MANHUNT

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TOO MUCH TO PROVE

He gave the thumb to a long black Cadillac. But he had a premonition, and he was almost sorry when it skidded to a stop beside him.

BY GLENN CANARY

THE ROAD was straight there, just outside Louisville, and he could see the car coming while it was still nearly half a mile away. He stepped closer to the road and stuck out his thumb. It was a Cadillac, he saw, and it was naturally long and black. Because he had seen so many movies, the idea slipped through his mind that maybe it was a gangster car and he should just let it pass. But it was the first car to come along for a long time and when he thought it was going to pass him, he swore under his breath. Only it didn't pass him; it braked sharply and spewed up dust and gravel when it skid-stopped right beside him.

He started to get in the back, but

the driver yelled, "Get in the front. There's room." The woman beside the man who had spoken opened the front door and he slid in next to her. It was a big car with a wide front seat, but she didn't move over much and when he pulled the door shut, she was pressed against him. "How far you going, boy?" the man asked. He was a handsome man, in an actorish way, and his voice was deep and rough and seemed to fit the lean, athletic body and the hard looking hands he hadn't taken off the wheel.

"California."

"Where, in California?"

"Los Angeles or San Francisco, whichever I get to first."

The man nodded and started the car moving. "We're going as far as Vegas," he said. He lit a cigarette and talked around it, letting it hang loose without dragging on it. "What's your name?"

"Carling."

The woman giggled; it was the first sound she had made. "Do you own the beer millions?" she asked.

"No."

"You got a job or something on the coast?" the man asked.

"No. I just want to go out there. Never was there and I thought I'd like to see it."

"Ever been to Vegas?"

"No."

"Don't like to gamble?"

"Never had enough money for it."

The driver threw his cigarette out the ventilator window. "What do you do to make a living?"

"Nothing."

"What are you, a beatnik or something?" the man asked, laughing.

Carling, the boy, didn't answer. The car was almost completely silent; there was nothing to hear except the humming noise from the tires.

"My name is Koccic," the man said, "and she's my wife."

"My name," she said, putting a sarcastic emphasis on the second word, "is Barbara."

The boy was embarrassed and only nodded.

"You ought to try gambling, Carling," the man said. "It's the greatest thrill there is."

"I play some poker."

"Good poker or college boy kind?"

"Just fair, I guess."

Koccic looked over at him contemptuously. "I guess you wouldn't have to be bumming rides if you were much good with cards."

It made Carling angry, the way the man was talking, and he felt a little prickle of cold nerves around the base of his spine. "Maybe you're right," he said.

He didn't feel her move, but the woman was suddenly closer to him. He could feel the heat from her thigh through the thin rayon pants he was wearing.

"There's more to a man than playing cards," she said.

"There's more ways to gamble than just with cards," the man answered. "Anyone with real guts likes taking chances."

"Is that why you drive so fast?" she asked.

He looked down at the speedometer needle and watched it while he edged it higher. "It's none of your damn business how fast I drive."

Carling leaned as far away from the woman as he could and looked out the window, embarrassed by their bickering and not wanting to listen.

"I've done some real gambling in my time, believe me, boy," Koccic said.

"People like different things," Carling answered.

"You take this car. You like it?"

"Sure."

"I won it, or won the money for it. On the stock market in New York. I'm pretty well educated, not to brag about it. A college education makes too many men womanish."

"It takes cash to start with to do that kind of stuff," Carling said.

"Guts is what you really need. A man can always get a stake to get started."

"Maybe so, maybe I don't have that kind of guts. I just don't have a taste for that kind of gambling."

"Don't have a stomach for it, you mean."

Carling turned his head away, looking out the window again. The man chuckled, but didn't say anything more. They rode in silence for a while. They came into a small town and the man stopped at a filling station. He got out of the car while the attendant worked and stood in front of the car, looking out toward the road as if it bothered him to remain motionless.

"How old are you?" the woman asked Carling.

"Twenty-two."

"That's pretty young to turn into a bum, just roaming around the country."

"I guess so, but maybe that's the time to do it."

"Don't you have a family?"

"Mother and sister. My father's dead. They're all right. My sister's married and Mom lives with them."

"Well, couldn't you find work in your town?"

"I was a boxer, a fighter."

"Oh?" She sat up straighter and looked at him curiously. "Weren't you any good?"

"Turned pro at eighteen. My manager told me I was the best he'd ever seen, said I was a cinch to be champ."

She smiled at him sympathetically. "Only it wasn't a cinch and you got beaten."

It annoyed him that she said it unquestioningly, as if she could just look at him and see it.

"I didn't get beaten," he said. "I just quit."

"Why?"

Because he knew she wouldn't

understand about losing, being cut, and lying alone in a dressing room that had plaster falling, he lied to her, told her something she would believe because she read the papers. "Gabe, my manager, sold my contract and I don't want to fight for the people he sold it to."

Koccic got back into the car. "I hope that guy didn't cheat me," he said. "I always forget to watch these hillbillies."

When they were back on the street, moving out of the town, the woman said, "Carling is a fighter."

Koccic glanced interestedly at the boy. "That's right? I follow the fights a little. You fight under the name Carling?"

"Tommy Carling?"

The man thought a minute. "Oh yes," he said, "I saw you on television the night you knocked out Martinez. In the third round. You looked pretty good that night. What are you doing out here?"

"I quit fighting."

"What the hell for? You could have made some money out of it."

"He doesn't like the racket about it," the woman said.

"Racket? Hell, everything's a racket. You just have to live with it."

"Maybe he didn't want to live with it."

"You want to be a bum?" the man asked Carling. "Don't you want things? A car like this? Women? What's wrong with you?"

"I just don't want to fight any more. I don't like it."

Koccic snorted, a deliberately contemptuous sound. "Be a bum the rest of your life then." He looked into the rear view mirror and then pressed harder on the accelerator. "Should have known," he said as if he were talking to himself. "A man who won't gamble never has guts enough for anything tough."

"How would you know?" the woman said. "Since when have you had anything tough?"

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing," she answered. She turned her head away.

"You never mean anything, do you?" He looked past her to the boy. "You don't have any guts, do you, boy?"

"What do I care what you think?" Carling shouted. His voice broke off shrilly. "If you don't like it, stop the car and I'll get out."

Koccic chuckled to himself again, but instead of stopping, he drove faster. "Don't be sensitive," he said. "If you're going to be a quitter, you can't be sensitive about what people say. The only way to keep people from talking about you is to do what has to be done. Like that time in Tangiers, I told you about. Remember?"

"I remember you telling me about it," the woman answered.

"I was there during the war, Carling. I was pretty wild in those days and Tangiers was a pretty wild place. I got into a poker game there

one night in a little off-limits dump in the roughest part of town. I was there and there was a French officer playing and a couple of guys who looked like Arabs. That was a rough game. I'd been winning and the Frenchman was winning and we kept building up the pots bigger and bigger. Finally, there was nearly ten thousand dollars on the table. I figured that this was the time, that the Arabs had been setting me and the Frenchman up for this one. And sure enough, I had a full house, Kings up, and one of those dirty bastards shows the same hand, only aces up."

"Tough," Carling murmured.

"It was tougher on the Arabs. I knew I'd been had, so I reached out like I was confused and started dragging in the money. When the Arabs started laughing at me and weren't watching, I jerked out my automatic and started blasting away. Then I grabbed that cash and ran, still potting away all the time. I got one, but the second one and some of his friends damn near caught me. I think they did catch the Frenchman. He was so surprised, he just sat there too long. But I wound up with the money."

"You proud of that?" Carling asked.

"Sure. That's what I mean by having guts."

"That story changes every time you tell it," the woman said. "I don't think it happened at all."

The man breathed deeply and for a moment Carling thought he was going to hit her. "It happened," he said finally.

"I believe you," Carling said.

"Would you have that kind of guts?"

"Enough to shoot a man. I don't think that would take much."

"Not that. Taking a chance on getting killed yourself."'

"You take that chance whenever you cross a street. And some men just aren't afraid to die. It doesn't take courage when you're like that."

"You read that in a book somewhere," the man said. "Everyone's afraid to die. Only it takes guts to take chances anyway."

"Well, maybe you're right," Carling said. "I've never been in a war or anything. You probably know more than I do."

"You'd be afraid to die, wouldn't you?" Koccic persisted.

"I don't know. I don't think so."

Koccic jammed down the brake pedal and the car slid to a stop, shuddering." You want to prove it? I can prove you'd be afraid to die."

"Maybe you could," Carling answered nervously. "What difference does it make anyway?"

"Oh Lord, the whole thing's stupid," the woman said.

"No, it's not," Koccic said. "It's a test. I'll prove what I say." He opened the glove compartment and took out a revolver.

"You're not going to shoot me,"

Carling said.

The man laughed. "No, that wouldn't prove anything, but you're already scared, aren't you?" He broke open the pistol and took the cartridges out. He tossed them on the floor and closed the gun. "They're all out, but one," he said. He spun the cylinder twice and handed it to Carling. "Now put it up to your head and pull the trigger. Prove you're not afraid to die."

The boy looked at the pistol and shook his head. "That's stupid," he said. "Just to prove something crazy to you. That's stupid."

Koccic laughed. "We'll give you something to work for. Here." He pulled out his wallet and took from it a thick sheaf of folded bills. He tossed the money onto the woman's lap. "That's nearly five thousand dollars. You try the gun and if you're still alive after you pull the trigger, the money is yours." The boy hesitated and looked at the gun. Koccic spun the cylinder again. "You are afraid, aren't you?"

Carling grabbed the gun. It slipped from his fingers and fell into his lap. He held it there for a minute.

"Don't do it," the woman said. "Don't be silly."

"Five thousand dollars could buy me a gas station or something. It could set me up."

"If you're still alive," Koccic said, laughing. "You won't do it."

Carling's face was white and his upper lip was shiny with sweat. He picked up the gun and raised it to his temple.

"You ever seen a man after he's been shot in the head?" Koccic asked softly. "It's pretty messy."

The boy lowered the gun, trembling. "It's stupid."

"Only if you haven't got any guts."

"You wouldn't do it," the woman said. "You talk about his courage, but you wouldn't do it."

"If he does it first, I'll do it without even spinning the chamber again. That gives me less chance than he has. Only he won't do it."

Carling raised the gun, pressed it against his temple and pulled the trigger, almost all in one motion. The click of the firing pin hitting an empty chamber seemed to drain stiffness from him and he shivered and lowered the gun. "Oh my God," he said.

The woman scooped up the money and laid it in his lap. She took the gun from him and looked at it. She spun the cylinder once and then again. "It's empty," she said. "There aren't any bullets in here."

"Sure, it's empty," Koccic said. "I didn't think he had enough guts to do it, but I wasn't taking any chances in case he did have."

The boy was still trembling and didn't seem to hear them. The money lay loose on his lap and he hadn't moved to pick it up.

The woman reached down to the floor and picked up a cartridge. She broke open the gun, inserted

the one bullet, and then closed it and handed it to her husband. "It's your turn," she said. "Spin it."

"It wasn't loaded when he did it."

"He didn't know that. He was brave enough to do it when he thought it was loaded. Let's see how brave you are when you know it is."

"Don't be stupid."

She fanned the cylinder twice. "Do it," she said quietly. "Show us how brave you are."

He stared at her for a moment as if he didn't believe she was saying what she was. Then he took the gun, raised it without hesitating, laid it against his temple and pulled the trigger. It clicked hollowly and he smiled when he lowered it. "Didn't you think I would?" he asked her.

Carling suddenly sobbed and closed his hand around the money. He threw open the door and ran from the car. He kept running down the road, away from the car, until he was out of breath. He leaned against a tree then, heaving for air. When he looked up, he saw the Cadillac was moving away. Through the rear window he could see the woman. She was sitting very close to the man and her head was on his shoulder. They didn't look back.

He stuffed the money into his pocket and started walking again, waiting for a car that might pick him up. He watched the black car until it was out of sight. He turned and looked back down the road. It was getting dark. He shoved his hands into his jacket pockets, waiting, and he felt sad, sorry for the man in the Cadillac. He wondered if maybe it was the woman who made him act like that.

DEAD BEAT

BY HAYDEN HOWARD

In the end you can tell the beat from the square.
Who smothered Adrienne?
Who?
Archie knew . . .
but he didn't care.

SHOES SHUFFLING, piano plinking, voices cawing, the party rammed into my skull like a subway express.

"Wake up, little poet." Adrienne's long hair darkened my eyelides as she kissed, her bones clashing with my bones, and I withdrew farther within my skeleton.

In this fifth day of my hunger strike, I felt like the ultimate skeleton in the genocidal closet called New York.

Someone hauled Adrienne upward, a departing contortion of purple lipstick, and she squawled: "Let go of me, Christy. I'm through with you. I'm through."

I had a glimpse of Christy's angry blond-bearded face. No matter how hard he tried, Christy was not quite with it, a square. To be really with it, Christy would have to pass beyond jealousy.

"You slut." He let her go; she flopped back beside me on the bed, and I closed my eyes inward.

But someone was pouring liquid on my forehead. It ran past my nose into the corner of my mouth, wine. I opened my eyes to the purple jug, to the grinning upside-down face of Max, my captor.

"Arise, Archie, messenger from the West," Max laughed. "You are the guest of honor. Take a drink. Then give us the word."

But I couldn't. Max had conned me to hitchhike from the West Coast on the promise he would round up the seventy-nine fifty to send me home again by unscheduled airline. With the seventy-nine fifty becoming more mythical each day, he cheerfully exhibited me to his friends while I died.

"Arise, Archie, my prize," Max was yelling with pride. "You are the guest of honor. Don't goof."

"Seventy-nine fifty," I cried at the dark and flickering ceiling.

In contrast to my self-starvation, the candlelight slithered over the smooth ebony belly of the buddha and over Belly, or more likely his name was Kelly, jiggling in his

wheelchair, his fat white doves of hands flooping while the Village inmates stamped the rythmn on the floor of his Greenwich basement apartment.

The horn skied upward, and Belly whooped: "Where's my Adrienne? Everyone else has his kiss from Adrienne. I want mine while we hear this poetic cat."

Beside me there was a muffled curse of revulsion, and Adrienne turned her face to the wall. Hands dragged me upward. I was umbrella-ed by their grinning faces.

"Stand on the piano bench," Max yelled, lifting me up, and an embroidery of widespread hands prevented me from toppling. "Attention for Archie. He brings communiques from the Coast."

But the squeals and gone-laughter and room-shouting conversations swept on beyond poetry, over Max's futile voice. I tried to get down. A sloppy smile across the immense paleness of his features, Belly sat back in his wheelchair, scratching beneath his pregnant T-shirt.

"Don't bug me, you cats!" Belly's shout came out angrily. "Cut the sound."

Our host and leader, Belly managed to modulate their monkey-like gregariousness, as I tried to climb down.

Max hissed at me: "We'll take up a collection afterward."

I doubted it, but in the seething room I felt the upturned faces of what might be my last audience, and I knew I would pound my drum while there was skin on it. By way of introduction, I began softly: "I came by thumb, through sleet, on sandals. On the strength of a postcard, I hit New York."

A voice yelped: "Did it fall, man, did it fall?"

"I have fallen three thousand miles across a continent," I cried, "and I want to go back."

The voice yelped: "That's beat, man, go forward, forward is the way."

"Seventy-nine fifty," I bleated, the reflex of a dying man.

The candles guttered as someone opened the door to frozen New York and left with a slam. In the sudden darkness, a girl squealed ecstatically among the amorous thuds.

"Recite from memory, quick," Max hissed impatiently after he'd relit the buddha's candle, only to have it blown out again by a bearded face. "The natives are restless."

If Max thought of himself as a missionary, I was his hymnal.

"I speak for you," I cried into a darkness as blind as Homer's. "This first communique is dedicated to Max and his migratory hunters. Throw money if you like it. Throw more money if you don't. My title is *Squawl*.

You are needles
Skipping the grooves
On the face of the nation

Hunting for Mecca
In a haystack
Go man, go!"

This first stanza caught their attention, and I felt their breathing begin to unify.

"You are horns
Squeezing the high notes
Through the din of creation
Squawling it crazy
In a bedlam
Go man, go!"

They really began to swing, yelling with me: "Go man, go."

I knew I had them as I shouted: "Lie back, cats, there are fourteen stanzas squeezing out of my skull.

You are cats
Squawling the alleys
With a sad man's elation
Crying it crazy
From the bottom
Looking up.

"Go man, go," they yelled, and I grew hoarse as the verses poured out of me, and the beds creaked as I caught my breath, and the voices shouted: "Go man, go!" and I really began to go, improvising on my one desire.

"I got to fly
Need the sky
Seventy-nine fifty."

On the subway, the signs had mocked me: FLY New York to California $79.50, and I was too weak to hitchhike back in midwinter, and if I stayed here I would become the complete skeleton.

"Too cold, starving
Cold winds carving
Seventy-nine fifty
My bones bare
California's there
Seventy-nine fifty
Throw a dime
For a poet doing time."

Instead a chick's hysterical screams deluged me: "Lights, lights," and there was an up-creaking of bedsprings, a scuffling in the dark, as I tried to shout her down: "Seventy-nine fifty."

Gently I toppled off the piano bench, floating down in the darkness, my arms enclosing the round and the smooth, the buddha. Among the screams, the weird but possible idea of making off with Belly's buddha left me clinging to it on the rug.

Last night I had heard Belly boasting his buddha was so priceless, after he was converted to Mohammedanism he'd even been able to hock it for a hundred bucks.

Now I lay with buddha against the wheelchair. The buddha was painfully heavy for a starving man. The wheelchair surprisingly rolled lightly away. To keep the lights from coming on, I cried: "Got to fly, or I'll die. Seventy-nine fifty."

I intended to improvise all the way to the door in the darkness.

"Too weak to walk, so got to fly." I would mail him the pawn ticket.

Stealthily rising, my legs shivering with the weight of the buddha, I added with a hurried lack of originality: "The Bowery, the Bowery, I'll never go there any more," and

toppled on a floor so soft because it was a girl—who squawled with pain and clawed.

Some square switched on the electric lights, and Belly breathlessly rolled his wheelchair forward. "Put it back, you little cockroach. You'll bust it."

But he was out-angered by Christy and Tea Man, who were braced by the bed, shoving each other, Tea Man toppled on his back like a turtle, and Christy bent over Adrienne. He pulled her to a sitting position, and her head, as if over-balanced by her long dark hair, flopped back and swayed from side to side as he shook her. "Wake, up, you beautiful drunk."

Tea Man got up, unabashed. "Man, she's in a coma. Call Bellevue or someplace."

Christy shoved him away again, crying: "She's dead. In Korea I saw the face of death. Adrienne's dead, and the walls came tumbling down."

Hipsters began yelling: "Man, she's dead, what'll we do?"

They turned square under crisis, their pallid faces like college kids who'd flunked lifemanship. I still hugged my seventy-nine fifty buddha on the rug, wanting to tell them: to reach lifemanship you must be hip to deathmanship. Adrienne had been my girl for two days on the Coast, or rather I had been her pet poet, and she had been a know-nothing, but now she knew all, or nothing, which is the same. I felt glad for her, and tried to formulate a poem in memoriam, but my concentration was incomplete, because I still had one desire I could not control: "Got to fly. Seventy-nine fifty. Need the sky, Seventy-nine fifty."

Dragging the buddha, I prepared to crawl among their restlessly shifting legs. They were close to running, close to an explosion toward the door, very close as I edged away from the wheelchair.

"Max," Belly's voice hissed. "Here's the key. Yes, lock the door quick, or they'll bug out and leave us with a corpse." His voice squeaked with the fright of a cripple in an apartment house fire. Belly couldn't run. He couldn't fly. Ever. "Hurry up. My whole stock of green is stashed under that bed."

He referred to the uncured marijuana, veritable bales of leaf he would drag out and cure in the oven and eventually light up for hipsters to support his own more expensive habit and pay his subterranean rent and keep his belly fat. Fat addicts are rare. According to Max, Belly hadn't been above ground in seven years.

"We can't have the fuzzniks," Belly squeaked; he meant the cops. "This isn't a floating pad. This is my cave."

Max shoved his way through the milling bodies to the basement door. He beat me there. The lock clacked. He pocketed the key.

With a smothering sensation, I

crawled back to where I had left the buddha. Belly hadn't even noticed. He was watching Christy bent over Adrienne, mouth to mouth, artificial respiration.

Belly laughed shrilly: "Play it cool, cats. Let's hear the piano. Adrienne's just drunk again. Let's hear the horn."

"Drunk?" a chick squawled. "With her eyes open?"

There was a frantic surge to escape from the apartment, squealing, shoving, grappling with Max, unaware Max had deftly returned the key to Belly.

Someone wrenched open the basement window, and a cold weight of air flooded down from the sidewalk through the iron grill that caged us below the level of the street. A chick began to scream for help, but a hipster's hand muffled her. "We can't have cops."

The jungle of eyes turned upon Belly.

"Yes, listen to your leader, you cats," Belly said with a reassuring smile, his fat white hands crosswise on his chest. "We'll play it cool. There'll be no problem, no one hung-up because of Adrienne. You listen to me. We want to believe, and what we want to believe is what we believe. Yes?"

Belly's wink could only be described as lewd. "Poor Adrienne is in a coma from bad liquor, but serious, man, serious, and needs immediate medical attention. Yes, volunteers are what we need to drunk-walk her up to Washington Square. She can rest on a bench while some cat jazzes a pay phone with a dime. Yes, in New York, Emergency Medical Service is what to dial. Then evaporate back to here, and your leader will roll you all some sticks of tea, on the house, man, on the house. The night is young and you are so beautiful, and an intern will know what to do with Adrienne."

Christy raised his futile mouth from Adrienne's. The others edged away, stumbling over me where I lay on the floor with the buddha.

"Yes, yes, you have to pick her up," Belly wheezed anxiously, making uplifting motions with his white hands. "You, Max, you're big and strong. You, Christy, don't go boy."

But Christy shouldered away into the uncertain conglomeration of sudden squares. I had to smile. Under stress, that high-flying group had become so bourgeois they wouldn't even touch a body.

"For kicks, man," Belly begged their blank faces. "You haven't lived till you've held a beautiful stiff in your arms. Pick her up—."

A telephone jangled like a policeman's hand on my shoulder, and there was a scrambling search for it under tables, behind the stove, under the heaps of overcoats.

I wondered if Belly would pay me seventy-nine fifty to remove the corpse from his apartment. In his desperation, no doubt he would.

But I lacked the strength. It was all I could do just to live.

"Hello?" a girl's voice had found the phone. "Yeah, this is John Kelly's apartment down stairs.—Yeah, he's fat, but he isn't a—. Turn blue, sir—. We *are* being quiet."

She clicked down the receiver. "One of your neighbors."

"Yes, yes, but he packs cardboard in his windows against the cold. He can't see out. Just drunk-walk her out of here. It's so simple," Belly persisted. "The kicks, you cats, this was the biggest. We can't leave her here."

Waves of icy air from the open but barred window set me shivering, and I struggled up from the floor, leaving buddha. With no place else to go. I found the warmest place—on the bed beside Adrienne, and lay there waiting for my future to unfold.

It did, like a poisonous serpent. The phone began to dial.

Christy's angry voice followed: "There's a girl dead here—at a party." He spat out the address.

The police. My nerves jerked me upright like a marionette's strings. The square had actually called the cops and doomed us all. A jail is a trap; the time I was jugged for vagrancy I ended up in Camarillo for insulin shock treatments.

In the scramble against the door, Max was wrestled and torn and searched. "I haven't got it. I haven't got it," his voice cried in pain. "I gave the key back to Belly."

"Yes, yes, keep away," hissed Belly's voice.

From the mass intake of breath, I knew without looking that, Sullivan Law or no Sullivan Law, Belly had pulled a gun. "Yes, yes, cats, a man in a wheelchair needs an equalizer. I'm not going to let the man who murdered Adrienne walk out of here and leave me with the body. Yes, yes, you cats, pick her up. We still have time to get her out of here."

"But the cops are on their way," Max yelled.

The room became bedlam, the toilet rumbling continuously while hipsters tried to flush down their incriminating sticks of tea, girls screaming about what would their mothers think. They weren't slick chicks any more.

One girl kept up a continuous wail as if she had an air tank for lungs, and I lay there with Adrienne's hand in mine and wondered where her purse was. She wouldn't need her money now. The girl's wail was gradually overwhelmed by the wail of a police car, all stops out because they thought they were coming to some sort of accident, and maybe they were. Adrienne's hand felt cool.

A nightstick rattled on the door, and I knew my only hope, to slip out as the police came in. In appearance, I am an innocuous person, and I staggered to the door without an eye following me. They

were too busy hiding switch-blade knives and razor blades in Belly's refrigerator. No one wanted to open the door. No one could. Belly still had the key.

I was surprised myself that I had the buddha in my arms. Its weight forced me to lean against the wall. Seventy-nine fifty.

I looked back at the bed. Under Adrienne, the mattress, the springs, and on the floor, baled in newspapers, was enough uncured green from Mexico to arrest us all through guilt by association. Taking his time, Belly lit an incense candle in an attempt to stifle the scent of marijuana, while the nightstick hammered impatiently, punctuated by indistinct shouts.

A flashlight beam flickered through the window grill from the sidewalk above. "Open up, kids," said an impersonal voice from the cold New York pavement. "An ambulance is on the way."

I edged close to the door, the buddha on my hip like a football, while Belly, blind to this, slowly handed Max the key.

In spite of my small size, as the door kicked inward, the eye of the revolver was on me. "Back up, shorty."

The voice was followed by a heavy - jowled, bad - taste - in - the - mouth, middle-aged beatnik hater. This cop was followed by a detective whose young face was compressed with disgust and professional boredom.

"All the men, face the wall, spread your fingers.—You, too," the young detective sneered at me as though I was a juvenile delinquent. "Put that thing down. Get with it, shorty."

With the barest glance at the chicks, and it would have been hard to tell which was deadest, the two of them shook us down for razor blades and such.

"Keep your face to the wall, shorty." The old cop's nightstick jammed into my kidney. He had contemptuously put his revolver away. "Keep your face to the wall, stupid," he repeated.

"I try to witness all of life, sir." They couldn't hurt me if I could get out the door.

They hadn't even bothered to search Belly, who sat so immobile in his wheelchair he was next to invisible.

"Now chicks," the detective's voice drawled. "Empty your purses on the floor.—You can't find your purse? Then empty that one, sweetie."

"But Adrienne's dead," a girl wailed. "It's Adrienne who's dead."

"We'll look at your Adrienne," the detective said. "But you addicts die all the time, so we're more interested in the living.—Now chicks, raise your arms, spread your fingers. That's right."

There were gasps and sobs as he shook down the girls. Finally, he turned, regaining his bored, resentful expression, to inspect Adrienne.

He poked her with his flashlight.

"Sir," Belly suggested cheerfully, "we'll be relieved when she's taken out of her. Of course you would be more experienced than I in recognizing addiction. But I suppose she met a contact before she came in here. She wasn't *invited* to our party. It does appear to be some sort of seizure—."

"You like to talk, don't you," the detective replied evenly, glancing around the room, even including me in his contemptuous gaze. "You will. You will."

With boredom and a flashlight, he inspected Adrienne's wrists and arms for needle scars, but H wasn't one of Adrienne's vices. Adrienne smoked a little tea to be sociable, and liked people and crazy conversations. One of Max's migrants, she had followed Max and company across the country, and now none of us had a thing to say.

It was as if she were already forgotten. Nobody cared. But suddenly the detective stiffened, his flashlight beam brightening her face for the first time. Suddenly the detective cared.

"Anoxia—," he wheezed excitedly, and he pulled her jaws apart to see if she had strangled on her tongue, and shook his head. His flashlight beam searched her neck, her mouth, her nostrils. "Suffocated, but no marks—."

He seized the pillow and turned it over, apparently looking for lipstick marks. Apparently he thought she might have been smothered with a pillow. He threw it down. He tore the bed apart, hunting over the sheet with his flashlight as if he thought she might have been pressed face down into the bed.

"Don't let anybody out of here," his voiced trembled on the edge of a real murder case, promotion, fame. "—must have used something soft, We'll look for a coat or something —with purple lipstick."

He whirled, his flashlight beam dazzling the girls' faces in the dim room. Some of these chicks were so intellectual they wore no lipstick at all. Others wore a sort of white underglow. None wore purple lipstick.

His flashlight beam stopped blindingly on my face. "So you were with her—."

I closed my eyes against the light and the whole ridiculous business. Undoubtedly Adrienne had smeared her lipstick all over my face while I lay unresisting, skeletonized upon the bed, and now it semed as logical as anything else in New York that I should be arrested, convicted, executed for her murder.

The light left me. "I'll be—she kissed them all! Even the cripple."

The detective sat down heavily on the bed beside Adrienne. He was through being a genius. He was going to ask. "O.K., you bums, enough fun and games. There are nineteen, twenty, of you here, so don't tell me you were all passed

out. This happened right in the room with you. You saw it. You'll be relieved to know that just watching won't make you an accessory, so you might as well tell me now. Come on, gals. She was your friend. Which one of these bums held her down too long?"

There was a nervous giggle. Adrienne had been no girl's friend.

"O.K., then, who made the phone call?"

"He left," Christy's voice creaked angrily.

"Through a locked door?" the detective yelled in baffled anger. "We came here by radio, fast. The sidewalk was empty. Don't con me, you bum. You were all locked in here together. Somebody did that, or you would of blown in every direction. He's here. He's here. Who used that phone?"

Now Belly was smiling with contempt. "You've alienated us, out-grouper. Flip now, if you want, but these cats won't talk. They can't talk. The lights were out. They don't know who used the phone. If Adrienne was smothered, they don't know that either."

Of course, I didn't need to be intuitive to know who had killed Adrienne. I had to smile while the detective asked them for motives: who didn't like her, and so forth. If he really understood beatniks, he'd know that no motive was necessary. The thing had been done, Adrienne smothered in the dark while I reeited, for kicks, man, real great kicks.

I knew. But to prove he had done it took more energy than I could spare. I had to bug out of there. Seventy-nine fifty. I had to fly, and I began to work my way toward the door, leaving buddha. Walking out with a forty pound ebony statue would attract attention, man, attention. But how could I fly without it?

"The lights were out?" the detective repeated incredulously. "Like hell!—O.K., people, and I use the term loosely, this is your last chance. I'm going to call the wagon."

He meant; it was his last chance. Unless someone talked, he would have to call in his superiors, giving away his chance of becoming a one-man hero.

"O.K., here's the score, girls," he said coldly. "Unless you finger the perverted bum who smothered that poor girl, like quick, you'll all be booked as witnesses, accomplices, and that's just the beginning. Don't tell me the lights were out. Don't bother to call a bail bondsman. You'll need your money for smart lawyers, because you'll also be booked for vagrancy, suspicion of possession of narcotics, suspicion of soliciting, lewd conduct; you will have had it forty different ways."

Then he shifted gears. He smiled in brotherly fashion as if he'd had practice on a Youth Detail. "On the other hand, you seem like nice girls.

Most of you guys, at least some of you guys, have good jobs you'd hate to lose. All you have to do is cooperate. Tell me what you saw, and depart in peace to your pads.—O.K., who did you watch smother her?"

"But it was dark," a girl wailed.

"Then you'd better see in the dark," he replied softly, "because I'm getting up to call the wagon."

"Hold it!" the cop yelled at me.

He was old, but I was weak, and he caught me before I could stagger up the steps into the night. He threw me on the floor.

I would die in a cell. Seventy-nine fifty.

In the hopeless silence, a girl began to sob.

Of course Belly had killed her. But my reasons would only cause me to be held as a material witness. And the joke was: my reasons wouldn't convict him. I knew he had done it, with something soft like a pillow, but what had he used?

I knew he had done it while I was reciting, because when I fell off the piano bench and clutched the buddha and rested against his wheelchair, it had rolled lightly away. In the dark he had crawled from his wheelchair the few feet to the bed where Adrienne lay.

I knew he had done it, because Belly was the one person Adrienne would not have kissed voluntarily. I could almost picture his fat face without lipstick before the lights went out. Now like the rest of the males, he had purple lipstick smears. In the dark, who had she thought he was—momentarily?

I knew he had done it, because he had practically said so. When he was trying to get them to drunk-walk her out of his apartment, he had said: "You haven't lived till you've held a beautiful stiff in your arms." He had said: "The kicks, you cats, this was the biggest. We can't leave her here."

I crawled to the buddha. One thing in our favor, we live from minute to minute. You never know what the next minute will bring. Somewhere, Belly had hidden his gun. Since he had stayed in his wheelchair during the period they were flushing sticks of tea down the toilet in preparation for the cops, his gun must be hidden in the chair, under or on his person. I could see the slight bulge of it encased in fat beneath his pulled-out T-shirt, thrust between his invisible belt and his fat belly. His gun was the intangible.

If I could finger him conclusively, he might go for his gun. In the confusion, I could depart with buddha into the frozen night. Seventy-nine fifty.

But I couldn't finger him conclusively unless I could find how he did it. A pillow? The detective found the pillow was clean. But there were no marks on her. She had been smothered by something soft. In horror, I knew.

"I'll talk, man," my voice squeaked before I could pull it back. "Look at Belly."

His bulging little eyes swivelled increduously at me. His mouth sagged with petulance that one of us had betrayed him, and his mouth contracted like a rubber band with terror, with the realization of what would happen to him, and then relaxed in a contemptuous smile. He felt untouchable.

"You're searching for something soft that can smother," I cried. "He carries it with him, all the time. Ask him to pull up his T-shirt."

The detective's hand reached forward. There was a glimpse of the great white belly with its convicting smear of struggling purple lipstick, but Belly's hand was quicker to the gun in his waistband.

With the explosion singing in my ears, I staggered up the steps with the buddha in my arms into the gasping cold. On the icy sidewalk I kept falling. Seventy-nine fifty. Someone had been shot. Seventy-nine fifty.

Who shot who?
"I came by thumb
Going back I'll fly
I'm on my back
I don't know why

You're no pawnbroker
With your chromium sky
Your bullet extractor
And antiseptic eye

It's me that he shot
But I can't die
Seventy-nine fifty
Doc, I've got to fly."

EXCEPT for the cackling of a hen back up at the barn on the hill across the road, there was scarcely a sound around the long, tarpaper covered garage. Neither a gas pump nor a sign indicated that there was a business here beside the narrow gravel road. Four junk cars, two of them upside down, gave a clue as did the other three cars parked on the gravel in front of the building. The smell of oil rose from dark spots where a crankcase had been drained. Oil drums, rusty and skirted with dead weeds, stood like headstones to the dead motor blocks at the edge of the graveled space.

WHITE LIGHTNING

There weren't many men could soup-up a car, sweet-talk a motor the way Tinker could. But then there wasn't much call for that kind of work these days except from the liquor men . . . the bootleggers.

BY DAVID MAURER

With his head under the hood of the 1953 Oldsmobile, Tinker spit tobacco juice on the chrome cylinder head. A drop of the amber went onto one of the carburetors. Tinker wiped that off immediately and carefully. All that bright chrome under the hood didn't make the car perform a bit better. The carburetors were different. Like the three-quarter cams, the planed engine-heads, the extra fuel pump, the skilled mechanical work —Things that made a different motor. Things that changed the top speed and made the difference between getting caught and getting away.

The chrome and trimmings were for young upstarts and fools. liquor-runners like Lefty, not for people who understood the guts of a motor. Like false eyelashes on a woman. Like the promises Lena

used to make. She talked with her mouth. She promised with her eyes. She promised with her lips. She promised and promised. . . .

Tinker made an adjustment and then reached for a wire, touched one end to the neutral safety switch and the other to the battery terminal. The motor started. He chuckled to himself, thinking how much simpler it would have been to reach in the car and start it with the starter. But a man needed to keep up with these things. All cars were different. Now, on a Ford, you'd just make contact with the solenoid. . . .

Listening to the rhythm of the motor, he knew it was perfect. It was faithful. It would not fail. The life and power in it would respond. Inside, under the bright chrome, the guts of it were exactly right. Like a woman with a heart that was just as steady at night as in the morning. A man could improve a motor. With his hands and what he knew, he could change a motor, but a woman. . . .

Funny how a man could lose himself just listening to the perfection of the sounds of a motor and think old thoughts, remembering old memories, calling back times that should be forgotten. Why did a motor do that to a man? Like drinking. You did it and wondered why you did it right while you were doing it.

The sound of a car on the gravel made him jerk the wire-harness loose, pull his head back like a turtle and slam the hood down. He eased back to put the car between him and the road. Hell, that must be Jock and Lefty. It couldn't be anybody else. Absently, he spit the quid into his hand and tossed it away as his uneasiness faded. Fumbling in the pocket of his greasy tan shirt for a cigarette, he rolled it between his long grimy fingers.

When the car pulled over and stopped, the silence returned. After the cigarette caught, he held the match cupped in his hands a moment for the warmth. There was a chill in the damp November air.

"Who in hell you hiding from, Tinker? You think we was the law snooping around to see whose car you're working on?"

Flipping the match away, he rubbed at his grizzled bristles, pulling his hand downward along his long, lean jaw, feeling the stubble.

"By God, I didn't know you for a minute. Ain't many damned cars passes here I don't know."

Jock laughed, deep down in his big belly, and Tinker wondered how a fat man could laugh that way and yet without mirth. Bronson said, "Fooled him, didn't we, boy?"

Tinker looked with cold speculation at Lefty who grunted without a change of expression and moved smoothly out of the Chrysler and started toward the Olds. Following Lefty with his eyes, Tinker wondered why the boy haunt-

ed him. What was there about him that brought a half-formed image to the back of his mind? Just a punk kid, maybe eighteen, no more, but trying his best to look older, probably wishing he was bigger. It was an aggravating thing, to feel that way. Lefty kept his expression set so that his fair skin looked oily and slick.

"It ain't quite ready, Lefty." As he said it, Tinker wondered why he had lied to Lefty. He watched Lefty's sullen green eyes, hooded by the low-pulled bill of the leather cap as Lefty turned. Lefty's resentment was apparent and Tinker saw it. Lefty couldn't know he'd been lied to, but he looked suspicious. The car was ready; and he wondered why he kept putting Lefty off.

"What d'you lack?" Bronson inquired in his pushy voice.

"Carburetor adjustment." Tinker didn't even glance at Jock. He was appraising the dark horsehide jacket Lefty wore, having some idea of what it had cost. Including the wrinkled, expensive trousers and the sport shirt, Tinker figured Lefty's clothes had cost more than the worth of the best cow Lefty's old man ever owned—which wouldn't be much of a cow. These fancy shoes cost money. More money than they were worth. From the wrinkles in his clothes, Tinker guessed Lefty had slept in them, no telling where. He knew Lefty didn't stay at home. Too many kids.

"How you like my new Chrysler, Tinker?"

Half turning, Tinker answered, "It's a good car, Jock."

"Sporty, ain't it? Cost me plenty, too."

"Yeah." But Tinker was watching Lefty, whose head was bent down near the floorboard of the Olds. He was looking under the driver's seat.

"Don't worry, Lefty, I welded it. It can't move," said Tinker, dryly.

He watched Lefty raise his head and turn, talking like Richard Widmark. "I aim to make sure."

"Lefty's got to have it right, ain't he?" laughed Jock.

"Well, you said weld it in and set it up close to the wheel. The wheel will about rub his belly. If that makes it right, then it's right."

"That's how he wants it. Makes it so's I can't get my big gut in the driver's seat without holding my breath." Jock lighted a cigarette, adding, "You said it ain't ready. You mean you ain't had it on the road yet?"

"Oh, I've had it out. I've fooled with it some. I just gotta make a carburetor adjustment."

"Hell with that. The main thing is, will it run?" Jock was getting pushy again. Tinker knew it bothered him not to be able to shove people around. He wondered how Lefty took that from him all the time. Tinker took a drag on his cigarette, deliberately letting his

eyes lock with Bronson's until Bronson looked away. To hell with Jock Bronson and his money. There wasn't anyplace else around here that he could get this kind of work done.

"Yeah, it'll run. And it's broke in pretty good. I run it some in the shop and I drove it some."

"Okay, if it's broke in, git the adjusting done so Lefty can drive it and see."

Moving toward the front of the car, he could feel Jock moving close behind him. It made him nervous. It had been a long time since he had to bother about somebody walking close behind him. He shut out of his mind the memory of endless barred catwalks and the clock-like rhythm of lock-step. But to ease his mind, he turned his spare frame sideways, half-facing Jock, and asked, "How come you to get the Chrysler?"

Bronson seemed to expand. "Just horsing around. I made this guy a pass—Just like that." Jock snapped his fat fingers. As Tinker raised the hood on the Olds, Bronson asked, "What'll it do, Tinker?"

Suddenly Tinker was aware that Lefty had stopped brushing at his pants and was looking at him, almost holding his breath. The green eyes nearly held Tinker's as Lefty seemed trying to pull out the answer. Tinker felt an urge to lie a little, just to draw Lefty out. Someway, the boy's silence irked him. If he told them some lie—No. You couldn't joke much with Lefty, nor with Jock.

"It'll maybe do a hundred and twenty or a little better. That enough?"

Jock took Tinker's mind away from Lefty. "I reckon it ought to be. With Lefty under the wheel, it'll do more'n anybody else can get out of it."

Tinker saw Lefty preen, and he thought he could see his leather cap getting too small for his head. Well, maybe Lefty could get more out of it and maybe not. Back in Tinker's mind a man wearing his cap backward dropped a checkered flag. . . . What did the years take away from a man? What did they give him in return? Just by twisting one screw, he could fix it so Lefty couldn't get so much out of it! But let it go. What else did Lefty have?

"Go on. Git that carburetor fixed," pushed Jock.

As he raised the hood wide, he saw Lefty pull off the leather cap. Maybe it *was* too tight! Lefty slid a comb from his pocket and ran it through his straw hair. All the time, he was easing over to get a look under the hood. Tinker resented the lust he saw in the pale green eyes.

Jock exclaimed, "Three goddam carburetors! Hell, the other just had two!"

"Yeah, your gasoline bill is going up."

"That don't make a damn. What

else you got on this thing?"

"Different fuel pump," Lefty broke in, and Tinker noticed that his voice wasn't dead level as he usually tried to keep it. A lot Lefty knew about it! It was the same kind of fuel pump, just like the ones on all Jock's liquor cars. Only the cover was different. A hell of a lot Lefty knew about fuel pumps.

"Where's the switch for the electric booster pump, Tinker?" asked Lefty.

"Under the dash, same as always. Don't use it under seventy, though."

Tinker watched Lefty move like a cat to the door of the car and grope for the switch. He strutted back using the comb. "Hell, I've run the tires off four of these damn things already. Is this crate gonna start as hard as the last one?"

"Try it," Tinker said. He was through fooling with the carburetor, through with the make-believe adjustment. Of course it was going to start hard, he thought. Any fool would know that, with the compression that motor had—But what the hell! "Go on. It's ready to go. See if you can break your fool neck in it."

Lefty's thick, tawny hair seemed to bristle, and he stood a moment looking at Tinker, his eyes cold and his expression set. Tinker looked straight through him, knowing what would happen. Then he had a feeling of satisfaction when Lefty's eyes wavered and he whirled into the car. The motor turned over laboriously a few times, then came to life with a roar. As Lefty reached for the gear shift, Tinker snarled, "Hold it! You got to warm that motor!"

"Okay, okay, I know it." But Lefty didn't look at him. He just teased the accelerator gently, causing a rhythmic rise and fall of the exhaust sound.

Tinker touched Jock's elbow and jerked his head. Jock followed around to the back of the car where Tinker said, "Listen to them tailpipes talking."

The low, throaty grumbling of power was symphonic music to Tinker, but he could see that it was just noise to fat Jock Bronson. Jock yelled at Lefty, "Kick it once, boy."

The response was a sudden thunder that made Jock fall back a couple of steps. "Goddam! I always fergit how much fuss them things make. Sounds like it'll go."

Tinker spoke to Lefty. "Do it again, but give it to her slow." Then he stood silent listening nostalgically to the twin straight stacks while the rising roar beat upward without faltering. Yes, what did the years take away from a man . . . ?

Then, looking through the rear window of the car at Lefty, he came back to reality and the tarpaper garage beside the narrow gravel road. "Damned if Lefty don't act like somebody's pushed a good-looking woman in his lap.

He'd grab her and hold on tight," said Tinker, absently.

"Hell, yes. He wants to see what this car will do."

"Okay, Lefty," Tinker said, "go ahead, before some damn snoop drives by here."

"You got her springs tied down, ain't you? So she won't heel?"

"Yeah, but you take it easy in that curve right down the road. Gravel has got stacked there so as it'll throw you."

Tinker saw Lefty's mouth twist a little in disdain. Lefty thought there was no curve he couldn't manage. Tinker heard the motor ease down, heard the gear shifted, and heard the motor pick up again. The Olds moved off smoothly, and then gravel spurted back toward Tinker as the car sprang forward like it was shot from a catapult. Tinker saw the Eighty-eight hesitate briefly and knew Lefty had shifted gears. He knew Lefty liked the feel of the straight stick. The roar of the motor built steadily the whole hundred yards to the curve, and kept building, only the tone changing a little as he bore into the curve. The car lurched seriously but settled again. Gravel flew clear into the field.

"I told the damn young fool about that curve."

"Don't worry none about Lefty. He can drive!" Jock got a cigarette going, offering the pack to Tinker. "Listen when he hits that blacktop."

Then the tires screamed as Lefty took the car onto the main highway without slackening speed. Tinker could hear the rising howl of the motor as Lefty started winding it up. He felt his own pulse quicken and his throat tighten. In that moment, he was wearing the horsehide jacket, feeling his shoulders tighten as he hunched over the wheel. His muscles felt the balance of the car, the pull of the steering in the curves, the sway of the body. His brain sifted through every sound of the motor, every sensation of feel and sight and sound. . . .

Nobody these days had any use for a car like that but the liquor men; but Tinker wished he could afford one for himself. Just to go fishing in, maybe. He didn't want to drive it fast, especially, he argued to himself, but he'd just like to own it. Maybe he'd have somebody else open it up once in awhile so he could listen to it like people listened to fox hounds after the fox.

He thought about that a moment. Hounds after the fox. The law after the moonshiners. He'd like to fix the hounds so they'd go a little faster, too. He thought what he could do for the revenooers if they'd give him a free hand to fix up a pursuit car for them. Then he could sit up on the hill at night and listen to the law's car howling after the moonshiners and the siren would be screaming and tires would squall in the curves and motors would thunder through

the narrow cuts in the hill roads.

"Hot dammy!" The sound of his own voice surprised him. For a moment, he had forgotten about Jock.

"What you say, Tinker?"

"Aw, nothing. I was just thinking if that Eighty-eight is faster than anything the law's got; and I reckon it is. Only way they can get hold of a good car is to catch one I fixed up for some of you fellers. They ain't got a thing that can touch that Olds. And it don't look fast, either."

"Well, when Lefty gets back, we'll know how it's gonna do."

"I know already," Tinker said. "Lefty knows mighty little about cars."

"He's one helluva driver, though."

"He ought to be good for something." Tinker knew his voice was rough, and he didn't care if it was. Jock ought to do something about Lefty. Somebody ought to— If Lefty was a son of his— But Lefty was a no-good. "His old man needs him on the farm," he added. "His mother's helping strip tobacco right today."

"Well, it's tough on the old lady, I reckon; but the old man had his fling." Jock's tone was easy, and he kept looking down the road like he was watching for Lefty to come back. "He made liquor for six or eight years, but the law got after him so hot they scared him out. Hell, I tried to get him to move on my place. He's a pretty good hand with stock."

"You still raising them black Angus cattle?"

"Yeah, sure."

"How're you doing?"

"Aw, doin' good, doin' good." The way Jock said it, it sounded memorized. It was something he had said many times to many people.

Tinker thought about that a minute and knew Jock was lying. But everybody lied about what he was doing and what he wanted to do, what he was, and what he wanted to be . . . and sometimes what he could have been. . . . Everybody in the world! Jock was a moonshiner and not a farmer. Jock wanted to be a big cattle man worse than anything, but he didn't know how and he left it all for somebody else to do. He tried to run his farm like he did his liquor business. Sometimes Tinker thought Jock would about as soon be caught with a load of liquor as to be caught working. But Tinker's thoughts would not leave Lefty. And Lena. . . . Lena would have been the one to handle Lefty . . .

"Well, it ain't my business, but I look for Lefty to be a young corpse. Either in a wreck, or he'll try to pull that gun he carries. I think he's seen too many gangster movies. Thinks he's a regular bad man."

"Aw, don't be too hard on Lefty. He's one helluva good driver."

"Yeah, you said that. Trouble is

he ain't got sense enough to listen. He knows all he'll ever know if he lives to be a hundred. Like I just told him about the gravel stacking up right on that curve— He's coming back! Hear him?" Tinker heard the squall of tires as Lefty came off the highway. "Better look sharp, Jock, he'll open that thing up on this stretch if he gets through that curve there."

"Don't worry. He will. I'd bet a thousand dollars the law don't catch Lefty in that job. It sounds like it's making a hundred-and-a-half."

"Get back from the road. He's really coming!" The high whine of the motor told Tinker how fast the car was coming. Then he heard the change in tone and breathed easier knowing Lefty was letting the car brake against the motor. Lefty brought the Olds through the curve, holding close to the inside. The Olds lurched as it hit the piled gravel, came a bit sideways and straightened as Lefty stepped on the gas to get more traction. In his shoulders, he felt the car straighten, then he let Lefty's hands come back on the wheel. Lefty could drive. You had to admit that.

Tinker sorted the sounds in his mind. The roar of the twin stacks, the motor's whine, the whistle of the wind, gravel rattling against metal as it flew up from the road, and the funny mixture of sounds that told you the car was moving faster than your experience could cope with. It was a little frightening. It gave you the creeps.

Just for a flash as the car passed, he saw Lefty sitting up close to the wheel, a cigarette drooping from the corner of his mouth, his cap pushed back. In that flash, he saw Lefty clearly for the first time. For a split second, Lefty's face was rigid and set, his eyes were larger than Tinker had ever seen them, his stare fixed, and his pale lips were drawn back above his clenched teeth. His straw-colored hair blew back in a tangled mat. As he passed, Lefty nonchalantly thumbed his nose with a white and bony hand. There was only the one clear glance. The rest was mixed in the blue of motion and nothing was distinct. Just the glance, then the blue and the roar, and he was gone in the dust from the gravel boiling up along the road.

Jock Bronson, looking along the trail of dust, let the pride of ownership come into his voice. "Boy, that's a real job." Then he added, "and I got a real driver."

"Yeah, I reckon," Tinker agreed, adding, "He'll start cutting notches under the steering wheel in a couple of days. He goes for the babes around the little towns where he takes them big loads of splo. He looks big to them in that hot car, so he grabs that bow tie out of his jacket pocket and snaps it on his collar and takes the gal out and then cuts a notch under the steering wheel."

"Aw, let him have his fun. If he wasn't a tomcatter, he wouldn't be a hot driver. Never seen it fail."

For once, Jock was right, thought Tinker. He felt his throat tighten. He refused to think of Lena. For a moment, the roar of big motors, the roar of big crowds, the smell of burnt castor oil, hot tires in pits, and the frenzy of movement— But Lefty came rolling up, smoothly, harmlessly, everything under control. Just an old black car with the nameplate off the hood and an extra rearview mirror outside, and nothing inside but the driver's seat welded down. Nothing inside but room to load moonshine liquor until the overload springs strained to hold it riding level.

Bringing the car to a stop, Lefty turned sideways in the seat as he opened the door. Tinker noticed that he sat there like he was with his favorite gal and hated to leave her because he wasn't tired of her yet. There was a glow in the boy's eyes that disturbed Tinker as he waited patiently for Jock to ask the questions. For himself, he knew the answers already. He knew the real answers, and he knew the answers Lefty would give. Lefty's answers showed in the pale eyes.

"How'd it do, Lefty?"

"Okay, boss. It'll run a little over a hundred and twenty, best I could tell. Speedometer busted on me same as always."

"How's it on the road? In the curves?"

"Good. Lays right in there. Corners extra good."

"Okay, Lefty, move over. I'll drive it out the road and back if I can git my gut squeezed behind the wheel." Tinker watched Jock twist himself into the driver's seat while Lefty moved over to squat on the floor of the car. Jock turned to Tinker. "Be back in a minute and pay you."

"Okay." Tinker thought about that as the car moved off. Jock didn't handle it like Lefty did. He drove it like he did the Chrysler, rather sedately. Jock liked it, though, Tinker knew. He figured the price in his head and decided to boost it fifty dollars over what he had first decided on. Jock wouldn't gripe much. Jock knew this job was going to run over a thousand, but he didn't know just how much over.

The car disappeared around the curve, and Tinker turned into his littered shop and reached up on a shelf behind some boxes of spark plugs for his bottle of white liquor. Bumping the bottle against the heel of his hand, he looked at the bead on the clear liquor and decided it was pretty good stuff. Maybe a hundred and fifteen proof. The only way you could get liquor that proofed that high was to know the man who made it. "Old white lightning," he said aloud to himself. "About two good drinks left. Take one and save one." He started to smell it and didn't. "If I smell

it, I can't seem to get it down."

One drink. His mind was made up. Just one. He couldn't afford to have the shop closed up for a week or two like the last few times. Just one drink, and he'd better get it down before Jock and Lefty came back.

With a quick motion, he unscrewed the cap, tipped the bottle and sucked at it hard. As fast as he could, he replaced the cap and set the bottle down. His throat was on fire! He was sure he was having a convulsion! He folded up double! He was going to smother! Clicking his teeth together, he finally caught his breath. He felt so weak he had to sit down on the old motor block by the wall.

Almost at once he felt better and thought that the first drink had gone down easier than usual. If Jock would come on back and pay off, now . . . Not that he was worried about that. Jock always paid and paid and paid. . . . In a way, you had to feel sorry for Jock.

His family wasn't much help, Tinker decided. They wanted to be big shots just like Jock did, and they wanted it right now; so Jock tried to buy what they wanted with the money he made from the liquor Lefty hauled and the liquor half-a-dozen others about like Lefty made for him. Jock figured there was nothing money wouldn't buy. . . .

It seemed like they had been gone a long time, so Tinker reached out and got the bottle again. He wasn't going to take another drink, really. He was just going to make the first one a little bigger, so it wouldn't actually be but just one drink. Just one big one. Again, he unscrewed the cap and sucked at the bottle. It didn't burn quite so much this time, and he could breathe sooner. . . . That was all of it.

Hearing the car returning, he hid the empty bottle in its place and walked out to meet them. Jock squirmed from behind the wheel and asked, "What's the damage, Tinker?"

Right on schedule! No use beating around the bush. Just throw it in his face and let it go. "Twelve-seventy-five."

"Holy Mary, Jesus God and St. Joseph!" Tinker thought Jock would bust a blood vessel. "That's out of sight!"

Tinker felt better than he had in a month, and he didn't care much if he did make Jock mad. Now was the time to put the needle in where it would do the most good and get his money quick. "Well, Jock, if you can't pay it, I'll wait—"

"Can't pay it! Can't pay it! Why, goddam, man, I got money like you never seen. Lookit here!" Tinker saw the roll of bills Jock brought from his pocket. "Them ain't ones and fives, neither. Here's your lousy money!"

That was the way to get the job done, Tinker thought. Jock's tenderest spot was his bank roll. He couldn't stand any slighting re-

marks about it. Tinker watched Jock peel the bills off: two five-hundred dollar bills and three hundred-dollar bills. Tinker took the money as Jock shoved it at him.

Jock said, "Just keep the extra twenty-five. I can afford it."

Tinker wadded the money into his shirt pocket and watched the fat Jock move to the Chrysler and jerk the door open. It wouldn't be good to let Jock go away mad.

"Better bring that Olds by here next week and let me check it over."

Jock stood by the door of his car a moment. "Okay, Lefty'll bring it by." He started to get in the car and turned back. "Say, Tinker, Lefty says he can come through your little old curve making ninety."

"Lefty's crazy!"

Tinker was surprised he had said that. He watched Lefty start the Olds and throw gravel as he took off down the road. Of course, he'd have to go out and come back. You couldn't get a car up to ninety just from here to the curve.

"What's he gonna do?" Jock asked, looking confused.

"He's gonna prove he can do what you said he could." Tinker moved over toward Jock, thinking about the empty bottle. "Look, Jock, I need some drinking liquor. You ain't got a bottle on you, have you?"

Jock looked at the dust rising along the road where Lefty had passed and muttered, "What *I* said he could? Now, you mean what *you* said he couldn't!"

"About the liquor—"

"Yeah, sure." Slowly, Jock unlocked the rear deck of the Chrysler. "Yeah, I got a half-gallon. Can you drink out of a fruit jar?"

"Naw, I can't." Tinker felt the shakes run through him. "But I can pour it into a bottle." He pulled the wad of bills from his pocket, awkwardly holding the fruit-jar by the top in his other hand. "What do I owe you?" Jock waved the money off, so Tinker kissed it and returned it to his pocket. "Good old-moonshine-liquor money."

"Here he comes!" Jock was looking down the road. "Now, you watch him."

"You watch him," Tinker muttered. In his mind he knew just how the ridge of gravel was, and in his mind he could see the two big stumps among the dead weeds and brush along the fence row on the outside of the curve.

The roar of the Olds was building, and this time there would be no braking against the motor, and there was none. The car was coming, whining, throwing gravel. Suddenly, it slowed around the curve, sliding sideways. Lefty was feeding it gas to straighten it out. It wouldn't straighten! It heeled off the gravel ridge and kept turning. Then it rolled! Over and over it went, hardly seeming to hit the ground, like a running rabbit hit

square with a load of number five shot. Tinker shut his eyes. Sounds of rending metal came to him. Sounds of bushes beating against the metal. Then the solid, chilling crash as the Olds thundered into the stumps in the fence row. Gravel rained down deliberately in a great, terrible silence, broken only by the cackling of a hen up on the hill.

Then Jock was yelling, "Come on, Tinker! He's wrecked! Tore the car all to pieces!"

But Tinker had the lid off the fruit jar, swallowing as fast as he could. Liquor was spilling down his shirt front. In his mind, Lena was coming home. She was ragged and gaunt and tired. In a few minutes, if his throat didn't plumb close up, he wouldn't be able to see her.

NAME: unknown

SUBJECT: murder

Marlene found the little grade-school exercise book lying in a gutter and suddenly she was engulfed in a nightmare of erotic violence.

BY SHEILA S. THOMPSON

THE EXERCISE BOOK was found by a girl named Marlene Kent. If it had been found by someone else this story might have had a very different ending.

Marlene was a tall, slow-moving girl, neither pretty enough, nor yet ugly enough, to be noticed by the boys who haunted the penny arcade she had to pass as she went to and from the station in the small seaside town in which she lived. She was one of the quiet army of people who seem invisible against the background on which they move. A creature, not of free will but of habit. Every weekday morning since she had left school and acquired her first job she had gone to London on the workmen's train and returned on the 6.15. A monotonous life relieved only by television, films, and her own romantic dreams in which she superimposed herself as the heroine of all the plays and films she saw.

On this particular evening she had just turned the corner to the street in which she lived when three rowdy boys rushed past, colliding with her; knocking her handbag to the ground, they sped on to disappear onto the promenade.

Furious, she bent to retrieve her purse and it was then that she noticed the exercise book lying in the gutter. With a small smile of triumph she picked it up along with her bag and walked on. "That'll teach the rough little beasts," she thought spitefully. "Now they've lost it." She looked sullenly round as if expecting one of the boys to come running back to reclaim it but the street was deserted except for a nondescript little man waiting patiently at the bus sop.

Once inside their small bungalow Marlene forgot the exercise book until her mother asked her to mind their neighbour's children for the evening to give poor Mrs. Gibbons a chance to go out for a few minutes and play Bingo.

"No thank you," Marlene said vehemently, suddenly remembering the boys on the way home. "In fact, I think I'll go to bed," and she flounced into her room.

When she first looked at it it did occur to her that it was remarkably clean for an exercise book, but even so it was quite a shock when she saw that beside the printed word NAME someone had written in careful script, "UNKNOWN", and beside the word SUBJECT, in equally precise handwriting was the word "MURDER".

"Name Unknown — Subject Murder," Marlene whispered to herself audibly. Her spine tingled. Then she shook her head. It was probably an author's rough book or, more likely, a schoolboy's idea of a joke. She scanned the pages quickly, sitting on her bed to read it carefully. It was a book of sorts, but the chapters were without continuity, each cryptically titled: *Case No. 1. Blonde.—Case No. 2. Blond. —Case No. 3. Grey*—and so on, up to six cases and colourings, and each case was a completely detailed account of rape and murder and every salicious act and reaction was described in minute detail—as if the murderer had been observing himself and his victim with clinical interest.

Since Marlene's sex education had been limited to the most elementary facts of life at home and what she could glean in details from the gossip of her more promiscuous colleagues at work, she was ill-equipped to comprehend the erotic turmoil that now gripped her. She read the whole thing from cover to cover twice before the implications of the book struck her at all. She closed it carefully, examining it, fascinated. It burned her hands, it seemed to have a life of its own. Some strange vibration flowed from it into her. She felt tired and weak, and the vacuum that she had always been was slowly filled with feelings quite alien to her, as if the evil of the author was a living thing encompassing her.

She knew this was no schoolboy's idea of a joke, no author's rough book—the details it con-

tained were too authentic, the places too familiar, the description of the women too reminiscent of recent newspaper reports, to be imagined. It was the diary of a necrophilist, pornographic, accurate, and terrifying, and she—Marlene Veronica Kent—owned it! Her sense of pride surprised her. Now she would be different. Now she had a secret, better than Sally's sloppy boy friend or Joanna's casual dates. She flopped back on her bed, confused and happy thoughts crowding each other through her mind. Trying to imagine the murderer's face, his build, his character, he became a composite picture of all the film stars she had admired and all the tough fictional detectives she had ever read about, so romantic that he wore the costume of a highwayman.

She lay there imagining him making love to her—she became case history 1 to 6 and was not killed because *she* was the woman he had been seeking all his life. It was the best and most exciting daydream she had ever had and she fell asleep suddenly in the middle of it, and slept till morning fully clothed.

Before she left for work next morning she hid the book and although she felt a little guilty whenever she saw a policeman she never really considered surrendering it to the police.

During the next few days a strange change came over her. Sometimes she felt all-powerful as being the guardian of the murderer's secrets, and sometimes she felt she was his servant and possessed by him, as if, unseen and unheard, he directed her actions. She had surrendered herself to being in love with the image she had created and lack of imagination and correct information rendered her quite insensitive to the revolting aspects of his type of crime.

The discovery of another murder not five days after she had found the exercise book, and in the same area as an earlier, similar, murder—within a ten mile radius of her home—neither surprised nor frightened Marlene. It did surprise the police, and delight them, for this was the first break in the line of insensible, brutal crimes committed in widely separated and densely populated areas; and now the pattern was broken, the killer had struck twice in the same area in ten days. They now knew he was within a given district during a certain period of time.

Hoping to panic what seemed to be a cornered quarry the police reported that they were closing in. The newspapers urged them on and derided them alternately and the public complained that with the police so lax it was not safe to be out alone. In spite of repeated warnings from her parents Marlene, who hitherto had walked from home to the station and from the station home, to sink into a

chair before the TV and never move again, now began to walk along the cliffs at dusk, even on the beach, by herself after supper. She felt drawn towards something as iron to a magnet and the feeling of destiny inexorably closing in numbed her to danger.

The papers began to hint at some special reason for the murder's apparent disregard for his own safety by lingering in the same area. A motive was beginning to emerge, they said. Revenge—this was another Jack-the-Ripper. Obviously he—the murderer—had now found the person on whom he wished to be avenged and for whom seven other innocent women had perished, and he was biding his time before striking again. The police, although they did not concur with the newspapers' sordid surmises, did agree that there must be some reason for the apparently illogical murderer staying where he was. The usual psychiatrists' opinions were printed with an entirely new theory. "As a simile for the layman," quoted the reputable opinions, "the murderer's mind can be reasonably compared to a scratched gramaphone record. He will now repeat his last crime continually in the present area until caught by the police and stopped."

Marlene read all the reports and comments with a supercilious smile and retired to her room to re-read *Case No. 7. Brown,* which she had added to the exercise book. She did not know why she had done it, obsessed by the invisible tie that seemed to bind her, she felt it her duty to keep the record up to date, even to painstakingly copying as closely as she could the original handwriting. She had written all that the newspapers could with decency report and then added such details as she felt necessary to complete the account by copying from previous pages in the exerise book.

It did not occur to Marlene that the exercise book might be of vital importance to the murderer and that it was for this reason he lingered so long, in the hopes of reclaiming it. Egoistically shut in her own secure dream world she was sure he was seeking her. Whenever she saw a good looking man, or a well built back, she would stand and gaze piercingly at him, or it, trying to stab the unspoken words into him—"It is I. It is I."—so that he might turn and claim her like the Red Shadow in the musical *Desert Song.*

One evening as she was walking along a low and lonely stretch of the cliffs she glanced on to the beach and there beheld a man and a woman in the final act of love. Quickly she dropped to the concealment of the long seagrasses and flowers from where she could watch unseen. Any lovemaking she had seen before had been celluloid and nothing she had imagined had

ever matched this for violence. She was fascinated by the twisting bodies, the muffled cries, the woman's naked limbs, which suddenly stilled. Then the man rose and for a second stood looking directly at the place where Marlene was hidden as if he knew she was there, and then ran rapidly towards the small path that led to the promenade.

The woman still lay half-naked, her arms flung out limply. "Well," ejaculated Marlene aloud, disgustedly. "She ought to have more shame," forgetting for the moment that she had watched their act with something akin to pleasure. She scrambled down the chalky cliff edge and strode across the beach towards the woman, intent on giving her a piece of her mind, lying around in public with next to nothing on, and not a young woman either. But the words of reproof died on her lips for here on the beach was her dream with the curtain of ignorance ripped away. Here, on the sand, in the cool of the summer evening air, with clothes ripped to the waist and white flabby limbs defenseless from the inquiring gaze, with swollen, mottled face and lips awry, protruding and agonised eyes staring at Marlene, who had unknowingly watched her die, lay *Case No. 8. Grey*.

Never in all her life had Marlene imagined anything more shattering than this poor inhuman human, this thing that accused her from the beach—The words she herself had written to describe *Case No. 7 Brown* came to her mind, but now she understood them and was completely revolted.

All of a sudden the evil that she had allowed to possess her was sloughed away, leaving her emptier than ever before. Reeling, screaming, and crying, she made her way up the same path the murderer had taken and onto the promenade where some passers-by tried to calm her. Then the police were on the beach and on the front. Although they were patient, and even eager, they could make nothing of her hysterically incoherent references to the "Exercise book" and she was finally taken home. She could not stop crying and she did not stop retching until the doctor had given her a strong sedative. At last she sat, dazed and glassy-eyed, in the arm chair.

"Why don't you go to bed, dear?" suggested her mother, to whom there were only three remedies to all the ills of the world—two aspirins, a cup of tea, and bed.

Obediently and silently she got up.

"Would you like me to come with you?"

Marlene shook her head. She couldn't bear anyone human near her. She went to her room, closing the door behind her. She leaned exhaustedly against it for a moment.

"Marlene, dear," called her mother, "are you all right?"

Carefully, Marlene turned the key in the lock. She could not talk tonight. Tomorrow she would tell them. She flicked on the light.

She was too dazed by the sedative to be able to register at first and then too paralyzed by fear. There standing by her dressing table, holding the exercise book in his hand, was a short, nondescript, middle aged man with puffy white hands and shabby clothes. The light from the ceiling shone through his thinning hair to reflect upon the pale shining skin, and his colourless eyebrows hung over almost colourless eyes. His thick wet lips were the most prominent feature in his dull face. He twisted the exercise book in his hands, smiling at her as he came towards her.

"Hallo, Partner," he greeted her. "I think we have some details to add to *our* notes . . ."

Tomorrow never came . . . It was too late to tell them tomorrow.

Skidmore shot Morgan in the back of the head, and then Skidmore disappeared. Merlo gave the word from Miami . . . and the next day Genna and Scalisi arrived from Chicago. They had a reputation for finding people.

THE TROUBLE SHOOTERS

BY DAN BRENNAN

THE TWO Sicilians crossed the street toward the brothel. Of red brick, faded by the harsh winters and torrid heat of midwestern summers, the big square apartment building, in which the prostitutes lived, was owned by the syndicate and faced the railroad yards. The street in front was vacant.

"He won't be here," the first Sicilian said.

"You never know," the second said. It was late afternoon. Shades on all the windows were drawn. The building loomed, looking quiet and empty.

"Yeah. We had a guy like him in Kansas City. Tried to pull the same thing."

"You mean Louie Drucci?"

"Yeah."

The first Sicilian's name was Tony Genna. He was about thirty. They were both men of medium height, lean, wirey, like vaudeville dancers, with small heads, narrow dark faces like two alert sharp-eyed foxes, peeking stealthily out behind a screen of bushes. It was their ancient Mediterranean blood that gave them this look. Their hair looked like smooth black leather, shined and oiled, smooth and flat on their heads. Around the wrist of his left arm Tony Genna wore a silver identification bracelet.

"Like I said, after the war there's better rackets than broads. We shoulda' kept in slots. No Feds breathing down your neck. Now we gotta worry about getting lousy broads across state lines."

"They stink."

"Yack. Yack. Yack. Anytime the Feds put a little heat on them. No guts. Worse than buying bootleg offa hill billies."

"And Merlo sits on his can in Florida and never gets the heat."

"Right. You can have this racket. Christ, before the war, with a couple slots in the right spots, a guy could do better."

"You're too young to remember running alky."

"Yeah. I know. My old man was in it. No sweat, no strain."

"A nice bit."

"My family don't even speak to me now. My sister knows."

"My brother, too. Him and his bookie joint. He acts like a Republican every time he sees me."

"There's something about taking money off broads I never did like."

"You said it."

They mounted the steps. It was summer but a wide wooden winter storm door with a small square window was fastened shut over the front door. There was no sound from within, but they knew what was inside and who they were looking for, ever since Ed Morgan had been killed a week ago. But they did not know if the man they were looking for was here.

There was a main room downstairs, a big room, with chairs along the wall and davenports, and tables, and a juke box in the corner. The floor was bare. In this room the customers met and danced and drank with the whores and made their selections to go upstairs. The shades were drawn and the light in the room came from the ceiling. It was like coming into a house at night. When the two Sicilians entered with the house madam, the room was full of girls. The two Sicilians sat down at one of the tables.

"Jesus," Tony said. "I shoulda stayed in slots."

"You ain't alone, you and me both," the second said.

"I never seen such crumbs."

"I shoulda kept the crap game. So a few lousy dollars more. It ain't worth it."

"Merlo's crazy. The guy ain't dumb enough to shack up here." From along the wall, from the other tables, the smell of the girls' cheap perfume rolled over them in waves. "I'm Tony Genna. I'm from Merlo," Genna said to the girls, roving his eyes around the room. The girls stared at him sullenly. "Merlo sent us. Where's Johnny Skidmore?" The girls stared at him. The odor of their cheap perfume, disinfectant carbolic soap, seemed to fill the hot, airless room. Their eyes, faces, bodies were motionless. "All right," Genna said. "You know why we're here. One of you broads is supposed to know where he's gone."

"Maybe they'd like to work in Chicago," the second said. "Maybe they don't know what work is."

"Come on," Genna said. "Start talking. You broads know Johnny?"

"Which one of these hustlers did he go for?" Genna asked the madam.

She was a fat, dark skinned woman with dyed blond hair. She wore a red dress.

"Alla time a different girl," the madam said.

"He's gone," the second said. "He took off. He'd be a sucker to hang around here. It was like this in Kansas City when Drucci knocked off Nelson and thought he could cut in. We caught up to him in Cape Girardeau. Merlo was screaming all the way from Miami because it took us a week to catch Nelson."

"I never thought Skidmore had the guts," Genna said.

"Yeah. Irish. Like the Greeks. Which is worse? They double cross five ways."

"Let's get outa here."

"Wait. One of these broads knows. I'll betcha. Four to one. Jesus, with slots we never had trouble like this."

"Yeah. That lousy Skidmore. He took off. Let's get outa here."

The whores stared silently at the two men. Their eyes were expressionless. Their perfume smelled stale, flat.

"Gutless bitches," Genna said. "What'll we do with them?"

"Let's see Mantello."

"Why should he care? He still gets his end."

"Yeah, he's got the town now," the second man said.

"Maybe he paid Skidmore. Now he gets the Cadillac." They got up and went out. Twilight shone pink and gold in the sky beyond the railroad yard. From a block away came the sound of evening traffic on Minnehaha Avenue.

"He's been driving a Cadillac almost a year anyway, I heard," the second man said.

"Morgan never knew it. It don't

matter. The bum's got the town."

"I heard they had a fight about the Cad. I heard Morgan told Mantello that only the top guy can drive one in Cereal City. Mantello didn't like it."

"Yeah," Genna said. "He can drive two Caddies now. Merlo don't care. Just so Mantello delivers the ice right every month. How about that?"

"I don't know," the second said. "I don't like Caddies. Do you?"

"No," Genna said.

"You're smart," the second said.

The apartment building sat on a hill, above the lake, surrounded by elm trees. It was a modern building, designed with a simplicity that was severe. It was five years old. It had been built and paid for by Merlo, out of Chicago, who had been Morgan's boss when Morgan was alive and who was now Mantello's boss. The walls were of gray sandstone.

Merlo had been born in Cicero, one of eleven children, out of the tenements swarm of Little Hell on the North Side; a member of the Market Street gang, a thief, highway robber, safecracker, and finally a bootlegger, the heir apparent of the Unione Siciliana, the last in the dynasty of bootleggers. Nobody knew exactly how he became boss, save that his competition disappeared suddenly, died suddenly. At that time he controlled syndicate operations throughout the middle west and shortly thereafter he installed Ed Morgan as head of the rackets in Cereal City, Minnesota. During the war, Merlo began to broaden the brothel operations of the syndicate through the middle west because police and political heat fell upon the syndicate gambling empire and intergang warfare between the west and east coast threatened his wire service. Out of the farms, small towns, slums, girls were recruited, and in the hierarchy of the syndicate local bosses, Ed Morgan ranked high. He ruled his own operation with a hierarchy of police and politicians, who gathered when the local heat from civic improvement groups and churches required a meeting of the local crime clan in Morgan's rooms in the apartment building Merlo's money had built in Cereal City.

"How about cutting down on the cat houses?" an alderman said.

"What's to make up for it?" one of Morgan's enforcers asked.

"There are too many cat houses," the alderman said.

"Right," the chief of police said. "Something's got to give. I can't take this heat."

"What about fourteen and sixty-six boards? How about a few spots?" Morgan asked.

"The governor won't buy it," said a state senator who was Morgan's lawyer.

"That phony crumb," Morgan said. "He got more than his end in

the last campaign."

They all stared at Morgan, waiting for some solution, some answer.

"Why not talk to him?" the county sheriff said. "The governor ain't a bad guy."

"No," the state senator said. "That won't work. He's got to keep the church vote. Passing the anti-slot law was the only way he could do it. I think you better go down for a while."

"Go down?" Morgan said.

"Yes. Let things cool off for about three months," said the chief of police. "We can open up again in the fall."

"How are we going to make it up?" said another alderman from the city licensing committee. "I quit selling soap two years ago."

Morgan looked at them thoughtfully.

"Merlo ain't gonna like it," Morgan said.

"Let him make it up elsewhere," the police chief snapped. "He's got to understand our position."

So they closed five houses and kept five running and sent the idle girls to houses in Wisconsin, Iowa and Illinois. Three months later the houses opened again and that winter Morgan went to Florida to see Merlo and came home driving a new Cadillac with a Florida license. It was painted white, a four door coupe, and the first day home he gave Mantello a ride in it and took it to the dollar car wash which Merlo also owned in Cereal City and every day after that Morgan had the Cadillac washed. Chickie Mantello had sleepy eyes, like a cobra, heavy lidded, but the sight of the white Cadillac made his eyes bright, alert, yet somehow veiled.

Mantello was a product of Cereal City, newsboy, bellhop, pimp, alky runner. Within a week after Morgan got the Cadillac Mantello started borrowing it to run errands. Morgan laughed to himself. Two years later Morgan went to Florida again in the winter and returned with a new Cadillac. Mantello quit asking to use it, but one of the enforcers of the syndicate told Morgan that Mantello had been pricing Cadillacs himself at the local Cadillac agency.

Morgan sent for Mantello. "Go down to Chase's lot and pick yourself out a second hand Caddy," Morgan said. He did not smile as he said it. "Send me the tab."

Mantello looked at him with a brief glance.

"Thanks," he said.

Mantello was then about forty-five, unmarried. Both were big men, gross, with florid faces, hairy hands, black hair, one Italian, one Irish.

"You like it?" Morgan said when he saw the car. It was last year's model, only yellow.

"Sure," Mantello said. His eyes

were blank and heavy lidded.

"Well," Morgan said, "you got yourself a nice car." He watched Mantello's face.

"What kinda car does Merlo drive?" Mantello said, his eyes still blank, his face wooden.

Morgan looked at him again.

"Two Lincolns and a Caddy," Morgan said. "But he doesn't use them. He hardly leaves the estate. So what? He's got what he wants."

That conversation was three years ago, and now Morgan was dead. He was to meet Skidmore one night, Skidmore the collector for the houses. He had been stealing from the collections, and though Morgan was only going to warn him, Morgan forgot to take precautions when he changed their regular meeting place from his apartment to his Cadillac in a vacant parking lot at night. Skidmore shot him in the back of the head.

That was three days ago: Mantello was the new boss and Morgan had been buried in the best cemetery in Cereal City with legislators and aldermen and policemen attending the burial service.

"Skidmore's still in town," Tony Genna said, as he and the other Sicilian rode in Tony's car to the apartment where Mantello lived. "The cops've staked out every station. Bus depot. Railroad. Airport. His car's still behind his apartment. Just like Drucci."

The second Sicilian's name was Harry Scalisi. "He'll have to hole up in town here. Everybody knows him."

"With slots we never had this kind of trouble. Only with broads," Genna said.

"He'll have to show in a week."

"We oughta watch all those broads when they change shifts. One of them is probably taking care of him at home," Genna said.

Genna turned into the parking lot beside the apartment building.

"Mantello can drive two Caddies now," Scalisi grinned.

"He better keep 'em in the garage," Genna said. Scalisi looked at him. "Maybe Skidmore wouldn't like Mantello looking for him in one of those Caddies."

Scalisi said, "Why should Mantello care? A guy that's got everything now."

"Why not? Maybe Skidmore goes for Caddies."

"Sure," Scalisi said. "But Merlo would never make him boss with Mantello chopped. He's had it."

"Are you sure?"

"Aren't you?"

"I don't know," Genna said, watching him.

Scalisi grinned. "To hell with Caddies. Skidmore is crazy if he thinks—" Scalisi stopped.

Genna smiled.

"Yeah. Real crazy," he said.

"Mantello's the boy for this operation."

"Either that or we ain't sup-

posed to be here," Genna said.

The carpets in the hallway of the apartment building were thick. The walls were a cool green and modern chairs and a marble top coffee table sat in the small foyer entrance. They rode upstairs in the self-operated elevator. On the top floor in another small foyer with a balcony overlooking the street sat a young man. He looked collegiate, young, blond, clean cut, in a camel's hair sports jacket and fawn colored slacks with too many pleats and black leather loafers and a silk purple sports shirt buttoned at the throat. When he saw them he started talking.

"This town's goin' to hell," he said. "When's Merlo gonna get us outa the pros business?"

Genna and Scalisi stopped in front of him. He looked up at them. "You ain't never gonna find Skidmore," he said.

"Sure," Scalisi said.

"You're wasting your time. He's outa state."

"That's what Drucci thought in Kansas City," Genna said.

"Was you—?" the young man said and ceased. His eyes jerked up at Genna.

"No," Scalisi said. "It was Santa Claus."

The young man looked at them.

"Saint Nick, buster," Genna said, and they walked past him.

The apartment door was painted a soft gray. The polished knocker glinted. Genna pushed the buzzer and an old man with a wrinkled face let them in. They entered a long room. It contained several white davenports. The walls were white, hung with big modern paintings and the carpets were white. Mantello was married to a young woman, fifteen years younger, a former cashier in a theater he owned. She had decorated the apartment to please herself. There was a grand piano in a sun room next to the big sitting room and a huge white television set against the far wall of the sitting room. There was a wide, high white brick fireplace. Two davenports were set at right angles to the fireplace. Between the davenports squatted a long, low ebony-black coffee table. Behind a modern desk, below which his trousered legs showed, in the corner of the room next to the television set, sat Mantello.

He was an even six feet, though he did not look it now at his age, and he weighed one hundred and ninety pounds. He was perhaps fifty. He wore a white sport jacket and a black sport shirt, open at the throat. His chest was broad, his stomach lean. On his feet were shining black loafers with tasseled shoe laces. He sat rigid behind the desk, with his lean, V-shaped face and narrow bridged nose and nostrils held back, slightly lifted. There was no expression on his face. His eyes, face, were inscrut-

able, quite still. He appeared to be staring straight ahead, musing on a point beyond Genna's head.

"We got in yesterday," Genna said.

Mantello said nothing. You could not tell what he was thinking. He did not move.

"Maybe he took off," Genna said.

Still Mantello did not move nor speak.

Genna said, "Why didn't you get him picked up right away?"

"Take care of it," Mantello said. "Don't come in here asking why's."

Genna watched Mantello's eyes. The eyes did not move.

"Look," Genna said. "Don't get in a sweat. Merlo sends us. He expects a job. He gets a job. Right?"

Scalisi nodded.

"We handled these before," Genna said. "Maybe you never heard of Spangola last year in L.A. It took us three months. We got him. Don't go getting in a sweat."

Scalisi nodded. He fixed his eyes on Mantello's face.

Mantello did not move, his face rigid, motionless, lifted faintly.

"We looked for Spangola in three states," Genna said. "We had him figured. Skidmore is a punk compared to Spangola."

Mantello's black eyes stared straight ahead. He appeared not to listen, to be musing on a point beyond both men.

"You're gonna help get Skidmore, ain't you?" Genna said.

Scalisi said, "You're top man here now."

"You're gonna help."

That day Skidmore, the former collector for Morgan, hidden in a top room in the brothel, listened to the radio. He was thirty, he had a long straight nose, a big round head; his forehead was high, and his teeth were straight, even and white. He had started his career stealing coal out of the freight yards, before he was ten years old, to supply the stove in a dingy apartment of three rooms in which he lived with his mother and father and three brothers and three sisters. He was the youngest. He had worked for syndicate operations in Cereal City since he was sixteen.

In the early morning darkness, the night on which he had shot Ed Morgan, he walked back to the brothel. In the dawn light the street was vacant. The madam named Eva Benson let him in the back door: the girls were changing shifts. Nobody saw him save Ruby, a prostitute for whom he had pimped before she had gone to work in the brothel. She was eighteen or nineteen, blond, Swedish, from a prairie wheat town. To her he looked frightened.

"Maybe I didn't kill him," Skidmore said, staring at her.

"Kill him?" she said. "Kill who?"

"Maybe he'll live."

"Who?"

"Morgan."

Her eyeballs seemed to bulge.

"Morgan?" she said in shocked amazement. He put his hand over her mouth. The sound of footsteps, voices, sounded in the hall below. Skidmore sat on the edge of the bed, panting. He had run the last six blocks to the brothel. His face was sweaty. "You gotta hide me!"

She muttered through his hand.

"You gotta!" he panted.

He knew the madam wouldn't squeal on him because he had been splitting with her part of the collection money he had been holding out on Morgan.

The cops came the next morning. The madam kept him hidden in the closet in her own room. The police did not search her room. The police and the syndicate trusted her. The odor of her clothes struck sharp and rank into Skidmore's nostrils. He could hear the police going up and down the halls looking in the rooms. The girls stood outside in the hall downstairs, silent in the big, long reception room.

From the top front apartment room in the building, with the door locked, Skidmore listened to the radio and watched the street outside. At noon there was a radio broadcast about the killing. No identification of the killer was made. The announcer said Morgan was in the hospital. Jesus, Skidmore thought, surprised, and I shot him in the head.

"He's still living," Ruby told him that night.

"I might as well be dead."

"Don't worry, honey," she said. He felt a longing to be out of this room, even in jail, even with the police, anything to stop the feeling of being trapped in the room, waiting, waiting, not knowing how to escape. He sat beside the curtained window, watching the street outside. The next morning he heard on the radio that Morgan was dead.

Two days later, in the afternoon, Ruby brought him a first edition of the Cereal City Tribune and he read about Morgan's funeral, smiling quietly while he read the pall bearers' names. Two were retired aldermen, a retired police captain who owned fifteen old apartment buildings, a lawyer employed by the syndicate, the brother of a retired county attorney, and four names unknown to Skidmore.

The next afternoon, watching quietly from the apartment window, he saw Genna and Scalisi walk down the street and mount the front steps. He waited and watched them leave. When it was dark he opened the door, listening to all the sounds throughout the building. The hall was vacant. He descended the stairs and walked through the kitchen on the

ground floor and passed a maid sitting at the kitchen table, her hand holding a piece of toast above a cup of coffee while she stared at him, mouth open, her eyes rounding whitely in her face. He ran down the hall, past the long reception room. The sliding doors between the room and the hall were closed. Through the doors he heard the juke box music thudding. He jerked the bolt back on the front door and ran outside into the summer darkness.

He ran up the dark street. He ran as far as the corner and turned. Three blocks down the dark silent avenue shone the lights of a busy street. He could see car lights rushing past. He ran again toward the lighted street, toward a taxi parked under the street light. He knew that both the police and Genna and Scalisi would be looking for him in the morning. He knew all the stations would be watched. He tried to remember who he had helped and he thought of a family of Assyrians, the Delmites, who were always being picked up by the police on bum raps to cover any heat the cops might be getting from the public. There were nine Delmite brothers. Some sold pornographic literature, photographs; three ran a floating crap game that was always getting knocked off by the racket squad because it wasn't a syndicate game and in addition, wouldn't pay off to the precinct police. Several of the brothers sold flowers in night clubs, day old leftover flowers, purchased half price from floral shops, on the side and with the flowers they attempted to pimp for free lance street hustlers. Skidmore had saved two of the brothers from a safe cracking rap and two other brothers on a charge of illegally selling fire works. He had told them who to contact in the police department for a pay off on the charges. In exchange, they informed Skidmore on any cops who gave the "go-sign" to non-syndicate operations. One of the brothers ran a large newsstand to cover the brothers' criminal operations. The next morning lying in the basement beneath the newsstand, Skidmore saw through the single window part of the drag net. There were two detectives, in sports shirts, hatless, carrying their police Colt .38s in bank messenger style: long leather wallets in their hands, big enough to hold a revolver. They were young, lean Swedes, Larson and Peterson, and he knew both of them, eager for promotion, not in on any pay off, just keeping their mouths shut, turning their eyes the other way, waiting for the day when they were in police hierarchy long enough to get their end of the pay off. They were talking to Larry Delmite. Larry shook his head. They didn't have enough on Larry to make him squeal. Skidmore

tasted his thirst now, the dry cottony flesh of his mouth; a sharp ache in his throat. "God, I could use a cold beer," he thought. He told himself this again, but did not move all day or night, lying on the single cot under which sat two cigar boxes filled with loaded dice. It was dark in the room when a hand touched him, roused him. He sprang bolt upright. An invisible hand pushed him down.

"You're too hot," Larry Delmite's voice said in the darkness. "You gotta get outa here."

Skidmore's heart thudded. He sat up.

"Jesus," he said, pleading. "Where the hell is there?"

"Here's a couple saw bucks," Larry said. "You'll get us all in the can."

"Yeah. I know. Thanks." His heart was beating faster now. He could see Delmite in the darkness.

"Wanna drink?" Delmite said.

"Got any beer?"

"Beer? Man! What's wrong with whiskey?"

"I'm thirsty."

"Take this jug. I ain't got no beer."

Skidmore took the pint of whiskey, stuck the bottle in his hip pocket. He followed Delmite upstairs. He walked out into the night. He kept walking, past dark houses. "I'll walk straight out of the city," he thought. "I'll hitch hike out of this state." He stopped under an elm tree and took a drink of whiskey and shook his head. He kept walking. The houses ceased. It was still dark. On each side of the road fields stretched away into black distances. He entered the fields, crossed a meadow. Out of the darkness a hump of thicker darkness loomed. He walked toward it. When he touched it he lay down, pulling the straw over his body and went to sleep. He woke with the sun in his face. An hour later on the highway he turned and stood almost face to face with a state highway patrolman, seated in a car. The patrolman's car was stopped. He looked quietly out at Skidmore, beckoned to him with one hand. Skidmore did not move. Standing there, looking at the patrolman, he felt suddenly hungry for the first time in many hours. He stared at the patrolman with red rimmed eyes. The patrolman got out of the car. He was tall, clean-faced, the embodiment of quick justice. Still Skidmore did not move. His trouser pocket still contained the .32 with which he had shot Morgan, but he simply stood there and watched the patrolman walk toward him.

He did not remember hearing the patrolman speak, nor any sound, until the explosion surprised him and a hot shocking blow struck him suddenly with terrific force in the left shoulder. It was a sledge hammer blow, and he did not know he had been

knocked down until he saw his hands sprawled in front of him in the dirt and felt his utter helplessness as he saw the patrolman coming toward him, pistol raised, the patrolman's face growing bigger. "Don't! Don't shoot!" Skidmore said. "Don't kill me!" He watched the pistol lift and then rise slowly again. The patrolman seemed to be smiling. Crouching, Skidmore's hand scrabbled at his trouser pocket, his red eyes suddenly wild and steady. Then he moved and fired, still on hands and knees. With the grimace of a smile on his face, the patrolman struck the earth. Skidmore stood up slowly and looked at the gun in his hand and the body on the ground with a dazed expression like he was waking from a dream. He backed slowly away. Then he turned and scuttled toward the car waiting in the road. By God, he thought, bygodbygodbygodbygodbygod, I'm lucky, I'm lucky. But he knew he mustn't drive the car on the highway.

Mantello drove the Cadillac slowly. He liked to drive slowly, feeling the thick luxuriant ease of the car rolling smoothly along the street. He never drove over twenty miles an hour in the city. He had driven at that speed all day, between each stop, where he spoke to men who worked for him, men who owed him favors, bootblacks, cab drivers, ex-convicts gone legit, waitresses, bar owners, bartenders, all who might know something about Skidmore. To Mantello it was demeaning in a sense, but to each man he spoke, he questioned him as if they were partners.

At five o'clock that afternoon with the Cadillac at the dollar car wash garage, Mantello relaxed in a booth in a bar owned by the syndicate. With his face tired, he sat reading an advertising pamphlet issued by the local Cadillac dealer. A drink sat on the table before him. He had not touched it. He was sitting there reading the pamphlet for the third time when Genna and Scalisi came in.

"Anything new?" Mantello said.

"He's still in town. He can't get out. We'll get him or the cops will."

"When?"

"Tonight."

"You guys are supposed to be hot stuff."

"Wanna bet?"

"You been here long enough to get five guys."

"Wanna bet?"

"Sure. Five to one no tonight."

"You got a bet."

That was the day the flowers on Morgan's grave began to rot.

The next day they were all brown and nobody ever put flowers on the grave again. It was the day Genna lost his bet, because he didn't get a line on Skidmore that night nor the next day. It was a week later when an informer—a hunchbacked after-hour-bootlegger Genna had promised to set in with

the cops and the syndicate—phoned Genna at his hotel. The hunchback had news. He had always hated the Delmites because once for five weeks they had been able to bribe the tenth precinct captain to let them run a pan card game for some garment workers while he was ducking around corners after midnight trying to sell a bottle of whiskey over price without getting picked up by the racket squad.

"He's been shot," said the hunchback.

"Where is he?"

"Delmite's attic. I got a friend watching the house. He's hurt bad."

They picked up the hunchback on a street corner downtown. Delmite's house was in the north end of the city, twenty minutes from the business district. They found the house, talked to a lookout planted in a car down the street and told him they would park a block away until it got dark.

"If he comes out of the house, honk twice," Genna said. "We'll get him after dark."

They drove down the street, parked a block away. In the twilight they listened to a dance band playing on the radio from Chicago. They sat with the windows rolled down. Darkness began to rise as though out of the ground between the houses. The street lamp on the corner flickered, flashed into light. They turned the radio low. Suddenly a horn honked twice, and Genna slammed the car into gear. The lookout met them at the corner. He leaned out of the car window.

"He came out and went back in when he saw me."

"Was he alone?"

"Yeah. He's got one arm all bandaged, shoulder, it looks like. He needs a doctor. Ain't a doctor in town'll touch him. Delmites musta fixed him up."

"Park in the alley behind the house," Genna said. "Go with him!" he said to the hunchback. "Honk fast if he comes out the back door."

The hunchback sprang out of the car cat-like and entered the other car almost as it was already moving, the back wheels spinning at the corner. A shade lifted in a window on the second floor. There was no one in the window. Genna lifted the .38 out from his shoulder holster.

"Let's go," he said.

The two Sicilians walked up the front steps and crossed the hollow, wooden front porch, walking heavily, making no effort to approach quietly. Before they rang the door bell Skidmore opened the front door. They saw his face in the dark doorway with the hall light behind him. He mumbled, half of his sad face in shadow. They looked at him quietly, not moving, their hands thrust in their coat pockets. He stared at them, his eyes red rimmed. His coat, with sleeve empty, hung

over one shoulder. In the dark they saw the white bandage, his arm pressed against his side.

"Let's go," Genna said. "You shoulda shot Mantello while you were at it."

The moon was out full, high and white and naked, and the summer sky starry as they drove in through the cemetery gates. Skidmore sat in the back with Scalisi. The sweet smell of water at night blew through the trees from the lake beyond the cemetery. Moonlight dappled the grass, the tomb stones, the trees big and dark in the white shining light. They followed the winding road. A pheasant scurried across the road in the down funneled lights of the car.

"How about a beer?" Scalisi said, shaking Skidmore's good arm. On the floor below the rear seat rested a six-pack of beer. Scalisi punched a hole in the top of a can. Skidmore was sitting up, erect, rigid, staring straight ahead. He was taller than Scalisi. His mouth was gaped, breathing hard. He looked out the window, from left to right, as if he did not believe what he saw.

"Beer?" Scalisi said. Skidmore did not move. Scalisi pushed the can of beer into Skidmore's hand.

"Thanks," he said dazedly. Then an expression of despair came over his face. He sat there staring at the can of beer, breathing hard.

"Drink up," Scalisi said. "We got a six-pack."

A long moment passed and Skidmore suddenly drank savagely, holding the rim of the can jammed between his lips until the liquid began to run from the corners of his mouth.

He brought the can away from his mouth. "Ah-ah-ah," he said, looking suddenly again out the window with a kind of dazed disbelief. Scalisi watched him.

"Give him another beer," Genna said in the front seat without turning his head, looking at the road curve and climb between the dark trees.

The tar road went around a bend. Trees made long shadows across the road in the moonlight. The night air blew peaceful and quiet over the grave yard. The car stopped.

"Come on," Genna said. "Get out." He spoke softly.

Scalisi reached across Skidmore and opened the door. Skidmore stepped out. He lifted his face to the moonlight. "Give him his beer," Genna said. Scalisi thrust the can into Skidmore's mute hand. His hand took it as if unaware of its movement. Skidmore looked across the tombstones in the moonlight. "Come on," Genna said.

Skidmore stared straight ahead. "The bastard shot me," he panted. "He shot me first."

"Come on," Genna said. Skidmore seemed to be walking up the slope without making any gain.

"Drink your beer," Genna said.

Skidmore's eyes glared suddenly.

"Sure," he said like a sleepwalker. He lifted the can to his lips. They watched him drink. He stopped. The can fell from his hand.

"Come here. Stand right here," Genna said, putting his foot out in the darkness, touching a mound of earth, feeling the top of Morgan's grave in the dark. Skidmore nodded and moved forward.

He was a soft-faced man wearing rimless glasses, but he handled the automatic with unmistakable competence.

I was rather surprised at my calmness when I learned the reason for his presence. "It's a pity to die in ignorance," I said. "Who hired you to kill me?"

His voice was mild. "I could be an enemy in my own right."

I had been making a drink in my study when I had heard him and turned. Now I finished pouring from the decanter. "I know the enemies I've made and you are a stranger. Was it my wife?"

He smiled. "Quite correct. Her motive must be obvious."

"Yes," I said. "I have money and apparently she wants it. All of it."

He regarded me objectively. "Your age is?"

"Fifty-three."

"And your wife is?"

"Twenty-two."

He clicked his tongue. "You were foolish to expect anything permanent, Mr. Williams."

I sipped the whiskey. "I expected a divorce after a year or two and a painful settlement. But not death."

"Your wife is a beautiful woman, but greedy, Mr. Williams. I'm surprised that you never noticed."

My eyes went to the gun. "I assume you have killed before?"

"Yes."

SHATTER PROOF

BY JACK RITCHIE

Mr. Williams was a civilized man. When the professional hired to kill him appeared in his study, gun in hand, Mr. Williams naturally offered him a drink.

"And obviously you enjoy it."

He nodded. "A morbid pleasure, I admit. But I do."

I watched him and waited. Finally I said, "You have been here more than two minutes and I am still alive."

"There is no hurry, Mr. Williams," he said softly.

"Ah, then the actual killing is not your greatest joy. You must savor the preceding moments."

"You have insight, Mr. Williams."

"And as long as I keep you entertained, in one manner or another, I remain alive?"

"Within a time limit, of course."

"Naturally. A drink, Mr. . . .?"

"Smith requires no strain on the memory. Yes, thank you. But please allow me to see what you are doing when you prepare it."

"It's hardly likely that I would have poison conveniently at hand for just such an occasion."

"Hardly likely, but still possible."

He watched me while I made his drink and then took an easy chair.

I sat on the davenport. "Where would my wife be at this moment?"

"At a party, Mr. Williams. There will be a dozen people to swear that she never left their sight during the time of your murder."

"I will be shot by a burglar? An intruder?"

He put his drink on the cocktail table in front of him. "Yes. After I shoot you, I shall, of course, wash this glass and return it to your liquor cabinet. And when I leave I shall wipe all fingerprints from the doorknobs I've touched."

"You will take a few trifles with you? To make the burglar-intruder story more authentic?"

"That will not be necessary, Mr. Williams. The police will assume that the burglar panicked after he killed you and fled empty-handed."

"That picture on the east wall," I said. "It's worth thirty thousand."

His eyes went to it for a moment and then quickly returned to me. "It is tempting, Mr. Williams. But I desire to possess nothing that will even remotely link me to you. I appreciate art, and especially its monetary value, but not to the extent where I will risk the electric chair." Then he smiled. "Or were you perhaps offering me the painting? In exchange for your life?"

"It was a thought."

He shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Williams. Once I accept a commission, I am not dissuaded. It is a matter of professional pride."

I put my drink on the table. "Are you waiting for me to show fear, Mr. Smith?"

"You will show it."

"And then you will kill me?"

His eyes flickered. "It is a strain, isn't it, Mr. Williams? To be afraid and not to dare show it."

"Do you expect your victims to beg?" I asked.

"They do. In one manner or another."

"They appeal to your humanity?

And that is hopeless?"

"It is hopeless."

"They offer you money?"

"Very often."

"Is that hopeless too?"

"So far it has been, Mr. Williams."

"Behind the picture I pointed out to you, Mr. Smith, there is a wall safe."

He gave the painting another brief glance. "Yes."

"It contains five thousand dollars."

"That is a lot of money, Mr. Williams."

I picked up my glass and went to the painting. I opened the safe, selected a brown envelope, and then finished my drink. I put the empty glass in the safe and twirled the knob.

Smith's eyes were drawn to the envelope. "Bring that here, please."

I put the envelope on the cocktail table in front of him.

He looked at it for a few moments and then up at me. "Did you actually think you could buy your life?"

I lit a cigarette. "No. You are, shall we say, incorruptible."

He frowned slightly. "But still you brought me the five thousand?"

I picked up the envelope and tapped its contents out on the table. "Old receipts. All completely valueless to you."

He showed the color of irritation. "What do you think this has possibly gained you?"

"The opportunity to go to the safe and put your glass inside it."

His eyes flicked to the glass in front of him. "That was yours. Not mine."

I smiled. "It was your glass, Mr. Smith. And I imagine that the police will wonder what an empty glass is doing in my safe. I rather think, especially since this will be a case of murder, that they will have the intelligence to take fingerprints."

His eyes narrowed. "I haven't taken my eyes off you for a moment. You couldn't have switched our glasses."

"No? I seem to recall that at least twice you looked at the painting."

Automatically he looked in that direction again. "Only for a second or two."

"It was enough."

He was perspiring faintly. "I say it was impossible."

"Then I'm afraid you will be greatly surprised when the police come for you. And after a little time you will have the delightful opportunity of facing death in the electric chair. You will share your victims' anticipation of death with the addition of a great deal more time in which to let your imagination play with the topic. I'm sure you've read accounts of executions in the electric chair?"

His finger seemed to tighten on the trigger.

"I wonder how you'll go," I said.

"You've probably pictured yourself meeting death with calmness and fortitude. But that is a common comforting delusion, Mr. Smith. You will more likely have to be dragged. . . ."

His voice was level. "Open that safe or I'll kill you."

I laughed. "Really now, Mr. Smith, we both know that obviously you will kill me if I *do* open the safe."

A half a minute went by before he spoke. "What do you intend to do with the glass?"

"If you don't murder me—and I rather think you won't now—I will take it to a private detective agency and have your fingerprints reproduced. I will put them, along with a note containing pertinent information, inside a sealed envelope. And I will leave instructions that in the event I die violently, even if the occurrence appears accidental, the envelope be forwarded to the police."

Smith stared at me and then he took a breath. "All that won't be necessary. I will leave now and you will never see me again."

I shook my head. "I prefer my plan. It provides protection for my future."

He was thoughtful. "Why don't you go direct to the police?"

"I have my reasons."

His eyes went down to his gun and then slowly he put it in his pocket. An idea came to him. "Your wife could very easily hire someone else to kill you."

"Yes. She could do that."

"I would be accused of your death. I could go to the electric chair."

"I imagine so. Unless. . . ."

Smith waited.

"Unless, of course, she were unable to hire anyone."

"But there are probably a half a dozen others. . . ." He stopped.

I smiled. "Did my wife tell you where she is now?"

"Just that she'd be at a place called the Petersons. She will leave at eleven."

"Eleven? A good time. It will be very dark tonight. Do you know the Petersons' address?"

He stared at me. "No."

"In Bridgehampton," I said, and I gave him the house number.

Our eyes held for half a minute.

"It's something you must do," I said softly. "For your own protection."

He buttoned his coat slowly. "And where will you be at eleven, Mr. Williams?"

"At my club, probably playing cards with five or six friends. They will no doubt commiserate with me when I receive word that my wife has been . . . shot?"

"It all depends on the circumstances and the opportunity." He smiled thinly. "Did you ever love her?"

I picked up a jade figurine and examined it. "I was extremely fond of this piece when I first bought it

Now it bores me. I will replace it with another."

When he was gone there was just enough time to take the glass to a detective agency before I went on to the club.

Not the glass in the safe, of course. It held nothing but my own fingerprints.

I took the one that Mr. Smith left on the cocktail table when he departed.

The prints of Mr. Smith's fingers developed quite clearly.

A trick, his mind screamed; a lousy copper trick. The gun lined up on the blue back. But he held the gun poised, let the uniform disappear.

THE FUGITIVES

BY MARC PENRY WINTERS

WITH THE BEGINNING of the drone again, Merle Watson tensed his shoulders against the cold and rolled his head on the turned-up collar of his topcoat so he could see upward through the thinness of the brush and the dying leaves on the cottonwoods that sheltered them. The drone became a roar with a flash of red against the steel gray of the sky.

"That's three times," Luke Herman said, the first words between them in two hours. "He's hunting us, Merle."

"He can't see anything."

After awhile Herman said, "I sure don't like this."

"We'll make it," Watson said, listening to the monotonous dull mutter of the river, a sound broken now and then by a gurgle when

the water lapped the near bank.

"Will we?"

"Lie easy, don't move. Keep out of sight, we'll make it."

There was quiet confidence in his words, for Herman's sake, while he vaguely wondered why all his life he had been entangled with people who had no courage of their own. The old man had been the first, damned old hunchback, leaning on the encouragement of a kid.

Watson himself sneered at the absurdity of confidence here. This strip of trees and brush, ravaged and denuded by autumn, was concealment only as long as nobody came in under the trees. Why they hadn't already in three hours he couldn't understand. And there was no way out.

Below was the car bridge they had fled across last night. A truck snorted across now, pulling away from a roadblock. Back away from the river at the edge of their protecting trees was a large field. It was surrounded by a budding suburban area that was a crisscross of new streets, scattered with houses, peopled with suspicious eyes, and overrun with patrol cars.

Watson pictured in his mind the barnyard above them with its noisy dog; the one acre slough of piled stumps and deadwood. The slough could have been their graveyard, taking ten long minutes to cross in the half light of dawn. Above the slough was the railroad trestle, towering over the river and the barren fields they had crossed after fleeing from the hayloft further on.

"This ground's wet," Herman said.

"Don't remind me," Watson said, knowing that the level ground would probably be drier.

He had moved them to this small depression, full of damp leaves, because it gave them more protection than the brush alone. The only danger here was that they were fully exposed to the building across the river.

He studied the building now. It appeared vacant but because of the four windows that peered down at them he felt uneasy. The windows were gray with dirt, and he knew that bored eyes were less apt to stare out dirty windows.

Beyond the building were trees and he watched the rising of smoke through their limbs from houses he could not see. He also heard the muffled sounds of the business district in the distance, so close and yet unreachable.

"I'm cold."

"Don't think about it."

At the nearby farm the dog began to bark. Watson listened closely for a moment. But the dog had barked often during the morning. That could mean something or nothing at all. He wished he could see into the field. But it was safer lying here motionless seeing nothing than risk movement that could give them away for a look that

could not help them no matter what they learned.

Only a matter of time now, he thought. It no longer made his stomach churn. Maybe he was too cold. Chill had eaten through his lean flesh to the bone, his aching fingers curled like frozen talons around the thick butt of the forty-five in his pocket.

He closed his eyes, listening for sounds that might come from the field. Then his mind shifted again as it had so many times this morning to the stolen license plates. They had been put on the car for the robbery in Tacoma two nights ago. After deciding against the robbery Watson had forgotten and left them on the car. But he hadn't noticed this until last night when it was too late.

"But it's my car," he had insisted to the police, and it *was* under the alias on the paper he had shown them. "How those plates got on the car, I don't know."

"Then why," the cop wanted to know, "did you try to run up there in the pass this afternoon? Another patrol car chased you for ten miles."

"I don't remember even seeing another car."

"He saw you."

"We never saw him."

"Well, the car has to be checked out."

The cop was foolish enough then to order Watson to drive the three blocks back to the local state police barracks. And Watson was taking no chances with guns in the car.

"If they shake us down," he told Herman as he drove slowly back along the thoroughfare with the police car riding their bumper, "that's it for me. I'm a loser. Those guns'll mean five years for me. And they'll send out flyers on us. Somebody somewhere is going to identify us on at least one caper."

After that if Herman had put his first shot through the windshield they may have been all right. The cop would have fallen back. They could have doubled back to the heart of town, abandoned the car, split up if necessary, and either holed up or skipped separately out of town.

But Herman shot only at the tires. And for a dozen blocks as they sped out a side street across a bridge and into the dark countryside Herman continued to try to hit a tire. Only after the cop had shot the back of their car full of holes and Watson had screamed at him to kill did Herman stop the police car with a shot through the windshield.

Five minutes later, parked in an orchard by a gravel road a mile from the town, Watson said, "We don't know this valley well enough to try to drive out, so we walk out."

Behind the orchard the hills began, rising in barren sweeps for thirty miles to Ellensburg. It was not until midnight that Watson realized they could never make it

that way, and then he led them back toward the town.

Shortly before daybreak, coming out of a thick stand of trees beside the river, they climbed into a hayloft a half mile above the bridge they had crossed when leaving the town. They did not know they were so close to the bridge, and they could not see the railroad trestle yet. In the darkness, if their car had not yet been found, they may have been able to cross the trestle to the town side of the river. But they were both too exhausted to do more than sprawl on top of the loose hay in the loft. And within minutes Watson was asleep.

Luke Herman, like Watson, was listening. But Herman was listening only to the dog, and every bark out of the mutt at the nearby farm sent a quiver through his thick body.

The dog now suddenly ceased its barking. Herman clenched his teeth to keep from chattering, conscious again of the misery of his body. This was worse than the army even if it was no longer freezing as it had been last night.

"My feet's coldest," he said.

"Tough."

"Wish I could stand up."

"You can't. Forget it."

The plane came again. Herman watched it wing past, low over the river, so close he could see the face of the pilot with eyes that seemed to look squarely into his. The illusion caused no new fear. He knew the difficulty of observation from the air as well as Merle did. But at the same time this knowledge created no new hope either. He had hope, but only in that Merle could pull them out of this as he had pulled them out of tight spots before.

"The hay," he said, thinking aloud, "was nice and warm."

"We should've dug in," Watson said; "buried ourselves."

"If we could've caught him . . ."

"Quit harping on it," Watson said. "When something's done, it's over, you can't go back."

Herman knew Watson was right, but he couldn't draw his mind away from it so easily, not when it was his fault. Unlike Watson he had been unable to sleep in the hay. All he had been able to think about was Cora, alone now on their farm, and he had been sick from the first with the realization that he hadn't really needed to make this trip.

So when the farmer had entered the barn Herman had heard him. He had known he should awaken Watson, but for some reason he hadn't, not even when he had heard the farmer crawling the ladder to the loft. And he hadn't done anything himself.

It was only after the farmer had raised his head into the loft that Herman had sat up and dug for his gun. But the farmer had disappeared before Herman could stop him. And Watson, waking and seeing the farmer running to the

house, had insisted they get away as fast as they could.

Watson was listening to the dog again, the difference in its barking, alarmed in tone but uncertain and coming closer. He turned his head to hear better and held his breath until Herman gave a jerk and hissed his name.

"I know," he said, the cold and the aches it caused forgotten as he rolled on his side, for at the edge of the brush a motor idled and springs squeaked. When the squeaking stopped, the dog began a steady barking against which the idling continued.

Seconds passed into long minutes. Watson's eyes began to burn from trying to see through the brush. He glanced down at his hand and wondered how the gun came to be there out of his pocket. He considered the hard thump of his heart, the tightness in his stomach, the difficulty of breathing through a nauseating wedge in his throat, and how his life was a succession of these sensations.

With the groan of an opening door, Herman whispered, "This is it, Merle."

"Watch the other way," Watson whispered back.

"They're going to get us," Herman said, a tremor in his voice.

"Shut up," Watson said. "Just go on, get down there." He gave Herman a nudge, and as Herman began to move, digging a knee into his kidney, he said, "And stay down, damn it."

"I am," Herman whispered, wishing he was a small man, smaller even than Merle. And he hoped there were no branches under the leaves. If he broke so much as a twig Merle would be angered.

Now facing the other direction Herman rested a moment with his face in the leaves, smelling the deep musk underneath. All his life he had loved the smell of earth. As a boy in the slums of Denver he had dreamed of a farm. Even getting lost once in the woods, a shadowy memory with an unclear touch of horror to it, had not discouraged him. And now he had a farm where he could till the soil.

If I only get back, he thought, lifting his eyes to the rim of the depression.

Through a small break in the brush he could see a fence and a corner of the barn at the nearby farm. The closeness startled him. The dog was there with its barking and he cursed the dog, silently but with such heat that his lips moistened. In his hand the thirty-eight felt good, giving him strength that the barking would steal.

Suddenly there was a blue pants leg where it should not be, and Herman raised the long barrel of the revolver. Unable to swallow he sighted, above the leg where the chest would be.

But as the leg moved he did not shoot. He breathed, Dear God, don't come this way. For this man,

the man last night, for nobody was there hate in his heart.

Then the leg was gone. The dog stopped barking, which made the idle of the motor sound louder and everywhere around him. His eyes roved the brush for movement that did not materialize. His ears ached with a strain that heard no footfall. And the barking resumed.

Come in, Herman said into his closed mouth. Get it over with, he wanted to scream. Merle, Merle, he whispered in silence. But only Cora made the idea of death terrible, Cora and the dread of long pain if death were slow.

As dry as his throat was, Watson might gag on a cigarette, but his craving for one was intense. And his thirst was almost unbearable, thirst on a cold day, thirst from long hours of tension, while millions of gallons of water rushed by in that maddening mumble the river made.

Long ago the car had moved to another point along the brush or another car had joined the first one. He could not be sure with the dog barking, nor could he be sure that again a door had slammed. The dog was not barking momentarily, but he could not be sure any more that he could hear an idling motor.

An hour had passed, one part of his mind tried to deceive him.

And yet, with only minutes passed, the car could be gone. When it had moved maybe it had driven away. A giddy feeling swept over him.

Yet it has to be true, he told himself. This was no place to die, cold and cramped and dirty, holed up like a cornered rat. And he thought of Toni, always warm . . . and the apartment would be warm.

"Nuts," he uttered.

"What?" Herman whispered.

"Don't talk," he whispered in turn, and had no more than gotten it said when there was a crackle of brush to his left.

"Damn!" a sullen voice said, sounding within a few feet of them, followed by the snap of twigs under a heavy foot before a new silence fell.

Only by the utmost control had Watson kept from jerking his head and gun toward the sounds. As he began now to swivel his head, a slow fraction of an inch at a time, he tried to decide what he must do when the cops called out to him and Herman, while one corner of his mind compared in an unreal detached way how Herman's irregular breathing sounded like the dying gasps the old man had made.

"Hoffman!" a voice called.

"Over here!" was the answer, so near that it sounded above them.

For the first time, out of the corner of his eye, Watson saw the blue of a uniform, a huge shape within twenty feet of the depression. His skin crawled and he almost choked on the pound of his heart.

"See anything over there?"

the far voice said.

There was no answer.

Herman started to move, and Watson snaked out a hand to clamp stilling fingers on an ankle. At the same moment, while his other hand swung across with the thumb tensed to dog back the hammer on the forty-five, he turned his face full toward the uniform . . . and the uniform was turning away to push out of the brush.

A trick, his mind screamed; a lousy copper trick. The gun lined up on the blue back. But he held the gun poised, let the uniform disappear.

For a moment brush continued to snap. Low voices mingled. The dog barked for perhaps a long minute. There was nothing then but more waiting, worse than before with every second expecting it to explode into violence.

Finally a car door slammed, a motor raced, springs squeaked, and the noise they made with the motor drifted away across the field. The dog barked, in frenzy and then in disappointed wonder.

Watson rested his gun on the ground. He breathed through his nose and mouth, sucking air deep, and stared at his hand. The palm was moist. He flexed stiff fingers. Shivers began to shake his body and he clenched his teeth to keep them from clicking.

"They're gone?" Herman whispered.

Watson made a careful yes in a low firm voice. Then while Herman turned to lay beside him he tensed and untensed his body, trying to stop the shivers without letting Herman see them.

"Light a smoke," he said.

"Now?" Herman whispered as Watson turned on his side to slip the forty-five back into his pocket.

"What'd I say?" Watson said, staring at the fear in Herman's eyes. "Relax. They're gone."

"He looked right at us, Merle."

"Sure, but he didn't see us. Now light a smoke," he said. After a moment of hesitation, Herman dug a crumpled package from his shirt pocket. While wtaching him put fire to a cigarette Watson said, "We should play nature boy only in the south . . . in orange groves."

"Or a cotton field."

"In the sun."

"Or a drain ditch."

"Stay down," Watson said. He watched Herman ease into a prone position. "Blow that smoke in your clothes," he said as he swept a hand through a streamer of smoke and broke it up. "And keep that cigarette moving."

He fished one of the two remaining cigarettes from the package on a leaf between them and holding Herman's hand took a light from the other cigarette. The smoke was bitter when he drew it down his throat through a mouth gummy with the dead aftertaste of fear. His mind swerved away from the thought of personal fear.

While he blew smoke out under his topcoat, rotating his hand so that other smoke from the cigarette was dispersed, he glanced at Herman. He hated the fear still to be seen in the other man. It reminded him again of the old man, bent and twisted sorry hulk, always afraid, never able to do things right, always on the move from one menial task to another while wanting only to be sheltered in one quiet simple corner of the world, dying from neglect of pneumonia, choking out his last breath in the arms of a boy better off without him as a burden.

"How could he miss us, Merle?"

"Do I have to draw a picture?" Watson said sharply. "Because he didn't expect to see us." He drew on his cigarette, choked off a cough, and almost vomited from the irritation of the smoke. "We're out on that mountain." He ground out the cigarette on a leaf. "Look, that farmer saw you, but only you, not me."

"He saw us leave."

"Saw you leave," Watson insisted. "One guy in his barn. No footprints; the ground was froze hard. The cops come. They look. But where? With that big stand of trees the other way, it don't make sense, even a lone bum, to come across those fields in plain sight of this whole area."

"That dog . . ."

"Nobody pays any attention to a dog that barks like him. Listen. Barking right now. Barks at anything, everything, and at nothing."

"At cops."

"Sure, okay," Watson said, smiling, satisfied by the firming of the lips and the admiration replacing fear in Herman's eyes. "They'll check and recheck these houses, that farm. But you listen to me, Luke, we're getting out of this stinking hole."

"How?"

"I don't know," Watson said. He eased over on his back. The chill had crept back into his body, and after the cigarette his mouth tasted worse, drier; he was more thirsty, and his stomach churned in demand of food. "But we will. Tonight. You just don't worry about it none."

Herman nodded and through a ribbon of smoke stared across the river at the building which he did not fear with its empty look. For two years he had believed Merle never made mistakes, not bad mistakes. He knew better now. Merle made many mistakes. Merle also had luck though and before had always had the answers to correct mistakes.

With care he drew on the short butt of his cigarette and crushed it out. He saw again the blue uniform easing through the brush toward him as the dog barked and froze the strength needed to pull a trigger. The ache of fear clutched at him again, tore at his vitals. He was not convinced they were safe. And yet he had to believe in Merle be-

cause he had no answers of his own.

Hours had passed in silence, and now Watson said, "Luke?"

"What?"

"Feel the sun?"

Herman could feel its warmth on his face, a very little warmth. And when he opened his eyes he knew he would look out through a timbered barricade on a sweep of snow-clad fields and German fortifications.

There was the scratch of a match and he was staring at dead leaves changing color as they dried. He rolled over with a series of complaining sounds and Watson pressed a lighted cigarette between his fingers.

"Sleep any?"

"Thinking about Cora," he said. The side of his nose twitched. "I'm a damn stupid ass of a fool!" He struck the ground with a meaty fist. "Cora, the farm . . . and look at me out here like this . . ."

"Should've thought about it two days ago."

"I didn't want to come."

"Nobody made you."

Herman stared at Watson and looked away. "Money. A man . . ."

"Nice stuff."

"A man shouldn't be greedy," he said as Watson took the cigarette from him. "Should get what he needs, no more."

"It got your woman over here, didn't it? You needed a bond for that, you got one. You got your farm . . . so what's your gripe?"

"You got no feelings, Merle?"

"Keep your voice down."

"Okay, but I wonder about that."

"Do it quiet."

"I'm sorry," Herman said. There was a bad ache between his eyes. "But what's going to happen to Cora?"

"Cora's all right."

"No friends," he said as though he hadn't heard Watson; "a strange country, hardly able to speak English . . ."

"Thing about a woman, Luke, they always get by."

"Cora's different."

"She's tougher than most . . ."

"Merle, listen," he said with a grip on Watson's arm; "we got to get out of this."

Indifferent to Herman's hand, Watson dragged on the cigarette and listened to the river, and said, "I'm all for it."

"Let's go then!" Herman said. "Let's get going!"

"Not right now."

"Merle, I got a bad feeling, Merle, they'll be back. We go now, you can get us out."

"Tonight."

"Now, now!" Herman whispered harshly and rose to his knees.

Watson gave a startled grunt and said, "Get back down here."

"I'm getting out," Herman said and stood up. "Merle, you got to come." He tugged at Watson's arm. "Come on!"

"You crazy fool!"

"Merle . . ."

"You out of your mind?"

The dog barked then, and Herman whirled toward the sound, crouching in terror. As a small boy, he cowered in the darkness of the night and the woods. A huge dog barked down at him. Saliva dripped from glistening fangs and hit his face like drops of molten metal. The whole world spun and spun and spun . . .

It was with a pain in his groin and a numbness in his head that Herman opened his eyes. "Merle?"

"Shut up," Watson said as he watched the building across the river, listening for any variation of noises from the bridge and the area behind them. His heartbeat was normal again, the sting had left his hand, but his stomach still raged with anger.

"Merle?"

Watson turned and jabbed a finger into Herman's neck. "Listen," he said, controlling his voice with effort. "If the bulls come now, you won't see your Cora again, that I guarantee, her or nothing else."

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry doesn't help."

"Just something," Herman said, closing his eyes as the pain in his groin eased; "I don't know what."

After a short silence Watson said, "I tried to tell you, Luke, we got to lay here like mice. We walk out now, ten feet out in that field, we're dead."

"You hit me, Merle."

"If it wasn't for the noise, I'd've blew your head off," Watson said. He watched astonishment flicker in Herman's opening eyes. "Just remember, I want to get out of this too."

"The war. I never was this way before," Herman said. "And that dog. I hate dogs."

"Just relax," Watson said, lying on his back, trying to relax again himself, knowing he must watch Herman every minute now. "Enjoy the sun; it'll be colder tonight."

Herman folded an arm under his head and traced the pattern of a leaf with his eyes. He did not want to think about Merle hitting him, or what Merle had said. The pattern of the leaf became rubble-filled streets through shattered buildings in which children like animals skulked.

But the scene was not unpleasant for Herman, seeing himself as he walked through evening shadows down one of the streets, his back straight, his uniform neatly pressed, his leather shining, a forty-five heavy at his hip. Fritz, Cora's brother, was beside him, because it was still unsafe for soldiers on the street alone or even in pairs, even for him after knowing Cora for a month and caring for the Bruner family with things from the PX and the company commisary.

"I wish the war hadn't ended," he said.

"You shouldn't gripe about this then."

"I don't mean that," he said, and he was not sure what he had meant except maybe that for once as a soldier he had belonged, had been a part of a group that had purpose and recognition. "I had a lot of fun in Germany. After the fighting, in Bonn. Cora's from Bonn."

"I know."

"Her mother and brother are still there."

"I mailed them a package of food, remember?"

"She was sure skinny at first. She's only nineteen, Merle."

"She looks older. Not much . . . but older than that."

"They had a hard time. And they were proud too. Cora was. I had to force stuff on her. Food. Soap. She didn't want to be obliged, not at first."

"Sure," Watson said with a smile that to Herman seemed a sneer.

"Cora's a good woman, Merle."

"All women are."

"Damn you," Herman said as he thrust his face forward, "don't talk about Cora that way."

"What way?"

"Just don't say anything. She's not that kind."

"Relax," Watson said. He rolled his head, glanced at the building, and looked up at the blueness of the sky. "Maybe I just envy you, Luke."

"Toni's a good woman."

Watson grinned. "She may be a lot of woman, but not a good one."

"When we get out of this, Merle," Herman said, fingering a twig, scratching moist earth with it, "I been thinking, maybe about quitting."

Watson nodded. He had been expecting this, and it was really to his advantage. For awhile Herman had been a good partner, dumb, but able and willing to follow directions. Since getting the farm and his German woman he had begun to get jumpy. And after this, if he did not queer them first, he would be no good at all.

"Had all you want?"

"It's not I'm scared."

"It's probably smart," Watson said, his voice casual as he put out his cigarette, wondering why he should feel what he knew to be disappointment.

To Herman his words had seemed to come spontaneously, but now that he had said he was through he felt vast relief. "I owe you a lot, Merle, just about everything."

"Forget that crap."

"It's Cora, Merle. I got to think about her and the baby and being alone if something went wrong."

"Luke, hey, you want to quit, okay. I'm glad for you. Have your dream . . ."

"Dream?"

Watson eyed Herman's intent face. "Cora, the farm, a bunch of kids. Isn't that what you dreamed of?"

"It's what I want."

"It's your dream."

"What's your dream, Merle?"

Watson frowned, his eyes on a leaf high above. Finally he said, "I quit dreaming . . . a long time ago." He was quiet for awhile, then looked at Herman. "Luke," he said in a harsh whisper, "sometime thank God you got a dream. A man isn't worth a hell of a lot without one."

Twice a car had eased past the brush but had not stopped, and the dog had not barked for a long time. Now shadows were lengthing as the hours until darkness were few. And the sun had thawed away the chill, leaving only the aches in Watson's back and shoulders and neck.

"Luke," he said and drew no answer. He studied the sleeping face, the simplicity naked there.

Him and his dream, Watson thought . . . his little plow-jockey dream. And the poor slob believed he was going to be happy in his muddy bit of world for all the days of his stupid life.

Watson looked out to the river, all that water, his lips chapped, his forehead feverish. With his body warmed he felt dirty. But only the aches were torment, they and the thirst. And if not for the building he could sit up, might even stand up and work away the pain.

Why can't you be normal? he asked himself. The old religious moment, he thought as he let his eyes close. Exhaustion crept across his mind, permitting the entry of despair. He opened his eyes and fought the feeling.

This isn't so bad, he told himself, then tried to think ahead, plan a way out of this mess. But circumstances as they presented themselves would have to show him the way, a thought that made him smile, for there was so little conscious planning to anything he had ever done, which would surprise Luke who believed that he planned everything with care and precision. Softly he laughed.

Luke and his dream.

Have you a dream, Merle Watson?

Money and good clothes, he thought; fast cars and strong booze, and women. No dream, that. Lust, hunger, a need, hate and compensation. A dream must have meaning and give satisfaction. These things had only fed his sensual appetites.

Was there ever a dream, he wondered.

"Nuts," he muttered and lighted a cigarette. A drink of water was his greatest desire.

For awhile he listened to sounds, then his mind again turned to the mistakes. They were so many they gave him a pain in the gut . . . the speed that had first attratced attention in The Pass, the stolen license plates, and finally running from the cop last night. He could have bluffed it out.

The whole trip was a mistake. Luke was right because Luke had-

n't wanted to come, had been persuaded to come when neither of them really needed money. With what Watson had he and Toni could have lived it big for months with no worry.

Toni, he told himself. That was better . . . or was it?

He frowned as he drew on the cigarette. Toni was a tarnished bauble, and a greedy one, and under her veneer there was an emptiness as great as his own. Of a sudden she was no more to him than any of the other tramps in his past.

With a balled hand he struck the palm of the other, making an odd echoing sound under the trees. Herman snuffled and Watson watched the slow rhythm of his breathing. And he hated Herman then . . . for his farm and his Cora, for his foul little dream.

"Sleep any?"

Watson pulled back from the words and the open eyes. "I look like I slept any?"

"You mad about something, Merle?"

"Forget it," Watson said and looked away.

"I'm thirsty."

"Shut up about it."

"I can't."

"I can so you can," Watson said. "Think about something else." Above a leaf broke free. "Don't talk about water."

He watched the leaf strike a limb and sail, flashing golden through a shaft of sunlight. A train hooted, gears clashed at the bridge, and he identified a wail as on a fire engine. The town rumbled like distant thunder. He could picture the streets with cars and people . . . a restaurant . . . a sparkling glass of water, snowy white linens, silverware, water, a smiling waitress; and he could smell the aroma of a thick steak beside the sparkling water.

Herman lighted a cigarette from the butt Watson had. He tried to close his mind to all thought, drift with the mutter of the river, and smoked in silence. The cigarette burned his fingers before he put it out.

"Merle," he said, "remember the ditch, the one we jumped? We could get a drink there."

"We could drink out of the river too, wave at the bulls on the bridge while we do it."

"Why you always say things like that?"

"Because you act so stupid sometimes."

"That ditch is here in the brush, not fifty feet."

"Where?"

"And it's got water in it. I stepped in it."

Watson frowned. He studied the blank windows of the building, listened to the bridge sounds, and thought of the long quietness of the dog. And the closeness of the ditch made his thirst more painful.

"Come on," he said without further hesitation and started from the

depression in a crawl. "But don't kick the brush and give us away."

On each side of the ditch the brush was cut back several feet, but the ditch was concealed in every direction except toward the river. Only the building was there.

"Wait here," Watson said.

Fifteen feet away the ditch made a bend. Watson crawled parallel to the ditch until he could see around the bend. The ditch here was in full view of the farmhouse, and the dog was there in the yard beside an old pickup.

"Okay?" Herman whispered when Watson returned.

"Better forget your thirst."

"Why?"

"That building."

"There ain't nobody in that building."

"I don't know that."

"I do."

"That building could be full of people."

"Ah, Merle," Herman grinned.

Watson felt like hitting him, yet knew that Herman was probably right. "It's not smart, Luke, but go ahead."

"Merle, if you don't . . ."

"Go on," Watson said. He watched the unease in Herman glancing at the building. "Well, go on."

The water was so near. Herman thought, crystal clear at the bottom of the ditch. He crept out of the brush, bent at the waist, the ends of his topcoat dragging the ground.

"Stand straight," Watson commanded in a low voice.

He watched Herman slip down the side of the ditch, straddle the narrow stream of water, and drink hurriedly from cupped hands. He swung a nervous gaze at the building, and though he saw nothing and heard nothing to alarm him, by the time Herman again squatted beside him he was tense.

"Ain't you going to drink?"

"Just take it easy."

Herman stopped breathing to listen, his mouth partly open as he stared at Watson. From the bridge came no sound, there was no rumble from the town, and even the mutter of the river had a subdued tone. Then like a muffled report a door slammed at the farmhouse. It was like a trigger, and the sounds they had come to consider normal resumed.

"Strange," Watson breathed.

"What?" Herman whispered, his nerves on edge now.

"Never mind," Watson said.

He stood up, watching the building, and walked out of the brush and down into the ditch. He squatted by the water, his heart beating faster than it should have been, then dipped his hands in the water that stung with is coldness. After rubbing his hands together he cupped them and drank, and as the water went down his throat cutting the cottony dryness he closed his eyes with mild ecstasy.

Three times he drank. Then he

dangled his wet hands over his knees and watched the wavering of slick green weeds under the surface. In his childhood there had been a stream like this small one, at a farm where the old man had worked one summer, a farm whose owner was a gentle man who treated Al Watson with a respect that other people never showed the hunchback.

For a moment Watson felt betrayed by his memory. The old man should not have died until the boy Merle had grown to be a man himself and given the old one a chance at peace. Then in disgust Watson erased the old man from his thoughts.

Once more he drank and then wet a handkerchief. As he stood up he paused a moment in wonder at the positive feeling of being watched. Then he turned and looked across the river at a white blotch behind the dirty glass of one window of the building.

"See something, Merle?" Herman called as the blotch moved and disappeared.

Watson climbed out of the ditch. "Our building," he said, with the water heavy in his stomach, "just came to life."

"You sure?"

"Stay down!" he snapped as he stepped into the brush, pushing Herman back as he went down on his knees.

"You sure, Merle?"

"You and your water," Watson grated and slapped the wet handkerchief against Herman's face. "Three lousy hours, and we'd've made it." As Herman raised one hand Watson drew the forty-five and snapped back the hammer. "You need a bullet through your stupid skull."

"Merle!" Herman cried, falling away from him.

From across the river came a metallic scream and Watson jerked upward to a crouch. One window of the building was open, and there were three faces peering out. And although the faces were not clear Watson could read excitement in the poises and movements of the heads.

"That's it," he said. "Come on." Herman still lay on his back, his hands up defensively, sweat glistening in beads on his forehead. "Get on your feet."

"No!"

"Luke!" Watson said. He slapped Herman hard and Herman cringed but his eyes cleared. "Listen, we're getting out yet. Understand?"

"Both of us?"

"We're partners," Watson said, easing down the hammer on the gun and putting the gun in his pocket. "If we get out, we get out together. You want to try or not?"

"You want me . . ."

"We got to hurry, Luke," Watson said. He smiled and took Herman by the arm. "On your feet now. Look sharp, boy."

With Herman close behind him,

Watson went up along the ditch and around the bend it made. He did not look back. The building had played its part, a part he had feared throughout the day. But that was over now. Ahead was the farm, fifty yards across the field . . . the barn, the house, the old pickup, and the dog not now in sight. He felt calm and his body felt free of aches.

At the edge of the brush they paused. The bridge below could not be seen because of the brush and a warehouse. But there was a thin stream of traffic on the thoroughfare that led to it, and Watson could see one black and white patrol car in this traffic.

When Watson left the brush, Herman jumped forward to walk beside him, his neck prickling as he searched the yard for the dog, his fingers curled tightly around the gun in his pocket.

"About the water, Merle . . ."

"I was thirsty too."

"A guy gets awful thirsty."

"I know."

"Thirst bothers me . . ."

"Yeah, "Watson said with one long glance at the girders of the railroad trestle sharply defined in the sky.

". . . more than anything," Herman finished, his feet heavy.

They came to the edge of the barn and to the fence that began there and enclosed the field. Watson methodically put a foot on the bottom strand of wire of the fence and raised the second strand with his left hand.

"Go through," he said. The police car had left the thoroughfare and was speeding along a street at the far edge of the field. "Get the lead out."

Herman seemed to shake himself out of a lethargy, then bent to go through the fence. He hooked the back of his topcoat on a barb of wire. With a jerk he ripped loose, breathing hard through his mouth.

"Hold the wire," Watson said in a tight voice, no longer calm as he wondered if the people in the building had already called the police and the patrol car had them located.

As Watson came through the fence, the dog appeared from the opposite side of the barn. It trotted to the middle of the yard, and they watched it, Herman still holding the wire while the prickling on his neck spread upward across his scalp.

When the dog finally sensed them it whirled. But it did not bark until Watson started forward. It sidled away then and began a belligerent yapping.

This made Herman want to turn and rush back to the brush. But on trembling legs he followed Watson, his eyes never leaving the dog, unaware that the back door opened at the house.

The appearance of a woman gave the dog a bravado it had lacked. Now it leaped forward as though

to spring at Watson. When he did not hesitate it sprang away, and then began to circle the men, its barking grown frenzied.

The woman called to them as they approached the pickup. Herman did not hear her. Watson ignored her and looked in at the dashboard of the pickup. He had hoped the keys would be there, and he mouthed an oath when they weren't.

While the dog continued to bark and circle, the woman called again, in a louder voice; and two blocks away, on the street that led to the farm, the police car whipped toward them.

With the pickup as a shield, Watson said, "Be ready."

There was sweat under his arms now. It was strange that he could also put his mind on the woman, seeing her off at the side of his vision edge out on the porch. If only the keys had been in the pickup they could have moved off a few blocks or miles before being cornered here and gained a fresh chance. They still could if somehow they could capture the police car.

But while yet a block away the police car turned to the left up another street. Watson grunted in surprise and relief as he watched it going away.

Herman had not seen the car. With his face drawn white under the black stubble of his whiskers, his attention had never left the dog. And the dog, knowing his fear, leaped in to nip at his leg.

"Ah-h!" he croaked and kicked at the dog.

"Say, you two men!" the woman cried.

"Easy," Watson said to Herman, with only a glance at the dog.

"What do you want? Hear me?"

"Yes," Watson said as he turned toward the house. In a soft voice he said, "We hear you, lady."

"What?" the woman said, edging back into the doorway. "Who're you two men now?"

"Police officers," Watson said.

The woman hesitated, her hand on the door, nervous and suspicious, and Watson held his breath and asked for just a little luck. But as he reached the porch, the woman's eyes widened. Watson saw fear replace suspicion and he bounded up the steps.

With a scream the woman slammed the door, and as Watson reached for the knob he heard a bolt moving. He pushed and found the door solid.

"Open up!" he demanded above the barking of the dog. "Open this!" He pounded the door with his gun. "Open up in there!"

A shot exploded in the yard, ripping apart the day with a sharp finality. Watson whirled. The dog was down, its barking now a whine, its legs jerking wildly. Herman crouched over it, his gun inches from its bleeding head.

"You fool!" Watson shouted.

"He bit me! He bit me! He bit me!"

Watson slammed himself against the door. With numb fingers he fumbled at the knob. There had to be a chance yet. Rage and panic seethed at conflict in his mind. He slashed his gun through a window, swung it in a circle to shatter away the glass.

Inside the house the woman shrieked, "Get out! Stay out of here!"

Watson put a leg through the window. A deafening roar seemed to shake the porch beneath him. He jerked back, his leg afire, and fell against the wall. The world had suddenly turned into a bedlam of screaming sirens, some close, some far away. He tried desperately to force his mind to calm function.

In the yard Herman stared at Watson, a dazed expression on his face, and took two steps toward the porch. Again a blast went off inside the house. Glass tinkled and one dangling end of Herman's topcoat whipped as though lashed by a jet of air.

Watson slumped down, his back to the wall and his leg going numb. He raised the forty-five and rested it on the one knee he could bend as the sirens grew deafening. He felt calm again, calm and light-headed.

"Luke," he said, "come up here."

Herman could not hear Watson, but he could see the movement of his lips and see the forty-five pointed at him. With a cry of anguish he turned and ran for the brush. The wire fence jolted him back. With a bellow he tried to vault it. The top strand sprawled him face down. As a police car ground to a stop between him and the brush he regained his feet. A glance showed him more cars entering the yard.

Twice he turned in a confused circle. Then like a great lumbering beast he lurched toward the car in the field. The thirty-eight bucked in his hand. A rattle of gunfire drowned the further crash of his own shots, and five bullets slammed him to the ground. He raised one arm. This was a burned field in Normandy and around him loomed soldiers, his own soldiers, and he had fired on them, and he fought to remember the name of a skinny girl he hadn't yet met in Germany as darkness swept up around him.

Without seeing the guns leveled at him or the voices that ordered him, Watson slid his own gun across the porch away from him. He stared at the crumpled figure in the field until rough hands threw him face down and twisted his arms behind his body. The bitter words around him were a garble. With splinters of glass digging at his cheek, he looked up at the girders of the trestle, starkly black against the wan sun.

Luke wanted to cross, he thought; and maybe it had been the right way. But he had let Luke make so few decisions. And the hatred of dogs, he thought . . .

something a man should know about a friend.

Why did the fool run, he asked himself. He had wanted to tell Luke there was no sense in dying, tell him because old Luke couldn't think for himself. And now the guy was dead. So was his dream dead.

Watson closed his eyes against the bite of the cuffs and the sight of the trestle. "I owe you a lot," Herman had said, the words of a jerk who left alone might have earned his dream someday and by earning it been able to live it.

Watson fought against loathing, fought until hands yanking him to his feet tore all the will from his mind and left him with only the knowledge that out in the field a part of himself once more had died.

Everybody on the waterfront paid up but Amato. Then they roughed up Amato's wife. So Amato went to "The Circle."

PROTECTION

BY HAL ELLSON

AMATO WIPED the sweat from his face and watched the other longshoremen leaving the pier. A tug hooted on the river now. The light was fading, shadows creeping over the waterfront.

The last man left the pier. Amato watched him join the others at the car parked across the street. Two men sat in the car. One collected the money. The other behind the wheel seemed unconcerned, but he kept his hand on a bulging pocket.

The one taking the money was big and muscular, with a round doughy face. Frowning, he checked off the men's names and at last looked up.

The one at the wheel raced the motor and shifted gears.

"Better hold it," Kehoe said. "One is missing."

Maguire shifted back into neutral and eased up on the gas. "Amato?" he said.

"That's the baby."

"The tough one."

"Second time he got away, but we'll see how tough he is."

"I hear he's carrying a knife."

"So?"

"You ought to pack a rod."

"Don't need one," Kehoe smiled. "Come on. I'm going to call on him and see how tough he really is."

Maguire shifted once more and the car moved off. From the pier, Amato watched it go down the

block and turn the corner. He wiped his face again, stuffed his handkerchief away and swore softly. Again he'd seen the others pay off.

But they don't make me, he promised himself, and a tug hooted from the river again. The sound faded. Silence flooded the pier.

He stepped into the street. It was empty now and darkening rapidly. He hurried toward home. It was ten blocks away, in a small red-brick tenement.

Safe, he thought, as he turned the last corner and walked under a streetlamp.

A moment later a cat crossed his path. He forked his fingers in the sign of the horns, and passed out of the light.

Half a block from home now. Fried peppers and spaghetti on the table tonight, he thought, and Maria's image came before him, the faces of the children. Suddenly his aching muscles no longer bothered him, his stomach stirred.

A little red wine with the meal, he thought, and went on to the door of the house where he lived and stopped in his tracks.

A man stood in the doorway, hands in his pockets, a cigarette in his mouth. Amato clutched his pay-envelope and tensed.

The two men stared at each other. Finally Kehoe dropped his cigarette.

"Trying to get away?" he said.

Amato kept his tongue.

"Better pay up," Kehoe said. "You got to if you want to work on the pier."

"Maybe the others, but not me," Amato answered, shaking his head.

"Not you, hey?"

"That's right. I earn my money. Nobody else gets it."

"You're sure of that?"

"Sure. I sweat blood for my money and I keep it. Nobody takes it."

"A lot of others said the same and changed their minds."

"Maybe the others are afraid, but I don't pay off."

"Okay, Amato. I just wanted to know how you felt," Kehoe said and took out his cigarettes. He put one to his lips and offered the pack.

Amato ignored the gesture. Kehoe grinned and took out his matches. A razor blade was concealed in the folder. He tore a match from it, lit his cigarette, closed the folder again and suddenly moved his hand. Twice he slashed Amato across the face, then struck him and knocked him down. A vicious kick finished the attack and he walked away.

Amato groaned, his hands went to his bloody face. "Yeah, I don't pay off," he murmured. "I don't pay off."

True to his word, Amato didn't pay off. On the following pay-day, he hid on the pier till after dark, then went home.

This time no one intercepted

him. Supper was ready for him. He handed Maria his pay-envelope, ate quickly and left the house.

His friend, Gulotta, was waiting for him at the corner bar.

"How'd you make out?" he asked Amato.

"Okay. They didn't bother me. It's like I said. Stand up to them and they'll lay off you."

"That's what you think," said Gulotta. "You're not off the hook."

"In my book, I am."

"Okay, but watch your step. I know Kehoe good. He'll lay back and wait. Take my advice and go to the Circle. Speak to them."

"I don't need the Circle."

"Okay, but it's a good organization. They'll handle Kehoe. I'll let you have the address."

"Thanks, but. . . ."

Gulotta shrugged. "Okay, when you're ready, let me know. How about another beer?"

"Next time. I'm going home," Amato said and left the bar.

When he entered the house, Maria wasn't in the kitchen and the table hadn't been cleared. Something was wrong. He felt that immediately and hurried into the next room.

"Maria," he called, and the bedroom door opened. Kehoe stepped out. A groan came from behind him. Amato paled. He was about to lunge, but Kehoe patted his pocket.

"Don't try anything," he said and walked out.

Another groan came from the bedroom. Then Maria called out.

"Oh, god," Amato cried and, in agony, sank his teeth into the flesh of his hand.

Gulotta was still in the bar when Amato returned. "Back so soon?" he said. "What happened?"

Amato explained, and Gulotta shook his head. "Now you have to go to the Circle," he said. "Tell them what Kehoe did and they'll kill him for you."

"But I don't want him killed."

"Listen to me and go. Don't and he'll give you the razor again, you fool."

"No." Amato shook his head. "No killing. I don't want that."

"Ah, you don't want that. Maybe you want him to come back for Maria again. He should be killed like a dog for that. His heart should be cut out."

"No."

Gulotta shrugged. "All right, but go to them. Tell them to cut him up. A good slicing job. They know how. It won't cost you much."

"All right."

Gulotta emptied his glass, swept his change from the bar and said, "Come on."

A block away they entered a fruit store. In back of it was a large room where a number of men were playing cards at a table. Gulotta introduced Amato. The card game was forgotten.

Big Mike, a husky man with a

cigar in his mouth nodded to Amato and said, "What's the problem?"

Amato told him of the incident with the razor and the assault on his wife.

"You want him dead?"

"No, just cut up."

"Okay. Whatever you say. We'll do a good job, it's guaranteed."

"How much will it cost?"

"Don't worry about the price. First, we do the job, then we talk money."

On Friday Kehoe and Maguire were waiting outside the pier for Amato, but he didn't appear. Instead, a car approached their own and stopped in front of it. The men of the Circle stepped from it. Big Mike opened the door of the other car.

"Which one of you is Kehoe?" he asked.

"I am. Who wants to know?" Kehoe answered.

"Get out of the car."

Kehoe didn't move. "You want to make me?" he said.

"This will make you," Big Mike answered.

Kehoe had no choice. A gun was leveled at him. He got out of the car, and one of the men frisked him.

"No iron," he said.

"All right," Big Mike said to Maguire. "Get out of here fast."

Maguire didn't have to be told twice. He drove off. As the car turned the corner, Big Mike nodded to Kehoe.

"Get in our car," he said.

Kehoe didn't protest. He climbed into the back of the car and it moved off to stop a block away in front of an alley.

Kehoe was marched into the alley. His face was white with fear.

"All right. Here."

The voice came from behind. Kehoe turned too late. A gun butt caught him behind the ear. Five men closed in. He tried to fight back and fell to the ground. The gun butt did its work again, feet thudded against his body. As his senses ebbed, he saw a man bending over him with a knife and tried to cry out, but no sound came from his lips.

"Do a good job on him," a voice said, and Kehoe passed out as the one with the knife started to slash his face.

On the following Friday no one was waiting outside the pier for Amato but, when he reached the house where he lived, a car drew up to the curb. Big Mike stepped from it and greeted him.

"How's the boy?" he asked.

"Okay."

"Good. No more trouble from Kehoe, hey?"

"That's right."

"By the way, how much were you paying him off every week?"

"Nothing."

"I see. Well, how much were

the others paying each week?"

Amato held up two fingers.

"Two dollars? That's not so much. Next week I'll be at the pier. Tell the boys, Amato. Tell 'em everybody pays three from now on."

"What do you mean?" Amato said, stunned. "You must be joking."

"No. It's no joke," Big Mike answered. "Everybody pays three to the Circle, including you."

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TO CATCH A SPY

Pardus was a white-collar worker, a quiet man with a wife and two young children. He detested violence. Yet suddenly he found himself assigned the task of penetrating the Iron Curtain, stalking and silencing a professional master spy.

A Full-length Novel

BY PHILIP FREUND

"YOU'RE the man for it!" said the colonel again.

Back of the colonel's desk, in a corner of his neat little office, was a dripping faucet and a discolored porcelain wash-basin and over it a small, square mirror in which Pardus saw himself. His hair was a touch reddish, his skin freckled; his eyes were blue. In different clothes, with a German cut and a solid drab tie, he could very easily pass as an East Berliner. Besides, he spoke the language with just the right accent. And he was utterly unknown in Berlin, having arrived here only two hours before.

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-two," Pardus replied.

"Married?"

"Yes, I am." Pardus added, "Two children." This might dis-

suade the colonel from selecting him. Pardus was taken aback at the prospect of being the one chosen; the very thought of it was unacceptable.

The colonel was, indeed, momentarily discomposed. But not for long. "Well, I'm married too. Most of the men on our staff are."

The colonel was a small man. His brown hair was thin and precisely combed, flattened with water to adhere to his clean scalp. He had a thin skin and a narrow face. His complexion was pink, youthful, but there were lines graven by hard work and anxiety: they enclosed his tense mouth, tightly compressed lips, in a sharply etched parenthesis and were like a faint wickerwork in the shadows under his eyes. Most of the lines were very fine, just perceptible; his skin was almost transparent. He looked like a Romantic poet, though actually he was the permanent Chief of the Intelligence Section here.

Colonel Orellis was truly of compact energy: his fingers drummed on the desk as though he were typing out his thoughts in advance. His grey eyes had a metallic shine, cold and nearly inhuman. But his daily responsibility was heavy. He was a good man for his nerve-wracking job.

"Are you telling me to kill Bauer?"

"No, we're not *telling* you that," Colonel Orellis repeated emphatically. "We can't. No one has the right to give you that order, or even make that suggestion. If an official investigation revealed later that we had, there's no telling what the consequences would be. We don't murder men. But if he's not silenced—"

"Someone must take steps," Pardus conceded.

And it was obvious that he, Stephen Pardus, was providentially the right man to do it. He answered to almost every requirement. But could he kill anyone?

Colonel Orellis's fingers drummed again, a mournful tattoo, his well-brushed nails shining in the rays of the desklamp. "You've had no experience at this kind of work?"

"No, none at all," Pardus replied, eagerly again. He wanted only to disqualify himself. He had walked into this room, and the colonel—hitherto a total stranger to him—had suddenly broached this assignment.

"How did you get into Intelligence, then? Exactly what are your duties?" The colonel sought to fill in his background. "'Pardus?' Sounds Slovakian?"

"It's Czech. My father and mother formerly lived in the Sudetenland, the German part of Czechoslovakia; they emigrated a few months before the Second World War. I guess I inherited a special gift of languages from my father; he was very good at them."

At the University, Pardus had majored in linguistics and written his thesis on the roots of certain Magyar and Finnish words that appear to have an affinity. He spoke both of those languages, as well as Czech, Russian, and German. After a job as translator in Intelligence, he had moved up. "I've been with the Department for eight years. I read highly secret reports and compile and evaluate them."

"What has brought you to Berlin?"

"Recently I've taken over some administrative work. I was told a week ago to come here to help straighten out a procedural tangle in your office."

"That's not very important." Colonel Orellis gazed at him fixedly. "Let me ask you this: Have you ever been responsible for assigning our espionage agents to specific missions?"

"I have, at times, recommended one man as against another, based on my acquaintance with the kind of reports they had turned in."

"But you've always stayed safely at your own desk?"

"That's true," Pardus said.

"What's your status? You're a civilian?"

"Yes, I am." Since he was not in military service, Pardus could not be compelled to go on an espionage mission.

But this was a moment of crisis. The lives of hundreds of men, and even the security of his country, might depend on Pardus's quick assent. He had helped to name other men for tasks as dangerous as this.

Pardus noticed every physical detail of the colonel's office: a map and a calendar with encircled dates on the wall, an olive-green filing cabinet with bright, protective locks, a laden coat-rack. But these sense impressions had no significance to him, and afterwards he would not be able to recall them with any vividness; he would feel that everything had happened to him in a haze. The unreality-*cum*-reality of the moment was overwhelming.

He would probably remember nothing but the colonel's cold grey eyes, the Spartan glance that seemed to pierce into him, measuring his courage, his loyalty. *That* was the issue between him and the colonel. Any man who worked in the vicious, dangerous, silent world of intelligence was bound to place vital emphasis on patriotic loyalty. Pardus was not immune to the contagion of "loyalty"; he himself had worked in this atmosphere for the past eight years.

"We can expect treason in this work of ours. It's almost an occupational disease amongst professional spies," Colonel Orellis said. "They're chiefly interested in money. So we never really trust them. It's quite different with Bauer. We *did* trust him. Everybody did."

Colonel Orellis knotted his brow in a melancholy frown. The moment Pardus had entered the office, on his arrival from Tempelhof Airport, he had been conscious of this air of crisis; it had shown on the faces of the staff, even of the receptionist, a trim and blonde young girl with searching eyes and a neutral, polite voice.

"You've not heard the news?" Captain Torrens had asked him, in a very worried tone, as Pardus waited to be introduced to the Colonel, the Chief of Section.

"No, nothing. I've been travelling here by air. Left home last night."

Captain Torrens, second in charge of the Berlin office, was about Pardus's own age. He had brown hair, cut remarkably short, and alert dark eyes in which were now flecks of light that bespoke his consternation. He apparently took this new turn of political events quite personally. He was close-shaven, but even so his beard showed through, giving him a very swarthy look. Obviously he identified himself strongly with his work, and any set-back to it affected him as though he himself were at fault. But what he had to tell Pardus did involve him, just as it involved Pardus, too, and all those on the side of the West.

"It'll be in the newspapers any moment. Felix Bauer, the head of West German Counter-Intelligence, has defected to the Reds. And, of course, he knows everything about our set-up, everything! The whole West German network, and how it's organized, and who its agents are. Their communications code, and probably ours . . ."

"Wasn't he recently in our country?"

"Yes, he visited Washington, London, Paris. Only last month. He was supposed to help co-ordinate the espionage activities of the West Germans with those of all the Occupying Powers. So there's hardly any secret he can't pass along."

Pardus appreciated that this was a major coup for the Communists in the realm of espionage, as well as a huge propaganda victory. To the Berlin section of Intelligence, the news was truly catastrophic, because its staff was practically on the "front line."

And then, a few minutes after Pardus had presented his credentials to Colonel Orellis, that grey-eyed officer had suddenly stopped talking. He had gazed at Pardus a long instant. He had forgotten his few, formal words of greeting and enquiry about the purpose of the newcomer's visit here. An inspiration quickly lighted his face with hope. "It's a stroke of fate, marvellous luck, that you've come! You're just the man, the only one who can do it for us! And it must be done immediately."

"What makes you think *I* can do it?"

"Bauer doesn't know you, does he? Neither does anyone else on their side. A German can't carry out the mission—Bauer's personally acquainted with every West German intelligence agent. He'd also recognize any one of our staff here in Berlin. But you're from a different branch entirely. And Bauer didn't meet you, when he was over there visiting you?"

"No."

"So you'd be perfect. You speak German fluently." Colonel Orellis considered this. "You can add a slight Czech accent and appear to be a Red from Prague or Bratislava. That'll account, if necessary, for your not being too familiar with Berlin. We'll give you identification cards. Dress you in the right kind of clothes."

It was at this point that Pardus had glanced at himself in the small square mirror over the wash-basin behind the colonel, and, in his troubled imagination, had seen himself transformed for this proposed role. How much of his nervous hesitation and fear showed on his face?

The colonel's drumming on his desk became more decisive, more insistent. "A Czech from Prague. If you're caught, you must keep on claiming that you're a Czech; you can't admit that we sent you."

"I understand."

Pardus himself, at his desk, had written out such orders for others.

"If Felix Bauer has gone over to the Reds, hasn't he already talked?" Almost desperately, Pardus sought a way out of his own dilemma. "He must've told them everything by now."

Colonel Orellis shook his head. "He's too smart to tell everything at once. For his own protection, he'll keep them asking. He'll stay valuable to them much longer that way. He's exceedingly able and cunning. He'll put a high price, in terms of special privileges and personal safety, on any data he divulges. His gesture in going over to East Germany is enough to satisfy them for the moment; but once the initial shock and sensation of that have passed he'll really have to prove himself important to them. That's when he'll spill his secrets, and we must act before."

"He might've been in their service all along."

"We're positive he wasn't. No one suspected him, so he had no reason to expose himself. If he was a Red before now, he'd have been much more useful staying where he was, in charge of West German Intelligence."

"But he's highly neurotic. We've always known that. Once again, you can expect that in this field of work."

A slight spasm of doubt crossed the face of Colonel Orellis, the features that were of an almost Etruscan delicacy. "His defection seems to've been a sudden emotional decision. He's sincerely critical of

present West German foreign policy, and his going over to the Communist side is a public gesture intended to dramatize that."

A telephone rang in the anteroom, and the receptionist replied to it. Pardus heard her say: "I'm sorry, but Colonel Orellis is in conference. Could I have him call you back?" Her voice was still neutral.

Somewhere outside, an automobile engine was started, a muffled series of quick coughs, as though the motor had a mechanical catarrh. But the world of the Berlin section—this little cubicle of an office, brightly lighted by tubular fluorescent lamps that caused people to look pale and even slightly bloodless—was very still. The rain was falling against the window, and the faucet over the porcelain wash-basin was dripping, its faint *plop* almost indistinguishable.

The enormity of Bauer's act began to loom even larger to Pardus, since he himself was ever more involved. "Is there any possibility that it wasn't a voluntary gesture? That he was blackmailed and forced to do it? Or even kidnapped? Or hypnotized?"

"That's what Bonn will claim in its counter-propaganda. We hear of kidnappings, and the public knows how many have occurred." Colonel Orellis frowned. His grey eyes were suddenly lifted to include Pardus again. "But even if it's true, and he was tricked and trapped—and we doubt it—he has been inexcusably careless for a man in his position. He must pay the penalty for it. Bauer himself realizes that." The grey eyes were hard, inhuman. "He is now where he can do us so much harm, that he must be eliminated. Perhaps he won't talk to them of his own accord, but he'll be tortured until his tongue is loosened. If he's innocent and a victim, the man who kills him will probably be doing him a favor."

"How much pistol practice have you had?"

"Virtually none."

"Well, come downstairs to our firing range. We've a row of targets there."

Pardus accompanied Captain Torrens, was given a weapon, and shown how to load and use it. The cut-out targets, the dark silhouettes of men, were in the brilliantly lighted cellar of the building. Each target had a white circle which marked where the heart would be. Pardus held a pistol very well.

"You've a natural aim. You sight perfectly, and your hand is steady," Torrens told him.

"The recoil feels as though it'd break my wrist!"

"You do have that trouble at first. Anyhow, you'll probably not have to fire it very often, especially if you shoot at your man from

close-by." The captain said this casually. He had fought in the Second World War, and his service ribbons testified to his having been wounded twice.

Pardus could think of nothing to say. He narrowed his eyes to sight at the white circle for another try.

The room was soundproofed, but the bark of the automatic was deafening; and after a time the ringing in his ears added to his continued sense of unreality: it was like the ringing he had known in high mountain altitudes, especially when he had visited Mexico City; or when a plane on which he was travelling suddenly descended before landing.

"You'll have a German weapon, a Luger. With a 'silencer' on it. We can't give you one of ours; it might be traced afterwards," tersely explained the captain.

After an hour's practice on the range, Pardus was taken to another room where Captain Torrens spread out a simplified map of divided Berlin; the four districts were outlined. "This is the American Sector. The British, which includes Charlotenburg. The French, which is quite far out. . . . The Russian, which reaches into the very center. You've only been here a few hours. I ought to take you on a tour of the city, but it'd be too risky for you to be seen with any of us."

"I'm supposed to be a stranger, anyhow. A Czech. So I can ask questions of anyone, to find my way about."

"Yes, that was the colonel's idea."

In the colonel's office, he was given two packets of money, a generous sum of both currencies. The money was waiting for him in separate piles on Orellis's fluorescent-lit desk. "These are the D Marks, for West Berlin. And the Ostmarks, for the other Sector. The unofficial exchange is about 5 to 1."

"Yes, I understand."

"Instead of our buying clothes for you," Orellis suggested, "you might as well buy them yourself. Go to Selber & Wolff; that's the largest department store on the Kurfürstendamm."

The colonel advised Pardus to study the dress of passersby on the streets. "Copy them." He offered further counsel: "Take your time. Listen to them talk; the Berliner has his own dialect. Your accent should be slightly different, but not enough to make you conspicuous."

Pardus went out into the drizzle; it had been raining since his arrival in Berlin. The office was on a small side street, Pfeilstrasse. Several near-by buildings were skeletonic ruins, dismal relics under the dark sky. He paused to stare at them and finally walked to the main street, avoiding the puddles in the gutter, and took a taxi.

In the store he searched through racks of cheap merchandise, since he had supposedly come from a

Worker's Paradise. He chose a dark green felt hat, a heavy tweed overcoat, and a black-and-white pepper suit with sharply accentuated shoulders. The overcoat was pleated and belted in the back and had a small imitation fur collar, and the suit's style was very different from the one he ordinarily wore. In a full-length mirror, his earlier image of himself in the colonel's glass became a fact: he was a Central European. His garb, particularly the fur collar, heightened the impression, but his physical appearance was even more responsible for it: his cheekbones, the shape and color of his face, clearly showed his Slavonic-Germanic descent; he seemed a younger version of his late father, especially when smiling.

He left Selber & Wolff and caught another taxi. He gazed through the misted windows of the cab, as he was driven along, trying to acclimate himself to the strange city. It was dusk; the foggy Kurfürstendamm was brightly and even garishly lighted with neon signs over shops and cabarets, but many of the upper floors of buildings were also gaunt skeletons. The city, half prosperously restored, half desolately ruined, had an air of unreality appropriate to his own disturbed mood. A weird ride . . . the contrasts were startling. He attempted to pick out and memorize a few landmarks. But it was becoming too dark; all he could select were a few signs which in daylight would be off. He paid off the taxi a short distance from the office, not to betray his true destination. He walked in the rain through the homeward-bound crowds for the rest of the way, and the dampness on his face, the feel of the drizzle, and the chorus of harsh voices and laughter around him helped to prove to him that this adventure was real.

He turned in at Pfeilstrasse. He walked upstairs to the fluorescent-lighted office, and was welcomed and scrutinized by the colonel and the captain, who approved at once of his new clothes. "You'll certainly pass for a traveller, a civil engineer from Prague," Torrens said.

Colonel Orellis nodded and exclaimed again: "What luck for us that you arrived here just today!" To the Spartan officer, at this moment of anxiety, Pardus's presence was a good omen.

Pardus smiled ruefully. He was unable to share their enthusiasm. He felt hungry and yet without appetite.

Pardus finally had supper with the colonel, who ordered sandwiches and coffee brought to the office. Between bites into buttered rolls and ham, Orellis gave him more advice. "Don't believe anything Bauer might say to you. He's a professional, very clever and

quick-thinking. He might offer excuses, but they'd probably be lies. You can't afford to take chances. Your own life will be at stake."

A black, portable television set stood in a corner of the office, and Orellis kept looking at it and his gold wristwatch. "Now you'll have a chance to see your man."

The newscast on the East Berlin station, *Deutscher Fernsehfunk,* was at seven o'clock. The announcer appeared on the small glowing screen. "Tonight I must proclaim an event of major importance. . . ." As Orellis had foreseen, the Communists were in a great hurry to exploit Felix Bauer's defection. "We are going to present Herr Bauer himself, and he will tell you tonight—and in a regular series of interviews to follow, each night at this time—why he felt compelled to make his decision."

Colonel Orellis spoke, half a whisper: "A whole series of interviews. He'll have an immense audience!"

"Few men can reveal as much of the true plans of the Capitalistic West," the announcer went on, emphatically.

The man who next shared the space in the framed bright rectangle seemed at first quite characterless. He was stocky, in his middle forties, his hair and eyes of an indeterminate color, though they appeared to be lighter than the announcer's. He was also somewhat shorter than the other man on the screen. He was introduced by the newscaster and tried a weak smile. He began the interview a bit awkwardly by further identifying himself. "For the past four years, I have been the head of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, which is Bonn's Intelligence unit. Some of you might know that much, but perhaps not be aware that in earlier days I was in the Abwehr, the Wehrmacht's Counter-intelligence. I should like to tell you that, at the same time, I was working as a British Secret-service contact."

"That's new to me," Torrens protested softly.

"Not to me," Colonel Orellis said as quietly.

"I was a true German patriot and put the downfall of Hitler before anything else." Bauer's voice betrayed his explicable nervousness. "In those days I met many Communists, who also shared my feeling about Hitler, and I learned to respect their devotion and selflessness."

"That sounds familiar," Colonel Orellis added. "The old propaganda line . . ."

"Later, I and my brother George, a zealous anti-Nazi, took part in the Generals' Plot to kill Hitler. When that attempt failed, I escaped but my brother was caught, tortured, and finally executed."

The hush in the Colonel's bare little office, filled only with the mechanically carried voice, lent

portentousness to the traitor's every word, despite a slight rasp of static. The man on the lighed screen seemed to be painfully reliving his very personal story.

"My brother was stripped to the waist. He was made to face the wall, and had his head blown open. The Gestapo took a film of the execution, which was later shown to Hitler, who was greatly satisfied. The film has been preserved, and I have seen it—how my brother George died." He paused and swallowed. His pain-filled eyes were now dominant in his face, and his mouth quivered. "If I have any passion in my life, it's hatred for Nazism."

"That explains a lot about Bauer," Torrens said. With his thumbnail he opened a cellophane-wrapped package of cigarettes, offered them to Colonel Orellis and Pardus, and took one himself. He went through the same procedure holding out a flame from his silver-plated lighter; then reached forward and deftly manipulated the volume-control knob on the television set: Bauer's voice was instantly louder and clearer. And Pardus grew conscious of the deliberate drip of the faucet into the porcelain wash-basin. The acrid taint of freshly burning cigarettes began to impregnate the air; a bit of blue smoke drifted in the ray of bright light emanating from the screen.

"For a long time, I have been with the Bonn Government and have served it well—everyone who knows me can attest to that. But lately I've seen things which have appalled me. There's much talk in Bonn of anti-Communism, but no longer any talk of anti-Nazism. No one pays any attention to the ex-Nazis, and they are returning in government posts everywhere."

"He'd like us to think that's the nub of the matter for him," Colonel Orellis muttered.

"Last week I attended a ceremony at Plötsensee Prison, the fifteenth anniversary of the day on which my brother and the others died there, martyrs to the cause of German democracy." Bauer's voice still had something less than an evangelical ring. "At that moment, at that tragic ceremony, I reached my resolve. I would cross the line and join the ranks of the East German Democracy, because here alone is kept alive and burning a true opposition to Neo-Nazism. All that I learned on recent visits to Western capitals, London, Paris, Washington, has convinced me beyond doubt that the Capitalistic countries are plotting a new war, in which Germany'll be the tool . . . Nor is there any genuine wish in the West to help us win German reunification."

The three men in the colonel's office continued to listen intently. The black-and-white image of the man on the glass screen spoke almost like an automaton. . . . "Is he drugged?" Torrens wondered

aloud.

"I don't think so," Orellis said, analytically. "Of course, he's had much of the speech written for him. I know Bauer well; that's not the way he talks when he's on his own. He's very nervous now, but he always was."

The apparition on the screen talked on. Although Bauer's delivery was febrile and halting, Pardus realized that the words had a sensational impact on his vast German audience on both sides of the line. His very lack of eloquence lent him an air of deep emotional sincerity. The speech was becoming an event of almost world importance. Who could be expected to know more of the truth about the West's political plans and feelings than Felix Bauer, who had been so near the seats of power? He lent great authority to any Communist claim of hostile encirclement by the West.

As the colonel had urged, Pardus was closely studying Bauer's lineaments and mannerisms. He was quite sure that he would recognize the man again, anywhere. Felix Bauer's brow was broad and intellectual; his hair emphasized his width of brow, perhaps unintentionally, by being parted on one side and lying horizontally. His eyes were large, and his nose, though strong, was his most sensitive feature, the nostrils moving as he spoke and at times compressing for emphasis. His mouth was sensual and just now irresolute. The chin was square, slightly cleft, and knobbed, a firm jaw that was somewhat rounded with light on the glaring screen. "His hair is light-colored, and his eyes are hazel," Orellis commented, helpfully. "Bauer is rather handsome. He's something of a ladies' man."

But Pardus asked himself if one could read character in that face, flattened by the hot, dazzling lights of a television studio and then sent over the winter air in a rapid if minute succession of electronic impulses, to be reproduced here. More than likely, the man delineated on the glass screen had put on make-up—for the broadcast—which abstracted from the face its revelatory lines and shadows. Bauer must, to judge by his personal history and the leading rôle he had played, be a man of purpose, a formidable antagonist. It was very dubious, in view of all these factors, that he could be assessed except by close attention to what he said; and, as the colonel held, even then the chance was strong that his speech —recited in a wavering manner— had actually been written for him. This was not Felix Bauer, but a sort of captive and instructed poltergeist, Bauer's demonic *alter ego,* brought by invisible waves of sound into a million European living-rooms. And like a poltergeist, it disturbed the decent silence with this mechanically amplified clatter that resembled a troubled human voice.

The announcer took over the television screen. He informed his listeners once again that Herr Bauer would carry on a series of talks based on his experiences in the O.F.P.O.C. and during his recent visits abroad. "The whole Western conspiracy against peace and the German people will be exposed."

The interview was over. The colonel quickly got up from his chair and turned on a West German station. He stood gazing down at the set and listening to it. The defection of Felix Bauer was also the subject of its newscast. His career was reviewed in much the same way—a still-shot was flashed on the screen, a group picture that included him on the occasion of his having attended the memorial service at Plötzensee Prison. He was wearing a hat and his face was half hidden and anyhow indistinct. Details of his flight, important facts in judging him, were reported. "Bauer went to visit a physician, Dr. Wilhelm Frühling, a close friend of his from former days, and a known Communist, though he has continued to reside in West Berlin. Supposedly Frühling wanted to discuss with him the plight of a widow of a one-time comrade-in-arms, whom he wished to help obtain a government pension. The two men talked for a long time. Late that night, Frühling drove him to the East Sector of Berlin, by way of the Sandkrug Bridge. Although Bauer left no note, Frühling did. It is now in the hands of the police and says: 'Herr Bauer has gone voluntarily to the East Sector. He is renouncing all allegiance to Bonn, for profound moral reasons.'"

Orellis asked: "Is Frühling on our list?"

"Yes," Torrens replied. "We've had him spotted for a long time."

Pardus gazed for a moment at the blank television screen. "That may be Bauer," he said. "But how does one go about looking for him?" While the interview was on, the man had seemed very close to him, virtually in the same room. But now, as the black-and-white images vanished at the click of a switch and the voices were abruptly stilled, Bauer became utterly remote, as though in truth an elusive spirit he had dematerialized with that sudden retreat of light and animation from the bright rectangle of glass.

The sound of the rain and the rhythmic drip of the faucet, maddeningly punctual, were once again the only sounds in the fluorescent-lighted office. The olive-green metal cabinets reflected the pale daylight lamps in white splotches. An array of newspapers with bold headlines and photographs were spread out at random on the colonel's ordinarily tidy

desk. In every newspaper, Felix Bauer's name was printed in large black letters and his blurred likeness, half-tone engravings on the slightly too coarse woodpulp, stared up under the lamp in a variety of moods and angles: smiling, solemn; profile, three-quarters, full-face.

Colonel Orellis spoke softly. "We know exactly where Bauer is at this moment."

"Where?"

"At the East Berlin broadcasting station. In Adlershof. The *Deutscher Fernsehfunk*. Also, we have one of our men outside it now. He was posted there as soon as the broadcast was announced. He'll trail Bauer and his guards when they leave. In an hour or two, we should know where Bauer's living or hiding."

Pardus felt very foolish. He was truly an amateur. He waited for the colonel's next words.

"Unfortunately, as I said before, Bauer will probably recognize him; he'll have to stay some distance behind," Orellis continued. "What's more, Bauer is bound to be well guarded. The Reds know that we'll try to silence him. So does Bauer himself. Besides, he probably hasn't been on their side long enough to be trusted as yet. And, as you've just heard him admit, he has a history of working on two sides at once. They'll keep a close watch on him."

The office was hushed. The three men waited idly; the colonel sat at his desk and soon his fingers lightly drummed on it once more, as though keeping time with the barely heard tattoo of raindrops. Torrens picked up one of the newspapers and gazed at it glumly, but he did not actually read it. From time to time, he turned anxiously toward the silent telephone.

"Even if he's guarded, we have to get to him," Orellis insisted. "And very quickly. Every day that passes will cost us men's lives."

Pardus looked at himself again in the colonel's dull mirror, which now—since the hour was after nightfall—was lit only by the oblique rays of a desk lamp. In the dim glass, his face was calm; he seemed to be completely without emotion. But his outward poise, and his inward control which allowed him to speak with a steady, quiet voice, were due to his still not believing that he was actually going to undertake this mission.

Torrens added a further count. "Our undercover people in East Germany will quit us, too, to save their skins. They know that Bauer can name and betray them at any moment, if he hasn't already done so."

The telephone rang. The colonel answered it.

"It's Tenzer, who was in Adlershof outside the broadcasting station," he reported, after a brief exchange. "He says that Bauer isn't staying in East Berlin—the Reds

probably think it'd be too easy for him to slip back from there. He has a room in a house in Potsdam, just across the line in the East Zone. I've the address."

Torrens said: "Potsdam? That's bad news!"

Orellis wrote down the address for Pardus. "This might make things more difficult. You'll have to be even more careful in Potsdam than in the East Sector of Berlin. We can't get to you, and there're border-guards all along the edge of the Zone. You'll be altogether on your own."

To cross to Potsdam, however, was amazingly easy. Pardus simply took a train on the Stadtbahn, Berlin's rickety elevated railway, toward the Wannsee Station. Potsdam was three stations or only sixteen minutes beyond Wannsee, reached by the same noisy, rattling train.

His night had been miserable. He felt ragged and tired now. By temper he was deliberate. In this instance, he had been forced to the most important decision of his life with no time to think about it. Only when he was alone afterwards, had the full scope of his plight become clear to him.

He had stayed overnight in the colonel's quarters. Orellis had spent additional hours talking to him. The colonel, his grey eyes alight, had offered an endless stream of ideas; and all this talk had also prevented Pardus from thinking for himself. Perhaps that had really been Orellis's intention. He was, as befitted the head of an Intelligence unit, wise and subtle. He was Machiavellian, as though by some racial inheritance. Pardus knew that he could not *withdraw* from this mission; he had never truly given his assent to it, but his willingness had been taken for granted. The two men, eagerly discussing what could be done to counteract Bauer, had even seemed to envy Pardus. The colonel and the captain had risked their lives often and took dangerous errands as a matter of course. Some innate love of peril and adventure had doubtless influenced their choice of careers.

The panorama from the window of the train was of acres of bombed-out buildings, gaunt and stark: a frightful sight, like the landscape of Pompeii or a Sicilian village on a volcanic slope, consumed by the hot ash of Etna. Over the years the desolate ruins had weathered: plaster in the exposed rooms had flaked off and been washed away by snow and rain; grass grew in the rubble. Because of the prolonged drizzle of the preceding day, the vast wet honeycomb of broken houses, which appeared to stretch for miles, was mud-bespattered but not dusty; and the color of the buildings was darker. When this area

had burned, on nights of holocaust, it must have been a huge charnel house. He guessed that this was the British Sector, in the heart of the city.

In the dark hours, when he had attempted to sleep at the colonel's house, his harried mind had reverted to his wife and children, to whom with no premonition he had said goodbye only a half-day before. Was not his family's future at stake as much as his own? Without him, what would happen to them? Yet he was not flattered to find that, when the facts were thoroughly examined, he was not deeply needed by his family. He could not convince himself of it, however much his pride desired it. Financially, they would be provided for; he had insurance enough. Julie's father was well-fixed, too: she would never have to want. So he was not essential to them as a breadwinner.

But what was the emotional stake if this mission did end in his death? Could Julie get over it? What of his children without his help and guidance? He did not ask himself whether he loved his wife, or whether he was passionately important to her, because that was not the issue now. He knew the answer, anyhow. He wanted to live, and doubtless she would prefer that he did. They got along excellently. The ardor of the first days of their marriage was past, of course, but they had a companionable relationship which he valued. But she could doubtless go on without him, and perhaps find someone else. She was bright and attractive. He did not ask himself, either, how fond he was of his son and daughter, or how much he meant to them. Robert was eight, and Madeleine five. At their age, they were delightful possessions; he cherished them, but what more? Pardus was not sentimental. He did not tell himself that they were precious to him simply because they were *his* children. He was too clear-thinking for that. Nor did he believe that they recognized him as a person apart from his generic role of "father". When they grew up, he might secretly dislike them; it was possible. Or they might dislike him. All this meant that in this adventure—as Orellis had said, though in a different connexion—he was very much on his own. His family was not to any profound degree sharing the outcome with him. Realizing that, he felt curiously empty and lonely.

Even so, he *was* married and had two children. Had he had the right to let himself be drafted for this mission? Orellis had made the point that most of the agents on his staff were married. Pardus could not hide behind his conventional family responsibilities to avoid danger. Besides, he had not been "drafted"; it might be more accurate to say that he had been "trapped" into it by the wily and

single-minded Orellis.

Pardus had already arranged with Torrens for Julie to be informed not to worry at not hearing from him for some days. The cable would say that her husband had undertaken a special errand and could not communicate with her. Julie would suppose, since he was with Intelligence, that this was nothing out-of-the-way.

The train rounded its curving trestle. The ruined area of the city had been left behind. The Grunewald parks had been denuded during the dire days after the War, when every tree and stick had been used for firewood: the parks had been reforested with saplings but still looked bare in the morning light: the North European sky was as grey and heavy as on the day before. Pardus expected rain by afternoon. Only a few people braved the damp air and threatening clouds to walk on the freshly gravelled paths.

He had bought a newspaper before boarding the train. *Berliner Morgenpost.* Felix Bauer's name was printed in outsized letters on its front page, and a picture of him. He had become famous in a single day, after having worked in dangerous obscurity so long. Some likeness such as this of Bauer, along with his more vivid televised image, had been delivered into practically every home in West and East Germany; and by now it had also appeared in the newspapers of the United States and Argentina and far-off Japan and Communist China. His motives and his fate were the subject of editorial speculation; and he was being praised or reviled, depending on the political bent of the journalists describing his deed. He was a "traitor", a "patriot".

The evening before, looking at the one-dimensional man of shadow and light on the tiny television screen, Pardus had hardly asked himself if he could kill him. That animated, talking image was not a man, no more than had been the cut-out target on the cellar range. The man was, moreover, a symbol: a schizophrenic German, torn two ways, between East and West. Pardus, acting as the avenger, would also be fulfilling a symbolic rôle; but though he was conscious of its drama, the part had no attraction for him. Such ideas were too abstract. He thought of himself in terms too physical and intimate: he was nerves and flesh-and-blood; and eventually, in his encounter with Felix Bauer, he would also have to deal with an actual man, his nerves just as sensitive, his flesh-and-blood just as warm and vulnerable.

The view changed when the train had gone by the parks, to suburbs of very German-looking villas with pleasant gardens that had no flowers now, because it was November. On the station platforms the people he glimpsed were

healthy and well-scrubbed. He saw the usual angelically beautiful blond children, and stalwart policemen in blue-grey uniforms with trim white caps. But the train was mostly empty; it was travelling out from the city at this morning hour, contrary to the ordinary traffic flow. These districts were in the American Sector, which was obviously where Berlin's upper middle-class resided.

Orellis had said that Felix Bauer was married but childless. His wife was still in West Berlin and claimed to have known nothing beforehand of his flight, although she had told West German operatives that for some time her husband had been "worried and depressed." She had not heard from him, but there had scarcely been time for it. He had left no message for her; at least, she tearlessly averred that. Communication with her, from East Berlin or near-by Potsdam, would be comparatively simple, and she might yet have word from him.

"From what we now learn, Bauer was quite a woman-chaser," the colonel added. "I'd always more or less been aware of it. So maybe he'll never bother to get in touch with his wife."

But the knowledge that Bauer was a "woman-chaser" only made him seem all the more human. Pardus was not conventionally religious and had never looked on life as divinely sacred, but he had a conscience—a very ticklish one, which was a reason for his being on this assignment; and he realized how important his own existence was to him; hence, he could appreciate what life meant to the other man. How often Orellis had exclaimed to him the night before, "It's luck—marvellous luck—that you came here just now!" But "marvellous luck" for whom? If Pardus had arrived in Berlin a day later, some other plan would probably have already been decided upon by the resourceful colonel, or someone else chosen to execute this present one. When the colonel had said to him, "You're the man for it!" why had he not replied: "I'm not at all the man. I'm psychologically unfit to *murder* anyone"?

Besides, he had been in Germany less than twenty-four hours. Even though he might pose as a foreigner, a Czech, he was utterly at a loss about many details of life here, even regional geography. He had also been deskbound throughout his job in Intelligence. He had to compare his inexperience at this sort of mission to Bauer's long career as a spy, twenty years or more. He knew nothing of the violent side of life. Bauer had actually participated in the daring Generals' Plot and had outfaced peril many times over. Bauer had seen the film of his own brother's bloody execution. The spymaster was a hardened "professional." Pardus

was a total amateur.

Wannsee Station. As they approached it, Pardus could see the lake and around its edge the Kursaal with its terrace for outdoors dining, stripped and abandoned in November; and the bathing establishments, deserted also at this season. He recognized the landmarks from the maps he had pored over, with Torrens' help, the preceding evening. On the further shore the lake, an arm of it, was heavily wooded with pine slopes. Through the streaked windows of the train, the narrow expanse of water was dull and the whole prospect, doubtless gay in Summer, had a dismal, lonely air.

Wannsee was the last stop in West Berlin; most of the passengers left the train, which finally rolled on, passing a second arm of the lake lined with boathouses and once-magnificent estates and still more wooded country. Some of the cars of the train were new, yellow-and-red; others were dilapidated and creaked; the air in them was stale—even though this was an elevated railway—not from crowds as much as old wood, rust, and flaking paint. His journey into "adventure" on this grey morning was depressing, and his nerves began to knot in the pit of his stomach as the Zonal line was crossed and the train entered not East Berlin—the Russian Sector of the occupied city, where anyone might walk or ride about freely—but East Germany itself, behind the invisible "Iron Curtain."

The ink of the newspaper had rubbed off on Pardus's fingers as he read about Bauer, and he tried to wipe it off on his black sock. In much the same way, something of the folly of Bauer's act had rubbed off on him. Pardus realized that after this experience he might be very different, regardless of his success or failure, at whether he proved himself an avenger or clumsy amateur. To transmute one's character so abruptly, to become someone else in such a short time as twelve hours, was too unnatural.

He had been warned that he would have to show his identification card and perhaps submit to a customs check at Griebnitzsee, the first stop after Wannsee. The train halted for four minutes to permit this. Border guards in olive-brown uniforms, and regular police in green, walked through the cars. Pardus sat very still, waiting. The steps and guttural voices of the men approached him, but he did not look around at them. When they came to him, they asked no questions and gave his card only the barest glance. The broad-shouldered corporal, his hands reddened and square fingernails broken, returned it to him. Since Pardus had no packages, the group of customs men passed him by, and he could breathe again with a sense of triumph. It was a tribute to the suc-

cess of his new personality, in the ready-to-wear suit he had bought on the Kürfurstendamm, and to the inherited cast of his features.

His name on his passport was now "Stefan Pardic." His photograph on it had also been somewhat altered, to heighten his Slavonic look. Speaking a slightly inflected German, in this very foreign environment, and feeling the ugly weight of the Luger hidden in the pocket of his tweed overcoat, he had become a stranger to himself.

Babelsberg, a suburb in a park. In another few minutes, the train clanked and jolted to a halt at the Potsdam platform; its run was ended. The station was a small one: two covered platforms. Pardus joined the other passengers as they trickled from the unheated cars. These remaining travellers did have a different air: they were less well dressed than the West Berliners, and looked less well fed. They appeared, to his biased eyes, to shamble rather than walk briskly, and nearly all carried heavy bundles. He advanced slowly past the ticket-seller's booth and down the steps from the platform into an alien world, one in which his life or freedom would be in jeopardy at every instant. And yet, at first glance, it was hardly any different from the other world, Wannsee, he had left only ten minutes earlier.

Immediately across from the station were flags and posters proclaiming amity between East Germany and Soviet Russia, and depicting the Socialist Unity Party as the "Friend of the People."

The rain began. Pardus surveyed the *Platz,* barely more than a broad avenue, in which was scarcely any traffic at this early hour. He had to rent a room, preferably one near Bauer's lodging—at an address Pardus had memorized, Geismarstrasse 26. Orellis had suggested that the best place for him to get information about rooms-to-let would be on a bulletin-board found near any Stadtbahn station. Pardus spotted a bulletin-board at last, next to a kiosk where newspapers and weekly periodicals were being sold—all of them East German papers, *Neues Deutschland, Berliner Zeitung, Neuer Tag.* Bauer's name was prominent in their headlines, and the same blurred half-tone picture.

Pardus crossed to the bulletin-board. Attached to it were small slips of paper, handwritten, advertising all manner of things: desperate offerings of personal possessions such as cameras, radios, and jewelry; household furnishings for sale, at forced prices; declarations by young women of their willingness to meet young men and accompany them on "vacations"; and notices of empty rooms. The bulletin-board was a condensed summary, tragic but vivid, of how it was to live in this long-stricken country.

"Bedroom—for single man,"

read a neat hand-printed slip.

The house was on Geismarstrasse, the very same street, and the number—37A—was very near that of Bauer's presumed lodging. Pardus asked the newseller, a blue-lipped elderly man, for directions.

"Geismarstrasse?" the old man repeated. "You can walk there. It's not far." He gasped a little, while speaking; his chapped blue lips told of a serious cardiac condition, and he huddled in his worn overcoat. He peered at Pardus. Obviously, he noticed the stranger's Czech accent, but there was no harm in that.

Once again Pardus looked around the wet, cobblestoned street, then started on his way through the rain.

The house in which Bauer was hiding, number 26, was small and partly concealed by shrubbery. Pardus walked past it several times the first day, glancing at it covertly and sharpening his impressions and knowledge of it: time-darkened stucco, with small windows and wet gables; an ugly house, but tidy and doubtless comfortable enough. Certainly, an inconspicuous and unlikely place to be the refuge of a world-famed traitor: it was such a middle-class dwelling, that one would hardly expect it to have been chosen by Communists for the safekeeping of a prize.

On none of his walks past did Pardus observe anyone guarding it, but Orellis had insisted that Bauer would not be left on his own; he would be under surveillance every minute. So, for all practical purposes, Felix Bauer was a prisoner in that commonplace house.

The street was tree-lined, the villas on it widely spaced with small gardens from which November had clipped most of the foliage; and only a few minutes away began the evergreen forest which lay between Potsdam and Wannsee, a hilly, neat stand of trees, thick with acorns and pine needles and veined with clearly defined paths that led to the lake's edge. To confirm his view of this landscape as glimpsed from the train, Pardus had already explored three of these paths for a short distance, pleased by their thick damp balsamic smell. But he had quickly turned back; he did not want to get lost. He gathered that many square miles of woods and lakes acted as a buffer between Berlin and the East Zone, thus interposing a natural barrier. Orellis had said that the Zonal line itself, running through these woods and crossing the lakes, was patrolled by East German border guards. So, to yet another degree, Felix Bauer was a prisoner. He could not reach West Berlin except by the Stadtbahn or motor car, and on any venture by either of those routes he would probably be recognized.

Two days on television had sufficed for his face to become known to a large part of the population. Pardus saw how irrevocably Bauer had crossed the East-West Rubicon. Now that he had elected the Communists, he would find it very difficult, perhaps even impossible, to return.

Bauer was also, to someone attempting to track him down, as inaccessible as any prisoner. Pardus had as yet caught no glimpse of the man, nor even a sign of life in the villa.

He had to find some means of keeping watch on the house without himself being seen and remarked upon. Unfortunately, he could not observe from his own house, another stucco villa with gables at 37A. It was a bit too far, and the angle of vision from his casement window did not permit it.

In 37A, meanwhile, Pardus was unexpectedly comfortable. His room had ornate furniture, a double bed with feather bolsters, and over it a salmon-colored satin-draped chandelier, somewhat dusty and faded but unmistakably elegant. His tall window opened onto a small balcony, overlooking the Autumn remains of a garden. He had a large marble bathroom with elaborate fixtures—including two wash-basins, since his room had apparently once been occupied by a married couple, very likely the master and mistress of the villa—and mirrors on three walls. In these he was multiplied, each challenging him with a different physical aspect of himself like a series of passport photos for which one posed by turning the head a little more at every shot. But despite the cracked grandeur of the bathroom, there was never any hot water; and the water always ran black when first turned on, discolored by rust in the pipes. His room was frigid at night, and his landlady implied that there was little hope of heat until the very depths of winter. Luckily, he did not mind the cold; in fact, he welcomed it. If the villa had seen far better times, that was probably true of every house in East Germany, on which the blight of a lost war and Communization had descended and fixed a harsh grip.

Potsdam had many gaps left by the war. The Russians had hotly raked it with shells in an artillery barrage and fought through it, and earlier it had been bombed by American planes. The Altstadt, the old part of the town, had been almost totally destroyed. Even so, Potsdam had been something of a refuge for harassed Berliners throughout those dreadful days; and, indeed, the villas on Geismarstrasse now occupied by Felix Bauer and Pardus himself were not far from the huge walled estate at Babelsberg where had dwelt Marshal Sokolovsky, the Russian commander of East Germany, during the early period of the Soviet Oc-

cupation of the Zone.

The landlady of 37A was Frau Wohlman, a little old lady. Pardus found her astonishingly incurious: she asked nothing about where he was from, or what he did for a living. Though she dutifully took his passport and copied down its number, to report his name and presence to the police, Pardus doubted that she had as yet actually bothered to do it. He himself had avoided the task of registering at the police station. When renting the room, he had explained that he might stay only a few days. Perhaps she was trying to save paying a tax on his occupancy. "Stefan Pardic". His name and accent, and his having no personal possessions with him, suggested some sort of irregularity. But she was in no hurry to lose him as a tenant, if there *was* anything wrong with him. It was not an attitude one expected to find in a tiny, shabby genteel old lady. Her toughened spirit had probably been bred by two decades of hardship and endless improvisation simply to survive. In West Germany there was a dire shortage of houses, but here the situation was very different: hundreds of thousands of East Germans had fled to the West, and there were empty rooms aplenty. A tenant, regardless of his character, was welcome.

Frau Wohlman was frail, had a trembling lip, pale blue eyes, and palsied hand. She was somewhat arthritic, but had thin skin and high color, which lent her an incongruous air of vitality. It was hard not to have a good complexion in this damp, cold climate, especially when there was seldom anything but icy water to wash with. The tidy interior of the villa showed Frau Wohlman's passion for cleanliness, but she was not strong enough to do a thorough job: she was too old and apparently not accustomed to such work and had no servant. Pardus felt sorry for her. Her late husband had held a government post in the pre-Nazi regime of Germany; the musty parlor displayed several photographs of him, a stiff and self-important bureaucrat. The pictures, in their tarnished silver frames, evoked a far different epoch from the present strange amalgam of bourgeois culture and Communist rule, a contrast that for Pardus seemed particularly sharp in Potsdam, a quiet and secluded royal suburb.

Sharing 37A with him were two other roomers, but Pardus saw nothing of them, though he sometimes heard footsteps on the stairs. He preferred that. He wanted to meet and later be recognized by as few people as possible. In every house a book was kept by a *Hausvertrauensmann,* a sort of agent of the police, but perhaps that person in this instance was an obliging friend or tenant of Frau Wohlman.

His chief problem remained: how to keep a vigilant watch on

the house at number 26? Who lived there, besides Bauer? When, if ever, would Bauer appear? How was Pardus to sight the phantasmal man glimpsed only on a television screen?

He had been in Potsdam three days. The weather grew warmer and clearer, with an occasional afternoon hour of pale sun. The dun, withered shrubs along Geismarstrasse shone in wan light. Meanwhile, how many secrets had Bauer passed on to the Russians in exchange for his skin? How many times had Colonel Orellis and Captain Torrens asked each other what, if anything, their new man in East Germany was accomplishing?

Pardus was walking past Bauer's villa, ostensibly on his way to the *Platz* to buy cigarettes or a newspaper, when a young woman in a green coat and hat came out of it. She moved along the street, slightly ahead of him and in the same direction. He quickened his pace, studying her sharply. Her green hat was of felt, a toque—Pardus's wife had once had one like it—and her hair was blonde beneath it. Her coat, of a darker green, was somewhat tight on her and hinted at a full but youthful figure. Her stockings were black and her shoes low-heeled; but the girls here were not smartly dressed. Her pace was vigorous, with very little suggestion of feminine undulation. She wore blackknitted gloves and carried a large shopping-bag.

Once they reached the *Platz*, he walked ahead of her and looked back casually, as though something in a shop window had caught his eye. In the glass, and superimposed on sober-hued woolen gowns and sweaters, her face was reflected: she was rather pretty, with a straight nose, active grey-green eyes—somewhat unusual coloring for a girl so blonde; and a thin but shapely mouth and fragilely pointed chin. Her austere mouth was a slight disfigurement; but her complexion was natural and superb, her forehead exceedingly white and her cheeks, by delicate contrast, ruddy. Her expression was lively, yet this came mostly from the alertness of her eyes; her features, generally, were gravely composed. She was certainly not flirtatious. She had a passionless fixity of feature that was characteristic of her race, the Aryan—he had often seen it in German faces in Dürer's etchings; she had none of the Slavic intensity or Latin mobility that particularly appealed to Pardus.

He stopped at another window to gaze at a meagre display of men's wear; she passed him and went into a shop two doors beyond. He lingered outside it. It was an *HO-Laden,* as the nationalized groceries were called, and a coarse scent of potatoes and onions drifted

from it and spiced the clean wintry air. When she came out, she resumed her errands; her shopping bag was heavier; if she noticed him, she gave no sign of it. He made no effort to conceal that he was rather brazenly following her.

He was taking the chance that in East Germany, in a quiet place like Potsdam, no woman resented a man's interest. Men here were in strikingly short supply; too many had been killed off in the war. Hordes of still younger men, the able-bodied of the new generation, had joined the secret but steady exodus across the border to the more prosperous West. The young women left behind, deprived of the normal society of young men, had become unnaturally bold and aggressive. On the bulletin-board near the kiosk were those half-dozen hand-printed offers from girls to accompany men on "vacations". On his walks about Potsdam, Pardus had stopped to stare at other bulletin-boards—there was at least one in each *Bezirk* or neighborhood—and had seen like offers. He had also observed the frank regard of young women who he passed on the street. The Communist regime was Puritan, even ascetic, but East Germany had suffered an economic and social collapse; and with that had also come a collapse of morality. One section of Potsdam, over which hung a smell of bad petrol, swarmed with Russian soldiers, but they were still the enemy and lived in a kind of ghetto, seldom fraternizing with the disdainful middle-class residents of the town. The better young women drew the line at them.

The girl went into a tobacconist's shop, and this time Pardus also went in. He could see her more clearly now: very Aryan, indeed; light in complexion, a most excellent skin, as he had already remarked to himself. Her smile was good, and her teeth very even and white, as though brushed with pumice. Her voice was low; he had difficulty overhearing what she said to the solicitous clerk.

She was buying tobacco. For Felix Bauer? When she took off her gloves to pay with small change, he noticed her hand: she was not wearing a wedding-ring. Then he ventured to speak.

"I wonder if—"

"Yes—?"

She looked up at him sharply, but in a manner by no means unfriendly. Presumably she had been aware of him, too, and was conscious of his steady interest in her.

"Could you help me, Fraulein?"

"With what?"

She was already taking note of his accent—he could see that.

"Frau Wohlman asked me to bring her a newspaper, but she forgot to tell me which one. Perhaps you know Frau Wohlman, she is almost a neighbor of yours—?"

"Yes, I know her very well." Her voice was suddenly stronger, con-

fident.

"Then would you be able to tell me which I should buy for her, which one she reads?"

"But it really makes no difference," the girl said, with a sly smile, also very German. "All the papers print the same news and say the same things about it these days—"

"Ah, yes. Perhaps you're right." Was not this exchange politically indiscreet, in a public shop?

He threw down fifteen pfennigs and picked up a copy of the *Neues Deutschland* from the newspaper rack. As the girl turned to leave the shop, he quickly took his place alongside and opened the door for her. "Since you live on the same street, might I accompany you—and carry your shopping bags?"

She was still trying to identify his accent, and her glance showed that she was much more curious about him than Frau Wohlman was. But then, he was being personally attentive to her, and so her curiosity was acutely motivated. The sweep of her grey-green eyes took him in and tried to interpret his conduct: why was he being so polite, so friendly?

"A little ways," she said. But she did not yield the heavy bag to him. She carried it with an ease that testified to her youth and strength.

She was scarcely bent by the weight of her purchases in the huge, netted bag. She walked erect and rather gracefully. She had no more marketing to do, and they crossed the rough-paved *Platz* toward the start of Geismarstrasse. The sun broke through the haze, and soon the grey dissolved to permit glimpses of blue November sky. At the corner of the *Platz* stood a yellow-bricked post-office, of very Prussian architecture belonging to Bismarck's epoch: a sun-splashed hideous conglommerate of green pointed roofs and weather-vanes called *Jugendstil.* Affixed to its walls were posters with the symbols of the ruling Party, dark hammer and upended sickle, and pictures of its elected Leaders. On one set of benignantly smiling faces, a child had drawn derisive cartoons and scrawled a phrase which Pardus, for all his knowledge of idiomatic German, could not translate. The unknown child's defiance belied, however, the official myth promulgated everywhere of the happy solidarity of the regime. That many East Germans hated their Russian masters was hardly a secret.

He began to tell her about himself. "I'm new to Potsdam, and Germany, as you can guess. I'm from Prague, but my father was partly German—Sudeten."

"Oh, I see." She did not ask him why he had come to Potsdam; in this "New Era", people had learned *not* to ask questions.

He found her eager, talkative, really not shy. She had already discovered his obvious virtues: he was educated, intelligent, courteous. She

was plainly delighted to have met him: he was a "catch". He had never made such a quick conquest; in fact, "conquests" were not usual for him. He had been quiet and withdrawn, as a youth; and he had since been a completely faithful husband. But Pardus had been bored and lonely throughout the past days, and anxious about his mission and frustrated by his lack of progress; to talk to her now was an unfeigned pleasure. It was so good to talk to anyone! He knew that he was showing it by the tone of his voice and the probable light on his face. She seemed to interpret this as a tribute to her own personality, a true and involuntary compliment. Her color rose; she grew animated, and finally her spirit betrayed itself as no little exhilarated. The girl with the shopping bag could be quite charming when she talked.

Paula Semmels was her name. She was about twenty-four. Walking back with her, at an ever slower pace, as though reluctant to part, he learned much. Her mother was a widow, like Frau Wohlman—Potsdam was veritably a manless world. Paula's father had perished during a furious air raid on Berlin, where he had once been an insurance broker. Herr Semmels had apparently belonged to the same mahogany and plush and lace-antimacassar bourgeois world of pensioners as the late Herr Wohlman. Klaus, her brother, had fallen on the Second Front in France; the young man had been an Infantry lieutenant. She was an only daughter and lived alone with her mother. They rented rooms.

"Do you chance to have one vacant?" Pardus asked at once, holding his breath.

"No," she smiled. "We have only two roomers—a lady school-teacher, and a gentleman, and that's really all we can accommodate now."

"I envy the gentleman. He's lucky! Who is he?"

"Someone who's connected with the government. He hasn't been with us long. In fact, he's just arrived. He's very pleasant and rather goodlooking."

"And young?"

"Not exactly young, but not old, either."

"And not married?"

"I think he *is* married; he wears a wedding-ring. But I've not asked him about it."

"Well, I'm glad to hear he's married!" Pardus himself did not wear a wedding-ring.

"He might be a widower," Paula conjectured. "Or separated from his wife. She might be in the West. I don't know. Such things often happen nowadays."

They had nearly reached 26, the villa that was Bauer's hiding-place. Paula suddenly halted, as if she

did not want him to accompany her further or even to be seen with him.

Pardus asked: "Could I meet you again?"

"I don't know when."

"Tonight."

"I'm afraid not. I'm going to a Singers' Guild Meeting, at our Youth Club."

"What time is that?"

"About eight o'clock."

"I might be there, too."

"You'd look strange," she smiled. "The Guild is only for ladies."

"Where is the Youth Club?"

"I don't think you should come there." But the way she spoke implied that perhaps he might, and if so she would not be angry.

Pardus walked on alone to 37A. He was still not sure that he would try to see her that night. Much depended on what happened during the afternoon: he might catch sight of Felix Bauer; he was far more concerned to observe Bauer directly than to attempt an oblique approach to him through the daughter of the house.

Once in his room again, he spent some time thinking hard about the girl. Was she telling what she knew about the new "lodger" in her house, or was she flirtatiously playing with the man who had picked her up? Was it possible that she did not know Bauer's identity? Was the fugitive living in Potsdam under an assumed name? Would there be any point to it? For several nights, Bauer's face had appeared on every television screen. Pardus recalled that on his walks past the villa, he had never taken note of a television aerial. But the villa was partly secluded in shrubbery, and besides he had not been looking for an aerial. Even so, Bauer's picture had been printed on the front page of every newspaper. Still the girl and her mother might not always read the daily papers. In the tobacconist's shop she had complained gently of the sameness of the East German newspapers, with their official "line" and slanted news accounts. He had heard that these people had grown very weary of propaganda, from having been exposed to so much of it during the Nazis' reign, followed by a decade of Communist press control. Germans were sophisticated about such matters, and cynical and apathetic. But though it was barely possible that the girl did not know who Bauer was, the chances certainly were that she did.

The room was suddenly shadowed, the pale sun had gone under a cloud.

Perhaps Paula Semmels herself was a trusted Communist, or else her mother was. Frau Semmels might know things that Paula did not know. Would Bauer have been lodged at 26, otherwise? Pardus had not dared ask the girl too many questions. He had not wished to arouse her suspicion. He wanted to learn where, in her

house, Bauer's room was. But in what plausible way could he put that query?

He gazed steadfastly at the feather bolster.

In the shop, the girl had been buying tobacco. Pardus had assumed then that it might be for Bauer. She had not mentioned that any other man lived at 26. How well did she actually know Felix Bauer? Orellis had described Bauer as a notorious "woman-chaser." Was Paula one of his girls? She was not beautiful, yet attractive enough to stir any man's interest.

Pardus still gazed at the fancifully embroidered coverlet folded back from the bolster on the bed.

Suppose he did meet Paula again, to what would it lead? What could he hope from it? But he might have no other avenue to the man he sought.

During these past three days, though his vigil had been increasingly tense, the hours had actually passed very slowly. His task of spying on the house was cruelly tiresome, and his opportunities for it limited. He had to be alert and yet had practically nothing to do. He had taken walks to explore the town, even to the gates of Sans Souci. He had visited the Garnisonkirche and the Stadtschloss. He felt that he should know more about Potsdam's wooded environs; at some future moment, he might want to hide in them. As time moved even more slowly, his suspense deepened. And there was, unremittingly, his inner self-appraisal, which he was constantly revising. Coupled with uncertainty about himself—his courage, his moral attitude, his resourcefulness—was a pervasive sense of frustration. He was ineffectual. Every minute he failed to carry out his assignment might cost lives. Whatever might happen, he would gladly add to the risk to have it happen soon.

With Paula's unwitting help, he might be able to reach a quick showdown with the elusive Bauer. What was the girl really like? It did not fit in with the bourgeois background Paula had given for herself and her mother, that she would now be a fanatical Communist and eagerly offering refuge to the West German traitor. She might be paying lip-service to Communism, though. A good many people in East Germany had joined the Party out of expediency; their loyalty was not deep. Paula might even be ready to betray the Party to serve the cause of "liberation"; many young East Germans were said to be secretly rebellious.

But what reason did he have to think that she, too, was ready to risk her young life? No better proof of his ineffectuality as an "agent" was needed than that he indulged in this day-dreaming.

He finally flung himself onto the bed and lay gazing intently at the ceiling. The room was very still, and the ceiling slowly darkened. It

began to vanish, and with thoughts subsiding he seemed to float in an airless silence.

Pardus had posted himself outside the *Verein,* the Club headquarters. By now it was nine-thirty o'clock. The night was hazy and damp, with a feeling of snow despite the moon's brightness. The light of the sky restored a soft but clear outline to the lampless, cobblestoned street. The moon's glow slanted on the gables and chipped coping of the ugly dark brick building by which he waited. He could hear the voices of the women at their rehearsal within: sopranos, altos, contraltos. So far, they were singing Bach. He had wondered the very name "Singers' Guild" might be a disguise for another sort of group, possibly a political one; but obviously it was not. What he was overhearing, through the partly opened windows, was two dozen women whose only concern was harmonious choral music.

Many things might intervene to prevent his meeting Paula Semmels tonight: she might not be alone when leaving the hall, but accompanied by others and hence too embarrassed to join him again.

His cold vigil here might be in vain. At last, the music ceased and clusters of women and girls, talking animatedly, began to appear through the door of the building. Paula came with two other young women, but once they reached the street they paused to exchange farewells and separated. Paula was left by herself. She turned and started to walk toward Geismarstrasse, and he followed. She was not surprised when he spoke to her; obviously she had sighted him the moment she had left the hall. Most likely she had half expected to find him there outside, after his hint that afternoon.

She replied now somewhat primly to his first words, yet her smile belied her tone. "Is it an accident that we meet again?"

"No, not by chance. I wanted to see you!"

"For what reason?"

"I think you're very attractive."

"You're very bold and impulsive."

"Not usually," he said, truthfully.

"So? What is it about me that makes you change your character?"

"The circumstances are very special," he avowed, truthfully again.

They began to stroll ever more slowly, oblivious of the cold. When they reached Geismarstrasse he led her past it, simply by walking on and choosing to turn instead into a less familiar street, that was deserted and dark except for the mercurial glow of he sky.

"You must realize," she said, "that I know nothing about you."

"Unfortunately, that's how it is."

"I've never seen you before today."

"And, perhaps, after a few days you will not see me again. I must go back to Prague."

"Ach so?" she said, almost in a whisper.

This was his best tactic. That he was a stranger in Potsdam, where she had always lived and was well known, favored him. She felt almost anonymous with him, and might be less cautious, less fearful of scandal. If he was to leave soon, there was less need for her to be prudent, and she could hope to gain nothing by delaying.

But again, if she was a dedicated Communist, his was a needlessly circuitous approach. She would not be bound by bourgeois conventions; her moral attitude toward "love" might be quite emancipated. But he lacked the effrontery to question her about this.

The short street ended, and a wide path led on into the fringes of the pine woods that stretched toward Wannsee. She did not seem frightened at walking into them with him. Doubtless she had known these woods and threaded her way through them since her childhood: she was far more at ease in their quiet and aromatic shadows than he was. He was somewhat fearful of being lost, especially since it was night, and marvelled at her courage in wandering here with him: he did not turn back; her trust in him could only be interpreted as a prelude to the intimacy he sought—on her part, an acceptance of it. They moved on for some time without speaking, in the filtered moonlight and piney air; he held her hand, light and smooth in his clasp. At last the path brought them to a secluded spot, where they were sheltered from the wind. He faced her. Her eyes were alert and lively, but her taut mouth did not seem to invite kisses; yet her encouragement of his first venture was strong and immediate. He felt the moistness of her lips against his, and in himself both a responsive sensual interest and pity.

Like so many other German girls, she was starved for sexual experience. He embraced her and kissed her several times and felt her ardent breath upon his mouth, and at other moments the warm satin of her delicately formed cheek resting against his face.

The shape of the trees against the vaporous, moonlight sky was eerily beautiful, and the feel of the pine needles underfoot was soft and springy. But the night was too cold and damp for lovemaking outdoors. Even their embraces were awkward, their coats were so heavy.

"The night after next, Friday, my mother's going to Dresden to visit her sister, who's ill. I'll be alone in our house; you could come then," she said, softly but eagerly.

On the wet ground, from which the cold air was beginning to rise

visibly in mist, the moonlight was reflected by myriad pine needles and the brown wooden scaly cups of acorns; overhead the drooping tiers of evergreen boughs soughed in the suddenly icy wind, and a few thickets swayed.

Her words came rapidly, showing how stirred were her thoughts: "You must be very careful—there's a side door, which's supposed to be locked. You must come exactly at ten o'clock. It'll be dark, and by then the man who lives with us will have come back from East Berlin—he goes there every night."

He stood silent, afraid to interrupt, waiting for her to continue.

"He has two friends with him, two men, who sometimes wait downstairs in the front parlor at the bottom of the stairs. But you can use the back hall and the back stairs, if I leave the side door open for you. My room's on the second floor, and you must pass two doors: one belongs to the man, Herr Dietrich—his is the first, at the head of the stairs—and the other to the school teacher, Fraulein Talman. Go past them; my door is at the right, and it'll be open, too, if you just turn the knob."

He put up the imitation fur collar of his coat, to protect his face and ears, by now almost frostbitten. But his blood was racing at her bid. It was an incredible turn of fortune, her proposal.

She asked: "You'll be in Potsdam until Friday night, won't you?"

"Yes, most surely," he replied.

Pardus had almost two full days to consider what he must do. The weather worsened. Snow fell, lightly at first, in flurries; next more heavily, in gusts and swirling winds that hid the bare garden and tree-lined street. He kept indoors mostly: the street had become slippery. Geismarstrasse was very changed by the long snowfall: it was silent, to him ominously so.

At night, as though sleeplessly keeping a fever-chart of his emotions, he lay abed haunted by thoughts of the act he must commit—the perils and horror of a killing.

Was the girl a decoy? She had whispered her sexual bid softly but eagerly. Was it only a trap? He had lied to her about himself. Why, then, should he believe that *she* was telling him the bruth?

Behind her grey-green eyes—not warm eyes, though lively ones—lay a faith at which he could not guess. If she was a Communist, her belief in the Party might be religious. Many young Reds had a zealousness which was ascetic and selfless. She might deliberately enlist herself to destroy him, if he was thought to be an enemy.

But if Paula was sincere, he was playing cruelly with her feelings. It could not be helped. So much, the lives of men, was at stake. Still, little was as sharply bitter and humiliating as a sexual disappoint-

ment. She would wait in her room, full of tremulous anticipation after having been long denied, awaiting a lover who never arrived.

He knew hardly anything about Paula. Perhaps she had not been long denied at all; perhaps she was promiscuous and having an affair with Felix Bauer. What was her actual relationship with the famous fugitive in hiding at 26?

Pardus asked himself: what if he went to the house at ten o'clock, the appointed time, but Bauer was not there? In that event, would he keep the assignation with Paula? That might be the only way to stay in the house until Bauer's return. Pardus had been faithful to his wife, but chiefly perhaps because he was a bit "cold"; besides, his daily habit—work, home, pleasant social routine—had left no time for sexual adventures. But now he admitted that his fidelity was not due to any emotional compulsion; he did not love Julie so exclusively, nor was he wedded to her so firmly in a spiritual sense. And Paula *was* attractive: her face was delicate and her skin silken. He allowed himself pictures of physical play with her.

It was a grotesque conjunction, his thoughts of sensual pleasure and cold-blooded murder. He could not believe that he was going to kill Felix Bauer. He was acting the role of an avenger but really did not intend to shoot anyone. He was not a killer, an assassin. And yet, why was he here, in Frau Wohlman's villa, if he was not in deadly earnest? Why was he in Potsdam? This business was *urgent*. Men's lives and fortunes depended on him and were endangered by every moment of delay.

Murder was an act at which the "Other Side" did not hesitate, but "Our Side" was supposedly too civilized and Christian for it. Orellis had never actually used the ugly word: his instructions were to "silence" the renegade. But killing Bauer was obviously the only way to do that. Captain Torrens had given Pardus a Luger and instructed him how to employ it. This was the "Cold War"; profound ideologies were in conflict, and sometimes there were killings in cold blood—not in the heat of battle, between nameless antagonists, but in personal encounters by lone assassins like himself. Something very perverted was at the heart of this, but at the moment Pardus did not feel himself competent to think it through.

If he succeeded in this assignment, he would get no credit for it. He could never confess his deed publicly. Orellis could not even report it to his government. What Pardus did must go forever unacknowledged. Even his own family, his wife and children, would never know of it. It would be a hidden episode. If he was caught, his government would immediately disown him. Orellis had made that very clear.

In truth, no one would ever learn

of Pardus's part in a "patriotic murder" unless he failed at it and was apprehended . . . then he might become a hero and martyr throughout the Western world, though officially disclaimed. But he hardly sought that honor. He had been drafted for this job by moral and psychological pressure, against his will and the promptings of his common sense. Actually, Bauer's "silencing" should have been a responsibility assumed by the West Germans, but Orellis had explained how difficult it would be for any German agent to reach the man. And in this "Cold War," the true struggle was between East and West, with the future of the world in balance. Pardus had as much at stake in that as anyone.

He lay sleepless in the cold dark. If he failed in his attempt—or even if he succeeded and got triumphantly away—Frau Wohlman, his landlady, might be implicated for having harbored him. And Paula might be involved and blamed, too. And even her unsuspecting mother, Frau Semmels. If they were wholly innocent, as frail little Frau Wohlman assuredly was, Pardus would have played a dreadful trick on them.

He must weigh the fate of the three women against that of the patriot spying for the West behind the Iron Curtain. In any such assessment, the odds were very much against Frau Wohlman and Paula and Frau Semmels. Their lives and happiness were unimportant by comparison, just as Felix Bauer's life was relatively of little value. What, in fact, had been Bauer's true motive for his act? Was he a mere opportunist? A tormented neurotic? Irresponsible? An idealist, sincere but misguided, confusedly seeking to do what he believed was best? A prisoner? Pardus wondered again if he had the right to condemn this man to death without fuller knowledge of him? Had not Orellis's decision been too sweeping and harsh?

Yet even while Pardus was rejecting the role of assassin and any thought of violence, another part of his mind was ceaselessly planning how he could carry it out.

During this stormy day, Bauer had stayed invisible to him, except for once on the television screen. The blond, good-looking spymaster had gradually gained poise as a speaker. He was, if anything, a little too glib by now in his "exposé".

Pardus had watched the broadcast in a tavern where he had gone for dinner; while he ate, he kept his eye on the brightly delineated interview. He observed that others in the noisy restaurant paid little attention to Bauer. A week had passed, and the public excitement caused by his flight was already fading. It was at this stage, however, that Bauer would become more dangerous; he would soon have to sell his secrets to keep himself valuable.

The morning light, bluish, crystalline, began to creep over the windowsill's ridge of snow; and Pardus, naggingly sleepless, gazed at the dawn-mottled ceiling. He now knew the approximate time, a bit before ten o'clock, of Bauer's nightly return from East Berlin. But at that hour it would be too dark for a marksman to see his quarry clearly; besides, Bauer would be guarded by the two men whom Paula had mentioned. Pardus could not count on "silencing" Bauer by shooting from a distance in the snowy night. He was not a good enough shot for that, nor would he have much chance of escape, and his mood was definitely not suicidal.

He must attempt a face-to-face meeting in the fugitive's own room at 26. His man was obviously too well protected other moments. The only likely way to Bauer was through Paula, and her invitation might be superb luck.

But to go into that house, while two armed men kept their vigil in the parlor? To steal upstairs and "meet" Bauer, and then to get away again? Could he possibly do it? He would need strong nerves and a clear head. He ought to rest now.

He closed his eyes and futilely tried to sleep.

The snow fell more heavily throughout the day. He could barely see through the frosted glass of his casement. Trying to nap to recover lost sleep, he was disturbed by the frequent but erratic rattle of the window.

By nightfall, the gale had ended. When he left the house, shortly before ten o'clock, the sky was dark and the air crisp, nearly icy. He trudged gingerly through the drifts that had already accumulated on Geismarstrasse. He had not far to go before he reached 26. He could count lights burning in four rooms; one on the first floor—the parlor that was an improvised sentry-post—and three on the second storey: Bauer's room, the teacher's, and Paula's. He assumed, anyhow, that Bauer was back from East Berlin he could see the marks of an automobile before the villa; the tracks were very fresh, the crushed snow still glistening white in the glow of lights from 26.

He glanced around for only a second—the street was completely dark and empty—then turned into the walk that led him to the villa's side door. A very dangerous moment for him: he might be seen approaching the house through the snow-covered shrubbery; that would be enough to alert the occupants. And he would have no way of knowing whether or not he had been observed—until much later, when he was already inside the villa; inside, that is, if Paula had kept her promise. Was the door unlocked? He reached it and hesi-

tated. He tried the cold knob very cautiously; it turned; he put his weight against the door slowly.

He slipped into a small dark vestibule. He closed the door behind him softly.

A faint light was burning at the top of the back stairs. The beckoning light? Again, was it a trap? Had he been seen? The passageway was steep, narrow, but carpeted. He tiptoed up the first few steps, gained courage, and began to mount more quickly. The steps squeaked, and he held his breath.

He was on the second floor. Ahead of him, in a wider hallway papered with a floral pattern of blue-and-white, he was confronted by a staggered row of four doors of golden oak, leading to Paula's room and her absent mother's, and nearer the teacher's room and Bauer's. In the third room, Paula was waiting, keyed up for his arrival and perhaps on edge with a promise of sexual pleasure.

Pardus had eaten nothing, to be more alert. He felt "heady" and a bit weak, yet his wits were working quickly. He stood outside Bauer's heavy oaken door—he assumed it *was* his door. If he was in error and Fraulein Talman or Paula herself responded to the tap, what would he say or do?

Should he knock, or merely try to enter? The door might be locked, and the slightest attempt to force it could be a warning to the man inside. Or, if the door did give, his abrupt invasion might be met by an outcry.

He tapped as lightly as possible against the door panel. A muffled voice, a man's voice, from within bade: *"Bitte kommen Sie herein!"* Pardus swung open the door, stepped in swiftly, and shut it behind him. At the same instant he took out the Luger and aimed it at the blond man seated in a large easy chair.

"Herr Bauer?"

"Yes, I'm Felix Bauer." He gazed at Pardus with only a slight vestige of surprise. Bauer was a well-lit target. An Oriental lamp with a fringed yellow silk shade was burning just behind him—his blond hair glistened—and he had been reading and had a book on his knees. He wore a dark sweater; black, buttoned down the front. He looked at Pardus as though there was nothing unusual in his having suddenly entered the room with a weapon in his hand; as though, indeed, this incident might have been expected at any time.

A long silence followed—at least, to Pardus it seemed long.

"Ah, my friend, you're here to kill me?"

Sucking in his breath, Pardus said: "That's right. . . ."

"Naturally! I knew someone would try it." He swerved a very little to put the book aside, almost with a sigh, as though regretting an interruption.

Pardus had definitely identified

the long-sought spymaster. Here was Felix Bauer: he very much resembled his familiar image on television but was handsomer and younger looking; his eyes were the clearest hazel and his gaze very steady. He had forced a slight smile. Bauer had outstared mortal danger many times. He had the instinctive poise a professional espionage agent ought to have: a presence of mind and self-control that belied the tortured neuroticism recently attributed to him by Colonel Orellis. Except for disposing of the book, he had not stirred in his chair; not a gesture hinted at his astonishment or concern.

Perhaps he realized that any untoward movement might prompt this intruder to fire at him.

Pardus's attention was too fixed on Bauer to take in any other details: he could not for a single moment look away from his brightly lit victim.

He himself was as if paralyzed by Bauer's immobility and strange calm. Yet Pardus saw something else in the man's face, revealed by the lamp that, lucklessly, was shining on him. Behind his bland expression *was* fear. His features, though under control, had changed their color; they had blanched a little, and his smile, having been forced, was somewhat rigid. He was not truly immune to being startled and even terrified.

"Who're you? I don't recognize you." By now Bauer was talking enough for both of them. It was obviously a trick, to disarm the invader by words. At very least, to buy a few moments. Within sound of his voice, if he dared to raise it, were his two bodyguards. "I thought I knew everyone, but you're a complete stranger. You're not a German."

"No, I'm not," Pardus granted involuntarily.

Why did he not pull the trigger and "silence" the man, as he had planned? This near, he could not possibly fail; he could fire two or three times at the heart in the black sweater and could not miss: the Luger's fatal click would not be heard beyond this room, and in another instant he might be out of here, on his way down the backstairs, to a safe outcome of this horrible adventure. But he could *not* do it. His finger on the trigger was numb; it simply could not be flexed. Inwardly, he was quite as frightened as his assigned victim and desperately hoped not to show it—it was humiliating.

"The next question is, which side are you on? East or West?" asked Bauer, his hazel eyes still fixed on Pardus. "Have the Communists already decided to get rid of me? Will they dispose of me and blame it on the West? Is that why you're sent here?"

"No."

"Are you from the West, actually?" demanded the man in the black sweater.

Pardus still avoided a direct reply to this. Instead, he offered a partial explanation of why he held a Luger in his hand, pointed at Bauer.

"I've no alternative. You know that. You're a threat to the lives of too many men."

"I am. That's very true. Who knows it better than I?" He finally swayed forward in his chair. "But I've not talked, *not* a word. *And I never will.*"

"I'm here to make sure that you don't."

"Do you think I'm really a traitor?" His stare, in its fixity, was like that of a hypnotist.

"It doesn't matter whether you are or not. While you live, everyone who's ever worked for the West is in danger."

The motionless man in the chair had made up his mind. "You're from the West? Good! But how did you ever get in here?"

"Never mind about that."

Bauer spoke with deep earnestness, and convincingly. "I was brought here against my will. You must believe that. I was drugged by Fruhling and kidnapped. I've been kept here as a prisoner—there're two men with me always—and I've been forced to appear on the broadcasts. But I've not betrayed any confidence. I've told them nothing of importance."

Orellis had warned Pardus not to listen to this spymaster. *"He's very cunning and quick-thinking."*

What paralyzed Pardus's will? He lacked the moral courage to kill Bauer. . . . To do that would be an act of true heroism, but he was not up to it. He could not kill anyone. He could only see the living man, under the warm light of the lamp: Felix Bauer, forty-four, his bated breathing perceptible; his stocky body vulnerable in his black sweater; the color of life in his face, the gift of luminous sight in his clear eyes. Pardus knew himself incapable of wantonly destroying that.

What was more, he had to listen to Bauer. He *had* to give him a hearing. He could not harm an innocent man, if Bauer was innocent. The Machiavellian ruthlessness of Orellis was needed now, and Pardus did not have it.

For, if he spared Bauer, he would be responsible for the murder of the others Bauer might soon betray. He himself was in jeopardy. Bauer was intellectually slippery and had a good chance of outwitting him. But even to save himself at once, Pardus could not bring himself to fire at this overly clever talker.

"Fruhling asked me to come to his place. It was a trick," recounted the man in the black sweater, eagerly. He seemed to have discerned Pardus's hesitance and was taking advantage of it. "I knew Fruhling was a Communist, but I also thought him sincere and decent. Many Communists are; they're merely misguided. His message

said he wanted to talk about my helping him get a pension for Mathilde Lessing, whose husband had served with me in the Abwehr. I was anxious to do it; I had respected Gunter Lessing very much. Sometime near midnight, we drank coffee. I was completely off-guard—it never occurred to me, until too late, that the coffee was drugged. After that, I was aware of what I was doing, but I had no willpower over my actions. I simply had to do what I was told."

"I've heard you on television, spewing forth propaganda."

"What else can I do? I'm a prisoner. And they'll torture me if I don't oblige them. The propaganda I spread for them means very little; Bonn knows how to counteract it, by a claim that I'm talking under duress. The East Germans believe nothing that's broadcast, anyhow—and all I've told about my background discredits much of what I say. I've deliberately revealed that I spied for both sides during the War, so that I don't seem trustworthy. If you've heard me, you know I've done that."

"Yes, you did," Pardus acknowledged. "But if you're afraid of torture, you'll eventually give them the names of everyone who ever worked with you. That's why I'm here, and must kill you."

"I'll *never* tell them. Believe me, I won't. I'll let them kill me first."

"How can you expect me or anyone else to depend on that?"

"You're right," Bauer said, suddenly. "I might be tortured into telling them everything. Take me back with you. I don't know your means of access, but take me back with you to West Berlin."

"If I do that, what makes you think they'll accept your story over there?"

"I'll have a hard time proving what I say, without Fruhling's testimony to bear me out. And Fruhling has vanished. But it's the only thing for me to do, go back. I don't know how you got here, into the house, but you must have some plan, some way of escape—let me go with you!"

His plea echoed in the hushed room, in which there had been only the sound of their two voices: Bauer's nervously high-pitched and dramatic, yet an intellectual voice, too, cultivated and even pleasant; and Pardus's, doubly strange to his own ears because he was still speaking in his inflected German, by now habitual, and because all that he had to say was so alien to his true character.

The room was very cold, like his own at 37A; but Pardus suddenly became aware that his brow was clammy and his body slightly wet with sweat, from his intense excitement; again, like a man in a fever.

"Take me back with you!"

The idea had never occurred to Pardus: to "kidnap" Bauer. He would really "silence" Bauer with-

out having to fire. Once delivered to Bonn, the spymaster might be charged with treason. But that would mean a public trial, fully legal, not a private assassination; and the moral responsibility for it would not be Pardus's.

"I'll return with you and give myself up, if you'll let me."

Was Bauer trying to trick him? A bid for time? Anything to delay his execution? Most likely! Bauer was clever and desperately afraid.

But to return to West Berlin with the fugitive Bauer would be a brilliant feat! His captor would prove himself even more resourceful than Orellis or Torrens. Could it possibly be done? To attempt that flight with this "prisoner" would be even more dangerous than killing him. To get out of the house, away from Potsdam, and across the snowy border? He and Bauer would be in the utmost peril every instant. And the peril would be doubled, since Bauer could never be trusted. To betray them at any moment Bauer need only raise his voice.

"I can't take you with me. I can't think how to do it."

"It's not too far from here to Wannsee, through the woods—or across the lake."

"I couldn't find my way, especially at night."

"I can. I know all the routes to West Berlin."

That was logical. As a spymaster, Bauer would have to be well acquainted with Potsdam and its environs, and all the paths across the border. With Bauer's help, they *might* accomplish it.

The room felt even colder to Pardus, and his brow even more clammy. He hardly seemed able to think, the room was so chilled and his decision so agonizing.

Was it a crazy idea? Could he put the slightest faith in Bauer? Unstable, neurotic, Bauer might change his mind at any moment, even if he was sincere to start with. Anyhow, might this not be a trap? What it amounted to was that he must risk his life over gain not to be responsible for Bauer's death. And that, Pardus knew at once, he was willing to do. Yes, to rid himself of the onus of being either a murderer or a failure, Pardus was ready to take on the burden of escaping not alone but with the spymaster in custody. He had not, as yet the faintest notion of how it could be carried out.

"All right. Put on your coat" Pardus said, in a low voice. "It's very cold outside, and you'll need it."

Bauer was silent until they had passed the last dark house on Geismarstrasse and had penetrated the first line of trees in the snowy pine forest that began there. Every bush was iced, and the branches cracked like a fusilade at the least touch. Where was Bauer leading him?

In the room at 26 Bauer had obeyed as wordlessly. He had risen from his lamplit chair with a look of relief on his face but perhaps a hint of triumph in his clear hazel eyes. He watched, almost expressionless again, while his overcoat was examined. Pardus had to make sure that his captive was not armed. The pockets were empty except for heavy leather gloves; most probably the Communists had not taken any chance with their prize "convert."

"Put on your gloves."

Bauer did so. They were thick gloves, black leather and fleece-lined; it would be difficult for Bauer to use his hands effectively when he wore them.

"And now let's go. Leave your lamp burning. Open the door. See if the hall's clear. Go ahead of me down the back stairs and out the side door. I'll be right behind you, only two feet away. If you make a sound, I may be caught, but you'll already be dead. We'll die together."

Felix Bauer forced another smile. A weak one. He was quite pale now; no past experience had fully fortified him against this moment.

Their progress from the second-floor hall was easy; they moved quietly down the stairs in catlike unison. Once again there were faint squeaks from the old wood under the carpeted treads, but the pips of sound were not likely to be overheard. At the bottom of the dim passage, in the unlit vestibule, Bauer turned the knob of the door, and both men slipped out of the house.

They waited in the dark, as though halted by the stinging cold air. This was the most decisive moment. Could they circle through the narrow grounds without being seen? Lights still shown from the second storey and the parlor, with its half-drawn blinds, where Bauer's two guards were on duty. If the spymaster had any intention of summoning help, he must do so now. Pardus leaned forward, pressing the muzzle of the Luger against the back of his captive's overcoat. "Just walk ahead, and don't even breathe loudly. I've a 'silencer' on this gun; I can send a bullet through you and escape, if you attempt to break away or make any noise."

Bauer offered no reply. He did not even falter as they went forward; unavoidably they came for a moment into the rays of the interior lights, cast on the shrubbery and snow; but apparently the two men, advancing so grotesquely close together, passed unobserved. A few seconds later, they were free of the little garden and onto the frozen sidewalk of Geismarstrasse; and Bauer led again, Pardus following at a short distance, the Luger hidden in his pocket, his stiffened finger still crooked to fire if it need be.

The snow-covered street was deserted as before, and they encoun-

tered no one in their solitary march along it, until they reached the forest's edge.

Once they were off the pavement, into the unbroken snow, a wave of wet cold enveloped them; it was arctic, chilling them to the bone. . . . The cold came not only from the ground but from the bushes through which they pushed, and the snow-laden boughs over them. It wet their feet; their shoes became sodden in a few minutes. Snow also shook down on them from the recoiling pine branches in a steady fall; their faces were softly pelted by it.

"We've about four miles to go," Bauer said at last.

"Through woods all the way?"

"Perhaps. It depends on whether we meet patrols. We might have to cut across the lake; that'd be the shortest route, and it's probably frozen."

"Can you find your way in this dark?"

"It'll be harder than I expected," Bauer confessed. "The snow has hidden the path, and the trees are set so regularly, it's difficult to make out where the paths run through them. . . ."

The thought of crossing the lake in the dark, on the uncertain ice, with the possibility of becoming a target for Communist searchlights, was scarcely cheering to Pardus. But he was not ready to admit any doubts or trepidation to his prisoner, who was also his guide.

Even this far within the snowy forest, and scarcely able to see ahead of them, they were not safe from discovery. Were they being followed, Pardus asked himself. Or had the border guards already been told to look for them? Although Pardus and his captive had slipped from the house almost soundlessly, the draft that swept up the back stairs from the briefly opened door might have betrayed their departure. It would take only a few minutes for someone to investigate it. Or Paula, particularly alert this night to all footsteps in the hall, might have caught some noise and gone to test the door. She would see Pardus's wet prints on the carpeted stairs and finally suspect what had happened and vengefully give warning to the pair below in the parlor. Who could blame the girl for doing that?

And now Pardus and Bauer were unavoidably leaving a trail of broken branches and tracks in the fresh snow; the tracks stretched all the way to the villa.

He and Bauer had a good lead, but local people with flashlights and lanterns, and more familiar with these terrifying woods, might overtake them; especially if Bauer guided him astray, pretending to be lost. Or Bauer might be unwillingly going in circles and not owning up to it. They floundered through the snow drifts and icy brush, that sometimes cut like knives.

Their shoes were heavier because wet; very soon walking became painful. Advancing through the snow was not silent but surprisingly noisy from the crunch of slippery shoes through the crust already formed and the snapping of branches. It was especially strange to be walking through the dark in a world that by day could be most dazzling. The cold penetrated more cruelly; the air was so icy, it was hard to breathe.

Pardus's feet were numbed yet needled by the cold; he began to falter. Like Bauer, he sometimes sank in the drifts to his knees. Both he and Bauer were likely to be frost-bitten or have pneumonia, even if they did survive this four-mile ordeal. That thought crossed Pardus's mind very often. He was already bitterly convinced that his impulse had been the extremest folly, to flee with Bauer, to let himself become dependent on him in a German forest. How did he know that Bauer would not merely wander in all directions in this snowy woods and encrusted undergrowth until dawn, counting on a pursuit party to rescue him, with Pardus himself, his face frozen, his hapless fingers stiffened, becoming the prisoner.

Ahead, in the dark, Bauer suddenly began to speak. "I was taken to East Berlin against my will, but at least the broadcasts gave me a chance to say *some* of the things on my mind." His voice, cracked by the cold, rose crazily. "I was right about Bonn and the Nazis; they're coming back! Bonn isn't stopping them. Adenauer is doing business with the fascist murderers, the Hitlerites. . . ."

To Pardus, the man who was guiding him through these woods was twice an enigma. Bauer's political complexion was baffling and very personal. They trudged on, and Pardus made no comment. He was not sufficiently informed about the German scene to evaluate any of this. Whatever might be Bauer's motivation, now and in the recent past, it was probably very complicated.

"I watched my brother die. Did you hear my first broadcast? We found the film of the execution, the one run off for Hitler," Bauer continued. "I'll most likely die the same way myself, after Bonn tries me and condemns me. But my death won't be for quite so worthy a cause as the one he perished for. . . . Frühling's deception put me in an impossible situation. How could I, the head of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, allow myself to be taken in by such a simple trick as drugged coffee? And by anyone like Frühling who was well-known to be a Communist? But I did trust him. He had always seemed to me honest. Whatever made him do it, whatever warped him so? Communism does that to a man! It makes high virtues of treason and deceit. . . . I

suppose I ought to kill myself, except that I've a good reason not to. Even if I'm sentenced to death by Bonn, I'll have a chance in court to tell my story, so that the whole world'll know how the Reds kidnapped me."

Pardus had scarcely stopped to think before the immense propaganda value to the West of Bauer's "voluntary" return from behind the Iron Curtain. If the renegade could be handed over to the jurisdiction of Bonn, it would really be a *coup!* But Bauer himself had already anticipated that.

"I might not have to stand trial." His words hardly reached Pardus over the noise of the snow's crust breaking underfoot, the soft thunder of trees and thickets, dropping their white loads, then scratching or whipping as they bounded back. "I know too much! Bonn may be afraid to put me on the stand, where everyone can hear. They might not find me guilty; they may believe my story, though it sounds incredible. I was forced to make those broadcasts, to escape torture. I was partly brainwashed. It's inevitable, in the circumstances. . . ." His voice, hoarsened by the cold, was becoming laryngitic. "Besides, I've made sacrifices in the past, and Bonn knows how much it owes me. I've friends, many of them very important officials who'll testify for me; I'll have superb character witnesses."

Very likely the trial would be a cause célèbre in Germany. But was there any hope for Bauer in that? Pardus knew he was probably marching the man back to his death. Could Bauer expect justice? His story that he had been abducted by the Reds might be true but it was too weakly documented, and the critical broadcasts had been heard by shocked millions in Europe. By returning Bauer to Bonn, Pardus was escaping the direct burden for a man's fate, but Bauer's death would still be his doing; it was a form of murder. His responsibility was merely at second remove.

Pardus told himself that if Bauer was innocent, this forced march would be the means of saving him. But the probability was that the spymaster was both innocent and guilty. Bauer was not a Communist but neither was he wholly faithful to the West. He was a victim of a time too troubled and confused for any good *modus vivendi* in it to be clearly understood and embraced. A man as serious and idealistic and opportunistic as Bauer could only feel mixed loyalties. Even his presumed opportunism was not necessarily discreditable to him. He had sought to do, at any given moment, whatever his circumstances allowed. While hating much of Communism, he had also welcomed the forum given him by the broadcasts to express his discontent with the Western world. And now, going back to Bonn, he

would use the witness-stand as a new pulpit to revile the East. In his own eyes, he would die a martyr.

Such a man was emotionally unbalanced, if not mentally so. Who could tell what changes his tormented soul might yet undergo? The appearance of an East German patrol might alter his political convictions in a twinkling. Pardus was silently asking what he would do, if Bauer sought to trick him at the last moment. Kill him? It was the only way to complete the mission —Bauer was not to be let to get away! If a patrol came near, would Bauer suddenly shout to attract attention? Nothing Pardus had heard him say in these woods had deepened his confidence in him. The chances were that Bauer would prove treacherous, although Pardus was risking his life to take the man back to get his rightful hearing. Pardus hardly thought he himself deserved any credit for it. Was what he was doing heroic, or suicidal cowardice? The question now was academic and unimportant.

Bauer had become silent once more, perhaps exhausted by the difficulties of their pushing onward. The cold grew steadily more intense. Pardus kept close behind. His eyes were tearing; he lurched on through the snow, both of them having to proceed slowly lest they stumble over roots or hidden boulders. If Pardus fell, his guide might easily elude him. Pardus, lost, might freeze to death, and if he shot Bauer, he faced the same fate.

They plodded amongst the whitened trees for hours, extricating themselves from deeper drifts and several unsuspected gullies; then abruptly the two men came out onto the lake's edge. The last fifteen or twenty minutes had been an excruciating hardship. Pardus's face was scratched by sharp thickets. He was smarting with the cold and lamed by exceeding weariness. He was weak and dizzy from hunger; he had not eaten since noon. All this seemed to overtake him at once. He stopped in the snow bank on the margin of the lake and bent over as though attacked by a cramp. His hands, though buried in his pockets, were palsied, and his teeth chattered. He tightened his muscles in an effort at self-control. In another moment he recovered from the chill and stood upright again. So far as Pardus knew, Bauer had not noticed the seizure.

"That's Wannsee, just over there," Bauer croaked, from his sore and hoarsened throat.

But now they must cross the ice, which ought to be solid but might not be so everywhere. This was not really a lake but a part of the River Havel, with running water which did not always freeze. On the further shore were no lights; the night was much too late for that. The point was to get across before the sky brightened.

Bauer had already ventured out

onto the ice. It had a coating of snow, and Pardus found that walking was suddenly much easier . . . no obstacles: no tangled bushes, fallen trees, rocks. The surface was slippery and demanded care as they picked their way; but the thick snow, though almost as hard as ice, broke just enough to give their feet a slight purchase.

In spite of his attention to his footing, a thought of Paula Semmels flashed through Pardus's mind. He had treated her badly tonight. He hoped that she would not be blamed for Bauer's disappearance—no one else knew of her tryst with the "Czech stranger" or that the side door had been left open purposefully. He was sure he would never see her again. To the extent, at least, that she had been interested in him, he had returned her interest, poor soul. The affair had been mutually flattering, as such quick romances very often were.

He might easily have been unfaithful to his wife, but actually he had not been. He was not passionately in love with Julie but was deeply fond of her, and he understood much more clearly what was his exact feeling about her.

In this open space, the two men had to fight the wind, which was sometimes unsteadying.

What if the ice broke under them? Bauer, who was ahead, had to test it. He might step on a thin spot where there was an air pocket and plunge through and drown. It would be almost impossible for anyone, especially the half-frozen and weakened Pardus, to rescue him. Later, when his body was found, it would seem to have been suicide. No guilt could be attached to anyone, and yet from the West's point-of-view it would be the perfect conclusion of Bauer's career.

Was it not a murderous wish once again, this fantasy that engaged Pardus? Besides, in any break of the surface, they might both perish; if Bauer went through, the probability was that the ice would give way under Pardus too.

Only when they had reached a mid-point did they finally see the searchlights of the East German border guards far down at the other end of the lake. Bauer glanced at them several times but said nothing. Pardus felt his breathing constrict and his heart quicken. But, strangely, the lights never swung in their direction. Perhaps the two men had passed over the Zonal line earlier, in the midst of the snowy woods, and both shores of this finger of the lake were within the West Berlin enclave.

They crossed in a surprisingly brief time; the "lake" was not really very wide. Bauer scrambled ahead of Pardus up an icy slope; it was overgrown with bushes and wooded. Now the pair rested, feeling safe—and an infusing sense of heat from their knowledge of that—but

the air was too sharp for them to stand still even for a few moments; they had to keep moving, away from the lake and the wind. Where were they? The shoreline was wild. Here were none of the docks and boathouses Pardus had seen from the train a few days before. It was too dark for Bauer to recognize any landmark. The two men stalked through more drifts between pines, broke through an icily barbed palisade of scrub, and came upon a deserted paved road. Bauer rasped his relief, his voice hardly a whisper. The road led them to a row of darkened villas in extensive gardens behind snow-topped walls also hung with long icicles. This was Wannsee at last.

Pardus and his captive found shelter and comparative warmth in the Wannsee Stadtbahn station, although no trains were running at this early hour. In the station was a public phone booth from which Pardus was able to reach Orellis.

"Bauer's with you? Incredible! I'll come at once in a car and get you. Keep close watch on him, until I arrive!"

Pardus still had the Luger in his pocket but no longer made a pretense of grasping it always. The man who was seated on a wooden bench, in the drab empty station, was beyond any further attempt at flight.

The clock on the stained wall of the station pointed to five minutes before four. The dawn would soon break.

Pardus heard a sob; he glanced at Bauer again. The spymaster had tears in his eyes, and not only from the cold; he was crying. He was an earnest man, deeply confused, in a troubled time, in a troubled place. His life was ruined, and he was physically ill after his night-long exertions, miserable and silenced by his laryngitis. He sat with the tears running down his square, handsome face, and he no longer had enough manly dignity to wipe them away.

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