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AUTHOR OF
THE BESTSELLING
**THE TAKING
OF PELHAM
ONE TWO THREE**

John Godey

**THE
FIFTH
HOUSE**

THE FIFTH HOUSE

He got out of bed very quickly, but not so quickly that she wasn't aware of his purpose. He ran across the room and caught her as she was reaching for the doorknob. He put his hands on her shoulders, but she shook them off and wrenched the door open. He lowered his hands and circled her waist, pulling her back into the room. She twisted and fought, but he held tightly, and swung her around to face him. Their eyes met and held. Met and held and searched, delved into unplumbable depths.

Then, lightning-fast, she put her knee into his groin . . .

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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The Clay Assassin

The Blue Hour

The Man In Question

This Year's Death

Never Put off till Tomorrow

What You Can Kill Today

John Godey

THE FIFTH HOUSE



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SECOND PRINTING

Arthur Burroughs sat wrong side about to his desk, with his back to the ink salesman, and stared outward at the hypnotic moving lattice-work of the traffic streaming along the Post Road. Behind him, seated with half a buttock on the desk, Sindermann, the salesman, was telling a story. Burroughs felt it waft by him like a gentle inconsequential breeze, which it was, and was intended to be, and nodded his head from time to time when he thought it was appropriate. The morning sun warmed him through the broad store-front window, casting a rainbow pattern across his knees where it came diffused through the black-and-gold lettering that said DEEVIEW GUARDIAN, aerated by Sindermann's smiling voice, surrendering willingly to the rumbling pulse of the Post Road.

Then he sat bolt upright, the peacefulness of the moment destroyed. Through a momentary break in the flow of traffic (actually, it was not a break at all, but a view between the tractor and the box of a passing trailer, horizontally bisected by the coupling) he caught a glimpse of Reed Wingate, teetering wildly on the rim of the opposite kerb.

His lips formed the words, "Don't, you fool," but he did not know whether or not they were articulated. But Wingate, as if he had heard him speak, as if he had needed only Burroughs' warning to prick him into defiance, looked up sharply and brought his foot down off the kerb, like a swimmer stepping from the side of a boat into raging waters.

"—enough red and blue ink for enough Fourth of July issues for eighty-eight years, the way I figured it up," Sindermann said in triumphant finality, and drove

the point of his story home with a sledge-hammer of a laugh. "Enough red and blue ink to— My God, watch out!"

Wingate had dashed out suddenly, his loose jacket skirting up behind him, his long legs hustling him squarely into the path of a station wagon. The station wagon squealed and bucked but could not quite stop. Wingate drew himself back out of its path, profiled, his body sucked in at the middle, and Burroughs would have sworn that the car's flanks must have grazed him. Like a bull-fighter, Burroughs thought, but if he keeps working in the car's terrain that way he's going to get gored. The woman driving the station wagon screamed at him in fury, the shrillness of her voice penetrating the bass rumble of the traffic. Wingate gave her a perplexed look, shaking his head, and then retreated to the sidewalk. He perched there tentatively, already eager, already impatient for his next try.

"Lunatic," Sindermann said in a drained voice. He came forward, peering. "Isn't that your reporter?"

Burroughs nodded, his gaze fixed on Wingate's pale intent face, and thought: Yes, that's it. You look for deep-hidden reasons and then a featherweight like Sindermann puts his finger on it without thinking. Yes, it was as simple as that; Reed Wingate was purely a lunatic.

"Dig him," Sindermann said, no longer frightened but chuckling, because it wasn't a human being who had nearly been killed, but Reed Wingate, who was crazy and hence protected. "He'll go through if he has to knock a truck over. He must have a real stop-press or tear-out-the-front-page story. At the very least the Second Coming. You want to buy some more ink?"

Burroughs said, "It could be a handout of the Deep-view Ladies Flower Arrangement Society." He detected in his tone the exasperation and helplessness that were inevitable when he spoke of Wingate, or to him, or even

thought about him. "It could be a lost dog, or a real estate item, or the betrothal announcement of two obscure people nobody in this town ever heard of. It's all the same to him. It burns a hole in his brain until he can get it into print."

The traffic light at the corner changed and the train of trucks and sedans and tiny sports cars ground to a halt. Wingate set his praying-mantis arms and legs into motion and charged across the street, his coat flying behind him again, the ends of his tie streaming over his shoulder.

"For heaven's sake," Sindermann said, only half in mockery, "I don't believe he means to open the door before coming in."

But he reached out with one of his incredible ^{ARTIS} arms a split-second before running through the glass, and shoved the door open. He stood on the threshold for an instant, his dark eyes glowing with a fever of excitement, and then he was on down the aisle to the small bullpen at the rear of the office. Sindermann looked at Burroughs with his brows raised comically.

Burroughs tensed and cocked his ear to the rear. It seemed to him that he could still hear Wingate's feet clattering on the floor, or at least the scrape of his chair being pushed back, when the first machine-gun burst of the typewriter clattered through the office.

He said to no one in particular, "Well, he hasn't slowed up any that you could notice."

Sindermann laughed dutifully and then said, "What makes that kid tick, Arthur?"

A time bomb, Burroughs said to himself, there's a time bomb in him that keeps ticking away and exploding periodically and then ticking away. . . . To Sindermann, he gave a shrug of his shoulders.

"He's a nervous strain," Sindermann said. "If I had to watch him cross the street another time I'd go to the boobie hatch myself. What makes you keep him on?"

"I get the work of two men out of him. Three." But although that was true, Burroughs thought, it wasn't the truthful answer to Sindermann's question. I haven't the faintest idea why I keep him on, Burroughs said to himself, but he knew that wasn't the truth, either.

"Is he that good?"

Burroughs listened to the echoing rattle of the typewriter. "He could hold a job on any newspaper in the country—if any newspaper would put up with him."

"Then why doesn't he?"

"Get a job on a decent paper?"

"I didn't say that," Sindermann protested. "You know you run as fine a weekly newspaper as any on the whole Atlantic seaboard. You've got the prizes to show for it and——"

"Okay," Burroughs said. "He doesn't try to get a job on another paper because he likes it here."

"In Deepview?"

"Except for when he went up to Harvard for four years, he's lived here all his life. I guess he likes it here in Deepview. I can't think of any other reason. Let's change the subject, Emil, it gives me a headache to talk about him."

"I like to know what makes people tick," Sindermann said. "That's why I'm a good salesman."

The telephone rang. Burroughs made a half turn in his swivel chair and reached lazily for the phone on his cluttered desk.

"*Guardian*. Burroughs speaking. Oh, Jerry? Yes? At the hospital—what?" He swiveled around to face the desk, no longer relaxed, his fingers gripping the phone tightly. "Who? For crying out loud!" He drew a pad and a thick pencil to him. "Give it to me." He began to scribble across the pad, then suddenly stopped, his fingers arrested in the middle of a stroke. "Wait, Jerry. Hold it a minute." He cupped his hand over the

mouthpiece and said to Sindermann, "Emil, run back to the bullpen, will you, and see what Wingate is writing?"

"See what he's writing?"

"No," Burroughs said impatiently. "Ask him. Tell him I want to know if he's doing a story on Lola Paris. The hit-and-run story."

It didn't seem possible, Burroughs thought, watching Sindermann push the swinging gate open with his hand and then disappear down the corridor; it didn't seem possible. But then it never did with Reed Wingate. There was Jerry Agnew, he thought, sighting down at his hand cupping the mouthpiece of the telephone, there was Jerry covering Headquarters, and doubtless at the scene five minutes—or even less—behind the police. . . . It wasn't possible.

He took his hand away from the phone and said, "Hold it just another minute, please, Jerry," and then he cupped his hand again, and listened to the silence created by the sudden cessation of Reed Wingate's typewriter. He waited, and then the clacking started again, and in a moment Sindermann appeared. He watched him swing the gate inward with his knee. He was flushed, and shaking his head from side to side.

"Well?" Burroughs said.

"He's got blood all over him," Sindermann said.

"He's got *what*?" Burroughs half rose from his chair, leaning across the desk, still holding his hand over the phone. "Is he hurt? What happened to him?" He remembered suddenly the station wagon that had seemed to graze him. Had he been gored after all?

"He says it isn't his blood," Sindermann said. "He says it's hers. This Lola Paris."

Burroughs let out a mirthless silent laugh. He said into the phone, "Never mind, Jerry. We have the story. Reed has the story. How did he get——?" His voice rose querulously. "Don't annoy me with foolish questions. Maybe he was waiting around all night for her to

get hit by a car. He says he's got her blood on him. Stick around and see if you can pick anything up that he doesn't have. But I doubt that you can."

He cradled the phone and got up, and with Sindermann following him walked down the corridor, blank except for the iron stairway that led up to Business and Circulation and down to the Press Room. In the tiny, cluttered bullpen—none of them could bring themselves to call it the City Room—Reed Wingate sat at the tip end of his chair, his hands playing the keyboard with a ferocity that Burroughs could only think of as an attack, but whether upon the enemy or a lover, he could not say.

He rapped his knuckles sharply on Wingate's desk.

Wingate stopped typing, and raised his small fine head, polite and attentive. But his eyes still smouldered with a fire that had been merely banked. Except for those fanatical eyes, Burroughs reflected, he might still be an undergraduate—the youthful face, the black hair neatly and not excessively crewcut. . . Except for the eyes and the ugly smudge of blood on the sleeves and breast of his jacket, and on his white shirt, and even (Burroughs could see it because Wingate's head was tilted up) on the underside of his chin.

He said, "How did you know Lola Paris had been hit?"

"I was passing by, on my way to the office, and she was lying there——"

"Passing by *where*? Lowndes Road?"

"Of course."

"Did you start out from your house this morning?"

Wingate nodded.

"Then how do you come to pass by Lowndes Road? It's a mile or better out of the way for you."

"I know," Wingate said.

Burroughs moved closer, and stood over Wingate so that Wingate had to bend his head far back to meet his

eyes. Then he moved off again, wrinkling his nose.

He said, "What's that I smell? Were you sick this morning? And how did you get Lola's blood on you? And what are you doing on Lowndes Road?" He stopped, and glared down at Wingate's polite patient face, and shouted in a rage, "Did you hit her yourself, to make news?"

He turned to Sindermann, outraged and pleading. Sindermann tried to look sympathetic. When Burroughs sighted down again, Wingate was sneaking a look at the copy in his typewriter.

He said quietly, "Just a minute, Reed, and then I'll allow you to get back to your story. I want you to do me a great favor, Reed."

"Yes sir?"

"Just answer each of my questions briefly and to the point and accurately. In return, I'll promise not to be surprised by anything you say."

"Yes, sir?"

Burroughs turned momentarily to Sindermann, as if to say: You see, I'm in sensible control of myself, and we'll soon get to the bottom of this.

He said to Wingate, "First, what were you doing on Lowndes Road?"

"I don't know. I just—" His thin shoulders shrugged helplessly. "I guess it was a hunch."

"You had a hunch to the effect that, if you went a mile out of your way, you would find that a girl had been run over by a car?"

Wingate looked abashed and said nothing, and Burroughs thought in astonishment, He's embarrassed for me, because I'm being unfair and sarcastic and hectoring him.

He said in a subdued voice, "One of your famous hunches?"

"I guess you could call it that."

He said over his shoulder to Sindermann, "He has

these things. Hunches. And they lead him to news. They're authenticated miracles." He sighed and said, "You drove up Lowndes Road, and you found Lola Paris lying there?"

"Not exactly."

"Tell me exactly, Reed."

"If I had come along two minutes earlier I would have found her myself." He looked apologetic, as if to make amends for ~~his~~ unforgivable tardiness. "The driver of a milk truck found her. Then I came along."

"You were there before the police?"

"Yes. I stayed with her and the milkman went into a house to phone."

Burroughs put out his finger and pointed to, almost but not quite touching, the still moist blood smeared on the fuzzy tweed of Wingate's jacket.

Wingate hesitated, glancing first at Sindermann, then pleadingly at Burroughs. Burroughs stared at him stonily.

"I held her in my arms. She was crying, hurting, I thought. . . ." He broke off, and his eyes glazed, as though he were seeing her again, lying in her own blood, feeling the pain communicate itself from her body to his. . . .

"All right," Burroughs said very shortly. "And afterwards you went into the bushes and got sick."

"Not in the bushes," Wingate said, and his shame was over-ridden by a look of surprise. "Right there on the road."

"All right," Burroughs said.

"Not because of the blood," Wingate said. "But when Sergeant Hunter hit me in the stomach."

Now Sindermann let out an exclamation, and Burroughs glanced back at him with a grim ironic smile.

"When did Joe Hunter hit you? And why?"

"When the police arrived. I don't *know* why."

"Is there anything else you care to add—I mean any-

thing that I can't read in your story?"

"No."

Burroughs nodded gravely. "Thank you, Reed. Finish up your story and then go home and get a bath and change your clothes."

He went back to his office, followed by Sindermann. Sindermann whistled between his teeth and shook his head sympathetically. Burroughs picked up his phone.

He said, "Bunny, see if you can get Sergeant Hunter at Headquarters." He held the phone away from his ear.

"Boy," Sindermann said, "he's from outer space."

"Half man, half typewriter," Burroughs said, and indignation, outrage rose in him unbidden. "He doesn't even know where the press room is, or care. He has to be led by the hand to the pay window—"

"Crazy," Sindermann said in a factual tone.

"Priceless," Burroughs said.

"A woman would straighten him out. He got a girl or something?"

"No girl but the paper." Burroughs rested the phone against his cheek. "I know, Emil. It wouldn't satisfy me, either."

Sergeant Nimmi, holding down the desk, said, "That's what I call a good cop, coming back with a whole paper bag full of clues."

Hunter said, "Is he in?" with the slightest inclination of his chin toward the staircase leading to the upper floor of Headquarters.

"He's in. I always say never fill up your pockets with clues, it spoils the lines of your suit."

Hunter grinned abstractedly, and shifted the brown paper bag from his right hand to his left. "Anything in the girl?"

"Still being operated. I hear she looked bad."

Starting slowly up the stairs, Hunter remembered how she had looked lying there on that quiet, opulent country road, and how she had looked when she was lifted onto the stretcher and loaded into the back of the town ambulance. Not dead, but somehow, in some way he couldn't formulate, ~~worse~~ than dead. Death had ~~not~~ ~~lost~~ of dignity; but dignity ~~was~~ denied that stained, shattered, askew ~~now~~ that a half hour earlier, if you could believe it, had been a pretty, seductive girl. He remembered, and grew sick with anger.

Saucier and Malone were working on reports in the squad room. They glanced up expectantly, but he merely nodded.

Saucier said, "Artie Burroughs called. Said it's urgent."

"I'll get back to him," Hunter said.

He walked stiffly toward the open oak door that could be seen in the slight bend of corridor just off the squad room. Behind him, he knew—not heard or saw or sensed, just knew—that Saucier and Malone were

watching him with sly amusement. He rapped on the open door just beneath the wooden plaque that read: *Captain Vergez*.

Vergez looked up from a clamped sheaf of bulletins and said, "Yeah? Come in, Joe." His uniform coat was open, and the black tie was pulled down two inches below his throat. He picked up his cigar and held it between his short fingers and watched Hunter come in and then stand stiffly in front of his desk. He waved his cigar at the paper bag. "Carrying your lunch these days?"

Standing almost at attention, trying as hard as he could to keep the contempt and bitterness out of his voice, Hunter said, "We have to look for a late model job, black finish, broken left headlight, dented and chipped left fender, chromium scratched and maybe dented on front grille towards left side, probably bumper chrome abraded, left side. Big car, anywhere from Buick and Olds up to Caddy or Chrysler or Lincoln from the indicated tire size. There'll be bloodstains, maybe hair, maybe bits of skin, orange-colored silk."

He opened the paper bag and dumped its contents carefully on the captain's desk blotter: broken glass, flecks of chromium, slivers of paint, tufts of black hair, a few bright silk threads.

"Good," Vergez said. "We got him if we can find him. F.B.I. lab ought to be able to tell us the make of car from the paint samples."

"Not worthwhile taking a moulage of the tire tread. What little there was, that reporter of Artie Burroughs scuffed up with his clumsy feet."

"Don't matter. I'll get out a G.A." He reached for the telephone.

"I hit him," Hunter said. "Wingate. The reporter."

Vergez stared at him. "Why the hell did you do that?"

"For scuffing up the tire tread."

"Did he do it on purpose?"

"No. Stupid clumsy."

Vergez shook his head. "I can't back you on that, Joe. If he puts up a holler you'll have to sweat."

"I know. I just thought I'd tell you."

Vergez shook his head again, then picked up the phone. "Billy, we got a good description of the hit-and-run car . . . No. Reconstructed. Put out a General Alarm. This description: Medium to big car. Broken left headlight—" His blunt finger touched a shard of glass. "Chipped left fender—" The finger rested on a chip of black paint. "Color black. . . . Wait a minute." He said to Hunter, "She's bad?"

"What I hear. Might go."

Vergez said into the telephone, "Better request a careful check on garages and repair shops. Also, get this out on the hot line to all County headquarters and the Troopers . . . Okay. Rest of the description. . . ."

When he had finished the catalogue and replaced the telephone he lighted the stump of his cigar carefully. He had a broad good-natured face and hard, dark, incompatible eyes. In his way, Hunter thought with a sense of surprise, because it had never occurred to him before, Vergez was a good-looking man—barroom good-looking, tough good-looking.

"Unless he goes into a hole and pulls it after him," Vergez said, "we'll pick him up. An automobile is a hard thing to hide. And if he's still on the road, trying to run, he's collared for sure."

"He's holed up already."

"Maybe."

"He's holed up," Hunter said, and now in spite of himself contempt edged into his tone.

Vergez caught it. He picked up the paper bag and peered into it. He said, "I thought maybe you brought him in with you, and he might have got stuck at the bottom of the bag."

Hunter kept his anger bottled up. He said, "You know Lowndes Road, Captain?"

"Call me Mike, like you used to."

"Lowndes Road is the shortest road in town, Captain."

"And the richest. So?"

"And it goes from noplacé to noplacé," Hunter said. "Except for tradespeople, nobody could or would use it unless he was visiting one of the five houses on the street. I don't think anybody was visiting around six-thirty o'clock in the morning, when the girl was run over. Except the girl herself. Her car wasn't there, and she lives clean over at the other side of town."

The captain looked at him shrewdly. Then he said, "Don't go off half-cocked on a theory. You got five houses on Lowndes, and the cheap one brought eighty-five thousand last winter. Don't get long on theory when you're dealing with people that can hire real good lawyers and clean out the town treasury if they sue for false arrest."

"I haven't arrested anybody yet."

"The people on that road aren't the hit-and-run type. Did you check out on delivery trucks and the like?"

"I'll need some help on the legwork. Can you assign Malone to the job?"

"You argue it must be somebody on the road. Why not a transient? He wanders off the Parkway, say, or the Post Road, gets lost—"

"It's two miles from the Post Road and four from the Parkway, not only off the main town arteries, but well off the sideroads too, high up in the hills, and even if you know where it is you have a tough time finding it."

"One of the locals—"

"It goes from noplacé to noplacé, Captain."

Vergez pulled at his dead cigar, looked at it in disgust and tossed it into the wastebasket. "Why couldn't a

thing like this happen in the Development? You do any checking for witnesses?"

"Only the milk-truck driver who found the girl. He doesn't know anything."

"People like up on Lowndes," Vergez said, "if they witnessed any part of it they would have called it in by now."

"They're not cops. People with information don't always know they've got it to give. You know that, Captain."

"Check them, check them. But do it tactful. Don't get anybody mad. It ain't the Development."

Hunter hesitated. "I'd like to see what they've got inside their garages, Captain."

"You would, eh?" Vergez showed his blunt yellow teeth in a mirthless grin. "You off your rocker?"

"I don't think so."

"If you think I'm going to let you do any witch-hunting with the class of people we got up on Lowndes . . . Get smart, Joe."

"You withhold your permission, Captain?"

"You're damn right I do. I don't want any goddamn witch hunts out of this headquarters."

"But you don't object if I check the five residents as possible witnesses?"

"Why should I object——" He broke off, pointed a thick finger at Hunter, and raising his voice said, "You trying to make a crack? What the hell are you trying to insinuate?"

"Nothing, Captain."

"You better not," Vergez said. "I'll stand just so much from you, Joe, and then I'll start getting tough. I'm the captain, not you, and don't forget it. All you had was a close miss." He kept his eyes on Hunter while he lit a fresh cigar slowly and deliberately. "Just a close miss, and the best man won."

"Can I get to work now, Captain?"

Vergez made a gesture of dismissal with his cigar. "Go to work now."

Trembling, with the pent-up fury inside him like sour taste, Hunter turned sharply, almost in a formal about-face, and went out of the office. He paused in the short corridor, unclenching his fists with a conscious effort, before going on into the squad room.

Saucier said, "Art Burroughs just called you again."

"Thanks." He went to his desk. While he was waiting for the phone to be answered he said, "Anybody over at the hospital waiting for the girl to regain consciousness?"

"Regan," Saucier said. "If she does."

"I see," Hunter said flatly. He heard Burroughs' voice in his ear. "Joe Hunter, Art."

"Sergeant—" Hunter had never heard Burroughs' voice so cold. "Sergeant, I learned from Reed Wingate that you punched him in the stomach."

"I lost my temper. He loused up what might have been an important clue or piece of evidence. You can tell him I'm sorry I hit him."

"Tell him yourself." There was a pause, and then Burroughs said conversationally, "Joe, did you ever know me to make an idle threat?"

"No," Hunter said, and thought, I'm taking too much, I'm taking too much from everybody. "Not that I can remember, Art."

"Then maybe you'll understand me when I tell you that if you ever lay a hand on that boy again, or any other person connected with this newspaper, I'll bust you right off the force and clear out of this town, too. You understand that, Joe?"

"Is Wingate going to bring a charge against me?"

"Did you understand what I said to you, Joe?"

"Yes."

"He doesn't want to bring a charge. I think he's a fool not to, but that's his own business. If it was me——"

"I'll apologize to him. Was there anything else, Art?"

"No." Burroughs sounded quite weary now, and his voice softened, faded, as though sapped by his weariness. "No, that's all."

I am writing this with the blood of Lola Paris smeared upon me, now turned from quick crimson to a dull dried brown, spread across my breast and my face. Later, I will wash her blood from me. But Lola's blood will not cleanse so easily from another person; it is a dye upon his or her brow, invisible yet bright and quick and red with life, the mark of Cain. And Lola's blood will never wash from this person so long as the memory remains of the girl he or she struck down and smashed and deserted in red ruin on a still country road on an otherwise still country morning.

The telephone rang. Burroughs swiveled around to it slowly. He placed the sheets of copy-paper down on his desk before picking up the phone.

"Burroughs," he said, and forced his eyes away from the paper, from the neatly typed, perfectly spaced copy untouched by pencil. A first draft, written at top speed. And did the lunatic even use a pencil, he wondered? "Yes. Hello, Miller. What can I do for you?"

Miller was upstairs in the business department, and he had a complaint. They had been running a series of ads for a school that taught obedience to dogs, and they had promised to use a publicity story, together with a picture of the trainer and one of his obedient pupils. Now he had the trainer on another phone, and he was crying the blues because—

"I've got the story, and the picture, too," Burroughs said, "and both of them are terrible, but I'll run them when I get the chance."

"I'd like to get this guy off my neck, Arthur," Miller said plaintively. "Can I tell him you'll use it today?"

"Today?" Burroughs looked over to the railing of his

office, where Wingate stood, his small face pallid and drooping above the gangling body, the blood-smears livid along his jaw and chin, brown on the tweed of his jacket. "Perhaps next week."

Miller protested.

"Next week," Burroughs said. "I may have room for it next week." He hung up the phone and said, "Run on home and get cleaned up, Reed."

"Yes," Wingate said. But he didn't move. His eyes were bright and hectic in his pale face.

Burroughs said, "I can read this just as well whether you're here or not."

"Yes."

"It will give the paper a bad name if anyone walks in here and sees one of our reporters looking like a stray from the walking wounded. Go home and get cleaned up."

He picked up the copy paper.

Lola Paris is—was—a pretty girl. There was nothing pretty about the red ruin I held in my arms.

Burroughs looked up, sighing, and said, "What do you want, Reed?"

"I'd like to go up to the hospital."

"I've got Jerry up there. Go home and—"

"I'll help him."

"There's no need. He doesn't need anyone to help him sit around and wait. He called in five minutes ago to say that she was still in surgery and likely to be there for some time longer."

"I'd like to be there when they bring her down."

"No," Burroughs said abruptly.

Wingate nodded, pushed away from the railing, and moved in a series of unco-ordinated jerks toward the door.

"Where are you going?" Burroughs said.

"To the hospital," Wingate said.

He's surprised that I should even ask, Burroughs

thought, but too polite to show it. He said, "Like that? Without even cleaning up?"

"I have to be there when they bring her down."

He opened the door, letting in the roar of the Post Road, and then shut it behind him. Burroughs watched him helplessly, moving with awkward determination down the street, headed for that tiny car of his which, placed against his gangling size, constituted a standing town joke.

But maybe, Burroughs thought savagely, maybe now he will be in too much of a hurry, and will simply pick the car up and tuck it under his arm and go off, heading full tilt toward the hospital with his long-legged strides, overtaking on the way a dozen astonished motorists. . . .

He picked up Wingate's story and began to read. Beneath his feet the floor started to tremble as the presses down below started warming up.

The hospital was built on the highest ground in the County, and from its roof it commanded a view of each of the five towns it serviced. It was a large, well-administrated, well-manned hospital, staffed by first-rate doctors, the majority of whom had moved out of the city after the war to the good life and rich pickings of the peripheral suburbs.

On the second floor, in one of the small waiting-rooms where smoking was permitted, Jerry Agnew sat on a wicker sofa, thumbing through a magazine desultorily. His gaze went frequently to the corridor outside the waiting room.

Regan stood at the window, with his foot braced on the low sill, looking down at the cobbled hospital courtyard and, beyond it, enclosed by a weathered post-and-rail fence, the hospital's parking lot. He watched a bug of a car pull into the lot, swing an abrupt circle, and then zoom into one of the diagonal parking spaces. At

once, spidery arms and legs of unbelievable length began to fold out of the car.

He said over his shoulder, "There's your buddy."

Jerry came over to the window. He looked out in silence.

"It's like that clown in the circus," Regan said. "The one that comes out of the little car. How does he ever do it?"

"The clown? I know how *he* does it. But Reed . . ." He shook his head, and watched Reed Wingate start across the parking lot, his legs moving like pistons, almost running.

"He going to relieve you?" There was a note of wistfulness, almost envy in Regan's voice. He was a big muscular man who felt that prolonged inaction deteriorated him and contributed to the shortening of his life.

"Not that I've been told," Jerry said. "But with Reed, you never know."

"Eager beaver," Regan said.

"He's my friend, but sometimes I want to kill him. Maybe I will. I might even do it today."

"Go ahead," Regan said. "I'll turn my back."

Jerry caught a glimpse of a white blur in the corridor. "Hey!" He turned away from the window and ran out into the corridor. "Hey, Red, wait a minute."

A stocky, red-haired intern stopped in midstride, turned and waited.

"Well," Jerry said, "is it over?"

Red shook his head. "I had to cut out. I got patients to look in on. Somebody's got to look after them. The whole staff's up there, practically, watching Denison work."

"How does it look? I mean, will they pull her through?"

"Bring her back, is more like it. She was nine-tenths

dead. Now you could say maybe she's only seven-tenths dead."

"But she might recover?"

"Look, buddy, I'm only an intern."

Jerry took out his pencil and a wad of copy paper.

"Tell me some of the things wrong—medical terms."

"In medical terms, she's busted all to hell and gone. I got to get to the baby ward, Jerry."

Jerry walked down the corridor alongside him.

"There must be a medical term or two. . . . What are they doing now, for instance, what are they working on?"

"They're working all over her, they're patching and glueing and cutting and trying to keep her alive. You want the medical term? Say Doctor Red Christensen, eminent first-year intern, says quote she's busted all to hell and gone unquote. You can also quote Doctor Christensen that she has the finest figure he has ever seen this side of the Copa. Thank you."

Red turned quickly and pushed through a pair of swinging doors. He disappeared into the sound of feeble but crotchety and ill-tempered wails. Jerry went back to the waiting room.

"Your friend was here," Regan said to him.

"Reed? Where'd he go?"

"He got bloodstains all over him. He said he was going to try to get into the operating room."

Jerry shook his head.

"Boy," Regan said, grinning. "The operating room. Just like that. Like all you had to do was go up there, dry your feet on the welcome mat, and walk right in."

Jerry started to light a cigarette, then took it from between his lips and put it back into the package.

"I'd better go see," he said to Regan.

An embrace, but for all the straining of muscles, the grasping and clutching, the pats and murmurs, mingling of warm breaths . . . but for all of that, a cold empty

embrace, a kissing of ghosts. A kissing, a parting of ghosts who had never occupied the solid flesh of affection. Now nothing. But that last embrace was love. Who?

Why were they still hurting her?

The last embrace was love. Who?

The shadowless morning. The fresh perfume of morning, and the whisper that touched the treetops faintly. Raising its voice, insistent, warning, becoming a roar, blotting out the treetops, changing the perfume of morning to a dark oil of night. Blotting out the morning. A great ugly black wind of crushing weight. A nightmare that punished, that rolled her over and sat down upon her and stamped with heavy feet, and bore her down. . . .

But they were still hurting her, with the sound of scrapes and tears and rendings. Hurting with sounds.

How could the sunshine be brightly black and full of pain? Raining down on a disgusting crawling object. Crawling object makes the flesh creep.

And then the embrace that was love and warm. Never mind who. Hold me tight, hold me, oh, hold me. . . .

With the first sudden rise of voices in the corridor, Dr. Denison brought his slippery wet hands up and away as though they had been stung. His eyes above the mask raked the room with an angry glare.

There was a sound of scuffling, and something thudded against the door of the operating room. There was more scuffling, the voices rose again, and then it was quiet once more. All the eyes in the room, isolated in the masked faces, were turned toward the door.

"Let's go," Dr. Denison said sharply.

The eyes swung back, and Dr. Denison's hands swooped down to the figure on the table.

Malone came out of the Captain's office with a very red face. He clumped across the squad room to his desk and sat down with a thud.

He said, "Fathead," but he said it under his breath, with a cautious look at the open oak door in the bend of the corridor.

Saucier said, "His bark is worse than his bite." Malone was silent, brooding. Saucier grinned. "You'll find out that's true the first time he bites you."

"Fathead," Malone said.

"He must of went round and round with Hunter. There won't be any living with him the rest of the day."

"That deal with Hunter—" Malone cast another sidelong glance at the corridor, and lowered his voice. "It's a dirty shame."

"All's fair in love and war and the cops. Joe was the best man, but Mike knew the Big Cheese. Mike gets the captaincy, Joe gets nothing. Close, but no cigar."

Malone said, "He puts me on the louse details. One man—check on the girl's relatives, friends, associates, storekeepers, domestics. One man for a real manpower job."

"Nothing wrong with the idea of a close check."

"Not with the idea. But the way he talked about it, he was sore at the girl. As if she went out and got hit just to personally inconvenience Captain Vergez."

Saucier put his finger against his nose. "He wants to prove a theory that it was attempted suicide. The girl gets in her car, runs herself over, gets back in the car and ditches it, then lays down in the road again."

"He hold a grudge against her?" Malone grunted. "I hate to get treated like dirt for nothing," he said. "After I goof, okay, but for *nothing* . . . I better get started."

After Malone had gone, Saucier sat for a moment and looked out the window, at a blue sky visible in patches through a leafy screen, and thought of Joe Hunter on Lowndes Road. Love, war and the cops. Five houses on Lowndes Road, and two of them were the story of Joe's life. All's fair in love, war and the cops. The story of Joe's life. Go see the chaplain. All's fair.

Over a period of an hour (as if there wasn't enough else to do, getting a thirty-two-page paper with half your staff keeping a death watch), Burroughs had read the second paragraph of Wingate's story five or six times. Now he read it again, for the sixth or seventh.

Up on the heights of Lowndes Road, five bland, silent, elegant homes looked down at the reporter and the bleeding girl who whimpered in his arms. No door opened, and there was no movement, however fugitive, at any window. They sleep late on Lowndes Road; they do not see the gray bleak commuters' dawn. They sleep late on Lowndes Road, but do they sleep well? Do they sleep the sleep of the just? (When will he learn to use short paragraphs?) Was one of the persons in one of those five houses pretending to sleep, lying beneath the blanket, head and all, eyes tight shut to blink away the remembered sight of the girl's upflung hands and falling body, the remembered sound of metal against flesh, of an agonized scream, the remembered sensation of the wheels going up over the obstruction and down, up and down, perhaps dragging a moment until a burst of power brought it up and over and down again? Which of those five blank facades hid a rat gnawing upon his conscience beneath a blanket? The facts are these:

He picked up his phone and said irritably, "Bunny, I asked you fifteen minutes ago—"

"I'm trying, Mr. Burroughs, I can't do more than try." The aggrievement in Bunny's voice winked off and she said, "Wait a minute, I think I've got them

now. Wait a minute . . . Go ahead."

"Hello?"

"Jerry? I've been trying for a half-hour to get hold of one of you two. We put out our little paper today, you know. Where have you been? Where are you?"

"The hospital administrator's office."

"You are? Where's Reed?"

"He's here, too."

"You're both there? Why do you both have to be there?"

There was a strangled sound, halfway between a cough and a laugh, as if laughter had been converted discreetly into a cough; and then there was silence.

"Well? Do I get an answer to my question?"

"The question being, why do we both have to be here? Because ~~we~~ both ~~told~~ to ~~be~~ here. That is to say, we were dragged here. No. Accurately, Reed was dragged here, and I ~~was~~ escorted. By escorted, I mean an orderly held me by the arm and—"

"Jerry—are you drunk?"

"No, sir, I'm not. Here's the administrator."

"This is Doctor Porterman."

"Doctor, will you kindly tell ~~me~~ what's going on?"

"I will, but not very kindly. This one—" He ~~was~~ so mad, Burroughs thought, not unsympathetically, that he didn't realize that he was pointing out Reed—there was no question but that his indignant finger was leveled ~~at~~ Reed—to a ~~man~~ at the other end of a telephone wire. "This ~~one~~ tried to break into surgery during an extremely critical operation. He then scuffled with an attendant who tried to restrain him, and had to be brought down to my office forcibly."

"Did he say why he tried to get into the operating room?"

"I've been trying to find that out for the past twenty minutes, without much success."

"The young man is upset, Doctor," Burroughs said.

"He had a trying experience this morning. You know, he picked up that poor girl after she had been hit—"

"The closest I can come to making sense of what he says is that she needs him. He seems to feel that she needs him. Are they related?"

Only by blood, Burroughs thought sombrely, by some curious figurative chemical composed of her blood and his pity and some subtle intercommunication of pain that is beyond me to understand or feel, and that I could only understand or feel, perhaps, if it had been I who had found that suffering girl and held her to my breast. Or perhaps not even then, because I'm not young, and the world in which such alliances can be joined lies behind me.

He said, "I wish you would accept my apologies for Wingate. His experience this morning must have been traumatic. Ordinarily—"

"I just want him out of here."

"So do I. In fact, that is the original purpose of my call."

"You can have him, Mr. Burroughs, and welcome to him. I don't see quite why you need two reporters here, anyway."

"I'd like Wingate to come right back to his office at once, and Agnew . . . Agnew is the other one, Doctor—" The one who is sane, he thought, or, at least, no worse than half insane. "Did Agnew try to break into surgery, too?"

"As closely as I can make out, he didn't. In fact, he seems to have tried to help keep his friend out, so I don't understand—" Doctor Porterman's voice faded as he spoke away from the transmitter. "Why *did* they bring you here, Agnew?" Jerry's voice was audible but his words were indistinguishable. Back on the phone, Doctor Porterman said, "He says that he was mistaken as an accomplice during the fact, whatever that means."

"It doesn't mean that much, I fancy."

"Nor do I." Doctor Porterman's voice became testy. "I don't see why you require two reporters here in the first place. Even if the girl should survive surgery, she won't be able to talk to anybody for a long time—if ever."

"Well," Burroughs said gently, "that constitutes news, too, Doctor. However, you're right about not needing two reporters. I'd like to ask you—apologizing once more for his unusual actions, and once more asking you to understand the circumstances—I'll ask you, doctor, not to take up any more of your valuable time, to tell Wingate to leave Agnew at the hospital and report directly back here to me? And thank you for your forbearance."

"Quite all right. You can speak to them yourself, if you wish—"

"No, thank you," Burroughs said quickly. "It's perfectly all right. There's no need for me to speak to them."

He had driven thirty miles to the south and the west, never once entering upon a main thoroughfare, zigzagging back and forth over the back roads, and his speedometer showed that he had rolled up almost forty miles to cover a distance of twenty-five. But he had not passed a single policeman so far as he knew. He had driven hunched over the wheel, only partially for concealment, otherwise because of the tension that gripped him. He had found a hat in the trunk of the car, and worn it pulled down almost to his eyebrows. On the rare occasions when he had passed another car, he had inclined his head still further over the wheel and averted it to the right.

He had come away unobserved—he was certain of it—and now it all depended on Foley. He pulled the battered nose of the car up to the rickety shut door of

Foley's garage, almost nudging it with the ruined bumper, and then he shut off the ignition and got out. He crossed the sparse gravel of the driveway, and pushed his way through a break in the ragged hedge that separated the driveway from the house. His legs trembled as he walked in the brilliant sunshine across the small square of patchy lawn to the narrow cracked flagstone path that led up to the porch.

There were loose boards beneath his feet, everywhere paint was worn or peeling off the dried-out clapboard, even the front-door button that his finger pressed was cracked and discolored. He heard the rasp of the buzzer within the house, and he waited, feeling the moisture cooling on his body and beading the sweatband of his hat. He started to remove the hat but restrained himself as though secret eyes might be watching him, or as if the equilibrium that he had maintained by a supreme effort for so long would be somehow upset, and he would lose his grip on his nerves.

He was about to ring a second time when the faded curtains over the half mullioned door moved. The door opened and Foley peered out at him, his eyes slitted irritably against the sunlight. His appearance was no surprise. He was wearing a T-shirt that clung tight and twisted to his meager chest, and beltless trousers in which all the belt-loops seemed to be torn away at the top joining, so that they hung down like the ears of a dispirited dog. He was barefooted, and his narrow veined feet were dirty.

"Hello, Foley."

Foley's eyes focused into surprised recognition. He said, "Well, if it ain't lover-boy."

"Let me in." He didn't wait, but pushed by Foley into the narrow hallway. "Shut the door. I don't want anybody to see me."

Foley closed the door and turned around, grinning. "Got girl trouble again? Want old Doc Foley to—"

"No." He stood nervously in the little hallway, a little faint now from tension and hunger and the pervading fumes of whiskey and beer that seemed to be emanating from Foley's pores. "Let's go inside. I want to talk to you."

The living-room smelled of age and neglect. It was small, mean, cluttered, and the fireplace was full of beer and whiskey bottles, some of which had been thrown, he was sure, and shattered.

Foley said, "Sit down. Get you a beer?"

He nodded. Foley was alert now, and his eyes were shrewd pinpoints as he padded off on his bare feet to the kitchen. When he came back his hands were full of beer bottles, an opener, and a bottle of whiskey, which he held precariously by the neck between two fingers. He distributed the beer bottles on a small table, and retreated with the whiskey to a lumpy sofa.

He lifted the bottle in salute, drank from it, and then put it down on the floor beside him. He said, "Not a girl again?"

"No."

"I'll tell you, if I had your looks and contacts, I'd get girls in trouble, too. I'll tell you—the price has gone up since the last time."

"It isn't a girl." He took his hat off, with a sense of relief, and put it over his knee. "It's worse." He saw Foley's eyes narrow secretly, calculatingly, and he added: "It's worse, but thank God it isn't me. I'm doing a favor for a friend—"

Foley's laughter was coarse and knowing. "You know," he said, and his thin face was lined with malevolent amusement, "I never thought I'd hear that line outside of the movies or the television."

He colored, and held his temper in rein. He said, "Are you doing anything? I mean, working?"

Foley shrugged. "I work when I want to. On the sauce or off it, I'm a Grade-A body man. I work maybe

two or three days and make good money and lay off the rest of the week. I get by." He lifted the bottle, leering. "Besides picking up a dollar here and there from rich big shots that need, say, medical information and such."

"I told you it wasn't a girl." He hesitated, and started sweating again, and then he said, "I want you to fix up a car for me."

Foley held up the bottle an inch from his lips. "That right?" he said casually.

"It has to be done fast—and perfectly."

Foley nodded sympathetically. "So that nobody can tell it was fixed, right?"

"Yes."

Still sympathetic, even sorrowful, Foley said, "It comes high."

"How high?"

"It depends on what the car hit."

"An animal."

"Sure," Foley said. "That's why you have to sneak down here with it instead of bringing it in to the nearest body place."

It occurred to him, with almost abstracted astonishment, that he was without caste in Foley's eyes. Anywhere else, he was a man of standing and authority, and people of Foley's stature licked his boots. But Foley, a booze-rotted bum, could treat him with contempt. And he stood for it because he came with his hat in his hand. In the sordid kingdom of the booze-rotted bum he was a petitioner, and Foley wouldn't let him forget it.

He said, "It belongs to a kid I know, that's why." He paused, casting about for an improvisation. "He's a college kid, and he smashed up the car once before, and if his father knew he had done it again—"

"Sure, sure," Foley said. "I know how it is. Tell me—the animal die?"

"No."

"Hurt bad?"

He looked down at his trembling hands, and his voice, when he spoke, was constricted, almost suffocated. "Maybe. I don't know. It was an accident."

Foley lowered the bottle and placed it by his foot, feeling for the floor, his eyes level and knowing. "Natch. How else does an animal get hit?"

He could not meet Foley's gaze. He picked up a can of beer, and, reading the label sightlessly, said, "Will you do the job?"

"Will you pay for it?"

He nodded, over-eager, and then caught himself back and said, pretending hesitation, "How much?"

Foley looked up at the ceiling, and his tongue found the inside of his cheek thoughtfully. Then he lowered his eyes, and his gaze grew solemn and measured. "A thousand dollars."

He started to protest, but stopped himself. There was no help for it. It was blood money, and both he and Foley knew it equally. Foley might have asked three hundred, or five hundred, and he would have paid it willingly. But Foley, picking a figure from the air, had asked a thousand, and so he would pay that, resentfully. To Foley, he knew, it didn't matter whether he paid willingly or resentfully.

He nodded and said, "When can you get started?"

"I'm giving you a break," Foley said. "I could have asked—"

"Shut up, you sonofabitch."

Foley looked at him first in surprise, then shrewdly, and estimated his visitor's distance from the breaking point. Very close. He was sitting in his chair tensed, like a boxed-in animal, his mouth stretched taut, his eyes wide and protuberant, trembling from head to foot. It was not a time for the needle.

Foley said, getting to his feet, "Pull it into the garage and we'll take a look at it."

Saucier transcribed his notes neatly on a clean sheet of paper, and went into the Captain's office. Vergez looked up scowling.

Saucier said, "I got all the information from Motor Vehicle Registry, Captain." He held out the sheet of paper. "Plus serial and engine numbers. On those cars?"

Vergez ignored the paper. "What's it say?"

"Believe it or not, there's thirteen cars belonging to those five up there. Gillespie, a red little MG—"

"Never mind that. Tell me who got the black ones."

"Gillespie, one black Olds, 1957. Wriston, one black Chrysler 1959, and one black Dodge 1955. Richards, one black Cadillac 1959. Murad . . ." Saucier had a brief innocent fit of coughing, while the Captain glared at him. "Murad, four black cars, as follows: two 1959 Cadillacs, one 1958 Continental, one 1958 Ford convertible. All four of them are black, Captain."

"Okay." Vergez snatched the paper from Saucier's hand and glanced at it broodingly. "That's all."

"You want me to do anything else on this case, Captain?"

Vergez flung the paper to his desk. "Ferchrisesake, we got half of the force working on it now. This the only thing we got in the house? What's the big attraction?"

"I was only asking. You rather I went out and caught a crook, Captain?"

"All right, Keystone cop," Vergez said. "Go out and catch a cold."

But the joking was heavy-handed and uneasy, Saucier thought, walking toward the squad room. Phil Murad has four black cars, all big ones. Maybe Vergez knows something, and maybe he don't, but he's worried.

Behind him, he heard the sound the captain's door made as it swung shut.

"Two gets you four," he said, speaking to himself, "that he's buzzing Phil Murad."

Captain Vergez closed the ponderous oak door, sequestering his office from the squad room. He returned to his desk, lifted his phone, then set it down again. He stared at the phone for a moment, chewing vigorously at his cigar, and then got up and went to the window. In the courtyard below, a black cruiser was just pulling out, its long rear antenna brushing back gracefully beneath an overhanging bough, then springing back.

He thought, or started to think, about ordering the overhanging tree cut back before it snapped its antenna, but the thought was never finished. It was cut off, invaded by the visual image of Hunter on Lowndes Road, prying and poking, grilling important citizens, maybe even gumshoeing around their garages in defiance of his orders.

He thought: There's going to have to be a showdown between us.

He turned away suddenly from the window, as if an unwelcome change of climate had turned the prospect bleak and unpleasant, and went back to his desk. There would have to be a showdown, but not on this particular matter. On this one Hunter had an advantage that he didn't even know about yet. He had to play cagey on this one, and later on pick his own battleground.

With Phil Murad in his corner he would lick Hunter again the way he had licked him on the captaincy.

As if spurred to resolve by this line of reasoning, he picked up the phone again, asked for an outside line, and dialed a number.

There was a single brief ring and the phone was answered. "Judge Peckham."

"Pecky, can I talk to Phil? It's Mike Vergez."

"He's busy right now."

"It's important, Pecky."

"He's asleep."

And next, Vergez knew, Peckham would say, "He's out," but he didn't want to hear that right now, even if it wasn't true.

He said, "Pecky, quit kidding around. I got to talk with him right away."

"He's out."

"Pecky."

"I know it's important. When isn't it? But he's having a fight with the old lady, and nothing supercedes that in importance."

That might not be good either, if it ~~was~~ true. For a moment, he considered telling Pecky what was on his mind, but decided against it. You could trust Pecky, but this was too delicate. Maybe, he thought with a twinge of worry, it was too delicate for Phil ~~a~~ well, and if he watched out strictly for Number One he would just keep his mouth shut and let events take their course.

But there was loyalty, and he wasn't anything if he wasn't loyal. Besides, where was Number One without Phil Murad?

He said, "The minute it's over—whether he wins or loses—tell him to call me."

"You want to give ~~us~~ ~~a~~ inkling of what it's about?"

"I got another call coming in, Pecky. Sorry, I have to hang up. You'll tell him? Thanks."

He hung up.

If Phil was actually having a fight with Melba, it could have real significance. Except that they fought all the time. Melba just couldn't get used to the idea that Phil played around. As Phil had once said, kiddingly, "She doesn't understand there's nothing personal in it."

On the other hand, early as it was, Pecky might be boozed up already. He remembered how Pecky had

answered the phone—"Judge Peckham"—and shook his head in wonderment. It was like taking anyone who knew him, or had heard of him, taking them by the lapel and saying: Remember me? I am the former city judge of Deepview who got caught taking ten dollar bribes . . . But Pecky didn't seem to care who knew it. Between taking a daily shampoo in booze and knowing that he was secure as Phil's secretary, he didn't have a worry in the world.

He would have sworn that Phil would have ditched Pecky when he was found out, but instead he had kept him out of jail and even given him a job. It was a generosity that Vergez couldn't understand and couldn't approve of. If you goofed as badly as Pecky did, you deserved to get your lumps. But Phil hadn't seen it that way. Or else, maybe it was a big joke to him, having an unfrocked judge as his secretary.

Would he be so kind to an unfrocked police captain?

The thought made him look anxiously at the telephone. If Phil didn't call inside of a half-hour, he would phone again. And if he didn't answer by that time, he would run up there in person.

He got up and opened the oak door. Then he came back to his desk and got Nimmi on the phone.

"Anything yet on the G. A. we put out?"

"Nothing, Captain."

They were all so goddamn polite, he thought, hanging up the phone and walking to the window again. What the hell were they all grouching about? All four sergeants—Hunter, Nimmi, Magruder and himself—knew the regulations when they took the test for the captaincy that the old Captain's retirement had opened up. The regulations said, in black and white—and neither he nor Phil Murad had made them—that the appointment would be made by the Town Council, following the examination, from that number of applicants who

passed the examination with a grade of sixty-five, and regardless of the order of finishing.

Hunter, who read all kinds of highfalutin books on criminology and attended police seminars on his own time, Hunter had scored ninety-six on the test; Magruder, a college man, made eighty-eight; Nimmi hit seventy-four; and he ~~hit~~ ~~was~~ low ~~man~~ with seventy-three. But seventy-three ~~was~~ a passing grade, and the Councilmen ~~had~~ exercised their option of naming the captain regardless of order of finish, and they had named him because Phil Murad had told them to.

Well, they had ~~all~~ known that that ~~was~~ a foregone conclusion, and known that their only chance was if he failed the exam. But he had scored seventy-three, and the Council had named him to the captaincy, and if they didn't like it they could ~~all~~ go whistle up a tree.

He focused on the overhanging bough that had bent the cruiser's antenna, and again, by some obscure cause and effect, he thought of Hunter. He would be up on Lowndes by now; even, maybe, walking up the steps to Phil's house.

He turned sharply away from the window and went back to his desk. He got ~~an~~ outside line and dialed Phil Murad's number.

"Judge Peckham."

"Mike again. I got to speak to Phil."

"I heard you the first time. He can't come to the phone now."

"I hate to break in on a stand-up fight between a man and his wife—"

"Rapier wit?"

"—but it's very important. I'm leveling, Pecky."

"He'll call you back. The fight with Melba's over, or postponed. He's talking business now."

"With who?"

"Forstmann."

Forstmann managed the lumber yard. Phil made his

office in his home, and ran the complex of his enterprises from there—the lumber yard, the boat basin, the mason supply company, the building firm, the real estate office and the town itself. He rarely entered any of those premises; when conferences were required, the nominal head of each enterprise came to his house—the head of the lumber yard, the head of the boat basin, the head of the mason supply company, the head of the real estate office, the head of the building firm, and the mayor.

He said, "Pecky, catch him for me the minute he's through with Forstmann."

"Okay."

"Pecky . . ." He hesitated for a moment, trying to determine the most tactful way to approach the subject. "Pecky, do you know about Lola Paris being run over this morning?"

"Lola Paris?"

"Yes. Do you know about it?"

"You just told me. It's too bad."

Vergez was briefly silent. Then he said, "Does Phil know about it?"

"You'll have to ask Phil."

"Pecky, Joe Hunter will be ringing your bell any minute."

"What for?"

"To ask some questions. Like did you see the accident, like do you know Lola Paris, like what was Lola doing up there on Lowndes so early in the morning."

"The answer is no to the first, no to the second and am I my sister's keeper to the third."

"What are Phil's answers, Pecky?"

"He'll call you when he's through with Forstmann."

"Thanks. Meanwhile, if Hunter turns up, you better stall him."

He replaced the phone in its cradle, but it rang again,

at once, while his hand was still on it. He brought it to his ear.

"Nimmi, Captain. You asked about the all points. Something car. in a minute ago. Worcester, Mass. They report picking up a black Buick up there, Fifty-seven model, with damage roughly fitting our description and bloodstains and bits of tissue."

Vergez listened intently. "Yes? Well?"

"Driver's from this state. And been drinking. They're interrogating him now, and giving the car a close check. Driver says it was a cow. They'll get back to us."

"Okay," Vergez said. "Keep in touch with me."

He got up and went back to the window. Above the overhanging branch, and up the asphalt driveway, there was a clear view of Main Street, a slice of the sidewalk and the whole of the bank entrance, set off as if in a frame by the curving wall that lined the driveway.

It was a standing joke around town that the reason the Deepview bank had never been robbed was that the captain kept it under his eye from the window. The joke had started in the Old Captain's time, but it was now applied to Vergez. It was vaguely flattering, and he smiled at it now. Then a man appeared in the entrance, coming out of the bank, and Vergez stiffened, making a noise deep in his throat.

He bent forward intently, squinting his eyes, as the man paused in the doorway and put something in his wallet. But there was no need for squinting; Captain Vergez had first-rate acuity of vision, and even a man who was half blind would recognize infallibly the comically squat figure and gray-tufted bald head of George Forstmann.

Lowndes Road was a loop of macadam in the rough shape of an alembic, enclosing a center island of grass and shrubs policed by tall, precisely—even primly—placed poplars. The care of the macadam and the island was the charge of the five property owners of Lowndes Road, who contributed a yearly sum to a communal kitty for road mending and the hire of a gardener.

Gilman was standing where Hunter had stationed him, at the narrow entry of the alembic, before the road split to the right and left, a figurative cork in the throat of the bottle. When he saw the police car coming up the road toward him he put on a keen, watchful look. The car pulled over to the side of the road, and Hunter rolled down its window. Gilman hurried over.

"Anything to report?" Hunter said.

"No cars in or out, Sarge. Except for the school bus."

"Anybody come out of their houses at all?"

"Just a gardener from Richards. Came down with about two hundred foot of hose and asked if he could clean off the mess where it happened. Said the master sent him. I figured with the pictures took and all, it was okay."

There was a darkly glistening patch of wetness on the pebbled surface of the macadam. A few gallons of water, Hunter thought, staring at the patch through his windshield, and the stigmata were washed away. But the violence still lingered, a heavy ghost in the clear spring air, guarding the wet-down patch that was still its own by eminent domain.

He said, "I suppose you could call it a public-spirited gesture. Or maybe only a tidy one." He shrugged. "I want you to hang around while I do a check of the houses."

Gilman said, "Want to split them up with me? I could do :- & :- of them while. . . ."

Was there a watchful mischief in Gilman's voice? But his face was guileless. To cover the traces of his own quick suspicion, Hunter used the moment to get out of the car. He motioned to Gilman to get in in his place.

He said, "I think it's better if you stay posted here."

He nodded briskly, stiffly, and walked up into the branching loop to the right, past the patch of wet macadam and its attendant invisible ghost.

The five properties on Lowndes Road occupied twenty-odd acres. None comprised less than three, and Phil Murad's was eight. The houses were all set far back and high above the tiny loop of macadam, and were reached by climbing, winding, blacktop access roads. Although some small token portion of each was visible from below—a corner of a chimney, or a television aerial, or a slice of sloping roof—they were in effect totally screened from the road and from each other.

The Fernald Richards house was first in line of Hunter's approach. Suppose Julie Beaumont's had been first? The question flashed in his mind, and he left it unanswered. And why hadn't he gone off to his left instead of his right, and thus made Phil Murad's house the first? He left this unanswered, too, and lowering his head climbed doggedly up the winding driveway.

Mr. and Mrs. Fernald Richards owned the only house on Lowndes Road which owed anything to modern architecture. To Hunter, admitted to the living-room by a man-servant, the debt seemed a very heavy one. The room appeared to be made up entirely of glass and sliding doors. There was a pool in the center of the

cork-tiled floor, and he had already ascertained that it was neither stagnant nor filled by hand, but constantly flowing and, apparently, fed by a stream that ran beneath the footings of the house. A clump of live ferns, which must have been cut back almost daily to keep it from over-running the room, grew out of the center of the pool.

The servant had gone off to inform the Richardses of his presence, but with the warning that they might have little or no time to spare for him, since their broadcast went on in an hour and fifteen minutes.

The Richardses did a daily radio broadcast from their home. They were celebrities, but this did not make them exceptional in Deepview, which assayed more celebrities to the acre than any comparable community in the United States. Hunter had never listened to their program but he had once heard someone say—it must have been at Julie Beaumont's house—that they were the most talented people on the air because they were able to speak for a full hour daily with dazzling authority on the most spacious range of subjects, none of which they knew the first thing about.

Mrs. Fernal Richards swept into the room with an apology for keeping him waiting. She managed to be brisk and charming at the same time. She also, Hunter thought, succeeded in giving the impression that she was a case-hardened professional person. Mrs. Richards—he had heard the phrase from Julie once—was always on.

She was wearing a long hostess gown, and her white hair was drawn back from her young face and held by a red ribbon. She extended her hand and gave Hunter's a vigorous manly shake.

"I'm sorry Fev can't join us, Sergeant. We broadcast in a short while, and he's busy. We're unrehearsed, of course, but we do work from notes, and Fev is making

up what we call our agenda. I hope you will excuse him?"

"I want to ask some questions about the hit-and-run accident this morning, Mrs. Richards."

"Poor dear Lola. The crushed butterfly. That's what I shall call her. We're going to do a bit ~~as~~ Lola on the show this morning. Are you familiar with our program, Sergeant? We'll do her ~~as~~ the Human Interest segment. Crushed butterfly. We'll ~~the~~ the incident as a spring-board for a strong indictment of hit-and-run drivers."

"Do you have any first-hand information ~~in~~ the accident, Mrs. Richards?"

"First-hand?"

She cocked her head in brightly alert inquiry. But her eyes, Hunter thought, seemed wary.

"Did you witness any part of it, or hear anything?"

"Oh my goodness, ~~no~~ We ~~were~~ quite sound asleep when it happened. It took place early this morning, didn't it, Sergeant?"

Hunter nodded. "How did you learn about it, Mrs. Richards?"

"The radio. I'm terribly fond of our little Deepview radio station. Don't you find it amusing? But it is invaluable for local news."

"Are you personally acquainted with the victim?"

"Certainly. That is, Fev knows her better . . ." Her eyes flicked to the side, then smoothly shifted to the ceiling, as though she were weighing the question in some balance of precise measurement. "Actually, you could say we ~~were~~ both slightly *acquainted* with her. I mean, in contradistinction ~~to~~ being *friends*."

"Would you happen to know who she was visiting on Lowndes Road early this morning?"

"Hardly. How ~~in~~ the world would I know whom she was visiting? If she ~~was~~ visiting someone. Do you know that to be a *fact*, Sergeant?"

"No, Ma'am, I don't."

It seemed to Hunter that she had awaited his reply with some anxiety, and reacted to it with relief. But how could you tell, he wondered. She was made of pure brass, inside and outside, and wouldn't chip, crack or rust.

She said, "I'm sorry I can't be of any greater help, Sergeant. Is there anything more?"

"You don't think your husband could add anything to what you've told me?"

"How could he? He ~~was~~ asleep, too."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Richards. I hope I didn't take up too much time?"

"Of *course* not."

When he left, Hunter glanced at the garage. It was a shed-like affair, joined to the house by a breezeway. It had three overhead doors, and they were all shut. He went on down the curving driveway, half-blinded by the sunlight that glinted off the huge windows of the house.

The next house was Gillespie's, and after that came Julie Beaumont's.

Mrs. Gillespie ~~was~~ a tall handsome ~~woman~~ whom Hunter judged to be in her early thirties. She was wearing a housecoat, and after a moment's hesitation she admitted him to a huge louvered porch. The glass panels were slanted downward, admitting controlled cheerful stripes of sunlight to the colored terrazo floor.

Mrs. Gillespie invited him to sit down, and seated herself almost halfway ~~at~~ the porch. Her features were fine, and her skin, without makeup, was extraordinarily pale, ~~as~~ though, Hunter thought bizarrely, all the color was drained from it by the tightly drawn black hair. Her long hands, clasped together and lying ~~in~~ her lap, were expressive even in repose.

She gazed across the porch at him with an at-

tentiveness that was taut and uncomfortable. As much to lighten the atmosphere for himself as for her, Hunter smiled. Her face remained expressionless, and her only response, if it could be called that, was a brief, almost spastic movement of her leg. Her ankle, Hunter noted, was slim and elegant even in mules.

He said, "You're a ~~new~~ resident here, Mrs. Gillespie?"

"Yes."

Her single syllable was not abrupt nor uncivil, so much as it ~~was~~ final. A question had been asked, an answer given, the exchange concluded.

"Living here about three or four months?"

"Since the middle of February."

She ~~was~~ tense, even agitated, he thought, and she was keeping it all inside her. He said, "I hope you like it here?" But this time he didn't wait for her reply. He said briskly, "I'd like to ask you a few questions about the accident this morning, Mrs. Gillespie."

There was ~~no~~ response, not by voice or gesture or even, now, by that involuntary movement of her leg. She sat and looked at him, her eyes unwavering, dark and steady, in the long oval setting of her face.

"We're trying to determine whether any of the people up here might have witnessed the accident."

"I didn't witness it."

"I see. Now, how did you—"

"But I heard it." Her words were sudden and, to Hunter, unexpected. He looked at her inquiringly. "At least, I think I heard it." She paused momentarily, and her lids lowered, ~~as~~ though in reflection. "I was upstairs, rousing the children for school, when I heard something that sounded ~~as~~ if it might be brakes being jammed on. That squealing, high-pitched sound."

He thought of the single tread-mark that the reporter had obliterated, but that was ~~on~~ the soft dirt verge of the center island. Such a hard stopping of the car as

Mrs. Gillespie had described would have left rubber on the road.

He said, "Are you quite sure of this, Mrs. Gillespie?"

"No. The children didn't seem to hear it. It might have been my imagination."

"Was your husband at home?"

"No. He left quite early this morning."

Hunter nodded sympathetically. "Seven-oh-two train?"

"He has a breakfast meeting with a client." She stopped, and, as if in anticipation of his next question, said, "He generally takes a much later train. The eight-thirty, I believe."

"Then he must have left the house this morning about—"

"At six-thirty."

Then the hit-and-run was neatly bracketed between six-thirty and a few minutes before seven, when the milk driver had found Lola. So much was incontrovertible, even if Gillespie had hit her himself.

He said, "I'll probably check with him later on, in the off-chance that he might have observed something—a strange car, or the girl herself. . . . By the way, are you acquainted with Miss Paris?"

"No."

"How did you find out about the accident?"

"Mrs. Richards, next door, phoned to tell me about it."

He waited, not because there was anything more he could ask her, but because there was something she had not yet said. She hadn't expressed interest, nor regret, nor had she thought to inquire whether or not Lola was living or dead, or was likely to live or die. She kept looking at him steadfastly across the porch, with what might be patience or a desperately disciplined self-control.

He rose, and Mrs. Gillespie rose too, and saw him

out. He thanked her for her co-operation and, standing below her on the bottom step, smiled up at her. There was no answering smile, no response in the wide dark eyes.

"You're quite welcome, Sergeant."

She closed the porch door. Hunter glanced quickly at the garage. The overhead doors were tightly closed.

He tried to consolidate his impressions of Mrs. Gillespie, but something else kept crowding his mind. The next house was Julie Beaumont's. His hands were trembling as he walked down the driveway, and for a single panicky moment he considered skipping it, asking Gilman to take over.

But he had to see her. No matter how difficult it might be, he had to see her.

Doctor Denison had already started for the washup room, nodding his head tiredly to the congratulations of his colleagues in the observation seats, when he came to a sudden stop, turned around, and plodded his way back. The sweat now ran unimpeded from his face into the neck of his gown. A nurse offered him a towel, but he shook his head.

From behind the mask that sagged over his face, heavy and damp with his exhalations, he said, "Let's see what she looks like."

He didn't mean it clinically but literally. He had spent two hours in close relationship with her, his hands tinkering inside her body through various holes he had made in it, working in that remarkable detached intimacy of the surgeon, using both his skilled hands to haul her out of the grip of death . . . but he didn't know what she looked like.

He thought: I can describe her large intestine for you, and the feel of the crushed ribs, and the texture of that pulpy mass of her skull, but I don't know what she

looks like: the color of her eyes, of her hair, the shape of her nose, whether she's pretty or plain. But he didn't reproach himself. The patient as a surgical field was what counted, not the shape of a nose or the color of an eye. Still, he was curious.

Between the ether blankets bundled up to the neck, and the casque of bandage swathing her head from the crown to the eyebrows, there was a tiny pale face, lips of the most delicate bloodless pink, two fans of dark lashes vivid against the pallor.

He said into the soggy mask, "Pretty," and then turned away.

But it occurred to him that what he had said was a formality, a conventional but meaningless response. The small face had communicated less to him of the girl's substance than the quick line of blood that had leaped up to the touch of his scalpel. The blood, artlessly, had denoted the presence of a life; that white face was nothing more than an inanimate mask. How could you tell from a mask what a life was like?

What he should have said, accurately, looking down at her on the stretcher, was: "Pretty mask."

He shook his head angrily, as if to rid himself of the fantasy of his thoughts, and then stood stolidly—a bulky middle-aged figure in a sodden bloodstained gown, a tired working man who had given the best of himself—while a nurse untied the cords that loosened his work clothes.

The point was, he told himself, that she would be pretty if she lived. But that remained to be seen.

He stood in his trousers, naked to the waist, a pudgy man with soft small supple hands. He had an entire hour to kill before his next scheduled operation.

There had been one occasion in Malone's tenure on the Deepview police force when he had had to go into a

dark building, up a black stairway, with drawn gun, in the expectation that a rain of bullets might come pouring down at him. That sort of thing didn't happen often to a country or suburban cop. But it didn't have to happen often for you to remember it. Just once, and you would remember it well, especially in the vivid and terrifying recollection of dreams.

But, because he was a sentimental man, and a fairly brave one—and possibly because the chances of its happening to him had been and would continue to be more frequent—there was another duty that was equally terrifying to contemplate and execute. That duty was the bearing of the tidings of tragedy. The first time it had happened—he had been charged with bringing to a young mother the news that her son had been drowned—he had gone on a stupefying drunk in an effort to forget the look on the mother's face, the shrill never-ending resonance of her screams. Only the understanding of the Old Captain—the man Vergez replaced—had saved his job for him.

And now, standing on the steps of the house where Lola Paris lived, with the clear blue of the Sound spread out behind him, he again faced that duty that was next worst to, and in some ways ~~more~~ awful than, walking up the blind stairway of his nightmares.

There ~~was~~ a sound of steps within. He braced himself, his shoulder straining against the worn serge of his suit. The door opened and, involuntarily (as ~~one~~ might, not to see the bullet from the man's gun on its way), he shut his eyes.

A soft, husky, pleasing voice said, "Yes?"

A middle-aged Negress, gray-haired, wearing an apron, holding a dry mop in her hands, stood before him when he opened his eyes.

He said, not because he didn't know it, but because

he couldn't face the silent guns of pain, "Is this where Miss Lola Paris resides?"

"She in the hospital."

It took him a moment to realize that it was over, that he had had a last minute reprieve, that the gunman on the stairway had turned out to be nothing but a shadow.

He said, "Oh, I see."

"Yes, she been hit by a car."

"I know that. I'm from the police." He took out his wallet and flipped it, and the Negress bent her head and studied his badge and I.D. card for a long moment, her lips moving as she read his name to herself. At last he flipped the wallet shut. "Detective Malone. Is anyone else here? Parents, husband? Is she married?"

"She a single girl. Her parents live in New York. Well, her father do. Her mother, she live here, but she married again, too."

"Where is her mother?"

"In Europe. With Mr. Tester. He her new husband."

"Has anybody tried to inform her father or mother about the accident?"

The gray head shook. "I sure as hell don't know."

"How did you find out about it?"

"Hospital call. I the maid, Carlotta."

"Somebody should let them know. Do you have their addresses?"

"Got Miz Tester's in Europe written down. Other one, Mr. Paris, I think he in the New York phone book."

"I'd like to have the addresses. Can I come inside while you look for them? I want to ask you some questions."

"You can come inside."

She had apparently been cleaning the living-room, but not very energetically. There was a magazine

splayed open on a sofa, and her cleaning cloth was lying beside it. There was a cigarette burning in an ashtray on a small table beside the sofa. She picked it up and took a drag out of it, and then sat down on the sofa. Malone sat on a straight chair.

"How she feeling?" Carlotta said. "I ask them at the hospital ~~on~~ the telephone if she hurt bad, but they say they don't know."

"It's pretty serious," Malone said. "That's why I want those addresses."

"I get them now, or you want to ask questions first?"

"I guess questions first." He took out his notebook, and Carlotta straightened up somewhat ~~on~~ the sofa, properly impressed.

She said, "My ~~name~~ Carlotta Masters. I been working here six years. When they bust up I stay with Miz Paris. Then she become Miz Tester."

Answers first, Malone thought, and questions second. He made a note of Carlotta's name. She went on to answer another ~~as~~ yet unasked question.

"The poor child only twenty-one. They got no sense to traipse off like that leaving her alone. You want a drink, officer?"

"Not while ~~on~~ duty." Except sometimes.

"Could I have one?"

He nodded his head, and she went over to a sideboard. She returned carrying a shot-glass with a small lady-like tot in it. She took her place on the sofa again.

Malone said, "Does she go out much?"

"All the damn time." She shook her head in indignation. "I used to try to tell her stay home once and now, but I stop. She say, 'Mind your own goddamn business, Carlotta.'"

"Wild kid?" Malone said.

"I guess not wild, you couldn't say. What she going

to do hanging around the house with me?"

"Is she better when her parents are here?"

"She fight with them all the time. She hate Mister Tester's guts. I guess she hate her mother, too, but a different way."

"What does she do? Does she work?"

"Actress. She down in New York every day, trying to get work. She been on television, mister."

"Is that her regular profession—television actress?"

"She been on three times. Once she didn't have nothing to say. But she keep trying."

Malone made a note. "She have many boy friends?"

It was a silly question, and Carlotta's look told him that she knew it. But he was stalling, trying to lead up to the only important question he had to ask. Important to the investigation at hand, that is. He already had the other important answers, the answers that told him about Lola. But the only one that counted, since he wasn't a sociologist, or expected to be one, or a reformer, or a sob sister, was: Where was she last night?

Carlotta said, "If the ugly ones have boy friends, the pretty ones *surely* do."

"Know any of them?"

"I seen them around here. They all looks alike to me."

"Do you know where she was yesterday?"

"New York. Wasn't back by twelve, when I went to sleep."

"I see." He paused, and watched Carlotta down her drink. "Any of her boy friends live on Lowndes Road?"

"Lowndes?" She scratched her gray head. "That way over on the other side of town?"

"That's right."

"Could be," Carlotta said.

Malone tightened his grip on his pencil. "You happen to know his name?"

"No sir. I don't rightly know does she have one on Lowndes. She got them all over, might's well have one on Lowndes."

"You never heard her mention any boy friend on Lowndes?"

"No sir. You mind if I have another drink?"

"Well, get me those addresses first, Carlotta."

For what it was worth, the parents would have to be notified. One by cable, the other by telephone. Whether they cared or not.

Carlotta stopped on her way out of the room. "You see her, officer, you tell her: Honey, Carlotta be up to the hospital to see you tonight. You tell her that?"

"I'll tell her."

Gilman responded to the signal on the car's radio. Sergeant Nimmi's voice said: "What are you doing up there, Gilly?"

"Waiting. Watching what goes in and out."

"What for?"

"Sergeant's orders."

"Hunter? Why'n't he let you help him check witnesses?"

"He said maybe the killer car might try to make a dash for it."

"Killer car," Nimmi said. "What are you hustling her along for? She ain't dead yet."

"I see too many movies," Gilman said.

"You got a car and two men tied up," Nimmi said. "How much longer you expect Hunter will be up there?"

"He's done Richards and Gillespie, so far, and a couple of minutes ago I saw him go up Beaumont's driveway."

"Ah, Beaumont," Nimmi said. "That's the one I want a report on. Here's what I want you to do, Gilly. Sneak up the back way and get your eye to a window,

preferably the bedroom, and write down everything—”

“Sarge, if he knows I did that—”

“I’m kidding,” Nimmi said. “But maybe I oughtn’t have told you.”

“Anyway, that’s over,” Gilman said. “Everybody knows it’s over.”

“Oh sure, it’s over, Gilly. Over. Speaking of over, from me to you, over and out.”

The radio ~~was~~ silent.

Burroughs did not look up when the door opened, to its familiar accompaniment of traffic sounds, nor did he look up when it shut again.

He said, as if he were speaking to the pages of neatly typed copy he held on his lap, rather than to the man behind him, "Reed, come in here and sit down."

There was a pause, and then Jerry Agnew's voice: "It's not Reed."

But I'm not surprised, Burroughs thought, not really surprised at all. Or if I am, I shouldn't be.

He said, "Well, then, suppose *you* come in and sit down, Jerry."

He waited until Jerry came around the slatted enclosure, pushed the gate in and sat down across the desk from him. And then he waited another while, with Jerry sitting opposite him attentively, grinning slightly, abashed but not ashamed.

At last he said, "It's no secret to you, is it, that four years ago, in what might be called the prime of my professional life, I quit my job as city editor of the second most important paper in New York City, to buy a one-third interest in this sheet?" He waited, while Jerry looked at him with his slight grin. "That might have all the earmarks of a rhetorical question, but I want an answer. Is it a secret to you?"

"No, it's no secret," Jerry said, and he continued to grin.

"Nor do I make any bones of the fact that I made more money formerly as an employee than I do now as a thirty-three-and-a-third per cent proprietor. Have you got the faintest notion of why I chucked up my job to come out here?"

Jerry's grin widened. "You wanted to work on a decent newspaper for a change."

"I worked on a very decent newspaper, and pride myself that I helped make it so. Unless you wish to interpolate another joke, I will tell you my reasons for quitting a fine and respected metropolitan newspaper and going to work on this bucolic rag."

"No sir," Jerry said. "I don't have a joke handy at the moment."

"I had tried adrenalin. I came out to the country to give it a rest. I didn't want any more huge responsibilities, unremitting toil, important work, competitiveness, and above all the acid aggravations of dealing each day with a staff of several hundred rugged but sensitive individuals. Very sensitive. Very individual. I came here, in short, for much-needed relief from human beings. Consider my consternation, therefore, to find that I have stumbled into a veritable hotbed of . . ."

He paused, as if lost for a word, and Jerry filled in: "—of human beings?"

"You flatter yourself. Now would you do me the courtesy of explaining why, when I instructed Reed to return to the office and you to remain at the hospital, why Reed has remained and you have returned?"

"He wouldn't leave. Since I didn't think it was your intention to have two of us at the hospital, and since Reed wouldn't leave, I decided that I would come back here."

"May I ask you why he wouldn't leave the hospital?"

"Sure," Jerry said. "Because he has a *fixe*."

"A feex? Are you speaking French at me?"

"It used to be French. Now it's psychiatric jargon."

Burroughs smiled, and looked at Jerry almost fondly. Then his eye caught the story in his lap, and he turned grim again.

He said, "Does he think the girl is going to wake up and tell exactly who hit her? And that he's the only one

who can write down what she tells?"

"I don't think that's what he had in mind."

"Because if she survives at all, she won't be doing any speaking for a while. And if she does survive, and does speak, it probably won't help much. She was struck down from behind."

"Reed knows that, too," Jerry said. "That isn't the reason."

"What is the reason?"

Jerry hesitated. "You'll think I'm crazy."

"If you are, then I am, too. The only one that's crazy around here—I mean authentically crazy—is Reed. He thinks he's in love with the girl."

Jerry nodded his head, wonderingly and with bewilderment. "And he never saw her before today." He looked at Burroughs with sudden suspicion. "How did you know—about his being in love? Did he tell you?"

"Did he tell *you*?"

"No, but I spent the last hour with him, listening to him, watching his actions—"

"And I've been reading the story he wrote."

"He was warned to stay away from the operating room," Jerry said, "and he did—until they started wheeling her out."

"How did he know when that was?"

"I'll be damned if I know. We were sitting in the waiting-room downstairs—Reed and Regan, the plainclothesman, and me—and suddenly he jumped up and ran out into the corridor. We went after him. He was standing in front of the elevator door, and sure enough, the door opened and they slid her out on a table."

Burroughs sighed. "If I could explain those hunches of his I'd retire a happy man."

"He walked beside the stretcher all the way to her room, with a look on his face . . . proprietary? When they finally got to the room he said to her nurse, 'When

she asks for me, I'll be right outside, on the bench. I won't go, no matter how long it takes.' And he won't. That's why I decided to leave him there and come back myself."

"No, he won't," Burroughs said. "Listen to this." He read aloud from the sheaf of copy paper on his lap:

"There is a need in all of us to be needed, and kneeling in the dust and blood—I wish he wouldn't overdo the business of the blood.—I experienced it perhaps for the first time in my life. There was one instant when—she might have been unconscious until then, and perhaps all of the time after then—her eyes opened, the lids dragging upward against the heavy gravity of pain—"

"Heavy gravity of pain," Jerry murmured. "The boy is real gone. No heavy gravity holding him down."

"... there was one instant when, etcetera, when ... she said, 'Hold me, darling, hold me, oh, hold me ...' and she meant me, although she did not know me then, nor does she know me yet. But in that fleeting instant I knew her, and her need, which was for me, not anyone, but specifically me, and although she could not hear me, I told her solemnly that I would hold her and be near her and help her. I will keep that promise."

"Like MacArthur at Bataan, 'I will return,'" Jerry said. "I tell you he's real gone."

"He's gone way beyond the pale of newspaper writing, or even reportage, whatever that is," Burroughs said. He held up a sheaf of copy paper. "Now what the hell am I going to do with this deathless document? No newspaper could do anything like this, for more reasons than one, including libel—and yet any newspaper would have to be crazy not to use it. It's got his living cells in it."

"Libel?" Jerry said.

"Oh, sure," Burroughs said in feigned surprise. "Didn't you know? At the end of the story he comes out

flat and accuses one of those five up on Lowndes of having hit Lola Paris. 'Her assailant,' is the way he phrases it."

After ten minutes he shut Foley up. He reached over suddenly and closed his hand around Foley's right hand, which held the wheel loosely at the center of the cross-spoke.

He said very quietly, "That's enough. If I hear one more word out of you, I'll drag you out of this car and beat you to a pulp. You understand?"

Foley said, "Let go my hand. You want to pile us up?"

But that was all Foley said. After that he was silent, the sneer still on his face, but the face itself pale and washed-out, the eyes focused strictly on the road.

When he had finally released Foley's hand he slumped down in the seat, and lighted a cigarette. With the exhalation of the first plump cloud of smoke, the thought came to him, flatly and undramatically: I killed that girl.

Looking at it clinically, cause-and-effect, that was the truth of the matter. What had ended with the running down of the girl had begun with his playing around. So if anybody had killed the girl—that is, if she had not killed herself by being drunk and weaving out into the middle of the road—if anybody was responsible, it was himself. He wasn't just splitting hairs. There was a cause-and-effect relationship as clear as crystal.

That was all. He just wanted to establish that little point, he wasn't going to make a big crisis of it. Like saying: Okay, that's it, from now on I quit playing around. He wouldn't say that because he didn't know whether he would stick to it when the pressure was off. He didn't believe in acquiring religion in a foxhole.

He broke the long silence only when Foley's car had passed the sign saying: TOWN OF DEEVIEW,

MAINTENANCE BEGINS HERE. DRIVE SLOW. Then he began directing him, curtly, as economically as he could: "Turn here . . . next right . . . left at the first crossroads. . . ."

Then he was silent again until they came up the hill towards Lowndes Road.

"Just go through," he said. "And I'll tell you what driveway to turn into."

Foley nodded, then his nodding head stiffened. "There's a cop car by the side of the road."

"Just go through."

There was nobody in the car. He turned his head deliberately to look at it as they went by. Its radio was blaring tonelessly, but it was empty.

He told Foley where to turn, and they swung up into the driveway. At the top, he got out of the car quickly, his eyes probing the house anxiously. It revealed nothing.

He said, "There's nobody in the police car. But if you're stopped, you know what to say?"

"You got off the train to make a phone call in my garage and found out there was an accident and your wife was upset. You asked me if I could give you a lift back home for ten bucks."

"Fine. Thanks. I'll hear from you soon?"

Foley's smile was vicious. "You'll hear from me."

He watched Foley swing the car around and head down the driveway, and then he hurried toward his door.

Gilman walked down the road a dozen yards below the opening into Lowndes Road, and struck off into the heavy untended brush. He had started to relieve himself when he heard a car go by him on the screened road, up into Lowndes. He cursed with soft bitterness, then reminded himself that his real concern was with anything that tried to *leave* Lowndes.

He was on his way back to the cruiser when the same car came down again. He yelled at it, but he was still too far from the road to be heard, and it went on by without stopping or slackening speed. He shrugged.

When he got back to the cruiser he turned the radio down to a reasonable level—he had tuned it way up in case there was a call for him while he was gone—lit a cigarette and slumped down comfortably in the front seat, with his head resting against the cushion. His eyes strayed momentarily to the driveway leading up to Julie Beaumont's house, and then to his watch. Better than a half hour. Maybe, like Nimmi said, it wasn't over, after all. He focused on the hidden house above the driveway, and his mind speculated excitingly but disturbingly.

Then his mind envisioned a grotesque ~~man~~ in which he was Hunter and, standing very straight and noble, he was refusing her offer of an embrace. He said to her—straight and noble—speaking aloud, "No ma'am, not while on duty."

The sound of the words broke up the scene, and he laughed aloud, then modulated the laugh to a grin. Or, he thought, making a game out of it now, No ma'am, I'm a happily married ~~man~~. He sobered suddenly. Hunter was a married man—*had been*—though maybe not happily, and maybe he had even used those words to Julie, but she was temperamental and wouldn't take no for an answer. . . . But this line of thought became vaguely uncomfortable, and he retreated to his original thought: No ma'am, not while on duty.

He grinned again and shook his head, at once in amusement and as a measure of self-reproof at his meandering.

Imaginative thinking could drive a guy nuts.

The maid, whose name was Betsy, stared at him in surprise and ~~now~~ trepidation. To settle her down and, perhaps, to settle himself, or to reaffirm his unfamiliar purpose on this familiar doorstep, he said more than was necessary.

"Is Miss Beaumont in? If she is, I'd like to speak to her about the accident this morning. To you too, Betsy."

"I don't know nothing about it."

"Miss Beaumont—"

"She's having her bath." She stared at him. "You want to come in and wait, I'll tell her you're here?"

Stepping over that threshold seemed ~~was~~ kind of symbolic act, though of what, Hunter could not tell, nor did he try to. As he followed the maid, he picked up memories like a magnet. Here, where he had seen her for the first time, distraught; the second time, his first social visit, promissory; there where they had said goodbye finally and bitterly, not even able to look at each other; here, where they had found each other in a first thunderous embrace. . . . First memories and last memories, and between those, crowding for his attention, the core of brief dangerous doomed passion—

The maid led him to the living-room, invited him sullenly to make himself comfortable, and went out to the hall and up the curving sweep of stairway to the upper floor. He looked about him uncertainly and then, with relief, chose a palely striped loveseat that was new to him and hence unencumbered with memories. There seemed to be a number of new things in the room, he thought as he looked around. Had she also changed the decor when she separated from her husband? The room

was less woody now, more tailored, more elegant and closely keyed, as if a decorator had put in a few licks. There were new, delicate, chinese-flavored tiles set into the fireplace and mantel; the Meltsner portrait of Julie as Mrs. Tanqueray had been removed, and in its place were a half-dozen small colored woodcut prints.

But in the pores of the room, above the odor of last night's fire, above the smell of freshly applied furniture polish, there was the ineluctable pervasive perfume of Julie. That had not changed.

The room was different than when he had first seen it, but not so different now as he was, or Julie. It occurred to him that he was seeing her in an official capacity, as he had the first time he had met her. That rounded it off very neatly, dotting all I's and crossing all T's, everything squared off and symmetrical, the first meeting and the last, the pious boundaries about a mass of wreckage.

As it is impossible to recapitulate the sensation of cold when you are hot, or of pain when you don't hurt, so it was impossible for Hunter to remember when Julie Beaumont had been a stranger. He could recall physical details—that she wore a green dress to set off the pale blonde hair; that she seemed older yet more beautiful than her pictures—but he could not undo the memories, and it seemed that the first time he saw her he was already her lover.

She had called in about a prowler, and he had beaten the woods around her house—the lovely autumn woods, fragrant and rustling under a full moon and a clear sky—for a full hour without seeing any signs of an interloper. When he returned to the house to tell her so she was apologetic, and no less nervous than when he had first come. So he had revised his initial opinion and concluded that it was not a performance, even though she had probably imagined the prowler.

She invited him to have a drink and, because the

night air had chilled him and filled him with vague autumnal longings, because he was finished with his tour of duty, because he had had another quarrel with Ellen and was in no hurry to return home. . . . There were a lot of becauses, and because of them he stayed for a drink.

Inside of fifteen minutes she had ceased to be a legendary figure, an unrealizable unattainable "star of stage and screen"—in the ruck of Deepview's celebrated celebrities, she was a *special* celebrity—but a nerve-ridden ~~woman~~ starved for sympathetic and disinterested understanding. Neither of them had ever known anyone like the other before—they were inhabitants of totally separate and distinct worlds—and possibly what excited them more than anything else, that first time, was the discovery that they were both human beings. It was a discovery of major importance, as it always is. He left at three, intoxicated with the good whiskey he had drunk, and the autumn air, and the warmth and essence of a beautiful woman.

The second time they met—he had told her to phone him if she felt an attack of nerves coming on, and she did—they became lovers. By the third meeting, they were in love.

The maid came into the room and said, "You wait a few minutes, Miss Beaumont be right down."

It lasted for two months, he reflected, wrapped in his thoughts, acknowledging the maid with a abstracted nod. It lasted two months and then, one night—in the snow, to make it worse, and wearing a pathetically flimsy coat, to make it worse; she couldn't have helped the snow, but she had a newer and heavier and better coat she might have worn—Ellen came ringing at the doorbell. The maid opened the door, and she walked right past her and found her way into the living-room and discovered them together—fully dressed, thank God—sitting together in the fireplace hearth, holding each

other's hand and speaking and looking at each other as only two people can in the intimacy of love.

With the first words that Ellen spoke—"Please give my husband back to me"—they both knew it was over, over and done. Though the formalities still had to be observed—the talk, the tears, the rending and tattering of emotions—it was all over with Ellen's first words, which she might have chosen with the genius of innocence or with a new-found guile born of desperation. He could see that painful scene now again, over there by the hearth, Ellen pitiful in her skimpy coat, younger and prettier but not so beautiful as Julie; and Julie, fittingly enough that night again wearing the green dress that he had first seen her in, Julie as pale as ashes with the foreknowledge of defeat in a fight in which she must surrender at the outset; and himself . . .

It was only the next day, after the victory was sewed up, after she knew, through innocence or guile or that unfailing woman's intuition which could be joked about but never denied, it was only the next day that Ellen's pride and anger asserted itself. And it would not subside—perhaps because it had so much to make up for in the prideless abnegation of those words, "Please give my husband back to me." He had tried, but she would not permit his trying. She kept the wound open and, at last, because it was the only thing she could do, because he and she both had maneuvered themselves into a position from which there was no retreat, so, at last, she packed her things and the children's things, and went to Minnesota to live with her mother.

He was on duty at the time, and learned about it from a note she left for him—a note which also told him what he might find in the refrigerator for his dinner.

He sat silent, immobile, in the new loveseat, wrapped in his memories as in sackcloth and ashes, until Julie

came into the room. He got to his feet.

She was wearing a face he didn't know, but that he guessed at once was her face of stage and screen. She held her hand out to him and he touched it briefly. They smiled at each other, a quick strained coming-and-going of the teeth, and she said, "It's nice seeing you, Joe," making it sound like "Do you think it's going to rain?"

He tried to respond in the same vein, but she was an actress and he wasn't. So he mumbled, averting his eyes from hers: "Nice seeing you too, Julie."

She said brightly, "Won't you sit down?" but this time she wasn't so successful, perhaps because of the stagy banality of the line.

He nodded, and walked to the loveseat, and after a moment she sat in a chair that faced him. It was one of the old chairs, he noted absently, and attached no significance to it. They looked at each other for a moment across the miles that separated them, and Julie smiled again. It was no longer the smile of stage and screen, no longer a protocol showing of the teeth, but a rueful sad smile in which there was a painfully bought accumulation of wisdom.

She said, "Well, all right, I can look at you without going to pieces. That's a good sign, isn't it?"

"Oh yes, a very good sign."

"Can you?"

He could, barely. But still, he could, and it was no time for misplaced gallantry. "Yes, I can," he said, and was pleased that his turmoil didn't show in his voice. "Time the healer."

"Yes," she said, and nodded her head solemnly, as though he had said something profoundly original. "Time the healer."

Then they were silent, looking at each other again, calmly but not dispassionately, appraisingly but not

longingly. If they were both careful, Hunter thought, the longing would not show. Time the healer. Time and Ellen.

As if echoing his final thought, she said politely, "Ellen. Your wife. And the children. Are they still—"

"They're still in Minnesota."

"I'm sorry, Joe."

He said briskly, "Yes." Then he shifted in his seat, and hunched his jacket into position on his shoulders, as if it might help readjust or reorient his viewpoint. "You know, I'm here on police business, Julie."

"Lola?"

"Yes. Do you know her?"

She nodded. "Will she be all right?"

"I don't know. She was badly hurt. How well did you know her, Julie?"

"You're very intense," she said, and smiled fleetingly. Then she became serious again. "I just knew her slightly."

Hunter said, "The girl might die. She could be dead already."

She shut her eyes for a moment, and shook her head.

He said, "Do you have any idea what she might have been doing up this way this morning, last night?"

Instead of answering she stood up and walked to the fireplace. He turned after a moment and looked at her. She was leaning with one hand on the mantel, graceful, poised . . . too graceful, he thought, too poised, the star of stage and screen. She stared downward for a moment, as if at the golden toe of her shoe, then lifted her head slowly.

"Is that an important question?"

"Of course it is."

"Yes."

He waited, and she gazed at him gravely, silently, and finally he realized that she had answered his earlier question, that she knew where Lola Paris had been last

night. He was suddenly jubilant, then, looking at Julie, worried. But he kept both reactions from showing.

He said expressionlessly, "Where was she, Julie?"

"At Phil Murad's house."

They were all at Phil Murad's—the complete muster roll of Lowndes Road householders: Mr. and Mrs. Feverel Richards, Mr. and Mrs. Chet Gillespie, Mr. and Mrs. Alan Wriston (the Wristons didn't speak to each other, but they remained together for the sake of the children, and made appearances together, possibly for the sake of the neighbors), and Miss Julie Beaumont.

It wasn't precisely a party, in the sense that it was impromptu rather than planned . . . at any rate Julie took it to be impromptu, although the arrival of Lola Paris gave evidence of, at least, some rudimentary scheming. Phil Murad had phoned around ten o'clock to say that he and Melba were bored, why didn't she drop over for a drink, the other neighbors were coming. . . . The five householders of Lowndes Road were reasonably friendly and informal, and such spur-of-the-moment invitations were not infrequent.

She had declined, on the grounds that she had several play-scripts to go through. She was reading scripts madly, hoping to find a vehicle for the coming season. But around twelve-thirty, depressed by her reading—why did they all have to try to be little Tennessee Williamses?—she decided to call Phil and see if the party was still on.

Not only was it on, but it had turned unexpectedly gay, and she was urged to put something on—not too much—"You know Phil," Julie said to Hunter. "The County Don Juan, never stops trying and implying."—and hurry right over. She took a leisurely bath, dressed without haste, and arrived at the Murads' somewhere around one-thirty.

Phil Murad wasn't there, and Melba Murad was surly. When she asked about Phil, Melba looked at her suspiciously, said, "He could have sent the chauffeur, couldn't he?" and went off in a drunken dudgeon. It turned out—the Richardses, the Gillespies, the Wristons, all took turns telling her, whispering gleefully behind their hands—that Phil had driven to the station to pick up Lola Paris, who was coming in from the city on the late train.

Phil arrived back at the house around two with Lola. The party got loud, liquory, hectic. And it kept going on, not because anybody—with the exception of Phil, possibly—was having a very good time, but out of everybody's inertia to call it a night.

"Or," Julie said thoughtfully, "it might have been because they all hated the idea of going home with each other."

If there had been gaiety earlier, it had evaporated completely by the time Julie arrived. The married couples—Richardses, Gillespies, Murads and Wristons—must have all honed up on individual quarrels before coming. Other than dirty looks, she hadn't seen a single instance of loving—or even civil—communication between a husband and wife all evening.

Lola Paris was the belle of the evening. If Phil Murad had expected to have her to himself, he was gravely disappointed. Lola flaunted her youth, her desperate need to be admired, wanted, and the wolves, nothing loath, responded with bared claws and dripping fangs.

"I knew about Al Wriston and Phil Murad—chasers from way far back. But Fev Richards and Chet Gillespie . . . right in there pitching, and pretty talented, too. Luckily for Lola's virtue, and any, the mob kept getting in each other's way. Though there was a time there when Fev Richards got her to the floor with a flying mare . . . and another time when Chet Gillespie wrestled her

dress down around her waist. . . . Both times wives walked in and spoiled the fun."

The wives were black in the face, murderous, when they weren't in tears. Yet they hung on. Pure masochism. Melba Murad was the first to call it quits. At three o'clock, without a word to anyone, Melba flung her glass into the fireplace—good Steuben glass, too—raked the entire room with a look of undisguised hatred, and went upstairs to bed.

"To sleep," Lola said. "*Perchance* to sleep."

An hour later, Mrs. Richards went home, saying good-bye to everyone but her husband and Lola.

"The Gillespies left together, if you could call it that, somewhere around four-thirty. Mona Gillespie looked as though she had spent the evening in the deep freeze, and Chet had inherited the black-face look from one of the women. They left together, but it wasn't exactly what the magazine had in mind."

She herself had had a big play from Wriston in those moments he could spare from the pursuit of Lola. She did a brief imitation for Hunter of Wriston whispering sweet nothings to her in precisely the majestic know-all voice he used in the air to announce the latest world cataclysm.

She left shortly after the Gillespies, fleeing Wriston, and leaving a piece of her dress in his hand. Wriston remained. Wriston and Phil Murad and Lola. And, upstairs, perhaps sleeping, perhaps grinding her teeth, Melba Murad.

She finished, and clasped her hands in her lap, and said, "That's life and laughter on Lowndes Road."

Hunter sat in silence for a moment, digesting her story. Then, abruptly, he said, "Do you dislike Lola Paris?"

"I'm not exactly crazy about her. Oh, I don't think she's a bad kid, not really, but that doesn't mean I have to like her. Uncertainty is her big trouble, insecurity,

lack of confidence, and it makes her aggressive. She needs someone to love her, as opposed to simply desiring her."

"Did you speak to her at all during the course of the evening?"

"If you could call it that. She came over at one point, and opened up a conversation with the engaging declaration that she was a better actress than me right now, even if she was fifteen years younger, and she could get where I was without any trouble anytime she decided to put out.

"Put out. That was the rather ugly phrase she used, too. I froze her, without a word, and she slunk off. I think I knew then—I do know now—that she probably despised herself for being so bitchy, but I hated her living guts for it. I froze, but I was murderous inside, I could have killed her without a compunction in the world. I worked to get where I am, Joe, and starved along the way, though I wouldn't have needed to do either one if I had been willing to put out, as she so charmingly phrased it. I could have killed her for what she said—killed her for being fifteen years younger than me, for that matter—and now . . . well, now I'm sorry, of course."

She was close to weeping. Hunter studied his hands for a long moment, to give her a chance to regain her composure. When he looked up, finally, there was no trace of tears. She sat quietly, attentively.

He said, "Was there any sort of prearranged agreement among the five of you that nobody would mention last night's party?"

"Yes," Julie said. "The Lowndes Road Mutual Protection Society."

"Was that this morning?" Hunter asked. Julie nodded. "Who asked you to do it?"

"Roz Richards. She phoned me and—"

"It was Mrs. Richards's idea?"

"I don't know. It was a kind of round robin thing. After she spoke to me, I was to call Mona Gillespie . . . I don't know who it started with, if that's what you mean."

"What did she say to you—Mrs. Richards, I mean."

"Oh, that it was bad enough having poor Lola struck down on our street, without letting word get around of that scandalous party. . . . The idea, I think, was that it might hurt real estate values, and since we were all members, you might say, of an exclusive little club—"

"The club members stuck together all right," Hunter said. "What made you tell me, Julie?"

She looked at him for a moment, and then she said harshly, "I only explain such things to my analyst."

He got to his feet. "I want to thank you for your assistance," he said, formally, awkwardly.

She nodded, and he turned and went out. She did not see him to the door, but remained seated near the fireplace, her back very straight, her eyes cast down to her hands lying clasped and motionless in her lap.

Almost directly opposite the shut door of Room 206 there was a long wooden bench, its seat gently eroded and burnished to a smooth finish by a generation of visitors. Except for a rattling of dishes from a cubicle to the left of where Regan and Wingate sat on the bench, the corridor was hushed.

Regan sat and watched Wingate with idle curiosity. Wingate sat at the tip edge of the bench, thin and brittle—seeming as a figure made of matchsticks, his small good-looking head alert as a bird's, his dark eyes fixed unwaveringly on the blank door. He sensed a movement or a sound long before Regan did, his eyes darting to its source intently, his pale face vibrant with anticipation.

When a short, stocky, blackhaired intern appeared at the far end of the corridor, Wingate got quickly to his feet (you could almost hear the clacking of bones, Regan thought with amusement) and was already at the door of the girl's room, waiting, when the intern reached it. Regan listened.

Wingate said, "Can I go in there if she's awake?"

"She won't be awake yet."

"But if she is?"

"She won't be. But you couldn't go in if she was. You the one that tried to bust into surgery?"

Wingate said, "Oh, I won't try to bust in there. I gave my word I wouldn't."

"Well, that was nice of you." The intern started to open the door.

"Can you leave the door open?" Wingate said. "So that I can look in from here? I won't try to enter. I gave my word."

The intern looked past him at Regan, his brows arched, his palms raised in a gesture of astonishment. "No, I have to shut the door."

He opened and shut the door quickly, while Wingate peered over his head into the room, his head craning on his long thin neck. Regan caught a glimpse of a nurse bent over the bed. The door shut. Wingate went back to the bench.

Regan looked at him curiously. He said, "Will you tell me what you want to hang around here for when you don't have to?"

Wingate studied him for a moment. "I have to."

"The paper making you do it?" Regan waited for an answer, but Wingate was absorbed in staring at the shut door, as if by concentration he might penetrate it. "You wouldn't find *me* here if I didn't have orders. You sit around a hospital long enough, and you start to feel like an invalid yourself. That smell."

"Carbolic spray," Wingate said, but his eyes were unwavering on the door.

"Even if she does wake up, and she can say something, I don't think she'll be able to tell us anything important."

"Not you."

"No?"

Wingate shook his head. "She hasn't got anything to say to you."

"But she got something to say to *you*? How do you figure that?"

But Wingate was near his feet, with the first almost imperceptible inward movement of the door. Regan heaved to his feet and followed him. Wingate spoke before the intern had finished turning around from shutting the door.

"Is she awake?"

Regan said, "How does she look, Doc?"

"She isn't awake, and she doesn't look any different

than ten minutes ago. I just stopped in to check on how the nurse hooked up the glucose and the saline solution. I didn't touch her." He turned to Wingate. "The glucose and saline are hooked up fine."

Regan said, "Any chance of getting in to talk to her when she wakes up?"

The intern shook his head. "Nobody can see her or talk to her until Doctor Denison says so. He'll be by to look at her in a couple of hours."

Regan groaned. The intern shrugged, and after another curious look at Wingate went off down the corridor. Regan and Wingate went back to the bench. They were silent for a moment, and then Regan groaned again.

He said, "A couple of hours. I last ate at six-thirty this morning. I'm starved."

Wingate said, "There's a lunchroom downstairs off the main lobby."

Regan brightened, then looked at Wingate suspiciously. "What if she wakes up while I'm gone?"

"I'll phone down to you."

"On the level?"

"Why not? I don't care if you go in there. She won't tell you anything, anyway. I told you that before."

"I'm starved," Regan said. "What about you? Don't you want to get something?"

"No. I give you my word. I'll phone you."

"You will?" Regan stood up. "Anyway, this is as good a time as any. The big cheese won't be around to look at her for a couple of hours. That what he said? I think I'll go now. You want me to bring you back something?"

Wingate shook his head. Regan went off down the corridor, his shoes squeaking, walking stiffly, as though his muscles too were squeaking. When he was out of sight, Wingate started to get to his feet. But a nurse came by, wheeling a food cart, and he sat down again.

When she had turned off into a ward, he got up again and went to the door of Room 206 and knocked on it softly.

After a moment the door opened, and a nurse, middle-aged and stern-faced, looked out at him.

Wingate said, "All I want to tell you is that if she wakes up and asks for me, I'll be sitting there." One of his long-fingered hands swept out, indicating the bench against the opposite wall. "Just put your head out of the door and call me, or even gesture, and I'll come. I'll be there whenever she wakes up. I won't go away."

He didn't wait for any answer, but nodded briskly, and turned and went back to the bench. The nurse shut the door.

Vergez leafed repetitiously through circulars and bulletins that he had already gone through a half-dozen times, although normally he would at most have scanned them casually before posting or filing. But now he was waiting for his telephone to ring, and he didn't want any interference with his waiting. So he plowed through the papers on his desk, as a sort of running in place.

He was not ordinarily a man who wasted time in worry. He had long ago devised a rude but effective philosophy that served his nature well: if you worry or don't worry, what's going to happen will happen. So don't worry. But he was not a fatalist. He believed that events could be altered, not by worrying, but by action. Thus his philosophy, refined, read: Don't worry, act.

But now he sat thumbing through leaflets, and worried, the nerve centers of action paralyzed. There was something going on that he was excluded from. If it was trouble, he should be let in on it; if they didn't let him in on it, they didn't trust him, and mistrust from his friends hurt him deeply. They were giving him the silent treatment, and there wasn't any way he could break to

loosen up a non-talker. You couldn't go around breaking Phil Murad's arm, although there wasn't any interdiction against breaking Pecky's neck, and that was something he would like to do.

Why should Phil exclude him if he was in trouble? Wasn't he the first man to come to in this kind of a jam? All it needed was one word from Phil, and he would have Hunter back in Headquarters in five minutes. Of course, that Phil knew the girl, and had been chasing her, didn't mean anything by itself. But you put it together with the runaround he had been getting from Pecky. . . .

He half-leaped across the desk when the telephone rang, and brought the instrument to his ear so savagely that he hit himself a smart crack on the cheekbone.

"Vergez. Yes?"

"Nimmi, Captain. We got a further report in from Worcester, Mass., on that driver they picked up."

Vergez sagged back in his chair. "Yes? What's it say?"

"They checked out his story, and he's clean. He hit a cow."

"Okay."

"They released him."

"Okay."

He replaced the phone in its cradle and stood up. There was only a brief moment of hesitation, and then he crossed the room and put on his cap and went out. He went down the stairs and stopped briefly at the desk.

"If you need me," he said to Nimmi, "I'll be up at Mr. Murad's place."

Gilman might have been drowsing—he wasn't sure himself—or just daydreaming, when he heard the car come roaring up the approach to Lowndes Road. He roused himself quickly, and even had one hand on the

door handle, but by then the car was already parallel with his, and there was nothing he could do but sit tight. He started to say something, to shout at it, and then it was by him, racing up the oval to the left, and he saw with astonishment that it was a police car.

He stared at it for a moment, wondering at its speed, and then started to trot up the road after it. It stopped suddenly, and started backing up toward him. Before it reached him he saw that the driver was Captain Vergez.

He started to salute, but Vergez shook his head impatiently and said, "Where's Hunter?"

"Sergeant Hunter? I think he's at the Wriston house, Captain."

"Has he gotten to Mr. Murad's yet?"

"No, sir. He started at the end, with Richards, and he's working his way—"

"Okay." Vergez started the car, and moved a foot or two before putting on the brakes. "Look. Drive your car over to the foot of Wriston's driveway, and when Hunter comes out tell him he can skip Mr. Murad. I'll cover it myself. Got that?"

"Yes, Captain. But he told me, Sergeant Hunter told me to post myself down there—"

"That's all right. You can do anything that comes and goes from near the Wristons' driveway, too. You got your instructions straight?"

"Park at the Wristons' driveway, and when Sergeant Hunter comes out tell him he don't have to cover Mr. Murad, you're covering him."

"And to return to Headquarters and wait for me there. Got it?"

"Right, Captain."

Vergez started the car. Gilman watched him swing up the road, then turn and disappear in the hidden opening to the Murad driveway. He walked back to the cruiser, his lips pursed in a soundless thoughtful whistling.

Hunter plodded up the long winding approach, lined with a small fortune in rhododendron and mountain laurel.

Alan Wriston himself was crouched beside a flagstone path leading to the front entrance of his house, digging pachysandra cuttings into the soft earth with the help of a trowel. It occurred to Hunter that Wriston was the first male he had seen since starting his rounds of the Lowndes Road houses. Mr. Richards was upstairs working—or as he had been told; Mr. Gillespie was breakfasting with a client; and Julie Beaumont had no husband—no resident husband, that is. She was separated but not divorced.

Wriston twisted on his haunches at Hunter's approach, and then made a leisurely ceremony of getting to his feet. He was wearing heavy gloves, blue jeans that were incongruously clean and pressed, and, Hunter's sharp eye noted, a pair of highly polished brown dress shoes.

"Good morning, Mr. Wriston. I'm Sergeant Hunter of the Deepview police. Can I take a minute of your time?"

"Good morning. Of course you can, Sergeant."

If it was not quite the hearty authoritative voice of the famous newscaster, Hunter thought, it was nevertheless not far removed from it. Wriston had modulated it, reined in on some of the sternness and volume; but nevertheless that simple greeting had been invested with a quality of importance and suspense that suggested that Mr. Wriston had just received the Word on the condition of the morning (exclusively!) through a secret pipeline to the North Pole.

"It concerns the hit-and-run accident, Mr. Wriston."

"Tragic." The word shimmered with the fine nuances of voice, and television's most celebrated pair of eyebrows (they were trimmed with a razor, Hunter noted)

climbed up the handsome dome of forehead. "Too tragic for words."

"I don't suppose you were a witness to any aspect of it, Mr. Wriston?"

The eyebrows descended, and knit in reproach. "Wouldn't I have come forward without being asked, if I had?"

"How did you happen to hear about it?"

"Jungle wireless. I was asleep at the time it happened, but when I got up it must have been all over town. I got calls from friends at the other end of Deepview."

"Did you know the victim?"

"Lola? Yes. Poor girl."

"You knew her professionally?"

The handsome head nodded judicially. "Naturally. She's done some small parts in plays at my network. I know her socially, too, if you call it that. We've been out once or twice—very casually."

What could that mean, Hunter wondered? When you took a girl out very casually, did it indicate that you had no designs on her? Or interest in her?

"Mrs. Wriston?" Hunter nodded his head toward the house. "Do you think she can fill in on the accident?"

"I doubt it. She hasn't been awake over a half hour."

"Did you tell her about the accident?"

"No," Wriston said. "We don't speak. We stay together for the sake of our children. But we find it more convenient not to speak."

He was married very casually too, Hunter thought. He said, "Have you seen Lola Paris recently, Mr. Wriston?"

Wriston's mouth puckered, pushed out, puckered in thought. "Recently? I wouldn't know that you could call it recently."

"Oh? I understood that you might have seen her at a party over at Mr. Murad's last night. . . ."

There was no more than a fleeting contraction of the brow to show that Wriston was surprised and disconcerted.

"I'm afraid your information is erroneous, Sergeant."

The voice had hardened, toughened, and so had the line of Wriston's jaw. But he was much too well-schooled to flub the delivery even of an outright lie. Except that I've got him dead to rights on this, Hunter thought, he could lie to me from here to Wednesday, and I'd never know he was doing it.

"Well, perhaps so," Hunter said. "Thanks for your help, Mr. Wriston."

Wriston's smile and nod were so brief as to be evanescent. He gave his well-pressed jeans a hitch, and bent to pick up his trowel.

The Wriston garage was off somewhere in back of the house. Hunter caught a glimpse of a low stable-like building that might be it, but he could see nothing of its contents.

He found Gilman waiting for him at the foot of the driveway.

One wing of Phil Murad's house, a rambling Georgian, was used as his office. It contained a suite of four rooms, and it had its own passage from a flagged walk that branched off the main columned entrance.

Vergez crossed the lawn, circling the huge sunken aquarium in which Murad kept a collection of beautifully colored tropical fish (the water was heated in the cold weather), and went in by the office entrance. Mary Lou Waters, who served as receptionist and stenographer, greeted him.

Vergez said, "Morning, Mary Lou," and went directly to Judge Peckham's office. Peckham was standing by the sunlit window, studying his face in a small rectangular mirror.

Vergez said, "Where is he, Pecky?"

Peckham glanced at him, then returned his gaze to the mirror. "I never would have believed it. Booze can turn your nose red, just like in all the old jokes."

Vergez walked behind the paper-laden desk, reached his hand over Peckham's shoulder and took the mirror from between his fingers. He tossed it on the desk.

"Listen to me, Pecky, I have to talk to Phil. It's serious."

Peckham went to his desk and sat down. He propped the mirror upright against his calendar pad and peered into it, his finger delicately touching his nose. Vergez stood behind him for a moment, furious, and then he circled the desk. He leaned over it with his knuckles, bending far forward, so that the peak of his cap almost touched Peckham's plume of white hair.

"Pecky—"

"I told him you called."

"Did you tell him it was important?"

"I told him you *said* it was important."

"Well?"

"He said he would call you back in the fullness of time."

"Why'd you tell me George Forstmann was here?"

"Did I?"

"You're damn right you did."

"Wasn't he?"

Vergez opened his mouth and then shut it again, and as he straightened up his eyes were puzzled. He said slowly, "Look, Pecky, why am I getting the business?"

"Maybe Phil doesn't *want* to talk to you."

Vergez' mouth drew down almost as if in pain. "Did he say that?"

"No. I'm just trying to help you out with a hypothesis."

Vergez began to breathe hard. He said, "If you wasn't an old rummy, I swear I would tear your head off."

Peckham's eyes flashed a dirty white beneath the black magisterial brows. He said, "You ought to know better than try to scare me with talk, you damned oaf."

"What are we fighting for?" Vergez spread his hands in appeal. "Cooperate with me, Pecky, it means as much to you as it does to me."

"Suppose you let me be the judge of what concerns me."

"Pecky . . ."

Peckham sighed. "He's asleep."

Vergez looked behind him for a chair. He pulled it close to the desk and sat down. Then, leaning on his elbows, his face no more than an inch from Peckham's, he said, "Last night Lola Paris was up here visiting. And this morning she was hit by a car and almost killed. Joe Hunter is right now doing a house-to-house canvass trying to find out—"

"Are you intimating that Phil hit her?"

Vergez sat back. For a long moment he regarded Peckham, and then he said, "Do you want me to ask him if he did, or do you want Hunter to ask?"

"Whoever asks, he won't take it kindly."

"I'll have to take that chance," Vergez said. "I'm his friend."

"As a friend of Phil's, you can entertain the idea that if he hit somebody with his car he would let her lie there and run away?"

Vergez nodded. "That's right, Pecky. He couldn't afford to do anything else."

"What do you want to do, arrest him?"

"Keep him from being arrested. You know how I feel about Phil? If I have to doctor evidence, or—"

"Hello, Melba." Peckham was smiling, his eyes on a line past Vergez' shoulder.

Vergez pushed his chair back and stood up, turning around. Melba Murad was standing just inside the doorway, plump and pretty in a shimmering emerald robe. She was not wearing makeup—it was the first time he had ever seen her without it—and her eyes were red and puffy.

From behind him, Peckham said, "Mike thinks Phil hit that girl, Melba."

"I didn't say that. What I said. . . . Damn it, Melba, I want to see Phil, I want to help him."

"He's inside having coffee," Melba said.

Before he followed Melba out of the room, Vergez turned to Peckham with a look of promissory threat. Peckham gave a quick flirt of his hand, dismissing, contemptuous.

Phil Murad was in the breakfast room, eating a half grapefruit. He was wearing slacks and a maroon polo shirt, and to Vergez his thin, intense, handsome face seemed drawn and washed-out.

Vergez put his palms out in front of him, half in sup-

plication, half in hurt anger. "I been trying to get you all morning. Every time I called, that damn rummy Judge—"

"Sit down, Mike," Murad said. "Have some coffee. Melba? Coffee?"

Melba said nothing. She turned abruptly and went out of the room.

Murad's dark circled eyes showed a faint flicker of annoyance, then became bland again. He lifted a silver coffee urn and poured from it into a cup that stood before Vergez.

Vergez said, "What's going on, Phil?"

"You take it black, don't you?"

"You're a great ~~man~~ in my book," Vergez said. His forehead had broken out in a sweat. "If you hit the governor of the state and left him laying there, I would know you had a good reason for it. And even if you didn't have a good reason for it, it would be okay with me. But you would have to tell me what happened, so that I would know how to help. I wouldn't want to know for any other reason. Did you hit that girl, Phil?"

The door chimes sounded.

Like Arthur Burroughs, Vincent Cowan had been a big-time newspaperman, but of a particularly rarefied sort. He had written an "inside" column from Washington that had been syndicated, year in and year out, in some five hundred papers around the country. But the pace had told him: the grinning devil of a thousand words daily, five times a week; the exhausting demands of a circle of friends, acquaintances, hirelings and "contacts" one cut above stool pigeons upon whom he relied for information; and finally the miasmal quality of the capital itself, that stewpot of dealings and double-dealings, of rising and falling fortunes, of a thousand tiny cogs that somehow made the mainspring of a great nation turn. The pace told him, exacting

its tribute of blinding headaches, falling hair, ulcerous stomach, inexplicable rages and inexplicable apathies, and at last, to save himself from dissolution, from death, from madness—he felt them all coming upon him—he tossed in the sponge and with his savings (what he called “blood money, *my blood*”), he bought out the Deepview *Guardian*.

His conscience, his professional pride, the personal drive that had not been absorbed even by the misery of the latter days of his column-writing, would not permit him to run a shoddy paper. He dangled a one-third ownership of the *Guardian* before Arthur Burroughs eyes, and Burroughs, a willing donkey following a tasty carrot, came running. Between the two of them, in a single year, they transformed the *Guardian* from a shabby rag into a model country newspaper that men of their conscience—which was high and considerable—could be proud of.

Now Cowan came into the office only an hour or two each week, spending the rest of his time at home, mending his shattered psyche slowly in the cultivation of roses. Burroughs, who was ten years younger, and whose ordeal had not been as stupefying, was *de facto* editor and publisher of the paper. The two men respected and trusted each other implicitly.

It was trust and respect, not chain-of-command or fear of consequences, that impelled Burroughs to call Cowan at his home at noon. There was a telephone in Cowan's fragrant hothouse, and over this he listened as Burroughs, without as much as a word of preamble, read Reed Wingate's story to him.

There was silence when Burroughs had finished, broken at last by Cowan saying, “I don't know whether he's the best newspaperman in the country or the worst.”

Burroughs said impatiently, “He's the most intransigent. But that isn't the point, Vincent.”

"I know it isn't the point. I'm vamping to keep from having to come to the point."

"Well, don't vamp all day. We have just ninety minutes before we go to press, and there's no tomorrow, only next week. As you can see, I'm still enough of a newspaperman not to want to be a week late with a good story."

Cowan said hopefully, "Can't it be edited?"

"You know I ~~will~~ edit the hell out of it. Do you want me to edit the hell out of it?"

"We're just a little country paper. We don't have to set the journalistic world on fire."

"Okay. I'll edit it. Thanks and good-bye."

"Wait a minute. Suppose you do this: call Bootsie and—"

"I thought of that myself, Vincent, and it's not any good. You'd know it's ~~no~~ good if you gave it any thought. All we'd get from Bootsie is a strictly legal opinion, and on the conservative side, at that. But it isn't a question of legality, or legal responsibility. It's a question of moral responsibility. Bootsie can't decide that for us. It's you and me, looking right down the barrel of the gun."

"His style is infecting you," Cowan said. "Look, read ~~me~~ that *finger points* stuff again, will you, Arthur?"

"It won't have ameliorated any since two minutes ago, you know. But I'll read it. All right. *Thus the rigid finger of logic points inexorably to one who sits in the abode of the mighty. One of the inhabitants of Lowndes Road drove his ~~car~~ into and over Lola Paris, crushing out all but a flickering spark of the life in her, and then fled. By surrogation, with the power vested in me of pity and anger, speaking for Lola Paris, I accuse a person, or persons by the ~~name~~ of Wriston, Gillespie, Richards, Murad or Beaumont, I accuse one of these of*

destroying the essence of Lola Paris."

"It's hysterical. And correspondingly lurid in style. There can't be any question of our printing *that*."

"Agreed. We can't print that, and couldn't even if every bit of the evidence he adduces is correct to the nth decimal—"

"Evidence! What are you talking about? There hasn't been anything in that whole—what do you call it?—*effusion*, that dealt with evidence."

"Call it circumstantial evidence. No, not even that. Extrapolation, you might call it. Crystal-gazing. It's there, but you didn't hear it, Vincent. I didn't read it to you."

"Why not?"

"Out of courtesy to your gray hairs and sensitive stomach. And because it goes too far. It would have you back on a milk diet again before the day is out."

"Don't be ~~more~~ considerate of others than others want you to be. I'm holding a graft ~~on~~ my lap. Give me five minutes to set it down and get back to the house, and I'll call you back. Okay?"

"I'll read it to you if you want me to, but you'll regret it."

"I'm sure I will. But I'm ~~an~~ old fire plug, Arthur."

Malone detested written reports, even an informal one, such as he should have made when he found that the Captain ~~was~~ not in. So he went downstairs again and asked Nimmi if he was interested in hearing about his morning's work.

"As long as I'm catching," Nimmi said, nudging the telephone with his elbow, "I might as well catch you, too."

Referring to his notebook, Malone first reported his interview with Carlotta. "I phoned the hospital. They said they would put in a call to her father in New York

and cable her mother in Europe."

Nimmi said, "It'll spoil the whole weekend for the both of them."

"Leaving her alone," Malone said. "Nobody but a dinge maid who spends her time sucking on a bottle." He shook his head. "I checked out on all the possibles for deliveries and such. Laundry, food stores, parcel delivery, mail, and so forth, too early for any of them. Nobody even has a truck out that early in the morning. Local taxis, ditto. Newspaper delivery usually gets up to Lowndes about seven, but he didn't get there until after nine today—breakdown on the train bringing the city papers up. I checked it out with the railroad, and it's kosher. Then there was the milkman, but we know he was clean. I miss up on anything?"

Nimmi shook his head admiringly. "Scotland Yard is proud of you, Mister Malone."

"It sure points the finger to someone up on Lowndes, don't it?"

"Make a report for the Captain," Nimmi said. "But just put in the facts. No deductions."

The Murads' couple, unlike most of the help in Deepview, which came from the town itself or of the contiguous communities, had been imported from the neighbouring state. They were Swedes, very blond and austere. The man, who had opened the door to Hunter's ring, was wearing a sweat shirt. Except for luncheon parties and on weekends he didn't put on his butling clothes until he was ready to serve the first before-dinner cocktail.

Hunter said, "Tell Mr. Murad that Sergeant Hunter would like to talk to him, please."

He was admitted to the foyer and asked to take a seat. The butler went out. He remained standing in the white and gold foyer, not thinking now, any more than he had when he received Gilman's relay of the Captain's orders. He had grunted, and gone on past Gilman, though Gilman had not spoken to him nor even existed. He stood stolidly, the eyes and mind blank, beside a Provencal chest that he could not know was Melba Murad's favourite piece. But if he did not think, nevertheless he had a fullness of the rage inside of him, controlled, congealed, deadly.

Vergez came into the foyer breathless, as if he had been running (and he might have been, Hunter thought), pale to the eyes, his own rage close to the surface, twisted on his lips in the white glare of his bared teeth.

He put out his hand, flung it away from himself in a violent gesture. "Get out of here, Hunter!"

Hunter said in a tone of surprise, "I'm here to see Mr. Murad, Captain," and marvelled at his resourcefulness in summoning a voice that was appropriate, a

voice so unrelated to the anger coiled inside of him.

It stopped Vergez in his tracks, or at least caused him to lose impetus. The outstretched hand wavered and fell to his side. His lip was still curled, but now there was a brief flicker of uncertainty in his eyes.

"Did you see Gilman?"

"Yes, I saw Gilman."

"Did he give you my orders?"

"I thought there must be some mistake, Captain, so I came up here anyway."

"There wasn't no mistake. I'm telling you that myself. No mistake." He gestured toward the door again, but this time it was with a belittling whisk of his hand. "You can take off, Hunter."

"I was surprised to see you here, Captain."

"That right?" Vergez put his face very close to Hunter's. "Why?"

"Because I didn't think you'd have the nerve, or the bad judgement, to pull me off Mr. Murad."

For the first time since he had entered the room, Vergez seemed to relax. The tension went out of him, but he remained wary, as if, Hunter thought, he now saw the issue joined and was confident—but not overconfident—of handling the situation.

There was something almost playful in his tone: "Talking to Mr. Murad a job for two cops, Sergeant?"

"Why no, Captain."

"Sure. One cop's enough to handle it, that's why I told you to go back to Headquarters."

Hunter was silent, seeing where Vergez was heading, not caring to escort him there, his mind searching furiously for a way to avert his imminent defeat.

"Sure," Vergez said. "Mr. Murad was good enough to call me at Headquarters and tell me he had some information, and would I mind coming out to his house. So I come out, and like I said, it don't need but one cop,

so I told Gilman you and him could go back."

"I see, Captain."

"That's okay," Vergez said. "You just didn't understand. But now you understand—right, Sergeant?"

"Oh, I understand all right."

"So you go back to Headquarters directly, like a good cop, and I'll finish my interview with Mr. Murad."

"Yessir," Hunter said. "Give my respects to Mr. Murad."

"I'll do that little thing."

They faced each other as adversaries, exchanging in a meeting of eyes mutual hatred and defiance, a silent declaration or restatement of position. Then, at the identical moment, as if both were satisfied on the score of understanding, Vergez turned and went back through the foyer the way he had come, and Hunter opened the white and gold paneled door and let himself out.

He stood for a second beneath the circular porte cochere, blinking at the sunlight. He was indecisive for only a fractional instant. Then, instead of coming down to the left, around the giant sunken fishbowl, he headed off to his right, beyond the farthest wing of the house, following an off-shoot of the graveled driveway that wound around to the back.

The garage was a long low two-storey building, connected to the rear of the house by a trellised breezeway. The upper floor was an apartment or apartments; the garage itself, from the number of its doors, was large enough to hold five cars. One of the doors was open, and in its shadowed interior, from where Hunter stood, there was a figure bent beside the front wheel of a car. The figure straightened at the sound of his feet on the gravel, and Hunter recognized Tommy Garrigue. He was wearing black cord trousers tucked into shiny black puttees, and a white shirt open at the neck, with the sleeves rolled up above the elbows.

Hunter paused on the concrete apron. "Hello, Tommy."

"Hey, bull."

Tommy came out of the garage and stopped on the apron. He had a dark discontented face saved from being ugly by deep-set eyes under straight black brows. The slope of the apron and his own height of better-than-six-feet put him several inches above Hunter.

Hunter said again, "Hello, Tommy."

He must be, Hunter reckoned, all of twenty-two now, and the toughness that had begun showing itself in him at fifteen was firmer, less showy than it had been. Two sessions at the reformatory, some luck with women, whatever maturity had come with age—these must have driven the toughness inside of him, Hunter thought, impacted it.

Tommy said, "What can I do for you, bull?"

The bull's deliberate, Hunter knew, a touch of the old pointless showy toughness. It was accompanied by a scornful lifting of the brows, although the face remained otherwise expressionless.

"I heard you were working out fine, driving for Mr. Murad."

"You heard that, bull? Well I got to hand it to you. You keep your ears open and close to the ground."

It came on the tip of Hunter's tongue to warn him, to advise him that his temper was held down only by a thin skin of control, that he had been tried sorely this day and must not be provoked any further . . . but the moment flashed by in which the impulse might have been articulated.

Sighting away deliberately from Tommy's contemptuous face, he said, "Enjoy driving those big jobs of Mr. Murad's?"

He knew before he finished his question that his tone was wrong, too propitiatory; and he knew that Tommy

would recognize it and drew strength from it.

"You got nothing to do but bother working men, Joe?"

"Sergeant Hunter."

Tommy said nothing. He looked down scornfully from his height advantage, his hands on his hips.

It's no good, Hunter thought. He's doing his best to provoke me, and I'm trying my best not to be provoked, and I'm lousing it up. I ought to warn him. . . .

He said, and knew as he spoke that he was failing to make his voice casual, "Mind if I take a look, Tommy? I'm a car bug myself and—"

He took a step forward, and Tommy moved, too, placing himself squarely in his path. They were close enough to feel each other's heat. Hunter thought, I'd better go now, I can't hold any longer—and he had actually started to back down the sloping apron, to turn away, when Tommy spoke.

He said, "Beat it, you stinking snooper, before I—"

Hunter hit him in the mouth, a short right-handed blow that was not planned or deliberate in any way, but got its impulse from the exploding core of anger and frustration inside him. Tommy staggered back and to one side, bringing up against the edge of the open door. The support straightened his sagging knees and gave him back his balance, but for a moment he seemed hung there, up against the wooden frame, and Hunter thought, Now he's back to fifteen again, a tough kid with all the formless fear and despair showing through the transparent veneer of toughness. It's over for him, he's beaten. He felt regret and pity, and he hoped that Tommy wouldn't try to come back at him, because he was already beaten. But he wasn't fifteen any longer, he was twenty-two, and he would have to try.

He came away from the garage in a rush, his arms flailing powerfully, windmilling like a kid, and like a

kid sobbing in rage and fear. Hunter backed away, avoiding the wild blows, and finally he stepped inside and threw his right hand again, hard but not as hard as he might have done. It caught Tommy under the heart with a thud and stopped him in his tracks. He sank to his knees, and the fight was over, as Hunter knew it would be.

He looked down at Tommy, kneeling in the gravel, his right hand clutching himself where he had been hit, his long black hair loosened and streakily awry. It was an attitude almost as of prayer, but it was not that. He must be thinking, Hunter thought, that he's back again at fifteen, six years of acquired toughness wasted, stripped of maturity. . . . And Hunter thought: I haven't done him any good, I haven't done anybody any good. I should have warned him or gone away quickly—

He had taken his first step into the garage when he heard the voice and the drumming feet behind him. Before he even turned, wearily, he knew that he had been thwarted again. Outsmarted, too. Vergez had guessed, a trifle belatedly, but still in ample time, that he would try to get a look at Phil Murad's stable of automobiles.

When Vergez told him—shouted at him—that he was under suspension as of that moment, he merely nodded. Without a word he went by Vergez' bulk, skirted it, in much the same manner skirted the fish pool, and went on down the driveway.

Burroughs said: "He eliminates the possibility of transients, locals, tradespeople, taxicabs, or anything or anyone but the actual residents being on Lowndes Road at that hour."

"Read me the whole thing," Vincent Cowan said.

"There's no time. His reasons are sound enough, but they're just reasons, and they don't take into account

the things that happen in this life that are plain unreasonable. Then he deals with the possibility that she might have been parked—I suppose the word parked carries its own clear connotations for the younger set—and rules it out empirically—”

“Read it,” Cowan said.

“All right. Blah, blah, blah, and then he says: . . . *but she could not have been parked on Lowndes for the simple reason that nobody would park on Lowndes. There are a half dozen established places in this town for parking—the beach, the pavilion, Rogers Memorial Park—but even if someone decided to be unconventional he would not choose Lowndes, with its floodlit center island.*

“Thus, ruling out an outlandish fortuity, the finger points ineluctably—there’s that finger again—to one of the landed gentry of Lowndes Road.”

“His own mother is landed gentry, in a way that none of those five on Lowndes Road will ever be,” Cowan said. “So why—”

“Don’t interrupt,” Burroughs said. “Here’s where he gets down to cases. This reporter reconstructs—remembering always that this is pure hypothesis—the running down of Lola Paris as follows: Late last night Lola visited at one of the five houses on Lowndes. Four of these five houses are occupied by married couples, making a total of nine adult occupants. Add the possibility of an escort for Lola, and we have ten people, one of whom ran her down.

“These nine people—barring the tenth, who is not known to me—There’s a touch of unexpected modesty—are consequential, rather celebrated people of the sort that have made Deepview so unique and desirable a place to live in. If one of them struck down Lola he would be expected to help her rather than run off. That he did not do so points to (a) drunkenness, (b)

fear of exposure of an illicit relationship, (c) deliberate as opposed to accidental striking down of Lola Paris."

Cowan broke in. "It doesn't point to anything of the sort, Arthur."

"Of course it doesn't. But it's fairly well reasoned with respect to the culprit being one of the nine on Lowndes."

"It's shooting at the moon. We certainly can't print it."

"There's worse to come. He runs down the private lives of those five families on Lowndes, all of which might be true, probably *is* true, but would nevertheless constitute scurrility if we were to print it. Don't ask me how he knows these things. He doesn't talk about it, wouldn't talk about it, because there isn't an ounce of malice or rudeness or even gossipy pettiness in the boy. But he knows it & he knows everything else in this town: he breathes it in with the air through the most perceptive and interested senses I've ever seen."

"My God," Cowan said, "he's a plain lunatic!"

"Everyone keeps coming back to that," Burroughs said, "so I suppose it must be true. Do you want me to read you the rest of it?"

"No. I don't know who's sleeping with whom around this town, and I don't want to."

"Oh, it isn't a specific all that, though I'm sure it could have been had he wanted it to be. However—"

"Arthur." Cowan's tone was abrupt, crisp. "I'm going back to the greenhouse. I leave it to your judgment to cut that story to conform with accepted decent journalistic practices."

"I had intended to do just that, and I will. But the general theory, that the girl was run down by someone who lives on Lowndes—"

"What about the police? Don't they have a theory of their own?"

"I was coming to that," Burroughs said. "It was for-

mulated later than Reed's and doubtless more professionally, but it's pretty much the same. From what Jerry Agnew tells me—I've got him down at Headquarters—the theorist is Joe Hunter, who hit Reed this morning, by the way—"

"Hit him? What on earth for?"

"Never mind that, now. What matters is that we have some eighty minutes to decide whether to print this story, in substance, with Reed's theory included—"

"But if it's the police theory, why not simply attribute it to the police? In that way we're clear if there's any comeback."

Burroughs sighed. "Suppose you were a kid reporter. Can you think that far back? Suppose you were a reporter, and on the strength of your own initiative, or in Reed's ~~raw~~ insight or clairvoyance or whatever the hell you'd call it . . . suppose you had doped out the solution to a crime, and then your editor lopped it off because he wanted to play safe—"

"I guess I'd better come down to the office, Arthur, hadn't I?"

"Yes, Vincent, you had."

When Burroughs hung up, his phone rang again, immediately. It was Sam Aubrey, calling from downstairs.

"Look, Arthur, I got a whole paper made up, except for page one. You got it in your mind to run it blank?"

"We're going to run Reed's story, but with some drastic editing. Mr. Cowan is coming down to the office to discuss it. But meanwhile I'll send what I can down to you in takes. Save 11 columns seven and eight clear to the bottom, and expect a large carry-over for page two. Drop the rest of the page in the expectation of a seventy-two point eight-column streamer."

He pressed down on the telephone bar, and asked for Jerry Agnew at police headquarters. While he waited, he quickly blocked out a headline: LOCAL GIRL HIT-AND-RUN VICTIM. He scratched it out at once. Too

mild. Again he wrote: GUARDIAN REPORTER SOLVES HIT-AND-RUN. Too romantic, too much wishful thinking.

He heard Jerry Agnew's voice in his ear. He threw down and his pencil and said, "Jerry, Arthur Burroughs. Any new developments on—"

Jerry's voice was excited, buoyant. "Yes. Sergeant Hunter has just been suspended by Captain Vergez. I don't know why. He just walked in here and . . . Can I call you back?"

"Yes. But make it as fast as you can, will you, Jerry?"

The receiver banged down at the other end, and it seemed to Burroughs, wincing from the crash in his ear, that he could almost see Jerry leaping away from the phone, vaulting a desk or two, bearing down on Hunter with the light of battle flashing in his eyes. . . .

It was good to be young, he thought. And, he thought further, not too bad to be middle-aged, either, if you had youth around you to help you forget your years.

Regan was passing through the main lobby of the hospital on his way from the lunchroom, carrying a sandwich and a container of coffee. As he passed by the main desk, the receptionist turned away from her switchboard, and saw something on her desk that caught her attention. She picked it up, at the same time smiling at Regan, and it started to leak money.

Regan came up short, so short that some of the coffee sloshed out over his wrist, and he and the receptionist stared at each other in astonishment. The money continued to shower down like a crisp green rain, and at last it stopped, leaving the receptionist holding an empty white envelope. She looked at Regan and let out a shriek, halfway between tears and laughter.

Regan was over, still holding the sandwich and container of coffee. He bent down to pick up some of the

bills that had fallen on the side of the desk toward the lobby, and observed that they were new and in the denomination of one hundred dollars.

When he straightened up, he saw the receptionist looking at the envelope in her hand. On it was printed, in block letters, with a heavy marking pencil: LOLA PARIS.

Jerry Agnew watched with a feeling of mild surprise as Hunter emptied out his desk in the hushed squad room. He would have been led to expect a degree of austerity in Hunter's personal possessions, but the melange that came out of the drawers of the sturdy oak desk was as individual and irrational as the ~~junk~~ in his ~~desk~~ desk at the *Guardian* office: towels that had been used as shoe rags, decayed lozenges, old letters, tattered and even age-yellowed official memoranda, the ends of a dozen pencils, remnants of erasers, ball-point pens that had expired, a box of cleansing tissues obviously left over from last winter's cold, all sizes of paper clips and clasps, an old pocket knife with the mother-of-pearl cracked away, a dried-out tobacco pouch, a black-and-yellow polka-dotted tie, two pipes broken at the shank and ineffectually mended with adhesive tape. . . .

The concert of stillness in the squad room was louder than a scream. Saucier, Malone and Sergeant Magruder were bent over various papers at their desks, frowning with the intensity of dedicated students. Their concentration was implacable, undeviating, and painful. They had been unbusy and relaxed when Hunter first came in, then curious. They hadn't approached Hunter, even after he had started to empty his desk, but had turned their eyes, like a battery of small guns, on Gilman. All Gilman had said, in an undertone that would not reach Hunter's ears, was, "Captain's suspended him," and that had satisfied their curiosity, or seemed to. It was at that point that the squad room had become a beehive of industry.

But if Hunter's colleagues could afford to be tactful and wait patiently for details, Jerry could not. He had

known at once, from the first instant of Hunter's arrival, that there was something important in the wind. He prided himself on his instincts as a reporter, although in this instance a blind man might have sensed the emanations that came from Hunter's stiff-legged walk and rigidly disciplined face. The stolidity of his features might be a firescreen, Jerry thought, but they concealed only the flames, not the heat. He had darted in quickly to overhear Gilman's whisper, and then moved across the room to within a yard of Hunter's desk.

He observed that Hunter's face had softened somewhat, no longer a mask. It had turned reflective, as if in conjuration of events connected with each of the objects he was dredging up to the surface of the desk.

Jerry cleared his throat and said, "Sergeant, you want to make a statement?"

"No, I don't want to make a statement."

His tone was harsh: not so much in belligerence as in warning, as if to declare his resentment of any attempt, no matter how well-intentioned, to breach the wall of his own misfortune. Jerry made this analysis in an instant, and in the same instant discarded it as irrelevant to him.

He said, "Why not, Sergeant?"

Hunter said coldly, "Because nothing I might have to say is any of your business."

He had heard that defense, or its equivalent, so many times that it made him smile now. He said, "Of course it isn't. But it's the business of the town and its people, who pay your salary."

"You mean it's your job, don't you?"

Jerry nodded. "That, too. I understand you were relieved of your duties by Captain Vergez?"

Hunter held up between his fingers a curiously, in fact illogically, shaped piece of wood that had come

from one of his desk drawers. He stared at it in puzzlement.

“For what reason were you suspended, Sergeant?”

Hunter shrugged at the piece of wood and tossed it into his metal wastebasket.

“Did Captain Vergez inform you of the reason for your suspension, Sergeant?”

“Failure to obey an order,” Hunter said. His tone was flat, unemotional.

Jerry slipped a pad out of his pocket, and with a stub of pencil made a hieroglyph upon it. “What was the order you failed to obey?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“I can understand that. But the taxpayers of Deepview are entitled to know.”

Hunter said, “Screw the taxpayers.”

Jerry said, sighing, “This can’t be a secret long, or at all. No longer than it takes me to get Captain Vergez’ account of the incident. Are you content to have me print Captain Vergez’ account?”

“Wouldn’t you be obliged to do that, anyway?”

“Certainly. But we’d want to print your version, as well.”

“Nothing to say,” Hunter said.

“Did it have anything to do with your investigation of the Lola Paris accident?”

Hunter drew his chair up to the desk, sat down, and bent over the lowest drawer in his desk. Jerry moved closer, to bring Hunter’s head back into his view. Then, deliberately, because he considered that it might be the surest way to shake Hunter into opening up, he said:

“Did it have any connection with Miss Beaumont?”

He had not bothered to lower his voice. If anything, self-consciousness had caused it to rise somewhat, and he heard the immediate reaction behind him, as all four of the policemen in the room stirred and drew in their breath at the same time. Five—including Hunter. He

saw Hunter start to lift his head, saw his whole bulk in motion, as if about to spring, and then there was a momentary stiffening, as though Hunter had managed to bring himself under control by an effort of will. So that when Hunter turned, finally, it was not on his original impulse, but with deliberation and restraint. He was quite pale, drained.

He said, "Listen to me, Sonny. I've hit two people this morning so far, and I don't want to make it three. So suppose you get out of here."

Jerry's legs were trembling, and one of his knees actually knocked against a corner of the desk. But he stood his ground.

He said, "Two, Sergeant? I know about Reed Wingate, but who was the second?"

Hunter shook his head, as if in grudging admiration of Jerry's persistence or courage or foolhardiness. He said, "Go away, please."

"I can't go away," Jerry said, "because this is my duty. I'm not simply trying to annoy you. I'm not here as a person, but as an instrument."

"Go away, instrument."

"Did you hit the Captain?"

"No."

"Before your suspension you were making a house-to-house check of all the people on Lowndes Road. Did you uncover anything that might help to solve the case?"

Hunter shut his lips tightly, and started to sort through a batch of papers on his desk.

Jerry said, "There are five families on Lowndes. Did you investigate all five?"

Hunter raised his head for a quick, searching, and—Jerry thought—surprised look, and then turned away quickly. Jerry's mind took a sudden leap into conjecture, savored it, and found it satisfactory.

He said, "All right, Sergeant, thank you." There was

a gleam in his eye as he walked across the room and perched himself on the edge of Gilman's desk. "Detective Gilman."

Gilman turned his face up nervously. "Look, buddy, I got nothing to say."

Jerry rotated his pencil nervously over his paid. "G-I-L-M-A-N—right? What's the first name again?"

"Archer. But I tell you—"

"Sure you have something to say," Jerry said. "Just tell me what happened between the Captain and the Sergeant. The part of it you know or heard or saw."

He watched Gilman's gaze go past him in appeal to Hunter. Hunter avoided looking at him, keeping his attention focused studiously on stuffing the impedimenta of his desk into several manila envelopes. Gilman turned his appeal to his colleagues. They had suddenly all become occupied in work again.

Jerry said, "Because the Sergeant won't talk doesn't mean he will object if you do. Did you hear the Captain fire Sergeant Hunter?"

"He didn't fire him," Gilman said, "he suspended him."

"Were you there when it happened?"

"I wasn't exactly there, but—"

Hunter, his arms full of bulky manila envelopes, walked over to Magruder's desk. "I'll be at home if I'm wanted, Charlie."

Magruder said, "Okay, Joe," and nodded. The others nodded, too, and then turned back to their desks, their faces blank and unrevealing. They didn't watch Hunter walk out. Jerry did. When Hunter's footsteps became audible on the stairs, Jerry turned back to Gilman.

"Where did this happen?"

Gilman said, "Dammit, I don't want to say anything."

"You don't have to," Jerry said. "All I asked is

where it happened. You can tell me that, can't you?"

"Murad's house."

"Was this before or after Hunter spoke to Murad?"

"Before or after?" Gilman knit his brow in puzzlement. "Well, you see, the Captain told me to tell the Sergeant he would cover Murad himself, but the Sergeant—"

Gilman broke off. There was no pretense at being busy now. They were all looking at him—Magruder, Saucier, Malone—and above him Jerry, staring down from his perch on the desk like a bird of prey.

"The Captain tried to head Hunter off from interviewing Murad?" Jerry was flushed, eager.

"Don't put words in my mouth," Gilman said. He looked around at the others in the squad room. They gave him no sign, one way or the other. He hesitated, then said angrily, as if in retaliation for the lack of cooperation, "The Captain told me to tell him to skip Murad and go back to the office. He went to Murad instead. That's all I know. When he came down the driveway where I was waiting, he told me the Captain suspended him. That's all I know."

"Thanks," Jerry said. He put his pad in his pocket and slid off the desk. On his way to the door he stopped by Saucier's desk. "Joe Hunter still live over on Maple?"

Saucier said, "You ought to know we don't give out private addresses of members of the force."

"I didn't ask you to give it out, just confirm it."

"Oh," Saucier said. "That's different. He still lives on Maple."

The neatness of the small living-room was such that, Jerry decided, Hunter must be an unusual and scrupulous housekeeper for a man. But then he studied Hunter, still wearing his topcoat and hat, sitting tentatively and somehow gingerly on the very edge of a

sofa, and he thought: No, it's because, since his wife left, he has just lived on the surface of things here, hardly disturbing them enough to show. He counted, quickly, three pictures in the room of his wife and children, and thought: He keeps reminders visible as thorns in his flesh.

He had arrived, having driven like a demon, at the instant when Hunter had been opening his door, and when he had asked to come in Hunter had looked at him in bewilderment, as though not understanding how he could be in two places, at Headquarters and here, but he had allowed him to enter. It was as if, at home, his natural manners took over and refused to sanction rudeness.

Jerry said, "I'm asking you to do something more than just talk to me for publication."

"It's my own problem," Hunter said, "and I have to work it out for myself. It's inter-departmental."

Jerry shook his head. "It's far more than that. And I know we can help you."

"I don't think you can."

"You know where my paper stands, on subjects like Phil Murad and the rule, the Captain Vergez—"

"Vergez isn't a bad cop."

"He's beholden to Phil Murad. Can a beholden cop be a good one?"

Hunter shrugged his shoulders.

"You know where our paper stands on his appointment as Captain. We were for selection by merit, not by Murad. We hammered away at that theme for weeks before the test was given, and we're still hammering at it."

"Where did it get you?" Hunter smiled sourly.

"It didn't make you Captain. But it piled up a little more against Murad's account, and one of these days, when the account is full—"

"I don't care about reforming the town. It's not a bad town, even with Murad running it."

"It's a good town. It could be even better."

Hunter made an impatient gesture. "I disobeyed the orders of a superior officer, and got suspended. I have a defense of sorts, and I'll use it at the departmental trial. It's strictly an internal matter."

"The hell it is," Jerry said, and surprised both himself and Hunter with the bluntness of his tone. "It's obstruction of justice. It's dirty work at the crossroads. What kind of a cop are you? What kind of a man? Have you forgotten about that girl in the hospital? Twenty-one years old and torn apart. Have you got any heart and feelings? If Murad hit that girl—"

He stopped, betrayed by his own voice, which choked him silent with its bitterness. He sat in his chair and glared at Hunter, his fists clenched tightly in front of him, saying wordlessly, If he gives me any lip, I swear I'll go for him, if I get annihilated in the process, which I probably will. . . .

"Easy," Hunter said, and tilted his head to look at Jerry as though it were the first time he had ever seen him. "Easy. We don't have any evidence that Murad hit her."

Jerry cleared his throat and found that his voice was working again. He said, "We don't have any evidence that he didn't."

"The law works on evidence, not lack of evidence."

"You weren't allowed to collect evidence. Vergez obstructed you."

Hunter took off his hat and set it down carefully on the sofa beside him. "Look—I care about the girl. I care about justice. A hit-and-run driver is a filthy rat. If Murad hit her—if anybody hit her—I want to bring him in. The point is, how can that be accomplished by my going down to your paper, or whatever it is you want me to do?"

"Come down and talk to Art Burroughs. He's a good man."

"It doesn't mean anything just to be a good man."

"He's smart, and though he talks soft he's tough. He might have an idea."

"Like what?"

"I couldn't say. But you can use a friend, can't you?"

As if a switch ~~was~~ touched, Hunter's eyes flicked quickly to the picture at his elbow of Ellen and the kids grouped on the lawn, squinting into the sun.

He said, "Yes, I can use a friend."

"Thanks," Jerry said. "Can I use your phone?" He was already beside it, his fingers hovering over the instrument. At Hunter's nod, he dialed very quickly. Waiting, he said, "I apologize sincerely for bringing up Miss Beaumont's ~~name~~ before. I did it to rile you up and get you talking. If you want to take a smack at me for it, I won't mind."

"I've filled my day's quota for smacking," Hunter said. "It's okay."

Regan put the sandwich and what was left of the coffee down ~~at~~ the bench beside Reed Wingate. Reed looked at them absently and promptly forgot about them. His eyes returned to their fixed alert focus on the door to Lola Paris' room.

"You got a dime?" Regan said. "I got to make a call."

Reed groped for his pocket and brought out a handful of change. Regan helped himself to a coin.

He said, "Somebody just left a package of money at the downstairs desk for her."

"She doesn't need money," Reed said.

"Who couldn't always use another four thousand?"

"It isn't money that she needs."

"It was left at the desk. Forty C-notes. The girl down there didn't even ~~see~~ who brought it."

"Blood money," Reed said.

"You mean the guy who hit her?"

"Possibly. I don't know."

"I'm surprised you don't."

"I haven't given it any thought," Reed said.

"Oh, that's why."

"I'll think about it."

"Sure," Regan said. "You do that."

He went down the corridor to the glass-enclosed public phone booth, and as he reached it, the phone rang. It was Burroughs, asking for Reed Wingate.

"I'll try to get him," Regan said. He put his head out of the booth and whistled. A nurse, passing by, made a *shsh* sound. Regan let the receiver dangle, and walked back to the bench. "Your editor ~~is~~ on the phone. He wants you."

"That right?" Reed picked up the sandwich, looked at it blankly, and set it down again. "Can you see the door from the phone booth?"

"I guess so."

Reed stood up, and eyed the distance and the angle between the booth and the door. It seemed to satisfy him. He said, "Okay, I'll talk to him."

"Make it fast," Regan said. "I need that phone."

When Burroughs heard Reed's voice crackle in the receiver he said, "What are you doing there?"

"Waiting for her to wake up."

"I could use you here," Burroughs said. "We're going to press in about an hour—"

"I'm sorry. I can't leave."

"No, I didn't think you could. Not even to edit your own story?"

"I'm afraid not."

It was not sarcasm, Burroughs knew, but ordinary politeness. He said, "There are a number of things in that story that have to come out. They're things that can't be written, that even *you* can't write."

"But I've written them," Reed said. "You mean you can't print them."

"I mean both. Shouldn't be printed, shouldn't have been written."

"Are you afraid?" Reed said. He was still polite. It was a query, not a challenge.

"Yes. And I'd be afraid to jump off a cliff, too. Do you want to come back to the office and edit it? That's a privilege that was never granted to reporters in my day, you know."

"I can't leave."

"Would you leave if I ordered you to?"

"No."

Burroughs sighed. "Then I'll edit it myself. Continue to edit it, I should say." He paused, waiting for Reed to comment. Silence. He sighed again and said, "How is the girl?"

"She'll be all right. Don't worry about her."

"No," Burroughs said. "Now that I have your assurance on the point, I certainly won't."

Vincent Cowan arrived at the *Guardian* office a moment behind Jerry Agnew and Joe Hunter. He stood on the sidewalk, that narrow plinth of refuge from the streaming tide of the Post Road, and watched Jerry, like an importunate sheep-dog, herd Hunter into the office. Through the window he saw, rather than heard, the excitement in Jerry's voice, and sensed the responsiveness in Burroughs from the manner in which he stood up behind his desk and beckoned them through the gate. He waited no longer, but hurried inside.

As he listened to Hunter speak, urged and prodded by Jerry, it became astonishingly clear that somehow, without benefit of on-the-spot investigation, or trained police technique, or two-way radios, or the availability of files or records, Reed Wingate had intuited the same conclusions that Hunter had come to.

Hunter had been a reluctant talker at the start, uneasy, even unwilling. But once fairly launched, and though impelled by the drama and virtue of his story, he had plunged forward without hesitation, his trained mind permitting him to fudge or skimp no detail, not even his visit to Julie Beaumont.

Burroughs, despite his absorption, nevertheless made a bet with himself, which he called "waiting for him to editorialize," but he lost the bet. Hunter's objectivity was remarkable, clean of derogation or defense either of himself or the others. It was a devotion to the pure fact, Burroughs thought, that would have sent even that grim-faced television detective into an ecstasy of fulfillment. And so he listened with fascination but a certain lack of sympathy for Hunter—because he had struck

Reed Wingate?—until he reminded himself that the man was suffering.

When Hunter was finished, pale and played out (although twice as much physical exertion would scarcely have extended him, Burroughs thought), he glanced at each of them in turn, nodding slightly to each, as if to declare his willingness to be judged.

It was a humility that reflected credit on him, Burroughs thought, and, smiling gravely, he thanked Hunter for all of them. Then he came directly to the point, or as nearly directly as it was possible for an admittedly involuted mind to come.

He spoke crisply and briskly, his eye on the clock that was racing closer to his paper's deadline. "Do you consider that one of those five up there on Lowndes is guilty?"

"I think that the circumstances would warrant considering them suspects."

"You would deem it essential, therefore, that all of their automobiles should be checked for evidence of damage?" He shoved a sheet of paper over the desk toward Hunter. "This contains descriptions of the thirteen cars registered to the five inhabitants of Lowndes Road. It's official. Jerry, here, got it from Detective Saucier."

Hunter let his eyes roam quickly over the paper. "I wanted to do that earlier, but the Captain. . . ." He shrugged.

"He obstructed you?"

"In fairness, I can't say that. It was his judgement, considering that they were all substantial and influential citizens, and that an investigation had yet been made at that time—"

"Sure. But now, in view of the facts you have uncovered—notably the party at Murad's which Lola Paris attended, which all of them up there attended—

now would you call it obstruction if he didn't check those cars carefully and thoroughly?"

"In my judgment it would be neglectful, if he didn't."

"Suppose," Jerry said, "suppose he sent someone up there to check the cars, but said that he had checked Murad's cars himself?"

"Keep quiet," Burroughs said. He addressed Hunter: "Would a search warrant be necessary in a case like this?"

"Only if the party refused to let his premises be inspected."

Jerry said stubbornly, "But why couldn't he say he had looked at Murad's cars himself—"

"Because he isn't that dumb," Burroughs said. "There was no question of inspecting cars when he turned Hunter away from Murad's house. Just a question of interviewing."

Vincent Cowan said, "I don't care much for Phil Murad, but aren't we all being over-eager to assume he's guilty?"

"Sure," Burroughs said. "We're assuming—because Vergez thought, or assumed, or feared that Murad was guilty—that, therefore, he is so. For all we know, Vergez might have acted on instinct, throwing up his shield to protect the boss even though the boss was innocent."

Jerry said, "He wasn't innocent of having Lola at his house last night, and making a pass at her."

"Neither one is a statutory crime," Burroughs said, "and we're wasting time." He looked at Hunter: "Is there a man on the force who, if privately instructed by Vergez, would see only what he was asked to see?"

Hunter hesitated. "They're all good men. I don't think so. But if anyone, it would have to be somebody like Tip Regan. He has a very large family."

"All right," Burroughs said. "Then if I were to call

Captain Vergez, and tell him what I know, and suggest that he had damn well better get a man up there to look at all those cars—would he send Regan?"

Hunter shrugged. "He might, if he knew one of Murad's ~~cars~~ was damaged." Hunter looked thoughtful. "He might in either ~~case~~. Even if Murad was innocent in the hit-and-run, he might send Regan anyway, because he could make ~~sure~~ that Regan wouldn't ask any embarrassing questions about last night's party."

"That's right," Burroughs said. "And ~~now~~ I'm getting to my point at last." He turned to Vincent Cowan: "Would you agree to let the *Guardian* turn detective?"

"Hasn't it?" Cowan said.

"I want to send a more impartial ~~man~~ than Regan up to Lowndes Road to poke into garages."

Jerry turned his head quickly, and grinned. "He means me."

"On what pretext?" Cowan said, frowning.

"None at all. Straight out-and-out brashness. Jerry knocks on the door and says: 'Sir or Madam, the facts in the case of Lola Paris are thus-and-so. Would you submit your innocence to the test by allowing our man'—that's Jerry, putting ~~in~~ the dog—to look at each of your automobiles?' Might get away with it on sheer audacity and surprise."

"Do you think the guilty party will permit it?" Cowan said.

"No. But I think the innocent ones, by the same token, will be glad to. That is, if Jerry handles it diplomatically, so that they don't decide to invoke the rule of every-man's-castle-his-home."

"I think I can do that," Jerry said.

Cowan said, "I thought I had retired to a ~~an~~ untroubled dotage when I bought this paper."

"You never know, do you, Vincent?" Burroughs grinned. "I take it we have your grudging assent?"

"I guess so. But it won't necessarily prove anything."

"It might," Burroughs said. "See how fast you can make it, Jerry. If possible, I'd like you to catch the culprit and wash up the ~~man~~ before we go to press."

Jerry grinned and started for the door. But he stopped when Hunter said, flatly disapproving, "It's police work. You don't have any right to butt in on it."

"Go ahead, Jerry," Burroughs said. "Joe Hunter is suspended, and therefore speaks without authority." He made a flicking motion with his fingers, and Jerry went out, already running. Burroughs turned to Hunter. "But we're going to do everything we can to ~~see~~ that you're reinstated, Joe. And everything in our power to ~~see~~ that the villains get their comeuppance. Stick around, Joe, and watch what happens."

Cowan grunted. "Just like *Front Page*."

But like Burroughs, he too was flushed, and his eyes gleamed with a bright youthful shine.

With Murad looking on expressionlessly, Vergez had helped Tommy Garrigue to his feet and lowered him into a ~~cane~~ seat inside the shadows of the garage. Tommy massaged his heart and rolled his eyes in a agony that Vergez knew ~~was~~ put on, to camouflage the wound to his pride that could not be soothed by massage. He spoke to Tommy brusquely, moving into the garage, bending over him, and it was only after he had straightened up that he realized that he ~~was~~ now directly facing four black ~~men~~ lined up parallel in the cavernous, timber-ceilinged shed. He stared at them for a moment, not really seeing them except as shadowy blurred shapes, and then, deliberately, he turned his back to them, and after speaking roughly again to Tommy, went outside.

Phil Murad said, "Is he ~~all~~ right?"

Almost unconsciously, Vergez edged forward, so

that Murad, standing in front of him, had to give ground, and thus they moved away from the opening to the garage.

"No moxie," Vergez said. "He's just putting on a show." They were walking toward the front of the house now, and Vergez' feeling of relief was uncomfortably tainted with a ~~little~~ of incompleteness. "I'm going to give Joe Hunter a real hard time."

Murad made a gesture of dismissal. They turned the corner and started toward the portico. "Like another cup of coffee?"

Vergez shook his head. "I have to get back to the office."

Murad nodded. Then he put his hand on Vergez' arm and stopped him. He looked at him curiously in the sunlight.

"Tell me, Mike, what's the penalty for the crime of hit-and-run?"

"Crime?" He looked past Murad's head at the house as he spoke. "Hit-and-run ain't criminal. It's a misdemeanor—evasion of responsibility."

"That so?" Murad lifted his brows in surprise. "And what's the penalty?"

"If I had the blue book, it's twenty four-ten in the blue book. . . . Best as I can remember, you lose your license, and there's a fine of fifty to a hundred dollars, or maybe two hundred, and I think technically you're also liable to a year in jail—but I ~~never~~ heard of anybody getting the jail sentence."

"Not very severe," Murad said. "But it's a rotten rap, and you can get hurt by the publicity. Nobody has any sympathy for a hit-and-run driver."

"Why should they?"

His voice was louder than he had meant it to be, and Murad looked at him sharply. They had reached the entrance beneath the portico now, and they stopped.

Suddenly, almost blurting it, Vergez said, "Phil, you

never answered my question before."

Murad eyed him levelly. "What question was that?"

"The one I asked you inside. Phil—did you hit that girl?"

"No."

"That's a great relief to me, Phil. To hear you say that."

Murad looked at him in astonishment. "You don't look very relieved. Don't you believe me, Mike?"

"Sure I believe you. Hell, of course I do. But you got to understand how I feel . . . the way you've been evasive with me—"

"Look," Murad said. "Here's what I want you to do. I want you to satisfy yourself. Go back to the garage and inspect my cars."

Vergez shook his head. "I would never do a thing like that, Phil."

"You wouldn't? Why not?" A corner of Murad's mouth quirked with amusement.

"Because I trust you, and anything you say goes. Right down the line, Phil."

Murad burst out laughing.

Vergez stared at him for a moment, and then he said shortly, "I got to get back," and turned and went to his car.

Driving back to town, he was in a rage of frustration, as close to rebellion against Phil Murad as his sense of loyalty in combination with his sense of self-preservation would allow. The simple fact of the matter was that he wasn't sure whether or not he believed Phil's statement that he hadn't hit Lola Paris. It was from doubt, not out of acceptance, that he had not even considered Phil's suggestion to check over the cars in the garage. It was one bluff—if Phil was bluffing—that he had no desire to call.

He drove into the Headquarters courtyard, and snarled when the overhanging bough raked the top of

the cruiser. He stamped inside, and cut Nimmi's amiable greeting short with a brusque cutting motion of his hand.

He said, "Anything come in on the all-points?"

"No, Captain."

Upstairs, in the squad room, he scowled at a group crowded around Malone's desk, not pausing, but expressing his displeasure in the heavy clump of his shoes. Then he caught a glimpse of Regan in the group, and he stopped short. He put his hands on his hips, and watched the faces turn toward him one by one.

He said to Regan, "Anybody tell you to leave the hospital?"

"Yes," Regan said righteously, "Sergeant Magruder told me."

"But I told you to stick there, didn't I?" Then he realized that Regan was probably blameless, and he was wasting ammunition on the wrong target. He said to Magruder, "You got a good reason for countermanding my orders?"

"I think so, Captain." Magruder was slim, almost boyish, and there was a quiet, studious un-coppish air about him that Vergez couldn't abide. "Somebody brought this to the hospital, put it on the reception desk, and sneaked off."

Vergez came close to the desk. He saw a thick envelope, open side facing him, and a sheaf of bills edging out of the open flap. He reached out his hand to it.

"Better not, Captain," Magruder said. "Prints."

"Anybody going to fill me in on this?" Vergez said.

Magruder said, "Regan was there when the receptionist discovered it. It contains four thousand dollars in hundred dollar bills. I sent down Pardee to sit in at the hospital in Regan's place. We'll check everything for prints, and possibly we might turn up something besides Regan's thumbs."

Regan said, flushing, "I handled it before I knew

what it was. Since then I been holding it strictly by the edges."

"Holding it strictly by the edges," Magruder said, "I shook the envelope out, and this is what came out of it."

He pointed to a sheet of white paper lying flat on the desk. It was specked by what appeared to be particles of yellow sand.

"What is that stuff?" Vergez said.

"Wood shavings, sawdust."

It fit like a glove, Vergez thought in silent anger, like a glove. Forstmann and the bank, Forstmann and wood shavings. Forstmann and Phil Murad. How could a smart guy act so stupid?

He said, "Well, what's it supposed to mean?"

"Guilt money," Saucier said. "The guy that hit her wants her to buy a new body."

"I theorize it might possibly be her father," Malone said.

"No," Magruder said. "It doesn't tie in. No reason for her father to play sneaky."

Vergez heard the phone ring in his office, and its sound was like a reprieve.

"My phone," he said. He did not leave at once but lingered to frown thoughtfully at the envelope on his desk. Finally he gave a deprecating shrug of his shoulders and went out of the squad room and into his office. He swung the door shut behind him.

His wife's voice on the telephone asked him if he would pick up a loaf of bread on his way home to dinner. He said yes, and switched her off quickly, pressing the button for his private wire. He dialed Phil Murad's number, and while he waited for the ring to be answered, formulated his approach to Peckham. Give me the boss without any backtalk, you mangy little punk, or—

Phil Murad answered himself, and he had to readjust

his mood quickly, cutting off his snarl and disguising it.

"Sorry to bother you, Phil—" Now what in hell was he apologizing for?

"What's on your mind, Mike?"

Murad spoke in that calm, quiet, almost apologetic voice that reminded him of Magruder's in its inappropriateness. If a man had power and authority, it ought to be reflected in his voice, or people might get the wrong idea. Not that they *kept* the wrong idea for long, ~~and~~ Phil started operating. . . .

He said with a bluntness he had never before dared, "Phil. ~~Do~~ you send four thousand dollars to the hospital in an envelope with Lola Paris' ~~name~~ on it?"

In the long silence that followed, Vergez began to fidget. He reached for a cigar, put it down, picked it up again, and stuck it savagely into his mouth.

"Phil?"

Murad said, "What makes you ask such a question?"

"One of my cops was there when the money came. He didn't see who brought it. But I know Forstmann was at the bank this morning, and there was wood shavings in the envelope."

"Wood shavings?"

"Sawdust. Like around a lumber-yard, sawdust gets into everything."

"You're quite a detective. Suppose I told you I didn't have anything to do with it?"

"Then that's it," Vergez said. He paused, waiting for Murad to speak. The phone was silent. He said, "I sure am relieved, Phil, because if Forstmann took four grand out of the bank this morning it would be easy to nail it by a regulation check of the bank."

"That what you're going to do—check the bank?"

"I have to, a standard procedure. I can't duck it."

"Why should you want to duck it?"

Vergez took his cigar out of his mouth, rolled it be-

tween his fingers, and said, "Phil, I hope you're not involved in any way, shape or manner with that money. I mean it, Phil."

"Why, Mike?" There was a tightening, a hardening of Murad's voice now. "Can they hang somebody for feeling sorry for the unfortunate girl, and wanting to help anonymously to pay her bills? Purely out of compassion and generosity?"

"Maybe not. But it won't look too good. And when you take the sawdust together with Forstmann pulling four thousand dollars out of the bank, it adds up to not so anonymous."

"Forstmann withdrew *ten* thousand, not four."

How could a smart guy be so stupid, Vergez asked himself again in bafflement. Wouldn't it occur to him that the serial numbers of new bills of hundred-dollar denomination would be on record at the bank? Or was he so used to big money that it never occurred to him that a hundred was different than a single?

"All right, Phil." He spoke slowly, selecting his words and his tone with care. "But I have to tell you as your friend that it was a foolish thing to do. Anything that connects you with Lola Paris—"

"You're taking too much for granted. Did you hear me tell you at any time that I sent that money?"

"Phil!" The cry came from Vergez' anguished heart. "I'm trying my best to look after your interests, and you keep giving me a runaround. It's like you don't trust me. Well, dammit, Phil, if you can't trust *me*. Everything I ask you—"

"All right," Murad said. "Anything you want to know, ask it, and I won't give you a runaround."

Vergez' fingers made a spastic uncontrolled movement, and his cigar snapped in two. "Just two simple questions needing two simple answers, Phil. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Was Lola Paris at your house last night?"

"Yes."

His mind leaped forward eagerly to a desired conclusion. "Is that why you been playing footsie with me about this thing? I mean, gentlemanliness?"

Murad laughed drily. "Gentlemanliness and self-preservation."

"When did she leave? I know this is more than two questions, Phil—"

"She left about six-thirty this morning. I made a real determined pass at her, and she got mad, and went off. I offered to drive her home, but she was boiling—and boiled—and. . . ."

Vergez' imagination filled in Murad's invisible shrug. "And that's the last you saw of her?"

"That's the last I saw of her. Going down the driveway trailing her coat on the ground behind her."

"The last question, Phil. Did you send that money?"

"Yes."

"Okay," Vergez said. "Now that I know about it, I can start thinking of the best way to handle it."

"All right. Handle it."

"Sure. Leave it to me, Phil."

"I'll do that. Thanks, Mike."

"Any time," Vergez said fervently. "Any time, Phil."

It was an awkward thing, that money, he thought as he hung up, but it was no worse than awkward. Now that he had it straight, he could go to work on it. It could probably be handled, there were always ways and means . . . if it came to the last resort, George Forstmann would have to take the rap to cover for Phil—

Then a question crept into his mind, and he stared at his broken cigar. If Phil was foolish enough to send money—it was good marked money—to Lola Paris, couldn't he also be foolish enough to keep a damaged car in his garage?

He got up very quickly, stamped through the squad room, and went down the stairs. Out in the courtyard he had to restrain himself from running to his car, and from the moment he pulled out of the police lot to the moment he drew up at the apron of Phil Murad's garage, he violated all the rules of the road.

There was no one around to see him go into the garage, and he wouldn't have cared if there was.

After Regan left, Reed Wingate appropriated the entire bench. He propped his back against one arm-rest, and stretched his legs as far as the bench extended. It didn't extend far enough; his long narrow feet accommodated themselves by protruding through the opposite arm-rest.

It was not a comfortable way to sit (he was so meagerly fleshed that he was never comfortable on any seat), but he was unmindful of it. The muted life of the hospital flowed by him through the corridor: nurses, orderlies, interns in white, staff physicians in darker suits who glanced at him sharply, frowning, because they couldn't place him, couldn't identify his status or function, but knew by instinct that his presence was an alien one.

He saw none of them, although he sensed the flow as a sunbather might have sensed with no more than fleeting minor annoyance the occasional transitory presence of a small cloud. The sun remained, immanent and unquenchable. For Reed Wingate, the door to Room 206 remained. The door remained. And behind the door the girl on the high bed remained, trussed and tubed, her pale face, as he had last seen it, calm and reposed, sentient beneath the bandage about the head that was like the insignia of some chaste and immolated order of agonized persons.

He could not conceive that she was now in pain, because he himself was not. There was a bond between them, a blood bond, some intermingling of the senses that had been born there in the dirt and pain of Lowndes Road, some cement of pity and understanding that had welded them together in the instant that he

took her in his arms, the instant that she had accepted their shelter. He knew vaguely that he was in an euphoric state induced by fatigue and hunger and excitement, but he knew also that his feeling for the girl was not a part of it, that it would survive any temporary state.

He did not put the name of love to it, because he was not in the habit of labeling things, and because, it occurred to him, he had no precedent to judge by. He thought: I have not been in love before, because I have never felt this way before; and this must be love because it is a new feeling. He smiled at his own reasoning. What he felt for the girl, he concluded, did not need a name. It was the most profound and exalted feeling he had ever experienced, and that would have to do. The girl had felt it, sensed it a great warmth in the coldness of her pain, but he didn't think she had a name for it, either. But she knew it was there, and he knew it was there, and he thought excitedly, it's something that will always be there for the two of us, something that we will always share.

When she recovers, he thought solemnly, we'll get married.

His gaze was fastened so steadfastly on the girl's room that he did not see Doctor Denison until he was already at the door. He had come down the corridor, walking briskly, a stocky authoritative figure, and had simply appeared in Reed's field of vision, which was the door. He had started to reach for the doorknob when Reed frantically succeeded in extricating his feet from the arm-rest of the bench, but he did not have time to turn it before Reed was by his side, looming over him, his face pale, his body gangling and as loosely articulated as a comic toy.

"Doctor."

"Yes?" Denison spoke brusquely, frowning, because he was a busy and preoccupied man, and because he

could not place this scarecrow in any assigned niche in a hospital. "What is it, please?"

"Doctor. . . ." Reed edged around to the door. He put his back against it, so that Dr. Denison had to remove his hand from the knob. "Will you let me go in there?"

"In *there*?" Denison looked at him in astonishment, and then said, "Of course not."

"Automatically," Reed said. He inclined his head on its long neck, bending down and toward the doctor so low that their faces almost touched. "You said that automatically, without thinking, because that is what is always said. Have you got a *reason* for keeping me out?"

Denison's face reddened—automatically, Reed thought—and his hand reached out again for the doorknob. But it halted in mid-motion, and he turned his broad face up to Reed's and said, "You must be the lunatic who tried to crash into the operating room."

"But I have a *reason* for wanting to go in there," Reed said. "Which is *more* than you have for keeping me out."

Dr. Denison studied him calmly for a moment, then turned his back to him and looked up and down the corridor. He beckoned to a nurse, who was carrying a covered bedpan, and she hurried toward them. He pointed a blunt finger over his shoulder at Reed.

"Nurse, I want you to find *me* an orderly. A large one. Two large ones. Tell them to come here at once."

The nurse—she was quite small and frightened, and, Reed saw, a student—said in a worried voice, "Two orderlies, Doctor?"

"Yes, please, and get a move on. Here, I'll take that."

He watched her move down the corridor, almost skipping in haste, in her anxiety to execute his order efficiently, and then he turned to face Reed again, hold-

ing the bedpan between them.

He said, "I'm going to have you thrown out of this hospital."

"You won't have to do that if you let me go into the room and see her. Just for a moment, just for a glimpse. Then I'll leave myself."

Denison looked him over sharply, professionally. "Are you all right? Is that blood on your clothing? Did you hurt yourself?"

"I'm all right, I didn't hurt myself," Reed said patiently. "All I want to do is look—"

"Are you related to the young woman?"

Yes, related by blood, Reed thought, touching his finger to his soiled suit. And in the future by marriage. But he only said, "No, I'm not a relative, if that's what you mean."

Denison said, "You can still avoid a scene by leaving now, young man."

But this doctor had worked on her for three hours. Reed thought, and it couldn't all have been automatic. As he snipped and cut and patched, he did the repair work he had learned from books and in practice, there must of necessity have been compassion in him, a feeling for the person rather than, or in addition to, a feeling for the surgery. That feeling must have been there, and if it was, perhaps he could be made to understand.

He said, "I'm not crazy and I'm not a relative, but can't you see that there is a truth between those poles, too? Emotions aren't cut and dried, Doctor, they don't fall into classified bins marked lunatic or relative or husband or pest. Now if you will listen to me for just two minutes—"

The slapping sound came to his ears even before it did to Denison's, and he saw the two orderlies, with the nurse following behind them, their white shoes patting out a soft beat on the composition as they tried to make

speed without making noise, running like toe-dancers. He glanced quickly at Dr. Denison's unrelenting face, then quickly back to the approaching orderlies.

He whirled himself around to face the door and reached out for the knob at the same time. He heard Dr. Denison's surprised exclamation and caught a glimpse of his reddened face, but by then the knob was already turning in his hand, and he threw all of his inconsequential weight against the door, bearing himself inward with its opening. At the window, a nurse started to turn toward him, but he was already standing over the bed, gazing down past the suspended containers of glucose and saline solution, their tubes pinned into the girl's arms and taped.

Lola's eyes opened and stared at him without recognition, and he felt then—though he only characterized it in his mind later—that it was the single worst moment he had ever endured in his life. Then her eyes steadied upon him, and something quickened in their glazed depths, something came alive, and although she did not smile, nor move, he recognized that she knew him and was pleased to see him.

And that was the single best moment of his life—he knew it at once, without any subsequent analysis. He smiled at her happily and reassuringly, dazzled by the look in her eyes, and he continued to smile even after the orderlies had grabbed his arms, and pulled them behind him, and started to haul him backwards out of the room. Between them they lifted him off the ground, and he could hear their labored breathing. He didn't struggle, nor did he once remove his eyes from the eyes that looked up at him from the bed, until he had been dragged out into the corridor and the door had been slammed shut.

He smiled at the frightened student nurse as the orderlies rushed him down the corridor, his long legs dou-

bled back behind him, the toes of his shoes trailing on the composition floor.

The call from Vergez somehow managed to squeeze its way through to Burroughs' phone between the agonized and almost continuous calls from downstairs, demanding to know when and if they were going to get a paper out today.

"Burroughs, this is Captain Vergez. I heard that Joe Hunter might be down there at your office."

"He's here," Burroughs said. He winked at the phone. "I'll ask him if he wants to talk to you." He covered the mouthpiece and said to Hunter, "Captain Vergez."

Hunter had been sitting in deep silence ever since Agnew had left, his chin resting on his chest, his eyes veiled. He might almost have been asleep. Now, without any expression, he rose from his chair, crossed in front of Cowan, and took the phone.

"Hunter," he said.

"It's Mike. Look, Joe, I acted hasty. I was all upset, you know how it is."

Hunter looked at the ring of curious faces and said, tonelessly, "Is that right?"

"You hadn't ought to have slugged that kid," Vergez said. "Not that he don't have it coming to him, but you know how it is. Don't let it bother you, though. I squared it. He won't peep." There was a pause, as if Vergez expected some word of gratitude, or at least of acknowledgment, and then he continued, with an attempt at heartiness, "Come wa back to work, Joe, all is forgiven."

Hunter said, "Does that mean I'm off suspension?"

"It never happened, Joe. I said I flipped my lid, or I wouldn't have jumped you. It never happened."

Hunter's voice was measured and cold. "You sure that's the way you want it?"

"Sure. Come on back to work."

"Am I still on the Paris case?"

"You was never off it. Didn't I tell you the suspension never happened?"

"Yes, you told me. And do I run the case my own way?"

"Anyway you want. Check the cars up there, too. After all, you were too much in a hurry this morning, witch-hunting, and that's what teed us off. After all, we didn't have anything to go on this morning. But now it's wide open up there. Check those cars, and we'll pull a warrant if anybody balks. I want that hit-and-run driver, Joe."

Hunter's head was cocked skeptically, and his eyes were puzzled, but he said, "All right. I'll get back to work."

"Bygones be bygones. Stop by my office first, and we'll shake on it."

Hunter hung up. He looked thoughtfully for a moment, then said, "I'm a cop again."

"So I gathered," Burroughs said. He tilted his head to one side and peered upward at Hunter. "That just about eliminates Phil Murad as a suspect, doesn't it?"

Hunter looked at him levelly and coldly. "I don't get you."

"Maybe it sounded ambiguous, at that. I'm not mistrusting you, but Vergez. I take it he's giving you carte blanche in the investigation?"

"That's what he said."

"He wouldn't risk that if Murad wasn't in the clear. I can't say I'm not a little disappointed."

Hunter nodded noncommittally. "I'd better get back to work."

Burroughs was gazing past him, at the door. "Stick around a couple of minutes. Jerry's back."

His phone rang. He followed Jerry Agnew with his eyes as he picked it up, trying to read something in that

face that was being so consciously inscrutable.

Sam Aubrey's voice screamed into his ear. "We can't hold up this paper a minute longer even for the Second Coming. They should have been at the disposal points twenty minutes ago, and carriers have been calling up and threatening to go home and do their homework. I can't stand hearing another soprano voice screeching into my ear."

"Give me another ten minutes," Burroughs said pleadingly. "After that we'll close, and that's all there is to it. We'll close, win or lose."

"I warned you," Sam said. "The carriers will all desert us, and you'll find you've got a paper out and nobody to distribute it."

"Ten minutes," Burroughs said. "After ten minutes you won't even have to call me. Just close her up and go to press."

Sam said, "Shall we synchronize our watches?" and hung up with a bang that made Burroughs' teeth ache.

Reed Wingate had seen Jerry Agnew trotting down the narrow sidewalk, and he might have reached the *Guardian* office at exactly the same moment if he hadn't tried to back his little car into a space that was barely large enough for a motorcycle. He made two attempts, while the backed-up Post Road traffic chuffed impatiently, and then gave up and drove well down the street to a space that he could jockey into frontwards.

He unfolded his length mysteriously from the body of the car (as two men stood and watched in gape-mouthed incredulity) and hurried along the street to the office. Through the glass door he saw that Jerry was the central attraction to an audience consisting of Burroughs, Cowan and Sergeant Hunter. He pushed open the door and Jerry trailed off to silence in mid-word; his hand, holding a scribbled-upon sheet of paper, curbed itself in the middle of a gesture.

Burroughs swung his chair around. His eyes behind

his lightly tinted glasses were lively. He said, "Start the spit turning, the prodigal is rejoining us. Did they throw you out?"

Reed nodded to Hunter and to Vincent Cowan, then turned back to Burroughs. He seemed very tired, his head drooped on the thin, boyish column of his neck.

He said, "Yes."

Burroughs said, "I suppose it was a rank case of injustice? Surely you didn't do anything to warrant being thrown out of the hospital?"

He did and he didn't, Reed thought, depending on whether you took Dr. Denison's automatic viewpoint, or his own, which might be called eclectic.

"It depends on your point of view," he said.

Cowan said, "You look bushed. Come in and sit down."

Reed said, "Thank you," and came around the railing into the enclosure. Jerry Agnew, who was sitting on a desk, kicked a chair toward him.

"You're extremely dirty," Jerry said. "Listen, did they take you by the seat of your pants and chuck you out into the street like in the Keystone comedies?"

"By the arms. Otherwise, it was like a Keystone comedy."

Hunter stood up. He said, "Look, I want to apologize."

"To me?" Reed regarded him in amazement.

"For hitting you. It was out of order. I sincerely apologize."

"For hitting me? Oh, that was a long time ago."

Burroughs smiled. "He accepts your apology without prejudice. He isn't sore. He never was. And anyway, too many important things have happened to him since you hit him. Do I interpret you correctly, Reed?"

Reed nodded absently, then cocked his head with a bird-like swiftness to the sound of the presses beneath the floor.

"That's the last of the second section run," Burroughs said. "We're still holding up—" He swung suddenly to Jerry and said, almost snarling, "Leave off the Scheherezade technique and get right down to it. Is it yes, or no?"

"Go to press," Jerry said. "The cars of Lowndes Road are all present and accounted for."

They were fair-minded men, Reed thought, and surely before long their fair-mindedness would reassert itself, and they would all be shamefaced at allowing their chagrin and disappointment to channel into a bitterness that diminished them.

And once that happened, once their minds were unclouded by the low-hanging vapors of defeat, then they might be able to see what was missing, and where it might be found. It was very simple—he was apologetic on their behalf—perhaps too simple for complex minds. . . . He half-listened . . . they vocalized their disappointment, not in words but sounds—mutterings, animal grunts, the outline of obscenities, a groaning obbligato to Jerry's dry-voiced rundown of his mission:

"From Richards through Wriston I dealt with the ladies, and in all cases my fatal charm won the day. Murad . . . Murad was something else again, I'll come to it in time. Mrs. Feverel Richards, with the warmth and charm of an ice-bag, informed me that she knew . . . good deal about the constitutional rights of a citizen, and that what I was asking was in direct contravention of those inalienable rights, but that she understood I was merely doing my duty, and since she was an old newspaperman herself. . . . She gave me the freedom of her garage, and there I saw her black Cadillac, 1958, in mint condition, and the engine number checked out.

"Mrs. Chester Gillespie and Miss Julie Beaumont, both of them agitated, tremulous, uncertain, were in no

condition to withstand Doctor Agnew's double-talk. They granted permission, I inspected their garages. . . ."

They had not wanted justice, Reed Wingate thought, but a culprit—with Phil Murad overwhelmingly preferred for the role—to satisfy whatever desire pressed upon them most urgently: to turn the tables on power, to score a coup in a newspaper, to accommodate this personal reason or that—

"Mrs. Alan Wriston," Jerry was saying, "quite drunk and quite amiable, personally demonstrated to me that the Wriston Cadillac, black, 1957, was unsullied—"

Reed closed his mind to Jerry's voice, and to the palpable emanation of frustration in his audience. They are really good and decent men, he thought; and then he thought, in balancing anger, No, they don't deserve to be told. But he had no mandate as a judge of people, and certainly the knowledge he held could not be juggled on a fine point of moral consideration. It was his duty to tell it, and get the whole affair quickly settled, and return to the hospital.

"... now Tommy Carrigue, and thought to take a short cut, Jerry said. "When he saw me heading for the garage he ducked inside it, and by the time I got there he was back out again, holding a twenty-two caliber rifle. He pointed it at me and told me that if I didn't cut me out—well, that's what he said—he would drill me."

Jerry paused and savored the surprise and alarm mirrored on the faces of his audience.

"While I was trying to make up my mind as to whether or not to call his bluff—if it was a bluff—who should put in his appearance but Mr. Phil Murad himself. He ordered Tommy to put down the gun, inquired of my intentions, and, when I told him, graciously invited me to satisfy my curiosity. No jitters, no drunkenness, no citing of constitutional rights. A pleasure to

deal with him. I thanked him, and proceeded to inspect his automotive fleet. The Murad fleet, gentlemen, is clean as a whistle and above reproach."

Reed watched Burroughs lift his telephone, with a reluctance that slowed down his movements like a lead weight. In a voice that was fagged out, drained of color, he asked to be connected with Sam Aubrey.

"What happened was this," Reed said, not even looking up, but staring down at his fingers lying like two bundles of sticks on his knees, "what happened was that the car must have been driven out immediately after she was struck—"

Burroughs motioned him to be silent. "Sam, go to press now. Yes, I know I've still got forty-five seconds—"

"You can't do it in forty-five seconds," Reed said. "But you might in . . . Well, Sergeant Hunter might be able to tell you how fast those bureaus work. I wouldn't know about that."

Only Jerry Agnew seemed aware that he had spoken. Jerry said, "Do what? What bureaus?"

"Motor Vehicle Bureau. Find the car. The fourteenth car."

Burroughs said, "I'm sorry, Sam," and replaced the phone.

Jerry said, "He says he knows how to find the car. The fourteenth car."

"We found them," Burroughs said. "There were *thirteen*, and they were all undamaged. Doesn't he know that?"

"You were here when I told you about it, Reed," Jerry said. "Didn't you understand?"

"The way people buy cars these days," Reed said patiently, "they shop around, here, there, for the best price. They can go six months by law before they have to buy the plates for this state—"

Burroughs said, "Does anybody know what he's talk-

ing about?" His face was grey, his features askew, and Reed thought, He has been scrambled by defeat and will need reassembling. The floor shook with the reverberation of the presses. "Damn," Burroughs said.

They all sagged in their chairs, empty-eyed and exhausted. Then, suddenly, Hunter sat up. He stared at Reed and said, "Go on."

Reed nodded. "We checked registrations only in this state. But since people are buying cars wherever . . ."

Hunter was on his feet, moving very quickly toward the phone, his eyes fixed on it, gleaming. An instant before his hand closed on it Burroughs exclaimed aloud—His features are reassembled again, Reed thought—and snatched it up, tore it away from his grasp, and asked for Sam Aubrey. While Hunter glowered down at him he shouted, "Sam, stop the presses! No arguments! Stop them!"

Then he handed the phone up to Hunter, at the same time depressing the bar to clear the connection. Hunter fidgeted until he was connected with his party, then spoke out with great energy and urgency.

Burroughs let out a sudden horse-laugh. "Stop the presses! Holy Hannah! How many times I've jeered at that in the movies—" The vibrations in the floor ceased, the sudden quiet was unsettling. "But it works, dammit. Maybe it's the only way to get it done. Stop the presses—" He seemed to be strangling on his own laughter.

Hunter, on the telephone, was extracting a promise of the speediest, most immediate cooperation, and when he was satisfied he had it, started reading off five names, last names first, then given name, then middle name or initial.

Reed got to his feet. He moved slowly to the wooden gate, and was already pushing it open when Vincent Cowan said, "Where are you going?"

"Write a new lead."

Burroughs tore his attention away from Hunter. "But you don't know whether it's so or not. And if it is so, you don't know what it signifies. And if it does signify, you don't know which of the five—" He stopped himself abruptly. "Or do you?"

Reed shook his head. "I'm sorry. I don't."

Vincent Cowan said, with an almost hysterical giggle, "It's nothing to be ashamed of."

"I'll have to leave the name blank," Reed said.

He went out through the gate, and with his long stride devoured the distance to his desk, where the typewriter stood, demanding and impatient. He sat down and rolled a blank sheet of copy into it, and almost at once began to type.

He was still typing, five minutes later, when Jerry Agnew came running toward him, his face red with excitement, and shouted a ~~few~~ at him.

He came around the desk and put his mouth against Reed's ear, and, still shouting, said, "The fourteenth car is a black Buick. I'm going up there with Hunter now, and as soon as I know anything, if there's anything to know . . ." Someone called his ~~name~~ urgently. "Whatever happens," he said over his shoulder, already running toward the door, "I'll call right in."

Reed nodded, and his eyes filled with unexpected tears, but he did not stop typing.

Mona Gillespie sat in the chintz-covered chair in the darkened room, waiting. She possessed infinite patience now, the dulled patience of despair, and she sat in the chair and waited for Chet to awake, not caring particularly whether it was sooner or later. He slept to one side of the huge bed, motionless, the covers over his head.

And she knew he dreamed.

From time to time, as she sat there, it came back to her in such vivid recollection and detailing of minutiae that the recapitulation was more real than the nightmare event itself. It wasn't involuntary—she knew that. She was consciously evoking it, in a sort of masochism, a compulsion to remind herself of its existence, as the tongue persisted in touching a sore within the mouth.

She saw herself—*was* herself, *is* herself—running, stumbling, in a blind rage, a blinding rage, needing to get away from that face, that hated and loved face, the torrent within her overflowed at last. As she ran toward the garage it seemed odd to her that she could hear her own labored breathing. But the screams were all inside her, bubbling like a geyser, but containing themselves inside, so that outside there was only the sound of her hoarse breathing.

She sees herself running into the garage (but here a detail is missing, and she cannot recall it no matter how she strains after it: is the overhead garage door open, or must she swing it up), her buttons scraping as she squeezes between the Olds and the Buick. She flings the Buick's door open, slides into the seat, her hand goes out with practised automatism to the key (but suppose

for once the key had not been left in the car, but had been absently dropped into a pocket or a handbag? Then it wouldn't have happened, couldn't have happened), the motor starts, she shoves the gear selector to reverse, the car backs out with a lurch of power. . . .

When the front fender has cleared the garage she swings the wheel hard (as she has done a thousand times before), backs up until the bumper scrapes against the semicircular stand of evergreen that sequesters the driveway from the lawn, brakes, shifts the gear selector to drive, careens down the steep winding drive, turns out, steps on the accelerator, and there is the girl in the road.

The picture is very clear: in the crisp dawn, the girl with her black tousled hair, the high heels, the jacket thrown over her shoulders. . . . There is no time for the brake. She swerves, turns out, but not enough, not nearly enough, and as the impact turns the girl their eyes meet, a glance of exchanged mutual terror, and then the girl goes down, flung away from her, and she feels the impact in her hands. The body drags beneath the wheels—she cannot and will not ever forget that moment of total panic as the body drags, clings to the car, refuses to shake free of it. Screaming, she wrenches and tugs at the wheel, and at last the girl lets go. . . .

The girl had *appeared*. She was going too fast, to be sure, but the girl had appeared in the middle of the road, a walking target, and whoever might have come down the road. . . . There was no time for the brakes, no one would have had time for the brakes, and the proper maneuver was to twist at the wheel and try to swerve, and she had done that, but she had not swerved enough, and the left side of the car—

But the question was—she put it to herself now, sitting in the bedroom darkened against the daylight—the question was: had she wanted to swerve enough? The question was—she demanded it of herself without eva-

sion, cruelly and bluntly—the question was: had she wanted to hit the girl?

Foley figured in his dream. He drove to Foley's ramshackle house in the ~~new~~ car, but it was shiny and undamaged, and then he ~~was~~ sitting in that filthy room, and they were both drinking, but it had nothing to do with the car. It had to do with a girl, a blonde girl, whose name he could not even remember, although he had inflicted upon her the penalty of motherhood. Incipient, or potential motherhood. And that ~~was~~ what he wanted to see Foley about. Eliminate the penalty. Foley knew the ropes. Knew where you could get marihuana, hot watches, illegal operations. . . . The dream with Foley ran its course, and then he was dreamless, and just before he woke there was a brief telescoped coda of the dream about Foley, the blonde girl whose name he couldn't remember. . . .

He knew Mona was there, in the dimness of the room, watching him from where she sat in the chintz-covered chair in the corner. He tried to retreat into sleep again, and succeeded, he thought, halfway, perhaps a quarter of the way. As a further refuge—his consciousness recognized it ~~as~~ that now—he tried to revive the dream about the blonde, but it would not materialize. What did come was reality, but it was dressed in the habiliments of the half-dream—or the quarter-dream?—and he was shielded from its full brutality.

He had watched Mona run to the garage, not terribly anxious, not terribly concerned, not really believing she would take the car out, considering it a gesture, nothing more. Surprised, but still not concerned when the motor roared and she came backing out of the garage (thinking only, My God, she's going to tear the fenders off), amused when she backed into the evergreens—you couldn't hurt those evergreens with a ten-ton truck. He

was just a little drunk, invigorated by the morning air, surprisingly not very upset by the quarrel, because, although it was true he had made a serious pass at Lola, Lola had said no, and therefore in effect he was innocent. Well, not innocent, but not guilty of all she had accused him of. On a technicality, he was innocent.

It was when she started the car down the driveway that he knew he should have prevented her from getting into it. Seeing the car shoot off crazily, barely making the first turn, he sobered up at once, meaning that the drunkenness and the cynicism both went together, and he stood there rooted for a moment, thinking and almost saying aloud, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, honey, I'm wrong, please don't do anything to yourself—"

He ran headlong down the driveway, expecting, knowing, that somewhere on its winding length he would find the car overturned, her body slumped inside it . . . and he was surprised when he reached the road, but not yet relieved. He was relieved only when he saw that the car had stopped, and he began to run toward her, thankful, full of apology. . . .

He almost stumbled over the girl.

He could not have said later—could not have said now—what instinct or set of instincts motivated his actions. Certainly there was no thought involved, or if there was, it was so instantaneous as to be indistinguishable from instinct, reflex. It was all there in his mind at once: get Mona out of the car, send her back to the house, get the car away. That was the most important thing, the crux. Get the car away.

He pulled her out of the seat, limp and dazed, and without having to think about it slapped her heavily in the face, twice, right and left, then started leading her toward their own driveway. He spoke furiously, although it was not fury he felt but a deadly certainty that the world had suddenly collapsed. But he had to pene-

trate the barrier that had been only partially broken down by those two slaps.

"Go back to the house, get into bed. . . ." His eyes kept scanning the street, but there was nothing moving, nothing in sight, and the houses were screened. "Get up when the kids do, get them off to school, if anybody asks you anything, you don't know anything— No, forget I said that. Think of it this way—you came home from the party and got into bed. Everything ends there, from there until you get up in an hour to get the kids . . . Do you understand? Everything ends there, what has happened from then on has not happened."

She nodded, or he thought she nodded, and now they were at the bottom of their driveway. He pushed her, as though to give her an initial impetus, and waited just an instant to see that she kept going, and then he turned and ran back down the road. He bent over the girl, his hand fumbling for her breast, though he could not bring himself to look at her. He knelt beside her, his eyes staring off into the near distance at nothing, his hand exploring. There was no detectable heartbeat, and that was as he had expected it, he had already accepted the inevitability of the worst.

He got into the car and drove off.

It could not be pushed off any longer. Slowly, he raised himself on his elbow in the bed, keeping his gaze lowered until the last moment. Their eyes met across the width of the room, they peered at each other through the dimness.

She said, "Are you awake now, Chet?"

"Yes."

She shook her head. "I mean really? I mean have we both woken up now? Have we?"

He said nothing, because he sensed that anything he might say would be wrong, and the paper-thin barrier of her control would be breached.

"Why don't you answer me?"

He did not speak, watching her carefully now, tensing his muscles, calculating the distance from his bed to where she sat.

She said, her voice rising, "I want an answer."

"All right." It didn't mean anything, but he had guessed that silence was no longer the proper answer. "All right, dear."

She nodded, and her voice was unexpectedly calm. "All right. How could we have done it?"

"We thought she was dead," he said. "Nothing could be served."

"Not taking anything else into consideration—not taking anything else, mind you—we could have gotten help to her twenty minutes earlier. Think of those twenty minutes of gross horror that we might have spared her."

"All right. But we thought she was dead."

"Will you tell me *one* thing?" She got up from her chair and came over and sat down on the bed beside him. "How could we have done it? What kind of people are we? What kind of brutal, vicious, uncaring . . . Will you answer the question?"

He said, "Self-preservation, the first law, without apologizing for it, trying to explain—"

"Answer. What kind of filthy low muck?"

He reached for her hand, but when he touched it she withdrew it in a quick reflex of revulsion. She said, "Are we the kind of people who do things like that?"

"Don't get yourself worked up, darling."

She looked at him for a long time, curiously, clinically, and then she leaned toward him and put her hand gently to his cheek.

"Get up," she said softly. "Get up and put your clothes on."

He shook his head. "Don't do it."

"Oh, yes."

"It's done, and we're out of it, and—" He stopped her from speaking, interrupting. "Scot-free? You were going to say that we have no right to get off scot-free, that there should be punishment, expiation? Well, don't kid yourself. We're not off scot-free, and there'll be expiation and punishment, both, for a long time, maybe for the rest of our lives. So don't get the idea that we're getting away with anything, that you're going to give yourself up and balance the books. The books will be balanced."

She got to her feet. "Don't waste your breath. I'll do it with you or by myself, it doesn't matter."

"No, you won't."

He got out of bed very quickly, but not so quickly that she wasn't aware of his purpose. He ran across the room and caught her as she was reaching for the doorknob. He put his hands on her shoulders, but she shook them off, and wrenched the door open. He lowered his hands and circled her waist, pulling her back into the room. She twisted and fought, but he held tightly, and swung her around to face him. Their eyes met and held. Met and held and searched, delved into unplumbable depths.

Then, lightning-fast, she put her knee into his groin, and as he sank to the floor she ran out.

They left Jerry's car below, on the feed-in road, and started on foot through the neck of the Lowndes Road alembic. Glancing at Hunter, Jerry thought: He looks as if he's going to a death, and his own at that.

He said, "You really think we've got it pinned down?" And when Hunter didn't answer, he said, "And it hurts you to do it."

"What did you think?" Hunter said. "Did you think there was pleasure in it?"

"No, not pleasure. But a sense of . . ." Triumph,

satisfaction—they were the wrong words. “Accomplishment?”

Hunter didn't answer.

Jerry started to speak again, but a glance at Hunter's taut face stopped him. Going to his own death, he thought, he dies a little each time. And meanwhile, back at the *Guardian* . . . Damn them, anyway, damn their elation, damn their vanity. Damn Arthur Burroughs, damn Vincent Cowan. What they needed was to come out here, to get the feel of it, to die a little as if it was their own death. But not Reed. You couldn't include Reed—

A shot cracked out, loud and vicious, and after a short interval the screaming began. It was only much later, thinking about it, that Jerry realized that the shot and the scream were not connected. But now, as he dove to the turf on the center island, he was sure that the bullet had found its target. It didn't occur to him that he was contradicting himself, although he was certain that they—he and Hunter—were the target, and neither of them was hit. He saw Hunter's legs upright above him, and rolled over to tell him to get down too, that they were being shot at. . . .

Hunter was looking up at the tall trees above them, at a small shower of shattered young leaves that were slowly spiraling to the ground. He seemed bemused, not at all frightened. He looked off to the left, where the shot had come from, and shook his head grimly, then became aware that Jerry was tugging at his pants leg.

Hunter said, “Get up, he was trying to scare us, he aimed thirty feet over our heads.”

He turned away and started loping up the road to the right, to where the screaming continued, alternately piercing and muffled. After a moment, still shaking, Jerry got to his feet and ran after Hunter.

The Gillespies were struggling at the foot of their driveway. He was trying desperately to hold her with one hand, and stifle her screaming by clapping his other hand over her mouth. She thrashed about wildly, jerking her head away from his hand, her hair tossed, her skirt disarranged. Then Gillespie saw Hunter, and he gave up, released his grip. Mona Gillespie floundered out of his grip and stumbled into Hunter, who grabbed her by the elbows and held her upright.

Jerry slowed down his pace, and by the time he reached them the scene had a curious calm. Gillespie was standing quietly, with his hands down at his sides, his chest heaving as he tried to catch his breath, his head bent in surrender and hopelessness. Mona Gillespie was still clinging to Hunter for support, but she made no sound.

Hunter said, "I'll have to ask you to come in with me."

Gillespie nodded. He said, "Mona . . ." and touched her arm.

"You'll want to dress," Hunter said.

Gillespie nodded again. He put his arm around his wife's shoulders, and gently turned her around. They started up the driveway together, Hunter following with Jerry beside him.

When they were halfway to the top, a slow labored procession, Jerry whispered to Hunter, "That shot . . ."

"Tommy Garrigue," Hunter said. "I'll take care of it."

At the door, holding his wife closely, protectively, Gillespie said, "Will you wait for us inside?"

They went on into the entry foyer. Mona Gillespie started up the steps. Gillespie lingered behind.

"You can wait in the living-room, or—" He gestured to a white-painted iron-scrolled bench in the foyer.

"This is all right," Hunter said.

Jerry saw the phone. He said to Gillespie, ducking

his head, flushing, "I hate to ask this. I'm a reporter. Would you let me use your telephone?"

Gillespie looked at him curiously (As if I'm some kind of a freak, Jerry thought—and I am), then shrugged and followed his wife upstairs.

Jerry lifted the phone and with his back turned to Hunter, his face enflamed, dialed the *Guardian*. When his ring was answered, he asked for Burroughs.

"Yes," he said. "The Gillespies. . . . Yes, I'll stay with them and get the details. And now you can send your stinking paper to press, can't you?"

He held the receiver to his ear just long enough to hear Burroughs gasp, and then he slammed the instrument back into its cradle with a thundering crash.

He stood looking at it in amazement for a moment, as if he wondered how it might have survived intact, and then he said aloud, "Vanity, nothing but goddamn vanity. Everybody!"

Nimmi watched them file through the door: first Hunter, then the man and woman, and finally, shuffling, glowering, the reporter. They all ranged themselves before his desk.

Hunter said, "Sergeant Nimmi, these people want to make a statement with respect to the hit-and-run accident. Will you escort them upstairs to the Captain?"

Nimmi said, "What?" and then, as Hunter turned toward the door, "Where you going?"

"First to have a talk with Tommy Garrigue—"

"What's he done now?"

"Nothing serious," Hunter said. His eyes flicked quickly to meet Jerry Agnew's. "I owe him a talking-to, that's all. Then I'm going home."

"You're going home?" Nimmi said.

"I'm taking the rest of the day off. Okay with you, Sergeant Nimmi?"

Hunter turned and went out. Nimmi stared after his

retreating back. He turned back, and looked at the reporter, who glowered at him. He looked at the Gillespies, who stood very close together, their shoulders touching.

He got to his feet. "Come with me, please."

With a great show of graciousness, Vergez turned his office over to the Gillespies and their attorney.

He said, "Nobody of us here is a criminal, and we don't treat you like that. Take your time and talk it over. Counselor Steedy is undoubtedly ~~among~~ of the factors."

He shut the oak door, and went out into the squad room, with ~~an~~ affable smile wreathed around his cigar.

He said, "Well, boys, we cleaned it up."

Magruder was sitting on the edge of his desk. He said, "What about the envelope, Captain?"

Vergez' smile closed down to a tight circle. "What envelope?"

"That contained the money. Did they mention it in their statement?"

The circle of Vergez' lips tightened further, and his cigar, caught in it, jerked upwards. He looked around the squad room. Saucier, Malone, Regan . . . they were frowningly busy, bent over their desks, but they were all turned in. Ears up like jackasses, he thought, and bit down hard on his cigar.

"Don't you remember, Captain?" Magruder's voice was polite—too polite.

"Sure I remember. They didn't say anything about it."

"Did you ask them?"

"I forgot. We got them on the big thing, dammit. What the hell's so important about that envelope?"

"It's a loose end."

"So somebody wanted to give her ~~some~~ money. Where's the crime and violation of the law?"

"Don't you think it's worth looking into, Captain?"

"Sure, look into it, but we don't have to make a Federal case out of it."

Magruder nodded. "I took the liberty of checking with the bank across the street." He pushed a slip of paper onto the desk in front of him. "The serial numbers on the bills correspond with part of a sum of cash that George Forstmann withdrew this morning."

Vergez took the cigar out of his mouth and glared at Magruder, who returned his gaze calmly. "What do you think you're doing—mouse-trapping me? Pulling the innocent act and then springing this on me?"

"Why, no, Captain, that wasn't my intention," Magruder said. "I thought there was a possibility that somehow Forstmann might have withdrawn the money for the Gillespies—"

"There's ~~no~~ connection," Vergez said.

"No, there's no connection there that I can think of." Magruder emphasized the "there" and his eyes glinted with a sudden hard humor. "But there has to be a connection *somewhere*."

"Forstmann? It don't make any sense."

"It might," Magruder said. "After I have a little talk with him. Okay with you if I go over to the lumber-yard and look him up?"

Magruder slid off the desk to his feet. He was taller than Vergez, and he stood very erect. Vergez tilted his chin to look up at his eyes: they were challenging, a little contemptuous, unwavering.

Vergez shrugged. "You want to waste your time, go ahead."

Magruder said, "I don't think it's a waste of time, Captain."

"Go on," Vergez said, "go on, Hawkshaw."

"I'll report back to you with any developments," Magruder said.

"Do that."

The door to the office was opening. Without looking

at Magruder again, Vergez started toward the corridor. He caught a glimpse of Steedy, the attorney. Behind him, he could hear a stirring as the men in the squad room relaxed their unnatural positions. The hell with them, he thought, and bit down so hard on his cigar that it almost severed.

The hell with them. And the hell with Phil Murad, too. Maybe it was no crime to make a pretty girl a present of four grand, but someone would have a tough time explaining it. Whether Forstmann took the rap or not, everybody would know it was Phil's baby. The hell with him—he deserved it.

"Where do you think he's gone?" Vincent Cowan said.

Burroughs raised his brows in surprise. "To the hospital, of course."

"And get thrown out again?"

"I daresay."

They sat in the enclosure that was Burroughs' office, spread out in their chairs, like, Burroughs thought, a couple of over-age gladiators. They had come out of retirement to take another turn on the circus card, he thought, and although they had managed to escape with their skin intact, it had taken all they had, all of their reserves, and now they were spent.

"It's not so much that he came up with the right answer," Cowan said, "because any one of us might have done that—if we were anywhere as smart as he is. It wasn't his coming up with the answer, as I say, but his absolute confidence that he was right."

Burroughs nodded absently, without replying. A dusk was settling outside, not yet the onset of twilight, but a false twilight compounded of deepening shadows and air darkened by the exhausts of the thickening late afternoon procession on the Post Road.

Cowan came out of the silence with a new tack. "How people like Chet and Mona Gillespie—I know

them—well-bred, law-abiding, ordinarily compassionate people, with a reasonably ethical code of morals . . .” He shook his head.

Burroughs was amused. “It shows you just how little removed we are from the primeval . . . Ten seconds, five seconds, less, while his eye took in that girl’s body lying there on the road—one second, and he was back to first principles. Survival. Self-preservation. He wasn’t in that instant a fifty thousand dollar a year account executive, but a cave-dweller. Everything was threatened. He acted on the principle of survival.”

A passing Diesel trailer shot up a cloud of dirty black smoke.

“His survival,” Cowan said. “Without any thought of the girl’s.”

“Well,” Burroughs said. “That’s exactly what it’s all about. Your own survival. At any cost. That’s the first principle.”

There was another long pause, and in the deepening gloom of the office, they could hear each other wheezing. This time Burroughs broke the silence.

“I’m not coming in tomorrow morning,” he said. “Somebody else will handle the calls.”

“What calls?”

“Parents of our carriers—indignantly tendering their sons’ resignations. They’ll all get home well after dark. Miss their supper. Dirty. Tired. No time to do their homework before bedtime. There’ll be hell to pay all over town tonight.”

Cowan was startled. “You think they’ll quit en masse?”

“I exaggerate.” He shifted heavily in his swivel chair. “But we got ourselves quite a story, didn’t we, Vincent?”

“Not exactly the ending we were hoping for.”

“Murad?” He nodded. “But it’s only morality tales that end perfectly. Reality orders its ending

haphazardly. Life is a skein of loose ends."

"You don't say."

"Mr. Murad comes under the heading of unfinished business. Sooner or later, he'll dig his own grave. For all we know, his involvement in the matter of the girl might turn out to be the preliminary spadework."

"Is that conjecture?"

"Only partially. We're all born with the spade in our hands."

"I'd better try to struggle home now," Cowan said. "Dusk and philosophy are thickening the air." He got to his feet with an effortful grunt.

Burroughs smiled. "I can afford to be philosophical now. A full week before we have to get out another paper. A full week. Beautiful."

"If there's another crisis, don't bother calling me."

"There won't be," Burroughs said. "Just club news, and who got pinched for running through a red light, and what the coach has to say about the high school team, and the latest news on the PTA front, and an editorial on the worsening parking situation. . . . In short, Vincent, life. And life can be beautiful, if dull."

Coming up the broad front steps of the hospital, Reed Wingate moved with a sort of stealth, casting quick glances to the right and left of him, and once, even, over his shoulder. But by the time he reached the glass doors he was laughing at himself. He grinned into his blurred reflection in the glass and said to himself: Stop it, you don't have to look furtive to call attention to yourself, not you, you're ~~a~~ inconspicuous as a stilt-walker. He laughed aloud once, in high spirits, and then boldly pushed the door open and entered.

The girl at the reception desk looked up at him and smiled. The shift had changed, she was not the ~~same~~ girl who had witnessed his ejection—that almost, but not quite, Mack Sennett ejection, ~~was~~ orderly at each

side of him, running him out. He returned the receptionist's smile, and went off to the long hallway and the stairs.

The bench facing Room 206 was vacant. He saw that from the stairhead. The police were no longer keeping a vigil. With a little luck, and especially if the shift had changed all over the hospital, with a little luck they would not know him. He walked the length of the corridor without meeting a familiar—which was to say hostile—face. He reached the bench, and sat down on it, sinking thankfully into its slightly curved hardness as if it were cosily upholstered.

He faced directly toward the door, and stared at it piercingly, as if, by concentrated staring, and by desiring it mightily, his gaze could penetrate the impenetrable wood. And perhaps it could. Well, not his gaze, but his spirit, his essence, his presence. Something of the sort.

He said to himself confidently, "Don't worry, she'll know you're here."

There was almost no place in the small living-room where he could sit without seeing one of the pictures of Ellen or the kids. It was almost as if, he thought, they had been tactically spotted with premeditation, looking forward to this moment when he sat with a bourbon-and-water in his hand and tried *not* to see them.

Focusing the eyes on some neutral object did not help, because the focus wavered, and the eyes were finally drawn to one of the pictures. Shutting the eyes did not help, either, because the eyes wanted to open, and when they did . . .

He made an angry gesture with his hand, and some of the bourbon sloshed over the rim of the glass onto his wrist. He placed the glass on the floor, took out his handkerchief, and carefully dried himself. Then, keeping his eyes cast down, he fumbled on the under-

shelf of an end table and let his hand close on a book. It was a paper-back detective story. He opened it at random.

"... flapped the barrel of the gun across his mouth, and he spat teeth like red corn kernels. The girl, her hair tumbled about her face, came to me with a shiv. I grabbed him, his face streaming red, and shoved him at her, and he took the shiv in the belly, screaming like a woman. I ducked around him and grabbed the girl and she shuddered and fell against me with a moan—"

He put the book down.

He swallowed a long draught out of his glass, and then got up and went out into the kitchen. He went through three drawers before he found the phone book, and he had to go over the scribbled cover three times until he found the number he was looking for, written in pencil between the pencilled number of the ear-nose-and-throat specialist and the poultry store. It said Mother, and then the number, and the name of the Minnesota town.

He went to the wall-phone, holding the book, and with a wild look on his face dialed the operator. Then, when she came on, he said, "Just a minute." And then, "Never mind."

He hung up. He stood beside the phone for perhaps a minute, and then, slowly and deliberately, dialed Julie Beaumont's number.

He said to the maid who answered, "Let me speak to Miss Beaumont, please."

She must have recognized his voice, because she didn't ask who was calling, simply grunted, and asked him to hold on.

Julie came on an extension. "Yes, Joe?"

He said, "I just wanted to say good-bye."

"Oh?" After a moment she said, "Are you going away, Joe?"

He shook his head, as if she could see it. "I'm going

to phone Ellen and ask her and the kids to come back." He laughed nervously. "I don't know—I just thought you would be interested in knowing that."

"I am. I think it's fine. I am glad you thought to tell me about it, because it's what I thought you ought to have done." Her voice was measured, grave. Then she said in a suddenly husky tone, "Good luck, Joe."

"Thanks. Good-bye, Julie."

"Good-bye."

He hung up, and looked at the phone, as if waiting for the connection to clear—but it is clear, he thought, it's all clear, now—and then he lifted the receiver and dialed the operator again, and gave her the Minnesota number.

.

Lola Paris woke briefly, somehow slipping the hold of the drug momentarily, and her eyes turned toward the door. He must be very near, she thought, whoever he is, whatever he really looks like . . . not that I won't know him again in an instant. He must be very near, she thought, and slept again, smiling.



ACCIDENT...OR HOMICIDE?

Lola Paris had been beautiful. But there was nothing beautiful about the battered body that lay in Reed Wingate's arms. She had been the victim of a tragic hit-and-run accident. Only, maybe it wasn't an accident.

Maybe there was a reason someone ran her down on a street that went nowhere except past the baronial estates of the city's wealthiest citizens. Maybe she was somewhere someone didn't want her to be. Maybe that's why no one would talk.

The cops were stymied, and it was up to Wingate, the impulsive young reporter to put the pieces together. He'd broken so many rules and

AID. L 950