker red. "I guess it don't matter. But this creep I ran into, his name's Tibble—"

He stopped as he saw the look on Trumper's face.

"—Alvin Tibble?" Justice had the line-up list but Trumper remembered the eighth man whose name he'd written on it. "Short kind of fella, real clean?"

Kulac was nodding. "Yeah—"

"One second, Mike." Trumper went to the door. "Hulan—go get the Captain, quick, tell him to come in here right away. You

stay there, watch them. Keep a special eye on the short fella standing by the door. Hurry, man."

He turned back. "Just hold on a minute, Mike, I want the Captain to hear you."

He stood leaning against the door frame for an instant. *I could 'a' cried*, he'd tell his doll when he got home that night. *I kept touching the wall, the telephone, the fern pot, to see if I was dreaming it.* A cold shiver ran up and down his spine.—*What if I'd said beat it, Mike, I'm too busy, some other time, Mike?*

He heard quick steps in the hall and Justice's thick-set body came into view, his blue eyes sharp and snapping.

"We've got him, Captain." He could feel the dark flush of his face under the lined tobacco-brown surface and his voice was more grating than usual. "—Officer Kulac, Sanitarian. He's come across a psycho collects ladies' slippers, his name's Alvin Tibble—and that's the last man I picked for the line-up, the short man—"

Justice stared at them for a split second and swung around, Trumper with him as he went quickly back along the hall. Behind them Mike Kulac was just saying "You want to watch out for him, he's a gymnast, he's up on Judo" when they heard the crash and the shouting in the Bureau of Identification. Real pandemonium, John Isham would have called it if he had been there. But the gambler's lawyer was the only outsider to burst into the inner room off the hall behind Trumper and Justice with Kulac in his beach costume, to come to a stop at the locked grill, nobody inside with time enough on his hands at the moment to unlock it. Two of the line-up men picked for citizens' duty lay on the floor and a B of I detective had been smashed into a corner, on top of him the camera and stand they used for mugging. Another was doubled up gasping against the wall. Across from them Lieutenant Hulan, his shirt ripped off, was holding a writhing, lashing Tibble pinned to the wall with his left hand, trying to take something out of his mouth with his right, the blood streaming down his right arm. For one staggered instant Trumper, standing there helpless, saw Tibble's face, eyes glaring, except for the bushy hair the exact and dramatic image of Mary Melissa Seaton's drawing before she had changed it. Then above the shouting inside and Captain Justice shouting to them to unlock the door Trumper could hear the scream of the rackets lawyer behind him as his client, the line-up man who was in the numbers, grabbed a gun from the detective collapsed against the right wall.

*"No! They'll fry you!"*

His voice rose to a piercing scream and cut off abruptly when his client brought the gun down not on the law but on the back of Tibble's head. As he dropped it on the floor by the detective they got the door unlocked and carried Tibble back to a cell. Hulan stood dazed in the little room, looking down at the blood flowing from his hand. It was closed in a fist. His fingers opened slowly, in his hand a bloody wad.

He looked around at Justice. "He was trying to swallow it . . . I told you there was this Sanitarian, and when you went out he says, Is it all right for me to get my lawyer's phone number I've got on a letter in my pocket? And I says, Sure, mister, and he gets his wallet out and in a jiffy he's got this paper. One of the detectives grabs it from him and he starts fighting and gets it back, and then he's got it wadded up and in his mouth."

"I'll take it," Justice said. "You get that hand fixed up, you're losing too much blood." He took the wadded paper and turned to the rackets lawyer. "Go on home, will you, your boy gets a medal."

Back in the office with a man from the Crime Lab. down to help they smoothed the wad out.

The Lab. man whistled softly. Captain Justice and Trumper looked at each other, faces impassive. Inside, Trumper's heart glowed.

It was a piece of stylish gray note paper. At the top was embossed "Ritter Meade, Portraits." At the left hand corner in hand writing was the word "Continued," below it a list of seven girls' names. Three were crossed out in red ink, beside them in red ink dates had been entered. The last one crossed out was Mary Melissa Seaton's and the red-inked date was Thursday June 20th. Below hers were four names, not crossed out or dated.

They looked down at it silently for an instant.

Trumper was remembering the rapist they'd had who'd tried to bribe his cellmate to break his arm so he could claim brutality. He had a list too, of children, eleven and twelve.

"—Makes you sick, doesn't it."

Justice put his finger down at the word "Continued."

"That's what gets you," he said quietly. His finger moved to the two names above Mary Melissa's. "How many others never told us about it? You can bet those two won't open their mouths."

He handed the paper to the technician and turned to Kulac. "Let's hear your story, Officer."

They listened silently, neither he nor Trumper saying what was the grimmer thing in their minds. *Okay, we've got him. Who's going to charge him?* Not the first two, and not the Seaton girl.

"And here was this closet, all full of shoes, like a showcase, all lights and mirrors—"

"Hold on a minute." Justice turned to the Crime Lab. technician. "Go get that red sandal you've got belongs to the girl at Mount Vale. Bring Miss Seaton's slipper too."

He turned back. "Go on, Officer."

Mike Kulac's flat Polack face was getting red toward the end. "He scared hell out of me, sitting there on the bed, that nasty grin on his face. Then it just came to me this morning, when I was out fishing. The ten-pound dumbbell I saw on the bookcase. There was a shelf of 'em out in his gym the other side of the bathroom, with an empty space for another pair, and on the bookcase was just the one. I'll bet he had the mate under the cushion on the bed right by his hand. If I'd turned my back to him opening that closet—"

The technician brought in a worn red sandal. The satin slipper he had with it was sparkling white.

Kulac nodded. "He had a red one, all right. There were two or three like that other."

Justice got up. "Let's all go have a look. Wrap these up and bring 'em along. If we get the mates to 'em, we've got him without Miss Seaton. Get with it, Trump. See Tibble's cleaned up enough to go with us. See he's handcuffed and get a couple of Judo men to bring him." He called out into the corner room. "One of you fellows get Northeastern, tell 'em to watch that house tight. Two good-looking young fellows turn up, arrest 'em!"

Trumper had forgotten Chalmers and Ryan for the moment, but he was not likely to forget them again for some time. Alvin Tibble had recovered and was in control of himself, the raving and cursing over, quietly contemptuous, nastily offensive. He refused to clean up till he had seen his lawyer.

"What's the idea, Tibble? You playing for time?"

Alvin smiled. There was no need of his telling them he was waiting till his sister got back from Washington to see him covered with blood, maybe in time to see him handcuffed to brutes twice his size. That was all he needed. He was calm now, pleased with himself, except for the pain where one of the dirty bastards had knocked him out. He was the panther and he'd showed

them. Of course it was a mistake, the word "Sanitarian" had panicked him. But he knew the girl wouldn't charge him.

In a way he was sorry about that. It would have been his big chance, what he'd wanted behind all those chances he'd taken, and not only since Thursday when he'd been sitting in their laps without their even knowing anything had happened. The girls always kept quiet. He wanted the big chance . . . to show them in a courtroom who was the smartest.

As they got out of the police car a uniformed officer strolled by in front of the house, said "No visitors" and moved on. Justice and Trumper went up the steps ahead of Tibble handcuffed between the Judo experts. When they got to the door Trumper came to a stop, pointing to the gleaming brass mounting of the bell button set in the marble frame. It had been polished so often the letters of the name carved in it were hardly legible.

Trumper read it aloud. "Thibault." He turned to Alvin. "Edward A. Thibault. Eight years ago you were a shoe clerk."

The sneer deepened on Tibble's lips. "So clever, aren't you? It was legally changed so you couldn't keep me from getting a job—if I'd happened to want one. The lock's tricky, I'll take the keys."

Inside, the two who were waiting, Chalmers leaning against the newel post at the foot of the stairs, Nat Ryan, the gun in his hand, in the door at the left leading to the stuffy front parlor, had exchanged a glance and straightened up, hearing the key in the lock, not being able to see through the narrow ruby and purple glass panel that Tibble was not alone.

The door opened a little.

"La casa es sua," Alvin Tibble said. He flung it open with a courtly gesture. "—As we say in old Spai—"

The "n" of the Spain was the first sound of a scream, high-pitched and piercing. Dave Trumper pushed past Captain Justice and took two quick steps in front of Tibble as he cowered, his face white, the handcuffs holding him to the detective behind him all that kept him from grovelling on the threshold.

Justice went over to Nat. "Give me that thing. You crazy damned fools. You're under arrest for breaking and entering."

Ryan gave him the gun. "Entering, Captain. No breaking. We've got a key."

"Where'd you get it? Give it to me."

Archie Chalmers handed it over. "I don't recall where we did get it, Captain.—It's lucky Ryan made me give him the

gun. I'd have shot . . . and probably killed you, Sergeant Trumper. But we'll get this white-faced obscenity. He'll be a hell of a lot bloodier than you people have made him."

Justice motioned to the Northeastern officer who'd followed them inside. "Stay here with these two. Lead the way, Kulac."

They went up the stairs, Tibble recovering a part of his air of old Spain.

"Here's his gymnasium." Kulac pointed through the bathroom to the door of the back room. "That's where his show is." Seeing the door there wide open, Trumper felt a warning before Kulac came to a dead stop.

"—It's gone. The bed's gone."

Alvin smiled, as Reggie Montgomery would smile. "What's gone, may I ask, Officer?" he inquired politely. "I don't understand you. That's a bed. Just there."

Kulac's face was a dark savage red.

"That's okay, Mike." Trumper went forward quickly. "Take it easy."

There was a studio couch in the room, mattress on springs, with a white spread. There were no books or bookcases, no paintings, no signs of where any had been, roller marks showing where a hurried job of yellow paint had been put on the walls. On one wall was a mirror with a yellow-painted wood frame. It could at one time have been at the top of a bed. Now it was behind a pine chest of drawers.

"Is that the shoe closet?"

Captain Justice pointed to a door with a brown crockery handle. Trumper looked around at Tibble, still smiling. The wooden door was the only thing in the room that was as Kulac had described it. He went to it and pulled it open. No lights came on to light mirrored shelves. There were no shoes, no portraits of brides, nothing but some clothes on hangers on a rod, the walls painted yellow like the walls of the room.

Justice turned slowly. "Where are they, Tibble? Where are the shoes?"

"What shoes?" He smiled at Kulac. "I think you're crazy, that make it clear?"

"Get him out," Justice said quietly. "Take him back. Charge him with assaulting an officer and language. Kulac, you go with 'em till he's in the car. Tell Chalmers and Ryan they can go for the present. We'll see them tomorrow. Then you come back here and help the Crime Lab. take this place apart, cellar to roof."

Alvin smiled still, his eyes glittering. "—You haven't got a

charge against me. Even if you had shoes—and you'll never get 'em—who's going to charge me? I know my rights. Don't make me laugh, you dumb, stupid—"

"Get him out."

Justice, Trumper and the man from the Crime Lab. were left, standing there in a harsh silence. Trumper nodded slowly as they heard the front door shut. "It's what they say, it's the truth hurts you.—Who is going to charge him?"

The Commissioner himself was repeating it in the corner room at Headquarters at the ragged end of a strained day. He and the Chief, the Inspector, the Captains of Detectives, Bureau of Identification, and the Crime Lab. had all come on their own to see what went on. Captain Justice, Sergeant Trumper and Lieutenant Hulan might have been flattered, if they had an answer.

"I talked to Seaton," the Commissioner went on. "He won't let us try to get the girl to charge him. He's afraid she'll crack up."

"Do you know these girls, sir?"

Justice handed him a copy of the names on the paper taken from Tibble. "The two at the top are the important ones. These people are all Ritter Meade customers. We found the place there all smashed up and a sign 'Gone Out Of Business' over a file. If one of these girls—"

As the Commissioner looked at the list he shook his head.

"My wife and I went to the wedding of this one, just before Christmas. Do you know who she married?"

None of them did. They were not Society.

"Elliott Flarington."

They knew him. The Governor's Committee on the Police and Port of Baltimore City.

The Commissioner shook his head slowly. "Flarington has a strong sense of his position next to the Cherubim. Her family was on the rocks, he was manna from heaven. Much older than she is. You can be sure she never told him. Put her on the stand and she'll lie herself black in the face. She's no use whatever . . . and neither is this other girl. She's married too and she's having a bad time, an alcoholic, I hear. There's no use at all approaching either of them."

"We'll never bother them," the Inspector said quietly. "—I don't blame Seaton, or the girl. Or the two boys, for that matter . . . We have no prosecuting witness and that house of the

fellow's cleaned out. No shoes, no bed, no nothing. If I was the Seatons—"

The telephone rang.

"Excuse me," Justice said. He reached for it. "Justice, Homicide.—Sergeant Trumper? Well . . ." He hesitated, looking at the high command sitting around him, started to say "He's busy right now," and changed his mind. "Just a minute."

He covered the phone. "A lady for you, Trump. Take it inside."

Trumper went into the small office and closed the door. He picked the phone up. "Trumper."

It was a lady, and a real one. The voice was gently vague.

"Sergeant Trumper . . . I wanted to tell you. This is Melissa Seaton.—Mary Melissa's mother?"

"Yes, Mrs. Seaton." Trumper came near to holding his breath.

"I think that after what happened this afternoon, it was rather awful, I'm very sure Mary Melissa won't make any problem. I think she sees she hasn't a choice, really. She knows she can't let that . . . creature go free. It's so very dangerous. I'm sure she knows that."

Trumper started to speak, and stopped.

"I know it's . . . hard for her. It makes my heart ache. But I'm sure hers would ache worse, in the long run . . . if she didn't bring this man into court. So, do you think you . . . I know it's a bother, and I suppose you're very busy—"

Trumper found his voice. "No, ma'am. We . . . it's no bother at all."

"Then . . . she seems to like you, she doesn't seem to think you're as . . . I suppose carnivorous isn't a nice word, but something of the sort. Anyway, if you and the Captain, to make it impressive, and Lieutenant Hulan, he's very sweet, would all come and talk to her, you could just settle it now. But I know you're—"

"No, ma'am. We . . . we wouldn't mind at all. When can we come?"

"As soon as you can. And don't tell her I called, I don't want her to feel I'm like Mrs. Chalmers. Thank you, Sergeant Trumper."

He put the phone down and stood there for an instant before he went back in the Homicide room and told them.

"I expect she couldn't let the two boys commit murder for her," the Commissioner said. "The rape would have to come out at their trial, she'd have to defend them."

Trumper remembered his saying that, later, and wondered why they'd all taken it for granted that that was what Mrs. Seaton was talking about. Even he had thought so, knowing her well enough to know better.

They were too thankful to ask questions when they talked to Mary Melissa Seaton, and around eight o'clock they were back to enter her charge against Alvin Tibble for rape. Tibble's sister Mrs. Meade was there, in a bitter frenzy, with a lawyer friend of her husband's. Trumper got home at 1.30, tired to the bone.

"I'm sorry for that damn woman," he told his doll in the kitchen. "She hasn't got one doubt we're framing the guy. She thinks her husband tipped us off on account of he hates Brother and we sent Kulac there to spy for us. When she saw him he still had the blood dried on his neck and the lump on his head and you could 'a' heard her across Fallsway.—You just start praying nothing goes wrong. I'm always scared."

"That's occupational," his doll said.

In the Chief Magistrate's Court below the Press Room at ten o'clock the next morning he stood close to Mary Melissa Seaton to shield her, not from Tibble, handcuffed for safety, but from Mrs. Meade, frightening in her bitterness. The radio announced on the 10.30 news that a prima facie case had been established and sent to the Grand Jury.

## CHAPTER 12

The State of Maryland vs. Alvin Tibble opened in Part VIII of the Criminal Court of Baltimore City the last Monday in August, Judge Jonas Hartigan presiding: in charge of the prosecution Alexander Dobson, Deputy State's Attorney; for the Defendant, Enoch Chew.

Sitting in the front bench of the center section Nat Ryan remembered what he'd heard about Chew, from people who admitted he was the State of Maryland's top trial lawyer but claimed he was half conger eel, half cobra and had sold out badly in taking this case. What Nat saw was a large handsome man in his late fifties with a comfortable paunch and a grizzling mane, impressively benign and as benevolently paternal as an

old St. Bernard, his presence and his rich deep voice making Alec Dobson look pallid and sound reedy.

It was Dave Trumper who'd told them in early July that Chew was defending. He'd left it to Talbot Seaton to tell them the rest of it, that it was Mrs. Chalmers who had got him to do it and was paying his fee. To Archie it had been like the pole-ax blow that hit Nat Ryan the day it finally got through to him that Mrs. Chalmers was accusing him of attacking Mary Melissa. After his first blinding rage had subsided he'd remembered the times he'd told Mary Melissa "She's been charming to me," and he was remembering it now, grimly sardonic, until he looked over at the State's table and saw her, her dark head bent down, her body a frail arc shrinking under the pitiless stares from the packed benches, his heart twisted in a deeper and tenderer love that had grown during a summer haunted by the spectre of the trial ahead of them, tormented with guilt and with the angry futility he couldn't get over. *If only I hadn't let her go in alone. If only we'd killed that little gray-green obscenity . . .*

Sitting there in the Courtroom listening to the two lawyers pick out a jury, he felt the bitterness of the summer turned into a kind of nostalgia, in the knowledge that when the trial was over it was the end of the road. He and Archie might go on, working together on a plan Archie had, but it would be without Mary Melissa. Her parents were taking her abroad and she was going to an art school in Rome for a year and maybe more. The only amusing thing that had happened to them during the summer was Trumper's bleak warning that Chew had a private detective out raking over Nat Ryan's past. The frightening thing that had got more frightening as the summer went on was the shadow of the girl at Mount Vale that they saw in Mary Melissa's shrinking away from any man's touch. She wouldn't go dancing or swimming. "I feel naked enough when I've got my clothes on."

They'd thought she was getting over that and getting more used to the spectre of the trial when a blasted fool of a kid in his first year of law school got her the transcript of another rape trial.

"Man, it's a honey," he'd said cheerfully. "She'll see what one's like." It was a honey, and she'd hardly been able to choke food down for a week. Looking at her now Nat knew it was part of her agony there in front of the benches, in a taut quivering knot, the flesh around her nostrils sickish green.

*The poor little devil, she's scared out of her wits.*

The summer night that was most vivid in his mind was an evening at the end of July that started at the Seatons'.

"The trouble with you, Archie," Mary Melissa had said, "—I mean why you got so stinking—is you didn't want to get married at all. You're not a monk but you're a born bachelor who forgot for a minute. Maybe it was . . . lucky."

When Archie said "Oh for God's sake" and barged off into the woods she'd gone on calmly. "It's true. With his mother why shouldn't he be scared of all women?—I'm scared of men. It's different, but it's the same thing. It makes the idea of marriage just . . . horrible."

That night when they'd got back to Farthingale Alley Archie poured them a nightcap and sat not drinking his.

"Moment of truth, Nat," he said, as sober as he'd been stone-drunk when he said it the May night in the Tower at Law School. "I guess she's right. It sounds corny, but I'm back to the things I dreamed about, once. My mother ribbed the hell out of me. 'Bless me, Dr. Schweitzer'. She told the kids and the teachers and I nearly died. That's when I started to be a real stinker. But Mary Melissa . . . I don't know when it dawned on me it was you she was in love with. Not till I got home and you weren't around. She didn't know it and I couldn't tell her. I didn't know till Mother started in that you were in love with her. Then, I didn't have the guts to do anything about it. So I've made a rotten mess, and now it's too late. It wouldn't do any good to tell her now it was you all the time. Maybe a shock—"

"If she has another shock with the trial she'll be in Mount Vale." Ryan could hear himself saying it harshly. "You're wrong anyway. All I've ever been is an adjunct to you."

"You let her think that, Nat. You shouldn't have been so decent." Archie got up. "Funny . . . I have a feeling we've said this before. I hope I'm not getting some glimmer of recall. I'd feel worse than I do . . . or hate the hell out of you."

At the end of the second day of Maryland vs. Tibble the jury was picked, with only time left for the opening statements, Alec Dobson's for the State was made quietly until the end: "The attack on this girl was not any sudden overpowering impulse of lust or desire. It was wickedly and carefully planned and plotted in the mind of a fiend. The State asks the death penalty, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury, for the safety of the young women who live and work in this city."

Ryan sat tensely through Enoch Chew's moving account of Tibble's unhappy insignificant life, waiting for him to open Mrs.

Chalmers's attack on him and Mary Melissa as conspirators to deceive Archie. But it never came.

"—Why didn't this child," he asked, turning gravely to Mary Melissa, "recognize Alvin Tibble if he was the man who so brutally attacked her? She had seen him many times, as you will be shown. She had seen him for two hours in her own house on Wednesday June the 19th when he was helping Ritter Meade who was taking her photographs. Why, at the police line-up on Monday the 24th, did she say 'The man is not there'? The State has told us she was frightened. Frightened of what? He was locked in. She was surrounded by officers who were armed. Why did she wait until the detectives from the Homicide Squad came out to her house *after* he was arrested?

"The State has told you Alvin Tibble when he was arrested attempted to swallow a paper, an infamous memorandum kept by a monster, they would have you believe, because this girl's name was written down on it, crossed out and dated. It was indeed . . . along with the names of other Ritter Meade customers. The dates are the dates when those customers requested to have their proofs ready. The names were crossed out when the proofs were in fact ready. It was that simple, my friends . . . and another young woman whose name is on that list will come here as a witness to testify. I greatly doubt if even the State will have the gross, unbelievable effrontery to suggest she was raped. That contention is monstrous, my friends. Alvin Tibble was trying to protect the family business. He could see with bitter clarity how infamous an interpretation would be placed on that list with Miss Seaton's name on it. Alvin Tibble, Ladies and Gentlemen, was at home and in his bed when this girl was attacked.—This girl is mistaken."

Outside in the hall at the adjournment Nat met Trumper. His face seemed browner and meaner than usual.

"You notice Tibble? You see he's lost a good twenty pounds?"

Ryan had noticed him, thin, even hollow-cheeked.

"They don't starve 'em in the Jail. I'm beginning to figure he's done it on purpose."

Nat walked along with him toward Headquarters.

"I guess I haven't told you this. When he first went to jail this cellmate he has tells one of our boys he's talking real cocky, they couldn't convict him, he 'had an ace he was keeping up his sleeve' till he could play it big. He was bragging about the big lawyer he could have been if he'd had his rights. When his sister got Chew in he carried on like a fool, said Chew was cutting him out of the limelight. Just now back there when Chew

was talking about him so tragic, I see him turn around and wink at his sister, like he's saying 'Watch me, I'm a smart fella.' "

"Maybe that's why Chew went so easy on Mary Melissa."

"You don't know Chew," Trumper said morosely. "He starts out this gentle, it means he's got something to clobber you with good, and don't you forget it. You and Chalmers thought it was funny when I told you he'd got this private detective—"

"We didn't think it was funny. I just said my sins weren't the gaudy variety he could do a lot with."

Trumper's smile was bleak. "I hope you're right. The fella he's using 's a scavenger goes in for divorce stuff. You been in a back alley he's the boy'll know it. Dobson thinks Mrs. Chalmers's 'heart' has changed. If it had Chew would 'a bowed out mighty quick. This is the first rape case he's ever taken and he's got to win it or he'll look like a slob."

Ryan remembered that the next morning. They got through the medical witnesses with no questions from Enoch Chew, only a profound and compassionate sympathy. He listened in the same manner to Lieutenant Hulan's account of going to the Seatons' and finding the girl in the sodden stained dress that was put into evidence. Women in the benches were crying when he told about her mother kneeling beside her. *It's all over now, baby, it can't hurt you any more.* When the State wanted to break Hulan off then and have him come later to describe Tibble's arrest, Chew objected at once.

"Let this witness be exhausted and return to his duties. I'm sure so capable an officer is needed, your Honor, in our crime-ridden city."

The reason was clear on cross-examination. He asked only one question about the night at the Seatons'.

"You say she was in shock and it was you who had to say, 'My God, you've been attacked.' But she had said there was a prowler outside. Unless she had reason for concealing it from her parents, couldn't she as easily have said, 'There's a rapist, I was attacked, and I saw him clearly?'"

Without waiting for Dobson's objection his whole manner changed.

"But strike that, please. Lieutenant, let's go on now to this battle you've told us about to prevent Tibble's destroying the list of the Ritter Meade customers.—Or holocaust, I may say. You're what, Lieutenant . . . six feet five? Six? And you weigh in at how much, Lieutenant? Two hundred fifty? Sixty? And the Defendant Alvin Tibble is five feet eight and one-half inches and weighs one hundred and fifty-two pounds. Do you

mind stepping down here, Lieutenant, and standing beside him?"

From there on it was a farce, a sweaty Goliath and a hollow-cheeked David, all tears forgotten, the sympathy all Tibble's, the list ridiculous, the memorandum of a monster brushed off with contempt.

"—Even the date that is written beside this young woman's name," Chew said scornfully. "June 20th, Lieutenant. You've read the Indictment. The date given in it is June 21st. Is this monster so inaccurate, or is the State unable to read?"

"Objection, your Honor—"

It seemed to Nat Ryan that it was then, in the argument whether Friday morning at 1:40 o'clock was Thursday night, that it stopped being a trial and became a beachhead, fought inch by inch, most of it out of earshot, in conferences at the beach or in chambers, Judge Hartigan then announcing his monotonous rulings. It took them six days for the technical and police evidence that would ordinarily have taken three. As Dave Trumper surveyed the wreckage, all he could see at the end was Ryan's hand prints on the gray sedan and the cast of the shoe print the Crime Lab. had taken out at the Seatons'. The Davey Tree man was not allowed to bring in the perch in the old locust. The white slipper Mrs. Seaton could not find was too tenuous to get in and in the hardest blow of all Officer Mike Kulac was allowed only to testify that he had seen the gray sedan in Tibble's garage, and that only for the limited purpose of showing a false self-exculpatory statement. It did not go to any weight of evidence that Tibble's car was the car in the Paddock Club or that if it was Tibble was the driver. Kulac was not allowed to mention the bedroom on the third floor . . . the gold bed or the books, the hairdye in the back of the bathroom shelf, the art, the shoe closet with the shoes and the brides' photographs propped up by them.

At the end of the sixth day, with Nat Ryan to come on the first thing in the morning, they had only his hand prints on the side of the car admitted to be Tibble's and the cast of the footprint the Crime Lab. had taken by the dirt pile by the Seatons' drive. *Thank God we've got them*, Dave Trumper thought grimly as he stood while Judge Hartigan went out. Then his eyes, on Mrs. Meade as she went to kiss her brother before the guard led him out, sharpened suddenly and he stood back to one side out of the crowd of spectators, still watching them. When Mrs. Meade hurried out into the hall he followed her, his eyes on her until she went into the ladies' room. Across the hall he saw Sam Riggins, Chew's assistant, leaning against the wall, wait-

ing for her. Trumper swung around, went back into the Courtroom and found Dobson.

"I think Tibble's playing that ace I told you about. When his sister was kissing him he slipped her a note. She went out walking on air. Chew was watching them like he thought something was up and he had Sam Riggin out waiting for her in the hall. Chew went out with Tibble."

Dobson frowned, glancing at Chew's briefcase and papers still on his table.

"I'll bet you Tibble's pulling a fast one."

Dobson shook his head. "We've got Ryan's hand prints on the car. Not even Chew can get around them. Ryan's up tomorrow. It's too late for a switch—even for Chew."

There was a call from Northeastern that afternoon, a man sent home from work with a headache who found his common law wife entertaining a friend and got out his shotgun. Trumper didn't get back to court. It was four o'clock when he got away from the blood-spattered apartment, the reek of it still with him when he went down York road to his car. A basket of golden greengages in front of a store looked clean and sweet after the mess, an antidote he needed, and he went in to get some to take to his doll. His mind was still back with the poor devil sobbing his heart out for a no-good woman, and he didn't see the man standing by the window, or notice the store was the one he'd been to back in June, where there was a clerk named Bertram Smith who'd been turned in by the cop at Northeastern. He didn't notice it until he found himself suddenly blocked inside the door.

"He ain't here."

Trumper didn't bridge the gap for a second.

"—I'm Gogan, remember? I manage the joint."

The ex-Marine's jaw was set and his eyes hard.

"It's like I told you. Somebody spilled it you thought he might be a raper. I couldn't help him."

"Where did he go?"

Trumper meant it just as a civil question. That wasn't the way Gogan heard it.

"If you weren't an officer," he said softly, "by God I'd—"

"Mr. Gogan," Trumper said. "—I came in to get a few of those plums. I'm not—"

"Yeah? Okay, take 'em and get out." He waved a hairy hand toward the evening papers in the rack. "'Rape Trial Opens. Police on the Stand.' And you want some plums. I don't laugh easy. —Look. I told you, he ain't here. He's left this town, he's out of

the state. He's not coming back. He's got a wife and kids to support and keep his name decent. He'll pay his debts when he gets him some money. Why can't you people quit houndin' him? I want to vomit."

There were greengages at the next store, but Trumper didn't get any. *The poor devil*, he thought. He remembered the new baby, the sick wife, the kid in the hospital. Then something struck him. *Who's hounding the fella?* It stuck in his mind as he drove back to Headquarters. Something else came back to it the next morning. "It's too late for a switch—even for Chew." *Not for Chew . . . maybe too late for Tibble.* He thought that sardonically as he saw Mrs. Meade come into the courtroom. She was in the same seat across the rail from the Defence table. Her dark glasses did not cover her haggard cheeks or the tear-furrows with powder caked on them. Her nostrils were pinched and her scarlet lipstick was like a paper cutout, no relation to the flesh around it. He felt a twinge of pity in spite of his relief. *The poor damn dame, she looks as if she's about had it.*

"What's with Sam Riffin?"

Trumper glanced around at John Isham. He'd already noticed that Chew's assistant had on City clothes in place of his usual rumpled seersuckers and a travelling bag by his chair with his hat and folded raincoat on top of it. He shook his head, watching the door from the detention room. When Chew came in he had an arrogant tilt to his head that disappeared in an instant as he came casually to his table. He opened his briefcase, then turned and went to Mrs. Meade, sitting beside her and talking a moment. She seemed to be protesting, but when he went back to the table she got up and went blindly out of the room.

*Doesn't want the Jury to see she's caved in.*

Trumper turned then at the sudden flurry of excitement in the benches, necks craning around to see Ryan and Chalmers coming in, and almost at once a second flurry indicated that Mary Melissa and her father had come in. She had on dark glasses and a grey cotton dress with three-quarters sleeves, her white cotton gloves pulled up to meet them, a turned-over white collar close to her throat, the only woman in the room who wasn't sleeveless and low-necked for the late summer heat. She came quickly down the aisle and stopped at the front bench.

"It makes me sick, Nat," she whispered. "You must . . . despise me."

"Nuts, girl . . . relax."

Trumper watched her go on, taut as a high wire, to the State's table to slip into the chair Dobson held for her, shrinking from

the eyes furtive and bold that crawled over her like hungry ants over spilled sugar. Then abruptly people scrambled to their feet, taking their seats again as Judge Hartigan repeated his injunction that no expression of approval or disapproval was permitted and Alec Dobson's dry voice said "Nathaniel J. Ryan." He moved forward when Nat had taken the oath.

"Mr. Ryan . . . you are a close friend of Mary Melissa Seaton and Archibald Chalmers, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"You came to Baltimore Tuesday afternoon, June the 18th. For what purpose?"

"I was to be Mr. Chalmers's best man at their wedding on Saturday, June 22nd."

"On Wednesday the 19th, what did you do?"

"I went to the Seatons' with Mr. Chalmers and was there while Miss Seaton was having some photographs taken."

"Taken by Ritter Meade, the photographer and the brother-in-law of the accused, Alvin Tibble. Was he alone?"

"Your Honor." Chew rose deliberately. "It's no secret that Alvin Tibble was there. Why all this cautious, or is it crafty, approach to a—"

"Your Honor, distinguished counsel for the Defence has expressed pained and incredulous surprise that the prosecuting witness Mary Melissa Seaton did not at once recognize the accused—"

"You may go on, Mr. Dobson."

"Will you describe the Defendant, Mr. Ryan, as you saw him Wednesday, June the 19th?"

"He had on Bermuda shorts, bright yellow, with yellow stockings and a white Cuban shirt with a spotted bow tie and a fireman's red cap—"

Chew was on his feet. "Your Honor, the Defendant has no pretensions to be an Ivy League dresser—"

"Sit down, Mr. Chew," Judge Hartigan said.

"—A red cap with an extra long visor, and a beard, a beatnik deal, auburn, like his hair now."

"So that this disguise—"

"Objection!"

"Your Honor, the State holds that the accused Alvin Tibble did deliberately, with intensive forethought, make use of disguise so that this girl would *not* easily recognize him. Sergeant Trumper has testified to seeing him the very next evening, Thursday, just before eight o'clock when he reported his car stolen, without any beard, with black hair with a wide light-

colored part, and to seeing him again the next afternoon, Friday, when his hair was cut close. He *was* disguised."

"Overruled, Mr. Chew."

"What else was different about him, Mr. Ryan?"

"His height. He—"

"Objection. There is no evidence at all that Alvin Tibble ever owned a pair of the elevator shoes that the police have pretended their crystal ball can detect in the foot print they found . . . which, if it is Tibble's, was made on Wednesday the 19th, when he was there helping Ritter Meade. This is simply a reckless attempt to make Alvin Tibble conform to the description this girl gave of her attacker, a limping man of approximately five feet eleven inches."

Judge Hartigan frowned, hesitating. "Sustained, Mr. Chew."

"Mr. Ryan." Dobson paused. "Let's straighten this matter out, if we may. How tall are you?"

"Five feet eleven, sir."

"At the end of May you had a motor accident in which you broke a bone in your right foot. When you came here were you limping?"

"I was, sir."

"In case the suggestion is made, or it is implied, that you are the limping man that Miss Seaton was describing—and forgive me for asking this—did you attack Miss Seaton?"

"No, I did not."

"Thank you, Mr. Ryan. The question is shameful . . . and if any such suggestion should be made, in the future, it is deliberately, maliciously, false, is it not, Mr. Ryan?"

"It is false, Mr. Dobson. I wouldn't know what its motive would be."

His flattened gray eyes met Enoch Chew's steadily for a moment.

"And now, Mr. Ryan, let us continue. You went with Mr. Chalmers and Miss Seaton to the dance in their honor at the Paddock Club on Thursday night. Being lame, you were not dancing. Were you drinking, Mr. Ryan?"

"Tonic water without gin, sir."

"So your mind was quite clear?"

*Not so clear as you'd think, sir.* The knife in the belly, the ache in the throat, the hand moving out to touch her feet there beside him . . . *I too, young madam, I too am flesh.* It all flooded back, so sharp and poignant that he had to swallow the salt swell in his throat. *My God I'd forgot.* For an instant of frightening clarity he could see how he'd unconsciously blinded

himself to that . . . and to what else? How many other blocks had he built up, how many other things forgotten?

"—Your mind was quite clear?" Dobson was repeating the question with an edge in his voice.

"Yes, sir, it was."

"But Mr. Chalmers was drinking."

"Yes." Out of the corner of his eye he could see Archie beginning to grin a little.

"Would you say he was drunk?"

Nat Ryan grinned too. "He was drunk as a skunk, sir."

A breeze of surprised laughter swept over the Courtroom. Judge Hartigan smiled faintly.

Dobson did not. "This is serious, Mr. Ryan."

"I'm sorry, sir."

He caught a glimpse of Mary Melissa, her head bent. She wouldn't understand at first that Archie's grin had taken all the strain off what he—and she later—would have to be saying about finding him in the car. She was still sick with embarrassment at the question direct that Dobson had put to Ryan, even knowing it would be asked at some point and with the typed pages of the transcript of the other trial swimming sickeningly in her mind.

She sat there blindly, hardly hearing Alec Dobson take Nat through the rest of it, hoping Chew would finish his cross in time for him to get Mary Melissa on the stand for a few minutes, to leave her the overnight image in the minds of the Jury. But again he had not figured on the beachhead tactics. It was three o'clock before he got Nat to the point he would gladly have avoided. *We're stuck with it, best meet it head on.*

"And now, Mr. Ryan. After this line-up, where Miss Seaton was frozen with fear—like a zombie, the Headquarters officers have called her—you and Mr. Chalmers went to Ritter Meade's studio. As he is in Venezuela and distinguished counsel for the Defence has suggested you and Mr. Chalmers drove him insane with the threat to his business, you are not permitted to say, in his absence, what he told you. But you can say what he did. He gave you a key. To whose house, Mr. Ryan?"

"To the Defendant Tibble's."

"Did you go there, and for what purpose?"

"We went there. To give him a chance if he could any way show us he was innocent. If not, to kill him."

Judge Hartigan after a swift startled look rapped down his gavel to cut off the gasp that came from the benches.

"This girl had been brutally and criminally attacked. Even though you were a student of the law, your mind—"

"—No, sir. There was nothing wrong with my mind. I was fully aware of the nature of the act and its consequences to me. I had no intention of evading arrest or pretending insanity. I'm not doing it now. My negligence was responsible for what happened to Miss Seaton."

"But you realize now—"

"I realize we looked like a couple of fools. I only regret it didn't succeed."

Dobson turned a shade grayer. Judge Hartigan's gavel silenced everyone except a woman whose cry of "Good!" was clearly audible. An attendant hurried to her, a tiny old woman, and led her out, not stopping her from turning back and shouting "Good for you, son!"

"Is that man in this room? If so will you point him out, please?"

Ryan's eyes flattened as he pointed to Tibble, gray-green in his chair at the Defence table.

"Thank you, Mr. Ryan." He nodded to Chew.

## CHAPTER 13

"Let's skip these heroics, Mr. Ryan." Chew turned to the Jury. "Or is this an attempted whitewash, a callous condoning of a criminal attempt, painting as chivalry what was in fact another move to dupe Chalmers, as drunk as a skunk, to keep him from learning his best friend had betrayed him?"

Nat Ryan tried to relax. *Here it comes. Keep your head.*

"—His best friend has just told us plainly, Ladies and Gentlemen, that he was responsible for what happened to this girl . . . and we shall see that *that is the truth.*"

He turned to Nat.

"You are under oath, are you not, Mr. Ryan?"

"Yes, I am."

"Let's get some facts, then. How long, Mr. Ryan, had you wanted this girl?"

"I don't understand you, I'm afraid, Mr. Chew."

"—Objection, your Honor. The question is not only offensive, it is irrelevant, immaterial—"

"On the contrary! It is not only material, it is the whole fabric out of which this monstrous farce has been woven. We can see this is a man with a man's passions . . . will he dare to tell us his love for this girl is a pure love that transcends all desire? He may not have envied his friend Chalmers his great wealth or his brilliance, his social position and arrogant good looks.—But he did envy him this girl. He understands perfectly what I mean when—"

"Overruled, Mr. Dobson."

Chew paused a long moment. "But I have no intention of being offensive. If this witness will say, under oath, that he never was in love with this girl and is not now in love with her, I will excuse him at once. I will gladly sit down without asking him one more question. On your oath, Mr. Ryan—"

"The question remains offensive, Mr. Chew."

"The truth often is. But I will put the question in another way. What was the date of the motor car accident the State has brought up and so easily dismissed? Wasn't it the night that you got this telegram?"

He took a yellow form out of his pocket. "Allow me to read it. It says: 'Dearest Nat, Archie's going to ask you to be our best man. Please, Nat, if you possibly can. For me. And to ward off the virus attacks. Love, Mary Melissa.'—Wasn't that message received the same night you had the accident, Mr. Ryan?"

The scavenger had raked well. In his peripheral vision Nat could see Archie's set face. There wasn't much doubt he'd get total recall now.—*Or hate the hell out of you.*

"It was the same night, sir."

"When you weren't even planning to come to the wedding? You were trying to fade out of the picture entirely, were you not, Mr. Ryan?"

Nat could feel his face burning, "I was going home, sir."

"—Mr. Ryan, believe me . . . there's no one of us here whose heart could withstand the truth you are trying—and failing—to hide. That accident after you had got this wire . . . was it a death wish, the subconscious desire to—"

"I'm not a psychiatrist, Mr. Chew. And that night I *was* drinking."

"And I must suggest, Mr. Ryan, you were drinking the night of the Paddock Club dance. Not tonic water. Vodka, Mr. Ryan. And before you deny it, let me tell you that witnesses will come

forward here to say your empty vodka bottles were found hidden at the Chalmers home, and another witness will tell us he saw you drinking the evening of Friday June the 21st, after your strange return from the strange trip you made to Washington, D.C."

Chew went to his table and picked up a card. "Let's get some more of the facts, Mr. Ryan. This is the official police description of Miss Seaton's assailant sent out by Police Headquarters.—Five feet eleven inches in height, lame in the right foot, build slender but muscular . . . which God knows is not true of the man you have accused. There is also an entry here 'Bushy black hair,' with a question mark after it. Did the police know then that that was fraudulent, thrown in to deceive them? The witness who saw you drinking that evening had already identified you, Mr. Ryan, by this description, and phoned in to Headquarters. But by this time you had in some strange way become an Untouchable. He was told to lay off you by officers who had not so much as seen you. This witness was a detective—and I say 'was' because he has since been hounded out of the Force because he was doing his duty in watching you. And he saw you drinking, Mr. Ryan."

Judge Hartigan's glances at Dobson had become sharper until he got to his feet. "The State hasn't objected, your Honor. We are happy for the Jury to see the lengths the Defence must go to, to attack an honorable young man whose scorn is so clearly written on his face."

"And will this honorable young man look scornful when ex-Detective Klingan says he took a bottle out of his pocket when he got into his car after he came out of the Seatons' house?—You hadn't known, Mr. Ryan, when you went in whether the girl had told her parents and Chalmers the truth, had you? And you needed a slug, Mr. Ryan . . . or will you say the colorless liquid in that bottle was water?"

Nat Ryan had remembered. In Archie's summer record of not drinking that bottle had been forgotten, in Archie's record of unwavering faith in Ryan that night's suspicion shamefully small-minded.

"It was vodka, Mr. Chew."

"And do you deny that you drank it?"

"I won't deny it."

"—Oh for God's sake!"

Judge Hartigan's gavel came down. "There are no privileged persons in this Courtroom, Mr. Chalmers. Proceed, Mr. Chew."

Off to one side of the room Dave Trumper, the slow burn of

anger inside him, looked over at Klingan in a back bench on Chew's side, in what was apparently one of Chew's cast-off suits, his beery face pious. *You dirty traitor, you low-down son of a bitch.* He felt a sudden chill pricking at his mind, eluding him. Something Klingan had told him.

"It was vodka, Mr. Ryan. Now let us go on to the only evidence whatsoever the police have brought in that could suggest the Defendant Alvin Tibble was not—as he says and as his sister Mrs. Ritter Meade will confirm—at home and in his bed when this girl was attacked. Look at the chart there on the stand by the Jury. Those are enlarged pictures of your hand prints on the side of the Defendant's gray sedan, are they not? Now, Mr. Ryan, you remembered, in great detail, Alvin Tibble's non-Ivy League clothes. Do you remember yourself saying, 'Want some help, Mac?'"

For an instant Nat Ryan did not. Then another picture of himself at the Seatons', lost in the shambles that had followed, flashed into his mind. Archie stone-stiff out on the terrace in back of the house, under the old locust.

"Wednesday, June 19th, Mr. Ryan. You were there, at the Seaton place. Alvin Tibble was there, helping his brother-in-law Ritter Meade. You left Mr. Seaton and Mr. Chalmers together on the terrace and limped over to the gray sedan at the side door where Alvin Tibble was getting the photographic equipment out of the back seat. You said to him, 'Want some help, Mac?'—I see you do remember it. Now, do you recall putting both hands on the side of the car, leaning in, saying 'Pass it out to me?'"

*My God, it was the gray sedan. I wasn't being helpful, I was just getting out of the way. Seaton wouldn't talk to Archie with me there, I was a stranger and his guest.*

"I don't recall leaning on the car."

"The cobblestones were uneven, you had a lame foot. Can you definitely say you did not brace yourself as automatically on the side of the car there as you say you did at the Paddock Club? Tibble was at the Seatons'. His car—the car shown in those pictures—was there. Can you swear you did not touch it?"

"No. I can't swear it. But—"

"There are no buts, Mr. Ryan. That car in those pictures, Alvin Tibble's car, was at the Seatons' on Wednesday, June 19th, Mr. Ryan . . . and that's when you leaned on it and made those hand prints as you said, 'Pass it out to me.'—And what will you say when I bring in some workmen who will tell us he came down to where they were placing the flares, at the trench

they had dug, and that is the origin of this footprint the Crime Laboratory men made such a dramatic point of here yesterday. It was indeed Tibble's footprint . . . but that is when it got there and not Friday morning when he is accused of having been there, when he was not there, when he was in fact asleep in his own bed.—After you, Mr. Ryan, have admitted you were there, alone with this girl."

"I was not alone with her—"

"Oh, we know you say that. You say you and Miss Seaton found Chalmers in his own car, passed out, stone cold. You say Chalmers was in the car you drove pell-mell out of the Club. In this room now, Mr. Ryan, sitting in those benches back of the Defence table, are seven witnesses—and I could bring twenty—who will say, each one of them, that Mr. Chalmers was not in that car. Are they all lying?"

"They are mistaken. He was in his car."

"Three of these witnesses will say they saw you and this girl beside Chalmers's car and when she drew back from it you picked her up and threw her bodily into it. They shouted for you to leave her alone and were running to help her when you raced away. They say you and Miss Seaton were alone, Mr. Ryan. Will they be lying?"

"They are mistaken."

"That colored gentleman in the second row, an old and highly respected employee of the Club—will he be lying when he says he was on the service porch looking *down* into the car and you and Miss Seaton were the only people in it?"

"He is mistaken, Mr. Chew."

"And these members of the dance band sitting there with him in this Courtroom now, who were on the front porch of the Paddock Club looking down into the car, are they lying too?"

"They're also mistaken."

"Mr. Ryan, the mother of your friend Chalmers will come here, into this Courtroom, and tell us she saw you from her bedroom window when you tore into her driveway, alone in the car. Her son was not with you."

"She is mistaken, sir."

"Will you accuse a distinguished lady of malice?"

"No, Mr. Chew."

"—Nobody's accused, nobody's lying. Everybody's mistaken. Totally blind . . . when they couldn't see a man of over six feet in height in a small foreign sports car.—You say you left Mr. Chalmers at home. But Sergeant Garvey will tell us he found him on the Club golf course hunting for you.—Stone

drunk or stone blind . . . everybody but you and this girl who was attacked and told her parents there was a prowler outside in the grounds."

He glanced up at the clock.

"Let's get on, Mr. Ryan.—You say you picked this girl up and lifted her into the car at the Club. Ten minutes later, you left her on the sidewalk in front of her house. The street was pitch dark, a storm was coming on, her front yard was dug up, no flood lights or porch lights . . . her in that dress, wearing high-heeled party slippers. You were in a great hurry to get over to Washington."

"That's not true."

"*You* say it's not. Then why did you leave this girl on the street in those circumstances? I suggest to you, Mr. Ryan, that even if she'd meant nothing to you it would have been an impossible thing for you to do. We've been told you were hastening to shield poor Mr. Chalmers from the storm. If Chalmers was dead drunk a little rain wouldn't have hurt him . . . as it hadn't hurt him when Sergeant Garvey found him soaked to the skin hours later—*not* with you, Mr. Ryan, but still at the Paddock Club. And you say you weren't in a hurry to get to Washington?"

"I won't argue, Mr. Chew, if you want it that way."

Her kiss on his ear was back, his blood pounding, the wild fire in the veins . . .

"Why do you change color, Mr. Ryan? What is the terrible memory you would hide? What was it that made you drive, alone, into the Chalmers place, as that distinguished lady will tell us, driving like a fool, barging into the house, changing your clothes, barging out again?"

"I wasn't alone and I wasn't aware I barged, Mr. Chew."

"You weren't conscious of skidding and ploughing up the Chalmers lawn as you tore out into the street, so that their gardener, as he'll tell us, had to resod that lawn?"

Nat Ryan shook his head.

"What guilt of conscience was it willing another accident, Mr. Ryan? But you're not a psychiatrist, I'd forgotten.—Was it your memory of that other accident that made you slow down, then, slow down so greatly, Mr. Ryan, that it took you almost three hours to drive the less than forty miles to Washington?"

"I wasn't familiar with the road and got lost, Mr. Chew."

"Lost, on so plainly marked a highway?" Chew looked at him silently for a moment. "Yes, you were lost, Mr. Ryan. You were indeed lost.—I suggest to you, in the most solemn way,

Mr. Ryan, that it was not 1.40 o'clock when you left this girl. It was 2.40 when she got into the house. It was 4.22 when you checked in at the Gresham Hotel in Washington. But I suggest it did not take you three hours to drive over there. I suggest that you made it there, and by way of the Chalmers house, between 2:40 and 4:22 o'clock. Alone with this girl whom you wanted so terribly, Mr. Ryan—"

"That's a lie, Mr. Chew. It's totally false, and it's—"

"You can't murder me, my friend, much as you'd like to. I'll ask you, Mr. Ryan, to look at this if you please."

Dave Trumper caught the sharp glance of warning from John Isham at the press table. Closer to Sam Riggin, Isham had seen him reach down and take his hat and coat off the travelling bag.

"What is this, Mr. Ryan? Will you tell the ladies and gentlemen of the Jury?"

Nat took the printed form he was holding out.

"It's my hotel bill for the night at the Gresham."

He hardly noticed the third item. What leaped out at him from the page was the scalding memory of the newspaper propped against the coffee pot, his eyes skipping the heading "Police Admit Search for Missing Best Man" until the Baltimore date line wrenched them back to it, and the stunned shock as it came to him. *It's Mary Melissa*. He half-closed his eyes for an instant.

"And this is yours, Mr. Ryan?"

As Riggin put the travelling bag on the table and took the padlock off the zipper Chew pulled it open. He took out a white dinner coat and held it up toward him.

"Your name is under the label 'University Tailors.' Did you take this to Washington?"

"Yes. I had to wear it at the bachelor dinner that night."

He had no thought of any meaning it might have. They hadn't gone anywhere during the summer where dinner clothes were worn, he hadn't missed it.

"And you *gave* it to the valet's boy?"

"Yes. I'd sent it to be pressed, but I was on my way out when the boy brought it back. I couldn't wait—"

"Also these you wore with it?"

Chew held up the black trousers.

Nat Ryan nodded, stiffening then as a first faint flicker of meaning began to dawn on him.

"—You had just seen the paper. You knew the police were hunting for you. It was not pressing, Mr. Ryan, that you sent

this suit out for. The third item on your bill is for *cleaning* and pressing . . . and the reason you presented a hundred and fifty-dollar tailor-made suit to the boy who brought it back from the cleaners' was that you didn't know how effective one cleaning—"

The scrape of the chair legs on the floor and the crash of the chair falling backwards were like thunder crashing in the room. Chew swung around, staring at the girl who had sat there a trembling zombie for six days and was now on her feet, blazing.

"That's just *foul*, Mr. Chew! It's *perfectly foul*! It's not true and you know it's not! You ought to be *ashamed*! Just *ashamed*, Mr. Chew!"

There was no need of Judge Hartigan's gavel in the dead silence that was broken by the sound of Mary Melissa's feet as she ran for the door.

She had got to the rail when Judge Hartigan's voice came. "Young woman! Come back here! Return to your place!"

"I can't, I'm sorry . . . I'm going to be sick!"

She ran out, Talbot Seaton hurrying after her. Hartigan's gavel came down then until the room quieted.

"—Take your seat, Mr. Ryan," he said quietly, as the gong sounded outside. He turned to the Jury.

"You will all go to your homes. Do not discuss what you have heard here among yourselves or with your families or friends. Court is recessed until ten in the morning."

Nat Ryan went out, people waiting silently for him to go past them. Behind him Archie sat rigid where he was.

Dave Trumper turned to see Isham beside him. "Jiminy," he said. "She knocked him to hell. What can he do now?"

"Go ask Tibble's sister." Trumper didn't mean it. He was just grunting an answer, watching Chew and Sam Riggins follow Tibble out, the back of Chew's neck flushed a purplish-red.

Isham's face lighted. "Yeah," he said. He smiled happily. "Leave it to me, Chief. I'll give you a call."

The officers in the Northeastern cruise car who found him in an alley that night around eleven would have known who he was if his wallet had been in his pocket. But his pockets were empty. They put him down as John Doe, yoking and robbery, and called the ambulance. The note he wrote Trumper when he came groggily to for a few moments in Emergency was given to a German girl interne in Baltimore on a scholarship. She was going into psychiatry and keeping a file on the mind of America. The note began: "Trump, I tangled with K the lousy bastard," after which reference to the Russian leader and some

further incredible fantasy it was signed "Judas Iscariot," a classical guilt symbol.

The interne read something about a rape and somebody was about to murder them. The subject was a clear paranoid and his clothes smelled like a wino's. She gave him a shot to quiet him down and sent him to a ward for disturbed alcoholics.

Some time the next day when he tried to get up he was too groggy still to notice that a nurse and two orderlies coming on the double were an unusual amount of attention.

"I wrote a note, didn't I?"

"Sure you did, honey." The nurse smoothed his brow.

"You're sure it was delivered?"

"Of course it was, dear." She hardly cared to call him either Judas or Mr. Iscariot, as he'd come labelled.

"Check again, will you? It's going to be murder."

"Right away, hon. Let's have a shot now, just don't you worry."

He couldn't have worried long anyway. Mauled by one expert, doped by two others, he could have been dead and buried so far as the State of Maryland *vs.* Alvin Tibble was concerned when Mary Melissa Seaton was called to the stand.

When Dave Trumper noticed Isham was missing from the press table on the morning of the seventh day of the State *vs.* Tibble he thought nothing of it, and it was with a feeling of pleasure only that he noticed ex-Detective Klingan with a strip of adhesive tape on a swollen right cheek. What concerned him was Nat. He'd come in alone, looking as if he'd spent the night pacing some lower circle of hell.

"Where's Chalmers?"

"He said he'd be with a friend at the Hopkins."

Trumper looked at him sharply. "He didn't go for any of Chew's stuff about you and Miss Seaton?"

"I guess there comes a point," Ryan said briefly. He didn't doubt that Archie had finally got total recall. But it was the note in his pocket from Mary Melissa that had started him packing his gear when a colored boy brought it around last night.

"Nat . . . I'm so sorry, and so *terribly* ashamed. Don't come tomorrow, I couldn't bear it. I know you were never in love with me and it's just horrible that I've got you into all this mess. I just can't face you, not now. Please understand. Some day, I'll see you.—M.M."

He was writing a note to leave for Archie when some spark of sanity made him see what Chew would make of his not

showing up. *If I'd only thought about that damned suit.* But even in his bitterness he knew that was stupid. It would never have entered his mind what Chew would do with it. Most likely if Mary Melissa hadn't read the transcript of the other rape trial she wouldn't have known Chew's meaning at all. So he stayed, and this morning he'd called her father to ask him to explain. "Tell her I do understand, I'll be leaving as soon as I can."

He sat now feeling a kind of gray pall of indecency covering him as Trumper moved back to his place, watching Mrs. Meade come in with Chew, pale still but not crushed as she'd been the morning before. Chew was himself again, smiling and assured. Trumper turned at the flurry in the benches as Mary Melissa came in. She went quickly to the chair she'd knocked over, not stopping to speak to Nat, and sat stiffly erect. As Tibble came in with his guard Trumper relaxed, realizing suddenly how tensed his insides had been till then and wondering why. *What was I scared of?* He hadn't known, only that he knew Chew.

It turned out to be Dobson who had the surprise.

"Do you wish Mr. Ryan to return to the stand, Mr. Chew?" Judge Hartigan asked. Trumper thought there was a tinge of dryness in his tone.

"No, your Honor, thank you," Chew said gravely.

"Mr. Dobson?"

"—Archibald Chalmers."

The heads of Ryan, Talbot Seaton and Trumper moved simultaneously as Archie came forward from the back of the Courtroom. Ryan saw for an instant the expression on Seaton's face. But Archie was sober.

"Mr. Chalmers, you requested to be put on the stand. Why?"

"Because trying to save me, Mr. Ryan let Mr. Chew draw conclusions that are not true."

Mary Melissa raised her head, her eyes shining softly.

"Point out those . . . errors, if you will, Mr. Chalmers."

"The vodka bottles in the first place. The ones hidden in my rooms were mine, and the one in the car in front of the Seaton's. I had just asked Mr. Ryan to help me find the man who'd attacked Miss Seaton, so I could kill him. He hadn't told me, but I expect he thought the bottle I gave him was half water. He wanted to find out if it was me or the vodka doing the talking."

"It has been said you were a dupe, Mr. Chalmers."

"I was not a dupe. I recognized Tibble in the line-up as the

person who'd followed me from Headquarters out to my mother's house, Saturday noon. It was I who got the revolver that Ryan had in Tibble's front hall after we'd got the keys from Ritter Meade. Ryan had taken the gun so I wouldn't shoot till we'd given him a chance to clear himself. It's a good thing he did . . . I'd have shot when I first saw Tibble come in and probably killed Sergeant Trumper when he jumped in front of him."

"Now, Mr. Chalmers . . . a number of references have been made to your wealth. There seems to be an implication that Mr. Ryan has a financial interest in you."

"On the contrary, I have one in him. I want somebody I can trust to help me work out a legal and medical plan. Not mine but Ryan's father's. He's a doctor and this was a dream of his. I hope it'll let this money Mr. Chew talks about do more people good than it's done the Chalmers family. I'm trying to get Mr. Ryan to stay here and help me."

"Mr. Chalmers . . . were you in your car, Tuesday night at the Paddock Club?"

"I was stone drunk, sir. But if Miss Seaton and Ryan say I was in it, there's no question about it. I had on a dark plaid dinner coat and being face down I'd be hard to see with the car going as fast as everybody says it was. Ryan's white coat is all my mother would see looking down from her window. I'm not being disrespectful when I say my mother has strong opinions but occasionally she's mistaken."

"The suggestion, Mr. Chalmers, that Mr. Ryan, or the old Adam in him—"

"Is contemptible, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Chalmers."

As Dobson moved back Enoch Chew rose at his table. "You were drunk as a skunk that night."

"Yes, Mr. Chew."

"Are you still planning to marry this girl?"

Archie turned toward the State's table, his face softening as he smiled at her. Mary Melissa blinked quickly, for the first time since she'd sat there a smile touching her lips.

"That's up to her, I'm afraid, Mr. Chew."

"That's all."

On the front bench Nat Ryan leaned down and brushed nothing off his shoe. *I'll get the hell out. They'll get together.* He'd come the full circle. *Back home . . . to forget.*

Then Archie was beside him there and neither of them was thinking about himself.

"Mary Melissa Seaton," Alec Dobson was saying.

Dave Trumper watched her go quickly to the stand, his lips tightening as he saw her hands grip in a knot in her lap and the muscles of her throat quivering as she tried to swallow.

*I mustn't be sick. I mustn't faint.* The girl in the transcript she'd read had kept on fainting and they'd kept bringing her to to go over and over the ghastly details. *They think I'm going to and I mustn't.* She could see the clerk putting a bottle of smelling salts out on the table. *It's nothing but words. I've got to say them.*

## CHAPTER 14

*It's nothing but words. I've got to say them.* But the words of the transcript she'd been given swam in front of Mary Melissa so that for a moment she did not hear Dobson.

"Miss Seaton." He repeated her name. "Will you look at the ladies and gentlemen of the Jury and tell us . . ."

It wasn't so bad then, as long as she could keep from seeing the jurymen with the moist eyes like peeled grapes and the tightly shut mouth. She didn't falter until she came to where Nat had stopped the car in front of the Seatons' gate.

"I wouldn't let Mr. Ryan take me inside. I didn't want my father to know Mr. Chalmers was drinking again. And I didn't realize it was the lights of the car that kept it from being so . . . terribly dark. It was entirely my fault he didn't stay. I told him I'd call to him from the porch, and I didn't."

Up to that point she had not been conscious of the people, all watching her, only eyes. Dave Trumper knew she was seeing the shine of excitement in them now. *Like she was a stripper.* He could see her start shrinking, a rabbit cornered by the dogs, hunting a place to hide.

"You insisted Mr. Ryan leave you and take Mr. Chalmers home and to bed before the storm started. And you called back to him not from the porch but from only a short distance inside the gate."

"Yes, sir."

"And you were there in the dark. Now just relax, Miss Seaton, and tell the Jury—"

She managed to get through the pitch blackness, the beginning of the terror when she heard the sound in the camellias and realized someone was there, opening her mouth to call, no sound coming from it. Then the hand on her mouth, the horrible voice in her ear. *Scream and I'll kill you. This is a knife.* She described the great fork of lightning.

"You didn't try to break away."

"How could I, with the knife . . . I was afraid he'd kill me. I'd read about that . . . the danger of making them angry, or frightened. It said you were supposed to keep . . . to try to keep calm, and use your head. And try to see them. And when the lightning came and it was all white I did see him. He was staring up, cursing."

"Miss Seaton . . . you saw him clearly?"

"Yes."

"You saw him clearly and plainly. Do you see him now?"

"Yes. I do see him."

"Point him out to us."

"He's there, at that table, by Mr. Chew."

"The defendant, Alvin Tibble. Is he the man you saw looking up in the lightning?"

"Yes. He's the one."

She pointed at Tibble huddled at the Defence table and closed her eyes, her handkerchief to her mouth, swallowing the wave of nausea that was not from her blurred half-blind vision of him but from what she knew was coming next. *I'm going to be sick.*

"What happened then?"

". . . He said he was going to take me to the carriage house. But then the thunder frightened him and he was cursing again. I thought I was dead. But the big drops of rain were starting to fall. He pushed me under the camellias."

*The poor little devil.* Trumper felt the excitement in the room, heard the people next to him breathing heavily. *God damn them, I could kill them.*

"—I know this is hard, Miss Seaton," Dobson said gently. "But it is necessary for you to tell the ladies and gentlemen of the Jury the words he said to you and what he did, when—"

"—Your Honor."

Enoch Chew was getting slowly to his feet, gravely compassionate.

"This child is almost fainting. My learned friend for the State has already presented an eminent medical specialist who has told us what happened when this girl was thrust into those

bushes. The medical evidence was explicit. The Jury are adults. There is none of us here who needs to be told the details of what happened. I beg we do not sear a brutal assault indelibly on her memory by this public ordeal. Why must this child be stripped naked here? The Defence grants she was attacked. We stipulate rape in the full meaning of the term and statute. The question before this honorable Court is not Was she raped? It is simply and solely Is this the man? Is this man Alvin Tibble guilty or not guilty of that terrible crime? Can't we and this child be spared all the harrowing and unnecessary details?"

"The Court concurs fully." Judge Hartigan snapped the words out. "—To you, Mr. Dobson."

*It's to him and it kills him.* Trumper saw the flush above Dobson's collar, knew what was in his mind. If he agreed, he was letting the Defence gloss over the horror. If he did not agree, he was callously crucifying his own witness. And Trumper knew there was more. The man at his left leaned toward him.

"Yah. How she so holy?"

Trumper suppressed a wave of fury. "Makes you sore, don't it?" he said softly.

"Damn right it does, she was poor people she wouldn't get off."

The Jury could think that. But Trumper knew Dobson had no choice, he could see it in the intense relief on the face of his witness, already pale and intense too in her father's face and Chalmers's, their eyes burning at Dobson in his hesitation. Nat Ryan was white-lipped, torn between the reprieve and the travesty of Chew's pity.

"—Yah." The man next to him leaned over again and stopped short as Trumper turned to him and he saw the look on his face. He stared for an instant, his own face paling, got up hastily and edged out. Trumper turned back to the girl on the stand, looking down at Enoch Chew with heartbreaking gratitude. *That's what he wanted, to soften her up.*

It didn't matter if she was dazed then. She was describing a dazed girl sitting under the camellias against the wall, waiting for her father and mother to go to bed.

"I didn't want them to know. I was going to call Nat . . . Mr. Ryan, and get him to come take me to a doctor. I didn't know he was going to Washington. That's why I said there was a . . . prowler outside. I just couldn't bear to . . . hurt them like that."

Her tenderness for her parents shone like a light over the

Courtroom. But she'd quit fighting Chew and the line-up was coming, when she'd need all her fire to put it across. When Alec Dobson glanced back at him, Trumper slid his eyes sideways to Ryan. *He's her beam, get her back on it.* He saw Chew move casually, turning to look at him, his eyes cold, his foot twitching angrily. Nat Ryan sat with his head down, Chalmers white-faced, her father gray as old granite. The three of them stood out in a Courtroom that was silent, people no longer avid but human, looking back from them to the small figure alone on the stand.

"Now, Miss Seaton. When you went to the line-up, at Police Headquarters on Monday morning, you said the Defendant Alvin Tibble was not there. You—"

"Yes. I shouldn't have said it . . . because he was there in the line-up and I knew it. I . . . just didn't expect . . . to see him, is all."

"Miss Seaton . . . you were out, I believe, when the suggestion was made that the reason Mr. Nathaniel Ryan wished to kill Alvin Tibble the accused was to deceive his friend Chalmers and cover his own guilt."

*"That isn't true!"*

"The suggestion has been made, Miss Seaton, that you were frightened at the line-up because you feared the police would accuse Mr. Ryan—"

"No! That wasn't it! I keep telling you Mr. Ryan had nothing to do with it!"

Dave Trumper moved forward in his seat, intent, watching Dobson move in patiently, to try to do what so far they had all failed to do.

"But the police and Mr. Ryan here all said you were frightened—'just like a zombie', is what one of them said—the morning of that line-up. You have insisted that nothing had happened. Here, under oath, will you say that is the truth?"

"No. It isn't."

"Something had happened. What was it, Miss Seaton?"

She had drawn herself tautly together, her eyes moving toward Tibble.

*"He called me up."* Her small jaw was set firmly, her eyes darkening. "At half-past two that morning. My phone isn't listed, so I thought it was some friend when this sort of English voice said 'What was old Archie doing at Headquarters Saturday noon?' I said without thinking he was down there with me and asked who was calling."

Her eyes were still fastened steadily on Tibble.

"He said if I didn't remember him he'd . . . come back again and I wouldn't forget him. But I knew him right away, his voice, the horrible words he kept using, the names he called me. He was in a fury, just like he'd been when he was cursing God and the lightning. He told me what he'd do if I didn't get the . . . the cursing police out of it—if I talked to them any more."

"That was why you were like a zombie—"

"No!"

She said it sharply. Dobson was taken aback, hesitating. "Then . . . why was it, Miss Seaton?"

For an instant Trumper could see her jaw setting in the same stubborn line it had had when she'd refused to tell them before. Then her eyes moved back to Tibble, smouldering.

"He said he had an . . . an *in* down in Headquarters, and in the Homicide Bureau. He'd only asked about Archie to see if I was telling the truth. He described Mrs. Chalmers being down there on Friday, and he knew people's names, like Sergeant Trumper's, and the captain's. People are always . . . saying the police are crooks. I didn't know—"

Trumper's blood chilled. *The poor little devil, the poor little devil* . . . He remembered how she'd looked in the captain's office, as if she didn't trust them any more.

"I just didn't know, he talked like he'd worked there, and I was . . . I was just petrified, till we got in the line-up room, and then I felt . . . safer, because I knew he wouldn't be there. And then I looked up and . . . saw him. I was just terrified, I didn't want him—"

"So you were afraid—"

"Not about myself, that wasn't it!" Her voice was like parachute silk being ripped. "I didn't want him to hurt my mother! That's what he said he'd do if I didn't stop seeing the police!"

She was crying then, tears pouring down her cheeks, her eyes still wide open, her hands gripped in her lap.

"That's why I didn't tell anybody! That's why I was so frightened! If you . . . knew my mother, you'd know she's just so . . . so lovely—I couldn't bear for him to . . . do all the things to her, the horrible things he'd said he'd do. He said he'd . . . he'd *get her*, someday when nobody was home . . . out in her plant shed in the old carriage house, where he . . . wanted to take me. He . . . said what he'd do to my mother. He said she'd . . . beg him to kill her. He said *we'd* wish she was dead. And I couldn't stand it! My mother's so lovely . . . That's what he said! That *beast* over there!"

Judge Hartigan's gavel came down sharply, breaking the tension gathering to burst out. As the Courtroom became deathly silent again, Mary Melissa turned to him.

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to say anything . . . wrong."

*That damn kid's going to kill me.* Sergeant Trumper was acutely embarrassed, not liking to take out his handkerchief to wipe his eyes.

"It is not you the Court is reproving, my dear child," Judge Hartigan said quietly. "Proceed, Mr. Dobson."

As his eyes swept the benches sternly, Dave Trumper's rested on Mary Melissa. There was a grim smile on his lips and his heart was beating a little faster. He could feel the tension running high, something like lynch-pitch, dangerous in the silence. Talbot Seaton had his face buried in his hands. He looked up then, his face shining, with pride and with a pity almost as heartbreaking as his daughter had been. Trumper looked past him. The faces of the two younger men were faces of stone. He rubbed his back against the oak bench to get rid of the chill creeping along his spine. *God help Tibble if Chew gets him off.*

Enoch Chew sat motionless, the back of his neck not swollen but shrunk to a hard oyster-white, his broad shoulders turned on Tibble, motionless there too, gray-green as if he could smell the antipathy and violence rising behind him.

*By God maybe Mr. Enoch Chew is wishing he hadn't taken this case.*

"—Go on, Miss Seaton," Dobson said quietly.

"It was just that I . . . I couldn't *think*. He hung up, and then he called back and said 'Get rid of the police,' and I told him I'd promised to go to a line-up Monday. He . . . started laughing, like he was crazy, and said to go ahead, he'd be there to watch me. That's why, when I saw him, right there in the line-up, I just didn't know . . . what to do. All I could think of was my mother, what he'd . . . said he'd do to her, and all that night he kept on calling, just . . . just breathing, or whispering 'You'll wish she was dead'. I was just . . . crazy, I was so frightened."

She turned then for the first time to Talbot Seaton, sitting there with tears running down his cheeks.

"I . . . couldn't tell anybody. It just . . . wasn't *decent*. I didn't want anybody looking at my mother . . . the way they look at me. I couldn't *ever* tell my father. You . . . you can't say such things about your own mother."

"Is she here in this Courtroom?"

"No, she is not! This sort of thing isn't fit for my mother to sit through, I wouldn't have her here for the world!"

"—Of course the ladies of the Jury are forced to be here," Dobson said quietly. One of them had flushed deeply. "And Mrs. Meade is here out of loyalty to her brother."

Glancing up at the clock Trumper saw there was still ten minutes. Dobson couldn't leave it; give Chew a chance for some neat kind of switch-blade to cut her heart out.

"Now, Miss Seaton . . . the suggestion has been made that you are attempting to protect Mr. Ryan—"

"That's false, Mr. Dobson."

"Of course it's false. But it has been suggested, and it's suggested that that pressure is what has brought you here, and that you tried to avoid coming.—Was pressure of any kind or description brought to bear on you, Miss Seaton?"

"—Yes. There was pressure. But not from Mr. Ryan. He and Mr. Chalmers both did everything they could to get me not to make a charge."

As she'd hesitated a bare instant before answering, Trumper, watching intently, saw the expression on Dobson's face change, and Enoch Chew move in his chair, alert, his face lighting. Trumper knew Dobson at that point would have given anything to strike his question. She'd left only the police. But there was no way. He had to go on.

"What pressure was brought to bear on you, and by whom?"

"It was my mother. By my mother, and by a reporter, John Isham."

Trumper stared. This was news. He'd suspected the phone call Sunday night . . . the only possibility. Until this moment he'd believed Ryan and Chalmers's attempt at murder was the thing that had pushed her into it. But Isham wouldn't figure in that.

"Mr. Isham came out to our house right after the line-up on Monday and wanted me to go . . . some place with him. But I—"

"To what place, Miss Seaton?"

As Dobson said it Enoch Chew moved as if to rise. Trumper knew what it was, now, and knew there wasn't a chance. Then he held his breath. The girl was turning to Judge Hartigan.

"Sir, Mr. Isham said you wouldn't let me say where . . . I'd gone to. But how can I say what kind of pressure it was if I can't?"

Chew was motionless. He was not only smelling danger. He was smelling the fear emanating from Alvin Tibble, and he

had smelled it since the instant the girl said "John Isham." He hesitated an instant, thinking quickly, and got calmly to his feet.

"Objection, your Honor. The—"

"Overruled, Mr. Chew. The witness may continue."

"Thank you, sir."

As Mary Melissa turned back to Dobson, Trumper let his breath out carefully. The girl was going to do what they'd done their damndest to figure some way of doing.

"Mr. Isham told me what I'd done. I mean, with what I'd said at the line-up. He wanted me to go see a girl he knew. I wouldn't go, at first. But . . . my mother said she would. I knew I couldn't stop her, and I . . . didn't want her out of my sight—I didn't know *he'd* been arrested. So we went to—"

"Objection, your Honor." Chew said it patiently, knowing he mustn't turn her against him again, not knowing what was coming but warned by the smell of fear of an ambush too dangerous to risk.

"—Overruled, Mr. Chew. It was you who suggested the pressure. The witness is permitted to state its nature if it is contrary to the kind you have charged. She may answer for the limited purpose of so stating."

"Exception, if I may."

"Certainly, Mr. Chew. Continue, Miss Seaton."

"We went to Mount Vale Sanatorium. There was this girl."

As Chew started to rise again she turned quickly to him. "—Mr. Chew! I'm not saying *he* was the one who attacked her! I'm just saying that what I saw there was the pressure!"

"—Be seated, Mr. Chew. You opened this matter. Continue, Miss Seaton."

"There was this girl who was going to get married, the same way I was, in just a few days. Somebody met her coming home from a party, only she didn't go in by herself, she and the boy were still in the car, and they were taken somewhere and the boy was tied up and he had to . . . watch what happened to her. He killed himself. And this girl just sits in a corner staring at a wall, and she starts screaming if a man comes anywhere near her, even the doctor. It's . . . horrible. John Isham—and my mother—wanted me to see what . . . rape can do, and how just . . . pusillanimous I'd be if I let the person who attacked me go free to attack somebody else—"

"Objection, your Honor! This—"

"The Court agrees, Mr. Chew, that the witness has made the nature of the pressure she was under sufficiently clear."

Judge Hartigan's tone was dry. "She has stated explicitly that she is not attempting to connect the Defendant with the young woman she saw at Mount Vale. The Jury will note it."

It was just then—ironically, just when it looked at its best for the State—that Trumper, watching Enoch Chew quietly request that Mary Melissa Seaton's testimony be stricken, take an exception as he was overruled and sit down shrugging his shoulders, became aware of a first definite twinge of sharp apprehension. He had glanced over at Mrs. Ritter Meade expecting to see her in a state of collapse. She was tense but with a difference, indignation, not fear, on her face, and he had the instant uneasy impression of a woman biding her time, unshaken and confident, not only believing her brother was innocent but sure the Jury would find him so. At the noon recess that came then he intercepted Dobson, who took one look at him, said dryly, "I know, we've just lost the case" and went on with his assistants, all beaming.

In the hall Trumper stopped a reporter from Isham's paper. "Where is he today?"

"Back at work, I guess. He was just coming in here on his own. You looked at Headquarters?"

On his way up to the corner room on the third floor Trumper did look, but the press room was empty. Captain Justice had not seen Isham and pointed out that that was agreeable to him. That ended the search for Judas Iscariot until later in the day when his editor called the Commissioner.

At the afternoon session Mary Melissa came quickly in, went past Nat and Archie again without speaking to them and took her place on the stand. *Like a real soldier*, Trumper thought, and amended it. *Not a soldier. Just one hell of a nice girl*. She looked very much like her mother, he thought then, with the same sort of tranquillity, not so cloudy. But he was uneasy. He could see the first shadow under the silken transparency of the skin beneath her dark lashes and up to her temples. He saw her move her head, not as far as Ryan but enough to get a glimpse of his clothes on the table between them, saw her quiver of revulsion and saw that Ryan saw it, Chew's sordid suggestion a nausea between them.

*I tried to tell 'em it was going to be nasty. I did my damndest.*

His eyes had already combed the Defence side. Mary Melissa was Dobson's last witness and Chew's were gathered behind him. Mrs. Meade sat there like marble. Next to her was a

man whose face was somehow familiar. Trumper remembered him then, Cobbett, Tibble's friend at the tavern on the corner by the alley. *And that dirty rat Klingan.* Near the ex-detective, ex-patrolman on the back bench of the center section were three sullen-faced lads with crew cuts, next to them three characters who could be from the orchestra and two colored men, also unhappy. *The kidnap contingent from the Paddock Club.* All were hostile witnesses, no more so than the glance Chew raked across them.

"You are still under oath, Miss Seaton," Dobson said gravely. "I have only one question.—Is there any doubt in your mind, any shadow of doubt in your mind or your heart, that the man sitting there at that table, the Defendant Alvin Tibble, is the man who attacked you?"

"No, sir. There isn't. He is the man."

"Thank you, Miss Seaton.—Mr. Chew?"

As Enoch Chew rose he was thinking: *As of this moment my truly abominable client is in the gas chamber. I was a fool to take this case. Having taken it I can not lose it. I've underestimated this girl twice. I must not do it again.*

"Miss Seaton," he said quietly, ". . . don't be alarmed. My feet are the same clay as other mortals', not hooves of the devil. Like you, I'm here to perform a duty. You are the person whom I must ask certain questions. I do not ask them to offend you. I'm sure you understand that."

"Yes."

"And we know you would not wish any possible injustice—"

"You were unjust, Mr. Chew, when you accused Mr. Ryan."

"Let me point out something to you, Miss Seaton. Something that perhaps you have not realized.—If you were now at Mount Vale, staring at a wall . . . or if you *had* screamed and that knife had killed you . . . don't you see that Mr. Ryan would not now be sitting where he is but would be at that table on trial for his life, and helpless in a net of circumstantial evidence far stronger than that which has in the same way been drawn around Alvin Tibble?"

"That's horrible to say, it's—"

"It is horrible, Miss Seaton . . . but it's *true*. If you were not here, who but himself could say that he did not forcibly abduct you, or that Mr. Chalmers was indeed with you? These witnesses against you are not lying, Miss Seaton. Twenty or more people, all of them reputable, *most of them hostile witnesses*, would have come here and *any jury in this land would*

*have believed what they said.* The limping footprint would have pointed to Ryan absolutely, Mr. Chalmers could not have helped him. You do see that, do you not?"

Mary Melissa nodded, her hands gripped tightly, her eyes drained to pale silver.

"What would any jury have thought of his changing his clothes and fleeing to Washington, arriving there after four o'clock in the morning? There would have been no one to say he left you at 1.40 o'clock. Miss Seaton . . . it has been my duty to make you see vividly how tragically mistaken witnesses can be, and how tragically the physical facts that support them can be misread."

He swept his hand back toward the Defence witnesses behind him.

"You do not believe any of these people. Yet you do not believe they will be lying?"

"No. They are mistaken."

"—They are mistaken. But they are *eye-witnesses*. That dinner suit is a fact."

"But they're wrong. So is it."

"‘So is it.’ Miss Seaton, if that fact could be ‘wrong,’ isn’t it possible that the list of Ritter Meade’s customers, for instance, that this man tried to destroy, could also be ‘wrong’?—Now please, my child. Wait just a moment. If Mr. Ryan were here alone, without you, who would believe him about that suit . . . any more than the State believes Alvin Tibble now?—These eye-witnesses. You say they are all wrong. But are you infallible?"

Mary Melissa flushed. "I've never said that."

"And you have contempt for people who believe they are, do you not? For so-called strong-minded people?"

"I didn't say that."

"We saw your face when Mr. Chalmers was on the stand. You resent intensely his mother—"

"I don't resent anybody."

"My dear child, you do, and quite naturally do, when you *know* that Mr. Ryan has been the victim of well-meaning but mistaken observers. All your actions have said so. You resented the fact of his motor accident being interpreted as meaning he was in love with you—"

"It wasn't the truth, and it was offensive."

"It *was* offensive, and it's frightening . . . and we can all of us see that you realize it is. It's a terrible thing, how inexorable a net can be woven, with honest eye-witnesses and a chain of

circumstances that without you here *would ruthlessly have supported what they were saying.*"

As he went to his table then Dave Trumper, back in the side section of the benches, sat very still. *The bastard, what's he doing?* His eyes moved from Chew to Dobson, to the bewildered girl on the stand, to the blank faces of Chew's witnesses. He saw Ryan and Chalmers not blank-faced but frozen, watchful, as aware as he was of Chew's monstrous agility. Tibble's sister Mrs. Meade was still rigid, not moving, like a wax figure in a store window. He glanced back at Klingan, also stolidly motionless, the sweat seeping in larger circles from under his armpits, darkening the light gray of the handsome material of Chew's suit he was bulging out of.

Trumper shifted uneasily. *Have they got it loaded, somehow or other?* When Chew moved to his table he slipped to the back of the room and stood between the two doors against the wall. Catching Klingan's snake-eyes following him for a fraction of an instant, he saw a light in them that was triumphant malice if he'd ever seen any. He leaned against the wall, his hooded eyes slowly examining one bench after another.

"—These photographs, Miss Seaton." Chew was back from his table, handing them to her. "Ritter Meade took them. What are they, please?"

"They're photographs of luncheons, and—"

"And you are in each of them, are you not. There are five of them, Miss Seaton, taken on five different occasions. Two are of weddings at which you were a bridesmaid, one of a Hunt Cup luncheon."

Trumper saw her eyes widen, her cheeks paling.

"And here are the work records that show Alvin Tibble there, as the photographer's helper, each time. Will you say he was not there?"

"No. Particularly not the Hunt Cup luncheon. One of these girls was attacked and raped the same night."

Judge Hartigan's gavel came down. "I will repeat this for the last time. There will be no expressions of approval or disapproval from the spectators. Court attendants will eject any further offenders."

A saturnine gleam lighted Trumper's eyes, and with it a glint of pure admiration as Chew took the smashing blow without a sign apparent to the Jury.

"Did you see him present there?" he asked imperturbably.

"No. I didn't see him. Not consciously, at least."

"Thank you, Miss Seaton. The records show he was there."

You were not conscious of seeing him. These were happy, exciting occasions . . . why would you consciously notice a photographer's helper?—But at your own house, for two hours, on Wednesday the 19th . . . that's different. Or is it? Were you too happy—”

“I wasn't happy at all. I was . . . very upset. Mr. Chalmers had been drinking. I knew there'd be trouble.”

“You knew your father would postpone the wedding. You've told us, my child. And you were very much upset at the dance, were you not?”

“It was upsetting . . . with the wedding in two days.”

“Of course it was. And then when you found Mr. Chalmers in the car you were deeply shocked, weren't you?”

“I'd never seen him . . . that way before.”

“So that when your friends thought Mr. Ryan was forcibly abducting you, all you were doing was imploring him to hurry?” She nodded.

“And when you and Ryan got to your gate—”

“I didn't want my father to see us.”

“And then, when the car left, and left you in the dark, you were not only upset. With this horrible figure leaping out of the camellias, you were in terror.—Forgive me, I don't want to remind you of the agony that upset you even now. And your love for your parents kept you outside with the storm raging, and when you stumbled through the mud into the house you said there was a prowler. That's all you remember. The officer has told us how you collapsed and were taken to the hospital. The next day, when the police came the description you gave them—”

“It was the truth, Mr. Chew. I saw him *plainly* in the lighting.”

“I'm not doubting it, not in the least.”

Mary Melissa's eyes widened blankly.

“On my soul I am not. You saw the man. You described him to the police, both Friday at your home and Saturday morning at Headquarters. Then, Monday morning at 2.30 o'clock you were awakened to another harrowing shock, the mother you deeply honor and love dreadfully threatened, and they say that at Headquarters you were 'like a zombie.' ”

“But I knew—”

“With the shadow of the gas chamber over a fellow human being in this room, won't you listen a moment, my child? You didn't expect to see anyone in that line-up whom you'd previ-

ously seen. But there was a man there whom you'd seen only three days before. You were terribly shocked and upset, and unconsciously when you saw him again, your mind telescoped that image . . . and *it was that face that you placed in another setting.*"

"No, sir. I did not."

"You'd seen this man here at your own home, for two hours, in broad open daylight, without 'seeing' him, and according to the records on at least six other occasions, again without 'seeing' him.—Miss Seaton, have you ever heard of the unconscious mind?"

"Certainly."

"And you've heard that it registers an infinite number of impressions that we are not consciously aware of? That in fact we do 'see' without knowing we're 'seeing'?"

"Yes, I've heard that."

"And you went down to Headquarters to the line-up on Monday. You say you were in terror. You *expected* to see your assailant, didn't you?"

"Certainly not in the line-up."

"But somewhere on the premises, where he'd told you he could watch you. Of course you didn't expect him in the line-up . . . you weren't familiar with police methods and their resourcefulness."

He paused a moment.

"On Friday morning, Miss Seaton, you had a traumatic experience. You know, I suppose, what 'traumatic' means?"

"It means a stunning blow, doesn't it?"

"And you had a stunning blow, to both your body and your mind, Friday morning . . . and another, you tell us, to your mind, in the terrible fear for your beloved mother, just a few hours before the line-up on Monday, when you tell us you were waked by the telephone. When the body receives a traumatic blow it is bruised and broken, isn't it, Miss Seaton?"

"Yes."

"And the mind is the same? So that when you went into the line-up room in the dark and saw the brilliant lights on the platform, you were not expecting to see a face that you knew there. Directly the contrary, isn't that correct?"

"Yes."

"And there, under those brilliant, almost hypnotic, lights, you saw a face you did know. How did you connect it?"

"I . . . don't understand."

"Did you say to yourself, 'I've seen Number Eight's face before, he's Ritter Meade's helper'? Is that what you said to yourself?"

"No, it is not. I *knew* he was the man."

"But you didn't remember you'd seen him with Ritter Meade? Did you have to be told that? Who told you?"

"The police told me, that night."

"After they'd arrested him?"

"Yes."

"But Mr. Ryan recognized him, without the red cap.—You had to be told. And when you were told, did you recall him?"

"Sort of vaguely. I remembered the red cap."

"So if he had had a red cap on in the line-up, your mind would have connected him with Ritter Meade and photographs, and not with the rape, wouldn't it?"

"No! I *knew* he was the man!"

"Miss Seaton, I'm suggesting your mental state was so understandably disturbed that your mind played you a trick—I think I may say, an almost macabre deception. Here was a man whose face you knew. It had been registered many times on your mind's eye. *And it became the face of the man who you had feared would be there somewhere.* Your unhappy mind confused the issues."

"That isn't true."

"My child, you must know the human mind is a complex and unpredictable thing. Haven't you yourself been affectionately amused when—for example—your mother has come in from the garden and put her trowel in water and left the flowers in the tool basket? Don't look so dismayed. I am not suggesting you have inherited the charming absent-mindedness your mother is known to have. I don't wish to alarm you."

Dave Trumper shifted uneasily. *That old witch Mrs. Chalmers has fed him this stuff.* He could see Mary Melissa swallow and knew what she was thinking. *I guess I am like Mother . . . even when I think I'm thinking clearly and calmly.* She'd said it the first day, to him and Lieutenant Hulan, when she'd told them how she stayed outside with the rain pouring down on her, and she'd said something like it other times, laughing at herself, not meaning it but meaning it nevertheless. He could see her eyes a little wider, her lips paler under the pale rose of her lipstick.—*Stay with him, baby. Don't let him make you think you're nuts.*

"If, my dear child," Enoch Chew was saying gravely, "if you had said to yourself at the line-up, 'I know this man. He's

shorter than I said he was, and he hasn't got thick bushy black hair, and I thought once he was the man who attacked me but now I see him like this I know he's the man I've seen so many times as Ritter Meade's helper . . .'—if you had said that, it would be reasonable for us to believe your mind was as clear as you seem to have thought it was. But you didn't say that, Miss Seaton . . . did you?—There is no need for you to flush, my child . . . that is the kind of error all human beings are liable to.

"Now, let's go back to your earliest identification of your attacker. When did you first describe him to the police?"

"On Friday."

"On Friday afternoon . . . the very day of the attack, when your assailant was certainly most vivid in your mind.—Was he not?"

"Yes."

"And on Saturday morning, at Police Headquarters, you saw photographs of possible suspects. Did they dull the vivid image in your mind?"

"No, sir, they didn't."

"And Sergeant Trumper and Lieutenant Hulan had had a drawing made of the man who attacked you, from your description. A police artist had drawn a sketch. You saw that sketch on Saturday morning."

"Yes."

"Did you approve of it? Was it a good one?"

"It wasn't very like."

"It was not very much like your assailant. And you are an artist yourself, Miss Seaton, and a talented one. Did you make some changes in it?"

"I'm not talented but I've been to art school. I made a new drawing."

"You could probably draw him better than you could describe him in words."

"Yes, sir. I think so."

"And your drawing looked like the man whose image was seared on your memory in those flashes of the forks of lightning?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you yourself made the new sketch, without suggestions from the police?"

"Yes. There were no suggestions."

"Now, Miss Seaton. On Monday, before you went in to the

line-up room, did you refresh your memory? Did you look again at your sketch of your attacker?"

"No, I didn't."

"When did you look at it? When did you compare the Defendant, Alvin Tibble, with the drawing you made?"

"I didn't at all. I knew him without it the minute I saw him."

Over against the wall Dave Trumper, his palms suddenly clammy wet, knew what it was he'd been trying to pin down, something about Klingan. *You lousy son of a bitch. You lying skunk.* Watching Mary Melissa helplessly he could see the lost shadow in her face, in the deepening violet under the silken transparency of the skin from her eyelids to her temples, the tiny tremor at the corner of her mouth as she tried to keep her chin stubbornly tight.

"And you didn't refer to it that Monday morning, before you went into the line-up room."

"No. I didn't need it. I knew who he was."

"And you didn't compare your drawing with Alvin Tibble *after* he was overpowered and arrested?"

"No."

"—But you're absolutely sure, no glimmer of doubt in your mind, that he was the man you described? You weren't like your mother—I know you'll forgive me—putting the champagne in the over—"

"Objection, your Honor—"

"Sustained. That's gone far enough, I believe, Mr. Chew."

"Strike it out, please. I apologize, Miss Seaton. I've already explained I do not believe these vagaries are inherited—"

"Mr. Chew." Judge Hartigan's tone was icy. "You are not immune to the rules of the Court."

"I'm sorry, your Honor.—Miss Seaton . . . did you *ever* look at your sketch *after* you saw Alvin Tibble in the line-up? Or *after* he was arrested?"

She shook her head. "I . . . don't think so."

"Then let me refresh your memory.—I have a copy of it here. When an associate of mine went to the precinct house in his neighborhood, and asked to be shown it, he was told all the copies had been destroyed—on the Homicide Bureau's orders, presumably—after Alvin Tibble's arrest. But all copies had not been destroyed. I have a copy given to Detective Klingan. I should say, ex-Detective Klingan, as he has been forced to resign from the police force. He was on duty across the street from your house on Friday, Miss Seaton. He was given this copy with the physical specifications of your assailant as you

gave them to the police—five feet eleven, dark bushy hair, limping on the right foot—on the police theory that a criminal is likely to return to the scene of his crime.”

Chew moved to his table and picked up a manilla envelope. He took out a sheaf of pictures, kept two and handed the rest to Riggin. He turned back to the bench.

“Miss Seaton I’m sure will identify these, so may they be placed in evidence and the Jury be permitted to have copies now?”

He watched silently for an instant as Riggin gave one to the bailiff to hand to the Judge, put one in front of Dobson at the State’s table and gave the rest to the Jury.

“Now, Miss Seaton, if you’ll please look at these.” He gave Mary Melissa the two in his hands. “The top one is the reproduction of your sketch that the police sent out to the various district stations and gave to the detectives, including Detective Klingan, from whom this was obtained. Is it a true copy, and is the other one in your hand an accurate photostat of it, the same photostat that the Jury now have?”

Trumper’s eyes still rested somberly on Klingan. *You son of a bitch, you told me you’d burned it.*

“—Yes, sir.”

She was seeing it vividly as she’d drawn it first, the eyes glaring, the snarl on the lips, the way it had been before she retouched it Saturday morning at Headquarters. Then, as she looked from it to Alvin Tibble, her eyes widened again, her face still paler. The Jury were looking from their copies to Tibble and over at her, bewildered.

“—It is true, Miss Seaton, isn’t it, that this is now the first time you have seen your drawing since that Saturday morning when you made it in Police Headquarters?”

She nodded slowly.

Chew waited a long moment. “But looking at it now, and looking at Alvin Tibble, don’t you see, Miss Seaton, that your mind was betrayed at the line-up that Monday morning? Possibly the flashes of the photographer’s bulbs—not in effect unlike the flashes of lightning—may have heightened and helped make some vaguely superficial resemblance Alvin Tibble has to this drawing, and confuse your shocked mind that morning. Because in the traumatic state your mind was in at the line-up *your unconscious mind leapt to the man you had seen, without consciously seeing, at your home on Wednesday when he was in and about your house for nearly two hours, and on several other occasions.* If Alvin Tibble had had a red cap on, the day

of the line-up, my child, you'd have placed him at once, at your house helping with the photographs. For what you have drawn here is a type of person, Miss Seaton. It isn't uncommon. Alvin is not an unusual type, I believe, in a city this size, of more than a million people? No doubt in this city there are many people who also resemble him, *in the same way that he resembles the man from whom your drawing was made*. Haven't you seen others?—Right here in this room, perhaps, there could be some. Would you mind looking around this Courtroom, to see if even here there isn't someone of the type?"

With his massive figure off to her right blocking her view of her father, Ryan and Chalmers, Enoch Chew raised his hand to direct her attention beyond Tibble to the benches where his witnesses were. Trumper saw Mrs. Meade there, rigid, hardly breathing, her eyes straight ahead. Chew's hand was moving on, leading Mary Melissa's eyes back through the side section. Trumper saw her steeling herself for the unhappiness of having at last to look at Nat Ryan when she hadn't once looked at him during the day even when she had had to say his name. Her eyes moved quickly past him now, across to the other side benches, before they were pulled back and she was staring at Nat and Archie Chalmers. Or it would have seemed so to the Jury until they saw, as she saw, the man who had been sitting behind Ryan shift over so that he loomed up directly between him and Chalmers, his head raised, his eyes staring up and on beyond the girl on the stand.

Trumper saw the Jury tense sharply, their eyes going down to the photostat in their hands and back to the face that Trumper could not see then but had seen in June, the clerk in the tea store whom Officer Sykes had so proudly spotted as the rapist, the dead ringer for Mary Melissa's sketch and a dead ringer for Alvin Tibble before he had cut his dyed hair and starved himself in the jail.

*Trial from Ambush.* Trumper had heard of it. Now he was seeing it, with a cold burning anger.

The eyes of the Jury moved slowly from the clerk Bertram Smith to Mary Melissa, the color drained from her lips as she stared numbly at a ghost in the flesh, the copies of the sketch slipping from her hands onto the floor. The clerk of the court sprang forward crying "Stand back!" and caught her as she fainted.

Chew's voice rang clearly as the gong sounded through the stunned silence.

"I move this Court acquit Alvin Tibble."

## CHAPTER 15

The last day of the State of Maryland vs. Alvin Tibble opened with Judge Hartigan denying Chew's motion for acquittal as a prelude to Mary Melissa's return to the stand and to a bitterly fought, anger-filled day with Dobson alleging indecent trickery, fraud and chicanery and Enoch Chew rising, coolly and almost contemptuously, to rest his case for the Defendant without calling a witness.

"This sketch of the man this girl herself made, of the image so vividly burned and seared into her mind, as she has told us, is the only witness the members of this Jury need in support of the evidence of their own intelligent senses. They would not and *could not* send a man to his death if only a reasonable doubt were to exist in their minds. Here there is room for no doubt whatsoever. This sketch is *not* the man who sits here, the Defendant Alvin Tibble. We have not said and do not in any sense say that the clerk Bertram Smith was the man who attacked her. The police have themselves proved he was not. But when this girl saw him and when she fainted here on the stand, she—who accused Tibble—by actions cried out, as she had cried out before, the morning of the line-up, 'The man is not there. The man is not Tibble.' This girl, with her shocked mind, cannot be accepted as a competent witness against Alvin Tibble when his life is at stake. Your Honor, we rest in the hands of this Jury."

Dave Trumper, not waiting out the thirty-five minutes it took the Jury to agree with Chew, heard the verdict of acquittal in the third floor room at Headquarters. There was no special sign of hollow frustration. They were used to it. An order had already gone out to the K-9s. There'd be a man and a dog in the Seatons' woods. Trumper went on to the hospital where the doctors had held Isham for possible internal injuries. After his editor had called the Commissioner they'd traced him via North-eastern and the yoking in the alley back of the tea store.

What could be done with Klingan remained to be seen.

"He could claim self-defence," Isham said moodily. He was sick about the verdict. "I saw the sister and Klingan leaving and

followed them. They went to the store. Gogan and this Bertram Smith were there in his office. It's got a barred window off the alley. Pretty soon Chew comes in. He takes a real wad of dough and gives it to Gogan. He counts it and puts it in the safe. They must have seen me, because Klingan gets up and goes out. I didn't hear him till he was right behind me. He offers me two hundred bucks to forget about it and I socked him. Me socking Klingan."

"He looks worse than you do. You all right?"

"They say so."

Trumper went on to the tea store. The ex-Marine looked at him unhappily. "Okay, it was dirty. I told the fellow's sister first time she came nothing doing. She's crying her head off. Then the next time she comes with this fat ex-bull and says there's two thousand five hundred bucks for him if I'll produce him. Two and a half grand for a guy ain't got a dime, he's in debt and got a sick kid needs care? I said, let me see the dough. What would you do?"

Trumper shook his head. "I got problems of my own.—Did Tibble figure it out? Had he known Smith?"

"Don't make me laugh, they went to school together. Always being taken for each other. Smith hated his guts. But like I say . . . I'm sorry about it, Sergeant, it was dirty for the girl and you were decent about Bert. And I'm sorry the other guy got hurt. When we went out Klingan said it was a smokehound sleeping it off. I called the cops to pick him up, if it helps any."

Trumper went back to Headquarters. Coming up out of the iron stairway he heard the Homicide phone ringing and Justice's voice answering.

"—One for what book?" he was saying, nodding for Trumper to come in. "Yeah? Yeah?" He kept saying it like punctuation, his face settling in more heavily sardonic lines. "Thanks. Yeah, I'll sure tell time. I got him right here now."

He put the phone down, looking silently at Trumper for an instant. "So you're a detective.—So I'm a captain. That was Tabb at Northeastern. One for the book, he says."

"I heard you," Trumper said, "What one, for what book?"

"This hillbilly gospel band plays on the corner out there on Tibble's alley. One of 'em tips Captain Tabb off this fellow Cobbett, got the tavern there, writes numbers. Tabb's got the idea maybe some cop wasn't looking too close, so he keeps an eye on the place himself off and on. Cobbett's got this old mother got a farm down in Anne Arundel, raises muskmelons and rents

her barn to a bingo outfit. Cobbett goes down there Sundays. So Tabb gets the county police to watch it. Here about an hour ago they call and tell Tabb there's a colored boy with a panel truck loading a bunch of stuff, big parcels wrapped up in brown paper, out of the barn loft. Then they call and tell him it's set out back this way. So Tabb's waiting at the tavern and sure enough, here it comes in the alley. Only it don't stop, not at the tavern. It goes on up the alley."

Trumper looked at him a moment in speechless disgust. "The gold bed."

"The gold bed and the big heavy mirror fits on the top. Tabb watches Tibble unpack the stuff, cocky as hell. I guess the books and the art'll come next trip."

"Cobbett swore up and down he hardly knew him."

"Yeah. Well, the sister's out in the kitchen right now, singing her head off, cooking a big dinner, fried chicken, the works."

"That's great." Trumper felt sicker than Isham had been. "Well, with his pretty bed and his stomach full he's not likely to go out tonight. And I guess Ryan and Chalmers aren't likely to try anything . . . not before the Seatons have gone."

Justice nodded. "The K-9s'll be there till they've sailed. I've had them change the girl's unlisted number."

When the Seatons' phone rang that evening, Mary Melissa had taken a sedative and gone to bed, fear keeping her from sleeping soundly. It was all that seemed to be left in her from the nine shattering days, this the most shattering, the stunned shock of seeing Tibble walk out of the Courtroom free paralyzing everything in her except the fear for her mother. When she heard the ringing she sat up abruptly, thinking first it was her own phone and then realizing it was in her parents' room. Her father was at a directors' meeting making plans for their trip. She got out of bed and went quickly across the hall. Her mother was sitting up in bed, her hand still on the phone, her face strange.

"Mother . . . who was it?"

Mrs. Seaton turned slowly. "Nobody, dear," she said softly. "Go back to bed, darling. The officer with the dog's outside, Daddy'll be home shortly. Let's get some sleep, love. Close my door, please."

Mary Melissa went back to her room. It was only when she heard the phone ringing again, reaching through to the fear that was stronger than the sedative, that she woke and ran back across the hall. The bed was empty and her mother's night-

dress was on the floor in front of the open door of her closet. She stood motionless at the door, and then ran between the beds, seized the phone book and found Tibble's number.

The voice answering was cautious.

"—Did you call my mother?"

She heard his breath sharply drawn.

"Where is she? What have you done?"

"Why, Mary Melissa . . . how nice of you to call me.—She's coming to see me. You could come too, but you'll have to hurry, darling, I—"

She dashed the phone down, started back to her room, ran back to the phone then and dialled her father. There was no answer. She ran back to her room, tore on her clothes and ran down the back stairs through the kitchen to the carriage house for her car, missing the square of note paper her mother had left on the front hall floor for Talbot Seaton. All she saw outside was that her mother's car was gone, and she'd started her own before the officer with the dog on a leash came from the edge of the woods.

She knew where Tibble's house was from seeing the pictures of it in the paper, near where her music teacher had once lived, but she had never been there on foot and when she had found a place for her car the dark seemed frightening as she hurried past the mouth of the dimly lighted alley by the tavern. The street was full of people, but what should have been security was frightening too. Nobody noticed her. It was as if she was alone in a blind and deaf country, so totally alien she was invisible. She wanted to ask the people on the dingy row steps next to the gleaming clean marble of the Ritter Meade house if they had seen a frail dark-haired woman go in, but when she paused they got up and moved silently inside.

*I should have brought the officer and the dog.*

It was too late and the policeman she'd glimpsed on the corner by the gospel band was out of sight now. Her hands and her heart were both frozen cold in the murky heat as she went up the white marble steps to the door of the house where Alvin in his gold bed on the third floor was waiting, his eyes bright, waiting for her to ring the bell so he could go to the front window and tell her to come along in.

As he looked up to the mirror the lust he could feel crawling inside his mind was the lust to kill. The heavy butcher's knife in his hand was like a live thing whispering. *Kill her. It's your chance. People'll see her coming. You can say she came here to try to kill you.* His hands on the knife were like velvet

caressing it as he listened to the velvet red silence of the house, waiting.

No thought wave took Trumper to Farthingale Alley that night. When he answered the phone at his house it was Mrs. Seaton asking him to go.

"It's quite terrible, really." She added that after she'd told him where she was and why she was there. "I couldn't call till I got here, I was afraid Mary Melissa would wake and hear me. I haven't dared call Archie and Nat, so will you go and see them, and see they don't do anything . . . foolish?"

The lights of the tiny house were on when he got there, the hi-fi playing and both of their cars were in the side yard. But there was no answer when he knocked. He went to the side window, peering in through the slats of the blind. A small table with an ash tray and a glass on it had been tipped over and left lying in the middle of the floor. Two other glasses, one full, one half-full, were by the other chairs, and the checked jacket hanging on the back of one of the chairs he knew was John Isham's. It was a clear picture of a room that three men had bolted out of. Isham's car, probably standing in front, would have been the nearest.

Seven minutes later he saw it again, jammed into the curb in a no-parking zone four dingy doors up from the Tibble-Meade house. He pulled in ahead of it and ran back and up the marble steps. There were no outward signs of trouble, no reason for the chill that was crawling at the base of his spine as he pushed the brass bell with "Thibault" still dimly shining in the mounting above it, but the chill grew colder as he pressed his face to the ruby and purple stained glass and saw the Lazarus light in the empty hallway. Chalmers by the newel post and Ryan with the gun in the parlor door were phantoms his own memory was putting there as he pressed the bell again and reached for the door knob, surprised when the door opened, as if someone inside had done it.

*La casa es sua, as we say in old Spain . . .* The mocking voice he seemed to hear was a phantom too in his memory, and the voice he heard then seemed almost as grotesquely eerie in the silence.

"Be quiet, he's dead."

He knew it was a real voice and that it was Nat Ryan's, but his mouth was ash dry as he heard a muted step in the parlor and saw the door open, Ryan's face bonewhite but with a strange glow of light in it.

"Be quiet," he said again. "Mary Melissa's in here, asleep. Just . . . worn out."

He stepped aside as Trumper moved over, the sweat breaking out cold on his palms and the hairs prickling up on the back of his neck as he saw her. She was huddled asleep on the green velvet sofa, in her white slip, her dress lying across the arm of a chair. Scarlet splotches gleamed in the blue cotton and a man's bloody handkerchief was on the floor by it.

"She . . . didn't kill him?"

His voice grated flat in the stillness of the hall.

"No. You can see. Upstairs, third floor. Archie's up there. I'm going to stay with her. If she should wake—"

"You'll keep her right here."

Trumper turned and went slowly up the stairs. *You're a cop and don't you forget it.* The hollow tread of his feet on the linoleum kept saying it as he mounted to the center and heart of the silence. It was the silence of death. And the odor of death. He could smell it now, the sickish sweet odor of blood in his nostrils, stronger as he reached the stairs to the third floor. He saw Isham's long legs then through the stretchers and saw his face, olive-green above his white shirt. Chalmers was there, by the closed door into the front bedroom, his lips a hard white.

"—Go easy," he said. "It's pretty rough." Trumper saw him draw a deep jerky breath before he went to the door and opened it.

Trumper went along the hall, started in and stopped, frozen. He said softly, "My God," and remembered Kulac, the thought coming crazily to him that he had no medal to touch.

He stood an instant and went on in, turning slowly as the voice came from his left.

"I killed him."

Tibble's sister was sitting by the front windows, her face like death, a death in life more terrible than the face of her brother, stark white on the dyed scarlet of his bed pillow. It was all that could be seen of him under the monstrous quilt that covered him, the end of it at his throat jagged and blood-drenched, gouts spattered on it, patches still living, crawling as if they had their own life down the sheet and into the pale gray of the carpet.

"I killed him. This is the . . . knife the girl took from his throat."

Her hand moved slowly to the long blood-covered blade of silvered glass that had broken off the end of the strange quilt.

Trumper looked up at the wooden frame at the top of the bed that had held the mirror.

Mrs. Meade's eyes were blind black caverns, great charcoal rings spreading under them.

"The girl called him up. He told me she was sorry she'd accused him, and she wanted to see him and arrange about . . . getting him a job at the bank. I . . . believed him. He told me to go to Cobby's. But when I got there I was worried . . . I thought she might have come to hurt him. I hurried back, and just as I got in the back door, she came in. He'd told me to leave the front door unlocked. She said he'd called down from the window for her to come in, and that her mother was here with him. I thought she was mad. I told her to wait, I'd . . . see. When I went up he thought it was her coming. He had on his silk robe, lying on his bed, and he . . . had the knife in his hand. When he saw me, he was . . . terrible."

Her head moved in a slow painful arc until her chin rested on her pearl beads. The noise from the street, the cars and the jukes, the blare of the gospel swing-time, muted by the closed windows, made the silence in the room eerily empty. Her head came up slowly, her eyes closing, her face a horror mask done with white chalk.

"Then he told me. The horrible truth. The girls, our customers. The list. The shoes . . . the girl at Mount Vale . . . and the boy. Oh my God . . . oh, God, be gentle, help him, my poor, poor mad brother. I never knew, I've been such a fool. Oh God, forgive me."

She sat staring blindly for a moment.

"—I knew he was going to kill me, but I had to live, to get that girl out of this . . . terrible house. I was holding on to the bed post."

Trumper looked at it, canted out, the gold carving still holding the wooden frame up.

"Then I turned to call to her to go and I thought I was going to fall and caught at it. He only had time to throw his hand up in front of his face, and he struck the end of the mirror with the knife. I heard it shatter and he made a . . . a strange sound and it was still all of a sudden. Just the girl running upstairs, calling her mother."

She pulled herself slowly to her feet, looking down at the blood-stained dagger of glass. "I didn't even see this in his throat till she ran over and . . . grabbed it and the blood came out like a fountain. She cried 'Get a doctor.' Blood was all over

her, and she asked what our doctor's name was, his phone number. She wanted to save him."

She turned to look into Trumper's eyes. "*She wanted to save him,*" she whispered. "—I wouldn't let her. It's best that he's dead. I . . . killed him."

Trumper moved slowly to the bed and looked down at the waxen face on the bright pillow. He turned back. "You couldn't have saved him. It was too late for a doctor."

"I wouldn't have tried. It was God's hand, working through mine. I'm willing to pay . . . for his sins, and mine. I wouldn't let the girl lift the mirror. Then the bell rang and it was these people. She let them in. I told them to call you, so you could see, so nobody could say it was Miss Seaton."

She took a wavering step toward the door. "Before you arrest me, may I . . . call my husband? I'd like him to know. I'd like him to come back."

Dave Trumper took a deep breath. "Go ahead, ma'am." He hesitated an instant and said, "Nobody's going to charge you."

He signed to Isham to help her downstairs. In the doorway he turned to look back into the strange room.

"You didn't get our message?" Archie asked.

"I was hunting for you.—I've got some bad news. Your mother's had a stroke. It isn't a bad one."

Archie stared at him. "Where is she?"

"At home. Mrs. Seaton's there with her."

"Mrs. Seaton? How did she—?"

"Your mother had the maid call her. She had a bad shock. Tibble telephoned her. He told her what he thought of her getting Chew, and I guess the rest of it too. So she's had it rough."

Archie's face twisted. "That's irony for you. The whole bloody thing. Mary Melissa thought it was him calling her mother. She called him and he said he did, her mother was coming here. She got here and got scared. She went down to the Mecca and called me, said she'd wait out in front. But when we came she wasn't there, and when we came in she was just running down the stairs all covered with blood. It was right rugged, for a second. We didn't know . . ."

His face changed then.

"One thing's okay. She's forgotten the business about being afraid of men. Of Nat, anyway. She didn't see either Isham or me, she was in Nat's arms right off. So that's as it should be.—I guess you saw all the time it was him she was in love with."

With death waiting silently with an eternity to wait in, Trumper took time to reply. "I didn't know you did."

Archie smiled. "Maybe a lot longer than I admitted . . . when I was sober anyway. That's what I was trying to find them out on the golf course for."

He started down and turned back. "So long, Sergeant Trumper—we're very grateful to you." He grinned again. "I guess I can't say I hope we'll see you again soon."

"No. I guess not," Trumper said.

They heard Judas Iscariot's voice from the second floor. "My story, Chief! Okay to call it in?"

"No," Trumper said automatically. Then he said bleakly, "Sure, go ahead. Only do it from the Mecca. And tell Ryan to get his girl out of here, will you?"

He waited till he heard them go out the front door and the silence of the grave seep back through the house. He didn't go back into the room where the High Court had heard the confession and reversed the verdict, death the swift judgment, death from its own ambush. He went to the phone in Ritter Meade's workroom and made his calls there. First the Morgue. Then Homicide. Then his doll. Each in its proper order. He was a cop.

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