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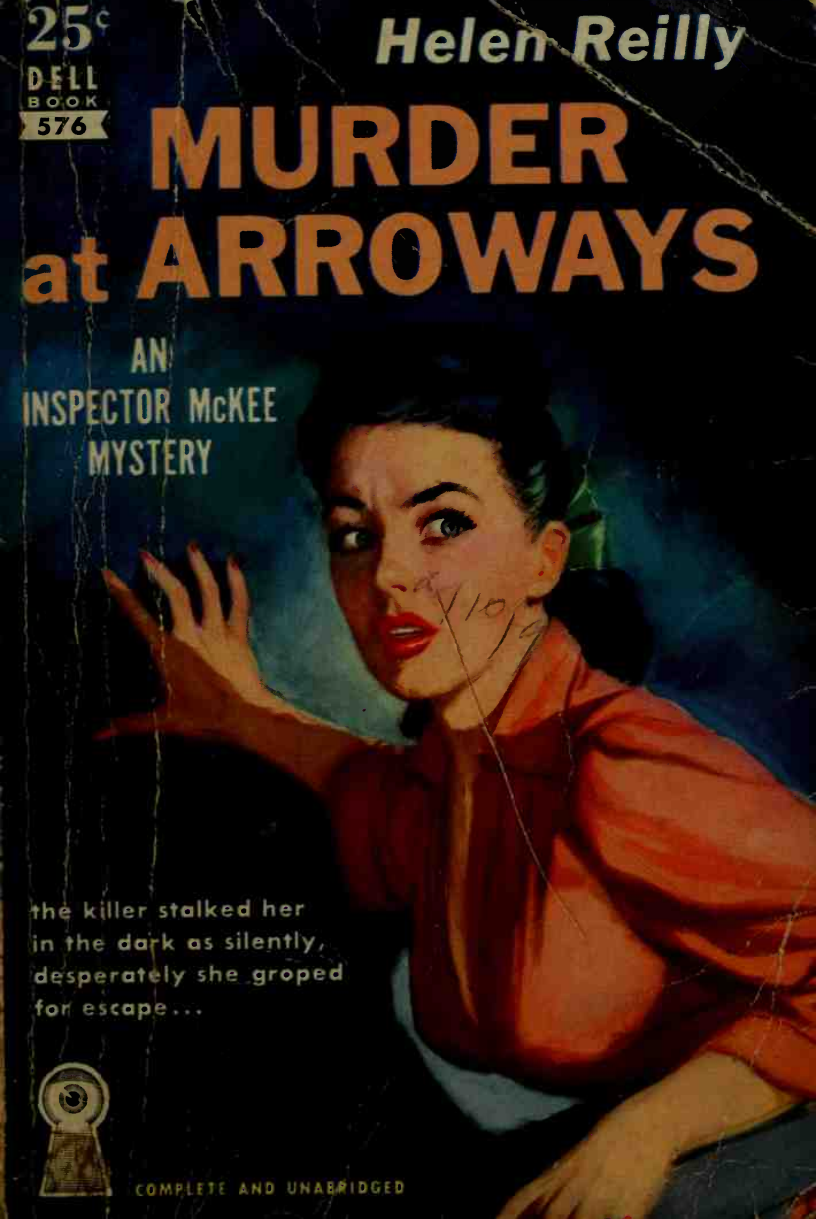
Helen Reilly

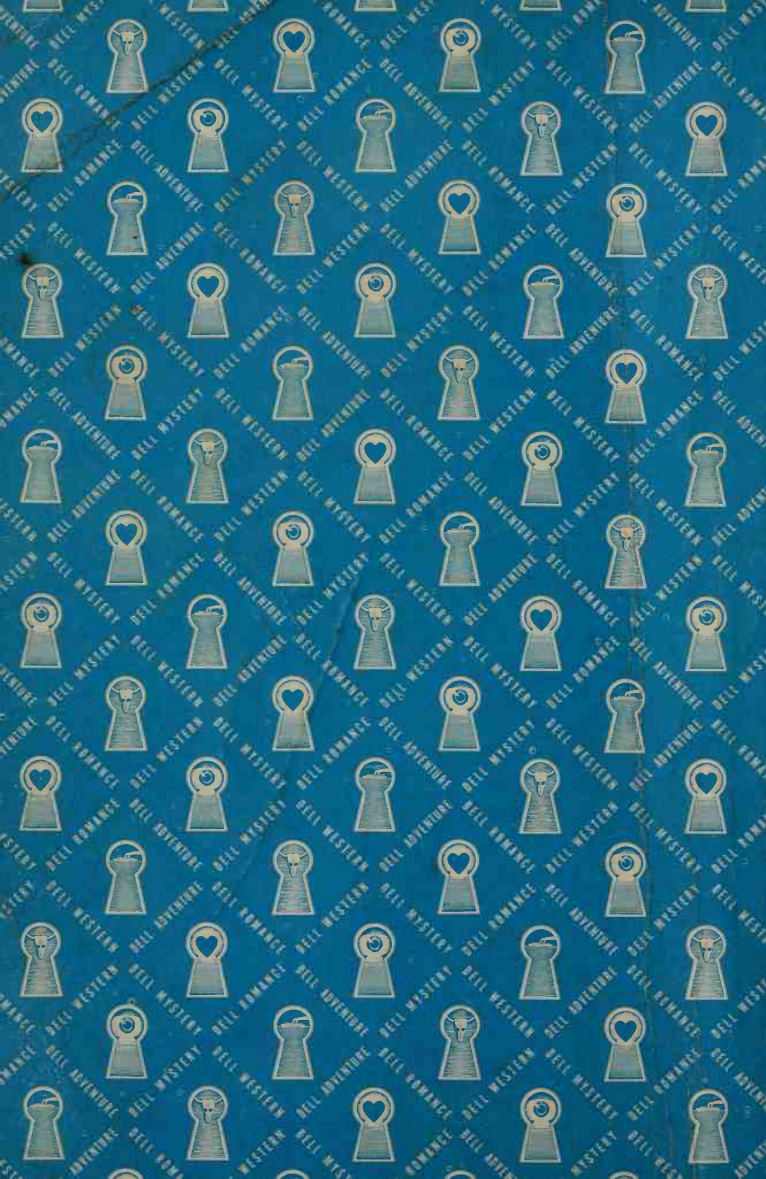
MURDER at ARROWAYS

AN INSPECTOR McKEE MYSTERY



the killer stalked her in the dark as silently, desperately she groped for escape...

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED


DELL ROMANCE
DELL MYSTERY
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STALKED BY A MURDERER . . .

She stood still, her head up. What was that? Had she been followed? Blackness behind her —was there someone hidden in the blackness? She went on, creeping forward, both hands feeling for a door—and found one at last. She felt a sort of latch and pressed it lightly.

The resultant click was like thunder in the stillness. Now. Damien pulled the heavy door open, raced forward, and came against an inner wall with a crash. A sob of rage and frustration choked her throat. She whirled. The door behind her had closed. . . .

FROM CHAPTER 18

MURDER AT ARROWAYS

Love and Hate Involve Them in Murder—

DAMIEN CAREY—a lovely girl with more charm than money, inherits Arroways after the death of her grandmother, Maria Mont.

OLIVER MONT—handsome, vital, upsets the wealthy Monts by spurning a position in Mont Fabrics to start his own freight air line.

ELEANOR MONT—Oliver's mother, was very ill following the sudden death of her husband, Randall, and now seems secretly devastated by some mysterious trouble.

JANCY MONT HAMMOND—Eleanor's beautiful daughter, has become neurotic and taken to drink since her father's death.

ROGER HAMMOND—Jancy's small, middle-aged husband, accepts her indifference and seems to know something that makes him afraid either of or for her.

BILL HEYWARD—an easy-mannered young man in love with Damien, has invented a process Mont Fabrics would like to possess.

LINDA ST. GEORGE—Oliver Mont's fiancée, is a sweet, uncomplicated girl with dark-gold hair and an eager, laughing mouth.

ANNE GILES—production manager of Mont Fabrics, is hard, greedy, smug, with a mannered vivacity.

HIRAM ST. GEORGE—Linda's retired, wealthy father, is an old friend of the Monts.

MIKE JONES—was madly in love with Jancy until old Maria Mont broke up the affair—and broke Mike, too.

LUCY STEWART—Anne Giles's cousin, a trained nurse, was with Maria Mont when she died.

INSPECTOR CHRISTOPHER McKEE—of the Manhattan Homicide Squad, comes into the case when a murder causes investigation in New York. His curiosity goads him into taking a holiday at Arroways.

LUTTRELL—town prosecutor and friend of McKee's, knows things about the Monts the police couldn't possibly know.

AN INSPECTOR McKEE MURDER MYSTERY

MURDER AT ARROWAYS

by HELEN REILLY

author of
"Staircase 4"
"The Farmhouse"
"The Silver Leopard"

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List of *Exciting* Chapters—

Murder at Arroways

Chapter One

The Crawling Edge of Dread

"Eleanor—is it true? I can't *believe* it. It doesn't seem possible!"

Mrs. Thomas Cambell, a large, handsome woman in her middle fifties paused for breath in the doorway of the sewing-room of Arroways, the Mont house in Eastwalk, Connecticut. It was ten minutes after four on the afternoon of October the eleventh. Ida Cambell had been a friend and neighbor of the Monts' for more than a quarter of a century. She was the one who generally dispensed news of the Monts in Eastwalk, that they were in residence, how they looked, what they had been doing. The rumor concerning them had fallen on her astounded ears via the expressman's wife, while she was selecting a leg of lamb at the village market ten minutes earlier.

Eleanor Mont was sorting the contents of a Martha Washington stand near one of the long narrow windows. She was a tall, sandy woman in her late forties, with a soap-and-water freshness about her. Warm autumn light reflected from a polished table fell on her serene hands, the fine angular proportions of brow and cheeks. She looked up nearsightedly. Her expression was tight. It loosened. "Oh, Ida—come in. Is what true?"

"Is *what* true?" Ida Cambell cried. "Is it true that Arroways is no longer yours? That it belongs to someone else—that you're not to live here any more—that the house is to be turned over to a stranger?"

Eleanor Mont settled back in her chair, a handful of colored squares vivid against her tweed skirt. She had been very ill following her husband's sudden death six months earlier. Traces of illness lingered in her languid movements, in the blue transparency of the skin under

her eyes, in the pallor of her face, thoughtful and restrained beneath piled auburn hair just beginning to be touched with gray. The faint silvery veil was attractive. She said, smiling, "Sit down, Ida. I was going to call you. Yes, it's true that the house is no longer ours. The estate has finally been settled. That's what I came up from New York for—to clear things away, get the house ready to hand over. It isn't true that it's going to a stranger. Damien Carey could scarcely be called that."

"Damien Carey!" Ida Cambell's well-rouged mouth fell open. She was thunderstruck.

Arroways had belonged to Eleanor's mother-in-law, Maria Mont, and Damien Carey was Maria Mont's granddaughter, it was true. Damien's mother had been Maria Mont's only child. But from the moment, thirty-one years ago, when her daughter Susan Mont had thrown over the man she was to have married and run off with Rupert Carey, a fellow of whom nobody had ever heard, Maria Mont had neither seen nor spoken to her daughter again. She had held no communication with her. It was as though Susan had never been born. Maria Mont had done more than that. She had, on the other hand, legally adopted the man her daughter was to have married and of whom she herself was passionately fond. Randall Mont was a distant connection of the family, hence the same name, and he had taken the place, in fact, that he had held in Maria's affections. He became her son by law. When he married Eleanor, Eleanor had become her daughter, their children her grandchildren. She had treated them as such in life and in death.

Ida Cambell gathered her scattered forces. "You don't mean to tell me that in the end Maria relented."

Eleanor shook her head. "No. It was Maria's husband, David. This house was his. He left it to Maria for life, stipulating that on her death it was to go to Damien Carey."

Ida Cambell's eyes sparkled. So Maria's husband, a quiet dreamy man one scarcely recalled, had slipped away leaving a joker in the pack. Maria Mont had had many

houses; the one she liked best was this place in Eastwalk to which she had come as a bride and in which she had spent her young married life, before she had been so successful, when the Mont fabric empire was merely an idea in her nimble brain.

"It must have galled Maria, Eleanor, that she couldn't do what she wanted with Arroways, that it wouldn't go to you."

"If so, she never spoke of it." There was a cool edge to Eleanor Mont's tone.

But Ida Cambell was not to be easily stopped. Eastwalk was a quiet place, and sensations of this magnitude were rare.

"You didn't know about the house in advance?"

Eleanor dropped the block of colored squares into a trash basket. They had been intended for a patchwork quilt. A piece of her wedding dress was among them. "No, we didn't know."

"Well, all I can say is, it's horrible," Ida exclaimed. "You've had a lot to bear in the last half year, Eleanor. Maria first, and then poor Randall."

Slow color crept up into Eleanor Mont's face. It ebbed, leaving her paler than ever. Her husband had died within a few hours of Maria Mont, of a heart attack. The tragedy was too recent to be touched on in speech. She got up, went to the window, and raised the Venetian blind. October sunlight slanted warmly over lawns from which great trees rose. There was a quality of farewell in the air. The green year was dying. The colors were brilliant, almost improbable in the low light. As she watched, a breeze sent leaves down slantwise like a shower of gold coins from clumped hickories near the stables. She turned back to the cool, shadowed room.

"Sooner or later, if we live long enough, we all have to bear things, I suppose," she said.

Her heart had begun its old palpitating—stupidly. Ida Cambell's insensitiveness, her brash barging in, meant nothing. And her officiousness and curiosity had their uses. She had been a help with the authorities, the police,

during those dreadful days at the time of her husband's death six months ago. She had made a reliable and disinterested witness. One had to be grateful for that.

"What do the children think of losing the house?"

The children were Eleanor's son, thirty, and her married daughter, twenty-three.

"They'll miss it, of course—but not as much as if they were younger. They have their own lives now."

"What's this Damien Carey like?" Ida Cambell asked. "Have you seen her?"

"Once."

That day in New York when she had first seen Damien Carey rose up, a slab on hinges, every sculptured detail clear, immutable. The past didn't change. Sleet had already begun to fall. She had just come in from the dentist's, had had only a glimpse of the girl, in a raincoat, a scarf tied over her hair giving her a nunlike poise and simplicity. As she had stepped out of the elevator in the big apartment house the girl had stepped in. White skin, dark hair, and long brows over gray eyes, a curving mouth.

"She's—distinguished-looking rather than pretty," continued Mrs. Mont. "Both Susan and Rupert Carey are dead, you know. Damien Carey lives in New York."

"No money, I suppose. Rupert Carey was as poor as a church mouse—a professor or something, wasn't he, at some obscure little college in Vermont? She won't live in this house, will she?"

"I really don't—"

There was a tap on the sewing-room door. It was Agnes, the maid Eleanor had brought up with her from town. Agnes said, "Telephone, Mrs. Mont. It's Miss St. George."

"Tell her I'll be right there, Agnes."

Ida Cambell rose perforce, and the two women went along the dim side hall and down the great main staircase. Ida talked about Linda St. George as they went. "Such a sweet child, Eleanor. You're fortunate—but then Oliver's a dear himself, so much—much steadier." Ida Cambell fumbled it there. Eleanor always bristled at the slightest hint of a criticism of either of her children. But

certainly Oliver wasn't what you'd expect a son of Randall and Eleanor's to be. Old clothes, disreputable friends, and sometimes being so curt and abrupt, and sometimes laughing when you hadn't said anything funny. "Oliver and Linda were made for each other," she went on brightly. "When is the wedding to be? Have they set a date yet?"

No date had been set. It was beginning to worry Eleanor. She had no intention of letting Ida Cambell see her worry. She said, "We think now it will be in November." For once duplicity didn't irk her. She was tired of questions, tired of problems. You could put up a fight for just so long, and then, when you most needed it, you found that your strength had mysteriously ebbed away.

Saying good-by to Ida in the hall, going toward the library, she thought, *Is there anything I've overlooked, anything anyone could find?*—and knew there wasn't. The police, the medical examiner, the lawyers, had gone over every inch of the house six months ago. If there had been anything to find they would have found it then. They had found nothing. The crawling edge of dread along her nerves was fatigue.

She paused in the library doorway. Across the book-lined room Maria Mont gazed down at her from above the mantel. At forty-five, when the portrait was painted, what youthful attractiveness she had had was gone, except for the carriage of the head—and her hands. She had had magnificent hands, square and delicate and strong, and she had been inordinately proud of them. She had used them to express the things she didn't say, with power and decision.

Eleanor looked back at the portrait of her mother-in-law, not seeing her in paint on canvas but as she had last seen her in a wide bed propped up on pillows with oxygen tubes in her curved nostrils, her breathing harsh, labored. Only those black tubes had kept her alive hour after hour, day after day, uselessly, without hope of recovery.

If their positions had been reversed, Eleanor told herself, Maria would have done the same thing—Maria who had moved lives around like a puppeteer manipulating

figures on a miniature stage. She turned with a sharp movement and crossed to the desk to answer the phone. Picking up the receiver, her expression lightened as she heard the voice of her future daughter-in-law. Linda was going to be good for Oliver. She was the sort of girl he needed, sweet, gentle, uncomplicated. Nevertheless, she shrank from Linda's eager question.

"Has Damien Carey come? Is she there yet?"

Damien Carey. Moistening lips that had suddenly gone dry, Eleanor Mont said calmly into the mouthpiece that Damien wasn't there but that she expected her shortly, and hung up. In the hall the clock struck once. It was a quarter past four.

Chapter Two

The Woman in the Ravine

At almost the same moment Damien Carey got her first glimpse of the house that had so unexpectedly become hers from the seat of a car running across the valley below. The car belonged to a friend, Bill Heyward. Bill was behind the wheel. He had formerly lived in Eastwalk; his aunt still lived there. When he had offered to drive her she had accepted with pleasure. Why not? Bill imagined he was in love with her. He wasn't. She was simply the girl of the moment—he was devoted to his mother and generally had a girl going to fill in the chinks. But he was a pleasant companion, easy, civilized, no effort, and it was good to get out of the city of stone in which she was reluctantly learning to acclimatize herself. There were no seasons in New York. Spring, summer, autumn, winter, were all the same, except when it snowed. And even that gave only a fleeting illusion, except for the bone-piercing wind at every corner and the piles of black slush in the gutters. It was lovely to be in the country again, particularly after they put the parkways behind them. Pink fields and gray stone walls and patches of woodland, cows in a meadow benignly chewing, brooks, white houses, clean and comely and well-kept, old churches on hills; they were approaching Eastwalk when Bill waved a hand. "There she blows. There's your baby. That's Arroways."

Damien's dreaming mood broke. She looked up across patched fields rich with yellows and mauves, scarlet and purple, to the pile Bill indicated, crowning the ridge above. Walls and roofs and chimneys were outlined against the sky—even at that distance and partially obscured by trees, the size of Arroways was inescapable. Damien stared upward until a spur of land hid the gigantic thing from

view, then sat back limply.

"What's the matter?" Bill asked, turning to her. "Don't you like it? It's one of our local showpieces. I thought you'd be thrilled."

With his hat on, Bill looked young; it hid his premature baldness. He had a nice face. The thing you noticed was his brown eyes. There was an almost piercing quality to them, unexpected in the agreeable mildness of his expression. "I am thrilled—with consternation," Damien said caustically, lighting a cigarette. "I expected it to be big—but not that big," she went on more soberly. "The taxes on it must be enormous—and think of the upkeep. How am I to do—whatever it is you have to do with houses to keep them from falling to pieces? It would take half the contents of the United States treasury—" She was dismayed —and bitterly disappointed.

When she had been told of her inheritance it had seemed like a stroke of magnificent good luck. Jane, the cousin with whom she lived in the wretched little apartment in New York that was all they had been able to find, wasn't going to get better. In the years that remained Jane was going to need nurses and doctors and treatments and comfort—things of which Damien's father had deprived her with the best intentions in the world. But her father was no businessman and he had lost Jane's money together with his own, so that when he died there was literally nothing. What her own job brought in wasn't enough to live on. The dazzling news about the house seemed like an answer to prayer. Now that she had seen it she realized that this gift from a grandfather she had never known was fairy gold. Worse than that. It was a liability. Great houses like Arroways were a drug on the market. To heat them cost a fortune, and it would take a corps of servants to keep them in order. She said so.

"Oh, come," Bill said. "You can always sell it."

"Sell it? To whom? A rich man with seventeen children, perhaps—but rich men don't have seventeen children—or if they do they don't stay rich."

"Marry me, Damien, and we'll live in it and have sev-

enteen children."

"Thanks, Bill—but not today."

Bill didn't insist—that was one of the pleasant things about him. They went on talking of Arroways. Damien said it must have twenty rooms in it.

"Twenty-four," Bill told her.

"That's right. You knew Maria Mont."

It didn't occur to her to call the dead woman grandmother. She had never thought of her in that way. Maria Mont and her adopted family had been shadows until a short time ago. Damien's experience with Maria then, her two experiences, had been as brief as they were unpleasant.

Bill said, "Yes, I knew Maria—I went to school with Oliver Mont."

Damien moved a little on the green leather cushions of the convertible. After her father's death three years ago Maria Mont had broken her long silence, through a lawyer. She had offered Damien a thousand a year for life on condition that she renounce any and all further claims on the Mont estate. Damien had never had the slightest idea of making any such claims. She had refused the offer out of hand. Oliver Mont had accompanied the lawyer to the Vermont town where her father had taught philosophy. After the lawyer went, Oliver had remained on trying to make her change her mind.

He was attractive, an iconoclast, a rebel, very unlike what she had expected a rich man's son to be. His ideas were bold, daring, and had little regard for ordinary conventions. She was young and impressionable, and after he had gone she had thought of him a good deal. She could afford to smile now at the *tendresse* of what had been an adolescent infatuation. It was a long while ago. She had seen Oliver Mont once since that, with the girl to whom he was engaged, in, of all places, the Mont apartment in New York.

Maria Mont was dying and, astonishingly, Damien had been sent for. The Mont apartment was the last place in the world in which she ever expected to be. More than two years of silence had passed since she had rejected

Maria Mont's offer. She hadn't wanted to go to the apartment; it was a summons she felt she couldn't ignore. A manservant had admitted her to the great duplex high above Fifth Avenue and the Park. She was evidently expected. "Miss Carey? Yes, miss." The man had conducted her through a series of state apartments like a wing of the Metropolitan Museum to a small, darkish room where she was left alone to wait. She had waited, interminably, until her patience went. Then she had gone in search of someone, through halls and corridors and cold empty rich rooms until she opened a final door.

It was the door of a sick room. The curtains were drawn, and there was an odor of drugs. There was a woman propped high on piled pillows in the great bed on a dais. Dark hair in braids framed a small parchment face. Two thin black snakes trailed from the nostrils of a high nose, lost themselves in shadow. The woman in the bed was her grandmother. Maria Mont's eyes were closed. They opened. She looked at Damien, gave a cry, and moved. One of the black tubes fell to the white coverlet. She began to gasp.

It wasn't until afterward that Damien realized that the black tubes were attached to a tank of oxygen that kept Maria Mont alive. Another door had suddenly opened, and a nurse had rustled whitely in, staring outrage and demanding, "Who are you? What are you doing here? You might have killed her." Damien could recall stammering something vague before she was dismissed, banished. Back in the small room a doctor had come to her, not Oliver, not one of the Mont family. She was Miss Carey? A pity. It was useless for her to remain. Maria Mont had fallen into a coma. It might be hours, days, before she regained consciousness.

It was on her way out of the apartment that Damien saw Oliver and the girl to whom he was engaged. It was only a glimpse through the looped draperies of a room she went past. The girl was tall and slim and dark. Her arms were around Oliver's neck, and he was holding her off a little and looking down into her face. Neither of them

saw her. Damien had been amused and interested by her own tiny stab of pain. How persistent emotional illusions were even when you thought they were forgotten.

Maria Mont died that night surrounded by her self-chosen family. Damien learned later that her adopted son Randall Mont had survived her by only a few hours. Hurrying to her bedside Oliver Mont's father had succumbed to a fatal heart attack.

Damien came back to the present. "Randall Mont's sudden death must have been a shock, Bill. He was a comparatively young man, wasn't he?"

"Fifty-six, fifty-seven." Bill shrugged. "That was Maria Mont for you again. Even on her deathbed she managed to mess people up. If it hadn't been for Maria, Randall Mont wouldn't have died the way he did—perhaps not for years. She must have known he had a bad heart and yet she sent him up here over ninety miles of icy road to get something she wanted out of the house. He was in bed and asleep when the call came that Maria was dead. They hadn't expected her to die so soon. It was after one o'clock in the morning and the storm was at its height. He got up and dressed and started for New York. Less than a mile from the house he collapsed at the wheel of the car he was driving. He was dead when the car crashed. They didn't find him until morning."

Damien frowned at a bank of purple sumac. "How dreadful, for all of them."

"Yes—" Bill hesitated.

"What is it?" Damien asked.

"Oh—nothing," he said. "Only I liked Randall Mont. You know the sort of talk that goes around. I never believed it. He was very handsome, and he was a convivial fellow. That was all there was to it. People said that he died in the nick of time, for his own and his family's sake. That he'd been running around and having a whale of a time, and that if Maria had discovered it he would have found himself out in the cold."

"I take it you didn't like my grandmother."

Bill negotiated a curve dexterously. "It wasn't a ques-

tion of liking or not liking. If you came within her orbit you either obeyed her or you didn't. Her interest in things that didn't concern her was enormous. First you got advice, and if you didn't take it you got a rap over the knuckles. No one escaped. Relatives, friends, acquaintances, employes, even the servants. We're coming to the place where Randall Mont ran off the road."

He pointed it out to her. It was on the far side of a little bridge at the foot of a long hill. On the left a grass verge sloped down into a ravine. It wouldn't ordinarily have been dangerous. But with a wheel out of control and a dead man behind it— The ravine into which the car had plunged was filled with maple saplings. Damien was gazing down when she sat sharply forward. Above the soft purr of the engine, from somewhere near by, some one cried out. The cry was harsh, piercing. Bill put his foot on the brake. Damien swiveled.

There was a woman at the bottom of the ravine. Her back was toward the road. She was running away, doubled up as though she was in pain. Her green beret was dimly visible through the thinning leaves for just an instant, then she vanished.

There was no further sound. But there had been a peculiar poignance to the woman's cry, her disordered plunge through the underbrush. Damien said, "Bill, oughtn't we to—"

"I'll have a look." He got out, went halfway down the bank, came back. "Whoever she was, she's gone. She seems to have been alone. Might be someone from the sanitarium. Occasionally they escape."

"The sanitarium?"

"Yes. The Oaks. Half a mile from here. Good place, well-run. Drunks, mostly, some genuine psychos." He stepped on the starter, and they drove on. Damien was going to spend the night at the Black Horse in the village, a pleasant inn famous since coaching days. Tomorrow she was to see the lawyer, Mr. Silver, and the property was to be turned over to her. Bill said, "The Black Horse first?"

Damien said, "No, Arroways first. I think I'll get my visit over with," and he swung left at the next fork.

Eleanor Mont had written Damien a note asking her to come to the house that afternoon. The lacy wrought-iron gates were open. The house was on a rise five hundred feet back from the road. Damien studied it with somber eyes. Close up it was even more formidable than it had been from the valley below. It was immense, weighty, defeating in its solidity. You couldn't argue an inch of it away. Brick walls covered with ivy towered to the blue slates of a heavy mansard roof, three stories above. The two enormous wings were only slightly recessed. A terrace on the left was partly obscured by blue spruces. There were people on the terrace.

Bill brought the car to a stop and helped Damien out. All at once she felt nervous. "Come in with me, why don't you, Bill?" she said. "You know the Monts."

Bill hesitated, then shook his head. "I can't. It's late and my aunt will be expecting me. I'll drop your bag at the inn and call you later."

Damien said all right, and he got into the car and drove off. A flagged path between barberry bushes led to the ponderous front door. A great green mustache of wisteria above it fell down in trailing strands on either side to lose itself in ornamental planting. Damien rang the bell, annoyingly aware of trepidation, uncertainty. She said to the dour middle-aged woman in gray chambray and a large white apron who answered, "Miss Carey—Mrs. Mont?"

The woman said unsmilingly, "Oh, yes, miss," and Damien followed her inside, across a vast dim hall and into a library on the left.

There were Venetian blinds at the tall windows. They gave a dim undersea light to the room. Books lining the walls were covered with newspapers. A huge desk was piled with miscellaneous objects. Deep leather chairs with huge footstools stood in the corners. The lampshades were shrouded in muslin. The house had evidently been closed since Maria Mont's death.

Damien looked around. Her mother, dead long since, had lived here thirty odd years ago, had walked through these rooms, come in and out of the doors, gazed through the windows; yet the house continued to be strange, alien, heavy with the weight of other lives. She turned. Mrs. Mont was in the room.

Oliver's mother was a tall woman with a wasted appearance, as though she had recently lost flesh, plainish, but with a presence. There were shadows under her calm eyes, eyes that were contradicted by a high bold forehead beneath pale rust-red hair beginning to turn gray. Damien's first impression was one of serenity, her second of strength. Eleanor Mont's manner was pleasant but not effusive. She shook hands with Damien, apologized for her worn tweed skirt and sweater. "I haven't had time to change, what with trying to get things packed and people coming in all day to—welcome you."

Scarcely to welcome her, Damien thought. The Monts' friends and neighbors must regard her as an upstart, an interloper—to say nothing of the Monts themselves.

"Linda St. George, the girl my son Oliver is engaged to, is here," Mrs. Mont was saying. "I'd like you to meet Linda."

"I'd like to meet her." Inanities embarrassed Damien—but what else were there? They went out into the hall. Its darkness and size were confusing. Things loomed vaguely in the purplish gloom, a tall ticking clock, chairs, the gleam of a table, the dull flash of mirrors buried in shadows, doors and more doors. Toward the back the hall widened. There grayness spilled down from a skylight that capped the well of the broad staircase three stories above. Everything in the house was massive, outsize. They traversed a short corridor, went into a vestibule, the sole furniture of which was, incongruously, a pinball machine, went past a powder room, and out on the terrace. It was long and wide, of brick, and roofed for half its length. Near the far end a small, fair-haired, extremely pretty girl was sitting on the wall, laughing up at someone, tennis racket in hand.

Eleanor Mont said, "Linda, here's Miss Carey," and Linda St. George jumped to her feet.

"Damien," she cried, as if she had known the other girl all her life. "This is lovely. I've been dying to meet you." She took Damien's hands in hers. "Welcome to Arroways."

Damien hid sharp surprise. This wasn't the girl she had seen with Oliver Mont in Maria Mont's apartment in New York in the spring. She was being introduced to Linda's father, Hiram St. George, a big man in his early sixties with a ruddily handsome face, iron-gray hair, and quick dark eyes, well-tailored, intelligent, and just not suave. His greeting was pleasant. She could feel herself being studied.

Linda St. George was altogether charming. Dark-gold hair as soft as silk and naturally curly was pinned into a knot on top of her head. Her face, broad at the forehead, narrow at the chin, had the glow of a mezzotint. Her rosy mouth was eager, laughing. She gave an impression of delicacy, without being at all weak. Her figure, above and below a small waist, was rounded and firm. Her voice matched the rest of her. It was light, gay. She asked Damien eager questions. No, Damien said, she'd never been in this part of the country before, but it wasn't very different from Middleboro, in Vermont, where she had grown up, "except that you have no mountains."

"Mountains? Miss Carey likes mountains? We'll have to order some for her."

The remark came, not from anyone on the terrace, but from a man standing inside the screen door. He opened the door and came out, and Linda got up and ran to him, radiant and sparkling. "Oliver!" She tucked a hand under his arm.

Damien hadn't expected to encounter Oliver Mont at Arroways. The hazy sunlight took on a metallic luster. A bird lit on a pear tree, flew off. A huge sycamore lifted pale skeleton branches into the blue of the sky. Oliver was greeting his mother and St. George. They were surprised to see him. He said he had flown up from the Nashville

office. Damien knew from Bill Heyward that Oliver was the only one of the family not in Mont Fabrics, that there had been a terrific blowup when, leaving the army, he had started a freight air line on faith and hope and a shoestring. His defection had scandalized Maria.

Linda said, "Come and meet Damien, Oliver."

"Miss Carey and I have already met, Cricket."

Oliver was strolling toward Damien, tall and as fair as ever, in boots and breeches and a leather coat that accentuated his height. But he had changed a good deal, she decided. There was nothing boyish about him now. He was older, harder, more self-contained, the fire in him schooled. But the vigor was still there, beneath wraps.

His hazel eyes under blond brows scrutinized her. Was there a flicker of surprise in them? He said in a friendly voice, a smile curving his wide mouth into lines of relaxation, "How are you, Miss Carey? It's good to see you again." The words had an empty sound, as though he was thinking something else.

Eleanor Mont was staring. She said, "You and Miss Carey have met? Where, Oliver?"

He said carelessly, "It was quite a while ago," and turned.

A woman was coming up the terrace steps between the blue spruces. She was tall and dark and strikingly handsome. She wore a severely tailored gray suit and a red cloche with a black nose-veil. An odd silver choker circled the throat of her black cashmere sweater.

"Anne!" Eleanor Mont went toward the newcomer quickly. Oliver followed his mother. Hiram St. George was on his feet. Oliver took the pigskin bag and the brief case the woman was carrying. A confused babble; presently Oliver brought the visitor over to Damien.

"The new owner of the old manse, Anne—Miss Carey, Miss Giles."

Miss Giles was production manager of Mont Fabrics. She was also the woman who had been in Oliver Mont's arms, and he in hers, that day in New York. He was already engaged to Linda St. George then, and Linda was

intelligent and sweet. Damien realized with a touch of shock, from the burn of indignation in her, that she had hopelessly overestimated Oliver Mont, had in fact, idealized him, on insufficient evidence.

Anne Giles was addressing her with mannered vivacity. "I've been wanting to meet you, Miss Carey. We've all been wondering what you'd be like. Linda, darling, hello—" She flattered the men almost simultaneously. "Oliver, dear, get me a drink, one of your nice ones. I had trouble with my car. Two flat shoes on the way up, believe it or not. Hi, please don't grow any more, you get bigger every time I see you. Tennis every day, I suppose—you look disgustingly healthy."

Miss Giles had come up to Eastwalk on business. "Don't scold me, Eleanor. I should have called you, but I only got back from St. Louis last night and I was up to here in confusion." She touched a shapely ear and light flashed luminously from a black pearl on her fourth finger.

The terrace had only begun to settle down again when there was a second interruption. The screen door was thrown violently open. Damien turned. A girl was standing on the threshold. She was very tall, as tall as Eleanor Mont. She looked rather like the older woman, except that she had the beauty that Eleanor Mont had never had. The coat and skirt of the tweed suit the girl had on were strewn with bits of leaf fragments. Her shoes were muddy, stained. Her small brown head, wound round with chestnut braids, was bare. A green beret swung from the fingers of one hand. There was something wild and free about her, as if she were a bacchante who had sprung miraculously from the depths of the great somber house.

Mrs. Mont said, "Jancy!" on a staccato note.

Damien's interest quickened. The girl was Jancy, Oliver's sister—and it was Jancy who had cried out in the ravine down the road half an hour earlier.

Jancy said, "Hello, Mother—Oliver. Linda, dear—" Her voice was husky, faintly blurred. Her gaze lit on Anne Giles—and then the change.

"What's that woman doing here?"

The demand was a whiplash cutting the quiet, deadly, venomous. Jancy took a blind step, stumbled, and fell flat on her face. As she did so a half-filled whisky flask dropped from her purse and smashed to pieces on the terrace floor.

Chapter Three

Midnight Search

"Look, Damien, you can't stay here. Let me drive you to my aunt's. She'll be delighted to have you. The Monts are in trouble—and it will be damned uncomfortable for you."

Damien and Bill Heyward were beside Bill's car on the driveway at the front of the house. Arroways towered over them darkly. A dry whisper of wind rustled the ivy veiling the walls. Bill had brought Damien's bag back. A sportsmen's club had taken over the Black Horse Inn for the week-end, and there wasn't so much as a broom closet to be had.

More than half an hour had passed since that scene on the terrace, but Damien could still smell the reek of whisky lacing the air, could see Eleanor Mont, her face ashen, gripping the back of a chair and staring down at her daughter as though she had been struck by lightning. Oliver and Hiram St. George had picked Jancy up and carried her into the house, thickly protesting. Eleanor Mont had gone with them, a figure in stone, looking neither to the right nor the left. Coming back, Hiram St. George picked up pieces of glass in silence. Linda crouched against the wall, frightened and distressed, her lip caught between her teeth; Anne Giles was the only one untouched. She had said softly, fitting a cigarette into a long holder, and seeming to smile without actually doing so, "Poor, dear Eleanor," with exaggerated pity.

That had infuriated Linda. She had challenged Miss Giles. "What do you mean?" she had cried, her pale cheeks suffused with rose, her eyes sparkling angrily. "Eleanor's not an object of pity. Jancy's swell." She stamped her sandaled foot. "If everybody was as decent, as nice, if

other people were half as—"

St. George had intervened with quiet authority. "Linda, go and see if you can help Jancy." Linda had looked as though she were going to rebel, engage Miss Giles further, then she had flashed across the terrace and into the house. St. George had explained, mildly. "She won't hear a word against Jancy. They've always been close friends. The truth is, Jancy's not well."

Eleanor Mont had struck the same note when she came down, pale but composed and holding herself very erect, apologizing to Anne Giles and to the rest of them indirectly. "Jancy's just a child. It's that stomach of hers—she should never touch liquor. It goes straight to her head, poor baby, and she gets the most peculiar ideas, wants to quarrel with everyone. I hope you didn't take her seriously, Anne."

It was a valiant effort. There was something hard at the core of Miss Giles's smiling acceptance. "Eleanor, darling, don't be *silly*. I've got a young cousin like that—one drink and she's climbing walls." They all knew it wasn't one drink, or two, or three.

Damien had already told Bill about it. "Jancy was the girl we heard in that ravine down the road on the way here. What does it mean, Bill?"

He shrugged.

"I don't know."

"Jancy seems to hate Miss Giles."

"Definitely. And Anne hates her."

"Why?"

"Because Jancy is shrewder than the others. Because Anne Giles is—sorry, Damien—a bitch of the first water." His expression was bleak. "She was a pet of Maria's in Mont Fabrics, and Maria wasn't easy to get along with. Other heads might roll—did roll—but never Anne's. People said that she was the old girl's official spy. I'm not crazy about Eleanor Mont, but I hope that now she's in the driver's seat she gives Giles the boot, fast." He kicked gravel explosively. "Come on, get your things. I don't like the setup."

Damien didn't like it any better than he did, but she shook her head. "I can't go, Bill. Mrs. Mont knows about the inn. She asked me to stay here. If I left now she'd think it was because of Jancy, of what happened. It will only be for tonight—but do something for me, will you? Call Jane and tell her where I am and that I'll call her myself tomorrow."

Bill said he would, and when he saw he couldn't persuade her, drove off. Damien picked up her bag and went into the house. In the room on the second floor to which she had already been shown, a large handsome room with most of the furniture shrouded, she unpacked only what she would need, a toothbrush and pajamas and a robe. She had kept her thoughts from Oliver Mont, but he was there at the back of her mind, persistently. Was there anything between Oliver and Anne Giles? Was that why Jancy had blown up? The woman was older than he was by a good five years—well, perhaps two or three. But anyhow older, and hard and greedy and—smug. That was it, that was what she was, a big cat purring with sheathed claws. Pushing a drawer shut, she thought, *Not my affair —but what horrible taste he has—engaged to Linda St. George, and fooling around with a woman of Anne Giles's caliber.*

Cool off, she told herself dryly, standing at a window. *Don't get mixed up in other people's troubles. You've got your own.* Outside, the autumn day was fading, but there was still some light. She lit a cigarette and wandered restlessly around. At Eleanor Mont's suggestion Hiram St. George had offered to show her over the house, but she had refused, almost curtly. It would have been a little too much like examining your pound of flesh in advance to see that it was in prime condition. But she could explore the grounds. She put on her coat. Halls and corridors were filled with a smoky gloom in which the few lamps were isolated islands. The lack of detail made the house unreal, theatrical, as though the walls were made of pasteboard with emptiness on the other side. The clock near the library ticked somnolently. There was no other sound and

no one in sight.

Damien let herself out. She already had an idea of what the terrain was like in front of the house. In back the ground fell gradually so that the house was four stories tall there. Long perennial borders in which a few chrysanthemums still bloomed, colorless in the dusk; a tennis court, tree-scattered lawns; she went past the bulk of brick stables off on the right, over level stretches of grass. Another pair of lacy iron gates in the brick wall bounding the estate to the east led to a narrow country road. Damien turned left inside the wall. More buildings, a decorative tool shed, a ladder propped against a pear tree that was being pruned, the branches lay on the ground. She skirted them. Farther along a little house like a doll's house with a stone terrace in front of it overlooked the tennis court.

There was someone in the little house. The lights were on. When Damien was some twenty yards away the door opened, and Eleanor Mont came out. She closed the door behind her and started across the terrace. Damien remained where she was. Something in Eleanor Mont's bearing, carriage, kept her from speaking. The older woman's square shoulders sagged under the fur cape thrown around her, her head was bent, and she walked stiffly and yet aimlessly, like a person who didn't know or care where she was going. A sundial stood directly in her path. Reaching it she paused, then suddenly stooped, threw her arms along the marble, and put her head down on her arms as though she was incapable of further movement.

Damien was alarmed. Was Mrs. Mont ill? She would have spoken then, gone to her— The thought of Jancy held her back. Eleanor Mont was a proud woman. She had tried to carry off the revelation of Jancy's condition before outsiders as though it were an aberration of no importance, now that she was alone she was giving way to her pain and grief.

After a moment she straightened, and walked slowly on, down some steps and across the tennis court. The drag of her slow footsteps receded. There was no other

sound. The twilit stillness was absolute until bushes crackled and snapped somewhere. The noise came from behind the little house. Damien stared through the dusk. Had someone left it by a rear door? The lights were still on; they shone on folds of her cherry wool coat, but no one appeared.

Her thirst for exploration quenched, Damien started back the way she had come, thinking of Eleanor Mont and of what it meant to such a woman to have a daughter of twenty-three who was an alcoholic, or who seemed to be one, and what could have brought Jancy's condition about. An unhappy marriage? It wasn't that. Oliver Mont told her what it was some five minutes later.

He was in the hall when she went in, near the foot of the stairs. His face was dark, strained, under his fair hair. The strain went out of it when he saw her. "I've been looking for you, Miss Carey. Come and have a cocktail." He led the way into the library.

The newspapers had been removed from the books, the dust covers from the lampshades, and the desk cleared. Oliver's manner was pleasantly casual, but she could feel his eyes appraising her as they had earlier in the afternoon. She sat down in one of the leather chairs and he gave her a drink and began to talk about his sister. "Mother's making too much of Jancy's little exhibition. Jancy's going to be all right. You see, she discovered my father. She adored him and she'd never been told about his heart, that he was likely to go at any moment. It was pretty rough for her. She's been at the sanitarium up here for the last few days under Doctor Marsh's care. Marsh is a good man. He advises a complete change—that's why Mother's taking Jancy South."

Poor Jancy. Damien felt easier with Oliver after that. She made the appropriate replies. Should she tell him about having seen Jancy in the ravine where Randall Mont had been found dead? Better. It might help. She described the incident briefly. Oliver was standing on the hearth lighting a cigarette. The flame made a rose-and-black pattern of his strong long-fingered hands. He turned

from her, threw the match into the fire, and said over his shoulder, "Jancy blames herself, blames all of us, that it happened the way it did—" and paused.

"Oliver, darling."

Anne Giles stood in the doorway. She couldn't see Damien in the far corner. Her voice was low, intimate, caressing. Oliver swung around.

"Hello," he said quickly. "Miss Carey and I are having a cocktail. Care for one? Your conference with Mother over?"

Miss Giles wasn't at all disturbed by Damien's presence. "Yes, Oliver, we thrashed out the Western branches— How do you like your heritage, Miss Carey? The white elephant to end all white elephants, in my humble opinion. Why they put so much waste space into halls and corridors I'll never know. Thanks, darling." She took the glass Oliver handed her. The second "darling" was almost exactly like the first, but not quite.

Damien put down her drink. She could hardly breathe. The room seemed suffocatingly hot. She wanted passionately to get out of it. If there was anything between Oliver and this woman, why didn't he come out with it like a man, tell Linda the truth, and ask her to release him? An engagement wasn't a marriage. It might hurt Linda badly, but it wouldn't kill her. Or did he prefer this hole-and-corner business? Someone else's wife in every port. He didn't look like that. He looked honest and straightforward and courageous—but the proof of the pudding was in the eating. She warned herself coldly, *It's nothing to you. These people are strangers. After tonight you won't see them again.*

Eleanor Mont came in. She had changed into a smart black wool dress and done things to her hair and face. There was no trace in her manner of her semi-prostration in the dark garden half an hour ago, but her eyes were deep in her head under the commanding forehead, and there was a stony expression in them as though she had gone blind.

Veils of nightmare wreathed themselves around Da-

mien. Tragedy appeared to stalk Eleanor Mont. You could feel it. An invisible guillotine reared itself against the rich background of books and lamplight and heavy, handsome furniture and inconsequential talk—which was absurd. Eleanor was worried about her daughter, quite naturally, and that was all. She said that dinner would probably be frightful. "Agnes is an excellent maid, but she's no cook." She had asked Hiram St. George but he had refused with a shudder. Linda was spending the night with Jancy. She told Damien in an aside, "Linda can always manage her even when she's in one of her moods," smiling at a temperamental daughter's amusing vagaries. *If only the woman would let go about Jancy,* Damien thought, but she wasn't a woman who would ever let go, not with that forehead and chin.

Joining them, Linda didn't echo Eleanor Mont's lightness. The blue dress she wore was perfect for her coloring. It made her look very young and vulnerable. She was intent on Jancy, who was asleep. "But I mustn't stay long."

"Nonsense," Oliver told her. "What do you suppose I flew up here for? Jancy will sleep till morning. Stop worrying, Cricket, and devote a little of your attention to me." He ruffled her soft hair.

Damien was genuinely puzzled. Linda St. George was deeply in love with Oliver, and he loved her dearly. Was she imagining a situation that didn't exist? Had the house cast a spell over her? It continued to do so. Dinner in the large, ponderous dining-room, coffee and liqueurs afterward in the huge drawing-room; sofas and chairs were draped in dust covers, sheeted statuary assumed strange shapes. Lusters on either side of the fireplace were fat and silvery and unrestful. There was no fire on the hearth, nothing to suggest permanency, comfort.

Damien's discomfort increased. There was a malign flavor to the air within the walls, dark, distorting. Animate and inanimate objects were all faintly wrong. Eleanor Mont was too quiet for the suggestion of driving inner activity she conveyed. There was something almost furious

in her tall, composed stillness. Oliver appeared to feel it, to watch his mother covertly, with a certain hardness in his sideway glances. Even Linda's sparkle was diminished. She sat with a cheek resting on her palm, an elbow propped on the sofa arm, her head down-bent. Anne Giles was the only one in good spirits, keeping a conversation of sorts going, smoking cigarettes in a long onyx holder, the pearl on her hand gleaming, every hair in place, her almond eyes brownly bright. The black cashmere sweater she wore brought out the warmth of her tawny skin, the silver circlet around her throat made drama of it, gave her the air of an exotic fencer resting between bouts. Linda, rather noticeably, didn't pay any attention to the older woman. Could those pretty hands grasp as well as flutter and stroke? Why not?

Eleanor Mont had asked Damien to the house for the express purpose of discussing furniture that had belonged to Maria Mont and didn't come under the terms of the bequest, yet she seemed to have forgotten about it. It was as though they were all waiting for an important, a momentous thing, to happen—and nothing did.

At around ten Anne Giles was called to the phone. The silence in the room when she left it clamped down more closely. A clock began to strike sonorously. Damien started. It was another tall clock hidden in a recess.

Oliver said, rousing himself from absorbed contemplation of a matchbox, "Plenty of them, aren't there? Maria had a passion for clocks. There are hordes at the Biloxi place. Joe Greening, a farmer down the road, has been keeping the ones here wound."

Anne Giles came back. Crossing beautiful legs with a display of shadowy stocking, she said, "You've heard the tale, haven't you? No? Well, I did, when I was closing my cottage in September. The people up here say that Maria herself comes to wind them, wanders around the house until it's time—"

Linda stared round-eyed. Oliver laid a hand over hers. "What rot," he said, laughing. "Pay no attention, Linda. You either, Miss Carey. Anne, don't tell me you believe in

ghosts?"

"I didn't say *I* did, darling."

There it was again. There was something almost insolent in the way she used the appellation, a twinkle of malevolence combined with a suggestion of hidden intimacy. Had anger replaced Linda's momentary fright—stiffened her posture? Damien put out her cigarette. She had fulfilled her obligations as a guest. Eleanor Mont wasn't going to discuss furniture or anything else with her tonight. She was engrossed in thoughts of her own, about Jancy probably, about the house. Damien rose. Good nights; five minutes later she was in her bedroom with the door closed.

Kicking off her shoes, pulling her dress over her head, she wondered why Anne Giles had been so assiduous when they parted. "You'll be in Eastwalk tomorrow, Miss Carey? Perhaps we can meet—if I don't go back to New York. It's been a pleasure." Was Oliver Mont in love with this woman or wasn't he?

Damien gripped the back of a chair with tight fingers, loosened her grip, and let her hands fall. Was the anger that shook her due wholly to consideration for Linda, or had it other roots? In plain words, was she herself jealous of Oliver Mont's absorption in Anne Giles? Ridiculous. She threw the thought from her and got ready for bed.

She was used to reading until she felt drowsy but there wasn't a book or a magazine in the room, and sleep refused to come. She heard eleven strike and then half past. Her feet twitched, and she was alternately hot and cold. She was rapidly getting into the state where she would lie awake all night. Finally she threw the covers aside and went into the bathroom to get an aspirin. There were none in the cabinet, but there were some in her bag. She couldn't find her bag, remembered that she had left it downstairs in the library when dinner was announced by the disagreeable-looking maid.

She put on her housecoat, opened her door, and went along the corridor and out into the main hall. There were lights burning there. As she rounded the turn she bumped

into someone.

It was Linda St. George, in a woolly blue robe that made her look sixteen. But there was something the matter with her. Her eyes were enormous in her small white face. She said, "What is it, Damien? Did you see her?"

"See who?" Damien asked, and then knew. "Do you mean Jancy?"

Linda nodded.

"I woke up. She," a hesitation, "she's gone. She's not in her room."

The liquor cabinet sprang to Damien's mind. It was evidently in Linda's. "She may be downstairs." They hurried toward the great gloomy cavern of the staircase. There was a single lamp lit in the lower hall. It was empty. So was the dining-room. But the liquor cabinet was open.

The two girls looked at each other. Linda was shaking. "Where can she *be?*" she whispered.

Damien said practically that there were any number of places Jancy could be. "We'd better search down here first."

But there was no Jancy and no sign of her in the huge kitchen, the servants' dining-room, the pantries, the living-room, the library. Retrieving her bag there, Damien said, "What about downstairs—or she may be on one of the upper floors."

"Yes." Colder air stirred around them as they returned to the hall. The shadows were thick. Linda eyed the front door. "You can never tell what she might do. Eleanor mustn't know; she'd worry and she needs rest. It's probably nothing—nothing at all. Maybe Jancy's hiding to tease us." She threw a thick braid over her shoulder with a movement of decision. "I'm going to wake Oliver. He'll find her."

Damien nodded. It was the best thing to do. The situation wasn't one in which the intrusion of a stranger would be welcome; she parted with Linda at the head of the stairs, listened to a man cough somewhere, and frowned. The cough didn't suggest Oliver, and he was the only man in the house. She went back to her own room more wide-

awake than ever.

After swallowing two aspirins she sat down on the window seat to have a cigarette. The moon rode in and out of a cloud-strewn sky. She couldn't hear anything. There was no sound beyond her door. There wouldn't be. Oliver wouldn't want to alarm his mother, wake the house. He would search for his sister quietly. Damien had been sitting there for perhaps twenty minutes when she saw the car, in a sudden burst of moonlight. It was a dark convertible with a light top, drawn up at the side of the house near a tall pine. Then she saw Oliver. He had found Jancy. He was putting her into the car, tucking in her skirt. He closed the door and turned and looked up at the house.

Damien drew sharply back. Had he seen her staring down? She wouldn't want him to think she was spying. Where could he be taking Jancy at that hour of the night? Then she remembered the doctor he had spoken of, under whose care Jancy had been. Poor Jancy, and the poor Monts, for the matter of that—but the situation wasn't new.

Damien went back to bed. She didn't hear the car drive away. She heard the small slap of dry leaves driven against the window by the wind and then nothing until she opened her eyes and it was morning.

The day was gray, bleak, but it was day. The darkness was gone. It was five minutes of eight. Damien showered and dressed with a feeling of lightness. Presently she would go into town to the lawyer's and sign papers, and then she would go back to New York. And that would be the end of Oliver, of the Monts, as far as she was concerned. She was putting on lipstick when she heard the running footsteps outside her door. There was a rush to them. Her heart stood still. The nurse had run like that the night her father died. She snatched the door open. It was Linda, still in the blue bathrobe, as though she had never taken it off. Damien went to her. Linda had come to a halt near the head of the stairs. Her hair was loose around her shoulders. Her eyes were dilated, unseeing. She said, "It's

Jancy; she—" and stopped.

Downstairs in the lower hall there were other voices. Oliver's was one of them. He said, "Dead? *Dead?*"

Beside Damien, Linda quietly folded.

Chapter Four

The Body on the Floor

"More coffee, Eleanor?"

"Thanks."

"You, Miss Carey?"

Damien said yes. Hiram St. George poured, carefully. The youth had gone out of him. He looked old and tired. Nearly half an hour had passed since that moment in the upper hall when Oliver Mont spoke below them and Linda collapsed, to drag herself to her feet and lean over the banister, listening. It had taken awhile to penetrate. Doors opening and closing sharply, more hurried footsteps, exclamations; like Linda, Damien had been at first deceived. Someone was dead. Linda thought it was Jancy. It wasn't Jancy. It was Anne Giles.

Curiously, Damien wasn't surprised. And yet one didn't ordinarily expect a house guest to be killed in the night, even at Arroways. It was in almost a cozy atmosphere that they were given the details. Black fluid, hot and strong, heavy cream, lump sugar in a Georgian bowl, polite hands lifting and passing things, gray light seeping through the tall windows on damask with a fleur-de-lis pattern; they were in the dining-room: Oliver and his mother, Hiram St. George, Linda, and Damien. The man who did the telling wasn't a stranger to the Monts. He was a tall, thin, young man with a gentle expression, in a shabby overcoat that had frayed cuffs and a button missing. Likable, not frightening. His name was Luttrell, and he was the town prosecutor.

The shocking discovery had been made early that morning, at 6:23 or 6:24, to be exact. Two hunters, a Phineas J. Whitcombe and a Thomas Rayburn, out after pheasant, had bagged other game. The two men left the Black Horse Inn at daybreak and were on the wooded slopes along the river to the south of the town when they sighted a

covey of birds in an open meadow surrounded by trees. Both men fired, a shade too late. Rayburn, however, winged a large hen. She flew into the underbrush for cover with the hunters in pursuit.

Charging through a fringe of evergreens, the two men suddenly found themselves with their noses almost in contact with a big window in the side of a house. The lights were on in the room inside. It was a sort of combination studio and living-room, furnished with a typewriter and a filing-cabinet, odd lengths of fabric, and chairs and tables and sofas. There was a fireplace in the wall opposite the window. A woman was lying on the floor in front of the fireplace. If it hadn't been for an outthrust silken leg and a flash of scarlet nail polish they would have mistaken her for a bundle of rags. The woman didn't move. She just lay there, on and on. The eagerness of the chase wiped from their wind-stung faces, the two men turned and looked at each other. Twenty minutes later the police arrived, then the medical examiner and the town prosecutor.

Oliver said harshly out of the silence, "What? How did —Anne die?"

Luttrell plucked at a loose thread on his sleeve. "Suffocation. Miss Giles was strangled with a silver necklace she wore. She was hit first by a blow on the head from behind that must have stunned her. After that the necklace was pulled tight around her throat."

His even words brought Anne Giles into the room, made them see the staring eyes, the protruding tongue, the heavy silver chain digging into flesh. Damien gazed at the opposite wall, her mouth dry. The paper was green and gold. An old muffin warmer and two candlesticks on the buffet needed polishing. The white candles in the candlesticks were faintly yellow. Outside, the wind blew.

Luttrell went on in his quiet way. "We won't know until after the autopsy what time Miss Giles died, except that it was before two a. m. *Rigor* was well developed."

Linda choked. Oliver put an arm around her, and she rested against him, fighting sickness, a handkerchief to her

mouth. Eleanor Mont's skin was blue over the bony structure of her face. St. George's ruddy color was gone; so was his air of command. He was badly shaken.

Oliver and his mother proceeded to give the prosecutor an account of Anne Giles's arrival late the previous afternoon. No, she wasn't expected. Eleanor Mont said she had come up on business. It was about the St. Louis branch—"Whether we should discontinue or not. Anne had just come back from a swing through the West." The evening had been quiet, uneventful. They had all gone to bed fairly early. Miss Carey had gone first, Anne Giles went next, then Linda, and Oliver and his mother shortly afterward. St. George, who had dined at the Black Horse, had stopped in to collect Linda at around eleven but she was already upstairs. "She was staying the night so as to have a full day with this man of hers," St. George said. "Mrs. Mont was the only one up. I didn't see Anne. Why," he struck the cloth violently with his hand, "did she go out at that hour of the night? Why did she go over there to her cottage? It was closed for the winter, the water was shut off, I helped her close it when she was here in late September."

"Why she went over there," Luttrell agreed, "is what we've got to find out. She didn't mention it to any of you? None of you had any idea she intended to go?"

None of them had—except Damien. Struggling up out of dull stupefaction her mind was beginning to work. She said, "Mr. Luttrell, there was something. When Miss Giles said good night to me in the living-room, she said, 'Perhaps we can meet tomorrow—if I don't go back to New York.' In the ordinary course, we were both here in this house, we would have met anyhow. Doesn't it look as though she might have intended to go away before morning?"

Linda spoke then. She had gotten hold of herself, was sitting erect, a dust of freckles across the bridge of her small nose golden against her pallor. "Perhaps it was that telephone call," she explained. "Anne Giles had a long telephone call from someone at around ten o'clock."

The maid had answered the phone when it first rang. Summoned, she said that it was a man who had asked for Miss Giles. She didn't know the voice. After that Oliver and his mother told Luttrell what they knew of Anne Giles generally. She was in her early thirties, had been with Mont Fabrics for almost ten years, for the last three of which she had been getting $25,000 a year. She was an extremely clever executive. She had an apartment in New York and the cottage in Eastwalk. She had spent a good deal of time in the cottage during the summer months, commuting to and from town so as to be near Maria when Maria was alive, so as to be in daily consultation with her when necessary.

"What about relatives?" Luttrell asked.

Eleanor Mont shook her head. "She came from a small town in Idaho as a young girl. I never heard her speak of anyone. I know her mother and father were both dead and that she was an only child."

"Wait a minute, Mother." Oliver lit a cigarette. Flame glinted along a tight jaw line. He stared at the flame as if he had never seen one before, blew it out. "That nurse, the night nurse we had for Maria toward the end, the good one—she was a distant relative of Anne's, a cousin, I think. Don't you remember? Anne got her for us when Maria took a dislike to that pretty little Miss Fox. Her name was Miss Stewart, that's right, Lucy Stewart. She works in New York, must live there. It ought to be easy enough to find her."

"Yes." Luttrell then asked whether they knew anyone—"Miss Giles had a responsible position to which power was attached"—who disliked her, had a grudge against her.

Damien thought instantly, couldn't help but think, of Jancy, standing on the terrace yesterday afternoon and lashing out at the sight of Anne Giles. "What's that woman doing here?" If ever there had been hatred in a human voice, it had been in Jancy Mont's. She sat with her eyes fastened on the cloth, glued to it, aware suddenly that she had become the focus of someone's attention. Had she made an involuntary movement that had at-

tracted Mr. Luttrell's notice? It wasn't Mr. Luttrell; it was Oliver. Glancing through her lashes, she found his gaze on her, bright and absent but wary underneath, as he said, "Lots of people disliked Anne—office people—she had an edge to her tongue, but certainly not enough to kill her—at least I don't believe so."

Luttrell accepted that, and Oliver looked away from Damien, confident that she wasn't going to mention Jancy. Anger stirred faintly in her. She had no wish to become, in however slight a degree, an accessory after the fact of murder. And yet Jancy could scarcely have been involved. She had only been missing for a short while, not more than half an hour, when Oliver found her and took her over to the sanitarium at a little after twelve. The cottage was three miles to the south of Arroways. Jancy wouldn't have had time to go there, and do what had been done.

Hiram St. George was talking. Shock, the impact of the unexpected, had relaxed its grip, and he looked less shaken. He said, his deep pleasant voice thoughtful, "How do you people figure it, Luttrell?"

And the prosecutor said, "Miss Giles went over to that place of hers to meet someone. The lights were on, and the fire had been started. She couldn't have gone there just to get something—she wouldn't have done it in that manner or at that hour of the night." He shrugged. So far there were no clues to who her visitor had been. No footprints. The ground immediately around the cottage was firm, dry. The state police were trying for fingerprints when he left. He got a list as far as the Monts could give it to him, of Anne Giles's friends and associates both in Eastwalk and in New York, then asked the question that produced the same sickness in Damien that patched Eleanor Mont's thin skin and made Linda into a wax mannequin, her vivacity and life doused. Oranges, figs, raisins, and walnuts—she had read of a case once where after a whole year the police had been able to break a murder case by the contents of a woman's stomach.

"What time did you have dinner last night, Mrs. Mont, and what did Miss Giles eat?"

Eleanor Mont told him. There was worse to come. So far, Luttrell's inquiries had been academic. He was there not because he had the slightest suspicion that any of the Monts had been concerned with Anne Giles's death but because she had been a friend and a business associate of theirs, and had been staying in the house the night before, or was supposed to have been staying there. His next question showed him in a new light, put a different construction on his presence. For all his rather shy, self-effacing manner, he had eyes in his head, keen eyes. He saw what Damien hadn't seen. He said gently, putting his pencil aside, "Your hand, Miss St. George—that's a nasty scratch. How did you get it?"

Stillness. The gray light in the room gathered solidity, weight. Linda sat staring down at her hand lying on the cloth, the nails unvarnished, buffed, at the vivid pink line that ran diagonally across the back of her hand and disappeared under the cuff of her blue wool sweater.

Jancy was going to erupt now, Damien was sure of it. They would have to produce her. She recalled Linda's agitation when they met in the hall the previous night, the way Linda had said briefly after a hesitation, "Jancy's not in her room. She's gone." There had been a struggle between Linda and Jancy and Linda hadn't wanted to talk about it—but the other girl's presence in the house would have to come out now.

Luttrell was waiting. Just when the pause threatened to become significant, Linda spoke. She spoke idly, easily, her downcast eyes still on the red line.

"It was hurt last night. It was Mrs. Cambell's cat, Tidy. Tidy doesn't like to be picked up. I always forget."

The iron ring holding them all tight loosened. The air became breathable. Luttrell said, his interest evaporating, "You ought to put iodine on it," and rose. "If I could see the room Miss Giles had last night? Maybe there will be something there that will explain her trip over to her cottage, whom she was going to meet."

Oliver said, "Of course. Come along, and I'll show it to you." The door closed behind them. Damien looked at

Linda, at her hand. Linda glanced toward Eleanor Mont and gave her head a slight shake. Evidently Eleanor hadn't yet been told about Jancy's outbreak the night before. Then where did she think Jancy was? But perhaps she hadn't had time yet to go to her room.

Hiram St. George pushed back his chair and got up with a little cough, and Damien repressed a start. St. George had told the prosecutor, by implication, anyhow, that he had stopped in at Arroways at around eleven the previous night and, finding Linda in bed, had gone his way. It wasn't true. He had been up on the second floor of the house much later than that. He was the man she had heard after she left Linda at five or ten minutes past twelve on her way to her room. She was astounded, studied St. George with new eyes. He was a man of leisure, retired and with money, an old friend of the Monts', the father of the girl Oliver was going to marry. The Monts' interests would be his. Was it Jancy again, were they all engaged in a conspiracy to protect her, not because they thought she had killed Anne Giles but because they were afraid the police would think so? If so they were doing an excellent job.

St. George got bacon and eggs for himself from a chafing-dish on the buffet and toast for Linda and Eleanor Mont. "Eat, both of you. You've got to," he said heavily. "This is a frightful business."

"Yes." Eleanor Mont poured fresh coffee into her own cup and Damien's, asked Damien what her plans were, saying apologetically, "I intended to leave here this morning. That's impossible now. There will be things to be done. That relative of Anne's, Miss Stewart, will probably come up. I'm going to have to stay on for at least another few days."

Damien said that she was in Eastwalk simply to see the lawyer in town, at his request, and that the house was Mrs. Mont's for as long as she wanted it.

Eleanor Mont thanked her without irony. She wasn't a subtle woman, and she hadn't much humor. She was direct, simple, but for all that she had her reservations. Not

a word about Jancy's almost fanatical hatred of the dead woman; it was evidently to be hidden away, suppressed. And then, suddenly and dreadfully, Jancy put in an appearance.

Damien, Linda, Eleanor Mont, and Hiram St. George had left the dining-room and were in the hall when a man came walking down the stairs, moving easily, as though he belonged there. He was smallish, dark, in his middle forties, and remarkably good-looking. Wavy black hair was brushed carelessly back from a very white forehead above chiseled features. His grooming was impeccable. It was the first thing you noticed about him. The man was Jancy's husband, Roger Hammond.

In a tone of astonishment, Eleanor Mont said, "Roger! When did *you* get here?"

Roger Hammond ignored that. "Where's my wife?" he demanded, but without rancor, like a man who simply wanted to know. The cheerful note in his voice seemed natural and at the same time forced, as though he had made cheerfulness a habit. "Jeanette's not in the house and she's not over at the sanitarium. I just called Doctor Marsh."

The front door opened, and Oliver came quickly into the hall. Light glinted on his head, his face was in shadow. "Keep your shirt on, Roger." He closed the door behind him. "You heard about Anne Giles?"

Jancy's husband nodded without interest. "Your maid told me. I never cared for the woman. Where's Jeanette?"

It was at that moment that a door at the back of the hall opened and Jancy walked into the hall from the western end. She came to a halt near the foot of the stairs, thrust her hands into her pockets, and stared at the group watching her across thirty feet of space. Her eyes were dull in a thin, dark face from which the life had gone. She held herself stiffly, with an air of bravado. Her skirt and coat were rumpled, dusty, her stockings were full of runs, and her hair was in wild disorder. "So that woman's dead, is she?" she said in a clear bell-like voice that had a somnambulistic quality about it. "Oh, yes, I heard. I was in

the pantry when old lady Luttrell was here. I wanted to walk in and tell Luttrell I was glad she was dead, but"—her smile was a grimace, bitterly jibing—"family pride, you know. For the honor of the name. I decided not to." She looked at her husband. "What brought you up here, Roger? When did you come? You didn't kill her, did you?" Her tone was faintly hopeful.

"Jeanette!" Hammond said sharply.

"Jeanette, Jeanette, Jeanette," she mimicked, then, as Oliver and her husband started toward her, she cried, "Let me alone," and dashed up the stairs and out of sight.

Damien had turned away. Again she had a feeling of intrusion, of being an unwanted stranger. She looked through the window at sparrows pecking on a stretch of fading grass. Jancy had managed to get out of the sanitarium again. She seemed to have a habit of appearing at awkward moments, wouldn't stay put under a doctor's care. What was going to happen now? Would Oliver take her back to the sanitarium again, and if so wouldn't Luttrell find out that she was in Eastwalk, had been at the house the night before? In that case it was foolish of the Monts to try to conceal her. Abruptly, she stopped thinking about Jancy.

Mr. Luttrell hadn't gone back to the village. The town prosecutor had stopped his car in front of the house next door. Damien could see him clearly through the leafless trees. Eleanor Mont had said that a Mrs. Cambell lived there. Luttrell was talking to a woman who was probably Mrs. Cambell at the edge of the lawn. It wasn't Luttrell's lingering that startled her, or his conversation piece with a neighbor of the Monts. It was what Luttrell was doing. He was down on one knee, snapping his fingers at a large yellow cat stalking toward him across the lawn. The cat rolled over at his feet, and Luttrell picked it up and began to stroke it.

Damien felt suddenly cold. She moved away from the window with a shiver. Linda's attempt to cover for Jancy, account for the scratch on her hand, hadn't gone down with the mild Mr. Luttrell. He was suspicious, or he

wouldn't have stopped at the Cambell woman's.

Eleanor Mont and Roger Hammond had gone upstairs after Jancy, and Linda and Oliver and St. George and Damien were still in the hall, when the front doorbell rang. It rang loudly. The peal held them suspended in a small whirlpool of sound. Oliver said, his head at an angle, "I'd better see who it is," and went to the front door and pulled it wide.

A state trooper was standing on the broad step outside, big and soldierly in his dark uniform and black polished boots. "Mr. Mont?" he asked, and when Oliver nodded, the trooper said, "Sergeant sent me, Mr. Mont. Crowd's beginning to gather over at the Giles cottage. Kids, too—boys. We're through with it, anyhow," he waved a hand, "and the sergeant thought it would be safer over here."

Damien looked where Oliver and the trooper were looking, and the fear that had been in the others earlier was suddenly in her, crawling, deadly, as she examined detail after detail. It couldn't be. It was. There was no doubt about it. The car the trooper had brought back from Anne Giles's cottage was the car in which Oliver had driven a woman away from the Mont house last night. She had been mistaken. The woman with him hadn't been Jancy. It had been Anne Giles. Oliver was the man who had been with Anne Giles over in the cottage in which she had been killed.

Chapter Five

TELLTALE FINGERPRINTS

"FOUR HUNDRED AND SIXTY-NINE YARDS in a northerly direction, easterly, nine hundred and eighty-two feet— A very nice property, Miss Carey, very nice indeed." In his office at the bank the lawyer, Mr. Silver, complacently tapped papers on the desk in front of him.

Damien dragged her thoughts back into the room, tried to give her attention to what Mr. Silver was saying. It was after two o'clock in the afternoon, and she hadn't yet had a chance to speak to Oliver Mont. As soon as the trooper who brought Anne Giles's car back was gone Oliver had taken Linda home, concerned for her, saying to her tenderly, "You've got to get some rest, baby. You're not as strong as you think. You're dead on your feet. Come on, I'll walk you over." After that he had disappeared. So had the others. Damien hadn't talked to any of the Monts before she had called a cab and driven into town.

The darkness of Arroways had followed her here into the bare, cheerful office. She couldn't escape it. A woman had been killed. Her death was murder. The police—Luttrell—said that the man with Anne Giles in her cottage the night before was in all probability her murderer. Oliver Mont had been with Anne Giles, and she knew it. It was her responsibility. Damien smoothed blue suede gloves against a taut knee, the mellifluous murmur of the lawyer's voice empty in her ears. Why did she hesitate? Why not go to Mr. Luttrell when she left the bank and tell him what she knew? She had no obligation to the Monts, any of them. She had an obligation not to conceal vital knowledge. And yet the role of informer was a revolting one. But she would have to do something. She would talk to Oliver Mont first, see what he had to say, give him his chance—and then decide? Yes, that was the thing to do.

Meanwhile she had her own affairs to attend to. They

were pressing. She thought of Jane, cooped up in the dark little New York apartment, of the light and air Jane needed. The doctors had been emphatic about that. "Get Miss Towle out of the city, preferably into a warmer climate, for the winter." But warmth and sunshine cost money, and she had none, and the heritage to which she had pinned her hopes wasn't going to provide her with any. Far from it.

Damien had been with Mr. Silver for almost three tiresome hours. Wrapped up in labyrinthian verbiage a good deal of what he said went past her, but she gathered that Arroways was free and clear. All at once she said, startling him by the suddenness of her question, "I don't know anything about such things, Mr. Silver, but—mortgages. I mean, if there isn't any, couldn't I get one?"

"Well, now, let me see." Mr. Silver peered at her over his glasses. She was a striking girl. Fine eyes. Looked a bit like her mother as he remembered Susan Mont. Flighty, though, couldn't keep her mind on business. Ought to be married, girl like that, and not working at a job in New York City. Horrible place. "You're in need of ready cash, Miss Carey?"

"Very," Damien said dryly, softening trenchancy with, "I have a cousin who lives with me. She kept house for my father while he was alive, and she needs doctors and a change of air. And my job doesn't pay much, and everything is so high—"

Mr. Silver signified benignly that he understood. He had already told her, somewhat shocked by her hurry to get rid of a place that had been in her family for generations, that as far as the chances of a quick sale of Arroways went, they were slight. Houses of that size were very seldom in demand. A mortgage was different. "How long are you going to be in Eastwalk, Miss Carey?"

"I had planned to go back to New York today."

"I see. If you could wait until—say, Tuesday, yes, Tuesday. There's a meeting of the bank's board of directors on Monday afternoon and I think a mortgage might possibly be arranged."

Damien hesitated. The Black Horse Inn was full, and she hated the thought of remaining on in the Mont house, but it would only be for one more night. By tomorrow, Sunday, the hunters would begin to shove off, and she could probably get a room there. And it would be nice to go back home with a check in her wallet, nice to have money again. "Yes," she said, "I can wait."

Out in the town streets under cold gray skies her momentary flicker of cheerfulness died. People everywhere were talking of Anne Giles, in knots on the pavement, in the stationery store where she bought cigarettes and a couple of reprints, on the bridge. "Yop, got her throat cut," a man blocking Damien's path said with relish. She stepped ostentatiously into the gutter with an angry glance. *Vultures feeding greedily at the trough of sensation,* she thought. But it wasn't actually that. They weren't close to it, it was like an exciting movie sequence, without reality. She had a cup of coffee and a sandwich at a beanery on Main Street and then walked back to Arroways instead of taking a cab. Her own name had been mentioned in the little restaurant. "The Mont house has changed hands, did you hear? . . . Don't tell me . . . Sure thing. The granddaughter got it. Name's Carey. The Monts must be furious. I guess old Maria softened up at the end, before she kicked off."

The Monts must be furious— They had shown no sign of it, Damien decided, swinging up the hill at a fast pace—but then they had shown very little sign of anything. She might have been a week-end guest whom they didn't know too well. Dry leaves swirled across the path. Marshal facts before she faced Oliver Mont, do a little straight thinking. Had there or had there not been anything between Oliver and Anne Giles? She thought again, coldly and objectively, of the glimpse of them she had caught in her grandmother's apartment more than six months ago. Had Anne Giles perhaps been comforting Oliver, trying to assuage his grief at the approaching death of the woman he had been taught to think of as his grandmother? It was scarcely likely. Anne Giles was not what one would call a

woman who dispensed comfort, nor for the matter of that was Oliver a man who would accept that sort of solace. He was too individual, too strong. If he had to suffer he would do it alone—and, anyhow, from what she had gathered, he hadn't been too wrapped up in Maria. He had refused to enter Mont Fabrics, had gone into business for himself early. There had apparently been ructions. All right, then. Suppose he had been in love with Anne Giles, although he was engaged to Linda. He might have tired of the older woman— Damien gave her head a shake. Murder was a rather drastic way of ending a distasteful relationship.

All too soon Arroways loomed up in front of her on top of the ridge, planted solidly in its gardens as though it had grown there out of its strength, massive and towering and secretive, like some great prehistoric beast that might suddenly move, sluggishly and devouringly, of its own volition. Walking up the drive and continuing to think over the things that had happened yesterday, she recognized that there had been strong emotional undercurrents for which there was no adequate explanation; Eleanor Mont's covert life-and-death air all evening, for instance—Mary Queen of Scots on the way to the scaffold—Jancy's hatred of the dead woman, not dislike, hatred, a white heat of it—

She let herself in quietly through the big front door, and at once the dark air was around her, air that had some principle of darkness in itself and wasn't like the air outside, in other houses. Oliver was there. So were Eleanor and Hiram St. George. They were in the library, talking in low voices. The talk stopped abruptly as she appeared on the threshold. The sudden silence was a door shut in the face of an intruder. Damien said with stupid vivacity, "I walked back from town. It's getting colder out," and three new faces, ones that hadn't been there before, polite, inquiring, were turned toward her.

"Come in and sit down," Oliver moved a chair courteously. "Finished your business at the bank?"

Damien said yes to the question, no to the proffered

chair. "I think I'll go up to my room and write some letters." She was embarrassed, uncomfortable, turned quickly away.

Upstairs in the big bedroom on the second floor she wandered aimlessly around, hating the house, hating her position in it, angry at the necessity that made her force herself on Oliver Mont, at the way she had babbled like a schoolgirl down there in the library. Why had they stopped talking so suddenly when they saw her? She stared soberly at her reflection in a long mirror, went to the dressing-table, and used her compact. She had to talk to Oliver. She also had to tell Eleanor Mont that she was going to have to stay on in the house for another night. Oak leaves tapped at the north window. She swung nervously, looked through the window, and saw Oliver Mont. He was strolling across the lawns in the direction of the stables. He was alone. This was her opportunity.

Damien threw on her coat and went downstairs. Hiram St. George and Oliver's mother were still in the library. She heard St. George give that cough of his and the murmur of Eleanor Mont's voice. The door was closed now. There was a man close to it. It was Roger Hammond, Jancy's husband. He turned, saw her, and came forward. Hammond had been standing quite close to the shut library door. Had he by any chance been listening to what went on inside? *No,* Damien thought, *I mustn't. I'm beginning to be suspicious of everyone and everything.* Roger Hammond greeted her cordially, shaking her hand and saying, "We were all in such a stew this morning, I didn't have a chance to say how do you do, Miss Carey. I'm glad to meet you. I hope you're going to enjoy Arroways as much as we have."

His fine eyes were like eyes on a dish, compelling your attention out of their context, perhaps because they were so fine, so shapely and liquid and clear. His other features were like that, too, his nose, his mouth, each perfect in its way. The over-all impression was a sort of nullity. Damien thanked him and asked, with some inner hesitation, how Jancy was. Hammond said, "Feeling much better, thanks,"

and she said she was glad and let herself out.

There was no sign of Oliver in the vicinity of the stables. She walked on. Then she saw him, beyond the tennis court, walking slowly and glancing around him, his head bare, his hands thrust into the pockets of a tan gabardine raincoat.

"Mr. Mont!" At the sound of her voice Oliver turned, quickly, as though she had startled, interrupted, him.

"Oh, Miss Carey. What is it? Can I do something for you?" He put a smile over—had it been discomfiture? It took the bleakness out of his face, made him look younger, more approachable.

Damien said, "I've got to talk to you," and his smile vanished. He gave her a long considering look, and nodded.

"I thought you might," he said quietly. "Let's go inside."

He led the way past the pear tree with the ladder propped against it, into the little house on the rise above the tennis court, closed the door. It was chilly in the pretty living-room with chintz draperies at the windows and flowered chairs and silky old Orientals scattered over a milky lavender-blue floor. There was a dart board on the wall opposite the fireplace. Bushes obscured the windows to the west so that the light was dim. Oliver switched on lamps.

Damien took a rush at it, looking past, rather than at him. Now that the moment had come, she dreaded it. "Mr. Mont, I was at my window last night at around half past twelve. I saw you driving away with a woman. I knew, from Miss St. George, that your sister wasn't in her room, thought it was your sister who was with you, that you had found her and were taking her over to the sanitarium. It wasn't your sister, was it? And it wasn't your car. It was Miss Giles's car, and Miss Giles was in it. You drove Miss Giles over to that cottage of hers last night, didn't you?"

Oliver had listened contemplatively, his eyes steady on hers. He sighed. Twisting a ladder-back chair around he sat down facing her above arms folded along the back.

"I was afraid of this," he said, offering her a cigarette and when she refused, lighting one himself. "Yes, I thought I saw someone at one of the upstairs windows. You're right, Miss Carey. I did drive Anne over to her cottage last night."

And that seemed to be all. He kept on looking at Damien equably. She was completely and utterly astounded at his calm assumption that all he had to do was to say yes to such a charge and that that was the end of it, that no further questions need be asked. He might be able to handle his mother and Linda like that; she certainly wasn't going to permit it.

She said, keeping anger at bay, "Why didn't you tell Mr. Luttrell this morning that you drove Miss Giles over to her cottage last night? The police are looking for the man who was with her there—or didn't you think they'd be interested?"

Her mockery had no effect on Oliver Mont. He was watching her attentively and yet with a detached air, almost as though he were a portrait painter and she were a sitter he was studying, weighing gesture, light and shade, essence. He flicked ash to the floor and got up and came close to her. Voice and manner changed abruptly. He was warm again and human and reachable, like the man she had known three years ago for a brief period.

"You have me wrong," he said. "Don't be angry, Damien, I'll tell you what happened. Over and above the fact that Jancy's my sister, I like her, a lot. But she can get herself into more scrapes than you can shake a stick at—always could. Last night Linda came in and told me that Jancy had gotten away from her and was on the loose somewhere. I made Linda go back to bed and started to hunt for Jancy. She wasn't anywhere in the house. While I was having a look around the grounds I met Anne Giles. She was on her way to her car. I asked where she was going and she said over to her cottage to pick up some papers."

Damien's brows rose.

Oliver nodded. "Thin, very thin. I agree—but mine not to reason why. Anyway I didn't give a damn, then. I was

too worried about Jancy, and afraid that my mother would wake up and find Jancy gone. Not being familiar with our local customs, you wouldn't know about Muffit. Muffit sells liquor after hours. He has a farm down the road from Anne's place. I thought Jancy might have gone over to Muffit's, so I drove over with Anne to her cottage, left her there, and went on, on foot, to Muffit's place. The last I saw of Anne she was unlocking her door and going into the house."

Damien said slowly, "And did you find Jancy at this Muffit's?"

"I did not." Oliver began to walk around restlessly, touching objects at random. His height and restrained vigor made the sizable room seem smaller, confining. "Jancy wasn't at Muffit's. She wasn't on the road there. She wasn't here at home when I finally got back. I kept on looking for her until it began to get light. Then I decided to get a couple of hours' sleep. I knew she wouldn't come to any real harm. She's got friends in the neighborhood. And, anyhow, she's done this sort of thing several times before. I was right. Jancy spent the night in the old harness room in the stables."

"But you can see," he paused in front of Damien, "why I didn't want to tell this to Luttrell. Or perhaps you can't see all of it. Jancy didn't like Anne Giles. I don't know exactly what the trouble between them was. It doesn't matter now. The thing that does matter is that Jancy didn't make any secret about how she felt toward Anne." He grinned wryly. "In fact, she practically shouted it from the housetops. So," he shrugged, "I thought the best thing to do was to keep my mouth shut—until the police find out who killed Anne. Jancy's all sound and fury, she wouldn't kill anyone, but she's gotten herself nicely balled up. She heard me searching for her last night and deliberately gave me the slip because she was in a royal rage and couldn't make herself sleep under the same roof with Anne Giles. She admitted it freely. It's not an admission that would go down very well with the police."

Damien could see that. She could also see that the Monts

wouldn't want Jancy's condition bruited about, which was what would inevitably happen if the truth were told. There were other things to be considered. Oliver spoke with assurance of Jancy's innocence. Perhaps he was right, perhaps not. He was waiting for her to speak. She hesitated. Hard to tell a man that you thought his sister might be a murderess, that there was no accurate proof to the contrary.

Oliver saw her hesitation. He said persuasively, moving closer to her, "I'm not asking you to keep quiet indefinitely, Damien. The police will find the murderer. Already things are beginning to clear up. Anne's purse is missing, and she generally carried a lot of money with her. They'll get the man who did it. If you just won't say anything for the next day or so—"

Damien wished Oliver wouldn't stand over her. She needed space to breathe in, think in. Anne Giles's purse was missing—she hadn't known this. It was important. For one thing, it provided a clear-cut motive, robbery—

Oliver was holding her pinned with that bright, searching, and insistent glance. A day or two wouldn't matter, surely. She capitulated. She said, "All right, Oliver, I won't mention it to anyone, now, anyhow," and felt herself coloring. He had called her Damien and she had called him Oliver. Again the room seemed small, close, as though the walls had moved in, cutting down the supply of air.

After she spoke there was an odd little silence. Oliver didn't move. The painter-sitter scrutiny was back in his hazel eyes, narrowly bright under gold-brown brows. "You've changed a good deal," he said unexpectedly.

The *non sequitur* took Damien off guard. "Have I?"

"Yes," he said, "you've grown up."

She didn't know what the answer to that was. "One does," she murmured, turned away—and saw the scarf.

It was lying across the back of a wicker chair, a square of vermilion silk burning redly. The scarf belonged to Anne Giles. She had worn it when she first appeared on the terrace the day before. Anne Giles had been here in

this little house—and the only time she could have been here was late the preceding afternoon, because the rest of her afternoon and evening was accounted for. She had been here with Eleanor Mont, had remained on after Eleanor walked out. What had transpired at that interview that had shaken the older woman so terribly? Or was she imagining things again? Was it simply, as Eleanor Mont had said, a business interview? And wasn't Jancy the cause of Eleanor Mont's breakdown? Probably.

Damien ignored the scarf, went through the door Oliver held. Walking back with him through the dusk, she felt relieved, almost lighthearted. And immediately he was proven right. The police were making progress. The lights were all on when they entered the hall, and voices came out of the living-room at the far end. The town prosecutor was there, with Eleanor and Hiram St. George and Roger Hammond. Damien knew at once from the general air that there had been a lifting of pressure. Luttrell told Oliver about it.

They had found out things about Anne Giles's visitor of the night before. Her visitor was a man. He had arrived at the cottage in a rowboat. The marks were deeply imbedded in the soft mud of the river bank at the foot of the lawn. Also imbedded in the mud were several footprints. The boat itself had been found floating around the next curve. It was a rowboat that had been stolen from the Lawrence place near town and on the other side of the stream. Joe Lawrence had tied the boat up safely at around eleven o'clock on the preceding night; it was gone in the morning.

In addition to the boat there were the fingerprints. Superimposed on those of Anne Giles on the brass knob of the front door were two clear prints. Ordinarily two prints wouldn't be much good, but in this case they were lucky. The man who had entered Anne Giles's cottage had cut his forefinger deeply at some time and there was a small scar across the whorls of the finger tip.

"One of the things I came for," Luttrell said, "was to ask you people to be fingerprinted."

At that there was a general movement of recoil. Eleanor Mont frowned. Oliver stared. Roger Hammond said smilingly, "My dear fellow, you don't suspect any of us of having killed that woman, do you?" St. George pulled on his pipe, examining his own square, capable hands. "Well, I have no scar," he remarked cheerfully. "Here, Fred, take a look."

Luttrell was gently jibing. "You don't suppose I'd have told you about the scar if I'd suspected one of you? No, but you people have all been over there at the cottage and your prints are scattered around. We want to separate the sheep from the goats, isolate any strange prints, maybe get a full set to complete the two on the doorknob."

They all expressed willingness to have their fingerprints taken. After Eleanor Mont described some of the things that were in Anne Giles's missing handbag, a black calf handbag lined with red leather, gold compact and gold lipstick, red wallet, and corroborated Oliver's statement that she generally carried rather a lot of money, three, four, five hundred dollars, Luttrell left.

Eleanor Mont looked tired. Her face was drawn, haggard. As soon as Luttrell was gone she went upstairs to lie down. Then Bill Heyward called Damien. Bill wanted to see her. Oliver had disappeared. Damien refused Roger Hammond's suggestion of Russian bank, and he had wandered off, and she was left alone with the house, its size and silence and shadows. She was overjoyed to hear Bill's voice. Ten minutes later he picked her up in the battered Chevy coupé.

The skies were still low and the wind cutting, but getting away from Arroways was like dropping an unbearable weight. As they went through the gates Bill said with unusual violence for him, "My God, what you ran into, Damien. That woman!"

Damien tightened the scarf around her head. Bill spoke almost as though Anne Giles had killed someone else rather than been killed herself. But Bill had loathed her and had made no secret about it. Like Jancy. Damien touched his sleeve. "Let's not talk about her, Bill. I want

to get away from it for a while."

"I should think you would," Bill said understandingly, and asked about the lawyer and what she had done that morning about the house. Damien described her visit to Mr. Silver at the bank and told him about the mortgage that, if it were granted, would really solve things for her. Inwardly she thought of the fingerprints on the knob of Anne Giles's front door with a lift. Oliver hadn't gone into the cottage with Anne Giles last night. He had told her the truth.

"Light a cigarette for me, will you?" Bill said and, complying, Damien asked, "Did you ever hear of a man named Muffit?"

"Sure." Bill eased the car over a bump. "He's a farmer. Lives down the river road. Used to be a bootlegger during prohibition. Still sells stuff—you can always pick up a bottle there on Sunday, or late at night."

The cigarette was lit. "Here you are," Damien said, and Bill put out his hand, looking ahead at the narrow banked curve he was negotiating.

"But where did you hear of Muffit? For a city slicker you've been getting around."

Damien didn't answer. She was looking at Bill's extended hand, a good hand, broad palm, well-made fingers. Across the tip of the right forefinger, across the middle of the tip, there was a small white scar.

Chapter Six

The Opening Door

"Damien, what is it? What's the matter?" Bill turned to stare at her, his clever face concerned.

Damien felt frozen. She looked through the windshield and said slowly, "A man who followed Anne Giles into her cottage last night had a scar across the tip of his forefinger."

Bill didn't seem to get it at first. "What? Oh, the police discovered something, did they? Then they're getting some place. But why are you so—" He broke off short, looked at his hand himself, pulled abruptly to the side of the road, and stopped the car. He was white and very angry. "Now, let's have this out," he said, facing her squarely. "I've got a scar on my forefinger. Yes. Got it opening a jackknife when I was a kid. I didn't go to meet Anne Giles last night. I didn't kill her. Is that what you're thinking, Damien? Is it?"

Damien was miserable, confused. "No. No, of course not. But the scar—"

Bill laughed. "Good Lord, how many people do you suppose have scars on their forefingers, all their fingers? What shape was this scar? How long was it, how wide, how recent?"

Damien said, "I'm not accusing you, Bill. I was startled, that's all. I was thinking of fingerprints and scars and when I saw yours it made me jump. If you tell me that you didn't kill Anne Giles—"

"I do tell you that."

"Then I believe you."

Bill started the car, and they drove on. But there was a constraint between them that hadn't been there before, not on the surface but underneath. Damien tried to break it down in herself and in him. She was very fond of Bill even though she wasn't ready to marry him. She told him that the police thought that Anne Giles had been killed

at somewhere around midnight, not later than one o'clock, at the most, and about her missing purse and everything that had happened in the house.

Bill was interested when he heard that Roger Hammond was at Arroways. "I can't stand that fellow," he said, scowling. "Jancy should never have married him—but that was Maria Mont for you again. Maria made that marriage, aided and abetted by Eleanor Mont." His eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "Roger Hammond would be in the other camp—"

Bill spoke with such extraordinary bitterness about Jancy's marriage that Damien wondered fleetingly whether Bill had been in love with Jancy himself. "What camp?"

"The Mont camp, my pet. Don't you remember my telling you yesterday that Anne Giles had the inside track with Maria, that she was her personal spy, court favorite, and general factotum combined? Sure, Randall Mont was executive vice-president of Mont Fabrics, sure Eleanor was and is general manager, but poor Randall was only a figurehead, and Eleanor had all the dirty work to do."

"Well, there are no camps now," Damien said reasonably. "When Maria died that was all over. Eleanor owns the whole shooting-match."

"Exactly," Bill said. "And Roger Hammond's married to Eleanor's daughter, and is in the firm. Oliver Mont's not interested in it, he's got a business of his own. Don't be fooled by that fellow Hammond's plausible front, Damien. He's as hard as nails. I'd like to know what time he got to Eastwalk last night."

Damien didn't know quite what Bill was getting at with his talks of two camps. On the edge of the town they stopped in front of a rambling white house with a lovely doorway. Before she could ask Bill, he said, "Here we are. I want you to meet my aunt, and after that let's have a drink at the Black Horse."

Frances Kendleton was a small, slight woman with bright, dark eyes lighting up a shrewd, weather-beaten face. She welcomed Damien cordially into an attractive living-room with a beautiful Bokhara on the floor and

some fine antiques. There evidently wasn't much money —the white paneling needed painting, the draperies were faded and darned, and the slip covers extensively patched —but the whole effect was charming.

Tea in paper-thin cups before an open fire; Miss Kendleton was more interested in her nephew's affairs than she was in Anne Giles or what had happened to her. "There's nothing as dull as murder when you know the solution. The woman was always flaunting around. She was probably robbed by some poor devil who needed the money. Bill, have you told Miss Carey about the Process?" She put it in capitals.

Bill grinned at her affectionately. Damien looked inquiring. It appeared that Bill had discovered a new method for the manufacturing of rayon that would cut costs in half and enormously increase production. Listening, Damien felt guilty. Bill had mentioned the subject to her weeks ago, but she hadn't paid any particular attention. So that accounted for the change in him, the new force and purpose.

"Don't count your chickens," he warned his aunt. "Fogler and Benson are interested, but they may be only nibbling. I won't be sure of anything until they put their John Hancock on the dotted line."

Presently the talk switched to Arroways. Miss Kendleton understood Damien's dilemma. It was she who made the suggestion. Damien couldn't see it at first but, considering it, she began to take fire. "Why not," Frances Kendleton said, "if you could get the financial backing, make it over into apartments like May Powell did her place? Remember, Bill? You know, the big Powell place on the corner? May's got five apartments in what was once an old rat trap of a place, and every one's rented. She's going to spend the winter in Florida and last month she bought herself a new Cadillac. All that out of the proceeds."

They argued the matter pro and con. Even though it was only an idea it was like a burst of sunshine to Damien. The house might not be a white elephant, after all. It might give Jane the things she needed, might be made to

yield a solid income. Might, only might, Damien warned herself. The pleasant half hour in the Kendleton living-room was marred by one curious incident, no, two. Apropos of Anne Giles, Bill said, putting a log on the fire, "Well, we've both got alibis, Frances. We were in bed and asleep at around eleven."

"That's right," Miss Kendleton said comfortably. "The only one they might accuse could be James." James was the cat, and Miss Kendleton had found him outside the house instead of in the kitchen when she got up that morning. "I thought he was under the stove but he must have slipped past me when I locked the door, Bill. The poor fellow was half frozen."

Bill agreed too quickly and heartily. "By George, yes, I believe that's what he must have done. You probably didn't notice. Maybe he wanted a night on the tiles."

Cats, Damien thought, *Mrs. Cambell's—and now Miss Kendleton's.* The scratch on Linda's hand, Linda who was much stronger than she looked— Not only cats went through doors. Had Bill gone out last night after he had pretended to go to bed?

After that there was the incident of the man she didn't see. They were ready to leave, and Bill was standing near one of the front windows when he dashed outside and closed the door behind him. Voices murmured beyond the door, Bill's and another man's. The other man's was loud, blurred. He seemed to be insisting on entering the house. She couldn't hear what Bill said. The voices receded. Bill was evidently taking the caller away somewhere. He came in alone in a couple of minutes. "Kit," he said carelessly to his aunt. "Drunk again. I put him in the kitchen. You might try him with some coffee." He gave Frances Kendleton a significant glance that didn't match his idle tone. There seemed to be some sort of message, warning, in it. Damien was puzzled and uneasy.

She and Bill didn't, after all, go to the Black Horse for a drink. As soon as they were in the car Bill glanced at his watch and gave an exclamation. "After half past three—I didn't know it was so late." He explained that he had to

see a man in town. "Mind if I take you back to Arroways now and ring you when I'm through?"

Damien said, "Of course not," but her vanity was faintly piqued. Bill had intimated earlier that he wanted nothing more than to devote the rest of the afternoon and evening to her. Any doubt of his feeling for her was removed when they reached Arroways. Standing in its shadow the chill was in Damien again. She disliked the thought of going into it, submitting herself to its soft encroaching darkness, the insidious pressure of the unknown, the strange.

Bill must have read what she felt in her face because he took her hands in his and said, looking down at her, his brown eyes serious, "Damien, come back to Frances's with me. She'll be more than delighted. This is no place for you. I hate you to be mixed up in this business of Anne Giles, even if you're only on the fringe." Suddenly he was drawing her toward him, a new note in his entreaty. "Say you'll marry me, Damien. I'm a persistent son of a gun. I'm going to keep after you until you do. Why not agree now?"

He had never been more attractive. He seemed to have come alive, to have sloughed off the shell of pleasant inertia, ineffectualness, that generally characterized him.

Damien shook her head. She didn't smile when she spoke. "I can't, Bill. I like you a lot but—not enough. It wouldn't work."

Bill let her hands drop and stepped back, his face dark. For the first time there was iron in him. "What is it, Damien?" he demanded, studying her closely. "I think I've got a right to know. Is there another man? You've been different today." His eyes left her, roamed the bulk of the house, came back to fasten themselves on her face. "You wouldn't by any chance have fallen for our friend Mr. Oliver Mont, would you? He's got quite a reputation along that line."

Bill's tone, his whole manner, was ugly, jibing. Damien was outraged at the way he spoke, the suggestion he made. She said icily, "Don't be more of a fool than you can help,

Bill. And don't bother to call me up later this afternoon. When and if I want to see you again, I'll let you know." She was still shaking when she entered the hall and closed the door behind her.

There was no one around, but the shadows were there, thick, enfolding. The stillness was broken only by the ticking of the clock near the library door. Faint purplish light seeped down the well of the staircase, fell on the carved banisters, polished the great round ball of wood surmounting the newel post. Damien went upstairs to her room. How dared Bill talk to her like that? Oliver Mont had a reputation in that line. Was what Bill said true? She took off her coat impatiently, threw it over a chair. Oliver and Anne Giles— Oliver and other women? He was engaged to Linda St. George, was going to marry Linda. It was Linda's business not hers.

She emptied her mind of it, forcibly, turned her attention to the house and Frances Kendleton's suggestion. Could it be made over into apartments? As Miss Kendleton had pointed out, it was near enough to town to be convenient, and there was certainly plenty of space. *Go over it,* she decided. Not that she knew anything about remodeling, but she might get a rough notion of what was possible and what wasn't. Anyhow, it was something positive to do.

Begin at the bottom. She was on her way downstairs, had reached the landing when she paused at the sound of her name.

"Miss Carey, I presume?" It was Jancy Hammond who spoke. She was standing at the foot of the stairs, looking up. At first glance Damien would scarcely have known her. Jancy's dark hair was a helmet of brown satin brushed smoothly against her head. Her color was fresh and her eyes bright above a green gabardine suit that modeled her tall figure in springing lines.

Damien nodded. It was an embarrassing situation. She didn't want to say, "We met yesterday on the terrace, but I don't suppose you recall it." She said instead, "Yes. You're Mrs. Hammond, aren't you?"

"I am." There was something almost ferocious in Jancy's smiling answer. She went on briskly, "How do you like your ancestral manor?"

Damien felt awkward, didn't know exactly how to proceed. There were so many things she couldn't touch on with Jancy. She said, "It's certainly large enough. I haven't seen all of it yet. I've been wondering—with the housing shortage that persists—whether it couldn't be made over into apartments—"

Jancy saved her the trouble of continuing a forced conversation by ending it herself. "You haven't done anything with Oliver, have you?" she asked, too sweetly. "I saw you with him earlier this afternoon, and he's not to be found. Linda's been looking for him."

The insinuation in Jancy Hammond, it could be just that, coming on top of Bill's insane suggestion was too much. Damien said curtly, "I haven't seen your brother in some hours," and Jancy nodded and walked on into the living-room.

Damien drew a long breath. Forget the Monts— She looked around her. Living-room, dining-room, library, the door leading to the corridor that opened on the terrace; another door at the back of the hall led into a part of the house she hadn't yet explored. She stepped into a corridor about twenty feet long by five feet wide. A narrow staircase, a back stairs, mounted into thick gloom. She went past a servants' dining-room and an immense pantry. The kitchen was at the far end, a faint clatter of pots came from behind the closed door there. Nearer, the mouth of another staircase descended into more blackness. There was a switch at the top. Damien pressed it and went down into dimness.

She was in a cement corridor that opened out in the middle into a square room. She looked into a laundry on the right, into a long game room straight ahead that held a pool table, a folding Ping-pong table against a wall, an assortment of worn leather chairs. There was a fireplace in the south wall, a bar in the corner. Half windows, up near the ceiling, were masked by bushes growing around

the base of the house. With those cut away, the game room would have plenty of light. It would make a wonderful living-room. There was enough space down here, she hadn't yet explored half of it, for at least two apartments. She switched off the light, left the game room, and studied the square room in the center that she had already traversed. It would do as a central hall with apartments on either side. There were garden tools neatly arranged against one wall, lawn chairs were stacked against another. A big board in the east wall held rows of hooks from which keys hung. Yes, there was plenty of space.

It was cold, and there was a chill in the air. The stillness was absolute. Damien went on exploring, fighting a faint and highly unreasonable feeling of uneasiness. She wasn't an interloper, the house belonged to her. Someone had once been a good amateur carpenter. A long narrow room to the west was fitted up as a carpenter shop. Dust lay on the tools, neatly arrayed on deal tables, saws and hammers and chisels and drills and all sorts of strange objects. Gazing at a particularly vicious-looking thing like a huge ice pick, a shiver went through Damien. The isolation began to press in on her, the emptiness.

She thought of Anne Giles and the man with the scarred finger tip, the man who was missing, whom the police hadn't yet caught, and went quickly to the door and switched off the light. The cellar of a house like this wouldn't be a bad place to hide in. She told herself that was being absurd, started to walk on, and stood still, her hackles rising.

Was that a step, the echo of a step, a faint tinkle? She listened tautly, relaxed when there was no further sound. She still hadn't seen the whole basement. The rest of it could wait. With her nerves in the state they were, the upper floors provided a better field for exploration.

She went up the back stairs, past the first floor to the second. Gradually the arrangement of the house was becoming a little plainer. There were irregularities but roughly the central hall was the leg of a T, the arms the corridors running into the flanking wings on either side

of the bulk of the main house. She was in the eastern wing. Eleanor Mont's bedroom was in the wing to the west so that there was no danger of disturbing her.

Oliver slept somewhere on the third floor. The wing she was in consisted of a sewing-room at the far end with long narrow windows from which you could see the stables and which would make a good kitchen, and four bedrooms, two facing the front of the house, two the rear. Damien examined the two rooms at the front cursorily, wondering vaguely what furniture belonged to the Monts and what to her. Eleanor Mont had never yet got round to saying. You could hardly blame her, in view of what had happened. Some of the stuff was good, but a lot of it was old without being old enough, big double beds, cumbersome dressers and chests and chairs and tables.

The rooms at the back overlooked the tennis court and the gardens and the little guest house near the wall that bounded the property. The first room was small and a bad shape, as though part of it had been cut off. It probably had, for an adjoining bath. There was a bath between the two rooms at the front. Damien tried the door in the inner wall. It was locked. She went out into the corridor to the second door, the door nearest the main hall, and opened it. Instead of leading directly into a bedroom it opened on a narrow transverse corridor that ended in a window. The wind was higher. The shade of the window flapped.

The door to the fourth bedroom was in the right hand wall—Damien recognized it then. It was the room in which Anne Giles had slept—or was to have slept—on Friday night. Eleanor Mont had locked it after the town prosecutor had gone until such time as the dead woman's cousin arrived to take possession of her belongings. The curious thing was that the key was now in the lock.

Damien stared at it. Had the cousin come? Was she inside the room packing the dead woman's bag? A draft stirred Damien's hair, and the door at her back, the door leading into the corridor, closed with a slam. At the same moment the door of the bedroom assigned to Anne Giles

began to open. It kept on opening, slowly and majestically, as though it were being pulled inward by an unseen revelatory hand, on a stretch of blue carpet, a large window through which gray light filtered, the edge of a bureau, the foot of the bed, a stretch of smooth blue coverlet, a portion of wall.

The fear in Damien was childish, unreasoning. Her exclamation rang in her ears, and only that. There was no other break in the stillness. Nevertheless, she wasn't going in there. She ran out into the corridor, along it, out into the main hall and down the stairs. Jancy Hammond had gone into the living-room. When Damien reached it, the living-room was empty. She returned to the foot of the stairs and looked uncertainly around, her hand on the coldness of the wooden ball at the top of the newel post. It was after four o'clock and growing dusky out, and there were no lamps on. The skylight far overhead was a purplish blur. Was that a sound up there in the direction from which she had come?

Damien stepped backward into the stairwell and gazed upward, listening and trying to see— And did see—so fast that there was no terror, no time for terror, just for an involuntary contraction of muscles. She wasn't fast enough. The crash wiped the scream from her lips, smothered it in hard blasting waves of sound.

Chapter Seven

The Missing Key

"I'm perfectly all right, perfectly. I heard it coming and jumped out of the way. It didn't hit me. It just grazed me as it went past."

Damien rubbed her shoulder and arm where she sat in a tall carved chair near the library, to which Oliver had carried her. The occupants of the house were all there. At one minute there had been no one, there had been nothing but that dark shape spinning down, and then she had fallen, the world smashing against her eardrums. Cries of alarm, running footsteps; she had a queer fancy that the people surrounding her had sprung out of the walls as though they had secret hiding-places behind them where they lived their real lives, Eleanor Mont and Oliver and Jancy and Roger Hammond, and then Linda had come, and finally Hiram St. George and a strange woman.

The mahogany table that stood against the rise of the stairs in the middle of the stairwell was grim evidence of what would have happened to Damien if she had been struck directly, instead of receiving a glancing blow. The shape that had come hurtling down was one of the big wooden balls that decorated a second-floor newel post. The table was in splinters.

Horror, sympathy, solicitude, conjecture. The ball was loose. A vibration had sent it over the railing. One had fallen last year— They should have seen to it then, but the house had been closed. Damien had had a lucky escape. Roger Hammond suggested a doctor, but she said no, almost irritably. "I really am all right."

"Perhaps I could look at it." The strange woman, a large red-haired woman with a plain angular face and round blue eyes, said, "I'm a nurse." Her face was vaguely familiar. Eleanor Mont introduced her. She was Miss Stewart, Anne Giles's cousin. Damien recognized her then.

Miss Stewart was the trained nurse who had rebuked her when she blundered into the room in the Mont apartment in New York where her grandmother lay dying. Damien thanked Miss Stewart and declined her ministrations with firmness.

Damien had gasped out her news about the door of Anne Giles's bedroom when Oliver had first picked her up. He and Hiram St. George and Roger Hammond went upstairs. They came down in a minute with varied and curious expressions on their faces. Oliver was frowning, thoughtful, his eyes steady and blank. St. George was bluffly flabbergasted and at sea. Roger Hammond was smiling with an amusement he tried to conceal.

Eleanor Mont said, "Well?" and Oliver shook his head.

"The door of the blue room is locked, and there's no key in it."

More exclamations. Linda said, "Perhaps someone took the key out—" Jancy Hammond said, "Or perhaps it was never there," and they all looked away from Damien, at each other, and then back at Damien again.

"The key," Damien said clearly, "was in the lock. It must have already been turned. The wind, there was a draft in the corridor, blew the door open while I was standing there. That was the way it was when I left it, the key in the lock and the door half open."

No one made any comment. The key with which Eleanor Mont had locked the door the morning after Luttrell went was in her bedroom. "I'll go and get it," she said. "We'd better look at the room." They all went, in a body, and Damien insisted on going with them. Her cheeks had begun to burn. She was angry under those stares of incredulity, disbelief. She didn't know whether or not Oliver was also a doubting Thomas. She had an odd reluctance to meet his eyes since he had picked her up and carried her away from the floor beside the smashed table. She hadn't known he would be so concerned, could be so gentle, didn't want him not to believe her.

Eleanor got the key and gave it to him. It was Oliver who opened the blue-room door. They stood in a huddle

around him just over the threshold. The room was in order. Wide bureau with a brush and comb of Anne Giles's on it, a white handkerchief, a box of face powder, between heavy silver candlesticks with blue candles in them. The draperies hung straight and still beside the wide window, the last of the light purple beyond the pane. Two armchairs, the smooth bed, the rug straight. Except for the things on the bureau there was no sign of Anne Giles's brief occupancy, no sign, either, of anything having been moved, disturbed. Oliver opened a closet door. A white satin slip on a hanger, beside it a black suede topcoat and underneath two bags, a pigskin dressing-case and a tan calf brief case. That was all. The bags were strapped and hadn't been unpacked.

This time Damien felt them all carefully not looking at her in the stillness. Outside, wind blew loudly. Oliver broke the pause. He said, "Yours isn't the only key, Mother. There must be others."

There were. Spare keys were kept on the key panel in the basement. Damien remembered the sound then, the faint tinkle and what could have been the ghost of a footstep, that she had heard when she was in the carpenter shop beyond the central room. Someone, she was sure of it, had taken the key then. She was right. Oliver came back to say that the spare key to the blue room was gone.

Downstairs in the living-room, over drinks Hiram St. George fixed, they discussed the missing key in grave voices. Someone had undoubtedly removed the key from the panel in the basement, and gone upstairs and opened the door of the blue room. This was a bald fact and there was no getting away from it. "But who would—and why?" Linda said helplessly. "And how could anyone, any stranger, get into the house?"

Roger Hammond took a deep swallow of Scotch and water. "How? If I've said once, I've said a hundred times that it's insane to leave the doors open up here the way you people do. Anybody could have gotten in. In any number of ways. There are three doors in the basement, and four on the first floor."

As you, Damien thought, looking at the dazzling sheen on his black oxfords, *got in last night without anyone having heard you, apparently.* Yet what Roger Hammond said was true. On the other hand, how would an outsider know where to look for the key, one particular key? Suppose it wasn't an outsider who had taken the key, suppose it was someone in the house, in the room? She glanced from face to face. No sign of guilt, self-consciousness, nothing but troubled wonder—

There was another thing. Damien was willing to accept accident as the cause of the heavy wooden ball's crashing down, but it could have been deliberately pushed down in order to distract attention, send everyone running to the main hall while the person with the key locked the door and put distance between himself and the murdered woman's room. She tried to remember who, after Oliver, had appeared first, and in what order others had come, and couldn't. Certainly, she reflected, they were taking the whole thing rather lightly. If it wasn't one of themselves who had unlocked and relocked the door of Anne Giles's room within the last half hour, there had been a stranger prowling in the house. Oliver and Hammond did go off and make a cursory search of it, and of the grounds, and Eleanor went and questioned the maid, without result.

To Damien's distress the subject of the remodeling of the house was brought up. Jancy had told her mother. Damien needn't have felt sensitive about it. The idea didn't seem in the least repellent to any of them. Eleanor seemed to be thinking more of getting away from Arroways, getting South, and neither Oliver nor Jancy appeared to care. Twenty minutes later Damien was alone in the living-room on a sofa before the fire. Oliver and Linda had walked into town, and the others had vanished one by one. Oliver had assured her before he left that she needn't be afraid of running into anyone, all the doors were properly locked.

Damien put her head back and gazed into the flames, thinking of Bill Heyward and the scar on his forefinger

and the man he hadn't wanted her to see—and of his allegations about Oliver Mont—until the clock in the distant corner that had startled her the night before struck five. She sat up. She had meant to phone Jane hours ago, from town, but both booths in the stationery store had been occupied. Find Eleanor Mont and say she wanted to make a long-distance call. Again the thought, *After all, it's my house*—but the Monts were still here, and Arroways had been theirs for a long while. Odd that they showed no emotion about losing it, but then Maria Mont had had lots of other places that were now theirs.

When she got up she found to her surprise that she was a little unsteady on her feet. She crossed the room, opened the door. Eleanor Mont was standing in the middle of the hall reading a letter. She was in profile to Damien, her head bent. She read a few lines carelessly, went back and began to read again. As she read, the change in her was shocking. She lost height, dwindled. The hand holding the sheet of paper fell to her side. She stared fixedly at a stretch of wall. Then she threw her shoulders back and up, a woman dragging herself erect after a frightful blow, and started for the stairs, moving much as she had moved late Friday afternoon when she parted from Anne Giles in the guest house. Her eyes were round black disks in a face as white as the ball of paper in her clenched fingers. She didn't see Damien. She reached the stairs, clung to the newel post for a moment, then started to climb.

Her dragging footsteps slowly receded. It crystallized in Damien then, the conviction that there were odd things going on in the house, in Eleanor Mont, for which there was no adequate explanation. Were they connected with Anne Giles? Bill Heyward had said two camps, the Monts in one, Anne Giles in the other—but that was only while Maria Mont was alive—and Maria was dead. She neither liked nor disliked Oliver's mother, but there had been something touching in the tragic white mask of her face. The phone was in the library. Walking toward it Damien almost stepped on an empty envelope lying on the rug. She picked it up. It was addressed to Eleanor Mont, had

held the letter that had so shaken Eleanor. It was postmarked Paris and had come by air mail. The return address leaped at Damien in bold black letters from the upper left-hand corner. *J. Castle, 22 Rue de Tivoli, Paris, France.* Damien put the envelope on a Pembroke table under a mirror, went into the library, and put her call through.

Jane was glad to hear from her. She said that the new drug was working wonders, and that Martha, their cleaning woman, was a find. Jane evidently knew nothing of the murder in Eastwalk, which was a break. Damien said, "I won't tell you the news about Arroways until I get back, except that the house is tremendous." She'd probably be home on Wednesday. The office didn't matter, she had told Miss North she might be detained. Anyhow, she'd call Jane again before she left.

She was still a little dizzy. She was also grayly depressed, wanted to get away from the sight of the Monts, the sound of them. Upstairs in her room she got out of her dress, put on a robe and slippers, took an aspirin, and tried to read. Her head ached dully. After a while she dozed, woke to find Eleanor Mont on the threshold. "We wondered where you were," Eleanor said brightly. "We were worried about you. Wouldn't you like a cocktail before dinner?"

Damien wasn't the first nor would she be the last to marvel at the power and the strength of the human entity for dissimulation. Eleanor Mont looked perfectly normal. Damien confessed that she felt rather rocky, and Eleanor said kindly, "You see? You didn't get off as lightly as you thought. That ball dropping was enough to shock anyone. I would suggest bed. I'll have them send you up a tray."

It was Linda who brought the tray. Oliver had carried it as far as the door. By that time Damien's head was really aching. Listening to Linda's pretty voice urging her to eat, Damien saw the shadow in the younger girl. For all her bubble Linda wasn't as cheerful as she determinedly pretended. She said that Miss Stewart was going to stay

the night, the Black Horse was still full up. "Which means, Damien"—she tucked in a strand of soft hair—"that we can keep you for a few days." She went, and presently Damien was asleep.

The sound of church bells woke her at eight o'clock the next morning. Her head was clear. The sun was shining. In the first moments of waking she felt buoyant, light, until she thought of the same hour yesterday morning and what had happened when she opened her door. There was nothing of the kind that day. The house itself seemed to have put on a smiling air. The sunlight was coming through the hall windows, if only for a little way, and birds flew in and out among the scattered oak leaves blowing across the lawn. Roger Hammond was practicing putting shots beyond the driveway, in slacks and a dazzling yellow pullover.

Damien was hungry. The others had already breakfasted. In the dining-room she found Eleanor Mont lingering over a cup of coffee. They exchanged good mornings. Damien got toast and bacon from the buffet, and they talked idly for a moment or two about how good the sun felt, how Damien was. The older woman was restless, kept moving about in her chair, and yet she didn't get up and go. She was hovering on the brink of something. Finally it came.

"I'm glad to have a minute with you alone, Miss Carey," she said, playing with a fork. "I want to talk to you before you make definite plans."

"Yes?" Damien lit a cigarette, her curiosity aroused. Was Eleanor Mont going to discuss the question of furniture at last?

It was something entirely different. It was so different, so complete a reversal of what had gone before, that Damien made no attempt to conceal her surprise. What Eleanor Mont said was, "I'd like to buy Arroways from you, Miss Carey."

"Buy Arroways?"

"Yes."

"But I thought—at least I gathered that you were anx-

ious to get away from Eastwalk."

Eleanor nodded. "I do want to get away, for a short time—principally on Jancy's account; she needs a change. But, Miss Carey, this was my home for a good many years. I was married from this house. Oliver and Jancy were born here. I didn't think I'd mind leaving, but when it comes down to it," she smiled wintrily, "I find it a wrench. However, I wouldn't mind for myself. The person I do mind for is Jancy. If you'd agree to sell, I'd like to give Arroways to Jancy for a birthday present."

Damien was too astounded to speak. She simply stared at the other woman, and Eleanor went on, with a touch of feverishness that echoed itself in red patches on her cheekbones. "Jancy always loved Arroways. And, after all, the house can't be anything but an encumbrance to you. It's expensive to run, to keep up, and I imagine you'd have trouble with that remodeling project. Moreover, if the housing shortage should come to an end, you might take a big loss. If you'll agree to sell we won't have any trouble over price. Jancy's birthday is next Wednesday week. Why don't we settle it here and now, between ourselves? I don't mean formally. But if you say yes, you won't have any further worry or bother. The lawyers can take care of the details, and you can go back to New York as soon as you like."

Damien sat for a moment without speaking. Eleanor Mont was taking too much for granted. Her anger rose. *What was going on?* Yesterday this woman hadn't cared a snap of her fingers about the house. And now, twenty-four hours later, she was elaborately enamored of it. On the other hand, though, if she herself could get rid of Arroways at a profit, without further worry or trouble, it would be all to the good. *No,* she thought, stubbornly. *Not like this, in a terrific hurry.* She wasn't going to be rushed.

Eleanor saw her indecision and tried to clinch the matter. "I'd like to think that this was going to be Roger and Jancy's home, Miss Carey, that—" She paused. The dining-room door opened, and Jancy came in.

Jancy evidently hadn't slept well. She had her mother's bone structure, plus beauty, but her handsome face was haggard, and her mouth was set in hard lines. "Who was taking my name in vain?" she demanded, hands thrust into the pockets of her white cardigan.

Eleanor smiled at her daughter. "The hem of your skirt's coming down, Jancy."

Jancy ignored her skirt. "What were you saying about me?" she persisted, in a suspicious, almost sullen voice.

"Nothing," her mother told her. "It wasn't *about* you, it was *for* you. I was asking Miss Carey whether she'd let me buy Arroways from her, telling her that I was thinking of giving it to you for a birthday present."

Jancy's dark eyes had been fastened indifferently on the cloth. She raised them. They were blazing. Her wide scarlet mouth twisting itself into ugly lines, she turned with a violent movement and looked directly at her mother. "I hate this house, hate it," she cried in a loud furious voice. "The air in it is poisoned. It ought to be burned, razed to the ground. The very sight of it sickens me."

She stopped because breath failed her. Her nostrils were pinched. She looked as though she might be going to topple over. Damien was starkly amazed. Eleanor Mont was sitting erect, lips pressed tightly together. Her face was gray. She put down the cup she was holding. "Jancy," she said, "have you taken leave of your senses? Have you—"

Her eyes moved. The dining-room door was open. Jancy had left it open behind her. The town prosecutor and Oliver were coming in. Jancy went to one of the windows and lounged there looking out, her back turned. Mr. Luttrell said good morning, and Oliver said, "How are you, Miss Carey?" and Damien said, "Splendid, thanks," and then Luttrell said, turning to her, "I want to ask you a question or two, Miss Carey."

Damien looked up at him with surprise. "Me?"

"Yes."

He must have been told about the missing key to the blue room, she thought, about the wooden ball crashing

down and narrowly missing her. Now, perhaps, they would get somewhere, perhaps something would be resolved. If they could find out who had opened the door of Anne Giles's bedroom—and why. It wasn't that.

Looking at her steadily, Luttrell said, "Was Miss Giles a friend, an acquaintance of yours, Miss Carey? Did you know her before you came up here to Eastwalk? Did you know her in New York, in the past?"

"Certainly not," Damien answered coldly. "I never saw Anne Giles until she arrived here at Arroways on Friday afternoon."

"So? Odd, very odd." Luttrell studied Damien thoughtfully and at length. Then he told her. At his request the New York police had examined Anne Giles's apartment there. Among her papers they found Damien's name and present address and her unlisted telephone number, together with half a dozen newspaper clippings from the Middleboro *Journal* published in Middleboro where Damien had lived until after her father died. The clippings dealt with Damien's graduation from college, her father's death, various social items about them both.

Damien stared at Luttrell without seeing him. "I—don't understand it," she said wonderingly, in amazement. "I never even heard of Miss Giles before I came here to Eastwalk. She was a complete stranger to me. I never so much as—"

She stopped short. The dead woman's cousin, Miss Stewart, had come in unheard. From behind the prosecutor she was watching Damien with a queer, searching look.

Chapter Eight

A Scream in the Night

Struggling in the meshes of an invisible net, trying to straighten it out, free herself, Damien was oblivious of the others. Luttrell was not. The whole business was extremely peculiar. He had come to the house the day before simply in search of information about the murdered woman. The Monts were friends of Anne Giles's; she was an employee of Mont Fabrics. She was staying at their house, or had been staying there before she drove over to her closed and shuttered cottage late on a cold October night. He hadn't been at Arroways two minutes yesterday morning when he felt the tension. Nothing that had been so far uncovered accounted for it. He had found out from Ida Cambell next door that Jancy Hammond had arrived at the house a few minutes after Anne Giles got there.

Luttrell had gone to school with Jancy, knew all about her. She had been deeply attached to her father, Randall Mont, had unfortunately been on the scene when Mont's body was found. No wonder she'd gone into a tailspin afterward. He could understand the Monts' trying to conceal her presence in Eastwalk, her mother had taken her directly to the sanitarium when they arrived earlier in the week and didn't want to set tongues wagging. What he couldn't understand was the state of nerves they were in, Eleanor Mont, Jancy herself, Hiram St. George, and the ordinarily imperturbable Oliver.

Luttrell's position was a peculiar one. He had known these people all his life, knew things about them, the way they normally appeared, conducted themselves, that the police couldn't know—and he was troubled. The very mention of Anne Giles was an irritant. Why should the Monts care whether she had known the Carey girl or not? Eleanor Mont looked as though someone had hit her over the head with a club. Behind that control of his,

Oliver Mont was following every word with deadly concentration, as if his life depended upon it. Jancy kept her back obstinately turned, but she was listening intently. Luttrell gave himself a mental shake. Intangibles were all very well. What he was after, had to get, was evidence.

Queer about this Damien Carey who had appeared out of the blue. Had Silver at the bank checked on her to make sure she *was* the former Susan Mont's daughter, and Maria Mont's granddaughter? Was the girl telling the truth when she said she hadn't known Anne Giles? Maybe— It couldn't be proved or disproved there. At the end of another five minutes he left the house, and on the way into town he met Linda. He watched her coming toward him up the road, a blue beret on her golden head, her blue coat swinging. He had been more than half in love with Linda for as long as he could remember, had once had hopes. That was over now, but he could never see her without a flash of mingled pain and pleasure, before he reminded himself that that was all over, that she was going to marry Oliver Mont. He stopped the car and got out.

"Hi, Fred." Linda came to a smiling halt. Then she glanced up the hill at the roofs and chimneys of Arroways, and her smile vanished, and a frown put two lines on the smoothness of her white forehead between the mild arch of her brows. She looked suddenly tired. "What is it, Fred?" she asked. "There's nothing wrong at Arroways, nothing new, is there?"

Her second attempt at a smile wasn't a success. Luttrell said quietly, "Linda, where did you get that scratch on your hand?"

She raised her blue eyes to his, made them round. "Mrs. Cambell's cat."

"Don't," Luttrell said. "Mrs. Cambell's cat didn't scratch you. It's as mild as milk." Before she could speak he went on heavily, "Linda, the Giles woman was strangled. Someone pulled that silver necklace tight around her throat until she was dead. The necklace had serrated edges, cutting edges."

Horror! Linda stared at him, her breast rising and falling tumultuously. "Fred," she breathed, "you don't think that I—oh, Fred!"

"No," Luttrell said more gently, "but I want you to tell me where you got that scratch." And when she obstinately didn't speak, "Then I'll tell *you*. You had a struggle with someone. You didn't stay at Arroways the night before last because of Oliver Mont; you stayed there to be with Jancy Hammond, as you've done before. They had you playing nursemaid again. Jancy did the scratching when you had trouble with her, tried to restrain her. What time was it?"

Linda fought back angry tears. Luttrell longed to comfort her, put an arm around her, pull her head to his shoulder. She was a little dope. He didn't know why he'd asked her about Jancy. She wouldn't tell him anything that incriminated the other girl; they had always been close friends.

She said defiantly, "Jancy was with me until after two o'clock on the night Anne Giles was killed."

"That's fine," Luttrell said. "So you're not worried about Jancy? So who are you worrying about? Oliver Mont?"

He had touched her on the raw. "No, no, no," she flamed, stamping her foot.

What a bunch of firecrackers she was, going off with revealing explosions. He eyed her thoughtfully.

After a moment she went on in a softer voice. "I'm not worried about Oliver and Anne Giles, if that's what you mean, Fred. It's just that"— She looked away, suddenly woebegone behind a chin-up posture—"that dreadful woman's death has been a—blight. Everything's—different, not like it was. Oliver's got his business on his mind, and Eleanor has Jancy. Then this—" She raised gloved hands, let them fall.

Luttrell wasn't prepared to take her word for any of the Monts' guilt or innocence—not, at the moment, that they were actually involved. But Linda was being hurt. It angered him. He could sense the uncertainty, the strain in

her. She, too, felt the change in the occupants of Arroways, no doubt of it. He said curtly, "Well, better not do any more covering for the Monts, Linda. Remember that," and got into his car and stamped on the starter.

Driving off, he thought, *Damn Oliver Mont. He doesn't really love Linda. It was a family arrangement. He's more interested in one of those crates of his than in any woman. The engagement was all old Maria Mont's doing. Maria Mont*— The tangle Jancy was in was another piece of Maria's work. He set his teeth. The man the state police had their eye on, the man they were trying to find, was Mike Jones. Three years ago Mike and Jancy had been madly in love with each other, and Maria Mont had broken it up. Broken Mike Jones, too. Jones was an architect of ability and he had been getting along first rate when it happened. He hadn't been a bit of good since, and had scarcely done a stroke of work. He drank too much and neglected his business, what Maria Mont had left him of it, and on Saturday night he had been heard cursing Anne Giles out in the tavern on Main Street.

Luttrell braked for the crossroads, went past the bank. Anne Giles had been Maria's henchman, had kept her informed, carried out her instructions. It was no wonder that Jones hated her. Jones lived in rooms over the factory beside the bridge in town. He had lost his house when the bank foreclosed, people said at Maria Mont's urging. He wasn't in his rooms, or anywhere else around. The state troopers were looking for him. Luttrell turned heavily into the square and parked his car, wishing he were a hundred miles away. Maybe there'd be news of Mike Jones at the office.

Meanwhile at Arroways the day wore on wearily for Damien. What was one to do in a strange house filled with strange people on a Sunday, with nothing to fill the time but those constant inner questions? The town prosecutor's revelation continued to astound her. What possible reason could Anne Giles have had for collecting information about her? The Monts were as curious as she was. After that scene in the dining-room they had tried to in-

terrogate her at various times, Eleanor Mont quietly, Oliver laconically, and Roger Hammond with persistence. She gave the same answer to them as she had given to Luttrell. "I don't know. I'm as amazed as you are."

From what Bill Heyward had told her, her grandmother had used the dead woman as an information bureau. Anne Giles might have been keeping an eye on her for Maria. To what end? She thought again of that strange summons to the Mont apartment in New York on the afternoon of the day her grandmother died, and wondered once more why Maria had sent for her. She would never know now.

There was a peculiarly dead quality to the dull day. Eleanor Mont and Oliver went over to the St. Georges' for lunch, and Damien ate cold chicken and salad with Roger Hammond and Jancy and the nurse. Why had Miss Stewart looked at her like that when Luttrell mentioned the information about her found in Anne Giles's apartment? Or was it something else? Did the woman actually think that she had attempted to cut off her grandmother's supply of oxygen when she had wandered into Maria's room by mistake more than six months ago? Staring at her across the table, at her common-sense unrevealing face, her scrubbed, capable nurse's hands manipulating knife and fork, Damien couldn't believe it. Yet there had been that look—

Jancy had recovered from her outburst of the morning. Jancy was another enigma. Why did she hate the house so much—with a hatred that had the same quality in it that her hatred of Anne Giles had? It was white-hot, searing. Between outbursts, indifference to everything clothed her, an indifference that apparently included her husband, who palpably and rather pathetically adored her. Did she love him, did she even like him? If not, why had she married him? When they left the table Hammond proposed that he and Jancy take Damien to see Hun's Lake where they swam in summer, and she said drawlingly, "I don't know about Miss Carey, darling, but I'm not in the mood for sight-seeing, myself. I'm going over to see Linda."

Damien thanked Roger Hammond and declined. Later on in her room upstairs she was struck by a sudden thought. Jane had lived with them, with her father and herself, for more than fifteen years. She knew things about people, who was whose cousin, and who had married whom, and how many children people had, and she had a phenomenal memory for faces. Perhaps Anne Giles had been one of her father's students at Middleboro, Damien reflected, or had lived in Middleboro. She wasn't more than thirty or thirty-one, and her father had taught there for almost two decades before he died. Anyhow, call Jane. But not from here.

She put on her hat and coat and left the house, as usual with a feeling of release, as though a great iron box had snapped open. It was cold and gray out, and the color had been sucked from the landscape. Leaves scurried and ran under the lash of a whipping wind. Crows called distantly, and tree branches creaked overhead.

Damien had gone only a few hundred yards from the gates when she heard a car coming along behind her. She stepped off the road and half turned, and the house was there, towering and massive and closer than she had thought, as though it didn't want to let her go, had moved up on her imperceptibly. Oliver Mont was in the approaching car.

"Out for a walk?" he asked, pulling up, "or can I take you somewhere?" He had no hat on. Above the turned-up coat collar his sharply-angled face was tight, absent, and his enigmatic eyes, veiled by the blond lashes, gazed at her with a perpetual question in them.

Because Damien felt curiously shy with him, awkward, ill at ease, because she wanted to say no, felt, without analysis, that she ought to say no, she said yes and got in. At once she was almost painfully conscious of him beside her, of his high fair head, of his elbow brushing hers. She plunged into talk of his air line. After a quick sideways glance that had a flicker of irony in it, he explained how it had begun, saying that he had been interested in flying since he was a kid. Suddenly, with no change in his sure,

pleasant voice, he said, "You're positive that you never saw Anne Giles before you came up here, never heard of her?"

"Never," Damien said. All at once it occurred to her that that wasn't the strict truth. She added, "Unless Miss Giles was the woman with you in the Mont apartment in New York on the afternoon of the day my grandmother died."

"You in Maria's apartment!" Oliver's hands tightened on the wheel. There was immense surprise in him.

"Yes." Damien gazed at a grassy hillside. "Someone, some man, telephoned asking me to go there to see my grandmother."

"You don't know who it was?"

"No, I didn't take the call." She told him briefly what had happened.

When she had finished he said slowly, "So you have no idea why Maria sent for you?"

His catechizing was becoming monotonous, and he hadn't replied to her original question. She let it go. They were nearing the village. Houses were beginning to appear, and the spire of a church rose beyond clumped elms. Damien asked Oliver to drop her at the drugstore, and he said yes vaguely, and pulled into the curb beyond the bridge. She thanked him and got out.

In the drugstore she got change and put through the call to Jane. But Jane wasn't any help. "Anne Giles? No, Damien, I never heard of an Anne Giles. Why?"

Jane was a sick woman and not to be uselessly bothered. Damien said, "Oh, something came up. It's not important."

When she left the drugstore, Oliver's Cadillac was still parked at the curb. He was standing beside it smoking a cigarette. Someone said, "Damien," and she turned her head. It was Bill Heyward. Bill greeted them both amiably. "Hello, Oliver. How are you, Damien?" There was nothing left of his mood of the day before. Bill was his usual unruffled, pleasant self. Damien had been furious with him yesterday for what he had said, but her anger had died away. After all, Bill was a good friend and if he

had lost his head for a moment he didn't often do it.

He said he had been up at Arroways looking for her. His aunt was anxious to see her. "Frances is all stirred up about that remodeling idea, she's had half a dozen people on the phone. My car's parked around the corner."

"Sorry, Bill, but Miss Carey's having a drink with me at the Black Horse." Oliver snapped his cigarette into the gutter, put a hand on Damien's elbow.

Damien glanced from one man to the other through her lashes. Bill was angry, Oliver coolly determined. She was annoyed at finding herself a bone of contention. Bill had no claim on her—but in view of his allegations about Oliver Mont, there was no percentage in adding fuel to the flame of a situation that didn't exist. She detached herself gently from Oliver's touch. "Sorry," she said, smiling at him, "let's have that drink some other time, shall we?" and moved off with Bill.

When they were alone together in the car Bill apologized for his conduct of the day before. "I'm sorry, Damien. I didn't mean it. I don't know what got into me." She laughed at his expression, said, "Forget it, Bill," and he relaxed and asked whether there was anything new, whether she had been able to find out what time Roger Hammond got to Arroways on Friday night.

Damien said no. It was scarcely a question she could put. Before she could tell him about the missing key to the room Anne Giles had occupied, or her own near accident, or about the material Anne Giles had accumulated concerning her, they were at Miss Kendleton's.

Damien was glad to get into the house. The air had a real bite to it, and she was chilled. The chill had nothing to do with Oliver Mont's withdrawn expression when she left him in front of the drugstore. If he chose to be put out because she had come with Bill instead of accepting his suddenly proffered invitation, that was his privilege, but certainly she was under no obligation to keep him in a good humor. Taking off her coat and sitting down before the living-room fire, Damien listened absently to Frances Kendleton describe a friend's experience with a

finance corporation and the arrangements the friend had made with a local carpenter. It was all quite simple and easy.

Bill was holding a match to Damien's cigarette. When she had a light, she said hesitantly, "I don't know, now, I'm not so sure now about what I'll do, haven't made up my mind to anything definite. You see—Mrs. Mont wants to buy Arroways."

Bill stared intently, his brown eyes alert. "When did that come up? What—" He paused.

The knocker on the front door rose and fell sharply. Frances Kendleton opened the door, and Luttrell and a state policeman walked in.

Damien's heart missed a beat, went on pounding. She could feel the blood draining out of her face. The scar on Bill's forefinger! In spite of his denial, was Bill the man who had followed Anne Giles into her cottage on Friday night? Had Luttrell and the policeman come to tax him with having been there, perhaps to arrest him?

Frances Kendleton, surprised, said, "Yes, Mr. Luttrell? What can I do for you?" And Luttrell said, his face and voice expressionless, "I want to talk to you, or rather to Mr. Heyward."

There was a roaring in Damien's ears. She glanced quickly at Bill's hand, but the tip of his right forefinger wasn't visible. The door was closed. The door of a trap? She held herself tightly, staring into the flames, and waited for the onslaught. When it came it took an odd shape.

Bill stood waiting easily, his hand palm down along the mantel, his other hand holding a cigarette. Luttrell faced him across the hearth, waving aside the chair Miss Kendleton indicated. Luttrell said, "Mr. Heyward, you're a close friend of Mike Jones's, about the closest friend Jones has. We know that Mike Jones was at the Giles cottage on the night Anne Giles was killed. Jones took Joe Lawrence's rowboat and rowed himself over there. He left his footprints in the mud on the bank at the foot of the lawn. We found the muddy shoes he had on, in his rooms over the factory. We didn't find Mike Jones. Where

is he, Mr. Heyward?"

Bill returned Luttrell's fixed glance with equal steadiness. He was neither angry nor frightened. "Going a bit fast, aren't you, Luttrell? In the first place, I don't know where Mike is."

"No?" Luttrell said. "I think you do. You and Jones were seen in your car last night, driving out of town at around eight o'clock."

Heyward said gently, "I deny that. Now let me ask you a question. Anne Giles was killed at between eleven p.m. on Friday night and one a.m. Saturday morning—right?" And when Luttrell nodded, he went on in the same unhurried tone, "Then you're way off base—in fact, you're wasting your time. Mike Jones was here in this house with me from a little after half past ten on Friday night until almost two a.m. on Saturday morning. If you want corroboration"—he turned—"you tell them, Frances."

Damien looked at Bill's aunt. Frances Kendleton was square and honest and truthful. She had already said, had said to her, Damien, yesterday afternoon that she and Bill were both in bed by eleven o'clock on Friday night. What was she going to say now? She had picked up her knitting. She dropped it into her lap and looked at the prosecutor over it.

"Bill's right about the time, Mr. Luttrell," she said. "Mike was here Friday night. I finally chased him home when I looked at the clock and saw the hour it was, but not in time to save the last of my bottle of liqueur Scotch."

It was late, for Eastwalk, when Damien got back to Arroways that evening—well past ten. If Bill had asked her to marry him then, when he helped her out of the car and they stood together on the dark driveway in front of the towering and all but invisible ivy-hung walls, she might have said yes. She had been deeply moved by what he and his aunt had told her after Luttrell's discomfited departure with his policeman in tow. As to whether Bill had been wise or not was another question. But wisdom of that sort, cool, calculating, self-seeking wisdom, was not an attractive

quality. Frances Kendleton had enlarged and explained Bill's bald narrative, filling in the chinks and crannies.

He and Mike Jones, the man the police were looking for, had been friends since they were boys. They had been through the war in the same outfit, and Mike had saved Bill's life in Sicily. The bond between them was strong. Mike Jones had seen Anne Giles arrive in Eastwalk on Friday afternoon. He knew that Jancy was already there, knew she was at the sanitarium. "It broke him up," Bill said. Mike blamed everything that had happened on Anne Giles. Rightly. At any rate, Mike had started talking about the Giles woman in no uncertain terms that evening in the Main Street tavern. He was a dangerous man when he was angry, and his temper was steadily mounting. Bill had been afraid of what he might do—and Mike finally did it. Late that night he eluded Bill and made for Anne Giles's cottage, he didn't know she was staying at the Monts', thought she was there. Bill had been in time to see him take Lawrence's rowboat but not in time to stop him.

Bill had admitted that the fingerprints on Anne Giles's doorknob were his. "Yes," he said. "I was at her place Friday night." Because of the boat Mike had rowed off in, he knew where Mike was making for. Bill had gotten his car from the town lot on the far side of the bridge and had driven over to the cottage. There couldn't, he said, have been more than five minutes between the time Mike got there and the time he caught up with him, to see Mike crashing away through the bushes in the direction of the river. The lights were on inside the house. Bill rapped. When there was no answer he opened the door. Anne Giles was lying on the floor in front of the hearth. She was dead. But, Bill said, she had been dead for some time. He had touched her hand and she was stone-cold. He had seen plenty of dead people in Italy. "Mike and I didn't get to the cottage until about a quarter past one. I'd say she'd been dead a good hour, at the least. So Mike couldn't have killed her." He insisted on that.

It was Mike Jones who had come to the Kendleton

house when Damien was there the afternoon before. Bill said that Mike had no more idea of self-preservation than a week-old baby, and was a perfect suspect for the police. The only thing to do, and Bill had done it, was to get him out of circulation for a while, until the police cooled off, until they found the real killer.

Damien looked up at Bill in the all but complete darkness in front of the big house. The reserve had gone from between them. What had happened explained a lot of things, among them, Bill's dislike of Maria Mont, who had broken up what apparently could have been a happy marriage between Jancy and his friend, and his open detestation of Anne Giles who had been Maria's staff sergeant. "You won't," he said pleadingly, "tell anyone what I've told you, Damien? It would be as good as the chair for Mike."

He was completely wrapped up in thoughts of his friend. Damien put her hands on the shoulders of his camel's-hair coat, a coat that wasn't in its first youth. "I won't, Bill. I promise you."

Bill started to speak, and stopped. Light suddenly engulfed them both, a long bright shaft of it. The front door had opened. Oliver Mont stood looking out at them. Damien dropped her hands and stepped back. She said good night to Bill, and Bill drove off, and she went into the house. In the hall, his eyes going probingly over her face, Oliver asked whether she wouldn't come into the living-room and have a highball, he was just fixing one for himself. But Damien, anxious to get out from under that singularly penetrating gaze, said no and went directly upstairs.

As she went she wondered what there was about Oliver Mont that had such an effect on people. What was the power he wielded? He wasn't self-assertive, didactic. But there was an obscure force in him, an inner decisiveness, vitality, that drew you under his influence, against your will.

She didn't feel sleepy. She undressed, put on a robe and slippers, and went to the window and leaned there look-

ing out. The night was very black. There were no stars. The wind had switched, was blowing from the northeast. It wailed around the house like ten banshees in full chorus. Arroways was on a high ridge. A breeze in the valley below was a gale here. Darkness outside the big dark house, darkness within, darkness and stillness and closed doors— What secrets was the house hiding, what traps was it setting, persistently, clumsily, with an inexorable and concealed purpose? Should she take Eleanor Mont's offer and get rid of it, throw off the great octopus winding thick tentacles around her? All at once the tentacles closed, and she was caught. Above the shriek of the wind glass crashed resoundingly, and then someone screamed.

Chapter Nine

Blue Room Mystery

The scream had come from far away. It died. So did the sound of breaking glass. It was almost a full minute before Damien stopped shaking and was able to move. Where had the dreadful sounds come from? What, she thought with sick weariness, had happened now? She pulled her door open and ran out into the hall. Instead of the single lamp that had been on when she came upstairs the lights were all lit and the others were there, in a huddle near the top of the staircase. White faces, staring eyes blank above robes thrown hastily on; it was getting to be a familiar pattern. Eleanor Mont was holding onto the newel post. Oliver was beside her. Roger Hammond struggled into an elaborate brocaded robe. Below its folds his bare feet and spindly shanks looked faintly shocking, a blot on the physical perfection he presented when fully dressed. Jancy was a little apart, her stance careless, as though the wild alarm of the others left her untouched.

A confusion of tongues in conflict. No one seemed to know what had happened. At least they were all present. The nurse was the last to appear. Her robe was a modest dark-blue flannel. She had taken time to button all eight buttons and pull dark-blue felt boots neatly up around her ankles, so that the cuffs were straight, unwrinkled. Damien madly expected to see a white cap perched on her thick red hair and a thermometer in her fingers.

Oliver was talking. "I'll go and see. That glass broke somewhere on this floor, at the back. You people stay here."

But Eleanor Mont wouldn't. "There may be someone—" Her lips shook, and she caught at his arm.

He said gently, "We've got to look, Mother."

They did it in a body, following Oliver like a huddle.

of sheep. The search didn't take long. Ahead, Oliver threw the door of the blue room open, the room Anne Giles had occupied for so little time. The explanation was there. There was a moment of dead silence. In the middle of it Roger Hammond hiccuped. Oliver said, "Well, well —the return of the native." Damien looked past the nurse's shoulder.

The blue room was in wild disorder. The bureau stood away from the wall, the drawers pulled out. One of the silver candlesticks on top of it had fallen, knocking over the box of powder and spilling it to the floor. The closet door yawned. Anne Giles's bags had been removed from the closet and were lying on the bed, the contents tossed every which way. Underthings and a rose-colored chiffon-velvet negligee she had never had a chance to wear, a sleek black broadcloth skirt in a heap, a white gilet under it. Papers from the slashed brief case, the locked zipper still held, lay in disordered sheaves. The big palladium window in the west wall was partially open. Most of the great sheet of glass was gone. Jagged edges framed the night outside. Wind rushed through the gaping hole.

They all started for the window with Oliver in the lead. Damien wanted to cry out, stop them. They were walking through the spilled powder and there were marks on it, marks that were instantly obliterated. Peering out into the blackness, Oliver called back in a voice that had something queer in it, "A *ladder!* The ladder's down there!" He pulled back into the room, charged through them and down the stairs.

For some reason or other, Eleanor Mont's extreme nervousness had left her. She took command with quiet capability. "Never mind now, Roger," she told her son-in-law who was pouring forth outraged questions. "Someone broke in, and the ladder fell. I'll lock this room, leave it for the police. Go down and build a fire in the library, dear—I think we could all do with a hot drink."

They straggled back untidily into the main hall where Jancy said, "If you'll excuse me, Mother, I'm going to bed." She strolled off, lighting a cigarette. Cool, Damien

thought. She, too, like the nurse, had taken time, after the uproar, time to arm herself with cigarettes and matches.

Oliver came back from his search empty-handed. There was no sign of the thief outside. He rang the town police. Before they came Damien went to bed.

At ten o'clock on the following morning Luttrell stood on the library hearth at Arroways listening to Sergeant Tobey, ranking officer of Eastwalk's five-man police force. Tobey had come out to the Mont house last night in response to Oliver Mont's call. There was no doubt that someone had broken into the dead woman's room the night before, entering it by means of a ladder. The ladder wasn't heavy. The thief had carried it from the pear tree beyond the stables, against which it was propped, to the wall outside the blue room. There was no telling what the thief had gotten away with. Neither Miss Stewart nor Eleanor Mont knew what Anne Giles's rifled bags had originally contained. The nurse hadn't been able to open them. The keys, in all probability, were in Anne Giles's missing purse. It must have been something of intrinsic value or something the thief badly wanted. Both brief case and bag had been slashed with a razor blade or a very sharp knife.

The only fingerprints in the room were those of Anne Giles, Mrs. Mont, and the maid. The powder-sprinkled floor had been all messed up by the Monts themselves. There were no marks on the ground underneath the window except for broken bushes into which the ladder had fallen. It was scarcely likely that the thief was on the ladder when it blew down, smashing the window as it went. His weight would have kept it anchored. None of the people in the house had been in that wing during the evening, none of them had heard anything suspicious, so that it was impossible to tell what time the robbery had actually taken place.

Luttrell rocked back and forth on the balls of his feet. "And you say an attempt was made, let's see, on Saturday afternoon, to unlock the door of the blue room from in-

side the house, that a key was stolen from the keyboard in the basement? And is still missing?"

"That's right," Tobey said. "Oliver Mont told me about it, and I talked to Miss Carey, too. She was up there in the vicinity of that particular room Saturday afternoon and she evidently scared off the thief. The key was in the lock when she ran to get someone, but by the time she got hold of the others the door had been relocked, and the key was gone."

"Why didn't the Monts report it at the time?"

Tobey shrugged. "I don't know. Guess they didn't think it was too important. What do you make of this, Mr. Luttrell? How does it tie in with the murder?" He looked hopefully at the prosecutor.

Luttrell remained silent, gazing absently at the portrait of Maria Mont over the mantel. Anne Giles. Anne Giles had been in Eastwalk on the night Randall Mont's car crashed into the ravine. His eyes were thoughtful. There was a tap on the window. It was Officer Hanson. Hanson beckoned, and Luttrell and Tobey joined him outside.

"Find something?" Tobey said, and Hanson nodded. "Come over here." He led them past the gardens in which a few chrysanthemums still bloomed, past the tennis court, to a big oak on its southeastern rim. Rounding the immense trunk, Hanson pointed down.

A dozen cigarette butts and burned matches littered the ground behind the tree. The turf was cropped short. Luttrell and Tobey studied the down-bent blades of dry grass. Tobey said, "Someone stood here last night for quite a while casing the house, watching the lights, looking for a chance to get in. Yes." Luttrell picked up one of the cigarette stubs. It was a brand smoked by hundreds of thousands of people. Hanson began gathering the rest of the stubs and the matches, and Luttrell and the sergeant walked back toward the house.

The town prosecutor was unusually silent. He paused in the shadow of the high terrace wall. "Whoever broke into Anne Giles's room last night had to know what room her things were in."

"I asked Mrs. Mont about that," Tobey said. "When old lady Mont was alive and Miss Giles stayed here at Arroways, when she didn't go to her cottage, she generally had that blue room."

"So that it could have been a matter of common knowledge." Tobey nodded, and Luttrell went on. "And when Maria Mont was alive, before she discovered what was going on between Jancy Mont and Mike Jones, Jones was in the house a lot, knew his way around." Luttrell straightened suddenly, his face hard. "Come on, Sergeant. I'm going over to talk to Bill Heyward. Heyward is hiding Mike Jones, or he knows where Jones is—and Heyward's going to tell me or he's going to jail."

On the terrace above, leaning against the cold stones —how cold the day was, how cold everything—Damien listened to the two men walk briskly away. *Warn Bill,* she thought, although she didn't know what particular good it was going to do. She crossed the terrace and opened the door, went past the powder room and the pinball machine, toward the hall, her mind heavy with scraps and tatters of knowledge that added up to nothing recognizable, Eleanor Mont's lightning change of heart about the house, Jancy's hatred of it, Oliver's surprise that a ladder had been used to gain entrance to the room Anne Giles had occupied when, with the doors locked, there was no other way for a thief to get in, the letter postmarked Paris that had been such a blow to Eleanor Mont.

What was in the letter? Who was J. Castle? Castle, Castle— Didn't the name rouse an echo? Hadn't she heard it somewhere? Never mind that. She thought instead of Bill Heyward—and Mike Jones, whom Maria had crushed, driving the tractor of her wicked will over and through other people's lives. Bill had intended to go back to New York last night, was staying in Eastwalk only to help his friend. Bill would go to jail, Luttrell had said so. It might mean his whole future now that things were looking up for him, with this new process of his—

Opening the door at the end of the little corridor she went into the main hall. It was warm and dim and vast.

She stood still with the knob in her hand, a large filigreed knob. Handsome. The road to the library was blocked. She was in one of the cross arms of the T, couldn't see around the turn. There were people between herself and the library. Oliver was there, for one, and a strange man.

Oliver was saying ". . . knock me over with a feather. But I'm glad to see you, Castle. We thought you were thousands of miles away."

"I was," the stranger said genially. "I flew over from Paris. Got in yesterday."

Damien stared fixedly at the denuded newel post. Oliver had had all the wooden balls removed as unsafe. Castle. The man who had just arrived was the J. Castle whose letter postmarked Paris had stunned Eleanor Mont.

Mr. Castle said, "I'm anxious to see Eleanor, Oliver—and Damien Carey. I've always felt a little guilty about that girl."

Guilty about her? *Guilty?* Damien moved. She took her hand from the doorknob and walked slowly forward to meet the man whose news, not from across the sea but out of an excellent memory, was to supply the answer to why she had been summoned to her grandmother's apartment on that day more than six months ago, news that was ultimately to resolve not only the smaller dissonances, but the reason why Anne Giles had been ruthlessly killed —and by whom.

Chapter Ten

A New Motive for Murder

"So you're Damien Carey."

Jerome Castle shook hands warmly with Damien. He was a slight man in his early sixties with a vigorous hawk-nosed face and receding grizzled hair.

"You're rather like your mother." He studied her with a pair of shrewd dark eyes. "I knew Susan when she was younger than you are now. The last time I saw you you were being spoon-fed in a high chair and you had a handsome green beard. Spinach. Tell me, I've always been curious, did you ever get to like it?"

Damien placed Jerome Castle then. She had heard her father speak of him. He was an anthropologist of note who had done something remarkable, discovered some famous bones or fossils or something. He had been fond of her mother, was apparently the only former friend who had ignored Maria's ban and kept up a relationship with the guilty pair.

Damien answered as lightly as she could. It was too late to call Bill. Luttrell had probably already arrived at the Kendleton house. Why did Mr. Castle feel guilty about her? What had he meant by that? He was asking questions, where she lived, what she did, how Jane was, as they followed Oliver into the living-room.

Oliver had sent the maid for his mother. Eleanor Mont came down almost at once. She went to Mr. Castle, her hands out. "*Jerome, dear*—what good wind blows you to Eastwalk? It's wonderful to see you—wonderful. Oliver, call Hi and tell him; he'll be delighted."

She looked younger, brighter, a tall, plain woman with charm and dignity and presence and an underlying force behind her quietude. No one could ever make Eleanor

Mont do anything she didn't feel like. She was her own udge and jury. Watching, Damien saw that she was very ond of Jerome Castle. Then why had his letter been such blow?

Mr. Castle spoke of it immediately. "You got my letter, Eleanor?"

Eleanor Mont was seating herself on a sofa at right angles to the hearth, tucking in her skirts, putting a cushion at her back as though she were cold. She looked up at Castle, standing on the hearth, her brows raised. "Letter, Jerome? I thought you never wrote letters. No, I had no letter from you."

Face, voice, manner were perfect. And yet it was a lie out of the whole cloth. "I must," Mr. Castle said, erroneously, "have beaten it over. I wrote you because last week at the Louvre I got to thinking about this young woman here," he patted Damien's arm, smiled down at her. "There was a portrait there, I forget whose it was, that reminded me of Susan. Anyhow, I got to thinking about this child, Eleanor, and about Maria—" He went into it then in detail.

Castle was a very old friend of Maria's, and she had sent for him on the afternoon of the day she died. "I tried to soften her up before, you know." He shook his head. "No good. But then, near the end, she saw the light. Only a very little bit of it, I'm afraid—but something. My dear," he looked at Damien, "I'm glad she wanted you to have her rings."

Jerome Castle spoke gently. For all that the impact of what he had said was tremendous. The air in the room seemed to vibrate. Damien was aware of Oliver at the end of the sofa, of the start he gave, slight and instantly suppressed, of Eleanor Mont's openly astounded gaze.

"Rings?" Damien said blankly.

Castle stared. "Yes, of course. Maria's rings." He frowned. "You did get them?"

"I don't— No, I didn't get any rings of my grandmother's."

Castle was thunderstruck. "But—good heavens—I don't

Oliver said, "No, Mother. The rings were not on Father —or in the car."

"Wait a minute," Castle interposed. "Maria might have been mistaken, might have thought she had left the rings up here at Arroways, while all the time they might have been in one of her safe-deposit boxes, or somewhere in the New York apartment. Grey will know."

Simeon Grey was the lawyer who had taken charge of Maria's affairs, settled her estate. Oliver went to call Grey.

Eleanor Mont rose and began to walk restlessly up and down the floor. "It's my fault, in a way, for not checking. If only I'd been on my feet, if only I hadn't been ill—"

Jerome Castle was deeply troubled by the turn events had taken. He said, rousing himself, "Nonsense, Eleanor, Grey has the rings, you can depend upon it."

He was wrong. Oliver came back. The rings weren't in any of Maria's safe-deposit boxes, they were not in the New York apartment, they were not at Arroways. All Maria's personal property had been carefully assembled and appraised for tax purposes shortly after her death. Simeon Grey said very positively that the rings had never come under his hands. They were definitely not among Maria's effects.

The rings left to Damien by her grandmother had vanished. The conclusion was obvious. Randall Mont must have had the rings with him when he left Arroways at shortly after midnight on April the second. He had come up to get the rings at Maria's request, would have been scrupulous about carrying out her wishes, in spite of the fact that she was dead—and over and above that he wasn't the sort of man who would have left valuable property in an empty house. Death had overtaken him when he was less than a mile from Arroways. His body hadn't been found until almost eight o'clock in the morning. During that interval, while he had lain dead in the smashed car at the bottom of the ravine, someone had removed the rich cargo he carried.

It was Jerome Castle who pointed this out. Eleanor Mont

agreed. "That's what must have happened. Yes." Oliver was thoughtful.

Castle said, "We'd better get the police," and Oliver nodded and returned to the phone.

The police came. Oliver and Jerome Castle gave them the facts. Eleanor Mont described the missing rings as well as she could, a square emerald of about five karats, flawed, a large oval ruby set in heavy red gold, diamonds, sapphires— There were about ten rings in all. They were valuable, but not as valuable as Maria had considered them, because of flaws and, in some cases, bad color. They were worth, she thought, approximately twenty-five to thirty thousand dollars.

Such a sum might be inconsiderable to the Monts, Damien reflected wryly, it was a fortune to her. Was? Would have been. The rings had been stolen in early April, and this was October. If their loss had been discovered at the time there might have been a chance of recovering them. But not now.

Luttrell arrived. Damien eyed him apprehensively. He said nothing about Bill. The missing rings appeared to engross him. He gave them a new twist. He remarked thoughtfully that Anne Giles had been in Eastwalk on the night Randall Mont died, and proceeded to elaborate on it. Six months later Anne Giles had been murdered. It was the search of her room at Arroways, the savage slashing open of her locked bags, that was suggestive, to Luttrell. Randall Mont had come up to Arroways for Maria Mont's rings, had started back with them to New York—according to the lawyer they were not in the house later on. Mr. Mont most emphatically didn't have them when he was found. They were neither on his person nor in the car. Anne Giles, who had been in Eastwalk on the night he died, had in her possession something of considerable value, for which her murderer was looking—

Jancy Hammond's response to Luttrell's groping was curious. By that time the others had all been informed of what had happened. Hiram St. George and Linda had come over, and Roger Hammond was there, neat and

handsome and frowningly intent. Jancy strolled into the living-room while Luttrell was talking. She listened, freezing. The maid had just brought in sherry. When Luttrell finished, without a word and with a face as blank as though she were asleep, she crossed to the tray, picked up the decanter, and emptied three glasses of sherry in quick succession. An agonized glance from Eleanor Mont; it was Linda who acted. Smiling, pleasant, she took the decanter from Jancy. "Don't be a pig, Jancy, darling. Leave some for us."

Damien went on thinking her own thoughts. The letter Jerome Castle had written to Eleanor Mont was about the rings, he had said so. Had there been anything else in the letter? If not, and apparently there wasn't, why had Eleanor Mont been so overcome at hearing that Maria had left her rings to her granddaughter? It wasn't greed. Eleanor Mont wasn't a greedy woman, or at least didn't appear to be. Was there a mystery attached to the missing rings, some secret meaning? There was no doubt that over and above their loss, their disappearance was a subject of general and deep concern, not only to Eleanor Mont but to Jancy and Oliver and Roger Hammond and Hiram St. George.

After a while the state troopers went. Luttrell was on the point of going. He had glanced several times at his watch, when an unexpected visitor appeared, a large handsome woman with a lot of white hair like a wig. It was the Monts' neighbor, Mrs. Cambell.

Mrs. Cambell was one of the people who had established the time of Randall Mont's departure for New York on the night he died. Luttrell requestioned her about that evening more than six months ago. Mr. Mont had arrived at Arroways at around six, had left the house at between half past twelve and a quarter of one? Yes; now during the evening, had Mrs. Cambell noticed whether Mr. Mont had had any visitors?

The question startled Mrs. Cambell. She flushed, blinked several times, and stood turning her head uneasily from side to side without looking at anyone. They

were all staring at her. There was a held-breath atmosphere in the room.

Ida Cambell moistened her lips. She was upset, embarrassed.

"I didn't want to— I don't think it meant anything. But, well—"

Anne Giles had not only been in Eastwalk on the night Randall Mont died, she had been at Arroways early that same evening. She had walked up the driveway some five or ten minutes after Randall Mont reached the house.

Silence. It was broken by a cry from Jancy. She jumped up, knocking over a small table as she did so, and rushed out of the room. Continued silence from the others; an odd persistent silence that Jancy's eruption didn't touch. Damien gazed at waxed floor boards beyond the edge of a creamy rug. Fissures, crevices, opened up in the icy air. According to Bill there had been gossip about Randall Mont, that he liked a good time, got around. Bill had said that it didn't amount to anything, that he was a handsome fellow and convivial by nature, that that was all there was to it. Could Bill have been wrong?

Luttrell said expressionlessly, "You say, Mrs. Cambell, that Miss Giles got here at shortly after six that night? At what time did she leave?"

But Mrs. Cambell was through. "I don't know. I didn't see her go. She was still here when I left for the PTA supper at six-fifteen. But she wasn't here when I got back. Mr. Mont was alone. I could see him moving about in the library, and he was alone when he left the house at a little after half past twelve that night."

The avalanche then, sweeping away preconceived and fallacious ideas. Anne Giles had been at Arroways while Randall Mont was alive and could have been aware of his errand, what he came for. The rings had disappeared from Randall Mont's body, which had lain for more than seven hours at the bottom of the ravine down the road. It was the road that Anne Giles had to travel to get back to the turnpike that led to the parkway and New York, which was what she had done, very early the following morning.

Anne Giles was a woman who liked money, needed it. Over and above their intrinsic value the rings could have attracted her. She had a taste for magnificence. Seven months later, after Randall Mont's death, when the Mont estate had been settled, when no questions had arisen about the rings, no suspicion as to their loss aroused, Anne Giles had been killed. From the evidence, her killer hadn't found what he sought in the cottage on the river. The room Anne Giles had occupied at Arroways had been broken into later and her bags ransacked. A man had telephoned to Anne Giles at around ten o'clock on the night she died. She had left the house at a little after half past twelve that same night and had gone over to her cottage. The only theory that fitted all the facts was that the man who telephoned to her had seen her take the rings from Randall Mont's body, had bided his time, and had then pounced. Anne Giles had refused to deal, and she had been killed.

Mike Jones, the man the police were hunting, sprang to the eye. Jones was in poor circumstances, needed money. He was well enough acquainted with Arroways to have managed to get hold of the key to the blue room from the keyboard in the basement, and when he was foiled in that first attempt to enter the blue room from inside the house in order to search for the rings, he had entered the room from outside by means of the ladder.

Mike Jones might leap to the eye; it wasn't Mike Jones who had telephoned to Anne Giles on Friday night. A strange man appeared suddenly in the living-room doorway, a tall man, dark, authoritative, quiet, powerful, a personage. There was no doubt of that from the beginning. Luttrell introduced him. The stranger was Inspector Christopher McKee of the Manhattan Homicide Squad, and he had been working on Anne Giles's murder from the New York end. The Inspector had come straight from the state barracks where the news had just come in. He told them.

A deep shiver went through Damien as the New York Inspector began to speak. Listening to his deep, almost

ndifferent voice, to what he said, she thought wildly, *Lies, ll lies, and I believed—*

The man who had called Anne Giles to the phone here t Arroways at ten o'clock on the night she died was Bill Heyward.

Chapter Eleven

The Stopped Clock

It was just one o'clock when Inspector McKee and Luttrell left Arroways. After that they went to the Kendleton house in the village to see Bill Heyward, who hadn't been in when Luttrell tried to get hold of him earlier. At three o'clock the two officials settled down in the town prosecutor's office over the plumbing shop on Main Street to talk.

Luttrell was not only a distant connection of the Inspector's, they were friends of long standing. Over the phone that morning he had said to the Scotsman, apropos of the discovery that Maria Mont's rings were missing, that they had been stolen from Randall Mont's dead body, or from the car in which he had crashed, "This is it, McKee. I felt that something was wrong at the time, couldn't put a finger on it. There was never an adequate explanation of why Randall Mont was at Arroways on the night he died—what he was doing there. Yes, this is it." He had asked for help.

McKee was interested. He was already familiar with the details of Anne Giles's death. It was he who had ordered the examination of her apartment in the city. On vacation and at a loose end, he had taken the next train for Eastwalk.

They had had a little difficulty getting Mr. William Heyward to talk. But when Luttrell said he was ready to produce a witness, one Sylvia Gross, who had overheard Heyward calling Anne Giles from a booth in the drugstore at ten o'clock on the night of her death, Heyward had capitulated readily enough.

On the surface, at any rate, he wasn't a man adapted for crime. Old stock, he had come from a line of well-charted forebears who had taken the tensile strength out of him, softened him up. He was habituated to ease and a comfortable conscience and a smooth social order. He

had admitted the charges Luttrell brought. He agreed that he had been at Anne Giles's cottage on the night she died. He gave the same account of his actions he had previously given Damien. Heyward had followed his friend Mike Jones to the cottage; he hadn't, he said, gone there to meet Anne Giles himself. The telephone call then. That, Heyward asserted, was a different matter entirely, the call had nothing to do with her death. "I'd like to have killed her," he confessed. "I'd like to have wrung her neck."

A gesture acknowledged his lack of neck-wringing ability when it came down to it. *Perhaps,* McKee thought.

Anne Giles was, had been, trying to hijack Heyward. He described his new process for the manufacturing of rayon. It was an important step forward in a wide-open industry, was going to make him money. Anne Giles had demanded a cut, saying that if he didn't come through she'd stop him cold, get out an injunction. He had formerly worked for an affiliate of Mont Fabrics, an affiliate controlled by Mont, and under the terms of his contract the new process belonged to them. It was a mere technicality. She was the only one who had spotted it. She had offered to lay off for fifty percent of the down payment and a thirty-percent cut of the royalties.

Yes, her death had benefited him. Certainly she could have made difficulties. It might have meant a court fight, could have put other buyers off. She had given him Monday morning as a deadline for agreement. He had told her over the phone on Friday night to go to hell. No, he certainly had not killed her.

Back to Mike Jones. Heyward swore that Mike Jones hadn't killed Anne Giles, either. All right, all right, so he had lied to Luttrell about having been in his aunt's house with Jones until two a.m. on Saturday morning. No, it wasn't true—but he had been with Jones from maybe—oh, say a little after eleven on.

Luttrell said coldly, "You weren't with Jones when he grabbed that boat of Joe Lawrence's and rowed off up the river. In fact, you weren't with him from about half

past twelve on."

"Listen," Heyward said, with an appearance of sincerity and calmness, "Mike couldn't have got to that cottage more than a couple of minutes before I did—and when I went in Anne Giles was cold, good and cold. She'd been dead at least an hour."

Within reasonable limits the medical examiner agreed with what Heyward said. Anne Giles had died between eleven p.m. on Friday night and one a.m. Saturday morning. In the medical examiner's opinion it was much nearer to eleven. Nevertheless, the evidence against Heyward was grave.

Miss Kendleton declared stoutly that Heyward had been in his room working on a presentation all evening. She had heard him go out after she was in bed, at perhaps a quarter past eleven. Miss Kendleton's testimony was scarcely grade A. She was devoted to her nephew, and had lied to Luttrell before. She admitted the lie frankly. "Of course I backed Bill up. I knew he had nothing to do with that woman's death. Neither did Mike Jones."

Miss Kendleton didn't appear to be passionately fond of the Monts. She said that Anne Giles had been close to Maria, in her confidence, and that there could be plenty of reasons why the Monts didn't like her, and pointed out that Anne Giles was staying at Arroways when she died. Her cottage was only a short distance across the fields—why not look closer to home? Anyhow, Bill couldn't have gotten to the cottage in time to kill her, or Mike either. They hadn't reached the cottage until after half past twelve.

This was all very nice and all very fine, McKee reflected, but there was no proof of exactly when Bill Heyward or Jones had turned up at the cottage on the river. The bartender at the Main Street tavern and half a dozen customers were vague about time. They admitted that Heyward and Jones had both been in the tavern latish on Friday night, but when they had left was uncertain. Moreover, Heyward's attitude about Jones was intransigent, to say the least. "Mike didn't kill that woman. That's all

there is to it. No, I don't know where Mike is. If I don't know I can't tell you, can I?" Luttrell had wanted to take Heyward into custody and sweat Jones's whereabouts out of him. McKee had advised against it. Given a free foot Heyward might lead them to Jones—and he wasn't a gentleman you could sweat anything out of.

When the two men were settled in broken-down comfortable chairs in the shabby office, Luttrell said, "Well, McKee?"

The Scotsman fingered a cigarette. "If the Giles woman lifted those rings from Randall Mont's body, you've got a good outsider motive. The old second-thief-best-owner. It's not in satisfactory shape yet. Neither—" he lit the battered cigarette and inhaled deeply—"is that Mont household at, what do you call it, Arroways? They're all jittery and they're all holding back. Mrs. Mont is a frightened lady. That business about the room the Giles woman occupied is muddy. Two attempts to enter it—two—one from the inside on Saturday afternoon, one through the window by way of a ladder on Sunday night—Tell me, why didn't you grab the bag and brief case earlier yourself?"

Luttrell looked unhappy. "Anne Giles was killed three miles from Arroways, in her own cottage. Her purse was missing. It looked like robbery, in the beginning, anyhow." He spoke ruefully.

There was no use crying over spilled milk, McKee reflected and went on to say that there was something in Miss Kendleton's suggestion. He contemplated Bill Heyward's devoted aunt for a minute through half-closed eyes, returned to the Monts.

"There's a definitely psychopathic flavor about the daughter, Jancy Hammond, Luttrell. That drinking of hers is symptomatic, has a cause. Mike Jones could have made his way inside unobserved, you say, and gotten hold of the key? And Jancy was in love with him three years ago, before she married this Hammond fellow? Hammond himself and that friend of the family, Hiram St. George, are a bit too untroubled, foursquare, telling all—Then there's Oliver Mont. Even there things aren't on the

up and up. Mont's engaged to marry Linda St. George, isn't he? Well, he's overboard about that Carey girl, or at least I think so."

McKee paused, watching Luttrell flush angrily. "What's the matter, Fred?"

Luttrell studied his hand, flexing the fingers. "If Oliver Mont hurts Linda, murderer or not, I'll—" He pulled up with an effort.

Eyeing him, McKee gave an inward whistle. Was Fred in love with the St. George girl himself? It looked very much like it. Emotional complications. The Scotsman sighed, sat up. "Let's get back to Randall Mont's death and those rings. And I want to look at the Giles cottage. Come on, we'll go over there first, and you can tell me as we go."

On his feet, he added, "I also want a look at that ravine where Randall Mont crashed. Death from heart failure—" At Luttrell's sharp stare he shrugged. "I'm not saying Mont didn't die of heart failure, I simply want to be sure."

If McKee had had definite impressions of the various occupants of Arroways, they in turn had been unpleasantly affected by the Inspector's appearance in Eastwalk, to a marked degree. Luttrell was one thing. As well as being the town prosecutor he was a neighbor, a friend, and could be relied upon to be both just and fair. The man from New York—one of the foremost criminologists of his day, St. George said soberly—was another kettle of fish. "What's it his business, what's he mixing up in it for?" Roger Hammond wanted to know with a moody fretfulness that touched on fury.

"Why should you worry, Roger, my boy?" Oliver asked, grinning at his brother-in-law. "You've got a clean bill of health, unless—by the way, what time *did* you get up here last Friday night, the night Anne was killed over there in her cottage? You've never said." He was watching Hammond intently.

"How do I know what time it was?" Hammond returned hotly. "I don't go around holding my watch in my hand. Are you insinuating—"

"Oliver, Roger—please," Eleanor Mont said in a tired voice, and her son and her daughter's husband stopped sparring.

Damien was too stricken by the revelation that it was Bill who had called Anne Giles at ten o'clock on Friday night to pay a great deal of attention. Why had Bill lied to her, by indirection, anyhow? It was unlike him to lie. If he was as innocent as he said he was, why hadn't he told her about the call? There had been plenty of opportunities. She couldn't talk to anyone about it. Jerome Castle had already gone. She was sorry when he went, felt in a vague way that she had lost a friend.

Funeral services for Anne Giles were to be at four o'clock in the funeral home in Eastwalk. With the exception of Jancy and herself, the others were all going. Immediately after the Inspector's departure, Linda had taken Jancy home with her. Linda was troubled. Her natural lightness, gaiety, were in abeyance, under wraps. Did she, too, know things she wasn't telling? For a while she had remained outside of the shadow that had fallen over Arroways. It had finally engulfed her. She was white and still and watchful, her sparkle extinguished. The others were in their rooms putting on the more formal attire the occasion demanded, when Bill called Damien.

He told her what he had already told the Inspector, the why and wherefore of his phone call to Anne Giles on the night she was killed. He said, "That deal of mine is still in the works. I didn't want to talk too much about it until it was wrapped up, signed, sealed and delivered. I didn't want to tell anyone what Anne Giles was trying to do until I got a definite answer out of Fogler and Benson. Then I'd know where I was. You understand, don't you?"

Bill seldom explained his reason for doing or not doing a thing at such length. This was different. Damien said, "Yes, I understand, Bill," and she did in a way. Bill had wanted to have something solid to offer her, as a surprise. The boyishness of this warmed her. But he had already held back twice, giving the story of his activities piecemeal and under pressure. That was Mike Jones. It

was Mike Jones who had kept him silent the first time; it was to protect Mike Jones that he had kept still about having been at Anne Giles's cottage. Bill was a good friend. He asked her to meet him so that they could talk, but she said, "I can't, Bill. I've got to go down to the bank in a little while and I don't know how long I'll be. Suppose I call you later?" Behind her the library door had opened. She hung up and turned.

It was Oliver Mont who had come in. His tall fairness was almost a shock in the dark room. All the light that was in it seemed to focus on him where he stood beside a window playing with the cord of the Venetian blind. He looked at her with one of his veiled glances. She told herself firmly that there was nothing mysterious about that veiling, nothing to excite interest, curiosity, invite exploration—it was simply the effect of thick blond lashes.

"Calling your friend, Heyward, were you, Miss Carey?" he asked in a dry voice.

Her friend—of course Bill was her friend. Damien's anger spurted. "Yes, I was talking to Mr. Heyward. You have no objections, Mr. Mont? Don't think I should have asked permission to use the phone?" She stopped short at Oliver's smile, annoyed at being pushed into absurdity.

Oliver left the window and moved toward the desk, moved slowly. His eyes between the short thick blond lashes held hers. He put out a cigarette in an ash tray without looking at it. The desk, five solid feet of it, separated them. It did no good. It was as though some inner bar, barrier, had gone down between them. Damien had a moment of blind panic.

Oliver was speaking again. His voice, what he said, put him farther away, steadied her slightly. "My advice is, you can take it or not, as you choose, don't get mixed up with Bill Heyward, yet. Wait a while."

Outside a horn blew. It was Linda in her roadster, calling for Oliver to take him into town to the funeral services for Anne Giles. Oliver turned away, tapped on the pane, waved to Linda, said calmly to Damien, "Think that over, Miss Carey," and walked out of the room.

When Damien left it herself a minute later he and Linla were gone. Eleanor Mont was in the hall, pulling on a pair of black gloves. Hammond had already left. Hiram St. George was going to drive Eleanor Mont into town. "I know you've got to go to the bank," she said to Damien. "Can we give you a lift down?"

Damien thanked her and said no, that she was going to walk, that she was probably in for a tedious interview and thought she'd get some air first. Her coat was in her room. She went upstairs for it. Coming down she caught a glimpse of Eleanor Mont and Hiram St. George through the window at the front of the hall. They were standing beside St. George's car, an elderly well-polished Cadillac. Eleanor Mont's back was turned; St. George faced the house. Oliver's mother was talking with unusual animation. She kept throwing out her hands as though she was stressing something vital. At the same time her posture was curiously rigid.

Whatever she was proposing was a shock to Hiram St. George. He shook his shapely head, a frown on his forehead, and more than a frown. Damien could hear no sound except the ticking of the clock near the library, yet it was clear that St. George was saying no, almost fiercely and with a desperate vehemence to what Eleanor Mont was urging on him. Suddenly Oliver's mother stopped talking. Her hands fell to her sides in a gesture of defeat, and she turned her face away from St. George and started across the gravel.

Something about the way he walked at Eleanor Mont's side, holding her arm, something about the care, devotion, with which he helped her into the car, struck coldly at Damien. A monstrous suspicion sprang up in her, blossoming like an evil flower. Randall Mont's sudden death after Maria had died had left Eleanor Mont not only a rich woman, but a free one. St. George had the stability that Randall Mont had apparently never had, he was companionable, intelligent, physically attractive— The shadows in the hall, the silence broken only by the steady ticking of the clock, became a stifling weight. Damien

threw off her flash of suspicion. Oliver's mother wasn't a woman like that. "No," she said aloud, taking a step, and put the idea firmly from her mind.

The telephone rang then. It was Mr. Silver, talking from the bank. He was sorry, but there was no use her coming down to the bank that afternoon. Pressing business occupied the board of directors, and her mortgage wouldn't be up for consideration until tomorrow, perhaps even Thursday. He would let her know.

Damien was disappointed but not unduly so. She didn't care enough. Nothing seemed to be going right—but then nothing seemed to matter much. She was restless and at the same time apathetic. All the duties, tasks, with which she ordinarily occupied herself were in suspension before the fact of murder. New York seemed a thousand miles away. She felt saturated with the people at Arroways, oppressed and overweighed by them and by the house itself, its courtyards and gardens and halls and corridors, its empty rooms lying all around. She went out for a walk.

The wind had shifted into the southwest and it was warmer, but exercise did nothing to lighten her mood. Returning before she had gone a full mile, opening the door and letting herself into the great hall, she was transfixed with a passionate longing for a small bright bar somewhere in the East Fifties, with rose-colored lights and music and tables and waiters and people—strangers. Jancy was over at the St. George house, the others at the funeral services for a woman who had been strangled to death. Here there was only stillness and vast spaces filled with gloom. Moving through them was like moving through a chain of islands in fog. Shapes in dimness had lost their reality, were distorted. She was almost at the top of the stairs when she came to an abrupt halt, her heart in her throat.

That footfall somewhere out in front and to the right was the maid, Agnes, going about her business. It had to be. There was no one else in the house. Coldness washed up in her. It wasn't Agnes. The maid had passed her down the road, saying that she was going over to Cobb's for

eggs. Not the maid— And the others in the village— The coldness in Damien lapped higher, became an icy tide. Anne Giles had said a few hours before she died that there was a rumor that Maria Mont came back to Arroways to wind the clocks of which she had been fond, waited around until it was time—

The clock! Damien caught at the stair rail. That was what halted her in her tracks, before the sound of the footstep. *The clock near the library door had stopped.* Her gaze between half-drawn lids probed the shadows. Was Maria going to materialize out there in front of her, drift toward her, through her, and down the stairs to wind the clock in the hall below? Fright, as illogical as it was spurring, sent her flashing up the remaining steps and along the hall to her own room. She opened the door, closed it behind her, her breathing ragged. There was a key in the lock. Lock the door, lock the other door on the far side of the bathroom, lock herself in here until people came. She started to turn her head, stopped turning it, and stood completely still. She was too late.

Chapter Twelve

Death in the Woods

The intruder who had been in her room was gone, purpose accomplished. It wasn't fear Damien felt, it was sheer unadulterated astonishment. Her luggage had been searched. There was no doubt of it. Her suitcase and hatbox weren't where they had been before. When she left the room half an hour earlier, the closet door had been closed. Now it was open, and the bags were in a different position.

The search had been carefully conducted. She opened her bags. Her things showed no sign of having been disturbed. But they had been, she was sure of it. Why? By whom? What had she that anyone could want? Clothes, slips, an extra dress, stockings, a couple of skirts, some blouses, and a few papers—her baptismal certificate and a copy of her father's will that she had produced for Mr. Silver, and the deeds to Arroways in a long white envelope.

Everything was so much in order that she began almost to disbelieve the evidence of her senses. Then she found her lipstick. She had used it before leaving the room, had left it lying on top of the bureau. The bureau was in line with the closet door. The gold case, crushed flat, oozed red paste that was like bright-red blood. It was a lipstick of a new shade that had just been put on the market, and she had bought it the morning she left New York. Whoever had searched her things had knocked it from the bureau and it had rolled into the closet, where the searcher had stepped on it when he or she replaced the bags.

He? She? The house was empty. Damien listened, her head to one side. No it wasn't, not now. Downstairs the front door closed, and voices sounded distantly. Damien picked up the lipstick, using a tweezers, deposited it in an envelope in her purse, put the purse under her arm,

and left the room.

Luttrell, the tall Inspector McKee, Eleanor Mont, and Hiram St. George were in a huddle in the middle of the downstairs hall. McKee and the town prosecutor faced the other two. There was a new air of gravity about Luttrell. He looked harried. He gave Damien an absent glance as she reached the foot of the stairs, turned back to Eleanor Mont, and went on with what he had been saying. "Something new has come up. Is Jancy—Mrs. Hammond—anywhere around? We'd like to ask her a few questions."

Eleanor Mont showed no emotion of any kind. She seemed to have put on some sort of invisible armor that turned back the thrust and cut off fresh attacks. She said mildly, "My daughter's not here, Mr. Luttrell, but we can get her for you. She's over at the St. George house. Call her, will you, Hi, and ask her to come over?"

Something new has come up—Damien wondered what it was with part of her mind, with the other whether Eleanor Mont and Hiram St. George had just entered the house or whether they had been in it for some time. They went into the living-room. She followed. Roger Hammond was there, in a chair in a corner, buried behind the financial pages of a *Herald Tribune*. At their entrance Hammond put the paper down and started to his feet. When Eleanor Mont said, "Mr. Luttrell wants to talk to Jancy," he sank back with an effect of collapse, as though he had been suddenly deboned by an expert chef. His handsome face wasn't one to change readily. He couldn't control his color. He went dead white. Damien felt suddenly sorry for him. Roger Hammond adored the wife who treated him with an almost cruel indifference. Did he know something that made him afraid for her?

They all sat down, with the exception of the Inspector, who stood near a window at the far end of the room, detached, disassociating himself from Luttrell's officialdom, but keenly observant. Why was he studying her like that? Damien averted her eyes. When he had questioned her that morning she had kept her word to Oliver, hadn't said that Oliver had driven Anne Giles over to the cottage on

the river last Friday night, or that Jancy had been out of the house from well before midnight until the following morning. Did the Inspector know, had he divined, that she was keeping something back?

Jancy, Oliver, and Linda walked into the room. Oliver and Linda had just gotten to the St. George house when Hiram St. George called asking Jancy to come home. It wasn't Oliver and it wasn't Linda who had searched her room. Jancy, Damien decided, was a different proposition. What a strange girl she was, sometimes beautiful and perfectly groomed, at others untidy and sullen and almost plain. She was in an in-between mood that afternoon. Her blouse was coming out of her skirt, as though she had given it an impatient tug, but she carried herself with assurance, her chestnut head at an arrogant tilt, her tangerine lipstick on straight, as she strolled to a sofa near the fire and settled herself in a corner of it.

"Yes, Mr. Luttrell?" She looked at the prosecutor with mockery. "I was enjoying my tea. An egg from one of Linda's hens, you know. Fresh. I hope it's something important you want to talk to me about."

Luttrell nodded. He had glanced once toward Linda and uneasily away. Hammond was sitting sharply erect in the winged chair in the corner near the hearth. Luttrell said, "I don't know whether you can tell us anything or not, Mrs. Hammond. Last night, between ten and, say half past, did you leave the house, this house? Did you go out into the grounds—for any reason?" He put an accent on the last three words.

Jancy stared at him. "I did not. Why do you ask?"

"Because," Luttrell said, his eyes steady on her face, "the man who was in the grounds last night, the man who stood behind the oak tree out there watching the house for some time, the man who carried the ladder to the window of the blue room, entered it, and slashed open Anne Giles's bags was Mike Jones."

If Luttrell had hoped to knock the pins from under Jancy with this statement, he failed miserably. Jancy continued to look at him without the slightest change of ex-

pression. Either, Damien concluded, Jancy no longer cared anything about Jones or, like her mother, she had armed herself in advance for this frontal attack. Luttrell said that the vet, Hanley Williams, passing along the back road late the night before had seen Mike Jones leaving the Arroways grounds a minute or two after the ladder went down.

"You didn't see Mike Jones last night, Mrs. Hammond, don't know where he is?"

Jancy repeated stolidly that she hadn't seen Mike Jones last night or on any other night since her marriage, that she hadn't been out of the house the previous evening at all, added with a flash of her dark eyes, "Why concentrate on me?"

Her husband was in the room. Luttrell couldn't say, "Because you used to be in love with Mike Jones and, according to rumor, still are." He put the question perfunctorily to the others. None of them had seen Mike Jones. The crash of the broken window and the maid's scream—her room was directly above the blue room—was the first thing that had aroused them.

Five minutes later Luttrell and the Inspector left the house, but not the grounds. They crossed the tennis court toward the little house on the rise at the back. The Scotsman was preoccupied, uneasy. Too many questions remained unanswered. There were gaps in the evidence with which Luttrell had presented him, dissonances. Above all, there was the emotional tension in the big house behind them. So far Bill Heyward had made no attempt to get into communication with Mike Jones, and with Jones at large, on the loose, anything could happen. He hadn't been in favor of bracing Jancy Hammond but, after all, it was Luttrell's case. A queer case, a case that refused to jell. He said aloud, "You haven't yet gotten to the bottom of why Anne Giles was killed."

"Those rings, McKee—"

"Personally I'm not satisfied with the rings, in the shape they're in."

"Don't you agree that Anne Giles's bags were slashed

open in a search for the rings?"

"Yes."

"Then—"

"The rings are somewhere in it, certainly," the Scotsman conceded. "I simply don't feel that they're in the right slot. Never mind. Let's get on with this."

He opened the door of the little house, went in, and closed the door. Luttrell didn't go in with the inspector. He went around to the back.

Inside the little house McKee talked to the air. Outside, standing close to the wall, in among the bushes that stood closely against it, the town prosecutor listened, and wrote. McKee came out. Luttrell had heard almost every word the Scotsman pronounced. According to Damien Carey, Eleanor Mont and Anne Giles had had their business conference in the little house late Friday afternoon. McKee said, "A business conference undoubtedly—Miss Giles was of a businesslike turn of mind. The question is—what business? Anyhow, there was a noise among the bushes in back after Mrs. Mont left. There could have been a listener there."

"You think Anne Giles may have had something on Mrs. Mont?"

"I do. And I think Eleanor Mont is terrified that we're going to find out what it was—Mrs. Mont and Hiram St. George."

Luttrell scowled at oak leaves drifting across the tennis court. "Mike Jones knew Anne Giles was here. He could have been behind the house."

The name of the missing man seemed to touch McKee on the raw. "Let's get back," he said. "There may be news," and started forward at a fast pace.

Inside the house, less than a quarter of an hour after the Inspector and Luttrell went, Damien discovered who had entered her room and searched her bags.

With the genius for ignoring disagreeable facts that the Monts were bringing to a high state of perfection, the subject of Mike Jones was dropped. The talk turned to Miss Stewart, who was going to stay on for a day or two. Anne

Giles had apparently made no will, and the nurse would inherit her estate as next of kin. As soon as the police were through with it the cottage had to be closed.

Jancy had gone upstairs. Linda and Oliver on a distant love seat talking in low voices, their close-together heads bright; opposite Damien, Roger Hammond changed his position. He sat back in his chair, stretched his well-shod feet out in front of him, and crossed them at the ankles. On the sole of the right shoe, worn faintly gray, there was a large, irregular red smear. The grayness had dulled the brilliant scarlet a little, but on the cream-colored background of the rug just in front of his chair, where his right foot had rested firmly earlier, a smear of her lipstick, a lipstick different from Jancy's, from Eleanor Mont's, and from Linda's, glowed in shadow.

Damien's first impulse was to lean forward and say, "Mr. Hammond, why were you searching my room a little while ago? What was it you were looking for?" She repressed it. A direct question to Roger Hammond would get her no place. For all his amiability he was anything but forthright. He would give her some trumped-up story that was a lie. No, she thought, tell the Inspector what had happened. The Inspector would know how to get at the truth—and it would be a relief to go to the police with definite evidence. But there was no particular hurry. Roger Hammond couldn't get away. They had all been instructed to remain in Eastwalk. Meanwhile, keep an eye on Mr. Hammond—

Nothing that transpired during the rest of the afternoon and evening shed any light on Roger Hammond's search of her belongings. Slow anger was gathering in her. Everyone in the house was covering up, for himself or someone else; she was the only one excluded, kept in the dark. When she went to bed that night she locked her bedroom door and the door leading into the adjoining room, and before she fell into a troubled and broken sleep finally made up her mind to tell Oliver that she could no longer remain silent, that she was going to make a clean breast of everything to the Inspector from New York.

On the next day, Tuesday, Damien implemented her decision. At half past one, coming out of the dining-room where she had had a solitary sandwich and a cup of coffee from the buffet, there was no one else in evidence, she ran into Oliver in the hall. She had written a letter to Jane, had the letter in her hand, had her coat on. The last time she had seen Oliver was late the previous afternoon. Under his gaze, and he seemed to be making a habit of gazing at her when they met unexpectedly, as though she were something strange that had sprung up out of the floor boards or descended from the ceiling, she felt awkward, uncertain. In contrast to his enigmatic scrutiny his voice was matter of fact.

"Going into town?"

When she said yes, he said, "I've got to go in myself, I'll drive you in," and she said that that would be fine and went upstairs to get her bag and gloves. On the way down a minute later she stood still on the shadowy landing. The front door was open, and Linda was in the hall. She had on a white polo coat, and her cheeks were flushed by the wind. She caught sight of Oliver, and her face lit up and she went over to him with a dancing step.

"Darling, where have you been?" she demanded. "I've been looking all over for you. The Brewsters are up from Virginia and they want us over for lunch. It's not too late. They've got some new boxers. I'm dying to see them."

"The Brewsters or the boxers?" Oliver twined a loose strand of Linda's fair hair around one of his fingers, and she nuzzled a cheek against his shoulder and laughed.

"The Brewsters *and* the boxers."

Oliver sighed. "The Brewsters may want us, but, dogs or no dogs, do we want the Brewsters—that's the question."

"Oh, Oliver, don't be difficult," Linda coaxed. "Jude Brewster's sweet, and Tom's nice, too."

"Nice and dull, my pet. Not to put a fine point on it, they're both crashing bores. Why not admit it?"

He spoke carelessly but with decision. The effect on Linda was instant. The gaiety went out of her, and her face crumpled. She looked like a child who had been slap-

ped for no reason and was about to burst into tears. She didn't. She flamed into sudden anger, stamping her foot and crying, "Oliver, you're horrid. My friends—it's always my friends. Phil Curry tells long stories, so we don't go there any more. Maida's got nothing but dusting on her mind, so we don't go there. Who *do* you like?"

"Now, Linda." It was Oliver's turn to cajole. He did it awkwardly, but there was genuine concern in him. He put out his hands to draw Linda to him, but she struck his hands down and backed away.

"Who do you like?" she repeated, her voice high.

"Linda—" Oliver paused.

Another voice cut across his. Jancy Hammond had come into the hall. She stood leaning against the doorway to the transverse corridor. She said drawlingly, removing a cigarette from her lips and blowing smoke, "Oliver likes unattached ladies, don't you, brother dear? It used to be Anne Giles, or was for a while. Now—"

It was her turn to pause. Oliver stopped her. "That's enough, Jancy." He spoke quietly, didn't move, simply looked at his sister, holding her eyes steadily with his.

Jancy retired from the fray. She shrugged, gave a short laugh, and strolled on into the corridor. Linda stared in bewilderment. Her anger had subsided as suddenly as it had risen. Strife of any sort was repugnant to her. She said indignantly to Jancy's receding back, "You're silly, Jan. Oliver never liked Anne Giles," and to Oliver, "It's all right, darling. I'm sorry I was such a beast. Forget about the Brewsters. They are on the dull side. Anyhow, I've got letters to do for Father, and I want to wash my hair."

Damien remained where she was in concealing gloom until Oliver and Linda had gone outside, then she descended the remaining flight of steps. Whether or not Oliver Mont was currently interested in someone besides Linda, Jancy had been right about Anne Giles, she knew that of her own knowledge. Her earlier distrust of him came flooding back strongly. And yet she was puzzled. Oliver wasn't the philandering type. He hadn't that particular

sort of male vanity, didn't appear to need that form of reassurance. It wasn't any of her affair. Drive into town with him, say what she had to say and get it over with. Then go to the Inspector.

The front door opened, and Oliver came into the hall. He said, "Ready?" and she said yes and went out with him to his car. As they put Arroways behind them and swung into King Street she began to talk. Oliver didn't interrupt her. He listened in silence until she had finished, although once or twice he turned and looked into her face.

The news that her room had been entered and searched by Roger Hammond appeared to startle him as much as it had startled her. "You're sure it was Roger? The lipstick? Yes, I see—"

He brooded over that beside her at the wheel but a million miles away, then said slowly, not looking at her but ahead of him at colored leaves and black tree branches, "You feel you must tell the police about Jancy, Miss Carey, that Jancy was running around loose the night Anne Giles was killed?"

Damien felt an odd sense of loss at his "Miss Carey," his air of formality, remoteness. The feeling angered her. Why should she care whether Oliver Mont censured her or not? She couldn't run her life to suit him. He had no claim on her, shouldn't have requested her to conceal evidence in the first place. Her yes was unnecessarily curt. She added to it. "You asked me to keep still until the police found the murderer. They don't seem to be much nearer now than they were three days ago. Tell me, do you think Mike Jones killed Anne Giles?"

Oliver shrugged flat shoulders moodily, his eyes on the road. "How should I know? Jones was hanging around in the grounds outside the house on Sunday night when the blue room was entered and Anne's bags were ripped open. Who else could have done it? You wouldn't consider waiting until the police find Jones?"

Damien pulled at her gloves, resettled a fold of her coat. She was thoroughly troubled. She had issued an ultimatum to Oliver; she was going to have to do the same

thing to Bill. The police were searching hard for Jones. According to Mrs. Cambell, who had dropped in at Arroways that morning, he hadn't yet been found. If Bill knew where Mike Jones was he ought to tell the police, friend or no friend. Innocent, Jones had little to fear; guilty, he should be handed over. But Bill might not know where Jones was now.

She said aloud, "The police may never find Jones. No, I can't wait any longer—and if Jones is the murderer, your sister has nothing to be afraid of."

"Well, if that's the way it has to be, that's the way it has to be." Oliver spoke quietly, with resignation. Damien didn't look at him. She turned her head and glanced at trees and bushes and stone-walled meadows moving past the window, at a graveyard on the hill—

A graveyard! She sat up sharply. There was no graveyard on the way into town. "Where are you taking me?" she demanded of Oliver. "This isn't the road into Eastwalk."

"Don't get excited." For the first time he smiled. The smile warmed the bleak planes of his face, brought him closer, made him human. "I have to go over to my ship. There's something wrong with one of my fuel pumps. I'm going to meet a mechanic there. It won't take long, the airfield's only a couple of miles from here. Don't think, Damien," he returned his attention to his driving, "that I'm not grateful for what you've done. If you hadn't kept quiet, Jancy might be under arrest. That would just about kill my mother." The darkness was in him again. She watched him shake it off. "Tell me about yourself and Jane. I remember her from Middleboro. An indomitable lady. Do you like New York, like your job?"

Damien settled back against the cushions. It was pleasant to talk idly. There was a liveliness in Oliver, an inner quickness that carried you on wings. The October sunlight coming from under a whipped-cream cloud was bright, the rolling fields a rich maize. Leaves fluttered down from scarlet maples, yellow hickory trees. There was a smell of wood smoke in the air. It was sweet to be

alone like this in a car with Oliver Mont—sweet and dangerous. Suddenly Damien knew that, or rather realized it to the full, because hadn't she, in a way, known all along that he attracted her as no man had ever attracted her before? Rousing herself, drawing off from the danger, was like trying to break the clinging veils of a golden nightmare.

All at once, without effort of her own, she was back in the ordinary world. The descent to earth was hard, jarring. The change of mood came, not from her, but from Oliver himself. They had entered hillier country. The terrain around them was wilder and more heavily wooded. They came suddenly to a driveway on the left, winding its way upward through tall pines. A sign near handsome cypress gates said *Howard Dalrymple*. Above the nearer trees the roofs of an extensive hunting-lodge were blocked against more distant pines. Smoke rose lazily from a big chimney.

Oliver said briskly, stopping the car, "I'm glad Dalrymple's here. I want to have a word with him. I've been trying to get hold of him for a month. There's no good reason why he shouldn't use our line for his freight. Wait here a minute, will you? I won't be long. You don't mind?" Damien said no, and Oliver got out, walked up the driveway, and vanished among the trees.

Damien was glad to be alone, free of Oliver Mont's presence. Now that he wasn't with her she could stop, look, and listen. What was this thing that happened to her when she was within sight and sound of him? It was as though her will ceased to function and she became someone else, a drifter, without roots or reason. It mustn't go on. She must put an end to it.

Bird songs, the distant tinkle of a cowbell, the wind in the grasses; the car was facing west. Fifty feet ahead the road went around a turn so that a wall of great trees confronted her. There was some underbrush, not much. The place was almost like a park, and yet lonely. The cow moved away. The birds went on chirping and calling. It was against those small noises that the explosion was

pasted, a great jagged hole in the peace and stillness.

The sound sending out blasting echoes was the sound of a shot. It tore through Damien's nerves, shriekingly. *Oliver,* she thought. Oliver had gone up the driveway, and the shot had come from straight ahead, but the drive might have taken a turn to the west—

She was out of the car. She stumbled, fell, got up, and began to run toward the wall of trees, in under them. Briars tore at her stockings, twigs snatched at her coat, her hair. The ground rose. Her lungs labored. There was a stitch in her side. A hundred yards inside the wood she stood still and leaned against a granite boulder for support. Below her a sizable brook tumbled and foamed through a miniature valley. What looked like a bundle of old clothes was flung down on the turf on the near side of the brook, and Oliver had his back to it and was running up the hill, wiping his hands on a handkerchief stained with the brilliant scarlet of blood.

Chapter Thirteen

HIDE-OUT

THE PHONE IN LUTTRELL'S OFFICE rang at 2:08. The call was from the town police. McKee was with Luttrell when the call came through. The two men had already had a full day. The Scotsman had insisted on going into every angle of Randall Mont's death, purportedly from heart failure, almost seven months earlier.

Like Damien, he had reflected that if by any chance Eleanor Mont had wanted her freedom, Randall Mont had died at a convenient time for his widow. Maria Mont was already dead. Everything Maria had went to Randall, and through Randall, by will, to his wife—except Maria's rings, destined for her granddaughter. He put the rings aside for a moment. They could be incidental, part of a larger pattern. Anne Giles, he was sure of it, had had something on the Monts, on Eleanor Mont, at any rate. Anne Giles had not only been in Eastwalk, she had been at Arroways on the night Randall Mont died. Later she had been killed herself. Mont's death had to be scrutinized.

McKee had examined the ravine into which Randall Mont had crashed down. He had gone into the weather conditions, talked to the garage man who had removed the wrecked car. He had examined the photographs taken on the scene, and in the house at Arroways, and consulted at length with the medical examiner, Dr. Birchall. Birchall was very sure of his ground. He wasn't a particularly clever man but he was conscientious and thorough. Randall Mont had been suffering from angina. He, Birchall, had occasionally treated him when he was at Arroways. Birchall had had conferences with Danby Street, the big heart man in New York. Death had come as they both had expected it to come. The awful thing was, Birchall said, that Randall Mont should have been driving a car on such

a night, particularly after he had received the news that Maria Mont, to whom he was devoted, had died.

McKee reluctantly concluded that if the facts were correct, and they had been carefully gone into at the time, Randall Mont's death had to be accepted as a natural one.

The search for Mike Jones had also been stepped up. The persistently missing man had been at Arroways on Sunday night; he had been seen leaving the grounds here after the ladder fell. This was his last public appearance, to date. The police of neighboring towns and states had been on the lookout for him since Monday morning, with no success. Jones could have slipped through the net before it closed, could have reached Poughkeepsie or even New York, where he could lose himself indefinitely. So far, his friend Bill Heyward had made no attempt to contact him.

McKee was uneasy about the floating Mr. Jones. He had just finished saying so when the phone rang. He knew before Luttrell spoke. The younger man picked up the instrument, listened, and swung round. McKee said, "Mike Jones?"

Luttrell nodded, his face gray.

"Where?"

"Out Finsbury way, in the direction of the airfield. On the Dalrymple estate. My car's downstairs."

Damien stopped shivering in the circle of Oliver's arms and turned her head stiffly. They were standing on the rim of the wood above the brook, the sight of the sprawled figure mercifully hidden by intervening brush. "Steady," Oliver said, and she said, "Listen. Here they come. The police."

The state police arrived first, with Luttrell and McKee on their heels. Emerging from the trees McKee took time to note the incidence of the two figures on the slope below. Oliver Mont had just released Miss Carey from his arms. Luttrell saw it, too, and a muscle in his jaw contracted, and his mouth thinned.

Mont left the girl and came to meet them. There was

strain in him, and he was on the white side, but voice and manner were controlled. He said, "Down there, beyond those alder bushes." Luttrell went to join the state police, already at the brook. McKee remained where he was.

"You found the body, Mr. Mont?"

"Yes," Oliver Mont said. "If I'd been quicker, even by half a minute, I might have saved Jones. He was shot just as I came over that hummock back there. I heard the shot and saw him fall. The lower part of his body was hidden by those bushes. I don't think there was anyone close to him. The shot seemed to come from a little distance away." He waved a hand. "Maybe from in among those willows beyond that stone wall."

McKee said, "Yes," murmuringly; then, "I want to have a look at Jones. You called from somewhere in the neighborhood?" and when Oliver said he had called from the Dalrymple lodge McKee said, "Then take Miss Carey up to the house, will you, and wait until we come?"

He watched the two figures out of sight, sent one of the state troopers to companion them, and continued on down the hill.

Thin sunlight slanted bleakly through the window of the enormous main room in the hunting-lodge belonging to Howard Dalrymple. There was a fire, the remainder of one, in the vast fieldstone fireplace at the northern end. A pot on the hearth contained the residue of what had been vegetable soup. There was a bowl and used spoon beside it. Cracker crumbs were white specks on the gray stone. The logs had burned away to a mere handful of glow. The room was cold. Damien stared at stumps of candles on the mantel. She was alone in the room. Three quarters of an hour had passed since she and Oliver had entered the house. The Inspector had already questioned her. He was talking to Oliver in the kitchen. A door opened, and Oliver and Luttrell and the Inspector came in.

Oliver moved across to Damien, pulled a chair close to hers, sat down in it, then got up and went to the wood box and put some logs and kindling on the fire. "Might as well be comfortable."

McKee nodded affably. Luttrell had asked him to take over, saying through his teeth, "I want to be fair, but—" McKee understood. He looked at Oliver. "Now just let's run through it once again, Mr. Mont. You started into town from Arroways with Miss Carey at around half past one, changed your mind, and drove out this way, intending to go over to the airfield first to meet a mechanic going to look at your plane."

Damien had given him that. Oliver nodded, and McKee went on. "You had heard that Dalrymple had gone south and when you saw this house was occupied, when you saw smoke rising from the chimney, the idea crossed your mind that Jones might be hiding out here. You didn't say anything to Miss Carey because you didn't want to frighten her. Your suspicion was verified. As you approached the house you saw Jones walking off across the lawn to the west, and in under the trees. You followed him, heard the shot, saw Jones fall, didn't see who shot him, didn't see anyone, didn't find any gun. That's about it, isn't it?"

"That's about it, Inspector." Oliver lit Damien's cigarette and his own.

McKee studied him thoughtfully. A brief survey of the lodge had given them Jones's story. Mike Jones had been in hiding in the place for some days, sleeping in a maid's room off the kitchen and cooking and keeping himself warm at the open fire. The electricity had been turned off. He had, however, left the lodge on one occasion. That was on Sunday night. Jones, the Scotsman was sure of it, had seen the person who had carried the ladder to the wall outside the blue room. Jones hadn't done that —his death was proof of it. He had died because, standing behind the oak at the edge of the terrace watching the house, in all probability in an attempt to get in touch with Jancy Hammond, he had recognized the man or woman who had placed the ladder against the blue-room window.

Also, there was little doubt that Mr. William Heyward had brought Jones here, or that he had at least suggested the lodge as a hiding-place. Heyward knew Dalrymple,

could know that Dalrymple was fishing down on the Keys. He had thrown the police off the scent by driving south from Eastwalk last week instead of north and making a wide circle. Have a little talk with Mr. Heyward, who was being brought out here—

Certainly this crime, and the crime out of which it had grown, was tied to Arroways and the people in it and their intimates and associates. Anne Giles had been a Mont Fabric executive and a friend, Jones had once been engaged to Jancy Hammond. But there were certain puzzling features. The rings bothered him. If Anne Giles had been killed for thirty thousand dollars worth of antique stones she had stolen from Randall Mont's body and which she had refused to share, it seemed unlikely that Eleanor Mont, her son, daughter, or son-in-law could be in any way involved. They were all people of means. Well, not Oliver Mont, perhaps, his air line was still in the red. However, he could get money. Asking his mother for it would be easier than choking a woman to death. On the other hand, all the Monts were holding back something that wasn't trivial. They were guarded, watchful, and afraid. Of what? Randall Mont's death was definitely not murder. He was at last sure of that.

Quick footsteps; a state trooper hurried into the room. Williams, the man shadowing Heyward, had lost his quarry. Heyward had given him the slip at around twelve o'clock, by the simple expedient of climbing through a lavatory window in the crowded garage in the middle of town.

Damien Carey hadn't left Arroways until half past one. She was a friend of Heyward's. "Miss Carey," McKee said, "you don't happen to know where Mr. Heyward is, by any chance? When did you last hear from him, see him?"

Damien stirred in her chair, tried to throw off the exhaustion of extreme mental fatigue. Why did the Inspector speak of Bill in that tone, Bill who had gotten himself into hot water to save a friend? Mike Jones's death was going to hit him hard.

"The last time I saw Mr. Heyward, Inspector, was on

Sunday night when he brought me back to Arroways at around half past ten, after I spent the evening at the Kendleton house."

Speaking, a sudden wave of relief washed over her cleansingly. How stupid she had been to suspect Bill, ever, for a moment. In spite of the telephone call to Anne Giles that he had concealed, in spite of his hatred of Anne Giles for what she was trying to do, he could have had nothing to do with her death. Damien went back over Sunday night. Between the time Bill left her at the front door of Arroways and the time the ladder fell from the blue-room window rousing the house, Bill couldn't possibly have moved the ladder, entered the blue room, searched it, and slashed open Anne Giles's bags.

McKee was standing with his back to the French windows in the east wall that opened on a terrace. Luttrell and the trooper had left the room to put the search for Bill in motion. Looking past the Inspector, Damien turned cold.

A familiar head and shoulders—Bill was there, crossing the terrace, hat pulled down over his eyes, a bundle under his arm. He had approached the lodge from the rear, hadn't seen the cars at the front. He pulled open a leaf of the French door, stepped through it, and stood stock-still.

In that first moment he seemed to know instinctively, without words. He turned very white, and his eyes darkened until they were expressionless brown disks. He looked at the Inspector. "Mike?"

"Dead," the Scotsman said.

The package Bill was carrying fell with a thud. A can of evaporated milk with a blue-and-green label rolled to the edge of the hearth. Bill dropped into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

There was no time out for grief allowed in a murder investigation. McKee began to question Heyward. Heyward dragged himself together and answered laconically. Yes, he knew all along Mike was here; he had brought him here himself. He had given the man watching him the slip

at noon that day in order to get food to Mike, hadn't wanted to lead the police to him.

He said narrowly, out of an inattentive pause, "What I don't get, Inspector, is why Mike left this house, even for a moment. Mike was no dope, he knew the police were looking for him. Once in the open there was always a chance that he'd be seen. After Sunday night he told me he was going to stay indoors and not budge. I talked to him on the phone yesterday morning from town. No, I don't see why he left the house, unless—"

Bill sat up, and his eyes began to burn. "Mike might have left this house if he got a message purporting to be from me, or"—he stopped and they all knew he meant Jancy—"a message that took him down there to the brook so that he could be—killed." Bill's mouth twisted. He looked sick.

McKee went to the door. He spoke to a trooper in the hall. Heyward was right. Someone had called the Dalrymple house at 12:03 that day. The call had lasted until 12:05 p.m. The switchboard operator couldn't remember whether it had been made by a man or a woman or where it came from, except that it wasn't a long-distance call.

Damien felt a nervous tightening under her rib cage. Bill had returned to life. He was looking at Oliver queerly, the burn in his brown eyes brighter. "How did you happen to get out here, Mont?" he asked evenly. And when Oliver told him, Bill smiled. It was a meaning smile. He said, on a musing note, "So you came driving out this way, by chance, and happened to notice smoke rising from the chimney. And all at once, just like that," Bill snapped his fingers, "you decided that Mike Jones might be here." He pushed the chair back and got to his feet. Suddenly there was passion in him, in the gaze he bent on Oliver. But he continued to speak drawlingly. "You happened to arrive at the house as Mike happened to be leaving it—to keep a little appointment made over the phone, down by the brook. Like hell you did."

Oliver didn't move. He continued to look at Bill, over arms folded on a crossed knee, with the grave attention

he might have given a revolutionary engine that aroused his interest. Finally he spoke. "Sorry, Heyward—but you're off your nut. I didn't make that telephone call. Odd that you thought of it, thought a call *had* been made. Odd, too, that you gave the man following you the slip at around noon. Was it to give yourself plenty of time? There's one person Mike Jones would have gone down to the brook to meet without question. Quite a coincidence your being in the neighborhood, your turning up here at this stage in the proceedings."

Damien sat stiffly in her chair, white and shaken. The room was full of bitterness, the clash of accusations and counteraccusations. The Scotsman put an end to it. He said, rousing himself when he saw that there was to be no more forthcoming, "Well, that will be all, for now. We'll probably want to talk to you people later on, so keep yourselves available," and walked out of the room and out of the house.

The state police had things under control, were searching for a gun they probably wouldn't find. He had an appointment for which he was already tardy. Twenty minutes later he and Luttrell went up the steps of the large, ugly, red-brick funeral home opposite the library on the edge of Eastwalk, and into the undertaker's private office. Arthur Manford, the head of the firm, was waiting for them, small and dapper and flurried.

"There they are, sir." He waved at a bridge table set up in the corner. "We had to—eh—clothe the deceased in the—eh—suit in which she passed away. But the valuables and—eh—other accessories are there. We had no use for them." He flushed.

McKee walked over to the table and looked down. He gazed at the black-pearl ring and the black gloves that Anne Giles had worn, at the red cloche with the nose-veil, wondering idly how a woman would look in a coffin with a hat on. No, Mr. Manford was right to be shocked at the idea. It would be too obviously a gesture of departure, mocking and cynical.

The silver necklace with which Anne Giles had been

choked was lying on the table. After being fingerprinted without result, it had been handed over to the undertaker with the rest of her things and it was carefully draped on a sheet of white paper as though it were in a show case exposed for sale. The clasp was fastened. McKee frowned. The neat circlet looked remarkably small. He leaned forward and picked the necklace up with a sudden sharp movement. The silver circlet parted at the front so that it was simply one long string of heavy links.

"What's this?" he demanded of both men. Luttrell looked mystified. McKee touched the swinging ends of the necklace. "What's this break here?" McKee held up the necklace pointing to the broken links at the two loose ends, where they had been crudely joined together in a hasty attempt at repair.

"Oh, that." Luttrell was relieved. "It broke when the killer gave it a final and needless twist at the last, I guess. It had already done its work. The windpipe was crushed."

McKee put the necklace in his pocket. Luttrell gave the undertaker a receipt for it. It wasn't until they were outside, at the top of the broad shallow flight of steps, built for the carrying of burdens, that McKee explained to Luttrell.

"The police searched the cottage in which the Giles woman was killed at the time she died, and they evidently weren't there," he said musingly.

"What wasn't there?" Luttrell was in a complete fog.

The Scotsman answered almost mincingly, as though he were juggling delicately with something precious, fragile, something that might shatter in his hands unless the most extreme care was used. "The missing silver squares at the front of the necklace, two squares, I think. Yes, probably two. Come on, Luttrell, I want to look at that cottage myself." He started quickly down the steps.

Chapter Fourteen

The Silver Choker

The two square silver links of the necklace with which Anne Giles had been strangled weren't in the living-room of the cottage on the bank of the little river, or anywhere else in the house. The links were small, four-fifths by four-fifths of an inch. They were also heavy. They had not been found earlier by the police. They had not been entangled in the dead woman's clothing. They should have fallen in the vicinity of the chair in which Anne Giles had been sitting when she was struck from behind and then, while she was dazed and helpless, the necklace was twisted and pulled tight. The police hadn't found them, therefore the killer had. Whoever the killer was, he had taken the links away with him when he fled the cottage, leaving Anne Giles dead on the floor behind him.

Why? Why bother to remove two links of a necklace which the most casual eye could see was the instrument of death? Certainly not to conceal the means. Then—what intrinsic value had the two silver squares? It was one of those small and apparently inconsequential puzzles that occasionally cropped up in a murder case. In this instance McKee had a feeling that when the question was answered of why the killer had bothered to recover and remove the missing bits of necklace they would have taken an important step forward.

He dallied with the thought of a locket attached to the two front links, a locket holding something valuable—the key of a safe-deposit box, a scrap of paper, the combination of a safe—but Luttrell was positive that there had been no locket, that nothing had depended from the necklace. He had seen Anne Giles wear it several times when she was alive and walking around town. However, perhaps they had better check with the Monts.

McKee said positively not. It was the first real lead in a rank undergrowth of disconnected facts concealing the truth. For the time being, at any rate, they would keep the links strictly to themselves.

The file on Anne Giles was accumulating bulk. Meanwhile another file was being assembled, a file on Michael Albert Jones. Jones had been shot at five minutes of two. Death had been instantaneous. One of the first things that had been done was to establish the whereabouts of everyone under scrutiny in the killing of Anne Giles, at between one and three o'clock that afternoon.

The Dalrymple lodge, like the murdered woman's cottage, was some distance from Arroways by road, the first a good five miles, the second almost three. Across the fields the route was considerably shorter, the distance cut almost two-thirds. An agile walker could, for instance, have gotten from Arroways to the lodge in half an hour, so that it would have taken approximately an hour to go over to the brook in the valley on the Dalrymple place, shoot Jones in that secluded spot, and return to home base.

Luttrell used the phone in the cottage, hung up, and read a list of names off to the Inspector, covering the period from one to three o'clock. Eleanor Mont—puttering around the grounds at Arroways and in the little guesthouse. Roger Hammond—out for a good walk. His wife, Jancy—in her car driving over the countryside. Hiram St. George was lying down nursing a cold and, as it was the maid's day off, Linda had remained in and around the house after a brief trip to Arroways.

Listening, McKee shrugged. "Not much good without verification, and from the circumstances, they were all separated and alone, there can't very well be any."

Their work in the cottage was done. They were on the point of leaving it when a visitor arrived. McKee opened the closed door and came face to face with the dead woman's cousin, Miss Stewart.

When the door opened the nurse took a step backward, and her hand went to her mouth. "Oh! You frightened me."

Her hand dropped and she straightened her jacket, pulled at the brim of an unbecoming felt hat. Brown bumps, a short brown coat chosen for long wear rather than beauty, a plain, square face, reddish hair, and round brown eyes; there was something in Miss Stewart's eyes that detained McKee. She wasn't dull-witted; there was more cleverness in her than this careful, slightly dour woman permitted to show. No doubt she was an excellent nurse. Nursing was not a profession that led to the accumulation of wealth, of ease, pretty things. Anne Giles had had money, it was now Miss Stewart's. *Look into her whereabouts last Friday night—*

Her gaze moved past him to Luttrell. McKee glanced over his shoulder. Luttrell had taken the necklace in order to examine it more closely, was holding it in his hands, the broken ends dangling. Miss Stewart said, surprised, "That's Anne's choker, isn't it?"

The trinket could hardly have been more aptly named; McKee was sharply annoyed at the nurse's catching sight of it. Nothing to do now but go ahead. The woman looked close-mouthed, and if there was a leak they would know its origin. He said, "Miss Stewart, two of the silver squares are missing from your cousin's necklace. Was there anything attached to the necklace? Were the two squares at the front a locket, and not, like the others, solid pieces—anything like that?"

But Miss Stewart corroborated Luttrell. There was no locket, and all the squares were the same. Where had she been earlier in the afternoon, at between one and three o'clock? She said she had been over here at the cottage taking inventory. "In the middle of it I ran out of cigarettes and walked into town to get some." She showed a new pack, displayed a sheet of paper with articles listed on it. "I came back to try and finish the inventory. Mrs. Mont is very kind, but I'm anxious to get back to New York."

The list could have been made previously. Miss Stewart's lack of curiosity as to why she had been asked such a question was unusual. Told of Mike Jones's death she merely looked thoughtful. But when McKee spoke of

Damien Carey and the material Anne Giles had collected about her, a gleam, quickly suppressed, appeared at the back of the round brown eyes. Definitely Miss Stewart knew more than she was telling, or meant to tell.

They left her. Driving into town, McKee suddenly recalled something else about the dead woman's cousin. Randall Mont's death was a natural one beyond the possibility of a doubt. Yet this case had its origins somewhere in the past. He wasn't yet satisfied that Maria Mont's missing rings explained all the circumstances. Randall Mont wasn't the only one who had died. There had been another death in the Mont family a little earlier. Maria Mont had died in the Mont apartment in New York, and Miss Stewart had been Maria Mont's nurse and had been on duty at the time. Re-cover Maria Mont's death and see whether there was anything there; back in Luttrell's office in Eastwalk, he crossed directly to the desk, picked up the phone, and called New York. That was around four o'clock.

Damien didn't get back to Arroways until a little after half past four. She returned to it not with Oliver in Oliver's car, but on foot with Bill Heyward. After the Inspector left the lodge, the naked animosity between the two men covered itself over. It was still there, under the surface, but there were no further verbal exchanges, they ignored each other, addressed themselves to her. Bill said, "Tough for you, Damien, to be in on this. Arroways hasn't been exactly a bed of roses for you, has it?"

They were all on their feet. Oliver, cool and in perfect control of himself, stood near the door in a waiting attitude. "If you're ready, Miss Carey, shall we go?"

Damien was torn apart inside. Because she was aware then. Somewhere during those dreadful hours complete realization had overtaken her. Her feeling for Oliver was no passing infatuation. *My dear, my dear,* she thought, looking past his tall fair head, *if only I could go with you, and we could be always together.* The thought was almost unbearably sweet. She knew that it was impossible. Oliver was another woman's property. It was terrible that this should have happened to her, that she should have learned

to love a man fully and completely, a man from whom she must be forever divided—but there it was. Linda stood between them, and Bill—at the moment very much Bill.

Bill could have gotten a ride into town with one of the state troopers. But he was still reeling under the impact of Mike Jones's death. And even if things had been otherwise as far as she and Oliver were concerned, she couldn't have left Bill summarily, without a word of sympathy, understanding, such consolation as a friend could offer, however empty. She had tried to convey something of the compassion she felt to Oliver, with her eyes. "I think I'll walk back with Bill, Mr. Mont, if it's not too far."

Oliver had refused her message. His fleeting glance at her was cold. He shrugged. "Okay. Whatever you please." He went out of the room, taking the light with him, leaving pain and emptiness behind. Damien knew it was the sort of pain she would have to learn to accustom herself to. Perhaps in time the edge of it would dull. She wasn't going to die because she had conceived a passion for a man she couldn't marry, a man, moreover, who had given no sign that he loved her in return.

The walk across the fields wasn't too long. Bill didn't talk much. He was as thoughtful and courteous as ever. He had much better manners than Oliver, who was careless, indifferent, sometimes didn't seem to know that you were there. Bill helped her over walls and through gates, but it was like being with the shell of a person, until they started up the drive at Arroways. Then Bill jerked himself out of his dark abstraction.

"Damien—" He stood still on the gravel under a tall elm banked with rhododendrons and laurel. "You can't go on staying here with the Monts. Not after this—"

She stopped him. "I don't intend to stay here, Bill. If the bank people haven't decided to give me a mortgage by tomorrow, I'm going back to New York. The mortgage can be arranged later, from there."

"But what about now? Come down to Frances's and have dinner. Stay the night. You can come back here tomorrow and get your things."

If she did, she wouldn't be with Oliver, have to look at him, listen to his voice— Better that way. Begin as you meant to go on. "If your aunt wouldn't mind, Bill, I'd like to have dinner and spend the evening. I won't stay the night. It would seem too marked. After all, the Monts haven't done anything to me, and Mrs. Mont has tried to be kind."

"What about that wooden ball that almost hit you?" Bill demanded.

"That was an accident."

"Well, maybe it was," Bill conceded grudgingly, and went into the house with her.

There was no one in the shadow-hung spaces of the hall. Thinking of the sprawled body on green grass beside the brook, Damien shivered. Was it someone here who had pulled the trigger of the gun that had killed Mike Jones? She conquered an impulse to turn and flee, run out through the door. Instead she said, "I won't be long," and went upstairs. She longed for a shower, but it would take too much time. She contented herself with cold water on her face and throat and arms, changed into a fresh blouse and skirt and did her face and then her lips, with the remains of an old lipstick—not the one Roger Hammond had stepped on when he searched her things. Roger Hammond seemed a great distance away, so did Mike Jones, who had never been anything but a name. She put them aside for the moment. There was nothing, no one, but Oliver in the world. She had to learn to put him aside, permanently, for good. Pain struck her. It was going to be a bitter lesson. She left her bedroom, and Arroways closed in around her again with its soft, inexorable pressure. Going toward the staircase, she had a clear view of the corridor running into the west wing.

She stood still. Miss Stewart was at the door of Eleanor Mont's room, solid back turned. The nurse was leaning forward, as though she were listening. There was a crouched air about her, an air of secrecy, purpose. She gave a quick glance over her shoulder, a glance that, because of the dimness and the position in which Damien

stood, didn't take Damien in, made her invisible. Then, after making sure that she was unobserved, Miss Stewart opened Eleanor Mont's door, slipped inside, and closed the door soundlessly behind her.

Chapter Fifteen

Another Murder Attempt

Damien remained where she was at the head of the stairs for a full half minute trying to decide what to do. Miss Stewart, there was absolutely no doubt of it, was illicitly in Oliver's mother's room. Why had she gone in like that, stealthily, surreptitiously? Damien was still motionless when the door of Eleanor Mont's room began to open.

A sudden unreasoning wave of fear surged through her. So much shadow-filled space, so many doors with puzzles behind them, so many people doing queer things—Miss Stewart not the least— She found herself descending the stairs fast and on tiptoe and reached the bottom, to be confronted by Jancy Hammond walking toward her.

Jancy didn't look at her, didn't seem to see her, although there was no more than ten feet of space between them. She went quickly past and up the stairs, a hatless young woman, her hair in disorder, her face a white blur, her head bent. She had no coat on, had evidently been wandering around the grounds in her thin yellow silk blouse and black skirt. There was a quality of hopelessness in her that aroused Damien's pity. Jancy must have been told that Mike Jones was dead. Hammond loomed up in his wife's wake, a tail at the end of an invisible kite.

Roger Hammond was not a man to ignore solid objects in his path. He said with an effect of breathlessness, and he really was out of breath, "Terrible thing this, about that man Jones. My wife knew him, you understand." He ducked his head with a pallid smile as though apologizing for not lingering, and followed Jancy upstairs.

In spite of what she had learned about him, Damien couldn't help feeling sorry for Hammond, too. He was a neat man with bandbox emotions who didn't know how to cope with the situation in which he found himself.

Jancy, all the Monts, were too much for him. Nevertheless, she resolved, at the first opportunity, to tell the Inspector about his search of her room. And yet—could she? The whole picture had changed. Oliver hadn't killed Mike Jones. Remembering how gently he had held her in his arms, taking her away from the pitiful figure below them, soothing and quieting her, she was sure of that. And whoever had killed poor Jones had killed Anne Giles. In any case she couldn't bring herself to say one word about Oliver to Inspector McKee. The idea was unthinkable. Then what about Roger Hammond? Leave that for later. At the moment she was too tired to wrestle with problems.

Bill wasn't in the hall. He had probably gone outside to wait. Damien went to the front door, opened it, and looked around the graveled sweep. There was no sign of Bill. He must be inside, in one of the rooms. She went back into the house. The library was empty. She went to the living-room door, looked through it. Bill wasn't in the living-room—but Miss Stewart was.

The nurse was at one of the windows at the far end of the room. She wasn't standing at the window looking out in an ordinary fashion. She was standing to one side of the window, stooping forward with the same crouched intensity she had worn upstairs, and staring absorbedly through an opening in the slats of the drawn Venetian blind at something beyond and below her, in the direction of the tennis court. Damien withdrew without speaking at the sound of the front door. Bill had been outside. Before she could go to him, the maid, Agnes, entered the hall from the service corridor. The maid said with that queer inimical blankness she had had from the first, "A call came for you while you were out, miss. It was from a Miss Towle. She said she'd call you back at six o'clock."

Jane— Damien was carried bodily into another more normal world. It, too, had its shadows. Had something happened? Was Jane worse, had a new complication cropped up? Bill said, "Ready?" as she went toward him, and she said no and told him about Jane's call.

"I can't go until I've talked to her, Bill." They went

into the library, and Damien rang long-distance, but the apartment didn't answer. Jane wasn't there. It was all right, Damien assured herself. There wasn't anything really to be worried about. Jane liked a little walk in the afternoon whenever she felt up to it and it wasn't too cold. She said, "I'll have to wait here until six, Bill."

Bill smiled at her. "If you can stand it, Damien, I can." He added between his teeth, his expression darkening, "But I wish to God you could be out of here for good. It seems as though there's always something to prevent your leaving this house. If Mike had never come into it, he'd be alive now."

The phone rang again, and Damien jumped. The call was for Bill. She gave him the instrument and went over to the window, started to light a cigarette, and didn't. The window opened on the side lawn. It showed much the same view as the living-room window at which Miss Stewart had been stationed. What had the nurse been spying on—that was the only word for it—so intently? There was nothing in sight but an expanse of rolling lawn, still green and dotted with almost leafless trees. She moved a little, and saw Eleanor Mont. Oliver's mother was down on her knees, working in one of the flower borders between the house and the tennis court. As Damien watched, she lifted an earth-encrusted bulb, put it in a basket beside her on the turf, lifted another, brushed the earth flat with a gloved hand, and got to her feet.

Whatever the nurse had been watching, it wasn't Eleanor Mont taking in bulbs for the winter; Damien turned back into the room. Bill was dropping the phone into its cradle. He had to go home at once. It was his aunt who had called him. A state policeman was at Frances's. The policeman wanted the name and address of Mike Jones's only living relative, a brother in southern California. Bill said, "I don't know just where Bob Jones lives, except that it's fairly near San Diego. I've got his address somewhere in my desk. I'll have to go down. Tell you what, I'll go along now and drive the Chevy back for you at six. Jane will have called you by then. I'll wait for you at the gate.

It's just as well anyhow, you've had walking enough for one day." He started for the door.

Damien said, "Wait a minute, Bill. Miss Stewart is up to something." She told him what she had seen the nurse do upstairs and then in the living-room. "She was like a cat getting ready to pounce, making sure of her position."

Bill said doubtfully, "Are you positive, Damien?"

"I am," Damien said. "Come and look for yourself, maybe she's still at the living-room window." But when they reached it, the living-room was empty. Miss Stewart had gone.

Bill and Damien were at the front door when Eleanor Mont entered the hall from the side corridor, walking hurriedly. She didn't see them. She went into the library to the telephone and called Hiram St. George. The door was open. They both heard the stress in her edged tone as she said quickly, "Hi, something pretty bad has happened. You'd better—"

She stopped talking suddenly. The sound of the receiver being put down; the library door closed. Damien stared at its blank surface. Something pretty bad had happened—was Eleanor Mont talking about Mike Jones's death? Scarcely. Hiram St. George must have heard of that quite a while ago. She gave it up tiredly.

Bill went then. The library door was still closed. Damien looked at the clock beside it. The clock was going again. Someone had started it. Why had it stopped yesterday afternoon? Because someone had forgotten to wind it, of course. It was almost twenty minutes past five. Jane was always punctual. She had only a little over half an hour to wait. Where was Oliver? Over at the St. Georges' with Linda, probably. She went upstairs to her own room.

But even shut up in it, she felt vulnerable. The sensation of something covert, strange, going on in the house, had deepened sharply since she had re-entered it with Bill. It was as though wheels were spinning faster, things rushing toward a focus— An overwhelming desire to be free of Arroways and the people in it took hold of her. At five minutes of six she went downstairs. The library

was untenanted. As the clock in the hall struck the hour, the phone rang. It was Jane, and Jane was worried. She had read about Anne Giles's death in the paper, noticed the story on an inside page because Damien had asked her about the woman. "I recognized the name." She wanted Damien to come home. Damien reassured her, said she'd probably be back some time the following day, hung up, and lifted the instrument again.

No matter what happened up here, it didn't alter her own problems any. She still had to have money, and she had to have it at once. Soon it would be cold, and Jane would begin really to suffer. She called the bank and asked for Mr. Silver. A voice at the other end of the wire said that Mr. Silver was in a directors' meeting. She left the number of the Kendleton house saying she would call again as soon as she got there. Damien put on her coat and left Arroways.

It was growing dark out. The sky was overcast. A light mist trailed ragged veils of gray chiffon through the hollows. Tree branches creaked in the low wind and gravel pinged under Damien's feet as she walked quickly down the driveway. Suppose she met Oliver now, on his way home? She quenched the wild hope that sprang up in her with hard bitterness; that sort of thing was out, definitely out. She must put Oliver Mont from her mind, not let her thoughts touch him. She increased her pace. She had rounded the turn and was on the stretch between it and the gates, a stretch banked by rhododendron on either side and hemmed in by the leafless elms, when she tripped and almost fell over the shoe.

Righting herself, Damien looked down. It was a brown pump with a cuban heel over which she had stumbled. Staring at it, little fingers of ice ran along Damien's spine. The brown pump belonged to Miss Stewart. She had never seen the nurse wear anything else. What was her shoe, one shoe, doing here on the driveway in the autumnal dusk, lying on its side, commonplace and forlorn—and demanding? Damien stood still, scarcely breathing, turned her eyes this way and that, and saw the stockinged foot. It was

just visible off on the right, protruding through glossy green leaves, heel in the air, toes digging into the earth. Damien walked stiffly across the grass, pushed more leaves aside. Miss Stewart was there, behind a thin screen of laurel bushes. She was lying face down on the turf, her arms thrown out. Her hat had fallen off. There was blood on the back of her neck, in her hair and on her skin. Miss Stewart didn't move. The blood did. It welled, bubbling.

Something else besides the blood moved. Close by, something stirred in among the densely massed leaves that were sloping green walls draped with mist. It was almost dark, and cold, and wet. The wind muttered. A leaf floated down. She and the nurse were in a bay surrounded by those concealing masses, walls. The house was far away. The sound again? Nearer this time?

Damien's frozen throat opened. Nothing but a harsh croak emerged. She turned and plunged back toward the driveway, crying out as she ran. She had to get help, get away. The two insistent demands were intermingled. Somewhere on that flight into blackness, fifty, a hundred feet from the spot where Miss Stewart lay, arms pinioned her, and she was caught and held.

It was Oliver, Damien had run into. "Miss Stewart," she cried. "Back there, in among the bushes. She's hurt—dead, I don't know. There's blood—"

"All right, Damien. Just take it easy. Show me."

But the others were before them, Bill, on foot, and just behind Bill the Inspector and Luttrell leaving a stopped car around the bend of the driveway. The lights from the car, brilliant in the dimness picked up the nurse's shoe.

Miss Stewart wasn't dead. Luttrell held a torch while the Inspector knelt, surrounded by the motionless little group standing back a few feet. The nurse was breathing. Luttrell went to telephone for a doctor. Without looking at any one of them, McKee said, "You people go up to the house and wait there," and alone with the injured woman, he knelt again. A handkerchief pressed gently to the wound behind the ear; he studied her position, then

reached out and opened the clenched fingers of her right hand. On her lax palm lay the missing squares of silver from the necklace with which Anne Giles had been strangled.

Chapter Sixteen

Window-Sill Clue

Just for a handful of silver she left us—*not* for a riband to stick in her coat—Miss Stewart had been savagely attacked and struck down for those two heavy silver squares missing from the necklace with which Anne Giles had been strangled and that she had carried in her hand. That much was clear to McKee, propped against a window sill at the far end of the living-room at Arroways listening to Luttrell question the occupants of the house. Also and in addition, if it hadn't been for Damien Carey's arrival on the scene, the nurse would have been polished off then and there and the missing bit of necklace removed. The injured woman had been rushed over to the hospital in Danbury, where she had been put on the critical list. She might or might not live. There was a fifty-fifty chance. They wouldn't know for at least twenty-four hours.

The situation was dangerous. The killer was on the run. Prudence, caution, had been thrown to the winds, of necessity. Events were ganging up on the perpetrator, there was no time to pick and choose. If they could only get at the real meaning of the broken necklace— Miss Stewart was the single lead. She knew. That was why the attempt to kill her had been made. Failing the nurse's return to consciousness, they would have to dig themselves, and digging took time. He returned his attention to the room.

The ceiling lights were full on. Shocked faces that told nothing, answers that were equally inconclusive. He threw the answers away. As in Mike Jones's death, everyone in the room, including the St. Georges, at the house when he reached it, and Bill Heyward, ostensibly there to pick up Damien Carey, every one of them, any one of them, could, as far as opportunity was concerned, have attacked the nurse. Slip after Miss Stewart in the dusk, through the

concealing bushes lining the driveway, strike, and flee perforce, without the bit of necklace, when the Carey girl showed up.

Jancy Hammond had reportedly been in her bedroom, Eleanor Mont in hers, the maid in the kitchen. Hammond had been practicing billiard shots in the game room in the basement. The St. Georges had been together in their own house and then on the way over to Arroways. Linda St. George said that with an effect of shouting it aloud, although she spoke in a low voice. Her hand was tucked under her father's arm where she sat beside Hiram St. George on the love seat, her blue eyes big and dark, like those of a clairvoyant's, her body shaking with small repeated tremors, the little dust of freckles on her nose gold against intense pallor. Oliver Mont had been at the St. George house earlier, had started home in advance of Linda and St. George, had heard Miss Carey calling for help, and had gone to meet her. Bill Heyward had been in his car outside the gates waiting for Miss Carey. He, too, had heard her cry out.

Hiram St. George said thoughtfully to Luttrell, "How did you people get here? What brought you at just that time?" Luttrell glanced at McKee. McKee said, "Miss Stewart called Mr. Luttrell's office. I answered the phone. She started to talk, changed her mind, and put the receiver back on the hook. I recognized her voice, thought she might have something important to say, so—" He shrugged.

Damien Carey after that. The same questions to her as to the others; her own movements first. She described them. Had she seen Miss Stewart about the house earlier, before Miss Stewart started down the driveway, did she know anything about the two silver squares? What had Miss Stewart been doing? Had there been any conversation between them?

Damien and Bill were sitting in chairs side by side against the east wall. Opposite and facing them, across the width of the room, were the Monts, Hammond, Linda, and Hiram St. George. Luttrell was at one end of the

impromptu horseshoe, writing, the Inspector, farther away, was at the other. Damien listened to the clock tick and looked at mental images, of Mike Jones sprawled beside the brook, of the nurse face down on the ground, blood bubbling from the wound behind her ear. There were certain things you could do and certain things you couldn't—no matter what the cost.

She straightened in her chair, abandoned retreat with finality, looked at Luttrell, and told him. She said that Miss Stewart had surreptitiously slipped into Mrs. Mont's bedroom about half an hour before she left the house. The nurse had only been in Mrs. Mont's bedroom a short time when she came out, with the same caution, stealthiness. Later, perhaps two or three minutes later, Miss Stewart had been watching something intently through the west window of the living-room. The only person outside, the only person in sight, was Mrs. Mont, gardening.

The clock ticked again. McKee spoke. He said, "Miss Stewart didn't have those two silver squares earlier this afternoon when we met her at the Giles cottage. She didn't know until we told her that the bit of necklace was missing. She didn't find it at the cottage. From the time involved, she must have come straight to this house from there. Mrs. Mont, Miss Stewart was in your room after she got back. Her demeanor appears to have been that of a woman searching for something. Can you tell us anything about the broken bit of the necklace with which Anne Giles was strangled?"

Eleanor Mont had sat looking at her hands while he spoke. She raised her eyes. She had never been calmer. Her control of all nervous movement was so complete it was a surprise when her lips parted. A flat negative.

"No, Inspector. No, I cannot."

The attack on the woman who had been a guest in her house seemed to have affected her far less than the revelation concerning Maria Mont's rings missing from her husband's body. Perhaps she was becoming inured to murder and attempted murder in her immediate vicinity. Then, of course, there was always the courage of despera-

tion. But if Eleanor Mont was cool, collected, apparently untouched by Damien Carey's statement, the others were not.

Jancy Hammond had come out of her lackluster lethargy. There was black anger in the look she bent on the younger girl. Oliver Mont's scrutiny of Miss Carey was sharp and cold. Linda St. George looked puzzled and uncertain and distressed. Hiram St. George was openly angry. Roger Hammond was outraged. His innocuous and handsome façade had an ugly crack in it. He said sneeringly, "Miss Carey thinks Miss Stewart went *stealthily* into Mrs. Mont's room, that she was watching something *intently,* through a window—" He smiled broadly, his chiseled face flushed. "Of course, if one doesn't care how one uses words—"

Damien felt the scorn, contempt, in all of them. It was in Oliver, too. *Well,* she thought grimly, *you wanted to put distance between yourself and Oliver Mont. It's done now.* She had something else to say. "Mr. Luttrell, yesterday afternoon my room here in this house was entered and my things searched—by Mr. Hammond." She produced her crushed lipstick from her bag, gave the details in a clear voice. "If you'll look carefully under that chair over there," she waved a hand, "you'll find traces of lipstick on the carpet."

She had thrown down the gage with a vengeance. Hammond's verbose and lengthy explanation, produced after an initial explosion, explained nothing—was exactly the sort of tale she had expected him to come up with. After he got home from the funeral service for Miss Giles he said he had fancied he heard someone in Miss Carey's room, knew she wasn't there, had gone in to see— The others rallied to his support, closed ranks, faced her with freezing glances.

No doubt now of what these people felt about her, including Oliver, Damien thought. They had admitted her to their midst, had treated her as one of themselves, while all along she had been spying on them and at the first possible moment, in spite of their kindness, she had run to

the police with irresponsible malice.

Eleanor Mont put an end to the scene. She said with icy courtesy, "I fear we've been trespassing on your indulgence, Miss Carey. Arroways is no longer ours. It belongs to you. We have no business here. I'm afraid it will be impossible for us to leave tonight, but early tomorrow morning we will be out of it. I can promise you that."

Damien was already on her feet. So was Bill. His silent companionship was warming, a comfort. Damien looked Eleanor Mont full in the face. "Thank you, Mrs. Mont. That will suit me nicely." Beside his mother, Oliver neither moved nor spoke. He continued to regard her through narrowed eyes above a lean hand negligently holding a cigarette, as though she was some new and not particularly interesting species of animal in a cage at the zoo. Damien turned to Luttrell. "If you're through with us, Mr. Luttrell?" and when the town prosecutor said yes, she walked out of the room with Bill beside her, picked up her coat from a bench in the hall where she had thrown it, and without the slightest idea of where she was going, except that it was away from under the roof that covered the Monts, she started for the front door.

Outside in the windy darkness, Bill settled her destination. He put a quick arm around her shoulders. "Good girl—that was telling them. It's time someone put the Monts in their place. Frances will be delighted to have you, and glad to hear it. Queer about Miss Stewart's going into Eleanor Mont's room—"

"Yes." Damien drew away from Bill's arm. Perversely, she wished he wouldn't talk about it. She had done what she had to do, wanted to lick her wounds in solitude. Her ambition was meager; it was difficult to attain. When they arrived at the Kendleton house on the edge of the village she was subjected to a barrage of questions from Miss Kendleton. They were well meant, but every word was a wound. Then Mr. Silver telephoned. The bank had finally approved her mortgage. He said that if she would come down tomorrow and bring the deed of Arroways with her it would take only a short time to complete the necessary

arrangements. Damien said she would.

Miss Kendleton and Bill were pleased for her. The former was full of plans. Jimmy Cramer was just the man for Damien, if she could get him. He was a marvelous architect—and cheap. Damien said yes and no, scarcely listening, and went early to bed, pleading a headache. It was a long while before she slept. When she woke the next morning the small pretty room was full of sunlight. She looked around, orienting herself in strangeness, remembered what had happened the night before, and threw an arm over her eyes to shut out the sunlight and turned her face to the wall.

At eleven a.m. on the same morning sunlight was all around McKee and Luttrell when they left the cleared space surrounded by laurel and rhododendron bushes where the nurse had been attacked. Blood stained the grass in one spot. Beyond that there was nothing informative under the most elaborate scrutiny. In the hospital in Danbury Miss Stewart was still unconscious, and not in good shape.

The day was cool, frosty, spacious. There was light everywhere. At the top of the driveway, with the bulk of the house in front and to the left, McKee paused and gazed over the descending roll of cropped green lawns from which leafless trees rose and across the tennis court to the neat little house in which Eleanor Mont had had what appeared to have been a devastating interview with Anne Giles, a short few hours before Anne Giles was strangled. To the right, propped against a pear tree, was the ladder with which Anne Giles's room had been entered on Sunday night. He strolled on down the slope, thinking of the two attacks on the blue room, one from the inside on Saturday, one from the outside a little over twenty-four hours later, of the bit of necklace that had finally turned up—and of the rings that had been removed from Randall Mont's body, rings destined for Damien Carey. At the moment the broken bit of necklace bothered him most. It had no apparent meaning. Why the

killer had removed it from the living-room in the Giles cottage remained a profound mystery. There had to be an answer. He reached the ladder, paused beside it.

The top of it rested against a black ring of creosote painted on the bark of the pear tree to repel ants, or other vermin—McKee was no horticulturist. He lifted the ladder away from the tree, hefted it. It was strong but light. Just as he and Luttrell had re-enacted the nurse's journey from the front door to the spot where she had been attacked, he proceeded to re-enact the entrance of the blue room in which Anne Giles's bags had been slashed open on Sunday night.

Carrying the ladder, he advanced over the lawn toward the house. Yes, he decided, looking across a wide stretch of well-cared-for turf, from his position behind the oak, Mike Jones would have seen the killer doing the same thing he was doing now—which was why Jones had died. Reaching the house, McKee propped the ladder against the blue room sill and mounted. He was still visible, or would have been visible, from the oak. He glanced down absently at the window sill, at the marks on it, black marks—and his glance suddenly sharpened. He moved the ladder a little. Dry now, the paint from the pear tree—on the uprights and on the top rung of the ladder—left no smear on the white ledge. But there were smears there. He descended so rapidly that he bumped into Luttrell who had no time to get out of the way.

"These people keep a gardener, Fred?"

Luttrell stared. "Not a regular gardener—not now. But I think Big Joe Dodge comes here once a week. He lives just down the road."

"Get him," McKee said, and didn't say any more.

Luttrell hurried off. Five minutes later the Scotsman had the information he wanted, and the puzzle of the broken bit of necklace, and its strange peregrinations, and why it was so important, was a puzzle no longer.

Joe Dodge came to Arroways on Thursdays and sometimes Fridays. The black ring had been painted on the pear tree and the lower branches of the pear tree pruned,

on the previous Friday morning before he left at noon. Creosote, the base of the insect-repelling ring, took twenty-four hours to dry because of the stuff with which it was mixed. "To be safe," Joe Dodge said, "if you do it like one morning, it'll be hard as rock the next morning." Yes, he agreed, the paint would have been a little tacky Friday night, but by Saturday noon it would have been okay. A lady could handle it with white gloves.

Joe Dodge was dismissed. When he was gone McKee said aloud, "Friday night the black ring on the pear tree was a little tacky. Yes, definitely," and looked past Luttrell. They were no longer alone. On the right Oliver Mont was rounding the corner of the house, and off to the left the Carey girl was walking up the drive. McKee devoted his entire attention to Oliver Mont, but Damien, coming on, was close enough to hear that calm, deadly, point-blank accusation.

"Mr. Mont," McKee said, "Anne Giles wasn't killed over there in the living-room of her cottage, she was killed here at Arroways. She was killed upstairs in that blue room, and after she was dead her body was removed to the house on the river."

Chapter Seventeen

Too Many Natural Deaths

Oliver stood still and stared at the Inspector in an attitude of arrested motion, his hands in his pockets, his head a little bent.

His tall figure, outlined against the sky, bore an odd resemblance to a statue in bronze, fair hair glinting in the sun, the sharply modeled planes of his face taut under a deeply tanned skin above the paler tan of his gabardine raincoat, an army shirt, an old pair of officer's pinks, and brown cordovan shoes.

Oliver's going to deny it, Damien told herself. *He's going to laugh in a moment—of course he is. The Inspector's just testing him. The whole thing is absurd. Oliver wouldn't—*

He spoke, and she leaned hard on inner recoil so as to break the force of the blow. Fishing a cigarette from the pocket of the gabardine coat, Oliver lit it and said quietly, "How did you find out, Inspector?"

"The marks on the window sill up there," McKee waved. "There was black paint on the top of the ladder on Friday night, black paint from the pear tree. There's black paint in the proper places on that window sill up there. The paint on the ladder was wet Friday night, dry before Saturday noon. Therefore the ladder was placed against the window sill on Friday night. You were the one who moved the body, Mr. Mont?"

"Yes."

"You killed Anne Giles?"

"No."

"I see." The Inspector was easy, almost genial. He was completely terrifying. A deep shudder went through Damien. She wanted to flee, put the horror behind her. If she had attempted to move she would have fallen.

Oliver went on talking in short curt phrases. "At half

past eleven that night, Friday night, it might have been a little earlier, it might have been a little later, I was out here in the grounds, strolling around. I looked up and saw my mother through the hall window. She was leaning against the banister, was bent over it, holding onto the railing for support. I thought she was ill, about to faint. By the time I got inside and upstairs my mother was in her room. She was in a state of collapse. She told me what had happened. Before going to bed she had gone in to speak to Anne. She found her lying dead on the floor. Anne was dead when my mother entered the blue room."

"Why did you move the body, Mr. Mont?"

"Oliver didn't do that originally. I did."

It was Hiram St. George who spoke, coming from behind the kitchen wing in a sport coat and slacks, a white shirt open at his sturdy throat. St. George was outwardly calm but there were leaden pouches under his eyes, and his expression was stern. The real force in him seemed to have come out from under blankets.

Oliver turned on St. George angrily. "Why don't you keep out of this, Hi?"

"I'm not going to let you take the onus of what was done. It was my idea. I did the planning and most of the work."

"Oh, come," McKee said pleasantly, "share the credit between you. That's the way it was, wasn't it?"

That was the way it had been. Bit by bit he drew the story from the two men. Coming over to see whether Linda wanted to go home, St. George had entered the house with Oliver at around half past eleven. When they were sure that Anne Giles was dead and that nothing could be done for her, Oliver got the ladder from the pear tree and propped it against the wall, and St. George lifted the dead woman and gave her to him. They couldn't risk carrying her down through the house. Miss Carey was there, and Linda and Jancy. "I think not your sister, Mr. Mont," McKee said, "but proceed." Oliver had gone down the ladder, carrying Anne Giles's lifeless body. He put her in the car and then drove over to the cottage.

"And when you got to the cottage," McKee said softly, "you pressed Anne Giles's fingers on the knob of her front door, then placed the body in much the same position as it had been in the room upstairs and took her purse to make the crime look like robbery."

Oliver started to speak. St. George cut across him. "Everything that was done was my suggestion. I knew we had to be careful."

"Why?"

That was the gist, that bald why.

"Hell," Oliver said harshly, showing signs of the strain he was under for the first time. He didn't look at the Inspector, or at Damien standing some ten feet away, held there against her will, deprived of the power of motion, but straight ahead of him. "I should think that would be self-evident. My mother was almost out of her mind. She's not a well woman. My sister was on the loose—you know that. Jancy had had too much to drink, she disliked Anne Giles and she had had a run-in with Anne earlier in the day. We knew what the police would think if they found Anne dead here—just what you're thinking now. But you're wrong. Jancy didn't kill Anne. My mother didn't kill her. But are you going to believe that?"

McKee said evenly, "We have your word for it, have we? Considering the amount of truth you've handed out to us so far, all of you, I'm afraid your word's not quite good enough. No, not quite. Mr. Mont, I want this in detail and in writing from you, and from you, Mr. St. George. And I want to talk to your sister, Mr. Mont, and to your mother."

Jancy was at the Black Horse Inn; the Inspector would find her there. He couldn't talk to Eleanor Mont. Both Oliver and St. George said that. Early that morning while she was dressing, Oliver's mother had fainted. The maid, Agnes, had found her lying across her bed partially dressed. They had revived her and had managed to get her over to the St. George house. She appeared to have conceived a hatred of Arroways because of what had happened there. When he had come at six that morning, the

doctor, Dr. Marsh from the sanitarium, said it was a complete nervous breakdown. He had given Eleanor Mont a sedative and left orders that she was not to be disturbed, or he wouldn't answer for the consequences.

"You can check with Marsh, Inspector," St. George said.

McKee nodded. "I will." Then and only then, did he recognize Damien's presence. He turned toward her. "You knew something of this, Miss Carey, this confession we've just heard?"

Before Damien could answer, Oliver interposed swiftly. "Miss Carey knew nothing about Anne's having been killed here. She did know that my sister had given Linda the slip that night, that Jancy wasn't in her room."

He looked at the Inspector, not at her. The gulf between them was wider than any sea; pain struck at Damien. In the middle of it she had a sudden sensation of danger, just such a reaction as she might have had if, walking across a long trestle, she had heard the distant whistle of an on-rushing train. The feeling was very strong. There was no apparent cause for it. There was nothing and no one alarming in view, nothing that threatened her. The windows of the great empty house looking down on them were blank, shining. McKee didn't appear to be interested in her; he and Luttrell and Oliver were starting across the lawn toward the front door. Hiram St. George lingered, saying kindly, "Is there anything I can do for you, Miss Carey?"

Damien said no, that she had come to get her bag and the deed for Arroways, and St. George joined the other three men, and she followed them inside, a walking automaton, and went slowly upstairs to her room.

It took only a minute or two to pack her things. She put the Arroways deed in her purse. Standing at a window trying to digest what she had heard outside she struggled with a feeling of mortal sickness. She touched the window seat in front of her with brushing finger tips. Seated on it last Friday night she had seen Oliver put, not a live, but a dead woman into the car beneath the pine

tree, tuck in her skirts, and drive off. The horror of it was suffocating. And yet, an alcoholic sister who hated Anne Giles, a mother who had found the body—yes, the provocation had been extreme—if Oliver was innocent. He was. He was. She turned with a violent movement, picked up her bag, and went downstairs. In the library McKee was questioning Oliver and Hiram St. George about the piece of necklace found in Miss Stewart's hand. The library door was open. Damien sank into a chair in shadow near it. What further damaging admissions was Oliver going to make? She had to know.

Oliver and Hiram St. George could, or so they said, tell the Inspector nothing. They hadn't known that the necklace had snapped, its work done. It was St. George who had straightened up the blue room after Oliver drove off with his burden. St. George hadn't seen the two silver squares, but then he hadn't looked. No, there was no sign of the weapon with which Anne Giles had been struck before she was choked with the necklace and her last breath stopped.

"What about the others in the house on Friday night?" McKee asked. "Roger Hammond, Miss St. George, your sister—did they know what had happened, what you did?"

Oliver and his mother and St. George were the only ones who knew. Linda had given her father and Oliver a couple of bad moments on Friday night. She wasn't aware that her father was in the house at all and she had knocked on Oliver's door when he and Hiram St. George were in conference. Oliver had stepped out into the corridor. It was then that Linda told him about her struggle with Jancy, that Jancy had gotten away. Oliver had said he would handle Jancy and had sent Linda back to bed. "My sister was out of the house before Anne was killed. I'm sure of it." He described her flight to the harness room in the stable where she had spent the night. As for Roger Hammond, neither man knew what time he arrived at Arroways.

"But why concentrate on this house looking for the killer?" Oliver asked tiredly. "The doors were all open.

We seldom, if ever, lock them. Anyone could have gotten in, gotten up to Anne's room, gotten out again safely, without being seen. Aren't you forgetting Maria's rings, Inspector? After all, Anne's room was broken into on Sunday night. Someone used the ladder—"

"For the second time, Mr. Mont."

"Yes, for the second time."

That, Damien thought, was why Oliver had worn that astounded expression when he looked out and saw the ladder below the blue-room window after the crash.

"Until you find out what became of Maria's rings," Oliver went on, "find out who removed them from my father's body, and who entered Anne's room on Sunday night and slashed her bags open—"

McKee said in a smooth, cutting-off voice, "Quite, Mr. Mont." Luttrell said formally, "If you will both sign—" Paper rustled. Damien got up and started along the hall. She didn't want to see Oliver again. It hurt too much. She was at the front door when McKee came out of the library.

"Oh, Miss Carey— Where can I find you later, if I need you?"

Damien stared past him at light falling across a red leather chair in the well of the staircase. So the discovery that Anne Giles had died here and not over in her cottage was not an end, it was another beginning. But her heart leaped. If the Inspector was convinced that Oliver had killed Anne Giles surely the case would be at an end. She said, "I'm going to meet the architect, Mr. Cramer, here at three o'clock this afternoon to go into the question of remodeling the house, or making it over into apartments, see whether or not it can be done. After that, when I'm through, I want to go back to New York—late this afternoon if I can."

McKee nodded. "Better get in touch with me before you leave Eastwalk, Miss Carey." Damien said she would and let herself out.

Five minutes later, when Oliver Mont and St. George had gone—and they couldn't go far, they, too, had been warned to keep themselves readily available—McKee stood

with Luttrell beside the flower border on the west lawn, looking down at a stretch of freshly disturbed earth between clumped chrysanthemums and fading marigolds. It was at this spot that Eleanor Mont had been gardening yesterday afternoon, taking up bulbs. He said musingly, "I think so. I think that Mrs. Mont found those two silver squares from the broken necklace somewhere in the blue room yesterday afternoon. Coming back from the cottage Miss Stewart told her they were missing. Miss Stewart saw Eleanor Mont find and conceal the links. She looked for them first in Mrs. Mont's room. Later she watched Mrs. Mont burying them here and dug them up herself, intending to bring them to us."

Luttrell was profoundly shocked. "Then you think it was Mrs. Mont who—"

McKee stopped him. "All of them, any of them, including our friend Mr. Heyward *could* have killed Anne Giles. We don't know the whole motive back of her death yet."

"Maria Mont's rings, McKee?"

The Scotsman shook his head. "Not conclusive—and not enough. No. I'm waiting now for a report on Maria Mont's death. When I get it that report may tell the tale—" He broke off. Luttrell was no longer listening.

Someone was calling to him. It was Linda St. George. When she saw the Scotsman she stood still, a lithe erect figure in a blue pleated skirt and a thick white sweater. The girl was harried, driven, and trying desperately to conceal it. She was afraid of him. Her effort at dissimulation was something less than successful. She asked where her father was in a quick anxious voice. "I can't find him. He came over a little while ago to get some things for Mrs. Mont."

Her father—it was her father she was worried about, not the man she was engaged to. McKee studied her thoughtfully. Luttrell said her father had been there but had gone home, and went over to her. Her face softened when she spoke to him. The life came back into it. Watching her with him, watching Luttrell with her, McKee reflected that they suited each other. They might have been happy

together if it hadn't been for Oliver Mont.

He looked away, his gaze hardening. Oliver Mont might soon be in a position where it would be impossible for him to marry anyone. For one thing, he had pleaded guilty to being an accessory after the fact of murder—when forced to, not before. He hadn't lost his head for a moment. Throughout there had been an air of calculation about him—as though he were saying to himself, "Admit what you have to, do the best you can with it, go so far and no further." For another thing, he had lied about his reason for being on the road to the airfield when Mike Jones was killed. There was nothing wrong with his plane, and no mechanic had turned up at the field. The gun with which Jones had been shot had not been found. Oliver Mont had had a service revolver. He had no idea where it was or when he had last seen it—which didn't of itself mean much. Randall Mont had had guns of all sorts. There was quite a collection in the house. One of them could be missing, there was no way to check. But then McKee had never had much hope as far as the murder weapon was concerned. Since the war untraceable guns were a dime a dozen.

Motive for the first crime was now the crux of the entire case. From the setup it looked as though Anne Giles had had something on the Monts. But what? Randall Mont had died of heart failure and not by force and/or arms. Maria Mont, then. There ought to be word on Maria soon.

Luttrell rejoined him, and the two men left Arroways and drove into town.

There was news. Maria Mont's demise had been fully covered by men from his own squad. Unless there had been a gigantic miscarriage of justice, and that was scarcely possible, Maria, too, had died a natural death.

Randall Mont—nothing.

Maria Mont—nothing.

Then why had Anne Giles been killed?

Chapter Eighteen

Murder Trap

The state police, the town police, the state's attorney, were duly informed of the discovery at Arroways, that Anne Giles had been strangled to death in a room on the second floor of the Mont house and her body removed after death to her cottage on the river. McKee didn't know, or particularly care, what action would be taken. The case was not in his hands; it wasn't officially his bird. He was simply giving an assist to Luttrell—not much of an assist so far, but a dim idea of the general pattern was beginning to take shape in his mind. It clarified further when Luttrell, who had gone to question Roger Hammond, returned to the office.

Early on the preceding Friday evening Eleanor Mont had called her son-in-law in New York to tell him that Jancy was not at the sanitarium but with her. Hammond left New York at a few minutes before ten p.m. This had been corroborated by the doorman of his apartment. He had reached Arroways at between eleven-fifteen and eleven-thirty, stopping for gas at Ferris's on the edge of town at a few minutes after eleven. "That," Luttrell said, "puts Hammond on the scene. He was in the house in plenty of time to have killed Anne Giles."

Lying back in his chair McKee looked pleased. "Yes," he said. "Yes, Hammond—" and broke off. The phone was ringing.

It was the Danbury hospital calling. Miss Stewart showed signs of returning consciousness. Her pulse and respiration had improved, and if the Inspector wished to interrogate her it might be possible for him to do so in a short time.

McKee said he would be there, and hung up. It was

the moment for which he had been waiting. He didn't immediately move. He was possessed by a curious reluctance to leave Eastwalk. The perpetrator was begging to go berserk, as witness the attack on the nurse, and the situation could easily get out of hand. Neither the state nor the town police had the personnel to keep the people involved under constant observation, and anything could happen. On the other hand, if Miss Stewart had seen her assailant, the case would be over.

He did a swift mental roundup, placing people and locations. Oliver Mont and his mother at the St. George house with Linda and Hiram St. George, Heyward and his aunt at the Kendleton house in the village. Miss Carey, he glanced at his watch, on the way to Arroways to go over the house with the architect, Jancy and Roger Hammond at the Black Horse Inn. He got to his feet, told Luttrell to keep checking, jammed on his hat, and left the office, Danbury-bound.

The day went on as it had begun. It continued to be warm, hazy. No clouds dimmed the sun as it climbed the sky. Damien reached the top of the Arroways driveway at around a few minutes of three that afternoon. She had little heart for the expedition on which she was bound. It seemed to her useless, silly, unreal. Half a dozen times she had been tempted to call it off, to phone the architect, Mr. Cramer, and say she couldn't make it, that she had to go back to New York. It could have been done later on, she had said as much to Frances Kendleton. Bill's aunt didn't agree, urged her to go through with it, saying that the house was useless to her in its present state, and that with very little effort it could be turned into a paying investment. Her own wish to be finished with Arroways, to get something decided about it and be able to put it out of her mind if only for a little while, had made her decide to come.

She had walked up from the village. Miss Kendleton had to go to a Woman's Town Improvement meeting, and Bill was deep in a series of long-distance talks with

he people who were interested in his new process. He was going to join her at Arroways when he finished.

The keys of the house had been delivered to her at Miss Kendleton's by the Mont maid, after she got back from the bank. There were four sets of them, all labeled, another set for the stables and for the little house beyond the tennis court. The maid said, "Mr. Mont locked up before he went. Mrs. Mont says you will find these correct."

The Monts were through with her, including Oliver—What could they do to him for what he had done, he and Hiram St. George? Oliver certainly wouldn't get off scot-free. Her heart twisted. Then there was Bill. Bill who had concealed vital evidence— She paused in front of the house.

She was a few minutes early. Soft October sunlight bathed the ivy-hung walls, taking away something of their frowning portentousness, perhaps because the Monts had gone. Birds were everywhere, on the lawn, flying in and out of the branches of the leafless trees. Mrs. Cambell was working in her garden. It was hot outside. Damien unlocked the front door, letting in sunlight, and forced her mind to the business in hand. She ran up the Venetian blinds in the dining-room and in the library, and the two rooms filled satisfactorily with brightness. The spaces of the hall continued to be dim. There was nothing much one could do about it, but if Mr. Cramer thought the remodeling project was feasible, the hall would soon be changed. She opened the door to the transverse corridor leading to the terrace, opened the door at the far end of it. The air that came in was sweet, cool.

Her thoughts returned to Oliver. Would he go to prison? She paused beside the gambling-machine against the inner wall, propped an elbow on the glass, and looked down at the little horses, their paint faded, poised in perpetual flight between rows of pins. The picture of Oliver stooped up, caged behind bars, hurt. She pressed one of a row of little knobs absently, watched a green ball inside the machine start rolling down the slope, followed its race in and out of grooves between rows of pins with empty eyes. She pushed another knob. If Oliver hadn't

killed Anne Giles, perhaps they wouldn't do anything to him. A yellow ball rolled in sweeps and curves. He and Linda would marry soon— Yellow counted fifteen. Whoever had killed Anne Giles had killed Mike Jones and attacked Miss Stewart—

Damien took her elbow off the glass. Things were coming out of a hole to the right of the knob. A shower of nickels and dimes, a red flash, a blue one, gold circles, a lot of them, spots of white fire; Damien cupped her hands involuntarily, stayed the flood, and stared down. What she held in her cupped palms were rings—Maria Mont's missing rings. The machine was supposed to be broken. By some quirk she had pressed the right knob. Maria Mont's rings— Randall Mont hadn't gotten them. They hadn't been stolen from the car in which he lay dead. Anne Giles hadn't taken them—

There was a faint sound somewhere. Damien put the rings down in a little heap on the glass top and raised her head. At her back, some fifteen feet away, the door leading to the terrace was open. She didn't turn. She went on into the central hall. Was it the architect she had heard? Had Mr. Cramer arrived?

The hall was empty. Beyond thirty feet of shadow brightness streamed into it from the library on the right and from the dining-room on the left. More shadow, and then the rectangle of the open front door, filled with sun and vista of trees and bushes and rolling green lawn. Nothing moved anywhere. The stillness was profound. It was broken by a loud wheeze.

Damien jumped. It was the clock. The clock struck three deep sonorous notes. They died away. Staring through gloom at the big mahogany shaft, the indistinct face, the swinging pendulum, Damien knew suddenly why the clock had stopped on Monday afternoon. It had stopped because someone had interfered with the works, searching its interior for the rings she had found.

A quick, tight premonition of danger, the same cold thrust she had registered that morning, struck at her again. It was sharper this time. She had found what the searcher

vanted. She was alone at Arroways. Rooms and rooms and nore rooms and passageways and corridors stretched away on every side. The front door seemed incredibly distant. She took a step in shadow—and froze to a halt.

This time there was no mistake. She did hear something. She was no longer alone in the house. There was someone else in it. Gathered faculties, body taut, she listened intently. She was standing near the back of the hall with the stairs and the mouth of the little corridor on her right. The door to the corridor was half closed. Had the sound come from behind it? Had someone entered by way of the terrace? Was that a footfall her ears picked up, or was it the thumping of her own heart, the echo of the tick of the clock? Silence, gloom, sunlight and safety and the open air far away; she mustn't move without knowing where she was going. If she moved in the wrong direction it would be fatal. Knowing nothing else, she did know that. Desperately.

Her alerted senses shouted at her, *Careful— There's something coming.* Her eyes traveled the surrounding shadows. Yes, the door leading to the corridor had just moved a fraction of an inch, no more. It was enough. Damien moved, too, soundlessly, in the only direction in which she could go. The front door was too much to attempt. She would be caught long before she reached it, but off to the left the mouth of the corridor to the kitchen wing yawned grayly.

She reached the doorway, stepped into obscurity, and glanced back over her shoulder. Nothing yet. So far she was safe. The margin wasn't good enough. *Eliza crossing the ice,* she thought with grim levity, the ice being that block of central hall that separated her from whoever was concealed beyond it. To proceed on into the kitchen and from the kitchen to the outside staircase and so into the open, she would have to turn her back on the danger.

Make a dash for it? No. Walk, do not run to the nearest exit. She did turn her back. Quickly now. One foot in front of the other—but no noise. Hold it, don't give way. Don't pause. Don't panic. There was linoleum under her

feet so that she had to use exquisite care. A faint slither. She had made the sound. No. No. There were footsteps behind her. She would, she thought despairingly, never make the kitchen—but she was level with the mouth of the staircase leading down to the basement. The darkness down there would give her cover and, what was more important, there were doors there that opened on the gardens.

Twisting sideways she began to drop into the stairwell, testing each step as she descended. It was a snail's progress, maddeningly slow. But caution was the whole of it. Abandon that, and she would be done. She reached the bottom of the stairs. The darkness was all but absolute, but she dared not switch on a light. As she recalled the arrangement, straight ahead there was a narrow corridor that emptied into the central enclosure. She wouldn't have to go that far. There were doors in the right-hand wall, doors that led to the outside world.

She stood still, her head up. What was that? Had her course been traced? Had she been followed down the stairs? Blackness behind her—was there someone hidden in the blackness? She went on, creeping forward sideways like a crab, both hands on the wall feeling for a door—and found one at last. It was a heavy door. There was a big iron handle to it. It didn't give. There must be some sort of locking mechanism. She thought, *The keys are in my coat up in the hall*—and felt a sort of latch and pressed it lightly.

The resultant click was like thunder in the stillness. But the door was yielding. Now. Damien pulled the heavy door open, went through it, raced forward, and came up against an inner wall with a crash. A sob of rage and frustration choked her throat. The faint cry that emerged was drowned in echoes, soft—and final. She whirled. The door behind her had closed. Two minutes later she stood still, perspiration trickling down her face from her forehead. She was locked into some sort of cubicle with smooth walls and an immovable door. She reached for a handkerchief, and her tight muscles unlocked, and she drew a long

breath of relief.

Her handkerchief, a fresh one, and her scarf, were in the pocket of her coat, and her coat was lying over a chair upstairs in the main hall. Not only that, but the front door was wide open and the Venetian blinds in the library and dining-room were raised and Mrs. Cambell knew she was there, had seen her arrive. The architect would come at any moment now. When Mr. Cramer couldn't find her, when he saw her coat lying over the chair, a search for her would be immediately set on foot. It wouldn't be long before she was free. The thing to do was to keep calm and be ready to call out and announce her location as soon as someone entered the basement. She went over to the door and leaned against it, listening.

"If you're looking for Miss Carey," Ida Cambell said, "She's not here, she's gone."

Jimmy Cramer, the architect to whom Mrs. Cambell spoke, was most certainly looking for Miss Carey. He and Mrs. Cambell, who had just joined him, stood on the gravel enclosure in front of the closed and shuttered house. The front door was locked. Cramer had already tried it. He was very annoyed. True, it was twenty-five minutes past three and his appointment had been for three. But when he found he was going to be a little late he called Arroways, didn't get any answer, and decided that Miss Carey hadn't arrived yet herself. Surely she might have waited for him, or at least she could have rung the office and saved him a fruitless trip up here.

"When did Miss Carey leave, Mrs. Cambell?"

"Not ten minutes ago."

"Did she say—"

"I didn't get to talk to her. I was over in my garden. She let down the blinds in the library, came out, and locked the front door and walked off."

The architect surveyed the closed and shuttered bulk of Arroways with offended dignity, got into his car, and drove off himself. When he reached his office the switchboard girl who serviced the building gave him a message

from Miss Carey. She was sorry but she had to go to New York and couldn't wait for him.

Half an hour later Luttrell got the same report. Checking as McKee had asked him to do, and unable to raise anyone on the Arroways phone, Luttrell called the architect, who told him what had happend, that Miss Carey had returned to New York. Luttrell then checked with Mrs. Cambell, who verified Damien's departure from Arroways at around a quarter past three. The town prosecutor was annoyed rather than alarmed. McKee wasn't going to like Damien Carey's slipping away like that, without permission. He himself had never particularly cared for the girl. She wasn't his type, didn't appeal to him. But to keep the record straight and with the Scotsman in mind, he called the relative in New York. That clinched it. The cousin, Miss Towle, had just had a telegram from Damien Carey saying that she would be home that night.

Meanwhile, at Arroways, Damien waited for the release that didn't come. The blackness of the little room into which she was locked was the hardest thing to fight. Not to be able to see gave her a feeling of suffocation. Until someone came it was useless to waste strength pounding on the door, which presently, after she had gone around the walls of the invisible cell half a dozen times, she lost track of. The door fitted flush, without panels or molding, and there was no knob on the inside.

It was bitterly cold in the cubicle. She walked up and down, stamping her feet and slapping her hands together. Why had she been locked in here? Who was it who had entered the house, followed her down the basement stairs, and slammed the door on her? Was it for the rings she had found, and that were in plain view on top of the gambling-machine? But why do that, unless to delay pursuit and detection? No, not detection. She hadn't seen the intruder, could be no menace to whoever it was. What good was it going to do to coop her up here—unless it was to gain time. It might be that.

She mustn't, she told herself warningly, let the cold and

the darkness and the confinement get her down. All she had to do was wait. It was some time before this protective shield was rudely pulled away. There was a faint whirring somewhere that she thought at first was in her own ears. She didn't associate the purr with the cold that was making itself more and more evident. It was bone-piercing. She had neither coat nor gloves, and her thin wool dress was no help. She went on walking up and down in an attempt to warm her blood. She might as well have tried to contain Niagara in a teacup. There was no draft, but the cold was steadily and inexorably deepening. It was a positive force that clamped down on her from which she couldn't escape. Go on slapping her hands together and stamping her feet as she would, walk faster and faster until she was almost running, three yards one way, two the other, the last vestiges of warmth in her went.

The cold was now intense. She found herself whimpering under its steady onslaught. It was intolerable. She couldn't stand it. She had to get out of that place or die. She had to. Beating clenched fists on the door she felt something odd. She had to use her nails to make sure. Scrape, and feel with numbed finger tips. It couldn't be. It was. What she had touched was rime. Frost, a light coating of it, was beginning to cover the walls of her prison. Her arms fell to her sides, and she stood still, the deep shudders that shook her as though she were a tree in the wind, in momentary suspension. All at once she knew. The place into which she had been locked was a cold room, a freezing-chamber in the bowels of the house.

A freezing-chamber. She wrestled with the idea until it began to lose its shape. She was growing very tired. Drowsiness weighed her eyelids. The salt of unbidden tears on her lashes was turning to ice on her icy face. Her thoughts were turgid. She knew dimly that unless she was released soon she would die, knew, too, that she would die if she fell asleep. But her body was too heavy, like wood, like stone, to keep moving around. It didn't seem worth while. Rest a little. Everybody had to have rest once in a while. She leaned against a frost-covered wall and didn't

pull back. The coldness was drawing off a little, wasn't so important now. Slowly, scarcely conscious of what she was doing, she let her knees buckle and slid to the floor. There was support behind her. She put her head back and slept.

Chapter Nineteen

Accomplished Killer

Outside in the upper world day ended, and the first star came out. McKee saw it through the window of the filling-station five miles south of Eastwalk where he stopped to get gas and call Luttrell.

He had talked to Miss Stewart. The nurse hadn't the slightest idea of who her assailant was—yet on the whole he considered the trip a success. Miss Stewart had been on duty in the Mont apartment when Maria Mont died. Although he knew there wasn't one chance in a million that Maria Mont's death was murder, he found himself returning to it. When he asked what Eleanor Mont had done that night, how she had borne herself, he got an instant reaction.

The nurse had roused, saying in a stronger voice, "That's what Anne wanted to know," and, unexpectedly, "Anne was a tricky one. I knew she was up to something."

As far as actual information went, however, Miss Stewart had very little to give. Eleanor Mont had been upset when she came home and found that her husband had driven up to Arroways, upset when she heard that before he went he had called Damien Carey at Maria's request. She expressed no emotion when she heard that Damien hadn't talked to her grandmother, but Miss Stewart got the impression that she was pleased. Eleanor Mont had called her husband at Arroways at six o'clock. When she didn't get any answer she had called Hiram St. George.

The room in which she did the calling was next to Maria's bedroom. Miss Stewart, busy with the patient, had lost track there. The only thing she could say with certainty was that when she went into the adjoining room, perhaps half an hour later, she had been shocked by Eleanor

Mont's appearance. Mrs. Mont was worried sick about her husband, had said so. It was a dreadful night, rain and sleet, and he had a bad heart. Nothing then until Mrs. Mont called Randall hours later and told him that Maria was dead. He said he would be right down. Yes, Maria Mont had gone suddenly at the end.

The pattern in McKee's mind took another forward leap. It was only a pattern in his mind. He said, "Luttrell?" into the telephone, and Eastwalk's town prosecutor said in a tone of relief, "That you, McKee? I tried to get you at the hospital."

Luttrell was worried about Damien Carey. She had telegraphed her cousin Miss Towle that she was returning to New York that day. There was a three-thirty bus out of Eastwalk, a three-forty-seven train. Apparently Miss Carey had taken neither bus nor train. Anyhow, she hadn't reached home. Miss Towle had called him half an hour earlier to say so.

Luttrell said, "It may be all right. But after the woman called I got to thinking—"

McKee didn't have to think. He knew, coldly and surely. His error. Well—there it was. He asked quick questions, heard that Damien was last seen walking away from Arroways at around three-fifteen that afternoon by Mrs. Cambell who had identified the distant figure by the cherry-colored coat, told Luttrell in a narrow voice to meet him at the gate at Arroways, dropped the instrument into its cradle as though it were red-hot, and walked out of the filling-station into the all but darkness of the October night.

"My God—look! Over there! The dining-room window!" Luttrell pointed. McKee had picked him up at the gate. They were at the top of the Arroways driveway. McKee brought the car to a stop, and they were out of it and sprinting across the lawn. The huge gaping hole in the glass of the dining-room window, visible in the headlamps, had blackness behind it. McKee and Luttrell went through the opening. Across the dining-room and into the hall;

there was a single light on there. McKee stayed Luttrell's advance with an outthrust arm. A peculiar spectacle confronted them. Blocked against stretching gloom Bill Heyward was standing in the middle of the hall, his back to them, bent forward in a listening attitude. McKee and Luttrell heard the voice then, Oliver Mont's voice. Echoing and re-echoing through the cavernous spaces it had an eerie quality to it.

"There, now— There, now. You're going to be all right. You're going to be fine. You'll—"

The man himself emerged from shadow, his hair a pale flame above a desperate face. He was carrying a burden in his arms, a limp figure closely clasped.

Heyward sprang forward. "Damn you, Mont. What have you—"

"Out of the way, you fool." Oliver Mont's elbow struck Heyward, knocking him off balance.

McKee moved.

A doctor, blankets, whisky. Damien Carey was neither dead nor in danger of dying. Once certain of that, McKee gathered the threads into his hands, straightening them out, testing them for strength. He was due back in New York. Finish it up, for the record. No time like the present. He and Luttrell had entered Arroways at six twenty-five. Oliver Mont had found Damien locked into the freezing-chamber in the basement a couple of minutes earlier. The murderer had planned well. Another two or three hours and the girl, lightly clad, would have frozen to death. The thermostat outside the chamber had been pushed to coldest and the switch that started it, thrown. It was that, so Oliver Mont said, the sight of the thermostat and the noise of the freezer, that had alerted him and made him open the heavy door. Heyward had entered the house on Mont's heels, bound on a like errand, a search for the missing girl. Both men professed the same motivation, worry about Damien Carey, disbelief in her return to New York, a conviction that, in spite of Mrs. Cambell's statement, she hadn't left the house.

Even before Damien was found, before he reached Arroways, McKee had gone further. The girl had promised not to leave Eastwalk without getting in touch with him. There had been no word from her. She wasn't at Miss Kendleton's and she hadn't returned to the city. He was convinced that someone wearing her cherry-colored coat, head concealed in the disguise of the scarf, had acted out the girl's departure from Arroways for the benefit of the distant, curious, and always watchful Mrs. Cambell. Luttrell said, "A woman." McKee didn't say anything.

The Scotsman was right. They found the coat and scarf hung innocuously in a hall closet. McKee used the telephone and called Centre Street. He wanted the best microscopist within reaching distance of Eastwalk. Five minutes later, wrapped in a large sheet of brown paper, the coat and scarf were borne out of the house by a state policeman.

Damien Carey was in an upstairs room, surrounded by hot-water bottles and electric pads, sleeping. When the doctor first came and woke her from that other more sinister sleep, she had been able to say a few words. "The rings— Maria's— The gambling-machine. I found the rings in it." The pattern in McKee's mind extended itself with a flourish, was almost complete.

There were no rings anywhere in the vicinity of the gambling-machine. It was taken apart. Result, a single small emerald that had fallen out of its setting, and two pennies. The perpetrator had removed the rings. They would have been dangerous to keep, had probably been disposed of, perhaps somewhere in the grounds. Individual statements had been taken by the state police; McKee reflected that the Monts hadn't acted as individuals but as members of a clan—with one exception. At half past eight that night he faced part of the roster of the people who had been under scrutiny, in the Arroways living-room.

Eleanor Mont could have refused to come; her physician would have backed her up. But she was there. Oliver Mont and Linda were with her. Bill Heyward was also there. He had said, "I'm not going to leave this house un-

til I'm sure that Damien's out of danger." McKee had made no objection. The Hammonds had been sent for, and Hiram St. George was on the way.

Lighted lamps, sheeted statuary. The furnace was going, but a chill that nothing could banish filled the long, ponderous, handsome room. In a chair near the empty hearth, swept but not garnished, Eleanor Mont was a woman in plastic, cleverly fashioned, cleverly colored, devoid of outward emotion but animated by purpose. She said, as soon as she was seated, "I want to talk to you, Inspector."

"No, Eleanor. No." It was Hiram St. George who spoke, coming hurriedly into the room and going quickly toward Eleanor Mont. She didn't look at him, kept her eyes on McKee.

St. George drove at her. "Jancy's— Hammond doesn't know where Jancy is. She's probably all right, but—"

Jancy—St. George played on her name as though he were pushing an accordion stop. It got through to Eleanor Mont. Her air of purpose faltered. She looked suddenly exhausted. "Jancy," she murmured, a ring of grayness around her mouth, as if she had left her daughter out of her calculations and confronted with the fact had to start building again from the beginning. "I thought Jancy was at the Inn with Roger, Hi."

St. George shrugged. "She was. But she went out in the car in the middle of the afternoon and didn't come back for dinner. Roger's half frantic."

Watching, McKee sighed. It couldn't go on. Eleanor Mont had to be made to talk. He plunged into it without preface.

"Mrs. Mont, I believe that on the night on which Maria Mont died, some hours before she died, you called your husband here at this house, at six o'clock, to be precise. When you didn't get any answer you then called Mr. St. George."

Hiram St. George was still as a rock, his arms folded. Eleanor Mont raised her eyes to McKee's. There was no surprise in them. She said quietly, "So you know."

"I think so, but perhaps you'd better tell me. There are details I'm vague about." They might have been casual acquaintances at a garden party engaged in idle conversation.

Eleanor Mont bowed her head. Staring at her hands, flexing them, studying the almond-shaped nails, she began to speak. It was the simplest of tales. Maria Mont had never, as everyone had supposed, legally adopted Randall Mont. She had intended to do so but had let the actual formalities slip. That meant that if Randall Mont, to whom she had left her entire estate by will, predeceased her, she would have been considered to have died intestate, and Eleanor and her children wouldn't have gotten a penny. The money would automatically have gone to her granddaughter as next of kin.

At that point, Oliver Mont got up and went to one of the windows and stood there, looking out into darkness, his back rigid. Eleanor Mont didn't turn. She went on in a flat monotone in which, mingled with pain, there was a sort of release. "No one," she said, "could talk to Maria, urge her to make a new will—but Randall and I talked. What he feared for me, and for the children, happened. Ida Cambell saw Randall drive up to this house on that day last April—and saw nothing more. She didn't see him fall dead on the doorstep before he could insert the key he had in his hand and open the front door. Someone else did see.

"Anne Giles was in Eastwalk that day. She caught sight of Randall driving through town. Her car was in the garage being fixed. She was a curious woman. She came up here and found him. When I couldn't get any answer from Randall I called Hiram. He came over. He didn't see Anne Giles. She took care to keep out of sight. There was nothing Hiram could do. Randall was beyond help. Hiram came into the house and called me back. Anne Giles overheard that call. I—"

"No."

St. George spoke at last, touching her shoulder. "I was the one who planned it."

At the window Oliver didn't move. Heyward was staring with all his eyes. So was Linda, hands tight in her lap. Luttrell took swift notes.

The rest of it then, briefly. Randall Mont was dead and Maria was still alive. She couldn't live long. It was a matter of hours. If Randall Mont's death could be pushed forward, if it could be made to appear that he died after Maria, Eleanor and her children would inherit through him.

St. George said calmly, "I thought it was worth a try." He described unemotionally what he had done. He had carried Randall Mont's body into the house, had turned up the heat and wrapped the body in blankets. He had put lights on and throughout the evening, had moved around behind curtains in such rooms as he calculated would be visible to Mrs. Cambell, who had assumed, as he thought she would, that he was the dead man. He had prepared food in the kitchen, putting Randall Mont's finger tips on various objects, and had then waited for Eleanor's call. It had come around half past twelve. Eleanor Mont had addressed him as if he were her husband over the phone, had called him by her husband's name. After that St. George put the dead man in the car and drove down the road, where he got out, and sent the car and its passenger down into the ravine.

They had succeeded in deceiving everyone—except Anne Giles, who had seen the earlier part of it, heard the plans. More than six months passed. Then, on the preceding Friday, after the estate had finally been settled, Anne Giles had told Eleanor Mont what she knew, in the little house beyond the tennis court, and had made her demands. She wanted five hundred thousand dollars and forty percent of Mont Fabrics.

"I didn't know what to do," Eleanor Mont said with unconscious simplicity. "Anne demanded an immediate answer. I told her I'd come to her room at around twelve, when the house was quiet. I wanted time to consult Hiram. I couldn't get hold of him until a little after eleven. He said he'd be over. But I was nervous. At half past eleven

I went to Anne's room to ask her to wait for an answer until morning—and found her lying dead on the floor. No one," Eleanor Mont moistened dry lips, "no one in this house," she went on with dull vehemence, "killed Anne. The front door was open. Anyone could have gotten in."

"Yes," McKee murmured, his attention directed elsewhere. There was a sudden movement off on the right. He turned his head sharply. Linda St. George was on her feet. She was looking toward the doorway, her face dead-white under gold ringlets clinging to a damp forehead. "Jancy," she cried.

McKee swung. Jancy Hammond was standing in the doorway. She had a gun in her hand. She said in a clear ringing voice that had a mesmeric note in it, "I'm the one. I'm the one who—" and turned the muzzle toward her breast.

Linda was the nearest to her by a good fifteen feet. *"Jancy, Jancy—don't!"* she screamed, and ran forward with the quickness of light.

They were all up and moving, McKee in advance. He reached the struggling pair in the doorway. Legs, arms, bodies, twisting and turning this way and that, the gun appearing and disappearing; a wrong move could result in disaster. He grasped Jancy's shoulder. She dragged herself free. The fury of the two contestants was amazing. Oliver Mont was trying to get hold of the weapon from the other side. Neither the Scotsman nor Oliver Mont succeeded.

There was a sudden loud report. A smell of cordite filled the air. Jancy sagged back against the inner wall, a bewildered expression on her face. Linda had fallen to the floor. Blood welled from her left temple. McKee said, "Back, please," and knelt. After a moment he rose. The fluttering heart under his hand had given a final lurch and was still.

Jancy broke the stunned silence, saying in a bemused voice, "She—Linda tried to kill me—"

"Yes." McKee spoke quietly. "She thought we might accept you as a murderess. She wasn't sure you would go

through with your attempt at suicide. So she decided to make sure. At the last moment, when she couldn't achieve that, she decided to kill herself, quickly and competently, as she killed Anne Giles and Mike Jones."

Chapter Twenty

Inspector McKee Sums It Up

Outside the wind blew. No trees shook. The house fronts across the way were solid, immovable. Damien stood at the window of the little living-room in the apartment on Ninth Street looking over the roofs. October was gone. It was the twelfth of November, and already, at four o'clock, the light was beginning to fade.

Without Jane, who had gone South with a nurse the week before, the apartment felt empty, dead, full of the lonely sound of her own thoughts. She wandered about restlessly, waiting for the Inspector. He had phoned earlier to say he was coming to see her. She didn't know why.

Everything was over except her tangle with a bevy of Mont lawyers, who couldn't or wouldn't understand that she wanted only enough of the Mont money to adequately take care of Jane. No matter what Eleanor Mont had done she had spent more than half a lifetime in Maria's service —and the laborer was worthy of his hire.

Her departure from Eastwalk on the morning after Linda died had a dreamlike quality. She hadn't seen any of the Monts since. She had talked to Oliver over the phone once. His call was strictly business. It had ended in what, if they had been intimates, would have been an open quarrel. He had been cold, formal, had said, "Miss Carey, Maria's money belongs to you. Your suggestion of sharing it—more than sharing it—is absurd. We can't permit—"

She had interrupted him there.

"I'm not asking anyone's permission, Mr. Mont. I intend to do as I please," and on that she had hung up.

The doorbell rang.

It was the Inspector. She welcomed him pleasantly. McKee sat down, took one look at her, settled back, and

began to talk about the case in a matter-of-fact voice. Cauterize the wound, it would heal faster. He had already had his troubles with Luttrell. This girl was another one.

He told Damien about the evidence they didn't need, that hairs from Linda St. George's head had been found embedded in the collar of her own cherry wool coat and in her scarf. Linda hadn't stopped to examine them when she put them in the hall closet at Arroways after she re-entered the house through a back door when Damien had been disposed of in the freezing-chamber.

Motive had been the thing from the beginning, McKee said, trying to interest Damien. "I distrusted those rings, Miss Carey. I'll return to them later. Anyhow, when you established to my satisfaction that someone behind the little house beyond the tennis court eavesdropped on the talk between Anne Giles and Eleanor on that Friday afternoon, the pattern began to emerge. I knew the eavesdropper wasn't Roger Hammond, who didn't leave New York until ten p.m. Jancy Mont was incapacitated and in bed. Hiram St. George was already in Eleanor Mont's confidence. That left Oliver Mont and Linda."

"Linda," Damien said, repressing a shudder. "She seemed so fragile—and such a child—"

"Exactly." McKee's tone was dry. "In the first place, Linda St. George wasn't fragile. She had plenty of physical strength—enough; and more than enough than was needed to do what was done. Anne Giles was struck down and helpless before that necklace was twisted around her throat, Mike Jones was shot, and Miss Stewart was assaulted from behind with some weapon that carried its own force. As far as Linda St. George having been a child goes, you're more or less right. She refused to grow up. She liked being a child, and petted and loved. She didn't know the meaning of no. She was completely undisciplined, and under that soft exterior she had an iron will."

McKee drummed fingers on a crossed knee. "She was attracted to Luttrell, I believe, but Oliver was a prince of the House of Mont, and she wanted to be his consort, with the Mont money. She killed Anne Giles because Anne

Giles would have prevented it. She killed Mike Jones because he would have exposed her. Linda knew where Mike Jones was. Jancy talked to me. Jones phoned Jancy early on Tuesday morning. He told Jancy where he was hiding out and said he was going to the police because he thought he knew who had killed Anne Giles. Jones, as Heyward said, was no dope, and he had seen Linda carry the ladder up the garden and place it against the blue-room window. Don't forget the ladder was light. He didn't tell Jancy over the phone that he suspected Linda. His caution brought about his death. Jancy confided in Linda, who called Mike Jones, saying that Jancy would meet him down by the brook on the Dalrymple place. Linda shot him from cover because she knew he had seen her move the ladder."

"I don't understand why she did that," Damien said, drawn in in spite of herself.

McKee said, "The blue room was already an object of attention. It was Linda who took the key from the keyboard in the basement when you were down there looking over the house. Before Linda killed Anne Giles on Friday night she struck her down with one of the silver candlesticks on the blue-room bureau. She put the candlestick back on the bureau after Anne Giles was dead, but she had no time to wipe it off properly. She was afraid that Eleanor Mont might enter the room at any moment. That Saturday afternoon she got the key and slipped into the blue room to take care of the candlestick. She was very nearly caught by you, Miss Carey. That wooden ball didn't fall of itself. She threw it down to distract attention and give her time to get away.

"Now, the ladder—and that brings up the rings again. Mr. Castle's revelation about the rings in the letter you saw Eleanor Mont read, and Castle's arrival later, were a terrific blow to Eleanor Mont. She realized that if Maria's rings were found in the house, the question would be raised of why her husband hadn't executed the errand on which he had come, particularly as he had purportedly been at Arroways for more than six hours. If questions

were raised there was a strong possibility that the truth would come out. Linda saw Eleanor Mont go through the blue room frantically and rip open Anne Giles's bags in a search for the rings early on Sunday evening. You say she was a child, and she was, in some ways. She had a child's quickness and shrewdness. The condition of the room was bound to be discovered. Mike Jones was already a suspect. And the fire was getting hot, too much attention was being concentrated on Arroways. Linda put the ladder against the blue-room window to suggest that it was an outsider who had killed Anne Giles, an outsider who had subsequently torn the blue room to pieces."

"And the attack on the nurse?" Damien asked.

"When Eleanor Mont saw Miss Stewart dig up the silver links from the border where she, Eleanor, had disposed of them, she phoned Hiram St. George and told him what had happened. Linda overheard the call. Gathering, from what her father said, that Mrs. Mont was afraid the nurse was going to the police, she slipped over through the dusk, followed the nurse down the driveway, struck, and was scared off by you before she could gain possession of the bit of necklace."

Damien frowned. "But Hiram St. George said that he and Linda were together when the nurse was attacked."

McKee shrugged. "St. George was covering for Linda. I think he suspected the truth."

"Why did Roger Hammond search my bags?" Damien wanted to know.

"He didn't," McKee said. "Your bags weren't searched. Eleanor Mont searched the closet in your room, as she searched a number of other places, for the rings. Hammond was simply following in Mrs. Mont's tracks, anxious to see what she was doing. He knew there was something going on, didn't know what it was. It was in order to get possession of the house, in order to be able to go over it inch by inch in solitude, that Eleanor Mont offered to buy Arroways from you, Miss Carey."

"And Jancy?" Damien asked tiredly. "When she stood there in that doorway was she really going to kill herself?"

McKee said, "I don't know. I'm not sure. She was half demented. She told me the whole story herself. She was one of the ones on the scene when her father's body was discovered, you know. He was taken to Arroways. She had no sooner entered the house when she found, almost stepped on, an earring belonging to Anne Giles. Jancy jumped to the erroneous conclusion that Anne Giles had come up to Eastwalk to be with her father the night before, and that there had been an affair going on between them. That was what was at the root of her drinking. She'll be all right now. Hammond will never dam up the Hudson River but he's not the world's worst guy. The girl has been through a lot. That Friday night, after she was carried upstairs, Jancy screamed out what she thought she knew—and her mother heard her. That was why Oliver Mont, at St. George's urging, consented to help in the removal of Anne Giles's body from Arroways to the cottage on the river. Oliver Mont was convinced that either his mother or his sister had killed her."

A pause then. McKee said, "I must give you what I came for," and took a small tissue-wrapped package from his pocket. He undid the tissue.

Maria Mont's rings sparkled on the little mahogany table in front of him, reflecting their bright fire in the polished wood. He said, "Linda threw these into a clump of bushes at the back of the grounds on her way home after locking you in that freezing-chamber." Outside, the wind kept blowing. The Scotsman touched a great flawed emerald with a random forefinger. "These caused a lot of trouble, didn't they?"

Looking down at them, Damien held back a cry of revulsion. "Yes," she said sedately.

McKee stood up. "How's Mr. Heyward?" he asked, getting into his coat. "For a while there I thought we had something." He smiled.

Damien smiled back. Bill had been wonderful, there when she wanted him, but never pressing, never obtrusive.

"Bill's fine," she said. "You wouldn't like to stay and have a drink? Bill's calling for me in half an hour."

But the Inspector declined. "I've got to get back to the office."

She accompanied him to the door. Just before he went through it, he said meditatively, "Too bad about Oliver Mont. Mont distrusted Anne Giles, even before anything happened. She was Maria's hatchet man. Later he became convinced that there was something wrong about his father's death and that Anne Giles knew more than she was telling. He played around with her for a while trying to get information out of her, with no success. Too bad he's selling his air line and going to South America. I guess he feels he's pretty much in the red, any way you look at it, even though Connecticut's not going to prefer charges against him, or against his mother, now that the whole thing's over. Well, good night, Miss Carey."

Damien said, "Good night, Inspector," and closed the door.

Three hours and twenty minutes later she dropped into a seat in a booth opposite Oliver Mont in the Green Goose on East Fifty-Fifth Street. She had had quite a chase. Oliver was sitting back, staring into an empty glass he held between his palms. He reared his fair head and looked up at her, startled.

Damien threw back her coat. "Hello, Oliver. You're a hard man to find. I've been tracking you down since half past five." She propped her elbows on the table, put a match to her cigarette, her heart sinking. He didn't answer. She couldn't break his guard.

Looking at her through blond lashes he said finally, like a polite schoolboy and with just about as much interest, "Really? Have you? Why?"

It was Damien's turn to hold Oliver's eyes with hers. She put down her cigarette and looked at him steadily. "We're not children, Oliver," she said slowly. "What took place back there at Arroways in October, was pretty rough. But it's past. Gone. Done with. Nothing's going to happen to you, and nothing's going to happen to your mother."

His face was still unyielding. Damien sighed, got up, went around the table, and settled down on the seat beside Oliver. He didn't move, sat quiet, nursing his empty glass.

She signaled to a distant waiter, and put her hand on one of Oliver's. "We'd both better have a drink, darling. I'm tired of this fooling around with the question of money." Oliver was turning toward her. She went on a little breathlessly, "Let's keep it in the family, shall we?" and didn't say any more.

The waiter who had come forward at Damien's wave didn't complete his journey. He paused near the booth, looked at the dark girl and the fair-haired man, their heads together, and retreated.

James B. Hirshfield


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and with it came TROUBLE,
TERROR, MURDER.

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