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The Clay Assassin

By the Same Author

THE FIFTH HOUSE
THE GUN AND MR. SMITH
THE BLUE HOUR
THE YEARS DEATH
THE MAN IN QUESTION

John Godey

THE CLAY ASSASSIN



A BERKLEY MEDALLION BOOK
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THE customs inspector might have been mildly surprised at the meagreness of my luggage, but he was too professionally indifferent to let it show. He cleared me through with offhand dispatch. In the busy terminal, for the first time, there was a sense of return: I was standing on United States soil rather than airline soil or government soil. I tested myself for some special savor, some thrill of homecoming, but felt nothing. Perhaps in time.

I tightened my grip on the handle of the new canvas bag, loosely packed with such bare necessities that they could not even by courtesy be called possessions, and started to edge my way through the jostling crowd.

"Hello, Roy."

My elbow made its uncontrollable twitch against the bulge of the envelope in the inside breast pocket of my jacket. But I walked on, without turning my head. A man fell in beside me, matching his stride to mine.

"My name is Constable, Roy. I'm a reporter on the *Globe*."

"Must be a mistake."

Something floppy described a flashing arc

in front of my face. I pulled back from it by reflex and came to a stop. It was a folded newspaper.

"Take a look," Constable said. He was tightly-knit and wiry, with reddish hair turning grey, sharp features with the precise definition of a die-cut, and eyes like insults. "You ought to know this man." He smiled, and the hard edge of his features softened. If the eyes were a liability in his face, the smile was an asset that just managed to balance the books. "It won't bite you, Roy."

There was a one-column head, in small black type: ROY HATHAWAY FREED. Beneath it a photograph, a white face with the eyes of a trapped animal. Then a deep caption: *Roy Hathaway, 29 . . . shot and . . . Clyde Stockman . . . released after . . .* I skimmed through the story quickly, and then turned to the picture again. It puzzled me until I realized that it was cropped, and the missing portions filled themselves in: the two burly *policías*, each with a bruising wristlock, the hand behind me, at the base of my skull, clamping me face-on to the camera. . . . The man in the picture was three years younger than me, and deranged.

I pushed the paper away. "There's no news," I said to Constable. "It happened three years ago. I'm nobody."

"You're talking to an expert," Constable said. "I was put on the story when it first broke, and I did a lot of digging for angles on this

end. It interested me even after it was cold, you get that way sometimes about a story."

"I thought I'd be forgotten."

He folded the paper and put it into the pocket of his jacket. "Did you? Really?" His tone was innocent enough, but his eyes shot out insults.

The crowd milled around us in an aimless fever of purpose; disembodied monotone voices blared names, numbers, the times of phantom arrivals and departures. I ought to have been a part of the anonymous confusion, but I felt naked, spotlighted, marooned on an upthrust of notoriety created by my past. Everyone knew me, and there was no cover.

"When you pulled that trigger," Constable said, "you placed yourself in the public domain."

"Not after three years. Except to somebody who's interested in prolonging an impersonal sensation. Nobody else cares."

"You'd be surprised at how many people care," Constable said.

I shook my head. "You want me to believe that. But if it were true, there would be other reporters."

"I wasn't talking about the newspapers," he said pointedly. Then he smiled his disarming smile. "Look. I'll stop playing footsie with you. I didn't come out here for the *Globe*, but on my own. I have a thing riding with a magazine. . . . Tell me, Roy, could you use between four and five thousand dollars?"

The point of my elbow tipped in against my breast, felt the assurance of the bulge. I said nothing.

"Rhetorical question," Constable said. "The facts are known. Five hundred dollars. You went down there and plugged Stockman for a stinking five hundred dollars."

But the money was the least of it, a down payment. The true reward was the promise of a haze of golden tomorrows. I said, "I didn't work quite as cheaply as you think."

He tilted his head in puzzlement, but not for long. "Oh, sure. That was why . . ." He was quick on the uptake. "By the way, have you shaken it?"

"Yes."

"Congratulations. It gives the story a good upbeat element. It's an extra plus value."

"I don't get it. Why would a magazine pay for a stale rehash of a three-year-old story?"

"Not for a rehash, but for a unique inside series. Roy Hathaway's Own Story—telling the facts subjectively from your own point of view, naming names——"

"I'm not interested."

"Listen," he said vehemently, "don't be so cavalier about it. This is worth eight to ten thousand, and we'll split it down the middle. Honest money, you won't have to shoot anybody for it."

"All right," I said. "Stand out of my way."

Like a magic unguent, his smile cleansed his face of all rancor. "I'm sorry, Roy. That was stupid. I apologize."

"Let me pass, please."

There was open warfare on his face between his eyes and his smile. It was a deadlock, but he stepped aside. I started walking again, and he fell in beside me.

"Have you got a story of your own cooking?"

"No."

He shook his head. "I don't understand you, Roy."

"Don't try."

"Going to be around town for awhile?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Don't be touchy. I just want to know if I can get hold of you in case you change your mind."

"I won't change my mind."

"Where will you be staying?" Constable said. I shook my head. "Don't know, or won't tell me?"

"Both."

"Be in town long?"

"Just overnight."

"Going back home tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Millville, isn't it? No. Millwood. Northwestern Connecticut. Can I reach you there, if I have to?"

"You won't have to."

"Don't be too hasty, Roy. Think my proposition over. Four to five thousand dollars. It's worth a few minutes of any man's thought."

At the glassed exit doors I said, "Thanks for the offer, anyway. Good-bye."

"Okay. If you decide to co-operate, phone me at the *Globe* office. Harry Constable." His eyes were suddenly spiteful. "Meanwhile, be careful."

I paused in the half-open door. "Careful of what?"

"Your general welfare. Call me up at the *Globe* if you want to discuss it."

I watched him turn and mingle with the crowd, his jacket swinging with the weight of the rolled newspaper in his pocket. Then I went on through the door. A brilliance flashed from the chrome of a parked car, and I flinched from it. For an instant, with that bleached flash in my eyes, I might have been back at the window of my cell, dazed by the bone-white heat, sucking painfully at the leaden tropical air. . . .

I shifted my head a fraction of an inch to avoid the shaft of the reflection and the unwelcome illusion vanished. This was the wholesome buoyance of a temperate zone spring, with just a hint, not an overdose, of perfume in the air. The sun was no enemy, the buzzing speck hovering over a smear of spilt ice cream on the sidewalk was not an infestation of insects but a single fly.

I took a deep breath. It was springtime, and I had only a single obligation to discharge to be free. For the first time a future drawn in terms of crisp blue-shadowed slopes of snow seemed a rational possibility.

"Roy Hathaway?"

My elbow flicked to my side. I wheeled

around, my hands coming up in front of me in a defensive reflex, my head ducking into the shelter of the canvas bag.

"Take it easy, Hathaway."

He was a man of medium height, solid and square-shouldered. His olive complexion was flushed, and he was breathing hard, sweating slightly. I lowered the bag.

"Who are you?"

"I underestimated the traffic through town, and damn near missed you." He gulped in air, held it, and blew it out with noisy relief through his lips. "I'm Robert Fornari, an assistant district attorney." He took out a handkerchief and dabbed at his forehead. "Want to go inside where we can sit down?"

"No."

He said doubtfully, "It's not very comfortable this way. Were you going into the city? I can take you in my car, and we can talk at the same time."

"Do I have to?"

"Up to you. We can stand here if it suits you better."

"I mean, are you ordering me to do it? Am I wanted?"

"Hell, no," Fornari said. "Purely voluntary."

"All right, I'll ride in with you."

"Fine. My car's over at that end." He waved his hand at the parking lot, with its rows of cars brightly hued in the clear sunlight. We started to cross toward the fenced-in lot. "Hell no, you're not wanted, Hathaway. You never

committed any crime in our jurisdiction. But there's something you can do for us."

To the left, with a roar of motors, a huge plane strained its snout upward, and took leave of the ground. It headed for the sun, winking and gleaming, its sound attenuating to a steady drone.

I said, "There isn't anything I can do for you."

"Yes, there is," Fornari said. "You can sing."

2

FORNARI was a cautious, deliberate driver, blandly impervious to being honked at. I sat beside him in the front seat, watching the grip of his olive-tinted hands on the wheel, and waited for him to speak.

When he did, he surprised me.

"In the first week after the shooting I tried to see you," he said.

I stared at him, not quite understanding.

"In the Republic. In Assumpta. In the what do you call it—*carcel*? The prison."

"Did you see me?"

It must have violated the first principle of

his driving philosophy to take his eyes from the road, but he turned and gave me a quick bewildered look. "Don't you *know*?"

"I wouldn't remember."

"They didn't let me see you. You were in a restraining jacket. I waited around in Assumpta for a week, and went back. By that time you were out of the jacket, and some doctor or other——"

"Doctor Moreno."

"Yes. I got into a hassle with him when he refused to let me talk to you, but he was running the show, and I didn't get in."

"You spent all that taxpayers' money to try to talk to me in the condition I was in then?"

"I spent the taxpayers' money in an attempt to talk to Clyde Stockman. He had me thrown out of the hospital. So I tried to see you, I thought there might be some lead——"

"Is that what you expect to get now?"

He angled sedately into the Van Wyck straight-away. "How did you react to Clyde Stockman's death?"

"It was a natural death. That is, a heart-attack, the arm had nothing to do with it."

"That's right," Fornari said. "I meant——"

"I was sorry he died. I read his obit in the *Assumpta Vigilante*. It was of more interest to me than the others, but . . ." I shrugged.

Doctor Moreno had brought the *Vigilante* obit to me himself, tossed it in my lap, and said, "Look, Roy, a man had died of a weak heart whom once you shot painfully but super-

ficially in the arm. There is no connection between the wound and the cause of his death. You understand this?"

There was more to it for me than just logic, but I told him that I understood perfectly.

Fornari said, "You didn't feel any sense of guilt?"

"When I learned that I would probably be set free a decent interval after his death—I felt guilty about that. Some kind of delayed reaction, I guess, or it provided a handy outlet for the guilt I should have felt at his death, but didn't. Hell, I don't know."

"From the sound of it, this Moreno couldn't sell you a hundred per cent on your guiltlessness."

"What are you—an analyst in your spare time?"

His fingers, all but the thumbs, lifted from the wheel in protest. "Just curious. Who sent you down to Assumpta to assassinate Clyde Stockman, Roy?"

"I don't remember."

Fornari sighed. "You had no *personal* reason for wanting him dead, did you, Roy?"

"I had never even heard of him."

"Did you know—do you know *now*—why an attempt was made to kill Stockman?"

"Only vaguely. A crooked politician makes enemies——"

"Not enemies. Friends. A crooked politician like Clyde Stockman made a lot of friends. At a guess, Stockman didn't have an enemy in the world. But he had a hell of a lot of friends."

He concentrated on maneuvering the car from Van Wyck into the Interboro Parkway. The westward city-bound traffic was heavy; the sun reflected from a thousand bumpers, hood ornaments, door handles, gleaming strips of decorative chromium.

I said, "Are you implying it was his *friends* who wanted him dead?"

A car in the lane to our left shot by dangerously close. "Damn lunatics!" He twisted his thumbs to point ahead through the windshield. "See that blue sedan in front of us? That's how to drive a car. I've been following him all the way from Van Wyck, and I haven't once had to go over thirty-five. That's fast enough in this traffic, but those lunatics——"

"I've never seen you in a courtroom, Mr. Fornari, but I'll bet you're a master at building suspense."

"I haven't pleaded a case in fifteen years. His friends, of course it was his friends."

"Funny kind of friends."

"Not an enemy in the world," Fornari said. "I would swear to it. Even you. You weren't his enemy."

"I wasn't his friend."

"You were a robot, an instrument." He flicked his eyes away from the road momentarily to smile at me. "I would make a bet that you know less about Clyde Stockman than the average citizen in this town."

"I know that he was a crooked politician and that he skipped out with a tin box and asked for and got refuge in Assumpta. I

learned that afterwards. When I went down to Assumpta with a gun in my pocket I didn't know any more about him than his name."

"My God," Fornari said softly, and stole another quick glance away from the road to look at me. Then he said, more briskly, "The tin box was figurative. It was a suitcase, packed full of greenbacks. You want me to fill you in on Stockman?"

"Not particularly."

"For reasons of my own, I'd like to, anyway. You know he was a political power in this town. Without ever having held any office except briefly, back in the old days, when he was an alderman. He was a king-maker, he picked the mayor, he handled the patronage, and he was the bagman. Five years ago the district attorney's office had worked up a case against Stockman that we were ready to take into court. But we were after more than just Stockman—we wanted to round up all the muckamucks, especially the ones that held high municipal office.

"The D.A. called Stockman down to his office one night, and laid the whole story on the line for him. We offered him a deal. If he talked, we would soften the rap against him. Otherwise, we would bring him to trial, throw the book at him, and he was a cinch to take a heavy fall. He was scared. He asked for a couple of days to think it over. He kept stalling us, so one afternoon we drew a warrant for his arrest. But his sense of timing was very good. He had slipped the tail we had on him—slipped or

bribed, whichever it was—boarded a plane, and landed in Assumpta.

“He left behind him a statement for the newspapers, to be delivered once he was over the border. It was the classic testament of the crooked politician: ‘I have done nothing wrong. I am the victim of a dastardly frame-up. My life is an open book,’ etcetera.”

Fornari snorted, an angry little expulsion of breath. He was silent for a moment, as if to collect or compose himself, then continued.

“His friends had persuaded him to go into exile, and to soften the blow they kittied up a half a million dollars. All in cash, all in the suitcase. The key officials in the Republic had already been alerted, and when he reached Assumpta all he had to do was make the proper disbursements out of the suitcase. Our extradition requests were politely turned down on the basis that Stockman was a political refugee and hence entitled to sanctuary. Very funny. We tried flexing our muscles, but the State Department jumped all over us—were we trying to wreck inter-American relations?

“Clyde Stockman was safe and snug and invulnerable in Assumpta, and without his testimony his friends were safe and snug and invulnerable in New York. End of a saga.”

Beneath the smooth olive skin the muscles of his jaw were working. I said, “Then there was no reason for anybody to want him killed.”

“Ah,” Fornari said. “He got homesick. It wasn’t enough that he had steaks flown down

to him from Gallagher's, and ordered his shirts by mail from Sulka. Or even that, every once in a while, a little kiddie from the chorus line of his favourite nightclub was despatched to Assumpta on a mission of love. He was a native product of New York, and it was the only place in the world for him.

"He made up his mind to go home. He wrote to his pals, pleading for release from exile. He argued that since two years had gone by, the heat must be off him, but that anyway he would rather spend his remaining days in a civilized jail than in luxurious freedom in a Spic republic. It was a foolish notion on his part all around, but he had had his first heart attack by then, and in an odd way it emboldened him. Having survived the attack, he must have felt he could survive anything. His friends tried to talk him out of it, but he was resolutely determined. So an assassin was hired."

He might have been referring to a stranger. And so might I. "But the assassination attempt was a flop."

"Oh, Stockman got the message. He unpacked fast when he got out of the hospital, and released a statement something to this effect: that since the abortive attempt upon his life by a half-crazed dope fiend . . ." He rolled his eyes at me apologetically. ". . . he had greater confidence than ever in his adopted country, the garden spot of Central America, and that all he asked was to be allowed to live out his life peacefully in the Republic. That was his reply to the message of

the bullet, and so no further messages had to be sent to him by his good friends in New York."

I had seen Stockman only once after the shooting. It was on the day he came out of the hospital. From the window of my cell I watched him slowly descend the broad sweeping steps, a hulk of a man in a white linen suit, walking with the extreme tentativeness of the wounded, or the very sick, or the very fearful. The white sling bandage was bleached in the hot sunlight, and he dwarfed the attendants who helped him into his car. I hadn't remembered him as being such an enormous man, but the only other time I had seen him was in the wavering sights of a gun, and it was understandable that he would look smaller then.

Fornari said, "Stockman's friends knew their man. They knew he didn't have to be killed to be convinced, just thoroughly scared. Otherwise they would have sent down a competent professional gunman. Sending you was by way of being a grisly sporting proposition. As long as you got a shot off, hit or miss, it would accomplish their purpose, and at the same time give him a gambler's chance of staying alive."

I said, "My God!"—whether from shock at such callousness, or in compassion for Stockman, or revulsion for the drooling creature whose success or failure was a matter of indifference, I could not be sure.

Fornari surprised me—and maybe himself

—by turning out to pass a car. He made a tense job of the maneuver, and was visibly relieved when the adventure was over and he had swung back to the right lane behind the sedately paced blue sedan.

"You were a loose end that they apparently hadn't given much thought to," he said. "So they must have figured that any connection between you and them was completely covered. But they must have gotten a little nervous, which explains why they sent somebody down belatedly to take care of you."

That angle had never occurred to me. "You think it was the same people? Not someone who wanted to, well, avenge the shooting?"

"No question about it," Fornari said smugly. "This one was a real professional. You don't know how lucky you were."

"Don't I, Mr. Fornari?"

He had no answer, for once. We drove along in silence, and I remembered how the world had blossomed into a hot flowery whiteness with a red sputtering heart at its core, how the stone around the prison window had begun to disintegrate into razor-sharp chips and a powdery dust. . . .

It was just after my sessions with Doctor Moreno had begun. I was led back to my cell—half-carried—tottering, aching, burning, freezing, choking, gagged by a single shattering unreleased scream stuck in my throat. At the window, I forced my face as far between the bars as it would go, welcoming the pressure on my temples as a torment that I

could understand and control. It was just before dusk, and the Avenida Bolivar was quiet, almost deserted. Below, a car came slowly along the street from the direction of the Plaza. It was a big American car, and it inched ahead hesitantly, now and then slowing to a stop before continuing. I followed it indifferently, my head still clamped between the bars.

The car pulled up directly opposite, and a man got out. He was very blond, with eyebrows so white as to be invisible, and his skin was hot with sunburn. He tilted his face upward into the waning sun, and his eyes, a glassy porcelain blue, focused on me casually for a moment. Then, without changing the position of his feet, turning only his head and shoulders, he reached into the car. His head and shoulders swiveled to the front again, and he put something black and elongated to his face.

It was only after the first burst spattered against the stone that I realized he was firing at me. In a cloud of fragmented stone and mortar I started a slow dream-like process of withdrawing my head from between the bars and dropping to my knees beneath the window opening (Dr. Moreno told me, later, that although I was not nearly as slow as I imagined, my reflexes were in fact somewhat blunted).

I crouched against the rough stone of the wall, shaking, watching a slow drip of blood from my cheek splat on the scuffed concrete

cell floor. A silt of powdered stone wafted down from the battered window-sill, and it was quiet as night.

It was all over in a matter of seconds. According to onlookers, the retreat was orderly. The blond gunman lowered the submachine gun, tossed it back inside the car, then hopped in himself. The car started off smoothly, gathered speed, and disappeared northward along the Avenida Bolivar, heading for the open country.

The next day, from the outside, officials of the prison checked the wall beneath the window and found a dozen gouges in the stone less than an inch beneath the sill. The gunman's first burst was just a fraction low. He corrected his aim on the second burst, but it was too late; by then I had stopped being a target.

Now, as I sat in the car moving into the westering sun, I touched with my fingertips the tiny scar on my cheek where I had been struck by a chip of flying stone. I knew how lucky I had been, although it had not mattered to me very much then. I had saved myself by instinct, not will or desire.

"What surprises me," Fornari said, "is that they were satisfied with a failure."

"The prison people took precautions. They moved me to another cell, an interior one off the street, facing into the courtyard."

He shook his head. "It's not impossible to kill a man, even in prison, if you're resourceful and determined enough." He shrugged.

"Maybe they reckoned that like Stockman you would scare quiet. Well, they were right, weren't they?"

My elbow pressed against the bulge under my jacket. "It doesn't make any difference to me what they thought—or what you think."

We headed for the entrance to the Triboro Bridge, a complex of access roads at various levels, and high concrete-walled tunnels open to the sky.

Fornari said, "I'd appreciate it if you would come down-town with me."

"What for?"

"Stockman's evidence died with Stockman. But if we can lead back to his friends through you, and tie them up with the attempt to kill Stockman——"

"I don't have any idea who his friends are."

"That's not the problem," Fornari said impatiently. "We know who they are. We always have. But we can't prove anything. Now, as I said, if we can forge a chain of witnesses, starting with you and leading up the chain of command. . . . You had to have a contact, somebody who gave you instructions."

I nodded. "But I don't remember."

He looked pained. "Oh, come on, Roy."

"You know what an addict is like? When I had a fix I was euphoric, far out. When I craved one I was in agony. Either way, I was mindless. I just don't remember."

"Have you tried to? I mean, tried to retrace it step by step, really working at it?"

"Why should I? It's not important to me."

"It is to us, to the law. It's your duty to co-operate."

"I don't remember."

He slowed the car down almost to a stop so that he could direct an angry glare at me. Then he started up the ramp approach to the bridge. We leveled out, and across the gleaming river the Manhattan skyline was a sharp scribble against the dying glow.

In a bemused voice, as if speaking aloud to himself, Fornari said, "They *knew* Stockman, better than his own mother did, so they could count on his not talking. But they couldn't have known you at all, and being an addict you were anyway entirely unpredictable, yet they never tried . . ." He said casually, "Didn't they ever try to get in touch with you? Threaten you? Bribe you?"

My elbow made its involuntary movement. "No."

"No? Can't imagine how they slipped up on that one. Still, if you say no . . ." He gave me a skeptical look. I met it stonily. "Well, then, do you have some other particular reason for not wanting to help us?"

I shook my head. "I told you. I don't remember."

"Would you come downtown anyway? Talk to us?" He was pleading with me now. "On the possibility that something you tell us might inadvertently be helpful?"

He paid his quarter at the toll booth. He was silent, concentrating on the swooping series of ramp curves, until we straightened out after

merging with the heavy traffic flow on the Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive.

"Why not, Roy? I don't know what your guilt feelings are about shooting Stockman. Frankly, I don't think you ought to have any. But anyway, why not talk to us, and think of it as, say, a final step in your rehabilitation?"

But I had already determined what that final step was to be. Once I turned over the money to Emil, my obligations to myself were discharged, paid in full. I owed no debt to Fornari. Still . . .

I said, "I'll think it over. And let you know tomorrow." He grimaced in disappointment. "I've got some business to attend to in town this evening."

"I'm sure you'll decide to co-operate," he said in a voice that was not at all sure. "This business you've got in town. I hope you're not going to get yourself into any trouble."

"No. It's just a personal errand."

"I'm counting on you, Roy." He reached into his pocket and handed me a card. "Phone number's on that. Now look—would you let me take some precautions? Assign a man to you?"

"You mean a bodyguard? It's ridiculous."

He said quietly, "It's not ridiculous, and I'd like to insist on it, but I'll respect your wishes. Sure you won't come downtown with me now?"

"I'm sorry."

"Okay. Can I drop you off someplace?"

"Midtown? If it won't take you out of the way. Say Forty-second and Fifth?"

He angled off the Drive at the Forty-second Street exit, beneath the towering monolith of the UN Building. Going crosstown I goggled at the crowds, at the News building, at Third Avenue denuded of the El, at the Commodore, at the hordes pouring into Grand Central Terminal, at the solidity and might and ugly shadowed coolness of the great buildings. Assumpta, the sleepy capital of the sleepy Republic, seemed far away.

Fornari turned right onto Fifth Avenue, and pulled up at the curb in front of Stoegers, the gun store, diagonally across from the mammoth pile of the Library. I started to open the door when I noticed a blue sedan pulling into the curb in front of us, farther up the block, close to Forty-third Street.

I said, "That looks like the car——"

Fornari said, "I'll be damned! Don't get out!"

He pushed open his door, jumped out, and ran back toward the cop directing traffic at the intersection. Ahead, a door opened in the blue car, and somebody slipped out of it and was quickly swallowed up in the crowd on the avenue. The car was already moving off. I followed it to Forty-fourth Street, where it turned left and disappeared. Fornari must have seen it go, too. He spoke briefly to the cop, then came back to the car and got in.

He said, "It was too good to be true, anybody besides me driving that circumspectfully. He front-tailed us all the way from the airport, then got somewhere behind us on the Drive,

followed us off at Forty-second Street. . . .” He shook his head in disgust, then said, “Anyway, we scared him off.”

I didn’t tell him about the man who had gotten out of the car before it drove off, because I knew he would then consider it his inarguable duty to assign a man to protect me.

I couldn’t have that.

3

I WAITED patiently while the bellhop executed the timeless ceremony of fiddling with windows and blinds, poking his head into closet and bathroom, switching lights on and off. I gave him the ceremonial coin for his meaningless services, and he returned the ceremonial nod of acceptance and went out.

I sat down on the bed, picked up the telephone, and gave the switchboard operator a number that had once been as familiar to me as my own name, and a good deal more important. Waiting for the ring to be answered, I kept my elbow pressed tightly against the bulge in my jacket, pinning it down.

A voice said. “Yeah, what do you want?”

“Is Emil there?”

The voice responded promptly and queru-

lously: "Emil? What Emil? I don't know no Emil. Who's this calling?"

I said, "Put Emil on."

"Who wants him?"

"I do."

"*Who, ferchrisakes.*"

I didn't want to give my name, but there was no help for it. "Tell him it's Roy."

"I don't know no Roys. Roy *what?*"

"Just Roy. He'll know who it is."

There was a protracted pause in which I heard congested breathing close to the transmitter, and I visualized the breather thinking, weighing me in the balance of a mind that instinctively accounted everyone a threat until proved otherwise.

"Emil ain't here."

I remembered that the phone booth was in the rear of the store, obscured by the paperback bookracks and piled cases of empty pop bottles waiting return.

I said, "Maybe he's outside."

"You telling *me?* I'm *here*, where the hell are *you?* What am I—blind?"

"You expect him around later?"

"Maybe he's having his supper. Maybe he'll be around later. Call back, ferchrisakes, later." He hung up.

I took off my jacket and went into the bathroom to wash my face. A moment later I came running out, dripping water. I snatched the wrinkled jacket up from the bed and patted the bulge in the breast pocket. I took out the envelope, weighed it in my hand for a second, and

then put it in my hip pocket. I went back to the bathroom to towel myself dry.

Panic gave way to self-disgust, and when I emerged I tossed the envelope on the bed, not even watching to see where it fell. It was a gesture to Dr. Moreno as much as myself, a sign that my obsession with the money could be controlled or limited. It would not have fooled Moreno. It didn't fool me.

But when the money first arrived, and for almost three years afterwards, I was totally indifferent to it.

About a week after the machine-gunning incident, when I was brought down to Dr. Moreno's clinic for my daily visit, he waited until the guard left, and then began tapping his finger on a heavy brown legal-sized manila envelope on his desk.

"We have mail call this morning, *amigo*."

I didn't answer. I fixed my gaze on a hump on the bridge of his nose. It was a technique I had developed for looking straight at him without meeting his eyes.

He said, "Very arresting mail. But I see. You receive so many letters that it is a matter of no interest to you."

I said, "Let me go back to my cell." I spoke without shifting my eyes from their fixed focus.

"Second. But first, you would like a fix, *si*?"

It worked. My gaze shifted violently. He laughed.

I said, "You filthy Spic bastard."

He said gravely, "I thank you for your attention, *amigo*." He picked up the manila en-

velope, held it in front of him, and let a sheaf of bills flutter down on the desk. *Mucho dinero, Roy.*"

"So?"

"Yours." He pushed the envelope over the desk to me. My name was printed on it, and the prison address. The postmark was New York. He said, "What a country you come from, that even failure is famously rewarded."

The bills were all in the denomination of five-hundred. I poked them with my finger. "How much?"

"You do not know?" I shook my head. His lip curled. "You lie to the good doctor who tries to help you, *amigo*."

I said, "Is it true you are an abortionist?"

He had eyes as black as prunes, deep-set in a heavy-featured swarthy face. They fixed on me in a steady unwavering stare of assessment. Then they softened.

"No, you are not lying. I will tell you. Five thousand dollars. Much money."

I shrugged.

"A bribe, perhaps? A generous bribe so that you keep your mouth shut?"

I said, "Listen. You want it? It's all yours for one solid fix."

"You tempt me, *amigo*." He sighed. "Money means nothing to you?"

"Take it and buy yourself a new curette."

He sighed again. "We will put it in safe-keeping for you. Perhaps even so that it will earn interest." He put out his thick hairy hand and fanned the bills apart, uncovering a small

rectangular slip of paper. On it was printed in unadorned block letters:

INSTEAD OF THE TYPEWRITER.
OKAY? E.

Dr. Moreno said, "What is a typewriter to do with it?"

"Machine-gun."

"Ah." He swept up the money into the envelope. "We will keep it for you, and give you a receipt, *en regulaci3n*, and thus when you are released you will be a person of means. Okay. No more entertainments for today. Now we will go to work, *amigo*."

It was nearly seven-thirty, and the canyons of the city were in deep shadow. I phoned a second time and a different voice answered; deeper and hoarser than the first, but the same in kind. I was informed that Emil wasn't there, that his present whereabouts were unknown, that he might or might not be around later. I said that I had called earlier, and that I would try again in an hour. Would he tell Emil, if he saw him, that Roy had called?

The hoarse voice said, "Nah, don't bother me," and hung up.

I called right back. The hoarse voice responded with incredulity and indignation.

"You're bad, buddy, you're bad. Now you call up once more, I'm gonna come down there and push your face in."

I said, "Tell this to Emil. Tell him that it's Roy, and that I have some money for him."

"You got money? What kind of money?"

"Five thousand dollars."

"Five grand. You ribbing me?" But there was already a note of compromise in the hostile voice.

"Five thousand. Emil will know about it. Ask him to stay around a while when he comes back. I'll phone again."

"I'll tell him the mawn I see him, the mawn he shows up. You want to leave your phone number, he can call you back?"

"No. You might come down to the phone number here and push my face in."

He made a hoarse sound that might have been apology or abashment. "I thought you was one of them jerky hooked characters. How am I supposed to know?" He gave a phlegmy laugh. "Whatsamatter—you think I can go through the phone wires?"

I hung up and went to the window. The sky was still bright, blending to sooty shadow where it touched the roof-tops; the shadow deepened as it descended between the walls of the buildings. Below, at the level of the street, it was already night. The street lamps and the store-fronts were lit.

I spent five minutes observing as much of the opposite side of the street as the angle of perspective would allow. So far as I could discern, the flow of pedestrians was steady, going in both directions. There were no loiterers, no men leaning against buildings pretending to read newspapers while they kept watch, no repeaters in the stream of passers-by. Even with

my limited view, I was satisfied that nobody was lying in wait for me. There was a certain matter-of-fact solidity about the city that made the idea of being stalked through its streets seem melodramatic. Or even worse, corny.

True, the blue sedan had followed us all the way from the airport—and cleverly, at that, front-tailing us on the Parkways, working from behind on the city streets. But took assurance from the dispatch with which the car's occupants had scattered when they were discovered. I couldn't disregard entirely the warnings from Constable and Fornari, but I didn't propose to let them panic me.

Remembering the man who had slipped out of the blue sedan into the crowd on Fifth Avenue, I had taken some pains to lose him if he tried to follow me after I left Fornari. My destination was a hotel in the West Forties, but instead of heading uptown on Fifth, I crossed the avenue and went back to 42nd Street. I walked westward on the long block across from the Library, pausing now and then to look into store windows. At one point, I started to cross the street, but ducked back into the crowd after seemingly having committed myself to the crossing. When I came to the big dime store I turned in abruptly, half-ran through the crowded aisles, and went out through the Forty-Third Street exit. I headed East to Fifth again, then North, and zigzagged West and North by various streets until I reached the hotel.

I had stayed there once, when I had come

down with my college hockey team to play at Madison Square Garden in a preliminary to the professional game. It seemed a very long time ago.

I weighed the question of having a meal sent up to the room but rejected it. It wouldn't do to give aid and comfort to spectral fears. I went out and had dinner at a French restaurant down the block from the hotel. Afterwards, I walked to a drugstore on the corner and phoned again.

Emil answered. As if three years had not gone by, I recognized at once the soft deceptive whine of his voice.

"Say, is this Roy?"

"Yes."

"I see you got sprung, Roy. Well, that's nice. Listen—you got something for me, right? You want to make a meet and give me something?"

"That's right."

"You ain't sore at me? I mean, maybe you got the wrong idea and all. . . . You want a fix, Roy? I mean, you're my boy. I got the real high-grade stuff——"

"I'm cured."

"You're cured? Well, sure you are." He gave a low secret laugh. "You're cured. Now tell me, what you want for this thing you got for me?"

"Nothing."

"Well, you want some H for it, right?"

"I don't want anything for it."

"I hear you. But how do I know? I mean,

maybe you're teed off at me, sending you down there and all. And want to beat up on me? I mean, why are you supposed to want to give me this thing, this lot of money, just for free? You admit people don't do things like that? I mean, it's a little crazy?"

"It's not crazy to me. If you don't want it——"

"I didn't say so, Roy, I never said so. I want it, you understand me, but I certainly don't want no lumps. It was just a straight business proposition, my only feelings for you was good-will. So why be sore at me?"

"I'm not sore, Emil."

"I don't get it, why you want to give me that thing."

"Listen, Emil. . . ." The sweat was beginning to trickle down my face in the hot confinement of the booth. "It's because of my religion."

"Ah, that's different. Religion, it's a different thing. Okay. We'll arrange a meet. Now look. You know the Columbia Theatre, it's an all-night grind joint on Forty-second?"

I was to meet him inside the theatre at nine-thirty; specifically, I was to sit in the next-to-the-last row on the left side of the theatre, second seat out from the side wall. He would be in the adjoining seat. After I gave him the money, if I wanted to I could stay and see the picture, he didn't know whether I liked movies, or what they had playing. . . .

"I said, 'I'll be there, Emil.'"

"You got that thing with you now? I mean,

be careful, don't get yourself rolled. You drinking?"

"Don't worry about me."

"I certainly am not worried about you. Now you'll bring that thing with you? *All* of it? I mean, why not all of it?"

"I'll bring it all."

"Great. I figured a clean-cut kid like you wouldn't hold out. Why should you? That's what I told myself. But these loogans down here, they never get a message straight. Nine-thirty—right?"

"Yes."

"The religion," Emil said, as if to convince himself. "That explains it every time."

I hung up and went outside. The springtime flush had cooled down with the coming of darkness, and there was a fresh breeze riffing off the Hudson, funneling through the long east-west streets. Broadway was lit to the sky with a medley of lights, suffused with its special aura of excitement and promise.

It was a tonic night, and as I strolled slowly with the buzzing crowd I felt for the first time a sense of freedom and hope and renewal. It was almost curtain time, and beneath the marquees, seat-holders smoked a last cigarette before entering the theatre. A pretty girl passed by, holding an eager prancing poodle on a leash. In Assumpta there were few dogs, and even those were ribby, lethargic, usually to be seen sleeping in exhaustion or creeping with drooped tail from shade to shade.

West of Eighth Avenue, the luster of Broad-

way lit only the sky. The streets, lined with rows of grubby houses, were dark and drab. From the river, the wind blew a beguiling sound of boat whistles. I was three-fourths of the way up the street between Tenth and Eleventh when I became aware of an acceleration of footsteps behind me. I looked back over my shoulder. The light of a streetlamp fell on a cropped blond head.

Whether he had been laying back strategically until I reached this particular spot—at my right the blank brick wall of an enormous warehouse, across the street a row of five or six brownstones in the process of being demolished—or because he knew I had discovered him, he broke into a sprint. My fears were not entirely spectral, after all. I turned to face him.

He came to a skittering stop, surprised, as if he had expected me to run, and watchfully crossed the few feet of pavement still between us. In the reflected light I saw close up the glinting blond stubble of the head, the red face that seemed to be still—or again—painfully sunburned, and the almost invisible eyebrows.

He said, "All right, you sonofabitch," and displayed large, unevenly spaced teeth in a rancorous smile. He reached into his pocket.

Fear engulfed me like a tidal wave. I backed off a step, and then cut sharply to my right and ran. I angled across the street and headed back toward Tenth Avenue. He came pounding after me. Beyond the line of wrecked houses, I changed course abruptly, and leaped up the steps of a broad old-fashioned brownstone

stoop. I threw my weight against the door at the top, at the same time twisting the brass knob. The knob was immovable, the door was locked. I turned quickly, and put my back against the door.

He was already at the foot of the steps. There was something black in his hand. But it wasn't a gun, and I realized too late that my judgment had been wrong. If I had continued running, I might have out-distanced him, without fear of a bullet in the back. His hand balanced a blackjack, long and deadly and fish-shaped, looped about his wrist by a leather thong.

When he started up the steps, unhurried, watchful, I began to shake with a shattering, paralyzing fear. He paused on the third step, tense and cautious, but smiling again.

He said, "I'm going to knock your brains out, buddy."

With the force of a blow it came to me that his words were nothing less than literal. Unemotionally, efficiently, expertly, he meant to bludgeon me to death, splatter my brains on the stoop. With time curiously slowed down, I watched him gather himself for a leap up the steps, his body tight and tough in a tan gabardine suit, the blackjack palmed lightly in his hand.

But I didn't wait for him. Some final trigger of self-preservation unlocked my paralysis, and I launched myself down the steps, my arms flailing. I took him by surprise. The blackjack swung but missed, thudding against

the stone balustrade. Without stopping, I caught him with the point of my shoulder and knocked him down. But it cost me my own balance. I plunged downward, landing on the pavement on my hands and knees. I scrambled to my feet and started running toward the meager lights of Tenth Avenue.

After two strides I realized that I had twisted my foot in falling. I ran hobbled, limping. There was not yet any sound of footsteps behind me, but I knew that once he started again he would overtake me well short of the corner. I was almost hopping now, to spare my left foot. A light in a window on a level with the top of another brownstone stoop caught my eye. On impulse, I turned in and limped up the steps. This time the door opened, and I half-fell inside a tiny vestibule. The door swung shut. Crouching beneath the glass in the door, I felt for a spring lock. There was none.

My breathing was heavy, but I tried to discipline it. Outside, there was a sound of running footsteps. I listened in an agony of concentration, but when the sound ceased, I could not tell whether it was because he had run on out of earshot or had come to a stop.

Behind me, in the vestibule, there was another door, its glass limply curtained. Still crouched, I shuffled over to the inner door and tried the knob. It didn't turn. Then, so abruptly as to startle me, there was a sustained buzzing sound. I threw my weight against the door and it opened. I scrambled inside, and pushed the door shut. I sat down with my back

against it and drew in heavy systematic gulps of air.

At the top of a flight of steep stairs, someone was looking down at me.

4

THERE was a garlic-and-olive-oil odor of cookery in the hallway, coming from the door to my right, thickly painted in brown to cover the uncoverable scars of generations of tough usage. To my left, further down the narrow hallway, leading toward the back of the house, another brown-painted door leaked radio music.

I sat with my back against the inner door, and looked up the stairs. Each tread was covered parsimoniously with a piece of threadbare carpet; the risers were bare. The weak light from a ceiling fixture cast a yellow glow up the steps, underlighting the girl at the top. It struck beneath her chin, painting odd shadows on her face. Her legs were foreshortened from where I sat, but the rest of her was elongated, from the hips to a sleek dark head. She was bent slightly at the waist, peering downward, and one hand rested on the banister. A ciga-

rette smoking between the fingers of the hand that held the banister gave her a curiously casual air. She was wearing a bright red smock.

"Are you running from the police?"

She might have been asking me if it was raining outside. And if her coolness was put on, there was nothing to betray the fact. Her voice was a generically familiar one. It was not native to the tenements of the West Forties, but the confident acquired voice of the well-bred daughter of money who has gone through a first-rate eastern woman's college.

I said nothing, leaning forward to probe the slight swelling on my left instep.

She bent a degree further at the waist and said, very distinctly, "I asked you if you were running from the police."

I started to reply, but froze into silence. The outer door was opening. I put my finger to my lips, and stared for a moment at the girl to convey my urgency. I drew my legs under me and raised myself to a crouch, my shoulder braced against the door. Looking up, I saw a face, or the smudged impression of a face pressed against the near-opaque curtain. The door rattled with sudden violence. I held my breath. It was a solid old-fashioned door, but it would not withstand a determined assault—and the glass could easily be broken. I caught a glimpse of the girl's face, pale and absorbed, her dark eyes fixed in fascination on the door.

There was a moment of suspended silence, and I could visualize him very clearly on the other side of the door, baffled or thoughtful,

his breathing irregular, his sunburnt face tilted to one side. Then the silence was broken, and I heard the outer door open and, after an instant, shut again. The girl started to speak, but I gestured sharply and she subsided. Still crouched, I laid my head against the door and listened. At last I was convinced that he was gone, that if he had remained in the vestibule I would have detected it by the slightest sound, even the sound of breathing.

The girl was watching me. I gave her a nod.

She relaxed visibly and said, "Are you going to sit there all night?"

"I'll leave in a few minutes."

"Oh, you don't have to go. Sit there if you like."

I said, "It wasn't the police."

"I didn't think so. I watched it from my window." She made a vague sweeping gesture behind her.

"Will he go away?"

"I hope so. I don't know. I guess so."

She had straight dark eyebrows. Now they contracted in a frown. "If he's not the police, and you want to call them—the police—you can use my telephone."

"It isn't that serious. Just a . . . well, a misunderstanding."

Laughter, abrupt and unexpected, floated down the stairs. "You've just won my medal for the best cliché of the week. And another for distinguished under-statement." She sent a puff of cigarette smoke rolling along the

down-sloping ceiling. "Come on upstairs and I'll give you a drink."

She took it for granted that I would comply, as all her life she must have grown to expect compliance with her casual invitations. I made no attempt to get up.

"Well, come on," she said impatiently.

I stifled any resentment I might have felt at her peremptory tone and nodded. "All right. Thank you."

I walked slowly up the steps, favoring my left foot. When I joined her on the landing I found that she was a tall girl, but not as tall as she had seemed from below. Her features were finely chiseled, almost classical, her skin-tone ivory against the black of her hair. Her eyes were cool and appraising, regarding me with the detachment of a horse-breeder sizing up a stud prospect.

She said, "One more flight," and I followed her along the narrow hallway to another steep rise of steps. Her legs were long and trim—expensive legs.

On the third floor, she paused in front of a partially opened door and gave me the horse-breeder's look again. "You don't look like a street brawler," she said.

"I wasn't brawling, I was running." I decided to return the compliment, if that's what it was. "You don't look like a native of this region."

She said severely, as if reproving me for snobbishness, "This is where I work and live."

She pushed open the door. "Come in, please."

It was a floor-through loft, running from front to back of the house. There were conventional windows at each end of the long high-ceilinged room, and a huge mullioned skylight overhead. A third of the area, facing the street, was fitted out as livingquarters; the remainder was a sculptor's studio. The living portion was carpeted, but the studio end was bare boards, splattered with hardened plaster. One wall was arrayed with stone and plaster torsos, all of them truncated just below the groin, some without heads, or without arms, like a gallery of the victims of some unspeakable atrocity. A wooden table was littered with hammers, mallets and chisels, all powdered with a fine dust of plaster. Beneath the skylight there was a sturdy pedestal surmounted by a turntable, on which a mound of clay had been squashed flat in a moment of impulsive anger or frustration.

The girl waved me to a seat on a studio couch, and went into a tiny kitchenette closed off by folding doors. I eased my left leg out in front of me. The swelling on the instep did not seem any worse, and with my weight off it there was no pain.

The girl brought two glasses, a bowl of ice-cubes and a bottle of whiskey, and placed them on a low table topped with a brown-veined marble. She sat down beside me, and fixed two drinks competently and without flourish. Her fingers were blunt-tipped and sinewy, but not ungraceful. She handed me one of the glasses.

She tasted her drink. Her eyes, over the rim of her glass, were dark, candid, observant. "Who is he? The blond man."

"I've never been introduced to him. Oh, my name is Roy Hathaway."

"Mine is Veda Lawrence. You don't even know him?"

"Only slightly."

"I was standing at the window, and I saw most of it. I saw you run up the stoop and into the vestibule. I knew the inner door would be locked. I pressed the buzzer and released the catch."

"I'm grateful for the impulse that made you do it."

She shook her head. "Not an impulse. Two months ago a man was beaten to death on this street, almost on this doorstep. It was horrible. An old man, a derelict. I called the police, but by the time they got here. . . ." She took a long swallow of her drink.

"But you didn't call the police this time?"

"Letting you into the house seemed more urgent. As it turns out, it was more discreet too, wasn't it?"

I nodded noncommittally, and sipped at my drink. It was the first whiskey I had tasted in three years. My only nepenthe in all that time was the tranquilizers Doctor Moreno had used at the start of my treatment to help wean me off heroin.

Veda Lawrence said, "Well, it's a hell of a Samaritan who pumps the weary traveler. I noticed that you were limping. Are you hurt?"

"Not badly."

I started to get up, to test my weight on my foot. But I sank back quickly when I saw that standing would frame me squarely in an open window.

Veda said, "It must be quite bad."

I shook my head. "Would you mind drawing the drapes?"

She was puzzled by the request only for an instant. She reached behind the sofa for a drawstring, and the drapes came together.

I limped only slightly going to the window. Standing close to the wall, I lifted an edge of the drape. I stared down into the empty street for a long time before I made him out. He was across the street, leaning against the post of a brownstone balustrade, so still that his shape and the shape of the post were merged. But the farthest outfling of light from a lamppost touched his blond head and gave him away. I let the drape fall into place and came back to the sofa.

"I'll finish my drink, if you don't mind, and then leave."

"Has he gone?"

I nodded.

"Well, good. I'm glad he didn't decide to stick around all——" She broke off, and looked at me thoughtfully. She put down her glass, went to the window, and peered out as I had, through the lifted edge of the drape. Returning to the couch, she turned her disconcertingly candid gaze on me.

"Gallantry is rare these days," she said,

"and I'm touched by it. But considering the circumstances. . . ."

"I can't stay here indefinitely."

"Neither can he." She freshened her drink, and seemed surprised that my own was almost untouched. "Don't I know you from someplace?"

"I doubt it."

"I'm sure I do."

"Isn't that the line I should be taking?"

"No, don't joke."

"I must have one of those common faces everybody thinks he knows. I went to a boy's college, so it couldn't be that. It couldn't be the army, or . . . And we certainly weren't classmates at Radcliffe, were we?"

"Don't try to put me off." She bit into her red lower lip in thought. "What made you say Radcliffe?"

"A lucky guess."

"You mean we're stamped by it, we all look alike? Maybe we do. But you missed. It was Smith."

"Sorry. I'm out of practice."

I looked at my wristwatch. It was twenty-five of ten. My date with Emil had been for nine-thirty.

Veda said suddenly, "Does he want to kill you?"

"What gives you such a melodramatic idea?"

"Your abject fear. The way you ran, and the way you crouched in the hallway. . . ." She lit a cigarette and held it smoking between her

fingers in the distinctive careless way she had. "I don't think you're a coward. I don't think you would run if it was just a beating you had to face up to."

"Can you tell all that simply by looking at me?"

She shrugged, and drained her glass.

"I have to get to work. There are books there——" She waved her smoking cigarette to a bookcase. "Stay as long as you have to. I usually work through half the night, anyway, so don't feel that you're inconveniencing me."

With a rather curt nod, she got up and crossed into the studio portion of the loft, her low shoes scraping on the patches of plaster. I went to the window and lifted an edge of the drape. He was still as difficult to see, but I knew what to look for now.

I let the drape fall and went into the studio, picking my way carefully over the bumpy floor. Veda stood with her hands on her hips, confronting the misshapen lump of clay on the turntable, eyeing it morosely.

Without turning, she said, "Don't do anything brainless."

"No. Can I use your telephone?"

She faced about. "The police?"

I nodded.

"I'm right all around. That man out there means to kill you. You don't want to call the police. But you're ashamed to be skulking, and you don't want to impose on me. All quite masculine and brainless."

"The phone?"

"On the wall in the kitchenette." She turned back to the clay on the pedestal.

I started back over the bumpy floor to the kitchen. But before I reached it I knew that I wouldn't make the call. Once I identified myself, the police would be sure to take a deep interest in my activities, even detain me on an open charge while they investigated. It would make it impossible for me to contact Emil. I realized it was irrational to risk my life for the sake of a megalomaniac obsession, but I had admitted that it was not rational when I started. Self-knowledge is not the same thing as wisdom.

"Mr. Hathaway."

I turned. She was regarding me with her horse-breeder's look.

"Mr. Hathaway, would you feel any better if you could pay your way?"

"I don't follow you." My elbow made its inward tic.

"You obviously don't want to call the police. Well, you don't have to. That man can't stay there forever, it isn't human. Until he goes, you can discharge any obligation you might feel under by modeling for me."

"You're not serious."

"I have to pay five to seven dollars an hour to a model when I can afford one, and when I do a figure without one. . . ." She motioned bitterly to the crumpled mass of clay on the turntable. "I'm *damn* serious."

Her assessment of my situation had been shrewd and accurate: I didn't want to face the

blond man; I didn't want to become involved with the police; and I didn't want to impose on her any further. Her suggestion offered an honorable compromise.

"Okay. I'll do it."

"Fine," she said briskly. "You can take off your clothes in the bathroom."

5

STANDING naked on a mat in the bathroom, I examined my foot. There was an empurpled contusion beside the swelling just below the right instep, but it did not seem serious or disabling. I drew on the swimming shorts which, Veda Lawrence had informed me somewhat severely, belonged to her father. It pleased me that they were a trifle long, because they completely covered the scars on the back of my thigh.

Veda had removed the misshapen lump from the turntable, and was busy replacing it with fresh clay which she trowled out of a large tin. She looked me over when I came out of the bathroom, and nodded her head in what might have been a sign of approval. I stood behind her, waiting, and goose pimples bumped

out on my arms and legs. It was drafty in the loft.

When she had a sufficient mass of clay piled on the turntable, Veda put the lid on the tin and hammered it shut with a wooden mallet. Then she went off to a corner of the studio, and returned dragging a heavy wooden beer case. She placed it behind the turntable, its solid bottom-side turned up.

"Platform," she said. I started to get up on the box. "Not ready for you yet."

She rummaged in a wooden chest, and dug out what seemed to be a tangled piece of wire. But when she placed it upright on the turntable, anchored in a solid blob of clay, I realized that it was shaped roughly to the conformations of a human figure.

"Armature," she explained. "The appendages—arms, legs, head—are too heavy to support themselves. But they'll hold if you build them on a wire structure."

She scooped up blobs of clay and started fitting them to the armature. Quite soon, she had a crudely recognizable figure—an early homo sapiens to whom there still adhered some primordial ooze.

I sat on the box and watched, with a sense of detachment and a feeling of profound unreality. Could I actually be sitting here three-quarters naked, wearing another man's drawers, while a very pretty but somehow forbidding girl made mud pies? Was the blond man real, or something remembered from a childish nightmare? The goose pimples, which

I gently chafed, added a final surrealistic touch to the picture.

"I think we're ready for you now," Veda said.

I got up on the beer case and struck what I thought might be a suitable pose—hands clenched at my sides, chest out, head and chin up like a figurehead on the prow of a ship.

"My God, no," Veda said. "We're not playing statues. I want you relaxed, natural."

I let everything collapse exaggeratedly.

"Oh, please." She came around the turntable. "Just stand the way you do normally. Your casual posture. Here, this leg . . ." She touched my knee lightly. I recoiled with such violence that I lost my balance and slipped off the box. She looked at me in puzzlement and said, "Sorry."

I climbed back on the box.

"Is there anything wrong?" she asked.

There was nothing wrong except that I had been in prison for three years, and had reacted to the touch of her hand on my skin as if it had been a firebrand.

I said, "Just ticklish."

She reached out her hand again, but thought better of it. "Look, don't hold that leg so stiffly. Bend it slightly . . . fine. All right. Now don't feel you have to maintain that pose. If you want to shift your weight, or change the position of your feet, go right ahead."

She returned to the turntable and began to apply bits of clay to the figure, working them in with an odd upward fillip of her thumb,

systematically building up the contours. She worked with great absorption, her level black brows drawn together, her face somber with concentration. I was surprised to see how seldom she looked at me; and even then it was usually a flicking glance followed by a quick return of her attention to the figure as if her impression must be hurriedly recorded before it was lost. Occasionally, to pare away an excess of clay, she would use a wooden-handled tool that had differently shaped wire loops at each of its ends.

Although I shifted my feet and changed my position from time to time, I began to feel a definite physical strain; and it was no longer a mystery that professional models were well paid. The girl seemed oblivious of me; like the clay, I was simply one of the materials of her craft. Whatever its effect on me, the hand that had touched my leg had been as impersonal as if it had been touching wood or metal or clay. I had no reason to expect it to be otherwise. So far as I know or could assume, it was only my own flesh that had been so long immolated, not hers. In helping me, she had acted humanly, not personally.

Beyond her, through the curtained window, the city night was still, but it seemed a hostile and threatening stillness, conspiring with the blond man in his vigil. The street as I had seen it through the window was fixed in my mind like a scene in a film: the geometrical parallax of the sidewalk, the wall of identical houses differing from each other only in a minor detail

of decoration, the perpendicular line that was both the waiting man and the ornamental balustrade. . . .

It was clear enough that he had not found me by blind luck. Obviously he had followed me from my hotel to the French restaurant, and then through the busy streets. It argued for his competence, as did his trailing me from Fornari's car in spite of all my efforts at deception.

I glanced at my watch. Ten past ten. Emil would long ago have left the theatre, disappointed and at the same time relieved. Cupidity tempered by suspicion. It wasn't surprising. In his world—or in any, perhaps—you hung on to what you had, and fought to get more. If you deviated from that pattern you were a suspicious character, maybe even crazy.

Curiously enough, crazy was precisely the word Moreno had used himself when I told him what I intended to do with the money. He apologized for the use of so unprofessional a word, but with no great conviction.

It was a week after Stockman's death, and I had just come from the warden's office, where I had been informed that I would be released from prison as soon as the formalities could be arranged.

Dr. Moreno got up and shook my hand. I was still dazed by the suddenness of the news, and while Moreno reseated himself, I stood beside his desk and looked around the office as if I had never seen it before.

"Sit down, *amigo*," Moreno said gently. "Sit

down for the last time in this chamber, the scene of our anguish and triumph. You will return home at once?"

I nodded.

His laughter boomed out. "*Absolutamente*, you will return home. It is a condition of the pardon that you will deport yourself. But you will not object to this?"

"No."

"Three years." He shrugged. "A bargain at your age. A bargain for the curing of the habit."

"I've never known quite how to thank you. How do you express your gratitude for such an enormous thing? A thousand thanks for saving my life? For saving me from insanity?"

"It was only my help. Without your suffering, without your will, it was a failure."

I shook my head. "But you understand what I feel?"

"*Ciertamente*. You know my view is romantic. My reward is in the accomplishment. Now ——" He turned brisk. "The future. You will do this ridiculous thing of the snow hill?"

What he called the ridiculous thing of the snow hill—a ski slope—had provided a grasp on the future once I started to make headway against the habit. It was a goal beyond the essentially negative one of cure, and Moreno had encouraged it, drawing me out by chiding me.

He said now, "So. The snow hill. Many Yankees chilled to the bones, circulation congealed, the faces blue, the skins peeling off when they are touched . . . those half-frozen

Yankees wearing the staves of barrels on their feet, flying down this hill, and at the bottom the frozen legs and arms snap off cleanly. But they do not complain, for it is sport."

My mother had died leaving me her sole heir. The bequest consisted of the old house, which had been in the family for 150 years, and the two-hundred-odd acres remaining of the several thousand that had once comprised almost the whole area of the present town of Millwood. Over the years the rest had been sold off. But the two hundred included the best natural slopes in the county. Although Millwood could not compete with localities further north so far as snow conditions and number of skiing days was concerned, its nearness to New York gave it a strong compensating value as a ski resort. I liked winter sports and was good at them, and the idea of running my own slope was an attractive one.

"Well," Dr. Moreno said, "*de gustibus*. For myself, I prefer the hot sun and the good two hour siesta in the shade. So. You will do this idiot thing. And with the five thousand Yankee dollars you will make little chairs to tow the fresh meat up to the chopping block?"

"A tow, yes. But not with that money. That money goes back."

"*Pardón?*"

"I can borrow from the Millwood bank, on the strength of the family good name. I'm going to give the five thousand dollars back to Emil."

"Listen, *amigo*, you are crazy."

I tried my best to explain to him why I had to return the money. I did it fumblingly, inarticulately, because I hadn't troubled to clarify it for myself. It had not seemed necessary to do so. I was acting by instinct, in response to some inner persuasion that had nothing to do with reason. It was all well enough to tell me that I was not morally responsible for the attempted assassination. Or that, in an odd kind of way, my ineptitude had actually saved Stockman's life. Or that, in three years of prison, I had expiated my crime.

I had died. Worse, I had become a sort of living dead, and by unspeakable anguish had contrived to be reborn. It was important for the rebirth to be clean, virgin, without any umbilical obligation binding me to the past. The money was a part of that past, and it must be returned.

Moreno was furious. He charged me with being a pathetic, sentimental, unrealistic fool. I listened to him, but kept shaking my head stubbornly. It was the only instance, since he had won my confidence, that I had ever disagreed with him. I admired him, loved him, owed him my life, but on this one point I would not be shaken.

I said, "Whether it's sensible or practical or not doesn't even enter into it. It's an obsession—if you want to call it that."

"Si. I wish to call it that," Moreno said angrily. "An obsession. Now you understand, Roy, I did not cure you of a physical obsession in order to see you fall into a mental one."

"I won't feel clean, or free of the past until I give the money back. I *have* to do it this way."

"Your bowels are in your head!"

His rage sharpened itself against the finality of my determination, and at last he ordered me out of his office. An hour later, he called me back.

"You see, *amigo*, I am like a caricature of the Latin temperament. Volatile. Hot. I would melt your snow hill. Now I will not become angry, I will employ pure reason."

But he merely repeated calmly what he had said earlier in high emotion. I had no need to feel a desire for further expiation. The money was mine, I had earned it. Never mind that I had not kept it from personal choice, and that the bribe had nothing to do with it. The money was small enough payment for the horror that had been wished upon me. I must use the money to get my ski slope started.

I said, "I didn't expect you to give your blessing. I didn't expect you to understand——"

"But I do understand, Roy. I understand that it is an obsession, and always an obsession is wrong no matter how righteously it is motivated. As your physician, I order you to cure yourself of this obsession."

"The only thing that will cure the obsession is the return of the money."

He sighed and looked at me sadly. "You Yankees have no sense of the value of money. You do not treat it with the proper respect.

You love it, but without soul, as one does a whore."

On the day I was freed he walked with me to the gate. We paused in the deep shade cast by the wall of the blockhouse.

"All right, *amigo*," he said. "Remember this. A person entered here three years ago, who bears a merely superficial resemblance to Roy Hathaway. A twin brother, we shall call him. That person, that twin, was depraved, a dope addict, an assassin . . . and he perished inside these walls many months ago. Guilt does not survive a man. It dies with him. You understand this perfectly and absolutely?"

"Yes."

He bent toward me, the dark, pouched eyes probing my face. "*Si*. I believe you. Okay. You will get along, you will not have nightmares. I discharge my patient."

The *guardia* was waiting to open the gate.

Dr. Moreno sighed. "*Abre las barras*, Pepe. No, wait." The *guardia* shrugged. "One last attempt, Roy. So much money. So very much money. To return it is to tear it up and flush it down the toilet."

"It's not good money. I have no use for it."

He looked at the *guardia*, who did not understand English, and said, "You see, Pepe, he is an innocent. He has not learned that in the marketplace money is money, and the good buys as much as the bad." The *guardia* yawned. Moreno shook his head. "You have no use for it. *Si*. Therefore you will present it to a

dope pusher who will find uses for it. This I understand. I too could find a use for it."

I said, "Save your breath," and smiled.

"See, Pepe, he smiles. The rich *porteamericano* smiles. He believes I am joking him. The clever doctor jokes him. But he forgets that the clever doctor has five omniverous children to feed, an aged mother to support. Therefore, the clever doctor does not joke about a serious thing like money."

"I wish I could give it to you," I said. "It wouldn't even begin to repay——"

"*Abre los barreros*, Pepe, before I lose my temper and kill this fool." He stepped forward, his eyes still smouldering, and embraced me roughly, then gave me a push toward the open gate. "*Adios, amigo!*"

"*Adios, mi medico, mi salvador*. I thank you."

Standing on the upturned beer case, even without the need to hold a rigid pose, became something of a mild ordeal. All the muscles of my body became heavy, cramped, protesting their constraint. Veda had abandoned the clay body, and now worked on the head. With the help of a flat wood tool serrated at one end and triangularly pointed at the other, she was gradually shaping the head into something recognizably human.

Although her glances at me were less frequent than before, they were of longer duration. Instead of flicking her eyes at me, she stared at my face with intense concentration,

as if to commit as much of it as possible to memory before applying what she saw to the clay.

When I thought she wasn't looking, I flexed my shoulders to relieve the strain, but, although her dark head was bent, she caught the movement.

"Oh, I'm sorry. You'd better rest."

"I'm not tired."

"Of course you are. I know how badly you can stiffen up. Don't be polite."

I got down off the box and stretched, touched my fingertips to my toes.

She said, "Let's have a drink. I'll get you something to put on."

From a sliding-door closet in the living portion of the loft she took out a navy blue bathrobe. "Little small, but it ought to do."

I thanked her and draped the robe over my shoulders. She freshened the drinks we had left standing.

"Don't let me forget you again," she said. "Now you see why models are expensive? It's hard work. I paid my way through the League by modeling."

I nodded, and sipped my drink.

"My father didn't think that sculpture was for nice girls." She peered gloomily into her glass. "Father is Fletcher Lawrence."

"Oh—really?"

"Politeness is going to get you into trouble one day. You've never heard of him. Well, he's the head of a large advertising firm, and in certain circles he's very well known. Matter of

fact, I haven't found a circle yet where they haven't at least heard of him."

"I'm more or less of a square."

"I believe you are." She gave me her disconcertingly frank gaze over the lip of her glass. "Anyway, when I insisted on going on with my studies at the League, he cast me into the outer darkness. Financially, that is. So I modeled my way through. Very wearying."

It struck me that she must have inspired some fairly attractive sculpture. Even the loose and shapeless red smock couldn't entirely hide the out-thrust of attractive breasts, and her carriage was lovely and subtly provocative. And then there were those fine expensive legs. But it wasn't a good idea to dwell on any of this. I was half-naked, and alone with a girl, and I had been continent for three years.

I shifted gears mentally and said, "Are you able to make a living out of sculpture?"

The red mouth grimaced. "What with the price of materials, and the high cost of shipping pieces to shows—they've got to be crated, among other things—it's a losing proposition. All out-go, except for an occasional bit of prize money, and a sale now and again. I live here because it's the only place I can afford that provides me studio space as well. A friendly aunt died and left me enough money to skimp by on for two or three more years."

"You prefer skimping to accepting help from your father, who has now forgiven your aberration?"

She smiled. "You're not quite as square as

you pretend. Oh, father has come around, of course. But I like independence, and I approve of the life I lead. Madison Avenue, and all of its works and its people, bore me."

The telephone rang. She frowned at her watch, excused herself, and went to the phone on the kitchenette wall. I got up and went to the window. At first, the street seemed empty. But then I thought I could make him out—still standing against the balustrade post of the brownstone. I stared until my eyes hurt with the strain, watching for some telltale movement. I saw nothing. When I heard the sound of the phone being replaced, I let the edge of the drape fall. Veda was just coming out of the kitchenette.

She said, "He knows you're here."

6

I ASKED her to repeat the phone conversation as exactly as she could recall it, and she did so.

A voice had said: "Take a message for your boy friend, sister."

Veda: "What? Who is this?"

Voice: "You got a nice voice, honey."

Veda: "Who is this?"

Voice: "If you match up to the voice you could be a pretty nice number."

Veda: "All right. I haven't got the time to——"

Voice: "Okay, honey. I know he's there, see. Tell him this message for me: say to him: 'I'll get you sooner or later, punk, so you might as well come out now.' Got it? That's the message."

Veda: "I don't know what you're talking about. What number do you want?"

Voice: "Come on, sexy, don't be like tire-some. I *know* he's there. Dig? So give him that message like I——"

Veda: "Listen. I've heard about a kind of dirty little man who got a thrill out of making anonymous phone calls, but I never——"

Voice: "Come on, hey, you bitch——"

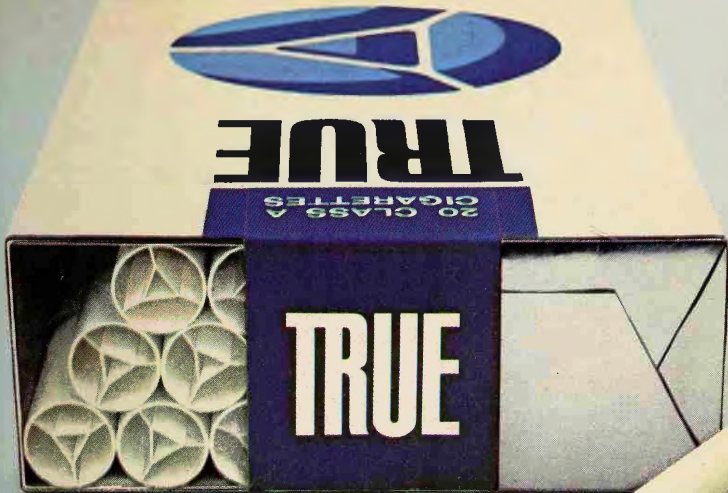
And she hung up on him.

She said to me, "I think I gave it away. He wasn't sure of himself at the start, but somehow, from what I said, or how I said it . . . At the end he was quite confident, there were no doubts in his voice."

"You just imagine it. You handled the whole thing very well."

"No. Possibly I talked too much. If I didn't have the knowledge of your being here, I probably wouldn't have talked so much, I would simply have hung up on him." She shook her head in puzzlement. "How did he know you were here? How did he get this phone number?"

Obviously, he must have been close enough



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tests of all menthol
cigarettes show
True is lower
in both tar and
nicotine than 98% of
all other menthols sold.

Think about it.
Shouldn't your next cigarette be True?

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behind me to see which house I had dashed into. Given that, the rest was not too difficult to reconstruct. At some point he had crossed the street, entered the outer vestibule of the house, and copied down the names on the mailboxes. There couldn't be more than five or six altogether. Then, consulting the listing in the phone directory, he would have called all the numbers systematically. A number of his calls would probably not be answered, and he would make the reasonable assumption that the party was not at home, rather than expecting him to call and cagily not answering. Immediately, the no-answers narrowed his field of possibilities. For those that did answer, he would rely on his native shrewdness to pinpoint the right party, listening with a trained suspicious ear for some sign that would be a giveaway.

He might not know for an absolute dead certainty that I was in Veda Lawrence's apartment, but he would be sufficiently satisfied that it was so.

I said to Veda, "I'd better get dressed and leave now."

She intertwined her clay-stained fingers and twisted them against each other. It was the first nervous or unsure gesture I had seen her make.

"I can't let you do that. He'll be waiting for you." The twisting hands separated and became fists. "That filthy, vicious man. You can't go now."

"You're already too much involved as it is.

Suppose he decides to try to take me here?"

"He wouldn't dare." There was sudden excitement in her eyes. "Maybe I would like to see him try. I've got a pistol here, a target gun. . . . Wait a minute."

She started away impulsively. I put my hand on her arm. It was a very firm arm. She stopped. I released her quickly.

I said, "Thanks, but no. No guns. I don't want to shoot anybody. Not even him."

"I don't have the same scruples. I know how to use it. I'm a good shot."

I shook my head. I started to go by her, but she stopped me by putting her hand on my arm, as I had stopped her before.

"Look," she said, "there's no sense in gallantry or graceful gestures. I've heard that man's voice. It's the kind of voice that . . . it's full of the promise of death."

"You read too much into it." I tried to disengage myself gently, but she held firmly to my arm, her strong stained fingers dark against the prison-whiteness of my skin.

She said, "Wait a minute," and released my arm. She went to the window, and peered through the lifted edge of the drape. After a moment she came back. "He's still there. Or back there. He probably phoned from the corridor. At any rate, he's back again. Status quo ante."

"I can't hole up here forever. I've got to go out there and take my chances sooner or later."

"He'll go away eventually. I hope you're not

trying to prove something to yourself. Or to me." She looked at me seriously, without coquetry. "Won't you please stay?"

"Okay."

She said, "Oh, fine . . ." and smiled. Her smile warmed up her features, softening their somewhat aloof classicism; if her face was handsome in repose, it was pretty when she smiled. "I know you're not a coward. I sensed that from the first, and I don't need any demonstration to prove it. I don't know why he's after you, or who you are, or what you've done, if you've done anything, but I have a right kind of intuition about you."

"You're taking an awful lot on trust."

She nodded gravely. "I suppose I am. But you can't have an IBM card on a person's character, can you? Sometimes you have to go on trust."

Somehow the relationship between us had changed, a gap had been closed. I had an almost uncontrollable urge to put my arms around her. I started to move toward her, and stopped myself, all in the same motion.

I said, "I'm ready to go to work again."

I didn't wait for an answer, but turned and walked around her to the beer case. I was quivering when I climbed up on it, whether from the impulse I had repressed or the physical nearness of her, I couldn't be sure. She followed more slowly, and when she stood before the clay figure again, there was a long moment in which she looked down at the floor broodingly. Then, as if shaking herself into aware-

ness, she lifted her head sharply to the figure and began to work.

After about twenty minutes, Veda put down her tools. She gestured to me curtly, and then turned and went back to the living quarters. I put the robe over my shoulders and joined her.

She said, "I'll make some coffee."

She went into the kitchenette, and I sat down on the studio couch. We had not exchanged a single word during the entire work session. It was as if both of us had been simultaneously struck by that sense of unreality or disproportion that occurs when two people are thrown into each other's company accidentally, and exchange confidences while they are still in point of time absolute strangers. Oddly enough, it was akin to the feeling you experienced in combat in relation to a man you didn't know, perhaps had never met before, but with whom there existed an intimate independence of life or death.

We had our coffee in a hush that was heightened somehow by the knowledge that the hour was growing late. Outside, the roaring whisper of the city was subdued; and with many of the electric signs turned off or dimmed, the sky would have paled in its ruddy auroral glow.

We went back to work. Again, in her absorption with the figure, Veda lost track of the interval. When she finally remembered, and called a halt, she was contrite. I stepped down, stretching my outraged muscles.

We walked slowly back to the living quarters, but this time we didn't sit down. It was as though some switchpoint in our relationship had been reached. For the first time, there was a tension between us, and we avoided each other's eyes.

Veda said: "You haven't asked to look at the figure."

"I've wanted to, but I thought it might upset you—an unfinished piece of work. . . ."

"Would you like to look at it now?"

I said yes, and followed her back over the plaster-covered floor. She stood beside me, and I could sense her eyes on my face as I looked at the figure. It might have been less than finished, but it was alive with strength and movement and individuality.

"I think it's fine."

"Thanks. I'll make a confession. I played a trick on you after I started working."

"What sort of trick?"

"Originally, I intended to do just a rough sketch that I would use as a reference later on for a statue in stone or plaster. That's why I used clay. We usually don't work in clay, you know."

"Why not?"

"It's easy to work with, but it has serious limitations. A clay has to be hollowed out before it can be fired—otherwise it cracks. It's almost impossible to scoop out a figure, especially of this size. Still, I've been working toward a finished piece, rather than a sketch."

"I don't see any trick in that."

"Oh, there is. We'd have been finished, otherwise." She smiled ruefully. "Anyhow, the trick has backfired on me. I've worked in such detail that I can't continue without a model."

"I'd be glad to come back—tomorrow?—and pose until you finished."

"Would you? Oh, that's wonderful. . . ."

I didn't think about it, or weigh it, or entertain it as a notion or a temptation; if I had, I would never have done it. I considered that later, when it was an academic point. In fact, it was already academic, because I didn't direct myself. If such a thing is possible, it simply happened. My arms reached out, and found her, and drew her close. Her head went back, not in surprise, but as if in query, and I bent to find her mouth. It was soft, but not responsive; her body was tight against mine, but unyielding. I tightened my hold, and she resisted, but just for an instant. She went soft against me, her mouth sweet and passionate and questioning. . . .

I fumbled with the buttons of her smock. She disengaged my fingers.

"Just a moment." She leaned away, and our bodies were no longer touching. She looked up into my face searchingly. Then she said, "I feel as if I've known you a very long time."

She took my hand and led me to the couch. I was ashamed of the way I was trembling.

She said, "No matter what, the clay has to be wrapped in damp cloths or it dries and hardens, and can't be worked."

She got up, and walked to the studio, rising on her toes against the cold of the uncovered floor. I rolled over on my side to watch her. She wrapped the figure and came back, proud and unabashed in her nakedness. She sat down on the edge of the couch and drew my head to her breasts. Her hand smoothed my hair, then suddenly stiffened, and she exclaimed aloud. I lifted my head. She was staring with horror and pity at the scars, running up from the inside of the knee to the base of the buttock, a still-tender complicated tracery of dips, hollows, raised or puckered tissue—a contour map of outraged flesh.

It took a long time, and a great effort of will, but I told her everything.

7

I PINPOINTED the start of it—in three years in the *calabozo* there was plenty of time to waste on what had become a purely philosophical matter—as the moment when a replacement named Heiss showed himself on the Korean skyline.

This was in that curious twilight of the Korean war when the endless taffy-pull of negotiation was going on at Panmunjom. The

lines were static, and both sides had settled down into an odd sort of trench warfare that was a throwback to the first World War. There were no massive movements or attacks, but daily there were artillery barrages, probings and soundings, strafing sorties from the air, and night patrols—endless patrols involving as few as three men to as many as a company.

The patrols didn't always make sense, but ours was not to question why. Ours was but to do and die, and although we died in comparatively small numbers, it was no consolation to the dead.

On orders that came down from Battalion, I took a squad out to try to silence a sniper that G-2 suspected might be holed up in a burnt-out and supposedly abandoned bunker well in advance of the Chinese lines, which in our company sector were about two hundred yards distant. We crawled out into no man's land an hour after dark, working around to the left flank, moving very slowly to utilize every bit of cover, behind scouts probing ahead carefully, mindful of the possibility of stumbling into a Chinese patrol.

Barring mishap, there was only one hazard on the route I had mapped out in the afternoon. Coming out of a dry gully bordering a small paddy, we had to bear out to our right, just beneath the crest of a spine-like ridge angling off toward the enemy lines. It was ticklish, but there was a sufficient contour to protect us from flat-trajectory fire.

We huddled in the gully, resting, before

tackling the ridge. We were better than half-way across when Heiss stood up (later, we decided that he had seen, or thought he had seen, a snake), a classically perfect target against the skyline. A machine-gun cut him to bits and flung him back among us like a puppet.

The Chinese lines came alive—another machine gun, burp guns, rifles. We flattened out beneath the protective spine of the ridge, and everything went over our heads. We were safe enough as long as we kept under cover. But we couldn't linger or we would start catching mortars. It was impossible to go on, now that we were discovered, because of a break in the ridge which would expose us to gunfire. It seemed prudent to return the way we had come.

I passed the word along and the squad began to inch its way back, along the ridge. A moment later we heard the crump of the first mortar. It was long, exploding with a bright whoomp far above us on the opposite slope. A second shell was short, and then they started coming over in earnest, bracketing us. The air was full of whoomping detonations and bright flashes, and the line in front of me speeded up, although it still moved with an agonizing deliberation.

The Chinese were very good with mortars, but the sheerness of the fallaway behind us and the thinness of the target we presented—between the topmost portion of the ridge-spine and the lip of the declivity—made us hard to hit. I was so sure that we would make it back,

despite the profligate number of mortars that were being thrown at us, that my main emotion was surprise when I heard a grunt behind me, and saw Corporal Dennis slump. He had been at point, and was the last man in the file now that we had reversed. I thought at first that he had been struck by a stray mortar fragment, but then a flash briefly lit up the abandoned bunker, and a rifle bullet whizzed by over my head.

For what it was worth, the Battalion G-2's guess about the sniper's position was correct.

Dennis had been hit in the chest, but he was alive. I watched the line ahead of me snake around a twist in the ridge-spine. I turned around, hugging the ground, and hooked my hand into Dennis' cartridge belt. Then I crawled forward again, tugging him along after me.

A moment later something exploded behind me, and lifted me off the ground. At the center of a blooming flower as red as blood and as black as the darkest night imaginable, I began to fall back and down, still holding to Dennis' cartridge belt. Somewhere on the descent I lost my helmet. My head struck a stone, and I was mercifully relieved of the excruciating pain of a fire that was eating my thigh.

Two members of the squad came back for me, after the mortar barrage lifted, and they told me later that I still had my hand twisted in Corporal Dennis' belt. The mortar shell had burst behind and just below us, and Dennis had taken the brunt of the concussion and

fragmentation, shielding me from the worst of both. There was not enough left of him worth bringing back. A few tiny slivers had penetrated my arm, but they were not serious. The back of my thigh was another story. It contained one huge fragment of steel as big as a golf ball; and a dozen smaller splinters had savaged the flesh around the central wound, which gaped like a gigantic fish-mouth.

I regained consciousness just before reaching the shelter of the MLR. One medic clapped his hand over my mouth to muffle the sound of my screaming, and another one shot me with a syringe of morphine.

I was removed to a field hospital behind the lines, where the large shard of metal was cut out of my thigh. The next morning I was shipped out on a hospital plane to Japan. Four operations later, another plane brought me to a hospital in the States.

By that time I had learned that morphine was the only thing that could ease the unending pain. And I had also learned that if you hit upon the right ward boy, and had enough money, there didn't have to be any long lapses between the periods of no-pain.

All you thought of was that you were miraculously freed of torment. It never occurred to you that you were accustoming your physiology to a regular diet of morphine. It never occurred to you that you were buying peace at the price of becoming an addict.

There were five more operations at various hospitals in the States. Between the third and

the fourth I received promotion orders. The single silver bar meant nothing to me; but the slight increase in pay and allotments was welcome to the extent that it provided me with more money. Already, there were times when I was hard-pressed to pay for a fix.

Between the fourth and fifth operations I went home to Millwood to see my mother. She was quite sick, and I should have stayed longer than overnight, but I couldn't hold out. I left early in the morning, keeping my handkerchief over my mouth for the entire train trip, partially to sop up the sweat on my face, partially to gag the unpleasant sounds I was making deep down in my throat.

Following the fifth operation, I was discharged as a patient. The surgeons had worked wonders. They had rebuilt my thigh painstakingly and brilliantly, and except for the livid scars and a soreness that would disappear in time, it was as good as new. There was no more pain. But it was a long time since I had needed a drug to kill pain. I needed it now to kill the need for it.

I was out of uniform but still on terminal leave when I began buying heroin from Emil. I was introduced to him by the ward boy at the hospital, who claimed that a new rigid inspection system was making it so tough for him to keep even his inpatient customers supplied, that discharged patients would have to find an outside source of supply. Emil filled the void.

I found a job in a sporting-goods shop less

than twenty blocks distant from the small candy store in the Chelsea district where Emil made his headquarters. I went home to Millwood on weekends to keep my mother company, and returned to the city and my job by an early Monday morning train. I didn't bother carrying any luggage on these trips. I had a change of clothing at home, and a second needle and bent spoon hidden away in my old room.

My mother died in the middle of the week. I spent the last of my money on enough heroin to tide me over through the funeral and the necessary details that required my presence in Millwood for about a week. When all debts were discharged, all legal and medical fees paid off, I was heir to something like two thousand dollars in cash, the house and the land, and my mother's 1941 Buick.

I sold the Buick for seventy dollars, and closed the house and came back to the city. The two thousand dollars carried me for a few months, and then I was broke again. I went to Emil and begged. He refused to give me so much as a single fix on credit. He told me sorrowfully but firmly that supplying dope on trust was bad business, and furthermore it made for enmity. He liked me too much to want us to be enemies. But if I wanted advice, he would advise me to go back to Millwood and sell off my property.

In desperation, I waylaid him one night, but he had friends within calling distance. He had them beat me up, but not too severely, because

he understood the forces that drove a nice boy to do bad things when he was heavily hooked. He helped me up from the sidewalk, gave me his own handkerchief to put over my bleeding nose, and brushed the city filth from my clothing.

Finally, he gave me a tolerant pat on the back and said, "Go sell that real estate up there, and you're in paradise for life practically, you're sitting way up high on the top of the world."

The craving of an addict for drugs sweeps everything before it, or nearly everything. Some little residue, some sediment of moral precept and ethic usually remains, but even this can be washed away in the final extremity of need. Yet I held firm. The house at Millwood had been in the possession of my family for a century and a half, and it symbolized for me, if only in a confused way, a saner past.

But other than this, there were no restraints. I went to see the man who had been my best friend in college—room-mate and fraternity brother and double-date companion. He had a promising job in a brokerage house. I gave him a hard-luck story about needing money to pay off the cost of my mother's funeral, and he let me have everything he could spare, about two hundred dollars. A few weeks later I returned and got another hundred. I had promised to repay him, but of course I didn't. I went back a third time. He refused me. I became unpleasant, we quarreled, and he had me thrown out of his office.

On Fifth Avenue, one day, I ran into an old girl friend. She had been married recently, and was living across the river in Leonia in a little house purchased with the aid of a GI loan. She invited me to dinner to meet her husband. I arrived an hour before I was expected. I resurrected the story of needing money to discharge funerary obligations. She was somewhat taken aback, but not unsympathetic. But she had no money. She and her husband, just starting out, were strictly budgeted. I redoubled my pleading, and she began to get uncomfortable.

I didn't want to alienate her, because I thought there was still a chance of touching her husband, so I controlled myself and went out into the living-room while she remained in the kitchen to finish cooking dinner. I prowled the living-room like an animal—it had been better than twenty-four hours since my last fix—until I saw her bag sitting on top of the television set. I tiptoed across the floor—their carpeting had not yet been delivered, and the floors were bare—lifted the bag, and started going through it. In my haste and excitement I dropped the change purse. It fell to the floor, and burst open with a shower of coins.

She appeared as I was digging feverishly in her wallet. She stood in a little archway between the kitchen and the living-room, wearing an apron, very pretty and flushed from the heat of the kitchen. I glared at her, and emptied the wallet of its money—three dollar bills. She watched me with wide tearful eyes. Neither of us said a word as I put the bills in my

pocket, flung the wallet across the room, and went out.

In the *calabozo*, later, I frequently thought about the girl—I couldn't remember her married name, but I had known her as Susan Pine—and there were nights when I was haunted by the memory of her tears: not tears of anger or fear or horror, but of pity. I had often considered writing her to explain, to apologize, but I never got around to it. I didn't know what she might have told her husband in explanation of my absence. I guessed she had told him the truth, because she was that kind of girl. But if she had made up a story—and if she had, it would be to protect *me*, not herself—I didn't want to raise any problem between her and her husband.

Three dollars wasn't enough for a fix, so the next morning I made up the deficit by dipping into the till of the sporting goods store. I dipped again two days later, and again the following day. On this occasion the owner of the store caught me at it. He didn't turn me over to the police. He was an old admirer of mine from my skiing and ice-hockey days. He didn't get mad: he simply asked me to explain myself. I told him to go to hell. He told me to put my jacket on and get out, but before I left he gave me a ten-dollar bill. I was sufficiently touched to give him a very surly thanks and then I hurried downtown to spend my money with Emil.

After that, there were no more resources left to me. Lying on my bed in the rabbit warren

that was called a rooming house, alternately shivering and sweating, raging and whining, I plotted means of getting money. Break into a house; stage a holdup in the dark of the night; waylay Emil and hijack his whole supply. I didn't do any of these things. I went down to the candy store and begged.

"A millionaire of property," Emil said to me reproachfully, "and you go around weaseling. Sell off that dopey land and you can take a bath in junk if you want to."

I told him I would think it over. But I knew I wouldn't sell. It was the final outrage, and I could not commit it.

It was a lesser evil to commit myself to carry out a murder.

Emil recognized that curious ethical ambivalence and made use of it. Leaning against a stack of Sunday paper feature sections piled near the telephone booth, he held a small white packet clenched in his hand, but with a corner of it visible between his fingers.

I stood with my back braced against the phone booth, at the same time to control my trembling and to help keep me erect.

I said in a hoarse voice, "Give me one fix, Emil, just one fix, and I'll do anything you say."

"I say sell your property."

"I'll do anything you say except that."

He shrugged, and opened his hand so that the white packet lay exposed momentarily on his palm. Then it disappeared in his clenched fist.

"Please, Emil, I swear, I'll do anything else you say."

"That's right?"

"I swear it!"

"Could be." His fist winked open and shut on the packet. "Listen," he said conversationally, "wasn't you a big soldier-boy?"

"I got to have a fix, Emil, or I'll go off my rocker."

"You're off *now*," Emil said calmly. "Ever shoot anybody? I mean, like the enemy?"

"Fix me, Emil, and I'll tell you about it. I'll tell you some fine war stories."

"Some other time. I got to go now."

"Emil——"

He put the packet in my hand. "Here. On the house."

"It was heavily diluted stuff, and I was back the next day, ravening.

"I give you a free fix yesterday," Emil said.

"It was cut. I hardly felt it."

He slammed me across the mouth with the back of his hand. He was scrawny and under-size and twenty years older than me. But I stood there without moving, barely conscious that I was tasting blood on my lips. He let out a sigh and smiled.

"Come on for a walk with me, Roy, I got something to tell you."

I followed him out of the store like a whipped dog. We strolled up Twenty-third Street toward the Hudson River docks, and, while he was lighting a cigarette, Emil asked me if I would kill a man for him.

I stared at him and said, "No!" so loudly that a couple of passersby looked at me in alarm.

Emil said, "Okay. Get lost, punk," and continued walking.

I stood where I was for a moment, then walked away in the opposite direction. I stopped after a dozen paces. Emil was crossing the avenue, jaunty and unconcerned. I ran after him.

At one of the liner piers, empty and cavernous with its tenant recently departed, sitting casually on the stringpiece at the water's edge and looking down at the brackish water, Emil outlined the proposition for me. It was all neatly worked out, from the flight schedule for the plane I was to take the next evening, to a rough scale map of the route to Clyde Stockman's estate. He had been ready for me. He had a fair knowledge of human nature, at least of the human nature that carries a monkey on its back.

I had precisely enough morphine—Emil knew the degree of my craving, and the exact dosage that would satisfy it—to see me through four days, including flying time. The reward—an inexhaustible supply of heroin—was mine when I returned. He didn't doubt that I would do my best to earn it.

And so I did—or thought I did. Dr. Moreno contradicted this view. "Our subconscious is governed by the kind of person we are," he said to me. "You probably know that even under hypnosis we cannot make a person per-

form an act that is morally repugnant to him. It is true your finger pulled the trigger, but your subconscious aimed the gun. It would not allow you to kill."

The plane put down at Assumpta Airport a few minutes before midnight, and in less than two hours time it was all over. I walked across the field, in the glare of the landing lights, to the white modern air terminal. I went into the *lavatorio* and fussed with my tie and hair before the mirror. When a ground crewman who was there had left, I went into one of the booths, poured a quantity of gage into my handleless spoon, mixed it with a drop of water, and heated it over the flame of a stub of kitchen candle I carried in my bag. I rolled up my sleeve and cut myself in. I waited for it to bite, and then I came out and walked along the Avenida Bolivar, leading two miles in a straight line into the capital. I found my way to Clyde Stockman's hacienda easily; the map Emil had drawn for me was accurate and simple to follow.

Everything was in order as promised. The stone wall about the courtyard was ten feet high, but covered with a tough ivy which, I had been assured, would provide a sufficient hand-and-foot-hold for climbing. It did. I pulled myself up, straddled the top, dangled by my hands, and dropped to the ground.

Skirting a monstrous night-blooming bush, I picked my way through the lush flower beds that enriched the bright night with an almost overpowering perfume. I was well-spiked, and

moved, or imagined that I did, with great sureness and ease.

The masonry balcony off Stockman's bedroom overhung a terrace, and again there was ivy to facilitate the climb. The French doors giving on the balcony were open, and through the screen I could see Stockman's bed very clearly at the far end of the room. The moon was like a silvery searchlight. Against the white pillow the grey of Stockman's hair and the ruddy complexion of his face were vividly clear.

I took the gun out of my pocket, and with the front sight tore a small hole in the screening. I enlarged it by pushing the barrel through and wiggling it. I braced the barrel on the supporting mesh of the screen and aimed at the figure on the bed. At the last moment, just before I pulled the trigger, Stockman stirred slightly, and let out a moan.

The echoing detonation of the shot momentarily stilled the keening chorus of the insects. Stockman's figure jerked as the bullet hit him, and I saw the white sheet start to stain red. I tore the gun out of the mesh in which the trigger guard had snarled, put it in my pocket, and turned away from the room. I eased my legs over the edge of the balcony, searched with my feet for purchase in the ivy, and climbed down. On the ground, I started back through the garden to the wall. I had gone about ten yards when a burst of light took me from behind and a voice shouted at me in Spanish.

I continued to walk toward the wall, ignoring the voice. There were footsteps pounding behind me, but I paid no attention to them. Then something jolted into my spine, staggering me, and the voice said something about "*pistola*." I had no trouble translating the word, or associating it with the stiff prodding object in my back. Pleased with my perceptiveness, I turned around smiling.

The man with the pistol was wearing a uniform (he was a sergeant of the *Assumpta policia*, and this was his night for playing cards with the *mayordomo* of the Stockman *casa*, who happened to be his brother), and spitting out a torrent of fierce Spanish at me. He waved his pistol at me threateningly. When he was satisfied that I would not attempt to escape, he sidled around behind me and prodded me toward the open door of the house, in which, presently, the *mayordomo*, who had first run to his master, now appeared. Smiling, I bowed deeply to the *mayordomo*.

The *sargento* kept his pistol trained on me while the *mayordomo*, guttural with excitement, phoned for an ambulance and a reinforcement of the *policia*. It did not occur to the *sargento* to search me for a gun, and I did not mention that I had one because I had forgotten its existence. I didn't escape because I was displeased with the scantiness of the audience. When the rest of them arrived, the doctors and the police, I would simply flap my wings and fly away, leaving them all far below

on the ground, gaping in astonishment and admiration.

8

SOMETIME in the night, waking out of exhausted and replete sleep, she must have gotten up and found the target pistol. Brightly nickled, it lay on a night-table not too distant from the fingers of the bare arm flung back in a graceful curve outside the cover. She slept soundlessly, on her back, the cover drawn up to and even slightly over her cheek. In the morning light, her skin was rosy, her untouched lashes as black as the color of her hair.

When I got up she stirred, but didn't waken. I walked softly to the window. My hurt instep felt stiff, and it was marked by a yellow-black discoloration, but the swelling had gone down. I lifted an edge of the drape and looked out. A woman was wheeling a laden shopping cart; two kids were playing some sort of ball-game against the stoop of a house; a few passersby were strolling with the relaxed gait of Saturday. The blond man was gone. A rubber ball bounced against the stoop at which he had kept his vigil.

I went back to the couch and looked down at Veda, soft and attainable in the innocence of sleep. Remembering the fierceness and tenderness, I felt curiously lightheaded and hollow—a phenomenon that in the past I had identified with love. But I didn't trust it. It was too easy to confuse sex with love. And on Veda's part—an impulse of the moment, pity?

I turned away and went into the bathroom. I washed, combed my hair, and put my clothes on. There was a safety razor in the cabinet, but I passed it by; I wasn't sure of the etiquette involved in borrowing a leg razor without permission—or of the hazards. When I drew on my jacket I felt the weight of the envelope in the breast pocket.

I rummaged in a dressing-table drawer and found a pencil and a yellow scratch pad. I wrote a short note, saying that I would phone in the early afternoon. No salutation, and simply "Roy" at the end. I needed time to stand back and examine my feelings toward Veda; I didn't want to commit myself—even lightly—to anything I wouldn't feel in a day or a week or a year from now.

I slid the yellow paper beneath the weight of the target gun, resisting the temptation to kiss her, or touch her hand, or by some token acknowledge my feelings toward her, however unresolved they might be. I started for the door, but on an impulse crossed into the studio. The clay figure stood like a mummy in crude cerements, bathed in sunlight from the sky above. I unwound the damp cloths and

looked at the unfinished likeness of me. It had a disturbing quality of intensity, even violence. I re-wrapped it in the damp cloths, and after a last glance at the sleeping girl, went out.

If the narrow dingy hallways had been depressing and slightly sinister the night before, they were merely shabby in the daylight. I went down the stairs to the entry where I had crouched, opened the locked inner door which had saved me, and went out into the street. On the opposite side, a man was cleaning his car, the water shining like crystal in the spring sunlight. The two kids were still playing their incomprehensible game of a stoop ball. On a roof, a boy with a long pole was signalling his pigeons. A woman shook a dustmop out of a window. The nightmare, as nightmares do, had dissipated with the light.

The Broadway area was crowded, as usual, dominated by flocks of noisy teen-agers, with a large sprinkling of smaller children, dressed in their finery and clinging to the hands of their mothers. I didn't bother to see if I was being followed, but I looked around carefully before going into my hotel. If I was being watched, it was probably by the blond man's relief. The blond man was undoubtedly trying to catch up on his sleep, tossing in his bed for the lack of a killing to quiet his nerves.

The desk clerk had an envelope for me. It had been left late last night. I asked him if he had noticed who had delivered it.

"Sorry, that would be the night man."

I thanked him, and told him I would be

checking out in about an hour. I locked the door of my room and opened the envelope. Written in pencil, it read:

Dear Roy, Okay, so I missed out twice on you, so let it go. Decided you are not going to squeal if not done so yet. Good boy. Go back home and bygones is bygones. Be a smart cat and don't poke your nose out of that hometown. We will know it if you do. Stay away from that D.A. creep and newspaper joe and you'll live a long time. Otherwise, you know what. Well, so long and good luck. Your Friend. You Know Who.

A scratchy female voice answered the phone. I asked for Emil. There was no response, but a loud metallic thud in my ear, and I knew she had let the receiver dangle against the wall of the booth.

In a moment I heard a preliminary thudding, and then Emil's voice saying, "Yeah?"

"This is Roy."

"Roy. What happened to you, buddy?" His voice was aggrieved. "Why didn't you show up?"

"I couldn't make it. Something I didn't expect——"

"Trouble?" He spoke quickly, warily.

"No. No trouble."

"Not drunk." There was a finality in his voice, as if to convince himself. "No, not drunk. Not you. A dame?"

"Something like that."

"But you still got that thing? You didn't lose that thing, Roy?"

"I still have it, and I still want to give it to you. As soon as possible."

He laughed with relief. "Sure. Well, you know, I was afraid maybe . . . well, a fellow's been in stir for three years, he finally gets near a woman, he loses all sense of proportion, and money don't mean anything to him. You know what I mean?"

"When can I give you the money, Emil?"

"Right this morning. You remember where I told you?"

I repeated the name of the theatre, and the row and seat.

"Fine. That place, at, let's see, half past twelve. Okay?"

"Okay. I'll be there."

"But you be there, right, kiddie? No more standups. Okay?"

I showered and shaved, and put on clean linen. I checked out of the hotel a few minutes past twelve. At Broadway and 42nd Street I went down into the subway entrance and checked my canvas bag in a locker. The theatre was halfway up the block toward Eighth Avenue, its front gaudily festooned with still photographs and boldly printed heralds shrilling the sex-blood-and-guts aspects of the two pictures on the screen. I bought my ticket from a woman with hopelessly bored eyes, and went inside. The theatre was almost empty, and the voices on the sound track boomed hollowly out of the bright glow of the screen. The house

was pervaded by a smell of staleness and age and cheap booze that even a heavy dose of perfumed disinfectant was not able to neutralize.

I took a seat two spaces out from the side wall on the left of the theatre in the next-to-the-last row. It was twenty-five past twelve. In five minutes, ten at the most, the last ganglion would be severed with the Roy Hathaway who had been hatched out on the slope of a Korean battlefront.

On the screen a brilliant blond in a negligee and a man with a hairline moustache were plotting the murder of the woman's husband in the name of sweet amour.

" . . . you got to do it, Frank, you got to!"

"Yeah. But afterwards, after I kill him, then what?"

"We put him . . . the body . . . into the trunk of the car, and we drive up . . . there's this lake in the mountains——"

"I don't like it, baby——"

"We tie weights to him and . . . oh, honey, you got to, there's no other way, so that we can live and love. . . ."

A few rows in front of me, a man began to snore loudly and raggedly, momentarily drowning out the conspiratorial voices on the screen before subsiding into a lower-keyed complaining mumble.

I gave some thought to the letter I had gotten from the blond man. It was hard to believe that having twice failed to kill me, he was now giving up and trusting a threat to keep me

quiet. But what motive could he have? To put me off my guard?

Although the note was puzzling in this respect, it helped to make things clear in another. The clue lay in the reference to "that D.A. creep and newspaper joe." If I assumed that Stockman's "friends" had taken it more or less for granted that I had accepted the bribe, and therefore would keep my mouth shut, the blond man's presence at the airport could be explained merely as a general precautionary check on my arrival. But after I had been seen speaking to Constable, and, especially, Fornari, the picture had changed. It must have been particularly damaging to me that I had driven into the city with Fornari. And so the blond man—as the agent for Stockman's "friends"—had been ordered to get rid of me.

It also occurred to me that, even in the unlikely event that the note could be accepted at face value, all bets would be off if the "friends" got wind of the fact that I was returning my bribe money to Emil. It could only mean that I was formally releasing myself of the obligation to remain silent . . . an unanswerable argument in favor of my death.

But this was something they need not know. Surely Emil, who was in effect double-crossing his employers by accepting the money, would not breathe a word of it. . . .

I heard the shuffle of feet in the aisle, and a man slipped into the seat beside me. In the light coming from the screen I glimpsed a ruddy jowly face. It was not Emil.

My elbow pressed in against my breast pocket, and I stiffened as the man leaned toward me.

"Take it easy, Roy. Emil sent me."

The hoarse voice was familiar, and after a moment I placed it as the voice of the man at the candy store, the one who had volunteered to push my face in.

"Emil couldn't come. I'm his brother. Vinnie."

"Where's Emil?"

"He got this toothache . . . ah, what the hell. He dint come cause he's scared you might beat up on him." He looked at me with contemptuous eyes. "I told him what the hell's to be scared of."

I turned away from him to the screen. Two shadowy figures were dragging something between them over the floor of a garage.

"Emil's the frail one in the family. Good business head, but no guts. I'm different." His voice toughened. "Okay. Let's have the thing and get it over."

I said, "I haven't got anything for you. I might have something for Emil, but not for you."

"I told you. I'm his brother Vinnie. Emil sent me——"

I shook my head. I believed that he was Emil's brother, and that Emil had sent him in his place for the reason stated, but I would accept no substitutes. I could not have defended on the grounds of logic my determination to give the money to Emil, and only to Emil, but

that was how it would have to be. Emil's name was on the selvage of the fantasy fabric I had woven for myself.

"Come on, buddy, let's don't horse around. I already seen this pitcher once. Slip me the ten and let's get the hell out of this dump."

My muscles tightened. "Ten? Ten what?"

"What you want me to do—holler it out so we can get our throat cut?" The hoarse voice lowered. "Ten G's. Ten thousand. The dough for Emil."

I said, "Okay, Vinnie. I had to be sure. Where's the men's room?"

"What for? Give me the dough first and then——"

"It's sewed to the inside of my pants. I'll be back in five minutes."

"It's over the back there, down a flight." He put his hand on my arm as I started to get up. "I better go with you."

There was a snort from the sleeper in front of us, and a whining voice said, "Pipe down, can't hear the pitcher."

Vinnie said, "Shut up, rummy."

I followed him up the aisle to the rear of the theatre. He pointed to a dim sign over a stairway that read *Men's Lounge*. We started down the worn carpeted stairs together. On the third step I held back. He was already one step below me. I took him from behind with my shoulder, butting him in the middle of his back. He yelped, and went tumbling down. I ran back up the stairs, through a side exit, into the street.

THERE was no circumstance in which it made sense for Vinnie to have asked for ten thousand dollars instead of five: not if Emil had sold me out; not if Vinnie was a confederate of the blond man's; and not if Vinnie was double-crossing Emil, who had sent him in good faith. And I could hardly believe that Emil had simply forgotten the sum of money that was involved.

I recalled now, vaguely, but troublingly, my first phone conversation with Emil, in which, after I had mentioned five thousand dollars, he had said something about "the whole thing" . . . and I was suddenly struck by such a chillingly devastating thought that I faltered and came to a dead stop on the busy street. But it was ridiculous to countenance, and I put it away from me with self-anger.

What remained was that I would not have given Vinnie the money under any circumstances, and that his asking for the wrong amount had not changed matters except to earn him a fall down a flight of steps; and I might have had to do that in any event to get rid of him. I was annoyed, even outraged by

Emil, but I couldn't help recalling that Dr. Moreno had warned me that my attempt to return the money would be suspect and misinterpreted.

My first impulse, after leaving the theatre and mingling with the crowd, was to go directly to the candy store in Chelsea, search out Emil, and press the money on him by force, if I had to. But it would be indiscreet to be seen with him openly, as much from my point of view as from his. I decided to return to Veda's studio, and phone him from there. I recovered my bag from the subway locker and headed uptown.

She was standing in the open door when I came running up the steps to the landing. She was wearing a tweed skirt and a cashmere sweater. I reached for her eagerly. She held me off, but there was regret and promise in her smile.

"There's someone here I want you to meet, Roy."

She drew me inside, squeezing my hand, and closed the door. She led me to the studio, where a gray-haired man, who was stopping to examine one of the headless torsos, straightened up to meet us.

"This is Roy," Veda said.

He said, "How do you do," and held out his hand. He was in his sixties, lean and well-kept, wearing slacks and a nubby gray Shetland jacket.

"This is Judge Hudson, Roy."

He must have felt the tightening of my hand. He smiled thoughtfully and said to Veda, "I wonder if you ought to mention to Mr. Hathaway that the title is an honorific. I'm retired to private practice."

They exchanged a quick look and Veda said in a rush, "Roy, I told the Judge about you, I think he can help you. . . ." She ended on a rising inflection, a note of pleading rather than question.

If I had not authorised her to tell my story, neither had I forbidden it—not in so many words. But she could not have been insensitive to my feelings about it.

"Roy?" Now the pleading in her voice was overt.

I said nothing, and looked at her blankly.

"Please don't stare at me that way." She turned helplessly to Hudson, who began to show discomfort beneath the neutral gravity of his expression. She turned back. "I knew I was betraying a confidence, Roy, but——"

I said, "I'll be getting along now, Veda. I want to thank you for——"

"Oh, stop it!" The helplessness in her face had vaporized in an instant, and left it determined, even angry. "Now, listen to me——"

Judge Hudson said, "Veda, I'd better be running——"

"No. Let me talk to him. Browse among the Lawrence works." Hudson started to protest. "Please?"

He glanced at me apologetically, smiled,

shrugged, and wandered off toward the array of headless and limbless statues.

Veda said, "*Please* let me explain, Roy?" A remnant of anger, and something else that I could not identify, or was hesitant to identify as deep concern, were at war in her eyes.

I nodded stiffly. She let out her pent breath in a wordless exclamation that was between relief and anxiety, and led me to the studio couch at the far end of the living quarters. We sat down, and when she faced me, her features were clear of everything but their familiar expression of candor.

"In the first place," she said, "I didn't conspire. Judge Hudson dropped in unexpectedly a little while ago. He's a friend of my father, and he buys stuff from me from time to time. He came by to see whether I had any new pieces. I didn't summon him."

In the studio, Hudson had moved all the way to the rear, as distant from the sound of our voices as he could get. He stood with his back to us and gazed down through the rear window at the tiny fenced-in yards.

"I'm not a compulsive do-gooder," Veda said. "I had no intention of taking you up as a cause. It was purely impulse. When he came in I was unwrapping the clay figure, the one of you. I had wanted to look at it. . . ." She paused. ". . . not critically, or to work on it, but because it was you."

She stopped, and looked down at her hands, the muscular fingers spread as if on display

against the taut tweed over her thighs. She might have been waiting for me to say something. I was silent. She raised her head to a defiant angle.

"Yes, it was sentimental. But what happened next was mystical . . . or just womanly, perhaps. He came over—the Judge—and stood beside me in front of the figure and said, 'That's a nice job,' or something of the sort, but I hardly heard what he said. I was looking at the figure, knowing that it was made of clay, and that it would take just one blow of the fist to smash it into a lump of nothing. I looked at it, and didn't see its line or composition, or imperfections, or anything like that—just its terrible vulnerability. And I turned to the Judge and I said—flippantly, of course, how else but flippantly?—I said, 'How do you like my clay assassin?'"

I said, "And then broke down and told him?"

"I didn't break down," she said coldly. "I told it to him as factually as I could, because he's a friend, and he has influence, and some wisdom . . . and I told it to him because I prayed that he might help me to keep you alive."

"Did you tell him everything—everything I told you?"

She cocked her head comically, but her eyes were very serious. In a strangely subdued voice she said, "Has it occurred to you, my boy, that I am in a way of speaking courting you?"

"How much did you tell him, Veda?"

She straightened her head, sighing. "How much did I tell him? Just what I thought was salient to the premise that you were in mortal danger of being killed."

"Did you tell him about the money? About my returning it to Emil?"

"I don't think I did." She closed her eyes a moment, in thought. "No. I'm sure. I didn't talk about that."

"All right." I put my hand out and covered hers, lying in her lap. It was icy. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to stay alive."

"I intend to."

"Stay alive, Roy, at least for another few weeks, so that I can find out whether or not I truly love you or . . ." Her hands stirred under mine, glacial but vital. "My father always said it would happen to me like this . . . when I wasn't looking. It's the first time in his life he's ever been right about me."

"I wanted to tell you about that, about the way I felt."

"I know how you feel, you damn fool." Her hands moved abruptly, overturned, and clutched mine very tightly. "Roy, they're not going to leave you alone. They're going to try again, and eventually . . . You can't be lucky forever."

"I don't think I'm that important to them."

She shook her head impatiently, urgently. "Do this for me. Talk to Judge Hudson. See

what he feels. See what he suggests. Will you do that for me? Please, darling?"

"He doesn't even know me."

"He's very nice. I asked him to help, and he said he didn't know if he could, but he would try if you wanted him to."

I returned the pressure of her hands. "All right, Veda."

She bent toward me and kissed me lightly, then got up and ran back to the studio. I followed after her. Hudson turned at the sound of our footsteps.

Veda said, "He's willing. Will you talk to him?"

He gave me a close scrutiny, as if to confirm my acquiescence. "I'll do my best. But I'm afraid . . ." He looked at his wrist watch. "I'm afraid I'm due downtown at the athletic club for a committee meeting. However, I should be back no later than four. . . ."

"That's fine," Veda said eagerly.

He smiled at her. "Then I'm expecting one of my law partners at my apartment at five." He grimaced. "Dinner at seven, then the theatre. . . . Can it keep until tomorrow? Unless you'd care to come to my place between four and five. . . . I hate to sandwich you in this way——"

"It won't keep," Veda said. She appealed to me with her eyes.

I said to Hudson, "I'm very grateful, sir. I'll be at your apartment at four, if it's no trouble."

"None whatsoever. Veda, give Mr. Hathaway my address, please. . . ."

We shook hands, and Veda kissed his cheek. She saw him out, and when the door had closed behind him, she ran into my arms.

Judge Hudson's address was an unfashionable one in the wake of the great migration to the East side which had abandoned the area west of Fifth to a variegated intermingling of flourishing minority groups. The building was a huge pile towering over the western frontage of the Park. Like most of the apartment dwellings on Central Park West, it had shut its eyes to the shabbiness of the surrounding side streets; and if its tenants were no longer strictly upper-crust, they were nevertheless moneyed and acceptable.

A doorman admitted me, and the elevator man let me off at the eleventh floor. It was the penthouse floor, and the Judge had the whole of it. The door was cream-colored, its insets edged in gilt. Judge Hudson opened the door to my ring. We shook hands and he led me through a corridor lined with small framed prints to a huge living-room. At the far end of the room, the entire wall opened out to a great terrace, rich with greenery in pots and boxes.

He waved me to a seat in an armchair, and after offering me a drink, which I declined, sat in a companion chair to mine.

"It seems to me," he said, frowning, "that your problem hinges on the question of

whether or not you're willing to take it to the police. From what I understand from Veda, you are unwilling to do so. May I ask why?"

"I'd rather not say."

His frown deepened. "You can be sure of this much: that the people who are after you are efficient, notwithstanding the fact that they have failed so far. You've been very lucky. If they don't find you here, in the city, they'll seek you out at home. Did Veda tell you that?"

"Yes."

"I can't urge this on you too strongly. If they want you dead they will *have* you dead. Don't make any mistake about it. Don't underestimate them for a minute. As things stand now, you're doomed. I'm speaking to you plainly."

I took the note from the blond man from my pocket. "This was left at my hotel this morning."

He read the note and returned it to me. "What do you make of it?"

"I'm not sure. I'd like to believe I could take it at its face value."

He leaned forward to take the note from me again. He scanned it quickly. "I would judge that they're offering you a deal. If you stay away from the D.A.—and by inference, the police—they would be inclined to let you alone." He returned the note to me. "Is that the reason for your avoidance of the police?"

"The note has nothing to do with it. I have a special reason, a personal reason."

He fixed me with gray eyes that almost

matched the color of his hair. "Thieve's honor, the code of the underworld? Something on that order?"

"No."

"I don't mean to sound harsh. I suppose it's my experience on the bench, where I've seen justice obstructed too frequently by that ridiculous romantic concept. However, in your case, I accept your word that it's something different."

But the focus of his eyes was unrelenting.

I said, "It's personal, it isn't dishonorable. It's . . . well, an obligation. I hope to discharge it by this evening."

"I'm no longer a judge . . . neither in the official nor the moral sense." He smiled. "If it bears on this matter, I suggest you unburden yourself."

"I have to dispose of some money—that's all."

Then, sparing details, I told him about the machine-gun attempt on me in the Assumpta prison, and the money that had come in the mail a week later. I explained my reasons for wanting to return the money.

He sat back in his chair. "It's a most unusual attitude. I think I understand the psychological prompting behind it. It clears the air somewhat. Once this money is returned, I take it, you will then have no objection to going to the police? Or to the District Attorney?"

"No."

"Very well. Now, it seems to me——"

He was interrupted by the sound of the door buzzer. The little frown appeared between his eyes. He excused himself, and went out into the corridor, looking at his watch.

Beyond the terrace the sky was a perfect blue. I thought of Veda. We had made love again, and talked, and shyly approached, without directly confronting, the deepness of our feeling for each other.

Judge Hudson came back into the room. The blond man followed just behind him, with a drawn gun in his hand.

10

DOCTOR MORENO had said to to me, shortly before my release, "You are now a man who hoards his feelings, and is afraid to spend them. It is a reaction against the emotional excesses of the years since your wounds. A long convalescence of the emotions. I do not worry about this. In time, as your scars heal, as you learn to trust your emotions, you will start to disburse them more normally."

Veda had said something like it, too: "You don't show anything, Roy. But I know it's there, darling."

I twitched in my chair when the blond man

came into the room, but that was all. I knew that nothing showed on my face. But I could not have prevented something from showing, some distillation of the rank bitterness inside, when the blond man's gun neglected to track the Judge. They had moved into the room one behind the other, the Judge walking toward me, the blond man at his heels, his gun pointed straight ahead. Then the Judge moved to one side, slowly, and I braced myself for the moment when the muzzle of the gun moved off me to cover him. But it didn't move. It held steady on a line with my stomach. The blond man was smiling with malevolent calculation.

Judge Hudson picked up a telephone standing on a cherry-wood table backing up a sofa. He scowled in concentration as he spun the dial. Waiting for his ring to be answered, he half-turned to study me, his lips pursed thoughtfully.

He spoke crisply into the phone. "Fred. Listen to me very carefully. I want Emil Shreiger taken care of. Immediately. As quickly as possible. . . . What's that?" He listened, frowning. "Yes, that's what I mean by taken care of. Don't tell me the details. Arrange it. And see that it's done."

The blond man's almost invisible eyebrows quirked. Without shifting his eyes, speaking from a corner of his mouth, he said, "What's with Emil, Judge?"

"Emil has been in touch with our friend here—for the past two days, apparently. Negotiating to accept the return of some money—

an act by which our friend hoped to purge his conscience before spilling his guts to Mr. Fornari."

"Sonofabitch——"

"Don't turn your head away from him, Hugh," Hudson said sharply.

The gun tightened in the blond man's hand.

"I'll come around where you can see me," Hudson said.

He took the same chair he had sat in before. The blond man, Hugh, moved to his left, to cover me and at the same time keep both of us in his purview.

"This cat wants to give the money back?" Hugh said. "What's he—a psycho?"

Watching Hugh, I observed that he held his index finger curled around the trigger guard rather than the trigger. It gave me a sudden insight, and I moved in the chair to test it. The gun stiffened in his hand, but his finger didn't move from the trigger guard. It indicated—or I hoped it did—that his specialty was not a gun, but a club or blackjack, and if he had to subdue me he might instinctively use it to bludgeon rather than to shoot. As a theory, it had some substance in the fact that he had missed me with the tommy-gun in Assumpta; and even more in his choosing to club me to death on the dark street when it would have been simpler and safer to shoot a silenced gun.

It might signify hope for me, or it could mean only that I would be unpleasantly bludgeoned to death instead of shot down cleanly.

Hugh was regarding me with a certain de-

gree of pleasure. "You know," he said, "I owe you, buddy, for making me trouble two times."

I said, "I'm going to make you trouble a third time. Haven't you ever heard about the rule of three?"

"What am I—a dope? Superstition is for dopes. Like ladders, and black cats? Don't make me laugh."

"I'm not talking about superstitions. The rule of three is mathematical."

"Quit your ribbing, dead man." But he threw a questioning glance at Hudson.

"Superstition," Hudson said reassuringly. "Don't let him get your goat."

"Psycho talk," Hugh said. "They're all like that."

I said to Hudson, "You must have been quite an ornament to the bench. A paragon of high-minded justice."

He ignored me. Oddly, even in my eyes, he had not suffered any loss of dignity since Hugh's entrance. He looked every inch a pillar of the community. And so he was. It followed, from what Fornari had told me, that Stockman's "friends" would almost all be highly placed, and prominent public figures. There might be, among them, judges by the dozen.

Hudson said, "I'm expecting a visitor in ten minutes. I'll go down and meet him in the lobby. The man on the rear elevator—his name is Marty—is taken care of. He'll help you get him down, and into a pickup truck. From there on, it's up to you."

"Like Canarsie," Hugh said. "I know a couple of good places where I can dump him."

"Use your own good judgment," Hudson said querulously. "This sort of thing isn't in my line. If it wasn't for my connection with Veda . . ."

"Leave it to my good hands," Hugh said. "I put the psycho out, and then——"

"Stop," Hudson said. "I don't want to hear any more about it. Just get it over with." He got out of the chair, and looked down at me, his face drawn. "I'm not a person who holds human life lightly. It's a question of sheer survival. Once you get yourself so deeply involved——"

He broke off, turned away abruptly, and went out of the room. I stared after him in disbelief. Presently, the outer door slammed.

"Okay, psycho," Hugh said. "On your feet."

I said, 'You're as good as dead, Hugh. The rule of three.'

"Get up, joker. We'll take a walk."

"Where to?"

"Bathroom. I got a little business to attend to."

Bloodstains would not be a problem in a tiled bathroom. I said, "I'll just stay here and wait for you."

"Look, funny man, don't make it tough on yourself. I can take you out with one swing, or I can make it last a long time. Don't bug me, don't get me sore at you."

"Come on and take me."

He edged closer, and I saw his hand shift on

the gun—two fingers gripped around the trigger guard now.

"But be careful, Stupid," I said. "You're just as liable to trip over your own feet——"

He came in very fast, the gun barrel swinging downward in a short chopping arc. I didn't try to dodge, but shot my right foot straight out and kicked him in the knee-cap. His leg buckled. Momentum hurtled him forward, and he fell headlong on top of me. His weight carried the chair over backwards with both of us in it. I hit on my right shoulder, and felt him land on me for an instant before his own weight slid him forward and over me. I heard a thud and knew he had lost the gun.

I scrambled to my feet, and ran at him while he was still on his hands and knees. As he started to straighten up, I put my knee in his face and felt his nose give. He flopped over on his back, floundering, blood gushing from his broken nose.

The gun had bounced a half-dozen feet away, beneath a chair across the room. There was a bad moment when I risked turning my back to Hugh in order to dig out the gun, but I might have spared myself the anxiety. He had quit cold. He was sitting up, whimpering, pressing a handkerchief to his bleeding face.

I stood over him. "Try to get up and I'll kill you," I said.

I left him sitting there and went over to the telephone on the cherry-wood table. I asked the operator for the police. When a Sergeant Something-or-other answered I said, "I've got

a tip on a murder. If you hurry you might be able to stop it."

"That right? Say, who is this calling, please?"

"The name of the victim is Emil Shrieger." I gave him the address of the candy store, and added the information that he lived in that immediate neighborhood.

I hung up on the voice importuning me for my name, for more information. Hugh had discarded the first handkerchief, a bloody flag, and was reaching with sticky fingers for another one in the breastpocket of his jacket.

I took from my pocket the envelope containing the five thousand dollars and put it on the cherry-wood table. I opened a drawer in the table and found a pencil, and wrote *Judge Hudson* on the envelope.

I put the gun in my pocket and started toward the corridor. There I paused for a last look at Hugh. He was in a half-reclining position, supporting himself with one hand on the carpet, bloodying the golden threads.

11

I DISPOSED of the gun in one metal trashcan, and its cartridges in another three blocks

away. On Tenth Avenue I turned south. When I reached Veda's street, in the Forties, I walked by very quickly, keeping my eyes straight ahead. By some heightened form of association, the street had become Veda, structured of her aura, her essence, her living flesh. I had not felt this way about a girl for a very long time, and it was a feeling I had never thought I would feel again.

The ache and intensity of love. The investment of the ego in another person.

And like any person in love, I was turning upon my love, flogging it, punishing it, declaring it guilty in the kangaroo court of my mind.

Yet there was a simple rationalization of her innocence. Hugh, knowing where I had taken refuge, turned in a report to the Judge. Hudson, knowing her, having bought several of her sculptures, dropped by on the pretext of wanting to see what new work she might have done. There was an element of coincidence in his knowing her, but it wasn't at all outlandish. The chances were excellent, even in a city the size of New York, that men of the stature, wealth and tastes of Hudson and Fletcher Lawrence would move in the same circles, or similar ones that frequently intersected each other. Granted this much, it would be easy to see how Hudson might be a patron of Veda's.

But I could make out an equally strong case for betrayal, goaded by the masochism of love . . . starting from the very same premise that exculpated her. Her father and Judge Hudson were friends, even colleagues. Either one, or

both of them—after learning from Hugh that I had taken refuge in her apartment—had induced her to persuade me to put myself in Hudson's hands.

As for the intimacy of last night, I was not the first man, nor would I be the last, who was betrayed while the bed was still warm. . . .

Below Forty-second Street, I began to experience the eerie sense of retracing a route I had first travelled in a dream. It was the route I had followed almost daily over many months . . . a tropism turning always toward the candy store, toward Emil, toward the hypnotic sun of a fix. In three years, the neighborhood had scarcely changed: the same cheap stores, shabby businesses, fly-specked bars, grimy wise-eyed kids, lumpy women and defeated men . . . and the rows of tenements, festooned with the inevitable folded elbows and expressionless faces at the windows, human beings who have passed in transit beyond patience and suffering into hopeless acceptance.

I was half a block away from the candy store—I could already see the jutting newsstand, the neglected window cramped with ancient sun-bleached advertising displays, the narrow cluttered door—when I heard a siren. It came nearer and louder, and I saw an ambulance weaving its way through the cross traffic on Twenty-third Street. It came on for two more blocks, and then curved west past the stalled traffic into Twenty-fifth Street. I started to run, but I was the only one doing so. In this neighborhood, the alarm of the siren

was a familiar instrument in the orchestra of the city, too commonplace to excite special interest.

I turned into Twenty-fifth Street and slowed to a walk. The scene of the drama was halfway up the block: the ambulance at the curb, three police cars parked at odd angles, a small ant-hill of a crowd. As I came up to it, the crowd, pushed by the police, eddied back rebelliously, resentful of this attempt to reserve a reasonable clearing on the sidewalk as a stage for the central player.

I joined other late-comers on the periphery of the circle. The supernumeraries played out the inevitable and unchanging dialogue.

"Hey, what happened, Mack?"

"Search me. I just got here. Anybody know what happened?"

Somebody plucked my sleeve. "What happened, buddy?"

A small thin man, with the nose of a hawk and a mouth twisted in permanent disdain, pushed his way outward from the center of the crowd; the ranks closed after him, like underbrush springing back in a dense jungle.

"Hey, what happened?"

The hawk-nosed man, suddenly elevated to featured status, milked his role. He looked wise, bored, lit a cigarette with maddening deliberation.

"Hey, what happened, Mack?"

A man with a dirty pepper-and-salt growth of beard said, "He must've jumped out of the window. See that open window up there?"

An innocent window, with a slightly belly-ing blue curtain, became suddenly invested with sinister drama.

A voice said, "He dead?"

Another voice: "He couldn't of come out that window, or he would of landed near the house. He's out at the edge of the curb."

"Maybe he's like a broad jumper, hah?"

A ripple of laughter breached the etiquette of tragedy, but immediately stifled itself.

A newcomer, breathless, said, "Anybody know what happened?"

The hawk-nosed man looked at him with bored contempt, and started slowly to edge away.

Somebody said, "Hey, this feller knows what happened. What happened, buddy?"

The hawk-nosed man puffed a cloud of smoke at the sky. "Got his throat cut."

There were awed exclamations. Someone turned triumphantly on the bearded man. "Didn't I tell you he didn't jump out the window? He would have to be a broad-jumper."

A second newcomer joined the group of us about the hawk-nosed man. "What happened?"

Nobody answered him. The hawk-nosed man said, "Ear to ear. Professional job."

Someone said, "Gangland killing. They're starting up like the twenties again."

"They used machine guns in the twenties."

One of the newcomers, addressing the hawk-nosed man, said, "He croak?"

There was a chorus of derisive sounds.

The newcomer, flushing, said defensively, "I heard of people living, their throat was cut. If it ain't the jungular."

"Sure, but this fellow said ear to ear. Ear to ear, you don't walk around living."

"Dead," the hawk-nosed man said, and spat. "They don't come no deader."

"Much blood?" somebody asked.

The newcomer said argumentatively, "How do you know for sure he'd dead? Maybe he's just unconscious."

The hawk-nosed man spat again. "I was in War Two, buddy."

"That don't necessarily mean nothing."

"I seen hundreds of stiffes. This one is dead for real."

I said, "Anybody know who he is?"

"It don't necessarily mean he's dead," the newcomer said stubbornly.

There was a chorus of groans for the newcomer's stupidity. The hawk-nosed man, who had been on the verge of replying to my question, was diverted to the newcomer.

"You know what D.O.A. means?" he asked scornfully.

"Sure I do."

"What does it mean?"

"I know what it means. What is this? A quiz show? I know what it means, that's all."

Somebody said, "Dead on Arrival. Right?"

The bearded man said, "Look at them stinking cops push the crowd. They hate the

citizens, and we pay their salary. But they push us around. Stinking cops."

The hawk-nosed man said, "The ambulance doctor said D.O.A. I was standing right there next to him. *He* ought to know. He's a doctor."

The newcomer was not convinced. "They ain't no doctors, they're interns. Learners. What the hell do they know?"

"Look at them stinking cops. They stink."

Someone said to the hawk-nosed man, "He pronounced him D.O.A., buddy?"

The hawk-nosed man nodded. "You'll see him come back to the ambulance in a minute. Hospitals don't pick up stiffs. You'll see the ambulance take off empty."

"Is there much blood?"

"Pools. The jugular."

I tapped the hawk-nosed man's arm. He looked at me combatatively. I said, "Do you know who he is?"

He shrugged, and turned to someone else. "The D.O.A.'s get took away by the cops for the autopsy. They autopsy them to see what they died from."

There was another quick guffaw of laughter. I moved off to a group that consisted mostly of women, speaking softly, their voices blended with the monotone muted voice, strangely detached on the early evening air, of a police car's radio. The center of attention was an angular greyhaired woman in a print dress. She kept her hand pressed to her forehead as she spoke.

“ . . . looked out the window, and there was this car taking off—I mean careening down the street——”

“You get the license?”

“—and he was holding onto his throat, bleeding like a pig, I mean it was gushing, I never seen so much——”

“I’ll never be able to eat supper tonight.”

“—and he tried to get up, I mean he give it quite a try, and run like a step or two, and then fell down dead. His eyes wide open, staring, it looked like he was staring right up at me. I’ll never forget them staring eyes long as I live.”

Heads shook in sympathy, tongues made dry clucking noises.

One of the women said, “Anybody know who he was?”

Another woman said, “Emil something.”

“Emil Shreiger,” the angular woman said.

“She knew him. He lived in her house.”

“For almost ten years,” the angular woman said. “He was a real nice man.”

The clock on the Metropolitan Tower read 6:10.

I had wandered eastward on Twenty-third Street, deserted in the calm of a Saturday, its larger buildings obstructing the lowering sun, filling the street with blue alpine shadows. The windows of the upper floors of the Metropolitan Building caught the last reflected gold of the sun that was nesting across the Hudson. I cut through the paths of Madison Square Park,

its benches filled with old men and women, and here and there a bum who had wandered uptown from the Bowery.

I thought of the angular woman's epitaph for Emil: He was a real nice man. Did anyone else think so? Was there a place in heaven for Emil, too?

It struck me that Emil's death rendered me useless so far as Fornari's purpose was concerned. To be sure, I now had an even closer contact than Emil with the "friends" of Clyde Stockman, but it seemed of doubtful value. Who would accept the word of an ex-drug addict, a would-be murderer, a jailbird, against the person of such a pillar of the community as Judge Hudson?

It was no secret to Fornari that Hudson was one of the Stockman crowd. What he had hoped for, through my single contact, was to build up a progressive chain of identification that would be strong enough—however questionable each of its links were—to bind Hudson and his other highly-placed colleagues. Now Emil was dead. But there were still Emil's brother, Hugh, the candy store and its unsavory denizens. Possibly one of these might be able to serve as a starting point in place of Emil.

I pretended my arrival at Grand Central was accidental, ignoring the underlying design in the steady eastward and northward path I had been following. I realized that if I had acknowledged my intention to myself, I would have deliberately gone off in another direction.

I strolled through the terminal concourses, gazing at the store windows, still deluding myself that my course was aimless. But when I arrived at the room containing the attended phone booths, I dropped all pretense.

An operator sitting behind the raised polished counter carefully noted down the information I gave her.

"Do you have any idea how long it will take?"

She suggested that I come back in a half hour, but added, "That's just to give us some leeway. If there's no delay, we can have your party in five minutes. Would you like to wait?"

I didn't want to wait, I wanted to postpone it as long as possible. But now that the move was initiated, it would be less painful to get it done with quickly. I told her I would wait. I lit a cigarette, and stood in the doorway with my back to the operator, watching the mild activity at a huge newsstand to my left. I finished the cigarette, and went inside.

The operator said, "We have your party, sir. There is a charge of twelve dollars and seventy cents for three minutes. That is payable in advance, sir."

I paid her out of the dwindling stock left to me of my accumulated prison pay—less than two hundred dollars remained.

The operator said, "Thank you, sir. Will you take booth number three, please?"

The shutting of the booth door activated a small rubber-finned fan set in the ceiling. But the instant I picked up the receiver I broke

into a poisonous sweat. An operator spoke my name and asked me to wait-a-moment-please. Then there were more wait-a-moment-pleases by other operators, and I sat with sweat pouring down my face, my hand clenched around the bakelite as if welded to it.

After the rather distant sound of the relay operators, the voice of the home operator was shockingly loud and clear. "We have your party, sir, go ahead."

There was a momentary silence, as broad and deep as a chasm, and then I heard the familiar voice, somewhat drained of its true vitality by distance, but near-by and intimate.

"Hello, *amigo*. It is you, Roy?"

"Yes. It's Roy."

"So. You are all right?"

"Yes. I'm all right."

"Ah, that is fine. Do you know the time here in Assumpta, *amigo*?"

"I'd forgotten. I'm sorry. Look, Doctor, I must ask you something. It's this: was there ten thousand dollars in that envelope that came for me three years ago?"

"What is that you say? Ten thousand dollars in the envelope?"

I said, "There was ten thousand dollars in the envelope, not five. I found out about that."

"You have changed your mind, and will not return the money? Is this why you call, *amigo*?"

I said slowly and with exaggerated distinctness, "There was ten thousand dollars in the envelope originally. You told me there was

five. What happened to the other five? Did you take five thousand dollars out of the envelope, Doctor?"

There was a sigh, as audible as though he had been standing in the booth beside me. He said calmly, "*Si, amigo*, I took the money. You despise me now? Well, it does not matter. You are cured now, and it does not matter now how you feel about me."

My throat was dry, my voice echoed parched and strangled in the little booth. "Why did you take it, Doctor Moreno?"

"You consider me a thief now?"

"Why did you take it, Doctor?"

"No. I did not take it as a thief takes, Roy, but as a gift to a poor but deserving man. I do not think of it as stealing, but as philosophical acceptance of a heaven-sent gratuity. Do you understand?"

"Better than you think."

"No, Roy, you do not understand." His voice was patient. "For you, five thousand dollars is not so much. It is half the cost of a bribe, a pittance to be despised and returned. But to a poor struggling doctor in the Republic it is wealth. It is the difference between grinding poverty and a measure of ease. Better food for *los niños*, the child—children—medical books, a decent dress for the *mujer*——" His voice went cold. "I am not making an apology. I accepted some money sent by a gangster to an assassin. I put it to the use of a worthy man and his worthy family——"

The operator's voice came in. "Sir, the three minutes are up. . . ."

"Think over what I have said, *amigo*," Moreno said. "And then you will not feel so badly."

"I'm sorry, sir, your time is up. If you wish to continue——"

"No. That's all, operator."

"Keep yourself well, *amigo* . . ." and his voice faded out.

12

A BEETHOVEN quartette revolved on the turntable, the purity of the recording marred by the insistent needle scratch of the open-topped player. The empty jacket stood beside an over-filled ashtray on the blond wood of the small desk holding the player; like the player itself, the desk was mistreated but serviceable. The Beethoven jacket was lettered in a chaste script, illustrated by an artist with a delicate line. The second album was called *Tangos for the Latin Kind of Love*. Its jacket illustration was a velvet-eyed girl wearing a mantilla and very little else: the swell of her breasts circumvented indecency only by bleeding off the jacket at the ultimate breech. The third was

called *Richie Bijou Sings Great*, and pictured Richie, a young man badly in need of a comb, surrounded by a bevy of adoring girls in bathing-suits.

Through the glass of the booth, past the stacks of albums on their stands, through a space in the store-window displays, I had a narrow, slanted, but perfect view of the entrance of the Grosvenor Hotel.

When the connection with Assumpta was broken—and with it the connection to another part of my past—I had walked quickly through the Terminal's concourse to the street. I knew then, already, that I was going to have to set a trap for Veda; only the method was unresolved. I didn't think of it as a test but a trap, and if that choice of a word constituted a pre-judgement, I didn't let the distinction bother me.

After Dr. Moreno, I was through with taking people on trust.

The Grosvenor was a small, unassuming, well-kept hotel in the Grand Central area. When I first saw it, I thought of it as a place to stay the night; but almost in the same thought, another thing suggested itself. I turned away from the entrance, walked to a drugstore on the corner, and telephoned Veda.

"Hello?"

The leap of my pulse at the sound of her voice served as a warning to me. Don't try to read anything in her inflection, I told myself, or in what she says, for that matter. If she had

consciously betrayed me, she was too accomplished an actress to be contended with. That was the purpose of the trap: so that I wouldn't be deceived by a performance.

"Hello, Veda."

"Roy? Where are you? I've been——"

"Have you had dinner yet? Look, I want you to have dinner with me."

"Of course. I've been worrying about . . . Did it go all right with Dennis? Dennis Hudson? I've been expecting——"

"I'll tell you all about it when I see you."

After a pause, she said, "You know, I've missed you."

She spoke shyly, even nervously. But I discounted that observation, erased it.

I said, "Do you know the Grosvenor Hotel?"

"Are you all right? You sound upset."

"I'm fine. Listen—can you come now?"

Wouldn't you rather come here? Where are you now?"

"At the hotel. I'd rather you came here. Do you mind, Veda?"

"No. I don't mind. The Grosvenor?"

I told her the address. "I'll meet you in the lobby. Will you come right away?"

"I'll leave in about twenty minutes. I'll take a cab. Do I sound excited?"

"You sound fine."

"Well, I'm excited. In the lobby of the Grosvenor. Good-by, darling."

I left the drugstore and went across the street to the record store. Except for a teen-age

boy and girl, and the manager, a studious young man with supercilious (or near-sighted) eyes behind hornrimmed glasses, it was empty. I spent less than five minutes pretending to browse, selected my three records at random, and went into the listening booth.

Dusk had fallen, with an effect as of a child's crayon scribbled over the streets and buildings. But the front of the Hotel was brightly lit by marquee lights. I took my eyes from it long enough to glance at my watch. Fifteen minutes since I had spoken to her. When I looked again, a cab was drawing up in front of the Grosvenor. For a moment no one came out. Then the door opened, and a girl ran across the pavement to the hotel entrance. Short fur jacket, red shoes, rippling blonde hair.

Someone tapped on the glass door of the booth. The young man with the horn-rimmed glasses. He opened the door.

"Since there's no one else in the store," he said, "I was going to suggest that you could turn up the volume."

"No, it's fine this way."

"And get more of the quality of the recording." He leaned in and gave the volume knob a turn. "There. Beautiful quality, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I personally prefer the Kroll myself. But the Griller is very good too. And the quality of the mechanical reproduction. . . ." He made a vague gesture, and shut the door.

The music soared now, but the needle scratch was amplified, too. I rested my cheek on my hand in the classical attitude of the music listener, and watched the patch of light beneath the Grosvenor's marquee.

Unbidden, an image of Doctor Moreno came to mind—swarthy skin, prune-black eyes, unkempt bar of a moustache. A portrait of a thief? He had taken the money, but he had cured me of drug addiction. On a quid pro quo basis I was far ahead of the game . . . but it was painful to discover that, after all, it had been a game.

He had not even troubled to defend himself, on the telephone. His explanation had disdained defense, and even his attempt at self-justification was casual. The question now in my mind was: without the money, would he have given of himself equally in curing me? Was the moral interpretation he put on it valid—that it was not stealing to clothe one's wife, to feed one's children, to buy medical books? But a code of morals that did not apply equally to all was anarchy. No. The answer was that it was a world of grab, and even the skilled, the compassionate, the brilliant, succumbed to its ruling tenet. Grab. Everybody grabbed. Without a single blink of conscience, Moreno had grabbed.

The needle slipped off the grooved track onto the brighter shellac of the label. I lifted the tone-arm, turned the record over, and let the head down again. At the far end of the store, the manager was eyeing me covertly.

Twenty minutes, by my watch. She would

be leaving just about now. A minute or two to find a cab, ten more to come crosstown and a dozen blocks south. . . . It struck me with some force that twenty-four hours ago I would not have been capable of either the suspicion or the guile to do what I was doing now. And what about my feeling for Veda? Supposing that she was innocent—could that feeling ever be fully recovered again, once it had been diminished by mistrust?

Three-quarters of an hour after my call, I began to grow fidgety. I strained toward the entrance of the hotel, pushing time ahead in my mind, seeing the taxi draw up, Veda jumping out, and like the blonde girl in the fur jacket, running eagerly across the sidewalk. . . . I would wait five minutes (meanwhile she would have returned to the street, searching for me to the right and left, anxiously and hopefully, before running inside again), check the street thoroughly, and at last cross to the hotel. She would turn, see me, come toward me quickly in relief. . . .

A car came into the curb in front of the hotel, wavered, then drew up a little distance beyond it. A man got out. He was almost but not quite out of range of the light from the marquee. Its outermost glow lit up the blond stubble of hair and a broad white patch of adhesive tape over the bridge of his nose.

I lifted the tone-arm off the record, and stopped the turntable. I inserted the record carefully in its protective envelope, and slipped it into the cover. The blond man was no longer

in sight. He had either gone inside the hotel, or edged down the street into the entry of a darkened shop. I squared off the Beethoven neatly with *Tangos for the Latin Kind of Love* and *Richie Bijou Sings Great*, and carried them out of the booth. I handed them across a counter to the manager.

He said, "You're taking those?"

I shook my head. "Is there a back way out of here?"

He smiled slyly. "I'm not surprised. Did you think you had me fooled?"

"Please. Is there a back exit?"

"Do you want to know how I knew?" His eyes, behind the hornrimmed lenses, preened themselves. "Because nobody could possibly be interested in both Beethoven *and* Richie Bijou? Well, yes, obviously. But that's not how I did it. I pride myself on a mystical sixth sense that tells me when I have a buyer. But how did I know you were *watching* something outside? Because a few months ago there was a man doing the same thing, and *he* asked if there was a back way out——"

"Is there one?"

"He asked my permission to watch. The very same booth. He suspected his wife had an assignation at the hotel, and she did, but then they—the wife and her lover—started across the street towards the store——"

"It's almost the same thing," I said. "Except it's the other way around. Her husband, well . . ."

"Oh, you're the *lover*?" he giggled. "Not the same woman, I trust?"

I turned and glanced at the hotel entrance. No one was there. I kept my back squarely to the door and window. The store was brightly lit, and although I would be fairly well concealed from anyone on the opposite side of the street, I couldn't know that he wouldn't decide to cross.

"There *is* a back way," the manager said. "Passion's escapeway, I think I'll call it from now on." He gave a hoot of laughter. "Well, if it can serve the husband, it can serve the lover. Why not? Come around the counter, lover."

I followed him through a curtained door into a large back room crowded with stacks of albums, unopened packing cases, and a great pile of colorful die-cut display pieces. At the rear there was a barred door. The manager shot a bolt and tugged the door open.

"To the left," he said, "climb the fence, and you'll find yourself in an alley between two buildings. It will take you out to the side street."

"I've very much obliged to you."

"I may not sell many records, but I do get involved in a lot of intrigue."

He laughed himself into a coughing fit. The sound carried out in the still night as I groped my way across a concrete yard. It pursued me over the low fence, and through the littered alley, but when I reached the street it was no longer audible.

IN A drugstore on Vanderbilt Avenue, across from the entrance to Grand Central, I looked up the number of the *Globe* in the phone directory. Before dialing, I remembered the card Fornari had given me. I took it from my wallet, crumpled it, and threw it on the floor of the booth. I was not unaware of the obvious melodrama of the gesture, but it suited my mood.

An operator at the *Globe* gave my call to the city room, where a voice told me that Harry Constable was off duty.

"Do you know where I can reach him?"

"At home, I imagine. He lives out in Queens. Number's in the book."

I thumbed through the Queens directory for Constable's home number. The phone was answered by a child.

She said, "My daddy is making dinner. But it's all right. He's just mixing the salad dressing. Mommy makes the dinner." She went off, yelling, "Daddy, *daddy*. . . ."

Constable's voice came on, saying crisply, "Yes?"

"This is Roy Hathaway." I sensed his stir of

interest, although he didn't actually speak.
"I've changed my mind."

"Fine! Say, that's great! Now look, we'll get together. When can we get together?"

"Whenever you say. I'm at your disposal."

"Well, why not tonight? Are you busy tonight?"

"Tonight's fine. About our arrangement . . . we split fifty-fifty?"

"You sure *have* changed," Constable said.
"That arrangement is okay. Now about getting together—would you mind coming out here?"

I told him I didn't mind.

"Now about the time. Is two hours from now okay? We're just about to sit down to dinner and——"

"That would make it around nine-thirty. Sure."

He gave me directions. I was to take either the BMT or the IRT to Queensboro Plaza. From there, a bus. . . .

"No, that's a nuisance. I'll drive over and pick you up. Nine-thirty, give or take a couple of minutes?"

I told him yes, and hung up.

It was a world of grab, and I was about to become a naturalized citizen of it. At last I would be marching to the same music as everyone else, and I had no doubt that I would be respected for it.

It was a world of grab, trample, betray, and both Dr. Moreno and Veda Lawrence were members in good standing. And perhaps Fornari was too, for all his pious cant about the

taxpayer's duty. He would undoubtedly make a fine splash by bringing the city's coterie of privileged crooks to justice; and like a noted predecessor, maybe, end up in the Governor's mansion.

In a grabbing world, the man who didn't grab was a lamb ripe for shearing. It was time I learned to wear the fashionable armor that would protect my wool from predators. My sins were all expiated now, and I could step proudly into the respectable ranks of the grabbers. The deal with Constable was an auspicious start.

The Queensboro Plaza station was elevated, and to the west the lights of the city seemed no further distant than a feeble stone's throw across the river.

Constable was waiting for me on the lower level of the station, pacing up and down in front of the turnstiles. He gave me his redeeming smile, but his handshake was perfunctory, and the standing insults in his eyes were only partially veiled.

As we started down the steep flight of steps to the street he said, "I'm glad to see you changed your mind and decided to go on the make. It restores my faith in human nature."

"If it makes you so unhappy, I can turn around and go back to the city right now."

"Oh, Christ, my big mouth." His smile did its cover-up job to perfection. "It's just the way I am, it doesn't mean anything." He gave me

an odd squinted look, as if he had never seen me before. "You'll get used to it."

The street below was part of an intricate network of approaches to the Queensboro Bridge, sprawled beneath the curves and switchpoints of the branching tracks overhead. Constable's car was parked the equivalent of a long block away, in front of a bank. It was a black Cadillac, a year or two, spotless and gleaming.

Getting in, I said, "Quite a car."

"I'm no different from my peers," he said. "Live in a hovel, but own an automobile like a golden chariot."

He turned on the motor, let in the hand-brake, and we moved away from the curb in a smooth glide.

"Position isn't everything in life," Constable said. "Even the lowly know a trick or two. Life doesn't have to be all hard knocks."

"Grab like everybody else. That the idea?"

"That's the idea, Hathaway. I'm glad to see you've got the idea."

The Cadillac eased its way through the factory district of Long Island City, long empty blocks of high windowed walls breached only by an occasional loading platform, or a small ramshackle wooden house, squeezed between the looming walls of two factories, a vestigial remnant of an earlier day when this had been farm land.

Constable broke the silence. "It's no world for suckers, Hathaway." His face was studious in the reflected light of the dashboard.

"I'm beginning to find that out."

"The sucker never learns. There's only one escape for him." He made a snicking sound with his tongue and drew his hand across his throat. "Sometimes it's an act of mercy."

I didn't answer. We drove in silence two blocks further, and then a man appeared suddenly in the street. The Cadillac's headlights picked him out, facing us squarely, his hands over his head, palms toward us. Constable braked, and swerved to the right as if to pass him. Instead, he guided the car into the curb, and pulled on the hand brake.

Before I could question him, a voice spoke to my right, at the window.

"Journey's end, buddy."

Even before I looked into that slightly pinkish face, with the adhesive, now smudged and dirty, drawn across the bridge of the nose, I knew the voice. The face retracted, and a hand appeared, shaking a gun at me, moving to attract my attention urgently to its presence. Behind Hugh, a second figure approached from the shadows; and to the left and still behind the car, I heard the footsteps of the man who had stood in the road.

Constable said, "I want you to know one thing, Hathaway. Maybe it will raise me in your estimation. I don't drive a Cadillac. I wouldn't drive one if it was given to me."

Hugh said, "What's to hate in a Cadillac?" He peered through the window, past me, at the man who had been in the road, and had now

come up alongside the car. "He got a thing against Cadillacs, Fred."

The third figure, emerging from the shadows, was Judge Hudson. He wore a topcoat with the collar turned up around his face; the brim of his hat came low over his eyes.

The man called Fred said to Constable, "You're getting out here."

"Damn right I'm getting out here," Constable said.

"Where's your car?"

"Around the corner."

"Get in it," Fred said, "and go home."

"Sure." He turned his head to me. "When I saw you at the airport, it was a bona fide offer. But they spotted me talking to you, and they picked me up, and made a fast deal. Five thousand—if you called, and I set you up for them. It was just a safety play—they expected to have you wrapped up long before this. You know, I didn't think you'd call. You surprised me when you called."

Hudson spoke for the first time. He said, "Give him his money."

Fred took an envelope out of his pocket, and handed it to Constable. It was not my envelope, but I wondered if it might not be the same money.

"Get out," Fred said.

"I'm going," Constable said. "I didn't do it for the money, Roy. I did it so that I could stay healthy. True, I have the money, but I'd rather have earned it the hard way, by writing the story."

Whatever there was in his face now, whether it was a sneer or a grimace of pity, or self-mockery, I wanted to smash it. But as I lunged toward him, something smashed against my jaw, and I fell back against the seat. Constable pushed me upright. The side of my face felt numb.

"Just a love tap," Hugh said.

"That's enough now," Hudson said sharply.

I twisted to look at him, but my eyes would not focus beyond a foot or two. The gun, glinting in Hugh's hand, caught my attention. It was Veda's target pistol.

Why not? He needed a replacement for the one I had taken away from him in Judge Hudson's apartment. She was a generous giver. Her body to one, her gun to another. . . .

The door at the driver's place opened. Constable got out, and the man Fred replaced him behind the wheel. Constable crossed in front of the car, and went on down the street. His step was jaunty, even swaggering, but his shoulders were hunched together as though he were very cold. He melted into the darkness beyond the farthest reach of the headlights.

Hudson got into the back of the car. Fred twisted about to face him.

"Oyster Bay?"

Hugh said plaintively, "Why all the way out there? Finish him fast and toss him in one of these here alleys. What the hell's the difference?"

Hudson said angrily, "The girl, you damn fool. His body mustn't be found."

Fred said, "Oyster Bay. Get in the car, Hughie."

Hugh moved away from the window, out of view, and then the car-springs gave to his weight. The rear door slammed shut. The car started away from the curb, and at the same time something hit heavily against the base of my skull.

"Easy," Hudson said sharply. "I don't want any blood drawn in this car."

"So sorry," Hugh said. "I just want my buddy to know for sure I got the shooter pointed in his neck."

He maintained the pressure steady and hard against my nape, and I could feel its shape, the ring of cold metal surrounding the hollow circle.

The car picked up speed. "The Parkway?" Fred said.

"Yes," Hudson said. "And be sure you obey the traffic rules. We don't want to be stopped."

We moved along smoothly through the dark streets. Suddenly Hugh said, "I don't dig. The girl knows me anyhow. If they find the body or they don't find the body. She fingers me just the same."

Hudson said patiently, "Without a body or any evidence that he has been killed, there is no case. You can handle whatever remains."

"I'm glad I can handle whatever remains. So tell me—how do I handle the fingers?"

"A mouthpiece," Fred said. "A mouthpiece can handle the fingers. But that's the only rap against you—not murder. Even if

they make it stick and you take a fall, it's just a little fall, not the big one for murder. Right, Judge?"

Hudson said coldly, "I have no sympathy for you, Hugh. It wasn't necessary. You didn't have to do it."

"Sure I didn't have to," Hugh said. "But I wanted to. I'm sorry I didn't bust her neck instead of just a couple of fingers."

14

HUGH told about it with malicious self-enjoyment. He could not know that although in its parts his recital was a torture to me, the whole was strangely comforting, even elating.

The Cadillac purred along at a sedate thirty-five miles an hour on the Interboro Parkway, eastbound for Long Island. Fornari would have approved. Fred, the driver, occasionally contributed a word or a grunt, but the Judge was blankly silent. I could not turn, with the pressure of the pistol unremitting on my nape, but I visualized Hudson as deep in his seat, his face hidden in his turned-up coat collar, reflecting. Pondering on what: the unappetizing complications that could ensue from a

sinful but common little career in municipal graft?

Hugh might have told aspects of his story earlier, but certainly not with the flourishes and elaborations he must have added now for my benefit.

Hudson had returned to his apartment about a quarter of an hour after I left, to find Hugh in the bathroom, and Hugh's blood, not mine, spattering the tiles. By then, Hugh had managed to stanch most of the bleeding by applying cold compresses, but his nose was badly swollen and seemed to be broken.

A doctor summoned by Hudson confirmed this diagnosis, reset the bone and taped the nose.

They had lost me again, and their best hope for finding me was through Veda. Hugh, wearing a clean shirt of Hudson's, hurried back to Veda's street. He watched the entrance to her house for about an hour, but became worried, and decided to try to get into Veda's apartment.

He pressed the button for one of the ground-floor apartments, and gained entry to the house when the responding buzzer opened the inner door. I wondered silently why he hadn't thought of that simple stratagem last night. His explanation (to Fred, who asked the same question aloud) was that, at first, he wasn't actually sure I had run into that particular house. Later, after his phone call, when he was convinced that I was in Veda's apart-

ment, he was afraid I would call the police if he tried to force an entry.

But this evening caution was out-weighed by nervousness. He sped up the stairs before the tenant he had roused could appear. On the top landing he paused until the tenant had investigated and returned muttering to his apartment, then rang Veda's bell. He was prepared to say that he was from the phone company if she queried him through the door, but it wasn't necessary.

An instant after he rang, the door opened. Veda, freshly dressed, was about to leave to meet me. She had thought to bring my canvas bag, which I had left there when I went to my meeting with Hudson. Hugh recognized it, and realized that he had intercepted her on her way to meet me. All that remained was to find out the meeting-place. It was a job right down his alley.

He bulled her back into the apartment, shut the door, and hit her on the jaw with his fist, knocking her down. While she was still dazed from the blow, he removed the scarf from around her neck, and tied it over her mouth as a gag. By the time he had rummaged around and found something with which to tie her hands, she had recovered, and put up a struggle.

He described this phase to Fred with some relish. "We had quite a rattle, and I dint always keep my mind on the job. I like them sturdier built myself, but for one of them thin

dames I got to admit she was loaded. But business before pleasure. So I give her another shot to the chin, and she goes out cold. . . .”

He lifted her into a straightbacked wood chair, untied her hands, and retied the left one to the back of the chair, leaving the right free. Then he dragged over a wooden chest, and placed it in front of the chair. He sat down on it and waited for her to come to. When her eyelids began to flutter he took out a blackjack, and that was the first thing she saw when she could focus again.

He said, “You was on your way out to meet Roy. Where?”

She realized her right hand was free, and lifted it to strike at his face. He caught her by the wrist, and forced her hand flat onto the top of the chest, palm down. He spread her fingers by exerting pressure on the back of her hand.

“I’m in a hurry, babe. Where is he? You want to tell me, shake your head and I’ll take the scarf away.”

She shook her head vigorously from side to side. He flicked the blackjack sharply downward and broke her little finger. Whatever sound she made was muffled by the gag. She doubled over in the chair. He put his hand on her forehead and pushed her upright.

“You feel more like talking now?”

Once again, she shook her head. He snapped his blackjack down again.

“She was still game, I got to admit,” Hugh said into the silence of the moving car. “But I

do the third finger and she can't take no more. She tells me. I tied her up good to the chair, and I get out of there. . . ."

I said, "I'm going to kill you."

Hugh burst into raucous laughter. Fred laughed more moderately, and said, "Maybe you can come back and haunt him all right, but you sure don't have no time left for killing nobody."

I braced myself against the back of the seat, and slid forward, away from the circle of metal on my neck. I twisted on the axis of one knee, and managed to turn partially around, but all I could see was a brightness descending with great speed. A microscopic instant after I identified it as the target pistol, it crushed me down into the center of an explosive blackness.

Soft remote dream-voices, rising from some source I could not determine, and floating in an etheric substance that might have been my mind, discussed my fate casually.

". . . not the power-boat. We don't want the noise. Row out to the channel——"

"Who knows where that is?"

"I'll come along and guide you. It's about a thousand feet offshore. We won't need lights. We simply row out in a straight line from the boathouse——"

". . . don't always stay down, Judge. After a while the ropes get rotten and he comes up a floater. Now you get some metal chains, and tie the weights on with them, and you're in business."

"I believe we have something of the sort in the tool shed."

"The rope rots, see, Judge, and the weight snaps the rope and he comes up and floats into the front yard of your summer house."

"There won't be too much weight. There's enough marine life—blow-fish, crabs, other fish——"

"Hey, stop, you're making me sick to my stomach."

They were not voices in a dream. I had drifted back into consciousness. I became slowly aware of my position: slumped to the right, my head supported in part by the back of the seat, in part by the window post. The pistol was pressed to my skull again. I lay very still, and muted my breathing, muffling it in the hollow of my shoulder.

I identified Hudson's voice: "Off at the next exit, then——"

"I know the way, Judge."

"This is the delicate part of the trip. There's no way to bypass going through town. Make sure he's not conscious, Hugh."

"I can take him all the way out, Judge."

"No. It's too risky. If anything goes wrong, we have a sick man in the car, that can be explained. But not a corpse."

I felt the heat of Hugh's body, leaning over me, and something stung my cheek sharply. I lay lax, and he slapped me a second time. Then I felt my hair in his grasp. He lifted my head and released it. I let it sag downward, a dead weight.

"He's out."

"Good. But keep a careful watch on him. At the first sign of . . . But just put him back to sleep. Don't——"

"I dig you, Judge."

There was a slight list as the car veered off to the right, and the steady droning sound of the Parkway traffic faded. The car slowed, stopped, then went on, turning again.

Hudson said, "It's a mile and a half to the town center. Speed limit is twenty-five here, Fred."

Hugh let out a short barking laugh. "I was thinking of that broad. Trying to get loose from that chair. She must wish she was Houdini."

Fred said, "If she got loose, there's a lot of cops looking to pick you up."

Hugh laughed again. "They sure ain't gonna be looking for me out here."

After a moment of silence, Fred said, "Two in one day. I never did two in one day before."

Hugh said, "I only count Emil a half. All you score is a half for Emil."

"Why a half? How you figure that?"

"I don't know. I just figure it like that."

Hudson said, "All right, now. The town center starts right up there, where the lights are bright. It's just two short blocks. Take it at fifteen miles an hour."

"Hey, the gay white way," Hugh said. "Hey, a hot Saturday night in——"

Fred jammed on the brakes. "Police cars.

Two of them. Parked right up there by that store. What's the big crowd for?"

"Go on," Hudson said. "You're holding up traffic behind us."

The car edged forward slowly.

"It's all right," Hudson said. The tenseness had gone from his voice. "They're having some kind of gala store opening. The police are just keeping things moving. Just go through slowly."

I opened my eyes to the narrowest of slits that would permit me to see. Ahead, a noisy crowd milled good-naturedly in front of a brightly lit store decorated with red-and-white banners. Here and there a child held a balloon. Two policemen were working at keeping the crowd from forming into impassable clots, and a third was directing traffic. As we approached, he held up his hand and signaled to a group of pedestrians to cross. We were second in line, behind a convertible driven by a man in a checked cap. In the Cadillac, there was the bated silence of breath being held.

The policeman halted the pedestrian flow and beckoned the traffic on. The car in front started slowly to move. I tensed my muscles, and as the convertible came abreast of the policeman, rolled to my left and at the same time shot out my leg and stamped down hard on Fred's foot lightly poised on the accelerator. The Cadillac leaped ahead, and plowed into the rear of the convertible.

Whether it was because they had been intent

on the signal of the policeman's hand, or simply because it did not occur to them that I was conscious—or even because the collision might have shaken them up slightly—neither Hudson nor Hugh realized at first that I was to blame. When Fred started to flail at me with his fists, Hudson intervened.

He came forward on his seat, and whispered, "Stop it, you damn fool!"

On the sidewalk, the squeals that had risen at the first clanging impact of the collision slipped into a lower register—a humming babel of excitement. The traffic cop bore down on us, and the driver of the convertible was getting out.

Hugh, in a fierce whisper, said, "You clumsy bastard!"

The traffic cop was at Fred's window, and behind him I could see the pale angry face of the driver of the convertible. I sat upright. The pistol was no longer at my neck.

The traffic cop suddenly withdrew from the window and turned on the driver of the convertible, who had begun to shout. "Nobody's hurt. Shut up the yelling and pull your car the hell up the street and wait there and we'll get this goddamn thing settled."

The driver shouted, "You're no doctor, telling me who's hurt!"

Hudson said quickly, "I'll handle the officer. I know him. He's all right."

The two policemen on the sidewalk came over, and began to push the shouting driver

back to his car. The traffic cop turned his attention to Fred.

"What the hell were you trying——"

Hudson, leaning forward, smiled and said, "Hello, Tom."

The traffic cop shifted his gaze to Hudson. "Well, Judge. Hello, Judge. . . ." The fierceness in his voice was displaced first by surprise, then respect.

Hugh crowded forward, as if to witness the colloquy, and under the cover of his shoulders hooked his fingers into the back of my collar.

"I'm terribly sorry, Tom," Hudson said. "I've put on a new driver, and he's not used to the car." He laughed. "His last job was driving a Ford, and he hasn't learned the difference between six cylinders and twelve yet."

The policeman's responding laughter held a note of servility. "I can sympathize, Judge, being I tool a six myself. . . ." He turned scowling on the pressing crowd. "Move on back. Whatsamatter—you never seen two cars make a kiss? Move on *back!*"

The two cops who had taken the convertible driver away returned and started forcing the crowd back onto the sidewalk.

"It was all our fault," Hudson said. "I'll make good the damage. As long as no one was hurt. . . ."

"Sure. That's the main thing."

I said, "Officer, these men are going to kill me."

Hugh yanked back on my collar, choking

me, forcing my head down on the backrest of the seat.

"Stop it!" Hudson said. "Let him go. I told you not to manhandle him." In a confidential undertone he said to the cop, "Can we pull out of this crowd, Tom? We'll get this collision settled, and I'll explain. . . ." The cop was looking at him blankly. He lowered his voice to a bare whisper. "My sister's boy. Alcoholic. I'm taking him. . . . Can't we pull out of this, Tom?"

"Sure. We'll pull out of the crowd." He withdrew his head momentarily, and called to one of the other cops. "We're clearing out to the end of the street, Barry, and get this thing settled. I can handle it, you handle the traffic."

I said, "Officer, the man behind me is holding a gun on me."

"No," Hudson said, laughing, "it's a knife."

The cop frowned at me and said to Fred, "Move it along, behind the convertible. I'll show you where."

The Cadillac started to move, very slowly. The cop walked alongside, facing the car, his hands resting on it, his head bent inside the window. I wrenched away from Hugh's restraining hand, reached across Fred, and hit the policeman in the face.

THERE was a split second when everyone seemed to have been struck motionless and speechless, as when a stopped film freezes its actors in the middle of a gesture. It occurred to me later that if Hudson had been able to capitalize on this instant, he might still have talked his way clear, on the strength of the esteem in which Tom held him, and the promise of a future palm-greasing as there must have been a past.

But he was congealed like everyone else, and when the film started up again, releasing the actors from thrall, it was too late. Hugh and the fourth cop took control of the situation. The fourth cop had been sitting in the police car, monitoring the radio signals, and when he arrived on the scene he knew only what he saw, and reacted to it by instinct. . . .

Tom's head snapped back, more in astonishment and outrage than from the force of my blow. I was lying sprawled on top of Fred. He heaved his arms and flung me away from him, so that I was a moving target when Hugh began to slash at me in a furious criss-cross

pattern with the barrel of the target pistol. He missed my head, landing painfully but not damagingly on my arms and shoulders.

I weaved away from the whipping gun, dimly aware of an uproar, whether inside the car or out I couldn't tell, and then something gave way at my back, and I felt myself falling. I grabbed for the seat to save myself, but I couldn't reverse or slow the momentum. I went out of the car in a backward heap, twisting at the last instant to take the brunt of the fall on my hip.

The blue legs that straddled me belonged to the fourth cop, who had pulled open the car door supporting my weight when he saw the pistol in Hugh's hand. I rolled away from his feet and came up sitting just as Hugh clubbed him in the mouth with the butt of the pistol. The cop staggered back, bleeding, and clawed beneath his coat at his holster. Hugh reversed the pistol and fired.

The cop sat down, with a long-drawn sigh, like a man giving in to a sudden and overwhelming fatigue. The crowd's voice burst from its throat—hoarse male shouts and incredibly shrill soprano screams in a close harmony of terror.

Hugh pushed the rear door open, and stood crouched, half in and half out of the car, like a diver contemplating a jump into unknown water. His face was bleached of its pinkness, his mouth stretched across his teeth in a tight snarl of desperation. Then he came out of the car, already running, his head lowered, the pis-

tol close to his side and pointed ahead of him. I threw myself at him, and tried to wrap my arms around his legs. The force of his forward impetus wrenched him free, but I had thrown him off stride, and now he was no longer running but plunging, his feet out of control and going too fast for him. The curb stopped him, tripped him, and he went down in a hard sprawling fall. The crowd on the sidewalk recoiled like a single organism.

I scrambled toward him without straightening up, on my hands and knees, and butted him with my head as he was starting to get up. He went flat under me, the wind knocked out of him, and I heard the pistol clatter out of his hand and bounce away into the crowd.

I put both hands against the back of his stubbled head and ground his face into the pavement. Too soon, they pulled me off him.

At police headquarters, there was a disposition to consider Hugh and me as criminals and Judge Hudson as somehow non-existent. Fred's status as chauffeur was explained helpfully by Tom, and he was regarded as an innocent bystander until it occurred to a hard-faced detective sergeant to go through his pockets. He found a switchblade. Where the steel joined the haft, there were minute traces of what might have been dried blood.

The headquarters building was a handsome old colonial a block off the center of town, artfully lit by ground spotlights set in a cropped lawn. Hugh had been taken off to the hospital

under guard, in the same ambulance with the policeman he had shot, whose wound had been pronounced serious but not critical by the intern who had examined him on the sidewalk.

We were brought into the detective squad room to await the arrival of the captain, who was off duty and had been summoned from his home. Hudson, befitting his rank as a distinguished citizen of the community, was seated in the only soft chair in the room. Since our arrival, no one had spoken to him, nor even looked at him, and he sat erect, with his eyes shut, frowning slightly, his fingers drumming softly but insistently on the chair-arm.

I sat on a straight wooden chair at the opposite end of the room. Tom stood behind me with a drawn gun and such an air of expectancy that he could only be hoping I would make a suspicious move. Until the switch-knife was found, Fred had been standing at the window with an expression of rumpled but honest bewilderment on his face. After that, he was ordered to sit down where he could be watched.

The captain arrived with hard-breathing bustle. He was a stocky powerhouse of a man with gray hair and a heavy-featured handsome face. He strode into the room, and without a glance at the rest of us, went directly to Hudson and put out his hand. After an instant of surprise, Hudson shook it.

"Now, Judge," the captain said heartily, "let's go into my office and get this thing straightened out."

Hudson gazed up at him, and momentarily there was a gleam of hope in his eye. Then he shook his head.

"Not without a lawyer, Matt. Can I make a phone call?"

Nothing changed in the captain's face, not even his smile, but when he replied the edge of his voice had sharpened, and his tone had taken on the extra weight of authority.

He said, "Certainly, Judge. Phone's over there." To the hard-faced detective he said, "Keep an eye on him, Kelly, he's got one call coming to him."

His eyes sized up Fred briskly, seemed to find what they saw familiar, and then swung over to me. "Who are you? You want to call your lawyer, too?"

Behind me, Tom snickered. I said, "I want to call Robert Fornari, Captain, a district attorney in New York City."

The captain's broad mouth quirked appreciatively. "That's a new wrinkle, anyway. Suppose you come have a little talk with me, first."

"I thought I might be entitled to a phone call, Captain, like the Judge."

"You're entitled to it, all right, but you don't make it until I say you can make it."

He turned to the sound of a telephone being replaced in its cradle. Hudson, accompanied by Kelly, was returning to his chair.

"Get your mouthpiece all right, Judge? He's coming directly down here?"

Hudson, his face a rigid gray mask, nodded.

"Fine," the Captain said. "That's fine. We'll have our little talk when he gets here."

I said, "I'm not asking to wait until Mr. Fornari gets here before talking, Captain. I'll talk now, but——"

"I'm betting you will," the Captain said, and Tom snickered again. The Captain bent over and peered at me frowningly. He straightened up and said, "Kelly, here's another candidate for the telephone. Bring him in to me when he completes his call."

He went out of the squad room. Kelly motioned to me. I got up, and Tom followed behind me with his drawn gun.

"Put that damn thing away," Kelly said irritably, "before you plug somebody."

The telephone sat on a bare oak desk. Kelly motioned me into a chair, and perched himself on the desk. Reaching for the phone, I remembered that I had thrown away Fornari's number. Kelly interpreted my hesitancy correctly.

"Tell the switchboard who you want," he said.

After a series of clicks and two interpolations by a long distance operator, a tired voice identified itself as of the District Attorney's office. I asked for Fornari, and was told that he was off duty.

"Could you give me his home phone number?"

"It all depends. Who is this, please?"

"You don't know me, but Mr. Fornari——"

"Your name, please."

"Roy Hathaway."

The voice quickened. "I *do* know you. Hold on and I'll let you have his number."

Kelly, who had been following the conversation closely, nodded to me when I looked at him enquiringly after hanging up. I gave the new number to the switchboard. This time a woman's voice answered. Mr. Fornari was not at home. Who was calling, please? I told her.

"Oh, yes. You can get him at this number. . . ."

Kelly said, "This is getting to be quite a production, mister. But I suppose you're entitled to a *completed* call."

The switchboard took the new number phlegmatically. The phone rang, was answered, and I recognized Fornari's voice.

He said, "Roy! Where are you?" Without waiting for a reply, he spoke away from the transmitter: "It's him." Then to me: "She called me, you know, and this is what I was hoping for—that you would call here. . . ."

"Where? Where are you?"

"Miss Lawrence's apartment. Isn't that——"

"I didn't recognize the number. How is she, Mr. Fornari?"

"She's okay. Do you want to——"

Kelly said roughly, "What the hell kind of chitchat *is* this?" and snatched the phone away from me. He said into it, "Identify yourself, mister."

I had arrived in my story to the point of my meeting in Long Island City with Constable when the Captain's phone rang. He picked up

the phone with his left hand, and with his right added Constable's name to a pencilled list he had been keeping. He grunted into the phone and hung up.

He said to me, "It's quite a yarn if it's true. Even if it isn't, I admit you kept me entertained. Well, we'll see. Fornari is here."

He got up and started toward the door, so that when the knock came he was already turning the knob. Fornari introduced himself to the Captain and while they were shaking hands, smiled at me assuringly. I saw Veda behind him, in the open doorway. She was very pale. Her right hand was suspended in a sling, and three of the fingers were stiffly splinted.

I got up and went to her.

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