OFTEN, WHILE HE was still planning his crime, he found himself wondering how
he would feel after the thing was done. Oh, he didn’t deliberately sit down and worry
about it. But again and again he’d find himself involuntarily pausing in the working
out of some one of the tiny details that were to make his crime not only sure, but safe,
and wonder just how it was going to seem when Jethro Hammer was dead, at last.

He knew, of course, that there would be no remorse — or else the crime would
never have been conceived to begin with. Likewise, he knew that there would be no
fear — because of that year of careful, methodical planning.

But it was the thought, forcing its way into his mind, that a man was going to die,
by his own hand, as a result of his planning. How was it going to feel, afterward?

He thought of it, against his will, whenever he saw Jethro Hammer, or stood watch-
ing his gloomy, shabby old house in the West Sixties. Often, while he stood there
across the street, he’d see a doctor hurrying up the brownstone steps, bag in hand, and
see Jethro Hammer, who kept no servants, open the door to let him in. He never
stayed long, though. There was nothing wrong with Jethro Hammer, except that he
didn’t want to die.

Sometimes he’d see Jethro Hammer riding the subway to his office, early in the
morning — he always arrived there at eight o’clock — and reflect that the old man
wasn’t looking well. That was age, though, he reminded himself. Age, and under-
nourishment, and meanness. Jethro Hammer was a tall, thin, bony man; he had a
pallid, lantern-jawed face, a narrow nose, a pinched little mouth, and pale blue eyes.
The wispy hair that still clung to his skull was a yellowish, dirty-looking white. Sum-
mer and winter he wore a black suit, a greenish-black overcoat, and a black derby.
He looked ill, though he was perfectly well; he looked extremely old, though he was
only sixty-seven; and he looked very poor, though he was a millionaire.

He knew why Jethro Hammer would spend money on doctors when he wouldn’t
spend it on anything else. He knew why Jethro Hammer worried about his health
until he could imagine himself ill and dying. Not from any love of life, or joy that he
found in it. But he didn’t want to let go of it, just as he never wanted to let go of
anything, once he had it in his possession.

Even the front of Jethro Hammer’s house seemed to proclaim that fact. A man who
wanted to hang onto his money as badly as Jethro Hammer did, might very well
have sold the house for a handsome price. But it was Jethro Hammer’s house, and he wouldn’t let it go, though he wouldn’t spend a cent for its upkeep, even for its cleaning. He never wanted to let anything go. Especially, not life.

Perhaps that was why, during that year of planning, the thought that he was going to kill a poor old man who didn’t want to die would rise up and obscure his hatred of Jethro Hammer, and the necessity for killing him.

But then his concern for himself would come back, and he would get back to his planning again. Because he didn’t want to die either, not in the electric chair for the murder of Jethro Hammer. Always, at the end of one of his evenings of making plans, he’d remind himself that if ever a murder had been justified, this one was.

Afterward, when Jethro Hammer was actually dead, he was surprised to find that he felt nothing.

He didn’t feel remorse, or relief, or pleasure, or even fear. It seemed to him that, with the killing of Jethro Hammer, he had become a vacuum. Life, all at once, was empty. He’d anticipated this crime for so long — even long before he had begun actually to lay his plans. Now there were no more plans to make; the thing was done.

He slept well, and soundly, for the first time in many months.

It was the next morning that he began to feel apprehensive. Had he overlooked something after all? Had there been some unexpected development he couldn’t have anticipated? He went over the whole thing, step by step, and found nothing wrong. Then slowly and carefully he went over the events of the past year to reassure himself that he hadn’t slipped up anywhere. No, everything had gone right.

He realized at last what had caused his anxiety. In the mornings, when Jethro Hammer boarded the subway at Seventy-second Street, a man got on with him. He never spoke to Jethro Hammer, nor was spoken to by him. Indeed, they never appeared to notice each other. But he was always there, and he always got off at the same station downtown. At night, when Jethro Hammer got on the subway at Rector Street — invariably at ten minutes after six — the same man got on with him and rode to Seventy-second Street.

The man was small, ordinary, inconspicuous — a pleasant, gentle-looking little man, always dressed in gray. A gray suit, and in winter a darker gray overcoat. And he had friendly gray eyes and gray hair. He was a man who would never be noticed in a crowd, or even in a roomful of people. His presence on the same subway car with Jethro Hammer would never have been remembered if he had not been there every single time. Even a shadow can make itself remembered by sufficient repetition.

But that was nonsense, nothing to worry about! The man in gray happened to live in the same neighborhood as Jethro Hammer, and happened also to go to his day’s work near the Rector Street subway station. His office hours were the same — long but not unusual ones — eight to six. Then why did he always board the same car as Jethro Hammer in the long and almost invariably crowded subway train?

Pure coincidence! And nothing for him to worry about. Because the man in gray
never came to Jethro Hammer's house, nor to Jethro Hammer's office. There was nothing to fear from him.

The sense of apprehension passed, though not all at once. As the day went on and nothing untoward happened, his confidence grew. By two in the afternoon he felt bold enough to buy a newspaper. The item he looked for was on the first page, but in an inconspicuous and unimportant position.

WEALTHY RECLUSE
KILLED IN FALL

New York, Feb. 15. Jethro Hammer, 67, famous as "the hermit of Wall Street," was killed last night by a fall down the basement stairs in his home on West 68th Street, it was announced today. The accident apparently occurred when the elderly eccentric, who lived alone, attempted to find his way down the unlighted stairs to attend to the furnace. When Mr. Hammer did not appear at his office this morning, an employee, Miss Sarah White, became alarmed and notified the police, who broke into the house.

Jethro Hammer became known as . . .

He tossed the paper aside, drawing a long, relaxing breath. Everything was all right. Everything was going to be all right.

The day went by, and another. The inquest was held. Death by misadventure. The funeral was held. A week went by. Then, a month.

Once or twice he found himself almost wishing the police had found that it was murder — with no clues pointing to him, of course. It would have given him something to watch and follow. Then he discovered a new game, planning how he would have hidden his tracks if the police had done so. That led to another: how he would have escaped, where he would have gone, and how he would have changed his identity if the police had learned that he had committed the crime. Finally he began planning what his defense would have been, at the trial, if they had caught him.

Exactly thirty-one days after the murder of Jethro Hammer, the knock came at his door. He was sitting at his desk, the lights low, engaged in his elaborate game. He had just reached the point where his attorney made his closing plea to the jury, based on the information he had given the attorney before the trial started.

There were two plain-clothes men at the door. He recognized them at once for what they were. Before he could more than blink with surprise, one of them slipped a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and clicked them on his wrist.

The other one said, "You're under arrest. For the murder of Jethro Hammer."

"Whether I am innocent or guilty," he said to his lawyer, "is not your concern. It's the defense that I want to discuss with you. Because there's something I've got to know before I"— he didn't bother to say "we"— "can plan what the defense is to be."

Burgess Chidester, lawyer, looked at him gravely, "Suppose, my dear boy," he
said in his beautiful rolling voice, “you simply tell me the facts.” He’d had experience before with clients who insisted on planning the defense.

“That’s all very well,” his client said, “except that I don’t know all the facts. And we must know the facts,” he said, “so that we can prove them false. Believe me, I have considered every possible angle of this case for — a very long time.”

He had planned to engage Burgess Chidester if it ever got this far. Now he looked searchingly at the lawyer and concluded that he’d done wisely. Burgess Chidester was a tall, dignified, magnificently well-dressed man, with an air of authority. His face might have served as a sculptor’s model for a monument to Truth or Justice. There was an almost hypnotic quality to his bright brown eyes. And he had an actor’s voice, on which he played as though it were a pipe organ. It could be sonorous and impressive, a magnificent thundering roar; it could hint subtly at unshed tears; it could drop to a dramatic and compelling whisper.

Meanwhile, Lawyer Chidester had been regarding his client with the same thoughtful stare. He knew in advance that winning this case would be important to him. Already he was figuring ways in which it would bring him in far more than his fee — it might, in fact, if he played it right, assure him a tidy little income for life.

“Of course, my boy,” he said, “I’ll do everything in my power for you.”

His client resisted an impulse to say, “Climb down off that high horse, you old shyster.” He restrained himself because, right now, he needed Burgess Chidester.

“Our defense,” he said, “has got to be absolutely foolproof. We can’t slip up anywhere — not anywhere, understand? We may have to conceal some facts, admit some, and be ready to answer others. And so, before we make any plans, we need to know that one thing. How did the police find out?”

“How did the police find out?” he repeated. “That’s the problem. Because, whatever it was, I have an answer for it. I assure you I thought in advance of everything that might come up. I didn’t overlook a thing, not one thing.”

“You must have overlooked one,” Burgess Chidester said. There was a pause. The great trial lawyer frowned. “What you need,” he said at last, “is a private detective.”

The prisoner smiled inwardly. Yes, Burgess Chidester was definitely the right man for him. “You’re right,” he said. “Get me one.”

Later, when the lawyer had gone and he’d been taken back to his cell, he began to feel a pleasant excitement that had been missing from his life for the past month. He had something tangible now with which to concern himself. The plans of the past month for eluding the police and hiding himself, had been abstract plans that might never be put into effect. Similarly, until that night of the knock on his door, the plans for a defense were pure works of fiction, mental exercises, with no reason for existence. Now at last he had something definite with which to cope.

Just let this Mr. Melville Fairr, whoever he was, dig up that one essential fact he needed so urgently — and then what fools he and Burgess Chidester would make of the police and the prosecuting attorney! Maybe it was better this way, after all.
Once he’d been tried and acquitted, he’d be free.

Melville Fairr had been highly recommended by Burgess Chidester. “An odd sort of a chap; but, then, private detectives so often are. Takes all sorts of cases, but he’s been exceptionally successful in this sort of thing: Always works alone, and he seems to have no private life. Works with the police or against them, depending on the circumstances. Seems to be thoroughly dependable. I believe he could find out anything he set out to discover, no matter what it was.”

He’d promptly told Burgess Chidester, “Hire him, and get him over here. I want to talk to him myself.”

He became impatient, waiting for Melville Fairr, because it was impossible to think ahead without that one vital piece of information. Oh, yes, there were tentative plans in the back of his mind. If the police had found a motive, he could prove that he had been far away from Jethro Hammer’s house at the time of the murder. Or if they had found that he was at Jethro Hammer’s house, he could prove that he had no motive and was only there for the most innocent of reasons. Even if they found both — well, he still had a line of defense to follow. Only, he had to know.

As he waited, he found himself developing an almost childlike faith in the powers of Melville Fairr. He must, he remembered, be rather careful about what he said to him. Burgess Chidester had warned him of that. Melville Fairr had, it seemed, some rather definite, though unconventional, ideas about honesty, justice, and human behavior. Well, he’d be able to cope with that, too.

He was impatient almost to the point of beginning to pace his cell when the guard called to him that he had a visitor. He stood for a moment, breathing hard, before he turned around to face the door. He felt the same mounting excitement he’d felt in Jethro Hammer’s house, the same tightness in his stomach, the same pounding in his ears. The excitement of coming, at last, to something he’d anticipated for a long time.

Already he was beginning to look beyond. Once the trial was over, once he was free, there were other plans to make. If he proved that he could escape the penalty for one murder, it would be safe to commit others. And there was more than murder in his plans. Wealth, great wealth. People to wait on him, listening for his every wish, as though he were a king. Power — power to destroy those who hated him in any way he saw fit. There were at least two women . . .

He heard the rattle of keys and the opening and shutting of the cell door, an almost musical clang. Burgess Chidester had used his influence to arrange a private interview with Mr. Fairr. He heard the retreating footsteps of the guard fade.

Then he heard a soft, gentle, almost whispering voice behind him. It called out his name. He turned around.

“Well, Mr. Fairr . . .” he said. His voice died away on words that he’d suddenly forgotten.

The man who stood in his cell was the small, inconspicuous gray man of the subway trains.
A BIG GRAY CAT with one torn ear and a long scar over his right eye sat on the most comfortable chair in the shabby little living room and watched the door.

The sound of soft footsteps on the stairs reached his sensitive ears at last, before they had slowed down for the second landing. The gray cat sat bolt upright. With one magnificent graceful leap he reached the door just before it opened.

“Well, good evening, Mister Thomas,” Melville Fairr said, closing the door softly. “You must be hungry after all this time.”

Mister Thomas made a happy, throaty noise, and began walking around Melville Fairr’s feet. When the feet moved to the closet, and paused there for a long-drawn-out business of hanging up a coat and hat, he voiced a small complaint.

“All right,” Fairr said in mock sternness. “Don’t be in such a hurry.”

He walked out to the tiny kitchen, Mister Thomas purring around his ankles. The can of sardines, opened and in Mister Thomas’s dish alongside of a bowl of milk, Melville Fairr began making himself a pot of tea.

Twenty minutes later Mister Thomas finished washing the last vestige of sardine oil from his whiskers and bounded onto Melville Fairr’s lap, to purr his appreciation. A friendly hand smoothed his back, scratched his stomach, and stroked him.

There was an absent-minded feel, though, to the motions of the friendly hand. Mister Thomas, an intuitive beast, sensed trouble. He made a soft, half-purring, half-growling little sound to explain that he, too, had his troubles.

Suddenly his ears grew stiff. He sat upright in the friendly lap for a moment, then, leaped down to the floor and bounded over to the window sill. A moment later the window was opened for him, and he moved cautiously out onto the fire escape. There was one long, growling cry, and he disappeared into the darkness.

Melville Fairr sighed and returned to his chair.

The day had been unpleasant.

A murderer had sought his help. Obliquely, to be sure, giving a false and yet plausible-sounding reason. “Certain evidence . . . which will be of inestimable value to my lawyer and myself . . . in planning the defense. . . . In short, Mr. Fairr, if you can find out why the police pinned this crime on me . . .”

“I could have told you why the police pinned this crime on you,” Melville Fairr whispered to himself. “Because I told the police. . . .”

He’d been engaged, as a professional and licensed private detective, to find the means by which the murderer of Jethro Hammer would be set free. To conduct a certain investigation. To ask certain questions. To interview certain people. To discover certain facts . . .

He sighed and picked up a little black-covered notebook from the desk. There was no investigation to carry out, no questions to ask, no people to interview. Because the facts he was expected to discover were already written down in the notebook.
JETHRO HAMMER

It was simply a question, now, of how he should use them.

He went back to his easy chair and opened the notebook. On the flyleaf was written, in his neat, precise hand, “Notes on the murder of Jethro Hammer.” The notes were divided into three sections: “Before the Murder,” “The Early History of Jethro Hammer,” and “Events Immediately Following the Murder.”

The first entry on the first page read, “I was called to Jethro Hammer’s office for an interview . . .” Its date, carefully written down just above the line “Before the Murder,” was three years, almost to the day, before Jethro Hammer’s death.

Before the Murder

The telephone rang at exactly five minutes after eight, startling Mister Thomas and waking Melville Fairr. A cold, businesslike feminine voice on the other end of the line asked, “Are you Mr. Melville Fairr? Mr. Jethro Hammer would like to see you, at eleven-fifteen this morning. The address is . . .” It was like an order for a command performance.

He’d heard of Jethro Hammer, the hermit of Wall Street, the millionaire miser. It wasn’t surprising to Melville Fairr that Jethro Hammer might need the services of a private detective.

He fed Mister Thomas raw hamburger, boiled himself an egg, and made two slices of toast. Then he took the subway down to lower Manhattan.

The address was a dingy little office high in an old building that looked down over Pearl Street. There was a tiny outer room, split in half by a brown wood railing. No chairs for waiting visitors, just a shabby, golden-oak desk and straight-backed chair.

A tired, gray-haired, spinsterish-looking woman behind the desk greeted him as he came in with a nod, an acknowledgment that he was there. She was as shabby as the office. Her dark woolen skirt hung unevenly, and half an inch of soiled cotton slip showed at the back. Her black oxfords were badly scuffed and worn.

She asked his name in the same cold voice he’d heard over the telephone, told him to wait, and knocked at the door of the inner office. “Mr. Fairr is here, Mr. Hammer.”

There was a moment’s pause. The door was unlocked from the inside, but not opened. She turned to him. “Please go right in, Mr. Fairr.”

As he reached for the knob, suddenly her hand was on his arm. Her eyes looked into his, bright with fear. They were large, dark, lovely eyes, curiously inappropriate in her thin, pale, homely face. “Mr. Fairr . . .” It was a whisper.

She had something to tell him, and he was curious to know what it was. Then he saw the doorknob turning, moved from within; her face went back to a spinsterish mask, and the office door opened. He never saw her again until the day after Jethro Hammer’s murder.

He went on into the so-closely-guarded inner office. It, too, was tiny, dingy, and undecorated. Another shabby golden-oak desk, two straight-backed chairs, an enor-
mous safe, and a patent-medicine wall calendar. That was all.

Fairr had felt a certain excitement at the prospect of meeting Jethro Hammer, who was famous for paying no visits and receiving no visitors; at being admitted to the inner office of Jethro Hammer, from which his widespread web of financial transactions was woven.

Now, this dreary little room, with the dirty windows looking down into a court, the worn, uncarpeted floor, the ugly, uncomfortable furniture — Well, yes, it was fitting, come to think of it. Certainly it fitted the thin, black-clad man who’d opened the door and then scuttled behind his desk.

"You don’t look very strong," Jethro Hammer said complainingly. He had a thin, whining voice.

Melville Fairr started to say, "If you’re looking for a bodyguard, I can recommend an ex-prizefighter —" He caught himself and said, "I’m stronger than I look, and in excellent health." Nobody could guard a man so marked for death as Jethro Hammer. Perhaps, he thought with a quickening of the nerves, that wasn’t what he was to be required to do.

He learned very quickly what he was required to do. "Frequently," Jethro Hammer said, "I carry valuable securities to and from my office, in my brief case. For reasons of my own, I prefer not to ask for police protection. Therefore . . ."

Melville Fairr didn’t believe the explanation. He said, modestly and smiling, "You want me to keep you from being robbed — or murdered?"

"Murdered?" Jethro Hammer said. "Who would want to murder a harmless old man like me? No one will benefit by my death."

"That’s right," Fairr said. "No one will be made happier by it." He said it, smiling and comfortably, with all the warmth he could put in the words. Yet there were men who had to be killed, who had been marked for it even before their birth. "And I’m sure you’ve never done anybody any harm," he told Jethro Hammer. It was a stock remark to be made to frightened men.

"Not intentionally," Jethro Hammer said. "Believe me, not intentionally. At least, not to anyone I cared —" His voice broke. There was a moment’s silence. Then he said, coldly and quietly, "Mr. Fairr, you’ve been recommended to me very highly. There are certain things I want you to do . . ."

He explained them, in considerable detail. Then he showed Fairr to the corridor door, a door that was both locked and bolted. He unlocked it and stood for a moment, one bluish, trembling old hand on the knob.

"I assure you," he said, "I assure you, there’s no danger. No one would want to hurt a sick old man like me. Believe me, Mr. Fairr. I’m ill, very ill, and old, very old. Ill, and old, and helpless. No one would want to hurt me, I assure you, I assure you." His watery eyes moved wildly from side to side. One thin, shaking hand moved up to scratch his withered cheek. "But," he said, "you know what I want you to do. Don’t fail me, you mustn’t fail me." He gasped, and then said coldly, "Miss White will send
you a check on the first of each month. Thank you for coming in, Mr. Fairrr."

The door closed suddenly. A key turned in the lock, and a bolt was shot back. Melville Fairrr never heard another word from his client, Jethro Hammer.

For three years he walked down the street on which Jethro Hammer lived at precisely fifteen minutes after seven every week-day morning, watching until the old man appeared at the doorway of his house. He followed him to the Seventy-second Street subway station, boarded the same car, stepped off with him at Rector Street, and walked close behind him to the door of his office. And in the early evening he reversed his course, from the corridor outside the office to the unlighted old house on West Sixty-eighth Street.

A one-room office was rented for him, next door to Jethro Hammer's, to give him an excuse for entering the building so regularly in the morning and leaving it so regularly at night. Daily he unlocked the door, walked in, tore a leaf off the calendar, walked out again, shutting the door behind him, and went down the stairs. At night he came up the stairs in time to cover old Jethro Hammer's departure from his office, ride down the elevator with him, and follow inconspicuously, always pretending to be engrossed in a magazine or newspaper, but always with one hand tense on the small gun in his right coat pocket, until the last few minutes when he walked back and forth in front of the dreary house listening for the heavy door to be bolted and watching for a dim light to show in the windows.

That glimmer of light was his signal that he was through for the day, through to go home to his shabby little apartment and the waiting, hungry Mister Thomas.

Day after day, for three years, the same routine. His fee arrived every month, in an envelope addressed in the neat, Spencerian handwriting of Miss Sarah White.

Then at last, as he had always anticipated, the routine was broken. It was a cold night, clear and cold, with dirty white snow piled in curb-high heaps, and a starlit sky. Melville Fairrr shivered as he walked slowly up the last half-block.

He moved up and down across the street, breathing on his hands, as he watched the tired old man climb slowly up the brownstone steps that led to his empty house. He stood, aching with cold, while the door was opened. He listened, and heard the sound of the great, heavy lock in the frosty silence.

But the dim light didn't appear in the window.

Melville Fairrr waited, holding his breath, his frostbitten fingers clenched inside his gray overcoat pockets. From where he watched he could see the tiny areaway that ran alongside the old house, a crevice of shadows. He knew that it opened only into the tiny service yard back of the house, that Jethro Hammer had long since had it bricked off from all other buildings.

Suddenly a figure appeared in the areaway, hardly more than a shadow. Melville Fairrr crossed the street, quickly and silently, and stood at the entrance to the area-
way. There were footsteps clicking on the paving, made sharp by the still, cold air. The figure paused at the entrance to the street.
There were two more footsteps, and Fairr made one quick move, pinning a pair of arms behind a back. To his surprise, there was no struggle and no outcry. The arms tightened and then went limp in his grasp.

He wheeled his captive around and looked at the most beautiful and most frightened girl he'd ever seen. Her face was like a sculptor's model. It was pale, not blue-pale, but rich cream-pale. Her odd-shaped mouth was deep red in the half-light; her eyes were big and very dark, and terrified. Great coils of inky black hair fell over the shoulders of her light gray coat. She was shivering with the cold, and she was much too scared to scream.

"I'm afraid you're getting a chill," Fairr said very gently. "Really, you aren't dressed warmly enough for a night like this."

She didn't seem to hear him, and she certainly didn't seem to be afraid of him. "He came in," she whispered, talking to herself. She spoke with a curious — and rather pleasant — accent. "I did not think — not so soon!" Then she stared at Fairr. "Who are you? Are you his friend?"

"The only one, I think," Fairr said mildly. "And why are you prowling around Jethro Hammer's house?"

"I am his daughter," she said.

Melville Fairr drew one slow, steady breath before he dared to speak. "If you're his daughter," he said, managing to keep his voice controlled, "why don't you go up the steps and ring the bell and walk in the door?"

"Dios!" she said. Then she laughed, a shrill, brittle laugh. "He has never seen me. He does not know —" Her voice broke off, and she stared up at the unlighted house. Her fingers tightened on his arm. "They will kill him, you know."

Suddenly she looked full at him, remembering where she was, and realized she'd been talking to a stranger. "Wait!" Melville Fairr said, but she'd pulled away from him and was halfway to the corner before he could make a move. She ran like a little girl, despite her high heels. Melville Fairr started to move after her, and then stopped.

The gray coat had been far too thin for late winter, but it had been an expensive one. The high-heeled black suede sandals were beautifully made for her small feet. Her hair was exquisitely dressed, and by a professional hand. Yet, he reflected, watching her run for the cab and remembering her lovely little face, she couldn't have been much more than twenty.

For a long time he paced up and down in front of the house. The light didn't appear in the windows. Would there be some outcry from the house, some sign? Melville Fairr thought not.

This, he sensed, was what he and Jethro Hammer had been waiting for, what he had been hired to wait for.

He felt an impulse to break into the house, call the police, rouse the neighborhood, perhaps even still save the old man's life. He had grown fond of Jethro Hammer, though they had never exchanged a word since that first meeting in the dreary office.
But he’d had his instructions, and by this time he knew the reason for them. At last, though, it was because of this fondness for Jethro Hammer that he walked briskly and casually away from the old house where Jethro Hammer had just been murdered.

At fifteen minutes after seven, the next morning, he was strolling back and forth across the street from Jethro Hammer’s house, as he had done for the past three years.

At a quarter of nine Melville Fairr stopped pacing up and down the sidewalk across from the house, walked to the corner drugstore, and called Sarah White. She notified the police. At five minutes to nine the squad car arrived.

“Accidental death,” the coroner called it.


He said the same thing a month later, when the arrest was made on the strength of his evidence against the murderer.

Murder was so easy. Easy and quick and profitable, and yet so difficult. How many bored and ambitious wives, Melville Fairr wondered, had procured poison for well-to-do in-laws, and ended, at the last terrible moment, by pouring the mixture down the kitchen drain. How many harassed business associates . . . such an easy thing, the twist of an ankle on a stairway . . . and then, an embarrassed tripping on the stairs, a stammered apology, and the moment gone. How many jealously enraged — or restless — husbands, pretending to clean a hunting gun, or tampering with a garage door, only to put away the damned device before it could do its deed.

Yet the murderer didn’t always turn back. And when he did not, something had to drive him on.

And the victim, what about him? If he didn’t know, if he hadn’t been warned, could he, did he, sense what was waiting for him in the next shadow down the street? Did those who were born to be murdered feel, in one of those dark and unexplored places of the mind, that some day someone . . .

If the victim did know, what would he do? Wait? Fight? Hide?

Jethro Hammer had tried, and terribly, to keep alive. For what reason? He had been a sick, lonely, miserly old man, obsessed with fear. It hadn’t been fear of death, Melville Fairr reflected. A man who had dared and defied death as Jethro Hammer had, didn’t hide from it in such desperation in his weary and lonely years. It must have seemed so pleasant, and so restful, at Jethro Hammer’s age. Then why had he made so great an effort to escape his inevitable murder?

Was it that there had been something he had to accomplish, something he had to do before he was murdered? Was that it? And if that was it, had he failed?

Fairr went out into his little kitchenette and lighted the gas under the teakettle. Then he went back into his shabby living room and opened the black notebook again.

He was going to write a letter before the night was over, and the letter would be a life-or-death decision to the man who received it. He was glad, now, that he was a man of unquenchable curiosity, and that, during the three years he’d followed old Jethro Hammer, he’d found one holiday week end to spend in Leesville, Ohio.
The Early History of Jethro Hammer

Will Donahue, blacksmith, was a simple-hearted, friendly man who loved children, especially his own. Of the nine he'd fathered, five had survived the perils of infancy, and he would have welcomed five more. He'd wept bitterly over those he'd lost, and buried them extravagantly in white satin coffins. On those who survived he lavished affection, attention, and the best of everything he could manage to provide for Will, Jr., Mary Margaret, Robert Emmett, John Patrick, and the baby, Sally.

The blacksmith shop and the ten-acre farm never did very well, and there was always a note to meet at the bank. But the five young Donahues were the best-dressed children in Leesville, Ohio, and Sally's Christmas doll came all the way from Chicago by mail order.

Will Donahue was a big, happy, hard-working man, with a broad freckled face and a lot of mussed-up sandy hair. He was a tinkerer and a putterer; give him a soft piece of metal, and he'd hammer it into a new kind of lock; give him a fine piece of hardwood, and he'd work it into a sturdy and polished door-frame. There wasn't a horse for miles around Leesville he couldn't shoe, or a man who didn't trust him, or a stray dog that didn't hang around the blacksmith shop for scraps stolen from the Donahue kitchen when Lizzie Donahue was looking the other way.

So it was only natural that when a tiny, sickly, two-year-old boy — as near as anyone could guess his age, poor mite — was found abandoned, wailing miserably, in a pew of St. Joseph's Church, that Will Donahue should take him home.

It was a bad, wet, sleety night when the baby was found. The church janitor and town watchman, Jethro McComb, had seen the door a bit ajar as he passed by, and paused to make it fast. He'd heard the hungry, despairing little cry, opened the door wide enough to see one small, clutching hand reaching up, and run for help.

It was a tiny child, underfed, white-faced, whining. Obviously, not one born in or around Leesville. This was a boy old enough to walk, though too weak to take more than a step or two; and every Leesville baby — legitimate or not — over ten days old was already accounted for.

Harvey Miller, down the street, was just closing up his feed store, and he ran down to the church while Jethro McComb went to get old Father Umland, of St. Joseph's, and Asa Jackson, the town policeman.

Half the town of Leesville was in the building by the time big Will Donahue pushed his way through from the door, looked a minute, and said, "He's hungry. I'll take him home with me."

"You don't know whose he is," Joe Caffrey said.

Voices began murmuring while Will Donahue picked the baby up with a practiced hand and wrapped him in the folds of his coat. A man and a woman in a wagon drawn by two thin, tired horses had stopped in front of the hotel, asked directions for getting to Sandusky, and driven on.
There was some talk, right then and there, about riding after them, but Will Donahue stopped it quick. "If they don’t want the boy," he said calmly, "they’ll only leave him off in some other place where might be there’s no home for him."

"You’ve four already," Harvey Miller said.
"John Patrick is six, come July," Will Donahue said. "I miss a baby about the house."

"You won’t for long," Asa Jackson said, and laughed.
"This one will be an older brother, then," Will Donahue replied, shifting the child to his other arm.

It was old Father Umland who laid a hand on Will’s shoulder and said, "Perhaps you’d best talk to Lizzie first, Will. With the new one coming in a few weeks now, she might not welcome a little stray about the house, to be fed and cared for."

Will Donahue hesitated. He glanced down at the child and saw two bright black eyes that watched him with a cold, unfriendly stare, alert, distrustful, waiting. He relaxed his arm a little. It could be Father Umland was right.

"Come now, Will, you don’t know what kind of a brat he is," Joe Caffrey said.

The baby whimpered faintly. Will Donahue’s arm tightened again. He tucked a fold of his coat around the chilled little body.

"A baby’s a baby," he said roughly, and carried the child out of the building without another word.

"You’ve brought home dogs and cats," Lizzie Donahue said, "and a broken-legged horse, and a hurt rabbit, but I don’t call to mind that you’ve ever brought home a babe."

She peeled off the boy’s ragged little garments, bathed him, dressed him in one of John Patrick’s outgrown nightgowns, and fed him a bowl of warm bread and milk. He was good and quiet, and easy to handle. Halfway through the bowl of bread and milk her face whitened.

"I’m not well," she said, smothering a gasp. She finished feeding him and then tucked him into the children’s bed, close by Robert Emmett.

"It’s only for tonight," Will apologized.

Ordinarily, Lizzie would have laughed and put the coffee on to heat for him. This time she turned a shade paler and sat down heavily on the edge of the bed.

"I’ll get Mrs. McComb," he said hastily.

It was just after dawn when the body of a stillborn baby was carried from the house, when Lizzie Donahue mercifully fell asleep at last, and tired old Mrs. McComb made herself a cup of tea on the kitchen stove and went home to get her husband’s breakfast.

Mary Margaret, aged ten, woke up first that morning. She crawled out of her place in the bed, half-waking Will, Jr., who turned over and grunted in his sleep. She shivered, and walked across the room to where Lizzie Donahue lay sleeping, her face
haggard. She looked at Will Donahue sitting on the edge of the bed, tired and pale, his face tear-stained. Then she looked back at the children’s bed, walked over, and inspected the intruder, who lay fast asleep, his little face like wax.

“That’s your new brother,” Will Donahue said. His voice was hoarse.

Mary Margaret Donahue looked at the child scornfully for a long time. “In a pig’s eye,” she said at last, and crawled back into bed.

In a few days, though, Lizzie Donahue began cutting down one of John Patrick’s old suits for the newcomer, and he became a member of the family.

After their first shyness had worn off, the young Donahues welcomed him warmly. After all, a baby was pleasant to have around the house, and Father had assured them that this was their new little brother. They’d been promised a new little brother.

The trouble was, though, he wouldn’t play like other babies. He didn’t respond to the puppy Robert Emmett brought him, he didn’t reach for the ball John Patrick rolled to him, he didn’t giggle and clap his hands when Will, Jr., tossed him toward the ceiling. Nor, on the other hand, did he howl with protest when Mary Margaret dressed and undressed him.

It worried them all, too, that he didn’t speak.

“He could speak,” Will Donahue assured old Father Umland. “He’s not dumb, God be thanked. Maybe it’s that he’s been frightened. He’ll get over it.”

Father Umland said gently, “It could be that the child’s a foreigner. Our language would be strange to him.”

No one ever knew, of course, whether Will’s or Father Umland’s theory regarding the baby’s silence had been right. But one night, some three months after his arrival, he looked up from the floor at Will Donahue and said, clearly and distinctly, holding out his hands, “Papa. Up.”

“Praise be!” Will Donahue said. And he lifted the boy clear up to the ceiling.

After that he lavished more attention and affection then ever on the boy. The young Donahues felt no jealousy. After all, their father lavished the same amount of affection and attention on them, and on the dog he’d brought home from the pound, and the kitten he’d found in an alleyway.

Yet a problem was growing in Will Donahue’s mind. There had to be a name for the child. For months they’d called him, among themselves, the Baby. But a name had to be found for him. And, strangely enough, Will could not bring himself to give him the name of Donahue.

Good Will Donahue spent more than a few long, anxious afternoons in his shop, pondering the problem. The adopted boy would be his son in every way. He would share in all the advantages that were to be given Will, Jr., and Robert Emmett and John Patrick; that would have been given Charles, and Francis Joseph, and Michael if they’d lived. And yet — the name?

Then one afternoon Father Umland dropped by the shop to inquire after the health
of the boy, and Will explained the problem to him. Father Umland understood. After a little thought, he advanced the suggestion that the boy be given another name entirely. Jethro, for instance. After the janitor of St. Joseph's, who'd found him. And the last name? Will discarded the obvious Smith, Jones, Perkins, and Brown. He began looking around the shop. Shoes, nails, anvil, forge, tongs.

The boy was finally named Jethro Hammer.

And so he was christened. He was entered on the town records as "Jethro Hammer, adopted child of Will Donahue. Age unknown. Male. White." He had a standing in the community now; he was named, he had a family.

Trouble was, though, nobody liked him.

Lizzie Donahue tried to, poor little half-starved tyke that he was. She bathed him, clothed him, fed him, and mothered him as best she could. She said over and over to the neighbors, "He's such a good baby." That was it — though she wouldn't have admitted it — he was too good. If he'd flown into a baby rage at being washed, she could have spanked him. If he'd cried, she could have comforted him.

And then — slowly — he began to soften to her, just as she'd been about to give up in despair. The little Donahues were away at school, five days a week, and she missed them. There was another young Donahue on the way, and that worried her. She'd lost the last baby, and she was no longer young. If only the young one would give her some comfort! Finally one day she lost all patience with him and slapped him, for some trivial misbehavior which she would have ignored on the part of the young Donahues. It startled him into crying, the first time she'd known him to cry. She ignored him and left him there on the rug, going on about her household duties.

It was an hour, perhaps, before she felt his hand tug at her apron. He'd never done that before. He said, "Mama." It was the first word he'd ever spoken to her.

She hugged him extravagantly, and gave him a lump of brown sugar.

Through the months that followed he was close at her heels wherever she went. She was gentle with him, as she would have been with some frightened little animal that had been badly mistreated. She began to teach him to speak, one word at a time. Kitty. Teapot. Table. Fire. Love. Baby.

If only she could get him to laugh. Just once!

Perhaps, after the new baby came —! Everybody laughed at babies.

She was resting out on the front stoop the afternoon Allie Miller came to call. She'd never liked Allie, and she liked her even less now. A mean nosy woman.

"So the new one will be here any day," Allie said. "I should think you'd be afraid, with that one in the house. He's a gypsy child, if you ask me, or worse. Aren't you afraid he'll put some curse on the new little one?"

"No," Lizzie Donahue said hoarsely. "You'd better go home." She never spoke to Allie Miller again.

It was only a few minutes until small Jethro climbed up the steps to her, held out his hand, and said his first sentence. "Flower — for — mama." It was a wilted,
pathetic field daisy. Lizzie Donahue threw it on the porch floor and ran into the house.

Three o'clock the next morning, after a long, bad time, Sally — christened Sarah Elizabeth Donahue — was born. So bad, indeed, that Will Donahue called in a doctor, and, finally, Father Umland, and thanked heaven that the children didn't wake. Jethro, though, was awake; on one of Will's pacings of the room he saw the little face staring up from the children's bed. The black eyes weren't staring at him, but at the ceiling, and there were tears in them. It startled Will Donahue. He'd never seen tears in the baby's eyes before. He reached to pick him up and comfort him, but then there was a cry, and then Father Umland called.

It was two days before they let Lizzie see the new baby. She was a beauty, no doubt about that. Perfect little features, perfect little hands, and perfect curling toes. Bright round eyes, and a mist of sun-colored hair. Only, one leg was a good inch shorter than the other, tiny, and misshapen.

The neighbor women expected Lizzie to weep and wring her hands when she knew. But she was quiet, perhaps too quiet. After they'd left her alone, she whispered, "Some curse — on the new little one —"

She was good to Jethro, always. She washed him, and fed him, and dressed him, and, in time, sent him off to school. But she hated him. And he knew it.

In time, the people of Leesville began to remark to each other that Will Donahue had gotten a bad bargain. Not that anyone, of course, would have said as much to Will himself. And actually there was nothing definite that could be said. The boy was honest and well behaved, and diligent. And yet there was — well, something . . .

Perhaps it was because he remained thin and sickly in spite of Lizzie Donahue's care and cooking, though nothing was ever actually wrong with him. Or perhaps it was because he was so smart in school, because he was shrewd and calculating even at the age of six. From the first grade on, he carried off all the prizes in school, delighting Will Donahue, disconcerting the young Donahues, who were too concerned with games, fishing, hunting, and parties to give much time to scholarship, and giving the townspeople something to talk about ("I hold with getting an eddication, it's a fine thing for a boy, but there's a limit").

There wasn't a thing, really, to put a finger on. Jethro Hammer was far more helpful to his foster-father around the farm and in the shop than the Donahue boys themselves. He was smart, he was honest, he was polite. Only nobody liked him.

The people of the town tried hard to like him, for Will Donahue's sake, because everybody liked Will and Lizzie and the five young Donahues. Everybody tried, and nobody succeeded. It was old Mrs. Alling, mother of the high-school principal, who summed it up at last.

"Somehow I just don't trust that boy," she said. "He's a good boy, and he's polite, and he works hard, and he's properly grateful to Will and Lizzie for all they've done for him, and he's never done a wrong thing. But I just don't trust him."
“He always seems like he was biding his time.”
Yet there were two people —
Will Donahue himself did like the boy. But it was in the abstract, warm-hearted way he liked his own kids, and the neighbors’ kids, and the boys who hung around the blacksmith shop, and the little giggling girls who came over to play with Maggie. Yes, and the kittens and colts and puppies and lambs and baby goats. Will Donahue just liked the young of all species, and Jethro happened to be one of them. Only in those days when Jethro was growing up, Will was a hard-worked and busy man, and somehow there never was a chance for them to get acquainted.

Then, there was Sally. For some strange reason no one could fathom, she worshiped him from the time she was in her cradle. If she cried, it was Jethro who could always comfort and quiet her. If she laughed, it was because he’d found some way to amuse her. It seemed, too, as though he was fond of her. He made toys for her, he built a little wagon in which to pull her about, he bought her small gifts with the spending money he earned in Will Donahue’s shop, he fetched and carried for her. He taught her to walk when no one else thought she’d ever learn; he made her a little crutch and showed her how to hold it; he guided her and steadied her uncertain little feet.

Years went by. Will Donahue worked hard to provide for the young Donahues. Jethro always worked with him after school. Bill grew up, married, and became head of a feed store. Robert Emmett became the wild one. More than once Jethro paid off his debts out of his own meager allowance. Maggie grew up to be a beauty — black hair, red lips, provocative eyes, and insistent demands for new clothes. It was Maggie who managed the household after she was fifteen. And John Patrick flunked the last three grades in school and took to writing poetry.

More years passed. It was in 1897, when Jethro was just twenty-one years old, that Will Donahue, who took in all kinds of small repair jobs in the shop, invented and perfected so necessary and simple an improvement in the sewing machine that it made them all rich.

Lizzie lived just long enough to enjoy a fine fur coat and a diamond brooch. Then, quietly and unobtrusively, on an evening when nobody was at home save Jethro, she died — of weariness, perhaps. Will came home, found Jethro sitting at her bedside, and collapsed.

The young Donahues, in their expensive new black clothes, wept noisily at the funeral. Jethro Hammer sat like a stone; his handsome dark young face impassive. The townspeople commented on it critically later. Of course, he had been seen to grip young Sally’s hand once, and he had taken Will Donahue’s arm, going down the steps to the mourners’ carriage. Still, hadn’t Lizzie Donahue been like a mother to him all these years since he was found in a pew of St. Joseph’s Church? And he hadn’t shed a tear!

In later years, though, whenever the Donahue family was discussed, Martha Alling
— that was old Mrs. Alling’s unmarried daughter — would talk about Lizzie Donahue’s funeral. How Jethro Hammer had sat there like a stone, all during the singing and that lovely sermon. And then, out at the cemetery, he’d taken a flower out from under his coat and thrown it into the grave. Just an ordinary wild daisy that a person could pick up anywhere.

Then the Donahue family moved to New York, including Jethro Hammer and old Will Donahue.

Old? He was only sixty-four. But it had all happened so suddenly. From a lifetime of comfortable and well-fed poverty, he’d come overnight into possession of money he couldn’t even count. From the warm, shabby little farmhouse just outside Leesville he’d been whisked to the New York mansion that Maggie had picked out. And in the process he’d lost much. He’d lost the little shop where he’d been busy and happy, tinkering and puttering. He’d lost his friends and neighbors, and the children that used to hang around the forge. Finally, he’d lost Lizzie. And sometimes, now, it seemed to him, vaguely and unhappily, that he’d lost the young Donahues as well. He changed in the course of a year from a hard-working, good-hearted, happy blacksmith and mechanic to a sick, broken, bewildered old man.

He’d been proud of the five young Donahues. Bill was well established as a feed-and-seed dealer; he’d married Minnie Snoddy, youngest and prettiest of the six Snoddy girls, and he had a strong, healthy son — old Will’s first grandchild. Robert Emmett had a fine mechanical mind; he’d been the first in Leesville to drive a horseless carriage and learn to repair it. Maggie was admitted to be the most beautiful girl in Leesville, and she was engaged to the cashier of the First National Bank. John Patrick, to be sure, spent too much of his time with his nose buried in books, but wasn’t he the only one in Leesville who could write poetry? There had been poets before among the Donahues. And then there was Sally, the little lame one, growing up to be as pretty as a picture, adored and admired by everybody, and loving gaiety and fun so that no one remembered her limp.

And, too, the lost little baby he’d carried out of St. Joseph’s Church that cold, bad night, had grown to be as fine a son as anyone might want — honest, hard-working, and reliable. A little on the solemn side, perhaps, but with a good heart in him.

Now it seemed to him that he’d lost the five young Donahues, along with Lizzie and the shop.

Bill assumed the position of head of the family and manager of old Will’s business affairs. Robert Emmett went in for motorcars, race-track driving, and chorus girls. Maggie hired the 1900 version of a social secretary. John Patrick went on a tour of Europe. Sally, the baby, just wanted to have fun.

Jethro Hammer, though, didn’t seem to care much for New York. And, according to Maggie, he was no social asset. He spent most of his time with old Will.

Jethro had grown into a thin young man with a pale, expressionless face and dark,
expressionless eyes. He never smiled, and he seldom had anything to say. He helped Will in and out of his carriage (Will distrusted motorcars to the very last), and he saw to the management of the house. He sat patiently for hours, listening to Will's long, rambling, and often confused reminiscences about the early days in Leesville. And he followed Sally everywhere with his eyes.

Maggie had already become Marguerite when Bill's wife, born Minnie Snoddy, decided that Donahue was not a sufficiently aristocratic name. She had her next box of calling cards engraved "Donohough." Maggie immediately followed suit, and that may have been what finally broke the old man's heart.

He was ill for only a few days. The young Donahues were all too absorbed in their own affairs to realize that it was to be his last illness. Jethro stayed with him, all day and all night, not sleeping for more than a few minutes at a time. No one knew, then or ever, what old Will and Jethro said to each other — if they said anything at all. The five young Donahues were all away from home the night that old Will died.

They gave him a magnificent and fashionable funeral. They wept for him, and honestly. Because, looking at the tired old man, with the lines of sorrow and anxiety the expensive undertaker hadn't been able to conceal on his face, they remembered. The doll, brought all the way from Chicago. The hand-made sled, with forged iron runners. The kitten that unexpectedly stuck a happy little face out of Will Donahue's pocket on Sally's birthday. Will arguing with the principal that John Patrick would study what he liked in school, and no nonsense about it. The money Will had borrowed to set Bill up in business. Maggie's first party dress. And all the other things.

It offended them that Jethro Hammer didn't weep. He sat apart from them, his sallow face quiet and impassive, his eyes dry as old bones. He listened respectfully to the sermon; he declined, politely and unobtrusively, to go up for a last look at poor old Will Donahue.

The lawyers weren't called in till two days after the funeral, because Maggie was in a state of collapse, with a trained nurse, two maids, and a room full of flowers, but when the lawyers were called in, they were the best that could be bought. Because simple-hearted, friendly old Will Donahue hadn't thought to leave a last will and testament. He'd just assumed that after he was gone the children would divide everything between them, the way they always had when he was alive and they were little.

The children didn't see it that way. They brought in the lawyers and they called a conference. Bill was there, handsome and impressive — even then he was beginning to get bald. His wife Mignon (born Minnie) was nervously trying to watch everyone at once. His son, Billy, aged five, was scared into silence by the presence of so many others. Maggie was there, elegant and beautiful in black, sniffing occasionally into an imported hand-embroidered handkerchief. Robert Emmett was flushed and red-faced. John Patrick sat aimlessly scratching his right cheek. Sally sat in the farthest corner, silent, as though she were trying to pretend she wasn't there at all.

The lawyer said, "You'd better call in this — Jethro Hammer."
Maggie sent a maid to call him. He came down from the little room behind the servants’ quarters to which he’d moved from the cubicle adjoining old Will’s bedroom the day after old Will’s death. He sat on a straight-backed chair, near the door.

“Mr. Hammer,” the lawyer said pompously, “you must understand this. You are not a natural son of the late Will Donahue. Nor are you, legally, an adopted son. We have checked the records very carefully and the inheritance laws of the state of Ohio, of which the late Mr. Donahue was a resident at the time of his death. The records at Leesville, made at the time you were christened, do not constitute legal adoption. Therefore, I regret to tell you, you have no claim on the estate.”

“Claim?” Jethro said. No one had ever seen him look bewildered before. “Why should I make any claim?”

The lawyer and the Donahues looked at each other with obvious relief.

Suddenly the Donahues all began to talk at once. Sally just said, “Jethro!” and was silent. Bill — W. James Donohough II — strode across the room and said loudly, too loudly, “Believe me, Jethro, we’ll always take care of you. Why, you’re —”

Mignon, née Minnie, said shrilly, “You’re almost like one of the family.”

“Look, Jethro,” Bob said. “You know a lot about cars. Why don’t you come and work for me? I need a good chauffeur.”

“Really,” Maggie said. “Just get a good job, and make something of yourself.”

“If you could operate a typing machine,” John Patrick said (he’d decided to become an author), “I’d give you a job myself.”

W. James Donohough II put down his glass of port. He said, “We all want to be fair with you, Jethro. I’ve discussed this with the lawyers. If it’s perhaps a matter of a few thousand dollars to set you up in business . . .”

Jethro rose. He said, “I can manage without it.”

He walked out of the room, leaving them staring after him. He walked out of the house. February snow was falling, but he didn’t pause for an overcoat, a hat, or a muffler. Everything he had in the world, save for the clothes he stood up in, and a little less than a dollar in his pockets, he left in the little room behind the servants’ quarters. But he carried old Will Donahue’s diary with him.

He was just closing the door when it was pulled open behind him. Sally, her face bright-pink from weeping, had limped hurriedly along the downstairs hall. Now, having caught up with him, she could think of nothing to say.

He looked at her impassively, standing there hatless, coatless, penniless in the snow. He said, “Good-by, Sally,” turned, and went slowly down the steps.

Sally stared after him. Then she gasped, “Good-by,” burst into fresh tears, fled back into the house, and slammed the door. She never saw him again.

The Donohoughs conveniently forgot him. It was twenty years before he returned, a rich man, to bring suit against the heirs of old Will Donahue for all accrued royalties from the sewing machine patent on the grounds — as set forth in old Will’s diary — that he, Jethro, and not old Will, had invented it.
CHAPTER TWO

LITTLE MR. MELVILLE FAIRR yawned, stretched, and shivered. It was very late, and the room was getting cold. He went to the desk and picked up his pen. There still was that letter to write before the night was over, a letter that was life or death to the man who would receive it by a special messenger in the morning. After a minute, though, he put the pen down. There were some facts he still had to consider.

Fairr had had a lot of time on his hands during those years when he protected Jethro Hammer in his comings and goings, and he was a man of unquenchable curiosity. When Jethro Hammer spent a few days in the hospital with an imaginary ailment, he had managed that trip to Leesville. He had found people who remembered the Donahues and Jethro Hammer. Harvey Miller, indeed, was still alive, a garrulous old man. Old Mrs. McComb’s daughter remembered everything her mother had told her about the family, and there were middle-aged men and women who’d played with the young Donahues as children.

People were always glad to talk to friendly little Melville Fairr. So it was no surprise that in two days in Leesville, he learned everything there was to know about the boyhood of Jethro Hammer.

The rest — those few unhappy years following the family’s move to New York — had proved just as easy, especially since he had so much time to spare. Melville Fairr always found it a simple matter to make friends with people he needed to know. It was, in fact, the young Donahues themselves — old Donahues now, of course — who told him what he wanted to find out. There was still that gap to fill in, however: the twenty years that had elapsed after Jethro Hammer walked out of the Donahue mansion and disappeared into the February snow. The secret of those twenty years was something Fairr did not learn until after Jethro Hammer’s death.

By the time he had made the trip to Leesville, driven by his own curiosity, he had begun to realize that Jethro Hammer had employed him for a far different reason from merely acting as bodyguard twice a day. It might have been that Jethro Hammer knew of Fairr’s reputation and his famous curiosity. For a long time, though, Fairr was in the dark as to what his employer wanted him to do. He knew there was a purpose, a deadly purpose; he knew there was a reason why Jethro Hammer had to stay alive until just the right time for him to be murdered, but in those days he did not know what the reason was.

Surely Jethro Hammer must have been aware of what his bodyguard was doing in his spare time. He gave no sign of approval or disapproval; but, Fairr reflected, that discreet investigation must have been one of the things old Jethro Hammer wanted him to do. There had been, for instance, the little matter of meeting the well-known and expensive lawyer who had handled the lawsuit for the Donahue family — Martin Reynolds, of Burke, Reynolds, and Chidester. That had been arranged by finding someone who had invited him frequently to the club to which Reynolds
belonged. It took only two or three visits before lawyer Reynolds was telling Melville Fairr all of what had gone on in the days before the suit, and how it was lost by the young Donahues. What had happened to them after that, Fairr was able to find out by himself.

The Later Life of the Young Donahues

The drawing room of the Countess d’Abazoli, the former Marguerite Donohough (born Maggie Donahue) was greatly admired in New York, though in 1921 families were giving up their Fifth Avenue mansions and moving into penthouses. Marguerite clung to her splendor and her drawing room. It was a large, high-ceilinged, deceptively simple room, with pale green walls, deep green draperies, Chinese tapestries, delicately ornate furniture, and a highly flattering portrait of the Countess herself.

The Countess d’Abazoli, now in her early fifties, was what old Will Donahue would have called “a fine figure of a woman.” Her magnificent dark hair had turned a becoming and carefully tended gray, and her Irish blue eyes were as provocative as ever. Her massaged and exercised figure showed off to good advantage the clothes for which she made an annual trip to Paris. She appeared at her best in the famous drawing room, receiving guests, the Count at her side. She’d married him only five years before, after what she enjoyed describing as a whirlwind courtship. True, he was some twenty years younger than she, but she assured her friends that it was a love match, pure and simple. “He just swept me off my feet.”

The Count himself, Enrico d’Abazoli (his wife always called him Ricky), was a small, wiry man, with thin, smiling lips that curled up from his strong, yellowish teeth when he spoke. His delightful manner, his slight, amusing accent, and his charming attentiveness to his wife were greatly admired by all Marguerite’s friends.

They made a striking couple, standing before the fireplace in the drawing room, with the long, slanting rays of late afternoon sunlight adding a glow to her hair. This afternoon, however, it was not a social occasion; it was a family conclave which had been hastily called one hour after the first papers in Jethro Hammer’s suit were served.

Lawyer Reynolds was the first to arrive, an enormous brief case under his arm, and a reassuring look on his plump pink face. He patted the brief case and said warmly, “Now remember, this is nothing for you to worry about. Naturally this man has no proof. Simply an attempt to extort money from you.”

“I am quite sure the case is in the best of hands,” the Countess said politely. Then her eyes blazed. “I always said we should have paid him off!” she snapped.

The Count laid a gently restraining hand on her arm and said soothingly, “Now, my dear . . .”

W. James Donohough II arrived before any more could be said. Old Will would have been proud of him — at least at first glance. He’d grown into a fine, handsome, middle-aged businessman, carefully turned out in a neat gray suit, a handmade,
white shirt, and a specially woven blue-and-gray tie. He'd become a trifle portly with the years, and his hair had turned a becoming iron-gray. To the clients who laid their financial affairs in his hands and were allowed to see the great man in person at the office of the Donohough Investment Trust Corporation, there was something immediately reassuring about the very sight of him.

His wife Mignon was at his side. She was a small, delicate-looking, vivacious woman with a sharp, fretful face and hair that was still a glistening blonde, in spite of the fact that she was only one year younger than her sister-in-law. She greeted the Count and Countess with a curt nod, shivered, and said, "I should think you'd have a fire in here. Really, I can't see why you go on living in this gloomy old museum."

The Countess' face turned pink. Even back in Leesville she'd heartily disliked her sister-in-law. She said, "Your little apartment is quite delightful, my dear, but we have a certain position to maintain."

The two children of the William James Donohoughs had arrived with their parents. For years now, Mignon had been explaining to everyone who'd listen that she knew all about her husband's latest infidelity, but for the children's sake she would never divorce him. If her friends suspected that for years her husband's private detectives had been quietly collecting evidence that would make such a divorce action front-page news, they never hinted at it in front of Mignon.

Billy, the older of the two children, and now in his middle twenties, was the only member of the family who looked like old Will Donahue. He was big and awkward, his broad, friendly face was covered with freckles, and his thick sandy hair was perpetually disheveled. He was a happy young man, and good-natured. He loved dogs, horses, and children. He enjoyed puttering in the garage of the Long Island house. The intricacies of business and finance and the delicate little problems of social life were entirely beyond his comprehension, but the motor hadn't been made that he could not repair, and to all the small boys in the neighborhood he was a hero.

The entire family was thoroughly ashamed of him; and, after innumerable unsuccessful attempts to improve him, had silently settled down to ignoring him.

His sister Muriel was the family beauty, and she knew it. She was small, like her mother, but her black hair and blue eyes had come straight from her Irish grandmother. By the time she was two years old, she'd learned that her father and mother worshiped her, and loved to show her off; by the age of three she'd learned the value of a good, noisy tantrum to get whatever she wanted. Now, at nineteen, she didn't have to bother with tantrums any more. She simply said, "I want that roadster," or "I want that necklace," and automatically got it. As the daughter of W. James Donohough II, she had a host of admirers who were willing to put up with her sulks, her exacting nature, and her fits of temper.

She knew Lawyer Reynolds well. He'd gotten her out of several minor difficulties in the past. She greeted him curtly and said, "What's all this nonsense about a lawsuit? Who is this man Hammer? I never heard of him."
It was Maggie, not the lawyer, who answered, "He was some little waif your grandfather picked up and befriended. He lived with us until he grew up. He was — well, I guess you'd call him a handyman. This suit, of course, is utterly ridiculous."

Muriel looked bored. "I don't see why we need to have a lot of stupid discussion about it. Why can't father just give him a check?"

"That," Lawyer Reynolds said, beaming at her, "is precisely what I am going to advise your father to do."

"Not if I have anything to say about it, he won't," said a voice from the doorway. "I say turn the fellow over to the police. It's blackmail, pure and simple."

The newcomer was Robert Emmett Donohough, millionaire sportsman and playboy, whose marriages, escapades, and scandals were the despair of the family. At fifty, Robert was a big, hearty, red-faced man, slightly bald. His early passion for motorcars had turned to an even more violent passion for airplanes around 1909, and in 1911 he had nearly broken his neck trying to better the continental flight record. He had recently become a manufacturer of aircraft, was in the midst of his third divorce, and was publicly engaged to a Follies girl.

"I'm damned if we'll pay one cent," Robert boomed. "Talk about ingratitude! Why every one of you here heard me offer him a good job as chauffeur the day he walked out!"

Mignon looked at him coldly. "Has it ever occurred to you," she said, "that offer may not have been entirely tactful?"

"Tactful!" Robert exploded.

"Oh, come now, Bob," William James Donohough said mildly. "Right or wrong, let's save ourselves all the trouble we can."

John Patrick arrived in time to hear the last words. "And let's get it over with as quickly as possible," he added. "I'm planning to sail three weeks from today. A month in America is about all I can stand at a time."

Robert snorted derisively. He had the heartiest contempt for John Patrick, who preferred to live exquisitely in Paris, writing slim volumes of poetry which he published at his own expense.

Martin Reynolds opened his brief case and cleared his throat. "I must warn you," he said, "this man does appear to have a rather strong case. Based on certain facts substantiated by your late father's diary. I should like to point out these circumstances: Whether or not this man's claim is false, the fact remains that to contest his suit would lead to a long, expensive, and definitely unpleasant court battle."

"And for heaven's sake," Mignon said, "let's avoid that at all costs. This family has already had enough publicity from lawsuits." She looked at Robert Emmett.

"The only question is," William Donohough said, "how much is he going to want?"

"I'm afraid there's one other question," Martin Reynolds said. "Will he accept a settlement, or will he insist on going to court? Perhaps if some of the family would deal with him privately, on a friendly basis. . . ."
“I’m damned if I will,” Robert Emmett said.
“It would be extremely distasteful,” John Patrick murmured.
“You’re all being very stupid,” the Countess said. “The person to approach him is Sally, of course. She’s the only one of us he ever liked.”
“She’s the sort of person he would like,” Mignon began cattily. She broke off at a warning signal from John Patrick.
Sally Donahue — she’d never changed the name from its original spelling — stood in the doorway, leaning heavily on her cane. On one side of her stood her companion, Miss White. “I think I heard my name mentioned,” Sally said. “Something pleasant, I hope?” Her tone indicated she had no idea that it had been pleasant.
William James looked embarrassed. “We were discussing the possibility,” he said, “that in the event we offered a settlement of this suit, you would be the best person to make the offer.”
“Not on your life,” Sally Donahue said. “I’m not going to get mixed up with him or the suit. It’s your problem.”
Mignon looked at her sister-in-law coldly. “Perhaps,” she said acidly to the room at large, “it might be just as well if our little Sally didn’t approach him. It might disillusion him after all these years.”
“Why, you bad-tempered old bitch,” Sally said. She said it amiably, without anger. She knew perfectly well what the family thought of her, and she hoped they knew what she thought of them.
But Mignon’s jibe got under her skin just the same. She remembered how she’d looked when Jethro went away — a laughing, slender, curly-haired girl of nineteen, attractive, even fascinating, in spite of — or possibly because of — her lameness.
Now, twenty years later, she had grown enormously stout. What had been delicate, flawless features were obscured by the mottled puffiness of her face. Her hair was dyed an outrageous henna, and her cheeks were streaked with thin, dead-white powder. There were a few spots down the front of her garish violet afternoon dress, and she wore an incredible amount of gaudy jewelry. And she was just a trifle drunk.
The family hated her, not only because she embarrassed them, but because she dared to do publicly things which they sometimes did not dare to do even in secret.
She stood there for a moment, coolly surveying them, and then said, “I just dropped in to tell you I don’t intend to have anything to do with this affair. If the worst comes to the worst, I can always make my own living, and it probably wouldn’t be the first time a Donahue had run a brothel.” She turned to her companion, and said, “Come on, Sarah, let’s get out of this morgue!”
The Donohough family was silent until they heard the front door close. Then Muriel said bitterly, “My aunt!”
“Sally has always been difficult,” the Countess said, in an unsuccessful attempt to save face.
Mignon turned appealingly to her husband. “Can’t something be done about her?
Couldn’t she be committed to an institution. After all she — *drinks.*”

Robert Emmett laughed rudely. “So do I,” he said. “You people leave Sally alone. She’s not half as crazy as the rest of you.”

Martin Reynolds cleared his throat very loudly. “It does seem,” he said, “as though she were not quite the person to approach this Jethro Hammer; and in that case —”

“As a matter of fact,” William James Donohough said, “it would probably be best for you to handle the negotiations yourself. If this can be kept on a business basis rather than a personal one —” The rest of the family nodded vigorous agreement, relieved at the prospect of having the problem off their individual hands.

“Quite right, quite right,” Martin Reynolds said briskly. “I’ll arrange an interview with him as quickly as possible. Now what kind of offer shall we make him?”

Two days later, he telephoned W. James Donohough II to inform him that the plaintiff, Jethro Hammer, refused even to consider the possibility of a settlement, and that the case would have to go to court.

Sally Donahue was the only member of the family who flatly refused to attend any of the court sessions. She pretended great disinterest in the proceedings, but it was noticed, however, that her inconspicuously dressed and spinsterish companion, Miss White, was frequently among the spectators.

For several years after Jethro Hammer’s disappearance, Sally Donahue had clung to the hope that he would come back. Indeed, she even borrowed money — the estate had not yet been settled — and had a private search for him conducted. It was no use. Jethro Hammer had vanished. It was a long time, though, before Sally completely abandoned hope. After all, she had been in love with him. No one knew, and no one would ever know, if she quite got over it.

Sally’s first reaction to the new world into which the Donohough family had so suddenly plunged was one of childlike delight. She loved lights and music, and theaters, and people, in exactly the same way she had always loved circuses; and as the years went along, they continued to delight her. But Sally had always had what old Will Donahue described as a smart little head on her, smart enough certainly to see through the posturings and pretensions of her brothers and sisters. Besides, she realized, now that it was too late, what, between them, they’d done to old Will Donahue. She began to drink because she loved champagne and she loved gaiety. She kept it up, first because it was the only revenge she could take on the rest of the Donohoughs, and later because it was the only comfort she could find in a world which daily grew more empty and more dull. She never married, nor was ever rumored to be engaged, but she did have one constant companion in her search for excitement.

The family always suspected that Peter Schuyler was her lover. They liked to apologize to their friends for the tragedy of Sally’s life by explaining that Peter Schuyler had an invalid wife hidden somewhere in a sanitarium.

The invalid wife was, of course, a myth on the part of the Donohough family, but
neither Sally nor Peter himself ever bothered to contradict it.

Peter Schuyler had been one of the first New Yorkers the young Donohoughs met. In fact, it was he who provided the opening wedge into the society world that was Maggie’s and Minnie’s goal. In later years, Maggie — then Marguerite, of course — liked to make amusing little jokes about the way in which they’d met Peter Schuyler.

“Our little Sally quite literally picked him up in the park. Isn’t that delightful?”

She always described it as having been a beautiful spring day, with the first leaves beginning to appear on the trees. Actually, it had been a rainy day in March, when the walks in Central Park were covered with mud and slush. Sally had sprawled in a puddle of melting snow, her cane having treacherously slipped on a hidden sliver of ice. Peter Schuyler had brought her home. He might not have made such immediate friends with the Donohough family if it had not been for the fact that he fell in love with Sally at first sight, mud, melting snow, and all.

Maggie cultivated him purely because of his family, an old and greatly respected one. He had no money and, even more unfortunately to Maggie, no personal charm. He was slight and rather frail-looking. He had very light wispy hair and a bad complexion. The aristocratic Schuyler nose dominated his narrow face, which slanted back at forehead and chin like two sides of a triangle. Worst of all, however, was his speech impediment, a stammer which at times made conversation with him not only difficult, but downright impossible. Those were trifles, however, which could be overlooked in a member of the Schuyler family.

He’d been born poor into a family which even then was on the downgrade, and the last remnant of the family money had gone to put him through school. Of course, there was still the old country estate, to which Maggie loved to refer in conversation; but it was in tragic need of repair, and its household consisted of Peter’s aged great-aunt, who was believed to be quite mad — at least she was always kept locked in her room when visitors were there — and a middle-aged, slightly eccentric uncle whose life consisted of desperate attempts to keep up the estate with the help of one ancient and stone-deaf handyman.

Peter Schuyler did not care to live on the estate. But he had to live somehow, and what income he had inherited just barely covered the cost of his clothes and personal necessities. Taking a job, of course, was out of the question. So he lived simply by being Peter Schuyler of the Schuyler family, and paying long visits to the homes of his wealthy but not so well connected friends.

In all honesty, though, it was Sally herself he fell in love with, not the Donohough money. That had been twenty years ago. Peter Schuyler was continuing to court Sally, though he knew — as he’d feared from the very beginning — that it was no use. In the beginning, her beauty and her lameness had appealed to him irresistibly; now the fat, untidy, boisterous old maid had the same appeal. She told him in the first weeks of their acquaintance that about Jethro Hammer. In fact, it was Peter who handled the details and arrangements of her search for Jethro. While he knew that he
would hate Jethro heartily, he hoped — he almost prayed — that he might be found if that was what Sally wanted.

As the years went by, he became a kind of unpaid companion. He accompanied Sally to theaters, parties, cabarets, and some less respectable places of amusement. He went along on several trips to Europe — quite discreetly, of course — and on winter excursions to Florida. He encouraged her in whatever she wanted to do, but as little by little he watched the slow process of decay which he was powerless to stop, his unhappiness turned to bitterness and resignation.

Sally, for her part, would have given anything she owned to fall in love with Peter Schuyler. But she couldn’t do it. It might have been because of Jethro Hammer, or it might not. No one, however, knew. She liked Peter Schuyler as she had never liked another person in her life. She depended on him; she realized again and again she could not get along without him. But she simply couldn’t marry him herself. Then, too — if Jethro should come back . . .

Perhaps the strongest of the bonds that held them together was the fact that they were both cripples — Sally with her short, misshapen leg, and he with his stammer.

Now that they were both in their forties — he was only a few months older than she — the search for excitement and diversion had lost its appeal. It was growing increasingly difficult for Sally to get around, even with the aid of her cane. Usually they spent afternoons and evenings together in Sally’s elaborately decorated but cluttered and dusty apartment, swapping outrageous stories, while Sally slowly but steadily got cheerfully drunk and Miss White sat quietly and disapprovingly in a corner with her knitting. Peter did not drink; he did not dare. His only pleasure was in seeing Sally happy. When she’d laugh uproariously, slapping her fat knee and wiping the tears from her eyes, he’d laugh with her, just as loudly. Sally liked to hear him laugh. “You know,” she would say, “I’m a Donahue and you’re a Schuyler, but there’s a good streak of vulgarity in both of us.”

Although Sally never visited the courtroom — or any of the many courtrooms through which the case was destined to be dragged — the rest of the family did, largely from curiosity to see the man who’d grown up with them as an adopted brother, and now was trying to ruin them all.

Jethro Hammer, in his early forties, was beginning to look like the old man who became famous as the hermit of Wall Street. He was extremely thin, and his face had a curious waxy color. He was tanned, but it did not look like a healthy tan. His hair was beginning to grow a trifle thin, but his black eyes were as bright and hard and unfriendly as ever. Even in those days he always wore cheaply made and rather rusty black suits.

The case dragged on for more than three years, with appeal after appeal by the Donohough lawyers. Always the appeals failed. Jethro Hammer based his case simply on the facts in old Will Donahue’s diary.
As the case dragged on, its records filling thousands of pages, there were frequent and increasingly desperate personal appeals by the Donohoughs to settle out of court, the offer increasing on each occasion. Jethro Hammer simply declined to consider them; declined, indeed, to talk to any of the young Donohoughs in person, and in time even to meet with their lawyers.

At last there was a verdict which could not be appealed. It awarded Jethro Hammer the full rights to the patent and the damages which he had claimed. Martin Reynolds was coolly sympathetic and sent in an enormous bill. By the time the damages were paid and the Countess' mansion mortgaged to pay the legal costs, the Donohoughs were bankrupt.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EFFECT OF the catastrophe upon the Donohough family was not what might have been expected, at least by anyone who hadn't known them back in Leesville. For instance, it might have been expected that the Countess would have a nervous breakdown, that the Count would promptly desert her to search for another wealthy wife, or that W. James Donohough II would jump from the windows of the Donohough Investment Trust Corporation. And as for Robert Emmett, John Patrick, and Sally — well, no one knew just what might happen.

The fact of the matter was, Melville Fairr thought, the losing of the lawsuit was possibly the luckiest thing that had ever happened to the Donohoughs.

He smiled to himself as he remembered how easy it had been to meet the Countess. Among his wide circle of acquaintances he found one who was building a new house and made a casual suggestion. The suggestion was enthusiastically received. Why, a house that wasn't decorated by the Countess d'Abazoli was practically no house at all! And would Mr. Fairr be so kind as to go along to the interview? Mr. Fairr would.

No one who'd seen the famous mansion twenty years before would have recognized it now, Melville Fairr thought, looking up at its greatly remodeled façade. True, there was still the air of discreet elegance and expensive simplicity, but the bronze plate beside the door said, chastely and modestly, "Countess d'Abazoli, Interiors."

Inside the mansion, few changes were apparent at first glance. Downstairs the magnificent old entrance hall was much the same, and the famous drawing room was exactly like the description of it Melville Fairr had heard from those who had seen it twenty years before.

Melville Fairr felt a little shock; a sense of excitement. His new friend, Martin Reynolds, had described so vividly the scene in that room on the day the lawsuit had begun, that now he felt for a moment he was seeing it for himself.

The man and woman who stood before the fireplace in the long, slanting rays of
late afternoon sunlight were a striking couple. The Countess' luxuriant hair was snow-white now. That only added to her beauty. Fairr suddenly realized that here was one of those rare and fortunate women who were pretty at twenty, handsome in middle age, and beautiful in their seventies. Her blue eyes had all their old fire. Her face was carefully made up and almost entirely unwrinkled, and her figure was as striking and well-modeled as ever. She wore black, a very simple and obviously expensive dress with a touch of blue-white lace, and a magnificent pearl pendant.

She greeted them cordially and charmingly. Then she indicated the man at her side and said, "My husband — the Count, you know." Melville Fairr fancied he could hear her say, years ago, "My brother — the poet, you know," or, "My friend — the Peter Schuyler."

The Count, too, had aged well. He was still wiry and energetic. He greeted them, and Fairr discovered that the slight amusing accent had not worn off with the years.

After ten minutes of listening to the Countess, Melville Fairr realized that she had not only retained her beauty throughout the years, but also her good Irish shrewdness. By the time a definite figure was arrived at, his conscience had begun to bother him a little, especially when the Countess said: "And who suggested that you come to me?"

Fairr's friend nodded toward the little gray man and said, "Why, Mr. Fairr."

The Countess flashed Fairr a look that was half appreciation and half speculation as to whether he intended to ask for a commission later. Fairr said nothing.

The interview ended on a note of the utmost cordiality. Melville Fairr bowed slightly over his hostess' hand. "May I call on you again?" he murmured.

"Of course," she said enthusiastically. "At any time."

Melville Fairr sensed what she was thinking and smiled to himself. When she realized that he was not calling on her politely to suggest 5 per cent of the sum involved, or perhaps even 10, she would probably prove even more communicative.

He waited discreetly for several days before calling on her. She received him in her private office. The Countess was all businesswoman now. She was cordial, yes, but she was wary as she smiled at him and said, "Well, Mr. Fairr?"

It took him only five minutes to make her realize, without coming right out and saying so, that he had no interest whatsoever in a possible commission.

Then the Countess moved from behind her desk to the satin-upholstered chair and rang for tea. By the time the visit was over, they were fast friends — but, then, everyone made friends with Melville Fairr, and everyone confided in him.

As time went on and the visits continued, the Countess was delighted to talk about herself — about her childhood in Leesville, about old Will Donahue and Lizzie, about the early days in New York, and, most importantly, about Jethro Hammer. Strangely enough, she spoke his name without bitterness.

The loss of the suit had been a tragic blow, no doubt of that; yet by the time the blow had fallen, it had been anticipated for so long that it was not a shock. "When it happened," she told Fairr, "the only thing I felt was — well, that's over with."
She had not known what to do or where to turn. She'd had a number of frantic ideas, ranging from a dramatic suicide in the old mansion to a return to Leesville.

It had been the Count, curiously, who had turned the tide. She had fully expected him, to leave her immediately, and her own thought had been to be fair with him. The day after Martin Reynolds broke the news, she talked it over with her husband. “I haven’t a cent,” she told him, “and this house is mortgaged up to the last chimney. I still have my jewelry. Take it, and sell it for what it’s worth. We’ll arrange a quiet divorce, and you can find another and,” she’d smiled bitterly, “more prosperous wife.”

Ricky had looked surprised. He’d said, “But I prefer the wife I have now.” “Without a fortune?” she had asked him wryly.

He had shrugged his shoulders charmingly and smiled. “You’ll make another.” She had sold the jewelry, yes, but the money went to start the business which had indeed created another fortune. It had been an era when everyone had money to spend, and New York was an interior decorator’s paradise. The woman who had been born Maggie Donahue knew how to capitalize on both her aristocratic name and the friends she had made in the days before the lawsuit.

It might have been expected that things would turn out that way, Fairr reflected. A woman of a different temperament or a different background faced with such a catastrophe might never have recovered from it. But not the daughter of Will and Lizzie Donahue, who’d grown up doing the housework in the tiny Leesville farmhouse and helping to care for the young Donahues. There was a lot of bounce to people like that.

She had no objection to talking about Jethro Hammer. Melville Fairr brought up the subject a little timidly, referring delicately to the lawsuit and wondering what kind of man could have done such a thing. The whole thing, he declared, was a mystery to him.

“And to me,” she said thoughtfully. “Not why did he do it. I have always felt that he hated us, even from the time he was a baby. Sometimes I almost felt — believe me, Mr. Fairr, I am not superstitious — that he was sent to us to do us harm. Or maybe it was our fault, I don’t know. But the mystery is not why did he bring the suit, but why did he wait twenty years? Where was he all that time?”

That was a question to which Melville Fairr longed to know the answer. Sometimes he wondered if he would ever find out.

There was, of course, one more question in his mind, an even more pressing one. Was this charming and successful woman the person who was already marked as the murderer-to-be of old Jethro Hammer?
CHAPTER FOUR

MELVILLE FAIRR did not have to depend on arranging a friendly introduction to meet W. James Donohough II. He simply telephoned the offices of the Donohough Investment Trust Corporation and asked for a business appointment.

It surprised and encouraged him that it was so easy to make an appointment with the great — and now aged — financier. A pleasant-voiced secretary simply said, "Yes, Mr. Fairr, will 2:30 Monday be satisfactory?" Fairr said it would. If it was as easy as that to see W. James Donohough II, then the man must be very successful indeed!

At 2:30 Monday, he presented himself in the large and quietly decorated anteroom of the offices which occupied two floors of a skyscraper on Lower Broadway. The pleasant-voiced girl at the desk smiled at him and said, "Mr. Fair? Mr. Donohough is expecting you." She called a page boy who escorted Fairr to another and smaller anteroom, where a dignified, friendly young woman took his name, spoke a few words into her telephone, and then said, "Will you come right in, Mr. Fairr?"

The moment Fairr stepped inside the door of the private office, he understood immediately why timid widows, small businessmen, and the trustees of orphanages felt reassured at their first sight of William James Donohough and were willing to place their financial affairs in his capable hands. It was a modest room, with nothing too large or elaborate or obviously costly that might have frightened away a possible client. At the same time it was not too modest. The middle-sized desk was finely polished mahogany, the big leather chairs were the best that could be made, the few prints on the walls were inconspicuous but excellent.

William James Donohough himself was nearly eighty by now, Fairr realized with a shock. He didn't look it. His face was thin and lined, but it was tanned. His eyes were bright and not hidden by glasses. He wore, as in Martin Reynolds' description of him twenty years before — a neat gray suit, a handmade white shirt, and a specially woven blue-and-gray tie.

Fairr apologized for this intrusion on Donohough's valuable time, especially since the matter was not a highly important one. It happened that a certain small Illinois college had inherited the fortune of a late client of his — Rufus Carrington. The college treasurer had asked him, Fairr, to obtain advice as to its investment.

"I will be delighted to assist," said Donohough, "with advice or in any other way."

Fairr coughed apologetically. "I'd been afraid," he began, "that since it was really so trivial a matter —"

The white-haired man smiled cordially. "These days I'm glad when I'm allowed to attend even to trivial matters. My confounded family and business associates seem to think I'm way past the retirement age. Now let's have the circumstances about this fund."

No, Fairr thought, this man would not reach the retirement age until they laid
him in his grave. Perhaps if old Will Donahue had gone on working, he might have lived many more years. He said, "The amount involved is a little over a million and a half dollars. My late client was a very wealthy man." He repressed a smile at the look of surprise that flashed across the financier’s face.

"Rufus Carrington," Donohougue said thoughtfully. "I remember, I knew him, in fact. Wasn’t he murdered?" He waited for Melville Fairrr’s quiet nod, and then said, "Who was it murdered him?"

"A number of people," Fairrr said, smiling.

"Damned interesting case, as I remember it," Donohougue said. "I never did get the truth of it straight in my mind. Look here, aren’t you a private detective?"

Melville Fairrr nodded modestly and admitted that he was.

"That’s interesting," Donohougue said. "Damned interesting. Look" — he glanced at his watch — "I’ll want to go over some of the information about this college trust fund tonight. Suppose we meet in the morning, go over the business and what suggestions I can make, and then have lunch at my club?" He added hastily, "I don’t mean in any professional capacity. I’ve just never met a real private detective before!"

He looked a little, Fairrr thought, like a small boy who’s been promised an appointment with Superman.

The next morning, when he arrived in the offices of the Donohougue Investment Trust Corporation, Melville Fairrr found that William James Donohougue had prepared pages of suggestions and details regarding the soundest and most profitable placing of the college trust fund. It looked, indeed, as though someone had worked all night on the problem. Later, as he became better acquainted with Donohougue, he realized that the work had actually amounted to only a few hours’ dictation, if that. The man had a mind that was a veritable encyclopedia — no, a whole library — of financial information. They discussed the business details briefly before lunch and sent the entire collection with a note from Fairrr to the anxious trustee in Illinois.

In the meantime, Fairrr had been noticing and admiring the collection of framed photographs that adorned the mahogany desk. A charming silver-haired and somehow birdlike woman: that would be Mignon; a handsome, hearty man of middle age: that would be Billy; a beautiful woman who must by now be middle-aged, yet who looked twenty-five, a face he’d thrilled to more than a few times on the screen at the neighborhood theater: Muriel, of course. There was a tall, good-looking young man in football uniform, and, in the very center of the desk, a laughing baby with curly hair. Fairrr pretended not to have noticed the other pictures. He nodded toward the one of the laughing baby and said, "Beautiful child!"

William James Donohougue looked as pleased as punch. "Grandchild," he said.

"Congratulations," Fairrr exclaimed. "Your first?"

"At my age!" Donohougue said, grinning. "No, she’s only the latest one — the eighth, as a matter of fact. Billy has a fine family." He picked up the picture of the boy in football uniform. "This is his first, made the All-American last year, and
Mariel has a daughter seventeen years old. Though,” he grinned again, “she tries hard to conceal that fact from her adoring public.”

Fairr couldn’t help grinning back at him. He liked this big, friendly, capable, white-haired man. He hoped from the bottom of his heart that William James Donohough was not the one who was contemplating the murder of Jethro Hammer.

“They’re fine kids,” Donohough said proudly. “There was a time when I used to worry about how Billy and Muriel would turn out. Looks now as if I’d been wasting my worrying. Shall we go to lunch?”

Fairr had been right. Donohough was not only an avid reader, but an avid collector, of detective fiction. Before they had reached dessert, he was already insisting that Fairr come out to the Long Island place and view his collection.

“I’ve heard a great deal about your Long Island place,” he said. “It must be very beautiful.”

“The family likes it. Well, as a matter of fact, I do myself. Thank God we were able to hang onto it, though it was pretty tough going for a while.”

Melville Fairr looked bewildered and blank for a moment, then seemed to remember something out of the shadowy past. “That’s right,” he said, almost with surprise, “you had quite a time with a lawsuit once, didn’t you? What was the fellow’s name?”

“Hammer,” Donohough said. “Jethro Hammer. Damnest thing you ever heard of. Too bad I didn’t know you then, a detective might have been a lot of help. Never could figure out for the life of me why it happened that way.”

“I do remember some of the details now,” Melville Fairr said. “And it was strange. Why didn’t he simply present his claim to you and work out some agreeable arrangement?”

“Oh, that’s not what’s strange about it,” Donohough said. “It’s true, his suit seemed deliberately vindictive at the time, but maybe we had it coming to us. When I look back on things, I can see we treated Jethro like a dog; and, damn it all, he grew up like our own brother, and he was a lot more help to my father than any of us ever were. But you know how it is; you get a little money unexpectedly, and right away you’re filled with a lot of ideas and notions that you’d laugh at if you stopped to think about it sensibly. Jethro was one of us. We should have divided everything with him.” He seemed to be musing for a moment. “It might have been a lot better for everybody concerned if he’d married Sally.”

Fairr lifted questioning eyebrows. “Sally . . . ?”

Donohough came back to earth quickly. “A sister of mine,” he said briefly, and looked as though he wanted to change the subject.

“But even so,” Fairr said, sticking doggedly to the line he had succeeded in opening up, “to bring a suit like that — well, it always struck me as curious.”

“The curious thing,” Donohough said, “is — why the hell did he wait so long? I’d give a lot to learn where Jethro Hammer was during those twenty years! But look here, let’s not talk about me. There’s nothing interesting about the Donohough fam-
ily. Tell me, what was the most difficult case you ever handled?”

A few Sundays later, Fairr alighted from a suburban train on Long Island. A handsome but conservative car was waiting for him with a cheerful, friendly chauffeur, and with William James Donohough sitting in the back seat.

“The kids are all out at the house today. They are looking forward to meeting you, especially Muriel. Seems she’s going to star in some kind of mystery movie.”

“I’m delighted at the prospect of meeting them,” Fairr said truthfully.

“Hope you won’t be disappointed in the place,” Donohough said. “It’s not showy, you know. Never could stand these country houses that looked like palaces. Actually, we live in a farmhouse, and we love it.”

It was far different, though, Fairr reflected, from the farmhouse where Donohough had been born. That had had three rooms, faded clapboard walls, and a shingled roof continually in need of repair. The simple little farmhouse on Long Island was a matter of twenty or more rooms, set back in a vast expanse of lawn and trees — almost a park — which was shut off from the outside world by a high iron grillwork fence. Yet, as the car moved almost noiselessly up the driveway toward the house, Fairr could see exactly what Donohough meant.

It was a large house, and an expensive one, and yet it looked comfortable. True, it was obviously the work of a fine architect, yet it had been so skillfully created that the result was unstudied. It was white and rambling and close to the ground. It looked homelike. It had been built, he knew, only forty or fifty years before, and certainly had been remodeled and improved during that time; yet it looked as though it had nestled there among the trees for at least a hundred years. The wide, hospitable front door was opened for him by a bright-faced girl of fourteen or fifteen, whose curly dark hair was tumbling over her face and whose cheeks were pink with excitement; a girl dressed in a sweater, a slightly faded corduroy skirt, and a disreputable pair of saddle shoes. She flung open the door, laughing, then her face sobered and she said, “Oh, excuse me, I thought you were Don.”

“Maggie,” Donohough said gravely, “this is Mr. Melville Fairr.” He turned to Fairr and added, “My granddaughter, Mary Margaret.”

Mary Margaret dropped a curtsy, learned at one of the best young ladies’ schools, and said with vast dignity, “How do you do, Mr. Fairr.” Then she turned and raced down the hall, heels flying. Her voice came from the distance, exclaiming: “Hey, kids, grandpop’s home, and he brought Mr. Fairr with him!”

A gray-haired housekeeper came hurrying up from the back of the house. “Why, Mr. Donohough,” she apologized. “I’m sure I didn’t hear the car drive up. If you’d rung the bell, Mr. Donohough —”

“Never mind, Katie,” Donohough said. “Miss Maggie let us in.”

Katie sniffed and said disapprovingly, “That child!” She turned and stalked indignantly toward the back of the house. Halfway down the hall, she turned and said, “Mr. Donohough, Bobby and Patrick have been putting tadpoles in the laundry
tubs again, and it’s a mercy the cook didn’t leave with the dinner half-ready.”

“T’ll fix them,” Grandfather Donohough promised. He turned to Fairr. “Let’s go in my library and relax a minute before these wild Indians decide to attack.” He opened the door into a quiet, spacious room, and said, “I assure you it’s not quite as noisy as this most of the time, but when Billy brings the kids out to spend Sunday with the old folks,” — he grinned — “sometimes I wonder how the roof stays on. Will you have a drink? Scotch? Bourbon? Rye? Or what would you like?”

Fairr settled for an ice-cold bottle of beer and began roaming around the library. It was a good library, built on a solid foundation of standard material — encyclopedias, histories, sets of classics. Then on that foundation had been built an interesting structure of the books its owner had read and liked, well-thumbed volumes of detective stories, from Edgar Allan Poe to Dorothy B. Hughes.

“Now, here’s a book I always liked,” Donohough said, pulling a volume off the shelf.

It was a good hour later before Fairr could leave the library and meet the family.

Halfway through a dissertation on the latest book by Craig Rice, Donohough paused, looked embarrassed, and said, “I must be boring you to death. Besides, the kids will never forgive me if I don’t produce you pretty soon.” He opened the tall French doors, and they stepped out onto the lawn. For a moment, Donohough stood happily surveying the scene and sniffing the warm summer air. Suddenly he called loudly, “Katie.”

A minute later, she appeared around the corner of the house, and he said, “Say, let’s eat outside today. It’s a shame to let weather like this go to waste.”

“I’d already planned you should eat outside, Mr. Donohough,” Katie said, almost indignantly, and started back toward the kitchen.

Donohough smiled. “You’d never believe it to look at her, but Katie’s been with us since Muriel was born. She was just an untrained Irish girl fresh off the boat, without a penny to her name, and she went to work as a kind of second assistant to the third maid. We had a notion that we needed a lot of servants in those days, if only to impress the neighbors. Now we know better; but Katie stuck with us, and she’s practically head of the family. Owns a fine piece of property in Brooklyn, too, and she’s putting half a dozen nieces and nephews through school.”

He led Fairr across the lawn to a silver-haired woman, and said, “Minnie, this is Mr. Fairr.”

Minnie, Melville Fairr thought. He wondered when she had dropped the Mignon.

Minnie shoved a curly-haired baby off her lap and said, “I’m so glad you could come out here, Mr. Fairr, we have all been looking forward to meeting you.” She pulled a pretty little girl to her side and said, “This is my granddaughter Lucy.” She pointed to the baby, who promptly began to giggle, and said, “And this is my granddaughter Elizabeth.”

A tennis game was finishing, and the players were coming across the lawn. Fairr
looked at the girl, and his heart jumped. Muriel Donohough, whose screen fans knew and adored her as Mary Dane, must have looked exactly like that at seventeen. Not exactly like that, on second thought. How had Martin Reynolds described Muriel? Cross, he remembered, and spoiled, and sulky. Not this girl.

"Another granddaughter, Mr. Fairr," Minnie said. "This one's on the other side of the family." She smiled up at the girl. "Betsy, this is Mr. Fairr. Mr. Fairr — Betsy Dawes."

She shook his hand and said, "How do you do, Mr. Fairr? I'm the skeleton in the family closet — at least I will be as long as Mums can get away with being thirty." She did not look as if she minded in the least.

"Betsy starts nurses' training tomorrow," Grandfather Donohough said proudly. He linked an affectionate arm with the other tennis player and said, "This is Bob, Mr. Fairr."

At first glance, the boy looked like the football player whose photograph stood on Donohough's desk. Then Fairr realized he must be a younger brother. This boy was hardly old enough to be an All-American.

"Go wash your hands and faces before dinner," Minnie said in exactly the tone she would have used if they had been six years old. The girl jumped up and said to Bob, "Bet I can beat you to the house." She ran gracefully like a deer, and he raced after her.

Melville Fairr did meet the family one or two at a time, but until they all sat down to a picnic dinner on the lawn he did find himself confused as to which was which. Then, having met the entire family, he was able to glance around and sort them out in his mind: There was Billy, who would never have a more dignified name in spite of his gray hair and fifty years — Billy, chief engineer in his uncle Robert's plant. The pleasant-faced matronly woman who held Elizabeth on her lap was Billy's wife, mother of a brood that extended from young Billy, the football player, to Elizabeth, the baby. There were seven altogether in the brood; and, Melville Fairr reflected, looking at them one by one, they were a successful collection.

Young Billy had come back from a game of golf with a pretty girl whom he addressed affectionately as Pinky, and fourteen-year-old Maggie was looking adoringly at a youth with glasses and braces on his teeth, who, Fairr decided, must be the Don she had been expecting. There were the three oldest — young Billy, Bob, and Maggie; and the four younger — Lucy, the twins, John and Patrick, and the baby, Elizabeth. All good Donohough family names except Lucy, and she was named for her other grandmother. No wonder William James Donohough II was proud of his family.

He found it difficult during the meal to keep his eyes away from Muriel. She'd arrived shortly before dinner with her husband, Arthur Dawes, a handsome middle-aged man who was not only her husband, but also her business manager.

She was very beautiful and incredibly young. Fairr found to his delight that he admired her even more in real life than he had on the screen. She had the calm self-
assurance of a woman who knows that at forty she still dares to wear severely simple white and to draw her dark hair straight back from her flawless forehead. She had great charm and, he realized at once, great intelligence as well. She shook his hand cordially, and said smiling, “Dad tells me you’re a private detective. I’m probably going to drive you crazy with silly-sounding questions.”

Fairr said, “I assure you they won’t sound silly to me. I only hope I can answer them.”

She laughed. It was a pleasant laugh. She said, “You’ll solve my biggest problem if you’ll tell me how I should react when the police find me looking very guilty at the scene of the crime. That’s in the first act of my next play, and unfortunately I’ve never experienced being found guilty on the scene of a crime.”

“I trust you never will,” Fairr said gallantly, and the people around him laughed with Muriel. The conversation went on from there, but Fairr felt a sudden chill down his spine. Was it the first act of a new play that she was rehearsing, or was it a scene she expected to play later in actual life?

Nonsense, he told himself firmly. Muriel could have no reason for murdering old Jethro Hammer, a man she’d never seen and who had certainly done her no harm.

After dinner, he told John and Patrick extravagant lies about his past exploits, rivaling indeed the most marvelous adventures of Superman. He engaged in grave and earnest discussion with Mary Margaret’s fifteen-year-old admirer as to the advisability of his becoming a G-Man. He listened with genuine interest while Billy explained to him a new development — his own — in production line management. He held baby Elizabeth on his lap until she went to sleep. He agreed with young Billy that he’d done wisely in enlisting in the Navy, where he’d be within the next week. He agreed also with Muriel’s daughter Betsy and young Bob Donohough that first-cousin marriages often turned out surprisingly well. He promised to look later at Lucy’s doll-house. In short, he almost became a member of the family, and in his heart he felt like a Judas.

For a while he sat with the lovely silver-haired lady who had first been Minnie, then Mignon, and now was happily Minnie again. She was knitting a sweater for baby Elizabeth, but her eyes watched the gardens where the grandchildren played and the ping-pong table where William James Donohough had taken on his son Billy and, what’s more, was beating him. She sighed contentedly.

“You’d never think,” she said dreamily, “that twenty years or so ago I was dead set on divorcing Will. I’d have done it, too, if I hadn’t known there would be a frightful scandal.”

Fairr looked at her thoughtfully. “What changed your mind?” he asked in his gentlest tone.

Grandmother Donohough laughed, a soft tinkling little laugh. “For a while,” she said, “I was too busy to think about it. There was this big house to keep up, you see, and no one to help me but Katie. And young Billy and Bob were just tiny things then,
and their mother wasn’t very well — though you’d never believe it to look at her now. And there was a lot I had to do to help Will out.” She smiled. “I was grandmother, housekeeper, and part-time secretary, and, you know, I loved it. And somehow, when things did get easier, I found myself wondering how I’d ever imagined I could get along without Will. I guess everyone has to do a certain number of foolish and indiscreet things in a lifetime.”

“Everyone is entitled to,” Melville Fairr said. He paused for a good half minute before he asked his question. “Don’t you feel terribly bitter toward this man — this Jethro Hammer — who caused you so much trouble?”

“Bitter?” she shook her head. “Perhaps I did at first. I don’t now. He meant to cause us trouble, but somehow I don’t think he succeeded. Perhaps what he did was just what we needed to bring us down to earth.”

A little later in the afternoon, when the shadows were lengthening on the lawn, Fairr strolled down to the boathouse and back with his host. Somehow he brought the conversation around to the lawsuit and the years immediately following it, so adroitly that Donohough hardly realized that he was talking about it.

“Believe me,” Donohough said, “I thought we were sunk. Every damned thing had gone down the drain. The hell of it was, so much of the money I had lost wasn’t mine. It had been turned over to me to invest.” He paused.

“Still,” Fairr hazarded, “plenty of firms like that go bankrupt.”

“Yes,” Donohough admitted, “but somehow — other peoples’ money...” He paused again and drew a long breath. “Besides, I couldn’t figure any other way to make a living. You know, what really got me was — well, I got to worrying one day that if I gave up, let the business go to smash and tried to find a job, I couldn’t earn enough to pay Billy’s and Muriel’s allowances for spending money. And then I remembered that old Will — my father — never earned that much in his life until he invented — or rather, Jethro invented — that infernal gadget.”

“You seem to have come out all right,” Fairr said.

“Oh, sure,” Donohough said. “I had to. But it was tough going. Minnie had given up the Manhattan apartment and fired all the help except Katie before I’d even gotten up enough nerve to suggest it. Then Billy, who’d never earned a nickel in his life, turned up with the news he’d gotten a job in his uncle Robert’s factory, and Muriel simply announced — announced, mind you, she never dreamed of asking us about it — that she had a tiny part in a Broadway play. Well, we mortgaged the place here. I borrowed everything I could, and somehow we pulled through.” He smiled at Fairr.

“And, damn it,” he said, “I’m glad it happened that way.”

It was only a few minutes before train time when Melville Fairr was escorted with great solemnity by Lucy to inspect the doll-house big brother Bob had made for her birthday. Fairr admired it with extravagant and honestly deserved praise.

“When Bobby gets out of school,” Lucy confided, “he’s going to be an architect. I don’t want to be one, I’d rather be a detective like you, Mr. Fairr.”
“Well, both are useful in their way,” Fairr said modestly. They walked around the house from the playroom Grandfather Donohough had built for his grandchildren’s Sunday visits. The group on the lawn was beginning to break up, and the sunset was painting the windows of the friendly white house with a warm glow. Grandfather Donohough was carrying baby Elizabeth, now sound asleep, to Billy’s car.

“Mr. Fairr,” Lucy asked in her clear little voice, “do you know who’s going to be murdered?”

Melville Fairr stared at the child. Then he managed a poor imitation of a laugh. “Now, how could I know that?” he said. “People are murdered every day. I’d have to be a fortuneteller, wouldn’t I?”

“No,” she persisted. “I mean the man Grandfather says is going to be murdered some day.”

This time there was more than a chill down Fairr’s spine. He felt uncomfortably cold all over, and more of a Judas than ever, asking questions of ten-year-old Lucy. “Don’t you think your grandfather was joking?” he asked.

She shook her head firmly, and blond pigtails wagged back and forth. “He meant it,” she declared. “I know he meant it.”

“Do you know who he was talking about?” Melville Fairr asked, hating himself.

“Nope,” she said cheerfully. “I just heard him say a lot of times there’s somebody who’s bound to be murdered some day.” Her pretty little face twisted into a frown as she sought in her mind for the exact words. “He said — he wonders why it hasn’t happened already, but he knows that some day it will.”

CHAPTER FIVE

MELVILLE FAIRR had a stroke of luck. A certain young friend of his, Jeffrey Bruno by name, wrote a book and had it accepted by a New York publisher. Melville Fairr promptly developed a sudden interest in the publishing business and became a voluntary adviser to his young friend. There had to be a number of visits, however, to the firm’s offices before he managed to meet a very thin, rather handsome gray-haired old man who held a position somewhere between third assistant editor and chief office boy. But after that first meeting, and after buying a number of drinks in an inexpensive bar just off Madison Avenue, he became an intimate, almost a friend, of John Patrick Donohough.

John Patrick had no objection to explaining why, during his twenty years with the publishing house, he’d remained in such a minor capacity. “I haven’t the ability to do anything else, you see. As a matter of fact, I wonder sometimes whether they’d keep me on at all if I hadn’t spent a lot of money with them in the days when I thought my poetry was worth being printed. Oh, yes, I guess I’m useful in a way. I open the mail,
I read a manuscript now and then, and I get rid of visitors my boss doesn’t want to be bothered with. That’s about all anyone can expect from an old man like me.”

“Why don’t you retire?” Fairr asked bluntly.

John Patrick laughed. “On what?” he asked. “Just because my brothers and sisters are rich, doesn’t mean I can expect them to pension me. And if they did, they’d probably expect me to live with one of them; and, frankly, they all bore me stiff. As a matter of fact, I am very happy the way I am.”

He looked around the inexpensive bar with a look of distaste. “This isn’t a very comfortable place to spend a Saturday afternoon. Won’t you come up to my apartment for a drink?”

“Delighted,” Melville Fairr said.

John Patrick Donoughugh lived in one large, beautiful room on Thirty-ninth Street, just off Park Avenue. Fairr followed him up three flights of well-kept stairs into a tiny hallway from which opened the folding doors of a closet kitchenette. Beyond the hallway was the one big room. Fairr paused at the entrance to it, looked around, and said, “You have a beautiful place here.”

“I think it’s beautiful,” John Patrick said. “And it certainly is all I could wish for. It’s rather satisfactory, you know, to discover that everything you want or need in the world can be put in one inexpensive room.”

“I seem to remember a saying,” Fairr said. “I don’t remember exactly how it goes, but it has something to do with infinite riches in a small room.”

“Brother,” John Patrick said, “you’re in the groove.”

It was cool and restful in John Patrick’s room. There was much in it to look at and admire over a long time of many visits: books in the cases that reached from the baseboard to the ceiling — Melville Fairr glanced at them and wanted to borrow and read them all. Chinese figurines in a glassed-in case — every one worthy of a long and reverent examination. Prints on the wall that couldn’t be looked at and passed by, but had to be studied thoughtfully and with affection. There wasn’t one thing in the room that wasn’t worthy of thoughtful and appreciative consideration. The comfortable furniture had come from second-hand stores, and then been carefully remodeled and refinished. The rugs on the floor had come a long way down on the social scale from their original owner until they fell into John Patrick’s appreciative hands to be cleaned and mended.

“Nice little hide-out,” John Patrick said, coming back from the improvised kitchenette and miraculously carrying two drinks of whisky, two glasses of water, and a package of cigarettes without the help of a tray. “Not a bad hide-out for a retired poet, if you ask me.”

Melville Fairr looked searchingly at his host over the shot of bourbon and said, “If you’re a retired poet, I’m the ambassador from Patagonia.”

John Patrick smiled apologetically and said, “Well — as a matter of fact — Oh, hell, I’m not going to bore you with my first literary success. If you’ll consent to it, I’ll
talk your arm off about my literary failures. But I'd much rather talk about the chances for the Dodgers in the World Series. But whatever you do, let me warn you, don't get me on the subject of the book I'm writing."

"I don't understand poetry," Fairr said, "and I'm not going to read your book, until it's published, and, frankly, I don't think the Dodgers have a chance."

"You don't need to be such an owly individual," John Patrick said. "As a matter of fact, it's one hell of a swell book, and if it isn't a best-seller, I'll shoot the publisher. That is, if I can find a publisher when I get it done."

"My private opinion of your book," Fairr said, sipping his drink, "is that it's probably the prize stinker of the century. Books by amateur poets always turn my stomach."

"I'm an ex-poet," John Patrick said indignantly, "and what's more, I'm a writer now, for the first time in my life a professional writer." He picked an envelope off his desk, took out the contents, and waved them triumphantly in front of Fairr. It was a letter of acceptance for a short short story, and a check for $12.75 from a midwest newspaper syndicate.

Melville Fairr shook John Patrick's hand with great solemnity and said, "Brother, you're on the rails."

The ex-poet laughed, laid the envelope carefully on the desk, sat down, and said, "Believe me, I've never been as proud of anything in my life except the blue ribbon for essay-writing in my second year in high school. Do you realize that this is the first thing I'll have had published in my life that I got paid for in real cash money. God, how I wish my father could have lived to see this check. If only I could have gotten it forty years ago! He always said I'd amount to something some day, and now that I'm nearly seventy, it begins to look as though he was right." He grinned at Fairr. "A late start," he said, "but a Garrison finish. I've sent them another short short story, and if they accept it, I'm going to become unbearably conceited."

"I don't see why a person shouldn't be unbearably conceited if he wants to," Fairr said. "It's a pleasant hobby in its way. But how on earth did an expatriate poet who lived by preference in Paris pick up the kind of strictly American language you've been using for the last hour?"

"I picked it up in cheap night clubs, dance halls, and Third Avenue barrooms," John Patrick said. "And I discovered it was a whole new language that sounded like music if you listened to it in the right spirit." Suddenly his eyes narrowed, and he looked searchingly at Melville Fairr. "I've never talked to you about myself. How did you know I was an expatriate poet who preferred to live in Paris?"

"Because I picked up one of your privately printed books of poetry on the five-cent shelf of a second-hand bookstore," Melville Fairr said truthfully. He didn't add that he'd been haunting second-hand bookstores, looking for one of those volumes. "It had your biography lavishly displayed on the back."

"I'm glad to know somebody bought one of those books," John Patrick said. "Even
for a nickel. Did you read any of the poems?"

"Only the first one," Melville Fairr said.

"Funny what a high opinion I used to have of that stuff," John Patrick said. "Or, come to think of it, did I? I guess I knew all the time it was pretty stinky poetry, but I had to do something, you see, to demonstrate to my friends that I had a right to live in artistic and literary circles. It's a dirty shame I wasn't poor forty years ago. But, being rich, I had to show off."

Melville Fairr glanced at him curiously. His first impression of John Patrick Donohough had been one of a slightly peevish, embittered old man. Now he realized that he'd made another mistake. John Patrick wasn't peevish, he was anything in the world but bitter. On the contrary, he was contented — a contentment mingled with the enthusiasm a boy should have at twenty. He hoped with all his heart that John Patrick would live twenty more years and sell a short short story every week.

"That's right," Fairr said. "You did use to be very rich. What happened?"

"If you don't know," his host said, "you certainly weren't reading the newspapers twenty years ago. Remember the famous Donohough suit? Jethro Hammer?"

"Oh, of course," Fairr said, surprised. "You're one of those Donohoughs. It must have been quite a blow when it happened."

"Well, it was and it wasn't," John Patrick said. "At the time, I thought of it more as an infernal nuisance because it kept me in New York, a city I hadn't learned then to appreciate. By the time the suit was lost, I had been expecting it to happen that way, so it wasn't any surprise to me."

"Still, it must have been hard on you," Fairr prompted him.

"Oh, yes, I suppose it was. It was hard on all of us. My dear brothers and sisters, bless them, had invested their money wisely while they had it. In social position, in brokerage houses, in aircraft plants, and in" — he grinned — "a mild form of crime. You ought to meet my sister Sally some time, Mr. Fairr. She's a lulu. I'm the only one of the family who keeps in touch with her any more." His face sobered and he went on, "They'd invested in things they could capitalize on later. I'd invested only in myself. And when the smash-up came, there wasn't anything in my mind to pay dividends. Not even a literary reputation." He gazed almost dreamily at the window. "But I still say, it's a shame Jethro didn't file his suit twenty years before. I might have been a great author."

Fairr sipped his drink and said, "I wonder why he didn't."

"And so do I," John Patrick said. "I've spent many a night lying awake wondering why he waited so long, where he was, what he was doing."

"I've often wondered what he was like," Fairr murmured.

"Jethro was a queer duck," John Patrick said almost dreamily. "But that isn't exactly accurate. That's what everyone always said about him. Looking back now, I think the only trouble with Jethro was that he was lonely. I don't know why he should have been, because Ma and Pa paid as much attention to him as they did to the rest
of us. And we all wanted to be friends with him when we were kids. I don’t know —”

He paused, scowled, and said, “Yes, I do know.”

John Patrick refilled his own glass and held it untouched in his hand as he went on. “If Pa hadn’t been seven kinds of a fool about the family name — if he’d named the poor little kid Jethro Donahue — I’ll bet you any money none of this would have happened. Look at it from his viewpoint. There he was, almost a member of the family, almost our brother. And yet, with that infernal difference. We were the young Donahues; he was named after a tool in a small-town blacksmith shop. No wonder we couldn’t make friends with him.”

Melville Fairr went on listening in silence.

“Well, how I got too absorbed in my own affairs and didn’t pay any attention to him. He was just there, like a piece of furniture. You know, that day when he walked out, I had the confounded nerve to offer him a job. I should have offered him — and insisted that the others offer him — his equal share in the family money. I should have thrown him at Sally’s head — he was probably too shy to propose to her. Now, of course, it’s all too late; but I’d still like to make friends with Jethro. I haven’t seen him for twenty years, but I think I’d still like him.”

Melville Fairr broke his silence. “Perhaps,” he said noncommittally, “and perhaps not. People change in twenty years. Twenty years is a long time.”

John Patrick downed his drink and set the empty glass on the table. He grinned at Fairr. “You’re dead right,” he said. “If we did meet, Jethro and I wouldn’t have anything to talk about except the weather, and we’d probably disagree about that. So I probably won’t see him again until I go to his funeral — as I certainly intend to do.”

Melville Fairr sipped his whisky slowly. It warmed him a little, and suddenly he needed that warmth. Jethro Hammer’s funeral!

He didn’t want John Patrick Donohough to be the murderer of Jethro Hammer. He told himself reassuringly that it was impossible. John Patrick would have nothing to gain by it. He had no reason for it. And yet, so far no one seemed to have a reason. He knew that when the time came, Jethro Hammer would be murdered; but he still didn’t know who was going to commit that murder. And he still hadn’t been able to find out why. Only — he put down his glass with a hand that came very close to trembling — not John Patrick.

CHAPTER SIX

ROBERT EMMETT DONOHOUGH made the front page of the newspapers for the first time in 1902, by breaking an automobile speed record. He made them again a year later by being shot at and slightly wounded while visiting in the apartment of
a small-time musical-comedy star when it happened to be invaded by someone who believed he had a prior claim.

From that time on Robert Emmett Donohough had kept pretty regularly in print. Now, at the age of seventy-seven, he landed magnificently on the front pages with the announcement that he, and he alone, was going to test-pilot the new plane developed by the Donohough Aircraft Corporation.

Melville Fairr read the story and remembered that fortunately he had a newspaper reporter friend for whom he’d once done an important and unpaid-for favor. The friend, it turned out, wasn’t covering the test flight, but knew someone who was. Without much difficulty, arrangements were made for Fairr to go along as a spectator.

As luck would have it, though, there were a series of delays on the way to the flying field. The result was that he did not arrive until the silver plane was hovering as tiny as a toy overhead.

There was a small, carefully selected crowd watching it — reporters, photographers, newsreel men, a small group of mechanics and engineers from the Donohough Aircraft Corporation, a very lovely girl with a sparkling freckled face and blazing red hair, Billy Donohough, looking like a boy in spite of his forty-odd years, and a homely, attractive young man with a deeply tanned face and — at the moment — angry gray eyes. He was dressed for flying, and he was making a loud and indignant protest to Billy Donohough.

“I told you I was supposed to go along,” he was saying, as Fairr strolled near the group. “I don’t care how good a pilot he is, he’s seventy-seven. Sure, I know he wanted to make this test flight himself. But I was to go along for the ride, just in case anything happened; and if you ask me, I was tricked. He took off a good ten minutes before the test was scheduled.”

The red-haired girl laid a hand gently on his arm, still watching the plane overhead with fascinated eyes. “Don’t worry, Joe,” she said. “Grandpop was flying planes put together with chewing gum and spit when you were just learning how to say ‘Mama.’”

The young man looked at her, opened his mouth as though to continue his indignant protest, then stopped himself and smiled at her. His fingers tightened over hers. Melville Fairr’s heart warmed, as it always did at the sight of very young people and romance. He strolled away from them and joined the ring of spectators.

The sky was clear. Far away toward the horizon there was a faint, pale shadowing of mist. Above was a brilliant blue, too brilliant, indeed, for comfort. Fairr hastily donned smoked glasses and gazed upward with the others.

Could there be, was there, a human being in the small silver speck that seemed like a kite which had soared to the end of its string, or a toy balloon broken loose from some small child’s hand, or a seagull perhaps — yes, far more like a seagull, as it turned, dived, and soared again? Impossible, he thought, to believe that it was a machine.

Then the plane began to circle over the field, closer and closer, until at last it seemed
to poise for an instant before coming in to land. Fairr’s ear throbbed with the roar of motors. Almost against his will he closed his eyes. When he looked again, the plane was taxiing across the field toward the newsreel men.

There was a rush toward it as it stopped. Cameras aimed, then Robert Emmett Donohough, his own test pilot at seventy-seven, got out grinning.

“Simplest thing in the world,” he said. “I had a lot more trouble with my first bicycle.”

Melville Fairr looked at him, curious and almost incredulous. He’d had a description of Robert Emmett at fifty — big, hearty, red-faced, and slightly bald. This Robert Emmett was thin and muscular, what remained of his hair was white, but the lean face was brown and his eyes were keen. Pilots’ eyes, Fairr thought.

Suddenly the red-haired girl brushed past Fairr, ran across the field, shoved through the photographers, and threw her arms around Robert Emmett’s neck. Even from that distance Fairr could hear her delighted cry. “Grandpop, you’re wonderful!”

From where he watched and listened, Fairr could sense the delight of the photographers as they caught that heaven-sent pose. He walked up slowly toward the plane in time to hear Robert Emmett Donohough say, “Nonsense!” in a voice that tried to sound cross, but couldn’t help sounding pleased. The young pilot looked furious and said, “If you weren’t my boss, I’d pop you one square in the nose. Of all the dirty tricks, going off and leaving me like that!”

Robert Emmett Donohough grinned wickedly. “Now, Joe, you wouldn’t want these reporter fellows to think the flight was a fake, would you — that I took off and then you took over? Besides, I wanted to find out if my touch is still as good as it ever was.”

There was a brief interview. Robert Emmett Donohough answered the reporters’ questions quickly and easily, and, more than once, colorfully. He spoke briefly for the newsreel men. And then he started across the field toward his waiting car, while the mechanics began to swarm over the plane, making the minute examination which would finally show the result of the test flight. That was when Billy Donohough caught sight of Melville Fairr and hailed him with cordial surprise.

Pure curiosity was the excuse Fairr gave for his presence on the scene, and everyone accepted it as a matter of course. It was not unusual for people to be curious about Robert Emmett Donohough.

Introductions were made, and the old man stared at Melville Fairr with his almost hawklike eyes. “So you’re the detective fellow Will was telling me about. Hop in and ride back to town with us. I’d like to talk to you.”

As the limousine door slammed behind them, Robert Emmett Donohough grunted, “Damn silly way to make a living, but I guess somebody has to do the dirty work.”

“Grandpop!” the red-haired girl said in a shocked voice. “Mr. Fairr —”

“Oh, he’s not insulted,” Robert Emmett said cheerfully. “If I’d thought he would be, I wouldn’t have said it.” Suddenly he added to her, “Look here, what are you doing in this car? Get out and ride with Joe.”
She blushed prettily and said, "He hasn’t asked me to."
"Perfect nonsense," Robert Emmett said gruffly. "You’ll never get him to propose to you that way." He opened the door, shoved her out unceremoniously, and called at the top of his voice, "Joe, drive my granddaughter back to town." He slammed the door hard and said to the chauffeur, "Let’s go, Art, before he has a chance to say he’s too busy."

The car lurched forward. In the rear-view mirror Fairr could see Art’s appreciative grin. "Don’t worry, Mr. Donohough," Art said. "She’ll get him."

"No man ever had a chance against a red-haired Donohough," Robert Emmett said cheerfully. "Slow down now, and let them all go past." The big car idled along as first an untidy little roadster with Joe and the girl, then Billy Donohough’s touring car, and finally the cars of reporters and newsreel men went past. When the last one was out of sight, Robert Emmett said, "Now stop at the lunch wagon up the road. I’ve had a busy morning, and I want a hamburger." He turned to Fairr and said, "I hope you’re hungry."

Melville Fairr was hungry, and the hamburgers were good ones, thick and juicy. The chauffeur, sitting at the counter with them, had two, and Fairr had two. Robert Emmett Donohough had four, and three cups of coffee. The chauffeur went out to attend to getting gas and oil. Robert Emmett Donohough turned to his guest and said, "So you’re a detective."

Fairr started. Conversation up to now had been confined almost entirely to talk about motors and a few mildly bawdy jokes, but, he realized, the word "detective" had obviously been in the back of Robert Emmett Donohough’s mind all the time.

"My brother Will seems to have a pretty high idea of your ability," the old man went on. "How does a detective work, anyway? On a salary, or on a fee basis?"

"There are different arrangements," Fairr said. "It depends on the circumstances."

"Well, we’ll work something out," Robert Emmett said briskly. "Let’s get to the point. Did you ever hear of a fellow named Jethro Hammer?"

Fairr looked into his coffee cup, counted ten slowly, and said, "Yes. I’ve heard of him."

"Well," Robert Emmett said, "he’s the fellow. I want you to get after him. Find out all about him. Find out what he’s planning to do."

This time Melville Fairr counted to twenty, even more slowly, before he said, "I’m very sorry, Mr. Donohough, I can’t take the job."

"Damned nonsense," Robert Emmett said explosively. "Of course you can. I’d like to know why not."

It was a difficult decision, but Fairr made it quickly. He said simply, "Because I’m already working for Jethro Hammer."

Robert Emmett said incredulously. "What the devil does Jethro want with a detective?"

"He’s afraid he’s going to be murdered," Melville Fairr said very quietly.
He hadn’t been just sure what Robert Emmett Donohough’s reaction would be. Certainly he wasn’t prepared for what it was. The old man stared at him blankly for a moment, and then burst into the loudest laughter Fairr had ever heard.

“Damn edest funny thing I ever heard of,” he gasped finally. “Old Jethro hires a detective because he’s afraid of being murdered, and I was going to hire a detective because I was afraid old Jethro was planning to murder me.”

He tossed a bill on the counter, rose, and said, “Let’s get back to town. I want to talk to you.”

Neither murder nor Jethro Hammer were mentioned again on the way back to town. Robert Emmett talked instead about the first automobile — the horseless carriage that had startled the people and terrified the animals of Leesville, Ohio. Then he was reminded of some of his past exploits in racing cars, a subject which kept him occupied for almost the rest of the ride. He did have time, though, to touch lightly on a few of his more scandalous exploits with Broadway blondes and brunettes before the car stopped in front of the unpretentious but highly exclusive apartment building in which he lived.

The elevator boy who ran the express up to the penthouse grinned at Robert Emmett and said, “Well, I see you made it okay. Congratulations, and what do you think of the plane now?”

“She’s a dandy,” Robert Emmett said. “Easy to pilot as this elevator.”

“Easy in a pig’s eye,” the boy said. “I bet you couldn’t run this elevator.”

Robert Emmett promptly bet that he could, and the argument went on until they reached the top floor. Then Robert Emmett gave the boy a tip on tomorrow’s Fifth at Pimlico and ushered Melville Fairr into the penthouse.

It was exactly the sort of place a millionaire sportsman married to a retired Follies girl would have picked. Pale carpets so thick that to step on them was like walking on a feather bed; big bouquets of enormous gaudy flowers; huge white-framed prints on the walls; a mahogany cabinet which obviously opened to reveal a built-in bar; little tables and crystal ashtrays and cloisonné cigarette boxes everywhere; tremendous flowered draperies reaching to the floor.

“Make yourself at home,” Robert Emmett said. “I’ll call Trixie, and she’ll make us a drink.” He went out through a door at the other end of the room, calling loudly.

It couldn’t really be Trixie, Melville Fairr thought, sinking into the most comfortable chair a little breathless. That would be too absolutely incredibly appropriate as a name for Robert Emmett’s wife. Millionaire sportsman, retired Follies girl. But, he remembered suddenly, Robert Emmett Donohough was far more than a millionaire sportsman. That was what he had been, a playboy pilot. But not now. Not with the magnificent machines that rolled from the Donohough Aircraft Corporation. Not with the fortunes Robert Emmett Donohough had put into research. Not with such a performance as he had witnessed himself this afternoon. The test flight at seventy-seven wasn’t the act of a sportsman pilot or the whim of an old man; it was
the desire of a creator to try out the thing he had made with his own hands.

But Trixie, now — She came into the room, one arm around her husband. Loud, brassy, blonde, in a purple housecoat, her hands heavy with rings. Fairr remembered suddenly that she was a good thirty years younger than Robert Emmett Donohough. That made her somewhere vaguely in her forties, and very well preserved for it, too. Her face was fairly smooth under the pancake make-up, and there was hardly a line around her mascaraed eyes.

She shook his hand cordially and said, “Hello, Mr. Fairr. How nice to meet you! What’ll it be? Scotch, bourbon, rye?” There was a pleasant warmth in her voice.

He smiled at her. “Scotch and water,” he said. “Not too strong.” He added, “I’m disappointed in you, Mrs. Donohough. I thought you would offer me champagne.”

She laughed heartily as she mixed three drinks. Then, as she handed him his, she said, looking very wide-eyed and girlish, “Believe it or not, I was seventeen years old before I knew there was any other kind of liquor except champagne.”

“That’s Trixie,” Robert Emmett said with a deep grumbling chuckle. “She’ll top you every time.” He lit a cigar and added, “Mr. Fairr and I are going to talk business, sweetheart.”

She plumped down into a chair, lit a cigarette, and said, “You aren’t going to talk business unless I’m present.”

Robert Emmett didn’t drop any further hints that she should leave them. Melville Fairr had a hunch that Trixie kept a careful eye on her husband’s affairs — not because she would inherit his fortune, but because she loved him. That was something of which he had been sure from the moment he entered the apartment. Something in the atmosphere when they walked into the room side by side, something in the way they looked at each other while they talked. Perhaps in the beginning she’d married him for his money. No, that was wrong, too. Trixie hadn’t married Robert Emmett Donohough until after he’d lost every penny in Jethro Hammer’s lawsuit.

“Anyway,” Trixie said, “I know what you’re going to talk about. You mentioned that Mr. Fairr was a private detective. So, obviously, you’re going to talk about Jethro Hammer. And I’m going to listen.”

Robert Emmett shrugged his shoulders. “You can’t do anything with Trixie when she’s got her mind made up,” he said to Fairr, a little proudly. His eyes narrowed. “If you’re working for Jethro, you must know a little about his family.” He paused. “You must know all about this family.”

Fairr didn’t answer that one. He said, “What makes you think Jethro Hammer is going to murder you?”

“Well, good God,” Robert Emmett exploded, “that’s what I’d be planning to do if I were Jethro. After the way I insulted him the day he walked out on us.” He frowned. “Damn it, man, Jethro was like my brother. We weren’t exactly pals, you understand, but he lived in the family, he slept under the same roof with us. And then, after my father — hell, our father — was dead, I had the confounded nerve to
offer him a job as a chauffeur; a chauffeur, mind you, when he must have had a better mechanical mind than any of us. I should have said, 'Jethro, old boy, let's take some of this damn money and go into business together. We'll clean up.'"

"And you really think," Fairr said, "that because of this possible insult of forty-odd years ago, Jethro Hammer might be plotting to murder you — now?"

"If anyone had insulted me in the same way — " Robert Emmett began. He paused and looked at Fairr.

"You'd have murdered him," Fairr said. "Only you wouldn't have waited more than forty years to do it. You'd have murdered him then and there on the spot."

Robert Emmett looked a little embarrassed. He said, "Well — well, yes, I would. But Jethro is different. You must realize that."

"Even so," Fairr said, "there wouldn't be much point if you were going to murder somebody to avenge an insult in waiting until your victim was seventy-seven."

"Hell," Robert Emmett said, "I'm good for twenty years yet. And I've got everything you can name to live for. And Jethro hates me. I am sure of that because . . . ."

"Yes?" Melville Fairr prompted after a moment.

Trixie sat up straight in her chair, "Go on, Pops," she said. "Give him all the details. There's nothing for you to feel so silly about."

But Robert Emmett did look silly just the same. He kept his eyes fixed on the rug, and he said slowly, "It was like this. When that suit was filed, I was as sore as a goat. Then, as the trial went on, hanged if I didn't begin to admire the guy. That diary, Mr. Fairr, was the real McCoy. There wasn't a doubt but what Jethro had worked out that silly gadget. And after the thing was over — I guess you know how it turned out — I had a nasty little mechanical problem at the plant that I couldn't lick. The best man in the country had tackled it and flopped, and I thought if anybody could figure it out, Jethro could. So I wrote to him."

Melville Fairr looked up. "You mean — after the lawsuit and the way it turned out . . . ? — Well, never mind. Go on."

"I wrote to him and apologized to him," Robert Emmett said. "Apologized for the way I had acted twenty years before. I hated to do it, but I meant it, and I said, 'Jethro, old boy, let's let bygones be bygones.' I gave him a hint of what my problem was. I told him I knew he could lick it. I told him he could name his own price or he could come in with me and own a share of the business. And, you know, he never answered. I tried to see him, never could get to him; tried to call him up: no luck. I wrote him again: nothing happened. Then I gave up. Now what do you think of that?"

"Maybe he does hate you," Fairr said. "But why would he wait this long to do something about it?"

"Why did he wait twenty years before coming back to file that suit?"

Melville Fairr sighed. "In a situation like this, it wouldn't work out to look after the interests of two such clients simultaneously. And, to be perfectly frank, I don't
think you have anything to worry about.”

"After what you told me out in the lunch wagon," Robert Emmett said, "I’m inclined to agree with you."

Fairr grinned. "As a matter of fact," he said, "are you planning to murder Jethro Hammer?" He said it lightly, as a joke, but he watched his host’s face closely. After all — it could be that way.

"Good God," Robert Emmett exploded, "do I look like a murderer?"

"No," Fairr said. "I can’t say that you do." And with all his heart he hoped that Robert Emmett Donohough was not planning to become one. He went on, "You wouldn’t really have any reason, either. The lawsuit couldn’t have hit you so hard — you still had the factory — you still were able to tell Jethro Hammer he could name his own price if he solved a little problem for you."

"That’s what you think," Robert Emmett said. "By the time the lawsuit was over, I didn’t have a dime. And I’m still scared when I think of the amount I owed."

"If you were that broke, how were you able to go ahead with it? What did you use for money?"

"He used my bank account," Trixie said. "And my jewelry. Luckily, there was plenty of it, but I always was a smart girl." She winked at Fairr and said, "The truth of it is, he married me for my money. Just a gigolo."

"Don’t listen to her," Robert Emmett said. "She got it back, and if you knew the interest that gold-digger gouged out of me..." His face grew serious, and he said, "It was a hell of a pull for a few years, though, even with Trixie’s dough, but we made it."

"Yes," Trixie echoed happily, "we made it."

Fairr drew a long breath. There seemed nothing more to be said, and yet he hated to go. He liked these people. He hoped that they would be happy together for a long time to come.

Suddenly the door burst open, and the red-haired girl rushed in, dragging after her the young test pilot, who looked completely embarrassed. "Grandpop!" she yelled, "I got him. And don’t ask me how I did it either, or you’d disinherit me."

She smiled proudly at everyone in the room and said, "We Donohoughs have a way of getting what we want."

Yes, Melville Fairr reflected. She was quite right. He only hoped one thing these Donohoughs did not want was the murder of old Jethro Hammer.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MELVILLE FAIRR worried a little about making friends with Sally Donahue. She wasn’t an easy person to meet. He had finally concluded that he’d have to manage an introduction with the help of John Patrick, when fortune decided to
favor him. A former client of his, one Reno Brown, requested Mr. Fairr to act for him in a little matter of blackmail. It wasn’t a new assignment. Mr. Fairr had acted for Reno Brown in similar cases a number of times before, and probably would many times in the future. On this occasion, however, he was especially delighted to act for Reno Brown, because the blackmail money was to be paid to Sally Donahue.

It was all handled in a very businesslike way. An appointment was made through Sally Donahue’s secretary, and Mr. Fairr insisted on seeing the lady in person. A time was set for the appointment, and Fairr felt a sense of excitement almost amounting to a pounding in his ears as he rode up on the chromium-decorated elevator of the expensive apartment building where Sally Donahue lived.

He rang the bell, and it was almost five minutes before an untidy red-faced maid opened the door. “You Mr. Fairr?” she asked. He nodded. She jerked her thumb toward a door to the right of the hall and said, “Miss Donahue’s in there.”

A raucous voice called, “Mamie! That’s a hell of a way to answer the door.” Fairr drew a long breath, steeled himself, and went on through the doorway.

“Damn these maids,” Sally Donahue was saying. “They all take advantage of me because they know I’m helpless.” There wasn’t any fretfulness or complaint in her voice, though, just a statement of fact. She went on in exactly the same tone, “Well, Mr. Fairr, I hope you’ve got the dough with you. Fix yourself a snort of Scotch and sit down. You might fix one for me while you’re at it.”

“I’ll be delighted to,” he said, walking over to the sideboard. He was more delighted to have an opportunity to look at both the room and its occupant.

The room was large, lavishly and elaborately furnished, incredibly cluttered, and very dusty. Everything in it, from the Oriental rugs to the smallest of the many pictures on the walls, had been costly. It was haphazardly filled with odds and ends of furniture, every article a collector’s item, and no two articles matching in period or design. A tray of unwashed dishes was on the brocaded sofa, and a half-empty bottle of what he suspected was stale beer stood on the beautifully carved mantel.

But it was Sally Donahue he really wanted to look at, not the room in which she lived. He glanced at her surreptitiously as he mixed two drinks.

She was an enormous woman, sitting in a wheel chair; the rug that had been over her knees had fallen aside, and he could see the one leg, shorter than the other and oddly twisted. Her hair was dyed an outrageous reddish brown; her broad face was mottled under its heavy make-up. Her purple negligee had a few spots on the front of it. This, he reminded himself, was the same woman, the lovely, laughing, curly-haired Sally Donahue who had wept when she said good-by to young Jethro Hammer.

“Thanks,” she said, accepting the glass. “I don’t drink as much as I used to. Have to keep a clear head in a business like mine.” She laughed. “Well, I see Mr. Brown decided to kick in.”

“Only on condition that you turn over the letter from the sanitarium,” Fairr said politely, “and don’t try to get another one.”
She laughed again. "Naturally," she said.

The business transaction was carried out quickly and pleasantly. Sally Donahue handed over the letter, and Fairr handed over the required sum in cash. He pocketed the letter and then said in his pleasantest voice, "This is a hell of a way to make a living."

She shrugged her enormous shoulders. "It's the only way I know," she said, "and, anyway, when people make bad mistakes, they should be expected to pay for them."

"Possibly true," Fairr said. "How did you get into it in the first place?"

"If you don't know that already," she said, "after nosing around my family for months, you're not as smart as I think you are." She grinned broadly at his look of surprise and said, "Naturally I know you've been nosing around. Peter keeps me informed of everything that goes on. That's how he makes his living."

"You still haven't answered my question," Melville Fairr said.

"I don't mind telling you," she said amiably. "I was broke. Broke and, believe me, desperate. My beloved brothers and sisters" — her lower lip curled unpleasantly, — "were able to take care of themselves all right, and they wanted to grab what looked like a God-given opportunity for taking care of me. Stick poor little sister Sally in a cheap sanitarium some place and forget her. That's what they wanted to do. I was at the end of my rope, when I remembered a rich and conveniently indiscreet young man who'd been picked up along with me and a lot of other people in a raid on a night club. The fool had actually written me a letter begging me to help keep it from his very respectable family. He paid $10,000 for the letter and, lo and behold, I was in business."

"With that for a stake," Fairr said, "you didn't have to stay in the business."

"Stop disapproving of me," she snapped, "because I like it. The only other businesses I knew anything about running were speakeasies and whorehouses. I've done very nicely for myself, too, and for Peter, poor fool. He gets all the information for me, and it's practically never that we frame anybody. After all, Mr. Fairr, I have my ethics."

Fairr couldn't help laughing with her. He liked this big, blowzy, untidy woman. She said, suddenly, "And how do you enjoy shadowing my former admirer, Jethro Hammer?"

Fairr looked up, startled into speechlessness. She took one look at his face and roared with laughter. "Of course I know all about it," she said. "I planted that companion of mine, Sarah White, in his office, so that I'd always know what was going on."

The smile faded from her face. She leaned forward in her wheelchair and said with a kind of desperation in her voice, "Mr. Fairr, do you think he is still in love with me?"

Melville Fairr stared at her, at her hennaed hair, her mottled face, her greasy purple negligee, at the fat, pale hand still holding the crisp new bills he'd brought from Reno Brown. He thought of white-faced, trembling, sickly Jethro Hammer.

"I'll tell you the truth," he said. "He's never mentioned you to me."

There was
no point, he reflected, in telling Sally Donahue that he'd never spoken to Jethro Hammer since that first interview.

She leaned back in her chair and said, "No, he never mentions me. He hasn't a picture of me anywhere. Sarah tells me everything about him. That's why I fixed it for her to go to work for him. So that she would tell me."

Melville Fairr closed his eyes as she spoke, and, listening, knew that the voice he heard, soft, a little husky, and faintly musical, was the voice of young Sally Donahue. "I should have run after him the day that he left," she went on. "I should have made him come back — or made him take me with him. Now I'll never see him again."

"When he came back twenty years later, why didn't you go to him?"

She stared at him, tragic eyes in her broad painted face. "Have you any idea what I looked like when he came back twenty years later?" she asked. "That wasn't the way he remembered me."

There were questions Fairr had intended to ask. Now he felt that he knew the answers to them already. He knew now how Sally Donahue still felt about Jethro Hammer. He didn't know, however, whether or not she was planning his murder. There wasn't much more to be said, and at last he said good-by and rose to go. He had reached the door when she called to him.

"Mr. Fairr, there's one thing I don't know. Where was he in those twenty years, where did he go, why did he wait so long before coming back, and why did he come back at all?"

He turned to look at her as he spoke. "I don't know," he said at last. "No one knows — except Jethro Hammer."

CHAPTER EIGHT

FOR A WHILE — indeed, up to the very day of Jethro Hammer's death — Fairr had wondered if Jethro Hammer had returned from that twenty-year absence simply at his convenience. He doubted it, partly because it left too much unexplained; more, because it wasn't logical, and Melville Fairr preferred everything to be logical.

To solve the mystery of those twenty years there was a torturing lack of clues. A man had walked out of a door into a February snowstorm. Twenty years later he had returned, and no one knew where he had been. How, then, could one set about finding out the truth?

Again and again Fairr told himself it was of no importance. The clue to the as yet uncommitted murder of Jethro Hammer existed here in New York, within his easy reach. But the question continued to tantalize him.

Then came the night when Jethro Hammer was murdered at last, and the encounter with the very young and very beautiful girl who claimed to be Jethro Hammer's daughter. She, if anyone in the world, could tell him what he wanted to know.
The only question was to find her again.

From what she'd worn he guessed that she had not been in New York long. Certainly she had not been dressed for a New York winter. He began asking discreet questions of hotel clerks, of steamship lines, and other sources of information.

Yet, before any of his inquiries could bear fruit, little Mr. Melville Fairr interrupted them, called himself every kind of fool, and settled down to wait until Jethro Hammer's funeral. If the girl was indeed Jethro Hammer's daughter, she would be there.

The funeral wasn't held until a week after Jethro Hammer's murder. There had been the inquest, of course, and all the police inquiries. Then there had been a certain doubt as to who should make the arrangements. It turned out that Jethro Hammer had left no will, and on further investigation it turned out that the "millionaire hermit of Wall Street" had left practically no money. It was Sarah White who finally took charge, and the funeral was held in a gloomy, slightly shabby undertaker's chapel on Amsterdam Avenue.

There was a crowd outside the door when Fairr arrived. His first thought was to go across the street and wait, watch for the girl to come out afterward, and then follow her. Then suddenly he saw her get out of a taxi, pay the driver, and stare with sudden dismay at the horde of curiosity-seekers.

Melville Fairr did not waste any time. He hurried up to her, took her arm, and said, "Let me help you."

She gasped, startled, looked at and recognized him, and then said, half-smiling, "You are very kind."

She was in black, the dead black of Latin mourning. A discreetly cut dress, high-necked and long sleeved. Thrown over her shoulder was a black cape of some rich, glossy fur, reaching well below her knees. Black stockings, black sandals, made of many fragile interlacing straps, certainly only the flimsiest of protection against the snow and slush underfoot. A black hat and a heavy black crape veil, lace-edged.

In one hand she clutched a tiny black-bordered handkerchief, in the other a rosary of a curious design Fairr had never seen before. He placed a reassuring hand over her elbow and said, " Permit me. " Quietly and unobtrusively he made space for her, and the crowd fell back, nudging and whispering. At the door of the chapel itself, Fairr turned to her, looking again at her costume. " You must have been very fond of your father, " he said gently.

She shrugged her shoulders. " I never saw him in my life, " she said.

A soft-voiced attendant in a cheap, dark suit ushered them into the tawdry little chapel from which old Jethro Hammer would be carried to his grave.

He glanced at the girl. She looked frightened and uncertain. He held her arm more tightly and at the same time more gently, and said, " Shall we sit way back here out of sight, so that no one will disturb us? " She nodded gratefully, and he guided her into the farthest and darkest corner of the little room.

The lights were theatrically dim, dim and faintly rosy. At every entrance were hang-
ings of some chiffon-like stuff which looked suspiciously like theatrical gauze. They were pale violet, and some of them were faded. Two big baskets of artificial calla lilies stood at either side of what looked more like a stage than anything else. Between them was Jethro Hammer's coffin, a cheap coffin, pathetically small.

The coffin was covered with flowers, costly flowers, chosen with the best of taste—a sheaf of roses, lilies and violets in profusion, and even a spray of orchids. Suddenly Fairr leaned forward, starting. Was it? Yes, it was. Nestled among the elaborate blooms was a little bunch of ordinary field daisies, tied with a ribbon.

The Donohoughs had sent flowers, he realized, but which of them had sent the daisies? John Patrick, who was so discerning? William James Donohough II, who was so warmhearted? Maggie, who was so thoughtful? Robert Emmett, who felt so keenly the wrong he had done? Or Sally, who'd loved Jethro Hammer? Could the pitiful little handful of daisies have been sent—or even brought—by the one who'd murdered him?

Music began to fill the chapel, music that obviously came from a hidden record machine and not from a pipe organ; very solemn music, very sentimental, and thoroughly detestable. Fairr shuddered. He glanced at the girl beside him and saw that she looked first surprised and then shocked. He wondered if he ought to tell her that this was "the custom of the country." But then the Donohough family began to arrive, little by little, and he forgot everything else momentarily, watching them.

The Countess d'Abazoli arrived first, discreetly clad in navy blue with a small, becoming veil. The Count, who had never known Jethro Hammer, was at her side.

Then there was John Patrick, his lean, handsome face a trifle pale, walking in alone and sitting by himself. And then William James Donohough II with a considerable portion of his family, Minnie on his arm, Muriel and Billy at his heels, and Muriel's daughter, holding tight to young Bob Donohough's hand.

Robert Emmett had brought Trixie with him. Fairr could imagine Trixie protesting loudly that she could not be bothered with family funerals, and then suddenly, insisting on going along, only because she didn't want her husband to go alone.

And, at last, Sally. Her wheel chair was pushed in by the red-faced and untidy maid. Her broad face was thick with a pasty white make-up. Fairr found himself wondering if she had plastered it on to hide the signs of tears. Her violet-satin dress looked new. At least, it looked clean. Her dyed hair was hidden under a purple turban. Her eyes were as expressionless as a doll's eyes.

Melville Fairr gave a long, curious stare to the man who walked beside her wheel chair. That would be Peter Schuyler, could be no one else. Now in his sixties, he looked very much like the description Fairr had had of him, though that description was of him in his twenties. Slight and frail-looking. Pale wispy hair—it was hard to tell whether it was yellow or gray. Sallow complexion. The profile that was like two sides of a triangle. Fairr saw all that in his first glance. He went on watching because he caught the look of near adoration that Peter Schuyler turned on Sally Donahue. And
because he noticed how carefully Peter Schuyler kept his eyes away from the cheap, pathetically small coffin.

The service was brief and uninteresting. A little more of the recorded music, a minister who spoke for five minutes and prayed for three, continually glancing at his watch. The Donohoughs sat in respectful silence. The girl at his side, however, fell to her knees when the minister appeared and, clasping the curiously designed rosary, began a prayer of her own in an almost inaudible undertone, and in a language Fairr could not understand and had never heard before.

The recorded music finished with an organ version of “Abide With Me.” Melville Fairr opened his eyes and watched the Donohoughs file out. Only one face showed that a tear or two had been shed — Trixie, who had never known Jethro Hammer, but who would always cry at weddings and funerals, no matter whose. The Donohoughs themselves looked impassive, even a little disinterested.

Melville Fairr waited until he was sure that they had left the parking space in front of the chapel. Then he led the girl into the anteroom and said, “I’ll try to find a taxi.”

She folded the black-edged handkerchief she’d been carrying and put it in her handbag. There was an air to the way she snapped the bag shut that suggested she was now completely through with the funeral of Jethro Hammer. With that gesture the black dress, the black fur cape, and even the black cape veil had ceased to look like mourning. She smiled at Melville Fairr and said, “I am hungry.”

“In that case,” Fairr answered, “I won’t find you a taxi, I will find you a restaurant.”

“Please do,” she said. “Any restaurant. But very quickly.”

They found a fly-specked little restaurant around the corner on a side street, and the girl ordered an enormous meal and announced that she was not going to speak until she had finished it. Melville Fairr sipped a cup of badly made tea and thought of what he should ask her first. At last she ate a dish of ice cream slowly and contentedly, licking off the spoon like a little girl. Then she leaned back and sighed with well-fed satisfaction.

“It occurs to me,” Melville Fairr said, “that I do not know your name.”

“In my country,” she said almost impishly, “it is the custom that the young lady does not tell her name to the gentleman who has not been presented to her by her father or her brother.”

“In a sense,” Melville Fairr said, “I was presented to you by your father, but I won’t press the point. Tell me now, where is this country whose custom you just described so charmingly?”

She stared at him and said, “Why do you ask these questions? What is it that you wish to know? And why must you talk around in circles? I am not afraid of you. I know that you were the friend of my father, and so you are the friend of myself.”

With this girl, he realized, it was going to be far wiser to come straight to the point. He said, “There is a mystery in the life of Jethro Hammer, and I want to find out the answer to it — only because I am curious. He walked out of a door here in
New York one night long ago. No one knew — no one knows now — where he went. Twenty years later he returned. That is why I ask so many questions."

She laughed. It was a nice laugh. Fairr liked it. "But you should have said this at the very beginning," she told him. "I know everything of what happened to him. I know even what he thought and felt and dreamed about."

Melville Fairr felt his skin fairly prickle with excitement. He kept his voice as calm as he could and said, "How do you know?"

"When he was ill," the girl said, "he told my mother. He did not know that he told her. He talked like a madman, but she remembered, and she told me. And now, if you wish, I shall tell you, because you were his friend."

"I do wish," Melville Fairr said, acutely conscious of the pounding in his ears. "First" — he looked at her searchingly and hopefully — "there is one question — perhaps the most important of all. Why did he not return in those twenty years — why did he wait so long to come back?"

She looked at him with surprise. "But how could he return?" she said. "He was in prison."

_The Later Life of Jethro Hammer_

It was the fourteenth of February. He had never been able to forget that date because it was St. Valentine's Day, and in the pocket closest to his heart he'd carried a valentine of lace paper and pink ribbons to give Sally Donahue.

The snow was falling everywhere when he left the house, and by the time he'd taken half a dozen steps, it had made a thick veil between him and the door. He heard Sally's voice through the door, half sob, half gasp, Good-by. He paused.

He could go back. He could say to her, "Sally, come with me. I don't know where we'll go or what we'll live on, but come with me." He could say all the things he had wanted and never dared to say. Or — he could go back and brave them — _shame_ them — all. He could tell them . . .

Then, from the other side of the veil of falling snow, he heard the door close. Then there was silence. He turned away and walked on down the street with no idea of the direction in which he might be going, or of where it would lead him.

He had walked a dozen blocks before he realized that he was shivering with cold, and that there was only a handful of change in his pockets. He passed under a street light and examined the handful. Two quarters, a dime, three nickels, and four pennies. That was his fortune. He wanted to retrace his steps along that dozen blocks, storm into the Donohough mansion, and throw the money he had carried away with him in their faces. But he pushed on doggedly in the direction he had first taken, as though some instinct led him that way. Perhaps somewhere he would find shelter.

As for the Donohoughs — he would return, but in his own good time, when he had found a name, his own name.
That was it, that was what he had to do. He had to know his own identity. Walking through the snow, he thought again and again of what old Will Donahue had said in the last weeks of his life—his mind half wandering sometimes. "I made a mistake, Jethro. I should have named you after the Donahues and not after a tool in my shop"—"Jethro, don't you ever wonder who your family was, and what your own name might have been?"—"You must have come from good people, Jethro; you're a good boy, you have been a comfort to me." Over and over in what the old man said in the pitifully few days of his last illness was the conscience-stricken refrain, "I made you my son, I should have named you Donahue." Until, at last, young Jethro had stood beside the bed, taken the dying man's hand, and said, "It's no matter. I have my own name."

Yes, but what was his own name? How would he ever find it out now?

He paused for a moment in a doorway, and his fingers reached into the coat pocket where he had placed the little book old Will Donahue had given him, the diary. "Keep this, Jethro," Will Donahue had said. "You'll need it some day, not for yourself, you're a good boy, but to protect them. They are your brothers and sisters, Jethro, for all that you don't have the same name." Jethro had never looked within the pages, but he had carried the diary with him since that moment.

In the same pocket his fingers touched the cheap paper lace of the valentine. He drew it out and stared at it in the winter darkness, a blurred, heart-shaped outline in his hand. He wished suddenly that he had given it to her before he left the house. Now he could not return to her until he had learned his own name.

He stood there for a while, braced against the doorway, almost unconscious now of the cold. How should he go about accomplishing what he had to do? It had been a long time, a very long time, since he'd been found, cold, hungry, and whimpering, in St. Joseph's Church in Leesville, Ohio. No one had ever bothered to try to trace the people who had left him there. Could they possibly be traced now, when so many years had gone by? Then, too, there was the chance that they might not have been his own parents at all. But they must be the starting point in his search.

There might be firms of private detectives who could pick up so fragile, so tenuous a thread, and follow it. That would take money, a great deal of money.

He must make money then, a fortune. He, who stood now shivering in a doorway, coatless, hatless, homeless, and with only a handful of change in his pocket. And in the meantime . . .

He looked again at the valentine, and then slowly tore it into tiny shreds. Then Jethro Hammer pushed on into the snowfall that had now become a blizzard.

He lost all sense of direction and all sense of time. It was hours—or it seemed hours—later that he finally saw a lighted doorway ahead of him. With his last strength he flung himself toward the door. It opened inward. He heard voices and laughter, and felt warmth. Then he fell, fainting and half-frozen, on the dirty sawdust-streaked floor of a water-front saloon.
For a while he was conscious of only a confused blur; someone bent over him, poured something hot and strong down his throat; little by little he became aware of voices around him, although it was a little while before he could tell what they said. Then, at last, one voice—a thick Scottish voice—said, “I wonder where he’s from and what his name is.”

That was what the janitor of St. Joseph’s Church must have said on that other cold winter evening so many years ago now. “Wonder where he comes from and what his name is.” And suddenly, for just one moment, Jethro Hammer remembered something hidden in his mind since twenty or more years ago—a memory of people, of a horse-drawn wagon moving slowly through the snow, of a woman who called him by his name. That name had been... had been...

“Come now, man, who are you?” one of the voices said.

Jethro pulled himself half upright to answer, and then he couldn’t remember. The name that had been so vivid in his mind was gone completely.

The bartender who had been bending over him—less for humanitarian reasons than from the fear that a stranger might die in his saloon and thus involve him with the police—stood up and said, “He’ll be all right now.”

“Bring him another drink,” the Scottish voice said.

Jethro Hammer rose painfully to his feet, uncomfortably conscious of the bedraggled figure that he was, and yet holding himself very straight with pride. Through the smoke and fog that clouded his eyes he could see dimly the man with the Scottish voice, a broad, red face, sandy whiskers, bright blue eyes. Jethro said stiffly, “Thanks, I’ll get it for myself,” and stumbled toward the bar, fumbling in his pockets for one of the two quarters.

They made way for him respectfully as he leaned his elbows on the polished wood, laid down the quarter, and asked for whisky. A moment before they had seen him half-dead at their feet. Now here he was, standing up to the bar and calling for his drink like a man.

“It’s on the house,” the bartender said, shoving back the quarter. He exchanged a surreptitious glance with the red-faced Scotsman, who winked, nodded, elbowed up beside Jethro Hammer, and said, “And what did you say your name was?” Jethro downed the glass of cheap whisky. It burned his throat. For a moment he choked.

“Come now,” the Scotsman persisted, “who are you and where did you come from, and where are you going on a night like this?”

Jethro Hammer began to laugh wildly, hysterically, as he had never laughed in his life, and never would again. “I’m nobody,” he said. “I’ve come from nowhere. I don’t know who I am, and I don’t know where I’m going.”

He didn’t notice that the bartender and the red-faced man glanced at each other again and moved a few feet down the bar, almost out of earshot. He didn’t notice the black-haired, dark skinned man who eyed him curiously from a corner of the saloon, nor did he hear when the bartender whispered, “He’s young and he looks strong.”
The Scotsman looked at his big silver watch and then at Jethro. He nodded to the bartender, and there was a whispering again regarding the sum of money the bartender should receive.

Jethro Hammer saw nothing, heard nothing. His mind was concerned with one thing only — bringing back that fragment of memory that had come and gone so maddeningly, the name, the name! What had the woman in that rickety wagon called him, what had she looked like, where had she come from? Was she French, Spanish, Irish, Jewish, or, as Lizzie Donahue’s neighbors had hinted, a gypsy? He had remembered for a space of time, so brief that it might have been counted between two ticks of a clock, and now it was gone.

He saw the bartender set a glass in front of him. He acknowledged it with a nod. He might have been nodding from a dream. He was grateful for the pungent warmth of the liquor. Back in Leesville he had tasted Will Donahue’s Irish whisky once or twice, and on the important occasions of holidays, birthdays, and special saints’ days there might be the mildest of wines on the Donahue table. But the cheap barroom whisky of New York’s waterfront was something he had never met before. That might have been why there seemed nothing odd to him about that last drink.

He felt very tired, very drowsy. It had been so cold, so very cold out in the snowstorm. Here it was warm and pleasant. Here people were friendly. Surely no one would mind if he dropped his head on the polished wooden bar for a moment.

He never knew quite how long a time passed before he woke. A day perhaps — or had it been a few hours, or a week? He couldn’t tell. He opened his eyes and saw a cold, cloudy sky. He moved his head and felt a stab of pain. He moved his hands over what he imagined must be a bed, and they touched cold, hard boards.

For a few minutes he lay motionless, trying to remember. The scene at the Doheny mansion. The walk through the snow. The valentine. The water-front saloon. But where was he now?

Suddenly he sat bolt upright, oblivious of the pain in his head. He saw a broad, friendly face with dark eyes and discolored teeth close to his own. A voice said, “Buenos dias, I trust you’re well. We have moved you here on the deck that you might awake with more comfort.”

Jethro Hammer stared around him, bewildered. For a moment he was on the verge of asking, “Where am I?” But it would have been a senseless question. Obviously he was on a boat, a small, not-too-clean, and rather disreputable boat.

There were footsteps close to him, and another face appeared, a weazeden yellow face.

The brown-faced man stood up and made an elaborate bow. “Allow me to present our new comrade,” he said to the newcomer, “Mi amigo Nadie.”

“My friend Nobody.” From that moment it became his name, so that later, when he was sufficiently recovered to be led into the shabby, odoruous cabin of Captain McLaird — who turned out to be the red-faced Scotsman of the water-front saloon
— and was asked to give his name, he answered with serenity, “Mr. Nadie.”

That, however, was many hours later. He lay down on the deck again, and little by little his physical discomfort receded. He discovered that he was wrapped in blankets, and that a folded blanket had been thoughtfully tucked under his head. For a long time he was content to lie on the deck in a kind of waking dream.

Jethro never knew how long he rested there, perhaps minutes, perhaps hours. But at last the dark-eyed man appeared at his side and asked solicitously how he felt. Jethro pushed aside the blankets and rose unsteadily to his feet. He felt a trifle weak, but otherwise quite well. The pain in his head had gone, and he was hungry.

“I am Carlos,” the man said. “Perhaps you would enjoy to see the boat? She’s not large, the boat, but extremely swift.” He reached out a hand as though to steady Jethro, and said, “You feel quite able to walk, yes?”

“Perfectly well,” Jethro said. “What boat is this?”

Carlos grinned broadly, showing his strong, discolored teeth. “La Perla,” he announced with an air of mocking pride.

Jethro looked about him. The boat certainly did not look like a pearl. She was small but extremely broad, and he realized that she was strongly built. Forward there was a small wheelhouse and behind it the cabin; aft, a low deckhouse and a hatch, then another hatch and a cockpit. Jethro wondered what kind of cargo she carried, and how long it would be before he could find out. He sensed already that this was a situation where questions might be unwelcome. So he confined himself to one.

“What are my duties to be?” he asked.

“That depends, Señor, on what your talents are,” Carlos said. “And on how Captain Mac wishes to use you,” he added. “You must understand, Señor, that we were leaving New York seriously short-handed, and when you so providentially announced that you had no immediate plans, Captain Mac took the quite unpardonable liberty of bringing you to join us. He will presently deliver his apologies in person.”

From Jethro’s vague remembrance of the red-faced man in the water-front saloon, he doubted that there would be apologies. He felt sure of it when a loud, thick, angry voice boomed out of the cabin behind the wheelhouse, “Carlos! Ain’t that fellow awake yet?”

Carlos bowed mockingly to Jethro and to the cabin, as though he were performing an introduction. “The captain,” he announced. He led the way into the captain’s cabin. It was small, dimly lighted by one smoking lamp, and very dirty. It smelled of burning oil, cheap tobacco, whisky, and perspiration. Captain McLaird — most frequently known as Captain Mac — sat behind a battered unpainted wood table pouring out a glass of whisky. “Sit down,” he said to Jethro. “Sit down and have a drink with me. I am the captain, but we are all friends here.”

Jethro sat down and accepted the glass offered him, made up his mind to do nothing more than answer what questions might be put to him, and studied the captain closely. From the night before — he remembered nothing save the broad red face,
the faint stubble of beard, and the bright, sharp, alert gray eyes.

Now he saw that Captain Mac was an enormously fat man. He had been wearing a greasy cap. He took it off and dropped it on the table, and Jethro saw that he was completely bald. He looked shrewd. He looked as though he could be cruel if cruelty were called for, or kind and generous if that happened to serve his purpose. But whatever he did, Jethro decided, it would be in some manner for his own benefit.

“Mr. Nadie, eh!” Captain Mac said. “I don’t believe it’s yours.”

Jethro said nothing. He stared at the captain stubbornly.

“Have it your own way,” the captain said, shrugging his fat shoulders. “Mr. Nadie it is. And I know this much about you, When we picked you up, you were broke. Well, you won’t be broke when we get back from this trip. Not if you behave yourself and keep your mouth shut. And if you don’t, Carlos will shut it for you.”

He glanced over Jethro’s shoulder as he spoke. Jethro instinctively turned his head and saw Carlos in the doorway. Again he was aware of the friendliness of Carlos’ brown face. At the same time he realized that Carlos would cut his throat without a moment’s hesitation on orders from Captain Mac, or even on his own initiative if it seemed like a good idea. Yet still he felt no sense of fear. As a matter of fact, he was beginning to feel rather glad that, quite by accident, he was on board La Perla.

He accepted this new situation as he had accepted everything in his life, without comment — as he had accepted the attentions of Will and Lizzie Donahue in his infancy; as he had accepted his position in life when he grew old enough to be aware of it.

Carlos led him on deck and left him for a while. He stood at the rail, looking at the gray expanse of water that seemed to have no ending, but to merge with the gray sky at some undefinable horizon. It seemed to him suddenly that all his life he had been waiting — waiting for something, he didn’t know what it was. Some destiny perhaps that he had been born to fulfill. He remembered something that old Mrs. Alling back in Leesville had said and that had been quoted to him in time by Sally Donahue.

“He always seems like he was biding his time.” Old Mrs. Alling had been right, he knew that now. All these years — twenty-three of them, as near as he could figure his age — he had been biding his time. Now he could go on waiting, certainly for the duration of this voyage.

As the days passed, he found that he fitted well and comfortably into the life of the ship. There were seven on board besides himself — the captain, Carlos, who glorified himself with the title of first mate, the little weazoned yellowish man whose only name appeared to be Sandy and who was an engineer of sorts, and a crew of four dark-skinned men who spoke no English and who were, Jethro learned, Carib Indians.

Carlos was delighted when he discovered Jethro’s mechanical ability and his general handiness with tools. La Perla’s engines were continually in need of attention, and Sandy was just as continually lying dead-drunken on the deck. Carlos declared over and over that the new crew member might be “Mr. Nadie,” but that he certainly had been sent to La Perla by the good God himself. As time went on, he and Jethro be
came friends in a curious half-detached manner.

Jethro knew that they were headed south, but toward what southern port he could not guess, and knew enough not to ask. He knew that they were heavy, well-nailed, unlabeled boxes in La Perla's hold, but he considered the contents to be no concern of his. Strangely enough, in the long lazy evenings while night after night the air grew warmer and the stars more bright, he found that it was he who was confiding in Carlos. Oh, not everything, of course; there was never a mention of old Will Donahue or his family, or of Leesville, Ohio, and certainly never a mention of Sally. These things he had buried deep in his mind, almost as though he were trying to forget them. Yet the one thing that lay closest to his heart he found that he could confide; and, rather surprisingly, that Carlos understood and sympathized.

It was a sad thing, said Carlos, not to know of one's family and one's own people, to be "Mr. Nadie." Yet he could not understand how Jethro would ever succeed in finding out. Jethro's parents, he observed, might very well be dead by now, and even should they be alive, you could never tell where they might have gone. Perhaps it might be as well for Jethro to forget about it and devote himself to the essential things in life: making money, spending it lavishly, finding girls in New York and Veracruz and Trinidad, and wherever else La Perla might briefly pause. As for the rest . . .

Jethro kept to himself his still half-formed scheme of making a great deal of money and hiring private detectives who would somehow pick up the trail of that unknown man and woman in a rickety wagon who had stopped at Leesville that February night. Indeed, he would have been happy to change the subject, but not Carlos. Once the latter's eager mind had taken hold of the problem, he could not let go of it.

If Jethro knew their nationality, from what part of the world they came, he might find it a simpler task to trace those parents he could not remember. He would sit and look thoughtfully at Jethro, as though the secret of his origin might be written somehow on his face.

"I've seen many men of many nations," Carlos declared, "many nations and many colors; yet somehow I cannot place you. It may be that after all you are, God forbid, a gypsy." And he looked deeply concerned.

"Why 'God forbid'?" Jethro demanded, almost indignantly. Once before, in Leesville, Allie Miller had hinted at a gypsy origin, and even now the memory left Jethro resentful.

"Because then there is no hope for you," Carlos said solemnly. "The gypsies are the lost people. They bring misfortune wherever they appear, and they are damned before they are born." He glanced at Jethro a little fearfully and crossed himself. Then he went on in his former tone. "But I, Carlos, am not afraid of a gypsy nor of the devil himself. You will continue to be my good friend, Mr. Nadie." And he went on to talk of other things.

In spite of the erratic behavior of her engines, La Perla was a good fast little boat. Day by day the ocean changed from the forbidding gray to a series of shadows of
green and blue, and every day the sun shone a little more and a little warmer. And then at last the color became a vivid, translucent, almost fabulous blue, and La Perla's deck simmered in the heat, and the Indian crew sang all day long. Jethro sensed that La Perla was reaching the end of her journey, and he found himself watching the horizon for signs of land, with his nerves tingling and his heart beating faster.

Then he realized another thing: La Perla was not only avoiding land; she was avoiding the well-traveled shipping lanes as well. Once a boat appeared far to the west of them. Captain Mac shouted an order to Carlos, and a moment later La Perla had veered off in the opposite direction. And there was never a moment of the day or night when either Carlos or Captain Mac, one or the other, was not on deck keeping a careful watch.

It was the day after the appearance of the boat that land was sighted, a gigantic symmetrical column whose top was half hidden in a veil of clouds. La Perla's engines stopped. Jethro guessed that Captain Mac was waiting for nightfall to approach the land.

Everyone on board seemed to be waiting idly for something. Carlos sprawled on the deck smoking his black, evil-smelling cigars. Captain Mac stayed alone in his tiny cabin. Sandy — cold sober — sulked in a section of the deck as far from Carlos as possible; he seemed strangely apprehensive, almost frightened. The native crew members were silent and watchful, huddled together.

So a few hours passed. Then the sun went down, and the brief southern twilight deepened quickly into night. La Perla's engines began to throb again, and the little boat moved on slowly toward the island.

Before Jethro could observe more, however, he was called into Captain Mac's cabin. The Scotsman seemed more red-faced, dirty, and bad-tempered than ever, and he glared at Jethro suspiciously for a moment or two before he spoke.

"I don't know if I can trust you or not," he said at last. "If I can't, it's a bad business for both of us."

"If you can't," Jethro said, still smiling and still noncommittal, "it looks like a bad business for me, but it would be a shame to throw me overboard to the sharks when you need a good mechanic as much as you do."

Captain Mac laughed noisily and heartily. "You're a man after my heart, Mr. Nadie. But I warn you, it's going to be a dangerous business. You'll make yourself a nice piece of money if it all comes off well, or you may end your life in some stinking jail."

"I don't know what the enterprise is," Jethro said calmly. "But I haven't any intention of backing out. Not if there's any money involved."

"Good," Captain Mac said. He smiled, almost a friendly smile. "Just keep in mind, though, you joined us of your own accord. And, so far as trusting you is concerned, there's very little worry in my mind. Carlos will have an eye on you."

Jethro went back up on deck where Carlos was waiting for him. He sensed immedi-
ately a change in the big man’s manner. He realized that Carlos had been listening. Carlos grinned at him, waved a brown hand toward the odd-shaped island, and said, “We approach with caution.”

Jethro leaned his elbows on the rail and gazed over the water. The moon was out now, and the cone-shaped piece of land seemed mysterious, ethereal, unreal. “We approach — what?” Jethro asked.

Carlos chuckled. “If I were to tell you its name,” he said, “you’d know nothing more of where you are than you do at this moment. It is an island. It is one of the Antilles, and the water you are admiring is the Caribbean Sea.”

“I’d guessed that,” Jethro said easily, “but what island, and why are we going there, and what are we carrying?”

Carlos chuckled again. “Not too many questions at one time,” he said in a tone of mock reproof. “The name of the island is Nevis. We pause there only to acquire a passenger. And the boxes in the hold, Mr. Nadie, contain ammunition.”

Jethro thanked him gratefully and asked no more questions. La Perla had come so close to land now and once more the engines stopped, and for a long time the little boat idled in the still water. For a good while they waited there until at last a tiny speck appeared on the silvery horizon. It came swifly nearer until Jethro could see that it was a small boat, rowed by two men and carrying one passenger, an imposing and dignified personage, tremendously fat and adorned with a pair of magnificent and ferocious black mustaches. By that time the little boat had drawn up alongside. Captain Mac hurried up on deck, and Carlos tactfully drew Jethro away to the far side of the wheelhouse.

“Our passenger may become disturbed,” Carlos murmured, “if he finds himself stared at by someone who is still a stranger.”

Jethro looked curiously around the corner of the wheelhouse. He saw that the man who had come on board was as short as he was fat, that he wore a wide-brimmed Spanish hat with a flat crown, a fancy waistcoat, and tight alpaca trousers. He was obviously nervous and out of breath and, as he stood speaking with Captain Mac, from time to time he drew out an enormous red handkerchief and mopped his round dark face.

There was a brief conversation on deck between Captain Mac and the newcomer, and then the two men went into the captain’s cabin. Carlos let loose a noisy sigh of relief and announced, “Thus far all is well.”

“Who is he?” Jethro asked, trying not to sound too curious.

Carlos shrugged his shoulders, and said, “He is a madman who believes himself to be the coming dictator of Mexico. Whether he succeeds or not — and I don’t think he will — is nothing for us to concern ourselves about, Mr. Nadie, since Captain Mac has collected his money in advance.”

The sun was up when La Perla resumed her cautious journey. There was very little danger now, Carlos declared. The official papers were all in good order for the little
boat to pick up certain quite legal articles of cargo at certain Central American and Mexican ports. The papers were forged, of course, but the chances were that no one would ask too many embarrassing questions.

The journey that followed was pleasant, uneventful, almost languorous. After the first day, their passenger came on deck and played interminable card games with Captain Mac. Carlos lay in the sun and talked to a Jethro who pretended to listen while he dreamed of his triumphant return, and Sandy kept out of sight as much as he could, half-apprehensive, half-sulking.

A morning came when land appeared, and for the rest of the day *La Perla* idled far off shore. Then night fell, a moonless night, yet lighted by the brilliant southern stars. *La Perla* moved in closer until the dim outline of land was less than five hundred yards away, and a tiny boat came out to meet her. All night long the little boat went back and forth between *La Perla* and the beach, carrying first the passenger and then the great heavy boxes which the native crew carried up from the hold. When dawn came, *La Perla* was headed out to sea again.

In the morning they met in Captain Mac's dingy cabin, the four of them. "Now," Captain Mac said, with surprising amiability, "we shall divide our money and head for Veracruz, where we shall take on our thoroughly respectable cargo, refuel, and be off again." He grinned. "Then we shall dump our respectable cargo in the Gulf of Mexico and pick up a more profitable one with which to return to the United States."

Jethro asked no questions about the "more profitable cargo." That was Captain Mac's business. He would learn about it in time. His share of the money amounted to six hundred American dollars, and that was only the beginning. By the time he reached New York, there would be more. If the total was not enough for what he intended to do, he would make another voyage on *La Perla*.

The night before they came to Veracruz, there was trouble on board. Jethro sensed what was going on long before he actually knew. Captain Mac and Carlos held a long conference in the captain's cabin in hushed voices. Jethro tried to listen, but he could hear only the sound of words and not their meaning. If it was important, if it was a matter that concerned himself, he would hear about it in good time. Meanwhile there was no use trying to eavesdrop.

Apparently Sandy did not possess the same quality of patience. Coming around the wheelhouse, Jethro discovered him by Captain Mac's cabin, his ear pressed tight to the boards. In the same moment Sandy saw him and straightened up, his yellowish face twisted into a frightened and angry snarl.

Instinctively Jethro leaped. One blow caught the little man in the face and sent him reeling backward. Another sent him sprawling on the deck. Before he could get up, Jethro was on him, pinning his arms behind him, dragging him into the Captain's cabin.

"He was listening," Jethro said. That was enough explanation.
Sandy did not move. He lay on the floor exactly where Jethro had left him, his pale little eyes fixed on Captain Mac.

“You see,” Carlos said.

Captain Mac nodded. “We can’t let him go ashore at Veracruz,” he said, “and it will be difficult to keep him shut up on board.”

Sandy began to cry, a thin, whining cry. Jethro turned away quickly and went back up on deck. He knew that he could have remained had he wished. Captain Mac and Carlos trusted him now. He might even have had a voice in deciding Sandy’s fate. He did not want to stay. What had to be done would be done, and there was the end of the matter. He felt no sympathy for Sandy. He had never liked nor disliked the man, and he would be neither glad nor sorry when he was dead.

He was conscious of the fact that his heart was beating a little faster, and it annoyed him. He walked to the far end of the boat, where he could not hear even the murmur of voices from the captain’s cabin. He tried to pretend that he did not know what was going on back there, but lay on the deck and watched the sky until at last he dozed a little.

Later in the night he was awakened by the unmistakable sound of a body being slipped into the softly rippling water. In the morning Sandy’s share of the money was divided between the three of them.

“He would have caused much trouble,” Carlos said. “He would have taken his share of what he did little or nothing to earn, and then gone on shore and acquired more money by giving information about La Perla to the authorities.”

Nothing more was said. Nothing more needed to be said.

That day they entered Veracruz. Captain Mac made a report that his engineer had died and been buried at sea, and Carlos prepared to show Jethro the delights of the town. Jethro went along half unwillingly. The immediate business having been completed, he was anxious to be off again, engaging in the next one. But Captain Mac and Carlos felt that they had earned a holiday.

In spite of his reluctance, Jethro found himself fascinated with the city and its noisy, bright-colored life, like nothing he had ever seen before. Walking through the plaza, he found himself suddenly wondering if he belonged here, if his unknown origin was some similar, hot, dusty, and — to him — pleasant place.

The sun was beating down so fiercely that the little arcades around the plaza were already curtained with sun blinds reaching to the ground. Within was shadow, but an even more stifling heat. Captain Mac sat down at one of the small tables, motioning to Carlos and Jethro to join him, and ordered rum. He announced that he intended to remain right there for his entire stay in Veracruz, to which Carlos replied with a pleasant leer that there were better things to do in Veracruz than sit and drink rum.

Jethro paid little attention to the friendly argument, but drank his rum slowly, half-reluctant to leave the scene, half-impatient to be off to new ones. Suddenly Carlos jumped up and said cheerfully:
“The devil take Captain Mac and his rum. I have other things to do.”
Jethro rose with him. They promised to meet Captain Mac at his table late that night and went out into the blazing sunlight of the plaza.
“We go to the establishment of my sister,” Carlos volunteered. “In New York you would call it a saloon. She is very beautiful, and you will admire her.”
Jethro felt a new interest, not at the prospect of a saloon or a beautiful woman, but at meeting Carlos’ sister. He knew very little of his companion’s private life, only that he came from Honduras and that he was enormously proud of his strain of Mayan blood, which, he declared, went straight back to men who were once the great kings of the world. Regarding his family, he had never said a word. This was Jethro’s first knowledge that a sister existed, and he was curious to see her.
La Cantina Dominga was a small two-story building not far from the quay. Its downstairs was divided into three rooms, the first a kind of general clubroom with small round tables crowded with sailors of all nationalities and women of all colors. The second room contained a long homemade bar, behind which a pock-marked Mexican dealt out liquors, and against which a dozen men drowsed over their glasses. Before Jethro had time to do more than look around, Carlos had led him into the third room at the rear of the building. It was small, simply furnished, and very clean. There was a little wooden table, a couple of rickety chairs, a few colored pictures of saints on the walls, and a baby’s cradle in one corner. There was a bottle on the table and a few glasses, and in the one comfortable-looking chair sat a woman with a child in her lap.
“This is my sister, Dominga,” said Carlos cheerfully. He turned to the woman and murmured something in Spanish. She laughed softly and murmured something in return. Carlos turned to Jethro. “She does not speak English,” he said, “but she wishes me to inform you that she is honored at your presence and proud to become your good friend.”
Jethro bowed as formally as he could. He wished that he knew even a few words of the language, enough to say something gracious and graceful to the woman whose face he could still not make out in the dusky shadows. He had to say instead, in English, “I’m pleased to meet you, ma’am.”
She laughed again and said something. He could not understand it, but he knew that it meant the same thing. Carlos walked to the table and helped himself lavishly to the contents of the bottle. A rapid conversation began between him and the woman. There was something in its tone that Jethro recognized, and at first could not quite place. Then it came to him. John Patrick talking to Maggie, Robert Emmett to Sally, brother and sister talking together while an outsider once named Jethro Hammer and now named Mr. Nadie sat by and listened and could not take part.
There were occasional words that he could understand: La Perla, Sandy, Captain Mac. He could guess that Carlos was telling the story of La Perla’s most recent voyage. He sank down into one of the rickety chairs and stopped trying to listen for words
that he could understand. His eyes were growing accustomed to the light now, and he sat looking curiously at Carlos’ sister.

Carlos was right. She was beautiful. Not as any of the girls he had seen in Leesville and in New York. She was large — tall and full-bosomed; her hair was black and pulled back straight from her face to be caught at the nape of the neck with a cluster of brilliant red flowers. Her eyebrows were straight and dark and as heavy as a man’s. Below them her great brown eyes were like pools he had seen at night in the brook that ran near Leesville. She had a wide red mouth, made for laughter, and for sympathy.

He heard a tiny sound, half whimper, half giggle, and his eyes went to the baby in her lap. It was a laughing baby, perhaps a year old, plump and fairly boiling with the happiness of being alive. The little half-whimpering sound had been made purely in the hope that someone would pay attention to her.

Neither her uncle nor her mother paid that attention immediately; they were far too concerned with the things they had to talk about. Hardly realizing what he was doing, Jethro walked across the room, picked up the baby just as he had picked up Sally so many times in her young life, and lifted her toward the ceiling. She waved her tiny coffee-colored hands excitedly and gurgled with delight. Jethro sat down on the rickety chair and began beating her hands together; she laughed and tossed her head and blew bubbles through her lips. It was several minutes before Jethro realized that Carlos and his sister had stopped talking and were watching, half surprised, half amused. Feeling a little foolish, he said. “She’s a beautiful child.”

Carlos beamed. He said something in Spanish to his sister — evidently a translation of Jethro’s remark, to judge from the expression on her face. Jethro put the baby back on its mother’s lap. It promptly began to squall and hold out its hands to him. Carlos laughed loudly and raucously. Dominga patted the baby on its back, turned to her brother, and said something, gesturing toward Jethro as she spoke.

Carlos shrugged his fat shoulders and said in English, “My sister invites you to remain as long as you wish. She regrets that she cannot speak your language, and that her daughter is too young to afford much entertainment to a man who has been on La Perla for many weeks. However, she wishes me to tell you her house is your house. But if you would like to come with me, I assure you you will have a much better time.”

Jethro looked at the baby, who had suddenly gone to sleep and was sprawling like a kitten in her mother’s lap. Dominga’s friendly eyes and laughing mouth. “I think,” he said a little haltingly, “I would like to remain.”

Carlos said loudly that Jethro was seven different kinds of a fool, yet, Jethro sensed, he was pleased.

Dominga said something, half laughing, in her native tongue. Carlos dived into the next room, the middle one of the three, and came back, his face beaming. He kissed his sister’s hand with an elaborate flourish and said to Jethro, “My good sister has found for me a girl, a blonde girl. Adiós, amigo Nadie, and I shall return for you late in the evening.” He paused, grinned, and said, “Very late.” Then he was gone.
Dominga looked at Jethro; and her brown eyes, wet with helpless laughter, indicated to him with a gesture, a movement of her shoulders, and a look on her face, that "after a man had been so long on the sea, and had just arrived in Veracruz, where there were many girls . . ."

She laughed and Jethro laughed with her, and he found how easy it was for people to share each other's thoughts, even when they did not know each other's language.

They carried on a long, almost wordless, and entirely satisfactory conversation. She indicated to him with one word and a gesture that she did not know his name. He said, "Mr. Nadie." She obviously understood. She lifted her lovely shoulders and her heavy dark eyebrows in one questioning gesture. "Mr. Nobody?"

That was when he began to realize that communication was possible without the ordinary medium of language. He managed somehow to explain to her with gestures, one or two Spanish words he had picked up from Carlos, and the expression on his face, that he was an orphan who did not know of his family nor the land of his origin. She gazed at him, her dark eyes half filled with tears, and murmured, "pobrecito."

Somehow, his heart warmed at Dominga's murmured "pobrecito." He wished suddenly that he could tell her of old Will Donahue and Leesville, Ohio, and of the field daisy he had carried to Lizzie Donahue's grave; of his brothers who were not his brothers, of how he had come to be named after a tool in a blacksmith shop and, especially, of Sally. These things were surely beyond telling with gestures and occasional words.

Suddenly he realized that they did not need to be told, that she understood. She might not know the name of Sally, but the look in her eyes told Jethro she knew such a person must exist somewhere. She did not know of Will and Lizzie Donahue, yet she understood that someone had taken Jethro in as an unwanted orphan and cared for him. She had not heard and would never hear of Will and Lizzie Donahue, yet she knew that Jethro had loved them. She smiled and reached across the sleeping baby to touch Jethro's hand. She said gently, "Amigo."

Jethro smiled at her. It was a far more heart-warming word than the more familiar "friend." He wished that he could explain that to her also, and then he realized that he had explained it when he smiled in answer.

But all this time they had been talking about him! He knew nothing about her and, because he liked her, he was curious. He said, "Dominga —?” and realized in the same instant that he had never known of another name for Carlos.

She laughed and said, "Dominga —” and shrugged her shoulders. Then she laughed again and said, "Dominga Nadie. Quién sabe?” I too am an orphan, her eyes and hands said.

"Carlos." With that one word Jethro managed to convey to her that Carlos, her brother, had spoken of people that were his own people, those who were descended from a race of kings. She, in her turn, indicated to him that it was true, but that her own people were very far away and she was as a stranger here in Veracruz.
The baby was awake now and happily playing with her fingers. Jethro searched his mind for the phrase Carlós had taught him, finally remembered it, and said haltingly, pointing to the baby, “Cómo se llama?”

Dominga smiled and said, “Soledad.” He knew that word too. Solitude. A strange name for a baby that laughed and blew bubbles through her lips and wanted to make friends with everyone!

He sat down, the baby on his knee, and stared at Dominga. There were so many questions he wanted to ask her, and he had to ask them all with his eyes!

Why had she come here, so far from her own people? Who was Soledad’s father? Was he alive or dead? How did she come to be running La Cantina Dominga? Was she happy? Did she ever wish to travel to faraway places as Carlos had done?

Somehow she sensed all that he wanted to know, somehow she managed to tell him. Life in the village of her birth was very primitive and at the same time very dull. She had not been happy there, though occasionally now she wished to return — not forever, of course, but for a little while. Once when Carlos had been back on one of his brief and infrequent visits, she had run away and joined him when he left. Here in Veracruz she had met and married a sailor. “Inglés,” she said. He had bought her many fine things, but after Soledad had been born, he had gone away and she had never seen him again. She had sold most of the fine things and opened La Cantina Dominga, which was doing a very fine business and making much money, so she was very happy.

She reminded him of someone, someone a long time ago. He half closed his eyes, trying to remember. Lizzie Donahue, of course, that was it. Lizzie Donahue smiling with pleasure when anyone praised food or drink that she offered. Lizzie Donahue moving silently and gracefully about the tiny kitchen where she did her work. Lizzie Donahue with a laughing baby in her arms.

Suddenly he realized that the baby had curled up and gone to sleep, nestled like a kitten in the curve of his arm. Dominga laughed, the tears still in her eyes. Jethro rose and carried Soledad to the cradle, Dominga following to smooth out its covers. For a moment they gazed down at her, her long lashes dark against her cheeks, her little hand half curled. Jethro felt a profound sadness that was almost despair.

Dominga laid a hand on his arm. “Qué es?” her voice was almost sharp. Jethro spoke one word, almost a cry, “Dominga!”

She said very simply, “Siempre te amaré.” Jethro did not know the words, but he knew what she was saying to him. “I shall love you all my life.”

And he had nothing to say to her in return, nothing to give her. In a few hours he would go away with Carlos. He would probably never see her again. In time he would return to his own country, carrying out his plan, and then — Sally Donahue. “Qué quieres?”

Jethro looked at her. How could he tell her that all he wanted was the warmth, the security, the sweetness of being here with her for these few hours. But she knew. Her eyes told him that she knew. Without another word she moved forward into his
arms. For uncounted moments they stood there, silent, motionless, breathless.

Suddenly Carlos burst into the room. Jethro stared at him in surprise. The big man was puffing for breath, his brown face glistened with sweat, and he was cursing loudly as he came into the room. They must find Captain Mac at once and be out of this cursed city. There was trouble — the rurales — the police, were seeking them.

There was no time for a farewell, only a quick, anguished glance. Then Jethro and Carlos were out of La Cantina Dominga and hurrying up a dark, narrow side street.

Carlos led the way to the table where they had left Captain Mac by a circuitous route through back streets and alleys. At last they entered the plaza, dodging along the edge of it to the table. Captain Mac was not there.

Carlos cursed again and said that obviously Captain Mac had been warned and escaped on board La Perla. They must do the same. Once out to sea, no one would catch them. La Perla was a boat of the most incredible speed.

They arrived on the quay to discover that La Perla was already almost out of sight.

Carlos stood gazing out to sea and called Captain Mac every name in his vocabulary. Not only had he saved his own neck by deserting them, but all the money — save the little that had been brought along to spend on the pleasures of Veracruz — was on board. Nor was there the faintest chance that Captain Mac would return to rescue them. They must manage their own escape as best they could. Dominga could hide them for a few days, and then . . .

But before they could even leave the quay a troop of gray-uniformed rurales came clattering up and took them into custody. Jethro understood very little of what was being said after that, but he did understand by the time they were lodged in a hot, airless Mexican jail that he and Carlos were charged with participating in a willful murder of one Jack Higgins, otherwise known as Sandy, late engineer of La Perla, whose body had been washed ashore near Veracruz.

There had been one chance in a thousand that Sandy’s body would escape the notice of the sharks and be washed up on shore in sufficiently good condition so that it was evident that his throat had been cut. That chance had landed Jethro and Carlos in jail.

Carlos ranged from anger to despair to philosophical acceptance of their fate and back again, his mood changing from moment to moment. Jethro had nothing to say. He had no idea of what might lie ahead for him, whether he would be hanged or shot or imprisoned.

It was hard for him to tell what was happening and what was going to happen. At last, Carlos informed him that they had been sentenced to life imprisonment.

Carlos was cheerful at the verdict. “It is good,” he said. “We shall escape.”

Escape! Jethro seized at the word. This imprisonment was to be, after all, only an interval in his life, as the involuntary journey on La Perla had been. He and Carlos would escape, and everything would begin again where it had been interrupted.

The day after the verdict they were taken from Veracruz by a night train. Two
Mexican guards accompanied them, fastening them, before the train departed, to the arm rests with heavy, shining handcuffs. A moment later, just before the train left, they were joined by another prisoner and two more guards bound for the same destination.

The new prisoner called a cheerful greeting to Jethro and Carlos and joked with the guards as they chained him to the arm rest. Jethro looked at him curiously. He seemed extremely young. His dark face was boyish, and his black eyes, shaded by their thick black lashes, were far more mischievous than criminal. Certainly he did not seem like a dangerous criminal. He made himself comfortable, demanded a cigarette from the guards, and immediately plunged into conversation with Carlos.

Jethro paid attention to them for a moment or two; and then, since he was unable to catch more than an occasional word, gave up and sat looking through the window.

Suddenly he realized that Carlos was addressing him. He wanted to introduce Jethro to their new friend, Pablo. The introduction was a highly formal one. Everyone, including the guards, bowed as much as the handcuffs would permit. Pablo Montejo. Señor Nadie. And everyone bowed for a third time. Their fellow passenger, Carlos explained, was a very great and distinguished man; though only nineteen, he had participated in a dozen robberies and killed six men with his own hands.

Jethro said, in English, that he was deeply honored, and Carlos translated it into what Jethro sensed was a flowery compliment.

Was their new friend going to the same destination? Jethro wanted to know. Carlos put the question into Spanish. Pablo and the other guards laughed heartily. One of them said something at which Carlos also laughed. Then Carlos said, “He is going to Mexico City to be shot. He is a very great criminal, and I am proud that we ride on the same train.” He winked at Jethro as he spoke, a gesture unnoticed by the guards. Jethro glanced, bewildered, at the other prisoner, who met his eyes with a wise, untroubled, and mischievous gaze.

Jethro asked no more questions. Something was going on, he did not know what. Certainly this handsome young man was not so merry at the prospect of being executed. But he would find that out in due time. He glanced out the window. The train was beginning to climb back and forth, back and forth, on the face of the mountain. Suddenly he felt Carlos nudge him sharply.

He looked up. Carlos’ face was innocent, half asleep. One of the guards had folded his blanket and gone comfortably to sleep, stretched out on a seat across the aisle, and another was dozing. The young bandit was talking cheerfully and rapidly with the one guard who still remained awake. Jethro frowned, confused. He looked again at Carlos, whose impassive brown face told him nothing.

Then all at once he realized what had happened. Somehow while he talked Pablo had managed to slip his thin, supple hand loose from the manacle, working slowly, little by little, until he was free. Now he was watching the window, waiting for some moment when the train went slowly on some rising curve where he could leap into
the heavy bush that grew beside the tracks and disappear.

Jethro was conscious of the effort it took to keep his face expressionless. He was as excited, his heart beat as wildly, as though he himself were about to make the attempt to escape. He dared not watch. He closed his eyes, leaned back against the hard leather seat, and pretended, like Carlos, to be asleep. The voices of Pablo and the guard who was still awake went on and on, a cheerful conversation from the sound of it.

Then Carlos’ elbow touched his rib lightly. Jethro stiffened. He heard Carlos whisper, a very soft whisper, “I am going to have a nightmare.”

Jethro opened his eyes, just a crack. Carlos’ face was perfectly motionless. It was impossible to imagine that he had spoken. His head lay far back, his mouth was open, and he snored a little. Yet even as Jethro watched, his face began to twitch and jerk, and he began to moan — but very softly, in his sleep. A minute went by, two minutes, five minutes; then Jethro saw Pablo’s foot reach out and touch Carlos very gently and unnoticed by the guard. Immediately Carlos began to howl in anguish and fling himself about in the frenzy of his nightmare. The one wakeful guard leaped to quiet him, the two sleeping guards woke up, and, still a little dazed, began to run in every direction at once. And Pablo made one quick lunge toward the window.

One of the guards saw him immediately and sat up with an outcry, leaping toward the escaping prisoner. Jethro pretended to have just been roused from sleep, made a sudden and apparently unintentional movement of his feet which sent the guard sprawling. Carlos at the same moment — still in the throes of his nightmare — managed to trip up another.

But there were four of the guards, for all of that only one of them had been awake when the trouble started, and while there were three of the prisoners — all wide awake and alert — two of them were handcuffed to their seats. Pablo was just half out the window when the guard who had been chatting with him caught him by the feet and hauled him back unceremoniously. An instant later the commotion was over, Pablo was again chained to the arm rest, and the guard was lighting a cigarette.

It was a moment before Jethro dared to look at the young prisoner’s face. He felt that it would be like looking at the face of someone very recently and tragically bereft. Then he heard Pablo’s voice. It was laughing, and he opened his eyes.

From the look on Pablo’s face, the whole circumstance appeared to have been the best joke in the world. At the moment when Jethro looked, the guard was engaged in removing a pair of ornately decorated silver spurs from the little bundle that held Pablo’s belongings. Carlos, seeing the look of bewilderment on his friend’s face, explained and translated. Pablo, it seemed, had made a bet with the guard: the spurs against a bottle of Cuban rum, to be collected later, that he would escape before the train arrived at Mexico City. But the other guards — like themselves — had only pretended to be sleeping. It was a very good joke on Pablo.

A short distance from Mexico City, the guards who had brought Carlos and Jethro on board glanced through the widow and hastily began making preparations to leave
the train. They were to take their prisoners off, it was explained to Jethro, outside the city limits, where they would transfer for the penitentiary.

The guard who had first gambled with Pablo drew a bottle of rum from beneath his blanket. He opened it, passed it to Pablo, who in turn passed it on to Jethro, to Carlos, and the other guards. One farewell drink all around, and then the train was slowing for its stop. Two guards hastily unfastened Jethro and Carlos and hustled them toward the door of the train. Pablo, left alone with his two guards, called one last sentence after them.

“What?” Jethro asked, almost in a whisper.

“He was asking us,” Carlos said gravely, “to pray for his soul.”

Jethro remembered very little of the rest of that day: more guards, uncomfortable conveyances, a few moments spent in the office of the penitentiary, a small, stuffy cell furnished only with a hard bench, and a sleepless night. His thoughts were with their fellow prisoner who had not escaped.

In the morning the new prisoners — Carlos and Jethro among a number of others — were called into the prison yard for inspection and to be assigned to their tasks. Carlos waved at Jethro, and then he pointed a quick, surreptitious gesture that would not attract the attention of the guards. Jethro let his eyes move in the direction Carlos had indicated. There was Pablo, dressed in prison clothes, still smiling, still joking with the guards.

Later Jethro learned that Pablo’s sentence had been changed at the very last moment to life imprisonment. For one reason, Pablo had too many friends, followers, and admirers. There might have been an uprising had he been shot. For another, he was young and strong, and he would be useful working on the roads.

At the moment, however, Jethro knew only that the young man was alive. Suddenly the hope he had almost lost returned to him. For Pablo’s eyes met his across the prison yard, and Pablo made a gesture whose meaning Jethro already understood: “We shall escape!”

CHAPTER NINE

TELLING IT TO MELVILLE FAIRR in the fly-specked little restaurant just off Amsterdam Avenue, the girl who called herself Miss Hammer paused at that point, stared across the table at Melville Fairr, and whispered, “It is a great pity. I know so little — my mother knew so little about those years.”

“Years?” Melville Fairr said. “What years?” But his skin prickled with excitement.

“It was a long time,” she said. “He always knew that he would escape. But it was eighteen — nineteen — years . . .” She paused and then said, “So long a time. And of what they were like, of what he did and what he thought — I do not know. He never spoke of them. He said only, ‘I was in prison for nearly nineteen years before
we escaped.’ For the rest, I do not know, even imagine. Only this, in prison he and Pablo and my granduncle Carlos became great friends.”

Great-uncle Carlos! Melville Fairr looked up at her sharply. She was, then, the daughter of that Soledad who had been a laughing, dark-haired baby in the back room of La Cantina Dominga. But what had happened to Dominga? And to Soledad? “But how did they escape?” he asked.

“It was arranged by my grandmother,” the girl said. “At first my granduncle Carlos believed that the escape would be simple, that they could arrange it within a few months, or even a few weeks. But that was impossible. You must understand, Señor Fairr, that the man who had been smuggled into Mexico on La Perla was unsuccessful in his little revolution, and he was arrested. He was not a very brave man, and he told quite freely how he had entered the country. So that my father and my granduncle Carlos were watched very closely in case they should escape and smuggle in some other men who might make a successful revolution. And Pablo was watched with great carefulness because he was so great a bandit that once out of prison he could have raised an army and begun a little revolution of his own.”

“And —?” he prompted her gently.

“That is why it took my grandmother so many years to arrange things,” she told him. “Though from the moment they were taken to prison she did not stop, no, not once. And at last she succeeded in finding those who could be bribed. Three men, in return for quite a large sum of money — and it took a great many years for my grandmother to accumulate what money was required — allowed themselves to be smuggled into the prison by a guard. And the guard, too, required a great sum of money. It was necessary for the three men to be smuggled in, you understand, because it was going to take several days to get the escaped prisoners out of the country. And during those days it had to appear that no one was missing from the prison.

“And there were other expenses. Great expenses. It was very difficult conveying them to the coast, even though their absence from the prison was not discovered until they were almost safe.” Her face grew sober. “But then there was some little trouble going on board the boat. They were discovered, and there was a great trouble in getting away. They did get away, of course, but my father was injured. Badly injured. My mother nursed him.” Again she smiled. “It was a great surprise to him when, after a very long time, he became conscious and found how many miles he had traveled without knowing anything of them.”

“It is fortunate,” the girl said simply, “that my grandmother lived long enough to tell of what happened after that, because otherwise we would never have known what happened on the way.”

Jethro Hammer’s Life, Continued

“It will not be a lucky voyage,” Dominga said gloomily as the small boat headed away from the dark shore.
Certainly it had not begun auspiciously. The careful arrangements, the bribed guards, the substitutes who had been smuggled into the prison, the perilous journey to the seacoast— all these things had gone well. Then, at the last moment, there had been the unexpected arrival of the *rurales* at the point where the boat was waiting.

Back on the shore three men lay dead and several wounded; one of the dead was the member of the *bandidos* crew Dominga had engaged at so great cost to convey the three fugitives to the seacoast. The rest of their number had fled into the hills.

The escape had been made, the three men were on board, and the little boat was rapidly losing itself in the shadows of the sea. But now they would be watched for at every port. And Mr. Nadie lay on a blanket on the deck, looking much more dead than alive. Dominga crossed herself and said a hasty prayer.

"It is unfortunate," Carlos said, coming up behind her, "all these years in the prison, at last the escape, and now he dies."

Dominga looked up at her brother from where she knelt on the deck beside the wounded man. He had changed greatly in the nineteen years spent in the penitentiary. The round face was deeply lined, and his thick hair had turned gray. There was a frighteningly unhealthy color, to his skin, and a dull hopelessness in his eyes. Dominga wondered if he would survive the voyage.

Her concern, though, was for Mr. Nadie. "He is not going to die," she said fiercely. "I have not worked and saved money and bribed officials and risked my own life these many years to have him die, now that he has just been returned to me."

Carlos smiled. For that moment he looked like the old Carlos who had been first mate on *La Perla*. He said, "I thought there was a reason why you devoted your life to our escape." His eyes softened. "It may be that he can be kept alive for you."

He and Pablo busied themselves immediately attending to the wounded man, with the skill and certainty of men who had handled such situations many times before. Even to their practiced eyes it seemed hopeless. There had been a heavy blow on Jethro's head, his face was waxlike, and two tiny streams of blood came from his nostrils. There was another wound, too. A bullet from one of the *rurales'* guns had gone cleanly through his abdomen, narrowly missing his spine.

Carlos laid a striped blanket carefully over Jethro. "There is nothing we can do," he said, "save to leave him where he is. He must not move, no, not the smallest portion of an inch. It may be that the good God will grow him together again."

The boat was only a small fishing vessel built to huddle close to the shore. Now, forced to the open sea, it sailed in continual peril of capsizing, and Carlos watched the horizon anxiously for the slightest sign of a squall. It was crowded with the three escaped convicts, Dominga, and the two Carib Indian boatmen; and by the time they rounded the Yucatan Peninsula, the provisions were almost gone, and Dominga had another patient on her hands.

Carlos had spent most of his life on the sea; now it seemed that he would die on it. The period of his confinement had destroyed him. He had been sturdily stout; now
he was unhealthily fat, almost puffy. His dark eyes had been gay; now they were the eyes of a man whose heart knows that he is about to die. Dominga listened to his continual cough, looked at his eyes, his skin, and his fingernails, and prayed only that he would live long enough to be buried beside his father. He did not.

By the eighth day of the terrible voyage, it had become almost impossible for him to swallow even a little water. By the tenth day he had become delirious, and there was a rank, bitter odor about him. Any hospital intern might have sniffed it and guessed cancer; Pablo and Dominga called it the smell of death, crossed themselves, and hung charms about the boat to ward off evil spirits.

Twenty-four hours later he became unconscious, and just after midnight, as they were slipping by Swan Island in the protective darkness, he died. They prayed for his soul and lowered him into the dark, still waters.

Dominga would never have described herself as having a highly complex personality. She probably never thought of her own personality at all. Yet there were a hundred contradictions in her nature. She was incredibly patient with an unwavering steadfastness of purpose; at the same time, she was impulsive as a child. It had been an impulse that had sent her into the arms of Mr. Nadie, the stranger Carlos had brought into La Cantina Dominga. Even now she could not understand her own reasons for having devoted her life to his rescue. If questioned, she would probably have said she was in love with him, yet at the same time she would have known that was not the answer. She worked now desperately and unceasingly to hold him to life.

Day after day she watched him anxiously for the slightest sign of returning consciousness, and at the same time dreaded the moment when he would open his eyes and look at her. She knew uncomfortably well how much she had changed during the years in which she'd worked and saved money and tried to arrange bribes. She remembered how she had looked on the day when Mr. Nadie first walked into the Cantina. She did not need the compliments of customers and admirers to know how beautiful she was. But that had been a long time ago, and the years had been hard. Her hair was streaked with gray, her skin was sallow, and her fat shoulders sagged.

Perhaps once she'd had some mad thought in her mind that if she rescued her Mr. Nadie from prison he'd make her an offer of marriage out of gratitude. She would have attempted the rescue in any case, however, simply because she could not bear the thought of him in prison. But if that had been in her mind once, she abandoned it now. Indeed, she would not like to see him married to a fat old woman. At last, and slowly, another plan began to form in her mind.

Dominga had been right. The journey was not to be a fortunate one. The second day after Carlos' death, one of the Carib boatmen slipped on the treacherously wet deck and was lost overboard. That left only two men to handle the craft, and Pablo knew nothing at all about boats. Too, it was the season for hurricanes. And there was very little food and water left. Their destination was a tiny village on a lagoon near Cape Gracias a Dios. It was still a few days' journey when the remaining Carib boat-
man began to protest that he would go no farther, and that they must put in at the nearest point along the shore. He was not only frightened, but hungry and thirsty.

Dominga pointed a gun at him and said angrily that they would continue on their course and no more nonsense about it. She watched him, the gun in her lap, through the entire night, her head drooping with weariness. In the morning Pablo announced that he was inclined to agree with the boatman. He did not look with favor on the prospect of dying from starvation, thirst, or drowning, after spending so many years of his life braving the rifles of the rurales. He pointed out that, armed as they were, they could put in at some tiny village along the coast and renew their stock of provisions — perhaps even remain until the danger from storms was past.

Dominga was deeply troubled. She realized that Pablo’s suggestion might be the wise one to follow. There was, she knew, not far along the shore, a small settlement where they might find temporary sanctuary. If it had been only for herself and Pablo, she would not have hesitated; but Jethro was still gravely ill, unconscious, unable to defend himself if need be, and Jethro was a hunted man.

In the end it was the weather that decided for her. That night the wind died, leaving the sea and air motionless. The dawn was a terrifying red, the glassy ocean an unbroken gray without a speck of white foam showing anywhere. Somewhere over the ocean a hurricane was preparing to swoop down on land and water. Dominga shrugged her shoulders, remarked warily that it was the will of God, and instructed the boatman to head for Bailey’s Lagoon, the nearest haven.

They were within sight of land when the wind struck. The seaward edge of the lagoon was a long sand bar twenty-five yards or so wide. Beyond it was the gray-green water of the lagoon. Against the sky was a low ridge of land, dark and shadowy, with here and there a tall palm tree showing above it. The small boat moved cautiously to the end of the sand bar and headed into the lagoon, when suddenly the water rose in a fury. A moment later the boat was thrown violently against the shore, its timbers crashing.

Dominga caught the unconscious Mr. Nadie in her arms as the water swept over them. She felt a wave carry them up on the beach. She heard the crash of timbers and the screaming of wind. Another wave rolled over them. She felt hands reaching out to rescue them in the blinding wash of sand and sea water. She could not tell whose hands they were. She reached out blindly to find Mr. Nadie, and he was gone. For Dominga, that was the end of the storm.

There was sunlight on her face when she woke. And a familiar voice said, “You have had a good sleep.” She looked up into a familiar face, Señor O’Rourke’s.

She gasped, recovered herself, and said, “How is it that you are still alive?”

Señor O’Rourke grinned at her. He had a thin, sharp face, black with tan. His bushy eyebrows were red, and so was what was left of his hair. He was very tall and extremely thin, and there was a dark red flush on his cheekbones under the tan, and a curious glitter in his unexpectedly black eyes.
Señor O’Rourke, you are very ill, Dominga thought. He grinned at her and said, “Mama Dominga, I must ask you the same question?” She started to answer before she thought that she was still alive because she had prayed to the good God, but she remembered in time that Señor O’Rourke would make fun of her.

He had been a smuggler until his illness came — something to do with transporting rum and brandy and mysterious liquors from European ports to New York, a business which she could not quite understand, only that it was profitable.

Señor O’Rourke had turned up from time to time at La Cantina Dominga. More than once she had hidden him there from the authorities; perhaps she could expect as much of him now. She stared at him, her fat face whitening. “El Señor Nadie?”

“He recovers,” O’Rourke said. “I would not have expected it, but he recovers. He still sleeps, but he is alive. I think that he will remain alive.” Strength seemed to return to her as he spoke. She drew one long, slow, half-sighing breath. Then she swung her fat, shapeless legs off the side of the rude cot on which she had been lying and pulled herself to her feet. “The others?” she asked.

“Pablo is alive and in good health,” he told her. “At the moment he is asleep. The boat, I regret to say, was entirely destroyed. The boatman was drowned, and that, too, of course, is just as well. If he had lived, he might have insisted on a share of the money.”

“Money?” Dominga looked at him uncomprehending. “The money on the boat was saved?”

He shook his head and said, “I wasn’t aware that there was money on the boat.”

There had been a box, a strong wooden box, which she had watched. Money to bribe officials, to pay native boatmen, to buy supplies.

“Occasionally in this out-of-the-way place we hear a little of what goes on in the world,” O’Rourke said, smiling. “There was a great reward offered for the capture of the men who escaped from the Mexican prison. It is known that they escaped by sea. Therefore, it is not surprising that there are many little boats patrolling the coast, manned by those individuals who have never co-operated with the authorities before. Since your unfortunate brother is already lost, you will be able to collect the reward without danger, at least” — he smiled at her, displaying yellow, broken teeth — “your half of the reward. I think we had better have a talk.”

The village at Bailey’s Lagoon consisted mostly of a cluster of huts on stilts. A larger, more substantial-appearing building was set back against the trees. It was the home of Señor O’Rourke, his Indian wife, and her numerous relatives. It had four or five dark and badly ventilated rooms and a muddy courtyard where dogs, chickens, goats, and children played happily together.

Dominga rose and followed Señor O’Rourke into what proved to be the coolest
and quietest room in the establishment. Mr. Nadie lay on a low bunk in the corner, an old woman squatting beside him, fanning him.

“It is sad,” Señor O’Rourke said softly, “that he will remember so little of his brief freedom.”

Domina glanced at him and said nothing.

“Many condolences,” Señor O’Rourke said, “not only for the loss of the boat, but for the death of your brother. How especially sad when you had gone to such length to accomplish his escape!”

Domina looked at him searchingly. There had been sincerity in his voice, and his eyes were friendly. She reminded herself again that she had been a good friend to him more than once in the past. At any rate, she had to trust him now.

“It was not because of my brother,” she said, “but because of Señor Nadie.”

His eyes widened with incredulity, then narrowed, with amusement. Domina could read what he was thinking, and she felt her face grow hot. True, Mr. Nadie did seem like a poor, skinny excuse for a man but that was only because he was so ill, and, as for the other thing she read in O’Rourke’s gaze — the reminder that she was old and fat and ugly — well, she had an answer for that, too.

“I will take him to the home of my people,” she said. “He will be safe there. It is possible to go by another route. On the river.”

“Possible,” O’Rourke said, “but difficult and extremely dangerous.”

She shrugged her shoulders both at the difficulty and at the danger. “Good strong canoes,” she said, “and men I can trust.”

He nodded and said, “It will take money, and you have none.” He paused and added slyly, “But there is the reward money, and there is Pablo. We could divide it equally between us. After all, I am your good friend, Mama Domina.”

Domina hesitated for a moment. After all, she owed nothing to Pablo. Before the storm he would cheerfully have sacrificed her safety and that of Mr. Nadie by going ashore at some port where she had no friends, and there was no other alternative.

She nodded assent and said, “The arrangements? How will they be made?”

O’Rourke had already figured them out. He himself would turn Pablo over to the proper authorities. He would hide Domina and Mr. Nadie and declare that they had perished in the hurricane. He would give them shelter until the reward money had arrived, and he would assist Domina in making the preparations for the long journey through the swamps and jungles.

CHAPTER TEN

“INCREDIBLE,” MELVILLE FAIRR said, leaning back in his chair.

The girl had just finished telling him of that journey through the swamps and jun-
gles. There had been four boats when the journey began, two of them loaded with supplies and ammunition. Dominga rode in a dugout canoe manned by a native boy, and in the other a bed had been carefully made for Mr. Nadie. Weeks later one canoe had arrived at the village where Dominga and Carlos had been born. The others had been lost on the way. By the time the terrible journey ended, Jethro Hammer had recovered consciousness, and Dominga was very ill with fever.

“What became of Pablo?” asked Melville Fairr.

She looked a little surprised. “He escaped, of course,” she said. “You do not think my grandmother would have arranged for his recapture without arranging also for his escape before he had even reached Mexico? Unfortunately, he did not know that it was she who arranged it, and is probably angry about it to this day. I think perhaps I will go to visit him and tell him.”

“Visit him?” Melville Fairr said. “Here?”

“Of course,” she said. “After he escaped, he came to New York. He became an American and very rich. Perhaps you have heard of him.”

Pablo Montejo. The name sounded no note in Melville Fairr’s memory.

“He calls himself now Paul Monte,” she added.

Melville Fairr swallowed a gasp. Paul Monte! Of course he had heard of him—the almost fabulous owner of night clubs, bars, and gambling houses, owner of a racing stable and, by reputation, one of the head men in the numbers game. Pablo had done all right for himself in America! Melville Fairr made a mental note that he, too, would call on him. Pablo had lived all these years in the same city as Jethro Hammer, for whose safety his own had been almost sacrificed.

“The rest is very simple,” the girl said. “They came to the village, and my mother was there. My grandmother had given her a good education, Señor. Mexico City, even once a trip to New York; and then when the escape was to be arranged, she sent my mother home in case there should be trouble with the authorities. They came to the village. My grandmother said, ‘Mr. Nadie, I have saved your life. It is my wish that you marry my daughter Soledad.’ They were married, Señor Fairr, before my grandmother died of the fever. And my father was very ill for a long time. He, too, had taken the fever and, while he was out of his head, he told my mother all of these things which she later told to me. And that is all.”

“It isn’t quite that simple,” Melville Fairr said. “Why did he go away?”

“He was a stranger,” she told him. “He did not look or act like the other men of the village. He did not speak their language, and they were superstitious, Señor, not educated and intelligent like myself. Whenever trouble came, it was blamed on my father; and at last they gave him money and told him to go away.”

That would be it, of course, Melville Fairr reflected. A nameless stranger in Leesville, Ohio. Mr. Nadie in an obscure village on the Honduran coast.

“May be that he was glad to go,” she said. “Yet my mother always believed that he was happy there.”
Jethro Hammer’s Life, Concluded

The little village on the lagoon near Cape Gracias a Dios was quiet and just pleasantly warm in the afternoon sun. Jethro Hammer, still thin and gaunt, lay in a rope hammock hung between two palms near the house he shared with Soledad. He was the only man left in the village at this hour. The others were away attending to the important matters of farming, hunting, fishing.

The past months had been languorous, dreamlike ones. There was much that he could not quite remember; and much that he did remember, he sometimes doubted was real.

There had been that first waking after the long period of unconsciousness. In its way, it had been like that waking on board La Perla. Consciousness of motion and the sound of water moving; strange, vague memories of what had gone before, of the escape, of the fight at the seacoast, and a few bizarre pictures of things that had happened after that, when he had come close to consciousness for a moment or two. A boat, voices, something about a storm, and an old, brown-faced woman pouring broth between his lips. Shots. An overturned canoe. These things were as disconnected and half-real as the occasional fleeting impressions that would come to him from time to time of that long-ago period before he was left in a pew of St. Joseph’s Church in Leesville, Ohio. He could not put them together. They meant nothing.

He remembered very little of the rest of the journey. Moments of waking and hours of dreams. He did remember paddling the boat for the last few terrible miles, while the woman — he still did not realize that she was Dominga — lay moaning, her face a muddy yellow. There were people who came to meet them. Someone gave him fresh water and put him in a bed, and then he slept for a long time.

When he woke he learned that the woman was Dominga; he learned all that had taken place from the time the small, unlucky boat had left the Mexican shore. He went into the room where Dominga lay dying, and there he saw Soledad for the first time in many years.

She had been a laughing, bright-faced baby. She was now a brown-skinned, lovely girl. Her eyes, as she watched Dominga, were glistening with tears, but he knew that another time they would laugh. Years before, in the back room of La Cantina Dominga, she had made him remember the baby Sally. Now, in some curious way he could not quite understand, she made him remember that Sally he had said good-by to on a February night in New York.

There was nothing he could do but to agree to Dominga’s wish — believing it to be the whim of a sick, delirious woman. When Dominga had recovered he would discuss the matter with her. Then he realized that Dominga wasn’t going to recover.

It all happened in the space of a day. The village priest was summoned, a thin, brown-faced individual who looked thoughtfully at Dominga and announced in matter-of-fact tones that it would be surprising if she lived till sunset. So that day,
while Dominga still lived, Soledad became the bride of Jethro Hammer.

Now, looking backward, lying lazily in the rope hammock, he began to feel that he had been fortunate, extremely fortunate. After all, he was no longer young, and the last twenty years of his life had been exhausting ones. Life was pleasant and comfortable here. Soledad was not only beautiful, but a good wife, and he was extremely fond of her. Then there were long philosophical discussions with Father Tomás, who was not only the village priest but its doctor, adviser, and authority as well. It was Father Tomás who told Jethro of the ancestral origin of Carlos and Dominga, and most of the other inhabitants. They were a mixture of Spanish and Indian; tradition had it that they had originally come from a proud Mayan clan who had fled to the coast of Honduras at the time of the conquest.

“We are Christians,” Father Tomás told Jethro in his halting English. “We also worship all the old Indian gods, and under the same roof.”

One thing Jethro did not know was that in his illness he had told Soledad all about himself. He did not know that more than once he had called her Sally. Nor did he know that on the day of Dominga’s burial he had repeated over and over again the one word “daisy.” Soledad simply considered it to be the name of Jethro’s fostermother. She preserved in her mind every detail of his voyage, yet when he recovered she never mentioned these things.

Soledad was essentially a cheerful, simple-minded girl who wanted only to do as she was told and to please everybody. Dominga had told her to marry Mr. Nadie, and she had done so without protest, without comment. But now, she knew that her Mr. Nadie longed to return to his own people, to his own country, to this Sally whose name he had spoken so often. Whichever way she chose, whether to let him remain or to send him away, her conscience would bother her. Finally, though, it was not Soledad who decided.

For several weeks Jethro had been aware of the increasing hostility shown toward him by the others in the village. If it had not been for Soledad, they would not have tolerated him there at all; and, at last, when several of the fishing boats were lost at sea, matters came to a head.

The older and most respected men of the community came to Jethro, accompanied by Father Tomás, who acted as their interpreter. The men had decided, Father Tomás explained, that the presence of this stranger in their midst was bringing calamity upon the entire settlement. Under ordinary circumstances they would have killed him. Since he was Soledad’s husband, however, they would solve the difficulty by sending him away. There were boats that went as far as La Cieba, and there he would find a boat to take him to New York. Furthermore, they would gladly provide him with what money he needed.

Father Tomás added, apologetically, that it was not his idea, yet perhaps Mr. Nadie would be happier in his own land. As for the little matter of the authorities, the search for Mr. Nadie had ended with Señor O’Rourke’s announcement that he had
been drowned in the hurricane. At La Cieba there were boats carrying liquor to the United States, and these boats landed at obscure and unwatched points along the coast, so that there would be no difficulty in the matter of passports.

There was something maddeningly ironic about it to Jethro. He had been shanghaied out of New York; now he was to be smuggled back in, and once more in his life he was being turned out because he was a stranger, because nobody knew who he was.

He was greatly relieved when Soledad announced that she did not wish to go with him.

He still carried old Will’s diary, a shabby, well-worn little book by now. It had been his best companion during the years in prison, and he knew quite well the significance of old Will’s references to his inventions. The whole thing was very plain and simple in his mind. It was necessary for him to have a great deal of money. The easiest and quickest way to accomplish that was to make use of the diary.

“We never saw him again,” the girl said. “He sent money to my mother, a great deal of money. She sent me to very fine schools, so that I would become a lady. When she died, I made up my mind to come here and find him. Mr. Fairr, was it one of these foster-brothers who killed him.”

Melville Fairr looked at her thoughtfully. “That night when I met you beside his house,” he said, “your words were, ‘They will kill him.’ What did you mean by that?”

She spread her hands in an expressive gesture. “These people,” she said. “He had taken all their money away from them. Naturally they hated him.”

“The truth is,” Melville Fairr said, “that I do not know who killed him.”

The girl rose. “Señor Fairr,” she said imperiously, “I demand that you find out who it was. He was my father. You must find out for me his murderer so that I, in my turn, may kill him.”

“Of course,” Melville Fairr said, in his most matter-of-fact and casual manner. “Now, my child, I think we have become friends. Will you tell me your name?”

“My name?” she said, smiling. “Daisy Hammer.”

He was silent for so long a time that she seemed to become uneasy.

“It was because Daisy was the name of his foster-mother,” she said at last.

**CHAPTER ELEVEN**

**THERE WAS THE** strange matter of the unsigned letter.

There was the curious fact that all Jethro Hammer’s money had disappeared.

There was the inexplicable behavior of Miss Sarah White.

Melville Fairr rose, stretched, and yawned. He was tired, extremely tired, and stiff in every limb. The cold March dawn showed gloomily through the windows.
There was a sound at the window, and Mister Thomas appeared on the sill, a deep gash down one foreleg and an ugly wound just over his glittering left eye. He stood there for a moment, making a song of triumph, half-growl, and half-meow, and then bounded gracefully into Fairr’s arms, purring loudly and magnificently.

Fairr looked at him proudly and affectionately. Mister Thomas was all the family he had or would ever have; not because he did not wish for a family of his own; but because he’d never met a girl he wanted to marry. But he had realized many years before that his life was one he could not share with anyone, even a wife; that its dangers must be for himself alone. Nor could he ever have truly intimate friends save Mister Thomas. In his deliberately chosen profession there would never be anyone he could trust.

In this affair of Jethro Hammer, for instance, he had met a number of people he liked enormously — though it was true that he liked everybody. He liked Robert Emmett and his wife, his daughter, and the young man who’d probably be his son-in-law some day. He liked William James Donohough II and all of his family. He liked the Countess and her husband. He liked John Patrick; he wished with all his heart that John Patrick could become his friend. And he liked Sally; yet he could not become intimately friendly with any of them because he could trust none of them until he knew beyond any doubt the murderer of Jethro Hammer; and by that time it was too late. Looking back now, he realized that he should have known the murderer from the very beginning. There was only one person the murderer could be that he had not known, and there would be those material clues which had to be followed up.

Yet the material clues had not proved so important in themselves; the question had not been who murdered Jethro Hammer and how and why; it had been, why did Jethro Hammer have to be murdered at all?

Melville Fairr smiled wryly to himself, remembering how a few days before he had been one of a group of people in a restaurant while a red-faced, loud-voiced, and very positive man was holding forth on the subject of superstitions and his contempt for them. Melville Fairr had listened quietly to a dissertation on Friday the thirteenth, walking under ladders, throwing a hat on a bed, or opening an umbrella in the house. Then, apparently quite accidentally, he had juggled the man’s arm so that half a shakerful of salt spilled over the tablecloth. He noticed with some satisfaction that the man hastily took up a pinch of salt and threw it over his left shoulder.

“Every man has some superstition,” Melville Fairr had said, rising and fastening his overcoat. “For instance, I know of a man who believed all his life that he brought bad luck to everyone with whom he came in contact, and that he would be murdered.”

“Well?” the loud-voiced man said indignantly.

“Well, he did bring bad luck to everyone,” Melville Fairr told him, “and he was murdered.” He’d paused then, smiled, and added, “Please excuse me. I have an appointment with the police to tell them the name of his murderer.”
Events Following the Murder

There was no surprise in Sarah White’s voice when she answered the telephone. Mr. Hammer had not appeared at his door this morning? Mr. Fairr thought that she should notify the police? Very well, she would do so. Was there anything else Mr. Fairr felt that she ought to do?

Yes, there was. Mr. Fairr wanted to go through Jethro Hammer’s house before the police arrived.

Miss Sarah White could attend to that, too. There was a key to Jethro Hammer’s house in the office safe. She would bring it to Mr. Fairr by taxi, then return to the office and telephone to the police that her aged employer had not come to the office at his usual time, and she feared that something might have happened to him.

Melville Fairr waited at the corner nearest Jethro Hammer’s dingy old house until Sarah White’s cab paused beside him. She handed him the key through the window of the cab and started to speak to him. Then evidently she changed her mind and motioned to the driver to go on.

“Wait,” Fairr said. There was no time to talk now, he realized. “Stay at the office after you call the police. I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

He walked up the steps of Jethro Hammer’s house with a mounting sense of excitement. As many times as he’d watched its doors and windows, he’d never seen nor been able to guess at its interior.

He unlocked and pushed open the heavy door and stepped into a hallway as dark as night. He fumbled for the light switch and finally lit a match to find it.

The hall was bare and empty. No carpet, no pictures, not a stick of furniture. The house was one of those high, narrow buildings whose downstairs consists of two or three rooms opening off a hall from which a flight of stairs goes up to the rooms above. Fairr stood listening for a moment. There wasn’t a sound in the house, not even the rustling of mice. The stairs were thickly coated with dust, as was the hall itself. He went cautiously through the double doorway into the front room of the house, paused, and gasped.

He had stepped into Will Donahue’s little farmhouse back in Leesville, Ohio. He’d enough descriptions of it from the Donohoughs and people in Leesville to recognize every detail of it. He’d seen the house itself on that one hurried visit. It stood desolate and empty, and he’d wondered at the time what had ever become of the Donahues’ possessions. Now he knew. Jethro Hammer had bought them and put them in his house. There were the faded colored photographs of Will and Lizzie Donahue on their wedding day and the picture of Will Donahue’s mother. There were the photographs of the young Donahues and of Jethro himself in various stages of childhood. There was the wicker rocking chair with its well-worn cushion, and a mending basket beside it. There was even a tiny cradle in one corner and a box that Fairr suspected held ancient broken toys. There was even the old stove, its chimney ending incon-
gruously above the unused fireplace. Obviously Jethro Hammer had heated his house with it.

The next room was the bedroom, and Fairr recognized it, too, from those descriptions. There was Will and Lizzie Donahue’s big bed, the beds where the young Donahues had slept, and Jethro Hammer’s cot. Only the cot had been slept in. The other beds were smooth and unwrinkled.

Fairr stood looking at the two rooms for a long time. They and the kitchen were the only rooms on the first floor. He went through the rest of the house, uncomfortably conscious that he was disturbing the unbroken dust, and found that the rest of it was as completely empty as the hall. Empty and obviously unused for as long as Jethro Hammer had owned it.

There was still no sign of Jethro Hammer. Melville Fairr found the door that led to the cellar stairs and switched on another light.

He lay at the foot of the stairs, his thin old arms flung out, his head twisted oddly to one side. His old face was no more pale in death than it had been in life. The look of fear and anxiety had gone, and he seemed to be serenely and peacefully asleep.

Fairr looked thoughtfully at the wooden cellar stairs. They, too, were thick with dust, and there were no marks in the dust.

He stood for a moment considering the picture that he saw. An old man, infirm and doubtless with bad eyesight, had fallen down a flight of cellar stairs in the dark. But why had he gone down the cellar stairs at all? And why had they been dark? If the light had been on at the head of the stairs, Fairr could have accepted the picture as it looked — that is, if he had come on the scene with no previous information about the man who had undoubtedly been murdered.

At last he caught the stair railing in his hands and leaped over, dropping to the cellar floor as gracefully as the cat. Jethro Hammer had been dead for hours, and he lay stiffened in the position he had taken when he fell. He looked very frail in death, and helpless, curiously, he looked happy.

Quickly, quietly, efficiently, Fairr searched through Jethro Hammer’s pockets. A few coins for tomorrow’s carfare, a cheap handkerchief. Nothing else. He stood for a bit, looking down at the body of the man he had spoken to once in his life, and who, he felt, had become his friend. Then he pulled himself carefully over the stair railing, went back to the two rooms that were Will and Lizzie Donahue’s Leesville farmhouse, and searched them. There was nothing.

Melville Fairr allowed himself one last lingering glance around the rooms, and went out into the street, locking the door behind him and being careful to leave no fingerprints. By the time the first police car came screaming up the street, little Mr. Melville Fairr was on the subway, bound for Jethro Hammer’s office, and Sarah White.

He had plenty of time, he knew. Few people in the city of New York knew the address of Jethro Hammer’s office. It would take the police a little time to find it. He reached for the knob and then stood for a moment, his heart beating fast. This would
be the first time he had entered the office since that first visit, when Jethro Hammer had engaged him. And the things he wanted most to know might lie behind that office door. He pushed it open. The room was empty.

He stood considering what to do. It was curious that the office should have been unlocked. Curious that Sarah White should not be here. He opened the gate in the railing and tried the door of Jethro Hammer’s private office. It, too, was unlocked.

Fairr stood in the doorway for a moment. There was nothing about the dingy little room to indicate that its customary occupant lay murdered at the foot of a flight of cellar stairs. No, there was one thing. The door of the enormous iron safe stood slightly ajar. Fairr wrapped a handkerchief around the handle of the safe door and pulled it open. The safe was empty.

The drawers of the desk were empty, not so much as a pencil stub or an old eraser in them. He stood for a moment, staring into them with a feeling of defeat. Had the murderer been here ahead of him? Then he saw that the drawers were thick with dust, the same undisturbed dust that had been on the cellar stairs of Jethro Hammer’s house. These desk drawers were empty and dusty because they had never been used.

A voice from the doorway said, “Oh, Mr. Fairr, I didn’t think you’d be here so soon. I hurried as much as I could, but—”

Melville Fairr wheeled around. A smartly dressed, middle-aged woman stood in the doorway. Her gray hair was exquisitely waved and dressed. Her smartly tailored suit was several seasons out of date, but it fitted beautifully. Her patent-leather sandals had outrageously high heels and looked brand-new. Her attractive face had a nice job of make-up, just the right amount of color on her smooth cheeks and well-shaped lips, and just the right touch of eye shadow flattering her beautiful dark eyes.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Fairr,” she said. “I didn’t think it would take so long to get my hair done.”

Fairr recovered his breath and his senses at the same moment. “You certainly didn’t lose any time after”—he jerked his head toward what had been Jethro Hammer’s chair—“was dead, did you?”

“I have spent a great deal of my lifetime waiting,” she said, laying the gloves on top of her purse, “and this looked like a good time to stop.” She lifted a quizzical eyebrow at him and said, “What makes you think I’d know he was dead? All you told me over the telephone was that he hadn’t appeared at his front door this morning.”

“You knew it,” Melville Fairr said, “because you were expecting it, and so was he, but did either of you know—” He paused.

“Who?” she finished for him. “No, he didn’t, and I don’t; and, if I’m not greatly mistaken, Mr. Fairr, you don’t.”

There was a sound at the door of the outer office. For a split second the two stared at each other. If the police were in the hall, there was no time to escape through the other door and into the little office next door. It looked as though Melville Fairr
would have to brazen it out with whoever had come from the police department. Then she caught his arm and pulled him toward the window. A moment later they were on the fire escape, and the window was closed behind them.

"We can’t be seen from the window," she whispered, "and they won’t be looking for anyone. Not yet, at least." She pulled him a little to one side and went on, "You can see a little of the office from here."

He could see part of the brown wood railing and the door. It opened, and three men came in, one in police uniform, another obviously a plain-clothes man. The third Fairr recognized, a tall, stocky, broad-faced man with huge muscular shoulders, Police Lieutenant Alfred Fowler of the Homicide Department.

Melville Fairr smiled to himself. Sometimes policemen were stupid, but not often. It hadn’t taken the bright boys in the first squad car very long to notice that evidence of the dusty flight of cellar stairs. He nudged Sarah White sharply with his arm and said, "You’d better get in there fast. It’s going to look odd if his secretary is missing after she went to the trouble of calling the police."

He knew he didn’t need to add a warning regarding what to say to them. Sarah White would know how to handle it. She ducked in through the other window and by the time the policemen had entered the inner office, she was waiting for them by Jethro Hammer’s desk.

She’d left the window open about an inch and, as the policemen came into the office, she adroitly moved a little closer to it. Fairr grinned to himself. Sarah White was a smart girl. She knew he would want to hear every word that was said, and she was arranging matters so that he would.

The conversation, unfortunately, was disappointing. Are you Miss White? I am. You telephoned the police because your employer hadn’t appeared at the office at his usual time? I did. Was it sufficiently unusual for Mr. Hammer to appear late at his office that you considered it necessary to telephone the police? It was. Mr. Hammer kept very regular hours. He was an old man, and he lived alone. She was afraid something might have happened to him. Then, with just the right touch of anxiety in her voice, Is he — ?

Lieutenant Fowler said bluntly, "Looks like he fell down the stairs of his house and broke his neck."

Sarah White said, "Oh!" in a shocked voice. "Don’t take it so hard," the plain-clothes man said. "You’ll find another job."

"Shut up, Clancy," Lieutenant Fowler said. He added, in a surprisingly gentle voice, "I am sorry, miss."

"I’ve worked for Mr. Hammer for so many years," she said, in a very small, unhappy voice. "It’s so awful — It’s so unbelievable for a thing like this to happen to someone you know!"

Fairr couldn’t see into the office, but he sensed that Lieutenant Fowler was patting Sarah White’s shoulder. He smiled to himself at the gentleness of Lieutenant Fowler’s
voice as he said, “Sudden death is happening to people all the time, sister. Might happen to you or me any day now.”

The plain-clothes man added, almost in a singsong, “You’re a short time living, you’ll be a long time dead.”

“Shut up, Clancy,” Fowler said for the second time. Then, to Sarah White, “There’s a lot of stuff I’d like to ask you about, if you don’t mind.”

Sarah White said, “Why?” There was a little gasp. Then she added, “You’re a policeman. Why are you here? Why are you asking questions? Was there — anything about — Mr. Hammer’s death?”

Out on the fire escape Fairrr grinned again. Sarah White was a very smart girl.

“In any case of accidental death,” Fowler said, “a routine investigation is necessary.”

“You don’t think anyone pushed him down that flight of cellar stairs!” Sarah White said in a shocked voice.

“I’ve said nothing to suggest that Mr. Hammer was murdered,” Fowler said. “You brought up the question of murder. Do you have any reason for believing that your late employer’s death wasn’t — accidental?”

“Of course not,” she snapped. “If I’d thought that, I’d have called a private detective agency instead of the Police Department. I’m only trying to find out, officer, why you think it’s necessary to come here and bother me with questions at a time like this, and why this Clancy person is taking the liberty of searching the office files.”

“Clancy isn’t searching your office files,” Lieutenant Fowler said. “He’s standing by the door, smoking a cigar, and I’m asking you questions because the city has a technically unidentified corpse on its hands, and we’d like to know what to do with it.”

Sarah White said in an unexpectedly meek voice, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be so cross. I’ll be glad to answer any questions you have.”

“That’s better. Did Mr. Hammer have any family?”

“No.”

“Close friends?”

“None. He lived alone.”

“How long have you been his secretary?”

“About — twenty years.”

“Know anything about his personal life?”

“No, nothing.” A pause. “Except — he didn’t seem to have any personal life.”

“How much do you know about Mr. Hammer’s business affairs?”

“Very little. My job consisted mostly of answering the telephone. He never confided in me about his business transactions. He paid me a good salary for very little work, that’s all I know.”

There was a brief silence. Then Lieutenant Fowler said, “Warrant or no warrant, do you mind if I look through Mr. Hammer’s desk?”

“Not at all,” Sarah White said. “I imagine it’s unlocked.”
Melville Fairr heard the drawers open and bang shut. He heard badly smothered exclamations of surprise from the police lieutenant. And then Sarah White’s voice, with a good imitation of amazement, saying, “But they’re empty!”

“Look here,” Fowler said indignantly, “you were this man’s secretary. You must have known this desk was empty. Been empty a long time. Look at that dust. What’s the answer?”

“I don’t know,” she said, and she made it convincing. “Mr. Hammer always kept his office locked when he wasn’t in. I never looked inside his desk.”

Lieutenant Fowler cursed under his breath. Then he said, “Have you a record of visitors to the office?”

“No. Practically all the people who came to see Mr. Hammer on business used his private door. I never saw them.”

“Where did he keep all his personal papers?”

“I don’t know. I assumed they must be in his desk.” She caught her breath and went on, in a sudden rush, “I don’t really know anything about him — anything! I don’t understand any of this. Was he murdered? Who murdered him?”

Lieutenant Fowler made the bad mistake of answering the second question first, and said, “We don’t know.” Then, in a hopeless attempt to correct his error, he added, hastily and angrily, “Nobody’s suggesting that he was murdered except you.” There was a little silence, and the police officer continued, with a change of voice, “But perhaps you can tell us who his enemies were.”

“Mr. Hammer didn’t have any enemies,” Sarah White said.

“Who was he afraid of?”

“Nobody.”

“He had no enemies,” Lieutenant Fowler repeated, almost mockingly, “and he wasn’t afraid of anybody.” He paused. And then he added thunderringly, “Then why in blazes is a private detective hiding on the fire escape outside his office window the day after his death?”

Melville Fairr resisted an impulse to race down the fire escape, catlike, and flee through the nearest alley. Instead, he shoved the window wide open, stepped into the room, and stood smiling at the police officer, looking very gentle, very friendly.

“Because it’s a rare privilege for me to eavesdrop on policemen asking foolish questions,” he said pleasantly. “Hello, Al. Nice to see you again.”

“What do you know about Jethro Hammer?” Alfred Fowler said hoarsely.

“That he’s dead,” Melville Fairr said. He smiled at Sarah White and said, “I’m sure the police are through bothering you now, my dear. So why don’t you run along and get some rest? They’ll want you to make the formal identification at the morgue sooner or later, and it’s bound to be unpleasant. And I don’t know about you, Al, but I’m hungry, and there’s a very good restaurant around the corner.”
“I’M NOT SURE it would be legal to throw you in jail,” Al Fowler said crossly, as he finished his chowder, “but it’d be a lot of fun. Mr. Fairr, what were you doing on that fire escape?”

“Eavesdropping,” Melville Fairr said. “I was Jethro Hammer’s bodyguard. Evidently I wasn’t a very good one.” He told, in detail, of his being hired by Jethro Hammer, of the daily trip back and forth on the subway train, of the cover-up office. He told, too, Jethro Hammer’s excuse for hiring him — the valuable securities that had to be carried back and forth. But he didn’t tell any more.

“You saw him home last night,” Al Fowler said, musing. “You went to pick him up this morning.” He looked sharply at Melville Fairr and said, “I still want to know what you were doing on that fire escape.”

“I still say I was eavesdropping,” Melville Fairr told him. “Jethro Hammer didn’t show up. I went down to his office. Shortly after, the police arrived. I thought that secretary of his might answer your questions more honestly if I weren’t present. And what’s more, I thought you might ask the questions more honestly.”

“And just what did you learn?” the police officer said.

“Exactly what you did,” Fairr said. “Nothing. And if you don’t mind my being curious, why do you have to learn anything? How did Jethro Hammer die?”

“He fell down his cellar stairs and broke his neck,” Al Fowler said. “But there was dust on the stairs. And the lights were off. And the furnace hadn’t been used for years.”

Melville Fairr raised his eyebrows and said, “Perhaps I’m being very stupid, but I don’t quite see —”

“The squad car went up to investigate after that secretary of his called,” Fowler told him testily. “They had to break into the house, it was locked up like a fortress. Looked like an ordinary case of accidental death. Old man, alone in his house, goes down cellar to tend the furnace. Falls on the stairs and breaks his neck. But one of those cops was smart enough to look around. Old Man Hammer didn’t use the furnace, he used a stove. The lights were off. He didn’t have a flashlight, or anything. And the dust was an inch thick. How could he fall down the stairs without disturbing the dust?” He was silent for a moment, and then said, “Mr. Fairr, give me a break!”

“It could have been this way,” Melville Fairr said slowly. “He was alone in the house. He heard a noise in the cellar. Rats, possibly. He rushed off to investigate. He was nervous enough to hire a bodyguard, remember. He didn’t wait to turn on lights or pick up a flashlight. In the darkness he missed the top step and pitched clear over. People do fall down stairs like that, you know, not hitting a step on the way down.”

Al Fowler nodded thoughtfully. “It could have happened that way,” he said. He looked at Fairr and said, “But you don’t believe that it did.”

“No,” Melville Fairr said. “I believe Jethro Hammer was murdered.” He seemed to forget that anyone was present as he went on. “I believe that, with good luck, one
day soon I will walk into your office and say, 'Here is the man who murdered Jethro Hammer.' And I believe that if you try to find him yourself, you'll only run into confusion, because the murderer is smart, and he's been planning this murder for a long time. But if I can find why it was necessary for someone to murder Jethro Hammer, then I can deliver that man to you."

"Somebody wanted to make it look like he fell down those stairs," Al Fowler said stubbornly. "So I figure that the somebody didn’t know about the dust. In other words, it was somebody who never was in that house before."

"A murderer can’t think of everything," Melville Fairr murmured.

Ignoring the comment, Al Fowler continued, "But this somebody must have been somebody old Mr. Hammer knew, or else how did he get in the house? But it was a guy who never had been in that house before, or else he’d have known about the dust and the furnace. Only, Mr. Fairr, who was he, and why did he want to murder old Mr. Hammer? It was murder."

"Meantime," Fairr said, "the question is, not who murdered Jethro Hammer, why did he murder Jethro Hammer, how did he murder Jethro Hammer? It is, what was there about Jethro Hammer’s life that made it necessary for him to be murdered at all? That’s a question I don’t think we will answer, not in this world."

He suddenly realized that Al Fowler was not a man who could deal in abstract things. He pushed back his chair and said, "It’s been nice seeing you again, Al. If I find Jethro Hammer’s murderer, I’ll let you know."

But his heart told him who the murderer was. There was only one person in the world that it could be.

"You handled them very nicely," Melville Fairr said approvingly. "You’re a bright girl, Miss White." He smiled at her. "I thought you’d come back to Jethro Hammer’s office for — our talk."

"I knew you expected me," Sarah White said. "But I don’t know what you want to talk about."

"About you, of course," Fairr said. "About the years in which you came to this office, daily except Sunday, and sat at a desk, answered the telephone, and spied on Jethro Hammer, and reported everything he did or said to Sally Donahue."

"You know a great deal, don’t you, Mr. Fairr?"

"I know a little," Fairr said. "Why don’t you tell me the rest?" He spoke very gently; his face was friendly. "You lived in a shabby rooming house, and you wore ugly, dowdy clothes, and you didn’t have any friends or" — he hesitated a moment — "lovers. You bought smart, pretty clothes, but you never dared wear them. You knew you were a pretty girl, but you didn’t have your hair done, and you didn’t wear make-up."

He paused. Suddenly he stood up and looked at her almost angrily. "It was unfair," he said. "Damnably unfair. You could have been happy. You could have mar-
ried, had a home and a family. Instead, you've lived like this for years. For a third of a normal lifetime. In the name of heaven, why?"

Sarah White didn't answer. She went on looking at him.

"It wasn't for money," Fairr went on. "You've been poorly paid for this. It wasn't for Jethro Hammer's sake. You'd never seen him until that day he walked into the courtroom where Sally Donahue had planted you. Then, why? Was it" — he paused again, giving her a searching glance — "because Sally Donahue — had something on you?"

"No," she said. "No!" Her face was white with what was almost fury. "You know a great many things, Mr. Fairr, but you don't know much about Sally Donahue.

"This is the secret of Sally Donahue," Sarah White said. "She was born a person with tremendous capacities for good or evil, nothing in-between. It was one or the other. Circumstances were such that — she became — evil. But she had the ability — she didn't know she had it — to inspire people who came in contact with her with a — feeling of lifelong devotion. I wasn't the only one." She sat down on a corner of the desk and said, "Perhaps you know that already."

"Yes," Melville Fairr said. "I know of two others." And one was Jethro Hammer.

"You see," Sarah White said, "it was devotion. And something else." She drew a long, slow breath. "She was my mother."

Only a superhuman effort kept Melville Fairr from gasping. He counted ten slowly and said, "I don't believe you."

"It's the truth." She opened the patent-leather bag and took out a yellowed collection of papers. "I knew you wouldn't believe me. That's why I brought these along."

Melville Fairr unfolded the papers and stared at them. They were copies of adoption proceedings, dated 1919. Sarah Elizabeth Donahue, spinster, aged thirty-seven, had adopted Sarah White, orphan, aged seventeen.

"You see," Sarah White said, "if she hadn't adopted me, I would have been sent to a reform school. Because I ran away. She hid me. She got a good lawyer. Her family was well known. She had a lot of money. Managing the adoption was easy for her."

"Why did she bother?" Fairr asked, in a very matter-of-fact voice.

"Because she was sorry for me," Sarah White said.

Fairr shook his head. "That isn't right. It's because you were an orphan." And Jethro Hammer had been an orphan, a nameless one. "Tell me," he said softly, "when, and how, did you first meet Sally Donahue?"

Her lovely eyes misted a little. She looked over his shoulder, into the past. "I was very young, Mr. Fairr. And very poor. At the orphanage they taught me to type-write and keep books. They were going to find me a job, when I was eighteen, and then — supervise me. One day I had the feeling that I'd had all the supervision I could stand, and I ran away. When I was seventeen."

"You ran away," he said. "And then what?"

"I hid," she said. "All kinds of places. And I starved. I didn't have any money. It
was summer, and it wasn’t so bad, having no place to go. But it was terribly hot in the
daytime, and I walked around to employment agencies, and I ran whenever I saw a
policeman, and finally I decided that after one more day I’d either go back or kill
myself. And I couldn’t go back. And that day one of the employment agencies sent
me to Sally Donahue. And” — she shrugged her shoulders again — “that’s all.”

The Early History of Sarah White

Getting away from the orphanage had been easy. At seventeen, she’d been allowed
to run errands for the superintendent. She had a little hoard of dimes and nickels,
saved from doing odd jobs. It was simply a matter of going on one of those errand
one day, and not coming back.

She couldn’t remember how long it had been since she first planned to run away.
Not that anyone was ever cruel to her. Not that there wasn’t plenty of good food,
warm clothes, school, and medical care. No, it was the constant reminder that her
life was being planned for her, supervised with impartial and impersonal kindness.

All she wanted was to be free, to live her little life according to her own modest
dictates. She couldn’t guess, that hot August afternoon when she slipped through the
big iron gates for the last time, that her life would always be planned for her, perhaps
had been planned from its beginning.

The superintendent had given her carfare and sent her to pick up two tickets for a
current hit show at an agency. She got the tickets, put them in an envelope, addressed
the envelope, bought a stamp at the nearest drugstore, and mailed them to the
superintendent, thus discharging her last duty. As the green iron mailbox clanged
shut, she realized that she was free.

Her plans had been carefully made for a long time. She’d saved the dimes and nickels
until she was sure she had enough.

In the basement of a big department store she bought a cheap dress, a hat, and
shoes. She had only a dollar and a quarter left after she’d made her purchases.

She lived on the dollar and a quarter for six days.

She changed clothes in the department-store restroom, folding the gray orphanage
uniform and shoes into a neat bundle, carried it down to the street, and deposited it
in the nearest trashbox. Then she began to feel safe.

The costume she’d chosen didn’t entirely please her — a flimsy little blue dress, a
flowered straw hat, white canvas pumps. She looked covetously in store windows at
beautiful clothes and shoes. But for the present, these would do.

Her plan had been simple. Run away. Disguise herself. Get a job. She looked in a
telephone directory for the address of the nearest employment agency, and went
there.

Name? Age? Training? Then, experience, references?
No experience. No references. And no job.
New York was having a heat wave; the blue voile dress wilted and clung to her
tired little body, the white canvas pumps became scuffed and dirty. She slept in rest-
rooms and in doorways; she lived on peanuts and coffee and popcorn. For the last
couple of days, she ate nothing at all. She trudged, hot, exhausted, hungry, and always
fearful, from one employment agency to another, going back again and again.

Then, on the sixth day, a curious combination of circumstances saved her.

She staggered into one of the agency offices and half collapsed on the waiting
bench. The girl at the reception desk took one look at her and hustled away to talk to
the boss. “Better get that kid out of here!”

At the same moment the boss was hanging up the phone after a conversation with
Sally Donahue. “That Donahue woman gives us too much trouble. Damned if I’ll
send her another companion for her to swear at and fire. Only —”

It was simply a combination of circumstances. The girl at the reception desk
nudged Sarah into frightened-eyed wakefulness and handed her a slip. Wanted:
companion-secretary. Miss Sally Donahue. Address —

“Do you know how to get there?”

Sarah clutched at the slip and nodded. Then she stumbled the forty blocks to
Sally Donahue’s apartment. This possible job was her last chance. The words became a
rhythm to her tired footsteps. Last chance, last chance, last chance.

She was too dazed to glance at her reflection in the windows that she passed. The
flowered straw hat — which had been picked off a bargain basement table for 39
cents — awry on her head, her hair straggling limply around her white, sweat-streaked
face. The blue dress, worn and wrinkled, and filthy dirty. The pumps, ragged now,
their heels half worn away.

She found the address. Luckily it was a first-floor apartment; she could never have
managed a flight of stairs. She rang the bell and stood, holding tight to the doorjamb
her head whirling.

From the other side of the door, a woman’s voice said, “G’wan away from me.
I’m not too drunk to open my own door.”

The door opened suddenly. Sarah saw a vague, shadowy figure. She held out the
slip from the employment agency.

She heard a man’s voice say, “Good Lord, Sally. What have they sent you this
time?” and the woman’s voice, in a sudden concern, “She’s going to be sick. Get some
water.” Then she collapsed on the rug in front of Sally Donahue’s doorway.

She was lying on a comfortable couch. There was a cool, wet cloth on her forehead.
Someone was holding a glass to her lips. She drank thirstily, clutching the glass.

“She’ll be all right,” the man’s voice said. “Don’t you think you ought to call the
police?” There was an impediment in his speech.

That word brought her to full consciousness. She pushed away the glass and tried
to sit up. “No, No, they’ll take me back.” The feeling of panic came back to her.
“Not the police. No!”
“Relax,” the woman’s voice said soothingly. “Nobody’s going to call the police. Whatever you’ve done, you’re safe here.”

“I haven’t — done anything . . .” She felt her voice fading; she was too weary to speak. But she clung to that one word, safe. She eased back on the pillows and opened her eyes.

There was a big, cluttered room. There was a fat woman in a soiled purple wrapper, leaning heavily on a cane, a woman who smelled of cheap liquor, who had friendliness and compassion in her eyes. In the shadows there was a thin, sickly-looking man.

Sarah managed to gasp out a few more words. “Miss Donahue. Baum Agency Job.”

“You’re hired,” Miss Donahue said.

“Sally,” the man said, “you can’t do this.”

“She’s hungry,” Sally Donahue said. “Peter, make her an eggnog. Pour some sherry in it. Then we’ll put her to bed. She’s hungry and tired, and” — she pulled off one of the white canvas pumps — “dirty as a pig. We’d better give her a bath.”

Peter hesitated and then went out to the kitchen to make the eggnog.

Sally Donahue looked for a moment at the girl. “Why are you so afraid of the police?”


“Good Lord,” Sally Donahue said, imagining the six days in which Sarah White, orphan, had lived on a dollar and twenty-five cents. She reached for her cane, made her way to the telephone. “Baum Employment Agency? You sent me a girl named White? Well, I’ve hired her.”

And just then Peter came back with the eggnog. Sarah White drank it and went to sleep.

She woke sometime the next day in a bed, a real bed, with clean sheets and a pillow. The shades were drawn; the room was quiet and cool. She lay there for a little while before she began to remember.

Then there were voices on the other side of the door. The voice of the fat, drunken woman. And men’s voices, with an unpleasantly familiar sound to them. Policemen’s voices. Sarah stiffened.

Perhaps she could get out through the window.

Sally Donahue’s voice came through the closed door. “Yes, she came here. From the Baum Employment Agency. I told her to come back, but she never showed up. And you can just tell the Baum Employment agency that the next time they send me a girl . . .”

In the midst of her tirade the policemen left. Sarah hearing the door bang behind them. There was a moment of silence.

“Peter,” she heard Sally Donahue say, “get me a lawyer, a good lawyer. Better get Judge Cranston. I can’t let that girl be dragged back to an orphanage or a reform school. The only way I can protect her is to adopt her.” A pause and a low murmur
from the man she addressed as Peter. “Of course I don’t know anything about her. Except she’s an orphan. Besides, I’ve always wanted a daughter of my own.”

About a month later Sarah White, orphan, aged seventeen — fed, rested, and hidden from the police in the meantime — became legally the daughter of Sarah Elizabeth Donahue, spinster, aged thirty-seven.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“BELIEVE ME, MR. FAIRR,” Sarah White whispered, “it wasn’t gratitude. I never felt grateful to Sally Donahue. I simply — loved her.”

Fairr nodded and said nothing. He could understand that. Because it hadn’t been charity on Sally Donahue’s part, or a drunken whim. It had been because Sarah White was an orphan, and Jethro Hammer had been an orphan.

“She talked to me,” Sarah White said. “About — him. About the little crutch that he made for her, and how he taught her to walk. About — everything. About his — going away. It was St. Valentine’s Day, you know, and he’d always had a valentine for her, ever since she could remember. That year he didn’t have one. He said good-by, and walked off into a snowstorm, and that was all.”

“The lawsuit —” Sarah White paused, and then went on, “She wouldn’t go to see him to offer a settlement. She didn’t go to the courtroom. But it wasn’t for the reason you think. It wasn’t because she was old and fat and ugly and a drunkard. It was because she wanted him to come to her, and he never did.” She paused again. “He couldn’t.”

“She sent me instead,” Sarah White told him, “and I reported everything to her. I was her eyes and ears. And after it was all over, when everyone wondered what he was going to do, I found out for her that he had rented this little office. She knew he’d have to hire an office girl. Someone drab and efficient and trustworthy. She told me to ask him for the job. I did, and he hired me.”

“And you’ve gone on being drab and efficient and trustworthy ever since,” Fairr said, with a resurgence of that almost angry pity.

“I haven’t minded,” Sarah White said. “I’ve been happy.” For a moment stars shone in her beautiful dark eyes. Then she said, “Mr. Fairr, it’s finished now. Can’t it be forgotten? Can’t I destroy his private papers? Can’t you go away and forget about Jethro Hammer and let him rest in peace?”

“No,” Fairr said, “because he was murdered.”

She looked at him silently, as though saying, “Is that any concern of ours?”

“I’ll make a compromise with you,” Fairr added at last, almost in desperation. “You’ll be reporting all this to Sally Donahue. If she agrees, will you turn over to me those papers and letters Jethro Hammer hid so well” — he gestured toward the shabby
old desk — "so well that there was not a thing about this office to indicate that it was ever used?"

To his relief, she nodded. Not impulsively, but slowly and thoughtfully. "I'll let you know," she said. Then, unexpectedly, her eyes filled with tears. "If he could only have lived one more day," she whispered. She drew a long, almost sobbing breath, and said, "But, of course, it wouldn't have made any difference, not any difference at all." Farr didn't ask any more questions. But he had a profound conviction, as he went away, that Sarah White not only knew the secret of Jethro Hammer's life, but the name of his murderer as well.

The inquest was well attended by the press. The death of Jethro Hammer, hermit of Wall Street, was an important and interesting event. Unfortunately, the press went away disappointed.

There was brief and rather dull testimony by the squad-car men who had broken into the house and found Jethro Hammer's body. The door had had to be broken down. The body was lying at the foot of the cellar stairs. Why had Lieutenant Fowler been called? Well, because there hadn't been any marks in the dust on the stairs. Marks in the dust? Kindly make your meaning a little clearer, officer. Red-faced, perspiring, and embarrassed, the policeman explained his theory.

Lieutenant Fowler, called to the stand, agreed with the theory and gave his reasons. The coroner's jury looked impressed.

Regrettably, the assistant medical examiner who had been called to the scene of Jethro Hammer's death had a feud of long standing with Lieutenant Fowler, based on some purely personal matter. He stated flatly that Jethro Hammer had met his death by accident. He produced diagrams showing how it would be possible for a body to describe an arc over a flight of stairs and land at the bottom without touching one step on the way down. The coroner's jury looked even more impressed when he had finished.

Sarah White was called briefly to the stand, and testified that, to the best of her knowledge, her late employer was not in the habit of admitting visitors to the house at any hour of the day or night.

And so, the coroner's jury returned a verdict of death by misadventure. *We find that the deceased came to his death by falling down an unlighted flight of cellar stairs.*

The press was, indeed, bitterly disappointed. Something spectacular had been expected, especially in view of the disclosure, made the day before, that Jethro Hammer, the millionaire hermit, had died broke.
THE DAY AFTER Jethro Hammer’s funeral, Melville Fairr sat for a long time over his morning tea, stroking a purring Mister Thomas and considering his next step. There were a number of things he wanted to do. He wanted to check alibis. Alibis and attitudes. He wanted to talk to Paul Monte. He wanted, most of all, to get a message from Sarah White.

His course of action was decided for him by a telephone call from William James Donohough. “Mr. Fairr? Wonder if you could spare an hour or so for a conference with me. With us, rather. It’s a matter that concerns the whole family.”

Fairr said he would be delighted, and hung up the phone, his heart thumping. An hour later he was on a suburban train, heading for the Donohough Long Island estate. But this time it was the chauffeur who met him at the station, not Donohough in person. And anxious-eyed Katie met him at the door, and said, “Mr. Fairr? The family’s waiting for you.”

The family was waiting. All the family.

Melville Fairr paused in the doorway of the chintz-hung living room that somehow managed to seem sunny in spite of the dreary midwinter rainfall outside. He had a curious feeling that he had been unexpectedly catapulted into the past, into a scene of more than twenty years ago.

Only the background for the scene should have been the famous pale-green drawing room of the Countess d’Abazoli, and the members of the family should have been twenty years younger.

Otherwise, the picture was the same. There were the Countess d’Abazoli and her husband, a striking couple. There was William James Donohough II, in a gray suit and a specially woven gray-and-blue tie; his wife born Minnie, white-haired and elegant; Billy Donohough, clumsy, friendly, and happy-faced; Muriel, the beautiful; Robert Emmett, with his pilot’s eyes; John Patrick, looking thin, scornful, and sardonic; Sally, in a comfortable chair, her cane beside her, wearing a sleazy purple dress with stains down the front; Sarah White, neat, efficient, and inconspicuous, at her side; and Lawyer Reynolds, his plump pink face sagging a little now, but with his brief case on his knees.

It was the scene as Martin Reynolds had described it. No — not quite the same. Sally had been standing in the doorway, looking scornfully at them all, leaning on young Sarah White’s arm. Now she was in a chair, watching the doorway.

There was another difference. Someone had come into the group, and everyone was looking at him. Someone, an alien, a shadowy little man in gray, named Melville Fairr. They were looking at him with what seemed almost like suspicion.

“Mr. Fairr —” Martin Reynolds began. “It has come to the attention of the family that, for some time prior to his death, you were employed by Mr. Donohough’s foster-brother, Mr. Hammer . . .”
Melville Fairr laughed softly, and Lawyer Reynolds broke off, staring at him with a shocked face and anxious eyes that seemed to be saying: Believe me, Mr. Fairr, calling you in isn’t any of my doing; the family insisted on it and on my being here. I assure you, Mr. Fairr, I trust we will continue to be friends...

“What the hell are you laughing at?” Robert Emmett demanded.

“Just a silly thought that ran through my mind,” Melville Fairr said. “When I heard that word, foster-brother.”

He saw the members of the family glance uneasily at each other. He knew they had the same silly thought. On that previous meeting of the whole family and Lawyer Reynolds, they had been principally concerned with proving that Jethro Hammer was not their foster-brother.

“Let’s get to the point,” William James Donohough said, a faint flush on his cheeks. “There’s a number of things we’d like to know, Mr. Fairr.”

“There’s a number of things I’d like to know, too,” Melville Fairr said. He sat down on the nearest chair. “First among them, who murdered Jethro Hammer?”

“Nonsense,” the Countess said. “This whole situation is — absurd.” Her handsome face was pale. “Who would want to murder poor Jethro?”

“Who did?” Fairr said gently.

Mrs. William James Donohough II looked unhappy and a little offended. “Mr. Fairr, according to the inquest —”

“We find that the deceased came to his death by falling down an unlighted flight of cellar stairs,” Melville Fairr quoted.

“Well?” the Countess challenged.

“Well, did he?” Fairr asked.

“Look here,” William James Donohough said. “Do you have any evidence to the contrary? You’re a detective.”

“The evidence was given at the inquest,” Fairr said. “There was dust on the stairs. The lights weren’t turned on.”

“But the coroner’s verdict —” Minnie Donohough murmured, delicately.

“— was accidental death,” Fairr finished for her. “Can’t you forget about Jethro Hammer and let him rest in peace?” He looked squarely at Sarah White as he spoke. She paled and turned her face away.

“Damn it,” Robert Emmett said, “I like to see things handled straight. Jethro hired you because he was afraid he was going to be murdered. And he was murdered. If you couldn’t prevent, by God, the least you can do is find out who murdered him and see to it he hangs for it!”

“Murderers aren’t hanged in New York State,” John Patrick said. “They’re sent to the chair.” He turned his haggard, handsome face toward Melville Fairr. “Who was it? Do you know?”

“Can you find out?” William James Donohough II added.

“Is that why you asked me here?” Fairr said. “To find the murderer?”
“My dear Mr. Fairr,” Martin Reynolds said. He cleared his throat again. “The family has empowered me to offer you a more than generous sum, if you will undertake—”

“I will undertake to find his murderer,” Melville Fairr said, “but not for the payment of this—generous sum. I’ve already been paid to so do.”


He rose then, and stood looking at them. “Jethro Hammer knew he was going to die,” he said, his voice very quiet. “He knew he was going to be murdered.” The room was deadly, frighteningly still. “There was something that he had to accomplish, before he died. I don’t know—yet—if he accomplished it or not.”

William James Donohough II said, “Look here, Mr. Fairr. There’s something you ought to know. Late in the afternoon, on the day Jethro died, he telephoned me.”

There was a stir in the room. Robert Emmett looked up and said, “That’s damned funny. Because—” The Countess caught her breath and said, “Will! He—” John Patrick’s sardonic mask dropped from his face for a moment. He leaned forward, put his elbows on his knees, and said, “Jethro called me, too. He said—”

Melville Fairr looked at the people who had once been the five Donahues. Only Sally sat without a word, her mottled old face impassive. “He called up all of you,” Melville Fairr said. “And what did he say?” The older four of the young Donahues all began to speak at once, and Sally, silent, turned white.

“It was a—social call,” William James Donohough II said at last. “Funny thing. You’d have thought—we’d been close to each other, on the best of terms, for all these years. That we’d spent holidays together, and exchanged Christmas presents, and called up every now and then to say, ‘How are you?’ ”

The Countess d’Abazoli said softly, “I knew his voice. It had been a long time, but I knew his voice. He said, ‘I’m sorry I haven’t called you before—but I’ve been busy—’ ”

“That’s a damned funny thing,” Robert Emmett said. “That’s almost exactly what he said to me!”

“He said—” John Patrick paused. “He said, ‘How have you been? Can’t we get together for lunch one of these days?’ ”

Sally said nothing.

“I can’t explain it,” Melville Fairr said. “Because—so far—I don’t understand it.” He paused. “Jethro Hammer always kept me paid a month ahead. It was, I think, so that when he—died—I’d have a month in which to find his murderer. I’ll do that, of course.”

“You’d better,” Robert Emmett roared. “That’s what we called you here about. Find the son of a bitch that murdered our brother Jethro, and I’ll give you every God-damned cent I have in the world!”
JETHRO HAMMER

Fairrr opened his mouth to speak, and then closed it again. What he'd been about to say would have been a rebuke not only to Robert Emmett, but to everyone in the room. "If you'd ever called him your brother Jethro, he might never have been murdered at all."

There was no point in saying it now, everyone was thinking it.

He said instead, "I'll do the best I can." He looked around the room and continued, "You must understand. There are certain — mechanical matters to be considered, when a man has been murdered. I refer to the matter of alibis. If you don't mind —"

All the people in the room looked at each other, startled.

"You mean, one of us?" John Patrick said incredulously.

There was a long and painful silence. The members of the family looked at each other furtively and suspiciously, each wondering about the other. As long as they lived, Fairrr realized reluctantly, they would look at each other like that unless he found the murderer of Jethro Hammer.

Martin Reynolds coughed apologetically. "There was a gentlemen from the police department who made the same inquiry," he said. "A Mr. Fowler. Al Fowler, I believe his name was. He was given statements regarding alibis, Mr. Fairrr, and I am sure that if you check with him, he will be glad to give you any information you may desire."

Good old reliable Al Fowler, Fairrr thought. The verdict at the coroner's inquest hadn't stopped him.

"Thank you," he said. "I'll get in touch with Mr. Fowler." He looked once more around the room. "One thing more, if you don't mind. Someone sent a bunch of field daisies to Jethro Hammer's funeral. Who was it?"

No one answered. Everyone looked bewildered. John Patrick said, "Who cares?"

"I care," Melville Fairrr said. "But never mind. Perhaps it isn't important."

But he knew, in his heart, that it was important

Was someone in the chintz-hung living room lying to him, was someone acting a skillful role? He hoped, as he'd never hoped before in his life, that no one was.

"Mr. Fairrr," Robert Emmett said gruffly, "I'm sorry as hell if I insulted you. My brothers and sisters are a bunch of dopes, but I should have known better."

"We didn't understand," the Countess said, her eyes soft. "It was a shock, in a way — to realize — you — Jethro —" Her voice broke. "I used to bathe him and dress him. I taught him how to eat with a spoon."

"Damn it," William James Donohough II said. "You know how it is. If somebody did murder Jethro. Oh, sure, we had a few differences of opinion." The scene when Jethro walked out of the house, after Old Will's death, the twenty years' absence, the lawsuit, and the more than twenty years of silence had become "a few differences of opinion" now. "If you can find out who it was —" His wife touched his cheek soothingly and said, "Now, Will, don't excite yourself."

"For God's sake, Mr. Fairrr," John Patrick said, "do everything you can." Tears were streaming down his lean old cheeks.
There was a moment of embarrassed silence, the silence that follows when everyone has said too much and yet not enough. Then Sally rose and said, “If you’re going back to town, Mr. Fairr, I’ll give you a lift. Take my arm please, Sarah.” She shuffled uncertainly toward the door.

Melville Fairr looked at them all once more. Was someone there lying to him? “I’ll do my best,” he said, very softly. “You see, I was very fond of Jethro Hammer.” He turned and walked out of the room as quietly and inconspicuously as he had entered it.

The Donohough chauffeur drove a handsome mauve sedan up to the doorway, stepped out, and stood by, disapprovingly, while Sarah White helped Sally Donahue down the steps.

It was difficult for Sally Donahue to negotiate the steps. She clung to Sarah White with one hand, and to the railing with the other, and felt her way cautiously. Fairr offered his arm and met with a furious glance from Sarah White.

Getting Sally into the sedan was even more difficult, but Sarah White managed it single-handed. The fat, mottled-faced woman sprawled over the seat and closed her eyes.

“You’d better ride up in front, Mr. Fairr,” Sarah White said quietly, sliding into the driver’s seat.

The Donohough chauffeur closed the doors with an expressive glance toward the woman in the back seat, and a friendly wink to Mr. Melville Fairr. The sedan leaped forward with a sudden jerk. Then Sarah White swung it capably down the driveway and into the main road. In the back seat, Sally Donahue began to snore.

“This has been very difficult for her,” Sarah White said, in a coldly defensive voice. “And she had a drink before she left the house.”

A couple of drinks, Melville Fairr thought. Three or four, in fact, quick ones. He said, “I don’t blame her. I could have done with a drink or two myself.”

Sarah White flashed him one grateful glance and said nothing more. They’d reached the approach to the Queensboro Bridge when Sally Donahue stopped snoring. Halfway across the bridge, she spoke.

“Sarah, is there any place around here we can stop for a drink?”

“There’s Hoppy’s,” Sarah said. “Just off Third Avenue.”

“Hoppy’s it is,” Sally said thickly. “I’d like to buy Mr. Fairr a drink.”

Sarah White swung the car into Third Avenue, drove a few blocks, and turned into a side street. She parked in front of what looked like a third-rate saloon, and this time she let Melville Fairr help steer Sally Donahue across the sidewalk.

Hoppy’s was dingy and underlighted, but, fortunately, not crowded. Sally squeezed into one of the brown painted booths and leaned her fat elbows on the table. A waiter with a dirty apron came to take their order.

“Double gin,” Sally muttered.

“A glass of ginger ale,” Sarah said crisply.
“A double gin for me, too,” Melville Fairr said.
The waiter stared at him curiously. His eyes said, “Sure you wouldn’t like a nice hot cup of tea, Mr. Fairr?” Melville Fairr had been in Hoppy’s before. Then he half-dropped an eyelid toward Fairr, and went away.

Sally gulped down her double gin. Then she stared at Melville Fairr, and said, “He wrote me a letter. I’m damned if I’ll show it to you. But I’ll tell you what he said. He said he wanted a date with me. Get it? A date with me. He wrote — wait a minute, Mr. Fairr, I’ll remember every word.” She leaned back and closed her eyes.

“He said — ‘Sally darling: Forgive me, I’ve been too busy to call you. But I’m so anxious to see you, soon. May I come to see you, tomorrow?’” She paused, pushed a stray lock of hair back from her forehead, and said, “That’s all he wrote. But why didn’t he write it before? Twenty years before? Forty years before?”

“You know why,” Fairr said.

In some inner eye, he saw Sally Donahue and Jethro Hammer standing in a doorway, a lovely girl with curly brown hair and laughing eyes; a pale, dark-haired young man who carried a lace and satin valentine in the pocket nearest his heart. In his heart he heard that young Jethro Hammer saying good-by. Not, “I’ll be back,” not, “Wait for me,” just plain, “Good-by.” And they hadn’t met again, not ever.

Involuntarily he asked, savagely, “Why didn’t you call him back?”

Sally Donahue propped her head on her hand and said, “Why didn’t he come back, if he wanted to?”

“Miss Donahue,” Fairr said in his most ordinary voice, “can you suggest any reason why he should have written to you, after all this time?”

She stared at him from under her wrinkled old eyelids. Her loose old lips twisted into a sardonic smile. “You’re a private detective, Mr. Fairr. Why don’t you find that out?” She nodded her head toward the bartender and pointed to her empty glass.

Sarah White’s eyes implored Melville Fairr to go away. He nodded at her, smiled reassuringly, and rose.

“Miss White,” he said, “there are certain things — you were going to show me —”

Before Sarah White could answer, Sally Donahue lifted her head again. “I know what you want to see. All Jethro’s private papers. No one knows where they are except Sarah here. And she won’t show them to you unless I tell her. And I don’t know any good reason why I should.”

“He was murdered,” Fairr said. “That’s reason enough.”

“I have no proof he was murdered,” she said. The bartender put a glass in front of her; she emptied it. “Mr. Fairr, I’ll make you a bargain. If you can come to me with the proof that Jethro was murdered, I’ll tell Sarah to turn over everything to you.”

“Do you want me to prove it to your mind,” Melville Fairr said softly, “or to your heart?” He heard Sarah White draw a long, slow breath.

“I’m a smart old woman, Mr. Fairr,” she told him. “You’d better prove it to my mind.”
Because, Melville Fairr reflected, she already knew it in her heart.

"It’s a bargain," he said, smiling at her. "Shall we shake on it?"

She held out her flabby old hand and said, "Sure. And we'll drink on it. Waiter!"

They drank on it. Sally Donahue's head drooped. Sarah White said, under her breath, "Why don't you go home? You can get a taxi at Third Avenue."

"You can manage all right?" Fairr said, glancing at the half-sleeping Sally Donahue. Sarah White's lovely eyes shot fire and hatred at him for a moment. "I have before. She's tired, that's all." Then, in a milder tone, "She meant that, you know. About proof."

"I know she did," Melville Fairr said, fastening his overcoat. "I'll deliver her the proof. And then you'll show me the private files I want to see. Including the things you've never told her about."

But it was nearly a month before he could manage it. There were too many things to do first. For instance, the matter of alibis.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

(From Al Fowler's Records)

DONOHOUGH, WM. J., broker. Left his office at approximately 5:45 P.M. Stopped to give birthday gift (box of candy and ten-dollar check) to girl at switchboard. Was expected to meet friends at club (Mr. M. Reynolds, Mr. J. C. Burke, and Mr. Lewis Eberhart). Did not show up. Telephoned Mr. Reynolds at approximately 7:15 and cancelled engagement. Made telephone call to Mrs. Donohough at same time. Mrs. Donohough being out, left the following message. "I may not be home till late. Tell Minnie not to worry about me." (Note: message was written on telephone pad by Miss Kate Flanagan, housekeeper.) Engaged taxi at corner of Fifty-ninth Street and Central Park West at approximately 11:45 and was driven home. Mr. Donohough's statement follows, quote:

If you have to know, I didn’t feel like sitting around playing bridge with three damned old fuddy-duddies. I felt restless. I just wandered around. Got some dinner in a saloon on Fulton Street. Took the subway up to the park and walked around in the cold, thinking how damned inefficiently the world’s run. And I felt restless, I tell you. Got pretty cold and tired, and called a cab and went home. That’s all.

Q. Mr. Donohough, do you remember if at any time you walked near Jethro Hammer's home?

A. Might have. I just walked all over the park. He lived near it.

Q. Did you meet anyone during the evening who might identify you?

A. Didn’t meet a soul I knew.
Donohough, Mrs. Wm. J. (Minnie), housewife. Had dinner on tray early, approximately 6 p.m., as was expected at Red Cross meeting at eight. Telephoned chairman of meeting (Mrs. Camille Gerke) and made excuse of slight attack of influenza. Had personal car (light coupé) brought around at approximately 7, and drove away, alone. Stopped at service station to have left rear tire checked. (Statement of service station attendant attached.) Returned home approximately 12:30 and ordered hot milk brought up to room. Statement follows, quote:

I see no reason why I should have to explain my actions on that or any other night to you, or anyone else. I didn’t feel like going to a Red Cross meeting. The fact is, I felt a sudden impulse to go into town and talk to my sister-in-law, the Countess d’Abazoli. A purely personal matter.

Q. Did you see your sister-in-law that night?
A. No. When I arrived at her house, I suddenly felt that my reason for seeing her was rather absurd, and I drove away again.

Q. Where did you drive?
A. Oh, I don’t know. I just drove around.

Q. Mrs. Donohough, what was the reason for this impulsive visit to your sister-in-law?
A. It’s none of your business, but I might as well tell you. Maggie and I never got along well, from the time we were girls in high school. I had a sudden feeling that here we were, old women, and we ought to make up all our past differences and be friends. I told you, it was just a sudden impulse.

Q. Then why did you drive away without seeing your sister-in-law?
A. Because I had a funny idea, when I stopped the coupé in front of her house, that she felt the same thing. That the next time we met, we’d talk like friends, and not be catty to each other.

Q. And the next time you met?
A. We were friends.

Donohough, William (Billy), engineer. Worked late in experimental department of Donohough Aircraft Corporation. Left plant at 6:24 p.m. (Gate Record). No record of later return or departure, but claims to have returned, worked until sometime after midnight, and gone straight home. Statement follows, quote:

How do I know where I was, and when? I worked until I got hungry and then I started home. Five, or six, or seven, I guess. Going out the gate, I got this idea. Suddenly. Just like that. I grabbed something to eat at the dog wagon. Then I beat it back to my office and started making drawings.

Q. Did you notify anyone that you were working late? Your wife, for instance?
A. Huh? Gosh. No. Guess I forgot. She isn’t sore at me, though.

Q. How is it that you returned to the plant without being checked in at the gate and left it again without being checked out?
A. Oh, I guess I just walked in and out absentmindedly. Or maybe I used
the private entrance. I can’t remember. I had my mind on this idea.

Q. The idea didn’t have anything to do with the death of Jethro Hammer, did it?

A. Hammer? Hammer? Oh, that guy. Gosh, that’s right. He is dead, isn’t he? Somebody was talking about it at lunch today. Whatever happened to him?

Q. Mr. Donohough, just what was this idea that you had?

A. Well, you see, it’s like this. Now you take the fulchronograph, the instrument that measures the power of lightning. If the same principle was applied using the principle of —

[Testimony not taken beyond this point.]

Donohough, Lucy (wife of William), housewife. Declares not unusual for William (Billy) Donohough to work late. When he did not return at the customary time, she attended to her family duties and retired early. Statement follows, quote:

If I waited dinner for Billy every time he came home late, we’d all starve to death. He gets one of these sudden ideas and has to work on it. I held dinner until seven, then the children and I sat down. After dinner, I helped Maggie plan a party — she’s fifteen, and those things are so important to her — and scolded John and Patrick about their homework. Then I hemmed up Lucy’s new dress, and went to bed.

Q. Is that your usual routine, Mrs. Donohough?

A. Usual? Good Lord, with seven children in the house, nothing is usual.

Q. When did you hear about the death of Jethro Hammer?

A. It was in the papers. That poor old man! What a blessing he’s at rest! What a shame he never married and had a family of his own!

D’Abazoli, Countess Enrico (née Margaret Donahue), decorator. Dined at home at approximately seven. Worked in study for a short time on projected article for House and Garden. Decided to go for walk. Left house at approximately 9:30, returned at approximately midnight. Claims to have been at the zoo. Statement follows, quote:

I’m doing a dining room in black and silver for Carlotta Cline — the actress, you know. It’s going to be a really magnificent thing. All around the walls these shiny black trees on dull silver paper. Then it occurred to me. There should be leopards skulking around the trees, the same motif to be carried out in heavy embroidery on the linens. I was making just a few sketches, and suddenly I felt an urge to look at leopards. Real leopards, you know. So I just threw on my coat and walked over to the zoo. I gave one of the attendants five dollars, and he let me into the leopard house. I stood there for hours, watching them pace up and down. Then I went home.

[Penciled Note: An attempt was made to check this alibi with the at-
tendant in question. It develops that he was fired three days ago for intoxication, and there appears to be no trace of him.]

Q. You just wanted to look at leopards, is that it?
A. Quite right. Didn’t you ever get an urge like that?
Q. Can anyone testify as to the time you left and re-entered your house?
A. I doubt it. I haven’t even a ghost of an alibi. But that doesn’t mean I killed him.

[Testimony not recorded beyond this point.]

D’Abazoli, Count Enrico (husband of Margaret), no occupation. Dined, with wife, approximately 7. Went for walk after dinner, returned approximately 10. Retired early.

I walk for a while after dinner, after every dinner. At my age, you understand, it is necessary that the exercise be taken in moderation. I walk to the park. I walk down Fifth Avenue a little bit. I walk back. I return, my wife is gone out. I do my exercises, I take a book, and I go to bed.

Q. You didn’t sneak out of the house while your wife was away, cross the park, and murder old Jethro Hammer, did you?
A. I? I had no quarrel with poor Jethro Hammer.
Q. What did you think about your wife going out to look at leopards and not coming back until midnight? Huh?
A. That? I think, my wife is unpredictable. All women are unpredictable.

Donohough, John Patrick, writer. Had dinner at Bianca’s Neapolitan Restaurant at 77 Ramm Street, approximately 7:30. According to testimony of Mr. Bianca, restaurant owner, he appeared uneasy and nervous. Ate lightly and left early, approximately 8:15. Went home, worked on book. Statement follows, quote:

I had work to do, understand? You’d be uneasy and nervous yourself, under the same circumstances. Something I had to put down on paper, quick. I was in the groove, but good. Look, I’ll show you a couple of pages of it —

Q. Mr. Donohough, if you don’t mind. Do you have an alibi for the time during which Jethro Hammer met his death?
A. Hell, no. Oh, here it is. This is the paragraph I want to read to you. He meets this girl that wants to sing in the opera, and —

Q. Did you murder Jethro Hammer?
A. Me? Do I look like a murderer? Look, are you going to listen to this, or aren’t you? They meet in this cheap saloon, see, and he says . . .

Donohough, Robert Emmett, Industrialist. Dined at home with wife, daughter, and son-in-law, approximately 7. Following quarrel with son-in-law, drove out to private
landing field on Long Island, took off in experimental plane named Trixie III, and was gone for approximately two hours and fifteen minutes. On return, drove to lunchroom and bar approximately three miles from landing field, called his chauffeur, and sat drinking until said chauffeur arrived to drive him home. Statement follows, quote:

Who does that guy think he is, telling me I’m too old to fly a plane I designed myself? Now that night. I felt low as a snake’s navel anyway, and none of your business why. He makes a crack that makes me sore. What does he mean, I’m too old to fly? I slammed the hell out of the place and drove out to the field, and I flew, brother, way out over the ocean and back again, just to show him, and everybody else, and God too, in case he was looking, that I could do it. And then I landed and had a couple of drinks and went home.

Q. Is that your alibi, sir, for the night when Jethro Hammer died?
A. Alibi? What do I need an alibi for? Look, you get out of here quick, or...

[Testimony breaks off here. Penciled note: Mr. R. E. Donohough proves to be a difficult subject for questioning. Statements of members of his family follow.]

Donohough, Trixie, Why shouldn’t Pops fly his own plane, day or night, if he wants to? It’s his life, isn’t it?

Joe Brookes, The darned old fool. He’s going to break his neck one of these days, doing stunts like that.

Brookes, Mrs. Joe, Gosh, I wish grandpop would be more careful. But he does get a kick out of it. Besides, he can fly circles around most of these kids.

Reed, Art, Yes, I’m Robert Donohough’s chauffeur. Yes, I picked him up at Skip’s Café. He was skunk drunk, and why not? Believe me, when I get his age—

Donahue, Sally, occupation not given. Spent entire evening at home. Retired early. Statement follows, quote:

Look at me. Would you say I could go running all over town at all hours? I had my dinner, I read a good book, and I went to bed.

Q. Miss Donahue, would you mind telling me—

[Penciled Note: Miss Donahue refused to answer any questions. As a special favor to an important member of the police department, she was not imposed upon.]

Schuyler, Peter, no occupation. Lunched with Sally Donahue. Took 3:10 p.m. Greyhound bus to Schuyler’s Mills, arriving at approximately 5 p.m. Was driven out to old
Schuyler home by local taxi. Same taxi picked him up at approximately 2 P.M. next
day, drove to bus station at Schuyler’s Mills. Took 4:05 P.M. Greyhound bus, arriving
New York approximately 6 P.M. Learned of Jethro Hammer’s death from newspaper.
Went directly to home of Miss Sally Donahue from bus station. Statement follows,
quote:

There were certain family matters I felt I must discuss with my uncle. Rather
difficult to explain to an outsider — Oh, well, if it’s necessary —! My uncle, I fear, is quite mad. He’s always been a bit eccentric, of course. Possibly a family taint. One never knows about these very old families. My
great-aunt Abigail was quite definitely insane, poor old soul. Had to be
locked in her room when visitors came, and all that sort of thing. Now my
poor old uncle gets the crazy notion to sell the family estate. Can you
imagine it? Why, it’s been in the family since before the Revolutionary War.
It’s a drafty, beastly old place to live in, but you wouldn’t want to see
strangers live in it. With a little money, it could be thoroughly restored,
without losing any of its character or tradition. There’s always been the old
Schuyler house, and Schuyler’s Mills, and a Peter Schuyler. That’s why,
when Uncle got this insane notion of selling the place, I rushed right up
there to talk him out of it. When I came back to town, I learned of the
death of this Hammer fellow. Must have been something of a shock to poor
Sally Donahue; I gather he was something of an old beau of hers.

Q. Then you were out of the city on the night of Jethro Hammer’s death?
A. That’s right.

Q. You can produce proof you were at the Schuyler home that night?
A. Proof? Why, I suppose so, if it’s necessary. There’s my uncle, if you
want to question him. Mr. Lawrence Schuyler, Post Office Box 169, Schuy-
ler’s Mills. And he has a handyman, who carried my bags in from the taxi.

[Penultimate Note: Checked alibi with Mr. Lawrence Schuyler. Difficult per-
to interview. Aged, quite near-sighted, and rather childish. States that
Peter Schuyler arrived and departed at times corresponding to his statement.
Tells of having received letter offering large sum for Schuyler home, but
unable to locate letter. Handyman’s story agrees with statement by Mr.
Peter Schuyler.]

Dane, Mary (née Muriel Donohough). In private life, Mrs. Arthur Dawes, actress.
Appearing in play, Seven Slayers, at Behan Theater. Comes on stage for first time
approximately 8:45 P.M. No opportunity to leave theater until after last appearance,
approximately 10:30, as she is going on and off stage all the time. Left the theater
approximately 10:45. Had appointment to meet husband and some friends at night
club. Did not show up. Was at apartment and asleep when husband returned home
approximately 1:30 A.M. Statement follows, quote:

Now look here, my friend. I don’t think it’s any of your business what I
did that night, or any other night. But let’s not get nasty about it. I wanted
to get off by myself for a while. Look. Try to imagine. Night after night, you say the same words, make the same gestures, take the same steps across the stage. Same faces looking at you. Oh, I know, it's a different audience every night, but the same faces, understand? Then, night after night you leave the theater, go to the same kind of places, with the same kind of people. God! Now please, my friend, I love Art and he loves me. We've been married twenty years, but for the love of Mike, don't tell any reporters how long it's been. Only — well, that night I just got an urge to break the routine. Different places, different people. My car wasn't there, and I couldn't see a taxi anywhere. I just thought, what the hell. I walked around a little, and had a drink in some bar on Eighth Avenue, and walked some more, and got some food, and went home to bed. Now, is that all you want to know?

Q. Miss Dane, Mrs. Dawes, I mean, what's the name of the, uh, saloon?
A. Oh, I don't know. I didn't pay any attention.
Q. And where did you stop for supper?
A. At the Automat.
Q. If you don't mind. Did anyone see you — uh — recognize — you?
A. Probably a few thousand people saw me. But I doubt like the devil if anyone recognized me. I didn't have any make-up on, you know. And as far as remembering me is concerned, your guess is as good as mine. I bet you money, nobody'll remember me ten years after this play closes.

Dawes, Arthur (husband of Mary Dane), no occupation. Spent evening (approximately 8:15 to 10:30 p.m.) in conference with Hollywood producer named Riegelman concerning possibilities of Mary Dane's next picture. Conference held in bar of St. Regis Hotel. Mr. Dawes was next seen at the Stork Club at approximately 11:15, when he joined several friends there. Miss Dane (Mrs. Dawes) was expected to join Mr. Dawes and friends, but did not appear. Approximately 1:15 a.m., Mr. Dawes rose, paid the check, and left. (Statement of waiter attached.) Mr. Dawes arrived home (apartment on Central Park West) at approximately 1:30 a.m.

Statement of Mr. Dawes follows, quote:

I can see no reason why you should annoy me with all these questions. Have I committed any crime? I did not accompany my wife to the theater on the night in question. After all, I've seen Seven Slayers around two hundred times, not counting rehearsals. In case you're interested, following our conference my good friend Mr. Riegelman signed her to play the lead in Seven Slayers on the screen. That's how I was wasting my time! Then I joined some friends at the Stork Club for a drink. After that I went straight home. Itsy was sleeping, so I went quietly to bed without waking her. Anything more you'd like to know?
Q. Who is "Itsy," Mr. Dawes?
A. Oh, that's a pet name I have for Muriel.
Q. How long have you and Miss Dane — beg your pardon, Mrs. Dawes — been married?
A. Oh, about twenty years. Why? Is there any law against staying in love with the same girl for twenty years?
Q. Mr. Dawes, did you know a Mr. Jethro Hammer?
A. Hammer? Hammer? Oh, Lord, yes. That’s Itsy’s uncle. Well, practically her uncle. He was adopted, or something. Some kind of rift in the family, as I remember. Don’t think she’d ever seen him.
Q. Because, Mr. Dawes, Mr. Hammer is dead.
A. Was he murdered? Itsy’s uncle? Great God in Heaven! With her appearing in Seven Slayers! What a publicity tie-up! And this screen contract! Just a minute — I’ve got to call Riegleman. I’ve got to call her press agent. I’ve got to call a lawyer —

[Note: Questioning broke off at this point.]

Little Mr. Melville Fairr chuckled as he read the pages so carefully taken down in shorthand and transcribed neatly by Al Fowler’s aide. The methodical Fowler hadn’t missed a thing, nor had he been deceived by the verdict at the inquest. But then, Fairr hadn’t expected him to be. There was a bulldog quality to Al Fowler’s mind.

There were more names in Al Fowler’s record. Young Billy Donohough, the football hero; Betsy Dawes; even Katie Flanagan. All the Robert Emmett Donohough family. He glanced over the pages with lessening interest. Fowler had checked on everyone who had, in even the most remote way, touched Jethro Hammer’s life. All save one. He, Melville Fairr, was going to check on that man himself.

Then he came to two last entries that quickened his interest.

White, Sarah, secretary to Jethro Hammer. Her employer had left the office approximately thirty minutes before. She remained, in case any late telephone calls came in. Took subway to Seventy-second Street, had dinner at Friendly Inn Tea Room, leaving at approximately 8:15. (Note: Statement substantiated at this point by waitress in tea room.) Walked home to rooming house, let herself in with own key, went directly to room. Read for several hours and went to bed.

[Note: this statement does not agree with statement of landlady, who declares she took an extra blanket up to Miss White’s room at approximately 9:30 and found no one there.]

Statement follows, quote:

I see no reason for these stupid questions. And I am sure this procedure is entirely illegal. I told you what I did and where I went that night.

Q. Miss White, your landlady, Mrs. Josephine Piazza, states that when she went up to your room at approximately 9:30 —
A. Mrs. Piazza is a very absent-minded woman. Besides, what if I was out at that time? Was that breaking any law?
Q. Please. If you'll only co-operate with us —
A. Stupid nonsense.
Q. All right. Then tell me, why is it that the first thing you did after receiving the news of Jethro Hammer's death was to go out and have your hair done and dress up in new clothes?
A. Because I knew Mr. Hammer's death would be interesting to the newspapers, and I thought photographers might come around. Now, will you get out of this office?
Q. If you please —
A. Good-by. Or I'll call the police.
Q. May I remind you, Miss White, that we're —
A. I said good-by!

[No further testimony taken.]

Melville Fairr grinned. He wished he might have been a mouse in the wall while Al Fowler was questioning Sarah White. He folded the papers neatly and put them back in their envelope, so that they could be replaced in Al Fowler's private file without anyone except himself and the file clerk knowing that they had been missing overnight. And Fairr had once done a favor for the file clerk's uncle-in-law.

Al Fowler had evidently figured out method. He'd done pretty well with alibis. Fairr wondered how he was doing with motive.

There was one recurrent theme running though all the statements. He wondered if Al Fowler had noticed it. "I felt restless." — "I had a sudden feeling." — "I got this idea. Suddenly." — "I felt an urge to look at leopards." — "He appeared uneasy and nervous." — "I felt low as a snake's navel anyway"; — "That night I just got an urge to break the routine."

The night of Jethro Hammer's death there had been restlessness, uneasiness, depression. Melville Fairr suddenly found himself hoping Al Fowler hadn't noticed the theme. Because it would worry Al Fowler, who was, for all his method and efficiency, a superstitious man. And Al Fowler couldn't know the reason.

One day, after so many years' silence, Jethro Hammer had contacted all those who had once been the young Donahues. And that night he had died by violence.

It hadn't been a dark, supernatural premonition of his death that had made the young Donahues restless and uneasy. It had been that first word, in so long a time, from the nameless orphan who had been their brother.

Alibis. Evidence. Tangible things. Those weren't what Melville Fairr wanted to deal with now.

The next day he smuggled the record back into Al Fowler's office and went to see Paul Monte.
CHAPTER SIXTEEN

IT HAD LONG BEEN A QUESTION whether actors portraying big-shot gamblers on the screen copied Paul Monte, or whether Paul Monte copied them. Melville Fairr inclined to the former theory, for no screen portrayal had ever been as fabulous or fantastic as Paul Monte himself.

Fairr had no trouble getting to see the man, though Paul Monte was ringed round with bodyguards and lived behind sliding steel doors. Because, five years before, Melville Fairr had done Paul Monte a favor, in a set of circumstances which cannot be told about now or, perhaps, ever.

Fairr looked at Paul Monte now and saw a paunchy man, well past middle age, with a round, brown face, heavy gray hair, a smiling mouth. A very ordinary, amiable, aging man. But the dark eyes were still gay and bright.

“You’ve changed,” Melville Fairr said, “except for the eyes,” and then could have bitten off his tongue.

“Changed?” Paul Monte said. “My dear Mr. Fairr, how is it you can be so cruel? Surely it has not been more than five years. Have I aged so much?”

Melville Fairr closed his eyes again for a moment, made a quick decision, and plunged right on, “I mean—you’ve changed since the night when you tried to escape from the train on the way to your execution.” He silently counted five and opened his eyes.

Paul Monte was laughing. “You come right to the point, do you not, Mr. Fairr? I had wondered, Mr. Fairr, if you would make the mistake of attempting to conceal from me the fact that you knew I had been Pablo Montejo.”

“I spoke on an impulse,” Melville Fairr said. He decided against asking Paul Monte how he’d known.

“I have changed, outwardly,” Paul Monte said. “At heart, I am the same.” He sighed deeply and shook his handsome old head. “All that was so long ago. Strange, that I can remember it all with so little difficulty. That journey by boat. It was a journey through hell, Mr. Fairr. By the grace of the good God, our poor Señor Nadie remembered nothing of it.”

Fairr said nothing. In some strange manner Paul Monte knew the purpose of his visit, knew that he, Melville Fairr, had been told the circumstances of that terrible journey. This was a time when it was best to listen in silence.

“I give you my assurance, Mr. Fairr,” the gambling and vice czar continued pleasantly, “I did not push poor Señor Nadie down those unlighted cellar stairs. If I had wished to kill him, Mr. Fairr, I would have used some other means, and a long time ago. We have lived in the same city for something like twenty years, you may remember.”

“I believe you,” Fairr said. He paused and said, “You read the newspaper stories about the inquest. But you, too, know in your heart that the man was murdered.”
Paul Monte nodded slowly and thoughtfully. His dark eyes turned an infinitesimal shade darker. "I know a great many things, Mr. Fairr. For a long time, he was as my brother. He said nothing of himself to me, I said nothing of myself to him. For, on my part, what had I to say? Ambitions. To escape from prison. To go somewhere and make much money, dishonestly if possible. I was born to be a great thief, Mr. Fairr. I do not refer to some curious superstition of my birth, nor to some scientific phenomenon concerned with blood chemistry, nor to heredity, nor to psychological factors in my youth. You observe, Mr. Fairr, that I have done some reading since I was a simple-hearted Mexican criminal escaped from the penitentiary. Or do I bore you, Mr. Fairr?"

"Far from it," Fairr said.

"It is, then, Mr. Fairr," Paul Monte went on, "that circumstances conspired against me and for me. Otherwise, I would never have become a thief and a murderer; never been caught, convicted, and sentenced to death. But on the other side, Mr. Fairr, otherwise I would never have had my sentence changed to life imprisonment, I would never have escaped, reached New York City, made my fortune, and married a good wife. But for him —"

Paul Monte paused, rose, put his hands in the pockets of his velveteen smoking jacket, and stared at Melville Fairr.

He said softly, "How many times did I not think of visiting him, of telephoning to him, of writing to him! Only to say this, 'My good Señor Nadie, this is your old friend Pablo, who shared your cell and your rations, who escaped with you, who helped to nurse you when it seemed that you were about to die. I am still your friend Pablo, let us visit together, come to my house, my wife will cook for you with her own hands, we will drink wine together and talk of the old days, and drink many toasts to Carlos and Dominga, bless their names.' I should have said that to him, and I did not."

"And at the end, Mr. Fairr," Paul Monte said, in a very low voice, "it was he who spoke to me, and on the day before he died. He said" — Paul Monte paused, and swallowed hard — "he said, 'Pablo, my old friend, it has been too long since we last met.' I knew his voice. It had been more than twenty years, but I knew his voice, Mr. Fairr. I said, 'Amigo Nadie,' and he said, 'We must meet soon and talk of the old days, and drink toasts in good wine to Carlos and Dominga.' And the next day I saw in the newspapers that he was dead, and I knew that he was murdered."

"It was like this, Mr. Fairr," he said, as though he were talking to himself. "That good Señor O'Rourke, bless his name, came to me while we were at Bailey's Lagoon. He told me that Dominga's money had been washed away in the hurricane and that it was necessary that she turn me over to the authorities to obtain the reward money, which he would then divide with her. I raved and raged like an insane man, Señor Fairr, I swore seventeen kinds of vengeance on Señor Nadie. And then I learned that one-third of the money was for me, to bribe the rurales, and to provide what I would need for the rest of my escape."
He smiled, shrugged his shoulders. "Those were wild days, Mr. Fairr. By chance there was trouble among the members of the crew on the rum-runner that brought me here, and by the time of the landing the cargo was owned by me. Since then I have prospered, and I have never ceased to bless Señor Nadie. I have all that an old man could desire, a happy home, a good wife, much money, and faith that I shall enter heaven in spite of my crimes."

"Why didn't you never call him up on the telephone and say, 'Here I am'?"

"Because —" Paul Monte drew a long slow breath. "Mr. Fairr, I think perhaps you do not understand about this Señor Nadie, or Jethro Hammer, or whatever his name once might have been. He was — Señor Nadie. Mr. Nobody. All he knew of himself was that he was alive and walked upon the earth. And circumstances made a little conspiracy against him, too, so that he believed he brought great trouble to whoever he might love, like, or even touch. It may be that he was correct in this belief, Mr. Fairr, but at this late time we will never be able to know for sure. Yet it seemed also, though he never realized it, that he brought great good as well. For so long a time he walked alone, Mr. Fairr, and then, just at the end of his life, he called his old friend Paul Monte, once Pablo Montejo."

He'd called others as well, Fairr remembered. Will, and Maggie, and Robert Emmett, and John Patrick, and Sally. He said, "Why was he murdered?"

"Because he was Señor Nadie," Paul Monte said.

"I don't know just what you mean," Fairr said.

Paul Monte shrugged his shoulders again. "But you are an excellent detective, Mr. Fairr. Surely, you can find that out for yourself."

The telephone buzzed sharply. Paul Monte said, "Excuse me, Mr. Fairr," picked it up, and said, "Yes, yes." Then he went on, "I will add this, Mr. Fairr. I am Paul Monte. But I know that I am Pablo Montejo. I know the name of my parents, and of the town where I was born. But Señor Nadie — was, Señor Nadie. A gipsy, an Indian, a — perhaps — a changeling. If he had known —"

A bell sounded quietly over the door. Paul Monte again said, "Excuse me, Mr. Fairr." The door swung open.

It was the girl named Daisy Hammer. She was beautiful, disheveled, and hurried. Her eyes shone.

A cannonade of excited Spanish conversation almost deafened Melville Fairr for a moment. Then she noticed him, her voice stopped in the middle of a word.

"Señor Fairr — !" Then, "Oh, Señor Fairr, the friend of my father, I have come to see him, I have talked much with him, I have told him what I wished most, and I am so happy, Señor Fairr!"

"She is young," Paul Monte said, his eyes twinkling. "But she is sensible. We spoke of her father, and we became friends. She told me, yes, what she wished most. That is, to marry well, but with love. I own certain night clubs, you understand, Mr. Fairr, and it was not difficult to arrange meetings."
"I love him, I worship him, I will die for him," she broke in. "Siempre se amaré.”
All my life. It was what Dominga had said to Jethro Hammer.
"Today," she said, "I have met his family. Next week we will be married."
"Who?" Melville Fairr demanded.
"Young Bob Donohough," Paul Monte said, smiling at Melville Fairr.
There was another burst of excited Spanish conversation. Melville Fairr took
advantage of it to slip quietly out of the door.
The daughter of Jethro Hammer and Dominga’s daughter Soledad. The grandson
of William James Donohough II. It would, he sensed, be a happy marriage.
It had been Daisy Hammer, of course, who had told Paul Monte that he, Melville
Fairr, was bound to be around asking questions. That was just as well, too.
Circumstances conspire —
The gunman in the hallway rang for the elevator.
If he had not been “Señor Nadie” —

My Dear Miss Sally Donahue:
He was murdered because his name was Mr. Nobody.

Sincerely,
Melville Fairr

“It’s here,” Sarah White said. She took a large insurance calendar down from the
wall of what had been Jethro Hammer’s private office and revealed a wall safe.
Inside the safe was a package of letters, an accumulation of years, neatly arranged
into packages and labeled. Sarah White spread them out on the flat-topped desk and
sat down opposite Melville Fairr, her lovely dark eyes fixed on his face.
“That’s where his fortune went,” she said softly. “Every cent of it.”
He hardly heard her. He untied the string from around the first packet, took up
the top letter, and began to read.

Spring Private Inquiry Company
New York City

My dear Mr. Hammer:
We must warn you that the investigation you wish to engage us to make
appears an almost impossible task —

Melville Fairr laid the letter down and stared at the wall across from him. It was
strange, ironic, that the first of those letters should contain those words.
Letter after letter, the whole pitiful story of Jethro Hammer’s last twenty years.
One firm after another — big ones, small ones, reputable ones, crooked ones — had
taken on the task of finding out Jethro Hammer’s parentage; and one after another
had given up.
But the old man had refused to give up. Every letter confessing failure and advising
him to let the matter drop had been followed by one from a new firm admitting the difficulty of the undertaking, but agreeing to make a try at it.

"That was what he had to do," Melville Fairr said. "That was why he had a bodyguard and spent so much on doctor bills. He had to stay alive until he found out."

And until he found out, he had to be a recluse, for fear that he might bring disaster to anyone he touched or loved.

The dates of the last packet of letters began only a little more than a year before. They were unsigned. There was no printed firm name at the top. They were type-written. They had been, Melville Fairr realized, old Jethro Hammer’s last, desperate hope.

The writer didn’t ask for money for expenses. He stated simply that he had stumbled on certain facts which made him believe that he could find out all about Jethro Hammer’s parentage and background. If he succeeded in doing so, he would exchange the proof for a hundred thousand dollars, cash. Otherwise, not a cent.

Evidently Jethro Hammer had told the letter writer to go ahead. Then the letters continued over the course of a year, eighteen or twenty of them in all, and they grew increasingly hopeful. Finally, the last letter of the whole collection.

MY DEAR MR. HAMMER:

My search has been successful. Your father and mother were New England farming people; poor, but of good family and reputation. Finding it impossible to make a living in the small village near which they lived, they decided to emigrate westward. Near Leesville, Ohio, traveling in an open wagon, they resolved to leave you in the nearest church, knowing that kindly people would take you in, for there was very little money, and your mother was ill. Their intention was to return for you when circumstances permitted. However, continuing the journey, your mother died several weeks after. Your father reached Colorado where he obtained work, but was killed some months later in a mine cave-in.

I have obtained all the proof, including baptismal certificates of your father, your mother, and yourself, parish records of your family, letters written by your mother to her family during the journey, one of which refers to leaving you in St. Joseph’s Church in Leesville, Ohio, etc.

I will be glad to turn all this material over to you on payment of the sum previously agreed upon, and will bring it to your home address at nine tomorrow night. The payment, you remember, is to be in cash.

"And he fell for it!" Melville Fairr murmured.

"I beg your pardon?" Sarah White said, staring at him.

He shook his head. "Nothing." He began folding up the letters, rearranging and stacking them into a neat pile. "Thank you for showing me these, Miss White."

Melville Fairr rose and began fastening his gray overcoat.

She frowned, puzzled. "But what am I to do with them?"
“Give them to Sally Donahue,” he said. “Tell her she knows, now, that he always loved her. And tell her to watch the newspapers for the name of his murderer.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

IT WAS DAYLIGHT, a cold, raw, dismal daylight. Mister Thomas woke, yawned, stretched, and began rubbing his head against Melville Fairr’s ankles.

“All right,” Fairr said in mock annoyance. “Breakfast.”

He rose and walked into the kitchen, stiff in every limb. He boiled two eggs and made toast and tea for himself. For Mister Thomas he poured a dish of milk.

Al Fowler had been hard to convince. The accused had an alibi. But, Melville Fairr pointed out, alibis could be cracked. Al Fowler doggedly went to work, asked a few questions, interviewed a few people. The alibi was broken.

He didn’t have a motive, Al Fowler objected. He’d never even met Jethro Hammer. But he did have a motive, Fairr insisted. Revenge, jealousy, hatred, and greed.

But he didn’t have the money, Al Fowler complained. He didn’t have any money at all. He did have the money, Melville Fairr stated flatly. Perhaps a search? Al Fowler searched, found the money, and, at last, arrested the murderer.

All on his own account, Al Fowler traced, discovered, and had tests made on the typewriter which proved (a) to have written the letters to Jethro Hammer, and (b) to have belonged to the arrested suspect.

Also on his own initiative, Al Fowler found that there never had been any investigation made into the origin of Jethro Hammer by the arrested suspect, and that the letters which had come from various towns and cities had been handled by a mailing service, whose clerks readily identified the arrested suspect as an ex-client.

It was enough for an arrest, probably enough for a conviction.

But those were tangible things. Melville Fairr still preferred to depend on the intangible.

He washed the breakfast dishes and put them away, let Mister Thomas out onto the fire escape, poured himself a second cup of tea, and sat down at his writing desk.

You engaged me to find out, I quote your words, why the police pinned this crime on you. The police did not pin this crime on you. I told them you had committed it. They arrested you on the strength of the evidence I gave them.

If you had been an ordinary criminal, I would have felt otherwise. If you had merely committed theft, or murder, I might have found it possible to do what you wished me to do — that is, to find a loophole by which you could escape. But you committed a far greater crime, that of destroying hope.

If you had robbed, or cheated, old Jethro Hammer of a hundred thousand
dollars because you wanted and needed the money so greatly, or if you had murdered him because of what he had done to Sally Donahue, or because you loved her and were jealous of him; if you had robbed him from greed or murdered him from hatred, it would have been a forgivable crime. It may be that I would have done what you wished me to do, and that you might walk out of a courtroom a free man. For there are those who are born to be murderers, just as there are those who are born to be murdered. But for you to break his heart at the last — that was the unforgivable crime.

Perhaps if circumstances had not conspired against you —

Melville Fairr paused for a moment in his writing. Then he went on, rapidly:

Or perhaps, if you had not tried to conspire against circumstances —

That, too, was the wrong phrase. He recopied the entire letter, and continued:

You made certain serious errors. The matter of the alibi, for instance. An alibi invites investigation. In this case, it was easy to discover that there was a car at the country house, and to check its mileage, to learn that your uncle was a simple-headed and quite near-sighted old man, and that the letter offering to buy the place for a fabulous sum — which situation would naturally call for a hasty visit on your part — had been written on your typewriter.

One other error. You should never have sent a bunch of field daisies to Jethro Hammer's funeral. Someone was bound to guess their significance.

I regret that I cannot help you, that you will undoubtedly be convicted and executed. Believe me, I am sorry.

He signed it, "Sincerely, Melville Fairr." He picked up the telephone and called for a messenger boy.

While he waited, he folded the letter carefully, placed it in an envelope, and addressed it to Mr. Peter Schuyler, care of Burke, Reynolds, and Chidester.

THE END

FOR MYSTERY LOVERS — The publishers of Jonathan Press Mysteries also publish the following paper-covered mystery books at 25¢ each:


**A Mercury Mystery** — The book now on sale is “PAYMENT DEFERRED,” by C. S. Forester. “A miracle of craftsmanship. It shouldn’t be missed.” — *Chicago Sun*.

All the mystery books published by The American Mercury are carefully chosen and edited for you by a staff of mystery experts. Sometimes they are reprinted in full but more often they are cut to speed up the story — always of course with the permission of the author or his publisher.
MERCURY MYSTERIES

If you enjoyed this mystery you will like the others we have published. Sometimes they are reprinted in full but more often they are cut to speed up the story, always, of course, with permission of the author or his publisher. The titles marked with an asterisk have been cut. Here is a convenient list to choose from, 25¢ each, postage prepaid.

MERCURY MYSTERIES

M85* THE CASE OF THE WEIRD SISTERS
Charlotte Armstrong

M86 TRIAL OF VINCENT DOON
Will Gursler

M87 DONOVAN'S BRAIN
Carr Stoddart

M88* WHITE COCKATEE
Mignon Eberhart

M89 MAIGRET TO THE RESCUE
Georges Simenon

M90* BACH FESTIVAL MURDERS
Blanche Bloch

M91* THE WOMAN IN RED
Anthony Gilbert

M92* CASE OF THE FOSTER FATHER
V. Perdue

M93 THE BRIDE DINED ALONE
Vera Caspary

M94* THE BLACK PAW
C. and G. Little

M95* LOOK YOUR LAST
John Strange

M96 THE SMELL OF MONEY
Matthew Head

M97* THE RAT BEGAN TO GNAW THE ROPE
C. W. Grafton

M98* KEEP IT QUIET
Joseph Shearing

M99* THE SPECTRAL BRIDE
J. W. Miles

M100* MURDER ON THE LINKS
Agatha Christie

M101 MR. BOWLING BUYS A NEWSPAPER
Donald Henderson

M102* BEWARE THEhoot OWL
Nancy Rutledge

M103 MURDER THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS
Michael Venning

M104 FOOTSTEPS BEHIND HER
Michell Wilson

M105 THERE WAS A CROOKED MAN
Kelley Roos

M106* THE UNDERTAKER DIES
Garnett Weston

M107 THE BLACK RUSTLE
C. and G. Little

M108* 30 DAYS TO LIVE
Anthony Gilbert

M109* CLUES TO CHRISTABEL
Mary Fitt

M110 DR. FELL, DETECTIVE, AND OTHER STORIES
John Dickson Carr

BESTSELLER MYSTERIES

B59 THE CASE BOOK OF ELLERY QUEEN
Ellery Queen

B60* HANGMAN'S WHIP
Mignon Eberhart

B61* MURDER AT HAZELMOOR
Agatha Christie

B62 THE CONTINENTAL OP
Dashiel Hammett

B63* THE BUDAPEST PARADE MURDERS
Van Wyck Mason

B64* ARTISTS IN CRIME
Ngaio Marsh

B65* COMPOUND FOR DEATH
Doris M. Dimiy

B66 ALARM OF THE BLACK CAT
D. B. Olsen

B67 DAGGER OF THE MIND
Kenneth Poreng

B68* VINTAGE MURDER
Ngaio Marsh

B69* PATIENCE OF MAIGRET
Georges Simenon

B70* DEADLY NIGHTSHADE
Elizabeth Daly

B71 THE CRIMSON CIRCLE
Edgar Wallace

B72 PARCHMENT KEY
Stanley Hopkins, Jr.

B73* AFFAIR OF THE CRIMSON GULL
Clifford Knight

B74 LAURA
Vera Caspary

B75* MISS SILVER DEALS WITH DEATH
Patricia Wentworth

B76 THE PRICKING THUMB
H. C. Branson

B77 WHILE SHE SLEEPS
Ethel Lina White

B78* DEATH WATCH
John Dickson Carr

B79 MR. PARKER PYNE, DETECTIVE
Agatha Christie

B80* THE CHUCKLING FINGERS
Mabel Seeley

B81 HAMMETT HOMICIDES
Dashiel Hammett

B82* QUOTH THE RAVEN
Bruno Fischer

B83 SHE FELL AMONG ACTORS
James Warren

B84* SINNERS NEVER DIE
A. E. Martin

B85* THE BLACK HONEYMOON
C. and G. Little

JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERIES

J16* MURDER IN RETROSPECT
Agatha Christie

J17 THE RETURN OF THE CONTINENTAL OP
Dashiel Hammett

J18 MAIGRET RETURNS
Georges Simenon

J19* PLAGUE COURT MURDERS
Carter Dickson

J20 PASSING STRANGE
Richard Sale

J21* ARROW POINTING NOWHERE
E. Daly

J22 DESIGN FOR MURDER
Percival Wilde

J23 BLACK ALIBI
Cornell Woolrich

J24 LAZARUS #7
Richard Sale

J25 IT WALKS BY NIGHT
John Dickson Carr

J26 THE RIDDLES OF HILDEGARDE WITHERS
Stuart Palmer

J27 NOT QUITE DEAD ENOUGH
Rex Stout

Please send me the mystery books I have marked with a circle above. I enclose $..............to cover the cost of the............books ordered.

NAME

(Please Print)

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

J28

MERCURY MYSTERIES • 570 LEXINGTON AVENUE, NEW YORK 22, N. Y.