GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL NO. 22

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By SAM MERWIN Jr.

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Chapter 1

THERE was no time for thought, little time for action, as the car bore down on them out of the darkness, its tires singing on the wet pavement. What Hank did was entirely a matter of reflex action. He flung himself clear of the pavement barely in time, skidding on the slick grass as his feet left the macadam. Half-falling, he twisted to learn the fate of his companion.

Although what happened took place in less than a second, it seemed to Hank to unroll with the patient relentlessness of a slow-motion movie. He saw Jervis spring awkwardly to the far side of the road, saw his heel slip on the rain-soaked pavement, saw him flail his arms in a desperate effort to keep from falling.

And then the unbelievable happened. The car, almost on top of Jervis, did not slow down—rather it seemed to leap forward. It swung to the left, directly toward the poet. Instead of the expected scream of brakes, hastily applied, the shrill protest of tires against increased fraction with the pavement, Hank heard the roar of a powerful motor goaded into greater life.

For a quick-frozen instant he could actually see a foot or so of space between chromium front bumper and Jervis' sprawling legs. And then the space had disappeared. The poet was lifted by the bumper and thrown high in the air, like some wilting matador in a Mexican ring tossed by a bull too cunning for him. There came a horrid thudding, scraping sound as his body struck the streamlined hood—then another series of horrid sounds as, limp and sodden with its own blood, it struck the macadam. And then the car was gone, its speed still increasing, its red tail lights dwindling to pinpricks in the middle distance.

Battling sudden nausea—more at what he knew he was about to see than at what he had already seen—Hank sprinted to the side of the shattered poet, who lay in a spreading puddle of blood that sparkled like Burgundy in the glow of the street light.

Hank had been close to death by violence too often in the

course of his career not to know, without doctor's telling, that Jervis was virtually dead. His legs lay at grotesque angles which had no coherent relationship to the angle of his torso, one of his wrists horribly bent so that jagged bone-ends protruded through the tortured flesh, one side of his face and head a bloody mash.

Yet, as he knelt to see if by any chance his first judgment could be wrong, the poet's one good eye opened and looked up at him with perfect comprehension. A corner of the sardonic mouth struggled to curve upward in a grin. A whispering voice said, "They were waiting.

... She trod dark turf with muted step,
Hid face beneath her hood...

Pretty corny, isn't it?"

He was struggling to laugh as he died. And Hank, for the first time since the trouble began, realized the danger in which he must walk from then on. He did not know who the killer was, nor from what quarter he would strike again, nor at what target. And worse, he did not know from *when* the murderer came. For the first time since the trouble began, Hank realized to the full the terrifying implications of the theory of Dr. Julius Conrad.

* * * * *

It had begun, some twenty-two hours earlier, at a typical rainy night gathering at the Wellington Institute Club bar—if anything in any way connected with that extraordinary assemblage of advanced egos and post-graduate intellects could be labeled typical.

The banquettes along the north wall had been pre-empted as usual by a group of Medieval Language Fellows, who were debating at half-heat the exact pronunciation and usage of diphthongs in Languedoc during the twelfth century. At the large round center table an Archeological Don, his face weathered and ultimately leathered by decades of expeditions under tropical suns, was expatiating to a trio of Fellows of his department and

two of their wives on the importance of the latest pre-Mayan discoveries in Guatemala. At one end of the bar Jervis, the poet, was getting quietly and mournfully drunk by himself.

And there were others present. At one of the small tables close to the bar Henry "Hank" Sanford, Fellow in Writing, and Liza Drew, Fellow in Drama, were seated, ignoring the torrents of talk that swept around them. Wordlessly they were marveling at the double miracle of one another, their sours-on-the-rocks barely touched. Occasionally, when the lighting of fresh cigarettes gave them adequate excuse, they engaged briefly in unobtrusive manual contact above the dark wood of the table. They were newly and utterly in love and their language was not the language of words.

"Don't darling," Liza murmured as Hank reached openly and successfully for her left hand. "Do you want to make an Institute Thing of us?"

"Well, we are one—or are we?" Hank protested, reluctantly releasing her fingers. He was a tall, raw-boned, thirtyish young man. His light-brown hair was close-cropped to a long, well-proportioned head with features whose somewhat astonishing ugliness was transformed into charm by the overt good humor of his mouth, the character and intelligence that showed themselves in his unexpectedly dark-brown eyes.

Liza made a face at him, sighed, said, "Oh, I suppose we are—but I'm not quite ready to tell the world yet. I'm enjoying things too much the way they are." Her voice was light, liquid, clear, perfect.

"That's the Smithfield in you, honey," Hank told her gravely. "If you didn't depend on it for my future support, I'd whale it out of you." He did his best to look fierce.

Liza gurgled her delight at him over the rim of her drink, put it down, said, "Not my Mickey Mouse."

He found her perfectly enchanting when she smiled. Her heavy, dark-gold hair framed a smooth, rather prominent forehead, wide-set, turquoise-blue eyes, a short, straight nose dusted

with freckles, a warm, too-wide mouth above a softly determined chin. She wore a splashily-printed dark blue dress and her figure . . . On that important matter Hank had more than once told her she was utterly wasted while sitting down.

He tried to look even more ferocious, growled, "I can be plenty rough when I have to. Let's look at the record . . . "

"Let's not," said Liza, motioning him to silence. She nodded slightly toward the bar at her left. Hank followed directions although he felt moderately abused at Liza's having allowed something from outside to break in upon her preoccupation with him. He picked up his drink, took a sip, listened.

It appeared that Herman Willis, Dean of History at the Institute, was angry at Dr. Julius Conrad, Don of Creative Arts. Physically the two Institute officials were absurdly ill-matched. Willis, tall, iron-grey, saturnine, had more than six inches of height over his colleague, and must have outweighed him by half a hundred pounds—although he was spare of build where Dr. Conrad was not. Furthermore, Dean Willis was by far the more impressive elegance in attire, a lethally satiric wit, and a solidly-earned reputation as an historian of civilization second only to Dr. Toynbee.

Dr. Conrad, on the other hand, managed to look remarkably like a penguin even when not wearing dinner clothes. He was casual in dress to the point of sloppiness, seemed superficially and a trifle vulgarly gregarious—wholly vulnerable to a man like the Dean. One stem of his horn-rimmed glasses was broken, and had been repaired temporarily and precariously with Scotch tape.

It was quickly apparent to Hank that the penguin had the upper hand in the argument. Dean Willis was obviously close to his boiling point. His face was dangerously red, his carefully combed grey hair appeared actually to bristle. In a paroxysm of exasperation he shook his head helplessly at Liza and Hank, then reached abruptly for his glass on the bar.

Dr. Conrad, following his gaze, ran stubby fingers through the remnants of sandy hair, winked, grinned at them—a succession

of gestures that seemed to add to his companion's annoyance. Abruptly, Dean Willis swung about to face the pair at the table, said, "What's the use of trying to talk sense to a crazy man?"

Dr. Conrad chuckled, said, "In the words of that incarcerated Chanler chap whose brother married the opera singer, 'Who's loony now?' Like every born traditionalist, when confronted by truths that disrupt the narrow canons of his faith, Dean Willis has a tendency to start screaming for the militia."

Hank felt uncomfortable. Although it was Institute practice to regard each member as the social and intellectual equal of every other, regardless of title or authority, he retained a sort of vermiform respect for his superiors that prevented his feeling as free as he supposed he should in their presence.

But Liza, though she was some months newer at the Institute than himself, had no such qualms. She said, "We were sitting alone minding our business, when out of an orange-colored glass . . . If you two want any non-humble opinions from us, you'd better give us a briefing."

Dean and Don exchanged glances and there was truce in their eyes. "Very well, then," said Willis, "if you don't mind listening to the ravings of a lunatic."

"Let's cut them a drink before we start bending their shell-pink ears," suggested Dr. Conrad, beaming at Liza in a non-possessive way that hinted at affection for, and enjoyment of, all pretty women.

Pat McColl, who had been hovering close to the argument, took the order, set the drinks on a tray at the bar. A big, blocky Hibernian with a broken nose and a sage way of listening, Pat had become almost as much of an institution as the Institute itself. He said, "I'd bring them to the table, but I've got to keep Jervis in order."

"Poor Jervis," said Dr. Conrad, eyeing the melancholy poet, who was leaning on the bar, staring into nowhere. "He always seems to be ossified. Thank God I'm not a poet. The hangovers would kill me, I'm afraid. The poor devil's in a blank. A pretty

decent chap, too, when he's got his wits with him. Emotional—but decent."

Dean Willis snorted. "He's not in a blank. Next week, next month, next year, we'll be reading all about our nasty selves and the nasty little things we're saying tonight. I'm beginning to think he's a menace."

"Was Jervis the subject of your argument?" Liza inquired.

"It's no argument—it's sheer lunacy," said Dean Willis. He turned to bring the tray of drinks to the table while Hank rustled extra chairs. When they were comfortably settled the Dean added, "They ought to make Pat McColl Institute Master when Manly Tabard retires. I believe he knows more about all the fields of study here than anyone else. Certainly he's *heard* more about them."

"Amen to that," said Dr. Conrad. Then, lifting his glass to Liza, "I wish they'd had Fellows like you when I was a bit younger. I'd have gone with them instead of girls any day and my life would now be a beautiful song for Jervis to write about."

Liza dimpled, and Dean Willis cut in with, "No matter what they call them, they're all the same to you, Julie, aren't they? Can't you leave *any* of them alone?" The unexpected venom in his voice made Hank jump. It was followed by a silence that could only be termed embarrassing.

Hank broke it, saying, "I thought you two came over to—to . . . " In his confusion he lost track of his thought.

Liza picked it up with, "Yes, what about this great debate you wish us to pass judgment on?" She assumed a mock judicial gravity that halted the unpleasant battle about to be joined in by the two older men. They signed another armistice with their eyes.

Dean Willis said, "You may or may not know that Julie here is ostensibly engaged in a study of human genius—its occurrence, its causes, its results. As such, his work is out of my department." Contempt lurked ill-concealed beneath his tone.

"And a good thing too," replied the plump man amiably.

"History *per se* is a dead thing—valuable only in its capacity to relate past human conduct to its present and future."

"Time-stuff again!" snorted the Dean. "Believe it or not, Miss Drew, Julie is trying to convince me that time travel is actually with us today."

"Oh, now really!" protested Liza, nursing her drink.

Hank felt his interest mount. He had always, though from an utterly non-scientific viewpoint, found stimulation in the type of plausible neo-fantasy that has won the name of science fiction. He said, "But even if time travel were theoretically possible it seems to me that the physical obstacles would be insuperable."

"My idea exactly," said the Dean, nodding. "While I was considering Julie's theory as some sort of joke I tried to explain some of these obstacles. In the first place, to travel backward in time, even in a non-physical sense, would imply travel faster than light. You know the old idea—that if a man *could* travel faster than light and had a sufficiently powerful telescope he'd be able to view history through it if he went far enough from Earth."

"I remember reading that one in the Book of Knowledge or something when I was ten," said Liza.

"Theoretically it makes sense, I suppose," remarked Hank, lighting cigarettes for Liza and himself.

"All right, theoretically it does," stated the Dean. "But in actuality, even if travel faster than light *were* possible, actual time would be taken to travel out and back from Earth. So when our traveler returned he would be somewhere in his own and the Earth's future rather than in the past."

"Have your fun, Herman," said Dr. Conrad, unwrapping a Bock Panatella.

Dean Willis ignored him, went on with, "And there are appalling physical obstacles. Remember, our solar system is moving through space at an unknown speed. Our galaxy is moving still faster. Imagine trying to get a fix on a past Earth and getting

back to it even if you did succeed in getting far enough away with your immense telescope to see history." He snorted again.

"Perhaps at some future date . . . " Hank put in cautiously.

"Nonsense!" said the Dean explosively. "It can't be done and it won't ever be done and I'll give you two good reasons why. In the first place, one-way time travel doesn't make sense. Our travelers, supposing them to be more or less human, would be wanting to return to their own time either to report or to show off. And if time travel into the past is incredible, travel into the future is downright absurd."

He paused to survey his audience. Liza and Hank regarded him with mystification. Dr. Conrad contented himself with blowing a large balloon-tire smoke ring, then blowing a smaller one through it. Dean Willis regarded this byplay with a frown.

"Imagine the task confronting our traveler to the future," he continued. "Not only would he have to travel faster than the solar system and the galaxy—he'd have to know where they were going so that he could get ahead of them and be waiting for Earth to catch up with him. Time travel!" He gave vent to his fourth snort.

"But," said Dr. Conrad, *sotto voce,* "as Galileo is supposed to have said when forced to admit the Earth was stationary, 'Yet it does move.' "

"All right, here's the clincher," Dean Willis retorted. "Let us presuppose that all these obstacles are solved. Let us agree that someone, in some far-distant future, has made time travel a reality. Very well—if time travelers are ever going to exist, why haven't they visited us? Why don't we know about them?"

Chapter 2

DR. CONRAD sighed tolerantly, sipped his drink, and spoke through a blue halo of cigar smoke. "That's like the old stock question about how rockets can move in space when they have no atmosphere to push against." He regarded them benignly, added, "It reveals lack of consideration for the factors involved. One answer

lies in the so-called broomstick or parallel time-tract theory, which has our world multiplying at every important point of historic decision and the results falling both ways. Perhaps, in returning to the past, our time travelers have faced such multiplication of worlds and ours is not a world to which they have returned."

"Eyewash—philosophical fiddle-faddle, and you know it!" said Dean Willis.

The latter grinned amiably, said, "Oddly enough this is one point upon which Herman and I agree. However, there are others.

"For instance, our recorded history is scarcely seven thousand years old. Suppose our time travelers come from tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years in the future. Our pathetic little era may not interest them. Or it may be buried beneath a new ice age and forgotten—or beneath the glassy surfaces produced by the atomic bomb."

"*Hah!*" said Dean Willis, smiling. "You're arguing against yourself, Julie."

"Not quite," replied Dr. Conrad, twinkling. "I'm merely trying to get the dead wood out of my way before proceeding."

"Proceeding to what?" Hank asked.

"To the thesis that time travel not only will exist but does exist in some future period, perhaps closer than we suppose." Dr. Conrad eyed the ash on his cigar. "Furthermore, that the agents of this future age are with us today."

"What a horrible idea!" said Liza unexpectedly. Hank glanced at her keenly to see if she were kidding—but there was no mistaking her seriousness.

"Exactly." Dean Willis signaled for another round from Pat McColl, who had been leaning over the bar, listening.

Dr. Conrad smiled crookedly. "I believe we were discussing *physical* time travel," he said. "The reality is far more terrifying. It involves mental temporal displacement and reorientation—in short, possession."

"You're joking!" cried Liza. Hank felt one of her hands reach for

his under the table.

"Never less so," said Dr. Conrad.

Hoping to lighten the conversational trend Hank said, "What beats me is the tie-in between time travel, genius and the History Department."

"If I'm right," said Dr. Conrad, "and I know I am, history as we know it is not only false, but without any educational meaning."

He paused as Dean Willis uttered a growl of dissent until the latter subsided, saying, "You have the floor now, Julie."

"Very well then," said Dr. Conrad. "I began my professional life as a psychiatrist—and a very successful one, if I do say so myself. But little by little I decided we were missing the boat. Every so often a case would turn up that could only be termed unsolvable."

"Geniuses?" Hank required.

"Not usually," was the reply, "although it was Piavatorsky, the pianist, who got me started thinking along my present lines."

"I heard him in Carnegie Hall," said Liza, the distaste in her blue eyes fading before magnificent memory. "I hear he's through playing—a great tragedy."

"Quite so," said Dr. Conrad. "But he did not lose his great gifts until he had developed its new wrist technique and acquired the fame to make it endure."

"But it's so difficult!" said Liza. "I understand he's the only pianist in the world who mastered it—or ever will."

"A dangerous statement," stated the ex-psychiatrist. "Suppose a new keyboard instrument were to be invented—after all, the piano has been with us less than a century and a half. Perhaps the very difficulty of Piavatorsky's technique, as applied to the piano, may bring about its invention. It would mean that Piavatorsky was actually playing an instrument not yet in existence. You see?"

"You're just trying to scare us," said Liza stoutly.

Dr. Conrad shook his head, remarked, "I expect to see and hear this new instrument before I die. Actually his difficult tech-

nique had nothing to do with the destruction of Piavatorsky's genius. A woman took care of that. But that's another story, I fear.

"At first I had no theory. I delved into history, seeking some psychiatric clue to genius. Why, I wondered, are some otherwise commonplace men or women of ordinary lineage gifted beyond all their fellows? I know Mendel's Law—but I believe it is too often employed in rationalization rather than as its discoverer intended.

"I came finally to believe in some outside agent that selects its candidates for genius by some system we do not yet understand. I tried to publish my ideas in the psychiatric journals, and got laughed at for my pains. So I sold them to the popular magazines until one day I found myself with fat royalties and a ruined professional reputation. So I was glad to accept an Institute Fellowship, ultimately become a Don.

"My original idea was to seek the causes of genius, make them understandable to others, perhaps even to make genius more frequent. However I found that many geniuses have lived briefly—either through their own failing or the stupidity of their fellows. Mind you, I'm not speaking of I.Q.—test geniuses. I'm speaking of that outpouring of talent and ability that has occurred so seldom in human history.

"Then there were those in whom genius flared briefly only to extinguish itself—men and women who must have lived out their days wondering what they had had and how they had lost it. These were the pitiful ones."

"Have you considered divine power?" Liza asked him.

Hank was afraid Dr. Conrad would laugh at her. But he didn't, said gently, "Of course—but the ways of the Lord aren't *that* mysterious. I had to turn elsewhere. And the corollary to my theory of genius as the gift of an outside agent was most unpleasant."

"*Now* we're getting to it," said Dean Willis.

Dr. Conrad continued. "It is that while genius may be a gift to mankind from some unknown donor, it is also frequently stripped from its possessors by the same or some other agency.

Inevitably, thanks to evidence I uncovered, I learned of a future whose agents are working against genius in order to make their past fit whatever present they wish to enjoy."

"Isn't that like lifting oneself by one's bootstraps?" Hank inquired.

"Not at all," replied Dr. Conrad. "*If* they have mastered a means of time travel by which they can possess certain minds in the past and manipulate them to suit the needs of their present."

"Proof, Julie—give us proof," said the Dean quietly.

"I've got it—in my rooms—come around tomorrow evening and I'll show it to you." He smiled at Hank, then at Liza. "And I'll want you two as witnesses."

"Count me in," said Hank promptly.

Liza hesitated, finally said, "I don't believe I'd like it."

Hank gaped at her, cried, "For God's sake, honey, what's wrong?"

"It's dangerous," said Liza. "There are some things we aren't supposed to know about. I—I just couldn't go."

"I'll be there," Hank told Dr. Conrad. He felt Liza's fingers drop away from his own beneath the table.

"We'll miss you, Miss Drew," said Dr. Conrad gallantly.

Hank, to turn the conversation to less personal channels, suggested, "How about letting us hear some of this proof now?"

The ex-psychiatrist sighed. "I need documents but—take Sir Isaac Newton for example. Here was a man of moderate distinction who suddenly, while still a young man, blazed forth with three basic laws that became the foundation of virtually all our physical science until Einstein came along. Authentic genius—right?"

"I'll grant you Sir Isaac," said Dean Willis.

Dr. Conrad sipped his drink, continued. "Thereafter what did he do? He spent the rest of his life in absurd experiments—in seeking the outdated philosopher's stone like some medieval alchemist.

"Or, for a more recent and painful example, take Adolf Hitler. How was it that for eighteen years, between the beerhall putsch of

1923 and the Russian invasion of 1941, he made no mistakes? What power stepped in and gave this repulsive little man, with the repulsive voice and the almost complete lack of talent, the evil genius to push men and nations around at will?"

He paused again, to drop ash in the tray at his elbow, added more slowly, "What power then robbed him of his genius and drove him into the most infantile mistakes that ever sent an empire down in ruins? Why, after the conquest of Greece, didn't he mop up the Near East, consolidate Rommel's victory, conquer Iran and perhaps India? There was nothing to stop him—and he'd have been in position to strike for the Russian heartland from the south as well as the west."

"Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad," intoned the Dean. "I could give you a hundred cases in history."

"Exactly." Dr. Conrad turned to Liza and Hank. "That's where Herman and I clash. I want to know *why* they went mad, who, or what, drove them to madness. Hitler, of course, was mad to begin with—but who, or what, for a period of eighteen years, gave his madness a sort of dreadful divinity? I know."

"Garbage!" said the Dean. "By your theory we have no history —or what we have is being deliberately manipulated by your time travelers to fit a present that may lie ten thousand years ahead."

"Right," said the plump man, smiling.

"You sound like Charles Fort," snapped Willis. "He insisted we were property—that we belonged, as pets or laboratory specimens, to some larger entities of our universe."

"Fort was close to the Jehovah theme," said Dr. Conrad. "He simply didn't dress himself up in robes and sound off from a pulpit. Oh, I believe we're property, all right, but not in a spatial or physical sense. I believe our masters are out of time—and time you must admit, is something we know damned little about."

"You're talking blasphemy," said Liza half-angrily.

This time Dr. Conrad did laugh at her—but gently. He said, "My dear, there is only one blasphemy—the suppression of ideas,

any ideas, however foolish or shocking they sound to you in your wisdom. For ideas are the road to truth, and truth is the only road to the God whose name you are using."

"One point you missed," said Hank quickly. "Now and then you find a genius who keeps on being one throughout a long life."

"I think I know the man you're thinking of, Sanford," said Dr. Conrad. "But before I guess at his identity the answer is this—there are men of genius whose work did not greatly affect the thoughts and habits of men—Michelangelo, for instance. Despite his magnificence he offered nothing new in human ideas. Such men are generally allowed to flourish. They are—decorative.

"And there's another possible reason for permitting genius to flourish throughout a long lifetime." Dr. Conrad frowned. "These futurefolk, whoever and whatever they may be, are human and therefore fallible. They make mistakes. But from their vantage point of the future they can usually rectify them. The man you were thinking of was Ben Franklin, wasn't it?"

"Right," said Hank. "Was he a useless genius or a mistake?"

"I'm increasingly afraid he was a mistake," said the ex-psychiatrist. "I think that, perhaps through some flaw in their history, some fault in their perspective, the importance of this country was underestimated. I think that we were allowed to grow unchecked until it became more difficult to stop us than they supposed.

"They tried, you know. There was the Burr-Alston conspiracy, the War of 1812, the Civil War, the Depression, World War Two. From each we have come back stronger than before. I don't think they like it. Whatever they are they are not democratic—from our point of view anyway. And now—I have a feeling they're readying a finisher for us. That's why I'm beginning my book next week instead of next year. I think time is running out."

"You mean, if we win the cold war too soon your sales will suffer," said Dean Willis, again angry. "I'll come tomorrow night to see this alleged proof of yours, Julie. But if you don't convince me—and you're going to have a hell of a time doing it—I'm going

to use every bit of influence in my power to see that your book is not published—or, if it is, to see that it is banned from the bookshops."

"See you tomorrow night," said the ex-psychiatrist calmly. He rose, put out his cigar carefully, bade good night to Hank and Liza.

"Damn him!" said Dean Willis, staring moodily at the retreating penguinish back. "What do they see in him?" He rambled on a trifle thickly as if talking to himself, "The fat fool's crazy, of course. But he's going to do incalculable harm with that book. It's the sort of nonsense that's sure to catch on. It'll make life hell for honest historians." He looked up, realized he was not alone, murmured an apology, moved unsteadily to the bar to pay the bill.

"Come on, Hank," said Liza, slipping into her dark blue raincoat and pulling the hood over her head. "Let's go home."

They walked through warm spring rain along the flagged paths of the grey Gothic institute with its newly-ivied arches. They held hands thoughtfully rather than amorously, they spoke not at all. Finally, after they reached Liza's entry in the women's dormitory she turned to face him under the rain-haloed light. Hank swore, "Damn both of them! I wish they had never come to our table."

Before she kissed him Liza said, "You don't know how much I wish it too, darling. You simply *don't* know!"

Chapter 3

In the soft warmth of the sunlight that streamed through the casement windows the following morning, Hank Sanford felt the fears and fantasies imposed upon him by the discussion at the Club bar fade like the mists of dawn. It had been interesting in its way, even convincing, he supposed—and certainly Liza had reacted oddly. Yet the reality of a slight headache, induced by the drinks he had imbibed, made Liza's behavior, Dr. Conrad's

speculations, Dean Willis' anger, background pieces against the foreground reality of the day at hand.

He showered, shaved, brushed, dressed, in the comfortable seclusion of his two-room-and-bath suite in the Bachelor Dormitory, then strolled to the Club for breakfast.

His life to date had been for the most part hard and interesting. His mother had died when he was born and his father, a restless and roving big-city newspaperman, had reared him in hit-or-miss fashion with the aid of various pseudo "aunts" until his own death in a plane crash.

Then fourteen, Hank had found work as a copy boy in the city room of his sire's most recent newspaper. He had fetched and carried and been bawled out by hungover reporters until, some two years later, he had been advanced to the glory of cub reporterdom at a raise in salary of five dollars per week. By the time he was twenty-one, Hank was a finished newspaperman, earning a good salary and spending most of it on what he supposed was a good time.

Heredity and environment had equipped him not only with understanding of the ingredients of a news story but with a certain small flair for putting words together effectively. He had displayed a social sympathy, untouched by anger, rare in so young a man. He had a happy knack of digging for the roots of human evil, of seeing both sides of a problem, that roused reader sympathy to the tragedy of the criminal while it did not lessen indignation at his crime.

Early in 1942 Hank did a series of features on Armed Services allotment racketeers that was widely syndicated and unexpectedly won him a Pulitzer prize. It also, with at least equal unexpectedness, won him an O.S.S. commission that put him into uniform before he could cash in on his success.

The Army put his highly specialized talents to use by assigning him to counter-espionage on a small island off the Georgia coast, populated chiefly by stinging insects and a deplorably man-hungry detachment of WACs. Hank escaped relatively unscathed

from both nuisances only to be bitten by the fiction bug—since for the first time in his life he had a chance to read.

He sweated out a novel based on his reportorial experiences confidently expecting it to finance his postwar career—and saw it returned by publisher after publisher, invariably "with regrets," on the ground that it was too factual to be good fiction.

"But it really happened!" was his anguished cry to his agent.

The latter sighed, said, "You might as well learn it now, Hank —truth is not only stranger than fiction, it's usually lousy fiction. Fiction needs plausibility, yes—and plausibility must rest upon at least a semblance of truth. But everything in a piece of fiction must be weighed carefully, not on its own merit but on its value to the story you are trying to tell."

Hank mulled that over for a while, then took his experience with the WACs on the off-Georgia island and wrote a romance that bore no resemblance whatever to the facts. It was promptly picked up by a good publisher and, while its sale was not large, won him considerable critical acclaim for its "realism" and its "unerring accuracy of character, incident and background."

Baffled, Hank retired from the writing of novels. His agent was able, thanks to the book and his Pulitzer prize, to arrange for him a profitable tie-in with a magazine group writing articles which supported him comfortably while he puzzled over the dividing line between fact and fiction, the various balances necessary between them to produce effectively either sort of work. Ultimately someone had suggested the Wellington Institute and now here he was, swotting away at what he hoped would be at least a partially definitive work on the problem. Walking the flagged, hedge-bordered paths to the Club, he tried to concentrate on the project—but wisps of Dr. Conrad's more colorful speculations of the night before kept fogging his thoughts—along with not-so-vagrant visualizations of Liza Drew. He felt a faint stir of excitement in his diaphragm at the long-odds of her deciding to breakfast at the Club too.

However, the only occupants of the barroom, which did double

duty as breakfast room, were a sad trio of Creative Arts painters and a Modern Language Don with whom he had only a nodding acquaintance. Pat McColl, burly and broken-nosed as ever, was busily polishing glasses behind the bar in preparation for the day's business. Hank sat down alone, ordered kidneys and bacon, rolls and iced tea from the waiter.

Pat, after eyeing a final beer goblet against the light to ensure its spotlessness, turned to Hank, said, "Quite a rhubarb Dean Willis and Dr. Conrad were having last night."

"Quite," said Hank. He sipped his tomato juice, added, "I don't suppose there's any real harm in speculative thought."

"Well, it's the identical same substance that made the A-bomb," the bartender said surprisingly. "You never can tell . . . "

"But you hope for the best." Hank concluded the ancient saw for him, stifled a foolish smile.

"Pat," he said to his own surprise, "you've been around the Institute a lot longer than I have. Do the powers that be raise much hell when somebody's work falls off a bit? I haven't been making much progress for the last month or so."

Pat scrubbed very hard at an invisible spot on the dark walnut in front of him, remarked, "Funny—Miss Drew was saying the same kind of thing just the other afternoon. But I wouldn't say either of you wasn't making progress."

"Listen, Cupid," said Hank, pretending annoyance, "go shoot your poisoned darts at somebody else."

Blandly the bartender ignored him, added, "I wouldn't worry too much if I was you, Mr. Sanford. They're very understanding folks here—tolerant's the word for them, downright tolerant."

Hank's meal arrived then, accompanied by a New York morning paper, and conversation ceased. As he ate and scanned the headlines, however, Hank considered the story of Pat McColl, whose importance as an Institute functionary had won him a recent profile in the Saturday Review of Literature.

Until winning a lowly kitchen-help job at the Institute some five years earlier Pat had been something of a Wellington ne'er-

do-well, an oafish young man who idled around the pool rooms and bars, had been in jail more than once for various types of disorderly conduct, had tried the prize-ring and failed miserably. Association with the trained minds of the Institute, even in a servant capacity, had done something to Pat. He had worked hard, had been given a chance at the Club bar. Today he was rated an intelligent citizen, a liked and trusted one, with promising futures before him in several fields.

Hank was considering the odd metamorphosis of Pat McColl when the waiter entered and announced that he was wanted on the telephone. Gulping a last mouthful of kidneys and bacon, Hank hurried to the main foyer, where the telephone booths stood like sentry boxes, anticipating the soft enchantment of Liza's voice.

The voice he heard through the receiver, however, was booming, deep, eminently masculine. It said, "Sanford? This is Manly Tabard speaking. I'm over at Cal Wainwright's. We'd both appreciate your coming here at once on a matter of grave importance."

"Sure—yes, sir—on my way," replied Hank, wishing he hadn't breakfasted so heartily. The words "grave importance" had an ominous aftersound. Pat McColl, he thought, had spoken both too soon and too confidently.

Carleton Wainwright's mansion of antique yellow brick and white woodwork lay at the head of a tree-lined driveway about a quarter mile from the Institute. It had been built at the order of Colonel Marcus Aurelius Wainwright shortly after the French and Indian War, had been lived in by his direct descendants until the stock market crash of 1907 put the estate on the open market. It had then served successively as a rest home for rich alcoholics, a road house and speakeasy, finally as a rural bordello. After the extinction of this last following a police raid it had been abandoned. Carleton Wainwright—no relation to the original builder and one of those shrewd young men who from time to time come out of the Midwest to make their marks on Eastern

finance—had picked it up at a tax auction in 1932, intrigued more by its name than by its potentialities as a home.

Not even a country grade-school graduate himself, his authentic contempt for what he called "long-hair education" had undergone a gradual about-face; it was as if he had absorbed the academic atmosphere by osmosis. Little by little, with the passage of the years and his own mellowing maturity, the millionaire had begun to yearn for some method of leaving his mark on the long-lived world of culture as well as on the more ephemeral world of finance.

Professor Manlius Tabard of the Wellington University English Department had supplied it. During the late 1930's, over a warm martini at one of the various University deaneries, he had casually remarked to the owner of Wainwright Manor that, while the School for Advanced Research at Princeton was a marvelous thing, it had two distinct shortcomings to his way of thought.

"They are," he said, belching with a sonorous bellnote that matched the chimes of his voice, "the insistence upon Ph. D.'s or at least upon firmly-established national reputations for admission—and what, it appears to me, must inevitably develop into a topheavy swing toward the physical sciences rather than toward the creative arts and the humanities."

Professor Tabard was one of those rare souls who had not only mastered the art of the long sentence in conversation but was actually able to balance his paragraphs while speaking. His talent fascinated the laconic Wainwright almost as much as the fact that the Professor was a shrewd adminstrator and an extremely affable person when his ulcers so permitted.

And so, after further discussions and considerable pipe laying, the Wellington Institute for Advanced Humanities was founded, ultimately located in a large war-halted construction project originally intended for the Wellington Theological Seminary, currently defunct. Wainwright obtained the property on a nominal 99-year lease from the University, financed its completion with his own money, and agreed to devote to the furtherance of

the Institute all of his vast fortune and the remaining efforts of his life.

Manly Tabard, of course, was first Institute Master, with a lifetime tenure, a comfortable mansion of his own, rent and tax free, a salary to match that of any football coach in the land, and numerous other perquisites.

Directly under him were the Deans of the three chief departments of Institute study—Languages, History, and Creative Arts. Philosophy was excluded after long debate on the ground that in its purest form it overlapped mathematics and the physical sciences, and that, in fact, it would be present and a vital factor in all three of the other departments.

The Deans were only slightly less-well-cared for than the Master himself. Below them, each heading a department subdivision, were the Dons, with a tenure of six years and an expenses-paid sabbatical year. Under them were the Fellows, with a tenure of three years and a six-month sabbatical.

Even the lowliest Fellow found life at the Institute scaled to existence at a lush resort hotel. Nor did he need a vast reputation or flock of university degrees to win admittance. What was demanded were new ideas along with sufficient personal character and integrity to impress a jury of three men—Wainwright, Tabard and the Dean of whatever department the candidate aspired for. Decisions were made by the discussion rather than by ballot and a candidate, if rejected, could try again as often as he or she wished. Any Fellow or Don could break his contract or obtain leave of absence upon consultation with the jury that had admitted him. The Institute reserved the right to request his withdrawal if its authorities felt him to be loafing or a detriment to the Institute in any way.

In return the Institute made two demands upon its members—that whatever work any member might produce during or as a direct result of his residence should be printed by the excellent Wellington University Press and that the Institute should receive ten percent of any resulting fees or royalties. With work

other than books—as in the cases of painting, sculpture or archeology—equivalent arrangements were worked out. The money thus acquired went into a fund toward endowing the Institute after Carleton Wainwright's death,—when only the fruits of his moneymaking genius, rather than the genius itself, should be available.

Hank, who had been a Fellow less than six months, considered these and less tangible Institute factors as he rang the doorbell of Wainwright Manor. If his work had not proved worthy—and it looked very much as if it had not—he was going to hate leaving the Institute. Lacking any form of higher education, he had never actually felt its absence before his enrollment. Now, having savored a little of what he had missed, he was hungry for more, and would have to tighten his mental belt if it were to be denied him.

A grave and pallid butler opened the door and said, "Mr. Wainwright is expecting you, sir. This way, please."

He then sedately led the ex-reporter through a lushly carpeted corridor whose walls were lined with Copleys, Peales and Stuarts, to a small study whose fine dark mahogany paneling was relieved by blue plaster ceiling and book niches, the latter lined with rich morocco bindings.

There three men awaited his coming.

Chapter 4

HANK recognized the two who rose to greet him. Surely, he thought, regarding Carleton Wainwright as he stood behind his fine Georgian desk, none of the original strain of Wainwrights could ever have looked so much the lord of the manor. Though born to a plough in Iowa, the founder of the Institute had the wiry grace of a latter-day cavalier. Only his voice betrayed his peasant origin by a nasal twang, a clipped laconicism, a use of non-urban colloquialisms.

He spoke as Hank entered. "Much obliged, Sanford. We got a

tough one to crack."

"A very difficult problem indeed, Hank," boomed Manly Tabard, removing meerschaum from mouth. He was a titan of a man, red of face, snow white of hair, with three chins, no appreciable paunch, a speckled suit and violet bow tie. "We are hoping that you can play the role of Alexander—and cut cleanly the Gordian knot that is baffling us."

Being greeted in such fashion after mentally kissing the Institute good-bye on the doorstep was, to Hank, like a blow in the solar plexus. He stood there, blinking stupidly, while the third man in the room rose reluctantly to be introduced.

His name was Luizetti—Lieutenant Joe Luizetti—and he was a cop, or rather chief of detectives of the Wellington Police Force. The tightness of his dark blue suit across his chest and shoulders, the massive ease with which he moved, the young-old severity of his face—all spelled gladiator to Hank, who vaguely remembered seeing the name on several All-American football listings shortly before World War Two.

Luizetti contented himself with a, "Glad to meet you, Sanford," but there was no hint of gladness in the chill dark stare with which he regarded the ex-reporter.

"Sit down, Sanford," said Wainwright doing so himself. Hank found a comfortable perch in a cushioned window bay and awaited further developments. The millionaire glanced at Manly Tabbard, said crisply, "Take over."

"An extremely tragic event has occurred at the Institute within the past few hours," announced Tabard in sonorous tones. "In fact it is so serious that I hardly know how to begin . . . "

"Let me, then," cut in Lieutenant Luizetti in a flat voice. "Sanford, did you know Dr. Julius Conrad?"

The "did" was the tipoff; something had happened to the plump little ex-psychiatrist with the amazing theory since the evening before. Hank decided to play it straight, said, "Yes, I know him—but not well. I'm fairly new here at the Institute."

Inwardly he was in turmoil. His years of reportorial experience,

the instinct for crime that had made him a journalistic standout, both shrieked at something very wrong indeed, as did the fact that he had been summoned from breakfast by the two most important persons of the Institute.

Yet why had they summoned *him?*

"You talked to him last night?" It was a question from Lieutenant Luizetti, but sure statement underlay it.

Hank admitted he had, explained some of the circumstances if not the subject of the conversation. Then, turning to Manly Tabard before the detective could stop him, he asked, "Why—has something happened to Dr. Conrad?"

"He was shot in his study sometime before dawn," the Institute Master informed him. Luizetti measured Hank with a wait-till-I-get-you-away-from-these-VIPs look, then began to buff the nails of his left hand on his coat lapel.

"Who found him?" Hank inquired.

"The charlady who cleans his entry," said Tabard. "She reported it less than two hours ago."

Luizetti had had enough. He said flatly, "If you don't mind, this is a murder case and I'm in charge. Mr. Sanford may be an important witness."

"But, Lieutenant," began Manly Tabard, "we told you before we sent for him that . . . " His big voice trailed off.

"Never mind, Lieutenant. I'll be good," said Hank. "What do you want to know?"

There was a brief relaxing of the detective's features that suggested his awareness of having met a veteran in police methods, if not a fellow professional.

Question and answers were brief and to the point. Who had Hank been with—who had the ex-psychiatrist been with—how had they got together? Then Luizetti asked Hank what they had talked about when all four of them were at table.

"I've been dreading this!" said the ex-reporter. "Lieutenant, I'm going to level with you. I used to work for"—he named a half dozen newspapers—"and I've done a hell of a lot of police

work in my day. I've known a lot of cops, all kinds—enough of them to know how you're going to react to what I'm going to tell you. You're going to say either I or Dr. Conrad or all of us were nuts."

"Let me be the judge of that," replied Luizetti. "I took a degree here at Wellington myself—Physical Ed." He said it with a trace of open defiance.

"I remember your name on some of the 1939 All-Americas," Hank told him, hoping he had the year correct.

"I beg your pardon." Manly Tabard cleared his throat from long rostrum habit, added, "Lieutenant, I remember you well. Hell, I ought to—I flunked you in sophomore English." He paused.

"Get on with it, Professor," said the detective.

"Very well." Manly Tabard was half smiling. "I also happen to be acquainted at least superficially with the project of Julius Conrad—at one point I had to pass on it, give him a green light to go ahead with it. I can tell you right now it's going to sound like sheerest lunacy."

"It wouldn't surprise *me*." Luizetti turned to Hank, said, "Was it about his work?" and, at Hank's nod, "Spill it."

Hank spilled it. Since no mention had been made of it he avoided reference to the more personal interplay between Dr. Conrad and Dean Willis. He watched the Lieutenant carefully as he expounded the dead man's weird theory, was not surprised, at its conclusion, to see the detective furtively cross himself.

"You don't look pert, Lieutenant," Carleton Wainwright spoke.

"Dammit, why should I?" the detective countered fiercely. "A man's been murdered and it's my job to find his killer and arrest him, no matter how daffy the motive." He paused, ruminated, added, "That's tough enough, but you, Mr. Wainwright, got enough influence to have me busted. So I gotta walk on eggs. And to top that you want to saddle me with your own pet stooge."

"That," said Wainwright twangily, "is up to Sanford." He turned to Hank, added, "No chance to explain. Let Tabard do it."

Manly Tabard harrrummpphhed again, said, "Mr. Wainwright

and I are deeply concerned with the welfare of the Institute—we both feel that this tragedy may do it irreparable harm if not handled both rigorously and with delicacy." He paused, regarded first Hank, then the Lieutenant with a sort of grave benignity. "Therefore, while we have every confidence in the ability of Lieutenant Luizetti to ferret out poor Julius Conrad's killer, we feel that we should have someone close to the investigation who could take the Institute's welfare into account."

"But why me?" Hank was so startled he had to pick up his cigarette from the carpet. "I'm new here."

"A point in your favor," boomed Tabard. "You have scarcely had time to develop any deep-rooted emotional tie-ups. And as a Pulitzer prizewinning crime specialist we feel fortunate to have you on hand."

"I've got one tie-up," Hank blurted to his own horror.

Manly Tabard smiled indulgently, said, "We have watched the development of your romance with interest, Hank. If things work out as they should you'll be a lucky young man. We hope they do. Well, how about it?"

"I—I don't know." Hank risked a glance at Luizetti, understood all too well—the resentment behind his black eyes. Then, reading the concern in the faces of Carleton Wainwright and Manly Tabard, he made his decision, told them. "I'll give it a try. But don't expect too much. That's the Lieutenant's job, not mine."

"We thank you," said Luizetti ironically.

There was a pause until Hank said, "Well, what are the facts? All I know is that Dr. Conrad was shot."

Luizetti, apparently resigned to his fate, briefed him. "Dr. Conrad was shot three times with a thirty-two—through the left eye, the stomach and the right elbow. The gun was automatic."

"Powder burns?" Hank inquired.

"Yeah," said Luizetti unhappily. "Three of them—in the cushion he was shot through. It came from the windowseat in his study."

"Nobody heard the shots then?"

"You're so right," said the Lieutenant savagely. He stared at Hank, added, "Henry Sanford—hey, you must be the ginzo who got a Pulitzer for busting the Serviceman's allotment racket during the war. Nice going."

"Thanks," said Hank, wondering what next.

"Maybe you *can* help me," said Luizetti. "You'll know how to handle the press for me. I'll tell you what to tell 'em."

"I'll do what I can," replied Hank. "Naturally I'll try to see it's not slanted against the Institute—and I'll try to see you get full credit for whatever you do."

"Skip it," said Luizetti wearily. "I ain't that kind of a cop. We'll play it straight. But some of the big-city hot-shots this case is sure to draw if we don't crack it quick may know you—and you'll be able to soften them better than me."

"I'll try," said Hank, relieved. He thought that perhaps he and the Lieutenant might get along after all. "What about more facts on the killing? Any witnesses?"

"They'll be tough to find," Luizetti told him, "especially since nobody heard the shots. But we dug up a couple saw a dame in a dark raincoat scramming out of his entry around two ayem."

"Anything else?" asked Hank.

"Not yet," said the detective. Then, looking sheepish, "You don't take this stuff about time travel seriously?"

"Sure," said Hank. "He was too close to the truth and a time traveler got him." Then, more seriously, "I was reserving judgment till he showed us his proof this evening." A thought struck him. "His papers are still there, aren't they?"

"Far as I know," said the Lieutenant. "No time to go through them yet."

"We'd better take a look at them," Hank suggested. "That is, if you don't mind my coming along."

"I got you whether I like you or not," said Luizetti. "It's the next stop on my schedule anyway."

Manly Tabard beamed on them both as they rose. He belched

gently, told them, "I had a hunch you two chaps would work together. I can't begin to tell you what a load it is off my mind."

"I wish I could say the same," Luizetti told him pointedly.

Hank thought of something else, said, "Isn't there a regular public relations bureau for the Institute?"

"Yeah," drawled Carleton Wainwright, named a famous New York firm. "Not their pidgin—they like broader scope." He rose, nodded prim farewell. "Good luck—and thanks, Sanford."

"You may hate us both before we're through," said Luizetti.

Wainwright shrugged, told them, "If I do it won't be your fault. If you dig up any rotten apples let's get them out of the barrel quick."

In the driveway a patrol car awaited them. Luizetti said, "The Institute," got in. Hank piled into the back seat after him. The Lieutenant lit a cigarette, regarded him quizzically, said finally, "Maybe this ain't such a bad idea at that. At least you know your way around this joint. How did a guy like you ever get mixed up with it?"

Hank gave him a thumbnail. Luizetti pondered it for a moment while the police car crossed the highway with siren screaming, then said, "You mean, if I was to go to them two back there and tell them I wanted to make a study, say of police corruption in a town like Wellington from a cop's viewpoint, they'd go for it?"

"They might," said Hank, turning to regard his companion thoughtfully. "I'd say you'd stand a pretty good chance."

Luizetti laughed a laugh of sheer delight, said, "Don't let my lingo fool you Sanford—nor the fact that Old Jumbo Tabard back there flunked me in English. I made a point of getting another prof and passing it the next year. Old Jumbo was just down on football players because the coach dragged down more than he did."

His accents were as crisp and cultivated as his grammar. Hank gulped. Lieutenant Luizetti, he decided, was a man he would have to watch.

"Naw," said that worthy. "It's a screwy idea. I got me a

wife, three kids. I could never support 'em on what the Institute could pay."

"The Institute allows living quarters and expenses for the family of every candidate it accepts," Hank told him.

The detective blinked, asked, "What do they pay?"

Hank told him. The police car stopped in front of the Don's bachelor quarters and he opened the door and got out. Behind him the Lieutenant said, "You mean they pay that kind of money for a guy to spend years on a screwy proposition like that time travel gimmick you were talking about back at Wainwright's?"

"Why not?" countered Hank. "The chief purpose of the Institute is to encourage original thought. And even you'll have to admit Dr. Conrad's idea was original."

"That it was, that it was," said Luizetti, standing beside the car. "Well, let's put the show on the road."

Chapter 5

AT first glance the lving quarters of the late Dr. Julius Conrad were symptomatic of the man—casual, somewhat cluttered, untidy, interesting, rather naughty, generally pleasant. A large davenport bed, pulled out for the night, was adorned with a single light-blue bolster on which was embroidered in white letters the motto *Never Complain, Never Explain.* A "white" Utrillo Montmartre hung above it on the wall. The window drapes, of light green chintz, showed nymphs and satyrs dancing to the pipes of a semi-recumbent Pan.

It was, Hank supposed, indicative of their owner that he had used the larger of his two rooms as a study. Here the rug, a pale rose affair without ornamentation, was stained with dark and ugly blotches of what had recently been the life-blood of the man who had lived and worked here, on the ground floor of the neo-Gothic building.

Following the detective, Hank picked his way carefully through the bloodstains to the desk. Looking at Dr. Conrad's actual place

of work he realized that the murdered man, for all of his apparent casualness, had been both precise and thorough where his job was concerned. Luizetti eyed the pile of manuscripts with distaste.

"You might give *them* a going over," he said to Hank. "The fingerprint boys have finished." He blew a small cloud of white dust from the papers, added, "I'll go over the rest of the dump."

"This won't be a ten-minute job," Hank told him.

"Just try to get a line on what he was doing," said the Lieutenant. "Not that you're apt to find much that can help us. I hear the Doc was quite a ladies' man."

"Is that bad?" Hank countered, vaguely disturbed by the detective's open vulgarity.

"In this instance it might have been," replied Luizetti. "Well, let's get at it."

Hank sat himself at the desk and, lifting a large chunk of manuscript, put it on the blotter in front of him. He felt as if he were back on a paper. Instinctively his eyes sought a handy telephone and long-forgotten deadlines crowded themselves back into his head.

But as he began to work his way into the manuscripts he quickly forgot time, place, memories. The pile of manuscripts contained Dr. Conrad's notes beyond question, the raw material out of which his book was to be written. Almost at once Hank saw that the murdered man had indeed been ready to go into writing immediately. Atop the pile was a neatly typed synopsis, which the ex-reporter read with growing fascination.

The preface, as sketched in, was to be a formal and heavily footnoted statement along the lines of Dr. Conrad's argument of the night before. He explained the difficulties in finding threads for his cable of logic in the cases of men and women who died hundreds, even thousands, of years before. He cited Confucius, Buddha, the ancient Greek inventors of the steam engine, his inability to find any agency save the unreadiness of their time which might have checked its development in a world of slave labor.

Dr. Conrad went on through a list of names Hank did not recognize until he came to Archimedes. Here the ex-psychiatrist confessed a wistful yearning for facts about the slaying of that titanic pre-Christian during the sack of Syracuse. " . . . but again we are trapped by time as by the journalistic lapses of a civilization to which both printing press and teletype were unknown . . ."

It had been Dr. Conrad's obvious intention to stress the trapped-by-time factor throughout his volume, to accent the helplessness of humanity, unaware of its thralldom, to deal with it. None the less, Hank reflected, what he had scanned so far in no way represented proof of the dead man's theory.

The first sizable folder of notes he came to was about one Manichaeus, a name known to him, and his interest grew greater. For here, reaching back some 1700 years, Dr. Conrad appeared to have uncovered records that at least implicitly supported his theory.

For the first time he read of the great Holy Man, considered heretic by the orthodox Christians of his era, who traveled from his native Mesopotamia first to Persia, then, while in his sixties, all the way to the shores of the Atlantic in pursuit of his dream—a union of Christianity with the then powerful Zoroastrian faith and that of Buddha. Dr. Conrad had written:

. . . and consider what this union might have meant to the world—a union of East, Near East and West, merged in a single faith that combined the strongest features of the faith of each . . . in an age when religion largely controlled all temporal power.

Consider East and West, not only meeting, but being joined at a time when neither was yet far removed from primitive levels, when the usages and philosophies of more advanced folkways had yet to turn each irrevocably from the other. What a world lay within the grasp of man had the great dream of Manichaeus been fulfilled.

Consider how close he came to success, this man who, through simple belief in the powers of darkness and light, forced the Roman Church, through two Colleges of Cardinals within a single century, not only to admit the existence of, but to adopt

the person of the Devil in an effort to counteract the growing popularity of Manichaean doctrine long after the martyrdom of its creator.

And now let us consider the forces that prevented the fulfillment of his dream . . .

Here followed a brief dissertation upon Persian court politics during the latter half of the third century A.D., a description of the flaying alive of Manichaeus in the year 277 by order of King Behram.

Then came the clincher—in the form of a photostat of a recently discovered document, written by a court counselor of Behram and purporting to relate how the tragedy came out. Clipped to it was an attested translation by an expert of the British Museum staff. In cumbersome prose it described a strange obsession that had seized the court favorite of the King at this time, her insistence upon the destruction of Manichaeus (or Mani), her intrigues, at last successful, to have him slain.

. . . and at length, with the Holy Man flayed in the courtyard, the possession left her and she wept bitterly at what she had been constrained to do. Whereat the King, aghast at her perfidy, ordered her similar execution. But she laughed at the whips, saying they could not harm her, and fell dead in her chains . . .

To Hank, who had never before heard of the Manichaean Dualism and its survival until the Reformation, in secret but well-organized cult-groups throughout Western Europe, it made fascinating reading. But by itself it seemed to offer little in the way of proof.

He leafed on through the notes, laying aside one folder after another. Apparently Conrad had treated his subjects in chronological order. He spotted the name of Leonardo da Vinci, and wondered. Here again he was in for a surprise, as Dr. Conrad explained the variety and subtlety of the time travelers' methods via a correspondence between a minister at the court of Lorenzo di Medici and one of the "Magnificent's" favorites.

Its object, according to the minister-epistleer, was to keep the Tuscan genius so occupied with painting, architecture, and diplomatic assignments that he was to have little time to develop the products of his inventive imagination into concrete actuality or even experimental status. The bait:

. . . should you continue to be successful your ladyship may rest assured of my extended influence toward recognition of your two sons by the Duke, in such fashion as will not only ensure them titles and rents for life but will enable you to look forward to an autumn of ease and affluence with the Duke during the next five months—after which da Vinci will be sent to Paris on a diplomatic mission in a swift succession thereafter . . .

Then came a listing by the letter-writer of the tasks that were actually to occupy the genius till his death—in a letter written many years before that event. Its ostensible purpose was to prevent Leonardo from martyrdom for sacrilege thanks to the Anti-christian nature of many of his discoveries.

Actually, as Dr. Conrad made plain in a long exposition, it was to prevent his enabling Man to develop an internal combustion engine in the sixteenth century, thus ". . . utterly disrupting the course of known history in a manner not in accord with the past sought by our custodians from the future."

The letter, like the Persian document, was photostated and fully authenticated by the chief archivist of a famed Florentine museum. There seemed little reason to doubt its authenticity.

He continued to examine the dead man's notes, passing more names that meant little or nothing to him, until he stumbled upon that of Sir Francis Bacon. Here, he thought, was one toward which it would be difficult to prove outside repression (save that of the political censorship of his time) of much practical use. But as he read he discovered it to have been quite different. Apparently Sir Francis had written in code and cryptogram a great many things not included in his better known works—things that might have proved ruinously disturbing to both church and state.

Hank read the deciphered account of a flying machine that attained motive power from a sort of super-top, whose spinning produced first a drone, then a whine, then a "hum"—after which the vessel itself, shaped vaguely like a primitive dirigible, became airborne.

He laid the paper aside, thinking this over. It sounded remarkably like some of the supersonic devices currently being tested in government-sealed laboratories. It might even, he decided, offer some sort of explanation for the motive power of the derided "flying saucers." And Sir Francis had known the principle involved.

Dr. Conrad here took over with:

. . . and in this instance, perhaps the most menacing technicality that our custodians from the future were thus far compelled to meet, they adopted still another technique to fit the circumstances and cause the possibility of human flight in a pre-industrial era to be disregarded.

Sir Francis himself gave them the opportunity—or rather the time in which he lived forced it upon him—by putting his invention in code. So a wily agent conceived the idea of discrediting him—outside of his more general writings on nature and Man—by cooking up the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy.

Recent discoveries of the bard's whereabouts during his so-called "lost" years have virtually proved that he was not the illiterate Baconians have long claimed. It seems to me significant that these discoveries should not have been made until any conceivable need for suppressing the Baconian inventions had passed.

By offering Sir Francis as the "true" author of Shakespeare's dramas, this agent managed effectively to transfer the interest of the intelligent world from Bacon the scientist to Bacon the literary freak.

Dr. Conrad dug further back into the legend, produced hitherto unprinted correspondence to prove that the whole Bacon-Shakespeare farce was a deliberate plot on the part of an obscure English literary adventurer of the early eighteenth century, " . . . at a time, you will note, shortly before James Watts' rediscovery of

the steam engine inaugurated the Industrial Revolution."

Against his will the ex-reporter began to feel himself growing convinced, if not of the authenticity of Dr. Conrad's theory, at least of its possibility. Certainly, as the dead man had pointed out in the notes to his preface, hitherto baffling people and events seemed to acquire a new lucidity when viewed from the vantage point of his remarkable hypothesis.

Lieutenant Luizetti looked in then and asked if Hank were hungry. "I'm sending out a man for sandwiches," he said. "Do you want anything?"

Hank looked at his watch, saw that it was past noon, discovered himself to be ravenous. He ordered a couple of ham sandwiches and a bottle of milk, then lit a cigarette and leaned back in his chair, asked the detective how his end was going.

"Not bad, not good," said Luizetti equivocally, seating himself on the corner of the desk and borrowing Hank's smoke to light his own. "Our boy was a ladies' man, all right—plenty of stuff around. Lighters, cigarette cases, compacts, things like that. But the cute so-and-so didn't hang onto any letters. We've got a lot of junk to track down—some initialed, some not." He yawned, looked discouraged, added, "That'll take time." Then, changing the subject abruptly, "How's time travel—did he have anything?"

"I'm not sure yet," said Hank. He hesitated, added, "He may have had something at that."

"Don't *you* go cute on me now," the detective told him, getting off the desk and studying the blood-blotches on the rug. "Have to get this thing down to the lab today." Then, switching subjects again, "How soon do you think you'll be through?"

"How would I know?" countered Hank. Relenting, he added, "Maybe another hour or two will give me the drift of it."

"Okay then. Any clues so far?"

"Just on time travel," said Hank with a half-smile. "But I'll tell you this—if he *did* have something, I'm surprised he wasn't murdered a couple of years ago."

Chapter 6

LUNCH over, Hank ploughed on through the murdered man's notes. He passed over Swift, Franklin, Voltaire, found himself looking at a double folder listing both Antoine Laurent Lavoisier and Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford.

Here again Dr. Conrad had struck paydirt, in the person of Marie Anne Pieretti de Chastenolles, wed first to one, then to the other of these men of genius. She had, as the dead man pointed out, been ideally located for a custodian of human progress. Her father, a man of high position in eighteenth century Paris, maintained a salon whose habitués included Rousseau, Laplace, the astronomer, Turgot, Franklin, Pierre du Pont de Nemours, Condorcet, the mathematician, and Lavoisier himself.

With the possible exception of Franklin, Lavoisier was easily the most important of the stellar group. It was he who founded modern chemistry out of the absurdities of phlogistics, directly descended from medieval alchemy. Unerringly little Marie Anne had selected him, had married him when she was not yet fifteen years old. With Lavoisier, according to Dr. Conrad's research, she had been shy and gentle, though she had driven him to strive for official rather than scientific advancement. This failed to halt her husband's career as a scientist. When revolution broke out in 1789, she managed to convince him he was in no danger until, after Marat accused him of attempting to deprive all Paris of oxygen, he was imprisoned, and finally guillotined in 1794.

Dr. Conrad admitted to having no proof of Marie Anne's complicity in the death of her first husband, although she proved perfectly competent to preserve her father from a like fate. But ten years later she met the brilliant Benjamin Thompson, and married him shortly thereafter, thus allying herself to "the father of thermodynamics"—the quotes were Dr. Conrad's. Reading the brief sketch of Thompson's life Hank found it extraordinarily interesting.

Thompson, born in Woburn, Massachusetts, in the middle of the eighteenth century, first won fortune by marrying a wealthy widow of Rumford (now Concord), New Hampshire. Through her influence he got a major's commission in the Provincial militia, which so incensed his fellow officers that the Thompsons moved to Boston, where they remained as Loyalists during the siege of that city by Washington's army in 1775-76.

Sent by Sir William Howe to London, Thompson's charm was sufficient to obtain a Whitehall appointment as Undersecretary of State for Colonies, whence he later returned to New York as an active Tory officer. After 1783 he resided in England, where his wife died. He then moved to the Continent, where he ultimately became Prime Minister of Bavaria and the "Savior of Munich." Simultaneously he began to gain fame as a scientist, was the first to conceive that heat was a form of energy.

This he proved dramatically by having a horse-drawn bit bore a hole in a cannon submerged in water, causing the water to boil without fire. For this and other services he was awarded the Papal title of count, selected Rumford as his title, "the place where my fortunes were born."

He returned to England, where he was loaded with further scientific and social honors, ultimately settled at Auteuil outside of Paris, where he died suddenly in 1814 while engaged in new scientific studies. This was Marie Anne's second husband.

A mature man, who had already received all worldly honors he wished, she was unable to influence him as she had Lavoisier. So she adopted more direct tactics, winning herself a name throughout Europe as a termagant and effectively keeping him too upset to accomplish his work. The marriage broke up within a few years and then Rumford inexplicably died while apparently still in his prime.

At this point Dr. Conrad had produced another clincher in the form of a diary written by Marie Anne herself in faded ink and in the flourish-ridden handwriting of the time. Said the two-time widow, shortly after her American husband's death:

. . . so now it is accomplished and at last I can hope for my return home. It seems unusually hard that I alone should have drawn two such assignments, yet I suppose it is an honor that such trust should be reposed upon me.

That the second of them, only just completed, should have proved so much more difficult of execution than my employers anticipated is not, I have been reliably informed, to be held against my proper self. At any rate 'tis done, albeit rather more violently than intended, and soon now I can return to serenity among my own people after discarding this miserable pain-wracked body.

Appended, as in the other files, was a complete list of affidavits and the correspondence required to obtain them.

Hank laid the double-folder with the others he had already read, lit a cigarette. Perhaps each recorded incident, taken by itself, meant little. Yet when viewed in bulk this assemblage of odd circumstances and facts represented an overwhelming body of evidence.

Coincidence had certainly been at work with a vengeance in having Julius Conrad murdered just as he was about to put the incredible results of his long research into publishable form. Even if, as Lieutenant Luizetti so resolutely insisted, it were proved that the ex-psychiatrist's death had been brought about by a much more mundane set of causes, Hank wondered if he would be able to believe it.

The fact that he actually asked himself such questions provided sufficient answer. Come what might as the result of Luizetti's investigation, the ex-reporter would be searching until he found an answer that satisfied *him,* Hank Sanford. Nor did the fact that obtaining such an answer could prove impossible afford him much comfort.

For the first time it occurred to him that he himself might be walking in danger through the knowledge he was obtaining by perusal of Dr. Conrad's notes. Unconsciously he shifted his chair so that the back was not fully to the windows.

This, he said fiercely and silently, was getting him nowhere fast.

But before he turned back to Dr. Conrad's notes he recalled what Liza had said about there being some things people were not meant to know, her strange remark when she bade him goodnight. Again he thought of the woman in the dark raincoat seen leaving this entry-way close to the time of the ex-psychiatrist's death. Liza *had* been wearing a dark blue raincoat.

It was nonsense of course—of a piece with his own childish panic over the wildly plausible theories of the dead man.

Hank got back to work. There was a huge mass of nineteenth-century material—brilliant men who had vanished, become intellectually impotent, been stymied by stupid or corrupt colleagues or enemies, died violently. There was evidence showing that the immensely important biological discoveries of Gregor Mendel might not have been lost for decades by accident.

There were others, each with its hint or overheard remark or written evidence, each neatly documented and prepared for fuller exposition. In the twentieth century, for instance, Hank came upon the name of Henry G. J. Moseley, the young Oxford graduate who, in less than four years, developed the entire theory of molecular matter, first gave the elements their numerical labels in accord with the complexity of their atomic structure.

It was Millikan himself, who said of Moseley, per Dr. Conrad, that he "threw open the windows through which we can glimpse the subatomic world . . . "

And it was of this same remarkable young man, who died heroically if absurdly at Suvla Bay during the Gallipoli Campaign in 1915, that a superior officer wrote in epitaph to his mother, "The brigade lost a remarkably capable signalling officer . . . "

Of this tragedy, Dr. Conrad stated:

. . . and since members of his family are still alive it was extremely difficult to get information without hurt feelings or lawsuits. But finally I was told by a relative by marriage, who was close to Moseley during the early days of World War One, of a "friend" of the young genius who drummed into his ears insistently the necessity of his joining the armed forces to prove his patriotism. This "friend" vanished under strange circumstances,

detailed below, shortly after Moseley enlisted. Thus the world lost what may have been its greatest atomic scientist and gained instead a "remarkably capable signalling officer"!

Hank stared blindly at the pile of notes in front of him, seeking a decision. Certainly here was no direct evidence that Moseley had not gone to his death through an understandable surge of patriotism. And there were rational explanations in all the instances he had studied.

Yet there were so many of them. Already, without fully understanding its purpose, Hank sensed a pattern. It *did* look as if some force were working to shape the world's past, its present, its possible future, through such geniuses as might affect the lives and thoughts of its less gifted humans.

The reporter lit a cigarette. He wondered, accepting the dead man's thesis, what techniques were employed. Apparently the time travelers used third parties when unable to control the genius himself. And genius generally was too strong of purpose and temperament for possession. So some weaker soul nearby was possessed to watch, to influence, if need be to use force against the subject. They were rewriting history from the future to what purpose they alone knew.

Regarding the smoke curling from his cigarette, Hank recalled what Dr. Conrad had said about not being democratic, about the time travelers ignoring America, perhaps because they inevitably must underrate democracy. When the dead man made this point Hank had been of half a mind to argue it with him.

Now he was inclined to agree. Genius might not be non-democratic but its subsidization had for some millennia been far simpler under autocracy. A czar or king or satrap or khan or tetrarch, learning of high talent in his domain, could easily see to it that the talented one received funds and opportunity for growth. In a democracy, with each man fighting his own way, such favoritism had gone sorely against the grain.

Today, with the United States wealthy beyond previous dreams

of nations, there were funds available for the development of talent into genius—funds like the Rockefeller, the Bamberger, the Niemann, countless endowed university scholarships and grants from private industry, from Carleton Wainwright and others. Genius and freedom, perhaps for the first time, could walk hand in hand.

Perhaps, as Dr. Conrad hinted, the time travelers were readying a decisive blow to destroy the system, or rather, lack of system, that had made such unprecedented achievement possible. Certainly, less than six hours after airing his theory publicly for the first time, the ex-psychiatrist had been perforated by three bullets, now lay frozen in the office of the Wellington County coroner.

It was not an encouraging thought.

Nor was Hank anticipating the prospect of telling Luizetti his findings and conclusions. He strolled into the other room, found the big detective leaning back on the bed-davenport, hands in pockets, eyes half-closed, surrounded by a litter of papers, dumped bureau drawers, general disarray.

"All through?" the Lieutenant asked him. Hank nodded. "Find anything?" Luizetti wanted to know.

Hank plunked himself into an armchair, decided to get it over with, summarized his discoveries briefly. The big detective listened in silence, then regarded Hank speculatively, "You think maybe he had something, don't you?"

Hank shrugged. "I'm not certain. But he talked last night and was dead in a matter of hours. What do *you* think?"

"I think you're as crazy as he was," said Luizetti, sitting up. "He was a guy dames liked—don't ask me why—and some dame liked him too much and maybe some guy didn't like that. Or else he tried to ditch one dame for another and the first one didn't go for it. It was one or the other—take your choice."

"What makes you so sure he didn't have anything in there?" Hank nodded toward the study door.

"I'll tell you why." Luizetti rose, looked down at the ex-reporter

with a frown. "It's not so tough. If he was killed because of those wacky papers you been reading—and he wasn't—why didn't whoever knocked him off take them with him or burn them or pour acid on them? Answer me that one—why leave the damn things around for guys like you to get into and get ideas from?"

"Touché," said Hank, rising himself. "Well, that's all I have for now. I'll be around if you want me."

In the air he felt like a stuffed egg. A glance at his watch revealed it was already past three o'clock. He had been poring over Dr. Conrad's notes for something like five hours. It was not surprising that he felt stuffy.

Liza, he thought, would probably be in her rooms now. He turned his steps toward the Bachelor women's wing of the Ladies' dormitory.

Chapter 7

LIZA was there. She looked pale and a little disheveled, Hank thought, as if she had been walking in a high wind.

She peered at him in the semi-darkness of the vestibule, almost as if she did not recognize him, said, "Oh, it's you—come on in, darling," held the door open for him.

He tried to embrace her but she was passive as lettuce and he let her go. "What's wrong—are you sick or just sore at me?" he asked.

She said, "Damned if I know, Hank. I'm sorry but it's one of those days. The experts say we have periodic depression cycles. I'm having one."

"You're sure that's all?" he countered, eyeing her.

"What else?" She shrugged, added, "I'll fix us a drink. Maybe that will help." She moved from him toward the tiny closet-kitchen that adjoined her bathroom.

Hank tapped out a cigarette, lit it moodily, stood on the living room carpet and contemplated the contrast between Liza's rooms and those he had just left. The color scheme, as befitted Liza's

own coloring, was dust rose, cobalt, grey and gold.

Liza maintained far greater surface neatness than the dead man—yet Hank knew without looking that last night's stockings hung from the bathroom shower-rod curtain, that despite the scrubbed ashtrays the silent butler was crammed with butts, that the wastebasket with its montage of pale prints from *Le Mode Parisienne* of the 1860's was crammed to the brim beneath the sheltering eave of the gate-legged table.

In the bedroom-study beyond, the bed would be neatly made, its blue-and-white candlewick spread innocent of crease or wrinkle. But the rest of the room would be in ordered confusion, stacked and scattered with reference books, note books, manuscripts. Where Dr. Conrad had been neat about his work and sloppy about his private life, Liza was a near-diametric opposite.

Still, he liked the sound of her banging around in the tiny kitchen, readying the drinks. He called to her, "Can I help?"

"Drop dead, I'll be right out," she replied. Despite the casual amiability of her words her voice still sounded strained.

Hank had first set eyes on Liza during the War. He had been trapped into taking a WAC lieutenant to the local movie, had been wondering how far he was expected to go beyond the sweaty hand-holding stage already attained when Liza flashed on the screen.

The man-hungry WAC lieutenant, her eyes on him like hot coals in the darkness instead of on the screen, had just given him the do-you-love-me-four-squeeze for the fifth time when around them the males had rustled to eyes-front attention and the females begun to coo their isn't-she-adorable litany.

Hank looked up and there was Liza, wearing a fantastic off-both-shoulders gown and threatening the alleged heroine with amputation of her hero. He came to rigid attention with the rest of the males, reveling in the slight tilt at the tip of her otherwise straight nose, her wide, warm, unorthodox mouth, her figure, the way she moved. And when the cast was listed as the picture's end he had liked her name—Liza Drew—even though he sup-

posed it wasn't real.

He saw her some months later in another picture. This time she played the inmate of a lunatic asylum, went around in a sort of Hollywood version of sackcloth and ashes. Hank hadn't liked this at all, despite the fact that the critics did. From the first his feeling toward her had been intensely personal. He couldn't bear to think of her as crazy or ugly, even in a part.

Back in New York after the War he sat through two terrible comedies and one mediocre drama just to watch her work on the stage. At the last, which displayed Liza as a vividly discontented home-wrecker, he considered briefly sending flowers backstage with a note.

Recently, having got to know her, he had told her of this abortive impulse. Liza had cooed her delight, said, "For Pete's sake, why didn't you? Don't you know actresses live on applause?"

"What would you have done—dated me?" he asked her.

"Of course not," was her reply.

As things worked out Liza Drew proved impossible to meet in Manhattan, even for a young man in Hank's presumably advantageous position. Part of it had been sheer bad luck—even his agent hadn't happened to know anyone with keys to the required doors. The rest could be laid to Liza's career-mindedness. She was, he quickly discovered, one of the busiest young women in or out of the theater, preoccupied not only with her stage, radio and television acting chores but edging into directional work as well.

Hence, when Liza herself turned up, Hank found he was in the somewhat startling position of having a long-inaccessible idol breeze right into his daily life. It was the Club bar that he first saw her, having a cocktail with a Drama Don. At first he had been too paralyzed to do anything.

Then he had downed five fast whiskeys and, having checked with Pat McColl to learn that Liza's escort was happily married, barged over and blurted, "Miss Drew—Liza—I'm Hank Sanford and I've been in love with you for the last eight years."

She had eyed him sternly, stated, "Mr. Sanford, I'll have you know that I am exactly seven years old—and I have a birth certificate to prove it." Then she had laughed and he had laughed and so it had begun.

Liza, it appeared, had been admitted to the Institute to produce a much-needed and, she hoped, at least a temporarily definitive work anent the divergent techniques of acting and directing in the modern theater, the movies, radio and television.

One of seven children of a retired Methodist minister in a small California town, Liza had a crystal-clear intelligence that won her scholarships and a Phi Beta Kappa key in a West Coast university, had enabled her to cut through to theatrical success along definite lines laid down by and for herself. Her Institute project was a part of her plan.

Actually the writing of her treatise represented the first vacation in her busy life—hence she had a place in it ready and waiting for Hank. As a writer, his work was closely enough allied to hers to give them much in common professionally and, he discovered, while he had not an education to match hers, she seemed to find his adventures and achievements well up to her requirements.

So their idyll had flourished—till now. He studied her as she brought twin tumblers from the kitchen, deftly arranged coasters beneath them on the coffee table in front of the love seat. They sipped in silence, side by side, not touching, and Liza lit a cigarette.

Then, as she turned slowly, almost shrinkingly, to meet his gaze, he said, "I've got to ask you a question, Liza. You know about Dr. Conrad, of course. I have no proof and I don't want any. It's a hunch pure and simple and your word will be enough for me, but it's been bothering me all day." He paused.

Liza wet her unpainted lips with a nervous tongue, said quickly, "I'm afraid I know what you're going to ask, Hank. Yes, I did try to see Dr. Conrad last night after you left me."

"You don't have to answer," he told her. "But may I ask why?"

At least she wasn't going to lie to him about it. He wondered why he had been so sure.

"I wish I understood that myself," she replied, looking down at the table. "I've been knocking myself out all day trying to figure it out. It wasn't what anyone but you would probably believe, darling; I mean, no sex. I—for some reason I felt that I had to dissuade him from writing that book."

Hank ground out his cigarette, watched the last wisp of smoke rise slowly from the tray, said, "You certainly reacted oddly to his talk last night. That was why I wondered when I heard a woman was seen leaving his entry-way early this morning—a woman in a dark raincoat."

"I was seen?" Her breath quickened. The freckles stood out on her nose.

"You were seen, honey," he told her quietly. "But whether or not you were recognized, I wouldn't know. If you were you'll be getting a visit from Lieutenant Luizetti—he's in charge of the case. Hell, you'll be seeing him anyway, since you were with Dr. Conrad at the Club last night."

"What shall I tell him?" she asked helplessly.

"That depends on what happened," said Hank, feeling sudden tension himself. "If you've got any kind of story, level with him. If not, clam up."

"*Hank!*" she exclaimed huskily, her fingers on his sleeve. "You don't think I killed him, do you?"

"Hardly." But his laugh was a trifle shaky. "Do you mind telling me just what did happen?"

"It wasn't anything—I felt like an idiot," she admitted openly. "I was dreadfully upset when you brought me home. Somehow I couldn't bear the thought of that poor man publishing that awful book. I can't explain it—it simply seemed bad. I was afraid of what might happen if he did."

"You didn't believe him, did you—about the time travelers controlling us?" Hank inquired, curious.

"I—yes—no—oh, I don't know!" she cried wearily. "I don't

know *what* to think. All I felt was that it mustn't happen—the book, I mean. I couldn't get it out of my mind after you left me. I tried to go to bed but I couldn't sleep. So I finally got dressed and put on my raincoat and went to see him. I thought perhaps I could get the way I felt across to him—I'm pretty good at selling emotions, you know."

"You're a damned fine actress, honey," said Hank. "What happened?"

She paused, winced, said in a monotone, "Not much. I got to his door and knocked. No one answered but I could hear rustling noises inside, as if someone were moving around. I knocked again, louder, and there were more noises. Then it occurred to me that maybe Dr. Conrad had—someone with him. I could feel myself blush there in the darkness. So I turned around and came back."

"Just rustling noises?" the ex-reporter inquired. "No voices, no bang, no thuds—no nothing?"

"No nothing," she said dully, paused to sip her drink. "I didn't fall asleep till dawn. I woke up around noon and looked for you at the Club, but you weren't there. So I ate lunch with the Drama mob and heard about the murder. Then I came back here to wait for you."

"I seem to be in this thing up to my neck," said Hank after a long silence. He told of his call from Manly Tabard that morning, sketched in what had happened since. When he tried to detail the extent of the dead man's proof of time-travel control Liza gripped his wrists tightly, peered into his eyes.

"*You mustn't go on with that!*" she said with heavy emphasis. "It—it's blasphemous!"

"You said that to poor Conrad last night—remember?" he told her freeing his wrists. "And now, another question. Would you mind very much telling me *why* you're so dead set against this project of his? You're an enlightened girl, even if you are a minister's daughter. You've never shown any signs of bigotry before. So what's got you into this tizzy?"

She turned away from him, shaking her head, told him, "That's what I keep asking myself, Hank. I don't know—but it's horribly real. I can't help but feel the book will cause irreparable harm if it's published. It will put thousands of lives on the wrong track. It will destroy belief for thousands more. I can't just sit by and see a thing like that happen without at least trying to stop it."

"As long as you didn't try to stop it with a gun," said Hank, "it's all right with me. But, Liza, I can't believe you're telling me the whole truth. Level off now—are you?"

"Darling—I don't know, I simply don't know!" cried the girl and, to Hank's horror, burst into tears. He dug out a handkerchief and wiped her face while he held her close.

Finally she looked up at him, said shakily, "I'm simply stinking, aren't I? And I must look like the very devil." She twisted from his arms, stood erect, added, "Hank, honey, fix us another drink, will you, while I make repairs? I'm sorry I bawled."

Chapter 8

By the time Liza re-emerged Hank had the drinks ready on the coffee table. The wan, disturbed, frightened girl had vanished, beneath a slick layer of pancake powder, vermillion lipstick, light eye-shadow, hair that modeled her head like a golden casque.

Hank, aware that it was all a game, managed not to grin. Her whole appearance was a whistling-in-the-dark gesture of bravado and he had no wish to destroy it with derision. So, carefully selecting another conversational tack, he said, "Dean Willis really had the wind up over poor Conrad last night. Was he jealous, or what?"

"Do you know his wife?" Liza countered, slithering gracefully onto the love seat and picking up her drink. "I hope you didn't make this too strong. It looks awfully dark."

"Mere artificial coloring," he told her. "I wouldn't say I *knew* her. I've met her at the Club a few times. A hungry female, no?"

"You stick to that," said Liza. "The word is that she's a cannibal. She's also supposed to have had quite a Thing with Dr. Conrad. I hadn't been here twenty-four hours before I heard about it. What do men talk about anyway?"

"Oh, Hedy LaMarr, Betty Grable, Ted Williams," said Hank.

"I'm surprised her husband hasn't done something about it before this," mused Liza.

"He's probably been too busy picking the right script for his shirt monograms," Hank told her. "And they say *men* gossip!"

"Nice idiot," Liza said brightly. "Has it occurred to you that he might have taken steps? He was wearing his steam suit last night."

"He was sizzling, all right," said Hank. "But I can't see him as a killer. He's too wrapped up in his history. I can see him slaughtering somebody who dared dispute the effect of the battle of Flodden Field on the Scottish succession. But over a mere woman . . . "

"Cora Willis is no mere woman," Liza hold him. "Besides, he's a complex character—and he was drunk. He might have gone home and brooded and . . . " She shrugged.

"Took out his little thirty-two," Hank intoned. "Rooty-toot-toot, three times he shoot, right through that—dammit, what rhymes with two? I don't believe it. He'd have waited anyway until Dr. Conrad showed him that proof he promised to let us see tonight."

Brittle gaiety fell from Liza like cellophane plucked from a cigar. She said, voice low, "Damn it, Hank, can't we forget about that crazy theory?"

"I still don't see why it should frighten you," said Hank.

She hesitated, told him, "I suppose because it runs against everything I've been taught to believe. It's as if we're slaves to some invisible master."

"Isn't that pretty close to the Old Testament idea you say your father used to preach?" Hank inquired.

"No it's not!" was Liza's indignant reply. "In Christianity

there are moral values and hope—and the Master is more than a man."

Hank took both her hands, pulled her toward him. She murmured, acquiescent, "You'll get lipstick," when there came an authoritative rap on the door.

"*Damn!*" she said, rose gracefully to answer it.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you, Miss Drew—oh, hello, Sanford, I thought I'd find you here." Luizetti's sleek dark bulk filled the doorway. He eyed them in turn.

After lighting a cigarette, he said, "Miss Drew, did you call on Dr. Conrad early this morning? I take it you must have heard of his murder by now."

Liza hesitated briefly, said, "Yes, I did try to see him—but I couldn't get in."

She went on, under his occasional expert prodding, to tell the detective almost word for word the story she had already told Hank. He listened, saying almost nothing until she was through. She concluded with, "And that's that. I suppose you'll arrest me."

Luizetti permitted himself a faint smile as he shook his head. "Hardly," he told her, "with the evidence we have now. You wouldn't have a thirty-two automatic around here, would you?"

"Not to my knowledge," Liza replied.

Good girl, Hank thought. She was adopting exactly the right tone with the Lieutenant.

"Okay, we'll let it go for now," said Luizetti. Then, with sudden grimness, "But, Miss Drew, you're not out of the woods yet. I wouldn't advise you to take any sudden trips. You see, you're the only person seen leaving Dr. Conrad's entry last night."

Hank, surprised, said, "Aren't you tipping your hand, Lieutenant?"

Luizetti shook his head. "Hand-tipping only hurts when a bluff is involved," he said. "I've got pretty near a royal flush." Then, swinging to Liza, "May I see the raincoat, please?"

My, thought the ex-reporter, *aren't we polite!* Luizetti followed

Liza into her bedroom, stood close behind her while she fetched the garment from her hall closet. It was a plain water-resistant job with hood.

"I'll have to take this with me," he told the girl.

"I understand," replied Liza, matching his laconics. But to Hank she looked scared stiff. He decided it was time to intervene.

He said, "Lieutenant, scores of women around the Institute might have been wearing coats like that one. How can you be—"

"Only one has admitted being on the spot at the right time," Luizetti replied with unanswerable finality, added, "And only one has been identified by witnesses."

Hank's eyebrows rose. "Witnesses—more than one?"

The detective scowled, shook his head. Hank grabbed him by the arm, said, "Come with me a second. I want to know something."

"I bet you do," replied the Lieutenant but he let the ex-reporter lead him into the bathroom, lock the door.

"I want to know more about those witnesses," Hank told him. "It won't go any further if it's important."

"Who's going to be the judge of that?" asked Luizetti darkly. "I don't have to tell you anything."

"Granted—but you will under the circumstances," Hank replied quietly.

"Hell—how do I know I can trust you, Sanford?" asked the detective. "I never laid eyes on you till this morning. That's quite a mess of chick you've got in the next room; men have sold out kingdoms for uglier ducklings than that."

"My word—that's all," said Hank.

The Lieutenant sighed, ran fingers through his hair, squinted at Hank, said, "Okay, so I'm a chump."

"Indubitably," said Hank. "I want to know about those witnesses—who, where, when, what they say they saw."

"For Christ's sake, why?" countered the detective. "Your cookie was spotted all right—hell she admits it."

"She didn't do it," Hank told him solemnly.

"How do *you* know?" The detective was all suspicion, eyeing the ex-reporter as if he had never looked at him before.

"She told me so," said Hank, bracing himself.

But Luizetti failed to sneer. He simply sat there, eyeing Hank mournfully, saying nothing. Finally Hank blurted, "Well, why don't you say it? I've got it coming to me. I'm nuts about her, I admit it. I know she's an actress and a damned good one, and I can see with half an eye that she's a raving beauty."

Luizetti sighed. "And knowing all that you still believe her?" he asked.

"Knowing all that I still believe her," Hank replied.

The detective shook his head, said, "Okay, I guess maybe I better go over the business with you. I know you're no jerk even if you are in love—not that I blame you.

"One of the witnesses was a Mr. Langley—he has something to do with old cities. He was at the Institute Club bar when you people were there earlier"—Hank recalled the leathery Don who had been discussing the recent diggings in Guatemala.

"About one-thirty he got sleepy and turned off his lights. His room faced the interior of the quadrangle diagonally across from Dr. Conrad's entry. He saw your gal pal come busting out of there, stand still a moment or two, then walk fast across the court through the rain and out."

"That would fit," said Hank reluctantly. "But what about the other witnesses?"

"Witness," said the detective. He shook his head, added, "This one's a beaut—a long hair. Poet named Jervis—he was at the Club bar too, alone he says. Had a couple too many, got sick, sobered up, went home, and had some coffee. He was standing at his living room window when he saw a woman with a dark raincoat on walk away. Everything checks—time, everything."

"Did either of them recognize Liza—Miss Drew?" Hank asked.

Luizetti's eyes narrowed. "What are you getting at, Sanford? We got two witnesses saw a dame in a dark hooded raincoat come out of the entry at the same time. Miss Drew admits it. What

more do you want?"

Hank, whose mind was racing at supersonic speed, nodded agreement. "It's okay as far as it goes—but it won't hold up."

"What do you mean?" the Lieutenant barked angrily. "She was there and you know it."

"Of course she was there," said Hank soothingly. "You're sure Jervis says he was standing at his living room window?"

"Are you trying to cross-question me?" Luizetti rose.

Hank grinned, said, "Sort of. But I know how those apartments are laid out. If Langley saw Liza from his window—any of his windows—okay. But if Jervis was standing at his living room window he saw somebody else, because it looks outside, not inside the quadrangle."

Luizetti stared at the ex-reporter a trifle groggily, then croaked, "You're sure about that?"

"Positive," Hank told him. "We can check if you don't believe me. Now, remember Liza's story about hearing rustling sounds inside Conrad's apartment when she knocked? What if another woman were already there and Liza scared her out? She would have gone out the study window as fast as she could and scrammed—and then Jervis might have seen her. Otherwise, no!"

The detective scratched his head, whistled softly to himself, said, "I'll be damned! So now we got two of them. For the sake of your chick I hope it works out okay."

"You and me both," said Hank fervently. He pushed past the big detective, unlocked the door. He gave an anxious Liza, awaiting them in the living room, a pat on the shoulder and a, "Sit tight, honey. Be right back," then went on out after Luizetti.

It took them less than two minutes to reach the entry in question. It took less than five, thanks to a floor plan that hung framed in the vestibule over the fire-alarm, to prove the truth of Hank's theory. The detective studied it, cursed amiably, said, "I knew you were bad news, Sanford, the minute I saw you."

Said Hank, "I don't suppose the kind of lawyers Liza and the Institute would get would miss a point like that—do you?"

"You got a point there," the detective told him, "but your babe's still not out of it."

"I know it—but at least she's got a chance," said Hank.

Luizetti moved outside, suggested, "Let's take a look at this thing from a new angle. We might find something."

They walked through the quadrangle and around outside to the murdered man's casement windows. Hank surveyed the scene with growing discouragement. No footprints could have held in the fine thick turf that grew right up against the base of the ivy-covered grey fieldstone wall beneath the windows. They were about five feet above the turf.

The detective said, "In the dark it must have looked like quite a jump down—especially for a dame. I wonder . . . " As his voice trailed off he moved closer, peered intently at the ivy, followed its passage up the wall.

Finally he whistled again softly, said, "Come here, Sanford. What's this?" He parted the foliage to reveal a sort of hook, a half-staple driven into the mortar between two of the stones to give the ivy a support. It was of heavy iron, protruded some four inches from the wall, was ordinarily concealed by the heavy blanket of vegetation. Moving carefully, the detective extracted from it an irregular triangle of dark-red waterproof cloth. He said, studying it, "I'd give even money the lab shows this was torn off within the last twenty-four hours."

Hank looked, nodded, said, "Well?"

"Well," replied Luizetti, "it makes your chick's story look pretty good. And it makes my job tougher. Now we got to find a woman all over again—this one with a torn red raincoat." He paused, frowned, added, "Wonder why Jervis thought it was blue."

"All cats look grey at night," quoted Hank. He paused, added, "It does something else, too."

"What's that?" said the Lieutenant suspiciously.

"It knocks out your theory about Dr. Conrad's notes not being stolen because they were unimportant. If the murderer was

frightened away maybe he—I mean she—didn't have time to get rid of them. So maybe Dr. Conrad *was* killed because of that book about time travelers he was going to write."

"Will you scram out of here and leave me to my own grief?" barked the detective. "Me, I got troubles enough without them time travelers coming back to haunt me."

Chapter 9

HANK'S immediate intention was to return to Liza and tell her of the reprieve he had won her. As he cut across the quadrangle, however, he heard quick footsteps behind him, and, before he could turn, a hand was laid on his shoulder. A long face, composed with odd asymmetry of sharp planes and angles, moved suddenly into his field of vision, deep-set eyes peered into his.

"You're Sanford," said a thin voice, a brittle voice that sounded as if it might break at any moment. "You were with him last night. Come walk with me. I must speak with you."

"Hello, Jervis," said Hank. He tried to compute the poet's degree of drunkenness. Hank judged he had just come from the Club bar. Yet his step was steady, his syllables clear. The ex-reporter decided it was not alcohol that had set his eyes alight, but some deep-burning, inner excitement..

Like Hank, Jervis was a Pulitzer prizewinner; he had also won himself an impressive chain of other awards and fellowships. His most widely-known work was a savagely sardonic ode to Mussolini, hanging head down like a side of beef by his mistress, the Petacci—his most important work in critical eyes a word-concerto in requiem to Stephen Crane.

He said, striking across the rolling fields away from the Institute, "Sanford, he talked to you, didn't he—last night, I mean? He told you something of what he believed, of what he knew?"

"A little," said Hank, wondering how he could decently break away and get back to Liza. "I got a look at his notes today."

"Then you *know!*" Jervis' tones were breathless. "You know

he was about to publish the most vital discovery of all time—*time!*" He laughed sardonically, intoned:

"Time passed beneath my window,
Her fingers bright with blood.
She trod dark turf with muted step,
Hid face beneath her hood.
She walked in rain, this woman,
This stuff of life, its breath.
Her face was smooth, she bore no scythe,
For these belonged to Death.
And Death, behind her, lurked
To smile at handiwork complete,
Then turned away to yawn.
For well these two had worked
Frail human genius to defeat,
And it was long till dawn."

Having finished, the poet said, "I never before thought of Time as a woman. Somehow it makes her more terrible." He eyed Hank obliquely, added, "What do you think of it?"

"What would Petrarch have thought?" countered the ex-reporter. Frankly he thought it bad—if strangely effective.

"*Petrarch!*" exclaimed Jervis. "He'd have had me flayed alive for such a bastard sonnet. But ever since I saw that hooded figure fleeing poor Julie's apartment last night the lines have been forming themselves. And dammit, bastardy or not, they express it."

The reached a decrepit stile over a stone wall at the foot of the meadow, scaled it to reach a poorly tarred road. Ahead, to the west, the clouds had broken and a bright streak of sunset sky caused unlit windows to glitter like sequins.

"Petrarch," repeated the poet more calmly as they swung along the road. "To think, if Julie was right—and he proved it to me at any rate—all time exists now, past, present and future. Perhaps Petrarch heard my foolish lines." He shuddered, for he was wearing only slacks and a plaid sports shirt and it was chilly.

"How much *did* you see last night?" Hank asked him.

"Too much—and not enough," replied Jervis. He shivered again, added, "*Brrrrh!* Should have worn a jacket. Well, no matter—there's surcease over the next rise."

They surmounted it and the ex-reporter was surprised to see before him a small crossroads community where the lane crossed the main highway. A scatter of houses clustered around a tiny church and neon signs announced the existence of a number of roadside bar-grills and auto-repair shops.

"Neetsville," said Jervis with a sweeping gesture. "It's far more ancient than Wellington, but died when the University was located two miles away. Now, with the highway, it lies reborn—in a sort of zombie resurrection."

They strode past widely-spaced houses whose architecture ranged from sagging Colonial to chipped and weathered Reign of Terror.

Jervis turned off the road short of the highway, ran up the front steps of a Sagging Colonial under a battered and faded wooden sign on which could be deciphered in faded letters the legend, JOE'S TAVERN. They passed into a dark hall to enter a low-ceiled taproom whose tiny bar was tended by a fat, bald man behind a dirty white apron.

"Rye—a double, Joe," said the poet to the fat apron. Then to Hank, "What's yours?"

Joe's Tavern reminded Hank inevitably of the Admiral Benbow in Stevenson's Treasure Island—without the saving presence of the Hawkinses, mother and son—so he asked for Jamaica and water. The poet, already served, downed his double draft, ordered another, led the way to one of the tables. "We can talk here," he said abruptly.

"How'd you ever find this place?" Hank inquired.

"Julie found it," said Jervis. "He had an idea it was relegated to such utter obscurity that here he would not be watched. We used to walk over here about once a week." The poet lifted his sharp-planed face to gaze around him, gestured expansively. "Put

pigtails and long coats and kneebritches on these people and you'd have your eighteenth-century tavern come to life. Dark, dingy, smelly, ready to clip you on the bill. And rooms upstairs, of course, for those who slide under the table.

"You won't find it at Williamsburg or any of the other panty-waist restorations," Jervis went on. "No—*this* is the real thing—with a few alleged improvements, of course."

"I hope one of them is a telephone," said Hank. "I've got a call to make—I'm late for a date now."

"And time—what is time?" countered the poet. "Poor Julie had the answer. Life is everything—for nothing can exist without it. Go on and make your damned call—and tell the Drew wench I love her."

Hank winced. "Is there anyone even remotely connected with the Institute who doesn't know about us?"

"They have a blind composer in Music, I believe," said the poet with an unexpected smile. He looked young, rakish, even gay, when he smiled. Hank grinned back, went to the noisome telephone booth, called Liza's number.

Liza's phone did not answer so he called the Club. There—Dean Willis, sounding disturbed and somewhat intoxicated, came on, informed him that Liza was dining in the bar. "She's worried about you, old man," said the Dean. "Where are you?"

"Jervis collared me," said Hank. He explained where he was, promised to get back to the Institute as soon as he could.

"Good man," said Willis. "I'll get Liza."

When she came on Hank repeated his statement, told her about the other raincoat. She was silent for a long moment, then said, her voice a trifle unsteady, "Thanks, darling—thanks! I've been so afraid something had happened to you. You *will* be back soon?"

"As soon as I can move Jervis," Hank told her.

"What does he want with you?" Liza asked with a trace of peevishness.

"He wants to talk about Dr. Conrad," replied Hank. "After

all, he's the witness who saw the other woman last night. He has even composed a sonnet of sorts about it."

"Poor Hank!" Liza sympathized. "And you had to listen to it?"

"Only once," he told her. "It goes, 'Time passed beneath my window. Her fingers bright with blood . . . ' "

"Spare me!" said Liza, laughing. "Come over when you get back. I'll be home."

"That," Hank told her, "is the first good news I've had today—that and finding out about the other woman."

The operator broke in twangily with, "Your three minutes are up, sir. Deposit five cents for another three minutes, please."

"See you in an hour or so," said Hank.

"I'll be waiting, honey." The phone went dead.

He hung up and, feeling considerably cheered, returned to the poet's table. Jervis regarded him owlishly, then lifted a freshly-refilled glass, drained its contents.

Putting it down empty he said, "There was something odd about that woman I saw leave poor Julie's last night."

"How—?" Hank was suddenly alert.

Jervis hesitated, then said, "She moved with a purpose not common in women—as if she knew exactly where she wished to go and how to get there. Most women know these things right enough but they spend their lives concealing them from men."

"How could you tell?" Hank asked him.

"It's hard to find the exact words—it always is, of course," said Jervis, frowning at his glass. "But it was there—oh, yes it was there—in the way she walked and moved."

"Did you spot anything else about her?" the ex-reporter asked.

"She was large—as such a herald of death should be," said Jervis, scowling. Hank left him to get fresh drinks.

"How could you be sure?" he asked on his return. "I mean, with the foreshortening of your angle of vision, the darkness, the rain and all."

"I could tell," said Jervis, reaching for his glass. "Perhaps a lawyer could make it look otherwise in court but I could tell.

'. . . And Death, behind her, lurked
To smile at handiwork complete,
Then turned away to yawn . . .' "

"It must have been eerie," said Hank.

Jervis belched, said, "It was."

"The whole damned business is eerie," Hank remarked, satisfied that Jervis could tell him nothing more of Conrad's mysterious visitor. "This idea of being watched out of time is a horror. We've got to find this agent or these agents of the future, if they exist. If not life will be unbearable."

"What's the use of seeking them?" asked the poet. His voice was growing thick. "If we find one or two or even three of them they'll simply send others. And how can we tell? I might be one of them, Old Tabard himself might be one of them."

"I doubt it," Hank told him thoughtfully. "We're all strong willed persons. I doubt, from Dr. Conrad's records, that we would make good subjects for possession."

Jervis tapped the table with a bony forefinger. "But you don't *know*," he said sharply. "None of us knows. Perhaps you and Julie are right. But what's the use? It won't do any good if you do find them."

He moved to rise for another drink but Hank restrained him, saying, "Slow down, pardner. Why won't it do any good?"

The poet literally shook himself sober. He said slowly, "Because they don't *have* to watch us. They know what we'll do. If they want us all they have to do is wait somewhere till we get there. They know where we're going."

This, to Hank, was even more terrifying than the thought of constant surveillance.

"As time goes by," Jervis winced at the song-title, "our records become more complete. Think of the stuff that gets written about all of us these days—you, me, Julie, your Liza. We wouldn't have rated write-ups a century ago. It's getting easier for them all the time."

Jervis leaned forward, looked at the ex-reporter almost piteous-

ly. "Now," he said, "may I have another drink? I need it."

"I guess so," said Hank, rising. "This one's on me."

Jervis chuckled, stabbed at him with a long finger. "You don't know it, my friend, but they're all on you. Left my wallet in my other pants. Joke, what?"

"Ha—and again *ha!*" said Hank. He moved to the bar. And so he saw Cora Willis make her entrance.

Chapter 10

HER long, lithe, magnificent figure seemed to have been poured into the riding habit that adorned it. A low-crowned derby sat at a jaunty tilt atop her sleek, blue-black hair, somehow managed to emphasize the pronounced and exotic tilt of her incredibly bright blue eyes. She wore pegged skirt and boots in the classic tradition rather than jodhpurs or breeches and as Hank gaped at her she slapped her crop sharply against a skirted thigh to gain the bartender's attention.

There followed a silent interchange of eyebrow signals and, ignoring both Hank and the poet with complete and studied non-recognition, she swung on her heel and vanished into the darkness of the hall beyond. Hank received a distinct impression of a shadowy male figure, also in riding clothes, hovering behind her in the dimness. Then he heard the crisp rhythm of hard boot-heels on the stairs beyond.

Recalling the ill-concealed venom of the shafts aimed at Dr. Conrad by Dean Willis the evening before, Hank was thoughtful as he returned to the table and Jervis with their drinks. He supposed there was nothing ostensibly out of order in the Dean's wife going out riding with some other man, stopping in at the old tavern for a warming drink on the return jaunt. Nor was there anything inherently reprehensible in her preferring the privacy of an upstairs room to the dingy and odoriferous taproom.

Back at the table the poet was staring at the now-empty doorway, his deep-set eyes haunted. He murmured, " . . . such high

dark beauty, flesh of pearls, that sweet brown blemish, no detraction but a jewel . . . " The clink of glass on table-top roused him, and he said, nodding toward the doorway, "Did you see that?"

"You mean that case of incipient saddle-sores?" said Hank, hoping to pull the poet out of his well of self-pity.

Jervis regarded him blankly, then began to laugh. "Not Cora. She's as tough as her riding crop. You don't know."

"I'm beginning to believe I'm the only one around here who doesn't," Hank said drily.

"Somewhere in the future your rendezvous awaits, Sanford," remarked the poet, smiling faintly.

"What was she to Dr. Conrad?" Hank asked abruptly.

Jervis downed his drink, gagged, held it. He said, his voice again thick, "What's she to any man—to every man? But she and Julie were different. They had a—a nice sort of relationship."

His elbow slipped off the table and he nearly fell out of his chair. Hank propped him up, said, "For Pete's sake, man, pull yourself to pieces. We've got to get back—at least *I* do."

"Little girl waiting for you, right?" said the poet, regarding him with drunken cunning. "She's nothing—*nothing!* Wait till Cora gets her hooks in you—if she decides to."

Hank rose, paid the bill at the bar—it was unexpectedly modest—then tried to persuade the poet to let him call a cab. But Jervis was obdurate. He had come out for a walk, and, by God, he was going to walk back.

Outside a pair of horses shuffled and nickered in the chill air of the spring evening. One of them bore a side-saddle and Jervis approached it gravely. He seemed, somewhat to Hank's surprise, to know how to handle horses. He began to make some odd changes between reins and bit.

"What's the idea?" Hank asked, mildly alarmed.

Jervis put finger to lips, said, "Just a little trick on Cora—always so damned sure of herself. See this? Going to cross her reins. Then the horse will be left-handed."

Hank knew he should put a stop to it, but the arrogance of Cora Willis in the doorway rankled. Furthermore she had carried herself like an accomplished horsewoman and it seemed unlikely that she would suffer more than exasperation from Jervis' practical joke.

"Come on," said the poet, finished. "Let's go home. Had our little joke." He snickered as he led the way unsteadily back along the narrow, high-crowned tar road.

Perforce the ex-reporter went with him. Several times while they were scaling the gentle rise Jervis visibly staggered. But on the whole he made surprisingly rapid and steady progress for a man in his sorry condition.

Atop the low hill he paused. A chill wind knifed through their hair and clothing. The lights of a car, coming from behind them, revealed that the poet was shivering. It passed them with a whoosh and its taillights soon vanished around a curve in the road.

"You'll get pneumonia," said Hank, who was if anything a trifle too warm from the drinks and the exertion of walking. He took off his jacket, a light-colored hound's tooth tweed affair, forced Jervis into it. It was far too big for its new wearer, and flapped about him in the breeze.

Jervis snickered, let the sleeves dangle over his hands, made crowlike motions with his arms, sang loudly, "Tenting tonight on the old caaaamp grooouuund . . . " Then, charging ahead at a trot, "The Assyrians came down like the wolf on the fold, And his cohorts were—*dammit!*" He swore as he stubbed his toe, all but fell.

Hank, at this point distinctly not entertained, caught up with him barely in time to save poet and jacket alike from violent contact with the tar. He wished fervently that Jervis had not waylaid him. After all, he had learned nothing he hadn't already known.

Half-helping the poet along, he shut his ears to his ravings, weighed the possibilities. The idea of agents from the future

lying in wait, perhaps for himself, at some inevitable future time and place, *was* even less reassuring than the thought of being spied on constantly. He began to feel the chill of the evening himself and occasional drops of rain were again falling.

He thought with longing of Liza's snug quarters and a long warm drink and non-drunken chatter and—well, and Liza. Yet her fair image in his mind was overcast by one darker, more dashing, more arrogant. He knew he could never fall in love with Cora Willis—yet there was something about her that made it easy to understand not only the Dean's jealousy but her attraction for other men.

A car came toward them then, moving rapidly, and Hank had difficulty shepherding his poetic charge out of its path. He had to shove Jervis to a side of the road and the poet promptly sat down on the lip of the ditch that bordered it. By then the rain was pouring down.

"Machine Age—*ptui!*" Jervis spat into the road after the automobile. He murmured something in French, gave Hank a bird-like look, said, "Baudelaire," allowed the ex-reporter to hoist him to his feet. They progressed a few hundred yards without incident, then the poet stopped, pointed waveringly upward toward the cloud-blanketed sky.

"They're somewhere up there," he said distinctly. "Way on out somewhere the world has not got to yet, reaching back and making us do and be the things they want us to be. They're trying to remake their world by tailoring their ancestors to fit. Why didn't they go back to the apes, the devils?"

"Maybe they did," said Hank. "Maybe the apes wouldn't play."

"And maybe we won't play," said the poet fiercely. He had linked an arm in Hank's. "Poor Julie was a horrid surprise for them. Maybe they knew a Dr. Conrad was to be killed last night —he could have been important enough for them to have known that. But maybe they didn't know he was to be killed to keep them from being discovered before they were ready."

"You could be wrong," said the ex-reporter hopefully.

"I'm not," was Jervis' angry reply. "Come on—let's hurry it up. It's beginning to pour."

"What about his work?" said Hank. "Who's going to carry it on? He had a hell of a lot done."

"I am," replied the poet quietly. "If you wish you can help—you're a better journalist than I'll ever be, and it needs a journalist's touch. That's what I really wanted to talk to you about—forgot it and got drunk back there. Sorry, Sanford. But if you don't want to come in with me I'll carry on alone. That book has to be written—and published."

Hank made his decision as they trudged on, finally said, "You can count me in. It will take some rearranging of my own schedule, but since the real work has already been done . . . "

"Thanks," Jervis said simply. "Even if it meets with public and critical ridicule, the evidence Julie assembled must convince some few imaginative souls."

Hank said, "Remember, Jervis, this whole concept, this whole theory, is not yet twenty-four hours old as far as I'm concerned. I'm still trying to get adjusted to it. It's so *damned* radical that it's hard to swallow."

They reached at last the end of the tar road, turned into a sweeping curve of broad macadam that led them directly to the quadrangles of the Institute. Street lamps broke the darkness at regular intervals, their glow fuzzy in the rain.

"It *is* a shocking idea, Sanford," said the poet, trudging slowly ahead near the center of the road.

She walked in rain, this woman,
This stuff of life, its breath.
Her face was smooth, she bore no scythe,
For these belonged to Death . . .

Yes, it's going to be up to us to expose her agents to the world."

"I think we ought to consult Old Man Tabar—" began Hank. He interrupted himself with a whoop of alarm as a car sped toward them, its twin headlights coming closer with appalling

speed to an accompaniment of singing tires on the wet pavement.

There was no time for thought, little time for action, as the car bore down on them out of the darkness, its tires singing on the wet pavement. What Hank did was entirely a matter of reflex action. He flung himself clear of the pavement barely in time, skidding on the slick grass as his feet left the macadam. Half-falling he twisted to learn the fate of his companion.

Although what happened took place in less than a second it seemed to Hank to unroll with the patient relentlessness of a slow-motion movie. He saw Jervis spring awkwardly to the far side of the road, saw his heel slip on the rain-soaked pavement, saw him flail his arms in a desperate effort to keep from falling.

And then the unbelievable happened. The car, almost on top of Jervis, did not slow down—rather it seemed to leap forward. It swung to the left, directly toward the poet. Instead of the expected scream of brakes, hastily applied, the shrill protest of tires against increased friction with the pavement, Hank heard the rear of a powerful motor goaded into greater life.

For a quick-frozen instant he could actually see a foot or so of space between chromium front bumper and Jervis' sprawling legs. And then the space had disappeared. The poet was lifted by the bumper and thrown high in the air, like some wilting matador in a Mexican ring tossed by a bull too cunning for him. There came a horrid thudding, scraping sound as his body struck the streamlined hood—then another series of horrid sounds as, limp and sodden with its own blood, it struck the macadam. And then the car was gone, its speed still increasing, its red taillights dwindling to pinpricks in the middle distance.

Battling sudden nausea—more at what he knew he was about to see than at what he had already seen—Hank sprinted to the side of the shattered poet, who lay in a spreading puddle of blood that sparkled like Burgundy in the glow of the street light.

Hank had been close to death by violence too often in the course of his career not to know, without doctor's telling, that Jervis was virtually dead. His legs lay at grotesque angles which

had no coherent relationship to the angle of his torso, one of his wrists horribly bent so that jagged bone-ends protruded through the tortured flesh, one side of his face and head a bloody mash.

Yet, as he knelt to see if by any chance his first judgment could be wrong, the poet's one good eye opened and looked up at him with perfect comprehension. A corner of the sardonic mouth struggled to curve upward in a grin. A whispering voice said, "They were waiting.

. . . She trod dark turf with muted step,
Hid face beneath her hood.

Pretty corny, isn't it?"

He was struggling to laugh as he died. And Hank, for the first time since the trouble began, realized the danger in which he must walk from then on. He did not know who the killer was, nor from what quarter he would strike again, nor at what target. And worse, he did not know from *when* the murderer came. For the first time since the trouble began, Hank realized to the full the terrifying implications of the theory of Dr. Julius Conrad.

Chapter 11

HANK awoke to a sense of horror lurking just beyond his range of consciousness, a vivid imprint of terror lingering at his shoulder, bony fingers extended to tap him. He opened his eyes slowly, carefully, widened them quickly as he discovered he was not in his own room. He had spent such of the night as had been left him in Liza Drew's living room. Sunlight was streaming in through the half-open casement windows.

Hank swallowed, discovered his mouth had a sheep-dip flavor, stretched, ceased all movement abruptly as full memory of the night before came flooding back in upon him.

Jervis, the poet, had been ruthlessly run down and killed while walking with him in the evening—while wearing Hank's light tweed jacket. Help had come quickly with the next automobile—but of course—much too late. There had been the Wellington

Police, the ambulance and its internes, the trip to the hospital, sight of a callous attendant pressing a rubber stamp on a registration card a stamp which left behind it, in purple capitals, the legend D.O.A.

Tedious routine police interrogation had been interrupted by the arrival of an angry Luizetti, dragged from pursuit of some other trail, perhaps leading to the slayer of Julius Conrad. As the ex-reporter unfolded the story of his fatal walk to Neetsville with Jervis, the tenor of the talk, the manner and method of the poet's death, an increasingly grey and shaken Luizetti pleaded almost tearfully with Hank to substantiate his account other than through agents from an unforeseen future.

"Dammit, Sanford, you *know* it's impossible," he stated, striding up and down the parquet floor of Wellington's carefully-Gothic new Police Station. "It's against all reason."

"Is it?" Hank countered. "Lieutenant, I don't think I'm a complete idiot, and *I* believe it—hell, man, I *have* to believe it. What else?"

"There *has* to be something else—something a human being can understand," said the detective.

"Have you read Dr. Conrad's notes yet?" Hank asked him.

Luizetti nodded reluctantly. "Yeah, I skimmed through them—and I still think he was a crackpot of the first water. But . . . " He paused.

"But," repeated Hank, "there are the facts. And it does seem odd that these two particular men should be slain just at the time they were—when first one, then the other of them had decided to go ahead with an exposé of the time travelers."

"Time travelers!" exclaimed the detective, but his tone no longer held ridicule. He added, "Remember, he was wearing your coat."

"I'm doing my damnedest to forget that," said Hank. "I can tell you right now that the only woman in my life is Liza Drew. And I can't visualize her as a murderer, even if it were physically possible."

The detective frowned. "She knew where you two were," he said speculatively. "You called her, remember?"

"Yes, but Dean Willis answered the phone, and she was with him," replied Hank. "Any number of people could have found out about it. They were at the Club together, remember?"

"Yeah," said the detective. "Well, I guess that about does it—for now. We've got a hunt out for the car but the chances of spotting it are lousy since you didn't get the number."

"How in hell could I?" Hank countered resentfully.

"What are you planning for the rest of the night?" said Luizetti, eyeing the big wall clock, whose hands read seventeen minutes past one.

"Why, Lieutenant, I didn't know you cared?" said Hank.

The detective swore fiercely in two languages, concluded with, "I don't—but I don't want your death on my conscience."

"Okay, I'll be careful," Hank told him. "I'm going over to Liza's if she'll let me in. I'm too tired to sleep and I need company."

"Stay right there if you can," Luizetti said bluntly. "I'm not trying to promote your romance, I'm trying to save your hide and what's left of my mind. You'll be safer not alone."

"Just as Jervis was?" asked Hank.

He had left the station then, been driven back to the Institute in a police car, gone directly to Liza's. She had opened the door for him, wearing a terry-cloth robe, her face covered with cold cream. He had kissed her anyway, heard her gasped phrases of relief.

"I heard—I've been simply sick with worry, darling. Are you all right?" She had held him off to look at him.

"Just bushed," he had told her. "And I think I'm catching a cold. I lent my jacket to Jervis before—before he was hit."

She had hugged him in, given him a drink, gone into the tiny bar-kitchen to make coffee. That was the last thing he remembered. And now he was awake on her love-seat.

He looked over at his clothes, saw that Liza or someone had

brought a fresh outfit from his rooms. He got into shirt and trousers, donned socks and shoes, then bleated for her. She emerged from her bedroom-study, looking breath-taking in shorts and halter. She was wearing Harlequin glasses and a pencil, stuck behind her ear.

He said reproachfully, "You can work at a time like this?"

She made a face, came over, kissed him, replied, "I was only pretending to—so I wouldn't wake you up, honey." She surveyed him thoughtfully, added, "You seem to be turning into a V.I.P. or something. Manly Tabard wants to see you right away—and, oh yes, Dean Willis wants you to call on him the first moment you're free. He's at home."

"When do I get to see you?" he asked her.

"Right now," she told him, "or whenever you have a chance to fit me in between appointments." She paused, her smooth round forehead wrinkled. "Isn't it awful, Hank? I hope they get whoever ran over poor Jervis and give him the electric chair."

"If they get him," said Hank. "Old Luizetti wasn't too optimistic last night." He rose, removed the pencil, kissed her right ear. "Honey, got some coffee? I need something in me before I face Manly Tabard."

"Would you like brandy in it?" she asked him. Then, over her shoulder, "I've put out towels and a spare toothbrush. You can use my razor if you dare."

Shaving, Hank considered the hitherto little-noted role played by Dean Willis in recent events. The ex-reporter had, during his interrogation by Luizetti the previous morning, played down the History Dean's intense dislike and jealousy of Julius Conrad. And, after Jervis' killing, he had not mentioned Cora Willis' entry into Joe's Tavern in riding habit.

These omissions had been largely a matter of taste. He had not been able to visualize the Dean as a killer, still failed to find the thought either reasonable or palatable. Yet there was the connection — and there was Cora Willis. He had about decided to visit the Willises. He was grateful for the Dean's invitation.

But first came the summons of Manly Tabard. Doubtless, Hank thought, the Institute Master and Carleton Wainwright wanted a report on his activities. He finished shaving, cleaned up, went out to drink his cafe royale with Liza, who had accompanied it with an intriguing dish of hot biscuits.

"Be careful, won't you, darling?" Liza suggested when he rose to leave. "Oh, how I wish those two men had never come to our table! It all began with that."

"Check, honey," he said.

He felt vaguely like his usual self as he crossed the campus to Manly Tabard's offices in the Administration Building, close by the main road. Yet walking with him he sensed danger, a danger that grew with each step he took.

"I'm getting the jams," he told himself. "The unscreaming Mimis." He actually caught himself trying to whistle in broad daylight.

Tabard, towering over Hank's six feet, greeted him with sympathy for his recent troubles. He parked the ex-reporter in a big white-leather arm-chair with gilt studs, sank into a similar one behind the low, broad expanse of his dark-cherrywood desk.

"Naturally, Hank, I dislike having to call on you after what you went through last night," he boomed with a deprecatory smile, "but I must have your help. The press is waiting downstairs in the Faculty Meeting room—en masse. New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, even Chicago—to say nothing of the local men."

"I'll do what I can—" Hank replied. "But tell me one thing first if you will—how do *you* feel about these murders? I don't mean just that, of course"—he cursed his own fiddle-footed approach—"but do you think Dr. Conrad's project may have something to do with them?"

"I'm doing my best *not* to think about that," Manly Tabard replied frankly. "I don't know what to believe. What do you think we ought to tell them without making fools of ourselves and the Institute?"

"We'd better go along with Luizetti," said Hank. "Two killings, perfectly normal—if any murder is normal—no hookup between them save the coincidence of their occurring so close together. If we give them the time travelers we'll never get them out of here."

"I agree," boomed Tabard, nodding. Then, his forehead wrinkling, "But what if they have picked up some gossip around the Institute already?"

"Simply treat it as loose talk," said Hank firmly.

And so it was done. Of the more than a dozen news gatherers and feature writers who entered, three had known or worked wtih him in his own newspaper days. There was some kidding, but very little. Tabard told them about Julius Conrad's murder. Hank gave them an eye-witness account of the death of Jervis, the poet. They were informed that the facilities of the Institute were open to them, from telephones to the Club, advised to keep close to the Police for further information.

"What were Jervis' last words—if he said anything?" a rock-faced syndicate crime expert asked Hank. Hank told him that the poet had repeated a line of his own poetry, said, "Corny, isn't it?" Unexpectedly a woman feature writer from Philadelphia burst into tears. Someone else asked him what the poem was. Hank lied, saying he did not remember.

When at last they were gone Tabard turned to Hank, asked him what the poem was. Blushing, Hank repeated it for him—he recalled the sonnet all too vividly. He concluded with:

". . . For well these two had worked,
Frail human genius to defeat,
And it was long till dawn.

Now you understand why I didn't want to give it to our friends from the newspapers."

Tabard, to Hank's surprise, had taken it down in shorthand. He smiled in half-apology, said, "After all, Jervis was one of our finest poets. I understand your reticence, of course. The tie-ins both with Dr. Conrad's murder and the time element are much

too evident." He rose, reached down to give Hank a pat on the shoulder. "Thanks for remembering it.

"Be careful, Hank," said the Master. "Whoever or whatever is causing these tragedies is not playing a game of jacks."

"I should know that, Manly," said Hank, using the Master's first name for the first time. He went outside to a telephone booth in the lower hall, called Dean Willis. A maid answered, then Willis himself came on. "Sanford—Hank? Glad you called. Come on over for lunch. I'm very anxious to talk with you."

Chapter 12

WILLIS, looking sardonic and impeccable as ever, met Hank at the door, ushered him through a long string of charmingly antique furnished rooms until he found himself in a dining room with unmistakable Adam furniture and Georgian silver.

Seated at the foot of the table, wearing a simple dress of turquoise linen that intensified the brilliant hue of her eyes, was Cora Willis. She acknowledged her husband's introduction of Hank with a smiling, "Didn't we meet at Manly Tabard's cocktail rout last month?" summoned a trim and dour-faced maid in grey uniform to see that he was seated and served properly.

The meal was almost unbelievably good. As he ate, listened, occasionally talked, it occurred to Hank that while Carleton Wainwright's home bore the stiff, heavy, somewhat indigestible stamp of a rural man's club, the Dean's house ran with easy perfection that bespoke both wealth and taste at its easiest and best. Of the two he supposed the Dean's was the more expensive—he wondered whose money supported it.

Not until the coffee did Willis get down to cases. He and his wife had, of course, expressed sympathy for the ordeal Hank must have suffered through the tragedy of Jervis' death. But otherwise the talk was general.

Cora Willis bore her part well. She had a dry rather droll mode of expression that emphasized the passionate bones of her

beauty—as if to say, "I can play these silly, pleasant little games, but I have so much more to offer."

Once she asked him, "Do you ride, Mr. Sanford?"

He almost did a double-take, restrained himself in time, replied, "I used to. I can stick on a horse but I'd hesitate to say I can ride one."

"It's a gorgeous feeling—to control a beast who weighs ten times what you do and can travel five times as fast," she told him.

Hank stifled an impulse to ask her whether her horse had responded rightly to her control on her ride home from Joe's Tavern the evening before.

Then the Dean, lopping off cigarette ash on the cloisonné of his ashtray, said, "Hank, I hear you got a look at some of the proof poor Conrad was talking about the other evening. Tell me, did he have anything?"

"It convinced me," Hank said quietly. "He managed to assemble some pretty impressive cases of what he called time-travel interference with history. And his documentation was excellent."

Willis looked reflectively at the chandelier, said, "I don't mind admitting that his theory had been bothering me. You can see what its acceptance—even on a limited scale—would do to my work." He sighed, added, "It's hard enough to get people interested in history anyway, without scaring them off by telling them it's actually being tampered with."

"Aren't you," said the ex-reporter, "tending to institutionalize your subject?"

"Cheers!" said Cora Willis, lifting her liqueur glass and dimpling over it at Hank. "I've been trying to tell Herman the same thing for simply days now."

"Neither of you understands," said the Dean, turning pink. "It destroys the whole belief in the past as something there, something solid, which is the basis of all historical study."

"I fear," said Hank, "that you're confusing the issue. Which is—is the time-traveler theory true or not? From Dr. Conrad's notes and the events of the past two days I'm inclined to believe

it may very well *be* true."

"I think it's fascinating," said Cora Willis, shuddering and obviously enjoying it. "I'm not going to rest until I find me a time traveler and learn from him what the future is going to be like. Think—knowing all the Preakness and Derby winners in advance! I could tell my broker to take a large flying leap. I could . . . "

"Cora—*please!*" said the Dean, wincing. "You might not like the future you found."

"Then I'd simply get my time traveler to change it," said Cora, smiling brightly.

Willis pushed back his chair, said, "Hank, if Cora will excuse us I'd like to talk to you in my study."

Cora made a face, said in mock anger, "Oh, very well. Whenever there's something serious to be discussed you shunt me off like an old switch engine." Then, smiling at Hank, "You come and ride with me some day soon. I'll get you a very gentle mount." Her blue eyes were aglow with mockery.

"I'd better pick my own," said Hank. She laughed and the bell-tones of her mirth followed them from the room.

"Cora's a high-spirited woman," said the Dean, leading the way into his book-lined den across the hall from the living room. "Sometimes I think she has too much spirit." He looked, Hank noticed, extremely tired.

They sat down. Hank refused a drink, and the Dean said, "Now tell me—just what did you find in Julie's notes?"

Hank had a moment of panic. He studied the handsome, enigmatic face of his host, seeking to read it for signs of possession, knew his effort was hopeless. The time travelers covered their trails too well—else they would long since have betrayed themselves.

But how did he know Dean Willis was not one of them? The answer, of course, was that he didn't. Whoever had murdered Julius Conrad had failed to get, or perhaps even to read, his notes. Currently they were under police guard. So how better to

learn what the first victim had learned than by questioning the one approachable person known to have examined the notes—himself? Hank wondered.

Then he decided there was nothing for it but to tell what he could.

So Hank told. He went through the files he had examined, naming Manichaeus, Leonardo, Francis Bacon, Lavoisier and Benjamin Thompson, Mendel, Moseley. In answer to the occasional questions of the Dean he described as closely as he could the documentary evidence.

While he talked, his listener grew increasingly excited. He finally jumped up to stride the carpet, to slam fist into palm, to exclaim, "Incredible! But if . . . ", then to launch himself into searching interrogation of the ex-reporter.

At the conclusion of Hank's recital he sat, grey and shaking, in an armchair. He said, "I was afraid of it—but why fear truth as I have?"

"This truth seems a bit grim," Hank told him. "I'm scared green myself." He went on to describe the conversation and events that led up to Jervis' death, omitting only Cora Willis' appearance at Joe's Tavern.

"It's terrifying," said Dean Willis. He managed a grin of sorts, added, "A little like discovering that fairy tales are true with all their ogres and giants and dragons and werewolves. Poor Jervis—nice fellow, fair poet, lousy drinker. Just like him to die sneering at one of his own verses."

"Oh, come now," said Hank, growing accustomed to the Dean's habit of insult. "Jervis was a damned fine poet—and a pretty swell guy too."

"All right, all right," said the Dean impatiently. He looked at the carpet, shook his head. Then he said, "You didn't hear the beginning of my chat with poor Julie at the Club the other night. I forgot how we got onto the subject of his time travelers but we did—and I asked him how they managed it.

"He quoted some electrical genius he knew or had looked up and

tried to tell me we were working along the required line ourselves. He quoted some gibberish about encephalographic vibrations plus electronic speeds as applied to the macrocosm—I couldn't make head or tail of the technical details. But the gist of it was that with a couple more atomic discoveries and further knowledge of the brain, plus electrical application of Dr. Einstein's new Unified Fields theory, we'll be on the road to time travel ourselves.

"I asked him how he proposed to obtain possession of other souls in other times." The Dean coughed, then resumed. "He told me psychology—not psychiatry, mind you—was well on the road to providing the answer. Naturally I hooted. That was when he began to sound off about his proof. And that was when we turned to you and your young lady for help."

"You didn't seem to think much of it," Hank told him.

"For God's sake, how could I?" countered the Dean. "It sounded utterly irresponsible. I'm afraid I blew my top. Sorry."

"I don't really blame you," said Hank. He sensed that the Dean was lying or at least telling only half-truths, suspected the Dean knew he knew it. But he decided to play along. He added, "What do you think ought to be done about it?"

"Hank," Willis said, "the first thing I must do is to get a look at those notes. If they impress me as they have you—and I see no reason to expect otherwise—it will be my bounden duty to see that they are fully developed and published. If this appalling thing is true the world must know it at once." He turned back to the ex-reporter, added, "Hank, like Jervis, I'm going to ask your help."

"I can only wish you better luck than he had," said Hank unhappily. "I'll do whatever I can. But I'm pretty much of an embryo compared to some of the writers here."

"There speaks a Pulitzer prizewinner," scoffed the Dean. "I'd better get over to Manly Tabard's and see about having a look at Julie's stuff. There may be some red tape that needs cutting."

Hank eyed his host with renewed suspicion. What, he wondered, if the entire act were intended, first, to sound him out about Conrad's material, then to get in and destroy it?

And then another thought struck him.

"From what you say Dr. Conrad told you," he said, "it looks as if our time-traveling friends may not come from as far in the future as I had supposed. Their time may be only a matter of decades—or even years—away."

"Right," said the Dean. "And if they're manipulating us toward a future of their choice, the moment of that choice may be close upon us." He paused, added, "I wonder who in hell the agent or agents are around here."

"That's been driving me nuts," said Hank. "Jervis had an even more gruesome theory—that it didn't matter whether we found them or not, because, knowing the past, they could always manage to be waiting for any of us they wanted to meet—or kill. Have you any ideas?"

"I may have," said the Dean. "I'm not sure enough to talk yet. But consider who, around the Institute, has the best opportunity to pick up information of what goes on."

"Manly Tabard?" suggested Hank.

Willis shook his grey head. "I'm not saying—yet," he replied. "But think it over, Hank." He glanced at his wristwatch, a costly and beautiful platinum affair. "Well, if I'm to get any action today I'd best be going."

"Want me to come along?" Hank offered, following him into the hall. But Fate, in the alluring person of Cora Willis, stepped in.

"I want to show Mr. Sanford the horses," she said.

Her husband looked at her with resigned exasperation, then at Hank with speculation. He said, "It's up to you, Hank."

"If you don't mind," said Hank, "I'm pretty beat and I just came from a session with Manly Tabard and the press. If you'd just drive me to the Institute—"

"Ridiculous man," cooed Cora Willis. "*I'll* drive you home whenever you say—in the Buick."

Dean Willis paled visibly. He mumbled something about, "Very well, then, as you wish. See you later, Sanford," and de-

parted, slamming the front door hard behind him.

Cora Willis laughed softly, her hand still on his sleeve, said, "Herman is worried sick about the Buick. When he drove it home last night the hood was covered with blood and brains." She shivered, added, "I believe it was used to run down poor dear Evelyn."

Chapter 13

CORA WILLIS pressed a button half concealed by the flat arch of the living room door-frame. She and Hank were barely seated when the maidservant appeared with a tray bearing bottles, glasses, a silver thermos jug of ice cubes. Her thin lips were pursed disapprovingly as she laid it down on a low mahogany coffee table.

Cora made a face after her, said, "Hope hates my guts. Scotch or bourbon?"

"Bourbon," said Hank. Then, puzzled, like most folk brought up to fend for themselves, by the exotic complexities of mistress-servant relationships, he added, "If you don't like each other why do you keep her?"

Cora shrugged, explained. "Simple enough. I keep her because she runs this house for me better than anyone else I could get—she stays because I pay her better than anyone else around here. Frankly I dislike overfriendly servants. They get in your hair."

"It doesn't sound very comfortable," said the ex-reporter.

"It works out," replied his hostess. She handed him a drink, added, "You don't actually want to see the horses, of course."

"Hardly," said Hank. "That was your idea."

"You miss a lot, Hank," said Cora, pouring herself a highball. She held it up to the light to study its pale amber hue. She reminded him of a great lady of the Renaissance—beautiful, brilliant, almost certainly cruel, utterly enwrapped in the sensual wonder of self. He felt heavy, awkward, adolescent, in her company.

But, he reminded himself fiercely, he was *not* an adolescent. He decided to move to the attack, said, "What about the Dean's car? If you're telling the truth it could very well mean . . . " He let his voice trail off.

Without removing her gaze from the glass, Cora Willis stirred slightly on her chair, said, "It's my car, not his. And as for calling Herman a murderer—if he had it in him he'd have murdered me years ago."

But Hank persisted. "You know about Dr. Conrad's theory. What if your husband were possessed by a time traveler? *He* wouldn't be operating—his possessor would. It might make a difference."

She considered this possibility, seemed to relish the idea of danger from a source long discarded as harmless. Then she shook her head, said, "I don't think so, Hank. To be possessed, as I understand it, a person must be either weak or unstable. And Herman, with all his faults, is neither. He's only a failure at living."

"Rather a large failure, isn't it?" prodded the ex-reporter.

Cora Willis laughed without bitterness. Apparently she was owner of such an ego that she could view even problems affecting herself with detachment. She said, "I thought it was a woman they saw fleeing the scene of the crime."

"Whoever it was wore a woman's raincoat—with the hood up," he replied, realized he had voiced a suspicion that must have occurred to Luizetti the day before. The enormity of his having missed the possibility of its being a man disturbed him.

"You want to look at my raincoats?" Cora Willis asked drily.

"If you had such a garment you'd never suggest it," said Hank. "And Luizetti or his men must have searched this morning."

"They did—oh, they did!" exclaimed his hostess.

"What about the car?" Hank asked. "What makes you so sure the Dean didn't drive it?"

Cora laughed brittley, said, "He could have, all right. But he was ostensibly escorting that little actress of yours home when

the killing occurred. He leaves the key in the car when he's at the Club. Anyone could have borrowed it."

"What's Luizetti's opinion?" Hank inquired, after a silent ten-count to keep from blowing his top at the scornful reference to Liza. "Does he put the Dean in the clear?"

"Naturally he doesn't know about the car," she replied matter-of-factly. "I hosed it off last night when Herman came in."

Hank stared at her, unable to credit his senses. Cora Willis' universe consisted of herself—surrounded by various animals, equine and human, and by inanimate gadgets created solely for her diversion. Her husband was one of the animals. To the world he might be an historian second only to Toynbee—to her he was merely another pet, to be cozened or chastized or ignored, to be sheltered when in trouble, because he was hers.

"Why are you telling me this?" he asked bluntly. "How do you know I won't tell Luizetti?"

"Because you won't," she replied almost casually. "You didn't tell either Luizetti or Herman about my being at Joe's last night with Major Allen—incidentally, who in hell did foul up my reins? I nearly ran Marzipan crazy before I caught on."

"That was Jervis," said Hank. "He seemed to think you had it coming."

"Has it occurred to you that these murders may have a totally different motivation?" suggested Cora Willis. "Somebody seems very determined to mow down my ex-boy-friends."

He said, "You still don't suspect your husband?"

She shook her dark head. "Frankly I think it's a pretty silly theory, but so far it's my friends who have suffered—Julie and Evelyn dead, and Herman a nervous wreck."

Hank decided to change the subject. So far he had learned from her but one thing—that the car-murderer of Jervis had been in or around the Club, had returned the car upon completion of his grisly task. He said, "I hate getting personal but just what *was* your deal with Dr. Conrad?"

She told him, "Julie and I were friends—if a man and woman

can ever be friends. We had our kicks—detestable slang—a long time back. Herman found out about it afterward—poor Herman is always late—and was horribly jealous. He thought Julie was The Man in my life." She laughed.

"And of course he wasn't?" the ex-reporter asked.

"Hardly—but Julie was sweet. He understood women—in fact he understood us too well. So we all made fools of ourselves over him.

"We had a sort of game," she went on. "He liked to get Herman sore—Julie hated stuffed-shirts—so whenever Herman got stuffy about my behavior I always managed to make him think I was with Julie." She laughed again, as at a well-remembered joke.

Hank hesitated, asked, "And what about Jervis?"

She shrugged, said matter-of-factly, "What real woman can resist a poet? And what real woman can endure one long? It was very brief—and very stormy."

"He wrote a verse about you," said Hank. "He quoted a line or two from it last night."

"Oh, Jervis wrote hundreds of verses about me." She made a face. "Most of them were—so unattractive. I think in his way he hated me." She paused, reflected, said, "Was he very badly messed up? From the stuff I washed off the Buick . . . "

"It was pretty bad," Hank told her. "And what about this husband of yours? Do you care for him at all?"

She rose, moved restlessly, said, "Herman's a habit—like this smoke. Lord, I wanted to make him a good wife. But he's so damnably wrapped up in his damnable studies—and I'm not the type to be neglected for a book. So . . . " She shrugged expressively, added, "Eleven years can be a horribly long time."

She exhaled, sat down again. He noticed that she had barely sipped her drink, decided she was far too vital a person to enjoy the self-effacement of alcohol, the dulling of the senses that accompanies intoxication. She would never do, he decided, as an agent for the time travelers.

She seemed to sense the change in his thought. She said, "I listened at the study door while you and Herman were talking just now. The whole thing sounds crazy."

"It does—until you read Dr. Conrad's notes, and add what's happened here since the night before last," Hank told her.

"There's one factor you people haven't considered—to me the most important of all," she said with unexpected gravity. "That is—what's their purpose—*why* are they rearranging history?"

"I guess we haven't had time to consider it," replied the ex-reporter.

Cora Willis frowned, said, "As I see it they're deliberately messing things up so there'll be a world blow-up—A-bombs or H-bombs maybe." She paused, ran pink tongue over her thin lips, added, "I think it's got to be Communism."

Hank considered it. She had a point beyond question. They hadn't been seeking the end in view, perhaps because the whole concept was too shocking. Yet she had also revealed her Achilles heel. Like so many people of property she was terrified of Communism, sought to blame every threat to her security on the Russians.

As for himself, he considered the aims and civilization of the time travelers as far more complex, perhaps incomprehensible to persons of the present—which was partly why he had not yet voiced any theories on the subject. "You say you think a man killed Dr. Conrad—whom do you suspect?"

"I didn't say I *thought* a man killed Julie," she replied. "I merely implied it might have been a man. I can't imagine a woman in her senses wanting to shoot Julie. He was too much fun."

Exasperated he took another tack, saying, "All right, if *you* weren't seeing him, who was?"

She thought it over, said finally, "That's a rugged question, Hank. Julie really got around. He was the complete democrat where women were concerned. All he really cared was that they be women, be reasonably attractive to him, and want him."

"Haven't you any line on his latest conquest?" Hank inquired, feeling utterly helpless. He wondered what Luizetti's reactions were to Dr. Conrad's love life.

Cora thought a moment longer, obviously considering and discarding various female possibilities. Then she said, "I did hear something last week about Julie being seen somewhere with Mickey Loomis."

"Who's Mickey Loomis?" Hank asked.

Cora Willis regarded him incredulously, then said, "That's right, you haven't been around here long—and your Liza has been taking up most of your time lately. Well, where to begin?"

"With Mickey Loomis," Hank suggested.

Cora Willis said, "Well—Mickey Loomis used to be what they called a college widow back in the days when I didn't go to college. Apparently she tried to marry every Wellington undergrad with rich parents until she got a little too old for that trick. Then she turned on the Grad College."

"And then the Institute?" Hank suggested.

"She never really got around to the Institute," said his hostess. "Some sort of a coffee machine blew up in her face and cost her the sight of an eye. She got fifty thousand dollars from the company, bought a dark-glass monocle, and forgot all about getting married. By that time I guess she hated men."

"I can't say I blame her," said Hank, considering the years of disappointments, rebuffs, betrayals, humiliations such a girl must have had to endure. Cora shrugged.

"I can't say I blame her either," she told him, "but apparently by that time she had the habit of men, or they had the habit of her—or both. Anyway, while she didn't marry—and she got plenty of offers once the money was in—she didn't exactly give up the ship."

Hank grinned in spite of himself. He said, "I think I understand."

Said his hostess, "She picked up a nice house in a nice part of town for back taxes and settled down. Her neighbors raised hell

about it, but beyond keeping her off the Saturday dance lists and out of the Garden and Country clubs they couldn't do a thing about it. She sank the rest of her money in various projects around town, and every one of them has prospered."

"Good for her!" cried the ex-reporter sincerely.

"I'm rather on Mickey's side myself," resumed Cora, "but I can't imagine Julie going for her. She's still stuffed with archaic collegiatisms—did I pronounce that right?"

"On the nose," said Hank, rising and jingling the change and keys in his trouser pockets. He was getting a little too relaxed—and he had an idea that relaxation with Cora Willis was on a par with taking things too easily around a hungry ocelot.

"Come on, Hank, let's get the hell out of here and get some air. I feel stuffy."

"Okay," he said. "I've got to be getting back to the campus anyway."

Chapter 14

HANK followed his hostess to a side door beyond which a gleaming Jaguar waited. He could not help noting the easy dancing rhythm of her walk. It revealed athletic training and discipline without loss of femininity. Unexpectedly he wondered how good a shot she was, this woman who could cheat on her husband as a game, then casually protect him from the law by cleaning a car covered with the blood and brains and flesh of one of her own ex-lovers.

She drove fast and well—this he expected. She also drove him directly to the Club—and this he neither expected nor desired. As they entered she turned her head to address him, revealing the fine long lines of her neck, said, "Now *you* can buy *me* a drink." Then, moving swiftly to the bar, "Hello, Pat, you old lecher. The drinks are on Hank here—the usual for me."

"Hi, Mrs. Willis," said Pat McColl, grinning widely at the sight of the Dean's wife. "I just came on duty. You timed it right."

"Don't I always?" countered Cora Willis casually.

Hank ordered a drink he didn't want, had a curious feeling as of augers boring into the small of his back. Glancing around for the source of this odd sensation he discovered Liza, sitting with another of the Drama girls, a lank-haired, bespectacled stage designer, at one of the corner tables. Liza, had, he decided, a right to be angry. He suspected that Cora Willis must have spotted her from the doorway, must have played her entrance deliberately to make trouble.

A slim, firm, definitely-feminine arm, slipped through his Cora Willis said, "Hank, darling, isn't that your cute little actress in the corner? My, isn't she attractive!"

He said softly through his teeth, "If you don't cut it out, I'll brain you right here."

"Game too rough?" she countered, smiling brightly.

"Just call me chicken, chicken," he replied as she swung him about and headed him toward Liza.

Before Hank knew just how it happened he found himself seated at her table between Cora Willis and the lank-haired scenic designer, directly across the table from Liza.

"Don't mind me, Liza," said Cora Willis easily. "I was just playing games. I'm not going to eat your Hank—though he is sort of cute in a mail-order way."

"You might find him indigestible," said Liza, coolly. "He snores."

"All you have to do is smother him with a pillow," Cora Willis replied in an offhand manner. Pat McColl came over with their drinks on a tray, something he seldom did for other clients. Cora gripped his white jacket-sleeve fondly, said, "Sweet Pat, thanks. How are things?"

The bartender reddened, muttered, "Okay—same as usual."

"I think Pat's the nicest man I know," cooed the Dean's wife. "And he used to be *such* a clod. But we were talking about this clod here." She shafted a sidelong look at Hank.

"You mean this here clod, don't you?" he countered weakly.

Cora's admiration was open—too open. She shook her head in disbelief, said, "Tsk, tsk—Liza, you *have* got a prize!"

"Yes, but a prize what?" the actress replied blandly.

"*M'aidez, kamerad,* S.O.S.!" cried Hank, holding up his hands in surrender. "What have I done to deserve this?"

Cora pinched his cheek, hard, and countered sweetly, "That's just it—nothing. What a waste!"

"Can't you picture him in doublet and hose—with a baldric?" said the scenic designer without warning. There was silence, then Cora rose, signaled Liza, said, "Excuse us, please! We have to enamel our noses." They left, and Hank found himself alone with the lank-haired woman.

She seized his right hand, studied it near-sightedly, said, "I *like* your fingers—sturdy, but not too long. They are the fingers of a craftsman, a producer."

"Producers are more in your line, I fear," he muttered.

His words were ignored. The woman said, "I can see you doing great things in the theater. Are you an actor, a director or what?"

"I'm a writer but . . . " Hank tried desperately.

He was cut off with, "Ah, an author! I *adore* authors. If it weren't for authors there would be no theater. No matter how gifted the actor, or how attractive, no matter how costly and daring the sets, no matter how skilled the direction—without a story, *pfft—nothing!* It is on you authors that the very *life* of our ailing theater *depends.* Another gin and tonic, please."

It took Hank five full minutes after the gin and tonic arrived to get in a few words to excuse himself. He decided to wait in the hall for the return of Liza and Cora Willis. When they appeared at last, to all outward evidences on good terms, he pleaded, "Get me out of here. For Pete's sake don't go back in there. I'll go anywhere, do anything."

The two women exchanged a long slow look. Finally Liza said, "All right, you're punished enough. Elvira is pretty hard to take without warning."

They took off, the three of them, in the Jaguar, had a brief

recess from the tensions of the forty-eight hours just past while Cora tooled her costly car expertly through back roads. Ultimately, toward sunset, she took them to a delightfully converted old manor house some fifteen miles from Wellington, where the mint juleps had real frost on the outside and the inevitable fried chicken was, for once, both crisp without and tender within. Cora took advantage of the wait for their food to call her home, leave a message for her husband to the effect that she was dining with Hank and Liza.

It proved a singularly pleasant interlude. Cora actually indulged in what Hank knew must be, for her, a rare apology, said, "I'm sorry I behaved like a *femme de pave* back at the Club. I was sore at Herman, so I took it out on you and Hank, Liza." She sat back, toying with her frosted glass, added, "But it was fun."

"I wanted to slug you," said Liza, smiling, "but then I began to enjoy it too. You'd have been quite an actress, Cora."

"Possibly a successful performer," said the Dean's wife frankly, "but never an actress. I'm much too fond of myself ever to get lost playing somebody else."

"Darling," said Liza to Hank, "stay away from honest women. They're much too dangerous."

There was more laughter and somehow the conversation drifted to psychic experiences. Hank lamented the fact that such experiences were apparently not for him. "I'm about as psychic as this chicken bone on my plate," he concluded glumly.

"That makes two of us," said Cora Willis thoughtfully. "How about you, Liza?"

To the ex-reporter's surprise the actress toyed with her dessert fork. After a pause, she said, "It's nothing to joke about."

"Darling, you don't mean . . . ?" said Cora Willis, her brilliant blue eyes alight with interest.

Liza nodded. She refused to look at Hank, who regarded her incredulously. She had never spoken to him of having psychic gifts. She said, "The first time was when I was eight. Mother was visiting in San Francisco—we lived in Southern California, Cora—

and I dreamed she was dead in a big double bed all alone. The next day we got a telephone call and it was true."

"Ghastly, but hardly unusual," said Cora Willis.

"I know that, of course," replied Liza. "I've never been able to predict things. But a lot of the time I can find things people have lost, or see things that are happening a long way off, if they're important to me. I found a necklace for a girl I'd never seen before once—it was caught under the paper in a hotel bureau drawer in Syracuse."

"I'll be damned!" exclaimed Hank. "If I had a gift like that I wouldn't bother learning a profession. I'd practice it and stay with it till I'd mastered it. Then I'd figure out some way to use it—maybe helping other people. And you keep it hidden."

Liza replied, with a trace of desperation, "It isn't like that at all, Hank. It—well, it's frightening. It's meddling with forces none of us is ready to understand or control."

Memory rang bells in Hank's head as he recalled Liza's similar comment on the theory of Julius Conrad. He said, "How is it frightening, honey? Do things actually jump out and scare you or what?"

"Idiot! It's not like that." Liza frowned helplessly, opened her hands in a gesture of frustration. "It's—well, it's a little like drowning—not that I've ever drowned."

"I'll bet she's the type who fights the anesthetist," said Cora Willis to Hank. "Any odds?"

"Don't take her up, Hank," said Liza, "because I am. I know it's stupid but I just can't help it."

"Perhaps it's just as stupid in this instance," said Hank.

"Perhaps—but I can't help feeling the way I do," replied Liza. "And others I know who have had the same experiences all feel the same way. It's . . . " Again she gestured her helplessness.

"Take it easy, Tarzan," said Cora Willis to Hank. Then, to Liza, "How do you go about it? Do you need a darkened room and a seance and all the hokus pocus?"

"Hardly!" Liza laughed. "It just happens—usually when I'm

about to fall asleep. It could happen here if anything came up, I suppose."

Cora Willis looked at Hank. "All right," she said. "Where's Herman and what's he doing?"

"I'll try," replied Liza. There was a long silence, then she said, "I'm not getting anything. It's all very confused."

"Never mind, Liza," said the Dean's wife. "I was only kidding."

"Wait a minute—something's coming through," said the actress. She seemed perfectly conscious, perfectly normal, yet she was not quite with them.

Then Liza said, a note of alarm in her clear tones, "I—your husband is unconscious. He's lying under what looks like a gigantic black spider. He—there's something tied around his mouth and his hands and feet are tied. But he's breathing."

"That's something, anyway," said Cora Willis, draining her glass at a draught.

"Did I give you anything?" asked Liza, and Hank could feel her return. She looked slightly embarrassed, as if she had been performing some too-intimate act in public.

"You said my husband was lying bound and gagged under a big black spider," Cora Willis told her drily. She added, "I wonder if it's a female spider. I hear they eat their mates, but I never knew they tied them up first."

The elderly woman in charge of the roadhouse came up then, said, "Mr. Sanford? I have a call for you."

Hank wondered briefly how anyone could know his whereabouts, recalled Cora Willis' pre-prandial call home. It would, he thought, be something of a joke if his caller were the Dean. Instead it was Lieutenant Luizetti, who asked, "Sanford, is Cora Willis with you?"

"Cora and Liza Drew," replied the ex-reporter, wondering what was up.

"Better hustle right back to town," said the detective. "Dean Willis seems to be missing."

Chapter 15

CORA WILLIS burned road and rubber driving back to the Institute. Hank, sitting on the outside with his arm around Liza, felt a little sick. Certainly evidence appeared to be piling up rapidly against the Dean. There were his jealousy and hatred of Julius Conrad, emotions which might well have been directed at Jervis had Willis learned of his wife's intrigue with the poet. There was the evidence of the car cleaned by Cora—and now his disappearance at a time when, perhaps, Luizetti and his minions were closing in on him.

Against his guilt, in the ex-reporter's mental scale, were three slim factors—Cora's belief that her husband was incapable of murder, his own intuitive agreement, Liza's eerie vision of the Dean lying bound and gagged beneath a monstrous black spider.

Hank tried to think what the monstrous black spider might be. It could hardly be taken literally—although a gigantic spider might be no less plausible than the time-travel concept.

He studied the soft perfection of Liza's profile against the harsher cameo of Cora Willis. It was well Liza was his, rather than the older woman. No man could for long maintain both love for Cora and his own peace of mind. She was far too restless, too volatile, too spoiled, too egocentric. Yet he would have, he knew, a thin core of regret always at never having been one of her legion of men.

He hugged Liza's shoulder in expiation for his thoughts and she turned to smile at him, to lay her smooth cheek briefly against his own. He breathed deeply of the sweet scent of her golden hair. "I've tried to see more," said Liza to Cora unexpectedly. "But it's still the same picture—your husband lying bound and gagged beneath a huge black spider-thing."

"I wonder how poor Herman managed to get himself into a jam like that," murmured his wife. Then, "Thanks, Liza—but we'd better wait and see what friend Luizetti has to say."

"Luizetti is a hater—I could feel it when he questioned me," said Liza.

"He's a damned competent cop," the ex-reporter told her. "I have a hunch he'll move fast when he has his facts assembled. He's not stupid, and I suspect he's honest."

"Worse than an honest woman—which Liza just charged me with being," commented Cora. "I loathe honest cops."

"They have their uses," said Hank. Cora, he decided, was a woman whose very directness made her appallingly complex. She reminded him of an overbred show-animal. She would probably have made a marvelous mother.

The Willis home was ablaze with lights. Luizetti awaited them in the living room with Manly Tabard; the detective looked tired and angry, Tabard merely tired. He sipped at bicarbonate of soda as they entered, greeted them with a tremendous belch, added, "Thank God you're back, Cora! You too, Hank—good evening, Liza."

Luizetti glanced at his watch, said, "Fifteen minutes since I called you, Sanford." He turned to Cora. "It's a wonder you weren't pinched again."

Cora lit a cigarette, retorted, "Emergency, after all. What's happened to Herman?"

"We don't know," replied Manly Tabard. "I got a call from him this afternoon about three-thirty. He said he had to see me right away. So I waited for three hours—and he didn't show up. I called this house, without avail, called the Club, his office. In view of recent tragic events I decided to call Lieutenant Luizetti." He paused, belched again.

Luizetti looked unhappy, said, "Mrs. Willis, do you have any idea where your husband could be? I don't want to order a full search if I can help it. I'm way short-handed as it is."

"Unless he's been eaten by spiders I wouldn't know," replied Cora. Then, seeing the official reaction, "Sorry fellows, just another breach of taste." She scowled, tapped her teeth with a madder-tipped forefinger, added, "You've tried his friends, check-

ed his car and all that?"

"We done what we could," replied the detective wearily. "He drove out of here in the Jeepster after lunching with you and Sanford—your servants saw him and the car's missing. He called Mr. Tabard from the garage before he left. Then he took off. A couple people saw him driving toward the Institute, but he didn't get there. And we haven't found the Jeepster."

The telephone rang and a maid came in to summon Manly Tabard, informing him that Mr. Wainwright was on the wire. With an expression of despair on his face the Institute Master left the room to answer it.

He returned moments later to inform Hank the Institute founder wished to speak with him. Feeling himself the victim of a buck-pass, the ex-reporter went to the phone.

"Can you get over here immediately, Sanford?" the rich man asked—it was more command than request. "I understand you know more about this mess around here than anyone else."

Hank suppressed a desire to shout he'd been framed, managed to say, "I don't know much—but I'll tell you what I can."

"I'll be waiting," said Wainwright. "Have you a car, or shall I send for you?"

"I'll drive you." Cora Willis, with Liza, was at his elbow. "There's nothing doing here. We're moving to the Club. That's where things seem to be happening these days."

Thus it was arranged. Luizetti was heartily in favor of the idea, since it grouped his key people under one roof. He arranged to have all calls to the Willis home transferred there. Cora drove Hank to the Wainwright mansion and Liza came along for company.

"I wonder what *has* happened to him," mused Hank, And to Liza, "You're sure about that damned vision of yours?"

Liza said diffidently, "Who can be sure about a thing like that? But it was clear as far as it went—both times."

"Herman hates spiders," said Cora, applying the brakes as they swung about in Carleton Wainwright's driveway. "Don't

be long, Hank. We need a male sound-board."

"I hope it's all wrapped up by the time I'm through here," said the ex-reporter. He gave Liza a buss, added, "Maybe he went out and got stinking somewhere."

"If he has he'll get hell when he does turn up," said Cora, smiling faintly. "But somehow I doubt it—no spiders."

"I wish you wouldn't kid about that," complained Liza.

The car drove off and, before Hank could ring the bell, the front door opened and the butler stood there, regarding him gravely, as on his previous visit.

He said, "This way, please, Mr. Sanford," led him through the same hallway to the same study, where Carleton Wainwright, wearing what appeared to be the same clothes, was seated behind the same desk.

Hank gave him the whole story as he knew it, complete with its apparent absurdities, its fantastic contradictions. Wainwright heard him through without comment and, in view of such lack of apparent interest, the ex-reporter concluded with, "I know it sounds stark staring crazy—but there it is."

"Crazy!" said the millionaire at last. "I've been afraid of something like this. Maybe it's not so crazy as it looks."

"How do you mean that, sir?" asked Hank, surprised.

"Well," said the millionaire slowly, "would it surprise you if I said I was directly responsible for Julius Conrad's assignment here?"

"Frankly it would. Were you?" the ex-reporter inquired.

"Maybe I should have said indirectly," remarked Wainwright, his usually cold eyes aglow with what might have been excitement. "I read his earlier stuff and saw where he was heading. So I suggested he be brought here and given his head on a study of genius."

"Then you think Dr. Conrad may have got hold of something real?" questioned Hank.

"I don't know—yet," the millionaire told him. "It seemed to me he was finding his way clear to an answer. Maybe not the

right one, but an answer—which is more than any of the others have come up with yet. So I thought it would be smart to encourage him. I got a lot of property in this world, and a lot of it's tied up in the Institute. I want to protect it if I can."

"If Dr. Conrad was right," said Hank frowning, "you're going to have a rugged time protecting anything."

"Don't be too God-almighty sure about that," replied the older man with a shrewd half-smile. "When you got as much power as I have you can do a whole lot of things about protecting yourself. But to do it you got to know the opposition."

"That's a big help," said the ex-reporter, "if they already know all about you."

"Maybe they do and maybe they don't," twanged Wainwright, resting his fingers on the edge of his desk. "But even if they do, don't you suppose they know all about the Institute? And don't you suppose they'd have stopped it, if they were against it, by now?"

Hank shook his head. "They don't seem to be doing it much good just now—if they're the people behind these killings," he said thoughtfully.

"Like Dr. Conrad told you," countered the millionaire, "they're human and that means they make mistakes. But if they did it, I'll give you odds they were acting in self-defence. There's one thing they can't stand—that's having the world find out about them ahead of time."

"I'll be damned!" said Hank. That Carleton Wainwright should give support to the time-travel theory was one thing he had not expected.

"Precisely," said Carleton Wainwright, "We're all damned. But if we're to live in purgatory it's wise to be on the side of the devils in charge. Remember that, young man. They killed Julius Conrad for preparing to expose them, they killed Jervis for intending to carry on. Now Dean Willis has expressed interest and they've done something to him. And if you . . . "

"What do you thing is going to happen to me if I take on

the job?" Hank asked him. "After all, there are a number of more-logical explanations for what has happened."

"Name one," Wainwright countered. "I'm not going to let you stick your neck out, Sanford. I don't want any more on my conscience. And I got a pretty good idea of what I'm up against."

Hank said, "But it was hardly your fault." He paused, frowned, added, "Once again—if these time travelers are so damned omniscient, how come they let Dr. Conrad get so far with his investigation? It doesn't make sense."

"I been wondering about that one myself," the millionaire told him. "Could be another of their boners. But there's another explanation for it I like a lot less."

"Which is?" said the ex-reporter.

"That Dr. Conrad's report was never completed and was never published—so they'd have no record of it in the future, would they?" queried the older man eagerly.

"I'm afraid I see what you mean," said Hank, wincing.

"Now—how about that drink?"

Chapter 16

GRIPPING a glass stocked with old London Dock brandy, Hank said, "Mr. Wainwright, Cora Willis thinks our time travelers are trying to prepare an all-Communist world. Do you agree with her? I haven't yet been able to convince myself that they've shown any recognizable political motivation to date."

Carleton Wainwright said, "Could be that you're right."

"Then why all this activity?" the younger man asked.

The millionaire permitted himself another dry smile. "Guess I'll have to explain," he remarked, settling himself in his chair. Then, after a sip of brandy, "A few centuries back the Church ran the works in Western Europe. Other churches bossed a lot of Asia too.

"This tie-up of church and state looks pretty nutty to us today," he went on. "The Commies, of course, have a sort of

state religion. But they represent reversion, not progress. Anyway, when Martin Luther broke the power of Rome, people needed something else to replace the Pope—so they kicked their kings upstairs and made sort of Gods of them.

"Then we had a revolution and busted that idea wide open," said Wainwright. "Instead of courtiers we came up with politicians. Today, outside of Communism or Fascism, we can't conceive of a government without political parties. But maybe your great-grandchildren will look on our ideas the way we look on monarchies. Have you thought of that?"

"Frankly I haven't," said Hank, amazed by the depth and range of thought masked by the millionaire's rural speech. "What sort of system do you suppose it will be?"

"I been wonderin' about that too," replied the older man. "Your guess is as good as mine. What's your idea about it?"

"Well, they obviously don't like the setup we have now," Hank offered. "But if they're against all our forms of government what do they want? I'm stumped."

Carleton Wainwright chuckled, said, "You just put it in words, Sanford. Could be they're against all forms of government."

"But that," said Hank, "would be anarchy."

Again Wainwright chuckled, said, "You just said it again, young man. Forty-fifty years ago Henry Adams said the world was dividin' up between the bankers and anarchy. He liked anarchy—he could afford it. Me—I went with the bankers because it seemed more practical. You got any idea what kind of world it would take to support a happy anarchy?"

Hank pondered, said finally, "I thought anarchy meant an all-around mess. How could it be happy?"

The older man shook his head, remarked, "Like most people, you haven't dug into it far enough. Logically the ideal government is no government at all—with everybody free to fulfill their own ideas of how to live."

"It sounds impossible," said the ex-reporter.

"It's impossible with what we got today," Wainwright told him.

"But maybe sometime in the future it could work. You get a world with only a few million people on it, with science to do all the work slaves used to do and labor does now. You make sure those people are bred right, fit in with their neighbors, don't want to be boss. You got a happy anarchy."

Hank thought about it, appalled by the implications of the millionaire's suggestions, said finally, "But that would mean virtual extermination of the world's population."

"Maybe that's what our friends want," said Wainwright, reaching out a thin hand to refill his glass. "Maybe they're humanitarians and don't want to exterminate too many people in their own time. So they're reaching back into ours to do the job."

The ex-reporter shuddered, said, "But if they destroy their ancestors how can they be sure who'll survive?"

Carleton Wainwright shrugged. "Maybe they're willing to take that chance," he said. "But me, I've got a sort of feeling they're coverin' themselves carefully. Remember, if Julius Conrad was in the right furrow, they'll be having a hand in where the hell-bombs are dropped. I'll lay odds they got a few good little survival pockets all laid out. And I'll lay some more odds Wellington, maybe the Institute, are on the recommended list."

"What makes you so sure of that?" Hank inquired.

"Where else are they going to get breedin' stock smart enough and secure enough to set up their anarchy or whatever it is?" countered the older man.

Hank shuddered again, reached for the bottle, said, "God what a ghastly idea! What do you suppose got them started on it?"

"Probably some of 'em decided their world was in too much of a mess to pull itself out," replied Wainwright, "so some of 'em decided to do somethin' about it. And they had the means. I got a hunch it's a conspiracy even where or when they come from. I'm just guessin'."

"I hope to heaven you're guessing wrong," said the ex-reporter fervently.

"I could be," replied the millionaire. "Maybe they come from

Mars or somewhere." He smiled again, faintly, as he spoke and Hank got the impression that he didn't for a moment believe his own words.

But in his bones he felt that Carleton Wainwright was on the trail of truth in his computations. He eyed the older man closely, wondered if Wainwright himself might not be one of the time travelers.

Certainly little was known of his origins; certainly he had been amazingly successful in speculative finance—which could argue a knowledge of the future. And certainly he had just told Hank he was not going to let him go ahead with Dr. Conrad's notes.

The millionaire rose, yawned, said, "Well, we won't solve anything by guessin'. You got any plans, young fellow?"

Hank hesitated, then marshaling his ideas, said, "There's one more person I want to talk to before I call it a night."

Wainwright regarded him, remarked, "Great thing—energy. Wish I had more of it left. Will you need a car?"

Hank decided it might be wise to avail himself of the offer. Wainwright spoke into an estate-telephone, told Hank a Ford would be at the door in two minutes.

It was—a shiny new station wagon.

Hank drove it a half mile past the University on the far side of town.

He hoped he had the correct location—Cora Willis had casually mentioned the address.

The house itself was set back some seventy-five feet from the road behind a low hedge and a stretch of lawn. It was a large white structure, complete with porches, conical turrets, a pagoda-ish widow's walk on its top looking like one of the hats of the late Dowager Queen Mary.

As he reached the piazza Hank found himself picked out, along with his immediate surroundings, by the headlights of a passing car, which slowed and seemed about to stop. He felt an almost irresistible impulse to duck behind the porch railing, to seek shelter from whoever might be on his trail. After all, two men had

been slain, one had vanished.

Just before he gave way to this urge the car picked up speed and went on by. Looking after it, the ex-reporter discovered to his dismay that his neck and face and hands were covered with a fine layer of sweat.

He stood in front of a large double door of some dark wood, sought a knocker or bell. As he found it, the door gave beneath the slight pressure of his hand.

Ahead lay a deep, dark hall. He could vaguely make out a bannistered staircase by the faint light reflected from a room to his right. He rapped loudly on the inner side of the door, waited, knocked again—but no answering noises greeted him. Moving cautiously, he walked warily on soft carpet toward the room in back from which the light was coming.

He took three steps, was close to the threshold of the room he sought when he was stopped by a low moan that was both human and tormented. It ended finally, was concluded by a string of mumbled but unmistakably female curses.

Hank stopped, blinking, on the threshold. The house might have been sixty or seventy years old, but the room was as new and brassy as the recreation center of a Southern California motel. From linoleum floor to ceiling, lit by a fluorescent moon, it was an anachronism. There was a quarter-circular bar in one corner, complete with chromium trim and mirrors in back. In another corner stood an immense television and record-player combination. The furniture consisted of round tables of blond wood and monks-cloth covered pieces of modern furniture, of the type than can be used alone as chairs or pushed together to form various-sized love-seats or sofas.

Along the side-wall opposite the bar three of them had been lined up unevenly to support a large, voluptuous girl with impossible copper-colored hair, who had raised herself on one elbow and was staring at him blearily.

"Well, don't just stand there, you so-and-so," she said thickly. "Can't you see li'l Mickey needs a drink?"

Hank stepped across to the bar, eyeing his hostess warily the while. She was wearing a two-piece black-satin playsuit that appeared ready to burst at the seams. There was a lot of her, amply revealed by her costume or lack of it, but all of it appeared to be shapely and in proper proportion to her Junoesque dimensions.

"What'll it be?" he asked her.

She pushed back her copper hair and sat up, moaned once more. "Somebody," she said, "slipped li'l Mickey a mickey. Never felt so goddam lousy in my life." She squinted at Hank as if to get him in focus, added, " 'Twasn't you—don't know you. Say, how 'bout a cigarette?" She lurched unsteadily toward him.

He offered her one, but her attention was diverted by an uncorked bottle of vermouth that stood on a corner of the bartop. She picked it up, downed several ounces, gasped, then patted her stomach and remarked, "Li'l apertif—jus' what li'l Mickey needs." Then, regarding Hank and frowning, "Who're you anyway, you so-and-so? What're you doing in here? 'Smy home. Beat it."

Hank decided to temporize. He said, "My name's Hank Sanford. I'm over at the Institute. I was a friend of Julius Conrad, and I'm trying to find out a few things about his death. I understand you knew him."

She stared at him incredulously, then apparently realized he was not fooling. "Julie dead?" she said. "What happened?"

"He was shot—murdered—the night before last, in his rooms," Hank told her bluntly. "Do you know anything about it?"

She rested both elbows on the bar, cupped chin in hands, gave vent to a derisive "*Hah!*" added, "That's a hot one, chappie. I didn't even know Julie was dead." She lifted her head in sudden alarm. "Night before last, you say—what day is this?"

The ex-reporter told her and she whistled. "You aren't kidding, are you, chappie?" she said.

"I'm not kidding," he told her.

"Good Lord!" She grabbed the vermouth, took another swig,

said, "You know something, chappie? I've been out cold for forty-eight hours. Somebody slipped li'l Mickey a mickey and li'l Mickey knows damned well who it was."

Chapter 17

HANK felt his jaw drop foolishly at the woman's words, closed it, then managed to ask, "Who was it, Miss Loomis?"

She looked at him searchingly for a long moment, finally told him, "Okay, chappie, you can stay a while if you want to. The name's Mickey though, not Miss Loomis, understand?"

"Right, Mickey." He turned on what he hoped was an ingratiating smile. "And mine's not Chappie, it's Hank. When you get to know me better you may call me Mr. Sanford."

"Joker, eh?" she countered sourly. "It's no time for gags—not if old Julie's murdered like you say. You did say so, didn't you, Hank?"

"He was killed, all right—the night before last," the ex-reporter told her again. "Somebody got him in his study, and fled through the window afterward." He decided to play along as Mickey Loomis wished for a while. He would be able to steer the talk around to the doped drink and its donor later.

"God! My head feels as if someone had bored a hole right through the top," said the woman. "Y'know something, Hank? I don't remember a thing since the evening of the day before yesterday—that's forty-eight hours. I had a drink in here with a friend, and that's the last thing I remember."

"Sort of a lost midweek," said Hank wryly. "You really must have tied one on."

"But I didn't," she said. "I hadn't had a drink for—for days. I was waiting for my friend and he—say, you don't really suppose somebody slipped me a mickey?"

"It's your mickey, not mine," replied the ex-reporter, his suspicion rising.

He studied her, could almost see the big beads of sweat grow

on her skin. Her expression became glazed, her face went from pink to white, then to a pale greenish yellow. She muttered something incomprehensible, tottered to a small door at the far end of the room, closed it sharply behind her.

Hank turned his back on the bar to survey the room. Its details, he saw, included overflowing ashtrays, twisted and empty cigarette packages on the floor, glass tumblers here and there at random upon the linoleum. A crumpled heap of dark-red cloth lay where it had been tossed in a corner, half behind some furniture. He went over to it, picked it up, shook it out. It was a lightweight hooded raincoat, with a roughly triangular piece torn out of its front.

Hank was still looking at it, stunned, when his hostess emerged from her retreat. She looked pale and somewhat drawn despite her puffiness, walked none too steadily to the couch, flung herself upon it, said, "Sorry Hank. Must have been something I didn't eat."

Hank stood over her, showed her the raincoat, said, "Is this yours, Mickey?"

She looked at the coat, nodded, replied, "That's right—it was raining the last thing I remember. I was going out with my friend for a ride. Hey! Look at that tear! Did you do it?"

Hank shook his head. "I didn't do it," he told her. "The Police have that missing triangle. It was torn out of the coat when Dr. Conrad's murderer scrambled out his study window. Well, what do you think?"

Mickey Loomis buried her face in her hands and so silent was the strange and garish room that the ex-reporter could actually hear the ticking of the watch on his wrist. Finally he said, "Don't you think I'd better see about calling you a doctor? And the Police ought to know about the raincoat."

She shook her head, replied, "There's no phone here. When I bought the house it was hard to get them and I decided I liked it better living without one. More privacy, understand?"

"I think so," Hank told her quietly.

Her little eyes narrowed. "So—they've told you about me. Well, it's *them,* the whole stinking sanctimonious pack of them, who made me this way. When I think how they used to kick me around before I got some dough—and I *paid* for that dough—and the way they sucked around me afterward . . . "

Hank had forgotten about the exploding coffee machine. Only then, thanks to the dimness of the lighting, did he notice that she regarded him with her head cocked a trifle to one side, that her left eye was clear, her right one bloodshot. Mickey had evidently foresworn her dark monocle in favor of an artificial eye.

"You'll only knock yourself out, not people at large," he told her. "But what about the night before last—don't you think you'd better do some talking? Somebody got Jervis last night, and now Dean Willis has disappeared. Who was the alleged friend who gave you the mickey, for instance?"

She considered this for a short while, shrugged, said, "Why not? You'll find out soon enough anyway. Everybody else seems to know. I take in boarders—you can tell that—male boarders, one at a time. But this time I'm the one that got taken in. That dirty so-and-so! Conning me into making a play for that fat little professor or psychiatrist or whatever he was, then fixing me up like this."

Her anger was obviously rising. Anxious to heat it still further, Hank suggested, "Just how did he 'con' you into making a play like that, Mickey? You don't look much like a pawn to me."

"I've always been a pawn—or always was till I got my money," the woman replied. "He doesn't have any dough of his own, and he told me this Dr. Conrad had some red-hot stuff he could sell for a mint if he could only get his hands on it. I'm always willing to help a pal, so . . . "

"You must be pretty fond of your friend," said Hank.

"I was—but no so-and-so is going to dope my drinks and try to frame me for murder and get away with it." She paused, swore again, obscenely and competently. "When I get my hands on that two-bit bartender! Just because he got himself written up

in that damned literary magazine he thinks he's a big shot. Why, before I picked him up he was living in a hole in Neetsville, cleaning out washrooms. Just a broken-down ex-pug with a record!"

The suddenness of this revelation caused Hank to do some double-time reconstruction of all he had learned and surmised about the murders. Pat McColl, the Institute Club bartender, was one person he had never thought to suspect. Pat, the well-adjusted, the well-trusted, the well-liked—it simply had not occurred to him. Yet, now that he considered it, Pat had hung on every word of the argument between Dean Willis and Dr. Conrad. It was Pat who had seen to it that Jervis was taken care of that same ill-fated night. Certainly, as Mickey Loomis' "boarder," he had had access to the torn raincoat, as a bartender would have known how to keep her doped while he arranged his frameup.

Yes, Pat McColl fitted into the role of the murderer better than anyone else that had thus far appeared. As for motive—if he were possessed by a time-traveling agent of the future, that in itself was sufficient.

The bartender, now that Hank considered him, offered a perfect type for time-travel possession. He had changed suddenly within the past five years from a lazy, violent, weak-willed lout into an assured and intelligent person. As for opportunity, Hank had little doubt that investigation would reveal it ample. He recalled that when he and Cora Willis entered the Club the previous afternoon, Pat McColl had informed them he had just come on duty. Which left him plenty of time to have seen and dealt with Dean Willis.

"Hey! Are you asleep or something?" Mickey Loomis' question brought him out of his reverie.

He shook his head, replied, "No—but I hadn't even thought about your Pat in connection with these crimes. Do you happen to remember whether Dean Willis was here this afternoon or not?"

"No." Her reply was firm, unequivocal. Regarding her, while he held the torn raincoat, he began to feel a sense of urgency.

"Listen, Mickey," he said. "Pat McColl knows you pretty well—right?"

"He knows me," she informed him flatly.

"Being a bartender he also knows a thing or two about mixing drinks—including whatever he gave you," suggested the ex-reporter. "He must have a pretty good idea of when you'll be coming out of your coma, which means he'll be showing up here any minute now. I think we ought to get out of here."

"So we're dead—bang, bang," said Mickey Loomis. "Right now I'd welcome it." She moved as if to lie down once more on the disordered sectional lounge.

Hank went to her, tried to pull her off to her feet. "No you don't," he told her. "Maybe you want to die but I don't."

She grinned up at him mockingly. "Nobody," she said firmly, "is going to make li'l Mickey do what she doesn't want to do. Li'l Mickey's tired of being pushed around. Why don't you get the hell out of here and leave me alone?"

It was at this moment, while Hank was desperately trying to come up with a convincing answer, that Pat McColl walked into the room. He appeared remarkably composed, but a pistol was firmly clutched in his right hand. He said, "Too bad, Sanford."

For the first time in his life the ex-reporter felt total fear. Somehow when his voice emerged, it sounded unexpectedly normal. He said, "All right, Pat, what are you going to do?"

"What *can* I do?" countered the bartender matter-of-factly.

Hank replied, "Well, you'd better get on with it." It was, apparently, time to die. There was regret within him for the loss of a life with Liza, for the incompletion of his project, for his inability to carry on with Dr. Conrad's work. He had a foreboding that, should McColl give him time to recover his full mental and emotional power, this regret would grow unbearably sharp. If he would only be quick . . .

Hank knew better than to try to rush a gun from a distance of fifteen feet. If he did he might not die instantly but slowly,

painfully, disgustingly. And either way he was going to die. So he stood there.

"Not so fast," said McColl. He added to Mickey Loomis, without turning toward her, "Too bad, kid—but you were slated for it anyway."

She replied with a burst of invective that Hank had never heard matched for incisiveness or variety, even in his newspaper and Army careers.

"Why delay?" said the reporter.

"I didn't expect you here, Sanford," McColl told him. "It changes things a little. They'll be looking for you right away and I don't want you found here."

"Then what's the pitch?" Hank asked him.

"Tell you in a minute," said the bartender. He shook his head. "I got held up, dammit. I was coming back to put Mickey under for another twelve hours but you woke her up."

"You unprintable!" said the girl through clenched teeth.

"You're so right," said McColl, unruffled. "On your feet, babe. You're going to drive the car—and very very, slowly."

McColl switched his attention, and with it, the gun, to the girl. He said to Hank, "One move and she gets it where it will hurt—plenty. Hold onto that raincoat. That's fine. Now, let's go."

A car was outside, parked in front of the station wagon Hank had borrowed from Carleton Wainwright. Its motor was running softly. It was a moderately new sedan of completely unremarkable appearance. Pat stood a little aside, said, "Okay, you get behind the wheel, Mickey. Hank, you get in front beside her."

While he spoke he moved toward the rear door—just as the blaze and sound of a shot came from the deep-treed shadows across the road.

Chapter 18

INSTANTLY, as the bullet ricocheted from the metal frame of the sedan, the bartender spun away in a crouch, putting the

car between himself and the shooter. Hank fully recovered from the paralysis of fear, grabbed Mickey's outsize frame and, flinging both her and himself to the ground, rolled with her toward the thin shelter of the hedge.

McColl straightened and turned as if to pump bullets at them. But as he did so the gun across the road spat twice and the bartender's pistol was sent spinning from his hand, to the accompaniment of a howl of anguish. Disarmed he ducked again behind the car, scrambling for the driver's seat.

Two more shots rang out, evidently aimed at the tires of the sedan, but the murderer was amazingly fast in getting behind the wheel and under way. His motor roared as he sped off down the dark road.

Hank picked himself up, was assisting Mickey Loomis to her feet when Cora Willis, dangling a small revolver from her fingers, came across the road, said, "Hello, you two. Everything okay?"

"I—I guess so," said the ex-reporter, who was feeling the effects of violent reaction.

Cora turned on the lights of the station wagon, by their light found a stout twig, with which she picked up the bartender's automatic through the trigger guard. She said, "Hmmm—a thirty-two. Guess this is what got Julie." Then, regarding Mickey Loomis, who was suffering from a chill and whose teeth were chattering, "Better slip into something warmer, just for a switch."

Hank found himself beginning to function once more. He discovered the red raincoat still wrapped around his left arm, opened it, draped it around the big woman's near-nude body. He told her, "This will do, I think." Then, to Cora, "Thanks—got a car?"

The Dean's wife nodded across the road and, by the lights of the station wagon, Hank was able to make out the low lines of the Jaguar, almost concealed by overhanging branches. Satisfied, the ex-reporter turned to Mickey Loomis, asked her if she could drive.

"I guess so," replied the Junoesque creature dully.

"Then get to the Institute Club right away and ask for Lieutenant Luizetti," said Hank. "He's in charge. And take the gun—here." He pulled out a handkerchief, wrapped up the weapon, gave it to her. "This and the raincoat ought to wrap the case up for him."

"Think you can do it?" Cora Willis asked. Then, to Hank, "Come on—we've got to find that so-and-so before he murders Herman—if he hasn't already."

"Any idea where he'd go?" Hank asked Mickey Loomis.

She said dully, "He used to have a room at Joe's Tavern, before I took him on—as a boarder." There was a pathetic insistence on respectability in front of Cora Willis in her final phrase.

"He may not drive there directly," said Cora Willis. "Let's go, Hank—we may beat him to it."

Somehow, despite a vast urge to accompany Mickey Loomis back to the Institute and the protection of the Police, Hank found himself climbing hurriedly into the Jaguar beside the Dean's remarkable wife. They were a quarter mile down the road before he thought to ask her, "How in hell did you happen to be there?"

Cora never took her eyes from the road, told him, "I didn't like the way Luizetti was handling things. Your Liza went back to fix up the place for me to stay in her rooms and we had ourselves an argument. I told him to get a hump on about Herman and he claimed he didn't have the men. Finally I took off to pick you up at Wainwright's. I figured out where you'd gone to, and followed you to Mickey's—Gad, what an appalling hunk of skin that girl is!"

"She claims she's been doped for forty-eight hours," Hank told her. "Come to think of it, Pat backed her up. Well, all I can say is, thanks for trailing along. I thought we were both cooked."

"I figured maybe you and the fair Mickey were doing all right alone," said the Dean's wife. "In fact I got up quite a head of

steam over it. I was just backing the Jag into the bushes to turn it around when Sweet Pat drove up and stopped. He acted sort of funny, snooping around the station wagon and then pulling a gun when he went toward the house. So I got mine out of the door pocket and waited. The light's tricky or I'd never have missed him. Is he really the man we want?"

"He's the man, all right," Hank told her. "He must have just finished doing whatever he did to your husband when he served us at the Club this afternoon. Remember, he said he had just come on duty?"

"What a slick two-face!" muttered Cora. Then, as they surmounted a familiar rise in the road, she switched off the headlamps, coasted the Jaguar, said, "Well, this is it."

"I'm scared," said Hank honestly.

"I would be too," Cora told him, "if I weren't so damned mad. When I think of that nasty ex-pug soft-soaping me this afternoon right after seeing Herman . . . I could spit."

"Do you suppose Mickey will make it?" Hank asked her.

"If she does," said Cora, "the boys at the Club are going to be in for quite a show when Luizetti strips that rain-coat off her. I didn't think outfits like that actually existed outside of theatrical photographers' studio wardrobes."

Hank found himself grinning despite his fear. Tough, realistic Cora Willis had a remarkable gift for thinking tangentially while not actually losing her direction. Looking ahead as they rolled down the shallow hill Hank saw the words JOE'S TAVERN glowing in dismal blue neon letters.

Cora turned the Jaguar off the narrow road a good fifty yards short of the tavern parking lot, brought it to a halt with its front bumper up against a ragged, untended wall of bushes. She opened the car door silently, motioned for Hank to do the same. Again she had the small revolver held firmly in her right hand.

She very evidently knew her way—Hank wondered what amorous escapades had given her such tactical command of the vicinity. They skirted the small parking lot, inhabited by one

lone roadster, moved silently around it toward the rear of the ancient edifice beyond. She whispered, coming close to Hank, "Take this, honey—but don't use it until I tell you to." He felt a metal cylinder pressed into his hand, discovered himself to be holding a flashlight.

"Maybe we did beat him here after all," whispered Hank, "or maybe he won't come here at all."

"Ssshhh! There's a side entrance," whispered Cora. They threaded their way through a disorderly maze of ashcans, garbage cans, cartons packed with broken bottles and crumbling under the impact of weather. Through a screen door with numerous rents they could see a foul-looking ruffian in a foul-looking chef's costume, pouring dark-brown grease in a skillet. Hank noticed, irrelevantly, that he had a large red powder-burn or birthmark that covered most of one side of his face.

Then they were around the corner, with only a dim reflection of light from a single small window to give them light. Cora moved gracefully and silently to a narrow door, set flush with the shingled wall, muttered softly, "I busted the lock on this thing last February—hope Joe hasn't fixed it yet." He hadn't, but the door creaked alarmingly as the Dean's wife pushed it open carefully. She paused briefly, then beckoned Hank to move past her. At his shoulder her lips said softly, "Now—just a flash. The stairs are tricky. Memorize them."

Hank used the flashlight. The stairs *were* tricky, reminding him of the twisting closet stairways so beloved of the Pennsylvania Dutch. He managed to climb them without major disaster but was vastly relieved when both of them stood, breathing rapidly, upon the platform at their top.

"What do we do now?" he asked.

"We look for Herman," she told him grimly.

Hank regarded her curiously, said, "Funny, it never occurred to me that you might actually love him."

"I don't," she retorted in an angry whisper. "But that doesn't mean anyone else can mishandle him." Then, lowering her voice

still further, "Follow me and if you meet anybody pretend we've been having a rendezvous and you're a bit drunk. Got it?"

"I'm drunk with you already," he replied.

"Shut up," she hissed. "Let's go."

There were five rooms to be investigated. Each was dingy, with decor that seemed based on a motif of golden oak and fly-specked oil-cloth. All were unoccupied save one. In this a man was sleeping on the sofa. His shoes were off, and he was wearing socks which had once been white. Cora led Hank back to the stairway, frowned.

She said, "Well, he's not here—and neither is any gigantic spider. Hank, I don't want to be insulting to the course of true love, but does Liza have all her buttons?"

Sensing the seriousness that underlay the flip question, Hank accepted it without resentment. He said, "As far as I know she's a very smart cookie. That business tonight was the first sign of anything off-normal about her I've seen."

Cora Willis looked at him. There was hopelessness lurking behind the brilliant blue of her eyes. "Well, if he's not here he's not here. Maybe we'll have to leave it up to Luizetti after all, even if he is a meathead."

Hank felt a sense of relief along with frustration. He remarked, "This would have been the place—it would have tied everything up so neatly. How about downstairs?"

Cora looked at him with scorn, said, "And have some drunk stumble over Herman? Not likely unless . . . " Her voice trailed off, her well-cut face took on renewed excitement. "Hank, there *is a* cellar here. It's just possible that they have . . . "

"How can we crack it without pulling the whole place down on top of us?" countered the ex-reporter.

"We can take a look, anyway," replied the Dean's wife. She tugged impatiently at his arm. They got down the narrow, twisting stairway without mishap, went outside. Cora tiptoed ahead with an arm touching the side of the old building, Hank following.

Finally she stopped, pointed down at a cobwebbed recess in the

foundation—what evidently was, or had been, a coal hole. She whispered, "Try your light in there, Hank. Maybe you can see something if the window isn't too fogged."

Hank nodded, feeling no desire to risk discovery through further talk in case they should happen to be right. At first, after lying gingerly on the littered ground and directing the light through the window, he saw nothing. Then, realizing that the outside of the window was thickly smeared with filth, he wiped it off with a sleeve of his jacket, redirected the torch's ray through it.

It was still difficult, since the inside of the window was also begrimed and sooty, but he found he could see a little. It looked, at first glance, about as a cellar for such an establishment should. There were piles of boxes, most of which appeared to be wine, liquor, beer or soft-drink cases, and a park of beer kegs in one corner. There was other debris scattered about, none of it interesting.

About to give up, the ex-reporter edged backward, wondering vaguely what shape his clothing was in, unintentionally lifted the flashlight so that its ray was directed higher, toward the ceiling of the basement. And then he froze, unable to move, unable to whisper for a long moment. What he saw looked exactly like a monstrous spider, immense black body, and thick, black legs radiating from it, hanging head down from the ceiling.

"What is it—what is it?" Cora Willis' whisper was urgent, sibilant, in his ear.

"Nothing, I guess," he said as the illusion faded before reason. "It's just a furnace. But for a moment I could have sworn it looked like a big, black spider."

She was pushing him aside, grabbing for the flashlight, before he finished. Flat on her stomach she peered, as he had, through the dirty window, squinting to follow the ray of the flashlight. Finally she rose to her knees, turned to him, said softly, "Hank, we've got to get in there. It's too much of a coincidence to let pass by. Let's get this window open."

"All right," said the ex-reporter reluctantly. It promised to be a

dirty, unpleasant, risky business. The window opened up and inward. If it were hooked they'd have to risk the sound of breaking a pane of glass.

At first, when Hank rammed his heels hard against the wood frame, it refused to budge. He looked up at Cora Willis after a second try, shook his head. But the urgency of her expression as revealed by the faint light from the tavern window was sufficient spur to make him try again.

This time there followed a faint, scrunching sound and Hank felt the window give a trifle. He clamped his teeth, drew up his knees, kicked hard with both feet. It held, gave slightly, then suddenly all the way, so that he was lying with his feet through it, the frame banging against his shins.

He rolled over, slid on through, landing on his feet atop a few scattered pieces of coal. Evidently the tavern's winter supply had been used up and it was too early in the season to have their quota for the next winter delivered. He took hold of Cora Willis around the hips, eased her down beside him.

The furnace looked more like a spider than ever from where they now stood. Hank held the flash on it for a full minute, examining it with puzzled interest. Certainly it was a tremendous heat generator for an establishment as comparatively small as the tavern. It must, he decided, devour coal like an old-fashioned ocean liner.

"Hank—this *has* to be it. Let's look around," whispered Cora, her fingernails digging into his arm through the sleeve of his jacket. He nodded agreement. They picked their way through the cases of bottles, some full, some empty, the beer kegs, the cartons of empty tin cans and other jetsam from the bar upstairs. As they reached the far side of the gigantic furnace they stopped with one accord.

Dean Herman Willis lay unconscious on his back on the floor. His wrists and ankles had been bound with bicycle tape; more of it had been slapped across his mouth. In the pale circle of the flashlight's beam his chest rose and fell slowly.

"Hank—we've got to untie him!" said Cora Willis, her voice

rising slightly with half-controlled emotion.

Hank turned to shush her even as she darted toward her husband, but both of them froze as a door above them opened, a bright light was turned on, a familiar voice said, "All right, leave him alone. I don't want any more shooting."

Cora, looking like a jungle cat at bay, had risen, her own revolver pointed upward. She said, "You'll have to get all three of us, Pat. And I'm a better shot than you are with your left hand."

McColl did not waver. Instead he smiled unpleasantly, told the Dean's wife, "Granted—but only when you have bullets in your gun. And you fired five times at me, remember?"

Chapter 19

CORA WILLIS' voice was glassy cool. She said, "Sorry, Pat—it's a six shooter. And one will do the trick."

The bartender smiled cynically, told her, "You're too used to guns, Cora, to keep a cartridge in the barrel chamber, so hand it over." And, as she hesitated, "You have exactly two seconds."

Reluctantly, she tossed her useless weapon toward the wooden stairs. When it had ceased to clatter on the cement floor she said to Hank, "Well, this seems to be where you came in. Sorry, partner. I thought maybe I could bluff it."

"It's okay, Cora," said the ex-reporter, wondering how long death would this time be deferred. For some reason he felt no recurrenee of the paralysis of fear that had gripped him at Mickey Loomis' house. Perhaps, he thought in fugitive fashion, he was becoming used to staring into loaded guns.

At the same time anger was rising within him. With the agent of the time travelers squarely in front of him all the terror, the grisliness, the grief of the last forty-eight hours, the bafflement, the sense of helplessness, seemed to come to a focus, to glow white-hot.

Pat McColl, coming slowly down the steps, then scooping up the gun Cora Willis had tossed at him, said, "It's all right, folks—you won't die if you behave yourselves."

"What's another murder—or two or three—to you?" said the ex-reporter angrily.

"No one has proved I've killed anybody—yet," McColl told them. Then seeing the incredulity on their faces, "Okay, so they will, thanks to you two. But I won't be around much longer. And I can use the three of you to parlay for time, if I need it."

"Why did you kidnap Herman?" Cora asked him suddenly. "Why didn't you just kill him?"

"And I always thought you were a cutie," said McColl, shaking his battered head. "Keerist, I couldn't leave him around Mickey's place. She might have come to and untied him. Now, both of you sit down on those cases behind you—and behave, or I'll put a couple of bullets where they'll hurt."

He moved quickly to the outsize furnace, opened its door, revealed therein a complex of metal coils and tanks and other machinery. Hank understood the reason now for its bigness; it held a liquor distillery within its spiderish body.

"Nice racket," Cora told McColl. "You're outside the jurisdiction of the Wellington cops and Neetsville hasn't any."

"Primitive, but profitable," said the bartender. He thrust his right arm, with its bandaged hand, inside the false furnace, reached behind the tanks of the still—and for a moment, as he grunted with effort, his attention was distracted from his prisoners and Hank propelled himself from the case on which he was sitting. He half-heard Cora scream, *"Don't!"* at him, knew he was being a damned fool—yet he knew also that this was the single chance any of them—the Dean, Cora, himself—would have for survival.

He veered wide as he sprang and the bartender, with his arm inside the furnace, could not pivot sufficiently to bring the pistol to bear on him. Before he could get clear to fire, Hank was on him, was desperately wrenching at the gun, twisting it up and around. McColl screamed like a gutted horse as it went off, and then the whole cellar seemed to explode. Flames flowered from the false furnace with dazzling whiteness, blinding the ex-reporter as he staggered back, his arms flung over his eyes.

The few seconds that followed were utter confusion he was never able to pierce. There were lesser, gunshot-like blasts as encased bottles were detonated by the sudden flare of heat. He kept back-pedaling, seeking to get clear of the flames, half-tripped over a beer-keg. Then strong, feminine fingers were on his arm, a voice was saying, "We've got to get Herman. This way, you idiot!"

Half-led, half-guided by Cora Willis, he got to her husband just before a little tide of flaming alcohol lapped over his unconscious body. Somehow between them they got the Dean's body to the window — the stairs were cut off by a wall of fire. Cora scrambled through it like a sailor up a rope and Hank managed to give her husband's body a hoist and push, to get through it himself afterward.

He was just clear, panting, when he heard a faint cry from behind him, turned to see Pat McColl, his clothing aflame, trying vainly to scramble out after them. Instinctively Hank reached an arm back to help haul the killer to safety.

McColl lay on his back on the grass, minutes later, while Joe's tavern blazed. He and Cora and Hank watched bartender and chef and a couple of patrons carry the man with the dirty-white socks out the front door, waited for fire engines to arrive from Wellington.

Pat McColl was horribly burned, unquestionably dying. He began to laugh as small bubbles, orange-pink in the yellow glare of the flames, emerged from his lips. He said, "You got me, all right. Couldn't get to the—" he used a long and, to Hank, incomprehensible word that sounded like temporal-transformer. "Stuck here—can't get back now."

The ex-reporter stared at him, feeling no pity despite the ghastly burns whose disfigurement of McColl's battered features increased with the passing seconds. He said, "Tell me, Pat—when are you from—how far in the future?"

Pat McColl laughed once more, faintly, gibingly. He said through lips already immobile, "You'll have to guess, Sanford. Know something? You're too late. You got me okay, but we've

already got my successor working for us. 'F you hadn't jumped me I'd a made it back okay. But I got Conrad's notes first."

He went limp, what was left of him. His eyes, staring out through the charred wreckage of his face, looked upward at the stars but saw nothing. Hank shuddered, pondering the killer's final words—"too late"—"successor working for us"—"I got Conrad's notes first . . ."

Cora said, "Give me a hand with Herman, will you, Hank?" and he turned to help untie the still-unconscious Dean. They had just finished removing his gag when the sirens sounded and both Police and Fire Department from Wellington were upon them . . .

It was past midnight. Hank and Cora Willis were sitting in the Jaguar, parked outside the Institute gates. Said Cora, regarding her cigarette ruefully, "Poor Herman—it's so typical that he should be all doped up and utterly unconscious while everything happened. Well, he'll be home from the hospital tomorrow."

"Don't forget," the ex-reporter reminded her, "that it was your husband who spotted Pat McColl first."

Cora sighed. "*And* had to be sure instead of going to the Police, thus getting himself into a jam."

"You're a great one to talk," Hank told her. "You didn't exactly rush to Luizetti when things began to happen."

She made a face at the windshield, then said, "And so it was just Pat going crazy with jealousy after all and then killing to protect himself." She paused, added. "In a way I miss the time travelers. At least they were different."

"Luizetti missed a couple of points," he said. He had not told anyone of the dead bartender's final phrases—nor did he intend to. He looked through the gates at the quadrangle, at the charred areas visible around the windows of what had been Dr. Conrad's study. He added, "Friend Pat was operating on a schedule tonight that just about defies possibility. This afternoon he received your husband, kidnapped him, stole his car in the process, left him tied up at Joe's Tavern. He went to work at the Club,

took his break to set an incendiary fire in Dr. Conrad's rooms, then came to check on Mickey Loomis' condition—and ran into you and me. He went to Joe's, hid his sedan, got his hand doctored, then came downstairs to find us again. It's too damned tight—especially the fire."

"I thought Julie's notes were under guard," said Cora Willis. "How'd he get at them—if Luizetti's theory is right?"

"They *were* under guard," Hank told her, "until Luizetti had to send out all hands to look for your husband." He shook his head added. "Even granting Pat did have time to set the fire, why in hell would he want to if the time travel theory isn't true?"

Cora shrugged, flicked glowing ash over the side of the Jaguar, said, "It all sounds so crazy now. Are you trying to kid me, Hank? If you are—don't."

He studied her, sighed, gave it up, remarked, "Okay—so we both know it's true. So what do you suppose Pat was going for in that false furnace under Joe's? Some concealed communications setup that connected with his own time? I don't know."

"I was watching you make your move, Hank," said Cora. "I didn't see him reach into it. God, it sure went up with a hell of a blast when that damned thing of his blew."

"That it did," he said aimlessly, beginning to feel a vast weariness. After all the danger, the tragedy, the anti-climax was upon him, and the time travelers had won as, he supposed, they had had to win from the beginning. The odds were stacked too heavily in their favor. Even Dr. Conrad's notes were cinders. He wondered if he or anyone could or would be able to do that monumental job again.

He became aware of Cora's closeness, of the whisper of her dark hair against his cheek, of her voice, saying, "Hank, you were grand tonight. I'm too keyed to go home now. Why don't we go away somewhere? After all, we're together in something tremendous, we've got to make plans. This fight isn't even started yet." Her voice, which had sharpened, grew soft, challenging, as she added, "Besides, we might make it—interesting for each other."

"I don't for a moment doubt it," he told her sincerely. "Cora, you'd just made me realize I was licked. I'm not any more. We're *going* to make plans. But I've got a lot of thinking to do first."

"Of golden hair?" She mocked him with derision that had, he thought, well-springs of utter assurance. "All right, Hank—go to your thinking. I can wait—that's one thing I've learned. And my waiting will be neither bitter nor solitary. Furthermore I don't think it will last very long. We have a couple of fights on our hands, honey." She put her foot on the starter, added, "Sure you don't want to come along—for the ride?"

"Not tonight, Cora," he told her firmly, got out of the car. Then, standing beside it, "Don't worry, Cora, you won't be forgotten." He wished he could trust her as he did Liza.

"You have very little to forget," she said, smiling at him. The low-slung English car vanished swiftly under the arch of night-dark trees that spanned the road. He stood looking after it, feeling stupid, self-frustrated, a little ashamed, as all men must feel on such occasions.

Then he forced his thoughts on Liza, walked into the Institute quadrangle. But his mind remained confused with Cora, Liza, the time travelers, the events of the past fifty hours jumbled like bits of glass in a kaleidoscope. One thing especially refused to fall into place—the time element of Pat McColl's actions that evening. If Luizetti were right, the bartender must have set the fire in Dr. Conrad's rooms in a matter of less than five minutes, which seemed to Hank a remarkably brief time in which to prepare and ignite a successful conflagration.

He would, he decided, never be free of the time-travel obsession. Perhaps he could not redo Dr. Conrad's work—but he could be always on his guard, looking for evidences of tampering by the travelers, seeking their agents, doing what little he could to thwart or nullify their work. He had no illusions either as to how effective his actions might be, or how dangerous to himself—yet he would have to carry on as best he could, risk ridicule should it become necessary. His life, which had never before held much purpose,

had taken on new and clear direction and focus. It was an assignment he could not quit until he died.

He wondered how much leeway the travelers would give him, how and when they would crack down—then shrugged off such thoughts as Liza's entry loomed before him. She must have been waiting just inside the door, for she opened it almost at once, flung herself, crying a little, into his arms.

As he patted her shoulder—she was again wearing the terry-cloth robe—he could see, beyond the dark gold of her hair, a section of the living room. On the coffee table was a copy of Life—and on the cover was a remarkable color-photograph of the latest test atomic-bomb explosion in the Pacific. The horrible great fireball rising from the green-blue water reminded him of a gilded derby hat held over the bell of some cosmic trumpeter's horn.

Gabriel's, perhaps, he thought—was annoyed with the orthodoxy of this concept. A Judgment Day was coming, coming soon, but there would be no divinity in the men and women who sat on the bench. They would be no more than human—would be prey to prejudice, to cruel impulse, to irrationality, even as himself.

Then Liza pulled his head down and her soft lips devoured his, and for a moment all else slipped out of reckoning. When at last she released him, she said, "Darling, I've been terrified. I guess there's no use trying to kid myself any more. I love you."

"I love you, Liza," he countered, wondering why even the faintest of reservations should clip annoyingly within him. He led her to the sofa, sat beside her, enjoying the soft strength of her within the circle of his arm. He said, "It's all over, honey. I didn't have time to give you the details over the phone but you got the main facts."

"Let's forget about it," she said earnestly. "It's been horrible—but if good has come out of it for us, if it has shown us the truth of our feelings toward each other, we oughtn't to complain, should we?"

"Who's complaining?" he asked her, grinning for the first time in hours, though his face was sore and stiff from the blast of the

still in the false furnace.

"Hank, darling!" she exclaimed suddenly, picking up his right sleeve. "You've got dirt all over your coat."

"Got it wiping off that cellar window at Joe's," he replied with a trace of ruefulness. The sleeve was a mess—he hadn't had much luck with his jackets during the search for the killer, he thought, then cursed himself inwardly for the selfishness and frivolity of his mind.

Liza rose quickly, sinuously, said, "I've got a whole new tin of benzine. I'll clean it for you."

She disappeared into the tiny bar kitchen and he waited, finally lit a cigarette. At last she came back, shaking an empty can close to her ear, told him, perplexed, "I can't understand it, Hank. I only bought it the day before yesterday and I know I haven't used any. It's empty."

Hank looked at her and a number of loose ends that had been bothering him fell into place with shockingly perfect fit. Benzine, he thought—it had been something like benzine that had been used to set the fire in Dr. Conrad's study, to destroy his notes. He recalled Liza's strange reaction two nights ago to the time travel theory, her abortive visit to Dr. Conrad that had frightened the murderer away. He recalled her fear of losing identity, either to psychic trance or anesthetic—bespeaking a basic weakness of personality that might make her fair game. He recalled the too-tight schedule of Pat McColl's activities during the evening drawn up by Luizetti, which almost demanded a confederate. He recalled the murderer's final words—"You got me okay—but we've already got my successor working for us . . ." Walking to Liza's apartment he had wondered what sort of restriction the time travelers planned to put upon him. Now he knew—they had taken Liza. And he was going to have to play his part, to marry her, to seek through their intimacy whatever clues he could find as to the nature and time of their plans, for there was just a chance they might not know he was aware of her possession. She had blundered about the benzine, but she—whoever she now was—was new. There

would be few more blunders.

His assignment was clear now, horribly clear—clear as the picture of the A-bomb burst on the magazine cover before him. It was, he thought, a hell of a way to get married.

He got up, yawned, said, "Never mind, honey—I'll have the cleaners pick it up in the morning. And now I need some shuteye."

Walking back to his rooms he wondered just how he was going to tell Cora Willis on the phone.